

**The National Museum of the Pacific War**

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

**An Interview With  
John H. Crooker  
Direct Commission As Ensign, Naval Intelligence  
Adm. Kinkaid's Staff, 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet  
Flagship AGC-9 USS Wasatch  
Briefing Officer for Adm. Kinkaid**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is January 19, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. John H. Crooker by telephone. His phone number is (713) 621-4591. His address is 3711 San Felipe, #5A, Houston, Texas 77027. 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. Crooker, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Agreement read. Is that okay with you?

Mr. Crooker

Yeah, I don't expect anything to get out of this.

Mr. Misenhimer

We don't pay and we don't charge. This just gives us permission to have this in our archives. My first question is what is your birth date?

Mr. Crooker

October 26, 1914.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have a middle initial?

Mr. Crooker

H.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Crooker

Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Crooker

I have one brother about 10 and a half years younger than I am.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was he in World War II?

Mr. Crooker

No. I think he was still a college student.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Crooker

He was an attorney.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Crooker

Well, I was able to attend college because I lived at home, ate and slept at home, therefore did not have to pay for room and board. And Rice Institute, it was then it's Rice University now, was virtually tuition free. They had what they called a registration fee but it was a very modest amount, so it cost very little to go to college.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you study or what was your major?

Mr. Crooker

Well I was a pre-law student because I went to law school after I finished Rice.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you finish law school? What year?

Mr. Crooker

I finished law school in 1937.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish high school?

Mr. Crooker

'31.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then after you finished law school, what did you do?

Mr. Crooker

Went to work for a law firm here in Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, '41 as you well remember, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when you heard about that?

Mr. Crooker

I was in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

What reaction did you have to that?

Mr. Crooker

Well, my main reaction was that my active duty date in the Navy had been one day before that. I'd been on active duty one day when the attack occurred on Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went in the Navy December 6<sup>th</sup> of '41. Is that correct?

Mr. Crooker

That was my reporting for active duty date, yes. My commission, I think, was dated something like November 18.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you get your commission?

Mr. Crooker

I applied for commission about in April or May of 1941. I became convinced that this was truly a world war and that our nation would be involved in it, and I sought a commission in Naval Intelligence.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a direct commission or did you have to go through OCS or something?

Mr. Crooker

I did not go through OCS.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go through any kind of a boot camp or anything like that?

Mr. Crooker

No, the only thing in the way of boot camp is before I went overseas in 1944, I went to a foreign intelligence school in New York City before going overseas. But I went to no school before going in and starting on active duty here in this country.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got your commission, what rank did you get?

Mr. Crooker

An Ensign.

Mr. Misenhimer

In Naval Intelligence.

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me what all did you do in Naval Intelligence?

Mr. Crooker

Well the first part of my service was in a personnel office because having reported for active duty and not being assigned to a specific thing on December 6<sup>th</sup>, the following day had become obvious that personnel was going to be very important; therefore, I was in the Personnel Office of the District Intelligence Office in New Orleans for many months before really doing anything else because the first several months was personnel, recruiting and trying to see that people were in the spots where their talents best equipped them to serve.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular you recall from your time doing that?

Mr. Crooker

I think not. You know first of all, it's getting additional personnel seeing what the Naval Intelligence Organization is going to need and trying to get capable people to come and serve.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you doing that did you say?

Mr. Crooker

Let me say that it was probably roughly the first year, maybe the calendar year 1942 when I was largely in that personnel work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you after that?

Mr. Crooker

Then there were several of us who were Naval Intelligence Officers in the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District and we were just assigned to various specific tasks. You know there were all sorts of rumors at that time about things, most of which did not happen, like some rumors that there were one or more German submarines off the Gulf Coast and they would come either up to or close to the shore and let the Germans depart from their submarines and come ashore to create havoc here, but just investigating various things. And I will tell you that also, though we were not at war against the Communists at that time, there was some feeling on the part of some of the top people in Naval Intelligence that the Communists weren't devotedly our allies and from time to time we had specific assignments to try to keep track of what Communist activity was going on in the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you mentioned the German subs in the Gulf. I understand a lot of ships were sunk out there by German subs. Is that correct?

Mr. Crooker

There were, yes, ships that were sunk particularly during 1942, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Along the Atlantic Coast also.

Mr. Crooker

Yes, of course the Atlantic Coast was not our problem. The 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District consisted of states, I don't know what, 6 or 7 or 8 states really, along the Gulf Coast from Texas on up to Florida I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, but my point was there was a lot of German submarine activity in the Gulf and on the Atlantic Coast.

Mr. Crooker

There was. I knew very little about what was going on on the Atlantic Coast because that was another fleet, but there was certainly activity in the Gulf of which we were aware.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your job was to look for saboteurs that might be landing rather than the subs out in the Gulf. Is that correct?

Mr. Crooker

Yes, I had no duty that involved my trying to have our ships intercept and sink subs as much as just trying to keep up with where they were and how many there were and what the dangers were to our own shipping.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you do? What happened next?

Mr. Crooker



Well after the personnel work of 1942 and keeping up with the German submarine activity and anything else that was a specific threat was related to us and that somebody in the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District Naval Headquarters would send one or two officers out to investigate, it got into 1944 and I thought it became obvious that a number of us were going to be assigned to overseas missions. So I began to try to get as much information as I could that I thought would be helpful to me if an assignment to some overseas mission in Naval Intelligence, I'd be serving the later months of World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have by now?

Mr. Crooker

Well, lets see. I guess I'd been in about 11 months before I became a J.G. and another 12 or 14 months before I became a Senior Lieutenant. I don't think I got to be a Lieutenant Commander until just about the time the war was over and they gave several of us promotions that I think it was just in case you are called back, you're going to be a Lieutenant Commander instead of a Senior Lieutenant. But I wouldn't say that I became a Lieutenant Commander really while I was on any active duty because I think it was just about the time the war ended that I got elevated to the rank of Lieutenant Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you regular Navy or USNR?

Mr. Crooker

USNR.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were getting ready to go overseas, did you say you went to some kind of a school then?

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what was that?

Mr. Crooker

It was a school at the Henry Hudson Hotel on 57<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City designed for Naval Intelligence Officers who had been only in this country but were going to be sent to one of the Combat Theaters.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did that school consist of?

Mr. Crooker

Well of classes for 6 to 7 weeks or so in various things about communications and what available information there would be to us and how we would best adapt to serving the active officers who were directing things in whatever Fleet we'd be sent to. And I was sent to 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Headquarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get involved with any code breaking or anything like that?

Mr. Crooker

No, the code breakers were a totally different set of people. They'd bring us things and from time to time would explain why they were confused and why they, in turn, were confusing us, but I worked with one or more of our code breakers in trying to figure out

what he was intercepting, or what he had been intercepting, and he was trying to make sense out of. That was only when they came and said, "Look. Here's what we've got. Here's what's still uncertain and confusing to us."

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you able to help them with that then?

Mr. Crooker

Maybe some but they did a much better job on deciphering the code breaking than I did.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were there in New York City, what did you live in? The hotel?

Mr. Crooker

Lived at the Henry Hudson Hotel on 57<sup>th</sup> Street.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of a schedule was this school, 5 days a week or all day or what?

Mr. Crooker

Well it was 7 days a week except that on Sundays, they permitted, I guess as far as Jewish boys were concerned, on Saturdays, but on the weekend they obviously permitted time for each individual to attend his own religious services. But it was 7 days a week except for time for religious services on the weekend.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to see much of New York City at that point?

Mr. Crooker

Not really. No, I had no car and wouldn't have known what to do with one if I would have had one. So I didn't see much of New York City.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any Broadway plays or anything like that?

Mr. Crooker

You know, I seem to remember that in the last week or 10 days of the session up there, my wife to whom I was then married, my first wife, came and spent the last week or 10 days where I was in the Henry Hudson with me and we may have attended one play, but not anything other than possibly one. That's about all I remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the people in New York City friendly to you all?

Mr. Crooker

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned you were married. When did you get married?

Mr. Crooker

I got married in the month of December 1941, a couple of weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just after you went into the Service then.

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished that school, what happened?

Mr. Crooker

When I finished the Henry Hudson?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, Sir.

Mr. Crooker

I was sent to San Francisco to be taken to Hollandia, New Guinea to be on the staff of  
Commander 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel to San Francisco?

Mr. Crooker

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Crooker

It was all right. They let me come by Houston and tell my relatives and friends good-bye  
for 3 or 4 days or so before I went on to San Francisco to go out by a troop transport from  
there to Hollandia, New Guinea, really Milne Bay, New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a Pullman Car going out there?

Mr. Crooker

Yes, I had a berth on a Pullman Car.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you on the West Coast before you shipped out for overseas?

Mr. Crooker

Well certainly less than a month. I'm trying to figure exactly how much. I'd say 10 days or two weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Approximately when did you ship out? Do you have a date in mind, close to a date?

Mr. Crooker

It was either August or early September of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel down to Milne Bay?

Mr. Crooker

Well by a troop transport.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you recall the name of it or anything?

Mr. Crooker

At the moment it escapes me. If I think of it, I'll let you know.

Mr. Misenhimer

That will be fine. No problem. How long did that trip take?

Mr. Crooker

It took, I would say, roughly 3 weeks to get to Milne Bay.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in convoy, were you escorted, or by yourself?

Mr. Crooker

I don't think we were in a convoy and I think that probably there may have been one destroyer, or destroyer escort, that went with this troop transport I was on.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the way down, were there any submarine threats or airplane threats to your ship?

Mr. Crooker

There weren't any attacks to the ship and I would say that I didn't even know about any possible air strikes, obviously, until we got out to the far part of the Western Pacific. The US had virtually complete control of the air. The worry was much more about Japanese submarines than it was about air.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any submarine threats along the way then?

Mr. Crooker

Not so far as those of us who were merely passengers knew about, and if there were any, well whoever the ship's officers were kept their mouths closed pretty well. Probably not wanting any of the boys to write back home and give some juicy stories about possible dangers.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were your accommodations like on that ship?

Mr. Crooker

Just in rooms that had 10 or 12 bunks with 10 or 12 officers each having a bunk on that ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food on that ship?

Mr. Crooker

Acceptable. It sustained us. I guess by the time I got back, I weighed 18 pounds less than I did when I went overseas, but Navy food wasn't exceptional but it certainly was sufficient to keep us alive and active and thinking.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there a lot of troops on the ship also?

Mr. Crooker

Yes, it was a troop transport.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now were these Army troops or Marines or Navy?

Mr. Crooker

Army I think. There may have been some Marines, but I think more Army than Marines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Would you have any idea what their accommodations were like?

Mr. Crooker

No, but mostly, they just were rooms with a whole bunch of bunks in it and every fellow had one bunk.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to Milne Bay, what happened then?

Mr. Crooker

Well, we got off the troop transport and waited for an LST to take a few of us on up the coast past Lae and Finschhaven on to Hollandia, which was 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Headquarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

You joined the Headquarters there then.



Mr. Crooker

Yes, I reported to whoever the Fleet Intelligence Officer was of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet at Hollandia, New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there?

Mr. Crooker

We were waiting because 4 of us had been sent as the people to stay at Hollandia in case the 4 Naval Intelligence Officers who went to the landing at Leyte, in case something bad happened to them, then the 4 of us were the backup Officers, supposed to serve as backup officers to the 4 who were going to Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what all did you do there then?

Mr. Crooker

Just tried to acquaint myself. Of the 4 of us, one was supposed to be an expert on enemy air, another on enemy surface forces, and my topic was enemy submarines. The 4 who were going to Leyte were similarly assigned those specialties, the 4<sup>th</sup> one sort of being in charge of the other 3 and doing all the paper and administrative work relating to the 4 of us. And as I say, the 4 of us were supposed to be the backup to wait at Hollandia, New Guinea while the first 4 went to the invasion at Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you know about the Japanese submarines? What kind of information did you have, or what?

Mr. Crooker

We had information. We were not told at that time that we were cracking Japanese communications traffic. But for an Intelligence Officer of reasonable intelligence, it seemed to be apparent that we were making some headway at breaking their communications traffic.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you tracking their submarines or doing what?

Mr. Crooker

We weren't tracking them. We were just processing information as it became available to us. But I think that our information was as much from intercepting Japanese communications traffic as it was from sightings, either sightings from natives or others onshore or sightings of any of our own submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever meet Admiral Kincaid?

Mr. Crooker

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you work fairly close to him there?

Mr. Crooker

Well I became the Briefer, the Daily Intelligence Briefer.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was later on though, right?

Mr. Crooker

Well it wasn't at the time of the battle for Leyte Gulf but it was reasonably soon after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

There in Hollandia, what did you live in there?

Mr. Crooker

They had tents.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many men to a tent?

Mr. Crooker

I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Several?

Mr. Crooker

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they left to go to Leyte, you stayed there, right?

Mr. Crooker

No, I was supposed to stay there to be a backup for the Naval Intelligence Officer whose duty was to keep up with Japanese submarines. I was his understudy. And he got sick just 2 hours before it was time for the invasion at Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

And so you left with them then, right?

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Crooker

We left on maybe about the 15<sup>th</sup> of October. I think the invasion was October 20, but when you're assigned something, you just do it. We'd been trained as well as possible. I had to know what ever I could learn about submarines and therefore, I took the place of a man whose name I think was Callahan, I'm not sure. He got sick and couldn't go so the Yeoman comes to me and said, "Lieutenant, Callahan's sick. The fleets leave in an hour and a half or two hours and you're going to Leyte Gulf."

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship did you go on?

Mr. Crooker

Probably the Wasatch. The Command Ships were named for mountain ranges. Battleships were named for states, cruisers for cities, and I think the command ships were named for mountain ranges like Appalachian and Allegany and so on, and ours was the Wasatch AGC9. You can check. If I'm wrong on AGC9 having been the Wasatch, you can call me back but I believe I'm pretty correct on that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Wasatch, is that W-a-s-a-t-c-h?

Mr. Crooker

Yes. Isn't that a mountain range between Nevada and California?

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that is. I'm not really sure, but yes, I think it is.

Mr. Crooker

I think Wasatch is the mountain range between Nevada and California. Anyway, command ships were named for mountain ranges.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's interesting. I wasn't aware of that.

Mr. Crooker

You knew that battleships were named for states, cruisers were named for cities, and I think the command ships were named for mountain ranges?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, I knew a lot of the transports were named after Presidents.

Mr. Crooker

I think you're right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on the same ship with Admiral Kincaid?

Mr. Crooker

You mean after I got to Hollandia?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, when you left there on the Wasatch.

Mr. Crooker

Yes, on the Wasatch. The Wasatch was the flagship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that trip up there and all.

Mr. Crooker

Well we knew that this was going to be an invasion, and invasions are never very pleasant, but the guys that are going to suffer are going to be those Army guys who stormed the beaches. We're there to do shore bombardment for a day or so before the actual invasion and do all the damage we possible can to Japanese shore batteries.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know about what ships the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet consisted of, how many battleships or whatever?

Mr. Crooker

No. I will tell you this, the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet, the only battleships we had were the old World War I battleships. The Central Pacific had all the new battleships and we had 4 or 5 or so of the old World War I battleships, the ones who crossed the tee in the battle for Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

You only had the small carriers, right. You didn't have any fleet carriers. Am I correct?

Mr. Crooker

I think all ours were CVEs, the escort carriers. I don't think we had any full size carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Halsey had all of those.

Mr. Crooker

Yes, either Halsey or Spruance. In the Central Pacific, they called it either the 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet or the 3<sup>rd</sup> Fleet, but that just depended on whether it was, at that time, under the command of Halsey or under the command of Spruance because they were the same ships involved.

They got the new battleships and other newer Naval vessels and the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet had sort of the leftovers from World War I.

Mr. Misenhimer

The purpose of the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet was to protect invasions as I understand.

Mr. Crooker

Sure, shore bombardment before the Army landed and all that sort of thing. They had foreseen that maybe the Japanese Navy would react and we had one group of 3 or 4 ships of some sort there on the south coast of Leyte rather than the east coast of Leyte largely for information purposes about major Japanese fleet movement before and up to the time of and including the battle for Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about when you all arrived up there and the bombardment. What did you do at that point?

Mr. Crooker

Well the vessels were engaged just in shore bombardment to knock out whatever we thought the intelligence was from Army Reconnaissance planes or Coast Watchers or whatever as to where Japanese artillery was. So they did a reasonably good job considering the information we had available.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me just what all happened up there.

Mr. Crooker

Well you know more from history than I will remember. You know that the invasion had been on October 20. About the 22<sup>nd</sup>, we began getting intelligence that the Japanese

fleet, one Japanese fleet was coming down from the home Islands and another was coming up, I guess from Surabajo or somewhere, the Borneo area. So that's about all we knew at that time was that we were going to have a major confrontation on our hands.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that Halsey went chasing the carriers to the north. Is that right?

Mr. Crooker

I don't want to be too critical of Admiral Halsey but we felt rather sharply about it. He did not guard the eastern end of San Bernardino Strait largely because if the major Japanese fleet had come through and come on into Leyte Gulf, they could lay off about a mile or a mile and a half further than our guns would hit and just bombard and sink virtually all the American vessels that had come into Leyte Gulf, not from San Bernardino Strait but from the southeast.

Mr. Misenhimer

You are being very diplomatic.

Mr. Crooker

Well, we were perturbed and scared both, but we knew the major Japanese fleet was coming. We were concerned and provoked, but at the same time, he was a most capable man. And I'll say this, during December and January, he certainly made up for any possible dereliction of duty on the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> of October.

Mr. Misenhimer

If it had not have been for the Taffy's, Taffy 1, 2, and 3, and those it could've been a real disaster there.

Mr. Crooker



Oh, yes. In other words, the planes from our CVEs kept us from being sent to the bottom of Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about those battleships crossing the 'T'.

Mr. Crooker

We had only the old battleships, the World War I battleships, but when it became obvious that there was a major Japanese fleet coming through the sea to the south of the Island of Leyte, and going to come up through Surigao Strait, then Admiral Kincaid decided we could get our battleships going in a line and cross the 'T' because the Strait was so narrow, the Japanese major ships were going to come through one at a time and if we could have the guns from 5 or so of our so-called old battleships pointed toward one at a time Japanese ships coming through that we could do major damage to them, which happened in that way. Admiral Kincaid was correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

How close were you all to the actual fighting?

Mr. Crooker

Well I don't know how many miles it was between Surigao Strait and where our old battleships were crossing the 'T'. I've sort of forgotten how many miles the guns from our old battleships could do major damage, but whatever that distance was, that's where they were.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your ship, the Wasatch, where were you at?

Mr. Crooker

Well we were further to the north. We weren't a ship with fighting power of its own. The command ship had very little. It had some gunners out in the turret but that was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else do you recall from the Battle of Leyte Gulf?

Mr. Crooker

Well as you know, in those 2 to 3 or 3 and a half hours on the early morning of October 25, I guess night of October 24, 25, we knew in some detail what Japanese ships were coming at us from the south through Surigao Strait. What we didn't know was that Halsey was no longer guarding the east end of San Bernardino and we were feeling very comfortable about the fact that any attack from the north was going to be intercepted by Halsey before it ever got down to us. It was maybe 7:30 in the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> before we became painfully aware that there were major Japanese ships coming at us from the north.

Mr. Misenhimer

What do you feel like caused the Japanese to break off the attack?

Mr. Crooker

I don't know that anybody's ever found out in the 60 years since it happened. They could've sunk every ship we had in Leyte Gulf. And I don't know why they turned. There were planes from our CVEs that I think they thought was part of Halsey's major plane capabilities from the CVEs that he had. They didn't know it was just a few CVEs that were sending those planes out.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that those planes off the CVEs fought so hard that the Japanese thought 'the main carriers must be around here'.

Mr. Crooker

That's right. They thought it was Halsey's force.

Mr. Misenhimer

So they decided to withdraw.

Mr. Crooker

Yes, because by that time, they had only 2 battleships left. I guess the Mogami is the one that wasn't sunk until the following April and the 2<sup>nd</sup> one, the Yamashika, they were sunk on the 24<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> of October in the Gulf before San Bernardino Strait, to the west of San Bernardino Strait.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had those 2 giant battleships, Yamato and the Musashi.

Mr. Crooker

Musashi, that was it.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the one that was sunk there.

Mr. Crooker

The Musashi was sunk on, I'd say, October the 24<sup>th</sup> or 25<sup>th</sup> of 1944. The Yamato was not sunk until the following April.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was heading toward Okinawa and it was sunk before it got there. What kind of information were you all receiving when the battle was going on?

Mr. Crooker

Well rather hectic because you know, you get in information and you're trying to perceive whether it's accurate or overstated or understated but it's an exciting time trying to get and correlate and evaluate information that's coming in about a battle that's going on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from that Battle of Leyte Gulf?

Mr. Crooker

No, I think that's about it. We were glad when we were convinced that the battle was over and that our ship and virtually all the other ships that had come into Leyte Gulf were still afloat.

Mr. Misenhimer

You lost, what, 3 CVEs I think?

Mr. Crooker

You know I've forgotten. Your information is going to be much better than my recollection of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine. It was several of them I know. Fanshaw Bay and a couple of others I think.

Then what happened after that?

Mr. Crooker

Well things quieted down and then there were various invasions of different islands in the Philippines and some fairly small invasions where instead of the 4 Intelligence Officers that stood the watch around the clock, just one would go. I remember at an Island called

Mindoro, the invasion, I think in maybe the early part of December of '44, I was the only 1 of the 4 Intelligence Officers that went because it was a small invasion and they weren't going to send all 4 Intelligence Officers for that so they just picked one of the four. I happened to be the most recent addition to the group of 4 officers who stood the watch, so I went to Mindoro and the other 3 didn't. That was interesting because that's after the kamikaze attacks had started.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think the first ones were at Leyte, weren't they, the first kamikaze attacks?

Mr. Crooker

I think so, just about the time of the battle for Leyte Gulf, which was of course a week before the end of October. And this Mindoro was early December so that's what, 6 weeks or so later.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened there at that invasion then?

Mr. Crooker

It was successful. It was a minor invasion. One thing that sort of sticks in my memory, that was the first time I had physically seen a kamikaze plane dive into one of our ships. I saw one hit the Kitkin Bay CVE71, which was one of our CVEs.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it sink it?

Mr. Crooker

No. My recollection is it either went a little bit on its own steam, but maybe for the most part being towed back to Pearl or somewhere for repairs and so on.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened after that?

Mr. Crooker

Well we waited for the major invasion at Lingayen Gulf about the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> of January of 1945. That's where Admiral Kincaid took virtually his whole fleet to Lingayen Gulf and provided shore bombardment before the invasion itself and so on.

Mr. Misenhimer

You all did not go back to New Guinea anytime in between there.

Mr. Crooker

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You stayed in the Philippine area.

Mr. Crooker

I hadn't been to New Guinea since.

Mr. Misenhimer

You stayed in the Philippine area that whole time.

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about the invasion at Lingayen Gulf.

Mr. Crooker

Well Lingayen Gulf was a major invasion. The two real big invasions, I think the only 2 that are called battles for the purpose of having a Battle Star if you wanted Battle Stars,

were Leyte and Lingayen. There were other invasions, like I say, at Mindoro that were so small they weren't called battles. They were sure as hell battles for those of us who were sitting out there, but they aren't listed as real battles of the Philippines. Lingayen was the 2<sup>nd</sup> big battle of the Philippines.

Mr. Misenhimer

What's some things that happened there?

Mr. Crooker

Nothing that I can add to just what's generally known about it, shore bombardment and then the actual invasion with Army troops going ashore and so on. Our command stayed afloat for a month or more before Admiral Kincaid decided to move his headquarters ashore at Tolosa.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were still Intelligence Officer with submarines, or what was your job at this point?

Mr. Crooker

Well I was one of the four Intelligence Officers to rotate around the watch to keep 24 hours a day around the clock with 4 Officers who were the Intelligence Officers for the 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet. Somewhere in there, not too long after the Invasion at Leyte Gulf, I became the Daily Briefer for the Admiral from, I guess, sometime in November of '44 I also became the Briefer.

Mr. Misenhimer

What does the Briefer do?

Mr. Crooker

Gives the morning Intelligence Briefing to the Admiral and his top staff.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's a very responsible position, isn't it?

Mr. Crooker

Well I guess the Admiral regarded it as quite important.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you would go in and brief the Admiral and his staff in the mornings on all things.

Mr. Crooker

When I became the Briefer, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's what I mean, right.

Mr. Crooker

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you moved ashore there in Luzon, where did you go?

Mr. Crooker

Well let me think. I guess we went ashore in Leyte before we went to Luzon. We were at Tolosa in Leyte. The Army had established Tacloban as its base of headquarters, and Tolosa was down the coast south 8 or 9 miles south of the town of Tacloban, which was probably Army Headquarters. So that's where we were ashore at Leyte then we went back afloat on the Wasatch for the invasion at Lingayen Gulf in January.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then you did move your headquarters ashore there, too, is that right?

Mr. Crooker



I'm pretty sure we were ashore at Lingayen. I'll tell you that in the later months of the war, we were really ashore in the town of Manila itself.

Mr. Misenhimer

After the invasion of Lingayen Gulf, did y'all stay there or did y'all go somewhere else?

Mr. Crooker

The Fleet didn't go anywhere else as an entire Fleet. They were just waiting for the preparation of the invasion of the home Islands of Japan. But on some invasion of various islands in the Philippines, there might be one or more of the ships with an Intelligence Officer aboard that went to that invasion. And you see, by this time, 4 of us are standing the Intelligence watch around the clock, so you're on 4 hours out of every 16 hours on the intelligence deck on the watch there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now in September of '44, we invaded Peleliu. Were you all involved in all that?

Mr. Crooker

No, I don't believe we were. I think that must've been some of Nimitz's forces but I'm sort of a blank on Peleliu.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think you're right. I think that was on the Central Pacific or whatever, not the southwest. You all were under MacArthur. Is that correct?

Mr. Crooker

Actually, of course we were. Now Admiral Kincaid would always say we were under him, which was correct, but MacArthur clearly outranked Kincaid and therefore, what MacArthur wanted apparently MacArthur pretty well got. He must've had a deal with

the President of the United States that whatever he said, the President was going to approve.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of MacArthur?

Mr. Crooker

I thought he was a brilliant strategist. Can I think of anybody who was more capable as a Commanding General? I would not have wanted him as President of the United States. The invasion of a town on the western coast on the Island of Leyte, I think the name of the town was Ormoc, I may be wrong about that, but MacArthur called a meeting of his top advisors and each of them brought 2 or 3 very junior officers with them. And I remember that Kincaid and Krueger and Kenny, the Air Force Commander, all advised against the invasion of Ormoc. And at the end of their recommendations to the General the General got up and took the pointer from whatever boy had been pointing things out on the map and said, "Gentlemen, I thank you for your recommendations but I have decided we are going to invade Ormoc. It'll be on December 7, 1944. And in my judgment, in the first 5 days we will have advanced thus far, the troops on the eastern part of the Island of Leyte will have gone thus far. And at the end of 10 days they'll be here." If you wrote a history of how that invasion occurred and how our forces moved, it would have been close to word for word just the way Douglas MacArthur said it would be.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in at that briefing at all?

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you actually were fairly close to MacArthur at various times then.

Mr. Crooker

Well as close as he would ever let the Navy be because it was his judgment. This was MacArthur's war and he told the Filipinos he was coming back, and it was, "I have returned." It wasn't, "We have returned." It was "I have returned."

Mr. Misenhimer

But I mean physically you were fairly close, same room with him and that sort of thing.

Mr. Crooker

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think MacArthur's big problem was ego.

Mr. Crooker

I think that's right. He was a brilliant military strategist. He was among the greatest of all times, but he had a tremendous ego and that's okay. I guess every top notch leader has to have some bit of.

Mr. Misenhimer

You are one of the few people I have found that I can agree with almost 100% on all of these things because I'm quite a fan of MacArthur. I think he did a great job out there. I recognize his problems, I mean his ego, "I have returned." It wasn't "us". Krueger never got the credit he should have gotten for all the fighting he did leading the 6<sup>th</sup> Army there. But I think MacArthur was a very good strategist.

Mr. Crooker

I don't think there's any question about that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Some people question it.

Mr. Crooker

I disagree with some aspects of his personality, but as far as being a military genius, I think Douglas MacArthur was among the greatest.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they invaded Ormoc, did we lose a lot of men there or not?

Mr. Crooker

I don't think our losses were huge. I think our Ormoc invasion was quite successful.

Mr. Misenhimer

Why did all of these people recommend against it?

Mr. Crooker

They thought that once we had attacked Tacloban and Tolosa on the east side of Leyte, just wait for the next invasion at Lingayen Gulf, which was then scheduled for either December or January, which actually occurred about the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> of January. But that we would have sufficient air control, but MacArthur thought that we needed to go into the westerly side of Leyte and tie down more airfields from which our planes could operate and there wouldn't be any Japanese planes operating, so that's why he was proposing that. I think it turned out exceptionally well.

Mr. Misenhimer

So after the invasion up in Lingayen, you all were just kind of waiting for the invasion of the home Island, is that right?

Mr. Crooker

Yes, and I don't remember exactly when and where we moved into the town of Manila itself because we were in Manila at the time of the Japanese surrender waiting for the invasion of the home Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

From January on then up until August, you all were not involved in any other invasions or any other fighting action, is that correct?

Mr. Crooker

Well we went with various groups of Army and Marine personnel for different Islands in the Philippines chain because we hadn't yet gotten to the big island of the Philippines, the southernmost one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mindinao?

Mr. Crooker

Mindinao, but you know different smaller invasions occurred frequently with one Naval vessel with one or more Intelligence Officers aboard that went to some of those invasions.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Crooker

Probably within an hour or two.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the reaction when you heard about that?

Mr. Crooker

Well we didn't understand what an atomic bomb was, but we were in favor of anything that might shorten the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then, of course, the second bomb was dropped 3 days later.

Mr. Crooker

August 6<sup>th</sup> and August 9 as I seem to recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's correct.

Mr. Crooker

On Hiroshima and then Nagasaki. Is that it?

Mr. Misenhimer

That's correct. Then Japan surrendered on August 14. Did you all have a big celebration?

Mr. Crooker

Oh, you'd better believe. You know, no whiskey permitted anywhere aboard and more whiskey appeared that day than you can possibly imagine. They had been stashing whatever whiskey they had. They brought it all out on the day the Japanese surrender was announced.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up and ask you some other questions. In April 12<sup>th</sup> of '45, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what was the reaction to that?

Mr. Crooker

Well we thought he was a brilliant man, a brilliant leader, and we didn't know much about Harry Truman. But Harry Truman, age, size, appearance, was so much like my own dad in appearance that I felt sort of kindly disposed toward him.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Roosevelt died, was it a pretty sad time then?

Mr. Crooker

Sure. I mean everybody recognized the tremendous job he had done and felt very grateful to him for all he had given to the country.

Mr. Misenhimer

May the 8<sup>th</sup> of '45, Germany surrendered. What reaction did y'all have when you heard about that?

Mr. Crooker

Well, we were in favor of anything that might mean an earlier end to the war, and we thought that with that surrender, that was a step forward in the end of the axis forces.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were down there, did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Crooker

I don't know that I ever heard Tokyo Rose. I may have. I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know a lot of people did I guess.

Mr. Crooker

I'm sure that she had some listeners.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was the Wasatch ever attacked by Japanese forces?

Mr. Crooker

It was never hit.

Mr. Misenhimer

But was it attacked?

Mr. Crooker

Well let me put it this way: You're in a group of 5, 8, 11 American ships and kamikaze planes come over, and are you attacked? Well in a sense you are. I remember seeing the Kitkin Bay get hit. It was the next ship in the convoy to us and our thought immediately was, "If Japanese intelligence had been better and they had known that ours was the command ship, we would have been hit instead of the Kitkin Bay."

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Crooker

I would say that the nights I had at Mindoro were most frightening because the Japanese kamikaze attacks had become sort of routine at that time. And how do you ever mentally adjust to the fact that there are going to be Japanese boys in planes diving at our ships, killing themselves? I guess those were the most frightening times. Somebody asked me did I ever think about things or hear any sounds. I said, "On sounds, the answer is yes.



The most frightening sound to me was being below deck and hearing the whirring of the location of our guns, pointing of our guns, from one direction to another, because when you hear that whirring, you're confident that there's a Japanese plane that has escaped our radar and one is coming in about at wave top level to do a kamikaze attack on one of our ships. And you always wonder, 'Is this one going to be our ship?'"

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was your battle station?

Mr. Crooker

My battle station was in the Combat Information Center one deck below the main deck on the Wasatch.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you weren't where you could see anything.

Mr. Crooker

I was below deck, yes. Hearing the gunners moving the position of our guns...

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard other people say that when the 5-inches were firing, they weren't too worried.

When they heard the 40s open up, they got more worried. And by the time the 20s opened up, they were really worried.

Mr. Crooker

Yes, (laughing) well when you hear the whirring of the turret on your own ship, you know that the boys in the turrets have seen something that we haven't told them about we picked up on the radar.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there any humorous incidents anywhere along the way?

Mr. Crooker

I can't think of any at the moment, but I'm sure there were some. None occur to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Crooker

I got a Bronze Star.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many Battle Stars?

Mr. Crooker

Well I think the only battles that they count as battles were Leyte and Lingayen. The small stuff such as Mindoro, they didn't count as big enough to warrant being called a battle.

Mr. Misenhimer

After the war was over, where did you go or what happened?

Mr. Crooker

The Japanese surrender I guess became official about the 15<sup>th</sup>, was it, of August.

Mr. Misenhimer

14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>. I'm not sure which one of those two days, right.

Mr. Crooker

But the Navy put out on the 16<sup>th</sup> of August the rules for anybody who had been in so many months and overseas so many months in a combat area so many months, would be entitled to go back on inactive duty. And the only thing the Officers thought about is,

“How does this apply to me?” They didn’t give a hoot about how many it applied to. It was just if it applied to me. And when I read the point system, I knew I had points enough to go back on inactive duty. So I went to Admiral Kincaid and explained to him that I had enough points. He keeps a straight face and he says, “Well Crooker, whenever you get a qualified replacement to be my Daily Briefer, I’ll let you go.” So it took me about 24 hours and I grabbed some old boy from Mississippi and took him in to see the Admiral and the Admiral talked to him a little while and then he let him go and he looked at me and said, “Crooker, you call this a qualified replacement?” “Oh, yes, Admiral.” Just a big laugh, you know. “Don’t tell me this is a qualified replacement.” But he said, “Well, I’ll tell you what, I’ll give you two weeks. See if you can’t come up with either a better Officer to replace you or teach this guy more than I think you can teach him in two weeks and don’t talk to me again for two weeks. But two weeks from now, I’ll probably let you go. I know you’ve been in and you’ve been overseas quite a while and you’ve got a wife and two little kids back there waiting on you.” So about 2 weeks later, he says, “Okay.” And meanwhile, of course, you do all the investigating you can as to what planes are going back and how can I talk my way on to one of them home.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you left there when?

Mr. Crooker

I guess I left on about the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. I think that’s right.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were not in Tokyo then for the surrender on September 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Mr. Crooker

No. And anybody wanted to go could go, but I didn't want to go. All I wanted at this time was having enough points to go on inactive duty.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did Kincaid go to the surrender ceremonies?

Mr. Crooker

I think so, but I'm unsure.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure either. How did you get back home then? Did you fly back on something?

Mr. Crooker

Yes, you know you just talk your way onto something that's coming back, and I flew as far as Pearl. There wasn't any real opportunity to fly between Pearl and California, but then you wait for surface transportation. And I found that some battleship was going to return two thousand or so service personnel who had a great many months of active service and a great many months in the combat area, and in some way talked my way on to being on a ship from Pearl back to California.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you finally released from active duty?

Mr. Crooker

Well I got to California, I guess either the last day of September or first of October and got enough...you know you just wangled your own way on transportation, and I got back to Houston and I guess went on inactive duty on October 10. That's as close as I can give you to an exact date.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's close enough. Now you were still in the Reserves though, right?

Mr. Crooker

Oh, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you join an inactive Reserve Unit or anything?

Mr. Crooker

No. I decided I'd roll the dice and not try to promote myself anymore on inactive duty, and just seek to get out someday.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you finally get your discharge then?

Mr. Crooker

Well I went on inactive duty on October 10, I guess, but I resigned my commission in early 1953.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you recalled for the Korean War?

Mr. Crooker

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

So then when you resigned your commission, then you are officially completely out of the Service. Is that right?

Mr. Crooker

Oh, yes. When you resign your commission, well, you're out.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Crooker

I wouldn't say that I did. I was just so glad to be here and to be having a civilian life. I don't think I had trouble adjusting to it. As I say, I had a wife and two small children, but you get acquainted with them right well.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Crooker

I don't remember. Of course I finished my education and legal education, so there wasn't anything I needed. I don't think I got a home loan, so I don't remember using it for anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions since you've been out?

Mr. Crooker

It seems to me that in about 1994, a Naval Intelligence Officer in New Orleans who had been in the 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District Headquarters before several of the rest of us went overseas set up one reunion, which I think we had it sometime in the year 1994. And it was the one and only time we had any sort of reunion. It was a Naval Intelligence Officers who had been in 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet Headquarters, some of whom had gone overseas and many of whom had never gone overseas, but they had I guess 17 or 18 Officers there and I think 3 of us had been overseas and the others had the 3 of us tell a little bit about our overseas days after we had left 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District Headquarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Crooker

I can't think of anything. I think you've asked me everything I can think of.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your career when you went to civilian life?

Mr. Crooker

Well I'd been practicing law 4 years before I went on active duty in the Navy, so I returned to the law firm in which I had been a lawyer and joined it as an attorney when I got out of the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

What firm was that?

Mr. Crooker

Well the Fullbright Firm.

Mr. Misenhimer

They're in Houston.

Mr. Crooker

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you lived in Houston there all your life then?

Mr. Crooker

I was born in Houston and I've lived here all my life except for years at law school and years in the military and then later, a couple of years in government in Washington in the 1960s.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Crooker

I was Chairman of the Civil Aeronautics Board. Let me go back to something. Back on Hollandia, before the ships left for Leyte Gulf, the Yeoman comes and tells me, "Lieutenant Callahan is sick. He can't go and you're his backup on Japanese submarines. You're going to Leyte Gulf."

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the 3 that were there that did not go, what happened to them?

Mr. Crooker

You know I haven't kept up at all. I seem to remember one of them was named Foley and I don't even remember where he was from, but I haven't kept up. I made no effort to keep up and have reunions.

Mr. Misenhimer

But as far as them joining you all later, they didn't join you all later or anything like that.

Mr. Crooker

I don't think so. Of course, the 4 of us kept fairly busy and particularly, when I became the Briefer as well as one of the 4 rotating the watch on the Intelligence Deck, I had my hands full. And my duty was to know all I could about Japanese submarines, so with my various tasks, I kept busy.

Mr. Misenhimer

The 4 of you that left Hollandia, the 4 of you stayed together until the end of the war then. Is that correct?



Actually, those who stayed at Hollandia and those who went on to Leyte Gulf, I think we made no great effort to have any reunions. As I say, the only reunion I remember I think was 1994 and it was by somebody who had been on active duty merely in New Orleans, Louisiana at 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District Headquarters.

Mr. Misenhimer

My question was, the 4 of you that left Hollandia on the Wasatch that went to Leyte, the 4 of you stayed together there throughout the rest of the war then.

Mr. Crooker

Yes, bear in mind that not only were we there in Leyte but we were in the Lingayen Gulf invasion. And then in Manila preparing for the invasion of the home Islands of Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

But none of the 4 of you were placed with someone else is my point.

Mr. Crooker

Not so far as I now remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've appreciated your time. Thanks very much. I'll try to get this thing put on the head of the list and get it to you before too long then.

Mr. Crooker

Considering my age, I may be the oldest of the people you are now talking to.

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