

National Museum of the Pacific War

**Nimitz Education and Research Center
Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Interview with Marty Romano
U.S. Navy**

Interview with Marty Romano

This is Ed Metzler. Today is April 28, 2007. I am located in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the National Museum of the Pacific War. I am interviewing Marty Romano. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Metzler: Let me start out Marty by thanking you for spending the time this morning to talk to us and let's start out by having you introduce yourself and where you were born, when, a little about your parents – that kind of stuff.

Mr. Romano: I was born and raised in Jersey City, New Jersey, first generation of immigrants. My father and mother migrated to the state at the turn of the century. I was born June 11, 1924 and, Ed, you take it from here.

Mr. Metzler: Well, tell me what your parents did for a living.

Mr. Romano: Well, my father was more of an entrepreneur. He did a host of things. My mother was the business woman. She took over a business that she had started and the business was in the dry goods business.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, we're starting up again. Keep going Marty.

Mr. Romano: Well, I'm here not for that type of background but to tell about my involvement in the war.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, tell us...

Mr. Romano: I went to my boot camp, Navy boot camp, at Newport, Rhode Island. From there I went to the Quonset hut in Rhode Island for PT boat training. From there I went down to Norfolk, Virginia.

Mr. Metzler: Did you volunteer or were you drafted or what?

Mr. Romano: I volunteered when I was in the boot camp to get on the PT boats. Actually, I didn't know what I was getting into. I saw the boats going up and down the Narragansett Bay there in the river and I said, "I wonder what they are. They're too small for a destroyer, and ... wow...."

Mr. Metzler: They look fast...

Mr. Romano: ...and they looked good. So two of us saw something on a bulletin board and there I was in Norfolk, Virginia, on my way to Europe. So this was the Pacific area of operations you folks are involved in....

Mr. Metzler: We're involved in everything World War II

Mr. Romano: Okay, from there, we were transferred, put on a train and transferred to Bayonne, New Jersey, which is about as bad as Jersey City and I couldn't get off the ship. On the Ranger, I was on the Ranger, the aircraft carrier [*USS Ranger (CV-4)* was the first ship of the United States Navy to be designed and built from the keel up as an aircraft carrier]. and we went to Casablanca, Africa, it was an interesting trip across.

Mr. Metzler: At the time you were in the PT group but you hadn't been assigned a boat yet?

Mr. Romano: You're right. I was assigned to Squadron 15. I was assigned to Squadron 15 and that was to catch up with the squadron in Europe. We landed in Casablanca and then there was transport from Casablanca via this old ornate (?) cattle(?) cars. We were stuffed in to this 40' long 8' wide there must have been hundreds of us in there and we got to Oran, Algiers, and from there picked up a boat and we went up north to an island called Maddalena, which is located between Corsica and Sardinia. From there Squadron 15 was stationed and then...

Mr. Metzler: Where ... were you in 1942?

Mr. Romano: No, in late '43 and early '44. From there I went up to Bastia, Corsica, and I was transferred from Squadron 15 to Squadron 22 and immediately put on a boat the 306, PT 306.

Mr. Metzler: How many boats in the squadron?

Mr. Romano: Twelve. There were 12 boats in the squadron and we would operate three boats at a time. And an interesting question was posed to me yesterday. It was, "What was our mission?" The mission of the boats, as I see it, was that we went out and intercepted provisions being supplied, whether, whatever supplies or men or material for the Germans or Italians, we were to intercede and if our size was smaller we were to attack...

Mr. Metzler: Let's see the Germans were still occupying Sicily at the time?

Mr. Romano: No, they had already gone through Sicily and were on the mainland now. Yeah, even when I got there, Anzio was being roughed up and Salerno. Yeah, first it was Salerno and then Anzio, and that's about the time I got in. I was assigned to the 306.... So what else you got for me?

Mr. Metzler: So what was your assignment?

Mr. Romano: I was trained as an engine, ah, motor man, motor machinist, and I was assigned to the engines.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about the engines,

Mr. Romano: Well, what do you want to know about the engines?

Mr. Metzler: Were they Packards?

Mr. Romano: They were Packard in line engines, aircraft engines, prepared for the boats. Yesterday, I heard that they were 1500 horsepower and the three engines that we got. We got three new engines at the time I was aboard and they were up to 1800 so we had 5400 horsepower and full crew...

Mr. Metzler: So this is a three screw?

Mr. Romano: Threw screws, three props, three rudders.

Mr. Metzler: How many in the crew?

Mr. Romano: How many guns did the skipper have...? For every gun we had a man so we had a minimum of 12 of us and the executive officer and then Lieutenant Growick (??) , he was our skipper, and Noble was our lieutenant, he was a lieutenant JG, he was the executive officer, so we had two officers.

Mr. Metzler: That's a pretty big.. ..

Mr. Romano: So we had 14 guys. I slept in the fantail with all the lazeret [a storage space between the decks of a ship]. There were four of us back there and then eight, the other crew, slept...

Mr. Metzler: So how many months were you assigned in the Mediterranean?

Mr. Romano: I was assigned. That was a good question. Altogether... that was a good question...I never did add up the months. (laughs) I was busy.

Mr. Metzler: That's right. Yeah, and what about the engines. Tell me, were they reliable or were they a pain in the neck.... Were they tricky?

Mr. Romano: No, no. Well, they were tricky to start. You had to have the formula. There were two buttons you had to press and they weren't close to one another.

Mr. Metzler: And in the right order?

Mr. Romano: And in the right order, yeah. So, the engines... In fact, when I was assigned to the ?? as a ??... I had to take the boat out on every mission and then we had one hour watches. They were four motor macs and it was one on and then three off because of the engine noise. In fact, my ears are still ringing.

Mr. Metzler: Is that right?

Mr. Romano: Yeah, my ears are still ringing from the experience, but, yeah ... and then, since we had one on and three off, and the rest of the crew and two on and two off, they pressured the skipper, and then when I'd get out of the engines I'd complete my watch on the engines and then I would come out and take a watch on the guns as a lookout for another hour so I was on two and off two.

Mr. Metzler: So you weren't with the engines the whole time?

Mr. Romano: No, I just couldn't. You just couldn't speak to me down in the engine room. You'd have to give me a pad and pencil and that's how we conversed.

Mr. Metzler: Either that or lip read. One of the two.

Mr. Romano: I was there for the invasion of Elba, a little small island which was north of...

Mr. Metzler: Which was famous for Napoleon....

Mr. Romano: And then the invasion of southern France and that our assignment was to take down the commandos. We took off from Bastia, Corsica, and we picked up the...would you call it, the armada, the invasion fleet. It was coming up, the Mediterranean, it's called the Tyrrhenian Sea, if you know that area. And then that was on the east side of Corsica. The main fleet was coming through that Straits of Bonifacio between Corsica and Sardinia.

The main fleet came through there and then came on the western side of Corsica and the landing took place... the commandos we took in was at Saint-Tropez...

Mr. Metzler: That's famous now for all the beachside resorts.

Mr. Romano: Saint-Tropez, slightly north of Cannes, slightly north of Cannes was a gulf we called it Gulf of Antibes. Antibes is a peninsula and from there you go to Nice and from there to, you know, you went up to what's that town where Princess Grace went?

Mr. Metzler: Monaco?

Mr. Romano: Monaco. And, yeah, so at Saint Tropez we brought in commandos...

Mr. Metzler: So how many runs with commandos did you make?

Mr. Romano: That's a great question. That one run there were a few...

Mr. Metzler: You were loaded.

Mr. Romano: We had to come in so they could wade ashore. We were trained to put them in these rubber boats. The screw was rubber, the nose was rubber, the batteries...battery operated. Did they work? Anyway, we put the commandos in the boats and in they went. After we dropped them off, why, we backed off and then we took up station to prevent any enemy action. And so, that's what we did.

Mr. Metzler: And so were the other PT boats doing the same things?

Mr. Romano: Well, when we took off there were 12 boats. There were three squadrons in that area. I don't know if you know that. There was Squadron 22, Squadron 15 and Squadron 29. Squadron 29 operated with us and so did 15 out of Bastia, Corsica, but they took over the west side of Corsica and, yeah, well, the 12 boat. We lost one boat, the 11 boat, and so there were 11 of us, yeah. I think one other boat was out of action. I forget right now

the one... . The 11 boat hit a mine and blew up. That was a cute thing the Germans and Italians would do. They knew where we were operating and, all of a sudden, we'd see these mines bobbing up and down in our path. And...

Mr. Metzler: So these were percussion mines?

Mr. Romano: Yeah, you can see them. We shot up quite a few. They blew up. What it is, you penetrate it and then the water would go in and sink it. I'm rambling on...

Mr. Metzler: I want you to ramble. Tell me about your captain. Was he a good man? Did you have a lot of respect for him?

Mr. Romano: Oh, yeah. Capt. Growick [he struggles with the name]. Tough to pronounce. To this day.... Then Lt. Noble. Lt. Noble was a hero, I thought. Sam Felitre (??) was a crew member and Sam was also a motor mac. I came out of the engines. Sam followed me into the engines. Went back down to my station on the "twin 50s" – that was my lookout on the starboard side.

Mr. Metzler: So the whole base was in Bastia?

Mr. Romano: No, we moved up with the Army. As the Army moved up, we moved up. So with the invasion of Southern France, we moved up with them. In the Antibes, that was where we spent at least two months. Then we moved up. We moved over to Livorno, Italy. Then we moved over there. We based there. Then I was relieved right after Christmas.

Mr. Metzler: Christmas '44?

Mr. Romano: Christmas of '44. Around that time I came home. No, it was after Christmas. I got home in January or February. I don't remember the dates....

Mr. Metzler: On a troop ship or an old freighter?

Mr. Romano: It was a supply ship. The skipper said to us that, there's three of us, we went home together. Gabe Costello, Gabe Costello, Tony (?). The three of us came home together because Gabe lived in the Bronx, New York; I lived in Jersey City, New Jersey; Tony lived in Orange - East Orange, Jersey. We did team up when we were home for 33 days.

Mr. Metzler: That must have been a wild 33 days.

Mr. Romano: Well, we had a good time. We would take – we made the crossing of the Atlantic and came to Norfolk, of all places Norfolk, and we intentionally stopped in Washington, D.C., for the first good meal. I remember we went up to the Mayflower Hotel. There were the three of us guys having a good time.

Mr. Metzler: Heard they treated you guys first class when you were stateside. Everybody, you know, really looked out for the servicemen. Is that true or not?

Mr. Romano: I don't know. We weren't there long enough. Thirty-three days, that's all I spent. I was on a troop ship again heading west to the Pacific. So I didn't stay long in the States at all.

Mr. Metzler: So you went down through the Panama Canal

Mr. Romano: No, no, no. We went right from there. We were on a troop ship. If you believe it, we had some WACS, Navy personnel – women – aboard and they were guarded by the Marines, let me tell you.

Mr. Metzler: They'd have to be.

Mr. Romano: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Can you imagine a ship full of troops and Navy ...

Mr. Metzler: That sounds like trouble waiting to happen.

Mr. Romano: (Laughs) Yeah. The first night they put me down in the hole and they assigned me a bunk and I had never slept down there again. I was topside at all times and I was

stopped many times saying, "Hey you can't sleep here," I said I just came from Europe – the Med – and I'll be damned if I'm going to get caught down there. I just went and found a little cubbyhole topside and that's where I slept.

Mr. Metzler: So what was the problem down in the hole?

Mr. Romano: I'd never get out if we were hit – never, never... never, never. So, then, in retrospect, we crossed the – I became – I went across the equator – what do they call it? There's an initiation. I was a member of the Dragons or something – it's in my record.

Mr. Metzler: What did they do to you?

Mr. Romano: Garbage and stuff like that. Officers as well as enlisted men went through the routine so, you know, fraternity stuff.

Mr. Metzler: Hazing?

Mr. Romano: Hazing they call it now. But in retrospect, when we crossed the 180th meridian at the same time we crossed the equator. In retrospect that skipper of ours, he did – it wasn't a smart thing, it was a stupid thing. All a Japanese sub captain had to do was to sit tight and wait for our vain captain to come on and nail it, you know. In retrospect, that's the only thing – after the fact.

Mr. Metzler: That was all clear after the fact...

Mr. Romano: After the fact. So then we moved out to the Solomons, up to New Guinea, dropped – exchanged – some personnel and then we went up to Leyte in the Philippines, and they had just invaded Leyte and they were in a mopping up operation and we went to Base 17, that was in Samar, which is... which is... Samar, that's slightly in the area of Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Metzler: That's right. There was a battle of Leyte Gulf – in the straits there.

Mr. Romano: From there I was waiting to be assigned to a boat.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so at the time you were not assigned to a boat.

Mr. Romano: No, I was going to be a boat replacement. I was on the base and then they called me up and called the 203 and the other fellas up. Okay, we went to Borneo to pick up a boat. I said, "Fine, I'm ready." We got to Borneo and I was put aboard the PT boat tender called the Oyster Bay – AGP 6. The Oyster Bay was a PT boat tender and I waited and waited and finally we went back from Borneo – back to Samar to be refitted for the invasion of Japan and the war ended and that was it – and that's when I came home.

Mr. Metzler: These PT boat tenders – so what do these things look like?

Mr. Romano: It was a converted destroyer. Several of them were LSTs. This was a modern one. It had seen plenty of action – kamikaze attacks and all – before I got there they were involved in the Okinawa operation. And, unbeknownst to me, I was converted from the PT boats to the tender. I was the ship's company. I did not know I was the ship's company. They – they – I was doing my training in Quonset Bay in a PT boat. He said, "Be aware – you guys be aware, if anyone comes along you're in the fleet. They need men and if you're not doing... they're going to grab 'ya. So take this address down. Take down the address in Washington, DC, and if that ever happens to any of you, you write to us. This is what they said."

Mr. Metzler: (laughs) Did it make you feel better?

Mr. Romano: I didn't know. That's how I got to the States. I did not know I was ship's company until I got called by a fella by the name of Fanwell. He was a member of the Oyster Bay and he made sure that ship was recognized in the PT boat operation. And, Fanwell, that was his name. He was the historian. I'm a member of the PT boat association out of, it was Memphis, Tennessee, and now it's – is it Germantown or something like that in Tennessee? And that's where our headquarters are, our PT boat. S

Mr. Metzler: So do they have regular reunions?

Mr. Romano: Every year.

Mr. Metzler: Do you make 'em?

Mr. Romano: I made a few of the first ones. I don't make 'em now. It's the same thing over and over.

Mr. Metzler: Right, right...replay of the old days again.

Mr. Romano: The first year, the first year 32 guys I know, maybe there's one or two of us left.

Mr. Metzler: Did you stay in touch with any of your shipmates after the war?

Mr. Romano: Yeah, I did for a while and then we just drifted apart – we got married....

Mr. Metzler: Went on with your lives

Mr. Romano: I got myself a degree in engineering - civil engineering -- got my master's degree in structural engineering. I moved up. My specialty is bridges and tunnels, so. ..

Mr. Metzler: Where was PT 306 built?

Mr. Romano: Let me give you a little history. I was thinking, that discussion I was into yesterday on the PA system, looking at the 309. It said there were three manufacturers. That was the Hutchinson, Huckinson ... that was the glamour squad out in Hawaii. Oh, no, no. They were the luxury. The one I was on was the Higgins manufactured by the Higgins industry in Louisiana. They were famous for their landing crafts and then Mr. Higgins he decided to get into building boats. And then the other one was by the submarine people up in Elko up in Rhode Island, not Rhode Island or was it London shipyards in Connecticut, New London. They built the Elko. So there were three different types. I'm being a little bit prejudiced. I thought the Higgins was more warlike than the other two. It's open. The

deck was open. The Elko had the closed quarters, like, with the canopy and the doors in the center of the boat. It was built for action – the Higgins, I thought –

Mr. Metzler: It might have been lighter weight too, I think.

Mr. Romano: I think the Elko and the Higgins. The Elko was, I believe, 80' long. Ours was 80' long with the three engines and the 40mm in the back and the 20 mm – that's the gun I liked – they had it in the center of the boat. The one here, the 309, shows it behind the bow but ours was in the center. We had a 37 up front and then we had the two twin 50s and the four fish – the four torpedoes -- and canisters for the smokescreen. D-Day plus one we were assigned to guard the communication ship – [*USN General Alexander*] *Patch* [*T-AP-122*] and [not sure if he refers here to *USNS Gen. Edwin D. Patrick T-AP-124*]. The Army and the Navy Secretary [James] Forrestal – he was on our boat. In fact, I came out of the engine room and I saw this guy in khaki with a 45 stuck in his hip pocket. I said, "Who's he?". They said, "He's the boss."

Mr. Metzler: The main man.

Mr. Romano: "He's the secretary." I said, "Oh." He was reading a note, just like you have here, with a foot on one of the canisters to rest. All by himself. That was on the *Patch*. There was Admiral King [Fleet Admiral Ernest Joseph King] and a couple of other admirals. We had 'em all. They were firing back and forth. That navy would go in a complete circle around that ship.... Eight on, eight off – three boats...

Mr. Metzler: That was D-Day on southern France?

Mr. Romano: I was there Aug. 16. Aug. 15 was the...

Mr. Metzler: You know, it's funny, that invasion doesn't get much press. I saw a thing on the History Channel one time about that whole operation.

Mr. Romano: Well, you can thank Churchill for that – and Eisenhower. The invasion of southern France and northern France was scheduled to operate the same day – June 6. What happened was it was just not enough ships to do them both at the same time. So northern France got the priority and everything was shipped up north and that took all the ships. By the time the ships got back into the Mediterranean area then that took place in August – Aug. 15.

Mr. Metzler: I heard, tell me if you agree with this, that a lot of the prime German units had been siphoned off of the southern French defenses and taken up to fight, you know, for the Normandy invasion and were pulled over to the Italian peninsula and what have you, and that there wasn't a lot of resistance when they went in.

Mr. Romano: There was resistance. There was resistance when we went into Sicily. It was a complete mess -- almost a copycat of northern France. There was a storm. Boats were tossing, fellas were getting sick in the landing craft and, if anybody wanted to do a study, the goof-offs on these invasions – Sicily was one – and France was another one.

Mr. Metzler: There were a lot of errors made on that one and some in the Pacific

Mr. Romano: Some historians should take that challenge up.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, well, you learn by doing.

Mr. Romano: You didn't learn nothing in northern France and that was repeated. We went into Sicily and northern France didn't learn from the Sicilian operation. So Anzio was another one and then Salerno. That was – Salerno and Anzio – that was Montgomery.

Mr. Metzler: I won't make any comments about Montgomery.

Mr. Romano: He took his time going up the Italian coast.

Mr. Metzler: I think that's what Patton always used to say about Montgomery. You've seen the movie and that's one of the standard lines. Well, your early days in the Mediterranean, after you first were assigned, you said that one of your objectives was to intercept equipment and material that the Germans were sending down the coast. Did you have the opportunity to actually intercept?

Mr. Romano: Oh, yeah. I have to take my hat off to the English. In retrospect, okay. That war was their war and the Pacific was ours. When we got into an accident a couple of nights, they'd say, okay, we don't have the radar. We'd pick up on our radar a couple of enemy – the Germans – we'd pick 'em up and, whew, they went in and you could see the gunfire.

Mr. Metzler: And they were going in with what?

Mr. Romano: They were gunboats. They were primarily gunboats. The light freighters and then we went in with our torpedoes.

Mr. Metzler: So your observation of the British in action was that they were go-getters?

Mr. Romano: Oh, yeah, that's my observation

Mr. Metzler: And did you torpedo anything?

Mr. Romano: We sent a couple of fish. We never did get credit. It was picked up in the harbor and we never did get credit. Nobody did far as I know. Well, there was a question asked of me yesterday, had to do with a mission. What was primarily your Well, to sum it up, we took care of the night patrols and during the daylight hours our aircraft would take over. The aircraft would come in and I can remember coming back just at dawn and the skipper said, "Well, let's make one more pass" and so we went up the coast of Italy and around Livorno no it was up more or less around Genoa. I spotted this aircraft coming out and I said – this was at dawn – and I saw this plane come at us and I said to the skipper, "Say, skipper, take a look" and the skipper said, "He's one of us, he's all right."

Sure enough, he opened fire and I could see the tracers coming straight out of the plane.

Mr. Metzler: Friendly fire?

Mr. Romano: He did hurt us. And he said to me, "Hold your fire he's one of us." I had trained, you know. Thirty millimeters, 20 millimeters two twin 650s trained...

Mr. Metzler: Did he make another pass or did he realize...?

Mr. Romano: He made another pass. Somehow he got the word and I can't understand. We had our radar on, he had his radar on, supposedly. Friend or foe? Our bow was painted. We were flying pennants and then, the stern was painted the colors we were supposed to have.

Mr. Metzler: Plus, the Germans didn't have anything like a PT boat...

Mr. Romano: Yes, they did. They had the E boats. Oh, my gosh. They had a gun called the 88 millimeter. We had a tangle with them – you couldn't run from them – the German 88s. That was a versatile gun. They had it on land and they had it ...

Mr. Metzler: They used it for anti-aircraft and everything. So tell me about...

Mr. Romano: Then they had the Italian PT boats and we caught one of those. We captured one of those. The next day we were assigned to tow it in. We set it on fire and left it to sink. And the following morning they said, "You didn't sink that ship". It didn't sink. We had to go out and get it.

Mr. Metzler: Describe to me what that boat...

Mr. Romano: It was a low. It had interesting, it had two engines. We had three. But it had two engines. It had an auxiliary engine on the same shaft. Like a Model T Ford engine and

then you kick in. What we had was the three engines and we could go two or three knots an hour. We might have maybe two engines going and the other one idle. We used the engine as a chaser or when we were being chased. We were very careful about that too because that wake, that white wake, it shows up. It even shines at night. I'm getting into too much....

Mr. Metzler: You have about five or six minutes left with me.

Mr. Romano: Well, let's get on the humorous side. D-Day plus three. We did have a couple of scares. The Germans would send over an observation plane and we'd have to go around and lay a smoke screen around the ship. We were just like a chauffeur. When these admirals or generals wanted to be transferred to shore, we'd take 'em. And had nothin' to do so we decided, well, we'd go swimming and we were diving off the boat swimming around a little. I wrote to my brother in the Philippines and said, "Guess what's happening?" They down there with the cruisers and battleships and lobbing shells overhead and I'm in swimming. They wrote back to me, "Are you crazy?" So, I'm laughing now. At that time, I had nothing to do.

Mr. Metzler: And the Mediterranean's good to swim in too. Clear water

Mr. Romano: But there were sharks there too, oh yeah. Out in the Philippines -- if you went swimming out there you had to kill them with submachine guns.

Mr. Metzler: Of course, we've all heard the stories about the sharks and the *Indianapolis*. What was the toughest time for you in that period?

Mr. Romano: After I was told I was being relieved. Up until that time ... The skipper said to me, "You're next. Your replacement's coming up." We were going up and back and I thought, "Wouldn't you know it, tonight we're going to run into something." Finally, how I got my replacement -- three of us on that boat. We were going back to Sardinia to pick up our replacements and, there they were. They were waiting to come back up and we had to go back for repairs and that's how I got my replacement. So Mr. Noble says to

me, "You guys, you don't want to go home now. We said, "Yeah, we got our orders. Thirty-three days in the States." He says, "We can fix that. We can put you on the island of Capri for a month." We said, "Nah, we'll take our chances." He said, "I can set it up for 'ya. In retrospect ..."

Mr. Metzler: The world's full of retrospect. Okay, Marty, thanks a lot. You did plenty of good. I appreciate it. I appreciate your time.

Transcribed by : Cathy Collier
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