

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Wilburn E. Laas**

**Spicewood, Texas**

**November, 26, 2007**

**Submarine Squadron 45 Division 292**

**At Midway on sub tender**

**Serviced Subs in from Patrol**

**Did some diving to put degaussing cables around subs**

**Severe typhoon on way to Philippines**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misemhimer. Today is November 26, 2007. I am interviewing Mr. Wilburn E. Laas by telephone. His address is 4823 Bob Wire Road, Spicewood, Texas 78669. His telephone number is area 512-264-1189. 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.

You say your nickname is Senator, right?

Mr. Laas

That is correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Laas

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the first thing I need to do is to get an alternative contact. We have found out that several years down the road we try to get in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something's has happened. So do have a son or a daughter or someone who would know where you are in case you are not at this place?

Mr. Laas

Yes. I do, several in fact, on both ends. I have a daughter, Pearl, and step-sons and daughters and so forth, who always know where I am at.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well just give me one of them, whichever you think would be a good one.

Mr. Laas

Well, my daughter is a nurse and her name is Lynn Vaughan . She is in Victoria, Texas, and I have her phone number. Is that what you would like?

Mr. Misenhimer.

Yes.

Mr. Laas

361-578-8518. she is a nurse, a flight nurse with a helicopter service in Victoria now. She uses a cell phone very much and it happens to be 361-935-2101.

Mr. Misenhimer.

Now the next thing I need to do is to read you this agreement with the Museum. When it is in person I give to the man and let him read it and sign.. So let me read it to and make sure it is satisfactory.

Agreement read and agreed to.

Now the first question is what is your birth date?

Mr. Laas

My birthday is April 3, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Laas

Schulenburg, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Laas

I had an older sister and two younger brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of them involved in World War II ?

Mr. Laas

Negative. They were not. Wait a minute now, let me put it this way, my sister was not. I was the oldest son and I was in the Navy. My second brother, the one below me, who was four years younger, was in the Korean War. And the youngest was in the Army but not during war time. He was mostly in Germany.

Mr. Misenhimer

If they would have been in World War II I would get information and possibly interview them.

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

Mr. Laas

Well it had a tremendous affect on us. I'll give you a little back ground on it. I was born to be a good worker and my father was in the cattle business, and he started that in 1929 so he had a lot of work constantly, and I did a lot of work with him, so I got started with a lot of physical work and some learning, of course, so I worked with him as a child, through the depression. I have good memories of a lot of it, so I worked hard and did a lot of things. We were not deprived of any of the necessities, I guess you'd say, but we were frugal.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now what kind of cattle business was your father in?

Mr. Laas

He was mostly, in those days, when he first started, in depression time, there was very little currency in peoples' hands, and so he did a lot of bartering, a lot of trading He would specialize in providing people with very good milkers. The Carnation Company started a plant in Schulenburg and they bought milk from the various dairy farmers. So my father, knowing this, got to where he got cows that were able to be milked and produce milk and then he would take in trade anything that they had that they didn't need and of course he accumulated a lot a of junk, you might call it, bovines, horses and mules and stuff like that, that people had to exchange for a cow that would produce milk both for home use and for sale. So there was a lot of exchange. And of course, in those days, when I first started, we moved cattle when we had to, by horseback. When he was fortunate enough to get some cash available, he bought a truck .He first made a truck out of a Model-T Touring car. With a hammer and a cold chisel he cut the back part of the bed off and he put a cattle bed on it, we could haul one cow in a Model-T. But the second one was a truck that he got because Roosevelt paid the people who had their herds cut by forty per cent. It was still during the depression, in '34 in fact. They paid twelve dollars a head for the cows they killed and eight dollars for the calves, so when the killing was over and the herd reduction project was over, he had a windfall of money that he didn't expect, because he had got along on the range, you might call it, and this was so good that he bought a truck. From that point on, we were in the trading business, buying, selling, hauling to the packing houses later and that sort of thing and I started driving and delivering the cattle in the truck when I was sixteen years old. I started before that but I didn't have a license until I was sixteen.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now these dairy cattle, milk cows, what breeds were they?

Mr. Laas

Well, mostly Holstein, Jersey and Guernsey, the milk type of cattle. That was before I could walk very good. People ask me a lot of times” When did you start riding a horse?”

I said “I don’t remember.” I was too young to remember. I wasn’t born on one, my mother assured me of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Laas

I went to high school in Schulenburg.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Laas

Well, I didn’t finish. I quit in my junior year late junior year to join the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the Navy.?

Mr. Laas

When I joined I was seventeen but they wouldn’t take me until I was eighteen, a couple of weeks later. So I never did finish high school. I quit as a junior.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you went in when, in ’44?

Mr. Laas

I got into the Navy on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April in 1944. That was the acceptance date ,I tried to get in a little before that but I didn't turn eighteen until the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understood that they would take you in the Navy at the age of seventeen, with your parents' permission. Is that right?

Mr. Laas

My father would not give me permission, so I had to wait until I could do it on my own. He didn't want to lose his best hand. He was in those days, in an essential business. I did finally graduate, and this might be an interesting thing. I graduated from high school in 2006. Are you familiar with what happened to veterans who had quit school to join the Military?

Mr. Misenhimer

I'd heard but tell me.

Mr. Laas

A member of the legislature in Houston, here several years ago, passed a rule that anybody who did this was entitled to a high school diploma. I heard about it, accidentally, my wife heard about it and she insisted that I go and ask for it. So I did I asked for the diploma in Schulenburg and on May 26, in '06 I went and went through the graduation line with the cap and gown, sixty-two years late. But I have my high-school diploma.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good.

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Laas

Well I don't really know, I chose it because I had done a lot reading as a youngster and I got fascinated with the Naval things and I had read about work that was done by sailors and industry that was connected to the war and I guess that's what motivated me. I chose Navy, also, because I had a little bit of a theory that it would be safer because it's hard to shoot a duck when he dives under the water, and so I wanted to be capable of getting under the water, so I really thought it would be sensible to be in a submarine.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had the idea of a submarine when you first went in, then.

Mr. Laas

I had the thought before I got in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been on the water very much before you went into the Navy?

Mr. Laas

Negative, no I was not, I was not. In fact I had never been to the salt water, ever. I take that back. I had visited the Gulf of Mexico coastline a couple of times but not on it, I just saw it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were not a sailor there or anything like that?

Mr. Laas

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you actually go into the Navy? Where were you sworn in?



Mr. Lass

In Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Laas

I went back to Galveston, Camp Wallace, got discharged, separation, etc, etc. there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Lass

San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel out there?

Mr. Laas

I traveled out there on a train. On a train from Schulenburg to San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Laas

Well it was an experience, but I had been around the railroad a lot because the Southern Pacific runs right through my home town. I had never ridden a train but it was an experience of its' own because the troop trains were best at moving people and it was not a passenger train per se.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of accommodations did you have did you have on that train?

Mr. Laas

We had bunks, we had bathrooms and open windows for ventilation, and I think that the wheels were square.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about food? Did you have food on the train?

Mr. Laas

We had sack lunches that were provided. Where they came from, I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long did it take you to get to San Diego?

Mr. Laas

Probably right nearly three days. Two days a and a part of a third one.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had a bunk to sleep in at night, right?

Mr. Laas

Yes we had a bunk. They were stacked bunks, you know, military types.

Mr. Misenhimer

Three or four high, or how many?

Mr. Laas

Three high.

Mr., Misenhimer

When you got to San Diego, what all did you do there?

Mr. Laas

Well we went through the preliminaries; I guess you would call it. One of the

first things they did was to give us a hair cut then we got our clothes and we went through that procedure, and a little bit of attention given to behavior and so forth, nothing requiring, just try and be a gentleman. Some people didn't like being one and I didn't mind at all so I would just conform.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Laas

In the barracks, at boot camp the barracks. Nice barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

What base was this, do you recall?

Mr. Laas

This was just a part of a larger base. I didn't get to see much of it, naturally, but boot camp was the shortest period that I would have imagined it to be. I don't think it was over six or eight weeks. It was boot camp on part of the Naval Air Station. I don't really know how large it was because we didn't get around much of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were at the Naval Air Station. That's what I was wondering. What were some things you did at boot camp?

Mr. Laas

Well, we did a lot of marching. Of course we learned a lot of discipline, but we marched, which I enjoyed, plus exercise, calisthenics. I was active and in good shape, so I didn't object to that, I liked it, in fact. But then what I really enjoyed was the rifle shooting range because I had been a hunter and had grown up in the country, used guns, so I did

very well on the target range. This turned out to be an extended pleasure because when we finished boot camp and I had to wait before I went anywhere, the next move, you might call it, I had watch one night from midnight until dawn and I failed to look at the post bulletin board to sign up to be waked, so in the morning when I woke up I learned that I had extended the watch of the previous person way beyond his term and I was on report for not doing the right thing. And the punishment was confined to the base, so when everybody else was going after the work was finished, to some of the things that were more recreational, I couldn't go because of that. They put me in a work group during that time I was on report, and what do you think they did? Because of my good record of shooting, they made me an instructor on the shooting range. So I had the pleasure of teaching others how to use the rifle. That was quite an experience because some of the guys coming in there were not very knowledgeable. I had fun being an instructor. All of a sudden I was no longer a standard person; I was in charge of something. I didn't spend the time in a prison. I enjoyed doing that. I spent the time between the termination of the boot camp and before I went to the next move, which was New London, Connecticut, for the submarine training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me back up, in your boot camp did you have knot time?

Mr. Laas

Yes, a bunch of that, but not extensive and again I had done so much trucking and so forth, I enjoyed that, what little that they gave us. In fact, I got to where I was able to handle rope and lines and do knots that some of the instructors were happy to learn, from me.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about swimming?

Mr. Laas

Well we did a lot of swimming and I, of course, was a good swimmer so I didn't have any problem with that.

Mr., Misenhimer

I guess the people who were not swimmers had a lot of problems with it.

Mr. Laas

Yes sir, I understand that. I was there. I saw that and it was sad. I had to learn to swim It was just another thing to do, because I already knew how.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time in boot camp?

Mr. Laas

Well, yea sir, I was a smoker in those days and at night when I was supposed to be on watch, which was usually four hours, and I couldn't smoke and at night, when you are doing nothing except walking back and forth, I got to where I wanted to smoke like most smokers do, but unable to, it took a little exertion of my patience to be that confined, you might say. But that was the only thing that I found unpleasant.

Mr., Misenhimer

Now, you mentioned being on the rifle range. Did you have quite a bit of weapons training?

Mr. Laas

Yes, I didn't see the need much, because it was the sort of thing that already came to me, already knowing how to do these things, so all I had to learn was just to listen to the first explanation and then go on from then. I really enjoyed it because of having my training growing up.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of rifle were you using there?

Mr. Laas

On the base, we were using the old military 30 06. I forgot what they called them..

Mr. Misenhimer

Springfield?

Mr. Laas

Springfield. Right. Thank you for that. Bolt-action Springfield. Nothing else.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you train with any other kind? Machine guns or anything like that?

Mr. Laas

Not there, no sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished boot camp and went through this other, then left to New London, Connecticut. Is that right?

Mr., Laas

San Diego to New London.

Mr. Misenhimer

Another train trip?

Mr. Laas

Another train trip, but this was a long one. This one was five days. It was again on a troop train and it was boring trip. I had a problem when we got up in the northeast part of the country. It seemed lot a lot of the locomotives up there would burn coal; I'm sure they did, and there was a lot of soot and dust and so forth, from the train engine. None of it was filtered and I came down with a pretty stuffy head. But it was a long trip, It was alright, I didn't complain about it, but it was not a pleasure trip.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've heard that they made them stop and allow a freight train to pass it. Did that happen to you?

Mr. Laas

Yes sir, almost entirely, we never got any preference in that. All the freight trains came by and that's where most of the smoke and dust came from,

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you got to New London, what happened there?

Mr. Laas

Well, because of having the bad cold, they didn't feel sorry for me, they started working me and we started school-submarine training. There was a chief warrant Officer named Sprits, who was in charge of that whole submarine school and we called it the University of Sprits. He was something. He explained every day up front in about a forty-five minute speech, that you were there to learn something; you weren't there to have fun so forget that. Then we had to forget it because they kept us real busy. It entailed a lot of training;

a lot of different types of training, a lot of work, because submarine service is highly voluntary, and he gave you some tests that made you qualify yourself with your answers. Sometimes the questions were ridiculous and sometimes they were almost insulting. But they were trying to learn your temperament. How you did you take this insult? I found that difficult but I wanted to be in the submarine service. I had originally asked to go to deep-sea diving school but there was no opening in that particular thing. I qualified. You see, I tried to go to some schools but going on into submarine service, that was an alternative, and of course, I'd already decided that would be a lot of fun. We had several tests that were different from anything I had ever known, we had to go into a pressure chamber and get 50 pounds of pressure put on us just to see if we could operate under pressure, under air-pressure. Of course I injured my ear, I had this stopped up head since the trip on the train, I was only able to stand eleven pounds of pressure then I had to get out because I was about to pass out with the pain. Of course they took me out through an escape lock and the others went on through it. I expressed my disappointment that this happened, and so they gave me another test ten days later, and by then my head had cleared up, and I had no problems passing it. Which pleased me very much because I hated to be left behind those people.

Mr. Misenhimer

What other kind of training did you get there at sub school?

Mr. Laas

Well, primarily it was training on the use of the controls on the submarine. Bow planes, stern planes and helm. All of the equipment that is standard to all types of submarines, because what we had was not fleet type submarines for training, the old R boats



and S boats that were used in World War I and a little later, so they gave us training. Most of the training was not on the boat but in simulators. And then of course as a more advanced thing, there was Sonar. Sonar was coming on strong when I was there and we had a lot of training on the Sonar use and I had, even though now I don't have good hearing, excellent hearing and I responded to that so well, that they used me a lot of times as an example with some other groups that didn't have the ability to do it as well as I did. Again that put me in a leadership thing and I enjoyed that, I guess I've always wanted to be ahead of the crowd, if I could. Sonar was my choice and a little bit of radar but that was up to the radio technicians on the boat, just crew members.

Mr., Misenhimer

How long was submarine school?

Mr. Laas

I'm going to say four months. For Some reason I don't have a record of how long I was there. But I'm going to guess, about four months.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you finish, do you have a date on that?

Mr. Laas

No sir. at again since I was about a month and a half, possibly two months, past my entry into the Navy, then three to four months would put me into along about fall, I'd say early fall.

Mr. Misenhimer

September or October.

Mr. Laas

Something like that. Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you finished the sub school?

Mr. Lass

That was the end of the submarine training, and immediately after that, we went back to the West Coast.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get leave anywhere along the way to go back home?

Mr. Lass

No sir, I didn't because they had already told us there was a great need of replacements, submariners, on the West Coast, in the Pacific, so they made it plain that we would be scheduled to do some business.

Mr. Misemhimer

So you went back to the West Coast, and then what happened?

Mr. Laas

Well we went on the same train, the same length of time, not quite as bad. We went to the San Francisco area at Treasure Island. There we got whatever we needed, you might say, that had not already been provided, such as gear and uniforms and such as that. I don't think we were there over five days, and then we boarded a Liberty Ship troop transport and sailed west to Honolulu, in pretty bad weather. So that was another one of these experiences. I never got seasick so I was one of the very few people who were a cooks' aid to prepare the meals to two-thirds of the passengers who were too sick to eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that when you leave there, somewhere around the Golden Gate Bridge, there some awful big swells out there that really do cause people to get seasick.

Mr. Laas

Yes sir, and this was little bit of stormy weather. It never bothered me, even on a submarine we had some training experiences, you know, some of the older boats at the Atlantic Coast, when I was in school, it didn't bother me. I guess that I was just fortunate. I don't know why I never got sick but how I was always unable to use that as an excuse to get out of any work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back to your training. Did you actually go out and actually dive in a submarine when you were there?

Mr. Laas

One time, yes sir. We went out on one of the boats and we through the procedure of sailing and operating on the surface and experiencing a dive a short term, I would say. thirty minutes at the most, submerged running and then surfacing, and we did this twice. By then they had started selected, I supposed they put it in our records, who was good at which of the functions, you know. So we did get aboard but it was a very short time of actual sea work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just the One time?

Mr. Lass

One time and two dives and two surfacings. and then back to the school.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to dive the first time?

Mr. Laas

Well. Because we had been schooled in simulators and all. And heard all the sounds, and told all of the procedures, that would be coming and what would be needed, it was nothing more than the real thing, but it was not a startling thing at all. I think that the preparation at school was so thorough that you felt qualified when you got aboard. By the time you dived you knew what was going to happen and it did happen.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your job on the submarine?

Mr. Laas

I spent most of my time on the sub as just a lookout and a helmsman and of course when we dived the helm still had to be manned. There were Bow planes and Stern planes which are the controls of the pitching and the depth level of running. So those things were the seaman's type of activity. Again we didn't get much training on Sonar because the Sonar on these older boats was nonexistent. Most of the training came in the simulator.

Mr. Misemhimer

I understand that in the submarine everybody is supposed to know everybody else's job.

Is that right?

Mr. Laas

Yes sir, as much as possible. Of course this is in the operations part. The electricians didn't share their knowledge. It was highly specialized. The people in the engine rooms were, you could go and relieve one of them for a few minutes but most of it was with

instructions on what to look for and what to do, and really it was not, it would not be successful to put them there as a full time person.

Mr. Misenhimer

My understanding was because you are in a submarine there is no place to go get replacements. If something happens to one person, someone has to be able to step in and kind of do his work.

Mr. Laas

Well we spent a lot of our leisure time going around and asking questions and learning from those who were on watch because we realized that if something happened we might need to know some of these things. So it was an exchange of knowledge from one sailor to the other.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Hawaii, what did you do there?

Mr. Lass

We went straight to the barracks and for two weeks, at the most, and washed our clothes and repacked our bags, swabbed the floors and did some marching. We were offered a chance to go to town, which I took one time. To the beach you know, the shore, they called it. I didn't care for Honolulu at all. I did not like it and I still don't like it. There seemed to be nothing for a Texan to be thrilled with. We were able to go and look at the Royal Hawaiian which was used as a rest camp for submariners all through the war. We were not a guest, but we could look at it from the road. We didn't do much of anything except that we stood our watches, as necessary and we did calisthenics on a regular basis. When the transportation was arranged, we were assigned to our various ports; I guess you

would call it, because we were just en route, there. I was assigned to Submarine Squadron 45, it was called, and it was Division 292 and they were based at Midway.

That's where the submarines came in for refitting and provisions and things like that. So they put only six of us, maybe eight, I'm not sure how many, but we rode as passengers on an old World War I Destroyer called the Litchfield. We rode the Litchfield and had no quarters down below, and we pitched our hammocks topside, on the deck, and ate in the mess with the sailors. We rode over from there to Midway.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me ask you this, When you were in Hawaii, did you get to go to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Laas

No. It wasn't allowed; it seemed like a busy place. It was pretty obvious that they were trying to get people moved on somewhere else. No, we did not.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you see much damage from where you were from the attack on December 7<sup>th</sup> ?

Mr. Laas

No I didn't. We saw very little indication that there was a problem in Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

You recall hearing about what happened on December 7<sup>th</sup>?

Mr. Laas

Yes, I was in High school when it happened. It happened on a Sunday, of course I heard about it on the radio but then Monday we lost about a half of day of schooling because we were talking about it., you know, like kids do. But, yes I knew all about it. In fact it was a startling thing for me.

Mr. Misenhimer

On Monday did they let you all listen to President Roosevelt speak, at he school?

Mr. Laas

No sir, they didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Some schools did. Now when you heard about Pearl Harbor, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Lass

I didn't connect it to me, before I was thinking I would not have to go into the service because I was much too young.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were fifteen at that point.

Mr. Laas

So it didn't have any affect.. I was as concerned as I could be but that was about all.

Mr. Misenhimer

I meant to ask that question earlier but I forgot.

When you got to Midway, then what happened?

Mr. Laas

I was assigned to attend a submarine tender called the Aigeir. Tied up right alongside of the dock and across the pier from it, was another tender that came and went some. That was the submarine station. It was a place where the submarines stayed in and they would tie up either the side of the Aigeir or the Pelius, which was the one on the other side of the pier, and they would get provisions and they would get torpedoes replaced, that they

had fired and ammunition that they had used, the deck guns; all of these necessary things.

I was in the work party that was the provider crew through the base.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the name of that sub tender, again?

Mr. Laas

The tender that I was on was the Aigeir.

Mr. Misenhimer

How do you spell that?

Mr. Laas

I'm going to say A-i-g-e-i-r. I'm not sure of that. I never have had any mailing address that was left over from my time on it. The other one was the Pelius, which was one that came and went. There were several of these submarine tenders that didn't stay there all the time. They went other places and I never knew why they might go and come but the Aigeir was there all the time. We had a lot of work; constant work. There was a machine shop, there was an Optical shop, and of course, there was a torpedo shop, and all on the Tender and so sometimes after work in some of those specialty shops, when they needed us; but primarily when a boat was coming in from a patrol, we jumped on it, like a swarm of bees, you might say We would do what needed being done.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get a chance to visit with any of the crews that were coming back in?

Mr. Laas

Oh. Yes sir. A lot. Of course I learned a lot about sea duty from them, and then they would give the crews some liberties on the Island and would allow us to go also, to the



recreation areas and the movies and things like that, with the crews that were there, we had a Air Base that's the one area that they would not let us go to. I was fascinated by it and I would go to the boundaries, as far as I could, and watch the planes that were on patrol in the mornings and the evening. We had the Navy Planes, dawn patrol and dusk patrol Air Craft. I would watch them take off and land and stuff like that, and then, I wanted to be a pilot then as much as I was wanted to be a submariner. I didn't qualify because I didn't have enough education. It was quite a pleasant experience. We got to use the beaches anytime we wanted to. We had a lot of time off. It was not like we did this all day every day and I had a little bit of a job, you might say. Projector operator for the night time movies. They showed the movies on the tenders, so I saw all the movies over four or five times.

Mr. Misenhimer

How often would a submarine come in?

Mr. Laas

Oh, I would say, every two or three weeks, there would be one to come in and stay for ten days at the most; depending on what they needed. If it was some mechanical repairs, or something they might stay up to a week or ten days. Because of the need for secrecy, I would not be able to talk to you or anyone else about these things, if we hadn't been so far from the secrecy of this because you know the submarine service called the silent service. So we didn't talk about these things during the war time or even afterwards. It was a habit that we just kept our mouths shut. But there was one thing that I was always fascinated by. The enemy's Sonar was more effective when there was a certain amount of magnetism that is naturally in the boat hull. That would removed by a process of

wrapping cables around it and charging those cables with electricity. Somehow this was some sort of prevention of magnetism that could be detectable by the enemy.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's called degaussing, I believe.

Mr. Laas

Yes, I believe that's what it was. I couldn't remember what it was. That was a job. It took several days to rig it up and do this. Again the work party that I was in was usually the ones who worked on that and it was in a different spot in the sub basin, still inside the base area. They would drape these wires or cables all around it, top side and underwater, also. So I got to do a little bit of diving there in the basin with the old gear, where you put on a suit and a helmet; a metal helmet. Of course, they would have to have someone down there to string these cables from one side to the other, underneath the boat. Of course, we had to clean the sound heads and things from the sonar, which was somewhat covered with barnacles. We had to scrape them while we were under water. So I was able to do a little diving which was a really a fascinating thing, that I had wanted at the beginning, but of course, now they have scuba which is different, but in those days you had to have that helmet on. It was fun. I enjoyed it.

As entertainment for the crews, before they would leave, there would be music by the Navy Band, in the recreation area and a lot of beer drinking and fun and games, and so some of us who had worked on them got to go to the parties also. We got to knowing that the next day they would be leaving, so we got to be able to say goodbye to some of the people we had gotten acquainted with, never see them again, of course. There was always a little bit of camaraderie that developed on the short term.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to go aboard some of these subs?

Mr. Laas

Oh yes, always, not for anything except for delivering things.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there doing that?

Mr. Laas

I was there until August, that is when the war ended, am I correct?

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Laas

I was there until two weeks before the war ended. I was assigned then to Queenfish. She came in and had some crew loss or transferred, or something, so there was a space for three people on the Queenfish and they assigned me to the Queenfish. It was right at the end of their refit so we went to sea then. I'd say, two or three weeks before the war ended because we were on what you call a shake-down cruise when the war did end we were out in the Pacific doing various tests and things, to see how everything worked. We had just finished doing a simulated depth charge. Now this where they actually drop depth charges but not in the immediately proximity of the boat, naturally. But to see what sort of pressure drops there might be and what sort of problems there could be from the jar, from reverberations from the blast. We had done two of those and came up. We surfaced then to do something on the surface, but when we did; and I was at the helm. when we surfaced, there was activity on the going around on the boat that I didn't

understand. I had a job to do, I had headphones but there was not anything being said that gave any indication as to why we were just fooling around so long, because we were just cruising around and around, back and forth. Finally there was an interruption on our P.A. system and the Executive Officer, I assume, came on and he said "I have an announcement." "We have just been advised that World War II has ended." It was very quiet time. In recalling I still get, I don't know, just a little bit disturbed over the feeling of "How nice. "

We didn't know much more than that because we couldn't receive radio. We were still on the surface probably an hour or two, I don't remember exactly, but we just talked about it within our duty at the time. Nobody whooped or hollered or anything. It was a very sober, learning, so then after a while we went back to base and tied up again. Of course, from then on there were a lot of conversations about it and rumors about what would be next, and what happened, you know. It was quite an experience, I'll never forget it. I promise you.

Mr. Misemhimer

Now when you got to shore, did you have any kind of celebration?

Mr. Laas

No. we didn't have near the celebration that occurred on these boats as they came in from patrol because there was a band to greet them and there was food. Such food was provided for the crews when they came in from patrols, and there was music and a lot of hand shaking and back slapping and so forth; but this time there was none. We just came in and tied up and were told what would happen next, they would let us know when they have something to tell us. It was several days before we got anything. We got orders then

to fuel up. And of course we were already fueled up, but we topped the tank, I suppose is the way you say it, and go back to the States. We didn't know why but we finally learned that the Queenfish was entered by then, for an overhaul, a complete overhaul; and we would be going back to Mare Island Navy yard for a complete over haul. So that's where we went. We did stop briefly in Honolulu on the way back to the States, but that was no more , we just tied up a couple of hours. I assumed it was to take on fuel, but I didn't have to do that, then went on to Mare Island.

What was the Number there of the Queenfish?

Mr. Laas

393

Mr. Misenhimer

SS393?

Mr. Laas

Yes sir, SS393 She was the flagship of that Squadron

Mr. Misenhimer

What was another ship in the Squadron with her? Do you know?

Mr. Laas

I have to be honest with you, I don't know, if I knew, I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who was the Commander of the ship when you were on it?

Mr. Laas

Shamer was his name. The Executive Officer was Bennet and they were good people. We didn't get acquainted with them very well; you don't just walk up and start talking to

them. They sometimes would talk to an individual, but they were all business. Because I was on topsides, later on after the war, the Captain would come up or the Executive Officer would come up for air and outings and I might have a chance to talk with a little bit, but we didn't get many opportunities to visit with them.

Mr. Misemhimer

Then what happened when you got to Mare Island?

Mr. Laas

I want to say that we passed under the Golden Gate Bridge a little before daylight and it was raining and immediately, when we got into the bay there, I was put on the headphones up on the bow up on the deck, you know, for a bow watch, I guess it was to keep from running over somebody. It was cold and raining and it was in the fall, by now, and kind a getting nasty and I nearly froze to death. We got to the Mare Island Navy yard alright. It took all day. We tied up and immediately they pulled a barge alongside of the boat for living quarters and they moved us out completely. So every body went aboard this barge which was no messes, of course, just the beds and bathrooms, heads as we called it. Mattresses on bunks like we always had and we didn't know the mattresses were all full of crabs. So everybody got a good dose of crabs, it was an annoying thing because it took days and days to try to finally get rid of all of this. But that was the only unpleasant part of it. It finally got corrected, it didn't hurt anybody, but it was annoying the heck out of us. We stayed there and they removed all of the armaments. They removed almost every thing. We got new batteries. We got new equipment in the engine room, we didn't remove any engines but they over hauled them all It was quite a long stay. I would guess that it was nearly three months that we were in Mare Island. Of

course the older members of the crew got the first thirty day leave and there were those who wanted it. Some of them got the Christmas and New Year leaves and I was sandwiched in between. I didn't have the time. I was too new; I didn't have too many choices, now I did get a thirty day leave between the first and third sessions.

Mr. Misenhiomer

Then what happened?

Mr. Laas

Well during the time we were at Mare Island we got lot of weekend liberties, for some reason, a lot of the submariners would not stay in Vallejo or any of the places. I went one time to San Francisco. But it was not a pleasure leave, so we started to going to Sacramento on the bus on a Saturday morning and coming back on Sunday evening. My playground was the bars and hotels there in Sacramento. We were surrounded by other submariners who did the same thing. Sometimes we even met people we had gone to school with; they had departed to a different area but they came back and you would see them again. That was infrequent. That was a good duty and of course the thirty day leave was kind of special.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was wrong with San Francisco, to stay there? The people were not friendly, or what?

Mr. Laas

Now it was just a little more of a town and there were a lot of, I guess you would say, a lot of sailors and military people of all types that came into San Francisco and it was just not as much fun, you might say. There were a lot of people who were Homosexual and

annoyed all of us that were not, of course. We didn't like that particular type of behavior, so we just stayed away.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now during the three months you were there, did you have a lot of duty or mostly free time, or what?

Mr. Laas

No sir we didn't. We would stand watches, fire watches, with the welders who would be working inside the ballast tanks, auxiliary tanks, and things like that; if they were doing any kind of work where they needed to have some one from the crew there to consult. We knew a few things that the workmen wouldn't know. But it was mostly fire watches for the welders. Of course, when they were trying to load torpedoes back into it, and things like that, the workmen knew what there were doing but they asked us to be there also, to make sure what we thought we ought to advise them on. No sir, we didn't have much duty. We had to be there but we didn't have duties, and of coursed we didn't get liberty during the week; we got liberty only on the weekend. We could go to Vallejo for a couple of hours. I went one time to get a hair cut and a manicure and a shampoo and every thing. I just, that was earlier in my stay, wanted to have everything done to me I could have done. So, I just got the works, as we called it and it cost seven dollars and eighty cents,

Mr. Misemhimer

What was your pay at that time?

Mr. Laas



I was making, the first Class Seamen's" pay plus the hazardous duty that we always got for sea duty, which was about eighty per cent of our base pay. I forget, I think it was something like, a hundred dollars a month for us submarine people.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which was a lot of money back in those days.

Mr. Laas

Oh, yes sir. Of course I had never had been able to spend it while I was in the Pacific I didn't draw a paycheck or any payment of my money until I came back to the State of Mare Island and got ready to go home on leave, so I was not broke.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were there on Midway, were you getting the hazardous pay at that time, too?

Mr. Laas

Oh yes. We always got that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Even when you were there at Mare Island, you got that?

Mr. Laas

Yes sir, because any anytime you a part of the ship's crew, the ships' company. you got it. I was either on the Aegein or on the submarine so I had it the entire thing. This was good I appreciated that that was a bonus that I did not expect. But it was good.

Mr., Misenhimer

I wasn't sure how that worked. Whether you had to actually had to be out on patrol or what.

Mr. Laas

No, just being assigned was the main thing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened there?

Mr. Laas

Well that was about the extent of it. When I got ready to go on leave, naturally, I was born to be a tight-wad, because we didn't have much money before I got into the service, but I found out that when you go it if you got a leave and when you got it and you could find a way, a military hop, they called, a military plane from the Air Force, that you could find an opening you could ride free. So there was a base at the edge of Sacramento and I took my papers and went there, gambling that I could get a ride. Sure enough, I did. I got a ride on what we called a C47 then, then they were <sup>DC3's</sup> ~~DS3's~~ They had the big seats, you sat on a metal seat, they were on each side, and wore a parachute. I rode from there to a base in southern California. Something called Twenty-nine Palms, was it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Could be.

Mr., Laas

Well, any way some Army base that airplanes landed for fuel and then we took off again and flew to Fort Worth. Of course that was all free. I went to the desk that handled people, like myself, and I happened to be the only one who was going to Texas. I told them where I was wanting to go but San Antonio was the nearest place I could go to, close to Schulenburg, and so I told them , and I had not gotten myself together when they called me and said there is s plane leaving here in a few minutes that will give you a hop

to San Antonio. So I went out and followed the fellow that told me about it. Sure enough there was a pilot, a copilot, the pilot turned out to be an instructor, the copilot was learning some night flying and one person they called a crew chief on a twin engine Bamboo Bomber. It was a fine plane so I got to ride as a passenger on a Bamboo airplane all the way to San Antonio. We got there about daylight. So I was nice and asked them "What can I pay you guys?" They said, "We can't take anything but you can buy the coffee." So I bought three cups of coffee. So that is what it cost me to come back to San Antonio but then I caught a bus from there on to Schulenburg. Had thirty days of oohing and ahing, having people ooh and ah over me because I didn't have any clothes to speak of except uniforms, so I wore them and in a little town called Schulenburg that was declared a thing, you know. All back patting. That sort of thing. Then of course, when my leave was up, I had to go back to Mare Island so I had to ride commercial and that was extremely expensive, I flew from San Antonio to Sacramento again. It cost me sixty-three dollars. But I was able to sit in the back end of the DC3 with the passengers' place. Right next to two attendants, they called them stewardesses, I think in those days, and I ate with them because they had some leftovers. We ate chicken all the way to San Diego. But I did get back in time to get aboard, and of course, we stayed there until the boat was ready to go back out. I guess it was January, possibly February, by then.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Laas

Well we got back aboard and doing our routine checking and all. You know, and out in the bay some, we didn't do much submerging but we went out and did a lot of things, but

we didn't have to do the depth charge test and things like that because there was no war going on and we could do that sometime later if we needed it. But we really departed Mare Island and went on out and I had commented to myself that we came in under the Golden Gate Bridge and I said "I am glad I'll never go back out this way again." I told myself a lie, because there I am going back out. But I was not eligible for discharge but I didn't sweat about it. I was glad the war was over and we left and we went back to Honolulu and we didn't go ashore there. We got fuel, there and I'm sure some Navy procedures done, and in about two days we were going West to Guam. We stayed on the surface. Every day we would make one dive just to periscope depth and check everything, and surface again, stay on the surface again on to Guam. When we got to Guam we tied up in the sub base and they gave us rotating groups. They gave us four or five days or a week, depending on how many people there were, a little time in a rest camp, over on the east side of the island. Of course, that meant that we were over there sleeping in a little open air barrack type of thing, and boy, living on the beach and drinking a lot of three-two beer, and after we all got a little bit bored being shore-bound, that played out and every body got a chance to spend a little time in rest camp. It played out and we went back aboard our ship; our boat. You know we called it boat, not ship. But we went back to our boat and departed Guam, we knew where we were going, we were going to Subic Bay in the Philippines. That's when it started to be a little bit of fun, that was again, an experience. You remember I told you that I wrote a short story for a publication we have here, I've been doing a little writing since we have been here in Austin. We left and hit a typhoon on the way to Subic Bay and so it was quite an experience, I'd never been in anything like it and I don't really long to do it again. Would

like for me to read this story? I happen to have a copy and I wrote it, so I guess I can read it.

Mr., Misenhimer

Sure. Go ahead.

Mr., Laas

That had limitations on us as to the words we could use. Now I got published in a previous edition of a book called "Noble Generation" No. 2. It was thing that was done , Tom Brokov wrote this book about, what was it called?

Mr., Misenhimer

"The Greatest Generation"

Mr. Laas

Yeah, about World War II; it was a book of short stories, so Barnes and Noble here decided to copy his type of book into one called "The Noble Generation". They limited us to a short story of fifteen hundred words or less. Of course this is why this is a very short, short story. I did get published with my first story; it was about my fathers' work during the depression And of course that is not connected to the military service but sometime when I can I will send you one . The first one was "The Noble Generation" the second one was the one I got published in, I completed this one for the third one but they didn't Print enough stories to make it worth while, so they did not accept this story at all.

I titled it as "Blue Water"

World War II ended in August of 1945. I was nineteen, a seaman far from my ranch

roots in Texas, and unaware that the most dangerous of my duty time on the submarine the SS Queenfish still lay ahead. By late 1945 a complete overhaul had put the Queenfish in great shape. We left the Golden Gate behind and headed across the Pacific.

A brief stop at Pearl Harbor, and then on to Guam, where we tied up at Apra Harbor near Agaña and took turns going to rest camp at Talo Fūfo.

Eventually we left Guam for the Subic Bay sub base at Luzon in the Philippines. There we would await final orders from for an eighteen month home port assignment, possibly China. That sounded great to most of us." Let's go," we said. The Queenfish, a World War II type submarine, was three hundred and eleven feet long, with a crew of seventy-two. The conning tower sat about one-third of the way back from the bow, It housed the bridge, the periscope shears, the main air-induction site. This was a huge thirty-six inch diameter pipe with a bow that took in the air needed to keep the engines running. The bridge was a platform above the pressure part of the conning tower, surrounded by a solid steel shield about shoulder high; the Officer of the Deck and the Quarter-master worked there. Two lookouts at a time worked above them on the periscope shears, standing on steel mesh, surrounded by a metal railing, their shoes about two feet above the heads of the men on the bridge. As I had excellent vision and hearing, I was usually assigned to look out duty while on the surface, at either Sonar or Helm; steering duty while submerged. Our job as lookouts was to report anything we saw that could be a hazard to the boat or its crew. Soon we faced first danger. Floating mines that the Japanese had planted are anchored in huge quantities in passes, harbors, and bays. They could be anywhere and deadly. About twenty inches in diameter, these three-hundred pound spheres were floating bombs. Because just about one-fourth of a mine was visible on the

surface, only human eyes could be depended on to see them in time to steer clear. Radar could detect surface craft only, day or night, but was no help against small mines. We rotated the watch; four hours on eight hours off. The day the second biggest danger arrived, my first lookout watch was from 800 to 1200. The previous watch reported some lightening way out, off the port bow. Nothing was visible now, but I noticed a steady wind from that direction. Seas were mild, but building. My Next look-out watch was at 2000 hours. It was dark and raining constantly. The seas were plenty rough. Before going topside we were issued lines to tie ourselves to the look out platforms and rails. Sea spray was visible only during light flashes. The boat was now headed directly into heavy seas and pitching severely. We had encountered a typhoon. We dare not submerge to avoid the storm. The Queenfish maximum dive time was only ten hours, to resurface in those winds and waves would be disastrous. We had no choice but face the storm head on. At midnight our watches were shortened to two hours, it was too fatiguing to be top-side for a full four hour watch in these conditions. We struggled against the wind and driving rain, tied ourselves securely to the railing; heading directly into forty to fifty foot waves, and experiencing blue water coming over the boat when it plowed into one of these huge waves. At night we could not see when the blue water was about to engulf us.

Tremendous amounts of blinding spray came first, but when the blue water hit the bridge below, we could hear the impact. At the tell-tale sound I would turn my head aft, take a deep breath and inhale no more until we had plowed completely through the waves into open air again. The Deck Officer and the Quarter Master below us were submerged first and for longer than the look outs. Then when daylight finally arrived we could hardly believe the scene. The Queenfish would plow into fifty to sixty foot waves and disappear

into a wall of blue water five stories high. Now at least we could see when to take that big breath of air and hold it. Suddenly the water would drop away and up forward was a hundred feet of steel submarine completely out of water but still horizontal. In moments, there she went again, onto another mountain of water. A submarine doesn't float on top of the water, like a surface craft; in still water, seven-eighths of it is below the surface. When the bow is out of water, the forward auxiliary tanks and the bow tanks loose all of their water and become excessively buoyant; buoyant to float like a cork, while the stern wants to sink like a rock. A submarine will always head straight into this kind of monstrous waves we encountered. Waves this huge, from the side would have been suicide, Fore and aft trim was manageable, roll trim would impossible to control. To keep this cigar-shaped vessel level and horizontal, the Chief of the boat, down below on the trim manifold, worked constantly to adjust the trim and juggle the buoyancy from positive to negative and back, fore and aft. Other crew members were equally busy, not just viable air was pouring into the sub-marine through the main induction tube, water was too and two electric bilge pumps pumped the bilges non-stop.

The engine-room crew made adjustments to keep our four sixteen cylinder; sixteen hundred horse power diesels running. The electricians kept the vital batteries working. Nobody knew exactly where we were or what was happening, we just knew that our very lives depended on team work. Four times every twenty four hours each of us lookouts lashed themselves to the railing above for two hours. Gasping for whatever air we could take in, while being soaked by both rain and salt water. Praying that our ropes would hold; clinging to our binoculars. Riskiest of all was the untied moments at each end of the watch. In those raging seas, exhaustion helped us sleep. When off duty I crawled into my



narrow bunk above the forward torpedoes to catch a nap. For sixty three long hours the Queenfish crew battled the typhoon. With no weather reporting stations available in the Pacific we probably cruised with the storm, not knowing where it was heading. Riding through this typhoon was an experience seared into my memory. We didn't know how tired we were until we finally sailed free of the storm.

Submariners are known to work together always, doing what has to be done. That teamwork carried the Queenfish and her crew through the typhoon undamaged. Subic Bay Sub base in Subic City, Luzon was a comforting sight when we finally tied up there. Weary and severely tested but triumphant and safe.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's quite a story.

Mr. Laas

It was quite an experience.

Mr. Misenhimer

You could only submerge for ten hours. Is that right?

Mr. Laas

We could submerge and stay down ten hours then we had to surface because these were battery operated hours. We could not stay any longer. If there was absolutely no use of the batteries for propulsion; we stayed down one time for nearly fourteen hours to see what you could do if you had to. To do this you used up all of your breathing oxygen, bottled, first, you released it but then it got past ten hours you would have to use a CO2 absorber, sheets on the bunks and things like that to reduce the bad gas where you could

survive a little longer, you know. Now I'll say this; after ten hours you could not keep a cigarette lit. It would go out between puffs because there was not enough oxygen in the air to support the combustion. I don't mind saying that when you have a forward and aft situation like we had in the blue water, the waves, you have to only concern yourself with the pitch; down and up angle, but when you got broadsides one, the roll would allow you to dump water or loose water out of your auxiliary tanks and you would then become wobbly side to side. So it was much more dangerous to try to keep the trim normal, where it should be, so you headed into it. We did this for that reason. You don't know what situation you might run into when you surface. You don't know where the seas are coming from, which direction; there was no weather report there. So this is why. I've wondered about it and talked about it many times since then, but these are the reasons why we stayed on the surface and why we battled that until we just finally sailed out of it. 1945, it was August when I went aboard the Queenfish.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've got this question. You've got this large induction pipe; wasn't that thing getting full of water and bringing the water in?

Mr. Laas

No sir that was another thing I couldn't explain in this article. When the conning tower got under water there was nothing that could happen except those would suck that slug of water, as we called it, right into that thirty-six inch pipe, and it was solid water, and the pressure was dropping and the boat was dropping like crazy then because they were pulling a vacuum in the boat, because that water wouldn't move as fast as air, and if you were down below, you would get the ear poppingest thing happening to you. That would

ruin us to do that, but. then when we got to the forward engine room, that thirty-six inch pipe slid into a twenty-four inch opening to the forward engine room and second room in the back, it was twenty-four inches. When that slug of water hit the engine room, there were five-eighths of an inch steel plate. (Tape ended.)

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you got the two twenty-four inches that come in and go ahead, what happened from there?

Mr., Laas

Well you got a thirty-six that comes in, you see it comes down from the conning tower through the pressure hull, and then it runs back to the engine room, which is through the control room and through the aft battery and to the engine room. So you got about, I would say, fifty feet of thirty-six pipe that the air is traveling through until that water comes into through it. And then it gets to the forward engine room, well it splits; and half of it. twenty-four inches. supplies the forward engine, there are two of them, they are sixteen hundred horsepower Fairbanks-Morse diesels, and they are running at probably, not full speed , because of the propulsion , you don't need to be running that fast, but you are running them because you don't dare shutting them down and having to start them up again. Now, when it got to the forward engine room most of the water was no longer available to the aft engines. So it was not so bad down in the second engine room but it was bad at the front. I couldn't get myself to go forward when it first started happening, I had to go back to see what was going, and is unbelievable what those people in the engine room had to contend with all during this watch. About every forty-six seconds that

slug of water would go out, Of course that affected the trim because that water was messing up the weight of the boat.

The person I had the most admiration for was the Chief of the boat, because he was on the trim manifold and he was constantly controlling the air. working pumps, and doing what it takes, flooding tanks, and blowing them dry. What it took to do all of this, every minute of every hour, and he never got any relief that I know of. It was just unreal for him. I had great admiration for that guy afterwards. I didn't have any reason to know what was going to happen; when I did, I had a lot of respect for that man.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned something a while ago about it hitting a five-eighths-inch piece of metal and spraying; what was that?

Mr. Laas

That was a five-eighth-inch thick plate of metal about four feet by four feet and it was at an angle right at the end of this first twenty-four inch pipe, where that water would come out and it would come out of that pipe as a slug of water and it would hit that plate to keep it from being a solid slug and going back into the machinery. It would just break it all to pieces; it would go in every direction, the water would, and if you stuck your head into that engine room you were going to get wet.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned something about it created a vacuum in there; sucking the air out, or something?

Mr. Lass

Temporarily, and I would say for about two seconds, perhaps, when that air intake got full of water, your pressure would start dropping and your ears would start popping, and it was not unusual to feel like your eyes were going to bulge out and your hearing was constantly damaged by this fluctuation, you know, of air pressure reduced and then coming back on. It was really terrible. It was almost impossible, when you just get through it.

Mr. Misenhimer

So when the air comes in, it doesn't go directly to the engine, it just comes into the room, is that right?

Mr. Lass

Into the room and the air intake is, there are eight cylinders on each side, and each one of them has its own intake, so it just comes into the engine room. Water would fall down on the deck and down into the bilges, and the pumps would be running always.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the outlet on the outside, how high above the deck was it?

Mr. Laas

It was a good a good six feet to the top; that is where the valve is. Thirty-six inch air intake is a steel pipe that narrows and comes in as a vertical pipe. That valve is on top of it. It is a flapper valve and when you close the air intake valve, it slams down on top of it so then the sea pressure, the water, increases the seal. Then it comes down and it gradually takes a ninety and it runs aft to the engine room. There is no opening between the start and the finish until it gets to the forward room and then there is a twenty-four inch that goes on beyond to the after room.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the purpose of having people up on the watch during that storm? What could you see?

Mr. Laas

Well, actually I don't know, I've been asked that question and I've asked myself why and I think it is the fear of us and at night you couldn't have seen anything. It was the sort of thing you did in the submarine service because that was one of the dangers of being out there in that area, because we were getting closer to the area where the Japanese had a lot of naval activities during the war, and they mined every intake and every bay, every channel they could and after the war, as gradually the mines would break their moorings and would start floating around. And of course I did see one in the day time and this was before we had the bad seas. I don't remember where it was. It was about forty-five degrees and I would say, maybe a hundred and fifty yards from us and it was just bobbing out there and we were passing along side of it. It is a horrible looking thing, knowing it could blow you all to pieces,

Mr. Misenhimer

Did it have the horns on it?

Mr. Laas

Yea, it did.

Did you shoot those or sink them or anything?

Mr. Laas

No, because we were already passing. I reported it but no action was taken because we were not into a hazardous position. It would have just delayed whatever we had to do.

No, we did not. That was done; it was done when there was more naval activity than just one boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you got to Subic Bay, what did you do there?

Mr. Laas

Well. We tied up at the submarine base and we had to wait for our next assignment, which was supposed to be an eighteen month duty in China as a home-port for eighteen months and I was told later that at that time, as it was shortly after the war, that it would be wise to have some men of war out this way for protection. So there were several boats that were going to be assigned to some duty out there in that part of the Pacific. Apparently that was a plan that never did get put in place because we were there at Subic Bay probably three months, and again that is a guess. We didn't do anything, we stayed at the dock and we went fishing and we did play things and they assigned three of to be the attendants to a rest camp on the river there, or creek, that had been dammed up and they made a swimming pool out of it; they had Filipino laborers that kept the grounds trimmed. They had baseball diamonds and different activities, where crews could rest and have an out door picnic and our job was to pick up beer at the sub base every morning and put in our reefers and cool it and sell it to the people who were there in the afternoons and all the ships were able to use that base as a recreation area, At times we would have as many as five or six hundred people out there from various surface crafts. We had some French sailors who came in, Some Australians who came in, and occasionally, not every day, but off and on. We had to sell the beer, and pick it up and cool it. We stayed in a RV, a travel trailer out there on the recreation area. We had Filipino cook, a young man who was hired

just to provide us with meals. We had rice and meat every day. Fives weeks, I don't know what kind of meat it was. It might have been a water buffalo, it might have been an animal of some sort but it was not a pleasurable ration. I promise you. But we drank a lot of our own beer and that's what we did until we finally got orders to sail on somewhere and we were in the process of getting the boat ready to go back to sea and because it was getting time for my discharge, the yeoman came to me. His job was to see if I wanted to ship over and join the regular Navy, they wanted me, and if I would like to do this, well. it would be a four year hitch. It would be a real wonderful experience, and you'd be going to China and you always wanted to go to China, and I did. So would I be interested in shipping over, this would be in April, and I thought about and said" Yeah I might do that. I would like to go to China" So he said "I'll make out the papers." And he did. And we got orders that we were not going to China, we were going back to Pearl Harbor for eighteen months there. And I had already decided I didn't like Honolulu. I didn't like it when I was there a couple of times; I don't like it now. So I changed my mind and we went from Subic Bay back to Honolulu and when we found out we were not going to China the Yeoman came up to me with the papers to sign to join the Navy, or ship over, as we called it. I said I changed my mind. He said I need your signature before we can do it. I said, "You are not going to get it. I don't want to stay in the Navy. I don't want to be in Honolulu for eighteen months." And he got mad and I thought he was going to try and whip me. He got angry because I told him I would do all this and then I changed my mind. I said I can't help it, I want to go back to Texas, the war is over. So we got to Honolulu and tied up late one afternoon and they told me that there would be a boat providing transportation for me back to the West Coast in the morning. I said," That soon?" They said get your things



together we are going to take you over there, you are going aboard and you are going to be a part of the crew until you get to the West Coast

It was the "Chivo", a submarine that was going back and for some reason, I never did know why. I had to stand watches on the trip back from Honolulu to San Diego, to be a passenger on the boat and go home for discharge. And that is the beginning of the end.

That Yeoman, I never saw him again, but I'm sure he was quite unhappy because it took a lot of paperwork to do that and he didn't like that. That is when I ended my career as a Sailor.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you discharged? What day?

Mr. Laas

May the eighteen '46 at about two-fifteen in the afternoon at Camp Wallace in Galveston.

Mr., Misenhimer

Now let me ask you some questions here now.

Mr. Laas

All Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any USO Shows anytime?

Mr. Laas

Yes I did. I saw two. One of them was in Hartford, Connecticut, and the other one in another town in Connecticut. But they were two USO shows that were local entertaining.

Now, I did go to one when I was in boot-camp, on a bus from boot-camp to a Glenn Miller Program in San Diego in a huge, huge auditorium dance hall type of thing. I

couldn't get anywhere close, I could hear the music but I couldn't get anywhere close to the band and the place was so crowded that it was almost miserable. We never did get anything to drink. Of Course I didn't have enough money to buy anything to drink anyway, but it was a bus ride down and a bus ride back. I liked the music, don't misunderstand, I always liked Glenn Miller and his Band music, but that was not a good one. Now I guess that I should have liked the USO shows more than I did, The people who attended it, the locals, you know, in Hartford were different types of people; they were nice, they were friendly and all almost like "Don't stand too close to me." I didn't feel comfortable. I tried to dance with some of the girls a little bit, but they were not Texas. I'm not to bad mouth the USO, I think they were great, but I didn't have enough opportunity. Now we had a good time in Sacramento. We sorter took over a couple of their nightclubs and hotels, and they had real nice music, small bands in these clubs and motels. They were good but they were not USO things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with any souvenirs?

Mr. Laas

That's another little story. When we were in the Philippines, there was a tremendous amount of military gear that was being gathered up and stacked in a yard. A salvage yard you call it and there huge amounts of things that had great value. It made me sick to see it, what was happening. There was tires, Jeep tires and truck tires that were still wrapped round and round like tape on each tire, a brand new tire. Hundreds of them, and they were all surplus and they were being stacked up to burn later. They were huge. They were still tied, bolted down to platforms that they had been shipped on. Brand new Jeeps and they

were being dumped in that salvage yard. There were tarpaulins that were still wrapped in paraffin coated bags and folding chairs, hundreds of them, good folding chairs, with canvas seats and backs; things like that that were just going to be destroyed. They had old used row boats and Captains gigs and things like that there in this thing just to get rid of them. Those kinds of things. Now they did have something that I liked. It was a short wave AM radio made by Hallicrafter. In an olive drab steel box with a radio in it; battery operated and it was an excellent radio and it was available to buy for nineteen dollars. I decided that I wanted one so I bought one and I carried it all the way home. That's my only souvenir. When we were going out one time because there some on the boat who were going on a truck to one of the bases where they had thrown some Japanese equipment. It was separate and you could go there and get a sword or a pistol or something of that nature, you know, there was going to be things like that available. I didn't go and I was questioned, why you don't to go and I said when this war is over all I want is faint recollection, I don't want any souvenirs. The Captain happened to be standing there on the side on the railings of the boat, and he heard me say that. He looked at me and laughed. You got a good reason buddy don't think there's anything wrong with that. So he didn't fuss at me. But no, I didn't care much for things like, I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Laas

Yes I did, The only time I was any where near the Red Cross people we went for one liberty in Manila, and the Red Cross had a office there I guess and there were some Red

Cross people there and we were able to visit with them a little bit. They were females, most of them, and they were rather nice looking, they were not young, you know I was a very young person then, and they were middle aged people. They were nice, but they were there to help , I guess , sailors on leave or military people, if they needed it. They had an aid station like, I guess if you were hung over and needed an aspirin, they would give you one, or something. That was the only experience I had with the Red Cross.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, could you get your mail with any regularity when you were on the ship or anywhere?

Mr. Laas

Well, no. This an interesting question. I was on The Aegein at Midway, in the fall, It was Thanksgiving, and we got mail, when it came. I don't know how to say it, we didn't get mail very frequently. But my grandfather died, he had a severe heart attack. He died on Thanksgiving Day at my parents home there in Schulenburg. He collapsed right in the driveway and died, I guess the heart attack killed him almost instantly. That happened on Thanksgiving and I found out about in just about the middle of February. It took that long for me to get one of these victory letters, V-mail and that's when I got it. I was at Midway, so that's how long it took for me to get the mail.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you got some mail along the way, between those two times?

Mr. Laas

A couple of times, and for some reason, I don't know why, but my mother wrote to me rather frequently, but my father was not a letter writer and he added a few words to one

of the letters that I got from my mother; but they were good patriotic people and instead of regular writing paper they used the V-mail a lot, and of course it was a very limited amount could be done on it; it was pretty thin. I didn't get much mail while I was in the service, but mostly because it was not sent to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you hear Tokyo Rose any time?

Mr. Laas

Oh yeah, yes sir, we heard Tokyo Rose a lot of the time, and I kind of enjoyed some of the music and, of course, we laughed the various stories that were told. It didn't bother any body that I know. It didn't have any effect on our patriotism or anything like this.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr., Laas

No, I didn't, I crossed the International Date Line, I didn't get that far South and I was kind of disappointed that I never did. I was hoping we would get down that far but we never did get over there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now April twelfth of '45 President Roosevelt died. Where were you then?

Mr. Laas

I guess I was at Midway. I don't remember. For some reason, I don't know why, but I remember hearing about it, but that was it. We had very little communications at Midway. There was not much activity. We had a movie on the base and we had goony

birds, Albatross, and we would go and watch the goony birds. It was recreational for us.

But no we didn't have a lot.

Mr. Misenhimer

May the eighth of '45 Germany surrendered, did you hear about that?

Mr. Laas

Yes, we had heard about it but we weren't paying a lot of attention to it because all of our minds, I guess you would say, pretty much there in the Pacific. We knew about it; we heard about it and we discussed things like, one of the fellows said he had an uncle in that theater and was glad it was over there and we hoped it was really over, and things like that. I heard about it and that was all, but there was very little live music, or anything.

We had a lot of records. I even owned a supply of records for one of these crank type record players, phonograph. And I had records that I wish I still had, there were some wonderful ones. We would take them into some of the abandoned air raid shelters there. There were a lot of shelters that had been left by the Japanese, it was cool there and we would sit there and listen to the records. There were a lot of records on the Queenfish; we had a lot of good music.

Mr., Misenhimer

What would you say was your most frightening time?

Mr. Laas

I don't really know that there was anything worse than that storm.

Mr. Misenhimer

The time of the typhoon?

Mr., Laas

Yes. For some reason, I don't know why. my background, I guess, I was not easily frightened by things I was subduing a whole lot of fear that I had developed when I was younger and I was taught by my mother not to fear, be aware of it but don't fear it. My mother put a little clipping on a mirror that I used when I was growing up, to comb my hair and do things to groom myself. She put this on the corner of the mirror. It was a cutout from a magazine page, and it said," Do the thing you are most afraid of, never let it never let it know you are afraid of it Dangers only hurt the body but it is fear that kills the spirit," I worked hard to overcome that fear. So I guess I was a success at it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the Officers you had over you?

Mr. Laas

I had a great amount or respect for them, I had no problem with any of the Officers. I got into a quarrell with one of my ship mates, I don't know how it happened because I had been drinking a little, he had apparently gotten a hold of me when I did something he did not like. What happened, I don't have a clue, but I was found by some of my other shipmates, like you wouldn't believe , my head and my face was so beat up I couldn't open my eyes. They knew who had done this and that he should not have done it, and I hadn't done anything to provoke it. He was just a very belligerent person. He did it and they knew it. But then one of the Officers who happened to be a Texan, his name was Armstrong, they got him to come to see me and he got real mad, I understand, he took this guy who had done this to me into a hand-ball court and closed the door and told him Okay you are tough get after me. I want you to treat me like you treated your shipmate. The guy sat down in the corner, I was told all of this, I didn't know any of it, he sat in the

corner of the hand ball court and wouldn't get up. Lt. Armstrong., of course chewed him real big and shortly after that, the guy who had done it was transferred somewhere else or was shipped out. I don't know. But you don't stay in the submarine service after that type of behavior. So that was an issue that I had, that problem. That was the only problem I ever had. I liked people and they kind of liked me, you know, so I got along alright.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that?

Mr. Laas

That was Midway. I was on the Aegean I never have understood why this guy did this.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get any battle scars?

Mr. Laas

No, not a one.

Mr., Misenhimer

Any ribbons or medals?

Mr., Laas

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got home, could you tell ant difference in our country?

Mr. Laas

Well yes when I left I had a little bit of trouble finding jobs. I had a little more success because I was in area where there was some of this defense work, you know. So I got jobs as I needed them, and of course I was still helping my father when he had to have



me. The attitude of the people afterwards; they were all very appreciative of the military. I had a lot of my classmates that lost a lot of their lives in the army and things, and of course, being one of the survivors I was appreciated. I had no problems with it; I had no plans of what I was going to do. I tried to think of finishing school and going to college, but it wouldn't work for me, first I would have had to get a GED, they call it, and then go to college and I had too much knowledge of the cattle business to not utilize it. Because of my father's tutelage, my father's abilities, when I was sixteen years old, I was buying cattle at these auction sales, and taking them to the stock yards; buying and selling, I would buy cattle in competition with the pros and haul them, and truck them, and sell them in San Antonio at the stock yards to the various packing houses and the people who bought them there and I was very knowledgeable and I had such a background that I couldn't hardly afford not to use it. I did follow up in that area then after some fooling around. The first year at home I was pretty much what we called a 52/20, I took advantage of that and did nothing but try to figure what to do.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your G I Bill for anything?

Mr. Laas

Yes, I did later, after I got started, I got different jobs and when I was trucking cattle, mostly from Schulenburg to San Antonio, I decided I wanted to learn to fly. There was an airport in Seguin, Texas, a little place right down the river; a little grass strip called The Silver Dollar Airport. I would stop, when I unloaded my cattle in San Antonio I would come back and I might fly thirty minutes. If I had the money to rent the plane for that long. Then in the next trip or two I would have the money saved up to fly another thirty

or forty-five minutes and when I got three and a half hours my instructor said, I'm tired of flying with you, you fly by yourself from now on. So I soloed in three and a half hours. I became, later, as time went and of course, I paid for all this when I could afford to fly. I got my private license and after a year of flying as a private pilot, I decided I wanted to get a commercial license. They had a school for G I training for commercial and all of the different ratings that you might want to get, so I got my commercial, multi-engine, instrument rating through that G I thing which was a wonderful program and I really utilized it later. Of course, I'm not a pilot any more. I'm qualified but I don't have any reason to fly and when you get a little older. you grow up a little bit.

Mr. Misenhimer

One other question; have you had any reunions?

Mr. Laas

I went to one reunion in San Antonio of the Queenfish and several other submarines they had a reunion that moved to San Antonio, and one of my ship-mates who I was real close to lived in Washington State. He called me, he is from San Antonio, I hadn't heard from him in years and he called me, I was living in Victoria, and he told me about the reunion and said, "Why don't you come up here?" So I did. Yes I went to one in San Antonio and it was a real nice time. It was just a few days, of course and then I didn't go to anymore because the next reunions, plural, were on the East Coast. That was a long way, and I never was in quite a position to go that far and spend that time and money. But then, I did go on a different reason one time to go to Bozeman and this same fellow, it was not a reunion with anybody, but him and the Chief of the Boat was there and the guy from Washington drove to Bozeman and visited with the Chief, Joe Sparks, my wife and I had

dinner with them. Just a little reunion of just the three of us. I had been in touch with my friend from Washington. Then last year I got a call, I knew he had been sick, and he was in real bad shape, so, my wife helped me and I got a plane and flew to Washington State, Tacoma, and visited him while he was in a rest home with cancer. I came back from the visit, I went up there on a Thursday and I came back Friday and Monday morning I got word that he had passed away. He was the last surviving ship-mate that I knew of. There may be some one that I did not keep up with, I doubt it, so I am the lone survivor of that ships crew that I know of.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you for your time today and again I thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Laas

I'm always glad to hear that .When I graduated from high school it was on May 26, which is so close to Memorial Day, that graduation exercise was emphasized by some of the speakers and so forth, as a time to honor our veterans and all. When the Graduation ceremony was over and I went out of the auditorium, I spent an unbelievable amount of time being greeted by the people who had been there just because I had been a service man, you know. And it was quite nice. I have to say that I had no idea that was going to happen. I was doing it mostly because I had never done it and my wife insisted. We heard about this from a lady who was at one of the functions for the writers' groups and I didn't know this had ever been available to anyone.

End of interview.

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