

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

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Jack G. Surles  
Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, Fire Control  
USS Franklin, CV13  
Very Serious Damage – March 19, 1945  
Four Battle Stars**

**April 19, 2004  
Lake Charles, Louisiana**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is April 19, 2004. I'm interviewing Mr. Jack G. Surles by telephone. His address is 929 Tallow Road, Lake Charles, Louisiana 70607. His phone number is 337-478-7404. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Jack, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today. Is your first name Jack? Or is it John?

Mr. Surles

It's Jack.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Surles

In a little town named Joyce, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Surles

July 8, 1924.

Mr. Misenhimer

Before we go any further, I forgot to do one thing here. There's an agreement with the Nimitz Museum. Normally when I do these in person, I give them to the person to read. But, let me read this to you and see if this is OK with you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Agreement read.

Is that OK with you?

Mr. Surles

That is absolutely OK with me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Surles

No, I didn't; I was an only child.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your parents' names?

Mr. Surles

My dad's name was Jasper Levi Surles. He preferred to be called Jack.

Mr. Misenhimer

He named you Jack then?

Mr. Surles

Right. He was a Navy man too. World War I.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he make a career of the Navy?

Mr. Surles

No, he didn't, but he was on three battleships.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Surles

I went to high school at Lake Charles High, in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Surles

1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

As you know, on December '41, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when that happened?

Mr. Surles

Yea, I was on a Sunday date with a young lady. We went to a picture show.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they interrupt the show with the announcement?

Mr. Surles

No, they didn't. I didn't know about it. My mother and father ran a drive-in restaurant at Lake Charles at that time and I pulled into the drive-in. My mother walked up and said, did you know that Pearl Harbor was bombed? I said no, I didn't. At that time, I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. I said, where is Pearl Harbor? She said, in Hawaii.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you think this would affect you?

Mr. Surles

Oh, I thought it would affect me greatly because I was in between what I wanted to do and I knew I wanted to go into the Navy. I had a job I was working on at



the time, so I fiddled around with that until, I don't know, around July. Then I just kind of took it easy until July of '42. Then I decided, I'm gonna talk to my parents and I'm gonna go into the Navy. Maybe go to college after I got out of the Navy. I really didn't know what I wanted to do. The war was on and I was kind of in a state of bewilderment. So, I went in, in December of '42.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day, do you recall?

Mr. Surles

Yea, I went to New Orleans. I was sworn in on December 5. That was the first time. Then I was sworn in the second time on December 10 in Great Lakes, Illinois. You know you went through two of those things.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, I didn't know that.

Mr. Surles

After I passed my physical, they swore me in again and told me I was Navy property.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel from New Orleans to Great Lakes?

Mr. Surles

Train, by a very slow train.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a place to sleep, or just sit up in a car or chair?

Mr. Surles

I sat up in a car.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food, did they have any food on that train?

Mr. Surles

Food wasn't bad. We ate sandwiches and things of that nature. Had a couple square meals and along the way there was always people trying to shove dinners to us through windows. I hadn't even got to the service yet really and they knew all of us guys were in the service on those cars.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this a civilian train, with civilians?

Mr. Surles

Yes, it was a civilian train. We had to stop as the troop trains went by and what have you. We had to stop on the sides. New Orleans to Chicago. We got into Union Station in Chicago and took a bus to North Shore Line, got on that and it was cold. My God, I've never seen weather that cold in my life. I had a little tan coat and I never will forget we got to Great Lakes and we finally found warmth.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about what happened there at Great Lakes.

Mr. Surles

They put us up on the main side. What we called the main side. It was the old Great Lakes. The new camp was really just being completed, or just being built. So, we were in the old brick camps. They put us in the old part of the Great Lakes Naval training camp. We had a good night there. We got up and had a

good breakfast and then we went in and got our examination. We took all our clothes off and all our clothes stayed off us until darn near noon. They put a number on our chest and that's all we knew, was number so-and-so. I don't even remember what number I had. They put it on with, I think it was potassium permanganate, that purple stuff. When we got through, we were buck-naked and they swore us in. Then they gave us clothes and we were issued uniforms and what have you. Actually, half of it didn't fit us.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Surles

My father was in the Navy and I just always liked the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were 18 when you went in. Did you have to have your parents' permission?

Mr. Surles

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened there at Great Lakes?

Mr. Surles

Well, I went through boots and we got all our shots and went through all this routine of getting woke up all different hours of the night. And were accused of everything we hadn't done. You know how that goes, typical boot camp stuff, forced marches. Just to see what we were made out of. And we also had to

take all of our aptitude tests to see what we might be best equipped for in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have knot typing?

Mr. Surles

Yea, we had to do knot typing. We had the Blue Jackets Manual. We had to go through that and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about swimming?

Mr. Surles

Yes, we had swimming, diving. We had to qualify on the diving board to make sure we could jump off a board. I think, there, we jumped 15 feet at the top.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you jumped in the pool, did you have your clothes on, or a bathing suit?

Mr. Surles

We had bathing suits on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any weapons training there?

Mr. Surles

Yes, we had some, mostly rifle. I qualified; made expert. Of course, being a country boy and being raised with a rifle in my hand I didn't have any trouble doing that. I also qualified with the old Thompson submachine gun while I was

there. I don't know why they picked me but they did and I went over and qualified.

We had boxing and judo. They had a big drill hall. We would go over to that drill hall and we would exercise. Especially in bad weather, you know. We would have forced marches where we would have eight-mile marches and different things like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did that boot camp last?

Mr. Surles

If I remember correctly, a little over three months. Now listen, I'm not much on remember dates on some of those sorts of things.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. That's close enough. Anything else in particular you recall from your time in boot camp?

Mr. Surles

Not particularly. I made several friends in there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything funny happen in there?

Mr. Surles

I guess you could call that funny. I was from Louisiana and they called me a puddle jumper, you know. I took it and got along with them alright.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were most of them from?

Mr. Surles

Most of the guys we had in there were from Illinois and some from Texas. I never will forget this one boy named Charles Free. I'd like to see him again. I don't know whatever happened to him. He was about seven or eight years older than I was and I kinda looked up to him. He kinda guided me through, you know. He had been in the service before and he was a re-entry. He was new to it, but he wasn't new to the military at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any other Louisiana boys in there with you?

Mr. Surles

Yes, we had some—one from Ville Platte, and I think one from Crowley, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any particular special training in boot camp?

Mr. Surles

Not particularly. Mostly self-defense and it was conditioning and marching and getting into the military way of doing things.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished boot camp then?

Mr. Surles

I went to school at Great Lakes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What school was that?

Mr. Surles

Fire control, gunnery.

Mr. Misenhimer

To control the weapons, the guns?

Mr. Surles

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that school?

Mr. Surles

I was about four months. When I left there I went to Washington, DC to advanced fire control school.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished that first fire control school, what rank did you have then?

Mr. Surles

I left there with seaman 1<sup>st</sup>. Everybody did. There was one guy, he was an optical technician, with an optical company that manufactured range finders that the Navy used. So they ranked him up to 3<sup>rd</sup> class petty officer right there and he didn't even finish boot camp. They shipped him off right then to Washington, DC to work in the same factory that he had worked in, as a technician.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your pay when you first went in?

Mr. Surles

I don't remember. \$36/month or something like that; \$42/month. I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

In this fire control school in Illinois, what all did they teach you there? What all do you do in fire control?

Mr. Surles

Well, we were taught the fire control problem. It started out with the basic fire control problem. And range finders. We were taught optics, you know, the range finder optics and things of that nature. We were taught basic radar.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had radar then, huh?

Mr. Surles

It had just started. Nobody knew anything about it at that time. I was very basic. What it was, was search radar. They taught us all the basics of it and what have you. Fire control problems, how to figure them and all the cross levels, level fires and everything that goes with it. And all the different types of guns that we would be working on. The type of directors. Everything from the large directors for the 16 inch cannon right on down to the 40 millimeter. It was all basic. Now when we went to advanced fire control, that was another story.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel from New York to Washington?

Mr. Surles

We traveled by train. I got leave from Great Lakes to Lake Charles. And I had 15 days leave. I was home with my folks and I went to Washington from there.

Mr. Misenhimer



When you got to Washington, what did you do there?

Mr. Surles

We went to school. I went to night school. My hours were from 4 to midnight. I went to school five days a week and had two days liberty. Anytime I wasn't in school, I could have liberty. It was up to me to manage my time. If I flunked out of school, it was up to me. You know what I mean?

Mr. Misenhimer

So from midnight until 4 the next evening you were on your own?

Mr. Surles

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you live there?

Mr. Surles

In barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What base was this?

Mr. Surles

It was Anacostia Naval Training Base.

Mr. Misenhimer

You could get a pass to leave if you wanted to? To leave the post?

Mr. Surles

Yes. We had an open pass. It was just in our billfold. It stayed there all the time. We'd kinda growed up, you might say. They gave us kind of an "OK boy, you've done growed up in the Navy a little bit."

Mr. Misenhimer

In your advanced training, did you specialize in certain weapons at this point?

Mr. Surles

No. We specialized on all aspects in fire control. Everything from the 37 director, which was the big director that incorporated the range finder with also the 37 director radar, the new mark 22 radar that came along with these directors. We had the mark 52 director that was with the 40 mm, and plus the mark 15 gun sight directors.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that school then?

Mr. Surles

It was six months.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, on your time off, you went into downtown Washington, DC, I assume?

Mr. Surles

Yea, we went into downtown and did things that young men did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the civilians there friendly to you all?

Mr. Surles

Oh, very friendly. Washington, DC in those days was a very nice town. You could go anywhere you wanted to go without having to worry about getting into a fight with anybody or get robbed or beat up or whatever. It's not that way now, but it was then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there a lot of service men in town?

Mr. Surles

Oh yea. There was a tremendous amount of service people. They always had dances for service men at the Willard Hotel. They had them on Thursday nights and Saturday nights. They usually had a main band there that would donate their time and what have you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now if you were going to class at night, you could only go on Saturdays, is that right?

Mr. Surles

On Saturday we'd be off.

Mr. Misenhimer

You could only go to the dance on Saturday, cause on Thursday night you were in class.

Mr. Surles

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular that stands out from your time there?

Mr. Surles

Well, being a country boy, it was a pretty good-sized town. I did a lot and got to see a lot of things I never would have seen. I went and saw some of the sights up there, such as Arlington. I was interested in that. I saw everything that Arlington had to offer up there, as far as the Unknown Soldier and all those things and The Memorial and what have you. Also, made all the beer joints I could find.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go to the White House, the Capitol, or anything like that?

Mr. Surles

Yea, I went to the Capitol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from that time there?

Mr. Surles

Well, I met the girl I married later on there.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you meet her?

Mr. Surles

We kept showing up at the same places. Different places, like the High Score Bowling Alley, or on a bus route going to town, or in the theater. Never did date or anything. That's another story in itself, which I'll tell you later. I never dated her. I only had four dates with her when I married her. That was after I got on the Franklin.

Mr. Misenhimer

But, you'd known her for a while then?

Mr. Surles

Well, not really. Just casually. I knew her daddy. He picked me up one night. I was broke, standing out on the corner and needed a ride. He picked me up. He owned a taxi cab company and he happened to be driving that night and asked me, "hey sailor, you need a ride?" And I said, "I sure do and I'm broke on top of it." So he said, "come on, I'll take you to your base." So he took me and I met him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else along that line happen there? Any other incidents?

Mr. Surles

Nothing really, other than we did the normal things that sailors did. We'd have parties, a bunch of us would get out, you know. We'd just get together and blow off steam.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many in your class?

Mr. Surles

Each individual class, we had about 20 men. We had several classes. They rotated the type of, the instructors. The instructors rotated through the classes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these instructors civilian, or where they military?

Mr. Surles

They were military. And we had tech reps on certain things like Ford range finder, or something of that nature, a special thing like a computer or something.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then where did you go when you finished there?

Mr. Surles

I went to Newport, Rhode Island to McGruder's Hell Hole. Ever hear of Captain McGruder?

Mr. Misenhimer

No, I haven't. Tell me about him.

Mr. Surles

Well, he wasn't very well thought of in the United States Navy. I went there for about 30 days for precommissioning detail. Went back to boot camp. He made everybody wear leggings, undressed blues. We had to salute the Chief Petty Officers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you say precommissioning. Were you being commissioned as an officer there?

Mr. Surles

No. I got busted there from 3rd class petty officer—I made 3rd class at Washington, DC. I was 31 minutes over leave and Captain McGruder called me to the Captain's mast and busted me from 3rd class back to Seaman 1st. So as soon as I got aboard the Franklin on January 29<sup>th</sup>, we pulled out and went over to Portsmouth. As soon as we got settled back in, that's when Captain Shoemaker

gave me my commission back. He gave me my petty officer commission back. They told me that. They said McGruder would court martial somebody just because he got a thrill out of it. So, I stayed 3<sup>rd</sup> class.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you were waiting for the Franklin. Was it already in service, or just going to service?

Mr. Surles

It had already been floated and had been christened and when I got aboard it, I got aboard it on January 29<sup>th</sup> of 1944. That's some of the stuff I've got here if you want. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1944, we were towed from, had a ceremony if I remember correctly, the guy's name was Gates. He was my father's lieutenant on the USS California. That's an odd thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure it is. Right.

Mr. Surles

He was Secretary of the Navy at the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was his name?

Mr. Surles

Gates. Let's see, yes, he was Secretary of the Navy, named Gates. He was a lieutenant in the Navy when my father was in the Navy in World War I. He was my dad's company commander aboard the USS California. That's weird, isn't it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to meet him then?

Mr. Surles

No. Me meet him? No way (laughing). We had our ceremony and they put tugboats alongside us and they pulled us over to Portsmouth, Virginia. They started provisioning us and getting us ready. We were doing all that for a full 30 days or so and then we went to sea for the first time into Chesapeake Bay for about two weeks of tryouts. We got to shoot our guns for the first time and at the same time, we zeroed, boresighted our guns and did all the alignment and everything we needed to do before we went into the shakedown cruise. Then when we got back, we had a few weeks, that's when I got married. I got married April 24. In fact, my wife and I will be married 60 years the 24<sup>th</sup> of this month.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, congratulations!

Mr. Surles

Thank you. Anyhow, we left Norfolk to go on shakedown in the Caribbean, 11 days after the 24<sup>th</sup>. What would that figure out to be?

Mr. Misenhimer

That'd be like the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of May or something like that, right?

Mr. Surles

I think it was May the 5<sup>th</sup>. I think it was 11 days, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the number of the Franklin?

Mr. Surles



CV13.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was a fleet carrier? Full size?

Mr. Surles

You know, I've got that thing wrong. We went on shakedown. Then I came back and married her the 24<sup>th</sup>. Yea, that's the way it was. Then we pulled out and went to the Pacific. Let's get it straight. Like I told you, I get kind of confused on things sometimes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine, no problem.

Mr. Surles

When you get old like that. Anyhow, when I came back from the shakedown cruise is when I married her. I married her on April 24<sup>th</sup>. For the shakedown, we went on down to the Caribbean and spent a couple of weeks and came back. We did everything down there. We got to where we could shoot real good, got everything lined up and shot at targets and did everything, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have planes on there at this point?

Mr. Surles

Yes, we had our air group, and they were doing all their thing. They were getting their airplanes in shape, the pilots in shape and getting used to landing and everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you considered to be a plank owner?

Mr. Surles

Yes sir, I was a plank owner.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the armament on the Franklin?

Mr. Surles

Well, I can tell you pretty well. We had twin five-inch—we had four of them. We had two twin five-inch forward on the starboard side of the Franklin, and we had two twin five-inch on the after end. They were controlled by mark 37 directors. That's where my battle station was, in the forward 37 director.

Mr. Misenhimer

How far down from the flight deck was this?

Mr. Surles

You mean above the flight deck?

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, above the flight deck, wherever, OK.

Mr. Surles

The guns were below us. They were on the flight deck.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were above them.

Mr. Surles

I was as high as you could get on that carrier. I was on those five-inch. Then we had four five-inch forwards, single mounts. Two mark fifty-two directors

controlled on those mounts. We had two five-inch aft controlling those mounts. I'll just tell you overall on the entire ship. We had 16, 40mm mounts. They were quad 40's. However many guns that is, 4 X 16.

Mr. Misenhimer

64.

Mr. Surles

I don't remember how many 20mm we had. We had a lot of them. I think something like about 40 of them or something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now these five-inch, they were dual purpose, anti-aircraft and bombardment?

Mr. Surles

They were five inch, 38's, they were dual purpose surface and aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer

You controlled which ones of them now?

Mr. Surles

The ones I was on, my battle station, was on the 37 director on the forward five-inch 38's.

Mr. Misenhimer

The twin mount, or all of them?

Mr. Surles

Well, we could control anything forward. We could control even the five-inch mounts. We could control them from there, but we didn't. All we ever controlled, our primary control, was the five-inch that were mounted on the flight deck,

forward of the island. Two of them were up kind of on the island, the other two were right on the flight deck.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now they were in a turret of some sort, is that right?

Mr. Surles

They were in an enclosed turret.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your trip down the Panama Canal. Anything happen on the way down?

Mr. Surles

Not going down. Going through the canal, we had the usual guys that got drunk, got in fistfights and got drunk and got sick at their stomach. Of course, one thing about Panama, the food was fantastic down there. You know what they got down there. I'm just not going to elaborate on that. I think the whole world knows about what they had down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you got down, did you anchor before you went through?

Mr. Surles

We had to anchor because they welded bumpers on the sides to keep it from bumping against the locks. We used rope, four-inch rope also to feed alongside, if we were going through the locks, to act as bumpers.

Mr. Misenhimer

How much clearance did you have on the sides?

Mr. Surles

Eight inches—four inches on each side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Wow. That's getting pretty close.

Mr. Surles

Yes it is. If I remember correctly, that's what it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a chance to go ashore there then?

Mr. Surles

I went ashore in Colon.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that on the Atlantic or the Pacific side?

Mr. Surles

That was on the Atlantic side. I didn't bother going ashore on the Pacific side. I had had enough of it already. Coming back, I went ashore just to eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long did it take you to go through the canal?

Mr. Surles

Overnight. We went through, then we had to have the bumpers taken off, you know. They welded them on, then they had to cut them off with cutting torches.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many bumpers did they put on?

Mr. Surles

You know, I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

A large number though, huh?

Mr. Surles

No, I think there were two on each side. Where the hull stuck out, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the length of that ship?

Mr. Surles

866 ft. This book I've got has got everything in there, but I'm not looking it up right now.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that sounds about right

Mr. Surles

They lengthened it a little bit after we got hit with that suicide plane that time.

They lengthened it some more, the flight deck, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of planes did you have on board?

Mr. Surles

F6F's. We had, I forget what they called those dive-bombers, and we had the TBF torpedo bombers.

Mr. Misenhimer

The dive-bombers were SB2C's, weren't they?

Mr. Surles

SB2C3's. Boy, I'm glad you remember that. I wasn't an air dale, so I was helping protect the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, when you left the canal, where did you go?

Mr. Surles

We went straight on to Hawaii at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went to Hawaii, were you in a convoy? Were other ships with you?

Mr. Surles

No, we just went straight on across, three days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you zigzag, do you know?

Mr. Surles

I'm sure they did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you ever have any general quarters?

Mr. Surles

Nothing at all going over. As we got hit, I'll tell you about the experience we had.

I've never seen it listed in any article.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, let's not forget that after while then.

Mr. Surles

All right. 880 feet, my wife said that thing was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then, when you got to Hawaii, what did you do there?

Mr. Surles

We did the usual thing, went ashore, sightseeing. I went to the Dole pineapple plant, had a few drinks downtown.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your ship do there?

Mr. Surles

We reprovisioned and got ourselves provisioned for heading through the central Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Surles

Gosh, I don't know. I've got it listed here somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just a short period of time?

Mr. Surles

It wasn't very long. I'll tell you what we did do while we were there. We did some maneuvers, we shot at some drones and what have you, radio-controlled planes.

I had the privilege to get my butt chewed out because they had a B25, I think it was, that brought a drone out to us and I was picking them up on the radar. He was supposed to be coming in behind the radar, supposed to be 1000 yards above them. He wasn't. He was in the wrong quadrant. I picked him up and we



commenced firing. I filled his damn plane full of shrapnel. He went flying back to Pearl and we had a big rigamarole. Nothing happened though. We were lucky we had a good Captain that understood those things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nobody got hurt on the plane, huh?

Mr. Surles

No one got hurt, thank God. That's one of those things that's not written up too. I'm just telling you about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. This is things we want to know.

Mr. Surles

Yea, I cranked him in, cause he was the biggest blip on that screen. That's what happened to him. He wasn't where he was supposed to be.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Surles

We went on back. I got back and everything, we did all our things. We got our pilots on board and they got the planes back on the flight deck. They flew them abroad and we head on out to Eniwetok.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you went to Eniwetok, were you by yourself? Or were you with other ships at that point?

Mr. Surles

We picked up some destroyers then. I don't remember all that, exactly how it happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

From where you were in your fire control station up there, could you see out?

Mr. Surles

No, you couldn't see out. We had some hatches we could climb up on and sit on and we could see forever then.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you were in an enclosed room when you were on duty?

Mr. Surles

Well, when you were in there, there wasn't much room. You had your gunnery officer, gun pointer, gun director pointer, elevation pointer, rangefinder operator and the radar operator.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is this what they call the CIC?

Mr. Surles

No, CIC was down below. They operated the search radar and we were in telephone contact with them. They were the ones that picked them up. They gave us the coordinates and we'd crank in on them, once we picked them up, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you arrive in Eniwetok?

Mr. Surles

I don't know. I'll tell you when the first action was. We left out of Pearl Harbor on June 15. That's in '44. Let's see, I've got to read all this here. It says here Hawaii quickly dropped into the sea and we left them. It said the Franklin, with her escorts, will remain a reserve in the Eniwetok area as reinforcements until called upon. On June 17, the Franklin crossed the International Dateline, blah, blah, blah, and everybody became a, I forget what you call it when you cross the International Dateline, sort of like being a shell back. They arrived at Eniwetok on June the 21<sup>st</sup>.

The Japanese navy was steaming toward the sea of Saipan. It was a job of Task Force 58 (that was us), to see that it never got there. 400 miles from Saipan, the Japanese launched a cloud of dive-bombers and torpedo planes, which the Japs believed would seal the issue. However, Admiral Mitscher, that was who our commander was on this trip, not Halsey. That's when we had that Philippine turkey shoot, and shot all those damn planes down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Marianas turkey shoot, they called it.

Mr. Surles

Marianas, yea. But the Big Ben never got into his first battle of the Philippine sea since the Japanese navy did one of its famous vanishing acts. Mitscher tracked it down with air cover. Then we got into the second job and that was when the big shoot happened. We were in the company of the Wasp, there was a group, the light carriers Monterey, the Cabot, all escorted by the cruisers—Boston, Canberra, San Juan, with nine destroyers in the stream. That was our group.

Then we went on into it and we were constantly told to patrol the search planes, etc. Snoopers. I remember that. They'd send those boogers out every night and every night we'd shoot'em down. Our plane, you know, we'd send out night fighters. It was usually those Emilies. When they'd fly, they were so big, that their wings, when you'd see them in daylight, the wings would flop. They moved.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, that was a big flying boat? Right? A four-engine flying boat, the Emily?

Mr. Surles

Yea, big, big, big, dang thing. It was really big, you know. The task group was only 400 miles from Iwo Jima at that time and we made several strikes on Iwo Jima. Didn't know just what they really had there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were there around the Marianas? Saipan/Tinian?

Mr. Surles

We were around the Marianas and around Saipan and all that. Mostly there were fights between our pilots. Occasionally we'd have somebody slip in on us and we would have a little, you know, a little dust-up go on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your ship shoot any planes down at that point?

Mr. Surles

Yes. A little later on we got involved in some stuff. We shot some Betty torpedo bombers down one night. I think about eight or nine of them shot down about 11 seconds. One of them come across the flight deck over my head and took the

set of the britches out of Lt. Winters. We shot the plane up real bad. One of the gun mounts I was on was shooting him. We shot that plane up real bad and knocked the right wing tip off of it. It hit the Lt. He was running to get away from it. Hit him right in the seat of his britches. Tore the whole seat out and did not put a scratch on that man. He was very lucky.

Mr. Misenhimer

That is amazing.

Mr. Surles

Yes it was. He was a great guy, too. Everybody loved old Lt. Winters. I've got a piece of that plane somewhere here at the house.

Mr. Misenhimer

It didn't actually land on the ship, it didn't hit the ship?

Mr. Surles

No, well, it skidded across the flight deck and come right over my head, right over my gun mount. It dropped some metal into the gun tub with me. At that time I was on a 40 mm gun. I was on watch when it happened. I didn't even have time to get to my battle station. I was caught on watch. So there I was. We didn't even have time to do anything. But, we shot down a bunch of those planes that night.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, you had two places, your battle station was in the gun directors?

Mr. Surles

Well, we stood watch all over the ship. Different gun stations so you could be ambidextrous, you know, you could do anything that had to be done.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was a typical day like? Take me through a typical day. What time did you get up, and what happened?

Mr. Surles

Well, you want a battle condition day, or just a cruising day?

Mr. Misenhimer

First of all, give me a battle condition day.

Mr. Surles

Battle condition day you would be on watch. Probably on 4 and off 4. In some cases you'd be on 6 and off 6 or something like that. But if you were in condition 1 you stayed on your battle station. Round the clock, you slept there and everything, ate there. They'd bring your lunch to you, whatever. Regular condition day, you'd get up and clean up your battle station. Clean up and do whatever needed to be done to maintain your battle station and all your bedding, your bunk or whatever. You'd have time to write letters. It went like that, on just a regular day. More or less an eight-hour deal.

Mr. Misenhimer

During a regular day, not a combat day, how much time did you spend in the fire control area?

Mr. Surles

I'd have to spend a four hour watch out of every 12.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were four groups of you that would be up there?

Mr. Surles

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened?

Mr. Surles

One thing that's interesting that happened one time during our cruise, we had one of our Lt. Commanders that walked off the end of the flight deck. Luckily the last destroyer in the group found him and picked him up. I threw him a life preserver with a little lamp on it, hollered "man overboard."

Mr. Misenhimer

How did he walk off the flight deck?

Mr. Surles

The flight crew had forgotten to put the chain up on the end of the flight deck. It was pitch dark and he was walking to where he thought was his battle station and he just walked right off the end of the flight deck. He fell into the water. Good thing they had not put that extension on the flight deck or he'd have killed himself.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you threw him a life preserver?

Mr. Surles

Yea.

Mr. Misenhimer

What about the light on his vest or something?

Mr. Surles

Yea, they'd get a little light. We all carried them. So if we fell overboard we could turn them on and you could see them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he have a life preserver on? A life jacket?

Mr. Surles

No, he didn't. He might have had one, I don't know. I know that I threw him one anyhow. I don't even know if he got it or not.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say he was an Olympic swimmer?

Mr. Surles

Yes sir. He did pretty good.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was the rear he walked off, not the front, right?

Mr. Surles

No, the front. He walked right off the front end of it. He was picked up an hour later by one of our destroyers.

Mr. Misenhimer

The ship didn't suck him under or anything when it went by then?

Mr. Surles



I don't have any idea. I never got a chance to talk to the gentleman. He was a medical doctor. In fact, I didn't dare talk to him about it. I don't think he was in the mood to be talked to.

Mr. Misenhimer

I imagine not. What are some other things that happened?

Mr. Surles

We had the usual things that happened, tempers would flare, things of that nature. If we had anything happen in the department where two guys got into it, we'd separate it or we would get separated. You know what I mean? We'd never say anything about it and that would be the end of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, how many different islands did you all attack? Do you know? Your planes, or whatever?

Mr. Surles

Let's see. We started out in the Carolines, got into the Marianas. We were in the Philippines in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Guam, Peleliu. I'm giving you these, maybe out of order.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. OK.

Mr. Surles

Palau, Luzon, Surigao Strait. I'm trying to think where all we went. Iwo Jima, Haha Jima, Chichi Jima. These were all targets. We got hit by a kamikaze also. October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Surles

It was right after the Battle of Leyte Gulf. We had been in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, nothing exciting had happened to us there. We were operating off the coast of Luzon. We had these planes come out and attack us and two dive-bombers came in after us. One of them dropped his bomb and missed us. It went into the ocean and missed us. He tried to hit us. The second one dropped his bomb, no he didn't drop the bomb, he hit us. If I remember correctly, it had a 250 lb. bomb on it. There have been several stories about the guy that was flying this plane. Some say that he was shot up before he got there and was dead when he got there. It's in the book I've got here. Another said he was an Admiral just trying to show it, this was the first capital ship, major ship that got hit by a kamikaze in WWII. The Franklin was the first one. Then we came back and spent Christmas at home for them repairing the ship in Bremerton, Washington in 1944. Then we went back out and that's when we got into the big one. That's when the Franklin suffered the big one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Surles

Well, here we go now. This is gonna be the end of this now. What happened, the end of this thing, when the Franklin got hit this last time, we got hit by two 500 lb. bombs. We were off the coast of Japan. We were up, some people say 45

miles, some people say 60 miles. I don't know which is correct. Somewhere between 45 and 60 miles we were off the coast of Japan. Our entire group was up there, at Kyushu. What they were doing was trying to finish off that Jap air force and getting everything ready for the invasion of Okinawa. Now this was, we got hit on March 19, 1945. At that time, I tell you where I started. I was on watch on the fantail. On the quad 40's on the fantail. At about 25 minutes till 7:00 that morning, on the telephone I got orders from the command for me to go up and relieve one of my best friends, Leonard McGlone. He was a fire control man, 2<sup>nd</sup> Class. At the forward director, where my battle station was. At that forward 37 director, 5". He wanted me to go up there and relieve him so he could go down and eat chow. They were getting ready to start launching aircraft for the morning exercise on Japan. We were that close to Japan. I'm sure you already know some of this story. I got all my stuff ready and everything and here's something that was not told. I've never heard it told and I've told it to people and they've never even bothered to write it up. Some of the guys that were in the "F" division would tell them the same thing. CIC had notified us of bogies in the area. We picked up on, they notified us of two that we picked up on. There was one that the USS Enterprise (I'll tell you about this in a minute) had picked up on some that we hadn't picked up on. But anyhow, we had picked up on these two and I don't know how many ships in the task group they had on them. But we commenced firing on them. Now this was about, I don't know exactly, it was just before we got hit. We started firing, say 30 seconds before we were hit. I'm just using that as a guess. Anyhow, just prior to us getting hit, one of those, the one

that we zeroed in on, disappeared from the screen, which gave us an indication that it was shot down. So I had just started to crank in on the other blip, I had the second blip, started to crank in on it and all of a sudden, BOOM. I mean our jawbones liked to come out of us. That ship was hit. Lt., uh, I get these memory blanks on these guys. Anyhow, our Director Officer, he said we'd been hit. I'll use the expression one of the guys said, "No Shit." So, anyhow, we sat in there and he asked permission to get out of the director. But he couldn't get any telephone, nobody to answer. So he told us to get out of the director and try to assist in any way we could because we had lost all power and everything. So, we came down out of there and somebody said we gotta unload these 40mm. Right below us was where they stored 40mm ammunition for 40mm mounts. We all went down there and helped unload that and threw it over the side. Then we worked our way down to the flight deck and started manning fire hoses, etc. All of us guys. Late that afternoon the fires got to where we could take a little rest and we were trying to find some place to get. So we ended up on the fo'c'sle, me and one of my buddies, Chuck O'Connor, and we helped up there. It was late in the evening and they were tying onto the Pittsburgh and they started towing us. They towed us all night. We just more or less conked out and did everything we could to help. We were just physically beat, all of us. Just rum dum, to tell you the truth. So anyhow we helped every way we could. We fought off sleep in any way we could. It was wet, we were cold. I got to where on some of that, I just blanked it out. But anyhow, that next day we manned some 20mms on the starboard side. There was a bunch of us there. And the 40mm, we were doing

everything by hand control. Course, the 20mm was all done by hand. There were 704 of us that stayed on that ship. We were part of the 704 Club, we were called. Of course there were a lot of things went on there and none of us knew what was happening. But they were saving a lot of men's lives. There were a lot of guys trapped below that we didn't know about. But we had to man those guns. So we got up there and manned those and we got under attack. A dive-bomber came in on us and I'm gonna tell you, if it wouldn't have been for those 20mm guns that we were on and that 40mm gun that was on the forward end firing, that guy would have got us. When that bomb dropped out of the airplane, he managed to, what we were doing, was shooting him and he got hit. It managed to throw him off and his trajectory was off. But when he dropped that bomb, that was the biggest thing I've ever seen coming out of an airplane. I thought to myself, boy, it's over. But anyhow, it hit the water on the other side of us. It blew up in the water. The Captain leaned over the side and he told us, you just saved this ship. So he wanted our names and what have you but we didn't have time to give them to him right then. The guy on the 40mm got a bronze star. None of us did; that was the last we heard of it. I don't know what happened, but that's immaterial. But this kid named Teddy Arnold—I was loading the 20mm for him. He had been in the armed guard and he was real good on those 20mms. So the ship owes that boy a lot and no one ever mentioned his name at any time. But I'm mentioning it because I was there and I saw what happened. He probably had, him and a boy named Warren Covault, both of them had been in the Armed Guard and both of them were the ones that were doing the actual firing on those

20's. I want to tell you something, if anybody deserves a medal, they did. They didn't get it, but as far as I'm concerned, they darn sure had it coming to them. Anyhow, they were the ones that really saved that ship. When that plane came in that close, those 20mm's, they were mechanical and they depend on somebody stepping on a pedal. Those cartridges were comin' out of those barrels. That was the end of the combat. We didn't have anymore combat after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up a minute. When that kamikaze hit you, where did it hit the ship?

Mr. Surles

It hit right next to the island. Just after it, the end of the island.

Mr. Misenhimer

How far from the water, or how far from the top?

Mr. Surles

It hit right at the base of the flight deck, on the island. I tell you, when the Franklin got hit on that thing, I'm thinking there was something like about 60 – 80 men killed on that thing. The whole combat death on the Franklin was 921 men killed. I can tell you the total killed on March 19 was 724. And between the kamikaze and the loss of our pilots, and the loss of another time we got dive-bombed and the bomb hit the flight deck elevator and it killed, I think, or wounded 8-10 men, or something like that. The Franklin also, had two men receive Congressional Medals of Honor. Father O'Callahan who was the only chaplain in WWII to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor; and Donald Gary, who was a

Lieutenant who was in damage control—I believe he was in damage control. He received a Congressional Medal of Honor too. Overall the ship was the most highly decorated ship in the history of the United States Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now they got the Medal of Honor because of this March 19<sup>th</sup> attack?

Mr. Surles

Because of the March 19<sup>th</sup>, Father O'Callahan and Donald Gary, they say they saved over 300 men's lives. They deserved it, too. You would have to read the story of what they did. It was unreal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Awhile ago you were talking about the Enterprise. What happened with the Enterprise?

Mr. Surles

Yes, on the Enterprise, they had picked us up on the radar and they had radioed lookout Franklin above. And the plane that hit us had come out of the clouds. It wasn't even on our radar. We didn't even know it was there. We had a real low ceiling and when he came in he dropped two 500-lb. bombs—one 500 lb. bomb at midship and one forward. One of them hit on the after end of the ship and the other hit at midship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now was that the kamikaze that got you on the 19<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Surles

No, no. On October 30<sup>th</sup> was when the kamikaze got us.

Mr. Misenhimer

October 30, 1944. March 19, 1945 was when the plane dropped the two bombs, off the coast of Kyushu. Now when did these people get the Medal of Honor?

For which one? For March 19<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Surles

That's when they got the Congressional Medal of Honor. Lt. Graham, he got the Distinguished Service Cross, or Silver Star. He should have gotten the Congressional Medal of Honor, the way I saw it, but, of course, I didn't give them out. I was just a fire controlman, 3<sup>rd</sup> class.

Mr. Misenhimer

So there were a lot of flames, fire, big fire?

Mr. Surles

A lot of fire, a lot of men burned to death, a lot of men got blown overboard. The USS Santa Fe, that cruiser, pulled alongside us and helped save the ship. They did a lot of fire fighting and they took a lot of our wounded and everything off. We had several destroyers that helped us a lot that should be commended. By the way, my wife and I gave a bunch of stuff to the Nimitz museum. She had to sign one of those forms, just like I just gave you on the telephone. She gave a whole lot of information and stuff that they wanted. One of them was a copy of an original statement that Gabriel Heater gave about the USS Franklin. The guy that got that thing, believe it or not, was Robert Tice, the boy I asked you to call. He is a very interesting person and I think you would enjoy talking to him. Now, he's hearing impaired. Now Robert Blanchard, I have his phone number also, if



you want to hold on, so you can call him. Have you seen this photograph of a young man lying on a flight deck with his chaplain leaning over him giving him the last rites? Robert was the one that was lying on the flight deck. He was in my division, and is a very close friend of me and my wife and family. We are very close. So if you want me to, I'll go look, I've got it right here. I'll give it to you. Robert can give you a lot of information.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK. I'm ready.

Mr. Surles

His name is Robert C. Blanchard. His address is: 8 Bellwood Court, Barnegat, NJ 08005-3124. His telephone number is 609-698-6495. You would enjoy talking with Bob Tice. He was under me on the Franklin. I hate to say that, because he was a seaman and I was a petty officer. But, he and I were the same age and we are just damn good friends. Super nice guy.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, I'll give both of them a call.

Mr. Surles

Yes, they can put you next to other people. I'll see about getting you one of these books and send that to you.

Mr. Misenhimer

OK, that would be great.

Mr. Surles

There is a lot of reading in it and you could really put a lot of stuff together.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, then, what did the Franklin do after March 19<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Surles

Well, after March 19<sup>th</sup>, we got underway and ended up going to Ulithe. We pulled into Ulithe and there we refueled and got some decent food to eat for a change. I went two weeks and all I ate was Spam and pineapple. It was a long time before I could eat a slice of Spam or a pineapple. But, I can do it now. Anyhow, after we left there we went to Pearl Harbor. Pulled in there and had a little reception there and I'll tell you a thing that happened there that I hate. We had a fire control man named Goetz, Jack Goetz was his name. He got killed. He was also one of our friends, you know. We were all pretty close in that division. His father was a commander, stationed at Ford Island, there at Pearl Harbor. He came aboard to see his son. All he got to see was the Captain to tell him that his son had been killed. He had a heart attack, right there.

Mr. Misenhimer

The father did?

Mr. Surles

Yes, the father did. It was hard, when the man came aboard, and we saw what happened, that hurt pretty much.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did the son get killed?

Mr. Surles

I don't know. I don't have any idea, an explosion of some kind, or you know, I don't know the exact circumstances. Anyway, my friend that I relieved for chow, he got killed and I found his body. I didn't go into all the gory details. I had to survey his locker and that was one of the toughest things I ever did in my life.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, I can imagine.

Mr. Surles

I was best man in his wedding. I was pretty freaked out. In fact, it's still tough sometimes to talk about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I imagine. Right.

Mr. Surles

But, I made a lot of friends there. A lot of them are still my friends. We meet every now and then. In fact, my wife and I went to Fredericksburg and met one of them. He lives in Canyon Lake, just a little ways from Fredericksburg. So we went to visit with him and got that plaque dedicated and everything that my wife and them got for me. Carl came down from Canyon Lake and helped do it.

Anyhow, when we left Pearl we came back through the Panama again. We left Panama, that's what I want to tell you another interesting thing that happened. We still had to stand our watches whether we was gonna do anything or not, you know. And I was standing watch with one of my buddies, his name was Carroll Hook. We were standing watch on the after 37 director, which is opposite the one that my battle station was one. We saw a periscope. We were

unescorted, we didn't have anything with us. But, we were running on our own power. Pittsburgh towed us that night, I told you about the Pittsburgh. They towed us all that night, then we got under our own power. Got four boilers going, then we got six boilers going, then we got more boilers going. So we could steam it up pretty good. Anyhow, we came back through the Panama and were headed back to Brooklyn Navy Yard. That's where we ended up. Anyhow, we weren't too far from North Carolina, off the coast of North Carolina there, and there was a dang periscope. So we called it up to the tower and there wasn't supposed to be American subs right in that area, so it was probably a German. But nothing ever happened. They didn't do anything to us and we didn't do anything to them. So, whether they were German or not, I don't know. But it was just an incident that happened on the way back.

Mr. Misenhimer

How far was that periscope from your ship?

Mr. Surles

Five or six hundred yards.

Mr. Misenhimer

Pretty close then?

Mr. Surles

Yes sir. It was going the opposite direction we were going in. It was just one of those things. My buddy and I reported it and that's something else I haven't read about anywhere. So you got an exclusive. We ended up in Brooklyn Navy Yard and we all dispersed and I got discharged from the Navy while I was in New

York. They started discharging everybody about that time. I was discharged September 17<sup>th</sup>, I believe it was. I came home and went to work for City Service here at Lake Charles. Been working ever since.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright, let me go back and ask a few questions here. What ribbons or medals did you get?

Mr. Surles

I didn't get any medals for bravery or anything. I did what everybody else did. I got my commendations. I got the Philippine government commendation, a little extra, for what we did in the Battle of Leyte Gulf. I got the Asiatic Pacific. I got Battle stars for four major campaigns. We were in 22 combats.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, let me ask you about the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Now, Halsey took a bunch of the carriers and went off running away after somebody else.

Mr. Surles

That's what happened. We were at Surigao Strait and we went off and left the Seventh Fleet sitting flat feet. Chasing after what he thought were aircraft carriers going north.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. You were with Halsey doing that run, right?

Mr. Surles

Yes. Bull Halsey. He made a mistake on that one. I didn't know what a big deal it was till just here awhile back. I had never given it any thought, you know. We did sink one aircraft carrier as a result of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

They didn't have any planes, they were sent down just as bait to draw him off.

Mr. Surles

Just for bait, that's what it was all about. He also made a mistake in the Philippine Sea storms when we went in them. I didn't realize what a mistake. We lost more destroyers and I was in that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Pretty rough time, huh?

Mr. Surles

Yes. We lost four destroyers. I had a neighbor that was on the Monterey, in one of them. It was a baby carrier. He lost both his legs and both his arms. He died later on. He didn't live very long after the war. He lived right next to me. His name was Rice. He stayed on morphine till he died. In pain till he died.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the Pharmacist Mates, or the medics? What did you think of them?

Mr. Surles

Our pharmacist mates? We had very good pharmacist mates.

Mr. Misenhimer

With all the damage you had, I suppose they were very busy, right?

Mr. Surles

Yea, you know what was funny? We had two morticians aboard ship. And when we got hit with that kamikaze that time, when they blew general quarters we were down in the chow hall watching a movie. Some old cowboy movie that went back to the days of Buck Jones. I was talking to a guy, I didn't know who he was so, of course, 3,000 men aboard ship, it's hard to know everybody. Anyhow I got to talking to him, he was a mortician on the Franklin. We had two of them. And guess what? He was one of the guys that got killed. Ain't that something? When they blew general quarters I left there and went to my battle station and he stayed down there in the chow hall and got himself killed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, you never know.

Mr. Surles

Right. That's the first time—I'd only met him for a few minutes. They had all the bodies laying down there in body bags and everything. Trying to get them in body bags and there he was. I said, "My God." I just talked to him, you know? Some of them got it, some of them didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Surles

The only one I ever saw was in port. I'm trying to think of the name of the guy. He was a banjo player.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know who you mean. Where was that at?

Mr. Surles

It was on the Franklin after we got him with that kamikaze. He came aboard in Eniwetok and entertained us. He's the only one I ever saw.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Armed Forces Radio?

Mr. Surles

You know what we heard in the Pacific? Tokyo Rose. I enjoyed her. All of us did. She was the most enjoyable thing we could listen to. A lot of people thought she did harm. She wasn't doing any harm. I mean, heck, we got a kick out of her. You know what I mean?

Mr. Misenhimer

She entertained you, yea.

Mr. Surles

We turned the PA system on so we could hear her.

Mr. Misenhimer

In April of '45 President Roosevelt died. Do you recall that?

Mr. Surles

Yes sir. When they announced it to us it was after the Franklin had got those bombs, March 19<sup>th</sup>. They brought us down to the hangar deck. They announced it to us. There wasn't a dry eye on that ship. All 704 of us. The 704 of us that brought that ship back. That was another thing right there. A lot of guys kind of resented us guys that brought the ship back. I don't know why. Well, I think there was too much made of it. So many of those guys that couldn't stay aboard



ship. It was either jump overboard or die. They didn't have no choice. There was too much made of it to tell you the truth about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Surles

No, not too many. Like I said, I come home when that suicide plane hit. I came home with part of the navigation chart that was in the plane that the pilot carried. I came home with part of that airplane, that Japanese Betty that skidded across the flight deck. It dropped a bunch of stuff into the gun tub. I didn't try to bring anything home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Surles

Yes. All they ever did was bring us a few donuts and some coffee. You wanna hear the truth? They disappeared with the officers. I ain't sayin' no more. In fact, I had to deliver a telegram from an officer's wife to him while he was in a compartment with one of them. He was surprised when I brought him that. From that point on, he and I were buddies.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Surles

For the most part, excellent. We had the usual people. The last captain we had was a very strict disciplinarian. Very arrogant. He was an old mustang. He went

up through ranks. Tough as a boot. But, I guess maybe it was a good thing he was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, was he there when you got hit on March 19<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Surles

Yes sir. Captain Shoemaker was a wonderful person, the first captain we had. He was on there when we got hit October 30<sup>th</sup>. Everybody loved him. He was a great guy but I wanna tell you Captain Shoemaker was a tough boot. He was on there when we got hit March 19<sup>th</sup>. He told Admiral Davidson, "Go to Hell." He wasn't going to abandon that ship. By God we didn't and we brought it back and it was the only aircraft carrier that suffered that kind of damage and came back in WWII.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right. I've read about that. Right.

Mr. Surles

So just through his stubbornness and said he wasn't leaving them 300 men. He knew all those men were trapped down there. He said, I'm not abandoning them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you able to get them out?

Mr. Surles

Yea, we got them out. That's what I was talking about. Donald Gary and Father O'Callahan. They were the two guys that pulled their boot straps up and led

them out. There was a lot of bravery that went on on that ship, a lot of guts. A lot of it was never rewarded. People never asked for anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it the Franklin that was the most damaged ship that came back, or was that another one?

Mr. Surles

I don't know of any other ship that was more damaged than that and came back under its own power. Now there might have been some destroyers that came back with a lot of damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

No. I'm talking about a capital ship. So did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life when you got out?

Mr. Surles

Yea, most of us did. I think we mistreated our wives and everything. We had a, I think we went into ourselves. You know? Kinda hard to explain. When you see things like that you start wondering about a lot of things. You wonder why. It takes a lot of time to get over it. You drink too much. You either turn fanatically religious or they just went wild as hell and drank and raised hell like I did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Surles

We've had them. I've only been to two of the big reunions. What we did, we started having reunions of our division. Because we all knew each other. We

were a very close-knit reunion. We had a wonderful chief named Ferrell Klutzz. He's still living, by the way, and we all see each other occasionally. He's 90 some years old. He lives in Hemet, California. You might wanna talk to him.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say Tice or Blanchard can give me some more names, huh?

Mr. Surles

Yea. But I can give you his name if you want it. I've got his telephone number and everything if you want it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure. OK. Did you use your GI bill when you got home?

Mr. Surles

Na, I went to work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you when they dropped the atomic bomb?

Mr. Surles

Here at Lake Charles.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were out of this, when did you get discharged?

Mr. Surles

I got discharged September 27, 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, OK. August the 6<sup>th</sup> was when they dropped the atomic bomb.

Mr. Surles

Yea. I don't remember what year it was. What year was it?

Mr. Misenhimer

1945. August 6<sup>th</sup> of '45.

Mr. Surles

OK. Well, I was in the Navy then. I didn't remember what happened. I was too busy just foolin' around.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan surrendered, did you have any celebrations then?

Mr. Surles

Yea, yea, yea. I celebrated a little bit. Not a whole lot, but a little

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time? Probably a lot of them, huh?

Mr. Surles

Well, there were a lot of them. I think the most frightening time was after we were hit on March 19<sup>th</sup> and it was the night. All that night. With all the death and all that on there I think what I didn't know. We didn't know what was going to happen to us. We didn't know whether we were gonna be a floatin' hulk out there, or whatever, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

The uncertainty.

Mr. Surles

Yea. The uncertainty of it. I guess that was it. I know that when we were relaxed, was when they told us the fifth day after the Franklin was hit that last time that we were out of any danger zone. That's when we relaxed. We were away from any combat-type situation.

This is the end of this tape.

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