

*Admiral Nimitz Historic Site
National Museum of the Pacific War*

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Johnnie Singleton
(World War II - U.S. Navy)
[Pearl Harbor Survivor & USS Maryland]
Date of Interview: January 5, 2005

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Today is January 5, 2005. My name is Floyd Cox and I'm interviewing Mr. Johnnie Singleton. The interview is taking place at the Jefferson State Bank on Fredericksburg Road in San Antonio. The interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War Center for Pacific War Studies for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Cox: Johnnie, I certainly appreciate you taking the time to relate the experiences you underwent during World War II. To start with, I would like to ask you some basic questions, such as where you were born, when you were born, tell me a little bit about your family and your siblings, and then we will take it from there.

Mr. Singleton: My name is Johnnie Singleton. I was born in Jackson County, Texas, Edna, Texas, December 31, 1924. Actually I was born in 1925, but when I joined the name I put my date of birth as 1924.

Mr. Cox: To make you older.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, to make me older so that I could join the Navy. I left Edna in 1938 and went to Weslaco. That is where my Mother lived. Prior to that I lived in Edna with my Grandmother and my Aunt. They raised us. I had two brothers and three first cousins. We all lived in the same house.

Mr. Cox: What did the family do? What kind of labor did they do?

Mr. Singleton: During the depression my Grandmother worked in a sewing room and made clothes under a Government program named WPA.

Mr. Cox: She was a seamstress.

Mr. Singleton: Yes. My Aunt worked as a maid. My Mother worked as a maid in the valley in Weslaco. My Dad lived in San Antonio. He and my

Mother separated when we were small. She remarried again. The man she married was from New Orleans, or rather Baton Rouge. I believe they married in 1937 or 1938. Then she came and got me and my two brothers in 1938. I went to school in Weslaco. Back in those days, as you know, it was segregated. As far as I could go in school was the 9th grade. There were very few blacks in Weslaco at that particular time. All of my friends/buddies/playmates were white boys and Mexican boys. All of my buddies/close friends boxed on the boxing team. They were also high school football players. We had a Golden Glove boxing team. We got together and trained together, but I couldn't compete in the Golden Glove Tournament with them.

Mr. Cox: Now the reason you couldn't compete was because you were black.

Mr. Singleton: At that time that was the state law. We trained together in the gym, but I couldn't compete. What they would do when they would have tournament, such as in McAllen or Brownsville, they would go and get the professional fighters from Mexico that were "washed-up" professional fighters and other "up and coming" youngsters and they would put them in the ring with me and we would put on an exhibition. I would knock them out. As a result, I was popular.

Mr. Cox: What weight did you fight at?

Mr. Singleton: Lightweight. I weighed around 130 pounds at that time. Most of the guys that I fought were larger than I was at that time. They were older and bigger. I was only 13 or 14 years old and I would knock them out. I said, "Bring 'em on." Remember Tom Landry?

Mr. Cox: Certain – coach of the Dallas Cowboys for years.

Mr. Singleton: He was on the Golden Gloves team for Mission, and one of my buddies from Weslaco busted his nose in a Golden Gloves match.

He took the gloves off and never fought any more then, but he was one heck of a football player. We watched him. He clobbered Weslaco during football season.

Mr. Cox: Now, you were from Weslaco, and before we get into your Naval career, that is where one of the flag raisers at Iwo Jima, Harlan Block, was from.

Mr. Singleton: He was a friend of mine.

Mr. Cox: You went to school with him?

Mr. Singleton: No, I didn't go to school with him. I couldn't go to school.

Mr. Cox: I understand, but you were in that age bracket?

Mr. Singleton: Yes. He used to come in and watch me box. He didn't box. He was one of the boys that wasn't on the boxing team. He used to come to the fights to watch and would watch us work out in the gym.

Mr. Cox: So you are down in Weslaco, living with your parents, and after you got out of school what did you do?

Mr. Singleton: I was intending to come to San Antonio to go to high school, but my buddies were joining the Navy. So I decided, "why not!" They had finished high school, so we went to the Naval Recruiter. My Mother didn't want me to go. We didn't know then that there was going to be a war. My Stepfather was in the Navy during World War I. He helped to twist her arm too. Reluctantly she signed and said that I was 17. I would not have been 17 until December.

Mr. Cox: What month did you enter the Navy?

Mr. Singleton: I went in June of 1941.

Mr. Cox: So, after you signed the enlistment papers, where did you go and how did you get there?

Mr. Singleton: We enlisted together and we thought that we were going to be together, however, they separated us. I went to Corpus Christi for my training. I got my training there as a Mess Attendant. That is all that we could be back in those days. I stayed in Corpus for a

while, and then they shipped me to California.

Mr. Cox: How did you get to California? On a troop train, or do you remember how you went to California?

Mr. Singleton: By bus. I went to what they called Shoemaker, California. There was a receiving station.

Mr. Cox: Now, when you went by bus, did they segregate you; did they have all Afro-Americans on one bus and white on another?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, on another. We had to sit separate. I went aboard the Maryland by way of the USS Pennsylvania. They took me to Pearl Harbor to catch the Maryland.

Mr. Cox: So you were on the Pennsylvania until you got to Pearl Harbor, and then you were assigned your ship.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, I was assigned to the Maryland. We went out and maneuvered for a while, and then we came back to Pearl. I was aboard the Maryland for three months before Pearl.

Mr. Cox: You went onboard the Maryland in September 1941?

Mr. Singleton: Yes. We were anchored there in Pearl Harbor when the Japs hit us.

Mr. Cox: Speaking of that, when the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor and you were on board, tell me what you remember.

Mr. Singleton: I was scared as hell. I was in the Officers' Galley and I was making a peanut butter sandwich. All of a sudden, something hit, guns began to go off. The boatswain's mate said for all hands to man their battle stations – we are being attacked. My battle station was way down below deck.

Mr. Cox: What was your battle station?

Mr. Singleton: In an ammunition handling room.

Mr. Cox: What did you do down there?

Mr. Singleton: Handle ammunition, send up ammunition.

Mr. Cox: OK, did you handle the powder charges, or did you handle projectiles?

Mr. Singleton: Projectiles and powder.

Mr. Cox: Both?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, we had both. We had a hoist that was used to send them up. We just kept it going.

Mr. Cox: Where did you get training for the handling of ammunition?

Mr. Singleton: We did that out at sea.

Mr. Cox: OK, it was on-the-job-training.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, on-the-job-training. We would have gunnery practice, and we would man our battle stations every month. It was to handle ammunition and send it up to the gunners. We constantly trained and practiced. There were seven of us down there handling the ammunition in this room. Most of the time I handled the hoist and the gunners mate was in charge.

Mr. Cox: At that point in time were most of the ammo handlers black?

Mr. Singleton: Yes. They had some whites too.

Mr. Cox: So it was integrated as far as handling...?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, as far as handling the ammunition.

Mr. Cox: Well, it should be. You were fighting for your life.

Mr. Singleton: No segregation in that.

Mr. Cox: As this was going on, of course you didn't know what was going on...

Mr. Singleton: On topside. We knew we had been hit because you could feel the concussion. The same way later on, during other attacks when we were hit. After we were hit at Pearl we were repaired, remodeled, etc.

Mr. Cox: That is what I was going to ask you, when the Maryland was hit at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, then it went back to the States, probably Bremerton, Washington.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, they remodeled us.

Mr. Cox: They redone it, and then they got the crew together and you

went out?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember what task force you were with and who the Admiral was?

Mr. Singleton: I believe Admiral Spruance. We kept the Flag most of the time.

Mr. Cox: The Flag indicating that the Admiral was onboard.

Mr. Singleton: Yes. It was the Admiral who was in charge of the Task Force. We started island hopping. It started at Tarawa.

Mr. Cox: So you were at Tarawa at the invasion? Were you able to see any of the action?

Mr. Singleton: Oh yes.

Mr. Cox: Did you get to go on top deck so you could see what was going on?

Mr. Singleton: Oh yes. After we made the initial bombardment and had knocked out some shore batteries we would come up on topside and watch the Marines fighting. We had the Marine Generals. I think we had Harlan Smith because I remember the time they wiped out the first wave of the Marines that were going in and he came back aboard ship in a whale boat, and he was mad – he blew his top. The Japs were in 16" pill boxes. On my ship we had 16" guns. The Maryland, the Colorado and the West Virginia were the only ships that had 16" guns of the older battleships. The rest of them had 14" and 12" guns. So anyway, we knocked out the shore batteries and then the Japs waited until the Marines got to the beach and they opened fire and wiped out the first wave.

Mr. Cox: The history books indicate that a lot of the Marines had to wade in several hundred yards...

Mr. Singleton: Yes, that's right.

Mr. Cox: You saw that?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, I saw that. As a matter of fact, I saw the Marine bodies

floating in the water. Some of them were about my age, with their backpacks on. That was terrible to see. The Japs just wiped them out.

Mr. Cox: Certainly, fellow Americans.

Mr. Singleton: We thought that after our planes bombarding and attacking there would be nothing left on the island, but they just wiped out the first wave of Marines. We captured two of the Japs. I believe they killed most of the others. We took those two aboard my ship and they were interrogated. One of them was a Korean and the other was a Jap. We weren't able to get too close to them. They were guarded by Marines. They would take them to the restrooms.

Mr. Cox: Well, after your Tarawa experience, then what happened? Where did you go?

Mr. Singleton: After Tarawa we went to the Marshal Islands – Eniwetok, Kwajalein. Even at Tarawa we had two seaplanes, the Kingfisher, and we had two officers – one a tall guy and the other a short guy. This one guy should have been considered a hero. He used to fly over Tarawa and drop hand grenades. That was a small plane, but he would make it back. He never got shot down or anything. So much for Tarawa, then we went to Kwajalein. We invaded there. It was another atoll, just like Tarawa, except it was a little larger.

Mr. Cox: On an invasion like this, you did the same thing as when you were on battle stations – you were an ammunition handler? Below decks. How many decks down were you?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, I was an ammunition handler. I was four decks below; at the very bottom. You couldn't go any lower. After we knocked out the shore batteries, then we could go up on topside. When we would have air attacks, then we would have to go back and man our battle stations. That was when we would go down below. Other than that, after the shore batteries had been knocked out we could go

topside. We didn't have too many air attacks at Kwajalein. Our Navy planes would knock them down before they got to us. Whenever they would get close though we would have to man our battle stations. After we left Kwajalein we went to Truck. They had a big Naval base there.

Mr. Cox: It was there for the Japanese. It was a major base.

Mr. Singleton: We thought we were going to find the fleet there. When we got there we only found a cargo ship. We sunk that. The fleet had left before we got there. We were fleet hunting for a little while. We didn't meet the fleet until later on during the Philippines. We took Saipan first.

Mr. Cox: You were in on the Saipan invasion?

Mr. Singleton: Oh yes. As a matter we had quite a typhoon at Saipan. We made the invasion after we knocked out the shore batteries, etc., the Marines were fighting and we were out there in the harbor, anchored, protecting the troop ships. They had secured Saipan, but they were still fighting on Tinnian, which was nearby. We were out there, and I was laying topside on the deck outside late in the evening. I was laying up under one of the gun turrets. All of a sudden, about 6 o'clock in the evening something hit. Before it hit though a Jap plane came over. He had his motor cut off, and all of a sudden turned them on. I thought it was one of our Navy Corsairs flying low. Just then something hit.

Mr. Cox: So you bounced about two feet in the air?

Mr. Singleton: About two feet in the air. We got the orders, "All hands, man your battle stations." I went down to man my battle station, but it was just that one plane.

Mr. Cox: Where did they put the torpedo?

Mr. Singleton: In the bow. Knocked a hole through the bow. You could drive a freight train through it. Then we went to Eniwetok for temporary

repairs. From there we were escorted to Pearl. Actually though, they only escorted us for a couple of days until we were out of air attack range. We had a couple of destroyers that escorted us. When we got to Pearl Harbor they had a bow almost waiting for us. We were able to go ashore there for a little R&R. When I got on the dock and looked over there and saw that big hole I wondered how we were able to make it to Pearl. We stayed in Pearl about two weeks or three weeks. They put a new bow on for us and then we went back out to sea.

Mr. Cox: Now while you were on shore and R&R, due to your race, were you very confined in Hawaii? In other words, were there very few places that you could go to?

Mr. Singleton: There were a few places that we couldn't go to, but most of the time we would go to the submarine base.

Mr. Cox: I was wondering if they had segregation in Hawaii as much as it was in the States at the time.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, it was just about as bad.

Mr. Cox: Just about the same?

Mr. Singleton: Yes. During this time we got into a fight at the sub base with some guys off of another ship.

Mr. Cox: Were they black or white?

Mr. Singleton: White. They took my two buddies and I to the brig. We had Marine guards at the brig. They made you take all of your clothes off and stand at attention.

Mr. Cox: You couldn't sit down or anything?

Mr. Singleton: Couldn't sit down.

Mr. Cox: How long did that go on?

Mr. Singleton: All evening – until the Master of Arms from our ship came over and got us.

Mr. Cox: OK, so you are talking about being arrested by the Shore

Patrol, and you are standing there buck naked. How long did they have you doing that?

Mr. Singleton: If I remember correctly, I would say about three hours. They made us shave, and this one buddy of mine had never had a razor on his face, but they made him shave.

Mr. Cox: He didn't really have a beard did he? He probably just had peach fuzz.

Mr. Singleton: He didn't have anything. He didn't even have fuzz.

Mr. Cox: Did somebody from the ship come and get you?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, the Master at Arms.

Mr. Cox: Did you have to go before the mast?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, we went before the Executive Officer. It was what we called the "Captain Mast." He didn't do anything to us then.

Mr. Cox: You didn't get busted in rank?

Mr. Singleton: No. We didn't get anything. I was Mess Attendant Second Class, I couldn't go any lower. We had another fight/brawl there in Kwajalein. One of my buddies got clobbered. A Marine was fighting there on the island and my buddy goes up to use the restroom. It was early, about 5 o'clock, in the morning. I usually slept down in the ammunition room, my battle station, most of the time. They used to call me the mole because I slept down there. This buddy of mine got involved in a fight when he went to use the restroom. One of the guys hauled off a clobbered him. He and my other buddy ... we used to run together all of the time. They came and got me. They found me down in my battle station. We decided to go and get 'em. We started swinging. Anyway, they finally broke it up.

Mr. Cox: You had Marines stationed there? They came in and broke it up?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, they and the Master at Arms broke it up. My buddies and I

were outnumbered, about 50 to 3. We started throwing big GI cups, plates, etc. They were getting ready to eat breakfast. Anyway, the Marines and the Master at Arms came in and broke it up. So we went to Mast before the Captain. We were standing up for this one boy. He was from San Antonio.

Mr. Cox: Do you remember his name?

Mr. Singleton: I can't think of his name. But we got to be pretty good friends later on. Anyway, we were standing up before the Executive Officer, and each one of us was going to give our account of what happened. Me, my two buddies and these three white guys. The one from San Antonio kept saying, "Well, I looked down and this Nigger..." When he said it I hauled off and hit him. Every time he would say it I would hit him. The Captain said he wasn't going to have that.

Mr. Cox: Oh you did that before the Captain?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, before the Captain and the Executive Officer. The Master at Arms was a right behind us. I was a young guy and didn't care about it. He said it twice and the Executive Officer said that he didn't want that word said again. He told him to say Negro or Colored. He said, "You don't use that word around here." Anyway, so he told his story. The Executive Officer said, "Well, we are in combat so you won't go to the brig, but after combat we are going to give you three days of confinement with bread & water." That is what we got.

Mr. Cox: Did the white boys get that too?

Mr. Singleton: Yes.

Mr. Cox: All of you that were the main ones?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, the main ones got it. The Captain sent for me. I can't recall his name now, but he was rather heavy set, ruddy faced. He had the Master at Arms to bring me to his office. I went there and he asked me what was wrong with me. He said that every time he looked

around I was in trouble. He said I was a good sailor, but whenever there was a fight I was in it. I liked the action of fighting. It didn't make any difference where I was. He wanted to know if I wanted to get kicked out of the Navy, or did I want a transfer, etc? I told him, "Not particularly." He wanted to know if my folks had ever told me, "Where there is smoke there is fire." I told him I had heard that saying before. He said that was the way it was with me. He said that whenever there was a fight I was in it. He said that if I thought I was going to get transferred or kicked out, but as long as I am Executive Officer aboard this ship you are not going to get a rank. He said that as long as he was Executive Officer I was going to be there and that was as far as I was going in rank. He told the Master at Arms to take me away – "Take him out of my face." After that he had no more problems from me. One day the guy that called me "nigger" and I were in the showers and he told me he was sorry but that he had been brought up that way. He told me he was from San Antonio, Texas. He wanted to know if I was from Texas too. I told him I was. He said that he was brought up that way and when he was growing up they had a colored maid and we used to think colored people had tails. That is what they were taught. He asked me not to get mad at him, but when their maid would hang out clothes they would pull her dress up and see if it was true. I guess you can imagine how I felt.

Mr. Cox: Certainly.

Mr. Singleton: He said he found out different. He also said that he was sorry and that we were out there in the Pacific for the same cause, and said "We shouldn't be doing this to each other. I think as much of you as a brother." I said, "OK."

Mr. Cox: That meant a lot to you, didn't it?

Mr. Singleton: It did.

Mr. Cox: His apology.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, and we got to be good friends. Later on after Tarawa and we caught the torpedo in Saipan, we only lost two people and he was one of them.

Mr. Cox: Oh my.

Mr. Singleton: He was one of the two. He and I got to be real close. I can't recall his name right now.

Mr. Cox: Did you come back to the States any time, other than...

Mr. Singleton: We came back. During the Philippines we met the Japanese fleet in the Sarangani Straits. After we knocked them out, sunk them all, then we went back to protect the transports in the harbor. We caught a kamikaze there. I believe we lost 25 or 30 people in that attack. It knocked out our gun turrets. There were two turrets forward and they were knocked out, so we had to go to Bremerton for that.

Mr. Cox: Do you recall what year that was?

Mr. Singleton: I think that was in '44 during the invasion of the Philippines. That is when I got my 21-day leave.

Mr. Cox: So your brother was at Seattle and you were at Bremerton, so you guys got together.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, I got a 21-day leave and we came back home together.

Mr. Cox: So you came back to Texas?

Mr. Singleton: Yes, Weslaco.

Mr. Cox: How did you travel from Washington to Texas?

Mr. Singleton: Train. There is another story there. It was during the winter months, and it was cold. We had a layover in Denver. The slow train was snowbound, so this lady said, "Whitecap." She thought I was a whitecap. She needed help with her bags.

Mr. Cox: Whitecap being the guy that worked on the train and handled baggage.

Mr. Singleton: I told her I was not an employee, but rather a sailor. From Seattle to Denver you could sit anywhere you wanted to, but from Denver to Texas after we changed trains there was one car for blacks.

Mr. Cox: So what you are saying Johnnie, from the Pacific Coast up to the Rocky Mountains it was not segregated, and then once you start heading eastward then it became segregated.

Mr. Singleton: Yes. Then you had to separate.

Mr. Cox: So you went to Weslaco. Were your Mother and Dad happy to see you.

Mr. Singleton: Oh yes, you see somehow they had heard on the radio that we had gotten sunk. You know, Japanese propaganda. They called us the “Ghost Ship.” Used to listen to Tokyo Rose all the time. She would always say that they had sunk the Maryland, etc. Finally, she began to call us the “Ghost Ship.” According to her they sunk us about three times. Each time they hit us they claimed they sunk us.

Mr. Cox: When you went home, I imagine your Mother was quite proud of you being in the Navy and serving our country.

Mr. Singleton: Oh yes, she was. My Stepdad too.

Mr. Cox: Certainly. How did the civilians treat you as a young, black, Navy man when you were home on leave like that?

Mr. Singleton: Real good. Weslaco went all out. Anything I wanted to do. Except one time – we were in this Mexican restaurant there. I was with some of the kids that I grew up with. They had not gone in the service. This white fellow came in and he didn’t like the idea of me sitting in the front of the restaurant.

Mr. Cox: You were with your friends on the stools.

Mr. Singleton: He was from Mississippi. He said something, and I told him, “You asked for it.” I let him have it.

Mr. Cox: Where there is smoke there is fire.

Mr. Singleton: I let him have it. The owner of the restaurant was there and his son was a good friend of mine, so he told the guy to get out. He called the Police. They came and took him, but didn't do anything to me.

Mr. Cox: Good.

Mr. Singleton: They took him on in. I had witnesses and everybody told him what had happened. They treated me good in Weslaco. They treated me as a hero. A bunch of my friends went in the Marine Corps after the war like Harlan Block. I think he went in the Marines in 1942 or 1943. After the war ended I went to Weslaco and some of the guys that were in the Marine Corps came back home and we all got together and have been buddies ever since. One of the times we came into Bremerton, one of my buddies from Weslaco had joined the Marine Corps. He was a white fellow. There were two of them, twins. This one, Leo Ryan, he was one of the Marine Guards at the gate there at Bremerton. So we hooked up that time. I took him aboard ship and showed him around. It was quite an experience for him. After the war ended he was Postmaster there in Weslaco.

Mr. Cox: After you finished your 21-day leave, I think you told me that your brother came down at the same time.

Mr. Singleton: Yes.

Mr. Cox: So you were down in Weslaco with your brother. After your leave and you went back to Washington, then where did you go from there?

Mr. Singleton: We went back to Pearl and we joined the fleet. We had already taken Saipan and the Philippines. Then we invaded Okinawa. That was the next one. That is when we ran into the typhoon. We knocked out the shore batteries, landed the troops, etc. Of course we were getting air attacks through the day and night.

Mr. Cox: Kamikazes were very bad at that time.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, they were bad – just like flies.

Mr. Cox: Did you ever get up on deck and watch the kamikazes?

Mr. Singleton: No, I stayed in my battle station. The only thing I knew about them was when they hit us. I knew we were firing because I was on an anti-aircraft battery. When we got hit, of course we felt that. Little did I know that we were trapped in down there until they started cutting us out.

Mr. Cox: You were trapped when the kamikaze hit?

Mr. Singleton: We were trapped. We didn't know it until we heard the jack-hammers and cutting torches. They cut us out.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you this Johnnie – during combat and you are down three or four decks below top deck, and you are in combat, do you remember what your thoughts were, or what did you think about besides just passing ammo? Were you just doing your job?

Mr. Singleton: Just doing my job.

Mr. Cox: You just concentrate on that. Are you afraid? Or do you have time to be afraid?

Mr. Singleton: No, you don't have to be afraid. You just want to get that ammunition up there to those guys. As a matter of fact, you wish that more would come on so you could knock them out. We would be cussing like hell – cussing and raising hell.

Mr. Cox: To get back to the kamikaze that hit your ship off of Okinawa, when they finally got you guys up on deck, can you describe what it looked like where the kamikaze had hit?

Mr. Singleton: Twisted steel, blood and bodies everywhere. We found the foot and shoe of the kamikaze pilot. We did recognize that.

Mr. Cox: Did you lose any acquaintances during that kamikaze attack?

Mr. Singleton: We lost some people. I didn't know them personally. One of the ship's cooks got burned real bad. He was at another battle station,

not from mine.

Mr. Cox: I would like to ask you something that happened during World War II. Here you were, a young, black seaman facing danger every day, and they had an incident that happened that happened in Port Chicago, California, regarding the handling of ammunition and explosives, whereas a number of black seaman refused to load this ammunition that was headed for the Pacific. When you heard about that, what were your feelings as a young, black man?

Mr. Singleton: That cocked my gun I tell you for sure.

Mr. Cox: In other words it made you extremely mad.

Mr. Singleton: Extremely mad and words really can't describe how I felt about that. I thought that every one of them should have been hung. I had a brother that just missed out on that. They were supposed to have sent him there, but somehow or another he didn't go there. They sent him to Sea Island rather than Port Chicago, and he was stationed there. He never went overseas either. Me and my buddies talked about that.

Mr. Cox: I'm sure you did. You were in harms way every day.

Mr. Singleton: Sure it was dangerous duty, but it wasn't any more dangerous than what we were doing.

Mr. Cox: Exactly. Those are my thoughts.

Mr. Singleton: Somebody had to do it.

Mr. Cox: As you know...

Mr. Singleton: We had newsletters aboard ship. We read about it and that is the way we found out about it.

Mr. Cox: Sure, after it happened.

Mr. Singleton: Yes, after it happened.

Mr. Cox: As you know, they courts martialled 50 seamen, and according to history books ultimately President Truman pardoned

them.

Mr. Singleton: I think he did pardon them.

Mr. Cox: It was just one of these unfortunate incidents, among many, many that happened during World War II. After you were at Okinawa, and I imagine that you worked pretty hard as far as defending your ship because of the number of kamikazes that were involved. By the way, you had a number of battle stars that you could wear on your uniform, didn't you? How many did you have?

Mr. Singleton: Seven.

Mr. Cox: Seven battle stars you were entitled to wear on your uniform.

Mr. Singleton: We took Peleliu also.

Mr. Cox: After Okinawa, then how did it proceed? Where did you go from there.

Mr. Singleton: After Okinawa, after we suffered our kamikaze, we went to Bremerton for repairs. We were there for about a month. Once we got repaired we went for a trial run, and from there we proceeded to go out. We went to Long Beach to pick up supplies and then we went out to rejoin the fleet to make the invasion of Japan. We are always going to be the first one in. The Maryland, the Pennsylvania, the Colorado, the West Virginia, and the Tennessee all operated together. On every invasion we were all together. We were going to rejoin the battle group and going to invade Japan. We would go in first and bombard to knock out shore batteries, etc. and then days later the landing troops would come in. I think we were out at sea for about two days when they dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. We didn't think much of that. We'd never heard of an atomic bomb before and didn't know what kind of damage it was going to do. We continued sailing, heading to join the fleet. A couple of days later they dropped another atomic bomb on Nagasaki. We continued going forward. A couple of days

later the Japs surrendered. By the time we got the word that the Japs had surrendered we were half way there, so we got orders to turn around and go back to Long Beach, California. That is what we did. After Long Beach anybody that wanted to re-up could do so. They would give us leave first though. They sent me over to Terminal Island at San Pedro. If you wanted to re-up and take leave you could go there. I went to Terminal Island, but they lost my records and I didn't get my leave. My ship left. That is the first time she had ever sailed without me for four years. I saw her leave and that is when I broke down.

Mr. Cox:

Just like home leaving you.

Mr. Singleton:

Yes. Anyway, they lost my records. I was supposed to get leave and I didn't get my leave. I was going to re-up then. I had enough points to get out. I decided to just go on and get out. I had no records and I stayed around Terminal Island the whole month of August. They were going to send me back to sea. They were going to put me aboard a mine sweeper. I went aboard this mine sweeper, the YMS-67, and wondered what I was doing – going back to sea again. The next morning they got ready to call the muster out, and I answered Johnnie Singleton, Steward Mate First Class. They said they wanted Johnnie Singleton Seaman First Class. The Captain said that I wasn't who they wanted. He told me to pack my bag and go back to Terminal Island. I reported back to Terminal Island, but no records. I laid around there up until October – no duty, no pay, no nothing. Every time they called me to catch a truck to the train station to go to Camp Wallace for discharge they would scratch me off. Then a guy called me, "Johnnie Singleton," and I said, "Yes." His name was Johnnie Singleton also. I had one of these blue jean jackets and my name was stenciled in it. We would take a match stem and dip it in bleach and write your name in

your jackets. He said, "You are looking for your records aren't you?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said that he had seen my records and they were in the Missing Records Department. He said that his had been missing too. I went over to the Personnel Department and I told the guy that my records were there. That guy said that my records weren't there. I asked him to look and see. He repeated that my records weren't there. I went to the Captain's Office and told him what had happened. I told him I was supposed to have been on the list to go to Texas for discharge. He said to wait a minute, and then he got on the phone and told that guy to look for my records and look in the Missing Records Files. He said he was going to hold on until the Yeoman found the records. He found them. He told him to give me my records so I could catch the next truck and for him to hold the truck until I got there. The Captain told him then he wanted him to come to his office immediately. The Captain said he hoped that I would re-up and I told him I would think about it. It made me mad. I didn't receive any pay for almost two months.

Mr. Cox: Did they give you your back pay?

Mr. Singleton: Oh yes I got all of that back.

Mr. Cox: What were you being paid at that time?

Mr. Singleton: I think I was getting \$80 a month.

Mr. Cox: They paid you in cash, did they not?

Mr. Singleton: Yes.

Mr. Cox: Let me ask you this, in your time in the Navy, overall what were your opinions of your superiors? That is, the Yeomen above you and the Captains, etc.

Mr. Singleton: I had no problems with my superiors. I got along with most everybody. I was just a typical young guy, always in to something. I figured it was just life, just the way we lived. I never will forget

this one time, when USC beat Tennessee in the Rose Bowl, Jim Hardy was a quarterback for USC. A buddy of mine from Tennessee and we made a \$100 bet. He bet on Tennessee and I took USC. We read about it and learned that USC beat Tennessee. Tennessee had been undefeated throughout the season, and so had Southern Cal. Jim Hardy was the star of the game, and he had a brother that played too. His name was Jim and he was the quarterback. For some reason we went to Bremerton and left there, and then went to San Francisco. This was during the winter months, about January or February. I guess it was January, right after the Rose Bowl, anyway we were in San Francisco and on our way back out to sea. So Sly Mess comes to me and says, “Hey Johnnie, guess what? Guess who is aboard our ship? Jim Hardy, quarterback from USC. We got him aboard our ship.” I said, “You’re kidding.” He said, “Come on and I’ll introduce you to Sly.” He was a Mess Attendant. What they did was take lunches to the officers.

Mr. Cox: Yes, they were waiters basically.

Mr. Singleton: Most of my duties were in the galley, peeling spuds for the cooks, washing pots & pans, etc. I did the dirty work. He said, “I had the pleasure of waiting on him.” I was introduced to him. Jim was with us all the time. I told him about the money I made off of him. He was with us every day. He was an Ensign, the same thing as a 2nd Lieutenant. He was with us every day on the ship and we talked about football. He was quite a guy – Jim Hardy. He finally made JG.

Mr. Cox: To get back, during the war do you remember hearing when President Roosevelt died? I’m sure you were at sea. What were your feelings then?

Mr. Singleton:

That was a sad feeling. I can remember the time when President Roosevelt was running against Dewey right before he died. That is when I started smoking. I had never smoked before in my life. Some buddies and I were sitting in the folksail discussing who was going to win the election, President Roosevelt or Dewey. I thought that Roosevelt would win it. This one black guy, one that I didn't have much to do with because he kind of looked down on us. He was from Georgia. He said that we didn't know what we were talking about. We had a supply ship along side and we were taking on supplies. He came on back and I hauled off and clobbered him. He fell over backwards onto the next deck while the guy was putting supplies away. All of a sudden I saw them run up the hatch carrying a stretcher. I wondered what was going on. I walked over and this guy was laying on the bottom of the deck and bleeding. They put him on a stretcher and rushed him to the sick bay. He was unconscious and remained that way for a long time. The guys were going back and forth to see how he was doing. The reports were coming back that he was still unconscious. I said that I was going to go up there and look for myself. I went to the Sick Bay and asked the Pharmacy Mate how the guy was doing. He said that he wasn't doing too good and it didn't look very good for whoever hit him. Little did he know that he was talking to the guy. I went back to the folksail. This one guy, Simmons, was smoking a Lucky Strike. I told him to let me have one of those cigarettes. He gave me one. I didn't know how to inhale or anything. I puffed, puffed, and told him to give me another one. I took another one and puffed. Then I asked for another one. He told me to go buy myself a pack because they only cost a quarter. I went and bought myself a pack of Lucky Strike and that is when I first began to smoke. The guy did come to. I went to the Captain's Mast and

he chastised me and told me I wasn't going anywhere. He gave me five days of bread and water. That was the second time. I smoked twenty some years. I quit smoking about 32 years ago. An old retired Colonel came to the commissary where I worked. I was the Grocery Manager there, and out of the machine. They cost 35 cents at that time. I was walking through the store and opening up the pack. This retired Colonel said, "Johnnie, come here." I walked over and he said, "Son, don't smoke those cigarettes." I asked him why and he said, "Look at my face. I've been taking cobalt treatments because I have throat cancer. I only have about six more months to live. Those cigarettes is what did it. I think a lot of you. You've been real good to us. You always treat us nice. If I can save your life." Tears were coming out of his eyes. He said that if he could save my life he would be satisfied. I told him that if he felt that strongly about it, I was finished – NOW! Sure enough, I walked away. A guy that was putting baby food on the shelf asked me for a cigarette and I gave him the whole pack. I haven't had a cigarette in my mouth since that day.

Mr. Cox:

Is there anything else? We are about to conclude the interview Johnnie, is there anything else you would like to add that you can think of? Let me ask you this, being a Steward's Mate and as you said, you were basically in the kitchen doing KP unless you were in General Quarters, how did you like doing that?

Mr. Singleton:

I would rather have been out there swabbing decks rather than KP all of the time. I would have rather been waiting tables than KP, peeling spuds and washing pots and pans. I was such a bad guy and I think that is why they gave me that job.

Mr. Cox:

They were afraid that you would get in a fight. I would guess that you did not get a Good Conduct Ribbon did you?

Mr. Singleton:

No, I didn't get one. We did receive a Presidential Unit Citation

though. Looking back over it though it was a lot of fun.

Mr. Cox: I want to take this opportunity to shake your hand and tell you Thank You for what you did for our country during those very trying days.

Mr. Singleton: Looking back over it, it was worth every bit of it. I would do it all over again.

Mr. Cox: I think that says it all. Thank you.

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