

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**James E. "Eddie" Atkinson  
Rogers, Arkansas  
March 23, 2006  
*USS Flasher***

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is March 23, 2006. I am interviewing Mr. James Edwin "Eddie" Atkinson by telephone. His address is: 3010 Parkwood Drive, Rogers, Arkansas 72756. His phone number is area code 479-636-3230. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Eddie, I want to thank you very much for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country back during World War II. The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Nimitz Museum. When I do these in person I give it to the man to read and sign but since this is by phone let me read this to you and make sure it is okay with you. "Agreement read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Atkinson

That sounds fine to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

One other thing. We like to get an alternative address. An address of a son or daughter or someone in case for some reason you move and we don't have your address; we have a way to get in touch with you. Could you give an alternative address and contact?

Mr. Atkinson

Mrs. Pam Parkes. Her address is 1204 Homestead Street, Flower Mound, Texas, 75028. It looks like they've got about 40 telephones there but this is their official home phone number: 972-691-4243.

Mr. Misenhimer

We like to keep those so thank you for that. Let me ask you first, what is your birth date?

Mr. Atkinson

Birth date is June 1, 1921. I'm 84 years old right now.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Atkinson

Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Atkinson

Pine Bluff High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Atkinson

1940. Somewhere in here I want to tell you about being a Pine Bluff Zebra.

Mr. Misenhimer

Go right ahead.

Mr. Atkinson

It was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Let me start a little bit differently. High school football was really big in those days in the whole state of Arkansas. You would not plan anything in the football season. You wouldn't plan anything for Friday night that might interfere with Friday night football games. I played my first year as a Pine Bluff Zebra in 1936. I was small and was advised not to play. I got my feet wet then. In 1937 I made All-State, great hero and we lost one game that year. At that time I knew that I wanted to play football

because I saw this as a way to go to college. We had a number of our people that went off on football scholarships. The first place that we would look is University of Alabama. Don Hudson was an All American at Alabama in the early 1930's and he went on to play pro ball with the Green Bay Packers. We all wanted to follow in Don's shoes. So that was in 1937 that, just let me say that I did real well. In 1938 after the first game in practice I broke my leg. Just disappointed; I was about to cry on the field. This was the year I was a senior. In Arkansas in those days one of the requirements of graduation was four years of English. So many of us and the first thing that I thought of when I saw that my 1938 year was shot, I thought I'm going to drop English and stay over one year so I could play another year and this is actually what I did. Then in 1939 we didn't lose a game and I would say half a dozen of us got offers to visit various schools in the Southeast Conference with the idea of football scholarships. But in 1939 as I say, we were undefeated and I don't know who called it the mythical high school national championship but we played a post season game down at LSU. We played the Louisiana champion and my wife still carries a little gold football that has E Atkinson and National High School Champions 1939. Again I don't know who really sanctioned this national championship but I still make reference to my gold football and we have a trophy in the high school today in Pine Bluff. Richard, this trophy is about three feet high and one of the biggest ones I've ever seen. It just so happens that after the game they gave two other individual trophies. I received one as the best blocker during the championship game and Robert Hudson, who also had a twin playing on the same team, Robert won another of the individual trophies. Robert was a younger brother of this All American Don Hudson that I was telling you about earlier. That opened the door. I visited I think every school in

the Southeast Conference. It is interesting in those days that I did not make a single trip to visit in Fayetteville, Arkansas, home of the Razorbacks. Our eyes, if we wanted to play football, were more towards the Southeast Conference rather than the Southwest or even our own school. It just so happened that at LSU that had helped sponsor this football game, the head football coach there was Red Sanders. About January or February Red Sanders came through Pine Bluff. I had met him down when I visited LSU. He said, "Have you ever considered going to Vanderbilt?" I said, "I have dreamed of going to Vanderbilt but I have never considered because the expense is just out of my league completely." He said, "How would you like a four year scholarship and play football for the Commodores?" I think I told him, "Who do I have to kill?" (laugh) So that got me to Vanderbilt University and I had always wanted football to lead me into an education. That was my ticket. I just wanted to bring the football in about the Pine Bluff Zebras.

Mr. Misenhimer

What position did you play on the team?

Mr. Atkinson

Richard I weighed something like 144 pounds but anyway I played guard. Actually this individual trophy that we got in the National High School Championship game was the best blocker. I had never heard of an award for being the best blocker. But I was the proud owner of that one.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you started Vanderbilt when you finished high school then, right?

Mr. Atkinson

That is correct. I was a freshman at Vanderbilt in 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up. Now you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Atkinson

We were in the middle of it. The Depression, I think I probably learned more about it after that thing than I did during it. During the Depression it didn't have any favorites; it was just all of us. All of my friends; all of my relatives; we were in the same boat essentially. Just didn't anyone have very much money but it wasn't quite as bad; it would have been horrible if you were the only one. My dad was a plumber and he was a damn good plumber but there was just a minimum of construction going on. It wasn't just laborers that were out of work. Real skilled craftsmen were out of work. I've always appreciated the WPA Program; I think it was an FDR Program. It was Works Progress Administration or something. I know in Pine Bluff there were one or two schools built with a WPA sign on the corner and that was a Godsend for us during those times. I remember that, I think I was about ten years old that I actually helped my folks with the wee little bit that I made delivering milk every morning working in a little small dairy there. If there had been any child labor laws (laugh), which there weren't, this dairy would have been in trouble because I certainly didn't come close to being 18 years old. Things were tough but I can say, giving credit to my mother, there were five in our immediate family but we always had either Mother's mother or some relative living with us and I would say that none of us ever went to bed hungry. My mother managed to put three meals on the table every dadgum day. I think probably she might have gone to bed hungry sometimes, but none of us did.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Mr. Atkinson

I was the fourth in five. The oldest was a boy, then two girls, then myself and then my younger brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were either of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes. In fact the oldest one was about six or seven years older than me and he actually worked on the atomic bomb project out from Knoxville, Tennessee during World War II. My younger brother, Pete, and I'll tell more about him later; Pete was killed in World War II, my younger brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Go ahead and tell it now.

Mr. Atkinson

I'm going to skip forward somewhat in that my submarine, U.S.S. *Flasher* had just returned to Fremantle which is Western Australia. We were returning from the fifth war patrol and we got into Fremantle and I had a letter from my daddy. I knew there was something wrong because Mother always did the writing. The first part of the letter was just telling of the mundane events that were going on in Pine Bluff. The last paragraph he said, "Received this telegram from the War Department: We regret to announce that your son, Sergeant Milford Pete Atkinson has been killed in action in Feni, India." He was killed December 27, 1944. This really hit me. I think it makes me wonder about our war

in Iraq right now. When I see a flag draped coffin I don't think of it as one soldier that is in that coffin. I think about the family that is devastated all to hell. I'm sure this even shortened my dad's life. Well, war is hell. Pete tried out as a pilot and did not make it. But he stayed in the Air Force and he was a gunner/radio technician. He was on a B-25. They had flown the hump and been engaged in battles with the Japanese and coming back, as the Chaplain of the air base wrote Mother and told her that the plane was coming back for what should have been a normal landing on a dirt landing field, they hit a hole which tipped the plane over. Pete was the only one that was even injured. He said that he was killed immediately and that he did not suffer. He gave the scripture that he used at Pete's funeral which I would say was a little above and beyond. That was my little brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they bring his body home after the war?

Mr. Atkinson

I was involved in that one in that I would say, and I think that my mother agreed with me at the very beginning, that we knew that he had received a Christian burial and he was resting where he lived his last days and we told them, "No we do not want it back." But about three or four months after that I got a telephone call and they said that Pete's body was enroute to Pearl Harbor. Do you want it to stay there or do you want it to come back to Pine Bluff. I said, "If you've disturbed him, then let's bring him home." So he is buried in the family plot in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Mr. Misenhimer

A lot of those cemeteries in those countries like India closed them all out after the war.



Mr. Atkinson

Yes and I'm sure that's what happened here which is understandable.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. Places such as France and England and a lot of places like that they maintained American cemeteries there.

Mr. Atkinson

Yes and they maintain them beautifully. My wife and I spent quite a bit of time particularly in France and we always visited every cemetery that we could.

Mr. Misenhimer

I wanted to go ahead and cover that right then and I realize that it jumped ahead in your schedule but we wanted to go ahead and cover that while we were there. Now, you started Vanderbilt in 1940; how long did you go there?

Mr. Atkinson

Let me tell you about my freshman football days. When Red Sanders went there it was with the understanding that Vanderbilt was going to reemphasize football. They had a little guy that was coming along at the University of Alabama by the name of Bear Bryant. He was the line coach for Red Sanders at Vanderbilt. So I got to be under my idol, Bear Bryant. At that time the freshmen could not play varsity football but we played four different schools in the Southeast Conference and we won all four. So we had an undefeated season of those four games. Then in 1941 I was a sophomore. The season had just ended when December 7<sup>th</sup> and Pearl Harbor was bombed. In fact I guess when I heard about Pearl Harbor, most of the football players stayed in the dormitory and had meals served there, but on Sunday we did not. We didn't have the cafeteria open and we

ate in one of the neighboring restaurants around the campus there. So we were walking back from lunch and somebody came up and said that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. I think we made a remark, "We'll have this thing over within 30 days and it won't bother us any." So that was December 7<sup>th</sup>. 1942 was another football season and Vanderbilt enjoyed another terrific season. I knew I wanted to go in the Navy, so in December 1942 I joined the Navy Reserve and there were two or three but I think this was the V-12 program. There was the V-7 program and a V-12 program; with the understanding, I want to emphasize again Richard that I really wanted a college education. I had it going there. I was patriotic and I wanted to join my buddies there but man I wanted to get that darn degree because it was almost within the grasp of my hand. We were told that if you joined the V-12 program that you will stay in college until you graduate and then you go to midshipman's school and then do your service. It was ideal; just perfect. So we signed up. July 1, 1943 the Navy changed its mind; which they do with the infinite wisdom that they have. But they pulled us out and of all things they sent us to Georgia Tech to school. If I had stayed at Vanderbilt I could have just about graduated in the length of time that I stayed at Georgia Tech. But I didn't. When I got to Tech I went on and played football there but was pulled out by the Navy in about mid-October. Georgia Tech went on that year and played in the Sugar Bowl. Of course I was off in the Navy then. After the season, I believe it was Bobby Dodd that was the coach that year because Coach Alexander had already retired; anyway, I received another gold football that my wife has. It has Georgia Tech Sugar Bowl and I'm sure we must have won but I don't remember who we were playing. (*Interviewer's note: Georgia Tech 20, Tulsa 18.*) But I got a little gold football that had Georgia Tech Sugar Bowl and my name on it. That is another

proud trinket that my wife has.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you didn't actually get to play in the Sugar Bowl though?

Mr. Atkinson

No I did not. I think I was in Norfolk, Virginia or something like that learning how to drill and shoot a rifle and things like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went on active duty in October of 1943?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes. I went in on active duty and was in a white sailor's uniform from July 1. Then I still had that same uniform when I was at Norfolk and we were there a short time and went to midshipman's school at Notre Dame. This is about November when I get to midshipman's school. I'm in midshipman's school and on January 20, 1944 I was commissioned an Ensign in the U.S. Navy and of course we start talking about "What duties do you want now?" Why in the hell I said sub school? I think I must have seen a movie or something. I said, "I want to go to sub school." We went through some real tough tests and interviews and as far as I know there were two of us that were selected for sub school. Chester Roush that now lives in Carrollton, Georgia. He and I went to sub school from Notre Dame. Let me say, I started to sub school and was then called into someone's office and they said, "Ensign Atkinson, you went through a specialist school. You didn't go through the regular four month midshipman's school. Yours is a specialist and to go to sub school you will have to take regular midshipman's school." (laugh) Have you ever been through midshipman's school? It's one of those things that I am damned

glad that I went through but I wouldn't go through another one for anybody in this world. (laugh) I really meant it when I said that I'm glad that I went through it but I would not go through it again. So I said, "Where do I go for a PT boat?" They said, "Let me look at this thing some more." Well to make the story a little shorter I still went to sub school.

Mr. Misenhimer

But did you go to midshipman's school?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes that was what the midshipman's school was Notre Dame.

Mr. Misenhimer

But I mean after that you didn't have to go through it again?

Mr. Atkinson

No I did not. I would not have. There were two things. One is that I didn't particularly care about playing monkey soldier and things like that. The other was I knew that war was perking along and that if I wanted to get into the darn thing I'd better not spend another four months in a midshipman's school. The reason I picked subs was that I wanted on a small craft where I could have a responsible job and one that I thought that I would be able to see some action. (laugh) I rethought that about ten months later about if I wanted to see that much action.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got a little more than you bargained for, huh?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes. But since I made it back I'm really glad that I did it. I went to sub school. You know I told you that I was born and raised in Pine Bluff, Arkansas and that's right on the

Arkansas River. That's not frequented by the submarines themselves. So when I got to sub school the scheduling was about a month away from another class starting. So I reported onboard a training boat there, a training submarine. I reported onboard for duty on the first submarine that I ever saw in my life. I'm glad I did and it was interesting. So I'm in sub school. That's on the Thames River in New London, Connecticut. It is just a short distance from the Electric Boat Company that built most of the submarines; the fleet type submarines. There were others built around; California had a couple but anyway that was the main submarine manufacturing area. Electric Boat Company is still manufacturing subs now. Can I just give some characteristics of a fleet type sub?

Mr. Misenhimer

Please do.

Mr. Atkinson

There are a lot of people who just don't understand what a submarine is. There were some old boats that were already in the fleet but most of those built during World War II and just prior to World War II were called fleet type submarines. When you served onboard one you could walk onboard another sub a month later and just in a little while you are up to speed on this one. They were pretty well made just alike. Place one on a football field. A football field is 300 feet long. It will overhang into the end zone about six feet on both ends. A submarine is 312 feet long. It was a round cigar with about a 27 foot beam, 27 foot diameter. It has six torpedo tubes in the forward room, which is the forward torpedo room. Then in the tail there are four torpedoes. The torpedo is about 21 inches in diameter and 21 feet long. The torpedo, I think most people understand that, is a complete autonomous little unit by itself. It's got a directional system in it and has its

own little engine in there. Then it's got, toward the end of the war all of them had Torpeti; it's about a 400 pound warhead on the front of it. Actually I said six and four and that's ten torpedoes but a war time complement was 24 of these torpedoes; 10 of them loaded in the tubes and then the others were stacked around in the forward and after torpedo room.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that you actually slept on them or close to them, or some people did?

Mr. Atkinson

That is correct (laugh). If one of them goes off it doesn't matter if you are sleeping on top of it or if you are at the other end of the boat because you're not going to be around very long.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, you're all on the same boat as the saying goes.

Mr. Atkinson

That's exactly right, yes. Then about in the middle there are two engine rooms and each of the rooms has two 1,600 horsepower diesel engines. You've got two rooms, so you have four diesel engines. These engines are pretty well like the ones that you see in the railroad engines now. It's a big thing. Down in the lower compartment are storage batteries. You have a diesel engine and directly connected to the diesel engine is a generator. When you are on the surface, and you have to be on the surface because you have to have an abundant supply of air for internal combustion engines like these diesel engines; so you have the engine going and you are generating power that goes directly to the motors that drive the propellers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Electric motors right?

Mr. Atkinson

Electric motors yes. The submarine is both a surface vessel and a submerged vessel. When you are submerged there is not enough air for the diesel engines to run so you shut those down and you switch over to the storage batteries. The batteries run the same motors and then they turn the propellers. When you are on the surface and you've got four engines running you can get 19, 20 or 21 knots out of the sub. You can run at that speed as long as your fuel lasts. When you are submerged and you are on just the batteries our normal cruising speed was about 3 knots. You don't go very fast at 3 knots but you're just sitting down there hiding anyway. You can for a short time use a higher speed of 8 to 9 to 10 knots but it's just a matter of a few hours before you are dead in the water. So you just don't use speed very much when you are underwater and submerged. In the middle of the war an operating procedure would be once you got into enemy controlled waters you would be submerged during the daylight hours and then at night you would surface and use two of your engines for propulsion, for turning the screws, and the other two for charging the batteries. Many times the Engineering Officer would have to fight the Captain because the Captain would want to put all four engines on propulsion to get over to where a target was or something like that. The minute you get on the surface the Engineering Officer wants to start recharging his batteries, which is understandable. We are talking about a boat that displaces about 1,500 tons. So it's not a big ship but it's a deadly rascal though.

Mr. Misenhimer

A destroyer displaces about the same tonnage doesn't it?

Mr. Atkinson

That is correct. I told you about the torpedoes and when you think about a submarine that's primarily what you think about; shooting the torpedo tubes. The torpedoes come out of the tubes. We were equipped with a 3 inch deck gun on the sub and then we also had 20mm's. They were for shooting floating mines and things; that's quite an exaggeration (laugh). We didn't have many on the surface battles but we did if a small, less than 500 tons, if we saw that they might be carrying something like oil barrels or something like that, we would sink them with the deck gun. I never was crazy about that. When you get up on the surface and you are firing at something you put yourself on about the same level as they are and I would rather be down below to where we had the advantage. Something like 80 men and 7 or 8 officers and that would be a complement.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your position on the sub?

Mr. Atkinson

An Ensign on my first patrol. The Ensign is the most junior man, which I was, and the junior man is the Commissary Officer. (laugh) I laugh at my own jokes now. I was Commissary Officer and thank the Lord that I had the best cook in the whole fleet as the cook and had the best baker as the baker. They knew what they were doing and I had sense enough to leave them alone. You got privileges by being mess cooks and things like that so I never did have any kind of trouble at all while being Commissary Officer. The nearest thing that I had to trouble was on the fifth patrol of the *Flasher*, which was



my second patrol. The fifth patrol we were having Sunday dinner. On Sunday we tried to get as many officers in the ward room as we could for a meal and we wore a shirt, not a uniform, but at least we wore a shirt. Most of the times it was just a t-shirt and shorts or something like that. It was most informal as far as saluting goes but it was always Mister Atkinson or Captain. Regardless of what kind of basis you were on with the Skipper, it was Captain and he was Captain. But on this particular Sunday the Captain said, "Eddie, these meals remind of a verse in the Bible, Hebrews 13:8." I looked at him like an idiot and he said, "You don't know what that is do you?" I said, "Captain, I don't have any idea." So he called Page the mess boy and he said, "Page, bring me your Bible." We knew Page had a Bible. The Skipper said, "Give it to Mr. Atkinson." So I flipped over and I knew about where Hebrews was. I flipped over to 13:8 and read it out loud, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever." That described the meals that my group had been serving to the Skipper. (laugh) But good came out of that; or I called it good. The next Sunday evening Page came by while we were all in the ward room. When I say all; the Officer of the Deck is not there. Page came by and said, "Mr. Atkinson, here's your Bible again." So from that day on we had a, most of the times we read one of the Psalms or something like that but on Sunday evenings we would read a short verse. Being the religious man that I am I gave that as part of the credit for us having such a successful run.

Mr. Misenhimer

If you don't mind, let's go back to sub school. Tell me about sub school.

Mr. Atkinson

It was both at sea and in a classroom. We went through diesel engine school. *(side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so your sub school was about four months?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes. We had diesel engineering classes and we had hydraulics classes and torpedoes. There were basically two types of torpedoes. They would throw in a specialty every once in a while but we had what we called a steam torpedo and that's the one that had alcohol to burn that created steam for propulsion. The torpedo had a double propeller on the back of it. Steam torpedoes would make about 50 miles an hour and that's the one that we would predominantly use. The disadvantage of that rascal was like you've seen in the movies, it left a wake that was just visible from an airplane and really it was nothing but an arrow that pointed to "Here's your submarine that just fired the torpedo; just follow the wake and you've got the culprit right there" The electric one did not create a wake but it was much slower; something in the neighborhood of 40 knots. Most skippers preferred the high speed even if it exposed our position because when you finally do get a chance to fire you don't want the target to be able to maneuver out of the way. On an electric fish they of course could maneuver and dodge the thing; but you don't dodge the steam ones very much.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have both kinds on the submarine?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you could choose which one to fire?

Mr. Atkinson

It had to be in the tube and you had to kind of plan ahead. Like when you get ready to fire you have the torpedo in the tube and the first action that you take is to flood the tube itself that has the torpedo in it. You don't want to flood it too soon because torpedoes, just like anything else, they leak sometimes. The procedure would be to flood it and then open the outer door. By doing that you don't have a bubble, whatever air was in there, you've gotten out of there. Then you give it a blast of air to push the torpedo out. When it is about half way out the starter has been triggered and she is under her own propulsion as soon as the torpedo gets out of there. The water that comes into the tube after this firing; the torpedo has gone out and water comes in; the water and the torpedo weigh about the same so there is no difference in total weight. You can fire ten torpedoes and you don't have to pump in water or pump out water because of the difference there; it is pretty well balanced. As a Diving Officer that's good.

Mr. Misenhimer

It doesn't affect the trim?

Mr. Atkinson

That is exactly right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back to sub school; when did you take your first actual ride in a submarine?

Mr. Atkinson

When I got to sub school I think I mentioned that the time for starting class had about a month to go. I actually served onboard this training sub for a while. I made a trip and we went out everyday in that. I was a spectator which to me was wonderful because I got to

start understanding what a sub is. Even on my first war patrol; normally it took about three patrols before a junior officer becomes qualified in submarines. The main thing that means is that you get to wear the gold dolphin on your uniform. Plus to become qualified in subs you've got to start at the bow with some senior officer and you go all of the way through the boat telling them what this valve is, what this line is, telling them how to start an engine, telling them how to stop an engine; you get to the diving station you tell them how to make a dive and then when you get back to the stern; you just have to know every valve and how to run and start and stop every piece of equipment on there. Then you become qualified in subs. I'm not going to do it right now, but I'm going to tell about our big attack in the fifth war patrol. We had a most successful war patrol. As I said on my first patrol I started spending all of my spare time learning about the *Flasher* submarine. The second patrol I was doing the same thing; learning about that. When we got into the port after the second patrol I told the Skipper that I was ready to be tested to become qualified in submarines. He said, "Let's go see the Admiral." We went into his office and the Skipper said, "Admiral, this is Eddie Atkinson. He feels like he is qualified in submarines and would like to be tested." The Admiral looked up and we had just had this real good war patrol and the Admiral looked up and said, "George was Eddie with you on your flaming fifth patrol?" He said, "Yes sir." He said, "He's qualified; go buy him a pair of dolphins and give them to him." That kind of made me mad because I felt like I knew what the heck I was doing and I really wanted to be tested to show off that I knew how to do it but when I had my dolphins in my hand I wasn't mad at anybody then. That's how I became qualified in submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

What Admiral was that?

Mr. Atkinson

I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

It wasn't Lockwood?

Mr. Atkinson

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Back to your sub school, what was it like the very first time you submerged in a sub?

Mr. Atkinson

I think that I would have to be honest and say that I've always been kind of cocky and just confident. I think I had already visualized what it was going to do and it did it. So I wouldn't exactly call it a non-event but later on when I became the Diving Officer on the *Flasher*, I would hear people make reference to making a routine dive. I said, "Well I guess I've made 1,000 dives on a submarine but I don't call them routine. Every one of them is a little bit different." That's from the eyes of the Diving Officer rather than being a spectator. Going from a surface craft to a submerged craft is probably and I don't want to use the word dangerous, but that is the most critical time because you are transferring from one type of ship to another type and you've got about 30 seconds to do it. It was a non-event I will say that about my first one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from sub school that you can remember?

Mr. Atkinson

I personally enjoyed learning how to be a Diving Officer. A diving simulator was just exactly like a diving submarine – when you were in a 10 degree dive, the floor that you were standing on would tilt to a 10 degree dive. I spent all of my spare time on this simulator. Also a great deal of time was devoted to learning how to determine the course and speed of targets. Sub school was across the river from Connecticut College and they had the most beautiful women in Connecticut College of anyplace I've ever seen. I guess we were the closest males. If we had a social event it was primarily with the Connecticut College ladies. Any free time, for me anyway, you were studying. We didn't have any of the Mickey Mouse stuff, you know Maid of the Deck and saluting everybody that came by. It was a technical school.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you finish the sub school?

Mr. Atkinson

I'm going to say July of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you go?

Mr. Atkinson

We got four or five days off. After sub school we got our orders. My fellow officer Chester Roush and I got it for Fremantle in Western Australia which is near Perth on the West Coast there. The reason for the base at Perth, it was a relatively short distance up to the South China Sea. That was our patrol area. We had a couple of submarine tenders in Fremantle and we operated in the South China Sea. The boats that operated around Japan

left from Pearl Harbor. We needed a base closer so that you wouldn't be just burning fuel all of the time; riding from one area to the next. There is one interesting thing. After sub school I got orders for Fremantle and we went to San Francisco. Let me tell you just before leaving sub school and about my friend Chester Roush. I saw him just about two years ago at his home in Carrollton, Georgia. I knocked on the door. We hadn't seen each other for 10 or 15 years. I knocked on his door and he came to the door and he said, "Eddie what happened to the green Hornet that we had and did we leave it at sub school or what?" I told him, "I know darn well that we didn't take it to San Francisco with us because we couldn't get the damn thing out of reverse." (laugh) Chester and I hadn't seen each other and the first thing he started talking about was that green Hornet. We got to San Francisco and Ensigns fresh out of sub school didn't have a very high priority as far as getting on airplanes. We could draw what they called dead horses; you could draw a month's pay if you were going overseas. We darn near went broke there in San Francisco. I don't know how long we stayed there. I know we started at the nicest hotel in San Francisco; big shots getting ready to go win the war. We ended up in a flea trap almost that cost us about \$2 a piece each night. So we were grateful to finally get on a plane to Pearl. Then we rode PB 2Y's. They were four engined and we would fly all day long and land at one of our islands because we had taken all of those by then. We would spend the night on the island and then fly again. One incident, I don't even want to say the name of the island it was, our next trip was going to be Brisbane, Australia. We got on that darn airplane and there weren't seats so we were just placed in the bottom of it with the rest of the luggage and so forth. We taxied away from this island that we had spent the night on; roared toward that darn thing and you just felt like you were going to

be on the island any minute. Just before we get to the darn thing the pilot would cut the power and it sounded like and felt like we were going to submerge. It was just as noisy as the devil. It was an old wooden bottomed airplane. So we would go back and roar the second time. I went up to the pilot on the second one and I said, "Now I know a little about submarines but I don't know anything about these things. This seems a little unusual." He said, "Oh no, all of this cargo that we've got is just so darned heavy that we can't get off but we'll burn enough fuel on the next one and we will be able to take off." I said, "The next time you get pretty close to that island, you just stop for a minute and I will lighten this thing 150 pounds and leave it with you." (laugh) He said, "Oh no, we'll make it next time." And we did. So to make it even better about our greeting to Australia, when we landed at Brisbane, actually there were four of us in the airplane, when we got to Brisbane and we were getting tickets to Fremantle the little clerk there said, "Are you all close friends?" We said, "Well, we are now." She said, "Well, I would suggest that you all ride different airplanes because we really haven't had too good of luck recently." (laugh) So there's a welcome to Brisbane. The most beautiful city in Australia was Adelaide and I think we were there for about ten days. We were halfway to Perth then. It was a heck of a lot cheaper than it was in San Francisco. We really liked Adelaide.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you getting a per diem? Was the Navy paying for your hotels?

Mr. Atkinson

We were getting a per diem. To end that, about September 1, I reported onboard for duty on the USS *Flasher*, my submarine. I've kind of finished that chapter. I can start about a patrol.



Mr. Misenhimer

Just tell me about joining the *Flasher*. What was it like joining the *Flasher*?

Mr. Atkinson

The *Flasher* had already made three patrols. I found out later that she was launched right close to the end of June in 1943. I said I was destined to be on the *Flasher* because I went into active duty on July 1. I went to Georgia Tech on July 1. The *Flasher* and I kind of got engaged into this thing kind of at the same time. Let me tell of the best attack the *Flasher* made. It was on the fifth war patrol. We had already had a real good attack and had sunk two destroyers and a 10,000 ton tanker. Of course our mission was to sink enemy shipping but if you had a chance of firing at a destroyer or a tanker we would always take the tanker because I wouldn't say it was our mission, but it was to stop the flow of oil down in Sumatra and up to the South China Sea to the mainland of Japan. It was almost by accident that we sank that second destroyer because we were firing at the tanker and missed the damn tanker and put two torpedoes into the destroyer. It sunk then, just immediately. Normally you could sink a destroyer with one. This attack was over with and we had performed air and sea rescue service while the Allies bombed Manila. I was telling about the sub, when I say that, I want to say that we did not pick up a single pilot but we performed air and sea rescue quite a bit. I read in a book just not too long ago that the submarine force was given credit for saving 500 U.S. pilots. I had not known that and that is a hell of a service itself. Of course you couldn't do anything about the airplane but the pilot was more important than the airplane anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer

And one of those was George H. W. Bush.

Mr. Atkinson

I wasn't going to mention that; I'm a damn Democrat. (laugh) We were at Manila so we headed west and went over to the then French Indochina, just near the coast. This was December of 1944 and targets were getting slimmer and slimmer all along and they didn't transit in the middle of the South China Sea as much as they did in the beginning. To take the shortest route they hugged the coast. The sea was rough and we spotted a convoy and it looked like four big ships. They were hugging the coast real closely; meaning there wasn't much room between the coast and them; meaning that a sub in its right mind would not get in that shallow of water. They had four escorts on the seaward side. We knew it was going to be a challenge getting in. But then the water got rough and you have to be careful in making a submerged attack so that you don't broach that thing and pop to the surface. You are more likely to do that in big waves. You might be at periscope depth; what you think is periscope depth and then you get in a trough and you are exposed to the escorts. We tried to get in and could not. We decided that we would perform an end around because in trying to go in for an attack this convoy got further north and they were getting ahead of us. We went out to sea and got on the surface. We could watch their mast with our periscope up while we were on the surface and we performed an end around. You could watch them to see if they were changing course or anything. But then you go up and get ahead of them. Somehow though we kind of lost those rascals. We were looking all night long for them. Just about midnight we had radar on them and we noticed that it looked like they had stopped for just a short time. We got right in front of them and the Skipper decided then that to get them we were going to have to go in between the target and the coast. Sometimes we would be in water 100 feet

deep and it is suicidal to take a sub in that shallow. We went on and got in between them and the coast. We got a good set up and we fired three torpedoes at the first tanker. By then we had identified them as large 10,000 ton tankers; which was a hell of a big ship in those days. We fired three into the first one and then shifted to the second one as a target and fired three at the second one; this was from the bow tube because we had six of them. Then we spun around and I made the stupidest suggestion, "Since we've got such a good set up, why not fire two torpedoes at tanker number three and two at number four?" And the Skipper said, "Because I want that number three." So we fired four torpedoes. Almost at the same time these torpedoes hit, there was a delay in them but they hit and fires immediately started on all three tankers. Before we got out of there, there was one big fire where these darn things ran together. It smelled like oil. It wasn't gasoline which was more explosive. So here we've got this one big fire going and then there was one destroyer as an escort to the rear. There were also escorts on the seaward side. The big destroyer itself was almost down to where this number four tanker was. After we fired the four into the number three tanker we were heading south just as fast as that thing would go, the *Flasher* would go. For some reason that destroyer was running just parallel with us. I was on the bridge with the Captain. We could see the people running up and down on that destroyer and I just knew they were running to their darn guns and they were going to start shooting at us. We had this kind of light gray paint on the whole sub and it was a little bit foggy because it was getting close to being early in the morning; daylight was about ready to start. We ran for about two miles side by side. The Navigator saying, "We've got to turn left and get out of the shallow water" and the Captain saying, "We'll be in that destroyer's lap if we do." So we headed on. For some unknown reason, I just

say by the grace of God that darned destroyer made a left turn which was away from us and went back on up towards the remaining ship that was there. It was just about at the point of no return for us. As soon as he got out of the way we then could turn out away from the coast. Later the Captain said, "I'm just sure that these ships thought they had run through a mine field or something because there was not a depth charge dropped." That tied in for us getting four 10,000 ton tankers and two destroyers. It made it one of the better patrols than any of the subs had ever made. On this patrol we traveled over 13,000 miles and burned almost 160,000 gallons of diesel fuel. The USS *Flasher* and I served on the fourth, fifth and sixth patrols and for the second, third and fourth we received a Presidential Unit Citation for anybody that served onboard on any of those three patrols. After the war some department of ours and some department of the Japanese got together and we were at latitude and longitude so and so we claimed that on December 22<sup>nd</sup> or whatever it was, that we sank three 10,000 ton tankers, the Japanese records showed that this Scottish Maru or something, that these three tankers, and they were just right close to 10,000 tons, they went through the whole war where ships were sunk and it turned out at the end of the war and at the final total, the USS *Flasher* sank in excess of 100,000 tons of enemy shipping; that's man of war and merchant ships, which was more than any submarine in the fleet. So we called ourselves numero uno, number one. We did not sink the most ships, but we sank the most tonnage. That was something that we could brag about. Are you ready for one more number? Again at the end of the war we knew that we were taking heavy losses, submarines. We lost 52 submarines. Some, very few, they got the people off of, but most of them went down with all hands. But 22% of our people in submarine service were killed. That's one out of five and not quite one out of four.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes a pretty high percentage.

Mr. Atkinson

It was high until I read not too long ago about the Germans. Richard, I think the number that I remember was that they lost 75% of their submarine personnel.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, something like that. I read the same figure, somewhere in that range.

Mr. Atkinson

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened?

Mr. Atkinson

You're ready for more? (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure, I've got two more tapes.

Mr. Atkinson

(laugh) I don't have that much voice.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was the fifth patrol right?

Mr. Atkinson

It was written up as *Flasher's* Flaming Action or *Flasher's* Flaming Fifth. I like *Flasher's* Flaming Fifth. After the sixth patrol we did not return to Fremantle. We went back to Pearl and then went to San Francisco for a Navy Yard overhaul. There in addition

to normal rebuilding of engines and all things like that, we put on a very secret underwater sound and underwater radar specifically to spot mines. Mines are anchored to the bottom and then they have a cable going up to the mine itself. The mine has prongs on it and the cables are supposed to adjust the mine so that it is six, eight or ten feet below the surface. It's better and just the same on torpedoes, when we would fire at a large ship we would set the depth for the torpedo to run to be something like 15 or 16 feet because you wanted to hit as low as you can because if a torpedo goes off on the surface 90% of the force is just going to create a water spout but when you go down into the bowels of the ship, the pressure that this thing expends goes up through the ship rather than pushing the water up so it does more damage. The same thing on a mine; you would like for that darn thing to hit near the bottom. In kind of the middle of the war we tried going into the Sea of Japan because shipping was getting kind of sparse and the Sea of Japan is an almost enclosed body of water which is just west of Japan itself. An almost enclosed body of water with just little entrances and it was real easy to mine those darn things. The Japanese ships were kind of running in the Sea of Japan with their running lights on because they were almost sure that we wouldn't go in there. But like an idiot we did. So now I'm going to get back to where I started. We were in the Navy Yard overhaul and we got those devices on there. That was the time that we on the *Flasher*, I'm going to say, got real nervous. We got those devices to sight the mines and then we went to Pearl in the clear water and we would go down to about 100 feet and we would keep the periscope up but the water was clear. The periscope could see the mines but then our underwater radar would pick them up and we would try to navigate. All of these are dummy mines we're learning on. We would pick the mines up but they didn't place them

all in a straight row or leave you a lot space in between so many times when you would turn to the right to avoid the one to your left you would run into another one. The most nerve wracking part was when you ran beside and came in contact with one of the cables. You would hear the noise start at the bow and it just goes right on back to the stern. If there is something, some kind of burr on the side of your ship, or something that will catch that darn cable it will pull it right down to you, right down in contact with your boat and all of us knew that. We did hang one in the dummy field. This was the most nerve wracking part of anything we had in my day in submarine activity. This was the time that we almost, they never said the word mutiny but we had more discontent about us going out on patrols and going through this mine field. In fact, even the officers questioned, "Why in the hell are we going to do this?" Kind of the worst part of it was that while we were exercising in Pearl with the mine fields there they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima on August 6<sup>th</sup>. It was something like August 15<sup>th</sup> the Japanese verbally said, "We accept surrender." August 20<sup>th</sup> we got underway heading for the Sea of Japan. Luckily we had everybody onboard. There were four of us in formation headed for Guam. We were about three days out and I had the deck. A messenger stuck his head up and said, "Captain said to reverse course." I said, "Confirm that order." I didn't change anything. About then the Captain stuck his head through the hatch and he said, "Turn around Eddie, we're going home." I turned and almost rammed the one behind us. We started back and we were not the senior boat, somebody else was. They signaled to us to get back in formation and we sent back, "Break your messages." Because we had gotten the message to come home and all four had gotten the same message of course. We just happened to be on the ball a little bit better. We weren't looking forward to going through that darn mine field.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand during the first part of the war they had a lot of trouble with the torpedoes?

Mr. Atkinson

Oh yes indeed. That was before my day but I naturally heard a lot about it and I read a lot about it. There were just several changes that had to be made. In peace time the submarine was used primarily as a scout for the task forces. Hell, we didn't have a task force. All of the battleships were sunk or damaged so they didn't need submarines for that. Then also the main attack method was to not expose the periscope so much but to use sound to determine the course and speed which is a task within itself, particularly when the sound is not too good. They used sound approaches and they were using magnetic exploders that you didn't have to hit the ship but to go underneath it and it caused this explosion down below which would break its back, which was real good. But none of the mechanisms were working. The other thing that compounded it was that the torpedo depth if you set it for 12 feet it was running about 18 or 19 feet. It got to be a real political issue and I just read this. The Bureau of Ships was not going to accept responsibility for this. They said it was the damn scared Skippers. The Skippers were individual people and the Bureau of Ships is the biggest department within the Navy department. But actually at Fremantle there was such a shortage of torpedoes that they were afraid to test any out there. I think it was Lockwood that finally said we have to do it. *(tape side ended)*

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Fremantle did you get liberty to go ashore there and all?



Mr. Atkinson

I'm glad you mentioned that. When we came in from patrol we would be greeted. The Admiral would come by and tell what a wonderful patrol and what a good job we did. Then shortly after he left a relief crew would come in. We would go over the things that we had troubles with and the things that we wanted changed. Then you turn all of these things over to the relief crew and everybody, every regular crew member left. We would go to different rest camps for two weeks. You didn't have to worry about the sub at all. It was needed. We would ride horses or go hunting or do whatever we wanted to do. We would play poker or whatever you wanted to do. We needed it and it was good and then we would come back and start training.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were the Australian people? Were they friendly?

Mr. Atkinson

There are not enough words to say how nice the Australian people were. Of course they had reason to be nice because the way it looked to me, they were next on the list to be taken by the Japanese until we got there. I don't say that their being nice was gratefulness for what we had saved them. I think they were just basically born nice people and they demonstrated that. I've read a lot, particularly submarine books and read a lot of things about World War II and almost without exception that when anyone had contact with the people of Australia they made it intentional that they said something about how nice the Australian people were. We went through Lombok Strait one night. It was after the fifth patrol and coming home the Skipper was feeling quite good. We had this little old boat that was making about the same speed we were and he was firing something like a 20mm

and the Skipper said, "I sure would like to get a Purple Heart out of this. I don't know whether to stick my hand out or my foot." I said, "Captain, if one of those things hits me, it's going to come through both of those periscopes and you because I'm going to be behind all three of you." (laugh) I wasn't looking for medals.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who was the Skipper on there?

Mr. Atkinson

The first one was Ruben Whitaker. He had her for the first four patrols. Then George Grider had her. Both of these Skippers were from Memphis which was kind of interesting. But after the war and I think maybe before it ended, Ruben Whitaker came back and was the Commanding Officer of the submarine base at New London. I've got an interesting story about that one too. After the war we turned around and headed away from Guam and we came back to Pearl. We got orders to go back to the States. Grider was the Skipper and Grider said, "I know I can get these orders delayed for 3, 4 or 5 days if you all want to see one of the islands here at Honolulu." I think most of the Reservists were still upset about us having to go out on patrol after the damn war was over. I know all I wanted to do was get back to Arkansas. We left immediately. Well we shot the deck gun some and headed for the Panama Canal because we had orders to go up the Mississippi River and tie up in New Orleans. We got to the mouth of the Mississippi River and no pilot. We waited about an hour and Grider the Skipper said, "Let's go." So we flooded down three or four feet so if we ran onto a sandbar we could blow that water out and back off. We went on up and got to New Orleans. We had been told Pier XYZ and we didn't have any idea where Pier XYZ was. We would shut the engines down and

go close to the shore and using our megaphone we would holler, "Where's Pier XYZ?" just like a bunch of idiots. The people on shore would motion on up the river, on up the river. We finally found where we were. I was telling this story one time about we would ask the people where this pier was and one of the enlisted men was there. When he heard me telling this story he said, "Hell, Mr. Atkinson, ya'll didn't even know what river we were in." (laugh) We tied up in New Orleans and I was the only single officer there. All of the other wives had met so as soon as we tied up I got on a train and went to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. I hadn't said anything about my wife-to-be but during the Navy Yard overhaul when we came back and I was there for a month. I'm mixing my stories but let me just go on with it. I went to Pine Bluff, Arkansas and I said, "Rachel, the *Flasher* is tied up in New Orleans. Why don't you come down to New Orleans with me?" I thought we were just going to go down there for a week or so and the next thing I found I was standing in front of the preacher and Rachel and I got married. We spent our honeymoon while the *Flasher* was in New Orleans right after the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get married in Pine Bluff or New Orleans?

Mr. Atkinson

I got married in Pine Bluff. The war got over about September 15<sup>th</sup> and this was September 29<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Misenhimer

September 2<sup>nd</sup> was the surrender on the *Missouri*.

Mr. Atkinson

Yes, but this was September 29<sup>th</sup>. Rachel and I were going to go down to New Orleans

and celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary but somebody by the name of Katrina got there a few days before us, so we did not go to New Orleans. I think we went to Branson instead. I got off onto another story but when we came back to the Navy Yard overhaul and again I was the only single officer so as soon as we tied up I got on a little airplane and flew to Pine Bluff. I guess that's when Rachel and I kind of confirmed because it was about 30 days and we pretty much decided but I didn't want to get married and then go back to San Francisco and then go out on another war patrol. At the end of the 30 days in Pine Bluff I sent the Exec a telegram and I said, "With ten more days in Arkansas I can win the war by myself." So I sent that telegram and he sent back to me, "Take six and we'll help you." (laugh) I want to mention this part to you. I was a proud guy. After we left New Orleans we went to Mobile because Navy Day was October 12<sup>th</sup> in those days. They wanted us to come over because they didn't have any ships in Mobile for Navy Day. Our crew marched and we done good. We stayed in Mobile for a few days and then we were headed for Philadelphia Navy Yard. I've got to get back to while we were still in New Orleans. Because we went up that New Orleans River without a pilot, if we had not been such a hot boat I think George, the Skipper, would have been reprimanded, but everybody laughed it off. The Skipper said, "Eddie, you've got a new wife here so you take her out." I practiced on all of my commands and everything. We got on the *Flasher* and single up and got underway. We wouldn't get up any kind of speed at all. They put the meanest SOB pilot that you ever saw to take us down the river. We would get up just a little bit and he would say, "Mr. Atkinson you are creating waves over there." I said, "Hell we don't even have steerage way on this darn thing." (laugh). He wouldn't let us get up any kind of speed at all. So we suffered for about 60 miles with him but we kind of

asked for it and we got it. When we were pulling away from the dock Rachel was supposed to be at a certain spot. I kept looking for her and looking for her and I couldn't find her. It didn't take the Captain long to see that I was more interested in what was going on the beach than I was in getting that ship down the river. He said, "Eddie, what in the hell are you looking for?" I said, "I'm looking for my new wife." He said, "Do you want me to take the deck while you look for your wife?" (laughing) I said, "No sir, I've given up on her." Bringing Rachel into it, I mentioned about Captain Whitaker was the commanding officer of the base in New London when we finally got up there. We met him at the Officer's Club and these old four stripers just really go for a young good looking lady. It doesn't matter whether their husband is there or not. Ruben said, "Eddie why don't you and Rachel ride with me. I've got to make an inspection tour here." So the three of us got in the car and we would go to Point A and he would get out and be a minute or sometimes he would blow the horn and they would bring him something. We were in about the middle of that and about 45 minutes had elapsed and he asked me to go in to this spot. When I came back we were talking and Ruben said, "Rachel do you want to do so and so?" And she said, "Hell no." I thought, "My God, here my Navy career has been such a glorious one and it's coming to an end right now." The next stop Ruben got out and I said, "Honey, what in the world? I've never heard you use a word like that." She said, "He told me while you were in that last spot that I'm getting tired of this yes sir and no sir. When I ask you something you either say, hell yes or hell no." I said, "Why in the hell didn't you tell me he said that." (laugh) We survived that one too.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do; mothball the ship? What happened to the ship when you got up there?

Mr. Atkinson

We mothballed it. At that time we either had to have the spare parts there or have an order written for them. I guess the last three or four days Rachel sat in the ward room and the yeoman was typing orders and I was signing half of them and Rachel was signing half of them. My J. E. Atkinson's went over half a sheet and hers were a real fine print, but she was signing the same name that I was. If anybody had got one of each one of those orders they wouldn't know what the heck it was. That was kind of the end of it in New London. We enjoyed the hell out of that; just still newlyweds. It was about that long I would say that I became untensed. It was a war and submarine service is not for everybody. We had been to the Officer's Club and we were walking back to; we had a little apartment on the base there and a damn four striper, I had one and half stripes, and I had my dolphins, two ribbons, the Presidential Citation and a Bronze Star and then I had a Philippine Liberation Ribbon, then the Asiatic or something, and then we had the Combat Pin underneath that; I thought it looked just kind of neat. I was proud of it. (laugh) A damn four striper stopped and said, "Where is your Victory Ribbon?" I said, "Sir?" He said, "I see you are not wearing a Victory Ribbon. Weren't you proud of our victory?" I said, "Well sir I was just kind of proud of what I had on here with my dolphins and my Combat Pin." And he proceeded to chew my butt out in front of my new wife. Finally he left and I think I saluted the SOB. We started back to our apartment and I said, "Come on, let's go." She said, "Where are we going?" I said, "We're going to Vanderbilt. I'm getting out of this chicken outfit right now." It was just as soon as I could get it processed. In getting back to Vanderbilt we came through Nashville from New London headed for Arkansas. We went in to see the Dean at the School of Engineering. I

said, "I want to make sure that I get out in one year." He said, "I'm sure that we can do that." So in just a little while everything was okay. He could see that Rachel was pregnant and he said, "Have you got an apartment?" I said, "No, but we're going to look around now." He said, "I know that Coach Sanders has three apartments. They are in kind of a barracks there but a bunch of the football players are there." I said, "I've lost weight during the war and I didn't have any to lose and I ain't going to play football." He said, "Well, if you change your mind Coach Sanders has got some." So we looked all over and I said, "Come on, we're going to play one more year of football." (laugh) Just for a damn apartment and that's what we did. That would be 1946 and we played that. When I graduated and got my degree Rachel was in the audience and our new daughter was in the audience.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you get your degree in?

Mr. Atkinson

A B.S in Electrical Engineering.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you studied electrical engineering when you were there the first time?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes. I went in from day one.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to in the Navy?

Mr. Atkinson

I stayed in the Naval Reserves and attended but I had to join a surface unit because there

was not a submarine unit where I was. I stayed in and took correspondence courses and took two weeks annual training and things like that. Some 18 years later I retired as a Full Commander. I get a small paycheck each month and the main thing is I get medical the same as a retired military officer and boy in this day with drugs like they are it's worth it just having the TriCare program.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes. What was the highest rank you got to during World War II?

Mr. Atkinson

Lieutenant (jg). All the Lieutenant and Lieutenant Commander came in the Reserve Unit.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you retired as a Full Commander?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes as a Full Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that is the same as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army isn't it?

Mr. Atkinson

(laughing) That's right it is. When I went home and went to Pine Bluff after midshipman's school and I had my one stripe and a star, people in Pine Bluff had never seen a Navy uniform and they would say, "We see the one star there. What's the equivalent in the Army?" I would say, "General." (laugh) Half of them still believe me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, let me go back and ask you a few questions here. On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?



Mr. Atkinson

We were between Pearl Harbor and San Francisco coming back to start our Navy Yard overhaul. I guess I just remember the things where I was the Officer of the Deck. I guess we weren't zig zagging; we were just plowing on through the water. The messenger stuck his head up and said, "Captain said to fly the flag at half staff." I said, "Hell, I haven't got a flag up here, what do you mean?" Then he said, "Our Commander in Chief has passed away." I said, "Who's our new boss?" And no one in the conning tower knew who our new boss was. Finally the Captain came up on the bridge and said, "An old southerner from Missouri, Harry Truman." I always thought a lot of Harry Truman and it doubled my impression of him when he okayed the dropping of the bomb.

Mr. Misenhimer

May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. You were probably in San Francisco then right?

Mr. Atkinson

Either San Francisco or I believe I was in Pine Bluff. The sub was in San Francisco.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any reaction to that?

Mr. Atkinson

I have to say it was another non-event. I don't like that word. It wasn't that I couldn't care less it was just that I knew what I was going back to. I had been there and done that and I knew where I was going. I'm going to use that same term; that was a non-event for me personally.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then August 6<sup>th</sup> when they dropped that first atomic bomb you were in Pearl Harbor is

that correct?

Mr. Atkinson

That is correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you all think when you heard that?

Mr. Atkinson

Hallelujah and if the *Flasher* would have had to drop it I would have been right there saying, "Let's go."

Mr. Misenhimer

With your background in electrical engineering did you have any idea what an atomic bomb was?

Mr. Atkinson

Not at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then on August 15<sup>th</sup> when Japan actually surrendered did you all have much of a celebration there?

Mr. Atkinson

We sure did, yes. We fired all of the pyrotechnics and signals that we had. There was a girl working at the Navy base at Pearl and she came by in an automobile with about five friends and I guess about five of us from the *Flasher* got in the same car making something like a total of ten. It's a wonder we didn't tear the car up or something. We celebrated that one, we sure did. Because again we had extra reason to because we knew we were going to the Sea of Japan and we didn't want to go. We had reasons for not

wanting to go. I wouldn't say we were scared because you don't get in subs if you are scared.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was Honolulu for a liberty town?

Mr. Atkinson

I think about the only thing. We had been in Australia and this was at the end of the sixth patrol and we got to Pearl. We were given a jeep and four or five of us got in the jeep and the Skipper was driving. We barreled out of there on the left hand side of the road and just in a little while fortunately we were pulled over and the Skipper said, "What in the hell have I done wrong?" "Well sir, we drive on the right hand side over here." (laugh) But I think, just like the Steward's Mate, as we were coming into Pearl and again we knew we would be there a couple of days and then go on to the States. He said, "Mr. Atkinson, restrict me to the boat." I said, "Page, now's the time to celebrate." He said, "You don't know how I celebrate. Restrict me to the boat." He said, "If you don't, I'll go out there and get in trouble and while you all go to the States, I'll be in the brig." I said, "You can stay onboard all that you want to."

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose any time?

Mr. Atkinson

Oh gosh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Atkinson

I think just interesting. When we could pick her up we listened to her.

Mr. Misenhimer

She played good music I understand.

Mr. Atkinson

We had one officer that was smart and I mean just really intelligent. I think he ended up teaching at MIT or something like that. But I would say, "We've got that Japanese station on again." "Eddie, that's Chinese, can't you tell the difference between Chinese and Japanese?" I said, "Hell no and I don't care about learning the difference." (laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned the Sea of Japan. Exactly where is the Sea of Japan? I've heard talk about the Sea of Japan and the Inland Sea, are they the same?

Mr. Atkinson

I think that's the same thing. It's just west of Japan itself.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is it between Japan and Korea?

Mr. Atkinson

Manchuria. I don't believe that Korea bordered it. It might be that Korea is part of the Sea of Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm not sure. I've heard people talk of the Inland Sea and the Sea of Japan and I wasn't sure.

Mr. Atkinson

I believe that they are talking about the same place.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Atkinson

(laughing) You won't tell anybody?

Mr. Misenhimer

Just on tape.

Mr. Atkinson

Is the tape on?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Atkinson

Okay. In New London, this is after the war and we have done the mechanical stuff of getting her out of commission but now we were going to do the ceremony. There was the Skipper and Tom McCants, who is a dear friend and was a Navy Academy man and he was on the *Flasher* for all seven patrols. To me if I ever needed Navy advice and I didn't know whether I was supposed to go to the Exec I always went to Tom McCant. Then myself and kind of a new fellow. There were four of us on the stern of the *Flasher* and somebody blew taps and we lowered the commissioning pennant. That commissioning pennant is over my mantle in my den right now. I must have done something but it's got one little moth hole in it and I don't know what to do about it. It's up there now. On either side of the mantle is a red running light and a green running light. They are running

lights and I just made a wooden base and a wooden top and put a small bulb in it. I really believe that's about it. I just recently got from somebody about a six inch piece of the decking of the *Flasher*. I went to Hobby Lobby the other day and ordered a frame because I've got a scroll that says, 'Decking from the USS *Flasher*' and I'm going to somehow attach this actual piece of decking; screw it to the bottom of this scroll that's in a frame.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is this decking wood or is it steel?

Mr. Atkinson

Teak wood. Actually the guy in New London, Bill Beaman and we still talk on the phone. I don't do much writing. We talk on the phone, but he got two or three pieces about three feet long. He sawed them into six inch links so that he could get them to different people. I think I know of four or five that got one. I'm going to hang that somewhere near the mantle. The other two I stole, but this thing, the decking was given to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ultimately happened to the *Flasher*?

Mr. Atkinson

She was scrapped. She was one of them that we called thin hulled. The first depth charge that I got was the closest that anybody on the *Flasher* ever heard. So to me I got my initiation when this guy laid four right on top of us and just damn near sunk us right there. But she was a thin hulled one. She was scrapped, not immediately after the war, about 20 or 30 years later. They did not scrap the conning tower and the periscope and the shears and the outside deck itself. That whole thing was put on a concrete platform in

Groton, Connecticut. For a while she was kind of the memorial for World War II submarines. Rachel and I went to a ceremony when they put the Wall of Honor right on the same physical location. The Wall of Honor has the names of the 3,600 submariners that were killed during World War II and it's got kind of a grey stone that I call it, for each of the 52 subs that were lost during World War II. The first time that Rachel and I saw that darn superstructure there we parked the car and I headed straight for it. I was half way up the ladder and she said, "Honey, don't you see that sign? It says don't climb." I said, "Rachel, this place was my home for about a year and a half. I don't give a flip what that sign says, I'm going to go up on the bridge where I spent an awful lot of time." They didn't arrest me.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've been there and seen that memorial.

Mr. Atkinson

You have. I've told all my grandkids and I'll tell my great-grandkids later that that is required viewing. I think about four of them have already been by there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about being depth charged. I'm sure you were depth charged a number of times, right?

Mr. Atkinson

That's right. Like where we didn't get a single depth charge because they thought they hit mines. That one is hard to describe. I tried first by saying, you being an old Texan, you know what a big old wash tub is, a metal wash tub, galvanized; it's just that the noise part of it just sounds like if you pull one of those things over your head and somebody took a

baseball bat and hit it as hard as they could; that somewhat approaches the noise. As I said on my first depth charge everybody agreed that was the loudest that we had ever heard; that the *Flasher* had ever gotten. I had psyched myself up. I was in the conning tower and I said, "Well the Captain is the most senior guy here and I'm going to watch him and see how he reacts." I mean he was on his butt in the corner of the conning tower because it knocked him down. Most of the time, particularly the officers, you are busy doing something particularly when I became the diving officer. You are so darn busy that is just kind of an annoyance over there. We never had anybody lose control or anything like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the longest that you were kept down by depth charging?

Mr. Atkinson

I would say three or four hours or something like that. Most of the time it was just the initial one. It was the initial attack. We were never to where it got progressively worse. It just seemed that each time that we were depth charged it was the initial attack. We would work our way and avoid it by putting our tail to the darn thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Atkinson

I think after the fifth patrol and we were in port and I got the letter about my little brother being killed. When we went out, it wasn't very long before we went out on the sixth patrol, particularly when I had the deck, I could feel that my, the Officer of the Deck is a watch officer just like the lookout, but when I was looking through my binoculars I think



I could feel my eyeballs on the outside of those damn binoculars and I was just saying to myself, "You son-of-a-buck, if you are out there; I'm going to see you before you see me because my momma and daddy ain't going to get another telegram saying that they lost another son." I was really more nervous. I think I would say that I was scared and that was the only time I was ever really frightened. I just knew that if I was lost it would kill them both.

Mr. Misenhimer

War is a terrible thing.

Mr. Atkinson

Yes. War is hell.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Atkinson

Not a single thing like that and I never got a Red Cross cigarette.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was another question; did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Atkinson

I did not. I don't think that was unusual for the submarine people. We kind of had our own rest camps. I certainly didn't have anything negative.

Mr. Misenhimer

There in Hawaii the Royal Hawaiian was reserved for submariners wasn't it?

Mr. Atkinson

That is correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned the letter that you got about your brother. Could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Atkinson

Only when we came in from patrol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Sure, naturally. Speaking of that, I've heard people tell me that when they left Fremantle and went up north around Australia there was some place that they stopped up there to get extra fuel and when they came back to leave off any fuel they had extra. Do you recall that?

Mr. Atkinson

Oh yes, we did that every time. That was about two or three days north of Fremantle. When I say three days and when we were going north that means that we were headed for what we called enemy controlled waters. When you got to Lombok Strait you were in enemy controlled waters. There is Exmouth Gulf which is on the same side of Australia but north of Perth and Fremantle.

Mr. Misenhimer

It is up towards Darwin isn't it?

Mr. Atkinson

The next one is Darwin. *(tape side ended)* When we left Fremantle and sailed just outside the northwest part of Australia because Darwin is kind of in the center of the northern part; we went up and filled up with fuel there and then we did not go through Lombok Strait then, we went straight on up headed for Manila. Then coming back home we came

through Lombok Strait and we were low on fuel and we put into Exmouth Gulf and I'm going to say took on 30,000 gallons to get us back to Fremantle. So we used both of those ports on the fifth patrol. We always used Exmouth Gulf either coming or going.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm looking at a small map here and I see Makassar Strait, that's between Borneo and Celebes and I see the Moluccas Islands. Do you see those? I'm trying to figure out where Lombok Strait is.

Mr. Atkinson

Okay. The big island of Java is south of where you are talking. You go east or go to the right and the first little island after Java is the island of Bali that had all the good looking women on it. Then the next one is Lombok. So that is the Strait.

Mr. Misenhimer

Between those two?

Mr. Atkinson

Yes between those two. Depending on the currents, sometimes we could go through it submerged if we were with the current. When you try to transit something at 3 knots and if you are in a 4 knot current you are losing ground. Which reminds me when I say that. I had another dear friend on the *Hoe* and he just passed away about three months ago. Nelson Abel was on the *Hoe* when they were in a wolf pack with us. Another sub and the *Hoe* collided because the *Hoe* was so much out of position because of having about a 4 knot current. It scratched the paint and maybe dented it but no real damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you can think of?

Mr. Atkinson

I hope not. (laughing) I was proud of my boat. One other thing. I qualified but the other was at the end of the fifth patrol. When we started home for the barn, the Skipper if the old Exec was going to leave he would use that for proving ground for the new Exec to let him practice navigation. In coming home the Engineering Officer was going to leave the *Flasher* but he wanted to brush up on his navigation so he was Navigator and that promoted me to the Engineering Officer, not just Assistant Engineering Officer. This was on my second patrol. When we were headed home and I remember it well that we were just off Singapore on our starboard beam. It was time for me to go up on the bridge and the Exec came up and said, "Eddie the Captain wants you to stand the deck by yourself tonight. So that meant that I was the Officer of the Deck of a U.S. man of war. It was a very proud moment. I kept my binoculars to my eyes all of the time. Let me just mention on the officer of the deck; when anybody except the Skipper, when anybody stuck his head up the hatch he would say, "Permission to come on the bridge." The officer of the deck would say permission granted or tell him why he couldn't. A lot of the senior officers didn't want to ask an Ensign for permission to come on the deck. I said, "You're not really asking for permission to come on my damn deck; you're letting me know as officer of the deck that there is one other person up here on the bridge." I don't care if he's got two stripes on or if he's the lowest seaman, the officer of the deck has just got to know who is up there because if an airplane dives on your or something he is going to automatically say, "Clear the bridge. Dive. Dive. Dive." All he has to get out is the word "clear" because by the time that word gets down into the control room all of the vents are open, the planes are open and we've started in on a dive. The officer of the deck has to

know who is up there. It doesn't matter if they are up there with or without permission.

It's deep water if you get brushed over the side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had many reunions?

Mr. Atkinson

Quite a few, yes. But we're losing people now. I guess about one a year.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you can think of from World War II?

Mr. Atkinson

I sure don't.

*(end of interview)*

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