

Haynes Harkey Oral History Interview

JAMES LINDLEY: Good afternoon. This is Dr. James Lindley. This is the 25th of September 2010. This interview is taking place at the Nimitz Hotel Museum, the National Museum of the Pacific War. The purpose of the National Museum of the Pacific War Oral History Project is to collect, preserve and interpret the stories of World War II veterans, home front experiences, the life of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and the old Nimitz Hotel, by means of audio and video recordings. The audio and video recordings of such interviews become part of the Center for Pacific War Studies, the Archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, and the Texas Historical Commission. These recordings will be made available for historical and other academic research by scholars and members of the families of those interviewed. At this time, Mr. Harkey, I want to thank you for your service to our country. I want to thank you for taking your time today to come to the museum and to give us your oral history of your experience as a young Officer aboard BB-58, the battleship *Indiana*. Begin by telling us your full name, where you were born, and a little bit about yourself, and leading up to the time that you became an active member of the crew of the *Indiana*, any stories that

you would like to tell us. Thank you again for coming today.

HAYNES HARKEY: Well, thank you for inviting me. My name is Haynes L. Harkey, Jr. I was born on October 9, 1920, in Lake Providence, Louisiana, which is a little community in the northeast corner of the state. I grew up there and went to high school there, and then I went to Louisiana Tech in Ruston after I graduated from high school. I think most people remember where they were when they learned about the attack on Pearl Harbor, and I thought I'd start with that because that's where my mind begins to recall, and that's in connection with the war. I was in law school at Tulane University in New Orleans, having graduated from Louisiana Tech. It's Louisiana Tech University now. I was in my first semester of law school. My mother and a friend from home were down to visit with me, and we were sightseeing in New Orleans, more for them than for me. We stopped at a drugstore on Carrollton Avenue in New Orleans. I went into the drugstore to get something, and while I was in there, I got the word about the attack on Pearl Harbor. I hastened out to tell my mother, and her friend, and the others in the car what had happened. Our attention then turned to the war and what was likely to happen as a result of this attack on Pearl Harbor. The details were not known

at that time, and so all I knew was that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, and that a considerable amount of damage had been done to our fleet. From there, I went on back to school and during the spring break of that year, several of us who were students, went down to the Naval Headquarters there in New Orleans. And by the way, New Orleans is a big Navy town, so that was probably the reason I chose to look into what the Navy had to offer for men like me. The fellow who interviewed me there and told me about what was available, he was a super salesman. I told him that I was interested in of the 90 day, one of the schools that the term was at that time and could he tell me something about it. And his reply was, "Well, we'll throw up an arm over," and he convinced me that they weren't going to make any more Officers for the Navy. He said, "We expect to get some additional slots from Atlanta, and they may come in later this afternoon. I suggest that you go on and go through this procedure, and we will give you your examination, the physical examination and so on." That's what I did. As the day went on, there was more and more discussion of what might be available to me. By the time at the end of the day came, I was ready to join up, and I raised my hand and I was sworn into the Navy. I didn't go down to New Orleans and to the City for that purpose, but

that's where it all began. I thought that I would receive orders immediately to go to V7 School which was Midshipman School, at the Notre Dame. After I was sworn in, there was dead silence and I never got any notice from the Navy or any acknowledgement that I had been sworn into the Navy. I decided to go on back to law school for a second semester. That semester went by and still no word from the Navy. I decided there are a few of us still left here and I'll just go on and complete my third semester which I did. Toward the end of the summer, I got orders to go to Notre Dame. Of course, by then I was certainly ready to go. The feeling at that time was we sure don't want the war to be over before we got there. I went to Notre Dame in the fall of 1942. Of course, Notre Dame was a well-known university to all of us, and it was in the football season and there was, there were a lot of football games for us to see. We were full time students in the Navy program, leading up to what I expected to be a commission as an ensign in the United States Navy. That went along until the following year. Then, in the spring of 1943, I received my commission as an ensign. I was an ensign, I mean, well, maybe I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Anyway, I was an ensign in the United States Navy and never had seen a body of water bigger than Lake Pontchartrain. There I was

with three months plus education to teach me how to be an Officer in the United States Navy. I have often said they won a war in spite of me. After going through the midshipman's school program, I moved on to the last month and the orders to various stations began to come in. Every day a great number of us would get our next order to our next station. I had put in for a small ship Navy, a PT boat, a destroyer if I can't get a PT boat, or one of the smaller ships. That was my choice. I was in the last group to get our orders to our next station and, lo and behold, they sent me to a battleship, and that was, I learned later that I was very fortunate, I sure was fortunate not to get a PT boat because those are dangerous. I went home for a few days of vacation and then went and caught the train in New Orleans out to West Coast and San Francisco. We were there just a few days. We went aboard a transport ship and went down to San Diego and picked up a huge number of sailors who had joined the Navy. There were, say, 8 to 10 of us who were ensigns there waiting to be sent. We went from San Diego to [Auckland?], New Zealand, which was a beautiful spot. I would have loved to just stayed right there but, of course, couldn't.

JL: How long did it take you to sail from the States?

HH: Oh, from San Diego? It was, I don't know. It was a number of days. This ship was not Speedy Gonzalez by any means.

JL: What did you do when you crossed the International Date Line?

HH: I didn't do anything on that trip. Later on, when I got on the battleship, I crossed the equator and they had special treatment for all of us who had never crossed the equator before. That was fun and everybody wants to, who's in the Navy, wants to cross the equator sometime and so I did.

JL: I'm sorry I interrupted.

HH: I'm getting kind of ahead of myself a little bit. I was in Auckland for 8 to 10 days and then I went up, got on a transport ship. Incidentally, in those days, they didn't tell you anything you didn't just have to know going to the next station. All I knew was that I was supposed to catch this transport ship. It turned out I went to Nouméa, New Caledonia, and there was where I caught my ship. I still don't know how they knew that I was there on the dock, but just they put me out on the dock with my duffle bag. The day went on and I kept wondering, well, how do I tell that I'm here. Well, now, I can't swim out there. But lo and behold, around mid-afternoon along came this whaleboat and picked me up to take me out to my ship. I never had seen a battleship. As we went out to pass the small first, and

they kept getting bigger. Each time I would see a bigger ship, I would be sure that was *Indiana*. Not so. After I finally got to the *Indiana*, it was huge. That was my first experience to be aboard the ship that I was supposed to be on. It was a big ship. It held about fifteen hundred people aboard. This was where the *Indiana* was stationed at that time. I reported aboard and saluted everything that I could salute and went on. Gradually I got to know people. I went to the usual hazing that took place for new Officers. It seemed to me that everybody there had been there before me and had been there a long time, so I felt really like the bottom of the pack. My first assignment aboard ship was to take care of, to take my crew up to the sky control which is today the topmost part of the ship. If you've seen Navy ships, there's always a place up at the top for command people to do their thing. I would take my crew up daily and they would scrub, and scrub, and scrub. One way to get into this thing was to climb up the outside, and that's the way most people did. The last step was to go up a ladder outside, well, it's the tub, I always called it, and climb over into the tub, and that's where we get things clean. The hardest place to keep clean was under that ladder where everybody's feet would kick to the gray paint on the ship. I was an ensign and I was supposed to

know what I was doing. I thought it would be a great idea to paint a blue tick strip in there under that ladder so it wouldn't get so dirty so fast. I was really proud of it. There it was, if you can imagine a totally battleship gray ship with one blue stripe up here right in the forefront of this tub. That afternoon the Captain came on his promenade, and so the story goes, he looked up and saw that blue tick strip and said, "Who the hell did that?" The word began to be passed down until it got to me and I was the one that did it. I had to go in and see him. He wanted to know why or what I was thinking about. I told him why I had done it. He said, "Well, you just shouldn't do things like that." He said, "Now, I want you to get your crew back up there this afternoon and paint it battleship gray again." Sure enough, that's what we did and I never tried that again. It also taught me that lesson that in the Navy, unless you are sure of what you are doing, you better find out before you start. The size of the ship was tremendous. I was still impressed with the way that ship looked. We moved on and got out to sea for a period. We received orders to go up and bombard an island on the north end of Japan, a little bitty island. We were told that it would be real dangerous and we would have, everybody would have to follow the rules and stay safe as possible. I



later learned that that wasn't the case at all, they just wanted us to have the experience of going on a project like this. It was good for us because we thought we were going somewhere important. Those poor folks at one of the little islands, we bombarded that thing with those 16-inch rifles and they must have thought the world was coming to an end. Then we left and went back to Nouméa. All this is part of learning and I sure had a lot of learning to do.

JL: Tell us what kind of gun you were working with.

HH: I was in the five-inch gunnery department which is a pretty good-sized gun, but it's not as big as the 16 inch on the forward and aft of the ship. A lot of what we did was ship-to-shore bombardment. It would start in before dawn and began to bombard the landing spot where the people were supposed to be hold up. It would be a certain distance on the port side, and then you turn around and do it on the starboard side, and each time move in closer. You finally get to the five inch, within range of the five-inch guns and we would take over. You just couldn't believe that anybody could still be alive over there on that beach. As we learned, and as most people now know, they were skillful at holding up and protecting themselves and still had, when they made their landings, they still had a battle to fight. I guess the most frightening experience that I had was the

collision that we had with the USS *Washington*, which is another battleship. You have to understand that we traveled in a group of ships and the battle was pretty much in the center, and then it would move on out on the outer edge, which would be the destroyers. We had fuel to fuel these destroyers. At night we would go out, and depending on what destroyers needed the fuel, we would go up and give them fuel. These fueling things would take place at night. There were no lights allowed on the ship that could be seen, the same thing on the other ships. When we traveled, we traveled in a zigzag pattern so that the submarines couldn't anticipate where we were going to be at a certain time. At evening, at best it would be difficult to get outside with a battleship and fuel a destroyer. The smart thing to do would be to just slow down and let the rest of the ships go by, and then pull up on the outside. The Captain of the *Washington* was convinced that he could figure out how to go sideways and get out to the outer perimeter. This was night and I was asleep. What had happened, but the *Washington* struck the side of our ship about midway and it swept across the fantail of the ship. The next morning, the first thing we saw was the *Washington*, and the bow had been crushed and the deck was hanging down vertically. We suffered some damage, too.

You asked me was whether I was at any risk of being hurt. When I got able to get out and look around, the bow of that ship just poked holes in the side of area where my stateroom was. My recollection is that about eight feet. It missed me, of course. The interesting thing was, what was left on the fantail of our ship out of the *Washington*, because that was all storage area on the *Washington*, we had tons of toilet paper, and a few desks and chairs, and all sorts of things. It belonged on the *Washington* and not on us. It was really an experience. We expected, as soon as daylight came, that we were going to be really bombed by all the planed and none of them showed up. We later learned that they had no planes on I think the island was Kwajalein, if I'm not mistaken. Even though we were sitting ducks, they weren't there with their equipment, their planes to shoot us up. It was a real scary proposition. We managed to get repairs to our ship, so that we could go back to Honolulu and get repaired. I think the *Washington* was beyond that kind of repair and it went probably back to the States. In any event, it was a close call for us. As far as I know, we did not lose a single sailor as a result of the collision.

JL: I think there were several.

HH: Oh, is that right?

JL: I think there were three that were dead, two that were confirmed and one was lost. There were 12 others that were injured.

HH: I couldn't remember.

JL: Do you remember this event? This was the burial at sea of those members.

HH: I was just going to say that the most impressive thing were the burials at sea. It wasn't just these people. If you can imagine, knowing that there's a dead body in those bags that are being cast over the side, that in itself was an impressive thing. They were there, once they hit that water, they were there forever or whatever. The idea that people, that we were going to leave sailors, now, I thought I was remember on other occasions when people died aboard, but it could be that I am remembering this very event. I do remember that that was certainly an impressive thing to watch the burial at sea because it's pretty permanent. Oh, let me see, I had two breaks and one of the breaks may have been right after this accident, to Honolulu. We had 30 days there. Other than that, we were at sea for long periods of time. We were sort of the floating USO for all the smaller ships and our squadron. We not only furnished them with ice cream and things like that, but we would also furnish fuel. Those 30 days in Honolulu were really a

relief. Maybe I ought to make my point here. Life aboard a ship is, if any of you read Mr. Robinson, he said that life on board of a ship in the Navy went from tedium to boredom and from boredom to monotony and then back to tedium. That's the thing that we had to fight the most was this just sameness about every day was like every other day. There were no Mondays and Tuesdays. Occasionally you would remember it's your Sunday because there would be some services on board. Otherwise, every morning the sun came up, and then there you were on this ship, and then at the end of the day the sun went down, and you stood your watches and everything. It was just tedious and it grated on your nerves constantly. I was out there for two years. Near the end of the two years, I just felt like I could jump overboard. Not really, but to do something to just, to get an end to it all. I'm sure that that was the experience of most everybody. I think the higher you got in the command, of course, the more responsibility you had, and that would consume some of your thinking time. Believe me, the merest person on a ship is an ensign. The men don't look up to you and the Officers all look down on you. Until you get a little experience and know what you're doing, it's pretty miserable. When we got back to the States after the, just before the Battle of the

Philippines, we called it a blessed event. We developed some engine trouble and so we got orders to go back to Seattle, Washington. We called that a blessed event because there we were, the first time of putting our feet back on US soil. Of course, they just gave us leave and that was wonderful. When I returned from my leave, I had orders to be transferred to a carrier that was being put into commission on the East Coast. They were -- remember it as a place in Rhode Island. The ship was being built in Norfolk, but we were putting a crew together in a little community in Rhode Island, and it escapes me right at the moment. That was a fun time. I say fun time because we weren't being shot at and we were able to get away from what we were doing frequently and so I, for one, enjoyed it. Then came the time when we took our crew down from Rhode Island to Norfolk and I guess you'd say manned the ship, and put it into, we had a shakedown cruise and went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We tested our planes. The whole ship was tested. Then we returned to Norfolk. At that time, we were expected to go back to the Pacific.

JL: What was the name of the ship?

HH: USS *Lake Champlain*. It was brand new. Incidentally, I spent all my time in the gunnery department on this battleship, and when I got to *Lake Champlain*, the executive

Officer who was in charge of things said he would apologize to me for not being able to put me in the gunnery department, but I had never been to gunnery school. The Navy, the gun was a loan as long as we won the war. We got the ship back to Norfolk and ready to go out to the Pacific again. Each side, the port and starboard, got a nice leave. I want to say 10 days. Everybody chose a place to go and I chose to go to Philadelphia. We were heading down and I had a girlfriend. We were having dinner at this nice restaurant that had a balcony. I can see that balcony now. Some radio announcer, I don't suppose it would be television at that time, he came and he was known by everybody that was from Philadelphia. He came to the rail and said, "This is so-and-so. I am here to advise you that by the grace of God, the war is over." That changed things considerably. We didn't go back to the Pacific. Our Captain was kind of a gung-ho guy and he talked them into letting us go up and down the East Coast and let people come aboard to see what an aircraft carrier was like. It was really just great fun. Then we got all of us to go to Norfolk, and they converted the ship to a transporter and put, I think it was five thousand bumps on the inner deck. The Army, or the other branches of the service would be formed up into a unit, and they would come aboard and

supposedly they would take care of feeding themselves. Our ship would do the cooking and putting it out on the tables. At that time, in the hull department, which it was logical to choose somebody from the hull department to be the Navy's opposite number to whoever was in charge of all those soldiers. That was a real experience, the first time I had any real responsibility. I represented the ship and was responsible for telling the crewmembers what to do. The only time we ever had any difficulty was the one trip to Italy. On the way back, I think it was Thanksgiving, in the Army and being KP, KP is the lowest of anything that you can be, it's not like that in the Navy. It's a plum job, but in the Army, it's a job that's not highly regarded. It was difficult to get them to man these food lines. We always had problems with that. That wasn't my responsibility; it was the Army's responsibility. This occasion was Thanksgiving, or some other holiday, and none of the soldiers showed up to do KP duty. The Captain on our ship said, he sent word down if they didn't man those food lines, he was going to throw the food off the ship. By golly, that's what he, so they didn't feed on that occasion. That was an interesting thing.

JL: They only did that once.



HH: Well, that's right. They liked to eat. Let's see if this is something new. I made a bunch of little scribbly notes. That pretty well covers my duty in the Navy. There came a time when I was separated. Well, it was in the spring of 1946. I wanted to go back to law school. By then the government was paying for you to go to school, so that's exactly what I did, went back to Tulane. I can't say that I'd like to do it over again, but it is a pleasant thing to look back on it such as we've done today, and remind you of what happened.

JL: Yes, sir. Let me ask a question. When you were coming across the equator, what did they do for you? What did you have to do?

HH: Oh, I don't know. I can't remember now. They probably painted us. I can't really remember. It was typical college hazing. I withstood us as all of us did.

JL: You became a shellback.

HH: That's right. All of those things, well, they were first times to do things and that was one of them, crossing the equator.

JL: It helped to break the tedium.

HH: That's right, it did.

JL: That was part of it. The anticipation of what was going to happen, and then all the stories you told after it happened.

HH: It took care of my one day.

JL: Going back to the collision, when that happened, what was your collision station? Do you remember?

HH: Well, my battle station was, well, as far as I know, we didn't have a collision station different from our battle station. The noise of this collision was what woke us up. Nobody knew, really, what had happened.

JL: Was your stateroom on the starboard or on the port side of the ship?

HH: I think it was on the starboard side. I've thought of that since you asked me to do this and I think it was on the starboard side. My bump was just inside skin of the ship. Of course, it was not, the skin of the hull, but on the deck. Fortunately, it just happened and all I know was it was, well, I heard the noise. I never knew what happened to the *Washington*. Did anything in your research show it?

JL: The *Washington* had a significant injury to her. They went back and were able to keep her floating, took her back and rebuilt the front end of the ship so that they could come back and serve in battle. I think that was all done, I don't remember reading that it was done in the States. I

think it may have been done in Pearl Harbor, I'm not sure. By that time the shipyard in Pearl Harbor was clear of the ships from Pearl Harbor Day and so they were able to do some major repairs in Pearl Harbor, and were doing things like that.

HH: As far as I know, the blame was not assigned to anybody. We all felt like that since the *Washington* was the one doing the unusual moving that it was the *Washington's* fault that we collided.

JL: It was 9:10. There was darkness, total darkness. There was no lights on, on any ship. The radar at the time may not have been able to see the other ship because of the profile of the ship and the height of the radar. It may have been under the radar at the time because of the closeness of the two ships. It's probable that they couldn't, the ship-handling individuals on the bridges of the two ships couldn't, see that this was happening. Although, one of the reports, as they appeared to get close enough, were when the *Indiana* saw what was coming, there was an attempt to make a turn to help get out of the way but it was too late.

HH: Too late.

JL: Thirty-five-thousand-ton vessels moving at 15 knots don't stop on a dime.

HH: No. Well, anyway, that was by far the most frightening event of my two years in the Navy.

JL: We certainly want to thank you for your service to our country, and I thank you for coming today and providing us this oral history. Your generation tolerated the depression and then World War II, and we appreciate all that you did.

HH: Well, you're welcome.

END OF AUDIO FILE