

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**George W. Stroppel
Midland, South Dakota
July 14, 2010**

***USS New Jersey*
Bombarded Iwo Jima and Okinawa**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is July 14, 2010. I am interviewing Mr. George W. Stroppel by telephone. His address is: 604 Main, Midland, South Dakota, 57552. His phone number is 605-843-2135. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Center for Pacific War Studies, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

George, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II. Now the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the Museum. "Agreement read." Is that okay with you?

Mr. Stroppel

That's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the next thing I would like to do is to get an alternative contact. We have found out that sometimes several years down the road we try to get back in contact with a veteran and he has moved or something. Do you have a son or daughter that we could contact if we needed to find you?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes. I doubt that I will be moving but you never know. You could call Patricia Bollmer at 605-843-2802. Her address is Midland, South Dakota, 57552. I think her PO Box is 124.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birth date?

Mr. Stroppel

April 11, 1926

Mr. Misenhimer

And where were you born?

Mr. Stroppel

I was born at Powell, South Dakota in a ranch house about a mile south of Powell, South Dakota.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many of each?

Mr. Stroppel

I had two brothers and two sisters.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were either of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes they were, both of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

My oldest brother was in the Army up in Attu. My other brother Jack was a Navy fighter pilot off of the *Makin Island CVE-93*. It was a Navy flat top.

Mr. Misenhimer

Are they both still living?

Mr. Stroppel

No, I'm the only one living in the family.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about your sisters? Were they involved in war work?

Mr. Stroppel

No. They were ranch people. Mary, my oldest sister, was a schoolteacher. As far as I know they weren't involved. They were in the country.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Stroppel

There at the high school in Midland.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish?

Mr. Stroppel

I finished in 1947, but I was a sophomore, I had just finished my sophomore year when I joined the Navy. I was 17.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you join the Navy?

Mr. Stroppel

September 4, 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Stoppel

Yes I did. My dad signed.

Mr. Misenhimer

Why did you decided to go into the service?

Mr. Stoppel

I had always kind of wanted to go into the Navy. A friend of mine suggested we join. We were both 17. We had both just turned 17 and we did it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did your parents object to you doing that?

Mr. Stoppel

My dad kind of argued with me a little on it but I wanted to go and he signed the papers.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Stoppel

I sure do. I remember it like it was yesterday.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you and what was it?

Mr. Stoppel

I was 15 years old and I was taking care of a Conoco station and I had the radio on. It came over the radio. I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was and until they said we would probably declare war I had no idea what it was about. I knew the Japs struck us. I remember knowing enough about the history of the world at that time and what the problem was. It was very much of a surprise that they struck us at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you think that would affect you when you heard that?

Mr. Stoppel

I don't remember. I don't think I thought much about it. I was just a kid in school. I was working part time there at the filling station.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Stroppel

My dad was a very good provider. He was a rancher and he had about 5,000 acres under lease and ownership and he hung on to it. I think the toll, the hardships and all that, everything was very hard, but I never knew a hungry day. We had clothes on our back. We didn't go to the WPA for any of the government stuff. In fact my Dad was pretty heavily against it. He thought people should earn their living. I remember he took a couple carloads of cattle to Chicago and by the time he got all the expenses paid he didn't hardly have enough to get back home. That I remember. It was a good life. It was hard but we had the dust storms, we had the grasshoppers. I remember them well.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all have a garden?

Mr. Stroppel

What the grasshoppers didn't eat.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about chickens and pigs and things like that?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes. Dad always had pigs. He always said that they were what kept him going. I remember in the 30's, 1930 I think it was, that cholera got in these pigs and it seemed like after that he didn't have much good luck with pigs. He still had them but not the herd that he had before.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you joined the Navy, where did you go in?

Mr. Stroppel

I went to Rapid City. We got on the train here at Midland and went to Rapid City and went to the recruiting office and signed up there. I remember we came home to get things straightened out; what we had. We had only just a few days. Then we went back to Rapid City to the recruiting office. There were two or three or four of us that were put on the train and sent to Omaha, Nebraska for induction. They stripped us and ran us through the mill there. Then they put us on a train and sent us out to Farragut, Idaho and did the same thing there. That's where we were sworn in on September 4.

Mr. Misenhimer

On these train trips, how were these train trips?

Mr. Stroppel

They were good. We were on regular passenger cars on those two trips.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you done much traveling before?

Mr. Stoppel

No. I did when I was four years old with the folks. I had been all over the west in 1930 when the banks went down. Dad had put some money away and he and a friend of my grandparents, they got in a house car and took a trip out to Yellowstone, Utah, right into Washington and over into Spokane where he had a sister. My dad had a sister in Spokane, right out of Spokane. They had an apple orchard. Then we went down through Oregon, into California. Mom had a brother and uncle and aunt living in California. I guess we stopped in there. Then we went to Arizona and stopped in and saw my uncle there. Then I guess we headed for home. I know we got home just about the time of the folk's wedding anniversary on February 14. I kind of remember quite a bit of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said a house car. What do you mean by a house car?

Mr. Stoppel

A housecar. It was on a truck. I was a manufactured house car. Originally it was on an old REO truck and Harold Plopper bought a brand new 1929 Chevy Truck. Just the frame and the hood. It sat right down on the frame and the dashboard and everything was right there. It was all equipped. It had two beds. One had a bed across the back. Then there was a fold out bed that had a canvas that covered you at night and then you folded it all back up. It was all done by hand. They lived in that.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many people were in this house car on this trip?

Mr. Stoppel

There were six to start out, seven with me. Then when we got to California where my uncle lived, my grandma and grandpa went back to Spearfish, South Dakota. That's where they lived.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was one of the very early recreational vehicles wasn't it?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now when you got into the Navy, where did you take your boot camp?

Mr. Stoppel

It was in Farragut at Camp Waldron.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there?

Mr. Stroppel

A barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food?

Mr. Stroppel

I thought it was all right. Other people always grumbled but I always got my belly full. I thought the food was pretty good.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do in boot camp?

Mr. Stroppel

Took orders. Marched. Stood guard. I was lifeguard for a week. We had a workweek after we were there about a month. We had what they called a workweek where each person was given an assignment to take care of. I had passed first class swimming and they put me on guard over the pool along with several others.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have quite a bit of classroom work?

Mr. Stroppel

Not during boot camp. We did have quite a lot of calisthenics. We did have some basketball if you want to call it that. It was just tough and running.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were your drill instructors pretty rough?

Mr. Stroppel

I didn't think so. One of the things I remember well is that they gave you a 16-ounce glove and you had your choice of; no we didn't, they just gave us that glove for whichever hand it fit. The other hand you had to hold behind you. We played basketball that way.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that boot camp?

Mr. Stroppel

From September 3 to November 3 I think it was. Two months.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished boot camp?

Mr. Stroppel

They gave us a 15-day leave and put us on a train. We came home. I went back and went into an OGU unit. Then they sent me to gunner's mate school for I don't remember how many weeks, 6 weeks or so. I studied all guns up through a 5 inch. Then they sent me to Hawthorne, Nevada, which was the second biggest ammunition dump in the United States. The biggest one was at Ogden, Utah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to your gunner's mate school. What all did you do in there? Did you actually fire the guns or what?

Mr. Stroppel

We studied the guns. We took them apart. What the idea was, was to be able to fix that gun. You studied the guns. We went from a .45 caliber, Thompson machine gun, Springfield '03 rifle, a 20mm, 40mm, and 5 inch. It seems like there was something else that we had there too.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that school?

Mr. Stroppel

That must have been about two months, something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then when you finished that, where did you go?

Mr. Stroppel

They sent ten of us out of that gunner's mate school to Hawthorne, Nevada.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Stroppel

Handled ammunition. We loaded cars, unloaded cars, of all types of ammunition, 5 inch, smoke pots, and 20mm and 40mm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nothing larger than 5 inch?

Mr. Stroppel

No, not right there. They had some 16-inch projectiles there but I was never put on that particular chore.

Mr. Misenhimer

This ammunition, was it in crates?

Mr. Stoppel

Some of them were, some of them weren't. The 5 inch 38, two of them were in a crate. If I remember right those crates weigh 140-something pounds. Sometimes they would come in crates. We also handled the Marine ammunition of which was millimeters, 155 and so forth. The trains would bring in trainloads of them. They would go up to the igloo and then we would unload them, or, if they were called, they would stay there until they called for them in the war zone. Then we would put them back on boxcars and crimp them in. That was our job. Then they did have, one time there they had, I don't know, I think it was something like 30,000 to 40,000 three inch cases that still had the primer in them. They sent out, I don't remember how many there were, but there were ten of them in my squad, and we would fire these primers off so they could send them and get them melted down. They gave us a brass punch and a brass hammer. One guy would hold them and you would put that punch up against the primer and hit them. We didn't have any hearing aids. I think that's where my trouble came from. I think we fired off 10,000 to 15,000 of them. I thought that was too slow so I went over to the dunnage pile and I got a piece of lumber and I rigged up a deal where I could set five of those shells in and I just sat there and I had them configured with a firing pin, I just used a nail, and I just made a hole and put that firing pin in there and I just went through there and hit them just as fast as they could take them down and take them out. We fired off a lot of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they would explode then, is that right?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes. It was about the same as about four shotguns going off at the same time. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was just the fuse off of the end of the shell?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes, these were primers inside of the casings. Do you know what a three inch 50 is?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes sir I do, but tell me for the tape.

Mr. Stoppel

A three inch 50 was fixed ammunition. In other words the fixed ammunition was where the projectile and the firing case and the powder and everything was all in one unit. They had already taken the

projectiles out and dumped out the powder. What this primer consisted of was fulminated mercury and black powder. Then there was, I can't think of the name of it. The fulminated mercury was the primary starter. There was some other little explosive which was the primary charge. Then that would take the black powder. When the black powder went off it lit the smokeless powder and sent the projectile out. This primer was probably five or six inches long and was probably about as big as my little finger, maybe a little bigger around. It was all full of holes so that fire could go out.

Mr. Misenhimer

Why were they doing this?

Mr. Stroppel

They needed the brass and the three inch 50 had become obsolete except for on merchant ships. The three inch 50 was the gun that most of the merchant ships had on them. But on the battleships, we didn't have that at all.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had about 30,000 of those to do?

Mr. Stroppel

I don't remember the exact number but I think it was around 30,000 to 40,000 or more. I just don't remember, but it was up in the tens of thousands that they had of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many crews were doing this? Quite a few, I guess.

Mr. Stroppel

There must have been four to six crews doing that. I remember the crews that got the most work done got to go on a weekend up to Reno, Nevada. They took us up there in a travel trailer. We went. I remember that. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what else happened? What are some other things that happened?

Mr. Stroppel

That's about the size of it in Reno, Nevada there at that ammunition dump. It was pretty much a routine thing. It wasn't in our company, but they were showing, I don't know if they were practicing or what, but they were using hand grenades. One of them got away and it flipped over the wall. The petty officer that was in charge had it thrown over the wall but it didn't hurt anybody that I remember. We had one smoke bomb that went off. It was down one igloo from us. It made a lot of

smoke. I suppose they dropped it or something. They weighed 300 pounds. Two of us would handle them.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you leave there and where did you go?

Mr. Stoppel

I think it was around the first of December and they sent us out to San Jose, California into in OGU unit. I can't remember what the camp name was. We were there for maybe a week or two. I know we were there over Christmas. Then they shipped us out on a troop ship. The only thing that I can remember was Mog Mog That was an island that we got to have beer parties on. The whole task force would be in this ring of islands out there so it had to be a pretty huge area.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on a troop ship when you got there?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes, I was on a troop ship when I got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Mog Mog is in the Ulithi area.

Mr. Stoppel

That sounds right.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know the name of the troop ship that you were on?

Mr. Stoppel

I sure don't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stop anywhere before Mog Mog?

Mr. Stoppel

We stopped at Hawaii.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get off there?

Mr. Stoppel

No we just stopped and let off some officers and some people that were left there. We took on supplies I guess and whatever. I know we were only there for a day or two and then took off and went to Mog Mog.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a convoy on this trip?

Mr. Stroppel

No we were just alone. We didn't have any convoy at all. This would have been in the latter part of December 1944 or the first part of January of 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had been in for a little over a year when you went here then?

Mr. Stroppel

About 15 months.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got to Mog Mog, what did you do there?

Mr. Stroppel

Then they assigned me to the new USS *New Jersey*. I did go out on a work force over on one of these cement barges they had that had lumber on it. We did some changing around and so forth over there; I think just to keep us busy. Then we went back to our own ship, to the merchant ship, the troop ship. I can't remember what the name of that ship was to save me. It was shortly after that I was put on the *New Jersey*. I was in Division One.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is Division One?

Mr. Stroppel

That is the number one turret, 16 inch. I wanted to get on; I asked to be put on a gun no bigger than a 5 inch because that's what I had studied. But they put me in that division.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to get on a ship as big as the *New Jersey*?

Mr. Stroppel

It was quite amazing. It's been a long time ago. I just can't remember my feelings except that I wanted to get on a destroyer. They put me on the battleship and I was a little unhappy about it. After I was on it for a while, I was glad I was on the *New Jersey*, on a battleship. We refueled a lot of destroyers. Those destroyers would have three feet of water going over their deck and we wouldn't have hardly any. They would holler up at us, "How is land duty?"

It was kind of a routine thing until you got under fire. One time we were refueling a destroyer and the Japs came over and he took off before we got the fuel shut down. It made quite a mess. They broke lines. We had quite a mess there for a while. Other than that I guess we didn't fare too bad.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that when that Jap came over and you broke that line?

Mr. Stroppel

We were out in the ocean and I don't remember where. It was a task force, that I remember. It might have been when we went up into the China Sea or it might have been during Okinawa or Iwo Jima. I just can't remember when that happened.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your job on the number one turret?

Mr. Stroppel

I was just more of a deckhand. I was just a Seaman First. As a deckhand you did your duties of keeping the ship clean and so forth. You were four hours on, and four off of guard duty. I was on guard duty most of the time on a 40mm. Once in a while I was put on guard on a 5 inch. When we went into GQ, general quarters, at first I was in the 16-inch powder room. Then later on they put me in the 16-inch projectile room. Then I went into the 16 inch as a primer man.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the powder room, what did you do?

Mr. Stroppel

We took powder out of the cans. There would be three bags of powder. If I remember right, the ratio was 48 pounds for a bombardment projectile and 60 to 65 pounds for an armor piercing one. We would take those things out and put them on a tray. It took six of them to fire the gun. You would send them up on an elevator type thing. The trays were all brass or copper. That was for safety's sake so they didn't spark. The ammunition in those cans; after they had been in those cans they would build up pressure and it developed a gas off of the powder in those containers they were in. What is that gas that would put you to sleep at Okinawa and Iwo Jima? You would get awful sleepy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was it ether?

Mr. Stroppel

That's it. I just couldn't think of the name.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you opened the cans, what did you do with the ether that was in there? Just let it out?

Mr. Stroppel

It just dissipated.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your turret, there were three guns at each turret, is that right?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes, there were three guns in each turret.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on just one particular gun?

Mr. Stroppel

We sent up ammunition for all three as far as I know. I'm not certain about that. When the ammunition came up, maybe there was a powder room for each one, but that part I don't know.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in the powder room?

Mr. Stroppel

It depended on how long we were on GQ. It seems to me like when we were firing there at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, it seems like we were in there for over 48 hours without getting out.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were in the powder room for both of those, Okinawa and Iwo Jima, is that right?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes. I remember one time they sent down sandwiches. I don't remember where that was at, which one of the places. We didn't break Zebra except for that person coming down.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you wear special clothing in the powder room?

Mr. Stroppel

No, we just wore dungarees.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go to the projectile room?

Mr. Stroppel

I don't remember just when I went. I know I was there for a while. It was my job to go in there when needed. Those projectiles were sitting around on the outside and there was a turntable like thing that

you would put that projectile on. Those projectiles weighed; I think the armor piercing was around 2800 to 3000 pounds, or something like that, and I think the bombardment was like 2200 pounds apiece. I might be wrong on that.

Mr. Misenhimer

I think you're pretty close to right.

Mr. Stoppel

It's been too many years. That's what you did. I wasn't in the projectile room too long. Then they put me up into the turret and put me on as a primer man. What you had to do was when the breech opened up, you had to get that spent primer out and slip another one in at that time. That was my job.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fire the guns when you were the primer man?

Mr. Stoppel

No, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

What I meant to say was, were the guns actually being fired while you were in there?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were they firing at?

Mr. Stoppel

I think it was when we were coming back from getting repairs. We went in after Okinawa to Japan, within 60 miles of Japan. The aircraft carrier sent in Navy planes and bombed Japan and got very little resistance. They were using these suicide planes. I remember seeing the *Franklin*. That was during the Okinawa campaign. I remember seeing the fire. It was about eight miles away from us. When we were in dry dock the *Bunker Hill* came in. The suicides had hit it. It was banged up pretty bad but it was still under its own power.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let me go back. After you got on the *New Jersey*, what was the first action that you were in?

Mr. Stoppel

When I got on there, I think it was Iwo Jima. I can't remember whether we fired in practice anywhere. I know we did but I can't remember the exact place.

Mr. Misenhimer

But the first battle was Iwo Jima?

Mr. Stoppel

Iwo Jima was first.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you know how many rounds you all fired there, or how long you fired?

Mr. Stoppel

We fired for three days. I know that we were there before they sent the troops in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you firing pretty steadily?

Mr. Stoppel

We fired as steady as we could. Those guns would get awful hot. We would be able to fire a round a minute if they wanted to. But if you did your gun barrel would get too hot. That's what I understood.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many turrets were on the *New Jersey*?

Mr. Stoppel

Three guns to a turret and there were three turrets. Two forward and one aft. They each had three guns.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the powder room, was the powder stored anywhere besides in that room?

Mr. Stoppel

There were other powder rooms, but I don't know just where. When you went down there, you went in, you went down a hallway, and you went down. We were three decks down, that I can remember. The powder room was down on the third deck.

Mr. Misenhimer

The projectile deck was how far down?

Mr. Stoppel

I can't remember. I don't think it was quite as deep as the powder room. It could be. It seems to me it wasn't as deep down. I know it wasn't right under the turret. The projectile room was inside of the foundation of the turret. There is a name for it but I can't think of it. That's where the projectile room was. But the powder rooms were different. I can't remember exactly where they were.

Mr. Misenhimer

There at Iwo Jima, were you ever up on the deck?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes, after we got done firing.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do then?

Mr. Stroppel

Stood around, worked, mopped the deck, stripped paint.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you still there at Iwo Jima?

Mr. Stroppel

I think we must have been there for a few days. But after they unloaded the troops I think we went back to Mog Mog in Ulithi.

Mr. Misenhimer

At Iwo Jima, were you ever attacked by the enemy?

Mr. Stroppel

I think that was when we went up into the China Sea. I don't know why we went up there; I just remember they said that is where we were going. You never knew just where you were at out there. It was just one big body of water. You could see the other ships. We were in Hulse's typhoon, I remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to go through that typhoon?

Mr. Stroppel

It was quite exciting. I know that happened to be where I was at. My bunk was still back in the aft end of the ship near the dining room area, the chow hall. I know when I would go up to the bow of the ship, you didn't notice it in the stern, but when you got up in the bow, I suppose that was rising and dropping at least 40 feet, maybe more. Then I was sent up to the pilot house and there were times that the bow of the ship would be underwater and it would come clear back up over the number one turret, a solid sheet of water. It had to be all of 40 to 45 feet that was underwater. Then the bow would come up again. When you were walking below deck, you would be walking along and it felt like your hips were coming up under armpits and the next thing you would be up on your tiptoes. It would just fall away from you.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was better to be on a battleship than a destroyer there, huh?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes. In one of those typhoons we lost a destroyer. It got awash. What happened was that it went under and the water came down the stack and put the fire out. That's what I was told. On those destroyers they might have been diesels, I don't know. I've been told we lost a destroyer.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were three destroyers lost.

Mr. Stroppel

That was a terrible storm. (*A Zero*) It came out of the cloud. It was rather low. I suppose the ceiling may have been 1,500 – 2,000 feet, maybe less. I remember seeing this Zero come down out of there and the ships all opened up at him and he went right on in and these two planes came out right after him. Before they could recognize them, they just knocked down everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

And they were F6-F's, you said they were shot down by friendly fire?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes. They saved our pilots, they told us. The Zero more or less blew up when it hit the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about going to Okinawa?

Mr. Stroppel

I was about the same thing. We bombarded I think for three days. I don't recall too many Jap planes and what there were, were more after the aircraft carriers.

Mr. Misenhimer

There were a lot of kamikazes at Okinawa.

Mr. Stroppel

Yes, at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, I understand, that we lost about 38% of our fighting ships to kamikazes. I've read that. I was down in Corpus Christi and they have an aircraft there (*USS Lexington*) and I was watching this WWII show about the battles and that's what they said. I didn't know it until they told it on that, that we had lost about 38% of our fighting fleet to the kamikazes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your ship was never attacked by the kamikazes?

Mr. Stroppel

No. I guess the closest we came, and I don't know where that was at, was while we were out to sea, a Betty came down alongside the ship and the ones that were up on deck said they could see the pilot, but he didn't hit the ship. The gunners didn't take him down. I don't know where that was.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you every fire at enemy ships?

Mr. Stroppel

No, not while I was on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

The *Yamato* was sunk in early April on its way down to Okinawa. Were you involved in that at all?

Mr. Stroppel

No. I think that was sunk by aircraft, wasn't it?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes it was, but there were other ships looking for it, but they didn't find it. After Okinawa where did you go?

Mr. Stroppel

From Okinawa we went back to Ulithi to Mog Mog. We refueled and then the task force went up to within 60 miles of Japan and sent the aircraft in to bomb Japan. We got very little resistance. Then in the meantime we had developed a flat shaft on one of the screws. When we would get up to 28 to 30 knots it just shook the stern of the ship. You could stand there and almost move because it would vibrate. The *Missouri* took our place and we came back to Bremerton and went into dry dock. Just before the 4th of July we got out of dry dock and we went down to San Francisco. Then from San Francisco down to Long Beach. We were there for several days or a week. We would go out and we would fire at those islands out there that were uninhabited. From there we headed back out to the war zone. When we came to Wake the 16-inch guns were used to practice because they said there was nobody on Wake. Then we went into the Philippines. I think we went into Saipan when the war was declared over. I remember we pulled in there. Maybe it was Guam. It was one of those islands out there that we went into. When we came in they were shooting water in the air, celebrating that the Japs had surrendered. Then we headed up to Japan to Yokuska. We anchored right off of Yokuska and were there until the last part of January of 1946. Then while we were in Japan I was on an LCVP, that was my duty. I was a bow man or stern man, whichever. Eddie Young and I were pretty

good friends and they put both of us on this boat. We carried personnel. We carried supplies and so forth. That was during the occupation.

Mr. Misenhimer

To take people and supplies from where?

Mr. Stoppel

Wherever they wanted them. We would take personnel from our ship over to another one. We might go over to another ship and pick up personnel and bring them to the *New Jersey*. The *Boxer* was sitting alongside us. I know one night the tide and wind got just right and it was swinging the two ships around to where they would have collided. The *Boxer* was about 1,000 feet long and we were 887 feet long. We used all the boats and tugboats that we had, shoving our ship to keep them from colliding.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go ashore in Japan?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes. We went ashore several times in Yokohama. In fact, the New Year's party or the Christmas Party, one of them, we went into Yokosuka and had our beer party there. They took us in on a landing craft and were there for about four or five hours drinking beer and celebrating.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any contact with the Japanese people?

Mr. Stoppel

Very little. They would go by us when we were sitting there and wave. The only time I had contact with them was when I would go into a store or something like that. But other than that, no. We would go in sightseeing. I remember one time we went in around where the palace was. These goldfish, I always thought they were little fish. There were goldfish in that moat that were three feet long, carp.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Japanese people that you had contact with, were they friendly?

Mr. Stoppel

Very friendly. Very friendly. Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any military-aged men? Japanese military-aged men?

Mr. Stoppel

No. There was a Japanese tank, a Japanese truck sitting there that we looked over. There was a half-track. I think that was about all. While we were there I remember them taking a barge load of ammunition and guns and so forth. They said they were taking them out to the open ocean and dumping them. That was Japanese stuff. Each one of us, if you wanted one you could sign up for one. I've got a 30-caliber rifle. I've never shot it. I just got it as a souvenir, and a bayonet.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when did you leave Japan to come home?

Mr. Stoppel

It was right around the 28th of January when we left Japan. I had an accident and smashed my back just a day or two before we left Japan. I was in sickbay when we pulled out.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do to your back?

Mr. Stoppel

It was a compressed fracture was what they called it, L1 and T12. When I got back to the States they put me in the Long Beach Hospital. I think we got back in February and they put me in the Long Beach Hospital. Then I was still assigned to the *New Jersey*. In the hospital they put a body cast on me, a full body cast from my waist up. I was there until the 1st of June. I was discharged the 12th of June at Long Beach, California.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you recover from your back?

Mr. Stoppel

It still bothers me if I work. I got it established with the VA due to the Legionnaires that were here, they got me to go up and sign and get it established. They had seen where guys that had been injured and had gone on and went to work and then later on in life they developed arthritis through this injury and couldn't get any benefits out of it. So I got a 10% disability out of it. But I still worked full time.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were discharged June 12, 1946. Let me go back and ask some questions. On April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Do you all hear about that?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes. When he died we were told over the loudspeaker that he had died.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the reaction people had to that?

Mr. Stoppel

I don't recall much reaction at all. Just that the President had died and Truman, the Vice President, was going to take over. I don't think there was much remorse or anything. It was just everyday life.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 8, 1945, Germany surrendered. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes we heard about it. One of the chaplains usually kept us informed. When we were in battle and like that, these chaplains would tell us over the intercom what was going on upstairs.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Stoppel

No we didn't. We just did our usual thing as I remember. We just said 'hurray' when the war was over. You mean for Europe?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Stoppel

I don't recall much reaction at all other than that people were glad that it was over. We could go home sooner.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when they dropped the first atomic bomb, did you hear about that?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes, they told us about it the same way. We were told over the intercom that a bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima, on Nagasaki, when they did it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were on your way back to Mog Mog then, probably.

Mr. Stoppel

We were on our way back to the war zone at that time but I don't know just where we were.

Mr. Misenhimer

When Japan did surrender on August 15, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Stoppel

There was a little whooping and hollering, glad that it was over. After you are out there, you know what that is.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you at sea?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes we were out to sea. We had some encounters with subs. I remember the destroyers milling around, throwing out these depth charges.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Stoppel

I don't know if there was such a thing as a frightening time. I think we just kind of took it in stride. When we did have those close calls, sometimes we would be down in the powder room or projectile room and we didn't know what was going on until somebody would come on the intercom and give us the information. We didn't have anything like that. Other than that, we were just doing out duty.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes. It seems like one time she said it was Tokyo Rose.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Stoppel

Didn't think anything. She was a propagandist. That was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Stoppel

Yes we got down to the equator. We crossed. It was during the war and the Captain said there would be no initiation. That we would be given our certificate for crossing the equator and that was it. I think I have that certificate around some place, but I don't know where.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Stoppel

I never had much contact with them. I never got into any trouble. I had no problem with them.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all souvenirs did you get home with besides the rifle?

Mr. Stoppel

I got that Jap rifle and then I bought some stuff over there in Japan that I brought home like silk stockings. I gave them to some girls. I got some silk stuff but other than that I didn't pick up any souvenirs there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Stoppel

One in Hawthorn, Nevada. It was a good show. I enjoyed it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any big names?

Mr. Stoppel

Not at that particular place. When I was in the hospital I got to see Bob Hope and Professor Colonna, and Bing Crosby. They came up and dedicated a 9-hole golf course. We sat out there on the back porch and watched them when they dedicated it. They had a loud speaker so you could hear it somewhat.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Stoppel

The experience that I had with the Red Cross is that they set up a donut deal and it cost us 10 cents.

Mr. Misenhimer

That didn't go over too well did it?

Mr. Stoppel

I was onboard ship. No it didn't go over very well.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were on the ship could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Stroppel

No not regularly but we did get it. During the war you never knew when. It might be a week or two, or it might be longer. When we got over in to Japan where we were pretty stationary, it came pretty regularly.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank that you got to?

Mr. Stroppel

I was just Seaman First.

Mr. Misenhimer

What medals and ribbons did you get?

Mr. Stroppel

I got the Pacific Theater, Okinawa, Iwo Jima, and Battle Stars. Then there was a ribbon the ship got.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that a Presidential Unit Citation?

Mr. Stroppel

I don't remember. In fact, I don't remember really, it's been so long since I've thought about it, what ribbons and medals we got. I've just kind of forgotten.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Stroppel

I drank too much. I don't think I really had too much trouble getting adjusted back.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Stroppel

Yes. I went back to high school and took two years, junior and senior year, in one. Then I took flying lessons on it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you buy a house with it or anything?

Mr. Stroppel

No, I sure didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go to college?

Mr. Stroppel

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you continue to use your flying lessons?

Mr. Stroppel

Just for my own personal purpose. I didn't go on and get anything more than a private license.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have your own plane?

Mr. Stroppel

No, I just rented whatever I wanted to do.

Mr. Misenhimer

When was the last time you flew?

Mr. Stroppel

Where I flew the plane?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes.

Mr. Stroppel

I suppose it's been 40 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything else that you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Stroppel

No. I think we've hashed it over pretty good. I just remember a couple of the guy's names that I was with. One of them was Stewart and the other was Eddie Young. Stewart was from Lincoln, Nebraska. And Eddie Young was from Franklin, Massachusetts. I haven't been in contact with them. I used to stay in contact with Eddie at Christmastime. About 15 years or so ago, I quit hearing from him. I sent cards for about 3 or 4 years and never heard anything back, so I figured something had happened to him.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Stroppel

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said that you have a letter on one now?

Mr. Stoppel

I've got this letter on a reunion now. If I can possibly make it, I'm going to.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was your career in civilian life?

Mr. Stoppel

I painted a couple of years, house painting, and barn painting. Then I went into a restaurant for a while. I got out of that and I went into heavy equipment like running cats and dozers and scrapers. I stayed in that for 17 years, in that business. I worked on the Ohae Dam for five years on the Missouri. Dammed up the Missouri. I worked on it for five years until the dirt work was done. Then I bought a cat and a scraper myself and had it for seven years. My brother had been running the family business. He left and Mom had me come down and help her. It was a hotel and hot mineral bath and massages. I started doing massages. My dad talked me into taking a course in Swedish massages. I've been at that for 44 years now.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened to your father's ranch?

Mr. Stoppel

My sister and brother-in-law took it over. They bought it from Mom and it is still in the family. My sister and brother-in-law are dead but their boys are on it. They left it to three of the boys.

When the Korean War broke out they called me in and I had that 10% disability. They called me back in and I went into the recruiting, where they were putting us through. They asked me the questions and wanted to know if I wanted to go back in. I said, "Well, not really. But I think there are a lot of younger guys who haven't been there and done that. But if you want me to go, then just send me." They put a big red X on my paper and sent me home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you stayed in the Reserves?

Mr. Stoppel

I stayed in the Reserves for a lot of years. I didn't stay active with it. I got out of it after about 10 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alright George, that's all the questions I have unless you've thought of something else.

Mr. Stoppel

It was nice talking to you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes sir. Thank you for your time today and thank you for your service to our country.

Mr. Stoppel

Thank you too. The wars that we have fought since, it just makes me mad when I think of what the boys in Viet Nam especially, when they came home and the attitudes people had. They should have been horse whipped. Anybody that has that disrespect for the military that has been over there and done that. And this thing that is going on right now. I don't see how they could do much different under the circumstances. At least the government is keeping the morale up of the people in the military. I have just been so upset over the Viet Nam deal that it just literally makes me mad.

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes sir.

Transcribed by:

Lesle Dial
Beeville, Texas
May 7, 2011

Oral History by:

Richard Misenhimer
PO Box 3453
Alice, Texas 78333
Home (361) 664-4071
Cell (361) 701-5848