

The National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

**An Interview With
Wilbert A. Shanks
Pearl Harbor Survivor
USS Helena, CL 50
Battle of Coral Sea
Helena sunk at Kula Gulf
USS Major, DE 796
In Tokyo Bay September 2, 1945**

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is January 30, 2009. I am interviewing Mr. Wilbert A. Shanks by telephone. His phone number is (956) 423-6532. His mailing address is P.O. Box 182 Combes, TX 78535. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. Mr. Shanks, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today, and I want to thank you for your service to our country in World War II. Now what is your birth date?

Mr. Shanks

December 26, 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer

And where were you born?

Mr. Shanks

Brownsville, TX.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Shanks

I didn't finish. I went to Arlington High School but I quit and joined the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you join the Navy?

Mr. Shanks

In 26th of December...

Mr. Misenhimer

1940 or when?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, it was in 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

1940?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, I went in '40.

Mr. Misenhimer

You had just turned 17, hadn't you?

Mr. Shanks

Yes, I left on my 17th birthday.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your parents have to sign for you to go in?

Mr. Shanks

Yes, my mother did.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Shanks

Well we had a family here that had about 6 boys and they was all in the Navy so I thought that was the way to go.

Mr. Misenhimer

What family was that?

Mr. Shanks

Reece, E. W. Reece family.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your boot camp?

Mr. Shanks

San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that boot camp?

Mr. Shanks

It was a good school. It was only 7 weeks and then I went in school after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What school did you go to?

Mr. Shanks

I went to the communication school. They had signalman, quartermaster, radioman, and yeoman. We were all in the same school but we split up into 4 classes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which class were you in?

Mr. Shanks

The signalman class.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to learn Morse Code?

Mr. Shanks

Yep, had to learn everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was it to learn that Morse Code?

Mr. Shanks

It was no problem. They tested everybody to see where they would put everybody and they checked you out for a course and I was a signalman.

Mr. Misenhimer

You operated the flags, too, is that right?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, that's what I did. We were lookouts, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that school?

Mr. Shanks

Oh, I think it was 16 weeks. I got out of there in, I guess it was June.

Mr. Misenhimer

In what?

Mr. Shanks

Of 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

June you say? What month?

Mr. Shanks

June.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go when you left there?

Mr. Shanks

I went into San Diego until they had an assignment on a ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you join that ship?

Mr. Shanks

I joined the ship on the 6th of July 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship was that?

Mr. Shanks

The Helena, light cruiser CL50.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you join it at?

Mr. Shanks

It was in Mare Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

Up by San Francisco.

Mr. Shanks

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you do when you got on that ship? Then what happened?

Mr. Shanks

Well from there after we got out of the Navy yard, we went to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that trip over there?

Mr. Shanks

Pretty good trip. By that time, I'd taken a ride from San Diego to San Francisco and an old oiler.

So I got over my sea sickness.

Mr. Misenhimer

On that trip over to Pearl Harbor, were there many people that got seasick?

Mr. Shanks

Well there were always a bunch cause when they come into port, you know, they always shut the ship down and you had to train a new crew all together.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you got to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Shanks

We just operated as a division. We was in Cruiser Division 9. We were the last of that series. I think she was the last of that series of cruisers.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other cruisers in that division with you?

Mr. Shanks

There was the Honolulu, Phoenix, Boise, St. Louis, and the Helena. The Helena was the last of the series.

Mr. Misenhimer

These were all in Division 9 with you there?

Mr. Shanks

There were all the Division 9.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yeah, all of them were, right.

Mr. Shanks

Yes, right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there at Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Shanks

We would just go out operate as a group, it was all the ships that were with us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go out with battleships and that sort of thing?

Mr. Shanks

No, we didn't operate with...however, when we went to...from Mare Island at San Francisco to Pearl Harbor, we went with the Oklahoma. It came out of another Navy yard.

Mr. Misenhimer

But in your maneuvering around Pearl Harbor, you weren't with battleships or anything like that.

Mr. Shanks

No, no. We operated with the cruisers and destroyers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you do gunnery practice and that sort of thing?

Mr. Shanks

That's what we did. We went out and did gunnery and flag hoist and whatever we did it was before the war. That's what they would train us to do.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your battle station?

Mr. Shanks

Well at that time, it was at emergency radio. I was down behind one of the engine rooms and that engine room was knocked out. It was emergency radio.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you could operate the radio, is that right?

Mr. Shanks

No, we had a radioman that operated the radio. I just used the headset to communicate with the rest of the ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything in particular that you recall before the attack?

Mr. Shanks

No, before the attack, we ordinarily, the ones that were up on the bridge, the bridge signalman and quartermaster, we was always up early and of course there was always something we had to clean up. I was just a seaman then so we got to do all that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about December 7th, '41. What happened there?

Mr. Shanks

Well, that's where I was. I was in emergency radio. I couldn't see anything. I went from my compartment to hear that the Japanese were attacking Pearl Harbor, I mean Ford Island.

Before then, they was always having drills but that's the first time they had ever had one on a Sunday morning. We thought we was gonna get off and everybody was complaining when they said that the Japanese had attacked Ford Island. That's when everybody went to their battle stations.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you were below deck when you got the word, right?

Mr. Shanks

Below deck, yes, I stayed below deck until, it was about 6 or 7 hours until everything was clear.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was your ship anchored there?

Mr. Shanks

We was at 10-10 dock in the Navy yard. We were tied up behind the Pennsylvania and all the battleships were tied up alongside of Ford Island. I don't know how many of them there were, probably 10 or 12 of them. They were all together.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you tied up to Ford Island also?

Mr. Shanks

No, we was at the Navy yard. The Navy yard was at the Naval Station.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were across the water from Ford Island.

Mr. Shanks

We was across from Ford Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was the Pennsylvania in dry dock over there?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, it was. The Pennsylvania was in dry dock because we had to go into dry dock so they had to get the Pennsylvania out. In route, we got a temporary part of the ship that went in to close the side of it. I guess it took, oh, about 2 or 3 months and we went to Mare Island to get another engine and a new side put back on our ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

The day of the attack, so you didn't see any of that then.

Mr. Shanks

No, actually, no, the only thing I saw was what we saw when we came topside. We saw all the battleships and ones that was damaged and whatever else was wrong. Ford Island was on fire, and different ships were tied up there. Pearl Harbor is a pretty good sized harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do during the attack?

Mr. Shanks

I just stayed there on the emergency radio headset. That's emergency telephone, kept those on until they gave us the all clear.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who all were you talking to?

Mr. Shanks

Just the whole ship. We were on part of the, there were probably 5 or 6 different lines. Some of them went to the ship and some of them went to control and engines and different ones.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of messages were you passing?

Mr. Shanks

I wasn't telling anything. I was just listening to anything that came over, we'd pass on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were the guns on the ship firing at the Japanese planes?

Mr. Shanks

Yes. you know, we had a detachment of Marines on there, we had 50-caliber machine guns and they completely wore the barrels of the machine guns out they got so hot.

Mr. Misenhimer

What other kinds of weapons did you have for the airplanes?

Mr. Shanks

Well we had 5-inch 38s. That's a pretty good size. And of course the main guns were 6-inch 47s, that's the biggest guns we had was the 6-inch. But the anti-aircraft was the 5-inch. They were in the turrets.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your ship shoot down any planes, do you know?

Mr. Shanks

As far as I know I think they did and we shot a hole in one of the smoke stacks at the Navy yard.

We were tied up right to the docks there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your ship hit?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, we were hit.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were you hit by?

Mr. Shanks

We were hit by a Japanese torpedo. We were supposed to be, the Pennsylvania was supposed to be there where we were. So instead of hitting the Pennsylvania, they hit the Helena in port there. There was a tugboat alongside and then another ship that was astern of us. Both of those were sunk. They raised them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which two were that?

Mr. Shanks

One was the Oglala. I don't remember the name of the other one.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, the Oglala.

Mr. Shanks

A sea going tug.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right.

Mr. Shanks

They used to pull our targets around and we gave our gunnery practice. They used to pull a sled with a target on it. We'd shoot at it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you came up on deck, what did you do then?

Mr. Shanks

When I come up on deck, they secured general quarters I went to the signal bridge.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you help to rescue anyone out of the water, anything like that?

Mr. Shanks

No, by that time I think they cleared everybody out but they had closed the engine room off and I think we had to go into dry dock before they got all the people out of there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any people killed on your ship when that torpedo hit?

Mr. Shanks

Actually about 300.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your ship?

Mr. Shanks

On our ship. That's quite a few.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, that is, right. And of course there were more than that wounded, a lot of them wounded too, right?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did the torpedo hit you at?

Mr. Shanks

Well it was right amidship and the engine room was below the number one stack. We had two stacks on the Helena.

Mr. Misenhimer

On the second day, what did you do?

Mr. Shanks

Just sat there and waited until we get in dry dock.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand on that first night some of our planes flew in from the carriers and were shot down.

Mr. Shanks

They were. That's what I say. We stay there and went back into general quarters and some of them planes was coming in. I don't know what happened to them but I think they shot some of them down. Of course that's all hearsay. I didn't see any of them actually being shot down.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was it before you got into dry dock?

Mr. Shanks

Well within a week.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then how long were you in dry dock?

Mr. Shanks

Oh probably 2 months. Then they put a temporary siding on the ship where the engine room was because they couldn't do anything with the engine room. They had to get a new engine. They had to get it in there. I don't remember if they had to make it somewhere else.

Mr. Misenhimer

During that 2 month period, did you get a liberty to go into Honolulu?

Mr. Shanks

I never did get off the ship then. I went into Honolulu before. After the attack, I didn't leave the ship to go.

Mr. Misenhimer

How were things in Honolulu before the attack?

Mr. Shanks

Well they were just like they are now. They had roadway and hotel and they had, there weren't too many people there then. Of course, they had sugar cane patch and pineapple fields along the way. We went to town on just a good old open air train like you see in some of the movies.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you left Honolulu and went to Mare Island, is that right?

Mr. Shanks

That's right.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went over there, were you escorted by other ships?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah. I think we were escorted whenever we could find a destroyer. We had a shortage of destroyers. We didn't have any.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's right. Then when you got to Mare Island, what happened there?

Mr. Shanks

We went into dry dock and we all got over the side and cleaned the bottom of the ship up and we put some more paint on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of repairs did they do to the ship there?

Mr. Shanks

They replaced the engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they do any more to the damage on the side of the ship?

Mr. Shanks

No, all the damage was inside. They just replaced one of the sides, the one that covered the engine room.

Mr. Misenhimer

But they did that on Honolulu, right, Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Shanks

No, they had to replace it. They took it off and did it in Mare Island. They had to get a new engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you at Mare Island?

Mr. Shanks

I guess we left there in June.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then where did you go?

Mr. Shanks

Well we went down to the Coral Sea. We operated with two carriers right there, the Wasp and the Hornet. And while we were there the Wasp was sunk by I guess Japanese torpedoes, submarines. We picked up all the survivors of the Wasp and took them to the, I guess we took them to Espiritu Santo one of the New Hebrides Islands.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that the Battle of the Coral Sea?

Mr. Shanks

No, that wasn't the battle. That was another one. We was just trying to get back home there.

Mr. Misenhimer

The first battle was in May, May the 8th.

Mr. Shanks

This was in June.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do during that battle, your ship do?

Mr. Shanks

Well we really did more or less an escort for the carriers then. There wasn't no plan or anything. We were just trying to be on the lookout for torpedoes and submarines. There was only one.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you rescued these survivors from the Wasp, did you help to do that?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, we took them to another, to Espiritu Santo. It's the one in New Hebrides.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you help pull them out of the water or anything?

Mr. Shanks

Well, I didn't help them pull but Travis Nations was on the bow of the destroyer as we come alongside. I went to school with him. I went to first grade with him, kinda odd.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you were there in the Coral Sea, did you fire at enemy submarines or planes or anything?

Mr. Shanks

No, there was nothing there. We were operating at night because the Japanese had planes.

You know, they could cover everything in the Coral Sea, so we had to operate at night. We took

off at sunset and got there at midnight or two, three o'clock in the morning when we encountered the Japanese ships.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where would you spend the daytime?

Mr. Shanks

We were in the Coral Sea. That's where we operated.

Mr. Misenhimer

But you say you could only operate at night, though.

Mr. Shanks

When we went into port, we had to load ammunition and get refueled and all that kind of stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

What port would you go into?

Mr. Shanks

Espiritu Santo, that's in New Hebrides.

Mr. Misenhimer

You would go into that.

Mr. Shanks

It's one of the most forward. At that time, it was the most forward.

Mr. Misenhimer

You say you encountered some Japanese ships there?

Mr. Shanks

No, not there. We had to go back to the Solomons to encounter the Japanese ships. We had 3 different encounters. They were all at night.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you below deck or above deck during that?

Mr. Shanks

I was on the signal bridge. I was above deck. I got to see everything then.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all happened? What all did you see?

Mr. Shanks

Shots opened up and the first encounter we had we had 36-inch search lights, and we turned them on and the Japanese shot them out first thing. So we quit using our search lights. We just went to radar altogether.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was where?

Mr. Shanks

That was in Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal was the main island.

Mr. Misenhimer

Right, about what date would that have been?

Mr. Shanks

Well the first one was in October. I think it was October the 30th and then the 2nd one was two weeks later. It was the 13th, the 14th of November. About all the ships we could get together

was 13 I think. We had 5 cruisers and I believe we had 8 destroyers. I guess we were just about out of destroyers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fire at these enemy ships?

Mr. Shanks

That's what we fired at. We opened fire on them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you hit any of them?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, we did quite a bit of damage on the first two battles.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did we lose any ships in those battles?

Mr. Shanks

We started out way north of there towards Kolombangara. We used to go, the Marines were trying to land up there so we was the artillery for the Marines. Our ship was sunk on July 6, 1943 in the Kula Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

In those two battles there in Guadalcanal, did we lose any ships there?

Mr. Shanks

Well that was after Guadalcanal.

Mr. Misenhimer

At those two battles at Guadalcanal, did we lose any ships there?

Mr. Shanks

One of them was in October and the other one was about 2 weeks later. We had to go back and take on more ammunition and more fuel so we could operate again.

Mr. Misenhimer

But I say, in those two battles, were any of our ships sunk?

Mr. Shanks

We sank a bunch of the Japanese and we had some destroyers that were lost. We were with the San Francisco. She was damaged. I think the 2nd time, we was with the Atlanta and the Juno and Admiral Scott was on the Atlanta. So they sank the Atlanta and so we rejoined and was going back to New Hebrides, and a Japanese submarine sank the Juno. We had 2 of those new destroyers lost overnight and the following day.

Mr. Misenhimer

When they sank the Juno, that killed the 5 Sullivan Brothers, right?

Mr. Shanks

The destroyers were anti-aircraft, mostly anti-aircraft. They was built to operate with the carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand at that battle, Admiral Scott and another Admiral both were...

Mr. Shanks

Scott and Callaghan were both lost. Callaghan was on the San Francisco and Admiral Scott was on the Atlanta. They were two different groups and that's all the ships they could gather up. It was close in that time, it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you with the Juno when it was sunk?

Mr. Shanks

Yes, we were going back to New Hebrides. In fact, I actually saw that explosion myself. Just one, they hit one of the main magazines or something because it was just one great big explosion and everything was going up. Which, we had to get out of there because we were trying to get away from the submarines that were out there from Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand they did not pick up any of the survivors, is that right?

Mr. Shanks

Well the destroyers had picked up, as far as I know. I don't know how many of them that were picked up but we didn't even slow down.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your next battle after that?

Mr. Shanks

The first one was October the 30th and the second one was November 13th. Yeah, then our other engagement was Kolombangara. It's north of Guadalcanal. That's close to New Guinea.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the name of that one?

Mr. Shanks

Kolombangara was the name of the island. They were trying to land the Marines there and we was trying to support them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you bombard the shore?

Mr. Shanks

The destroyers, I think they had about 10 Japanese destroyers came in. They was trying to land some troops, too.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you help bombard the shore when the Marines were landing?

Mr. Shanks

That's what we did. I was on Signal Bridge. That's what we done. We was more or less support. In fact, that's what we did. At Guadalcanal before we had those different engagements, we was acting as artillery for the Army or Marines, whoever was on the beach there. On that 2nd battle, Admiral Halsey was on Guadalcanal. He ran out of carriers so he had to go to the beach.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you say your ship was sunk on July 6, 1943.

Mr. Shanks

July the 6th, '43.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was it sunk at?

Mr. Shanks

At Kula Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

Kula Gulf, okay. Tell me about that.

Mr. Shanks

Well we went in to battle to fire as the active artillery for the Marines there. They was on there and while we was there, the Japanese, they had 10 destroyers came in and that's what they did. They were landing a bunch of troops from the destroyers. So that's when we engaged them. And for some reason, one of the Japanese destroyers fired, I think it must've been 3, 3 different torpedoes. We were dead in the water and I think there was 2 more torpedoes hit us later on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you wounded during that?

Mr. Shanks

No, I wasn't wounded but we had to abandon ship. When abandon ship, I just walked into the water with just a life jacket on. And two of our destroyers that were with us picked us up, the ones that they could pick up at night, and took us to Espiritu Santo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were there many people killed on your ship at that time?

Mr. Shanks

There were quite a few. We don't really know. They were in 3 different groups. In fact, the story about the captain was in the whale boat and he had came across of the life rafts and he

was pulling them around I think for about a week, so...and some of the other groups actually got over on the island. And I think some of the Marines finally got them off.

Mr. Misenhimer

What island was that?

Mr. Shanks

Kolombangara. There was just a whole group of islands there, I don't know which one it was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now that was the Invasion of New Georgia?

Mr. Shanks

Right. We had started before then, we used to go up and bombard 3 or 4 different times. Of course we always had to do it at night cause the Japanese had planes and if it was daylight, we were in their range.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you got to Espiritu Santo, what happened then?

Mr. Shanks

Well, they got us on a ship and sent us back to San Francisco. We went to the Naval station on Treasure Island and it was a receiving station. And they reassigned the bunch. So I was assigned to a school they had in Miami, Florida. And then I was assigned to another ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of school was that in Florida?

Mr. Shanks

Well it was a communication school and it was like you was...we was from a larger ship so they were trying to teach us all about the smaller ships.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what ship were you assigned to?

Mr. Shanks

I ended up on the Major. Had to go to Orange to pick it up. It was a 796.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ship is that?

Mr. Shanks

It was a destroyer escort.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the name of it?

Mr. Shanks

Major.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was 796.

Mr. Shanks

796.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do on it?

Mr. Shanks

Well we ran escort duty between Norfolk and Trinidad. In fact, we made about 3 or 4 different trips. Some of them went to Aruba, some to Trinidad, and some to other islands. We just went by some of them and some of the ships joined our convoy and the smaller escort ships escorted them out there. Sometimes it was daylight before we knew we had twice as big a convoy as we started out with.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you join the Major?

Mr. Shanks

It was on the 12th of February of '44.

Mr. Misenhimer

You stayed along the coast just up and forth to Trinidad and down through there?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, it was just like taking another ship over, just bringing everybody on there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you looking for submarines or what?

Mr. Shanks

Well, that's what we were, submarine escorts. We ran into the Mediterranean and then we escorted about 3 different convoys over to North Africa and one of them ended up in Plymouth, England.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you were down there in the Caribbean, down through there, did you find any submarines?

Mr. Shanks

There never was an encounter as far as I know. I know that the convoys ahead of us ran into some and some of them behind us did. We was running a convoy, it took us about a week to get over and a week to get back.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go to the Mediterranean?

Mr. Shanks

Some of them went to the Mediterranean. We went to Tunisia. We went Oran.

Mr. Misenhimer

You didn't go to the Mediterranean, right?

Mr. Shanks

That was when we took the 36th Division I think they were the Texas National Guard I think.

That's where we escorted them to.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go to the Mediterranean?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, we went to the Mediterranean, went by the rock of Gibraltar. Of course that's the main inlet where you go into the Mediterranean.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you go to the Mediterranean?

Mr. Shanks

It was, I know when we went to Oran in the Mediterranean, it was... I don't remember the exact date.

Mr. Misenhimer

What month and what year?

Mr. Shanks

We started out in February then we went to the Caribbean then we started on our own convoy.

We were just starting training when we were going to the Caribbean. Panama Bay, Cuba, and they checked us out, made sure we could run our own ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

About what month did you go to the Mediterranean?

Mr. Shanks

We just escorted ships into Tunisia. Had to get back out and then we ran into one of the little island, got some fuel. I think it was one of the Canary Islands, coming back to Norfolk.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any battles when you were over there?

Mr. Shanks

The convoys, sometimes in the convoys, we'd have about anywhere from 5 to 6 ships in them.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you encounter any submarines then?

Mr. Shanks

No, we didn't encounter any. Not on the ships we were on. Some of the convoys ahead of us had ran into some, and some of the convoys behind us ran into some but no, we was running a

convoy at least once a week.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that was to where, to Africa?

Mr. Shanks

Convoy 2?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, Sir, where?

Mr. Shanks

In the Mediterranean. Bizerte was the port. And then the other one, we went to Oran. We had escorted the ships there and some of those smaller escorts escorted them into port.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Shanks

After that, we went to the Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, you went back to the Pacific?

Mr. Shanks

We went through the canal and to the Pacific and went to New Guinea and then we ended up in the Philippines. From there, we went to, well we ended up in Tokyo.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in the Philippines?

Mr. Shanks

We ran escort for convoys around the island between there and Okinawa. That's what we did when we were trying to look for submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Leyte Gulf, was the fighting over there then?

Mr. Shanks

By the time we got to the Philippines all the invasion was over. They had already landed. We were just running mail routes and escorts to Okinawa. Then we ended up taking a group to Tokyo.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were at Okinawa, was the fighting still going on there?

Mr. Shanks

No, no, we never did run into anything. We just more or less were escorting ships from Leyte Gulf in the Philippines up to Okinawa. What we was doing, we was mainly just escorting the ships and then we went back to Leyte Gulf.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go to Tokyo?

Mr. Shanks

When they signed the treaty on the 2nd of September...We escorted a bunch of, I think it was, whatever the general's name was then, we escorted, I think, 5 different ship loads to Tokyo. So we were there when they signed the Armistice on the Missouri.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in Tokyo Bay then?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, that's when we were up in Tokyo, yeah, when they signed the treaty. We were there when they signed it.

Mr. Misenhimer

How close were you to the Missouri?

Mr. Shanks

We were pretty close to the Missouri at that time. We weren't that close but we were close enough to see them with our long glasses and binoculars.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now I understand there was a big fly over of airplanes that day, is that right?

Mr. Shanks

Yes, they had one airplane flew down to Manila and that's when the group of Japanese came down. And then after that is when we escorted MacArthur's staff. There was 5 shiploads of them to the Yokahama. Of course, they went into port. We just anchored out with the Missouri.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Shanks

Well that's about all that happened then. We went back to Okinawa and stayed there until I got another ship to get back to San Francisco then I went on leave. And then after I went back to San Diego, they sent me back on the Mayhew, stayed another year on there before I was discharged.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of ship is the Mayhew?

Mr. Shanks

Destroyer escort. It's between a destroyer and a smaller escort.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do on it?

Mr. Shanks

I was a signalman on there, ended up being a signalman first class, so I practically ran all the communication on the ship. We had some quartermasters that did all the navigation.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where all did the Mayhew go?

Mr. Shanks

Well we just went back out to San Diego and we were doing escort duty for the aircraft carriers.

By that time, we would plane guard. They tried to, you know they had a bunch of jets they were trying to get to fly off of the carriers at that time. So we just went out there and we plane guarded for them.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was off of San Diego, right?

Mr. Shanks

We eventually were just plane guards.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then what happened?

Mr. Shanks

Well, then I was discharged and come home.

Mr. Misenhimer

When were you discharged?

Mr. Shanks

I was discharged from the Mayhew.

Mr. Misenhimer

What day?

Mr. Shanks

December the 26th, on my 23rd birthday.

Mr. Misenhimer

1946. So you were in the Navy about 6 years?

Mr. Shanks

After that, I stayed in Reserve until '84 then they ran me off.

Mr. Misenhimer

(Laughing) Were you recalled to active duty anytime?

Mr. Shanks

No, I never was recalled.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you retire from the Navy?

Mr. Shanks

That's where I retired, from the Naval Reserves.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your highest rank?

Mr. Shanks

Chief Signalman. I was Chief Signalman for 6 years just before the Asia war. I just did training after that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Shanks

I ended up with Asiatic Pacific and the Helena won the Navy Unit Commendation, and then I had Good Conduct. And then I got to the Reserves, some of them are for 10 years and 20 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about Battle Stars?

Mr. Shanks

Yeah, we had 13 from the Helena. We had 13 battles and I think we ended up just counting 7 of them. We had 1 silver star and 2 bronze, that's on the Asiatic Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions since you've been out? Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Shanks

I did go to aircraft, the school for about 9 months. That's the only school I went to. And then I ended up with a bread route, ended up with selling cigars, and then I ended up as Postmaster in Combes. That's where I retired in '89. It was \$300 retirement.

Mr. Misenhimer

One of the things I want to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back with the veteran and he's not here. Do you have someone that we might could contact to let us know where you are, a son or daughter or anyone?

Unknown

No, we don't have anybody. It's just us. We don't have any children or anybody.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about any relatives of any kind?

Mrs. Shanks

No, uh, uh.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well I guess Mr. Billings might know where you are, huh?

Mrs. Shanks

Possibly, possibly he would if he outlives us. (laughing) We're all getting up there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, yes, I know what you mean. Now another thing, I hated to try to do this with him over the phone. I have an agreement with the museum that I normally let people sign. Can I read this to you and let you tell me if that agreement is okay with you all?

Mrs. Shanks

I'm just a little bit leery of all this, but you go ahead and read it to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Okay. Agreement read. Is that okay with you?

Mrs. Shanks

Well that's all right with me but I'm still leery of putting all this out. I don't know, I really don't know the purpose behind it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I appreciate it very much and tell him it was a very good story.

Mrs. Shanks

All right. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

Thank you.

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