

Robert Sargent Shriver, Jr.
Lieutenant
Oral History
[Circa 1969, at Peace Corps Headquarters, interviewer unknown]

Sargent Shriver: He had his eye out the periscope, inside the sixteen-inch mount, and the last Jap plane came over and dropped a bomb right on top of that mount. It landed right in front of the aperture through which the periscope sticks. The result was, when the bomb went off, it jarred that external end of that periscope, and the end that he was looking through, smacked him in the face, and he got the Purple Heart. I'll never forget that as long as I live.

Interviewer: He must have been a heck of a skipper.

Shriver: Gatch was very good, yeah, very good. He also had two very good looking daughters. [?] junior officers' morale.

Interviewer: When did you join the South Dakota?

Shriver: I joined it in--I think it must have been January of '42. It was either December of '41 or January of '42.

Interviewer: Where did you join it?

Shriver: In Philadelphia.

Interviewer: And this was before or after the shakedown cruise?

Shriver: This was before she'd ever gone anywhere. South Dakota was tied up in Camden at the New York Shipbuilding Company, and it was going through what they called a final fitting out period. It had not yet been underway.

Interviewer: What were your duties when first assigned?

Shriver: I was an ensign, and I had a regular job that they gave a junior officer. I was in one of the antiaircraft divisions, and stood watch, as a junior watch officer.

Interviewer: Sidney Shalett in his book *Old Nameless [Old Nameless - The Epic Of a U.S. Battlewagon (1943)]* refers to you as a gunnery officer, and by the time--this is during the battle of Santa Cruz Island--by that time did you have a battery of antiaircraft guns--

Shriver: Yes, I did. That's right, yes. By the time we actually got into action, I was in charge--I think they used to call it the Eighth Division, which was responsible for the twenty millimeter guns on the starboard quarter of the ship--on the forward side of the ship, on the starboard. We had about thirty or forty twenty millimeter guns.

Interviewer: This battle of Santa Cruz Island was really the baptism of fire for the South Dakota and you and your crew, wasn't it? Because they were really a green crew.

Shriver: That's correct; they were.

Interviewer: Would you go through the battle of Santa Cruz Island with me, as you remember it, and tell it in conversation?

Shriver: Well, anybody's memory this long after an event like that is not too reliable. But I do remember that it was an experience which was unprecedented for everybody on that ship, because even though there were many of us on there who were new to the Navy, I don't think there was any man on there--officer or man--who had actually been in action against the enemy before. This was still very early in World War II. The dates I think were about October 1942, and our Navy at that time was really fighting a defensive war against the Japanese, because the Japanese had gotten the upper hand on the United States Navy in the first years of the war. In this particular battle, there were two aircraft carriers, if I remember correctly. There was our ship, the South Dakota, and our ship was the first battleship to become

involved in one of the battles that they called an air-sea battle. Up until then, battleships had always been fighting other surface ships. But here it was confined exclusively to air--

Interviewer: You were actually, excuse me, sir, but your mission was to protect the Enterprise because of the terrific losses that we had sustained at Pearl Harbor--

Shriver: That's right. I think we had two, or maybe three, operational carriers in the Pacific at that time. There was the Enterprise, the Hornet, and the Wasp. The Saratoga had caught a fish--it had got a torpedo--and it was in Pearl Harbor in dry dock. The first of the Long Island class carriers, which were just little converted freighters, were just beginning to arrive in the Pacific. As a matter of fact, I saw the first Long Island class carrier arrive in Noumea, New Caledonia, with a shipment of about forty American airplanes. They called them ferry carriers. They ferried airplanes out to the advanced lines. Except for that, that was the only carrier they had out there. The carriers with the airplanes became sort of like the cavalry used to be in the Army. It was your intelligence; it was your scouting force. Without the airplanes, you were pretty helpless. You didn't know what the enemy was doing. So when the United States Navy was down to so few carriers, we were in a precarious condition. In this battle, our carriers were shooting off airplanes, attacking their carriers, and they were doing the same thing to us. The South Dakota, along with a couple of cruisers and some destroyers, as a job, tried to shoot some of these enemy airplanes down and protect the carrier.

Interviewer: Going back to this October 26 battle of Santa Cruz, where were you in battle stations when general quarters sounded?

Shriver: I was on the starboard side, right up in the forward part of the ship. I had the twenty millimeter guns that extended down that starboard side. The way we were organized, you had a pair of head telephones, and you talked to a person at each station, who let's say had four guns, or two guns, under their control. It was my job to make sure the batteries opened fire at the correct time, that they were on the right target, that if there were any casualties, that people were replaced, that the ammunition continued to flow correctly, that we were carrying out our part of the battle plan.

Interviewer: When these planes came in, Mr. Shriver, could you say for a fact that your batteries were responsible for any definite portion of that thirty-two that the ship shot down that day?

Shriver: Everybody always claimed they shot down this one or that one or the other one, and frankly I don't think anybody ever really could prove those things. There were some cases--the next to the last plane that came in, I was firmly convinced was shot down by a couple of guns in the Eighth Division, which I was in charge of. But you have to realize that it's practically impossible to prove that, because when a plane comes diving in on a ship like the South Dakota, there'd be anywhere from twenty to fifty guns open up on that one plane. Who's to say which one actually shot it down? At the very moment you might have the target in your sights and shoot, another fellow might be just on the target at the same time. You both might have shot it down. There were so many planes shot down so fast that day, they were falling all around, that I don't think anybody really worried too much about who shot down what. They just wanted to shoot down the planes, and make sure you didn't get shot down yourself, that was the principle preoccupation everybody had.

Interviewer: What was your reaction to your crew? This was their baptism of fire. How do you feel they performed?

Shriver: They did terrifically well. Terrifically well. We had a great gunner there, a fellow named Chatelaine, who they subsequently named a destroyer after him. The crew, they

couldn't have been better; they did a great job. I think Captain Gatch was very pleased. These fellows were right out in the open. There was no armor plate, for example, between them and enemy fire or enemy shrapnel. Usually on a big ship, a capital ship, a battleship, a large proportion of the people onboard are inside the ship. The men in one of those big sixteen-inch turrets are inside the turret, and they're protected by four, five, six, eight, ten inches of grade-A armor plate. So for example, in the battle of Santa Cruz, this one we're talking about, a bomb did land right on the top of the number two turret. There were a lot of guys in that turret, they hardly knew the bomb had landed on the turret. But up there in the open, everybody knew it had landed because three or four fellows got killed by that bomb. The men in the antiaircraft divisions were running around with nothing on but--y'know--their clothes. You're in a big battle with people shooting eight-inch and sixteen-inch shells around, and all you're doing is running around in the open, exactly as if you were on the inside, so I think they had a terrific amount of courage, and they did damn well.

Interviewer: Where were you when this five-hundred-pound bomb hit the turret?

Shriver: Well, I don't know that it was a five-hundred-pound bomb. I guess it must have been at least a two-hundred-pound bomb, but well I was--again, as I said--I was up on the starboard side forward, and fortunately, so far as I'm concerned, I was on the starboard side so that when the bomb exploded, the shrapnel which came aft was outboard of me. So guys in my division were killed. Fellows that weren't any further than ten or fifteen yards from me. But the blast couldn't get around the corner to where I was, so I fortunately was not killed.

Interviewer: This is the bomb that struck and seriously wounded Captain Gatch, wasn't it?

Shriver: That's correct.

Interviewer: Captain Gatch in the book by Sidney Shallet, *Old Nameless*, is pictured as a great builder of morale and men and a great officer. Did you find him so?

Shriver: Yes. Yes, he was. I'll tell you what he did, that I thought was very valuable. He got everybody focused on what the job was, namely, fighting. It didn't make any difference to Captain Gatch whether you had on your uniform exactly correct, or whether your shoes were shined exactly right, or whether your tie was on exactly right, he was interested in whether you were going to be an effective fighting member of the South Dakota crew when it got into action.

He and Bull Halsey were very much alike. When Bull Halsey took command of the South Pacific Fleet, everybody was walking around in white uniforms, and it was so-called spit and polish, and if you didn't have your tie on at the right time you were in trouble, and so on. Halsey told everybody, just take those ties off. He said you can get rid of the white uniforms, and he started wearing khaki uniforms all day long, and the next thing you knew, they cut the sleeves off, halfway down, and people were comfortable in that hot tropical climate, and they began to think about how to fight rather than how you looked. Or how the ship looked. Sometimes people complained that the South Dakota was a messy looking ship. It wasn't always painted up perfectly, and some old line fellows would sometimes get on there, and say this is a far cry from the kind of Navy ship I've been accustomed to seeing. Well, it was a far cry. I'd been out on USS Arkansas in 1940, and the USS Arkansas at that time, I'll bet you, had paint on it three inches thick. We'd put on one coat, and then we'd put on another coat, and everything was always just perfection. Externally, it looked beautiful.

But we found out to our dismay, for example in the battle of Guadalcanal, that thick paint can catch on fire. And can kill you. The fire can go through bulkheads which are closed-

-watertight bulkheads. For example, if you have a fire in one compartment and you have a completely watertight, armor-proof bulkhead between that compartment and the next compartment, the heat from the compartment where the fire is burning can ignite the paint on the other side of the bulkhead. And in that way the fire can spread from compartment to compartment, simply by heat, and not by any flames. I'll never forget that, in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, we scraped every bit of paint off that ship. We scraped everything right off the floor. We took up every piece of rugs and stuff like that that were on the floor. A lot of people said this was a very bad-looking U.S. Navy ship, but Captain Gatch was never worried about how it looked. All he was interested in was whether it would fight effectively, and he transmitted that spirit, and concentration on the fighting ability of the South Dakota to everybody in it. So they didn't care about anything except that. I'll tell you, when you're in battle, that's the only thing that makes any difference.

Interviewer: Mr. Shriver, going back to the battle of Santa Cruz, how many men did you lose in your command?

Shriver: I'm sorry, I can't remember.

Interviewer: Were the losses heavy aboard the ship that day?

Shriver: Oh, no, there were practically none. As a matter of fact, I think that my own division--the Eighth Division--suffered most of the casualties. I don't know that anybody was hurt, except in the Eighth Division. I suppose the Navy records would show what that is. But the largest portion of the fellows who were wounded or killed in that particular battle were in the antiaircraft division that I had charge of.

Interviewer: You didn't get much of a rest after--let's see, they hit you--what--two or three times that day? Two or three waves of Jap planes.

Shriver: I can't remember how many there were.

Interviewer: Just about two and half weeks later, you were involved in the second battle of Savo Island. In that one, you did sustain a lot of hits, didn't you?

Shriver: Yes, I think we sustained more hits by major caliber projectiles in that battle than any battleship had ever taken. I don't know whether this is accurate or not, but I was told that the morning after that battle--it was in November sometime--

Interviewer: The record I have shows the 14th and 15th.

Shriver: Well then, the morning of the 15th of November, one of the older, regular Navy officers on board told me that that battle was the first time the United States capital ship--that's a battleship, a capital ship--had fought--had actually fired its guns at an enemy ship since the war of 1812. On that night, I think we were struck something like a hundred to a hundred fifty times by major caliber projectiles. That means a shell that's eight inches or bigger. An 8-inch shell, 10-inch shell, 12-inch shell, 14-inch shell, 16-inch shell--those were major caliber projectiles. And we were hit over a hundred times by those shells.

Interviewer: Sidney Shallet tells a story in *Old Nameless* about what you're referring to, and he said that--of course, it's a courtesy to ask for permission to fire, and Captain Gatch asked the admiral for permission to fire, and he--Captain Gatch--hoped to be the first one to fire his guns, and the admiral says, "Fire at will." So Captain Gatch turned to give the order to commence firing, and the admiral's flagship loosed the first blast, and Captain Gatch's comment was, "A wry fellow, the Admiral."

Shriver: I'll say I was not close enough to the captain to hear any such comments, so I can't vouch for what they were. But the admiral was on our ship that night. Admiral Lee. He was on the South Dakota. Wasn't he on the South Dakota the night of that action? I think he was.

So the admiral had given the order, you mean, but the South Dakota's guns fired first, is that what you were saying?

Interviewer: No, actually, the admiral's flagship--

Shriver: He was on the Washington that night?

Interviewer: I think he was, sir. At least according to the book.

Shriver: Well, then he may have changed it. Well, I'm sure the book is right. They probably changed it. I know he came on the South Dakota originally. I'll never forget when he came on board, as a matter of fact. We were just getting ready to go to the South Pacific. None of us knew that, but that's what it ultimately turned out to be. And this admiral came walking down the dock--I remember it just as if it was twenty minutes ago--I'd never even seen an admiral. There hadn't been any on the South Dakota, and he had on a khaki uniform, and he came on the deck and went up to the admiral's quarters. And he hadn't been on there, it seemed to me, twenty minutes and we picked up and left. I think the reason he came on so quietly was the Navy didn't want the people in Philadelphia to be gossiping about why there was an admiral on board. He came on just by himself, with one aide, I think, and maybe one other person. Usually, an admiral has quite a staff. He came on just by himself. He got this name, Chin Chin (?) Lee--

Interviewer: Where did he get that name?

Shriver: He got that out there in Guadalcanal. I can't remember exactly why he got that name.

Interviewer: Mr. Shriver, going back to Savo, did you ever sustain a personal injury during the war?

Shriver: I picked up a piece of that shrapnel that was flying around that night. At Savo Island.

Interviewer: Did you receive a Purple Heart?

Shriver: No, because it didn't amount to anything. I mean, I got hit by a piece of shrapnel and--I'll never forget it, it was so funny because when I got hit, suddenly I knew I was hit--after all, you get a piece of shrapnel--it happened to hit me in the arm--and you start bleeding. I'd seen so many Westerns, I suppose, as a kid, I grabbed my arm and said, "They got me." Or, "My god, I've been hit." I thought sure I must have lost my arm or something. I started waving it around to see whether it worked, and of course it worked all right. But it's funny how you can be shocked, just by being hit, even if you're not hit in any consequential way. It was just that you're in a battle, and suddenly you feel you're hurt, and naturally then you think you've practically been killed. But I wasn't hurt at all. I had just what they called a flesh wound.

Interviewer: Where is Savo Island, exactly, while we're on the subject?

Shriver: Savo Island is a little island just north of Guadalcanal, and a little bit to the east of Guadalcanal. We were on the eastern side of Guadalcanal, steaming up the eastern side. You went north, and then if you wanted to come around the top of Guadalcanal and come down the--excuse me, we were steaming up the western side, and you come across the north and come down the eastern side, you had to pass through a channel between Savo Island and Guadalcanal. That channel got a nickname. They called it Ironbottom, I think it was, Ironbottom Channel because so many ships got sunk in that channel. It was a very narrow channel. At night time, when we went through there, it was possible to see the outlines of Savo Island on the port side, if I remember correctly, almost at the same time you could see the outline of Guadalcanal on the starboard side. I can't remember the exact width of that channel, but my memory is it would be less than twenty miles wide.

You have to understand for a battleship to be in a channel like that, it's much more unusual than for a destroyer. A big capital ship never gets into constricted waters if it can possibly avoid it, because the advantage of a capital ship in those days was that it could shoot projectiles a long distance, like fifteen or twenty miles. So if you're on a capital ship, what you want to do is to keep little ships as far away from you as you can, and shoot them down before they can get close enough to shoot at you. Therefore, you try to keep a capital ship away from constricted waters and away from the land, but you never want to make it possible for people on the land to shoot at you. So when you got a capital ship, like a battleship, like ours, in a channel as narrow as that, that's not good. You want to stay out of there. That's why it was relatively unusual for a big ship like that to be in there. We had had cruisers in there. We lost three cruisers right in there. I had a couple of friends that went down in that channel.

Interviewer: Do you recall, Mr. Shriver--you said over a hundred major caliber shells hit the South Dakota--do you remember the extent of major damage to the ship?

Shriver: I couldn't be precise on that. That's all in the record book, but I know that these shells severed a lot of the electrical cables in South Dakota. So it was no longer possible to handle the big guns automatically and electrically. It was because of these injuries to the firing installations of the ship that the South Dakota was sent back to the United States for overhaul and repair.

Interviewer: Is that where you left the South Dakota then?

Shriver: No, I stayed on, and after we got refitted at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, the South Dakota went up to Scapa Flow, and we operated in the North Atlantic with the British Home Fleet, I'd say six or eight months. We were up there in the so-called Land of the Midnight Sun, off Norway. We were based at Scapa Flow, which is in the northern part of Great Britain, or the Scottish islands there. That was the main base for the British Home Fleet. We used to operate with a big battleship called the Duke of York, and there was another big British battleship up there, I can't remember the exact name.

Interviewer: These were merely patrol assignments? You didn't actually get into any engagements in the North Atlantic, did you?

Shriver: No, we didn't get into any engagements. They were continually trying to make forays, as they called them, along the coast of Norway, in hopes that one of those big German ships like the Bismarck would come out of those fjords in Norway where they were hiding. There was the von Tirpitz and the Bismarck, if I remember correctly. They were up in those fjords, and there would be these scouting efforts, and maneuvers. [Tape stopped.]

Interviewer: You mentioned, Mr. Shriver, you were combing through *Old Nameless* by Sidney Shallet there, and you ran across a name that was familiar to you?

Shriver: Oh, yes, there was an officer on the South Dakota that was a good friend of mine, named William Wooster (?), and he was a full lieutenant at the time. He was in command of the antiaircraft batteries in the after part of the ship. Here it is at the Peace Corps now, twenty-five years later--and his son, William Wooster, Junior, is working here at the Peace Corps.

Interviewer: Is he one of your fieldworkers, or here in the Peace Corps headquarters?

Shriver: He's here in the Peace Corps headquarters.

Interviewer: According to your staff, you had another coincidence the other day. A new member of the Peace Corps to whom you'd sent a congratulatory letter and also sent one to the father and mother as you normally do?

Shriver: That was extraordinary. I think it was after the battle of Savo Island. There was this boy named Johnson who was a gunner's mate. He was a very good gunner's mate, and he was

killed. After the battle was over, I wrote a letter to his mother, telling her about this boy's death. I got a nice letter back, a month or two later, from the family, thanking me for writing. Things like that go out of your mind and you forget all about them. But then about two or three weeks ago, I got a letter from a man named Johnson up in Massachusetts, to ask me whether by any chance I could have been the person who wrote to his mother about this fellow being killed in the battle of Savo Island, because he had gotten a copy of the letter from me to his daughter, this man's daughter, welcoming her into the Peace Corps. And he looked at the two signatures, the one I'd written to his mother twenty-some years ago, and the one I wrote to his daughter. He said they looked alike. And sure enough, I'd written this man's mother about his brother, who was killed, and now I was writing the same man about his daughter who joined the Peace Corps. It was a real coincidence.

Interviewer: Small world isn't it? Well, after your North Atlantic operations, did you leave the South Dakota then?

Shriver: Yes, the South Dakota came back from serving with the British Home Fleet--we were up there about six or eight months--and it came to Norfolk, to the Navy yard at Norfolk. I had applied for service in the submarine force, before we went to Europe, and when we got back, my orders came through, approving my transfer from the South Dakota to New London. To the submarine school at New London. So I left the South Dakota--this must have been in October, sometime like that, of 1943. And I went to submarine school.

Interviewer: Your staff was telling me a story earlier about you were in San Francisco after the war when the South Dakota put in--was it San Francisco or San Diego?

Shriver: The South Dakota came back, and Admiral Halsey was on board. I had a good time that day. This was after the war was over. The South Dakota was coming back, and she was flying the flag of Admiral Halsey, the Commander-in-Chief of the Third Fleet. San Francisco--and California--were all decked out for the returning war heroes. I'd gotten back, I guess maybe a month, before the South Dakota did. I was in San Francisco visiting, and I thought well, gosh, I ought to get out to my old ship and see some of my shipmates. I made an application to go out, and I found out there were no vessels being allowed to go out. The returning ships were steaming in under the Golden Gate Bridge, with firehoses squirting, and airplanes zooming around, and all shipping had been ruled off San Francisco Harbor.

But I managed to finagle my way onto a launch, which was bringing the governor of California out to greet Admiral Halsey. At that time it was Governor Warren, now Supreme Court Justice--Chief Justice Warren. There was the mayor of San Francisco, the Commandant of the Navy on the West Coast, the Commandant of the Army on the West Coast, and one or two other dignitaries of that level. I sneaked on the rear--I was a lieutenant in an old beaten up Navy uniform, and I sort of hid in the hold, while this snappy cruiser went out and came alongside the South Dakota, and they all got out and started up the accommodation ladder. Of course, I was the last one to get out, being the most junior guy there. I came up to the top, and I'd never seen the South Dakota look so splendid. The whole commanding staff of Admiral Halsey were all lined up there. Admiral Spruance was there, everybody was in spit and polish, they were playing "Ruffles and Flourishes," the Navy band was out there, and I came up over the side. I saluted the flag and then I turned around and saluted the officer of the deck, which is the procedure you follow, and there was one of my best friends who was the officer of the deck, and he nearly dropped his spyglass--you used to have to carry a spyglass--and I said hello, and he said welcome aboard.

So I was sort of part of the official party, and had to go down the lineup of people. And the next thing, I found myself shaking hands with Admiral Halsey. I looked at him and I didn't know what to say. But as that cliché in the Navy, I shook hands and I said, "Admiral Halsey, my name is Lieutenant Shriver. Well done." So I congratulated Admiral Halsey on the South Dakota. To me it was really funny, because I'd never seen--when you're on a big ship like the South Dakota, you never see anybody like Admiral Halsey or Admiral Spruance. You get to see, by accident, maybe, some admiral like that. When we were in the Navy Yard at Pearl Harbor, one time we were in dry dock, and Admiral Nimitz came on board. He was Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet at that time. Everybody nearly dropped dead because he just walked on just like anybody else. Which was not customary in the Navy, prior to wartime. He just came on like everybody else, and I was there, and I met him--because he was the highest ranking admiral who ever came on there, except for Halsey. But you don't see many admirals when you're an ensign or a lieutenant junior grade in the Navy.

One time I remember coming back through Washington during the war, and I stopped by the Navy Department. I was getting pretty salty, and I'd been out there for a couple of years and been in a couple of battles, and I was a lieutenant. And my god, y'know, they wouldn't give a lieutenant a job emptying the ash cans in the Navy Department. The lowest ranking fellow around there was a captain, practically, and the rest of the people all had admiral's uniforms on. It was the first time I ever saw so many high-ranking officers in my life. So it was quite an experience for me to go on that ship when Halsey came back, being the hero of the war, on the South Dakota.

Interviewer: As a civilian later, did you ever get to know the admiral and to refresh his memory on this humorous incident?

Shriver: No, I never did, although I did know his son. A very nice guy, a son of his I used to see after the war was over, in California.

Interviewer: Are you still a reserve officer?

Shriver: No, I was one of those that retired. I can't remember exactly when it was, but quite a while ago. I retired as a lieutenant commander.

Interviewer: How did you get your original commission?

Shriver: I joined something which was called the V-7. I joined up in 1940. I was in law school at the time, and this plan the Navy established made it possible for some fellow like myself who was in law school to take off the summer, which I did in 1940. I spent the summer of 1940 at sea on USS Arkansas, as an apprentice seaman. We slept in hammocks and wore bellbottom trousers and made our shore leaves along with everybody else. Went down to Guantanamo Bay. It was really terrific. It was a great experience. We learned drills and we learned how to handle ourselves at sea, and learn the Navy operating procedures. Standing watch, all that type of thing--firing the guns.

And then you could go back, as I did, and finish law school, and then come back in the next summer, which was '41. So I graduated from law school in June of '41 and went right on active duty with the Navy. And that time I was a midshipman, and I went to school for two or three months as a midshipman, and at the end of the midshipman training, which was I think in September, I became an ensign. And then the Navy--the war still wasn't on, and the Navy permitted me to take off for about thirty days to take the New York state bar examination. I did do that. I took off for thirty days, passed the bar examination, I think the exams were given on a Thursday and Friday, and then the next Monday, I was back in the Navy. I was on active duty with the Navy at the time the war started.

Interviewer: As you look back, what's the outstanding thing you remember about the South Dakota and your service thereon?

Shriver: That's a big question. I guess that night action off Guadalcanal is the thing I will never forget. There's lots of things I will never forget, but that was one of them. I'll never forget some of the officers I met, and the men, on that ship. One of my best friends, quite a bit senior to me at the time, a regular Navy officer who was on the South Dakota, just was made an admiral a few weeks ago. His name is Charlie Linden. He was a lieutenant in the original crew that put the South Dakota into commission. He was a fine officer and a really great fellow. I'll never forget when I arrived at the Philadelphia Navy Yard--I was just an ensign--and I didn't know anything about just the routine procedures for getting yourself onto the ship. Charlie Linden was a full lieutenant in the Navy--he was an Annapolis fellow--took one look at me, and I guess he said, boy, here's a real rube. I'll help this guy out. He shepherded me through the whole procedure, and it was typical of him that he'd take the trouble to do that. But in answer to your question, I think that night action off Guadalcanal would probably be the thing I remember most about that ship.

Interviewer: You hear a lot of people say--it looks like they could be killed, and their life flashes before them. Do you recall what your personal reaction was?

Shriver: My life never flashed before me, I can tell you that. I'm glad it didn't. The thing that scared me the most was--that very night--our ship had taken all these hits as I told you, and the communications from the top of the ship--that is, from this foremast--it was a great foremast, and it had lots of officers all the way up and down, who were in spotting positions, and they were all hooked up by telephones. I was about a quarter of the way up that mast, and all the communications were shot out. Part of our ship was on fire, and it was the middle of the night, we had lost four destroyers there, I'd seen men churned up in the waters, there were guys all around the place shot to pieces, and there was blood all over the place, and half of a person's body would be lying in the passageway, and the executive officer--Commander Ullinger--got me on the phone, and he said, "Shriver, can you get up that foremast? There's an awful lot of people up on that foremast who are hurt." And also there are some things burning up there that disclose our position to an enemy. If you're on fire at night, it's obviously very easy to see you. He said, "Can you get up that tower, and put out those things that are on fire?" And help those guys that are either dead or dying up there.

Let me tell you, one place I did not want to go, was up that tower. It was really horrible. You'd be going up the ladder and half the steps would be--the rungs would be shot out. There were these gaping holes that you couldn't see because it was midnight. You could just fall right down through a hole and maybe go four or five decks down. What's more, it stunk so. God, it smelled terrible. It was all these--blood and guts and skin and bones all over the place. And in the middle of it, you could hear these guys groaning. You really couldn't see them. You could feel them. I swear to God, the last thing I ever wanted to do was go up that tower. He said can you go up there and I said sure I could go up there.

I started up that tower, and I'll never forget that climb up that tower as long as I live. Y'know, you get your very good friend up there, lying there, shot, with bullet shrapnel, all you could do would be to give the guy a shot of morphine, and I don't like to have people sticking needles into me, and I don't really like sticking them into other people. But it was really grizzly. And then I got up there, and here was this great big stack (funnel), and sure enough, floating back over that funnel were these pieces of signal flags, and they were all burning. So the problem was to walk out to where these flag fragments were burning and grab them and

throw them down so they wouldn't any longer expose our position. And it was really, to me, it was damn scary because you had to walk out on a very little ledge and hold onto a wire and grab these flags, and we were doing about twenty-five knots through the middle of the night, and screaming in the wind, and all these people up there sick and wounded, and the people screaming, and the blood and the stink and everything, boy, I really hated that. My life did not flash in front of my eyes, but I wouldn't like to get many more experiences like that.

Interviewer: Were you able to get out and get the flags?

Shriver: Oh, yeah, we got the flags and got them down, and then I carried them back down. There really wasn't an awful lot you could do. I think we lost--we must have lost twenty-five or thirty men up in that tower. This admiral that I'm telling you about, Charlie Linden, could tell you a great deal about that. Several of his very good friends were killed in that tower.

Interviewer: Do you see a corollary between Lieutenant Robert Sargent Shriver, Junior, U.S.N., fighting man, one of many but a fighting man nevertheless, fighting for democracy, and Sargent Shriver, the director of the Peace Corps? Do you feel there is a corollary?

Shriver: I don't know whether it's a corollary, but I will say I learned many things in the Navy which have helped me in trying to manage the Peace Corps today. In addition, I think, and I hope, it isn't any longer feasible to settle differences between people by armed warfare. Therefore we have to have new ways of expressing our belief in our system of government or our conception of man. One of the ways of expressing belief in the American system of government and in our philosophy of man is by serving in something like the Peace Corps. By doing that I think in a sense we are bearing witness to what has made our country great, just as the people do in wartime by fighting. I think now we're waging the peace. I don't know who it was that said it, but it's true: "It's more difficult to wage peace than it is to wage war." The Peace Corps is in the business of waging peace. It's a very difficult business, but in my judgment it is just as important as waging war.

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