

**The National Museum of the Pacific War**  
Fredericksburg, Texas

Presents an Interview with

**Alex Taylor**

**Cook 1<sup>st</sup> Class**

**USS Enterprise**

Interview with  
Alex Taylor

**Mr. Cox:** Today is August 22, 2001. My name is Floyd Cox. I am a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. We are here today as part of the oral history program of the National Museum of the Pacific War. We are here in Lafayette, Louisiana to interview Mr. Alex Taylor concerning his experiences during World War II. Alex I would like to start this off by telling you thank you very much for taking the time to relate your experiences. To start with if you would give us some of your background about where you were born and who your parents were.

**Mr. Taylor:** I was born April 3, 1921. My father's name was Aaron Taylor and my mother's name was Claudia. I had five brothers. Two of them died so there are only four living now. I had two sisters. My youngest sister died.

**Mr. Cox:** What were your brothers and sisters names?

**Mr. Taylor:** I'll start with the one next to me. Richard Taylor, next one is Leroy

Taylor, Paul Taylor, James Taylor and Aaron Taylor, Jr. My sisters were Joyce Taylor and Gertrude Taylor. We were eight in the family.

**Mr. Cox:**

That was quite a family. Where did you live?

**Mr. Taylor**

I was born in Scott, Louisiana and then we moved to Lafayette, Louisiana. I went to school at the Paul Breavy Elementary School. They used to call it Lafayette Parish training school. I left school in the eighth grade because I had to go to work. It was tough times because it was during the depression. I started working the cane fields and the rice fields trying. Our family was large and the oldest ones had to go out try to help feed the family. I started working with traveling salesman Mr. Otto Blanchette. I worked with him about two and a half years. I would go to the post office and I would see that Navy advertisement. I always wanted to travel so I said, "I'm going to try and get in the Navy." That was 1939. I talked to Dr. Davis's father. I didn't have any money and the father of Dr. Davis liked to help poor people so I went and talked to him. He said, "Sure, if you want to go on a ship, I'm going to help you get there." He gave me money to go to New Orleans. I went there on a train. I went to a Recruiter Station on Canal Street They signed me up and had the Doctor check me out. The Doctor told me I had a bad tooth and that I would have to get it fixed. I went back home and had the tooth fixed. Dr. Davis's father gave me money to go back to New Orleans and this time I was accepted. The Recruiter told me that they would be sending for me. I

went back home and in about two weeks they sent me a letter saying I been accepted for enlistment and to come to New Orleans. That was on a Saturday morning and I caught the train about five or six o'clock to go to New Orleans. I had a buddy Aaron Scott. He was about thirty years old, so I had someone with me. We were sworn in October 21, 1939. The train didn't leave until that night so the Recruiter told us that he would meet us at the train station before the train left. He met us there and gave us our ticket to go to Norfolk, Virginia. That is where we would take our basic. We had eight weeks of basic. When we arrived at the training station and saw all those sailors with all those stripes and stars, I said, "Lord I left my Mother's home to come to this outfit. What have I got myself into?" (Laughter) They started cussing us and were yelling, "Take off those damn civilian clothes." (Laughter)

**Mr. Cox:** Was it segregated during your basic training?

**Mr. Taylor:** Oh yes. We had some Navy men that were black but the Drill Sergeant was white and that guy was rough. Anyone make a mistake in that Platoon and he would make us take our rifle and run us all over that drill field. That guy was tough until we got everything professional. If we made any mistakes he was tough, he didn't have any mercy. From Norfolk, Virginia they sent us to the West Coast Naval Receiving Station in San Diego. I was assigned to the USS Dobbin. That was in 1940.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you have any kind of training between basic and going on the

Dobbin? Did you go to any kind of technical schools?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, no other training and no technical schools because all blacks could be were Mess Attendants. If my memory serves me right the ship I caught to go to Hawaii was the Cruises Savannah. The Dobbin was already in Hawaii.

**Mr. Cox:** What type of ship was the Dobbin?

**Mr. Taylor:** It was a destroyer Tender. It serviced the destroyers. It would put supplies and fuel the destroyers. There were two types of those ships, the USS Whitney and the USS Dobbin. The day Pearl Harbor was attacked we were going to play baseball against each other for the Hawaiian Detachment Championship.

**Mr. Cox:** Now was this segregated baseball?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, I was the only black on the all white baseball team off the USS Dobbin. I played second base.

**Mr. Cox:** When the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor, do you remember what you were doing?

**Mr. Taylor:** I was talking to Lieutenant Commander Erickson, the Duty Officer. We were on the deck. He was a great baseball fan. We were talking about how our chances were going to be against the Whitney who had a good

baseball team. It was going to be a battle but I said, "I think we are going to win this one." Just as we were talking the orderly came in and said, "Commander Erickson the Naval Air Station is being attacked." When we turned to our right we saw the Naval Air Station was on fire. The Japanese were attacking us.

**Mr. Cox:** How did you feel at that moment?

**Mr. Taylor:** I was scared. My mind had just been on baseball because I love baseball. We lost three men that day. We lost a Gunners Mate and a Coxswain. I can't remember who the other one was but I know there were three. They got hit by the strafing.

**Mr. Cox:** Did the Dobbin sustain any damage from the bombing?

**Mr. Taylor:** No just from the strafing. They really caught us with our pants down. On weekends half of the ships crew was allowed to go ashore. They picked a good day to hit us. I'll never forget, all of those Cruisers and Battleships were tied mostly behind each other on the side by the pier and they fell in there just like a hornets nest. At Higgins Field and Scofield they hit those planes on the ground, which was smart of them. The mistake I think they made was they didn't land ground troops on that island.

**Mr. Cox:** When you were notified that the Japanese were hitting Pearl Harbor and obviously you could look up and you could see it and hear the explosions, what was the first thing that you did?

**Mr. Taylor:** They sounded the alarm for the battle stations. My battle station was ammunition carrier. You have to go down below and you pass the ammunition up by hand. Down there you couldn't see what was going on. You could hear shooting and you could hear planes flying. It was never the same after that. They declared marshal law and there was no more baseball, we talked war.

**Mr. Cox:** That was basically the end of your baseball playing for a few years?

**Mr. Taylor:** Oh yes.

**Mr. Cox:** When the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor I would imagine racial barriers really came down during combat didn't they?

**Mr. Taylor:** Oh yes, we were all trying to save ourselves. I think it was in 1946 when President Truman ended segregation in the Armed Forces. When the war started we had segregated quarters but we mingled some.

**Mr. Cox:** On shipboard did the blacks and whites intermingle socially at all?

**Mr. Taylor:** No the whites had their quarters and the blacks had their quarters.

**Mr. Cox:** After the attack was over what did you people on the Dobbin do? Did you start picking up men in the water?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, if my memory serves me right we didn't pick up any survivors. We started giving supplies to destroyers that came along. We were a supplier

for these ships.

**Mr. Cox:** After the attack was over and you had supplied these destroyers did the ship go and pick up more supplies?

**Mr. Taylor:** They would bring the supplies from the Mainland and we would go to the dock and pick up the supplies. In February of 1942 about three months after the Pearl Harbor attack, I was reassigned to a bombing squadron in San Diego. I'll never forget, the Yoeman said to me, "Taylor would you like to go back to the states?" I said, "Yes, I've been here two years." He told me they needed a Mess Attendant in this bomber squadron. I was the Executive Officer's Boy. That is what they called it. He said, "Taylor I don't believe I am going to let you go." (Laughter) One day the Yoeman told me to pack my bag and they gave me my orders. I went to the receiving station and waited for transportation to the States. I went to the Naval Air Station in San Diego. I stayed there about eight months and then we went back to Hawaii and boarded the Enterprise.

**Mr. Cox:** During this time did you get to go home to Louisiana?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes I did. I hadn't been home for a while and I was glad to go home to see my Mother, Dad and brothers and sisters.

**Mr. Cox:** I bet they were quite proud of you in that uniform.

**Mr. Taylor:** Oh yes they were. You know you would see blacks in the Army but I was



really the first black to go into the Navy from this area. That was a big thing. My Mother and Daddy were real proud of me.

**Mr. Cox:** After you went back to Hawaii and went on the Enterprise what was your job there?

**Mr. Taylor:** I was a cook third class. It was a promotion. I went from a mess attendant to a cook third class. I didn't go to Cook and Bakers School. I wanted to go but they wouldn't let me go back to the States because they needed me there. It was on the job training. I was on the Enterprise for about a year. I was an Officers Cook. All the Officers had their own cooks. They had their own menus and their own Stewards. They were completely separate from the general mess. We shinned their shoes, put their uniforms out and pick up their laundry.

**Mr. Cox:** How did these white officers treat you?

**Mr. Taylor:** Well you had some of them that were kind of rough and you stayed out of their way. Other than that I got along good with most of them. Based on my record I got along good. I considered it an opportunity for a poor southern boy to get out there. I didn't look down on the Navy because it was segregated, I considered that an opportunity for me. I am grateful to the Navy for I believe they did wonders for me.

**Mr. Cox:** You left Hawaii on the Enterprise do you remember where you went after that?

**Mr. Taylor:**

We went to the Santa Cruz and Solomon Islands. When we sailed into battle in the Santa Cruz Islands and that was a tough one. We shot down sixty-three Japanese planes. It was the whole flotilla. I'll never forget the Engineer was on the loud speaker and he said, "How soon can we get fresh water?" We were hit really hard. There was the USS Hornet, the Enterprise and there was another carrier. The battleships did a superb job that day. That was a tough battle. My battle station was still in the ammunition dump passing the ammo. Once you are assigned a battle station that is where you stay. I tell you I lost two good friends that day. Both of their last names were Jones. I can't think of their first names. One was a tall bright fellow and the other was little short fellow and both of them were from New York. One of them was coming out of the restroom and was hit. That was my first experience with battle. We stayed without fresh water for about two or three days. They had damaged the ship pretty bad.

**Mr. Cox:**

Did you have time to be scared while you were passing the ammo?

**Mr. Taylor:**

Well you are just concentrating on what you are doing and trying to stay alive. Passing the ammo I was down several decks of the ship so if the ship had gone down I would have gone down with it. I really got scared afterwards when the Engineer was asking about fresh water. I knew something was wrong when you don't have any fresh water aboard ship.

This was October 1942. After the battle is over you go back to your regular duties doing whatever you were doing before.

**Mr. Cox:** After the battle was over where did you go?

**Mr. Taylor:** We had to go get the ship repaired. We went somewhere to get temporary repairs and then we went to Bremerton, Washington to get the ship repaired at the shipyards there.

**Mr. Cox:** Later on the next month you were in the battle of the Solomon's. Do you recall that battle?

**Mr. Taylor:** Not too vividly. The battle of the Santa Cruz Island was the tough one. That was a mean one and the Japanese were out to get us. They had those suicide planes, the Kamikazes, that they used. Those battleships did a superb job that day.

**Mr. Cox:** As a cook did you get to know any of the pilots flying off the Enterprise?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes I did. Lieutenant Commander Thomas, he was a little short fellow and there was the Commander of the Bomber Squadron. He really liked me. He was the one who promoted me. He was from Mississippi and he became the Navigator for the USS Essex. I can't think of his name but he was a real nice fellow. He got to be a Senior Commander.

**Mr. Cox:** As a cook did they have some of you working around the clock? Were

there some of you working shifts all the time preparing meals?

**Mr. Taylor:** Not on twenty-four hour shifts. There were Mess Attendants that were on duty to make coffee and sandwiches around the clock.

**Mr. Cox:** In those days the Officers would dress formally wouldn't they?

**Mr. Taylor:** Oh yes they would dress in their white uniforms. They might wear their blues but they stayed dressed up all the time. You see those fellows came out of that Naval Academy with that big ring on their finger. (Laughter) It seemed that you couldn't even look at them, because if they saw you do so, they would put you on report for insubordination. Some of them were really tough. They would put you on report and you would have to go before the Captain.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you ever have to go before the Captain?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, I tried to stay out of trouble because they put you on bread and water in the Brig, sometime for thirty days. I knew some that were put in the brig for disobeying an order or fighting aboard ship. One fellow that was charged for rape was given a court martial sentence. He got ten or fifteen years

**Mr. Cox:** After your battle your ship was in the battle of the Solomon's and you came back to Bremerton for about a month then you went to a training center in San Pedro. What did you do there?

**Mr. Taylor:** I was a Cook second or first there. I was promoted. You have a Chief Cook and I am next to him as Cook First Class. My next promotion would have been Chief Cook. My responsibility was meals for the officers. That was my title, Officer's Cook. Some ships combine the general mess. The officers eat general mess so you work with the general mess cook. That doesn't happen too often. Usually the officers eat separately from the general mess. My last assignment before I left the Navy was the sweetest duty. I was assigned to be the Captain's Cook. That is all I had to do was cook for the Captain. He had his family in San Diego so sometimes I might only cook two or three meals a week. He had his Steward who was mostly in contact with him and I was his cook. I would prepare his meal down in the galley according to whatever he wanted to eat that day.

**Mr. Cox:** You were at Bremerton in 1944 and then you were on the USS Saunter?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes, that was a minesweeper and I was only on it for about a month. My rating didn't call to be assigned to a minesweeper so they considered that to be an error and they transferred me back to San Pedro.

**Mr. Cox:** Then you were on the USS Vent. What kind of ship was that?

**Mr. Taylor:** That was a salvage tub. It had a much smaller crew than an aircraft carrier. Everybody ate the same thing so I was the cook for the whole crew. We didn't have separate meals. I was still overseas. When my oldest daughter was born I was so far away from here. I didn't see my

daughter until she was seventeen months old.

**Mr. Cox:** What did the USS Vent do? Did they do any actual salvage work over there?

**Mr. Taylor:** They had one ship that got stuck and they were able to get it afloat. It was near Australia. Whenever they would need a tug that is what we did.

**Mr. Cox:** How did you like serving on board a ship?

**Mr. Taylor:** I loved it and during my whole career I never got seasick. I've seen some fellows get so seasick they would call for their Mamas, especially on the Vent. I really felt sorry for them. Sometimes the sea would get so rough we would just rock back and forth. Dishes would be breaking and it would really be rough. It was a small ship maybe one hundred and fifty feet long. One thing we did was we would anchor and stand by to see if they needed us. Wherever they needed us we would go and I was sure glad of that because you could really be tossed around.

In 1945 we went to Nagasaki, Japan after the surrender. You are allowed one extension on your original enlistment and my present enlistment was for six years and it expired in October 1945. I decided to extend my enlistment for two more years. I extended my enlistment in Nagasaki, Japan and there was no doctor there. You have to have a physical before you can extend your enlistment so they sent me to a school there. That is where they drop the second Atomic bomb. A doctor examined me there.

You could hear the windowpanes crackling while I was taking my physical.

**Mr. Cox:** As a military man you knew that they were probably going to attack Japan if something didn't happen. Were you aware that the next step would probably be a land attack on Japan?

**Mr. Taylor:** Yes, President Truman had warned them to surrender unconditionally. That was before they had dropped the first bomb on Hiroshima. They Japanese were hardheaded. He told them we had a powerful weapon that no one had ever used. When they unleashed it on Hiroshima and it killed a lot of people, Lord have mercy. They still wouldn't surrender and they hit them the second time. That was Nagasaki and then it was all over. General McArthur accepted the surrender terms aboard the USS Missouri.

**Mr. Cox:** What do you think of President Truman's decision to drop the bomb?

**Mr. Taylor:** I think it was necessary. It was painful but as a military man I think we had to drop the bomb to end the war. If he hadn't done so, it would have gone on for many more years and we would have lost a lot more men. During that Pearl Harbor attack we lost more men during that single attack than we did in World War I. You sacrifice people in war. I applaud his decision. You have to make decisions that are painful and they aren't going to be popular with everybody.

**Mr. Cox:** During the signing were you anywhere in the area when they signed the peace agreement?

**Mr. Taylor:** No I wasn't around Tokyo Bay. I was in Nagasaki after the peace agreement.

**Mr. Cox:** As a layman can you describe what Nagasaki looked like?

**Mr. Taylor:** When I got off my ship and they sent me to that school for my physical, people would bow to their knees if you were black or white. I don't know if they were afraid because they had been hit with the Atomic bomb but you could see they were not happy. They were beaten. They were proud people but they were beaten. They thought they could beat the United States but they didn't. I didn't see much of the devastation from the bomb. It was off in a distance and there was a huge hole. That was my recollection. When I was at that school I could hear those windowpanes crackling.

**Mr. Cox:** After your reenlistment then you came back to the States for a while?

**Mr. Taylor:** I was very happy to come back to the States. I boarded a transport ship and we got off the ship in Portland, Oregon. They sent us to some hotel. I tell you the truth I slept that whole night. The next day we were to wait for orders. I applied for shore duty in New Orleans. They assured me I was going to get it but unless you have it in your hand you can't depend on it. I had sixty days leave so I went home. I told my wife I was going to



get shore duty in New Orleans. I was there about a month and they told me I was to go back to California. That was sure a disappointing time for me.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you take your wife with you?

**Mr. Taylor:** No I didn't. We got married in 1943 and my wife was with me in Seattle, Washington for about two or three months. I kept moving from one place to another so she went home.

**Mr. Cox:** You were stationed in New Orleans for about four months and then you went to San Diego. After San Diego you were assigned to the USS Skagit?

**Mr. Taylor:** That was a supply ship also. That was where I was the Captain's Cook. That was in San Diego. It was long before they got orders they were to go to China. I was a short timer [a short period of time left on the current enlistment], and that is what saved me. The Executive Officer said, "Aren't you the Captain's cook why do you want to leave?" I said, "For my family. My wife wants me to get out." He said, "You been in here eight years and you want to go?" He tried to talk me out of it. I was lonesome for my family. The Navy is not too good for family life because you keep moving all the time. It was kind of tough for me but I stuck it out. I really enjoyed the Navy. You have good days and bad days but I had more good than bad.

**Mr. Cox:** You were on the Skagit for almost a year and then you were on the USS Appalachian.

**Mr. Taylor:** I didn't stay there too long. It was an ammunition ship and I didn't like that too much. (Laughter) I was only on it about two months. Then I was assigned to Alameda. I thoroughly enjoyed that duty. It was a beautiful Naval Air Station. It was like a big college campus. It had libraries and everything. That was the sweetest duty I had the whole time I was in the Navy. I said to myself they were trying to bait me. (Laughter)

**Mr. Cox:** About this time in 1946 they had desegregation in the Armed Forces so you must have experienced this.

**Mr. Taylor:** Oh yes, I saw it on the USS Appalachian. We had black gunners mates and seaman. It was a different Navy.

**Mr. Cox:** How did it seem the white seamen and officers took this desegregation, did they fight it at all?

**Mr. Taylor:** No, mostly they didn't have a choice. If you tried to fight it, they would court martial you. Maybe some of them deep down in their heart didn't like it but they accepted it. They worked with the black seaman. It was about time too. If you were good enough to lay your life on the line, then you should have an opportunity to serve anywhere you wanted to. The Navy now is a totally different Navy. They even have black Admirals

now. That was unheard of back then. Colin Powell first black Chairman of Joint Chief of Staff. He is a brilliant man who came from a poor family.

**Mr. Cox:** Is there anything that you would want to add to this interview?

**Mr. Taylor:** Well I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to express my opinion and my experiences in the Navy. It is wonderful that someone took enough interest in me to come and interview me and hear what I had to say.

**Mr. Cox:** I would like to shake your hand and tell you thank you for what you did when I was young boy. It was guys like you that saved this great country of ours.

**Mr. Cox:** We are taking this opportunity to talk to Alex Taylor's wife Hazel Taylor concerning how it was to be married to a military man who was put in harms way on a daily basis during World War II. You and Alex got married while he was in the Navy?

**Mrs. Taylor:** We married while he was in the Navy. Our families knew each other for a long time. He used to play marbles and baseball with my brothers. We married, September 1, 1943. We'll soon be having our 58<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I was excited to go to the state of Washington and I stayed about a five or six months in Seattle while he was in Bremerton. I was

kind of lonely there in the apartment but I soon learned to get used to the place. I was disappointed that I couldn't go with him but it was wartime. After about five or six months I decided to go back home. I traveled by train going back to Louisiana and it took about five days. It was rough too because you had the soldiers on there. Being from a small place and to travel that far made me feel uneasy. I was pregnant with our first child. I had money and I taped it on me in case I would get robbed. I came home and stayed with my Mother and Daddy. I had the baby in June, a lovely little girl named Patricia. Alex wasn't here when she was born. I sent him a cablegram but they wouldn't let him come. That was the worst part of the war so he didn't see her until she was a year and five months old. When Alex finally got home she was so used to me and her grandparents, she would say, "Who's that man?"

**Mr. Cox:** When Alex was on the Enterprise did you think about him being in harm's way?

**Mrs. Taylor:** Oh yes I did. We would get the paper and on the radio we would see how bad everything was. We didn't have television at that time but we got all the news on the radio and the newspaper. I stayed anxious that he would get out and come home safe and sound and not all crippled us like a lot of the soldiers that were coming home.

**Mr. Cox:** Did he write you regularly?

**Mrs. Taylor:** Yes he did. The letters were forwarded because the letters coming from overseas but he would write and say, "You don't write often enough and send me some pictures." (Laughter) I kept sending pictures of me and the baby. I was never able to go and be with him for any amount of time. The Navy kept him moving so much. I did encourage him not to reenlist for more years because we can't raise a family like that. We did have another baby, Gail about five years after he got out. It made a big difference having him here with me when the baby was born. He helped me with everything.

**Mr. Cox:** During the war while Alex was overseas did you have any kind of job at that time?

**Mrs. Taylor:** No I didn't work at that time. I kept busy with my church and volunteer work then.

**Mr. Cox:** The reason I pose that question is because a lot of women worked in industry at that time.

**Mrs. Taylor:** In Lafayette there weren't any jobs in wartime. Probably if I had stayed in Seattle maybe I would have found employment. When he came home I had bought this home with money that he had sent me. I saved enough from the allotment check he would send to buy this home so when he got home that was all situated. I wanted him to get out of the Navy so he could get a decent job. Thank God we did come through it all and we've

done really well and have more blessings than we could ever count.

Transcribed by:  
Cynthia Gay Cox  
San Antonio, Texas  
August 29, 2001