

**The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)**

**Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview With
Captain Thomas B. Dabney
Graduated USNA May 1936
USS Plunger 4 Patrols
C.O. USS Guitarro 3 Patrols
October 31, 2005**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is October 31, 2005. I am interviewing Captain Thomas B. Dabney by telephone. His address is 6218 Palma Delmar Boulevard Saint Petersburg, Florida 33715. His phone number is (727) 867-5912. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Captain Dabney, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today.

Mr. Dabney

It's my pleasure.

Mr. Misenhimer

And I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Agreement read. Is that okay with you?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, it is.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you, appreciate that. Now my first question is what is your birth date?

Mr. Dabney

4-23-1913.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Dabney

I was born in Rogers, Arkansas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sister?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, I did. I had 2 brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they in World War II?

Mr. Dabney

One of my older brothers was in World War I.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he come home from the war?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, he did. He was in a Navy ship, and I remember he went to Odessa, Russia in that ship. When he came back, he came back to the states. I don't remember where they came back to but I remember he came back.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's and mother's first names?

Mr. Dabney

My father's first name was Charles, no middle name. My mother's first name was Lora Corinne Bullard. That was her maiden name, Lora Corinne Bullard, before she was married.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Dabney

My father was a cottonseed oil man. He ran a cottonseed oil mill in Texas. A little later on, he moved to Arkansas then he moved to Muskogee, Oklahoma. Where he bought and operated a plumbing and heating business for a number of years. Later he owned and operated an automobile business.

Mr. Misenhimer

Quite a varied career.

Mr. Dabney

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Dabney

The great depression was a financial disaster for my family. My father lost his business and most of the real estate that he owned. So we were forced to move to a small farm that he managed to save. Fortunately I finished high school. I received a second alternate appointment to the Naval Academy and passed the examination but lost to the principal appointment. Life on the farm was not easy. We were fortunate that we had a home and food on the table. My ambitions for a future education did not appear in prospect. Good fortune came my way when I learned that the Navy offered 100 appointments to the Naval Academy from enlisted ranks, which were never filled.

Confident that I could pass the examination, I enlisted in the Navy and was sent to San Diego for my initial training. Eventually, I was assigned to the USS Texas, where I met

two other aspirants, John Preston, and Robert Odening. The Executive Officer, Cdr. Kaufman, was very sympathetic to our ambition. He assigned two officers, the chaplain, and a gunnery officer to tutor us several evenings each week until the examination. It was with much surprise and elation when we were informed that all three of us had passed the examination and would be transferred for entry to the Academy in May 1932.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Dabney

I went to high school in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you finish there?

Mr. Dabney

I finished there in 1931.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that schooling at the Naval Academy?

Mr. Dabney

The schooling was a completely different lifestyle – a strict dress code, a disciplined life in every phase. I was so proud to have been able to go there, and I enjoyed my life at the Academy. It was a great experience. I learned a lot of lessons that lasted me a lifetime.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now I understand as a first year, what do they call them, a Plebe, the first year?

Mr. Dabney

A Plebe, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

They're pretty rough on those people. Is that right?

Mr. Dabney

As a plebe, all are subject to various conditions of "hazing". Each plebe reports to a first classman practically every day. Each of us suffered some degree of unofficial actions. We were expected to answer questions by "Yes Sir". "No, Sir" was always a fatal answer, which required the plebe to find the answer so that he could always respond with "Yes, Sir." Generally the questions related to Navy life, thus enhancing your professional knowledge. On Sunday evenings when we came to the dinner table we were required to bring a letter to our parents, and letters of thanks to anyone who entertained us. These lessons followed me throughout my life, and have always been considered as valuable assets. First classmen always inspected any plebes general appearance to insure correct attire, clean and spotless clothing, and polished shoes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's good, yes. What are some other things you studied there at the Academy?

Mr. Dabney

Our courses were concentrated in the engineering field-steam and electric propulsion, math, physics, and science, detailed instruction in ordinance and gunnery. However we received excellent instruction in literature, naval history, and composition.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you were in submarines later. Did you study submarines at all in the Academy?

Mr. Dabney

We enjoyed a brief introduction to submarine life when an operational submarine took us for a short cruise in Chesapeake Bay. We were also provided introductions to Marine Corp activities, and afforded flights on Navy aircraft, as well as summer cruises on a battleship to foreign ports. All very interesting and exciting to know what our life would be like after graduation.

Mr. Misenhimer

What type of military things did you study at the Academy?

Mr. Dabney

We had a well rounded education in literature, classic novels, poetry, Shakespeare, Ibsen, historic military conflicts, and the art of composition. Detailed analysis was conducted of famous Naval battles, Nelson at Trafalgar, Faragut at Mobile Bay, WWI Scapa Flow, Dewey at Manila Bay. Extensive training was conducted in celestial navigation. The significance of Naval gunfire ashore and at sea, and the types of Naval weapons was emphasized. An interesting story concerning the torpedo developed with one of my classmates. A question on the ordinance exam asked the student to sketch and describe the Mk. 48 torpedo. His reply was, "God only knows" to which the examiner replied, "God gets a 4.0, you get a swabo."

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things that happened while you were at the Academy?

Mr. Dabney

Navy football excited a great deal of interest among all Midshipmen, their families as well as national following. We held large and extensive pep rallies before every game,

especially the Army Navy game. It was an exciting occasion, with the Navy Band, the Drum and Bugle Corp and the Navy Cheerleaders. Of course, there were no young girls in short skirts with pretty legs to admire, but the middies did a creditable acrobatic job and created an inspired midshipman brigade. The Brigade was allowed to take a number of weekend excursions for the away from home games. It was an exciting occasion when we boarded the trains in Annapolis and were delivered to the rail platform in the hosting city. Normally when we debarked, it was necessary to assemble in a military formation and march through the streets to the stadium. It was a happy occasion and the local populace with scads of young ladies came to witness the parade and offer words and other signs of encouragement to the Midshipmen.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you play sports?

Mr. Dabney

I was not much of a sports fan. I went out and I took lacrosse, and I did alright with the running, but I wasn't very well coordinated. Unfortunately, neither I or my roommate were athletic idols or stars. We were members of the rifle team, debating club, and other sedentary activities often derisively referred to as "The Radiator Club."

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to be a senior, what position did you have then?

Mr. Dabney

I was a Company Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything about your senior year that stands out?

Mr. Dabney

I remember that when you graduated, you were offered a choice of several military services - surface ships, the Marine Corps, Air Force, Submarines, and you could also join the Army Air Corps. My choice was submarines, but unfortunately, I didn't stand high enough in my class. I think they took 4 people out of the class for submarines

Mr. Misenhimer

Lets go back to your time in the Academy. How many were in your class?

Mr. Dabney

There were a total of 350. It was a very small class, and that was depression time.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you graduated when, what year?

Mr. Dabney

1936.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you finished about halfway in the class.

Mr. Dabney

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did any of your class members go on to real high office?

Mr. Dabney

I had, let me see, a David Richardson (one of my classmates) became a Vice Admiral.

He was in the carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then when you finished, of course, you were an ensign. Is that right?

Mr. Dabney

That's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've got a question. We've always seen pictures of them all throwing their hats up in the air. Did you all do that?

Mr. Dabney

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How do you get your own hat back?

Mr. Dabney

You don't.

Mr. Misenhimer

(laughing)

Mr. Dabney

What you do is you bring one that's all faded and the crown was smashed in, and they wouldn't let you wear it at any formation.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you threw the hat up in the air, this was the old hat? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, it was. You would put a nice, white, cover on it and the chin strap was new, but all the other parts were old.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you didn't care if you got it back or not then.

Mr. Dabney

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's always been a question I've had. Anything else you recall from your time there at the Academy?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, I remember one event. Admiral Thomas C. Hart the superintendent was relieved by Admiral David Sellars. He was an Admiral on the Texas when I was there, and the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet was Admiral Joseph Mason Reeves. The Superintendent frequently invited special guests to speak to the midshipmen. On this particular occasion, they invited Admiral Joseph Mason Reeves to be a guest speaker.

We all went up to Smoke Hall for the occasion. He was a very distinguished man; with a goatee and mustache. Admiral Reeves was the anchorman in his class. Admiral Sellars his classmate was the number one. When Admiral Sellars introduced Admiral Reeves, he said, "This is my classmate, you can't believe it but he was the anchor guy in my class.

So it may seem odd but Admiral Reeves ended up in the highest position in the U.S.

Navy as Commander in Chief of the Fleet. I want to remind all you who stand very low

in your classes, you may be another Admiral Reeves, like cream - you'll come to the top." I thought that was a great example.

Mr. Misenhimer

All right. Any other humorous incidents there in the Academy?

Mr. Dabney

Let me think. Well, yes, I remember our Superintendent was Admiral Thomas C. Hart.

As was customary, he held a reception for the Plebe class. I had a classmate by the name of Benny Friedman. He was a smart kid, and he was always cutting some antre. He went to the physics lab one day and we were all cutting up in there waiting for the professor.

Benny stands up and he's throwing a book at somebody. It went right through the lab movie screen. Again, Benny went over to the Superintendent's reception, greets the Superintendent with a handshake. Tommy Hart was very prim taciturn man, immaculate in dress. We wore very narrow peg-leg trousers. Benny Friedman was expressing his dislike said, "Admiral Hart, when are you going to widen the cuff on these trousers? I have a hard time getting them on over my shoes." Well, I thought Admiral Hart was gonna fall back on the floor. But he said, "Look, young man. No gentlemen puts his trousers on over his shoes." (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

So then you graduated in '36. And where did you go when you graduated?

Mr. Dabney

The class of '36 was offered several choices for duty upon graduation, surface ships, submarines, Army Air Corps, Naval Air, Marine Corp, but the selection had a specified number for each choice. I opted for submarines which was in demand. Unfortunately I

did not make the cut and went instead to the Battleship New York, where I became the Assistant Navigator and 5 inch battery officer. My senior was Commander Norton. We got on well together, and I gained considerable knowledge. When the New York was assigned duty to the crowning of Prince Edward as King, I was detached and ordered to the USS Chester as AA Gunnery officer. This was one of my finest tours of duty, under Captain Ezra Allen, and Commander Davis Detreville.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then the Indianapolis was in Hawaii.

Mr. Dabney

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And anything else you recall from your time on the Chester?

Mr. Dabney

Let me see. Oh, yes. When I was on the Chester, I was one of the few people who had a car. I had bought a car from an uncle of mine who ran an automobile agency in Texas. I got a good deal on a Plymouth. I bought this Plymouth, a sedan, and I took it out there. So I was always going somewhere. We went to Hollywood, and I remember we went to a party and I met a lot of girls. And that was a big deal, too. I had a lot of girlfriends. I used to go to, I went over to Culver City. I remember that because Culver City was not so much, but it was a place where, in those days, all the entertainment people hung out. It wasn't a real Hollywood atmosphere, but they went to Culver City and hung out over there. And at the Cotton Club, I met a lot of them and I enjoyed particularly the Ink Spots, and I thought the Ink Spots were the greatest. And then I also met, oh...he was a

great singer, and I can't think of his name. I remember I thought, oh that was a great experience. I used to go over there and hear all these guys. The thing was it didn't cost anything to hear them. And I used to go out to the Catalina Island. That was a great place to be. In August of 1938, I was assigned to duty on the Staff of Admiral Adolphus Andrews, as a communication officer, on the USS Indianapolis, under command of Capt. Jack Shaffroth, a vary amiable and competent officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all happened to you on the Indianapolis then?

Mr. Dabney

I went to the Indianapolis, Admiral Andreas, he had a daughter and I had a car and so I would get a lot of invitations to go places, and everybody wanted to borrow my car. And I always laughed about that because the Admiral, once in a while, he'd say, "What are you doing with that car today?" (laughing) I recall an amusing incident on the bridge while I was the O.D. during a General Quarters Exercise. The Captain was also on the bridge since that was his battle station. The exercise reviewing officer gave the Captain a slip of paper which announced that he had been wounded and required a stretcher to carry him to sick, below the main deck. The Captain weighed over 250 lbs., which immediately produced a comic scene in everyone's eyes. In response to the call for the metal stretcher to be brought to the bridge, a very small member of the band was seen painfully lugging the metal stretcher up the tortuous accommodation ladder. A chief boatswains mate observed the absurd response, and with the aid of a bullhorn yelled down to the damage control officer on the main deck, "Get that piccolo player back in the

band, and send the strongest people you have, since it's Captain Shaffroth you have to carry!"

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask some other questions. As an Ensign, what was your pay when you first became an Ensign?

Mr. Dabney

I think it was \$120 a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you promoted to JG?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, let me see. I'll look on my little list here. That was June of '39.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would your pay have been as JG?

Mr. Dabney

You know I can't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. I was trying to get a little idea of what pay was like in those days. And you were on the Indianapolis for how long then?

Mr. Dabney

Well, lets see. Stayed on the Indianapolis... Well I guess it was until May of 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were on there just about two years, a little over two years.

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your position on the Indianapolis?

Mr. Dabney

I was with Admiral Andrews's staff and I was a communications officer. That's where I had an introduction to a man I always thought a lot of. An officer by the name of Lt. Cr. Joe Rochefort, oh, he was a big code man. He broke the Japanese codes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got to know him, huh?

Mr. Dabney

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, good. Tell me about him.

Mr. Dabney

Well, Joe Rochefort, he was on the ship and he did a lot of work in the code room as well as stand watch on the bridge. But at that time, and I just didn't realize that he was the guy behind breaking all the codes. He was a rather retiring guy and he didn't say anything about it, and I knew that he was in the code room a lot, but I didn't realize until after he left the ship that he was so instrumental in breaking the Japanese codes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Of course you know he was the one that decided that Midway was going to be the point of attack.

Mr. Dabney

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And I understand that he kind of got crossways with the higher ups, with King and some of the other people, because of that. And he was kind of pushed out to the side after that.

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yes. You know why? There was a lot of politics being played, and I had a classmate Tom Kimmel, Jr. His father was part of that, too, a scapegoat so to speak, after Pearl Harbor, and as communicator I understood. I knew an admiral who knew all the politics. Admiral Wilkinson had been the head of the intelligence office in Washington. He and his wife lived in Hawaii. Anyway, here's what happened from my viewpoint. Admiral Wilkinson had been head of the intelligence office and was aware that all the information to Admiral Kimmel about the Japanese movement had been withheld. Kimmel's family have been fighting a long time to restore him to his former rank, it's a damn shame but that's the way it was. They had a big investigation in Washington and he was scheduled to testify before Congress. Admiral Wilkinson came down to the Portsmouth ferry to go to Washington. He had his wife and daughter in the car with him. He drove on the ferry, he was first car in line, stopped the car to let his wife and daughter out. And as soon as they got out, the car rolls off of the ferry into the Portsmouth Harbor and he died.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now this was after Pearl Harbor, right?

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, this was...

Mr. Misenhimer

Part of the investigation.

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, this was after Pearl Harbor. You know, my memory's so poor, I really know of all the occasions. I wrote a big log of my experiences and I read it off there. That's the only reason I'm remembering.

Mr. Misenhimer

You're doing well, no, you're doing very well. Now why do you think he committed suicide? Do you think he knew something?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yes, I feel certain he knew since he had been Chief of Naval Intelligence.

Mr. Misenhimer

What do you think he knew?

Mr. Dabney

Well you see, he had been head of the O&I, and he was told, "Don't send Kimmel anything."

Mr. Misenhimer

Records show, I believe, that the information on Japanese movements was available in Washington but for some reason the vital information was not documented to Admiral Kimmel.

Mr. Dabney

That's what I thought.

Mr. Misenhimer

He did not want to testify to that then.

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, right. You know, Admiral Nimitz. Admiral Nimitz was a very cagey man. He was offered the job of commander in chief instead of Kimmel. It was rumored that he was offered the job first. That's the story, but he refused it because he knew all about politics in Washington.

Mr. Misenhimer

So in case I missed a little bit, so Nimitz did not want it before Pearl Harbor, but when Kimmel was relieved, he took it over.

Mr. Dabney

He presumably knew all the politics and what was going on higher echelons. So after Pearl Harbor was over, he said that he would take the position.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you know Nimitz personally?

Mr. Dabney

My favorite hero, only three official contacts, and an infrequent party.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm sorry.

Mr. Dabney

I said Admiral Nimitz was my hero.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you know him personally?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, I met him several times. Of course, his son was in my class.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say that Nimitz did not want the job because of the politics.

Mr. Dabney

Yes, that's my conclusion.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left the Indianapolis, where did you go then?

Mr. Dabney

Let me see now. Oh, I asked to go to a destroyer. So I was transferred to Norfolk, Virginia and I was assigned to the USS Bernadou, B-e-r-n-a-d-o-u, a WWI four piper.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's the DD number? Do you have the number of it?

Mr. Dabney

DD153.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anyway, about when did you join the Bernadou?

Mr. Dabney

Well, let me see. I went to the Bernadou in May of 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was it home ported?

Mr. Dabney

Its home port was Norfolk.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what all happened when you were on it?

Mr. Dabney

I was there until October of 1941. It was just a little over a year.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that's when you were escorting the convoys?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yeah! Bernadou was on that escort duty for convoys, supplies, which were going to the British. We took them up to Iceland and transferred them to British authorities, then they took them back to Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some of the things that happened on those escort missions?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, boy! That was the roughest job I ever had. I want to tell you. The sailors all said, "Bernadou, rolls in dry out." And we started on that patrol; I'll never forget it. It was in the middle of the winter, in the north Atlantic and the gigantic seas. I remember those seas. The ship would roll 50 degrees. I watched the inclinometer several times it went over as far as 50 degrees. And the waves, they were monstrous. There were lots of times, we'd go through and pop out. These gigantic waves would crash on the deck of the ship and they would roll back you know. Standard gear was our life jacket for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Anytime you went out on deck, you had to buckle yourself up to something or else hang on to the lifeline. Those waves swept across there in rapid succession and they'd sweep you right away. And I remember one time I was on the

bridge, and this big wave crashed right on the bow of the ship. And the chief's quarters were right underneath the breaking waves. Well, I'll tell you, before that wave finished washing back to the stern, those chiefs were all up on the bridge. They said it buckled the stanchions in the chiefs quarters. The stanchions had a big curve in them, so we had to send a party up there to temporarily brace them up. We went into Reykjavik and tied up to the tender to get some work done. There were British destroyers alongside also. So we came alongside. I remember sailors on the destroyer yelled over to sailors on the Bernadou and they said, "Well when do you guys want fresh seafood?" And they sailors said, "No, what we want is all the toilet paper you can spare." (laughing) We didn't have any toilet paper. I went over to the tender, and I had to cross over the British ship. As I crossed over I spoke to the officer of the deck. And they had a big battle going on outside of the harbor between the German submarines and a convoy. And depth charges were going off, and we had planes and you could hear it over the TBS system. I said to the officer of the deck, "You know, I thought with all this action going on they'd probably send you out there to protect the convoy." He said, "Oh, no, don't worry Jerry will be there tomorrow!"

Mr. Misenhimer

How many of those convoy trips did you make?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, I made about... I think I made 2 of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever have any contact with German submarines or anything?

Mr. Dabney

No, never had any contact with them. Oh, I remember that the crew on the Bernadou, there were a lot of reserves on it. And we had a yeoman that was the captain's writer. He ran the yeoman's office where all the records are kept and these reserves were always had questions and gripes about this and what do they do about that and all that. The yeoman played the violin, which he kept handy, when these sailors would come up and start complaining, he'd say, "Wait just a minute." And he'd take out his violin and take his bow and put the violin under his chin and strike up a tune, and say, "I'm gonna play while you sing." I remember one of the chiefs that was on the Bernadou, he was a reserve and he wore a big pair of coveralls, pink coveralls. And on the back of it was a sign that said, 'Joe's Garage'.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what was your job on the Bernadou?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, I was the navigator. I was the executive officer, the gunnery officer, and the supply officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how many on the crew?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, there were about, I guess around 125.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is an old 4-stacker.

Mr. Dabney

An old 4-stacker, WWI vintage.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else happen on that destroyer?

Mr. Dabney

Let me think. No, I don't think of anything right away, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go from there?

Mr. Dabney

Wait a minute and I'll tell you. We were alongside the tender, that's where I got the message to have a physical exam that would qualify me to get into submarine school. So that's where I went. In September, I went into submarine school.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now where was the submarine school?

Mr. Dabney

New London. I went to submarine school in September and then in December when the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor, they graduated us early and I joined the Pacific fleet right after Pearl Harbor. I got there I think right after New Years.

Mr. Misenhimer

What town was this school in, was it in Connecticut or where?

Mr. Dabney

The submarine school was up at New London. In New London, Connecticut.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were there then about 3 months.

Mr. Dabney

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you study in that school?

Mr. Dabney

Well we studied a lot about the general characteristics of a submarine, the ballast tanks, and the trim tanks, and the operation of the diesel engine, and the safety devices, and the torpedoes and the torpedo tubes, batteries, the supplies on board, and the electronics which we carried, and the periscope. Then we took, well we went out on submarines operations in the Bay. At the same time, you're learning that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like the first time you dived?

Mr. Dabney

Well, that was quite an experience of course. But I had gone through a dive when I was a midshipman. And so I experienced there the diving, the safety measures employed, the precision required, but it was a more personal nature now because I was a part of the organization and I had a little job to do here and there in the operation. So much depended on every man to do his job.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any claustrophobia at all?

Mr. Dabney

No, not me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were on the destroyer, did you ever have any seasickness?

Mr. Dabney

I think I was sick from the day we left Norfolk until we came back.

Mr. Misenhimer

(laughing) Not too good for a sailor, is it?

Mr. Dabney

You know, I never got to the point that on that destroyer in really rough weather, where I could accommodate the sea sickness. When I was on a bigger ship, I managed to survive and eventually assume a normal life. And the submarine, wasn't any problem, we'd dive and get away from it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time there at the submarine school?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, well I was transferred. From there, I went to Pearl Harbor directly, and I came into Pearl. And Pearl was a mess. All these ships were laying there with damage and waiting repairs and support. And all around you, you saw the effects on the base of bombed out batteries, abandoned automobiles, that sort of thing. And it was a really, real sight.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you got there in January of '42?

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, got there in January.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel from the States over to there?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, I went out to San Francisco and reported to the Commandant for the district and then we were there in a quarters downtown, you know. And we had the life of Riley, good times running around the city. Then they finally the President Hayes was assigned to transport us to Hawaii. There was a number of submariners plus other military on it with many young women, and we had a great time. Since I was one of the few guys who had had previous Navy experience, I knew a lot of things – jokes and whatnot. And I remember I played a joke on them. They had a good number of women and men on board. I told these greenhorns, “There is something you will want to see. Tonight, I about 1 o’clock in the morning, the ship will come alongside the mail bouy and we will mail letters and pick up mail from our friends.” And I said, “You want to get on topside and see this.” So all these people went up topside at 1 o’clock in the morning. They wanted to kill me. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you got to Hawaii, that was in January of '42, then right?

Mr. Dabney

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

And there was still an awful lot of the wreckage and everything there.

Mr. Dabney

Yes. And then I went out there. I was assigned to the Pompano, and the Pompano was in Pearl Harbor Skipper was Lou Parks. In fact, when I reported aboard I had contracted a mouth infection so they had to transfer me to the Naval hospital over there and have my mouth infection treated. The Pompano sailed on without me. About 10 days later, I came out of the hospital and they transferred me to the Plunger. And the Plunger was skippered by Commander Dave White. That was where I worked and I made my first patrol. After that patrol, Lieutenant Commander Bass took over and I made my five patrols under Bass.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about your first patrol on the Plunger.

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, that was under Dave White. Oh, we went to Shanghai, and we went over to Shanghai because that was a busy port and we figured that we would surprise the Japanese. We arrived there and we started our patrol. We were submerged during daylight, sometime after dark after we had surfaced around the lights that were visible. Well, about midnight, we sighted a ship exiting the harbor. A big one. We were excited at sighting our first ship. We sailed up and we closed the range and we were on the surface, and we could see this big ship and all of their lights were on. After closing the range to less than 2,000 yards, we saw this big red cross on it, so we had to let it pass, and shortly after it passed, we received a message on the radio, which had been delayed in transmission. After decoding this message told us that the ship was carrying Ambassador

Grew and was to be granted safe passage. He was being evacuated. I often wondered if Ambassador Grew ever realized how close he came to not making it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then what happened after this ship went by?

Mr. Dabney

I'll look at my notes here. Oh, it was the Gripsholm was the name of that ship.

(*Editor's Note: The ship carrying Ambassador Grew was the Conte Verde) Then on 30 June of that year, while on patrol, we sank a 3,000-ton cargo ship, and the next night we sighted four more ships, and we fired our torpedoes at one of those. Our torpedoes had not been performing well, however we sank another 2,000 ton ship. Then we fired several more but couldn't get any hits. Having expended all of our torpedoes they sent us to Midway for a refit, and were later routed to Pearl. They installed, the latest periscope, which had a radar incorporated with it. So that way, we could take a true bearing, a true distance. It was a significant improvement. You know, advanced, in the art of submarine service.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many patrols did you make with the Plunger?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, I made, lets see. I made 4 patrols and I came off the Plunger in June of 1943. We had one very eventful patrol, the 3rd patrol I made on the Plunger. We went to Guadalcanal and one night, we were patrolling on the surface close to Munda Bar. And we discovered that 2 Japanese destroyers, which were tied at a makeshift pier at Munda Bar, which was a portion of Guadalcanal. And we saw the destroyers were transferring

equipment and supplies, but these were Japanese. so we surprised them. We came in on the surface and we got within a couple thousand yards from the beach and sank both the destroyers bringing in their supplies.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was up at Munda Bar you say?

Mr. Dabney

Munda Bar.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, that's up on New Georgia Island.

Mr. Dabney

There was a lot of fire from the beach erupted after we fired our torpedoes, and one of our officers was hit with one of the small arms fire. It didn't kill him, but it hit him. His name was Lt. Brown. Subsequent treatment on board was effective. We sustained a casualty on the bridge. They put me in the relief crew at Pearl Harbor, for later transfer to the DCO School in New London as prospective commanding officer. I was assigned to the Electric Boat Company as the executive officer of the USS Becuna. Becuna was commanded by a Lieutenant Commander Hank Sturr. He was a great skipper. And it was while we were there that I married. So the Becuna was commissioned in New London in May of 1944. We went from New London through the Canal on out to Pearl Harbor and a patrol in the Pacific. While n board I was officially qualified to command a submarine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you went to Pearl Harbor, did you go through the Panama Canal?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yes we did. We went through the Panama Canal.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, that was an interesting passage. We went into the Caribbean and shortly after we entered the Caribbean close to Cuba, we were surfaced, and normally set our torpedoes for 40' depth in anticipation of firing on a submerged submarine. We were on the surface and lo and behold, a German submarine surfaced right ahead of us. The Captain fired 4 torpedoes, depth set at 40', we forgot to change the torpedoes depth setting for a surfaced submarine. The submarine's on the surface and all 4 of them went underneath. Our target dived and escaped! So strange as it may seem, when we arrived at the base on the Pacific side of the Canal, the command over there wouldn't believe us that we saw this submarine. We stated it was in plain sight. "That's not possible." Well, we differed from them on that of course.

Mr. Misenhimer

As I understand, the German submarines were quite active in the Gulf and in the Caribbean.

Mr. Dabney

We figured out why he was there. German submarines had a habit of meeting a fueling submarine on station in order for them to stay on station longer. They would send this submarine loaded with fuel to rendezvous and transfer fuel to the submarine on station. That's what they were in the process of doing. They thought we were the submarine that

was to be refueled. We wondered. We felt pretty lousy because we didn't sink that target of opportunity.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've forgotten the number, but there was several hundred of our ships that were sunk along the east coast and in the Caribbean and in the Gulf in the first 2 or 3 years of the war.

Mr. Dabney

It was terrible loss when they sank those ships. Actually, one of the survivors came ashore around Virginia Beach and what not. We went to Fremantle. I was detached from the Becuna and I was ordered to command of the USS Guitarro. The Guitarro had a really remarkable skipper, Enrique Haskins, who had made a phenomenal patrol. I relieved Captain Haskins and I went out on my first patrol. I took the Guitarro on 2 December and we departed Fremantle on 11 December. We transited Lombok Strait and went to Camranh Bay in Vietnam. While observing Camranh Bay one morning submerged patrol destroyer came out of the harbor. He was using his sonar. We could hear him but it didn't sound like he had an echo. Anyway, we prepared to attack the destroyer and made an initial observation and set up. The submarine suddenly took a down bubble and periscope was dipped so I couldn't see. I called down to the diving office, "Hey, what's wrong? Bring us up." And they said, "Well, we're trying but the stern planes are on hard dive." And I said, "Well, shift to hand operation." They said, "Yeah, we tried that and it didn't help. They're still on hard dive." We contacted the after torpedo room, they said, "Something happened. We don't know what it is. It looks like it's in the gear box." So we were in about 180 feet of water and the submarine was

185 feet long, with a 15 degree down bubble, it was a critical position. Not wanting to give our position away, I didn't want to blow my ballast tanks and so I backed down full on my engine. This normally would bring the bow up but nothing happened. We just kept heading down, so as an emergency measure, I passed the word that all hands not in a critical job to go to the after torpedo room. All the hundred or some odd people went back to the after torpedo room. What that did is that transferred enough weight rapidly that the bow came up. Now we were headed for the surface. Actually, by moving people back and forth and using our trim tanks, we were able to get control of the submarine. That night, we come to the surface and contacted the Commander of Submarines in Australia and told him our plight. "Well, just head out toward Mios Woendi Islands in New Guinea, and we'll send a destroyer escort out to meet you." So in the interim, we learned to control the submarine. We could dive and surface, level off, or even make an attack if we had to. Enroute to Mios Woendi on the surface, we passed Palawan Island and observed through the periscope what appeared to be the mast of a ship. Continued observation a Bamboo Pole riding at about a 60 degree angle with a man astride it with little more than his head above water. We maneuvered to close, brought him alongside and fished him out of the water. He was a Filipino boy who had been prisoners on the Island. They had seized a small sailboat and were in the process of escaping when they were overtaken by a severe storm which sank the boat. As the only survivor, he had managed to cling to a bamboo pole, 3 inches in diameter. Through nourishment and the care of the pharmacist mate, he gradually came back to life. Our destroyer escort joined us a short time later. Since the destroyer would eventually return to the Subic Bay, we transferred him for return to his home. On 17 January 1945, we moored alongside the

USS Griffin in Mios Woendi, where the remarkable crew had manufactured a new bronze worm gear for replacement of our damaged one. Close examination revealed that the packing gland around the stern plane shaft had been damaged during severe depth charge attack so that salt water filled the gear box, rusting the steel bearings and freezing the steel pinion gear. Two days later, I returned to patrol station off Hianan Island.

Although we patrolled close in shore submerged during the day and on the surface at night, no targets were encountered. Finally, during a night surface search, revealed an intermittent contact on the radar which closed to about 10,000 yards before we lost contact. Following the recommended procedure, we were steering by Arma Course Clock. This device cause the lubbers line on the compass to constantly move such that the ship's course described a sinusoidal curve. Thus the bow was swinging to starboard, when the wake of three torpedoes was sighted. The rudder was ordered hard right, and the nearest torpedo almost disappeared under the shadow of the bow. While diving we heard the torpedoes explode as they hit the bottom. Returning to Fremantle, we sighted a tanker and a cargo ship, with two destroyers. Unable to close the range submerged, we surfaced and started an end-around, using our radar periscope. The convoy eventually anchored in the shelter of Cape Batangan. After dark. We pursued and finally fired three torpedoes from around 8,000 yards at the anchored targets, on 6 February 1945.

Explosions followed, but sinkings not observed as we cleared the area, and set course for Fremantle. We returned to Fremantle on 15 March, having completed the longest patrol on record, 91 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever depth charged?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yeah, yeah. I don't think anyone, that would be a record if anybody went out and wasn't depth charged.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was on which ship or all of them?

Mr. Dabney

I was depth charged on every submarine I made a patrol on, Plunger, Guitarro, Becuna. When I took command of the Guitarro, the submarine offensive in the Pacific had practically shut down all shipping between Japan and the South Pacific. If you wanted to go to the South Pacific, you could walk on the periscopes of American submarines on Patrol. In view of the fact that there were very few if any targets of opportunity, ComSubPac decided to have Guitarro conduct a mining operation in Berhala Strait, one of two main entrances to Singapore Harbor, one of the largest harbors in the world. To minimize detection, because of an extend surface run in comparatively shallow waters, it was considered prudent to conduct as much of the mission during darkness as possible. We departed Fremantle on 9 May 1945, planning to arrive at the target around midnight. We ran on the surface, with all four main engines on the line, since it was a race against time. Arriving in the strait at about midnight, we had loaded our mines in the tubes, in preparation for accomplishing our mission. We were surprised to find two small ships with escorts exiting through the straits. Since we were in the narrow confines of the strait, in shallow water, and small boats all around us, we had to down load our mines in the forward tubes and reload torpedoes, in case we were suddenly detected before we could commence our mission. The convoy passed within a thousand yards, apparently

without detection. The small fishing boats, although close at hand, gave no indication of giving our presence away. We reloaded our mines and took position to lay our mines in a sinusoidal curve. We successfully completed our mine field operation on 19 April, 1945, and started our return at top speed on the surface, just before daybreak. We had a hundred miles of open water to cover before arriving at the 100 foot curve, suitable for diving. A Japanese plane spotted us and we had to dive. The bomb load fell around us but there was no damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you, on your mining operation, how do you put the mines out of your submarine?

Mr. Dabney

Mines were down in the submarines. Since they were special adapted for the torpedo tubes, they fit through the torpedo loading hatch. We carried them in the torpedo racks and loaded them directly into the torpedo tubes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And so they were the same size as the tubes so they'd fit in there. Were these round or were these oblong?

Mr. Dabney

The mines were round but they had an oblong shape with anchor base attached. They were moored mines. When you fired them out of the torpedo tubes, the base fell off and it went down, and hit the bottom, a pre set depth. Then a locking mechanism locked it so that the mine remained submerged.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just wondered how that worked.

Mr. Dabney

How does it work? You see, you knew the depth of water you were laying them in cause you decided you'd set them at about, oh, about 15 feet. And so what happened was the anchor would lock on 15 feet. So when they hit the bottom, it held the mine at 15 feet submerged.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were saying what else happened?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, and I took command of the Guitarro in Fremantle on 2 December 1944.

Mr. Dabney

Well, then after that, let me see. On the 19th of May, we were directed to go to Pearl Harbor. So we arrived at Pearl Harbor on the 8th of June and there they subsequently ordered the Guitarro to go over to Mare Island for overhaul. So we proceeded to Mare Island, and while I was at Mare Island, they decided to put the Guitarro out of commission...cause the war ended.

Mr. Misenhimer

It ended August 14.

Mr. Dabney

Wait a minute. They decided to put the Guitarro out of commission after the refit period. They put the Guitarro out of commission and they assigned me to the Plaiice. And when did I board the Plaiice?

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you the CO of the Plaice?

Mr. Dabney

Yes. I assumed command at Hunters Point in California November '45.

Mr. Misenhimer

This is after the war, right.

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, right. So from the Guitarro, I went on the Plaice. After overhaul, the Plaice returned to Pearl Harbor. When I got back there, they allowed us to return to the Pacific and visit all the places we had conducted patrols. We went to Truk Lagoon and anchored inside the Lagoon. What a formidable place it was. We went to Subic Bay and my orders in Subic Bay, I'd never been to Manila. So I had a Jeep assigned to me and I got permission from the Sea Frontier Commander, Rear Admiral Kaufman to visit Manila. In those days, guerillas were active and we were cautioned about that. I took along my exec and one other officer. We filled an ice box with food and beer. We went down the only road called the "zigzag trail". This was nothing but a path cut out of the forest. It was like powder with very little rainfall, you know, so we drove through this big powdery thing leaving clouds of red clay dust. Around noon we came to a little stream. It looked like a comfortable place to stop and have a bite to eat and a beer. So we pulled up, laid out our tarp and opened our icebox. We're having a beer and a sandwich. All of a sudden, we're surrounded by about 4 guerillas and they had their guns drawn and all that. So they questioned us for better part of an hour, I said, "Come have a beer." They agreed to that, so we all sat down and laughed and talked and drank some beers. They got up

and said, "Good bye. Have a good trip." So we got arriving in Manila in late afternoon. We had a great rapport with the locals there. We stayed the day and the night and came back the following day without an incident.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was quite an experience.

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where else did you go on this trip?

Mr. Dabney

We had a stop at Eniwetok, and we went to Guam and Okinawa. Oh, while I was in Okinawa, my wife had a brother who was a priest, a member of the 69th Regiment. He was assigned to a regiment in Okinawa. While the Battle of Okinawa was going on, my brother-in-law was administering to the dying on the battlefield and he was killed. They buried him in a little cemetery on Okinawa. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to go over to the cemetery to visit his grave. Later we visited a small island named Kusais. The Japanese had been there and one of their ships had been sunk in the harbor. Once in the Harbor, we could see the masts of a sunken ship sticking up where we anchored. The governor, or Chief, whatever you want to call him, was a black fellow. He wore the native costume was a Sari and stood in his bare feet. I took a sack of sugar, a sack of flour and some other things as gifts that they could use. He had all his servants. He said, "Sit down. We'll have a drink", all of course in broken English. He took one of those men and he said, "Go get some coconuts". I didn't know what he was going to do.

Anyway, he scooted up that tree. I couldn't believe how he nimbly climbed the tree and retrieved the coconuts with their machetes they cut the tops off and they gave one to King John and they gave one to each of my officers to drink. And I didn't really enjoy the coconut, but drank it out of courtesy. While we were anchored there, King John came out to the topside movie along with a number of Islanders in canoes – a big fascination for them. I thought it was rather interesting and great fun as well as experience. Later, we went to Guam where there was still a number of Japanese around that didn't know the war was over. They had this big fenced compound stacked high with Fort Put beer!! The base commander said, "You don't want to drink any of that. You come over and I'll give you some of my beer." After three months of travel including stops at Sasebo, Yokosuka, and Midway.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you get back from that tour?

Mr. Dabney

We came back to Mare Island in July of 1947. Subsequently Plaise was ordered to Mare Island for deactivation, decommission in April of 1948. That ended my tour of duty in submarines, I reported to The Bureau of Naval Personnel for duty. I went to Staff College and then I had an interesting tour of duty with the US Army of Occupation in Germany, based in Heidelberg. I retired in 1961.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Dabney

Captain.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever come across a submarine called the Flier?

Mr. Dabney

Yes, in Fremantle. Fremantle had a home for orphan boys run by an Italian Priest. When the war came along, the Australian Government told the priest, who was an Italian, "We'd like to have your barracks and that piece of land here because we want to establish an airfield for the Australian Army and Navy." So the Priest said, "Well, that will be good, but where do I take my orphans?" "Well, we know a lady and she's going to give you 10,000 acres in the Outback." Thus they increased their domain by trade. He takes the boys out to the Outback and sets up a camp. They build another barracks. They quarried the stone and built a barracks. When they finished the barracks the boys moved in. And as far as their surrounding went they didn't have much. Good fortune comes their way, the US Army arrives and said, "Hey, we want to build an airfield." So they said, "We'd like a piece of your land if you let us have it." He said, "Sure", "What can we do for you?" "Well, I'll tell you, we've got a dry arroyo over here and we always need water. I need another well drilled. Do that for me and dam that arroyo, during the rainy season it will fill up and we'll have not only an important supply of water to irrigate the garden that we made, but also maybe some recreation for the kids as a swimming pool. Well sure enough, the Army dammed up the arroyo. The orphans were living out there in the outback in the barracks. So the priest invited the sailors in Fremantle out to his place to go Kangaroo hunting and show them what life was like in the outback and keep them out of trouble. Two officers and about 4 members of the crew accepted the invitation. The Tender had a lucky bag and it was full of mattresses and sheets and

underwear and dungarees, socks and so forth. I asked the Skipper of the tender if I could have some of that contents?" He said sure. I took a lot of that clothing and mattresses and whatnot. In addition I took some sugar off the ship and some flour and coffee. We made the trip. It was a treat for all. The following day we went hunting in the outback forest. There were plenty kangaroos. They jumped over us, they went around us. I remember the boys couldn't hit one. So in the process of all this excitement two of the sailors got lost. We couldn't find them. Although they had matches and their own guns. We never saw fire, never heard a gun fire. We couldn't find them. The brother, I said, "I think maybe we ought to go back." "We fiddle around out here in the dark, we might lose some more of these sailors." We'll get the Abos. They will find them. We returned a little after dark around ten, eleven o'clock at night. The Aborigine Chief and his men went out. About two or three o'clock the next morning, they showed up with the sailors in hand. "Don't believe anybody that tells you you can get lost in the outback. You may be lost but the Aborigine will know where you are. They will never lose track."

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you some other questions. What medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Dabney

I got the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, and a Commendation Ribbon.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you get the Silver Star for?

Mr. Dabney

I got the Silver Star...well, when Benny Bass was Commander of the Plunger, and I was his exec, and I made an approach, missed that, then I made another one before going to

Truk. So I said to Benny, I read all the patrol reports from submarines that had been on patrol. And I said to Benny Bass, I said, "Well, according to these, all I can say is a lot of these submarines go there and then they fire torpedoes but very few of them get a ship." So I said, "There is a place down here where I knew a lot of the lines converge with the convoys from the Japanese Empire." So I said, "As a long shot, instead of going directly to Truk, lets head for that spot and then if we don't find anything, we'll just go right back down the track to Truk and hopefully find a convoy when they get out of the cover of the islands there." "Well that sounds like a good idea." So we went out there and we hadn't just arrived there and we see smoke on the horizon. Sure enough, there was a convoy with about 4 or 5 ships with several escorts. So using our periscope radar we made an end around on the surface, took a position on their estimated track and dived during daylight waiting for them to come by. So sure enough, they got up there just before dark and we managed to fire our torpedoes and sink a couple of ships. So of course, the depth charges forced us down and kept us there for several hours. After they had their little game we surfaced again and did another end around. Repeating this procedure, we sank all the ships except one which was damaged. So Benny Bass said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Lets try sinking him on the surface." There is no escort around, lets go take it on the surface with our five -inch guns. So we did that. We manned the 5-inch guns, closed. Within about 1500 yards and open fired. We could see the tracers going into the hull. Eventually, we saw fire and smoke coming out of the hull. There was no personnel in sight. We saw a Japanese destroyer returning. While the destroyer surveys the scene we fired a torpedo and sank the merchant ship. We sank the entire convoy. Benny Bass received the Navy Cross. And I was awarded the Silver Star.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, good. Did you get Battle Stars in the Navy?

Mr. Dabney

I'm not familiar with "Battle Star" – We did receive a Star in our Combat Control Pin for each designated "Successful Patrol".

Mr. Misenhimer

How many Battle Stars did you get?

Mr. Dabney

I received 6 Battle Stars, one for each successful patrol. We also received a Gold Star anytime you awarded a second medal of the same type, I received a Battle Star in lieu of the 2nd Bronze Star.

Mr. Misenhimer

You completed 9 patrols. Any time you were depth charged, did your submarine ever suffer much damage?

Mr. Dabney

No, we didn't sustain any substantial damage from a depth charge. But you know, what they did, they developed indicators to aid in escape technique, I'll tell you about the progress they made in addition to the Periscope Radar. They had a device which could tell whether the depth charges, the relative position of where depth charges were being dropped (above, below, forward or aft). So if they were getting too close in depth, you could maneuver, course, speed, and depth. And then another thing they provided was a bathothermograph. A bathothermograph provided a graph showing the submarine's depth and the variation of temperature with depth. If you had a temperature inversions

where the water temperature changed suddenly 5/10 degrees, the density of the water changed and that layer formed a barrier which reflected sound. When they used their sound gear, the sound wave hit that dense layer of water and bounced off at an angle, giving a false bearing about your location.

Mr. Misenhimer

So that was a big help then.

Mr. Dabney

Those 3 things were a tremendous help in evasion tactics in submerged cyseration.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now I understand the torpedoes at the first of the war were not very good.

Mr. Dabney

Well that's true. They had a terrible problem with them that these torpedoes had a...

Mr. Misenhimer

A magnetic exploder?

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, they had a device on them that would sound and would allow them to track, you know. The problem was that they didn't have good depth control and they'd fire them and they would porpoise instead of heading off at the right depth, it would go underneath. And miss the target. So ComSubPac decided to conduct his own investigation. So he took a torpedo warhead and load it with water, and installed the firing device in there. They found out that the firing device, a second before impact, would fracture and fail to fire. So with that information, they corrected the submarine torpedo problem.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Dabney

Yeah, I got one souvenir. The souvenir I received through the courtesy of General Vandergrift, the Marine Commander on Guadalcanal. He collected all the Japanese Samurai swords lying around. They had a truckload of them. He sent them all back to Pearl Harbor to the Commander of Submarine Pacific, with instruction to give every submarine officer, submarine skipper, one of those swords.” So I got one of those swords as a souvenir, and I’m sitting right here looking at it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now who was the commander of submarines Pacific?

Mr. Dabney

That was Admiral Lockwood.

Mr. Misenhimer

Lockwood, right.

Mr. Dabney

Charles Lockwood.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was there an Admiral Stark? What was he?

Mr. Dabney

King was the CNO and Stark was the Presidential Advisor. One thing, when they had the Battle of Midway, I was on the Plunger, and we were sent out. Nimitz was a very astute and intelligent man. He had everything in place, even rowboats. The Enterprise came in,

I think it was (the carrier) from the Battle of Coral Sea, she was damaged. She arrived in Pearl Harbor Navy Yard just before the Battle of Midway. So as the story went, the Naval Yard said, "Well, it will take two months, before the carrier will be ready." He said, "You misunderstood me." He said, "We need it for The Battle of Midway, you have two weeks." "Nobody leaves the Navy Yard – civilian or military – until the Yorktown sails to sea." So he went out there and he gave Admiral Raymond Spruance, who was not a carrier skipper charge of the carrier force. He did a superb job. They sent him up there to the North toward Alaska. The carrier up there in case Alaska was attacked, and the Japanese, for that reason, did not locate them until too late. These carriers caught the Japanese red-handed loading their demolition bombs planning to go back to Midway for another strike.

Mr. Misenhimer

Earlier you mentioned Admiral Tom Hart. He was CNO before King, right?

Mr. Dabney

Thomas C. Hart was commander in chief of the Far Eastern fleet, but not the US Navy C.N.O.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yeah, Tokyo Rose, we frequently listened to her over the radio.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Dabney

While she was passing out encouragement and erroneous information, we were sinking the ships and losing her Japanese audience, we had a different view of what she said.

The only thing we were doing was having a laugh. 'Ha, ha, ha.'

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with Halsey or Spruance?

Mr. Dabney

No, no personal experience. I have a good story, though.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me the story.

Mr. Dabney

This officer's name was Ramey. He had a great sense of humor and concocted stories beyond belief. And he was out in, he was there at, oh, one of those islands. I've forgotten. It was close to Guadalcanal near the Bismarks. We used it as a base for support ships. Ramey had a destroyer in the area. Admiral Halsey had his carrier there. So he sent Ramey a message to tow a damaged escort to Guam. Next day Halsey said, "Now I've got another vessel I want you to tow, too." So Ramey sent Halsey a message. He said, "I said, 'Hey, listen. Admiral, if you'll give me an oar, I'll stick it up my a-- and paddle all the way up'". So he said he got into Guam and Halsey was there. Halsey sent him a message to report on aboard. "When I come up the carriers gangway, Halsey was standing there with the oar." (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of Halsey as an admiral?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, he was a great guy. He was very impulsive, but had had a lot of common sense. I remember the time the carriers were making a raid on the Philippines and the planes were returning to the carriers for night landings. It was 10, 12 o'clock at night and all ships were darkened. He sent the famous message to the fleet, "Turn on the lights so the planes can come back safely." I'll never forget that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Dabney

Any other stories.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Dabney

Well, yeah. I've got a sad one. Well, it was habit if you were in Fremantle and went out on patrol. You went out to Exmouth Gulf. Exmouth Gulf was on the extreme northwest corner of Australia. And it was a shallow place, but the Navy made it a fueling station for submarines and airplanes and small ships. So what you did when you went on patrol, you went up to Exmouth Gulf first and then there because it was a thousand miles. So you went in there and you topped off your fuel, went out on patrol, and when you came back you did the reverse. And excess fuel you had, you'd drop it off at the fueling station. So I went in on my way on patrol and the officer in charge of the fueling station was a lieutenant, don't know his name, don't remember. Anyway, he invited me and some of the officers to take a jeep ride around the station and see what the Outback was

like. So we did. As we skirted the Gulf Shore, I saw this PBV fuselage sticking up out there in the water. "What's that doing out there?" "Oh," he said, "that fellow came in here for fueling and there was an obstruction in the water we didn't know about." And he said that a plane hit the obstruction, it caught on fire, and the pilot and the co-pilot nearly died. I said, "Did they survive?" He said, "No, their a grave site is over here. We'll just drive over and take a look." I looked at the grave and lo and behold it was one of my old classmates, Roy Krogh, it was his grave. He had been a good friend. I had not seen him since graduation. I roomed with him during Plebe summer. I had a shipmate from Texas I promised to room with him. After the war was over, I was at home in Norfolk and the phone rang. My wife answered the phone "There's some lady who wants to speak to you." So I talked to the lady, who had known Roy when he was in the Academy and had dated him. She said to me, "You remember me." And I said, "Oh, yes. I do Carol." "Well, you know I lost track of Roy after he went down to Pensacola and I don't know what happened." And I told her the story. so she started crying on the phone. I said, "Listen, Carol, we're right here and you can come over to see us", but I never heard from her again.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, that is. That's a sad story.

Mr. Dabney

Right. Oh, yeah! I've got one more story.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good. go ahead.

Mr. Dabney

When I arrived in Pearl, there was wreckage and sunken ships. One ship called the Oglala, which was an old wooden ship, the station ship in Guam. She had come back to Pearl Harbor for overhaul when the Japanese attacked. The Oglala sank alongside the dock. The newspapers reported that the Japanese had sunk the ship with a bomb. The sailors said, "Who served on her, that's a big lie. We know the Oglala, and we served on her. Oglala was infested with termites. The termites held hands and kept the Oglala afloat. The explosion scared them and the termites let go holding hands and the Oglala fell apart at the dock." Another story, Pompano was there, so I went over. Admiral Nimitz came over to talk to the submarine people who were in the submarine base. "You know, we are in a terrible situation. You people in submarines must realize that you must carry the war until such time in which we can replace our fleet. We're depending on you. One bit of advice 'where ever you are, be sure that you have a plan and be sure that everybody in your group knows about and be sure that they follow it.'" "If you have a plan and people know about it and they follow it, you'll always be a success." I never forgot that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good advice, right. Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Dabney

Oh, yes. I've had a couple on the Guitarro and I had a reunion on the Plaice and I had a reunion on the Chilton, all memorable occasions.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else?

Mr. Dabney

When I went to the Chilton reunion, I came down to Fredericksburg with my wife and two sons and their wives. That was a great experience. We drove along that road through the hill country. I looked at all those hills and they were beautiful. I noticed that the top of every one of those hills has somebody's home. The visit to the Nimitz Museum was an outstanding experience of my wife and family – Admiral Nimitz was my hero. The greatest Admiral who ever lived and commanded the largest Naval Force ever assembles for a success that changed the fate of our nation. His son was an esteemed classmate, whose loss I mourn.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think we've pretty well covered everything, haven't we?

Mr. Dabney

I think we have.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well I want to thank you very much for your time.

Mr. Dabney

Well thank you for calling. I enjoy being talked to.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you.

Mr. Dabney

It's a pleasure.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well good night and we'll talk to you again.

Mr. Dabney

Okay, thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good-bye.

Mr. Misenhimer

Captain Dabney is mentioned on page 775 and 822 as being commander of the Guitarro
in Clay Blair Junior's book, Silent Victory.

Transcribed by
Christa Granger
November 9, 2005
Alice, Texas

Oral History by
Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
(361) 664-4071