

Interview with Victor Krygowski

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project

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This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Mr. Krygowski was conducted via the telephone and recorded 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.

Vic Krygowski: [0:00:00] Well I got into military service actually when I was in my third year of college. At that time the representatives from the third naval district visited my school which was the Newark College of Engineering at the time, now it's known as New Jersey Institute of Technology. And they were looking for potential naval officers. Well, I had always been interested in things pertaining to the marine environment so I figured being in the Navy, especially since we had a shooting war going on in Europe, because that war started in September of '39 and it was now 1941. So, I signed up for it. And actually I was granted a probationary commission as an Ensign to be made permanent upon graduation and getting a degree a year later.

In the meantime, in that summer between my junior and senior year they offered me a job at a naval establishment of my choosing near my home and I chose the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I spent the entire summer in the Brooklyn Navy Yard as a probationary Ensign and I got Ensigns pay and I got the uniform allowance at the time since we were still at peace time, so I even got the ceremonial sword that every officer had to have at that time. I stayed with them until school started. They released me and I went back to complete my senior year in college.

Now in the meantime, December 7 of 1941 came along and for awhile I was sitting there on pins and needles waiting to be called to active duty in some capacity. They'd probably sign me up as a seaman at that time because my commission was strictly probationary and contingent upon graduating. But nevertheless they just told me and the others in the class to stand by and if they need us they'll call us. And so they permitted me to complete my senior year which the school abbreviated by one month; I graduated in May of '42. And then I went into the ... then I got my commission and I went into the Naval Reserve as a permanent Naval Reserve officer.

Janis Kozlowski: How old were you at the time?

Vic Krygowski: Well, I guess I was 21.

Janis Kozlowski: Pretty young.

Vic Krygowski: I graduated ... I mean I was born in 1920 – November of 1920. And that was '41 so I was 20 years old, 21, right.

Janis Kozlowski: And so where did they.... [0:03:38] What unit did you end up in and where did they end up sending you? How did you get into the wartime effort?

Vic Krygowski: Ok. The very first duty assignment that I got upon graduation was to the officer indoctrination school in Notre Dame. It was at Notre Dame University. And that went on for, I guess, a couple of months. At that point they had ordained me to be an ordnance officer. I had no choice in that. I had some designation as an Ordnance Officer.

In fact, my designation after Ensign was OV -- initially it was P – Officer Volunteer Probationary, and later, Officer Volunteer Specialist.

And when I got through with Notre Dame or as I was completing Notre Dame they gave me a choice. They said we can send you to one of three places. We can send you to the Naval Gun Factory in Washington DC where you will become familiar with the big 16 inch guns of the battleships and the ordnance of that size. And I'm thinking about my getting out of the Navy sometime in the future and pursuing a civilian life. Well, 16 inch guns didn't seem to be in the picture so I passed that up.

The other choice they gave me was the Naval Mine Warfare Depot in Huntington, West Virginia. And here again, I felt, you know, is there any civilian application to mines and I couldn't think of any [chuckling]. Then the last choice that I had was to go to the Naval Torpedo School in Newport, Rhode Island. Now, that appealed to me because the torpedo was a unit of and by itself. It had a propulsion system, it had a depth finding system, it had a course finding system with gyroscopes, it had an exploder system, and so it had ... and being a mechanical engineer I was a gadgeteer – I liked all that kind of stuff. So I chose torpedoes. And so they sent me to Newport.

And while I was at Newport in the Officer Torpedo School – and incidentally they ... it was a hands on course there where you could almost ... they trained you to know so much about the couple types of torpedoes that they had that you could almost assemble and disassemble one in the dark. But, while I was there, the submarines from New London, Connecticut and from Portsmouth, New Hampshire came down to pick up exercise torpedoes and to have their torpedo tubes aligned. And the skippers of these submarines, by and large, invited the officers from the torpedo school to come down and pay us a visit. So I took them up on that. And almost every day after school I would hike down to the docks and I'd climb aboard one of these submarines and just look around. And of course, it was a gadgeteers dream because there are more valves and dials and gauges and things on a submarine than you can shake a stick at so that appealed to me. And I kind of took a liking to submarines at that point. Up until that point submarines were not on my agenda at all.

But ... so when I got back to the Torpedo School or ... I went to see the Officer in Charge and I told him that I want to put in a request for submarine duty. And he said, "You know, guys like you we brought in here to be torpedo specialists and we envision you in a job, perhaps, overseeing civilian inspectors at torpedo manufacturing facilities." And either at Newport or at, I guess there was one from General Motors in Lansing, Michigan and a few others.

And ... so the torpedo ... the Officer-In-Charge of the torpedo school said there wasn't a China mans chance in the world of my getting submarine duty. I said, "Well, I don't want submarine duty, I want to go to submarine school first." And he says, "Well, it's one and the same thing."

[0:08:25] So, anyway, I went ... I continued my classes but on the last weekend of torpedo school – and we had school from 8 o'clock to 5 o'clock every day, seven, ah ... six days a week. And on Saturday afternoon was exam time. There was absolutely no interruption of that class while that class was in session and it had on exam day.

However, on this one day the Officer-in-Charge of the school shows up at the door and he's giving the "come-on" sign in my direction with his finger. Now, I wondered, "uh-oh somebody's in trouble here but it's not me I was doing well." So, he then finally said, "Krygowski." So I went out to see him. He says, "Pack up, you're bailing out." And I says, "Oh, submarines?" He says, "Oh, no, no." He says, "We couldn't get you submarines, but we got you pretty close. We got you on a submarine tender." And I have the orders in my hands and the orders read, "To be detached from the Torpedo School and then to proceed to whatever port the USS Beaver was in and report to the commanding officer for duty." I had no idea in the world at what port the USS Beaver was. But the Officer-in-Charge said, "Go down to New London and they'll set you straight as to where she is."

So, I packed up and left by train. The train then ran from Providence to New London and I went to the submarine base and the Officer on the deck told me that the USS Beaver was in town. She wasn't at the submarine base but she was at the, oh, what do they call it... like a ... oh, a pier. I'll think of the name of the company later. [The name of the pier was, State Pier in New London, CT. It was a public pier belonging to the State of Connecticut. The Beaver was there strictly to load provisions and other cargo in anticipation of her forthcoming voyage. Per V. Krygowski, July 15, 2008]

And, so he said, "I'll have a driver take you down." So, fine. We loaded the station wagon with my stuff and off I went. So I met the Executive Officer and it's now getting late in the evening and first thing he asked me, he said, "Where do you live?" And I told him, "in New Jersey." He says, "Do you want to go home for one day?" And I says, "Sure!" So he said, "Ok, come back tomorrow night." And so, I then found my way to the train station and got a train down to Newark. I called my family and they picked me up at the train station and that was that up to that point.

[0:11:41] And then the following day I reported back to the Beaver at the pier that she was at. And a day later we left for Scotland. Now I didn't know that we were going to Scotland. Neither did anybody else. But the night that I reported back on board we then left New London and we went to Long Island Sound to form a convoy of 40 ships, a total of 40 ships that we were going

to a destination across the Atlantic. And that was the time when the German U-boats were having their heyday if you remember or if you recall from your elementary school history lessons.

[0:12:22] So we left and that was the scariest journey that I had ever gone on because a wolf pack of German U-boats found us, found the convoy, and began to take pot shots at us. Now, the USS Beaver carried, among other things, 500 warheads – torpedo warheads – each of which weighed over 500 pounds of Torpex, or TNT, so we were a veritable floating bomb. And so, being considered an ammunition ship they put us smack in the middle of the convoy. Then close by us they put other valuable ships like aviation gas tankers and ships that were carrying precious cargo for the war effort and then finally on the outskirts of the convoy were the banana boats and others that were kind of expendable.

Janis Kozlowski: How many ships were in the convoy?

Vic Krygowski: 40. [0:13:27] On the way across we lost 10 of them.

Janis Kozlowski: What ... how'd you lose them?

Vic Krygowski: Through German U-boats, yeah. I remember very vividly one night ... well, first of all, you've got to remember that the Beaver was originally a pleasure craft. It was an excursion boat that was built for civilian purposes and acted as an excursion boat. I guess it was built in 1905. It had a steam driven engine and the Navy, I think, took it over in World War I, 1918 or thereabouts, and converted it to a submarine tender. So they took out all of the pleasure amenities and replaced them with machine shops and that kind of thing. And so she was a submarine tender, which was a mother ship for a squadron of submarines.

Janis Kozlowski: Did you have submarines in your convoy that went over or were you going to meet the subs that you were tending?

Vic Krygowski: We were going to meet them over there, yeah. We went separately in this all surface ship convoy and the submarines caught up with us later.

[0:14:40] And there were, I think, six or eight submarines in our squadron. It was submarine squadron 50 – five-zero. And it was under the leadership of Captain Ives and they had quite a bit to do with the landings in North Africa where the submarines were kind of the forward guard that checked out the area to, you know, find the hazards and so on and communicate back with the surface fleet that was gonna come in and do their work.

Anyway, our purpose in going to Britain – we wound up in Scotland, as I said – our purpose in going there was to relieve the British submarines and to let them go down to the Mediterranean to fight the war there while we were supposed to handle the British waters and the North Atlantic waters. And for awhile we had an experiment where we were trying to match submarine versus submarine which didn't turn out to be too successful because it's awfully difficult to pinpoint a submarine in the water since it has that third dimension. You know, you've got the depth. When

you are on the surface you've got the planer dimension. But when you're under water you have that third dimension of depth which complicates matters quite a bit.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:16:13] Yeah, it sounds like it was probably a pretty terrifying crossing.



Vic Krygowski: Oh, it certainly was, it certainly was. Since I was a late comer on the USS Beaver I asked the Exec, "Where's my battle station?" And he said, "Well, where do you want to be?" [laughing] I said, "I don't care." He said, "Well, go up on the flying bridge and make sure that the lookouts are paying attention and looking for periscopes and submarines rather than to look at anything else that's going on."

So I was up on the flying bridge where I had a bird's eye view of all of this. And as I was watching that tanker that I mentioned that was on our port side – port and starboard, I guess. The tankers are built with an island forward and an island aft and then the rest of it is low lying tanks and they just have catwalks that connect the forward island with the after island. And they had crews that were berthed in the forward part of the ship and crews that were berthed in the after part of the ship including in the bow they had the US Naval armed guard which went on all of those merchant ships at the time. So when the German submarine torpedo hit that ship loaded with aviation gas it was like the biggest fireworks display you could ever see.

It was burning from stem to stern and as I watched I could see the people from the forward island running along these catwalks, running aft and those from aft were running forward. And then when they got to the middle there was no place to go so they jumped overboard.



Janis Kozlowski: Oh, boy!

Vic Krygowski: And, on that particular ship they had picked up three people afterwards – this was the escort vessel did this. We only had two British corvettes which were like minesweepers or anyway they were about 60 or 70 feet long. And they were kind of useless, really. They carried depth charges, but they were not a real threat to the German U-boats. But anyway, they picked up a couple of survivors and the Beaver was the only ship in that convoy that had medical doctors on board. We carried two doctors and a dentist and so we were making provision to transfer these people to the Beaver for treatment. And as we started negotiations they said forget it; one of them is dead. And then before we got too much farther along the second one was dead. And then the third one they were already ... [coughing] excuse me ... they had him in a basket, I think, and... but he succumbed. And so nobody survived that. Zero survival rate.

Janis Kozlowski: So every ... are you talking about of the three guys or on that ship?

Vic Krygowski: Of the three guys.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok.

Vic Krygowski: Well, there was nobody else that was saved from that ship because there was nobody else to pick them up. So...

Janis Kozlowski: Right.

Vic Krygowski: If they didn't burn to death, they drowned.

Janis Kozlowski: Horrible! So, since you were about ... just about 20 years old, you probably wondered what have I gotten myself into? I volunteered for sub service ... ah, sub duty and then here I am on this ship watching people die and burn and ...

Vic Krygowski: I tell you that's what convinced me that I would rather be on the firing end of those torpedoes than on the receiving end.

But, anyway, I saw the young ... young sailors who were supposed to be lookouts on the bridge, they would actually kneel down and start praying aloud, while they saw this carnage going on around us.

Well, anyway, we got to Scotland and that was rather pleasurable because the Scottish people were awfully nice and very generous. They didn't have too much for themselves but they invited the crew members of the Beaver to come on Sundays to have Sunday dinner with them. And....

Janis Kozlowski: That was very nice.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, they were very generous. You know, you think of the Scotch people as being miserly but that's not so – not the ones that I knew.

So when we got to Scotland, as usual, they have to have their Officer's Club there. So, Victor Krygowski was named to set up the Officer's Club in Scotland in a place called Rosneath, R O S N E A T H. And that I did. Then I had a number of trips I made to Glasgow by station wagon to stock the bar and other beverages and then also the other odd jobs were like movie officer so I had to arrange for films to be brought to the Beaver to show to the crew on movie nights.

Janis Kozlowski: So that was kind of a fun job.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, it was alright. It wasn't Navy work, it had nothing to do with torpedoes but I didn't mind it. I had to be there one way or another so I'd just as soon be doing something.

[0:21:42] And, while I'm there, while I'm in Scotland, I'm continuing to put in my requests for submarine duty. Now, anybody putting in requests to the Chief of Naval Personnel or any other higher authority has to go through the ranks. So, my skipper, he said that, "Well, since you want submarine duty so badly," he said, "I'm going to endorse this. I'm just going to forward it. I'm not going to endorse it not recommending approval or denial. I'm just going to forward it. Let the Navy make up their own mind as to whether they want me to go to submarine school or not." So that continued like every three months while I was on the Beaver including the time that we were in the Pacific. And it wasn't until we got to Attu that my orders to submarine school came through. Now, I had to go half a world back to New London, Connecticut for submarine school. But they finally came through and I eventually got on board a submarine.

Janis Kozlowski: Before you leave your Scotland experience, did you have any other hair raising experiences there?

Vic Krygowski: In Scotland, no.

Janis Kozlowski: Or how about on your way over to the Aleutians? That was a pretty long trip.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. Well that one was ... that one ... well, the thing that I remember about that trip most of all was the fact that we crossed the 180th meridian three times while we were going forward. We hit a williwaw up there in the northwest Pacific and it was so severe that even though our engines were going ahead the wind was blowing us back. So we crossed the 180th and then before we knew it we were being blown back across the 180th and then we had to go over a third time. [both laughing] We crossed it to head on the rest of the way to Attu.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:23:57] That must have been quite a williwaw because the Beaver was a pretty large ship, wasn't it?

Vic Krygowski: Oh yeah. Yes, it was over 300 feet long and ... yeah, it was fair sized. It was a very comfortable ship as a matter of fact, even though it was a floating graveyard because it had no water tight integrity whatsoever. And had one of those German torpedoes hit us I wouldn't be here talking to you today, I'm sure.

Janis Kozlowski: It just wouldn't have been able to take the hit?

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, that's right. It would just cause a bit hole in it and it would go down. Period. Nowadays they have double hulls and that kind of thing. They didn't have that in those days. Especially since this was not built as a war ship, it was built as a pleasure vessel.

Janis Kozlowski: And, it was getting pretty aged, wasn't it?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yeah. 1905. It was on in years.

[0:24:52] One other nice thing that happened to me on the Beaver was, I had been a deck officer, standing deck watches all this while and then when we got to, when we were leaving Mare Island [30 miles northeast of San Francisco on the edge of Vallejo, California, established in 1854] to go to Dutch Harbor, which was our first stop, I think, the skipper switched me over to the engine room. He says, "I'm gonna make you an engineering officer."

So, we left Mare Island and it was still pretty warm. I didn't exactly like that, the engine room was hot as can be. But, boy, when we got into Alaskan waters I really appreciated it. [laughing] It was nice and toasty! The guys on deck were freezing to death. So that was one of the good things that happened. I enjoyed being the engineering officer too after serving on the deck all that while.

Did I mention this was a steam driven vessel?

Janis Kozlowski: No.

Vic Krygowski: It had a steam engine in it that was driven by, I guess, two cylinders and one of the jobs I had to do as the engineering officer of the watch was as this big rotating cam shaft came down you'd have to slap it feel if it was getting warm. That would mean that the bearings were wearing and something has to be done about it that you certainly have to lubricate it for. And so that was one of the jobs.

The other thing I remember about the engine room there is that the crew, long before I got into the engine room, had tapped into the high pressure steam line with a copper tubing coil that they used to heat the water to make coffee with. Now that was a complete no-no. [laughing] If the skipper had ever found out about that they'd have been in deep trouble. If he ever knew about it he never said anything but that's how we made our coffee in the engine room.

Janis Kozlowski: Had to learn to make do with what you had.

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yes, yeah. And all it took was to fill up a jug or a mug with water and just run it over this coil and take it out and by then it was steaming boiling hot, which goes to show you that the heat that was in that steam that was in that line. Had that ever ruptured we'd also have been in trouble.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, yeah. [0:27:07] How many people were aboard the ship?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, I don't know exactly but we had about oh, maybe, 30 officers, I know. And I have a roster of the officers that were on board but I don't have a roster of the crew.

Janis Kozlowski: Would you ... how many would you guess were on there?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, I would say a couple hundred, maybe.

Janis Kozlowski: And, let me back up just one second. How long did you spend in Scotland?

Vic Krygowski: Well, I was there ... the Beaver was there just short of a year.

Janis Kozlowski: And then, how long were you in transit going from Scotland over to the Aleutians?

Vic Krygowski: Well, then we came back. We crossed the Atlantic. We were not in a convoy at that point.

Janis Kozlowski: You just came as a single ship?

Vic Krygowski: As a single ship, running at high speed and we did some zig-zagging so as not to form a target for German U-boats. We got to Brooklyn Navy Yard, they did some repair work on it and then we went around to the Pacific side through the Canal and wound up at Mare Island before we went to Alaska.

Janis Kozlowski: Do you have any ... do you remember how long that was from when you left Scotland until you got to Alaska, how much time had passed?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, it had to be months. Because the Beaver was not a fast ship to begin with and when you zig-zag you slow yourself down even more because you don't steer a straight course.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, right.

Vic Krygowski: So, it took several months. I don't know exactly how long. But, it was a good long time.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah, that's a lot of water to get all away across to the other side of the world.

Vic Krygowski: [0:28:47] Once we got to Attu and the Captain permitted the crew to go on liberty I happened to be officer on the deck when these guys were coming back from liberty. And here they were coming back with rifles, mortars, grenades, all live ammunition stuff and so I had to stop them. And I called for some help from the Army that was there at the time and we set up the quarterdeck at the end of the pier, not onboard the ship, and we collected all of this ordnance from these guys as they were bringing their souvenirs on board.

Janis Kozlowski: Where had they gone on liberty? Just on the island?

Vic Krygowski: Just on the island, yeah. At the time they even had dead Japs laying around they hadn't dealt with.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, oh.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, no, they were there and every now and then you would see a sign over a mound of dirt that says, "Here lies 30 dead Japs." That was their head stone.

Janis Kozlowski: Hmm. So that's where they got all the guns and ammunition.

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yeah. Well, they took them from the corpses, sure. And unbeknownst to them, some of them were booby-trapped so that they were so arranged so that if you tried to take that from a corpse, it blew up. None of our guys got caught with that but they ... but they did have quite a . They could have had their own war with what they collected. That was quite a trying experience.

Janis Kozlowski: I guess, yeah. I imagine they probably weren't too excited to go on liberty on Attu Island. There wasn't much to do there so that was probably one of the few things they could find to spend time doing.

Vic Krygowski: That's right, we had no facilities set up for recreation whatsoever at that point. So all they could do was to go hiking around the island and as I said, there was still corpses just laying around. They hadn't been cleaned up yet.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:30:48] Were you and the people on the ship aware of the battle that had taken place there before you landed?

Vic Krygowski: Well, we were aware that there was ... that the Army had invaded Attu and there were Japs on there and they had a war. But we never knew, you know, what size it was or too much about it for that matter.

While we were on Attu, one night while the crew was at the local movie theatre on land and a couple of Japanese planes came over from the island of Paramushiro and dropped a couple of bombs. It didn't cause much damage of any kind, missed any critical targets and I know they called us back from the movie theatre to our ship but by the time we got back to the ship they were already gone and they didn't show up after that at all.

Janis Kozlowski: So it was just that one time they came over?

Vic Krygowski: Just that one time, right.

Janis Kozlowski: Well that was probably enough to shake you all up a little bit.

Vic Krygowski: Oh, you said it! [both laughing] Of course, we could hear the explosions in the movie theatre so we knew something was up and then they interrupted the movie to say, "Get back to your ships immediately!" We all steamed out.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:32:09] Was it just your ship there at Attu at the time, or were there others?

Vic Krygowski: Well in our immediate vicinity the Beaver was the only one there. There might have been ... we might have had a submarine or two tied up alongside but I don't really recall that.

Janis Kozlowski: Um-hmm.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, we tended a squadron of S type submarines.

Janis Kozlowski: What were the S type submarines?

Vic Krygowski: They were pre-World War II submarines. The earlier ones had other initials like the "O" type submarines were really the very first functional ones and they were really primitive. Like, for example, they had one head that was right in the middle of the control room. So anybody doing his duty was right there. They had nothing like in the line of showers or that kind of thing.

When I got on the Devilfish, of course, we were a modern fleet type submarine and so we had crew showers and we had officer showers and private bathrooms and that kind of thing.

Janis Kozlowski: What was the Devilfish?

Vic Krygowski: That was the submarine that I was on later on in the war.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok, so you ended up, at some point you did get on a sub?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yes.

Janis Kozlowski: But after you saw these S type subs you were probably glad you didn't get on one of those?

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, but I got a scare on that one because one night our skipper was coming back from the officer's club and he was somewhat shaky and reeling and he said, "Krygowski, you're going out on the S so and so tomorrow morning." And then he left. So I didn't know, you know, quite what to do.

So I then ... I knew that he was under the weather so I couldn't talk to him anymore and he had gone to his quarters but I got nerve enough to wake up the Executive Officer who wasn't quite asleep and I said, "Hey, am I going out on the submarine tomorrow?" He said, "Where'd you get that idea?" I said, "Well, Skipper just told me I'm going out on the so and so." I forget the number, it was in the 40s. And, so he said, "no, no" he says, "You're not going out on any submarine." And so I rested easy that night but the thought was in the back of my mind [laughing]. Here, Skippers telling me I've got a job to do and I didn't want to be AWOL from the submarine when it goes out on patrol if I'm supposed to be on board.

Vic Krygowski: So ... well, we got past that one alright.

Janis Kozlowski: So you never did have to go?

Vic Krygowski: No. And I'm glad that I didn't have to go on the S type submarines.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:35:00] What kind of missions were those submarines on?

Vic Krygowski: Well, they were to protect any of our shipping that was operating in the North Pacific for one reason or another. They were, of course, to intercept any enemy warships or merchant ships of Japanese extraction and sink them.

Janis Kozlowski: So they'd be gone ... they'd be out doing their missions for a long time and then they'd come back to the tender, the Beaver, when they needed support?

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, for repair, re-fit, re-provisioning and the crew got off and got some rest on dry land and that was it.

Janis Kozlowski: Were you the only sub tender in the Aleutians?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yes. Yeah, there was none other.

Janis Kozlowski: And you stayed at Attu? That was your base?

Vic Krygowski: That was our base. All the while I was there it was in Attu and it was in Attu until she left. When they left there she went to San Diego and stayed there for awhile but I was not on board so I don't know too much about that.

Janis Kozlowski: Ok, now you said something I thought was kind of humorous. You said, "the subs came back and were refitted and so forth and the guys got a chance to sleep on dry land." Does that mean they went up and slept on Attu in tents or did they come on your ship?

Vic Krygowski: No, they had, like, a dormitory set up for them by that time. They didn't have any luxury apartments in it but they slept on cots. But anyway, it was dry land rather than a wet, soggy forever humid submarine.

Janis Kozlowski: And did you do that off of your ship as well or did you always stay on the ship?

Vic Krygowski: I stayed on the ship. No, our ship was high and dry and there was no need to leave it for any reason.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:36:56] Were you provisioned pretty well on the ship?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yes! We carried provisions for the whole submarine squadron.

Janis Kozlowski: So you got pretty good food and plenty of it?

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yes. Yeah, we got submarine food which was excellent.

Janis Kozlowski: So, because a lot ... I heard a lot of guys complain about how the food was not that good, a lot of powdered eggs and, you know, not too good. Sounds like, but the people from the Navy have always said that they had better.

Vic Krygowski: Oh, yeah. Well, either on the sub tender or on a submarine you provision yourself with as much that ... with as many vegetables and fruits for the duration of time that the fruit would keep without, you know, freezing or that kind of thing. So, we would carry maybe a weeks worth or two weeks worth of fruits and vegetables. But when that ran out then it was indeed powdered eggs and other things that the cooks could come up with.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, what did you ... as a young guy out in the Aleutians there, what did you think about the place?

Vic Krygowski: Well, I thought it was quite a desolate outpost. It didn't have much of anything. I guess, nature had a ... painted a nice picture there, it was a picturesque place but other than that, you know, I'd rather be home in New Jersey.

Janis Kozlowski: Sure. So how long did your ship end up staying in the Aleutians?

Vic Krygowski: Well, I know that they stayed beyond my time. Now, I left the Beaver to go to submarine school. It had to be about ... well the early part of '44, I think.

Janis Kozlowski: That's when you went to sub school?

Vic Krygowski: Yes. And I spent three months in submarine school and then upon graduation depending on your class standing you were given your choice of submarine duty. And they had a whole list of stations that you could go to. You could choose a school submarine right there at New London, the old "O" type submarines that would go out in the morning, come back in the afternoon, you know, and do their training exercises. Or you could choose a new construction submarine which was state of the art, fully air conditioned and all the amenities of good living. Or you can ... you can choose an operating submarine that, maybe, was older vintage. Well, if you were so inclined and wanted to go on an "S" boat, you had that choice.

But anyway, the top guy in the class got his number one spot and everybody else followed. I didn't do too badly so I got new construction submarine and they gave me a choice of the submarine that I wanted. So I looked at the roster of where the submarines were being built and what were they. So they had the Cramp Shipbuilding Company in Philadelphia building submarines and I figure, well, that would be a nice place, that's close enough to Jersey I'd be able to get home and, you know, that kind of thing.

[0:40:23] So I signed up for new construction in Philadelphia. And then when it came to choosing the ship that I wanted, I looked at the roster and they had names like: Escolar [SS-294], Hackleback [SS-295] – they were named after fish – Ling and the Devilfish. And the Devilfish [SS-292] sounded like more of a daring kind of a ... it sounded like it would make a good submarine picture – motion picture. [laughing] So, I chose the Devilfish and I got it. So I spent quite a few months in Philadelphia waiting for the Devilfish being completed.

But to tell you the history of the Devilfish – she was the very first keel that was laid at Cramp. Cramp was going to built these.... First of all, Cramp were excellent builders of concrete barges.

Janis Kozlowski: Is that C R A M P?

Vic Krygowski: C R A M P, yeah Shipbuilding Company. And so you wouldn't think that there would be a link between building concrete barges and submarines.

Janis Kozlowski: No, because they are pretty different. [both laughing]

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. But they worked under the auspices of the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard expert who came down and were, you know, teaching them the ropes, so to speak. But the result of all of this was that they started on the Devilfish and they hit some snags. When they hit some snags they left it and they went on to the Escolar and the Hackelback and the Dragonet [SS-293] and they were working on them while they let the Devilfish linger.

In the meantime, all of the gear for the Devilfish was being brought to the piers where the submarine was being built. As a result of that we had a lot of sensitive radar gear, you know, high priced electronics, sonar gear and all of that that was sitting under leaky tarpaulins.

Vic Krygowski: [0:42:39] And so, then the Navy finally got after Clamp and said, “finish the Devilfish.” So, they finally finished the Devilfish but we didn’t feel too good about it especially since as we were.... Oh, first of all the Dragonet, the Hackelback and, I guess, one other – the Escolar, went out ahead of us.

So when we got ... when we rounded Panama Canal and we were heading out toward Pearl Harbor, which was going to be our base, we found out that, a) the USS Escolar was sunk, reason unknown – as it is for most submarines and, b) the USS Hackelback was limping back into port with a flooded forward torpedo room.

Due to some unexplained accident. But it didn’t sink, it just got a lot of water and they were coming back for repairs. So, anyway, morale on the USS Devilfish when we got to Pearl Harbor was at very low levels because now Cramp boats began to be jinxed boats. They call submarine boats, incidentally, they are big enough to earn the title of ship, but they’re really boats. Every submariner calls his ship, a boat. So they ... we found out that these two boats were gone ... well, one was gone and one was almost gone. And then people began to want to get off the Devilfish because they were jinxed ... it was a jinxed boat.

Vic Krygowski: [0:44:18] So, I had a couple of excellent torpedo men, I was a torpedo officer, and I had a couple excellent men on there. One guy was named Kellogg and the other ones name was Scully [William E. Kellogg, TM 1/c and John F. Scully, TM 3/c. Per V. Krygowski, July 15, 2008]. Kellogg was the first class torpedo man and Scully was a third class torpedo man--petty officer. So I moved them to the base, you don’t want to be on the Devilfish, off you go. So they went to the base and were subsequently, both of them were reassigned to the USS Snook, S N O O K – that’s another submarine that was subsequently sunk with all hands, including Messieurs, Kellogg and Scully. So they got out of the frying pan and into the fire without knowing about it. [The Snook (SS279) was declared lost in the spring of 1945. Per V. Krygowski, July 15, 2008]

Janis Kozlowski: They would have been better off staying with you.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, yeah. We at least survived. [0:45:13] We were hit by a kamikaze plane in our second patrol but we survived it. [coughing]

Janis Kozlowski: So were you just ... were you on the surface at the time?

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. That’s a whole different story. That could be a ... the subject of another interview some time.

Yes, we were on the surface. We were en route to our patrol area and we were.... Late in the afternoon a lookout spotted an airplane. Well, when a submarine spots an airplane you don’t bother changing recognition signals, you know, any of that stuff, you just get out of his way. So, we pulled the plug and we went down and as we were going down this loud explosion rocks the

whole ship and water begins to pour in in the conning tower area – from many, many openings. So now we thought that he was up there, he dropped a bomb that came pretty close to hitting us, did a lot of damage, and that he's circling up there to give us the coup de grace. Except that now we are under water but in Pacific waters depending on where you are you don't know how deep into the water they can see the silhouette from the air.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh

Vic Krygowski: So, you're sitting on pins and needles, you know, knowing he's up there and he's about ready to unload another bomb and maybe put you out of commission forever. So, we then ... Skipper.... The water intake was greater than we could pump out. So, the Skipper then had to make a decision because if we stay under much longer getting heavier we're not going to be able to fight this negative buoyancy so we're gonna have to surface and fight this guy on the surface with machine guns. So we surfaced.

Janis Kozlowski: So are subs equipped to fight on the surface with sub machine guns?

Vic Krygowski: Oh no, no. They weren't designed for that. That was just like a, you know, a second line of defense so to speak.

Vic Krygowski: Anyway, I had you sitting on pins and needles now waiting for that bomb to drop. [Janis laughing] So the Skipper says "surface." So the alarm goes off, "Kaooogah, Kaooogah" and up we come. Now, when you blow main ballast tanks in the submarine only the conning tower comes out of the water, the whole ship doesn't come out of the water. And there's only one hull opening or one hatch for people to get in and out of the conning tower.

And the Skipper is watching the board, the depth gauge, and his Christmas tree display of lights and he says, "open the hatch." He's already spotted that the hatch is up out of the water. Meanwhile we have the gun crews all ready with their machine guns which came from a nice dry magazine down below ready to go on deck and put these machine guns in their sockets and start firing. The Skipper says, "Open the hatch."

So the Quartermaster of the watch is already on the ladder and every submarine hatch has a wheel in it that has prongs that go out to lock the hatch in place – they call [them] dogs. So he spins the wheel and the dogs recede. They're ok. Then all he's gotta do is to hit the latch, like on a screen door and the hatch flies open. So this guy's hitting this latch to a point where his hand begins to bleed and it's not opening. So the report goes back to the Skipper the hatch won't open.

Now the Skippers beside himself because, you know, [chuckling] because this never happened before and he doesn't see why this hatch wouldn't open. Others get on that ladder and they're hammering this with their fist. Somebody gets a hammer and is hitting on it. Nothing, nothing helps.

So now, what you got ... there are other openings on the submarine, of course, along the main deck. But now you've got to get the whole ship out of the water and you do that with what we call a low pressure blower. That takes about 15 or 20 minutes. So we get the low pressure blowers going and gradually the ship comes out of the water. In the meantime, we were all

saying our prayers because we know now we are fully visible, we're on the surface. And he's up there circling. He can't miss!

So we were sitting on pins and needles. Everybody is sure that, not IF we're gonna die, you know, but WHEN are we gonna die. So the ship finally gets up out of the water and the gun crew up through the deck hatches to go up on the conning tower to put their guns in their sockets. And what do they find, but this big landing gear right over the conning tower hatch. He had come into the water after us as we were diving.

Janis Kozlowski: Oh, so there's a big piece of airplane stuck on the conning tower. That's why the hatch wouldn't come open.

Vic Krygowski: That's right, that's right. So we had to then remove that big landing gear and we hack sawed off some of the name plates and we sent that to naval intelligence and they found out what kind of a plane it was that hit us.

But anyway, we knew then that he had come in the water after us and there was nothing around us and we searched the whole surface. He was not ... we thought maybe he'd be floating out there in a life preserver or something. But the kamikaze don't believe in life preservers because their mission is to go out – it's a one way trip guaranteed for the sake of the emperor and you give up your life so that the rest of the country is safe.

Janis Kozlowski: So he never tried to save himself, he just went down with his airplane in the water?

Vic Krygowski: Well, he was probably killed on impact in the airplane. So he probably went down in his seat and sank with the wreckage.

Janis Kozlowski: How far off from Pearl Harbor were you at the time?

Vic Krygowski: We were just south of the island of Iwo Jima at the time. And, we reasoned ... see this was March 20th of 1945. We reasoned that that must have been ... oh, and the Marines were just about securing Iwo Jima at that time at great cost to us. And we reasoned that he must have been one of the last Jap planes that could possibly get off the island and rather than strafing a few Marines on the island he saw this multimillion dollar submarine with 80 people on board and he figured he was gonna earn his place of honor on the Emperors whatever – honor roll – and he would be then deified forever by the Japanese people.

Janis Kozlowski: But he never ... he didn't really damage ... nobody got hurt on your sub?

Vic Krygowski: No, no, not a single person.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, that must have been a pretty scary experience.

Vic Krygowski: Yep. Oh, it was, especially when that water began to pour in. We had to do what we could to funnel it down to the bilges so that the bilge pumps can start pumping it

overboard. But the intake was so far greater than the output that the ship was getting heavier and heavier. And if you get enough negative buoyancy then, you know, you only go one way and that's straight down.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:53:03] Well, at that point were you sorry that you worked so hard to try to get in subs?

Vic Krygowski: No, no. Actually I think if the day after that the war had ended and they wanted me to continue to stay in I probably would have gone.

Janis Kozlowski: So what did you do after the war was over?

Vic Krygowski: Well, I worked for the company that made one of the secret torpedoes for the Navy – unbeknownst to me at the time -- the Western Electric Company in Kearny, New Jersey. They were makers of Bell Telephones. It was the manufacturing unit for the Bell system. So, I looked around and was interviewed for several jobs. I had my BS in mechanical engineering and so I had a number of offers but none of them were as good as Western Electric which was \$63 per week.

Janis Kozlowski: That was probably pretty good wages at the time?

Vic Krygowski: That was excellent at the time. And so they kind of gave me some credit for my Naval Service although some of the others said, you know, you haven't worked a day in industry. We can't credit you with any experience. So you fought the war, so, you know, you fought the war – that's different. But Western Electric was a little more sensitive to that and so they gave me a better offer than the average.

Janis Kozlowski: Plus, you were building something that you knew quite a bit about since you'd gone through all that training.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. Well, the Western Electric Company in Kearny had one building that was set aside just to make these, what they called "Cutie" torpedoes [The acoustic homing torpedo was a Mark 27 Torpedo. Someone gave it the affectionate name of "Cutie" and it stuck. It was not the official Navy name for it. Per V. Krygowski, July 15, 2008]. They were sound sensing torpedoes. The idea was that a submarine, if it found a target, usually a smaller target than a big battleship or something like that, but a smaller target. If they found one in the neighborhood they would then go down to about 100 feet or more and send out the torpedo. Now the torpedo would go up to about the 50 foot level and circle until the sound picked up the propellers of the enemy ship. And then it homed in on that sound. And then it headed right for it and it blew the rear right off every ship that it hit.

Janis Kozlowski: Sounds like a pretty good weapon.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, and it was super secret at the time. I remember that even when we were loading them we had Marines standing around so that nobody could get too curious about them. The building in Kearny had an armed guard of anti-aircraft people on the roof of that building should somebody decide to attack it.

So knowing that and since they gave me a good offer, I figure I'll go with them.

We had a lot of Western Electric equipment on board. All the sound powered telephones, some of the radar - that was made by Western Electric. The radio gear itself was made by Western Electric. So it was ... it had a good reputation of being a good place to work.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:56:13] So was this, maybe, in '46?

Vic Krygowski: That was ... yeah, that was ... yeah. Because, I was discharged in '45, in September of '45. I came home, got married in September of '45 and then had to go back for a little bit. But the early part of '46 is when my time was up and the paperwork was done and I separated from the Navy at that time.

Janis Kozlowski: So your wife didn't know but she married a rich guy, or a guy that was gonna be rich - working for Western Electric.

Vic Krygowski: Well, [laughing] as rich as a working man can get in those days.

Janis Kozlowski: Yeah. [laughing]

Vic Krygowski: There was in Bloomfield at the time, well, my wife lived in Bloomfield, I lived in Newark. But she ... so I went to the General Electric Company in Bloomfield and I went to Westinghouse in Bloomfield and they both made me offers but they were not good or there was some other negatives about it that made me opt for going with Western Electric.

Janis Kozlowski: Then did you stay with them for your whole career?

Vic Krygowski: 34 years.

Vic Krygowski: With Western Electric. Yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: So that turned out to be a good choice for you.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, I went from a rookie engineer to middle management in engineer ... all of it in engineering. I had a tour of duty in labor relations which was an eye opener for me. But, yeah, it was a good life's excursion. If I had to do it over again I wouldn't change too many things, I'll tell you that.

Janis Kozlowski: Well, it sounds like you were pretty single minded about what you wanted to do, even when you were young and getting out of college, you know, you wanted ... the torpedoes were a good choice for you and you kind of stuck with that and the submarines and then this whole thing carried into your profession later.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, there was a linkage that drew us together, sure.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:58:08] Do you have any ... any of your wartime experiences that stuck with you that seem very important, that kind of shaped your life?

Vic Krygowski: All of them.

Janis Kozlowski: All of them [laughing]. The whole experience for you....

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. Well, you know, you undergo some of these, some of these periods in your life where your life is at stake and at periods of time when you're sure you are gonna die. You begin to wonder, what's it like to die. So, it's ... that has a sobering effect on you, I guess, all through your life, somehow.

Janis Kozlowski: Yes, particularly when it happens at such a young age.

Vic Krygowski: Oh yeah, yeah.

Janis Kozlowski: [0:58:52] Do you keep in touch with some of the guys that you served with, do you ever keep in touch with them?

Vic Krygowski: Yes, I kept in touch with a few of them. I never.... I kept in touch with the radar officer aboard the Beaver right up until lately when he went into an assisted living facility. He's not well.

But in the meantime another friend showed up, a guy by the name of George Reynolds, who was a motor machinist mate on the Beaver. He was ... he had gotten out of the Navy and had experience in many fields and lastly he became an ordained minister. But, he was trying to get a roster of old surviving Beaver-ites so that, maybe, we could have a reunion.

He caught up with me through the memorial log of the US Navy in Washington. Are you familiar with that?

Janis Kozlowski: No.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah, they have the US Navy Memorial in Washington DC and part of their claim to fame is that they keep what they call a "Navy log." And if you go into that log, and this is all available by email, internet, you can submit a name and they'll tell you about, you know, who this guy was what his rank was, what duty stations he had, what medals he won. You know, they give you like a brief biography of the guy.

He found me on that and he hasn't had too much luck making contact with too many others because most of us are gone.

Vic Krygowski: And so we ... I got to know him in 2006 and we met, we met for ... just about at Thanksgiving Day. I have a son that's a dentist in Falls Church, Virginia. We go down there for Thanksgiving holidays every year by tradition. On the way down since this guy is in Elkton, Maryland and he's right off I-95 so we made provision at that time to meet at a McDonalds right

off the highway. And we had a very, very nice minireunion. And then last year we did the same thing. And this year, God willing, we'll do it again.

Janis Kozlowski: So now you have another new tradition.

Vic Krygowski: Yeah. [both laughing] In fact, he had a battle station that was not more than maybe 20 feet away from my battle station on the Beaver. He was in charge of the searchlight that was on the mast, just in front of the flying bridge that I was on looking over my lookouts.

Janis Kozlowski: So you worked pretty close together?

Vic Krygowski: In fact, we have ... he sent me some pictures where he identified, you know, where his perch was and where I was. Yeah, I'll send you some of those pictures.

End Interview at 1:02:14