

***The National Museum of the Pacific War  
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)***

***Center for Pacific War Studies***

***Fredericksburg, Texas***

**Interview with**

**Lt Commander Jack Whetsel**

**February 11, 2002**

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**Interview with LCdr Jack Whetsel  
(Served in the Pacific on the Staff of Admiral Turner)**

This is William G. Cox. The date is February 11, 2002. We are located in the National Museum of the Pacific War. I am visiting today with Lt Cdr Jack Whetsel (U.S. Navy, Retired).

**Mr. Cox:** How are you this morning?

**LCdr Whetsel:** I'm fine. Just fine. It is a beautiful day.

**Mr. Cox:** I understand that you live in McAllen, Texas?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you have a nice drive up?

**LCdr Whetsel:** We had a very pleasant drive up. We spent three days at MO Ranch and came over and spent the night here, and I'm here this morning.

**Mr. Cox:** OK. Are you going back home when you are through here?

**LCdr Whetsel:** No, we are going to Austin after we leave here.

**Mr. Cox:** I hope you have a safe journey home. I would like to ask you a few questions about your childhood. Would you mind telling us a little about who your parents were and where you were born, etc.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. I was born April 12, 1920. That makes me almost 82 years old. I was born in McAlester, Oklahoma. I didn't know my Father. He was sick a long time. I did know my Mother. She raised me and I

grew up in McAlester until I went off to college. My first year at college was at Oklahoma State. It was called Oklahoma A&M back then. I was there one year and then my Mother and my family moved to Waco, Texas, and I went to Baylor. I graduated from Baylor. That is where I met my wife, Martha. I majored in Accounting and Business Administration. I was never an accountant, but I took all of the accounting courses and I taught a Freshman Accounting Lab course. Baylor is a great school and it is getting better all of the time. I appreciate Baylor very much.

**Mr. Cox:** I'm assuming that you graduated from Baylor?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes I did.

**Mr. Cox:** What year was that?

**LCdr Whetsel:** In 1941. As soon as I graduated from Baylor I volunteered for the Navy. I had a job first. They said, "This is the best job we have. We are going to give it to you if you want it." That was in Waco. I went to that job and I was supposed to be an understudy for an accountant. It was a steel plant. I was there for two weeks and knew I never wanted to be an accountant. I took accounting, but didn't want to be one, so I walked in one day and said, "I'm sorry, I'm taking your time and money and I don't want to be an accountant. Before I get any deeper into this I'm leaving." They said, "Well, if you will stay here, we will get you an exemption from the armed services." I said, "I

don't want to be exempt. As soon as I leave here I'm going down and volunteer with the Navy." I did. I volunteered for the Navy and they took me to Dallas for my indoctrination. Then they brought me back and I was waiting. I wanted to get in the V7 program and I did. I was accepted into the V7 program. The V7 program was where they trained officers for deck service in the Navy. I went from Waco by train to Chicago. We trained on the Northwestern University campus. We used their buildings. We used the Navy pier, the Armory, etc., and we were there for four months. We were 120-day marvels. I received my commission and my first assignment was Newport, Rhode Island at the Naval Operating Base. I was there for almost 18 months. I was in Chicago when Pearl Harbor happened. I was in the Navy and most of those in the school thought, "well, tomorrow we are going to leave this school, we are going to the Navy." We didn't know anything. They didn't have any ships and they didn't want us, so we stayed right there. The only thing that we did was we had one person on patrol and then we put two people on patrol. That was the extent of our additional safety.

**Mr. Cox:**

Patrol – would this be...

**LCdr Whetsel:**

Within the buildings. Just wander around the building. You had different places where you had to punch in, etc. Just security patrol. Then I went to Newport, Rhode Island. We were there for 18

months. I was married there. In those days you couldn't be married in the Navy V7 Program. If I had gotten married they would have broke me and sent me back to being a Seaman. Absolutely not like it is now. They had rules then and you had to live by them. One rule was you can't get married as long as you are a Midshipman. So once was an Ensign I got married. I had gone with Martha three years at Baylor. I knew her well. In those days you didn't get married unless you could take care of your wife. Now, you get married and wonder how you are going to take care of her. Since I was in Operations on land we were constantly trying to get transferred to sea duty. They sent four Ensigns from Northwestern, from the V7 Program, to Newport, Rhode Island. At that particular time, our duty was to protect the shipping off the coast from submarines. We had German submarines from Long Island Sound to Cape Cod, in the middle was Block Island, and in all that area we had some small, converted ships that had depth charge and a three or four inch gun. We were just doing the best we could to keep the submarines away from the ships because the ships left New York and they would go up to Boston to form a convoy to go across to England. Our job was to protect them in this area. We did a good job.

**Mr. Cox:** What size were these vessels?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Small. Converted yachts. A lot of people had some pretty nice sized

yachts. I remember one yacht, I think it was the Vanderbilt yacht. Inside it had mahogany, real palacious surroundings, except they put depth charges on it, I think a 3 or 4 inch gun or the front, and some machine guns. That was it. Mainly the weapon was the depth charges.

**Mr. Cox:** What kind of speed would you have?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Ten or twelve knots. Not very fast. Up the way was Quonset Point. That was a Navy Base with Navy Pilots. They helped us patrol that area too. I can remember also that they trained PT Boats at Quonset Point. I remember one time, they had two torpedoes on these PT Boats. They were training there. They were making this training run, and I was at the operating base at that particular time and a message came through that a live torpedo was coming down Narragansett Bay and we had one ship in the harbor. It was a commercial cargo ship. So we went over to the lookout and all of a sudden we saw that torpedo hit that one ship. What had happened was these torpedo boats were making runs, and apparently they had two switches. One switch was open and they hit the other one. Anyway, they launched this torpedo down the bay. That man must have gotten an honor for being the first candidate to sink a ship,

**Mr. Cox:** But a U.S. ship?

**LCdr Whetsel:** It didn't sink, but it knocked a big hole in it. But anyway, we were

there for 18 months and then I got my orders to go to Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet. So I did. I went from there to San Francisco; from San Francisco I went aboard the Enterprise. That is the first ship I was ever on, the USS Enterprise. I sailed on it to Honolulu. I reported to Commander Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet, and that was Admiral Turner, so I reported to his staff. I was on his staff for the rest of the time that I was in the Pacific. I saw Admiral Turner; I saw him work. The overall commander in the Pacific was Admiral Nimitz. He was Commander of the Pacific Fleet. Under him were two admirals. They were Admiral Spruance and Admiral Halsey. Under that would have been Admiral Turner. He had all amphibious forces in the Pacific. That meant he had the cargo ships, he had the transports, he had the LSTs, the LSMs, all of the landing craft. They assigned to him the old battleships, supporting cruisers and destroyers and some small aircraft carriers. So he had most of the ships in the Pacific except the first-line battle ships and big aircraft carriers. He moved these around to formulate the attack forces that attacked the various islands. As I said, if there is one person in the whole Pacific that probably had more to do with winning the war in the Pacific than anybody else, it was Admiral Turner. Admiral Nimitz would say, "OK, next we are going to take....", and the first place they took was Tarawa and Macon. He said, "You take it." I'm sure they worked

together on that on how they were going to do it. That was the first invasion of any island. Now Admiral Turner had been down and he had controlled the landing at Guadalcanal. They were not too successful at Guadalcanal. We weren't too successful at Tarawa because we ran into problems and questions that no one knew about. They didn't know about the coral and what kind of landing craft was needed to get over the coral. We got through Tarawa, had a big loss at Macon and the from there the next islands were Kwajalein and Eniwetok. That was a better operation. Then Turner went to Guam, Saipan and Tinian. That was more successful, but it was a hard operation. By that time the amphibious forces in the Pacific knew what they were doing. They were moving along. I don't think anybody could have stopped them. All this was under control of Admiral Turner. We were going to take Truk, which was the big Naval base in the Pacific for the Japanese, but it was bypassed. We just bombed it. It would have been a tremendous operation to take Truk. It didn't offer any advantage so we just bypassed and equalized it. They had to move all of the ships out because we were constantly there with aircraft bombing anything that was in the harbor. Then next came Guam, Saipan, and Tinian. They took those so we could have aircraft that could bomb the Japanese mainland. That is when the B-29's came in. They had thousands of B-29's on these three



islands. They would fly and bomb Japan. Admiral Spruance and Admiral Halsey were the covering force. Their main duty was to protect the landing forces from the Japanese fleet. Well, they may have been a thousand miles away from us, or closer, during these operations. They knew where the Japanese fleet was and they were between the landing force and the Japanese force, but Admiral Turner did all of the work. He was the "work horse" in the Pacific on taking the islands. He formulated the plans. When I first got there, his first operation, his Flagship was the USS Pennsylvania, but there wasn't much room on it. So we would write the plans at Pearl Harbor. Then they would move the staff onto the Pennsylvania and they did the operation. I stayed behind on that because they didn't have enough room. On those old battleships there wasn't a lot of room for his staff. By the time you had your radio, your communications, etc., and at the same time planning for the next operation. Right after the Guam operation, I wasn't there, but I went with Admiral Fort to the Palau operation. I was assigned to him as temporary duty because I had planned other operations. I went with Admiral Fort as temporary duty to take Palau. We took the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division from the Russel Islands. They had moved from Guadalcanal to the Russel Islands and reformed. Then I came back to Pearl and joined Admiral Turner's staff again. I can still remember, he said, "OK, everybody, there will

be no more vacations.” I had a two-week vacation after that Palau operation just because he said we were going to move our base from Pearl Harbor to Guam and we were going to operate out of Guam. That is 4,000 miles further. He said, “You know what you are supposed to do, you are trained in this, so there will be no more leaves until after the war.” At that particular time we were looking for three or four years additional time in the war. But I got two weeks leave and I met Martha at Phoenix and then we came to California. We stayed about two weeks and I went back. Then we moved from Pearl Harbor to Guam and that is where we staged out of. We had Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Iwo Jima was a tough operation. I remember that on our ship, which we had a new ship, the USS Eldorado. He moved his flag to the USS Eldorado at that particular time.

**Mr. Cox:** Was that a cruiser?

**LCdr Whetsel:** No, it wasn't a cruiser. It was a converted transport. All we needed was room. We had room, acres of radios and communications. We had people that would break the Japanese code. We had everything that could happen to make the operation easier. There was ship's company. We were staff onboard that ship.

**Mr. Cox:** So you had a regular ship-board compliment.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes.

**Mr. Cox:** Then you were a special staff?

**LCdr Whetsel:** It was the staff of Admiral Turner.

**Mr. Cox:** It was the staff coordinating between Turner and... Was Turner on board that ship?

**LCdr Whetsel:** He was on board that ship all of the time. He used the Pennsylvania for the first few operations because we didn't have this ship. This ship was brand new and we met it at Pearl Harbor and sailed it to Guam. In Guam we started our operations there. The first operation we had on board this ship was Iwo Jima. We went to Iwo Jima and I still remember this – on board our ship we had the Commander of the landing force, either Marines or Army. At Iwo Jima it was Marines, the Fourth & fifth Divisions that went with us. The Commander stayed on our ship until he had a successful operation and secured the beachhead and then the General went over to the beach. Our ship and Admiral Turner continued to stay there until that island was secure. When it was secured, we'd go back, and in this particular case, to Guam to get ready for the next operation. We might have several Generals and several Admirals on our ship. When we went to Okinawa I think I can remember counting several Admirals and Generals. If they had hit our ship it would have stopped the whole operation. We had General Buckner on our ship going to Okinawa. He was killed on Okinawa, and they named Buckner Bay where we were. I was reading in a book a while ago that while we were in

Okinawa, we had over a thousand kamikazes over our transport area while we were there. We saw many hit. I remember the most memorable one that I saw, we were in that particular operation Admiral Spruance (this was Okinawa) was the Admiral in charge of the covering fleet. Now we had the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet. Basically, the ships were the same. The Admiral in charge was different, and his Flagship was different. At Okinawa we had Admiral Spruance, and he was on the Indianapolis. The Indianapolis was sunk later on. He came in to talk to Admiral Turner and see how everything was going along. He was anchored 400-500 yards from our ship. We had enemy planes over us and we had a flight of American planes. Do you know what an IFF is? Identify Friend or Foe. This squad of planes was showing friendly and they went right over the transport area. Two Japanese planes had tagged on behind them, so they showed "friendly" too. They got right over before anybody noticed, and then there was a Flash Red and they started firing at the two Japanese Kamikazes. They were over Admiral Spruance's ship and we were right next to it. His ship looked a whole lot more attractive because he was on the cruiser and we were what looked like a transport. One Japanese plane was shot down, but the other came down and hit the Indianapolis. It went right down the smokestack and it killed 50 people. Admiral Spruance was not hurt,

but he had to leave his Flagship there and get another one. The Indianapolis then went back to the coast to be repaired. It was repaired and was on the way back. It brought the atomic bomb back to Guam. My roommate, who was a Flag Lieutenant of Admiral Turner had gone back to the States and was coming back. He came back on the Indianapolis as far as Guam and they had the atomic bomb on the Indianapolis. They left the atomic bomb on Guam and the Indianapolis went on to meet us in the Phillipines because we were getting ready for the Invasion of Japan. That is when the Indianapolis was hit and sunk, between Guam and meeting the fleet where we were to stage out of at Manila Bay. We lost more ships at Okinawa than any place else. We had a lot of them that were hit by Kamikazes and sunk. I walk through this museum and I see it and it is great. A lot of it is fine, but you haven't given mention to Admiral Turner. In all of this you mention everybody else, but you don't mention Admiral Turner and I think if there is one person that had more to do with victory in the Pacific than anybody else, it was Admiral Turner. I'm here to say that you ought to have a plaque or a story about him. You could probably write to the Navy Department and get more information about him and say something about him because he was one that gave us success. I really feel that he is the man who has been left out of this museum and he is the one that should be in it.

**Mr. Cox:** Let me summarize. These amphibious forces were new, so he had to develop all of the techniques to bring them up. Every island was not necessarily that successful, but they learned and developed new techniques.

**LCdr Whetsel:** That's right.

**Mr. Cox:** OK. Back when you were talking about coming on board the Eldorado, you obviously had divisions of Marines and forces that were going to make the amphibious landing. You mentioned that there were some officers. Now did the Marine Commanders, like the General of the Division, was he on board that ship.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes, he was usually on our ship.

**Mr. Cox:** So the communication network was going and he was working with his subordinates with the landing forces.

**LCdr Whetsel:** They planned it – whoever was going to take it – either the Marines or the Army. In Okinawa we had both, the Marines and the Army. But the Army was overall command at Okinawa. That was General Buckner. He was on our ship. At Iwo Jima, the Marines were there. We did not have any Army. Iwo Jima was all Marines and I believe that was "Howlin' Mad" Smith was the General on board our ship for this operation.

**Mr. Cox:** Yes, he was around Tarawa and Iwo Jima.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes, he was in charge of all of the Marines in the Pacific. He, or some

of the other General, whoever was in charge, was on our ship when we got there. After we got there and they had a firm beachhead they moved everything off the ship to the shore, then the island went over to command of either the Army or the Marines. The Naval gunfire was from our ship; it was directed from our ship; the Naval aviation was directed from our ship, so Admiral Turner had all of this under his command. We also had the Marine Transport Quartermaster telling us that he needed so many ships and so many ships here. We'd have to get the ships there and give them ample submarine protection on the way. When you have a thousand ships that you are working with, and he had that many and more, that is a tremendous job.

**Mr. Cox:** So he had to coordinate all of the convoys coming up to the point to where troops and supplies would disembark.

**LCdr Whetsel:** That is right. Everything that happened in the Pacific in regard to amphibious ships, amphibious techniques, he formulated it. He had had a little experience at Guadalcanal, but that wasn't too successful. That was our first operation, but he knew about it, so they made him Commander of Amphibious Forces Pacific. His first operation was Tarawa. That was a tough operation too. We knew nothing about landing. Each time we went to one island we learned something. I remember, on our ship we had an Australian Captain. He had been Captain of a sailing vessel, and he had sailed all of these islands and

gone in, and he was on to tell us a little bit about the topography of the islands, where the shoals were, how to get in, etc. He was on our ship during these operations. He had been to most of these islands. They were a mystery to us. We didn't know what to do. After a while they perfected the Duck, which would go from water over these corals. They could be used in landing on the islands. There were a lot of things that were perfected during this time and it improved the next operation. By the time we got to the final operation, getting the troops on the beach was down pretty good. I used to think that no one could have stopped us in the Pacific then. We had everything going. We had the ships, the men, and we had the know-how, and everything was going. But all this technique was really generated by Admiral Turner and his knowledge, his crew, and his staff. I was just a kid then. I was probably 24. When I got on this ship I think I was a LtJG. While I was on their I made Lt Senior Grade. When I got off I was a Lt Commander. I don't think that anybody could have stopped us. I had four roommates. My friend that I had been friends with all through the Navy, he was Admiral Turner's Flag Lieutenant. He was a Lieutenant just like I was. Then we had a Lt Commander, which was a regular Navy. We called him "Smokey." One of his main jobs was to get the oil up to the fleet. Our best protection when we were near an island was when we knew that the Kamikazes were



coming over was to make smoke. So we had these smoke generators on the ship, and also we put them on the small boats that went around the ship, and we'd have hundreds of these smoke generators going. We had probably a 15 minute notice sometimes before the Kamikazes got there. We'd all crank up these smoke generators and cover the whole area. I can remember standing out on the deck of the ship and hearing the planes right above us. They couldn't see us. They were looking for us, but we had this blanket of smoke every place and that was our best protection. We called him "Smokey Coker." One of his main jobs was to keep the oil coming so they could put it in these smoke generators to make smoke. Another was an Army Major. His job was to coordinate the gun fire support from the ships. He found out where they wanted on the islands and we would pass it to the various ships that were assigned to that area. They would put the gun fire in on the island exactly where they wanted it. It wasn't a big staff. I was sort of young then, and those people were in their 50's and 60's.

**Mr. Cox:** What were your specific duties on that staff?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Well, I was in Operations. We had to bring the ships to the right port, assign the ships to the right divisions, or whatever it was, just to move all of our shipping and our forces around. We had everything on that ship. I remember, we had people who had studied aerial photography.

They would go in and fly and take the pictures of the island before we took it. We had photo interpreters that would look at these pictures and tell us if they could see where there was any sort of a hindrance on the beaches, or maybe gun emplacements. All of these things were studied and passed on to the appropriate person for action.

**Mr. Cox:** Depth of the water, gun emplacements, etc?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes.

**Mr. Cox:** Was any of that type of work done, to your knowledge, during the operation to see what was going on?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Oh yes. Sometimes they would drop that right close to our ship and we'd pick it up, or they would send it out to the ship.

**Mr. Cox:** So it was processed right on board the ship?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. (LCdr Whetsel is showing Mr. Cox some photographs). Commodore Tyce is the only Commodore that I ever knew. Commodore is a rank right between Captain and Rear Admiral. He was the Chief of Staff on Turner's staff.

**Mr. Cox:** That didn't last too long after the war did it? Commodore went out.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. Well, it might have gone out before, but he was still a Commodore. You can see in the photo that there were not too many people in Operations.

**Mr. Cox:** No, 17 or 18. Something like that.

**LCdr Whetsel:** I imagine those other people were a number of years older than I was.

So I'm sure that none of those people are here now.

**Mr. Cox:** Were those officers, more or less, out of the Academy?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes.

**Mr. Cox:** Had specialty training?

**LCdr Whetsel:** They had people involved with aircraft, ship movement, etc. They had all had commands at sea.

**Mr. Cox:** I would think that probably Admiral Turner had the opportunity to kind of pick and choose.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes he did. Two of us, Bill Stringer, his Flag Lieutenant, and I came on board the same day. That is when they were forming the staff at Pearl Harbor. When he had been moved from the South Pacific to the Central Pacific and that is where we joined him.

**Mr. Cox:** Now, between one invasion and another, did you pretty much stay at sea? Or did you have some opportunities to go back to Pearl Harbor?

**LCdr Whetsel:** On the first operation, after the island was secure, we went back to Pearl. I was at Pearl Harbor then. They came back to Pearl and for the first couple of operations because you didn't have enough room on the Pennsylvania to do any planning. We would have all been on the Pennsylvania if there had been enough room, but they just had to take a few and we did our planning on the beach. At first Admiral Turner had the rear echelon planning group and he didn't want anybody else making his plans. They helped, but when he was making plans, it was

him making the plans. As I said, when he was in command, he commanded. Lots of people at sea, around him called him a “mean, old, son-of-a-bitch,” because he commanded.

**Mr. Cox:**

He was strict.

**LCdr Whetsel:**

Yes. He knew what he wanted and insisted that he got it. He carried out the operations with a high degree of success and when the war was over, when the atomic bomb was dropped, we were in Manila Bay. We were loaded and our slow ships had already started to Japan. We were due to leave the next day and we were going to take a group of islands off the coast of Japan. The staging was going to be from this group of islands. I can remember that Ernie Pyle was on our ship sometimes. He would come and visit us on our ship. The Secretary of the Navy, Forrestal, was on our ship when we went to Iwo Jima. He rode the ship to Iwo Jima with us. Then they put him on a destroyer after he was there about a day and sent him back. I can still remember when he would come up to Operations. He would come in and we would be looking at the charts, etc. I remember Forrestal, and he'd be smoking that pipe, asking us questions up in the Operations Room. So we saw a lot of people on that ship because that is where everything originated and operated from. That is the reason I feel that Admiral Turner had so much to do in the Pacific that he should not be left out of this museum.

**Mr. Cox:** So he really had the responsibility of getting each one of the invasions organized, making recommendations on the size of the forces needed, the type of, supplies, ammunition, etc.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Everything came through his command.

**Mr. Cox:** He would have to coordinate it with the Marine Corps.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Or the Army.

**Mr. Cox:** Do you recall whether or not Nimitz was ever on board?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. When we first started at Pearl Harbor he was there. I was in his office a number of times taking things back and forth. I'm sure he was on our ship, however, most of the time when we were at Pearl we didn't have a ship. We would just move onto the Pennsylvania when an operation was starting. There wasn't enough room to do planning and all the things you needed to do before the operation, so Admiral Turner would move all of his staff off the Pennsylvania back over on the beach. The planning was done there. When the operation actually started, maybe a day or two before, they would move on to the Pennsylvania. That was his Flagship for the first three operations until he got the Eldorado. That was a brand new ship. They called it an AGC. That was a brand new type of ship. It was made especially these. They had maybe two or three of them. I was on another one with Admiral Fort. I was on the USS Mount McKinley. That was a similar ship to this one and that is when we went to Palau. They were

communication ships. We didn't have much armament. We had 20 mm and 40 mm, and five inch 38's. That was our armament.

**Mr. Cox:** You had to have a lot of communication equipment, radar, etc.

**LCdr Whetsel:** We were lucky in the Pacific too because we had radar. The Japanese didn't have radar. That is when it first started.

**Mr. Cox:** How early in the war did you first get a ship that had radar on it?

**LCdr Whetsel:** When I first reported on the Eldorado we had it. That was a new ship from the coast and it had radar on it. Cruising at night in formation, it was a tremendous effort because you were blacked out and didn't have any lights. With radar you knew just exactly where your ships were, if they were in the right position. If a strange ship appeared, it might have been a submarine, but radar was a great help. It was not early in the war, well it was pretty early in the war that we got some radar and then they started putting it on all ships after that. It was great for convoys.

**Mr. Cox:** The facilities that were on board ship that would be the actual command post, was it more than one room?

**LCdr Whetsel:** We had one bridge, then we had the bridge at night. Yes, we had several rooms for planning, and then we were up in the bridge a lot of the time.

**Mr. Cox:** Was that one central room? Did it have a big area confined to radio contact, or was that separate?

**LCdr Whetsel:** That was separate because we had so much radio equipment. We had radar on the bridge. The ship had radar and the staff had radar.

**Mr. Cox:** Were you depending on the staff of the ship for the radio communication or did you have your own special operators?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes, we had that. We could talk to the whole convoy because the ship did not guide the convoy. The Admiral guided the convoy.

**Mr. Cox:** So, the Marine Corps General that was in charge of one or two of them, then they would have their facilities communicating with their people. Is that correct?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. At the start of the war we didn't have very good communications. As it went on it got better. The Japanese didn't have it hardly at all. They had terrible communications. Between radar and communications, those were two great things that we had, which the Japanese didn't have. They are so high tech now they probably have the same sort of radar and communications that we'd have, maybe even before us if we are not careful.

**Mr. Cox:** Do you remember what you were doing when you heard that the Japanese had surrendered?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. We were in Manila Bay and we were loaded and we were ready to go. I think we were scheduled to leave the next morning for this outlying group of islands off the coast of Japan to take that as a staging base for the invasion of Japan. We were that close.

Everybody was happy about the bomb being dropped.

**Mr. Cox:** You mentioned that a little earlier, but did you have a particular task that you were doing, or had you had any idea that this was going to take place?

**LCdr Whetsel:** I had no idea at all. It just came over the ship's communications to everybody onboard ship that the Japanese had surrendered.

**Mr. Cox:** Do you remember what your emotions were at that time?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Oh yes ---- Great! We are going to get to go home. We weren't looking forward to landing on Japan. A lot of people talk about the atomic bomb. Let me tell you, it saved lives. It saved lots of lives. I would think that maybe we would have lost at least a million Americans because they were going to fight us every inch of the way on the Japanese Islands. They had civilians, kids, everybody was going to take up arms against the landing. So there were going to be several million Japanese killed and I'm sure a million Americans killed on this. It wasn't going to be overnight; it wasn't going to be a success by just getting on and saying here we are, now you surrender. They were fanatics. We knew that from the islands. On the island of Guam, 20,000 people they say marched over a cliff and killed themselves because they had been told how bad the Americans were and they were afraid of the Americans. The Japanese were going to fight us every inch of the way when we landed on the Japanese



homeland.

**Mr. Cox:** Did you have an opportunity while you were in the Navy with these ships to go into Japan?

**LCdr Whetsel:** No. Admiral Turner flew from our ship to Japan for the signing of the Peace Treaty. I think he took one or two people with him. He took my roommate, his Flag Lieutenant, with him. Many people wanted to go, but there wasn't that much room on the battleship that was in the harbor at Japan for the surrender.

**Mr. Cox:** Did he have to transfer to another ship for flight, or did he have the facilities?

**LCdr Whetsel:** I think he flew. We had an air base in the Phillipines by that time, and he probably flew to Japan.

**Mr. Cox:** What was your itinerary from the time the war was over, until you got back to the States and were discharged?

**LCdr Whetsel:** In those days everybody got points by how long you were there, if you were at sea, things like that. I had been in the Navy since before the war, so I had been in the Navy longer than most people, except the regular Navy. So I had a lot of points. I was looking forward to getting out because I wanted to get started on my life at home. I had been out in the Pacific for almost three years, so I was anxious. I went by ship then from Manila Bay all the way back to San Francisco.

**Mr. Cox:** Do you remember the name of the ship?

**LCdr Whetsel:** In those days everybody got points by how long you were there, if you were at sea, things like that. I had been in the Navy since before the war, so I had been in the Navy longer than most people, except the regular Navy. So I had a lot of points. I was looking forward to getting out because I wanted to get started on my life at home. I had been out in the Pacific for almost three years, so I was anxious ~~to get home~~. I went by ship then from Manila Bay all the way back to San Francisco.

**Mr. Cox:** Do you remember the name of the ship?

**LCdr Whetsel:** No, I don't remember the name of the ship.

**Mr. Cox:** Was it a transport ship?

**LCdr Whetsel:** I think it was a small aircraft carrier. When we took Palau, then Admiral Fort took his staff back to San Diego to pick up a new ship. A new one of these AGC's. So we left our ship forward there and we got on a small aircraft carrier. ~~At night we would call~~ <sup>called</sup> it the Gay 90. <sup>number 90</sup> It was the Roy. All ~~our~~ <sup>of its</sup> duty was to take new airplanes from the mainland to the forward area and pick up the bad airplanes that they could overhaul and take them back to be worked on. So I rode back to Pearl Harbor. I got off at Pearl Harbor to go back to Admiral Turner's staff and the rest ~~of them~~ went to San Diego. I was thinking that was a great opportunity that I missed.

**Mr. Cox:** You said, AGC. What does that stand for?

Harbor, and I had been overseas for a long time, so I had a lot of points. I took the option to get out early. As soon as I got back to San Francisco they sent me to Houston to Camp Walters. Martha met me at Camp Walters and I got out pretty fast. They were moving them out fast in those days. I went back to the Rio Grand Valley where Martha lived. I didn't have any place to go when I got there so I just stayed. We've been there ever since I got out of the Navy.

**Mr. Cox:**

What have you found to occupy your time?

**LCdr Whetsel:**

I always wanted to own a hardware store. So I opened a hardware store in McAllen. It is called Broadway Hardware. I believe it is one of the best hardware stores in the world. I want it to be and I think it is. I sold it about ten years ago. It is still there and it still has a good reputation. It did well for me. I stayed in the Navy Reserve when I got back to McAllen. We had a Navy Reserve in the Valley and I stayed there. I remember that one day I had a letter from the Navy telling me that I needed to report to -- I had just opened the store and I had one employee working for me. They said that I was supposed to report to New Orleans for two weeks of active duty. I guess this was before Korea and they were getting people primed for that. Somehow I went to New Orleans for two weeks active duty. They gave me orders and said, "These are your orders. Take them home and put them in the safe, and if you hear on the radio that we are in a

state of emergency or war, then you are supposed to automatically report within 48 hours to New Orleans.” I had those orders. That was kind of bad because I had everything invested there and I was just going to have to toss it aside and leave. That never did happen, but it was always a threat that I was going to have to leave any minute. After 5 or 6 years in the Navy Reserve I got out and got sort of into politics and I was a City Commissioner, then I was Mayor of McAllen. I enjoyed all of that. McAllen is a nice town. When I arrived it was 10,000. Now it is 120,000 I believe. It has been good to us and I hope that we’ve been good for McAllen.

**Mr. Cox:** So, do you consider yourself to be retired now?

**LCdr Whetsel:** Yes. I’m director on a bank and that is about the only business part that I have left to do right now. I volunteer for a lot of different agencies and do a lot of volunteer work. So I can understand how you are volunteering here at the Nimitz Museum.

**Mr. Cox:** How many children do you have?

**LCdr Whetsel:** We have two. We have one. My son, Jack Jr., was killed in Viet Nam. He was a 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant.

**Mr. Cox:** I’m sorry to hear that.

**LCdr Whetsel:** That is our greatest loss in life.

**Mr. Cox:** Was he married at that time?

**LCdr Whetsel:** No. He got his commission at Fort Benning. Then he went to Fort

Hood. He was at 21. He had a company of men under him at 21. He was in the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. He stepped on a mine. He didn't step on it – his radioman stepped on a mine and it killed him. They had been out in the field all day. They came back into Headquarters and there was a tank on the side there that had been disabled some way and they told him to check out this tank. He went over and checked it out. They started back and Jack stepped over the mine and his radioman stepped on the mine.

**Mr. Cox:** Then you have a surviving child.

**LCdr Whetsel:** Cissy. She lives in Austin and she has two children, so we have two grandchildren. One of them is in video production and the other is a teacher. He teaches history and loves history. So we have two grandchildren and a daughter.

**Mr. Cox:** If you have nothing else to add, on behalf of myself, I certain would like to thank you for everything you did in World War II. On behalf of the Museum I also want to thank you for taking the time to give us this oral history interview. I salute you.

**LCdr Whetsel:** I wouldn't even be here if I didn't think that Admiral Turner needed the acknowledgment for what he did.

**Mr. Cox:** What was his beloved name among his men?

**LCdr Whetsel:** "Terrible Turner."

Transcribed by:  
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