



**Center for Pacific War Studies
Oral History Program**

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

James B. Perry

United States Navy

Date of Interview: April 3, 2003

**National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with
Mr. James B. Perry**

Mr. Graham: I am Eddie Graham and today is April 3, 2003. I am interviewing Mr. James B. Perry. This interview is taking place at the Bush Gallery in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Perry, tell us when and where were you born?

Mr. Perry: Dallas, Texas. 1921.

Mr. Graham: Where did you go to school?

Mr. Perry: At Dallas Technical High. It was the old Bryan High. They changed the name to Dallas Technical.

Mr. Graham: What are the names of your parents?

Mr. Perry: My mother's name is Lucy and my dad's name is Jefferson _____ Perry. I am not a "junior." My mother said "no junior."

Mr. Graham: Where were you and what were you doing on December 7, 1941?

Mr. Perry: It was on Sunday and at that time I was working at Titche-Goettinger. I was out of high school and working at Titche-Goettinger.

Mr. Graham: Titche-Goettinger?

Mr. Perry: Yes, it's not anymore. I was marking hog wire supplies and dishes and things. That's what I was doing that particular time.

Mr. Graham: What were you doing when you actually heard the news?

Mr. Perry: Oh, I cannot tell you. I can't remember.

Mr. Graham: How did you end up in the Navy?

Mr. Perry: Well, when I graduated from school in 1940, it was June. I went down there to join the Navy then. I went through everything and then when I got done, they said "you've got to take this affidavit." This is what people don't understand, up until two or three months after I went in, twenty-one, without your parents permission, you won't go. So I took it home and mother wouldn't sign it. So I forgot it. A lot of them went back there and got somebody else to sign it and went on in, but I was too bashful. I let it go. It was 1940. "OK, forget it." So I did odd jobs and finally I got the best paying job I ever had. What people don't know is Gulf Oil Company during the war closed out all service stations, independent, and took their company employees, gave us a uniform, cap and everything, and gave us two weeks training at \$60 a month. The next two weeks after that, you got \$90 a month. Man, I had more money than I knew what to do with! This was 1942. So I went to work for Gulf Oil Company. Things were rocking along pretty good and all of a sudden, I got a letter to come down to the Army, the federal building on Commerce. They start you early. I think 7 o'clock in the morning! I said "This ain't going to work." I'm going to join the Navy. So I went down to the Navy, took everything and today I don't know who signed. My kid brother said "I signed for you." Whatever, I got in. After that, they lowered it. You didn't have to be 21, but that was after I went in. Up until then, you had to be 21.

Mr. Graham: Where did you do your boot camp?

Mr. Perry: San Diego. I can't give you the name of the camp. I used to know, but it's been too many years.

Mr. Graham: OK. Where was your first assignment after boot camp?

Mr. Perry: I got out. I went through boot camp. It used to be 18 months, and they cut it to 9. So I got out in 9. I went to school, Tech High, and I took all the shops-- wood, sheet metal, everything. The last two years, you decide which one you want to advance in. Then you're going to spend the next two years in that particular shop. Well, I like automobiles, so I went automotive mechanic. I took two years of automobile training at Tech High. I'm more adapted to machinery than anything else, so I said I want to go in diesel. I want to go to diesel school at Ames, Iowa. "Fine. You're number 1." OK, but just before, the school broke up. When the schools break up, they've got to fill them up. Here comes the "C" draft and took a bunch of kids. About that time the school broke up and they've got to fill them up. Radio school, they wanted to fill it up. I said "Hold it! I'm not no radio and never will be." In the first place, you've got to type and I ain't never done typing. "We'll teach you." If you don't, you'll go to night school. So I said "well, the electrical part of it, a radio technician, I'll take it, in a New York minute." "No. You're going to be a radio operator." Well, I started. I had to go to school, started taking that stuff. It began to come in. To get up gradually, the code. But I saw those radiomen, all white, what I mean, their skin was fair. I said "man, I'm outdoors. I can't go for that" and you've got to type. I hadn't got to typing class yet. Anyway we had to go to calisthenics. We'd go out and walk around and make a big bend at this building and go out there in this "grinder," they'd call it, and go do calisthenics. There's a kid with me and I said, "You know what. Let's get at the tail end of that line and when they break

around that corner, let's beat it." "That's a good idea." So we go back to the barracks. We just got back there, where this guy come from, I don't know. "Let's go down and see the commander." That kid says "No." He got out of the Navy. Course I had new orders waiting on me, so I had to take it. They give me 5 days bread and water. Give me a transfer. They're going to get me on a detail. They sent me to North Island Naval Air Station, and the day I got there, they said "Get your gear together." They gave me a sack and all and said "You got loaded." Man, this is great. _____ when we got there, and I stayed there two or three months, I don't remember. I was in what they called the First Division. We took care of the island. Just patrolled the island. Did things around the island, which is a racket! My buddy and I one day, old Johnson said "Perry, let's go down and join the submarine service." I said, "I've got a week's leave. I'm going back to Texas." So he said "OK." He took a week's leave and went to Tennessee and I went to Texas. When we come back, I'd forgotten all about it. He said "Perry, let's go down there and join the submarine service. You're Seaman 1st and I'm Seaman 1st. We're ready to go." I said "Might as well. I ain't got nothing else to do." So we go down there. Bang, bang! I took the physical and I'm getting ready. I've got the papers. Boy! I'm all _____. I'm going to New London, Connecticut submarine school. The PO says "No. No. You're going to Mare Island. Submarine Division 121." "That ain't what these orders say." And I went to Mare Island. I didn't see New London until after the war. Never seen a submarine in my life! I didn't know nothing and stick me in the submarine service! What they call a "relief crew." A relief crew is when a boat comes in, someone goes on the beach _____ transferred, stays and works on the boat, work on the engine. I didn't get in the

engine part of it when I got in the submarine service. They'd already beat me out of going to diesel school which would have gotten at least 2nd class. I know we got 3rd in a breeze. I was going to try to get 2nd class. Some of them do make it. That's what I'm going for. I never got a shot at it. So when I was in the relief crew, a boat come in, work on it. *Bluefish* comes in and I asked for the *Bluefish*. They said no. "Well, forget it." So I got a hot date that night and in a hurry to get to 4 o'clock so I can take liberty. A guy comes down about an hour before 4 o'clock to the barracks. "If the *Haddo* gets in before 4 o'clock, get your gear and come aboard." Doggone the luck! Guess what! Just before 4 o'clock, the *Haddo* came in! So I got my gear. There went my liberty that night. I didn't get to go. I went aboard the *Haddo* and that's how I got in the submarine service. You don't know it, but when you go to sea, you're going to carry about two weeks, so you have fresh vegetables, tomatoes and stuff like that for two weeks, which is the worst time in the world to be mess-cooking because you got all that fresh vegetable stuff. It's a mess! The sailors are not too nice about how they get rid of it. So they're setting on it. To tell the truth about it, they split it up between the fireman and a seaman. I was the only fireman aboard at that time. The rest of them were rated, third or fourth or whatever. I was the only non-rated fireman. I was the only fireman aboard. They stuck me on mess-cooking. Well, the cook, who was 2nd class, just got the clap(?) and they put him on the beach ____ to take a little _____ on the base there and he was the cook. The best cook they ever had. He was a Mexican. I didn't know until many, many years later, I didn't know, a Mexican is a Mexican. He ain't no different than I am, you know, I didn't know the difference. I didn't know the ratio. There's only 3 Mexicans from the state of Texas in the submarine service. This Mexican came out

and was giving a speech. He was a Mexican but he was a first-class quartermaster and he had a whole history about the submarine service about the Mexicans. I said "Well, we had one aboard the *Haddo* as a cook." I don't know what his name was, I forgot, but he and I were the best of buddies because we worked together and he got seasick and vomited. We had metal cans that said "soda" on it. It's not table soda. I don't know what kind of soda it is but it's not what we use to set tables. It's to sprinkle on the deck to make the oxygen go further in case you're down a long time. That's what it's for. He says "Do you think it'll hurt me?" I said "I don't know. We're gonna find out." So _____ and he was OK and nobody on board that ship ever knew he got seasick. I wouldn't say. No way! He was the best cook. He and I got along. He made me up some stuff, special stuff It was really great. He tried to make it look pretty and tried to please everybody. Most of the guys were real nice except the one that sat back in the corner, from New York or somewhere. He'd come down and snarl, like you didn't do anything but take it out of the cans and put it on the table. Compliment on something, he didn't know how to do that. I didn't like him, because I know the cook and he was good. But when we came in, the guy's got well and they put him back aboard and they took him off. Oh man, don't think they didn't notice the difference--the officers too!

Mr. Graham: What kind of action did you see after that?

Mr. Perry: The *Haddo* had been to Scotland before I got on it. That's where you had about four hours nighttime. You're down 20 hours and up about 4 because you could only come up at night to charge your batteries. You had to do it all in about 4 hours. When they came back to the States, they pulled into Pearl. Then they made a patrol out of Pearl and came into Fremantle. That was their fourth patrol. I got in on the

fifth patrol. They had never sighted anything or never fired at anything, never took a depth charge, never done anything.

Mr. Graham: They had seen action?

Mr. Perry: They hadn't seen action actually. There wasn't much in Scotland. Nobody had seen any over there. They weren't the only one. My buddy was on the *Hake*. He was over there too.

Mr. Graham: That was a sub?

Mr. Perry: Yes, submarine. He was over there and his buddy died coming back to the States and they threw him overboard, weighed him down and dropped him overboard. What else are you going to do? Here's the funny thing about it--he didn't come with me, old _____ (Bringle?), we met here in Dallas-- and he was on patrol with my buddy, Bob _____ (Quen?), but of course, he'd never met him or met Quen either. How come me to be with Quen, when Quen come on, he rode the *Hake* back and went to Pearl and went on patrol and come into Fremantle. They took him off the *Hake* and put him on the *Haddo*. That's where I met him. He and I were the best of buddies. His daddy, Harold Quen, was on an old S boat up in the Aleutians. I don't think there's anybody else that can say this, Harold Quen and Bob Quen, father and son, were the only father and son in World War II submariners. Nimitz' daddy was a submariner way back there. This is just World War II.

Mr. Graham: What action did you see now?

Mr. Perry: You won't believe this. The *Harder*, you've heard of the *Harder*.

Mr. Graham: I don't think so.

Mr. Perry: Samuel D. Dealey. When we formed our charter, we called it the Sam Dealey Chapter. He was from Dallas. He was connected with the Dallas Morning News.

His family was. What I like about it when these kids go to school and they flunk. "Don't worry about it. You get a second chance. You can do it again." The world don't end because you flunked once. In fact, one of the greatest submariners we ever had was kicked out of Annapolis. I say kicked out, he was thrown out because he flunked. He comes back to Dallas, took some credits, and got back in. Of course, you know his history. He went back in and he made an officer. He was _____ officer that the *Harder* ever had. They made five patrols and on the fifth one, they got sunk. How I know him, on that fifth patrol I was on, we hadn't done anything. Oh, we had sunk some little craft. I went up on the lookout and I could see the thing burning, flare up and down, flare up and down.

Mr. Graham: When they were attacking your ship, what were your duties?

Mr. Perry: When I wasn't on mess-cooking, I was assigned to the aft engine room. I was an oiler. When we secured everything, they'd signal "a-ooga! a-ooga!" and you know you're going up. Well, two things I had to do. It's not very far to go all the way up to the control room and I'd take over the trim manifold and what I'd do with the trim manifold is the officer tells me "pump 500 gallons here, pump 500 gallons here" to level up the boat. You have to level up the boat to make it work easier. Here's the thing, 4 to 8, that's the watch I had, 4 to 8 at night, 4 to 8 in the morning. OK, 4 to 8 at night, they called me and said "Let's go up to the trim manifold. I'm going to break you in on that." "You do this. You do this. This is the rheostat. Run it up to 500 pounds. Cut it off. _____ the water. Back and forth. This you never use!" "All right. Forget it." So the next morning, I had four hours on the manifold, and the next morning, I'm there by myself! That went on pretty good until one day, Nimitz decided he was going to do something different. He wanted water shifted

from this tank that I ain't never used. I said "Man, they didn't tell me this yet." He said "Get somebody that knows what they're doing." That guy come over there and just died laughing and said "Perry, don't worry about it." Shifting water, never did it again. Never used that again.

Mr. Graham: You said "Nimitz."

Mr. Perry: C. W. Nimitz, Jr.

Mr. Graham: Is he related to Admiral Nimitz?

Mr. Perry: Yes, sir. He's his son.

Mr. Graham: OK, that's what I thought.

Mr. Perry: You bet. He's his son. His old man was a five-star admiral. He was a pretty sharp dude. I liked Nimitz. Anyway, I was going to tell about the *Harder*. As you go to sea, especially when you've got a new crew, new people involved, they don't know how to bring food aboard. You fill up every corner you've got. You fill up everything because you may need it. Well, we didn't. So they said we've got to go in and pick up some English fliers. We couldn't get in. It was too shallow, too dangerous, but anyway it took about an extra two weeks. They said we're going back to base. So we went back. After that we rendezvoused with the *Harder*. We already know what the *Harder* done. They already sunk five tin cans, or destroyers. Five tin cans! Of course we all knew that when we came alongside. I ain't got nothing to do so I go up to the control room where all this is going on and I can hear Nimitz and Dealey talking. I never will forget what he said because it pertained to us later. I heard him talk to Nimitz and tell Nimitz "Everything's pretty good around here. We just sunk five tin cans. Kind of safe for submarines now." We got rid of five of them. That's a big number. Five! He said "Be careful! They're fast! Watch

those planes.” OK, everything’s going along pretty good and all of a sudden, I heard that thing “a-ooga! a-ooga!” so I ran up to the control room. “What’s going on?” “They spotted a plane.” So we dived, got enough depth just in case they dropped a depth charge, aerial depth charge. Some of them planes carried aerial depth charges. OK. I don’t know how long we were down there. I never sweated so much in my life. I’m talking about, I don’t sweat much, it just runs off and drops off on the deck. I’m talking about just pouring off of me because we just had to close everything off and shut everything down and only run something that you have to have because they’re up there waiting on you. I don’t know how long, but anyway Nimitz didn’t really think that my buddy, Bob Quen, the one that spotted the plane, really saw it. He asked him what it looked like. Anyway he didn’t think he really saw it. We were down there a heck of a long time, but he decided he’d go up and take a look. That Jap was smarter than he thought. He figured that we’d do exactly what we did, so he just waited. You can see, at 65-foot periscope depth, you can see a submarine. That clear water out there was just as level as the deck, as this table. You could see a submarine. He just waited and he was right above us. I’m standing in the conning tower. I can see up there where the periscope comes up _____ to take a look. That’s when it went off and I don’t know whether it was a reaction _____ I don’t know. Down periscope! I began looking around. I guess we’re all right. I don’t see no leaks coming in or anything bad. It was close. It shook us up pretty good, but we got out of it.

Mr. Graham: The plane did drop a depth charge?

Mr. Perry: He dropped a depth charge on us, and that’s the first time they’d had anything like that and I’d never been aboard one that had it either. That was my first time. One’s

enough! Afterwards I thought “you know, I think the Good Lord _____
_____” because he had us dead to rights, just like shooting ducks
in a pond. He waited on us. He did everything right. There’s no way we could
defense it. He dropped that thing right down our periscope, but it didn’t make it. He
missed us enough to shake us though. Just shook us up. Of course you know we
stayed down and I say one thing, from then on, anybody yelled “plane” we’d dive,
didn’t worry about it. He didn’t ask no more questions about it.

Mr. Graham: How long can a submarine actually stay under water before it has to come up and
recharge the batteries?

Mr. Perry: Oh, I really don’t know. They can stay down like that over 30 hours. They told me
when they were in Scotland, 20 hours down. Some of them smoked, not too many.
We couldn’t keep cigarettes lit. After about 15, 16, 20 hours it was hard to keep
cigarettes lit. The oxygen got thin. They had stuff put on the deck that would make
it go a little further. We never did get to that.

Mr. Graham: OK. What happened next then?

Mr. Perry: We made the two weeks, I mean the extra. The day you come in off of patrol, you
have a good meal. We set back stuff so we had a pretty good meal coming. We ran
out of coffee. We ran out of cream. We ran out of everything, but we had a pretty
good meal. When you come in, there’s a pilot comes aboard, takes you into the base.
They take over the steering of the boat to get you in. They were just going to stay on
the boat. They’ve already got their whites on. They’re ready to hit the beach. The
paymaster on board, you’re paid so all your wages when you get to that dock. You
hit the dock and they lower the gangway and you hear “_____ two weeks,
room and board!” Oh man, that’s the greatest thing going.

Mr. Graham: Where did you dock? Where was this?

Mr. Perry: Fremantle, Australia. We're going into Perth, about 12 miles.

Mr. Graham: Did you stay on a military base?

Mr. Perry: No, we go in a civilian hotel and take over. Wentworth was first and the next time was King George. You stay there and everything's furnished. Room and board.

Mr. Graham: Did they have an open bar for you too?

Mr. Perry: Well, you pay for that. Oh, yeah. All hotels are open in Australia. Hotels, you got a bar. If it's a high sail, it's a hotel without a bar.

Mr. Graham: OK. You stayed there two weeks and then what happened?

Mr. Perry: Then we go back aboard and they get the ship ready. They test this and that, this and that, make sure everything's right. Then we go back to sea again.

Mr. Graham: OK, what was your next assignment when you went to sea?

Mr. Perry: Being a fireman in the aft engine room. I was in the aft engine room.

Mr. Graham: Where did the sub go then?

Mr. Perry: Oh, I don't know. South China Sea somewhere. I couldn't tell you where we went. Both times, we went up through Lombok Straits. You had to go through there in daytime. They can see you on both sides. Up until practically the end of the war, they were never fired on. Kind of an agreement until some Britisher went through there and fired on them and that kind of messed things up for us, but you have to go through in the daytime because you can't make it, three knots is the most. You don't want to go through there. You ain't going to make it. You have to go through on the surface. You can see everything there. It's pretty close.

Mr. Graham: You say "fired upon." By whom would you be fired upon?

Mr. Perry: Japanese.

Mr. Graham: So the Japanese for some reason or other would not fire on your boat?

Mr. Perry: I read this, for some reason, they don't really understand it, there wasn't a boat ever fired on going through there until...

Mr. Graham: ...this Britisher...

Mr. Perry: ...yeah until he messed up the playhouse. They probably just didn't know what we knew or something. We'd been going through there, and that's the way it is.

Mr. Graham: So did you spend your whole duration aboard the *Haddo*?

Mr. Perry: No, I made another patrol. I made a fifth and sixth, and I went back and they put me in rest camp. That's serving liquor and beer, delivered to officers in submarine service.

Mr. Graham: Where was this at?

Mr. Perry: That was all in Perth, Australia.

Mr. Graham: Oh, Perth, Australia.

Mr. Perry: Fremantle is the port. Perth is about 12 miles in.

Mr. Graham: How did you end up getting there? Were you just assigned there or what?

Mr. Perry: They just put me there and I didn't ask no questions. Greatest deal I ever had!

Mr. Graham: What happened after that?

Mr. Perry: Well, we went on with that and then in '45, the war was over with. They put my name on the list to come back to the States. This was in October and so I went aboard the submarine tender *Orion*.

Mr. Graham: You came back to the States.

Mr. Perry: I came back to the States after about 30 days. We went to Panama and had a _____
_____ and then went through Panama Canal and come up the east coast to

Virginia, then went on up to New London. I stayed there until I got out of the Navy in '46.

Mr. Graham: That's where you were processed out of the service?

Mr. Perry: Yes, in New London, Connecticut in '46. How I got out was an accident. When I joined, I joined six years. I joined the regular Navy. This kid that was with us over in Australia and he come back to the States with us and he got married, shipped over, got his shipping-over money. I didn't know anything about it and he told me, said he was going home. I said "What do you mean, you're going home? You just shipped over. You're regular Navy." He said "Well they came out with a new thing-- dependency discharge. My wife's a dependent." I said "That sounds pretty good." I didn't like the duty. I wanted back on the boats. At that time, I hadn't talked to the captain. I had, that's right, I did! I had gone and talked to the captain. I knocked on the door and talked to him. I said "I got about two years, a little better to go. I want to get back on the boats." He said "OK." Yeoman came down _____.

There's a school going on right now in New London, Connecticut. I waited and I waited and I went back to talk to that yeoman. I said "What happened?" He said "The Sixteenth Fleet won't let you go." That's priorities. _____ submarines, putting them in mothballs, in case they ever use them again, which they didn't. He said "The Sixteenth Fleet was higher than that captain you talked to and they turned it down." Good God, that made me mad. Wasn't nothing I could do about it. As time went on, I wasn't too well pleased because they hadn't put me back on the boat yet. He told me he was going to get out. So I talked to the I'd already talked to him once about getting out. The first thing he says "Are you regular Navy?" He says "I'm a regular." He says "Well, then you're wasting your time."

“Ah, forget it, chief.” So I forgot all about it until I ran into this guy that was getting out. He’d gotten married and shipped over and everything. I said “Here I go! Same thing!” I said “Give me those papers, chief. I’m going to waste my time.” Maybe a month or so, they called me in...

END OF SIDE A

Mr. Perry: So after I had my operation and was feeling good, I said “OK. _____” So they processed me. I had 63 days, so they let me go and paid me for 3 days and at 60 days, I’m still in the Navy for 60 days and they paid me for the next two months, sent the money to me and I got out December 3, 1946. That ended my Navy career. So in 1948, old Harold _____ (Barsch?) that I went to high school with and played football with one another and he said “Hey, Perry, why don’t you come back and join the service?” I said “I don’t think so.” “You get a check every quarter. Every day’s pay, you know, for a quarter and you get nine days’ pay” or something like that. I say “That sounds pretty good.” So I joined the reserves in 1948. I got married in ’50 in Mexico City, come back and my mother said “They want you out there at the Navy base.” I don’t think so, but I’ll go out there and see them anyway. They said you’ve got about 2 weeks _____. So I never did go back. I had taken vacation and I needed to go back to work. That was 19 days. I got married August 11th and I left August 30th going back to California.

Mr. Graham: OK, let’s go back to your experience in World War II. Is there anything special else that you’d like to say or tell us about?

Mr. Perry: Not really. I’ll say this, there were 4 of us boys-- Arthur, he was in the Army, Ray went in the Marine Corps, I go in the Navy, and my kid brother went in the merchant service. How it all came about is when they drafted in 1940, my brother Arthur was

the very first one to be called up but instead of going in the Army, he went and joined the Texas State Guard. It became the original 36th Division that was all shot up down in Salerno in Italy but before he got in there, he put in for officer's training and he made it. He came out in 90 days as a second lieutenant and he was transferred to California. At Christmastime, in the years I was going to the Rose Bowl. There ain't no Rose Bowl. They're playing on the east coast this year. The Rose Bowl where they played was on the east coast so I decided I'd hitchhike up to Atascadero which is where my brother was, up around Frisco and met him up there. He paid my fare from there to LA because I had to take it from LA back to San Diego. So going at different times and in different service, we get together before he went overseas. Ray had been sent overseas and he got his hand messed up. They sent him back to Balboa at San Diego and I'm in San Diego so me and Ray, while he was recuperating and getting his hand well, we get together and make 2 liberties there in San Diego. Then I left and went overseas, but up until then I hadn't gone anywhere and done anything. Then my kid brother, I never did see him until after the war. When the war ended in '45, he only made one cruise on the... He had to make two so he was eligible for the draft and they drafted him in '46. So I went to Japan and he went to Korea.

Mr. Graham: Then I guess this about covers your World War II experience unless you have something else.

Mr. Perry: I had a lot of close friends in that span of four years and four months, met my brothers and all that, which was almost unreal, and we all _____, brought us all back.

Mr. Graham: Let me say, on behalf of the National Museum of the Pacific War, we want to thank you for your contribution of your story. We will place it in the museum's archives of oral histories. Thank you, Mr. Perry.

PROOF

Tape 832
Transcribed by:
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Fredericksburg, Texas
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