

The National Museum of the Pacific War
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with
Donald Richard Hair
863-74-44
USN

By John Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter

Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Illinois
USS Aulick DD 569
Construction Battalion Maintenance Unit 536, New Caledonia
NTS Newport, Rhode Island
USS Bountiful
USS Rexey
USS Aderondac
25 Feb., '43 - 12 Dec., '45

Donald Richard Hair
863-74-44
25 Feb., '43 - 12 Dec., '45
USN

Pacific Theater

Medals earned:
Purple Heart
American Campaign Medal
World War II Medal
American Defense Medal
Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal
Philippine Liberation Medal
Ruptured Duck

Original Interview by
John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter
completed
12 June, 2004

With reinterview with of
Don Hair
by John Tombaugh
14 June, 2004

My name is John B. Tombaugh and Peggy Van Meter and I are interviewing Mr. Don Hair

Mr. Tombaugh

Would you please give your name and address?

Mr. Hair

Oakwood Apartment 433 E 18th Street Apt. 9 Rochester, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where were you born?

Mr. Hair

Winamac, Indiana.

Mr. Tombaugh

What were your parents names?

Mr. Hair

Esther M. Styles Hair and Milo Hair.

Mr. Tombaugh

What age did you go into the Navy?

Mr. Hair

18 years old.

Peggy Van Meter

Did you attend Winamac School?

Mr. Hair

Yes.

Peggy Van Meter

Did you attend Winamac schools throughout your time in school?

Mr. Hair

Yes. After school went to Indianapolis, Indiana and it was there I was drafted.

Mr. Tombaugh

What kind of work did your parents do?

Mr. Hair

My Dad was a self employed carpenter. My mother died in 1934 when I was ten year old.

Mr. Tombaugh

Where did you report to when drafted?

Mr. Hair

Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

Mr. Tombaugh

What did your training involve?

Mr. Hair

Don't know exactly what we did. I did learn morse code there. Then signal flagman; helmsman; loader on 5 inch 25 gun.

Mr. Tombaugh

Dual position, 5 inch DP?

Mr. Hair

Yes.

Mr. Tombaugh

Surface or air?

Mr. Hair

Yes.

Mr. Tombaugh

After completing training what was your first assignment?

Mr. Hair

They sent a bunch of us over to California not on the coast but in the valley. We waited there for a ship which was the CA 28 USS Louisville, a heavy cruiser. That ship took us across to Pearl Harbor. Then after weeks or months I was assigned to a destroyer, the DD 569 USS Aulick. That destroyer I was assigned to had to be reconditioned as it had hit a reef down in the southern part of the Pacific. It was then pulled into Pearl Harbor where it was reconditioned. Following that we joined the 7th Fleet, Admiral Kinkaid's fleet. Then we went to a series of other islands, I don't know the sequence of the arrivals but one was Guam, also Guadalcanal, Solomon islands. There was no fighting there at that time. Then we went on to Philippines and that's when all Hell broke loose.

When we first went into Leyte Gulf we bombarded the shoreline so the army guys could get in their and get a foot hold, then they sent us out to patrol for subs at the mouth of the gulf. And that's when it happened.

Mr. Tombaugh

And that was when the ship was hit?

Mr. Hair

Yes, I don't know where we were hit, either in the gun behind us (No.2 turret) or in the bridge. (At this time he got a model of the ship to show us.)

After our gun got knocked out I don't know what happened, I don't have the slightest what happened.

At the GQ sound we ran to our guns. Evidently I was just getting into the gun when one hit off the bow. There was five of us in the gun mount and we all got scrap metal. The guy sitting to my left who set the shell fuses never got out; he died there. So I got out of the gun and tried to get back to the sick bay when I saw a guy

with scrap metal in his butt and I helped him back to the sick bay following the port side of the ship. The sick bay is directly under the torpedo tubes. In route I felt the shrapnel in my back but we managed to get back there where there were others laying on the deck seeking aid from the corpsman. There I received morphine to kill the pain which lasted for a short time but then it came back and hurt worse then before the second time he gave me a double shot. Sometime after that a landing barge came along side and they put the wounded in that via wire baskets. We all had blankets covering us and I didn't realize I was naked at that time. While on the barge a female nurse came over to check me and when she raised the blanket all I could think of was Oh, God!

The fleet had communications with the hospital ship, but before we got there a storm hit and we all got soaked. We couldn't do a thing about it, just lay there and get soaked. They finally got us to the hospital ship and there they took out the shrapnel from my back. I do remember see a buddy of mine on the ship but he is the only one I remember.

Mr. Tombaugh

Do you remember the name of the hospital ship?

Mr. Hair

No, not the slightest idea it was painted white with a big cross on the side (It was the AH 19 USS Bountiful). Probably others on the hospital ship beside the men from the Aulick.

They had a nice hospital down there on New Caledonia's shoreline. I stayed there but I don't remember how long in months I took to recuperate there. After I was able to do things I ended up on the CBMU, which is a Seabee construction unit. They gave me job I rather like it was greasing trucks and I was by myself with no officers around. And then they had a bunch of officers come into my tent for an inspection - the building had wooden sides and a tent top - and when they walked in I stood at attention and they said relax. I sat back down. I don't know how CB Camp, but I remember one thing, the flag-United States Flag-was at half mast and upside down. I asked a guy who in the hell put that upside down like that and he said haven't you heard President Roosevelt died. They had a certain barracks there for returnees to the United States and I was one of those. Finally got a ship back to California.

US Fleet Hospital 105 originated in New York home of the naval medical supply depot and Brooklyn Dodgers and was named US Mobile Hospital No 5 until 8 July, 1944. The official commissioning took place on May 26, 1942 and present were 19 officers and 260 enlisted men with Captain Frederick L. Conklin (?) MC USA in command a great deal of training and had work was the order of the day in the months to follow as the hospital and personnel made there way from Brooklyn to New Caledonia arriving September 23, '42. The Stars and Strips were raised over the hospital November 23, '42 four days after the first group of patients were received from Guadalcanal.

During the period that followed thru' the year 1943 hospitalization and medical care was furnished to patients from

Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Bougainville, New Georgia, Treasury Islands, Makin Island, Vella la Vella and other land actions as well as from the fleet. Captain S.S. Cook relieved Captain Frederick L. Conklin as medical officer and commander on March 29, '44.

During the year '44 the hospital was improved continuously for the comfort and welfare of patients and staff. Patients were received from action in and about the Marietta Island and other area in central and southern Pacific.

Mr. Tombaugh

You don't remember the name of the ship?

Mr. Hair

No.

Mr. Tombaugh

What kind was it?

Mr. Hair

Troop transport I guess you could say. (The USS Rexey) It came from Bombay, sailed around Australia then they picked us up and that was a long trip home but boy was I glad to get home.

Mr. Tombaugh

The closer you got the longer it took, I bet!

Mr. Hair

While aboard that ship they had some lunch-meat for sandwiches and after eating I thought I was getting seasick. I told somebody that I was seasick and he said they got bad meat in the sandwich and to go to sick bay and they would give me something for it. I arrived and they gave me a little shot glass of white stuff and after taking it I felt better. It was meat that was improperly refrigerated. I just thought I got seasick but I didn't.

Our ship went thru a typhoon and I got sick as a dog, vomiting for four or five days.

Mr. Tombaugh

Were the waves taller then the bridge of the ship?

Mr. Hair

Yes, the destroyers are like a cork on water, they go up and they go down. These waves were as near as I could tell between 80 and 90 Ft. high, as the waves were above the mast and radar of the ship. Of course you don't go into the waves, you go into the trough of the waves. During that I was helmsman. On the bridge there is an inclinometer mounted which shows the degrees the ship turns from side to side. The most I remember it rolling in the storm was 67 degrees. If the ship went 90 degrees we would be on our side.

Mr. Tombaugh

Should the ship go to a 90 degree lean the water would be pouring in thru the vents and the ships stack.

Mr. Hair

Yes. Luckily we didn't roll over. Following the storm I was finally able to start eating again.

Being a signalman a lot of things happened. I remember one time they need someone who could do shorthand and I thought the quartermaster could but he couldn't, so who get it, me! I couldn't do it either. They needed this in the CIC room. In the room there is a big table with a map of the Pacific located under a glass top and which is about waist high. Once there I received a handful of pencils and a high chair. In the room were three or four speakers which were constantly carrying messages with each speaker designated to a specific frequency assigned to the different ships. My job was to listen to one of those speakers and write down what was transmitted, and our ship was code named "Seagull." As the signal started coming for our ship the pencil in my hand and the words were barely in time with one another but somehow I managed to get the gist of the message and told the captain the contents of the message.

At another time as we were steaming and we spotted another ship in the dark. As we were on patrol I used the hand held signal lamp which is a approximately three feet long and four inches in diameter. Located at the back end is the light itself inside thus it can be seen only by the one it is pointed at. As I pulled the trigger the bulb would be illuminated and in this manner I tried to raise the other ship. I did that four or five time without receiving a response. I then turned to the skipper and told him they were not responding. He told me to try once again. Finally somebody answered. The ship I was trying to raise had a signalman but he was not on duty thus someone had to go down and get him. They were just very fortunate in that they did respond as they were so close to being sunk by not responding.

We finally arrived in the US but I don't remember what I did then, outside of probably going on liberty.

Mr. Tombaugh

On returning from overseas combat everyone received liberty of two or three weeks didn't they?

Mr. Hair

I don't know but I did get some liberty.

Following liberty I was to report to a new ship on the east coast, a communication ship named the AGC 15 USS Adirondack. Adirondack is named after the mountain in New York.

Aboard the ship I was in charge of six men and we were stationed on the large bridge. Also present were army and marine people. The ship was based in Virginia and it was from here that was sent back to Great Lakes Naval Base for the final separation. The trip back was done by train and during a change over I almost froze due to the fact I did not have my P-coat due to the attack on the destroyer Aulick. Upon arrival at Great Lakes they had food waiting for us. It was here too that they had the building to reenlist and I was not about to step into that building for another tour. I then went into a room for an interview with a Red Cross lady and in the conversation she picked up that I was wounded and eligible for

compensation and she instructed on how to file for the compensation.

Mr. Tombaugh

What was your rank at that time?

Mr. Hair

I was up for 3rd Class Signalman but at that time due to the amount of the men they froze the promotions.

It was during this time that another incident happened. A destroyer located about a half mile from us hit a mine and we sent a whale boat over to the stricken vessel. I was one of those aboard the boat and when we got over there I glanced back and found our ship was sending a message. I proceeded aboard and mentioned it to the destroyer's signalman. The DD's signalman apparently didn't know his job. I finally told him I would read the message and he could write it down which he was able to do. I later talked to another man on that ship and he said that they needed a signalman and they just picked that guy who knew nothing about signaling.

While on board the DD I looked down thru a deck hatch cover and could see the bottom of the ocean. It was thru the sealing of the bulkheads compartments on either side that the ship wasn't flooded worse than it was.

I also remember at one time as we were patrolling the west coast off California from San Francisco to Catalina Island we were sailing in heavy seas and I was assigned the task of taking a group of men aft. The ship was rolling in the waves and I instructed the men to go to the next upper deck for safety. Before they could climb up the waves hit and the only thing that saved them from being washed overboard was a safety line along the deck which they grabbed as their feet were washed out from under them. As they regained their footing they quickly followed my instructions to climb up to the next level.

Peggy Van Meter

How's the food?

Mr. Hair

It was good on the ship. A lot of the food was instant such as potato's and eggs.

Mr. Tombaugh

How was the food when on shore duty with the Seabees?

Mr. Hair

Oh, that was great. In fact when I was in the hospital in New Caledonia, I think during Christmas, we had a turkey dinner. (Here he shows us his book of the hospital.)
Admiral Halsey had his quarters there on the island.

John Tombaugh

What did you do when you got home?

Mr. Hair

I went back to Indianapolis, Indiana and returned to the same place I had worked before the war, Inland Container Corporation and worked there for 39 years.

Peggy Van Meter

How old were you when you were discharged?

Mr. Hair

I was 23 years old.

I was working 2nd shift and that night I didn't go to work but went to the Top Hat in Indianapolis and that's where I met my future wife. Her name was Esther Monzel "Monty" Gardner and I fell for her the first time I saw her.

We were married in Wheatfield at her sister's home and went to Lake Bruce for honeymoon and rented a trailer there and visited with my Aunt and Uncle and later went to Winamac and told my sister I'd got married. I adopted her daughter, Camelia Gardner when she was 5 1/2 years old. Esther and I were married for 30 years until she died.

-END-

20 hours total