

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

**Center for Pacific War Studies  
Oral History Program**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Mr. Keith D. Healy**

**Nimitz Staff CINCPAC  
USS New Mexico**

**Date of Interview: November 11, 2004**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is November 11, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Keith D. Healy by telephone. His address is 44425 Westminster Canton, Michigan 48187. His phone number is (734) 414-7617. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific Wars, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Keith, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today.

Mr. Healy

Yeah, well I've got nothing else to do.

Mr. Misenhimer

And I want to thank you for your service for our country back in World War II.

Agreement read. Is that okay with you?

Mr. Healy

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay fine. Lets get started. Now the first question is: What is your birth date?

Mr. Healy

My birthday is 5/23/20.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Healy

Sterling, Illinois. It's 100 miles west of Chicago.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Healy

He was a painter, kind of a painter, designer, wallpaper and so on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Healy

I had one brother, two years older. He was exactly 2 years older. We were born on the same day. I was born on his birthday.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he in World War II?

Mr. Healy

Yes, he was. He got drafted in late '40. A lot of people say, 'was the draft going in late '40?', and I said, "Oh, yes." He wrote me a letter. He says, "Whatever you do, don't get drafted." And that's the reason I jumped in the Navy. He says, "I'm in the tent city in Camp Swampy, Geogia, \$21 a month. Later he put in for the Air Force, made it and became a pilot on multiple engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he come home from the war?

Mr. Healy

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. Now you grew up during the depression. How did the depression affect you and your family.

Mr. Healy

Well it affected quite a bit. We were never very rich to begin with and then the crash of '29 came along. My dad was working out at the factory then. The factory went out of business. I don't know how we got by because there was no food stamps or welfare of any kind. But I don't, kids, you don't pay attention to that. You come home from school and find something to play and get something to eat and a place to sleep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Healy

In Sterling, Sterling High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish?

Mr. Healy

Class of '39. I just went a few months ago to my 65<sup>th</sup> reunion for the class of '39.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good.

Mr. Healy

The group's getting smaller.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Healy

Well, I couldn't get a job because things were rather depressed, and I didn't go to college cause my folks were very poor. I went to work in one of those lousy dirty old factories

for about 9, 10 months and I put aside \$850. That was a big chunk then. Me and another fellow, we went to put in for a business college down in Missouri, which is a branch of the University of Missouri. The reason I went there, they would let me sign a note for the tuition. (laughing) But after a year and a half, two years, I was out of funds. We used to, 3 or 4 of us, would hitchhike into Kansas City and go to the post office where the old Navy, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, guys with hash marks up the sleeves, and they were 40, 50, 60 years old but that was kind of fun. We'd sit there and listen to their spiel where they had been all over the world and all over. Finally one day, this old Navy Chief says, "Any of you guys type?" I said, "Yeah, I can type. We did that in high school for fun." He says, "Well sit down there." And he put a letter down there and he said, "Just type this." So I typed it, and gave it to him. He says, "Let me get back to you. We need bodies and maybe I can get you a rating." And he called me later and said "Come down, sign up, and you'll be a third class petty officer, a yeoman." And went to Great Lakes June 1, 1941. That was the ship's company there for June, July, August, I can't remember all these times. Probably sometime late September. The Navy has a habit of every once in a while, take a ship and take about 20, 25% of a crew and ship somewhere and ship somebody else in or something. And they shipped a whole bunch of us all over the different parts of the country. They shipped me and a bunch of the guys into New York. We were put up in a receiving station there, beautiful place. It was formerly an Italian cruise line building. You know, real modern and all, and we were there for a week or 2 or 3 I guess. We got to go and see the big city. My dad, in fact, was born in New York City, and we're not a military family but it seemed like over the years, it looked like it. My dad was in World War I in France and my brother and I were World War II and I

have a son that was in Vietnam. The other son was 4 years in the Navy as a Marine.

Anyway, after a few days, some of us got orders, we were assigned to the battleship USS New Mexico. And we were shipped up to Boston. The ship was supposed to be up there, but we got to Boston Naval station and it wasn't there. Then occasionally they'd land some places, wouldn't converse in those days, they didn't know where the ships were. They had German submarines off the coast so they had to be very careful. That was the first time I ever saw a mess in the Navy was that gorgeous seafood. I never had seafood like that before other than that catfish my dad caught in the river. All right, we got the bunks and they said, "Well, the New Mexico is not here so it's up in Portland, Maine." They put us on a train, went up to Portland, Maine. Well, it wasn't there. They think it went back to Boston. They put us on a coastal steamer. I didn't realize until later that that's pretty dangerous. Boy, there was German subs already sinking ships out there.

Anyhow, we go down to Boston, got in there about 6, 7 o'clock at night. We pulled up to the dock and they said, "Well there's your ship down there. Get your gear and get down there." We walked down that long pier. Man, look at the size of that ship. And went on board, and they didn't know what to do with us at first I guess so they had a guy take us. I always remember the word when I went on, Officer of the deck says, "You'll go aboard ship." Okay, we went aboard ship and they took us down about 2, 3 levels and a couple of decks, and we ended up temporarily. They had cots down in the, what they call emergency steering. We stayed there 2 or 3 days. Finally, I was assigned with 2 other guys and a gunnery officer. The gunnery officer, senior officer was Lieutenant Commander Rosenthal. Under him was another commander, Martell, and I guess it was a case of they took all his crew and shipped them somewhere. Okay. Anyhow, we pulled

out and picked up a sister ship, the USS Mississippi, and destroyers. And we were assigned running convoys to England. You have a model of the USS New Mexico in the big room there at the Nimitz Museum.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Healy

And I would stand watch up on the sky aft, and it was so cold in the middle of the Atlantic, we bundled up. We could hardly walk with all the clothes in the 4-hour watch. We'd come down, they'd give us the 12 to 4 watch at night, you know. We'd still have to get general quarters a half hour before sunrise. It was a common practice, submarine had a good shot at you against the sun. Anyhow, we were almost over to England, I guess, I don't know, Captain Brown, an old 4-striper...never could find where we were you know. We didn't chat very often. The ship would come out and take them to Liverpool, South Hampton. We turned around and come back. I don't know what one, maybe the third time coming back and we were somewhere south of Greenland or something and we got the word Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Instead of pulling back to Boston where it was home ported, we pulled into Casco Bay, Maine. What the hell were we doing there? And we sat there about 2 or 3 days. Finally, we pulled out. We thought we're not going back over to the England without getting refueled or getting supplies on. We turned south. They bet on it, when the anchor dropped and everything, and we turned south. And 2 or 3 nights later, I had the watch from 12 to 4. Boy, that was cold. I came down. They always had "stuff on the shingle".

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, right. I know what you mean. S.O.S.

Mr. Healy

It was ground hamburger with gravy on toast, you know. And boy when you come down off of watch, that's like a t-bone steak. Anyhow, I went back to the...we 3 guys slept in the gunnery office. We had our folding cots beneath the desk and a big thick 2-inch mattress and a pillow and a blanket. I stripped down got in that bed in about 2 seconds and just zonked out. About a half hour later, there was a 'bump' or something. We hit something and general quarters sounded and everybody jumped up, dressed you know. I had to go all the way across ship, the port ship to a up ladder to get to my general quarters...

Mr. Misenhimer

To your battle station?

Mr. Healy

Yeah, which was in the conning tower, that big steel tower just below the bridge. During general quarters, you don't go up a down ladder or 6 guys will put their foot in your face. Anyhow, I get up topside and, "What the hell?" The search light's on, shining. I said, "Boy, that here's a German sub with a nice target." But I get up front and I see. Oh, my God. We had rammed a 10,000 ton freighter. That big bow of New Mexico, put a big hole in it. One of our anchors dropped off right on that ship's deck and I don't know, I guess fell in the ocean. I don't know why it happened that somebody didn't know there was a big convoy building up off of New York or Boston. I don't know exactly where that was. We were right in the middle of them. They shined the searchlight around and my God, there were ships all over the place. And we backed off and finally pulled out



and went on south. We heard later that the ship sunk with about a dozen men or something. I don't know why they didn't contact the merchant Marine or the Commander Atlantic or something. But anyway, we pulled into Norfolk of all places. We pulled into a dry dock. You know what a dry dock is?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, uh, huh.

Mr. Healy

We pulled in and they closed the door and pumped the water out and there we were sitting dry. But about 50 guys come on board from that scaffolding over the side and they were scraping barnacles. They've got to do that every so often because of the drag. Something else they did, they learned a lot at Pearl Harbor. A lot of people were killed aboard ships from fumes, it's like a house fire rather than flames and there's so much burnable on even the military ships. The overhead beams for the gunnery office. You know that saying in the Navy, 'if it doesn't move paint it.' They had a good quarter inch paint on it. And also all over the deck inside, they had a half-inch of old linoleum type stuff, brown linoleum. And they chipped all that paint out, all the way through the ship, took all that linoleum up. It was a nice surprise. The panels, we were on the outer bulkhead on the port side. They cut the panels off and there was big spare pieces of cork, 4 inches deep and 20 by 30 inch in the sides for insulation or whatever. And they took maybe 2, 3 weeks to do all this. When we got done, there was a pile of stuff out on the pier there that I couldn't believe, and we couldn't get much liberty you know. Norfolk is not a friendly city to me anyway. I think I went ashore twice or 3 times. But they had signs around in different neighborhoods that said, 'dogs and sailors keep out'. Finally,

they had got done. The office looked like a cave then, and we pulled out and went south into the Pacific, then we went through the canal sometime late January or sometime. It always seems hotter than it could be. Some of the guys down in the engine room, they were hauling them up passing out. I watched going into the canal and then I went to bed. The next morning, we were in the Pacific and we went up the coast, pulled into San Francisco. What a wonderful deal that was. After the Norfolk, we pulled in down in Embarcadero I think it was right next to the, just a couple of blocks down from the ferry building at Market Street. In other words, you go ashore and you're practically downtown San Francisco, and that was nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was San Francisco?

Mr. Healy

San Francisco, yeah. Then finally we started operating out of there. We'd go out and cruise 2 or 3 months and sometimes be in dock. I found out later during the Battle of Midway, we were about 200 miles east of Midway and then there were a bunch of other cruisers and destroyers. I forget the exact number. I think the idea was if the Japs did take it over, we would have flattened the place. I think battleships were good for pounding up something. Finally, one trip out we pulled into Pearl Harbor and we operated out of there for a couple of months. While we were there, we'd be off for a couple of days, then I'd come in and they said, "Okay, you're transferred to Cincpac." I said, "What's Cincpac?" He kind of smiled, he said, "Commander in Chief Pacific." Oh, okay. So I was with him, Admiral Nimitz, for some time. And then later, the war moved west. Finally they pretty well cleaned up Guam, but there were still some Japs in the

boonies. We moved the headquarters out there and it was kind of interesting to see all the big guys; Halsey and McCain and all those come in for meetings and stuff. One time, they had a big meeting and some of the chiefs of staff from Washington came out. We invited General MacArthur from Australia to come up. He replied he was too busy. He couldn't make it. He was a pain in the butt for everybody from the President on down. Finally we moved out, he took the group of us on his staff, some of us. And we went on a ship. We stopped at Eniwetok and Kwajalein, I remember that. Some of the guys were swimming there, and first time I ever saw a guy standing on the side of the ship with a rifle in case the sharks came around. We pulled into Guam to build a headquarters up on the hill there and it's now called 'Nimitz Hill' as I understand. I worked for the operations office. I worked for a Commodore Curtis. And I was outside and another room was secret so I never went into the pilot room. Admiral McMoriss, Admiral Nimitz is chief of staff always going in and out of there all day long with other people. Admiral Nimitz was a very modest man in opposition to General MacArthur, who traveled with umpteen photographers and public relations people, you know. He wasn't liked in this area and they didn't like it when he said to the Filipino people, "I will return" instead of 'we will return.' Finally, there was a big meeting and I guess Admiral Nimitz or chief of staff who oversees the Navy got the President involved, told General MacArthur get his butt up there to Guam. And I'll never forget that morning. They had all the big guys: English, French, must've been several of the Admirals or someone for them. And it was supposed to be at 10:30 in the morning. The only guy who wasn't there yet was General MacArthur and most of them were already up to the headquarters there. You know, no big deal. And finally at about 11:00, we heard the sirens. These 2 motorcycles with the

lights flashing, the command car. I didn't know there was a command car on Guam. And it was MacArthur coming uphill. Everything he did was dramatic, you know. Pulled up and we stood there for effect and finally he gets out. He had a corn cob pipe sticking out of his mouth, some of his photographers snapping pictures. He come in, he walks right by my office, and I had a notion to give him an ashtray but I didn't think that would be a good idea. Just to show, you know, he could be arrogant. Nimitz, like a lot of people know, he says, "I don't want any autobiographies written until after I'm dead." And he died 1966. Somebody did write a book, the story on him. The title of the book was just simply *Nimitz*. While at Pearl, his Aide-De-Camp, was commander...took care of all his personal stuff and meetings.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that Hal Lamar?

Mr. Healy

Hal, yeah! That's it, Hal. And they told him I wanted to get out of that office, just like a personnel office. In order to make chief, you had to go to the school in San Diego, so I put in for it and 2 weeks later, then the Commander walked in and said, "Healy, pack your bags. You're going back." There was a warrant officer in his office and he jumped up and he yelled and he says, "Oh, he can't go!" The warrant officer Larson, what a schmuck. He'd been out in Pearl there about a year and I had been at sea or overseas for about 3 years and had never been back home and he didn't want me to....anyway, I went and that was good, good old time. That was before we moved to Guam of course. Hey, look I should have recorded a lot of it. One day, Commodore Curtis says, "I want you to take these" and he gave me a big envelope, "over to Admiral Byrd." I said, "Who?"

“Admiral Byrd. He’s in that other building over there all by himself.” I wasn’t thinking or I would have got a photographer cause I knew the guys up in the photography department would photograph me talking to Admiral Byrd, holy cow! He had gone to the North Pole. He had something to do with harbors and landscapes and so forth. I walked over and gave it to him. He didn’t even have an aide or nothing, sitting behind a big desk you know. Also, we were getting pictures back from Iwo Jima and the flag raising. A friend of mine from the photography department came down, he had a whole pile of them. He said, “These haven’t been censored yet.” A lot of them showed burnt Japs and you know, holes for their eyes and he said, “These won’t be released to the public.” Then he came across, he had some of those flag raising pictures – 8 by 10 glossies, and one of them was signed by the guy that took the pictures. What was his name?

Mr. Misenhimer

Joe Rosenthal.

Mr. Healy

Yeah, yeah, and I thought, later in life, “Why didn’t I stick that in my own desk?” They had a whole bunch of them up there that I liked. That would have been really a prize.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, yes, that would have.

Mr. Healy

But we didn’t know at the time that was gonna be such a famous thing. Of course, I worked on the battle plans, different operations. After the war, there was people saying, you know people didn’t know what they were talking about, they said they didn’t need to drop the bombs. I said I very distinctly remember going through the operations for

Southern Kyushu and it covered everything, logistics, medical, whatever, of the different divisions. One said in the back there, 'Estimated American casualties: 7 to 800,000 and estimated Japanese, you know, don't quit they just get killed and die: two million. So these guys I read later you know, I'd just like to ask them sometime, 'Were you there?'. We didn't soften it up enough in Tarawa, getting caught out there in the low tide and the Japs are like gophers in tunnels. And I don't know why we couldn't use more battleships and just started to beach and go up. When I first arrived in Guam and went down to what was the city of Agana, there wasn't even a big stick there. 3 battleships crossed there and they told the people, a city of about 25,000 before the war, they said, "Get the hell out of there." They knew the Japs would be in there and they started at the beach and just up ladder 100 yards and just, 'boom, boom, boom, boom'. Anyway, I got a couple of pictures of some of the things we talked about, the Navy took them. We used to get some orange juice and take it down to a lady called Mrs. Kerner. Her husband was the Chief, Bosun. He was captured on Guam and sent to Japan. He didn't survive. And then all those ladies, they made a hefty brew called 'agagi' out of coconut, I don't know something and we'd get orange juice and drink it you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

I interrupted you when you were talking about working with the war plans there.

Mr. Healy

Oh, yeah. We'd get a lot of celebrities go through there. In fact, they'd come back in the back of the office one day, a guy named, big actor Robert Young or something sitting on the edge of my desk. I said, "Mister Young, you mind getting your butt off my desk. I've got work to do." "Oh, yeah, sure." We went through a lot of them, you know. Most

of them were special. We had a movie theater outdoor there and unfortunately it was the north end of the airport, B29s were taking off and landing. And every time we'd get a good movie, they'd start coming in from Japan, 1, 2, 3, 4, right after another. You couldn't even hear the movie. Somebody was hollering, "Hey, shoot them guys down!" interrupting the movie. Anyhow, finally I thought, "These guys,". I'd been ashore too long here and I'd like to get out to the Task Force 3 or a carrier outfit. They were having all the fun you know. I told Lieutenant Andrews. He was kind of like in charge of personnel for the staff and everything, "I'd like to get out of here. It's been wonderful but I'm bored." So he got me out. He sent me down to a supply place in the harbor and said "Eventually, there will be an opening and you'll get sent to a carrier or something like that." Well, it never happened. 2 months later, the war ended. After a while, they closed everything down and so forth, but finally me and a bunch of us were put on a transport. It was kind of nice, had a state room and it must've taken 10 days for that sucker to reach San Diego. And you know all the Hullabaluh on Broadway, Japs quit. We used to call them USO Sailors and Soldiers. We pulled into there and some God forsaken place in the harbor in San Diego. Wasn't a soul in sight. We took our gear off and we had to walk quite a ways. We finally found a cab and we thought, "Boy, the big homecoming some of these guys got that never even got out of the States." All I wanted to do was find a train station, and it took about 3 days to get home where I guess I got out. I don't know, it was October maybe. I tried to get my records and I understand that most of them were in St. Louis and lost in a fire. All the records were in a booklet type thing like a passport only bigger. So that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back and ask you some questions here. Now when you were going to go back to the States to get that training for CPO, for Chief Petty Officer, did you get to go for that training?

Mr. Healy

In San Diego?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Healy

It was at a Marine Base there, they had classes for Chiefs, Yeoman Chiefs, and all kinds there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So did you get to go?

Mr. Healy

Oh, yes. In fact, I hadn't had a leave in a few years. I got the chance to go home. I went all the way to Chicago and back on to my hometown. None of my buddies were there. I had quite a few buddies in the war. In fact, one of my good buddies that I went through high school with him and was in football, basketball and track; he was a hell of a quarter-miler. Anyway, he was a lieutenant and he got killed on Guam and I visited his grave there. Another fellow was over in Europe. Another good buddy was flying over the hump in China and disappeared. That was a great war, though. Four hundred and something thousand I think were killed totally in World War II. The Battle of the Bulge I think was 60,000. Iwo Jima was just too many killed there. I don't know why we couldn't have...Napalmed them into the...?



Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, we had it then.

Mr. Healy

We should have dropped about 400 tons of that stuff there and blew them out of their caves. 400 tons on Suribachi there, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think the first Napalm was used on Iwo but I'm not sure about that. it might have been...

Mr. Healy

I don't know. I've only seen pictures of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've read somewhere when the first was used and I've forgotten where it was.

Mr. Healy

They had those Napalm gunners that would spray fire. They had done that on Guadalcanal to get them out of the holes. That's what a friend of mine showed me those pictures of those Japs burned to a crisp.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back. You mentioned December 7, '41. Again, where were you when you heard about that?

Mr. Healy

I don't know. We were somewhere, I estimate, somewhere off of Greenland heading back.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you all think when you heard that?

Mr. Healy

It was a surprise. You know, that's way over there in Hawaii. But gosh, it spread fast around the ship. My God! The Japs! I still refer to them as Japs. I got corrected a few times. They said, "I don't like to be called Japs." I said, "That's too da-- bad."

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm with you.

Mr. Healy

I see a Mitsubishi car and I think, 'we should shoot those sons of bitc---. I stood watch, as I said before, on the gun and we just practiced, practiced, practiced. And it was 4 of us up there and an ensign controlling. The guy on the left of me, cause we were looking through the range finder, all he did was keep a line, I don't know how primitive it was, but keep a line on the horizon. The man on my right was in control of the horizontal and I controlled up and down and I would fire it. So we'd get a biplane or a pontoon plane on it. We'd fire of the turret, number 4 turret, and they'd pull the target up there, way up there you know, which was dangerous. And we put the timing on the fuses and slipped in and they'd say 'fire' and I'd pull the trigger twice, 'boom, boom'. Those 5-inch 25s make a hell of a crack. The 14 inches make a 'vooom'. We had earphones on but I was a little hard of hearing all my life and I think a lot of it was that. Today, they've got things they can wear for noise you know. Some guys don't wear them and they've got rock and roll bands and they get hard of hearing too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever shoot at any enemy planes?

Mr. Healy

No, when I got transferred off, I got trapped on Pearl and whether those 2 other buddies of mine and the gunnery officer and the lieutenant commander, Rosenthal, they got in some battles. They got hit twice, as I understand, by a kamikaze. And the first time, it was below the bridge. I said, "Oh, my God." Those Jap planes had a bomb on them and gasoline I never could find out whether those guys were still on the ship or whether they got killed or what. Later, they got hit again somewhere. I don't remember details. No, I was safely at Pearl Harbor in that building there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you mentioned on the ship, part of your duty station was in the conning tower below the bridge.

Mr. Healy

That's where I was at general quarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your job there?

Mr. Healy

Just a talker. I would relay orders. General quarters, which was at sea during war time you'd go to general quarters a half hour before dark and sit there an hour until after dark. And the same thing in the morning. You'd get up a half hour before light, whatever, and there were 3 of us that were talkers. I would sit next to Lt. Com. Rosenthal. He can't talk to all the phones at once so that's what we were doing when we were practicing the 14-inch guns or something. When you practiced antiaircraft, for some reason, just practicing I would be in the sky aft tower. We were practicing off the coast of California

one time and one of the very first times we did a lot of shooting at aircraft. The old Army Air Force biplanes, that's the ones they'd get rid of. So they would have a drone coming in on our port side. Boy, the first time I did that, between the 5-inch 25s and the 20mms and the Pom Pom 1.1's, the Marines down in the lower deck fired the .50s. that sky was black out there and that da-- plane came right through her until it got over the bow and then a guy with a 20mm finally hit it. Oh, my God, a torpedo bomber was coming in, we're gonna have... Then they were recruits. They got better and better. Finally one day, I know they were overflowed and we got a good fix on it. It was up probably about 5 or 6,000 feet and we had just fired one gun and we fired it and I assume the Captain was watching this whole thing. We had an accident one day. We had some cruisers off our starboard there and they were practicing also so they had cease-fire all around so all the guns stopped and so forth. Then I climbed down and was on the deck. All of a sudden, the da-- hot miss fire exploded over our ship 2,000 feet up. I thought, "Oh, my God!" Then all of us, we ran like hell, there was an overhang on the 14-inch guns in that turret, and we rolled underneath there fortunately. Because 2 seconds later, a big piece of sharp-edged shrapnel about 3 inches wide come down and stuck on that teak deck. I inquired and nobody else got hurt. I'm sure other pieces hit the ship. I don't know what happened with that but that's the way it goes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now which gun fired that shell? Was it your gun?

Mr. Healy

That cruiser, one of the cruisers out over the horizon. It seemed they were way, way over there. I don't know what happened. They had the thing in the breech. I don't know how it fired but it did. But boy that could have been dangerous.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever on board when they actually fired the guns in anger?

Mr. Healy

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever threatened by submarines or enemy planes or anything?

Mr. Healy

Well, there were submarines all around the north Atlantic, but we never saw them. We had so many destroyers and if I were the German subs, I'd stay clear of them. The guys I must admire for something crazy were the Merchant Marines. Like I said, I hope to hell they made a ton of money cause some of those ships that we escorted, I don't know, they looked like old clunkers to me, but they were just using everything they could get that would float. And every once in a while, one of them would conk out and we can't stop, buddy. You're on your own and they'd get sunk. They were crazy to join the Merchant Marines. Of course, the money's great, yeah. If you survived in the north Atlantic, you're not gonna last long.

Mr. Misenhimer

I heard recently, I'm not sure if this is correct, that the Merchant Marine suffered the highest percentage of casualties of any section, any part.

Mr. Healy

Yeah, I imagine. The poor devils.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you first got to Pearl Harbor, was there still much of the damage left there?

Mr. Healy

Oh, yeah, sure. You could still see the ships sitting on the bottom, the Oklahoma rolled over and some were bad and had a hell of a lot of wreckage.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you got there around when?

Mr. Healy

Oh, boy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Probably February maybe, something like that, of '42?

Mr. Healy

No, later I think. I don't know exactly. March, April like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said you went through the Panama Canal in January of '42.

Mr. Healy

Yeah, that was right. Well, we were operating out of San Francisco for a few months when we finally pulled up. And we operated out of Pearl a couple of times. We'd go out about 2 or 3 months and cruise. I don't know. We always, one of the greatest things about seamanship, we would refuel our destroyers a line over, big hoses over and then we'd send, we had a bakery on board. You know the battleships were preferred and all kinds of fresh stuff over to them. We were all in blues and the destroyer guys were all in

jeans you know, really informal. The only way they could do that, we're all big wagons together, we carried 200,000 gallons of diesel fuel and what we hated to see was to get up to secure from general quarters and there's a big supply ship heading out there. Oh, damn. That's another month here, or a big tanker, oil tanker come up alongside. It was boring you know. And everybody had money and you can't spend any. Cigarettes were fifty cents a carton in a big wax, sealed thing. And what did you buy? Toothpaste and shaving cream and razor and that's it. And I used to go weeks and months even without even picking up any cause I didn't want the rest of the guys getting it then you'd put in a chit to get what you want. I wanted a check for whatever I got. I sent it home. I had a hell of a bank account when I got home. Unfortunately, I got married and spent it on furniture. I said, "Geeze, if I'd have just invested in a few things." I could be a multi-millionaire. Oh, well. You don't forget all those things. I forget a few things but not many.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were actually pretty close to Admiral Nimitz. Is that right?

Mr. Healy

Oh, yeah. I mean, we weren't buddy buddy but the separation of officers and enlisted people was quite wide. I knew my place. The building on Guam, like in the tropics, you don't have hallways. They had outside porches that were quite wide and I'd come out and walk down and he'd walk by and he'd nod and I'd, "Admiral, good morning." You didn't really see people standing around you know. I got something to do, busy, busy, lets go. He liked to take walks. A couple Marines, they had to watch it because there

were still some Japs back in the boonies there. Heck, we lost 2 chiefs that went out deer hunting and they got picked off. He was a very nice man, very modest man.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of that, did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Healy

No. You could go up in the bush behind our barracks, and we lived in those Quonset huts, and you could see all kinds of... Then we found a couple of Jap shoes one day with the foot still in them. They had a, there wasn't any meat left because they have red ants out there that eat them up. That one guy, he brought back some tiger seashells, some tiger seashells, put them in his locker in the barracks. And a few days later, everybody about threw him out of the place cause they would rot. What you've got to do is dig a hole and put them in there for a few weeks and you come back and the red ants had cleaned them out nice. They had a badminton and a volleyball court and it was nice. We'd have a big battle every evening. That was great.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO Shows?

Mr. Healy

No, I don't remember seeing one out there. Bob Hope never made it there. I was hoping.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about the Red Cross, did you have an experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Healy

No, no. I guess they didn't want to be, well they weren't around us at all.

Mr. Misenhimer



What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Healy

Just the Atlantic, the Pacific. I never got a \_\_\_\_\_ as chief. My wife on my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she got a whole bunch of my stuff from the Navy and before and after. She's got a picture in there of a chief in dress blues. I said, "That's not me." She said, "There's 2 that look just like you." When I come back from Guam, I had just the khaki things you know. Out in the Boonies we never dressed up. In fact, I thought about it when I got off that ship there in San Diego coming home and man I should go to one of those places and get some dress blues. What the hell for? I'm not gonna be in any parades or anything you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose any time?

Mr. Healy

No. I don't think we ever had a radio.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Healy

Yeah, yeah, well that got out there fast.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what reaction did people have to that?

Mr. Healy

Shock of course. You know, he was in his 3<sup>rd</sup> term for crying out loud. He was our hope. We just couldn't believe it. He had been the only one. And of course, Harry Truman had to take over. Two of the democrats, the only 2 of them I ever liked.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they dropped the atomic bomb, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Healy

Well I'll tell you. I kind of thought I was on the inner circle there with all the top-secret stuff I handled and I didn't know a da-- thing about it. It was really kept secret. Some of my shipmates and other people, "I didn't know we had an atomic bomb. Holy cow!"

But some of the Russian spies knew it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when Japan surrendered, on VJ day, did you all have a celebration then?

Mr. Healy

No. I had left Cincpac and I was down at the harbor there on...I forget what it was. And no, we loved it. You know, that's great. We'll go home. We finally came back and I thought I had been away out of the States so long, I thought maybe we had come in through Ellis Island. We were all happy and that was a long, hard war. I was fortunate and I never got in any tough situations. I'm comfortable with the thoughts of landing maybe but we didn't have to swim in it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Healy

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you all had any reunions over the years?

Mr. Healy

Ship reunions?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, or unit reunions.

Mr. Healy

Yeah, I had a call a few years ago from some guy down south. He wanted me to come to a New Mexico reunion and I don't know all the guys. I went to one reunion down there in Fredericksburg I remember and I'd see a guy walking around there. He had a New Mexico hat on and he was on board part of the time that I was on board. You've got, what, 1800 people or so and you don't know everybody. And one reunion we went down to, I think it was the last one, I took 3 sons with me and I have a son lives in Galveston and another in Baytown and then one lives here. And we flew down, picked up the other two and we drove over to San Antonio, well Fredericksburg. And that was nice. They had that reunion, I'm trying to think. What's that town south of Fredericksburg?

Mr. Misenhimer

Kerrville?

Mr. Healy

Yeah, Kerrville. We stayed in a hotel there cause the hotel there in Fredericksburg, we never could get in it. And they had a convention there, and Hal Lamar was in his 80s I think. I saw him sitting in the couch and I had taken some stuff with me, the 2 pictures of Admiral Nimitz that Nimitz had wrote on it 'Chief Keith Healy, Thank you for your

services' and so forth and signed Admiral Nimitz. And I showed them to him and he says, "I remember you, yeah!" That was flattering. I introduced him to my kids. They got a big kick out of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill when you got home?

Mr. Healy

Yeah. I married a beautiful girl in Chicago and worked for a paint company right off Michigan Boulevard there. And I guess I'm a small town guy cause I wanted to get out of town. They had an opening in Toledo. The guy I worked for, I said. "Why don't you send me down there? I get tired of this bumper-to-bumper traffic you know out every day or whatever." He says, "Okay." Well I moved to Toledo, I had just been married. I think we were married about 3 years. I had a year-old son. My wife came down with Spinal Polio and that changed everything. She was in an iron lung for 2 years, finally got a little...and she was also 5 months pregnant when my daughter was taken by caesarean section out of an iron lung. That was an experience.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, that would be.

Mr. Healy

Man, that was tough. Then finally she went up to the University of Michigan Respiratory Center where they took care of people like that. 13 years later, she died. She had died every day of her life anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would be tough.

Mr. Healy

That set me back, you know. I couldn't work. I couldn't travel. I did get some help from the National Foundation in Toledo. When I got transferred to Columbus, the national foundation wouldn't pick up anything. Then I finally had 2 kids, one was Scott, the guy had been in Vietnam, and a daughter. \_\_\_\_\_ . I've been married 40 years now. She's a lot younger than I am and in fact, she's still working. She's got a good job Chrysler truck and Jeep engineering. She's gonna quit in I guess January or something. I appreciate anything anymore after that first marriage you know. You hear of people complaining about this or that and I say, "You don't know what tough is." My first wife laid in that iron lung, couldn't move, couldn't breathe, then had a tracheotomy. She could move her hand just a little bit. We took her engagement ring, put it on her right hand and the nurse never left the room but for a second or two. She could knock on the sides of her arm if she wanted something. I don't blame her. I would rather die than be in that type of thing. But it's gone. It's history and I've been very fortunate since then. I had financial setbacks but then that's unusual.

Mr. Misenhimer

When is the last time you were down to Fredericksburg to the Nimitz Museum?

Mr. Healy

It's been a while. I can't remember. They hadn't quite opened that new George W. Bush Museum then.

Mr. Misenhimer

They opened that in '99.

Mr. Healy

Could be something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

'99 when they opened it.

Mr. Healy

I'd like to go to more of them cause they're interesting. I don't know of many people left my age, but then...

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, yes, yes.

Mr. Healy

There's a few around. I was surprised. I went to my class of '39 reunion you know about 20, 24 people there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else you recall from your time in the Service?

Mr. Healy

In the Service, the stuff you'd see, you know. It's boring, boring, boring. Not too much excitement. Hampton Roads there, what's that Navy Base there, not Norfolk? Across the river there. Anyway, they got those 50-caliber machine guns off, pea shooters you know, they put on one of those 1.1 pompom things, and they put on something called radar. We had a lot of trouble for a while getting the radar people trained and so forth and getting some false things. Today, it's so sophisticated it's amazing. They had updated it. That was great.

Mr. Misenhimer

The time you all got in the middle of that convoy on the New Mexico...

Mr. Healy

In the North Atlantic?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah.

Mr. Healy

I don't know where we were. We zigzagged you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course they had no radar then so you didn't know what was out there.

Mr. Healy

No, they said somebody on the bridge saw it but that big ship doesn't turn on a dime you know. The captain, he was sleeping. Well, it was the middle of the night, you know early in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

He has to get his rest.

Mr. Healy

Yeah. I presume there was an investigation. He probably retired, but I felt bad about the cargo ship. I forget I read later in a paper somewhere what they had on board. I forget what it was. They were hauling all kinds of stuff to England you know. I don't think that if it wasn't for our supply, they wouldn't have survived. It was the tenaciousness of the British Air Fleet and so forth was keeping Hitler from crossing the channel. On thing that does bug me, and it still bugs me, this hate American thing in Europe. That after we've saved them. My dad was over there in World War I. My buddies were over there

in World War II. This war comes in there, fight it yourself. They were cowardly people.

That Chirac is a pain in the a--.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything you've thought of that you might tell me?

Mr. Healy

Not really. The natives in Guam were so appreciative. They didn't have any place to live but the shacks they'd build up out of what remained of their houses. The Americans gave them a lot of stuff, the Seabees. I learned a little. I got a picture, of course they were all Catholic. They're very similar to Filipinos you know. The language and what not. I have a picture of a bunch of Catholic girls. They must've been 15, 16 years old and a priest standing there with them. I always kept that. I went down to one of those reunions and I don't know what he was, a Senator or Congressman or something, of Guam and people were talking to him. And I come up to him and I said, "You know any of these people?" He looked at the picture, he says, "Oh, yeah! That's Norma Flores then there's Jack." He says, "She's passed away." I said, "How about Mrs. Kerner?" He says, "Oh, yeah. She's passed away." It's been many years. Yeah, I know those ladies. They're still there living. That was great... Admiral Nimitz had a gun target place. You had to go out there with a 45 automatic, and he'd out shoot you.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say you had a horseshoe pit that he played also.

Mr. Healy

Yeah. I'll tell ya. I didn't feel forward enough to ask Commander Lamar, "Can I get a picture standing with him." I was with him so long and went to Pearl and out to Guam



and so forth. But I wasn't brave or I was too shy. I don't know, but I got one with Admiral Byrd for Christ sakes. That would have been something to show the grandkids. Grandkids don't know but the kids do because they're older – 40s, 50s.

Transcribed by  
Christa Granger  
October 6, 2005  
Alice, Texas

Oral History By:  
Richard Misenhimer  
P.O. Box 3453  
Alice, TX 78333  
361-664-4071