

Arnhold Schwichtenberg Oral History Interview

PETE JENSEN: This is Pete Jensen. Today is September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011. I'm interviewing Mr. Arnhold Schwichtenberger.

ARNHOLD SCHWICHTENBERG: Schwichtenberger.

PJ: Schwichtenberger. This interview is taking place at the Fredericksburg High School, and 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. Can I call you Arnhold?

AS: Call me Arnhold.

PJ: OK, Arnhold.

AS: Everybody calls me Arnie.

PJ: OK, Arnie.

AS: Arnie.

PJ: Arnie.

AS: Yes.

PJ: If you would like to start, tell us a little bit about where you were born?

AS: All right, I got a long spiel here, but anyhow, I was born in Bayonne, New Jersey, in July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1921. I was graduated from the Bayonne Technical High School in June of 1938. I went to work immediately as apprentice tool and die maker for Solar Manufacturing Company in Bayonne, New Jersey. And I worked for them from May of '38 until December of '39. Now I was laid off in that time and in February, I went to work for Worthington Pump Company in Harrison, New Jersey. It was the same job; apprentice tool (inaudible) until June of '39. I was laid off again. Then on the way home to my home in Bayonne, I stopped at the Naval Recruiting Station and I signed up and got in the Navy.

And I finally got in, it took me quite a while. I didn't get in until September of '40.

PJ: Why was that?

AS: I went into New York. I was sworn in at 90 Church Street -  
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PJ: OK.

AS: -- right at the 9/11 church, you know, that's the first building standing, federal building standing yet. And we've been there since the 9/11 and been to the towers, and (inaudible) where I was sworn in, 90 Church Street. I went up to boot camp in Newport, Rhode Island, finished boot camp, and they put me on a train in Providence, and sent me across country seven days to San Diego, California. And there, I boarded the USS *Gridley*, DD-380, to a trip to Pearl. And then I boarded the USS *Trever* in Pearl in November 1940. And then immediately, I found out they had spelled that place wrong. The real spelling should have been H-E-A-V-E-N, because it was like heaven; believe me for a 19-year old kid. Well, that was quite a place. Well, I went aboard the *Trever* and operated with her, and I became part of the No. 4 Gun Crew. We fired, we got an E; the first time the ship had an E aboard, and I was the trainer No. 4 gun. So, it was pretty good. I made \$5 a month extra a month for that. I got advanced in rank, and my chief duty aboard ship was boat engineer. I was what they called A Division. I had steering engine, anchor, (inaudible). That was my import place equipment that I took care of, but I had the whale boat also engine that I took care of but on that first of December --

PJ: I'm going to close this door.

AS: OK. On the first of December, I made fireman first which was \$60 a month plus my \$5 gun money. I was doing pretty

good. On the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup> I had been on duty since Saturday morning, 24 hours. I was getting ready to go off duty, the call for colors were made, and I as I remember we called for colors, we stood facing the stern, and I heard the full power of airplane engines unusually noisy, unusually strong. As I looked, I just as I looked south or two the west I saw them drop two torpedoes in the water. And as I swung out over the top of us, I seen the down on us really, and kept looking down on us really and people looking right out the hatch cover was pulled back, and they're looking down on us, and I seen the red ball, Japs. Oh. And at the same time, I seen the torpedoes hit the USS *Utah*. Two huge columns of black smoke. And I headed for my gun. The gun was a four-inch 51 caliber built in 1914, didn't fire anything but surface. So I sat there on the gun and watched everything take place. I no sooner got to the gun when a plane that had dropped a torpedo on the USS *California* came right off our stern, not 50 feet off our stern, dead plane and engine dead, trying to keep the plane in the water. I could see him right now looking at him. I could see him. I'll see him all my life. Watched the plane go down the lower end of the bay and he ducked it in like that. I seen the hatch cover come back and one guy get out. That's the last I saw of him; my visual sighting of him. I know a lot more about him. At the same time, I saw a plane coming toward us right wing ablaze, I could see the ribs in it. When it got to the curves which was between us and California, he dove into the hangar deck on the Curtiss. And shortly after that, one blew up over the top of us. And they had parts of it, and why to this day I always say he dropped the bomb. He was supposed to hit the four ships, but it went a stern of

us, quite a ways a stern of us. It made a splash, but it did not explode, and I'm been telling that for almost 70 years now. That bomb did not explode. But shortly after that, I was ordered into the whale boat, get off the gun, made the trip down around the Ford Island, round up the 10-10 knock, got us a bunch of officers not ours. I was supposed to get our captain, but he wasn't there, or we missed him, or whatever. And we took the captain of the *Hovee* and a bunch of other officers back aboard ship. When we got back we got officers on the ship and then we untied the buoy and helped untie and helped to get underway. And then we got picked up and started out to channel. As we started out the channel, they were still trying to get the *Nevada* and bombing it and (inaudible) or whatever else, but the planes were really hitting hard and we really maybe backed down a little bit to stay out of the mess. And then after while we steamed past her and went out to sea. Three o'clock that afternoon, we came back in, came around the harbor. And like I say now, as we came in we came past the *Utah* and it was 70 men and a new memorial, new memories, place. And then they came by the *Arizona* and there again we had another tomb with 1,177 men, and there was the *Oklahoma* (inaudible) 60 men in that and then back out to sea. That evening I watched the whole bombardment as we shot down our five planes from the *Enterprise*, spectacular firefight show from about sea, huh. That was about December 7<sup>th</sup>. I had watched the two man submarine too while was I was watching. In other words, I had seen that. I was watching them in my gun sight. We couldn't fire at it.

PJ: Why is that?

AS: Couldn't get the gun battle --

PJ: Oh, because it was just --

AS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was this way, too close. Too close. I watched all the shells explode around it, and I watched the Perry's shell hit it. And until 1951, it took that long before they decided that Perry actually had hit it. Watched (inaudible), but I saw a lot did what I was told as very best as I could, didn't make any mistakes. Great day. I have fond memories of it. I have bad memories of it. I don't have any bad memories. I do have flashbacks now once not as much as I used to have. But one of the guys that I'm shipmates with called me about 15, 20 years ago, and "Schwichy," he said, "you have any flashbacks about the trip?" And I said, "Really, Joe, I do but not as many as I used to have." And he said, "Well, I do too." And he said, "What was your (inaudible), Joe?" He said, "Well, it wasn't about the 70th," he said, "you know in '41, when we were towing rope loose and we had to put the whaleboat in the water, and we went over to get on the target?" I said, "Yeah, I remember that, Joe." I said, "Yeah." I said, "We had to back it out to keep from riding up." "Yeah," he says, "I still wake up yelling back her down Schwichy, back her down." And he's still alive. One of the three men I know are alive on the Trever, that 130 men that's all that's left that we know of. And if there's some, they've hit out somewhere. They don't want to be known. We never have a record of him in the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association.

PJ: What type of ship was that? You said the Trever?

AS: It was a four-stack destroyer --

PJ: Oh, OK.

AS: -- built in WWI. We had, when I came aboard in November of '40, we took the torpedo tubes off. We had them old 18-inch torpedoes and they were small, they were useless

really, but we still only had 300-pound depth charges on board. We never got (inaudible), but we only had them see. But in face of them torpedo tubes, we got a degaussing cable.

PJ: A what?

AS: A degaussing cable for magnetic mines.

PJ: Oh, OK.

AS: Yeah, and that's why we came back in that afternoon. We were the first ship back in, the Trever was. And we made a trip around the island with our degaussing cable in case there was magnetic mines left in the harbor by the submarines. You know, it was nobody knew what went wrong, what happened that day, that's a fact that we were surprised, but yet we knew it was coming, everybody knew we were going to war. It was done, just a matter of when, what day. So, like I told the panel out here today, we had fire drills, we had collision drills, we had man overboard drills while we were in the harbor, but we never had an air raid drill, you know?

PJ: Yeah.

AS: See, we had anti-torpedo runs on the ships, we used the metal ships as targets, but we never had an aircraft attack, never. We operated with the carriers, but the planes took over the carrier and went someplace else, you know, and we never had an enemy attack us and in maneuvers, never did. Never seen a torpedo plane come down and try to fire a torpedo at a battle ship or anything, you never seen that. Not before the war. After well, we see lots of it. But that was the way it was that morning. The following Sunday we stayed steaming in what they call the easy circle outside of Pearl and that we had all of the destroyers that were out there kept a constant big circle (inaudible) they

called it, the (inaudible) circle and that was whenever another one of our ships came in, when our carriers came in we had two lines of destroyers running back and forth at 25 knots to make a sound barrier if the submarines couldn't fire through that at then our carriers and our cruisers as they came in. But on Sunday we were ordered out to sea to -- we were supposed to escort a Norwegian Freighter but when we got to see where it had been sunk by a submarine we picked up 39 men and a woman in a lifeboat and brought them in. Then on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, we were escorting a tug with two planes and a barge; two planes on the barge and tug boat towing it and a Royalty Frank, a little Army transport. When we secured the general quarters and I was standing on the stern and two torpedoes went a stern of us, hit the Royalty Frank blew her to bits and two torpedoes went underneath us, right under, you know. We dropped all our depth chargers that day and didn't do any harm but later in the afternoon the Jarvis finally caught up with us and came out of Pearl and one pass with a 600-pound depth charges sank the I78 and we know that and it's one of them historical markers, nobody can dive on it. It's a cemetery, eh.

PJ: So how many men were --

AS: That's a Jap sub, huh?

PJ: Yeah. How many --

AS: I don't know what the count was.

PH: I mean a small sub or pretty --

AS: A full size sub, yes.

PJ: Oh, OK.

AS: Yeah. It was a full size sub, yeah.

PJ: the ones that were in the harbor though were --

AS: Little.

PJ: One man or --

AS: Yeah, just like we have at the museum here. Exactly like that, huh, but that was my battle accident in that part of it. I didn't get in the Battle of Midway because I was back in Mayrant. I finally got back. We was due to the for the states on the morning of the 8<sup>th</sup> to go back to Mayrant and get new guns. Yeah, so and we were due to go and one battle ship was going to go with us. So nobody seems to know which battleship was going to leave that morning with us. No, I've never found that out and I asked Frank, the news moderator. He says he don't know and he knows a lot. He's a very well-versed man. He knows as much about the Trever as I do, believe me. He's very well versed on the Trever. But then after I got back to Pearl and I was transferred back to the states to go to diesel school (inaudible) made second in June and --

PJ: Of '42?

AS: Yes, of '42. And in order to make first class machinist at that time, you had to have (inaudible) school. So I would say I was one of the bright boys on the ship all right. That's bragging, but I was going along pretty good and I had been a machinist and that made me a very valuable man, yes. Now I could scrape berries and I could teach the other guys so, and they would send me back to the states. I put the DE-13 in commission. The first DE to commission the Mayrant.

PJ: What is that, DE?

AS: Destroyer escort.

PJ: Oh. OK.

AS: The first one I was went in commission was put in commission in February of '43 in (inaudible). I went to two diesel schools. I went to one in Chicago and one in



Miami, Florida and I was transferred out to put that DE in commission and I brought her around to Florida and made a school ship out of her. We had a whole mess of DE's being built and the skipper, the (inaudible) on the (inaudible) end was a good friend. I'd met him on the *Gridley* years before so I told him I didn't want to stay in Florida. I wanted to get back out to sea and get to where I belonged and shortly after we got to Miami why he got a hold of me and said pack your sea bag. I'm going to Boston and put a ship in commission. I'm the commanding officer and I want you to come with me. So I did. And as soon as I got there, I made first class machinist mate, and nine months later I made chief. So I made chief in March 1<sup>st</sup> 1944.

PJ: Wow.

AS: Twenty-two years and nine months of age. Had a fabulous time on board the *Steele*. Great time.

PJ: That was the other new ship?

AS: A DE-8.

PJ: OK.

AS: Brennan was a DE-13, which was the first one. And I served aboard the DE-8. I stayed on her until the war ended.

PJ: How do you spell the *Steele*?

AS: S-T-E-E-L-E.

PJ: OK.

AS: *Steele*, with an E on the end.

PJ: Yeah.

AS: And it was named after a guy that was killed on the *Lexington* in the Battle of Coral Sea, a marine. Yeah, one of them Navy rejects. A general --

PJ: Tell Hagey that?

AS: Oh, yeah. First time I ever met him. Oh, my gosh, you know, one of the Navy rejects, you know. Oh, general and I

had a very good, great rapport together, we do. My only like I say I don't donate any money anymore to anybody, but the Nimitz Foundation and my picture's out there on the wall, I've been there for many years. And my sons when we were here the other day, we're walking down the line down there to see the breakfast, you know, we got to have a brick so they got Marty, we're going to have a brick out there, Schwichtenberg family.

PJ: Oh, good. Good.

AS: Now, but I got a great life. I'm 90 years of age. I still get around a little bit.

PJ: When did you get out of the service then?

AS: I got out in '46.

PJ: Forty-six?

AS: After the A bomb. I went to both A bomb tests in Bikini on the USS *Rockingham*.

PJ: Oh, you were there?

AS: Yeah. Yeah, on the USS *Rockingham*. I got back to the states in August 21<sup>st</sup> and I got paid off on the 24<sup>th</sup>. And they put the *Rockingham* out of commission on September 15<sup>th</sup> for being too radioactive, which was in the test. She lays bottom up at Kwajalein, still radioactive. The German cruiser. But anyway, my first wife's family had a dairy in Oakdale, California, and they were old, and they told us they'd sell me that ranch and the cows. So that's how I got in the dairy business. So in October of '46 I took over the ranch. And August 1<sup>st</sup> of 1950 was the first time I got a day off because as soon as the Korean War started, I got orders to report back to the --

PJ: Oh.

AS: -- and I had to get rid of the cows. And August 1<sup>st</sup> was the first time I had a day off. I went up reported to Treasure

Island, go to Island really, and I met the skipper they had on the steam and he said, "Swchichy," he said, "why won't you stay as a civilian? I need ships. Go to Hunters Point, I'll get you over there. We've got to have somebody who can put ships in commission and get them going and you're the guy that can do the job." Oh, I went over to Hunters Point. I got a crew, and I put 20 destroyers in commission. Had a great crew. Went to sea with every one of them. Took a trip out through the island, underneath a bridge, made a run, made 25, 30 knots, got back in and turned it back over to the Navy.

PJ: So you stayed a civilian during that time?

AS: Oh, yes, stayed a civilian. I stayed a civilian until I left the Navy yard in '57. I stayed through the Suez crisis.

PJ: For six years?

AS: Yeah --

PJ: Yeah.

AS: -- went back out to the ranch and went in the hog business. Bought a bunch of hogs. Got a bunch of hogs and I stayed down with them until '61. Then the counties begin to squeeze me pretty bad and I got rid of all the hogs, and ripped the place all up and planted almond trees. And I stayed in almond trees until 1997, when I turned it over to the kids, and mom and I went to Florida. My first wife died in 1964, and I married Lil. We're just married 45 years in July.

PJ: Wow.

AS: So and I had three children; she had two, she was a divorcee, and we have one between us so. Again, they all got along. The two boys here; one is hers and one is mine. And they're like you never two --

PJ: Just like it yeah.

AS: Fantastic, unbelievable.

PJ: Good.

AS: All the kids get along.

PJ: Great.

AS: Her boys never called me anything but dad, her two boys.

And my son, the one that's here, he was the only one left home when my wife after we were married. My other two had already left home, were married. At any rate, I told Neil I said, "I want you to meet this lady." And went and meet in a park in Riverbank and meet her two boys and we met and they played together. There were a lot of different about six, seven years between them, but he had a great time. When I said, "We got to go home," he said, "Gee, dad, can't I go home with her?" And he called her mom ever since. All my kids call her mom. She'd been a great mother, a great wife. Look at me. She keeps me alive and keeps me going, and she's had a tough life. She's had a hydrocephalous, that's the first thing they -- the last in '97, she started to fall and couldn't find out what was wrong with her. And '99 a PA, physician --

PJ: Assistant, yeah.

AS: We were at the doctor's office together, and she went to a regular doctor but I went to a lady PA. I liked lady doctors. And I went to the PA, and as my wife and the doctor walked down the hall the PA said to me, "Has your wife had a stroke?" I said, "No, why?" She says, you know, "I don't like the way she walks." And I said, "Well, they're looking for something, the reason why she falls and everything. And they're now looking, checking about Parkinson's disease." She said, "She ain't got Parkinson's, she's had a stroke." She said, "I'll see Dr.

Bennett." So he'd taken her and sent her to the hospital and take a CT scan of her head, and the guy that took the CT scan says she's had a stroke. And what it did, it blocked a section of the brain which controlled the flow between the spine and the brain, you know, the circulation of spinal fluid and it was blocking the circulation of it. And that was accumulating fluid in her brain, and that's why she would have these falling spells. No other outward sign, huh. So they immediately sent me to a neurosurgeon and he said, "Well, I'll fix that." And he was a Lebanese, incidentally. And he drilled a hole in the top of her head, put a tube in and run it down her neck and down inside into her stomach. When, in the operating room hardly could walk or and was very shaky. I had to watch her when she was cooking. She couldn't -- it was well over six months, it was getting progressively worse. And she walked out of the hospital like a new woman. Then she had a stroke with the operation and everything, blood thinners. She had a stroke, a bleed and I was sitting, we were sitting in the evening and sitting alongside of one another in a love seat. And I asked her to give me a piece of candy and she says, "OK." And I looked and I noticed there was something radically wrong. And I said, "Are you going to give me a piece of candy?" And she says, "OK." But she's still staring straight ahead, and I know something's wrong. I don't know what's wrong but I know there's something wrong. And I said, "If you don't answer me, I'm going to call 911." And she said, "OK." I got the phone. I said, "911." She said OK one more time and I punched 911. And of course, where we live within five minutes I had a medic there and he walked in he said, "She's had a stroke." And they put her in a gurney and got her to the

hospital, and her doctor immediately got there and he said, "Arnie, we got to get her someplace else. She's bleeding and this ain't (inaudible) ain't capable. So he sent her (inaudible) Melbourne, and by helicopter and they sent me home. They said, "Go home. There's nothing you can do. You're only in the way. See us at 9 o'clock in the morning, and you can't help. We'll call you at three o'clock in the morning, tell you how she is." They called me at three and told me that she was paralyzed on the right side, and she couldn't speak and come in at nine o'clock. And I got in at nine o'clock and Dr. [Plaky?], the nurse surgeon was there and he said, you know, "Her right leg's got some motion, and we're going to try to get her up and make her walk. Want to help?" Yeah. So by gosh, she did. She was able to walk 400 feet. But the leg movement was there but there was no movement on the right side, she couldn't speak, face was a little droopy. And they started therapy. By noon time, they were therapy on her. And we stayed in the hospital there for about four days, and they sent her to a rehabilitation hospital and they worked on her. And about 20 days after that, in that rehabilitation she said catastrophic.

PJ: That's a big word.

AS: And the nurse said to me, "That came out of her, Arnie! She's going to be able to speak. That came out of her. She's getting message." And of course, it progressed. And in the meantime, I'd work her arm or our daughter came and they said move that arm. They said, "The more you move that arm without resistance, it's going to help. Maybe it'll get a message through to the brain that that arm is there because the brain don't know it's there anymore." And we kept moving that arm, and one day she was able to

move the arm there. And then a couple of weeks later, she was able to bend the elbow and it was seven weeks after the stroke they had told me when I was home, now you tap this ten times like this, ten times like this, and see if she can get some motion out of that hand. Well, after seven weeks we're sitting one afternoon, same love seat. I'm tapping at the side, I've been doing for hours and oh, the wrist moves. She said, "I moved it. I can move it." And three days later, these fingers she got moving. And but these wouldn't work and it took about a month. They finally put electrodes and found the nerves and made these fingers work. And after a while, she was able to work them.

PJ: Just by memory then?

AS: Yeah, and if you see her you would never know. She had a little speech impediment even now. She said, "I know what I want to say, but it don't want to come out like I say." And she can't say no. She said all these years, I still have trouble saying no. It just don't want to come out. And excuse me, but that's a straight answer. She can't say no and you ask her, she'll tell you. She says no, but she says, "But when I need to say no, I can't get it to come out." But, you know, I've had a fabulous time here, and I hope everybody enjoyed the hike. People were -- you've seen them around.

PH: Yeah, sure.

AS: Says, Arnie, you did a great job, that dynamo. I keep telling everybody I have Alzheimer's, huh. And I told the whole crew, I've got Alzheimer's from here down (inaudible), you know? And that's the truth too, you know, you don't believe me, ask my wife. But I feel good and I hope to be here next year. We're going to hope and have

the Pearl Harbor Survivors Association here next year for our national convention. And I think we'll have it. With the support we get here and that's what we need, the leg work. The organization like this and symposium that take a lot of extra people to put it together and make the arrangements and we're all in our 90s and most of the women did most of the work on these things over the years and they're getting old and tired too, like the rest of us. So we're hoping and we've been negotiating with them here and --

PJ: So that'd be the 70<sup>th</sup>?

AS: The 70 --

PJ: Yeah.

AS: The 71<sup>st</sup>. This is the 70<sup>th</sup>.

PJ: That's right, 70<sup>th</sup>, yeah, you're right.

AS: And our children want me to go to Pearl for the 70<sup>th</sup>, but there's not going to be anything out there. And it's a long ride from Florida. It's a long ride. And I said I'd rather not. And somebody will have me speaking somewhere. So we've decided we won't go to Hawaii this year and we'll all come here.

PJ: Good.

AS: Yeah, they'll come here.

END OF AUDIO FILE