

The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Elmer Batschelet

May 12, 2001

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Kevin Picard, the date is May 12, 2001, and I'm at the Nimitz Museum interviewing Elmer Batschelet, from Pierce City, Missouri. This is part of the SACO group and Elmer has been kind enough to give us his oral interview.

Mr. Picard: Elmer, where and when were you born?

Mr. Batschelet: I was born October 22, 1918, near Spencer, Iowa, and that is in the northwest part of Iowa.

Mr. Picard: Who were your parents?

Mr. Batschelet: My parents were Arthur Batschelet and Stella Batschelet.

Mr. Picard: Were they also from Iowa?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes, I think probably they lived there most of their lives, although my Dad had lived at Wilton, Iowa, but he was still in Iowa, when he was a smaller boy.

Mr. Picard: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes I did. My brother was Robert Batschelet, and my sister was Dorothy Batschelet. They were both younger than myself.

Mr. Picard: Where did you go to school in Iowa?

Mr. Batschelet: The first three years I went to Greenville Consolidated School and the last years of my grade school was done in a country school south of Spencer, Iowa, approximately 6 miles south of Spencer, Iowa, and then my high-school, I went the four grades in high-school in Spencer, Iowa. Spencer High School.

Mr. Picard: You graduated from Spencer High School Elmer?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes.

Mr. Picard: Now after graduation what did you do?

Mr. Batschelet: At the time I was working on the farm with my Dad and lived at home until October 10, 1942, I joined the Navy.

Mr. Picard: And whereabouts did you join the Navy?

Mr. Batschelet: I joined there in Spencer, Iowa, but then, of course, was sent to Great Lakes.

Mr. Picard: Was there any reason you joined the Navy versus any of the other services?

Mr. Batschelet: Actually I guess there was a reason because if I hadn't joined the Navy I would probably have been drafted by the Army, but I did actually join the Navy.

Mr. Picard: Is that unusual for somebody from Iowa to join the Navy?

Mr. Batschelet: No, not really, however, when I got in the Navy you didn't find many people from the farm to begin with.

Mr. Picard: I see. Well after you joined the Navy where did you first report to?

Mr. Batschelet: We reported to Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

Mr. Picard: And that is located?

Mr. Batschelet: Near Chicago, north of Chicago, I guess that would be as near as I could tell you.

Mr. Picard: After you got there what were some of the training you went through?

Mr. Batschelet: Actually I went through Boot Camp, but I was only in boot camp for four weeks and that was just the basic training they put you through and then I was accepted for a trade school, which lasted four months, and I still was at Great Lakes until February of 1943 and then they shipped me to Bremerton, Washington. I was in that area, Bremerton/Tacoma, etc., for, I can't remember the exact number of months but at first I was assigned to the Baffin

Bay (?spelling) and this Baffin Bay was turned over to the English so I never really, I went aboard it just as training, but nothing, I never went to sea or anything on the Baffin, but then I was taken off of that, you might say, and eventually I was assigned to the Mission Bay, which I reported to and served time - approximately 8-9 months on the Mission Bay.

Mr. Picard: The Baffin Bay was a ship. What type of a ship was it?

Mr. Batschelet: It was an escort carrier, and there was a lot of them in that class, the CVE.

Mr. Picard: And then the Mission Bay?

Mr. Batschelet: It was the same class.

Mr. Picard: Same class, escort carrier?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes.

Mr. Picard: What were your recollections the first time you went on board a ship and were assigned to a ship?

Mr. Batschelet: Well, of course, it was new to me because I hadn't been anywhere near the. Well actually I had been to California, but really the ship and everything, you might say, was new to me, and I was assigned first to the oil gang. I was in, it would be the Engineering, the Fireman, and so forth, below decks, but, B Division is what it was.

Mr. Picard: I see.

Mr. Batschelet: My first duties was with the oil gang they called it, and that was to keep the oil, you know, in tanks and transferred, so forth.

Mr. Picard: Right. (Break)

Mr. Picard: Elmer, where we left off you had gone on board the second ship, the

Mission Bay.

Mr. Batschelet: Yes, actually, you might say the first ship. I did have that Baffin on my records, but no actual time served on it. Just more or less as a training. I think we went aboard and they gave it over to the English, and so I was naturally taken off and I don't think I ever slept aboard it or anything. It was in my records, but that was about it.

Mr. Picard: Now, when you were assigned to the Mission Bay, what was your specialty?

Mr. Batschelet: Well, I was in what they called the B Division, which was Firemen, Oil, actually I made a little mistake there. I was actually assigned to the evaporators, which made fresh water out of salt water. I misspoke there, but I was in the oil gang at another time, but first I was assigned to the evaporators and they made fresh water out of salt water, and that was a heating process to steam to help that salt water to the salt went up and you know it was a process that eliminated the salt out of the water.

Mr. Picard: Surely.

Mr. Batschelet: And then, then I guess I was in the oil gang.

Mr. Picard: Well after you were assigned to the Mission Bay, now, then did you go out to sea?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes, we went to sea and went through the Panama Canal. The Mission Bay was built on the west coast, I told you I went to Bremerton and Tacoma and that area, and then we went through the Panama Canal, went around to the East Coast to I think Norfolk, Virginia, and then approximately December,

close to Christmas, we convoyed, or that is two of those escort carriers, the Mission Bay was one and I can't remember the name of the other, went along with this convoy that took supplies to North Africa and we, on this ship, just followed along. Our planes went out scanning the surface for submarines. That was their duty. Submarines were pretty bad at that time and I made that trip to North Africa, and then back to the United States on the Mission Bay and then we were there a period of time and then was assigned to take planes to India, which now is Pakistan, but at that time it was India. We went from the East Coast with these planes, which I think were P-40's, they were Army planes. They were attached to the deck with their, whatever ties them down, and I can't remember the number, but they were as many on there as they could get on the boat. Well actually they was on the hangar deck I guess because they needed their planes to go out and still do that submarine to some extent. So we took those to, stopped at Brazil, and then Capetown South Africa, and then to India, which I say now is Pakistan, Karachi was the name of the city. Then they were unloaded there, and of course we made that return trip back you know in reverse of the way we went the first time.

Mr. Picard: Elmer, did you have any submarines when you were taking these planes over? Run into any?

Mr. Batschelet: Well, we didn't. If we did I didn't know about it. In other words I can't remember whether they sighted any or not.

Mr. Picard: Did you run into any enemy shipping at all?

Mr. Batschelet: No, as far as I remember. See we were sort of out of the war area till we

got over. The planes I understand were taken to be used in, oh you know the people were fighting in China, you know, against the Japs. I presume that is what they were for.

Mr. Picard: The Chinese Nationalist of Chang Kai-shek.

Mr. Batschelet: Yes, that is what I understood they were for. Yes. And so then, of course I told you we made that return trip, you know, basically in reverse of the way we went the other time and then when we got back to the States in a period of not too long of time I transferred from the Mission Bay to the Ticonderoga, which was being, it hadn't made any of its run yet, but it was starting to assemble a crew. The Ticonderoga was. I went aboard the Ticonderoga, in that would be '44 I guess. If I got my dates right that would be in '44. I don't know, May, June, sometime in early 1944. Anyway, then we took the Ticonderoga through its shake-down cruise and everything, and prepared it to go to the Pacific Ocean. Went back through the Panama Canal. I think went to Bremerton and from there we eventually went to the Pacific Theater with it.

Mr. Picard: The Ticonderoga was what type of ship?

Mr. Batschelet: It was a CV or maybe a CVE, but anyway, it was an Essex Class Carrier.

Mr. Picard: Essex Class Carrier?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes, in fact there is one in the museum, a replica of the Ticonderoga.

Mr. Picard: Was this the first voyage?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes it was.

Mr. Picard: Elmer, after taking the ship out into the Pacific, where all did the ship go to

at that time?

Mr. Batschelet: Well, it started across the Pacific and stopped at Pearl Harbor, or Hawaiian Islands.

Mr. Picard: And the time, you indicated

Mr. Batschelet: That was in, let's see we got there in October. We got clear to the Theater of War after the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the big battle, one of the biggest battles there was, but we weren't in that. We arrived there right after that because the Princeton was, can't think of the class carrier it was, it was one below the CVE, it was, but anyway, we took the place of the Princeton. The Princeton was sunk in that engagement. It was a real big, I think they called it the Battle of the Leyte Gulf, anyway it was the last big naval engagement of the war where ships were against ships.

Mr. Picard: Now was the Ticonderoga in that battle?

Mr. Batschelet: No it wasn't, it got there shortly after.

Mr. Picard: Now, in what part of the Pacific are we?

Mr. Batschelet: We're right around the Philippine Islands.

Mr. Picard: I see.

Mr. Batschelet: Yes. And then that was about the time they started to take the Philippine Islands back and we were in those engagements where they tried to bomb the Philippine Islands and we were just the Third Fleet. Well that is about the time the kamikaze started operating.

Mr. Picard: Did we, the Ticonderoga at that time, what type of aircraft was it carrying?

Mr. Batschelet: They carried three, and I can't remember the exact, but one them was a

fighter plane, one of them was a torpedo plane that carried torpedoes, and the other was in between. One plane carried one pilot, the other plane carried two, and the torpedo carried three. I'm talking about three people. That is the type, and I can't remember their official designation.

Mr. Picard: Well, you mentioned kamikaze, was the Ticonderoga then engaged by these kamikaze?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes, it was hit January 23,

Mr. Picard: What year, January 23?

Mr. Batschelet: Five, Five. See I got out there in late '44, in October. Anyway, right after that battle. Yes, it was hit by on the 21st of January, right near, I think we was kind of between Formosa and the Mainland. And now they call that

Taiwan. **Mr. Picard:** Well what type of damage was caused?

Mr. Batschelet: It was quite extensive. In fact the biggest damage was caused not by the plane and bomb itself, but by the fires it started. The planes on board the Ticonderoga were refueled ready to go out on a strike and when that kamikaze hit, well first a bomb came through, and then the plane itself. Well that started a multitude of fires on the ship and I can't explain much that happened above because I was in the mess hall when they first hit and my station was clear, you might say at the bottom of the ship in the pump room and so I naturally went to that pump room and most of the action was above, but at one time they was going to abandon ship which would have left me, but they didn't, they fought the fires and got them out. But then the second kamikaze hit about probably 45 minutes to an hour after the first and it hit the bridge, and it killed, well the

Captain and the Commander had both injured but not killed, and then there was three other high ranking officers killed, the Gunnery Officer, Aviation Officer, I don't know, anyway the top man after the engagement was Engineering Officer, and he was down the line. So then actually I was in that pump room from about noon until midnight because after the first engagement and they fought the fires and about got them out, or did get them out, then the Japs sent another bunch of planes to finish us off. Other ship, of course, there was a lot of ships in that area. They naturally came as close as they could and we didn't get sunk.

Mr. Picard: That was a pretty exciting time.

Mr. Batschelet: Well, it was in a way, and yet you was trained to do that, and of course like I say, I wasn't topside where the whole thing was going on, and yet I was down there and would have never got out if that ship had sank.

Mr. Picard: Elmer, how many people were killed in that engagement?

Mr. Batschelet: Approximately 140.

Mr. Picard: On board the ship?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes and then I think totally 500, you know counting all that was killed was wounded and so forth.

Mr. Picard: And how many men would a ship of that size carry?

Mr. Batschelet: Three thousand, to thirty-two hundred with officers and men, with about 80 sea-going Marines. So the total when you want a round figure would be three thousand, but its possibly 3,200. Then, of course, you had your aircrews on there too, and they counted I'm not sure how many there were, but it took a

three pilot to fly a plane and then the extra help, so forth. The ones that took men would naturally. So that was separate from the ship. In other words, after our ship got hit, our aircraft went to another carrier.

Mr. Picard: What happened to the planes? How many planes did we lose?

Mr. Batschelet: Actually, our planes, we didn't lose too many in the engagement. Well I presume some of them were burned, but there was a lot of them still survived. They were still on the ship, but they thought that they weren't fit to fly anymore so they pushed them over the sides, so we lost a total of about 100 planes.

Mr. Picard: And most of them we pushed over the side?

Mr. Batschelet: A lot of them we did, yes. Because they took some kind of a bomb sight out of them and the rest of it just went.

Mr. Picard: Well, after all of this activity, the ship itself, of course, had been damaged and how was it able to and where did it go? How was it able to make it?

Mr. Batschelet: Yeah, it made it back to a little chain of islands, Ulape (?spelling) was one of them that they refueled and reprovisioned and stuff. I think possibly we were back there first and then to Pearl Harbor, and then it was able to make it under its own power. The lower part of the ship was fairly intact. Well a Kamikaze came through the hangar, the flight deck, that was fairly, well you know, not very well protected. Then the Hangar Deck was I don't know how thick, but it had a layer of steel. Well, when you hit that it held, you know, it didn't go all the way through and then, of course, the bottom part of the ship was basically able to maneuver and the top bridge and so forth was

damaged pretty bad, but they could still maneuver the ship and so then they took it back to Pearl Harbor and everywhere we went we had three destroyers because they didn't want submarines to attack. In other words, we didn't go anywhere without these destroyers or destroyer escort. Took it back to Pearl Harbor, then back to Bremerton and we got a 25-day leave and, of course, that was half of the ship. It took them 60-90 days to repair.

Mr. Picard: Now what date are we looking at?

Mr. Batschelet: We was hit January 21st, 1945, and then I'm not sure. Of course, it took a while to get back to Pearl and back to the States and then they started working on it and I can't remember the exact number of days it took to finish it. Eventually when it was finished we went back to the Pacific again.

Mr. Picard: What, was it summertime when the ship was ready to be active again?

Mr. Batschelet: I would think it was yes because I'm sure it was April or May before we went back, but I just can't remember the exact date.

Mr. Picard: On the way back what was your rank at this time?

Mr. Batschelet: My rank was, well I can't remember. I ended up Water Tender Second Class and I can't remember whether it was Fireman First Class or Water Tender Second at that time, but I eventually got to be Water tender Second Class.

Mr. Picard: Now, the ship is now refurbished and you are heading back to the Pacific. Where did you go to?

Mr. Batschelet: Well we went back to and joined the Third Fleet again when they were operating in the area of, eventually got close to Japan. Of course they were fighting in Okinawa and those places and we were in that area between the

Philippines and Japan you might say. One of those times, and I can't remember what the date was, we got into a real bad hurricane in the South China Sea. It was almost as bad as the battle because three destroyers were completely lost, they couldn't, they lost their fuel, in other words the destroyers had to refuel say every three days, or they didn't have a very long period. When they got in that real bad hurricane, you are supposed to ride into the waves, and they finally just lost their control, just bobbed around and sank I guess. Of course I didn't see that. Some 800 men were lost on those three destroyers. The reason they were lost is because had no way, and there was hardly any of them saved because the sea was so rough they couldn't.

Mr. Picard: Did the Navy have warning of this hurricane?

Mr. Batschelet: Apparently they did. See the Third Fleet was made up, as I understand, of three units and sometimes we was in one unit and say three big carriers, probably two or three battleships, several cruisers and several destroyers. They was all in a formation to try to protect us. In other words, when the Kamikaze came they headed for the carriers and then these other ships was basically support for the carriers. Once in a while you would see another group. There was three of those groups in this Third Fleet. When one ship would get hit and have to go back another one would take its place.

Mr. Picard: Well, after the hurricane, you were in what part of the Pacific?

Mr. Batschelet: South China Sea.

Mr. Picard: Was that on the western side of Japan.

Mr. Batschelet: I would think it would be south.

Mr. Picard: Is that near Korea?

Mr. Batschelet: Not real sure how it related to Korea.

Mr. Picard: Korea is north of Taiwan.

Mr. Batschelet: Well, then it would be south of Korea.

Mr. Picard: Were there any more kamikaze attacks on the ship?

Mr. Batschelet: We weren't hit. The Ticonderoga wasn't hit again, but you know, a lot of other ships were. We were hit by those two and that is it. We had some misses and so forth, but.

Mr. Picard: Now, at this time what did the Ticonderoga do?

Mr. Batschelet: Well, mainly just operated with the Third Fleet.

Mr. Picard: Was there any action?

Mr. Batschelet: Oh yeah, there was quite a bit of action, but we weren't hit. Our planes would go out on missions and then come back. They'd come back if something didn't happen to them. That was mainly what we did. At the same time, this was getting near the end of the war, those B-29, that giant plane was flying from the Islands and bombing Japan. It was sort of, you know. At one time I think they had 1,500 just planes off the carriers up in the air. Just as a sort of show of strength.

Mr. Picard: So, at this point in time you are coming to the end of the war?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes we are.

Mr. Picard: And what is the Ticonderoga doing now? I mean what was its mission and where was it going?

Mr. Batschelet: Well, it was operating with the Third Fleet, mainly in that area between the

Philippines and Japan.

Mr. Picard: When did it come back to this country?

Mr. Batschelet: It was there when they signed the end of the war thing in Tokyo Bay. It was just stationed in the Bay.

Mr. Picard: The surrender of Japan was on which ship?

Mr. Batschelet: Missouri.

Mr. Picard: On the Missouri.

Mr. Batschelet: Yeah, and we were just there as a show of strength.

Mr. Picard: Well that must have been a pretty exciting time.

Mr. Batschelet: Well it was. Of course you could only see about so far.

Mr. Picard: Elmer, are there any unique and interesting facts that you had during the war?
For example, what were some of your thoughts. Did you have any close personal friends that got killed in action?

Mr. Batschelet: No, during the kamikaze quite a few general maintenance people got killed, but they weren't in my division. So I didn't know personally anybody that got killed. Well, I knew people from my hometown, some of them, but they weren't on my ship.

Mr. Picard: Did you have any special feelings, or can you remember smells

Mr. Batschelet: I think the worst of it was the next day after we were hit. During the time that we were hit they pulled the wounded and the dead into a gun turret place, kind of like you might say a building and when I was there the next day and they started pulling some of them people out it was, that kind of shook you a little. At the time you was trained to go to your station and do your duty and you

just sort of went through your actions.

Mr. Picard: So after the surrender, it was in Tokyo Bay

Mr. Batschelet: Yes.

Mr. Picard: You were in Tokyo Bay?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes and I also went to Japan a couple of times on leave, but that didn't amount to too much.

Mr. Picard: That was after the surrender?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes.

Mr. Picard: While you were in Japan how were the people?

Mr. Batschelet: They were happy too it was over.

Mr. Picard: Well, how long after that did you stay in the Navy?

Mr. Batschelet: Not too long. We were made a troop ship after the war. We took people back. We made one more trip and we took 6,000 people aboard. You know, kind of a troop ship. Made that one trip and I got out in December 1945.

Mr. Picard: December of '45?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes.

Mr. Picard: And then you went back to Iowa?

Mr. Batschelet: Yes I did.

Mr. Picard: What was your lifestyle like on board the carrier?

Mr. Batschelet: It was quite crowded. The sleeping area was very crowded and a lot of times we would just take a blanket and lay it on the catwalk on the decks. Of course we also stayed in the bunks some too. But if we could, it was terribly hot down there. You took four hours down and eight hours off. The

are going to be used for research and history. We do appreciate it very much because these stories we get more from the viewpoint of the individual as opposed to just the general vision the people have of the war. We now make it a very real thing. We do appreciate it and this is the end of this tape.