

NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

***Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas***

***Interview with James R. Taylor
US Navy***

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This is Cork Morris. Today is February eighteenth, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. James R. Taylor. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, the Archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Morris: Well, Mr. Taylor, thanks for giving us some of your time here. I'd like to start out with just a little background, where you were born, what your parents did.

Mr. Taylor: Well, I was born in St. Ferdinand in St. Louis County. And that's a little town that's almost at the edge of St. Louis County. North, of the Mississippi. and I owned, when I, when Pearl Harbor occurred, I owned a newspaper corner on Grand and North March.

Mr. Morris: How old were you?

Mr. Taylor: Sixteen. And we were small businessmen, they called us back then, you know, and the papers treated us pretty nice. There was three papers in St. Louis then, and every corner sold all three of 'em. And we controlled all the routes off our corner. So I had a lot of kids working for me. Some of 'em were, some of 'em, in fact, they earned more money than I did, and I owned the corner. But we had a good time. But when the Sunday that the Pearl Harbor attack occurred, December the seventh, 1941, the druggist, he owned the drugstore, and he used to play the radio and I'd pay him to pipe the music out, so he had a couple of speakers, one on each stand, 'cause the kids'd be pretty busy there, and at the news time, then, in the evening, we'd always hear the ball scores. And the ball park was only, you know, down four blocks. And one of our brothers owned the corner at Grand and St. Louis, and that's where Carter Carburetor was, and the main entrance to the ball park was right next to Carter Carburetor, and Carter Carburetor was a big employee. They called that area Butch Town. Because that's where all the slaughter houses used to be.

Mr. Morris: Stockyards?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. And we worked, all of us kids, I come from a family of fifteen. And I'm the only one that, after the War, the Navy paid for me to go to Washington. We had two universities to select from. We took competitions in the Navy, competition tests, and I was number two. I don't know who was number one. But we was all electrician mates, every one of us was electrician mate, and every one of us had been divers. I was a diver. I don't know if that made it a requirement after so many of us, but we took the test, and they sent us off. There was only two schools in the United States that had rod control piles in it, and one of 'em was Washington University, St. Louis, and one of 'em was University of California at Berkeley.

Mr. Morris: When you say "rod control piles" . . .

Mr. Taylor: Well, that was carbon rods. They control the nuclear reaction going on within the pile.

Mr. Morris: What year was this now?

Mr. Taylor: This is 1947. And I went to school there for eight years, I guess. I got my degree in electrical engineering. Besides learning how to control, rod control, the piles. That's what they were putting on ships then. We had to have heavy water after that, but a lot of people, to control the heavy water—you know what heavy water is?

Mr. Morris: Um-hum.

Mr. Taylor: It's H-3.

Mr. Morris: Right.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. And it was a little easier to control the radioactivity with the heavy water. But it went through the same way. They had pipes . . .

Mr. Morris: Piping it through.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, and how many you opened up was how much activity you had in the pile. We controlled the speed, and how much steam we made, and the steam controlled how much water the ship made.

Mr. Morris: How fast it went.

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, all that good stuff.

Mr. Morris: Well so, back to Pearl Harbor, did you join right up, like so many did?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, yeah. I wanted to, but my mom and dad wouldn't let me 'til I, I was seventeen the next July and I joined. (Laughs) And, I was one of the Mensa kids. I was, you know what Mensa is.

Mr. Morris: I didn't know it existed back then.

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, yeah. In fact, Mr. I.Q., he was on, he had a radio show. And he picked a bunch of us, in one of those stretch limousines. We had, I think there was twelve of us, that he picked up.

Mr. Morris: As kids?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, and he come all the way from Centralia, Illinois, or wherever Central Illinois was, he was a professor there. And he would have people call in, you know, and one of us would have the answer. It was nothin', it really wasn't. But we got paid fifty cents an hour.

Mr. Morris: To be on his show?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, to be on his show. And I suppose that was a lot of money. My parents, I know it was quite a bit of money. My parents were glad to hear that I had a job! Wow! The Mensa was paying off, being a Mensa kid.

Mr. Morris: Well, did they, did the Navy take this into consideration when you joined up finally?

Mr. Taylor: Well, I don't think so.

Mr. Morris: They didn't know, they didn't care?

Mr. Taylor: Well, they cared. They was all excited then. I got put through the physical just like that, that wasn't mentioned there.

Mr. Morris: Did they, you still had to d boot camp, I assume.

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, Great Lakes. Yeah, I went through boot camp.

Mr. Morris: What did they give you as your specialization?

Mr. Taylor: Electrician.

Mr. Morris: Right from the get-go?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah. Well, they asked me what I wanted to be and I had three brothers that were already in the Navy, and they were all water tenders, and they said, "Don't be a water tender." (Both laugh)

Mr. Morris: So what was your first duty assignment? You say this is 'forty-two? This is 1942?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. The old *Rex*. We were going to, not only going to, we did invade Guadalcanal. I went through boot camp in electrical school, and then I got on the old *Rex*. That was number three, I think. AK-Three.

Mr. Morris: What kind of ship was this?

Mr. Taylor: We carried the troops and heavy equipment. The tanks the Marines had. We only did it once with Marines. I don't ever remember. We took a five hundred pound bomb, old Charlie, he was Japanese. Only one, the only one, and we took a five hundred pound bomb, or whatever he had. It went right through our main deck, and right through all the decks, to the bow, and we couldn't control the sinking because that thing was, you know, it was big, it was like that. And we couldn't control the ship.

Mr. Morris: This is at Guadalcanal?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, at Guadalcanal. In fact, it's still there. I was repair officer, I went through the war at that rank, and then when I was a warrant officer, why, they wanted everybody to do away with the warrant officer. Of course, we didn't. But they wanted us to, so they made me a lieutenant then. When I was, yeah, I was just lieutenant.

Mr. Morris: This was 'forty-two also, or this was later?

Mr. Taylor: Oh no, no, this 1958, '57, '58.

Mr. Morris: So when they sunk your ship where did they send you?

Mr. Taylor: I was on the last carrier sunk in World War II, that was that one.

Mr. Morris: The *Bismarck Sea*.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, we stopped at Iwo the 'twentieth. Today's my wife's birthday. She's, we've been married fifty-eight years.

Mr. Morris: It's easy to remember, I guess. (Both laugh)

Mr. Taylor: Well, I got, we got married on the ninth of March.

Mr. Morris: In what year?

Mr. Taylor: In 1947. And boy, she don't ever let me forget. As far as I, well, I told her, I, she says "Well, you were all Navy." And I said "Yeah, they had to put me out." They retired me because I was disabled. They said I couldn't run the ladders anymore, and I was one of the few navigators, we didn't punch buttons then, we shot the stars and took sunlight, and you knew where we are.

Mr. Morris: So you went, was this in, uh . . .

Mr. Taylor: Well, I knew that when I was a kid, 'cause I had steamed the Mississippi on, uh, *Gasterine??* Towing Company had ships running up and down the Mississippi, not ships, they were river boats. But we learned navigation from the old pilot that was aboard, and it just stuck with me.

Mr. Morris: So you did this in addition to being an electrician?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you had to know navigation to be a gyro electrician.

Mr. Morris: That makes sense.

- Mr. Taylor:** I was a gyro electrician 'cause I knew navigation. I suppose. I don't know.
- Mr. Morris:** Was this the job you had on the *Bismarck Sea*, or did this come later.
- Mr. Taylor:** I was gyro electrician on the *Bismarck Sea*. But there was two of us. Well, there was actually more than that, there was four of us using there. We had two compasses, one compass up in, the navigation compass was up at the bridge, the island, so it was on the starboard side, and it was just the island there, but it was part of the island, part of the command structure. And then the other compass was down, I think, the fourth deck down, or fifth deck.
- Mr. Morris:** This sort of a backup type of thing?
- Mr. Taylor:** Well no, well, sort of, yeah. It had all the HD and HE that we had, equipment in it, for transmission out, and how you had to position the ship for launching. 'Cause the ship always has to go into the wind to launch.
- Mr. Morris:** How big a ship was the *Bismarck* then?
- Mr. Taylor:** Oh, it was about eighteen, twenty thousand tons. It was a pretty good sized ship. Six hundred and ninety-five feet long, flight deck was. The ship, I think, was about twenty foot shorter than what the flight was, ten foot over.
- Mr. Morris:** Did you guys interact with any of the flight crews?
- Mr. Taylor:** Oh yeah, yeah. I was the flight deck damage control, it's all in there. And we had a JG in charge but he was useless. He didn't care about, the only thing he wanted to be was an officer. I think we had a lot of them. I was second class on the *Bismarck Sea*, and we just ran things from the enlisted branch.
- Mr. Morris:** Well, that's sort of the old story, whether the officers would admit it or not, the enlisted people run things.
- Mr. Taylor:** Well, I went all up through the ranks. I retired as commander.
- Mr. Morris:** So you were assigned to the *Bismarck Sea* after Guadalcanal?
- Mr. Taylor:** Well, I went on new construction, Fletcher class destroyers, from the old *Rex*, and yeah, we sank there and the ship's still there. I was telling you.
- Mr. Morris:** Hard to pull it up.
- Mr. Taylor:** For VietNam, all of Vietnam, that ruined me. I got tropic _____ in Vietnam.

Mr. Morris: What's that?

Mr. Taylor: Well, that's a tropical disease. And no cure for it.

Mr. Morris: You got that in Vietnam?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. In Vietnam, yeah. I was repair officer for the amphibious forces. John McCain, his daddy had been John McCain in Australia. Beginning of World War II. Yeah, his daddy was the big boss of the Pacific Fleet. But that was only a three-star command. But when John McCain, the one you know about, he was four-stars when he became commander of the Pacific Fleet.

Mr. Morris: You said you were in, they put you in new construction. Was that back in the States?

Mr. Taylor: I as in, we went to the Gilberts and Marshalls. We put a ship in commission a Fletcher class destroyer, *USS Charrette* DD581. We put it in commission and we went through the Canal and stopped at San Diego and then we stopped at Pearl, we were assigned to command, we were shield for battleships. And new battleships, the *Washington*, *North Carolina*, *Wisconsin*.

Mr. Morris: So you were with like their group, their battle group?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, to their battle group. We were assigned to their battle group. then we went to pick up the invasion force for Tarawa and we, that's where Liscome Bay, CVE (laughs) the first one that was sunk, was by torpedo action.

Mr. Morris: Okay, that was at Tarawa?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, yeah. Liscome Bay was the first CVE that I know of that was sunk, and they say they picked up fifty or sixty guys, but I only know of three.

Mr. Morris: For the whole show.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah

Mr. Morris: Wow.

Mr. Taylor: Well, we only had three out of twenty-one. Survivors, on the *Bismarck Sea*.

Mr. Morris: You have to give me some history on the *Bismarck Sea*. I'm not really familiar. I assume it got sank.

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, at Iwo Jima. We were the last carrier sunk at Iwo. When I got, they sent me back, I was burned pretty bad. There were only three of us come out, we were after, we had the

after damage control on the flight deck, we had forward. And just part of the ship, below the repair locker, like that was the work bench, and that was the door up, no, all this, yeah, is the other way. That was the door out to the catwalk. Only three of us. The rest of it was bulkhead and all this bulkhead just disappeared when the suicide plane went into bomb storage on the starboard side, the starboard side there.

Mr. Morris: What was the complement of the ship when it got hit?

Mr. Taylor: About fifteen hundred.

Mr. Morris: Fifteen hundred?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

Mr. Morris: And where exactly did the kamikaze hit?

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Right underneath the after gun control, last gun control we had, firing millimeter guns. Right there, bomb storage was right underneath the after elevator. The after elevator went down into a hole, you know, to roll the airplanes on and off. And it was in the center of the ships in those days, the elevator, at least on the CVEs.

Mr. Morris: So there was essentially no saving it, once this thing hit.

Mr. Taylor: Oh no, no. A twin engine Betty then the second one that finished us off . . .

Mr. Morris: You got hit by two?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. The first guy hit on bomb stowage and just wiped out twenty-three guys. There was twenty-six of us in flight deck damage control after, and I was second class, I was senior electrician made aboard for flight deck damage control, and we, our main job was communication between the air boss, he was a three-striper, a commander, and the landing signal officer was the, on our ship, he was an ensign. Billy Stell. Billy's still alive, I think, he lives in North Carolina.

Mr. Morris: So where did the second one hit?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, the guy in charge of fighting fires in damage control, he said, getting out of the locker, the two guys couldn't open the door that was next to me on the work bench, I was right down by the coffee. 'Cause I drink coffee, and I says "I'll get it open." And so that's all I know that I said. They said I said "Let's get the hell out of here," and they said "Well, we can't, unless you want to go in the hangar bay." There's the ship gallery down there, and fires, and . . .

Mr. Morris: Ordinance going off?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, all the planes, we had 'em all armed for an evening shot at Mt. Suribachi. And we had to put 'em all back down below when they said we had to take the airplanes off the *Lexington*. She had—the *Lexington* or the *Sarah*. One of 'em had taken six, five or six suicide planes. And we had to take their aircraft, but we spread it out amongst a number of CVEs. We were, there was five of us in the squadron then. Ships squadrons. Five carriers, and we had twenty or twenty-five destroyers. But he was aiming for us. 'Cause we had been in the battle in Leyte Gulf, we had come from the Battle of Leyte Gulf, and Lingayen, we had been in both of 'em. *Leyte and Lingayen Gulf. Leyte Gulf, that guy, that admiral, that Japanese admiral, if he had any guts at all, he'd have sunk about a hundred of us, there wouldn't have any Iwo Jima.*

Mr. Morris: Right. There's always been a big dispute about who should of done what, when.

Mr. Taylor: Well, at Leyte we had used up, the Japanese fleet come just at the right time, 'cause we had sent our planes over to support the troops, and they'd used up everything. Except some of 'em had machine guns. Fifty caliber. And some of our airplanes had thirty-seven millimeters and the cannon in the prop, the center of the prop. If he'd had any guts at all, he'd have taken us.

Mr. Morris: Well, that would—correct me if I'm wrong here— but that was according to, of course, Monday morning quarterbacking. He didn't know how many ships we had.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, that's right, he didn't know how many CVEs he had bottled up in there.

Mr. Morris: Right. So he just . . .

Mr. Taylor: Well, he had, out of the South China Sea, he had battleships and cruisers coming at us. And he had to stop from fleeing with guys. Up north at Leyte, there was another entrance to Leyte Gulf, he had another bunch ships, cruisers and battleships, and the thing that saved us was Admiral Stump detached our shield, which was all destroyers, and I got a description in there of the one guy going in with all his guns ablazing, and he had fired all of his torpedoes already, and he was sort of defenseless going against battleships and cruisers. But he did. And that's what saved the carriers. We had guys that were suiciders too, I guess, you might call 'em, 'cause they took whole crews, you know, three hundred and forty-five, three hundred and four hundred men, on a destroyer. With five-inch mounts. I don't know how many forties we had, we had twenty or thirty forty-millimeters and maybe fifty twenty-millimeter machine guns.

Mr. Morris: Not so much against a battleship, though.

Mr. Taylor: Oh no, no, not when you figure they had twelve, thirteen inches of armor on 'em. But, a five-inch could do a pretty good job. Thirty-seven, about like that, you know, five-inch,

big shell. Weighed fifty-two pounds, when you using attached, I don't know what they weighed. They weighed about seventy-five pounds, I think, when they had the shell. The shell weighed fifty-two pounds, was attached. You used a fire bag, one fire bag per propellor. And then it had ammo in it, and fuses. If you used a lot of antiaircraft weapons you had proximity fuses. They had just come out. The biggest we had for antiaircraft then was three-inchers. And then we went to five and some of 'em had, were just for land bombardment and that was attached shell. And they weighed fifty-two pounds. And then, when they went to antiaircraft, why then the shell went separately.

Mr. Morris: Then those had an altitude fuse or a proximity fuse?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, proximity fuses, soon as they got close to their target they went go off.

Mr. Morris: Back to Iwo Jima. Where did the, you said the first one hit and then there was a Betty that came in and hit you?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

Mr. Morris: And where did that hit?

Mr. Taylor: Well, he, the first guy, blew the elevator out when the bomb storage went and that just left a big burning red hole in the space. Well, we didn't think we was gonna see any suicide planes. They had started at Leyte Gulf and continued over into Lingayan gulf, and when we took the main force into Lingayan, and then we went into, well, we went into _____ Crossroads and whew!, I forget, I think it was the *McKinley*, one of the ammunition ships. It blew up there. But we were down, we were twenty miles away from it, when it blew up, but yet they restricted us from sunbathing on the flight deck and that sort of thing. But when it went off, man, I rolled, I knew the safety net was there, and I just rolled into the safety net rather than get up, 'cause a big piece of shrapnel had hit the deck.

Mr. Morris: From forty miles away?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, yeah. When the ammo ship blew up, boy, she went.

Mr. Morris: It's hard to imagine that.

Mr. Taylor: I think it was the *Mount McKinley*. They were all named after mountains. You could hear it.

Mr. Morris: You were on the *Bismarck Sea* at the time?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. We had won the battle of Leyte Gulf. Like I told you, the destroyers and the torpedo

boats saved our butts. About a hundred CVEs that were in there and we were supplying all the air power, we controlled the air over all the Philippines. Or, we thought we did. (Chuckles) But I saw the *St. Lo* and the *Princeton* go down, and the *Gambier Bay* was the only ship we ever lost to surface gunfire in World War II. Well, ever.

Mr. Morris: Ship to ship gunfire?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. They lost the *Gambier Bay*, or, we lost the *Gambier Bay* to surface gun fire. It was the only carrier ever lost to surface gun fire. Yeah, the *Gambier Bay*. But we picked up, our boats, picked up quite a few survivors of f all three of 'em, and then the *Prince*, *St. Lo*, *Gambier Bay*, and another one that starts with, another CVE that starts with "G," was sunk with suicide planes there too.

Mr. Morris: You still haven't told me where that second plane hit.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, he come down through the flight deck. Just forward of that, he aimed his plane just forward. I saw him, I always said it was a twin-engine Betty. 'Cause single-engine planes couldn't reach Iwo Jima from Japan.

Mr. Morris: Oh, these things were flown from Japan?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah. Yeah, we already controlled the seas. Halsey had gotten rid of the *Yamamoto*, and three others. They had three carriers left, and we sank them.

Mr. Morris: So I'm assuming that second plane hit it was pretty much abandon ship?

Mr. Taylor: Not 'til he did hit, though. Man, I went to the repair boss when I went up to flight deck, I still had that dumb door in my hand. I'd taken the pressure off of the door. It was a bomb compartment waterproof door. And they just couldn't work the wheel in the middle of it, and it worked all the dogs around the side of the door. And I said "I'll get that thing," and it come off in my hand.

Mr. Morris: Oh, the handle or the wheel?

Mr. Taylor: Well, no, the whole door did. I got it loose.

Mr. Morris: Wasn't that a little weighty?

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah. The damn thing was—but the damage control, the guy, the J.G. that was fighting the fire up on the main deck, main flight deck, he said "What're you doing with that door, Taylor?" And I said, "Damn if I know."

Mr. Morris: (Laughs)

- Mr. Taylor:** And I just let it go. Then when he said "Well, we need another nozzle, will you be a nozzle man?" and I said "Give me the hose." One of the kids brought it up to me. I was just kidding myself, I was only twenty years old. I was nineteen.
- Mr. Morris:** So you were on the flight deck when that other one hit?
- Mr. Taylor:** Yeah. In fact, I was running when I saw him coming, and I said "To hell with this. You guys"—'cause we had six or seven guys on each hose, they had about a hundred and fifty pounds of water pressure, so it took several of us to control that end.
- Mr. Morris:** A big hose, huh?
- Mr. Taylor:** Yeah, it was a four-inch hose. Anyhow, I was running down there when he hit, and when he hit he had a loaded airplane, too, 'cause when he hit he blew and I just sailed down the flight deck. I know I couldn't have made it . . .
- Mr. Morris:** That far?
- Mr. Taylor:** Well, that far, to the island. I made it all the way, they had sick bay set up there at the island, and the first class hospitalman said, "You all right?" He come over to me and I said, "I suppose so. You feel around, see if I . . ."
- Mr. Morris:** Everything's there.
- Mr. Taylor:** He said, "You got all your legs." He didn't do any feeling around at all. I said, "Well, I'll do whatever you guys want me to do." I found out I was in one piece, but I was burned pretty bad in this part of my face. They put white petrolene on it, vaseline. I stayed there. And then they said, well, the gun control director, and that was Lieutenant _____ and I knew him well, 'cause he was a rebel too, you know. (Chuckles) I went and got him and brought him back. I got the Navy Marine Corps medal for that.
- Mr. Morris:** Oh, really!
- Mr. Taylor:** Yeah, 'cause that part of the ship was low enough forward, and there was just a walkway, and not even a walkway. It was a piece of channel iron going out to the director, forty millimeter director, and all, everybody was gone off the director except him, and I remember I went and I got him, and I said "You all right?" He said "No, I can't walk." He was holding on to the rigging of the director. And I said "Well, get on my shoulder here. We'll get you back." And he said "That won't hold us." He was talking about the piece of metal that I'd come out on. And I said "Yeah, it held me, it'll hold both of us." So I took him back and got him medical attention. And then we went on the—well, I went, I had gone down to see if there was any IC room left, and there wasn't any . . .

Mr. Morris: IC is what?

Mr. Taylor: Interior communication room. And all the phones were in there. It was right on the next deck down from the flight deck. We controlled the He, HD circuits, and all those circuits. All the communications circuits. There just, I opened the fire door, and there wasn't any, I was looking at the Pacific Ocean.

Mr. Morris: I guess your job as an electrician was pretty much over at this point, huh?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, yeah. And the pilot ready room which *had been turned into a sick bay* was right diagonal from the entrance to the IC room, and I stuck my head in there and he said "You go up, Taylor, and take this guy down to sick bay." I said, "There isn't any sick bay left." You couldn't see any. But they got all the patients, we had some guy that had been operated on. One guy that had landed, I forget what ship he was from, but we had a helicopter and it was one of them crude ones, one of the early ones. But he had dropped an appendicitis guy. Not too long before the battle started.

Mr. Morris: How long did the ship stay afloat?

Mr. Taylor: Oh I guess, three or four hours. When I was in the ready room they said "Take this guy down to sick bay," and I said "Well, we're about ready to get rid of the ship." And they said, "You're kidding!" And sure enough a guy stuck his head there from the catwalk and said "Abandon ship, abandon ship." So they said would I take the kid with me, he had both of his legs off but he wasn't bleeding. The fire had seared him. I suppose he was ready to go, and I says "Yeah, I'll take him down." And I said "Pile on," and he got on my shoulders and we went, we just had a little ways to go to get to the outside catwalk, and then you had to take four steps up to the catwalk to get up to the catwalk, and the catwalk was like halfway between the ten-foot ceiling.

Mr. Morris: That's, all the lifeboats and stuff are up there?

Mr. Taylor: Well, I cut them loose. I was a swimmer. We was UDT then, underwater demolition, and we took care of all the *machine guns before the landing*. We went in first.

Mr. Morris: You personally?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Morris: Well, you're not telling me. This is a great story, you're not telling me this part.

Mr. Taylor: We went in before the landing force ever went in. We blew up tank traps and boat traps that the Japanese had built so we couldn't land there, our landing craft. And we took care of the machine guns. They said, "As long as you're going in, you might as well try to get some of those guys." But we went in. Before we set the charges off, we had all radio

controlled charges, and one guy had them, we put them on floaters and set them so the signal would go down to them. So then we went in and cut all the throats of the guys that ...

Mr. Morris: Really!

Mr. Taylor: Well, we kept our knives, at least. The guy we took instructions off of was Buster Crabbe was his name. He was a lieutenant commander from the British Navy. He had taught the British Navy, I guess, how to do this stuff. And he taught us how to handle explosives and my dad, who was a full-blooded Cherokee-Osage Indian, he said "Richard, don't ever carry"—they called me James Richard, a lot of us were called by our middle names then, I don't know why.

Mr. Morris: Too many kids to keep track of.

Mr. Taylor: Anyhow, he says "Richard, don't ever carry fuses and dynamite together," 'cause we carried dynamite and we carried it from our arms down, to our knees, wrapped, they'd tape it on us. He just, I wouldn't carry fuses. I wouldn't even get near the fuse guys, 'cause those fuse guys, boy, they blew up. They had mercury fulminate. You lit them, you used waterproof fuses all the way down.

Mr. Morris: How many guys on a UDT team?

Mr. Taylor: There was about a hundred of us. So we could get rid of a lot of machine guns.

Mr. Morris: You guys were all on the *Bismarck Sea*, or was this like . . .

Mr. Taylor: Oh non, no.

Mr. Morris: . . . on different ships?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

Mr. Morris: You'd just coordinate what you're doing.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, uh-huh. So the big guy in charge, he was always part of the ship's command structure, and he was our _____ special, the team leader, we called him then. That was my ambition, to become a team leader, and I did.

Mr. Morris: So you guys, you UDT guys went in like the day before?

Mr. Taylor: Oh no, the morning before.

Mr. Morris: Oh, the morning of it.

Mr. Taylor: We went in, got rid of the tank traps and boat traps. And we got rid of the machine guns, too. Those guys could have walked ashore after we got done.

Mr. Morris: And so for the other Japanese that didn't want us to come ashore.

Mr. Taylor: But the machine gunners, they were set and zeroed in, and most of 'em were thirty caliber machine guns. That's a pretty good sized weapon, about as big as your . . .

Mr. Morris: How far off the beach were these machine gun emplacements.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, maybe just a yard. It was according to how much sand they had. Next to a rock, next to the beach.

Mr. Morris: So okay, you did this . . .

Mr. Taylor: We went in silently, you know. We didn't make a lot of splashes. In order to qualify, we had to swim from Rosie Roads in Puerto Rico to Vieques Island, and then we had to set our charges and blow 'em up and swim back, and that was across Windward Passage, and Windward Passage had four to seven knots of current in it, according to what time

End of Tape One, Side A
Beginning of Tape One, Side B

Mr. Morris: You guys were like the original seal team.

Mr. Taylor: Well, we were, these guys were tough. We weren't that tough.

Mr. Morris: Sounds sort of tough to me. I wouldn't want to go in.

Mr. Taylor: We kept ***(a blank space of several seconds here on the tape)***

Mr. Morris: The only weapon you had, personal weapon, was a knife?

Mr. Taylor: Oh no, we carried side arms. A forty-five or a thirty-eight. I preferred the thirty-eight, but they didn't have enough of them to go around, so I became pretty proficient in the forty-five.

Mr. Morris: How'd you keep all that stuff dry?

Mr. Taylor: You didn't.

Mr. Morris: It got wet, and that was just nature of it.

Mr. Taylor: Oh sure, yeah, you made sure. I made sure my gun was clean. That was the only thing. It left you real dirty, boy, and then of course it wouldn't fire. But that's the reason I liked the thirty-eight, 'cause it had the . . .

Mr. Morris: Hammer.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, the hammer, and you could fire it by hand. That's the reason you see the fanned action. But that's only because they were saving the double-action, you know, you need to cock it first. Because they wouldn't work, but they'd work by the fan, by fanning them. That's how fanning, or at least that's what they told me, fanning.

Mr. Morris: Well you got all that extra leverage with the hammer and stuff.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. And it forced the wheel around.

Mr. Morris: The cylinder, yeah. Okay, so that's the morning of the initial invasion. How long after that was the *Bismarck Sea* hit?

Mr. Taylor: We were hit in the evening.

Mr. Morris: The evening of that same day?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

Mr. Morris: Boy, a busy day for you there.

Mr. Taylor: Well, we got started early. If they were gonna put out the boats, the Marine boats, they run in circles until they're called in to get their load. If they were gonna to go out at four o'clock, we went out earlier.

Mr. Morris: So you didn't have to swim back through all 'em or anything like that?

Mr. Taylor: We used what they called pickup boats. Pickup boats were the fastest things on the water. They were, I don't think they got any faster pickup boats, but they might have. And they used partially inflated inner tubes for us to hook on, when they come past, to hook our arms through, we'd get pulled right into the side of the boat that way. We had rubber guards.

Mr. Morris: Or fenders?

Mr. Taylor: Fenders, yeah. And we'd naturally slam against when the pickup boat would pick us up.

Mr. Morris: And somebody'd haul you on board?

Mr. Taylor: Well, they'd help us, yeah, get on board. They weren't any happier than we might be running away from machine gun fire.

Mr. Morris: So, it was a busy day here. What, who picked you up when you guys went over the side off the *Bismarck Sea*?

Mr. Taylor: The pickup boat.

Mr. Morris: No, I mean when, after the *Bismarck Sea* was sinking and you abandoned ship.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, that was the *USS Edmonds*. And my neighbor was a bosun mate on the *Edmonds*, and he was pulling me in, it was about midnight or eleven o'clock when he was pulling me aboard. Didn't know he was gonna be the one pulling me aboard, but I was leading, I had ahold of the knotted line that they threw over for us to grab hold of, and he was pulling me up the side of the ship and I walked up, and I was on the gunnel, it was just outside of their life line, and he let go and looked up, and he said "Taylor!" and he let go of the line and dropped me right back into the water. (Both laugh) My next-door neighbor.

Mr. Morris: Neighbor from home?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Right over from my home. We lived in a four apartment apartment building.

Mr. Morris: Wow, that's a coincidence if I ever heard of one.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. _____ was his name.

Mr. Morris: So did he pull you back up?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Well, he was coming in by the time he knew that he'd let me fall back in the ocean. Him and a couple others. He was first class petty officer then. He was first class bosun then. That was surprising.

Mr. Morris: I'm sure it was.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. But I had sent, I had kept his kid, this Marine, he was one of the captain's bodyguards, Captain John Lockner Pratt, and he was one of his bodyguards.

Mr. Morris: Oh, this was the kid that lost his legs?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. He had other, a hundred of 'em aboard, and the captain, the ex-o, and the air officer, I forget who else, had bodyguards. I had two bodyguards and they got killed. I had two bodyguards in Vietnam. And I was only a lieutenant commander. But I was command, I was in-country Navy repair officer. I built ways up in Hanoi, and I built

ways down in _____. But then, I had become, I had sworn that I'd help the good Lord if he saved me after that sinking. And I did. I went and took four years at Moody Bible Institute in Los Angeles, and I went to chaplain school in Newport, Rhode Island. In fact, I'd become a religious lay-leader. And they ordained me in the Missouri Synod.

Mr. Morris: But you didn't, uh, follow that up, or?

Mr. Taylor: Well, when I retired we were missionaries, my wife and I. When I retired I preached at a lot of churches. And black churches on the East Coast, mainly, for ministers that were on vacations. Replacement, interim. Well, I didn't charge nothing, so they all wanted me.

Mr. Morris: Made you real popular.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, yeah. And then I, we started two churches in Thayer, Missouri, and a church in Village, Arkansas. And the only one that I know of going is the church in Village, that is still going. And they built real expensive church. But I was pastor of both of 'em. We had a hundred and two miles, when we first started the missionary work I told 'em I wouldn't take any money but I'd just take gasoline money. And we didn't even do that. I had plenty of money as a retired officer. We did it all volunteer. I had bought an organ for my oldest daughter, and we had the organ and we changed from the black book to the red book back then when I first, I forget what year it was. But it was after I retired. They forced me to retire 1 July 1970.

Mr. Morris: The Navy or the church?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, the Navy.

Mr. Morris: Well, let's just jump back to Iwo Jima here. After you guys were picked up, then what did they do with you?

Mr. Taylor: Then we went to our regular jobs aboard ship.

Mr. Morris: Did you get assigned to another ship?

Mr. Taylor: No, I went into the *Bismarck Sea*.

Mr. Morris: No, I mean after that sank.

Mr. Taylor: After that sank, yeah. Well, I went to a hospital, when they did the flag raising on Mt. Suribichi, I had the white petrolatum was still in my eyes, and I couldn't open my eyes. And I heard all the whistles blow, and I told this first class corpsman, I said "Get this junk off."

Mr. Morris: To see what's going on.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. So I could see what was going on. So he asked the doctor, and the doctor said "I suppose it's all right. Had his eyes burned a little bit." And I guess they were reading off of the thing that come with me. 'Cause that was, I was on the *Rockbridge*.

Mr. Morris: Is that a hospital ship?

Mr. Taylor: Well, it ws APA 231. I, they made it into a hospital ship after it got into the troops. I had come from the ship that picked me up, the *Edmonds*, and they'd put the white petrolatum and filled my eyes with it, really, and the whole front part of my face. I needed reconstructive surgery, that's the reason they sent me to Treasure Island.

Mr. Morris: Back to California.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. We went to, yeah, Treasure Island, yeah. That's where I got debriefed. And the guy says "You won't ever have to worry about going to sea, not during this war." They said, "What school do you want to go to?" and I said, "Well, I'd like to go to Mine Warfare School and find out what pulsing is between ships," you know, when you're sweeping back many times. You got, somebody has to pulse negative while the other ships pulsing positive. And how did they do this? I'd sort of figured out, solved it, but I really wanted to see it done. And I went to Mine Warfare School. I had to (*a few words lost here*) waiting for me. And I said, "You're . . ."

Mr. Morris: They sent orders to go back to se, you mean?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. The same debriefing officer. He was debriefing others. I said, "You telling these guys lies now?" (Both laugh) Next morning I was on the *West Point*, which was a civilian liner, I forget, but she had stablers, stability controls for fore and aft and roll, anti-roll control.

Mr. Morris: And the most modern of the modern _____.

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah, yeah. The *West Point*, that's the one you wanted to get on. Not if you was going into action (laughs), but if you was coming back. But it was fast.

Mr. Morris: The war must have been pretty much over.

Mr. Taylor: Oh no. We was getting ready to go into Japan proper.

Mr. Morris: Okinawa had occurred?

Mr. Taylor: Well, it was occurring when I got out there. It was raining suicide planes. And I thought I'd seen a lot in Leyte Gulf and Lingayen Gulf. We didn't see anything. They had four, we

was shooting down four hundred planes a day. The American fleet was. And the fleet was between our airplanes and the gunners on the ships, they were shooting down four hundred airplanes a day. But they was sending in anything, to stop us, to try to stop us. But there wasn't any way that they were gonna stop us.

Mr. Morris: Everybody knew it was over.

Mr. Taylor: Well, after Iwo Jima, after Tarawa, Peleliu, and Iwo Jima. At Peleliu, we had to get Peleliu, and the three biggest *Japanese counteroffensive* was against the Marines. The Tarawa, Iwo Jima, and Peleliu. Peleliu came first before we got into Leyte Gulf. And about the same number of Marines were lost taking Tarawa and Iwo and Peleliu, and they averaged out about even. So they, we had a lot of action.

Mr. Morris: Was the *West Virginia* a battleship or a cruiser?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

Mr. Morris: Battleship? Okay.

Mr. Taylor: In World War II.

Mr. Morris: When did you guys, after Okinawa, so I guess you guys were all, the plans were to invade the mainland, or?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, yeah. Yeah. When they dropped the bomb, whew!

Mr. Morris: Where were you? Were you still at sea, still at Okinawa?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, yeah. Well, we was down at Formosa, we had taken Okinawa. We was in Formosa when they dropped the bomb. We was ready, we was prepared to escort our people in. I was on a mine sweep then.

Mr. Morris: Finally figured out that mine sweeping?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, yeah, I had the orders to mine sweeper. I had pulled up, he was just a young lieutenant, if anything he was younger than I was. I was just twenty, and I was wondering how he got commission so quick. But then I found out. My wife got, when we started out, we had eight percent gold on my . . .

Mr. Morris: Sleeve?

Mr. Taylor: Uniform. Yeah. We had eight percent gold. And when we finished up we had two percent gold but it was in the same year. If you can imagine that. But if the gold cost us so much,

if I hadn't been, to get it sewed on, you had to get a bonded guy so he wouldn't steal the gold. And so, who was more dependable than my wife. But we went down to two percent, and I think it's got down now to one point eight, or one point nine.

Mr. Morris: I didn't know there was actually gold in the gold braid.

Mr. Taylor: Oh yeah. You see the guys with the real dark—when I first started presenting medals to the kids in the MJROTC program, I presented medals. I wouldn't, I'm not the senior officer in San Antonio but *I'm one of them, so I volunteered, and then they paid, but you get on their Chicken Circuit and, they treat you pretty good.* And I knew all the officers, all the Naval officers, that were in command, various units. So I, but if you see a guy saluting the flag, you know that he's got the least amount of gold in there that he can have.

Mr. Morris: Get away with.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. That's, uh, when I, I had to buy new shoulder boards for my whites, 'cause of 'em wanted me to do something outside with one of the kids. And I had to call all the way to Knoxville to get a pair of shoulder boards. I think it was thirteen, sixteen dollars each.

Mr. Morris: When was that?

Mr. Taylor: In 'ninety-six, I guess.

Mr. Morris: That's not bad, with inflation and stuff, you know. (Both laugh)

Mr. Taylor: That's a lot of money. But I guess ensign would have been a lot cheaper. But that, you know, that's just two percent gold. But my sleeves were all right. My wife had, John McCain had just taken over as _____ and I was his repair officer. And this was in 'sixty-three. And he said, I had gone in just a few days earlier and he came in. And he had just made the third star, all of our commanders are three-star commanders. Like _____ and _____, they're all three stars. I remember when he said, "I want all"—I'm _____ now, you understand, I've come through chiefs and warrant.

Mr. Morris: Oh, I see. From enlisted and on through.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. He said, "I want all my officers to have a sword." Well, I didn't have a sword, you know, they was three hundred and ten bucks apiece back then. The good ones. Naval Academy. And I raised my hand up, and he says "Yes Mr. Taylor?" I was only a lieutenant then. But he knew who I was. All us guys, they know 'em down there, the Navy don't pick 'em for, you know, just because they got political pull. They might make him a three-star, but they're gonna put the guy in command that can really do the job.

And I said, "You know, Admiral, the Good Book says," and he says, "What did I just say, Mr. Taylor?" And I knew what he (chuckles) he wanted us to have swords. So, and we didn't have to have dinner dress, either. And that's expensive, I don't know whether you know it or not.

Mr. Morris: That's the cutaway?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, yeah. And the trousers, you know.

Mr. Morris: Um-hum. Stripes, and all that stuff. Well, I bet it's expensive to keep up all that stuff.

Mr. Taylor: Well, it was as much as the sword. My wife spent well over six hundred dollars getting the things together for me. This was for the _____ Fleet Ball. The Navy Day Ball, October the thirteenth is Navy Day. And I raised my hand again when he said he wanted (laughs). But he was in command of the ship when they made me repair officer for Vietnam. And then I was lieutenant commander. He said, "I read that, and I read that, and I hope"—Zumwalt was the commander for Vietnam, the Navy, and he said "I hope you know these regulations." Cause Taylor convinced him.

Well, I got command of a, I got orders for command of a battalion and battalion Seabees. You're supposed to be a CE, civil engineer, if you're commanding Seabees. And I was electrical engineer, so we had a four-star up there in Hanoi, and we were in the Embassy, the Naval Headquarters, which was in the Embassy, and I took my orders, I says, "Aren't you ashamed of this?" and he says "Whose name is that?" I says, "James R. Taylor." He says, "Congratulations." (Laughs)

Mr. Morris: Was that your final assignment?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. I got Tropical Scro and they said I couldn't do anything anymore. In fact they actually sent a letter home how my wife should treat me, and she said well, they wanted me to just vegetate and die. We owned a hundred acres back in Missouri and, I guess, it was five bedroom home on it, and we had three kids that were still in school, so we moved back there, and she said "We're going to go to work." We were a hundred miles from Fort Leonardwood, door to door. Boy, that was a big job.

Then, they wanted to seat me at Fort Wood or down at Memphis Naval, no, it wasn't Memphis, (**Several words lost here**) Naval Air Station, now BUPERS is up there at Iron Mountain, Bureau of Naval Personnel. BUPERS. And I had to go to, or else to St. Louis. Well, my legs were so bad, and then they still are, I use these braces on them to stay erect as long as I can. Otherwise I have to sit down.

Mr. Morris: Is that part of the scro?

Mr. Taylor: Oh no, no, this is from shrapnel, playing football.

Mr. Morris: Life experience.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah.

Mr. Morris: Okay.

Mr. Taylor: My wife went to Roosevelt High School and I went to Beaumont High. And they had the first three hundred pounder in the whole United States' football history on their team, Jim Kakian, Kinkik—anyhow, he went to the Pittsburgh Steelers direct from high school. but they thought they were gonna win it all, and we were like sort of a nemesis to them, and, well, all four years that I played I made All-State and they didn't. 'Cause I knew where to tackle this guy. I was enough Indian that I didn't worry about tackling. Then they'd group, "Kill him, kill him." They'd carry me off the field (laughs). They used to give us Novocain shots right in our knees, and ankles. They don't do that any more.

Mr. Morris: They got better stuff now, I'm sure.

Mr. Taylor: Oh, I'm (laughs) yeah, yeah. We played good. We had a good running back from a long time ago, Lee Tevis, was a good running back. But, we got knocked about pretty good. But we didn't let anything stop us. We'd run through or over.

Mr. Morris: Where's you pick up the shrapnel you got?

Mr. Taylor: Off of various ships.

Mr. Morris: Just stuff blowing up around you?

Mr. Taylor: Oh, yeah. I can't stand up unless I put, you know, and stay up, unless I've got—I've got another pair at home, these are just wraparounds, I call 'em, just for walking, quick.

Mr. Morris: Easy on, easy off, that stuff.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah, yeah. They're Mullers. You have to hold it tight but they keep you up and down, and I got a good of Mullers. I didn't pay for this stuff, you get one of these, uh,

Mr. Morris: VA Cards?

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. One of that. It has to say "Service Connected" underneath it, underneath your picture, and then I get . . .

Mr. Morris: Don't lose that card.

Mr. Taylor: I get my dental work, one hundred percent, particularly since Congress, you used to have to argue, justify, you had to have justification, and you went through whatever. Now, I got this card since the _____ Care for Life, when through, and . . .

Mr. Morris: Here's my card.

Mr. Taylor: Well, like my glasses. These things cost me a hundred bucks. And there's what, about even dollars glass? (Both laugh)

Mr. Morris: The government at work, of course.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. And, but, now I get free glasses. In fact, I got my first dental appointment—not dental, but eye appointment, at Audie Murphy, Frank Tejada. Frank Tejada sent me.

Mr. Morris: I got a lot of people I haul back and forth between here and Audie Murphy. Great hospital.

Mr. Taylor: Well, I go there. That's where my primary doctor is. If they get rid of me (laughs) they're gonna pay for getting rid of me.

Mr. Morris: Well, I think we can probably call that in, unless you got something you want to add to it. I appreciate you taking the time. Very interesting, even though I had to drag some of it out of you. Thanks a lot.

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