

**ADMIRAL NIMITZ NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE PACIFIC WAR
Fredericksburg, Texas**

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Interview with Admiral Thomas Moore, USN (Retired)

Place of Interview: Fredericksburg, Texas

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Interviewer: Ned Smith

Admiral Thomas Moore (USN, Retired)

Introduction: Today is 1 October 2000. I am Ned Smith representing the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I will be doing an Oral History today with Admiral Thomas Moore, USN, Retired. We are in the Oral History portion of the auditorium at the high school in Fredericksburg, Texas. Admiral, let's start out at the beginning. What was your father's name and your mother's maiden name?

Admiral Moore: My father's name was Richard Randolph Moore, and my mother's name was Hulda Hill Moore.

Smith: You were born and reared where?

Moore: I was born and raised in a little town in Lowndes County, central Alabama. It was called Lowndes County.

Smith: Lowndes County.

Moore: It was between Selma and Montgomery.

Smith: Right, right. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Moore: Yes, I had one sister and two brothers.

Smith: Did the brothers also follow..did they have to serve in World War II or were you the only one in the family?

Moore: One of them wound up Vice Admiral and the other one was a dentist. He was in the war, but..

Smith: As a dentist, right?

Moore: Yes. My father was a dentist.

Smith: I see, I understand. Why did you two boys pick the Navy?

Moore: Well, I think we, so far as I was concerned, I grew up in the Great Depression, and so I lived in a town where there were two banks, both of them went broke, and my Dad told me that he didn't have enough money to send me to college so I wrote off to a Senator and a Congressman. From the Congressman, I got the opportunity to take the physical and mental exams, and he promised me what they called a "principal appointment." I had an alternate to start off with the following year, but they didn't give it to me. So I wrote a letter to—we had a rather famous senator in Alabama called Gotten(?) Tom Heffler(?). And so I wrote him that I had passed all the exams and so on and what the situation was, and then I had finished high school, which I finished when I was 15. I had gone to work for my uncle in the country. He was a pig farmer, and also he had a general store which sold everything, and I mean everything—coffins and on down. I was there one day and up comes the Western Union man with a little yellow envelope, and it is from the senator telling me that he is giving me the Principal Appointment because his principal had failed the physical exam. I found out later—he didn't say that. So there were no airplanes in those days so I had to ride the train all the way to Annapolis, and I had three days to get there—I think it was—on the 10th of June 1929. So I had to ride the train to Atlanta and then ride from Atlanta to Washington, and then get on the trolley and go to Annapolis to the Naval Academy. I just made it. And that is the way I got into the Navy.

Smith: I see. Right, right. During your early days at the Academy, did you have some roommates who were characters or anybody who stands out in your memory?

Moore: Oh, yes, my roommate for four years, as a matter of fact, was a friend who was from Montgomery, Alabama. His name is Marks, and his father was a rather well known ___ man in Montgomery. We stayed together for four years. He is dead now. He died from Parkinson's Disease. Not long ago. But there were plenty of characters, as you call them, at the time. You always will find characters, but I found it very interesting. It was very confining. It was very active, I mean you never had a spare minute. But again coming back to the fact that there was the Great Depression and so there was only-- the Congress passed a law that only--they would give every graduate a degree--a Science Degree, but only commissioned 50 percent of them. I did get a commission.

Smith: Oh, right off the bat.

Moore: Right off the bat. Of course, it wasn't very long--let's see this was '29, and it wasn't very long before it became so evident that we were going to have a war that they took them back anyway even though they had gone to do theexercise(?) and so my first ship after I graduated was a cruiser--one of the new cruisers authorized by the London Naval Conference after World War I. I was trying continuously to get into aviation which I did. And then I went to Pensacola in 1935, that's the year, of course, and then I went to aircraft carrier, and I was in a fighter squadron at that time on the *Enterprise*--one of the famous carriers, and I put on my commission(?) and from there, I went up the usual ranks: lieutenant, lieutenant commander, commander, so on. Then I was promoted to Admiral and then subsequently, I became the Commander of the 7th Fleet which is the western fleet in the Pacific, and then I became Commander of the Atlantic Fleet, and Supreme Allied Commander in NATO -- that's the Allied NATO Command, and then I was finally Chief of Naval Operations, and then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Smith: Let's go back to the cruiser. What were your duties aboard the cruiser?

Moore: Well, the whole idea was that it was a training cruise. I primarily was in what was called

the Second Division which included the number two turret–gunnery(?). I stayed in that until I went to flight training.

Smith: I see. Right. OK, let's talk a little bit about World War II. What squadron were you in at the beginning of World War II?

Moore: At the beginning of World War II—let me go back a bit. Roosevelt and Churchill made an agreement that the British would take the Atlantic and the United States would take the Pacific. And then in one swell swoop, in effect, the Atlantic Fleet was transferred to the Pacific and became the Hawaii Detachment, and it was because of that that the Japanese knew that they could not—see, they were just about to seize four items among the southwest Pacific nations. They were going to get oil from Borneo, tin from Malaya, and rubber also from Malaya—there was no synthetic rubber then—it all came out of a tree—and rice from the Mekong Valley, and they knew they couldn't handle the Asiatic Fleet which was a very small fleet--actually, if you wanted to look at it that way, a political fleet. It only had two cruisers and a squadron of destroyers, and so everyone, including the people in the Philippines, and MacArthur was in command at that time, they expected in the event of a war with Japan that we would transfer what was the Atlantic Fleet, but actually called the Hawaiian Detachment—we would transfer that to reinforce the Asiatic Fleet, and that, of course, is exactly why the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Smith: And then you were with the—you were in charge of the Asiatic Fleet.

Moore: Not at that time.

Smith: Not at that time.

Moore: Oh, no. I never did get in the Asiatic Fleet until after the war started. And after the war started, we had 12, by that time I had been transferred from the carrier to large sea planes—the PBYS. We had 12 aircraft; they were all destroyed in the Japanese attack. We promptly got 12

new ones from California, and then we were ordered to the Philippines, but we never got to the Philippines because the Japanese had captured the Philippines when we got there, and we operated in the Dutch East Indies, at Surabaya, Darwin, Australia, and so on. Then I was—the Battle of Midway was coming up so those of us who had been on aircraft carriers that were in that fleet out there were promptly ordered back to the States because they thought the casualties in the Battle of Midway were going to be very high. They didn't turn out that way so I went then to Africa for the Invasion of Northwest Africa..

Smith: But on December 7th, you were at Pearl Harbor?

Moore: Yes, Pearl Harbor.

Smith: Anything outstanding sticks in your memory about that?

Moore: Well, it was all very active. My squadron—we had been out at Midway for two months, and we were on a Friday ordered back to Hawaii, and the first thing I did was—before we left Midway—was to escort some fighter planes from one of the carriers, the *Enterprise*, to Wake Island where the Marines were setting up a base, and then I came home on Friday, and nothing happened on Saturday, and the war started Sunday. Then that is when—I got ahead of myself—then we got ordered to the Philippines, but we wound up fighting in the area along the Dutch East Indies—all the way from Singapore to Darwin, Australia.

Smith: I understand that when you were in PBYS, one of them was shot down. Will you tell us that story?

Moore: Yes. That was on the 19th of February, and the Japanese aircraft that had been at Pearl Harbor were coming down to attack Darwin, Australia. Now if you check the geography, the west coast of Australia and look at our West Coast, Darwin is like Seattle and Geraldton is like, I guess, Philadelphia—oh, not Philadelphia—like Los Angeles. And then Perth, Australia, is like

San Diego. They just go right down, and so we had information that the Japanese that were at Pearl Harbor were coming down to attack Darwin—like Seattle. So I was detailed to go out and see if I could find them, which I did, and I got shot down on February, the 19th, 1942. I got—there was a Philippine ship that saw me go down, and the captain came over and picked us up. We had—the plane was on fire, and we managed to get out of it.

Smith: With your parachutes?

Moore: No, no. I landed it—on fire.

Smith: You ditched it.

Moore: I ditched it. We got the crew out—it was a crew of eight, and we had all kinds of trouble—the boats were shot up, and the plane was on fire—really on fire. We had a full load of gas because we hadn't been flying very long so we had full tanks. So then the ship picked us up, and I went forward to talk to the captain, and I found out that the ship was loaded with ammunition from stem to stern. This ship was one of seven, I think, that had a contract to take ammunition to MacArthur in Corregidor hoping that one of the seven would get through. So I was convinced that it wasn't going to get through, and so I told my crew that the ship was going to get attacked, and I wanted all of them to get back on the stern because when I saw those bombers coming, I wanted everyone of them to jump back in the ocean.

Smith: You had a feeling just exactly what was going to happen.

Moore: Yes. That afternoon about two o'clock I looked up and saw nine dive bombers coming down on the ship, and so I told them to jump. Well, everybody jumped except one kid who got bored or something—I don't know—he had gone forward to talk to the captain, and I never saw him again. But anyway, in the meantime, when we jumped over, the Japs were aiming at the ship and the ship was going along at a pretty good clip, by the time the bombs hit, we were here, and

the ship was here, and so the ship had two lifeboats on the stern, and it sank bow first like that. The two boats were here, and I swam back to the ship with one of the sailors and we climbed up and cut the lifeboats loose and there was nothing in them—no water, no medicine, no food, no compass. You didn't need a compass, though, because they had the sun and cross—like the North Star. So we picked up all the survivors from the ship. There were 40 people—we picked up 20. I put ___ in one boat; I put ___ in the other, and the boat did have sails, and I knew how to sail so I set sail for Australia. I didn't know about--there was a strong East drift, and about the third night, I heard the surf hitting the beach. So I beached it. I had the two boats beach. We got ashore, and it was a beautiful, gorgeous, white sandy beach—no coca cola bottles, no cigarette butts, no cigarettes. Nothing. It was just—no one had ever been there. But anyway, when we got ashore and looked around, we still didn't have water to speak of. But we found some—a pool. We built letters in the sand, about this high, about 3 feet high, and 3 feet across which spelled “water” and “medicine.” On the next day, an Australian reconnaissance plane came over—he tipped his wings, and he dropped a note and said “I'll be back.” In about two hours, he came back and dropped water and medicine and dropped another note which said: “We are going to pick you up at daylight.” So they picked us up at daylight took us to—headed toward Darwin, Australia, and on the way to Darwin we got bombed again, but they never touched us. And then, I went ashore, the captain said to us “I've got other things to do, I have to put you ashore.” So he put us ashore, and I had been to a hotel once before—there wasn't a man, woman or child in that city. Not a one. They had all run. They had thought the Japs were going...

Smith: Evacuate....that was a surface ship that picked you up, wasn't it?

Moore: Yes, a destroyer. So I went into the hotel, and they had left so fast that they had left whiskey in the bar, steaks in the ice box, and we set up shop. We stayed there, and three days later, I think, or four days later, the MPs came by, and I identified myself, and they sent down to Perth—that was where my squadron had gone. Perth is like San Diego—way South, and one of the pilots came up and picked us up.

Smith: Took you back to Headquarters then?

Moore: Yes. Took us back down to Perth, and then I stayed there until the Battle of Midway started up, and we were getting into that. All the carrier pilots that were in that squadron were put on a army transport and took us back to New York. Then, I came home on a little leave, and then got a command of another squadron and went to Africa.

Smith: To Africa at that time?

Moore: Yes.

Smith: Let's back up to December 7 again. Would you care to comment on the treatment that Admiral Kimmel and General Short...

Moore: Oh, yes. I would be glad to comment on that. I have already personally, myself, been to see five presidents trying to get them to change that.

Smith: Well, the Congress is working on it...

Moore: Yes. Well, I have been working on it for a long time with his boys, and I think one of his sons finally died.

Smith: You are talking about Hubby Kimmel's son, right?

Moore: Yes. Both of those boys have been very active trying to restore their Dad's rank. I think we may be closer. You see, Roosevelt—they convened this court which was chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and charged Kimmel and General Short with negligence and took away their rank. Well, I am trying to get that back. I don't think that Roosevelt was giving people in Hawaii all the information. I do know that they had these decoding machines, the three

of them, and they gave one to MacArthur, and to Larson(?), and I think one to the British, but didn't give one to Hawaii. I was there when it all happened because I was just a lieutenant, although I took off that night. Mr. Kimmel(?)...went off to seeThis is the Japanese, and this is Hawaii, and this is.....He wanted me that night—he wanted me to fly—overfly the Japanese....to daylight and then turn around and come back so he thought I'd meet them. Well, the problem was that in those days, we didn't have radar. (Note: Portions were hard to understand.)

Smith: This was in the PBY, is that correct?

Moore: Yes. The PBY. Well, one thing about the PBY, it has real legs. I have flown many times from San Diego to Hawaii—almost 2000 miles, and anyway, that is what I did that same night. Then my squadron lost all its planes, and we got new planes and we got ordered out to the Philippines, and we wound up working with—joining the Asiatic Fleet, and we worked there a long time. And finally, as I told you, when the Battle of Midway was ending, they sent those of us who were carrier pilots back to Washington. But that didn't materialize so then I got command of a squadron and went to Africa.

Smith: And you were not back in the Pacific Theater during World War II?

Moore: No. Not back to the Pacific. I stayed in the Atlantic Theater all the time because at that point, the German submarines were about to kill us, and that is what my squadron was doing. We were trying to supply the French and the British and the Russians, even, with supplies—not to mention our own troops. So the submarine was very, very active, and a matter of fact, I think Admiral King almost got fired because of it. Ship after ship. You go down to—I remember going down to the beach at Norfolk, Virginia, and you could see what they called “Flaming Datum(?)”—which was a burning ship. And you could see two or three at a time. So the skippers of the ships wouldn't pay any attention to orders. They were supposed to be in New York at 9:00 tomorrow morning—they were going to get there, come what may. Well, finally, we had to resort

to escort before we could put a stop to it. I then came back to the States on—I was in charge of Air Anti-Submarine Warfare in the Atlantic for the Atlantic Commander. Then I wound up going to Japan again for a survey of what went on in Japan during the war—very interesting. Then I ultimately went to—my wife and I went to Japan to live. I was the Commander of the Fleet in the Western part of the Pacific. Then I got the Command of the entire Pacific. And then I was moved from there to the Atlantic. I took command of not only the Atlantic Fleet, but also of the all military forces in the Atlantic, including NATO. After that, I was ordered to Washington as Chief of the Navy—Chief of Naval Operations. Then I was ordered to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Smith: During your early service out in the Southwest Pacific or during the latter service, did you have an opportunity to meet General MacArthur?

Moore: Yes.

Smith: Would you care to comment on that?

Moore: I had one particular meeting with him because the Australians had what we call a Green Berets group. We had one in Rabaul, they had one Urdmorbay(?), and one in Tibola (?) out on Timor which is the eastern most island of the Dutch East Indies. The Australians had been guarding that—I mean with the Dutch, and the Japanese had come in and attacked it. They were getting that close to Australia then, and several of the Australian boys were pretty well wounded, and they had withdrawn up into the mountains along the seashore there, and the Australian Government asked MacArthur to send somebody over there to get them. And it turned out to be me. MacArthur wanted me to come see him and tell him how I was going to do that. I went over and told him. I talked to him awhile. Then I got to see him again, because later on, when I got ordered to Japan and command of the Seventh Fleet which is the western part of the Pacific. Well, he came to Japan then as the “Controller” of the Occupation. He was something. You know, the first thing that he did, when he got to Australia, was to invest, I think, a couple of

hundred thousand dollars in Australian bonds, and then the Australians said: “well, the Japanese are not going to invade because MacArthur wouldn’t invest all that money if he thought they were going to invade.” I mean he knew they were going to say that.

Smith: He had a psychological advantage...

Moore: And then later on, when I was in Japan, he—the Japanese didn’t have much to do because all their factories were bombed out, and even if they wanted to, they didn’t have any raw materials to manufacture anything. And so, they would all gather around Machi(?) Building which is downtown Tokyo to watch MacArthur—he came at noon every day—walk up into the building. He put out an order that all soldiers in the Pacific who were seven feet tall were supposed to be sent to his staff for his honor guard.

Smith: The Japanese are normally small anyway.

Moore: Oh, yes—waist high. They came about waist high so I was standing—they were watching them, and I saw two little girls just chatting away, and I had an interpreter, and I asked “what in the hell are they talking about?” He said: “they are speculating on how much rice you have to eat before you get that tall.” But that’s about—I didn’t see MacArthur much.

Smith: Do you think he got a fair shake from Harry Truman or what was that situation? Were you familiar with that at all?

Moore: This is a situation that I have been caught in myself. The President, according to the Constitution, is Commander in Chief—and that’s it. So you can’t be right. MacArthur can’t be right. I mean if you put it up to a vote of ten military men, nine out of ten would vote for MacArthur—not because he is MacArthur, but they thought it was the best military thing to do. But it was the same thing in the Vietnam war. You know, you had McNamara doing the same thing. He should have been fired. But that is in the Government, in a democracy, you can’t do a

thing about it. Look, how in the world do you think that Clinton gets away with all these things?

Smith: Let's not get into that! (Laughing)

Moore: OK.

Smith: You know, I have heard other naval officers who were at Pearl Harbor talking about-- back to Kimmel and Short--they said if Kimmel and Short were going to be court-martialed, why didn't they court-martial MacArthur when he lost the Philippines?

Moore: Exactly. Not only he lost the Philippines, he lost all his B-17s--all caught on the ground. That is a good question. I have asked that quite a bit myself.

Smith: Would you care to comment a little about your duty in Washington, D.C.? I understand that a lot of military people don't enjoy that duty too much, but you have had...

Moore: You can take your pick. You can avoid it or you can retire.

Smith: If you are not going to avoid it, you have to make the best of it.

Moore: That's right. And it's very confining. I mean, it is hard work. I used to get over 100 messages a day when I was _____. There is a lot going on. You take the Defense Department--it is spread all over the world. It is so heavily involved in foreign policy, and so to answer your question, I find it very interesting. I testified before the Congress about 300 times, I think, over many years and so I have been living in Washington for 17 straight years. Of course, I have been retired 14 of that. But before I retired, I was--we were living in Washington. __17 years.

Smith: Of course, as Joint Chief, you were sort of caught in the middle, weren't you, between the

politicians and...

Moore: Sure—and that was the problem with MacArthur. He was caught in the middle between Truman and ... I don't think Truman was dealing with whether or not MacArthur was right. He was dealing with whether he was subordinate. So he got dismissed because he was subordinate—not because he wanted to do the wrong thing.

Smith: But like you say, there is no question about that, is there?

Moore: No. It is just like when you are in jail—almost—when the policeman wants to lock you up, he is going to lock you up. And it is legal.

Smith: Did you have any opportunity to meet Harry Truman?

Moore: Yes. I admired Truman because he was a very unique person in the sense that he was very decisive. You have to look and see what all that he decided. He decided to manufacture the nuclear bomb, he decided dropping it on the Japs. If we hadn't done that, there would have been hundreds of American boys killed in the invasion, and he screwed the Russians in Korea. I mean one of them is gone or something, and so Truman was not colorful and not the kind of leader that attracts attention world wide and all that, but one thing that is so rare—the one thing he could do, he could damn well make a decision. And he didn't hesitate. As a matter of fact, the decision that he made turned out to be right too.

Smith: That is correct. I agree with you 100 percent.

Moore: You know, on TV, he had a little whiny, unattractive voice, and he was not the kind who would excite the public like a football star or something or a movie star or something that. But when it came down to just making a decision, I thought he was pretty good.

Smith: I think history has proven that.

Moore: Yes.

Smith: We are getting near the end of the tape. Are there any final thoughts you might have on—you understand how this tape will be used by students sometime in the future?

Moore: Yes.

Smith: And anything you would like to pass on to them?

Moore: Well, I'd like to pass on two things. The first one is that any leader has to remember that it is not the people he works for that makes him look good, it is people who work for him. And that is the way he ought to spend all his time. The second thing I would like to point out is that I don't think that so much comment about the situation of the youth and so on, I don't think there is a thing in the world wrong with the youth. I think it is a matter of what has happened is the breakdown of the family and the lack of leadership because these youth are not any different than all the youth. It's the environment they live in that makes them behave like they do. The grownups ought to put a stop to it. I think this day and age if they don't have knowledge, if they don't have a degree, they are not going to be able to get along, and they ought to know that. And they ought not to miss opportunities to learn everything they can. But they can do it. I don't like to see them condemned before they try.

Smith: As a military man, you understand the importance of discipline.

Moore: Absolutely.

Smith: This is something that seems to be lacking in some of our society.

Moore: Yes, and even in the courts. For instance, this business of the Supreme Court telling the public that the kid can't pray in school or before a ball game or something like that, that just drives me up the wall. I mean: what harm does it do? I mean: what's the problem? And, of course, you have these special groups that press always for their freedom. I think they just carry some of these civil rights far beyond the area of common sense. Humans living together—we have been doing it for a couple of hundred years and have been rather successful. I tell these people—I said—they criticize this country, and I tell them if the country is so bad, why the hell do people cut your throat to get over here?

Smith: Well, Admiral, on behalf of the National Museum of the Pacific War, let me thank you very, very much for taking the time to visit with us. And as I say, this is for the benefit of future students of the war in the Pacific, and if you can think of any one other thing you would like to tell them, tell them.

Moore: Well, I think that what I just told them—I'm really talking to the parents, I mean they have to spend more time on the children, and they have to set the right example. I mean if the parents don't stay home more with the children, if they don't carefully monitor their progress in education and get involved in the schools and so on—and just expect the government to do everything for them, it is not going to happen.

Smith: Thank you, Admiral.