

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR
(ADMIRAL NIMITZ MUSEUM)**

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Richard Byrøn, U S Navy (Retired)
Corpus Christi, Texas
April 14, 2005
Pearl Harbor Survivor
USS *Lexington*
Battle of Coral Sea**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is April 14, 2005. I am interviewing Mr. Richard Byram. His home address is 1417 O'Neill Street, Corpus Christi, Texas 78418-5149. His phone number is area code 361-937-1535. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

First off Richard, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today.

Mr. Byram

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Byram

I was born in Decatur, Nebraska.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Byram

April 27, 1917.

Mr. Misenhimer

You have a birthday coming up in a few days don't you?

Mr. Byram

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not quite two weeks. You'll be 88?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Byram

I went to Decatur High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate there?

Mr. Byram

It was the year before I went into the Navy. It was in 1935 I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you go into the Navy?

Mr. Byram

I went in August of 1936 I guess it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were what about 19 years old or so?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Byram

I was in the First Division and I was in the gunnery and we had to handle one officer's motorboat and a whaleboat and one officer's boat hauling them. We had two 5 inch

batteries on the ship and we would man them. But the Marines wanted them. They told us a month ahead of time they wanted those guns. So I said, "I'll volunteer to join the torpedo squadron." I had known them a while and they had been on there for tests and so forth and they said, "We operate out of San Diego and we've got to send some planes over to Pearl to get them worked on before we go to war." I was assigned as one out of five men to go on there and help Old Man Mac take care of those planes. I thought I was going to work on spark plugs or gears or something but no, they put us on a job doing what he wanted us to do in the shop like cleaning up the shop or putting in lines to fire extinguishers in one certain plane that was in there that needed some repair work done on them. And we worked on some seaplanes that were in there for repairs. They had to have an oil line put in from the pump to the engine. We did some work on them. We were assigned to go to work at a certain time in the morning. On the weekend we had the weekend off. If we wanted to go ashore we could go ashore. We decided that war was coming on so we might as well stay aboard and get out some guns. They said it was kind of irregular but they let us get some guns out and we could shoot down some planes if they came over there. We were down there and had some machine guns out. Some of us had to work so we just hauled them out there by the channel and here was a row of battleships. We lived in a place where they had barracks and right beside it was kind of a little hospital. They blew that thing up when all the bombs came down. I woke up when the bombs were coming down and I said, "Well I'd better get down there and get on those machine guns." I looked out there and here came a Jap submarine. Somebody got on that thing and put a bullet right through the conning tower. So we went on downstairs and they were getting bodies off of the ships and bringing them in and throwing furniture out

the windows so they could tend them. He said to them, "You'd better lay down because you are hurt." They were stunned and were lying out there on deck. So I said, "I want to go down there and get on those machine guns." I got out of there and went downstairs and they said, "We're going to hand out some rifles; these Jap planes are coming in so we're going to hand out some rifles." I said, "Maybe if we give out the shells they might turn around and shoot us and kind of cut down on that." I got outside there and went on down where they dropped a bomb in our Hangar 117; that's where we worked. Just over from the building was a swimming pool and then Hangar 117 where we had our planes. We went back there and somebody dropped a bomb at that but they missed. They didn't hit the building; they hit a building adjoining it. It was a good sized building and this bomb ripped through the building; it was made of plastic and it didn't go off. It came within a foot of a guy and he went up and kicked it to see if it would go off. I said, "That could blow up if you hit that fuse right." (laugh) They didn't realize that building was where they stored acid; barrels of acid; tanks of it and it was all running down onto the ground. Those guys were out there wading around in it. I said, "You're going to get your feet burned, that's acid." Then they realized it and run off into the dark because their feet were burning up with acid. So I was down there awhile and I said, "The only thing we can do is just go ahead and do a different job." Like some planes came in that had been shot up. Someplace they had stopped along the way and they had welded them, even their steering gear up in the pilot's room was damaged; they welded them together and they managed to land. We tried to do something with them. Finally our ship came back from where it had been out. I asked them what happened and they said, 'Well we didn't get a lot done because our torpedoes were set too deep and they went under the Jap ships and

didn't go off so we had to go down and use machine guns on them. So I said, "Well I'll get back on there when we get these planes out of here." We worked down there and didn't seem to have a lot of activity going on but there was a lot of dead they had to get rid of. Then they had to find a way to feed us. There was one woman we found in the building in front of our building in the little sick bay. She was the only one alive in there, the rest of them were all dead. There wasn't much they could do. Then we had to go out and get ready for that battle they called the Coral Sea Battle. I didn't know what that was about but they got ready to go.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship were you on?

Mr. Byram

I was on the *Lexington*; the old *Lexington*. I had to wash my clothes with a scrub brush on deck. We didn't have a washing machine or anything. I would hang them up to dry on the smoke stack. When I went on the *Midway* later on they tried to dry some stuff on the smoke stack and they all burned up.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went on the *Lexington* to the Coral Sea Battle did you?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Byram

We went down there and the Marines said, "We want the gun batteries." I said, "I'll stay

with this squadron and go along with you.” I was in one plane that was going to take off but somebody had shot the tail wheel off so I didn’t get to go. It had a torpedo on it. Before they took off I’ll tell you what happened. The night before I had had duty practically all night. That put you out late at night and then general quarters came up and you had to go to duty. That was kind of a bum deal. The bomb tore up the battery I used to be on; the number two battery. Then it went on down and finally pierced the tank clear down to the engine room and killed a lot of people. I wasn’t in that mess. I was back aft of there. I got some sandwiches and by the time I got to where I was going to take them they had all fallen apart because there was so much noise going on. So I decided, “I’ll try to get some field glasses off the main deck.” I started up there and decided that they would be too heavy to carry over so I finally got off that ship and got on a cruiser. I got on a cruiser; I think maybe it was the *Northampton*. Anyway it was going up to fight some Japanese. They had four ships and they were in a hurry to get up there so they wanted to let us off. So they layby at Noumea and took us off there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was the *Lexington* sunk there at the Coral Sea?

Mr. Byram

Yes. It was sunk later that night. They started to come out. One guy stayed on there until they started dropping depth charges into it to sink it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your job on the *Lexington*?

Mr. Byram

I had been training on the 5 inch guns as first loader, fuse setter, second loader, hot shell

man. I had every job on there and I figured I done a good job but the Marines said, "We want that gun. We've got some qualified Marines." So I said, "Well I guess you get them and I'll go get in this squadron." Later on I got in a different squadron. I know one squadron I was in was a seaplane squadron but they were a bunch of drunks. They would land at Alameda and they would say, "You've got the duty." Then one of those guys would say, "I want to borrow your clean uniform to go uptown to buy something to drink." So I would loan him my uniform and I would sit around in dirty clothes on duty while he was uptown buying whiskey for the officers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back on the *Lexington* at the Coral Sea, it was hit a number of times, by what, bombs?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get off of the ship?

Mr. Byram

I waited until the Skipper got over the side and then I said, "I'll swim over and get on this cruiser." I swam for maybe 100 yards and swam over to the port side and I got aboard. That night we were cruising so we didn't get much to eat or no bath, it was too hot. They were running to try to get up there to attack the Japs. It was late at night. Oh yeah, I came down a passageway and there was a roll of bills, somebody rolled up some bills and they rolled back and forth with the ship. So the next morning I turned them into the OD and I said, "Somebody lost these." So then he was going to put me on report because I wasn't wearing a lifejacket. That's all I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was on the cruiser?

Mr. Byram

Yes that was on the cruiser.

Mr. Misenhimer

During the battle there at the Coral Sea did you fire your guns or what did you do then?

Mr. Byram

No. I worked on aircraft engines. They had one that was down that was ready to go and they took it down to the hangar deck and then the hangar deck filled up with smoke and we couldn't work on it so we just let it sit. We had to go down there and get some guys out there on the hangar deck to bring them out; they died from that smoke. We had to bring some out of that hangar deck because we had a few dead ones down there from when this gun battery blew up. It was all full of smoke down there. Then I went out. After the Skipper left I went down to see if there was any candy laying around or anything but there wasn't so I decided to go over the side and swim over to that cruiser. That's all I know.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you saw the Japanese planes attack the *Lexington* then right?

Mr. Byram

Yes but you know what? One guy was telling about how he used to go up and they had a buggy they would fly in but then they gave him a job and he got put on a machine gun where they took out a boat and put a machine gun on there and he had to fire that thing. That's where they Japs torpedoes came in and blew him up. He was dead. H was just up

against the wall; he didn't have a chance. Those guys had it tough. But I kind of had some spare time there. I was off getting those sandwiches when those bombs went off so I didn't get hurt.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went to Noumea on the cruiser?

Mr. Byram

Yes. Later on I tried that seaplanes outfit and then I got out of that. Then I went back to I think the *Salsbury Sound* was one of the small ones that took care of seaplanes. They would hoist them aboard and repair them and then put them back in the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was this at?

Mr. Byram

You could get on them at Alameda or you could go up to the shipyard and get on one of them. I was on several of them. I was on the *Pine Island* and *Salsbury Sound*. Then we I got on the *Midway*. That was a pretty good job. I had to take care of the Corsairs. They were training out of Panama and went through the Canal. I tell you we had trouble in the Canal. We hit one of the pilings and knocked over a big crane that was sitting up there that was supposed to be taking care of ships. We knocked it into the ocean. They had a pilot on every ship and I don't know what he was doing. They had to pass a line to the ship so they could go through there straight. Well we didn't get this line straight and the ship ran into the side of the Canal and knocked that big crane off. I bet that cost a lot of money. It seems like some of the officers were new on there and they didn't know how to talk to servicemen and I didn't know anything about them. So we didn't have a good

understanding but on one side the pilot had a good view of what was going on but the other side of the ship you couldn't see if they were going to get this cable hooked on. There wasn't much clearance between the ship and the Canal and that caused damaged. So that's where we got into trouble they couldn't see to put the line on. They said, "Well that's just one of those errors."

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your job on the *Midway*?

Mr. Byram

On the *Midway* we worked on Corsairs. We had to change the engines or change the cylinders. I tell you they had some planes on there that were lemons. I told them, "Don't use that plane." Lindbergh told me about those Corsairs. If you don't get an overhaul bomb rack every so often they won't work. I got a hold of one plane and what happened was they brought it aboard and didn't check the bomb rack. I told the guy in charge of the bomb release that it was no good. I said, "You might as well put that out of commission because it won't release a bomb." He wanted a fuel tank on there and he was going to dump that fuel tank. What happened, the pilot went up and tried to release the fuel tank and it got loose and it went like flying around and went onboard the plane; now that was the Chief's fault. I said, "You made a serious mistake." He said, "I don't know." They finally gave him shore duty over on some island off the East Coast. They got rid of him but I know he had two dependents. Do you know what was the matter? They didn't have a lot of telephones down there and you couldn't talk to people and tell them what was going on. This Chief he didn't want to talk to anybody. He said, "In that ready room where they keep all the log books on that plane." I said, "You go look in that log room

and you'll find out what was the matter with that plane." He hadn't overhauled the bomb rack. Lindbergh told me that one time, he said, "That's the only thing that I can see wrong with that plane."

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you know Lindbergh then?

Mr. Byram

I met him out on the West Coast. He was flying part time off some carrier there. He told me that. I said, "I don't know what's the matter with this plane. It's got a lot of power." But I got to stay with that type of plane for quite a while. Then I was on the Midway and we had to take care of them. One time I was changing an engine on one of them and I got pneumonia up on the East Coast. They had to give me a lot of penicillin before I got well and got back to change that engine. (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you on the *Midway*?

Mr. Byram

Let's see, when did I get off of that thing? They were going to make a trip to Italy and I said, "I'm due to get paid off within 90 days." They said, "If you want to get out early we'll let you out a couple of months early if you'll take boot training off the East Coast." Well I went home to Texas. My wife lived in Clarkwood and I said, "I'll stay there until they give me the word that they are going to send us over there to boot training." But you know what? She got rid of my clothes. The officer said, "I can't force you to go if you don't have a uniform." So I said that's the way it goes and she wouldn't let me go.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was after the war?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What battles were you in with the *Midway*?

Mr. Byram

They were training. I don't think we had any battles. They trained off of Cuba or someplace, Guantanamo they trained off there.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you weren't in combat with the *Midway* then?

Mr. Byram

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the Battle of Coral Sea was in April of 1942. Then where did you go from there?

Back to California you said?

Mr. Byram

Yes. I joined the seaplane squadron then and it was 50-something. I forget the number of that group of planes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of planes were they?

Mr. Byram

They were seaplanes.

Mr. Misenhimer

PBY's?

Mr. Byram

Yes they were PBY's.

Mr. Misenhimer

But this was in the States?

Mr. Byram

Yes and they would go clear up to Attu Island. There was one time they went up to Attu Island and they sent me up there at night to see if the superchargers had been rubbing. They would rub and it would cause trouble. Or they would send you up there to see how much oil was in one of those auxiliary power units that they had. If you fell off there at night you would be dead from the cold water. Actually some of the officers in those seaplane outfits were a lot of drunks. I had my wife out to Alameda and she stayed in the barracks and I was getting ready to ship over or something. She was trying to adopt a baby. It was a Jewish child and we would adopt it and we would take care of it. I had bought a case of beer. I don't know who told him I was going to adopt a baby but anyway he had the word; I guess he ran into a nurse. Oh my wife got mad over that. She said, "That old devil caused so much trouble that the woman just took the baby and left." She was so mad about that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back. When you first went into the Navy where did you take your boot camp?

Mr. Byram

At San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was in 1936?

Mr. Byram

Yes. I left there on an oiler and went to San Pedro to get on the *Lexington*. They were out of port so I had to stay there several days and then they came in. While I was down there they were giving away ships to England; a bunch of destroyers and they wanted us to work down at the shipyard. I had been taking care of garbage up there; instead of being a mess cook I was taking care of garbage. I cut my leg on a garbage can and I had blood poisoning in one leg so I had to go up there and be treated for about a month for blood poisoning in my right leg. I still have trouble with that leg. Right there is where it hurts.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes I see a scar there.

Mr. Byram

Yes. I got the same thing down there when I was in the Navy, just going down there fishing on the dock and I cut my leg on a wire and I got blood poisoning.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you picked up the *Lexington* on the West Coast then?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go to Pearl Harbor then, Hawaii, or where did you go?

Mr. Byram

They went out looking for this woman pilot that got lost in the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

Amelia Earhart?

Mr. Byram

Amelia Earhart yes. When I was out there they searched so many days for her.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were on that search were you?

Mr. Byram

Yes. I was standing jobs like on the gun watch or the boat watch or you know like a messenger. Then you had jobs sometimes where you had to do the wheel watch upstairs in the conning tower or you had this one where you called the engine room, "Your anchor is up and down. Your anchor is up and down, sir" and all that. "Yes we're getting underway sir." I had that watch. So I had most of the jobs together actually I didn't have much trouble running in the boats because I had messenger watch. I didn't make a rate until I got in the squadron. I think I made Second Class right away. I went to work with the mechanics. On the *Midway* was where I got plugged. I went ashore and this one Skipper said, "No Liberty tonight" and I said, "Well I know how to get ashore." (laugh) So I got ashore. The next morning I had to come back and I had to ride back with him. He said, "I'm putting you on report so you won't get approved when you go up for Chief." I said, "Well I guess you've got me there." We just stood our watches. Those Corsairs we worked on them in a hangar that didn't even have a roof on it. It was just down from that little town down there right below Houston. We were down there. There was no roof on the hangar. We used to go down there and change the engine on them and this and that. I remember it was kind of a funny place. You could walk into the gate carrying a bottle of

whiskey. They wouldn't bother you because they figured you might need that and they didn't care what you did. I was down there awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you did the search for Amelia Earhart where did the *Lexington* go then?

Mr. Byram

I think that was about the time; I forget what time of the year it was, but we were getting ready to go to the Battle of the Coral Sea I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, this was before Pearl Harbor when you were looking for Amelia Earhart. So then you went to Pearl Harbor is that right?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the number of that *Lexington*? The CV what?

Mr. Byram

Ours was torpedoed too and it was the two I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in Pearl Harbor before the attack there?

Mr. Byram

Well we were down there. I did have some freedom there; I did go ashore once. I went over to a YMCA and they had a little shooting gallery over there and somebody got loose with one of the guns and shot somebody. Let's see, I don't know how long that was.

Mr. Misenhimer

The day that they attacked Pearl Harbor you were on the shore then right?

Mr. Byram

Yes. I was free to go ashore but we got the word; we had gone down to this one joint. It was an all night booze joint and had a dance and bring your own bottle and all that stuff. We asked them when they thought the Japs were coming in and they said, "We think they'll come in tonight." So we went down and gave them the word down at the Base and tried to get the guns ready; to set them up so that in the morning when we got up we could go fire those guns. So the next morning I was kind of tired and I slept in. I could hear the band playing and then they shot that submarine and there were bombs.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on the mainland or on Ford Island?

Mr. Byram

I was on the Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ford Island?

Mr. Byram

Yes. This little place down there was kind of like sickbay. The bomb just dumped that concrete and it kind of did like this and it killed all of the nurses in there except for one nurse.

Mr. Misenhimer

The *Lexington* was out at sea then?

Mr. Byram

Yes. They had to go out; they were looking for somebody. But they told her to come back and she made a clean sweep but the torpedoes were set too deep. The Japs were moving some troops to one of their main bases. I don't know what base it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the first Jap plane you saw that day?

Mr. Byram

This one plane that came down low, I forget the number of that thing, it ended up the bullets hit the plane and it crashed into the wires and while it was hanging it released its torpedoes. The torpedoes were hanging down like they were going to land on a ship. The back end of the ship had some ammunition stacked. There was a big pile of that and it was burning but that ship had already been bombed before I got up because it was sitting deep in the water and there was nobody running around on deck. They were already off.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that the *Arizona*, or which one was that?

Mr. Byram

I think the *Arizona* because they were pretty close. We were on the Island and the battle ships were around this way. If they were on the port side of the channel, that would be the starboard side if you went out, port side coming in. Anyway, they were already sunk and somebody went down there and started pumping water like they were going to float it. They couldn't float it, it had already been bombed you see.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from Pearl Harbor when they were bombing there?

Mr. Byram

That night after they had that one raid they had something over on the west side and some Japs came in a boat; maybe that was a Japanese sub, I don't know. They came out of someplace and came up and there was some shooting going on up the road like they were shooting at these Japs. I don't know if they ever found a submarine down there or not. I saw the one they had at that exhibit here in Texas; the Jap sub.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you all did shoot one there through the conning tower that day?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right through the conning tower, huh.

Mr. Byram

That's all I know.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you help to rescue any of the people out of the water or any of the bodies or anything?

Mr. Byram

No. I know one guy had oil all over him and I told him, "You'd better go sit down." When I picked him up half of his head was gone. They had blown off the back of his head. Over there on our ship they had a fire after the bomb went down through the number two gun gallery. There was one officer that went down there and opened that hatch where they had ammunition stored and when he opened it, it crushed him. They

had to patch him up with bandages. He was sitting up there in the wounded area; he was just a wreck. He probably died there before they got him off the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get into any other action at all?

Mr. Byram

No. I think our pilots up there were attacking our own outfit. Somebody on the ridge was firing guns and one guy they called Cash Register he downed some planes. He knocked down one of the planes and he got killed. They tried to put plastic tanks on some of the planes and you know what? They got a whole bunch of them on there and they all started leaking. So we had a whole bunch of tanks that were all leaking gasoline and we had to get rid of them. One time we were out with that ship and they had too much gasoline aboard. They had to shut off the engines and drain some of the gasoline. They had to drain some of it off so the ship wouldn't catch fire.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship did you go to Attu on?

Mr. Byram

I think it was maybe on the *Salsbury Sound*. There was the *Nassau* and then there was *Pine Island*. Later on I went on *Pine Island*; that was after I came back from the *Midway* I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went up to Attu were you on one of those tenders?

Mr. Byram

A seaplane tender, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was up in the Aleutian Islands, Alaska?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it cold up there?

Mr. Byram

Yes it was cold alright but coming back from there we had a fire and I took this fireproof foam and tried to put the fire out. One gun battery put a lot of trash back there and it caught fire. They were trying to throw it overboard but it got too much fire. I called up the fire department and we dumped this foam on it. Some officer came up and he said, "Cut out that foam you nearly knocked out one of our guys working down there." So we won't use those anymore. But then about two weeks later they had guys out drilling on how to use that foam. That stuff was so much a can, it nearly cost \$5 but we had to get used to using it. Nobody had used that stuff. It was just sitting there so they said, let's have a fire drill. I know one time they had a side elevator on the *Midway* and they had I guess too much ocean, too much waves and they just tore that off the side of the ship. One of the hangar deck guys ran around and I saw one guy grab a hold of a plane and his fingers went right through the fabric. He didn't want to get washed off. The guys in the room down below they were afraid of that cold water coming downstairs, something was going on. I was up on the hangar deck; I wasn't worried too much because we had pumps on the hangar deck that could get rid of that water. So I didn't have too much worry there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship was that on?

Mr. Byram

That was on the *Midway*. But I got assigned to a squadron that was supposed to go on the new *Lexington* but I decided that I was eligible to go on leave so I took leave and didn't ever serve with the squadron on the new *Lexington*. I got my name on the ship somewhere here someplace but I didn't actually operate off of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you did on the original *Lexington* though?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in boot camp what all did you do in boot camp?

Mr. Byram

In boot camp we had to learn to drill and they never had me go out and wander around carrying a sea bag until I passed out. I had two Chiefs then and they were, I forget the number of our company, but they were Horn and Hennessey and they were two mean Chiefs. One was a gunner's mate and the other was a boatswain's mate I guess. They would yell at you and beat you with things just so you would march good. I said, "I'm not much at marching." I used to get lots of beatings off of those guys.

Mr. Misenhimer

They were rough on you were they?

Mr. Byram

They didn't kill me but boy they could raise lumps on you. They could beat you. I wasn't going to fall out and cry about it. *(tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, I asked you what did you sleep in on the *Lexington*?

Mr. Byram

We had our own hammocks. We slung them on the main deck. That was the first living quarters forward of the radio shack. The radio shack had a few bunks in there ahead of us. But the rest of the division had bunks in the anchor windlass room. I wasn't stationed in the anchor windlass room. My duty was on the flight deck or the boat deck but not in the windlass room. We had duty on the bridge but we had hammocks. We had to roll our hammocks up and stow them in the lockers with our sea bags.

Mr. Misenhimer

Every day huh?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is it like to sleep in a hammock?

Mr. Byram

It was very good sleeping. The only thing was we had duty as mess cooks. We didn't serve the food directly unless we had the duty but we would clean vegetables. We would clean all kinds of vegetables to get them ready for the cooks. That's how I got blood poisoning in my leg. I cut my leg on a garbage can.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did anything funny happen along the way?

Mr. Byram

One time we got to sleep in late and one guy got restless and fell out of the hammock and broke his neck on a folding bed. Somebody had left it standing. So he hit the deck and broke his neck.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it kill him?

Mr. Byram

Yes on a Sunday morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was before the Pearl Harbor attack?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Byram

We had a good boatswain's mate. We used to run boats out into the gangway and that ship would go when it was swaying with the tide, the hangar deck would go underwater. He would bring one along side and that water would go right through the hangar deck.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't around Okinawa or Iwo Jima at any time were you?

Mr. Byram

No not when the action was going on. We went over there to Okinawa; I know I pulled a lot of liberties there. Let's see I used to go off of one of the seaplane tenders maybe, the *Salsbury Sound*, the *Pine Island* or one of those. On the *Nassau* we would go in there and we had to help moor the ship or stand watch on it going in and out of port.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever around the Philippines?

Mr. Byram

Now the Philippines. I was in there one time. We went down there because a commercial liner was going to take us back to the States. We went down there and it was a fine ship. The only thing I had to do was serve tea to 4,000 Aussies that they were hauling down to New Zealand or Australia or somewhere down there. I served a lot of tea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this during the war, or when?

Mr. Byram

That was later on. Finally I got off of that and went back to the States. What they did was make a mistake and went around the wrong side. We told them to not go around that one side because they would get blown up because there were mines in there. They said they were going to do what they wanted to do so they went in there and blew the bottom off. We only lost one man but it was uncalled for. It was just pure stubbornness. They knew where the mines were.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that at?

Mr. Byram

I think it was down below Noumea; someplace down there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that at New Hebrides?

Mr. Byram

Yes. They let that thing blow up but I didn't go on it then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that ship the *President Coolidge* that sunk there?

Mr. Byram

It was the *Coolidge*.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Byram

When I was on the *Salsbury Sound*, one of these seaplane tenders, they gave me a medal for being on the 5 inch guns on the *Lexington*. They gave me another medal but some yeoman got it. I didn't go and pick it up and some yeoman got it. So I didn't get that medal.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you finally get discharged then?

Mr. Byram

I got discharged; they were going to send this ship to Italy, I think that was the *Midway*. They said, "You can get out early and go to camp boots in the fall down south." I don't know, some station down south but the wife didn't want me to go so I didn't go. I didn't

have a uniform. They put me in the Reserves just before my twenty years.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you spent twenty years in the Navy?

Mr. Byram

Just about; minus that duty they put me on the Reserves. I think it was about two months early.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you retire from the Navy then?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you get retirement?

Mr. Byram

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank that you got to?

Mr. Byram

First Class. Like the guy said, "You ain't going to get no rate" when I went ashore when he said, "No liberty."

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Byram

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

You weren't close enough over there?

Mr. Byram

One time we were out there on one seaplane tender and they ran around there for two months. All you heard was "Doo di doo doo, doo di doo" they were playing music all day long. I don't know it might have been records.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you got out probably in 1959, somewhere along in there when you finally got out; or 1956 I mean.

Mr. Byram

It was 1958 I believe.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you went in 1936?

Mr. Byram

They wanted to know why I wanted to get taxi fare back to Corpus Christi. They went right by Clarkwood on down to Corpus but they didn't want to stop. So they hauled me downtown and they had to come and get a taxi driver so I could go all the way back to Clarkwood five or six miles.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's where your wife lived then?

Mr. Byram

Yes she lived there with her parents. She liked the Navy. I got a trailer house when I was up on the East Coast in Leonardtown. That was bum duty up there. I worked on some

planes there and got sick from that smoke and went out the gate and one of the guards hauled me in because I looked like I was drunk but I was sick on that smoke. Then one time the City made it rough on you. You would go take off your license plate to put a new bolt on and they would get you for driving without a license. You had to go down there and report to the base. The guy that I reported to had a home on the base; he lived in a brick home. Ain't that awful? That was Leonardtown, Maryland.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Byram

No. That's about most of it that I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any particular friends that you had from that time?

Mr. Byram

I knew one that was Italian. He helped capture a German submarine someplace. They had one guy that went on to the Coral Sea with me. He had a lopsided baby; there was something wrong with it. And one fellow his brother was killed; he never told me which ship he was killed on, but he was killed on one of the ships. I didn't keep track of them. Somebody gave me this; it says 1924 to 2004, 80 years. Somebody thought I ought to have that.

Mr. Misenhimer

He is showing me an overseas cap here with Pearl Harbor survivor on it and a couple of badges on it.

Mr. Byram

But I don't believe that I made Seabees I think I may take that off. I don't know why they put that on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your sister was a nurse in World War II?

Mr. Byram

Yes she was a Lieutenant. Then Beth married a pilot; he was a fighter pilot but he was a drunk. She worked as a stewardess on one of his planes flying around the world. They used to fly around the world and the kids didn't have to go to work because their old man was flying around the world.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Byram

There were seven of us. Me, Maxine and there was Charles and Beth and Roy and Janice and John. John was the youngest and he made more money than anybody else.

Mr. Misenhimer

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Byram

I delivered papers, the Omaha Bee and then I delivered the World Herald. We could deliver for 12 cents a week. The only time somebody came down there was when they would deliver the papers and they would cut the bundle open and take one pack for their route. Then my brother got polio and he couldn't use his hand. Mother kept books and hauled the World Herald all those years. Somebody threatened to kill him, I don't know,

some courier person in the neighborhood. So we canceled the route and finally he went to a rest home and died there. He had been delivering papers; I delivered them two years myself but he delivered them a long time. I know he got a medal for delivering them.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your dad's occupation?

Mr. Byram

Dad used to mine gold and cut timber. But he would buy this Oregon whiskey and drink it to keep warm in the winter time. After the timber business kind of slacked off he went off to buy some. He got in a gun battle and killed two of those guys and went and told the Sheriff, "I killed two of those bootleggers out there because they tried to kill me. My buddy got shot too." He used to write for the *Woodsmen's Magazine* out there about hand logging and stuff like that. He mined gold there in Alaska for \$15 an ounce. He used to give it away but now it's worth quite a bit more. But my brother went up there and in three days he got a pound of gold. That was north of Nome and then you go east until you hit some lake and you go down there with a pick axe and your chemical device and you uncover gold. You have to pay tax when you take that gold out.

(end of interview)

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May 29, 2006

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