

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. James R. Snellen

Date of Interview: March 8, 2013

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Mr. Murphy: This is Brian Murphy. I'm the interviewer. Today is March the eighth, 2013. And I am interviewing James R. Snellen, uh, by telephone. Okay, now, Mr. Snellen?

Mr. Snellen: Yes, sir?

Mr. Murphy: Do I have your address as 1544 Mayfield Rd?

Mr. Snellen: That's correct. Saint Johns, Florida 32259.

Mr. Murphy: Very good. That's what we have here. Now I'm going to read you a little statement, and, this recording, this oral history will be available to public history. Is that agreeable to you? Do you understand that?

Mr. Snellen: Yes, and I'm honored.

Mr. Murphy: Oh, well thank you sir. Let me just read this to you. The purpose of the National Museum of the Pacific War Oral History Project is to collect, preserve and to interpret the stories of the lives and wartime experiences of World War II veterans. Audio and video recordings of these interviews, as well as additional materials provided to the museum by the interviewees, become part of the Center for Pacific War Studies, the archives of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission. These materials will be made available for historical and other academic

research by scholars and members of the interviewee's family. Now I have a release to read as well.

Mr. Snellen: Okay.

Mr. Murphy: The undersigned, that would be you, Mr. Snellen, have heard the above statement and voluntarily offer the National Museum of the Pacific War, full use of the information contained on this audio or in this case, video, of this interview, as well as any additional material that would be provided to the museum by yourself pertaining to your life and wartime service. And further assign all rights and title and interest pertaining to the material, to the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission. Do you agree to that?

Mr. Snellen: Yes, most definitely.

Mr. Murphy: Very good, sir. Then we can begin our interview. And,—

Mr. Snellen: May I butt in and say something?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir. Of course.

Mr. Snellen: I hope this doesn't mess you up.

Mr. Murphy: No, it doesn't.

Mr. Snellen: This must be something similar to Florida State University has on file, there. And also, the archives in, Washington; I forget what it's referred to. But go right ahead, sir.

Mr. Murphy: All right sir. Okay. Mr. Snellen. Can you tell us about your growing up life; where you grew up, where you went to school and so forth.

Mr. Snellen: I'm honored to do that. Okay. I was borned in Bullitt county, Kentucky. Uh, which is the county next to Louisville. And, I was borned in my great-grandparents pre-Civil War log house. And I went to a two-room school, um, in Kentucky, in Bullitt county, Kentucky. And graduated from the eighth grade there. Then I started to a school in Jefferson county, Kentucky called Valley High School.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir.

Mr. Snellen: And. I was fifteen years old. Oh, I'd like to back up a second, if I may.

Mr. Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Snellen: It was such an honor. I was so proud of the background that I grew up in. There were five boys and one girl in our family. I was second to the oldest. And we lived on this farm, we worked hard, and, but I never regretted it. All the young people around where I was borned and grew up, they worked in the fields. I never have, I could never remember a single one being in any kind of trouble, causing any kind of trouble. And the reason I mention that. Shows the difference in yesterday and today. And incidentally I was born September 27, 1926. And I'm so proud of the little school that I went to. And I have to say this, that my one teacher that I was so proud of, whose name was J. C. Brachear, B-r-a-c-h-e-a-r. But he paddled me four times. And, I believe it was about the fifth grade. But yet as I grew up, he was so strict, I remembered rather, he was so strict. And I look back, and that was one of the start of my life that really; I look back as a, what an honor it was to have this gentleman, who was such a strict teacher, and so different than today's young people.

And I was fifteen years old when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. And my older brother was two and half years older, and, so he was, it wasn't long 'til he was being drafted and so quickly he joined the air forces. Then it was called the Army Air Corps. And I could not wait. Back then, everybody was patriotic. Everybody wanted to get in service. And I didn't think I'd ever reach the age of seventeen, to where my parents would hopefully sign my papers to join the Navy. And my older brother, then, wound up after a couple of tours in the States, into England, in the 8th Air Force. And he kept writing home; and I was always known as Jim or Jimmy. And he'd say to my parents, "Do not sign Jimmy's papers to join the Navy." Well, after about six months. Let see, my birthday was September 27th, and then on April 4th or 3rd, my best high school friend and myself, we were out with two young ladies. We were, had travelled near Fort Knox, Kentucky, which is twenty-eight miles from Louisville. And, we decided, it was about midnight; we'd better turn and go back. And incidentally, the car I had was my older brother's, he was foolish enough to leave it for me while he was overseas, in service and overseas. Well, we ran into a ditch, they had dug a ditch. The reason I'm telling this, is how I wound up in the Navy. In a little town called West Point, Kentucky; just a little bit north of Fort Knox. And we turned in the side street and they had dug a ditch across the water or gas line or something, and the car dropped in that. And it was a little before midnight, and we sat there, we could nothing, we couldn't get out. And back then, there certainly was no, we wouldn't have gone to a neighbor's house and knocked on the neighbor's,

knocked on anyone. We sat there until daylight, and this is the gospel truth, there was nothing un, nothing bad happened between the two girls and ourselves. The two fellas, my best friend, Charles W. Harris, and myself. We sat there until daylight, and, I had someone that pulled us out. We couldn't call home, so when I arrived at. My mother and dad had left the farm, I'm going to guess a year earlier, and, lived in Louisville, Kentucky, the city of Louisville. And my dad needed to go to work, he hadn't heard from his son. But first, I'd better back up and say; when we got to the girls, they lived about a block apart, this is the gospel truth. They said, "You stop. Let us jump out and you go. We don't want you facing our fathers." Can you believe that? This is the truth. And we did so. I left my friend off at his parents, and, or his mother and step-father, and I got to, I walked in the door at 10:30 in the morning, and my dad would never call me, my middle name was Richard, after my mother's father, and James was after my dad's father, James Richard. And when my dad, whenever he'd get mad at me, he would call me Dick, short for Richard. Why, only when he'd be mad, I don't know. But I stepped in the door at 10:30, he said, "Dick, where in the hell have you been?" And I said, "If you don't like it, sign my papers to join the Navy."

Mr. Murphy: Are you serious? Wow.

Mr. Snellen: Am I talking too much?

Mr. Murphy: No, not at all.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. And, and you know what he said to me. "Son, go get your papers." I called my friend. I said, "Bill." Charles Harris was his name, and

incidentally, both of our pictures are on the front of the book that I wrote.
Maybe you've seen that at the Nimitz Museum.

Mr. Murphy: I have not seen the book yet.

Mr. Snellen: Oh, okay. I'd be glad to send you one.

Mr. Murphy: Please. We can talk about that later. I'd like it.

Mr. Snellen: Good for you. I'm sorry, I'm getting off track. And so I called and told him, "My mother and dad have signed, have agreed to sign my papers to join the navy." He went to his mother, he didn't have to have his step-father. She agreed for him. So at 1:30, we were holding up our hand to join the navy. At 4:30, or 4:00 or 4:30, we were on a train to Great Lakes—

Mr. Murphy: Naval Air.

Mr. Snellen: and, and that was on April the twenty-fifth, I believe that's the exact date. And so, we took four weeks boot camp, training. Today I suspect it would be two or three months. Four weeks. And then we got a seven-day leave, back home. Then each of us went back to Great Lakes for assignment. And incidently, all we did, seems to me like, was march. I felt we would be walking in water and all, but we marched, we marched, we marched, for those four weeks. Something else, would be of fun interest, it's in my book. I grew up around water, and I could swim like a duck. But my friend couldn't swim a stroke. And being in the navy, they said, finally, and I passed my swimming test and they said, "You cannot go on leave unless you pass your swimming test." Now gentlemen, you won't believe this, but it's the truth. I, dumb, dumb, me, I show up and they said, "What is your name?" And I said, "My

name is Charles W. Harris. I'm here to try for the swimming test." I wanted him to go home with me on leave.

Mr. Murphy: Sure, sure. (laughter)

Mr. Snellen: And I jumped in. I can still see. It was a big pool and they held a pole over my head all the way around. "Now Harris, are you okay? Are you okay?" "Yeah, yeah." I got finished, they said, "Harris, you passed your swimming test." Can you believe, gentlemen, anybody would be stupid enough to do that? But I did it. And so we got to go home together, for seven days and back again to Great Lakes. And then, sadly, we were, they parted us. He was sent to Little Creek, Virginia for the LST training. That's called a Landing Ship Tank, that's the big one. It hits the beach and the big doors open and either tanks or trucks can run out on the beach. They sent me to Fort Pierce, Florida for amphibious training. That's the little LCVPs, [Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel] that you gentlemen are familiar, they can haul, they called them Higgins boats. And Higgins was out of New Orleans, and, there's a big museum there and there's several of those Higgins boats, I know two or three, on display. And they haul thirty-five men. And we spent uh, I was there from June, I can't remember what day exactly, from June to the first of September.

Mr. Murphy: What year would that be?

Mr. Snellen: That was June, 1944. And each boat, we were, we trained from June till, I'm going to say, the first day of September. I don't have that exactly, the last of August, or first day of September. I believe it was the fourth day to be exact. Anyway, from there, I was. Each boat had four sailors that manned them.

And we could haul thirty-five men. And there's the cocksman, who drove the boat. Then right directly behind the cocksman, was a 30-caliber machine gun. And there was a gunner that manned that gun and then right straight across the boat was another 30-caliber machine gun and the gunner, signalman and radioman manned that gun. And that was my responsibility. And then the person that stayed down in the boat was the engineer, whose responsibility was to keep the boat in operating condition. And, so we joined, there were sixteen of us, for the ship. We were assigned to the U.S.S. Cofer, APD-62. That's Attack Personnel Destroyer, number 62. It had been the DE-208 (tape goes silent for an instant)

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir?

Mr. Snellen: Destroyer Escort, 208. I believe someone's ringing in on me but I'll just keep talking. Ignore them. Hope it doesn't come through on your end.

Mr. Murphy: No.

Mr. Snellen: And, so, are you still there, gentlemen?

Mr. Murphy: Yes, we are. You bet.

Mr. Snellen: Okay, I'm sorry. And, so we arrived at, we were shipped, sixteen of us and one officer, was sent to Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York. And, the Cofer, they converted from a Destroyer Escort. It had made two trips across the Atlantic for submarine escorting convoys. And then they decided to convert those, a number of them, to amphibious ships for the South Pacific. And each one had four boats, those little LCVP boats, aboard. And sixteen men, four in each boat and one officer. And we left in September then, for the South

Pacific. And the title of my book is *South Pacific at Seventeen, World War II USS Cofer APD-62* by James Richard Snellen. And incidently, I received a shipment of books yesterday. And they're still being sold. The book was, I'm getting off-track but you gentlemen, I'm sure, cut anything you don't want. While it's on my mind, it was published in 2008 and even two weeks ago I received a little royalty. It's still being sold throughout the country and the publisher also had a place in Oxford, England. But we left New York and I'll tell you a quick something. I'm getting a little off from what you might want to hear from me but our first stop when we left Brooklyn Navy Yard on the Cofer was Norfolk, Virginia. And we tied up on the left side of a dock and on the right side of the dock, right next to us, was the USS Bennington, an aircraft carrier. Our ship was 320-some feet long, if I remember correctly, and the Bennington was, you can imagine, an aircraft carrier, and right across the dock was our little ship. Someone aboard our ship heard that the Bennington had a player piano aboard. And I don't you whether you gentleman know what a player piano is, but it has rollers on it. They went aboard the Bennington, several of our fellas, and said, "We've been sent, from the shore, to pick up your player piano, take it ashore, and tune it up." Well, they piped down on the aircraft carrier, several men to come and help get that piano off the ship. They got it off, and they even provided them with the rollers so they could use that in tuning it up. They stood there and covered it up with a tarpaulin. Our ship had a big boom on the tail fin, on the tail end. They swung that boom over and when it got dark, picked up that player piano, down

in the hold, cargo hold, and the next morning at daylight, we took off for the South Pacific. Our little ship stole the player piano off the big aircraft carrier. And then, we went through the Panama Canal and stopped in Balboa. The next stop after Balboa was, we called it Galapagos but the proper pronunciation is Galapagos Island. Darwin's Galapagos Island. And we took, they put our little boats in the water for testing and what have you. I've never seen so many sharks in my life. And then from Galapagos, our next stop was Bora Bora. I don't know whether you gentleman have ever heard of Bora Bora, but it was the most beautiful island. It was a French society islands. It was just a beautiful place and we refueled there and then our next stop, we crossed the equator. And that was something back in those days. They really pounded you. Now if I'm talking too much, you gentlemen tell me.

Mr. Murphy: I just wanted to ask you, if I could, but you trained at Fort Pierce until September 1, 1944. Then you went up to Brooklyn Naval Yard.

Mr. Snellen: Yes, sir.

Mr. Murphy: And you were there for just the rest of the month?

Mr. Snellen: Just for the rest of the month. Pulled out on the 26th of September. The day before my eighteenth birthday. But even so, I used the book, "South Pacific at Seventeen". I left for the Pacific, I wasn't in the Pacific for a couple weeks, but later. Go ahead, right now.

Mr. Murphy: No, that's fine. That's what I was wondering.

Mr. Snellen: On the exact date, the date before my eighteenth birthday, we pulled out of Brooklyn Navy Yard for the South Pacific. Stopped overnight in Norfolk, and

then from Norfolk down to Cape Hatteras, past Cape Hatteras. First time I ever got, first time to get seasick. And then down through the Panama Canal to Balboa, which is on the west coast. From Balboa to Galapagos, Galapagos to Bora Bora, French society islands. Next we crossed the equator and our first stop. And incidently, I'll be glad to mail you guys, I know I'm getting a little off track a minute, while I think about it, I can, I'd like to send you a complete history, a typed history of our ship. Also the day, each day we stopped, everyplace we stopped at, throughout the Pacific until we came back and decommissioned the ship. And then crossed the equator, and that was quite an experience. I remember being, having crawled through a canvas tunnel. On the other end the tunnel, was the, was our Philippine chief, navy chief, and they had greased his navel and, they said, "Kiss". You crawl through this water hose, pressure against you and they said, "Kiss the Chief's navel." And so I was smart, I thought I'd just put my lips up and when I did, I don't know if you gentlemen have ever heard of a cow prod or not. When I put my lips up to the Chief's navel, he was dark-complected. They hit me in the butt with that cow prod and I, my mouth flew open, and did I ever kiss the Chief's navel. They even broke one of the officer's arms. And they really, back then, when you crossed the equator, was something else. Then our first, next stop was Finch Haven, New Guinea. And again, this list I'll be sending you, gives each one of those exact dates. And we were in Finch Haven, New Guinea. Then from Finch Haven, New Guinea to Hollandia, New Guinea. And the Japanese were still fighting, but it was secure around the shorelines.

And then from there, we took off for the Philippines. And we left Hollandia, New Guinea for the Philippines.

Mr. Murphy: When would that be? What date do you think that would be?

Mr. Snellen: I can give you the exact date. I pulled this out in case you'd ask me. I've got it right in front of me. Okay. Let's see, we left Hollandia on, we arrived in Hollandia on November the fourth and we left Hollandia, New Guinea on November 17th. And we arrived in Leyte, in the Philippines, November 24th. And that was about two weeks after MacArthur landed at Leyte, in the little town called Tacloban in the Philippines. On the 24th. Let's see, we arrived, yeah, we left Hollandia again on November 4th, arrived in. I'm sorry fellas, I've gotta back. We arrived in Hollandia on the fourth of November. We left Hollandia on the November 17th. And on the 24th of November, three days later, we arrived in Leyte, in the Philippines. And MacArthur landed in Leyte, on the beach, we went in, just about two weeks after his initial landing. And then on the 27th, three days later, we left Leyte, we arrived on the 24th and we left on the 24th. And then gentlemen, I would like to say this. We arrived at night time, I can well remember. And, oh, I wanted to see action so bad, I was just, I was afraid the war would end early before I got to see anything, any action and miss out on the fun. The first night, a little PC, that's a little Patrol Craft, much smaller ship than ours, in Leyte harbor, a Japanese bomb hit that ship. And I can still hear men, we were close enough, screaming. And I thought, "This is nothing like the movies we saw back home." The movies back then, gentlemen, were propaganda. The Marines would hit the beach,

the Japanese had bad eyesight and they'd mow the Japanese down. That's why I wanted to get into that, and help pay back for what happened at Pearl Harbor. But anyway, we left Leyte on the 24th for Palau. I don't know whether you've ever heard of Palau or not. That's where there was. I'm going to. There were hundreds of Marines lost their lives in Palau Island. And, that was one that was often written that they should have bypassed that island. But there's, if you go back in the history, you'll find there was a number of stories written that they should have bypassed Palau and saved those lives. So we picked up part of the 77th Infantry. Again, we could haul 137 men. There were five ships in our division. APV 59, 60, 61, 62, and 63. Those five ships. Each one of us had four boats again, aboard her, aboard us, aboard them. And we left Palau and arrived two days later back in Leyte, where we had left from. And then on December the sixth, we had picked up the 77th Infantry. At Palau. The Army would usually go in behind the Marines and do the mop-up and what have you. So we picked up 130-some of the 77th Infantry and to land them on Ormoc, O-r-m-o-c Leyte. We landed on December the, we left Leyte again, on December 6th. On December 7th, Pearl Harbor Day, 1944, we landed troops on Ormoc, Leyte. And that's, the Japanese had just started suicide bombing. And our sister ship. Well, we landed troops without any problem. Landed the troops, and gentlemen, I say this. The Cofer, having been the destroyer escort, was a beautiful ship. But when they took the torpedoes off of her and added four boats and big gavets, to swing those boats over, put them in the water, lift them, dropped them, not

dropped them, the cables would lower us into the water. The former ship's crew did not appreciate what happened to their beautiful ship by adding those four boats aboard her. We, as a boat crew of sixteen men and one officer, we were treated like orphans. They did not have any respect for us, to speak of. What we had done to their beautiful ship. So, we made that first landing and we went in and hit the Japanese beach, dropped our ramp, the troops ran out and the engineer that I mentioned earlier, who was always down in the boat, and I was closest to him, it was our responsibility, after the troops ran ashore, to, run up and crank that steel ramp up in front of us and we did that as quickly as we could, because we were open to the Japanese beach. There was nothing between us until we got that steel ramp up, as the coxswain, the driver backed off the beach. And we did that. Today you'd push a button but we had to crank it up and we did it as quickly as we could. But we got back to the ship. From that day on, they had a lot of respect for the boat crew. If that makes any sense. Then we left, we went back to Leyte. Oh wait, let me back up a minute. It was a horrible day at, on December 7th, 1944, the Mahan, you may have heard. The first ship that fired a shot, it sank in Pearl Harbor, a Japanese two-man sub, on December the 7th, 1941. And she claimed to have sunk a Japanese submarine. It was never confirmed until later years, just a few years ago, they found that submarine at the bottom, that had been, that was sunk there. But the Mahan was sunk that same day at December 7th, at Ormoc harbor, Leyte. The ship that fired the first shot against the Japanese, I saw her be hit by suicide and explode and sank at Ormoc. A number of ships

were hit by suicide planes that day, including one of our sister ships, the USS Liddle, L-i-d-d-l-e the APD-60.

Mr. Murphy: Was that from your boat?

Mr. Snellen: No, that was our. You see, there were five ships, APDs in our division. And, she was hit, the Liddle was hit by suicide plane. It started for our ship and our gunneries knocked her down. We were back aboard, put aboard our ship. We already landed troops and I saw it dive, it dove into the Liddle and hit the bridge. They'd always go for the bridge, loaded with gasoline, the Japanese suicide planes, because that's where the brains were. If you know what I mean. And it killed all of the officers except five. And thirty-five men and injured, I think about a hundred. I know it was a large number. I had the list but I don't remember exactly. So I know it killed all the officers except five and one of those was knocked off the bridge, but later lived. The ship was going around in circles, and back then, they didn't have any other communication except blinkers, they called them signal lights. You've seen those I'm sure, blinking. And I was a signalman/gunner/radioman, I knew how to read those. A is like dit-dot, and C is dot-dit-dot-dit—

Mr. Murphy: Jim, can I ask—

Mr. Snellen: To blink the signal flags. Anyway, our skipper got as close as, our ship to the Liddle, as possible. And he yelled out, with a bullhorn, "Who's in charge?" And the answer came back, "Nobody. They're all dead." And so he put one of the boats in the water, and sent five men over and caught, somehow, to get aboard and bring the Liddle under control. And, after. That was at 12:02, I

remember that exactly, in the afternoon, when she was hit. And, there was one of the ship's signalman, was one of the five men. There was a doctor, a pharmacist, and, another officer and a signalman. I don't remember who the other one was. And the signalman, I won't mention his name, after two hours signals, "Please replace me. I can't take it. Please replace me." So the captain had the person in charge of the signalman, on our ship, who's name was L. J. Terley. In my book his name is well mentioned and a very good friend. Incidentally, he was from Kentucky. And a great friend of mine. I'm getting a little off track but it might be of personal interest to you. L. J. Terley was the ship's head signalman, first class signalman. And, he took me under his wing because I was just seventeen when I first went aboard and I know he felt sorry for me. But another gentleman, another signalman, Art Conn. Henry called Art Conn, C-o-n-n, from Ottawa, Ohio. He was a signalman and myself, I was a signalman from the boat crew. We were put in a boat to run over to this crippled ship and replaced this signalman, that asked to be replaced. And it was, you can't imagine what it was like. Just dead bodies, pieces and whatever. And the ship lost its steering. They had to be steered from the aft steering. I don't know whether you know what I'm trying to say. If something happened to the steering up in the bridge, they had steering down below and that's the way that ship was being steered. Or guided, whichever you want to call it. So I helped Art Conn in signalman. He was a much more talented signalman that I was. He was a third-class, he was rated, and I was just still a seaman at that time. So I helped him throughout dark and all and

they put a little. Our ship, the Cofer, put a little red light in the back end. You couldn't have lights at night time because the Japanese. A tiny light and the Cofer, I mean the Liddle, the USS Liddle, the APD-60, that was so badly damaged. They followed the Cofer back to, around the island of Leyte, Tacloban. And by following that little red light, on the back of the Cofer. At daylight, I always said I volunteered but I think I was volunteered. Given a shovel to help scoop up body parts and toss them over the side. I kind of get choked up, please forgive me, when I tell that. It was. I just turned eighteen, December seventh, I turned eighteen, September twenty-seventh. You know, before we went through the Canal. So I was given a Bronze Star—

Mr. Murphy: Really.

Mr. Snellen: Forgive me for doing that. And. So we got back into the harbor, Leyte, about eleven o'clock and we were relieved and went back to our own ship. And they were able to work that ship over, the Liddle, and get her back to the States and she was re-worked and later joined the fleet. After Leyte, now if I'm going too long, you gentlemen just tell me.

Mr. Murphy: Well, I wanted to find out. On the ship did you have any duties? I know you had duties on the Higgins boat but did you have any duties on the ship itself?

Mr. Snellen: Good question. Good point. Yes. Anytime that we was back aboard ship, we manned guns and the army gave us a number of 50-caliber machine guns and they welded them on the steel posts around the ship. I can't remember exactly, what my duties were earlier. I'll tell you later, when I get to it. We always. This is a good point. You wouldn't hardly. It would be hard for you

to accept this. We were on, the Japan. We had to man the guns an hour before sunrise and an hour before sunset. That's when the Japanese would, was most apt to attack. So, we could get off of duty. We'd man for four hours. We could get off from eight to twelve o'clock, at midnight. And an hour before sunlight, daybreak, we had to all go to our, man our battle stations. Each man was assigned a certain position on the ship. And being a gunner in the boat crew and a signalman, I was always assigned to one of the guns. Either one of the little 50-calibers that was manned, welded around the ship, to help knock down suicide planes or one of the, working helping the larger ones. The biggest gun we had aboard ship was a five-inch 38 gun. It was on the bow of the ship.

Mr. Murphy: Did you have a single or twin gun up there?

Mr. Snellen: Pardon?

Mr. Murphy: Did you have a single-mount five-inch up there?

Mr. Snellen: Single-mount five-inch. And incidentally, when she was a, the DE she had a three-inch gun. That was changed to a five-inch 38. And incidentally, it's odd. It's mounted on the side of the ship. I felt kind of close to it. It was produced by U.S. Naval Ordinance at Louisville, Kentucky. That's where that five-inch gun on our ship, my home town, was manufactured. But I never had anything to do on the ship around the five-inch. But I always was either around the little 50-calibers or 20-calibers. We had regular 20-calibers, we had two 20-caliber, right behind the bridge, one on each side. On the left is

port, naturally. On the right, starboard. Then on the back, they had two twin 40-millimeters.

Mr. Murphy: Right.

Mr. Snellen: Anti-aircraft guns. And then again, they had, the Army gave us those 50-calibers and we had to, welded all around the ship. Then after. Oh, I told you, I received two Bronze Stars. Gentlemen, I wasn't a hero, don't get me wrong. You only did what you were doing. And, but that one was the toughest, but it wasn't nothing heroic about scooping up body parts. So then, now you interrupt me and ask any question you might—

Mr. Murphy: Sure, sure.

Mr. Snellen: Wait, you, wait. I got off, telling you about. I worked, at different times. And I'm going to get ahead of myself, one time, if I may, on something I'll probably forget later. At Balikpapan, Borneo, which is later, our ship was attacked. I'll hold that for a little bit later. I'm sorry.

Mr. Murphy: Okay.

Mr. Snellen: Forget that. I hope you can cut anything you want, when this is over. But after Leyte, that was, a number of ships were hit by suicide plane. The Japanese through everything they could, whether because it was Pearl Harbor day, but the reason for that invasion on Ormoc, MacArthur invaded on the one side. The Japanese were reinforcing over on Ormoc Bay on the opposite side of Leyte. And that's why they sent us over and we were one of the ships that landed troops there. And incidentally, our five ships, we made, and I'll touch on them, we made eight such invasions in the Philippines. And there were

bigger ships that hauled a lot more troops than ours, but we always, we were always first. Those five APDs. We put the initial troops ashore and got out of the way, I guess they would call them the troops to hold the shore, the coast. And we'd get out of the way of the big stuff, like the APAs, AKAs and the LSTs and the larger ships. But every, we were in eight invasions in the Philippines and I can quickly mail all of them to you, but we always put, we were always first to land the initial troops. And we were really, you might say, "Well that was horrible. Tough being first." We were safer than the ones that came after us because the bombardment of the larger ships and the planes, the B-25s, B-26, B-24. They bombed and strafed the beaches to high heavens and the Japanese, except snipers and different things, and for mortars, shootings, shots rather, bombarding. Japanese had mortars, and I know you know what mortars are. Except for that, the Japanese would pull back until the initial troops got ashore and there was no more bombarding. So our APDs, the five in the Philippines, we always made the initial landings and got out of the way of the big stuff. Sometimes, they would assign us to help haul other stuff in. But as a rule, we made one landing and then back aboard ship.

Mr. Murphy: Jim, Jim—

Mr. Snellen: So after Ormoc—

Mr. Murphy: Jim, may I ask a question?

Mr. Snellen: Sure.

Mr. Murphy: Sorry for interrupting. As you would take the boats into the shore, in the first wave, like you say, your boats were first on site. When your boats came back to the ship, did you lift them back onto the boat or did you meet, did you—

Mr. Snellen: As a rule, several times we were assigned to help other ships haul something in or supplies or something. But as a rule, they hoisted us back aboard the ship. And when I send you a picture of it, you can see there was a big boom that came over on each side. Two boats were mounted in a cradle, two on each side. And we'd pull along side, and they'd hoist us up aboard. And the first boat was dropped down the cradle and then the boom went back down and picked up the second one and it was dropped above the first boat. If you know what I'm trying to say. Two on each side of the ship.

Mr. Murphy: Now, did they—

Mr. Snellen: Incidentally, our LVCPs were all wooden except the big steel ramp that we were always glad to get in front of, coming off the beach or going in. Except for the engines and guns. Other than that, they were all plywood.

Mr. Murphy: I was going to say, they were plywood? Is that right?

Mr. Snellen: Yes, sir.

Mr. Murphy: Wow.

Mr. Snellen: And they started changing to fiberglass in Vietnam, as I understand. But they were all wooden except the engines and they were diesel, GM diesel engines. And I can, I can't stand the smell of diesel smoke because we were sixteen months in the South Pacific. From the time we left and we got back. Now I'll go on but you stop me at any time, please.

Mr. Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Snellen: Okay, after Ormoc we went back to Leyte. And that later became our home base. That's where MacArthur made initial landings when he said, "I have returned."

Mr. Murphy: Right.

Mr. Snellen: Then on the, we got back to Leyte on December the eleventh. And then on December fifteenth. No I'm lying. On December eleventh, we picked up the 240th Infantry division. And we left Leyte with the Army troops, again, headed for Mindoro Island, in the Philippines. We landed troops at Mindoro on the fifteenth of December. It was a very easy one. There was no activity to speak of. I did see the USS Nashville en route to Mindoro and I believe it was on that same trip. Hit by suicide plane. That was MacArthur's flag ship. He was aboard her, I'm sure. Because later, we saw the Nashville, I'll touch on that. MacArthur was aboard that time, but I'm sure he was aboard. A suicide plane hit the USS Nashville between the Penne Island and Leyte and Mindoro. So we landed troops on December fifteenth and left the same day. Got back to Leyte on the seventeenth of December. And on the twentieth of December, we left Leyte and headed back to Hollandia, New Guinea. And we arrived there on Christmas Eve, December twenty-fourth. And on December twenty-ninth, we left Hollandia for N-o-e-m-f-o-o-r Island and landed there on December thirtieth. And we picked up the 57th, 135 men of the 1 58th Infantry division. That was on December thirtieth. Then on January first, 1945, we landed at P-a-d-a-i-d-o Island on January first, 1945. And we left

there on the same day and we arrived at J-a-p-e-n Island. Sounds like Japan but it wasn't, naturally, on the second of January, 1945.

Mr. Murphy: Now, Jim, may I ask you another question?

Mr. Snellen: Sure.

Mr. Murphy: Now in your trip over from, starting at Brooklyn, Norfolk, Panama, Galapagos and so forth. Had you been told to anticipate the suicide attacks?

Mr. Snellen: If we were, I sure couldn't remember it. No, we couldn't have been because they didn't start until September, when MacArthur. This is official, you can quote me on this. They started, the suicide planes started after MacArthur landed in September of 1944. And let's see, our first was—

Mr. Murphy: You landed at—

Mr. Snellen: MacArthur was September. Anyway, we went into. That's when they started, when MacArthur landed troops in the Philippines. That's when the suicide planes started. And as you probably know, they lost, maybe lost, I think more men than the Army at Okinawa. Go ahead, sir, I'm sorry.

Mr. Murphy: That was what I was wondering. If they had prepared you for the suicide plane attacks.

Mr. Snellen: As far as I can remember, we didn't even see any until that morning of December seventh, 1944. But I think they started, just because MacArthur landed before that, on the same island. But we were, we landed our troops on the opposite side. We were the. Leyte was the first Japanese Philippine island that Americans returned to. And again, that was on the Leyte side, a little town called Tacloban. Right next to, across the bay was Samar Island and,

and then. But that's the first time I ever saw a suicide, but gentlemen, it was horrible. They were diving out of the sky. Pardon me a second. (sneeze) I'm sorry. They were diving out of the sky at the ships. And again, they tried to always hit the bridge because that's where the communications and the brains were.

Mr. Murphy: Did they upgrade your ships, at all? With anti-aircraft weaponry?

Mr. Snellen: Maybe I didn't make that clear. In Leyte, I'm going to get a glass of water. I'll keep talking. I'm enjoying this because I know it by heart, but I'm going to grab a glass of water, if you don't mind. Just a second. Those planes dove into our ships, you can't believe it. To look up and see a plane. And unless you can knock them out of the air, on the way in, they would hit your ship. And they actually, that first one that hit our sister ship, the Liddle, headed toward our ship first. And our ship threw up so much flak. Pardon me, I took a sip of water. That the Japanese plane, it diverted and headed for the Liddle, our sister ship. And hit her. Flew into the bridge. But you asked about the other gun. See, someone on our ship, I guess the quartermasters. They went to the Army at Leyte, because the Army had all these 50-calibers and 30-caliber machine guns, and they gave our ship enough 50-caliber machine guns that all around the, there was cables on the, to keep you from falling overboard. And they welded these 50-caliber machine guns on each one of these iron posts. In other words, to have more stuff to throw up against these planes that were diving into ships. I don't know how many ships were lost at Ormoc, but several ships were lost. It was such a bad, bad day, at Ormoc. So

then, after Ormoc, then there were only four in our APD division. It was called, I think it was called Division 103. But we were always the APD, we always put the initial ships ashore and got out of the way. Okay. Now I'll go on, you interrupt me anytime. Let's see, after, then our next invasion was (cough) forgive me for talking so loud. Our next invasion was Lingayen, in the Philippines. Lingayen Gulf. That's where the Japanese came in. I keep sipping water.

Mr. Murphy: That's okay.

Mr. Snellen: I'm talking so loud. But the Japanese, that's where they invaded the Philippines when the war started. Lingayen Gulf. That's in the northern Luzon island. And there was over a hundred ships in that invasion, that day. Lingayen. Let's see what the date was. On January the eleventh.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir.

Mr. Snellen: January eleventh. So we went back to the same spot where the Japanese first landed. And we left the next day, on January twelfth, headed back for Leyte. We'd always go back to our home base. It became our home base. Our next invasion we landed troops, the 38th Infantry Division on January. Oh we picked up troops on the twenty-sixth of January. No, I'm lying to you. We were back in Leyte on the twelfth of December and on the twenty-sixth, on the twenty, yeah, the twenty-sixth, we picked up troops and we landed them on San M, M-a-r-n-n, S-a-n capital M-a-r-c-i-s-c-o, Luzon on January twenty-ninth and then we left there on January thirtieth.

Mr. Murphy: Now were these resisted landings?

Mr. Snellen: I'm sorry?

Mr. Murphy: Were the Japanese resisting you on these landings?

Mr. Snellen: Oh, yes. I mean. But. If you remember earlier. We were safer, as a rule, than the ones that followed us because, all we'd be encountered with would be sniper fire or mortar fire, because the regular Japanese troops would pull back to get away from all that bombarding. You cannot imagine how they'd bombard the beach, the destroyers, and B-24s, 25s, and 26 would strafe and everything. Bomb. And. So, for that reason, except, as a rule, we were safer than the ones after, after we got out of their way, they'd start coming in, then the Japanese started forcing their way, quickly, coming towards them, back to encounter the landing. Does that make sense? What I'm trying to say?

Mr. Murphy: Yes it does.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. Then on the San, that was on January twenty-ninth. And then we had, the 38th Infantry. Then back on the. Then on the thirtieth, we landed troops, we were right there close by, Subic Bay. I don't know whether any of you gentlemen ever heard, that was the biggest Navy, U.S. Navy base in the Pacific. I guess, maybe, it was larger than Guam. But for years, it was a big, until they finally pulled out of the Philippines and turned it over to the Filipinos, years later. But we were on the invasion of Subic Bay. And that was the least resistance of any. What was so funny, there was, Americans had left a big, sixteen-inch gun right at the harbor. And the reason it's such a special harbor, it's deep water and you had just a little channel to go through and then you were back in behind a peninsula. And on that point, was a big

sixteen-inch gun. And I kid you not, I'll always remember how funny we felt going in to land troops. We went in behind the point that came out and landed troops on the backside of the island, backside of that peninsula. If I can say it like that. And that big sixteen-inch gun was pointed right at us. We later learned that the Americans had bombed it enough it was dismantled. And only one man, we heard later, was killed that day. And there was a, like if you see a new home being built, a new construction, they'll attach a, like a temporary circuit breaker on a pole out in the yard for electricity? The Japanese had a booby trap set up and one man, we heard later, pulled that lever, and it was a booby trap, and killed him. But that was the easiest invasion we had of all. And then after Subic Bay, uh let's see, that. I'm sorry.

Mr. Murphy: No, I'm listening. Go ahead please.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. Let's see. Wait. That was Grand Island, in Subic Bay. Then the next was the regular Subic Bay. The big invasion we made, the one I was really telling you about. So that first one was Grand Island, Subic Bay. Subic it was called. And the next was the regular bay invasion of February seventeenth. Then, after that, we went back to, then we went down to Mindoro. Not our home base, but where we was in on that earlier invasion, the second invasion. And incidentally, when we went back to, from Mindoro, after that second invasion, our skipper, Captain Alvin P. Chester. He had been through so much already, I guess the first two invasions we were on, when we went back to Hollandia, Christmas Eve, he absolutely, I don't want to say he flipped but they relieved him and later years he became one of my best friends. But he

was relieved and replaced by Captain McCrease(?). Captain McCrease replaced him. But our skipper, those guys would be up day and night, all hours, and he flipped at Hollandia, when we were there. I know this is, I'm getting, jumping back a little. I don't mean to. And then, at Subic Bay, I mean, after Subic Bay invasion, we picked up troops at Mindoro. That's where we made our second invasion and after that's when we run back down to New Guinea. Our next invasion, on the twenty-sixth of February, this is 1945, we picked up the 186th Infantry Division and we landed them on February twentieth-eighth at Port-A-Princess, Palawan, that's P-a-l-a-w-a-n. I'll mail you guys a copy of this, and you can have all that in front of you. This was really something, it was a big invasion. And Palawan is right on the northern tip, what used to be called Borneo and now I think all of us call it Indonesia. And we landed troops and we were back aboard ship and I saw a train, coming around like, looked like a mountain. This was a big harbor and someone, some ship in the group fired and knocked that train off of the hill. And apparently the Japanese decided to try to get even. We didn't know this until later—

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir.

Mr. Snellen: There was an allied prison there, and, on those prison camps, they had Dutch, British, Americans, Americans that were captured in the Philippines. And, there was one of those prisons there at Palawan. You can go back, probably pull it up on the screen, called the massacre of Palawan. When that train was knocked off of the mountain, almost immediately we saw a huge smoke

coming up, it was over on the starboard side from where we landed troops. And we later learned, that was a Japanese prison that was holding Allied prisoners and they set that building on fire. Many of them, I don't know whether most, but many of them were burned. A number of them escaped and was able to tell about it. But that happened right after that train was knocked off of the side of the hill at Port-a-Princess, Palawan. And let's see, after Palawan, then we left on the twenty-eighth and we went back to Mindoro again. Then we arrived there on the March the third. We left Palawan on the twenty-eighth. On March the second, we landed troops at Zamboanga. We left Mindoro and on the eighth, two days later, we landed troops at Zamboanga. That's Z-a-m-b-o-a-n-g-a, Mindanao. That's where they, that's the biggest island on the southern part of the Philippines. And that was a tough one. There was a lot of shore activity on that one. Nothing hit us but I always remember, you heard me say that it was my responsibility. Once we could get that ramp up, I had to run up. There's two cleats up on the top of the ramp that locked that—

Mr. Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Snellen: boat in and those two cleats, uh, it was my responsibility to hook those cleats so the ramp, if a cable broke or something, the boat ramp couldn't drop. If you know what I'm trying to say.

Mr. Murphy: Sure, sure.

Mr. Snellen: At Zamboanga, I was a little on the dumb side. Always tried to see what I could see, as we were backing off the beach. I kept hearing "zing, zing, zing,

zing, zing" and I happened to look down over and the bullets were going all around our boat, hitting water. None of them hit our boat. I dropped down quickly. I had already, I saw enough there. But that was a, Zamboanga was not an easy one. And let's see, after Zamboanga, we went back to Mindoro. And then Mindoro, we went to Leyte. On the thirteenth day of March. And on the fourteenth day of March, we left Leyte. And on the twenty-fourth, we picked up the. We left Leyte rather. I'm wrong. We arrived in Leyte on the fourteenth, thirteenth and fourteenth, got there on the fourteenth and on the twenty-fourth we picked up part of the 182nd Infantry Division. On the twenty-fourth. And on the twenty-sixth, we landed them at Cebu City in the Philippines. Could ask a favor of you guys?

Mr. Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Snellen: Could we stop for just a minute?

Mr. Murphy: Sure. You bet.

[tape stops and restarts]

Mr. Snellen: I'm so sorry.

Mr. Murphy: No problem.

Mr. Snellen: Let's see. Oh, yeah. This was the worst invasion of all, well, one of the worst that we were in. At Cebu City. C-e-b-u. We landed troops there on March the twenty-sixth. It was the first place we ever had any trouble getting to the beach. Our boat hit a coral reef, and we landed troops, the landing was just a little left of the main city. And Cebu City was, I guess it still is, the second largest city in the Philippines. We hit a coral reef. We could not get to the

beach. And there was a, we always had 35 or 36 men down in the boat, Army. And incidentally, they would climb down a rope ladder, from the deck of our ship into our boat. I didn't think to mention that earlier. And so, we hit that coral reef, our coxswain, again who was the driver, told, there was an Army officer with that group, said, "I can't go any further." And he couldn't. And all those troops, that Army officer was so mad. I mean, this is one time it was hell on the beach. I mean, the Japanese was throwing everything on the beach, hitting the beaches. That wasn't the reason we stopped. It was a coral reef. And so they had to, it was shallow enough that we dropped the ramp down to water level and they jumped off the ramp, maybe waist-deep, and they started wading toward the shore. All except one. We heard a shot, and we assumed, and this guy's arm went up and it was just his fingers dangled. He put his hand over his M-1 rifle and blew the whole center part of his hand off rather than going ashore.

Mr. Murphy: Really! Self-inflicted wound.

Mr. Snellen: We thought it had come from the beach until I got up in the boat, after the guys were out; he was there, just his fingers dangling on that one hand. And there was the projectile from his gun in the bottom of the boat. And it ripped up through the wooden side, from inside out. So I gave him two morphine shots. And back to the ship and they, someone on our ship, turned him over to the Army. I don't know what ever happened to him. And maybe, in the long run, he was the only one that lived because where our boat would have been, hit in the beach, is about where those guys, wading, got to. And a mortar hit

right in the middle of them and all I can remember, seeing bodies flying every direction. I would assume, I'm guessing, that we were like a hundred and fifty feet from the beach when we hit that coral reef. But that was really a horrible one. Okay, after Cebu City, we went back to Leyte. We were in for a while. Our next one, we went back to Subic Bay, which had been that big base, and we landed there on April the second. And we picked up minesweeping gear. This is so important. Minesweeping gear, aboard our ship. Our ship was designated to become the flagship for a group of minesweepers for Borneo. And they decided to arm our boats, something as we were told, the Navy had never done before, they rigged, they decided to rig our little boats up for shallow water minesweeping. So instead of landing troops, we were going to go along the beach and do shallow water minesweeping, towing the equipment. After we left Subic Bay, on April the seventh, let's see, just a second, Subic Bay. Oh, yes. We left, going back to Leyte. Left Leyte on April twenty-second. And the twenty-fourth we went back to Zamboanga, Mindanao and left there the next day.

[tape 1 ends, tape 2 begins]

Mr. Snellen: And then we arrived on the twenty-seventh of April in Tarakan, Borneo. I think, if you look on the map, it's now, most of it, call Indonesia. It's just north of , just south of Port-a-Princess, Palawan. And in Tarakan, Borneo, the ships. They rigged our little Higgins boats, up, for minesweeping duty. We had to go within a 150 yards of the beach for shallow water mining.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir?

Mr. Snellen: And the bosman, there was a little, looked like venetian blinds except they were big, about three or four inches, aluminum and they were like three foot square and a cable would go out behind our boat, pulling this thing. It went out to an angle, it would sweep out like, I'm going to say, fifty feet or something and it would go down so deep for shallow water mines. And, it had jaws on it, like scissors. And we could only go, like five miles an hour and can you imagine? They sent us in, within like a 150 yards of the Japanese beach and we'd move along like five miles an hour.

Mr. Murphy: The Japanese were still there. Oh my.

Mr. Snellen: And this is the gospel truth. I think the Japanese actually felt sorry for us. They played with us. They'd just fire around the boat, they didn't even try to hit us. And you say, "I can't believe it." But this is the truth and it's in the records, the places, the three places in Borneo we did this. And at Tarakan, they sent us, our four little boats, up inside the harbor at Tarakan and the ships, the bigger minesweepers and the ships laid outside the harbor, and our four little boats were up inside the Japanese harbor and we knew when we hit a mine, because our boats were stopped dead in the water. Because it hit that cable. Also we'd know when that, those scissors, I'll call them, cut the cable, because our boat would shoot forward and the mine would pop out of the water. That's when it was fun for us because we'd kind of make circles and shoot our 30-caliber machine guns, and they had prongs, these mines, sticking up, I'm going to guess like three inches. You had to hit one of those prongs to make the mine explode and that was kind of fun for us. We did that, and then

finally, up in the harbor one afternoon, we were there several days doing that, in Tarakan. Water started breaking, at Tarakan, up in the harbor. And this is the gospel truth, it's in my book and I guess it's in ships' records is where I got that information from. The, our radio call was Idiot. I was Idiot 2. So the Japanese, and the ship's radio call was Goldwin. For some reason, I was a gunner, signalman and ship-to-shore radioman and I had the most powerful little radio of the four, our four boats. And our officer would usually ride with me for that reason. And all of a sudden, a bow comes up out of the water. And, no periscope, and my officer said, "Jim, call Goldwin, call Goldwin! And tell them a Japanese submarine is coming through the harbor." And it had a big dome on it, with huge, like rivets, big, on top. I'm going to guess it was like three inch, the dome was. No bow, I mean no periscope, just a big dome and it had a hook on the back. It had to be one that they hoisted aboard ship. I guess a two-man sub. And I said, "Goldwin, Goldwin, this is Idiot 2. Come in please." And they called back. They had put a high-ranking naval officer on our ship because she was the flagship of several minesweepers. And they came back and said, "Idiot 2, Idiot 2, this is Goldwin. Come in please." I said, "There's a Japanese submarine coming through the harbor." And the answer came back to me, "That's no." They couldn't see us. All we could see was, there was some British and Dutch coal-burning ships, smoke from them. And I said, they said, "That's no submarine, that's a fish." And gentlemen, this is exactly what I said, and I'll tell you what happened to me

after that. I said, "Fish my ass! That's no fish! I've never seen a fish with rivets in it before!"

Mr. Murphy: (laughter)

Mr. Snellen: And fellas, you're listening to a guy that got into deep, deep trouble. This was, this was, this was the truth. When we got back to the ship. And if the ship would have done what they could have done. Our ship had sonar on it.

Mr. Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Snellen: That threw out a beam in the water. And when it hit metal, it come back. They called sonar. They could have blocked that harbor, and they could have trapped that submarine in there. But they would not do it because they assumed, they were laying out there, they couldn't even see us, that it was a submarine. When we got back to the ship, there was two, waiting for me at the dock. I meant at the fantail. They said, he was some kind of an admiral, brigadier or some high-ranking officer that was temporary. And my officer followed me. When we got up there, gentlemen, he gave me the riot act. He read me the riot act. He chewed me up one side and down the other. I mean, he really worked me over. And my officer just stood behind me, saying, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir." When he finished, he said, "Sailor, I'm not going to court-martial you. But you do not use language like that on an Armed Forces radio. It's going down in the records as a fish." Okay. That was in Tarakan, Borneo. We landed there on April twenty-seventh and didn't leave until March the fifth. And between that April twenty-seventh and March the fifth, we were sent around, on the north side. Incidentally, the minesweepers they

had, most of them were wooden. They were called YMSs, like Yellow-Mary-Sam, YMSs. And our ship was a flagship for them. So we got around to the north side of the island. They, for some reason, they picked our, not, our boat. I said my boat. The coxswain is always the one in charge, that drove the boat. Put us in the water, and it was a little channel, a harbor. There's another big harbor in there, little channel into that harbor and all the minesweepers in our ship layed out up there and they put our little boat, boat number two, YMS, I mean the Cofer, they, in the water and we swept that har, channel. Went up in that harbor, pulled our minesweeping gear up in, and went back to the Cofer. Went back and they did not hoist us back aboard. In the meantime, there were two natives, came aboard our ship and warned them that the Japanese, on that point that we passed, we could have, within fifty or a hundred feet of us

Mr. Murphy: Oh my.

Mr. Snellen: Had two large, five-inch, they called them five-inch. The natives warned our officers that that was there, that Japanese were on that point. Yet they sent us past them and up in the harbor pulling our gear. The Japanese were smart enough, they saw these ships laying out there, waiting to come in and they weren't going to give their position away on a little wooden boat with four guys. I was one of them, right in front of them. And why they didn't hoist us back aboard, I don't know. But we were riding along beside the first boat. It was YMS-481. You can go on the internet and you can pull up YMS-481 sank, was sunk at Tarakan Borneo on, let's see, what, I don't--

Mr. Murphy: By those five-inch guns, Jim?

Mr. Snellen: I'm sorry.

Mr. Murphy: Did those five-inch guns sink the boat?

Mr. Snellen: Yes. Yes. Why they didn't wait for two or three of them to go past, I don't know. But luckily we were, our little boat was riding along side YMS-481. When she got right to that point, where those guns were, and there was another YMS, I forget the number, right behind her. They let go, and they hit that YMS wooden ship, and I mean wooden pieces flew all up in the air, like over us. It exploded. It sunk. They sank the YMS-481 right there at that point we already been through and back. Up through the pass and back. And we were riding along beside her in the water, in our little boat. And they threw, I don't know how many shells at us and our coxswain would slow one side and the other and they'd hit the water around us and they were also shooting back at the other ships but they hit the YMS behind us. And a number of men were injured or killed on it. But a number of them were killed. Some of them were saved on that one. But we just kept going, and our ship, I can still hear the Japanese. First time I'd ever seen them. They shot from a five-inch 38 on the front of our ship. Ours was the biggest ship in the group. Those phosphorus shells. And I can still see them, there's like five fingers when they'd explode. White phosphorus. And I can still hear those Japanese behind those guns scream. And I guess it just burned right to the bone. But they knocked those guns out. But we couldn't go back because it was all burning right there, in that little channel. And we went all around that whole island, out to where we had the other island, harbor. We were able to

go through like a river. And they had our boat and four men, four of us, missing in action. And we found our ship, back where it originally started, back where the first were. We found our ship about eight o'clock that night. And our shipmates, and our radio calls weren't strong enough to go very far, to alert them that we were okay. But our shipmates were so happy to see us. You know, because they had us missing in action. Our four guys, we four guys and our little boat. We went all the way around that island, we went through a river, because we knew we couldn't get back through that burning section. Okay. We left Tarakan on May fifth and on May eighth we landed at Morotei, M-o-r-o-t-e-i. On May eighth. And we left Morotei on June the second. And we went back, and we circled over and stopped, to another isle or area for minesweeping duty. Brunei Bay. Have you ever heard of the Sultan of Brunei?

Mr. Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Snellen: I bet you have. Okay. He was one of the richest men in the world because of the oil. That's what the Japanese were after in Tarakan. And incidently. When we got in sight of Tarakan, backing up, they had these oil tanks. The Japanese, and they set them on fire. It was just black smoke from all over. And we did not land troops, we just did in Borneo, we just did that minesweeping along the beaches. The Australians landed at Tarakan. And also, Brunei and later Tarakan. In Brunei Bay, we landed there on June the seventh and we didn't leave for four days later. We swept the harbor and different things. And the 484, it was a steel mine ship, minesweeper, that was

sunk by a mine, or shore battery, I'm not sure, but a number of people, men were killed and our ship picked up some of the survivors and put them on some larger ship. That was a big invasion at Brunei. It was so different than Tarakan. We did the same thing there. We swept along the, as close to the beaches as we could get. And again, even down in Tarakan, I think they were anti-aircraft guns. The Japanese, a number of times, even, back in Tarakan again, I said I'll back up again, once more. One time, they got so close to us, just playing with us, we requested permission to return to the ship. And permission was denied and the words came back, "Make a closer sweep to the beach." Can you believe that?

Mr. Murphy: Holy mackerel!

Mr. Snellen: People wouldn't do that. But we did what we were told to do back then. So, left see, we left, we left Brunei, Brunei Bay, we left there on June the eleventh, 1945. We were there four days, sweeping and doing minesweeping duty. There was a number. Oh, incidentally, too, it's in our ship's log that almost every night, in those three, and I haven't gotten to the last one. The three invasions we were with the British, Dutch and Australians in Borneo. These YMSs would get so close to the beach, some of them would be killed, hit and killed by shore batteries or mines blowing up or damage them. And they'd bring the bodies aboard our ship because we were the flagship for them.

Mr. Murphy: Sure.

Mr. Snellen: And they'd prepare them for burial at sea. And gentlemen, there's nothing, you'd never, if you ever saw that, you'd never forget it. They take these heavy

canvas, and sew it up with two five-inch projectiles with the body and they'd put it on a stretcher and the Captain, they'd do their ceremony and his last words were, "I now commit thy body to the deep." I can still get chills hearing the bodies slide over that canvas and hit the water. It was almost every night, seemed like, as I can recall, we would be burying one or two or more, from the minesweepers. Not from our own ship, but from the minesweepers themselves. And after Brunei, we went to TawiTawi, T-a-w-i-T-a-w-i, TawiTawi. Landed there on June twelfth. And we left the next day for Balikpapan, Borneo. B-a-l-i-k-p-a-p-a-n. And gentlemen, this was probably, our most horrible thing that our ship, even above Ormoc experience. We went into Balikpapan. And at Balikpapan, our little boat not only did we do minesweeping in the daytime. At night time, we would, and then there were only two of us, two boats. Two of our boats, I'll tell you about that in a second, what happened. At night time, we would take, we called 'em demo boys, now they call 'em Seals. And at Fort Pierce, Florida where we did our amphibious boat training, there's also was a demolition boys, now they're called Seals base. And they have a big museum in Fort Pierce, Florida and also, there's a big museum there to our small, thousands of men were taught these small landing craft for Europe and all over, at Fort Pierce. But we called 'em Demo boys and again, they're Seals. And at night time, they'd come, we'd put, they'd get in our boat, there were only two of us. I'll tell you what happened to the other two, and they would, they had nothing on except trunks and they'd be loaded with ammunition around their waist. And we'd take

them in on underwater exhaust so the Japanese couldn't hear 'em, this was at Balikpapan, the most southern big, big oil city in Borneo. They would jump over, we'd get so close and they'd jump over. And they had, what I call duck feet, to help them swim, and they'd go ashore, and maybe thirty minutes or something, all of a sudden, we'd hear, about the same time, we'd see a little blinking light at the beach, and we'd hear boom, boom of radio stations or bridges, they'd blow them up. Not one man was ever lost. That's the truth. And I don't know how many nights we did that with them, at Balikpapan, Borneo. And we'd run in, then we'd drop the ramp and they'd jump aboard and we'd back off. It all happened so fast the Japanese never once, as far as I can remember, fired at us. Then in the daytime, we'd do our minesweeping from those little boats. At Balikpapan. One night, one night, eight torpedo, Japanese torpedo planes, not one of them dove into us, I guess they valued them too much over the ones like they were diving in up in the Philippines, and later Iwo Jima and Okinawa. But eight torpedo planes dropped torpedoes at our ship, one ship, because we were the biggest one. And not only that, we had these huge, big, huge, big, probably twelve-foot rolls of cable for the minesweepers on the back end of our ship. And they probably thought we were a cruiser or something because the silhouette of us, was so big. They threw, eight planes through torpedoes at our one ship, this is the truth, it's in the ship's archives. And one of them, not one of them hit our ship. They'd troll the ship one way, they'd miss the front, they'd miss the tail-end of us. I was on, what they called the starboard, which is the right side, right behind the

bridge on a twenty-millimeter. One man would be the talker, and one would be strapped in the gun, a twenty-millimeter anti-aircraft gun. And this, you'd always wait until the word came from the bridge "commence fire". You held regardless. There was this one plane that came from across the right side, starboard side, right across the middle of us and this guy, I, you'd reach up and hit him on the back, it was dark, commence firing and this guy, and I won't mention his name, mention it to anybody but some of people knew it. He abandoned that gun when he saw that planet coming directly toward us, he took off.

Mr. Murphy: Oh, no!

Mr. Snellen: I don't know what they would have done to him if I'd have told. I jumped in behind the gun but it was too late. The plane went right over us and dropped a torpedo, undoubtedly, they said they had it set too low for us. It went under our ship, the torpedo, and came out on the left side, the port side. The torpedo. And our people on the left side shot that plane down. One guy, on our fantail of our ship, who's last name was Lewis, he was the carpenter's mate, we had a carpenter that did woodwork whenever they needed something. He jumped overboard, didn't have a lifejacket on or anything, he abandoned ship. And an hour and a half, he treaded water. He had to be a great swimmer. He treaded water for an hour and a half until a minesweeper heard him yelling and picked him up. But eight torpedo planes missed our ship and they shot down two of them. One of them was the one that came right over us. Anyway, that's the story of , that was a horrible night. After

Balikpapan, we left there on July tenth. We were there from June fifteenth to July tenth. Oh, and incidentally. Here comes a cruiser into Balikpapan while we were there. And who was on board that cruiser? The USS Nashville? But General MacArthur.

Mr. Murphy: He was? What was he doing there?

Mr. Snellen: What did we hear, I'm going to say in the same day. General MacArthur went ashore, landing troops at Balikpapan, Borneo. That was the biggest bunch of crap you'd ever believe. That was days after the Australians landed troops at Balikpapan. MacArthur, he had a lot of, a lot of, propaganda, if you know what I mean. And that's the gospel truth. The USS Nashville at Balikpapan, Borneo. All right, let's see. We left there on July tenth, we landed in Leyte, four days later and on August the twenty-ninth, we were in Leyte, being briefed for going to Okinawa for Japan. On the twenty-ninth, the war ended. And we left on the twenty-ninth. They shucked us out quickly for Okinawa. On August the twenty-ninth, 1945. We left Leyte on the day they announced the war ended. And we arrived in Okinawa on September the first. And incidentally, if I'm not mistaken, the Navy lost thousands and thousands of men because of the suicide planes at Okinawa. Now we never got to Iwo Jima. Luckily we missed out on the landings of those two but we had some horrible experiences in Borneo.

Mr. Murphy: Right. At this point, Jim, when you got to Okinawa, you'd been in combat almost constantly for a year. Is that correct?

Mr. Snellen: Oh, yes. Yes. Let's see, we started our first combat was December the seventh, 1944. And we ended, our last was Balikpapan, on a, well, you're right, on, we left Balikpapan and there was still war going on there, July tenth. But we had done our part. You're right. It was twelve solid months of uh, and we would have to get up, manned our guns, again as I mentioned earlier, one hour before daylight and one hour after daylight. And no matter, you could be off at midnight and four o'clock in the morning, you're back on, you're manning, whatever your responsibility was, whether it was a gun or ammunition. It was your duty. Then you could be on, from, or you could be working, your job could have been, always four hours. From four to eight, then you could go back and sleep. But at twelve o'clock then, you'd be back, either. If you weren't right in the danger zone, we were chipping and painting. All you did was chip paint, and paint, paint. I'll tell you a funny story. It's a little off track, but I was, on one Sunday morning, my officer piped me to come topside. I thought the world of the man. Edwin J. McClendon. And he said, he handed me a paintbrush and some paint. We were underway. And he told me to get outside and touch up some paint on my boat and he made the mistake of telling me that's the last paintbrush aboard ship. You may want me to get back to the war part and forget this. This is personal. You want me to forget this?

Mr. Murphy: No, no I don't. Go ahead.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. And he told me this is the last one aboard ship. Who ever heard of the Navy being down to one. I guess the other guys threw them overboard. So he

handed me that brush and, so. And the ship was pretty smooth so I put the paint bucket on the outside of the, next to the edge of the ship, on the portside and my foot on the inside and the ship kind of rolled a little bit left. I kicked that with my foot and there went that paint bucket and brush overboard.

(laughter) He always said he got (unintelligible) kept me from being court marshalled. He took his white hat off and threw it on the deck. Jumped up and down. That was the end of me painting any that day. The later years, this is so funny, we had a reunion in Caton, Ohio. And me and my wife sat down for breakfast with he and his wife, Ruby, and I told him, I said, then we could call him Mac, it was always Mister when we were in service, I said, "Mac, years and years now, my conscience has bothered me." "What? What?" I said, "Something happened aboard ship one day." And I told him what I did.

(laughter) And I thought his wife was going to roll on the floor laughing. But he looked at me with those beady eyes, like he could have killed me. But later he told me, he thought it was funny too. But that was a fun thing. I gotta tell you what happened, too. Backup. Before we got to Balikpapan, I think it was a, I can't remember, I'd have to go back to my book and read, we, we were doing some testing, and hauling some stuff and picking up stuff to put aboard ship. It was a lot of. There were, let's see, one, two, three, four, five, five of us in the boat. And we pulled along the right side, we had a lot of stuff, weight in the boat, and we raised the boat up. They raised the boat up on the cable to the top of the boat deck, which was about twenty feet above water. And two of us, a fella by the name of, another gunner's mate, not a boat crew

person, I don't even know why he was in the boat, and myself, we stepped off on the boat deck and a fella by the name of Joe White started to get out of the boat. He was not a boat member either. And this Don Miracle and myself pushed him back in the boat and I remember saying, ride on over, it wasn't a very nice thing to ride up that cable, go up over the top and then down in the cradle. Ride on over, I say, real soft. Pushed this Joe White back in the boat. When that boat, seven and half ton of steel in the cable, inside of that, that pulled those boats up. That seven and half ton of steel went between the front and the back of the cables. I'm not making a very clear picture of that but anyway. That cable, when they hit the top [phone busy sound]

Mr. Murphy: Hello? Oh no! We just got disconnected.

Mr. Snellen: Oh, okay.

Mr. Murphy: Okay, good. I'm talking to. This is Brian Murphy interviewing James Snellen and it is the eighth of March. Go ahead, Jim.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. Now where were we, exactly?

Mr. Murphy: You had been at Leyte in, August twenty-ninth. You said you'd gone to Okinawa on the first of September. The war was over at this point.

Mr. Snellen: Right, okay. Now we left Okinawa on September the ninth.

Mr. Murphy: Yes, sir.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. And we headed for Wakayama. I've got to spell this all out. Wakayama, W-a-k-a-y-a-m-a. W-a-k-a-y-a-m-a, Japan. And we went up through the harbor, through a mine field, and led six hospital ships. Our ship, 'cause we were a war ship, then sent us first. We picked up a pilot, a Japanese

pilot, came aboard our ship that knew that mine field and steered our ship. And we'd go so far, stop dead in the water, the captain made everybody get topside with lifejackets on, that could be topside. In case we hit a mine. And we'd turn one way and go another, but we led those, and those hospital ships followed straight behind us. They went in to pick up allied prisoners, wounded or whatever. And so, that was on. We arrived there on the eleventh of September, left Okinawa on the ninth. Two days later. And then we left Wakayama on the September fifteenth. But when we got in there, late that day, they asked for volunteers to go ashore. It was a Japanese hotel there. That was one city that was never bombed. It was in excellent condition. And they asked for volunteers, so, being a boat crew, somebody had to take them in. I volunteered, one of them. We went in, spent the night there, the first night. We went ashore. And that would have been on September the eleventh. And we stayed in this old Japanese hotel. And I can remember, they didn't even have commodes, they had holes in the floor. Even if it was a hotel. No commode. But it was real funny. We, seventeen of us, went walking past these Japanese, and they had been sent in there to clean up the hotel, I guess. To get ready for the Americans that were coming in. And I can still see them. They were sitting cross-legged down and they just looked at us like they expected us to attack them. Because they had been told that the Americans killed their mothers and all this stuff, you know. That we were horrible people. But the next morning, we roughed it that night in that old hotel building, and that next morning we heard a train and we rushed to where

we could see it. And coming around the mountain, was a train and all American flags, little flags had been dropped to the prisoners, from the air. And were waving these flags out the train window. That was a sight to see. And we left Wakayama on the fifteenth, four days later. And the next, two days later, we arrived in Nagasaki, N-a-g-a-s-a-k-i. I know you know how to spell that. Japan. That's where the second atomic bomb was dropped. And it was dropped on August the ninth. And we arrived there, September the seventeenth. Five weeks later. Where 70,000 people were killed. And I kid you not, that was a horrible place to visit. Smell. I can only remember, in fall in the background, there was an old, partial church standing. Everything else was blown away. Concrete docks. I found a souvenir there, that. A bank vault had been blown open and I grabbed that, called the Bank of Nagasaki. That was a wonderful souvenir. That thing was probably so radioactive. They did not tell us, the government, did not tell us anything about radiation. And we walked around where they had bulldozed some areas, what had been the streets. And the smell was horrible. I'd say, most of our former shipmates have died from cancer. I've had skin cancer ten times, nine, ten, or eleven times and most of our shipmates have died from cancer. There's only two of us gunner's mates. I was later made gunner's mate. On the boats I was signalman, gunner and gunner's mate, gunner rather. But they had no ratings until the war was ended and then I was transferred out of the boat crew into the ordinance or gun. I'll call it the gun division. And I was made gunner's mate, third. And I was in charge of two twin 40-milimeters aboard ship. I'm

going back some but I left the Navy as a gunner's mate third class. So from Nagasaki, on the twenty-second. We left there and arrived the next day in Okinawa, on September twenty-third, hauling. We brought back 130 some allied prisoners to Okinawa. And we left Okinawa on September the twenty-seventh for Sasebo, Sasebo, Japan. S-a-s-e-b-o. That's on the southern, western, south-western tip end of Japan. A Navy base. And we arrived there on September twenty-eighth. Let's see. Well, I arrived in the, I left Okinawa on my birthday, September twenty-seventh.

Mr. Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Snellen: I was nineteen. I turned nineteen on September twenty-seventh. The day we left Okinawa for Sasebo, Sasebo, Japan. And from Sasebo, we went back to Okinawa on September twenty-second. I mean October, I'm sorry. Left there, left Sasebo September twenty-eighth and arrived back in Okinawa on September the twenty. Correct that, I'm sorry. We left Sasebo, arrived Sasebo September twenty-eighth. We left Sasebo on October second, arrived back in Okinawa October third. And we left Okinawa on October third. And the worst typhoon that was known in that time happened, we left Okinawa on October eleventh because the typhoon was coming. And we went around and joined about a hundred ships in a convoy. And the next day, on October twelfth, at noontime, it was horrible. The waves were higher than any part of our ship and it was so bad, that the captain announced over the PA system, you can't believe this, I get cold chills myself, he said, "Secure all hatches." Said, "She's going to break in half any minute."

Mr. Murphy: Oh my!

Mr. Snellen: That's the gospel truth. That's the truth. And the only way they kept her afloat was heading right into the big waves and the boats were on there. They put two temporary boats to balance the ship, after that one crash that time. We couldn't, one that one side, they needed to balance her. And even, the bolts that held those boats down, bent. It was a mess. A number of ships were lost, a number of men lost their lives, but back then, they never told that until later years. It was a typhoon October twelfth.

Mr. Murphy: Ships sunk?

Mr. Snellen: It hit October twelfth. Hit Okinawa. And a number of ships, I think either one or two destroyers were lost. And our ship was top-heavy because of those boats, but we were lucky to have made it. And then we left Okinawa on. I know, I'm sorry. We didn't go back to Okinawa. We left, after that typhoon October twelfth, headed for Pusan, Korea. They spelled it P-u-s-a-n, some of them spell it F-u-s. It's the most southern tip of Okinawa. Let's see, that was five years before the Korean war. You know, back then, we didn't get our mail sometimes for several weeks after it was sent because it was some ship catch up with us that would be carrying our mail. And I'd write home from Korea and, we were there from October fourteenth to November twenty-seventh. I'd write home, people'd write back. "I never heard of Korea. I never heard of Korea." (chuckle) But everybody knew it five years later. 1950. When the war broke out. Okay. We left Okinawa, November twenty-first, orders for home. We didn't think, you know, the war ended two months

earlier, and you know how. We didn't think we'd ever get to come back home. And then, we stopped in Hawaii.

Mr. Murphy: Right.

Mr. Snellen: We stopped in Hawaii on the way back. Spent a couple of days there. From Hawaii, San Diego. Hold on, just a second. [conversation in the background] My wife says we're going to eat at 5:30. Let's see, so I've got about twenty-five more minutes. Anyway, okay. San Diego on Christmas Eve, 1945. Then we left a few days later, I don't have that marked, in front of me. Went back through the Panama Canal, up through, up to Brooklyn Navy Yard. Got a home leave, then Brooklyn Navy Yard, back to, hang on just a second. [calls for Dot, his wife] I'm going to tell her to give me a few more minutes. And then, back up, back to the ship, picked up the ship down to Okinawa, down to Norfolk and, just a minute [speaks to Dot]. Anyway, stopped in Norfolk and then, down to Jacksonville, Florida and picked up a pilot, at Jacksonville, and went down twenty-eight miles down to Saint John's River, because it's fresh water and joined, what they call the. That was in February, 1946 the Mothball Fleet and then on May twenty-fifth, I believe was the exact date, I was sent to Great Lakes for discharge. And then I was out of the Navy. I quick make this story that from that, went back and finished high school and from high school, I started University of Louisville but I was so confused and a little bit later I reenlisted in the Air Force and I was in eleven months before President Truman came out, anybody who needed to work on a family farm could apply. I grew up, if you know what I mean, I came to my senses then.

Mr. Murphy: Well, Jim, that's amazing. That's a good story.

Mr. Snellen: Have you got any other questions?

Mr. Murphy: Well, did you ever go to university?

Mr. Snellen: To Louisville and then after I got out of the Air Force, then I went to work for General Motors and soon got transferred to Oklahoma and started Oklahoma City University at night school. Spent two years there, going to tri-mester courses so I never finished college. I should have.

Mr. Murphy: Well, you ended up back in Saint John's just like your ship came in.

Mr. Snellen: I'm glad you said that. I never dreamed, I'm right here within twenty minutes of where I ended my Navy days. And being from Kentucky, never dreamed I had some family here, talked us into coming back over here.

Mr. Murphy: Well, did your brother make it home from the Eighth Air Force?

Mr. Snellen: Oh, yes. He surely did. He was the spotter. He was really ground forces, but he was Eighth Air Force and he never got a scratch. Went all through Germany, France and Germany, and he was a spotter. And came back and he was discharged a little before I was.

Mr. Murphy: Okay. Well Jim, we can conclude the interview and I'm going to thank you very, very much. We will send you a copy, once we get it put back together, we have to splice the two parts together. We will send you a copy of it. And you've got my phone number, thankfully, so you can call me anytime. If you come over here, I'll just be pleased for my wife and you and Dot, we can go out to dinner or something and you can tell me some more stories, okay?

Mr. Snellen: (laughter) My wife, I was motioning her a while ago, when she came in, to get out because she fusses at me. But you know, I, a lot of people don't like to talk about it, but to me, I do. And I golf, I'm very active, I'm one of the lucky ones, so far. Not bragging, don't get me wrong. But I really appreciate; it's so nice of you. And we might be over that way because our daughter and son-in-law have a home in Georgetown. They were the ones that brought us down last year. Do you live in Georgetown?

Mr. Murphy: No sir. I live right here in Fredericksburg.

Mr. Snellen: Oh, you live right in Fredericksburg. I didn't mean to say Georgetown, I meant to say Fredericksburg. You live right in Fredericksburg. Well, we lived in Texas once, and I used to work all over Texas, and we've been to Georgetown a number of times. But, I hate to kind of be rushing the end but my wife, we're supposed to go to dinner. But you've got my number and you can call me anytime and if I'm not in, I'll call you back. And if I get over that way, I'd love to at least get to meet you, okay?

Mr. Murphy: Very good, Jim, you have a good evening. Thank you.

Mr. Snellen: Okay. Now where would this. You said this would be in the school or something?

Mr. Murphy: No, this is at the Nimitz Museum of the Pacific War, in their archives.

Mr. Snellen: Oh, this would be in Nimitz?

Mr. Murphy: Yes.

Mr. Snellen: Oh, great! I'm honored. Now they have my book. It was a lady, she wrote me a nice, nice letter. I spent two days there last year, touring the museum

and all. And I think I told you, I kidded the gentleman because they didn't have an LCVP, the wooden landing craft

Mr. Murphy: Well, there's an LCI, is it an LCI?

Mr. Snellen: Well, an LCI is a landing craft infantry

Mr. Murphy: Their organization is here tomorrow. And they're donating all their archival material to the museum.

Mr. Snellen: Oh, okay. Every invasion I was in, everyone, even in Borneo, they had LCIs. That's Landing Craft Infantry. And it has ramps on each side. And I'll tell you one more quick thing about the LCIs. Each time we'd go in for an invasion, we'd be in our boats, headed for the beach. And they'd be loaded with, the LCIs would be loaded with rockets, behind us. Before we'd hit the beach, they'd let go with those rockets up over our heads. And I mean, it scared the crap out of us. (laughter) That was LCIs. I remember that well. (laughter)

Mr. Murphy: Well, Jim, you have a great evening.

Mr. Snellen: If I get that way. I hope we'll be in Texas sometime this year. I'd love to get to meet you in person. It's just been my pleasure. Okay?

Mr. Murphy: All right, Jim. You have a good evening sir. Thank you.

Mr. Snellen: Same to you. Bye bye.

[Transcriber note: Names of people have not been verified.]

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