

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

*Center for Pacific War Studies*

*Fredericksburg, Texas*

Interview with

**Mr. Wendall Stewart**

July 16, 2001

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

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I am Richard Misenhimer, and today is July 16, 2001. I am interviewing Mr. Wendall Stewart at his home at 2606 Wolf Pint Drive in Rochester, Indiana. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information relating to World War II.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Mr. Stewart I want to thank you for taking time today to share your experiences with us. Let me start off by asking you where you were born.

**Mr. Stewart:** June 20, 1925 and I was born in Tipton County.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Here in Indiana?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK, and what were your parents names?

**Mr. Stewart:** Oscar Stewart and Opal Stewart.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And where were they born?

**Mr. Stewart:** Dad was born in Clinton County, and my Mother was born in Tipton County.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. Do you know when your ancestors came over to this country?

**Mr. Stewart:** My son could tell you, but I couldn't tell you exactly, no.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

**Mr. Stewart:** I have one brother and one sister. Richard and Gwendolyn.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Are they living? Was your brother in World War II?

**Mr. Stewart:** No, he went in later and he was in six years. I believe when he came out he stayed in the Reserves and retired from the Reserves. Both are still living.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. Where did you go to school?

**Mr. Stewart:** I started in Prairie School in Prairie Township, Tipton County, Indiana for the first ten years and finished the last two years at Tipton High School, Tipton, Indiana.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And what year did you graduate?

**Mr. Stewart:** 1943.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. When did you go into the service.

**Mr. Stewart:** You'll have to ask my wife. She's got the figures.

**Stewart:** You want enlistment or the service?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yea. It would be the enlistment.

**Stewart:** February 12, 1944.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK, and what branch did you go in?

**Mr. Stewart:** Went into the Naval Air Corps.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Did you volunteer?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes, had a little trouble. I joined the Naval Air Corps as a volunteer and the draft board didn't want to send me because their quota was short and they wanted me to go in the draft and I had to send a telegram to the Commander of the Naval Base in Chicago and he sent orders for them to send me on down. So, I had to fight to get in the service.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** How did you choose the Naval Air Corps?

**Mr. Stewart:** I really couldn't tell you. That was just where I wanted to be I guess. I thought that would be something, you know, real nice.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And how old were at that time?

**Mr. Stewart:** I was 18.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Eighteen. And where did you take your training?

**Mr. Stewart:** I started out, I don't know whether it gives that date there when I went to Indiana State –

**Mrs. Stewart:** March the 1<sup>st</sup> of '44.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** March 1<sup>st</sup> of '44.

**Mr. Stewart:** In the V12 Program.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Indiana State at Terre Haute?

**Mr. Stewart:** Right. And I had two semesters, two terms there and they decided they didn't need any more pilots after we had all of our training there and ready for flight school, so they were transferring us out to Deck Officers and here, there and yonder. That I didn't want, so I went up to Great Lakes and they gave us tests up there for placement and I kind of flunked. The officer called me in and he said, "You're not this dumb." "I know where you've been." So I was sent to gunnery school for four months. I graduated second in the class. I was put in charge of a company of 200 men there. The last night I was there we had liberty. Went and took a shower. I

hung my dog tags and my pass up on a nail. I took my shower and forgot to get them. When I got to the gate, of course there was a whole company and I didn't have any pass to get out. The guy behind me says I got an extra one. I said, "No, I'm not going to get caught with a fake ID." I just held my hand up like that and walked out like I had the pass in my hand. I went on Liberty. Of course I figured, shoot if they caught me when I came back I was going overseas anyhow. When I came back I had a buddy hang with me. We were the last ones through the gate. We stood and talked to the guards a little bit. They said, "Have any booze on ya?" "No, don't drink." "OK." See you later. Walked back into Great Lakes with no pass. They gave us our overseas shots. They were rough. Got out to California three or four days later and they gave them all to us again. It was just as bad the second time as the first. O graduated from that and was sent over to San Francisco to go overseas. I don't know the name of the ship, but I do know that we left in the summer time in full winter uniforms, with a carbine rifle. We all thought we were going to Alaska, but we went to the Marshall Islands. When we were just out of the Marshall Islands we had a little fun there when we heard the sub chasers go off and about three days later we were still three days from the Marshall Islands. So we did a lot of twisting and turning. And then I landed in Mindanao on a base down there. That's at the southern tip of the

Phillippines and then I came up. I don't know what type of boat we were on. We came up through the Straits of the Phillippines and landed at Manila. They put me in Boat Pool 15-1. There was not anything in Boat Pool 15-1 for me because I had already passed all the tests and qualified as a Gunner's Mate and was ready for advancement. Even the GM was attached to my name. So I couldn't get any other rate and I went into the Captain's office and I asked for a transfer and he kicked me out of his office. He says I need men. Well, I was so dumb, I went back the next day and he threw me out the second time. You don't do this you know? And I went back the third time and he transferred me and what I didn't know was that there across the Bay at Cavite was Boat Pool 15-1 but it was a landing a repair outfit. So I really didn't advance too much. But I ended up as Ship Fitter 3<sup>rd</sup> Class when I was discharged and did a lot of work over there.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Let's go back to your gunnery school. Where did you take gunnery school?

**Mr. Stewart:** At Great Lakes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What did gunnery school consist of?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, it was gun mechanics of all types of guns all the way from a 45 revolver up to 16 inches. We didn't get to work on any 16 inchers, but I worked on the 5 inchers. I filed out a firing pin for a 5 inch gun with a piece of steel and a file device. That's work.

But we'd completely tear the gun apart, repair them, and put them back together, and then I taught gunnery and fire fighting while at Great Lakes while I was in gunnery school.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** How long did gunnery school last?

**Mr. Stewart:** I couldn't say exactly. I think it was about 4 months..

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. And what rank did you have when you got out of there then?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I was 1<sup>st</sup> Class Seaman with GM for Gunner's Mate attached to my name, which had me tied up for advancement in any other branch. It took a year before I got that cleared up to where I could make 3<sup>rd</sup> Class. So I was kind of stopped dead in my tracks. Course in Boat Pool 15-1 at Cavite across the bay from Manila I did welding and torch work, and all that kind of stuff. In that case one of my main jobs was to crawl in past a big post between two 200 gallon fuel tanks and cut the exhaust pipe out with it saturated with fuel. About every third one I would get on fire.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** How did you put it out?

**Mr. Stewart:** I had a man standing outside with a fire extinguisher. Just as soon as I could get out, he would knock it out and then I'd go back in and finish the job. I had an officer one morning call me over as I was going to work and he says, "I just want to tell you that I stand here and offer a prayer every morning when you go to work. I had noticed him there before, but I didn't know what he was doing.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Now when you finished the gunnery school, approximately what

month or what year would that have been? Do you know?

**Mr. Stewart:** It was just about a year after I enlisted.

**Mrs. Stewart:** The Spring of '45 I imagine.

**Mr. Stewart:** Because I had approximately, what? Eight months at Terre Haute? I think about four months up there. I was up there all winter.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. So the Spring of '45 then? And you went from there where?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well I went overseas. I went to San Francisco and then we went on board ship, landed on the southern tip of the Phillipines and then came up through Manila and then was transferred across to Cavite where I stayed during the rest of the war.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** When you landed in Mindanao was the war still going on?

**Mr. Stewart:** Oh, yes. The war was – I was over there a year.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. How long did you stay in Mindanao?

**Mr. Stewart:** A short time. I couldn't tell you exactly because it was just kind of a landing place to spread us out wherever they wanted us to go.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Then you went up to Manila?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yea, I went up through the Straits of the Phillipines to Manila.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And how did you get up there? What kind of ship did you have?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, that's what I've been trying to remember. It could have been an LST, but I'm not sure. I do remember that the

navigator got off course and in the middle of the night we hit a reef and they backed it off the reef. All of the water, of course, came under the ship and it was Navy personnel down in the bottom hold. For some reason they didn't wait for the order to abandon ship. Some of them went up and over the side. When the Captain got us stopped I guess I was about half-way up the ladder, but they had to wait till daylight and we were in enemy territory in a cove. So we were not in a real nice place.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Did anything else happen to you along the way?

**Mr. Stewart:** I'll have to stop and think. I walked though a mine field for 30 days about three or four times a day and when we found them, I went around it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** That was where?

**Mr. Stewart:** That was at Cavite. There were three of us and for some reason we walked single file and we had a path. We went around a big water tower that had been bombed and had fallen over, and we'd go around it and go on down and go to work on the beach. Same path, one behind the other one. I don't know what would have happened if we'd been side-by-side. I didn't walk through it after they found it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** They didn't know the mine field was there?

**Mr. Stewart:** No, they just missed that spot. I don't even know how many there were. I just know that they found mines there and I

avoided it after that.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK. You got to Manila and you only spent a few days there and then you went to Cavite?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes, I was only there three days and I was sent across the Bay to Cavite in the repair unit.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And the fighting was still going on there at that time?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, we had secured the Philippines then, but they – what’s the big island off the North. I want to say Formosa, but that’s not it.

**Mrs. Stewart:** Corregidor?

**Mr. Stewart:** No, that’s not it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Okinawa?

**Mr. Stewart:** Okinawa, yes. They took Okinawa I think after I was –

**Mr. Misenhimer:** April 1<sup>st</sup> of ‘45 when the landing was made on that island.

**Mr. Stewart:** If the information was right that I received, just before the Atomic bomb was dropped, our outfit got the orders that we were to be the first wave to hit the coast of Japan and we were supposed to leave and go up to Okinawa for practice landings, and they dropped the Atomic bomb and that stopped everything. That probably saved my life.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** There at Cavite what all did you do?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I was a ship fitter. I did welding. I braced like screws on landing boats so when one would get bent or broke I could set and brace one of those back on and sand it and balance it

out. Drive shafts. I've welded drive shafts and sanded them down and balanced them out. Cut out exhaust pipes. Just whatever came up. Straighten rudders or whatever. It was repairing landings boats mainly.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** These were the LCM's?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. LCDP's, LCM's, etc.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And these had been damaged in combat or whatever?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. I got called out from lunch one day. A fellow came in and he was an LCDP I believe it was, and he had his rudder all bent up. Well, I tried to straighten it cold, but it wouldn't do anything and so I had to heat it and I couldn't get enough heat in it and finally I looked at it and because to take it off you have to take the whole back end of that thing apart and I didn't want to do that. So it was hot out there! So I just took the torch and cut it off the shaft and laid it on a big steel slab and took the sledge hammer and straightened it out, and of course when you cut down, why it was the same pattern so you could just put it back, it was just about a quarter of an inch shorter and I spot welded it and then I braced it on both sides and the fellow that was running the boat, he looked at me and he said, "Do you think that will hold?" I told him that if it didn't to bring it back. If he'd lost his rudder he'd had a real hard time coming back.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What were some other things that happened there?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, you know it goes in the service. Of course I wasn't guilty of it, but somebody found some steaks somewhere and one night they called me out and I popped the padlock on the – I'll get in trouble on this – popped the padlock on the tool shed and took the acetylene torch and cooked the steaks with an acetylene torch. The next day the Captain called me in and he said, "Don't you do that again." He said, "I know it was you. I know your work." So that was one of the funnier things that happened, maybe.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Oh yes. Anything happen along the line, in training somewhere, anything you might recall?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I almost killed a Chief at Great Lakes. It was a dumb thing to do because I was putting a recoil spring in a 20mm gun. That's a big spring. A big washer goes in front of it and you have to compress it and pop it in. And all the instructions say that if it doesn't seat the first time, take it out and start over. And this one was about two-thirds of the way in and the Chief walked up, and he was standing in front of the gun and he said, "Hit it." That's a direct order from a superior officer. Right?

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Right.

**Mr. Stewart:** I said, "What did you say?" He says, "Hit it." And I did. And it came out. And that washer went over his shoulder and it went all the way across that building and hit the cement wall. I've thought since, I didn't think then, if it had hit him in the head, I had

no proof that I had a direct order to hit it. Yet, if I didn't obey a direct order, that was wrong too. So what should have I done? But I still think it was the wrong thing because I knew what it was going to do.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What did he say when that happened?

**Mr. Stewart:** Nothing. He just turned white.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** And walked off, huh?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What were some of the other things along the way?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I'm trying to think. I had scarlatina up at Great Lakes. Everybody did that winter.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Do you recall any particular friends you had? In training somewhere along the way?

**Mr. Stewart:** the outfit that I was in at Cavite, they'd all been together since before the beginning of the war. They were in the service when the war started and it was a kind of rough and tough outfit. There were six of us that were transferred in as replacements that were around 18 or 19 years old. And all the rest of them are at least 30 years old or older. So I kind of grew up in a hurry. Got my big toe cut off one evening, or almost. The leader on top wasn't cut in two, but it cut the toe off and it was laying up on top of my foot. Happened to be laying on my bunk and two of the fellows got in a fight. And they were good friends. But, I don't know. They got

mad about something and I happened to see one of them pull a knife and I jumped in to try and help. They were bigger than I was. When I jerked one over backwards, I tripped on an open Planter's peanut can and that's just like a knife. And that was a little hard to explain up at the hospital.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Were they able to save your toe?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. The doctor, when he got there, I crawled up on a cot and he said, "Hold your foot up." And he started to sew that toe back on. I said, "Doc, aren't you going to numb it?" He said, "This isn't bad enough to use anything on it." He says, "I might need it for somebody else." So he sewed it back on. I told him, "If I'd have known you were going to do this, I'd have cut it off and thrown it away." He said, "You'd tried to get a pension wouldn't you?" So I still got the toe, but it doesn't do a whole lot.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Did you finish up your service there at Cavite then?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes, I was at Cavite. I left Cavite and went to Subic Bay and I don't know why, but I did two or three nights of shore patrol duty there and that was one rough city. Because the battleships would come in, you know, and they'd unload everything but a skeleton crew. There's three of us that went together all the time. We stayed together. We didn't dare separate, you wouldn't come back. That was an experience. And then other story I guess I can tell. My Granddad Stewart had cancer and what was it?

**Mrs. Stewart:** Thirteen

**Mr. Stewart:** Thirteen grandsons that were in World War II.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** My goodness.

**Mr. Stewart:** And he said God promised him that he would live till the last of them got back. And when I got back to Great Lakes and mustered out, I was supposed to be mustered out the next day, but I was the last one mustered out that evening. I caught the train and I got into Elwood, oh probably 2:00 AM, two o'clock in the morning. A man was there to meet his daughter that knew me and he took me home. I shouldn't tell this, but I went over to see Carol probably about four or five o'clock in the morning and got her out of bed, and then went back home and at ten o'clock I was up in Prairie Township, which was about close to 20 miles from where I lived. And I seen Granddad and he died at two o'clock that day. When I got back, he just gave up, but he said God promised that all of them would come back and I was the last one. We all came back. Some had been prisoners and so forth, but we all came back.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Fantastic. Where were you when the war in Germany got over? Do you recall? That was in May of '45.

**Mr. Stewart:** I must have been in Cavite.

**Mrs. Stewart:** That's about the time you were on board ship going or there because we didn't hear for a long while.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Was there any kind of celebration or anything?

**Mr. Stewart:** No, we were too busy.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** How about when the war in Japan got over?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I don't know if a guy can get in trouble yet or not. One of my buddies was in Manila when the war ended. The announcement came and he got to drinking some of that stuff you're not supposed to, and he was so drunk he didn't know which way he was going. But he had guard duty out on the pier and he didn't come back and he didn't come back. So, I took his place, which isn't quite according to Hoyle or something, and he got back before the four hours was up and he wanted his rifle to stand his guard duty. But he wanted to know why all the lights were still on and he was going to shoot 'em out. Well, I filled him full of coffee, but that didn't do it, and I finally gave him his rifle so he could stand guard duty, but I kept the clip. I guess if I'd have gotten caught doing that it wouldn't be good either, but that was what I remember most about when the war was over. When he came back drunk and I was standing guard duty.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** I understand at some places some of the ships fired in the air and all. Did anything like that happen?

**Mr. Stewart:** Nothing like that happened where I was. No. It was fairly quiet there.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Did you say Subic Bay was where the battleships would come in?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. A lot of them would come in and they would have

liberty. When those fellows came ashore, why it was just a little bit rough. I walked in on a robbery one night of a store just as it was going on. The guy that was robbing it ran out of the back door and I chased him down a walk out to the outhouse that was in a swamp out back of the store. He went right off the end of it and I figured if he wanted to go out through there he could go, I wasn't.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Were you on Shore Patrol then?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. That was at Subic Bay.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Anything else?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I don't remember too much right now that –

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What day were you discharged?

**Mrs. Stewart:** May the 20<sup>th</sup> in 1946.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Did you stay in the Phillippines all that time?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. I was at Cavite all that time.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Do you remember when you left there and came back to the States?

**Mr. Stewart:** Well, I could find out. The book with the pictures in it – The Taladaga – I kept a record coming back.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What did you come back on?

**Mr. Stewart:** The USS Taladaga. It was an APA.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** An APA. And where did you land here?

**Mr. Stewart:** What is it? No, it was Treasure Island I think was where we went.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** In San Francisco.

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK.

**Mr. Stewart:** I've got a question to ask you.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** OK.

**Mr. Stewart:** You've been interviewing different ones. How many Japanese ships did we capture during World War II?

**Mr. Misenhimer:** During the war?

**Mr. Stewart:** During the war.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** I'm not sure.

**Mr. Stewart:** As I understand it we only captured one and it had the markings on it as a Red Cross ship. But the bulkheads were all full of guns and things like this when they boarded it and they brought it into Manila Bay. I've got chopsticks that came off of that ship.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Is that right?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes. They had guards on it for there was nothing left to ship, but also when they were cleaning everything up they brought the stuff to Cavite to the dock to be burned. I got two sets of chopsticks.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Do you recall the name of that ship?

**Mr. Stewart:** No I don't know what the name of it was. I didn't even see it. It was over in Manila somewhere. I thought that was – I got the chopsticks off of it. The only ship we captured as I understand it. There might have been more, I don't know.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** I haven't heard of any, but I don't know. Then when you got back into San Francisco, how long were you there?

**Mr. Stewart:** I don't know, two or three days maybe. Treasure Island there we had everything inspected and they x-rayed the sea bags and all this, that and the other. That's because they didn't want – if you had anything important, they didn't want it to get back to the States I guess. That or somebody else wanted it.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Right. And then you came from there back to –

**Mr. Stewart:** Back to Great Lakes and was discharged.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** How did you go from San Francisco to Great Lakes?

**Mr. Stewart:** By train. Yes, that's the way I traveled all the way, both ways.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** You were discharged there and came home?

**Mr. Stewart:** Discharged at Great Lakes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** What did you do when you got home?

**Mr. Stewart:** Got married. No, my Dad had an 80 acre farm because he knew when the war was over we'd be coming back and he put an 80 acre farm out, when I got home he said this is yours. So Carol and I got married, and, well the fact is we got married because the tomato crop was ready. I was running myself to death. The farm was about 15 miles from where we lived. It was a good crop and I was over there all the time and I said – we planned to set the date we just got married a month earlier.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Was your Dad a farmer?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes, all of his life.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** When you got back to the States, was there any change in this country that you could see?

**Mr. Stewart:** I didn't notice that much, no. The farm dirt was still there and you planted a crop. I was kind of a country hick. I didn't know a lot about the outside world. I've learned a lot and grew up fast when I was overseas. In fact of the case the first woman I saw overseas, I was taking a shower and she was wearing a loin cloth carrying a bolo and she wanted to buy my soap. So I finished my shower and sold her the soap.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Did you get any ribbons or medals or anything?

**Mr. Stewart:** Just the area. I didn't have any combat.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** You got the Victory Medal and the Area Campaign Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Medal and the Philippine Liberation Ribbon. You do have those?

**Mr. Stewart:** Yes.

**Mr. Misenhimer:** Anything else you can think of?

**Mr. Stewart:** Not right now.

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