

**Interviewee:** Maddox, Emery  
**Interviewer:** Robin Sellers  
**Date of interview:** April 12, 2005  
**Category:** World War II  
**Status:** Open  
**Tape location:** Box #50

**Sellers:** Mr. Maddox, if you'll just go ahead and before we get into your World War II experiences, tell me a teeny bit about where you were born and where you grew up.

**Maddox:** I was born in Apalachicola, moved to Tallahassee in 1925 – I was probably six or eight months old, and I've lived here most all my life, with the exception of about four years in service during World War II and five years in Georgia after I graduated from college at Florida State. But the rest of the time I've been here, and I know this city real well. I grew up on the east side of town out near – I don't know if you know where Godfrey Smith, his home is – I was about two blocks away and we were neighbors out there. They're wonderful people. But anyway, I know Tallahassee quite well.

**Sellers:** You went to school here?

**Maddox:** Yes, after World War II, I started college at Auburn and went one semester and then transferred down – that was the middle of 1946 – transferred down to Florida State. Well, then it was the Tallahassee Branch of the University of Florida. It really became that in, I think, September.

**Sellers:** May of '47.

**Maddox:** '47, that's right. Legislature voted that in the spring. But we started college in – they allowed the male students to come in in September. I really started in the summertime. I started in June. And I don't know if this had been allowed before that time or not, but they allowed some male students to go to school in the summer.

**Sellers:** Yes, that was part of the legislature's approval for both schools all the way through the years, that opposite sex could attend classes in the summer.

**Maddox:** I wasn't aware of that, no.

**Sellers:** It had to do with teacher training and they were training male students and female students, giving them updates on their teaching credits and things, so the summertime was the only time that the teachers had off to go to school, that they would let them attend. But they were never allowed to get their degree from there until '47.

**Maddox:** Well, that was a good plan but I didn't know that.

**Sellers:** Before we get into attending FSCW's campus and all the girls and things, tell me about what you were doing as World War II showed up on the horizon and what your thoughts were about it and things like that.

**Maddox:** Two months after I graduated from high school, which is early June of 1942 – two months afterwards, I volunteered for the Navy. I guess in my senior year we were in war, and I was a normal kid, I guess, I was immature about the war happening. I remember when Pearl Harbor happened, when the bombing occurred, and the great news and the shock of the whole world including our country. The first question I asked was, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" [laughs] Honolulu - I knew where that was. But pretty quickly we got educated where it was. That, I suppose, got me thinking a little bit once the war got started and progressed for six months until my graduation. I knew they were just calling up a lot of men to go into service.

**Sellers:** Did any of the students in your senior class leave school to join?

**Maddox:** I think there were two or three, but I don't remember who they were. Some of those, they were in the class before me but they had missed a course or two and so they were pushed into a half-year class. Those people did go ahead and volunteer and go in because they had to enter the workforce or go into service. Of course, I was in high school. At the time I graduated, I was not ready for college, I didn't have any money to go to college, and I was just not mature enough, really, to challenge college and get into it. I guess the war just said, "Go ahead and get in because I'm going to be in service in a matter of six or eight months, anyway." I went downtown to the federal office (where the federal building is now on Park Avenue) and went into the Navy recruiting office and talked to them – by myself (and my parents did not know anything about this, of course)[laughs].

**Sellers:** Were you eighteen yet?

**Maddox:** I was eighteen; I had been eighteen about three months. So I went home and told my parents that I had talked to the Navy recruiting office and I wanted to go on in the Navy. They were apprehensive. They were reasonable and then they said, "If that's what you want, we will sign the papers," or "we will agree." They did sign papers, but I think if you were eighteen they didn't have to. Seventeen, I think they did. But anyway, I decided I would go in, and so I volunteered. They sent me to Jacksonville and I took the oath in Jacksonville with about 100 other men. Then they put us on a troop train and sent us to Norfolk, Virginia, which was a huge Navy base. Still is, but it was one of the originals. I was up there for six weeks, from August to September, and in boot training or basic training. They had shortened their basic training at that time from three months down to six weeks because they needed more men in service. They were building a lot more ships, Navy ships as well as the Merchant Marine. We were quite a bit short of ships when we got in the war; it was kind of a shock to us. We really were not prepared.

At the end of basic training, I came home on leave because – an unusual circumstance – a

close family friend was killed in an airplane crash. He was in the Air Force. And they asked me if I wanted to go home for the funeral. I said, “Yes,” of course I did. I came home for about a week and went back, and when I got back there my training unit, which was about eighty men (they call them platoons), they were still there in Norfolk; they had been quarantined because two the men had mumps [laughs]. So I went back with the same group. They assigned us into the Armed Guard. They called us out on the ramp, two or three chief petty officers, and told us — they called out about half of us, the names, and said, “You guys are being assigned to the Armed Guard.” We said, “What is that?” We had no idea what it was. The chief said, kind of with a twinkle in his eye, he said, “Well, you guys will find out.”

Anyway, we did find out pretty shortly; it was providing Navy security protection on board merchant ships. We were called gun crews, or gunnery crews. They sent us over to Little Creek, which was about forty miles from Norfolk, and we went through gunnery training with machine guns and 20-millimeter cannons and then the bigger guns, the 5-inch .38s and the .450s and the .350s. We were about five or six weeks in training there and then they assigned us. Most of us there went to New Orleans to a new armed guard base. They had three armed guard bases in the United States at the time – One was New Orleans, one was Brooklyn, New York, and the other one was San Francisco. We went down to – on a troop train they sent us to New Orleans, and we had a little more training then on some other drills on guns. Then they assigned us to a Liberty ship. A Liberty ship was being loaded there in New Orleans and Liberty ships were, of course, the new ships that were being built, as they could be built fast, because they were partially prefabricated.

They assigned us to a Liberty ship; there was twenty-eight gunnery crew members to a Liberty ship and about forty Merchant Marine. Now, of the twenty-eight Navy crew, most of them were gunnery people, but we had two signalmen, Navy signalmen, that went aboard, along with an executive officer that normally was an ensign or a lieutenant. He was in charge of the crew. We had two or three petty officers that were either coxswains or gunner’s mates. They were the petty officers that were in charge of the rest of the seaman. We were inexperienced; we’d been trained on gunnery and signal work. But we went aboard there and we were on board about a week or ten days and then they sent us to San Juan, Puerto Rico, loaded with construction material.

**Sellers:** Who did the Merchant Marine take their orders from? Because they were not actually in the service.

**Maddox:** No, they were not. I’ve forgotten the governmental agency that ran the Merchant Marine in wartime. Of course, all of the ships owner prior to that time were independent. But I’ve forgotten the name of the organization.

**Sellers:** I just wondered if you took orders from the Merchant Marine men or if they could take orders from you if they needed to or you needed them to or just what the hierarchy was.

**Maddox:** We were entirely separate. We had separate quarters on the ship. Fortunately, with Liberty ships, they were newly designed, and when they designed them, they were able to modify the design in such a way that they could put the Navy crews in certain quarters. In fact,

even the mess hall where we had our meals was separate. Now they were on the same side of the ship, and we were separated from the Merchant crew by a small galley that was about five or six feet wide, and there was a pass through the galley for food going to each of the mess areas. We had two tables; all of the tables, of course, were secured down to the deck.

**Sellers:** So the Merchant Marine men were there to run the ship and you all were there to protect the ship?

**Maddox:** Right, that's right.

**Sellers:** And your jobs did not entwine?

**Maddox:** Did not in any way at all. We got along quite well. There was a few ships, I think, where there was animosity between the Navy and the Merchant Marine, but that usually did not happen. We knew a few of those people, but normally we hung together, we sat out on the deck or we were in our quarters, maybe talking, or in the small mess room we had. In the evenings, there was a card game very often in the Merchant side in their mess hall. They would play cards or sometimes poker and their mess hall was a little bit larger than ours. In ours, we could feed sixteen at a time. However, under battle conditions several merchant marines volunteered help, such as passing ammunition.

**Sellers:** So you ate in shifts?

**Maddox:** Yeah, we ate in shifts. We had about a twenty-eight Navy crew on board and there was forty Merchant Marines, so they outnumbered us some. But the ship operation was under control of the master, or the captain of the ship, and he had a first mate, a second mate, a third mate, and he had a purser, which was the business manager of the ship, so to speak. We did not have any doctor at all. The purser had some medical training quite often, which was strictly emergency basis. In the Navy, we didn't have any corpsmen with our group at all. We did occasionally have a radioman, but at sea back in wartime then, even that early when I went in in late '42, you didn't communicate by radio hardly at all. It was all done with visual signals.

**Sellers:** Semaphore.

**Maddox:** Right, semaphore flags and pennants and blinker lights. So our operations weren't distinctly separate. We provided five men at a time at all times, twenty-four hours a day, on watch while we were at sea. These five men were located around the ship where they had a certain segment they would look-out or scan. The watch was for submarines or for other ships that might be coming in close contact with us in convoy. Each of the watch men had a telephone. You wore your telephone with a speaker so you could talk to the bridge at anytime.

**Sellers:** Like a headset?

**Maddox:** Right, it was a headset. The master was in control of the ship all the time except when we got under battle conditions. He and the Navy officer worked together, but the Navy officer could direct the master to turn the ship forty-five degrees in a certain direction or full-speed ahead or whatever. The Navy officer in charge took those actions as preventive measures against some enemy. If it was a situation involving heavy seas or fog or something, the master was still in charge, but we had to get under battle in order for the ensign or the lieutenant to take control of the ship. But anyway, it was a good operation and it worked smoothly and we never had a particular problem.

**Sellers:** Now, you started out before I interrupted you to say that your first cruise was to San Juan?

**Maddox:** We went to San Juan and we went down there with eight ships in convoy, and we were not escorted on that particular trip. There were a few submarines in the Caribbean – the Germans had planned to move the operation on into the Caribbean because we were sending a lot of ships out of New Orleans and Texas and Tampa and down in the Caribbean. We'd take supplies; we'd bring oil back sometimes. Sometimes it'd be bauxite that they would make certain things out of, but they mined bauxite down in South America. They were building an air base in Puerto Rico. We went to San Juan; we went to that air base harbor. We dropped off supplies and went to Ponce, which is a nice Puerto Rican village. They had a small square there.

Then we left and came on back up with a few other ships to New York and New York harbor. They took us into Hoboken. There were harbors all over the New York harbor – Brooklyn, Hoboken, New Jersey. They began outfitting our ship with a heavy reinforced bow and with cork insulation on the exterior bulkheads. That got our attention a little bit because we began to speculate, well, this had to do with cold weather. The reinforced bow had to do with breaking ice. They loaded for about ten days, and we loaded a lot of munitions and we had other general cargo. We left New York in convoy. You'd come out of the harbor and the ships would come out in single file, not in any particular organized manner except they'd been ordered to exit the port and to form at sea (the convoy). So it takes perhaps a day or so to get the convoy organized and together, because the convoys back then ran anywhere from fifty ships up to — one convoy I was in was ninety-six ships. That is a tremendous and a huge convoy. But there was a lot of supplies having to be shipped to England.

**Sellers:** And in '42 and '43, the subs in the North Atlantic were ferocious.

**Maddox:** They were a real terror. I think we started the convoy system in the early part of '42. They apparently developed it in late '41 when they saw submarines were just picking off ships everywhere, and ships had no guns. There was a lot of cases where the submarines would surface and they wouldn't fire their torpedo – because they had twelve or fourteen or sixteen torpedoes, depending on the sub – they would surface and use their deck gun to sink the ship. And the ship would be running along as best it could. Most of those Merchant ships could not do over ten or eleven knots.

**Sellers:** That wasn't exactly fast.

**Maddox:** Submarines, they could run about twenty-two knots or so on the surface. In fact, in late '42 and early '43, we couldn't get enough guns on the ships. The first thing they did was put some dummies on there. They took – you might say telephone poles – they were smaller than that but they were poles, approximately fifteen-twenty feet long, and they painted them black, mounted some sort of a mounting down there and they'd put them on the stern of the ship and maybe a couple of other places they'd have something that would simulate a gun. That kept the submarines from surfacing [laughs].

**Sellers:** They thought they were anti-aircraft guns.

**Maddox:** I'm sure they chuckled about that, the Germans did, sometime after they found out.

**Sellers:** They may not have chuckled [laughs].

**Maddox:** [laughs] Right. But anyway, they did that. The Liberty ship was a beautiful ship to me because I was on three of them for about three years, and that's the only ship I knew. They had some older ships that had been built back in the 1920s, and they could barely make eight knots. The convoy can only go as fast as the slowest ship can go. I don't know how they arranged the quarters on some of those ships, because the quarters were normally built for the Merchant seaman in non-wartime periods. When you load about ten more – say on a smaller ship you might have thirty-five Merchant Marines and when you try to put ten more Navy guys on there, I don't know how they did that.

**Sellers:** Plus military equipment, like guns. The weight is considerable, too.

**Maddox:** But anyway, our ship was well-equipped. This is a Liberty ship [shows picture]. It was designed to transport 10,000 tons.

**Sellers:** They always surprise me at how big they are. I always expect them to be about the size of a PT boat for some reason.

**Maddox:** Well, these Liberty ships are 440 feet long. This is one loaded and he's riding heavy at sea. This is one that's empty. This is a photograph, of course – this ship, there's only three of them left, including two Liberties and one Victory ship. Actually, there's two Liberty ships left; there's one on the East Coast, and it is docked in Baltimore, Maryland. They maintain it, and the armed guard veterans are keeping up the guns – they remounted guns on them, so we have the guns we had in World War II. We have another one in San Francisco.

**Sellers:** San Francisco - the *Jeremiah O'Brien*.

**Maddox:** Yes, and the *John Brown* is on the East Coast.

**Sellers:** What's the one in Baltimore? The *John Brown*?

**Maddox:** Yeah. But the guns are mounted all about the ship. Up here is a 3-inch .50 and you can see it. There's a bigger gun here. And they have two .20 millimeters here. All three of these guns, the .350 and the .20 millimeters, can all fire surface or air, either way.

**Sellers:** And they swivel, don't they?

**Maddox:** They swivel and they can point almost straight up.

**Sellers:** Do they swivel 360 degrees?

**Maddox:** Yes. You could do that but —

**Sellers:** Sometimes you shoot off your mast?

**Maddox:** [laughter] That's right. You can never tell when the excitement starts. They had four .20 millimeters on the bridge - one here, one here, one here, one back here on the bridge aft. Then they had two more 20 millimeters back here on stern, plus a big gun (eight 20mms total). The big gun back here was normally larger than the bow gun. Some of these were old guns. The 4-inch .50 fired a shell that was almost three feet long and about 4-inch .50 wide. So it was a bundle to load up and slam in there and fire it. Then they had 5-inch .38s back here, which was a newer and a modern gun. But that was the arrangement of the Liberty ships.

**Sellers:** Was there a gunner always at a gun?

**Maddox:** No.

**Sellers:** Only if you were at battle position?

**Maddox:** They called it general quarters. Whenever they rang the general alarm, well then you went to battle stations.

**Sellers:** Where was your assigned battle station?

**Maddox:** Well, it depended on the trip and the crew. Normally, if one crew stayed on the ship, you normally would be on the same gun for the whole trip.

**Sellers:** So you weren't a specialist on a particular spot?

**Maddox:** No, we had to know them all.

**Sellers:** You could go anywhere that they needed you?

**Maddox:** Right. The next ship assigned, there'd be different crews, and they just took names – they would assign usually two men to each 20-millimeter and there was about five men for the two big guns. You had to have a loader on a 20-millimeter. They have a magazine that was almost two feet big and it probably weighs about sixty or seventy pounds, and you have the magazines, they're in the gun tub around you. Usually, even when your under battle conditions, you normally don't fire more than one or two of these magazines. But you have to lift them up and jack them into the top of the gun. It's a little more unwieldy than a machine gun. But they're really machine cannons is what they are, and they fire a shell that's almost eight inches long and the projectile that goes up is almost big as your thumb. But they are rapid fire – they're like a machine gun, and every fourth shell is a tracer.

**Sellers:** So you can tell where they're going.

**Maddox:** Yeah, if you're behind a plane, you can pull forward, you can catch up with him, you know? You can see where you're firing and where you're missing. The bigger guns did not use tracer shells. And you set the bigger guns at fuses, depending on the elevation. If the plane's up higher, let's say at 2,000 or 4,000 feet, well, then you quickly set the fuse in the nose of the shell, or loaded pre-set shells to reach certain elevations or distances.

**Sellers:** How did you determine your trajectory? Was it just dead reckoning by eyesight?

**Maddox:** It was.

**Sellers:** You didn't have anybody that was figuring it out with calculus and telling you what azimuth and —?

**Maddox:** Nope. Back in those days they just did not have the technology to do those things. But quite a number of planes were shot down.

**Sellers:** There were no forward spotters, huh?

**Maddox:** No. There were not [laughs]. Sometimes it got a little amusing. We had an attack in the Mediterranean off North Africa. Torpedo planes came in – the Germans from southern France. We knew they were coming; we got the warning just before dark. The first torpedo plane came in – we were a lead ship in the convoy, and he was coming low on the water looking for the convoy, as a matter of fact, and he banked in front of us. This gun up here – you had five gunners there. One of them is a trainer and one of them is a pointer. The trainer has to train the gun (left/right), he has to crank it, and it's on a geared basis at the base. The pointer elevates the gun, and he's the one that pulls the trigger.

**Sellers:** So one of them is left and right and one of them is up and down.

**Maddox:** Right. And it was somewhat amusing in this particular attack we had that as this plane came by, the gun was pointed to the port a little bit and the plane was flying from port to starboard, off the ship perhaps 200 yards, maybe. This gun was trying to keep up with him, to catch up with him, to fire the shell. The guy on the right was the trainer, and he was cranking that gun as fast as he could crank it to swing it, and the pointer on the left was saying, "Crank, dammit! Crank!" The guy on the right was just standing up in his seat, just trying to get the gun moved. Anyway, we finally got off four or five shots at him.

**Sellers:** Did you hit the plane?

**Maddox:** Our ship got credit for bringing down that plane. The .20-millimeters also fired. They started firing on this side, these right here [showing photo], and the others on the other side picked it up. We don't know who else fired, such as the bridge 20mms..

**Sellers:** Take me through a typical cruise, from the time you mounted your convoy and left port until you got to where on the other side of the Atlantic you were going. Can you do that?

**Maddox:** Yes. I made seven crossings during those three years at sea, and six of them were in the Atlantic. The last trip was to the Pacific. As we came out, normally it would take us eighteen to twenty day to get to Europe. Our ship usually went to England somewhere. After we got at sea, we were assigned on watches and, of course, that was twenty-four hours a day. And so you always had five men on watch plus a signalmen in the daytime. Two signalmen – we had somewhat of an advantage – I was a gunner for about half my experience and then I was a signalmen for the last half. I just got interested in signal work and went into training while we were at sea, as a matter of fact. But anyway, we would leave and we'd be in convoy and the convoy was formed like probably a big rectangle, with the widest part facing the direction you're going. That caused the Germans to — it gave them less chance to line up with a lot of ships. Sometime a submarine would have difficulty catching, if they spotted a convoy, catching up. Sometimes we would just be — what we called rows were across the convoy and there would just be six or eight rows, but we might have fifteen or twenty columns. We were simply assigned to a place in a convoy and normally side to side, starboard to port, we would be from the other ship perhaps 300 yards, 200 yards.

**Sellers:** What was the ratio of ships to armed escorts, like you all?

**Maddox:** We normally had eight, ten, sometimes twelve escorts, a ratio of about 5:1. They were assigned the perimeter all the way around the convoy. We had two or three in front and on the sides and in stern behind the convoy. They were constantly working back and forth, and they would get soundings for subs and they would race over to that point and drop depth charges. We could hear the depth charges; sometimes if you were close enough, you could see them. It would just be a dull boom. So there was not a lot of excitement except that we were uneasy not knowing — The Germans, once we got into convoy, they learned that their best method to catch

these convoys going to Europe was to put out wolfpacks of submarines. They actually had some wolfpacks that were up to twenty or twenty-two submarines assigned to the North Atlantic. They would stretch out – they would be on the surface very often, stretching out across the sea about every five miles or eight miles. So with twenty submarines, they could cover an expanse of the ocean, and they were trying to find the shipping lanes. The first submarine that spotted – they looked for smoke from the stacks of the convoy ships. They could see the smoke usually before they saw the ship. The first submarine that saw a ship or the convoy, then he would radio to France. He would never radio between submarines; he would radio back to the base in France. France issued orders directly to all the submarines in the wolfpack to race to this location. Once they got there – it was just a cat and mouse thing. They would frantically get there as fast as they could. They would just try to pick off ships. Of course, they had some problems. They had the corvettes and the destroyers and the PCs racing around. They knew they were being hunted, so it was a little difficult for them to get on target with a ship. But they would pick off a ship here and there. They very often got stragglers of the convoys – a ship breaks down and he just drifts out of the convoy. Sometimes they would leave a corvette with him for a while, but the corvette or the destroyer had to catch up with the convoy, and the Germans would just pick them off. They sort of hung around the backs of the convoys and kept them in sight because that happened very frequently – an older ship would just break down. Anyway, that’s how the convoy business went about.

**Sellers:** When you went into England, what ports did you go into?

**Maddox:** We went to various ports, but I was in Liverpool three or four times. It was a huge harbor, and they had adjacent harbors to Liverpool. But that was a big unloading point for the Allies back during World War II. It was somewhat safe from the German bombers. It was on the west coast and sort of opposite Ireland. We went into Liverpool our first trip. We actually were assigned the — that first trip when we got the cold-weather gear, we were assigned to go to Russia. I guess we got up near Iceland and they diverted us. We stayed in a gale for about five days. We were injured; our ship did crack. Three other ships cracked in convoy and they broke in two.

**Sellers:** What would cause that?

**Maddox:** Well, it’s the constant stress – in our case it’s five days of a gale, and when seas are sixty feet high (and that was the worst conditions that we ever had) the ship rides up — these waves are a couple hundred feet apart, but your ship rides up these heavy waves and then they come down and meet the next wave. It’s just a big stress on the ship. If the ship is somewhat empty, like it was sometimes coming back from Europe, there would put a ballast in just to keep you under control. But when you’re hitting heavy seas like that, and if you were standing on the stern, it would almost bounce you off the deck. The ship has a certain amount of springiness to it. Liberty ships, we didn’t know until way later, that they were subject to breaking in two because they were welded ships, they were not riveted ships. Our ship cracked all the way across the deck and almost down to the waterline; that was about the third or fourth day into that storm. The Merchant – I really give my hat off to the Merchant crew. They put two or three

hawsers – steel cables that were approximately an inch-and-a-half in diameter – all the way from the stern all the way to the bow on both sides of the ship, tightened up with the winches to keep the ship from trying to flex down and break in two. Anyway, we managed to get through the storm and they diverted us to Belfast. We went in there for repairs.

**Sellers:** How far out of Belfast were you when you headed that way?

**Maddox:** We were likely four or five days.

**Sellers:** So you just held on?

**Maddox:** Yeah, we held on. And everybody stayed in their life jackets. Most all of us stayed somewhere on the deck. We were off and on the bridge, but we were someplace where we could get on deck in a hurry. I guess we slept; we probably dozed, because you had to get some sleep. But when you're laying in your bunk and you feel your ship riding up and riding up, slowly, on top of one of these waves – and you can feel it – and you know it's coming down, and it tilts down, and then you meet that next wave into those heavy seas – and that bow just disappears. That sea just comes over the bow and the ship just struggles back up. It takes half a minute or so and water just pours off of it. But anyway, it's an experience that we all had. It gets a little bit exciting [laughs].

**Sellers:** I'll bet it does [laughs].

**Maddox:** Very often you had deck cargo that you put on there. After you load the ship, we would put airplanes and sometimes small locomotives. We had a big cargo of Army trucks and they had to put some of them in crates, and they'd cable those down to the deck. And in heavy seas, those cables began to break lose for various reasons. I remember Army jeeps, brand new trucks, going off into the sea and standing on this wing of the bridge looking down at that. I never had a vehicle in my life, at that young life, and thinking, "if I just had that vehicle," [laughs] — watched it go to the bottom.

**Sellers:** And you're eighteen and nineteen and twenty years old at this time.

**Maddox:** Out of twenty-eight men, I expect twenty of them were eighteen to twenty. We had very few men that were twenty-five, very few. One guy was probably thirty-five, but he was the oldest guy and that was my last trip.

**Sellers:** What about seasickness? Did you all get your sea legs really quick?

**Maddox:** You get them quick. We ran into a bad storm off Cape Hatteras on our first trip from Puerto Rico up to New York, and even some of the Merchant men that had been at sea, they got sick, too. But after that, very few of us got seasick. We had one man from Jacksonville, a fellow named Robinson, and he had chronic seasickness.

**Sellers:** Why was he in the Navy?

**Maddox:** I guess he didn't know that he would get seasick [laughs]. You began to get swells before you'd get out of the harbor in New York, and he would start getting sick. He would stay sick for eighteen or twenty days until we got to England. Then it took him two or three days to get over that. We were there normally ten days, two weeks, or sometimes longer depending on what we were doing. Then we'd go back to sea. He made just the one trip and he got sick coming back, stayed sick, just – when you really get deathly seasick, you don't care if you die.

**Sellers:** I've heard that. You wish you would.

**Maddox:** Yeah, right. You're afraid you might live. But we got back to, came into Boston on that particular trip, and the officer got him off on shore duty, reassigned him. Well, he was no use at sea, I mean, when you're sick like that. But we stayed on watch. We cleaned our guns everyday or went and checked them. We didn't have to take them down. Parts of the gun we had to take out of the gun and clean it. We mixed kerosene and carbon together, graphite, and put it on the guns because when you got up in real cold weather, if the oil was very heavy, the guns wouldn't fire right – they were just too sticky. Sometimes it was so cold we'd have to take the gun breech apart, hurry it downstairs and do the cleaning of the precision parts and go back up to the gun and put it together.

**Sellers:** What about all of the saltwater affect on the guns if the seas were coming over? How did you protect them from corrosion?

**Maddox:** Well, the exterior of the guns mostly — the larger guns are painted but the gears are exposed, and we'd just have to put heavy grease on those. The .20 millimeters, the exterior surface of that is a very dull finish and it normally will not corrode. So we didn't have to – we usually would wipe the salt spray off of it, the corroded salt on it, but it usually did not rust any of those guns. But in heavy seas, you get a lot of spray that comes all the way back to the bridge from the bow. Even up on the flying bridge, you stay wet from the salt spray coming back. Occasionally we dropped a canvas gun cover over the 20mms. When we were up on this one trip, when we got pretty far north, some of the spray that would come off the bow would freeze by the time it hit the bridge. It would be sleet. But normally we'd be in port for, like I say, ten days, two weeks. This first trip we were at Liverpool a couple of weeks and loaded some ballast, and usually that's some kind of rock or sand or dirt. I don't know where they got all that in England because there was a lot of ships that had to leave England in the wartime. But that's how we would get back.

**Sellers:** Did you ever have any liberty during the time you were in England?

End side A

**Sellers:** Okay, we were talking about liberty.

**Maddox:** Yeah, liberty – we normally were one day on the ship, two days on liberty, so we had our freedom to go where we wanted to. One place in England one time we had very limited liberty because — we were on the east side of England near Hull and Grimsby and the Germans were bombing there, so we had to stay at the guns. But anyway, the normal on-guard crews would be at sea on the ship five months, six months, up to a year or ten months. They often would try to give you a leave of two weeks about every year if they could work that out. So anyway, we stayed on the ships. But we would load up, take our cargo to Europe and drop it off and come back. Most of my trips were in the North Atlantic in the first two years, and then one trip was to the Mediterranean. It took a little bit longer to get there but the seas were a lot calmer.

**Sellers:** And there were less submarines, perhaps.

**Maddox:** Right. We ran into submarines about a day or so before we got to the Rock of Gibraltar. We think that submarine was sunk. It was right in front of the convoy when they picked up his soundings. The destroyer that picked it up had dropped some depth charges and was still chasing him. The submarine went down a column right beside our ship and the other column and the destroyer just said to the captain, “Hold your stations, hold your positions.” He tracked that submarine right straight behind and right on out the back of the convoy. Began to drop depth charges and they got debris from the submarine. But they also left a corvette to stay there for thirty-six hours. Sometimes they’d be damaged down there and the Germans did – in a few cases they released oil just to fool us into thinking they were sunk. But anyway, they left a corvette. We got into the Rock of Gibraltar off of North Africa and that’s when we had the torpedo plane attack — and went into Algiers. We had some tanks on deck and a lot of general cargo in the holds. I didn’t realize until last year sometime when I was doing some research (and I had gotten some copies of the ship’s logs from a government organization) and I traced the ports we went to in the Mediterranean, and we were over there about three months. I thought all these years and just not given it too much thought – we went to Algiers and then Bizerte and went up to Sicily and Naples and came back to North Africa. We picked up about 200 soldiers that had been wounded at Anzio beachhead, which was just above Naples, and they had recovered sufficiently to be able to go back to the front.

**Sellers:** So this would have been early ‘44?

**Maddox:** This was about February of ‘44. February, March, and April we stayed over there. But we shuttled back and forth between North Africa and Naples about four or five times. I had completely forgotten that.

**Sellers:** How can you forget shuttling back and forth between Naples — [laughs]?

**Maddox:** It sort of gets routine, I guess. When we got to Algiers, though, they began to

unload the tanks. They had stevedores - they were the Arabs. One of the cables broke on a tank and dropped it on a stevedore. We were just watching the unloading and a number of our men saw that experience and it was pretty bad. But they gave us liberty there, and of course everything was Arab there and you couldn't - I don't think we walked around town, but through the USO or somebody, they arranged to - they said, "We can take you up into the mountains up to some French chalets." We were puzzled because we didn't believe there were mountains there, certainly not that high. They put us in an Army truck; there was about a dozen of us. We began to travel out of Algiers and slowly climbed, climbed. We weren't aware of it; we were getting chilly, though, and then we began to see snow along the road. So we got up on a little higher elevation and there was a true resort up there. They had a big lodge and there was very few people there at the time because it was wartime, but they did operate the lodge a little bit. We went into the bar, and that was my first experience with - let's see, what was that? Some sort of a drink. But we were cold, and I remember it feeling warm going down my throat. But we had to do something - we were young guys just looking for fun. There was a French guy that had some wooden skis, and I don't remember how we got them onto our shoes, but anyway, we managed to ski around a little bit. It took me about an hour to break a ski. There was a little confrontation with the Frenchman that wanted me to pay for his ski, but I didn't do that. Anyway, that was an experience that we didn't reckon with.

Another nice experience was going to Pompeii when we got to Naples. Mount Vesuvius was erupting when we went in there. In the harbor you can see the big mountain, smoke coming out. Most of the way down the mountain is just gray ash. We got on a little trolley and they took us up to Pompeii. Along the way, the houses, the yards, the fences, stone fences - everything was just charcoal gray from that ash. How the people lived through that, I don't know, but it was an experience. Of course, they've done a lot more to Pompeii since then. But they had uncovered a lot of it, and they had a guy that walked around and told you a few things about the history of it. We enjoyed that. There was nothing else in the Mediterranean that I was impressed by except the fluorescence in the water. Soon as we got past the Rock - I mean, your big screw is twelve, sixteen feet turning and just churning the water, and behind the ship at night it's just boiling with florescent in the water.

**Sellers:** What causes the fluorescence?

**Maddox:** I don't know why that particular sea has that much. You know, from the air an airplane can spot it kind of more easily because you can see that. But anyway, I was impressed with that. We came on back from there to New York.

**Sellers:** You have not mentioned the frozen North Atlantic eyelids.

**Maddox:** Well, that was just one of the experiences of the coldness is that sometime if you stayed up there exposed to it and didn't keep your eyes wiped out, it would freeze. Back then, cold-weather gear was not that good. We wore galoshes over our shoes. We didn't have any fur lining equipment at all. We had gloves and we had face masks. I think the closest experience to danger for me, or losing my life, was just heavy seas and being on the flying bridge. It happened to be - there was only two people on the bridge and that was the mate that was in charge and

the helmsman that ordinarily was under this little cover here; he's steering the ship by compass. I had come up from the back of the flying bridge up here and was coming forward and it was heavy seas - everything was wet. I had foul-weather gear on, my galoshes, and they were rubber, and this whole deck up here is asphalt and it's painted and so everything is fairly slick. The ship heeled way over about forty degrees and I lost my footing and I was right beside the stack. I headed for the side, but right up here on the side there's three little cables that run from back here forward and I just spread-eagled out as I slid. I was looking right down at the sea; the ship was way up over.

**Sellers:** Were you sliding headfirst or feetfirst?

**Maddox:** I was on my butt. My feet went out and I just slid out; I caught the cables, but I was off into the sea if it wasn't for that. Once you go into the sea, in cold weather conditions you can live about thirty minutes, if you're lucky. The ships in the convoy don't stop for you. They have to sail by you. They might throw you a life ring if they see you. We'd run up a flag that indicates man overboard. As soon as they run that up, every ship, all the signalman, everybody on duty are watching ships for flags going up, because that was the way we signaled normally. We ran a flag up and then all the other ships do that immediately. If it's a man overboard, then they immediately start looking for a man.

**Sellers:** And someone coming along behind would possibly be able to hook them or bring them back in?

**Maddox:** Not likely. In heavy seas, just no way to do it.

**Sellers:** So you're gone.

**Maddox:** You're usually gone, but the corvettes or the destroyers, they immediately try to find the person. And they would pull them out of the sea if they could find them. Normally on a ship at sea, and I don't know why, very often there's a line that hangs out the side and goes all the way back. We used to stand up and look down and we used to think, well, if we do ever go off into sea, then we'll try to line up with the ship behind us, and if that line comes by, try to grab it and hang on. Anyway, that was just one of the things we thought about once in a while.

**Sellers:** You say six trips to Europe and one to Pacific?

**Maddox:** Right.

**Sellers:** How did you get shifted across country? Or did you go through the Panama Canal on a ship?

**Maddox:** It had to do with the latter part of the war. We had just been to England and back, back in December of '44. That was about five months before we beat the Germans or the Axis in

Europe. So they were slowing down sending supplies over there. For some reason, they just needed a crew to — we went back to the base in New Orleans. They needed a crew to go and load up supply and go to the Pacific. They sent us up to New York and we went from New York down to Norfolk and loaded up, finished loading up, went down through the Canal and went to the New Hebrides Islands, which is east of Australia. That took about thirty-four days, I believe, from New York to get in the first port at New Hebrides. We were twenty-eight days out of the Panama Canal without sighting land at all. We didn't see anything. We sailed alone; we were not in convoy. By that time, they had really sunk most all the Japanese subs. The few that they hadn't were operating way over in the Pacific.

**Sellers:** So the shipping lanes were pretty open?

**Maddox:** Right, so we just sailed along, and it was beautiful. Compared to the North Atlantic, it was a piece of cake.

**Sellers:** And it was warm.

**Maddox:** And it was warm. We went into the New Hebrides; it's now called Vanuatu, I believe. But we eased in there. The harbor was just between two islands and we eased in there. Normally, a ship this big is helped in by one or two tugs. In New York, normally four tugs would get you into your dock. But over there we got into the dock without a tug and tied up, everything was quiet. I was a signalman then and our quarters were right up here next to the bridge on the rear. It was nice duty because one other signalman and I shared a cabin. That was pretty nice. The rest of the gun crew — these quarters down here, there was a cabin here that was about ten-by-ten, and a cabin over here that was a ten-by-ten, and then one back here that was about probably eighteen-by-eighteen — fifteen men normally back here on the stern, six men in this ten-by-ten cabin, six men over here in this cabin (two cabins amidship). So you didn't have any space. The only space you had was a bunk and a little locker that was one-by-one-by-two feet. The other gear you had, you'd push under the bunk. But you know, you learned to live with that. There were men coming on duty and going off at midnight and four AM, every four hours.

**Sellers:** You didn't need a whole lot of change of clothes, probably.

**Maddox:** No. We stayed dead tired all the time at sea, just about, in the Atlantic particularly. You know, you had eight hours off, but you had to clean the guns and do a few other duties. You had to get your meals in there; we had meals three times a day. If you got off at four o'clock in the morning, then you could go to sleep for about three hours, but you had to get up and get breakfast because there was no other time to do it. So it broke your sleep.

**Sellers:** How did you get your laundry clean?

**Maddox:** We did not have a laundry on the ship. We normally washed our clothes in a

bucket.

**Sellers:** In saltwater?

**Maddox:** No, we had fresh water. That's another thing - we normally had fresh water for everything, showers and toileting. But we had a method that we adapted, usually at stern, back here, where we could insert a pipe of steam into our water to heat the water. We just sloshed the clothing up and down or scrubbed them by hand and rinsed them out in the water. You normally draped them over things; sometimes we had them inside the quarters a little bit but you didn't have much room in there. We had to air dry them; we didn't have a dryer. So that's normally how we did that.

**Sellers:** Where did you run into the kangaroo?

**Maddox:** Well, on our trip to Australia we went to New Hebrides and then from there we went to Russell Islands, which is right next to Guadalcanal. Then we went to New Guinea and then we went up to Leyte Gulf in the Philippines and then back down to Zamboanga, Mindinao, and then back down to New Guinea and back down to Sydney, Australia. Sydney was a great city and a great city for liberty - we had a lot of fun there. In fact, in the whole crew of twenty-eight men, about half of us chipped in and we rented an apartment.

**Sellers:** How long were you there?

**Maddox:** We were there about three weeks. We rented an apartment to give us more spacious living and to have a place quartered in the city. So the guys that were on liberty used the apartment a good bit. A lot of us came back to the ship. But if we were on duty one day out of three we were on the ship. I've always loved milk from the time I was a kid because we always had a milk cow, so I had all the milk I wanted. And I missed that desperately when I was in the Navy. When you're at sea, you'd have milk for two days and that was about it and it was gone. When you got to Europe, you couldn't get milk. But in Australia we had all the milk we needed. I remember once we tied up and got all settled, beginning to bring foodstuffs on board and they brought these five-gallon milk cans, ice cold. I just drank milk until I was full. We left Australia and went up to Townsville, which is on the east coast near the Barrier Reef of Australia. We had some engine trouble and we had to slip into a little town there that was about the size of Havana. So we didn't have anything to do there; we were there about eight days maybe, ten days. We were not unloading foodstuff; we just had the repairs and we had to wait for parts. So we went out into the countryside. We found a rancher out there that had about thirty or forty horses. We commissioned with him to rent horses, and ten or twelve of us would go out there and rent their horses and ride the countryside. He furnished the saddles and we just had a ball.

**Sellers:** Australia was very hospitable to the Americans.

**Maddox:** Very much so, yeah. They had a small zoo that was not far from there; we would ride over to the zoo and get off and walk around and enjoy the small zoo. But they had a pen of half a dozen kangaroos. You know, they're quite docile animals; they run from you if they're in the wild. When we were riding horseback through the hills, we would occasionally see kangaroos. There would be four or five and they'd bound away. But it was kind of a thrill to see that in the wild. But in the zoo there where they had those half a dozen, I decided to walk into the pen. So I opened the gate and went into the pen. I always heard about or had seen these films of boxing with the kangaroo, you know. The kangaroo was sitting on his tail and he was about as tall as I was. I reached out and tapped him on the nose a couple of times just to see what he would do. He naturally, just with his little hoofs, almost like claws – he did that and he scratched my hand, so I grabbed his two hoofs. And I didn't see it coming. He was sitting on his tail, and of course that's part of their defense. He just brought his back feet up and hit me in the stomach and knocked me fifteen feet, knocked me down. All the guys had a good laugh out of that.

**Sellers:** How long did it take to you to get back up?

**Maddox:** Well, it knocked the breath out of me. Knocked me against the fence and I was really shocked and surprised at that. But I did, later, soon after that — I remember when I held his claws, I thought I saw his brow wrinkle up [laughs]. But anyway, that was the kangaroo story.

**Sellers:** You learned to read kangaroo expressions better [laughs]. You mentioned a minute ago that the little port that they brought you into was the size of Havana - Florida or Cuba?

**Maddox:** Havana, Florida. It was small. But they had a little skating rink, a wooden skating rink, with a canvas top. That was the other thing we could do.

**Sellers:** Roller skating?

**Maddox:** Yeah, roller skating. So we did that a few times. There were not many girls that I recall in that small place. I mean, that was not a place to meet girls. When you go to Sydney, there are girls that come down to hang around where the guys are coming on liberty. You know, we're both looking for dates. Anyway, we went from Townsville back into New Guinea and back up to Manila; we went to Manila again.

**Sellers:** Were you in the Pacific when the atomic bombs were dropped or were you back in the States?

**Maddox:** We were halfway between; we left Manila and headed for Hawaii. We were not halfway, but the first bomb had been dropped and we knew about that. Then there was a lot of speculation whether or not the war would end and the second bomb was dropped. Then I think it

was three days later, if I remember right, that the Japanese capitulated. Of course, we were all happy then. From that time on, you could run at night with lights and the whole bit at sea.

**Sellers:** How long did it take you to get back to the States and where'd you come in?

**Maddox:** We came into Pearl Harbor. When you're offshore and looking at a shore that may be five miles away or six, it's hard to pick out a harbor entrance sometimes; it sort of all looks alike. You have to ease your way into them to find a harbor entrance. But we went into Pearl Harbor and anchored around Ford's Island. That's out right there in the harbor. We anchored there and there was a family friend, a Tallahassee friend that lived with us, she was almost like a sister to me, a couple years older. She was there at the time working for the government. You know, I'd get mail back and forth and I knew her location, her address. So when we went in there, I decided I'll go over and see if I can find Ray - that was her name, Ray Weeks. So I went on liberty. I caught a boat; we didn't tie up at a dock; we were at anchor. They had these little water taxis, Navy barges, they run you over to shore. So I went over to the Naval operation or the government operation and inquired about the building and somebody told me, "There's the building you're looking for." I went in and then I inquired about Ray Weeks. They said, "Well, she's on the fourth floor." I went up to the fourth floor and went into this big room, and it was one of these huge rooms where they have fifty, sixty desks and no walls and they had file cabinets— So I walked into the room and I saw Ray over there about thirty feet away. I just stood there and put my arms up on the file and just kept watching and thinking she would look my way one time. She looked up and then she looked away and then she looked back - she couldn't believe that I was right there at that place. She shrieked and, of course, that got the attention of everybody. I went over and visited her house. They had a house right there on Pearl Harbor sitting by itself. It was a big bungalow and a few of the women rented in there, and went and visited there.

We were there just three or four days and then came on back to Mobile. Was detached from the ship at Mobile and sent home on leave and given orders at that time to go back to Norfolk for release of service. You had a point system; you had to have so many points for years of service or months of service. So I had enough at the end of two or three months to get out. They sent us back to Norfolk and I stayed up there about two months. Then they sent me to Jacksonville for discharge on December 14 of 1945 and gave me \$300 [laughs]. I immediately went to a men's shop and — had those tight Navy uniforms all those years and that's what I was used to. I bought a nice sports coat, and the salesman said, "That coat is too small for you - it's too tight." I bought it anyway. He knew how to drape a coat on somebody but I didn't. I found out very soon that I couldn't use the coat. I came home on a train. So that was in December, 1945.

**Sellers:** Had you been corresponding with your parents and your family?

**Maddox:** Yes.

**Sellers:** Was it pretty regular as far as getting mail back and forth?

**Maddox:** Yes, it was fairly good. It was V-mail back in those days, Victory mail. But

yeah, we got mail at every port. We'd get mail in England. I had a system worked out with my parents where before I went – maybe after the first trip – you know, everything was secret about where you were going - you really couldn't talk about anything. They just kept us scared to tell wherever we went. But I worked out a code system with my parents with the towns and cities around Tallahassee. Monticello could be England, North Africa could be Quincy. I had a list of about fifteen or twenty places. When I would write home when I'd say, "Hope things in Quincy are fine," they knew I was in a certain place. That's the only way they could keep up with it.

**Sellers:** That was something. That gave them an idea. Plus, getting the mail they knew you were okay.

**Maddox:** One time, I think it was almost three months in which the parents did not get a letter from me. They were quite worried. But normally in the military, if you were injured or killed, they got word to you pretty quickly. So that was their hope.

**Sellers:** No news was good news. Can you think of anything else you want to add at this point?

**Maddox:** No. Just one other thing - recreational equipment. Every time we went on a ship they would normally supply us with maybe three or four bats, four or five gloves, five or six softballs, and a crank phonograph.

**Sellers:** And you played softball on ship?

**Maddox:** Not much [laughs]. Usually it would be on the dock after we got someplace.

**Sellers:** And a crank phonograph?

**Maddox:** Crank phonograph, and about a dozen records that pretty soon got scratchy.

**Sellers:** I was going to say, they'd get scratchy and then they'd warp in that sea air, wouldn't they?

**Maddox:** Well, they didn't, and that wasn't a problem. They were not made out of vinyl, they were made out of carbon, I believe. They were more stiff. You know, you could crack one easier. But that was our recreational equipment and that was about it.

**Sellers:** What records did you take on board? Did you have a choice or was it good old Navy issue?

**Maddox:** It was Navy issue, but they'd give us Stardust and Rose Room – back in those days it was the good stuff. The other experience I had in my career, one of the most impressionable things – two things. One was the admiration of the English people during

wartime. They sacrificed, everything was blacked out at night, they had air raids and they had food shortages and they had not much fuel for their homes, you know, and England's kind of cold.

**Sellers:** They had their children sent out to the Midlands to keep them out of bombs.

**Maddox:** Yeah, right. But I had great admiration for the English, particularly back in '41 and '42 when they really suffered. The other thing was experiencing New York on liberty down on Broadway – 42nd Street. Usually we headed there; we saw all of the shows, we saw all of the big bands. There were fifteen or twenty back in those days – Glenn Miller, the Dorsey Brothers

**Sellers:** Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw —

**Maddox:** Artie Shaw – just all of those. We saw all of them; we went to their shows. There was a lot of military people into those shows (audience), I guess probably almost half of them.

**Sellers:** Did they charge you to get in or was it complimentary?

**Maddox:** Yeah, we paid. I went to the Stage Door Canteen up in New York one time - it was pretty good. But I was impressed – I loved the music and it was fun.

**Sellers:** Yeah, those big bands are really fun. I'm a sucker for them, too.

End Interview

Addendum: travel summary: on three ships we covered approximately 65,000 miles of ocean (Puerto Rico; British Isles; Utah Beach and Cherbourg, France; Mediterranean, and the Pacific.