

# **Transcript**

## **Oral History Interview**

**Joseph Bonds**  
**USS *Razorback* officer**  
**World War II and Post War**

**April 15, 2010**

Interviewer – “Today is April 15, 2010, and I’m here with...”

Joseph Bonds – “Joseph Bonds”

I – “And you live in...”

JB – “I live in Atlantic Beach, Florida now, at an old sailor’s home called “Fleet Landing””

I – “So, appropriate name.”

JB – “Yes, it is.”

I – “You served aboard USS *Razorback* during World War II.”

JB – “Yes. I made two war patrols, the fourth and fifth. Then, I stayed on board for a total of five years. Which, in those days, I guess even now days, [it’s] unusual for an officer to stay on board that long.”

I – “You went to the Naval Academy.”

JB – “Yes, I went to the Naval Academy, out of the fleet”

I – “So you had enlisted in the Navy?”

JB – “I enlisted when I was 18 years old. I went to the training station in Battleship, Mississippi. Then I went to the prep school in Norfolk, Virginia where there were about 70 or 80 of us. The only thing they did was prepare us to take the exam. With the Secretary of Navy appointments, the only thing you had to do was pass the exam.”

“Unfortunately, I did not pass the English exam.”

“There were exams in...I don’t really remember all of them, but, English and History and Physics and Chemistry, and a couple of other things.”

I – “Mathematics”

JB – “Yeah. You had to pass each one of them. I had, like, 3.4 or better in all the others, but in English, I had a 2.4”

“So, I went back to the fleet, and I was too old to try the next year.”

“So, I went back, and I went to the Training Station in San Diego, where I mess cooked at the Chief’s Quarters for a couple of months. Then I got orders to go out to, to report to the Commander of the Submarine Force, Pacific Fleet. Well, it wasn’t that then, it was ‘Scouting Force’ then.”

“So, I went up to his office, and somebody said, “Would you like to go on a submarine?”

“And I thought to myself, “Well, why not?”

“So they assigned me to the USS *Pollack*, the 180 [(SS-180)] in Pearl Harbor. So I went down to the *Pollack* and reported to the Exec [the Executive Officer] and he looked at the record, and he said, “You haven’t been to Sub School!”

I said, “No, Sir!”

“What are you doing here?”

“And I said, “They sent me here, Sir!” [laughs] I was the first non-Sub School graduate that they had ever on the submarine. This is now, 1940, I guess.”

I – “So, still the peacetime Navy”

JB – “Yeah, still the peacetime Navy.”

“So I stayed on *Pollack* and went back to Mare Island for overhaul, and they sent me down to San Diego to go to Fire Control School. The day before we were to graduate from Fire Control School, they called me up to the office and they said, “We’ve got orders for you.”

“I thought the submarine was getting out of overhaul early, but [they said,] “No, you’re going back to Prep School.”

“I left out one part. They, Congress, raised the age, or somebody, raised the age limit for the Naval Academy one year. I had applied to go back to the Prep School, and BUPERS [Bureau of Personnel], which was then called the Bureau of Navigation, why I don’t know [laughs], but, anyway, they said, ‘you had one chance.’”

“So, I was going to take the exam from the fleet. You didn’t have to go to Prep School to take the exam.”

“So, they had loaded up the Prep School with a bunch of people, who, really their only interest [was to] get off the ship they were then on. There were five of us that had failed the exam and all of us were ordered back to Prep School. I went back to Prep School. This time I passed and I went into the Naval Academy in July of 1941. I was there when Pearl Harbor erupted. I went on there and graduated and then went on to Sub School and out to Pearl.”

“I served in Relief Crews. They were the crews that took the submarine while the regular crew, who had been on patrol, were boozing it up at the Royal Hawaiian.”

“So then when I went on *Razorback*, we had eleven officers. I was the eleventh officer. We hot bunked. One of the officers slept on a cot in the Captain’s Cabin. Three or four [of the] very junior, we ‘hot bunked.’ For three officers, we had two bunks.”

I – “You said what we now call the ‘Senior Officer’s Stateroom’ [with two bunks] was actually set up for three men and what we now have set up as two separate ‘Junior Officer’s Staterooms’ was set up as a single stateroom with four bunks.”

JB – “Right”

I – “So the submarine has changed some.”

JB – “Yeah, a little bit, but basically it’s much the same.”

“I stayed on there [aboard *Razorback*] until April of 1950. The Exec left before the new Exec came aboard. We had five ‘JGs’. We had the Captain who was a Commander, the Exec who was a Lieutenant Commander, and then we had five JGs and a couple of Ensigns. I spent more time as a JG than any other rank. I got caught in the lack of promotion after World War II.”

“I ended up being Acting Exec for two months. So I went from eleventh officer to Acting Exec.”

I – “All on one submarine.”

JB – “Then I went on from there to COMSUBPAC Assistant Material Officer, Submarine School Electrical Department, and XO of *Sea Robin* [(SS-407)] CO of *Sea Leopard* [(SS-483)], Operations Officer for SUBRON Four and then COMSUBDIV 42. Then SUBDIV 41 left and so I had both divisions for a while. SUBPAC Operations Officer and a very pleasant tour in France with NATO for two years. CO of *Compass Island* [(AG-153)] for a little over two years. CO of USS Newport News for two years and a couple of shore assignments and then I retired.”

I – “I hope you’ve been enjoying your retirement, and we certainly appreciate you taking the time to visit us here at *Razorback*.”

JB – “I’m so happy my son prodded me to, let’s face it, Little Rock’s not the easiest place to get to.”

I – “It is not near any ocean, that is for certain.”

JB – “He was coming from Chapel Hill to Dallas. So he said ‘meet me in Memphis and we’ll go down and see the *Razorback*’, so here I am.”

I – “How about that. Again, I want to thank you very much for...”

JB – “My pleasure. I didn’t think I’d ever see the old, the old boat again. One of the Exec’s, matter of fact, the Exec that took over when I was Acting Exec, Charlie Styer, lives at Fleet Landing. He said ‘give the old gal a pat’. He was the Exec from I guess about 1950 to 1952.”

I – “When they decommissioned her to go into the GUPPY Conversion.”

JB – “Yeah. He took it around to the, uh...”

I – “To the East Coast”

JB – “To the East Coast, yeah.”

I – “She operated for a very short time out there as a target boat.”

JB – “I don’t know of any officer that did war time duty on it that is still alive. Captain LaJaunie, who took over right after World War II, he just recently died. All the rest, I think are gone.”

I – “Well, again, we certainly appreciate you coming to see us and hope you’ll come back again.”