

**THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR**

**Center for Pacific War Studies**

**Fredericksburg, Texas**

**An Interview with**

**Eugene C. Spencer  
Sanibel, Florida  
March 11, 2009**

**Pearl Harbor Survivor**

My name is Richard Misenhimer. Today is March 11, 2009. I am interviewing Mr. Eugene C. Spencer by telephone. His phone number is 239-472-1656. His address is 601 Sea Oaks Drive, Sanibel, FL 33957. 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. Misenhimer

Gene, 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 during World War II.

Mr. Spencer

Well, I also served in the Korean War and I was also available for the Viet Nam War.

Mr. Misenhimer

I want to thank you for all of your service to our country, not just World War II.

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum, to make sure it is okay with you.

Mr. Spencer

Read it.

Mr. Misenhimer

*Agreement read.*

Mr. Spencer

O. K.

Mr. Misenhimer

My first question is what is your birth date?

Mr. Spencer

July 7, 1912

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Where were you born?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**Brooklyn, New York**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Did you have brothers and sisters?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**I had two older brothers and a younger sister.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Were either of your brothers in World War II?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**Both of them were in the World War II. In the Army Air Force at that time. The other one was in the Navy.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Did they both come home from the war?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**They all came home.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Good. Were your sisters involved in war work?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**No she wasn't.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Now, you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?**

Mr. Spencer

There was just my mother. She was very, very proud and she put the flag in her window with three blue stars on it. She survived the war very well.

In regards to the Depression, we were all affected very badly by it. Back then it was the Depression that caused me to join the Navy, in a time which was a very difficult job. My brothers and I had the same idea. The Navy was very small at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you join the Navy?

Mr. Spencer

I can only give you the approximate date. I think it was in March, 1934. I joined the Naval Reserves at that time, then I switched over to the regular Navy and went through Boot Camp at Newport News, Virginia.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that Boot Camp?

Mr. Spencer

Well, it was pretty miserable. It had been out of commission for a long time and there was cold weather. A lot of things needed fixing up and it was cold and it was miserable. We didn't expect anything else. It was part of the whole experience, I guess, and we didn't complain too much about it. It was something we had to get through and we got through it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were your drill instructors pretty rough on you?

**Mr. Spencer**

They were very good people. The Chief Petty Officers were in charge of our troop. I remember the number 15, Battalion 15. I was the leading Petty Officer of the troop because I had prior Naval service in the Reserves.

**Mr. Misenhimer**

When you finished Boot Camp, what did you do?

**Mr. Spencer**

When I finished Boot Camp, I went down to Norfolk, Virginia to a metalsmith school. About six weeks in the metalsmith school.

**Mr. Misenhimer**

Then, what happened?

**Mr. Spencer**

Then, we were asked for our preference of duty and I didn't get what I wanted. I was assigned to a brand new type of destroyer leader. It was a new type of ship, U.S.S. Porter 356.

**Mr. Misenhimer**

What as the name of that ship, again?

**Mr. Spencer**

U.S.S. Porter

**Mr. Misenhimer**

Then what happened?

**Mr. Spencer**

On the Porter, I was assigned to the Engineering Department and my first duty was in the Fire Room. That was pretty good duty, I liked it. Then, they moved me into the

Engine Room which was sort of a promotion. That was very interesting and I stayed there in the Engine Room for all of the time I was there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was the Porter home-ported?

Mr. Spencer

We started in Philadelphia. The ship was built in, I forget the name of the shipyard, but they went on a strike so the Navy took Porter on over to the Philadelphia Navy yard to finish it. The crew of people in the Navy in the yard that were building it, came over to the ship and finished the work.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then, where did the ship go?

Mr. Spencer

First of all, it went on the steam-lines up off the coast of Maine. It was sea work and packing work and all that kind of stuff. Party-sighting. Then we came back for repairs or patch-ups here and there for what was found wrong at the time. The time had already come up at the beginning of the summer. We went on a shake-down cruise. It was a marvelous trip for a bunch of young sailors who had probably not been very far because of the amount of the money that the Navy had to deal with. We went first to South Hampton, England; then to Stockholm, Sweden; then to Helsinki, Finland; then to Amsterdam and then to Madera.

Then they were shipped back home.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was in 1936?

Mr. Spencer

I think so.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Spencer

We started back from the Madera but we got word in Madera that there was a hurricane forming. This was quite late in the season. It was in November. There was quite a bit of time spent in the various cities that we stayed at. They sent men ashore to gather up the sailors on the shore and brought them back to the ship. They had had a lot of wine, it was quite free in Madera. So I ended up in the Fire Room, the only one sober enough to operate the water tenders job and the fire watch. We got out of there and I stayed on watch until some of the men were sober enough climb down and stand their watches.

That was my first experience with a whole Engine Room all to myself. You know looking back, it was fun now.

We started across the Atlantic right in this hurricane and, it seems to me, it was Wednesday when we started. Sunday we came through the eye of the storm and we hadn't had anything to eat except sandwiches and coffee. We hung on to the rails and pipes that were in the vicinity of where you were standing. We had one meal sitting down until we got to the other side of the storm and we started getting beat again. By this time, we were getting low on fuel. We didn't have any ballast in the ship, we just starting rolling and for a while we thought we were going to go over. It would roll so far that we could walk on the bulkhead easier than we could walk on the deck and when we would get there, we would shudder for just a moment or two. We didn't know whether it would keep on going or coming back and in a little time it came back. We changed

course a little bit to head right straight into the storm and it eliminated a lot that danger.

We approached the east coast and we went north and the hurricane went south or where ever it went to. I don't know if it had a name even in those days.

We headed up and went up to Philadelphia burning diesel oil in the fire box because we had run out of fuel oil. We got back to Philadelphia and the paint on the ship had almost been stripped off and the ladders going to the main deck to the ops deck were all bent.

We had an anvil that was riveted to the deck with big rivets which were torn loose and was laying underneath the depth charge rack in the back, at the end of the ship. That was the end of that trip.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened next?

Mr. Spencer

We refurbished, repainted the ship, had the Navy yard fix the ladders and put the anvil back in place and straightened out the depth charge racks. We got word that we were assigned to go to Newfoundland to represent the United States at the crowning of the King of England. So we went off to our duty there. As we went up the coast, it was foggy. Of course, a lot of ice floes when we got close to Newfoundland. A destroyer doesn't stand up very well to ice floes on the high sea and It could break a hole in the ship. We had to sort of feel our way. We didn't have radar in those days. We were told that we had to arrive at Newfoundland at a certain time because they had an ice berg and it had floated down and got caught on the pinnacle of a rock at the entrance of the harbor and operated as a gate. When the tide was going out, the gate was open. When the tide was coming in, the gate was closed. We had to get in between that. It



was sort of a hairy trip under those conditions. We represented the United States at the crowning of the king over in England.

Then we returned, once again, to Philadelphia to get ready to go down to Guantanamo Bay. I guess it was somewhere around July, we went down there and on the way down we got word that, I think it was the USS Detroit, I'm not sure. One of the four stack light cruisers, that was coming back from duty in Spain and grounded on one of the islands. It found itself, it had slid up onto a sand bank, was sitting there. They weren't moving. That was one of the ways they discovered they were aground. They assigned us to go there and make big waves it appears and float it off. We went down to one of the islands and made speed runs. We waited for high tide and they would make speed runs and they made as big waves as they could, but we couldn't budge the ship off the sand bar. So after 4 or 5 attempts, they released us.

They sent us on to Panama. We went through the canal, went up the west coast and joined the fleet in San Francisco.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like going through the Panama Canal?

Mr. Spencer

That was a big thrill. Many of us had never seen the Panama Canal. It just seemed to be one of the wonders of the world. We went through there without any trouble. That was one of the easy trips. Later on, we had experience on a the canal but that's another story.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get liberty on either end of the canal?

Mr. Spencer

We got liberty on both ends of the canal. Liberty in Panama was unbelievable. You couldn't understand the amount of poverty. The people were poor, they were extremely poor, except those who worked in the canal. The canal had two systems. It had the Gold System for the people of the United States. The Silver System was for the Panamanians. That existed for many, many years. This was the monetary system.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to San Francisco, what happened then?

Mr. Spencer

Up in San Francisco, we reported to the Commander in Chief of the fleet there. We were assigned as the leader of the 4<sup>th</sup> squadron of the destroyers and the ship was a destroyer leader. It was 1750 tons, where the ordinary destroyer was about 1500. It was strange, they built this ship. They built it and put on 5-inch guns, which were single purpose guns. They would not fire on anti-aircraft, they couldn't elevate them that much. They added on two batteries what they call 1.1's which never proved to be useful during wartime. When the war came they yanked them off and put on a Orlekens.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Spencer

I was with the fleet. We returned to San Diego and operated out of San Diego for a while. As the years rolled by, it was just doing the same old stuff. Let's see what happened here.

When we arrived back through the Panama Canal, we had just missed the time of looking for Amelia Earhart. So that was an experience we didn't have to go through. It was pretty bad, some of that stuff.

1940 – June or July About that time of the year, we had fleet maneuvers and our squadron was in the dark that night, tied up at the pier. Nobody was allowed to use any telephones or communicate with home at all. We changed our ammunition on the ship from practice ammunition which we always carried during peace time and put on all active ammunition. We put warheads on the torpedoes which we had never seen until this time. We were changed over from a peace-loving squadron to a war one. We didn't know what was happening. All we knew was what we were told and we did what we were told. At midnight, we were already cleared and went out and joined the fleet again. This was earlier.

When midnight came again, we headed south as fast as we could with a high-speed oil tanker and two heavy cruisers and a light cruiser. We headed into the south Pacific and the crew didn't know where we were going except we were going south. Shortly after breakfast, the Captain called all to quarters and said, "Fellows, this is it." We had all that ammunition on board and we wanted to know what was "this" we were in for. He said, "There's a German sea raider out here in the south Pacific and we are out to find her and sink her." That was no small thing for a sea raider has 10-inch guns, the biggest we had were cruisers with 8-inch. He said, "If we sound General Quarters, come to your assignments ready to fire." So we knew what we were up against at that time. We were on the lookout for the strange ship that looked like a big merchant ship. It was, in fact, a disguised sea raider. It drew close and dropped curtains and her guns go, "Boom". We searched the south Pacific for months and finally we received word

from the watchers that they have all over the world on these strategic points and they reported that the sea raider went into the Indian Ocean from the Pacific. That took it out of our jurisdiction, so they divided us up into two groups and one group was off to New Zealand, which I was in, and the other one to Sydney, Australia.

Two weeks later, we joined together again and went home to Honolulu, Pearl Harbor and continued the regular life that we had.

The thing I just told you about is almost impossible to find anywhere written down because at the time we weren't at war with Germany and had we done this as an act of war and reported it, Roosevelt would have been impeached by the Republicans. They were looking for something to impeach him with. He got away with that one.

Impeachable offence.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was Honolulu like at that time?

Mr. Spencer

Honolulu was a nice quiet, little city. It had only a couple of buildings of any consequence. A very laid-back, lazy sort of way of living. It was a beautiful place and that's all disappeared now. Now it's a big, bustling city. Unbelievable.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you there at Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Spencer

I guess 4 or 5 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got back there, then what happened next?

When you got back to Pearl Harbor was that in 1940 or 1941?

Mr. Spencer

That was 1940. That was a year and a half before the war started.

Mr. Misenhimer

You stayed there at that time?

Mr. Spencer

Yeah. Then the next four years we did our thing and all practiced what we were going to do in case of an attack. Time went on, the Japanese started moving into China and they were afraid they were moving into the Philippines and on December 7<sup>th</sup>, they attacked us. They destroyed all the plans that were made. They sunk all our Navy ships except the aircraft carriers, which were fortunately out of position that day.

Two planes crashed together somewhere over their operating area. They were out searching for the pilots. Had they not stayed out looking for the pilots, they would have been sunk because the position that they were in was occupied by the Utah which was a target ship. That poor little ship suffered horribly with the number of torpedoes going into it.

One rescue action at sea saved the aircraft carriers from destruction. I don't know how we would have operated after that. We would have had to start from scratch. We didn't have too many aircraft carriers at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did you stay on the Porter?

Mr. Spencer

I stayed on the Porter for, I guess, about 3 years. Then I transferred to the Shaw.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you transfer to the Shaw?

Mr. Spencer

I guess it was sometime in the late 1939 or 1940.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do on the Shaw?

Mr. Spencer

I was kind of placed on a small ship as a metalsmith. I usually ended up in the Engine Room doing the duty there. I worked where a metalsmith was needed, but I also stood watch in the Engine Room.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were down looking for that raider, what ship was that on?

Mr. Spencer

That was on the Shaw

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand you got married somewhere along in there. Is that right?

Mr. Spencer

September 11, 1940 It was a nice day, you know, 911.

Mr. Misenhimer

A very historic day now.

Mr. Spencer

That was 1940. In 1941, I brought Evelyn out to Hawaii to be with me. I brought her out in July of 1941. I like to say all the time. It only took her five months to get the war started.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now tell me about December 7, 1941.

Mr. Spencer

Like everything else, we were on three shifts. One-third of the ship was in session and the other two-thirds were ashore. I was home. We heard the booming and the radio guy said something about attacks on the ships, the base and so forth. I jumped into my whites and I gave my wife a big kiss and said, "Your birthday present, (which was the next day) is up on the shelf in the closet." I ran down to the street to get some sort of transportation to the base. Here came a little roadster with a pilot from the Army heading out the same way I was going. He took me on out and dropped me off at the Hickam Field gates and I always wondered what happened to him. I had to run toward the gate before the planes came back over again because they had been firing along the road. I got back to the landing just as the Captain arrived at the pier, so I rode back to the ship with the Captain. It was a very, very hairy ride because we were riding up on oil and the jeep was very unstable. You dared not move around too much.

We went back to the ship and went aboard the ship. The ship had been bombed just prior to that and it had casualties on half the guns crew. It was not a direct hit on the ship. It was a near miss and shrapnel type wounds in the after guns crew area. We lost 3 men that morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ship was that?

Mr. Spencer

That was the USS Dobbin.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Spencer

Nothing, except a squadron of destroyers was coming to Pearl Harbor for assignment. They came at what they called Flank Speed. That was everything they had. They came into Pearl Harbor and they were beaten up and we had the job of straightening out the front section of these ships so they were useable again and were water-tight once again. That took quite a few days and nights. We had to work around the clock on those. Working at night aboard ships was dangerous because you had to pass by a lot of other ships that had men standing on the bows with guns and they fired at anything that looked suspicious.

We lived through that, too. We got them all straightened out and then we got word to go to West Loch and that's the ammunition depot at Pearl Harbor. For three or four days we carried ammunition and stowed it in every place aboard ship. We were a floating bomb. We came out of there and then we just continued right on until we ended up at Pango Pango. We anchored there. We were lost without any other assignment. We stayed there for about five or six weeks. While we were there, the Navy was building a pier or extending a pier in Pango Pango so a ship coming in could be unloaded fore and aft at the same time. The civilian welders went on a strike, so the officer in charge came over to our ship and said, "Can you spare a group of welders?" We said, "Oh, sure." I was one of the ones they chose to go over and live like civilians. We thought that was living like kings. Girls waiting on us, all that kind of stuff, for food, for lunch and breakfast and so forth.

We finally were assigned to a battle group, the ones that had fought the Coral Sea battle. We went down with one escort to Tonga-Tabu, an island in the South Pacific. We serviced them. We gave them more ammunition, we gave them food, supplies, fuel



from our tanks and sent them off. We didn't hear anything from them for some time. Then finally we heard about the Coral Sea battle. We lost one carrier and the Yorktown was badly beaten down and in a few days they came in over the horizon and came in alongside us and we did what we could on the Yorktown, but they needed her badly up in Pearl Harbor. They had broken the Japanese code and they knew exactly what the Japanese were going to do and they needed her very badly. So we patched her up the best we could and she left there with the rest of the whole crew. She left the ship and headed north. She went right into the drydock, which was all set for her. Twelve hundred (1200) men came on board to work around the clock to get her in position so they could operate and they sent her to the Battle of Midway.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back to ask you some questions now, if I may.

Mr. Spencer

Okay

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, did your ship shoot at any Japanese airplanes?

Mr. Spencer

We were attacked by one, but we had a small defense against that through machine gun fire, that was all. The big 5" gun we had was surface fighting but that didn't come into play.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your ship try to get underway at all?

Mr. Spencer

No

There was no sense in trying to get underway. There was no place to go on that day.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you anchored?

Mr. Spencer

Just off the battleship row. We could just look down and see all those ships burning, black smoke for days and days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see the Arizona explode?

Mr. Spencer

No. I got there a little bit late for that.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand the Shaw really blew up, also, is that right?

Mr. Spencer

That blew up early also. That was one of the early birds. I had my eye on it and I don't know why it was in the floating drydock, where they haul them up right out of the water. It was sitting on the drydock. It was a dry dock, without any water.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have at that point?

Mr. Spencer

I was a First-Class Metalsmith.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was a Petty Officer?

Mr. Spencer

Yeah

Mr. Misenhimer

When you went down to Pango Pango, were you with other ships?

Mr. Spencer

We had one ship that went with us, to support us. We had a destroyer, I don't know which one it was, but it ran along sounding its sounding devices.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Dobbin, what kind of ship was that?

Mr. Spencer

The Dobbin was one of the first destroyer tenders they had.

Mr. Misenhimer

So, it wasn't actually a fighting ship then?

Mr. Spencer

No

Mr. Misenhimer

After you worked on the Yorktown, then what happened?

Mr. Spencer

We sent it off as fast as we could and it went off to the Navy yard and went directly into the drydock which was all set up for her. They closed the gates, flooded the docks. No they didn't flood it they kept it dry. They sent twelve hundred (1200) men from the Navy yard aboard that ship to do what they could to get it prepared for the battle they knew was coming because they broke the code. They knew what was happening. They didn't know, for instance, that the whole Japanese fleet was right behind the force with the five carriers that they had. When we caught them with their pants down, fortunately,

we sunk four of them and damaged the other one so badly that we never heard of her again.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your ship do after that?

Mr. Spencer

We had left our group at Tonga-Tabu and they turned us over to the MacArthur group and sent us south and we ended up in Sydney, Australia to work on ships in a place called Woolamaru. We stayed there about four years.

I was transferred off in 1944 and sent back to the states. (Oh, I haven't got that far yet.)

Where were we?

Mr. Misenhimer

You had just finished working on the Yorktown. Then what did you do?

Mr. Spencer

As we approached Sydney, our lead destroyer that we had with us (remember we were loaded with ammunition from end to end) was hit with a torpedo which made a tremendous blast. This destroyer discovered a submarine in that area and started searching for it. They sent us off and we went north towards the Coral Sea and we kept going. The destroyer circled and found us and brought us back into Sydney late in the afternoon.

Instead of going to a dock, the union people are very strict down there. They don't work after certain hours. So we anchored in Rose Bay right next to one of the sort of plush sections of the city. For the first time, they allowed a certain number of people to go ashore on liberty – just a few, not many. I was still on board ship that night and just around 11:30 (somewhere around that time) I was awakened by gunfire. I got up and

ran to the edge there and looked over. The "<sup>Chicaco</sup>Chico" was shooting down on the water at a periscope that was going down in the water. Shells were ricocheting, going over and landing in Sydney. Sydney sounded the air alarms. (They thought they were having an air attack.) We put all our boats in the water, that we hadn't already put in, and put depth charges on them. If you know anything about Navy boats, they're not fast. They were ordered to go out and anything suspicious drop one of the depth charges on them. Boy, when you drop one of those things in a harbor where the water wasn't very deep, you'd better get going as fast as you can because the water behind you is going to blow you out of the water. You had these boats going in and had no boat problems, but we didn't discover anything.

About 11:30, we were standing at rest, but not at General Quarters but at rest. I was leaning on the rail and looked over the side and here goes a torpedo, right by us and I could see the wake of it coming and going. It passed underneath the bow of the "Clark" which was up ahead of us, a destroyer. A little further on, there was an Australian barracks ship and it hit the barracks ship and blew it out over the sky. Here we are sitting on ammunition that would do the same thing to the whole coast of Sydney.

There wasn't much we could do, a bunch of tugs magically seemed to appear and they came over and surrounded us, made us like in a blanket, all the way on both sides of the ship. They held us there until it was daylight and at daylight, they took us down the harbor, one great big harbor, and stowed us away in a real narrow place called "Too Long Pier." Then the Australians came aboard and unloaded the ship. That was a near miss, one that would have been very devastating.

They moved the ship to a place called "Woolamaru" and they did a lot of work there.

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Did you get liberty in Sydney?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**Oh yeah, I got liberty in Sydney.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**How was that?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**It was one of these places, if you were single, it was Heaven. There were an awful lot of girls in Sydney who were lonely and no boyfriends because whatever there was, was up in Africa and besides that the Yanks were very easy with their money. They would go places and do things and the crew enjoyed it very much.**

**We knew a newly married couple I met and knew them for years and visited them after the war and had many enjoyable sessions with them from time to time.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**So you have been back to Australia since the war?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**We've been back to Australia about 20 times. Australia is the place that we would live if we had it to do over again.**

**I was in the states in early 1944, I guess. I was there for 2 weeks and my wife came from Pearl Harbor and we were able to get two weeks together and she went back to Pearl and I went back to Australia on the SS Louie Aguelo (I don't know how you spell it, that's the way it sounds). With us, we had about 300 men and we lived on boiled beef and potatoes, the whole crew. The thing that got to us was the crew of the ship was civilians. They had a union and they had meetings and they didn't like the menu so**

they had to change it. They had choice of five meats at breakfast and stuff like that, and here we are eating boiled beef and potatoes. I always thought that when the war was over, I would not support anything for those union people. They got their extra money, got their extra food and everything else during the war when we didn't have it. It just didn't seem fair.

Then we went down to Cairns, Australia, for 31 days. When we got down there we met a battalion of CBs. They went ahead and put a town together right down the river from Cairns and inside of a month we were in operating condition with roads and electricity (I guess it was even shorter than that) and water supply and all that kind of stuff. It was marvelous, what they did! They put in a thousand foot pier in there.

We had the ships come in and tie up while we repaired them or serviced them, and give them food or fuel, whatever they needed. We had almost lost New Guinea at the time. They needed support to get people over to the island in these boats.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened next?

Mr. Spencer

I worked there for a little over a year. They transferred me back to Pearl Harbor, where I was assigned to duty in the Navy yard. I was a Ship Superintendent. In the meantime, I was promoted to Warrant Officer before I left Australia.

I came back to Pearl Harbor and worked in the Navy yard. As Ship Superintendent, I was assigned various ships to, usually, beef up their gunnery or to patch up here and there, but mostly adding new armament to the ship. I got the big ships that were in charge of each invasion of the island and they needed more machine guns. I put machine guns all around the ship and gave them a good armor and so forth.

Then they brought in small ships, some LCIs or something like that. Landing Craft Infantry.

We would strip the decks where people would stand normally and put in rocket launchers. Each one had 40 or 50 rocket launchers and I had those prepared. That was interesting, because I could see what they were going to do. They would go close to the shore and start firing. Firing some of these rockets going over and clearing out some of these areas.

Then I was assigned, you remember when – well maybe you won't remember – one of the cruisers lost its bow because it was so flexible and broken in a heavy storm. They were going to send the rest of that squadron into Pearl Harbor in a period about 4 days apart. I was to get each ship repaired so the flexibility was limited.

We were working without plans so we had to go down and measure everything on the first ship. From there on, it became easier. The first ship took about 4 days to do. The rest of the ships came in and we were doing them in less than a day because with everything ready, the guys came aboard ship, welders were on board and welders in place. The only complaints I got was when the Supply Officers of one of the ships said, "You've got to send somebody over to clean up ships." We don't clean up ships, we just make a mess out of them. About that time, the war came to an end. That was the end of this story.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now were you in Pearl Harbor when the war ended?

Mr. Spencer

Yeah



**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Did ya'll have any kind of celebration?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**I was there when it started and I there when it ended. I was gone most of the time.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**When the war ended, did you all have a celebration?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**Not really. We yelled, "hoorah, hoorah", "hooray", "that's great" and that kind of stuff.**

**There was no big celebration, it was sort of a big letdown, from a higher plane, you know.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**What would you consider your most frightening time?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**When that torpedo went by. I didn't know whether we would get a second torpedo or not. Of course, the day at Pearl Harbor was probably the most shocking thing that we had to put up with. It was unbelievable.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**What medals and ribbons did you get from World War II?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**Mostly I just got campaign ribbons. I've never counted them – not very much.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**I have a little picture frame here with the ribbons all displayed in it.**

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Spencer

I have two Japanese rifles and that's about all.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

Mr. Spencer

No, I never heard her, but I've heard of her. I never knew where she operated on.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Spencer

I never came in much contact with USOs. Well, we had the Australian version of USOs. One thing was very funny. We were Cairns at Christmas. On December 25 in Cairns is not what you would call a cool day. We had the crew from Sydney out there. This little girl got up and she was going to sing a song for us and she sang "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" and the perspiration was just rolling down her face and dripping off her nose. It was just so hot. We all laughed and she laughed, too. It was kind of a different Christmas. There was no such thing as snow in that part of Australia. They do have some in the south.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you crossed the Equator did you have any ceremony?

Mr. Spencer

No, because I crossed the Equator before the war started when we were looking for that German Sea Raider.

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**They didn't initiate you into anything, right?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**One time they initiated me and cut my hair, slathered me with stuff and dunked me into a pool of water.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Have you had any reunions of your people from World War II?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**We do go to the Pearl Harbor Survivors Reunions. We have been to Pearl Harbor for the 50<sup>th</sup> and the 60<sup>th</sup> we went to Fredericksburg, Texas because that was the home of Admiral Nimitz and the Museum of the Pacific is there. Just this last year, we went to Fredericksburg, again.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**You stayed in the Navy, right?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**I stayed 32 years. The Korean War started and I was assigned to a sea plane center and I spent 3 tours in Korea, 8 months each.**

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**What did you do on those?**

**Mr. Spencer**

**Well, we serviced the planes that were in our squadron. We brought a squadron of planes with us. We were back-ups for the aviation group. The Navy had what they called the "Brown-Shoe Navy" which was the air force and the "Black-Shoe Navy" which was the sea going force. The Brown Shoes did most of the work while we were out in**

Korea. We could man the ship back and forth (I can't even remember the ports.). The home port and some of the other bigger cities for supplies and recreation.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about Viet Nam, were you involved in the Viet Nam war?

Mr. Spencer

I didn't get involved in that. I was available and they just didn't need me.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you retire, what date?

Mr. Spencer

I retired the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1966.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was 32 years.

Mr. Spencer

What's that?

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Spencer

CWO4

That was the highest I could go at that time. Now I've heard of a "5". The Navy no longer uses the Warrant Officer.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Spencer

Nothing

**Mr. Misenhimer**

**Gene, I want to thank you for your time today.**

**Transcribed by:**

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