

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Real J. Cyr
Winslow, ME
August 27, 2010
USS Herring SS-233
Four Patrols
HMS Seraph, British Sub
Commandos to Norway**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is August 27, 2010. I am interviewing Mr. Real J. Cyr by telephone. His phone number is 207-872-8401. His address is 4 Beacon St., Winslow, ME 04901. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Real, I want to thank you for taking time today to do this interview today and

I want to thank you for service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, and for 28 years after the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stay in for 28 years?

Mr. Cyr

After the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

You retired from the Navy then, right?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, all totaled I had 32 years.

Mr. Misenhimer

Good, good, we will cover that later on. Now, the first thing I like to do is read this agreement with the museum. When I do this in person, I let them read and sign it but since this is by telephone let me read it to you. "Agreement Read." Is that ok with you

Mr. Cyr

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Cyr

Well, a couple years from now I will probably on eternal patrol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, we hope not but in case we need to....

Mr. Cyr

I have 2 sons, I have one that is a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Force, Richard Cyr and another one that was a Naval Academy graduate and got hurt in the first Bush war and is now a Math teacher at the Winslow High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is his first name?

Mr. Cyr

Andrew.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have an address for him?

Mr. Cyr

Well you can send it here to 4 Beacon, I am sure he will get it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well let's say it is 4 or 5 years down the road.

Mr. Cyr

It's Twin Road, but I think it is.....

Mr. Misenhimer

That's fine; do you have a phone number for him?

Mr. Cyr

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is that?

Mr. Cyr

207-872-9076

Mr. Misenhimer

And he lives in Winslow also?

Mr. Cyr

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

What is your birthdate?

Mr. Cyr

3-6-1925

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Cyr

I was born in Maria, Quebec.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Cyr

Yes, but they were younger than me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Ok, they weren't in WWII?

Mr. Cyr

No, they didn't go into the service. I'm the only one that went in.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, you grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Cyr

Well, we worked hard. My father was a surveyor and in the winter time he was gone on the big lakes out in Quebec and I was 8 years old and I was taking care of the barn, the cows, the horses, the sheep and still find time to play hockey and go to school.

Mr. Misenhimer

You lived on a farm?

Mr. Cyr

Yes, a 100 acre farm.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a garden?

Mr. Cyr

Oh,yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were able to get along ok during the depression?

Mr. Cyr

Well, we had plenty to eat but we had no money.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Cyr

I graduated from high school in Waterville High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

In Waterville, ME?

Mr. Cyr

Yep, yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you move from Canada to Maine? Oh, what year did you graduate from high school?

Mr. Cyr

In my late 70's; a program for veterans.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, you didn't graduate before you went to the service then?

Mr. Cyr

Nope. 2003 I graduated.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you move from Canada to Maine? When did your family move down here?

Mr. Cyr

It was just me; it was December 1945 at the end of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were living in Canada during the war then?

Mr. Cyr

Oh yeah. I lived in Canada; I lived on 2 U.S. boats and 1 British boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

I mean as far as land, you were living in there during the land part?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, I guess if you want to call it that. I was just South Pacific so.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Cyr

I went into the service in November 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were 16 at the time?

Mr. Cyr

I was 16 and ½.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did somebody have to sign for you to join up?

Mr. Cyr

Nope, I went to Quebec City to study to be a welder and that welding school didn't pan out. It was more or less a scam, they were taking your money and one or two guys got to

weld everyday and the rest of them stood there and look at them and so I said "Well, the heck with this stuff." So, in Quebec City I walked down the street and there was the Army Recruiting and the Navy Recruiting office. I went to the Navy and they said "When you are 17 come back." I went across the road and I went to the Army guys and I was a big kid, I weighed 184 then and I guess in 1941 they needed bodies so they said "come on in." So, I went to 158 days of basic training in Chicoutimi, Quebec and the orders came for us to go overseas and then they discovered my age. They couldn't send me overseas because I was too young, so they discharged me. So, I still got my Canadian discharge here from the Army.

So, I went back to the Navy department in Quebec and said "I'm all trained now, do you guys want me?" They agreed to give me a couple weeks of seamanship training and they shipped me to Halifax, Nova Scotia and there I joined my first Canadian ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

What date did you go into the Navy?

Mr. Cyr

Well it was around March of 1942. There I was on a Canadian corvette convoy, duty and we went overseas with the convoy and landed in Scotland and this British officer came onboard and said "Anybody want to volunteer for commando training?" and I said, being young and foolish I said "ok." So I got 14 more weeks of training and then I got assigned to the *USS Herring SS-233*. There was 6 U.S. submarines in Scotland, the *USS Herring*, the *USS Shad*, the *USS Blackfish*, the *USS Guinerd* and 2 R-boats. And every submarine

before they went on patrol they had 6 commandos onboard and a British officer. So that is how I got on the submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about that Commando training, what was that like?

Mr. Cyr

Oh, it was rough. Commando training in WWII is what the Seals do today. They took the commando training and they improved it, and of course they got better equipment and better diving stuff then what we had. But, you could say that we were early Seals of the war.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do during that training?

Mr. Cyr

We did everything from hand to hand combat, handling of different arms that they had in those days and the last week you went through what they call the baptism wall of fire and there were about 5% loss of our own troop without a question. And we crossed this river and you crossed this river swimming and above they had dropped some carcasses of old animals there so if you swallowed some of that water it wasn't very good for you. Then they had a fixed machine line of machine guns firing 18 inches above the water so you had that leeway between sticking your head up to highI got on the other side and I had a bullet across my pack on my back. I kept my head low.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was a lot of physical training, right?

Mr. Cyr

Oh yes, yes. A lot of marching, you would get up at 3 o'clock in the morning and run 5-6 miles with your full gear and then come back and have a breakfast which included beans, and more beans and then you would train; the average day of training was about 18-19 hours. You didn't get much sleep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take this at? There in England?

Mr. Cyr

In Scotland.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long was that training?

Mr. Cyr

14 weeks. I was already trained from the Canadian Army and they gave us 14 more weeks of training. So I went from 184 to a 158, so you can tell by that that the training was rugged.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of weapons did you train with?

Mr. Cyr

Anything that the British had; rifles, demolition stuff and then you had to become a good swimmer.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you said hand to hand?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, we took judo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then when you went there, you went to the *USS Herring*?

Mr. Cyr

Yes, I was assigned to the *USS Herring SS-233*.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do on that?

Mr. Cyr

Well, I speak French so the first patrol that we went on was off the coast of North Africa and we were suppose to be radio beacon for the Army people onshore. Well, we hit about 2 ½ to 5 foot seas for 2 weeks. Well a submarine on the surface, the submarine dived through the wave and the poor guy that was lookout; we were tied in the lookout station so the water wouldn't wash us away. But my job was to translate the French message that came aboard besides being a lookout.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any submarine training at that point?

Mr. Cyr

No, no. I was use to the sea, my father was a fisherman. I never was seasick, thank God. I've seen a lot of people seasick.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what did you do?

Mr. Cyr

Well, that was part of the first patrol and on the way back in the Bay of Biscayne it was very foggy and one morning before they saw us, there was another submarine on the surface, a German submarine. We got them before they saw us.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you torpedo them? Or how did you get them?

Mr. Cyr

No, we shot them with a 5" deck gun. Then we came back to Scotland and that was the end of that first patrol; it took about, well 2 ½ months. The second patrol we went back to the Bay of Biscayne and we got a French sloop that was under the Vichy government. We were escorting convoys. But all in all, I got 4 patrols out of England in either the North Sea and I remember one night, Joe Hund was a gunnery officer aboard and Joe is still living, I talk to him quite often, well he had the con that night and this German Destroyer was after us and we were down to 170 feet and Joe says "we'll go down deeper and they won't know where we are." And he was right. The cold water of the North Atlantic Ocean, the sonar doesn't work out there. Yeah, Joe is 90 years old.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, ok. So then what happened?

Mr. Cyr

Well, in early 1943 the US called back the 6 submarines back to the US, the 6 subs that were in Scotland. So, not being a regular crewman off the *Herring*, I was assigned to a British submarine, the *HMS Seraph*.

Mr. Misenhimer

And that would have been about what date?

Mr. Cyr

That was early March 1943. We had a mission, a commando mission to go; we went up in Norway in one of the Fjords above Bergen, the Alta Fjord, and in there was a German pocket battleship hiding.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the name of it again?

Mr. Cyr

The *Prinz Eugene*. So 6 of us left the boat early in the morning after they put molasses inside of our suit and the idea of the molasses is to keep you warm in the cold water. First they put, like a cotton suit and then they cover you in molasses all over your body and then you put your diving suit over that. So we headed for the Alta Fjord.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on a boat at this point?

Mr. Cyr

We got off the submarine, we are in the little rubber raft. It's about 4:30 in the morning, its pitch dark and we got to the Alta Fjord and we found the boat and our orders were to damage the screws and the rudder. So we put charges on the screws and the rudder and we moved out of there and we were about 400 yards when the charges went off and we got back to the British submarine and all there was, was a yellow, like a little yellow buoy floating, so you had to dive and go knock on the hull and give the signal that we were the right guys that want to come back onboard. Then the submarine surfaced and

we went in.

We made the mistake of saying what we saw. That German, the Prinz Eugene was a light fast cruiser, instead of one regular screw you had 3 screws, one regular one and about 4 feet above on port and starboard side they had 2 smaller screws. Well, we didn't touch those. So we come back to the boat and I guess we had a like we called, what we call a British spy onboard; every submarine had one, I know because I served on two more submarines. So we told them that there were 2 screws that we didn't touch. So the word came back from England, probably somebody sitting in an office having a drink of scotch and smoking a cigar "tell those boys to go back and finish the job!"

Well, two nights later we went back, we knew it was going to be rough, we get there and the Germans spotted us in the water and they came at us to make us surface. So, I don't know how many there were but there were a lot more then the 6 of us. One guy got a knife in the eye; one guy they cut his throat; I got a knife in the left hand, I still got a big scar there. But three of us alive so they brought us aboard this German cruiser and the Gestapo officer wanted to know where that submarine came from and all they got from was name, rank and serial number. Well, we took beatings and that evening they put us onshore in an, like an old shed and you could see through the cracks and they had our feet tied together but they left our hands free and they teach you in survival school that the fluid of the eyes of any small animal will sustain you. Well you know what lemmings are?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes sir.

Mr. Cyr

Well that place was crawling with lemmings, they were all over us. So we'd catch them with our hands free and we chew the heads and throw the rest in the corner. Well we were there for 4 days before they came back to look at us. We didn't freeze to death; I don't know why we didn't, because it was cold. When they spotted us and saw that we were still living, they brought us back on that German battleship and they had a place the regular size of a kitchen there, they had a table set with all kinds of fruit and food, you know anything that you wanted, and booze and in back of the table there were girls that had their nipples showing and they said "tell us where your submarine came from and this is all yours." Well we knew better because we would have got shot if we told them, so we didn't get fed, no drinks, no girls.

They put us on a train from Bergen to Oslo and that is about a 9 ½ hour ride, you go through tunnels, on the mountain and it wasn't a first class train. We got in Oslo and the Gestapo met us again and the same thing happened. They wanted to know where the submarine came from and we told them name, rank and serial number and they gave us a heck of a beating and then they put German Army uniform on us which was against the Geneva Convention. Then they lead the three of us we went on some big fishing boat and we were down in the pump room tied to a stanchion and we get bread and water for three weeks. I don't know where the heck we went and at the end of three weeks we pulled into Belgium; Antwerp, Belgium.

There they put the three of us on the train and we figured that this is it we are going to prison camp. So we had a plan, one of the survivors used to be a stunt man in the circus before the war, his name was Lanny Ross and the other guy was Frank Chemko. So Lanny could pass out and you couldn't get a pulse, his eyes would roll back and he could get a little bit of blood come out, you would swear he was dying but it was part of his act, there was nothing wrong with him. So on that train there were 4 Germans watching us, and one of the young Germans spoke perfect English and I said "where did you learn your English?" and he said "I graduated from Toledo, OH high school."

See what happened when the German family, when the war started in 1939, they moved back to Germany and this kid was one of the guards watching us. So this was more of a plus for us, having somebody who could speak English, I didn't speak very good German. So we get those Germans to take the handcuffs off of us, I said "come on, there are 4 of you and three of us." And they more or less agreed and they took the handcuffs of us and that is when Lanny passed out. Well, I picked up Lanny and threw him on my shoulder and I said to the kid that spoke English "Lets take him; there must be some water here. Come on." And he said "Yea, in the corner." You could come out where we were and on the end of the car there was like a little washroom there and it had water in there, so, they went in, the two of us and two Germans and when they shut the door I let Lanny go and the element of surprise I guess we put those two guys to sleep. So then we broke the window, we were going to get rid of them through the window but there were bars on the window. So when they heard the window break, Chemko and the other 2

guards come running in. Well then there were 3 of us against two of them. So they got the same treatment and we put them to sleep.

The train was slowing down to stop in Lille, France, station, which is about 10 miles from the Belgium border and before the train stopped we jumped and we no sooner hit the ground that the French underground got us. And there we are with German uniforms and I kept telling them in French and English, I said "were not Germans, were prisoners." Well, they didn't quite believe us; they took us down in some cellar there, stripped our clothes off and there was one girl in charge and she was one tough cookie. She kept looking at my left arm and I got a tattoo there that says "RCNVR", the letters are underneath the tattoo which stand for "Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve" So not too many Germans have tattoo's like that one and speak in French and....anyway we give them the work Beaver, Beaver was one of our submarine tenders, which to them beaver was only an animal so they didn't know. So I guess they radioed to probably England, somewhere and the word came back if they know Beaver, they were ok.

Then the Germans from the train that we had jumped off of, they were looking for us. So these French underground put us in a convent, the Grey Nun in Lille, France and we got in there and we get dressed up like the rest of the nuns and they even, they had given me a name 'Mother Emily'. They kept me working in the kitchen because I had one hand all bandaged up. We were in there for 4 days until they made arrangements for us to move out. The 4th evening at about 9 o'clock at night they came and took the nuns uniform back and they gave me a pair of wool pants cut off at the knee and a big shirt, no shoes,

and the other 2 guys the same thing and we marched from Lille, France to the coast which is about 22 miles. So we marched at night and sometime in the early morning but they kept us hidden during the day, either in a farm house or wherever they could place us away from the Germans. Finally this second day we made the ocean and there was an old French captain, fishing boat, he had a boat and it was full of fish and our orders were to go down up to our neck in the fish and we had a piece of hose in case we ducked under the fish to breathe. But I tell you, fish is a little bit cold! And about 6 hours later we rendezvous with the same submarine that left us in Norway. The HMS Seraph and they took us back to London.

There we went in the hospital because the German where they hit me in the head with a rifle butt, it didn't look too good and my hand was all infected. So we were in the hospital there for about 5 weeks. They grafted skin off my butt to fix my hand and I have fun with that. I have girls feel the V, it is a different skin then the rest of my hand and I say "you know what you just felt?" So I tell them "You felt my butt!"

But anyway when we became fit again, the war was still going on in the South Pacific so they asked me if I wanted to go back on a submarine and I said "yes." They put us on a troop transport from England and about 3 ½ weeks later we landed in Perth, Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when would that have been?

Mr. Cyr

That was in about November 1944. And there I was assigned to the *USS Croaker SS-*

246. I replaced a guy by the name of Surette, well he hurt his back. So being a qualified submariner by then, I was; by the way I qualified on the *Herring*. So we went up and I put two more war patrols on the *Croaker* and the war ended and we came back to San Francisco and still being a Canadian they took me off the boat and put me on the train to Washington, and Washington to Halifax. And there I got discharged by the Canadian Navy and went home.

And there was no work at home for my trade, I became an electrician. So I decided to come in the state of Maine to look for work. I went maybe before New Years, I went down to the plant which was then Hollingsworth and Whitney and applied for a job and they wanted to keep me right then and I said "No, no. I want New Years off. I spent 4 years in the war, I want New Years off." They agreed and just come back Monday.

So, then in 1954 I was in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and I ran into a couple of submarine guys that I knew and they said "why don't you come back in?" Well, they talked to me and I went back into the selective reserve where you are assigned to a boat or ship or whatever and I put 28 more years in the reserves. And at age 44 they took me off submarine and put me on mine sweeper and I put 7 years on that mine sweeper and then I was assigned to an ammunition ship, *USS Suribachi AE-26* and the Suribachi went on a Med cruise and they assigned me to another ammunition ship and there I finished my career.

Mr. Misenhimer

So what date did you retire then?

Mr. Cyr

I retired at age 60.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would have been in 1985.

Mr. Cyr

Correct, in March 1985.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now let me go back and ask you some questions. When you left England to go to South Pacific, what kind of ship did you go on?

Mr. Cyr

We were on a troop ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you in a convoy?

Mr. Cyr

Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just by yourself.

Mr. Cyr

Yep, by ourselves.

Mr. Misenhimer

And how was that trip down there?

Mr. Cyr

Oh it was, well, we hit about 28 foot seas one night and we had a bunch of Marines and

Army guys onboard and we lost a generator and the chief knew I was an electrician and he said "Can you give us a hand?" and I said "Sure." So we had to go through one of the compartments where the guys were staying and after this night at seas, those guys were seasick and I came very close to being sick just going through that compartment. But we get the generator replaced and they kept me working most of the cruise until we got to Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were still in the Canadian Navy at this point?

Mr. Cyr

Well, yeah, I was being paid by the Canadian Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

What rank did you have at that point?

Mr. Cyr

I was Second Class Electrician and when I retired from the 28 years in the reserves, I retired as E8, Senior Chief Electrician.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got down to Perth, what happened down there?

Mr. Cyr

When we got into Perth that is where the *USS Croaker* was, that is where I replaced one of the crewman that had hurt his back. They were going on patrol and they needed a qualified submariner and they found me.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what happened?

Mr. Cyr

The first patrol we got the Japanese light cruiser Nagara.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you sink anymore ships on that first patrol that you were on?

Mr. Cyr

Not that patrol. We sank two more on the last patrol, one of them was a Sampan and the other one was a small oilier.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about the sinking of the cruiser, what did you do to sink the cruiser? How did you go about that?

Mr. Cyr

Well, they got into position and we were about 1200 yards away when they fired the first four torpedoes and three of them hit. You could hear them. And by the way, I got a picture of that Japanese cruiser going down. We had a person aboard that was working on the periscope and he took the picture of the Japanese cruiser going down through the periscope. And every person in the crew got a picture.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many destroyers were with that cruiser?

Mr. Cyr

Well, I don't know how many there were but there were 3 that came after us.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did they keep depth charging you?

Mr. Cyr

Well it was 7 hours on the bottom. After 7 hours they gave up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on the bottom?

Mr. Cyr

Yep, 426 feet.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it liked to be depth charged?

Mr. Cyr

Oh, it is not a good feeling, if you ever knew any prayers in your life, they come back to you. We had 2 of the crew that we had to put something in their mouth so that they wouldn't bite their tongues and tie them up because the two of them really went.....

Mr. Misenhimer

That would be a very terrifying experience.

Mr. Cyr

You know what, we had a, on the *Croaker*, we had a meeting after the war. The *Croaker* is now in Buffalo, NY and in 1994 we had a reunion. Out of 86 crewmen on board, there were 61 that made the reunion and Captain Lee, we got very friendly with him and he asked us "Do you remember that depth charge that we took?" He said "You guys were probably were scared but I was scared too."

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you went on the next patrol with him also, right?

Mr. Cyr

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do there?

Mr. Cyr

The last patrol? I told you, we got the Sampan. By the way, we got some Japanese prisoners up there. That Sampan, you know it was suppose to be fishing boats but they were armed, they had radio onboard and they could give your position. So, we took four Japanese prisoners and when we were bringing them onboard one of them, he had a knife under his arm, he pulled a knife and stuck in Charlie Morales arm and Charlie Morales is a big engineman. He picked that guy up and I think the picture of his body is still on the sail of the boat. I thought he was going to put him through the sail and the captain said "Charlie, no." But we transferred the prisoners to another sub and finished our patrol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did he kill that one that stabbed him?

Mr. Cyr

No he didn't kill him but I am sure he was sore for awhile.

Mr. Misenhimer

You sank that Sampan with your deck gun, right?

Mr. Cyr

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

But the fifth patrol, the first one that you were on, you only sunk the one ship is that

right?

Mr. Cyr

On the fifth all we did was that big Japanese cruiser.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that? What part of the ocean?

Mr. Cyr

That was in the Sea of Japan, don't ask me the position. I probably could tell you if I look on the map.

Mr. Misenhimer

No, that is alright. It was in the Sea of Japan that is my point, in that area. What else happened on that sixth patrol?

Mr. Cyr

Well, on that sixth patrol was only that Sampan and that light oilier and not much else. You know at the end of the war, Japan didn't have too much left.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you leave to go on that 6th patrol?

Mr. Cyr

Oh we left in, well, probably February of 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were in Fremantle, Australia, right?

Mr. Cyr

No we were in Adelaide, the 6th patrol.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, ok. You came back to Adelaide?

Mr. Cyr

No, we left Adelaide and went on the patrol and came back to Hawaii after the patrol was over and from Hawaii back to the States.

Mr. Misenhimer

On your 5th patrol, you left from Fremantle, Australia, right?

Mr. Cyr

Correct.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you came back to Adelaide on that patrol, is that correct?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, to come back to refuel.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like in Fremantle? Was it pretty good there?

Mr. Cyr

Well, I wasn't there very long. I was at Fremantle and the next day I was on the submarine and that early morning the submarine went out.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were only about one day then?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long were you in Adeliade?

Mr. Cyr

Oh, we had about 4 days and that place was nice.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you been back to Australia after the war?

Mr. Cyr

No, I would like to go but my age is against me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else do you remember from your two patrols?

Mr. Cyr

Well, we had 86 guys onboard and after the depth charge attack there were 86 guys that were glad to see the submarine come back to the surface.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was that the only time you were depth charged?

Mr. Cyr

No, I got depth charged when I was in the North Atlantic.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened there?

Mr. Cyr

Well, the patrol in the Sea of Biscayne, the second patrol some German ship spotted us but we got away from the depth charge. In the cold water you can maneuver that away

from the radar. In the South Pacific no matter where you go the water is about 100 degrees.

Mr. Misenhimer

How would you compare the British submarine to the American submarine?

Mr. Cyr

Ah, there is no comparison; the British submarine is a 5 compartment boat, the US Submarine is an 8 compartment boat and when you are a little French-Canadian onboard a British submarine, you don't feel at home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you feel at home on the American submarine?

Mr. Cyr

Yes I did.

Mr. Misenhimer

The British submarine is smaller than the American submarine, is that right?

Mr. Cyr

Yes, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is it more cramped inside?

Mr. Cyr

Well, some compartments aren't. Their compartments are different than the US boats. A submarine, no matter where you go it's cramped.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the captain you had on the *Seraph*?

Mr. Cyr

The captain was, his name was Jewitt, he was a nice guy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Why did you not feel at home on that boat?

Mr. Cyr

Because here we are 6 commandos and here we are assigned to this boat, this crew, and we don't know anybody on the crew, we just came aboard and we went on this mission.

So really we didn't have a chance to know the crew to well. It was about 2 ½ days of mingling to Norway and while we were there we were preparing to go over the side.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were only on that submarine for a short time then?

Mr. Cyr

That's correct. I was on there for about three days?

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things that happened to you during WWII?

Mr. Cyr

Well when I was on the Canadian Corvette we got washed overboard, 6 of us one night in heavy seas. We were trying to put a depth charge rack on the stern of the ship. They had the depth charge in the racks and in the heavy seas these charges got loose and we were trying, the 6 of us, to get them back in and this wave came over and washed 6 of us over the side.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you all picked up?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, by the time they picked us up we were pretty near frozen. They put a net over the side and I couldn't use my hand to grab the net. And when I got onboard after they got me out, they had a pretty sharp doctor onboard and he told me "You'll probably be sterile from this cold water." So I told my wife when we got married "Good chance I'm sterile." Well we had, about 10 years later, we have 5 kids. (laughing)

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things that happened?

Mr. Cyr

Well I remember the first rum ration I got from this Canadian ship. You know when you are 16 years old and they ask you when you get onboard "are you going to take the rum ration or the Grog money?" Grog money was 10 cents a day if you didn't take the rum. So I said "well, I'll take the rum." Well that first swallow of rum you are suppose to drink it in front of an officer. I made some face but I got use to it. Think what they had in the real stormy cold weather they used to make it, they called that kye. They take a, like a plate of chocolate and they make a powder with that chocolate and they do that in a 2 galloon pail and then they put the steam to it and the syrup from the chocolate and they put a little bit of cream in it. It's a thick drink but it keeps you warm. A drink of kye, you could be out on deck and feel warm for about 2 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you say that you escorted convoys on that Corvette?

Mr. Cyr

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take them to?

Mr. Cyr

Took them to Halifax to Scotland.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many convoys did you make on that ship?

Mr. Cyr

That is the only one crossing that I made. When I got to England I volunteered for commando training.

Mr. Misenhimer

What are some other things that happened?

Mr. Cyr

Oh, I don't know my memory is; you know when you get 85 years old and you think of things that happened 60 some years back its.....well good luck to you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to be an American citizen?

Mr. Cyr

Yes sir.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you do that?

Mr. Cyr

In 1950; I was the only one in that class with 24 women. I studied for; the judge looked

at me and said "Cyr, you going to be a brave man to come here with all these women."

That was all that he said to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did being in the US Navy, did that help you in getting your citizenship?

Mr. Cyr

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now April 12th of 1945, President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Cyr

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What reaction did people have to it?

Mr. Cyr

Well, uh, I remember Captain Lee coming over the PA system and announcing that the President had died and there was a quiet period onboard.

Mr. Misenhimer

About where would you have been then?

Mr. Cyr

We were out in patrol in somewhere in South Pacific, I don't know exactly where.

Mr. Misenhimer

Under 6th patrol?

Mr. Cyr

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you come back to the states, after that 6th patrol you came back to where?

Mr. Cyr

Came back to Hawaii, to Pearl and we were in Pearl for about three days and we got orders to sail to the US and our captain, he was a full captain. He made rear admiral after I left the boat but his name was Jack Lee and he was a senior officer of the convoy and here we are a little submarine coming in to San Francisco and behind us are big cruisers and destroyers. (laughing) It was kind of a celebration when we got to San Francisco.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you arrive in San Francisco?

Mr. Cyr

We arrived in San Francisco about December 3, I think.

Mr. Misenhimer

When?

Mr. Cyr

About the 3rd of December.

Mr. Misenhimer

Oh, that late? In 1945?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now the war got over in August, what did you do from August to December?

Mr. Cyr

Well when the war got over in August we were still way over in the Sea of Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer

You said you left on your 6th patrol in February?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many patrols did the *Croaker* make?

Mr. Cyr

Six; I got 4 on the *Herring* and 2 on the *Croaker* and 3 days on that British.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were on the *Herring* in the Atlantic, what all happened there?

Mr. Cyr

Well, besides sinking that German U-boat and that French sloop, we didn't sink any other ship but we were on convoy escort.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you did four patrols on the *Herring*?

Mr. Cyr

Yep, we were still at sea. They never kept us long; about the longest we got in any port was about 7 days all the time I was on submarines.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now on that 6th patrol, you left from Adelaide and came back to where? Back to Pearl?

Mr. Cyr

Yep.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you stayed in Pearl for how long?

Mr. Cyr

Oh, about 4 days.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, on May the 8th of 1945, Germany surrendered, do you all hear about that?

Mr. Cyr

Yes, well we were in the South Pacific but we heard that Germany had surrendered, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Any kind of celebration?

Mr. Cyr

Yea, there was a little bit of a celebration.

Mr. Misenhimer

On August the 6th when they dropped the first Atomic Bomb, did you hear about that?

Mr. Cyr

No, not on August the 6th; we heard about it about a week later.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think when you heard it?

Mr. Cyr

Well, it was good news.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then August 15th when Japan did surrender, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Cyr

Oh yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you have that at?

Mr. Cyr

Right on the ship, the captain called what they call "splice the main brace." They took the rum and divide it amongst the crew. You get a couple good drinks.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then on September 2nd when they had the big ceremony of surrender on the Missouri in Tokyo Bay, where were you then?

Mr. Cyr

That's a good question. I got to look back in my notes and.....

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the morale on the *Croaker*?

Mr. Cyr

Very good, very good. We had a, all submarines had a good crew on the *Herring*. By the way, the *Herring* went down after I left it and when they got back to the US there were 9 people that got off to either go to new construction or go to school. And Captain Johnson was one of the person that got off, Charlie White was a chief engineman and at the first submarine convention, WWII submarine veterans in Atlantic City, during the convention at one of the meetings they asked if any survivors of any submarines were

present and I got up and across the room I recognized Charlie White and he told me that Captain Johnson was there. So as far as I knew they had gone down with the boat and as far as they knew I was gone when I went on that patrol in Norway. So we had quite a reunion.

Mr. Misenhimer

So the *Herring* was lost where?

Mr. Cyr

The *Herring* was lost in the Sea of Japan June 1, 1944, with all hands onboard. What happened is that they went into this little harbor; Zabinski was the Exec when I was aboard when they changed the crew when they came back to the states. Zabinski was made commanding officer and they went into this little harbor and sank three ships and on the way out, they were the only submarine that was sunk by shore batteries.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever under friendly fire?

Mr. Cyr

Well, one night I was a look out and I saw this plane and I immediately passed the word and we dove and they dropped some charges but the word came back a couple days later that that plane was a US plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home from WWII with any souvenirs?

Mr. Cyr

I had souvenirs but they took them all away from me. I had pictures, I had a Japanese long crooked knife, I forget what they call them?

Mr. Misenhimer

A saber.

Mr. Cyr

A saber, and in Halifax they took my pictures, they took my Japanese souvenir.

Mr. Misenhimer

That was after you got out then?

Mr. Cyr

Yep, that was when I got discharged.

Mr. Misenhimer

In the Pacific, were you in any typhoons down there?

Mr. Cyr

Well I don't know if you call them typhoons but we hit some rough seas but luckily we weren't on any special missions so you go down a 150 feet and its not so severe. It still bounces you around.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any USO shows?

Mr. Cyr

Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Cyr

I had an experience with the Red Cross in Scotland.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was that?

Mr. Cyr

Uh, they gave me a couple donuts and a cup of coffee.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they charge you for it?

Mr. Cyr

Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer

On December 7th of 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Cyr

We were in Scotland, and yea we heard about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Cyr

Oh yes, we did.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Cyr

Shoot the bitch.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you crossed the equator, did you have any kind of ceremony or anything?

Mr. Cyr

Yeah, I happened to be the youngest guy in the crew so they took it easy on me. The youngest guy on the crew I was promoted to assist the Exec of the boat. So the paddle, I saw the paddle but I didn't get it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get your certificate making you a shellback?

Mr. Cyr

Yea, I got the shellback and I got a certificate from Scotland, I got a decoration from the old Queen of England.

Mr. Misenhimer

What other ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Cyr

Well the highest decoration I got was the Meritorious Service Medal and the Hand to Hand Combat in the Water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get the Submarine Combat Ribbon?

Mr. Cyr

Yes, oh yea, I got 6 war patrols on my record.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider to be your most frightening time?

Mr. Cyr

Depth charges.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you got out did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Cyr

Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Cyr

Not really.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now you stayed in and made a career, you went back in 1954 and made a career out of it?

Mr. Cyr

Yea, in the reserves.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you involved in the Korean War at all?

Mr. Cyr

Yea, I got called back in the Korean War and they sent me to New London as an instructor.

Mr. Misenhimer

And what about the Vietnam War?

Mr. Cyr

Nope.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else that you recall from your time in WWII?

Mr. Cyr

Well one time we surfaced after another depth charge attack and I was right behind the captain when he opened the hatch and he said "Oh my God?" You know what a cigarette deck was on a submarine?

Mr. Misenhimer

No, tell me.

Mr. Cyr

It's a little deck off the bridge there where people went to smoke, that is why they called it a cigarette deck, it's about 2 feet by 2 feet. After our depth charge attack and we surfaced and the Captain opened the hatch, there was a depth charge stuck right there. So we put it in a rubber raft and captain sunk the boat until the raft floated and then we shot it and it was live. If that thing had gone off I wouldn't be here today.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Cyr

Well, we had one guy that got, we were diving the boat and he didn't quite get the word and the only thing, the periscope he hung unto the cable on it, on the after battery. He hung onto that cable until we got the boat back up and got him.

Mr. Misenhimer

What boat was that on?

Mr. Cyr

On the *Herring*.

Mr. Misenhimer

Anything else?

Mr. Cyr

His name was Moldy Higgins, Francis Higgins, but they called him Moldy because inside the submarine everyone had a nickname. My name was Moose because in Newfoundland one night we got into the Newfy Screech and the next morning I had a big head so I stuck my head in a bucket of ice water and pulled my head out and went "pbbbbbbtttt" and they called me the moose.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else?

Mr. Cyr

Oh, after I hang up I will think of a lot of things but right now I can't think of anything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, alright. Thank you again for your time today and for your service to our country.

Mr. Cyr

Alright thank you.

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