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RHEA  
Interview with  
DALLAS ~~DEED~~ CLARK, US NAVY  
USS HOUSTON  
February 28, 2002

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## ORAL INTERVIEW

DALLAS REED CLARK, UNITED STATES NAVY

USS HOUSTON

Good morning, this is William G. Cox. I'm in the Hilton Hotel on the campus of the University of Houston. I'm doing an oral interview this morning with Mr. Dallas Reed Clark, last name CLARK. The date is February 28, 2002. The purpose of this oral history is for the archives of the Admiral Nimitz Museum war in the Pacific, World War II. Mr. Clark, how are you this morning?

MR. CLARK: I am fine, thank you.

MR. COX: Where are you living now?

MR. CLARK: It's at Portsmouth, Virginia, Ashburn Road 204, and the zip code is 23702-2012.

MR. COX: Thank you. Let's find out a little bit this morning. Where were you born and the name of your parents and maybe where you went to school? Could you tell us a little bit about that?

MR. CLARK: I was born September 1, 1911, at a power plant back then. It was the hydroelectric plant built by an entrepreneur from Atlanta, Georgia. He came to Waynesville, North Carolina, and he says, "This is a wonderful

summer resort here, and they have no lights. And I think I'll do my best with my fellow engineer to build a dam down the river, Pigeon River, and we will provide Waynesville with plenty of lights, which they did. Back then work was slow. Most of it was manual work. We didn't have the technology we have today to build dams. When the dam was built and power was furnished to Waynesville, it was 20 miles down the river where the dam was built, and Waynesville was 20 miles away up in the northern part. So the folks in Waynesville were delighted. They had used oil lamps and carbide lights for numerous years, and they were happy to have Mr. B. J. Sloan from Atlanta to give 'em a power plant and lights for Waynesville. My early age was spent in rural schools, county schools, and later on my father's work seemed to have moved him around quite a bit, and I never got to spend a full year in any particular school until the latter part of my teenage. I finished Waynesville High School in 1929. In 1929, I didn't foresee this, but other people apparently did, but we had a depression coming on unbeknown to me. Since I was in my younger days, I had been a young teenager doing a lot of farming for my dad. My dad had numerous farms and tenants on them, and I become disgusted with farm life and I decided that I would try the Navy. I'd heard about but it, but I didn't know too much about it. So I enlisted in Ashville, North Carolina, January, 1931. From Asheville, North Carolina, I was sent to

Norfolk, Virginia, for boot training. During and shortly after boot training, I decided that I'd like to be a mechanic and be in the engineering force on some of the big ships. So I spent my first year in mechanical school in Norfolk, Virginia. The school was a nursing school. I was taught a great deal about steam turbines and machine shop work. I dearly liked the idea of machine shop work, and I finished with a fairly decent, a .39 Naval grade. After a year in school, I was given a preference of a ship that I'd like to serve on. Since I had a cousin on the USS TEXAS, I decided to request the TEXAS for my duty. After having finished the engineering school, I was transferred to the TEXAS which was on the west coast. USS TEXAS was a battleship, a great ship, triple-expansion steam engines. I liked it. Shortly after boarding the TEXAS, I was assigned to the machine shop. I spent my next six years as a machinist. In the early part of my career, you board a ship you were supposed to qualify on many stations. So I was given a short term session in the evaporators, the refrigeration system, the ice machines we called them back then, but my primary job was shop work. And I dearly loved the shop work.

MR. COX: What did you do there in the shop work that you liked so much?

MR. CLARK: Well, my experience in the school taught me how to machine cylindrical work, make screws, SAEs and standards, threading bastard studs

5/8 on the one inch and half on the other. These jobs were a bit laborious at the time, but I spent much time learning the difference in US standard thread and SAEs thread. The threads on them are quite different. SAEs, naturally are finer threads with more torque.

MR. COX: What does SAE stand for?

MR. CLARK: Society of Automobile Engineers. So these SAEs are used mostly on cars. Aboard ship we used the standard v-thread bolts, nuts.

MR. COX: So anytime a piece of machinery or equipment needed repair for a screw or something else, you fabricated the part?

MR. CLARK: We had a number of pumps on the old TEXAS that had been used a number of years since World War I, and these pumps were oblong. They weren't true cylindrical in shape, and quite often we had to re-bore, re-machine them. And they make piston rings.

MR. COX: They weren't originally made that way? You said you just made them oblong in shape.

MR. CLARK: After wearing over the years, they get out of the true cylindrical shape, and they are not uniform in measurement all the way up.

MR. COX: Did you have plans, drawings and this sort of thing on board ship?

MR. CLARK: Yes, there were plans on most any and all the equipment that was brought to the shop.

MR. COX: Were you ever given an object that you just had to take measurements and make it?

MR. CLARK: Well, my first experience in making gears was a bit complicated but with the books furnished and the machines we had, simple gears were used aboard ship, I didn't find them too complicated.

MR. COX: Were there other people on board that did the same work that you were doing?

MR. CLARK: Yes. My cousin had been on the ship a year longer than I. He and I and a 1st class machinist, we called him Peggy. His last name was O'Neil and we worked for him, and he, of course, received his requests and information from the engineering force on what to do each week. Every day it was a different assignment.

MR. COX: Now all this was still on board the USS TEXAS.

MR. CLARK: Yes, I spent six years on there.

MR. COX: Okay, so what year did you come off the TEXAS?

MR. CLARK: In 1936. My enlistment expired, and I was debating on whether I wanted to make the Navy a career or not. I was paid off in California, Sacramento. And my home being on the east coast, I rode a

Greyhound bus across country and debated on my way across country whether I was gonna be a 20-year serviceman or go back to the farm. During my trip across country, of course, I made a quick decision. I thought six years is almost a third of my retirement. Should I stay in? So rather than lose the benefit of six years in the service, I decided to ship over for another four years. When I shipped over, I was given an opportunity or chance to go to new construction down in Virginia. I shipped over in New York in one of the old receiving stations up there. After having shipped over, my executive officer said, "You want new construction?" And I said, "Yes." Well, in Norfolk, Newport News rather, the aircraft carrier YORKTOWN was almost completed, and I requested the YORKTOWN when I got down to Virginia.

MR. COX: Did you get an increase in grade when you re-upped?

MR. CLARK: No, not really. I had made second class machinist on the TEXAS.

MR. COX: What was your monthly salary?

MR. CLARK: I think it was \$72.00 for second class, as best as I remember.

MR. COX: And you were on board the YORKTOWN aircraft carrier?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: How many years were you on board the aircraft carrier?

MR. CLARK: I was on there about two years. I happened to be near the

execs office one morning and I noticed that there were openings for applicants to the optical school in Washington, DC. So I went down to the execs office and applied for the optical school in Washington, and I was shortly notified that I had been accepted. I took the optical school for a year in Washington, DC.

MR. COX: Would you explain to us a little bit about what the optical school consists of?

MR. CLARK: Optical schools did many jobs on old instruments from World War I. These instruments having served the purpose of the time were stored in warehouses, and each class that assembled in the optical school was given an opportunity to take these instruments, sextants, statameters, binoculars, range finders. You had an assignment from time to time, a different assignment for a different object and you become real knowledgeable about optical instruments. I liked the school very well, very much. Having finished it, I think it was a one-year school, I was given an opportunity to go back to the ship that I came up on which was the YORKTOWN. The YORKTOWN at the time of my having finished the school was in San Pedro, California.

MR. COX: What type of optical equipment was your favorite that you liked to work on?

MR. CLARK: Well, the big range finder, they were about 16 feet long, I



liked that one real well. The optics on 'em, of course, we somewhere somehow had received from Poland one of Germany's best range finders. And our first assignment aboard ship was to take this range finder and break it down, take pictures of all the instruments in it and the different optics. The Germans had a different procedure, and their directing light through an instrument, their optics were different than ours. They were plain old optics and we had the prism optics that transmitted the lights through these range finders. After working on these range finders for about a month and a half or two months, the instructor would give you a plan to assembly and see how well you could assembly and how your knowledge of the place of the optics in the proper position and shooting rangers in the Arlington area from the naval gun shop there in Washington. And we knew the exact distance to the objects in Arlington and, of course, with these range finders they could tell how accurate you were in placing or positioning the optics to get the proper range.

MR. COX: Would that be a calibration of the equipment?

MR. CLARK: Yes. The instructor could immediately decide or made a decision as to whether you had accomplished your instructions or your missions in the instrument.

MR. COX: So you had to learn the principal of the range finder, be able to

repair it as well as use it in actual practice.

MR. COX: And how many years did you work with that type of equipment?

MR. CLARK: Well, unfortunately, in those days the carrier didn't have range finders, so I was transferred back to the carrier and went back to the machine shop work.

MR. COX: Primarily, what did they use that range finder for?

MR. CLARK: They are used on the big battle ships, and any ship that has large guns on it. They must

have range finders to determine or shoot the proper distance or range from the ship to the target wherever it may be.

MR. COX: So the term 'range' would be the same as distance?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: You utilized that on the aircraft carrier, that's where you were trained and using it.

MR. CLARK: Well, really on the carrier, my primary concern in optics on there was the optical instruments on guns, etc. And each of your optical instruments must be free from moisture, and you have to energize 'em with some sort of a gas that helps keep out the moisture.

MR. COX: What kind of gas did you use?

MR. CLARK: I forget now the name of this particular gas we were using,

but you put in about a pound and a half or two pounds would keep out all the moisture. Periodically you'd go by and check the instrument and there was a small gauge on there that would let you know whether it was still energized with the gas.

MR. COX: Okay, so they had a pressure type that you tried to maintain.

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: After you came off of the aircraft carrier, were you assigned to another ship?

MR. CLARK: Well, I liked the carrier very well. Of course, having finished the school and going back to the carrier, I wasn't disappointed because I couldn't use the experiences in training I had had at the optical school. So I was put back in the refrigeration system, the ice machine plant system, York compressors that furnish the refrigeration for all of meat boxes, fresh fruit containers and all that.

MR. COX: On the range finder, I would assume duties were more or less up on the deck, and the refrigeration is down in the boiler room area?

MR. CLARK: Oh, yes. Well, I was flexible. I could be used most any place. In addition to the work down below, I was later on given six months in the generators. Their object was to train each individual in the engineering force, train them thoroughly on each station they were assigned to so if and

during war or something it wouldn't be one man one job. You were flexible enough to be sent most anywhere, steering engines, refrigeration, generators, secondary power, diesel engines, elevator operators. You were qualified for many things.

MR. COX: Was there a certain amount of paper work that went with a job like that?

MR. CLARK: Well, I imagine the engineering officer and your division officer kept records on your assignments from place to place.

MR. COX: You had quite a diversified range that helped you keep your interest in the Navy going pretty good.

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: What was your next assignment?

MR. CLARK: Well, the chief I worked for was in the generators, and he came to me one morning about ten o'clock, and he said "Clarkie, (I was first class machinist) there's an assignment on the board up there where the HOUSTON is going out to the Pacific, out to the Philippines, to relieve a sister ship, AUGUSTA. And the men they have on there, there's a lot of short-timers on there, and they won't sign over and they don't have enough time to go out there. Consequently, the HOUSTON will need about five or six hundred men that have a length of service to be sent out there, two years

or more. So the Chief says, "I have a good friend in the flag ship over in Pearl Harbor here, and I know him well enough that I think if you would like to go, I would like for you to go with me. We'll go out on the HOUSTON." So he left the ship, and in about half an hour or maybe it was longer, hour and a half, he's back to the ship and he says, "You got your bag packed? He says we're certain of an assignment on the HOUSTON." He, the Chief, had finished his twenty years and wanted out of service, but back then no more discharges. He had just bought a new Buick and had it stored somewhere, I believe, in Frisco. And, of course, he and I went on to the HOUSTON and out to the Philippines. I think in about 1940. What ever happened to Stewart in the last days of battle, I'll never know. He didn't get back. He and a Marine Sgt. Major was down at the armory on the ship and they each one wanted a gun. They said if this ship is ever sunk, we'll never be taken by the Japanese. He and the Sgt., I never knew much about 'em after this, our last engagement.

MR. COX: When you went on the west coast to the Philippines, did you stop any place in between?

MR. CLARK: No. There was a stop at Midway and Darwin, Australia, I believe, before going into Manila in the Philippines.

MR. COX: So you went quite a ways south to Darwin and then doubled

back up into the Philippines.

MR. CLARK: Yes. In Darwin, we had an oiler to beat us. We needed more fuel to get on out to the Philippines. We refueled in Darwin. And I never did get into the big cities of Australia, just that northern tip, Darwin, is all I ever got see all during the war.

MR. COX: Was everybody pretty much on the alert at that time or were things just kinda normal? CLARK: Our first year out there was cruising. You see, there are 7,000 islands in the Philippines and about 350 of them are inhabited. Consequently, we cruised in and around all of these islands spending right much time at Zamwango and other places.

MR. COX: Would you spell that?

MR. CLARK: Zamwango?

MR. COX: That's okay.

MR. CLARK: It's in the news today quite a bit because some of our transports are operating out of there trying to get the Moslems or something straightened out.

MR. COX: I understand where you are coming from now. Was that kind of an orientation cruise?

MR. CLARK: Those cruises are just to familiarize the skipper and navigators how to cruise in and around all of these islands that make up the Philippines.

MR. COX: Now date-wise, just to kinda make sure I understand, we're what--in the forties now?

MR. CLARK: Yep. The early part of the forties, we needed to repair ??? to the ship, new searchlights and new generators. So we were to take an assignment in Caveti Navy yard there in the Philippines for new searchlights, generators. We went into the Caveti Navy yard the first of November and our repair assignment was supposed to have been finished by mid-November, I think it was around the 20th of November. The skipper said, "No more liberty, men, until we get this ship back in number one order for cruising, shipworthy." So the people in the Caveti Navy yard and the crew worked around the clock until we got our ship back together. And suddenly, the officers, I happened to be in and around the big shots at topside and the officers said, "Well, the Army and Navy in Japan had been battlin' as to who would be number one. The generals in Tokyo took the command away from the Navy in Japan, and consequently this is trouble because Japan needed volunteers." They had been cut off from mineral resources, ours and ???. And they said the general said, "I'll get you some. You just get me to these places where we have all minerals or whatever." So our assignment then was, I think the skippers we are to get everything we can out of the Philippines here. Disperse them. Well, then we knew there was something

radically wrong. We were set, a group of our ships, destroyers, MARBLEHEAD, the HOUSTON, and others were dispersed to different islands down south in case of bombing we wouldn't be ???.

MR. COX: Now down south would be?

MR. CLARK: Illo Illo was our...

MR. COX: Still in the Philippines?

MR. CLARK: That's 300 miles out of Manila, and that's where we were when these, early on a Monday morning, I think it was a Monday morning, when the skipper sounded general quarters and the engineering officer got all the engineering men and they said, "Folks, there is bad news. Pearl harbor has been bombed and I think two thousand five hundred or more men have been lost and so many ships." And, of course this was unhappy news for all of us. The skipper has opened his new assignment and in the event of war, he opened his assignment to see what we were supposed to do. And our assignment is convoy and combat and we will leave Allewdo and go back to the Philippines and get all available ships that are able to float and take 'em back down to the ADB ??? which is the American, Dutch, British, which had formed that new contingency of ships in the Java Sea area. See the HOUSTON had four scouting planes on it, seaplanes. The dispatcher would send 'em out early in the morning and two of 'em were out all the while.



When two would need replenishing of fuel or something, they would come and two more would be going out to take their place. Their objective was to scout for enemy ships which was a blessing to us. We knew as long as there were no enemy ships within their range with our slow convoy that we were taking down to Java. I think we had the old LANGLEY, which was loaded with odds and ends of whatever they could...

MR. COX: Now the LANGLEY was an aircraft carrier but it had been converted from some other type of ship?

MR. CLARK: Yep, that's right. I think every ship that was in the Philippines was able to be taken out or worthy of cruising out on their own at mid-November. So our objective was to get these ships into the Java Sea area. There was one submarine that was so broken down and needed repair so badly that they didn't get it back together, and I think it was the only piece of naval equipment that was lost in the Philippines by the Japs. This happened to be in the yard, and, of course, we couldn't do anything about that, but that was the information we received after the Japs bombed the Manila area.

Okay, you may ask questions.

MR. COX: Okay, I was just making some that I was gonna follow up on as we went along. So during this stage of the game you were moving all of the moveable equipment and ships out of the Philippine area and you were

moving them southward toward the Australia area.

MR. CLARK: Not in the Australia area, it was in the Java Sea area. I think we were moved down there and put under the command of a Dutch Admiral.

MR. COX: So that would be down in here around Java?

MR. CLARK: Yeh, in the Java Sea area.

MR. COX: What was your port or did you have a particular port that you were working out of?

MR. CLARK: Not really, we hadn't been assigned a port. The Dutch had not given us an assignment in Java as yet. Since the Japs were moving rather rapidly both by sea and their army was being moved by troop ships, etc. To get a lengthy assignment anywhere back then was quite an ordeal. So it was do the best you can with whatever you have wherever you are.

MR. COX: So your particular group then was doing an assignment and it was being coordinated by the Dutch, the Dutch Commander.

MR. CLARK: Yes, the Dutch.

MR. COX: Were there other forces involved?

MR. CLARK: We had Australia. We had two English, the EXETER and something that had been in battle quite some time previous to this, but they had come into this area. I think there were three Aussie cruisers and two English cruisers and the Americans had the MARBLEHEAD and the

HOUSTON.

MR. COX: So you primarily had a force of cruisers?

MR. CLARK: Yes, we had about six or eight destroyers with us.

MR. COX: Was the Dutch Commander more or less in charge of all of these?

MR. CLARK: Yeh, he was, since we were in his territory, I think the command lay with him. His decision to protect his islands, like Dutch Borneo, see, Borneo is a big area, half of it at that time was British, the northern part belonged to the British and the southern part was the Dutch. The last refueling job we had just as we got down to Java was to stop at Borneo, and we received their oil directly from the ground through strainers into our fuel boxes.

MR. COX: Just crude oil?

MR. CLARK: Yes. It was a much thinner oil than the oil our pumps had been using or pumping, consequently, we burned the bearings out of many of our oil pumps. We had to quickly establish a cooling system, sea water cooling jackets around each pump.

MR. COX: It didn't have the paraffin content that you had been used to using?

MR. CLARK: No. As a matter of fact, when the ship went down, I had one

of the pumps that the metalsmith had just put new bearings in and I had it mounted on the milling machine to re-machine the correct holes, or size the holes for the shafts.

MR. COX: Was it kinda like the consistency of maybe a diesel oil, or was it heavier than that?

MR. CLARK: Well, I never really paid particular attention, but it was much thinner than the oil our pumps were designed to handle.

MR. COX: What I was getting at, the commander and the makeup of the forces in here, did you sense that there was a real solid system in command or was there a lot of flexibility?

MR. CLARK: There was quite a bit of flexibility. Our ship was given a chance to go into port. The capital of Java was Batavia then, I guess it still is today. The ships' leading officers would have a meeting with the Dutch and they'd made decisions on what they would want to do when the Japs moved in or closer to Java?

MR. COX: Did you have any type of smaller craft that may have been doing some reconnaissance work?

MR. CLARK: The destroyers were constantly on the move. They would go out maybe 200 miles or so north and south, and, of course, seaplanes would made their mission out, too.

MR. COX: Were these larger type of maybe based on land type of seaplanes, amphibious?

MR. CLARK: No, these were the four that we had on our cruiser...

MR. COX: Okay, you had four reconnaissance aircraft?

MR. CLARK: Yeh, scouting planes they called them.

MR. COX: Do you remember the names of any of those?

MR. CLARK: Not really. I remember the names of some of the men that flew. Winslow was one of them. You've probably heard his name mentioned.

MR. COX: Yes, sir. So you had four of those on board? So they moved out checking out where there might be danger?

MR. CLARK: They would be catapulted off and then if the sea was a bit rough, the old man would get the ship up to about 28 or 30 knots and make a A-turn and smooth the water down, and these planes would come right down on this smooth water and taxi up to the booms that would hook on and rig 'em in by catapulting.

MR. COX: In all of these areas in here, could you make a determination really, were you doing more escort duty for supply ships or were you trying to avoid the Japanese or were you really trying to find out where they were and maybe attack them to any degree?

MR. CLARK: The Dutch officer, since he was senior in command, apparently wanted to keep the Japs from landing on Java. And, of course, his ships, his cruisers, our destroyers and things were constantly patrolling in and around the area.

MR. COX: So when you refueled on Borneo, do you remember the base at the town that you refueled at?

MR. CLARK: For the longest time I...

MR. COX: Do you remember which coast it was?

MR. CLARK: It was east coast of Borneo.

MR. COX: So you were in here in the strait of Micassa?

MR. CLARK: Micassa Strait. Yes. That's where the MARBLEHEAD, we were in that area and MARBLEHEAD was waiting to be refueled and we were bombed by the Japanese. The MARBLEHEAD lost her steering gear from a bomb by the Japs.

MR. COX: What date was that?

MR. CLARK: I think it was February 10th or 12th somewhere along there. That's just a guess.

MR. COX: Now did the MARBLEHEAD go down pretty rapidly?

MR. CLARK: No, it did not go down. The Skipper dispatched a couple of destroyers over there to guide and get her back down to the repair station on

Java.

MR. COX: She still had maneuverability and power?

MR. CLARK: Well, she didn't have maneuverability, the destroyers did it.

MR. COX: What did she lack in that maneuverability?

MR. CLARK: Her rudders were apparently at an angle, but these destroyers got her back down to some port in the southeastern part of Java. They made quick repairs and the MARBLEHEAD got back to the States.

MR. COX: So she kinda wanted to make a little circle, a little turn all the time?

MR. CLARK: Yeh, they made temporary repairs in there so that she could steer herself, and she got back to the States, so they said.

MR. COX: When was your first encounter in here in the Java Sea and this area with Japanese forces?

MR. CLARK: The first encounter was the latter part of January. We were sent out to Darwin, Australia, to pick up a convoy of troops, a troop ship. That's where, you've heard of the Lost Battalion?

MR. COX: Yes, sir.

MR. CLARK: They were the men that were on the ship. So we picked them up and received a quick assignment that Japs were about to take over Timor. Timor is a little island about three hundred miles from Darwin, Australia. We

were within about seven hours of making a landing up there, and we received word from the Dutch to disregard the trip up here to defend. The Japs have already landed and have taken full charge. That afternoon we received our first bombing mission from the Japs. Our Skipper did a magnificent job maneuvering in and around the troop ship and kept their planes over and beyond what our five-inch guns could reach ,consequently, their bombing wasn't the most accurate bombing. However, one bomb in its falling stripped the side of the ship. And the shrapnel from this bomb penetrated the lungs of one of the men, and they sent him over shortly after the bombing. He was brought over to our ship and given medical attention.

MR. COX: Can you tell me whether these were land-based Japanese planes?

MR. CLARK: Yes, they were land-based from Plug Island nearby near ???.

We don't know whether it was the southern part of the Philippines or some other place.

MR. COX: Single engine type?

MR. CLARK: No, they were all two or four engine.

MR. COX: Fairly high altitude?

MR. CLARK: Extremely high.

MR. COX: When they attacked you, you had five- inch guns and smaller caliber, I'm assuming. How was your munitions? Did you find they were



adequate or were they old munitions?

MR. CLARK: Not really. From time to time, there was a small munitions boat that came out and brought us, I think some five-inch, three-inch, and one-inch. They gave us what they had to supply. They didn't have a full load but they gave us what they had . And we were happy to get it.

MR. COX: How was the quality of it?

MR. CLARK: Not the best. Apparently quite a bit of it was old.

MR. COX: Okay, what did that do to the shells?

MR. CLARK: We weren't getting much results from a lot of them.

MR. COX: The shells would not explode?

MR. CLARK: We couldn't tell exactly what the dickens, and we asked a Marine Sgt. there what his idea is, and he said we just got hold of some bum stuff.

MR. COX: Do you think that contributed to any hardships?

MR. CLARK: Well, it certainly didn't give us a mark of efficiency in our shooting and such.

MR. COX: Did you have any torpedoes tubes on board?

MR. CLARK: No torpedo tubes.

MR. Cox: Were there any submarines involved in any of these conflicts?

MR. CLARK: We had subs in there but they were busy in the sea lanes

between and Java and Singapore.

As a matter of fact, our subs sank some of the troop ships that the Japs were taking their troops to Singapore, and from Singapore they'd go up Malaya and Malaya to Bangkok.

MR. COX: Did you have any reports of the success of the torpedoes, the quality of the torpedoes?

MR. CLARK: Not really, we couldn't tell exactly what our subs were doing. However, they did sink a couple or three of the Jap ships that had some of our POWs on them.

MR. COX: Was that part of the Missing Battalion?

MR. CLARK: No, it was just some of the Dutch and other people that were on Java that were being transferred up to Singapore. The intelligence from the Chinese, or someone that was pro-American, enlightened the people in Australia and somewhere else that the subs should take it easy. They were killing off a lot of the POWs. So from then on, Jap ships that were taking many other troops to the Singapore area were not bothered very much by the subs. So apparently they got the word.

MR. COX: Now, we've probably moved our time line up into January and February of 1942.

MR. CLARK: We're up to the latter part of January, I believe.

MR. COX: So how many months were you working this area between Australia and Java and through those straits?

MR. CLARK: From the date of arrival which I think was in early January, we arrived in the Java Sea and became more or less under the command of the Dutch.

MR. COX: Was there ever any occasion that you doubted the ability of the Dutch Commander?

MR. CLARK: There was pro and con on that and, of course, in my position, I wasn't in a position to receive real close information. Being in the engineer force, you get some once in awhile but you probably get it after it has been handled two or three times and you don't know what.

MR. COX: In there during January and February, was the Japanese activity remaining rather stagnant, or about the same or was it increasing?

MR. CLARK: No, it was increasing. It's amazing to me when we left Manila tired of the bombing, we knew that the main Japanese task force, or at least our officers on the ship knew, that the main task force of the Japanese was between the Philippines and Honolulu. And it's amazing that we were caught with our pants down on a ???

MR. COX: But you just didn't really have any long-range reconnaissance either.

MR. CLARK: Not really.

MR. COX: Was there any case in here that you were working with that to your knowledge where you had coastal watchers that were maybe giving information?

MR. CLARK: There was quite a bit of information received from different sources but I couldn't tell you exactly from what point.

MR. COX: I'm sure the commanders must have felt like it was reasonably reliable.

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: What was, how were you when you first made the Japanese and the Allied forces in here made contact with the Japanese that was really the fatal battles, more or less the final battles were taking place?

MR. CLARK: Mid-February. I think it was about two in the afternoon, we, rather the information people on the ship, received information that the Japs were moving in on Java itself. So quickly we got our ship together and got up steam. I think I was given the assignment then in the steering engine. I was down there for about four hours. The Dutch command was in charge, and we contacted the Japs about 200 miles north of the Java coast. And our first engagement or first run, we were running parallel to the Java Sea during our engagement. We did considerable damage on a number, and the Dutch

Admiral, on the second run, he says, "Let's move in closer. My ship has five-inch guns and you have eight-inch." Our Skipper sent word back to him, says, "We are effective from our position, but if you want to move in, you do so on your own." On our second run, the Japs zeroed in on 'em and it was no time until their cruisers were all gone.

MR. COX: The Japanese had cruisers or battleships?

MR. CLARK: No, the Dutch ships. The Japs had all sorts of ships out there. If you got a hit on one, they would just lay a small smoke screen and put it outside their line of defense and bring another one in.

MR. COX: So they were very determined in their battle?

MR. CLARK: Oh, yes, they were.

MR. COX: And had a lot more ships maybe.

MR. CLARK: Having been down below during all this time, of course, the people on topside could get a better vision of what was going on but on our second run we lost all of the Dutch ships. Our Skipper, I think, decided that since there was a shortage of ammunitions and our fuel oil was getting rather low, the Japs disengaged and we were happy for them to do so. And we did an about-face and went back into the coastal area to replenish our oil.

MR. COX: Did you get your fuel oil tanks loaded and everything?

MR. CLARK: Well, we got what we could get from the Dutch. Take

whatever you can get over there from, I've forgotten the name of the little coastal town.

MR. COX: On Java?

MR. CLARK: Yep.

MR. COX: And then were you maneuvering down toward Australia at this time?

MR. CLARK: No. We remained there until about the 27th, I believe, of February. A decision was made by the Skipper on the PERTH and our Skipper, Rooks, that since there was a depletion of ammunition and fuel oil, our best bet was to try to get into the Indian Ocean and get back to Australia. And this is what brought us up to the fatal night, the last night of February.

MR. COX: Can you describe that to us?

MR. CLARK: I don't know too much about it except I was scheduled to go to the engine room on the twelve to four, and eleven o'clock at night the Aussies apparently entered the Sunda Strait where the Japs had been landing for a couple of days. And they, in a little or no time, was sunk. The time we moved up to those position they were giving it to us. There were a few Aussies, I think, in the water. So the men aboard our ship with the searchlights picked up a few survivors of the PERTH. And from there on out, it was rather rough.

MR. COX: Okay, what I sense that you were bombed or was it artillery shells?

MR. CLARK: Torpedo shells hit the starboard engine room first. It penetrated the main steam lines. My repair party and I were making an effort to try to get down and the repair officer said, "Look at that old linoleum there, it looks like an big fried egg. There's many pounds of steam all over the engine room, do not open the armored doors." On second thought, we had decided it was a stupid idea to try to get down there after this bomb or torpedo had penetrated the steam lines because there was a tremendous amount of steam down there in a little or no time.

MR. COX: Did you have some orders about that time to maybe prepare to abandon ship?

MR. CLARK: Not right then, but it wasn't long after. At that time and during the engagement, things happened so quickly, so rapidly, so many decisions have to be made, and someone is trying to make the best...

MR. COX: But the ship essentially didn't have any power.

MR. CLARK: In a little or no time, the steam line had depleted its steam. But the firemen were still trying to make it, but it was all in vain.

MR. COX: You made it to topside?

MR. CLARK: I didn't right then. I was a bit late. I had mid-ship repair

group that was to support and help other areas where there might be damages. Well, in a little or no time, word was passed "Abandon ship", and I said "No, we can't." And I wasn't too quick to respond to that. I thought, well, we've practiced abandoning ship a few times in peacetime. We've been prepared for this. When I got on the topside, this chief boatswain mate had his thirty year in and I said to Dutton, "Chief, let's get off this thing." And it was listing pretty heavily. He said, "Clarkie, I served the Navy for thirty years, I've given them the best of my life, and I'll give them the rest." And he opened the manhole plate on the door and went down in ???

MR. COX: And also this was a time that prior you talked about the long-term Navy and the Marine that had requested a gun, I'm assuming a pistol, that they weren't going to abandon the ship. So this is the point and time that you were making reference to earlier, I think.

MR. CLARK: Yes, those that had access to the armory for guns or whatever that wanted to take 'em with 'em perhaps did so. After the word had been passed to abandon ship, my concern was to try and find a life raft or jacket. Well, life rafts had long since been put overboard. And I was looking up in the life jacket locker, and we get another hit nearby me and it just about knocked me senseless. I decided to get myself over on the opposite side where they were firing. And I stripped down to my underwear.



MR. COX: You got a life jacket though.

MR. CLARK: No, I had no jacket. I had my birthday suit. I went over the side with my drawers on. I started to dive over and I thought with the debris and something you'll break your neck, and I thought, well, I'll go feet first. And I was right over where normally the propellers would be turning if there was steam. They were dead in the water. I went in feet first. When I came up, my eyes were full of oil, filth, and I thought these drawers are holding me back, I reached down and yanked on 'em and snapped a button off of 'em and got out in my birthday suit.

MR. COX: How long were you in the water before you came across some other survivors?

MR. CLARK: I lost all track of time, but it seemed like it was forever and a day before I got to one of the rafts. This raft had a number of men on it. As a matter of fact, there were too many on it, because the man in the center of the boat says, "We can't handle you." I said, "I've got to have a few minutes rest."

He says, "We may be out here three or four days in this water. We're going to keep it until we have to have it." In a short time, I left this raft and there was another raft nearby with men on it, and some apparently had been injured. I made that one and while I was at this one, most of these men

seemed to have been out of the engineering force, and do you know that after having left that raft, I never seen or heard of any one of those men. What happened to them I don't know. The whole group of men on that raft were mostly engineers. And I left that one, and a third raft I had just gotten over to it and the searchlights and what little light we had there was a troop ship or something, it looked to me as if it was trying to cut the raft in two with these people on it. As it neared, I just pushed off the raft and went on the opposite of the ship from the raft and whatever happened to those men I don't know.

MR. COX: Obviously a Japanese transport or some kind of ship.

MR. CLARK: I never told you this, but on the first raft, this boy or sailor, his name was Glover, I didn't have a jacket and he said, "Clarkie, you don't have a jacket?" I said, "I've got my birthday suit."

He noticed a body floating in the water with his face down. He said, "That poor fellow is gone there. I'll get his jacket for you." He had a sheath or little knife in his little scabbard on the side of his pants, and he jumped off and cut the main strings and brought the jacket back to me. He says, "Here, do something with this. It will be helpful." And I was grateful to him. In my earlier days I was a good swimmer in fresh water, and this salt water was a piece of cake. I could float all day or all night, but I used the Australian crawl and side kicks and all that, but most generally I floated. When I left

this last raft, it was about ten o'clock in the morning, I guess. I was floating by a Jap, looked like a baby carrier, and as I floated through the water I could see this Jap training his gun around toward me. And I submerged as much of my body as I could, and the tide was moving rather rapidly and fortunately he never fired on me. If he did, I didn't know it.

MR. COX: Were you eventually picked up by a ship or did you float into an island?

MR. CLARK: No. About six o'clock at night, there was a raft with twenty-two men on it, three or four of them were the cooks, Chinese cooks that was cooking for the officers, and some musicians, and a marine officer. He says, "Aren't you tired?" I said, "Yes, sir, I am." He says, "Well, come on aboard." I says, "Looks like you have a bunch of people here that's asleep and don't care whether they ever get ashore or not. Why don't you take the slats out of the bottom of this thing and try to paddle?" He says, "Paddle where?" I says, "Don't you have any idea where the beach is?" He says, "No, I don't." Anyway, about two or three hours later I jumped off the raft and went down feet first to see if I could get any sand, and I couldn't. But an hour or so later I tried it again, and I says, "Well, we're apparently nearing the coast." Well, there were non-swimmers on this raft. We eventually got to the coast about eight o'clock, I guess. And then there was a couple or three

natives on the coast and they climbed a coconut tree. The marine officer says, "The men are very thirsty, and we need some coconut juice or something for 'em." And the natives cut down three or four coconuts and came down and chopped the ends off of 'em and that's where we got our first drink in about two days.

MR. COX: Was there a name for that island?

MR. CLARK: This was the extreme, let's see, Java runs east/west about 600 miles long, I think, and we were on the coastal area next to the Sunda Strait entrance, west coast there.

MR. COX: It wasn't just an isolated island?

MR. CLARK: No, it was still a part of Java, the west coast of Java.

MR. COX: Now, by that time, was Java still under Allied control?

MR. CLARK: No, the Japs had not secured it. That was their objective of landing there. The Japs objective was to secure the Island. Of course, there was an objective for the Lost Battalion and others. They were to drive back and forth on the Island to give false impressions to the natives and to the Jap spies that might be on there that there were many American troops on there. Consequently, they, the Japs, delayed a landing that was heading for New Guinea area. Delayed them for quite some time because it was four or five weeks before they had it completely secure. When it was completely secured

by the Japs, they said they would move us out of the native prison which is on the west coast back to the Bicycle Camp or the capital, Batavia. They said there would be better provisions there for you people. Of course, they let us know right away that they didn't want any POWs but since they had a few they'd use them.

MR. COX: So the fact that you were a machinist and a technician, were they...

MR. CLARK: I never, I just told 'em that I was a school boy. I never relayed or gave them any ideas that I had a trade. Those that did were taken to Japan.

MR. COX: So you wound up over here in the mainland working on the Bicycle Camp?

MR. CLARK: In and around the Bicycle Camp or the capital there, Batavia. About a battalion force of us would go down to the docks each day and load all the loot and stuff that the Japs had gotten together, and fifty-gallon drums of gasoline or stuff that had been pumped out of the Dutch filling stations.

MR. COX: So how long did you do that?

MR. CLARK: It was about two months. And after two months, we were told that we would be taken to Singapore. And we thought, well, those of us in the camp there thought, well, Singapore will be a great change for us, we'll

get off of this Java. And we'll get up there and the British must have provisions up there to feed us a little better. It didn't happen that way.

MR. COX: Did you continue then quite a period of time at Singapore or did they keep moving you to different places?

MR. CLARK: In Singapore, the first month or two up there, the Lost Battalion group and survivors of the HOUSTON were, they had an assignment to go to a rubber plantation. The Japs were removing the rubber trees the three miles from our camp to make a garden. And in the garden they were going to have veg and onions and stuff to feed their troops and people in the hospitals in Singapore.

MR. COX: But not for the POWs?

MR. CLARK: They didn't specifically say for whom but we figured they would be first for whatever reason.

MR. COX: Did you have an opportunity to work in any of those gardens?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: I say opportunity. I mean...

MR. CLARK: It wasn't an opportunity, it was forced labor. We were sent out to do, these rubber trees have a tremendous tap root on them.

MR. COX: Were you able to maybe graze on the vegetables a little bit as you went along?

MR. CLARK: No, but we concealed a lot of the seed onions they gave us to plant. We'd fill our canteens full and go back to the camp and have a great time with a cup of rice and a bunch of onions.

MR. COX: Was what they fed you during the day, rice?

MR. CLARK: Primarily. The main source of food was rice.

MR. COX: Did you have to cook it or did they cook it?

MR. CLARK: No, we had our own cooks. Aussies are good cooks, the English are not the best. The English had pretty good provisions there. Of course, they had had the Singapore area I believe from the latter part of the seventeenth century up until the present time. And, of course, you remember when the PRINCE of WALES and some other battleship was lost there in Singapore, just completely lost for no reason. The guns in Singapore were all knotted and pointed out to sea, and the Japs came down the peninsula. They couldn't turn their guns around.

MR. COX: Can I infer that when you were there at Singapore you mentioned...

MR. CLARK: That's where I got separated from the crew. I had to go to the hospital there for about two months or three.

MR. COX: Did the British have their own impoundment camps?

MR. CLARK: Yeh, these are military barracks and things that had been there

since through most of the eighteenth century.

MR. COX: And the Japanese just used them for their prisoners?

MR. CLARK: Yeh, they just moved us in there. Cockroaches and things in between the plaster in there and it's not a decent place to get a night's sleep.

MR. COX: Did you stay there in Singapore quite an extensive time?

MR. CLARK: I was there for about two and a half months during my stay in the hospital. The remnants of the crew of the HOUSTON and the Lost Battalion were taken out to Rangoon by ship. And they would work one end of the railroad, and the group that went up Malaya to Bangkok area would work the eastern end. There's two hundred and eighty some odd miles of mountainous terrain in there that this railroad had to pass through. And our job was to build the railroad.

MR. COX: So you worked on that railroad?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: Was there a particular assignment they gave you? How did they employ the POWs to work on the railroad?

MR. CLARK: Well, see, the British attempted to build a railroad line into some of these mountain areas there to get minerals and teakwood and stuff. In their effort and during the time that they were trying to build this railroad, they decided that it was too expensive. And the Japs got a hold of some of



the blueprints and some of their ideas. Of course, the British had some officers there that were well-informed about their previous attempt to build the railroad and, of course, the British willingly gave the Japs all the information they could.

MR. COX: Were you assigned certain sections?

MR. CLARK: Oh, yeh. I was with the group of Aussies when I was taken up through Malaya and into the Bangkok area. I was with, I think there was about seventeen hundred Aussies that had been in the mideast and on their way home to help defend when the British stopped them in Singapore said we need you here to help defend Malaya and Singapore. The Aussies were real unhappy but, naturally, they have to do what seniority says.

MR. COX: What type of equipment did you have to work with?

MR. CLARK: Everything was man- made. Once about half way through our assignment on the railroad, some compressors were brought from the Philippines and they asked for a technician or someone to operate the compressors. The compressors operating would give additional air and they could use air guns on the rock cliffs and things around the river. So I had an assignment on the compressors for about two months until the monsoon season and then river got up so big it swamped the compressors, covered them over about five feet. And then the Jap officer says, "Can you fix?"

through his interpreter. "Yes, I have to have numerous bottles gasoline, kerosene, or something to wash sand and stuff out." They gave me a ??? that had a pretty good mechanical ability to help and assist me in overhaul. The people who were using these air hammers, or places where air hammers were supposed to be used, the British and Aussies, too, were happy to have the air compressor because it was much better than driving it manually. That manual driving in the rocks is not the easiest thing.

MR. COX: So you were building the grade for the railroad?

MR. CLARK: Uh huh, oh yeh.

MR. COX: Were you still working on that at the time you were...

MR. CLARK: No, we completed our assignment on the railroad, and they made several runs with troops and supplies there. Shortly after the railroad was completed, the Americans lost their foothold in the Burma area, and the Japs, of course, took over temporarily, but not for long. Our troops and the strength of our troops became so great that the Japs were driven out and many of them came back down this railroad. I don't know where they got, I think they went back to Indochina or somewhere.

MR. COX: Where were you at the time you found out the war was over?

MR. CLARK: I was working at a roundhouse down near Bangkok. They gave me an assignment to take the men out to the machine shop repair station.

Locomotives would come in with ruptured tubes and things.

MR. COX: So they finally found out you were a machinist?

MR. CLARK: Yes. My work wasn't too hard because the British conferred an honorary officer's rating on me. And, of course, I was just ??? the men to work and the Japs would say "Well, give me 600 men for the reservoir, and give me 600 for the antiaircraft nest of guns up here." I'd take the men out there and they'd tell me how many they wanted. Of course, it was all in Japanese.

MR. COX: So the Japanese would come down and contact more or less a man in charge of the Allied forces, and then you would cooperate by sending them out.

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: And they really didn't attempt to...

MR. CLARK: No, they were fairly decent to you when you were working with them. We found that out from the air league ???. We didn't want to learn the commands or anything. They say okay, just cut your rations in half. Instead of a full teacup of rice, you'd get a half. It wasn't long until we learned new commands, eyes right, eyes right, count off.

MR. COX: So when the war was over, you were in Bangkok.

MR. CLARK: Yes., it was on my birthday, September 1st. Our people spoke

India, the army over there came in with planes when the Japanese finally gave in and said they'd surrender. They, the Americans came in, two motor jobs, into the Bangkok area with blankets and medics, quite a bit of medicine of different types, especially for malaria and dysentery. The Commander in charge of the flight groups, said, "We want fourteen of the men that are capable of making the trip from here to Calcutta." That would be our first stop. In Calcutta we were to remain for a month or two months. They wanted to get more weight on most of us and get us physically able to make the trip back home through Kurachee and places where there's a lot of trouble going on now.

MR. COX: So you finally managed to get some transportation back to the States, I assume.

MR. CLARK: Yes. The Army gave us, not all of us because there were so many a great number of 'em had to use boats for transport.

MR. COX: So you flew back?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: And where did you land in the States?

MR. CLARK: San Albans, New York, Naval hospital.

MR. COX: How long were you there?

MR. CLARK: Not too long. About a week after I had been there, they said,

“There’s a new HOUSTON being put in commission down in Texas, and they want a bunch of you people to volunteer and go down.” So I volunteered to go down with a bunch. We got on a passenger train and when I got back from Houston, back to San Albans, my mother had contacted her senator and wanted to know why he couldn’t help to get me home.

MR. COX: How many years had you been in the Navy at that time?

MR. CLARK: This was ‘45. I’d been in from January, 1931, until...

MR. COX: About fourteen or fifteen years or something like that?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: Did you stay in the Navy?

MR. CLARK: Yes, I did. I was given ninety days rehabilitation leave, and I thoroughly enjoyed that. But while I was on leave, I had malaria several times. I used to get malaria about every twelve or fourteen days. They didn’t have any treatment of any sort.

MR. COX: So how many years did you stay in the Navy before you retired?

MR. CLARK: I finished my twenty. I got out of the Navy in 1952. Seven days later I enlisted in the ammunition depot plant in Portsmouth, St. Julians Creek, and I did my twenty years there. The government had been making ammunition there in World War I when they used the buggies and horse.

MR. COX: So you had a career in the Navy, and you had a career with Civil

Service or the equivalent of.

MR. CLARK: Yes, I worked for a machinist up there chief quarter man in Civil Service.

MR. COX: So you basically retired from the Civil Service in about '75.

MR. CLARK: Yes, it was around '75, and I took up golf then.

MR. COX: Was there a point and time in there when you got married maybe?

MR. CLARK: Oh, yes. When I came home from overseas in '45, my sister introduced me to a young lady in a little town ??? my folks still there, and after three or four months I married her. I had one daughter and I received an assignment, my first shore duty assignment was Potomac River, Maryland. I thoroughly enjoyed that and that's where my daughter was born. I have one daughter, only one.

MR. COX: So you took up golf?

MR. CLARK: Yes.

MR. COX: That little ball kinda drive you crazy occasionally?

MR. CLARK: No. I wasn't a good golfer but no one enjoyed it any better than I. People say, "You just relax and do whatever you want to, and we're out her just..."

MR. COX: Are you still able to participate?

MR. CLARK: Up until a year ago. My vision has become pretty bad and I would have to take one or two men along in the cart with me to find out whether I sliced it or...

MR. COX: So what do you do to occupy your spare time?

MR. CLARK: I participate in with the Golden Age group. I don't know whether you've ever, they're a group of people who once a year they go to a different state. For instance, my first year was in Leesburg, Virginia, and my second year was in Topeka, Kansas, third year Geneva, New York, a different state every year. You participate in your favorite sports. You're allowed to participate in three or four.

MR. COX: Seniors of your same age group, I'm assuming.

MR. CLARK: Most of them are a little younger than I.

MR. COX: When you look back on your career, what do you think is really the high point in your entire life, you know, joy wise, emotionally, etc.

MR. CLARK: After having been liberated, I decided, personally, that I would enjoy life. I'd take it just as God gave it to me. I belong to a nice church, and I participate in a lot of church work or did up until about three months ago. My vision became so bad I couldn't do the paper work. During all this time, I might say that the good Lord is a good man, and many many times I've asked Him for guidance and direction. And I feel that the good

Lord has given me strength and direction over many of my years and I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

MR. COX: When you were in the service and going through the hardships that you did, did you have any experiences along this line with your religion.

MR. CLARK: I'm a Methodist, that's a protestant.

MR. COX: But it did give you some support.

MR. CLARK: Oh, yeh, I have participated in or took an interest in services aboard ship when we most generally had a chaplain or two. As a matter of fact, the chaplain that we had on the HOUSTON; I wasn't with this group, but he saw a seaman struggling in the water and he took his jacket off, this chaplain did, and gave it to this young seaman. He says, "My work is finished and you're a young man." Later on, I found out they designed and built and named a ship after him, RENTZ. He was a great man.

MR. COX: I was going to ask you what his name was and you helped me there. So I appreciate that. I don't want to tire you out, but is there anything else that maybe we've missed that you'd like to add to the interview?

MR. CLARK: Well, this interview has been kinda like from soup to nuts. I don't know whether you can put it all together or not. Normally, interviews should be preplanned and given with thought, and this was quite unexpected to me, and I've just given it to you kinda hither and yon.



MR. COX: But I think that fills in your personality. We may have missed some points and we may have stayed a little longer than maybe you wanted to on others, but we've pretty well followed a time-line in your life span, and I think we've probably covered a lot of important points in your life.

MR. CLARK: Forgive me, you've told me your last name.

MR. COX: C O X, Cox.

MR. CLARK: That shouldn't be hard at all.

MR. COX: Old Floyd, you know, just remember my dad.

MR. CLARK: Okay, Floyd. It has been a privilege and a blessing to be with you for a few minutes.

MR. COX: On behalf of myself, I want to thank you personally for all the things that you did in the war. I was just a little bit too young. Your sacrifices kept me and my age group out of the Japanese war.

MR. CLARK: Well, thank you, Mr. Cox, thank you so much.

MR. COX: And your quality and your personality and your lifestyle has given a lot to the country. And on behalf of the Museum, I also want to thank you for giving us the time for this oral history, and I salute you, sir.

MR. CLARK: Thank you, sir, thank you.

MR. COX: And without further ado, we'll end it right there unless you have something else you want to say.

MR. CLARK: I don't think I have, well, maybe a few incidents, but I feel...

MR. COX: We have the time if you want to say them.

MR. CLARK: I feel that I've given you the most important items of my career.

MR. COX: But it was people like you that had the strength and the courage to do the things that you did. I don't think we'll ever see another generation like that.

MR. CLARK: Thank you.

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