

Interview with John Fahey

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Program

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This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The telephone interview with John Fahey was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:00:00] I'm interested in finding out how you wound up in the service during World War II. Was that something that you had wanted to do, or did you enlist, or were you drafted - or how did that come about?

John Fahey: Well, I enlisted in 19... in July 1941 - after I graduated from high school. There was no jobs available for me and my mother was my sole support. And she was ... couldn't afford to send me to college. So we decided it'd be probably best if I went into the service and I decided I'd go in the Navy, because I didn't like marching.

Janis Kozlowski: [Laugh] The Navy doesn't make you march?

John Fahey: Well, they did in boot camp. But, I mean, you're not a ground pounder like the army guys.

Janis Kozlowski: Right, right. So, did you have any particular skills or interest that lead you a waterborne task like that? Or was this kind of a first time out on a ship and doing that kind of thing?

John Fahey: Well, I went through boot camp in Great Lakes, and they tested you for various things. And then they had various schools that you could go to and I wanted to go the aviation radio school. And I was lucky enough to pass enough tests to be able to go to that. And I was sent out to Seattle, Washington to a naval air station to go to a naval training center there for aviation radio. I mean, they had other schools there for aviation mechanics and so on and so forth. So that's how I ended up out in the west coast. Actually, I flunked out of radio school. So, this was in December of 40... no, in December of '41. And Pearl Harbor, and shortly after Pearl Harbor, they sent me over to Bremerton to a naval station there. And I was assigned to the St. Mihiel. So, that's how I ended up on the St. Mihiel.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, was one of the tests that the Navy gave you to figure out where you might best be placed? Do they actually test people for, like, vertigo, or sea sickness, or that kind of thing?

John Fahey: Not at that time, they certainly didn't. You were headed where they wanted you to ... if you had enough skills to go. Otherwise, they just – you were pretty much at their disposal, you went where they sent you. And I was lucky enough that they sent me to the training school in Seattle.

Janis Kozlowski: [Um-hum] So, were you trained for any particular skill for the St. Mihiel after you got out of aviation radio school? Did they send you to a different kind of training then?

John Fahey: No, I was sent to Bremerton, where they, which is kind of a pool there; where anybody was sent to there. Then, they would send people to what ships, who ever that was available, they would send them to a ship. I was sent to the St. Mihiel. I was, at the time, I was a lowly Seaman, Second Class. And, so I was put into a deck, my job was in the deck-force, you know, swabbing decks, painting, chipping paint, and so on. I worked my way up to some watches; I'd stand wheel-watches - that was part of my job - steering the ship. And most of the time I was on deck.

But, I didn't like that deck work, so I - because I had some radio training, I ... what they call, I could strike for a job in the radio shack. So, I would go up, when I was off my regular work, I could go up there and practice my radio skills. And eventually, they let me take a test for Radioman 3rd Class. They really didn't care if I went up there or not, because they liked that I was a pretty good Helmsman, and they wanted me to stay on the Deck Force. But, eventually, the communications officer convinced them that I should become a Radioman. So I took the test for Radioman 3rd Class, and passed. And after that, I was a Radioman the rest of my career in the Navy.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:04:54] So, what did a Radioman do?

John Fahey: Well, we copied code from.... During that time they didn't have the modern communications we have now; they had stations around the globe that would send out messages in code to all the ships in the Navy. And Radiomen had to sit there and copy code, because it come [sic] over in code; it was not what they call plain language. You could sit there and type all these characters. You couldn't read them - you'd have to copy them and give them to the command, the Communications Officer, who would then de-code them. So, if there was a message there for your ship, you did know what.... If there was a message come [sic] in for your ship, you would recognize the call sign. So that message immediately went to the Communications Officer. The other communications, all the other stuff, and you'd copy – some of it would be general messages for the whole Navy, or that whole fleet, or whatever. But, we copied around the clock - 24 hours a day. Somebody was always copying code, and that was my job. I worked on, maybe four hours on, eight hours off; four on, eight hours off. And the only time you did shut the radios down, that was when you were in port somewhere. Like,

when you get back to the states, why, you'd shut it down. But, that was the only time you didn't copy.

Janis Kozlowski: So, it sounds like you had pretty busy job, as a Radioman.

John Fahey: Well, it was busy, in a sense. The worst part of it was the four on, eight off – you never got enough sleep. [Chuckle] I can't recall getting a full night's sleep in the Navy, because you ... that eight hours off, you had to eat and, you know, bath and everything else. And then, get ... and at the most, you'd probably get six, seven hours of sleep.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, that's not very much.

John Fahey: No, [Chuckle] not when you're doing it around the clock. And there's a lot of times ... because at meal time in the afternoon, you'd have a short watch - which would be, like 4:00 [o'clock] to six. And then somebody would relieve you. And then there'd be a six, eight [hour] watch. This way, you rotated around the clock. So, you'd have a 12:00 [o'clock] to 4:00 watch one day, in the afternoon, and maybe later on, you'd have a 12:00 to 4:00 in the, at midnight; and 4:00 to 6:00 in the morning. Because, then, at breakfast, why, you only worked - had two hour shifts. And so it rotated.

Janis Kozlowski: So, did it turn out to be a job that you liked?

John Fahey: Oh yeah, I enjoyed it, because it got me out of that hard lifting work on the deck, you know. And being in Alaska, it was a lot warmer in a radio shack than it was working out on deck.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] Yeah, I bet. [Chuckle] And where was the Radioman's office on the ship?

John Fahey: Well, we were on our particular ship, it was right next to the Captain's quarters. Ah, no, there was a space in between - where they had a lot of electrical gear in our particular ship. I think we were on the ... yeah, we had one deck above us. And I was just trying to recall all the [Chuckle] details now. We were close to the Captain and close to the Conning part of the ship.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. And so was the ... was the job interesting in one respect; because you were privy to information coming in, right - which was probably hard to come by for most sailors?

John Fahey: No, not real.... Like I said, everything came over in code, you know.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

John Fahey: ... you'd copy stuff and you, you can't read it; it had, it'd be ...

Janis Kozlowski: Oh.

John Fahey: ... it'd be in five letter groups. And sometimes you'd miss the darn stuff, and it could screw up a message. But, most of the time we got all of it. But, we didn't know what we were getting. Once in a while, we'd get a message in a plain ... what we'd call plain language. And that was something that you could read - like a letter. But, that was very unusual.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, OK. I misunderstood. So, somebody else deciphered the code, you didn't. So you, if it came in code, you never really knew what it said.

John Fahey: That's right. We took that message to the Communications Officer, and he had a machine to decode the message. And so, if they wanted us to know, then they would tell us. But, that was for the Communications Officer and the Captain and the rest of the officers that were needed to know that information.

Janis Kozlowski: Right. OK. And, and how were ... how was your radio equipment? Did you have pretty good equipment to use?

John Fahey: Yeah, it was pretty good. I would say it was probably state of the art at the time, and, you know -- because we needed good communications. And it was a long time ago; before they had the modern stuff, you know - internet and all that other. But yeah, I'd say, it was good for the time.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:10:57] And, and you ... so, did you start on that ship in '41, did you say?

John Fahey: Actually, it was right after Pearl Harbor; I went on board in January of 1942.

Janis Kozlowski: And, and then how long did you stay on that ship?

John Fahey: I stayed on it 'till it was decommissioned in Boston in December of 1943. We took the St. Mihiel.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, why did they decommission the ship in the middle of the war?

John Fahey: Because they decided to make it into a hospital ship. And so when they got to Boston, they decommissioned it. They sent ... all the crew was sent to various receiving stations around the country. They gave us leave - I think it was two weeks leave. This was right around Christmas. And we could turn ourselves in anywhere on any receiving station on the east coast, or as far south as New Orleans - we could not turn ourselves back in on the west coast.

Everybody was scared to death of the submarines in the Atlantic at that time. We wanted to get sent back to the west coast and get a ship. But, I went on leave back to Iowa, where I was originally from. And I turned myself in to New Orleans - that was the closest one to

the west coast that I could get. And I was there two days, and they shipped me to Tampa, Florida to a receiving station. And I was assigned to the next ship. We eventually ended up back in the Pacific, anyhow.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:12:47] What ship was that that you were assigned to then?

John Fahey: The U.S.S. Volans.

Janis Kozlowski: And was that a better ship than the St. Mihiel, or more a modern ship?

John Fahey: It was a cargo ship. It was a, what they called, a "Liberty Ship."

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, OK.

John Fahey: Yeah, Liberty Ship. I think I actually preferred the older ship, which was the St. Mihiel, originally; then a U.S. Army transport. And when the war broke out, it was given back to the Navy, and it was [then] a transport. We transported people all over to Alaska at the beginning of the war. And we took troops and Army nurses up to Alaska. And then we would bring back the dependents of those service men that had been serving in Alaska. And also pregnant nurses after they had been there a few months, 'cause they wanted to get the hell out of Alaska.

Janis Kozlowski: [Chuckle] So you had quite a varied group of people that you transported.

John Fahey: Oh, yeah. We use to have a lot of fun when we were bringing them back from Alaska, yeah. Because at night we'd have parties with all the women and stuff, because, you know, it was kind of dull on that ship otherwise. It was kind of nice to have women around once in a while.

Janis Kozlowski: So, did you have some pretty harry voyages? I mean scary, scary voyages - big seas and that kind of thing?

John Fahey: Yeah, the first time I went to sea on the boat - it was my first trip - we hit exceedingly rough seas. I got so seasick; everybody got seasick - even men that had been in the Navy for years that were used to it. It was a really bad trip. We traveled the Inland Passage, most of the time - from Seattle up to Alaska. And that was interesting, because of the beautiful scenery and everything. But the ... when we hit the open waters, man, there's really a difference. So, I had a couple scares on the....

One time, we were coming back from Alaska, we ran aground on the Inland Passage. And I was on duty that night - on the radio shack. And the ship started listing to the side, and, "What the heck is goin' on?" We hit a rock somehow or another, and put a hole in it - in the ship. So, we contacted ... I forget who exactly we contacted, but we, they had to send a tug out to help us get back into Seattle. We went to Bremerton Navy Yard, and we

were in dry dock for, oh, while they patched the thing up. So, we got to stay in Seattle a little bit longer than usual, at that time.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:15:57] OK. Um, any other bad rides that you remember - up to Alaska, or back down?

John Fahey: Ah, one time, I remember, we were traveling in convoy with the, our sister ship, which was the U.S.S. Grant. And it was a similar; they looked like identical twins to see the ships. We were on the way to Alaska, and I had to watch it -- a wheel watch, that was before I became a Radioman. It was during the night; I forget what time it was say, around midnight, or something. We had a scare - somebody said they saw a torpedo. But I think it turned out to be a false alarm. But, it really spooked everybody on the ship at that time.

And then the next scary thing we had was, we were on our way to Dutch Harbor, and we heard that they had -- the Japanese, had bombed Dutch Harbor. So, we went into Kodiak Island and we loaded up the ship; we had troops aboard, and we loaded up with drums of gasoline, which were all over the deck. And they also had ammunition stacked on the deck. And we were kind of scared to [be] going into Dutch Harbor. But, we did go up there, and got there shortly after the Japanese had bombed the place. So, that was a, kind of a scary part of my service.

Janis Kozlowski: So, what do you remember about Dutch Harbor, when you pulled in there? What did it look like when you saw it?

John Fahey: Well, there was some damage there. I think there was one old ship that they had bombed. And it was part of the ... it wasn't a functioning ship as far as being able to - it wasn't seaworthy. I think they were using it for some kind of a building. I don't know exactly what it was. It was tied up alongside, I believe, and they hit it. And there was some damage. I never got off the ship at that time; I don't know ... didn't see too much.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:18:26] OK. So, would you say, what would you say your most memorable trips were? Were those the ones, where you had people that you really liked on 'em, or?

John Fahey: Well ... I don't know, that was a memorable trip -- going to Dutch Harbor. Another one was when we were in on the invasion of ... Attu, is it? Oh no, we helped, we took troops to Attu during the fighting on Attu. And we were sitting out in the harbor, and you could hear the gunfire on the beach, on the, ... the army and the Japanese fighting on land. And I remember one day the weather -- you know, how different it can be up there. We were on deck, and some of the guys were actually sun bathing, and you could see them fighting on the hills where they're snow capped on Attu. It was very unusual you'd get the sun at that time of year ...

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah.

John Fahey: ... too, on Attu, because usually there's a lot of fog up there. And that was [one of] the problems they had fighting on Attu. I remember they brought a lot of the wounded soldiers back to our ship, because we had a doctor and corpsman on ship. And we had soldiers lying on deck in stretchers and stuff, because we didn't have any place to put 'em. And most of them guys were suffering from frozen feet, because the army hadn't furnished them with the proper footwear, and the guys were getting frozen feet. And so many of 'em ... most of the ones that I saw had frozen feet. I remember that our doctor received a medal of some kind for his service on, of the wounded on Attu. That was one thing that I remember about the battle of Attu.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:20:53] Did you know that, when you went in and dropped the troops off at Attu there, that you you'd be sticking around and taking casualties off. Or was that just something that happened, once they recognized they needed that kind of support?

John Fahey: Well, I think they needed that kind of support. So that ...because, there was no hospital ships in the areas; there was no medical, permanent medical deal on Attu. They had to get the men back onto, back on the ships that were wounded to take care of 'em.

Janis Kozlowski: And that was before the

John Fahey: And we weren't the only transport there; other ships were there, too, doing it.

Janis Kozlowski: So, that was before the Mihiel was decommissioned and then set up as a hospital. So at the time, how were, how well were you equipped to take care of casualties?

John Fahey: Well, we had a doctor aboard, and I think there were four or five corpsmen. He was a very good doctor, I remember that, 'cause he took very good care of the crew. And I think that he had another doctor - probably an army doctor, assisting - taking care of the wounded that they did bring aboard. So, they were very busy, I remember that.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I'll bet. Now, did you get involved ... well, did you know what was happening on the ground there at Attu while you were out in the bay; did you have much information?

John Fahey: Well, yeah, they kept us pretty well informed. Because, you know, we could see a lot of what was going on, on the ship - on the shore, from the ship. And ... but, then again, a lot of time the fog obscured the vision, so you couldn't visually see what was going on. But, you'd get reports, and then the wounded guys coming back would tell you what was going on, too. So ... we pretty much knew what was happening on Attu. Isn't like ... other times, during the war, you never knew what the heck was going on, because, they didn't pass all that stuff down. They didn't tell you where you were going, or what was happening 'till it was after, until afterwards. But, that was just part of the game.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. Just, kind of, [you] were left in the dark, most of the time?

John Fahey: Yup.

Janis Kozlowski: Now, now was ... did the St. Mihiel, was it armed at all?

John Fahey: Yeah, we had some ... we had a three inch gun on ... three inch gun on the fo'c'sle [forecastle], and we had a five inch gun on the stern, plus we had 20 mm anti-aircraft guns on the ship. I don't think we ever fired 'em in anger. We did practice occasionally with 'em, but, we never did fire 'em in anger, thank goodness.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:24:01] Yeah. Now, now, were you involved in the invasion of Kiska, also - in support of that?

John Fahey: Oh, yeah. After Attu, we were, you know, they were going to go into Kiska. We went in convoy ... with all the invasion ships. And I remember this one ... and this was before I was a Radioman; I was still trying to become a Radioman. I had a wheel-watch one day. And at that time we were ... my orders were on the wheel; it was to - I was following a cruiser ... and he says, "Follow the cruiser." And I did. And later on, our heading was 355°, and ... no, let's see, I think my ship heading was 355°, and ... yeah. And the officer's deck, they decided they weren't gonna ... that they [didn't] need to follow the cruiser; they were gonna go parallel, or something else. And he says, "Come right to 350°." Well, that meant that I would, had to go almost a complete a circle to do that - go from 355° to 360° and then around to 350°. And I told him, "Sir, I'm heading 355°." And he says, "No, no, no, no, [Chuckle] belay that order; turn left at 350°." So ... I did something that sticks in my mind.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:25:44] [Chuckle] Is it ... was it unusual that you got a chance at the wheelhouse, which, which is a big job on a ship?

John Fahey: No, that was part of my job ... is, being a helmsman - to steer the ship... I don't know, I just had a knack for it. It wasn't that difficult.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you have any idea how large some of the biggest waves were that you saw?

John Fahey: I don't know, but they all seemed awful big when there was ... and they [were] coming over the side and hitting you. I remember one time when we were leaving Dutch Harbor and our ship had these big booms that had to be rigged, and ... they were used for loading cargo and stuff from the holds. And I was still working on it - this was early on in my service, and I was on the deck force. And we were rigging these booms, and we were leaving port because they had to leave in a hurry for some reason. And ... we had to get these booms tied to the main boom so they wouldn't break loose. And we hit the open sea before we had all those booms secured. And boy was that a fight to get those secured, because they could have caused a lot of damage if we hadn't. But, we managed to get those secured.

But, I remember being up on this ... mast, where we ... secured the booms; and ... up pretty high. And I remember the ship was rocking from side to side, and I could look down, straight down, and see the water on one side. And then it'd rock, and [I'd] see, look straight down, and see water on the other side.

Janis Kozlowski: How many, how many guys did you work with on this ship? How big was the crew?

John Fahey: Umm, well, it must have had a crew of a couple hundred, because at times we had a ship load of soldiers. We had to, you know, feed and take care of those guys and maintain the ship, and man the engine room, and all the other things that a ship has. And, you know, we had the galley, and cooks and bakers, and we had quite a crew. [To] take and maintain a ship, it, it, takes quite a bit of men. And I forget exactly how many we had there - close to 300, I would say.

Janis Kozlowski: And then, how many ... do you have idea how many people they could transport?

John Fahey: Oh, I don't know. Those holds, hell, they had those bunks stacked four to six high, and very close together. I would imagine we could put 5-600, maybe a 1000 guys on there.

Janis Kozlowski: So, did the crew get better quarters than the, than the people you were transporting, or did everybody kind of have the same kind of cramped quarters?

John Fahey: No, we had our own quarters; different from - we didn't bunk with them, and ours were better than theirs. Wasn't saying a lot, but they were a lot better. And we could keep 'em; we had lockers for our clothes and stuff like that. And we each had a separate bunk assigned. And it was, it was a lot better than what, [Chuckle] "Dog Faces" had to put up with.

Janis Kozlowski: Who were the Dog Faces?

John Fahey: That's what we called the Army guys.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:29:28] Oh. [Laugh] Um, so it sounds like you were really busy in your job on the ship, but did you have any time for recreation? And, and if so, what did, what did you do in your spare time?

John Fahey: Well, a lot of us, we played cards and read; we read a lot. Of course, you write letters home and so on and so forth. A lot of guys played poker, shot craps, played Acey Deucey, and we had a few games like that was the main recreation on the ship. Of course, when we hit port we'd go nuts if we got off. And like, we'd get back to Seattle every month or so, and, you know, and then we'd get liberty. We worked out of Seattle mainly.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, how long was your cruise usually? Once you left Seattle, how long did you go sail to Alaska, before you got back to Seattle again?

John Fahey: Well, that would depend. We'd probably get back on the average, every two months. Later on in the war, when the, you know, like in certain times – the Attu and Kiska invasions, where I, we were further and further away - way out in the tip of the Aleutian Islands, why, we did not get back as often. It may be every three months, or four. 'Cause we'd have to take guys back, or go back and get another fresh load.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you have any idea how long it would take the Mihiel to get from Seattle, like, all the way down to Kiska or Attu?

John Fahey: Well, normally, we didn't go direct. We would go to Adak, or one of the other islands up there, maybe get more supplies, or drop stuff off. Because, we never did go out there directly. When we were in on the invasion of Kiska and Attu, we had to link up with other ships going in out there. So, there was no set time.

Janis Kozlowski: OK. Was there any place, any of the ports in Alaska that you particularly liked to go to?

John Fahey: No. [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: [Laugh] None of 'em at all, huh? Were there any of them that you particularly really didn't like going into?

John Fahey: Cold Bay. [I] didn't like going in there, because, god, it was a cold place. I don't know if it was just the time of year that we were there, or not, but we were tied up alongside the dock, and I remember the water was so cold that there was ice around the ship, and that was unusual for sea water to freeze.

[0:32:34] But I wanted to tell you, in Dutch Harbor, you know, after they - the Japanese - bombed Dutch Harbor, they found this one Japanese Zero in a field [on Akutan Island], and where that guy had tried to land. But, he thought it was a nice open field to land in, but it was a, a kind of a bog. And when he hit, the plane flipped over and it broke the Japanese pilot's neck. You know, and somebody found it a month or so later. And they retrieved it and brought it back into Dutch Harbor. Our ship was there at the time when they brought it back and they put it on board our ship. And we took it back to Seattle, where it was turned over to the authorities there. And they reconstructed that ship and sent it down to San Diego; that plane, rather.

And it was flown, and they got all the information off ... how the Zero operated and what its capabilities were and what its shortcomings were and everything. So, that helped 'em design ships to fight the Zero later on in the war. And, it was the first one that they'd - flyable one - that they'd had ... were able to obtain. So, that was kind of exciting.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:34:19] Do you, are there any other things that you remember about the war that kind of stuck with you; any kind of experiences that you had?

John Fahey: Well, I remember we went to Juneau one time. That was kind of interesting, 'cause it's a hard place to get to, unless you decide to really go there. And I remember we got liberty there and were able to walk around the town and I think it had, I think it was totem poles they had stationed around the city, which were interesting.

Janis Kozlowski: [Um-hum]

John Fahey: Most of the other places I got to, I never got off the ship.

One thing [Chuckle] I think that was interesting - when we went into Kiska for the invasion of Kiska, I was assigned the duty of taking a walky-talky radio. And, I was supposed to go in on the invasion - in the landing party - on Kiska with this walky-talky - so I could communicate back to the ship. [It] scared the heck out me. I was scared witless, and ... putting it nicely. And [it] turned out that the Japanese had left before we had to go in, so I did not have to go ashore. And I was so thankful. [Chuckle] I didn't have to go over and carry that big radio and talk to anybody. But, that still sticks in my mind. I had nothing to do with, really, of any importance, except personally.

Janis Kozlowski: Now I guess there was some casualties even there on Kiska, even though the Japanese had left; did your ship deal with any casualties there?

John Fahey: No, we did not. I knew that there were, but it was all due to friendly fire - the guys coming in from different directions were shooting at each other - didn't realize that they were friendly. So, it was a lack of communications again.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you remember at all, how quickly it was that you learned that there ... the Japanese had left Kiska?

John Fahey: Yeah, well, I mean, it was the same day we started the invasion, you know, they found out. But the, you know, they come in from different parts of that island. So, yeah, we learned the first day.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:37:03] Oh, OK. OK. So, you said earlier that you, one of the things you did for recreation, you wrote letters to family. Did you get mail very often?

John Fahey: Not too often. Because, you know, when you're traveling around, it's hard to keep up with you. So, unless you were in port for a few days, the mail didn't catch up with you. If you managed to stay in port for a week, or so, then usually you did get mail. But, if you were only there a day or so, it wasn't; you didn't get it.

Janis Kozlowski: Umm.

John Fahey: Now, you could, you know, even if you were there a day, or a day or so, you could still send mail; but receiving it was something else.

Janis Kozlowski: Umm. And did you, did you get much communication about what was happening in other theaters of the war?

John Fahey: Well, we did copy what they call, "Copy Press," which was radio information that was sent out for the ship, too. But, it was pretty well censored, and it was pretty generalized; you didn't get any real details. But, you did get some news. And when you're close enough to the states where you could pick up radio, commercial radio, you could get the news. But ... you never got all the ... I've learned more about the war since ... [Laugh] the history channel has come around than I [Chuckle] learned at the time.

[0:38:39] I went from New Orleans, it just ... I was only there a couple of days and they transferred me to Tampa Florida and I was assigned to the crew of the Volans, in Tampa Florida.

We were, we were there for about a week, or so. And then they shipped the whole crew up to Newport, Rhode Island. So what they put us back through ... really, basically, was boot camp again - only this time, we did it as a crew together. Then, when we got done with boot camp, in Newport, they shipped us back down to Tampa, or where you got on the ship. It was commissioned and we took it down through the [Panama] canal and out to the South Pacific.

Janis Kozlowski: And then what kind of missions did you sail there, in the South Pacific?

John Fahey: Well, we were a cargo ship and we carried everything from medical supplies, to steel plate, to toilet paper, writing paper; anything a ship would need, why, we would supply 'em with it. And then, we would get resupplied at some station again. So, we traveled all over the South Pacific, going to various ports - from Espiritu Santo to Nouméa. We went to Guam, we went to ... all kinds of Islands there. And we were on the periphery of a lot of the fighting. We never actually got into it ourselves, but we supplied the ships that were going. We ... were, went to Ulithi; which is where they had the congregation of ships there. You could ... I think they had more ships in that lagoon than there was actually in the invasion in Normandy.

Janis Kozlowski: Tell me the name of that place again.

John Fahey: Ulithi. U-L-I-T-H-I. And that's where they formed up for the invasion of, like, Okinawa; and also for some of the other major invasions in the South Pacific. And, it was the staging point for ... because it's a great big lagoon, like a ... kind of a circle. And it was very calm in there and the ships could ... and they could protect 'em in there very well. And, so....

Janis Kozlowski: Did you have any ... um, instances when you were in the Pacific, as you did in Alaska, where you felt like you might have to be a part of some of the action?

John Fahey: No, not really. We were, like I say, we were on the periphery and we were in supply; so we were in the background most of the time. We ... I think the closest we got to anything was in the Philippines. We were in the invasions of the ... we weren't in any invasion of the Philippines, but we had to go the Philippines to supply some of the ships. I remember we were there for 29 days, and the reason I say 29 days is because ... if we'd have been there 30 days, we'd have got a medal - [Chuckle] a Philippines invasion medal. We would ... we were kind of disappointed we didn't stay another day. But, that was no big deal.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh. So, where was your home base, and where did you pick up supplies when you were working out of the South Pacific?

John Fahey: Well, we would.... Well, after Guam was taken we picked up stuff there. And another one was Manus, M-A-N-U-S. And other ships would supply us, actually, sometimes, though.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh.

John Fahey: [0:42:44] We never come [sic] back; we went back to the states one time before we ... that was; we went to ... where in the heck was it? Seattle, I think. And ... yeah, 'cause I got leave. I remember this was ... oh, boy, what year? 1944 I think, yeah. But, we didn't stay in the states very long, and we went back out again.

Janis Kozlowski: So that, in terms of ... [Chuckle] I guess you wouldn't call it fun, but fun assignments - that one probably wasn't very good. Because you were, you were out in remote areas a lot, it sounds like.

John Fahey: Well, yeah. And the ... we didn't get to, you know, any major cities, or anything like you do in [Chuckle] Europe, or.... [Chuckle] You know, we'd get to these islands and see the fuzzy haired Natives. A lot of time, that was about it. And once more, we'd get to an island, where we play - go ashore and have ... play baseball, or softball, or have a few hours of recreation. But, there was ... it wasn't until the war was over that we got any place. I went to, got to go to Japan, and go to China and Korea after the war. So, that was interesting.

Janis Kozlowski: So you, you stayed in ... after the, after VJ Day you continued on?

John Fahey: Yeah, I had to. When I signed up - went into the Navy - I was 17. The terms of my enlistment were that at, when I turned 21, I can get discharged. Well, of course, at 21, I was in the middle of the Pacific and we hadn't invaded the Philippines yet - in 1944. And I had a choice: I could stay in and become part of the reserve and I'd take my chances [on] when I can get out, or I could sign over for three... two years - what they called, "Skivvy" cruise, and I can, I can get shipping -- what they called, "Shipping Over Money." So, I got \$300. So, I said, "Well, might as well stay in, because the war's

not over”; we haven’t, you know, didn’t know how long it was gonna last -- I figured, in two years. So, I might as well get the \$300. Anyhow, this is ’44, and the war was over in ’45. I wanted to get discharged, because I had all kinds of points, which we had ... they had set up that, people would, with so many points, would get out of the service. Well, I went to see about that, and they said, “The jokes on you, you signed up for two more years and you’re gonna stay until the enlistment’s over.” So....

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, ho, ho, ho.

John Fahey: [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: So, it didn’t matter how many points you had at that time; that you were ... you were stuck!

John Fahey: Well, I was regular Navy, so that didn’t make any difference.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:45:50] So, where were you when the, when you heard that Japan had surrendered, or when you heard the bombs had been dropped?

John Fahey: Actually, we were ... I was home. We’d go back to the states and ... I was home on VJ Day, which was a lot of fun. And I come [sic] down to... my mother was living in Los Angeles, so I came down to LA to see her at that time. So, that was ... it was quite a wild time.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I bet you were pretty happy to hear that.

John Fahey: Oh, yeah. [Laugh]

Janis Kozlowski: Until you found out, you weren’t gonna actually get out of, out of duty, though. [Chuckle]

John Fahey: No, all that wasn’t too bad, ‘cause.... Kind of disappointing, but, you know, you made your bed and you had to lay in it.

Janis Kozlowski: Right. So then after that, then what did you do, um, after your leave was over and the war was over; then what did they have you doing?

John Fahey: Well, we went back to the Pacific. And like I say, we went to ... Korea, we went to ... and we dropped supplies off there. We went to Shanghai, China. I remember I was there New Years eve, 1945. No, 1945/46, you know - it was the beginning of 1946 we were in Shanghai. And that was interesting, because I ... we pulled in there, and I remember I won the “Anchor.” We had a, what we called the “Anchor Pool,” - \$100 - which was a lot of money then. What happened, we would, they’d sell chances for which minute the ship was logged in when it got in port. And it so happened, I picked the right minute and won myself a \$100 bucks. So that was a big deal at the time.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, I bet. Did you end up comin' out of the service with quite a bit of money in your pocket?

John Fahey: I had some money that I'd sent home to my mother, because we really didn't have any place to spend it, other than supplies on the ship, you know - for cigarettes and tobacco, ah ... tooth brushes and stuff like that; you know, your grooming supplies. And they had candy too. You didn't have too much chance to spend money.

Janis Kozlowski: [Um-hum]

John Fahey: Unless you got to a place, like, in ... oversea, like when we got to Shanghai; where we got to be able to buy quite a bit of stuff, you know, souvenirs and stuff. But, you really couldn't get big [things], because we didn't ... we had small lockers and you had to keep everything in there. So, you couldn't buy anything big, because there was no way to get 'em home till you got back to the states.

Janis Kozlowski: [Um-hum]

John Fahey: So, I had most of my money sent home to my mother. So, I had enough when I got out. I bought a car in '46 with it. I kind of depleted my money, but at least I had some.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:49:18] What, what did you, when did you get discharged, and then what did you do, besides buying the car?

John Fahey: Well I, I got out in the last part of August of 1946. And a couple weeks later I was in school; I'd wanted to go to college. So, I started at El Camino Junior College there, in Los Angeles - Torrance, California, which is a suburb of Los Angeles - I don't know if you knew that. But, yeah, I went to El Camino, and was in the first graduating class in 1948. And after that, I went to U.S.C.

Janis Kozlowski: What was your profession?

John Fahey: Um... [Laugh] No, I worked in construction. I was what they call an estimator, or [Unclear word, sounds like "help"]. We, what ... the companies I worked for, we'd build roads and bridges and subdivisions. And earth moving was a big part of our work. So, we built freeways and bridges and stuff like that.

Janis Kozlowski: So your training, military training; did that help you with that at all, or?

John Fahey: Oh, yeah, because I could sit there typing code at night and go to sleep talking.

Janis Kozlowski: [Laugh]

John Fahey: And I knew the.... [Laugh] Actually, I would do that.

Janis Kozlowski: Really?

John Fahey: The typewriter would wake me up, when, you know, when you're ... got a bell on it when it comes [to the end] and you hit the return.

Janis Kozlowski: Ah-huh.

John Fahey: And, hell, I actually would fall asleep copying code ... in the middle of the night; it's not hard to do.

Janis Kozlowski: You mean, just in your mind, you did that?

John Fahey: Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh. How long did that go on? Was that something ... that stuck with you?

John Fahey: Well, that, being able to type was a big help in the work.