Chris Knaggs oral history interview

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Abstract: Christopher Knaggs, a career Navy veteran and volunteer docent at the Virginia War Memorial talks about his service on submarines during the Vietnam War and the Cold War era, working with crews that led secret missions around the U.S.S.R. and in the Arctic. Knaggs rose through the ranks to become a captain, administrating the Pearl Harbor Naval Base during the filming of the movie Pearl Harbor. He also discusses his work in nuclear weapons research as a Navy liaison to the Department of Energy, his civilian careers and volunteer work, and his views of how 9/11 and the Global War on Terror have changed the Navy since the Cold War.

Transcript Notes:

Transcriber:	TEMI
Abstract by:	Kyle Rogers, VWM Intern
Additional Notes:	
	CK: Chris Knaggs
	KR: Kyle Roger

Interview Transcript:

[0:03] KR: Hello, I'm Kyle Rogers, Oral History Project Intern at the Virginia War Memorial. Today we're here with Chris Knags, who's a Navy veteran and a volunteer at the War Memorial. Today is the 8th of October 2020, and this is for the Oral History Project. So Chris, could you just, could we begin by having you tell us a little bit about where you grew up?

[0:22] CK: Yeah, my name is Chris. I grew up in Detroit, Michigan on the East Side, and that's where I spent most of my life. I was kind of an inner-city kid overall until the very, very end of my high school, when the family finally moved to a suburb, so I got a little of each of that, so.

[0:41] KR: OK, what was it like growing up during the Vietnam War?

[0:45] CK: Actually, I was *in* the Vietnam War, so uh, for me personally, it is always a personal thing. "Am I gonna have to deal with this or not?" So, by 1970 I graduated high school; it's been going on for seven years. We're ramping up. Funny, just about that time we're starting to really seriously pull out—try to find a way to get a way out, but they're still drafting, OK? And I'm sitting here. I always laugh about this because people make fun of—now, don't take this personally—*millennials*: you know, "always want time off, don't have a plan. The world will"—well, I was a 1970s millennial in Detroit, Michigan. I was like, "I'm just hoping I don't get drafted. I don't know what I wanna do. Maybe I'll get a job in one of the auto factories: put tires on cars. But I don't know. But there's no plan." But then my [Selective Service] number came up. So, I had to make a decision at that point. I mean, Canada was only 20 miles away, but that wasn't gonna happen in my family: a lot of ex-military; no one was going to Canada. You can't be from Detroit and be a conscientious objector, not living in the violence you do there (laugh). So, uh, you know, so I actually tried getting in the Air Force. *Everybody* wanted in the Air Force. No offense to my Army buddies, I'm not much of a camper, and I'm particularly not a camper in jungles. So, I ran to the Navy. The Navy basically said, "We're not sending you to any schools. You'll go to basic training, you're going on a ship. If you wanna be with us, you just figure it out when you get there." And that's exactly what I did: I went to boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois, and then all of a sudden I was in a landing ship transport for Fresno in San Diego, California, and a week later we left for Vietnam. So…

[2:40] KR: OK, yeah, well that makes sense. I was gonna ask why you chose the Navy over another branch of service, but you explained that.

[2:47] CK: Yeah, no great history there. Just, you no big love or "Oh boy, I can't wait!" No "anchors away!" It was just like, you know, *millennial*, whatever! Maybe this'll work!

[2:58] KR: (Laughs) yeah! And you were making the best out of a bad set of options.

[3:01] CK: Right, right.

[3:03] KR: Did you have any opinions about the Vietnam War before you joined the Navy?

[3:07] CK: Um, yeah, I don't know! You know, I was a little—I think I was like a lot of young people. At that point I probably, you know, had a little more trust in the government. It's kinda

funny: I never really quite understood some of the reasons and why. It actually made some sense, not then but when I went to the War college years ago, and you talked about a little bit what, what was trying to be accomplished in Vietnam. And even though it wasn't specifically accomplished *tactically*, I guess you'd say, strategically it kinda, it kinda worked out for Southeast Asia much like some of the people were hoping it would. So, you know, a defeat, but in the long run not so bad actually. So, yeah I was a little confused, and I hate to say it: You just, you do everything in self-interest and personal terms. I'm not sure if it wasn't me facing it. Um, I'm not sure. I did lose an uncle there, a pilot, that was killed in Vietnam. So, that was personal, but that, he was one of the first to die. He was like there on the Wall right in the middle; he's one of the first names in there in like '63. But I was young. I mean, you still kinda, yeah. It was a personal thing, and I said, "Eh!" Versus a huge political "Aaah!" You know? It just meant having to go do something else, and I was probably very lucky I did that [enlist], you know. You fall into stuff sometimes by sheer accident.

[4:35] KR: Yeah, yeah! So after, after basic training for the Navy, what was your next step? Did you get stationed on a ship?

[4:41] CK: Right, I got on the U.S.S. Fresno. We went right over, made a couple port calls to Vietnam, picked up a bunch of Marines, and our mission was, basically, we'd swap: We had equipment and Marines, and every five or six weeks we would go ashore, land, and we would swap out with another company of Marines that had been in country. And I did that three different deployments, OK? So, you could say I went to Vietnam three times, which sounds "oooh wooh! You know, like, woo, 'Deer Hunters'!" and um. If anybody shot at me, I missed the whole thing. Uh, no air conditioning; that was bad. Sometimes the ice cream machine went down. But it wasn't—I have to be honest, you know.

[5:23] KR: (Laughs)

[5:26] CK: You see a Vietnam vet, people are thinking I'm *that*. It was a pain in the butt, but it wasn't like that for me. You know, it just wasn't. I can't take that kind of credit with me like some of my compatriots in the War Memorial that saw actual *hard combat* in the jungle, so.

[5:44] KR: OK, so how did you end up getting stationed on submarines.

[5:49] CK: Oh, another, another millennial game. I mean I'm on this ship for almost two years as an enlisted man; I'm a seaman. Uh, I have to pick a rate. After a while, if you don't get a rate coming out of being enlisted and go to school, you're called a non-designated non-rate; you're hamburger. But, you can get on board a ship and what we call "strike for a rate." So, "I wanna be one of those! I wanna be a cook! I wanna be this!" I was on the deck gang most times. Well, that was "I'm tired! I'm getting paid nothing. I'm getting paid $250 a month or something." Then all of a sudden this thing comes up that says you can join ROTC and become an officer. Now, I'm gonna tell ya: This whole officer thing, I hated officers; you know, I was an enlisted guy. But, I'm looking at the pay's better, and the first thing you'll be at a civilian university for four years. I'm sitting there living with 60 guys, and I'm—I hate to say it—I'm a millennial; that sounds better! OK? Off I [go], you know, and my grades were reasonable out of high school. I did good on the SAT. I was always very technical. Go ROTC, you know, graduate from the University of

Michigan, you know technical degree a-da-da-da. And mostly in the Navy, unless you had a real objection—At one point in time, '75-'76 if you were technical and you didn't un-volunteer for some reason, that's where you were going—and *boom* I'm in the submarine force as an officer.

[7:23] KR: OK!

[7:24] CK: Again it was just, you wake up one day: "How the heck did this [happen]? You know, what happened to college? Now I gotta really do something? Ah God, are you kidding me? This looks painful." You know, Of course you start looking for the next thing: "When's shore duty, you know? When can I get out?" You know, so you're like, "Yeah, all right." Onto the Submarine Force. So I end up on, uh, an attack submarine for about a year. That one's going back into the yard, so then they took me off of that and put me on a missile submarine for three years after that, so.

[7:56] KR: What did you study at the University of Michigan?

[7:58] CK: I was a double-major in Business and Engineering.

[8:03] KR: Oh cool! So while you were in submarine crews, what missions did you and your crew get assigned? What was your role, first of all, on a submarine?

[8:10] CK: Well if you go aboard a submarine, your role can vary. First off, you've got a thing called Division Officer. You're put in charge of divisions.

[8:21] KR: OK.

[8:22] CK: OK, and it could be anything: could be supply, could be sonar. Usually when you first get aboard, a small division. So you got five, six, maybe ten people working for ya.

[8:34] KR: Get your feet wet.

[8:35] CK: Get your feet wet and maybe learn a little bit of a specialty. And then you might rotate. What your primary purpose though is to run the submarine, drive the submarine, and fight the submarine. So you're gonna become an officer, a diving officer, an officer of the deck who's driving ships around, shooting torpedoes. Depending on your mission set: When I was on the attack submarine there was a lot of, we went up under the ice. There was chasing Russians around a bit. The missile submarine a little different. Missile submarine, the big deterrent patrols: We would go underwater for months at a time and just hide, in huge blocks of ocean. We used to call it four knots to nowhere. Because I swear to you, we would have a block of ocean the size of Wyoming, they would tell us. And then not even the United States knew where we were. We had orders to be in this block of ocean, and we would just sit there very quietly. You want to talk about boring, staying away from everybody—fishing boats, anything—just waiting for orders to launch missiles, all right. And I'm not gonna get into communication systems, and how, and protocols for how that happens. But that's what you did. No communication, virtually no communication with the outside world; very, very rare. And you'd never radio out because as soon as you; if you put a mast up, the radio satellite had you. So, I'm telling you, it was super-secret, quiet. I don't think 99% of the American public even knew we were under there doing that, and all over these box motions were all of these submarines, just waiting for orders to launch with the presumption that if no one could

find us, that no matter what an enemy tried to do—they could hit all our missile sites and all our bombers, you know—it was coming back. So *don't do that*! Don't even think about it. And they still are out there today doing that very same mention. So, I mean it's…

[10:27] KR: Right.

[10:29] CK: You know, it's a horrifying thought to think about what that could mean, but we always thought as, "If we do our job, it doesn't happen. And if we convince a potential enemy," of course it was the Russians at that point, "that they could never get us all." There wasn't any pause. You know, they were gonna get eliminated too, or largely. There was no sense [in attacking], no logic to it. And of course, they're thinking the same sort of way. Or who knows what they're thinking? You know (laugh), you never know what an enemy or a potential enemy's thinking. You know, you can only guess what their capabilities are and try and react.

[11:03] KR: Sure, OK. So, while you were on the sub, did you ever get to communicate with your family back home, or were you basically radio-silent the whole time?

[11:11] CK: We were radio-silent the whole time. Um, no. If you went underwater, and we had the staff, and we had one of our chiefs die a weekend of patrol, OK, you couldn't radio off that, and the families never knew until we came up for patrol like 12 weeks later. Similarly, if you had a death in your family or something, no one wanted to get called into the CO's cabin right when you surfaced to go back into port; that *cannot* be good news. So, um, so you would just never know. Now, what they did have: Your family got five—it was called—"Family-grams." They had, and they could put 25 words in it. All right? And throughout the patrol, they could do those 25—they would submit em to the squadron, all right, and the squadron would try to put em on up. I don't know if you know how communication worked, but one of the worst things in communication protocol is ever to have blank space. Because, if all of a sudden they're radioing to the submarines, and it's a one-minute transmission, then all of a sudden, the next day it's 15 minutes of transmission, the enemy's going, "What's going on? Everything's alert!" So, you always fill it with something: sports scores or something. And if they had room between operational stuff, you know, like 'The Soviets here. We got em spotted here; stay here." If they had room, the Family-grams would come in, and it would just say, "Child born. Named em this. Everybody here fine. Wish you well." The CO would intercept the bad ones: "Divorcing you," (laughs) "I never wanna see you again." They would stop that, though the radio men would see em, you know. But usually, there wasn't much they could say, you know? And, so it was mostly. But you'd be surprised. It's like mail that you always hear about for military members anywhere. You would hang on it, and they'd paste it over their bunks. You know. Because again, the squadron made sure. They really didn't want you passing news, bad news, that way. If you're gonna hear it, you wanted to hear it from the captain in person, not just some impersonal thing. So, it was a little strange. Sometimes they'd get a little racy, and the radio men would let them go through, but not too much, you know?

[13:37] KR: That makes sense, OK.

[13:38] CK: But you are pretty isolated, yeah. Today in this world of iPhones and Instagram and stuff, it's hard to imagine that, um.

[13:46] KR: Being totally off the grid.

[13:49] CK: *Totally* off the grid. I always tell people this—it still happens to me today—is there will be, a song will come on, and I'll say, "That's a pretty good little tune." And soon they'll say, "Yeah, like 40 years ago." And you're like (makes confused face). Or some event that, a historical event, and I'll sit there like, "Is that right? Did that happen?" They'll say, "Yeah, that happened!" And I'd find out the time frame of it. "Oh! That's when I was in the submarine monastery, OK? Yeah, you know, I got it!" Cause there's still today there's blanks, whole blanks in things that, you know.

[14:25] KR: So, did you have anything, any kind of entertainment to keep you occupied during your off hours?

[14:32] CK: Well, there aren't that many off hours. It's hard to believe, four knots to nowhere, but there's not that many [off] hours. But let's talk about the primary entertainment was reading.

[14:40] KR: Sure.

[14:41] CK: OK, now sailors on submarines, almost no one gets on a submarine until they've been through two years of school.

[14:48] KR: OK.

[14:49] CK: Even our enlisted have, I should say—I can't say what it is today—but even our enlisted had associate's [degrees] or full degrees. So, it's a very different type of Navy than the—the navy I came out of on that LLC, which was full of tattoos and scars and people fighting and raising hate and discontent. Much more—what's the term—esoteric, readers, thinkers—not everybody, but, I mean, people read. I mean, I can just remember things like *Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit*, I mean people would have those books almost memorized. It was like *Fahrenheit 451*, if you can remember that where people are memorizing books. I mean, those things are big, and uh, some people would. It would have been lovely today because you could have done college degrees; you couldn't do that back then. Now, you ahd movies: one movie a night, the big reel-to-reel, OK? All right, you would take enough on patrol usually for one movie a night, and the enlisted men would switch. You couldn't watch the movie unless you were qualified in submarines, which took about a year. Which means you had done all the things that they said you are now a submariner, and you wear these dolphins—I don't have one on here—and you wear these dolphins; you are now qualified on submarines, which was a really big deal. You know, you get qualified for very difficult, um, but you couldn't watch a movie until you got qualified. You know, you were lower than whale shit-non-qual-puke until that. Didn't matter if you were an officer; if you weren't qualified, no respect. In fact, I would argue on submarines, rank is important; it's always there, but it's what you know; it's your qualifications; it's that sort of a thing that generates respect. No one's, you know, you couldn't even, you wouldn't even know who the officers were on the submarine if you just looked at em. Most of the time we were in t-shirts, in shorts, or in bath robes. I mean, who cares? And beards, I mean you look like Rasputin or something, you know? Until we came back up, it just didn't matter. Now, you know who the captain is; you know who your officer is; you gotta watch the game and stuff. But overall, you know, I never found an enlisted [man] on a

submarine that wasn't able to talk to any officer and say, "This is crap! This doesn't work." And if you shut em down, it's like "What are you talkin about?" Because you're kinda in this—I won't call it a fraternity at that time, all men, but—yeah, it was just like you were all together; you had to get along. So, being officious and a big pain in the ass, that ain't gonna work, OK? Now the captain can do that, right, and some would, but you better be with the crew here. So again, you get to watch the movie; saw some awful movies. But sometimes the guy that worked the signal projector was the most important guy on the submarine because you're really outside entertainment. So, I don't' wanna belabor, but the one movie I can remember watching on the submarine was *The Exorcist*, OK? So, watching *The Exorcist*; the crew's watching *The Exorcist*. And I don't know, I don't wanna—I don't know if this gives it away—but at the end there's a big scene. I mean, all the Catholics on that god-dang crew were freaked. You couldn't go to the god-dang enlisted berthing area without people moaning and worrying about someone being possessed. I mean, that, we said "No more movies like that!" Crew are, sailors in general are superstitious, you know? They may or may not be religious, but everybody's throwing the salt over the shoulder, you know, like that. This will give you another aside; I don't wanna belabor this too much.

[18:34] KR: No, please!

[18:35] CK: I was on this submarine called the U.S.S. Casmir Pulaski. Isn't that a funny name for a U.S. submarine?

[18:41] KR: Yeah, who's that named after?

[18:42] CK: All the missile submarines were named after freedom fighters. They didn't have to be American freedom fighters: Casmir Pulaski, the [inaudible], the Tecumseh, the Simon Bolivar, OK, the Stonewall Jackson, the Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln—people that were, you know, doing freedom. So, we're the Casmir Pulaski. We're in the Cold War. Eastern Europe belongs to the Soviets, or whatever, right? Well, we keep getting stuff from Poland because they considered us "their submarine." And, you know, sometimes you'd want envelopes and put the ship's sticker on it and stuff. But the funny thing is they kept sending us "sacred soil," OK? And it was a little vial mounted, just a little vial like that with soil. And it said, "Blessed by the Cardinal of Warsaw"! Well, I mean, I don't know how many Catholics there are aboard, or how many were even following. But everybody's like, "Oh, that's bad luck. We gotta put the sacred soil up." OK? Well after a while, we had four or five of these things right outside the war room, and anytime we'd go to battle stations people would—have you ever seen Buddhist temples where they take the thing? People would touch each one of them if something was going wrong, right? I know it sounds silly, OK, but you know who that cardinal was? Pope John Paul II, eventually becomes the pope. We don't know that at the time; he's just trying to keep the church alive in a communist system. But this thing, it's a funny, funny world that, you know, takes place. Well, let's go on. We could go on that forever, so.

[20:25] KR: No, I loved hearing about that! I had a question; hopefully I'll remember in a minute, but let's go on. So, were you on sea duty for your entire career?

[20:38] CK: Oh no, no, you can't do that. I mean, in the Navy, unless your specialty, your sea-going warfare specialty is going to be Air, Submarines, OK, or Surface. OK, now there are

specialties—supply, civil engineers, medical stuff—but in terms of what's called the Warfare Specialties, it's one of those three things. So, in your Warfare Specialty, you're always gonna be dealing in submarine; you're gonna go to submarines, submarine tenders, maybe submarines squadrons. You're gonna do that because you're always progressing in your specialty, whatever. Now, when you go ashore for shore duty you can go all over the place, you know. Now, a lot of it is submarine-related. Now it's interesting, what's weird for me is that because I had a technical background, I had a business background at the same time, I got hooked into—strangely, well, I ended up here first, down in Bellwood on shore duty.

[21:44] KR: Oh, OK.

[21:45] CK: It had nothing to do with what I ultimately would do on my shore assignments. I basically told my detailer—*millennial*—I've done four years of sea duty; I still owe them a couple years. I'm getting out of this Navy because I'm fed up with this sea duty. So, I told my detailer, "I don't care where you send me. I just want there to be a lot of women." OK? And he said, "Well I got this billet down in," it's for, it's called Operations Research guy "down in Richmond, Virginia." I said, "Well, I don't know anything about Richmond. I'll go down there." OK, and it's Bellwood, you know down the street here about 12 miles—big supply depot, I was an Operations Research guy. And the history is that they taught me very, very well. They teach—I should say—they treated me very well. I actually had a regular life; people were wonderful; met my wife there. And then when it was time for me to leave the Navy, I had done the, what, *the millennial thing*: had made no plans whatsoever. You know? And the detailer says, "Well, how about a ship out of San Diego? It's pretty nice out there." So, I said, "Aaah, OK!" And the next thing I'm (laughs) on the ship in San Diego. The rest of my shore duties were, um, not particularly popular. They were very nuclear weapons-related, and weapons-related. I spent a lot of time *not* in Navy ports: Offutt Air Force base in Nebraska, Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, and areas like Los Alamos and Livermore. And I don't wanna overload myself about me being this big scientist; I was mostly there just trying to keep on my track a little bit. But I got into this incredible world that a lot of people hate and everything, but this incredible world in history of how all this Physics worked, which is something I love. That's one thing I like about submarines: it is nothing but physics! Hydraulics, air, you know, water, it's nothing but physics your whole life. And so, I did a lot of what you would call "not normal tours (laughs)" for Navy guys, but then I would always eventually go right back to some tour submarine-related: Charleston, you know, something. I went to other places, you know, some supply jobs, but they were all submarine-related. And then back, and then maybe back to shore duty if you were technical, and then you get sort of senior, and you're too old to go to sea anymore.

[24:19] KR: So, while you were assigned to those nuclear research bases, like Los Alamos, were you doing research, or what was your assignment there?

[24:26] CK: You know the, if I had to, this is gonna sound not right: a babysitter. All those places are run by the Department of Energy. The United States Military doesn't own any nuclear weapons; they're owned by the Department of Energy. And, it's gonna sound funny, but they're signed out to the military for their use, or potential use. OK, and one of my jobs was keeping track of all those and doing different things like, like that, you know? But also some of my jobs were—

the military had specific needs for the weapons to do some in certain ways, and it being something we could maintain. Now, these scientists were brilliant. They were like, these were the kind of guys that you see with Carl Sagan, and they're trying to figure out black holes, and white holes, and dark matter. Sometimes as a military guy my job was, "OK, that's all cool, OK." And the scientists loved it because they could get funded based on military research to look at a lot of things. But I said, "OK look, that's neat. But here's the deal: We need something that does this, that can be maintained by people that can break *anything*, that can be safe, OK, that we can transport the way, you know." All right, all that "gee whiz stuff' is good, but we're interested in what we do, how we do it, how we get it there. All this other stuff, "Wow that's," you know. And they had some amazing things. They were, you know, having to figure out how to ensure weapons would work when you couldn't test them anymore, OK? And they really got into that because, again, that research led to a lot of research that's going on now: quarks and dark matter. Because who else has got cyclotrons and all this weird stuff to do it, you know? But again, "OK, we still need to make sure these things are gonna run when the time comes." So, so I found a lot of my job, when I actually wasn't touching weapons or making sure where they went or getting them transported, was, in those environments, was just "OK guys, got it, but we need *this*." But the guys were brilliant. You know, amazingly brilliant. And I would tell people that I know people don't like nuclear weapons; they want to get rid of them. Like, I got it. As Truman Capote said, "Watch out what you wish for … more tears shed." I never found a group of people in the military that were thinking farther out ahead about the world was gonna look at. You could go to a place like STRATCOM in Omaha, Nebraska, and they'll have an outline about what they believe the world's gonna be in 100 years, OK: various permutations of what they think, and then what actions that we need to take as things happen. OK, I mean I can look back now, and I can remember words like "North Korea" or "Iran" a long time before they had a glimpse of nuclear weapons. Things like that, "proliferation" and what would happen. So, it's not an accident, and people know what they're doing. I know it's unpopular, but they should have some confidence that—I used to call it the Nuclear Non-weapon Organizations because, in some ways, they had to make sure it worked, but everybody was trying to do everything in their power, so that they would never *have* to use them, OK? So, "Here's what we need to do to make sure this happens, this happens, so no one gets an inkling," whatever. We're given something here that could make somebody nervous or, you know, unhappy. We gotta be careful, so. It's an interesting environment, and I was very, very invested. And even though some of them were kinda in the Nether Zone.

[28:25] KR: So you were kinda like the military liaison to the science teams; you could speak in both worlds, right?

[28:30] CK: Right, basically. Now, I had an admiral I was working for; I mean, I'm not alone on this god-dang thing, you know? I'm [not] just a little Navy captain who's driving around setting nuclear policy. I guarantee that goes all the way up to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the President. But, you need somebody who's got the wherewithal to get into those big bubbas and say, "OK, here's what they're thinking. What do you want me to tell them?" All right. And, you know, it's an interesting political problem for political leaders because, you know, if you're—I'm not gonna get on one aisle or the other—but if you've always been kind of anti-nuclear, and you get thrown in this world, and you're President. And you'll notice that there are all kinds of

very, I would say—let's use the term "liberal"—but more Left presidents who would be very anti-nuclear go into the office and then all of a sudden never seem to be able to quite do anything with it—weapons—because I think when they realize the responsibility is there, it's a lot more complex than they thought.

[29:34] KR: Sure.

[29:35] CK: There's a lot more dangers and weird stuff that can happen. So, yeah, so you gotta translate what the political leadership wants to do, you know, and everything. But I'm never gonna say that some little Navy captain is setting nuclear policy for the—no, that goes all the way up the Sec-Def, the President, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, so.

[29:56] KR: So was it always weapons development, or was there any nuclear research into clean energy, or power plants, or nuclear submarines, or things like that?

[30:04] CK: No, the actual weapons themselves and the nuclear reactors. Wait a minute, the submarine nuclear reactors, that's all Navy; the Navy takes care of those.

[30:15] KR: OK!

[30:16] CK: The whole Navy Nuclear Power Program. Only the weapons are run by the Department of Energy. Now, they were using—and honestly, my concern was weapons. But the Department of Energy—it's just an, it's a huge organization—had all kinds of things going. Now what they're doing on alternative energy all the time, I don't know. I know they were using a ton of the stuff for weapons research, were also used for energy: fusion. Like, I just read a thing from Lawrence Livermore that they believe they're close to a fusion reactor. And they were using the very same technologies used to make sure the weapons worked when you can't test em to do that sort of thing. So, a lot of that's going on, but that—ah, that's, that's, you know, that wasn't my chart, you know. I would like to have been; it was all interesting. I still read their magazines today, like, "Oh wow, that's cool!"

[31:12] KR: Gotcha, OK. So, what was your most rewarding assignment during your Navy career, or what was the most memorable time of your service for you.

[31:21] CK: God, that's hard. Most memorable? I mean, um, God that's a really hard thing because there were a lot of memorable things. You know, I'll give you—a rewarding one would be I'm at Submarine Force Pacific Fleet; I'm a Navy captain, all right? They're the ones that run all the submarines in the Pacific Fleet, but I'm not on a submarine now. I'm a Navy captain, OK? They have their own guys running their ships, but I'm responsible for making sure at least part of their ships are ready to go on deployment and do the same things we've talked about. So, here I am darn-near 50 years old, and I'm getting to ride submarines again, but I don't have to ride em for months at a time; I ride em for a week, OK? And you kinda get treated a little like royalty, as much as you can on a submarine. You know, you're a captain; they're kinda like, "[inaudible] Oh, there's nothing but trouble here[?]" So, I'm getting to be with a group; I feel like I'm helping—I'm not sure they would all agree—but I feel like I'm helping. But I'm getting to be part of this environment and this crew. But then, three weeks a month I'm home: family, kids, you know. I get the camaraderie without a lot of the pain and suffering, and that was really, really good,

particularly towards the end of my career. It's funny though, I would realize what a young man's game it was. I mean, the first time I rode that submarine when I was like 50, I hadn't been on a boat for like 10 years. And I couldn't figure out: You know, I'm sleeping with the XO on the top bunk, but I couldn't figure out how to get in the top bunk anymore. I mean, when you're young you used to dive in. But I'm sitting there like, "How do I get up there?" You know, and like that. And then, you know, you forget how hard they work. You know, "I'm older now! I need naps! (Laughs) and you know, they're like up all the time!" I said, "Does this ship ever go to sleep (laughs)?" You know, I mean, like, all these bells and buzzers and "down periscope!" and "depth!" and "We're doing this!" And you wanna participate, but you're like, "Oh, come on, let's go to bed!" You know, that kind of thing. You realize that, "Yeah, there's a young person probably having to do most of this." So, um, most rewarding tour: I mean, I don't know. There's os many good ones. Shore duty when I had command in Hawaii; I had command in Hawaii.

[33:55] KR: What did you do in Hawaii?

[33:56] CK: It was called the Fleet Industrial Supply Center. Basically, the funny thing is that we, um, on Hawaii, Pearl Harbor, the Navy base is right next to the Ari Force base; in fact, they're attached. And the Air Force has this beautiful base of palm trees and lawns. And you go, all of a sudden you go in the Navy base, and it's nothing but cranes and yards and boats and things. I mean, I always akined [sic] it to *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy goes out, and it's all in color when she leaves her house; that's Hickam [Air Force Base]. Well I owned everything that looked like North New Jersey—no offense to the people of North New Jersey—but I mean, I owned all the cranes, all the oil, the house of goods, the container port, um, all the spare parts, you know, the warehousing. You name it, I had this incredible footprint that's all, like, 60 years old because you can't change anything from the way it looked when Pearl Harbor was attacked. But it was a big command, a lot going on, a lot of things happened when I was there. 9/11 happened when I was there. Uh, they did the premier of the movie *Pearl Harbor* and filmed it when I was there, and I had a lot of involvement in that. So, there was a lot of good things: Great civilians because everyone—in Hawaii, it's hard to find jobs that aren't hotel- or restaurant-oriented because it's a tourist area. So jobs in government, they're like, if you've got one, you keep em. So, I had very little turnover; I had experience. It wasn't like being back in the mainland where people were going all over. What a great team they were in Hawaii. I said, "Aren't I lucky? These people." And it was very involved and complicated, but yeah I had a command. Towards the ned of my career; I only had one tour after that. So, I knew I was going; I didn't make admiral, so I knew the handwriting was on the wall that, you know, in the Navy you're up or out! You know, so.

[36:08] The movie *Pearl Harbor*, what was your involvement in that? Did you ever get on the film set?

[36:15] CK: Oh yeah, yeah, the film set was all around us! They filmed in our house. OK, we had a house on Ford Island—I mean on Hospital Point, the one I had—this was when I was a sub-pack, then I later went to Ford Island—it's right on the channel that all the ships leave go past Hickam out to sea. And there's a scene in the movie where all these nurses are supposedly living in this house together. And the bombing starts, so they all run out of our house to the edge of the water, and Zeros come ripping by. And we're watching the film, but it was like, I swear they filmed all

day long to get about eight seconds of film for the movie. Various states of undress for the nurses to see what they could get away with. You know, Kate Beckinsale, Jamie King, all these—who I didn't really know much about at the time. But uh, "submarine monastery" stuff. It was interesting to see how much work went into eight seconds. And then, all during that period they're bombing Pearl Harbor. I mean, they're setting off explosions, and Zeros or Zero replicas are going all over. So, it's a pretty exciting time. Then, when they had the premier, they bring an aircraft carrier in to do the premier on: the USS Stennis. So that's, you know, the Navy's like, "This is like Top Gun: big advertisement for the Navy to come and do the film." Well, my command because they docked at my piers, and because of the unions in Hawaii, they weren't gonna build anything on that, uh, they weren't gonna be building bleachers to show that movie and all that stuff unless my guys did it. I mean, that's just the way it is, OK? And they were gonna bring all these people from L.A. to do it. I said, "That's not gonna have to work here. You're gonna have to use these folks. You're gonna have to pay for them." So, we built all kinds of stuff for the premier, which was fun. Because I was a "baba," I got to go on board for the three days before the premier, while they're doing all these media interviews. So, they got pictures of me with—Kyndall's [Kyndall Drumheller] got em—me and Ben Affleck, the stars. And you know, my seven seconds of fame, like we're all best buddies or something. But it was interesting to see the whole move thing, you know? The movie was so-so; I won't be a critic. But it was a little too long.

[38:49] KR: Agreed.

[38:50] CK: But I thought, uh, you thought that one of the reasons that Pearl Harbor happened was because the government was spending so much time trying to keep this love triangle together in one place.

[38:59] KR: (Laughs)

[39:00] CK: If they had been paying more attention to something else, maybe this wouldn't have happened. But yeah, that was my only touch of Hollywood.

[39:11] KR: On the flip side, did you ever have a low point during your service that made you second-guess your decision to stay in?

[39:17] CK: Oh, just about every other day.

[39:20] KR: OK (laughs)!

[39:21] CK: [I'm a] millennial, man! I mean, you know, I get past my gratification period, and then OK, "Hey, this kinda sucks (you know, to use the direct word)." I'm gettin' tired of this. And you know, thre's an old saying in the Navy: The only good tours are the ones you just came from or the ones you're going to. You know, so, I constantly was writing letters of resignation, and "I'll show them!" as if the whole naval infrastructure is just dying to keep me in, like they would care. So, you know, you just run into stuff like that; even in command some days just feel like, "I'm in charge, in command." Then you realize, "I'm not really in command of much of anything." I can do somethings, and I have command. But the whole world's interrelated. There's stakeholders and a hundred things; no one has the power. When you're at sea it might be a little different, but no one has the power. So some days, you'd be frustrated; you'd want to get something done. Or you

deal with Washington; nothing ever gets done. I mean, I think the low point for me was 9/11. You think about my career, it's, you know, even though I did go to Iraq. But if you think about 9/11, what was our job in 9/11, before 9/11. But [inaudible] my job was to make any fight (points) *over there*. Not here. So even when things didn't go well—Vietnam, Persian Gulf, whatever it was—what little bit of thing you were in—Grenada, Lebanon—whatever you were doing, you know whether it was popular or not, or if you did it well or not, as long as the fight was *there*, that's what mattered.

[41:04] KR: Right.

[41:05] CK: Then the fight *wasn't* there—guilt. You know, "What did we do? How did we miss it?" you know. And you can look at an individual and they say, "Not my fault!" And you say, "No no no, that's not the point!" You know, we were supposed to keep it *out there*. And we didn't.

[41:23] KR: So, how did 9/11 change the Navy? From your perspective, what was different after that day?

[41:28] CK: Well you know, it's gonna—I'll tell ya, a lot of Navy people are gonna get pissed at this, but—when 9/11 happened, we get the ships out, we get this idea: "We're at war! We're going for it!" Troops are getting ready to leave. We're getting this; we're ramping up and stuff. And as things start developing about where the 9/11 came from, OK, all of a sudden we start realizing, "This might be so much of a Navy thing," OK? And the Navy kinda looked at it like, "There is no ramping up for the Navy; we're always ready. We're always on deployment. When you leave that home port, you're ready for war: full of ammunition; everything's ready to go." For us, there is ramping up. Now, there might be more ships going than were before. We kept the, you know, battle groups in there pretty continuously ever since. But for us, you know, all the people who thought there were gonna be new budgets and new ships all of a sudden, look, maybe not so much. It just looks like it's going to be the way it was: more Army, more special operations. Of course, the SEALS are a part of that and everything. But in the general greater Navy, either your hopes or your fears were not realized that all of a sudden the Navy would change greatly. And people just said, the Navy is, you know, "This is what we do. We're supposedly ready all the time, so unless it's a little more of the same thing." Plus, how are you gonna ramp up? It takes ya seven years to build a ship anyway [and] maybe seven years before that to even plan it. So, it ends up being more an Army, whatever, Air Force a little bit. Now eventually the Navy gets more and more involved because the Army's and the National Guard's reserves are getting so burnt out that we end up sending lots of Navy people—and still today—Afghanistan and Iraq to do a lot of particularly logistics stuff. Um, you know the Navy will take some of that over for periods just because of burning out, you know, of the other services. So that's an unusual thing that the youngsters now are doing, but that wasn't in my [time]. You know, we said, "That's stupid. I'm not carrying a gun; I've got missiles." You know, so that was different. So, I would say in many ways 9/11 didn't change the fundamental guts and heart of the Navy. Technology got better and different things. But we were kinda doing the same things: spy missions, going over, ready to launch. I'm sure the Navy, "Oh, we did this! We did that!" But for me, I look around, ultimately I said, "You know, the Navy's kinda always been ready. This is how we get ready. Um, there's not much more we

can do to get ready. All right, cause everybody leaves; they're gone. There's no hope." So I think that, I just don't think there was that big a change as people thought. So, um…

[44:25] KR: That makes sense! So you mentioned you were in Iraq. What was your role in the Iraq War [*sic; Desert Storm*]?

[44:30] CK: Oh, there that's not Iraq War!

[44:33] KR: Operation Iraqi Freedom?

[44:35] CK: Oh no, the first one, afterwards, right? Desert Storm.

[44:43] KR: Desert Storm, right.

[44:44] CK: So after Desert Storm, I'm working with all these cone-head scientists. Well, they called me a cone-head too. So the war's over, and we have the No-Fly Zone. Then all of a sudden somebody—the worry is—there's always been worry, even before the Iraq War about Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear capability. I mean, Saddam [Hussein] had used chemical weapons, Anthrax, on Iran in the war. We were desperately worried and [inaudible]. So, now the war's over. And now we've actually captured a lot of that. Part of the agreement, I don't know, part of the agreement was that we wouldn't go in; the Iraqis would start surrendering all this stuff. You know, "No-Fly Zone, you can't fly here anymore, and this is ours. We're not gonna (air quotes) occupy you, per se, but you're not going to do this." So OK, so now you've got, I mean *mounds* and mounds of chemical weapons. What do you do with them? Who knows what to do with those? You know, how are they armed? What do you do with them? And so, a lot of the scientists from these national laboratories are sent out there to figure this out. OK, we burn em on site, then you got the biological stuff, then you got the nuclear stuff. And so, I am a giant four-striper gopher, OK? I'm getting these scientists out in the middle of nowhere, making sure they have tents. I'm a supply guy, making sure they're happy, making sure there's security around, OK? Getting what they need, I'm not having anything to do with figuring out what they're gonna do—and they gradually do figure all that out—but, you know. So, that's where I am. So there I'm sitting there, was I ever in any danger? I think probably not. There were some minefields, but you know, I was hanging pretty close to the chow hall anyway, so you know. I was just trying to keep them happy for about four months. And then someone took over for me while, and they rotate scientists, and they took care of it. I will say when the actual Iraq invasion happened, and there was all that debate about what kind of weapons were there or not weapons, I don't know what went into that exactly; I wasn't part of that discussion. But I could see where anybody who had seen what had been there before would have thought: "Man, they were into this stuff!" You know, and they probably, and it's been whatever, 20 years, they've probably got a lot more of the junk. So I don't know what the intel would tell, but I would see. I was pretty convinced, you know, that I bet you there is a bunch of stuff there. Now I guess we didn't find it, or we found a little bit, or stuff like that. Yeah, cause they were into it; they had a lot: Anthrax, everything, you know that kind of thing.

[47:50] KR: Oof, that sounds rough. So, how long was your Navy career? When did you decide to retire when you didn't make admiral?

[47:58] CK: 32 years. I had command at Hawaii, and it was, now here comes 9/11, right? Chris is gonna leave. OK, I'm done. And then 9/11 comes, and what is the first thing the military does: "We don't know what's gonna happen, so we freeze everybody." OK, so I'm sitting there like, "It's time for me to rotate. I don't *have* to rotate, but you know, command slots are command slots." And then, so all of a sudden they tell me, "Look, we want you to, we want you up in Washington, all right? And we want you working in the Army as the CIO of the Military Traffic Management Command. So, uh, any I hate to say it: They didn't know what to do with us. They stashed us. So, I took that. But then after about 10 months—again, as I had mentioned—there came this logic: They said, "What are we doing? We're holding all these people back. Our force structure's getting out of hand, or out of balance." And then all of a sudden, they just said, "If you want to go, you're more than happy to stay for another couple of years, but then you'll have to go. But if you'd like to go, we have people to replace people." And I said, "I'll retire." And what did I do? My wife was down here. I was batching it up in Washington, coming down on weekends. We bought a house here cause her mother was here. She was working at Bellwood's, so I get a job at Bellwood's. So I'm like, "OK, now I'm a Virginian for sure." So, have been ever since.

[49:42] KR: So, what was your next step when you got home? From that job at Bellwood's, what did you do next?

[49:47] CK: Well, I worked at Bellwood's as, uh, a federal employee in the weapons area, kinda doing—at a much lower level—but kinda doing what I had always done. But they're focused on aviation, OK? I don't wanna break any big secrets in the Navy. (Joking) we have this Air Submarine.

[50:06] KR: (Laughs)

[50:08] CK: Most all of the organizational parts, how it works, is all the same thing. OK? We make it *so* specialized. And it is specialized in the dropping-of-bombs end, but most of the infrastructure behind. So, I come in here, and [they say], "Oh, you're not an aviator guy." "It's parts! It's just parts! This is easy stuff! You know? I mean, this is nothing." And then so I started working that, and I did like five or six years at, uh, Bellwood working for the Defense Logistics Agency, and then I got a job at the Defense Contract Management Agency at Fort Lee and—continuous process of growth—I got a Statistics teaching job. I always say this, my wife's retired from the military; I'm retired from the military. She's retired from the civil service; I'm retired from the civil service. I'm retired from the military, OK, I'm not on Social Security yet, but there wouldn't be a national debt if there wasn't my family because we're sucking the Treasury dry.

[51:13] KR: (Laughs)

[51:15] CK: You know, we just have been able to successfully, uh, keep on keep on. So really, federal government, I was in one form or another for 46 years.

[51:28] KR: OK, so what are you doing now? Are you still working, or have you retired?

[51:33] CK: Well, the COVID messed me up.

[51:34] KR: Yeah.

[51:35] CK: OK, I was still working for a private-sector company. I retired out of, then—again, that's a partial retirement, but. And I worked for a private-sector company, teaching: Rent-a-Professor actually. Uh, when they'd have enrollment problems or misjudgments and stuff, almost no one wants to hire a permanent *anything* anymore because of all the benefits. So, I did Rent-a-Professor, and I did a lot of that overseas, OK. If you're in the State Department, teaching things with anywhere from the United States International Development Peace Corps. Things that we would do, I'd have classes—some for U.S. citizens, sometimes for foreign citizens—and I did that for awhile. Kinda spotty work, but, you know, got me to travel. And of course, the COVID come up, so there's nothing happening now. And I don't know where that will go from now on. I'm not sure where normalcy will go, and if people weill have the money or want to continue doing that or not. I don't know if I"ll feel comfortable doing it. I'm pretty open to, you know, risk and everything like that. But uh, because most of my classes were in the Middle East. But, you know, with the COVID, I just don't know how the world will be. Even when we think we've got most of this beat or whatever. We're gonna wait and see. Until then, what do I do? I volunteer everywhere: SPCA, here, Red Cross. I try and do as much as I can, and so does my wife, within the confines of what the COVID will allow, OK?

[53:16] KR: Sure.

[53:17] CK: And uh, you know, so that's what we're trying to do: that kind of thing. So, virtually every day I'm volunteering somewhere.

[53:25] KR: When did you start volunteering at the War Memorial?

[53:28] CK: Oh, I'm probably about three and a half years at this point.

[53:31] KR: OK, cool.

[53:32] CK: You know, a lot like a lot of visitors at the War Memorial, I saw this shrine here. I said, "What the heck's that?" In fact, it's my wife who told me what it was because her uncle is enshrined up there; he died in World War II. And I said, "Oh!" Well, I'm part of a submarine veterans' group, and I'm an officer in that, so we decided to have a meeting here.

[53:58] KR: OK!

[53:59] CK: And we just said a meeting here, and I just said—this is before even the *new* section—I said, "Well this is pretty interesting!" I talked to a volunteer. He said, "Yeah, it's pretty cool. You do *this*." And I knew I was getting close to transitioning out of my federal service job. I said, "Maybe I'll look into it," and I got with the staff here, and I've been here ever since. You know, and here, unless I'm traveling, I'm here Thursday mornings all the time. I try to do special events. I've done their Mighty Pen Project: veterans' writing. So, I've worked with em quite a bit. IT's a wonderful organization, great new facility. I guess I'm advertising now. I guess you don't need that. I think we've got a lot of room; we've got a lot to see here, and I think we need to get discovered, OK. Cause for a lot of Richmonders, like I said, this whole thing here is, "There's that shrine, and then there's *something* up on the hill there. I don't know what that is exactly and all those pillars," but you know. And then we get people in, and they start looking around, they're like, "Wow!" And it's too bad about COVID because we used to get our school groups in here.

And then, you know, next Mom and Dad—the kids are like, "Come on, you've gotta go see this!" We need to get through this because there's a lot here, so. OK, enough advertising (laughs).

[55:23] KR: No, that's great! So, we like to gear these oral histories toward education and giving students in the classroom a real person's perspective on wars and other military experiences that they may have only read about in textbooks. So, I wanted to ask, if you were visiting a school classroom to talk about serving in the Navy, what would you want students to know?

[55:46] CK: Oh, here we go again. I'm not sure. One thing is that as a volunteer, as an ex-Navy officer, I do not see myself as a recruiter for the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Army, or the U.S. Marine Corps. And I'm careful about that because a lot of people visit here, and they get their "gee whiz!" about weapons and you watch their video games, whatever the war games, and you hear em, like, "I just can't wait until I can join the Army and do *this*." Sometimes they just want, when I talk to school groups, I don't dissuade them, but I want them to chill out a little bit. Let's get, let's wait and see. There's a great career, a lot of good things, I'll admit it, but it's not for everybody. It looks like fun, but a lot of times it's not fun. I'll tell stories, but it's a little not-fun. I don't tell stories about people getting shot up to school groups. And you're just like, "Cool it." And you wanna sell—to me, this is just me—I want to sell: Be a teacher. Be a fireman. Be a policeman. You know, *serve*, OK? Be a historian, all right? Be a Park Ranger. There's a billion things you can do that are great things, you know, and see what fits, all right? Just don't get lost in the "gee whiz" and the fancy movies. So, that's kinda what I tell em. I try and tell em both what it's, you know, "This can be good, but there's some things that you need to know: Do you ever miss your mother? Have you already gone to summer camp with the Boy Scouts? Did you miss Mom?" No one will admit it; they're all looking at their shoes. I said, "Well think about doing that for a year at a time." One of our ships just came back that's been gone for over a year—two of our ships, OK? Haven't been home for a year, been at sea 95 percent of the time. So you gotta think about whatever. The combat-related stuff and some of the other volunteers will talk about. Some of the awful things they went through in Vietnam. They just say, "This is not a movie, and it's not a video game." You know, it's service but just beware. Just go in open-eyed.

[58:04] KR: Absolutely. So, as you've mentioned, we're in the middle of a pandemic, and right now it kinda feels like we're fighting a war against COVID-19. So has your military experience, your service in the Navy, made you see the pandemic any differently or react differently than most people?

[58:24] CK: Well again, it's interesting. Being a submariner, being on all those missile patrols, I always argue I've been planning for a pandemic forever. So, when the pandemic happened, people started talking about isolating yourself and, you know, staying away from each other. And I'm kinda like, "Yeah." My whole life was that, you know? "No social contact!" OK well, I had the other guys on the ship, but really most submariners, I would say, are probably more introverted, introspective type people. So it's not like we're having a, you know, I don't know. It's not like a gossip, really a gossip mill. But so when the pandemic happened, my first reaction was for me, "OK, I can stay at home." It just doesn't matter to me that much, OK? My wife, it kills her cause she's a social-contact, more extroverted person. She wants her sorority groups, and all of a sudden she can't meet. I'm like, "I'm OK. You know, I'll read. I'll write, Mighty Pen. I'll do stuff." So, it

didn't matter. But an interesting thing I always tell people about the pandemic—and I'm not trying to make light about it—but when I first heard about the pandemic, when I was working in Iraq with those scientists, you know, there was a big argument before Desert Storm about whether we had to inoculate all our troops against Anthrax. I had nothing to do with that, but I was at the Joint Staff at the time, so I was in staff meetings: Colin Powell and Dick Cheney—like Dick, like I really know him—and I'd listen to a lot of the arguments about it. And we messed with this for a year, and one of the reasons was a vaccine—I think it was like three shots; I got one of them—was a *hard* vaccine. It wasn't like a little flu shot; it was rough on people. It had some side effects. So, I'm watching this thing, and really they're really trying to figure out "Should we or shouldn't we do this?" And then, a guy, a scientist got up at Fort Dietrich, Maryland, which was—I don't know if they still—was kind of the Army Biological Warfare Center. I don't know if they still do all that stuff or whatever. And he's kinda looking at em like what are you guys worried about? Vaccinate em, that's not your problem. That's not it. You know what the problem is? You've got people out there in Iraq trying to develop a vaccine that 50 percent of the people get in three days, and they're dead three days later—50 percent of them. That's what people are trying to do. OK, that's what we're trying to stay ahead of. So when I hear about COVID, and the first reactions are, "Well, it's a problem. You can get sick and die, but not *that* many. It's a little worse than the flu." You got in that kinda like, "Some people get it, but a lot of people don't." So my first reaction when I heard about that was, "Oh God, it's not *that one*. It's not the Stephen King scenario, you know?" And when I first heard it, "OK, we can deal with that, you know. We should be able to figure this out." Now if you'd told me that we'd still be messing with this, you know, eight months later, I was like, "Are you kidding?" And we still, in a way, know so little about it. It seems like—again, it's media, so—but we keep getting surprised, you know? And I'm not dissing our scientists or anybody. I'm just saying, it just seems like we're finding out this is very, very complex. We find out new things. Maybe the media, because we have so much of it, as soon as earliest hint of something comes out, it goes out all over the place. I thought I was in good shape. I have type-O blood. For a while they were telling me I'm in good shape. Now they're saying not so much. So, you hang on every bit of good news and every bit of bad news. So, um, yeah you just kinda want it to be over, you know?

[1:02:20] KR: Yeah, could not agree more.

[1:02:22] CK: And, uh, but as I'm not trying to be a pessimist. I'm not trying to be get geopolitical on you. You know, I sometimes stay up at night worrying. Particularly some of the things I did, the weapons and different stuff. One time I said at night, "There's six billion of us, going up to ten billion by 2050. You don't think that more of this stuff is gonna happen? Have you ever seen animal over-population? Eventually nature says, 'that's enough!'" And I'm like, "Holy crap!" I'm not trying to make a big political, but I really, I got kids. It worries the heck out of me, you know. So, maybe this is a warning to us to rein something in: I don't know, environment, population, something, you know. But we won't listen. It's like, we're all millennials at heart: "it's all about us. It's all about our self-interest." It just is. It's hard to get through that, man. And maybe that's what I like about the military. I'm never gonna say there isn't self-interest involved, but as part of a team I'm part of a submarine. You could see that self-interest was always subjugated to the good of the team. You know, what is it Spock says (Vulcan salute), "The life of one…"?

[1:03:36] KR: "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of [the few or] the one."

[1:03:40] CK: Yeah whatever. See, you're a fanboy. So I miss that. That's like when I became a captain, and I got to go back on a submarine after politics in Washington, it was just, it was just nice to be back in environments that seemed more focused on the big picture of what they were doing than their individual whining and complaining. But self-interest is always there, trust me.

[1:04:07] KR: Sure, OK. So, last question I have: Looking back, do you feel like events like the Vietnam War, the wars in the Middle East, have they changed America's outlook toward the world?

[1:04:26] CK: (Sigh) I hope not. And I'm gonna try to tell you why this is weird. I just heard the president's pulling everybody out of Afghanistan, OK. I'm like, "OK, I mean that may be a good move. Hopefully it's thought-out." But when I look at things like Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, all the stuff we've done everywhere—and I'm not just talking about military—I'm talking about diplomatic, spies. It goes back to what I said about 9/11: The engagement out there, as long as you're out there, and you're engaged, you've got something to say. It could be economics, I don't know what. You may not always win, but as long as you got a finger in the pie, OK, you have a chance of influencing stuff. If you contain everything in [isolationism], all right, then events just happen, and next thing you know somebody's invading Poland again, and you don't know. All right? And then you're into something that you're way behind the power curve, whatever. It is just human nature for us to say, "OK, let's rein it all back in." I was just reading political commentaries "Libertarian, we don't' belong anywhere!" OK, cause it's always messy, and we lose people, and the [War Memorial] wall's a testament to that, right. There's always things that are out of control. But because you're out there, because you have an interest, because you're trying to do something, OK, you have a say—maybe not much. And there's risk things will go wrong, and they cost a lot of money. And I can see people saying, "Oh, we gotta spend money here." But I always got this isolationist fear. It's just been our nature, and I'm surprised and floored too how out-there we've been. You know, you hear about it now and then—but it doesn't matter, Democrats, Republicans, whatever—it seems like we always have generally stayed out there and kept our hands where in the pie. Not just militarily; economically, diplomatically. But I get this fear with COVID. I get this fear with needing money, national debt, that we're gonna rein in. And that always seems so seductive at the beginning cause it *is* money. And now we won't get involved in all that. But then, then it happens. It always seems to happen in this geopolitical world with maybe 10 billion people, you cannot be left alone. There is no country, OK. OK, there's a tribe maybe, but we're all in it together. And whether you want to be involved or not, they're gonna involve you, OK? Someone's gonna involve you for their own purposes: good, bad, or indifferent. So, that's the thing probably keeps me up. It's just those kind of things and these scenarios. We're just not very good sometimes in the long run in the United States. We're not the British, you know, we're managing empires for 400 years or something. We're just not good at it; we don't like it. It makes us uncomfortable. And for all these years, particularly since World War II, we keep doing it. We're getting on 80 years of trying to influence the world, and I think, I think there's a move afoot, regardless of party, (gestures inward containment motion): You know, let's get, let's not, no more of this stuff. That's it, I mean that's what I would say. Probably a bunch of BS, but uh.

[1:07:52] KR: No, I don't think so. No, yeah. I think you see some things coming that are probably coming soon. That was all the questions I had.

[1:08:01] CK: Good, good, I appreciate it.

[1:08:03] KR: I want to give you the last word. Is there anything you want to say that we haven't gotten to yet?

[1:08:07] CK: No, I think you've done fine. And we could talk, and I—you know I'm a talker; I can talk for all kinds of things—no, I think this is good. I appreciate, I appreciate what the War Memorial does: capturing these, these memories. The Mighty Pen Project, trying to get authors to write about the things that have happened. You know it's, as Clay Mountcastle said, you know, always make the point that it's a *living* museum. I guess I'm not supposed to use the term "museum," but it's a *living* education center. We honor those on the wall, but we're trying to teach, teach, teach, and recover what is going to be lost. OK, and I think there's great that someone is willing to do that. All right? And you know, I just think in all the stories my parents—well, my father was in World War II—but my mother and my wife's mother, who have passed, talked about *living* here in World War II. You know, it just kinda, kinda lost because these kinds of people aren't getting their stuff [preserved]. Because they were the home front. There were some—and now we have a movie about them—but there was some stuff: I mean, they thought we could lose this war, you know? So, I don't know. I think it's good that we do this, you know? And I know we digitize; people try to get that all out, but because once it's gone it's gone. You know, so, I appreciate the War Memorial's effort; that's one of the reasons I've stayed here: because I feel like I have something to offer. I'm proud of the War Memorial. I got in at just the right time. I mean, I swear I was here a year, and they're breaking ground, and we've gotten bigger and better, and more movies, and everything. And thank God for the state of Virginia, who funds so much of this, and the foundation, you know, the donors who give so much, so we can educate and do it. It's the right thing to do. And it's a good thing because it's a permanent thing. It's not something where you just throw some money in a hat, and it just disappears. It's here, and it will be here for a long time. So, I think that's the last word for me.

[1:10:23] KR: Well, thank you so much. This has been fantastic. You gave me everything that I wanted and more, and I really appreciate you taking the time.

[1:10:30] CK: Yeah, good luck transcribing all that.

[1:10:32] KR: Thanks Chris, I'm gonna be at it awhile.

[1:10:34] CK: Hahaha, great! Thank you!