Today is November 9, 1984, we're with the World War I veteran Russell Powers.

TL: Why did you join the Navy?

RP: Because I weighed 175 pounds, and I could get in as a fireman. They wouldn't take them unless they were 175 at least.

TL: You were a volunteer?

RP: Oh yea, I never waited to be drafted. War was declared on the 6th. and I went in on the 8th.

TL: Where were you living at the time?

RP: I was living in Wichita, Kansas.

TL: What do you remember about the outbreak of the war?

RP: Well, we kind of expected it, but we didn't know when. My buddies in latter years wanted to know why the hell I'd waited so long; from the 6th. to the 8th. to get in. There were so many that were going through in those days, they didn't ask any questions; wanted to know if you were alive, that was all.

TL: How useful did you find your basic training at the front?

RP: Well, I got my basic training at the Great Lakes, up in Waukeegon Illinois. I didn't go to the front, I was on a transport ship. All I did was haul troops back and forth. And some were the crippled ones.

TL: How did you get on with French civilians?

RP: Oh, just fine, just wonderful. The only thing is they're all foreigners, and I couldn't speak any French. But the girls say "Oui, Oui."
Do you remember any particular families?

RF: Oh, there was a family by the name of Reshard. And they had a daughter by the name of Michelle. And she'd write letters to me and I'd have to get my buddies to read it to me. Oh they were just nice people.

TL: How did you feel about the Germans?

RF: Well, they were doing what their bosses told them to do.

TL: Did you feel any hatred?

RF: No, we had a spy aboard ship, and us fellows would have loved to have twisted his neck, but they wouldn't allow us to do it. They turned him loose in France. He was in the bunker down in the fire room and he was signaling with a flashlight.

TL: What was your attitude towards your officers?

RF: Oh, some of them were wonderful. Just like anything else. And then some of them didn't know how to come in out of the rain, but they got in as officers.

TL: Do you remember anyone in particular?

RF: No names or anything like that. We had a case in the fire room by golly, where this 90-day officer came down, he asked the coal passer what the different pipes were and why they were marked this way. The coal passer told him that the steam pipes were marked red. About two days latter he came down and went to the same fireman and asked what red was. And he said 'I just told you the day before yesterday, that's the steam pipe.' So that officer didn't last long. Then we had another case where we had a leaky tube in one of the boilers and they cut in and out of the line. Steam got down to about 50 pounds. The officer that day told out boilermaker he was using the wrong tube. He looked up at the gauge, and he looked at the officer, and he said do you mean that? Well certainly I
mean that, it's your job isn't it? Yes, but he said, I won't go in there. So the officer said he'd have to put him up for mutinous conduct. So the guy says look, I'll go in there if you'll go in, there's 50 pounds of steam, if that thing didn't happen to catch when I rolled the tube, it would cook you right in there. So that's all we heard of him. We had others who were just wonderful.

L: As a fighting soldier, what was your attitude toward the home front, and did it change as the war progressed?

P: Well, the homefront, my folks we're just trying every eay in the world to save money and everything by cutting out on sugar and stuff like that. And every day we'd throw tons of good food over the side, at night because there was certain stuff that would float, and a submarine could figure how long it had been afloat and how far we were ahead. So that's what irked us, to think that our folks were going hungry and they were throwing the damn stuff away.

TL: What were your feelings about your chaplain?

RP: Oh, we had a wonderful chaplain, his name was Hopkins. I don't know his nationality or anything else, just that he was a heck of a good guy.

TL: Did you have strong religious feelings?

RP: No, I've never had anything like that.

TL: So that war didn't change your religious feelings?

RP: No.

TL: What were your feelings during the war towards industrial workers?

RP: To tell you the truth, I never gave it a thought, we were in there doing what we were supposed to be, and we figured they should be doing the same thing. So we never thought about it.
How did you feel about conscientious objectors?

P: Well, we thought they should be hung up by their necks for awhile by gosh. To think they're in our wonderful country and they're conscientious objecting, to think they'd be allowed to live here. And they shouldn't have been, they should have hung them up.

L: What did you and your friends read and talk about during the war?

P: Well, that would ne an awfully good question because we talked about everything.

L: What was the main topic?

P: The main topic was to get the job done. You see us fellows we went in, there were very few fellows who had an education. Most were 6th. to 8th. grade educated, so there weren't alot of us who were intelligent as far as learning was concerned, but I wouldn't trade my education that I got; little old country school, for some of these God darn college degrees that they're giving today. Because they don't teach them anything like patriotism, or just like leaving other peoples' stuff alone, how to mind your own business. Now a days, they just let them do as they please.

L: During the war, was there any particular thing that you looked forward to as a treat?

P: Well, we always looked forward to shore leave.

L: Tell me about your typical shore leave?

P: Oh, just typical shore leave. I had a girl in White Plains New York, and when I'd hit the beach I'd high tail it to White Plains. She was working at a hotel up there that had been made from an old barn, and it was called Witney Farms hotel. And she was in charge of the desk. Cigars, candy,
In those days, a lot of movie stars went there. Like Al Joleson, and Phil Zigfield. He gave us some passes which was good because we got about $24.00 a month. We couldn't spend an awful lot of it, but you could spend a little bit and get some good out of it. Transportation was very cheap in those days. You'd pay a nickel and could ride all day in the subway in New York.

**TL:** How did you feel about discipline in the Navy?

**RP:** Discipline, oh we had wonderful discipline. No trouble at all. As I said before, you worked for a man, you did what he told you to do. We didn't have any problems. Oh, we'd have a case where some fellow was rated, made a rating, and then it would go to his head and he'd be put back again. Until he'd behave himself. We had one fellow by the name of Blackie, he was just a wonderful worker, just swell. Worked like a darn mule. They'd rate him and he'd be so darn miserable they'd have to put him down with the other fellows, where he belonged. So that's natural, you'd find that any place.

**TL:** What did you believe you were fighting for?

**RP:** We were fighting a war to end all wars, and they had been fighting wars even before Christ's time, they're still fighting wars.

**TL:** So you thought that would be the end of war?

**RP:** That's what they told us, so we believed them.

**RP:** What did you think of President Wilson?

**RP:** We thought he was a stuck up darn chump, is what we thought, but he was still the President and we went in and did what we had to do.
Was there any point in the war when your morale was particularly low or high?

RP: I felt alright as far as I was concerned. We hauled about 70,000 troops during the war, it was just a job to get done.

TL: What employment did you take up after the war?

RP: Well, I did everything. I got paid off right here in San Diego in 1921. I did everything, it was very, very tight. You couldn't get a job hardly at all. I'd work a few days here and there, and of course we didn't get $100.00 a day in those days, we were darn lucky if we got $5.00 a day.

TL: At the end of the war, did you think it had all been worthwhile?

RP: No, war is worthwhile. Nobody wins in a war. The only thing it does is get rid of a lot of our cream of the crop in our service people. Because they won't take anything but the young ones.

TL: Did your life change as a result of the war?

RP: It did, quite a bit. We were torpedoed on the 5th of September, 1918. And from then until the following May, I was hospitalized. Then when I asked for something to do, they sent me to Kansas City for recruiting duty. And I went there just doing little odd jobs. Because my Commander there in Kansas City said to me, you're not much of an ornament to put out here to get people into the service for recruiting duty. So he said, just fix signs and keep busy with odd jobs. So, whenever a fellow would be turned in who had jumped ship, he'd be sent up to Illinois and I'd have to take him, not always, but every once in awhile.

After the war in 1919, they had a bunch of surplus stuff, so they told the old man that they had a motorcycle and a side car. And I had to
Tell me about your purple heart.

P: Well, we were torpedoed. I was burned over 60% of my body, and they said I wasn't supposed to live. I was too damn ornery to die, I guess. So I kept on living. I had terrible keloids off my arms, neck and knees. My feet weren't burned. But I had a pair of gloves that I worked on the job and this right handed glove had little holes in it, right here in the little finger. And when I took my glove off, my finger peeled right off with it. When I got up to sick bay, I took my shirt and my back and belly peeled right with it. They gave me petrie acid and a washtub and a rag to sop myself with, because lots of fellows got out of the fireroom before I did. I had crawled out. I was in the number 5 fireroom and the torpedo hit in #6, on the bulkhead, and that kept the torpedo floating inside the ship. There were 36 fellows who were killed.

L: Tell me, as a person who has only seen battle scenes on television, what is it like when you're getting torpedoed?

P: I just think they imitate them so they look darn real. It don't bother me anymore, it used to throw me all out of gear. They can imitate them so well, it's awful real. I never smoked or never drank. And when I
And when I was in the hospital in France, right after we were torpedoed, we had 19 boilers aboard, and the firemen who weren't killed on the nine that were out of commission went forward to help to fire the 10 boilers. And they took her back to port under her own steam. The lights went out when the torpedo hit, so the boys had to work by available light from the fire. But they couldn't see the water gauge, so a guy would be there with a shovel of live coals and he held the shovel until the coals died down and then they'd replace it so he could read the gauge. See how much water they had. Those were the boys who did the work, believe me. We were torpedoed at 8 o'clock in the morning, we were about 300 miles out at sea. They turned her around and at about midnight we got into Brest France. And when we got into Brest, they ran it onto the mud flats so it wouldn't sink anymore. Because we were sinking at a rate of an inch an hour. The size of the hole was about the size of the end of a trailer. They couldn't get pumps to get the water out. But they had water tight doors and a collision mat.

TL: What was the name of your ship?
RP: The Mount Vernon.

TL: Hit by a submarine?
RP: Yes, we were hit by a submarine, early in the morning. We were with a group of destroyers at the time, but they got a shot in.

So, after you were in the hospital in France, you went back to the U.S?
RP: Well, the hospital, what they had done, was taken an old Catholic church and made it into a hospital. And that was just at the beginning of the flu epidemic. So they put tents out there in the yard, the flu patients out there. And the inside was for surgery. The main room of the church was for that.
Tl: How long were you over there?

RP: I was there about 6 weeks, so they took the ship in dry dock and put a patch on the outside of it and filled it up with concrete.