

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. A. J. Dunn

Date of Interview: July 13, 2011

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Interview in progress.

Interviewer: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is July 13, 2011. I'm interviewing Mr. A. J. Dunn. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. The interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies; Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War; Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to this site. Mr. Dunn, if you...first of all thank you very much for taking time with us today and if you would, please state your full name for the record and where you were born and what's the date of your birth place.

Mr. Dunn: My full name is Abner James Dunn. I was born in Corpus Christi, 1922 – October the 23rd.

Interviewer: Okay and can you tell us a little bit about your background; what your parents did; whether you had brothers and sisters and your schooling and so forth?

Mr. Dunn: Yes sir. Well I had a high school education when I went into the Navy in 1940 and went to boot camp in San Diego. And when we'd completed the course there they lined us up on (unintelligible) field and the doctor come by and took me out. He said, "You step back a little bit." He comes back, checked behind my ears; he said, "You stand over there; you've got German measles." (laughter) Everybody got transferred except me. So I went to sick

bay. And when I got out I was pretty weak after that episode and I had...I was transferred...one-man draft...to Hawaii. And I went aboard the Enterprise across the bay from boot camp...the full sea...sea bag and everything on my shoulders and me being weak...and they let me climb aboard the Enterprise there (unintelligible) on a gang plank that looked like it was going straight up! That was just one episode. And when we transferred to the Oglala...the one-man draft...usually they give a Boot a bad time, and they didn't even know I was a Boot. By that time I was pretty salt. So anyway I went aboard the Oglala; I spent about...almost a year there on...on before the attacks on Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Now and this was...this would have been 1940 that you were transferred to Hawaii on the Enterprise, and...

Mr. Dunn: The Enterprise...they went out for maneuvers; come back and transferred me to the Neosho – a oil tanker.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Dunn: (unintelligible) oil and that oiler took me to Hawaii.

Interviewer: Okay so you were on...you were on...you were crew on the Enterprise and it wasn't just transferring you over to Pearl?

Mr. Dunn: Well we...as passengers.

Interviewer: Okay so you...so then you went to...you sent to Pearl on the Neosho?

Mr. Dunn: The Neosho.

Interviewer: ...which was later sunk as a matter of fact. It sunk in the Battle of the Coral Sea it was.

Mr. Dunn: I met a guy over in one of the...oh, what was it...La Vernia...he walked up to me. He said, "What ship?" I said, "The Oglala." And I said, "Well what ship were you on?" He said, "You wouldn't know it." I said, "Well tell me." He said, "The Neosho." I said, "That's what took me to Pearl Harbor!"

Interviewer: Yeah, (unintelligible) me too, then. Okay so you're...you got a...you're on board the Oglala; did you have any other training beyond boot camp or were you just basically a basic seaman or...?

Mr. Dunn: Well the Oglala was an old ship. In fact I have an old...old book on the...the Oglala that laid mines in the North Sea in World War II...and later really had a history. We...we were like (unintelligible) Navy...or seamanship. I got a good training on seamanship. And I had a special liberty...(unintelligible) with the 5th...to go to Hawaii and Honolulu and buy Christmas gifts and everything for the family...and I did. And...but I was supposed to meet my buddy who was on the Arizona and then we was going to come back to...Honolulu and...didn't quite make it. As...as we were traveling back to Pearl Harbor...(unintelligible) start falling on the highway...was a group firing. They were firing guns up there without second fuses or anything...(unintelligible) went up had to come down.

Interviewer: So you had spent the night of December the 6th in Honolulu and you were on your way back to Pearl on the morning of December the 7th?

Mr. Dunn: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: And when the...when the firing started...

Mr. Dunn: And as we went out through the gate there was a group of us all in whites. I seen this Jap plane bank and I knew what he was going to do, so we all hit the ditch!

Interviewer: Now when...when did you first realize that it was...it was a Japanese attack? When the...when the...?

Mr. Dunn: I don't know. When I looked up and seen that...that rising sun on that...I knew what it was.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Dunn: We'd heard talk and of it...and that's all.

Interviewer: Had you been warned on the ship that the...the war could be starting anytime soon?

Mr. Dunn: No word whatsoever.

Interviewer: No word at all?

Mr. Dunn: All of the ammunition boxes were locked...stories about two men firing 5inch guns without second fuses or anything. It was just...get up there and...

Interviewer: So they had several...several locations, I'm sure, yes.

Mr. Dunn: Yes. But as we were running there after that plane strafed us, somebody...must have been a chief who said, "All of ya'll follow me! We got a...fight fire over in dry dock #1," And we went over there and they was chasing down the two destroyers. One was pretty well gone; it was a fire and we were there on the fire hoses and somebody said, "Get out of here, that thing is going to blow!" I just barely got around that building and it blew...right down to the ground. I looked up...there was an automobile over

there about twenty feet from me. Something had come down and mashed it (unintelligible). So I got up and started running again. Well I went down there near where my ship had (unintelligible)...and could see that there wasn't nothing I could do...(unintelligible) stand around. So I seen this destroyer back in the (unintelligible) on the dock, and I run and jumped aboard. And of course, the captain I'm sure was happy because a lot of his crew went over. And I (unintelligible) sent down below and sent up ammunition to the guns. And as we went out the bomb bursts were still up there. I don't know why they left us alone. As soon as we cleared harbor...Captain passed the word, "All hands strip ship for action."

Interviewer: What ship were you on now then?

Mr. Dunn: That was the Mugford.

Interviewer: The Mugford destroyer.

Mr. Dunn: The Mugford.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Dunn: And the old Navy...when they pass a word like that...you know we're not coming back. All of our (unintelligible) lines went over the sides; all of the mess tables; everything that was burned went over the side. And we were looking for the Japanese for a battle...seven days and seven nights. And it was other ships that joined us. I don't know where they came from. We had a couple of cruisers...

Interviewer: So then you put to sea...did...you had the...they already had the boilers up when you came aboard and so you immediately...you left (unintelligible)?

Mr. Dunn: The ship was backing away from the dock.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Dunn: And I seen...my chance to get out of here!

Interviewer: Yeah! So and...and about...about what time of the morning was this since the attack started at...right...right at...

Mr. Dunn: It was before noon.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Dunn: And we passed...the battleship that run aground.

Interviewer: The Nevada.

Mr. Dunn: Nevada, yeah. They were fighting fire on the fo'c'sle where they took the bomb. But they had managed to get out of the channel so...stopped it up. But we...we did sink while we were out there looking. And we came back in and they took muster and everybody that didn't belong on the ship...they transferred us over to the heavy cruiser, New Orleans. So I spent about a year on the New Orleans. We...our main job was...to convoy...Matson Lurline...you know the ships they...(unintelligible)...for a cruise. I forget how many Matson Lurliners we had in that convoy. But we were the only cruiser in the task...in the convoy and one destroyer. The Japs had (unintelligible)...but went into Brisbane, Australia with these troops. And Brisbane...the way it's located...you go up the river and...and the river is like Main Street when you get into Brisbane. Boy...talk about a reception, we got a reception bringing all those troops in and they were afraid to (unintelligible), you know?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Mr. Dunn: After that...just before the Battle of Midway, they transferred me back to...the States...the Battleship Indiana (unintelligible). And the...when...New Orleans was in that battle there, the Midway, they lost their bow...so I just missed all that.

Interviewer: Okay so...so you missed Midway by just being transferred...

Mr. Dunn: Yeah.

Interviewer: ...and you went back to...and...and commissioned the Indiana then?

Mr. Dunn: Yeah, (unintelligible)...commissioned. Then we...after...had our sea trial they sent us up to Portland, Maine and there was a task force up there waiting. We had two or three sister ships and...and our landing cruisers and they were going to...(unintelligible) battalion battleships and about that time the...our other sister ship...they called the Battleship X...they wouldn't name it...got in trouble out there in Guadalcanal; they took a bomb hit on turret 2 and I understand the captain got shrapnel in the neck or something, but we had to relieve them and so down to the Panama Canal; through the Panama Canal and back out in the Pacific. That's the closest I came to getting sick. But anyway we went into Noumea, New Caledonia. That was our main base up there and we would go out around Guadalcanal and first time they'd located any Jap ships well we run back to...our base because we couldn't have caught them (unintelligible) you know...one battleship...that's all that was out there! Finally months later here they come from job over there...on Italy. And our

sister ships...I forget how many came in...there were...we were really happy to see them.

Interviewer: Now...now...what...do you remember what time of year or...or what the dates...about the dates were when you went through the Panama Canal going to the South Pacific?

Mr. Dunn: (unintelligible)

Interviewer: 'Cause you...you were on the New Orleans for about a year so that would have put you going to the Indiana in the late...or late '42 or early '43 then, right? So...so this would have been somewhere like in the mid...middle of '43...you would have been in Guadalcanal then. Okay.

Mr. Dunn: Anyway I spent two years on the Indiana and we operated in Task Force 58 under Halsey. Of course and then this was (unintelligible). We went through the Marshall and Gilbert Islands and we bombarded the island before the landing forces would get there. Then they used the old battleships to come in with the landing forces. Of course all of ours was fairly new ships and we'd do the bombarding. I remember...what island we bombarded... Kwajalein. I heard the Marines say they couldn't hardly walk on the beach for shell holes. We...just lined up...take our time and lob them sixteen inch shells over there.

Interviewer: Now what...what was your job on Indy?

Mr. Dunn: I had the armory. I was studying to be a gunner's mate. I ended up...made first class gunner's mate before I left that ship. But we had charge of all of the small arms and the ammunition...like powder magazines...we had readings on them every day. "Cause on that...the older that ammunition got the more

sensitive it was. And I run samples in this surveillance oven to see how...how far along it was...and anything that looked dangerous...go over the side.

Interviewer: Well was this...was this bag...was this mostly for the sixteen inchers then because all the... you had the what...the five inches and maybe three inches and the forties...but all of that would...would have been cased...pre-cased?

Mr. Dunn: Some of them was three decks below. We had those (unintelligible) poles...grab a hold...you had to climb a...and set all morning long taking readings...and we run those tests; and we issued all the small arms to the watches like the 45s and so forth. After I got transferred I...I went to receiving station in California...Treasure Island and they transferred me to San Diego Amphibious Training. I got down there they said, "What are you doing here?"

Interviewer: That doesn't sound good!

Mr. Dunn: "We don't have no gunner's mates down here." I said, "I didn't transfer myself!" "Well, as long as you're here, you're a Boatswain mate." So I picked up a crew and I had to take them out on the (unintelligible)...and take them to different places to get instructions and everything for. So we completed that. I got transferred to the APA-136; they had a name of Botetourt.

Interviewer: How do you spell it?

Mr. Dunn: I never did learn. But it was an attack transport.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Dunn: And we went to...after we left San Diego we went to the Philippines. And then they give us a job of running up to Borneo and pick up a load of troops and move them up to...Manila...(unintelligible)...from Manila.

Interviewer: Okay so this was after the...after the Philippines had been secured then?

Mr. Dunn: Yeah after they'd been secured.

Interviewer: Okay and so what...this would have been...what 19...late '44 or do you remember the timeframe?

Mr. Dunn: Not too long before the atomic bomb.

Interviewer: So it would have been mid '45 then.

Mr. Dunn: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Dunn: And we were staying there in one port waiting on...going back and make another trip and they dropped the bombs.
And...(unintelligible)...everyone....every APA and PA...fill up troops and head for Tokyo. Luckily when we got up there our ship passed right alongside the Missouri...they were all at quarters...when they signed the papers.

Interviewer: So at the very time they were signing the...the surrender papers?

Mr. Dunn: Surrender...yeah.

Interviewer: I'll be darned!

Mr. Dunn: And we went right on into Tokyo to unload our troops. Well they even said we could have liberty if we wanted. I didn't see any point in that.

Interviewer: I was wondering about that. I...I know I...I talked to another fellow that was on...another cargo ship...I think he was on a cargo ship and they...they had shore leave there and this was like, you know, the...the...during the time of the service...the signing of the ceremony...early September and I was kind of surprised they would let American military men just wander around in...in Japan like that. I thought that was kind of scary.

Mr. Dunn: Well it wasn't anything but just shambles. It was like one of these tornadoes had tore up the whole town...this is the way it looked. There were even ships sunk in the harbor around Tokyo. I think there was a small aircraft carrier that was sunk...still sticking up above water. It was a mess. So after we left there they sent us down to...Genseng (spelling ?), Korea and we picked up a load troops...I don't know what they were doing there, you know. But anyway we picked up a load of troops...you know we went straight from there to...oh what's the name of that town?...went up the river there at (unintelligible)...Washington...Oregon...went into Oregon and unloaded our troops on New Year's Day. We made front page...pictures and everything! I was New Year's Day when all those troops came back. And so...

Interviewer: Now these were troops you picked up in Korea, is that right?

Mr. Dunn: Genseng, Korea.

Interviewer: Okay.

Mr. Dunn: I got pictures and (unintelligible). So after that I got transferred off of the ship in...in...went to Treasure Island receiving station. They sent me to San Diego...Amphibious Training base. And when I got down there, they said,

“What are you doing here? We don’t have no gunner’s mates.” So I went through as Boatswain mate and made that trip and they transferred me into the APA-136...and...no wait a minute...no I got way back there...

Interviewer: No you said...after...after you left the...

Mr. Dunn: Duplicating some...

Interviewer: Uh-huh.

Mr. Dunn: After I got off that they transferred me to...oh come on!...San Diego...in bay...it was a minesweeper that had come back from China and we had the job of cleaning it up and restoring everything...and then we were supposed to deliver it to the Philippine Islands and we were going to turn it over to the Philippines. I had two months (unintelligible)...my six years. I told the captain...I said, “You can’t take me out of the States; I only got two months!” He said, “Well I can’t let you go.” Anyway he got orders to let me go when we got to Guam and they dumped me! (laughter) Anyway...

Interviewer: Did... you signed up for six years when you went in 1940, is that right?

Mr. Dunn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay...and they didn’t have the draft yet then...or...or was...?

Mr. Dunn: No, there wasn’t a draft.

Interviewer: There wasn’t a draft at that time.

Mr. Dunn: I was in the regular...thing.

Interviewer: Okay so you...you were regular Navy for six years?

Mr. Dunn: Uh-hum.

Interviewer: Okay. Lifers...(unintelligible)...

Mr. Dunn: They asked me to ship over and I said, "No. I tell you what you give me some shore duty...you get me that and I'll ship over." "Well we can't do that." I said, "Okay, I'm gone."

Interviewer: Okay, so how'd you get back from Guam?

Mr. Dunn: I was out there about two weeks waiting for trans...transportation back. It ended up it was a Coast Guard transport...pulling two barges...and I had to put up with that all the way back to Pearl. We got to Pearl, they had (unintelligible) shore patrol...and that made me mad because I had shore patrol so many times before you know...and they put me on shore patrol and I was a passenger. I said, "Well that makes up my mind, I know what I'm going to do...I'm going to get out of here." Said, "Well we'll make you chief if you stay." I said, "Wait a minute, (unintelligible) are all chiefs and they're getting out...I don't want to stay." Well that was my tour of the Navy.

Interviewer: Okay so this...so this was in 1946?

Mr. Dunn: ...around Christmas. No, it was a couple of months over my...(unintelligible) time.

Interviewer: So, well, you...you got around a lot. Gosh I...I don't...I think I lost track of the ships that you served under.

Mr. Dunn: The Oglala, the New Orleans, the Indiana...

Interviewer: Well did you...did you keep track of any of the guys that you served with on any of those ships in later years?

Mr. Dunn: I don't know why I didn't. The last I seen...anybody that I knew was the receiving station. One guy come by there when I got off the Indiana...he had

served there with...with me as a gunner's mate...he says, "Man I wouldn't want to be out there in that ocean if you...you were on...behind them guns!" (laughter). But I did...(unintelligible) pretty good.

Interviewer: Yeah, a lot of people do it, so, yeah...well...well that's...that's a pretty...pretty remarkable episode in...in your life, I'm sure. You got a lot of good memories and I imagine a few bad ones, too, in there, so at least it's...kind of a...

Mr. Dunn: ...kind of rounded off everything...five different ships.

Interviewer: Yeah, and a little...little bit of just about...every...every kind of duty, so...okay well that...I'm running short on questions here unless you've got some more details...guess we could...

Mr. Dunn: Well I...another story that I missed...there are (unintelligible). We were in that convoy taking those...all those troops into...Australia and it was oh, about three or four o'clock in the morning...the (unintelligible)...and I went to my post and I was on earphones...it was a ship out there that was trying to get us in between them and the moon where they'd have the advantage and they wouldn't answer any of our calls. This went on for...I was just waiting for the guns to start going, and finally they answered. Well they...what it...a destroyer or cruiser from New Zealand...they almost fired on us. They figured we were Japs.

Interviewer: Yeah, they didn't know who you were, okay. Well that was a close call, I'm sure there was a lot of that going on out there, too, because you...they

couldn't very well signal who you were. I mean that's...just not a smart thing to do out there in the middle of the Aleutians.

Mr. Dunn: When I went in the Navy they told me...I'm going to tell you know...sleep is...what am I trying to say?...is a luxury...luxury...and I found out that it was a luxury. Our Task Force 58 it was just one battle after another and these Japs had (unintelligible) seaplanes...it was south...just out of our range and I thought they were going to come in. Well every time they did this...general quarters! You maybe had a watch and just got off of it...roll out again...get back in...in the sack and all of a sudden...general quarters again!

Interviewer: Yeah, they just wear...wear you down.

Mr. Dunn: I (unintelligible)...everybody got out and did their jobs.

Interviewer: What did...what did everybody think of Admiral Halsey and...?

Mr. Dunn: Bull Halsey...he was admired.

Interviewer: Well that's...that's sort of the story that I...that I've gotten from most people that served under him.

Mr. Dunn: He made some mistakes but...

Female voice: (Unintelligible)...to you.

Mr. Dunn: Oh to me?

Interviewer: Checking on the island.

Mr. Dunn: Oh, we were laying around in some of the in...inhabited...uninhabited islands and...anchored on the...when I was on the Indiana...and I don't know what they were waiting on but...I got news about a fishing party going out one morning, so I went to my officer and said, "Hey why can't I go along,"...and

they dumped us on the island and hunt chickens. There was...told...there used to be a ranch out there. Well I got permission to...about three of us went over there...we got out there before daylight...climbed up on top of this mountain and waited on them chickens. And dawn had come and about the time dawn broke...roosters (unintelligible)...sounded like he was in the middle of a barn yard...all around us! Ah man, we're going to make out you know! So...better get on down there and get stationed so when they come off we can get them. We went down there...and never seen a chicken!...until we was walking down this path and we decided to turn around and go back. We turned around and...a rooster took off...and I got him just as he took off. We looked in them high weeds and everything for an hour and (unintelligible) chicken...that...that was all we got. But we...waiting on the fishing party to come back, we started walking around different places and...one instant we were up on the side of this mountain and looking at the prettiest stallion you've ever seen...this is at close at you ever get. And we were running down this gulley and down there this old cow and calf took off like deer...they were gone! Well then someone had...been using...before.

Interviewer: So there had been people living on the island...they were just not...not (unintelligible) lost.

Mr. Dunn: I never thought that I would ever get that shook up, but...they say you know you go crazy. We started running and falling and everything else just trying to find where the (unintelligible) was...where the water was...we couldn't find the water. And anyway we finally did and there was a straight

cliff...straight down...so we followed the water along and finally found a place for us to get picked up. But that was (unintelligible).

Interviewer: Well I imagine in time of war like that if you...if you didn't show up at the right time they would pull out without you.

Mr. Dunn: Yeah...go back...they was...

Interviewer: Well that's some interesting stories and I really appreciate you spending some time with us here.

Mr. Dunn: Somebody may get a kick out it.

Interviewer: So...

(end of interview)

FINAL copy
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