

This interview is being conducted on Saturday, August 10, 2024 at the home of Charlotte Zinsky. My name is Fran Prokop and I'm speaking with Michael J. Zinsky who served in the United States Navy and is a veteran of the Iran Conflict, the Preying Mantis Conflict of 1988. He served from 1984 to 1990. Michael learned of the Veteran's History Project through his mother, my friend, and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veteran's History Project. Here is his story;

Michael, when and where were you born?

I was born October 13, 1965 in Evergreen Park, Illinois.

What were your parents' occupations?

My Father was a guard for the Federal Reserve Bank and my Mom, growing up she was a housewife, but ended up taking different jobs from a bus driver to a worker at Hostess Cakes, delivering cakes to various stores, to ultimately becoming a member of the crew of Southwest Airlines in their reservation area to helping out as a gate attendant.

How many sisters and brothers did you have?

I have one brother and two sisters. One of my sisters has passed away.

What did you do before entering the service?

After high school I went to college for one semester and then joined the service within 6-7 months of graduating high school.

So you enlisted.

Correct.

Any particular reason why you chose that branch of service?

They had the best opportunity in my mind for schooling that I wanted to attend.

And how old were you at that time?

18.

How was your departure for training camp and your early days – where did you go, first of all?

I went to Great Lakes Naval Training Center in northern Illinois. I was originally scheduled to leave in the Spring, early Summer of 1984 but they had reached out to me and see if I wanted to do an earlier arrival, in January of 1984 and I accepted that.

So that was your boot camp in Great Lakes?

Yes.

Could you describe a typical day of boot camp?

Physical fitness training, a lot of marching around, some classroom training, learning Navy terminology, using a gun –

Did you have gunnery practice?

Not much; there was one or two exercises with guns but given that, generally speaking, Navy people don't use guns -- not like the Army or the Marine Corps. Just general classroom training on Navy terminology.

How did you adapt to military life – like the physical regimen and the military barracks, and social life –

It actually wasn't all that challenging, to be honest, as long as you did what the company Commander said, and from the physical fitness standpoint I didn't have any challenges with that – and the classroom sessions weren't all that difficult. Like I said, if you just did what the company Commander said and didn't cause trouble, it was relatively easy to get through.

Because you were from Illinois and your home wasn't far away, do you think that affected the way you felt about being in the service? Not feeling homesick or something like that?

No, I don't think so because you still weren't able to speak to your family all that often. You might be able to call maybe once a week – a collect call. But I don't think that that had anything to do with it.

So you adapted pretty well.

Yeah.

How long did your Boot Camp last?

Boot Camp was 12-13 weeks.

Once you were finished with Boot Camp, what happened?

So right after Boot Camp was what they call A School; that's your first training. And since I was going in the Nuclear Power area, my A school was for Machinist Mate, which was learning about valves and piping and the mechanical parts of a nuclear power plant.

So how long was A School?

That was three months.

Is that considered specialized training?

It is.

And that was also at Great Lakes?

Correct.

What happened after the three months?

After that the next major stage was going to be to head to Orlando, Florida for our naval nuclear power school. However, they only have classes every so often, so in between my A School and nuclear power school I worked for a few months – actually working for Coast Guard individuals on the base itself – on the naval base but they were Coast Guard individuals.

What base was that?

It was Orlando Naval Training Base. It no longer exists. Now it's a bunch of condos. So in Orlando they had Orlando boot camp and Orlando power training center and I think that was the extent of it.

So what did you do in the meantime – in the interim – before you got to nuclear power school?

So working for the Coast Guard – it was Administrative, more clerical things with the Coast Guard --two individuals that I worked for.

So when did you actually start the Nuclear Power School?

So that was in early 1985.

How long did that school last?

That was about a year; and that was the classroom setting of learning, physics and math and the like.

So you went to school all day long, every day?

Correct, again, you go to school 40 hours a week; you get your regular homework, get tests.

And those were all college level classes?

Right.

You got college credit for that?

Correct.

So after the year – that was all in Orlando.

Correct.

So what were your off-duty activities – recreational pursuits – at that time?

Well, Orlando's not too far from the beach so -- during the week there wasn't much time for recreational activities, but on the weekends, spent a lot of time at the beach.

So what happened after you completed your course?

Then there is the hands-on portion where you go and work on an actual operating nuclear reactor and for that I went to Idaho Falls. There were three different training sites for that but I went to Idaho Falls and that's where you actually, under the supervision of qualified individuals, actually operate the reactor.

Was that a Navy reactor – part of the Navy –

Yeah, it was Department of Defense.

How long did that take place?

The first part of that was nine months, and then I got asked to participate in another schooling to become an Engineering Laboratory Technician, which is, for those people that operate the chemistry in the power plant and also are in charge of all maintenance on radioactive systems in the nuclear power plant. So that was another three months in Idaho Falls.

So you were there like another full year, at Idaho Falls?

Yeah.

So after you completed your education, what happened after that?

Then in April of '86 I was leaving to go to my ship, the Enterprise. So I had a little bit of time off in Chicago to see family, flew through the Philippines, stayed there for a few days; then flew through a small island called Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and then actually flew out to the ship and landed on the ship while it was on patrol in the Indian Ocean.

Did you remain on that ship for most of your career with the Navy?

From there, yes; then it was all on board the ship.

And what were your actual duties on board the ship – what did you do?

As an engineer laboratory technician for – there were eight reactors on the ship – so we monitored chemistry in both the radioactive side of the plant, as well as the non-radioactive side of the plant to make sure that the chemistry was in order. Also we monitored various like discharges from the ship, both liquid and gas, to make sure we weren't releasing anything radioactive. And finally, when there was maintenance on radio systems, we were in charge of making sure that no radioactivity was released from those systems by way of the maintenance-

Through your fault.

Yeah.

So was that your job for all the time that you remained in the Navy?

Yes.

By the time you finished at Idaho Falls had you gotten all your college accreditation?

Yes.

So you had a Bachelor's Degree by then?

No, there was no Bachelor's – they added some credits but not enough for a Bachelor's.

Oh, okay. So where did the Enterprise go – we're talking about 1986, you said, start there.

I flew out when it was in the Indian Ocean, then, what had occurred in '86 was Muammar Gaddafi had said that – normally the international waters end 12 miles from shore and he said it was 100 miles away from his shore, and he said this is the line of battle. So my ship, which was closest in the area, we went through the Suez Canal, and we challenged his 100-mile marker, so our ship and others in our battle group went within his 100 miles to see how he would react – and nothing occurred. We called his bluff.

Right, right. I think I remember that. I remember hearing this 12-mile marker –

Yeah.

That's like an international boundary for any land –

Right, yeah.

So you were still in the Indian Ocean –

No, our ship went through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean to actually enter the 100-mile marker with our ship.

Did you go into the Persian Gulf at all?

Oh, yeah, that was our normal area of patrol.

Where did you patrol around – where did the ship go and from?

Well, it was up in the air with Iran. Normally our ship would stay a little further off because the aircraft carrier is the most protected ship – because there is the most fire power with 80 or so planes on it. So we sort of stayed out in the Persian – a little further out in the Indian Ocean in most cases. And then when needed, like in 1988, our planes would go in and do mostly –

Well, please explain to me – you started to talk about the praying mantis conflict – which was not advertised or heard about that much – would you describe that --

So that's going to '88 now, jumping to the next cruise, and there's a lot that happens between '86 Libya – there's a lot more that happens after that –

I don't want to jump ahead. Why don't you go ahead and describe that – in 1986.

Yeah, stay with '86. So then after the Libyan thing we went on to hit a couple of ports in the Mediterranean; we stopped at Naples, Italy –

Did you get off the ship and visit –

Yeah, spent some time in Naples. Then I took a train up to Rome with some friends – and the Vatican – so that was a handful of days off to enjoy all parts of Italy.

And that was normal – whenever you went into foreign ports you would stay a week or so –

Not a week or so; usually a few days –

But sailors could de-bark – and visit --

Yeah, the thing was my group in the reactor department – people still had to monitor the reactor, so where other departments could just leave for the whole time, we had to rotate through and so didn't get as much time as the other departments. But yeah, I had a few days off in Italy – and then the next port stop was Toulon, France. I got a chance to see some of France as well. When we left France we circled around on the west side of Africa and went down to Perth, Australia.

Did you de-bark there at Perth?

Yeah, we spent a handful of days at Perth and that was sort of comforting because it really felt like home – like America –

Oh, really!!

It was –

What was specific about that?

Just, you know, the shopping stores and the restaurants and the food – it just felt –

English-speaking too.

Yeah, all that made it feel like home after being away now for a number of months. And I didn't even start on the cruise the whole time, obviously, in the Indian Ocean, so, that was in April and then we ended up finishing the cruise in August.

How long do these cruises normally take?

Then it was 6-7 months.

And you sort of joined mid-cruise –

Yeah, exactly, and then, -- so then after Perth, then we went through the Philippines, which back then was a common port both coming and going. And then lastly we hit Seattle for what we call a Tiger Cruise – and what that is – so there's – some of the ship's crew leaves the ship

for vacation, and then my Dad and brother were able to come onto the ship and live on the ship and experience the food and shoot guns and see flight operations on the line for a few days as we made our way back south to the Bay Area.

Is that something like in San Francisco they have Fleet Week – people can't stay on; they can only visit and walk around.

Right. But this is the actual – my Dad and brother lived on the ship for several days –

Wow! Was the ship in motion?

Yes, oh yes –

Really? In motion –

We went from Seattle; we were out to sea for, I think three days as we made our way back to Alameda, California. So they experienced being at sea –

\Interesting! Is that normal?

That's a thing that they do. I don't know if they still do it, but it was definitely something that the Navy would do on occasion.

So they more or less stayed on from Seattle to California.

Yes, yes.

Wow! I never heard that.

Yes, slept in the same beds.

What did you sleep in – were you an – by the way what was your rank at that time.

E-5 or Petty Officer 2nd Class.

Was that the highest rank you achieved?

Yes.

What were your lodgings like on the ship?

Well, they were three-tiered bunks.

And did your Father and brother sleep in the three-tiered bunks?

Yeah, they did.

That's interesting. What did they think of it?

My Dad loved it. He kept the tee shirt he had from that till the day he died.

Oh, so they enjoyed it. They enjoyed the whole thing.

Yeah, absolutely.

That's interesting. Okay, so you're back in Alameda, California –

Right, that was the end of the '86 cruise. Now, there are then, over the stretch, until the next cruise, which was October of '88, I believe it was, there were times where you have to fix the ship. So we actually went into dry dock at Hunter's Point, California, and where they pull the ship out of the water. You have this 93,000 ton ship, 1,100 feet long that is completely out of the water. You can walk under it, and the like – so there's a lot of maintenance on that –

Well, you're not doing any.

Well, yeah, I'm assisting in the power plant. So we came back in August of '86 and then the next cruise, the next WesPac started January of '88. However, in the months leading up to that you always do what are called workups, where you go out for a week and come back. You go out for three days and come back. You go out for maybe a month and come back – in preparation. And, so, then the next cruise went from January to July of '88.

Do they call them shake down cruises?

Workups –

To make sure everything is working on the ship – after the big overhaul.

Right.

Mike has a book here from the cruise –

So this is, you know, like in high school you have a yearbook, this is a cruise book for the '88 cruise. It just gives the history of what went on – like they highlight from the '86 cruise at the time he was Vice President George Bush came on; it talks about the Hunter's Point dry dock episode; talks about training that we do – about a trip to Seattle that we made, for Fleet Week actually, and the like, and then in October – during those workups, from October '87 to November, for about a month, we went up to Alaska. Just cruised up there; spent some time going –

What waters are up there – you didn't go into Hudson's Bay?

No, no, that's on the other side. Gulf of Alaska, near the Aleutian Islands. So that went through November, so then about a month and a half later we left for our WesPac.

For the January '88 WesPac. That was an eventful cruise.

Yeah, that was the one where – first right out of the gate we rescued a Japanese fisherman that had – his boat was sinking on January 21, 1988 we rescued a Japanese fisherman and actually had to do some surgery on him. You know the ship has a hospital on board, so they had to

operate on him to save his life. We also, as pictured here, there were some interactions with, at that time they were still the Soviet Union, right? So some of their ships, some of their bombers that were coming close to us – so this cruise book highlights some of those interactions. And then, again, our first, at the time the Philippines was a big port for us where we sort of stocked up on things and supplies, so we spent a handful of days in Subic Bay.

And all this time you were always working in the power plant – maintaining.

Right.

And did you have – what were your hours? Did you have like regular 40 hours or on and off?

No, no, it was – it's difficult – you don't have set hours. You may have 8-hour watches in the 24, but then you have maintenance to do. We have drills that the power plant participates in. Then you have ship-wide drills -- pretend like we're being attacked. So there weren't really like set hours; you slept when you could.

So you had no set hours for work.

No set hours, yeah.

How many men did your job – who had the same position as you?

Probably 50 people.

Wow – well, that's a huge ship.

In total, with the flight crew, or the air wing when they came on, we were over 5,000 people on the ship.

I understand; yes, I know that; carriers are huge. But the people in your specific department that took care of the power plant –

So, that's more than that – but who did my exact job, probably 50 or so.

That's still a lot.

And the reactor laboratories – the people that did my job as well as the chemistry, were probably 100. And then reactor department were hundreds. I'm not sure how many, but there were hundreds of people, because there were 8 reactors to operate.

8 reactors – wow – well, that's a huge, huge ship.

One of the things I like – so we – with the monotony - we had a Steel Beach picnic on the flight deck when we got rid of all the planes – and then we had a bar-b-que –

Where did the planes go?

In the hangar bay – right below there's elevators that they can put them in right below –

Oh, I thought you meant the planes had to go off the ship.

No, no, no --**They just went down in the hangar bay.**

Correct. And then another big event that occurred – I went through this exercise – this initiation, I should say, in '86, is when you cross the equator.

I heard of that.

They call it Polliwog Day and so – it's an initiation ceremony – for those who want to participate, and most people do, where you get up at 4 in the morning, and you wear your clothes inside out and backwards, and then they have you crawling all over the ship. The morning's breakfast was green spaghetti from the night before, and made it really salty so -- you know, something crawling from the ocean. People shoved coffee grounds down the back of your pants –

Oh my God.

Hit you with fire hoses, ot really hard, but and they make you go – inaudible

Then on the flight deck, you kiss the belly of King Neptune; you dive in containers that have nasty food and water, and at the end of it, you – on the flight deck – once you've gone through all of those, which takes hours, you just take all your clothes off, get naked, throw them over board and they hose you off with a fire hose. Then you go downstairs and take a shower - and then for dinner, they have a nice steak dinner for you.

That's nice. I never heard it described in its entirety like you did. But I've heard about it before – the King Neptune - and they call them polliwogs.

Polliwogs and shellbacks, once you go through it. So in '86 I went through as a polliwog and in '88 I participated as a shellback. They have a similar ceremony – we almost went through it – where you cross the Arctic Circle; when we went on that NorthPac we were close to it but then we weren't able to do that.

Well, you had enough of it there.

Yeah. So then our first stop on the '88 cruise was to Mombasa, Kenya. I basically relaxed; we went to a resort and hung out by the pool. I rode on the beach on a camel and just kind of relaxed and had some fun.

You did not go on a safari?

I did not. That's my biggest regret in the Navy – not doing that.

You rode the beach on a camel.

So the next was Operation Praying Mantis which started on April 18 of '88 and the cruise book described it as the biggest at sea battle since World War II.

Can you discuss that today?

Yeah, yeah, I don't know what was on the news –

Nothing. I don't remember ever hearing anything about Praying Mantis. I'm going to take a look at this book after the interview is over.

Yeah, they

What did it involve – this praying mantis?

So Iran was trying to attack us, so between our planes and rockets and other smaller ships, we repelled their continuing invasion – trying to attack us with smaller gunboats and some of their smaller warships. Here, this is probably – this is our Captain of the ship (reading) “This is probably the largest U.S. Naval battle since World War II. The combined efforts – we proved to be an unbeatable team – took place on April 18 when Iranian Sam Class frigates fired missiles at our aircraft and our battle group. We returned fire with direct hits.” It was about 7 hours after we took out some oil platforms in the Gulf.

So no provocation or – how did this start? They just came out and attacked?

I don't know the – you probably had more access back then anyways, as to what was going on politically at the time than we did. We didn't have much – we were just given what the captain was telling us at the time

Right, exactly. Who was President at that time? Still Bush?

That was '88 –

That wasn't Clinton yet –

No, no.

That was probably still Bush, or Reagan – no Reagan was earlier.

Michael is reading a book from his '88 cruise, correct?

Correct, this is the Cruise Book and this is what's highlighted as to what happened to initiate Operation Praying Mantis and it said that, “President Reagan ordered the attack after the U.S. uncovered evidence that Iran had laid a mine that blew a hole in the U.S. Navy Frigate, USS Samuel B. Roberts just days before.” And so we went on to take out some of their, platforms that were launching Iranian gunboats and then we took out the gunboats that were seeking to attack us both by rocket as well as by their gunboats.

Do you have an estimate of how many ships were disabled or sunk?

Not sure – between – yeah, I don't recall.

So this was like a one-day thing –

Yeah, one-day thing –

And then it was over.

Correct.

Wow, and no further problems after that time.

Right.

So the rest of your cruise was uneventful?

Yeah, until we got to Beer Day, which is another Navy tradition.

Okay.

So normally they like to try and get us into port every now and then, right, just to break the monotony of being at sea. However, if you're at sea longer than I think it's 77 days without seeing a port, which, believe me, is a challenge – you get two beers per person. So that was another thing, sort of like the Steel Beach picnic where we went up on the flight deck and were able to get two Budweiser's – if I remember correctly mine were fairly warm – yeah, two Budweiser's, if you wanted them. And then they had a talent show that night.

Oh – what kind of recreation did you have on the ship? When you were off duty – if you had time.

They had TVs that played movies and shows that were fed in on the ship/s channels.

Were they current movies or just old movies?

Mostly older.

Did they have current TV shows or anything?

Occasionally. They'd have that, but it was mostly movies.

Did you ever have any, like, USO troupes coming on the ship?

We – so going back to '86 briefly, right before I joined the ship they were filming Top Gun, and so they had Tom Cruise on the ship.

Oh, I see.

I think they had Miss America or Miss Teen America and their group come on board. We also had, during this cruise, some foreign dignitaries from the Middle East come – and put on an air show, so that brought out, for example, an old ship and drop real bombs on it to sink it.

Oh, Wow!

And they had planes fly overhead, say west, and from the opposite direction planes shot overhead and broke the sound barrier overhead. They would show – a plane would be dragging a target behind it and only have these “sea whiz” – which is a close-in weapons system that shoots I think 20 mm big shells – like thousands of rounds per minute – and so they showed how that works and blew up a target that the plane was dragging along. Jesse Jackson came on board at one point in time –

Really! Wow ! So you had occasional celebrities – things happening.

Occasionally, not too often. I mean nobody wants to go out on the Indian Ocean but occasionally we had some people.

So other than this one-day of shelling, did you ever see any casualties or witness any destruction?

Yeah, well, casualties – I talked about the chemicals that we put in the power plant on the nuclear side we put in ammonia to control certain things, and one of our supply guys in my department was supposed to wear a gas mask to go down into the supply area to get it and he thought he would take a short cut. And he was overcome by fumes and then the other supply guy did the same, so they both perished.

Wow! They were both Navy men?

Yeah, one of them was in my department. When we were on that NorPac where we went up near Alaska there was a Chief that went outside for a smoke and was washed overboard, never found. There was, one the air wing, one of them got sucked into the intake of a jet and got killed that way. The last one that comes to mind was a pilot – he was reaching over to pull something out and hit the ejector for the seat that knocked him up in the air and killed him.

Gosh!

So it is definitely a dangerous place.

But you really did not witness any wars – that type of destruction.

No, no, nothing like that.

How about friendships formed and camaraderie of service? Are you still in touch today with men that you served with?

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You know Facebook made it easier, quite honestly –

That true! Yes. And they have reunions.

The ship has reunions. I haven't gone to them the last few years. To be honest they all look like they're 90 years old. Maybe at some point in time I'll go, but –

When you retire maybe?

Yeah, when I retire.

Are they held in different locations throughout the country?

Yeah. I think the next one is in South Dakota – if I'm not mistaken.

I think they try to get around so everyone gets close to someone's home town.

And it's also not just my group, and so I wouldn't even go. So the only connection I ever had was we – hey, we're 30 years apart on the same ship.

Yeah, right.

They're small; I saw a picture. One of the guy I know from my group did go last year, and it's maybe couple dozen guys, so it's not very big – but through Facebook – and even, I got to see a few of my friends – one from Arizona – couple of us got together in Chicago. We have a football text link among 5 or 6 of us; we talk football during the season and the like. So I stay in touch with some of them, good friends, and some of the guys just choose not to be found.

Right, right. That happens too. When you were on the ship how were your communications from home? How did you stay in touch with family & friends? Mostly letters?

Letters, yeah, when we were out to sea it was letters only. Now my Mom had always told my family like hey, Mike's out to sea, if you get a collect call, even if it's at 2 o'clock in the morning, pick it up. My favorite place was Hong Kong – so when I was in port I would try to make a collect call home, to say hello –

Not too often, I'm sure – that would only happy couple of times a year.

Yeah, and then at one point in time, for a year, my friends and I got an apartment so it was easy to give the family a call from the apartment with our own phone.

Oh, but that was after you were off the ship –

Yeah.

Not while you were on the ship.

No.

Let's finish up with the cruise in '88.

So next stop was Hong Kong which was probably my favorite spot. Of course that was before 1997 when China took it back. It was just an amazing place! The food was something special; the architecture was amazing. It was just such a different culture than what I was used to.

Yes, definitely. Anything specific that you remember about it. Did you take a tour?

No, there was a – something that goes up to Victoria Peak, if I remember correctly –

Like an incline?

Yeah, yeah, so like you would take to go up skiing – that type of gondola-type –

Finicula?

Yeah, to go up –

You rode that?

Yeah,

Just for the scenery –

The architecture, like the buildings –

I want to take a look at the book Mike is showing me after we get done.

But it was just a different culture, you know, different food –

They speak English quite a bit there?

Yeah, yeah, they do. It was a little easier than some other spots, so that was probably my favorite spot.

How long were you there – in Hong Kong?

It was only a handful of days, again –

Just the one time?

Just one time, yeah. Then after that we hit Korea for three days – in Pusan, Korea. That was interesting as well but Hong Kong just stood out to me.

Any the other places you visited -- that you remember?

Yeah, think I'm hitting them all – then we hit Seattle – those were the breadth of the places I've hit on the first couple of cruises. That last cruise, which we didn't talk about, I definitely didn't see much; I was getting out then.

Where was the last cruise? How long did it last?

So that started in mid to late '89 and I got out in December of '89. So I got out in the Philippines – so I made it from California to the Philippine, then I was supposed to get launched off the ship, which would have been amazing, but got bumped by a senior officer. So when we pulled in the Philippines, I walked off the ship there and got out. The thing there is -- during that time, we had provided the air cover because there was a Communist uprising in the Philippines, and in late '89. As I was taking a bus to Manila we were going through armed check points and I was kind of laughing to myself that I made it through six years in the Navy and I'm gonna get killed on the way to the Manila Airport because of the Communists.

Oh my God – but you made it safely.

Yeah, made it safely, yeah, but the '89 Cruise – that was gonna be the World Cruise, so if I would have stayed on for the rest of that, they were going go all around the world and then change their base to Virginia because at that point in time they were going do a total refuel of all the reactors on the ship.

But you didn't stay on for the whole thing?

No, I didn't, no.

So you got to the airport in Manila safely, where did you fly back to California?

California – processed out for a few days and then I drove home to Chicago.

Oh, you drove from California.

Yeah, I had a car – so my Dad flew out and we drove home together.

Your Dad flew to California to pick you up.

Yeah.

And yu drove home together.

Correct.

Oh, that was nice. So you were not married while you were in the service?

Not at all. No. Actually I met my wife the January after I got out.

January of '90.

Yeah. Asked her out February of '90, got engaged July of '90 -- (turn tape)

Just to go back a little - got out in December of '89. My Dad flew out to meet me and drove home with me. I then went to Cancun with the family for a week's vacation and I started school at that point in time. Met my wife in English 101class in January. Asked her out in February. We were engaged that July of '90 and then married in January of '91 and have been married 33 years.

Congratulations!! You went to school – did you go with the GI Bill?

Well, no, so I took one semester – since we got married I thought gosh, I need a job so I went to work for a commercial nuclear power plant for four years.

Where was that?

Actually two years in Southern California.

Oh, you moved back to California for work?

Moved back to California for work, yes.

And that was after you were married?

Yeah. And then after spending a couple of years there, Van wanted to be closer to home so I got a job for two years at a commercial nuclear power plant in central Illinois.

So same job in Illinois.

Yeah, and then I decided to switch careers so I went back to school to become an accountant.

Is that when you used the GI Bill?

Yeah, I did, actually the State of Illinois had a program where if you were an Illinois resident before and returned to Illinois, the State would pay for schooling.

Wow!

And I might have been able to get more on the GI Bill and I just didn't know about it or think through it, but anyway the State paid for all of that, which was wonderful.

Where did you go to school?

University of Illinois at Chicago.

Oh, Circle Campus.

Right; got a Bachelor's in Accounting there. Went to work for Deloitte Touche, which right now is the largest accounting firm in the world. They paid for my Masters of Tax. Now I'm the President and Chief Financial Officer for the Wrigley Family

Oh, Wow! We have to go back – Michael did not talk about his medals, honors and awards received and he does not have his DD-214 here but does have it at home. He is going to email that information to me and I will include it at the end of this interview.

When you got home with your Dad, how was your reception with family and friends?

My parents had moved so a lot of my friends had moved on but the ones I had kept in touch with – actually a few of them went to the military themselves in Iraq – so yeah, I was well received by my family as well.

How about your readjustment to civilian life.

It was easy.

No problems?

No, no problems.

And you did have contact with fellow veterans over the years through Facebook and things like that?

Yeah.

Are you a member of any Veterans' Organizations today?

No.

Do you use any VA services today?

I do not.

How do you think that your military experience affected your life?

Just getting out of high school I just wasn't ready for college and I think -- then I ended up going into the most difficult program in all of the military -- and so I think it allowed me to mature and learn how to study better. A lot of employers, especially coming out of college, that was the real story -- gosh, how did you go from Navy nuclear power to sitting before me today --

Yeah, in a classroom.

A lot of employers like the military discipline that people get out of the military.

You didn't have to take a full four years, did you? 120 credit hours? Could you test out of some of it?

You know, I didn't have any Accounting or Business; it was all science related stuff. So that knocked out some of the basics. In the Accounting theory it's only one or two classes anyway, so it really didn't do much for me from knocking out credits. I did get through things quickly. Instead of the typical student who would take 15 credit hours, I was taking 21, because I was older --

And because you could.

Quite honestly coming out of Nuclear Power School -- college was pretty easy for me. I was older and more mature as well.

Yes. So what life lessons would you say you learned from military service?

That really showed leadership skills early on, as I saw in union jobs it's all based on seniority. It doesn't matter how good you are whereas in the military, if you were good at what you did, especially in the nuclear power field, you were given leadership skills early on.

You were given much more responsibility.

Right.

Well, I think men who go through the military are more responsible than people who haven't been in the military – just for the discipline – and everything else you receive while in there.

Yeah, and how to analyze problems, dealing with nuclear power related issues, fairly complex, can't be summed up in a manual; be a little quick on your feet and think under high pressure as well – are some of the things I've learned.

I think that sums it up. If there's anything else you wish to add to the story you can always add to it, some anecdote or something, we can always add to it, but we can't take it away – because it's on tape. That's all that I have. I'm going to look at your book and see if there's anything noteworthy to add to this. You will send me your awards in an email. I thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

Michael J. Zinsky

10625 Shilling Road

Frankfort, IL 60423

mzinsky@yahoo.com

Additional Information provided in the Field Kit – Medals, Honors and Awards – Battle E Award – 1988; Joint Meritorious Award – 1988; Armed Forces Expeditionary Award; Navy Expeditionary Medal (Libya); Good Conduct Award; Sea Service Deployment Ribbon (2)

