

**National Museum of the Pacific War**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

**B. J. Pumphrey**  
**United States Navy, USS *St. Lo*, Pacific War**  
Date of Interview:

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**Mr. Alexander:** This is Mr. Bill—

**Mr. Pumphrey:** B. J. “Bill” Pumphrey.

**Mr. Alexander:** Where do you live?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I live in Ft. Worth, Texas.

**Mr. Alexander:** Can I have your address?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You sure may. Ft. Worth, Texas, 2211 West Magnolia Avenue, 76110.

**Mr. Alexander:** Telephone?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Area code 817-926-6869.

**Mr. Alexander:** We are going to start out at the very beginning of your life. Where were you born and when?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was born in Abilene, Texas, April 6, 1925.

**Mr. Alexander:** I was going to ask about your mother and father. What are their names?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** My father’s name was Charles Monroe Pumphrey and my mother was Lou Elizabeth Cooper Pumphrey.

**Mr. Alexander:** Did you have brothers or sisters?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I had one brother and three sisters.

**Mr. Alexander:** Who were they and are they older or younger?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Much older. My mother and dad were about forty years when they decided they were going to adopt me.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, I see.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** So, I was raised up with older siblings. My brother died when he was fifteen. My three sisters, the oldest one died when she was ninety-one; the next-to-the-oldest one died when she was eighty-five; and the next one died when she was eighty-four.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's pretty good. I'd say just terrific. You were born where?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Abilene.

**Mr. Alexander:** Abilene, that's right.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That's where they adopted me from and then they lived in Paint Rock, Texas.

**Mr. Alexander:** Paint Rock?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, Paint Rock, Texas.

**Mr. Alexander:** I thought I knew most of them but not Paint Rock.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Concho County, county seat of Concho County. Paint Rock got its name from the Indian hieroglyphics on a bluff that runs for three-quarters of a mile and it tells a story. Very interesting. Used to you could go in and it wouldn't cost you anything but now you can't even get in because people defaced some of it.

**Mr. Alexander:** Of course. That's terrible.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** When I was a kid, my brother (he died when I was about five or somewhere in that neighborhood), he would take me over to the bluffs. We'd look at the bluffs and then he'd take me down in this cave. It was not a cave; it was where the water from years had run through this underground and it came out down on the other end of these paintings.

About fifteen years ago, I took my wife out there to show her the bluffs. I knew the owners and I talked to them and they said, "Yes." They sent this man with me because they didn't let you go by yourself. So, we went out there. He was explaining not knowing that I'd lived there, not knowing I knew what these hieroglyphics were talking about. Anyway, we went through that. When he finished, I said, "Oh, by the way, do you know where the entrance to the cave is?" "There's not any cave here." "Oh, there's not?" He said, "I was raised here." I said, "Oh, really? Come go with me." (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Is that right?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He'd lived there all his life.

**Mr. Alexander:** But didn't know about it.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I took him over there and I said, "See there? You go in there and you'll come out where we just left." He said, "I didn't know that."

**Mr. Alexander:** That's interesting.

What about schooling?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I went to school until the ninth grade.

**Mr. Alexander:** In Abilene?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, in Paint Rock. Something about the Depression. Something about had to make a living.

**Mr. Alexander:** You bet your life.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I helped my father raise cotton and cattle and whatever. I didn't go back to school.

**Mr. Alexander:** You say you did?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I did not.

**Mr. Alexander:** This would have been coming up through '37, '38,'39?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes. I went into the service.

**Mr. Alexander:** Let me ask you something. We were getting close to a war, of course, did you decide that this was a good idea? What about your father and mother?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** My dad finally lost what he had.

**Mr. Alexander:** It did happen.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I decided when the Japs jumped us that I'd like to go in the service. My dad wouldn't let me in. He said, "You're too young."

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, you were pretty young.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I waited around until '42 and my mother signed for me. If you can get your mother to sign for you to go into the service, you're doing something.

**Mr. Alexander:** You sure have. When did you get in—July, August?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, I believe it was June.

**Mr. Alexander:** June of 1942. I remember that myself pretty well. I was back in California having a lot of fun.

Where did you go; where did they send you?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** San Diego.

**Mr. Alexander:** How long were you in—

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Boot camp?

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Let's see, I think maybe we were there six to eight weeks. I can't recall for sure.

**Mr. Alexander:** I think at the time it probably was eight, I would think. But maybe not because we had to get people out of there in a hurry. When you got out of there?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I went to Alameda. That's where they had their air base.

**Mr. Alexander:** They sent you out there?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes. For a while I just kicked around because they didn't have any particular thing for me to do, I guess. A bunch of us didn't have anything to do. Finally, one day they said, "You're going to do this, this, this." We did.

**Mr. Alexander:** You had two stripes.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That's right, I had two. Second class. Made that fifty dollars, you know.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, sure. That's a lot of money.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It all went home.

**Mr. Alexander:** Sure, had to. They put you up to go on a ship, is that right?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, let's see. They were flying anti-submarine patrol from Alameda to Alaska. We were flying from the Naval Air Base there in Alameda

anti-submarine patrol from there to Anchorage.

**Mr. Alexander:** You went up in a boat?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Flying.

**Mr. Alexander:** What were you flying?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** PBYS.

**Mr. Alexander:** What were you doing?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was sitting there in a gun blister waiting, I guess, to see a Jap. We had ash cans on there, depth charges for the submarines.

**Mr. Alexander:** Before you got on there you must have had some work done with machine guns.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We went up a ladder and looked down this hole and dropped a penny to see if you could hit it. Don't ask me. I was just doing what I was asked to do plus the fact we had a little gun practice.

**Mr. Alexander:** You must have had to be able to do that. You weren't likely to be shot at, but—

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, we weren't shot at but let me tell you what happened. We were coming back one time from Anchorage and the pilot called in and said, "Bogey," and gave all the coordinates. Then we came back and they told him to check and he checked. Bogey submarine.

**Mr. Alexander:** A bogey submarine, okay.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We flew back around and dropped a depth charge and about four seconds later up came the biggest damn whale you ever saw in your life.

**Mr. Alexander:** A whale!

**Mr. Pumphrey:** So he said, "Scratch one bogey." (laughs)

I didn't like flying in those PBYS simply because you look out there and there was wing spread about one hundred and twenty-five feet long and they were doing this.

**Mr. Alexander:** You mean like wings on a bird?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, just enough to give you "hmmmmm."

**Mr. Alexander:** You didn't much care for that. Did you ask to get out of it?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I had a little problem with the commander. I was an old West Texas boy who hadn't been anywhere in my life. I was going down the street there on the base one day and whether I did or didn't, I don't know.

**Mr. Alexander:** You didn't salute.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He stopped and began to chew my little butt out and I stood there for a few minutes and I said, "Commander, why don't you stick all that bullshit up your ass?"

**Mr. Alexander:** Really?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Really.

**Mr. Alexander:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was a ripe sixteen and a-half.

**Mr. Alexander:** How long were you in the brig?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was in there a day. Next thing I knew they put me onboard a damn carrier.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, I see. He got rid of you.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He did.

**Mr. Alexander:** You expected him to?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't know what I expected because, like I say, I was fresh out of the country.

**Mr. Alexander:** I know.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Those old boys out there in West Texas didn't give a damn. If he wanted to fight, let's fight. If you want to make love, let's make love.

**Mr. Alexander:** I understand that, but you don't do that with a commander.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't know that, see? I hadn't been in there long.

**Mr. Alexander:** Come on. You were down in-

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Diego?

**Mr. Alexander:** No, you were down for eight or ten weeks and you understood a lot about it when you were in boot camp.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I guess so.

**Mr. Alexander:** (laughs) You wouldn't do what you did to a commander.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't know. I whipped two captains in a bar one night.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yeah?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't know if I was supposed to or not but I did.

**Mr. Alexander:** Well, there are always circumstances. We won't go into that right now.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Okay.

**Mr. Alexander:** We're kind of buddies in that sense. But anyway, let's get you on an aircraft carrier.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I went aboard the aircraft carrier; it was the USS *Midway*.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, it was? The *Midway*. Brand new ship.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Not the new one. This was the CVE-63. The same as the *St. Lo*. We'll get to that story a little later.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, I know that story. You're right. They changed the name. We'll get to that in time. You still had two stripes?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I had my two stripes, yes. When I reported aboard ship, I reported to Captain McKenna, Francis J. McKenna.

**Mr. Alexander:** How did he spell that last name?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** M-c-K-e-n-n-a or something like that. It's in the book. All I know is I was his talker.

**Mr. Alexander:** You were his talker? What does that mean?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You have phones and you can talk to any part of the ship you want to. I was his voice. He would give me an order like to the boiler room, landing officer, wherever.



**Mr. Alexander:** You were upside?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Up on the bridge. When he went to the bridge, I went to the bridge. When he came off the bridge, I came off the bridge. Sometimes I didn't think he was going to ever come off the bridge.

**Mr. Alexander:** I'm sure.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** But a great man.

**Mr. Alexander:** You're telling me something here now that you were enjoying what a good opportunity that you're getting.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I'm enjoying what I'm doing because the man in command was a man's man. There was no bs about it. He told us when we went to sea, "Gentlemen, we're at sea. There will be no saluting on this ship as long as I'm your captain."

**Mr. Alexander:** That's very interesting. That made everybody feel pretty good about that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's very interesting. I don't think I've ever heard of anybody doing that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Really?

**Mr. Alexander:** No. When you were going out to sea, where are we now?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We came out of Oakland, back down to Diego. They de-magnetized and took on fuel, ammunition, etc. Then we took off. Went to Pearl Harbor.

**Mr. Alexander:** When you went to Pearl Harbor, it was by yourself or with support?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** When we went to Pearl Harbor, we went by ourselves.

**Mr. Alexander:** You didn't have any destroyers.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No destroyers, no.

**Mr. Alexander:** Where are we now, in 1942 or '43 now?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We're getting close to '43. Let me see; let me think. If I can remember, it was May.

**Mr. Alexander:** You had been flying with the planes for a certain period of time.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** May of '43? I'm trying to think when they invaded Saipan, the Marianas.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's right.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It was in that period.

**Mr. Alexander:** So, you're in that period. And you came out of Pearl?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Pearl.

**Mr. Alexander:** Were you in the Third Fleet or the Fifth Fleet? Did they come out as a fleet when you left there or what did you do?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We left there and that morning when I went to chow, we were with a group of ships. I don't know what time they got it up.

**Mr. Alexander:** Did you notice a lot of them?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** There were just three or four, five. Destroyers and one thing and another. They were going the same direction we were.

**Mr. Alexander:** You were the only flattop?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Best I can recall.

**Mr. Alexander:** Did you know where you were headed for?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Nobody knew.

**Mr. Alexander:** But when you got there, what was it?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Before we got there, one morning we went down to chow and the old cook says, "How do you like your eggs fixed today?" Uh huh. I said, "Where are we going, Cookie?" And he said, "I don't know." But we're going into something. That's where we were going—we were going to Saipan. We went to Saipan and then Tinian and then Guam and then we went to—

**Mr. Alexander:** We're going too fast. Right now you're going into Saipan.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We were there about three days maybe, I don't know. The Japanese fleet had just got their ass kicked up at Wake Island not too long before that.

*problem with tape, static*

**Mr. Alexander:** I think we're okay now.

You were only there for several days?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, I'm going to say several days. We were there for about a week. About a month before that, the Japanese had jumped, was it Wake Island? Nimitz sent in (?) with the carriers. Some of these places I don't know for sure.

We were there during the invasion of Saipan and then after they secured the island, they jumped on Tinian and went to Tinian. But in between time, the Japs flew a bunch of planes in there and that's all because they didn't have any ships left. Don't know where they came from. That one afternoon, we shot down 253 of their planes. We lost a total of sixteen out of all the carriers. By that time, we had several carriers in there. That broke their back as far as their aircraft. Marianas Turkey Shoot.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, that was in June. Did you go on from there?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We went from there to Eniwetok. Went up there and had a little R & R. We left there and went to, I'm going to say, the Manus Islands. There might have been one in between but right now I can't think.

**Mr. Alexander:** It's the fleet that you're still working with?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, we had two or three carriers with us plus destroyers.

**Mr. Alexander:** And the rest of it.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** *White Plains* and some of the others, the *Fanshaw Bay*. We went to the Manus Islands. We stayed there for about three or four days.

**Mr. Alexander:** For a little R & R, you say?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** At Eniwetok.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, that's where you did that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Then we went to Manus. Then we got there and we had a little R & R there. You don't want to hear the story about the big fight, do you?

**Mr. Alexander:** The big fight, huh? Well, why not?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They gave each one of us two bottles of beer. They let the port side go to shore which is half of the ship. Not only us but the rest of the aircraft carriers. We go on this little island. Everybody's having the two bottles of beer except ol' Pumphrey. I don't drink that stuff.

**Mr. Alexander:** So you gave it to somebody else.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Sure. Everybody was feeling good on two bottles of beer.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, you betcha.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Well, the *Fanshaw Bay* and the *St. Lo*, their signalmen got to cussing each other. We all converged on this dock at the same time. You never saw such a fight in your life. I'm telling you. Sailors are going over the side. Me, I'm a smart guy, stay in the background.

**Mr. Alexander:** Amen.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The next thing I know, here came motor whale boats full of officers. That was a mistake. Next thing I knew, these sailors quit fighting each other and they started throwing those officers over the side. (laughs) Anyway, we finally got back aboard ship. I didn't ever know what happened to it.

**Mr. Alexander:** And you never want to either.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No. The captain asked me, "What happened over there?" I said, "I don't know. All I know is when I walked up there I saw the damndest fight I ever saw in my life." He said, "Did you get into it?" I'd had a little problem. I said, "No, sir. I stood back and watched this one. There was too damn many and I didn't know which one I wanted." (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** At this point, was the ship changed to *St. Lo* by this time?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No. We again gathered supplies, provisions. Then we went to Morotai and the Celebes. There we had some excitement. We were going to invade Morotai. Took a big convoy and they landed and they had five Japs on there. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Five Japs.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Fifty thousand soldiers and five Japs.

**Mr. Alexander:** Not too bad a situation.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Nine miles over here in the Celebes Islands they had 95,000 Japanese. What they did is they blockaded. They couldn't get anything in and couldn't get anything off. Isolated them. During all this time, there was a sub got in amongst us and fired a torpedo. One of the lookouts said, "Torpedo on the starboard side." The captain told the helmsman and he did his thing. That torpedo went by no further than that wall. After it got out there a ways, the

captain turned to me and said, “Well, Bill, you only lacked that much getting a thirty-day leave.” (laughs) I’m talking about eight inches.

Then we went back to Manus. That’s where they changed the name.

**Mr. Alexander:** Did you know anything about that or why?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It was a surprise to everybody.

**Mr. Alexander:** Do you know now why it was?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes.

**Mr. Alexander:** What was it for?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They were building the big carrier and they wanted to take the name of USS *Midway* because that was a battle that they fought and put it on a larger carrier.

**Mr. Alexander:** I see.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Now we had some old boys onboard that ship had been in the Navy thirty-five years. I’m talking about seamen up to— And boy, they were raising hell. Literally.

**Mr. Alexander:** Of course they would.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** This one old, he was a sailmaker, this one old boy said, “You know, in the old Navy you didn’t change the name of a ship unless you christened it and we hadn’t been christened. So, we’re going to sink.” Fifteen days later the USS *St. Lo* was sunk.

**Mr. Alexander:** I thought that change was a lot earlier than that but it was within fifteen days.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That’s when it happened.

**Mr. Alexander:** You’re now in October when that turnover happened.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We got in one of the damndest typhoons you ever saw. Waves a hundred-and ten feet tall, wind blowing a hundred-and ninety miles an hour out there.

**Mr. Alexander:** Are you sure that wasn’t in December?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, it was before we invaded.

**Mr. Alexander:** That’s right because you lost your ship. I didn’t remember about that typhoon then.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Well, we had one. If it wasn't a typhoon, I don't want to go through another one.

**Mr. Alexander:** I know. I lost my brother in the typhoon in December.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Oh, really?

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, three destroyers and he was on one of them.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The USS *Nashville* was MacArthur's headquarters and they were getting submarine pay. Back in those days when it was built, they had riveted decks, plates. It was blowing them off of there just like shingles.

**Mr. Alexander:** Just popping off of there, yes. You're in Taffy 3. Tell me what Taffy 3 means. Do you know? I'm not sure I do but I thought maybe you did.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** There was a Taffy 1, 2, and 3. They were all Navy flattops plus DDs, DEs.

**Mr. Alexander:** Was it just DDs and DEs and the flattops?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Um hum. We were in Leyte Gulf. There are a lot of these things you hear when it's taking place, but time takes care of a lot of things.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, I understand that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Particularly now. I'm telling you, it's been bad.

**Mr. Alexander:** What were you doing on the ship now? Were you still with the captain?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I went onboard and I came off a survivor as the captain's talker. I'd spent a day or two in the brig. (laughs) I always said to him, "Captain, you want to open the door before it sinks?" He had to do something, I mean, I understood his situation.

**Mr. Alexander:** Now wait a minute. We'll talk about that in just a minute.

Did you all have any idea about what was going to happen with the fleet?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No. Captain probably did because, you see, there were two different frequencies. The TBS.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's ship-to-ship.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes. Then I don't remember the other one. But that was strictly for those

ears only. So, there was a lot of that I didn't get in on, but everything that came on TBS, I got it the same as the captain did. Sometimes they would say, "Well, we're going to see something in a few days." But they never would say where or which.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's probably understandable.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** By this time, I'm a seaman first class.

**Mr. Alexander:** Well, good. Even with brig time you got the darn stripe.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You know what? They asked me the other day—we're off the record here, huh?

**Mr. Alexander:** No, we're not.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Oh, okay. I was asked the other day at a meeting, one of the guys there said, "I was on the USS *Bowie*. I got a good conduct medal when they discharged me but Nakahoma (That's my nickname.) he didn't get one." I said, "You're right." The other day I was going through my desk drawer and I opened a little old box about so big. I pulled this paper out and on there it says: September 4, 1945—Let's go ahead and then we'll get to it.

**Mr. Alexander:** Okay, that's good. We'll do that.

On 25 October, you had planes on deck.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We had planes on the deck but they were still being serviced and tuned up and whatever. There was a plane took off. I wrote the time down on every plane that took off. It was early.

**Mr. Alexander:** Early in the morning, is that right?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes.

**Mr. Alexander:** Dark?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, you could see a little light. One of those mornings it was a nice morning to see a sunrise. It took off and then another one took off. Wasn't long after that a pilot called in saying, "We have located these ships, battleships." But they were in the clouds. Admiral Sprague told him to go down and check and be sure. When he reported back he said you could see the pagodas and he told him there were battleships and cruisers and destroyers and all this kind of stuff. It wasn't long after that we got our first salvos.

**Mr. Alexander:** The first salvos from them.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** From the battle wagons.

**Mr. Alexander:** How many battle wagons did you have?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They had two battle wagons. I'm talking about them; we didn't have any.

**Mr. Alexander:** How many flattops of yours?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We had six. There were thirteen ships so, six and seven is thirteen. That was the DDs and the DEs.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's all in that whole thing. What was going through your mind at this point when you're getting shot at?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was saying to myself, "Pumphrey, you're a damn fool."

**Mr. Alexander:** Why?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You volunteered for this job. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** That's good enough.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was more concerned about other ships because it wasn't long after that until the *White Plains* got hit. Then there weren't any more ships hit until after a while, until the destroyers and destroyer escorts. Then we had the squalls come in about three-quarters of a mile apart which was God-sent. Not counting the smoke screen but this was low on the water. Consequently, they would have annihilated us long before any of them were sunk.

Admiral Sprague, "Ziggy" Sprague, *Fanshaw Bay* was the admiral's ship and he came aboard ship.

**Mr. Alexander:** What ship?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** My ship. I never did understand why. I never did know what was going on because it was (*whispering unintelligibly*).

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, really? Hmmm.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He stayed on there about an hour, I suppose.

**Mr. Alexander:** With your captain.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Then he left. I've thought about that over a period of time and I think what he was saying was if the *Fanshaw Bay* was hit— Captain McKenna was the



senior captain of the fleet. Anytime that the Admiral left out of the area, he was in charge. It didn't make any difference if it was Halsey or him. I think that's what he was saying. He could have said that on the radio, but he didn't. He didn't want anybody else to know, I suppose.

**Mr. Alexander:** I think you're absolutely right. That's how he got your captain to know that we aren't going to have any help from the Third Fleet.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** And we didn't!

**Mr. Alexander:** God knows you didn't, no. Unbelievable.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He began the maneuvers—Sprague had the maneuvers going. Our Captain McKenna, who was a very sharp man, had at that time thirty-five years' service. They would fire salvos and if they missed us the first time, which they did, then when they shot and they hit then he'd move over to where that splash was. Japanese can't see; they used dye shells. Yellow, blue, orange, and—

**Mr. Alexander:** White?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, not white. Yes, they were white but there were colors. Pink. The reason I know this is I could pick up people from all over the ship and I guess the guy had the button down on his phone saying, "Lord, don't send any more of them yellow ones. Send more of those blue ones." (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Isn't that something.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That old boy was from Oklahoma and I wish I could remember his name. All of us were saying the same thing. This went on, seemed to me like, forever.

**Mr. Alexander:** Your destroyers and those guys were going in there.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** This is when Sprague would call for the little boys. "Little boys, so and so and so and so." We called it a suicide run. These destroyers take off and they're going full speed, flank speed and they'd get within nine thousand yards and they'd fire their torpedoes. Then they'd turn and come back. That's where the *Johnston*—Evans, the captain, he was a Cherokee Indian or something.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, he was. I read the book.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It was pitiful.

**Mr. Alexander:** It was. It was pitiful in one sense, but just think what damage they did, for one thing.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** And what they could have done.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes. With what you've got, you do what you can and that's all you're going to have. Those guys went in there and went in and then went back in and went back in until they had nothing left. I shouldn't be talking, but that's one of the most incredible things in the South Pacific in the war.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Well, anywhere.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** This battle lasted better than three hours. I've forgotten now, nearly four hours. Before they retreated, can you imagine, the Jap fleet retreated simply because they thought that these destroyers and destroyer escorts were Halsey's fleet.

**Mr. Alexander:** They didn't know.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They didn't know. So, they retreat. Before they do that, they fire like twenty-seven torpedoes at these carriers. Tex Waldrop from over here in East Texas someplace strafed and blew up one in the water. We blew up one in the water with our 50s. We were shooting those Japs with our 5-inch. We carried five hundred rounds and when they quit firing, and the reason they quit firing was the fact that barrel had gone this way. Heat. By this time, they had sailors dead in the handling room because the equipment, the hydraulic stuff, didn't work and they were passing it. It was extremely hot. So, anyway.

**Mr. Alexander:** That was terrible.

We're at the end of this side of this tape. So it doesn't blow my ears off, we'll pause it right now and we'll turn it over.

Side two. Mr. Pumphrey. We're back on.

When the Japanese turned off and went away, what happened then?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You just keep steaming.

**Mr. Alexander:** But you've got shot. They didn't shoot you.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No. They were over the horizon, let me put it that way. We hadn't had chow yet for breakfast and so this was cornbread and navy bean day. Hooray.

**Mr. Alexander:** Hooray, is right.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The captain said, “Why don’t you go get chow.” In other words, he dismissed the starboard or whatever side and the rest of them stood by. I get down into the mess hall and there was a guy named Maybern Mann.

**Mr. Alexander:** Maybern?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Maybern Mann and a man named Allen who was supposed to have been from my hometown. I never did know him prior. We were talking. Maybern was the water tender first class and he said, “Bill, if something happens and I don’t make it would you go and talk to my parents?” I said, “Sure. Vice-versa.” Well, he didn’t make it. But, anyway.

**Mr. Alexander:** He did not make it?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He did not make it, no.

They sounded GQ. I came out of the chow hall, all of us did. We were going back to our battle stations. As I crossed the hangar deck, a secondary explosion. The plane had already hit. Caused the explosion up where they were refueling the planes with gas and ammunition.

**Mr. Alexander:** Was this in the aft part of the ship?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, it was the forward elevator.

**Mr. Alexander:** That’s what he hit?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He hit just aft of the forward elevator. I was almost all the way across the hangar deck and I reached and grabbed the rail to go up the ladder. About that time, the second hit and I mean, next think I knew I was going through the air.

**Mr. Alexander:** I didn’t realize you got hit twice.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, it was the secondary explosion. Bombs are going off, gasoline from this first explosion. So, I get back up and I grab a hold of the rail and the first thing I thought was, “My god, I can’t stand up. My legs are gone.” But they weren’t. I guess I was scared to death. I go on up the ladder and get to a passageway up there that goes from port to starboard and it’s full of dead people. I worked my way through there. Got out on the flight deck and started up to the bridge. There was an old boy they called “Venezuela,” a Spanish guy, he was burning. He was on fire. I hollered down to a gun tub and I said, “Throw me a blanket.” They did and I covered him up, the flame. I went on up. I went up on the outside. If you went up on the inside, you’d

have to go in under the flight deck. As I was going up that ladder, blood was just pouring off that damn bridge. I said, “Oh, my god. There’s nobody alive up there.” That’s what I was thinking.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, sure.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** When I got up there, there were these guys standing around, moving, doing this, that, and the other. I thought, “Well, maybe.” But there was a guy standing over there and he was really hurt. I bet he had five hundred particles of shrapnel in him.

**Mr. Alexander:** Shrapnel, oh gosh. Where all that blood was coming from.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I go on over and I pick up my phones and put them on, check in. The captain told me to check this one and that one and I did. I heard him say to the quartermaster or the boatswain’s mate that they were to pipe, “Prepare to abandon ship.” All I heard was “abandon ship.” So, off my phones came and I started over the side. Somebody grabbed me and said, “You can’t do that.” I said, “Like hell I can’t.” “He didn’t say ‘abandon ship,’ he said ‘prepare.’”

So, I go back, pick up my phones and he said, “Boatswain, abandon ship.” Threw the phone down and I went by and he said, “Bill, take these papers with you.” “Yes, sir.” I stuck them in my hip pocket.

**Mr. Alexander:** Who gave them to you?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The captain.

**Mr. Alexander:** The captain did.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I get on the rope. Well, by this time, the sailors are going down that thing and I look down and one of them has gotten hung up down in there, got his foot tangled up or something and they were beginning to stack up. I don’t know how high it is from the rail on that bridge down to the water but it was a pretty good jump.

**Mr. Alexander:** It’s a long ways.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I said, “Well, I ain’t gonna sit here and wait for the thing to go down before I can jump off in the water. So, I just hauled off and jumped as far as I could. Hit the water after about two hours it seemed like. Down I went. Seemed like it was another two hours coming back up. I looked back like this and there go those papers right toward the ship. I said, “You go that way. I’m gonna go this way.” I was swimming and there were men all over that water.

**Mr. Alexander:** I'm sure there were. How many onboard that ship?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Eight hundred and something. There were 116 killed outright. I don't know how many died afterwards.

Let me back up. They were trying to put the fire out and the elevator came up and fell back towards aft of the ship. All those people fighting that fire was no more. The third explosion, there were men all over the deck trying to do this, that, and the other. This one guy—a lot of people think I'm goofy, and I might be—but he came up and he was standing straight up and his arms were out like this.

**Mr. Alexander:** Out away from his body.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It looked as though if you had taken and cut this same out on both arms and pulled that skin down—

**Mr. Alexander:** I see, yes. All the way off.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** —all the way down to the hands. He died the next day on the *Dennis*.

**Mr. Alexander:** On USS *Dennis*?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes.

**Mr. Alexander:** Those kind of things in terms that no one else that was not there could never understand or never—

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Comprehend it.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's exactly right. You just could not at all. You lost a lot of friends.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Oh, yes.

**Mr. Alexander:** And you might have lost yourself.

You were in the water and I guess you had some help out there.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, they had these flotations out there. You know, I was quite a swimmer. I'd swim by a guy and his face would be down and I'd pick him up and see if I knew him. This went on for a while. I kept hearing this guy hollering, "Help, help, help." I swam over there. His name was Rodarmel. He was from Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Dutch. I said, "What's the matter?" I knew him. He said, "I can't swim." I said, "Horseshit."

**Mr. Alexander:** That's odd.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** "You can't swim? What the hell you doing in the Navy?" He said, "They were supposed to teach me." I said, "Well, it's a good place to learn, isn't it?" I said, "All right. Grab a-hold here." I had one of those CO2 belts on and the underwater explosion had split the thing. It wasn't any use. I said, "Grab a-hold of my collar and I'll take you over to that flotation." So, he did. On the way there, there was another guy in the same predicament. His name was whatever and he was from Alabama. I knew him, not well, but I knew him and I called him by name. I can't tell you now, but it'll come someday. I said, "Okay, you grab the other side." Here I got these two guys and I finally get them over there and got them on that thing. They weren't injured. They were in good shape. I took off. I saw an island or I saw land. I don't know how far it was but I could see land. That's where I was going. Three hours later the USS *Dennis* picked me up. I would have never made it but I was sure going to try.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's where the planes went, wasn't it?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, I don't know where they went but I don't think they went where I was going to go.

**Mr. Alexander:** It was pretty close.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't know. There were about two hundred men, I'm going to say approximately, that got the Purple Heart for sliding a goddam rope and having rope burns. I had the same rope burns. This guy came by and said, "Got injuries?" "Sure don't."

**Mr. Alexander:** Well, you didn't.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No.

**Mr. Alexander:** I understand that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It just irks me to death. I read a book the other day about the Vietnam War called *Stolen Valor*. If you ever get a chance, read it. It's about these guys getting these medals. Buying the medals; getting them through the mail. It's terrible. Do you know how many Medal of Honors were given in that war?

**Mr. Alexander:** I've heard about it.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Tremendous amount. So, to me, what is a medal worth?

**Mr. Alexander:** There are medals and then there are medals. You know, you got it and it was yours and they gave it to you.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** But I didn't get one. I didn't get it because I didn't deserve it. I might have deserved it but I didn't get it because I didn't think I deserved it. You know what I mean?

**Mr. Alexander:** That's a very good idea. More people did what you did than the others.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That's right.

**Mr. Alexander:** It doesn't sound like it, but they did. It's difficult to find out if a person does have that opportunity. It's difficult for the person who's saying, "Do you really need this or have this or not?" What the heck. I say, "What the heck," I don't mean it that way.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I know what you mean. It cheapens the whole damn thing to the point that I have some grandsons and they're about the age in a year or two they're going to be going someplace. I'm going to tell them, "If you get the Congressional Medal of Honor, tell them to stick it up their ass because it ain't worth a damn."

**Mr. Alexander:** No, that isn't true.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You tell me what is true.

**Mr. Alexander:** If they got that the way it should have been and if they do, that's a wonderful thing to have. The fact that other people are buying them and so forth, doesn't mean a thing. I tell you what it does. That person is on a roll that he'll never come off. Don't tell those kids to do that. But I know where you're coming from.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They picked me up a day or two later.

**Mr. Alexander:** Who?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The *Dennis*. First though, here comes this damn Japanese destroyer and they're coming down through there and this guy thought, "Oh, hell, they're strafing." You could see this guy doing this way. They weren't. They were taking movies. Then the *Dennis* came by and picked me up.

**Mr. Alexander:** Was there anybody else with you at time?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, I was by myself. As I said, I was going to that piece of land I saw.

**Mr. Alexander:** How did they manage to pick you up?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They just happened to be up on me.

**Mr. Alexander:** Must have been a bright day.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It was a little overcast.

**Mr. Alexander:** One guy out there is pretty hard to see.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, I know, but they saw me. Then when they got there, they dumped this cargo net over and they hollered and told me to grab hold of it and I grabbed hold of it and about that time the old ship rolled. When it did I didn't have any strength. Down I went and here came that old ship and I said, "My god, Pumphrey, you're going to kill yourself!" I got back up and there were two guys and I grabbed. Two guys got hold of me and put me onboard ship.

**Mr. Alexander:** They got hold of you. Boy, I can imagine that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They took us down to Peleliu and put us on a troop transport back to Pearl. Interesting story: We had a commander, an executive officer named Froling.

**Mr. Alexander:** Froling?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Froling. Oh, god. The world's worst. Ever.

**Mr. Alexander:** What was he?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He was the executive officer. When we got to Pearl Harbor—

**Mr. Alexander:** We being?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The group on the (?). The captain was there and the quarter master and some of the other people that worked on the bridge. He was getting ready to debark.

**Mr. Alexander:** The captain?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Uh huh. He called us together and he said, "Now boys, I'm going to tell you something. You guys are getting an extra thirty days." Which was fine. He turned and looked and there stood his executive officer. He said, "What's that son of a bitch doing here?"

**Mr. Alexander:** This is the captain saying that?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Uh huh. He's supposed to be with some other men some place else.

**Mr. Alexander:** I see.



**Mr. Pumphrey:** We all gave him a salute and wished him well and all that stuff. Down he starts and up starts this commander. They get about half-way and I heard the captain say, "Commander, put yourself on report. We're going to give you a general court martial for leaving your men." The highest ranked man with him was a second class petty officer.

**Mr. Alexander:** Really?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Well, they did. Busted him to chief petty officer. Busted him to a seaman; reinstated him as a chief petty officer. Wouldn't you like to work with that sucker?

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, no way. No.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He was a bastard from the word "go."

**Mr. Alexander:** He had to be. The other thing that would have been any worse would have shot him, basically.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Well, some of the people said if they'd had a gun they would while he was still in the water. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** I'd never heard of that. That's something.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He died about four years ago.

**Mr. Alexander:** Is that right?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, I'm going by this guy Crawford in Reno. He was telling me because he keeps up with a bunch of them.

**Mr. Alexander:** There's always somebody who does that and it's really great.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** But, you know, if I had to go back I wouldn't change anything other than the fact I don't think I want to be in that predicament again.

**Mr. Alexander:** I can understand. It would be nice not to do that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Be an enjoyable thing, wouldn't it?

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, boy.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Do some other stories off-record that we used to do onboard ship and that kind of--by the way, I lost \$13,000 on that ship.

**Mr. Alexander:** \$13,000? Wait a minute, you must have picked it up and then lost it.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We were playing poker.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yeah, but if you've got \$13,000, you were doing darn well.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I had my own cabin. I had my own bunk.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, you did? That's right, sure.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The boys would meet up in my cabin. We'd sit there and play poker. I guess I was lucky. The first thing I did to make a little money was when we left Pearl Harbor that time, I went to ship service and you could buy Kool-Aid in a carton for fifty cents.

**Mr. Alexander:** Less than that, wasn't it?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It might have been.

**Mr. Alexander:** Maybe twenty-five cents.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It might have been. I know I got them cheap. I buy six cartons; take them aboard ship. After we take off and are underway, I thought to myself these pilots probably—I was right across from the ready-room and their mess was right there at my door. They had a steward's mate. Rap, rap, rap on their hatch. Had these two packages and I said, "You reckon those pilots would like to have a little Kool-Aid?" "Oh, yeah, man." I said, "Well, here. Just try it and see if you like it." The next day knock, knock, knock on my door. Said, "You have any more Kool-Aid?" I said, "Yeah, I got some more." "How about a couple more?" I said, "Well, let me tell you, that stuff is hard to come by. Let's make a deal." I never went to chow again the rest of the time the ship was afloat. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** All right! That's terrific.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** There were some fun things and then there were some real bad things. As I said to my dad, you know, I've run a couple of times in my life when I was fighting. I was trying to get away from the guy. The guy was whipping my butt. I said, "The Japs ran from us and they were whipping ours." (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, that's right. They sure were. When you got to Pearl, what then?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That's where they were bringing back survivors. On the way from Peleliu to Pearl, all I had to do was shine my shoes. I shined them for fourteen days. Spit-shined them. When they had admiral's inspection, guess who inspected

us.

**Mr. Alexander:** I don't know.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Nimitz.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, Nimitz.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Here we are all out there in whites and I'd shined those shoes and the sun was just glaring off. Being a short man, I was down on that end. Here comes Nimitz and the captain and his entourage. Nimitz gets up there and he looks me up and looks down and he said, "Sailor, what's wrong with your shoes?" I thought what in the hell is wrong. I said, "Admiral, I don't know unless a fly walked across them." He just broke up. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, did he? That was pretty fast.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yeah well, I had to think—

**Mr. Alexander:** That's really neat that you had a chance to see him.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I told my wife, I said, "I've seen a lot of beautiful blue eyes but he had the most gorgeous eyes for a man I ever looked into in my life." Just gorgeous.

**Mr. Alexander:** Isn't that interesting. He was quite a man, too. I don't know what we would have done without him.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't either. He was in the right place at the right time.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's right. There was no question about that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Eisenhower was at the right place at the right time. Anytime that you can get two good Germans—

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, gotta say that. That's true. That's right.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** One of them fighting the Germans and he did the job he did. I don't know what nationality I am. Last night my wife and I went to dinner and this young lady at this place said, "You have a first name?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." "I need it." I said, "My name is Kindengieser." "What?" I said, "Would you like to know my last name?" She said, "No." (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** I need to find out where you go now from Pearl.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I went to Seattle, Washington, Pier 91.

**Mr. Alexander:** Where are you now on stripes?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I'm still seaman first class. I have a little problem.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's all right. We all have. I did the same. I had three. What the heck? Who cares?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I stayed there for about a week and a-half, two weeks. We didn't have any clothes so they issued a clothing allowance. We didn't have any pay. And another thing that was funny that happened, my name being "P," I was down the list a ways. You know, you check in with this one and this one checks you in and he checks in with this guy and he checks you out and this one check you out and you get to the end of the line and you count it. Paying us in five dollar bills. I went to counting this stuff and there was two of them on one. I said, "What's going on here?" Every one of those bills had two (?).

**Mr. Alexander:** Really? Stuck together.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I turned and said to the guy on the end, I knew I wasn't going to be able to take it back, but I said, "He's overpaying me. He paid me twice what I should have." The pay officer turned and looked in his satchel and he said, "Not a damn thing I can do about it now." He's responsible.

**Mr. Alexander:** Is that right? I would think so.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, he is.

**Mr. Alexander:** What did he think about it?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Wasn't anything he could think about it. I thought to myself, what the hell, they gave me a bonus. I knew better than that. They were stuck together, new bills. I guess he paid everybody in front of me double.

**Mr. Alexander:** Must have.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Must have because he said, "Well, I'm almost out of money."

**Mr. Alexander:** That makes sense. And he was only half-way done. Yes, I can see that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Then they gave us uniforms. We get to go on liberty. I get in trouble and that's nothing unusual. Now then they're going to let us go home on our survivors' leave.

**Mr. Alexander:** Survivors' leave, now what does that mean?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** When your ship is sunk and you survive, they give you a leave, survivors' leave.

**Mr. Alexander:** Is that thirty days?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Thirty days. I got the sixty, don't ask me why. Just three of us or four of us got the sixty days.

**Mr. Alexander:** Were they on the deck?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, it was on the bridge.

**Mr. Alexander:** All of you on the bridge. You got that extra.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I wouldn't know. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, not at all. No, I'm just dumb; I wouldn't understand.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was going to make application to the Red Cross to get money to go home. I had written my mother and dad a letter saying that after we got back to Peleliu that I'd be home. That's all I said. Well, it never did get there. I was wanting to go home to see my parents. I went down there and asked the Red Cross. I never will forget. I've forgotten now; it was sixty-six dollars or some damn thing. It wasn't much to catch a train from here to there.

**Mr. Alexander:** In those days, sixty-six dollars would take you a long way.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I said I'd like to get whatever amount of money it is so I can get me a ticket down to Texas and back. The lady was writing the deal there and she said, "Oh, by the way, that'll be one percent interest." I said, "Stick it up your ass." I never gave them a dime since and never will give them a dime. Millions they get and they wanted to charge me one percent.

**Mr. Alexander:** You have your right to do that.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I don't think it's fair to the men who were over there.

**Mr. Alexander:** I know. I understand exactly.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** You know your brother was lost over there. A hell of a man there in Ft. Worth, his name is Foster. I didn't know him until just here recently. His brother was on a cruiser. He approached me one day to find out what his brother did. He said his brother never talked about to him about his service. He passed away sometime back. I only found out he was in two engagements and that's all I can find out. I don't know if it was more or less or not. I sent

him a sheet.

**Mr. Alexander:** I understand that. You're now in 1945.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I went home and came back.

**Mr. Alexander:** Went back where?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Went back to Bremerton, Washington. One day they said to me and gave me a piece of paper, "You report to the USS *Alabama*." "Yes, sir." I was supposed to be able, as a survivor I had the choice of the buoy tender, (?), and one other one. I said, "Okay, I'm going to the *Alabama*, which is fine." I get my seabag, go the *Alabama*, go onboard, check in, have my seabag ready to unload, here came the messenger saying, "Nope, we're transferring you to Newport, Rhode Island." I went by the personnel office and they gave me a bunch of stuff—travel orders, money, or whatever. I go down and there's a train load of us. I guess they were gathering them up because we were going to commission a new cruiser, the USS *Little Rock*. Now they turned it into a missile cruiser. On this train it was forty and eight.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, good, one of those.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We'd go from Washington State to Chicago. Yeah man, you talk about terrible. Awful.

**Mr. Alexander:** Where was the ship?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It was going to be christened out of Philadelphia. That was the receiving rather than Newport, Rhode Island. Finally get to Newport, Rhode Island. Reported. There was some more of that brig time, but anyway.

**Mr. Alexander:** Okay. (laughs) Two or three times, whatever.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We stay there for six weeks, I think. Then we go down and we're going to christen that ship and we're going to take her out and shake her down.

**Mr. Alexander:** Do you know about where you are in terms of January, February?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** In '44 we got back to Seattle in December. So, it was the fourth month of '45. Anyway, it was right there in that neighborhood.

**Mr. Alexander:** About April?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes. Now we're getting back where I want to tell you about my good conduct. That's when it was. We report in; we stay there for two, three days,

weeks, and go down and christen it, and go to sea shakedown. While we're on the shakedown cruise, in the meantime, I had gotten a leave to come home to get married. I came back, went onboard ship. Again, I work for nobody but the captain. His name was Francis whatever. I thought, "Isn't this strange? My old captain was named Francis J. McKenna and this guy is named Francis. Is every damn officer named Francis?"

We're down to the Philadelphia Naval Yard and we're waiting to take off and go to shakedown. This guy from Omaha, Nebraska, he didn't know me although he did know, he worked in the office where they issued the deal that I had gone home to get married. He said, "I see you got married to that half-nigger woman." I knocked his ass through that door. Going out the door, he knocked a warrant officer on his ass. I was going after him and the warrant officer got up and stopped me. I'd a killed the bastard.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, I bet you would have.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** So we go to court martial. I mean, the Captain's mad. The captain said to me, as I said I worked for him, "Pumphrey, what happened?" I told him and I said, "I knocked him on his goddam ass." "You're dismissed." This guy is named Porter. "You stand by." I don't ever know what happened to him.

**Mr. Alexander:** He went somewhere.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Uh huh. When I reported and they said you're going to report to Captain Francis whatever, can't think of his name. I did. He said to me, "Seaman Pumphrey, as long as you're on this ship, I don't want to see you. You have no duties. Whatever you want to do, you do it, but I don't want to see you." Well, he got to see me that one time. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Isn't that something.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I didn't have duty one. That's the hardest thing to do.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, yes.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I farted on that thing for a month and a-half. We went over and came back and we were going up to Chesapeake Bay when the Japanese threw them up.

**Mr. Alexander:** August-

**Mr. Pumphrey:** 14<sup>th</sup> or whatever.

**Mr. Alexander:** How long were you in there after that?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was out the 27<sup>th</sup> of September. It seemed like I had some extra points.

**Mr. Alexander:** You certainly did. You would have had to with what you'd been through.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I can't tell you about the other things. I've been sworn to secrecy until I die. I can't tell you.

**Mr. Alexander:** I don't care.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It's incomplete.

**Mr. Alexander:** It's incomplete because it is incomplete. All right. What about when you got out of the service? What did you do? You were married then.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I was married. I came home and I got me a job with Community Public Service which was an electrical service. They put me in charge of a crew. We installed generator plants and one thing and another. I didn't like that so I left and went to Ft. Worth. I got me a little ol' job and I stayed with it for a while. I didn't like that. I read in the paper one day "Ft. Worth Fire Department hiring." I said, "Well, hell that sounds about my speed." I went up and made application and I got called to go in for training. Damn, if they didn't hire me. I stayed there for years. One day the city manager's office called the Fire Chief. I was doing the PR work for the fire department. Said, "I want to see Pumphrey over in the city attorney's office." I thought they're going to fire my ass, aren't they? (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** And they did, huh?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, they didn't.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The chief and I went over to the city attorney's office. The city manager was there and the assistant city manager. We were sitting there and "Howdy-doodie." I said, "Let's cut this bullshit out and get it on." So, he said, "Bill, we've been discussing the fact that the city of Ft. Worth needs a lobbyist in Austin. Would you be our lobbyist?" I like to fell out of my chair.

**Mr. Alexander:** I bet you did!

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I said, "Well, I think so. When do I go?" "Well, do you want to talk it over with your wife?" I said, "She's not going. I am." I knew nothing about what I was doing. I mean, you talk about a babe in the woods.

**Mr. Alexander:** Of course not.



**Mr. Pumphrey:** I said, “I know that I’m going to need money. How much money will I have?” He said, “We got thirty-nine million set up.” I said, “That’ll be about right.” (laughs) I said, “There’s going to have to be some testimonies down there.” The little, young assistant city manager was sitting there and I said, “Don’t send that bastard down there. He doesn’t even know the way to get down there.” The fire chief at that time went under the table. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, I can understand why.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Let me say this to you: I’ll tell you like it is. If you don’t like it, that’s fine. We can settle it any way you want.

**Mr. Alexander:** Sure.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** If they didn’t like it, they had a chance to fire my ass right there. They kept me down there for years. One day I called my wife and said, “I’ve had it up to here with these silly bastards. I’m coming home.” She said, “You quitting?” I said, “Not yet, I haven’t called the city yet.”

**Mr. Alexander:** We’re about to the end of this tape.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** After that, I went to work. I bought a ranch. I just sold it four months ago.

**Mr. Alexander:** Pretty darn well.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, doing pretty good.

**Mr. Alexander:** I understand that. I tell you what, this has been a very good interview. I think you’re going to have fun when you see it. You’ll get a chance to take a look at it.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Some of that stuff you might want to edit.

**Mr. Alexander:** It won’t be edited.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That’s fine.

**Mr. Alexander:** That’s what it’s all about.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I’m going to ask some questions tomorrow when Mr. James—. I know his name but can’t think of it. There’s a question there, you know, I said about a minute difference between where he said that he called in and the other pilot. On the TBS, see every day I heard these pilots report in, report out, and I knew their voices from our ship. I didn’t know the boys from the other one. I’m

saying that there's just a little bit of time difference between him and this other one. In this book, if you'll notice, Mr. Brooks and his crew show up in three chapters pretty heavy. Buddy, buddy, buddy.

**Mr. Alexander:** I gotcha.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I'm not the only one that thinks that.

**Mr. Alexander:** I'm sure you're right. Well, I'm going to have to shut her down.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That's fine.

**Mr. Alexander:** Thanks a lot, by the way.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I'm certainly glad you got to meet me.

**Mr. Alexander:** So am I. It's the same thing.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** It should broaden your knowledge.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, hell no, it hasn't a bit. (laughs)

**Mr. Alexander:** This is the second tape of Bill Pumphrey, P-u-m-p-h-r-e-y. The other tape will go with this. It goes with the other tape.

Now then, you had wanted to add some information.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I should have given it to you and I didn't think about it until after.

**Mr. Alexander:** I'm glad you did this.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** When we were at Saipan, we were cover for the Marines or the Army, whoever. We'd go in and strafe and bomb ahead of them.

**Mr. Alexander:** On your ship?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** On the plane. Airplanes. We'd go in and bomb.

**Mr. Alexander:** They were your planes on your ship?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes.

**Mr. Alexander:** That ship at that time was named—

**Mr. Pumphrey:** USS *Midway*. On this particular day, we had plans to go in. TBMs usually

carried the bombs. Two of them were shot down. A couple of weeks later, the Marines or the Army had taken that area and they found the three-man crew, so it was six people. They found them buried up to their shoulders with their heads cut off. Now this is what I should have thought of it then. We used, first time, aviation gasoline in our wing tanks. We would drop it on the Japanese and a fighter would follow behind us strafing. That would burn the hell out of them.

**Mr. Alexander:** These tanks?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** The wing tanks. You drop them.

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes, you do.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** And so we dropped them.

**Mr. Alexander:** And they were full of gas.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes, aviation gas. If they didn't explode on impact then they would strafe them. Strafe the bomb. Then they would blow up and just burn everything up. It was retaliation. Now, that was against the Geneva Treaty. The old man had everybody swear.

**Mr. Alexander:** "The old man" meaning your skipper.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes. I got to thinking about it, well, that's over with, done with. There's no way they're going to prosecute people that are dead.

**Mr. Alexander:** Oh, no. Not at all.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** So, I got to thinking about it and I said, I'll just get hold of you and tell you that story. I did tell you about the Turkey Shoot, did I not?

**Mr. Alexander:** Yes.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** We went from there to Guam. We'd been there about a day and a-half. We were off of Guam on whatever side and it was early in the morning around 2:30-3:00 o'clock. The captain was on the bridge. I'm on the bridge with him. I keep seeing this light back over there.

**Mr. Alexander:** On the shore?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Yes. I said, "Captain McKenna, I believe there's somebody signaling us over there. I may be wrong. It may be a campfire." I didn't have any glasses, so he got the glasses to put on and the guy was saying, "My name is Tweed. I've

been on the island for three years.” He was a signalman.

**Mr. Alexander:** A signalman?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Signalman. The captain radioed Sprague, the admiral, and asked him if he wanted us to go pick him up in a motor whale boat off the island. The reply was, “No, we will send a destroyer after him.” Simply because it could have been Japs setting a trap or something. When they went over and picked him up—

**Mr. Alexander:** Was he in the water?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, no. He was on the island. He’d been there for three years. The only one on there that was white. The rest of them were natives and they took care of him during that time. The Japanese were after him constantly. I don’t know, they say there’s a book out on him. I never did see the book. He did a hell of a good job just staying out of their hands.

**Mr. Alexander:** He must have. I guess nobody else knew he was on there.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No. They figured if anybody was left, they were dead. That’s what they figured. That’s what happened. We were more or less responsible for picking him up, indirectly. That’s what I saw. That light back over there going like this.

**Mr. Alexander:** Was it a flashlight or something or what?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I think it was a gasoline can with a wick. He had another deal and he’d go— It was a homemade situation.

**Mr. Alexander:** Isn’t that something?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** He had three years’ of pay. I don’t know what they made. A petty officer and I don’t know what they made, but whatever it was. I understand through hearsay that he turned out a drunk.

**Mr. Alexander:** Let me ask you this: You didn’t pick him up then?

**Mr. Pumphrey:** No, the destroyer picked him up. I don’t know who it was.

**Mr. Alexander:** You never knew who it was.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** I thought that may be a piece of information.

**Mr. Alexander:** That’s terrific. I want to ask you something else. I’ll stop it first because you

may or may not be the person here.

*Tape is stopped and re-started*

**Mr. Pumphrey:** After the Guam campaign, we went back to Tinian. They took Tinian and made an air base for the B-29s. While we were there, we were pretty close into shore because the main island had been taken care of and not too much on the other. There was a Dutch tugboat sunk and you could see from the wheelhouse up to the bow sticking up. A couple of us were standing there on the side looking at it and there were two Marines swimming out there. They were going to swim out, I guess, to get them some souvenirs. One went in and down. The other went in and up. The one that went down came out of that sucker and he had a Jap working him over with a knife. Man, he was cutting the hell out of him. He was hollering and going on and the guy up front in the bow came out and killed this Jap or he'd have killed that Marine.

**Mr. Alexander:** Why sure.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** Oh, man.

**Mr. Alexander:** Isn't that something? That Jap was in there just—

**Mr. Pumphrey:** They found that the sucker—they had a little autopsy—was eating barnacles, sea worms, anything that was edible. He had been in there since the beginning of that battle back over in Guam. Three or four weeks. You tell me they can't live on anything?

**Mr. Alexander:** You got that right. That's right.

That's really good. I'm glad you did this. We'll just hold it down unless you have anything else.

**Mr. Pumphrey:** That was the two things.

**Mr. Alexander:** That's what I thought. Let's do that and I'll check and make sure that this gets to the other tape. With this, we will shut her down. Thank you.

**Proof**

Bonnie Day Rush  
August 12, 2010  
Dublin, Texas  
Tape 1259a & b

