

Oral History Interview

with

ALAN CALDWELL

Independence, Missouri

October 9, 1992

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

JOHNSON: Would you tell me your birth date and birthplace, and your parents' names?

CALDWELL: My birthday is November 5, 1928. I was born in Baltimore, Maryland. My father's name was Herbert C. Caldwell, and my mother, who died three weeks after I was born, was Grace Ayers Caldwell.

JOHNSON: Ayers was her maiden name?

CALDWELL: Yes. We had an Ayers that married into a Ayres, and I hesitate to think which is which.

JOHNSON: There is an Eben Ayers who was an assistant to Charlie Ross, President Truman's Press Secretary. Have you heard of any relationship in your family with Eben Ayers?

CALDWELL: No. As I say, because my mother died when I was

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only three weeks old, I haven't really learned a whole lot about the Ayers side of the family.

JOHNSON: So you grew up in Baltimore?

CALDWELL: Well, my father moved to Philadelphia at the beginning of my high school years, and I enlisted in the Navy in Philadelphia.

JOHNSON: What year was that?

CALDWELL: November, '45.

JOHNSON: And by that time what education had you had?

CALDWELL: Finished high school. I actually went down and made the application five days after I was seventeen. I had already graduated, and I was called up the first of December 1945.

JOHNSON: You had the option then of going into the Navy or being drafted?

CALDWELL: Oh, I was too young to be drafted. The reason I joined the Navy was that at that time and at my age, I couldn't get any job except for something such as packer in a grocery store. I couldn't get insurance. I had wanted to be a veterinarian, and there was an ad for a veterinary assistant for the Philadelphia SPCA. I had gone through two interviews and went into the

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final interview, and the guy says, "And you will be 18 in November?" I said, "No, I'll be 17." He said, "Land, man, I can wait a month or two, but I can't wait a year." So, on my way back from the Philadelphia SPCA, I went into the Navy Department and asked them what they had. I took the papers home and put them on the table that day, and told my father if he didn't sign them I'd sign them for him. He said, "I said all you had to do was graduate," so that was where it went. I enlisted for three years, which would put me out the day before I was 21.

JOHNSON: Where did you get your boot training?

CALDWELL: I took boot training in Great Lakes, Illinois. Do you have time for a very interesting story about that?

JOHNSON: Yes.

CALDWELL: They were trying out for a platoon leader, and most of the people who were trying out were former military people who had reenlisted, or military school graduates, and none of them knew anything about drilling. The company commander says, "Is there anybody else?" I said, "Yes, I'll volunteer," and he said, "What experience do you have?" I said, "Two years in the Pennsylvania National Guard." I was

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barely old enough to have been in the Pennsylvania National Guard, but then I ended up being the platoon leader for 63 men throughout all the boot camp. One of the most interesting things about it was that when we had our final parade, there were eight companies and 16 platoons, and the base commander, who was a full captain, complimented me on my drill squad.

During the day, and that evening, I was in what was called Junior Officer Day Watch. He came in after supper to get something; he came into the office and then went on back to his. Then he came back and took a second look at me, and said, "Aren't you the one I complimented on your drill squad today?" I said, "I was one of them." He said, "No, you were the only one. Where did you learn to drill?" I said to him, "Do you want the truth, or what I told the company commander?" He chuckled and said, "You're going to be gone from here in two days; it really doesn't make any difference." I said, "I learned it in Boy Scouts." He said, "You didn't tell him that did you?" I said, "No, I told him I'd been two years in the Pennsylvania National Guard, and I was barely even old enough to have even gotten into the Pennsylvania National Guard." But he complimented me for taking that quick stand.

So, it really started off a fantastic career in the Navy.

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JOHNSON: So after boot camp you went into what?

CALDWELL: Well, I wanted to go into UDT, because I'm a relatively good swimmer, and.

JOHNSON: What's UDT?

CALDWELL: Underwater Demolition Team.

JOHNSON: Okay.

CALDWELL: And that was all closed. Then I finally decided that, well, I'll go to sea as a quartermaster. You know, it's right at the end of the war, this is November of '45. So I was in an outgoing unit waiting to be shipped out, and they read my name off, after I had been on liberty in Chicago. If you were going out, you weren't supposed to be on liberty that weekend, so I was sleeping in; they called my name the second time, and I had to hustle up and pack. They sent me down to Jacksonville, Florida, to aviation fundamental school, which was basically an introduction into the ten aviation rates at that time. I spent, I think it was, twelve weeks down there, and was introduced to aviation metalsmith, gunners mate, torpedoman, boatsman mate, aerographers mate, radioman, and since I loved the out – of - doors, I chose to go on to meteorology school at Lakehurst, New Jersey. We had our choice as long as we could pass the grade, but Jacksonville, Florida was

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fantastic duty because of my swimming background. I never stood guard duty. I only stood lifeguard duty at the officer's pool, which was pretty nice. Then I got sent up to Lakehurst, New Jersey to meteorology school.

JOHNSON: After you got out of that, where did they station you?

CALDWELL: Well, our graduating class had the opportunity to volunteer for the Byrd expedition to the South Pole in 1946 and '47. There were 52 that volunteered, 16--I think it was 16 who were selected. I came in second physically and 8th scholastically, so I was assured of a berth on the expedition, the first postwar expedition to Antarctica.

JOHNSON: What ship was that?

CALDWELL: The DD-868 U.S.S. *Bronson*.

JOHNSON: Yes, I have your chronological record of service here and it says you started with the *Bronson* on November 2, 1946.

CALDWELL: Believe it or not, that's the day that they actually wrote the orders I should go on it. I actually arrived on board on my 18th birthday.

JOHNSON: Then I guess you completed that duty on April 11th of '47?

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CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: You were in the Antarctica over the winter?

CALDWELL: Oh, yes. That's summertime down there.

JOHNSON: Oh, that's right.

CALDWELL: Hemisphere shift.

JOHNSON: What was the purpose of that expedition?

CALDWELL: Can I be brutally honest?

JOHNSON: Yes.

CALDWELL: It was to do the research that Byrd himself never did. There was a Commodore Defeuk, a one-star admiral who was called a commodore. He was sent down to really gather the scientific data that Richard Byrd never really gathered. He ultimately made four-star admiral. He was a fantastically good man. The ship that I was on plotted what is still known on oceanographic charts as the 1947 iceline. I've seen over two-thirds of the continent of Antarctica on the DD-868.

JOHNSON: Any anecdotes that kind of stand out in your mind about that expedition?

CALDWELL: Oh, I could tell you lots of sea stories if you want sea stories.

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JOHNSON: Did you feel you accomplished what you set out to do?

CALDWELL: Yes. I thought it was well worthwhile. However, our captain, who, by the way, was named HMS Ginder, was a full commander and fantastic guy. He wasn't so sure that it was really a worthwhile expedition, and one day as we were going around the Palmer Peninsula, I was looking at the mountains, and was watching the snow blow off of them. We were a considerable distance away, but I didn't have any binoculars. The only thing that was available was the long glass, which of course, is a telescope. Captain Ginder came over to me and he asked me what I was doing. I said, "I'm looking at the rock formations over on those mountains," and I said, "I think I'd like to go back home, go to college, get a degree in geology

and come back down here.” He walked away and shook his head, and I continued to look. The next thing I knew, he came over to me, took his binoculars off, hung them around my neck, took the long glass out of my hand, and said, “Here, you can see twice as much with two eyes, and you won’t have to come back again.” So if you want an anecdote that was probably the gem of the anecdotes.

JOHNSON: Ginder.

CALDWELL: H.M.S. Ginder. That was the Captain. H.M.S.

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Ginder, His Majesty’s Ship Ginder. A good name for an American naval captain.

JOHNSON: Did this expedition have anything at all to do with the “Cold War” [no pun intended]? Was there any feeling at this time that there was any rivalry in the offing with the Soviet Union for control in the Antarctic?

CALDWELL: Oh, I’m sure there was. I’m not sure that it had been nurtured to the extent that it ultimately got nurtured to. But see, the first Antarctic treaty, which was a 30-year treaty, I think, just in the last year or so was renewed. It was renewed so that in ‘45, that would have been a fair amount of time before the rivalry really got underway.

JOHNSON: Did you encounter any Soviet expedition?

CALDWELL: No. I can say this, which is sad to say, that when we were down there, there probably wasn’t a day that we didn’t see sixteen to eighteen whales. And when I went back down there on an oceanographic research ship for the National Science Foundation in 1982—83, we were lucky to see one whale every sixteen days. It’s really sad what the whaling industry has perpetrated on the whale population.

JOHNSON: But there is a treaty on the whaling isn’t there

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now?

CALDWELL: Well, yes, but in Japan, when I was there in 1982-83, I think they took 82,000 whales. I think that’s the number, and they said that was for research. That’s a lot of research. The big whales are virtually all gone.

Speaking of Antarctica, I might add when I was there in ‘82-83, at the Palmer Station Library, I saw an article that said that Hitler was the whale’s best friend. It followed up by saying, in essence, I’m paraphrasing of course, that while Hitler kept the world at war for five to seven years, the whale population had an opportunity to redevelop.

JOHNSON: That's about the only population that did.

CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, then you came back to Norfolk, apparently, from there, and you're Weather Central Atlantic Fleet . .

CALDWELL: Yes, Atlantic Fleet Weather Central, yes.

JOHNSON: That's in May of '47. What kind of duty was that?

CALDWELL: Well, when ships are in port, there's no need to keep weather personnel aboard, so they're taken off and transferred into the fleet weather central for future

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assignments. So what we did was all of the same duty, except that we also carried all of our weather maps and reports out to the ships that were moored, and some of them even that were out at anchor. The weather maps and everything were sent to them, so that they didn't have to keep weather people aboard.

JOHNSON: Now, you must have coordinated closely with the United States Weather Bureau.

CALDWELL: Oh, yes. Very definitely, we were on their teletype schedule and everything.

JOHNSON: Then on July 18, 1947 you were assigned to the U.S.S. *Missouri*, according to this chronology.

CALDWELL: Yes, that would be next.

JOHNSON: So that was the trip to Rio?

CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you took the *Missouri* down to Rio, and President Truman flew down that month to get in on the conclusion of the Rio Conference. That provided a hemispheric defense treaty. What were you told when you were assigned to the U.S.S. *Missouri*? What did they tell you when you were assigned there?

CALDWELL: Oh, I would probably need to back up to give you

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some background on this. When I came back off of the Byrd expedition, I had been out for six and a half months, and as soon as I reported in to the fleet weather central, I asked them what they had going out. The commander said, "Why?" And I said, "Well, I joined the Navy to go to

sea.” He said, “You’ve been out for six and a half months what do you want to go back out for?” I said, “I joined the Navy to go to sea.” And it made quite an impression on him. So thereafter what he did was to allow me to look at any billet that came in, and gave me first right of refusal before it was ever posted. So this came along, and it was, I think, identified as a Presidential cruise. I might add that on all of my ships, I was on temporary attached duty. I was never ships company. So I volunteered, and he saw to it that I got there.

JOHNSON: What was your title onboard ship?

CALDWELL: I was Seaman First Class, I think at that time.

JOHNSON: But you were a meteorologist?

CALDWELL: Yes. I was a graduate A school meteorologist.

JOHNSON: And you were the only Meteorologist on board?

CALDWELL: Oh, no. No, the ship had its full complement, but I was added to the complement.

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JOHNSON: Well, how many people would there have been in the meteorology department, or whatever you called it?

CALDWELL: Oh, probably seven or eight. You see, meteorologists, unlike most other duty, stood an eight-hour watch rather than two or four. You know, if you’re on the helm you usually stood two hours, or four hour watch, if you’re lookout, and that kind of thing. Then in meteorology, we ran very much like a weather station would aboard shore. You work eight hours, and then the duty forecast officer would not have a counterpart. Other than that, you would have at least two men standing watch 24 hours a day.

JOHNSON: You’re getting your information mainly through teletype?

CALDWELL: Radio teletype.

JOHNSON: And you would prepare maps and .

CALDWELL: Maps and everything. Not like it’s done today, I mean the maps. We had to decode all of our stations, land stations, report stations and all of that. And then maps.

JOHNSON: Was there anything unusual about the weather going down to Rio?

CALDWELL: I don’t recall anything going down. Coming

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back--I think that was the trip-- from the Rio conference, off to the south and east of us, I saw seven waterspouts. It was really phenomenal to watch that.

JOHNSON: That's when the Trumans were on board?

CALDWELL: When we went out, there was a big question because of a hurricane, and there was a real question as to whether we should go back into the protection of the Chesapeake Bay, or get out to sea. We were advised that we would be far better off at sea than we would be in the shallow waters of the Chesapeake Bay.

I'll have to go back and figure out what that was.

JOHNSON: If there had been a problem, he, President Truman, would have flown back I suppose?

CALDWELL: That [situation] was just as we were heading out, as we were heading to Rio to meeting him.

JOHNSON: So you hadn't seen President Truman yet, I don't suppose.

CALDWELL: Oh no, no.

JOHNSON: When did you first see him down in Rio De Janeiro?

CALDWELL: I first saw him when he first arrived in Rio; whatever date that was, I'm not sure.

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JOHNSON: When he arrived there? By airplane?

CALDWELL: When he first came aboard the battleship *Missouri* in Rio, that was the first time I saw him.

JOHNSON: But he saw that parade there on Sunday morning, the 7th of September, the day they departed from Rio de Janeiro. Did you see the parade?

CALDWELL: I didn't actually see the parade. I had duty the day of the parade.

JOHNSON: You were on ship.

CALDWELL: I was on the ship.

JOHNSON: Then after that, the President's party did board the *Missouri*.

CALDWELL: Right. But I think he'd come aboard even before that.

JOHNSON: But you had seen him before that.

CALDWELL: I think I had, yes.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea what day it was that you actually met Harry Truman?

CALDWELL: Oh, it would have been after we had departed Rio, because we were heading back to the United States.

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JOHNSON: And before you got to the Equator.

CALDWELL: I'm sure it was before we got to the Equator, yes. I was due up on watch at noontime, and the evaporators on the starboard side forward in the crew's quarters were not working. I don't know whether they were working on them or what, but anyhow we couldn't get hot water in the showers. So I had to go all the way back to portside aft to the showers, to take a shower before going on watch. I had finished my shower and come up the portside passageway, and then there was a transverse passageway that I had to come over. Then I had a little short U turn to the left to go around a set of bunks to get into my compartment which was on the outboard side. I was coming across the transverse passageway, by the way, dressed only in wooden shower clogs with a towel around me, and I had my little toilet article kit in my left hand, and I saw a full-dressed Marine going up the starboard side passageway. I waited momentarily to see if he was by himself, or whether he was escorting somebody or what, because they used the Marines as messengers as well as escorts through the vessel. He had gone through a water tight bulkhead, through the hatch in it, and I didn't see anybody behind him, so because I was running late, I grabbed one of the stanchions that runs from the deck to the overhead.

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I just virtually catapulted around that U turn, and when I did I hit President Truman chest-to-chest. He and I were both about 5'8". I could have kissed him on the tip of the nose, and I slammed him, very frankly back against the bunks. I knocked his hat off and his cane out of his hand, and I stepped back with my towel and apologized. He kind of pulled himself together and got the hat off the bunk, and I picked his cane up off the deck and handed it to him. When I apologized to him, he said, "Oh, that's quite all right, son," and headed on through the hatch that the Marine had gone through. I had really never expected to get dressed. I figured that that Marine was going to come back and throw me in the brig before I had ever had a chance to get on watch. But nothing happened. I went on up on watch and our weather office was just aft of the starboard side of the navigation bridge.

So I had taken my 12 and 1 o'clock obs [observations], and the 2 o'clock observations as well. I and had just sat down at the desk, put my feet upon the desk, and picked up a *Reader's Digest* to start reading, and I looked out the corner of my eye to my left, to the doorway, and there was Harry Truman standing there. I jumped to my feet--I don't recall saying anything to him--but he looked at me and with a big broad grin, he said, "Haven't we met before?"

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And you know, we think in words, and the thought that came to my mind was, “You old codger you, there are 3,000 men on this ship and I didn’t even have any clothes on.” So, after thinking that thought, I said, “Yes, sir, if you mean down in the compartment.” He said, “Well, I don’t mean to be trite, but what’s the weather?” He was facing the map desk and I came around beside him and showed him where we were on the chart, and showed him the weather systems around us. He was very curious as to how we got the information, so I escorted him over to the radio shack and showed him how the code came in, in synoptic code, which is done in groups of five numbers, and then the airways code, which is done in symbols.

We went back to the weather office and I went through a couple of stations and showed him how they were decoded and entered on the weather map. I then showed him what we look for with wind barbs and so forth, to decide where the fronts were and which way the weather was moving and so forth. He was a most attentive audience. I was just absolutely enthralled, as a 19 year old sailor, at the attention that he gave me. And then he asked me where I lived and I told him that I had enlisted while I was in Philadelphia but my family had since moved to Baltimore. He said, “Oh, then you’re a neighbor of mine; you’ll have to come

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over and see me some time.” With that he offered his hand, shook hands with me, and thanked me profusely for having taken my time.

Well, let me tell you, I was on cloud 99. I had the President of the United States undivided attention for approximately 50, 55 minutes, with nobody else. Just me, this 19 year old sailor. And then we chatted a little bit more and he shook hands again with me a second time before he left. The neatest thing about it was after I got out of the service, I was double - dating, and I picked up my date and the other guy, and had gone to his date’s house, and she wasn’t ready. So my date went upstairs with her and we were sitting there talking to her father, who was a retired lieutenant colonel.

JOHNSON: Was this in Washington, D.C.?

CALDWELL: No, in Baltimore, in Mount Washington. You said Washington, you threw me off guard. Mount Washington, Baltimore, was where this retired lieutenant colonel lived. And every time I told the story, I commented what a fantastically attentive audience he was. He wasn’t like “I wish you’d shut up so I can get out of here;” you know, he was a great guy. He was genuinely interested in what we were talking about. The lieutenant colonel said to me, “You know why, don’t

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you?” I said, “No, I don’t. All I can tell you is that I was pretty proud that I had his attention the way I did.” The lieutenant colonel had served with Truman at one time, knew him personally.

JOHNSON: Do you remember his name?

CALDWELL: No. I don't think I could. But anyway, he told me that one of Truman's hobbies was meteorology and he said, "He was very familiar with the land-based operation, but had probably never seen the ship-board operation." So, not only was it neat to have had the experience, but that was really the icing on the cake, to know why he was such an attentive audience.

JOHNSON: He knew what you were talking about.

CALDWELL: Yes, he did.

JOHNSON: He knew exactly what I was talking about.

CALDWELL: He sure did.

JOHNSON: It might have been in another oral history interview where someone brought that up, that he was very much interested in weather and how weather was plotted and how the weather bureau did its business. [See interview with Harry Vaughan.] But that was your only meeting with Truman?

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CALDWELL: Yes--the encounter with nothing but a towel on, and when he came into the weather office. I have been a reserve building advisor for the Red Cross, and I was sent out here to Northwest Missouri, because of floods in the summer of '65. I had a car rented, and at my disposal, and I came in one weekend here to the Library. I hadn't been in this part of the country at all. I got to talking with one of the security guards, at the front of the Library, and told him about it [the encounter with President Truman in 1947]. He said, "Oh, you have to talk to the President's secretary." I don't recall her name, but she was certainly gracious and talked to me. She set up an appointment for the very near future, because I was only out here on assignment with the Red Cross for about six weeks, for me to come in and meet President Truman. I told her of his invitation to visit him in Washington, and she said, "He would have. If you had called him, he would have."

Anyway, on the date that they had set, Margaret had become rather ill and Mrs. Truman and President Truman flew back to be with her, and the appointment was never reset. Then I moved out here in November of '65, and unfortunately we just kept putting off taking him up on that invitation to come over and see me sometime."

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JOHNSON: Well, when did you retire from the Navy?

CALDWELL: I didn't retire; I had a three-year enlistment. I was offered a fleet appointment from the Naval Academy, from my research experience I was not only on the trip to Antarctica,

and the Presidential cruise, but I was on the detonations of the bombs in '48 at Eniwetok.

JOHNSON: When you were on the U.S.S. *Albemarle*?

CALDWELL: On the *Albemarle*, yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, I notice you were assigned to that ship in January of '48, and again in April of '48. Well, it says July 6th of '48.

CALDWELL: Probably back to the fleet weather central about that point.

JOHNSON: So, you're talking about the atomic bomb tests, apparently in the spring of 1948, sometime in the spring? What was your duty then?

CALDWELL: Well, again I was added to the ship's meteorological complement as additional personnel for those tests. I had a security clearance of Top Secret with the Navy at that point in time. My specific job--well, I had two. The first was that I would sketch the cloud formations every ten seconds because they were

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not sure that the light from the blast would not overexpose the film. Then I also compiled all of the data and sent it back to the Chief of Naval Operations office in Washington, D.C., so it was all sent back over my name.

JOHNSON: So you were to record the effects of the blast on weather?

CALDWELL: Everything, yes.

JOHNSON: The phenomena.

CALDWELL: There was a set of tracking stations, including, you know, the *Albemarle*, where we tracked those clouds three and a half revolutions around the earth.

JOHNSON: You say you kept track of them?

CALDWELL: Yes, with various weather stations. Kept track of that cloud.

JOHNSON: This was a radioactive cloud?

CALDWELL: Yes. And the amount of fall-out.

JOHNSON: How many bombs were set off?

CALDWELL: There were three while I was there, and they were all above . .

JOHNSON: Air bursts?

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CALDWELL: They were all air bursts.

JOHNSON: Two hundred feet above ground.

CALDWELL: I think they were. We never were really told.

JOHNSON: You don't know how many kilotons we're talking about here?

CALDWELL: No, we'd have to go back into the data to get that.

JOHNSON: What was your impression of that first atomic bomb blast?

CALDWELL: Well, I want to tell you this, that I don't ever want to see one used in warfare. It's an awesome sight. I watched flames shoot up in the air 42,000 feet in 14 seconds.

JOHNSON: These were real flames?

CALDWELL: Well, I mean the blast, and then the color in the cloud, yes. You don't actually see flame, but . .

JOHNSON: But it's an orange color.

CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you're doing these sketches every ten seconds of the cloud formations. Did the photographs turn out?

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CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you didn't have that overexposure problem.

CALDWELL: No, they were apparently very successful. You've got to remember that I did not have any cameras; nobody had any cameras except the [authorized photographers].

JOHNSON: You were wearing smoked glasses?

CALDWELL: We were wearing glasses. Now, Eniwetok, is about 6 degrees north of the Equator, and we were wearing glasses that were so dark that you could lay on the deck looking right up at the sun at noontime and it looked like a candle.

JOHNSON: Like welders, or even darker than welders?

CALDWELL: Oh yes. They were really dark glasses. We were admonished even with the glasses on--not to look in the direction of the explosion for two or three seconds after the initial explosion. We were laying broadside through the blast, with a full head of steam up. This was a seaplane tender that has, you know, the hangar deck with the PDMs. If I'm not mistaken, we rolled 6 degrees just with the pressure wave that came by.

JOHNSON: How far away were you, do you know?

CALDWELL: I think it was 9.2 miles, if I remember; that's a

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long time back. I think it was 9.2 miles from the first; 7.8 miles from the second, and 6.2 miles from the last detonation.

JOHNSON: And were they all about equal power?

CALDWELL: I think they were. I have no way of knowing.

JOHNSON: But the third one you would have felt the effects even more wouldn't you?

CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about radioactivity; did you get any fall-out?

CALDWELL: I'm listed as an atomic veteran. I feel very good, but I .

JOHNSON: There wasn't any rain that precipitated from it?

CALDWELL: Oh, no. We were very dry. There wasn't any humidity at the time.

JOHNSON: Were any of the observers down-wind?

CALDWELL: I don't know whether there was a case of being down-wind or not, because we were in the lagoon. It's hard to tell whether we were in the counter equatorial currents or not. I'd have to go back and do some research on that. They were relatively still days as I remember.

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JOHNSON: Didn't they have a requirement probably of no more than a certain wind velocity?

CALDWELL: Very probably. Very probably.

JOHNSON: To minimize the danger of fall-out?

CALDWELL: Oh, yes. I remember that the charts on the hydrographs, when that bomb blast went by, just dropped from a high relative humidity--if I'm not mistaken--clear down to 14 percent. It just dried the air out, almost instantaneously. I'd love to see those charts today, to recall what they were. Well, of course, it was exciting. The portside was facing the detonation and I was right over against the portside rail. That was my position for sketching these [detonations], and shortly after that bomb went off I saw a fin I was told was a barracuda, heading out to sea. He just slammed right into the side of the vessel, right below where I was standing, backed up and regaining his sense of direction, went out and came back again and hit the ship further aft, again. I mean he was heading out. The third time, he careened off of it, but I think he got around the stern. It was interesting to watch. Everything left the area when the blast went off.

JOHNSON: You didn't have a plume of water?

CALDWELL: No, not a plume.

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JOHNSON: Kind of a depression.

CALDWELL: Yes, there was a wave that came. It was behind the barracuda, I'll tell you that. The barracuda was moving.

JOHNSON: So those were the only atomic tests that you were involved with?

CALDWELL: Yes, those three. Yes.

JOHNSON: I imagine that was some experience.

CALDWELL: It was. As I say, it was enough to convince me that we don't need to be getting involved in atomic warfare.

Oh, I have a cute little note to this, though. I mentioned that all of the materials were sent back to Washington, D.C., over my signature, and I got out of the Navy in November of '48. I went to Baltimore Junior College and I was elected president of my class and the treasurer of the class said, "I know you." We could not figure out where we knew each other from. I mean we tried and tried and tried, and we finally found that we were both navy aerographers; that is the Navy's term for meteorologists--aerographer's mate. He saw my signature one day, and instead of making an A with a pointed top, I make my A look kind of like an H with a top, and he recognized the signature. He was the guy

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in Washington who received all of my materials from the atom-bomb tests. He knew the name,

but that was all he knew; it was Alan S. Caldwell. As I say, he was the class treasurer and I was the class president.

JOHNSON: Which college?

CALDWELL: Baltimore Junior College; it would have been February of '49.

JOHNSON: Have you ever checked to see if those records are in the National Archives, and if they're accessible?

CALDWELL: No, that's why I say it would be interesting to do it, because I would love to have a photocopy of that hydrograph chart. It would all be declassified.

JOHNSON: I think so.

CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: You got out of the Navy then in . .

CALDWELL: I think the next trip was to Little Falls, Minnesota, wasn't it, to launch the high altitude cosmic ray research balloons? Operation Sky Hook. Do I have Little Falls?

JOHNSON: You don't have it mentioned here.

CALDWELL: That's right, this is only for the ships. Well,

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it would have been between these two.

JOHNSON: The middle of '47?

CALDWELL: Yes. You asked me how I got on the *Missouri*. I came back from the Antarctica, and I commented about wanting to go back to sea. He told me to go take my thirty-day leave. He had something coming up, and they put up a billet for the New York-Bermuda yacht races, and I'm an avid sailor. I love rag sailing, white water canoeing, all of that, and I wanted to go on it and they wouldn't let me. He said, "No, you'll be ahead of the sailboats, you'll never see them, and when they're going back to Bermuda, you'll be going back to Norfolk."

I have to tell a tale on myself here, but in the weather service, that Weather Central, we stood three watches of four to midnight, and then we had 32 hours off. There were three watches of midnight to eight in the morning and then 32 hours off, and then three watches of 8 to 4, and then 72 off. The duty forecast officer didn't care who was there as long as he had enough people to man the operation. We frequently would take our 72 hours, and then have somebody stand in

for us for the next three and sometimes even for the next three, so we could get 11 days liberty on a 72 hour pass. The only thing the forecast duty officer

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said, "If you get hurt, or anything happens, I didn't know you were gone." And this particular time, I had been off on a 72 and had come back for the midnight watch, so I made a 7-day, 72-hour liberty out of it, and my father used to continually ask me, "When are you going back?" I'd say, "Well, when I get ready," and he thought sure I was going to end up with a BCD, bad conduct discharge.

But anyhow, I had just crawled in the sack from one of my midnight to eight watches, and the yeoman came over and said, "The exec wants to see you." I thought, "Oh, I've been caught taking a 7-day, 72 hour liberty, and I said, "Well, I'll get a shower and come on over." He said, "No, I have his car here for you now." I thought, "Oh, lands, I am in for it."

So I got dressed and went over with him and went into his office, and he said--no that was the atom bomb test.

JOHNSON: That's when they notified you . .

CALDWELL: When they notified me about the atom bomb test; he said, "Alan, how would you like to go to the South Pacific?" I said, "Fine, what's going on there?" And he said, "Atomic bomb tests." He knew that I wanted to go to sea and he knew about this when he wouldn't let me go on the New York to the Bermuda yacht races. So

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that's how I got on the atom bomb tests, and that's also how I became classified Top Secret. So, that prepared the way for me then to be assigned to Truman's staff on the battleship *Missouri*.

JOHNSON: And then that Sky Hook operation .

CALDWELL: That came after the *Missouri*.

JOHNSON: Okay, after you came back.

CALDWELL: Right. I was the only enlisted meteorologist sent to Little Falls, Minnesota, to a 19,000-acre Army base to learn to launch these big high altitude cosmic research balloons. We launched three of these, and then launched them at sea aboard the *Norton Sound*.

JOHNSON: Yes.

CALDWELL: The way I got on that, I happened to be in the fleet weather central, when they were ready for that operation. The officer in charge of those balloon ascensions was a Lieutenant Lewis; he was my class officer in meteorology school. He recognized my name and asked for me to be on that. Those balloons were the forerunners of space flight and one of the balloons that I

launched--I have to get my book out here to see right now . .

JOHNSON: You're referring to a book by the title of 200

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Miles Up by J. Gordon Baeth, New York, published by the Ronald Press Company. This is a second edition, copyrighted in 1955.

CALDWELL: Right. I found this book in the Library after I had gotten out of the service, and bought one of my own, and I'm trying to find, "Sky Hook Balloon,"

JOHNSON: How many hundred thousand .

CALDWELL: 116,700 feet. Wait a minute, that's not the right date.

JOHNSON: That was in '54.

CALDWELL: Here's the one, 140,000 feet.

JOHNSON: Sounding balloon. All right, 140,000 feet, September 28, 1948, and you're the one that launched that?

CALDWELL: I'm the only enlisted meteorologist on that launch, yes.

JOHNSON: It's not a manned balloon of course,

CALDWELL: Oh, no, it's not a manned balloon.

JOHNSON: You had an instrument package . .

CALDWELL: To a mounted balloon.

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JOHNSON: It was a helium filled?

CALDWELL: Yes. Preheated helium, as a matter of fact. The balloon was 72 feet in diameter and 142 feet high.

JOHNSON: I bet President Truman would have been interested in seeing that, since meteorology was one of his interests.

CALDWELL: Here's a picture of the balloon. The tests were being sponsored by the Brookhaven Laboratory, and the balloon was made by General Mills out of agricultural materials, the plastic that made the balloon. The instrumentation was designed to see if man

could survive going through the radiation belts around the earth. So it is really the forerunner of space flight.

JOHNSON: Okay, on page 100 here, there is a photograph by General Mills. It says, "The Sky Hook cell is launched in Minnesota, carrying a load of cosmic ray equipment, which will be parachuted to earth at the completion of the flight. The cell is only partially inflated to permit room for gas expansion caused by decreased atmospheric pressure at greater altitudes." And I think that you said you were one of two or three . .

CALDWELL: I'm the guy holding the white box.

JOHNSON: Okay, that's the one on the left, I guess, or is

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it the one in the center?

CALDWELL: It's the one in the center.

JOHNSON: That's you.

CALDWELL: No, I think this is me here.

JOHNSON: On the far left.

CALDWELL: Yes, on the far left of the picture.

JOHNSON: And what's that white box?

CALDWELL: That's the instrument box.

JOHNSON: So that's the entire package right there.

CALDWELL: Yes. When the balloon bursts, the instruments are parachuted back to earth. Well, we started preparations about 4 o'clock and then launched them right at dawn so that we have as still an atmosphere as we could get. Believe it or not, that's where I learned to drive. We used an Army jeep and chased all over the Minnesota countryside to retrieve the instrument packages out there.

JOHNSON: Yes.

CALDWELL: Then I launched the first three that were launched from the *Norton Sound*, about midway between New York and Bermuda.

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JOHNSON: So this information was used in the rocket program?

CALDWELL: Well, space flight, yes.

JOHNSON: In space flight.

CALDWELL: Yes, that was information that was gathered as the forerunners of manned space flight.

JOHNSON: So then you left the Navy in

CALDWELL: Well, I went aboard the *Fremont*. The *Fremont* is shown there at the bottom isn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes, here it says *Fremont*, October '48.

CALDWELL: It was a cold weather amphibious operation off of Argentia, Newfoundland. We ran into the severest storm that I had ever been in. It was a double cyclone center, one coming up the east coast, and one coming down out of Canada, and at one time, we took winds of 108 miles an hour. The task group commander told the various ships in the task group to disperse and do whatever it took to stay afloat. It took us four days to regroup, and . .

JOHNSON: You were pitching and rolling like crazy then?

CALDWELL: No one was allowed out on deck, and even behind the spray shield which folds forward, you couldn't even

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stand on the bridge, if you weren't within three or four feet of the spray shield. The turbulence, you know, as it would come over, would push you back against it, rather than blowing you off. We lost a 22 ton landing craft off the starboard side. I happened to be out taking the weather observation, when this wave came down the starboard side and as I say, we were equipped for amphibious operation. So, all of the cradles were filled and then landing craft were hanging outboard on the deck. In other words, they'd bring them up and sit them in the cradle, and then they'd go down and pick up another. So, the ship's sailing along with landing craft hanging outboard, as well as having them all in the datas, and that wave came down along the starboard side of the ship and smashed into the bow of the first landing craft with such force that it broke the forward cable. I hollered back to somebody and as it fell, the weight of it, and the surge of it broke the after cable and in seven to ten seconds you wouldn't even have known there was a boat there. I mean it just dove right straight down to the bottom.

JOHNSON: Well, that was one way of ending up your service.

CALDWELL: Well, I got put on that because I told the man I didn't want to spend a month or two months in the discharge unit. I think I came back from there,

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probably a week, or just about a week before I was discharged.

JOHNSON: In November of '48.

You saw the U.S.S. *Williamsburg* when you came back on the *Missouri*. Is that the first time you had ever seen the *Williamsburg*?

CALDWELL: Well, yes, I guess it was.

JOHNSON: When you came back on the *Missouri* from Norfolk .

CALDWELL: Because we tied up on the inboard side. I think it was pier one at the Naval operating base. We were tied up at portside two, and Truman got off of the *Missouri* and walked about 80 feet across the dock and boarded the *Williamsburg*. I watched him depart Norfolk and head up to Washington.

JOHNSON: Did you see the *Williamsburg* again after that?

CALDWELL: I was on the *Williamsburg* last summer, believe it or not.

JOHNSON: That was the first time that you had seen it since?

CALDWELL: Oh, no. Living in Baltimore, when I got out of the Navy, I had seen it several times down here at the

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Navy ordnance. In Washington, it was tied up while it was still the Presidential Yacht. I saw it while it was being used as a fancy restaurant, and that kind of thing.

JOHNSON: Yes, Eisenhower didn't want to use it.

CALDWELL: No, Eisenhower felt that it was an extreme waste of money, but Eisenhower also wasn't a seadog. Eisenhower is the one that initiated Camp David, as you will recall, up on the top of the mountain.

JOHNSON: It was probably just as expensive.

CALDWELL: Very probably, because it takes a pretty good crew. That's a pretty big layout up there. I've been up to Camp David. I haven't actually been on the grounds.

JOHNSON: Well, there's a story that Truman didn't want to use Camp David because they had to use a squad of Marines to help guard it. And he thought that was extravagant.

CALDWELL: Well, they also used to have to drive there. Now they can get in and out of it by helicopter, but I used to do work for the Red Cross in Baltimore and there was a crippled children's camp called Camp Green Top, which was very close to Camp David. I'd go up there and put
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on small safety demonstrations with a canoe for the children at Camp Green Top. So, I've seen presidential entourages going to and from, you know, by vehicle to Camp David.

JOHNSON: You're interested in the possibilities of restoration of the *Williamsburg*?

CALDWELL: Yes, I'm very much a maritime history buff, and I was down on the *Williamsburg* last summer, probably about this time.

JOHNSON: Where was it moored?

CALDWELL: It's tied up at the Washington, D.C. sanitation department's facility, a sewage treatment plant to be perfectly honest with you. It is actually almost right across from the National Airport.

JOHNSON: Is it seaworthy?

CALDWELL: It could be made seaworthy. Unfortunately, people have stripped a lot of the teak off, and a lot of the railings are gone. The teak steps that went up on top of the wheelhouse [are gone]. It's been allowed to deteriorate extensively. I think that it is still watertight below the main deck.

JOHNSON: How about the stateroom, or the room that Truman used to use?

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CALDWELL: The interior of it is terrible. I would like to bring it back to Kansas City. I would like to see it brought back to Kansas City. It will take a major effort. I started with a group a little over a year ago, or two years ago, whatever it's been, that was going to bring it back. Forgive me for being critical, I think their egos were more involved than their public service, and I don't think anything has happened to it. I flew over it, coming out of Washington about a month and a half, two months ago, and it's still at the dock. I was sitting at the left side of the airplane, leaving Washington National Airport and as we came up I knew what the area looked like, because I've been in and out of Washington National airport and Anacostia as well. I saw it still laying there, so I'm trying right now to find out what the status is, and have met with some people that maybe are very interested in providing an off river harbor for it here in the Kansas City area. If it's done in a cooperative effort with preservation of the vessel itself being paramount, and not somebody's ego, I think it can be done.

JOHNSON: You are married I presume.

CALDWELL: Yes.

JOHNSON: When and to whom?

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CALDWELL: I've been married 33 years; 1958, I guess, is when I got married. Yes, it would be. I told you I was offered a fleet appointment to the Naval Academy, and the girl I was dating didn't want to wait to get out of the academy to get married. I got out at the termination of my enlistment and in two or three months I had broken up with her. I didn't meet and marry my wife for ten years. I could have gone through the Academy, got an advanced degree in meteorology from MIT and been a lieutenant commander in that ten—year period of time.

JOHNSON: What was her name?

CALDWELL: My wife's name is Joyce Annette Rice. We now have five children. We had planned parenthood--girl, boy, girl, boy, girl. Four of our children are married, and we have 12 grandchildren and a 13th one on the way.

JOHNSON: Any meteorologists?

CALDWELL: Yes, believe it or not. That's interesting that you should ask the question. My son Aaron, my second son, is a Navy reservist and an Aerographer, yes.

JOHNSON: Well, okay, thanks so much for all this information, and let's hope for the best for the *Williamsburg*.

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CALDWELL: Oh, you had better believe it.