

# **National Museum of the Pacific War**

*Center for Pacific War Studies*

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**Presents an Interview with  
Virgil Cassel  
January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

This is Pete Jensen. Today is Wednesday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008. I am interviewing Mr. Virgil Cassel. This interview is taking place at the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg, 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. Okay, Mr. Cassel, if you would like to start.

Mr. Cassel:

I was born January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1925 in Winnsboro, Texas on the family farm. My father was a sharecropper. I was born at home right in the middle of a blizzard. I started off well as I weighed over thirteen pounds.

Mr. Jensen:

Where is that located – Winnsboro, Texas?

Mr. Cassel:

It's in East Texas, not too far from Dallas in the East Texas area. We moved numerous times through different places in East Texas; then when I was four years old we moved to Calhoun County, Texas which is in South Texas. I lived there until I enlisted in the Navy. My father was a farmer and also a carpenter, and ran a saw mill and various other occupations. He had very little education, but he did well for himself. I went to Port Lavaca High School and graduated in 1941.

I was sixteen years old when I graduated and there was nothing I could do - no one would hire me because I was too young. So I went back to high school in 1942. In July 1942 I enlisted in the Navy in Victoria, Texas. I was sent to San Diego for basic training and at that time there was a dire shortage, I suppose, of sailors, and so I was rushed through Boot Camp training, consisting of about four weeks. The first day the company met, the drill instructor asked for anyone who could type so I held my hand up – one of the last times I ever volunteered.

Mr. Jensen:

(laughs)

Mr. Cassel:

I was made the Company Clerk and I sat in the office all day. I never went through any type of training. When we graduated from Boot Camp we were given two weeks leave. Then when I came back to San Diego after our leave I was shipped out to Pearl Harbor. On about September 15<sup>th</sup> of 1942 I went aboard the Enterprise. I was a seventeen year old Apprentice Seaman. I served on the Enterprise until the war was over in 1945.

I actually left the Enterprise sometime around March of 1946. When the war was over and the Navy was discharging people my rank was Chief Yeoman. The Yeomen were the people in the Navy that did all the paperwork. So our rate was frozen – no Yeoman could be discharged. But, if we would sign up for extended duty we could get sixty days leave so I signed up and my last assignment aboard ship was in charge of the Captain's office. The Captain I worked for the longest (Captain G.B.H. Hall) was appointed to the Board in Washington, D.C. to work on the establishment of a new service – the U.S. Air Force. I went to visit him in Washington, D.C. and told him my situation and that I'd like to come to Washington, D.C. He told me "fine." He would like to have me as his writer again, and for me to re-enlist, take my leave (I was still aboard the Enterprise) and come back to the Enterprise. I would have my orders ready for my transfer. Well, when I got back to the Enterprise instead of my orders transferring me to Washington, D.C. I was transferred to Berlin, Germany.

Mr. Jensen:

(laughs)

Mr. Cassel:

I was requested by name – I never knew why. I spent almost two years in Germany.

Mr. Jensen:

What did you do for the Navy in Berlin?

Mr. Cassel:

In Berlin I was assigned to the Admiral as the Admiral's Writer, which means the Secretary to the Admiral who was in the Office of Military Government for the U.S. Navy and head of that in Europe – in Germany. We – the United States, France and Russia – were disbanding the German Navy. The Admiral was advising on the breakup

of the Navy. In May of 1946 the Secretary of the Navy appointed a Board of Senior Naval Officers of which my Admiral was the Committee Head and was backed up with a couple of Captains. I did the paperwork and we were doing an analysis of the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. We went to Nuremberg and I actually attended many of the trials. The German Admirals were Admiral Rader and Admiral Doenitz. I sat through the trials for most of their testimony. Then in addition I attended some of the other trials. I was present for some of the trial of Funk, who was the finance man, and of Goering. And then after we had been there for awhile the Board began to compile their analysis of the Admiral's trials and I had to stay at the house to do the paperwork.

After about six weeks the Board stayed there and I went back to Germany and started back working in Berlin. Eventually the Admiral returned and we went about our normal duties. I worked for the first Admiral – William Glassford, a three-star Vice-Admiral. He was relieved by Rear Admiral Roscoe Schuirmann. Admiral Glassford was more the social Admiral. Admiral Schuirmann was strictly business. I did go with him to London for the Peace Treaty and I spent several weeks in London at the meeting. Then I left the Admiral and his aide and went back to Berlin for just normal duties until about November of 1947. The Navy wanted to do further reduction so they offered to discharge those who really wanted to get out. I had a wonderful almost two years in Germany, but I thought I had done my duty in the South Pacific and I was ready to get on with my life. So I took them up on their offer to discharge and I returned in November of 1947 to my home in Port Lavaca, Texas.

In January of 1948 I entered the University of Texas. I stayed active in the Navy Reserves for a couple of years, but then I joined the Air Force ROTC during my Junior and Senior during the Korean War. The Navy recalled me to active duty. The Air Force got the order cancelled and got me discharged from the Navy because I was now in the Air Force. I graduated as an Honorary Military Graduate and was selected to all of the honorary ROTC programs. I graduated in 1951 and received a commission in the Air Force as a Second Lieutenant and immediately called to active duty for the Korean War. I was assigned to an Air Force Fighter Squadron. They were on the last legs of their training before shipping out to Korea. Because I had so many months overseas duty I was not eligible to be sent overseas so I stayed at Bergstrom Air Force Base in Austin for

a few weeks, then I ended up at Strategic Air Command Security Training School in Camp Carson, Colorado.

I spent the rest of my Air Force Career as an instructor in Leadership in the SAC Security School. Then again, the war was nearing its end and they were releasing people. I asked to be relieved from active duty and I actually was released in November of 1952. I stayed active in the Air Force Reserve for several years but finally I resigned my commission after accumulating about ten years of accredited military service. Since then I've sort of lost contact with Air Force and Navy.

Mr. Jensen:

So how many years all together did you have – about five or six years in the Navy, right?

Then about ten years in the Air Force?

Mr. Cassel:

Not on active duty – I was on inactive reserve with the Navy for a couple of years then went with the Air Force. When I resigned my commission I resigned as a First Lieutenant in the Air Force. And that's about it!

Mr. Jensen:

I was looking at this write-up (transcript submitted to the Museum by Mr. Cassel). Can you tell us a little about your experience on the Enterprise, especially when you were first in battle?

Mr. Cassel:

The group of sailors that went with me from San Diego to Pearl Harbor were assigned duties to the ship. I was assigned to the U.S.S Enterprise strictly because my name started with a "C". All those people from A to D went to this ship without regard for what we did. I remember my first impression of the Enterprise as we were marching down the dock. The Enterprise was in dry dock being repaired from earlier damage. We walked down the pier and as we approached the Enterprise the side of the ship which was in dry dock burst into flames. That was our introduction – of course we were petrified, but the flames were extinguished very quickly. There were rumors, of course, that it could have been somebody intentionally setting the fire. I thought "what am I getting into?" Here I was seventeen years old and never been out of the state of Texas. About a week after we boarded the Enterprise the repairs were completed and we went to sea.

This would have been in September and I was first assigned to the Lookout position where all of the expendables were assigned first (laughs). I had spent some time hanging over the side chipping paint while we were still in dry dock and once we got underway I started going to Air Craft Recognition School classes. The Lookout Division seamen were those that were topside watching for approaching planes. We were the ones assigned to the various work parties.

After I had been at sea about two or three weeks I was on the hangar deck looking at the bulletin board on which was posted the openings in various departments. There was an opening for what they called a Yeoman Striker which meant typing and office work.

Mr. Jensen:

What's the difference between a Yeoman and a Yeoman Striker?

Mr. Cassel:

Yeoman Striker is a beginning seaman. When I went aboard the ship I was an apprentice Seaman and I was immediately promoted to Seaman Second Class. Then two weeks later Seaman First Class. At Seaman First Class I applied for the job in the First Lieutenant's Office which was Damage Control and Repair Department. They took me on and I stayed in the First Lieutenant's Office for a couple of years. I know that I was promoted very rapidly; every time I spent the very minimum time required in grade I received my promotion.

I left the ship as a Chief Yeoman which was the highest rank for enlisted men. From the First Lieutenant's Office my battle station was Damage Control Central.

Mr. Jensen:

What did you do in Damage Control?

Mr. Cassel:

We had nothing to do until there was damage. We had repair parties situated all over the ship – some seven or eight different repair parties who were there ready in case of damage. I was a telephone talker relaying messages between the repair party and the Damage Control Officer so that he would know what to do to repair the damage...temporary repairs, sometimes permanent repairs. Throughout – even though I worked in several other offices – I went from the First Lieutenant's office to Ship Service office where I worked about a year in the Navigator's office. In the Navigator's office

my primary job was typing up the ship's log from the entries that the Officer in command of that particular ship had entered. From there I went back to the First Lieutenant's office where I was assigned as the Yeoman-in-Charge. From there, actually after our last encounter in May, I was promoted to Chief Yeoman and took over the Captain's office. My last few months aboard ship were in the Captain's office. During all this time my battle station remained Damage Control Central. Damage Control Central was a very small compartment two decks below the water line. We set battle conditions – all the water-tight doors were closed and that compartment was just a little place (laughs). I started off as just one of the general phone talkers connected with the repair party in their particular part of the ship. As the years past I kept moving up a step so that in my last probably year or so of duty in Damage Control Central I was the Chief phone talker. I collected the information from the repair parties and passed it on to the First Lieutenant (the Damage Control Officer) who advised the repair parties what to do – whether to flood this compartment or that one to keep the ship on an even keel. We never saw any battle because we were two decks below the water line. We could hear – the repair parties kept us pretty well informed and the bridge also kept a loudspeaker going, letting crewmen know what was going on.

Mr. Jensen:

So you didn't – where you were located you couldn't see...

Mr. Cassel:

...couldn't see anything.

Mr. Jensen:

Did that make you - what do I want to say? Would you be more scared being down there not knowing what was going on or ...?

Mr. Cassel:

Well, I never thought about it a lot. I never was particularly scared.

My first battle was the Battle of Santa Cruz on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1942. We were in company with aircraft carrier, Hornet, and had been in General Quarters for some time. The Japanese had attacked the Hornet first and the Hornet was sunk. I kept thinking to myself "Why don't they leave the poor Hornet alone and come over and fight with us?" Well, they did. But I never knew as I was too young and too naïve to have much idea what was

going on. I do remember the day after the battle when we were out of General Quarters and were allowed to go around the Enterprise dock. I remember the dead being laid out on the hangar deck of the ship and in body bags ready for burial at sea. In my mind I remember thirteen bodies ready for burial at sea, but I actually learned in later years there were forty enlisted men and three or four officers who were killed in the Battle of Santa Cruz that were aboard the Enterprise.

Mr. Jensen:

So they were all buried at sea?

Mr. Cassel:

Yes.

Mr. Jensen:

I guess because that was all you could do...you weren't going back to port. They must have been able to repair most even some major damage it seems like from what I read. They could do a lot of repairs right there on the ships themselves.

Mr. Cassel

Oh, yes. Sometimes when there was no battle looming we would anchor off one of the little islands and sometimes the Seabee crews would come aboard and help. Our own construction and repair people were qualified to make most repairs until something major such as a bomb, torpedo, or kamikaze hit. That damage would be too much for them to handle so we went back to Pearl Harbor a couple of times for repair. We returned to the States once in 1943 and once in 1945 for major overhaul...something our crew couldn't do.

Mr. Jensen:

I understand (the Enterprise) was the most decorated ship in World War II.

Mr. Cassel:

Yes, it was. We had the Presidential Unit Citation which is the highest award given to a unit. And we received the Navy Unit Citation and of course, various campaign ribbons...Philippine Liberation...I don't even remember what all the battles were. I know that our last battle was in May of 1945. That was when a kamikaze plane crashed

on our forward elevator and raised it up – just the whole elevator – about 400 feet in the air. Of course that totally put us out of commission as far as an aircraft carrier. I do remember that there was extensive damage, but we kept the ship afloat.

For my efforts in accumulating the damage estimates and passing on repairs I received a Letter of Commendation from Captain Hall. He was still with the Captain when the war was over. He was the one that I had hoped to work for again.

Mr. Jensen:

In Washington, D.C.

Mr. Cassel:

In D.C., but that didn't happen. But I would not have traded my time in Berlin. We had an important job to do and it was interesting. We had a very, very small Navy contingency in Berlin and we participated in all types of sports. We pretty well held our own against the Army companies with whom we competed.

Mr. Jensen:

That's when at that point Berlin was split up between the Russians and the British and Americans.

Mr. Cassel:

There were four sections of Berlin. There was the French, the English, the Americans and the Russians, of course. We had free access between the U.S., French and English sectors, but it took quite some doing to cross over into Eastern Berlin that was controlled by the Russian Army. The country of Germany was divided into four zones. Since Berlin was the major city in the middle of the Russian zone that sort of left us almost like being in Damage Control Central two decks below the water line...we were surrounded.

Mr. Jensen:

You were right in the middle of the Russian zone?

Mr. Cassel:

Right! I had a lot of experiences with the Navy. It was just a good experience, but I was ready to go, ready to get on with my life.

Mr. Jensen:

I read something here which I thought was amazing. You mentioned earlier that you were assigned to ships by alphabet and it said that the U.S.S. Porter would intercept a port torpedo.

Mr. Cassel:

That was in our first battle.

Mr. Jensen:

It actually on purpose took that torpedo hit?

Mr. Cassel:

Well, the job of the smaller ships – the destroyers, destroyer escorts and the cruisers – was to protect the aircraft carriers. As I recall – of course I didn't see any of this, I just heard what was happening – there were two torpedoes coming from opposite directions and both of them were aimed right at the Enterprise. The Captain could evade one of them, but he couldn't get out of the way of both. So the Porter came in and took the torpedo and was sunk instantly with, I believe, no survivors.

I was also at General Quarters later in the war when the Navy was trying to develop night flying planes and the Enterprise was the guinea pig. We almost reversed – we had days at night and our nights at day. The night flying squadron was under the command of Lieutenant Commander Butch O'Hare, which O'Hare Airport was named after.

Commander O'Hare had earlier been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his part in the early months of the war. On their first night operation Lieutenant Commander O'Hare and two other planes were up. The radar didn't work too well and there was some confusion. In all this we were listening as the bridge was piping this conversation throughout the ship so everybody knew what was happening. Butch O'Hare said – his wing man, whose name I don't remember – the last thing O'Hare said was "Is that you? If so, turn on your lights!" And then that was it. It was believed that he was shot down...and it was believed at that time (rumored) and I think that it's actually mentioned that the Rear-seat Gunner of his wingman was the one that actually shot him. But, I don't know...that was never confirmed. It was never was brought to any conclusion. And I don't know – he was declared missing in action and I don't know when or where it was determined that he was not missing in action but was actually killed in battle.

Mr. Jensen:

You said the Enterprise at one point was hit where the elevator is. There was just one elevator to bring planes up?

Mr. Cassel:

No, there were three elevators including a forward elevator and a rear elevator. One of them usually brought the planes up from the hangar deck and the other one moved the planes from the flight deck back down to the hangar deck. They were stored in the hangar deck unless they were prepared for battle, then they were brought up.

Mr. Jensen:

At one point, I guess after the Hornet sunk, the planes were all out on a mission and they came back and they all landed on the Enterprise, or the ones that could make it back.

Mr. Cassel:

That was true, but later we had several carriers – new ships that had joined the fleet – in an operation that started there must have been five or six carriers at that time. We went into a battle that didn't start until about dusk and when the planes were on their return it was night. They couldn't see to land. The planes were falling all over because they were running out of gas. The admiral who was commanding the fleet at the time told the task force to go ahead and turn on their lights. They told the pilots "You see a lighted ship – land! Don't bother whether it is your own ship or not!" So, yes, all the carriers got returning planes from all the battle zones.

Mr. Jensen:

Where did they put them all?

Mr. Cassel:

They all had – there were five groups of planes and five carriers.

Mr. Jensen:

Then back when the Hornet was sunk the Enterprise had to take on their planes, too. I guess they just had to keep them on deck!

Mr. Cassel:

Oh, yes. One of my best friends in the Navy was a rear-seat gunner. The first time I ever flew I took his seat in the rear-seat gunner spot in an F-4F in a routine four hour patrol. That was quite an experience. I just know that I did it – I don't know if I was breaking

regulations or not (laughs), but the pilot was Chuck Bolton and the Rear-Seat Gunner was Joe Smythe. Joe became my best friend and we played volleyball together. That was our one big exercise aboard ship – all we had room for. They landed on another ship it was several days before I knew whether they were sunk. Finally they got sorted out and got back to their rightful planes after the battle was over.

Mr. Jensen:

What was the food like on the ship?

Mr. Cassel:

I never complained. At the beginning when we were in General Quarters we were given Spam sandwiches and coffee. I didn't mind all that except I couldn't drink coffee with milk or cream. But eventually enough people complained so they had plain coffee. Then toward the end of the war the k-rations – c-rations kind of filled in the food. We didn't miss too many regular meals because, you know, the battles were not continuous. They'd be over in a day or sometimes less than that. We'd be secured from General Quarters and then everything went normal.

Mr. Jensen:

What do you mean by "General Quarters"?

Mr. Cassel:

General Quarters is when a ship prepares for battle.

Mr. Jensen:

And each person has a place?

Mr. Cassel:

Each person has an assigned spot; each compartment was sealed off completely by airtight doors. Anytime there was an imminent threat to the ship or when the ship was going to be in battle with the Japanese fleet we would go into General Quarters. And sometimes it would last a couple of hours, sometimes half a day, sometimes a day. We never knew. Anytime the ship was in danger the Captain would call for General Quarters.

Mr. Jensen:

When you were just normal conditions I guess you had pretty good food.

Mr. Cassel:

I'm sure some people did, but I wasn't used to a lot of fancy food. I fared very well. We had a soda fountain aboard ship and they had ice cream and different types of drinks that you could buy. And if you knew someone that worked in the galley you might get extra food. But to me it was not bad at all.

Mr. Jensen:

Did you have a PX there in the ship?

Mr. Cassel:

We had a very small ship's store. The soda fountain, the laundry and the barber shop were all part of the ship service that I was assigned to as Yeoman to keep records of.

Mr. Jensen:

As sailors, did you pay for haircuts or were they free?

Mr. Cassel:

Free. The crew, the unlisted men, got their laundry free. The officers had to pay to have their laundry done. Part of my job as Ship Service Yeoman was to keep track of the officers' bills and see that they paid their bills.

Mr. Jensen:

So you were sort of like secretary-treasurer.

Mr. Cassel:

Well, we had the Ship Service Officer who was usually a Lieutenant assigned as his extra-curricular job, but I had a one-man office and pretty well kept all the records. Our books were audited every month by a Senior Officer who made sure everything was going right. I never really had any problems in all my years aboard the ship.

When the Enterprise was at Bremerton Washington Naval Yard where the repairs had been completed we were scheduled to sail the next day. The peace treaty was signed and the war was over. We went back to Pearl Harbor and joined up with the fleet – with the U.S.S. Missouri – and the entire fleet came back from Pearl Harbor through the Panama Canal into New York for Navy Day of 1945. The first night out of Pearl Harbor when all the ships were out there and they all had their lights on. It was a grand sight, because all during the years of the war we had total black-out so when we went up on the flight deck we saw miles and miles of ship's lights.

Mr. Jensen:

Like a big city!

Mr. Cassel:

That was quite something to observe.

Mr. Jensen:

The Missouri – that's where the Peace Treaty was signed, on the Missouri, right?

Mr. Cassel:

The Missouri, yes.

Mr. Jensen:

And you went to New York after that was signed?

Mr. Cassel:

Yes, for Navy Day. The ship was open to the public for tours for a couple of weeks.

Then on Navy Day itself we lined up a number of ships – the Enterprise being the center attraction followed by the battleship Missouri on the Hudson River for a Navy Day review of all these ships and the important role that they played during the war. I have a picture of the ships which was about four feet long. Of course the Enterprise was in the center. But it was quite spectacular to see all these aircraft carriers, battle ships, cruisers, destroyers.

One interesting thing – throughout the war the Enterprise and its soda fountain made ice cream. When one of our pilots would go in the water they'd be rescued by one of the escort ships – a destroyer. When they'd bring them back to ship we'd give them a five-gallon can of ice cream as an exchange (both men laugh). The smaller ships didn't have the facilities that we had.

Mr. Jensen:

When you were back in the States or Pearl Harbor, as a young man what did you do? Did you get shore leave?

Mr. Cassel:

I was, as I said, very, very young and very naïve. I went into Honolulu a few times, but it never appealed to me. I usually would stay aboard during my section's liberty and let someone go in my place. I think the Enterprise was probably the only ship in the fleet that did not get a chance to go to Sidney, Australia on rest and relaxation, but we never

did. We did go to Noumea, a city under French control. I did go ashore there to sightsee. When we were tied up in the little islands under minor repair the ships crew would be allowed to go by sections ashore on the little island. As they left the ship they were given two cans of beer. There was nothing there except palm trees, coconuts and sand. But it was a chance for them to blow off a little steam, play softball and all sorts of games. But I didn't take advantage of it very often because first of all I sunburned too easily and second I'd just as soon stay aboard ship, so I did. We had an active volleyball program – we had an enlisted men's team and an officer's team who competed against each other. We had Yeoman teams and Marine teams and the air-group teams. That was the extent of our recreation. Occasionally we would have a movie.

Mr. Jensen:

Where did you play the volleyball at? Which deck?

Mr. Cassel:

On the hangar deck.

Mr. Jensen:

I was going to say – you could lose a lot of volleyballs...on the flight deck (laughs).

Mr. Cassel:

Early in the war we had one volleyball and it got knocked overboard. Our Executive Officer, Commander Tom Hamilton dove off the ship and retrieved our volleyball which was a *very* big morale booster. But in the later years we got more and more equipment – we had basketball and badminton and other things. We had a very active volleyball program aboard ship, but then when we were anchored with other ships we would have inter-ship competitions. That's about it! In Berlin, we had a very active athletic program which was designed to keep us out of trouble. I played volleyball, softball, badminton and tennis and the Navy was Berlin Champions in softball and volleyball. We played for the European Championship in both sports. But the Air Force sort of beat us out in both. The Air Force volleyball team had big six-footers, which was very tall at that time. But we had a lot of fun and worked hard.

Everybody did a good job. In Berlin if you had the least bit of a screw-up you were transferred out because we were just too visible to other nations. When I attended the Nuremburg War Crimes Trials, of course, there were officers and people from just about

every country. When I was there I was dressed in my Chief's uniform and that's so different from an ordinary enlisted man, but not quite like an officer and nobody ever knew just whether to salute me or not! (laughs)

Mr. Jensen:

The current Enterprise is the nuclear aircraft carrier, right?

Mr. Cassel:

Yes.

Mr. Jensen:

The Enterprise from World War II that you served on...what happened to it?

Mr. Cassel:

There was an attempt made to turn it into a museum, but they couldn't raise enough money to move the ship from Staten Island where it spent its last days on the Potomac River, so it was sold for scrap on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1958. I believe there have been two additional Enterprises since then. The Lexington that's a museum in Corpus Christi was a second generation – it was newer than the Enterprise. The original Lexington was sunk. The Enterprise was the first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, but I believe after about ten years it was replaced by a newer type. In the many years since I returned from the South Pacific and Berlin, I've only met two sailors that I knew during the war. When I went to Germany I was totally cut off. Our news wasn't that current with what was going on in the United States and I just never knew who went where.

Mr. Jensen:

When you were on the ship, the Enterprise, did you get much news?

Mr. Cassel:

There was a daily bulletin. It was just current shipboard news – anything that wasn't censored was published in this bulletin including any special events...

Mr. Jensen:

Did you know who was playing in the World Series? Did they give sports news?

Mr. Cassel:

In the 1946 World Series when the St. Louis Cardinals were playing in the final game it was broadcast in Berlin at about three-o'clock in the morning. I was a Cards fan so I

stayed up until two or three-o'clock in the morning and listened to the ballgame, which the Cards won. But aboard ship it was just a daily bulletin. In Germany we had a local Navy publication and the Stars and Strips carried news of interest to the military from all over.

Mr. Jensen:

Did you get mail while you were on the ship?

Mr. Cassel:

Yes. Our mail got to be fairly regular. Of course, everyone was encouraged to write home. We had D mail that was a self-sufficient sheet of paper that you could write home and seal it and address it. There was no postage needed - it was just delivered. I have in my scrapbook, I think, a letter that one of the captains from the Nuremburg War Crimes Trials had written and he had addressed it just simply "Virgil Cassel - Port Lavaca, Texas". That wouldn't get very far today (laughs), but I got it.

Mr. Jensen:

Well, can you think of anything else?

Mr. Cassel:

Not really...I don't regret being on the Enterprise for almost four years. And I certainly don't regret my years in Germany. I was a lot happier as a Navy enlisted man than I was as an Air Force officer. I don't know why...I spent my twenty-first birthday in the middle of the Atlantic in January of 1946 after Navy Day - well, actually on the Enterprise after the repairs were completed when we returned to Pearl Harbor and picked up around sixteen hundred released P.O.W.'s and brought them back to the States. Then the ship was converted into a troop transport; our hangar deck had bunks installed about five people high. We made two trips to England and one to the Azores Islands. Returning trips we would have about five thousand Army people.

Mr. Jensen:

These were American P.O.W.'s?

Mr. Cassel:

No, not necessarily. The ones we picked up in Honolulu and brought to New York were P.O.W.'s, I believe. The trips to England were troops returning home for releases.

Going through the Panama Canal was very interesting. Our ship had to remove a couple of gun mounts on each side because the ship was too wide to go through the Canal. But that was quite an experience. You'd almost have to be there and see it to understand how it worked.

Mr. Jensen:

Well, I want to thank you for coming today and telling your story. We try to collect as many of them as we can, so we certainly appreciate you taking the time.

Mr. Cassel:

Delores (Young – Marketing Director for Museum of the Pacific) is a very determined person.

Mr. Jensen:

(laughs)

**Tape 2147**

**Transcribed by:**

**Julie Storer**

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