

**Admiral Nimitz Historic Site-  
National Museum of the Pacific War**

***Center for Pacific War Studies***  
Fredericksburg, Texas

**Interview with:  
Mr. Albert Montague  
Submariner  
USS-Stingray / USS-S-40**

## **Interview With Albert Montague**

This is Peter Johnson, the date is December 6, 2001. I have the honor of interviewing Mr. Albert Montague, a Pearl Harbor survivor. The interview is taking place at the Bethany Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for the Pacific War Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War of the Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information.

**Mr. Johnson:** Can I call you Albert?

**Mr. Montague:** Monty.

**Mr. Johnson:** OK, Monty. When were you born?

**Mr. Montague:** I was born in Azusa, California on October the 17th, 1921.

**Mr. Johnson:** Who were your parents?

**Mr. Montague:** My father's name was Albert A. Montague Sr., and my mother's name was Garnet Montague.

**Mr. Johnson:** Where did you attend school in California?

**Mr. Montague:** I went to quite a few different schools, because we moved. I went to Venice High School, Luezinger High School, Long Beach Poly, and graduated from Pasadena High School. I graduated from East Los Angeles College and then I took some courses at UCLA and USC and Long Beach State.

**Mr. Johnson:** You say you moved a lot. Was your father in the military?

**Mr. Montague:** No. My mother and father broke up at an early age, that's why.

**Mr. Johnson:** When did you enlist?

**Mr. Montague:** I enlisted with two of my buddies from Stockton, California in August of 1941.

**Mr. Johnson:** Where did you do your training?

**Mr. Montague:** I did my training in San Diego, California, boot camp there.

**Mr. Johnson:** What made you decide to join the Navy?

**Mr. Montague:** I'd been raised in Southern California around the Navy all my life. I'd been on board the SS Saratoga and one of the old-time submarines that was anchored out in the Long Beach harbor, so I knew a lot of sailors in the fleet, and that's probably the main reason.

**Mr. Johnson:** What was your first duty station?

**Mr. Montague:** My first duty station was the submarine base at Pearl Harbor in the territory of Hawaii.

**Mr. Johnson:** What was Hawaii like at that time? That was 1941?

**Mr. Montague:** Yes. The other side of the island, they still had grass huts over there. And the commercial district was much smaller than it is. From the naval base almost all the way in to Honolulu was sugar cane fields, and they had a sugar cane train that somehow came and harvested the sugar cane. That's all gone now.

**Mr. Johnson:** I guess the weather in Southern California was probably not that much of a change.

**Mr. Montague:** I lived in Stockton, California, which was quite hot and dry. The trade winds in Pearl Harbor was quite refreshing.

**Mr. Johnson:** What was your primary duty at Pearl Harbor.

**Mr. Montague:** I was assigned to the sub base at Pearl Harbor. From there I went to signal school at the submarine base at Pearl Harbor, and graduated from the signal school. My first assignment as a signalman was on the fleet signal tower by the administration building on the sub base. We used Mossberg flashing lights and flags on the halyards and the semaphore. Most of the time we assigned incoming ships to docking positions. One thing about being at that location at that particular time, Admiral Nimitz would come up on the roof every afternoon and do his constitutional walk around there, so we did get to talk to the Admiral on several occasions. He was very accommodating.

**Mr. Johnson:** How old were you when you arrived at Pearl Harbor?

**Mr. Montague:** I was 20.

**Mr. Johnson:** What did you miss about home?

**Mr. Montague:** Because of my previous experience, I was not home. I left home about 16 years of age and worked at CCC camps in the the mountains, so I didn't miss home at all.

**Mr. Johnson:** Where were you on the 7th of December?

**Mr. Montague:** I was at the submarine base at Pearl Harbor, I was just coming out of the mess hall having finished breakfast, and walking across the grass infield between the submarine base barracks when I observed a Japanese plane flying at about 75 feet above the base and strafing, and it was so close that I could observe the red circles on the wings. It was plain to me that we were being attacked by the Japanese.

**Mr. Johnson:** Who was with you there?

**Mr. Montague:** My buddies from Stockton, a guy by the name of Keiffer and a guy by the name of Bergman. Keiffer went to cook and baker school and was assigned to the USS Runner, it was a submarine, 275. Bergman also went to cook and baker school and was assigned to the USS Pickerel. The USS Pickerel and the USS Runner are still on patrol, they never got back.

**Mr. Johnson:** What were their first names, do you remember?

**Mr. Montague:** Yes. They were BKR 2/c J. J. Bergman and R. C. Keifer, BDR 2/c. I have the roster of the entire ships' companies, of the Pickerel and the Runner.

**Mr. Johnson:** What was your reaction when you saw the Japanese plane?

**Mr. Montague:** My reaction was to run as fast as I could down to the base armory, I got ammunition, a machine gun, a BAR and a bunch of rifles, and we went up to the top of the submarine base tower, which was at a height of 115 feet. We opened up the exterior windows and there were some slings between the windows where we could position the BAR and the machine gun. and we started firing at the torpedo planes that were coming down the channel towards the battleship row, and they were lower than we were, so we were shooting downward.

**Mr. Johnson:** Were you successful?

**Mr. Montague:** The box of ammunition that I had commandeered was all tracers, and we decided that mainly we were shooting behind the planes, so we decided to shoot way ahead of them and let the planes fly into the tracers, and the one plane that we did get to was set on fire, and the last we saw of him, he went through the smoke from the Arizona and to the outer harbor.

**Mr. Johnson:** Can you describe the damage you saw after the attack? You were up high, you must have been able to see.

**Mr. Montague:** The damage I saw—of course, the Arizona was down. It was just completely a wreck. It was capsized. The California was beached on the point, the Nevada was also bombed, and the Maryland and I think the Tennessee were hit with one bomb each, and the Pennsylvania was hit forward with a bomb. I volunteered to go onto the submarine diving boat and we went over to the USS Oklahoma and the divers went underneath the Oklahoma, one went through their after hatch, and persuaded five sailors from the Oklahoma to follow him down, and he rescued five of those Oklahoma sailors. That's where I got all of the oil spots on my white uniform which is now in the Admiral Nimitz Museum.

**Mr. Johnson:** What was life like on a submarine? How long did you serve on a submarine?

**Mr. Montague:** I served on the Stingray from the first part of 1943 until the last part of 1944. Submarines did not have enough bunks for the entire crew, so we did what you call "hot bunks." When one person was off duty he got on the bunk, and when he went back on duty somebody had that bunk assigned to him. The only trouble was we had been bombed, it knocked out the air conditioning and the temperature inside the boat went up to 134 degrees, so when we went into a bunk we were smelling really rank. Because of the supply of water to our batteries, we only had sufficient water for a shower about every three weeks.

**Mr. Johnson:** When you were out on a campaign, how long did you stay out?

**Mr. Montague:** The usual patrol run was anywhere from 45 to 60 days.

**Mr. Johnson:** After you left Pearl Harbor, what were some of your assignments, or campaigns?

**Mr. Montague:** Our first run was to Wenchow, China. We went into the harbor there, and we laid a mine field in the harbor, and we came back out. The next night we observed a convoy of six ships, and we attacked the rear ship, which was about a nine thousand ton cargo vessel. We fired three torpedoes, and one torpedo hit it. He was off the radar screen in 31 seconds. After that, we thought that we were getting close to the mine field that we had laid the night before, so we broke off the engagement and went out to the outer harbor and shortly after that we heard an awful lot of loud explosions. We presumed that the convoy had run into the mine field.

**Mr. Johnson:** Where did you go after that?

**Mr. Montague:** We patrolled off of China and found no other targets that we could contact. Then we went back to Pearl Harbor for refit. We did have one unusual circumstance. We were down at 140 foot, and we were coming up to 60 foot to take a periscope look and we ran aground on a submerged mountain, and we lost our sonar, our sound gear, and a lot of other things, and we were scheduled for a refit at Midway. But because we had to go into dry dock, they sent us all the way back to Pearl Harbor.

**Mr. Johnson:** Where did this occur?

**Mr. Montague:** This occurred just south of the Mariana Islands, now called Stingray Shoals.

**Mr. Johnson:** When you went back to Pearl Harbor, where did the ship go after that?

**Mr. Montague:** We had two weeks' rest and recreation at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel, and then we went back and we were assigned to Truk, which was the Japanese naval base in the Pacific. A large portion of the Japanese fleet was anchored there. We stayed there for two

months with no ships coming up. We went back to Pearl, and went back again and stayed there for another two months without any ships whatsoever. Then we went back to Pearl, and then we went back to the United States for a complete overhaul. The submarine that took our place at Truk was there, about two weeks after we left the fleet did come out, and that submarine's still there. It was sunk by Japanese destroyers.

**Mr. Johnson:** Were they able to get some of the ships before that?

**Mr. Montague:** I think they did. I have the records of that. They did have survivors from that submarine, and one of the survivors was a pharmacist's mate. I worked for the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, and one of the nurses at Central Jail happened to be one of the survivors of that submarine, his name's Todd.

**Mr. Johnson:** You mentioned that one of your experiences during World War II was torpedoes. Can you tell us about that?

**Mr. Montague:** We had sunk a Japanese ship several days before that, and the Japanese had the habit of putting one their submarines in the area. I was on the bridge about 3:20 in the morning, and I observed—we were on a zigzag course, and we had just started on our starboard zig to the right—I observed two torpedoes coming toward our starboard quarter. If we had continued the zig we'd have turned right into them, but we saw them and we turned left. One was about 50 yards to the starboard and the other one was about five or six feet to starboard. I had a very good friend who was in charge of the aft torpedo room, and the screws from the Japanese torpedo woke him up. He said to himself, "It's too late, it's too late to do anything about it."

**Mr. Johnson:** What year was this?

**Mr. Montague:** It was in 1943, south of the Marianas, between the Marianas and the Philippines.

**Mr. Johnson:** Do you have any other stories to tell us?

**Mr. Montague:** I have lots of other stories. We made Ripley's *Believe It Or Not*. We were the submarine assigned to the air-sea rescue west of Guam for the reinvasion of Guam. We rescued several pilots. One of the pilots was Ensign Bryant. He was shot down and landed about a quarter of a mile off the shore where there was a Japanese shore battery. The commenced firing on him. We wanted to get him, but we were straddled by the second salvo from the shore battery, so we submerged. His wing man went to our periscope and directed us to the pilot. We went over to the pilot and made three passes before he finally got hold of the periscope. We hauled him out about six miles and then took the periscope down and picked him up. He was injured, he had a deep gash on his left hand where he'd tried to get out of his parachute harness. I was on the helm in that action.

**Mr. Johnson:** Any other stories?

**Mr. Montague:** There are so many. The night after the Pearl Harbor attack, we had a fire storm. That night, I was up on the roof of the submarine barracks, everything was going off, and I was hit from behind by a guy. I turned around and I looked at this guy, about six foot six, and lo and behold! it was a guy I'd gone to high school with, a very good friend of mine. He was a corporal in the Army, assigned to the antiaircraft battery up there.

**Mr. Johnson:** How did you hear that the war was over? Where were you?

**Mr. Montague:** I was aboard the USS S-40 in San Diego. We'd come back from Australia. Most of our patrols were out of Brisbane and Darwin, Australia. We had a very secret, secret, secret patrol out of Darwin, Australia, in 1944. That patrol report was only declassified a few years ago. We took about 15 Filipino freedom fighters into northern Luzon and they went in there and they freed those native people in there from being raped and beheaded by the Japanese. The atrocities were really rampant in there. While we were there disembarking the troops, there were two convoys of Japanese ships. One convoy went outside of the bay but the second convoy came inside the bay and the range of those ships went down to 350 yards. They didn't fire, and we didn't fire. The Philippine government now is in the process of erecting a monument, memorial, to the USS Stingray at that particular location, and they're getting all of the men that were there, and all of the members from the Stingray to go back there and be part of that. We were there, August the 27th, 1944. I don't know if it will be this August the 27th, or in April. August is pretty bad weather there, so they may change it.

**Mrs. Montague:** They were going to have it last August, and it didn't happen, because the Philippine government lost it's president. There were a couple of fellows who are working on it who came over to interview, who stayed with us at our home, then they were going to Seattle to speak to a lady who had been there in the Philippines.

**Mr. Montague:** Her husband was tortured and killed there, and the Japanese had a form of torture, they would fill a person up with water and then they'd jump on his stomach.

**Mr. Johnson:** How long did you stay in service after the war was over?

**Mr. Montague:** I was discharged on December the 26th of 1946. I went into the Reserve. I was recalled to the Reserve in 1950 and went back aboard the USS Remora, another submarine which was a Guppy submarine. They put it in dry dock and made a four-engine Guppy out of her instead of a two-engine. I did about a year on her.

So I did a six year hitch before the war, so about 11, 12 years, actually, Reserve and regular Navy.

- Mr. Johnson:** When you went back in 1950, where did you go?
- Mr. Montague:** We operated along the Pacific Coast, we didn't go to Korea. There were only one or two submarines, that I know, that went to Korea. They were operating with the Marine Rangers, bringing them in behind the enemy lines. But the North Koreans didn't have a navy.
- Mr. Johnson:** Can you describe what coming home after the World War II was like for the veterans?
- Mr. Montague:** When I came home in December of 1943, I'd already lost a couple of my buddies. Most of them, when I got home, because a lot of people don't understand, the Pacific submarine warfare was what was called a "silent service." A submarine would be lost and they would not name the submarine, they would just say "A submarine has been lost." While the families of all the submariners that were at sea, they thought they were the ones, so it was pretty tragic for them. When I knew I was going back on the Stingray, going back out to sea, my family and I didn't think I'd ever get back. It was very emotional. We lost 25 percent of our submarines. We lost 52 submarines. Some of them had survivors, a few. Most of them lost the entire crew.
- Mr. Johnson:** How many submarines did we have in the war?
- Mr. Montague:** I think they built them very fast, I think at the end of the war we had about 350, both in the Atlantic and the Pacific.
- Mr. Johnson:** How many people made up a crew?
- Mr. Montague:** About 75, sometimes up to about 80.
- Mr. Johnson:** That was the largest submarines?
- Mr. Montague:** No, the Narwhal, the Nautilus, and Argonaut were large submarines, they were used primarily for supplying the guerillas and for Carlson's Raiders, they did the Makin Island raid, the Marine Corps. Carlson had been an executive officer of President Roosevelt's guard in Warm Springs.
- Those three submarines mounted two six-inch guns, one forward and one aft. They were the largest submarines that we had. But they were not serviced long because they were slow diving. They were not sophisticated enough .
- Mr. Johnson:** How were you powered?
- Mr. Montague:** We had four 16-cylinder Winton engines, and one 1,000 hp. engine that we used to top off the battery. They were diesel submarines, we called them "pig boats." If you've



ever been in one, you know why they were called "pig boats."

A funny thing. We'd been on patrol, been out about 60 days, and one of the sailors from the sub base thought he would help us, so he opened up the forward torpedo room hatch, and from the "perfume" that came out of that hatch after 60 days, he immediately got sick.

**Mr. Johnson:** You say your uniform is on display at the Nimitz Museum? When did you donate that?

**Mr. Montague:** That's been quite a few years ago, when the Nimitz Pearl Harbor exhibit was in a very small room. It must have been 15, 16 years ago, or more than that.

**Mr. Johnson:** Before we stop, is there anything else I should have asked, that would be interesting?

**Mr. Montague:** The only one thing that I could add was we had a captain by the name of Sam Colby Loomis who was as far I'm concerned the best captain we ever had in the Navy, he was just a wonderful individual, very aggressive. That's one thing that a lot of people don't realize, the Submarine Service was a volunteer service and everybody that was in the Submarine Service was very aggressive, and they wanted to do the job that they were there for. And we sank 53 per cent of all Japanese shipping.

**Mr. Johnson:** Crew members on a submarine, you'd have to get along pretty good? What was the atmosphere on a sub?

**Mr. Montague:** You have to understand that the most menial jobs on a submarine are very important. The tough job on diving, you had to close the main induction valve. If it was left open, the submarine sinks. Everybody has their job to do, and they have to do it. We had so much training on the submarine that you do things automatically. When something happens you react, it's almost instantaneously. When we spotted the torpedoes coming at us, we only had one engine on the line, and we went to flank speed we had to put the other three engines on the line, and the engines went on like this: *aroonk, aroonk, aroonk*. They were exhausting those diesel engines inboard. The guy on the helm, he put the helm over full left so hard that it jammed the rudder so it took four or five guys to unjam it.

**Mr. Johnson:** What's the highest speed?

**Mr. Montague:** High speed on the submarine was about 20, 21 knots.

**Mr. Johnson:** That's the fastest, full speed ahead?

**Mr. Montague:** That's it. If we were heading toward the United States, we'd probably get 22.

**Mr. Johnson:** You were in Australia then some?

**Mr. Montague:** Yes.

**Mr. Johnson:** Did you get shore leave in Australia?

**Mr. Montague:** Yes. I was transferred off the Stingray in Australia. I went into the Submarine Crew there, was transferred to the Shore Patrol. They assigned me to the Queensland Police Department, and I worked with the Queensland Police Department on their bootleg detail. In 1997 I went back and reacquainted myself with the Queensland Police Department and they gave me a nice, beautiful Queensland police badge.

**Mr. Johnson:** What year did you do that?

**Mr. Montague:** That was in 1945.

**Mr. Johnson:** You say bootleg detail. Is that what I think it is?

**Mr. Montague:** Yes, whiskey. Funny thing happened with the police. They bought whiskey in the suburb from this lady, and they had done it before, but she didn't recognize us the second time. Usually it was six months in jail, that's what they usually did then, and all of a sudden her husband went berserk. Turns out he'd just gotten out of jail that morning.

**Mr. Johnson:** I was going to ask you one other question, maybe you can explain it to me. I've been reading about Pearl Harbor and different ships and things. When they say a four-inch or a five-inch gun, could you describe what that is? I see a five-inch gun up here at the Nimitz, and it's big.

**Mr. Montague:** A three-inch is a 75 mm., a four-inch is a 105 mm., a five-inch is a 155 mm. The battleship Missouri had 16-inch guns, and the projectiles, they were several tons.

**Mr. Johnson:** What millimeter is a 16-inch gun?

**Mr. Montague:** Maybe 400 mm. but our submarines sank Japanese battleships in World War II.

**Mr. Johnson:** I enjoyed talking with you.

**Mr. Montague:** Thank you for having us over here, we'll be looking forward to reading whatever comes out of it.

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda  
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