

Harper Gruber Oral History Interview

LARRY RABALAIS: This is Larry Rabalais, and today is May 12th of 2010.

I'm interviewing Mr. Harper Gruber. He is in the South Carolina area whereas this interview is taking place by telephone here in Fredericksburg, Texas. 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. And with that comment, I'll turn this over to Mr. Gruber, and let you tell us your story of life and the war. Go ahead, Mr. Gruber.

HARPER GROUBER: Thank you very much. I'm Harper Gruber, and I'm 85 years old, and I served on a wooden mine sweep --

LR: What was your date of birth, if I may ask?

HG: Nine, two, twenty-four.

LR: Nine, two, twenty-four in South Carolina. Where did you go to school at?

HG: I went to school in Walterboro, South Carolina.

LR: All right. Was that elementary or did you go to high school there too?

HG: All the way through high school and naval shipyard apprenticeship, Charleston Naval Shipyard, and also school in the Navy school --

LR: What were they building at Charleston at the Navy Yard at the time that you were apprenticing there?

HG: LSTs, destroyer escorts, and destroyers.

LR: So, the war had already started when you were working there?

HG: Yes, sir. We were not in the war at that time until, naturally, until Pearl Harbor, and I was working in the Navy Yard just a little bit before Pearl Harbor.

LR: So, when Pearl Harbor happened you were working there as an apprentice at the shipyard?

HG: Yes, sir.

LR: When you heard about it, what were your thoughts? I mean were you sort of angry at the Japanese or worried about your job or what did you think about that?

HG: Well, naturally, we would be angry. I was angry and I feel sure that without the attack on Pearl Harbor we would probably not have won the war. I say that because I was old enough to know that our country went on war footing, and when I say war footing, I mean production day and night. The whole United States took up reigns and produced ships, tanks, you name it.

LR: Well, after you heard that as a worker at the shipyard, did you get drafted or did you volunteer?

HG: No, sir. I went in -- I got into the Navy due to the fact that I was in an apprenticeship at the Navy Yard and had electrical experience, and I would up in Bainbridge, Maryland for boot camp, and then electrical school, and there was such a need for electricians at that time until -- I did not have a leave after

school, went directly to Panama Canal Zone in a bomb proof communication building --

LR: How did you get to Panama, by ship?

HG: Hold on just a minute. I wound up at Portsmouth, Virginia, got on a troopship at Portsmouth, Virginia, wound up at Colon, and then went over to the West Coast side by truck and rail.

LR: All right. So, you basically joined the Navy through this program, through -- sort of through this apprenticeship program.

HG: Right, I went right on into electrical school after I finished boot camp.

LR: How long was boot camp by the way?

HG: If I'm not mistaken it wasn't but three months. They cut everything short. They cut the school short. They cut the amount of third class electricians graduating. They cut all leave time off except 72 hours, and immediately I was put on a ferry from Bainbridge, Maryland, down to Baltimore and wound up on a troopship down to the Canal Zone.

LR: Now, when you were in boot camp did you all practice any at all with rifles or anything like that?

HG: No live ammunition other than all the marching and all with rifles --

LR: Yeah, the empty rifles.

HG: -- but no live ammunition.

LR: In boot camp did you all do any boat seamanship kind of stuff in small boats or?

HG: Very little but we were trained, we were trained, we were trained in little boats.

LR: What about the swimming thing? Did you all have to swim?

HG: Definitely had to dive or jump off of a board about 14 feet up whether you could swim or not, and they had a pole that would pull you out in case you couldn't swim, yes, sir.

LR: Could you swim at that time?

HG: Oh, sure. Sure, I grew up on the river, half a mile from a river so I could swim.

LR: OK, so that wasn't a problem for you. OK, so, now you're in Panama, and you're waiting for an assignment to a boat or ship?

HG: No, sir. I was assigned to the 13th Headquarters in the communication building, 13 foot of concrete and steel over my head.

LR: Now, is that on the Pacific Ocean side?

HG: On the Pacific side, yes, sir, Ancon side. On the Panama side.

LR: So, how long were you there on dry land?

HG: I was suppose to be there for 15 months, and an electrician on a mine sweep faked a back problem, and every time he heard the ship was going to the Pacific he had a terrible back problem, and then when he found out it was coming to the States and it didn't come

to the States, they transferred me being physically able onto the wooden mine sweep, and that's where all hell broke loose.

LR: Where was it based it when you were transferred --

HG: Right in the middle of the Canal at one of the big lake -- just a big lake right in the middle of the Panama Canal.

LR: Uh-uh, I'm familiar with that, yeah. So, you all were -- the mine sweeper was already there when you were assigned to it, and it had already had been operating.

HG: They were trained in the Caribbean and immediately, immediately after boarding the mine sweep we went on a 34 day cruise to Manus Island, Admiralty Islands at Manus.

LR: Was it pretty rough? I mean it's not a big boat, and so was the seas OK, it wasn't too bad?

HG: YMS, aboard the ship 130 feet long and 24 feet wide. It is designed and rated as one of the safest ships to float --

LR: Really? That small a ship.

HG: The battleships and destroyers and everything afloat it was one of the best riding, and I've just been reading up -- it was one of the best riding, even though it was rough but it would go through tornadoes and stuff, and things like the cyclones and typhoons and all they had all out there. It would go through that better than a lot of your other --

LR: Well, LSTs didn't ride too good. I've interviewed a lot of LST guys and you talk about a rolling tub.

HG: They caught hell. We took on fuel from LSTs. We had to refuel seven times on that trip.

LR: So, that was a long run for you guys.

HG: Thirty-four days on what is known as a yard mine sweep.

LR: Well, let me ask you this. How big a crew would that have been on a boat like that?

HG: Twenty-nine enlisted and four officers.

LR: That's not a whole lot. That's not a big crew. How did you all get fed? Would something that small have a little galley or something?

HG: We had a galley. We had a Mexican cook, one cook, and one helper, and all of the fresh food, no storage whatsoever because it was designed to stay in yards, return to the yards every night or every couple days, and we took on fuel seven times, we took on bread from ships along side --

LR: Did you all go in a convoy on that long run or --

HG: Yes, sir, there was a half a dozen ships. A fuel ship, we took on fuel, and food, and stuff on --

LR: OK, so when you got to Manus Island that was sort of a staging area where a bunch of ships were gathering for something, right?

HG: Approximately 500 ships in the harbor, and the harbor -- the depth of the harbor was perfect, and you were instructed to anchor anywhere you wanted to anchor.

LR: Did you all do any practice sweeping?

HG: That was done before I got onto my sweep, yeah, that was done before.

LR: OK, so, what exactly would have been your duties on board that (inaudible)?

HG: Electrician, had two electricians, first class electrician, and I was a striker and made third class. Before I got out I was first class electrician.

LR: So, you tended like control panels and the --

HG: All the electrical we had.

LR: -- electrical systems.

HG: We had two small generators with diesel. We had three big diesels. We had one tremendous generator for magnetic mine sweeping, 1,700 amps at low voltage but it had a big -- same diesel it propulsion. We had three of the same size diesels for propulsion --

LR: So, maintaining all this equipment was your job then, uh-uh.

HG: Right, yeah, plus mine sweeping, plus duty in the wheelhouse and -

LR: Now, in sweeping, what did it do? They pay out a couple of big cables with some cutter heads on it or what cutter veins, how does that work?

HG: Well, you have four different type mines is what you have. You have your mechanical cutter sweeping. You have your sound mines. You have your magnetic mines, and then they came along with

vibration in that part of the war with just a ship disturbing the water. We were equipped for three type mines. We had a boom on the bow that they lowered in the water with an air hammer on it that would set off an acoustic mine way in front of the ship. Then we had the old type mine sweep which you set out one long cable with a float on it, and set the depth with a power vein on it which would pull out to an angle from the ship, and you run that out, and that would be held in the water whatever depth you set your cable on the power vein, and then you roll another cable out at the stern of the ship to bring it down horizontal in the water.

LR: Now, this mine, assuming that it was attached to a cable of its own, the idea was that it would cut it free and it would float to the surface, is that what --

HG: No, until the Japanese came up with a cable that you couldn't cut, and we happened to get involved in that. I happened to be on the winch when I pulled one up to the stern of the ship close enough to see it --

LR: Oh, my goodness.

HG: -- and it wouldn't cut it, and a sample of the metal was tested, and it was -- you couldn't cut it so they put a small charge of TNT with a pin right at the mechanical collar and as the cable went in to cut it, it pushed the pin and exploded and you lost part of your sweep gear but your mine came up. Then they directed

the ship -- probably not the ship that cut the mine but one further behind, you swept in three to five ships, the first lead ship had its cable out a couple hundred yards side of the stern of the ship, and the next one dropped in behind a flag so he wouldn't be in danger of hitting a mine. Do you follow me?

LR: Uh-uh.

HG: Except the one that the ship cut off, if the ship cut off one, he was in danger, and we worked in five mine sweeps, four or five mine sweeps in that manner, and when you cut the mine off it popped up to the surface, and if I'm not taking too much time, I'll --

LR: No, not at all, good ahead.

HG: I'll have to give you a little story on that. The captain of the ship was taught that when you shoot the mine and sink the mine it would not explode. Well, he didn't realize that that meant shooting the mine not with a tracer bullet.

LR: Well, wait a minute. What kind of armament did you all have on a mine sweeper?

HG: No armament -- well, what kind of -- guns?

LR: Yeah, what kind of guns you all had?

HG: OK, we had one 3-inch on the bow, two .20s; one on port, one on starboard level of the wheelhouse, and two .50s, and two depth charge racks on the tail end, and two wide guns; one on each side port and starboard on the back of the ship.

LR: Well, what would you shoot a mine with, the .50s?

HG: Shoot the mine with the .50-caliber machine gun but the ship cut loose a World War I mine was nothing but barnacles and was about three times as big as a World War II mine, it was a World War I mine --

LR: So, it was like a big old round barnacle-encrusted thing?

HG: Oh, man, nothing but a big round crusty ball, and we were ordered to sink it, and didn't take into consideration about those tracer bullets, so we pulled along pretty close to that mine, and when they fired on that mine it exploded, and you've never seen as much black smoke in all your born days. It was ships coming in to pick up the survivors when the smoke cleared, and from then on the skipper wouldn't get close enough for the .50-caliber machine gun to sink the mine, we picked at him, "Captain, it won't go off, get a little bit closer."

LR: What rank was your commanding officer at that time, about a lieutenant commander or a lieutenant?

HG: No, no, no, no, no, no, second lieutenant.

LR: Oh, really, an ensign.

HG: Yeah -- no, second lieutenant, second lieutenant.

LR: Oh, really?

HG: Yeah, and then he would make lieutenant, and he would probably be in charge of five mine sweeps.

LR: Oh, my goodness. He had quite a responsibility for that --

HG: He didn't go any higher than lieutenant. Well, he only had 29 men. He had four, and four --

LR: Yeah, but still, that's a big responsibility, yeah.

HG: Well, yeah, it is.

LR: Well, OK, from Manus where did you all first go to there?

HG: From Manus -- let me get it straight. We went just after the first invasion of Leyte, Leyte in the Philippines, we missed the first invasion at Leyte, and then we went on to the southern most island. Mindoro or Mindanao was the first invasion that we swept mines on, but no opposition there other than suicide planes.

LR: Let me stop you. I'm going to put it back on again. Now, you're down in Mindanao, now when you all swept there in the Philippines, did you all sweep up any mines at all?

HG: Oh, yeah. Every operation that we went on -- I don't know if we went on any operation that we didn't sweep some mines.

LR: Did you all generally destroy them?

HG: Oh, yeah, we had to destroy them. We sunk everything that came up to the surface, and then your magnetic mine was a completely different operation. Your magnetic mine you strung out a long cable, and you dropped down 40 feet of copper, and then you strung out from the ship connected to the same one with floats on it, you strung out the short cable 100 yards behind the ship, and dropped the cable electrode down, and you pulsed in between the two cables through the saltwater.

LR: And you would detonate it?

HG: Definitely detonate it, and there was so -- the Germans wound up with so much technology involved in the mine sweep until magnetic pull on a relay set off the mine and current flows out the long cable and gives a pulse in one direction, and when it returns back to the -- pulse got the short leg and returned it back into long it picks up the needle the other way so you had to -- some of the mines you had to do it two or three times up and down before the mine would even go off. You could pass several ships over it, and the wooden mine sweep was more or less non-magnetic. We could cross over it and not set it off.

LR: Well, let me ask you this, did you all have some mine sweepers that actually were sunk maybe by accidentally detonating some mines too close or something?

HG: One mine sweep was not sunk, and in reading the captain's log I didn't realize it but the ship I was on we was sinking, taking on water and a mine that we set off or another ship set off too close to our ship, and another ship it dismantled the generator, and really disabled one ship completely.

LR: So, it put some cracks in your hull?

HG: It bursted a pipe, no it bursted a pipe, bursted a pipe on the sweep I was on, and we had about two or three ships coming in to pump us to keep us from sinking but we would have gone down.

LR: Where was that at, in Leyte area or?

HG: No, sir, that was later on.

LR: Later on.

HG: Yeah, no, that was later on in Luzon or one of the other islands.

I went over seven Philippine invasions, swept mines on seven
Philippine invasions --

LR: Seven different beach areas, yeah.

HG: Right, seven different invasions --

LR: Were you all pretty close to shore when you were sweeping in some
cases?

HG: In some cases, yeah; in some cases, no. We were the most shallow
mine sweep, and we had an eight-foot draft, and we could sweep
right on up as close as -- well, where they would fire mortar
rounds at us and all. I mean, and rifle fire. We took on rifle
fire.

LR: Oh, really.

HG: Oh, yeah, yeah, we took on rifle fire.

LR: Did they ever hit the boat?

HG: No, no, they didn't hit the boat, and they wouldn't let us fire
back, and the destroyer shot every phosphorous shells and shut up
the action on the beach, but that was on (inaudible) where they
could shoot down right --

LR: Were there a lot of coral reefs or anything like that in that area
or not so much there?

HG: Well, we ran the ship -- the skipper was running a race with his buddy at Sibuyan Island, and we didn't anchor any line with the channel but the Japs had moved the sea markers, and we had to shortcut on the skipper of another mine sweep, and we ran on a reef high tide, and when the tide went out you could play baseball out in front of the mine sweep.

LR: Oh, my goodness.

HG: And we had a Marine commander with one of his small landing crafts, flat bottom come in and pull us off at high tide.

LR: That's got to be a little embarrassing for the captain.

HG: Well, it was but the skipper got by with it. They didn't know he was running a race, and the Japs had moved it. They had moved the markers and all.

LR: All right, now, from the Philippine area you did a lot of mine sweeping at different beach invasions in and along the various islands of the Philippines from what I understand, and so from there where did you -- did you all go for any refit anywhere or any R&R?

HG: Dry dock, the mine sweep barnacles would form on the hull of that wooden ship and it would slow it down.

LR: Was it painted?

HG: Oh, yeah, definitely, but it still was a wooden ship. You had to go dry dock --

LR: Where was that dry dock that you would go? It was a floating dry dock.

HG: Floating dry dock, yeah, just followed the ships, yeah, floating dry dock, floating dry dock. No, we didn't come back to the States at all.

LR: So, then from the Philippine areas what was your next assignment? You all didn't have much time for rest and relaxation, I guess --

HG: Well, let's go back to the Philippines. Let's go back to the Philippines --

LR: Did they put you ashore?

HG: Let's go back to the Philippine area.

LR: All right.

HG: For three months, I think right at three months, we didn't touch a beach unless it was the party that went after the mail, and there was a little small 10-acre island at the mouth of Manila Bay that had a barracks on it, and we had -- our Army had occupied it, and the Japs took it from us, and then we took it back from the Japs, and they turned this island into a recreation area. They marked off the live shells and all, and had a PA system, and I grew up on a farm and played with my uncle's deep well water pump, and they had a hand pump on the outside of that barracks, and I looked at that pump for about a minute or so and why I didn't pick it up God just didn't want me to come home, that's all I can say, I walked off and the guy that picked it up it blew him sky high.

LR: Oh, my goodness.

HG: Yes, sir.

LR: It was rigged?

HG: It was rigged to the -- loaded, loaded. Yeah, so we all had to go back aboard ship but we swept in Philippines -- we swept eight invasions in the Philippines including Lingayen Gulf, that was a tremendous invasion, and we were there ahead of the fleet. Everywhere we went, we were ahead of the fleet. The motto is, "Where the fleet has been, we have already been there."

LR: Now, the Japs made an attempt to intersect one of the landings there, and --

HG: That was in --

LR: (inaudible)

HG: Lingayen Gulf, yeah.

LR: Where were you all at when that happened?

HG: We were on another mine sweeping operation but they was a big mistake made there by our fleet, and if it hadn't of been for aircraft carriers and all we would have really lost that battle. Halsey was tricked on that and it went down as a victory but it was not a victory at the time. One of the men in that -- one of the men in that warfare operation there boarded our ship, came aboard the ship I was on, and he said they lost about -- they had PT boats, mine sweeps, everything in the fleet, destroyers,

everything in the fleet firing on Japanese battleships. Making runs on them, making runs on them and firing on them.

LR: Your mine sweeper was YMS339 that whole time?

HG: Yes, sir.

LR: OK, all right. A sturdy little boat then. All right, so, you're still in the Philippines now and -- but you didn't get much shore duty for sure --

HG: No, no shore -- no time on the beach.

LR: Not much room on a mine sweeper for you to fiddle around on there and have fun, I guess.

HG: I slept in the top bunk with my knees up between pipes with asbestos insulated pipes, that's how I slept on that mine sweep. To keep from rolling out the side.

LR: Were you all able to get some decent food from the supply ships while you all were in this long period of time in there?

HG: No, sir, nothing but dried eggs, dried milk, Spam that was the only fresh stuff we had was some canned goods, and until the war ended we had no fresh food. We had no refrigeration whatsoever.

LR: I was going to ask you, there was no refrigeration on a little --

HG: I think when it was in Panama, I think they had -- I don't ever remember seeing a refrigerator or freezer but I think while they were in a yard condition I think they had some fresh -- I know they had fresh food. Yeah, they had fresh food. We had none while I was on --

LR: Wow, that's a long stretch. OK, now, let's move off from the Philippines now. Where did you go next?

HG: OK, now that was the big one. I swept mines on seven Philippine invasions, and then the last invasion of the war, Balikpapan in Borneo, what's that, the Dutch East Indies? What's that area?

LR: I think so.

HG: I can't -- I'm not altogether on geography. Anyway, it was very, very important to the Japanese oil, Balikpapan in Borneo was tremendous oil producing nation, and we went to Balikpapan in Borneo 17 days ahead of the invasion force. We swept mines from four or five miles out all the way up as close as we could to the beach, and after about 15 mine sweeps in the first operation, and we lost nearly half of them disabled, and on about the tenth day Admiral Kincaid supplied us with a half a dozen or so more mine sweeps, and we were being fired on by shore batteries, and when you have the mine sweep gear out you can only do about four knots, and you can't maneuver so we'd cut the mine sweep gear loose, and that's not having a yellow streak down your back, that was the only method we had of outmaneuvering a gun, a shore battery.

LR: Did you all ever get hit?

HG: Splashed water in my face. I had to take my glasses off, but several of the mine sweeps were disabled, took hits. One took a hit right behind the anchor and they put men over the side and

patched it, and kept right on sweeping, and didn't even stop, and I mean it wasn't 10 feet from the magazine.

LR: Tough little boats.

HG: The shell went right on through that wooden ship. Yeah, and we swept that -- we swept that 17 days before the invasion, and that was the last invasion of World War II, and when the war was over --

LR: Well, how did you hear about the -- did you hear about the atomic bomb, and how did you hear about it, and what did you think about it?

HG: We were right out at sea and we had one guy that stayed up in the chart room on his spare time, assistant cook, and he would listen to a radio that picked up news around the world with a headset on, and he came rushing out the charthouse, hollering "We rode hell out of 'em. I don't know what happened but we rode hell out 'em. The war's as good as over."

LR: Did you wonder what an atomic bomb was?

HG: Oh, yeah.

LR: I guess the word came around.

HG: We didn't know anything about what they were saying --

LR: Yeah, a lot of people didn't know much about it.

HG: No, sir, we didn't even know when Franklin D. Roosevelt died on that little ship until we saw the ship for the half mast flags --

LR: Well, I'll be.

HG: -- signal over or radioed over and questioned why are you flying your flag at half mast? Yeah.

LR: OK, so then now the war -- let's say the war finally ends. It's in August of 1945, and you'd been on board this whole time. What was your rating at that time?

HG: I wound up first class electrician.

LR: So, how did they head you towards home or did they?

HG: The original crew that put the ship in commission --

LR: Blank owners, uh-uh.

HG: -- about 17 were still on the ship. They got off after that Balikpapan invasion. We still had 17,000 mines to sweep more or less in the Pacific in Japan. I don't think that even counted Japan. Anyway, there were 17,000 mines that had to be swept --

LR: Did you all make it to Japan in your boat?

HG: No, sir. Balikpapan in Borneo, I got off of it right after Balikpapan in Borneo, but it did not go on to Japan. It kept right on sweeping mines but it didn't go to Japan. I wound up -- I was in seven men that got on one time and we wound up getting off -- the seven of us got off and had to hook a ride on a --

LR: Did you all get off in New Guinea?

HG: No, we got off in a little small Philippine island. I don't even remember the name of it, but I caught a ride on a little small boat, and somebody stole my rain gear while I was putting on one pair, somebody stole the top of the -- or the bottom under there,

one or the other, and wound up over on a center over there, and then we caught a APA, Auxiliary Personnel ship, APA222 and 17 days to Portland, Oregon.

LR: Portland, Oregon, OK.

HG: And they treated us like a tourist. We did not do one thing for 17 days.

LR: Was there a bunch of soldiers on board also or was it mostly Navy guys?

HG: Oh, yeah, it was all type of military.

LR: All kinds of military going home.

HG: All kinds of military. They had -- Congress had investigated the return of the troops and the ships, and they made them paint over and -- we slept on nothing but canvas. You didn't have a mattress, you slept on canvass, and the quarters were painted over, and they made us serve three meals a day, and everything was first class.

LR: Well, that was a change for you.

HG: Oh, yeah, everything was first class.

LR: Now, talking about being on a small ship, did you get seasick a lot at first or did you get used to it pretty well?

HG: The Caribbean is one of the roughest places you can go aboard a ship --

LR: Really, I wouldn't have thought so.

HG: Oh, yeah, Caribbean is one of the roughest places you can get on other than North Atlantic, and the Caribbean was very rough, and I was told by the motor MAC that they would take a bucket down in the hole with them, and when they got the bucket full they'd come up and dump it, and that continued on. When I got on there we headed out for the 34-day trip, and they had fresh fruit still on the ship, and those old salts said, "You go and eat four or five oranges, and don't you quit." It wouldn't even change the taste. You'd come up, you'd eat the oranges and then throw them over the side, and you go back and eat four or five more, and after 24 hours I never vomited again.

LR: How 'bout that.

HG: I got sick but I never vomited again. I went through a lot of rough waters but -- now, some people cannot serve aboard ships.

LR: During the war there was a couple of typhoons that Halsey led his people into. Did you all get involved in those typhoons in anyway?

HG: We got in the tail end of one taking an officer that thought he had an appendix attack, and we took an officer to a hospital ship or to a ship that had doctors on it, and come to find out he just got scared of a stomach ache is all it was. We got in the tail end of a typhoon that was rough as you could possibly get in, and his book describes how the mine sweep would ride a wave better

than any other ship, and it did exactly what this article in the *Mine Warfare* magazine says. It was designed to ride perfect.

LR: What a great little ship, huh?

HG: Yeah, yes, sir. It was designed as good as any ship in World War II is what --

LR: Well, you all took a lot of white water though over the top, over the decks I'm sure because of the up and down plunging of that.

HG: Oh, there wasn't a place you could stay dry. No, there wasn't no place you could stay dry --

LR: I forgot to ask you, during battle stations like when you were in the Philippines and all that, did you have a particular battle station or are you strictly down below?

HG: I had a sound power telephone station.

LR: OK.

HG: Yeah, I had a sound power telephone station. In mine sweeping I had the winch. I operated the winch. I did all electrical work.

LR: I had forgotten to ask you that. OK, so, you've gotten to Portland now but you haven't been released yet, so where did you go from there?

HG: I went to Portland to a receiving station, and from there I came home, and then wound up in a Charleston Navy Yard waiting on a discharge, getting enough points. Electricians and motor MACs were held in service for --

LR: So, you went all the way across the country to Charleston?

HG: Yes, sir.

LR: By train?

HG: Five nights and four days without a shave, without a shave or bath, or anything.

LR: OK.

HG: Yes, sir, five nights and four days from Portland, Oregon home.

LR: So, you're in Charleston now waiting for all the paperwork and everything I guess.

HG: I lived four to five miles from Charleston so I would come on a Navy Yard bus with the workers from the Navy Yard and go back the next day.

LR: So, you actually went home in between?

HG: Oh, yeah, went home every day because I wanted to go home. I was first class petty officer, I was treated a little bit different from the regular lower class.

LR: Were you ready to get out or did you think about staying in?

HG: No, sir, I was ready to get out. I was ready -- I was offered a one year school in New Jersey, and I should have taken it but I was anxious to get out.

LR: So, you ran almost three years of --

HG: Lacking a couple of months.

LR: Couple of months, right. Well, we won the war thanks to people like you and --

HG: Well, I had a small part in it but what we have today, and I don't think this should be in the interview, but what we have today doesn't match what we fought for. I'll just stop right there.

LR: That's perfectly all right to express your opinion. Well, let me ask you this, my other coordinator interviewed your executive officer, what was his name?

HG: Let's see, Sellers.

LR: Yeah, Sellers, uh-uh.

HG: He was a little different. He was a little different. My engineering officer was one of the men, and I visited him in Colorado two different times, and he passed away a couple of years ago, and his wife -- no -- yeah, his wife just passed away too, both of them.

LR: Did you all ever get together of the crew a little bit?

HG: That's what I'm fixing to tell you. I met a motor MAC engineering officer, three of us, in Colorado, Denver, Colorado, and I went over there -- I've been over there two different times, and then my best buddy, the radar man, moved from Chicago, Highland Park area, down to Florida in retirement after working for AT&T, and now he visited me after 40 years, and I visited him several times.

LR: Well, that's wonderful. What kind of a career -- I assume you got into a career involving electricity in some way. What did you do after the war?

HG: I came right back home, wound up in the Charleston Navy Yard, and worked there a while, and got out of there. I wound up in a paper mill two different times for three years, back in the Navy Yard, and then worked five years at the Savanna River Plant Construction and Operations.

LR: Were you pretty much involved with electrical stuff or just general --

HG: Construction and maintenance at the Savanna River Plant. The test (inaudible) in the Charleston Navy Yard.

LR: Is the Savanna River outfit still building anything?

HG: Oh yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah, yeah, it's still producing. I had Q class. I went all the way into the finished product.

LR: Did you get married right after the war or?

HG: Nineteen-forty-eight I got married. I have three daughters, and no sons. I had four brothers and no sisters. I have three daughters and no sons, one wife, and every man ought to have. On Sunday morning, one bathroom, three daughters, and one wife, and that's --

LR: I can relate to that. I have three --

HG: -- put your shell on your back -- what do you have?

LR: I have three daughters and a wife, and that was an experience, so I can relate to that. Well, listen, Harper, I can't tell how much we appreciate you sharing your stories with us. The National Museum of the Pacific War treasures all of these interviews, and

your voice is particularly sharp and clear still at your age, and that's what I was amazed when I backed the tape up and listened to it, it was exceptionally clear which is not necessarily the case. A lot of the people your age have begun to lose their voices for one reason or another, and it's sort of hard to do it on the phone but yours was particularly good. I really don't like cell phones too much because sometimes they don't do as well.

HG: Right, I have a little bit of humor I have to put into this.

LR: OK, go ahead and we'll put that in.

HG: If we got -- if we have --

LR: Oh, we have time.

HG: All right. When the war ended, before the war ended, the Mexican was a cook and he was -- Navy had different ratings for cooks and bakers but Poncho started doing some baking. Everybody begged him to bake so he started doing some baking but when the war ended we got fresh fruit on the ship, and Poncho wouldn't bake. The skipper told him he wanted baked food on the table three times a day or two times a day, and Poncho put an orange or an apple on the table and didn't bake. The skipper called him down and told him, "You understand I want baked food on the table twice a day." "Yes, sir" Well, Poncho knew the skipper didn't like chocolate so everything he baked he loaded it with chocolate, and I happened to be out on the main deck, and the skipper stepped out the wardroom and he yelled, "Poncho," and that Mexican snapped at attention,

"Yes, sir," he said, "What rank are you?" He said, "I'm first class cook." "I'm going to bust you down to a deckhand if you don't straighten up. You know what I'm talking about." "Yes, sir".

LR: So, he straightened up.

HG: The captain got in the last blow.

LR: OK.

HG: One more thing, one more thing.

LR: Sure.

HG: I'm going to get off of it. I'm not doing anything but watching a baseball game but it's -- we had a first class gunner's mate. He had a monkey named Roscoe.

LR: On board the boat?

HG: Yes, sir, we had a monkey, and the monkey took up with Freeman, the first class gunner's mate. The monkey had nothing to do with anybody else except Freeman, and the skipper's walking out across the main deck, and he had on short tacky britches, and Freeman walking across the deck, I happened to be out there, and the monkey jumps up and grabs the skipper by the bottom of his britches at his knees, and he shakes him and shows his teeth, and the skipper said, "Get that so and so off this ship, and I mean you get him off this ship." Well, Freeman was about to cry. That recreational island, he took Roscoe over and put him on the beach, and when we got back on the ship and threw the lines off to leave

the dock, Roscoe was swimming to the ship, and we threw him a line and pulled him back aboard. The skipper turned his head the other way.

LR: I'll be darned. (laughter)

HG: Well --

LR: All kinds of stories.

HG: I thank you for calling. Thank you for calling.

LR: Well, thank you, Harper. We really appreciate it and you have a good life and stay healthy. We appreciate it. Well, listen, what's going to happen is we will type this up -- I just wanted to let you know, and there will be copies made and sent to you for you to review. It will be double spaced so that you can strike out or edit anything you would like to edit, and then you return -- we'll give you an envelope, and you'll return the copy to us and then we'll final type it, bind it up nicely, and we'll send you a copy of -- two copies of that. Now, one copy and the tape will go into our museum archives over here for the historians and academic people to use to review. Like say, if someone is writing about mine sweepers, they can, by computer, pick up the people that had the experiences there, and get the real story. And that's how it works.

HG: All right, I thank you, thank you very much.

LR: Thank you, and good night, Harper.

HG: Thank you for what you're all doing.