

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

THE NIMITZ MUSEUM

PRESENTS

AN ORAL HISTORY BY

HOWARD LUCKHAM

TAPE NO. 388

WILLIAM HOWARD LUCKHAM. IS IT OK IF I CALL YOU HOWARD? YOU CALL ME JIM.

I AM JIM KOEN. TODAY IS DECEMBER 6, 2001. I AM INTERVIEWING MR. HOWARD LUCKHAM. THIS INTERVIEW IS TAKING PLACE AT BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH IN FREDERICKSBURG, TEXAS IN SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR ARCHIVES FOR THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND WILDLIFE FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION RELATED TO THE SITE.

WHERE WERE YOU BORN HOWARD?

HOWARD

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK.

JIM

WHAT YEAR?

HOWARD

MARCH 28, 1918.

JIM

WHAT DID YOUR PARENTS DO?

HOWARD

MOM AND DAD. MOTHER WAS A HOUSEWIFE ALL HER LIFE. DAD HAD VARIOUS JOBS. WHEN I WAS A YOUNGSTER, HE OWNED A FARM. DURING THE HARD TIMES WE HAD BACK THERE IN THE 30's HE LOST THAT. HE RAN GROCERY STORES, AND THEN HE WORKED FOR DELCO IN HIS LATER YEARS. HE RETIRED FROM DELCO, MAKING BATTERIES AND GENERAL MOTORS PARTS.

JIM

HOW DID IT COME TO PASS THAT YOU ENTERED THE NAVY?

HOWARD

YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW? I WAS WORKING ON A FARM FOR MY ROOM AND BOARD ALL THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL. I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL. THE FARMER OFFERED ME 60 DOLLARS A MONTH TO STAY THERE. I GOT TIRED OF COWS SWATTING ME ON THE SIDE OF THE HEAD WHEN I WAS MILKING. I LEFT THERE AND I HAD A COUPLE LITTLE JOBS. I HAD A JOB AS A JEWELER APPRENTICE FOR 8 BUCKS A WEEK, 6 DAYS A WEEK. MY JOB AT NIGHT WAS TO GO TO THE POST OFFICE. I KEPT SEEING THAT SIGN "JOIN THE NAVY". I WENT IN AND TALKED TO THE RECRUITER AND SIGNED UP.

JIM

WHAT YEAR WAS THAT?

HOWARD

1939.

JIM

YOU ENLISTED FOR WHAT PERIOD OF TIME?

HOWARD

FOUR YEARS. THE LAST GROUP BEFORE THEY TOOK THEM FOR SIX YEARS.

JIM

THEN LATER THE DRAFT FOLLOWED. THEY WERE ACTUALLY DRAFTING BEFORE WORLD WAR II STARTED. IS THAT YOUR RECOLLECTION?

HOWARD

I DON'T KNOW WHEN THE DRAFT STARTED.

JIM

IS THERE ANYTHING PARTICULAR THAT ATTRACTED YOU TO NAVY AS OPPOSED TO THE ARMY OR THE AIR CORPS? WHY THE NAVY?

HOWARD

I WAS INTERESTED IN SEEING PARTS OF THE WORLD.

JIM

HOW OLD WERE YOU WHEN YOU ENLISTED?

HOWARD

TWENTY ONE.

JIM

GOING BACK TO YOUR FARMING DAYS, IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU WERE LIVING WITH A DIFFERENT FAMILY?

HOWARD

OH YEAH.

JIM

DID YOU SEND MONEY BACK TO YOUR PARENTS?

HOWARD

I NEVER GOT ANY MONEY. JUST ROOM AND BOARD. I WENT TO HIGH SCHOOL AND LIVED WITH THEM FOR 5 YEARS FOR ROOM AND BOARD. IF I HIRED ON A SATURDAY, I GOT \$2.00. IF IT WASN'T TOO MUCH OF A JOB, HE GAVE ME \$1.00. THAT WAS ALL THE MONEY I HAD.

JIM

WHEN YOU GOT IN THE NAVY, HOW MUCH WERE YOU MAKING A MONTH?

HOWARD

\$21.00 A MONTH.

JIM

\$21.00 A MONTH?

HOWARD

YES SIR, PLUS ROOM AND BOARD, A NICE CLEAN PLACE TO SLEEP AND THREE SQUARE MEALS A DAY. WE HAD TO BUY OUR CLOTHES.

JIM

YOU HAD TO BUY YOUR CLOTHES OUT OF \$21.00?

HOWARD

WE HAD TO PAY FOR EVERYTHING.

JIM

SO YOU ENLISTED IN THE NAVY. WHERE DID YOU GO THEN?

HOWARD

FIRST I WENT TO BOOT CAMP IN RHODE ISLAND. BEFORE I FINISHED BOOT CAMP, I FORGET, 8 WEEKS, 12 WEEKS. I WAS 2 WEEKS SHY OF FINISHING BOOT CAMP AND THE WAR IN EUROPE WAS GOING ON AND THEY SENT THE WHOLE COMPANY, A HUNDRED AND SOMETHING MEN TO THE *USS HELENA* IN THE BROOKLYN NAVY YARD. WE PUT HER IN COMMISSION. IT WAS A BRAND NEW SHIP.

JIM

WHAT KIND OF SHIP WAS THE *USS HELENA*?

HOWARD

IT WAS A LIGHT CRUISER.

JIM

HELENA IS THE NAME OF A CITY, ISN'T IT?

HOWARD

HELENA, MONTANA

JIM

ALL THE CRUISERS ARE NAMED AFTER A CITY, RIGHT?

HOWARD

CITIES AT THAT TIME, YEAH.

JIM

WERE YOU ISSUED WHAT THEY CALL AN "MOS" AFTER THAT RHODE ISLAND TRAINING?

HOWARD

I WAS A DECK HAND. A SEAMAN.

I STARTED OUT AS AN APPRENTICE SEAMAN, THEN SEAMAN 2ND AND THEN YOU START TAKING EXAMS FOR ADVANCEMENT TO SEAMAN 1ST AND THEN UP THE PETTY OFFICER RATINGS.

JIM

DID YOU EVER ATTEND ANY OTHER TYPE OF TRAINING IN FACILITIES OTHER THAN ON THE JOB TRAINING DURING YOU NAVAL CAREER?

HOWARD

OH YEAH. I WENT THROUGH MACHINE GUN SCHOOL ABOUT SIX MONTHS BEFORE PEARL HARBOR.

JIM

WE'LL GET TO THAT LATER. YOU WENT ABOARD THE *USS HELENA* AND SET SAIL?

HOWARD

OUR FIRST CRUISE WAS DOWN TO SOUTH AMERICA.

JIM

WAS THIS THE MAIDEN VOYAGE OF THE *HELENA*?

HOWARD

IT WAS A BRAND NEW SHIP.

JIM

WHAT DID YOU DO DOWN IN SOUTH AMERICA

HOWARD

I HAD A GOOD TIME.

JIM

DO YOU REMEMBER SOME OF THE PORTS YOU WENT TO?

HOWARD

WE WENT TO BUENOS AIRES, MONTEVIDEO.

JIM

DID YOU HAVE ANY OTHER SHIPS GO WITH YOU?

HOWARD

NO, NOT AT THAT TIME. IF YOU REMEMBER, BRITAIN AND GERMANY WERE AT WAR AT THAT TIME. THE *GRAF SPEE* WAS DAMAGED AND CAME IN THE HARBOR THERE AT MONTEVIDEO AND THEY SCUTTLED IT.

JIM

WERE YOU THERE IN THE HARBOR WHEN THAT HAPPENED?

HOWARD

NO, IT HAPPENED THE THIRD TIME BEFORE WE SAILED IN THERE. THEY HAD A BATTLE OFF SOUTH AMERICA. THIS IS BEFORE WE GOT INTO THE WAR. WE WERE REAL FRIENDLY WITH THE GERMAN SAILORS, DRANK BEER WITH THEM AND HAD A GOOD TIME. THERE IS A BIG ENGLISH SETTLEMENT IN BUENOS AIRES AND THEY DIDN'T LIKE THAT VERY WELL. WE LEFT THERE AND WENT OVER TO MONTEVIDEO FOR A FEW DAYS.

JIM

DO YOU REMEMBER, OTHER THAN JUST A SHAKEDOWN CRUISE, WAS THERE ANY OTHER PURPOSE IN *HELENA*'S MISSION DOWN THERE?

HOWARD

NOT MILITARILY, NO.

JIM

DO YOU THINK THEY WERE JUST SHOWING THE FLAG DOWN THERE?

HOWARD

I THINK THAT WAS PROBABLY THE THING. POLITICS, YOU KNOW.

JIM

WHEN YOU WENT ASHORE THERE, WHAT ACTIVITIES DID YOU DO?

HOWARD

I REALLY GOT ENTERTAINED DOWN THERE. VISITORS CAME ABOARD SHIP. SOME OF THE MEN WHO HAD THE DUTY THAT DAY WOULD TAKE THEM AND SHOW THEM AROUND THE SHIP. THIS LITTLE GIRL ABOUT 16 OR 17 YEARS OLD HAD A LITTLE BROTHER WITH HER. THE GUY NEXT IN LINE WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE HER AND I SAID, "NO, NO, I'LL TAKE HER." I SHOWED THEM AROUND THE SHIP AND IN TURN, SHE INVITED ME OUT FOR TEA THE NEXT DAY AND GAVE ME INSTRUCTIONS HOW TO GET OUT THERE. I GOT ON THIS BUS AND I RODE AND I RODE AND I RODE INTO AN EXPENSIVE RESIDENTIAL SECTION. THE BUS STOPPED AT THE CORNER AND LET ME OFF. I WENT IN THERE AND THEY HAD A BIG ELABORATE TABLE LAID OUT. THEY WERE ALL WOMEN AND CHILDREN. I WAS THE GUEST THERE. I NEVER GOT OVER THAT. THAT NIGHT, THEY INVITED ME AND THE FATHER WAS THE DEAN OF A COLLEGE DOWN THERE. HE CAME THAT NIGHT AND TOOK ME DOWN TO THE WINE CELLAR. WE TALKED AND HAD DINNER THE NEXT NIGHT THEY TOOK ME TO AN OPERA.

JIM

WHAT TOWN WAS THIS?

HOWARD

BUENOS AIRES. THE WEEKEND COMING UP, HE HAD A YACHT AND HE TOOK ME DOWN ON THE COAST AND HAD DINNER. THE SHIP WAS LEAVING THAT NIGHT AT HIGH TIDE AND I WAS LATE. THEY DROVE ME DOWN IN A BIG LIMOUSINE. (COMMENT ABOUT A CHAPLAIN)

JIM

YOU SAID THE SHIP WAS GOING TO TAKE OFF. WHERE DID IT GO THEN?

HOWARD

WE CAME BACK TO THE BROOKLYN NAVY YARD. THEN THEY HAD SPEED TRIALS WHERE THEY PUT THE SHIP TO MAXIMUM SPEED AND TURNS UP IN MAINE. THEN WE CAME BACK IN 1940, WENT THROUGH THE PANAMA CANAL, UP THE WEST COAST THEN OUT TO PEARL. WE OPERATED OUT THERE UNTIL THE WAR STARTED.

JIM

THE HELENA WAS ASSIGNED TO THE PACIFIC FLEET.

HOWARD

THAT'S RIGHT.

JIM

I TALKED TO A GUY TODAY THAT TOLD ME THE SAME THING. HE TOLD ME HE GOT HOLD OF SOME MARIJUANA AND HE AND A FRIEND OF HIS SMOKED MARIJUANA THE WHOLE TRIP. IT WAS IN PANAMA WHERE THEY STOPPED AND COULD BUY IT ON THE STREET.

HOWARD

I NEVER TOUCHED IT.

JIM

SO IT WAS ABOUT 1940 WHEN YOU GOT TO PEARL? BEFORE PEARL HARBOR, WHAT WERE YOUR DUTIES?

HOWARD

MANEUVERS. WE KNEW SOMETHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN. WE COULD FEEL IT. WE STRIPPED SHIP FOR ACTION OVER 3 MONTHS BEFORE PEARL. ANYTHING THAT WOULD CATCH FIRE EASILY WAS THROWN OVER THE SIDE. WE STRIPPED DOWN TO BARE METAL. THIS WAS 3 OR 4 MONTHS BEFORE PEARL HARBOR.

JIM

SO YOU TOOK ALL THAT BEAUTIFUL TEAK WOOD DECKS.

HOWARD

WE RIPPED IT ALL OFF THE SHIP BECAUSE IT WAS A FIRE HAZARD.

JIM

DID YOU KEEP UP WITH CURRENT EVENTS BY READING NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES?

HOWARD

WE READ A DAILY PAPER THAT CAME OUT ON THE SHIP EVERY DAY.

JIM

WAS THERE A SENSE THAT MAYBE WE WERE GOING TO WAR WITH JAPAN?

HOWARD

YES, AND WE DISCUSSED THIS. WE FIGURED THE JAPS WERE GOING TO HIT THE PHILIPPINES AND SOME PLACE OVER THERE.

JIM

WERE YOU SURPRISED WHEN THEY HIT PEARL HARBOR? DO YOU FEEL THIS WAS A GREAT SURPRISE FOR THE PEOPLE AT PEARL HARBOR.

HOWARD

WE WERE ON MANEUVERS THAT WEEK BEFORE. WE WERE IN WHAT WAS CALLED CRUISER DIVISION. THE *ST. LOUIS*, *THE HELENA* AND I FORGET THE OTHER.

JIM

YOU WERE RIGHT NEXT TO THE *OGLALA*.

HOWARD

WE WERE ON MANEUVERS THAT WEEK AT BATTLE PRACTICE. WEDNESDAY NIGHT, MY BATTLE STATION AT NIGHT WAS AT A SEARCHLIGHT LOCATED BETWEEN STACKS. IN BATTLE PRACTICE, YOU WOULD ILLUMINATE THE TARGET, WHICH WAS TOWED WAY OUT THERE AND THEY WOULD FIRE AT IT.

JIM

YOU WOULD SHINE THAT SEARCHLIGHT ON THE TARGET.

HOWARD

YES, I HAD EARPHONES ON FROM THE BRIDGE. AFTER THE EXERCISE WE USED TO REQUEST PERMISSION FROM THE CAPTAIN OF THE SHIP TO PLAY WITH THE SEARCHLIGHT. WE WOULD GIG THEM AROUND. I TURNED MY SEARCHLIGHT ACROSS THE BOW OF THE SHIP AND THERE WAS A JAP SUBMARINE SITTING UP THERE OBSERVING WHAT WAS GOING ON.

JIM

THIS WAS A BIG DEAL HUH?

HOWARD

THIS IS A BIG SUB. WE WERE YELLING, "RAM IT, SINK IT." I CAN STILL SEE THE JAP CREW RUNNING DOWN THE CONNING TOWER TO GET SUBMERGED. REMEMBER, THIS WAS ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

JIM

WAS HE IN INTERNATIONAL WATERS?

HOWARD

BEYOND 12 MILES FROM HAWAII. IT WAS WHERE WE DID ALL OUR MANEUVERS OFF THE BIG ISLAND OF HAWAII. WE CAME IN ON THURSDAY, BACK TO PORT. I'LL NEVER FORGET AND I STILL DON'T KNOW WHY, WE WERE TO GO IN AND ALL THE BATTLE WAGONS WOULD GO OUT, 6 OR 7 OF THEM WOULD GO OUT FOR THEIR MANEUVERS BECAUSE AT THAT TIME HONOLULU WAS NOT LARGE ENOUGH TO TAKE THE WHOLE NAVY FOR LIBERTY.

WE PULLED IN AND TIED UP ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CHANNEL. WE HAD 3 BATTLE WAGONS SITTING THERE. THE *PENNSYLVANIA* WAS IN DRY DOCK AHEAD OF US. THAT WAS ON THURSDAY. THURSDAY NIGHT I RATED LIBERTY. ME AND MY BUDDY DECIDED WE WEREN'T GOING TO TOWN. WE WOULD GO TO THE MARINE BASE AND GET A FEW BEERS. THAT WAS SATURDAY NIGHT. OF COURSE, SUNDAY MORNING OUR SHIP TOOK A HIT.

JIM

WERE YOU ON BOARD?

HOWARD

AT 8 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING.

JIM

WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

HOWARD

I WAS IN SHIP'S LAUNDRY IN ORDER TO MISS REVEILLE, I SLEPT ON A COT DOWN IN THE LAUNDRY. I GOT UP LATE. I HAD A LOT OF FRIENDS. I HAD MISSED BREAKFAST BUT THIS COOK FIXED ME UP SOME HAM AND EGGS. I ATE THAT.

JIM

WHEN WAS REVEILLE?

HOWARD

5:30 OR 6 O'CLOCK. SUNDAY, IT WOULD BE 6 O'CLOCK.

JIM

SUNDAY AT 6 O'CLOCK. WERE THERE OTHER PEOPLE AWAKE?

HOWARD

OH YEAH. DO YOU WANT MY WHOLE STORY?

JIM

YES, I SURE DO.

HOWARD

AS I FINISHED MY BREAKFAST AND CAME OUT OF THE MESS HALL. OUTSIDE THE WATER TIGHT DOORS WAS OUR BARBER SHOP. WE HAD FOUR CHAIRS IN THERE. I WENT IN THE BARBER SHOP AND SAT DOWN IN ONE OF THE BARBER CHAIRS AND PICKED UP A FUNNY BOOK. I STARTED LOOKING AT THAT THEN I REMEMBERED WHEN WE WERE IN PORT AND GOT THE DAILY PAPERS DELIVERED. I WENT DOWN TO THE LAUNDRY TO GET THAT. I OPENED THE DOOR OF THE LAUNDRY AND I WAS SITTING ON A CHAIR WITH MY FEET UP ON THE TABLE. I JUST STARTED READING THE FIRST FUNNY SHEET AND WHAMBO WE WERE HIT WITH A TORPEDO. THE ENGINE ROOM WAS ONE DECK DOWN AND ONE DECK OVER FROM WHERE THE LAUNDRY WAS. IT KNOCKED ME FURTHER THAN FROM HERE TO THAT WALL, CHAIR AND ALL. IT KNOCKED ME AGAINST THE BULKHEAD.

JIM

HOW FAR FORWARD WERE YOU THEN? HOW FAR DOWN?

HOWARD

THIRD DECK BELOW. WE WERE AT THE WATER LINE. I WAS NUMB FEELING. I CAN REMEMBER I FELT LIKE I WAS FLOATING FROM THE CONCUSSION. I CAME TO AND THE LOUDSPEAKER CAME ON AND ANNOUNCED, "THE JAPS ARE ATTACKING." THEN IT WENT OFF AGAIN. IT CAME ON AGAIN WITH, "GET TO YOUR BATTLE STATIONS" AND SOUNDED THE ALARM. I RAN UP THE LADDER AND IT WAS A SLEEPING COMPARTMENT RIGHT ABOVE ME. HERE WERE GUYS THAT WERE ALL ON FIRE, I MEAN THEIR HAIR AND CLOTHING WERE ALL AFLAME. THEY WERE HOLLERING. I GRABBED TWO OF THEM, ON IN EACH ARM. I WENT UP THROUGH THE PASSAGEWAY, AND TOOK THEM TO SICK BAY. I PUT THESE GUYS IN SICK BAY THEN I WENT UP BETWEEN TWO AND THREE TURRETS TO GET UP ON DECK WHERE I COULD GET BACK. SOMETHING TOLD ME TO STOP. I STOPPED BETWEEN TURRETS AND AS I STOPPED THIS JAP PLANE STRAFED THE DECK. IF I HADN'T STOPPED I WOULDN'T BE HERE TODAY. THAT'S HOW LUCKY I WAS THAT DAY.

THEN I GOT BACK TO MY GUN STATION. WE GOT BACK THERE AND HAD NO AMMUNITION. THE MAGAZINES WERE ALL PAD LOCKED, NO KEYS, NO NOTHING. WE HAD TO BEAT THEM OPEN WITH CROWBARS AND ANYTHING ELSE UNTIL WE GOT THEM OPEN. THEN I WENT UP FORWARD. FIRST I STARTED BACK TOWARDS THE BARBER SHOP. IT WAS ALL OIL AND WATER COMING UP. IT WAS ABOUT KNEE DEEP. I TURNED AND WENT BACK THE OTHER WAY. MY BATTLE STATION WAS ON THE STERN OF THE SHIP.

JIM

WHAT WAS YOUR BATTLE STATION?

HOWARD

I WAS A POINTER ON WHAT THEY CALLED A 1 POINT 1 GUN. IT WAS AN ENGLISH GUN AT THAT TIME BEFORE WE HAD 40 mm, A 1.1 THEY CALLED IT.

JIM

ONE INCH WAS THE SIZE OF THE SHELL?

HOWARD

IT WAS AN ENGLISH GUN.

JIM

DO YOU REMEMBER THE NAME OF THE GUN.

HOWARD

THEY CALLED THEM POM-POMS. THEY WENT BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM. THEY WERE SLOW.

JIM

WHAT DID THE POINTER DO?

HOWARD

THE POINTER ELEVATED AND DEPRESSED THE GUN. I (FIRED THE GUN WITH MY LEFT FOOT PEDAL. I WOULD PRESS THIS DOWN AND IT WOULD OPEN UP THE MECHANISM AND START FIRING. WE WOULD INSERT A CLIP OF FIVE SHELLS DOWN IN THE MAGAZINE. FIVE AT A TIME.

JIM

HOW LONG DID THAT TAKE?

HOWARD

15 OR 20 MINUTES, MAYBE LONGER.

JIM

WHERE WAS THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE SHIP?

HOWARD

DOWN TO THE ROYAL HAWAIIAN HOTEL HE CAME BACK IN A CAB. I GUESS DURING THE SECOND WAVE.

JIM

WHAT WAS THE NAME OF YOUR COMMANDING OFFICER?

HOWARD

I CAN'T THINK OF HIS NAME. I CAN SEE HIS FACE.

JIM

LET'S GO BACK TO YOUR POM POM GUN AND THE AMMUNITION.

HOWARD

A CRATE OF POTATOES WAS SITTING THERE ON THE DECK. A LOT OF PEOPLE WON'T BELIEVE THIS. THE JAP TORPEDO PLANES WERE COMING RIGHT OVER THE STERN OF OUR SHIP AND DROPPING THEM IN THE CHANNEL. WE THREW POTATOES AT THEM. I COULD SEE HIM IN THE OPEN COCKPIT LAUGHING HIS HEAD OFF.

JIM

HE KNEW WHAT YOU WERE DOING?

HOWARD

YEAH. WE COULDN'T LEAD HIM ENOUGH.

JIM

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN THEY GOT THE AMMUNITION?

HOWARD

ALL THE AMMO WAS DRILL TYPE.

JIM

HOW IS THAT DIFFERENT FROM REGULAR AMMUNITION?

HOWARD

THE FIRING PIN IS OUT TO MAKE IT EXPLODE. THAT IS ALL WE HAD THROUGH THE FIRST WAVE.

JIM

WHAT ABOUT THE SECOND WAVE?

HOWARD

WE GOT REAL AMMUNITION.

JIM

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR SHIP SHOOTING DOWN ANY JAPANESE AIRCRAFT?
HOW MANY HITS DID YOU TAKE, ONE TORPEDO HIT?

HOWARD

ONE TORPEDO AND AN NEAR MISS WITH A BOMB.

JIM

WHAT THAT NEAR MISS DO?

HOWARD

IT HIT ON THE DOCK. IT DIDN'T DO MUCH DAMAGE TO THE SHIP.

JIM

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT?

HOWARD

AFTER WE GOT TO FIRING, THE JAP DIVE BOMBERS WERE DIRECTLY FIRING AT US. I CAN SEE THE FIRE COMING OUT OF THE WINGS, BETWEEN THE PROPELLERS. HE WAS DIVING RIGHT ON OUR ONE GUN. MY BROTHER CAME OVER AND WAS DRINKING BEER WITH US THAT NIGHT. I LEARNED TO FIRE BY TRACER. I YELLED, "2 DEGREES LEFT, THE GUN NEVER MOVED. I REMOVED THE ???????. HE GOT HIT RIGHT IN THE NECK. FINALLY HE WAS DOWN THERE BY MY FEET.

THE GUN CAPTAIN GRABBED A SAILOR BY THE BACK OF HIS NECK LIFTED HIM OVER THE GUN AND SAT HIM IN THE TRAINERS SEAT. I CAN REMEMBER THIS AS IF IT HAPPENED YESTERDAY.

JIM

WAS HE FIRING TRACER ROUNDS AT YOU ALSO?

HOWARD

YEAH. ONE OF THOSE SHELLS GOT ON MY SHOE AND I THOUGHT MY LEG WAS ON FIRE. IT BURNED ALL THE WAY UP. I WAS WONDERING WHY I DIDN'T GET KILLED OR WOUNDED AT TIME. I JUST GOT A SMALL PIECE OF SHRAPNEL.

JIM

WAS THIS THE FIRST OR SECOND WAVE?

HOWARD

THIS WAS THE FIRST WAVE.

JIM

WHAT WAS THE INTERVAL BETWEEN WAVES?

HOWARD

I WOULD SAY ABOUT 20 MINUTES, MAYBE 15 MINUTES. IT IS HARD TO TELL. THE *OKLAHOMA* WAS CAPSIZING AND THE BATTLEWAGONS WERE BURNING. THE *ARIZONA* WAS SUNK YOU KNOW.

JIM

DID YOU SEE THE *ARIZONA* GO DOWN?

HOWARD

I COULD SEE THE BOMB AND THE BOMB WENT RIGHT DOWN THE STACK.

JIM

COULD YOU SEE THE *OKLAHOMA*?

HOWARD

I SAW IT.

JIM

WAS THERE A SHIP BETWEEN YOU AND THE OCEAN?

HOWARD

YEAH. AN OLD, OLD MINE LAYER. WHEN THAT TORPEDO HIT, SHE HAD SHALLOW DRAFT. THE TORPEDO WENT RIGHT UNDER HER AND THE CONCUSSION BROKE HER SEAMS WIDE N AND SHE SANK AND SHE WAS LEANING OVER ON US

JIM

DID YOU MAKE RESCUE EFFORTS ON YOU SHIP FROM THE *OGLALA*?

HOWARD

I DON'T REMEMBER.

JIM

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT? WHAT HAPPENED IN THE SECOND WAVE?

HOWARD

THERE WERE MORE HIGH LEVEL BOMBERS.

JIM

DID YOU GET HIT AGAIN BY THE SECOND WAVE?

HOWARD

NO.

JIM

NO MORE TORPEDOES?

HOWARD

ONE JAP CAME FLEW RIGHT UP THE CHANNEL AND I LET HIM HAVE IT.

JIM

COULD YOU ELEVATE YOUR GUN LIKE THAT, THAT LOW?

HOWARD

OH YEAH. WE WERE ALL SET. HE WAS COMING UP THIS CHANNEL AND BOY WE LET HIM HAVE IT.

JIM

YOU SHOT DOWN THIS PLANE?

HOWARD

I'M NOT SURE.

JIM

QUESTION ABOUT GUN CAPTAIN

HOWARD

WE GOT CREDIT FOR ONE. THE ONE THAT CAME UP THE CHANNEL.

JIM

THEN WHAT HAPPENED? WAS THAT PRETTY MUCH YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN PEARL HARBOR?

HOWARD

YEAH.

JIM

YOU WANT TO GO ON THE RECORD? THEN WHAT HAPPENED AFTER THAT?

HOWARD

AFTER THE BATTLE WAS OVER, OF COURSE, WE WERE TAKING CARE OF CASUALTIES. IT WAS ABOUT MIDNIGHT I THINK WORD WAS COMING OVER THAT THE JAPANESE FLEET WAS BOMBING SAN DIEGO AND THE WEST COAST; THE JAPS HAD TROOPS OUT THERE AND THEY WERE GOING TO LAND AT ANY TIME. OF COURSE YOU GET THE FEELING THEN THAT YOU DON'T HAVE MUCH CHANCE. WE WERE SITTING THERE AND ALL OF A SUDDEN WE COULD SEE TRACER FIRE GOING UP OUT THERE IN THE OCEAN. WE KNOCKED THEM DOWN. THEY WERE BURNING THE SUGAR CANE FIELDS.

JIM

WERE THEY U.S. LIGHT BOMBERS?

HOWARD

I'M NOT FAMILIAR WITH THE TYPES.

JIM

AFTER THE JAPANESE ATTACK WHAT WERE YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES?

HOWARD

OH, BACK TO WORK, BACK TO THE REGULAR ROUTINE.

JIM

DID YOU WRITE LETTERS HOME A LOT?

HOWARD

I WROTE A POSTCARD HOME TELLING MY MOTHER I WAS OK. IT WAS FEBRUARY WHEN MY MOTHER GOT IT.

JIM

THAT WAS THE FIRST NOTE THAT YOU WERE OK?

HOWARD

YEAH

JIM

OTHER THAN THE GUN CREW MEMBER, DID YOU HAVE ANY OTHER CLOSE FRIENDS ABOARD?

HOWARD

I HAD A FEW MORE.

JIM

WHAT WERE THEIR NAMES?

HOWARD

ONE OF THEM WAS ORVILLE MINIE.

JIM

WHERE WAS ORVILLE MINIE FROM?

HOWARD

ORVILLE WAS BURNED REAL BAD. AT THAT TIME, HE WAS STANDING CLOSE TO THE STACK DRINKING A CUP OF COFFEE WHEN THE TORPEDO HIT THE ENGINE ROOM ALL THE STEAM CAME UP AND BURNED HIM REAL BAD. I WAS OVER TO SEE HIM IN THE HOSPITAL. HE DIED FIVE DAYS LATER. THE OTHER GUYS NAME WAS BODISH .I DON'T REMEMBER JUST HOW HE GOT KILLED. HE WAS WOUNDED AND DIED LATER TOO.

JIM

DID YOU HAVE OTHER FRIENDS THAT YOU SERVED WITH DURING YOUR CAREER IN THE NAVY?

HOWARD

OH YEAH. I HAD A LOT OF THEM.

JIM

WHAT YEAR DID YOU LEAVE THE *HELENA*?

HOWARD

THE HELENA HAD A CRACK ON THE SIDE WHERE SHE WAS TORPEDOED SO SHE WENT BACK TO MARE ISLAND. THEY TRANSFERRED A GOOD PART OF THE CREW OUT.

JIM

AND YOU WERE TRANSFERRED OFF?

HOWARD

THEY WERE TRANSFERRED OFF TO REGULAR NAVY WHILE IN DRY DOCK FOR REPAIRS.

JIM

YOU WERE REGULAR NAVY?

HOWARD

YEAH.

JIM

DID YOU MAKE THE NAVY YOUR CAREER?

HOWARD

I DID 20 YEARS, 1939 TO 1959.

JIM

DID YOU GO BACK WITH THE *HELENA* TO THE DRY DOCK?

HOWARD

NO, I WAS PUT ON APA-11, AN ATTACK TRANSPORT TYPE SHIP.

JIM

THAT WAS AT PEARL HARBOR?

HOWARD

NO, I GOT ON AT SAMOA.

JIM

WHAT WAS YOUR JOB ON THE SHIP?

HOWARD

I WAS A 20 MILLIMETER GUNNER

JIM

AND THIS WAS AN ATTACK TRANSPORT?

HOWARD

AN ATTACK TRANSPORT. WE USUALLY TOOK IN RAIDERS.

JIM

YOU TRANSPORTED MARINES, ARMY ON SPECIAL OPERATIONS?

HOWARD

WE WENT IN ON THE FIRST PART OF THE INVASION.

(A section of the tape I cannot read concerns island hopping on the invasions)

HOWARD

WE WERE IN NEW ZEALAND A COUPLE OF MONTHS WITH THE MARINES AND TOOK THEM ALL IN TO TARAWA.

JIM

WHAT DID YOU DO DURING THE BATTLE OF TARAWA?

HOWARD

I WAS ON MY GUN.

JIM

ANTI-AIRCRAFT?

HOWARD

YEAH

JIM

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN FIRING AT THE ENEMY OTHER THAN ANTI-AIRCRAFT?

HOWARD

YEAH. (FIRED DIFFERENT GUNS)

JIM

ANYTHING THAT STANDS OUT IN YOUR MIND THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO RELAY TO US?

HOWARD

I FORGOT HOW MANY SHIPS WERE LOST BUT ANYWAY, THE BATTLEWAGONS AND DIVE BOMBERS AND HIGH LOW BOMBERS WERE SUPPOSED TO SOFTEN IT UP. IT WAS ONLY 4 OR 5 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL. IT SHOULD HAVE TAKEN NO MORE THAN 8 HOURS TO SECURE IT. I USED TO WATCH THEM UP ON DECK WHEN THEY WERE GOING OVER MAPS AND STUFF. I CAN REMEMBER A LONG PIER COMING OUT THROUGH THE REEF. THE JAPS HAD MACHINE GUNS ON EVERYTHING. THEY LET THEM GET IN JUST A PIECE AND THEY HAD THEM IN CROSSFIRE. WE HAD BODIES FLOATING AL OVER. ALL WE DID WAS PULL THEIR ID OFF THEM. IT TOOK 5 OR 6 DAYS.

JIM

DO YOU REMEMBER WHO THE MARINE COMMANDER OF THAT BATTLE?

HOWARD

I REMEMBER HIM.

JIM

WAS HE A GENERAL?

HOWARD

NO, HE WAS A COLONEL.

JIM

DO YOU REMEMBER THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE *USS* ?????

DURING YOUR BATTLE TIME, WERE YOU ATTACKED BY JAPANESE AIRCRAFT AT ALL?

HOWARD

NO.

JIM

WHAT WAS YOUR NEXT BATTLE?

HOWARD

WE WENT BACK TO PEARL AND LOADED UP FOR ENTIWETOK AND DID THE SAME THING. THE NEXT ONE WAS ?????? ANOTHER SMALL ISLAND. AFTER THAT, GUAM AND SAIPAN AND THE WE WENT INTO LEYTE GULF. WE MADE TWO LANDINGS AT LEYTE

JIM

IN THE SEA BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF?

HOWARD

NOT THE PART I WAS IN. WE WERE CARRYING TROOPS. THEN TWO LANDINGS IN LEYTE.

JIM

THAT'S WHEN MACARTHUR WENT BACK.

HOWARD

MACARTHUR WAS ON A CRUISER BEHIND US GOING IN.

JIM

DID YOU SEE MACARTHUR?

HOWARD

YEAH. I CAN SEE HIM YET. WE WERE RIGHT CLOSE TO WHERE HE TOOK HIS LANDING BARGE IN. IT WAS THE TWELFTH WAVE. THE SOLDIERS WERE ABOUT TEN MILES INLAND BY THE TIME HE GOT THERE.

JIM

"DUGOUT DOUG"

HOWARD

HEY, I SAW HIM LANDING. THE TROOPS HAD GONE IN BEFORE HE PUT HIS FEET IN THE WATER.

JIM

DID YOU SEE HIM LAND?

HOWARD

YEAH.

JIM

WERE YOU ON THE BEACH?

HOWARD

I WAS ON THE SHIP. WE HAD ALREADY DISCHARGED OUR TROOPS AND WERE JUST ANCHORED THERE. AFTER LEYTE CAME MANILA. WE MADE A LANDING UP THERE TOO.

JIM

ARMY TROOPS?

HOWARD

THAT WAS ARMY, YEAH. HERE IS WHAT I DID IN THE LINGUYAN GULF. RIGHT CLOSE TO SHORE IT CAME OVER THE LOUDSPEAKER, THEY WANTED VOLUNTEERS, A WORKING PARTY TO TAKE AMMUNITION AND FOOD INTO THIS GROUP OF MARINES THAT THE JAPS HAD BOTTLED UP. I WAS JUST SITTING AROUND ON DECK DOING NOTHING, I VOLUNTEERED. WE LOADED UP WITH MUNITIONS AND C-RATIONS. WE WERE A WORKING PARTY OF 8 MEN AND ONE OFFICER IN A HIGH SPEED LANDING CRAFT. AT A SIGNAL, GOING ALONG THE SHORE REAL CLOSE WE FOUND THIS GROUP OF MARINES THAT WERE BOTTLED UP. THE BIRDS WERE SINGING, NOTHING, ALL OF A SUDDEN WHOOSH, THE JAPS WERE THROWING MORTARS AT US. WE NEVER DID FIND THOSE GUYS.

JIM

DID GUAM COME AFTER THAT? WAS THERE REALLY A BATTLE FOR GUAM?

HOWARD

I WAS QUITE A BATTLE, SAIPAN TOO.

JIM

LETS TALK ABOUT SAIPAN.

HOWARD

WE GOT THE TROOPS IN THERE WAS QUITE A PROBLEM. A LOT OF THEM GOT KILLED. THE JAPS HAD A BIG CANNON UP IN THE MOUNTAIN. THEY KEPT FIRING THAT THING. IT WAS ON TRACKS OR SOMETHING. IT WOULD COME OUT AND FIRE AND THEN GO BACK INTO THE TUNNEL. FINALLY THEY BROUGHT IN SOME DEPTH OF FIRE. THEY WERE FIRING RIGHT OVER US. THE JAPS WERE FIRING BACK OVER US. SHELLS WERE WHISTLING BOTH WAYS. I REMEMBER THAT REAL PLAIN.

JIM

WERE YOU EVER WOUNDED?

HOWARD

I GOT HIT WITH A PIECE OF SHRAPNEL ON SAIPAN RIGHT HERE. (DESCRIPTION OF THE PIECE) BROKE THE SKIN AND I WAS BLEEDING. I WENT DOWN, AFTER THE BATTLE WAS OVER, AND I SHOWED THE PHARMACIST MATE. HE SAID, "AH YOU BUMPED INTO SOMETHING OR RUBBED YOURSELF," LUCKILY I HAD PICKED UP THIS PIECE OF SHRAPNEL WHEN WE WERE CLEANING AROUND THE GUN AND IT FIT RIGHT OVER THE MARK. HE SAID, "WELL, I'LL BE DAMNED." I SHOULD HAVE GOTTEN A PURPLE HEART BUT I NEVER DID. IT BROKE THE SKIN, THAT'S ALL.

JIM

YOU NEVER APPLIED FOR A PURPLE HEART?

HOWARD

NO. I WAS TOO GUNG HO.

JIM

WHAT WAS THE LAST LANDING OR ATTACK THAT YOU PARTICIPATED IN?

HOWARD

WE LOADED UP AND WAS GOING TO OKINAWA. WE HAD ARMY ABOARD AND THEY TURNED US BACK.

JIM

WHERE WERE YOU WHEN VJ DAY WAS ANNOUNCED?

HOWARD

VJ DAY? I WAS ABOARD.

JIM

WHAT KIND OF DAY WAS THAT?

HOWARD

I HAD BEEN OUT TO SEA FOR SO LONG, THE EXEC SAID, "WHEN WE GET BACK TO THE STATES, WE ARE GOING TO TRANSFER YOU BACK TO THE EAST COAST." THAT DAY MY ORDERS WERE TO BE TRANSFERRED BACK TO THE EAST COAST. A FIRST CLASS YEOMAN AND AN OFFICER TOOK MY ORDERS AND AS HE SAT THERE TYPING THEM UP. AND I LOOKED AT IT AND HE HAD DISCHARGED ME. I JUST SHIPPED OVER IN JUNE AND THE WAR WAS OVER IN AUGUST. I HAD SPENT FOUR YEARS DURING THE WAR AND I FIGURED WE HAD TO GO ALL THE WAY THROUGH THE JAPS AND EVERYTHING ELSE AND I FIGURED I MIGHT AS WELL GET THE SHIPPING OVER MONEY SO I SHIPPED OVER IN JUNE AND THE WAR WAS OVER IN AUGUST.

JIM

AND YOU WERE DISCHARGED WHEN?

HOWARD

HE DISCHARGED ME.

JIM

AND WHAT DAY WAS THAT?

HOWARD

IT WAS ON VJ DAY. HE LOOKED AT ME AND SAID, "YOU HAVE SO MANY POINTS, WHAT THE HELL YOU WANT TO STAY IN THE SERVICE FOR? I'LL GET YOU OUT." "NO, I SHIPPED OVER, I'LL STAY IN." HE HAD TO DO ALL THE PAPERS ALL OVER AGAIN. I CAUGHT THE LAST BUS OFF TREASURE ISLAND OVER TO FRISCO. I REMEMBER THEY WERE BURNING CABS, LOOTING STORES EVERYTHING.

JIM

DID YOU GET KISSED BY ANY GIRLS?

HOWARD

OH YEAH. THE COMMAND CLOSED ALL THE BASES DOWN. NOBODY WOULD BE OVER THERE. I GOT OVER THERE THE NEXT MORNING, WALKING DOWN THE STREET-----.

JIM

YOU ENLISTED IN 1939, YOUR 4-YEAR TERM EXPIRED DURING THE WAR.

HOWARD

I EXTENDED FOR 2 YEARS. I WOULD HAVE BEEN FROZEN IN PLACE ANYWAY. I WOULD HAVE STAYED IN EXTENDED OR NOT.

JIM

WERE YOU ENTITLED TO A BONUS?

HOWARD

OH YES, SHIPPING OVER MONEY. I DON'T REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS THEN BUT WHEN I SHIPPED OVER AFTER SIX YEARS, I GOT ABOUT \$1,300 TO SHIP OVER FOR ANOTHER 4 YEARS.

JIM

THAT WAS A LOT OF MONEY BACK THEN. WHAT HAPPENED THEN? YOU WENT TO THE EAST COAST?

HOWARD

I WENT TO THE BROOKLYN NAVY YARD FOR A WHILE THEN THEY TRANSFERRED ME TO AIRFIELD, QUONSET POINT, RHODE ISLAND.

JIM

WHAT WAS YOUR JOB THERE?

HOWARD

IN CHARGE OF THE BASE LAUNDRY.

JIM

YOU RETIRED IN 1960, RIGHT?

HOWARD

IN 1959. '39 TO '59.

WHAT WAS YOUR RANK AT THE TIME?

HOWARD

I MADE CHIEF, WHICH IS E-7. I THINK I HAD 13 YEARS IN THE NAVY WHEN I MADE CHIEF.

JIM

DID YOU SEE ANY MORE ACTION IN ANY OTHER WARS?

HOWARD

JUST IN THE KOREAN. DURING THE KOREAN WAR, I HAD DUTY ABOARD A DESTROYER. WE WERE OPERATING OUT OF NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND. WE HAD A SQUADRON OF 4 SHIPS. THEY DESIGNATED US TO GO TO KOREA AND GAVE US 3 WEEKS TO GET TRANSFERRED BECAUSE THEY COULDN'T TRANSFER WITH SOMEBODY ELSE. I WAS MARRIED THEN. MY WIFE TOLD ME, "YOU BETTER GET A TRANSFER AND STAY HERE. I SAID, "I BETTER GO." A WEEK BEFORE WE WERE SUPPOSED TO LEAVE, THEY CHANGED OUR ORDERS AND SENT ANOTHER SQUADRON. THEY WENT AND I STAYED THERE. THAT WAS AFTER MY DUTY AT QUONSET POINT

JIM

PERHAPS YOU WOULD LIKE TO HAVE PUT ON THE RECORD THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO MAKE PART OF YOUR INTERVIEW. ANY EXPERIENCE OR ANY FRIENDS YOU HAD TO TALK ABOUT?

HOWARD

I HAVE AN OLD SHIPMATE WHOSE NAME IS HAROLD HURD. WE WENT THROUGH BOOT CAMP TOGETHER. WE SEE EACH OTHER EVERY FEW YEARS WHEN WE HAVE A SHIP REUNION.

JIM

ANY SHIP FEELING

HOWARD

THE *HELENA*.

JIM

ARE THE REUNIONS ???????

HOWARD

NEVER BEEN TO ONE.

JIM

DO YOU KNOW WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE *HELENA*?

HOWARD

SHE GOT SUNK.

JIM

WHERE?

HOWARD

JAP DESTROYERS SUNK HER ONE NIGHT.

JIM

DESTROYERS SANK A CRUISER? WITH A TORPEDO?

HOWARD

YEAH, ABOUT 4 OF THEM. THE WHOLE PATTERN HIT HER. I TALKED TO FELLOWS ABOUT HER. NO COMMENT ON HOW THE DESTROYERS GOT IN THERE.

(COMMENTS TO THE SIDE, WHICH I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND)

----- OKINAWA.

HOWARD

WE WERE ON OUR WAY TO OKINAWA BUT I DIDN'T GO THERE. OUR ORDERS WERE CHANGED. THAT'S ABOUT ALL I CAN REMEMBER I THINK.

JIM

THIS CONCLUDES OUR INTERVIEW WITH MR. HOWARD LUCKHAM.

TRANSCRIBED BY FOREST J. REES

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EDITED JANUARY 2004