

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Leslie Axelrod

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Veterans Remember Oral History project

Interview # VRK-A-L-2017-054

Leslie (Les) Axelrod, a Korean War veteran who served on the USS Lewis, a destroyer escort, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Veterans Remember – Korean War* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: Jun 30, 2017 Location: Highland Park, IL Public Library

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark R. DePue, Director of Oral History

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 1:54 + 1:41 / 1.9 + 1.68 = 3.58 hrs.

Session 1: Early life, enlistment in the Navy plus basic training and Navy OCS

Session 2: Experiences on the USS Lewis off North Korea, and USS Wilkinson

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on January 17, 2018.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Leslie Axelrod, *Veterans Remember*, VRK-A-L-2017-054

Biographical Information Overview of Interview: Leslie (Les) Axelrod was born on June 28, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, and grew up in University City, a St. Louis suburb. His father worked as an accountant and his mother was a housewife. During World War II, Les was in the Boy Scouts and helped with tin can drives and other activities. He graduated from University City High School in 1945, with a strong aptitude in math. He enrolled in Washington University and majored in chemical engineering, graduating in three years and taking classes with many World War II veterans. Axelrod enlisted in the U.S. Navy in September, 1950, and attended basic training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center, north of Chicago. He continued there in the Electronics Technician School (and later at Key West Naval Station), but in late 1951 he was accepted into the Navy's Officer Candidate School in Newport, Rhode Island, and received his commission in March, 1952. Les was already married to Leah Mandelker by that time.

Following his commissioning as an ensign, Les was assigned as the Electronics Officer (and later the Communications Officer as well) to the USS Lewis (DE-535), a WW II era destroyer escort that was coming out of mothballs in Mare Island, California. By July, the USS Lewis was sailing for South Korea, with stops at Midway Island, Yokosuka and Sasebo, Japan enroute. By late August the Lewis was on station off the coast of North Korea supporting ROK Navy mine sweeping operations and shelling enemy shore installations and troop concentrations. On October 21, 1952, while the Lewis was laying down a smoke screen for South Korean mine sweepers in the Wonson harbor, it came under attack by the North Koreans, and was hit by artillery in the forward fire room that knocked out one of the ship's boilers and killed seven sailors. The ship underwent repairs in Japan and then returned to San Diego in December, 1952. In May, 1953 Axelrod was reassigned to the USS Wilkinson (DL-5), a destroyer leader that was then under construction in Quincy, Massachusetts. Les supervised the installation of electronic equipment on the ship. The USS Wilkinson was commissioned in August, 1954 and went on its shakedown cruise to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Axelrod was released from the Navy in January, 1955.

Subject Headings/Key Words: electronics and communication officer in Navy during Korean War; naval operations off east coast of North Korea, 1952; USS Lewis (DE-535); USS Wilkinson (DL-5); USS Lewis's combat action on October 21, 1952; growing up in suburban St. Louis during depression; growing up during World War II; Naval OCS at Newport, Rhode Island

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