

Narrator: Robert Owens

Interviewer: Matt Costantino

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(0:00:13 – 0:00:38) Matt Costantino: This is Matt Costantino with the Intrepid Oral History Project. Today's date is October 1, and I'm sitting down with Bob Owens, who is a former crew member of the USS *Growler*. So, just to start things off, nice and easy – can you say your name, your rank while on board the *Growler* and your dates of service?

(0:00:38 – 0:01:15) Robert Owens: Okay, I'm Bob Owens, Robert Owens. Lieutenant Commander in the Navy. I was on *Growler* two years as Executive Officer; and one year as the Commanding Officer. I first went aboard *Growler* in February and, to be honest, I don't remember the year. I think it was around '63. And then I decommissioned the *Growler* at Mare Island Naval Shipyard.

(0:01:15 – 0:01:17) Matt Costantino: What year was that?

(0:01:17 – 0:01:22) Robert Owens: That would be, uh – you got me again. (laughs)

(0:01:22 – 0:01:24) Matt Costantino: 1964?

(0:01:24 – 0:01:26) Robert Owens: 1964 or something like that.

(0:01:26 – 0:01:28) Matt Costantino: You were on for a year on board *Growler*?

(0:01:28 – 0:01:31) Robert Owens: No. I was on board *Growler* for over three years.

(0:01:31 – 0:01:35) Matt Costantino: Three years, as XO; and then, as Commanding Officer.

(0:01:35 – 0:01:39) Robert Owens: Yeah, two years as Exec. And one year, as Commander.

(0:01:39 – 0:01:49) Matt Costantino: Okay. So we'll go back and we'll start at the very beginning. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?

(0:01:49 – 0:05:04) Robert Owens: I was born in Sanger, California – which is a small town outside of Fresno, which is in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley. I was born there in, June 3, 1924. And grew up, went, completed high school. At that time, World War II had started and Uncle Sam requested my presence. So at that time you could get in the Navy, being drafted. So I selected the Navy, and go in the Navy. And sent me to boot camp at Farragut, Idaho, which is by Coeur d’Alene. At the end of that, I went to Electrical School and went to Submarine School in New London, Connecticut. From there, to Hawaii. And what’s interesting to me is – I rode the *Intrepid* from Alameda, California to Pearl Harbor, as a passenger. So now my ex-ship is sitting across the pier from it. But anyway, I was on the submarine tender in Pearl Harbor. From there, we took the tender to Majuro Atoll and set up a forward submarine base. And I was then put on board the USS *Tinosa*, my first submarine, on my 20th birthday in 1944. I made seven war patrols on the *Tinosa* in the Pacific.

(0:03:33) The very first one, I remember distinctly because we received 132 depth charges and aerial bombs that one trip. So I was indoctrinated quite rapidly. The last patrol we made was into the Sea of Japan. We had a new sonar installed that detected mines. So they sent nine submarines with this equipment into the Sea of Japan through the southern end, through the mine field. Going through the mine field, we had a cable scrape down the side of the ship and, obviously, we survived. I’m here. Our patrol was off Pusan, Korea. We sank four ships and of the nine boats, eight of us got out the north end. We lost the USS *Bonefish* to Japanese sub-, destroyers. And we went right, we got back into Pearl Harbor in July. And then, of course, the war was over in August. So we had just started out on our next patrol and was halfway to Midway, and they told us to turn around and go to Mare Island to decommission the boat, which we happily did. And so, that ended that part of my career.

(0:05:04 – 0:05:08) Matt Costantino: What was that submarine like? How was it, how big was it? How many crew?

(0:05:08 – 0:06:04) Robert Owens: Well, World War II, it was called the Gato Class. It was 312 feet long, and the inside was 18 feet, at the widest point. And then they put the equipment in it. So you can see, space was not really readily available. The enlisted guys, which I was at that time, we did what they called – hot bunking. You had three sailors assigned for every two beds. So, a guy got up and went on watch. You come off of watch and got a nice, hot bunk to go to bed in. But, the food was good. The boats were very close. Small, really. And we had a crew of about 75 to 80 in there.

(0:06:04 – 0:06:05) Matt Costantino: Did it smell?

(0:06:06 – 0:06:06) Robert Owens: Huh?

(0:06:06 – 0:06:07) Matt Costantino: Did it smell?

(0:06:07 – 0:06:41) Robert Owens: Oh, yes. It had its odor of its own. And, so . . . but we survived. Our patrols usually lasted about 40 to 50 days. We did make one run. We plotted all the mine fields around Okinawa before the invasion. That was a 56-day patrol. And we did that. And that was the longest one, doing that kind of work.

(0:06:41 – 0:06:48) Matt Costantino: I'm probably going to go back a little bit more about training and . . .

(0:06:48 – 0:06:48) Robert Owens: Okay That's all right.

(0:06:49 – 0:06:59) Matt Costantino: . . . and see how you got into World War II. So you said you were drafted at the outset of World War II?

(0:06:59 – 0:06:59) Robert Owens: Yes. Yep.

(0:07:00 – 0:07:03) Matt Costantino: Where were you when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

(0:07:03 – 0:07:12) Robert Owens: I was in junior college. I was going to junior college. I just finished one semester before I was called to active duty. And . . .

(0:07:12 – 0:07:19) Matt Costantino: And how did you wind up in the submarine track? Going into submarines?

(0:07:19 – 0:09:34) Robert Owens: I, I, well . . . they sent me to Electricians' School; and that was a four-month course. At the end of that, I was rated 3rd Class Petty Officer. And they come in and ask for four volunteers for Submarine School. So I held my hand up, and away I went – to New London, Connecticut to Submarine School. And back there, after I passed all the tests; they run you through a bunch of shrinks to talk to you, to see why you were doing such a thing. He did a pressure test. They put you in a big chamber and pumped it up to 50 pounds. If you survived that, and they took you to the escape tank. It was a 100-foot-tall tower of water. And you put on the, at that time – called a Momsen Lung, which is an escape device. And then you made simulated escapes from 25 feet down, and 50 feet down. You had to do three of those in each level. Then, once you passed that, you would start school again. I started into Submarine Electrician School, where I learned the electrical systems on the submarines. How to charge the

batteries, how to do this and that. But that's where you learned that. And then also, you went to sea on a submarine. The first submarine I ever went to sea on was a World War I submarine. It was the – 08 was the hull number. And, boy, we went down to 50 feet and it leaked like a sieve. And all of us new guys were scared to death. (laughs) But the crew, it didn't bother them, so we figured it must be all right. So, from there, then I caught the ride on the *Intrepid* and started my Pacific tour.

(0:09:34 – 0:09:37) Matt Costantino: So you were on a submarine tender first?

(0:09:37 – 0:09:39) Robert Owens: Yes. The USS *Bushnell*.

(0:09:39 – 0:09:42) Matt Costantino: Okay, and what's the purpose of a submarine tender?

(0:09:42 – 0:10:23) Robert Owens: Okay, on the tender they do all the repair work on the submarines. Plus, they have on there what they call – relief crews. These are guys like me who are qualified to go aboard submarines. And when a submarine comes in from patrol, they normally transferred about 10 to 15 people. So, from the relief crews, they got the people to replace them. So that's how, so the *Tinosa* come in and they needed an electrician, so I went on the *Tinosa*.

(0:10:23 – 0:10:27) Matt Costantino: Would that be the home, the base for that submarine? Or would they, the home base . . .

(0:10:27 – 0:10:46) Robert Owens: No, the home base was still Pearl Harbor. That was just an advance, where you'd get fuel, torpedoes and food and stuff like that. And a couple of weeks' R&R, on an atoll where there's not much there.

(0:10:46 – 0:10:48) Matt Costantino: Did you have to qualify on the *Tinosa*?

(0:10:48 – 0:11:42) Robert Owens: Yes. You had to qualify as an enlisted to get the Silver Dolphins. And that required, you had to go into each compartment; know what all was going to happen in that compartment, be able to do the job. For instance, I was an electrician. I had to know how to shoot the torpedoes. I had to know how to start and run the engines. The same as the engineers had to know how to run the electrical parts. So, and then an officer would take you through the submarine and ask you questions. If he gave you an upcheck, then the Executive Officer would walk you through and give you tougher questions. But if he approved you, then he recommended the Captain qualify you – and you got your Dolphins.

(0:11:42 – 0:11:58) Matt Costantino: Was it scary being, knowing that you're at war and you're in the Pacific. You were right on the front lines, right next to Japan. What sort of thoughts go through your head?

(0:11:58 – 0:13:20) Robert Owens: Well, yeah. You certainly thought about it because you knew there were Japanese guys out there looking for you. Several times, we had torpedoes shot at us. Fortunately, they missed. And, and then we had destroyers after you all the time. And our biggest problem was airplanes. Japanese airplanes because, unless you spotted them by eyeball you didn't know they were coming until they were right there. Because the one radar we had, they called it an SD Radar. It was air search. But we found out, after a few years, that that radar actually sent out a signal that the airplanes could pick up. So it was useless, so we never used it. We used the Mark One Eyeball and hoped the lookout paid attention to what was going on. We, in fact, one patrol they sent us down to Truk. And the lookout missed an airplane and he dropped a bomb and it just missed us about 100 yards. And that really scared everybody and it really made the lookouts be a little more alert. (laughs)

(0:13:20 – 0:13:28) Matt Costantino: What was the atmosphere on board when you were engaged? When there is a ship out there that . . .

(0:13:28 – 0:14:28) Robert Owens: Well, of course, at that you were at battle stations and it was a very tense time. And everybody had a specific job to do and they had to do it really well because we were attacking another ship. And that ship we were attacking had escorts which were destroyers that didn't like us. So all that work was done up in our, what they call the Conning Tower, where the Captain was and the Exec. And they looked through the periscopes and the rest of us, we didn't know what was going on except what we could hear now and then. So we kind of were in the dark, as to what was happening. But then, when it come time to be depth charged, everybody knew that because it shook the boat up a little bit.

(0:14:28 – 0:14:33) Matt Costantino: What was the communication like back home at that time, as far as your family?

(0:14:33 – 0:14:47) Robert Owens: We didn't have any. We . . . yes, the submarine itself received messages. But there was no, none of this family stuff or nothing. It was all business, Navy business messages.

(0:14:47 – 0:14:52) Matt Costantino: So, did your family not know until you were coming back home after the war?

(0:14:52 – 0:14:55) Robert Owens: No, my folks didn't know at all.

(0:14:55 – 0:14:56) Matt Costantino: Man, that's, I can't even imagine.

(0:14:56 – 0:16:44) Robert Owens: Yeah, I got home once on two weeks' leave in three years. I'll tell you a funny story, though. My mom and a group of ladies at the church knit turtleneck blue sweaters for their sons in the service, in the Navy. Well, my mom shipped it to me for a birthday or Christmas – one, it didn't make any difference – along with cookies. Well, anyway, I was at New London. Somebody in the postal department saw the word "London," so that's where it went. Not – New London. London. So it gets to London and somebody over there says, "Well, now wait a minute. There's no Submarine School here. They must mean New London in the U.S." So, back it went across the Atlantic. That sweater survived two crossings of the Atlantic and never got torpedoed by a German. (laughs) The odd thing, the whole thing – by then, I was gone from New London to Hawaii. The sweater came to Hawaii. They said, "No, he's on the tender. It's out at Majuro." The old sweater headed for Majuro. "No, *Tinosa's* on patrol. But when it comes off patrol, it's going back to Pearl." Old sweater, back to Pearl. So, I did receive the sweater at the end of my first patrol, in an old beat-up, taped-together box. That poor old sweater was full of ground-up cookies and candy. So I just buttoned it up and sent it home. (laughs)

(0:16:44 – 0:16:44) Matt Costantino: You don't have the sweater anymore?

(0:16:44 – 0:16:49) Robert Owens: I didn't need a turtleneck sweater in Hawaii, I'll tell you. (laughs)

(0:16:49 – 0:16:57) Matt Costantino: Well, that's a good story. (laughs) So then, you said you were on your way to Midway when you found out the war was over.

(0:16:57 – 0:16:58) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:16:58 – 0:17:02) Matt Costantino: What did you do after World War II?

(0:17:02 – 0:19:30) Robert Owens: After that War? Of course, like everybody, I wanted out. So I got out. I came home to Sanger. And then I went to Fresno State College, four years. I got a degree in geology, which is great. I figured, I'll be a geologist. So I found a sign that said, "you might qualify for a Naval Reserve commission." So I applied and so they said to come to San Francisco and take a test. So I did. I told the person up there I wanted to be in the Civil Engineer Corps of the Navy. Because I knew they sent those guys to the University of Oklahoma

Petroleum School. And that's what I wanted. Because, you know, I'd be head of Standard Oil in six months after that. So anyway, nothing happened. So I figured I wasn't selected. Then I get a letter saying, "Come get your commission." So, boy, by then I was married. And my wife and I whipped up to San Francisco and I started signing papers. Then I read them. I was being commissioned Ensign USNR Line Officer. That meant – they could put me any place but Petroleum School. (laughs) And, but they did tack a submarine designator on it, which meant – if I was recalled to active duty, I'd go to a submarine. Lo and behold, Korea started. And I got a letter requesting my presence. Now, this is another weird thing. They said I was to report to the port in which the USS *Sirago* was, at the time I reported. Well, that makes a lot of sense, right? So I called Frisco. They said, "Yes, sir. We have a copy of your orders." I said, "Well, where's the *Sirago*?" And the person I was talking to says, "We can't tell you. That's classified information." I said, "Well then, please explain what I'm supposed to do." And the voice on the other end says, "Sir, if I was you, I'd go to Norfolk, Virginia." (laughs) So that's where I had to go. (laughs)

(0:19:30 – 0:19:32) Matt Costantino: Why would you go to Norfolk, Virginia?

(0:19:32 – 0:19:50) Robert Owens: That's where the *Sirago* was. (laughs) But he wouldn't tell me that. He just said, "Go to Norfolk." Well, I knew right away, that's where it was, I guess. So now I'm back in submarines, but this time, I'm an officer. And that has problems, also. (laughs)

(0:19:50 – 0:19:54) Matt Costantino: Where were you and your wife living at the time?

(0:19:54 – 0:19:55) Robert Owens: In Sanger.

(0:19:55 – 0:19:55) Matt Costantino: In Sanger?

(0:19:55 – 0:20:10) Robert Owens: Yeah, I'd just finished college. In fact, I graduated in June. My son was born in June. And I bought a brand-new Chevrolet in June. So that was a good month. (laughs)

(0:20:10 – 0:20:14) Matt Costantino: So then, what did you do on the *Sirago*?

(0:20:14 – 0:21:30) Robert Owens: About every job that no one else wanted to do. (laughs) Ensigns don't get to do much. And then, being a reserve officer, that didn't help. I had some trouble with some of the Naval Academy graduates because they were all full lieutenants. So, as an ensign, all that . . . I got the dumb jobs. Like, I was Assistant First Lieutenant. That meant I had to help paint the deck and get the paint. And then I had to, I worked my way up. I was a Commissary and Supply Officer. I was in charge of the food. That wasn't, not fun either. (laughs)

And every time a quota come in for some kind of a school, if none of the lieutenants wanted to go there, I got to go. So, I got to go to Torpedo School down in Florida. And that's how I got in the Regulus business. None of them wanted to go, so I was sent. (laughs)

(0:21:30 – 0:21:34) Matt Costantino: You were at a Torpedo School, and that's how you became involved in the Regulus?

(0:21:34 – 0:21:47) Robert Owens: No, I went to the Torpedo School because the officers, none of the officers wanted to go. Then we got a quota to go to Regulus School, and none of them wanted to go. So I went to there. So that's how I got into the Regulus business.

(0:21:47 – 0:21:52) Matt Costantino: And this is all, as part of your, while you were on the *Sirago*?

(0:21:52 – 0:21:53) Robert Owens: Yep.

(0:21:53 – 0:21:56) Matt Costantino: They send you to these different schools to get different training?

(0:21:56 – 0:21:56) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:21:57 – 0:22:07) Matt Costantino: That's interesting. So where, did the *Sirago* go out on patrols anywhere?

(0:22:07 – 0:22:33) Robert Owens: No, it played . . . well, yeah, we went out and played war games with things. And we went, we made one trip to the Mediterranean. And then, we did a lot of work down in the Caribbean Sea, playing anti-ship stuff. We'd tried to sink them and they tried to catch us – that type of stuff. Training, basically.

(0:22:33 – 0:22:44) Matt Costantino: Okay. So then, we'll move on to the Regulus program. When you finished that school, or what was entailed in the school, in Regulus?

(0:22:44 – 0:24:51) Robert Owens: Well, that was a four-month school where you learned the Regulus Missile inside and out; how to prepare it to launch. How to launch it. Recover it. All the parameters of the missile itself. And when I left there, they sent me to a guided missile unit; a guided missile unit, they called it. It was out at Port Hueneme, California. This was good because my wife's from Oxnard; Ventura and Oxnard are all together, and Port Hueneme. But that was the, they prepared the Regulus missiles for all the tests. It was a Navy unit. And so, I

was just thrown in there; by then, I was a Lieutenant Junior Grade. No longer an ensign. And, about that time, the Navy come up with a program to switch from Reserve to regular Navy. And it was a selection process. So I applied, and I got selected. So now I'm – USN. So I'm like all the other guys. But I was at the missile unit and the guy that was the missile officer was, he was a lieutenant. And I don't know, he did something not right or something. So the Commander canned him as a missile officer. And since I was the new guy just from school, I became the missile officer for the unit. So I was responsible for the preparation of all the missiles. And we launched Regulus missiles out of Point Mugu Naval Air Station. They had the launch pads over there. So we'd prepare the missiles in Port Hueneme and truck them over to Mugu and launch them. The missiles were recovered out at San Nicolas Island.

(0:24:51 – 0:24:53) Matt Costantino: Had you heard of the Regulus missiles before your training?

(0:24:53 – 0:24:55) Robert Owens: No, not until I went to that school. (laughs)

(0:24:55 – 0:25:03) Matt Costantino: I was under the impression it was originally a, just a ship-borne . . .

(0:25:03 – 0:25:51) Robert Owens: The initial, the initial one, I think was ship, on cruisers. Actually, the missile itself was a follow-on. After World War II we brought over a bunch of German V-1 missiles. They were a air-breathing missile. And . . . oh, I forgot; I think it was Ford or one of the auto companies built them. And from that, they developed the system to launch it from a submarine. And then, the Regulus was a follow-on to that missile. But the first, the first missile, it wasn't very successful. But the Regulus was. It really did the job.

(0:25:51 – 0:26:00) Matt Costantino: So that Regulus unit that you were assigned to – was that sort of, developing techniques to use . . .

(0:26:00 – 0:26:49) Robert Owens: Yes, it was, it was to develop the missile, the use of the missile; and to train missile technicians to go on board submarines. We trained the guys that went on the *Tunney*, which was the first Regulus missile submarine. We trained all those, and our guys would train. And besides that, we launched target missiles, Regulus, but they're used as targets for the Sidewinder air-to-air missile evaluation. We launched three missiles and they shot them all down. So, the Sidewinder was a very successful air-to-air missile.

(0:26:49 – 0:26:53) Matt Costantino: Um-hm. How did you get from there to being on the *Growler*?

(0:26:53 – 0:27:56) Robert Owens: Well, first I had to go through the *Grayback*. From the missile unit, I was assigned then to the USS *Grayback*, under construction at Mare Island. I was going to be the Weapons Officer, Missile Officer. They sent me up there to oversee the installation of the missile equipment and the launching equipment. So I reported in and I was the only officer there. And there was maybe two or three enlisted people. So, in a sense, I was acting Commanding Officer, Exec, Engineer – and the whole bunch. So I spent all my time observing tests of the engines and putting in the batteries. Besides putting in all my launching equipment, and making sure those big hangars worked, and all the missile test equipment and all that stuff. So I was very busy for about three months before anybody else showed up.

(0:27:56 – 0:27:58) Matt Costantino: So, you could say you built the *Grayback*?

(0:27:58 – 0:29:36) Robert Owens: Yeah, I did. So, I made, we got the *Grayback* commissioned, ready to go; made it out to Hawaii. I got a set of orders taking me off the *Grayback* and sending me to COMSUBPAC Staff as a Missile Officer. And I said, “Well, that’s not fair. I built this thing and I ought to at least make the first patrol.” So, SUBPAC wrote me a set of orders and sent me back to the *Grayback*. So I made the first patrol of *Grayback*. I was the navigator. And then, the *Grayback* went into Yokosuka at the end of that patrol, and I was taken off and flown back to Hawaii to SUBPAC Staff. And I did my tour there. Then I went to the *Growler* as prospective Executive Officer. Then they sent me to Commanding Officers’ School. It’s a school where they teach you tactics and all this other stuff. I finished that while the *Growler* was in the shipyard. That’s when they modified the sail. Raised it seven feet. So, to do that, they had to get new periscopes. All the masts had to be extended. And they had to add some new saddle tanks on the side, to balance the thing out for . . .

(0:29:36 – 0:29:38) Matt Costantino: Why were they raising the sail?

(0:29:28 – 0:30:12) Robert Owens: The boat was very difficult to control submerged. Because the tops of those big hangars were too close to the surface. So they lowered it seven, they lowered it seven feet. By adding seven feet to the sail, we could lower the boat down; and that helped the control quite a bit. But both *Grayback* and *Growler* were very difficult to control submerged.

(0:30:12 – 0:30:17) Matt Costantino: Who was Captain, when you were XO on *Growler* – who was the Captain?

(0:30:17 – 0:30:43) Robert Owens: First one was a fellow named Bob Crawford. I knew Crawford in the Regulus program earlier, and Crawford had relieved Captain Priest who was the Commissioning Captain. And then, Don Henderson took over from Crawford. Now, Don Henderson had been the engineer on the *Grayback*. So I knew him. (laughs) You know, we grew up together.

(0:30:43 – 0:30:44) Matt Costantino: It's a very close community.

(0:30:44 – 0:30:51) Robert Owens: Yeah. It really was an, incest between those two boats. (laughs)

(0:30:51 – 0:30:55) Matt Costantino: How many submarines were there, that launched the Regulus missiles?

(0:30:55 – 0:31:13) Robert Owens: At that time we had five – counting *Halibut*. *Tunney* and *Barbero* each carried two missiles, so they had to go out together. We all carried four. *Halibut* carried five. But she was nuclear-powered, so she didn't have any problems.

(0:31:13 – 0:31:17) Matt Costantino: What were the jobs of an XO on a submarine?

(0:31:17 – 0:31:55) Robert Owens: Back then, the job of the XO, you were a navigator. You were responsible for the crew. You were sort of the Chaplain. Problems came to you first. If you couldn't handle it, then you went to the Captain. But you were kind of the buffer between the crew and the Captain, in a sense. So and you had to, you were responsible for training. You were technically the Training Officer for the crew and the officers.

(0:31:55 – 0:31:59) Matt Costantino: So the Captain is, has the final say, in charge.

(0:31:59 – 0:32:00) Robert Owens: Absolutely.

(0:32:00 – 0:32:02) Matt Costantino: The XO is sort of the . . .

(0:32:02 – 0:32:12) Robert Owens: He's, you're the Assistant Captain but he's still, he's the guy that's going to take it in the neck if something goes wrong. (laughs)

(0:32:12 – 0:32:18) Matt Costantino: How did it feel when you got the call to be a Commanding Officer?

(0:32:18 – 0:32:48) Robert Owens: Well, I seemed to take it all right. (laughs) It's kind of, they don't even hardly do that anymore. They call it – fleeting up. You fleet up from XO to Commanding Officer. They don't really do that anymore. They got to go to Commanding Officers' School for six months or something. That's a long, drawn-out thing. Of course, the nuclear submarines are more complicated than ours were.

(0:32:48 – 0:32:52) Matt Costantino: Did you have to do any re-qualifying when you came onto *Growler*?

(0:32:52 – 0:32:52) Robert Owens: No.

(0:32:53 – 0:32:54) Matt Costantino: Because it's a new boat?

(0:32:54 – 0:32:57) Robert Owens: The boats were so similar that, uh . . .

(0:32:57 – 0:33:06) Matt Costantino: What about, well, as you built *Grayback* – was there any kind of special training that the crew had to go through?

(0:33:06 – 0:33:41) Robert Owens: Well, yeah. We had discourse, we had some different crew members. We had missile techs on board. And we had a warhead specialist – an officer and enlisted. And they were the, they handled all the nuclear warhead stuff. So they had to qualify on the boat. They'd been to Warhead School and they knew how to do that. But they might not be submarine-qualified, so they had to do that.

(0:33:41 – 0:34:01) Matt Costantino: So we're going to pretend that I'm going through the training process of the Regulus Program. I want to walk through, step by step – what happens when you get the order to launch a missile? What's the chain of command? What sort of procedures happen?

(0:34:01 – 0:34:01) Robert Owens: Okay.

(0:34:02 – 0:34:07) Matt Costantino: So, a call comes in over the radio, I would assume.

(0:34:07 – 0:34:07) Robert Owens: Yes.

(0:34:08 – 0:34:11) Matt Costantino: To say – launch the missiles. What happens?

(0:34:11 – 0:36:42) Robert Owens: Well, the first thing – the President makes the decision. That decision then goes down and a coded message is sent out that tells everybody with nuclear weapons. First they upgrade the readiness. Now, the message comes on board. It's a coded message. It tells you – now you can open up your secret envelope that you have in your safe. So, the Commanding Officer goes to his safe; gets that envelope. That gives you your target. That gives you all the specifics of the target and how to set the warhead. So, you call in your team. Now, this team has all been highly-classified and sworn in and all this other stuff. So there's very few. There's the Captain, the Exec, the Warhead Officer and the Missile Officer, and the enlisted warhead guy. They are about the only five people that have access to all this information. The boat is brought to high readiness. Say, Condition 1, say. That means everybody's on alert. The top guy in each field is at his position. No beginners. Everybody's the top guy. The next thing that happens – the missile men check out the missile. It's already plugged in, so they run a complete test on the missile to make sure that it's going to function when it's fired. In the meantime, the warhead guys have done their little job on the warhead – which is all their secret. And they have to do all that. Then that's all done, and so – everything is ready to launch. The ship is at the right depth. We have to surface, but you're at periscope depth. With your antenna up, because you have to catch the message that says, "Shoot." So, you just, you're just sitting there like this. When that happened in the Cuban Missile Crisis, the *Grayback* was in that condition for 14 days.

(0:36:42 – 0:36:42) Matt Costantino: Wow.

(0:36:43 – 0:37:11) Robert Owens: Just waiting for this one coded message to come in that says, "Go." Well, fortunately it didn't. But that's what we would be waiting for. The radio would be manned. Everybody would be on their toes. And there wouldn't be much sleep either because you never knew – that message might come in at two o'clock in the morning, or, you know . . .

(0:37:11 – 0:37:12) Matt Costantino: Wow. That's . . .

(0:37:12 – 0:37:39) Robert Owens: But your target had already been cranked into the computer and your plotting people were ready to go. And, see, Regulus was a guided missile. We guided it to the target. Where the new ones are, you shoot them and forget them. But we had to actually **guide** that Regulus.

(0:37:39 – 0:37:42) Matt Costantino: How did the guidance method work? Was it . . .

(0:37:42 – 0:38:03) Robert Owens: It worked well. It worked over the radar, it worked. We could send coded signals to the missile. And the missile would decode that signal. It might say,

“Speed up. Go up to 40,000 feet, come down.” You know, “Turn left, turn right.” We could do that.

(0:38:03 – 0:38:04) Matt Costantino: Were those pretty precise?

(0:38:04 – 0:38:33) Robert Owens: Yes. The missile itself was fairly accurate, but it still was not, that’s why they put the big warhead on it because . . . well, at one time I heard a figure that we could miss our target possibly a mile, and still do 90 percent of the damage. So . . .

(0:38:33 – 0:38:37) Matt Costantino: What is the launch process? What if you got that order to fire?

(0:38:37 – 0:40:15) Robert Owens: Okay. The launch process would be to – surface. First, before you’d surface you’d move the launcher over behind the hangar that had the missile you were going to fire. So that when you surfaced, once that big door was clear, you’d open that door and the ramming chains in the launcher go in and hook onto the missile and drag it out onto the launcher. Then that big door would close almost clear down. And the guys would hook up the final, hook up the fuel line to the missile. Because when we ran the engine, it ran on the ship’s jet fuel until it was launched. And then, that pulled away. And they had an umbilical cord that you sent signals to the missile while it was on the launcher. And then you had another little connection for the booster rockets. And that all had to be done because . . . and first, you took readings on the wires to the boosters, to make sure there was no current. And then you plugged it in. And until you pushed that firing button, those things, we hope, would stay inert. (laughs) But then, they just counted down – “Five, four, three, two, one – shoot.” Because you wanted to get that missile off and out of there, so you could dive.

(0:40:15 – 0:40:17) Matt Costantino: How long did the whole process take?

(0:40:17 – 0:40:57) Robert Owens: We’ve got it down to about 12 minutes, where we could surface, ram out the missile, launch it, close up and dive, in about 12 minutes. And that’s – if everything went right. And we figured, or . . . we could most probably get the first missile away okay. Maybe a second one. But we wouldn’t stand a chance for three or four because we leave too big a footprint when those things go off. Big smoke and everything. And they’d be looking for us, for sure.

(0:40:57 – 0:41:00) Matt Costantino: How close to shore are you?

(0:41:00 – 0:41:06) Robert Owens: We're out over 200 miles, but that's nothing. That's nothing to a jet.

(0:41:06 – 0:41:10) Matt Costantino: That's very close. So it's a pretty dangerous situation.

(0:41:10 – 0:41:10) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:41:11 – 0:41:15) Matt Costantino: And you always had that in the back of your mind, thinking about . . .

(0:41:15 – 0:41:49) Robert Owens: Well, we practiced it. All except ramming the missile out. But we practiced all the time, so we could . . . and then, back in Hawaii we did fire, they had the red-painted missiles were recoverable. So that's what we'd practice with. And then, we would really practice. Surface, open the door, ram the missile, shoot it, and down. And tried to develop faster and faster and faster.

(0:41:49 – 0:41:56) Matt Costantino: How did you feel about the mission of *Growler*? The purpose of being there?

(0:41:56 – 0:42:40) Robert Owens: My feelings, and I feel it was the feeling of the crew – we were out there to protect the United States. And I felt that, if some guy was going to take a shot at my family back in Pearl Harbor or San Francisco or any place else – I wanted to take a shot at him. And we figured we would have enough time, we'd probably could get our, get our missile in before one of theirs impacted. Because they have to fly it farther away. If that would be true or not, I don't know. But we hoped it would. (laughs)

(0:42:40 – 0:42:55) Matt Costantino: So, given that's a very stressful situation for the crew to be under, what was, how did you try and relieve that stress on board? Were there, what were the feelings of the crew?

(0:42:55 – 0:43:22) Robert Owens: Well, when the readiness condition backed down a notch, it was just like a big sigh of relief. Everybody relaxed and the jokes started again. And things like that. But we all felt the same. But we did all feel a lot better when we had to stand down, too. (laughs)

(0:43:22 – 0:43:26) Matt Costantino: Was the general attitude on board pretty jovial? You guys joked around a lot?

(0:43:26 – 0:43:26) Robert Owens: Yeah. Yeah.

(0:43:27 – 0:43:30) Matt Costantino: Even amongst officers and enlisted?

(0:43:30 – 0:44:00) Robert Owens: Yeah. It was, it was a real . . . well, it's like these fellows here. We're all just good friends. And they were, the fellows here today – only Playdon was the other officer. All the rest were my enlisted guys. But we were good friends. And we'd joke around a little bit. But there's still respect and stuff, and it works out well.

(0:44:00 – 0:44:04) Matt Costantino: Where was your bunk on the submarine?

(0:44:04 – 0:44:19) Robert Owens: Well, of course, the Captain has his own little bailiwick. But when I was the Exec, I was in a two-man stateroom. And being senior, I got to pick the upper bunk. (laughs)

(0:44:19 – 0:44:39) Matt Costantino: So, we've talked a lot about time on board the submarine. And life amongst the crew. But we're always curious to hear about stories from, on leave. When you guys are in port and come off the submarine. Did you hang out together – officers and enlisted, off the submarine?

(0:44:39 – 0:45:42) Robert Owens: Yes, we did. And there was lots of parties, believe me. And it may not be proper to say, but there was a lot of alcoholic beverages consumed. (laughs) But, we did. We . . . now, there were not a lot of parties between the officers and the enlisted people ashore. But they had their parties and we had ours. I mean, it wasn't that we didn't like each other. It's just, it didn't happen that way. The old Navy traditions and customs still held forth a little bit. And, then if an officer got qualified, he had to throw a big party to celebrate him getting his Gold Dolphins. And you, as an Exec, you had to have a big party. And then you got to be the Captain, you had to have a bigger party. (laughs) So, believe me – there were a lot of parties when we were in port. (laughs)

(0:45:42 – 0:45:46) Matt Costantino: Any particular stories that stand out in your mind?

(0:45:46 – 0:45:54) Robert Owens: Well, no – not really . . . that are tellable. (laughs)

(0:45:54 – 0:45:58) Matt Costantino: What about, as a Captain? Did you have to bail anyone out of trouble?

(0:45:59 – 0:47:48) Robert Owens: Yeah, we had . . . well, I wasn't the Captain. I was the Exec. When we were in the shipyard on *Growler*, and I don't remember which one of our sailors, but he had a little too much to drink. So he took one of the pickups of a shipyard worker, and was tearing around the shipyard in Hawaii – until the cops finally got him. So we brought him to Captain's Mast and Captain Crawford. We assigned the guy to the brig, the marine brig. So he went to the brig and then Captain Crawford, I guess, was talking to the Legal Officer at SUBPAC Staff. And they said, "Well, you can't put a Second Class Petty Officer in the brig. You have to break him down to Third Class." So Crawford said, "Well, I don't want to do that. He's a good guy." (laughs) So, then the Legal Officer said, "Well, then you better get him out of the brig." So we had to get him out of the brig. But he spent the night. And when I went down to the boat the next morning, he was sitting on the pier. And of course, the first thing that happened, he got a Marine haircut at the brig. And I come down the pier and he jumped up, and he says, "Mr. Owens." I says, "Yeah." He says, "I never want to go back there again!" I said, "Well, that's up to you." He says, "You better believe that. I'm not going back . . ." (laughs) So it really worked well. And he was a good sailor. We didn't want to lose him; he was an excellent sailor. But he just had a little too much to drink. And he didn't . . . he **really** was a good sailor now. (laughs)

(0:47:48 – 0:47:49) Matt Costantino: That's good. It's a good sign of camaraderie.

(0:47:49 – 0:47:55) Robert Owens: It served its purpose. Yeah, it served its purpose too.

(0:47:55 – 0:48:01) Matt Costantino: I heard mention of the Dolphins earlier.

(0:48:01 – 0:48:01) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:48:02 – 0:48:15) Matt Costantino: I know submariners feel very proud of their Dolphins and you mentioned that there are those big celebrations that happen.

(0:48:15 – 0:48:15) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:48:16 – 0:48:28) Matt Costantino: Are there any particular instances of someone earning their Dolphins that you remember? I understand the Captain has, is the one who presents the Dolphins . . .

(0:48:28 – 0:50:50) Robert Owens: Well, the one I really remember was . . . actually, it was on, I guess it was the *Growler*. It was either *Growler* or *Grayback*. This young officer earned his Dolphins. Well, I had a big party at my house. The guy's name was Bill, Pecos Bill, because he was from Texas. And he was a geology major, like I was. So anyway, Pecos got his Gold

Dolphins. Well, you put them in a glass and then you fill the glass with every kind of liquor you got in the house. (laughs) And you drink your Dolphins. Well, I had this big monkeypod tree in my yard. So Bill decided he could climb that tree and stick his hand out of the top. So away he went. And the next thing we heard was, “Crash, boom, bang!” Down he come. He skinned his arms because he had tried to grab a limb and . . . well, all the ladies oohed and aahed over Bill and they patched him up. And he had a sports car. So he says, “Well, I’m going into town” because all his buddies were in there and he wanted to tell them about getting qualified. Well, he was pretty inebriated. So we said, “No, you better not.” “No, I’m going.” Away he went. Well, he got out the gate of the base, Pearl Harbor. Sure enough, a Hawaiian highway patrol got him. And they stopped him. And this highway cop says . . . Bill told him he just got qualified in submarines and he’d been at a party. And the officer said . . . of all the luck, the officer happened to be a submarine guy, out of the Navy. But now, a cop. So he said, “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. I’m going to let you turn around and go back to the base. And I better not see you out here on the street again.” So Bill was sober enough he took the warning and he never got arrested, he never got a ticket. But that guy, had it been another Hawaiian cop, he’d have been in jail. There’d been no question. Because they didn’t like sailors, anyway. (laughs)

(0:50:50 – 0:50:57) Matt Costantino: Yeah, again, that really shows the camaraderie that comes with those Dolphins, as a submariner.

(0:50:57 – 0:51:20) Robert Owens: Yeah. It’s a real great fraternity – to be honest with you. I’ve gone to Monterrey a couple of times to the submarine birthday ball. And there are people over there I never knew in my life, but we all got Gold Dolphins on and we’re all smiling and clapping each other. (laughs) It’s great.

(0:51:20 – 0:51:25) Matt Costantino: So you had your base there, at Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii?

(0:51:25 – 0:51:25) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:51:26 – 0:51:28) Matt Costantino: And that’s where you lived, on the base?

(0:51:28 – 0:51:28) Robert Owens: Um-hm.

(0:51:29 – 0:51:32) Matt Costantino: So, and you were married at the time?

(0:51:32 – 0:51:36) Robert Owens: Oh, yeah.

(0:51:36 – 0:51:44) Matt Costantino: What was it like for your wife, living the life of a submariner?

(0:51:44 – 0:53:53) Robert Owens: Well, of course, she didn't like me being gone all the time. And then, before I got up into the higher levels, she didn't think too much of that stuff. She never, ever been associated with the service. So, here she married me and then all of a sudden, I got re-called to active duty. And I was, just had a new son – so it was tough on her. She had to drive across the country all by herself, with two of my kids. (laughs) And she was telling me last night, she's going to write a book. (laughs) But anyway, I feel she did a great job as a naval officer's wife. She did everything she could. We had, in Norfolk, on the *Sirago* – back then it was customary that you paid, what they called a "courtesy call" on your Commanding Officer. And back then, we had to pay one on the Division Commander. That meant, you went to his house, had a cocktail. And then, he'd come to your house. Well, as ensigns, you don't have a lot of money for parties. But anyway, the Commander, who was a Captain, he came to the house with his wife. His wife was a wonderful person; she took my wife kind of to the side, to explain to her what she's going to be up against as a Navy wife – because my wife didn't know. And that really helped, you know, to have – here's a woman who had years of experience, talking to a junior one. And I thought – what a nice woman, to do something like that. And I think that helped my wife help other wives, when they came aboard. So, it was kind of handed down the line.

(0:53:53 – 0:53:55) Matt Costantino: It's a tradition, just like you guys with your Dolphins.

(0:53:55 – 0:54:00) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:54:00 – 0:54:03) Matt Costantino: So, when you left *Growler*, where did you go from there?

(0:54:03 – 0:56:30) Robert Owens: When I left *Growler*, I went back to COMSUBPAC Staff. I was a Polaris Targeting Officer. I did all the targeting for the Pacific Polaris boats, for a year. Then I got orders and went back to the East Coast and had command of the *Sea Leopard*, which was a fast-attack diesel submarine. And that was fun. That was just a great joy, because I ran with the carrier *Randolf* and six destroyers and two submarines. Well, I was the senior submarine guy – so I was, now I was an Attack Unit Commander. Well, I had another submarine under . . . but we played war games all the time. But basically, we were out looking for Russian submarines. But, man, I got to go on all kinds of good ports – liberty and everything. And one trip I was in, went into Kristiansand, Norway. And it was on July the 4th and we had visitors come through the boat, go through the boat. Well, this one gentleman come through, and I got to talk to him, and he had been our Ambassador to the Soviet Union, before the war. I'm trying to think of his name. Kennan. Ambassador Kennan, was his name. So I invited him and his wife for lunch the

next day. So he came for lunch and then him and his wife invited me, my exec and the other skipper and his exec to take a cruise on her boat. They took us up fjords, all around. She served us a Norwegian lunch. Great! But then, he wrote a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, saying what a splendid job the two submarines did in Kristiansand, and how proud he was and all that. Well, man, that hit CNO and it come on down. That was great. I'll tell you, that was a feather in our cap. (laughs) Because you don't get letters like that from famous guys. (laughs)

(0:56:30 – 0:56:33) Matt Costantino: Yeah, that's good. You're an ambassador for . . .

(0:56:33 – 0:56:33) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:56:34 – 0:56:42) Matt Costantino: . . . not only submarine service, but the Navy as a whole. Did that come with any sort of benefits?

(0:56:42 – 0:57:27) Robert Owens: Oh, we just got some, we just got some "well-done's" from CNO and then on down, ever down the line. But that was worth it, really. And then, I guess the next-best thing – we took the two submarines into the German Naval Academy at Flensburg. And I had on board for lunch Admiral Kretschmer, who was a German Navy Admiral. He was the Number One U-boat ace in World War II. He only sank 400-and-something tons of, thousand tons of our ships. He was the Number One ace. And he was still alive. And he was, he was really something. (laughs)

(0:57:27 – 0:57:29) Matt Costantino: Two old submariners.

(0:57:29 – 0:57:30) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(0:57:30 – 0:57:35) Matt Costantino: So, from that – commanding your own attack unit, where . . .

(0:57:35 – 0:58:43) Robert Owens: Yeah, from there I went to CINCLANT fleet. I was on the team that would send the go-message to the Polaris boats. That was our job. From there, I went down to South Carolina, Charleston. I was Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations for SubFlot 6. So SubFlot 6 – we had submarines in Rota, Spain, Norfolk. All those submarines belonged to me – plus the Polaris boats. So I did that for three years. And then, I got orders to the Pentagon for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I was the Submarine Officer attached to the Chairman's SALT negotiation team. So I worked directly with Lieutenant General Allison, who was the Joint Chiefs of Staff representative for the SALT talks. I worked with him and his staff.

(0:58:43 – 0:58:45) Matt Costantino: And what were the SALT talks?

(0:58:45 – 1:00:08) Robert Owens: Strategic Arm Limitation Talks – with the Russians. So as such, I went overseas and I talked to the Russians about how to do away with missile submarines, because they were going to cut back on the numbers. And I remember asking this . . . and the Russians always played one-up. If we sent a Commander, they sent a Captain. If we sent a Captain, they had a Rear Admiral. Every time. They had one-up on. It was great. And I was on one little committee. We were going to upgrade the Washington/Moscow Hotline. It was a land line, or is still a land line. But the French kept cutting it. So we decided, between the two countries, to go satellite. So that's what I was negotiating. So the gentleman in charge from the State Department was introducing us to the Russians. And he's running on and he said, "And this is Mr. Owens." And this Russian head guy said, "Wait a minute. What's a submarine captain doing here?" (laughs) They knew everything about us. (laughs) You know, it made you feel kind of creepy. (laughs) What else have I hidden this guy knows about? (laughs)

(1:00:08 – 1:00:12) Matt Costantino: They knew you guys were lurking around over there?

(1:00:12 – 1:00:19) Robert Owens: Oh, yeah. Sure they did. Well, they were doing the same thing.

(1:00:19 – 1:00:23) Matt Costantino: When did you, was that your last, you were still active-Navy at the time?

(1:00:23 – 1:01:44) Robert Owens: Yeah. Oh, yeah. From there, my next assignment was back down to Dam Neck, Virginia. I was, what they call, the 688 Project Officer. 688 was the new nuke class, fast attack. We were developing a communications system for the 688s to talk to the aircraft carrier. Because the task groups all ran with two nuke submarines, plus their destroyers – the carrier. The nukes were way out in front. But they wanted to, they kept saying, "Well, all they got to do is surface and send a message." And I said, "No, no, no, no, no." That's why we got nuclear power; they don't have to surface. So we were trying to develop a communications system so we could tell the carrier, "We got a Russian submarine out here at such-and-such." And I didn't see eye-to-eye with a lot of them. And finally, I could see I wasn't going anywhere. So I figured it was time to call it a day. So I resigned. So I resigned from Dam Neck, Virginia in 1975.

(1:01:44 – 1:01:47) Matt Costantino: That's a long career in submarines.

(1:01:47 – 1:02:07) Robert Owens: 28. I got 28 years, day, 28 years active-duty. Because they count my World War II time also. So I had 28 years. And it was all to do with submarines, which was great. That made me happy.

(1:02:07 – 1:02:10) Matt Costantino: I understand you went back to California after that?

(1:02:10 – 1:02:52) Robert Owens: Yeah, I'm, we moved back to Sanger and I, of all things, became a plumber. (laughs) My family owned a plumbing business in Sanger, that my grandfather started in 1896. And it was still in the family. So what I did, my brother was, had half-interest. So I bought my uncle's half, so now I was partners with my brother. And, unfortunately he passed away all of the sudden, so I just sold it. I'd had enough, anyway. So here I are. (laughs)

(1:02:52 – 1:02:55) Matt Costantino: How is it adjusting to civilian life?

(1:02:55 – 1:02:55) Robert Owens: Huh?

(1:02:56 – 1:02:58) Matt Costantino: How is it adjusting to civilian life?

(1:02:58 – 1:03:09) Robert Owens: Great, doing all kinds of things. Hobbies.

(1:03:09 – 1:03:15) Matt Costantino: I want to go back, you mentioned a story earlier, about a fishing ball.

(1:03:15 – 1:03:15) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(1:03:16 – 1:03:18) Matt Costantino: And something to do with . . .

(1:03:18 – 1:04:56) Robert Owens: Okay, what this is – the big nets up there have a float on it with a light. It stands, probably four feet high, with a light on top. A great, big glass ball in the middle is the floatation device, it is a metal frame with a thing down here for the battery. Well, that battery was a stabilizer because it was, the weight was down. And they tied that on the end of their nets, so they knew where the end was. Well, we found one floating our way, and Bob Harmuth, who had the deck, I think. Anyway, we recovered it. So I had the electricians re-wire it so we could use our electricity in the bulb. And what we did, we come back into Pearl, we had it bolted down to the top of the sail. And we painted it bright red. So (laughs), and the Admiral was very upset. He says, "Get rid of that." He said, "You're going to give away where you go on patrol." Well, for heaven's sake, one fishing float is going to . . . the Russians already

knew where we were. (laughs) We weren't going to tell them any secret. (laughs) But I still have that in my backyard. And, in fact, the net that held the ball finally disintegrated. So I went to a sports store and I bought a basketball net, and re-netted the ball. So it's now got a new net on the ball. (laughs) I'm going to give it back to Harmuth, if he'll ever come get it. (laughs)

(1:04:56 – 1:05:03) Matt Costantino: Did you guys have any kind of accidents on board? Like, running into fishing nets or anything?

(1:05:03 – 1:06:42) Robert Owens: Oh, we had, we had a torpedo – which was powered by hydrogen peroxide. And they're very sensitive. And what you do, you watch the indicator and the bubble – which is the decomposition of the hydrogen peroxide – it bubbles. And they count these bubbles. And if that increases, you know you got a problem. Well, this one torpedo was in the rack and it had a problem. So, we quick, pulled a torpedo out of the tube. And in the meantime, this thing had gotten so hot, the metal was turning color. So we shoved it into the tube, and Don Henderson was the skipper. He told me, he says: "You go back and maneu-, in control and when I tell you, you back up." I said, "You want me to back up the *Grayback*, the *Growler*?" "Yeah, back up!" Because we're going to shoot this thing. We don't know what's going to happen, whether, when it hits the cold water, it'll blow up. So, Captain said, "Go to control and back up." By golly, I did. Well, trying to back that *Growler*, was (laughs) . . . we didn't have much speed going ahead, let alone backing up. (laughs) But we backed up, and we launched the torpedo, and it just sank up there, off the . . . it's laying up there someplace. But we saved the boat because if that had cooked off, none of us would have been here today. (laughs)

(1:06:42 – 1:06:55) Matt Costantino: Wow. (laughs) Going back to the launching for the missiles, you mentioned that targets are located in the safe. And . . .

(1:06:55 – 1:06:55) Robert Owens: Yeah.

(1:06:55 – 1:06:59) Matt Costantino: . . . who puts the orders there, in the first place?

(1:06:59 – 1:07:00) Robert Owens: We were given those when we get underway.

(1:07:00 – 1:07:00) Matt Costantino: Okay.

(1:07:01 – 1:07:09) Robert Owens: With our op-, with our operation order, we are given the envelope with all the missile information in it.

(1:07:09 – 1:07:13) Matt Costantino: And so, nobody knows the targets until those are opened?

(1:07:13 – 1:08:18) Robert Owens: Um-hm. (shakes head) Nobody on the boat. But the target, the targeting came, at that time, from – what's that place in Colorado where the, big, underneath the mountain? It's a SAC headquarters. They're responsible for all the missile stuff. I went back there when I was working on the Polaris targeting, I went back. Cheyenne Mountain, that's the name. It's the big center. A huge place, underneath a mountain. And the mountain was hollowed-out and that's where we sat down and targeted the Polaris. We had to get altitude of the target and all this stuff. Then I would pick the patrol areas in the ocean for the Polaris boat, so he could be in position to hit that particular target. And, but that's where we'd been. I knew all those places. (laughs)

(1:08:18 – 1:08:36) Matt Costantino: How did it feel for you, knowing that those, that these pieces you're moving around – whether it's *Growler* to launch missiles, or those Polaris boats you're positioning – that it's essentially starting World War III?

(1:08:36 – 1:09:15) Robert Owens: Well, yeah, I mean . . . there's, I guess you could get a *Red October*-type guy and cause a problem. But they got theirs aimed at us, and we're aimed at them. I mean, it's just a matter of somebody making the wrong decision, and then we would be in a heap of trouble. Because everybody's ready to launch. I know they are. And so are we.

(1:09:15 – 1:09:32) Matt Costantino: Okay, fast-forwarding now to having the *Growler* as a museum. What is the most important thing you think visitors could take away from seeing the *Growler* at a Museum like the Intrepid?

(1:09:33 – 1:09:54) Robert Owens: Well, I'd like them to understand what we went through to protect them. Why we were out there. We weren't out there just for fun. We were out there protecting those people coming through, looking at the boat. And, of course, some of them were probably little teeny kids when we were out there doing that.

(1:09:54 – 1:09:57) Matt Costantino: It's definitely a . . .

(1:09:57 – 1:10:16) Robert Owens: I think it's important for people to know what others, others have been doing to keep them safe. Because I know, even in my family, I got people that probably don't even know what we were doing. (laughs)

(1:10:16 – 1:10:27) Matt Costantino: Well, as a submarine man through and through, are there any, is there any advice you would give to someone who's maybe considering the submarine service?

(1:10:27 – 1:11:22) Robert Owens: Oh, absolutely. I think anybody that wants to . . . because now it's really great. You, if you get into Nuclear Power School, it's really great because if you get out of the Navy and you've got that nuclear power license in your pocket, there are a lot of nuclear power plants around the United States now, where you . . . in fact, the guy on the *Sirago*, that helped me the most – Don Hall was his name – got in the nuclear program because he was smart as a whip. When he retired from the Navy, he went right to work for Tennessee Valley Power Company, running one of their big reactors. And I'm sure he wasn't getting paid zero for that. (laughs)

(1:11:22 – 1:11:22) Matt Costantino: Well, great.

(1:11:23 – 1:11:58) Robert Owens: No, I think that, I think youngsters get into, if they get in the Navy they ought to take a shot at . . . when we were back there, there were four sailors, enlisted sailors come through. And I was talking to them. They had just finished Nuclear Power School. And I guess they, they went to a nuclear power boat, they couldn't believe, probably, what they were looking at. (laughs)

(1:11:58 – 1:12:01) Matt Costantino: Well, I think that's all the questions I have for you.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]