

Antarctic Deep Freeze Oral History Project
Interview with Clinton Davis, BM2, USN (Ret.)
conducted on September 25, 1999, by Dian O. Belanger

DOB: Today is the 25th of September, 1999. I'm Dian Belanger. I'm speaking with Clinton Davis about his experiences in Antarctica on the USS *Glacier*.

Thank you for talking with me, Clinton, and I'm eager to hear about it.

CD: I'm Clinton Davis and I'm here to give you what information I can as far as the *Glacier* is concerned and what I can remember.

DOB: Thank you. To start, just tell me very briefly a little bit about your background: where you grew up, where you went to school, what you decided to do with your life, and in particular anything from all of that that might suggest you'd end up on an icebreaker in southern waters.

CD: Well, I was born and raised in North Carolina, a little town called Winnabow, North Carolina, and I went to school in Southport, North Carolina. I entered the service on December the 5th, 1944.

DOB: The Navy?

CD: The Navy. And I stayed in boot camp approximately six weeks because that was during the war and you didn't stay in very long. After I broke boot camp, I was shipped to Little Creek, Virginia, attached with the Amphibious. And I stayed with that until I got out . . . I was attached to the Amphibious, then I went to Texas to pick up an LST-443, which was attached to the Amphibious Navy. From there, we brought the ship around to Norfolk, Virginia. And from there the war ended so we got off the ship, transferred off, and I got out and went back to high school.

Then I decided I would come back into the service and do a career in the Navy. So I did, and I left North Carolina and I went to Norfolk, Virginia, and they put me on a ship and I went to Honolulu, Hawaii. I stayed there, was stationed there for four years. I left there, came back to the States and went to San Francisco to put the USS *Iowa* in commission during the Korean conflict. We put her in commission, we went to Korea, I stayed on her until 1951 . . . '51 or '52.

Then I was transferred to Patuxent River, Maryland. I was stationed there for training midshipmen [midshipmen] for approximately two years. While stationed there, I got orders. They created a crew for the USS *Glacier*. I had no dreams of icebreaker . . . I didn't know exactly what it was. The crew, we boarded a train and went to Pascagoula, Mississippi.

DOB: Did you volunteer for this or were you just sent there?

CD: I was sent. Orders were cut for me to go. So then after we got to Mississippi, we stayed there for a few weeks before the ship went in commission. We boarded the ship before she went in commission because we had to get it ready, sleeping quarters and what-not squared away, and we did that and she went in commission on the 27th of May of 1955. And from that day, I stayed on her until 1963.

DOB: That's a very long time.

CD: Eight years.

DOB: They call you Mr. Glacier.

CD: I know. I'm one of the plank owners that was on there and put her in commission, and I stayed on there longer than any other sailor that served on it.

DOB: How did that happen? Did you ask for that then?

CD: Well, in a way I guess I did because they wanted to transfer me to a tanker—switch places with another bosun mate. He was on the tanker *Caloosahatchee*, and I was on the *Glacier*. So he didn't want to leave the *Caloosahatchee*, I didn't want to leave the *Glacier*, so the officers got together through the Navy and just reversed the orders. He stayed there and I stayed on the *Glacier*. It was a dream for me because for the simple reason, every year we would leave in the early fall, September, for the Antarctic.

Now our first trip we towed the YOG, which was an oiler—picked it up in Norfolk. We towed that all the way to New Zealand before we went into the ice. Then we went in the ice and we came back and picked it up and took it down into the ice. So it was an experience for all of us because I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was the longest tow in Navy history, I believe, for one ship to tow an oil barge that far. We had our problems with it, but things did work out okay.

DOB: This was its maiden voyage?

CD: Yes, it was the maiden voyage.

DOB: Tell me about it.

CD: It was a situation where you might not take to a round-bottom ship. She's built round bottom so she could ride on the ice if the ice ever got too bad, and it was rough riding. You get into bad weather, you had to strap yourself in to the bunks at times to stay. After a while, you got so that you could walk on the ship. You know, you'd wobble a little, but even then you could walk and you'd have the necessary balance to catch hold to the bulkheads and what-not. You could maneuver. So as time went on, you got better and better.

DOB: Did you get seasick?

CD: I never got seasick out of the eight years I was on there. I guess it's fortunate because I was brought up on the river there in North Carolina. Maybe that had something to do with it. But anyway, I never got seasick.

But I said to myself, why am I on this ship when it's a possibility I could've gone to something bigger? But after finding out that we'll be gone for six months from the United States, which was winter back here, summer down there. Daylight twenty-four hours a day. But it was awful cold. But the idea is, when we leave from down there, the sun was beginning to set in the horizon, so it's time to get out because things were beginning to change. The weather is getting colder and everything, so we got off from down there. We got back into the States approximately April or May, then we are there in Boston, which was our home port for six months.

If we had damage, we would go in dry dock. Sometimes Navy dry dock, sometimes civilian dry dock. And they would overhaul the ship, do the repairs they had to do, and we were there during the summer months so it was fine. Everyone likes warm weather. I do. So therefore, it was fine with me. And then as soon as fall come, we head back to the South Pole.

DOB: The ship never went to the North Pole in that time?

CD: The ship did. I don't remember exactly what year it was, but I think we were the only ship that went from the bottom of the world to the top of the world in the same year. We left the South Pole, stopped in Boston, came up through the St. Lawrence Seaway and up into Thule, Greenland, which is the Air Force base up there. We got up there and we broke ice and took ships in there.

We stayed up there a while and we came back, and we went through the process of the ship being checked for whatever damage and overhaul or whatever was needed, replenish food supplies and everything so we would be ready to go back down south come September.

And it was a constant thing each year. We did not hit many ports going down. Not too many going down for the simple reason we would go to Norfolk . . . we'd leave Norfolk . . . most of the time we'd leave Boston and go into Norfolk and leave Norfolk and then we'd go through the Panama Canal, Panama Canal to New Zealand, which was Christchurch. Well, Lyttelton, New Zealand. That was our first port because Christchurch was inland. Lyttelton was a small port for the ship to get water and supplies. We'd go in there and we'd stay approximately, oh I'd say a week, ten days, getting fresh food, vegetables, whatever, fuel, picking up scientists and whatever they

would have to have. Then we would leave there and go to the South Pole. It would take approximately two or three weeks—all depends on the weather—to get there.

DOB: Two to three weeks from Christchurch?

CD: It would take approximately—it all depends on the weather. Now if we had decent weather, it wouldn't take that long. But if it was bad weather, you couldn't travel that fast. We would go into the ice. We'd start breaking the channel.

DOB: Tell me about the first year, because that was—

CD: Fifty-five. The first year, believe it or not, you're in your bunk, you're not used to this noise and rumble. They're breaking the ice and nothing but a roar and a rumble and the ship rocking. You couldn't sleep for the first night or two because you're not used to it. Afterwards, like I said, as time passes on, you get used to just about anything. You got so you could take anything. They break ice and the ship hits a big piece of ice and you're rolling and it wouldn't even wake you up. You got used to it. And after so many days of that stuff, it didn't bother you.

The first year, though, it was an experience I guess that . . . I don't know, I never had experienced in my life. It's hard to describe because midnight, you're sitting there, you look out and the sun's shining just like it is out here now.

DOB: It's disconcerting, isn't it? Why am I tired when it's light . . . ?

CD: Yes. You know, and you're saying, what is happening? You're down to the bottom of the world, you see the sun shining all the time, day and night, twenty-four hours a day. There's no darkness. But we had to go through the same routine as we did where the sun set and it gets dark if you're back in the States. The lights go out at ten o'clock; six o'clock was reveille. But guys would stay up all night if they didn't have watch duty. It didn't make any difference—play cards, watch movies.

But the first year it really was a great experience. And me being a single man, I would write to my mother every so often. She was the only one that I was in contact with. I didn't have no wife, so I said, well, I will stay now until I can . . . do the time, the twenty [years] or whatever, it all depends.

But after the first year, we came back, came back into Boston, they had balloons, the airship overhead greeting us. It was a wonderful feeling because tugboats with the water just like the big parade. Oh, yeah. We were the biggest icebreaker in the free world. Of course the Russians had one bigger, but that was the Russians, not the United States. And everybody like dignitaries were down on the pier, we pulled in, tied up, they came aboard. They have to come aboard to see what you brought back into the United States from other countries. So they check you out. And then if you had liberty, then you get

ready to go ashore. People down there waiting for you. If you had people down there on the pier, they're down there at the gangplank waiting for you. And they started waiting and looking and waving, and so you leave the ship.

But to see that is undescrivable, almost—that feeling you have. You know, you're steaming into the Boston harbor, and horns and tugboats blowing their whistles and all this and an airship overhead and all that. Oh, man.

DOB: Just for you.

CD: Yes, you know. Man! You know, it was something. And after you do it so many times, well that's the first time—the first trip.

DOB: Then they don't care.

CD: Yes, that's right. It's old news then. But we found out that as long as we maintained I guess you'd say dignity and spirit-wise as far as the Navy and the ship is concerned, people sort of looked up to you as a good ship. So that's what we wanted. That was the main purpose of our concern—keeping the ship up to the par that it's supposed to be so we wouldn't feel bad nowhere along the line. So that's what we did. We tried to keep it looking as decent as possible, which me being a boatswain mate, which was deck crew, it wasn't an easy job because sometimes you couldn't get out there and do anything. In inclement weather, you couldn't.

But getting back to that first trip, it was great. I don't think we broke blades on the first trip. I don't think we did. We would go in the ice and break ice, I was told up to twenty-foot thick. The big chunks would pass by underneath, and the blades would hit them and they would break. So if we break off too many of the blades, we had to come back into New Zealand and go into dry dock. That happened two or three times out of my eight years on there.

But the idea is . . . I found that when we do that, we come back to New Zealand and we would stay sometimes ten days to two weeks, stay in dry dock because they would have to fly the blades by Air Force big planes from the United States down there to be put on the ship.

DOB: How big were they?

CD: Tons. They were tons. They really were big, huge blades. It's hard to describe. I forget how much they weighed.

DOB: How big in dimensions?

CD: I would say approximately . . . from one tip to the other, I'd say approximately maybe ten feet. That's from one tip of the blade to the other. And there were three of them. One

here, one like this and then one in here like this. So we would go into dry dock and they would take them off. That was the only way they could do it. They couldn't do it if the ship was sitting in the water. So they'd take them off, and then while they're doing that, we're working on part of the ship that needed to be done on the inside in the structure part that's not pertaining to what they were working on. Of course civilians did it, you know, they did the work.

DOB: When you were in Antarctica, you went first to where? Did you go to McMurdo Sound?

CD: McMurdo Sound was our first stop. Yes. That was the destination point—McMurdo Sound. Of course when we first got there, you couldn't break all the way in to McMurdo Sound.

DOB: Why not?

CD: The ice was too thick. I think the captain and other officers of the ship, you know, engineers and navigation officers, they got together and they said, well, there's no sense trying to break all the way up. What they would do, they would have these MSTS ships. They had them to come in, which is the Navy . . . civilian . . . ran by civilian but it's MSTS ship with the gold stripe on the stack. But they would bring the supplies, then they would offload. We'd go alongside the ice, and they would plant what they call deadmen in the ice. So they'd dig a hole, put that big timber in there with a strap around it, drop it in there, and then pump water in there and it would freeze. Then the line that tied the ship, from the ship, take it out, put it on there, and take up the slack on the winch. The ship would lay up against the side of the ice.

So that's the way we would unload cargo, onto the Caterpillars. Seabees, they're pulling the sleds and cargo. Unload this material, supplies, they'd take it on out. We'd go up as far as we could, then they would take it the rest of the way up McMurdo Sound. So that's when they started building McMurdo Sound. After the first trip they started—they had to because they had to start sometime, you know, in order for guys wintering over.

DOB: You also went to Little America, didn't you?

CD: Yes, we went to Little America.

DOB: And did you go back and forth between them?

CD: I think they did. I'm not sure, but I believe they did. It's hard for me to remember exact movement of this because some people have better memories than others on certain things. But anyway, we did go back and forth so many different places. Over eight years, it's hard . . . maybe I should've had all that stuff written down.

DOB: That's fine.

CD: But I find it to be interesting because every time we'd make a trip, it seemed like something new was happening . . . changes, you know. And sometimes we'd leave Christchurch, Lyttelton, go into the ice and we'd hit a storm between there. And the waves would break up on the ship, and the ship would create so much ice that we'd have to go out and chip that ice off the bow of the ship so it wouldn't put too much weight on the ship.

DOB: How did you do that?

CD: Well, we used picks. We'd go out there with picks—

DOB: By hand?

CD: Yes. We'd go out there with picks, sledgehammer, anything to get that ice off the ship. We'd throw it over the side to lighten the ship because the more it would freeze it makes it heavier and heavier. We couldn't have the ship with the bow down. The rest of the ship didn't get that much, but the bow did. We would clear it off the best we could, and then we'd steam on. But sometimes the weather would be extremely rough . . . terrible.

DOB: What was the worst kind of weather to have to deal with?

CD: You mean as far as cold goes or the water?

DOB: Whatever made it unpleasant.

CD: Like I say, in the rough seas and the water splashing up. When the seas break, they come down as frozen, it's so cold.

DOB: It must be dangerous to be on deck.

CD: That's true.

DOB: And that would've been your job.

CD: Well, part of it. Not only me, other guys, too. Now then if it was . . . they wouldn't let you go out there if it was in the storm. After it would subside, then you go out and break the ice off because there's no sense going out if it's still in the storm and the water's still coming over. But we did this, and it would lighten the ship, and we'd go on. Like I say, every trip, just about, it was a different experience. It was one thing or the other.

So it was dangerous, believe me, to be out there because ice, you can't walk on it. You could slip through the lifelines if you're not careful. You'd have on very good clothes—

the one thing about the Navy, they did give us very, very good clothing to wear during that operation down there.

DOB: So you didn't suffer from the cold?

CD: No, you didn't suffer from the cold. From gloves to shoes, boots, socks, underwear, everything. And the nylon outfit you wore on the outside was nylon such as where the water would hit it and it would run off. It didn't stick to it so that made it much better.

But the weather could change in a matter of minutes. It could be nice this minute, and the next five minutes, you couldn't see ten feet . . . whiteout . . . what they call a whiteout, which is dangerous for the simple reason, I was always told that during a whiteout, if you're out from the ship you stay in one spot. Don't try and roam around because you're going to wander away from where you should be. And when it clears, you're right there at that one spot where you were when it first started. It makes sense.

So that's what we would try and do. I say "we," I'm talking about the whole ship. It was a whole ship effort, believe me. Not just only deck crew, from the captain on down to the lowest enlisted men. Everyone had to work together to accomplish what we started out to do. You wouldn't say, well, that's not my job or something like that. Everyone had to work together. And it was good.

DOB: Tell me what a bosun's mate or a bosun does.

CD: A bosun mate? It's upkeep of the exterior and the interior of the ship. The exterior is the structure from the sides, the decks, the structure from the deck going up to a certain degree. That's the job we . . . chip, paint, keep it up because the salt water will rust any spot, and to keep it from spreading, chip it out and you put red lead on it, then you cut it with sharp tools, then paint with gray paint.

Then we would also . . . we had part of the crew inside to keep the living quarters clean. What we call the head—you say the bathroom—we'd have to keep those clean, and the showers and what-not. Everything would have to be kept clean because you're in a close environment. You can't afford to have anything in there that's dirty for the simple reason germs create sickness. You can't have that, getting everybody sick. If we catch one guy that doesn't take a shower, then we put him in the shower and give him one, the hard way. That's true.

You're in close quarters, three bunks high, and it's only I think about eighteen or twenty inches between bunks. So you reach onto this bunk, you slide in and you're in your bunk. And the next guy above you and a guy below you. And it's warm in there, you know, you've got heat in the wintertime. You've got heat because the ship wasn't air conditioned, but we would get outside air coming in. But even in the ice it's warm down there. So therefore, you've got to stay clean. You don't stay clean, it's terrible. Living conditions were fairly decent most of the time.

We had our own laundry. We didn't use sheets. We used mattress covers open on one end. You put it on and then slide it up and then you could tie it to keep it from sliding off. Three strings on it and you tie the end. And you had a blanket and pillow and that was sufficient.

You had your footlocker you put stuff in. Everyone had to be based on an honest situation, you know, as far as lockers and personal things are concerned, because if you didn't, then you could lay stuff down and someone come along and pick it up, out of another division. You wouldn't know because the ship was open. You didn't lock your division quarters when you left out of there. It's open, you know, steps going down the hatch and so forth like that.

DOB: Two questions: How many people composed the bosun crew? You talked about keeping all of this stuff up. How many did what you did?

CD: Well, let's see. We had first and second deck divisions, first division, second division. The second division was aft. Half of the ship aft, first division, half of the ship forward, the outer structure, you see. So we're talking about, I'd say maybe . . . I guess fifteen to eighteen, maybe twenty men in a division, because the ship was only three hundred and some feet long. It wasn't a real big ship, but it was enough to keep the deck crew working. Then we had to maintain the lifeboats, that stuff. We worked the cranes that were on it during the operation of moving cargo and stuff like that. We had to do that stuff also. That would come under the deck division. So the deck division had a pretty good responsibility, I thought, of keeping it up.

Now each division consists of one, two, three petty officers—the deck division did. And the rest were seamen under you. We had a first, second, and third class petty officer. That's how it was set up. So that way, it was always a petty officer if we're in port onboard in charge of that division because we split it up into three sections.

DOB: Where did you fit in that scheme of things?

CD: Well, I was second class. And then, after the first class left, I had the whole division . . . the second division. I was the petty officer of the second division, which meant I had two other petty officers under me. I'd get my orders from our division officer in the morning. It was at what they call muster. Quarters. Quarters, you know, you line up and all that. Then the division officer would come along and see if everyone is present. That's up to you to give him the account of every man that's there. If you had men on watch, you had to give him who was on watch because they weren't present for muster.

And after that, then he would determine, well, let's see what we're going to do today. Now he's talking to his petty officer—not to the other crew. He'd tell me, "Davis, well,

we're going to do this and this and so on and so on and so on." "Very well, sir," and then I would pass it on to the other two petty officers.

And we split the seamen up in groups working in different areas of our territory on the ship, so that way we'd know just where they were. And it worked out fairly good. I mean you can't satisfy everyone. It's impossible. I know. It's impossible.

DOB: How busy did you keep? How much free time would you have in a day?

CD: Well, after I became division petty officer, I didn't stand watch on the bridge because on the bridge, you had seamen—under way now, this is when the ship is under way—you had lookouts, helmsman on the bridge, messenger for the OD (officer of the deck—he's the one that's in charge up there on the bridge), and then the bosun mate, he's the overseer. Well, he's under the officer of the deck, but it's his responsibility to keep the lookouts and everyone on their toes doing their job the way they're supposed to do because that's less responsibility . . . officer of the deck would have enough to do besides watching the lookouts or the other guys. The helmsman, see if he's on course, and all that. Some of them, you know, they'd get up there and they'd stray away from what they're supposed to be doing, so you've got to keep your eye on them.

And it was four-hour shifts. Now you had free time if . . . you're up there for four hours and then you had eight off, unless they went to port and starboard. Then it was a different story. You're up there longer, you're there longer on duty, then you're off the same time. You know, you split it up. Like you had a twelve-to-four watch in the afternoon. That's twelve o'clock in the day till 1600.

At night, now if you had that, you'd have midnight watch from twelve that night till the next morning, and then you get relieved. Now if you had midnight watch, twelve to four, you could sleep in one hour after six o'clock. They would give you that opportunity to sleep in one hour after six o'clock because you're breaking up your sleep. You get up at eleven o'clock, get ready for the midnight watch, and you're up until four o'clock in the morning. That's the best time to sleep. You get back in your bunk, you get to sleep maybe four-thirty, quarter to five, something like that. It all depends. Then you're sleeping at six o'clock, so they don't bother you.

You had a pretty fair free time to do the things you wanted to do. It wasn't a constant thing where you had to constantly be on duty. When you're on the ship under way, you're on duty at all times to a certain extent, but you do have free time. You can watch movies. They show a movie every night. If you're not on duty, you could watch that.

There's other duties. Master-at-arms, you check the ship. You've got to go around and check the ship, check the compartment. When the officer of the deck comes through, he wants to check the cleanliness of the ship about, say, around six, seven o'clock in the evening. So the petty officer had to take him to his compartment, show him how well the

compartment is clean. If you didn't, like I said before, it would go down and that's no good, not being in close quarters.

DOB: Take me on a tour of the *Glacier*.

CD: Well, you come on board middle ways up the gangplank. Now you could go either aft or to the bow. We'll go to the bow first. We come on board, we make a left . . . if it's on the port side, we'd make a left turn. If it's on the starboard side, we'd make a right turn. So therefore, we go up the port side, go in, this is up on the structure outer deck. We go up the ladder up on the next deck. That's the deck will take you out on the foc'sle [forecastle], what they call the bow of the ship is the foc'sle. Take you around to the anchor chains, the anchor. Is all that secure?

Then you walk around and you can go up another set of steps and you come up on the bridge where they do the steering and all this, the control of the engines and everything. Behind you is a radio . . . like this wall is the radio shack, IC-inter-communication, I think it is.

DOB: On the bridge level.

CD: On the bridge level, just off the bridge because they have to be close with the communication with the officer of the deck, and the navigator and all those have to be right there so they can chart the course. If there's any change to be done, they'll have to be right there so they'd know. And they're on duty just like *you* are.

DOB: How many people would you expect to find up there on the bridge level?

CD: Let's see. Two lookouts, a helmsman—

DOB: What does he do?

CD: Steer the ship. Then you have one on the controls, one standing there on the controls. The officer of the deck may tell him one-third ahead, two-thirds, full, stop, whatever. Then he's there to act to those commands. Now that's two, four, the bosun mate's five, the officer of the deck is six, the navigation officer is seven, the quartermaster is eight, nine—

DOB: What does he do?

CD: The quartermaster's the one that helps the navigator chart the course. So then in the radio room it's always two in there, because they're on the radio if any messages come in. And IC is the one with the scope, like radar. They're the ones that watch the scope and if anything's coming up . . . and the depth and all that. They take care of that. So all in all,

you're talking about ten or twelve people up there at one time. And that's just on the bridge.

Well, the engine room, I don't know how many's down there, so they can keep the engine running. Like I say, about ten or twelve up on the bridge out of a four-hour watch. Then when they get relieved, you have the same amount come up and relieve them.

Then you go to . . . everyone when they get relieved they tell the OD where they stand. They're supposed to go to the officer of the deck and request permission to be relieved, and he would grant it, and then you go on, you leave. And the other guy, he takes over. That's the routine that carries straight through. How's that?

DOB: That's good. Take me through the rest of the ship.

CD: Okay. Now that's the bridge part. Now you're going on the stern of the ship. The main deck is where . . . I'll take you up on the first level going back where the helicopters land—the flight deck. We did have a flight deck for helicopters—that's all. That's right off behind the two five-inch gun turret which is one of the main deck . . . not the main, *main* deck below, but the deck up on top. Part of the structure that's up top, they have a hangar there. You could fold the helicopters up and push them inside during inclement weather and chain them down and what-not.

DOB: How many helicopters?

CD: We would carry one helicopter. Sometimes it would be two on there, but mostly only one. You could land one and push it in and then the second one could land, but he would have to stay right out there on the deck. So that's one tour you see the nets up about three feet, you drop them down when the helicopter is landing and taking off. So then once they land secure, you pull the nets up secure. Now that's that deck.

The next one down is the deck where the towing is done if you have to tow a ship through the ice. The big towing machine is sitting inside of the bulkhead, but the cable, which is about two inches thick in diameter, comes out through the roller and goes out. We have a roller across the back that when that cable hits it, it rolls and keeps rolling. It'll roll while feeding the cable out. Like I said, when we towed the YOG, you had a line—shoot a line to them.

DOB: How far away did you tow them?

CD: We towed that approximately . . . we tried not to tow it too far behind. I'd say . . . I hope I'm right. I guess maybe from 150 to maybe 200 feet. About 100, 150 feet behind the ship.

DOB: It must've been a nasty ride for them. But did it make a difference on the *Glacier*?

CD: No, it didn't, because between Norfolk and the Panama Canal and then into New Zealand, it wasn't bad weather—not really extremely bad weather. Well, naturally the sea would get a little rough, but they fared pretty good. And what it was—I'll get back to this about the deck—when we hook up to the cable, the control was set where you could put it on automatic—the towing. You put it on automatic, if the strain come, it would let it go out. And when the slack come, it would come back in and roll up itself, because they had it set to a certain tension. And we towed this ship.

But what we would do, we'd shoot a heaving line over to them and a line, and then we'd highline them food or fresh stuff that we had on the ship when they would get low. We had communication with them at all times. We'd do that, and once they finished that, then bring the line back in and secure it. They had water on there. They made sure that they had plenty of water on there when we left. So, you know, fill the tanks full of water.

DOB: How many were on that ship . . . about? I don't care for exact numbers.

CD: Maybe I'd say ten, twelve, something like that. Maybe more, maybe less. It's hard for me to remember exactly.

DOB: How many guns did you have on the ship?

CD: We had two twin five-inch on the deck by the helicopter deck. We had one three-inch and the one five-inch on the post.

DOB: Did anybody ever shoot them?

CD: We had target practice. Sure. We had target practice. We went down to Gitmo [Guantanamo Bay], Cuba, for shakedown cruise playing with towed targets and we'd fire at the targets. You had to have the training because you never know when you're going to need it. And we had small arms on the ship—rifles, pistols. But we never came to use them, but those guns, they were made on the ship all the time. And we had one part where the five-inch was controlled by fire control to control it. And you could set up the three-inch up there with fire control. In other words, it's a different section connected with the gun that once you lock it in and everywhere you move, the gun would move. So you're the one that's putting the gun on the target when you're looking through the scope.

DOB: Okay. Is that the deck? Have we done the deck?

CD: We've done the deck where the towing winch is. That's underneath—the lower deck under the helicopter deck, so we're finished that. Now we're on the extreme main deck of the ship itself, forward and back. That's where mostly, like the galley, the mess deck, your aft was the storage area, the sail locker where you sewed canvas and what-not, and the forward part was—

DOB: Sails?

CD: No, not sails, but that's the name they use—sail lock canvas, where if you wanted to make anything out of canvas, you have sewing machines in there, and I did that quite a bit. The other bosun mates did, too.

DOB: It's probably left over from the days of sails?

CD: No, we'd bring that roll-up canvas on board, and then you'd measure what you want to cut out and you cut it out. Not for the sails for the ship itself, but for other use.

DOB: Like what?

CD: Well, like when they had the initiation.

DOB: Important things. [Laughs]

CD: You know, they'd make up these long, round tubes. You sew it up, then you turn it inside out where the stitches would be on the inside. Then you pack it with whatever you want to and you soak it and you have it ready for the initiation. But that's a different story. [Laughs] It was funny, though, and it was complicated to a certain extent. But we would sew everything on the ship, like uniforms. Take, for instance, we would leave the ice, and they would get worried that we were going to have a personnel inspection in Norfolk, Virginia. That would mean everyone.

[End Side A, Tape 1]

[Begin Side B, Tape 1]

CD: Like I was saying, we would sew the rates on the sleeve, patches of the ship, USS *Glacier* patch on, and hem the trousers and what-not, because they don't come . . . you know, all in the same length. So you have short guys, medium, and tall so you've got to cut them off, and you had a machine there you could run it through. So you could get everyone, the laundry would press the uniforms for inspection when you got back. Everyone would be looking sharp, ready for whoever—the captain, the admiral, or whoever would come on board for inspection of the crew.

DOB: Did you wear uniforms in the Antarctic?

CD: Dungarees. That's what we wore, dungarees. Dungarees underneath the foul-weather gear that we had. We'd dress with just shorts and t-shirt, your dungaree pants, your dungaree shirt, with your long underwear underneath that. Long underwear underneath that, then the dungaree pants, dungaree shirt, then the foul-weather gear on top of that.

So you were dressed pretty warm. But the boots came halfway up your leg. They're thermal boots. They were very warm. You had thick socks. All this was special issue to you on the way down there because you had to have it.

And sunglasses. You had to have them because the ice, the sun shining on that ice was so bright, it would blind you. They wouldn't let you go out there unless you had dark glasses on because it was just too bright. Everywhere you look, you could see nothing but ice, and the sun shining all the time on there, it would take effect on your eyes.

DOB: Some of the ships, even some of the icebreakers I think, got stuck in the ice, and then they'd call on the *Glacier* to come and help them out.

CD: True, true. The *Edisto* . . . I remember the *Edisto* getting stuck in the ice. We were breaking a channel. She was supposed to have been breaking one side. She was, she was breaking a side, and we were breaking one side. So we were breaking out, and she got stuck in the ice, so we had to turn around and go back, back up to her, put our tow cable on, and pull her out backwards. So they didn't appreciate that because it was a smaller icebreaker, you know, and we would get a kick out of it because we knew we were the biggest icebreaker. We knew we were the best. They didn't appreciate us razzing them about that.

And we'd break a channel, we'd break it all the way up, break it all the way back, break all the ice, it would float away, then it would be open. Then we'd run up the channel with a broom up on the halyard which would mean clean sweep. We have swept the channel clean for you guys to go up.

DOB: Did the *Glacier* ever get stuck?

CD: The *Glacier* . . . not really. Well, we did over in the Bellingshausen Sea. What happened was this, as far as I can remember now. We were over there, and—

DOB: What were you doing there?

CD: I think they were trying to chart courses.

DOB: Because we had no stations in the Bellingshausen.

CD: No. But when they got there, we were going through the ice and then the wind shifted with the ice flow, so we couldn't go anyplace due to the fact that the ice had closed up where we were going. So the captain of the ship and the officer got together and said, "There's no sense using fuel trying to break out of this. We'll wait, and when the wind shifts, take the pressure off it, then we'll go on." And that's what happened. But we were there I guess three or four days or something like that. But people did begin to get worried to a certain extent.

DOB: That was my question. Were you worried?

CD: I thought about it, you know. I really wasn't worried that much, but I thought about it. I said, well, if they have confidence, I guess I'll have confidence. And it did happen where the wind shifted and we came out of there.

But we had the ham radio set up, and guys that got on there were telling their people we were stuck in the ice. So that created a situation where they were worried a little bit about that. So then the Navy department wants to know what's going on, then they had to tell them what was happening and so forth. And then we came on out of there okay, so everything was fine. But I don't think I would want to sit there that long again in the ice.

See, the ship was built round so the ice pressure, the ship would ride up on top of it. It wouldn't crush the ship, because she was about . . . I think she had a two-and-a-half-inch steel plate around the hull, specialized for that. But the ice pressure, it would rise up—ice pressure she'd rise up. So that meant it couldn't crush the side of the ship.

DOB: At least less likely.

CD: That's true. Not like the *Titanic*. No, she was well equipped for that. And the speed was good, good maneuvering. Everything was . . . and as the years passed, they would start changing things on it, like making a rec room, put the jukebox on there where you could listen to music. When we came back to the States, they closed it off and put portholes in it and all that where you could see out, put tile on the deck and all that. So they tried to make you as comfortable as possible, even though you're away from home.

DOB: In Deep Freeze II—you must've been there then as well—one of the jobs of the *Glacier* was to escort the group that was going over to Wilkes Station. Tell me about that. Were you also at Hallett Station then?

CD: I think we did. See, I'm trying to remember these things. You say escort the group. Well, the *Glacier* could only go so far. They would set out with teams to go a distance, [inaudible] these arms on it where they could detect a weak spot before it would get there because it was a chance that they were taking. You're riding on ice, you don't know what it's like. It looked thick, it could be thin and there you'd go through. Now I can't remember too much about that, but I know we did. Like I said, I try to remember as much as possible. It's been a long time.

DOB: Well, Wilkes Station was one of those that was put in way late in the year, so there would likely have been some difficulties.

CD: Wilkes Station we did, yes. It was away from McMurdo Sound. Little America was another one of the stations that they built down there, and Wilkes Station was another

one. So, you know, different years as time went by the operation called for doing these different things.

But I don't know, I find it really . . . it was exciting to see so much ice when I first I don't mean snow, I'm talking about ice. I've seen ice shelves probably like 180 feet high from the water level. Now you can imagine how much is under water. Ice shelf sticking way . . . we passed by, the mast is up there, and the mast is low in comparison to all that ice. I'm thinking, now suppose the world changed where all that ice was to melt down there. It wouldn't be no place where . . . the earth wouldn't have no place to take it, all that water.

DOB: They're worried about that now, aren't they?

CD: That's right, because I think it is melting to a certain degree because it's getting warmer. But so far everything is holding, and I hope it continues to hold.

DOB: Well, given that the *Glacier* was the newest and biggest and strongest and safest and nicest and all of that, you had a lot of VIPs on the ship, starting with Admiral Byrd.

CD: I met him. I was on there with him when he went in '55. He was on the first crew with us—he went down.

DOB: What did you think of him?

CD: Well, you know, let's face it. Enlisted men didn't get to rub elbows, I should say, with the high-ups as much as the officers did. Of course not, because they're in charge of the operation. You were there to do what they say do. But I thought he was nice. He must've been all right. I thought he was all right as far as I was concerned. And Admiral Dufek, he was in charge. I think Admiral Byrd made one trip, and then Admiral Dufek . . . well, he was in charge as I guess the pioneer of the Operation Deep Freeze, where Admiral Dufek, he was in charge of the Navy.

DOB: He called the shots.

CD: That's right. And then it came on down that . . . our first captain, I think he was an icebreaker skipper, captain, I think. I think he did. I'm not sure now, but I believe he had that experience.

DOB: Who?

CD: Captain Maher. I think he had that experience because some of the others did not have it. But I was told today that the Navy sort of hand-picked the crew for the *Glacier*. I was told this today by one of the top officers that was on there. I thought it was, but I wasn't sure, not that I felt any different.

DOB: Why not?

CD: I felt that, you know, I say, hey, you had to be something for the first big icebreaker like this. In other words, they checked your record, your personality, and see how you cope with people and what-not and see if you qualified. It wasn't so much of the medical aspect of it, but it's the ability to cope with that environment, because you know for yourself, when you leave to go down there, it's another world in that ice, it's no return. Once you leave New Zealand, you're stuck with the guy on the ship. That's what I was told, that they sort of hand-picked

DOB: Did you have trouble with anybody?

CD: No, not really. Funny enough, the guys were telling me, I don't know, I was the type of person, I didn't really say a whole lot unless I had to. I was the type of person who would hold back. Spotlight? No, I didn't want to be in no spotlight. But I never had really personal problems.

Now you had some problem with guys who couldn't take orders the way they should. Now that comes under a different heading. But me myself, I always felt that I treat people the way I'd want to be treated. Even though I had these guys under me, and they come to me I would try and listen to their story and see what we could do. But when it came to work, if I tell you to work, do this, you do it. Not that I would raise my voice or nothing, you know, then this is the way I saw it. If a guy didn't do his work Monday through Friday the way he's supposed to, half a day Friday, and he had a weekend coming up—

DOB: He could do it then.

CD: See? This is what I would do.

DOB: Did I guess right?

CD: Yes. This is what I would do. He'd leave Friday at noontime for a seventy-two-hour pass and be back Monday morning at eight o'clock. But I would tell him before he'd leave, I'd tell the duty petty officer, "I want so-and-so back for two hours extra instruction on Saturday morning," so that would mess up his weekend. But his record doesn't have any blemishes on it. He's not on report to go to the captain. You see what I mean? And I found out you do that one time, you never had another problem with him. I found that out. And all the guys, I'm not bragging, but they just wanted to work under me. I said, "Well, everybody can't work under me. I'm only one person."

But we had fun. Some had ups and downs more than others, you know. Of course during that time the United States wasn't like it is today. It wasn't balanced out to a certain degree. Hey, what can you say? But you had to take whatever you get, and you

always had to remember that there's always someone over you giving orders. So everybody can't be a leader. Someone has to be able to take orders. That's the way I saw it, and I got along fine. Now at this reunion they tell me, "Oh, man, you were the best guy I worked with." Oh yeah. You tell me that now.

I never did have any problems, really I didn't. I never did have any problems. I'm just an easy-going guy, to a certain extent. But if I said something, I meant it. You probably ran into people like that, you know, that when they say something they mean it but they don't raise their voice, they don't boast, they don't, "Well, I'm so-and-so-and-so-on" and stuff like that. You just tell them what you want to do in a nice tone and you do it. That's how I got along. How's that?

DOB: It's a good answer. Are you saying that race was not a problem?

CD: Race was to a very small degree on the ship. You know, like that. [Holds thumb and first finger about an inch apart.]

DOB: I'm so pleased to hear that of 1955.

CD: Well, that's true. And I wouldn't sit here and tell you that it was 100 percent treatment, no. Race was only a very small problem. Now like I said, we had some guys that come from different parts of the United States, and me being who I am, they didn't appreciate me telling them what to do because they weren't brought up that way—a black man telling them what to do. But I told them, "Okay. You're in the service. It's not like back out there in civilian life." Well, you know, but then they'd get over it and we got along fine. But it was there. Like I said, some of the guys had a little confrontation, a little fight, fistfight, and stuff like that. Words were said or something of that nature.

DOB: How many people of color were on the ship?

CD: Oh man.

DOB: A handful? Dozens?

CD: Yes, it was more than . . . let's see. The whole steward department, they had them in every department on the ship [inaudible] engineers . . . oh man. We must've had about . . . I'd say about twenty, twenty-five, maybe more, maybe less. I'm just giving you approximate figures. Like I said, some could take it and some couldn't.

Now when the ship was going in commission, we had to go to Pascagoula, Mississippi, and Mississippi was a state that, you know how it was. Maybe if you don't know, you read it. So we were down there, the ship was being put in commission, we were there. And naturally you go out in town. I stood shore patrol once one night, but I wasn't allowed to go into the white club to check on the sailors. So they said, "Well, Davis, since you can't go in, we won't even put you on shore patrol anymore." Fine by me. I

was glad because I didn't want to be in there anyway. I mean we went our way, they went their way, and everything turned out fairly good, I thought.

The majority of the crew was white. Like I say, there were some blacks on there, some Filipinos on there and what-not, but it seemed as if everyone had a mind of jelling together to try and do the best job that was possible. And it was good. It was really good for doing that.

DOB: Was there someone that you met on the *Glacier*, on the ice, that you were particularly glad to have had there?

CD: On the ship, because everyone was on the ship [inaudible]. Well, yes. You mean like I would take them as my best buddy?

DOB: It could be that. I was thinking more in terms of someone whose leadership you particularly admired or someone you thought, boy, I'm safe now because so-and-so is here. Or someone who was a role model or just special.

CD: Well, I'll tell you. Me being a bosun mate with the bosun mates that was over me, like John Hancock, or Hancock—I think his name was John—Hancock. Well, he's passed now. If you were there last night when we had a memorial service, well, his name was called. So therefore, he was the type of guy that he would do anything to help, regardless to what color you were. And I'd go to him and he'd sit down and talk with me and tell me and show me things, because he had more experience than I did. And it was a very good feeling to me to have someone like that.

The other guys was . . . well, Carl, he was another bosun mate. He was okay. He would help me . . . in a situation if I got into it and didn't understand everything, he would help me. So yes, those two guys really were people that I didn't mind following through the Navy career.

DOB: Were you ever truly scared?

CD: What? On the ship?

DOB: Yes. In the ice.

CD: Not really. No. Not really truly scared. I really wasn't. I guess it never dawned on me to be scared. I guess you could say that. But it never dawned on me to really be afraid of what was happening. I figured if there was any survivor, I have a good chance of being one. That's the way I see life. I mean I have just as good a chance as the next person of surviving, and that's the way it was on this ship. I mean there were times that you really . . . I thought, well, oh boy, I hope we make it. Naturally you're going to say these things, but not that you are so afraid that you panic or something like that.

DOB: What are you proudest of from your eight years on the *Glacier*?

CD: Being on the *Glacier*, I guess. The wonderful crew that we had. You see, by me being on there for eight years, guys come and go. They could remember me, but it's hard for me to remember everyone. And like I said, if a guy came new, I'd treat him just like I would if he was there for a year. I tried to make them all feel that I'm their friend. Not only their petty officer in charge of them, but as a friend along with being a petty officer in charge. That's the way I feel, and I always had that feeling.

DOB: How long were you in the Navy?

CD: Twenty years. And I don't regret it.

DOB: What made you leave the *Glacier*?

CD: They transferred me from the *Glacier*, believe it or not, from Boston to Annapolis, Maryland, where I am now. They transferred me down there for training midshipmen. See, they have boats down there which they call YPs, yard patrol craft, so they're a scaled-down model of destroyers. So what they do, they bring . . . two officers would come on and they'd bring on eight to ten midshipmen. Each one would have a group, and they would take them out in the Chesapeake Bay and they'd teach them navigation, sonar, and we had to teach them seamanship out on the deck. I did that for two-and-a-half years.

Well, the Vietnam War came up, and they asked me, "Well, you've got orders coming down to go to Nam." I said, "Do I have enough time to get out?" "Yes, you do." I said, "Well, cut the papers, the orders for me to leave," because I had this feeling that I went in in World War II, then I went out and I came back in. I was in the Korean War over there on the battleship *Iowa*, bombarding, shelling, what-not, and I was in Hawaii four years and Patuxent River and what-not. So I felt that my time . . . not *my* time, but the advantage I had of surviving was slimmer if I went to Nam than it had been all along. I'm doing twenty, if I can get out, I'll get out.

Maybe I was wrong, but I know one of my buddies went down there. He was doing the same thing I was doing, and he went over there and they put you on these small boats running up these rivers. And those Viet Cong, they're shooting, and he got killed over there.

DOB: What effect, if any, did your Navy experience, and particularly your *Glacier* experience, have on later directions your life took, do you think, if any?

CD: Well, my experience on that ship and in the service showed me how to get along with just about everybody in every walk of life, believe me. And I haven't had a problem with

that, see? I worked in the post office for twenty-one years. I didn't have a problem with people.

DOB: Have you ever been back to the Antarctic?

CD: No.

DOB: Would you go?

CD: No. I don't think I would because . . . not on a ship, no, and not flying because I've heard of planes flying down there and they don't make it. Not that my luck would be that bad, but I just don't have the desire.

DOB: Been there, done that?

CD: My experience with the Navy gave me a whole new concept on life. And I'm glad I did because I've seen a time I couldn't sit and talk with people when I was younger, sit and talk with people any length of time. Now it doesn't bother me, really, that much. Especially if it's someone you feel comfortable with. That's it.

DOB: What haven't I asked you about your *Glacier* experience that I should know?

CD: You've asked me just about everything, I think.

DOB: Do you have a favorite story?

CD: No. I really don't because I just felt that all of my stories on there was an average, good [inaudible] experience story. I never ran across one that really took me out of my way of thinking about life more so than another. I'm just the type of person that can sit back and lay back and see other people [inaudible]. But if I have to, I can, and I will try. I believe in helping people. I love to help people. I do it now.

But as far as like [inaudible], I'm not looking for a milestone anymore because I've reached that plateau where it's all behind me. I have a family and wife, four kids, and my home, car, truck. I don't have a lot of money in the bank, but I'm living comfortable so I can't ask for anything much more than that. And I thank God every day for my life, for my health and my strength. My health is not one hundred percent, but it's a lot better than some of the same people I've seen less my age. So I'm thankful.

DOB: Great. Thank you so much for talking with me.

CD: You're quite welcome.

[End of interview]

