

National Museum of the Pacific War

NIMITZ EDUCATION AND RESEARCH CENTER
Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Clyde Johnson
United States Navy, USS *Chester*, Pacific War, World War II
Date of Interview:
February 18, 2005

National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with Clyde Johnson
United States Navy, USS *Chester*, Pacific War, World War II

Mr. Daniel: This is an oral history interview of Clyde Johnson, Electrician's Mate 3rd Class in World War II on the cruiser USS *Chester*. He was born the seventh of February 1926. The interviewer is myself, Dwight D. Daniel, an oral history volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War located in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today is 18 February 2005. This interview is taking place at the sixtieth anniversary of Iwo Jima at Fredericksburg. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies which is the archive for the preservation of historical information of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife. This is tape one, side a.

Now Clyde, let's try your voice again.

Mr. Johnson: I enjoyed my time in the Navy and especially the servicemen that I served with.

Mr. Daniel: One of the few questions I always ask everybody is what were your parents' names, your mother and your father?

Mr. Johnson: My daddy was Oscar and my mother was Hattie.

Mr. Daniel: Hattie, a good old name. What was her maiden name, do you remember?

Mr. Johnson: Sullivan.

Mr. Daniel: I know because we talked that you lived in Hondo. Where were you born?

Mr. Johnson: I was born in Hot Springs, Arkansas, but left there at six weeks old.

Mr. Daniel: Why were your folks in Hot Springs?

Mr. Johnson: That was my mother's home. Daddy was in the oil field.

Mr. Daniel: That explains it then. What kind of oil work did your father do?

Mr. Johnson: He owned his rig for a while and then at other times he was a driller. Spent

thirteen years in Old Mexico.

Mr. Daniel: Your mother was a housewife?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: You said you were born in Hot Springs and you left at six weeks. Where did you go after you left?

Mr. Johnson: Hondo.

Mr. Daniel: You've lived in Hondo forever and ever.

Mr. Johnson: Except for the time in service or in college.

Mr. Daniel: Your father basically worked out of Hondo as a driller and things like that?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, but when he moved to Hondo they drilled a well and he liked the place and the land. He bought it and became a farmer and rancher.

Mr. Daniel: How many acres did he have?

Mr. Johnson: He had partnership in over three hundred.

Mr. Daniel: Good size ranch. Since you lived in Hondo, I assume you went to high school and everything else in Hondo.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I went to school in Hondo.

Mr. Daniel: Did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: I always ask because in that time and era a lot people didn't graduate from high school. You were fortunate. Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Johnson: When I heard about Pearl Harbor I was working in the local theater as a projectionist while I was in high school.

Mr. Daniel: Did they make an announcement over the radio and that's how you knew?

Mr. Johnson: No, they heard it over the radio or someone told us and then the owner made

an announcement to those in attendance.

Mr. Daniel: You were about fifteen then? No, that can't be right.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, that's about right.

Mr. Daniel: So obviously you were a little young to join the service.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: When did you join?

Mr. Johnson: I joined January of '44.

Mr. Daniel: Why did you pick the Navy over say, the Army or the Marines?

Mr. Johnson: I tried to get in the Naval Air Corps. Didn't make it. We had the local airfield there and it just didn't appeal to me so the Navy book showed all the travel and everything. So, there I went.

Mr. Daniel: That makes sense to me. Where did you actually join the Navy? Was it in Hondo?

Mr. Johnson: No, I had to go to San Antonio.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. Where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Johnson: I went to San Diego, California.

Mr. Daniel: This was actually the first time you traveled, right?

Mr. Johnson: It was the first time I ever--

Mr. Daniel: Ever out of Hondo.

Mr. Johnson: Well, I'd been to San Antonio. (laughs) That's about it.

Mr. Daniel: What was boot camp like?

Mr. Johnson: It was just regular marching and really trying to get you away from being a civilian. I only spent five weeks in boot camp. Then they sent me to the University of Kansas to electrician's school.

Mr. Daniel: You had a good deal then.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: Do you know how you were picked?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, because of the math score.

Mr. Daniel: Okay. So your camp was short then.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. My whole firing was about twelve rounds with a .22 rifle in an indoor range.

Mr. Daniel: How long were you at the University of Kansas?

Mr. Johnson: I was there four months.

Mr. Daniel: I assume as an electrician, they wanted you to do all the electrical stuff on the panels on a ship, right?

Mr. Johnson: They wanted us to do any electrical work that was needed.

Mr. Daniel: What did you think about that; did you like it?

Mr. Johnson: I liked it. I had done a little bit of electrician's work before I went in the service. A guy who wired houses would hire me.

Mr. Daniel: You were familiar with it then.

Mr. Johnson: Slightly.

Mr. Daniel: What was the University of Kansas like in those days?

Mr. Johnson: They tell me if you were there in '44, that it looks the same way today. It was a nice little town. We enjoyed ourselves.

Mr. Daniel: Since this is considered advance, you were allowed to go out and leave at night weren't you?

Mr. Johnson: We were given Wednesday night out until ten o'clock, I think, and then weekends if you didn't have duty.

Mr. Daniel: That was actually pretty good duty.

Mr. Johnson: And they had cooks for us. No mess duty.

Mr. Daniel: How was the food, good?

Mr. Johnson: Food was good.

Mr. Daniel: I guess taking math in high school really helped you a lot then.

Mr. Johnson: Oh, yes. I was always interested in it and at the top of my class in math.

Mr. Daniel: That worked out real good for you then. After the University of Kansas, where did you go?

Mr. Johnson: I went to a receiving station at Shoemaker, California.

Mr. Daniel: Where was Shoemaker?

Mr. Johnson: It's down south of San Francisco.

Mr. Daniel: You were in the receiving station for about a week or so?

Mr. Johnson: No, I was there about three or four weeks.

Mr. Daniel: That's unusual.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, at that time of the war anyway.

Mr. Daniel: Any guess why you were there so long?

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Daniel: Normally they try to get you in and out as fast as possible. That is unusual. After the receiving station, where did you wind up?

Mr. Johnson: Wound up going up to Treasure Island. In San Francisco we boarded ship to go to Hawaii.

Mr. Daniel: Now you still haven't been assigned to a ship yet, right?

Mr. Johnson: No. I went over to Hawaii on the USS *Taylor* and then about three weeks later, we boarded the USS *Ernst* and headed out for the fleet by way of Guadalcanal, New Guinea, up to Manus, and then we were waiting for the

fleet to come back. Meantime, they had taken Ulithi. So we went up there after being on this ship for fifty-six days because we had two guys came down with spinal meningitis and they quarantined us. They would give us sulfa pills for it. If they gave you your pill up at the top deck, you went down to second deck. There were about a half-dozen glasses of water for everybody to drink out of.

Mr. Daniel: What did you do on ship?

Mr. Johnson: On that ship?

Mr. Daniel: Yes.

Mr. Johnson: Nothing.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought.

Mr. Johnson: Slept. Played cards. Told stories.

Mr. Daniel: Weird. You've been on this ship quarantined, which is not pleasant admittedly, how was the food on the ship?

Mr. Johnson: Well, it was two meals a day. More or less troopship food.

Mr. Daniel: Nothing special?

Mr. Johnson: Nothing special.

Mr. Daniel: Then what happened?

Mr. Johnson: We got to Ulithi and shortly I boarded the USS *Chester*. October 31, 1944.

Mr. Daniel: Any guess as how they picked you for the USS *Chester*?

Mr. Johnson: They were probably needing an electrician.

Mr. Daniel: Was that the biggest ship you had ever been on by that time?

Mr. Johnson: Oh, yes. I'd never seen anything like that.

Mr. Daniel: What did you think about the *Chester*?

Mr. Johnson: I loved it. When we first went alongside, it had been out at sea for quite a bit.

It looked pretty rugged. When I boarded it and got into the electric shop and met the guys, it was the swellest bunch of guys. In fact, we're still in touch. What few of us are left.

Mr. Daniel: What were your first assignments like on the USS *Chester*?

Mr. Johnson: My first assignment was the lights. Mainly it was switching light bulbs and being that the ship was commissioned in 1930, we had lots of old cable and everything was old. We spent a lot of time re-wiring and then re-insulating.

Mr. Daniel: It probably wasn't refurbished.

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Daniel: That's bad. A lot of times when you refurbish a ship they do that.

Mr. Johnson: After it had already taken a bomb and a torpedo.

Mr. Daniel: I figured they would take it back to the—

Mr. Johnson: They took it back but they didn't take time to pull all that cable out.

Mr. Daniel: They were probably in a hurry to get it back.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: What kind of job is getting rid of all that old cable? Is that like crawling around in all these little small spaces?

Mr. Johnson: No, they had the bays up close to the ceiling.

Mr. Daniel: So it wasn't too bad then.

Mr. Johnson: No, it wasn't. You only got that really when one chief actually would catch you and you didn't look like you were busy then "Come pull the cable."

Mr. Daniel: Pulling cable is a horrible experience.

Mr. Johnson: I didn't do too much of that. Insulating the fuse boxes.

Mr. Daniel: Where did the USS *Chester* go?

Mr. Johnson: They were chasing the Japanese fleet in Leyte Gulf and we went out there but

we weren't very close to them. We didn't spend much time out there. We were under the command of Admiral John McCain.

Mr. Daniel: You chased them around for awhile, then what happened?

Mr. Johnson: We went back to Ulithi. This was getting into November. We went up to Saipan and were there a few days and then we started bombarding Iwo Jima in November. We would return every few weeks. In fact, we had five bombardment missions up there.

Mr. Daniel: I didn't realize that.

Mr. Johnson: Prior to the fleet going up.

Mr. Daniel: Did you do anything special when there was a bombardment or did you just do your normal electrical stuff?

Mr. Johnson: I was on a repair party. Normally I didn't do anything unless something went out.

Mr. Daniel: What did you think about the bombardment?

Mr. Johnson: I happened to be down on second deck and saw none of it. All I would hear is they'd say, "Commence firing." About that time those 8-inch guns would go off. I would jump about two feet high. After that, I could sit there and sleep the rest (?).

Mr. Daniel: Amazing. How was the *Chester*? It seems like it was a pretty good ship.

Mr. Johnson: It was a good ship. We would make those bombardment runs and then we went up on the sixteenth, I guess it was, and started bombarding it prior to the invasion. My watches, I had three different ones. One of them was on the search lights and whoever thought they'd turn search lights on in the middle of the ocean at night but I was up there. Then my other one was generator watch and also after-diesel.

Mr. Daniel: The after-diesel could be interesting, I guess.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, you sit there again and read your book.

Mr. Daniel: (laughs) You had a rough tour, didn't you?

Mr. Johnson: Wasn't a whole lot about electrical work.

Mr. Daniel: You said you read; did you have the manuals you could read and study?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: That's good.

Mr. Johnson: We'd get ahold of manuals for the next rank.

Mr. Daniel: Not bad. Okay, you did the bombardment mission at Iwo, what was that like other than you were down on the second deck and didn't see anything?

Mr. Johnson: Didn't see anything.

Mr. Daniel: I'm not trying to be funny. Did you know what was happening? Did they tell the crew?

Mr. Johnson: Oh yes, every once in a while. We had scout ships aboard ship and they were taking off and landing. We could hear them speak over the intercom.

Mr. Daniel: But you were still on the second deck.

Mr. Johnson; Second deck. All those bombardments and didn't see a thing.

Mr. Daniel: I'm laughing because I interviewed somebody that was on the USS *Vestal* which was the repair ship beside the USS *Arizona*. I figure I have got the gold mine of all knowledge. So I said, "What do you know?" He knew absolutely nothing because his battle stations were in the very bottom of the ship as a fire watcher. He said he heard a big explosion that shook him up and he didn't leave the station. He wasn't supposed to. He came up about half an hour or hour later on and the USS *Arizona* was sunk. They had rammed his ship. Had no idea what happened. He went to a seminar to figure out what happened. He was just like you. This is your job; don't go outside.

At the bombardment, they told you what was happening. Did they tell you why they were taking the island?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we were told that it would be a landing for the B-29, the fighter pilots because it cut the distance back to Saipan by half.

Mr. Daniel: Good. I just wanted to make sure. It sounds like they did a good job on this. How long were you at that bombardment?

Mr. Johnson: Usually a few hours. Then we would come back and go to Saipan or straight on back to Ulithi to replenish.

Mr. Daniel: How long did you guys do that? I know you said you were there for the initial landings.

Mr. Johnson: We were there until in the morning of February 19, '45, the actual invasion. It was before daylight. We were going into our position, firing position. A mine sweep got in the way and we gave way to him. We gave hard left rudder. We saw the USS *Estes*, a command ship about to ram us, so we hard left ruddered. They turned and we just about made it but in the latter part of the ship they did ram us. Knocked off one screw.

Mr. Daniel: I didn't know that.

Mr. Johnson: Cracked another shaft. We continued our bombardment mission that day and then we escorted a destroyer escort that had caught a kamikaze the night before back to Saipan.

Mr. Daniel: I imagine your workload went up tremendously at this point, or not?

Mr. Johnson: No, not really.

Mr. Daniel: It was just all those propulsion machines.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it was. And like I say, it knocked out a little electrical circuit but not enough to speak of.

Mr. Daniel: What happened at Saipan? Is that where you were refurbished or fixed?

Mr. Johnson: No, we went to Saipan and we wanted to go to the Philippines to a dry dock big enough for us. No, go to Pearl Harbor. So they sent us back to Pearl. They looked at us and says go back to Mare Island in San Francisco. With only two screws.

Mr. Daniel: When you went back to Mare Island, were you by yourself or did you have any other ships with you?

Mr. Johnson: No, we went back alone.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought. This must have been some serious damage then.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, it was. It caved in the side. They had to (?).

Mr. Daniel: How long were you at Mare Island being repaired?

Mr. Johnson: We were there until June. I forget just the date on that.

Mr. Daniel: That had to be some serious damage then.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. They brought us all up to date with radar.

Mr. Daniel: Normally, if there's that much damage to a ship while it's there they just rebuild everything in sight.

Mr. Johnson: They rebuilt it.

Mr. Daniel: When you were at Mare Island, were you still on ship?

Mr. Johnson: No, they put us in some barracks there for a while.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I figured. To get you out of the way so the crews could get on there.

Mr. Johnson: That's right. And the food was good.

Mr. Daniel: When you were in those barracks did you really have any duties?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we had to go aboard ship every day.

Mr. Daniel: Sometimes it's good just to be in a barracks though.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: Did you get a lot of liberty at the time?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we had duty every third night.

Mr. Daniel: That's not bad.

Mr. Johnson: No, and we could leave at noon and weren't due back until eight o'clock the next morning.

Mr. Daniel: That is good. That wasn't bad duty then.

Mr. Johnson: Our favorite thought was Sacramento, California, Smokestack City.

Mr. Daniel: What did you do when you went to Sacramento?

Mr. Johnson: Hit the bars. I had a gal friend up there for a while. That's about it.

Mr. Daniel: How long was the USS *Chester* at Mare Island being re-done? You said until about June.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: I assume the *Chester* was sent back out again.

Mr. Johnson: Yes, we were sent back for the ending of Okinawa.

Mr. Daniel: You got there at the very end.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: After the ship came out of Mare Island, how was it? Was there a lot of work done to it?

Mr. Johnson: Oh, yes. You wouldn't know it.

Mr. Daniel: That much work, huh?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. They cut the old high mast off of it and where they used to have lookouts, they put on your modern radar.

Mr. Daniel: Did they replace any of the cable that you were having problems with?

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Daniel: Can't have everything.

Mr. Johnson: But at that time I had enough time on it and was on the refrigeration and the motors. So that stopped all the little duties.

Mr. Daniel: The ship got back to Okinawa. Then were did you wind up? You're getting real close to the end of the war here.

Mr. Johnson: We went from Okinawa to the South China Sea and swept out Japanese mines. And actually got within sight of Shanghai. Mail service was ten days.

Mr. Daniel: That's not bad.

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Daniel: Were you guys doing that when the war ended in effect?

Mr. Johnson: No, we still had another adventure ahead.

Mr. Daniel: This is getting better.

Mr. Johnson: We went from sweeping mines to going up to the Aleutians.

Mr. Daniel: You're kidding me. You went from the South China Sea up to the Aleutians?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, and went to Adak and Attu. When we were dropping the anchor, I believe it was at Attu, we got the announcement the war was over.

Mr. Daniel: Why did they send you to the Aleutians?

Mr. Johnson: We were going to lead the Russians into north Japan.

Mr. Daniel: So that was the ship. Okay. You guys had a lot of sailing time.

Mr. Johnson: Yes. Then when it was over we were assigned to go to Ominato, Japan, which is between the two islands as occupation. While there, we went around Hokkaido, the northern island, and landed troops around it. We were there.

Mr. Daniel: You guys just sailed the oceans, didn't you?

Did you have any special jobs or were you still the refrigeration motors guy?

Mr. Johnson: Still the refrigeration motor guy and standing generator watch.

Mr. Daniel: Did you have any problems with those generators or motors?

Mr. Johnson: We did with the motors especially in the galley because of all the oil and grease. We were always having to re-wind one of those.

Mr. Daniel: You actually re-wound these things?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: That's the good old days when you tried to save the motor.

Mr. Johnson: Right. We didn't have any others.

Mr. Daniel: That's right.

I love this. After you did the occupation duty, where did you guys finally wind up?

Mr. Johnson: We ended up back at Iwo. Loaded a bunch of Marines. They took the planes off and put hangars in the hangar deck and we brought them back to the States.

Mr. Daniel: Amazing. Then where did you guys wind up?

Mr. Johnson: We went from San Francisco, where we brought them, then we went from there back to Eniwetok and picked up another load of Marines.

Mr. Daniel: I love this. This has got to be the most sailing ship I've ever heard of.

Mr. Johnson: We ended up with eleven battle stars.

Mr. Daniel: How many trips did you go back to pick up Marines, just those two?

Mr. Johnson: Just those two.

Mr. Daniel: After you brought this second load back, then what happened to the ship?

Mr. Johnson: We went down through the Panama Canal into the Gulf. While we were in the Gulf, we had time trials. The ship had made 32.8 knots at commissioning and we got 31.8 shaky knots.

Mr. Daniel: That's not bad. After all that wartime service and all that sailing and damage, that's not bad. That's impressive.

Mr. Johnson: We ended up at Philadelphia and put the ship in mothballs.

Mr. Daniel: When did you finally go to Philly?

Mr. Johnson: We went to Philly in January of '46.

Mr. Daniel: You obviously got out of the Navy. Why did you get out of the Navy rather than staying?

Mr. Johnson: Because they started all the inspections Wednesday and Saturday night. I was willing to do any of the work they wanted but inspections, I couldn't handle.

Mr. Daniel: When did you finally get out?

Mr. Johnson: I got out May 21, 1946.

Mr. Daniel: Where did you get out?

Mr. Johnson: I got out at Camp Wallace.

Mr. Daniel: A lot of people did that.

Mr. Johnson: Mostly Navy and Marines.

Mr. Daniel: You went back to Hondo?

Mr. Johnson: Went back to Hondo.

Mr. Daniel: What did you do at Hondo?

Mr. Johnson: I worked around, just pick-up jobs. There was an airfield and I worked with a couple of contractors. Then I went to work in a refrigeration and repair shop and stayed there for a couple of years. Then I went to work for Alamo Lumber Company which was a big chain of lumber yards all over South Texas.

Mr. Daniel: What was the name of it again?

Mr. Johnson: Alamo. I stayed there twenty-five years. Started out as an appliance man and ended up as branch manager.

Mr. Daniel: So you retired from them.

Mr. Johnson: I retired from there. Laid out for a couple of years. Went to work for Medina County as veterans service officer. Put in fourteen years there and retired again. Have a ranch with four hundred acres on it and a bunch of cattle.

Mr. Daniel: Living the good life with all this retirement coming in.

Let me ask you some questions going back. When did you get married?

Mr. Johnson: I got married February 10, 1949.

Mr. Daniel: Did you know your wife before?

Mr. Johnson: Before, no.

Mr. Daniel: I assume you sent your money, your allotments home to the family.

Mr. Johnson: My family didn't need it and I just built up a good account.

Mr. Daniel: Good. I was going to say, there's not a lot you can do when you're onboard ship.

Mr. Johnson: We'd draw out five or ten dollars. Go down and get our fifty-cent cigarettes and whatever goodies we wanted. Then we gambled the rest of it.

Mr. Daniel: You must have spent a lot of time on ship. Very little on the land once you got going on the USS *Chester*.

Mr. Johnson: Only land duty I really had was when we were in the barracks there at Mare Island.

Mr. Daniel: Were you getting mail while you were on ship like from the family or anybody?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: I know you said Shanghai was ten days, what was the rest of it like? Were you getting good mail service?

Mr. Johnson: It varied depending on where we were and how long we stayed in that zone. I still have a fruitcake that I haven't got yet. (laughs) But, like I say, sometimes they would be shipping it to a certain area and then we would change and maybe two months later you'd think you owned the post office.

Mr. Daniel: That's typical. Were you getting real letters or were you getting those V-mails?

Mr. Johnson: I got both, mostly real letters. I have every letter I wrote my mother which was at least once a week. Couldn't mail them at times.

Mr. Daniel: Your mother wrote you quite frequently?

Mr. Johnson: Oh, yes. She went to the post office, her and another lady would meet down there at a certain time every morning.

Mr. Daniel: I like that. What did mom tell you about, just what was happening locally in

town?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, and they would have liked to know where I was going but I couldn't tell them.

Mr. Daniel: I understand that. Yes, censorship is ugly sometimes which makes good sense.

Was the ship ever under a kamikaze attack?

Mr. Johnson: None of the severe ones, no.

Mr. Daniel: Where was your battle station? Was it always on the second deck?

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: You really saw nothing.

Mr. Johnson: I saw nothing. I just heard lots of noise.

Mr. Daniel: It makes sense, but after a while you say, "Maybe I need to get up there so I can see something."

Obviously, you never saw a USO show considering you were always on—

Mr. Johnson: Yes, I did.

Mr. Daniel: You did? Where did you see that?

Mr. Johnson: Aboard ship. One came aboard and I forget the young lady's name but boy, she looked nice. They had Eddie Peabody play his banjo.

Mr. Daniel: It was actually a pretty good show then.

Mr. Johnson: It was good. One of the better shows.

Mr. Daniel: What did you guys think about that?

Mr. Johnson: It was real nice. It was a break.

Mr. Daniel: When you were at Iwo Jima, did you ever see a B-29 or were you always on that second deck?

Mr. Johnson: No, not at Iwo but I could see the tail of them on Saipan.

Mr. Daniel: I can understand that. That was huge. The reason I ask is because that turned out for the Marines that was really important as a morale booster. They could see those B-29s come in every so often.

Mr. Johnson: We left there before the invasion and none of the airstrip had been taken.

Mr. Daniel: That's what I thought, okay. What else do I need to ask you? In case you wondered, a lot of people got out of the military right after the war because they just didn't want to put up with the inspections and stuff like that.

How were your supplies? Were you fairly well supplied for your job?

Mr. Johnson: Oh, yes.

Mr. Daniel: You had no problems with supplies coming in?

Mr. Johnson: I didn't have any supplies, of course, other than lots of light bulbs. Before bombardment we'd take down a lot of the fixtures in the officers' quarters and go put them back up afterwards.

Mr. Daniel: Which makes sense.

Mr. Johnson: Then go replace all the others.

Mr. Daniel: You'd like to think they'd have those shock-proofed by then but they never did.

Mr. Johnson: They had those pig-tails.

Mr. Daniel: Not when you shoot that much.

Mr. Johnson: No.

Mr. Daniel: What were the living conditions like on the USS *Chester*?

Mr. Johnson: I'll say it was good and clean. We took care of ourselves. We didn't run around like you hear or see some of them.

Mr. Daniel: Sounds like the USS *Chester* was a well-run ship.

Mr. Johnson: It was. Our captain was Henry Hartley during most of the time. He went in

as an apprentice seaman and did skip a rank and ended up captain of the ship. Then after he got off the ship he was made commodore. That was when he first made that rank.

Mr. Daniel: They must have liked him.

Mr. Johnson: In fact, he was on one of the ships that rescued the *Squalus* and some of those other subs

Mr. Daniel: That helps a lot then.

Mr. Johnson: So he knew what to do when we got damaged at Iwo. In fact, he put on a diving suit and went down and inspected it himself.

Mr. Daniel: He had that experience then.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: That's good. That gives the troops a real good morale.

Mr. Johnson: Yes.

Mr. Daniel: To know that the captain can do that, but more, that he's concerned about it.

Did you miss anything during this time? What did you miss most about not being in the States?

Mr. Johnson: I looked at it like it was my duty and I didn't really miss. I know why they said we went wild when we hit shore. We were deprived of everything.

Mr. Daniel: I can understand that. I can't think of any other questions for you. You got anything else for me?

Mr. Johnson: Only one other little incident while I was aboard ship. It was in November of '44. We were leaving Ulithi and that's when the Japanese first started using the human torpedo, the *kaiten*. We--

Side a ends; side b begins

Mr. Johnson: --the USS *Case* destroyer cut us off and went over and rammed it. We always thought it was a two-man submarine. I found out at a symposium that it actually was a *kaiten*. One of them had gotten by and went in and sunk the USS *Mississinewa*, a tanker in the harbor. It was trying to get to the carriers.

Mr. Daniel: That's not bad then, the fact that the USS *Case* was smart enough to do that. You found out much later on, so you didn't even know about the human torpedo?

Mr. Johnson: No one knew about—
gap in tape

Mr. Daniel: Yes, I can understand nobody knew anything about those so it's hard to figure that out.

Mr. Johnson: They started working in mid-'44 on how they could win the war. Thought up *kamikaze* and also the *kaiten*. But I learned about that at a Nimitz symposium. I don't remember whether it was in San Antonio or Kerrville.

Mr. Daniel: That's interesting. Trying to think of anything else I can ask you. Can't think of anything. The USS *Chester* sounds like it was a good, tight ship.

Mr. Johnson: It was a good, tight ship.

Mr. Daniel: That was your only real assignment, right?

Mr. Johnson: Yes, other than that was on the two troopships.

Mr. Daniel: That's just as fill-in.

Mr. Johnson: That was just getting me over there.

Mr. Daniel: I know what I was going to ask you: When you crossed the equator, did they have any ceremony or were there just too many people?

Mr. Johnson: I went across it on the troopship. Yes, they had a ceremony but I don't know anyone that got the whole ball of wax. There were just too many aboard.

Mr. Daniel: What happened to you then?

Mr. Johnson: I went through where they were spanking us and I think I had to kiss King Neptune's belly. That was about it. Thank goodness, the line where they'd throw them in the tank with the garbage, I missed that. (laughs)

Mr. Daniel: On a troopship that's got to be a lot of people. You just can't do that. Can you think of anything else you can give me?

Mr. Johnson: No, I think we just about won the war.

Mr. Daniel: What did you guys think about when they announced the war was over? Was it just like total elation?

Mr. Johnson: Yes. I was in the aft engine room on the communications system and I heard it and I told the officer in charge. He looked at me and about that time they announced it over the PA speaker.

Mr. Daniel: I bet you everybody was happy.

Mr. Johnson: Oh, yes. Yes, we had a pretty good party that night.

Proof

Bonnie Day Rush

April 28, 2011

Dublin, Texas

Tape 1363