

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. George Feliz

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Interview in progress.

Floyd Cox: This is Floyd Cox. I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Today is October the 24th, year 2007, and I have the pleasure to interview Mr. George Feliz regarding his experiences during World War II. The interview is taking place in the Oak Hills Medical Center Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. 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. George, I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview with us, and I'd like to start off by asking you a few of the basic questions...when you were born, where you were born. Tell me a little bit about your parents and your siblings and we'll just take it from there.

Mr. Feliz: Okay, I'm George Feliz and I was born in Florence, Arizona February the 22nd, 1924. My parents had a little farm outside of Florence about six miles out of Florence and that's what...where I was raised. I went to school at this...it was a two-room school house and I grad...graduated from the eighth grade there. And when I graduated there was three of us that graduated that year and it was...my cousin, a girl and myself. So that was a pretty big class for...for that year there because...usually there was either one or two and

that's...that's what...what it was! And you know...you used to...out in the country and...and...in those days...why, you know, it...there...there was hardly anybody living out there!

Floyd Cox: Sure!

Mr. Feliz: It...just the people that...that worked out on the farms or...or that lived there on the little farms of their own.

Floyd Cox: Sure. Now what'd you do after you graduated, George?

Mr. Feliz: I went to the high school in Florence, and then I had...we had the...ride the bus because it was six miles to...to Florence from...from where I lived.

Floyd Cox: And you graduated what year?

Mr. Feliz: In 1942 I graduated from high school.

Floyd Cox: And what did you do after you graduated, George?

Mr. Feliz: I went to a...a welding school in Tucson, Arizona, and when I graduated from the...from the welding school, I went to work in Oak...Oakland in the shipyards in Oakland. And I was there for, oh, it wasn't even a year and...in order to stay on that job you had make a...you have to become a journeyman, so...and I couldn't make it; I wasn't that good at...at welding, so I knew I was going to get drafted...get my...at the...that they were going to call me to...for...to go into the service. But I didn't want to get caught and leave from there...from Oakland, so I...I went home. I came back to Florence and I hadn't been there maybe a month and I got a letter...

Floyd Cox: Greetings!

Mr. Feliz: Greetings...there...to...go and get my physical in Phoenix, and so this...this was in 1943 when...when I got called in. I went in the...in the Navy.

Floyd Cox: Now did you have your choice of going in the Army or the Navy?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, they asked me if I wanted...what branch of the services I wanted...they wanted...I wanted to go in and I...I thought I was going...you know it was just automatic Army because...because I was drafted. But no, he asked me and so I...I joined the Navy.

Floyd Cox: Is there any particular reason you selected the Navy over the Army?

Mr. Feliz: Really, well I had two cousins that...we were very close; we lived right there almost in...in the same...just maybe fifty feet from...from each other. We were born and raised there almost, you know...

Floyd Cox: Sure.

Mr. Feliz: ...because the...the farm was...it was four brothers that...that owned the land there and they...and they all lived right there. They all had their...their houses (unintelligible) there, so we were all raised there, you know, the four families were...went to school at this...

Floyd Cox: Very close then, weren't you?

Mr. Feliz: ...very close then, uh-huh.

Floyd Cox: Very close.

Mr. Feliz: So...they...they joined...they were in the...they went in the...they weren't drafted, they...they volunteered and they went in the Navy. So I says, "(unintelligible) guys," says, "I want to go in the Navy because I've got two

cousins that are in the Navy.” And that’s...that’s what...why he did, so I went in the Navy!

Floyd Cox: So once you joined, where did they send you, George?

Mr. Feliz: They...I went through boot camp in San Diego.

Floyd Cox: Oh!

Mr. Feliz: My boot camp...company number was 190...yeah.

Floyd Cox: How...how did you find boot camp...your being a farm boy from Arizona?

Mr. Feliz: I was one of the lucky ones. I was only in boot camp for twenty-one days.

Floyd Cox: Oh my goodness!

Mr. Feliz: Twenty-one days...I couldn’t believe it!

Floyd Cox: Less than a month!

Mr. Feliz: Yeah! They...they sent me to a...Signal School in Los Angeles right there where the...where the ballpark is now. At that time the...they had...it...it was a...an armory for the Los...for the City of Los Angeles, and...and they converted it into a Signal and Radio School. So I went to this...Signal School there for four...four months.

Floyd Cox: And what did you learn in...in Signal School, George?

Mr. Feliz: Well I learned how to read Morse code and send...and...and then signals by Semaphore...by flags.

Floyd Cox: So basically...were you a Radio Operator?

Mr. Feliz: No, a Signal Operator.

Floyd Cox: Yeah, so you...you learned Morse code but...

Mr. Feliz: Yes.

Floyd Cox: ...but you learned how to send it with a...

Mr. Feliz: Yes, send and receive.

Floyd Cox: Okay.

Mr. Feliz: Yeah.

Floyd Cox: How did...how did you find...learning flags? Was it difficult to learn?

Mr. Feliz: Oh, no, no; very easy, very easy! We went through all the motions and it was very easy.

Floyd Cox: Now did this...you also used those lights that you often see...

Mr. Feliz: Right.

Floyd Cox: ...that's where you send Morse code (unintelligible)...

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, you use Morse code with the lights, too.

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: We had a...in school we just had a little bitty light and...with the...like you...you'd hit the...

Floyd Cox: Key.

Mr. Feliz: ...keys where the key...and then the light was up there and you could see it. You could also hear, you know, just like you hear...it's just like you hear...

Floyd Cox: Did-dah?

Mr. Feliz: ...the...the...

Floyd Cox: Did-dah?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, you know.

Floyd Cox: Dah-dah-dit?

Mr. Feliz: You know.

Floyd Cox: Dit-dit-dit; do you remember any of your Morse code?

Mr. Feliz: I...there's some of those that...that I...that I get mixed up with now...

Floyd Cox: (Unintelligible), yeah!

Mr. Feliz: Well after all these years, you know, but...

Floyd Cox: Sure!

Mr. Feliz: But...no, that's how...that's how we learned at school.

Floyd Cox: Did you find it very difficult to...(unintelligible)?

Mr. Feliz: No, it was...no it wasn't difficult at all, you know. It'd be...you know, you just drilling it...and...and practicing every day and so it...it came pretty easy.

Floyd Cox: Well how long did you go to Signal School?

Mr. Feliz: Four year...four...four months.

Floyd Cox: Four months.

Mr. Feliz: Four months...

Floyd Cox: And then?

Mr. Feliz: ...there in Los Angeles.

Floyd Cox: Did they have a regular graduation ceremony?

Mr. Feliz: Yes they did; yes they did. And...

Floyd Cox: Did you get a ranking; did you get any stripes while you were there?

Mr. Feliz: No, no. There was only two that made Third Class and the captain of the...of the school...he was...he liked boxing. And they had...and every company had...they had their...their, you know, you could try out for boxing. And there was two of those in...in our class...two boxers. One of them was from Los Angeles and the other one was from Oklahoma...from the State of

Oklahoma. I don't remember what city he was from in Oklahoma, but anyhow they were good! And they are the ones that made Third Class.

Just...just the two of them, you know! (laughter)

Floyd Cox: So after you graduated, did you go home on leave or where...what...what took place after graduation?

Mr. Feliz: Well I went...we had...about nine days leave, I think, something like that, and then went back. From there...after that I went from...I was on a...they...they put us on a...(unintelligible)...on a...a (unintelligible) they called it then like a aviation crash boat.

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: It was a...it was...an Ensign, it was...a Captain and there was...three others; I was a Signzman and they had one...like a Gunner's Mate and none of us were...were ranked, you know. All of...except...the only one that was...was the Captain and...and he was an Ensign; he was the captain of the boat.

Floyd Cox: Most of you were no-rankers?!

Mr. Feliz: No, no. It was...only...only was...was a rescue boat, you know, just like...if an airplane came down and there was somebody to pick up out there, why...that's...that was what we had to do.

Floyd Cox: That was about the size of a tug boat? Was it about that size? The crash boat...smaller?

Mr. Feliz: Smaller...smaller; it was smaller, and I think it had a fifty...fifty millimeter gun on it.

Floyd Cox: But it was bigger than a captain's gig?

Mr. Feliz: Oh yes, uh-huh!

Floyd Cox: Okay.

Mr. Feliz: Well, we...this was...we were stationed in Los Angeles Harbor and...we...we weren't there but maybe just on that boat for about a month.

Floyd Cox: Did you have any...what'd you do; did you pick up anybody or...?

Mr. Feliz: No, no, we never did go out...never did go out, no. We weren't there long enough, you know, to go out anywhere...not even to practice. I guess they just wanted to get rid of us and put...put us somewhere you know? (laughter)

Anyhow, from there...I...I was sent to...right there in...in San Pedro...was the...where that prison was...yeah...before they converted it into a Navy with all...right where they have...the Navy...men that...they put there and then from there they send them to other, you know, wherever...(unintelligible)

them out of there...from San Pedro...

Floyd Cox: Like a replacement depot?

Mr. Feliz: Uh-huh, and...and this is where I was sent. And from there I went to...to Bremerton, Washington and that's where I picked up my ship, the Gambier Bay, CVE-73.

Floyd Cox: Now was it a brand new ship?

Mr. Feliz: They...they...hadn't been commissioned but very shortly.

Floyd Cox: So you...you're a plank owner of the Gambier Bay?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, uh-huh.

Floyd Cox: Well you can always...take pride in that, can't you?

Mr. Feliz: Oh, yes.

Floyd Cox: So you were assigned to Gambier Bay as a signalman then?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, a Signalman Striker because I want...you know that's what they called them. They weren't rated; if you weren't rated, why you were a striker...you just...you were just learning and...and not rated.

Floyd Cox: Okay now you're assigned to the ship...now take us from there. What...what did you do? Did you go out on a...on your initial cruise...shakedown cruise or...?

Mr. Feliz: They had already had the shakedown cruise when I got on; they had just come back...

Floyd Cox: Oh, okay, okay.

Mr. Feliz: ...and delivered some planes...some (unintelligible), but they...then they came back and that's when I...I got on.

Floyd Cox: Once you got on it...take us from there. Where did you...do you remember where you first...first went?

Mr. Feliz: Well we went to Pearl Harbor.

Floyd Cox: Okay.

Mr. Feliz: Okay...and when we got to Pearl Harbor and we anchored...and it just happened that we anchored in...in...if you went to the bow of the ship and looked down, that's where the Arizona was...that's where the Arizona...

Floyd Cox: I've seen that.

Mr. Feliz: ...that's where...twice...we...we did...we were there...once on the Gambier Bay and the next time on a...on another carrier the CVE-112, the Siboney.

And so...it was right there...the same...same place...right there where the Arizona was.

Floyd Cox: Can you remember how you felt when you looked down and saw the remains of that battleship down there?

Mr. Feliz: Oh, yeah...you...it...it didn't feel very...you know...it...it's sad; it was sad to see you know with the...knowing that that many had been killed there and...it...it wasn't a very nice scene but, you know, you...you didn't feel good.

Floyd Cox: Sure.

Mr. Feliz: Yeah.

Floyd Cox: Sure. Okay so you're...you're in Pearl Harbor; take us from there...where did you go?

Mr. Feliz: When we...we got liberty there, we went...I think I was the only farm boy there in that...in that...I think there was about four or five of us that went out together. And...and I just went with a crowd and I says, "Well, what...what you guys want to do?" And one of them says, "Well the first thing I'm going to do," he says, "I'm going to go into Pearl Harbor and...get a tattoo!" And it was...a lot of it was...they...you know, that's what they did then. The kids then they...they were crazy about the (unintelligible). Me, I wasn't...never...I didn't care for any tattoos on my body, so...

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: ...and the others...they wanted to go horseback riding. And I rode a horse back...since I was a kid, you know, there at the farm we used to have horses

and...and we had cows and we used to milk the cows and ride the horses and I didn't care too much but I still went on along with them you know.

Floyd Cox: Sure.

Mr. Feliz: And these...these boys were from back east...(unintelligible)...one of them was I think was (unintelligible)...and you know places where...where you don't...they didn't see horses at all. A lot of them didn't even know how to ride.

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: So they put us on a...on...on those horses that...just barely moved! (laughter) And I was used, you know, I was used to riding horses and they put me on one of those horses that they just barely moved and...and no saddle. I never did care to ride on a saddle.

Floyd Cox: You liked to ride bareback?

Mr. Feliz: I used to...ride bareback. But these...these guys they...they...oh they were having a good time and I just looked at them and laughed, you know, because I'd watch them because they'd never ridden a horse before. So that's what they wanted to do when they got to...got to Pearl Harbor. It was comic though for me!

Floyd Cox: It certainly was! So after you went on leave you went back on board ship and where'd we go then?

Mr. Feliz: We went to the Marshall Islands and delivered some planes there...that I remember.

Floyd Cox: Did you see any action going over?

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, no, no.

Floyd Cox: Okay and then what'd you do...come back and get another load of planes?

Mr. Feliz: No, no we stayed there.

Floyd Cox: Okay.

Mr. Feliz: We...we unloaded there and then we headed...we...we headed for Saipan.
And that fell. That's the first battle star that we got when we...

Floyd Cox: Now what was your...what was your station?

Mr. Feliz: My battle station was...on the...on the starboard side and it was back by the
after elevator...and on the catwalk. I could look over the...the flight deck
and...so I could see all the action you know. When...when they started
shooting at us, when this...Japanese...ship started shooting at us, why I could
see the fire coming out of the cannons. And then pretty soon you hear *zoom!*
and it was a color...colored shell. When it hit the water, you could see the
color.

Floyd Cox: Now this was off of Leyte? Is this when you...?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, no...this...this was off of Leyte. This...I got...I got ahead of myself
here. We're supposed to be in Saipan.

Floyd Cox: Yeah, okay, you're in Saipan.

Mr. Feliz: Right.

Floyd Cox: Okay.

Mr. Feliz: (Unintelligible).

Floyd Cox: You...now Saipan, what'd your...your ship...?

Mr. Feliz: We...our planes went out in...and they would strafe or bomb the...the beaches or whatever, you know, whatever targets that they could see up there. And...

Floyd Cox: Was your ship ever under attack during this (unintelligible)?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, yes, we were under attack by Japanese planes. And our ship had...we had credit for four planes that...that the...our...our gunners shot down.

Floyd Cox: Now your battle station...you're up there on a catwalk...you just basically had to stand there, didn't you?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, yes. I didn't have any arms or anything; just stand there and...and watch. We didn't even have any binoculars.

Floyd Cox: Oh my gosh!

Mr. Feliz: Nothing...just, you know, just your life jackets and...and just observe whatever went on, you know? Well that was it.

Floyd Cox: Why...why were you there? In case they needed some Semaphore or...?

Mr. Feliz: Well, no...they...they called it emergency steering. But there was no...that's what got me, there was nothing...no steering of any kind there that you could maneuver the ship!

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: So, I...I don't know why they called it that, but...

Floyd Cox: Guess they had to have a place to put you during combat.

Mr. Feliz: I guess! (laughter) Well I'm glad that that's where they put me because, you know, I liked that.

Floyd Cox: Sure.

Mr. Feliz: ...because I...I could see everything, you know, that went on 'cause I was up there. There was no one else...nothing...the only obstruction...if I looked to...to the front of the ship, well I...it was just the island.

Floyd Cox: Yeah.

Mr. Feliz: But everything else, you know, I could see.

Floyd Cox: Yeah, great observation post!

Mr. Feliz: Yes it was.

Floyd Cox: Did you see any...during some of these battles; did you see any of the fighter planes getting in actual combat with the Japanese planes?

Mr. Feliz: No.

Floyd Cox: It was strictly ground support then...what basically your ship...planes were?

Mr. Feliz: Well when they...they were out, you know. If they...they...if our planes (unintelligible) and they weren't that close to our ship, you know, at that time...

Floyd Cox: Okay. Okay after the Battle of Saipan, let's...let's go from there. Where did you go to?

Mr. Feliz: We went next door to Tinian.

Floyd Cox: And...with...deal?

Mr. Feliz: Same thing...the same.

Floyd Cox: Support the group troops, huh?

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, yes, support the ground troops and...and they would bomb the...or strafe the whatever.

Floyd Cox: Island?

Mr. Feliz: Uh-huh.

Floyd Cox: Okay, now you're through the Battle of Tin...uh, Saipan and Tinian, now where do we go?

Mr. Feliz: Oh, we had a...we could...we got off the ship at New Hebrides. I remember we were...we had a...like an hour...an hour...there for one day and went ashore.

Floyd Cox: Got on dry land for one day!

Mr. Feliz: They, you know, had liberty there...

Floyd Cox: Sure.

Mr. Feliz: ...and before we got off...you could have a choice of...of a can of beer or a...ice cream. And at that time I didn't drink anything...I didn't care for...to drink liquor or anything, so I...I had the ice cream. They...well you could...you could...get more if, you know, so when I...I get the can...I gave it to one of my buddies, you know, I said, "You want this?" "Yeah!" So I just gave him my...

Floyd Cox: Speaking of buddies did you have any real close friends on board ship...*really* close friends?

Mr. Feliz: Well I...I had one...because we...this one and I were on the two ships...on the troop carriers together.

Floyd Cox: What was his name?

Mr. Feliz: Bob...Bob Gun (sp?) Bob Gun was his name. And then our...the other one was...was a Signal Officer on the (unintelligible) Gambier Bay and then he went with us...and he...and on the...on the Siboney he was the...the

Communications Officer. So just the two of us, you know, had been on the Gambier Bay and the...and the K Division that was...what...the K Division was for radio and...and signalmen.

Floyd Cox: You got a well...along well with your...?

Mr. Feliz: Oh yes, yes.

Floyd Cox: Good. Now going back to where we left off after you had your leave, one-day shore leave, then where did you go?

Mr. Feliz: We went to Hollandia.

Floyd Cox: You...once again as support?

Mr. Feliz: Pardon me?

Floyd Cox: Once again as support for the troops on Hollandia?

Mr. Feliz: Well we went there and...and that's where we waited and then...that's just before the invasion of...of (unintelligible). And I...while we were there in the harbor, I was up there on the bridge and I looked over to my right and I...I saw an LST...that's a landing ship's tank...

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: ...and I had a cousin that was on one of those LSTs. So I got the binoculars and I checked it and then I saw this 452...LST 452...and my cousin happened to be on that...on that ship! So I got up on the lights...I got up there on the bridge with my light and I called it...

Floyd Cox: Bad news...you (unintelligible...)?

Mr. Feliz: No, by light...the light, and I called it and I asked for him. And it happened that he was a Quartermaster on that...on board the...the LST. So he came

up...they got a hold of him and he came up and we talked...both by light and Semaphore. And he says, "Let me see if I can go over to see you." So he got permission to come over. In the meantime, I found out that we're not going to be there...we're going to...move out before he...before...and I called back; I says, "Don't come over," I said, "because I just found out that we're going to take off pretty soon." So he didn't...he didn't come over.

Floyd Cox: Came (unintelligible), too.

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, yeah.

Floyd Cox: Okay, so you're getting ready to sail out again.

Mr. Feliz: Right.

Floyd Cox: And where do we go from here?

Mr. Feliz: We just...from there we...were supposed to be...escort the...the boats and ships that...that are going to...to Leyte.

Floyd Cox: And this is when you really got surrounded?

Mr. Feliz: This is...yes.

Floyd Cox: So take us into...

Mr. Feliz: October...October the 20th, 1944 is...was the initial landing of Leyte. And we had been there five days...that's...the 25th is when the Japanese ships came and...they were supposed to...go in there...in...in the harbor and...and get rid of all the transports because the troops were still on some of the transports there and...in the harbor, and...but we happened to be in their way. The morning that we...that...that the Japanese ships came...it was cloudy, very

low clouds so our radar didn't pick...pick them up until they were twenty-two miles out. I heard that...I think you heard about that before didn't you?

Floyd Cox: No, I haven't.

Mr. Feliz: No, okay, well that's how close they were before they...they found out that...that...

Floyd Cox: Didn't know you were there until they got within twenty-two miles.

Mr. Feliz: No, that...that's how close they were before they...they found out they...they heard about it, but, you know, they...they weren't for sure. I guess they got the...the word from...from an airplane that they had seen a bunch of...of Japanese ships.

Floyd Cox: Ships, Japanese fleet, yeah. Okay, now...now we're getting you to the part when...what was the first inclination you had that the enemy was within range?

Mr. Feliz: Well they sound...they sounded general quarters and we all went to our battle stations. But...it wasn't very long...when...when that Japanese cruiser started shooting at us.

Floyd Cox: So you could see...you could...could you see the...what do you call it, the muzzle flash...?

Mr. Feliz: Yes.

Floyd Cox: ...where...now I...did you see any shells in the air? I've heard that you...?

Mr. Feliz: No, all you could hear is *zoom!*...you know. There was...*zoom!*

Floyd Cox: Okay.

Mr. Feliz: And the sound that...I...I could see the fire from the cannons. When they fired...oh, I could see the...and then pretty soon...you know, come over.

There was maybe about four that hit...aways.

Floyd Cox: You said awhile ago these were colored (unintelligible) fired?

Mr. Feliz: Yes they were, yes.

Floyd Cox: Why were they colored?

Mr. Feliz: That would...that's to determine the distance, you know.

Floyd Cox: So the Japanese could determine where they were hitting?

Mr. Feliz: Oh yeah. Yes.

Floyd Cox: Okay. Once they got within gun range, did they really start firing or what did they...?

Mr. Feliz: Oh, yes, yes, yes. They didn't miss...they didn't have too many misses after that, because I know one hit up there close to the bridge. And...the one that...that was closest to me was when it hit the elevator. An armor-piercing shell hit the elevator and it just flew right up! But it didn't explode; it went down and it didn't explode even then down there! So, you know... 'cause...our...our bulkheads they weren't...they weren't very thick, you know. They could go through...especially for an armor-piercing...and I think it was about an eight inch shell that...that hit the elevator. And then...before I forget I want to mention that we had a five inch gun on the tail...

Floyd Cox: The fantail?

Mr. Feliz: ...the fantail of...of our ship and they shot once and it was way short 'cause I could see where...where it hit the water, you know. And pretty soon they shot again and they made a direct hit on the island of the...of the cruiser that shot us. You...you could tell because it...it...there was a big fire, you know, when it exploded and it...you could see...you should have seen us yelling! We yelled and yelled; we were so happy that we got a hit! And you know what...what got me is that I could never out why that they didn't fire anymore. And then I found out that...here since we've been going to the reunions...that it...it was because...they couldn't fire or something happened to the...to the gun and...just...they couldn't fire anymore. But I...I was thinking, "Well maybe...I wonder how come they didn't fire...just make a direct hit," you know, "they have the distance right now." And...and then they didn't fire anymore...couldn't figure that out.

Floyd Cox: Now did you take hits from one Japanese ship or several Japanese ships?

Mr. Feliz: No, just from the one...that's all. He was the closest one and...that...we could see the others, you know, they were back.

Floyd Cox: Right, now how many hits did you take from this particular ship?

Mr. Feliz: Well, as...as far as I could tell...you know...that I saw...because there was some...they say that there was two that hit up there...or one hit...the front of the engine room...by the engine room, but then the one that really sunk us was the one that hit on the...on the after-engine room below our water line...because right away it started listing...the ship...there was taking a lot of

water then and just started listing, and that's the one that got us right there!
Because...because not long after that is when they...we had to abandon ship.

Floyd Cox: Captain told to abandon ship?

Mr. Feliz: And I went down a manila rope. I waited until everybody went down that I could see that was around close that was coming over...to go overboard.
And...but I...I had heard that, you know, somebody might...you know, behind me would fall and...and hit you and knock you off, so I waited until...made sure that everybody in that area had gone down...until I...then I went down the...the manila rope.

Floyd Cox: Can you remember, George, if...were you scared or...?

Mr. Feliz: Oh I was scared! I don't think anybody...I...I...they...I think everybody was scared, yes!

Floyd Cox: Because you didn't know what to expect once you went into the water, did you?

Mr. Feliz: No. Before I forget, too, there's a...we had...that morning what was supposed to have...beans for breakfast...and I never went to breakfast when we had beans for breakfast. I...I just didn't care for them. So when I...I got in the water, I didn't have anything in my stomach. And then with the nerves, you know,...

Floyd Cox: Sure!

Mr. Feliz: ...I got the dry heaves! Oh I was sick! I was just...you know, didn't have anything...throw up and...

Floyd Cox: Yes!

Mr. Feliz: ...and I said that's they called...they called it the dry heaves, you know. But awhile after, oh maybe about fifteen or twenty minutes I got rid of everything, you know, I didn't...it didn't bother me anymore.

Floyd Cox: Now were you...did you have your life vest on?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, I had a life jacket on.

Floyd Cox: And how long did you float around out there? Were you picked up by a raft or did you just float in your flight...uh, your life jacket until they picked you up...rescued?

Mr. Feliz: No, we were in the water for two days and two nights before we were...that's that group that was with us, you know?

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: We were in the water for two days and two nights before we were picked up.

Floyd Cox: So you were...just basically dangling there in your life vest?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, yes.

Floyd Cox: Now did you have any problems with sharks within this time?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, yes. I didn't see any, but...there was a...we...we...the group that I was with there was only one big life raft and that's where the...on the life raft they had the...the wounded, okay? And then there was people hanging all around it, you know. And I just heard about a...a lieutenant that got bit by a shark. What happened is that he was on the raft and...the...he said...one of his buddies was down here in the water and he says, "Pay (sp?), you come up here and I'll go down there." So he did and he traded places with him and a shark...he hadn't been there very long when a shark got him in the butt and

just took a big bite; he didn't last very long. He said...I didn't see it but, you know, the...I heard from the...from the guys that were on the...on the...because I didn't stay there very long with them because I knew...the ones that...that...where the sharks would come around because of the...all the blood, you know...

Floyd Cox: Yes!

Mr. Feliz: ...and so I...I thought about that long. On the second day that I was...in the morning...that I was out there in the water...I...I had my life jacket...here comes an inner tube...floating in the...so I went right over there and I got that inner tube and that's...when I got picked up that's what I had...an inner tube.

Floyd Cox: You don't know where it came from, you just...?

Mr. Feliz: I got rid of my life jacket...and I don't...well I figured it might have been from one of the airplane tires, you know. They...they had...in those days they probably had inner tubes.

Floyd Cox: Sure.

Mr. Feliz: But that's...that's what I...that's what saved me...is that inner tube!

Floyd Cox: Now did you...during this two days...plus that you were in the water...did you have anything to eat or drink?

Mr. Feliz: No, didn't have anything, no.

Floyd Cox: Did the thirst really start getting to you after the second day?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, but I...right away...I saw what happened to some of those guys. They started drinking that salt water and they went crazy. There was this one...there was three of them right there close to me and that was still...in the

morning of...it had...it hadn't been very long that we...we were out in the...in the water and one of them says, "I'm going to go down and get me some Geedunks." He was going to down and get him some ice cream, you know. And they said, "Hey, hey, hey, don't...don't...don't don't," because we already knew. The other guys didn't...say, "no, no, no, you don't want to go down there!" But the guy had already had...had too much salt water, you know?

Floyd Cox: He got delirious.

Mr. Feliz: He got delirious and he started...right away he wanted to go down there and get him some ice cream...we never did see him anymore. And there's a lot of them...that...that's what happened to them that...that didn't...that didn't make it because, you know, they started drinking that...that salt water, you know.

Floyd Cox: And makes you just start imagining the things that are not really there then.

Mr. Feliz: Uh-huh.

Floyd Cox: So what you're saying...he thought he was going to go down below deck to get ice cream and...

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, and...yeah.

Floyd Cox: ...and here he was floating around in the water.

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, so he never did make it back. But...

Floyd Cox: Well once...by the way...did you lose any close friends during the sinking or during the shelling by the Japanese fleet?

Mr. Feliz: The only ones that I was close to were the...the Signalmen and the Radiomen because, you know...but not...not really close because we...we...you know...we weren't there...there that long, you know...didn't know each other that long. The only time that we would see each other was when we went on watch...together, you know?

Floyd Cox: Right, yeah.

Mr. Feliz: The other times...if they weren't on watch...we were. And that...that's the way it was, you know...so...we didn't hardly ever know the other...any of the others...company like the...the Boatswain's Mates, the...the Storekeepers; the...the Cooks, you know. They had their own...sleeping quarters. And our sleeping quarters was just above the...the upper engine room. It almost...it almost way down in the bottom, you know, and all we had was just a steel deck. And hot...it was very hot!

Floyd Cox: Did you sleep in hammocks?

Mr. Feliz: I slept...we slept in hammocks, and I had the top bunk. And we had a little fan maybe about, oh, I'd say about eight inch fan up there...and the...the Bugler had the...a top bunk also. And whoever got there first faced the fan to his...(laughter), so I always tried to beat him, you know. And...I'd...I'd put...I'd face that fan so it would hit me. But a lot of times I didn't even sleep down there; I'd stay up there on the bridge. I'd go up there and...and I'd sit up...up there. I spent a lot of time reading. When I was on watch I...I was...used to read a lot.

Floyd Cox: This is the end of side 1.

(end of Tape 1, side 1)

Floyd Cox: Okay. So you spent the...you slept a lot outside because it was cooler?

Mr. Feliz: Was cooler, yes.

Floyd Cox: Okay let's go back to when you were floating around in the water...you were on the inner tube and you were picked up. Do you remember what ship picked you up, George?

Mr. Feliz: I don't remember the...the number of the LCI, Landing Craft Infantry, that picked me up...and this was about three o'clock in the morning. The second night that...that I...we was out there...I was all by myself. There was nobody with me at all. I...I got away from the group. I wanted to be by myself because of the sharks.

Floyd Cox: Right!

Mr. Feliz: So...I...while I was out there I came across one of the...one of the Radiomen that I knew, and he was asleep. So I went over there and I shook him; I shook him; I...and I woke him up. And...but I didn't stay with him, I left. I left and I went down...well maybe about oh, it wasn't maybe about half an hour later that I came across my Signal Officer...was...Paul Williams was his name. I came across him and he was asleep. So I went up there, too, and I woke him up...and...I left; I didn't stay with him either. I wanted to be by myself. So...it was maybe...this...this...when I saw them it was probably about...about one o'clock in the morning...something like that, and...I...I was floating out there and pretty soon I saw a light! And I seen that light going, you know, they was looking...like a spot light, you know...checking.

And I saw it and right away I started hitting the water, and yelling...and hitting the water and yelling...so that they could see me! And pretty soon they saw me and they asked me what my name was; where was I born and...and I said...I yelled back at them and says, "I'm not Japanese!"
(laughter)

Floyd Cox: Well these two gentlemen that you woke up, were they...did they survive also?

Mr. Feliz: Just the officer; the other one didn't make it. In fact it was the officer that...that asked me...'cause they wanted to find out who the last person was that saw that...saw that person that didn't...didn't...he was...and I was the last one because I saw him out there, you know.

Floyd Cox: Do you remember what his name was, George?

Mr. Feliz: Well, he...he was a Radioman Third Class...

Floyd Cox: That's okay; I just thought you might...

Mr. Feliz: Well I...I...Case was the last name, but I forget what his first name was.

Floyd Cox: You just basically disappeared.

Mr. Feliz: Yes, he did...I guess maybe he went back to sleep and, you know, and when they came around why, you know, he...they didn't see him...and that was it; he didn't make it. You know...if he'd of stayed awake, why he would probably have because they picked the officer...all by himself...up.

Floyd Cox: Now once the LCI picked you up then take us from there. What did they put you aboard?

Mr. Feliz: Aboard and LST, a landing craft tank. And...and then we went to...from there we went to...this LST took us to...oh, Hollan, no, it...it was...it was Australia.

Floyd Cox: They took you...(unintelligible).

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, it...

Floyd Cox: So you could recover?

Mr. Feliz: To...no...so they put us aboard a luxury liner, the Lurline. It was...in...in World War II, they converted this luxury liner into a...a passenger ship, you know, to carry...it was just ...thousand...there was thousands of them...different branches of the service on that boat. They were going to take us on that boat...yeah...ship...take us back to San Francisco.

Floyd Cox: Now did you have...were you severely hyd...dehydrated?

Mr. Feliz: Not very. The only thing that hap...that...that bothered me when I got up...when they pulled me out of the water was my joints, you know, from being in the water so long that...that I...I hurt...my joints...my...like...like where my...my life belt was; my...right here under my...that's...well because of the salt water, you know, and it rubbed on...and...and...(unintelligible) but...but that was it. I mean I...I wasn't sick at all, I mean just...just...of that...that's it, you know.

Floyd Cox: Boy, you were fortunate!

Mr. Feliz: I was...I was...

Floyd Cox: No wounds of any kind?

Mr. Feliz: I was lucky!

Floyd Cox: You sure were!

Mr. Feliz: Not one scratch did I get!

Floyd Cox: Now...now you're...they put you on the ship and take you back to San Francisco...

Mr. Feliz: Yes.

Floyd Cox: ...what transpired after this, George?

Mr. Feliz: I...because they give us a thirty-day...survivor's leave...

Floyd Cox: You went home?

Mr. Feliz: ...and I went home for thirty days.

Floyd Cox: I bet your family was glad to see you (unintelligible)?

Mr. Feliz: Oh yes, yeah!

Floyd Cox: 'Cause they were aware that your ship had been sunk?

Mr. Feliz: Yes, they...they found out it had been sunk, yeah. And I went to...back to...Treasure Island. I was there for maybe...a month or less and then they sent me back to Bremerton, and I went back on the...on the Siboney, CVE-112.

Floyd Cox: You know how to spell that Siboney?

Mr. Feliz: S-i-b-b-o-n-y [s/b Siboney].

Floyd Cox: Now when you...you went aboard...that was a brand new ship at that time?

Mr. Feliz: Well it...it was at that time, yes.

Floyd Cox: So basically you were a plank owner on this one, too?

Mr. Feliz: No, no, no.

Floyd Cox: Oh okay, it had alright, it had already been...?

Mr. Feliz: Yes.

Floyd Cox: Okay, now what was your job on the Siboney?

Mr. Feliz: The same, a...a Signalman. And that's where I made Third Class...on...I...I got it right there on the...on the Siboney.

Floyd Cox: You got a fifty dollar raise?

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, about.

Floyd Cox: Just about...?

Mr. Feliz: Yeah. (laughter)

Floyd Cox: That's a month?

Mr. Feliz: Yeah. (laughter)

Floyd Cox: So you're on the Siboney, now...now take us from there. Where did you go?

Mr. Feliz: Okay we...we hadn't been out of...out of San Francis...well no, I don't remem...Bremerton, Washington very long...we were headed for Pearl Harbor...again. So before we got there, the declared VJ day, victory in Japan.

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: But we still...where we...we were in...in Pearl Harbor...for just oh, I don't know. It wasn't very long and then we...we went and...and we had liberty in Tokyo and Hong Kong and Manila. And that was right after the war.

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: Though...we went ashore on liberty in Japan and I didn't enjoy it one bit because...the stink and the smell was still there, you know, and it was...it...it...I didn't care for that liberty at all.

Floyd Cox: Was the smell from the...?

Mr. Feliz: The...from the dead bodies, yes, because you came right, you know, they took us...ashore on a...it was a...try to recall it...it...it would...the...the...(unintelligible) would just come down flat, you know, and they just walk off it. Oh I forget exactly what they called it.

Floyd Cox: Wasn't a Higgins boat, was it?

Mr. Feliz: No, no. No it was like a little landing...

Floyd Cox: LVT I think they called it.

Mr. Feliz: No, no...LCI, Landing Craft Infantry, that's what it was, yeah, that's it.

Floyd Cox: I think we've got one on display at the Museum where the back falls down.

Mr. Feliz: Yeah, an LCI. It's not very big, but...

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: ...still....

Floyd Cox: Holds about twenty something people.

Mr. Feliz: ...this...we went ashore in.

Floyd Cox: Now did...how did the Japanese people act while you were on...on leave in Japan right after the end of the war?

Mr. Feliz: They...we...what we came across...the people that we came across (unintelligible)...you know, they...they didn't say anything and neither did we, you know. But I...I couldn't...I...have a good time there because of the smell, and then you know it just...so I didn't go back 'cause we were there a few days...but I didn't care to go back over there. I'd rather stay aboard and...

Floyd Cox: Well...to go back a little bit...anytime...during any time that you were at sea and combat did you ever witness any kamikaze planes...

Mr. Feliz: No.

Floyd Cox: ...crash on the...?

Mr. Feliz: No, we were lucky that we didn't.

Floyd Cox: You sure were.

Mr. Feliz: Uh-huh.

Floyd Cox: You sure were. So after you...you took shore leave in...in Japan...then let's take us from there. Where did you go from there?

Mr. Feliz: We went to...to Hong Kong.

Floyd Cox: Okay, how did you like Hong Kong?

Mr. Feliz: Oh, I liked Hong Kong. Yeah, it was good to be over there.

Floyd Cox: How many...did you get twenty-four hours shore leave?

Mr. Feliz: No, it just over...just...just hours, you know, you had to be back on the ship. They'd take you over there and leave you and then come back and get you...maybe for...

Floyd Cox: Now they wouldn't take everybody off at the same time...

Mr. Feliz: No, no, they just...

Floyd Cox: Groups?

Mr. Feliz: No, just groups, uh-huh, so many from each company.

Floyd Cox: Right. And after Hong Kong, where'd we go?

Mr. Feliz: We went to Manila. And this was...December the 24th of 1944...

Floyd Cox: That'd be...'45 after the end of the war.

Mr. Feliz: ...because the year would be... '45.

Floyd Cox: Yeah.

Mr. Feliz: Well I happened to be on watch... on midnight. I had the...the midnight watch and, 'course you know, you...you always report fifteen minutes early before you...you relieve your...your fellow...

Floyd Cox: Right.

Mr. Feliz: So I was on watch and I even think it was dark...we were in...in Manila harbor, and it was real dark...no lights anywhere and then I started thinking, I said, I told myself, "I think I'm going on tower...tower...How One (sp?)," that's they called the...the shore tower...How...How One. So I got real brave and I got up there on that twenty-four inch lights...a big light like that...and it's got a key...like you can hit the key and operate it that way or you just got a handle and...and they know you can...you can send your signal with...with your handle and the light. So I shined the light up to the sky because that's a strong...a real strong light, and I shined it up there and then I got (unintelligible) called How One and he answered and I wished him a Happy New Year. And right that...that whole harbor was lit with light...there was lights all over! When they got through I told myself I hoped there wasn't...I hope nobody finds out about this...because they might get after me! (laughter) Never did hear a word...never, you know! (laughter) So...

Floyd Cox: Okay now...now we're...we're...

Mr. Feliz: ...over there.

Floyd Cox: ...now what happens after that? Did you head back to stateside?

Mr. Feliz: I...went...we came back and we stopped in...in the meantime I made Third Class. Okay, and then we stopped in...in Hawaii again...in the same place...that's when they stopped the second time there...right there where the Arizona was, okay? And...you could get out...get out of the service...if you had enough points, okay? I had enough points to get out. I made...I made Second Class...I took my test in there for Second, but they wouldn't give it to you because they already...the ship was rated...four Signalmen...four Second Class Signalmen, that's it, you know? So I would have to make another...and...and stay on and...and go on another cruise if I wanted to make Second Class. I said, "I don't care if I make Second Class...I'm going to go home!" I had enough points to go home, and...and I did! So they put us on a...on a some kind of a...I don't know what they called it...but anyhow we went back to San Francisco and I...and...and that's when I got out. And this was in...I got out in 1945.

Floyd Cox: You get a discharge in San Francisco? Is that where they...?

Mr. Feliz: Well not in San Francisco, but right outside there some place. I forget what they called it. Anyhow that's when I...when I got discharged...in '45.

Floyd Cox: So then you went back to Arizona?

Mr. Feliz: I went back to Arizona, yes.

Floyd Cox: And what did you do when you went back to Arizona? Do you remember?

Mr. Feliz: I worked as a...let's see...I worked at a dry goods store there in town in Florence. And then this friend of mine and I went...this was in '46...we went to Los Angeles and we worked in Los Angeles for almost two years. I came

back to Florence and I...I...I started...I took over the farm, my dad's farm, and I started...I...I started farming and I was planting cotton and whatever...wheat, barley or...uh, in those days they were...they were planting flaxseed...

Floyd Cox: Yeah, flax, yeah.

Mr. Feliz: Flax...flaxseed for oil, paint...paints and stuff.

Floyd Cox: Yeah.

Mr. Feliz: And I also worked at the state prison for twelve years...for the state. And I...in 1971 I started working for...I quit the state and I went to work for this plasma program they called it. It was for Bayer...that makes the Bayer aspirins and stuff like that.

Floyd Cox: Oh!

Mr. Feliz: They...they had a plasma program...they also had...had there at the prison. So I quit the state and I went to work there because they only worked four days. And at that time, the wife and I had...had bought a little restaurant across the street from the high school there in Florence and so that was just perfect for me because I only worked four days – Monday through Thursday and then that way I could help there at...in the restaurant. I had already quit farming because the...I wasn't making any money in farming because it wasn't big enough, you know, to...to make a living. So I had...but I always had a...a job on the outside. Even when I was farming I had a full time job either working at a service station or, you know, working for somebody else.

Floyd Cox: Well let me ask you this; did you miss the Navy once you got out?

Mr. Feliz: No.

Floyd Cox: You didn't miss the Navy...as much?

Mr. Feliz: No. (laughter) After I got out I did miss it, you know...so...

Floyd Cox: Have you ever had call to use the Morse code or your Semaphore again?

Mr. Feliz: No, no. The only time I used it is when we went on a...on liberty...on one other reunions and we...there was a...we were out there on the...on the harbor by one of the ships and I was down there and I saw the Signalman up there on the bridge, so I got up there and I started sending Semaphore, you know, to him...and so he couldn't read me very well I guess. So he says, "Wait a minute," he says, "let me send you a pair of flags," so he threw a pair of flags down there and then we got together! (laughter) And...and I sent him some Semaphore. That's how we communicated...that's what happened but...

Floyd Cox: Well, before we conclude this, George, is there anything that you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about that you...?

Mr. Feliz: No, you did pretty good asking, you know, things that...that happened that I could remember about and it was...

Floyd Cox: Well I want to shake your hand...

Mr. Feliz: Yes sir.

Floyd Cox: ...and thank you for your service to our country...

Mr. Feliz: You welcome, sir.

Floyd Cox: ...appreciate it! And thank you for spending the time with us.

Mr. Feliz: Okay, you bet! Thank you.

(end of interview)

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