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**Interview with Harold Fleming
U.S. navy**

Interview With Harold Fleming

my name is Virginia Roberts and I am a volunteer at The National Museum of the Pacific War

I am interviewing Harold Fleming. Today is September 29, 2002. We are located at Fredericksburg High School in Fredericksburg, Texas. The interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for War Studies, for the Preservation of Historical Information related to World War II.

Ms. Roberts: Mr. Fleming, where were you born?

Mr. Fleming: Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1926.

Ms. Roberts: When you enlisted, were you living there?

Mr. Fleming: No, I only lived there two years, then we moved to Maryland. That's where I went to school. When I finished my third year of high school I had turned 17, so I joined the Navy.

Ms. Roberts: So you had to come back and finish up.

Mr. Fleming: I got most of my high school courses while I was in the Navy, and then one of my English teachers—when I went back my high school had become junior high, and I saw all the little kids in there, and I said “I can't go back there.” My English teacher told me, “You come by my house twice a week and I will give you a test and you can graduate with the class of '47.”

Ms. Roberts: Your family, then, you were in Maryland. Do you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Fleming: My older brother, ?????

Ms. Roberts: Your father, what business was he in?

Mr. Fleming: He was in construction. In fact, he was the contractor on Atlantic City Hospital in 1926.

Ms. Roberts: So that's why you were there.

Mr. Fleming: Yes.

Ms. Roberts: Were a lot of your friends leaving school to join, or were you just real inspired?

Mr. Fleming: I guess there were a few, not a whole lot. I went over to Baltimore to join the Army Air Corps then, and had they had a program to become a navigator, a pilot, or a bombardier, you didn't know which. I passed all the tests except my eyes. The doctor told me to come back the next day, that he was sure I would pass. I walked across the street and joined the Navy.

Ms. Roberts: Where did you receive your basic?

Mr. Fleming: I went to boot camp in Bainbridge, Maryland.

Ms. Roberts: That wasn't very far. That's unusual, usually they send you half way around the world to boot camp.

Mr. Fleming: That's right. By that time I was ready to go home. But instead of that they sent me to San Diego to go to radio school. I went to radio school for 20 weeks, then we were sent up to Shoemaker, a Naval base outside of San Francisco, to catch a ship. We were there a couple months. I went aboard ship there, I was the radio operator. The *USS Drew*, APA 162.

Ms. Roberts: After you were on shipboard, then where were you?

Mr. Fleming: We went to Saipan and Guam, Japan.

Ms. Roberts: So you saw some active duty.

Mr. Fleming: Not really, because the war was over in October. By the time I got aboard ship and everything—well, the war was still going on but I wasn't any place where there was active duty.

Ms. Roberts: How many men were on your ship at the time?

Mr. Fleming: About 400.

Ms. Roberts: Tell me a little bit about your service, and where the ship was sailing.

Mr. Fleming: We were taking supplies and picking up soldiers to return home.

Ms. Roberts: That must have been a nice experience. They knew they were going home.

Mr. Fleming: Yes. I enjoyed the trip in the South Pacific Ocean.

Ms. Roberts: Did you get to spend some time on shore?

Mr. Fleming: Yes. In Japan, and Guam. We went ashore there.

Ms. Roberts: Where were you in Japan?

Mr. Fleming: Yokohama. We could see Mount Fujiyama.

Ms. Roberts: We tried to see Fuji last year, it was the rainy season, so we didn't get to see it.

Mr. Fleming: You had to get up early to see it.

When we were coming back we were supposed to go to Bremerton shipyard to be decommissioned. Then we got orders that we were to proceed around through the Canal to Norfolk. That's where we were decommissioned. Of course, we had shore duty in Panama City and Colon. By the time I was 19 I had quite a bit of traveling.

Ms. Roberts: Then, when you returned you finished school, and you married?

Mr. Fleming: Yes, four kids, 13 grandchildren.

Ms. Roberts: Was anything about shipboard life unexpected? Did you have some inkling of what shipboard life would be, or was it just sort of a new . . .

Mr. Fleming: It was new. I guess when you're 17, I don't guess you really think of it too much. We were in Japan, in fact I didn't even stay ashore as long as I could have. It really wasn't that interesting, although now I'd like to go back to those places.

Ms. Roberts: Have you been back to Japan?

Mr. Fleming: No.

Ms. Roberts: What was life like on the ship? Were you in the ????, or was this ship that had pretty good accommodations.

Mr. Fleming: We had bunks, and of course being new guy and Black, you get the bottom bunk. Sometimes when you're in the rough you got water aboard, your bunk, you got right out being on the bottom, it was just wet. But we had four hours and eight hours off duty. (*A few sentences lost here*) That's all you did, it was all coded in five letter groups, and that's what you did. And I guess the only time I had a problem was when I happened to be ????? and the ship's call came over and ????? came over and I froze.

Ms. Roberts: Was that an emergency call?

Mr. Fleming: We had to break radio silence to get it repeated.

Ms. Roberts: What was that code that came over, that let you know the boat . . .

Mr. Fleming: Oh, the ship's call was "Man Dog ?????," and that's MDST. We had to break radio silence, and we had an old Navy chief from the *Hornet*, who'd gone down on the *Hornet*, and he put me on extra duty. He said I had to crack the code. Four hours on and four hours off for two solid weeks. I became pretty good with code.

Ms. Roberts: Tell me about mustering out. How you felt, and what . . .

Mr. Fleming: I was ready to get out. But then hen we got to Norfolk and the Naval Air Station there, all of us were in a bunch which were chief or seaman first class, which I ended up being. They came back one day and they said, "We got a real good job for someone who can type. Two 12-hour shifts a week." And I said "Gee, that's for me." So I volunteered. You're not supposed to volunteer, but I did. I got this good duty, but the thing of it was, I got froze in the service and I had to stay on an extra three months. I had 19 months.

Ms. Roberts: What was the job?

Mr. Fleming: Teletype operator. We could lay down and sleep, but you had to get up every hour, when the thing would come on and ding, ding, ding, and you had to send a message back that it was being manned.

Ms. Roberts: Did you have ?????

Mr. Fleming: Yes.

Ms. Roberts: There was someone here who had the old typewriter, a Remington.

Mr. Fleming: Yes, a lot of the guys had that.

Ms. Roberts: Now it's so easy on the computer, the touch is so light.

Mr. Fleming: It wasn't much of a—it was 19 months. I enjoyed it. I wasn't happy all the time, but I wouldn't have given it up for anything.

Ms. Roberts: It was your chance to go abroad. There's some country that requires a year of service after high school, I don't know where it is, but I've often thought young people would mature . . .

Mr. Fleming: It wouldn't hurt anyone.

Ms. Roberts: I agree. So, did you marry someone from home?

Mr. Fleming: No, I married someone from Texas. I worked for the Veterans' Administration in Washington, D.C. I was ??????? engineering there, we were in charge of building all the V.A. hospitals. I came back to do an air conditioning job in Waco, that's where I met my wife.

Ms. Roberts: Do all of your children live nearby?

Mr. Fleming: No. One's in Arkansas, one's in New Orleans, one's in Pennsylvania, and my oldest grandson, he was a police officer. He got killed at the age of 36.

Ms. Roberts: Well, thank you so much for your service, even though you said it was very, very brief.

It was very important, and we appreciate what you did. Thank you so much.

Mr. Fleming: Thank you.

Transcribed by: Betty Paieda
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