

**ADMIRAL NIMITZ NATIONAL MUSEUM
OF THE PACIFIC WAR
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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

HAROLD "BUD" COLLINS

Machinist Navy Seabees

Oral Interview

October 19, 2001

**ORAL INTERVIEW OF
HAROLD "BUD" COLLINS
MACHINIST IN THE NAVY SEABEES**

My name is Rick Pratt. Today is October 19, 2001. I am interviewing Harold "Bud" Collins. This interview is taking place at the Woodfield Suites in San Antonio, Texas. The interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Center for War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Pratt: Mr. Collins thank you very much for taking the time to relate the experiences you underwent during World War II. To begin with, when and where were you born?

Mr. Collins: I was born September 24, 1920 in a town called Driftwood in Pennsylvania. It was a town where a tannery had been located and had just closed. I was raised there. My mother and father separated when I was 7 years old.

Mr. Pratt: What were their names?

Mr. Collins: Gertie and Clyde. Gertrude. My mother was a school teacher. My father ran a saw mill.

Mr. Pratt: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Mr. Collins: Yes, I have two brothers and two sisters. They are all gone. When my mother and father separated, I lived with my sister for probably 5 years. When I was 14, my father came and picked me and my younger brother up and took us to Philadelphia where he worked on the Delaware River Bridge. That was in 1934. I moved to Parkland, that is between Philadelphia and Trenton, near Langhorne. From there, I went to school in Langhorne for two years. Then I went to Stephens Trade School in Lancaster to become a machinist.

After that, the war started. I got a job at Kingsbury Machine Works. They made thrust bearings for battleships and PT Boats. I worked there for about two years. They froze my wages. So I went to Morrisville, which is right across the river from Trenton. I only worked there one night and a couple of Navy big boys came out and made me go back to Kingsbury Machine Works because of all the Navy work they were doing there and they were short-handed. I was making 95 cents an hour and couldn't get a raise because wages were frozen. At least that is what they told me.

I talked to a couple of my buddies at work. We figured out what we should do. I had one deferment for six months. I went to the Draft Board. I knew one man there, Doc Welch. I asked

him if I had a deferment coming up which would be extended. He told me “yes”. I told him I didn’t want the deferment. He sat there and thought a while.

Mr. Pratt: What was the deferment for? A medical deferment? Or, because you were working on military projects?

Mr. Collins: Yes, doing naval work. He told me to go down and sign up right then and they couldn’t do anything about extending the deferment. So the next morning, I went to the recruitment office and signed up. I talked to a couple of men and they suggested I go into the Seabees because they needed machinists. They gave me a rate of Seaman 1st. I told the person who was interviewing me that I was trying to avoid another deferment. He told me once I was signed up, I was in.

I went home and told my father. I had to be in Philadelphia at 8 a.m. the next morning at the railroad station.

Mr. Pratt: How did your father take this?

Mr. Collins: It didn’t bother him. Only my father and I lived together.

Mr. Pratt: Where were you assigned first?

Mr. Collins: I went to a couple of camps before ending up at a camp in California. From there I sailed out.

Mr. Pratt: What unit were you in?

Mr. Collins: I was in Company A, Platoon 1.

Mr. Pratt: In the 93rd.

Mr. Collins: Yes. We formed our Battalion when we got to Rhode Island. I did more training and rifle training in Rhode Island.

Mr. Pratt: So you went around to Rhode Island.

Mr. Collins: From Camp Perry to Rhode Island. We were there about six to eight weeks. Then we went from there to Camp Parks in California. From Camp Parks we were sent to board the ship.

The night we boarded ship, my brothers and I were going down to Mexico. We were on a USO bus. Just before we got to the Mexican border, they stopped the bus and asked if there was anyone on the bus from the 93rd Seabees. I think there were four or five of us. They told us that we had to go back. They loaded us into a van and back we went, because our ship was pulling out. So I never got to see Mexico, and haven’t yet.

Mr. Pratt: So your specialty was a machinist?

Mr. Collins: Yes.

Mr. Pratt: What else do you remember before you shipped out? Any training? Any new friends you might have had?

Mr. Collins: The training to me wasn't too bad. Any young guy figures it is a lot of work. For machinists you don't get much exercise anyway. Just pull levers all day. Everything went pretty good. I had a nice car.

Mr. Pratt: What kind of car did you have?

Mr. Collins: I had a '41 Pontiac convertible. Red.

Mr. Pratt: Don't you wish you had that car now?

Mr. Collins: Oh yes.

Mr. Pratt: What kind of clothing and equipment did they issue you? You had your regular uniforms. But did they issue you any specific equipment?

Mr. Collins: Our uniforms were mostly jeans and blue stock from the Navy and Marines. We wore tan clothes. That's why they called us "confused bastards". We didn't know whether we were Navy or Marines because of the clothes we wore. Usually it was Navy issue.

Mr. Pratt: When did you ship out?

Mr. Collins: I am pretty sure it was in October in 1943.

Mr. Pratt: What kind of ship were you on?

Mr. Collins: It was an old German Freighter, called the Perida. It was old. We weren't out to sea for a couple of days and we had black potatoes already. The refrigeration was terrible.

Mr. Pratt: Where did you go?

Mr. Collins: The first land we saw was the Christmas Islands. We zigged zagged in the Pacific.

Mr. Pratt: Were you in a convoy?

Mr. Collins: No convoy. There was one other ship with us. Just two ships.

Mr. Pratt: What was the other ship?

Mr. Collins: I don't know the name of it. But it had most of our heavy equipment on it. After the Christmas Islands, we didn't see anything else until we stopped at New Caledonia. We had just dropped anchor. You could hear the anchor going down and Kaboom. An ammunition ship at the dock about 500 to 600 yards from us blew up. Bodies were just flying from that thing.

From what I heard, the Seabee Stevedores were unloading the ship when it went off.

Mr. Pratt: So what caused the explosion?

Mr. Collins: It was an accident.

Mr. Pratt: This was basically your first stop.

Mr. Collins: Our first stop and our first smell of war.

Mr. Pratt: A couple of weeks after leaving.

Mr. Collins: It seemed to me like a month, some people said it was 17 days. I can't remember the day we landed.

We went to Guadalcanal and dropped off 35-40 Marines. Then we lifted anchor and took off for Binkakia Island, which was 30 miles beyond Guadalcanal. From there we built a hospital. We were there maybe two months.

Mr. Pratt: So that was the first thing you sat down and built.

Mr. Collins: There was nothing but coconut groves there. Rats were all over the place.

Mr. Pratt: This would be close to Christmastime. You spent Christmas over there.

Mr. Collins: I would say our first Christmas was at Binkakia Island. From Binkakia we went to – well we formed three waves, two weeks apart, as far as I can remember. I was on the first echelon and we went to Green Island.

On February 14, Valentine's Day, I was topside of the LST and my truck had ammunition on it. Of course they would not allow that below deck. It stayed up on top. I was sleeping in my truck and about 5 a.m., just at sunrise, I heard these guns going off. I looked and the Jap airplane and you could see the holes that had been shot through it. Never hit a vital spot till he pulled out and they got him. I could hear bullets flying all around. I quick ran for the door of the LST to get down below and a guy blocked the door and told me to get back to my gun. I told him that I was not on a gun and I dove under his legs to get out of there.

Another plane dropped a bomb on one side of the LST and then on the other side and missed us. At least two dozen guys were down on their knees.

Mr. Pratt: So that would have been after Guadalcanal and Binkakia. Then where did you go after that?

Mr. Collins: Green Island. We were there on February 14.

Mr. Pratt: How long were you on Green Island?

Mr. Collins: I guess a year, or close to it. We built two air strips and a hospital and a warehouse. We had airplanes landing in within a week or two of finishing the air strips. An Army observation plane landed and the mud was still about six inches deep.

Going to Green Island, I never saw any action myself. The door flew open on the front and went down and we hit the beach pretty hard. A squad of New Zealanders were in front of us. The New Zealand sergeant looked back and asked us where we were going. Our lieutenant told him that we were supposed to back them up. We had machine guns. He said "not with those helmets you are wearing, you aren't." So we took our helmets off. We put a cloth hat on.

I got about 50 feet on shore and that was about as far as I went. We were busy getting stuff unloaded and getting into position. We had a lot of oil drums to roll into place. I didn't even get to drive my own truck off.

Mr. Pratt: What kind of truck did you have?

Mr. Collins: I had an International dump truck. It was assigned to me and two other guys. Between the three of us, we put 13,000 miles on it and never had it out of second gear. We had it all the time while we were at Green Island.

Mr. Pratt: So you were at Green Island most of 1944?

Mr. Collins: Yes. After Green Island, we hit the Philippines.

Mr. Pratt: Could you tell us about that? Where in the Philippines did you land?

Mr. Collins: It took us about a month to get packed up at Green Island and ready to leave. I didn't get in on that. I was a truck driver. On the way to the Philippines, we stopped at New Guinea. We were there four or five days. We gathered in a convoy to go to the Philippines.

Once we got to the Philippines, the first action I saw was about a day before we got there. Jap airplanes tried to bomb us. Of course, I will never forget that they sent everybody below. The commander and the captain on the Cape Johnson would let us know what was going on. He would tell us. We weren't allowed above deck. I did see a Jap come in with a torpedo and tried to get the troop ship that was 300 to 400 yards from us. That bomb hit the water and bounced over the ship and landed on the other side.

So the first day of the invasion of the Philippines, we didn't get ashore. We got the green light to go ashore, but couldn't get there because of all the confusion. We went around and around in the water for about four or five hours.

Mr. Pratt: Where in the Philippines were you?

Mr. Collins: We landed on Samar Island, which is right across from Leyte. You could see the shooting going on at Leyte. Just like the war pictures you see. That is just what it was, airplanes dropping bombs, shooting one another.

The Japs did drop a bomb down the hold of our ship. The hold was open to get the equipment out. Anyway, the hole it hit was nothing but duffle bags and it didn't do much damage. It did burn for a couple of days.

Mr. Pratt: So the guys on board had shrapnel in their duffle bags.

Mr. Collins: The next day we got ashore. It was a big mess. They had fork lifts and equipment stuck in the water. We were there for one month. We had Thanksgiving dinner in the new chow hall we had just built on Samar Island. We had to move on up the Island a small village about 50 miles up the road. We built two big air strips there. We put in dozens of warehouses. I was told that when we finished and the warehouses were filled, they could have built an airplane if they had to. They had enough parts.

Mr. Pratt: Could you describe a little bit the construction of these buildings? Were they primarily out of wood or.....

Mr. Collins: Oh, no they were steel Quonset huts with concrete floors at least 8 inches thick...

Mr. Pratt: Where did you get the concrete from?

Mr. Collins: We made it from coral. They used hard coral and sand. That was the second truck that I drove. It was a little GMC and the dump body had three compartments in it. Each compartment held a yard of material. We had wood chutes built. You would pull up under the chutes and they would measure and load the truck. They would throw seven bags of cement in each of those compartments. You would go down to where they were pouring the floor and dump it into the hopper and it would be mixed up one yard at a time.

Mr. Pratt: So the cement they brought from the United States and aggregated your sand?

Mr. Collins: The sand was native. They also added hard coral. That is about all I can tell you that I can remember about the construction part.

Mr. Pratt: You were on Samar across from Leyte?

Mr. Collins: Yes, I never got to Leyte. But I do remember the night that Jap paratroopers tried to come in. You could hear, but you couldn't see much because it was dark. We could see parachutes coming down because they had spotlights on them. They were shooting these Japs as they would drop down. The Japs were trying to take the strip back, I guess.

Mr. Pratt: So how long were you in the Philippines?

Mr. Collins: From the Philippines, I came home in October that I had enough points to come home.

They took me off truck driving. The Lieutenant asked me if I could ride a motorcycle. I told him that I would like to try it. This one had a side-car. He gave me a slip to go down and get a motorcycle loaded up on a truck. Took it back to camp and put it together. That was my job to go over to another island across the lagoon. We had to travel about 3 or 4 miles to pick up the mail every day. It was a Harley Davidson and it had a reverse on it. I dropped the mail off and took the motorcycle back to the transportation tent. I stopped and the lieutenant told me to go pack my clothes and be ready to go in an hour. I put that motorcycle in reverse; I had never tried to back up before. A wheel went up on the side of the tent and I almost flipped it.

I knew I was getting near for points to come home. I got my clothes cleaned up because I knew that aboard ship you could not do laundry. When the clothes got dirty, just throw them over board.

Mr. Pratt: What kind of ship did you come back on?

Mr. Collins: It was another Liberty Ship. I can't remember the name of it. He hit one hell of a storm when we got just below the Aleutians. We had to stop and let the storm get by. They knew by radio contact what was happening. They just kept the motors running and kept it heading into the wind and the waves. But the ship that was with us – I don't know how true this is – they tell me that the Captain took vote, either they wait out the storm or they go home. They voted to go home and they did. I saw the ship when we got back to Goat Island in California. There wasn't a life boat on it. They had all been torn off. I heard that the Captain lost his license.

Mr. Pratt: So where did you end up? In the San Francisco area? Where was Goat Island?

Mr. Collins: Goat Island was near San Francisco where the ships would come in and discharge the troops. You got off and went through the normal lines, the examinations to see if you were all right. It took two or three days to process us before we could go home. They gave us liberty right away and we spent time in San Francisco. So I spent a few days there.

Mr. Pratt: Then you went back home to Pennsylvania?

Mr. Collins: Yes, I rode a train. It took me three days and three nights. It was the dirtiest trip I ever had in my life. It was a coal train and we got as far as Denver and the dining car went bad. Something happened to the bearings in the wheels and they took it off the train. First, you

couldn't get a seat on the train. The Servicemen had to stay in the end. The civilians were up front. So I was walking through the cars looking for a seat. There was a big red head sitting there, smoking a cigar, I bet she weighed 200 pounds. Her leg was propped up on the seat. She asked me if I was looking for a seat and told me I could sit next to her. I put my duffle bag down and the SP grabbed me and told me to go to the back. I thought "here we are, fighting that damn war for 2 years and we can't even sit with a civilian."

So I stood up from there to Chicago. Had nothing to eat or drink. So we stopped at Chicago and I asked the conductor if I could get something to eat. He told me I had about 20 minutes as they were changing engines. The USO was about 500 to 600 feet, so I ran over and asked them for a couple of donuts and a cup of coffee. I just happened to look back and my train was moving. I ran to catch it before it pulled out. I asked the conductor why he had told me I had 20 minutes, and he apologized and said that that is what he was told.

I had about a 17-hour ride from Chicago to Philadelphia. I told them to wake me when we got to the North Philadelphia station. I slept all the way for two days.

Mr. Pratt: What did you do after the war? What trade of work did you get in to?

Mr. Collins: First, I didn't have enough points to get out of the service yet. So they put me in the Philadelphia Navy Yard running prisoners between their cells and the medical center. I got friendly with the corpsman there and asked him to check my records to see if there was anything about my ears. He checked and told me that there was nothing in my record about my ears. The doctor overheard this and checked my ears. Finally he told me to pack my bag and go to the Naval Hospital. I had jungle rot and didn't know it. It causes thickening of the inner ear drum. I was in the Naval Hospital from December until February when I was discharged. I was in the service 2 years, 11 months and 10 days.

Mr. Pratt: I want to thank you for sharing your story with us.

Mr. Collins: I saw a few Japs, but not many. Most of the ones I saw were dead. I guess I saw 200 piled up like cord wood. They were buried on the beach at Green Island.

Mr. Pratt: The museum will have this story typed and put into the archives for future generations to read all about the war.

Mr. Collins: Thank you.

Typed by: Becky Lindig
Nimitz Volunteer
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