

Jesse Dwain Holmes Oral History Interview

ED METZLER: This is Ed Metzler. Today is December 7, 2009.

I'm interviewing Jesse Dwain Holmes in Fredericksburg, Texas at the Nimitz Museum. This interview is in support of the Center of 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. Let me start out, Dwain, by thanking you for spending the time today to share your experiences with us, and I'm going to turn it over to you, let you introduce yourself, and when and where you were born, and we'll take it from there.

JESSE DWAIN HOLMES: OK. My name is Dwain Holmes --

EM: You don't need to lean, it'll be OK.

JDH: I was born in Anson, Texas, April 20, 1926. I went to school at a little rural school by the name of Valley View.

EM: And what did your dad do for a living?

JDH: My father owned some small telephone companies in North Texas, yeah.

EM: Back when, I guess, they had individual private phone companies?

JDH: Yeah, they were private telephone companies, and we had, I think, it was six small exchanges scattered there in North Texas.

EM: Now, I'll be darned. Did you have brothers and sisters?

JDH: I have two brothers. My brother Jack, he was in the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force, he was a tail gunner.

EM: On a 17, huh?

JDH: On a B-17, and my younger brother --

EM: Did you lose him in the war?

JDH: Did what?

EM: Did you lose him in the war?

JDH: He was seriously wounded.

EM: Wow.

JDH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Go ahead.

JDH: My younger brother, Gordon, he served on a carrier, CVE-112, I believe, the *Siboney*, I believe that's the name of it, *Siboney Bay* or *Siboney*, I'd have to look it up and see, but anyway CVE-112. That's really about all I can say about our family.

EM: Did you live in the country or were you in town when --

JDH: I'm sorry.

EM: -- you were young? Did you live in the country or were you in town?

JDH: No, we lived in town.

EM: OK, so you went to the local --

JDH: Well, it started out -- my father worked for Southwestern Bell Telephone Company. In 1927 he was transferred to Iowa Park. In Southwestern Bell, as the local manager, Southwestern Bell did not build any rural lines. If you lived in the country, you had to build your own line up to the city limits, and they'd assign you a cable pair and you could get a telephone. Well, there were several people lived in farms that south and west of Iowa Park, and they'd come to dad about what would it cost for us to get telephones, and he had so many people wanting telephones that he built a telephone line from Iowa Park out to the Valley View KMA Community or Kemp City Community they called it then, and he had 12 or 14 telephones. Well, it was during the Depression years, and he'd get like a dollar and a half a month per telephone so that much more revenue that he got. And then in 1936 when he got his World War I bonus, some \$500, he quit Southwestern Bell and took his pension money, and what money he had with his bonus, and bought the little telephone exchange that was last built in South Bend. Well, we lived there a year and a half, and they got oil where he built that rural line out of Iowa Park, and a little town developed and first thing you knew

there was like 150-200 drilling rigs working that area out there, and supply stores, just everything you could think of for a boom town. I'm talking about the oil field supplies, the honkytonks, music all night long --

EM: The bars --

JDH: -- the muddy roads --

EM: The brothels, the whole thing.

JDH: Yeah. Incidentally, that was probably the last boom town in the USA was right then. From late October of 1937 on up to about 1940, it grew, and grew, and grew, and the telephone industry. Our little telephone exchange that he built, well, he got help and he added more lines, and built lines in, and put an exchange in Kamay -- or KAM City, and had a little over 500 telephones out there at one time.

EM: That turned out to be a real bonanza.

JDH: Well, it did and most of it was all rural. I mean, it was rural but it was still the call was all long distance. The oil companies calling their main offices basically in Houston, Graham, Wichita Falls, just (inaudible), Oklahoma City, Parker City. There was three gasoline plants that were built out there, and -- maybe four gasoline plants they had built. But, anyway, then he built a telephone exchange at Scotland and Windthorst, Texas and then Blue Grove, Texas, and they bought the telephone exchange for

[Trodia?] and Byers and Charlie from Southwest State Associated Telephone Company which they didn't operate in Texas anymore. They wanted to get out of Texas, and they had fell into a receivership during the Depression, and so they were needing to get rid of a lot of stuff to accumulate money.

EM: So you went to the local schools there then, I assume, public schools.

JDH: Yeah, Valley View.

EM: And high school there?

JDH: Yeah, --

EM: So about when did you graduate then? You graduated --

JDH: Forty-four.

EM: So, you were in high school when the war started?

JDH: Yeah, actually, I went in before school was out. The recruiters came, and they talked to the seniors down in the gym, the Navy, Army, and Marine Corp, and the Coast Guard. Well, the Navy --

EM: And you were a senior when they came?

JDH: Yeah. The Navy, he came again later on, and he went through our superintendant and principal to see how our grades were, and he said, "If they came out of school now would they go ahead and graduate?" Well, being patriotic the principal and superintendant said, "Yes, they would

graduate," and so that was it, the diploma and everything, and the mothers took the diploma there in the commencement exercises and so on and so forth.

EM: But you weren't there to take it.

JDH: I wasn't there.

EM: You were somewhere else.

JDH: But I wasn't the only one like that, you know, and the little girls -- the girls cried, you know, in class girls, you know, because we wasn't there. It was sad, the mothers coming on stage and accepted the diploma, you know.

EM: Well, yeah, yeah.

JDH: Yeah, it was.

EM: So, where did you go to get inducted?

JDH: Went to Dallas. Rode the bus to Dallas.

EM: And this was how long before you would have graduated or before your graduation ceremonies?

JDH: Well, I went in the Navy on April the -- either -- I believe, the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup>, I'm not sure but it's one of those. Real close to that date.

EM: Yeah, so about six, seven weeks before you probably would have gotten your diploma.

JDH: Yeah, yeah, but I did. I had good grades so there was --

EM: So, you knew you were going to go and graduate.

JDH: I didn't want to wait.

EM: And tell me again why you picked the Navy? Because he was just persevering when he was --

JDH: I had my wife's brother was in the Navy. She was my sweetheart then. You know how boys and girls are. And her brother joined the Navy in August of 1941 after he'd got out of school, and he didn't want to be drafted, and he had an uncle who was in World War I in the Navy, and he told his nephews that you need to join the Navy because you don't want to be in the Army, it's too hard a life.

(laughter)

EM: As if the Navy life was you just set back and lean back in your bunk, huh?

JDH: Yeah, but anyway, that was the way it went. He said you got a roof every night, you got a chow hall, not too --

EM: Yeah, warm food, no foxholes to dig.

JDH: Yeah, there was a lot of stories on what you just mentioned there, food, especially during an invasion.

EM: I want to hear those. So, let's get you into the Navy first. So, you went to Dallas and you went --

JDH: I took my physical, then I came home, and I stayed, I guess it was late March when the recruiter talked to the principal and superintendent, and then right before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I went to Dallas, took my physical, etc., and came back and then on April the -- again, 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup>, when I

officially put on a uniform, when I was at boot camp in San Diego.

EM: So, they took you out to San Diego. I guess that's where most of the Navy guys seemed to go is the West Coast.

JDH: Four weeks of boot camp. A lot of guys look at me and they say, "How did you get buy with four weeks?" I said, "Well, I don't know." That's just what the Navy had, and that's what all the companies were getting at that time. The Navy was needing personnel. The only thing we learned was how to march and how to roll our clothes up basically.

EM: It makes you wonder why you even had to know how to march because what do you do, march around on deck on the ship?

JDH: No, grounder, I mean in boot camp.

EM: Yeah, well.

JDH: And then at the end of the fourth week I went over to the destroyer base and went to gunnery school. Four weeks of gunnery school, and from there we got on a Pullman and went to San Francisco, Treasure Island, and three days later from Treasure Island got on a sea going draft, went aboard a merchant ship as an Armed Guard, and --

EM: So, what did you think about getting in the Armed Guard, did you know anything about it?

JDH: Well, yeah, I had a couple of friends that were in the Armed Guard. You know, they were several years older than



what I was but when they'd come home on leave -- they only come home one time that I knew of, but one boy, his name was Eddie [Ferrell?] and, gosh, he graduated, I think, in 1939 somewhere in there. I don't know whether he was drafted or whether he volunteered, but, anyway, he wound up in the Armed Guard, and he'd tell me how good it was, you know. He said he was in the Atlantic in the early days and he made one trip from Murmansk, Russia, and there was nothing good about that trip.

EM: That's got to be rough duty. Talk about cold.

JDH: Cold, uh-uh. Rounds freezing up and everything else, you know, it was just holy hell.

EM: I would think North Atlantic duty was not good.

JDH: It wasn't good. But, see now, we're going back again -- I hate to back up some here.

EM: That's fine. You back up any time you want.

JDH: But in August, yeah, in April of 1941 the Germans were sinking our merchant ships off the Eastern seaboard. President Roosevelt called his Secretary of State, Cordell Hull in his office and he said we have got to do something to stop these German submarines from sinking our ships. And he said during World War I we had what we called an Armed Guard on merchant ships. And he said, "I want you, Cordell, to go to the Secretary of Navy and tell him to

reactivate Armed Guard units." And the first Armed Guard units went to war in August of 1941, three months before World War II without a declaration of war. And the Congress and Senate it was hush-hush. They didn't know one thing. Now, I'm talking about what I've read. They knew nothing about it. So, that was the starting of the Armed Guard for World War II, and they were the very first people, the very first sailors to go to war in 1941 before the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. The Armed Guard never did get any recognition, period.

EM: That's what I understand. I know I've not heard of them much.

JDH: We never got any recognition, and, gosh, they were called fish food, they were called everything, you know.

EM: Second-class citizens, huh?

JDH: Yeah, you'll be sorry, you know, fish food, you'll be sorry, so and so forth. It breaks our heart that we were never recognized. This right here, went to Washington back in, I guess, it had been the first week of May --

EM: Of this year.

JDH: Yeah, this year, on what they call the Honor Flight. You probably know something about that.

EM: I know all about it.

JDH: OK, and there was a couple of congressman that -- into a meeting room which was in the mall there at Washington, and it came up and said why didn't we ever get anything, a Congressional Medal of Honor?

EM: Or any recognition.

JDH: Anything. He said, "Well, nobody ever filed for one through the Senate or through the Congress." He said, "You're only allowed either three or four years to do that, and nobody did it in the Armed Guard, it's probably the reason why." But just the other day Mr. Obama, your president, he awarded a presidential unit citation to a marine on something that happened years back.

EM: So you can go back if you...

JDH: Well, he did.

EM: So, maybe we should apply again.

JDH: Well, I don't know how you'd even do it. There's nobody that's really in command of the Armed Guard anymore. You have --

EM: Then you go through your congressman or something.

JDH: Well, I went through my congressman, and I got a letter of, you might say, appreciation from him, a congressional letter what all it amounted to in a printed form, and he signed off on it.

EM: Well, let's talk some more about what actually happened in the war. Now, you went -- you were Treasure Island, you were put on a ship.

JDH: Went aboard the John T. McMillan Liberty ship.

EM: Let me get that down, John T. McMillan. Now, what was the John T. McMillan?

JDH: It was a Liberty ship. It had two 3-inch/50 rifles; one forward and one aft, and had eight .20-millimeter cannons on it. I went aboard and like 30 days later we were sent to Espiritu in the New Hebrides.

EM: That's a long ways away.

JDH: Yeah, yeah. We cross the equator and got our butts busted --

EM: You got to shell back then.

JDH: Yeah, yeah, exactly right. Got the full initiation. It was comical. It was good and they turned the salt water -- started the salt water pumps and hosed everybody down, you know, that was coming through in fore and aft. We got a little mimeographed certificate, you know.

EM: Yeah, I've seen some of those that the guys have showed me.

JDH: Yeah, I've still got my mimeographed certificate.

EM: Yeah, they had kind of Neptune on one side and a mermaid on the other.

JDH: Yeah, yeah. Neptune (inaudible), you know.

EM: Exactly, I've seen those things.

JDH: It's got the date on it and signed by the gunnery officer, and your name on it.

EM: Now, was the McMillan alone or was she in a bunch --

JDH: It was alone.

EM: You were soloing down there.

JDH: Yeah, uh-uh, yeah.

EM: How many Armed Guard guys were on board?

JDH: There was 25, 24 Armed Guard sailors and an ensign officer, yeah.

EM: So, mostly you're just got gunnery duty, huh?

JDH: Right.

EM: What do you do when you're not at your stations?

JDH: Well, you --

EM: Just hang out or --

JDH: Well, your watch would be three hours on and nine hours off, so in the nine hours you had to catch up on your sleep, you had to eat, you had to wash your clothes, and maybe a lot of guys played pinochle, I never did play pinochle, and late in the afternoon the ones that wasn't on duty would play rummy back on the fantail in the 3-inch tub, and we'd stay there until general quarters. When the general quarters started that wound up the rummy.

EM: That shut her down.

JDH: Anyway, we'd get a bit to eat, and then we'd come back and basically go to bed because you going on watch maybe at midnight or you go on watch at 7:00, midnight, at 3:00, and then at 6:00, and just so on and so forth.

EM: What gunnery crew were you a part of then?

JDH: I was a .20-millimeter gunner up on the bridge.

EM: And did you guys mix and blend with the civilian crew or the Merchant Marine crew?

JDH: Very little bit.

EM: Or did you kind of stay a part?

JDH: No, we stayed a part.

EM: Was that intentional do you think?

JDH: Yeah, the Navy guys, the gunners, those on the fantail -- we were more of a -- kind of separated. All of our activity took place back there, and the guys up forward it took place up forward, you know.

EM: A lot of acreage between them and you, so.

JDH: Yeah, but in the chow hall, you know, in liberty and everything, we were all good friends. In fact, some of the best friends I ever had in my life was on that one ship. They were the greatest bunch of guys I was ever with. There wasn't any stealing, and there wasn't any -- I'm trying to think of the proper word -- anybody wanting to

fight somebody, you know. I don't believe no fight ever took place on -- in the gun crew.

EM: What about your ensign officer, was he a good guy or just a 90-day wonder or what?

JDH: Best guy in the world.

EM: Really.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Was he older than you guys were?

JDH: Oh, yeah, he was a geologist.

EM: Geologist.

JDH: He went to school at Brownwood there. Got his education at Brownwood at the -- I'm trying to think of the college.

EM: Tarleton State, isn't it?

JDH: No, no.

EM: What's the name of that other...

JDH: Oh, gosh, but anyway, I'll think of it in a little bit, and he worked the oil fields during that Kamay oil boom. He worked for Continental Oil Company, a geologist, and he worked the Kamay oil fields, and when the war started, of course, he went straight into the Navy.

EM: When you say Kamay, spell that for me.

JDH: K-A-M-A-Y.

EM: OK, I wanted to make sure that I was hearing that right.

JDH: Yeah, and before then it went by about three different names, Kemp City, then the initials KMA. I'm not going to tell you what KMA stands for.

EM: Why?

JDH: Kiss my ass. (laughter) I'm serious.

EM: I never would have thought that.

JDH: No, the fellows running a well, and they told them if they had a dry hole, and he'd bet money to another guy that it would be a dry hole. When that well come in it blow plum up in the derrick, and that's what he said. He lost his money right there -- and that just stuck, and they started calling it KMA, KMA oil field, and even your maps will show it KMA oil field.

EM: I got to look that up sometime.

JDH: And so they, Kemp Munger owned a lot of land there, and they wanted the name of the town -- there was already a Munger, and Mr. A.J. Kemp, the land that he owned he told him he'd give post office land if they'd get a post office, and they sent a name in it was K-M-A is what they wanted to name it -- no, Kemp City is what they wanted to name it. Well, the postal came back and said, "We already have a Kemp City in Texas, so we're going to give you the name K-A-M-A-Y, like Camay Soap," still the KMA City, yeah.



EM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, that is -- I'm sure that is the only recording we've got that's got that information on it. But, anyhow, he was a good guy. He was a geologist?

JDH: He was a wonderful guy. Very fair and very honest with you, and he didn't expect anything for you to do that he wouldn't do. Let's put it that way.

EM: Yeah, that's about all you can ask for.

JDH: Yeah, and with the sea and one night the night cook and baker he called back there for me and another fellow who was there, [Winfrey Galesail] from around Oklahoma, and I picked up -- well, I had the phone zone and he said, "Hey, Dwain," he says, "I've got some hot rolls here, donuts and hot rolls, if you want some come up here and get 'em." So, I told [Seth?] I'm going to go up there and get us some hot rolls, so I got us two a piece, but when I got back Mr. Mayfield was -- I wasn't suppose to leave that gun station. Mr. Mayfield was back there on the gun tip talking to Seth. Well, I knew I was in trouble right then, and I says, "Look what I've got here. I've got some hot rolls, and I've got coffee. Mr. Mayfield?" "Sure, I'll eat one." He never mentioned me leaving that gun battle station, but from that night on for maybe a month and a half later he was back

there every night about -- or every morning about 4:30  
a.m., 5:00 a.m.

EM: Amazing how that works.

JDH: Yeah, and he liked those donuts.

EM: He got his fill of donuts --

JDH: Sweet --

EM: -- and rolls.

JDH: Yeah, exactly, but he was, he was a wonderful person.

EM: So, on that first trip out, anything happen or was it just  
--

JDH: Well, I hadn't got there yet.

EM: Well, good.

JDH: We went from Santo Espiritu to New Hebrides to Guadalcanal.

EM: OK, I was talking about the trip down to Espiritu Santo.

JDH: To where?

EM: Your first trip down there nothing happened. You crossed  
the equator and went on --

JDH: Not from there back to San Francisco, but when we got to  
Santo Espiritu, I don't know what we -- well, we unloaded  
or took on supplies. It's been too long ago, but we stayed  
there a few days, and we shipped out, and went to  
Guadalcanal, and we stayed at Guadalcanal maybe a day, day  
and a half or two days, and we went over to Tulagi to take  
on fuel, and take on fresh water, and as they laid the

gangplank down, and the slip the ship went into is a fueling slip. So, they docked the gangway and here come the fuel lines over to the ship to start filling it up with fuel, and one of the guys said, "Tojo's son who was a fighter pilot was killed, and he was shot down over this island here and said his grave is right out here about 100 yards. There's a path here that goes to it, need to go out there and look at it. So, we went out there, five or six of us, and here was the grave and here was the (inaudible), holes in the front and on top of it about this high off the ground.

EM: That's three feet off the ground.

JDH: Yeah, the sign said, "Tojo's son, piss on him," and we helped ourself. (laughter)

EM: It was a nice urinal, huh?

JDH: But, anyway, we left there and went to Bougainville, and at Bougainville they took all the freight off, and they converted us into a troop ship. OK, and so a few days later when they got the bunks all built inside, Marines started coming on. It was a Marine Air Group, I believe it was Marine Air Group either 22 or Marine Air Group 23, one of those two, I forgot which one it was.

EM: Now, this is what, late '44 now that we're talking?

JDH: Yeah, this would have been in like October.

EM: OK.

JDH: Yeah, late September, October somewhere right in there.

And they went on there. They went from there around to Green Island and picked up some more Marines that came on, and then we went to Emirau Island, and we didn't do anything at Emirau. We just went there and they dropped anchor, and for what reason I don't know.

EM: Emirau, can you spell that for me? I've not heard of that island.

JDH: I can't pronounce it -- I mean I can't spell it.

EM: OK, but that's in the same area?

JDH: Yeah, it's a member of the Solomon group.

EM: Right, OK.

JDH: And from there we went to Milne Bay, British New Guinea, and we reloaded and took on more ammo for our guns, .20-millimeter and 3-inch projectiles, and some ammo, and we took on food stuff. We went on down as far as Finschhafen, New Guinea, and went into a slip there and took on fuel. Went from there to Hollandia -- that's New Guinea -- and there was a big, large convoy -- I mean ships were sitting in the harbor there, and they had nets across the harbor, and a couple days later, well, there we were, we were off then for the Philippines.

EM: Headed for the Philippines.

JDH: Yeah, and we were towing a LST behind us, and there was, I don't know, eight or 10 ships towing LSTs, and I don't know how many ships there were in the convoy, but some were between -- half way between New Guinea and Leyte Gulf. At night around midnight a Japanese submarine somewhere would fire a star shell, and they could evaluate what that convoy was. Approximately how many ships were in it, so and so forth. Well, we started going on four hours on, four hours off, four hours on, four hours off, and we had our cots at our gun pub, and we pulled in -- anyway, we hit the South China Sea and the sea was so rough they had to cut a lot of these LSTs loose, let them be on their own. Well, that's what they wanted. I mean the LST, the personnel on it could not take that rough sea like that.

EM: I know, those little flat-bottomed --

JDH: Yeah, I was going to say just like this right here, uh-uh, yeah, and those waves like 10-, 12-, 15-foot high, maybe even higher. So, anyway, we got into Leyte Gulf, into Leyte and we anchored out for a couple of days and got into another convoy then for the invasion at Lingayen Gulf which was up on Luzon.

EM: Let me ask you about the star shell thing.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Did you see the star shell you saw?

JDH: Oh, yeah.

EM: Well, tell me what that looked like and what was going through your mind when it happened.

JDH: Well, I just hoped we don't have any torpedoes coming our way. That's about all you could hope for.

EM: That'd be nice, but everybody knew what was going on?

JDH: Yeah.

EM: And why do you think they didn't fire on you?

JDH: I don't know. I cannot answer that. What Mayfield said later, Mr. Mayfield said later, he said somewhere between where we were and where that star shell was fired, there had to have been another submarine to actually evaluate that convoy because, you know, you can only see about eight or nine miles on a straight -- you can't see eight miles across, you know, the curvature of the earth, and if he was far enough out, he could -- actually, he wouldn't be able to see how many ships there were in that convoy. Somebody had to be a lot closer than what that ship was that fired -- that happened either two or three nights in a row.

EM: OK, so I interrupted you though. You're pulling into Lingayen Gulf, is that right?

JDH: Yes, right.

EM: So, you were not in support of the invasion of the Island of Leyte?

JDH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: So you supported Leyte invasion?

JDH: No, we didn't support Leyte.

EM: You skipped that one?

JDH: Yeah, the troops were all going to Lingayen to make the landing there, and the -- anyway, we got into Lingayen, and we anchored out like a half a mile out and we sat there not doing anything. We stayed on -- we had general quarter air attacks just every hour, and we moved in -- well, let me go ahead and back up a little bit here. When we were sitting out here, behind us was another ship that was unloading, and they was unloading with their nets into amphibious type vehicles. They'd take that net, drop it in there, and they'd go into the beach and they'd unload it. Well, these drivers, these amphibs were told when they see a condition -- let's see, red flares go up that's air attack. Go to the nearest ship. Well, this fellow, he came to our ship in that duck, and he said, "Can I come aboard?" We said, "Sure, throw us your line." So, he'd throw a line over to us and we tied him up fore and aft, you know, and they came aboard, and they came back there were several of us were, back there with the 3-inch/50 rifle. Well, I'd been transferred from the 20 to the 3-inch. I forgot to tell you that. Anyway, he said, "I haven't eaten anything in

three days other than what was out of a box. Is there any way that I can get a bite to eat?" I said, "Seth, come here." I said, "Take this boy here up there to the" -- our chow hall was open 24 hours a day -- "take him up there and have Bob, the cook, fix him something to eat." So, he took him up to our little chow hall, and he said, "What do you want to eat?" He said, "You mean I have a choice?" He said, "Yeah, you've got a choice. What would you like to have?" He said, "What about eggs?" "Yeah." "Ham?" "Yes." "Hash browns?" "Yes." "Coffee?" "Yes." He said, "My God, you guys live good." Well, he ate that and he came back, and he thanked all of us, you know. A green shell went up so --

EM: That meant all clear?

JDH: Yeah, it was all clear. So, he got in his jeep, and we said, "What do you got on there?" He said, "Beer." Well, that was a mistake. He said, "You all want some?" "Yeah." He said, "Two of you get in the water and as I come around the stern of the boat," the aft, you know, "I'll throw off about four cases." So, he threw off four cases. Myself and another guy, name of Ed [Hamlin?], we grabbed those and had a line, and they would tie them up, and they'd pull them up. And we had smoke pots, and you could take a case of beer and pull the cover off that smoke pot, and you



could put a case of beer in there, and put the cover back over it, and nobody would ever know it.

EM: Unless you needed a smoke pot.

JDH: Yeah. So, we had four cases of beer there, and we had four smoke pots; two on the starboard and two on the port side. Well, sure enough, a little bit later condition red again, air attack. So here come another duck driver. He wanted to tie up, and he said, "I was talking to Charlie a while ago, and he said that he got something to eat from you guys." We said, "Yeah." So I said, "Seth, can you take him down to the galley and get him fed?" He said, "Sure." He took him down and fed him, and oh, boy, just like the first guy, just as happy as he could be, he couldn't thank us enough. He said, "That's the best food I've ever had." And you could understand why, you know.

EM: Sure.

JDH: And he said, "Now, he gave you all some beer," he said, "I want to give you some too," he said. Well, we'll get in the water, and we'll take it when you pitch it up. He threw up four more cases, so we had eight cases of beer, but we had to hide that in the magazine, the aft magazine. So, anyway, here was the next morning of that same night, later on, about 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning. Mayfield woke up, called general quarters. The gun crew mustered on the

fantail. Everybody came back aft, and he said, "We're going in with the Marines and they're getting off." This was an amphib landing, and he said, "We're going to participate in it, and we're going to lay a smoke screen." There were two or three other Liberty ships like we were, and it was probably the only time in World War II a Liberty ship ever laid a smoke screen.

EM: Darn. So you had to drink all that beer, didn't you?

JDH: Well, we had to take that beer out and put it also in the magazine, and we had to move more 3-inch ammo out of the magazine up to the number -- well, the number 2 -- 3-inch/50 rifle. So, we did that, got everything -- it must have been, I don't know, sunup when we got through moving everything around and getting everything ready, and by then you didn't go back to bed. Well, we pulled the plugs on the smoke pots and the Marines went ashore then, and whatever happened to them I don't know. But, again, there was no Marine infantry in the Philippines. You were aware of that?

EM: Oh, yes, I was. I know the Army was the primary --

JDH: Yeah, MacArthur wanted the Army to take it, and the only thing the Marines had was airplanes.

EM: OK.

JDH: Yeah, it was a MAG unit, Marine Air Group, and from there we came back to Hollandia.

EM: Let me interrupt you for a second, and ask a question about when you were getting all the red flares up that meant an enemy attack of some sort, were you actually attacked? Did you...

JDH: Yeah, I'm going to repeat what -- I went to one of my shipmate's birthday, 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, I never thought much about what he said but it's the gospel truth. His family had a 90<sup>th</sup> birthday party for him, and they probably had 50 or 60 friends and family there, and as he was talking, he was talking about the invasion of Lingayen Gulf, and he said the gunfire was so thick your britches would just shiver and shake, you know, from concussion, you know. We never fired a round, we couldn't for the simple reason we was afraid we'd hit another ship. We were so close together and we were in the middle of it, and that was something. Guns were all -- .20-millimeter were loaded, 3-inch/50s were loaded with antiaircraft projectiles, the fuse was set like at a second and a half or second, you know, but Mayfield wouldn't give the order. He said it would be too dangerous, it would be killing our own people, you know. But, anyway, we left there and came back to

Leyte and stayed there, I don't know, two or three days, and got into a smaller convoy.

EM: I meant to turn this thing off.

JDH: Got into a small convoy but when we came back -- I'm going to back up again. When we came back from Lingayen to Leyte, Ed [Hammler?] was our acting post boy, postman, and he asked me, he said, "If I get permission from Mayfield to go ashore to get the mail, you going to go with me?" I said, "Sure." So, Mayfield said, "Sure, you can go." Well, we went to the fleet PO and got the mail, and came back and our launch was going to be there like at 6:00. By the time we got the mail and got back it was almost 7:00. Our launch wasn't even there. So, Hammler, he said, "I know where a bar is at, let's go to it." So, that was a mistake. (laughter)

EM: I could have told you that.

JDH: And then we walked down this street and there's a barricade across it that said, "Off limits to military personnel," and Hammler said, "Don't pay any mind to that sign." We kind of walked down an alley and here was an outside stairway. We went up those stairs, knocked on that door, Filipino Joe he pulled that crack open and looked at it, looked at us, opened the door and we went in. It was a honkytonk. So, we went in and they had Filipino beer --

I'm trying to think the proper name for it -- San Miguel. They had some San Miguel beer. I think it was home brew put in San Miguel bottles. But, anyway, this little Filipino boy came over and said, "What would happen if the MP and SP was to raid this place?" Well, at that time that tonk had filled up with GIs. I mean it was a real going -- music, and swinging dancing, and everything. Hammler told that kid, he said, "Tex here will throw them out the window." Just like big and tough. Hell, I'm not tough. But, anyway --

EM: But he did say that.

JDH: Sure enough. Every door opened on that place, there was two front doors and that one back door, and they loaded us up in the back of a truck, a canvasback truck, you know, and took us to the SP station, and we got in line, and the inside an office about like this right here was a Lieutenant JG, Shore Patrol, he was over the Shore Patrol when they were on duty. When it come our time to come in he looked at us and he said, "What was you sailors doing? They're off limits." We told him we hadn't been anywhere in almost a year, about eight months at that time, and he said, you know, "We're just looking for a little recreation." He said, "Are you off of a ship?" "Yes, sir." He said, "What's the name of the ship?" We told him

John T. McMillan. He said, "I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to release you and this command car right here is going to take you back down to that fleet landing, and even if you don't have any way to get back to your ship you can sleep in the sand. I don't want you back in Leyte proper, period. Do you understand?" "Yes, sir." We go down there and there must have been, I don't know, a couple of hundred sailors waiting on their ships to come in, and here was a full commander. He couldn't have scratched his butt with both hands he was so intoxicated, and I don't know why he asked me -- he looked at me and he says, "Do I know you, son?" I said, "No, sir, I'm off a ship out here." He said, "Well, what are you doing here?" I said, "Well, our launch left us." "That's not a problem. My launch is coming in. I'll take you." Well, you know what kind of a launch he had, a canvas up over the bow and everything, and he had two coxswain and a boatswain on there. He pulled up and he told one of the coxswain, he said, "We're going to take them -- take these two young sailors here to their ship out here." That really urped their butts.

EM: Did it really?

JDH: Yeah, it was way out of their way. Anyway, he took us out there, and we thanked him very much. We shook hands with

him. He must have been a really a fine guy to work for, you know. So, that was it. Incidentally, we did keep our mailbag and our sidearm, and our mail card --

EM: After all of that.

JDH: Yeah, we had everything, you know, yeah. When we left went back to Manus, and we got our orders at Manus to go back home, and from home we went to Treasure Island, and --

EM: Now, was the war over?

JDH: No, no, uh-uh.

EM: So, why were you going back home?

JDH: Well, the ship had been out for ten and a half months, and it looked liked a rust spot.

EM: Really.

JDH: Yeah, it was empty --

EM: She wasn't new when you went on her?

JDH: No, uh-uh, no, but that was about the limit of a Merchant Marine tour. A lot of them would be maybe a year at the very longest, you know. Then we went back to the States and we all had leave coming, and so when we came back we all got separated and busted up. Then I went aboard the Motor Ship *Square Sennett*.

EM: Square --

JDH: Yeah, S-Q-U-A-R-E.

EM: I got that part.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Square --

JDH: *Sennett*, S-I-N-N-E-T-T.

EM: That's an interesting name for a ship.

JDH: The initials in front of the name is MS, Motor Ship.

EM: MS. Now, that was a US flagship?

JDH: Yeah, uh-um, yeah. There were four of them. There was a contract for four, and I only know of two that was ever built. They were diesel electric and they were made -- they were real shallow running. There were three holes, had one 3-inch/50 aft and have eight .20-millimeter cannons on it.

EM: So, this would be smaller than a Liberty ship?

JDH: Oh, yeah. I don't remember the dimensions but it was quite a bit smaller than a Liberty. And the gun crew was only, I think, 15 or 16 of us.

EM: So, where did you board her?

JDH: In San Francisco, right underneath the Oakland Bay Bridge, Pier 44, 46, somewhere right in there. And then we went from there to Ulithi Island, and at Ulithi that was where the fleet had congregated for the invasion -- or for Okinawa. And when we were there, for some unknown reason, we went to Eniwetok Island in the Marshalls, and they have a Prairie Island which is right off of Eniwetok maybe a



half a mile. It's about the size of a city block, and it was a rec island. It was flat, sandy, perfectly round, no humps or anything, and we got a beer ration, and sandwiches, and pop, candy bars. We played ball, swam, and went back to the ship.

EM: So it was an R&R island.

JDH: It was kind of, uh-huh, yeah, exactly right, but this was only like three-fourths of a day, you know.

EM: Yeah, a short R&R.

JDH: But anyway, went back to the ship, and they pulled anchor, and we took back off to Ulithi again, and the convoy pulled up then a day or so later to Okinawa. Coming into Okinawa the convoy split right down the middle. Everything to the right went into Buckner Bay, and everything to the left went to Ie Shima, that's where Arnie [Pyle?] was killed there.

EM: Uh-huh, I know Ie Shima.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Now, I have heard that that was a huge armada of ships that went up to Okinawa. Is that your understanding?

JDH: It was large, of course. I didn't know. I couldn't hardly answer that. Every convoy to me was large, you know, but it was a big convoy, and I can remember it splitting. I had got letters from my friends that was on the McMillan,

and they were in the same convoy, and I got this one letter, and he told me the name of his ship, and sure enough to the right of us -- to the left -- been to the right, rather, when it went into Buckner Bay, he was on it, and I got our signalman to signal over and asked if a Winfrey [Gay Self?] aboard, the signalman signaled back and he said, yeah, he's on board. I said, tell him Dwain Holmes is compliment, you know. And, anyway, well, Self, he got his signalman to call back and he said, "Thank you, Jesse, I'll see you when the war is over."

EM: I'll be darned.

JDH: And we saw each other until he died. Yeah, he died about eight or 10 years ago.

EM: So you went to the Ie Shima side, huh?

JDH: Yeah, uh-huh.

EM: What happened there?

JDH: Well, they were with -- we dropped anchor, and I think it would get almost like a landing boat, it was so shallow running, and they were made for the invasion of Japan.

EM: Go ahead.

JDH: It was a LST with no crew on it but it was partly submerged, and what had happened, a few days before a kamikaze hit it and as we had gone up it looked like -- when you got away from it, it looked like it was a heavy

loaded LST that sank down on the bottom and there was about six or eight foot above it, above the water, you know.

Well, the next day a kamikaze went into it so it got one torpedo, and one kamikaze, and nobody on it.

EM: Isn't that something? Did you see the kamikaze go in?

JDH: We saw the kamikaze and everything, yeah. We were firing at the kamikaze.

EM: Really.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: So you finally got to heat up your gun barrels here, huh?

JDH: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was the point on the 3-inch/50 on that ship, uh-huh, yeah.

EM: Yeah, I heard there was an awful lot of kamikaze in Okinawa.

JDH: There were a lot of them. But most of them were in that Buckner Bay area. That's where most of the fleet was all at. That's what they were after. But, anyway, we pulled - - when we got through and unloaded we pulled anchor and went to Buckner Bay, and then we saw the peace envoy in a Japanese Betty Bomber, they flew over, and we saw them land. Our gunnery officer and the ship's captain they got to go ashore and see everything at the airstrip, and so on and so forth. They came back and he had our orders, and they pulled anchor, and we took off then to Guam, and we

didn't know for what reason or anything else. From Guam we went to Saipan. We stayed at Guam overnight. We went there to Saipan then the next day. I guess it's probably maybe a day and a half from Saipan to Guam by ship, and we got to Wake Island. We took the surrender of Wake Island, and that is the only Armed Guard group that ever took a Japanese held island, and there was nothing that's documented. I've never read --

EM: I'll be darned.

JDH: And as far as I know there's nothing in it says that we did it. That's what I'm trying to tell you.

EM: I'll be darned.

JDH: And that then in the neighborhood of maybe four weeks after the end of the war we went ashore. There were six of us in the Armed Guard that went ashore. The ensign was from [Ilany?], Texas, and he was a good friend of my uncle and aunt that lived there, and my cousins. And he was a football coach at Wellington, Texas -- Wellington Skyrockets, and I knew everything about the Wellington Skyrockets before he got off that ship.

EM: I bet you did. (laughter)

JDH: I was probably closer to him than anybody in the gun crew than anybody, you know, because me being from where -- I was the only one from Texas on there, and lived where I

lived at, and he knew all about the oil field, and school teaching, and some of the football coaches that I had, etcetera. We went up to what would have been a hangar and that was where the Japanese interpreter was at and so --

EM: Now, we're on Wake right now, right?

JDH: Yeah, on Wake Island. The Marines, when they came aboard at Saipan they had a van. The van had a transmitter and receiver in it. They had a trailer that had a generator in it, and they had a command car that they could use on the island. I'm sure that maybe in that trailer they probably had maybe a tent and some cots, and maybe some boxed food to eat. That's about all I knew about them, but we picked up a few souvenirs, and the Japanese commandant, his interpreter told our gunnery officers there is no booby traps on this island, none whatsoever. Well, going back to the ship here was the bunker, Japanese bunker, and it was made of 55-gallon drums full of dirt, standing up and covered over, you know, but we went in it and what these Japanese were doing, they were living in it. We was going through some of that stuff there and here was a newsprint, mimeographed newsprint, Wake Island Wigwag, October -- I don't know, 5<sup>th</sup>, or 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup>, early October 1941.

EM: Right before they took it.

JDH: Yeah, two months before, and I still got it.

EM: Really.

JDH: Yeah. The Armed Guard, we have a publication that comes out, I think, every third month, four times a year or three times a year, and I was talking to the guy that headed it up, and I tell him what I had, and he said, "I want a copy of it, and we'll hook up a story on it," about what I'm telling you, be part of the story.

EM: That's interesting.

JDH: Yeah, there was three full sheets of it.

EM: You know, I thought we had taken Wake Island before the end of the war but apparently not. We just skipped it, didn't we?

JDH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I have a friend there in Iowa Park, he's dead now, and I was telling him about what I was telling you here. He was on an aircraft carrier, I forgot the name and number of it, and he flew a torpedo plane, a TBF, same thing George Bush flew, and he said, "We used to fly over Wake just to harass them. Just for the hell of it, you know. We didn't dare do any damage. They didn't have anything we could damage anymore. We had blown up their docks."

EM: They were basically living underground like moles.

JDH: Yeah, uh-uh. But, anyway, we came back -- I got off the ship -- we came back, went aboard the *Sennett*. We went

back to Guam, and I got off the ship at Guam. I had enough points to get out on. I stayed in a receiving station there, I don't know, four or five days, and then APA121 the Hinsdale or Hinesdale went back to Terminal Island on it, and from Terminal Island the CO there gave me leave papers, and I was to report back to Dallas, the Naval Recruiting office. So, that was December -- around the 20<sup>th</sup> of December, and so, anyway, I went home for Christmas. On December the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>, somewhere in there, I went to Dallas. They said your records are not here, and he said I'm going to give you 10 more days -- I'm trying to think the proper name for it -- anyway, I came back home --

EM: Leave? You talking about leave?

JDH: Yeah, yeah. Came back home for 10 more days, and I went back and my records were still lost. So, I came back home for five days or six days, well, starting the next Monday. So, I went back again, and he said your record is in Algiers, Louisiana. So me and another sailor, that's where his records were, they put us on the train, and we went to New Orleans, got off at New Orleans, went down to the docks, caught the ferry over to Algiers. Then the next morning they called our name out of a muster and said your records are in Norman, Oklahoma Naval Air Station. That's how things were. It was that way all over the end of the

war. So there, we went to Norman, Oklahoma and it was there big process for, I guess, two full days.

EM: Finally got out, huh.

JDH: Oh, yeah. Caught the bus to Wichita Falls, mother, and dad, and my lady friend met me, and that was it.

EM: Were you able to write home much or have much mail between you and home while you were over there?

JDH: (inaudible) went four months and never heard from them, I mean the whole ship. In the Arabic world they say, [maybe kalas?], you know, no mail, yeah. Incidentally, the mailman when my first letter came back, I sent to mother and daddy, and when they got it the postman that -- mother and dad in the meantime had moved to Wichita Falls. The mailman was going through the mail and here was this letter from me. He went out and got in his car and drove that letter to my mother and dad's house and personally gave it them.

EM: Now that's -- you don't get that from the postal service --

JDH: You don't get that from the PO anymore, you sure don't.

EM: No, you sure don't.

JDH: And coming home from Terminal Island there was another shipmate by the name of [Cambiss?] who lived in St. Louis. We had our leave papers, and we hitchhiked into Los Angeles terminal depot there. You couldn't get a ride. They'd



sell you a ticket but the ticket wasn't any good. You had to go by the numbers, and they said it would be probably two to three weeks before you can get a train out of here. Well, everybody was going East.

EM: Wow, two to three weeks.

JDH: And we were walking out of the depot crossing some railroad tracks, and here come an old man in railroad overalls on, railroad blue shirt, railroad cap on, and he got past us. He said, "Just a minute sailors." He said, "I couldn't help from hearing part of your conversations, what's your problem?" We said we won't be home for Christmas. We got a ticket but the tickets no good. He said, "Just a minute here. I can get you a ticket." He said, "Where are you going?" I said, "Wichita Falls." "And where you going?" "St. Louis." He looked at me and said, "You give me \$25," and he looked at Cambiss and said, "You give me \$35." We give him the money. We'd had our papers. The old man, he took off and he was gone, and gone, and gone. We thought we had been shanghaied. Sure enough, the man came back, and he had two tickets. The tickets wasn't any good but he said, "Right here it says on here you can return them and get a refund. Now, you boys can hitchhike." So we took a taxi cab, give him \$10, and said, "Take us \$10 out on Highway 66." Well, he went out \$10 worth, and he said,

"Where are you sailors going?" "Well, going to Texas and Missouri." He said, "This is a bad place to get a ride. I'll take you further on out where you can get a ride." So, he took us way on out another five or six miles, and he only charged us that \$10. When he said, "Where you going?" We told him. He took that meter arm and crammed it down, you know, took off and he said, "You can get a ride here," and sure enough about the third car came over with the car going to Little Rock, Arkansas. The guy was going to a funeral, and the only thing asked us is, "Can you drive?" He said, "I've got to be in Little Rock for my grandmother's funeral." "Yeah, we can both drive." Well, he got in the backseat, and I started driving, and I drove, I don't know, probably until midnight, and we was needing gasoline so we pulled into an all-night gas station with a little café night station, gassed the car up, went in and got us a hamburger a piece. We got back in the car, well, he kind of woke up. He said, "Where we at?" Said, "We're almost in Arizona," and he said, "Well, let's get a bite to eat, and we'll fill the car up." I said, "Well, we've already filled the car up." He said, "I'm going to pay you for it." He said, "I need a bite to eat." So, anyway we went back in the café and Cambiss and I had a cup of coffee, and he had a hamburger and whatever else, and he

got through eating, and Cambiss, he said, "I want you to drive now." So, Cambiss, he started driving and I sat there in the front seat and went back to sleep, and he went back to sleep. About sunup, well, he come to. I don't remember this. Now, he come to and he started driving and Cambiss got in the back seat, and I was still asleep. We was in Phoenix, Arizona, and we had breakfast there. He picked up the check for that, and paid us for the gasoline we had spent money for, which was only like four dollars or three dollars, something like that.

EM: But that was a lot of money back then, though.

JDH: Yeah. And then the next time we stopped I want to say it was Albuquerque; I could be wrong on that. We ate in Albuquerque. Wichita County was dry, and my dad was not a drinker, but I bought him a fifth of whiskey there in Albuquerque. Anyway, we got back in the car and got to Amarillo a little bit before sunup. Snow and ice was that deep in Amarillo. The temperature was about zero. I got out of the car, and we shook hands with him, you know, and I told Cambiss we'll get back together in another few weeks, and they took off and here come a city cop, and he rolled the window down over there and he said, "Sailor, what are you doing out here?" I said, "I'm going to Wichita Falls." He said, "Get in. I'll get you a ride.

Throw your gear in the backseat right there." So, we drove out on Highway 280 -- been 287 and he said, "There's a truck stop down here, so I'm going to stop there first, and you stay in the car where it's warm." You could see him going in and going to table after table, and finally I could see him nodding his head, and he came back out, and said, "I got you a ride with a guy going to Fort Worth."

EM: That's right on the way to Wichita Falls.

JDH: Yeah, and so he was coming through Wichita Falls, he said, "Where do your folks live at?" I said, "On Ninth Street," we're on Fifth now. Scott is the main street, and here's Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth. I said, "Down here is Ninth Street." He said, "How far do they live from here?" I said, "27 blocks north, 27 blocks to the right." "Well, I'll just take you on home," and he took me right up to their sidewalk going to the house.

EM: Right to the front yard, huh?

JDH: Up to the curb, uh-uh.

EM: I'll be darned.

JDH: Got home, I don't know, it was --

EM: How did it feel to get home?

JDH: Wonderful. But I'm going to back up a little bit here now. When I came home in June, May, April rather, it was 1945, rode the train, walked out of the depot, there was a taxi

cab, and it was a young man, a young married couple in the backseat, and this cab driver he says, "You need a cab?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Whereabouts?" I said, "2711 Ninth Street." He said, "Let me put your gear in the trunk here and I'll take you on home." Dude, if you all care, let him be first instead of you two. They said, "No, we'll be glad for you too." Well, they drove up, that was a boulevard with a median in the middle. So, he went down and had to make a U-turn and come back. My mother was out in the front yard working on her flowerbed. We drove up, and me being on the passenger side when I got out, she saw me, and she fainted. Just fell over.

EM: Fainted dead away.

JDH: Yeah, I didn't call and tell them I was coming home or anything. I was in a hurry to get home. Anyway, this young couple they got out, and the cab driver got out, and by the time we got there she had kind of come to, you know, and then she got her senses back. She said, "I don't want you all to leave yet. I just made a fresh pitcher of tea. Would you all have a tea with me?" "Sure." So it wound up all four of us -- she had a sunroom, in on the sunroom, you know, having tea. And the cab driver didn't charge me anything -- no fare whatsoever to bring me home, which was about a two-mile trip.

EM: Yeah, I'll be darned.

JDH: Then I went back and got on the *Sennett* and that was it.

EM: What was the toughest, lowest, darkest hour for you during your time out there in the Pacific?

JDH: Really, I don't think I really had one. When you're real young, like 90% of us were, we never gave getting killed even a second thought. It never entered our mind.

EM: Isn't that something.

JDH: I just cannot answer that.

EM: OK, that's fine. That's good not to have a low, dark spot. I think that's good.

JDH: I've never had a bad dream in my life, never have, uh-uh.

EM: Is that right, that's good. How do you feel about the Japanese?

JDH: I told my grandsons, I don't want a Japanese car even on the same damn block I'd live on, period.

EM: That's getting harder and harder.

JDH: Yeah, and if you'd seen the Americans they kept captive as Japanese prisoners of war, you wouldn't have a Japanese car either.

EM: Have you seen them? Did you see any prisoners of war yourself?

JDH: Yeah, uh-uh, in the Philippines we saw some.

EM: Tell me about that. Tell me what you saw.

JDH: Well, there's nothing a whole lot to it. There was probably 15, maybe 20, maybe 30 at the most, and they were with -- the Army had them, and they were -- I want to say they were in a -- well, it would have been a bus, bus like, whatever the Army had in regards to a bus, and they were moving them. There was a hospital ship that was there. I don't remember the name of the hospital ship, and that's where they were going to go to. And then, Billy Ray Harvey from Waco, Texas on the next ship that he caught, he was back in the Philippines, and they were moving Japanese prisoners from the Philippines back to Japan, and he said, "I hated this worse than anything in the world." He said, "I wanted to kick them, I wanted to shoot them, and everything else, you know. Treat them like they treated our prisoners."

EM: But these guys were in bad shape then, huh?

JDH: Oh, yeah, they were real bad. Some of them -- and I'm telling you what another fellow told me about them, he knew some of them who actually had duty with them that -- I'm trying to think of the proper word for it. It's kind of like leprosy where the skin falls off, like a jungle rot, and, of course, they were malnutrition, you know that. But seeing them was altogether something else, and I had a schoolmate that graduated in 1940, 1939, '39, '40, he was

on the Texas National Guard, 36<sup>th</sup> -- 131<sup>st</sup> 36<sup>th</sup> Division and they called them the Lost Battalion, and we had three boys from KMA that was in that. Two of them survived, one died in a Japanese prison camp. In fact, they're all dead now, but, God, he had no love for them whatsoever. They were captured in Java, and they split them up, and him and the three that was from home apparently they went to Thailand, the way he talked, and worked on that railroad.

EM: Oh, really, the *Bridge over the River Kwai* thing, huh?

That's a painting of a B-24 bombing the Bridge on the River Kwai right there. I'll be darned. You've given me a couple of humorous incidences that happened to you, do you have any more of those things that kind of make you smile when you think back on those years that you want to share with us?

JDH: Well, there was one I'm not too proud of but...

EM: Well, are you too embarrassed to tell us or not?

JDH: No, I'm not too embarrassed.

EM: All right, well, then tell us.

JDH: This happened on the *Sennett*. We came in from Okinawa to Guam. Well, I was the acting mailman there because I liked what Hammler did on the *McMillan*, get off the ship. So, I got a buddy of mine to go with me. We put our (inaudible) on, got our arm band on, squared our caps off, put the body



belt on, put the sidearm on, got away from the ship. We stripped everything off but the mailbag. We went to the fleet post office. We didn't have any mail, and the fellow told us there was a plane coming in from Honolulu, and he said he's due in within an hour, he says that's all I can tell you right now. We stepped outside and there was a Marine there and I said, "Where is your rec area at?" And he said, "Hoover Beach, straight up this road here and you'll see it." Well, to go into that you had to have a mail card. You had to prove you was off of a ship, so a mail card was all we needed. So, we got up there and I showed this Marine sentry our mail card and he said, "Go on in." We got in, we started getting in that line getting beer, and we probably drank, I'm going to say, maybe three beers. That's all we needed, more than we needed, and we closed that thing down, I don't know, at 6:00 or 5:30 I forgot now. We got back outside and we was hitchhiking back to the fleet PO and this GI truck stopped, we went aboard it, and he stopped at the front PO, in front of the fleet PO. We went inside and we had mail. The mail bag is still in that truck, sidearm, everything. So, we went down to the docks and there was a couple delivery ships tied up there, and we asked the guy on the gangway, Navy armed guard, "I need to talk to your gunner's mate in charge."

They went and got him and he said, "Yeah, what can I do for you?" I said, "We need a place to spend the night." I said, "Our launch left us." He said, "Yeah," he said, "We got plenty of bunks here, we can put you up." He said, "Have you eaten?" "No." "Well, you can come into the chow hall and eat, spend the night, eat breakfast with us," and then, that's it. Well, we did that. We had a meal. Both pretty tired. Went to bed, woke up the next morning and went to fleet PO and that truck driver turned that bag in, everything in it, and we had mail. So, anyway, our launch had come in, waiting, wanting to know what the hell happened to us. So, we went on it, went out going toward the ship, and a lot of the guys were leaning up against the railing, you know, here they come, here they come, you know. So, went aboard and anyway the gunner's mate, he said, "Holmes," he said, "the old man wants to see you," Ensign Williams. You and the -- I can't even think of his name now. We went to see him, he said, "What happened? Why didn't you come back to the ship when the launch left the island?" We said the guy at the fleet post office said there's a mail plane coming in. We kept awaiting on it and he went off and left us, so we went down to the Liberty ship and spent the night. He said, "That's good thinking."

Went back to fleet PO this morning and we had mail. "I'm proud of you."

EM: Came out smelling like a rose.

JDH: We didn't tell him where we'd been. He didn't ask us.

EM: You didn't tell him about the beer and the beach, and all of that?

JDH: No way, uh-uh. (laughter)

EM: I wonder why.

JDH: Well, you know why.

EM: I do know why. Well, you came out all right on that.

JDH: Yeah, we did. We come out ahead on it.

EM: So, generally, the food was good then? You guys ate well on those ships.

JDH: We did eat good, yeah, we sure did. We didn't have any C-rations or anything like that.

EM: But you didn't get any sort of a beer ration or anything --

JDH: Yeah, we did. Mayfield got us a beer ration in New Guinea, a case a head.

EM: That's unusual is it not?

JDH: Well, that's what he ordered, and that's what he got.

EM: And so then what would you do? You'd get them two at a time or...

JDH: No, if you were in a -- if the ship wasn't going to go back out to sea at a certain time there was nothing ever said

about you drinking a beer. I don't know of anybody that really even got drunk unless I was drunker than what they were not to know it. I never was a drinker, never have been but I do enjoy a cold beer after working in the yard and things like that, yeah.

EM: Did you ever get exposed -- you were banging around in the tropics quite a bit, did you ever get exposed to malaria or any of the other tropical diseases?

JDH: No, no mosquitoes at sea.

EM: Well, that's true but you were ashore there off and on. I just wondered if they ever nailed you with --

JDH: I don't know of anybody had any sickness, no appendicitis, no nothing.

EM: That's good.

JDH: Now, the Merchant Marine, they had a couple guys they had to take off. One of them went batty.

EM: Really?

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Just lost it, huh?

JDH: He lost it -- one of the Merchant Marine -- the other one was one of the Marines that we picked up, a Captain Head, and he went off.

EM: What did they do with him?

JDH: They took him off at, I believe, in Hollandia in New Guinea we took him off at.

EM: He just went like combat fatigue or whatever they called it?

JDH: I don't know. I cannot answer that.

EM: Just something snapped, huh?

JDH: Yeah, uh-uh. They took him off and this other kid they took off, his name was Seltzer, like Bromo Seltzer, yeah. Yeah, those Marines we had on there is Seltzer, we called him Bromo. He'd take a Marine and he would say, "Now, I welded this seam right here," and he said, "I thought I put my initials there but I don't see them. They probably took a sander and sanded my name off," you know, or whatever, you know, Emery.

EM: Ground it off.

JDH: Well, he went just -- he went batty, yeah. Anyway, the Captain [Doby?], he was a good guy, the Marine captain of the ship. He was telling me when I was up on the bridge, he said, "They moved the ship from this mooring to this mooring, maybe a half a mile," and he said he wanted to know why they were moving that ship. He didn't give anybody permission, you know. It was something.

EM: So, do you feel like when you came back you were a totally different guy than when you went out or not?

JDH: No, my dad put me to work.

EM: So, it was back to usual, huh?

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Well, of course, you were just in high school when you went out.

JDH: Yeah. A lot of funny stories about employment on the ship. What they're going to do when the war was over, you know. I already knew what I'd be doing.

EM: What would you be doing?

JDH: Working for my dad, telephone. But we had one guy, his name was Red Hester, Donald Hester, and he was a pug nose, and we called him Pug which that's normal. Well, he came back aft this particular day and we were at sea, well, there was another guy up on the forward gun, Hester was this guy's loader, and this guy told Hester he had a fleet of trucks, and when the war was over he'd give him a job. Now, he was just bulling the old boy. Well, Hester, he came back and he says, "This is the happiest day of my life." I said, "What do you mean it's the happiest day of your life?" He says, "[Ivy?] give me a job driving a truck for him when the war was over."

EM: But it wasn't true.

JDH: No, it wasn't. Well, Ivy was real good about that and just kidding, you know, and -- that's all he was doing, just --

and then we had a guy by the name of Edgar Ernest Johnston from Minnesota, and his family had a dairy farm.

EM: Not surprising.

JDH: And he said, "I'm not going back to Minnesota to that damn dairy farm. I didn't know Navy life could be this good. I didn't know any life could be better -- any life could be better than a dairy farm. Getting up at 4:00 in the morning."

EM: Forty below zero.

JDH: Forty below zero, milking the cows, cleaning up the mess, you know, then milking again.

EM: So, I guess he didn't go back to Minnesota, huh?

JDH: No, I tried to find him, and then after -- when computers become popular, I give him -- my daughter his name and address, and, anyway, she had the disc, she tried to find him on the computer.

EM: Couldn't find him?

JDH: Got close to it but never did get the right one.

EM: I'll be darned.

JDH: Yeah, yeah.

EM: Did you ever go to any reunions?

JDH: Yeah, yeah. The Armed Guard had a national up until about three years ago but it got so small, personnel dying off, and the Texas group, this past March was the last one we

were going to have but I found out here a few weeks ago we're going to have one again in March. It will be in -- where Blue Bell Ice Cream comes from.

EM: Brenham.

JDH: Yeah, Brenham, where we're going to have it at.

EM: I bet you show up at the creamery, don't you.

JDH: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. The fellow was telling me this, he said a Mr. [Smit?], German Smit, you know how to spell, he's going to sponsor it, and he said, "Well, what about some of that ice cream?" He says, "We're going to get a free dip of ice cream too."

EM: One dip?

JDH: Well, I don't know. He just said we're going to get a dip of ice cream.

EM: That sounds good, that sounds good.

JDH: Yeah, him and his wife were doing sponsors. You know, Washington on the (inaudible), if you ever studied history you know all --

EM: I do, yeah.

JDH: Anyway, and she died this -- really, probably in April, and she was actually the one that was going to actually go to head it up, and she died and the old man, he said, we'll he's going to having it regardless.

EM: That's nice.



JDH: In her honor, you know.

EM: That's nice. I heard somewhere and I think it might have been your friend, Bob, said that most people don't know that there was like 150,000 in the Naval Armed Guard and that you had some of the highest casualties percentage wise of the war. Had you heard that?

JDH: Yeah, uh-uh.

EM: So, you were really quite lucky then that you and your ship didn't take it. So, what are most of these guys -- I mean, did they just get torpedoed and this kind of thing and they were on the --

JDH: Yeah, some of the most horror stories you can ever read about happened to Armed Guards.

EM: Really.

JDH: Exactly.

EM: Well, you were blessed then.

JDH: Yeah, our two ships I was on was blessed, uh-uh. Yeah, they were the first to go to war, and they were the first to disband. Dwight Eisenhower, it's documented, said we would not have won the war without the Armed Guard. He said every essential tool we needed to win the war the Armed Guard made sure we got it.

EM: That's a good point.

JDH: Defending our Merchant seas.

EM: Good point.

JDH: And yet we have no recognition whatsoever.

EM: Yeah, maybe that will change. I think you guys ought to just keep trying to get the word out.

JDH: In the foundation here there are monthly. There's nothing ever in it about the Armed Guard.

EM: Or even the Merchant Marine --

JDH: That's right. Well, I can understand the Merchant Marine. I'm not a lover of the Merchant Marine.

EM: Oh, really?

JDH: No.

EM: Why not?

JDH: Well, number one, they never went to boot camp. They never had the shots. They'd go down to the union hiring hall and they'd hire you just exactly like you are in that chair. Go aboard a ship and you'd be a deck aid or whatever you want to call it, you know, they didn't know what taking orders were to speak of, and their pay -- yeah, an ordinary seaman's pay -- a Seaman First in the Armed Guard, they were the gunners, our pay, I believe was \$72 a month. It could have be 74, maybe 78 plus 10% --

EM: For being in the combat zone?

JDH: Well, no, we got 10% when we went aboard that ship. That was your money to go home on, that's what that was for.

When a Merchant Marine got into a less combat area they got like 50% more on top of what they were already making.

Now, when they got into a more frigid combat area they got 100%, and when they got into a shooting combat area, they got 150%.

EM: And they probably made more to begin with too.

JDH: Yeah, that's right.

EM: So, you're adding bigger on top of bigger.

JDH: Yeah, three different ways that they could make more money, and our mess men, the mess men, what we called them Little Joe, he would not throw the garbage out until after like 8:00 something like that because his killing time was 7:00, and he'd wait an hour to throw it out where he'd get an extra hour overtime. They would get overtime all over 40 hours.

EM: They really had it good, didn't they, unless they took a torpedo.

JDH: Yeah, number one, the draft board sends them a notice, (inaudible) Merchant Marine and make one trip, it could be a month trip or a two months trip or whatever, they could go home and stay 90 days before the draft board would get after them. They'd just take another trip, and yet they want the same benefits that a veteran has, and they're not entitled to it. The VFW does not recognize

them. The American Legion does not recognize them.

Because liberal congressmen, liberal senators bring them in, and they shouldn't have ever did it. You weren't a Merchant Marine, were you?

EM: No.

JDH: That's just the way I feel about them.

EM: You've got to call it like you see it.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: That's good insight. I have never heard that before because I know that every once in a while we'll get a Merchant Marine guy here, and they'll complain because they don't get any recognition.

JDH: Well, they got recognition through paychecks.

EM: Yeah, it sounds that way. You guys didn't.

JDH: Yeah.

EM: Well, what else can we talk about Dwain before we shut her down here?

JDH: I don't know, I don't know.

EM: This has been fascinating. We don't have very many stories at all of the Naval Armed Guard, and that's why I was pleased to get two of 'em while you guys were here in town, and I appreciate your spending the time to share these with us.

JDH: In Okinawa and the Philippines, now, I had a buddy on the Sennett, name was James Houston and he was from Paw Paw, Michigan. He shot down a Japanese Zero singlehanded. He was the only one fired at it, and this was in Leyte Gulf, well, the fact that their ship was unloading there in Leyte, and Leyte has got mountains all around the bay there, these Japanese kamikazes they came over real low. Radar didn't pick them up until they were already inside, and he was coming from the chow hall to his quarters which was on the fantail, and he came right by -- the number 8, I believe, or number 7 .20-millimeter, and he saw those airplanes, and he saw this one take off to a ship that he - - the guns were already loaded, and all he had to do was push that cocking [landry?] down, bring it up, and it was ready to fire. He did that and here come another kamikaze after another ship and he was the only one fired at it, and he hit that thing, busted into flame, and crashed before it ever hit the ship, and he was rewarded for that. And he's also dead. I used to correspond with him quite a bit.

EM: Well, all right. This is fascinating. Thanks, Dwain, I appreciate it.

END OF AUDIO FILE