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Interviewer: Jessica Williams

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(0:00:11 – 0:00:31) Jessica Williams: Today is September 14<sup>th</sup> 2016. I'm Jessica Williams with the Intrepid Museum, and we're here in Charleston, South Carolina, at the reunion of *Growler* crew members. I'm talking to Dennis Sloan. Thank you so much Dennis. We really appreciate you chatting with us. So would you mind introducing yourself and telling us your connection to *Growler*?

(0:00:32 – 0:02:07) Dennis Sloan: I am Captain Dennis Y. Sloan, United States Navy, retired. I attended the Naval Academy and graduated in 1957, spent a year and a half on a heavy cruiser, the USS *Los Angeles*. I went to submarine school, got married, went to submarine school, and in June of 1960 reported to *Growler* in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. She had just finished her shakedown cruise, and we spent two months in Portsmouth, and then transited to Norfolk and through the Panama Canal to Hawaii. I was nominally the commissary officer for the first part of my tour on there. I had absolutely no idea about food service, no experience on that on the cruiser, but it was – fortunately, the ship was well manned by experienced enlisted. My main function onboard was to get qualified in submarines so that I could take over watch standing and make the load easier for the other officers that were training me to relieve them.

(0:02:09 – 0:02:22) Jessica Williams: Great. That's a lot. We'll go back into detail about some of those things in a bit. I'd love to step way back, just to get to know a little bit about you and where you come from. Where are you from? What was your family life like when you were . . . ?

(0:02:22 – 0:16:26) Dennis Sloan: My dad was in the Air Force, so we spent the war years in Iowa while he was overseas. And he got out briefly and decided that he really liked the challenge in the military so he, after the war, went back into the Air Force in Wright-Patterson Air Force Base for three years. Then he was transferred to Washington. We lived in Arlington. I went to Washington-Lee High School, which had a – I had absolutely, not knowing anybody. They had a high school crew and I participated in that some, the last couple years. And Navy had just won the Olympics. My choices

for either academy was West Point or Annapolis. And I decided to row crew at Annapolis. So, did that for four years and graduated. We took preference numbers rather than by class standing, and by the time we got down to my preference number there was only one combatant left. The rest of them were amphibians or aircraft carriers or something like that, so I went to the *Los Angeles*. Ended up in the gunnery department, and by the time I finished my tour on there, had completed all the requirements for the surface warfare designation except engineering. And I had no desire to go down into the oily hot engineering spaces, so I applied for submarine school. It was a convenient break between the Pacific Fleet and going to sub school. We were able to take leave and get married. So, we both started out in submarines in New London. It's a six-month course. And, it was . . . pretty good social period, and you learned a little bit about the social part of submarining. When we finished I had a brief stay in Baltimore with Nancy's folks, then went to Portsmouth. Finding a place to live for two months in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, or Kittery, Maine, which is a very popular summer resort area, was pretty difficult, but we managed to do that. The wardroom on the *Growler* was exceptional. The commanding officer, Commander Charles Priest was probably the finest CO that I ever served with, and my goal was to, if I ever had the opportunity to command a ship, to emulate his example. I tried. I'm not sure that I could ever have achieved that. He is head and shoulders above anybody else that I knew. So it's -- it was hard for the separation, and particularly difficult for my wife because . . . the Navy knew how to transfer people, but you had to know who to contact and what lead time in order to make things go smoothly, and by and large it was pretty good. She managed to ship out the car from Bayonne, New Jersey, and show up in San Francisco on time, and get the ship, the MSTS ship to Hawaii. So, they were there when the ship -- when *Growler* arrived, when the boat got there.

(0:07:05) The transit was very interesting. We spent a overnight in Key West, which was a, still a submarine port. And my leading cook, I didn't understand this, but found out that it was the way to do it and it turned out quite well, but we had a ton of Nutty Buddies brought aboard, which was a ice cream cone with ground up nuts on top of the thing. Very popular with the crew, and it worked out well. We went through the Panama Canal. I was the officer of the deck under instruction going through. *Growler* had a shower, a salt-water shower, between the hangars, below decks, accessible through the forward escape trunk, and so people -- and of course, Lake Gatun is fresh water so everybody took a shower. That's probably one of the most thorough showers anybody ever took on the ship. We got to the Pacific side and there was a horrendous tide variation there, and so when we -- the wardroom went ashore to see the wonders of Panama on that side, and when we left the ship, it was normal pier side mooring, and

it was odd that the -- we moored to a float that had a long ramp that was parallel to the pier, which normally you'd just do perpendicular to the pier. That was unusual. We went ashore, had liberty, meal and enjoyed the port, came back in taxis and pulled up at the pier, and the ship wasn't apparent. And the captain said, "Where is my submarine?" And you had to walk over the edge of the pier and look down, and it was down there, and this horizontal -- this platform had gone down on the pilings that it was tied to it, so it had gone down, and this long ramp was no longer even with the pier, it was at about a 45-degree angle that you had to walk down. This poor duty section had spent all night letting out the lines as the tide went out, and then taking them back in when the tide came back in. It was an interesting evolution.

(0:10:33) We got underway and went to Hawaii. Somewhere along the line there I qualified as a officer of the deck underway. I had been that on a cruiser in a fast carrier task force, so just learning a difference in the control systems and the communications. But basically it was a seamanship, and you had to learn that. Interesting evolution en route. Probably others have alluded to it. One of the officers, and my leading cook, and a torpedoman, got the idea they would take -- inflate the raft and go out. And we did a exercise where the ship would come by at periscope depth and lasso -- they would lasso the periscope on the way by and get towed for a period, and that was successful. Then the ship hauled off further and we were going to do a battle surface and run out a missile so they could take a, video that. So we hauled off, and did the battle surface, and they started frantically waving and paddling towards the ship, and we thought well, they think we want a further close up. Basically the problem was that they had attracted a shark who would like to play with the raft, and they were very enthusiastic about paddling over to the boat. It wasn't till they got quite close that we realized that they weren't having fun, they were scared out of their wits (laughs) and trying to get out of the way of that shark. They were recovered without incident. And they took a lot of ribbing about that for a while.

(0:13:03) We got to Hawaii, and it was training, finding a place to live. I guess it was pretty standard, training type thing that involved submarines, and the submarine is obviously a whole new ball game from a surface ship. Surface ship you had a whole lot of people. If there was a fire some place, why you had a fire department that went and fixed it. If there was a leak some place, you had plumbers who would go fix it. On a submarine, if there's a fire, the first guy -- the closest person to it is the fire department and he better know what's burning and how to put it out. If there's a leak, he has to know what's the system, how do you isolate it, what's the ramification. Instead of a general appreciation for the systems that run the ship, you had to have a detailed one,

and part of the qualification, which was, first year aboard is your main job, is to trace out every system: piping system, electrical system, whatever. Trace it out, the pipes, where are the valves, what do the valves do? When you shut this valve what happens? What have you lost? And it's important that you know that. When we get underway, the ship is rigged for dive, and so everything is put in a particular position, and you have a check off list that you go through and check each valve that has some purpose has to be in a particular position, and you know where it is, what it's supposed to be. And if you don't do it correctly, somebody could get hurt, and I learned a very -- learned that very early on. Fortunately no one was hurt, but putting a hydraulic valve in the wrong position when they open the vents to dive, this manual operator came flying out of the overhead, and of course it was attached, but if somebody had been directly underneath, could've been injured badly, so, another sailor and myself learned a very valuable lesson because, for the rig for dive, it's done by a sailor who's qualified in that compartment, and it's verified by an officer. It's done on a submarine because it's written in blood. People who've gotten errors in rig for dive have . . . caused a lot of problems.

(0:16:29 – 0:16:30) Jessica Williams: May I interject for a second?

(0:16:31 – 0:16:31) Dennis Sloan: Pardon me?

(0:16:32 – 0:16:53) Jessica Williams: May I interject (Dennis Sloan: Sure.) for a second? Because you've gone through a lot. I'm going to go back to some other things, but specifically about -- we've talked to -- we've talked to more enlisted sailors than we've talked to officers on *Growler*. Can you -- is there anything different about the qualification process for an officer compared to an enlisted person?

(0:16:54 – 0:20:48) Dennis Sloan: Well, certainly. We spent six months in school learning what the, in general, the systems are, it's kind of like flight training for an officer. You're going to go to flight school; you learn the systems on an airplane and what they do, and the parameters that the airplane can control that. Well the submarine is an airplane in a heavier medium. In other words, we fly underwater, where they fly in the air. If something happens in a submarine it affects, anywhere from a crew of 70 -- I've forgotten now how many people were on *Growler* -- up to currently there's -- submarines have about 120 crew. The consequences are every bit as severe now as they were on *Growler* or pre-World War II submarines. So, it's very demanding, you have to go through the training. Enlisted goes through submarine school, the officers go through submarine school. Today the officer goes through, in addition, goes through nuclear power school, usually, although some of them -- not everybody is a

nuclear trained officer on the new boats. You've got weapons officers. That's the principal exception. Anyway, a person is -- and the crew is limited, so he has to be well trained in the arena that he's going to serve in, particularly the enlisted. The officer sometimes will go to a special school, weapons training for instance, but that's -- a lot of it is on the job learning. But it requires a level of expertise far above what I had experienced on a surface ship. Most of us enjoyed the challenge of learning it a little more accurately, and I found that out of my Naval Academy class, unless there was some physical reason they couldn't, most of the -- those interested in a career would go either aviation or submarine. Physical -- aviation probably visual is the toughest part of weeding it out. Submarines, everybody has to be able to go through the escape tank, which, uh, gives you about . . . I don't know, 50 -- the equivalent of 100 foot of depth, and I forgot now how many pounds that is, but anyway you have to pressurize the compartment that much and then you do an escape through a thing and go up through the tank. Now I guess they just do it in a pressurized tank that will allow to demonstrate that physiologically you can handle that.

(0:20:53 – 0:21:08) Jessica Williams: I want to think back to a few things that you touched upon earlier just to make sure that they -- I don't lose them entirely. So you joined *Growler* when *Growler* was still in Portsmouth, so it had just been commissioned recently.

(0:21:08 – 0:26:18) Dennis Sloan: It had been recently commissioned. They did their shake down, which is generally a month, six weeks of operations to find out, hey, what things didn't work right? They go back and have a post shake down availability. The length is determined by the number of problems that they encountered. While I was in sub school, my college roommate and sub school classmate drove up from New London to Portsmouth just to tour the ship. And I was amazed that the oxygen loading valve for the ship -- we had oxygen tanks that if you were submerged for a long time could refresh the air that you could bleed oxygen in -- and that was right inside the main hatch down to the crew's mess, which was the main access to the boat. And so we went down there and they happened to be charging oxygen, so this hose was running down and tied in there, and people didn't have a overriding fear of that until we got -- while *Growler* was in Pearl Harbor, a nuclear boat, the *Sargo*, was taking aboard oxygen. Their loading valve was in the after torpedo room, and nobody knows what the casualty was, but somehow there was damage and a spark, and they had a 25 inch blowtorch coming out of the after torpedo room. And there the maneuvering room watch which was immediately forward of the torpedo room, and always manned, was able to shut and dog the hatch, which saved the ship. And the chief of the watch opened the after group

vents and submerged the stern of the ship and flooded the compartment and put the fire out. That was a pretty spectacular illustration of the hazard of handling liquid oxygen, and as a result of that one, the *Sargo* was supposed to take the King of Thailand and his wife underway the next morning. We found out at 18:00 that the *Sargo* was obviously not going to do that, but *Growler* was. So there was an immediate recall of everybody in the ship. Everything was fixed to be operating, and they polished and painted and everything else you can think of to get it ready. And the next morning at 07:00 for quarters, everybody showed up in full dress white, which was very interesting. I had the watch going out, and we submerged the ship, and *Growler* was a little different than most diesel boats in that it was very heavy forward, and when you opened the bow buoyancy tank, which is, I don't know, about 124 tons worth of ballast, you got a down angle pretty quick. And so you had basically about 20 seconds from the time that you sounded the diving alarm and the lookouts lay below, the officer of the deck lay below, shut the upper hatch, there were 20 seconds before the water level reached the top of the hatch there, so you didn't dally. That was a lot of fun, and we – fortunately, the officer of the deck did not have to wear a sword for that. But jumping to that, underway, there was so much seniority on that ship: ambassadors, admirals, that the Commander of Submarine Force Pacific Fleet had to eat in the after battery in the crew's mess. It was the CO, and the king and his wife, and every politician in between, in the wardroom. Unusual. But I digress. Now what was the original question?

(0:26:19 – 0:26:34) Jessica Williams: I think the original question was about you joining the sub in Portsmouth, and what was happening at that, so we've digressed a lot I think, unless there was another question. One of the -- something that's . . .

(0:26:34 – 0:28:59) Dennis Sloan: Well, let me say, (Jessica Williams: Yeah, go ahead.) one of the things about *Growler* too, submarine school allowed the graduates to select their boats from a list of available, by class standing. And so I had selected -- we'd looked at, discussed it with my wife, and one of the boats available was home ported in -- oh, um . . . can't think of the name of the port now. Anyway, not Cuba but . . . Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico. And we thought, man, that would be fun. We'll go down to San Juan, Puerto Rico. So about three weeks before we graduated I got called into the director's office and he said, "Well, that boat's no longer going to be home ported in San Juan, Puerto Rico. It's going to be home ported in Norfolk." At the time, Norfolk was not a super location for Navy personnel, I mean, it was known for signs, "Dogs and sailors keep off the grass." And that really wasn't the kind of place that we wanted to go to. However, *Growler* had not been on the list before and it was going to Hawaii, and that was offered as an alternative. I thought, Hawaii here we come. Didn't know

anything about *Growler*, and not many did. Turns out my roommate from the Academy went to *Grayback*, which was the sister ship that alternated with *Growler* and two other diesel boats, and *Halibut*, for the missile type thing. So, we got involved in *Growler* in that manner.

(0:29:01 – 0:29:15) Jessica Williams: How -- so you said you didn't know much about *Growler*. At this point the Navy's submarine based missile program was pretty new, so how much did you know about the Regulus missile at the time?

(0:29:16 – 0:34:19) Dennis Sloan: Nothing. Except that on the cruiser I was on, also had a Regulus program, and we never paid any attention to it. I mean as -- it didn't affect me one way or another even though I was fire control officer on there, I had nothing to do with the missile. And we had a marine detachment that did all the security for it, and it was just there. It was -- the boatswains didn't like it because it took up the storage location for the ship's boats, so they had to be stored topside, and every time we fired turret number three, why it'd knock all the caulking off the boats, so we had -- the boatswains were not real happy about that. We realized that in *Growler* that the missiles were our reason to be. It was built and designed for the Regulus II missile, which was longer range and a larger missile. So, the hangars were designed for that, just happened to carry two Regulus I in each hangar. I know after our first patrol, my thought was, you know, if we ever had to shoot this, it was rougher than, I mean, incredibly rough in the Bering Sea. And the chances of getting that thing started before you'd have a flame out because of the washing -- the wave action, were pretty high. It was -- you just hoped you never had to do that. And fortunately we didn't. My subsequent ship after nuclear power training was the *George Washington*, which had a similar mission. Didn't operate in the North Pacific. We operated in the Norwegian Sea, which is shallow, and very similar conditions to what the *Growler*, the main advantage was that, one, we didn't have to snorkel, and two, we had ample amount of water so you could shower. It was still cramped, and fortunately we didn't have to fire those either. But it's a -- it was a stepping stone to the current system. The current Tridents are large, built for that purpose, very habitable. I was fortunate enough to participate in new construction of two of those, and made seven of the Polaris patrols subsequently and, it's a far cry. I mean I have the utmost respect for all of the sailors who did a patrol on one of the Regulus missile boats. The *Halibut* would probably be as close to being habitable as any of them were. And I suppose the *Tunny* and *Barbero*, which were the World War II types doing it, were a step below *Growler* and *Grayback*, so, having to snorkel in rough weather was sheer -- if you're a diving officer, it was a sheer lunacy. You flew by the seat of your pants. If you had a manometer, a bubble, that would give

you the angle, and if you waited for the -- to see the bubble move, you were too late. You can -- couldn't catch it. So, you physically felt it going up or down and reacted, and we had some really, really super planesman who had educated rears. I mean they could sit there and they could start the motion -- start the reaction that you were going to order before you even ordered it. And it worked out pretty well that way, but . . . it was miserable, and if you're snorkeling, the high speed FM engines would cut out.

(0:34:20 – 0:34:21) Matt Francis: Time out real quick. Sorry.

(0:34:24 – 0:34:27) Jessica Williams: One sec. Switching the media or the . . . ?

(0:34:27 – 0:34:28) Dennis Sloan: We pause?

(0:34:28 – 0:34:30) Matt Francis: The card totally just got full.

(0:34:30 – 0:35:00) Jessica Williams: Yes, pause for a moment. We're switching out the card. So, filled up the last -- actually let me ask . . . I'm going to -- once we're ready, I'm going to start by asking you a related question to what you were talking about (Dennis Sloan: Okay.) which is in the same vein, but just related to the characteristics of *Growler*.

(0:35:05 – 0:35:12) Matt Francis: We're still rolling here so we should be fine. We don't really have to go back, but we can start with the last if you want.

(0:35:12 – 0:35:34) Jessica Williams: Yeah, because you were in the process of talking about snorkeling and how challenging that was in controlling *Growler*, so the question I wanted to ask was, one of the things that we've heard is that *Growler* was very difficult to control because of its odd profile, so I'm wondering if you could explain what that situation was.

(0:35:34 – 0:41:08) Dennis Sloan: *Growler* had a short sail. So, you snorkeled at a relatively shallow depth. Snorkeling, you have a pipe basically that goes up, has a head valve on it. If water hits the head valve it'll shut, and when the head valve comes out of the water it'll reopen. When the head valve shuts, you are now drawing air, the engine's still using the same amount of air and they're drawing it from the boat now. And when you're snorkeling, the head valve shuts, the air would come from the forward torpedo room heading aft, and officer's country was forward of control, so, come through there, and the curtains would flutter aft, and it's cold air. Typically during a

winter patrol, the torpedo room -- the bilge of the torpedo room would have ice in it, it's frozen, and so there's pretty dag gone cold air there. And cold air heading aft and when the head valve opens then everything equalizes and warm air from the engine room comes flooding forward and you get instant fog. So, now the hangars -- the profile of the *Growler* was not that of a sleek submarine, it had these two humongous hangars forward that made depth control extremely difficult because every wave was going to do something. It would either push you down or suck you up. And like I said, if you didn't anticipate correctly, you were either going to broach, which is an ultimate no-no, or you shut down, which happens at about seven inches of vacuum, so your ear drums get cycled. When you're snorkeling and it's your time to be able to sleep, you'd go into the control room and watch the altimeter, and when it got to 3,500 you stopped equalizing and hoped you didn't yawn, or sneeze, or cough, or anything else, before you got to sleep because the pain would not be excruciating at either extreme, but boy if you go from -- and it took about 40 seconds to zero to seven inches of vacuum, and that could really exercise your ear drums. Very, very uncomfortable. But that was the nature of the beast. Later they increased the height of the sail, which gave it longer periscopes and a longer snorkel mast and facilitated the depth control, but . . . you can't -- in that rough weather, it was still tough. We experienced the same thing, to an unusual degree, on *George Washington* in the Norwegian Sea. *George Washington* didn't have the forward hangars, didn't have all that, but depth control of that monster in the Norwegian Sea was also very difficult. So, it was tough, but the creature comforts, I mean on *Growler* were, non-existent almost. The food was good. Not because I was commissary officer. By then probably I was a first lieutenant or something else. They rotated a junior officer through different specialties so that you had an appreciation for all of it. The missiles techs didn't have a whole lot to do, unless we were going to launch a missile, and so they volunteered to be night bakers, and did a great job. Nothing like having hot rolls at about 4:30 or five o'clock in the morning, and the smell would permeate the whole boat so that was welcome. If he had the unfortunate consequence of having a cake in the oven, and the head valve would shut, the cake would rise precipitously, and when the head valve opened, it would descend even faster. And I've had a -- when I was on the dive and not doing very well, have a cook come in with this pan full of flat dough and he'd say, "Good job diving officer." And go back. Does that cover the food very much?

(0:41:08 – 0:41:16) Jessica Williams: Well so as -- so you say you were commissary officer for a bit and then you cycled through other roles.

(0:41:16 – 0:41:16) Dennis Sloan: Yeah.

(0:41:18 – 0:41:23) Jessica Williams: I guess for the -- specifically what, as the commissary officer, was your responsibility?

(0:41:24 – 0:45:54) Dennis Sloan: Oh, commissary, well supposedly, you were ordering the food for the crew and making sure that you stayed within the budget. As I said, I had an experienced first class cook, and he'd bring the papers in front to sign and I'd sign and everything happened fine. (laughs) We always stayed within the allowance. The crew didn't complain about the food, and we didn't run out of anything. That was the time . . . have been on a boat where in the patrol cycle they ran out of coffee two weeks early and that didn't go over well. So, we had everything that we had planned for, and were able to cover every contingency so that worked pretty well. The ship had limited water. If you made water, it was a distilling plant, and that takes power. So, if you used a lot of water, you used a lot of power, and that used fuel, and that meant that you might not be able to go straight home. You may have to go someplace else and refuel before you go home. That's not a popular occupation. So, when you got underway you were issued two sets of olive drab, shirts and trousers, which were probably World War I surplus. Two sets of thermal underwear, and two sets of thermal socks, and nylon skivvies. And one day out of Pearl you put those on because it got pretty chilly, soon. And you probably never got below -- well, you might wear your khakis over the long johns for a little while, but pretty soon you were wearing the full bag. And half way through the patrol, we'd decide, okay, it's calm and so we'll start making water. They make water in the stills, fill up the fresh water tanks, everybody takes a shower, a Navy shower, you know, a few drops to get wet and soap up, and a few more drops to rinse off. And put on the fresh uniform, and we would bag the uniforms we had spent 30 days in, with garbage weights, which look like a discus, lead discus, and pack them in nylon bags. Then we'd haul off as far away from the Soviet Union as you could get or any other land, and surface and dump them over the side. So, some place in the North Pacific are a whole lot of bags of deteriorating wool uniforms. I doubt -- the fish would probably avoid that area. And the last guy to shower was popular as skunk in church. Then we do -- do the same routine on the way back to Pearl where people break out the whites and discard the other-- hopefully there is enough water to take a shower then, but if you didn't take the shower then, you'd take it as soon as you got home, by direction.

(0:45:55 – 0:46:05) Jessica Williams: So that's -- the dumping the clothing over the side story was a new one for me, so thank you. Thank you, that's funny, and it completely makes sense because why keep it at that.

(0:46:05 – 0:46:27) Dennis Sloan: Well, I mean there wasn't any space to store it, you know, it's like potatoes and onions got stored in the shower so, that made it easy, but . . . those uniforms weren't fit to be reused by the time you had 30 days in it. Oil soaked and smelly and aah.

(0:46:28 – 0:46:31) Jessica Williams: What did it smell like inside *Growler*?

(0:46:34 – 0:47:36) Dennis Sloan: Well, diesel exhaust. I mean, when you shut down the engines, there's still air, and when the head valve opened and you were snorkeling, why, the air would come forward, so you always smelled diesel. When I go home, my wife, (sniffs twice), "I smell diesel." Regardless of what you were doing. So, to make it more palatable, when everybody showered, the exec had taken along a couple of cans of spray deodorant, and go through the berthing compartments and spray all out. It's kind of like you can take the boy off the farm, you can't take the farm out of the boy, well, you can take the oil off the sailor but the odor lingers on. We didn't have the same problem on the nuclear boat.

(0:47:38 – 0:47:42) Jessica Williams: Was that because there, oh, I guess there's no smell of diesel.

(0:47:42 – 0:48:01) Dennis Sloan: Very seldom used the diesel on the nuclear boat, yeah. It's a steam propulsion plant. And as far as showers and all that concerned, I made 8,000 gallons of water a day, if I wanted, so, that was no big deal. Take a shower.

(0:48:03 – 0:48:23) Jessica Williams: And one of the things that other crew members have told us about *Growler*, and I don't know if anybody said it on camera, is that the engines were very finicky and the distillation was finicky, so there was -- so not only was there not a lot of water produced, but the priorities were that it went to the engines and the batteries.

(0:48:23 – 0:50:53) Dennis Sloan: Absolutely. The number one priority for water was the battery. Number two was cooking. The engines were experimental, essentially. *Growler* and *Grayback* had them, and for the attack boats, *Harder*, *Darter*, *Trigger*, *Trout*, I guess, had them. And I thought I would -- when I left *Growler*, I thought I would see the last of that. However, subsequent to my engineer, or, yeah, engineer tour on a FBM, Fleet Ballistic Missile submarine, I got orders to Charleston, to the squadron here which only had two nuclear submarines but had 10 diesels, and four of them were *Harder*, *Darter*, *Trigger*, *Trout*. So I was stuck with those engines again. Most of them

by that time had been replaced with the original rock crushers that had been reliable for so many years. These were high speed. Supposedly you could cram a lot of power into the battery in a short period of time. It was not very successful. I think everybody would have been happy. Inevitably, one of them would break down on the way, and you loaded up with all the spares in Hawaii when you left, and you didn't bring many back. So, it was, you had to be very careful and use them . . . gingerly, I guess is the way to put it. Minimize any stress that you could. In other words, shut downs, snorkeling, were hard on the engine, and so that, in addition to being uncomfortable for everybody, it was uncomfortable for the engine, and you tried to minimize that.

(0:50:57 – 0:51:07) Jessica Williams: Back a little bit to your job on the submarine. You mentioned you started off as commissary officer and then you did some other roles. Can you talk about the other jobs you had?

(0:51:08 – 0:55:06) Dennis Sloan: Well, I guess, before we went on patrol, we got a new officer so he became commissary officer and I guess I became torpedo officer. Again, super group of enlisted, and you do -- you make sure that you have war shots and that you prepare them, there's a checklist, like, rig for dive, well, rig for the torpedoes. And we did that. And it was very -- now I don't know what, subsequent to the patrol I was on, they had a casualty in the torpedo room. And, the same chief that I had on there was -- and another officer who had been on before me and subsequent, did a super job in taking care of the torpedo casualty up there. Could've been -- could've lost the ship doing that, so, it's -- now everything you do on a submarine is done, not haphazardly but very controlled. Example: subsequent to that on a nuclear boat, I was the diving officer. First dive, the ship can have different -- there's no way to predict what the weight of the ship is, to go, until you submerge, and -- but as long as you have the screw in the water, and the planes work, you can control a whole lot of problems. The *Halibut*, which was one of the boats that was in the Regulus program, had a casualty way early, and they got hung up with a 60 degree down angle. And there's nothing -- I mean you can't extract yourself from that easily, and the screws were out. So you just sort of hung there and guys were hurt and everything. So we go out, and I'm the diving officer, and you're in a 425 foot submarine in 125 feet of water, and we had had a causality coming out, hydraulic casualty, fixed that. And so when we dived, I ordered the after group open first, and it didn't open. So we went back and corrected the line up and made it. So when we did dive, and then you got the admiral aboard and all sorts of people, Admiral Rickover, and all sorts of people running around saying, "What are you doing?" Well, it turned out we were 30 tons heavy, forward, and had I not opened the after group first and found out it didn't operate, we could've buried the bow, and had the

screw out, and I probably wouldn't have been able to go further in my submarine career. So, but it's -- you do things the safest way you know how. And you make sure that what you do will provide you the most opportunity to combat any causality that comes along.

(0:55:08 – 0:55:25) Jessica Williams: Makes perfect sense I'd say. Another, you know, work related question or operations I guess, but describe the relationship between officers and enlisted crew members onboard *Growler*?

(0:55:26 – 0:57:04) Dennis Sloan: Well, aboard a submarine, it's a mutual trust. I mean, you've got to learn the boat, and they're going to make sure you know how, you have to go see the enlisted, the senior enlisted, the expert on that system, you have to go and convince him that you know everything there is to know about that system. And then he'll sign you off. And so, it's very -- they have a confidence in you, and they have to go through the same programs so you have a confidence in them. There -- it's a mutual respect that -- I mean you will respect people on a surface ship, but the submarine is much tighter. You know the people personally, and you know their strengths. And if you really want to know something about a system, why you'll go see the guy who's an expert on it and . . . they'll teach you, they enjoy teaching, and they're -- they want to make sure that you will bring honor to their instruction, that you know what you're doing.

(0:57:06 – 0:57:23) Jessica Williams: And you as an officer are overseeing enlisted guys in the various areas where you're working. What was that sort of management, I guess for lack of a better word, relationship like as far as giving orders and things like that?

(0:57:24 – 1:00:29) Dennis Sloan: The principal thing that you could do is marry their expertise with the ship's operation. I guess the sonarman is, probably knows as much about what's going on as any other person around there. The cooks don't necessarily know what the ship is doing at that time. So sometimes you'll -- if you go through you want to, you know, "Don't bang the pans around right now. We're tracking this guy." Or that type of thing. On the same plane -- you have to know what the cooks are doing. Daily you will probably discharge garbage. There's a vertical torpedo tube in the middle of the ship that they pack a TD, a torpedo, or trash disposal unit cans. They roll the cans, put a weight in the bottom of it, use a trash compactor to compact the can. It became common practice in the submarine force that you have what you call a TDUcicle. You will have a form of the ball valve that controls the torpedo disposal unit, and you'll freeze an icicle on the thing. And when you get ready to go, you'll drop the

icicle down first, which shapes, then you put the cans in, shut the valve, flood the tube, pressurize it, and then when the officer of the deck reaches the right depth and there's nothing around to bother it, then you'll flush, you'll open the valve and flush it, and close it, pump it down and do it again until, simultaneously, that's the time when you'll blow the sanitary tanks. The gray tank, fresh water disposal, cooking stuff like that, you can pump. The sewage tanks, you have to blow, and so while you're shallow, getting rid of the garbage, you'll blow the sewage tanks, and then vent them inboard, not a popular time on the ship but, something necessary. If you do it too fast you'll overcome the carbon filters and they don't do their job very well. That's something that the auxiliaryman learns as he gets checked out.

(1:00:31 – 1:00:43) Jessica Williams: Do you have any, in supervising enlisted men, did you have any discipline issues or difficulty with any of the people who worked with you, for you?

(1:00:48 – 1:02:48) Dennis Sloan: Oh, in all of my time in submarines . . . I can't think of a one. I mean, people respond -- if a guy's wrong doing something, you get counselled, and the peer pressure is really tight, so, it hasn't been an issue. I haven't had a captain's mast on any of the ships I've been on, including command, until I got to a surface ship, and then, you have a whole different breed of cat. But, the guy was a volunteer to begin with, he's screened . . . and so, it's just -- if anything, I guess some guys would like to use . . . improper language I guess, using slurs, ethnic, that type. That goes away real quick. The crew doesn't -- there are some things that are allowed and some that are not, you learn which real quickly, and it doesn't become an issue. But the . . . the peer pressure is a marvelous equalizer.

(1:02:49 – 1:03:03) Jessica Williams: So, that's interesting. So then -- so just to ask a crew related question or try to clarify this a little bit. So, in terms of -- so talking about using slurs right, it's crew members potentially insulting each other. So you're saying that . . .

(1:03:03 – 1:03:11) Dennis Sloan: They, some things that they think are cute, and some don't take it that way, so . . .

(1:03:13 – 1:03:19) Jessica Williams: And so it's other men basically telling somebody that they're stepping out of line in a way.

(1:03:19 – 1:03:30) Dennis Sloan: Cool it . . . with him, you know, some -- eight guys it might not bother, two it does, don't use it with them.

(1:03:33 – 1:04:00) Jessica Williams: Interesting. I had some -- oh yeah. So, one of the things that you mentioned earlier, way earlier, which I wanted to get back to, is you were talking about Captain Priest. And you're not the only person who has very fond memories of him and his leadership qualities, and you mentioned specifically that you thought about him as somebody to emulate. What were the qualities about him that made him such a good . . . ?

(1:04:00 – 1:06:17) Dennis Sloan: He's very low key. If you made a mistake . . . usually you recognized it yourself, and he would recognize it, you'd recognized it, and that was the end of it, unless you did it again. People were motivated. You wanted to please him, so everything you did was to please him. He was, like I say, very, very low key. He . . . would not necessarily dictate what is expected of you, but your wardroom mates would. And if he felt that you understood what was expected, then that was it, and he expects you to go and do it. The crew responded to him very well. I think the most -- one of those things that -- most fun I had on *Growler* was we were awarded the battle efficiency E for the first year, and so I had gotten called back to Naval Reactors for an interview, and he had already left the ship and was selected to go as a commanding officer of one of the Polaris boats. So he was at Naval Reactors studying as a student, and I got to take the piece of paper, a copy of the piece paper that awarded the battle efficiency E to *Growler*, personally, and give it to him, because that was his doing. He had trained and motivated everybody to achieve that.

(1:06:18 – 1:06:38) Jessica Williams: Great story. You mentioned, with respect to Captain Priest, this notion of, if you make a mistake, you know, learning from your mistake essentially instead of really berating somebody for it. Were there moments -- did you recall any mistakes that you made during your time on *Growler* or things? I guess there was the . . .

(1:06:38 – 1:06:41) Dennis Sloan: Well, I made one of the diving, rig for dive.

(1:06:41 – 1:06:43) Jessica Williams: Yeah. Any other things that you can recall?

(1:06:52 – 1:07:03) Dennis Sloan: Not of significant consequence like that. Not really. That's 50 years ago.

(1:07:03 – 1:07:36) Jessica Williams: Yeah, yeah, small things probably wouldn't stay in the mind. I'm curious to -- and this again has come up somewhat a little bit, but to ask the question more explicitly. So you served on surface ships and you also served on submarines. And so, bits and pieces of those differences have been coming out over the course of our conversation, but I'm wondering if you could try to kind of boil down the differences, maybe even the differences in the people or the culture of those different types of vessels.

(1:07:37 – 1:10:17) Dennis Sloan: Well, I guess -- you could say, if an aviator makes a mistake, he's liable to pay for it. If a submariner makes a mistake, a whole lot of people will pay for it. They're all volunteers. They're all trained. They understand the mission, and the object is to carry out the mission. There's a camaraderie among the officers and the crew. Everyone is recognized and appreciated for their contribution. You want to make sure that the qualification process is stringent, and that people understand why. Casualties occur routinely, and if the crew is well trained, that's it, their routine. On a surface ship, I didn't know the particulars of a whole lot of equipment on that ship. I was a qualified officer of the deck underway, and I basically knew what the parameters of the systems were, and plus you had to know what all the other ships were doing and things like that. But as far as internal to the ship . . . there wasn't the same respect. Now I had a very good first CO on a cruiser. And the second one came aboard and was a bean counter in Washington who was getting his ticket punched. And it was a real disappointment to most of us. Didn't find a similar thing in the submarine force. You either carried your weight or you end up outside of the submarine force.

(1:10:21 – 1:11:00) Jessica Williams: Not like on a surface ship. Interesting. Okay. I'm going to take this in potentially a slightly different direction because in a few moments we're going to talk to your wife Nancy. So I want to ask some questions about family life a little bit. And one thing -- I want to refer back to something you said at the very beginning again, which was that when you came to Portsmouth it was your introduction to -- you described it as the social part of submarining. So let's talk about that a little bit. What does it mean to be part of the submarine force in the sort of bigger . . . ?

(1:11:00 – 1:15:23) Dennis Sloan: Well, we reported in to *Growler* on -- I don't know what day of the week it was, but it happened to be the night, or the day of the submarine birthday ball. And so the executive officer, you know, finding a place to live in Portsmouth in the summer is tight, so you just didn't go into the local motel because they're full. So the exec said, "Oh, you're staying with us." Everything we owned was in two cars. And he said, "Tonight's the birthday ball. Can you find your dress uniform?"

Well, we thumbed through things and found it, and we got dressed, went to the ball with the exec and his wife, met the captain and his wife. She was marvelous, I mean the perfect match for him, I mean the two of them . . . you couldn't ask for better. I was brought up in a military family and I used, "Yes sir," and "Yes ma'am," as routine, I still do. And we were conversing with the captain's wife and she asked a question and, "Yes ma'am," and, "No ma'am." And about the third time I did that she said, "You say ma'am to me again, and I'm going to sit on you." And I almost said, "Yes ma'am." (laughs) She was marvelous. Nancy had no military -- her family hadn't had any military experience, so, my mom would talk to her some, but when we got to -- I guess sub school was a good chance for us to know each other, but as far as interaction in a, there wasn't a wardroom in that . . . I don't know if -- if we got into the social thing now that wardrooms are no longer as tightly knit as they once were because you're all co-located in Navy housing usually. In our experience, starting with *George Washington*, every time we had a transfer, we bought a house. And some of them we lived in for five years. Some of them we lived in for five months. The house in Hawaii put three daughters through private college, and Nancy lived in it for five months, I only lived in it for two months, and we got ordered from Hawaii to Charleston. Fortunately every place we were buying was a good rental market so we could rent the houses, and we moved into two of them upon occasion, Charleston and Norfolk. The captain's wife was marvelous in handling all the wives. They just . . . they take care of their own, very much, except that part of the education is getting to know who to call and under what circumstance, I mean if the ox is in a ditch here's somebody you call, if you got a splinter, don't bother them, here's the person. That type of thing. And you eventually learn how to handle with kids. We left *Growler* with a two-month-old and went up from there; one born in Hawaii, one born in Maryland, one born in California.

(1:15:27 – 1:15:28) Jessica Williams: (loud voices heard in background) It's very exciting out there apparently.

(1:15:29 – 1:15:31) Dennis Sloan: Sounds like the wives got back.

(1:15:31 – 1:15:33) Jessica Williams: Yeah maybe (laughs) they're back from . . .

(1:15:33 – 1:15:35) Matt Francis: Read the signs ladies.

(1:15:37 – 1:15:39) Jessica Williams: How did you and Nancy meet?

(1:15:40 – 1:15:55) Dennis Sloan: She was a blind date when I was at the Naval Academy. My roommate dated hers and, so they arranged for a blind date with us, and it's worked for 57 years.

(1:15:56 – 1:16:08) Jessica Williams: That's great. And we will ask her this question too, but from your point of view, how did she feel about your Navy career and moving around and all this stuff?

(1:16:11 – 1:18:24) Dennis Sloan: It's hard. You know, we had to pick up and move when sometimes it wasn't convenient. Probably the hardest move we had was from Washington, from DC, Northern Virginia, down to Norfolk. And my middle daughter had just finished her junior year in high school, and she begged us to go down, to stay with a friend for her senior year. And Nancy's, "No, family's got to be . . ." Today she's so appreciative that we had her do that, but it was a tough year for her. Being a Navy wife, particularly in submarines where you're gone for a deployment, you go from being the XO when I'm around, she supports that. I'm gone, she's number one. And now I come back, well, I've been in charge while I'm gone, I come back, I'm still in charge. And it's hard to come back, you know, I've got all these arrangements and now you go reshuffle the deck. That's hard to live with. But we're both very happy now, I think. I am. And we've moved into a super location. God's blessed us very much, and we have a family that's very close . . . and they're doing very successful. She's the glue that holds it together. She knows all the birthdays, she knows what everybody's doing, she's on the Facebook, didn't have that back then, but she keeps track of all the kids. If one of them steps out of line, why she might mention to a parent and say, "Gee, you might want to check on this."

(1:18:26 – 1:18:47) Jessica Williams: That's great. Two more family related questions and then probably we'll start to wrap things up so that we can make sure we get her in here too. So the first question is, so you mentioned that your oldest child was born while you were assigned to *Growler*. Was *Growler* in port at the time or were you out when that baby . . . ?

(1:18:47 – 1:19:46) Dennis Sloan: No, we were in port. Because that was at Tripler, and I could go sit in a waiting room, but they wouldn't let you in, and the other two; the second one was born while I was on patrol on *George Washington*, and the third one was born when I was – the two days I was back in Washington for an interview. So, she was at home at her place for the second one so. Tripler was not user friendly but they were competent. The others were probably more . . . more homey.

(1:19:49 – 1:20:03) Jessica Williams: Thank you. And the last question on this topic I have at the moment is, to what extent could you tell Nancy about your missions when you were, or purpose of *Growler*, what you guys were doing?

(1:20:10 – 1:22:01) Dennis Sloan: Oh, I think that . . . Now, where we were going was not, really wasn't germane. What we were doing . . . it was fairly obvious. I mean, we had the missiles and . . . that was our reason to be. You get all these olive drab uniform, I mean wool clothing, and you're going to be someplace where it's cold. *George Washington*, I flew to Holy Loch, and we went from Holy Loch, and came back to Holy Loch. And as far as people are concerned, it's like . . . on a nuclear boat, on a submarine today, when you get underway, you go to the sea buoy, or whoever, usually to the hundred fathom curve and then you submerge. And nobody knows where you're going from there. They don't need to. With the missile boats, your boss doesn't know exactly where you're going, he's got an area and you're supposed to be in that area. And when you get back, they'll go over and say, "Yeah, you stayed in your area." Or, "Why were you over here?" And you better have a good reason for being out of your area, but . . . the where, not important.

(1:22:04 – 1:22:11) Jessica Williams: I'm going to turn over and ask my esteemed colleague back here, Matt, if he has anything that he wants to ask you?

(1:22:12 – 1:22:20) Matt Costantino: I just had one question, it's, after you left *Growler* you mentioned you were involved in building some trident submarine?

(1:22:20 – 1:23:26) Dennis Sloan: Not tridents, two FBMs. Well I went to *George Washington*, and then I went to *Woodrow Wilson* in Mare Island. Stayed on there through first sea trials, and walked across the pier to *Stonewall Jackson*, and was an engineer, a gold engineer on that one. And I made one patrol on *Jackson*. We made three on *George Washington*, one on *Wilson* – or one on *Jackson*, and three on *Sam Rayburn*. And that was my patrol experience. And one on *Growler*. *Growler* got -- eventually they recognized *Growler* as part of the strategic plan, so that they got the missile award, I mean, pin, patrol pin.

(1:23:27 – 1:23:35) Matt Costantino: I was just going to ask you to comment more on how life on submarines today compares to life on *Growler*.

(1:23:36 – 1:26:00) Dennis Sloan: (laughs) Okay. I have the utmost – and, oh gee, I can't tell you how much I admire the guys who made more than one patrol on her. It was

pure hell. It was the best of times in that it was shared deprivation, but it was the worst of times, and I mean creature comforts were just zilch. And when you're snorkeling and the head valve shuts, those curtains would flutter, heading aft, and that cold air would come through, I mean you were sitting in like a big thermocouple there. When the head valve opens, all the hot comes forward and it's instant fog. Oh golly. It's just incredible how they put up with that. And, you know, we talk about seven inches of vacuum. On a nuclear submarine, I always had some engineering type jobs so that I would control, and we would measure the pressure every day, and I could watch, there's pneumatic controls on those, so you used air bleed to control temperature, various valves and things like that, so I could track the use of air, and as long as the slope was consistent, that's fine. If all of a sudden, the slope changed, that means you got an air leak someplace and you ought to find that. Hopefully it's, you know, those controls did a whole lot of different things, so it was important to find something that was out of the ordinary. On the *Growler*, if you had -- I don't remember now all the parameters, but you operated the ship such that the parameters were consistent with what you anticipate. And if something that you anticipate doesn't happen, then you need to find out why, because something's wrong. And if it hasn't bitten you already it probably will unless you find it and fix it.

(1:26:08 – 1:26:13) Jessica Williams: Have you been to the museum? Have you been to see *Growler* as it's open to the public?

(1:26:13 – 1:26:33) Dennis Sloan: The first reunion we had at New London, we took a bus down and they closed the ship for -- the boat for visitors, and brought all the docents in, and we went and described to them what life was like. It was kind of an eye opener for a lot of people I guess.

(1:26:34 – 1:26:45) Jessica Williams: Yeah, sure. It's always so helpful for us to talk to you. And we're doing this to preserve the history of *Growler*, but also to convey as much of this as possible to our visitors, so . . .

(1:26:45 – 1:27:20) Dennis Sloan: Well, and it, you know, that was a step for the strategic, it was necessary for the triad. I mean you got the bombers, you got the land missiles, and you got the ship missiles. Bombers they can see on radar, land missiles they know where they are, submarines are survivable. They don't know where they are. So, that is one of the keys that kept the lid on in the Cold War.

(1:27:25 – 1:27:42) Jessica Williams: What, you know, I didn't ask you this. This is a question we ask almost everybody. At the time, what did you think about the -- about *Growler's* deterrence mission, or the Navy's deterrence mission? What were your perceptions of that?

(1:27:43 – 1:30:06) Dennis Sloan: Well, it's like a kid in elementary school. I mean, you're shooting for a degree, you're starting down here, and it's a ramp. It's not a step function. And so, *Growler* was the first ramp. *Growler*, *Grayback*, *Halibut*, and the two B boats. But, as far as, you know, if we'd have to rely on that for any length of time, it would've been pretty grim. And you look at the *Polaris*, the 598 class, *George Washington*, *Lincoln*, and the *Patrick Henry*, and those, they were another step on the way up, but a far cry. And as far as the attack boats today, I wouldn't be confident, I mean competent, to walk down the brow. I don't -- wouldn't know how to work them. *Growler* was the model T. It worked. Fortunately we didn't have to -- it was mostly psychological. But it was sure uncomfortable psychology. (laughs) And it, it gave you, you had a, one of the things that was kind of a -- when the *Sargo* had her problem, the fire, the oxygen fire in the torpedo room, immediately everybody went to battle to say, "Ah, a nuclear submarine, Oahu is going to be decimated." Well, *Sargo* couldn't do a thing to Oahu. However, *Growler* could wipe Oahu off (cckk) gone. And, you know, nobody really thought about that unless you were, and part of me said, hey, you know, we got a lot of responsibility here. Fortunately the others are safer now too.

(1:30:13 – 1:30:44) Jessica Williams: I guess that's that. The last thing we do is the quick close up of you, so you just get to sit here and chill out while Matt takes your close up. Thank you. We covered a lot of -- you covered a lot of ground. Hopefully Nancy's doing alright with her (inaudible) hanging out somewhere. But yeah, no, it's great to hear your experiences. When's the last time you've been to a reunion? Were you in Reno?

(1:30:44 – 1:31:27) Dennis Sloan: Well actually, at this point, although there are more here than I had anticipated would be, among my shipmates there, there are more here than I had thought would be. I went to the first one and I was disappointed that none of the officers that I wanted to see were there. And -- so I kind of, and they, went, you know, spread it out. So, this one, principally I wanted to give the things to you all, and . .

(End of interview)