

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview with

**Marvin T. Alexander
Corpus Christi, Texas
April 4, 2011**

**Pearl Harbor Survivor
VP-12
Espiritu Santo
USS *Wright*, Seaplane Tender**

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is April 4, 2011. I am interviewing Mr. Marvin T. Alexander by telephone. His phone number is 361-852-4740. His address is: 2121 Harry Street, Corpus Christi, Texas 78411. This interview is in support of the National Museum of Pacific War, Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II

Mr. Misenhimer

Alex, 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. Alexander

Yes sir.

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 or someone that we could contact if we needed to find you?

Mr. Alexander

Michael L. Alexander, 5514 Dominica St., Corpus Christi, Texas 78411. His phone number is 361-853-4230.

Mr. Misenhimer

Your birthday is when?

Mr. Alexander

July 1, 1923.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Alexander

I was born in Sibley, Louisiana.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Alexander

I have three brothers and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were any of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Alexander

One brother served in the military.

Mr. Misenhimer

During World War II?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is he still living?

Mr. Alexander

No, none of my family is living.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your sister involved in any kind of war work?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Alexander

We were farmers. My daddy was a farmer and it didn't affect us. We didn't really realize it. Of course, I was young and it didn't make any difference.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this in Louisiana?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did your father raise on his farm?

Mr. Alexander

He raised cotton and sugarcane and corn.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all have a garden?

Mr. Alexander

We had a garden. We had two black families that lived on the farm and they took care of all of the farming with my dad until he died. He died when I was two months and four days old.

Mr. Misenhimer

Just after you were born. I'm sorry to hear that.

Mr. Alexander

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have a milk cow or anything like that?

Mr. Alexander

Yes, we had milk cattle but our uncle was in the dairy business and he wouldn't let us drink the milk because of salmonella. He delivered milk to us every day, buttermilk and butter which was pasteurized.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Alexander

I finished high school in Tyler, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year was that?

Mr. Alexander

1938.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you finished high school?

Mr. Alexander

I went to work for my brother in the oilfield.

Mr. Misenhimer

Doing what in the oilfield?

Mr. Alexander

Basically I was working in Illinois.

Mr. Misenhimer

Working on a rig or what?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. My brother was a drilling contractor. He was a supervisor.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Alexander

February 14, 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you decide to go into the service?

Mr. Alexander

I was working in the oilfield and I had gone back to visit my sister in Tyler and we decided that I would apply for the military. By applying for the military there was a six month waiting list back at that time and you couldn't get in right away. You had to wait. I chose the Navy to go in. I signed up in 1940 and got called in February of 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Alexander

I don't know why I decided on the Navy. I liked the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you done most boating before you went in?

Mr. Alexander

No. We did a lot of fishing.

Mr. Misenhimer

Fishing from the land or from a boat?

Mr. Alexander

A boat.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you had been on the water some then?

Mr. Alexander

Yes on the lake.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you join the Navy at?

Mr. Alexander

The recruiting office was in Longview, Texas. I actually signed the papers when I was in Tyler, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you take your boot camp?

Mr. Alexander

San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel to San Diego?

Mr. Alexander

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was that train trip?

Mr. Alexander

It was good.

Mr. Misenhimer

How long did it take?

Mr. Alexander

Overnight. We left one day and got there the next.

Mr. Misenhimer

That's pretty good. Did you have a place to sleep on the train?

Mr. Alexander

No, not that I recall. I can't remember that far back. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Had you been that far from home before?

Mr. Alexander

No. I had been all over the country because I lived with my sister and my brother. After we moved from the farm; my brother decided we weren't going to live on the farm alone anymore because the farm was a considerable distance from the highway. We had no one around. He decided that it was time for us to move to town. I was about 11 or 12 years old. We moved to town, my mother and all. That lasted about a year and then we moved in with my sister and then we switched out between my brother and my sister.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you all keep the farm?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. We kept the farm and leased it out sharecropping. We eventually sold it to my brother. He got hurt in the oilfield and lost his leg and he had gone back home to the farm and try and make a living at that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about your boot camp. How was that?

Mr. Alexander

Boot camp was fine. I did fine. I liked to have drowned with all that swimming. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

How were your drill instructors? Were they pretty rough on you?

Mr. Alexander

Pretty strict.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some things that you did in boot camp?

Mr. Alexander

We learned to sail in San Diego Bay. We did a lot of marching and just general things. I went to mechanical school and from there into the squadron at San Diego.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you live in there in San Diego?

Mr. Alexander

Barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the food there?

Mr. Alexander

Fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have knot tying?

Mr. Alexander

Yes, that went along with the sailing.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you had swimming of course.

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is there anything in particular that stands out from your time in boot camp?

Mr. Alexander

No sir, not that I recall.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long was it?

Mr. Alexander

Three months.

Mr. Misenhimer

After boot camp, then what?

Mr. Alexander

I went in to the patrol squadron VP-12. Coronado Naval Air Station.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the number of that unit?

Mr. Alexander

VP-12.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any kind of schooling after boot camp?

Mr. Alexander

I went to mechanical school.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where was that?

Mr. Alexander

It seems to me like that was in Florida.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you learn in that school?

Mr. Alexander

I learned how to repair engines.

Mr. Misenhimer

It was an engine repair school, then. About how long did that school last?

Mr. Alexander

Six months.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then you came back and joined VP-12?

Mr. Alexander

I was in VP-12 and then almost immediately after that we went to Hawaii.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to at Hawaii?

Mr. Alexander

Ford Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

And when did you go?

Mr. Alexander

It must have been October of 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of planes did VP-12 have?

Mr. Alexander

We were flying PB5s.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you travel to Hawaii?

Mr. Alexander

We flew from San Diego to Honolulu, Ford Island.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you fly over on a PB5?

Mr. Alexander

Yes, on a PB5.

Mr. Misenhimer

It could make all that distance without landing, right?

Mr. Alexander

Right. It had extra fuel tanks in the back of the airplane.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you do when you got to Hawaii?

Mr. Alexander

I worked in the ordnance department for a while. Then I was assigned to a plane crew and I took care of the airplane. I worked on the airplanes to keep them operating. Then I started flying with the flight crew. I became Plane Captain of the plane or the crew. I had the responsibility of taking care of the airplane to make sure it was all ready to go when we were flying. We were flying Search and Rescue. We were flying out of Pearl Harbor and we would fly different sectors. We would be in the air for 10 to 12 hours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Speaking of that, how long did it take to fly from San Diego to Hawaii?

Mr. Alexander

I can't remember. It was about 16 hours it seems to me.

Mr. Misenhimer

That sounds about right. Did anything else happen before December 7, 1941?

Mr. Alexander

No sir, it was just trying to keep the airplanes going, and working until all hell broke loose.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me about December 7, 1941.

Mr. Alexander

Our squadron was at muster. We were at quarters, calling the roll. We were lined up in the hangar. When we heard the explosion, we ran out the hangar doors; we thought a plane had blown up and we saw all these planes up in the air. The Officer of the Day came running in, screaming that we were being attacked by the Japanese. Then it was a fiasco for about four or five hours; in fact for all day. We were dispersed and got out of the hangar. We took the 30-caliber machine guns out of the ordnance and got into a big trench alongside the air strip, the landing strip. We got into that ditch. The Japanese were strafing that ditch. Then later that day, a lot of us were assigned to go help the crew bringing the people from the ships that had been killed or injured. We lined them all up along the mess hall floor. We went to everybody's lockers and got all of the blankets and sheets and covered the bodies with the blankets and sheets. We went down and picked them up. That is one thing that I can recall, the burning flesh. I can still smell that today. We picked them up to get them out of the water. Later that day the carrier launched their planes, so they were firing at our own airplanes. .

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that there were a few of them shot down by our own fire.

Mr. Alexander

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you all were in the ditch with the 30-caliber machine guns, did you shoot at the Japanese?

Mr. Alexander

We were firing at the planes as they were coming over strafing us. We were firing at some of the torpedoes and some of the bombers. They were coming in across the water and dropping their torpedoes, but they would come over the island after they would launch their torpedoes and drop their bombs on the ships. We were firing at them. In fact, we shot down one of the Japanese that landed behind our hangar out by the wheel attaching area. The guy had his target on his flight suit on his leg. Security took that. He was dead when he landed. We were all in shock and we were all trying to get over the shock. We didn't know what to do. Nobody else knew what to do.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you see any of the ships blow up?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. A lot of them blew up.

Mr. Misenhimer

Could you see it happen?

Mr. Alexander

You could see all the flames and the fires. The *Arizona* was sunk. It lost all of its oil. That is what was burning on the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which side of Ford Island were you on?

Mr. Alexander

I was on the Diamond Head side where you come into the harbor. As you come into the harbor from Diamond Head, Waikiki Beach, you come into the harbor and if you go to the left you go to Pearl City and if you go to the right you go to the submarine base, or the repair base, then you go all the way around the island. There is water completely around Ford Island. As you approach Ford Island coming into the harbor, we were straight dead ahead, the hangar next to the landing strip. We had one hangar on the corner that they bombed first. There was a hangar behind it that formed an L-shape.

There was a hangar on the point, a hangar behind it, and a hangar to the left of it. We were the hangar to the left of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

So you were just behind Battleship Row then?

Mr. Alexander

Yes, and we were on it

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you all do that night on December 7?

Mr. Alexander

I don't remember. We still were in our hangars and shooting up at the airplanes coming in. I don't know what I did that night to be honest with you; it's kind of a blur. We didn't anything and we finally got to go to the barracks and go to sleep. That probably around 11:00 or 12:00 before we got to go to the barracks.

Mr. Misenhimer

I know they were expecting a possible invasion. In fact there were some rumors of some Japanese troops on the island.

Mr. Alexander

We didn't hear that, or I didn't. The only thing I knew is that we were shooting at our airplanes. Finally they came out and said they were ours.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were many of your planes damaged in your squadron?

Mr. Alexander

We had a lot of damage to our squadron. We tried to launch some seaplanes to get them in the water but they were strafing us. We couldn't get any of our planes in the air.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that most of the PBYS were destroyed, is that right?

Mr. Alexander

They were pretty well shot up. We spent probably two or three weeks getting them all repaired and back to a state where we could fly them.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in that ditch and they were strafing you all, were any of the people in the ditch hit?

Mr. Alexander

No sir, not to my knowledge. They were close.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were fortunate on that, then.

Mr. Alexander

I don't recall anybody getting hit.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened the next day?

Mr. Alexander

The next day we started cleaning up, trying to get our planes in working order. We were cleaning up and trying to help the people that had been murdered or had passed away. We helped moved the bodies out. There were a few of us that had to go and help with that. That didn't take long. As far as I recall they had trailers or something that they put them in. I can't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Alexander

That was pretty well it. Then we got back into a normal routine a couple of days after that trying to get our airplanes back in shape.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you able to get most of them back working again?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. I think we probably had 95-98% that were all flyable within two weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many planes did you have in VP-12?

Mr. Alexander

I think we had twelve.

Mr. Misenhimer

I've seen pictures of PBVs being blown up. There were a lot of PBVs on the island in different places.

Mr. Alexander

All of them were on the apron between those three hangars. That was the only seaplane area on the island for PBVs. The ones that were blown up were over by the hangar on the point. There was no one working in that hangar that day. If they had hit our hangar there would have been 108 killed. We were fortunate they didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer

After you got your planes put together, what happened next?

Mr. Alexander

We started flying, looking for the Jap fleet and what have you and then all of a sudden we got orders to Midway. Four or five of our planes took off and we went to Midway Island to the Battle of Midway. I don't remember if that was May or February.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go down there before the Battle of Midway?

Mr. Alexander

They had already bombed Midway. We were there searching for the fleet. I think we found the fleet. I can't remember what island but they found the fleet and our ships were able to go in and take care of it.

Mr. Misenhimer

The Battle of Midway was June 4, 1942.

Mr. Alexander

I can't remember if we went in May or June. I think it was right after the battle.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you go down to Midway?

Mr. Alexander

Yes, we were at the Battle of Midway.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all happened there?

Mr. Alexander

We were looking for the fleet and we found the fleet. We were there for five or six days before we found the fleet. They had bombed the provisions and all we had to eat for those five days or six days that I was there flying for 12 hours a day, all we had to eat was Spam and lima beans. I don't eat either one of them to this day.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were attacked by the Japanese while you were there, right?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened during those attacks?

Mr. Alexander

They hit all the provisions. They bombed all the mess halls. So all we had left for provisions was Spam and lima beans. They got a lot of the carrier planes. Our planes weren't attacked, we were okay.

Mr. Misenhimer

And you were there for just a few days, is that right?

Mr. Alexander

It seems like we were there for about a week.

Mr. Misenhimer

And then where did you go?

Mr. Alexander

We went back to Ford Island. Then we were transferred from Ford Island to Kaneohe Bay. We moved over to Kaneohe Bay and we were there for a while. Then we left and went to the South Pacific.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go in the South Pacific?

Mr. Alexander

We flew into Johnson Island. From Johnson Island we went to Noumea, the Fiji Islands, and then on to Espiritu Santo.

Mr. Misenhimer

You flew in your planes all that way, right?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. We had our own planes. At Espiritu Santo Island we stayed on the USS *Wright*. Our planes were anchored there.

Mr. Misenhimer

The USS *Wright* is a seaplane tender, right?

Mr. Alexander

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do there at Espiritu Santo?

Mr. Alexander

We were flying search and rescue. We were flying what they called Dumbo missions. We would go out to different islands, what have you, and pick up survivors and bring them in to the ship. They would doctor them and take care of them and ship them off.

Mr. Misenhimer

Would land on the ocean to pick people up?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. Then we moved to Guadalcanal and then to Tulagi to a seaplane base there. We went to Bougainville. We just flew all over that area until about 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

About when did you go to Tulagi?

Mr. Alexander

Tulagi, I have no idea. They built the seaplane base there across from Guadalcanal. The Seabees were there and built that base. We went probably, I don't know if I have records that go back that far.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long were you at Espiritu Santo?

Mr. Alexander

We were flying in and out of there. We would go to different islands but we would always come back in to Espiritu Santo.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that was a very large base there.

Mr. Alexander

It was a base. They had the Black Hawk squadron on the island. We were on the right of the bay. They had the Black Hawks there. All the airplanes were painted black.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were those PBVs?

Mr. Alexander

No. These were fighter escorts, fighters, bombers. I think they called them the Night Hawks. They were all black.

Mr. Misenhimer

They had a PBV group they called Black something, what was that?

Mr. Alexander

I don't recall. Our planes were painted blue so that when we were flying over the water we would blend in with the water. I don't remember what that squadron was called.

Mr. Misenhimer

About how long were you at Tulagi?

Mr. Alexander

We were there until 1943. I think we came back in October or December of 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

You came back to where?

Mr. Alexander

We came back to Honolulu to Kaneohe Bay. From there we transferred back to the States. From there I took my vacation and went home. We were there and I joined the squadron back in San Diego. We were flying and training combat air crews on PBMs.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is the PBM a four-engine?

Mr. Alexander

No, it's a two-engine.

Mr. Misenhimer

I wasn't sure about that.

Mr. Alexander

It is much larger.

Mr. Misenhimer

What else happened?

Mr. Alexander

That was it. I was here in 1945 when the war was over and we declared victory. Then I left here and went to San Diego and from San Diego I went back to Whidbey Island. I joined VP-1. Our duties were to fly over the Arctic Circle. We went to Whidbey Island and from Whidbey Island we went to

Kodiak. From Kodiak we would go out to Adak in the Aleutian Chain. Then we would go back to Kodiak. We were six months out and six months back at Whidbey Island. Our job was basically to fly search. To follow the Arctic Circle we would fly out of Kodiak and then to Fairbanks. Then from Fairbanks we would go up over the Arctic Circle and then go over to the Siberian Coast and fly down Russia. Their planes would come out and meet us. We would go into Nome and we would stay in Nome and then go back to Kodiak.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of planes were you in there?

Mr. Alexander

We were in P2Vs which was the Neptune.

Mr. Misenhimer

These were not seaplanes were they?

Mr. Alexander

No. They were all land based.

Mr. Misenhimer

And this was when, in 1946?

Mr. Alexander

1946 and 1947, 1948, and 1949. I came back to Corpus Christi in 1950.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you stay in the Navy then?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. I spent 13 years in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Let's go back to when you were in the South Pacific. Did you actually get to Guadalcanal?

Mr. Alexander

We flew over Guadalcanal bombing it. We would fly over it at night when we were coming back from search and rescue and throw out bottles. Empty bottles sounded just like a whistling bomb coming in through the air. Just to antagonize them, the Japanese.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they shoot at you?

Mr. Alexander

Yes. Fortunately they didn't send any planes up to get us. By that time we were pretty well occupying Guadalcanal. It was pretty much over.

Mr. Misenhimer

That would have been about what year?

Mr. Alexander

Early 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer

February, 1943 is when they considered the fighting to be over on Guadalcanal.

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Which of those islands down there did you like the best?

Mr. Alexander

None of them.

Mr. Misenhimer

(Laughing) Which did you like the least?

Mr. Alexander

(Laughing) I guess Tulagi probably. We had a lot of recreation on Espiritu Santo. The French owned the island and we would go to the little village and get French bread and things.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get to any of the other New Hebrides islands besides Espiritu Santo?

Mr. Alexander

I was all over the New Hebrides islands. We went into another island but I can't remember the name of it. We landed on the water. We spent the night and went back the next morning.

Mr. Misenhimer

There was an island called Efate. That was the main island, the capital of it.

Mr. Alexander

There were a number of islands. We rescued about 436 people while we were there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were these people that had been off of sunken ships or planes or both?

Mr. Alexander

Both. Sunken ships. A lot of them had been sunken and they would wind up on the islands. When we were flying search and rescue people would come out with white flags or what have you and you would go in and land and pick them up and take them to Espiritu Santo.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was your plane ever attacked by enemy fighters?

Mr. Alexander

We were when we got our tail section shot up in the Battle of Midway. We were able to get right down a few feet off the water, right down on the water.

Mr. Misenhimer

What guns did you have on the PBV?

Mr. Alexander

We had the 50-caliber.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many?

Mr. Alexander

Two.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were they located?

Mr. Alexander

On the back part of the plane forward of the tail section.

Mr. Misenhimer

On each side?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did they ever fire at enemy aircraft?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever do any strafing of the enemy?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

You all would land in the sea quite often, is that right?

Mr. Alexander

We would land, in fact we were flying with some of the British and there was a big story about it. When we were off of Port Moresby, New Guinea we went in and picked up a fighter pilot. He was in the sea for 20-something days in a raft. We were the only plane that would land and we broke one of our blisters when we landed. Took on a bunch of water and we had to bail that water out of the plane. We had to stay on the water overnight, about 18 hours, before we could take off the next morning. We shouldn't have taken off then because the seas were rough, but we figured that the guy we

rescued would like to get back since he had been out there about three weeks. Bob Hamblin, our pilot, decided we would go. We had to work on the engines. Attempts to keep the salt water out of the engines so we could get them started. It was quite a fiasco. The pilot we rescued was really happy. We fed him a bunch of steak. All he could eat. He was really happy.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever stationed at Port Moresby, or did you just fly into there?

Mr. Alexander

No, I wasn't. We just flew in to there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What were some other things that happened?

Mr. Alexander

That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Alexander

Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Misenhimer

How about in the South Pacific; were there any times in the South Pacific that were frightening?

Mr. Alexander

No. By then I was pretty well accustomed to all of that. We were trying to keep the plane going. We were running out of power. Our engine compression was so low we could hardly get off the water. It would take two miles to get airborne when we left there, coming home.

Mr. Misenhimer

Tell me again, when you went to take off at Espiritu Santo coming home, what happened?

Mr. Alexander

The pressure was so low in our engines and we couldn't get enough power. It took us about two miles on the water to get airborne. We finally got airborne and limped on in. I think we stopped at

either Palmero or Johnson Island on our way back to refuel. We got back into Kaneohe and then back to the States.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were at New Hebrides, did you have much contact with the civilian people there?

Mr. Alexander

The only contact we had while we were at New Hebrides was with some natives, particularly with the storekeepers in the village. We would go to the village and buy bread and wine and stuff like that. That was about the only contact. We had contact at the other islands, some of the guys had bought some of the outrigger canoes, or whatever they called them, that they hand carved. We had some of those. I picked up a big little book written in Japanese, and a bunch of souvenirs. But they wouldn't let us bring them with us because of the weight. I never got it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I understand that the New Hebrides were French and English both. Is that right?

Mr. Alexander

Yes they said they were but they were owned by the French. I'm sure they were owned by the French.

Mr. Misenhimer

My understanding is that they had what they called a condominium government between the French and the English. It was different. It wasn't where the French had their area and the British had theirs. My understanding is that if you happened to be arrested by a French policeman you were tried under French law and the guy standing next to you could have been arrested by an English policeman and be tried under English law.

Mr. Alexander

I don't know. None of our people were ever arrested so I have no idea.

Mr. Misenhimer

I'm just using that as an example, my point being that they had what they called a condominium government and it was just intermingled.

Mr. Alexander

We went for R&R there. They would take us over in a boat; or you would go on a boat and then you would get off and walk. They had a nice area. We would just go over and have beer or wine and hors d'oeuvres or things of that type. You could swim if you wanted to. I never did go on that. I was doing a lot of other hobby work and I was studying for some classes that I was taking by mail order. I never did fool with that type of stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of hobby work were you doing?

Mr. Alexander

I liked to do wood work back then. When I was in Alaska I did a lot of plastic and I did a lot of wood work and carving in Corpus. We would take the scrap boxes they had left over and we would make bookends out of them or table lamps. I did a lot of leather craft. Just a lot of hobby craft. I spent all my time doing that. When I was in San Diego and Corpus I would work at the Officer's Club and we would make extra money. And I did a lot of fishing. We would take the fish to the cannery and they would give us half of the fish. We could bring them back home with us. It was interesting. I enjoyed a lot of it. More so than I did any other island.

Mr. Misenhimer

You mentioned souvenirs. What all souvenirs had you collected?

Mr. Alexander

All that I collected in the South Pacific I lost.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you have that you lost?

Mr. Alexander

I had some of the outrigger canoes that the natives had whittled or carved out of bamboo. I had the big little book that was written in Japanese. I had a Japanese sword, just a bunch of junk. But to me it was interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home with anything?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Nothing at all?

Mr. Alexander

No, just me.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of the officers you had over you? I don't mean the pilot; I mean the other officers, what did you think of them?

Mr. Alexander

They were very nice. They were very understanding. They didn't hassle us a lot. We did our job and that is all that we were expected to do. I had excellent officers.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the morale in your outfit?

Mr. Alexander

Very good. We lost one crew when we were on Whidbey Island. I don't know whatever happened to them. The weather turned bad and we were called back and they didn't get the message. I guess they just kept going and were lost. We lost contact with them. We don't know whatever happened to them. Anyway, it was interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did you think of her?

Mr. Alexander

I didn't think a lot about her. We didn't listen to a lot of that. Like I say, I really wasn't into all that stuff. I was more involved in my crafts and reading and studying and doing things on my own. I just didn't participate in a lot of that.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Alexander

Yeah we did when we crossed the line. I got a certificate. I brought it home with me. It showed that I crossed the equator.

Mr. Misenhimer

They call you a shellback after that.

Mr. Alexander

I don't remember. I can't remember what they called it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You were a polliwog before and you were a shellback after you crossed.

Mr. Alexander

Okay. I got some kind of certificate or something that shows that I did that.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you crossed it, were you in a plane or on a ship?

Mr. Alexander

I was in a plane.

Mr. Misenhimer

So there wasn't room for a lot of initiation then?

Mr. Alexander

No. We got that after we got there.

Mr. Misenhimer

What did they do to you then?

Mr. Alexander

They just did a bunch of crazy stuff that I can't remember. It wasn't anything drastic or I would remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have to kiss King Neptune's belly?

Mr. Alexander

I can't remember doing that.

Mr. Misenhimer

That is one of the things they did a lot of the times.

Mr. Alexander

I can't remember that. We did a lot of crazy stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever in any typhoons?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you then?

Mr. Alexander

I was in Corpus Christi in 1945 when the war ended.

Mr. Misenhimer

On May 8, 1945, when Germany surrendered, did you have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Alexander

When the celebration was taking place I had been home and we were on a train returning back from Indiana to Corpus Christi when all of that took place.

Mr. Misenhimer

Was this when Japan surrendered?

Mr. Alexander

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

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

Mr. Alexander

Do you mean when I got out?

Mr. Misenhimer

Yes, when you got discharged.

Mr. Alexander

I was very busy. I built my home in Corpus. I subcontracted and built my own home when I got out of the military. I was managing the Officer's Club at the Naval Air Station. That was before I built my home. I was in the produce business with two other guys. That didn't last very long and then I went back to the Officer's Club and I managed the Officer's Club for 5 ½ years while I was building my home.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you first got back from the South Pacific to the States, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life here then?

Mr. Alexander

No because I was still in the military. I wasn't out. I had gone home, picked up my family and brought them to California back to the squadron and then back to Corpus. So no, not really.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Alexander

Chief Petty Officer which is number one pay grade. It's called Master Chief now.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you use your GI Bill for anything?

Mr. Alexander

No, I've never used it.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Alexander

No. When we got off the ship in San Francisco I went to the St. Francis hotel. I went to a place where we did the Maypole Dance and that kind of stuff. I won a \$50 war bond.

At that time most of them were on the aircraft carriers. I take that back. When I came back when we were at Kaneohe Bay, when we got back from the South Pacific they had Arte Shaw at the USO. He had a band and they were performing at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel on Waikiki Beach. That was good. He was in the military, so I guess I didn't see any USO shows.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Alexander

No.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever see that sign "Kilroy was here"?

Mr. Alexander

All over the South Pacific. (Laugh)

Mr. Misenhimer

Everywhere, huh?

Mr. Alexander

Everywhere.

Mr. Misenhimer

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Alexander

I was looking up after I talked to you and there is nothing on my discharge paper. The only thing I could find was the paper where I reenlisted. It shows the Asiatic-Pacific with five bronze stars, Victory medal for World War II, American Defense with one bronze star, American Theater, Philippine Campaign, and Good Conduct with two bronze stars.

Mr. Misenhimer

What do the bronze stars represent?

Mr. Alexander

I guess the different battles you were in.

Mr. Misenhimer

How many total did you get?

Mr. Alexander

I got five in the South Pacific for the Asiatic Pacific. The American Defense had one. American Theater and the Philippine Campaign. That was it.

Mr. Misenhimer

You got eight stars, right?

Mr. Alexander

I don't know. American Defense has one, American Theater doesn't show any. So American Theater and the Philippine Campaign. That's it.

Mr. Misenhimer

When you were in Hawaii, did you get much liberty in Honolulu?

Mr. Alexander

Yes we spent a lot of time. When I came back I spent a week at the Royal Hawaiian, R&R.

I didn't see any USO shows but I saw some military shows.

Mr. Misenhimer

How was the liberty in Honolulu?

Mr. Alexander

It was very good. When we first went there, before the war, we rented an apartment, three of us. It was right off the beach. We would spend the weekends at the apartment, but that didn't last too long. By the time we got it all set up the war started. We didn't get to enjoy it too long. I had just bought a car. I left that with my friends. I don't know what ever happened to it.

Mr. Misenhimer

I don't have any other questions. Is there anything else that you recall from your time in WW II?

Mr. Alexander

No sir. We pretty well covered everything.

Mr. Misenhimer

Alex, I want to thank you again for your time today and for your service to our country.

Mr. Alexander

Thank you for calling. I wish you well and many more birthdays.

Mr. Misenhimer

And to you too.

Transcribed by:

Lesle Dial
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Oral History by:

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