

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR
(Nimitz Museum)

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Fredericksburg, TX 78624

Interview with
ROBERT L. HAGEE

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

ROBERT L. HAGEE

This is Pete Jensen. Today is December 4th, 2008. I am interviewing Mr. Bob Hagee. This interview is taking place in the Lutheran Church 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. Bob, if you could talk a little about your family and where you were born and that type of information.

MR. HAGEE: Well, my mother and dad came to New Mexico separately in 1800 and they settled in Lincoln County close to Billy the Kid there and they got married in 1901 and I was born in Tularosa, New Mexico. I was the tenth of eleven children and grew up in New Mexico in the mountains nearby in what is now known as Ruidoso. The little town and post office was Alto, New Mexico, and that's where I went to my early school in Alto, one room schoolhouse, one teacher, eight grades in one room and they did a fantastic job in that school for having a few minutes with each class each day. Then I went to Captain High School in Captain, New Mexico, and played a little football and ran a little track. Out of there I joined the navy.

MR. JENSEN: What made you decide to join the navy?

MR. HAGEE: Well, that goes back to almost early childhood there in the mountains. Once in awhile those little airplanes would fly over the mountains and I'd see them and I'd say, "Boy, someday I'm going to do that. Someday I'm going to do that." And then I was in El Paso at Christmas 1938-39 and I saw a big sign there on the courthouse said,

“Join the Navy. Learn to Fly.” So I went up and they suckered me in, and that’s really what it was because I didn’t know then but they were recruiters the same as they always were. So I told them I wouldn’t go until high school was over so they waited and called me in July. I went to San Diego and boot camp wasn’t hard. Lot of people thought it was but Dad worked me harder than boot camp ever worked me.

MR. JENSEN: What did your father do?

MR. HAGEE: He ranched and farmed. That’s what we did and I thought I was a cowboy when I left and went out there, but, anyway, I didn’t mind boot camp. Just as we graduated, they canceled our boot leave. They were starting to re-commission some old destroyer air force stackers, 200 boats, and we all got sent down to the marine railway and dry docks and started scraping hulls and putting ships in commission. In a month or so I was assigned to the BAINBRIDGE and went from there to Mare Island up by San Francisco. There was another incident of the BAINBRIDGE that was unique. We missed the channel and wrapped a buoy chain around our starboard screw and was all day getting it off and getting it back in the yard. We came out of there and went to Panama and our duty there. Destroyer Division 62 was us and some more were in charge of the security of the canal. We changed sides just about every month and patrolled one side, then that side would go to the other side, and most of it was to get educated with going through the canal, the sea. We had gunnery practice off the coast out of Perilous Island. We swam a lot; we had the row boats out. We did what the navy did in peace time along with patrolling. It was a good time for me, a kid away from home, growing up and I did well. I advanced a little more rapidly than most people did, and spring of 1940 my division officer thought I was a pretty good worker and pretty good kid. He said, “How

would you like to go to the Naval Academy?" And I said, "I'd like it very much but I don't think I have enough education to go to the Naval Academy." He said, "We'll send you to prep school." And I said, "Well, I wouldn't mind it" but, you know, I was out on a fence. I didn't know. Well, this went on a month or two and then they called me down and they said, "How old are you?" and I told them. Said you'd have a year in prep school and you'd be over twenty-one then. You're too old to go to the Academy. So I stayed aboard the BAINBRIDGE and in the spring, there we entered into some early war time activities. Christmas of 1939, just before Christmas, we put to sea under orders to intercept the British Cruiser out there and help them out. We relieved him of a captured German ship and brought it into Panama. They refitted it and put it to sea under an English flag. We fired shots across merchant man's bow every now and then and made them heave to and let us inspect their cargo and where they were going. Some of them were a little belligerent about letting us know what they had. Another thing we found very interesting during that time in 1940 even as late as very early '41, fishing boats hundreds of thousand gallons of diesel oil aboard and the next day we'd see the same boat empty. This happened time after time.

MR. JENSEN: Where did it go?

MR. HAGEE: They unloaded it; we think they sold it to submerged submarines. That's just an opinion but we'd see them two days later and they'd be empty and no barrels, no nothing and gone. In their logs and everything they'd say, "Well, we're going here. We've got this." We've got them where they got rid of it and that's all we ever got.

MR. JENSEN: Was this off of Panama?

MR. HAGEE: No, this was between Panama and Key West you might say mostly. In the spring of 1940 we burned out a reduction gear and had to go to Norfolk and we went up there on one screw all the way. They fixed it and we came back and reopened the navy base at Key West. It had been shut down for twelve years. That was a good time. People were glad to see us back, the money and the marines that came; it was a party every night. We patrolled out of there then same as we had done and then we went to fleet maneuvers in the Virgin Islands and there was the first time it really dawned on me we're getting ready to go to war. We tried to tow tanks and landing barges aboard behind destroyers. We lost one of them, lost a tank, saved the crew, but the way the destroyer turned the thing over and it was too fast and we tried to tow them into twenty knots and it didn't work. Anyway, it was a good time for kids, you know. In the meantime, we had been out of Guantanamo Bay and all down through there and I made 3rd class petty officer at the time which was very early. I was very early making petty officer because the division officer liked me and decided I was a good worker and minded my own business. The man I worked for, carpenter's mate, was in charge of the G&R Division and he backed me and I made 3rd class very early. Then we went from there to Norfolk and they changed our armament and we went up and down the coast. We had 4-inch surface guns, had one, two, three, four 4-inch surface guns depth charge racks on the back and that was our armament, a couple of 50 calibers. They took the 4-inch guns off, put on four dual purpose guns, 3-inch for aircraft and surface and air and they put on a lot of 100mm instead of the fifties. They put on two more depth charge racks so we could drop and carry more depth charges. They didn't increase our birthing capacity much but they increased our crew by about thirty men and this put a load on everything and very

crowded. We were in and out of San Juan and through that country in there and Key West. In May of 1941 I think we were in Philadelphia or somewhere up there and we went to sea and went to Newfoundland and picked up a captured German luxury liner. They wanted to bring it to Boston and refit it for troop transport and we went around the northern end of Newfoundland and down between Canada and Newfoundland because they thought that would be safer than coming through the shipping channel where all the submarines were. The navy thought, or somebody thought, I don't know, they would sink this ship rather than let us have it for transport and it was a luxury liner. Gosh, it was a beautiful thing inside and we saw one somewhere and he just looked at us and we looked at him. We saw the periscope but as we turned around the northern end of Newfoundland we watched them sink the Hood. We could see the gun flashes we were that close. We asked the navy and they said no, stay out of it. So we came on with our little ship we had and brought it to Boston. Then in July we went to New York way up the Hudson and cut the crew in half and gave half of us 48 hour liberty and then gave the other half 48-hour liberty and they said something is happening here. What in the world's going on? This just doesn't happen, you know. We stayed there two days, three or four days until all our liberties were over. Things had jelled outside. And then we left there and went to Norfolk and when we got to sea, skipper who was on the fantail there, said I'll read your orders and you'll know what we're going to do. He said you will rendezvous with the REPUBLIC, the WASP, the QUINCEY and all the other ships just off of Norfolk and you will take these troops to Iceland and establish a base there at whatever cost. So this was actually the first expeditionary force. We did, we moved into what is now Keflavik and that is where we started the base. We anchored up at Albafor

about twenty-five miles north of there but the main body of the troops were right there at Rikovitz or what is now known as Keflavik base now.

MR. JENSEN: What did they use that base for?

MR. HAGEE: The English had something there but we needed a fuel stop on the convoys and the NEW MEXICO moved in there, stayed awhile, the WASP was there but the big thing was the battleship TIMBER. TENDER VULCAN was there and the first week in October when the KEARNEY was hit that was the first man of war hit by German submarines. They were in a convoy just a day or so ahead of us. We went through the wreckage the next morning after we heard they were hit. KEARNEY didn't sink. It made its way to Iceland. The VULCAN repaired it and sent it back to Boston. That's how good a ship the VULCAN was. The next week our sister ship RUBEN JAMES sank, blown in half and everybody aboard went down. We got a few off the stern.

MR. JENSEN: There was a song written about that is there not?

MR. HAGEE: I remember the song, but the Ruben James was a boatswain mate. He had got a ship named after him because he was a right hand man for some commodore back many years. They named the ship after him because he was such a powerful leader for this commandant and the song basically was originally about the boatswain mate but I think it kind of lapped over there somewhere. The BAINBRIDGE came after William Bainbridge who got his fame in the Tripoli wars. I went to reunion, I may be getting ahead of myself here, three or four years ago in Florida and we were kind of guests of honor 'cause we were survivors of the old BAINBRIDGE and they commissioned the fifth BAINBRIDGE and we got to be for them. Good time. Anyway, when we came

back from Iceland we never got to come back to the U. S. after taking the invasion force up there. If we anchored at all we anchored at Newfoundland at Aregentina(?). There we refueled, re-provisioned, whatever we needed in Halifax, picked up a convoy just off the north coast of England or Scotland, picked up another convoy come back and we refueled and re-provisioned. Then the NEW MEXICO and the WASP when those ships left there in early fall they went to South Pacific. The Wasp was sunk in, I think, the battle of Midway and the NEW MEXICO was hit when we invaded there and they crippled them up pretty bad. I was in those invasions. Had one good incident up there that sticks in my mind because we were anchored, VULCAN was over to be anchored down, a lots of ships in there anchored, a lot of empty merchantmen in there anchored in Habifour, beautiful place and wind came down one hundred and twenty-five knots. Everybody got under way, even the VULCAN got underway with two anchors down to hold the position in the bay. From October on that's the kind of weather we had 35 degrees water in the ocean coming in the engine room, wind from fifty to a hundred knots never let up day after day, night after night and, because the submarines liked to attack at sunup and sundown, we had to man the whole battery every day sunup and sundown, stand watch was four on and four off the rest of the time and if you were lucky and nothing happened, not too many contacts, you got four hours every third night. That was the north Atlantic war. It was long quiet dark nights. As the winter came on days got short and it was just dark all the time. You couldn't use any lights topside and weather was horrible and we made our first attack I think in September, I'm not just sure. At the same time the BROOM was fired on by a submarine. That was the first time they fired. I don't believe they intended to sink it. They didn't really want us aggravated. They just wanted the

ship and they left us alone. Then the KEARNEY came in that night and the English had fired a lot of star shells and it was as bright as day they said and KEARNEY was a new ship, one of our new destroyers, that come a steaming in there under full power from another convoy. He came to help and they let him have it right off to get him out of the way. It hit him in the dead fire room and he didn't blow in half so he limped into Iceland and was repaired. During that time, too, the English captured a submarine up there, one of the small ones that did most of the attacking and we got to see it. That was a fighting man's submarine.

MR. JENSEN: Do you know how many people?

MR. HAGEE: Probably fifty, if that many. They were small crews but had lots of torpedoes and they worked off of mother ships in pairs and this is another thing I'd like to bring out. Wolf packs; we didn't see any. This was a story. The way they attacked and the way they were very successful, one would come in very, very old, maybe even have his conning tower up. It was common. It takes two destroyers, one to attack him and one to hold him to attack him a second time so there's a big gap in the screen then. The other one comes in very quietly underneath all this mess and surface and he has no opposition. He'll fire his four tubes and turn and if he doesn't have any more he'll fire some more as he leaves and then they run, both of them. Once he comes in and attacks this guy you go after he's already dove and he's getting out of there. He's evading and going, he don't care. He just wants you to follow him and it happened and then next time he gets to attack and this guy gets to be the dummy, you know, and it was very effective, very effective. They'd come in and sink three or four ships in spite of everything you could do. So this went on all winter but along toward spring it was beginning to ease off a little

bit. Then we were coming back to the States in December and we hadn't been ashore in Reykjavik since we'd gone up there. You can imagine one hundred and thirty men on thirty foot by three hundred feet that long. We had a terrible storm coming back. It was a bear cat and I was on sonar watch and I was one of the early sonar operators. It wasn't my rating, I was a ship fitter; water damage control was my job but they needed sonar operators. Asked for volunteers and I volunteered and became a sonar operator. I was on watch and one of the officers came in and said, "Hagee, they need you down in engine room. Let so and so take over." The ship had twisted until it had broken the fire main in the engine room and so me and machinist's mate down there at two o'clock in the morning took it apart and put it back together and got the leak stopped. At this time the weather had been so rough and the newer ships, 400 boats we called them, were having problems up there. They had sent them back to the States to be redone. They were top heavy, they were turning over, they couldn't take the rough seas and so most of the newer destroyers had gone back to the States by this time to get refit. The old destroyers like us they had poured twenty ton of lead in our keel before we went up there and we were a lot more stable. We had the largest roll; recorded in the log was fifty-seven one way and sixty-three the other. That's a hundred and fifteen degree roll. We always say, well, when you don't roll back you just get knocked back.

MR. JENSEN: What was it like being on the ship in that kind of weather?

MR. HAGEE: You didn't sleep, you eat standing up what you could hold in your hand and you didn't ever undress. We'd go a week or ten days whatever it took to get into Iceland, while we were there we maybe got a shower and cleaned up a little bit. We pulled in alongside NEW MEXICO one day, took on oil and some other things. Two

guys had their white skivvy shirts on and blue britches and hanging over the rail and I was in the roughest old sea garb you could ever see. I had two weeks growth of beard and I was dirty and I said I need to hook up some fresh water. So that guy came and one of them said, "If you put me on that damned thing I'd go over the hill." That was the destroyer life, old four pipers that were very stable and very competent and had some good sailors I like to say, I think we did.

MR. JENSEN: Did a lot of people get seasick, probably not after awhile.

MR. HAGEE: Not then. I got over it and most of them. We had a couple but if they were chronic we got rid of them somewhere else. Then as we were coming back to the States with a convoy it got terribly rough and the fire main broke first, but during this time and the previous time we had begun to break up other places. I had Ford engine in the engine room, Ford engine room, both sides where the hatches come out like that. It was starting to split the main deck here and I had one of them eight feet long that opened and closed that much as the ship worked. I was pumping my dry bilges fore and aft pit tanks we used for balance. I was pumping them three and four times a day. The engine room was pumping twenty-four hours a day. We were leaking so badly it riveted holes in seams and whatever because it just twisted and turned and we were breaking up. Me and this machinist mate and a gunner's mate came off a watch and one other man was in the galley. We kept soup and bouillon nearly twenty-four hours a day and you could go anytime down there and get you some hot soup and bouillon. There was two of us sitting on one sink with our feet on the other one like this and two over here with their feet on this one, that ole ship at fourteen knots came up and got steeper and steeper and steeper. All at once pshew and this boatswain mate said grab a hold or the gunner mate said grab

a hold this is gonna be a rough one and bang we hit the bottom and it stopped just like hitting the bottom, just dead still, and here it come back to the top. Everybody get topside, hollered torpedo. The doctor was in the bunk room just under the bridge. He come out hollering torpedo. It had mashed his bunk about this wide and threw him out of it. It had shoved our bridge almost from gunnel to gunnel back eighteen inches, had a gap that wide in the deck.

MR. JENSEN: Eighteen inches or so?

MR. HAGEE: Yes. So we did what we could. That water poured right in the ward room and we did what we could. The convoy went straight to the yard. It took them a month to repair us and while we were there, Pearl Harbor was bombed. All sailors said, "Thank God we got help finally." That was our opinion. So this was up to Christmas.

MR. JENSEN: How did they fix the eighteen inch gap in there?

MR. HAGEE: The old destroyers, all the two hundreds, I'm going to tell you all about this. Two anchors here, the gun was here, ammunition boxes here, ??? lines all along here and some other things; the bridge like this, the doctor's bunk was either here or right here. I'm not just sure but it was right in the forward in deck. It broke all the rivets 'cause all of these were riveted at that time. Broke all the rivets loose from about here to here and just caved this whole thing in straight across here and left a big eighteen inch gap right there. We had tried to fuel a couple of weeks earlier at sea and the two bits we had here had been jerked out of the deck. When they jerked it up to the bull nose here it broke the line and we had an eighteen by two foot hole there that was dumping water down in the officers' quarters. Then we come on back here on the stern like this and that

torpedo took ???, and torpedo took ???, and torpedo took ???, had depth charges here, depth charges here. I forgot where I was going there.

MR. JENSEN: Where the average was or where pulled apart here?

MR. HAGEE: Well, we couldn't use any of the torpedo tubes. Oh, the engine room, forward engine room was like this with hatches so that when it was hot you could open the after engine rooms like. Those splits were right here and that was almost to mid ship. This one was over eight feet long come right out of forward engine there and had two shorter ones there and me and the engineering officer talked about it. Of course, he had a pretty good education, I had a pretty good education for water type damage control but that was all. We agreed that the best thing to do was just drill a hole over at the end of that and see if we could slow down the split so we'd have a little place to work. And it worked, I think; it slowed it down. Anyway, we were about to sink, about to come apart, when we went into the navy yard to be refitted. I think, in my estimation, not a man missed that ship and went back to sea when we went back to the North Atlantic afterward, not a man missed it. Everyone came back. A lot of us were a little overdue getting back to ship but we didn't miss it.

MR. JENSEN: What did you do in Iceland?

MR. HAGEE: The few times we got ashore, we went to town and ate. They had terrific restaurants and pastries there. We were in town very little but Keflavik was getting bigger and bigger and a lot of good stuff, oranges and stuff like that came and migrated into town and everything. The first thing we knew we were instead of foes we were friends 'cause they were pretty pro-Nazi when we moved in there. The Germans had come in there and built huge steam-fed hot houses and they had stuff that they had never

had before. They had done a lot of stuff for Iceland, technology-wise, and they were a little pro-Nazi. About three months they were a little pro-American. They treated us very well.

MR. JENSEN: What was the weather like?

MR. HAGEE: Summer was very nice, about twenty hours of daylight, sun just dipped down and come back, the winter was just the reverse. Now Reykjavik is not too bad. It is on the south side and the Gulf Stream just barely creases the south end so that keeps the south end of Iceland pretty nice. The north end of it is bitter and we went up there earlier in the year going to Murmansk(sp?) and around there and, oh, that's miserable. When you get off the Gulf Stream the temperature drops, the water temperature drops, everything freezes where it hits and you get top heavy. We didn't have much sympathy for these guys in Pearl Harbor basking in the sun. It was a sad thing but that's just the way we thought. Then I went from there, and I had been trying to get to aviation for three years and they never would approve it. One boatswain mate told me as long as you work you're never going to aviation. They'll keep you here until you die. So we got a new executive officer aboard and he had come up through the ranks and was a lieutenant, and a really nice guy. So I took my request up there to go to aviation. I said I've been trying to get this approved for two years and I said I just can't get it approved. He said, "Well, by George, I always thought if a man in the navy thought he could improve himself he ought to be given a chance. He said I may be in trouble but I'm going to send you down to Norfolk and let you change your rate and if I'm fired when the skipper gets back, so be it. That's when I got to aviation.

MR. JENSEN: What was his name?

MR. HAGEE: Fransu, I don't know his first name, Lt. Fransu and he was a whale of a good officer, really a good one. He replaced an officer by the name of Marshall and inside here they were the same man. Marshall had the Academy and everything, he was well educated, really a brilliant man and what a navigator and sailor. The two men were very similar except for their education, they were really a pair of good people, and Fransu became skipper before he left it. Then I went to Norfolk, took me nearly a year to change my rate. There I made chief, I did well enough to make chief. I went to the South Pacific then in BB20 as a navy seaplane bombing squadron and I had more experience than nearly any other chief in the PBM so I got to be engineering chief and my plane commander just happened to be exec. A great bond came between me and him. I run the maintenance of the squadron and his plane crew and he ran the squadron and me. He was a good officer. He became four-star Admiral Weinser and I knew him till he died. I visited and had dinner with him just two months before he died in Pensacola.

MR. JENSEN: What was his last name?

MR. HAGEE: M. F. Weinser was his whole name.

MR. JENSEN: What kind of planes were these?

MR. HAGEE: PBMs. I was in the PBM 3, I think we had the PBM3D down there and it was a different modifications. Then when we got to the war front we caught the Wolf 1 in the Halmari (sp?) group at Morati(sp?) That was way south of the Philippines and there we were. We didn't know what we were going to do. We just went out there as a bombing squadron. There they decided we would be a Black Cat squadron; you've probably heard of them. The Black Cats were developed by the PBY people, the earlier people in the seaplanes down there and what they did because they were slow and quiet

and efficient and they had a lot of durability and could carry a pretty good bomb load. They painted them black, had a lot of different slogans for them and insignias. We hunted shipping at night and they would isolate an area, anything in here is yours. We don't have anything in there. You sink anything you find in there. What we were trying to do was to get to the China coast and cut off the oil supply and mineral supply to Japan. That's where all their supply was in Borneo. We couldn't reach China coast from the Halmari group. When we got to Leyte Bay, I think in December, we couldn't reach it from Leyte Bay either. And then we invaded Lingayen. Every squadron there could reach the China coast every night. I think there were two or three PBM squadrons. There were five squadrons there and I don't know which had the most planes whether the PBMs or PBYs did. There were five squadrons there and the first day we were there was the first time they ever shelled our planes. They began to shell our planes. The invasion was nothing. Landing barges landed, the town people met them, everybody went on beachheads. Then they started shelling our planes and whoever was in charge, Kincaid had the seventh fleet but I'm not sure he was there at that time; NEW MEXICO was hit that night and put out of commission. Kamikaze went right into his bridge from the rear and they put a hole in one of our planes. They said we'll get him on the deck and move those planes over out of reach and send a couple hundred men over there and silence those mortars that are over there. Two hundred men never reached the beach. That was the second third of the invasion and then all war broke loose over there. For the next week they had a hard fight over there and they never bothered us. We had five squadrons there and we each flew three flights a night and all fifteen planes could reach China coast every night and within thirty days we had the oil shut down. You could tell the lack of

bombings everywhere. They didn't hit any planes down around Manila and in there, they didn't hit them nearly as often anymore, they were just running out of everything. Then we went there from Manila and this buckle was made there, March, 1945. We went to Manila and then we went, we were at all the beachheads one time or another. We went to Mindoro, went to Palawan, and then we moved and went to Bruney Bay and then we went down to Tauai Tauai(sp?) just north of Borneo and we were gonna help the Aussies take Borneo back. What we did there was mostly shipping, whatever we could find. We hit land base, and it was so easy there then. The war was so wound down, the Japs had so little by June that most of our attacks, especially on land, they didn't even shoot back at us. They didn't have anything to shoot with.

MR. JENSEN: What year was this?

MR. HAGEE: Early 45. A good story here, maybe I ought to tell it. That went quite well and we saw a lot that we had never been able to see before. We saw a lot of the things in the daylight we'd never been able to see before, because we only flew at night. It became a different perspective. We got to use our guns on the plane a lot more. We hardly ever used them flying at night. We dropped bombs; that's all we did.

MR. JENSEN: Were these dive bombers?

MR. HAGEE: No, that was fly by hand every night all the way. We picked up a ship in this area we were assigned. We knew it was a bogie we could hit it, quick as we got him on tv we went ten feet off the water, jumped him and run. We allowed one or two five-hundred pounders as far as it would go, that's what we had. We hit one or two whatever we thought it was going to take and if we only dropped one, we'd hunt another one.

Once we dropped the two of them we tried to get our way home. And some nights we

didn't find nothing; we just flew and flew and flew and didn't find nothing. Most of the nights were that way, just long black dark nights. And then one night down on the Island of Hiland, I believe it was, I'm sure it was, we could see the moon in there and see a lot of ships in the bay there. Weinsler said they're floating, aren't they? I said sure looks like it. We couldn't tell; it was dark. You could just see the bright ships and spots in the water, you know, couldn't see nothing. He said let's go in and look and see what's there; don't look like much there. So we went in and one of the guys back in the after-station said, "Mr. Weinsler, I don't believe these ships are floating. I can see water in those open hulls, they're sunk. So we went way up to the upper end of the bay, turned around and started back and there was ship building place there looked like it maybe had something going on on it. Couldn't tell 'cause it was dark. Weinsler said. "We'll just drop a bomb on that thing; we haven't found nothing else tonight, we'll just get that ship." Just as quick as we nosed over, wasn't a thousand feet, he nosed over toward that thing and that whole harbor just erupted with gunfire. I never saw so much pressure in my life and I was on the flight engineers panel and I felt the plane was bumping. I said, "They're shooting at us" and I looked out the window and saw these big guns going off over there and I said, "My God, I'm in trouble." I looked around and found my pistol and put it on and got my life jacket and put it on. I said we're going to get in water here in just a minute and I began to get ready to abandon ship and look at my engine in between and about that time it all quit. As quick as they opened fire he just dove right down on the water like that and run and that's what got us out of there. We reported it and he said that report of that being a benign harbor anymore that the air force had bombed out, he says

it's pretty live. Anyway that was our experience there. We never even took a bullet hole and got away with it.

MR. JENSEN: You flew off a ship?

MR. HAGEE: No, we flew off the water.

MR. JENSEN: Oh, that's right, you were in an airplane.

MR. HAGEE: Yes, we operated off a tender and that's why we couldn't go generally with the first invasion wave because we had to have a tender in there to put out buoys so we could tie up. By the time we got there we needed gas and a lot of things, you know, and we had to have a place to anchor. So the tender had to go in right behind the main force to get us a place and then we came. I wasn't at Leyte when MacArthur was there. He had already moved on.

MR. JENSEN: If you didn't drop the bomb, did you have any trouble landing again with those bombs?

MR. HAGEE: No, they were on the wing in a bomb bay. A lot of times we'd have two bombs on one wing and a three-hundred gallon gas tank in the other wing and if we got under fire we'd drop that gas tank. It had no self-sealing, it was a metal tank. No, it would blow up with the pressure in that empty tank, and the self-sealing tank hardly ever blew up. Just an empty metal tank a tracer would go through it and it's empty it's going to blow up. So we'd drop that tank if we got under fire after the tank was empty because we didn't need the gas. It was no value to us anymore. We burned it out first and then if we had to drop it we could drop it. And then if we needed to be lighter that's eighteen hundred pounds or six pounds per gallon whatever that three hundred gallons weighed.

MR. JENSEN: You still had bombs in the other side, wouldn't that sort of...

MR. HAGEE: Oh, that's not a big thing, not a big problem, because the first off the bomb base closes and then the PV2 that I was in, later the bomb bay was in the belly, so it was nothing. Whatever we had there, gas tanks or whatever, it was too near the center. No that was no thing. We could take care of that. Maybe I need to add this personal, not my personal story, but it's personal for the plane. We got our crew down there in June, I believe, because I was relieved in July, and we took the crew on its indoctrination flight. When we got a new crew, one of the crews that had experience with the plane commander, the plane captain, the head ordnance man Fred Radiman would go with this new crew and say this is what you've got to do to go home and see your kids. So this was a young red-headed lieutenant, I think a whale of a pilot, but he was much too aggressive and my pilot told him you won't live thirty days out here if you do this. You cannot do what you're doing in this airplane and get away with it. Well, we turned him loose, the first flight he did it and that was the end. The sad part of it was he hit both ships he was trying to hit, he did a good job, and then went back to strafe and that's when they nailed his tail to the wall. Then he said, "Well, we're going down, we're not going down, we're going down, we're not going down" and two or three hours later he said, "We're just on the west side of the Celabees, I'm going to have to put her on the beach somewhere quick as I find a place." It was night, you know, and the navigator gave us position, it was a degree wrong, we were looking at sixty miles north of where he said he was and we were the next day finding him. The Japs found him first and we lost the whole works. Anyway, then I came home and went out of navy and then I went back in and I never got back to where I was. The navy had changed and I had changed, but I

went into a good airplane, the PB2. I stayed in that until I retired. And that was a real fine airplane and we flew all over the Aleutions, we photographed.

MR. JENSEN: What's that planes identity?

MR. HAGEE: The Lockheed Neptune, the navy called it the PV2. We photographed southeastern Alaska in 1948 and we photographed the north shore in 1949 in prelude to this war thing. That was the fifth naval oil reserve then and we were in charge of security northwest sea frontier at that time. Admiral Perry, I think, had that at the time. And by the way, Admiral Kinkaid had the Seventh Fleet in the south ??? hit him all the time. I don't know whether this is interesting or not but I brought these just in case it would be interesting. We've got through World War II, any questions?

MR. JENSEN: What have you got there? Bob is showing me various medals from his war time.

MR. HAGEE: This American Defense here and this big A means the North Atlantic war from September the 1st 'til December the 7th. They issued a star for this long after the war was over. This is a good conduct. I got three Air Medals. This is the Distinguished Flying Cross. These are the three big campaigns in the South Pacific. This is Philippine Liberation medal.

MR. JENSEN: What were the three campaigns?

MR. HAGEE: Philippines, New Guinea and Borneo, I guess. I may be a little wrong on this. I don't know just how this was divided up. All I know is we got three stars off of that and then this is the original combat air crew wing. When we came back from any mission after we graduated as a combat air crew you had to have written verification of each star. One star meant you hit them from air to air, or air to ground or air to sea. If

you got all three that meant you had hit them air to air, air to ground and air to sea. You had to hit them in all three places and you had to have verification. Now you buy that wing and the stars are in there. They just come with it. A lot of guys came down there and saw a lot more action than I did off a carrier and they had one star 'cause they just hit them air to air or maybe air to sea and that would give them two, but you had to have verification at that time, how many stars you could put in there. This is the Air Crew Wing that came out later and the rest of these are just, oh, a few years ago the State of Missouri gave me that. They wanted a little notoriety and they got some of us together. My son, maybe you don't know who he is, doesn't make any difference, my son happens to be a big shot in the Marine Corps. He was home on leave and they conned him into coming back

MR. JENSEN: He was the Commandant of the Marine Corps?

MR. HAGEE: Yes, he's Gen. Hagee.

MR. JENSEN: Lives here?

MR. HAGEE: He grew up here and went to high school here. He's coming. That's why I'm here.

MR. JENSEN: Well, he comes back to Fredericksburg a lot and he's just a terrific guy, terrific speaker.

MR. HAGEE: One of the best speakers I ever listened to in my life. I'm prejudiced but I know he's a good speaker.

MR. HAGEE: Do you know Donnie Dietz uptown here at the Bakery?

MR. JENSEN: I do not know him personally but...

MR. HAGEE: Well, him and Donnie played football together. I visit Donnie every time I'm here. I saw him yesterday.

MR. JENSEN: At Fredericksburg High School?

MR. HAGEE: Yes. My oldest daughter is here and she was born in Keidel Memorial and my youngest daughter was born here. That's my only claim to glory is Mike.

MR. JENSEN: I've got one more question for you. And this question is there's a gentleman doing some research, he's got a grant I guess from one of the chocolate companies, and he wanted to ask the question the use of gum and chocolate for military uses. Do you have any wartime memories involving hard candy, Tootsie Rolls, M&M's, gum or chocolate, like sharing a piece of candy with a refugee, energy lift, whatever?

MR. HAGEE: There's a lot of stories but what my experience was with the Philippines which I contacted mostly, what they wanted mostly was soap and they would trade anything for soap. Next they wanted any food that you happened to have, canned or otherwise. But what they wanted mostly was soap. I forget where it was, it was either in Manila, I believe it was Manila, when Kinkaid said, "No more trading soap. We're running out, we don't have enough soap for our own use." They wanted soap to clean up with and I could trade them a box of soap and they'd wash my clothes for three weeks. They would come in outriggers and that's the way they did it. Michael has a Filipino criss war sword, the wavy bladed war sword that the Moro Indian used. The guy came out and he wanted to trade and I wanted that sword. I gave him everything I could give him 'cause that was really the best one I'd run across. I says what would you, well I had something there, food, I don't remember what it was, and he said well, no, that's just not enough. He didn't want to really part with the sword but he wanted to trade. I had a pair

of navy dungarees on and I said, "I'll give you this new suit of dungarees for the sword." "Two suits it's yours." That's the way I got the sword and they were mostly after practical stuff. First off, we didn't have what you're talking about, we couldn't get it. What little was on the ship was very, they opened the PX like once a day and if you weren't up there, you didn't get anything. We were out on the water so much working. Now the army, I think, had a lot more experience with this than I did. I was gonna left out in the BAINBRIDGE, too. When we sunk that sub off of Kingsland, Jamaica, there with the troops, they were outside New Orleans and they were waiting on us. We left New Orleans, come down the river high speed because we were late. That river pilot we had, the lieutenant and everybody went down to eat. We were about half way down the ninety miles to the coast when I come up from eating and went to my shop. The destroyer went like this and come to a screeching halt. I run outside, my shop was just right of midship just after the bridge and there are cottonwoods all over everything. He had run that destroyer plum out into cottonwoods on the delta. We were all day and half the night getting off. We had to go back to New Orleans have our sonar gear cleaned out and everything. Those troops out there were fighting mad, lying out there in the hot sun they couldn't even get below deck without cooking. Then we went to Kingston where we had to unload some of them. I was on sonar gear, I may have told you this, and I called the other man and I said, "Al, this is a pretty good contact for us but right on the beach over there is bound to be a sandbar." He looked at his, I don't know, that is pretty good contact. We debated there four or five minutes, maybe longer, whether to even report it or not and finally Al, he was the best operator we had, said, "I think we ought to report it. That's too isolated, it's too good." So we blew general quarters and went after him. Just

as we did the other destroyer, the troop ships were just breaking up to come in and only one of them was coming in and the others gonna lay off. So everything stopped. Everybody laid still and then this other destroyer came in behind us and he had us on the radio by that time. He said, "We've got a live one. His screws are turning, he's trying to get out." He run over him, and then we run over him, and then he run over him and everything got quiet 'cause it wasn't thirty feet or forty feet of water there. Lying on the bottom without nearly a doubt and he was waiting for that ship to get right in the channel and he was going to put her right there. Then we pulled off, the ship went in. In less than a half hour when we all quit our bombing runs, depth charge runs, you could have walked to shore on the fish that were on the surface. It was solid fish as far as you could see and in the next thirty minutes there was two hundred boats out there picking them up. They came out and that old Port Royal that sunk there back in the pirate days. BAINBRIDGE had some interesting things happen. Then summer of '42 we had a convoy going north just before I got off the ship and we had broken down. We were going to Norfolk and they'd pull the mine net back and the convoy was broken down single file, had about forty ships. They were entering the mine net and an English trawler and another man of war, I forget, had gone back, maybe a DE had gone back next to Virginia Beach and us and the other destroyers had gone to sea where there was more room. We were going two or three knots ??? steerage way out there we didn't have to go anywhere we were just waiting for the convoy to get in. That English trawler and that other ship over there got it and they just blew up right there and survivors swam up on Virginia Beach, they were that close. This young lieutenant we had on a bridge, again, he was the only officer up there and he sounded general quarters, rang for full speed ahead and then dropped the

depth charges. We're doing about two knots and the depth charges set at fifty feet and that old destroyer just lifted up out of the water and came back. After it was over, we just rushed to the Portsmouth navy yard to get the hull repaired. We were leaking all over and the first lieutenant was running up and down looking for me. Somebody said I think he's in that hole. He'd go down there and he'd say no, he just left here, he's in the next hole. I had all my rubber plugs and wooden plugs and I was driving plugs in rivet holes. We were squirting like a sieve down there and they repaired us and put us to sea. My daughter here several years ago wanted to know more about the BAINBRIDGE and she went on the inter net and this story came up. It said the BAINBRIDGE hit a mine and damage was slight. That's what went on the record and I'd like to see what went on the record when we run ashore down there. Well, that's half of my career, most of it really, and then I retired and went back to ranching and I've been at it ever since. Well, I had another stroke of luck, you might say, I went back to ranching and I wasn't making a living. I got married in 1943, had seven kids, Michael the oldest, and I was up there in Missouri. We left here and went to Missouri because I had gone up there to visit my brother and, boy, it was a lot greener lusher country and looked like ranching was a lot better up there. So I sold out here and went up there and bought a three-hundred acre place there and I still wasn't making a living. The banker that I was doing business with there said, "Hagee," I had done some work for him and some other people there in Pineville, and he said, "You're pretty capable in maintenance. There's a good job coming up with the school if you'd like it." I said, "What's it doing? I don't want to be a janitor." "No, No", he says, "you'll be in charge of maintenance of the whole county." I think I could like that. He says, "It will pay pretty good." I said, "I can stand that."

Didn't pay nearly as good as it should of, because normally that's a degreed person holding that place, but a degreed person didn't have the background I did. And the only thing I run a fowl of it the navy was really one hundred percent there. They asked me what I knew about steam boilers. I said, "Very little. I was never a machinist in the navy. I was damage control and flight engineer." We had a hot wing furnace on the PV2 and the Lockheed Neptune, just exactly like a steam furnace only our air was from the flight of the airplane, theirs was from a fan. We burned gas just like they did, our deicers on the wing we called it hot wing. I said, "This is no stranger. I know this from the Lockheed Neptune." So the only thing I had to learn after I got there, the school paid for my tuition in Carter College, I went up and learned their conditioning and cooling.

Found out that was no problem because the only difference was the controls were all the same, one just cooled and made heat. So I didn't have a problem there. I retired from the school system there in '82. That made me a retirement I could live on because the navy didn't give me much. They didn't pay a chief very much then. Three hundred and eighty dollars was our base pay and we got half of that when we retired.

MR. JENSEN: Well, is there anything else that you can think of?

MR. HAGEE: It's up to you, what do you want? There's a lot of little things that don't make much. There was one interesting thing that I left out and it was more than interesting. When we were last in San Juan in 1941 we bought fresh stuff aboard. We had potatoes, onions, lockers all out side in open containers and we brought a bunch of cockroaches aboard there in San Juan. Normally we'd spray and get rid of them if we brought bugs aboard, didn't find them in the galley, they'd sprayed and get rid of them. Well, somewhere or other 'cause we went from there to the North Atlantic we didn't

know until we were up there, then we didn't get anywhere where we could spray and by Christmas you couldn't open a locker anywhere without running the cockroaches off first and seeing what you wanted. Some of them were as long as my finger and they come down in the food. We slept with them, we eat with them, we eat them. Then they evacuated the ship when they repaired us in Boston and we thought we'd get rid of those cockroaches anyway. A month in the yard all the smoking and crap that went on in there to fix that hull and we went back to sea and there wasn't a cockroach missing. Not a cockroach missing! And we lived with them and then when we went back to San Juan in April, May of '42, we sprayed. We had some gas and we took it in the hold and turned it loose and we got rid of them. When we swept them up in piles and took them out in big buckets. This guy that brought the bottles down said, "Did you ever handle this, sailor?" I said, "No." He said, "It's a very deadly gas. What kind of rescue breathing you got?" I said, ??? He said, "That's a good one. Just make sure it's in your mouth and make sure you use it 'cause all you get is one whiff of this and you'll be with those cockroaches." So I took it down three decks and worked my way out.

MR. JENSEN: If you have an atomic bomb attack the cockroaches would still survive.

MR. HAGEE: I believe you're right. I tell you what, it's amazing. Michael over thirty years ago when he was still quite a young officer got me to reading philosophy. I can't believe the mental quality of the people of 600 B.C. It just blows my mind that they could convince me of one thing, things have not changed a great deal, just environment. People have not changed an iota. Three hundred B.C. a very famous man said, "The problem with democracy is at first looks very fine because of the freedom but basing it on a false assumption that all people are equal is its first downfall. Secondly, it is a popular

vote which is manipulated by trickery and good talkers and emotion. For a ship of state to run on rough sea of emotions is a rough sea to ride on.” They were some sharp cookies back then and they just didn’t have anything to work with but their mental process. Gosh, it was good. One of my very favorites of Stehleys and he lived 625, 650 BC, something like that, gosh, he was sharp. He measured the sun, he measured the moon, he measured the planets, he set up 365 days a year and called the thirtieth a month. He set up a lot of things that we have today because he understood how they worked. It just amazed me what is out there if you look. Well, I’ve talked long enough.

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