

Oral Memoirs

Of

Philip Rogers

An Interview Conducted by

Killian Hiltz

November 14, 2014

Community Veterans History Project

University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida

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Interview Histories

Interviewer: Killian Hiltz

Transcriber: Killian Hiltz

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the RICHES of Central Florida Department, University of Central Florida, in Orlando, Florida.

Project Detail

The Community Veterans History Project, a RICHES of Central Florida Project at the University of Central Florida, includes interviews with Central Florida veterans from all branches of the United States military. Beginning in 2010, the UCF Community Veterans History Project is collecting, preserving, and making accessible to the public the experiences of Central Florida's veterans so that future generations will better understand the realities of conflict. It is a collaborative endeavor supported by multiple departments and offices at UCF. The histories, which are collected by students and faculty, are archived and made digitally available through the UCF library. The UCF Community Veterans History Project will also contribute selected veterans' histories to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress.

Killian Hiltz was a student in the Department of History at the University of Florida.

The Philip Rogers was a retired Navy Commander who was an instructor at the Naval Nuclear Power School in Orlando, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Philip Rogers is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on November 14, 2014.

Abstract

Oral history interview of Philip Rogers, who served in the U.S. Navy from 1978 to 1998. Rogers was born in the Bronx borough of New York City, New York, in 1953. He attended Lehman College for undergraduate school and Indiana University for graduate school. In May of 1978, Rogers was commissioned as an officer and assigned to teach engineering at the Nuclear Power School at Naval Training Center (NTC) Orlando. After four and a half years, he became an Engineering Duty Office in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

This interview was conducted by Killian Hiltz in Orlando on November 14, 2014. Interview topics include Rogers' background, becoming a commissioned officer, teaching at the Nuclear Power School at NTC Orlando, serving as an Engineering Duty Officer in Pearl Harbor, serving

University of Central Florida Community Veterans History Project
A RICHES Project: Regional Initiative for Collecting the History, Experiences and Stories of Central Florida

in the Naval Reserves, advanced training, the USS Nathan Hale, the Cold War, the University of Central Florida (UCF), his wife and family, and the terrorist attacks on September 11th.

Philip Rogers

Oral History Memoir
Interview Number 1

Interviewed by Killian Hiltz
November 14th, 2014
Orlando, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Hiltz Today is, um – it is November 14th, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Phil – Philip Rogers, um, who served in the Navy from 1978 through – to 1998. Mr. Rogers served as an instructor at the Naval [Nuclear] Power School. Uh, he retired as a Commander. My name is Killian Hiltz, I am interviewing, uh, Mr. Rogers as part of the UCF [University of Central Florida] Veterans Community History Project. We are recording this interview, uh, at Orlando, Florida.

0:00:31

Background

Hiltz Um, thank you, Mr. Rogers. Um, uh, where and when were you born?

Rogers I was born in the Bronx[, New York City], New York, uh, in 1953.

Hiltz Uh, what was your childhood like?

Rogers Uh, grew up in a modest, you know, tenant apartment. Went to public schools, um, two years of private schools, went – and then Lehman College, which is a ci – city school. Did that, uh – did that for, you know – through – and then I worked a little bit. Um, and probably when I was like 22, I went off to graduate school in Indiana.

Hiltz Um, what was the private school like?

Rogers It was good. It was a little more disciplined. The schools I was[sic] in was[sic] a little rough, so my parents took me out to a more, you know – less chance of getting hurt [*laughs*] – school. Um...

Hiltz Um, what was, um – what was college like, for you?

Rogers I liked it. I was a commuter. I went back and forth on the train, uh, eh, because we didn't have a car. So we – I travelled on the train to high school and to college for eight years. Uphill both ways – just joking [*laughs*]. Um, uh, so I traveled that way, uh, and did my four years there, and I got a degree in chemistry from, eh, um, Lehman College.

Hiltz Uh, you mentioned that you went to graduate school, as well.

Rogers Yes.

Hiltz Uh, what was your gra – what was your grad...

Rogers Uh, I got a Master's degree in chemistry, entomology, from Indiana University. I was in the PhD¹ program, but when the Navy came looking for people, I kinda said, *Well, I wanna do that.* so I kinda left with a Master's degree and went on to, uh, um – the, um – took the Master's and then went on to the Navy.

Hiltz Um, what did your parents do for a living?

Rogers My father was a laborer, worked in a baker[sic], and my mother was just stay-at-home – stay-at-home mom.

Hiltz Did you have any siblings?

Rogers Brother. Still have a brother. Actually, he lives in Orlando. So...

Hiltz Uh, did, uh – your brother also join the service?

Rogers No, no. He never did. No.

Hiltz Um, did, uh – did anyone in your family before you, uh, serve as enlisted or commissioned?

Rogers Yes, my father was – was, um, enlisted in, uh, World – World War II. Um, and my grandfather was in World War I.

Hiltz Uh, what branches did they serve?

Rogers Army. Both of them, Army.

Hiltz Uh, did they see combat?

Rogers Uh, yes. Both of them did. Uh, my – In fact, my grandfather had a Purple Heart, and, uh, my father didn't get a medal, but he had – he had some kind of foot injury or something, but – yeah. So...

0:03:05 **Becoming a commissioned officer**

Hiltz Uh, uh, what caused you to become a commissioned officer?

Rogers Well, it was a – it's a long story. It was like, um – let's see. Indiana University – it's kind of cold up there – Bloomington, Indiana. It was like six degrees below

¹ Doctorate degree.

zero [sniffs], and, uh, the Navy had a little brochure says – saying, “Would you like to fly to Orlando on the Navy this weekend?” Free. Orlando, Florida. So I said, “Sure.” I had no intention to go into the military – zero. So I went, “Okay. Fine.” so I signed up, and then I had to go take some tests, you know – you know, academic tests and physical tests, and, uh – and then they said, “Well, You know, Admiral [Hyman George] Rickover,” who is the Father of the Nuclear Navy, “would like to interview you in Washington D.C.,” you know, “Would – you – would you like to go?”

So they sent me to – first, let’s go back up. Before I went there, they – they told me I was going for an interview. So they showed me the school – so they sent me down here as promised for the trip down here, so I went to the trip in Orlando, and it was great. [Walt] Disney World – they took us to Disney World and showed us – the Nuclear Power School, by the way, was in Orlando, at that time, okay? Just up the road here, by Bennett Drive. Um, so they showed me the school, and it was like 80 degrees. It was really nice. They hooked me in, so I’m like, *I’d like to go there*. It was – it was an academic job, because, you know, I liked teaching, and it was an academic job, and, you know, I would get paid a lot more there as a graduate student, than as a graduate student. So, uh – so I said, “Okay. It sounds good to me.”

So then I went to Washington D.C., uh, for an interview, and, uh, one thing you got to understand that in that the nuclear – in the nuclear program, it’s kind of a select program, and that the admiral that is in charge – the four-star admiral is about as high as you can go in the Navy. He interviews all the applicants, you know, that – that – that come into the program, and so you go there for a day of tests. Take a bunch of written tests, oral exams. They ask all kinds of physical questions, and – and then they ask how to explain things and they do that, and at the end, you go see Admiral Rickover – Hyman Rickover. So I go into this guy’s office, and he’s a four-star admiral, and he’s sitting in a chair. Very little man, probably 5’5”, uh, white grey hair, he was about 78, at the time, and, uh, he – so I sat down. I had long hair, I was a graduate student, I had no inkling of military at all in me.

So I sat down, and, uh, the Admiral says to me, I had an American Chemical Society pin on me and the Admiral says to me – um, I had an American Chemical Society pin on me, right? So the Admiral says to me, “Wha – what’s that? What’s that pin on your, uh, lapel there?” So I took it off and I said, “Well, um, this means I’m a member of the American Chemical Society.” And he jumped at me, and he says to me like this – he says, “Let me see that blicity pin.” ‘Kay? I don’t want to put any expletives on this tape, but he – but, uh, he said, uh, um, “Let me see that pin.” so I put it in his hand, and – and he said – looked at me in the eye – and he goes, “How do you know I know more chemistry than you do? Maybe I should keep this pin.” And I said, “Admiral, if that’s the case, then you can get your own pin.” Then he threw is back at me, and then he says, uh, “Did any of the girls tell you that you were good-looking?” I said, “Sure. All

the time." He says, "That's a proposition. You don't even know the facts of life. Get out of my office."

So this was my interview with a four-star admiral. So I said, *Well, I dunno. I guess I didn't get that job.* So I walked down the hall, and this captain, that[sic] went in there with me, said, "Congratulations. The Admiral selected you to be an instructor at Nuclear Power School." So I said, "Great." so I signed up, finished my – my dissertation for my Master's degree, and then I, uh – I came down to Orlando. Went – went to some school – uh, Officer School – Officer Indoctrination School, and then I came to Orlando in 1978. I was commissioned in March of 1978, I believe, and, um, – then I, Um, uh, came to or – Orlando in May. Went – went to some – in the school – I went to the school in between then about six weeks. So I – I arrived down here in like May of 1978 – in Orlando, and I spent the next four and a half years here.

Hiltz Uh, what was your officer, uh, training like?

Rogers It wasn't the standard training that – that you'd normally get. It's kind of like training – 'cause we weren't expected to stay in the Navy. We were expected to go in for our four, you know – our – our – our four-year promise, and then leave, Right? So it was very watered down, so to speak. It was not very rigorous as some – some. It was like the same training lawyers get, the doctors get, and – and nurses, the – the professional, you know – the training the professionals gets. It's [inaudible] how do you – how you act like an officer, and – and, you know – so nothing – nothing too, uh, exotic.

Hiltz Uh, what was your family and friends; reaction to you becoming a commissioned officer?

Rogers Well, that was funny, because my father was enlisted and he – he had some grumbling about officers. He goes, "I remember – I remember this officer made me salute him." He goes, "He was a big jerk. I hope you're not like that." So [laughs] – so he was a little – he was proud, but yet, he was saying, you know, you gotta be a little humble, you know, when you're doing this stuff too. So – But I think he was proud that – that I went in there, you know, and – and did it. So, like I said, I had no – I just did it, because hey, it was great. I wanted to go teach and the Navy's got this job to go teach, you know? I said, *I'm not staying in.* I said, *Honest, no way I'm staying,* you know?

So then I did my four years. I taught thermodynamics, I taught nuclear physics, you know, regular classical physics, I taught chemistry, radiological – all the stuff, and the thing about that Nuclear Power School: they – they teach you how to teach a class, you know? They teach you how to talk to people, how to make eye contact, how to go back and forth and relate information. I still carry that – that talent to this day, with how they taught me how to do that. So, it was really – it was really good. So I really had – it was the best job of my life. I mean,

it was, you know, basically, a day job. No deployment—nothing. It was great for four years. You know, unfortunately, you know, after four years, they want you to leave, 'cause in the Navy, you get to move up or you move out. So—so that's what happened.

0:09:02

Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

Hiltz 'Kay. So, uh...

Rogers [sniffs].

Hiltz What happened after those four years?

Rogers Well, after four years, normally, you get out, right? And this was right at the height of the Cold War, 'round 19—it was around 1982, and they needed people with engineering background—not necessarily ship driving experience, but with some engineering background, and some knowledge of chemistry, physics—To work on shipyards, to help when the ships—Submarines come in [sniffs]. They help the submarines get ready for sea, and—and fix them, and things like that—to oversee that. So they asked if, you know, I would like to go do that, and I said, "Eh, I'll think about it," and then they said, "Would you like to go to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, and do it?" [laughs]. So I said, "Hm. Okay. I'll—that sounds good to me."

So I did—I went into what is called the "Engineering Duty Officer Program," so I went in—which is basically engineering. I—I was very restricted, because I'm colorblind. Eh, when I took my physical, I was actually—they determined that I was colorblind, so I could not drive a ship. So I was restricted as to what I could do. So, I mean—but I could do the engineering stuff, so I was—I became a Restricted Line Officer, which means you don't drive the ships, but you can do a lot of other things naval officers do. So—so I did that.

I was—I went to Submarine School after that, I went to Engineering Du—Duty Officer School, and Nuclear Ship Superintendent School, which show you—show you how to manage repairs of a ship. Not that I would do the repairs myself, but I oversee the people doing it, right? And interface with the ship, as a—as a representative from the Navy to get[?] that, and I did that for about—about, uh, three years, right? And then—it was okay, but it wasn't teaching. I really wanted to teach.

0:10:41

Naval Reserves

Rogers Um, so what—what I did after that time is: I—I—I got out of the Navy in 1986, but I stayed in the [Naval] Reserves, uh, as a—as a [sic] Engineering Duty Officer. Oh, also, on that time while I was on active duty, I got my Engineering Duty Officer Dolphins, which is, you know specialized in submarine repair, and then, after that, um, I got out of the Navy and tended my resignation, but I stayed on—

I stayed in the Reserves, and then, I came down to, uh—went down to, um, South Florida. I took a job at a nuclear power plant. I was an instructor, right? Teaching down there, and I stayed in the Reserves, and I drilled for the next 12 years. I—I drilled, uh—drilled my—my—from Jensen Beach, which is about 130 miles from here, to Orlando. I drilled every week—once every week—and two weeks a year, and I—I went up through the chain there, [inaudible], and got my rank there, up to—and made Commander in the Reserves in 1994.

0:11:36

Advanced training and the USS *Nathan Hale*

Hiltz Uh, what, uh—what was your schooling like, when you were going through the Submarine and Engineering [Duty Officer] Schools—Oh, um, when you were still in the active? What was that like?

Rogers Oh, that was, uh—it wasn't—I mean, it was okay. It was a—was a—it was kinda challenging, because, Uh, you had to—you had to go and know—know how to—and they put you in a room, and they start leaking the pipes, and, you know, you gotta, you know, repair the pipe, so you don't drown and stuff like that, and then, you know that—you learn a little bit about navigation and how to—how to basically, uh, go through it. I was a little bit senior. I was a Lieutenant when I went through, and most of them were ensigns that[sic] went through there, but, Uh, you know, it was basically how to respond to emergencies on submarines, and then, you know, dive the ship up and down. I was able to do that[?]. I did a—I was able to surface the ship and dive the ship. I did that several times on the simulator and—and in real life—in a real submarine.

You know, and one thing that I did not—I neglected to mention is that I was on a submarine for two months, as part of my qualification program. So I was on the *Nathan Hale*, and we went out—and I can't tell you where we went—but we went out somewhere in the ocean, and we had missiles on the ship. Uh, we—that was a deterrent patrol that I had to go through to get my qualification, you know, to do that.

Hiltz Yeah.

Rogers So—and then—then that's [inaudible]. Nuclear Ship Superintendent School is very technical. It was like how to ma—manage radiation. The Navy is very sensitive to—to nuclear safety and the shipyards have to be—everything perfect. So they want people who are going to follow the rules and know what they're doing. So they send us to special school to—to kinda—to kinda help us understand how to manage this[sic] nuclear, uh, projects at the shipyard.

Hiltz Uh, what, uh—was your, uh—the submarine's class? Do you—do you know?

Rogers Yes, it's a—it's a—it was an SSBN [Nuclear Power Ballistic Missile Submarines]. It was a ballistic nuclear submarine, uh, it's since, has been way since

decommissioned. It was a pretty old ship, when I was on it Um, so it carried *x* number of missiles, and, uh, I 'm not sure if that is classified anymore, but it's so many missiles, and what we did was just go out there and wait – wait for launch orders, which, thankfully, never came. So I never really fought in hot war, but I was in the Cold War, which kinda was preventing the big war [*laughs*]. So...

Hiltz Um, what was it like – what was life like on the submarine?

Rogers Um, it was very, uh, interesting. It was kind of lonely. Uh, Now, I knew I was only going to be on it for like one patrol, so it was okay, you know? It was interesting. Got to do some – some interesting things, but, for the most part, you really eat a lot. They have – they have – you can eat up to four times a day. It's just like a cruise ship, but you work [*laughs*], right? So you have breakfast, you have lunch, you have dinner, and then you have MIDRATS [Midnight Rations] at night, depending on your shift. They always got meals going on in a submarine, so you can eat, eat, eat, and I actually gained 15 pounds, you know, on the submarine, you know? So it was a – it was a bit of a weight curve, trying to get the weight off [*laughs*], but, uh, you know, it was good. I got the up and down – A lot of stuff in the submarine, you don't know everything, because a lot of it's classified, like what they targeted – the stuff – I couldn't see that. So I never knew where we really were at. So it was all a part of, you know – it was kind of a tense time, with the Cold War. We were in secret locations and stuff like that.

Hiltz Uh, what was the crew like?

Rogers Crew was good. I mean, they were – they knew I was a short-timer, so they – they kidded me around a little bit, and – and – 'cause they knew. They called me the "rider." You know, and they said, "You're just in your rack all day. That's all you do. You don't do real work." but they were kinda – they were in a kidding type of way, right? And I was called – they called me the "assistant engineer." So I – I – I oversee some training lessons and did stuff like that for them, but I stood the watch. You know, on the submarine ship, you stand a watch, you're – you're good, because, uh, somebody else doesn't have to stand the watch for diving officer. I did that. So, uh...

0:15:24

Hawaii

Hiltz Uh, what was your time in Hawaii like?

Rogers Oh, it was great. It was, uh, beautiful – the most beautiful places on Earth. It's, uh – nice mountains, and the job was pretty stressful – getting the ships out – because, like I said, this is the height of the Cold War, and the ships came in. they had to get repaired in a certain window, Because there are only so many submarines out there. One comes in, and, uh, they only got coverage for a certain amount. So you gotta get that ship out on time, and if it's not on time – not out on time, some people up high up don't get too happy about that. So we gotta

make sure that everything's done timely and safely. So not only – and we just couldn't – since it's a nuclear submarine – First of all, nuclear submarines can be hazardous in themselves, and you got reactors on 'em, and you gotta be extra special careful with respect to nuclear safety, and so sometimes, some things take a little longer than you might anticipate. So, uh, you always have that – you always have that bal – and I was in charge, so if the ship was late, it was on me. You know, I had to answer for it. So...

Hiltz Uh, did, uh – did you ever have any incidents happen, during that time?

Rogers Well, yeah. Um, I was on one submarine. When – when I was in the shipyard, we occasionally had to go out ride submarines when – after repairing them, and then one of the hydraulic plants went on fire. So it was a submarine underwater, and it was on fire, but the crew is so trained. It was like, "Okay. Fine." Just like training – t was no different than when we had the training. We went over there, *swoosh*, they put it out, and then we – we went on to eat for lunch. So it was like okay.

They were very seasoned, very seasoned crew. Um, the chiefs in the Navy – they really – I was an officer, but the chiefs in the Navy – they, you know – they run the show. They – they get the people to do the work, and so my admiration is for the chiefs, you know, [inaudible] folks. They're – they're the ones that make it happen, you know? We get the credit, most of the time. Sometimes, we get the blame, as the officers, but that's kind of the way it is, but they're the ones that – the enlisted guys – they're the ones that[sic] – that[sic] make it work. So my father kind of sent me a lesson, when he said, "You're gonna – you're gonna be this hotshot officer, but you're going to learn who does the work." And I did.

0:17:26 **Making suggestions and dry docking**

Hiltz Uh, do you have any, uh, moments that stand out, during your time in, um, Hawaii or Orlando?

Rogers Um, well, one day, uh – well, I can say that, at the end, I – I – I made a suggestion to move the repair somewhere where it would be cheaper or a little more cost-effective, and – and still do it safely, and that – they – they actually listened to me and did it. So when I left – I don't know how that went, but it wa – it did save some money. So that was – that was a good, good part of it, uh – good part of it, but a lot of that – I remember it was a lot of stress on that, but – but that was a good part of it, at – at – at – at the end there.

So – and I would still dock ships, you know – dry docked ships that come into the shipyard, and a dry dock is: you – you – you bring a ship in, and to work on the hull of a ship, you can't – can't be in the water, right? So you – you put the ship on blocks, you drain the dry dock down, and then you go into the ship, and you do what you gotta do, back – and back up. Then you put the water back in,

and then you float the ship out, but Putting the ship on blocks is a—a, you know—a very engineering-involved thing. So, as the docking officer, I had to do the calculations to make sure the ship would sit on the block right and stay there, and do all those calculations and stuff.

0:18:37 **Transition from active duty to Reserve**

Hiltz 'Kay. Um, so, um, coming back now to, uh, your—your—how was your transition from being active duty to Reserve?

Rogers Uh, not really—not really, um,—because I never had too many deployments, so I was always with my family. Like I said, I had a[sic] atypical career. I [inaudible]—I had it good, really. Um, so I didn't have a lot—other than that one deployment, right? So when I went to Reserves, you know, I really was away from home more in the Reserves than when I was active duty, 'cause I would have to drive to Orlando on—on the weekends, And then the two weeks a year, uh, I mean, again, I was with a lot of engineers. I had in my group, we had like PhDs, we had, you know, professional engineers. All highly, you know—highly educated people that[sic] worked for NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration], or worked for the [John F. Kennedy] Space Center, or whatever, and then they did the Reserves stuff, you know, on the side, 'cause they were—they had this engineering background.

So I didn't find too much of a, uh—uh, a transition. I went from a kind of academic environment, uh, to that. Now, I had a little more experience than a lot of the Reserves, 'cause I actually was a[sic], uh, active duty—engineering duty officer, and a lot of them just came in the Reserves. So I had a little—a little more experience actually being there. I had the qualifications for the Dolphins and stuff like that. So that helped me a little bit, you know, with getting my advancements, you know, as I—as I, you know, got promoted on. So I also had some good leaders that[sic]—that[sic] showed me the ropes in the Reserves. That—that really helped me.

0:20:03 **Naval mentors**

Hiltz Do you remember any of those?

Rogers Oh, I do. I, uh—can I say their names?

Hiltz Oh, yep.

Rogers Or whatever?

Hiltz Yeah.

Rogers I remember one, uh—one key person that[sic] was a—was a, eh—he was a[sic] Admiral: Rear Admiral Steve Israel. He was, uh, a great mentor to me. Um, when

I first came in the Reserves, he kinda took me under his wing, kinda showed me the – the life in the Reserves, and, uh – and we worked together. I worked within several of his units, when he was a – When I met him, he was a Commander, and then, as he went through, he became Captain, and then ultimately, he became – became an Admiral, and I still, you know, am still in contact with him, you know, to this day, but He was very, very – he was a [United States] Naval Academy graduate, very good about dealing with people, and stuff like that, and another person gr – Captain Jim Tully. I worked for him, and I took his Reserve unit when he – when he left that unit to go to another unit, I took over for him in, uh – in – for him, in that – in that capacity. So he always mentored me too, and he’s – he’s actually the Mayor of Titusville. Yeah. So [laughs] – but He’s great – he is one of the – one of the best leaders I’ve ever met, and one of the most, uh – most – talk about people – talk about people with integrity, and people in political office. Well, he’s got political office, and I don’t know anybody with more integrity than that man does have. He’s just amazing. So we still keep in touch. Yeah. So...

Hiltz Do you, um – do you have any stories or memories from your – from your time in the – in the Reserves that stand out?

Rogers Well, again, going back to the, you know – the enlisted people run the show. Uh, When I got – when I got command of my unit, I – I – I had a chief who was a Mensa [International] – high IQ [intelligence quotient] guy. Much smarter than I would ever be, and I asked his advice, you know, all the time, and that’s why my unit was so successful, and he helped me, give me advice on how to do things, and, you know, it went on from there. So I relied heavily on that. So I never – I never – I only made a couple of mistakes when I was a junior officer, thinking I knew it all, but that didn’t last out. Found out: the more senior I got, the less I thought I knew [laughs]. I knew more I had to rely on people that[sic] working[sic] for me. I mean, that’s the key to success. Um, and, uh – so – so that was very, very helpful.

0:22:09 **Ronald Reagan, the Berlin Wall, the Cuban Missile Crises, and Bill Clinton**

Hiltz Um, during – during the time in the Navy, um, did you, um – Um, what was – what was life like, um, in the [Ronald Wilson] Reagan years?²

Rogers Oh, life was good. Reagan was president – in fact, I saw Reagan come in the airport in Hon – Honolulu[, Hawaii], and, uh, you know, I am a big Reagan fan. Uh, and, uh, ‘cause I, eh – we grew up to kinda get the Cold War – and one of the beautiful things was when I finally got into the Reserves, there – there – the war we were fighting, we really won it, because even though it wasn’t a hot war, the Soviet Union collapsed. We stood up to them and they’re gone. Now, they’re rattling their little sword again, but – but, at – at least at that time, they were –

² January 20, 1981 - January 20, 1989.

we – we won that. So, I mean, I liked the war. I felt like we had a strength in the nation for – for – for that, due to Reagan and the buildup – the buildup he did. I just kinda make the Russians³ – “Well, we can’t keep up with this.” So...

Hiltz Uh, how did the – the – in that case, how did the, uh – the breaking down of the Wall in Berlin[, Germany] make you feel?

Rogers I thought it was great. I says[sic], “Wow. This is a great thing.” Because I grew up – when I grew up in the – in the [19]50s, the – the – I mean, I grew up during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and we thought we were going to World War III. I mean, it was right – right around the corner. I mean, my father was shaking and white ashen[?], ‘cause I looked at him – well, and I was only – what? I don’t know. 11 – 10 years old, or something like that, and – and it’s just like – he’s shaking white. Something – something’s going on here, and – and that was the closest we’ve – we’ve ever come, right? And, um – and there were some things – even during the Cold War, there were some things that happened, which we don’t want to go into, but, you know – but, for the most part, there was peace, right? So when the – when the [Berlin] Wall came down, Reagan said, “Tear down this wall,” and it happened. So that was – that was a good thing, and then, when, uh – I would never had believed it when it happened – they said the Soviet Union collapsed. It was like, *Wow*.

Hiltz Um, in co – and in comparison, how are the [William “Bill” Jefferson] Clinton years in the Navy?

Rogers Well, uh, Clinton – I mean, to a – see, Clinton was – he – ‘90s, uh, I got my senior – I think he signed my, uh – uh, my – my, uh – my promotion to Commander, and also he signed my discharge – my – my retirement paper, uh, in ‘98, right? So – so I have some good – good, uh, Um, you know – He treated, you know, the military well too, you know? He was a smart, smart guy. Uh...

0:24:39 **Final years in the Reserves and civilian life**

Hiltz Um, how were your, uh, final years in the Navy, eh, eh – in the Navy Reserves?

Rogers Good. Um, I mean, it was good. Uh, I was like – I had command of the unit, and then I was traveling so much back and forth, it was like, okay, you know? I was getting up for Captain, and I just decided that was time to, you know – time to – I didn’t make Captain the first pass. So I said, “Okay.” I had another chance, but I decided, you know, to get out. Um, so I decided just to – to go spend more time at my other job.

Hiltz What was your other job, at that point?

³ Correction: Soviets.

Rogers Oh, I worked at a nuclear power plant, teaching chemistry, physics. The same thing I did in Nuclear Power School, right? So – right.

Hiltz So what was life like after the Navy?

Rogers Well, it just went from teaching for the Navy and the submarine stuff and still have the resources – so it was really – To me, it wasn't an abrupt end. It was a, uh, gradual transition over the years, 'cause I was, uh, in active duty for eight years, Reserves for 12. So it was kind of a long – and then I – well, during the 12 years, I had my civilian job. So I – I kinda worked the two together, you know? Worked the two together. So – and As, you know, eh – as I went through my job, and I got more senior in the Navy, more senior in the Navy, and then got up there. I mean, Commander is pretty high up, I guess. So, you know...

0:25:54 **Civilian attitudes towards the military**

Hiltz Um, how did the Americans actually treat you, while you were in the Navy?

Rogers The who?

Hiltz The Americans. The civilians.

Rogers The civilians? Oh, yeah. No problem. We didn't have that Vietnam Syndrome, where, you know – where they – they spit on me or anything like that. Uh, I think today though – I mean, I think people are more appreciative of the military today, than they were even back when – when I was in there. I did used to do some recruiting for – for, uh, the Nuclear Power School, when I was at Nuclear Power School. I went out to the West Coast, and sometimes, I didn't get a very friendly reception by the – the people on the campus at Washington University. Over there, they didn't quite like my presence there. So – But I think today, I – I think the American people are more – are a lot more behind the troops. A lot more than compared to Vietnam [War] and even than when I was in. I think they realize what really they do for them.

0:26:48 **University of Central Florida and wife**

Hiltz Did you have any dealings with UCF at that time?

Rogers I did actually. I, uh – I took a couple of classes here in 1982, when this campus was just a few buildings. So Industrial Chemistry, I took a few courses, because I was living in Orlando, and, you know, I just – I just did that. It didn't end up in degree – I didn't end up in a degree. I just have the classes. I think I have like 15 credits. Um, uh, Dr. [Gerald] Mattson – I think I had him, and I think he is still here, in the chemistry department. Um, so, uh – so I had that, and, you know, we were just kinda starting out. My wife was pregnant with our first child, and we – we came to UCF. She had to take an education course and sit in these little seats, you know, she could barely fit into it. It was kinda – we went together. She took

a [inaudible] some education courses, and I did the chemistry stuff. So—so yeah. UCF is a little part of my time here.

Hiltz Um, you mentioned your wife. Um, did you—you met her while you were in the Navy?

Rogers Actually, I met my wife in Orlando, okay? Um, uh, when I was an instructor here, I worked with another instructor, and his wife worked at a school, and she knew somebody. So they set this up on a blind date, and, uh, I mean, that was it. We're married for 34 years.

Hiltz Fantastic. Um, did she go with you to, uh, Hawaii?

Rogers Oh, yeah. You bet she did. Now, obviously—and, In fact, we were on the submarine. Um, they did a dependents' cruise. Now, what a dependents cruise is: you can actually come on a submarine, right? They let the dependents come on the submarine. So she actually came on the submarine with her father, and we did, uh, some op[eration]s for them. We dove the ship, and surfaced the ship, and did all these things, and they got to eat.

You know, so she comes in—she comes into the submarine. Now, on a submarine, you gotta understand: there's a wardroom, just like this, and at the head of the table, there's the Captain, and that's the Captain's chair. Nobody sits in the chair. So what does my wife do? She comes in and plops down right in the Captain's chair, and I kinda say, "I don't [inaudible] you need to sit there." [laughs] So I rise her about that [inaudible], but she is probably one of the few ladies that[sic] were ever on a submarine—a nuclear submarine. Now, Of course, they are getting women into the program, but at that time, you know, she—she thought was kind of fun. So after being at sea for a little bit on the submarine, And then, I—she went off, and then shortly after that, I—I came back home. So that was—that kind of fun.

0:29:06 **Terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001**

Hiltz That's fantastic. Um, um, how did the events of 9/11⁴ effect you?

Rogers Uh, I was pissed, right? I was really mad that we couldn't—that something like that could happen here. Uh, and I don't know. You can point fingers and blame, but, you know, I, eh—it—it's just one of those things that we got to make sure it doesn't happen again. Uh, it's one of those—it ripped every American apart, you know, and—and including me. Now, I was actually retired already. Um, so I, um, was already done. Uh, I mean, I could have been called to active duty, but they didn't. I'm too old already, I guess. So—so they didn't bother, you know, calling me up, but, uh—so yeah. That was kind of...

⁴ September 11th, 2001.

Hiltz Did you still have any, uh – were any of your friends still in the – in active...

Rogers Yeah, I think Captain Tully, that[sic] I talked to you about. I think he was still in at that time, and, uh, then he retired subsequently after that. So, um, yes.

0:30:08 **Lessons learned from the Navy and benefits of joining**

Hiltz Um, what was one of the most important lessons that you learned from the Navy?

Rogers Uh, leadership. How to manage people and how to respect people, and just, of course, you just gotta – because you got all the stripes on doesn't mean you know everything, and, I mean, that was the lesson my father tried to let me know before I went in there, and I did some stupid things. "Oh, I am in charge, because I'm an officer." You know, I only did that once or twice, and then I remembered that I had better relying on the chiefs more, because they're really the ones that really kinda know what's going on [*laughs*]. So I did that. So a little humility's a good thing.

Hiltz Um, do you have any, uh, messages that you would like to tell the young people of America today?

Rogers Uh, yeah, the military's a great way to go, especially if you got some technological talent. Eh, you – that – that Navy instructor program is a great way to get in, serve your country four years. You don't have to stay in. You can teach at the Nuclear Power School, you can teach [*inaudible*] people who are really willing to learn, and they have to be, and they are really good students, and you – you get to teach stuff, and you come away with some great teaching skills that, at the end of it – that you can – that you can use anywhere else, you know? So, you know, To this day, I could teach anybody off the street how – how a steam engine works and so they would understand it. So, I mean, it's am – an amazing thing.

So – so that's – and don't overlook that service. I mean, you know, my sons are likely not – not to go into it. I didn't influence 'em either way. One's an engineer and one's a – one's a – a [*inaudible*] MBA [Master of Business Administration]. He's got his MBA and he is a HR [human resources] manager over at Seaman's[sp], so my sons are pretty successful, but I never influenced them to go one way or the other, but they're proud of me that I did it.

Like I said, I did not have the career that some of these guys out there. They really put their lives on the line, and I never really had to do that. I was never shot at, okay? Um, but I served my country the best I could, you know? But the guys that really – the guys that went into Iraq and Afghanistan, and it's just amazing how they – they sacrificed – a lot of them – just so much: their lives, limbs, and everything else. It's just – and – and – and did it, and they get – they

get something – they get like their hand shot off, and they wanna go again, and go back and do it again. It's just, you know – how do you – how do you instill that in our youth? That – that sense of duty. You know, it's just a great, great thing. Not that they got hurt, but that they have this, uh – this dedication, and their patriotism for their country, and to do the right thing.

0:32:48 **Migrating to Orlando and working at UCF**

Hiltz Um, uh, uh, um, what, um – How did you actually end up at UCF, after, um, your time in the Navy?

Rogers *[laughs]* Well, I, um – a granddaughter comes into that. I was, uh – worked at the nuclear plant for 25 years. I – I retired from the Reserves in '98, right? And in 2001, I went back to school again, got a Master's degree – another Master's degree – online, um, for – for, uh, education – online distance learning. So I did that for about – took me about four years to get it. I got that degree in 2006. Uh, and then finally, uh – Uh, what – what was your question again?

Hiltz Oh, how did you end up at UCF?

Rogers Oh, yeah. Okay. So I – I graduated – after 25 years, I, you know – I retired from – I retired from FPL [Florida Power & Light Company] and I got bored, okay? So when I got very bored, um, I decided to come back to work. So my granddaughter – we had a new granddaughter that[sic] lives down in, uh, Oviedo[, Florida], here. So they – I saw this job at UCF as a Safety Training Coordinator. When I'm training, it looks good to me. So I applied for that job. I got it, so we moved down here. So my wife's a – a full-time grandma, babysitter type, you know – help out with the kid, and I – I come here. I like my job, I'm teaching, and I got something to do. I got a sense of purpose, other than sitting at home doing nothing.

Hiltz Uh, what year did you guys, uh – did you come here?

Rogers Uh, June 2013. So I haven't been here that long. I've only been a UCF employee about a year and a half. Uh, you know, Two years it will be in June. So...

0:34:29 **Closing remarks**

Hiltz Well, congratulations.

Rogers So...

Hiltz *[laughs]* Um, is there anything else that, uh, we missed that you would like to talk about?

Rogers No, I mean, I think you about hit all on the head. I mean, it's all – in the military, it's all about – it's about duty, honor, country, leadership. I mean, everybody

should kind of get that experience. Well, not for everybody. It's not for everybody, and – and I don't know if I would have gone in, if it weren't for the nuclear program. I don't think I would have enrolled to just go, you know, to drive a ship. I couldn't have anyway, because of my – my color – they wouldn't – they wouldn't have accepted me in anyway, but because I had some academic potentials, they used me for that, right? So the Navy kinda used me for what talents I had, and – and so, you know, anybody can do that. Yeah. So it's a great thing. My thanks is for all the people that[sic] have gone on, and – and help, and, today, that[sic] continue to serve.

Hiltz Well, uh, thank you for your time. Uh, and thank you, um, on behalf of UCF and myself, for answering our, um...

Rogers Yeah[?].

Hiltz For answering our questions and having this, uh, wonderful interview.

Rogers Alright. Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your – your interview.

Hiltz Thank you.

Rogers Thank you.

End of Interview