

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

Richard F. Hoffman

Kemah, Texas

April 17, 2007

Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer on *Damon M. Cummings* DE-643

Escorted Supply Ships to Okinawa March 31, 1945

Shot Down Kamikaze Attacking Them

After War to French Indochina, Tsingten, China

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is April 17, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Richard F. Hoffman aboard the *Lexington* in Corpus Christi, Texas. His address is 1420 Marina Bay Drive, Apt 722, Kemah, Texas 77565. His phone number is area code 281-538-8491. 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

Dick, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Hoffman

I appreciate that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Hoffman

January 7, 1922.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Hoffman

I was born in Seattle, Washington.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. I had two older brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they in World War II

Mr. Hoffman

They were but in different roles. The one that was 2 ½ years older than I was an Army Officer and wound up doing post-combat intelligence interviews in Europe. The one that was 5 years older had just finished his studies in naval architecture and marine engineering and they put him to work building ships. He was Assistant Superintendent at Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock out in Kearney, New Jersey. They were building all sorts of things including *Fletcher*-class destroyers and destroyer escorts.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are either one of those still living?

Mr. Hoffman

No, they are both gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Hoffman

If you are asking what were the physical results of it; we were quite seriously affected. My father lost his business and we lost our home and we were among those many who put cardboard in our shoes because there were holes in the soles. But as far as the psychological effect, I don't think it was that bad. We never thought of ourselves as poor. I don't remember any real distress that I ever felt as a result of it. I didn't feel different from anyone else because there were a lot of others in the same situation. My mother came from a wealthy family and her father lost all of his money and that bothered her a

lot. But as far as we children and my dad, he just found another job, developed a dry dog food, traded the idea to the Carnation Company for a job and went on his way. That was a time when you coped, is what I'm trying to say.

Mr. Misenhimer

In Tom Brokaw's book, *The Greatest Generation* he feels that one reason for it is because of what people learned through the Depression; that it molded that generation.

Mr. Hoffman

I think it had something to do with our attitude towards fighting the war. There was a sort of stoicism that we felt in the sense that life is what it is and you do what you have to do and you might as well be happy doing it. Nobody was happy going to war but a lot of us enjoyed our time running the ships; operating them and the time at sea. So yes, I think probably the Depression experience had something to do with our attitudes later in life.

Mr. Misenhimer

It toughened them for one thing.

Mr. Hoffman

I guess you can look at it that way, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Hoffman

I went to three high schools. I went for two years in Seattle, one year in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and I graduated from Evanston Township High School in Illinois.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you graduate from there?

Mr. Hoffman

1939.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Hoffman

I worked for a summer in a milk condensory in Pennsylvania and then I went to college in the fall in 1939. I got my first degree in 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go?

Mr. Hoffman

I went to Marquette University in Milwaukee. That's where we were living then.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you major in there?

Mr. Hoffman

Philosophy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back. On December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall where you were when you heard about that?

Mr. Hoffman

Absolutely. I was sitting in an upscale cocktail lounge on Downer Avenue in Milwaukee when it occurred on Sunday afternoon. I suppose, like everywhere else, there was a lot of speculation about that sort of thing. We didn't know that we were going to get attacked but the country was not without knowledge of the threat in Europe and the efforts on the

parts of many to get us involved. So there was an atmosphere that anyone who was "tuned in" would realize that there was a threat of war hanging over us. We didn't know it was going to happen of course, so to that extent it was a surprise. I didn't know anything about Pearl Harbor, the Navy Base. I just knew that something dramatic and meaningful had occurred. I guess we looked at each other and finished our drinks and went on about our business.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you think it would affect you and you would have to go into the service?

Mr. Hoffman

Oh yes. Any of us of my age knew that we were going to be involved. The way that nations work; big nations with big wars, marshal their resources immediately; their steel, their rubber, everything they need. And their men. The young men all go into programs. So it didn't take a whole lot of deduction to realize that we were in the right age; my whole family, with three boys, was likely to be involved, and indeed we were. The question was how to address it.

Mr. Misenhimer

They started the draft in 1940; had you registered for the draft?

Mr. Hoffman

I suppose I had. I don't remember that specifically but I'm sure I must have.

Mr. Misenhimer

You graduated from college in 1943 and then when did you go into the service?

Mr. Hoffman

Actually I went into the service in 1942. In this business of marshaling the youth, or

aligning the youth of the nation, the Navy and other branches of the service put out these programs and they went to the colleges and universities and said, "You physically fit young men, join us and we will leave you in college. Go ahead and get your degrees and when you are finished we will grab you and if you've done okay, we will send you to officer's training." So about a year and a half before I graduated I joined a Naval Reserve program which was known as V-7. There was V-5 which was the same thing for guys that wanted to fly, but V-7 was the surface ship guys.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard of the V-12 also.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, that came later. One of the major differences was that the V-12 guys were put into uniform while they finished college but we didn't have to wear uniforms. We were in the Naval Reserve, the Army couldn't touch us. We had obligations to the Navy but we went on with our civilian life until we graduated. I went to work in an International Harvester plant just to have something to do when I graduated. About a month and a half later I got a letter saying, "Report to Great Lakes and get mustered in."

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you actually join V-7?

Mr. Hoffman

Probably March or April of 1942, to the best of my recollection. It was simply a matter of getting qualified physically and giving them my credentials in school and then I signed a paper.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you actually sworn into the Navy at that point?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, I was an Apprentice Seaman at that point but on inactive duty with the orders to complete my education.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any kind of pay or allowances or anything or uniform or anything?

Mr. Hoffman

No. We were just kind of put into a corner over here saying, "We'll get to you later."

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, you graduated in 1943 and then when did you actually go on active duty?

Mr. Hoffman

That was in August of 1943. I entered the USNR Midshipman's School in New York on August 24, 1943. I had a month there as an Apprentice Seaman and when we finished that month, those of us who were selected went on to become Midshipmen. So in September I became a Midshipman. Three months later, on November 24, 1943 I received a commission. I was a Deck Officer (Volunteer) in the United States Naval Reserve.

Mr. Misenhimer

As an Ensign, right?

Mr. Hoffman

As an Ensign, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that Midshipman's School and where was that at?

Mr. Hoffman

It was at Columbia University and it was fine. As I reflect on it, the Navy had the cream of the graduating classes from all over the country. I don't know how many of those Midshipman schools there were but I know personally of five or more. Notre Dame had one and the University of Washington had one. There were also other Naval ROTC's where young men received their training as part of their college curriculum. That was a different program, but they were putting out naval officers. These programs were well managed and they got guys from every walk of life. I would guess that 60% of our class had never seen the ocean.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you ever seen the ocean?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. I had the benefit of having been raised in Seattle, Washington. I fell in love with the Navy when I was a 10 year old kid. On Fleet Week out there they would bring all the ships of the Pacific Fleet in and put them in Puget Sound and we would get to ride out in those big 40 foot motor sailers. The water would splash over us and we would get to visit these big ships. At one time I even thought about trying to get into Annapolis.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you kind of had saltwater in your blood, huh?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, and my older brother was always interested in boats so I was around boats from the

time I was a young man, a boy really. To this day I'm the same way. I've sailed all my life and my children sail now. I just love being on the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever go through anything like boot camp?

Mr. Hoffman

Only the one month that we spent as Apprentice Seaman at Columbia. That approached boot camp but it wasn't quite as rigorous. They wanted to shape us up physically and they were looking at us, more than anything else, to see whether they thought we would make officer candidates. Some of the fellows got nudged out at that point.

Mr. Misenhimer

I wondered if some of them didn't make it.

Mr. Hoffman

For whatever reason, but I never got into that.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you graduated and became an Ensign then what did you do?

Mr. Hoffman

I had the unique experience of having finished 5th in a class of 1,200; partly because of my knowledge about boats, and because I had grown up in Seattle. I was ahead of these guys because I knew something about boats. So I don't lay it all to my credit, but because of that they gave me some options that some of the others didn't get. Back in those days the big threat was that if you were not at least in the upper half of your class you went in the amphibious service. Don't ever say that to an amphibious guy because they were just as proud, and they have every right to be just as proud as we were, but that was just the

way it was. One of the choices that I had was antisubmarine warfare. That gave me about six months in Florida in training. I said, "That sounds good to me." So I was trained as an Antisubmarine Warfare Officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that training? What all did that involve?

Mr. Hoffman

It was fine. I was down in Miami and we learned a lot about small ships because that's what we used. We learned about sonar equipment and how to use it and how to make attacks. We drilled onboard ship as well as in the classroom. There was a Fleet Sound School, two months I think it was, down in Key West that followed that. That was more technical; about the use of the gear and techniques for attacking submarines that were submerged and so on. More riding on small vessels that were doing antisubmarine warfare work. That was very enjoyable. I had appendicitis while I was there. I'm really not sure I had it, but it felt like I did. That provided two weeks sick leave in Miami. My girlfriend came down from Milwaukee. I loved that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

That didn't set you back in your class did it?

Mr. Hoffman

No. I really enjoy talking about this because it is the way nations work during a war. They had all us guys down there in training. My story is about destroyer escorts and are involved in what I tell you. 563 destroyer escorts were built in something over 2 to 2 ½ years. They were being built in every shipyard on all three coasts. While this was going on men like me were being trained to man those ships. Some were learning gunnery and

some were learning antisubmarine warfare as I was. Some were just learning deck officer duties and others, enlisted groups, were being trained to operate the ships. So all they had to do when I dropped out for two weeks was assign me to another ship; they were coming out of these yards like crazy. That's the way it worked. We went to Norfolk after I finished this specialized training. A nucleus crew was formed there for the destroyer escort USS *Damon M. Cummings*. She was DE-643 built in Bethlehem Steel Shipyard in San Francisco. That became my assignment with about another 100 mostly young fellows, but also in that group were the Chiefs. The program of Reservists wouldn't have worked without the regular Navy Chiefs that we had. There was just no way that it could have worked. The Chiefs were the guys who knew how it all worked. They were assigned to these small ships (and not all of them were happy about it). They formed the crews and organized them and trained them in the everyday affairs. It worked so well that after we got to San Francisco, in a matter of two weeks, the ship was commissioned and we were on our way to San Diego for a shakedown and then to war. The ship worked. We didn't bungle things. Everything worked fine. These kids, they were 17, 18, 19 years old, the crew of the ship, they were marvelous guys. They would do anything you asked them.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day did you go on the *Cummings* then?

Mr. Hoffman

I've forgotten exactly what our commissioning date was but I think it was about April or maybe March of 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything in particular that you can remember when you were getting ready here

on the Atlantic side?

Mr. Hoffman

We went through several weeks of a training as a “nucleus crew” of the *Cummings*. That training was done in Norfolk. I’ve read stories of other guys that were in the destroyer escort fleet and almost all of them, I guess, found their way into Norfolk for training before they went onto their ship. Then there was the notorious train trip from Norfolk to wherever the ship was. In our case it was all the way across the continent. Since I was the lowest ranking officer involved and the Chiefs were certainly not going to have anything to do with this. I became the Train Commander (laugh) 22 years old. We had 100 guys on those darn cattle cars and conditions were terrible. Five different railroads shared the pay of getting us from one coast to the other. They were all steam engines. The windows were open and the soot got into the bunks. Half-way over, the guys were maxed out when we stopped in Shreveport, Louisiana. As the train entered the yard, I told the conductor that we had to pull over. “We have to stop this train. We are going to get off and take some R&R.” He said, “Oh you can’t do that.” I said, “It is necessary. I want you to take the train over and put it on a side-track. There is a grassy field over there and we are going to get out and we are going to just take it easy for a little bit.” He said, “No, I can’t do that.” So I pulled myself up with my shiny new Ensign bars and said, “I think that I am in charge here.” (laugh) Here was this 40-something railroad man listening to this punk kid with a bar on his collar, but he gave way. He pulled the train over and the fellows got off. I found a tavern down a winding path by the railroad yard where there were a bunch of quart bottles of beer. To this day I marvel that they were there because there were 100 of us. I told the guys, “Now look, if you do this right, gather in groups of

ten, go down the little trail and talk to the owner, and each of you will get a quart of beer. You drink it and then come back up here and let the next group go down.” So they all did and the rest of them stayed up by the yard and played touch football. One of the outcomes of that was a fellow whom I’ve met at reunions since. While we were playing football I got called and one of them had a gash in his lower arm above his hand. It appeared that there was some broken glass out there in that grassy field and he had stumbled across that. We got him all wrapped up and sent him off to a sick bay somewhere and he joined us later in California. It turned out after all those years, we were chatting together at some reunion about five years ago and he told me the real story. What he had done was grabbed another quart of beer and hauled it up with him and he had stumbled and fell and it was that beer bottle that had cut him. (laugh) I laughed when he told me that. I said, “Well, in the official records you cut yourself on broken glass playing football.” Anyhow, we got back on the train and went on to San Francisco and we went aboard the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

These people on the train, were they enlisted people? The 100 men?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. I think the highest we had were a couple of First Classes and a Boatswain or two.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you the only officer?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes and that was again because I was the junior guy and all the other officers said, “Not me” and they all flew across the United States. In fact they only allowed officers four

days to go from one coast to the other and it took us five days. Therein also lies a tale. Last October in Albany, New York a few of our crew members met for a reunion. One of them was Jim Hood. We celebrated Jim's 90th birthday when we were up there in Albany. He was our Supply Officer on the *Damon Cummings*. Whenever I see Jim at a reunion I hit him up for that fifth day's pay. When the train finally got to California they said, "You are only allowed four days and you took five." I said, "I had this crew on a train." They said, "Sorry." (laugh) So the Navy still owes me a day's pay, which didn't amount to much based on \$110 a month.

Mr. Misenhimer

But that was big money in those days.

Mr. Hoffman

Not very big. We had to buy our own uniforms; officers had to buy their own uniforms.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you actually join the *Cummings*?

Mr. Hoffman

In San Francisco at Bethlehem Steel Shipyard.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship were you on in the Atlantic during this different training? Just different ones?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, just training ships. I wasn't permanently assigned to any of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the train trip did you have a Pullman with a place to sleep?

Mr. Hoffman

No. We had what we called cattle cars. They were really not much bigger than traditional cattle cars. They had windows down the side but they were rectangular, the same shape that cattle cars were. They had bunks thwartwise in the thing; tiers of bunks; three or four high. We slept in those things.

Mr. Misenhimer

You as an officer, did you sleep in there with the enlisted men?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. I didn't have any problem with that kind of stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about food on this train trip?

Mr. Hoffman

I don't remember much about the food; I really don't. It must have been alright because I don't remember anybody hollering about it. How we got it I'm not really sure. Probably it was supplied to us along the way because we didn't make too many miles each day. That's why it took five days to get across the country. That must have been how we got it. We were going 24 hours but with frequent stops.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard people say that trains like your troop trains had to give way to all of the other trains.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes we did and I did tell you that there were five different railroad companies involved. I think it was a matter of "sharing the wealth" as far as these railroads were concerned. We

would go a day or so and darn if we didn't stop on a side track and take the engine off and put another engine on from another railroad, and off we would go again for another day. It was a hoot. The fellows still talk about it at reunions.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you can remember from your time before you got to San Francisco?

Mr. Hoffman

No, it was mainly training getting ready to go aboard the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was brand new, so are you considered to be a plank owner?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes I'm listed on the original crew. She was one of the better DE's. There were various classes of DE's; I think about six. Many of them were driven with diesel. Ours was a steam driven ship with steam turbines driving generators which drove motors which drove the screws. That was a better, more efficient system. So we were able to make about 24 knots whereas many of the others were about 21.5 or 21.8 knots.

Mr. Misenhimer

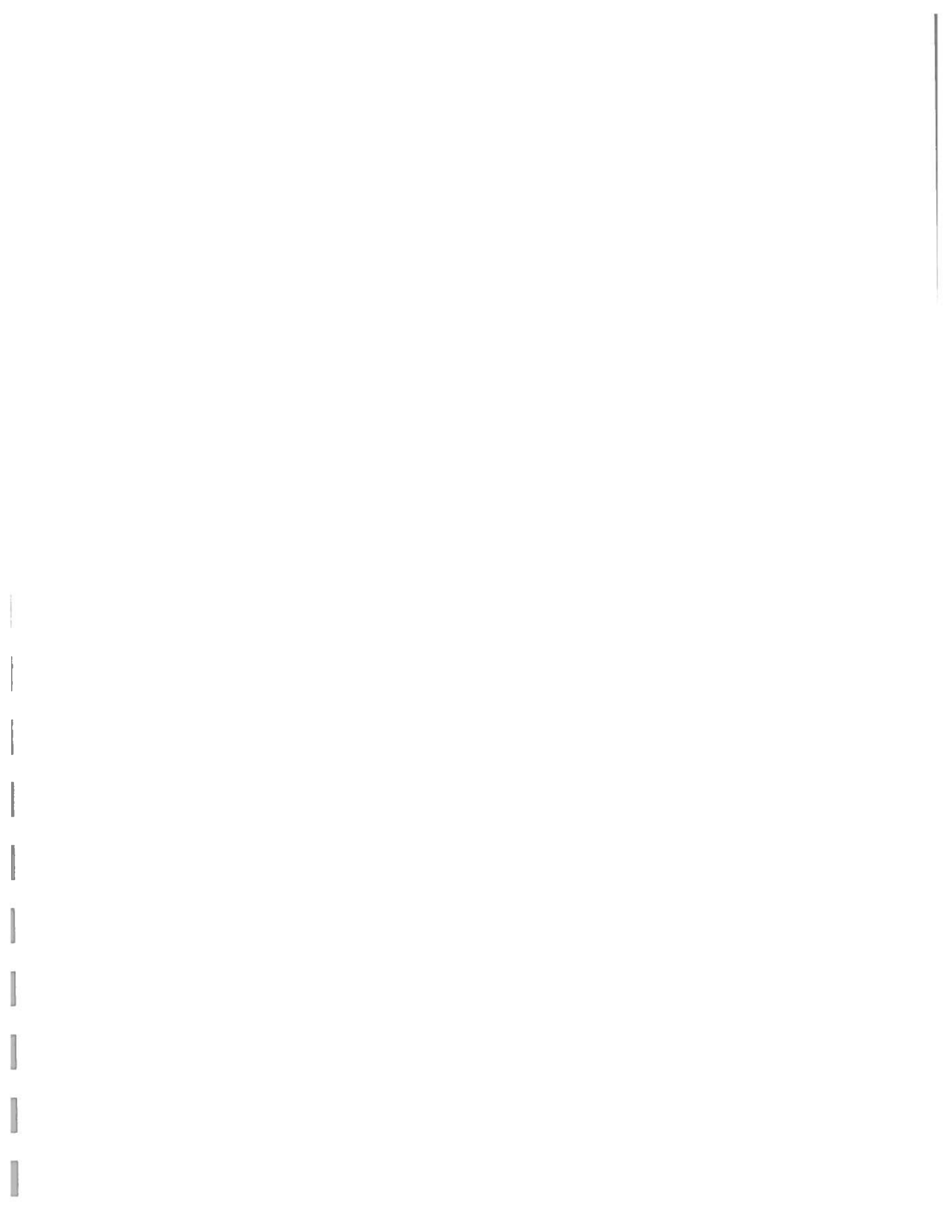
What fuel did you use?

Mr. Hoffman

Fuel oil, just regular fuel oil.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not diesel, but bunker?



Mr. Hoffman

Yes bunker fuel. We used the fuel oil to fire boilers. We had diesel engines on board but they were for auxiliary purposes.

Mr. Misenhimer

So your steam turbines drove a generator and you had electric motors on your screws.

How many screws?

Mr. Hoffman

Two screws with two rudders. The ships were highly maneuverable. They were very well designed. We laugh when we get together because there is a video that some of us have that was taken in a shipyard on the East Coast where they were building some of these destroyer escorts. One engineer is heard to say to the other one, "If we get six months out of one of these, it will be worth it." (laugh) They were not built for the protection of the crew; 3/8ths inch steel was what they were on the outside of the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

No armor plate?

Mr. Hoffman

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were the dimensions, the length and that sort of thing?

Mr. Hoffman

The ships were 306 feet long. There were a few earlier ones that were shorter than that, but the bulk of them 306 feet and about 34 feet wide. They were slender and they were shallow draft. They were designed that way partly for economy and partly for quick

maneuverability; and they were quick. They had two screws and two big rudders and you could turn them on a dime. That was necessary for making attacks on submarines and for evading torpedoes. They were designed precisely to be antisubmarine vessels. A lot of the design characteristics came from the British who had already started fighting that war against Hitler's submarines. They came to us and said, "Look, we can't do this. We don't have the resources. We don't have the industrial power." We started building these DE's before we got into the war. Indeed, the first 20 or 30 (or more) of them went to Great Britain. There are still reunions that have British crews who come to the United States and join us. And some of our guys go across to England to have a reunion over there. A number of the early DE's were manned by Coast Guard personnel. But after that the vast majority of them were strictly Navy. Another thing that I think is worth commenting on and is one of the things that I tell visitors that come aboard there at Galveston on the museum ship *USS Stewart*. These ships were essentially manned by the people that back through history were called "citizen warriors". Back in the Roman days, there was the tradition of people coming out of the ordinary civilian world and fighting. There was also a professional group. Our professional group was the regular Navy. But they were completely overwhelmed with the job of running their own war ships. So they turned to the civilians to man the other craft. I think it is worth noting how well the civilians did. Again, we scooped them up from farms, small towns, from every walk of life all over the United States with not much more than six months training and in many cases a lot less than that. We put them to sea in these small ships and it worked. When I tell the story of the DE's, and I did it for the Texas Historical Commission, I make a point of that. I think that is one of the things that should be remembered about those ships. There were

150,000 roughly that manned the small ships of the sort that I was on. I figure that there are not more than 50,000 now. I've had an occasion to contact a number of them to try to get them interested in our ship in Galveston. I can send out 100 letters and I get 30 of them back, "no such person at this address." That's just a fact of life.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's one of the reasons that we are getting alternative contacts.

Mr. Hoffman

Sure.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay let's go ahead now, you went to California and you joined the *Cummings* out there.

Tell me about that.

Mr. Hoffman

It was exciting. It was an adventure. I told you earlier that I was raised in an environment of ships and that it was a thrill for me to be a part of this thing. She looked just like the *Queen Mary* to us. When I first went aboard to report to somebody, and I don't recall now who it was, keep in mind I was the lowest ranking officer on the ship at that time. I immediately was instructed to climb the mast, right to the top. I thought quickly, with no time to reflect, "If I don't do that, I'll never have any respect on the ship." So I put my bag down and luggage, and climbed the mast. Then I was assigned to a little stateroom off the wardroom and went to work. It wasn't long before we were at sea.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who ordered you to climb the mast?

Mr. Hoffman

I don't remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

But it was some other officer?

Mr. Hoffman

It could have been anybody. It wouldn't have made any difference who did it, the point is that if I didn't show the courage to do it, the mast was 90 feet tall, and when you got up there and looked down, it's a long way down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have handholds?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. There are ladders on those masts but they are unprotected. But as I say, it could have been the Quartermaster on the Watch who had no authority over me at all but if he had said, "Do it" I thought at that time that the right thing to do would be to do it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any reactions from other people about it?

Mr. Hoffman

I think they did that with all the new Ensigns. They were just measuring us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you see that they had more respect for you for having done it?

Mr. Hoffman

What I can say is that, had I not done it, I think my life onboard would have been a whole lot different, but I know of nothing tangible. The first *Cummings* reunion my wife and I

went to happened while we were visiting friends in Charleston. My shipmates were holding their reunion in Charleston and so I said, "Mary Anne, why don't we go over to this reunion and see who's there." When we got a couple of minutes away from the hotel, I said, "In a few minutes we're going to find out what kind of officer I was because these guys are going to see me for the first time in 50-something years. The way they react to me, you are going to be able and I'm going to be able to tell what kind of officer I was." (laugh) I'm happy to say that they seemed to think highly of me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay, so you climbed the mast and then you went off to war you said. Where did you go?

Mr. Hoffman

The first stop was a couple of trials out in the San Francisco Harbor and then down to San Diego where most of the ships shook down under the auspices of the Navy Yard down there. I guess the shakedown was about two weeks. Just a whole variety of tests and drills and things like that. Then you are declared ready to go and you find yourself leaving the harbor there in San Diego to go out into the big Pacific. We left there and we didn't come back to the United States for 15 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you leave there?

Mr. Hoffman

Let me think. The ship was commissioned in March or April, so probably April. We went to Pearl first and then we went to Eniwetok. We shuttled around the islands a good bit out there in the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went to Pearl, were you by yourself or with other ships?

Mr. Hoffman

By ourselves. The war was far enough advanced then that it had been pushed over past the middle of the Pacific as far as we were concerned. The waters where we were were pretty safe.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Pearl what did you do there?

Mr. Hoffman

Provisioned and took on some more men. One of the interesting things was that's where we got Jim Hood, the supply officer I mentioned earlier. We didn't have a supply officer when we left. We needed one and so when we got to Pearl, Jim was ordered to come to our ship. It turned out that Jim already had orders to go to the *Samuel B. Roberts*. The *Samuel B. Roberts* was one of the destroyer escorts which confronted the *Yamato* and another task force down there in the Battle of the Philippines. So because we came along without a supply officer, he didn't make that trip on the *Samuel B. Roberts*. Their supply officer was one of the guys that survived from the *Samuel B. Roberts*. He has written probably one of the best accounts of what happened to them through that battle, and the almost four days they spent in the water. It was quite a story.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know the name of that book?

Mr. Hoffman

The Last of the Tin Can Sailors. It tells that story and a lot of others. I'm not that fond of the style of that book. He is a little bit brash. His characterization of us was a little flip I thought. But be that as it may, the story is still reliable about the *Samuel B Roberts*. Destroyer escort Sailors weren't "tin can sailors" for one thing. The "tin can sailors" were the destroyer crews. Back in those days the destroyer sailors wouldn't give us the time of day. They thought we were just brothers-in-law." If we were in the harbor with a destroyer, forget it. They would get everything and we would take what was left. We were not considered "tin can sailors."

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Pearl Harbor, was there still much damage there?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes there was a good bit of it. And of course the *Arizona* Memorial had not even been dreamt of yet. Stuff was still lying around. There was a good bit of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there?

Mr. Hoffman

Not long. We were just getting provisions

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a chance to go into town?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes we got on the beach. One thing that I remember is that they had macadamia nuts on the bars like you see peanuts on bars now. We did the usual thing. We went to the Royal

Hawaiian, the pink hotel. It's still there and it's still pink. It and the one next to it were all that was there on Waikiki Beach in those days.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that they had pretty much made the Royal Hawaiian for submarine people, is that right?

Mr. Hoffman

During the war, yes, I think it was an R&R place. But I'm not sure it was exclusively submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Not exclusively, but the majority were submariners.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, both of those hotels were R&R places. The ships were so far out in the Pacific; they were so far away that unlike the Atlantic, where they could take small ships like ours and bring them back to the States to do work on them and so on or take them to friendly nations on the European side where there were shipyards; out in the Pacific that wasn't the case. So about the furthest back that you would get would be to a place like Pearl Harbor, to Hawaii, for recreation. So when I say I was out 15 months to a guy that served in the Atlantic, he doesn't understand that.

Mr. Misenhimer

The size of the oceans is just so different.

Mr. Hoffman

They brought everything out to us. A ship our size was supplied by various types of supply ships; ammo ships, fuel ships and supply ships. They were spotted in various parts

of the Pacific and when we were near them we would go over alongside and get what we needed. There were tenders out there and we did use destroyer tenders because we were enough like a destroyer that the guys on the tenders could handle us as easy as they could handle a destroyer. And there were actually floating dry docks out there. We dry docked in the middle of the Pacific one time.

Mr. Misenhimer

And I understand they made supply bases out of places like Ulithi.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes and we spent a lot of time in Ulithi.

Mr. Misenhimer

So once we captured these islands they would make bases there.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, forward bases.

Mr. Misenhimer

Maybe now is a good time Dick. Tell me how was the crew on your ship.

Mr. Hoffman

A destroyer escort was pretty standard. The crew ranged from 210 or 215. Generally the officer group was maybe 15 to 18. There were about 15 officers normally and about 10 to 12 Chiefs. They were then broken down into the different organizations of the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about armament? What did you have in the way of guns?

Mr. Hoffman

The main battery was 3 inch 50's. We had three of those; two forward, one aft. The

secondary battery was a 1.1. It was our antiaircraft weapon. It was thought to be the equivalent of a 40mm but it really wasn't. It wasn't that good a gun. One of our gunnery officers was quoted as saying that, when he went to gunnery school, the guy that taught the class said, "I do hope that none of you are assigned to a ship with a 1.1." (laugh) Because it didn't always fire. But when we needed it, it fired. We were attacked by a kamikaze and we were able to shoot it down, and it was the 1.1 that did it. That morning it wasn't firing, but that afternoon when the plane came in, it was. Then the smaller guns were 20mm. Most of the ships at sea, including the merchantmen, had 20mm's.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were they dual?

Mr. Hoffman

No, ours were single. Now as an aside, we don't have our 20's on the USS *Stewart* in Galveston. We've been looking all over and cannot find a 20mm. Yet for all of the guns that were in the Navy, they must have outnumbered everything else. They are all gone.

Mr. Misenhimer

The 40mm was a 1.6 inch roughly. The 1.1 was a little smaller. Did it have an explosive shell?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. The shell with the projectile was about that long (indicating size with his hands). I have two of them as a matter of fact.

Mr. Misenhimer

About 12 to 15 inches long, yes.

Mr. Hoffman

They came in clips like the 40's did. This 90 year old shipmate that I was telling you about, Jim Hood, our supply officer, was the Gun Captain when we shot the kamikaze down. I like to tell this story about Jim because we were the hotshots. The deck officers with the stars on our sleeves and Jim was the Supply Officer, but everybody did something on ships like ours at battle station. Jim had the 1.1. So it was he, the Supply Officer, that got the kamikaze. Jim scooped up a couple of the shells out of the volley that brought that airplane down and he kept them all his life. Recently when I saw him, back last fall, up in Albany, he had the two shells with him. (Who was the guy that piloted the *Enola Gay*?)

Mr. Misenhimer

Paul Tibbits.

Mr. Hoffman

Paul Tibbits' signature is on each of those brass shells. Jim was a businessman in Indianapolis all of his life and he had gone to some event up there that Tibbits came to address. So Jim had the presence of mind to take his two shells and ask Paul Tibbits to autograph them and he did. One of them is now in the Museum of the USS *Slater* up in Albany, which is the DE-766. I have the other one that I am holding for our museum in Galveston.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you left Pearl Harbor, then where did you go?

Mr. Hoffman

Our first stop was at Eniwetok. That was our first taste of the Pacific. Most of the Chiefs

and senior officers had been to sea before, but by and large most of the rest of us had not been at sea. So here we were. We went into the harbor there and waited for further orders. We had a small adventure there. The water looked so beautiful, so clear. It was like Cozumel. So we persuaded the Skipper who was a "by the book" Annapolis guy who had left active duty to go into maritime law in New York. A nice guy. We talked him into a swim call. Somebody asked me about this the other day so its fresh on my mind. We all got into our trunks and dove over the side and boy, we got to looking at each other, and we all decided it was time to get out of the water. It was so hot it wasn't even fun. So then we got on the cargo nets and climbed back up and got on the deck, and immediately our feet were getting burned. We ran for cover. That was my main recollection from Eniwetok.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went from Pearl Harbor down there, were you by yourself or with other ships?

Mr. Hoffman

We traveled by ourselves.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you zigzag?

Mr. Hoffman

I think we probably did, yes. We didn't zigzag as much as one might suspect. I don't know just how that was determined as a matter of fact but I think it had to do with where the war had progressed. So as long as we were in the Central or Eastern Pacific there wasn't a lot of zigzagging going on. We went to convoy duty and patrolling shipping lanes for submarines. Some of it was this business of going from point tedium to point

apathy. But in the course of it we saw the Gilberts, we saw the Marshall's. We went in and out of Ulithi almost as a headquarters and the Carolines. I guess the furthest south and east that we got was Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. The way things worked out we crossed the equator about the time that it turned summer in the south. So we had 15 months of summer. We were in the northern hemisphere and then we went into the southern hemisphere. We moved around a good bit down there. We thought we were going to be lucky enough to get to Australia and New Zealand but it didn't work out. Then the Okinawa thing was on people's minds and we found ourselves working in that direction. We did some training down there. A lot of this was interesting because again, we were getting ready to go into the Okinawa thing as part of that armada. So they thought it would be helpful if we had some experience with antiaircraft. One morning we were instructed to head to a certain area where we were to be met by some friendly aircraft who were going to simulate attacks on our ship. Fine, we were all gung ho and ready to go. All of a sudden, at the appointed time, somebody hollered "off by the starboard bow, here comes one." So all of the guns on the ship train in that direction and man we would have nailed that guy, until as he was making his approach, the after lookout said, "One's back here." So here was another one coming in on our after quarters. So now what do we do? We split the gun batteries up and now we were aiming at two of them. Then somebody said, "Look over on the port beam" And here came a third one. About that time we realized what this was all about. There was no way we were an antiaircraft ship. We couldn't get our guns turned quick enough because most of our guns were manually controlled. We couldn't get them wheeled around that fast. So we went through the drill and shot at targets that were being towed and things like that

but we were really depressed when that day was over. (laugh) And that's the way it worked out. Fortunately we weren't ever under attack from multiple aircraft when we finally got into the battle at Okinawa..

Mr. Misenhimer

Antisubmarine war; did you all attack any submarines or find any?

Mr. Hoffman

I've been asked that question by my shipmates a number of times; almost every reunion somebody asks it again. I think as the antisubmarine officer onboard, to be honest, I have to say that I'm not sure that we ever contacted a submarine. Did we have contacts, yes. Did we run attacks, yes we ran some attacks but there is an uncertainty that goes with the primitive sonar that we had in those years that leaves me unable to sit here and say, "Yes we really were under attack by a submarine." We have no credit for sinking one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Most of them never fired a torpedo at you?

Mr. Hoffman

Not that I am aware of, no. Usually they would rather sink the ship we were escorting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, that's what they were after, were the bigger ones.

Mr. Hoffman

Right and even at that, I don't know that we were ever under attack by a submarine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any ships that you were escorting ever attacked by submarines?

Mr. Hoffman

No. We didn't do a whole lot of convoy duty. Our main escort duty occurred as we were leaving the Philippines going up to Okinawa. There were reputed to be 1,000 ships in that assault. Some historians now say that the Okinawa Battle Campaign was the largest one in the whole of World War II, Europe or the Pacific. We didn't think of it that way when we were part of it. We knew we were part of an enormous undertaking. The ships stretched all over the horizon.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard between 800 to 1,000.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, the number that we were told was 1,000. Our duty in the Pacific was largely unexciting you might say. We were always subject to running across a submarine but we really didn't get into a combat zone until we got past the Philippines. Then Okinawa was a big deal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you want to talk about that now?

Mr. Hoffman

That's fine. That too was fairly simple. Our job was to help escort this armada up there. It was full of supply ships, troop ships, auxiliaries of all kinds to support the fleet. It took us several days to get from the Philippines up to Okinawa. We arrived there late at night actually. As we approached the island I saw these lights floating through the air and I remember going to the Captain and saying, "Captain, what are those lights I am seeing?" They were 16 inch and 14 inch shells, the tracers on the back of them. The battleships

were already up there. The *Texas*, the *Nevada* and the *New Mexico*, some of the older ones were in there two or three weeks in advance, lying offshore just bombarding the island, just trying to soften it up. It turns out that they didn't do a lot of good. I still remember looking at those things as they floated. I always thought that a gun as big as that, the projectile would just go straight, zip. They don't; they lob them up into the air. We got there and our job was to escort some of the supply ships into the harbor. They went up on the beach and started discharging. They were to discharge all day. Toward evening we were then to be on hand, and as they left we were to pick up a certain group of them. The plan was that all of the supply ships would disperse and there would be no ships there overnight because they were vulnerable. But it didn't work out that way because they didn't get their job done in time and they didn't leave before dark. So here we were, all milling around, hundreds of the ships were close together. None of them anchored. They all thought they were going to leave as we did. But it didn't work out that way. So for about four or five nights it was a mess in there. We worked by radar so that we wouldn't run into each other. We were only moving about two or three knots. By that time I had become the Combat Information Officer so my job was to keep us from running into other ships as well as try to keep track of any enemy aircraft. The enemy aircraft only emerged at night to drop flares on us. We realized after some of this went on, after several days, they weren't trying to drop bombs on us; they were just trying to keep us up all night, and they succeeded in doing that. All of the warships had smoke makers on their sterns. So we would get orders to make smoke and that hid us from the enemy but it also hid us from each other and that made matters worse. That went on for about a week. Then everything settled down. Most of the discharge was done and the

troops were on the beach. There was no resistance when they landed. They went immediately to the airport. A big fuel tank was set on fire. I can still see that huge ball of orange; that stuff burned orange. It burned all night. Then it was a matter of our setting up a perimeter around the landing area. There was an outer circle and an inner circle. The destroyers were mostly on the outer one. Our job was to try to shoot down anything that came down and entered our area. The destroyer escorts were mainly on the inner circle. Then it was just a matter of going from point to point, back and forth to maintain your screen out there. That's when we lost destroyers, on the picket line. I remember one particular day we were assigned a point in the picket line right opposite Ie Shima. That's where Ernie Pyle was killed. I remember watching that from the deck of our ship. It was like a movie of a miniature war because everything was going on. Shore bombardment. Planes dive bombing. All the activity on Ie Shima. We were just lying offshore running back and forth but we were able to watch the whole thing through our binoculars. We learned, I guess that night, that Ernie Pyle had been killed. We did a whole lot of picket line duty up there. We got detached long enough to take one of the damaged cruisers down to Ulithi. That was a big break because it gave us a chance to get away from the stress. There were three attacks a day by the kamikazes. Not always everywhere and as a matter of fact we didn't know where they were going to attack but we knew that some of them would. They would send these flights of kamikazes down over us at dawn, at noon and at dusk. That went on for most of the time that we were there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now April 1st was the invasion. Were you there before the April 1st?

Mr. Hoffman

We arrived the night before April 1st.

Mr. Misenhimer

The night before; so you were there?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. That was the night that I saw those tracers. It was also April Fool's Day and it was also Easter Sunday.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you shoot your kamikaze down? There?

Mr. Hoffman

There, yes on one of the picket lines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that.

Mr. Hoffman

I'm not a good one to tell that story. Jim can tell it better and he does every time we are together. The reason I'm not is because, although I was the antisubmarine officer when I went aboard, we lost our CIC (Combat Information Center) Officer down in Manus.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you lose him to transfer?

Mr. Hoffman

George and I went to the officer's club that night and coming back, George stepped at the wrong time to get into an LCVP to come back to the ship and wound up, (bless his heart George Boone, a sweet guy), falling across the coming of the LCVP, cracking his ribs.

I'm laughing because it took George out of the service. He missed most of the Okinawa Campaign. He was getting his ribs repaired. George was a full Lieutenant. He was the CIC Officer. Then I got quickly promoted to CIC Officer. That put me inside so I didn't see anything. I was working the radar and the radios to keep the Skipper apprised of what was taking place around us but I couldn't see anything outside. All I could do was hear. I tell the story this way. When the 3 inch guns went off I didn't pay much attention because I knew those crews would be shooting at something long before they should because it was probably out of range. You couldn't do anything with 3 inch guns. When the 1.1 went off I began to pay attention; something was near by. When the 20's fired, as they did that day, I knew something was pretty close. I only had it reported to me that we shot the aircraft down; I didn't see it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there a bunch of them or just one?

Mr. Hoffman

There were a bunch of them around but there was only one that singled us out. According to Jim's story, the plane made one pass and then disappeared up into some clouds. Jim said it wasn't anything that he did that shot it down. He said to the crew, "Watch those clouds and when he comes out of there just open fire, fire at will." And that's what happened. The gun crew saw him and they got on him.

Mr. Misenhimer

So he went into the water then?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. He crashed into the water right near by. On another day, we picked up the body of a

kamikaze pilot that was floating by. There was a reason to check it out; to see if there was anything that he was carrying that would be helpful. That was a little episode that occurred one afternoon. I was up on the bridge and I went back aft after they had gotten the body out of the water. It was just a typical young man. He had been in the water some time and the body was bloated. He was in the black suit that they told us they were wearing. We got his wallet out and I looked through it. Of course, the first thing we saw was a picture of his family and a young woman who was probably his sweetheart. My reaction was simply, "Here's another guy, hoodwinked by some bad people and it cost him his life." He was just another young man caught up in the madness. They had the story of the Emperor being god and you do what the Emperor asks. And if you die then you go to heaven. Exactly like what is happening in Iraq right now. Different god, that's all. I think one of the smartest things that MacArthur did when he took over in Japan, was almost immediately, he marched the Japanese Emperor, the little man, out on the balcony of his palace and he made him announce publicly to his own people that he was not god. MacArthur was shrewd enough to understand that he had to do that before he could have any hope of converting that population. And he did it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you all were on the picket line did many kamikazes come after you out there?

Mr. Hoffman

We always knew they were in the area. The thing about it is that they were moving around at a couple 100 knots, and it wouldn't take long for one of them to find you. But you never knew when that might happen. So you were under a certain amount of stress. You knew they were in the area. On the other hand, from our point of view, we hoped

they didn't mistake us for a destroyer because that's what they were really after. The destroyers suffered a lot more damage than we did, along with any of the larger warships that they could find. I think it was a little unusual that one of them did single us out and attack us.

Mr. Misenhimer

They hit some LST's too.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. If their mission was about over and they were running out of gas; anything around became a threat. I think that's how they found us. He wanted to do his thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you at Okinawa?

Mr. Hoffman

With the exception of the time that we took the cruiser down to Ulithi, we were there the whole time.

Mr. Misenhimer

Three or four days, a week to get the cruiser down?

Mr. Hoffman

It was something over a week. We took her down, got her on her way home and then immediately we went back up to Okinawa for the rest of the time. Of my division, there were six ships in a destroyer escort division.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which one was it? Squadron?

Mr. Hoffman

I've forgotten how they designated us but anyhow there were six in a division. Of the six in my division, four ultimately suffered some damage. We had a longer time exposed than any of them so we're pretty grateful that we came through without damage.

Mr. Misenhimer

But none of them were sunk of the six?

Mr. Hoffman

No, none of them was sunk. There was damage and loss of life on some of them but we escaped any of that. We did get shot at. We had orders to go to the other side of Okinawa after the war had advanced some. We were running down the west coast of the island and we were going around the southern tip and we got too close to shore. It hadn't yet been neutralized. The after lookout called the bridge and said, "Look out there." All of a sudden we were seeing these splashes off our stern. (laugh) So we said, "Make a 90 and we'll head back out to sea" and we got out of range of the shore batteries.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you bombard the island at all?

Mr. Hoffman

No, our ships didn't have that kind of armament to do bombardment. The destroyers did with their 5 inch guns. We weren't big enough. After things had settled down, we were anchored one afternoon and I was up on the bridge. Here came along a little spotter aircraft. The way that destroyers worked, these poor guys in these little Piper Cub type planes had to hang around over the shoreline. They were acting as spotters for the destroyers. One of them came by us and he slowed down and opened his little door and

leaned out and said, "Do you have anybody named 'so and so' down there?" He had a buddy that was on a DE like ours. He was going so slow I was able to lean back and say, "No, not on this ship." (laugh) He closed his door and drove on. There were a lot of them up there that were a lot more exposed than we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else from Okinawa?

Mr. Hoffman

That is most of it. It finally came to an end with those bombs that we dropped. We had in our possession by that time, a black book about an inch thick. It was the operation orders for the invasion of Japan. So had Japan not capitulated we knew exactly where our ship was destined to go and it was not a comfortable place to go. We would have been in a little set of islands just south of the southmost Japanese islands.

Mr. Misenhimer

South of Kyushu?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. I had always thought, "That's not a very good place to be because we would be right where everybody would be going to Japan from Okinawa, it was not a good place." I didn't find out really how bad it was going to be until I read a later account of how that invasion was to occur. The invasion was to start with a small group of islands just off of the southern tip. That's where we were going to make our initial invasion. We were going to establish a base there and work from that base. That's where the *Cummings* was going to be. (laugh) I didn't know that until a couple of years ago when I read something that pointed it out. Anyhow, it didn't happen.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what?

Mr. Hoffman

We cruised a little bit offshore after we heard that the war ended. My main reaction to that was we didn't want to turn our running lights on again. After you run dark for that long it was uncomfortable with lights, to advertise where you are. I know as a matter of fact that one of our ships, one of our destroyer escorts, was sunk at the end by a Japanese submarine.

Mr. Misenhimer

This was after the 15th of August?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. They either didn't get the word or they saw an opportunity to get in one last hit.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think that more than likely that's what happened.

Mr. Hoffman

Then we were ordered in to Japan. We were there a week after the signing. We had a couple days at Yokuska at the naval base.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go ashore?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. Unfortunately I was deprived of some of my time because I got the flu. I had some kind of a bug and I was only able to spend two or three days onshore. But that was enough to be immensely interesting. We were moored there at Yokuska. One of my

friends, the Assistant Engineering Officer, Jim Brown and I went on the beach. We got into the officer's club at Yokuska Naval Base. There was a table set up and I got a cup and saucer off the table. That was good china compared to ours; quite pretty.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any interaction with the Japanese people there at all?

Mr. Hoffman

No, not directly. We were in among them. We rode one of their trains over to Tokyo. Everybody was very polite and considerate.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you feel threatened or like there was any danger being with those Japanese people?

Mr. Hoffman

No. They were puzzled more than anything else.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you armed? Did you carry a weapon?

Mr. Hoffman

We were instructed to not take our sidearms. I think that was a wise instruction. So none of us was armed and therefore we were not threatening. The Japanese? How would you react if you were them? They were so terribly devoted and determined to win. They were set up with pieces of wooden sticks with the ends burned to a point. They were going to fight to the last ditch. We got on the beach. We were walking on the outskirts of Tokyo and I saw what appeared to be just a grassy area, perhaps a mile square. I had expected to see a residential area. Then it dawned on me. There, surrounded by grass, were tops of brick chimneys. I was looking at the remains of houses. There was more devastation from

napalm, firebombing, than there was from the atom bombs.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. People don't realize it but that killed a lot more people than the A-Bombs did.

Mr. Hoffman

So I got a look at some of that. I saw the Imperial Palace, and I saw Frank Lloyd Wright's Imperial Hotel, which is now gone. One of my sons had business in Japan and told me they've put another hotel there now. The original hotel was one of the first earthquake-proof buildings they built over there. Then we headed back. We set our going home pennant-most of the length of the ship from the masthead-and off we went. We made our way back to Pearl Harbor and got some new personnel on board. One fellow was a brand new Ensign and we put him on the Quarterdeck Watch so we could go ashore. At the change of the watch, he mishandled his Colt .45 and he shot our Second Class Gunner's Mate right through the buttocks. Of all the guys he could've shot, he picked one of the nicest men on the ship. Fortunately it didn't hit any bones. So here we are on our way home, everybody was just gung-ho to get home and we've got an incident that could have turned us over to a Board of Inquiry. (laugh) Fortunately we had an Exec who was an Annapolis guy. He wasn't regular Navy but he knew a lot of folks at Pearl. So the first thing he did was to call up some of his friends and say, "Hey, we've got this injured guy. We need to put him on the beach for medical treatment, but we don't want to say anything about this (laugh) because we are supposed to sail in the morning for home." So we got him taken care of and back onboard that night and then we left as fast as we could get out of there before anybody could notice what happened. (laugh) The

Skipper gave the new Ensign a bad report in his service jacket. The new officer just didn't think that was quite fair. We got back to the States. We went into Bremerton where we badly needed to go because for 15 months we had not been around a shipyard. We went in for a pretty major overhaul. We gave everybody leave. There was lots of rejoicing. Everybody went home. When I got back most of the older officers had been relieved and we had a new Skipper. Even though I was not really experienced enough to do the job in wartime, they made me Exec. So on the ship's second cruise, I went out as the Executive Officer. I knew how to do what we needed to do then, but I didn't have the experience to fight the ship and I hadn't had any ship handling. But things went well. We went back to Shanghai. We were assigned as a flagship for a "four-striper." Then things got really quite interesting. I was also the navigator. We took the ship down from Shanghai through the Formosa Straits, Hong Kong, down to French Indochina. We stayed at Haiphong for several weeks. Our new "guest" was in charge of a flotilla of LST's. What the LST's were doing was taking Chinese Nationalist troops out of South China and hauling them up the coast and putting them into Tsingtao against the Communists. I don't think the people at home ever really knew our country was that deeply involved in the affairs of China. We had an interesting time at Haiphong though we were just moored at a wharf and just kind of stayed at the harbor there. As we arrived they were picking up a kid who sentries had killed. He had been stealing rice out of the bags of rice that were stored on the wharf. They were kind of nasty down there. We saw some interesting things. Our crew adopted a little kid out of a gang of children who lived on the wharf. They had been thrown out by their families, or they may have been orphans. Families were so poor they couldn't take care of the children. Children gathered

on the wharfs down there in a little troop and maintained themselves by stealing rice and anything else they could find. So being typical Americans, our crew found this little naked kid and adopted him. The next thing we knew they had sewn together a little uniform and had him decked out like an American Sailor.

Mr. Misenhimer

How old of a kid was he?

Mr. Hoffman

We could only guess because his age was not readily apparent. We figured he might have been 12. We officers began to worry because we thought he might be turned on by the other kids. The crew got him clothed and then we began to see food from our ship going over to him. This really worried us. We thought the other kids might attack him. Do you know what he did? He took the sandwiches that our crew gave him and the other little kids would gather round, and he would parcel them out to them. When our time came to leave and we had been feeding him by that time, we didn't know what was going to happen. Remember when we got there they were picking up the body of a little kid that one of the sentries had shot. The sentries kept their distance when they realized that we were looking after this little kid. There was an Army base up on the hill, a weather station or something, or maybe it was even part of our intelligence. We got hold of the guys in charge up there and told them our story. When we were leaving, there were a couple of Army officers, one on each side of the little boy. He was standing at attention and saluting us as we were leaving. That was in Haiphong. From Haiphong we went down to Saigon. We were the first major war vessel to make an official visit down there since before the war. We lasted for about three days and then they threw us out. They said they

couldn't any longer assure our safety unless we turned up the next morning with everybody wearing an American flag patch on his sleeve. So we got orders to leave. We went back up through Hong Kong to Shanghai. Because I was Exec I had to have a Bureau of Personnel replacement. He was an Annapolis graduate, a Lieutenant. I got relieved and got on a troop carrier and came home.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Saigon, why were you no longer safe there?

Mr. Hoffman

This was French Indochina, not Vietnam. At that time there were three factions trying to grab French Indochina. There were the Chinese who finally saw their time to take back what they thought was theirs. There were the Vietnamese who were jumping up and down saying "this is our chance to be free" and then there were the French who wanted their colony back. Everybody was fighting everybody. There were three sentries in front of every building up at Haiphong. One from each faction. We were able to go in and out of the city, and we spent a good deal of time over there during the day. One Sunday for example, I asked the Skipper if I could take a church party over to the Catholic church there. He said fine. There were about ten of us. The men fell in behind me and we were walking through town. We had to walk in the middle of the streets. We weren't in military formation but it could of looked like that because I was an officer and the fellows were kind of two and three side by side, behind me, as we were hiking off to church. We got into the middle of town and one of the Chinese sentries jumped out in front of me and put a rifle right in my stomach. I just sort of doubled over that rifle in shock and the guys behind me kind of piled up like dominoes. I didn't know what to do.

The first reaction I had was that there was no way in the world that I could communicate with this man. I couldn't tell him we are going to church. He had no idea. I'm sure he was wondering why he stopped us. But there we stood. He backed away a step and I backed up a step hoping to ease things. Then we looked at each other. Time passed. We stood there for a minute, probably not that long. Then I looked over my shoulder. The guy had backed off two steps by then. I said, "Let's go." (laugh) So we started walking slowly and he didn't do anything, so we went on to church. But it was that kind of environment down there. There was shooting every night. We could hear the shots.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the Communists trying to take over at that point too?

Mr. Hoffman

No, they weren't down there. The Communists were up north.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about in Saigon? Were there any Communists?

Mr. Hoffman

No. That's why we were down there. We were to get the Chinese Nationalist troops and take them up north to fight the Communists. They were in such bad shape, Richard. They had to be declared healthy enough to stay with their Army as it was boarding our LST's. It was pitiful because they were scared to death they were going to be left behind. The Chinese Armies, then, lived off the land. They lived from whatever they could scrounge from the population. By the time we found them as they came out of the interior they were a ragged bunch. I went over one night to see what they did look like while they were loading on to the LST's. The ramp was probably about a 30 degree incline going up

to the ship. The medical test, well, there was a doctor there looking at them, but the real medical test was simply, could they get up that ramp? It was really pretty sad. These guys were frightened because if they couldn't make it up the ramp they knew they were going to be left behind. It was just a matter of sure death for them. They wouldn't be helped by anyone. They told us down there that, culture-wise, if you tried to help somebody and you were a good Samaritan, you became responsible for that person. They didn't have enough to take care of their own families. So if you were out of luck and ill, you were just cast aside. They were so dirty, they were not allowed below deck on the LST's. They kept them up on the main deck during the whole trip up to Tsingtao. They hauled them up and turned them loose against the Communists. Tsingtao is where they were putting them ashore. It was an interesting experience.

By the time I got to Shanghai my replacement had finally found the ship. He took over and I went back into Shanghai and got a ride home - 21 days in the hold of a troop ship. I finally left Shanghai in May of 1946. I hung around in a hotel there for a couple of days. The guys who were arranging our transportation home, because there were so many of us over there, said, "Hey look, if you want to stay for a while, I've got plenty of others." I had no reason to rush home, so I really wanted to stay in Shanghai for a while but I couldn't get any money. I had sent all my money home and it was in the bank. There was no way to get a check cashed over there so I finally had to give up that scheme. I took a ride on this old troop ship back, 21 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get involved at all in repatriating the Japanese troops from China back to Japan?

Mr. Hoffman

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Because they were doing a lot of that too. Were you aware of that?

Mr. Hoffman

No, I really wasn't. What we did the whole time we were in China was just serve as a floating hotel for our "four-striper". I still remember his name, Captain Peden.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then did you get out then; or when did you get out; or did you stay in?

Mr. Hoffman

No I didn't stay in. I was anxious to get back to civilian life. I had plans to go to law school. So I got back home in latter May I guess and I think I was discharged from active duty in June of 1946. I stayed in the Naval Reserve and worked with the Active Reserve. We had something once a week and then a weekend once a month or something like that. I stayed with that while I went through law school. My parents had moved to Dallas by that time. My father's business took him down there. So when I finished law school I followed them down to Dallas. I stayed in the Reserve even after I left Dallas and went to Houston. I wish that I had stayed in it until retirement because I enjoyed that aspect of the Navy. I liked being around the ships and that sort of thing but I dropped out. My business was pressing and I had a boss who was ambitious for me. He told me that I didn't have time to do that kind of stuff. That was it.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Hoffman

During the War I was a Lieutenant jg.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when you were discharged you were a jg?

Mr. Hoffman

I was a jg when I was discharged. Ultimately I became a full Lieutenant before I left the Naval Reserve.

Mr. Misenhimer

During the Reserves?

Mr. Hoffman

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Hoffman

That's a story. (laugh) I wasn't a collector. I kind of wish that I had been. But I did bring back the saucer and the cup from Yokosuka. My dear wife, bless her heart, not realizing what it was, held a garage sale and it disappeared. (laugh) Other than some pictures, the only souvenir that I have is a heavy bronze ashtray, that weighs about three pounds. It was like the ash trays that were in the ship's wardroom. The shipyard, Bethlehem Steel, made it a policy to give each plank owner officer one with his name on it. I do have that and it will wind up on the USS *Stewart* after I pass away. I sent that home to a young

woman with whom I had gone for several years before I went to war. She married a Marine that was injured on Iwo Jima and got home early. So I wanted my ash tray back, but she wasn't going to give it to me. I had to go to her mother's home and almost forcibly take it away from the mother. I still have it. I have logs and stuff that shipmates have shared with me, so I have a fair bit of information about the ship that I was on, but I didn't bring a lot back.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you find most frightening?

Mr. Hoffman

I thought about that particular subject. I don't know if you want me to bring it up now or not, but since it's on our minds, let me comment. I decided the things about which I was most frightened were things that I did not know or understand. In the ordinary conduct of the war there was no use to be frightened because a rational individual would say that we are in the middle of a war and one of these things can hit us. When I was frightened was when something happened that I didn't understand. One of these instances occurred in a place called Kerama-Retto which is a ring of rocks that stick up and form a circle just southwest of Okinawa. Early in that invasion we neutralized that little ring of rocks because it was a protected area. There were Japanese still up there climbing around those hills that I call rocks. We used it for repairs and supplies. We would retire from the picket line and come down there and get fuel and so on. One night we were ordered into Kerama-Retto. By the time we got there it had turned dark. We were inside the harbor which was filled with ships. We found our way over to the point where we were supposed drop our anchor. We got a call from the lookout on the foredeck. An unknown

object was moving towards us. At that time the Japanese, like those in Iraq right now, used everything they could to kill us. They had a suicide version of just about anything, any device that you could think of. One of them was simply to put a man in the water with a rope attached to a mine and have him swim over to your ship and detonate the mine. So we didn't trust anything. If anything came at us that we couldn't identify, we would shoot at it. We shot at orange crates and all sorts of things when we later identified them. So here was this thing coming towards the ship. I am on the bridge with the Skipper and the others are up there. We keep getting these reports. We don't want to turn on the 24" searchlight because we would give away our location. So we were in a dilemma. We didn't know what was happening. That was the source of my fear. I got frightened. The Captain said, "Hoffman, go down (there were some ladders over that part of the superstructure). Run down there and see what you can see." So I scrambled down the ladder to the foredeck. I couldn't see anything but this black object slowly moving towards us. All of this happened within about a minute or two. Finally the Skipper gave way and turned the light on. It turned out to be a marker buoy, which was something where, i.e. somebody had lost an anchor or something under the water, they put these marker buoys on them so they could go back later and find it. It wasn't moving; we were. We were slowly moving towards it. All of our engines were stopped. That's the kind of thing that caused fear for me. That leads me to the time that we were in Okinawa, a short time after we got up there. This huge armada of ships was in the big bay where the landing occurred near Naha. I had a radioman hand me a clipboard one afternoon with a decoded message. The message said the Japanese battleship *Yamato* is coming to see you guys. (laugh) The story was simple. They are accompanied by three or four cruisers and

an array of destroyers. Their mission is to come directly down from Japan right into your harbor, beach and then shoot at you. These were 18" guns they were going to be shooting at us. I was scared then. I went to bed that night thinking, "In the morning I'm going to wake up to all of this stuff." It never happened. But again, it was something that I couldn't comprehend, so therefore, I couldn't cope with it. It turned out of course, and this guy might have been nice enough when he sent the message out, to tell us, that we had a major carrier task force up there in between the *Yamato* and us and you know the story of them wiping out the *Yamato* and sinking all but a couple of the destroyers. That was the end of the Japanese fleet. Those were instances of my having been frightened.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Hoffman

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross; good or bad?

Mr. Hoffman

No. The closest we got to any entertainment was when we went into one of the harbors and a hospital ship came in. There were a lot of ships in the harbors, all of the guns of the ships in the harbor trained on the hospital ship as soon as it arrived. Everything. It was readily understandable if you stop and think. There were telescopic gunsights on those guns and what these guys were doing was looking for the nurses. (laugh) The guns were just following the hospital ship as it came in. Up on the bridge, we officers were using our binoculars.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were out on that 15 month cruise, could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. Each ship was its own little post office then. We had a guy aboard that was the post master. It could be a long time. It was not uncommon for mail to take two and three weeks to make a trip out there.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's pretty good, two or three weeks.

Mr. Hoffman

Yes, so you never knew. When you wrote letters you didn't write with the idea of getting a lot of information through quickly; that wasn't it. You were visiting more than anything else with people. Speaking of letters, I was talking with some people recently. One of the jobs that officers had on the ship was to censor mail. Everybody thinks that might have provided a bit of voyeurism, but that's a mistake. It got very boring, very quickly. All we were looking for was information that might reveal the location of the ship and what we were doing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes we listened to her all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Hoffman

She was great. She had the best music out there. Fortunately we had enough information of our own not to be suckered by anything she had to say. But her music was good and we kept her on a lot.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you crossed the equator, what kind of ceremony did you have there?

Mr. Hoffman

The typical. We did a pretty good job at that. The Chief Boatswain King Neptune.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were a polliwog and had to go through all that?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes I had to go through it the first time. They did a good job with us. The older guys were the ones that put it on. I have sung all my life so they made me sing a song. Then they had the cargo nets on the deck. We had to wear everything that we could put on above our waist, but just our swimming trunks below. We had to crawl under those cargo nets while they were spraying water on us with the fire hose and things like that. They did a good job of setting it up. It was something that you remember. I still have the certificate. My children had it framed for me some years ago. It hangs on the wall in my den.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers that you had over you?

Mr. Hoffman

I can't honestly say that I had any problems with any of them. They were decent guys.

Like any group of people, you hit it off with some better than others depending on your backgrounds and your interests in life and so on. We spent a lot of time together; 15 months is a long time to be on a 300 foot ship. By and large they were fine folks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have the same Captain the whole time?

Mr. Hoffman

During the war cruise we did, that 15 months. We changed Captains just before we returned. On the second cruise we had another Skipper. I had no problem with any of them. Each was different from the others. One, as I mentioned earlier, was a maritime lawyer. He had to be right at 40 at least; he looked older than that. He was a chain smoker and kind of a shy sort of fellow. Very much of a "by the book man." He was one of the guys that had been in the water; he was on the *Wasp* when it was sunk. He was deathly afraid of submarines. I can remember still, when I was in CIC, we were in a combat situation and I said, "Captain we've got an aircraft bogey over here at so and so." I can still hear him saying, "The hell with the airplanes Hoffman, where are the submarines." He was a decent man. I went out and visited him right after the war. He was back in his cubicle in his law firm up there in New York.

Mr. Misenhimer

These officers that you had; any particular strengths or weaknesses that you recall about them?

Mr. Hoffman

They were all Reservists. The Skipper and the Exec were both Lieutenant Commanders and they had gone to Annapolis but after their obligated service, they chose different

careers. One went into law and I've forgotten what Commander Heerde did. He was a very decent fellow. The other guys, well one of them, his family owned some small hotels. Another guy, I don't know what he did before the war, but he had a big black 1941 Roadmaster convertible Buick. He had it there in San Francisco with him so he must have had some money. A nice guy. The officer group, in fact everybody - I had no problems with any of the guys onboard.

Mr. Misenhimer

On April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Hoffman

Of course I do.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of reaction was there to that?

Mr. Hoffman

I think we all had pretty much the same reaction, at least those that I have talked to about it. There was a real sense of loss. I wasn't a Roosevelt fan and I'm still not a Roosevelt fan. I was enough aware of politics, even back then, that I really didn't like the way that he was running the country. But he was my Commander in Chief and that's what counted. We were out in the middle of things up there, under a lot of stress, and all of a sudden to lose our Commander in Chief was like losing the Captain on the ship. So it made a definite impression. We had no idea what Mr. Truman was going to do.

Mr. Misenhimer

He was a complete unknown.

Mr. Hoffman

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then on May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What reaction?

Mr. Hoffman

That didn't mean much to us. In fact I think if anything we were a little miffed because the whole world went into a great celebration with VE-Day, and by the time VJ-Day came along there wasn't much celebrating. We were glad it was over, obviously, but VE-Day didn't mean much to us. We had the worst of it still ahead of us.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan did surrender on August 15th did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Hoffman

No, not a celebration. There's no way to celebrate on a ship like that. There was just a tremendous sense of relief. Our thoughts then could turn to coming home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you at when you heard about that?

Mr. Hoffman

At Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer

Kay Clemenson yesterday said that they had the biggest fireworks display he ever saw. That all the ships shot all of their tracers and everything.

Mr. Hoffman

I don't remember that but we may have been off by ourselves doing some patrol duty. I do not remember that. My recollection is that we were cruising offshore somewhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Hoffman

No. I don't remember a lot of guys that did. I had tons of friends that were coming out of the service. There was an attitude that we had just finished something that we had to do and now it was time to get back to the main part of our life. I don't know quite how to explain it. Sure, there was a certain exhilaration in getting back in civies again. I don't think we really looked back much. We just went on with our lives.

Mr. Misenhimer

You started to college then, did you?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. It was my plan to go to law school. When I got back I was disappointed I couldn't get into the law school of my choice. My scholastic record was pretty good, and I think I could have made one of the better law schools. Because I didn't get out immediately after the war ended the law schools were just flooded with guys. I wound up going back to Marquette. Not that I regret it, it was a good law education but I wanted really to go to the University of Michigan. It was one of the more prestigious law schools then.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned reunions. You have had quite a few reunions have you?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. My wife and I were in Utah one time and ran into a couple in a restaurant and, as people do, we got to chatting. They were saying that they were on the way to a DE reunion and the man's wife nudged him and said, "You'll have to tell these people what a DE is." We started laughing. One thing led to another and I'm not a reunion guy, I had never been to one in my life. But he took my name and address and about two months later I began to get letters from old shipmates. All of this stuff started flooding back into my mind. Some of these names I didn't remember until I got the letters. I began to reconstruct all of this. We had an occasion to be in Charleston visiting with some friends down there when my ship was having a reunion. So I said, "Let's go over and see them." Well we fell in love with them. They are just a wonderful group of people. This year, those who still can, are coming to Galveston.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this is from the *Cummings*?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes from the *Cummings*.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the first one that you went to; when was that?

Mr. Hoffman

The one in Charleston was or first. It must have been 9 or 10 years ago or longer than that. My wife was still well. It would have been during the 1990's some time.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went back to law school, did you use your GI Bill for that?

Mr. Hoffman

I sure did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use it for anything else?

Mr. Hoffman

To buy a house, sure. That was a wonderful thing. The State of Texas also did a good thing with its land purchase program.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Texas Veteran's Land Board?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes. That was a really smart move. A lot of the states gave money and the money was just squandered, but what they did here in Texas, I think was really good. I got those benefits and without question I am very grateful for them.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and battle stars did you get?

Mr. Hoffman

World War II Victory Medal. American Campaign Medal. Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal with one Battle Star. Navy Occupation Service Medal. China Service Medal. Combat Service Ribbon.

Mr. Misenhimer

One battle star?

Mr. Hoffman

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's for Okinawa I'm sure?

Mr. Hoffman

That's right. It was the biggest battle in the war and it only rated one star. (laugh)

End of Interview

Transcribed by:

Lesle W. Dial
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Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer
P.O. Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
Home: (361) 664-4071
Cell: (361) 701-5848