

Interview with Paul Sweet

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Interview # 1: August 31, 2013

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue

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DePue: Today is Wednesday, August 31, 2013. My name is Mark DePue, Director of Oral History of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. Today I'm with Paul Sweet. Good afternoon, Paul.

Sweet: Good afternoon. Good afternoon.

DePue: We're going to talk today about your career in the Navy during the Vietnam War, but you got nowhere near Vietnam, did you?

Sweet: No, sir, I did not.

DePue: And a little bit about the career you had following that many years later in the National Guard, first in the Army Guard, then in the Air Force.

Sweet: Then Air Guard, yeah.

DePue: Primarily though, it's going to be about those early years with the Navy.

Sweet: Okay, sure.

DePue: Then maybe we'll finish off with a little bit of discussion about the memorial that you so much involvement in building, out at New Berlin. But, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

Sweet: I was born in Springfield, August 12, 1947, born at St. John's Hospital.

DePue: Did you grow up in Springfield?

Sweet: I grew up my entire life here in Springfield and graduated from Springfield High School in 1966.

DePue: Do you know how the family got to the Springfield area to begin with?

Sweet: Yeah. My father was born and raised in upper Alton. My grandfather was a coal miner, and he died in the coal mine. Therefore, they decided to move up to Springfield to where my grandmother could either find employment or find a place where she could live at lesser cost than where they were. They moved here to Springfield, and by coincidence, my grandparents on my mother's side came from Germany, and they settled up in Chicago, up in the Winnetka area. My mother would come down to visit a friend of hers. This friend introduced my father and mother and—

DePue: What's your mom's maiden name?

Sweet: L-u-e-n-s-m-a-n, Luensman.

DePue: What was her first name?

Sweet: Lola.

DePue: Lola?

Sweet: Yeah. Luensman, in German, means "countryman."

DePue: Sweet, what kind of a name is Sweet?

Sweet: English. So I'm German-English.

DePue: There you go. What did your father do for a living?

Sweet: Part-time he was a gunsmith, but full-time he was a merchandise manager at Coe's Book Store.

DePue: Kohl's, as in—

Sweet: Coe's. C-o-e-s. Or as in C-o-e-'s, Coe's Book Store. So he sold office furniture, and he repaired cameras; he repaired fountain pens and was also their shipping individual.

DePue: You were at the beginning of that huge surge of babies that were born at the beginning of the—

Sweet: Baby boomers.

DePue: Baby boomers. I'm curious, was your dad in World War II? Is he a veteran?

Sweet: My dad was born in 1901, so for World War I he would have only been about seventeen. He felt he was too young to go in World War I. So by World War II, which would have started in what, '45?

DePue: Well, '41 was Pearl Harbor.

Sweet: Yeah, Pearl Harbor, so he would have been closer to thirty-eight, thirty-nine, and he felt he was too old for World War II.

DePue: You came along pretty late in his life.

Sweet: Yeah.

DePue: Was your mother a little bit younger than him?

Sweet: About eleven years. There was eleven years difference.

DePue: Tell me about growing up in Springfield. What neighborhood were you growing up in?

Sweet: I was in the neighborhood... Well, I don't know as we actually had a neighborhood name, but I was on South Douglas, just south of Laurel. I lived about two blocks west of Butler Grade School.

DePue: What was Springfield like when you were growing up?

Sweet: Simple, plain—

DePue: Was this the idyllic version of growing up in the '50s and '60s that people think about?

Sweet: I would say, yeah. You know, America was baseball, apple pie. I grew up in what I felt was probably mostly an honest, independent atmosphere. Today I've had a little different attitude about it, a little different feelings.

DePue: Does that mean your mom wasn't too worried when you got on the bike and rode around town?

Sweet: Now that you mention that, I'd get on my bicycle, and I would sometimes wouldn't even tell my mother I was leaving, and I'd be gone for hours. I rode over to Washington Park, and I'd be gone for hours. I'm surprised she never really had a little tighter rein on me than that, you know? I guess she just trusted that wherever I went I'd be okay.

DePue: What were you doing on all these excursions?

Sweet: Oh, we'd ride over to the park and take the hills and ride around in the park...just get exercise.

DePue: What's your earliest memory from when you were growing up?

Sweet: I remember—I couldn't say what age I was—but I remember I had this metal blue stroller that I would climb in and climb out of. I remember, on the front of it were these beads. I guess I was big enough that I kind of lost interest in the beads, but I would climb out of it. Then, if I wanted to sit down, I'd climb back in it. So earliest, that's probably about the earliest memory I have.

DePue: You said you went to Springfield High School.

Sweet: Yes sir.

DePue: What year did you graduate?

Sweet: Nineteen sixty-six.

DePue: Did you have any favorite subjects in high school?

Sweet: Probably shop. (both laugh) No, I actually took several drawing, drafting classes in high school, and I always wanted to be a draftsman. My dad repeatedly said that draftsmen are a dime a dozen. I'm not saying I proved him wrong, but I went to college, and I became a...I didn't get a degree in engineering, but I became what they call an engineering technician for the State of Illinois. I enjoyed the job I did—

DePue: You earned a living, doing what you enjoyed doing in high school?

Sweet: Yes. Yeah, I did.

DePue: That's pretty unusual.

Sweet: No, I really pursued being a draftsman, because early on I remember the first project we had in junior high school, I was supposed to draw this; it was an "S" wrench. The part of the project was to center the "S" wrench on the sheet and make sure that you had room for all the dimensioning. I thought, Yeah, I like doing this, and I thought, If that becomes...Obviously it would become more complicated, I thought, I can do this.

So, after separating out of the Navy, I went on to college, and I got an associate degree in architecture; I got an associate degree in structure and also have an associate degree in fire science.

DePue: That's a little bit ahead of our story, but it certainly ties in with the question. How about some extracurricular activities?

Sweet: I loved baseball, baseball. I played baseball. I can remember our coach. Initially we started playing baseball in Washington Park. It became so crowded; the ball diamonds became [crowded, with] other teams occupying

the field that right now we're... where it's the—I'm trying to remember the name—it's the shopping center [Town & Country shopping center] there off of MacArthur, where they're now putting in the new Hy-Vee store. We built four ball diamonds in that flat area, before they built that shopping center. Then all of a sudden one year, we found out that the ground was sold, and we were going to lose our ball diamonds. Of course, at that age, I was probably old enough that I was losing interest in playing baseball anyway.

DePue: But you played baseball all the way through high school?

Sweet: No, I just kind of gave it up. I played football in high school.

DePue: What position in baseball did you play?

Sweet: First base.

DePue: How about football, when you were on the team?

Sweet: Second-string center. My challenge was a gentleman by the name of Bill Martin.

DePue: Anything else?

Sweet: As far as high school, education? Probably not. Nothing that really stands out, but I can remember in my sophomore year of high school, there's just something about the Navy just drew my interest, drew my attention. I went to my dad, and I said, "I want to join the Navy." I wouldn't leave him alone; I just kept pestering him about it.

DePue: You don't remember what caused you to start that interest?

Sweet: It was just something about being in the Navy. I didn't even have an idea what my career would be, just something about the Navy uniform, being in an organization as big as the Navy.

DePue: Well, the Army and the Marine Corps are big organizations too.

Sweet: Anyway, I pestered my father enough about it that, between my sophomore and junior year of school, we went and talked to a recruiter. The recruiter said... Well, at that time, I hadn't finished high school. The recruiter highly recommended that I finish high school before I... At that time, the Vietnam War, they were taking individuals who were either with a... what do they call it, your high school—

DePue: A GED [General Education Diploma]?

Sweet: A GED, or even high school dropouts. I said, "No, I want to finish high school." Well, the recruiter, he understood or took that I was serious enough

that he actually set up where, between my junior and senior year of high school, I went to boot camp, up at Great Lakes.

DePue: The full deal of basic training?

Sweet: Thirteen weeks, yeah.

DePue: Before we get on beyond high school, just a couple of other quick questions. You mentioned baseball. You're from Springfield, so which professional team do you root for?

Sweet: I definitely would have rooted for the [St. Louis] Cardinals and Stan Musial, number four, first base, Stan Musial.

DePue: That one rolled right off the tongue.

Sweet: Stan Musial, absolutely.

DePue: "Stan the Man."¹ Here's taking you back a little. You're of that age, though you'd have been pretty young, do you remember when JFK [President John F. Kennedy] was assassinated?

Sweet: I was in junior high school. I believe it was probably seventh grade when John F. Kennedy...I remember that my teacher, math teacher, left the room. They came and got him; he left the room. Then he came back and brought a television in, and then we were watching news coverage about John F. Kennedy being assassinated, down in Texas.

DePue: At that age, did you have an appreciation for what had happened?

Sweet: You know, news like that is something you don't normally anticipate; you don't expect. It didn't really hit home until you get home that night, and you really see it again on television, what was happening and the fact that after they pronounced Kennedy dead, that Johnson on the aircraft, was sworn in as president. And here's Jacqueline Kennedy [the first lady] standing there, with her pink dress on and just spattered with blood. She's there standing, witnessing Johnson being sworn in as president. Within hours, that happened. Yeah, it was a change, a national shock, I think. Yeah, I clearly, clearly remember that.

Incidentally—I know this has got nothing to do with the interview—but Jacqueline Kennedy, for John F. Kennedy's funeral, copied many things that happened in Lincoln's funeral and in his final funeral procession.

¹ Professional baseball player, Stanley Frank Musial (1920-2013) was known as "Stan the Man" for his extreme generosity.

DePue: Very deliberately so.

Sweet: Very deliberately, yeah. I don't know who planned the funeral or planned the procession and that, but she, Jacqueline Kennedy, very deliberately copied a lot of things that happened in Lincoln's final funeral procession.

DePue: Well, we probably should mention then that you now volunteer at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum. Explain to us what you're wearing today and why you're wearing this.

Sweet: (laughs) Today I'm representing John R. Caldwell, a bugler from the 33rd Infantry. I was called in to...I volunteered, out of Jo Daviess County, after, in March of 1861, when Lincoln sent a telegram to Ulysses S. Grant in Galena. The telegram was in two parts.²

One, Lincoln wanted to re-commission Grant back into the federal army. The other part of it was that Lincoln wanted Grant to muster as many volunteers as he could. I believe that he mustered as many as 500 enlistees out of five counties up in northern Illinois. And Jo Daviess County is where Galena, where Grant had—he was a leather merchant—assumed the responsibility of his father's business.

Grant brought the troops from Jo Daviess County here to Springfield. They encamped around the Illinois State Capitol, as it was built here in 1841. Grant wasn't satisfied with being re-commissioned. When Grant resigned his commission in the federal army, he resigned as a captain. Lincoln wanted to re-commission him as a major, and Grant wasn't satisfied with that. But he eventually realized that Lincoln was the new president, commander in chief, and he [Lincoln] wasn't going to allow him to be commissioned any higher.

So, from April 4th until July 4th, Grant and his troops encamped around the old state capitol. It was July 4th that they decided to leave and head south into Kentucky, Tennessee. They were initially heading south, to go to Cairo. As they left the capitol here, their first day of march was to Island Grove, which is about twenty miles west of here.

As they were ready to leave, Grant was contacted by the governor of the State of Illinois, saying that he would offer Grant a train to take down to Cairo. Grant said, "No, my troops need to march. We don't need a train ride." He said, "My troops need to stay active, and I want to march."

They left here and went—actually it's almost due west—to Island Grove, which the Island Grove area was settled by Captain James Nicholas Brown, who was a legislator, sat right next to Abraham Lincoln in the House,

² Galena, Illinois is the county seat of Jo Daviess County, named after Col. Joseph Hamilton Daviess, a prominent Kentucky lawyer and Indian fighter who died in 1811 while leading a charge against Indians at the Battle of Tippecanoe, in Indiana.

and was a friend, colleague of Abraham Lincoln. This Captain James Nicholas Brown ended up being a pall bearer at Lincoln's final funeral.

Now, Captain James Nicholas Brown came from Kentucky. He came from Fayette County—where Lincoln was born—out of Hardin County, which are adjoining counties. Lincoln was born February 12, 1809, and Captain James Nicholas Brown was born 1803, so there was about six years age difference.

When Captain Brown left Kentucky, he wanted to leave because Kentucky was a slave state. Coming up here to Illinois, he realized that this was kind of part of the new frontier; there was a lot of ground available. His brother-in-law, who was J. D. Smith, James D. Smith, they came up here to Illinois and looked at the ground that became Island Grove. They approached the Sangamon County, wanting to buy the ground. At that time, Abraham Lincoln was a land surveyor for Sangamon County.

The day that Lincoln came to survey the ground for J. D. Smith and Captain James Nicholas Brown, Lincoln and Captain Brown talked, over a fence, as Lincoln was doing the survey. That was the first time they met.

Of course, I think probably in their discussion, Lincoln asked why he [Brown] moved from Kentucky. He said, well, Kentucky was a slave state, and he didn't approve of that.

Coming from Kentucky, Captain James Nicholas Brown brought thoroughbred horses and a herd of short-horned steers. He had a very large herd in that Island Grove area. That was the first cattle that was brought here to Illinois. As Grant stopped for his first day of rest at Island Grove, Captain James Nicholas Brown gave him a number of head of cattle for him to use for—

DePue: Feeding the troops.

Sweet: Yeah, for feeding the troops as they were proceeding.

DePue: Apparently you've gotten into quite a bit of history since your retirement.

Sweet: Well, I'm into Lincoln simply because, next to George Washington, I believe he was our greatest president. Had it not been... I think things in everyone's life are more manifest than latent, and I think that Lincoln, having been the sixteenth president and having the responsibility of trying to maintain the union and its sovereignty, he realized that, as he made his house divided speech, April 16, 1858, that a house divided cannot stand [Matthew 12:22-28].

Therefore, he knew that civil war was probably pending, but he knew that a country divided would not endure. Therefore, him winning the Civil

War and maintaining our nation and its sovereignty, I believe he's probably, next to Washington, the greatest president in this country.

DePue: Well let's move from the 19th century into Paul Sweet's story in the 20th century. I love the passion, and it's interesting to get some insight. So, the next question here might be a little bit related. Did you have any mentors when you were growing up, people who really influenced your life?

Sweet: Definitely my father. My father wasn't, I wouldn't say, a strict disciplinarian, but my father always had, he had his own little philosophies; he had his own little stories; he had his little ways of... Well, just like Lincoln. One of the books that most influenced Lincoln was *Aesop's Fables*.

My father always had little stories or fables or little, I want to call it life instructions. I just remember one of my dad's famous sayings is that a dromedary camel is a racehorse designed by a committee. (DePue laughs) But he had all kinds of little sayings and little stories that he could relate to life, kind of giving you good guidance and giving you good direction. My father was, I guess you'd have to say, my number one mentor.

DePue: What did he think about your desire to go into the Navy?

Sweet: He was fully supportive of it. But he also knew that education was primary, so he also supported the fact that I needed to finish high school before I went to the Navy.

DePue: Anybody who goes into the military, though, is going to continue their education.

Sweet: Absolutely, there's no doubt about that. (laughs)

DePue: Tell me about going up to Great Lakes then. You must have been one of the youngest kids up there at the time.

Sweet: I was. I'll say, within a few days after my junior year, I was on the bus, headed to Great Lakes and did my boot camp. Then I started attending meetings at the surface unit, out here at Lake Springfield.

DePue: Any stories you recall from going through basic training up there?

Sweet: Oh, I could tell you a lot of stories. (laughs)

DePue: Well, pick one or two out to illustrate the enjoyment you were having there.

Sweet: (laughs) I remember one morning when we headed to the chow hall. Of course, you'd march up in company, single line, single file. You'd be four abreast, and you'd march. Depending on openings, you'd march in and get in line. After chow, you'd leave the chow hall.

I went and broke through a line of other troops that were sailors that were marching. They were actually at parade rest, and boy they came unglued, because I broke their ranks. That's one thing I'll never forget, is walking through their ranks, and they just came unglued. I thought, What difference does it make? Well, apparently it made a big difference to them.

DePue: Did you have any struggles, converting from floor and door and left and right?

Sweet: Oh, all new nomenclature for everything. You know, the floor is a deck; the door is a hatch; walls are bulkheads; ceilings [are] overhead. It's total all new nomenclature, and if you didn't use the right nomenclature, they let you know right away. (both laugh)

DePue: Did you have any second thoughts like, what am I doing in the Navy; why did I do this?

Sweet: No, boot camp really...there was a lot of good training there. Of course, they will always assume that you're probably going to be onboard ship or wherever you're stationed, that you'll be involved at some point in time in firefighting. So, that was one of the big training [issues]. They don't make you so much as a rifleman, but they do make you qualify with firearms. As far as you want to call it, just being onboard a ship or ship life, they do everything they can to take the basic training and make it into what you would expect as [if] being onboard ship—

DePue: This would have been the summer of 1965?

Sweet: Sixty-five, exactly.

DePue: At that time, Vietnam was just starting to build up in a serious way.

Sweet: Probably, probably.

DePue: Was there any discussion at that time about Vietnam by your drill instructors?

Sweet: Not that I can recall. Although it seemed like we had many, many, many long days of going into different classrooms, different training, exposing you to so many different things that you weren't familiar with. The thing I remember most is sitting in class, just trying to stay awake. (laughs)

But I don't remember them talking so much about Vietnam. I'm sure that, after thirteen weeks in boot camp and then going active duty, you would have been probably as much prepared as they could make you for, say, whether you're on a shore duty station or whether you're onboard ship somewhere.

DePue: Did you get any specialized training that first summer?

Sweet: It seemed like firefighting was one of the biggest concerns, because you're onboard ship, and for the ship to survive and you to survive onboard ship, you've got to extinguish the fire. Fire is one of the biggest threats. In that, you go through training that the ship's been hit by torpedo; it's been hit by aircraft bombardment or just, you've got weapons fire, say like machine gun fire, that you've got holes in the bulkhead.

So you always anticipate a fire, trying to make sure that if you have a fire, it's extinguished, and any damage to the exterior—say of walls or the bulkheads—you could seal up, so that you have airtight compartments, so that you're not involved in chemical, biological or nuclear warfare. It just seemed like, just anything that pertained to maintenance and survival of the ship was one of the biggest training issues.

DePue: When you came back, you were still in high school. This would have been fall in '65, early '66. I've got to believe that a lot of your classmates, the guys, were all sitting there thinking, Holy____, I'm going to get drafted as soon as I graduate." Do you remember any of that?

Sweet: I do remember that. I remember in spring of...I had registered, I'm thinking it was at age seventeen, I had to register with selective service. I don't recall ever getting a letter saying what my selective service number would be, because you would—

DePue: Well, that was before the lottery, so you would have been 1-A or 4A or something in between.

Sweet: Yeah, yeah. Well I was 1-A, and I knew that, should they activate selective service, where they would start pulling people, I wanted to have my own choice of where I was going to go. So I think that was one of my main reasons I selected going into the Navy. I also knew the Navy had good schools too, which I would have thought I'd like to take advantage of.

DePue: Probably more active skills that the civilian market would desire more than being an infantryman or an artilleryman.

Sweet: Yeah, exactly.

DePue: You mentioned that you went to drills when you did come back.

Sweet: Yeah, during my senior year of high school, I went to the surface unit out here, and I went to drills. Now, typically, Guard units or Reserve units typically meet once a month, and they're there for a weekend. Although this unit that was out here, we met every Tuesday night, from 5:00 until about 10:00 at night.

DePue: Did you enjoy that?

Sweet: They had limited resources, so it was more or less that they wanted to keep us enrolled in the correspondence courses. Because I was in high school, they didn't earmark me to go to any schools at that time, because they knew that when I graduated, within weeks I'd have my set of orders, and I'd be gone.

DePue: Did you get paid for doing that?

Sweet: Oh yeah. I got paid, yeah.

DePue: Well that's not so bad, huh?

Sweet: No, but pay, back then, I think we got... We only got like \$18 to \$20 a drill, which was like \$20 a night, which ends up being about \$4.00 an hour.
(laughs)

DePue: Well, minimum wage was one dollar an hour, wasn't it?

Sweet: I suppose, I suppose. I truthfully don't remember.

DePue: What happens when you graduate then?

Sweet: Of course, I had to report to the recruiter's office. [I] told them that I'd graduated from high school, gave them a copy of my high school diploma. Within two weeks I had orders to go active duty.

From here, I boarded the train, and I went to Norfolk, Virginia. Then I took the bus, after being there inducted... Well, I guess they call it... You're entering into or deciding where you're going to go from the schools you've had and what your background, your test scores look like. Right away, they put me into... I was considered as a damage control firefighter.

DePue: But the only school you've had, up to this point, is just the boot camp, right?

Sweet: And correspondence courses that I had taken through the year I was in school, senior year of high school.

DePue: Was there a girlfriend that you had to say goodbye to when you left?

Sweet: Sort of. Two years later when I returned, she was already... Well, I hadn't been gone four months, and I got a "Dear John" letter. You know, it's—
(laughs)

DePue: That's part of the draw.

Sweet: Part of life, yeah.

DePue: Were you okay with the assignment you received?

Sweet: Oh yeah, absolutely. Like I said, my first reporting duty station was Norfolk, Virginia. Then I was sent down to Charleston, South Carolina, and I was assigned to the 18th Submarine Squadron. At Charleston I didn't know how to get out to...

The station, wherever I was going to, was called "Weapons," and it was way out in the swamp. I mean, it was thirty miles from nowhere. So what I had to do is, there was Navy buses that came into town and would bring people in who were on liberty. I soon realized that if I got on that bus, it would take me out to my duty station. So I got on the bus, got out to my duty station and reported to the ship I was assigned to, went onboard.

Right away, they got me all set up, and... Now, the downside to that whole thing was that the first six months I was onboard ship, I was a mess cook. That's just the initiation you go through, when you go onboard a new ship.

DePue: What was the ship?

Sweet: It was the *Canopus* AS-34.

DePue: USS?

Sweet: *Canopus*, C-a-n-o-p-u-s.

DePue: What was the number again?

Sweet: AS-34

DePue: What is an AS-34?

Sweet: It's an auxiliary sub [submarine] tender.

DePue: Then you're in a submarine service, but you're not getting on a submarine?

Sweet: I did two, what they call testing. After they've done repairs to, whether it would be your ballast tanks or your ballast pumps or... I did go out twice with them to test everything.

DePue: Describe a submarine tender.

Sweet: The *Canopus* was about, from bow to stern she was about 480 feet, 80 feet at its beam. There was eleven decks below the weather deck and seven decks above.



Paul W. Sweet on the fantail of the USS *Canopus* AS-34, facing aft. The *Canopus* saw service in the Atlantic Ocean.

DePue: Eighteen decks?

Sweet: Yeah.

DePue: This is a big ship.

Sweet: It's a large ship, because onboard they store Polaris missiles.³ The 16th Submarine Squadron that I went to was, what they call them, boomer class which is... It was Polaris submarines. So we not only had to store, repair Polaris missiles onboard, but we also had a torpedo trunk where they stored torpedoes. And some of the torpedoes were just normal torpedoes, but some of them were nuclear. So, very, very, very high security, very high security onboard ship.

DePue: Did you have to have a security clearance to work onboard?

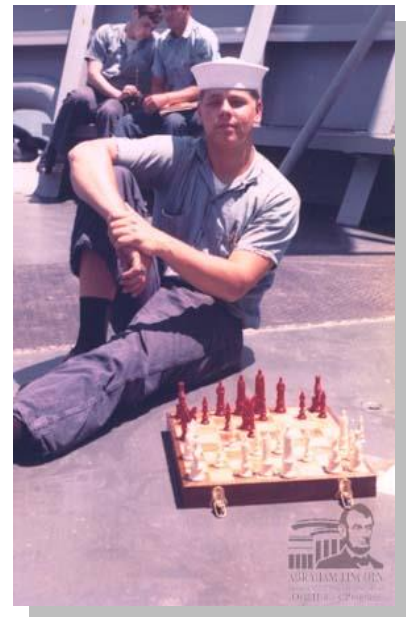
Sweet: I didn't realize it until I got there, but I had top secret clearance, because not only did I have to sometimes work in the trunks where they stored the missiles and torpedoes, but there was also times when we had to work on the reactor systems on the submarines. Anything that I would go work on or see had to be kept just totally confidential and top secret. You couldn't even talk about what you did and what type of work you were doing.

DePue: It sounds like a significant percentage of your sub tender crew then had top secret clearances.

Sweet: Certainly did. If you ever decided to go, like for a weekend liberty or take a leave, you always had to go through a briefing, where you said you can't talk about anything you've done onboard ship here.

DePue: Is that one reason why you spend six months as a mess steward, because you don't yet have security clearance?

Sweet: Let's put it this way, the size of the crew was about 2,400 men. When you have anywhere from twelve to fourteen cooks, you have to have somebody who's assisting them. So the lowest ranking individuals who first come onboard ship ended up being mess cooks. I did everything from crack eggs,



Paul Sweet participates in a noon-hour chess game, sitting on the bow of the USS Canopus AS-34. He served on the ship from June 1966 through July, 1968, which was assigned to the Atlantic Fleet.

³ Solid-fueled, nuclear-armed submarine-launched missiles.

peel potatoes, to swab and scrub decks, to serve chow; you name it. [I] took trash cans to the piers or the receptacles; you name it. (laughs)

DePue: Did you like that?

Sweet: No, because usually we had to be up at 4:00 in the morning to assist either the baker or the cooks in getting them started for the chow that was to be served at 6:00; early chow was 6:00. Then through the day, you were either cleaning up or...And on the mess decks, on the ship, is where they always brought the torpedoes through. So, you might be stripping the deck of wax and getting prepared to swab it down and re-wax it, when all of a sudden the hatch opens, and they're handling torpedoes through there, on your nice clean...I've got to tell you a funny story.

One day I was...I had completely, with a buffer, stripped the mess decks down, and I had just finished swabbing it, and I'd start waxing it. The two hatches on that was on the starboard side of the ship. I kept those two hatches dogged.⁴ I saw the one hatch was getting opened up, and I yelled at the individual; I said "That's fresh wax, sir." And it happened to be the captain of the ship that was coming through the hatch. (both laugh) I thought, Hell, he's going to walk on my wet wax, and there's nothing I can do about it.

DePue: Welcome to the Navy, huh?

Sweet: Yeah.

DePue: Well what happens to you after the six months?

Sweet: I got sent to...it was an R-Division. We had four R-Divisions, which were all repair. I ended up in hull repair. My primary job was...I guess you call it peace time; I was a carpenter, but for war time, I was considered as damage control firefighter. So my job was to...After I got down to shop, my job was to building scaffolding around the sail, so that the different shops could work on the periscopes and snorkels and all the other equipment that comes up the sail.

DePue: We know what a sail was in the 19th century; what was it in the 20th



From left to right, Kenneth Thomason, Paul Love, and Paul Sweet pose for a picture in the carpenter/pattern shop aboard the USS Canopus AS-34, in 1967.

⁴ With a pivoting latch, locking down a water-tight hatch.

century, dealing with submarines?

Sweet: It's the top structure of a submarine. It's above, basically you'd call it there [the] main deck, exterior deck. And in there is all kinds of... The sail really protects all of the scopes and all of the snorkel and any type of instrument that they have that are stored in that sail.

DePue: So you essentially became a carpenter.

Sweet: Yes, for the most part.

DePue: And even in that skill you needed to have a top secret clearance?

Sweet: Oh yeah, because see, there were times when I'd be replacing, say flooring, in the command center, or I'd even build scaffolding down in the reactors of the submarines. To go in there, you had to have top secret clearance. They'd tell you as you're going in, "Whatever you do here, you don't talk about it."

DePue: What did you think about having these experiences? You're still a very young kid.

Sweet: I was about eighteen years of age.

DePue: And you're working around nuclear weapons; you're working around the tip of the spear, as far as the United States deterrent force is concerned.

Sweet: Absolutely. What was my feeling? Here I'm experiencing things that I never even really considered existed. You hear about submarines, but you always think about the old diesel boats. You think about the boats that were cramped quarters and that, where the Polaris class had two crews, a gold and a blue crew, and when they went out, they went out for ninety days.

Ninety men in a crew, and even down on the submarines they worked three...we'd want to call it three duty sections. So a third of the crew is doing some kind of repairs, maintenance, upkeep, where another third of the crew is doing a watch of some kind, whether it's preparing weapons for use or just navigation, steering the boat, whatever, and then the other third of the crew is at rest.

But, yeah, I'm witnessing things that I never would have dreamed of, and experiencing, like you said, here it was the tip of the spear of... When you realize where you're at and what you're doing, and Russia is at the eleventh hour of possible nuclear war, you think... Then you realize that all of the firepower in one Polaris missile is greater than all of the firepower of bombs used in World War II. One head, four warheads in a Polaris missile, had more firepower than all of the bombs used in World War II.

DePue: That's got to be hard to wrap your brain around, but awe inspiring too, I would think.

Sweet: See, the next, after Polaris, was Poseidon submarines. They had far bigger... When they came in with the Poseidon class, they basically started phasing out Polaris class submarines. And today they've got the Trident class. Trident class submarines, they dwarf Polaris class submarines.

DePue: In terms of the size, or the—

Sweet: Size, warheads on the missiles. Let me just say, it's confidential what number of warheads are in a Trident missile. But I can tell you, a few Trident missiles hitting Russia would definitely do more than get their attention.

DePue: Did you envy the guys who actually got to serve on the submarines, or were you happy that you didn't have to go?

Sweet: Really in a way, I would have liked to have gone out on patrols and just would have liked to have seen what they did, but going down for ninety days just didn't somehow appeal to me. (DePue laughs) And they did, I tell you, because there was a submarine that went out, and now I can't recall the name of the sub, but—

DePue: Is this the *Scorpion* you're talking about?

Sweet: No, this was another sub that was part of our squadron. One of the crews, there was just a new third class cook that came onboard. He was from Springfield, Illinois, a new young lad, apparently just graduated through cooking school—what do they call it? —"services" and also graduated through sub school. He went onboard sub, first cruise, and after being down for thirty or forty days, he couldn't take it. He hung himself.

Typically, when the subs return to port or return to the sub tender, the harbor going tugs or the boats that pull them into our station in the port, they always would bring them right alongside the tender. Well this particular time, here's ambulances and shore patrol out on the pier, and they put the boat right up along the pier. The next thing you know, we're all on the fantail, watching what was going on, and here they come out with this body bag. This guy had hung himself after about forty days out on the cruise, and they just put him in a body bag and put him in the freezer. They were not going to resurface and bring him back. They just kept him onboard ship, onboard the boat until they came back.

DePue: Yeah, it's not what you can afford to do. Even a dental problem is something you just have to deal with it, isn't it?

Sweet: Yeah, deal with it until you... Now see the crews on submarines... there was always two crews, a gold and a blue. So when the boat wasn't out on cruise...

let's say, when one crew's out on cruise, the other one's taking thirty days leave. Then they'd go to a thirty day refresher school somewhere that would be updating their, which would be their rate—the Navy considers your career field as a rate—so they would go to schools to update, upgrade their rate or get any additional training that the Navy saw that [they] might deem necessary for them to have. Then they'd come back, and they'd sit at the station for another thirty days, waiting for the sub to return.

DePue: When you were at sea, how long were you out?

Sweet: We'd go out for sometimes thirty days, because we had to do several things. Of parts and pieces that came off, whether it'd be the missiles or the torpedoes, we had to dispose of it; you couldn't just throw it in the trash. So we'd not only go out and dispose of contaminated nuclear water, which we pumped off of the... Because we always pumped fresh water into the reactors of the subs, we had to go out and dump that water into the ocean, besides parts that we couldn't just throw in a dumpster. We'd literally put them in these... it was called trash receptacles, and we just literally sank them to the bottom of the ocean.

DePue: Seal them up?

Sweet: Seal them up and sunk them to the bottom of the ocean.

DePue: But there was water you were getting off the nuclear subs that was contaminated water that went right into the ocean? Or was it treated?

Sweet: We stored it on tanks on the tender, and then we'd go out. Every sixty days, we went out for twelve to fifteen days, which that's how we got our sea pay. But that's also how we'd go out and dispose of the contaminated nuclear water.

DePue: So you'd just dump it in the ocean.

Sweet: Dump it in the ocean. All these environmentalists, they'd get all upset, and we'd say, "You know, your son, that you see every day, puts more contamination in the water than what we're dumping into the ocean." [That's] kind of a side story.

DePue: You mentioned, when we did the pre-interview, about the U.S.S. *Scorpion* as well.

Sweet: The *U.S.S. Scorpion* was a fast attack submarine, not assigned to our squadron, because—

DePue: That's different from a boomer?

Sweet: Yeah. Boomers are where you've got a certain number of torpedoes and a certain number of missiles. The thing of it is, you'd never know whether all those missile trunks or missile tubes all had missiles in them.

But anyway, the fast attack was just basically the same size submarine, but they had special purpose or a special function, where they would take Marines or special trained Seals to do a particular mission. They might go into, say, the Persian Gulf, drop off a Seal team to go to do some kind of a mission, and then later, after so many days, they'd resurface to extract the team.

DePue: Are those the same submarines that would tail a Soviet sub if they could?

Sweet: Yes, they would.

DePue: So you wouldn't use a boomer to do something like that.

Sweet: No, not really. Boomers usually went out, and they sat on the bottom somewhere. Or if they did go on patrol, you just never knew where they... The commander, the captain of the boat, always opened his orders after he was out and submerged, so you never knew where they were going. He didn't know until they were submerged.

But anyway, the *Scorpion* had problems with her ballast tanks and blowing her ballast. I know it was partially with not only the ballast tanks, but the pumps that would blow the ballast. They came in for repairs. She pulled into our squadron for repairs, and they sat there for... I know it was probably all of three weeks, going over and trying to maintain and fix everything that they thought was malfunctioning. Then it was in June that the *Scorpion* left. I believe it was in June of '67 that the *Scorpion* left—

DePue: I just read June 5, 1968 is when they—

Sweet: Was it '68? Okay. I remember it was in the summer, so it might have been the summer of '68 that the *Scorpion* left us and was headed back to... it was going to Newport News, Rhode Island, to go back to harbor there to be totally renovated, insofar as repairs. Well, she got just past the Azores Islands, and then she was down; she couldn't blow her ballast tanks and just went down and imploded.

DePue: Lost the entire crew?

Sweet: Lost the entire crew. Went down, and the water pressure just imploded the submarine.

DePue: What's that do to all of you, when you're hearing that news?

Sweet: I suppose, had it been crew members that you knew personally, you probably would be more affective to you, more than just knowing that you just lost a sub and ninety men on a sub that really wasn't assigned to your squadron. But, yeah, it was national news, because they were expecting to come home to be reunited with their families. Once they were back to Newport News, Rhode Island, they were going to get liberty, get leave, and they didn't make it.

DePue: In the summer of 1968...It seems like everything was happening in 1968. Do you remember when Martin Luther King was assassinated?

Sweet: I do. I remember watching it on television. He had been staying at a hotel—

DePue: A hotel in Memphis.

Sweet: Yeah, in Memphis. All I remember is, in watching it on television, is that they were like on the second level or second deck of this hotel. I don't know whether he was shot there or...But I remember seeing that news coverage of it, yeah.

DePue: What was the percentage of sailors you were serving with who were black?

Sweet: Onboard ship, I would say that if there were 2,400 men, there might have been thirty-five or forty black sailors.

DePue: That's a pretty small percentage.

Sweet: It was a small percentage. To be perfectly honest with you—and I'm not trying to change the subject, but I know it was when I was with my division—

I thought I'd got food poisoning, but nevertheless, one morning formation I just became deathly sick. Everybody thought, oh, you're sick from being hung over. I said, "No, it's either something I've eaten or something I've contracted." So I went to sick bay, and the doctor said, "Oh yeah..." I forget what he told me I had, but I got sent to the base hospital, and I was there for five days.

In the five days I was there, right next to me was one of my shipmates, who was...I remember his last name was McGregor. One night I woke up, and my IV had come out of my arm. I was just literally laying there bleeding to death. I got his attention, and he saved my life.

DePue: Why did you mention that name in conjunction with Martin Luther King's assassination?

Sweet: First off, being in the military you never know what's going to happen; you just never know. One day you could be...I remember one day, here we were all working away in the shop; the shop chief come in, and he says, "We're at war." I said, "Sir, what do you mean?" And he says, "We're at war." I go,

“Well, we’re in the Vietnam War.” He says, “No. This is the Six Day War with Israel.” He said, “We’re at war.” Well it ended up being the Six Day War where the Muslims, whatever—

DePue: That would have been 1967. I’m trying to remember. I think that was the one that the Israelis initiated, because they knew it was pending that they were going to be attacked by the Syrians and the Jordanians and the Egyptians. I’m not sure about Jordan, but certainly the first and last.

Sweet: And the thing about it was, the reason it only lasted six days... I remember when the chief come back, they literally thought that we’d have to leave port and go to Israel or at least that area, and we were going to have to extract civilians out of that area and bring them onboard our ship and take them back to...well, whether it’d been Spain or somewhere else, for all these civilians to be to some form of safety. That never happened. But after six days, the shop chief came in, and he said, “Well,” he says, “the war is over.” He started explaining it to us. He says, “I want to tell you one thing. Israelis, they’re serious; they don’t take prisoners.”

DePue: You’ve alluded to it a couple of times, but we need to mention where the port is. Where were you stationed out of?

Sweet: Oh, Rota, Spain. It’s actually the southeast coast of Spain. It’s actually in the Atlantic, but it’s just outside of the Mediterranean. It’s about, oh I would guess, maybe 100, 120 miles from the mouth of the Mediterranean at Gibraltar. Yeah, it’s in the Atlantic, but it’s outside the Mediterranean. Most of the cruises that our boats went on were either in the Med [Mediterranean] or North Africa or Southern Europe.

DePue: When you were on cruises were you part of a fleet?

Sweet: Actually, when *Canopus* would go out on cruise, we were always escorted by submarines. We never knew how many were escorting us. We were also being escorted by ocean going tugs. And also, we had these sub chasers that were chasing Russian subs; they always escorted us too. We weren’t, say, part of a fleet per se, but we always had escorts when we went out on patrol.

DePue: Maybe I’m just missing the terminology, but I would think that the sub tender would be there to escort or be with the submarines that needed your help. You made it sound like it’s vice versa.

Sweet: The sub tender, as I said, we would, about every sixty days, we’d go out for fifteen to dispose of certain things. The rest of the time we were in port. We were stern to the pier. So the boats always came in; they were berthed alongside the sub tender for repairs. We may have as few as two subs and as many as five at a time, berthed alongside.

DePue: When you were in port.

Sweet: Yes.

DePue: When you were in port, were you sleeping onboard or—

Sweet: Oh yes, absolutely.

DePue: How often did you get liberty?

Sweet: Typically, we were what's called three duty section. It's like, one week you'd have duty through most of the week, and then you'd have like two days off. The next week you'd have like four days of duty, and then you'd have three days off. And the next week you'd have maybe six days of duty, and then you'd have one day off. It just depended on...so that there was always a certain number of crew members onboard.

DePue: Well, you know all of us landlubbers who never had one day on a ship, let alone in the Navy, have heard all these stories about a sailor's got a girl in every port.

Sweet: (laughs) No, I never really had that kind of an interest. (DePue laughs)

DePue: What was it like going on liberty in Rota?

Sweet: Well, Rota was basically...it's a typical sailor town. Once you get out of the gates, there's always that strip where they've got...[On] both sides of the street, they've got bars on both sides, trying to get you to come in and just drink and play cards or mix and mingle with the bar hogs to have some other—

DePue: The bar hogs, is that a euphemism?

Sweet: Yeah, that's what you wanted to call the ladies in the



Paul on base in Rota, Spain, enjoying liberty off the USS Canopus AS-34, in 1967.



From left to right, Edward Schroder, Ken Kern, Charles Thurston, and Dave Stark participate in the noon-hour card game held in the carpenter/pattern shop aboard the USS Canopus AS-34, circa 1967.

bars. We just called them bar hogs. And for the most part, they probably were. (both laugh)

DePue: I know that one of the things you mentioned before was that your war time duty was as a fire fighter; is that right?

Sweet: Yes.

DePue: Do you have any experiences to tell about that?

Sweet: While onboard ship I did fight; I fought two fires. One was fairly small and insignificant; it was just a small, probably nothing much more than a trash container in a compartment.

But the one that stands out most in my mind is... Every day onboard ship, every day... Depending on whether it was the captain or the executive officer, sometimes they would have two drills during the day. Drills would be anything from a nuclear mishap to a fire, to a... There were just all different kinds of different drills and exercises they'd put you through, and sometimes they'd have two a day.

I remember this one particular day, they kept repeating, saying, "This is not a drill. This is not a drill." As it happened, where my workshop was, it was in the compartment... You'd go into the passageway, go into the next hatch, and then you had to go down through the deck to go to where the fire was. So, it was just immediately where I was working. In that particular compartment, they had a lot of computer circuit boards and different things stored. How the fire got started, I have no idea, but it was—

DePue: These are 1960's computers, so lots of—

Sweet: Yeah, their circuit boards, they were as big as... The size of an eight and a half by eleven sheet of paper would be a small circuit board.

DePue: And we're talking tubes and not transistors?

Sweet: No, these were transistors, but I'm sure they've probably miniaturized computers today, as they would have back then. But in that compartment were all these different electronic and circuit boards. The fire was just extremely intense.

By the time I got down into the compartment, fighting the fire, I was... [It] started out, I was about waist deep in water. By the time we got the fire out in the compartment that was next to us, the... For what little light I had, I could see the paint literally blistering off the bulkhead, because the fire was so intense. And once we got into that compartment, got the fire out, I literally thought it was my last moments, because they closed the hatch above us, kept us in the compartment, because they didn't want to feed the fire with oxygen.

They sealed off all the compartments, and here we were with just [a] minimal amount of lantern light and whatever the fire was. It was just so smoke filled, you couldn't take your breathing apparatus off. By the time we got the fire out, it was above chest deep in cold, North Atlantic water, seawater.

DePue: You're having to fight it with seawater.

Sweet: Yeah, they pump water out of the ocean for you to fight the fires with. You wouldn't use purified water or potable water to fight fires with.

DePue: This was not an electrical fire then?

Sweet: Truthfully, I don't know what started it, and I don't know, for the most part, what was being consumed by the fire. All I know is afterwards I saw them taking half-burned circuit boards out of there that were in storage.

DePue: The only reason I asked is I thought there would be different ways of fighting an electrical fire versus a standard fire versus oil or something like that.

Sweet: Well typically, if you know what kind of fire it is... If it's an electrical fire, yes, you would either use a dry chemical, or you'd use a chemical, like a foam. All we knew was it was just a compartment fire, and we were fighting it with water. You're right. Typically, there could have been energized outlets or energized wiring that could have electrocuted us. You just didn't know.

DePue: You don't really have time to ask questions, do you?

Sweet: Yeah, you don't have time to... All you're concerned about is getting the fire out and getting back topside and pumping the water out of the compartment and trying to take everything out that was burned in the fire. Then the next job is restoring the compartment back to... cleaning it and repainting it and restoring it back to, say, a useable compartment again.

DePue: Would there have been situations like that, where you're not considered to be necessarily in a combat zone, but can you get medals or certificates for—

Sweet: No, I think they just consider that just as part of your job, fighting a fire. There's no medals or rewards or decs [decorations] for doing anything like that; it's just part of your job.

DePue: Was that the hairiest experience you had while you were in the Navy?

Sweet: Yeah, because I figured, when that fire... Here we are, just wearing what are called work uniforms, which are your—

DePue: Dungarees?

Sweet: Dungarees. And you're starting out waste deep in cold water, and you're about freezing to death, or you feel like you're going through a...losing your body temperature.

DePue: Approaching hypothermia.

Sweet: Yeah, you're approaching hypothermia, besides the fact you've got a breathing apparatus on, which restricts not only your breathing, but it restricts your view, your vision. So you're trying to figure out communicating with other fire fighters and trying to get the fire out. Here you're in a compartment that's so filled with smoke you can't hardly see anything.

DePue: The breathing apparatus, is that hooked to an oxygen tank, or it just filters the air?

Sweet: No, what they used back in the '60's is...There's a self-contained can that you push up into the breathing apparatus. There's like a latch on the bottom, and you push the can up in. As you're tightening the can up in there, there's a chemical reaction within the can that provides you with oxygen. I don't know the principles behind it, but we didn't really get into what they...They called it OBA [Oxygen Breathing Apparatus], which is a breathing apparatus. But we really didn't get into the self-contained oxygen tanks until later.

DePue: This is a different situation, but I brought in a picture. It's a really neat picture, and I wanted to have you explain what we're looking at in that picture.

Sweet: Well what happened was, is the sub that was called the *George C. Marshall* was on patrol. Here again you're talking about classified and top secret information, but the *George C. Marshall* had surfaced, and it was rammed by a Russian trawler. They call it a Russian trawler; it was basically a Russian spy ship.

DePue: So the Russian ship knew what it was doing.

Sweet: The Russian ship, even though it was disguised to look like a fishing vessel, it was a Russian spy ship. It rammed the *George C. Marshall*. I don't recall her hull number, but at the time, our floating dry dock, which is the ARDM-1 [class] *Oak Ridge*, had a sub in it that was being repaired, so because we couldn't take the sub out of the dry dock, we had to build a coffer dam to build on the outside of the sub to repair the area that had suffered the damage.

I remember it went from like frame [rib] thirteen to frame twenty-three on that sub. The cofferdam box that we built was all of about forty feet long, and it had rubber gasket.⁵ As a matter of fact, in the photograph you can see that the gentlemen who are standing in here are Navy divers. They had to go under and take chains around the sub and secure that cofferdam to the... Then once



This cofferdam was built for SSN George C. Marshall on the pier where the USS Canopus AS-34 docked in Rota, Spain in 1967. The Marshall had been rammed by a Russian trawler (spy ship).

we had the coffer dam secured, then we had to pump it down, keep it pumped down, so we could go in and cut the hull out and repair the framework of the submarine.

DePue: So this is a steel structure?

Sweet: Steel structure, built on the pier. It's just amazing that the ship fitters were able to build that thing so it fit so well on the... They literally had to go into the plans and look at all the different radiuses of the exterior of the sub and build this cofferdam to fit the exterior hull of the submarine.

DePue: It's something that I would think has to have quite a bit of precision, to get a good seal on it.

Sweet: Absolutely, absolutely.

DePue: Are you in this picture?

Sweet: I am, barely. I'm the guy right here with the hard hat on... just barely. I thought when I was standing there I would be in the picture, but apparently when they took the picture, they clipped me out, just about clipped me out of it.

⁵ A cofferdam is a temporary structure designed to keep water and/or soil out of the excavation in which a structure is built.

- DePue: I'm looking at... On the far left of the picture, in that second, middle row, there's a guy split in half with a hard hat on.
- Sweet: Hard hat on. We've always wore hard hats whenever we worked anywhere, whether it was upper weather decks, or whether we were down in compartments on subs, we've always had to wear hard hats.
- DePue: I'll take your word for it. (laughs) That's a cool picture. Where there any other memorable experiences you had while you were in this assignment?
- Sweet: Well, militarily, I can't recall too much. Sometimes working on submarines was kind of routine, and [we] did a lot of things that were repetitious. I can recall one time when... The subs that were all assigned to our squadron were all... they had what they call a paint schedule. Paint schedule means the color of flooring, the color that the bulkheads were painted, any interior, anything that was in the interior of the submarine was all painted one of four colors. When we'd go down to, say, replace some linoleum on a deck, we already knew ahead of time what the color was.
- We always had in our inventory vinyl's or flooring that they would have initially used. When they would consider that the vinyl flooring was worn out, we had to go down and replace it. Even in like the scullery or the mess decks or in the galley, where all the mess cooking was going on, they always had ceramic tile. Just because of the submarine's compression of the water and then the expansion when they surfaced always caused the decks to buckle, and all that compression caused all that ceramic tile to loosen.
- We were constantly going down and repairing decks, metal decks, and putting ceramic tile back down. Sometimes we ran out of the particular color and you'd... I remember one day the chief of the boat came down, and he says, "That color doesn't match." And I said, "Sir, that's all we have. We either fix it like this, or you'll have to be without until you can come back."
- DePue: What's the significance of particular colors?
- Sweet: I guess it was, when you go down on a submarine for ninety days, even though you're kept occupied, whether you're on your watch, on your work time, or whether you're on your free time, they want you to feel comfortable. So they always tried to do soft colors, like in a light green or in light blues, so you wouldn't feel... I guess, maybe you have some psychological thing behind it.
- DePue: What was your impression of the sailors that you served with?
- Sweet: I made a lot of good friends, and I still keep in touch with two of them today. One lives near New Haven, Connecticut, and another one lives in Bark River, Michigan, Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

DePue: New Haven. That's Navy territory out there, isn't it?

Sweet: Well, and even this particular buddy of mine, even before he joined the Navy, he worked at what was called Electric Boat.⁶ He worked on submarines before he came in the Navy. So when he enlisted in the Navy, right away they put him right into submarines because of his background and his experience. After he separated from the Navy, he went right back, got a really great job working back on...He even wrote me one time; he said that he was no longer working on Polaris class submarines; he was now working in the Poseidon class. But he earned a living working for Electric Boat.

DePue: Which is the company's name.

Sweet: Electric Boat probably built...I'm guessing they probably built most of the naval submarines.

DePue: How about the officers and the NCO's [non-commissioned officers] that you served with? Did you—

Sweet: Realistically, I really didn't make much acquaintance with officers, although I'll just say that kind of the ironic thing was that, when I was transferred from the 18th Submarine Squadron to the 16th, the captain of the 16th, the *Canopus*, when he came on board, his name was Youngblood. And I thought, Boy that sounds like an old pirate's name, you know? (laughs)

DePue: Why is it that you didn't have a lot of dealings with the officers?

Sweet: Probably most people we had in contact with would have been...Well, I will say this, our division officer, his name was Thompson. When we would have formation every morning, he would always come to our formation, and he would—after they took roll and talked about what our plan of the day was, what jobs and tasks we had to do for that day—he always came and gave us about a three-minute, five-minute pep talk or talked about things that were going on that he wanted to relay to us. But outside of formation and occasionally seeing him onboard ship, he was off. I won't say off ship, but he was doing something somewhere else. We didn't really have much contact with him.

DePue: That was typical then, that the sailors rarely would see the officers?

Sweet: Now, as far as shop chiefs, yeah, shop chief was in the area all the time.

DePue: That would be the equivalent of an NCO in the Army?

⁶ Electric Boat, a General Dynamics Company, was established in 1899 to design, build and support the lifecycle of submarines for the U.S. Navy.

Sweet: Yeah, he would have been an E-7, E-8, maybe an E-9. Chief Femino was my shop chiefs, and—

DePue: Chief—

Sweet: Femino. It's F-e-m-i-n-o. He's Italian. Chief Femino, of course being Italian, we always called him the Golden Guinea. (both laugh) But, yeah, Chief Femino was pretty much always around. I mean, he—



From left to right, Tony, Edward Schroder, Ken Kern, Paul Love, Kenneth Anderson, Chief Petty Officer Femino, Charles Thurston, and Paul Sweet gather in the carpenter/pattern shop aboard the USS Canopus AS-34 to celebrate Femino's birthday.

DePue: And somebody to be paid attention to, I would assume?

Sweet: Yes. He had, probably at that time, Chief

Femino probably had twenty-eight, thirty years' experience. He'd been around for a while.

DePue: Another thing you always hear about the Navy is that they tend to be a little bit more tradition bound than the other services. Did you find that to be the case?

Sweet: Well, let's put it this way; I liked the Navy uniform. I liked the fact that I never anticipated being in long enough to become a senior NCO or a chief petty officer, but I knew that if I had become a chief petty officer, I would have gone from the Navy traditional uniform to the brown khakis. I suppose, at that point in time, you'd be more concerned about just your job and future than you would be concerned about the type of uniform you wore.

Typically, Navy was very, very, very traditional, everything from blowing the boatswain's pipe to get you up in the morning to announcing the commander coming on board or whatever, very traditional.

DePue: Did you ever have the experience of crossing the equator?

Sweet: No, I did not. I'm not a...what do they call them? I know what you're talking about, but no, I never went south of the equator.

DePue: I know there's quite a tradition that deals with that.

Sweet: Yeah, they go through all kinds of initiation, if you hadn't before.

DePue: How would you describe the morale onboard ship?

Sweet: Oh, we had a great...I think the morale was very high onboard ship. Of course, I suppose the fact that where we were stationed it was a very moderate climate. Being stationed in Spain, if you wanted to take, if you got, say, a long liberty weekend, you could...USO, you could always take tours, go and visit.

Spain, even though it's still a third world country, it has a lot of history. And as far as Portugal, you know, they've got history that goes way, way back, even to the Roman times. Even the Romans occupied Spain for a while, as well as Portugal, and then also the Moroccans, the—

DePue: The Moors.

Sweet: The Moors, they occupied Spain. Yeah, Moors, they occupied Spain hundreds of years ago. So there's a lot of history there.

DePue: So, as ports go, Rota wasn't so bad?

Sweet: No, I enjoyed being in Rota.

DePue: Did you get to go to any other exotic ports or not so exotic ports?

Sweet: While stationed there, I got to take a lot of good liberties. [I] went all along the coast in the Med, visited Gibraltar, all along the inner coast of the Mediterranean along, which would be like Torremolinos, Malaga, Costa del Sol. Other tours I took, I went up into "Sevilla", or as we would pronounce it, Seville. I took a lot of good tours, saw a lot of things I never figured I'd see.

Within a real short distance of Rota is where...History records that Columbus was buried in three different locations. One of the locations is a church that's inside the Med; I believe it's not too far from Malaga, Spain. And he's supposed to have been buried in the floor at the back of a church. But also history records that he's been buried two other places.

DePue: Well, it's not because we sawed him into three parts, but because they don't know where he's at.

Sweet: Yeah. But anyway, within probably less than ten miles from Rota was the Cadiz; the Spanish pronounce it "Cadee;" it's mispronounced as "Cadiz." But that's where Columbus got his crew when he decided to sail from Spain to the New World.

DePue: You're pretty close to Gibraltar as well. Did you ever get down to Gibraltar?

Sweet: I've been to Gibraltar.

DePue: Is that worth seeing?

Sweet: Oh, absolutely, yeah. The British actually occupied the peninsula of Gibraltar, and the agreement from Great Britain to Spain is that, as long as Britain occupies that peninsula of Gibraltar, that they have to allow the monkeys to live on that peninsula. [It's] just an agreement that they had with Spain. So you get down to Gibraltar, and there's these monkeys that just live everywhere down there.

But before World War II even started, Britain was down there. They tunneled all of that Rock of Gibraltar. In there they have, say, [from] magazines for storage of ammo, to tunnels that come out to different gun ports. So, that basically protects anyone from coming in and out of the Mediterranean.

DePue: You talked about this a little bit, but what was your impression of how well the Navy was dealing with integration issues? It sounds like there was just a handful of blacks that served on your ship.

Sweet: Integration, well I was never really aware of it. I didn't know that it was a problem. In the repair divisions that I was part of, I know I had one black chief, and there was several blacks that worked in our divisions. One I can truly remember, his name was Magruder. Now it's been so long, I can't remember some of their other names. But hell, we always got along with them. We never had any problems. There was never, as far as I was concerned, issues of racial or you call it integration or interracial, never—

DePue: You are also in the Navy, from 1966 to '69. Increasingly during that time frame, the anti-war protest is building up back in the States. Were you guys hearing any of this news on ship?

Sweet: Realistically, we didn't have television type of connection. For the most part, if you didn't receive newspapers, say, like they were mailed to you from home, we just got *Stars and Stripes* and I'll just call it the radio, whatever the radio was that was there.⁷ I think they broadcast from Crete. We could listen to the news broadcast that came from Crete.

DePue: Armed Forces Radio?

Sweet: Armed Forces Radio, yeah, Armed Forces Radio Overseas. I think the radio station we listened to came from Crete, Greece. It was probably about like *Good Morning Vietnam*; they just restricted probably certain news items that would go out over the news.⁸ Realistically, for the most part, all I really

⁷ *Stars and Stripes* is an American military newspaper that focuses and reports on matters concerning the members of the United States Armed Forces.

⁸ Loosely based on the experiences of Armed Forces Radio Service DJ Adrian Cronauer, *Good Morning, Vietnam* is a 1987 comedy-drama war film, set in Saigon in 1965 during the Vietnam War. The AFRS DJ is hugely popular with the troops, but infuriates his superiors with what they call his "irreverent tendency."

wanted to listen to was the current music, the current rock and roll that was—
(both laugh)

DePue: Which kind of defined the period as well. A lot of it had the anti-war themes to it.

Sweet: Exactly, exactly.

DePue: How about in August of '68? The Democratic Convention was being held in Chicago, Illinois, and of course, there was the huge outburst of protest going on there and the police reaction. Did you hear anything about that?

Sweet: Not that I really recall. I was probably young enough that I wasn't a registered voter, wasn't really too concerned about politics.

DePue: It wasn't the kind of thing that the sailors were sitting around and talking about. What are we doing in Vietnam? That wasn't one of the subjects that came up?

Sweet: Oh, I suppose every once in a while you'd get into conversation with somebody, wondering what was going on in Vietnam. Here you are in the Mediterranean and mild temperatures, nice climate, nice place to go for liberty and... But yeah, I don't really recall too much about [that] until actually I got home, which would have been... I was home by July 4th of '69.

DePue: Did you wear your uniform home?

Sweet: You know, back then you could. You were actually required to travel in uniform. When I came home, I flew from Rota, Spain, up to Torremolinos, which was an Air Force station, air base. Then I flew from Torremolinos to... We stopped in the Azores to pick up some military personnel in the Azores, and then we flew on in to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at the naval station there.

But anyway, just a quick side story.... When I was standing at Rota, waiting for my aircraft to take off to fly back up to Torremolinos, as I was in the terminal, I see two shore patrol coming towards me. I was in uniform, wearing dress blues, and of course, you had your name tag on, and they came up to me, and they said, "Are you Third Class Petty Officer Sweet?" I said, "Yeah, I am." And I said, "What's going on?" And he says, "You need to come with us." I said, "Well, I'm here waiting for my flight." They said, "You won't miss your flight, but you have to come with us."

Well, they took me to Shore Patrol Headquarters, and I was sworn in as Shore Patrol, because I had to bring a prisoner back on the same flight I was taking. I said, "You got to be kidding me." And they said, "No, sir. You're coming with us." So I had a nightstick, handcuffs; I had the Shore

Patrol Band, and I was sworn in as Shore Patrol, trying to bring a prisoner back in handcuffs.

DePue: What had he done?

Sweet: He apparently... On base every Sunday, different denominations, when they'd hold church, they always took up a collection, and he went and stole the collection. He got caught and went to captain's mast.⁹ I don't even know how; I just know that they knew he was guilty, and he was being dishonorably discharged.

Once I got him back to Philadelphia, I don't know what they were going to do with him, but my job was to see that he stayed on the flight and that we got to Philadelphia.

DePue: Did he give you any trouble?

Sweet: He tried to several times. When I was at the air base in Torremolinos, this guy was giving me a hard time. I was about to take a nightstick to him, and this Green Beret, the guy comes up and literally picks him up by his collar and put him up against the wall. He [the Green Beret] said to him, he says, "You pay attention to the Shore Patrol." And he said, "If you don't follow what he's telling you," he says, "I will literally rearrange your face." and put him back down. The guy was in better behavior after that.

DePue: (laughs) And you were appreciative of that.

Sweet: I was appreciative of it, because I didn't really want to have to work him over with the nightstick. (laughs)

DePue: That was your reception in Philadelphia then?

Sweet: Because our flight was delayed twice, once in Torremolinos and once in the Azores, because for some reason we got delayed in the Azores, by the time we got to Philadelphia, it was about 6:30 or 7:00 at night in Philadelphia. Outside of there being Shore Patrol walking around, I had missed my connection with the Shore Patrol who was waiting for me.

So here I end up in the terminal at the naval air station with this prisoner, and I got nobody waiting for me. So when I did see Shore Patrol, I got their attention. I said, "I need to get to your Shore Patrol Headquarters and turn this prisoner over." They wanted to see my orders, and I showed it to them. And they said, "Well, we'll take you there, but you'll have to ride in the back with all our other people." And I said, "You've got to be kidding me."

⁹ A captain's mast or admiral's mast is a procedure whereby the commanding officer must make inquiry into the facts surrounding minor offenses allegedly committed by a member of the command, afford the accused a hearing and then dismiss the charges, impose punishment or refer the case to a court-martial.

DePue: What do you mean, other prisoners?

Sweet: Other prisoners, yeah. So in their paddy wagon I'm riding...Of course everybody that they had picked up was intoxicated. So I'm riding in the back with this prisoner.

I will tell you this; when we were in flight, I had to remove the handcuffs, but when we landed I had to re-cuff him. So when we get to Philadelphia, I meet up with Shore Patrol. They take me to Shore Patrol Headquarters, and just by minutes I got there in time, because they were ready to close down their Shore Patrol office for the evening. I walked in, and I said, "I've got to turn this prisoner over," handed them a copy of the orders. And they said, "Well, you got here just in time, because," he said, "a few more minutes, I'd have been gone."

DePue: And you would have been stuck with him all night long.

Sweet: I would have been stuck with the prisoner all night long, yeah. So I turned him over. I don't know whatever happened to him.

But then I got to where I was there temporary, as being transit, being discharged. Of course, when I left Rota, it was mild, cool temperatures. Got to Philadelphia, and it was just hot as...just unbelievable hot, and I'm wearing dress blues.

DePue: What month was that, July?

Sweet: That was July, yeah. I was home in time for Fourth of July in '69.

DePue: So this is your last couple of days in the Navy? Had they started talking to you about reenlisting?

Sweet: Yeah, you can get all these bonuses, and we'll guarantee you these schools, and on and on. I said, "No." And actually I did come back, and I went back to the surface unit for two years of meetings.

DePue: In the reserves?

Sweet: In the reserves. Yeah, then I went to the reserves.

DePue: Why did you decide you didn't want to stay in?

Sweet: I just didn't care much about working on submarines. I could see I could improve my life by getting a college education, probably getting some kind of a civilian job that would have paid better than just being in the military. But after I did get what college I did get, I did get a job with a consulting engineering firm here in Springfield. Then I realized, I can get a second

pension if I went back in the military. So that's when I joined the 3637th, and I was out there for two years.

DePue: Just a couple other questions about getting off of active duty. Sometimes you hear the stories about Vietnam era veterans coming back to the United States and not being treated too well. Did you have any experience or any encounters like that?

Sweet: I didn't experience anything like that. But I do know that, a short time after that... See, we were required at that time to travel in uniform, but it was some time shortly after that, in the early '70's, that they, because of the... Whether it was because of Vietnam or whether it was because of Russia or whatever, they came out and said, "Now you will travel in civilian clothes." Here you're carrying green bags in civilian clothes, what a dead giveaway.

DePue: (laughs) With a short haircut in the 1960's.

Sweet: With a short haircut, yeah, in the '60's. You're not in uniform; you're not a blaring sign. But when you're still carrying three green bags with your military gear and your military clothing, it's—

DePue: Did you have any kind of visceral reaction to hearing about the anti-war protests? Did that bother you at all?

Sweet: No, it didn't bother me a bit, no, because I always felt that if you want to leave and go to Canada and avoid the draft, or if you want to protest, hey, we have the First Amendment, which is the freedom of speech. I didn't agree with them, but I certainly wasn't going to openly oppose them either.

DePue: You came back. Was it your intention when you got off active duty to go straight to college?

Sweet: That's what I had in my plans, yeah, and as it coincidentally turned out, what became Lincoln Land [Community College], they started out here just south of Springfield in what was called "Plywood U," and I was there at Lincoln Land the first year Lincoln Land opened.¹⁰

DePue: In 1968?

Sweet: Yeah.

DePue: Really?

¹⁰ Lincoln Land Community College held its first classes on Sept. 23, 1968, in temporary buildings on a temporary site. LLCC was first housed in a half-dozen quickly constructed buildings on South Sixth Street in Springfield, IL, near the Hazel Dell interchange with Interstate 55. The school's nickname there was "Plywood U."

Sweet: So that fall of '69, I was going to Lincoln Land. Of course at one time, it became where there was a... Where was it? It was a smorgasbord that was there; I forget the name of the place, but just south of it they built all these... it almost looked like Army barracks that they built, which was the original buildings for Lincoln Land. We just called it "Plywood U" until they bought the ground where they built Lincoln Land College and Sangamon State University.¹¹ For a number of years I went to Lincoln Land.

DePue: Were you working at the same time or a full time student?

Sweet: Early on I didn't work; I just went to school. After I was considering that I wanted to stay in and get into engineering or get into architecture, I was looking at possible places of employment, and I ended up with a consulting engineering firm that was called Jenkins, Merchant & Nankeville. I went to work for them, so I'm getting [what] I guess you want to call it "hands on" experience, as well as getting education at the same time.

DePue: I assume you're going to school on the G.I. Bill?¹²

Sweet: Yes, I was. The interesting thing was, in working for Jenkins, Merchant & Nankeville, the first project they put me on... At this time Abe Lincoln's home was still under the control of the State of Illinois. My first job was to go over and measure the foundation at Lincoln's home. I went over and measured all the walls, all of the inner support parts of the foundation, and tried to, with photographs, drawings, determine what deterioration had happened.

Then, once I drew up the plans and showed the photographs to the structural engineers, they had actually hired a masonry company that was called Jorgensen. They went in and actually lifted the house and did all the repairs to the foundation. That was my first project, working on Lincoln's home.

DePue: That's a pretty special project to be working on. (laughs)

Sweet: It was. And see, then in '71, the State of Illinois turned over Lincoln's home to the National Park Service, and then they really did a lot of renovations. Of course, part of my other project, working on Lincoln's home, was we went in and took pictures of all the interior, took pictures of the wallpaper, all of the cornices and everything where the plaster work was, so that, in working on the structure, any damage done to it, we could do the restoration.

¹¹ The first classes at Sangamon State University were held in 1970, which is considered the founding year of SSU. In 1970, SSU was acquired by the University of Illinois and became known as the University of Illinois Springfield (UIS).

¹² The GI Bill encompasses all Department of Veterans Affairs education benefits earned by active duty service members.

As it turned out, they turned it over to National Park Service, and they really did a lot of restoration, as far as making it fire safe, fire alarms, fire detection, safe as far as burglar alarms or sensors of intrusion or something like that.

DePue: That's got to be a delicate line to walk, between getting it up to code and preserving the authenticity of the place.

Sweet: Anyway, then the National Park Service took it over. So then I ended up working on other projects after that.

DePue: Was that where your fascination with Lincoln began?

Sweet: Well, no, because actually my fascination with Lincoln began when I was in Boy Scouts. I was in Boy Scouts, Troop 14, First Presbyterian Church. I was there from probably about age thirteen to age eighteen, and once I got my Eagle Scout, I got to sit in Lincoln's family pew, because at that time the pew was still in the sanctuary. When you earned your Eagle Scout at First Pres, you had the privilege of sitting in Lincoln's pew and listening to a sermon.

DePue: That's pretty neat.

Sweet: So I've had the privilege of sitting in Lincoln's family pew.

DePue: Well that's cool. What happened after you got done with your education?

Sweet: Actually, early on I'd finished the architectural side, and I'd finished the part of it as being the fire science. I went on and got a job with the State of Illinois; I was in the Bridge Office [part of the Illinois Department of Transportation]. I decided early on that I could see an opportunity of getting a second pension, so that's when I went over and...I tried to get in the Air Guard.

DePue: Before you go there, I wanted to have you tell the story about IDOT, the Illinois Department of Transportation, where you ended up.

Sweet: Um-hmm.

DePue: I know you mentioned that there was a person there that had some submarine service or—

Sweet: Yes. He came later, after I'd started. I started there in May of '71, and he didn't probably show up until late 70's, like maybe '76, '77. He was a submariner off the *Scorpion*. The *Scorpion* was a sister boat to the *Sculpin*, or he was on the *Sculpin*, and the sister boat was the *Scorpion*, the one that...I was the last one off the *Scorpion* when she pulled into our port, when the *Scorpion* left and imploded.

DePue: I thought that there was a Thunman there who was influential in getting you a job.

Sweet: Well see, yeah Carl Thunman was the... When I went to work for the State, Carl Thunman was the bridge engineer. At that time, the Bridge Office was a section of the Bureau of Design and Environment. And due to—I'll just say the embarrassment of—the fact that all our surrounding states, which would be Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, Kentucky, Indiana, all of their bridge engineers, the top bridge engineers, was like the second or third in command in a department of transportation, where here, they made our bridge engineer a section head in another small bureau.

So they elevated Carl Thunman from being a section head in a Bureau of Design and Environment to making the Bridge Office its own bureau. So we went from about sixty men up to about 120 men in a short period of time.

But when I went to interview with Carl, on my resume I had it on there that I'd been in the Navy. He looked at it as, "Oh!" Well he apparently had a brother who was a commander of a submarine squadron somewhere.¹³ I believe that probably the fact that I'd had what education I had been working on—I guess you'd want to say background and experience—and the fact that I'd been in a submarine squadron, I believe that secured my job that I got with the State.

DePue: I wanted to get that story out because his brother is Ron Thunman, who I've had an extensive interview about. Yeah, he had his entire career spent on submarines, both boomers and attack subs, and ended up being the commander of the entire Pacific submarine fleet before he was Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Submarine Warfare.

Sweet: That's amazing; that's amazing. Whether he was an officer on board a boat and became a boat captain and then all the way up to... Yeah, that's just amazing; that's dedication.

DePue: So it was not a bad thing to walk in and say, "I've got submarine service."

Sweet: I'll reiterate on that. That's dedication. When you're part of a submarine squadron and you go out and you're gone for ninety days, you don't see your family, your wife for ninety days, that's dedication; that's dedication.

DePue: Is that part of the reason that it didn't necessarily appeal to you to have all those tours?

¹³ Vice Admiral Ron Thunman spent a lifetime in the U.S. Navy, the vast majority of it involved with nuclear-powered submarines. His oral history may be found at [ALPLM/Library/Collections/Oral History/Veterans Remember/Cold War Era](#).

Sweet: That's probably a good part of it.

DePue: Well when did you end up getting married? When did that happen?

Sweet: I got married June of '71.

DePue: Not too long after you got back.

Sweet: Not too long after I got back.

DePue: Not to the woman who sent you the "Dear John" letter though.

Sweet: No. (laughs) No, no.

DePue: Where did you meet your wife?

Sweet: I had gone to... I'm going to say it was in the winter of 1970, one of my high school buddies, who had been in the Navy, came home, asked if I would want to go up into Wisconsin and Michigan to go snow skiing. There was about nine of us that went up in three cars. I get up into the Upper Peninsula, go snow skiing, and I get hurt about the fourth day we're out there, dislocated a shoulder. Another guy broke a foot and another guy, I forget, he came home with some kind of a sprained ankle or something. So we took one vehicle and came home.

Well here I am, dislocated shoulder; it's about two days before Christmas, and I'm looking at planning on maybe trying to go out New Year's Eve. I get introduced to this young lady. I asked her out, to go out New Year's Eve. At that time, the Lake Club was still in existence.¹⁴ So we go out to eat and dance at the Lake Club for New Year's Eve. Well, sitting at a table right next to my date is this other gal that I just couldn't take my eyes off of.

DePue: What was her name?

Sweet: Marsha. She was out with her aunt. Of course, I danced with my date, and I asked my date if she didn't mind if I danced with this other young lady. She said, "No, I have no problem with it." When I noticed that she [Marsha] had left the table, I excused myself, because I figured she went to the restroom. I met her out in the front lobby, and I asked her for her phone number. (laughs) She gives me a phone number, so we just connected up, and we continued dating. So, by June of '71, we were married. (laughs)

DePue: What was her maiden name?

¹⁴ The Lake Club in Springfield, Illinois first opened as a nightclub in 1940, gaining a reputation for big-name entertainment and illegal gambling. The club closed in the 60s, but during the 1970s experienced a revival as a popular nightspot. It burned down in August 1992.

Sweet: Colwell, C-o-l-w-e-l-l.

DePue: How many years now is it?

Sweet: This past June was forty-three. I guess you'd say forty-two.

DePue: You're well on your way to fifty.

Sweet: Let's put it this way, she can still tolerate me. I guess we'll stay married. (both laugh)

DePue: You've already mentioned this, but in, I think it was around the 1976, '77 timeframe, you decided to take another look at the military; didn't you?

Sweet: Yes. Well actually, I figured that I could earn a second pension, so I went out to the Air Guard to talk to the recruiter out there. He said I'd been separated from the Navy too long, and furthermore, my Navy rate wouldn't transfer over into anything that would be Air Force related. I said, "Well, send me to school." "No," he said, "that won't work."

I knew an officer who was at the 3637th. He was a captain, Captain Williams. I went out there, and I talked to him. I said, "Sir, I'm interested in becoming a part of the 3637th."

DePue: Which is a maintenance company in the Army Guard?

Sweet: Light maintenance, yeah. And he couldn't move fast enough to pull the forms and get scheduled for physical and get testing scheduled and get an interview scheduled. From that particular date, I was in uniform within two months.

DePue: What was your pay grade when you got off of active duty?

Sweet: In the Navy, I was an E-4.

DePue: Which would be equivalent of a specialist in the Army?

Sweet: Yeah, Spec-4.

DePue: What pay grade did you come in when you re-enlisted?

Sweet: They brought me in as a Spec-4, and I got out of the Army as a sergeant.

DePue: Sergeant E-5?

Sweet: Yeah. And then—

DePue: Did you go to a school? Did they send you to school?

Sweet: I was in teletype, went to teletype repair school. I thought, Why am I going to this school? Here we're sending up satellites, yet we're still using antiquated teletype radio signals. It wasn't too long after that, they did away with the MOS [Military Occupational Specialty], and one of the guys in my squad, come up to me and he says—of course I knew he was prior Air force—he says, "I'm going over to the Air Guard and talk to the recruiter; you want to go with me?" And I said, "Sure, I'll take a chance."

I ended up talking to the exact same recruiter; I remember his name was Carroll Loeb. I sat down in Carroll Loeb's office, and I said, "I'd like to transfer over from the Army side, over here to the Air Guard." He says, "Not a problem. I'll schedule you for a physical. We'll do the testing and schedule you for an interview." I said, "Okay." I ended up having a guy write a letter for me about my education, background and that. Within two months, I was out at the 183rd.

After I'd been out there for about four months, I went back to the recruiter, and I said, "Sergeant Loeb, do you remember me?" He said, "Yeah, I brought you in here about four or five months ago." And I said, "If you will recall, about two and a half years ago, I talked to you about coming out, and you wouldn't bring me in." I said, "Here I am." (laughs)

DePue: Why did you want to join the Air Force in the first place? And why did you decide you didn't want to stay with the Army Guard?

Sweet: With the Army? Because as a teletype, I knew that they were eventually going to teletype repair. I knew they were eventually going to do away with the MOS. Furthermore, as in the guard, that's what I carried around most of the time, an M-60.

DePue: An M-60 machine gun.

Sweet: Eighteen point seven pounds, NATO round 7.62.

DePue: (coughs) That didn't appeal to you?

Sweet: I got tired of carrying that with the tripod and a box of ammo. (laughs)

DePue: Did they treat you okay in the 3637th?

Sweet: Oh, I had no problem, yeah. Although I will say this; at the time I don't think the Army was nearly [as] organized as I knew the Air Guard was, because we'd say... Say a squad leader would say, "Okay, we're going up to room 205 for training." You'd get up there, and there's already a class in the room. He'd say, "Well, I guess we'll have to find someplace else to go." I thought, You didn't know that the classroom was occupied?

I felt that, you know, besides they want to do away with my MOS, the fact that I got tired of carrying an M-60 machine gun, and the fact that I knew that there would be a future with the 183rd, I just went out there and transferred over to their civil engineering.

DePue: It seemed like a better fit for you then, in your own professional background?

Sweet: Better fit.

DePue: What did you end up doing in the 183rd?

Sweet: I was in the Civil Engineering Unit, and I was put in what they called the Civil Engineering Shop. Initially, at that point I was an E-5, responsible for being under, say the squad leader. I was responsible for taking care of utilities, finding utilities, working on structures, facilities and building anything that was new and also doing surveys.

One of my periodic jobs was to go out on the flight line and test ground rods, so that when they set the aircraft on the apron that they could ground it without any problem. You can't work on an aircraft that's got static electricity, so you have to ground it.

DePue: In the Air Force did they have the same concept as they had in the Navy, where you've got your day-to-day type of job and your emergency job?

Sweet: I think all branches of service have pretty much what you'd call a peace time job and a war time job. I don't know so much about Marine Corps, but Air Force, my main job in peace time would be taking care of structures, facilities, utilities and structures.

Primarily in war time, my job was maintaining runways and taxiways, maintaining them so that they would be able for aircraft to land and take off. And should you take bomb damage or rocket or missile damage to your runways, you've got to be able to get out and fix those runways, [with] what they call rapid runway repair, making sure...

If you can't get everything fixed, then on what runway you have, you've got to set out what they call a MOS, which is a minimum operating strip, so aircraft can land. That was an intense training. The idea was not to have to use a MOS. The idea was to bring the runway back to 100 percent. But sometimes clearing the debris and filling craters and compacting and doing the things you need to do to bring the runway up to where you can land and take off aircraft—

DePue: This is just a quick, aside question, but this is the 183rd Fighter—

Sweet: Fighter Wing.

DePue: Fighter Wing.

Sweet: Um-hmm.

DePue: So they had what kind of aircraft when you got there?

Sweet: When I got there they were flying F-4's, an old work horse. Within about five years they converted from the F-4's to F-16's.

DePue: Getting back to the training then, did you have an opportunity, maybe especially in annual trainings, to go out and actually practice on your wartime skills?

Sweet: Every year.

DePue: Where'd you go for that?

Sweet: We either went up to McCoy or—

DePue: Fort McCoy, Wisconsin.

Sweet: Fort McCoy or to Douglas, the Air Guard base up in Wisconsin, or they sent us down to Tyndall, which is Tyndall, Florida, Tyndall Air [Force] Base, Florida, or, oh shit, I can't think of... There's two other Air Guard bases down there where they'd send you to. Eglin [AFB, Florida] was another one, another base they sent you to.

The runways you were trained on were runways that they were used to train pilots on in World War II. So you would go down and you'd literally blow up the runways and then have to repair them in a minimal amount of time. And I mean, we literally blew up runways.

DePue: What kind of materials were you using to repair them?

Sweet: We had to excavate the crater to where all loose material was out. Then you'd backfill and compact and tamp the crater in levels, until you got to the surface. And then, if you had time, you poured concrete. If you didn't, you'd put down a small grit. Then you would compacted it to where... and then you pulled a mat over the top of that repaired crater.

DePue: Well I'm having visualizations of the kind of things they did in World War II where they had this perforated metal material that they would—

Sweet: That would have created too much problem for the aircraft.

DePue: So you weren't using anything—

Sweet: We used a metal mat, but it wasn't the grating, like you're talking. These mats were like eighteen inches wide, and I think they were probably close to

twenty-four feet long. They snapped together, and then you had to secure those down, because if you didn't properly secure that mat down, just a jet blast could peel that mat right off the ground. You couldn't have a mat where... If the aircraft was coming down and dropped its tail hook, you couldn't have that mat where they were going to take the barrier; otherwise, they could hook right into that mat and pull the mat up. So there was a lot of training involved.

And then, when we'd go out and do that training, we were also being shot at by snipers. That's where my M-16 training came back into play, where you'd take cover and shoot back at the snipers.

DePue: It sounds like your civilian job and your military job were pretty compatible with each other, complemented each other.

Sweet: I think so; I think so, yeah.

DePue: Did you enjoy this kind of work?

Sweet: Oh, the Air Guard? Absolutely, oh yeah.

DePue: More so than the Army Guard?

Sweet: More so than the Army Guard. (both laugh) I mean, I don't care what Air Force base you're at, runways never change. The direction of the runway might change, but the distance you need for different types of aircraft and the quality of the surface of the runway has to be maintained. You just have to learn, you know, if you end up with spalls [splinters or chips, especially of rock] out of the runway, you have to quickly epoxy patch all those spalls [foreign object debris or damage], make sure there's no debris—they call it FOD—no FOD on the runway anywhere.

DePue: FOD standing for?

Sweet: Foreign object. It's got foreign object—

DePue: Debris or something?

Sweet: Yeah, it's an acronym for Foreign Object Debris.

DePue: When did you retire from the guard?

Sweet: In October of 2002.

DePue: About a year after 9/11.

Sweet: Yep, and I'll tell you what. In 2000, I was sent to Saudi Arabia—

DePue: Deployed to Saudi Arabia?

Sweet: Deployed to Saudi Arabia, Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, and then—

DePue: How long were you there?

Sweet: Ninety days.

DePue: Prince Sultan?

Sweet: Prince Sultan. Here's a whole bunch of photographs. Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, you'll never guess who built it.

DePue: The Illinois Air National Guard.

Sweet: The United States Air Force contracted Osama bin Laden's brother, who was a contractor. That's the truth too. All these structures I have photographs of were built by bin Laden's brother. I couldn't tell you his name, but... Then, when we had a falling out with Saudi Arabia and they wanted us out—why, I don't know; that was political after I'd left—we said, "Okay, fine, we'll leave." We did base denial; we destroyed the whole base.



The Civil Engineering section billeting area in the cantonment area at the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia in February, 2000.

DePue: Did you feel like going over there and serving for the couple of months you were there?

Sweet: I was there ninety days.

DePue: Ninety days? Is that kind of the culmination of all this training and experience you had?

Sweet: Absolutely.

DePue: You enjoyed the experience then?

Sweet: Let's put it this way; I feel that Iceland and Saudi Arabia have a lot in common. They don't even have tall grass. All you see is either sand or rock, as far as you can see.

DePue: You've been in Iceland as well?

Sweet: I've been in Iceland, stationed in Iceland for a short period of time.

DePue: In the guard or before that?

Sweet: In the guard, the 183rd, Reykjavik, Iceland.

DePue: Any particular stories you have about your experience in Saudi Arabia?

Sweet: Yeah. We'd go out and walk at night to check on certain things, and there'd always be camel spiders or vipers, all over the base. You had to watch where you were going and where you stepped.



The Civil Engineering Group at the entrance to the cantonment area of the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, in February 2000. The blue arrow points to Paul Sweet.

DePue: Did you have many dealings with the Saudi people?

Sweet: Actually, the cantonment area was six miles from the flight line.¹⁵ Why they did that I don't know. But the cantonment area, they only allowed...See, basically Saudis don't work; they don't work. If you know anything about Saudi Arabia, from their oil revenue, Saudis do not work.

DePue: Do they bring in all foreign labor?

¹⁵ Cantonment area is a location, during a military campaign, such as winter quarters, where units of an army may be encamped for longer periods than they are during advances and retreats.

Sweet: They bring Afghans, Iranians, Iraqis in to work for them. Now, if you're a Saudi nationalist, they'll send you to college. You could get a degree in... become a physician, but you don't have to work. They have enough revenue income from our oil that we purchase from them that they don't have to work.

DePue: You're emphasizing this with a not very high regard for the Saudi people? Is that what you're getting at?

Sweet: Let me answer your question this way. The night I flew in to Prince Sultan Air Base, Saudi Arabia, you always fly in escorted, between 2:00 and 4:00 in the morning. That's so that the—well, the enemy would be Iraq, Iran or Afghanistan—can't shoot missiles at you. You fly in escorted in darkness.

Well, when we landed and were being processed in, we were being processed in in an open hangar. I'm looking around and seeing all these vehicles and trailers and trucks and everything that are parked, and over all of the wheels they've got brown canvas. [To] the sergeant that's processing me in, I said, "What's the deal with this canvas over the wheels?" And he said, "The air here is so dry that if we didn't cover our wheels every day, and particularly during the day, with wet canvas, tires would rot in sixty days, just go to nothing." I said, "Oh boy, I'm in for an experience."

DePue: Was the entire 183rd there?

Sweet: No, I was sent with the group to help... I was sent there as an antenna specialist to build an antenna for them and to do the structure. So I was there thirty days before I even got to see the antenna, as it was shipped in. I had to build the foundation and set all the anchor bolts and build the tower, build the antenna.

DePue: Were you given any explicit instructions about what you could and couldn't do, because you're in Saudi Arabia?

Sweet: You were never permitted to speak with any nationalist of any kind on the base. You never really saw any Saudis, but you knew that there were Afghans or Iranians or Iraqis there. You were not to have any contact or communication with them. And one thing you were not permitted to do was take photographs of them.

DePue: Why not?

Sweet: I don't question rules. I just know it was a rule that you had to follow. About taking pictures, I don't know what the reasoning was, but they just didn't want you to talk with any nationalists of any kind.

DePue: Were there any religious restrictions, what you could or couldn't do while you were there?

- Sweet: No, because all of our, if you want to call it Christian services, were all held within a building. Now, when I was in Turkey, that was different, because in Turkey...that's another story.
- DePue: That was also on a military deployment?
- Sweet: Military deployment. I was at Incirlik Air Base, Turkey. But while I was in Saudi, you know, there's times when they pray five or six times a day. When you hear that chanting or whatever they—
- DePue: Call to prayer.
- Sweet: The Muslim prayer, you just stay away from them, because they'll bring their rug out, and they'll pray for fifteen, twenty minutes. You just avoid them; you just let them do their thing.
- DePue: But it sounds like in both cases you pretty much were restricted then from having a lot of—
- Sweet: Contact, no contact with them whatsoever.
- DePue: What was your rank when you got done with your service?
- Sweet: I was a master sergeant, E-7.
- DePue: Master sergeant, E-7. The only reason I say that is a master sergeant in the Army is an E-8.
- Sweet: No, a master sergeant in the Air Force is an E-7. Now, if I would have passed my testing, I would have been considered as a senior master sergeant in the Air Force. Senior master sergeant's an E-8. Chief master sergeant's an E-9.
- DePue: Why retire in 2002?
- Sweet: Because when I came back from Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, after being there for ninety days, the first drill weekend I was home the squadron commander called me in his office, and he said, "You're going to Afghanistan in six months." And I said, "No, I'm not." But the problem was, at that time they had what they called "Stop Loss" on my AFSC. Within a couple of drill weekends, they removed the "Stop Loss." I went and told the...well he was our squadron commander, I said, "I want to let you know I'm going to personnel. I'm asking for a separation."
- He says, "I wanted to take you with me in Afghanistan." I said, "I've had my fill." At that time I had about twenty-nine years, nine months, between all military, and I said, "I'm done."

DePue: That's a long tour. What was your reaction when you heard the news about 9/11?

Sweet: Infuriated, infuriated about it, because from what I had heard, I believe intelligence should have known, or if they did know, it's just like between the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and OSI [Office of Special Investigations], or whatever; they wouldn't share information.

They knew that things were going on. There were pilots... There were Arab Muslim pilots training at airfields, commercial airfields, in Texas. Now, why would they come to the United States and learn how to fly a commercial aircraft, when they don't even own one and not working for anybody that owns one? That to me would send up a big red flag.

DePue: Was your time in Saudi Arabia before or after 9/11?

Sweet: Yes, I was there in 2000. Let's see, I was in Saudi Arabia in 2000 and in Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, in 2002.

DePue: So Saudi time was before 9/11?

Sweet: Yes.

DePue: I wanted to finish today with a little bit of discussion about the New Berlin [Area Veterans] Memorial.¹⁶

Sweet: Okay.

DePue: How did that all begin in the first place?

Sweet: I will say that there was three of us—

DePue: I should mention that you now live in New Berlin.

Sweet: Yes, I do.

DePue: Go ahead.

Sweet: About five years ago, a gentleman by the name of Al Smith or Allen Smith— He was in the Marine Corp; he was a JAG [Judge Advocate General]; he was an attorney; he was living in New Berlin at the time—and a gentleman by the name of Jim Davenport [had] back and forth, different, say, conversations over a cup of coffee. We talked about, "Hey, we need a veterans' memorial."

¹⁶ The New Berlin Area Veterans Memorial features six granite monuments for the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard and Merchant Marines and was erected to serve as a memorial to honor deceased, living and future veterans.

It was just a lot of talk for a while, until Al Smith, Allen Smith, decided that, let's get organized. Because he was an attorney, knew law, also knew, I guess you'd want to call it steps and procedures in getting us organized, he wrote our by-laws; he wrote the structure of our organization; he knew how to approach [the] attorney general, how to approach the secretary of state, file for the fact that we wanted to be a charitable organization. [He] also filed with the IRS so that we'd become a 501(c)(3).¹⁷

For a year and a half...it took us a year and a half to file all these letters and get results from, as I said, secretary of state, attorney general, Federal IRS, and then refile letters back with attorney general, secretary of state and become an organization where we could solicit the public for funds. Shortly after that time, after we really became an organization, we had to come up with a plan, location to build the structure.

About that time, Al Smith decided to move from New Berlin to St. Louis where his son was an attorney. He wanted to be with his son and his grandchildren. When he announced that he was leaving, he made me chairman and president, and I said, "Al, what do I do?" And he says, "You'll figure it out." I figured you just take it step by step, you know, make a list and outline of what we need to do and you just can't step ahead of yourself; you just figure out what do you need to do next.

So we came up with a concept of what we wanted, looked at about six different locations, approached the village, and the village gave us a licensing agreement to put the memorial where it's at.¹⁸

We also approached the Knights of Columbus to get a licensing agreement with them. At this point we had to hire an attorney to write all our legal work, as far as licensing agreement. Knights of Columbus signed off on theirs; the village signed off on theirs. We started soliciting, looking at sponsors, donors, contributors. Early on you're just looking for money, looking for things that you know you have to have upfront.

Then, when you get into the development, planning, design of it, you know what kind of materials you're going to need to build the formwork, the concrete, the steel. Incidentally, the individual that designed our footings and foundations was that individual I spoke of that was off the *Sculpin*. He became a structural engineer and currently works for Illinois Department of Transportation.

DePue: I would think having a design, something that people can look at, would really help when you're out there trying to raise money.

¹⁷ A 501(c)(3) organization is a corporation, trust, unincorporated association or other type of organization that is exempt from federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of Title 26 of the United States Code.

¹⁸ The memorial is located on a lot across from the New Berlin Fire Station #1 on the corner of National Avenue and Casper Drive, New Berlin, Illinois.

Sweet: So early on, we were looking at different monument companies. The one that we were working with before we put out bids, they literally built a model for us of what we'd come up with, from our concept to a design. We used that model at the bank to show the public what our plans were, at least give them a concept idea of what we were planning on developing.

It was four years of coming up with... The village, the first thing they said after signing the licensing agreement was, "We need for you to prove that you're not going to create a flood problem." So we had to hire a consulting firm to do a flood study, look at all the areas of what would be a watershed area and where the water flows, design it with 500 year rain. Were we going to create a flood problem for... So we had to get them to sign off on letters and the design for everything, from where we were building to an underdrain system.

Once we got the underdrain system in, we started putting in the foundations. So it was just a matter of getting the materials, getting it built, getting concrete delivered, going step by step. And I was involved in it. Through the winter months we couldn't work on it, but you can just about bet from the end of March until sometime in September, every year, I was busy figuring out what we needed next and where we were going to get it and who's going to sponsor this. It was just very involved.

DePue: Are you still working for the state?

Sweet: Oh no, I've been retired. I retired from the state... matter of fact, when I was in Incirlik Air Base, Turkey, George Ryan was the governor, and I was sending e-mails. Now, here I'm no longer on radio, teletype, I'm now e-mailing on the Internet, back to people, my wife and family, and fellow employees at the state. They said to me, "Are you going to take the early retirement?" And I go, "Well, I didn't know anything about it." By the time I came back... I was home in time for my daughter's high school graduation. I was just there a day ahead of it.

So when I came back, of course, I had that time when you're supposed to readapt or reacquaint yourself and that. The first drill weekend, I go out to guard, and the squadron commander says, "Oh, incidentally, in six months you're going to Afghanistan." I said, "No, no I'm not." Well anyway, I decided to separate. Of course at the same time, I'm looking at the early retirement with the State, and I had enough time that I could not only buy five years early retirement, but I bought two years military time, and I said, "I'm gone," because I knew that what George Ryan didn't screw up, the next governor was going to.

DePue: (laughs) Well, you weren't too wrong on that one, because the next governor was Rod Blagojevich.

Sweet: My feeling was George Ryan was screwing everything up, and I felt either the next governor was going to have a migraine headache, fixing what he messed up, or the next governor was going to screw things up more. And I was right.

DePue: So all of this happens, it sounds like, in 2002.

Sweet: Yeah, so here I am—

DePue: Which is the only reason you've got the time to work on this memorial.

Sweet: So here I am eleven years later, wondering why our state hasn't corrected our pension system.

DePue: (laughs) That's a whole other interview that we don't need to go to.

Sweet: That's a whole other interview. Yeah, I don't need to go there. (laughs)

DePue: When did you get started with the actual construction of the monument?

Sweet: It was probably March of '09, we started putting in the drainage system. We actually got the drain tile donated to us by Springfield Plastic, out of Auburn, Illinois. We went down there and showed them what we were doing, and they said, "Yeah, sure, we'll donate the tile." So they not only donated all the drain tile, but they donated the bigger tile that we used for the forms for the flag pole foundations and for the light standard foundations.

DePue: This is a very impressive memorial, if I can say that.

Sweet: Thank you.

DePue: When did it get dedicated?

Sweet: We actually dedicated the area as Veterans Memorial Park in 2010. It was actually like Memorial Weekend, 2010. We had another celebration in 2011 that we were making progress and wanted to show the public what our plans were. Then we actually had the final dedication July 6 of 2013. So, probably as early on as 2008, we were just in the planning, development, getting our paperwork together.

DePue: What was it like on July 6, when you realized all those years of work had finally come to the point where you had something to show to the public?

Sweet: I was weak in the knees. I was proud, but I was weak in the knees. I was glad it was over and (emotionally) it's there, for people to visit, to respect and honor. It's not a war memorial; it's a veterans' memorial, dedicating to any veteran who gave some and to those particularly who gave all. And I'm glad it's done.



From 2008 to 2013 Paul Sweet was one of the key players behind the planning, fund-raising, construction and dedication of New Berlin Illinois' Veterans memorial, which was dedicated in July, 2013.

DePue: I always like to end with a couple of very broad questions. Let me just ask you this, and maybe you just answered the question. How did your military service change you, change your outlook, change who you are today?

Sweet: You want me to be blunt and truthful? It made me realize that there's two kinds of people in this country, patriots and traitors. And that's it, clearly defined. You're either a patriot or a traitor. That's the way I feel about it. If you don't support the Constitution as it originally was written and the Bill of Rights as they were originally written, and you don't—

I want to tell you a little short story. Less than two weeks ago, after the dedication, I was approached one day while working in my garage. Two young gentlemen came up and wanted to talk to me about something. They left a pamphlet. Just less than a week ago they came back, and they said, "We'd like to talk to you." And I said, "What church do you represent?" They told me. And I said, "You people won't join the military, will you?" They said, "No." I said, "You don't salute the American flag, do you?" and they said, "No, but we respect it." I said, "No, you don't. If you won't say the Pledge of Allegiance and understand what the purpose and reasoning is behind the Pledge of Allegiance, and you won't salute the American flag, you're a traitor." And that's just the way I feel about it.

DePue: If you'll allow me to make an observation, during the Vietnam War protests, you didn't seem to have as strong feelings at that time.

Sweet: You've got to realize, I was eighteen, nineteen years old, maybe twenty at the most. I didn't see things like I do today, after raising a family [and] being concerned what's going to happen to the future of this country. I now have three granddaughters. I'm concerned about them every day. What kind of education are they going to have? What kind of healthcare coverage are they going to have? Is our country going to get so screwed up that they won't be in the financial security? Will they have a pension? Are they going to be able to collect Social Security after they pay into it for forty years, you know? Yeah, I've changed.

DePue: Here's your opportunity to share some words of wisdom for your kids, grandkids, anybody else who listens.

Sweet: Listen to those that will give you good guidance, steer you in the right direction; be self-reliant, independent; get a good education, and try and always do what's the right thing.

DePue: I think that's a pretty good way to finish for today. Any final comments for us, Paul?

Sweet: Not really. No, I don't think so.

(end of transcript)