

GEORGE DE LONG
USS HELENA
GUADALCANAL

(Transcriber note: The following is a speech Mr. DeLong gave to the Jaycees in Great Falls, VA in August 1993. The tape recorder was some distance from the speaker and he was not wearing a microphone. There are places in the speech where due to background noise or other interference, and the speaker turning away from the tape recorder the transcriber was unable to get parts of the story.)

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jaycees. The last time I was here I told you my story about Pearl Harbor and how I was trapped aboard the USS Oklahoma. I recognize quite a few faces here tonight. On the other hand, there are some new faces here, too. If you don't mind, I am just going to run-down a thumb nail sketch of what I told them the last time.

My story basically was that I went into the Navy in January, 1941. On December 7, 1941, I was in Pearl Harbor on the battleship Oklahoma when the Japanese attacked.

As they attacked the ship with torpedoes, the Oklahoma took a list to port almost immediately. I was down in the steering station, way down about the fourth deck of the ship, way under the water. As the torpedoes hit the ship, we didn't know what was going on. I had just gotten out of my bunk that morning. The next thing you know, the ship turned over and there we were fighting for our lives, trapped in a compartment below decks.

For a day and a half we struggled down there trying to keep alive while the water was coming up. The air was getting stale and everybody was just hoping that we would be rescued in time. We heard guys about a day after we started, we had no idea about the length of time. We found out the next morning, this was after December 7 at 8 a.m. when the Japanese attacked, twenty-four hours later they were trying to cut the ship to get to survivors.

Taking into consideration there were 451 fellows killed on the Oklahoma, there were only 32 of us cut out, you realize how lucky I am to be here talking to you. So that part of my story is easy to tell because I have told the story for the past 52 years at least several hundred times.

Last time I started to tell the story about Guadalcanal last time I was here, but decided that could be told at another time. The last time you wanted me to talk about Pearl Harbor. As a result, you have invited me back to finish my story. I now will tell you of the rest of my Navy career. It runs into quite a few chapters because it covers all the way from Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941 through the war and through the peace.

And because I had signed up for six years, after the war, I couldn't get discharged. All the rest of the fellows had points - points for things you earned during the course of the war. They were able to get discharged early, in other words they had been in the reserves. Being a regular Navy man, they wouldn't let me out, so every time I shipped back to Pearl Harbor, they would

send me back out into the Pacific again. So my career spans all the way from Pearl Harbor to Bikini where they did the A-bomb test. All of this was in the Pacific. I never got over to the Atlantic side.

The story that I have come to tell tonight is based on the Battle of Guadalcanal. Now the reason I gave you the literature is because I suppose that if I had told this story back in roughly 1950 or sometime like that, almost everybody would have remembered where Guadalcanal was.

Guadalcanal was one of the bases out in the Pacific where the war changed. It was at that point that the tide turned. The basic paper I have given you here will tell you the areas in the Pacific that the Japanese had conquered. The story that I am getting at is basically over here under the item - Pacific movement. I want to run through that quickly. Possibly if I read it to you it will take a little faster than if you read it yourself because you can keep the map in front of you and see what was going on.

If you look at the key to the map, the black areas are where the Japanese were up until December 7. In the course of this time, I am going to be giving you not only the history of it but the geography of it, because it will help you to understand the importance of the Battle of Guadalcanal.

The key to this whole thing was that the Japanese immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor went all the way across the Southern Pacific. There was nothing to stop them. At that time, they had pretty well wrecked the Pacific fleet and Pearl Harbor. We salvaged those ships and we managed to get them back into the war later on. Those early months of 1942, we had no victories at all in the Pacific. All of these blackened areas (again referring to the map he had handed out) is what the Japanese had conquered before they attacked Pearl Harbor.

Then the hatched areas (again referring to the map) are the areas that they conquered after that. Now this became very, very important. The areas with the hatched marks, the black and white stripes, went all the way down past China, Indo China, all through these islands. Anywhere they went, they simply defeated everybody. They went through Singapore, the British were unable to stop them. They went to Hong Kong, any place they went they conquered.

So at the particular time I am talking about, the Japanese are now the victors and we had these losers. There was no challenge to them, up until this time. So the key to the whole thing is - if you will look (again referring to the map) all the way until just before Pearl Harbor, that big black line encloses the entire area that the Japanese had conquered.

Now the key to this whole thing was that we were fighting a war on two fronts at the same time. We were fighting a war in the Pacific against the Japanese and we were fighting a war in the Atlantic against the Germans. And later more people got into it. But by in large, the decision had been made long before the attack on Pearl Harbor. Winston Churchill and Mr. Roosevelt had gotten together and decided that if war came, the war in Europe took priority. They would not do much about the Pacific. At that time they were not thinking about the Pacific because the Japanese were not necessarily at war, the Germans were.

And while we were not at war, the English were. They were fighting the Battle of Britain and all that sort of thing. So finally when the Japanese attacked us, they gave the Americans a reason why they could join the British in the fight against Germany, which was really what they wanted anyway. The Japanese were now an enemy. The question came up then among the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the President and all the people making those decisions, how we would divide our forces; where are we going to send our ships; where are we going to send our armies, our marines, our air force?

The Air Force at that time was not a separate unit. It was a part of the army. It was the Army Air Corps.

The battle then became between the Army and the Navy. Who would get what and where do we send them?

Well, of course, those who were out in the Pacific at the time, kept thinking “we ought to fight this Pacific war at the same time we are fighting the other one.” We understood that we had to help fight Germany but after all, we had ships in the Pacific. Unfortunately the Japanese had us outnumbered.

They had more ships, more air craft, more ground troops. They had armies all over this part of the world. In Germany, the Nazis were running all over the continent. So with limited forces and before we had gotten to the point where we were producing, like we later did, you can see that we only had a limited number of ships, planes, and trained men. I mentioned trained men because unfortunately, what happened was that between World War I and World War II, the size of the military tended to decrease. We would have a soldier with maybe 20 years of service, has never seen a battle, has never been accosted by an enemy or anything like that.

On the day of the air attack at Pearl Harbor, the first thing I heard was “all hands man your battle stations, set the water tight conditions throughout the ship.” My reaction, was why are we doing this on a Sunday morning, until I heard the first explosion, the second explosion and the third explosion and the ship starting to turn over, I realized there was something more than a drill going on.

So what happened to us at Pearl Harbor didn't necessarily happen to all of the servicemen in the service at that time. General MacArthur was out in the Philippines and he heard about Pearl Harbor. He said “you had better be ready they are coming out there.” The truth of the matter is we always thought they would attack the Philippines in the Pacific. We never thought they would attack Pearl Harbor, no body ever expected that.

But now a day after the attack at Pearl Harbor, the barrack soldiers that MacArthur was bragging about, the Philippine soldiers and the American soldiers in the Philippines that were so great, all of the sudden we find out that he sits in his room and decides “what shall I do” and can't make up his mind. He had some of the Air Corps there and we would have loved to had them at Pearl Harbor. But he sat too long. The Japanese a day after they attacked us, went back to the Philippines and caught all these planes on the ground. They surrounded the Philippines and

started landing. The next thing you know he has decided that best thing you can do is get him off the island or they will be taken prisoners. And that is exactly what happened, soldiers were taken prisoners.

As you will notice on your map that the Philippines is definitely included in the hatched area.

I will bring you up-to-date now on exactly what we were doing at that time. We went out there and Admiral Nimitz was the Commander of the Pacific Fleet. General Mac Arthur was given a section out there. But they weren't always getting along too good. Because the Army wanted to have their way and the Navy wanted to have their way.

The Japanese were doing the same thing. The Japanese had a problem because they had certain war mongers who wanted to expand more and then there others who said "no, we don't want to fight the Americans. We might as well fight the Russians. We want to take China as we had planned earlier."

There was an Admiral who decided that he wanted.....he was part of the group who planned the attack on Pearl Harbor. Now before he planned that attack, he didn't want to attack Pearl Harbor. He didn't think it was a good idea until they decided they were going to attack America and they were going to do it now. He was a bright student of the Navy and he had been trained at Harvard and he had been an attaché in the United States. So he knew the sentiment of the American people.

At Pearl Harbor, we weren't ready for a Japanese attack. Some of the people thought that when these planes came in the Germans were attacking us, because we didn't think the Japanese could do that. So the truth of the matter was, they were much better than that, even though they had broken the treaties that we once had. The fine-line treaty of the division of the ships that everybody could have. In other words, the British were supposed to have five ships and the Americans were supposed to have five ships and the Japanese were supposed to have three ships. And that is what we agreed to at one time as a way of keeping peace by reducing armaments after World War I. Of course, the Japanese weren't too happy with that.

By the way, we were selling them scrap iron and we were selling them steel and as long as they could build up their army and attack China, then they were happy. They didn't want to bother us. But when we started saying "let's cut them off and stop them from killing the Chinese", then all of the sudden they realized if they didn't attack now, if they would sit tight, that they would eventually continue as a international power.

(Due to the quality of the tape, the transcriber is unable to understand this portion of the speech.)

They didn't have the oil and they didn't have the steel. So their big problem was the Americans were cutting them off. After they attacked China, the U.S. went a step further and cut off their assets. Now we were going to take their money they had in America away from them

too. Well, at that point, the Japanese said “we don’t have much of a choice. We have to go to war.” We sort of knew that this was their thinking. We miscalculated where they would strike. By that time, Cordell Hull was Secretary of State and others had already announced that this would mean war with Japan after we cut them off from their assets.

At that point, the attack was a natural thing to follow. The one thing that the Japanese didn’t get that they wanted, was the airplanes. When they attacked Pearl Harbor, they got battleship row, they wiped it out. They wiped out the other ships. (Unable to understand this part of the tape.)

I was down there in the Oklahoma, they finally cut us out. They took us topside and we went to the hospital ship for one night. There was nothing wrong with us after a day and a half. We finally got off the ship and they transferred us to another ship. They felt these guys were experienced sailors now. I was 19 years old and had one battle under my belt and don’t even know what happened then. I was down in the dark the whole time.

So we went out into the Pacific to fight the war out there. We were caught in that group of people who were supposed to be expendable because we didn’t have enough material to fight the Japanese but we had to stop them anyway. That was the problem that we had. Our command was down (he is now referring to the map) just below that line. That is where our central command was. They would issue the orders there as the ships in upper part (referring to the map) in other words above that. As they got up into - in other words, we started getting a little bolder even though we didn’t have the ships or the men to take on the Japanese.

We decided finally that unless you did something, the Japanese would over-run you. Eventually they had already planned to take Midway. Before that, they set their ships up in the Coral Sea where they were running rampant and Yamamoto had said - he was the Admiral who had planned the attack on Pearl Harbor - and he had said then “I can run wild for the first half year or year, anywhere I want to. But after that, unless we force the Americans - into their victory, the Japanese victory -”,. In other words, unless we surrendered - unless the Americans surrendered - after the first year, from that point on he would never be able to come back again.

He was wise. He understood America. He understood that if they had unleashed this nuclear power....we were not prepared for war. That is true.

But we were able to fight one because we had a productive capacity back in our country. If only we could stop the Japanese long enough to get our people working to start delivering the machinery, the Japanese could not - could not - make the same materials we could. They could not replace their ships. They only put one major ship into commission after the attack on Pearl Harbor, because they had used up everything they had for that. Although they had plenty of carriers running around the Pacific. We were lucky when we two or three at a time because half the time ours were damaged back at Pearl Harbor being repaired.

So at the time this battle took place in Guadalcanal, we had decided we were going to stop them there. Period. We had to stop them. Of course, Admiral (unable to understand name) who

was down in Nanumea, said “Look, we don’t have enough to do this.” But the guys back in Washington had decided we were going to stop them there. And MacArthur said “Well, in order to go up along to New Guinea, we are going to have some of these (unable to understand words) taken.” But he didn’t want to give up any of his ships or planes or men. The Pacific, of course, didn’t have very many. So finally, they got together and decided to hit Guadalcanal.

Guadalcanal was (referring to the hand-out) as you will see the area is in the Solomon chain. The Japanese had been running wild just above (unable to understand words). And finally they decided, just about the time we decided, that we were going to try to put little air strips on Guadalcanal so that we could control some of the air. Just about that time we were ready to start, they were doing the same thing. They had made the same plans because they had a big base up at Nugu. Nugu was way up north of the Solomons.

The base there could send planes - because the limit of their planes was the area down along Guadalcanal. So if we were going to have ships operating there, then we had to have something to stop their planes. But we didn’t have that. But now they were going to put an air strip there then they were going to be able to control Port Moresby which was down the southern coast of New Guinea. They were going to be able to threaten Australia and New Zealand. They would threaten our base at Nouvea and New Caledonia. All of these bases were now going to be threatened because the Japanese were going to get an air strip on Guadalcanal.

Well, at that point the Admirals and Generals and everybody else agreed that we could not let that happen. So they sent a force of Marines up there. You might have heard about the famous Marine Corps that went there to Guadalcanal. Well, my story is the ships that took the Marines to Guadalcanal. And then we had to stay there in the area to hold off the Japanese from attacking the Marines at Guadalcanal.

The only problem was, we didn’t have enough ships to do it and we didn’t have enough planes to do it. The only thing we had was enough to get them in there and even then it was debatable whether or not we could retain them because once we dropped them off, all of the sudden they decided they couldn’t risk any more carriers after they had fought the Battle of the Coral Sea, they had fought the Battle of Midway. Most of our carriers had been lost.

Now there was no way we would risk losing our last two carriers. So they went away. They dropped the Marines on the island. By that time we had word from the Coast Watchers. The Coast Watchers became very important in this story. The Coast Watchers were Australian and British. They would tell us when the ships and planes were coming down. We were trying to get supplies and fresh manpower to Guadalcanal. (Unable to understand tape.)

The Marines had landed and the Marines were outnumbering them. But they couldn’t do much because the planes that came over were Japanese, the ships that were firing at them were Japanese. So it was a land, sea, air operation. We were only one part of it. So when I tell you about the battles, you must remember there are many, many other people who were doing their share on the island itself.

At this point, we went up there and we got into battles, obviously, we were trying to supply the island with men. (Unable to understand the tape.)

The Japanese were right around that air field. Now the fighting started. And it all started down in the mud and the horrible conditions of Guadalcanal. More Japanese and Americans died in Guadalcanal of malaria than were killed by action. So we had disease.

(The speaker is not speaking distinctly and turning away from the tape recorder. The transcriber is unable to get this whole story. The transcriber will continue as the tape becomes clearer.)

They would fire shells into the Japanese and the Japanese would do the same to our Marines. That went on for a month or two and all of the sudden we found out that they were planning now - they had given up trying to (unable to understand tape) -

The Japanese were going to send all of the ships and battleships and cruisers and destroyers and send them down followed by transports with soldier replacements with all kinds of material, with ammunition and they were going to try to take over the place. Well, in the meantime we were trying to do the same thing.

So we were coming up from the south and they were coming down from the north and they were meeting there and then fighting with each other.

I will just describe two of the battles to you that we fought over this island as a result of this meeting at that point.

What actually happened was - there was one major battle, but there were many, many minor battles. Many battles where they sank only two or three ships. Well, you think, that is an awful lot. It was a lot to the Japanese. It was more important to the Japanese than it was to us because by this time we were beginning to be able to construct more ships.

Now we have Rosie the Riveter helping make ships and planes back in the United States while the fighting men are going out. We were beginning to get some replacements and reinforcements. But by in large, they are all going over to make the second landing in Europe and the idea was to end the war in Germany first - win the war in Europe first. Then come out and fight the war in the Pacific. So that our shoestring operations were still going on and that is what we were caught in the middle of. Which meant that we were almost always out-numbered. We were always out-manned, out-gunned and so forth.

But these particular nights that I am talking about the Battle of Cape Esperance was one that I fought in. I fought in about six or seven of the battles out there. The one that I will describe first of all is Cape Esperance.

Cape Esperance was right at the end of Guadalcanal next to Savo Island. (The speaker is now referring to the map.) The Battle was supposed to be Savo Island and Cape Esperance. The key to this battle was simple. They were coming down with transports and their fighting ships.

We knew they were coming. The only trouble was we didn't trust radar. In those days, our ships had radar. One of the destroyers had a search radar. The search radars would tell you where the ships in the area were. But we only had two ships that could do that. The Admiral, because he was sentimental about the ship he would be on. In other words the Admiral's flagship was supposed to be the one that was the best. Instead of that, he said that he used to be the Captain of the San Francisco and he wanted to be on one of the older ships. He took his flag on the San Francisco.

The Admirals had been instructed to organize the best they could and go in there and fight the Battle of Cape Esperance. So we got in there and it caused the Admiral to make so many mistakes. He accidentally crossed the keel on the Japanese ships. Now "crossing the keel" for those of you who are not concerned with military tactics - a ship would come out have it broadside or the ship that is coming toward it is "cross the keel". In other words, (the speaker was explaining visually "crossing the keel") - all the ships are in line here and they are in line here, and they are coming down toward you, you can spin all your guns. If you had 52 major guns in your battery, you can spin and you can fire at all the ships. On the other hand, they are coming toward you and you can only fire your forward guns. Otherwise the ships back here are their own ships. (The speaker continues to use a visual presentation for "cross the keel".)

All of the sudden, for no reason, we were trying to get word to Admiral Scott that we had spotted them on radar. He didn't know it. The Admiral was on a ship and there was only one line of communication - what we called a TBS - transmission between ships. The transmission started out "Admiral, I think I see something out there." The next thing you know, the Admiral said, "Where? Is it our ships or theirs?" After awhile, we knew exactly where the Japanese were, but we never could get the word to the Admiral because too many guys were trying to talk to him at the same time.

He turned and turned around and when he did, he didn't let the destroyers up ahead know and they swung off to the side and after awhile they were out of position. And he had taken the column as it was coming back and he was asking the destroyers "what are you doing?" We are trying to get into formation. As a matter of fact, what he actually did, he accidentally crossed the keels. He was a lousy admiral.

In the meantime the Japanese were sound asleep on their ships. They were coming down.

(The speaker talking very fast and away from the recorder. The transcriber is unable to get this part of the tape.)

.....He wasn't prepared when we opened fire on their convoy. Their guns were still trained fore and aft. They had no knowledge exactly where we were. So we opened fire and when we did a real battle took place. We sank a cruiser and a destroyer. We finally battered up several of their other ships.

And the end of the story was that they ended up getting one of ours. One of our destroyers that had swung off accidentally went off on his own attack against the whole fleet and he ended up

getting sunk. (Unable to get narrative due to background noise and people laughing.)

One of the stories that I have to tell - Some of the survivors were picked up. The ship had about 70 men and they rescued 140. Some of those who were rescued - now these waters had sharks. Now normally sharks don't attack humans. Now the natives on these islands did bury their dead at sea. As a result, the sharks that swam around these islands loved human flesh, so after a while they didn't care whether it was swimming or not. This one guy that was picked up and he was bleeding. We took him to sick bay and it wasn't too serious. He had some scrape marks on his backside. He said that after the ship sunk, he swam away from the ship and a little shark came up. After a while it was punching at him and every time it would grab him, he would turn around and hit it on its nose. Finally, when the destroyer came to pick him up, he was glad to see it and they pulled him out of the water and the shark was still hanging on.

That battle was the prelude to the big one. The big one was the Battle of November 13, 1942. It went on for three days. But that night the Japanese decided now they were really going to take over. They came down there with two battleships, a cruiser, nine destroyers and we had about four or five cruisers and about half a dozen destroyers. In other words we were fairly well matched if you consider a battleship about equal to a cruiser.

When you start to measure the gun power of a battleship to a cruiser, of course, they had us out-gunned and out-manned. They came down through there (referring to a map) - the same area roughly, they came around the corner. (The tape recorder is moved and the voice of the speaker is lost.)

Now this battle - the most interesting thing about this - is the fact that it was put together hastily. In our task force, many of our ships had never operated together. Now you talk about begin a green outfit. We had two admirals and one was on the Atlanta and the other was on the San Francisco. Again neither of those ships had the type of radar we had. The Helena and the Fletcher. Now the Fletcher was a destroyer. If you will look at the tail end (referring to a map) of the column. That ship should have been right up front. And the Admiral's flagship should have been the Helena. Looking back, it is Monday morning quarterback, it just goes to show you how little we knew about what was going to come in the future months.

The fact that the Admiral didn't trust radar and he had it turned off because he was afraid the Japanese had a receiving thing that would give the signal to the enemy before it bounced back to us. They were even debating whether aircraft carriers were better than battleships at that time. There was a horrible argument because by this time the Japanese were already proving that air attacks against battleships - the battleships lose. This is where the old Navy - it took them months before they finally found out that the Japanese were anything worse than we were.

They came down in this column (referring to the map). Now they were planning to take Guadalcanal. All our Marines on Guadalcanal can tell you the story. That night if we were to stop the Japanese, they would have been dead in the morning. It was that simple. The Japanese assigned all these ships. Behind them were these great big columns of these transports and cargo ships and everything else. So the only choice that we had - now we came up and the Admiral said that we needed to get as many ships together as we could and then he gave the command to attack.

So we go up there and in the meantime, the Japanese are coming down full speed never knowing we were there. They were even worse with radar than we were. They were disciplined in training and we weren't. We never really needed it because we finally found out how good radar was. So these ships were coming down there, and all of the sudden our Admiral, not knowing exactly where they were.....we found out that the two leading destroyers we had - you notice how they turned to the left there - and there were two Japanese destroyers coming down the other way. They got so close together that they almost rammed each other. These are ships now that are capable of finding a ship over the horizon. So all of the sudden the lead destroyers were saying "May we fire, Admiral? May we fire the torpedoes?" They had their torpedoes turned on the ship and the Admiral would not give the order. He didn't know if he wanted to fire or not.

Finally, after the ships were passed, after this turn was made and the two lead destroyers were passed, all of the sudden the rest of our column is coming up there - now in order to avoid hitting this destroyer that turned off to the left, the ships behind were beginning to pile up and if they wouldn't turn out of the way, we would ram our own ships.

The Admiral didn't know what was going on, so he said "What are you doing?" He said, "we are turning to avoid hitting our own ships." That was coming over the TBS. And finally, they got around and then all of the sudden, we are going right up between all these Japanese ships. And nobody is firing a shot. So at this point, we look around and somebody says "Hey, there is a battleship over there. And there is a battleship over there." The Admiral says "Prepare to commence firing."

The Japanese are coming down there with ammunition to bombard the island - bombard Guadalcanal. And they are going to wipe out all of the Marines on Guadalcanal and they are going to take the air strip. They needed incendiary bombs and they needed fragmentation shells. So they come down there ready to meet us in battle and what do they have in their guns? Shot-gun shells. All of the sudden they get into a battle. The Admiral - I reconstructed all of this recently to make sure what I was talking about - on the Japanese ship got into an argument with his commanding officers - to see if they had time to change to hard shells - to armor piercing shells. They finally decided "yes". So they started taking all of the ammunition out of the guns and - in the meantime - we are up there letting them get away with this.

When they opened fire they turned on the search lights. In the background the Japanese ships were coming down through there and all of the sudden the Admiral, he was even worse shape than Admiral Callaghan and Admiral Scott, and he says "ok, turn on the search lights. You wanted to see who we are shooting at." By the way, they turned them on and a statement was made that they turned them on the Atlanta, but I happened to know that they turned them on the Helena. Now it might be that they turned them on both of them.

But the reason that I know that - all of the sudden I see this search light come on. Now I thought the whole Japanese Navy was hitting just me. They weren't shooting at anybody else - they wouldn't hit me in the head or the toe, they would hit me right in the belly. I was so sure they were aiming at me and all of the sudden, within seconds after that light went on, the word had

gone out “commence firing” and bang someone took a shell and threw it right at the light. Within seconds we knocked it out. Now whether we did or the others did - see when you are in a column like that and all the ships start firing, you don’t know exactly who did the shooting. Only years later when the Japanese told us the truth - they said that those hits we got were 6-inch shells. Well that was either the Helena or the Boise. In other words, we could determine later what they were.

It was unbelievable that we could go on fighting the war like that. By this time, remember our ships were sinking, their ships were sinking. Right there in what we called “Iron Bottom Sound” (referring to the map) - it is right there off Guadalcanal. At this point, there are so many ships in there, that there is no concentration of sunken ships like there is there. Japanese ships, American ships and Australian ships - they are all there. Many of them came from these two battles that I am talking about. There are others around the islands there but what we did that night - and I will summarize this as quick as I can - when the battle was all over, we had stopped the Japanese from landing their troops. Furthermore, they were so scattered themselves - after one battle they were crippled so bad that the planes took off from Guadalcanal and got back the next day. They got another one the next day, the other one the Hiei, the Kirishima, which was in that column there.

We eventually sank both those battleships. The battle went on for three days. But that night, we stopped them from landing their supplies and their troops on Guadalcanal. So the Marines were fighting these guys and the guys on the air strip. They were delighted with us. General Vandergrift, who was the head of the Marines on Guadalcanal, sent us a message three days later. It said “We the Marines of Guadalcanal take off our battered helmets to you.” We earned it because we didn’t fight continuously day after day, but we were right in the middle of all this activity.

What actually happened then? The next day one battleship is crippled in the water there. Our planes take off from Guadalcanal. By that time, Admiral Halsey had sent two battleships and an aircraft carrier - I think the carrier got there first. By the time the other battleship tried to come around to start attacking, the other battleship was there. They were the South Dakota and the Washington. We had two of them there. We blasted that Japanese battleship out of the ocean.

The end result was that the battle went on for three days. If we had not stopped them that night, we would have never taken back Guadalcanal. They would have taken over that island, they would have had their planes landing the next morning. They would have had the air strip repaired. The next day we would not have had a chance because we wouldn’t have dared brought our aircraft carriers or our battleships in there.

(Side A of the tape ended - will continue on Side B. The speaker continued to talk while the tape was being turned over.)

Then all was lost and we would have been back where we started from. We went on to fight and the other thing that becomes very essential then is that the battle while it went on for months after that, by February 9, 1943, the last Japanese was evacuated from Guadalcanal.

They kept coming in more and more all the time. They would come down every night and put more of their soldiers there. And more of their supplies. (Unable to understand the tape.)

Then we would bombard them instead of having them bombard the troops. But by in large once this battle was fought, we broke the back of the Japanese Navy. Now we gave it to them really good. But the end result is that we ended up so that now they were worried about us attacking them, not their attacking us.

So I am sorry that I took so long to get through this story. You see it is rather complex. I can take some questions and answers....do we have time? Yes.

Any questions?

(Due to background noise and distance from tape recorder, the voices could not be heard.)

Right after the November battle we went back down. Now we had a couple of hits. In the battle when the ships had the lights turned on, I was in a station upforward and at the same level back further we had a telegraph and the Executive Officer was there. In the course of the battle one of these Japanese ships fired a five-inch shell that came right through and killed a guy near the searchlight. In the middle night when the battle was going on I felt something hit my jacket. The next morning, I was standing by the telegraph station and we looked up and there was a big hole right in the middle of my battle station where a five-inch shell had come through. It hit that and was one foot away from my left foot. The shell exploded but the base was still intact. I survived another one.

Did you have R&R? Yes, in Fiji. We used to get R&R on these islands. (Due to laughter and the quality of the tape the transcriber is unable to hear.) The natives sometimes would not have clothes on. Sometimes they were wearing a loincloth. We sent boxes of shirts ashore and asked that the women put the shirts on. They were trying to keep the guys under control. The next morning, the guys headed ashore. They had the shirts on all right - but during the night they took scissors and cut.----- (laughter).

At this point in the tape, with the audience participation, talking and laughter, the transcriber ended this Oral History.

Typed by Becky Lindig
Nimitz Volunteer
January 2003