

Milton Seacord Oral History Interview

MARK CUNNINGHAM: -- Pacific and Fredericksburg, Texas. The date is February 6, 2008. I am interviewing Mr. Milton R. Seacord. He is at his home in California. This interview is being done by telephone, and Mr. Seacord is aware that the conversation is being recorded. So with that introduction, Mr. Seacord, let me start right off and ask you what branch of the service did you join?

MILTON SEACORD: Coast Guard.

MC: And what made you select the Coast Guard?

MS: Well, you know I thought Coast Guard that sounds pretty good. We were going along the coast of California here protecting it. How wrong I was. I was in every other coast in the South Pacific but California.

MC: Okay, well, let's start at the beginning of your service. Where did you sign up?

MS: In Los Angeles.

MC: Okay, and that was in '43?

MS: Yes.

MC: The date again? September?

MS: I'm not sure.

MC: Okay, 1943. And where did you go to boot camp?

MS: Oakland.

MC: And how long did that last?

MS: Six weeks I think.

MC: Now were you given any -- did you specialize or what were you trained for primarily?

MS: I was just a seaman. I didn't have any special classes or anything. It was just to get you indoctrinated in the service. Well, you know, you went to recognition courses so we could recognize Japanese planes and ships and our medical classes -- what to do in case of injury and so on.

MC: Now you mentioned your brother. Did he go in with you?

MS: Yes.

MC: Both of you into Coast Guard?

MS: Yes.

MC: Did you stay together or were you separated or what?

MS: Well, we stayed together, and we went to Oakland. After we got out of boot camp, we went to Seattle and stationed there. Jefferson Park in Seattle. We were there for -- I don't know -- about six months, and then I went to --

MC: Now what were you doing while you were in Seattle?

MS: We were just waiting for -- it was kind of a -- they send people from there -- it was kind of a holding area, and all we was doing was building on the mess hall and stuff like that. We weren't doing anything as far as service. We weren't taking any classes or nothing. We were just more

or less loafing. Then I went to sea on the Coast Guard cutter going to Alaska.

MC: Okay, now what was the ship's name? Do you remember?

MS: No, I don't. Probably 160 foot cutter, a small ship. I wasn't on there very long. I had to go back to Seattle to hospital there. I had a small touch of pneumonia, and then when I got out of the hospital, I went down to Coos Bay, Oregon.

MC: Okay, you sailed from Seattle up to Alaska. Is that correct?

MS: Yeah. Then I went off the ship there. Went back to Seattle to the hospital.

MC: Okay, and then you -- after you got out of the hospital, you went down to Oregon?

MS: Yeah, Coos Bay, Oregon.

MC: Spell. Coos Bay. Where is that?

MS: C-O-O-S.

MC: C-O-S B-A-Y?

MS: No. C-O-O-S, then B-A-Y.

MC: Right, was that a Coast Guard station?

MS: Yeah, it was (inaudible) station there in the lighthouse. Our biggest responsibility was taking on out and getting the fisherman that run aground coming into the bay and then manning the lighthouse.

MC: All right, so it at that point was typical Coast Guard type duties. Is that correct?

MS: Yeah.

MC: I want to break real quick here. Okay, we picked it up real good so it sounds real good. All right, so you're at Coos Bay. You're doing typical Coast Guard type stuff, and that was what timeframe? Still '43?

MS: Yeah, the end of '43.

MC: The end of '43. How long were you at Coos Bay?

MS: Not very long. I got the idea to go back to southern California so I thought, "Well, I'll go and ask the one in charge, and see what happens." So I did. They sent me to southern California. I went down to Point Loma down near San Diego.

MC: Port point what?

MS: Point Loma.

MC: You might have to spell that one.

MS: P-O-I-N-T Loma L-O-M-A.

MC: Oh, okay, and what were you doing there?

MS: Well, it was just the Coast Guard station. We would mainly our duties was to stand guard on the ships loading and unloading in the harbor there in San Diego. Just that's about all we did, and we had to patrol boats that went out from there along the coast.

MC: Were you on any of those patrol boats?

MS: Not very much. Sometimes. Mostly I was standing guard duty on ships.

MC: And how long did that go on?

MS: For about a year, and then I got tired of that so --

MC: Hold on just a minute. I'm going to break this because there's a call coming in. I'm not going to answer it, but I don't want it on the tape. Okay, we're back on the tape now. All right, and so you're in southern California now standing guard duty, and it lasted how long?

MS: I said a year, but I don't think it was that long. About six or seven months I guess, and then I got involved in making up a crew for a transport, and they sent us back to the Coast Guard station in Oakland. I mean the boot camp at Oakland waiting for a ship to be done, and we stayed there for a couple of months going to classes and so on and so on. Just something to keep us busy while the ship was being done, and then we went on a ship. That was the USS (inaudible).

MC: All right. Wait a minute. Let me get that down. USS?

MS: Admiral Capps.

MC: A-D-M-I-R-A-L.

MS: C-A-P-P-S.

MC: C-A-P-P-S. All right, and what kind of a ship was that?

MS: A transport, 608 foot.

MC: What kind of a transport? What did you transport?

MS: Troop transport.

MC: And what was your job on that ship?

MS: Just as a seaman. Maintaining the equipment and so forth.

MC: And you picked that up in Oakland. Is that correct?

MS: Yes, and then we went on a shakedown, and then we went to San Diego (inaudible) San Diego with the troops and mail and went to Hollandia, New Guinea.

MC: Now that's a little bit far off of the U.S. coast, right?

MS: Yes.

MC: For a Coast Guard guy.

MS: We made it in 13 days.

MC: You went to New Guinea?

MS: Yeah, in 13 days.

MC: Now how many troops did you have on this thing?

MS: About 6,000-8,000.

MC: All right, now what were the conditions onboard the ship? Crowded or --

MS: Well, they were crowded. The bunks were four foot high -- I mean four bunks high.

MC: Now were the sailors or the ship crew did they have separate quarters from the troops?

MS: Yes, yes, because the troops were housed in the hold, and then the center of the ships was the crew's quarters. We all used the same mess hall. We'd have our breakfast, and then the troops would have two meals a day. They would eat at 9:00 and 3:30 I think it was. They ate the food we ate, but --

MC: But what were the conditions like? Were they sparse or were they decent or what?

MS: Oh, they were decent, yeah. A brand new ship. Everything was really fine.

MC: Now that was your first really long sea trip. Is that correct?

MS: Yes.

MC: Was the weather cooperative, or did you hit rough seas, or how was the sail across?

MS: So and so. When we went across the Coral Sea, it was like glass. I've never seen the ocean or a sea that was as smooth as that was.

MC: You were subject to attack by enemy subs and all that kind of stuff too. Is that correct?

MS: Yeah, we changed our course every six minutes.

MC: To avoid that?

MS: Yeah, to avoid submarines.

MC: And when you departed -- or when you got to New Guinea, did you go ashore?

MS: Some of us went ashore. They took I think 15 of the crew. I guess we were extra. They put us ashore there at Hollandia for about three or four days, and then I went on an inter-island supply boat. It's a small -- about the size of a PT boat, and moving supplies among the islands there. Fortunately I wasn't on there very long because I didn't care much for that. [laughs]

MC: But now you're still in the Coast Guard, but you're -- were those PT boats operated by Navy or Coast Guard personnel?

MS: It was the PT boat, but it was about the size of a PT boat, and it was -- I guess you'd call it a supply ship. We hauled ammunition. We hauled food and stuff like that to the outposts, and those around the island of New Guinea. Then I had a chance to (inaudible) there which I didn't care much for. It was very dangerous because we were going in amongst the islands and some of them had Japs on them. I didn't think that was such a good idea.

MC: Do you remember some of the islands?

MS: No, I don't. Mainly I remember some of the islands, but I just figured this was all New Guinea.

MC: Now these were just small, tiny islands where there would be what? Fighter bases?

MS: Yeah, some of them had fighter -- air strips on them, but like I say, I wasn't on there very long because I just didn't -- there was a chance to go on another ship and I thought, "I'm going to get on a bigger ship."

MC: What were you doing on the small boats? What was your job?

MS: Just a seaman. Load and unload stuff.

MC: And you weren't there very long? A month or so or what?

MS: Not even -- probably three weeks or a month.

MC: What ship did you find to get on?

MS: I got on the USS Murzim I think was the name.

MC: USS -- what is it?

MS: I have it in my mind M-U-R-Z-I-M.

MC: All right. What kind of a ship was that?

MS: Well, I thought it was a supply ship, and I got on there, and I found out it was an ammunition ship. [laughter]
(inaudible) was kind of nerve wracking. Somebody would drop something, and you'd come off your bunker by the foot because you weren't sure (inaudible). I think if I remember right 4,000-6,000 tons of ammunition.

MC: And where were you taking this ammunition?

MS: Well, we were supplying ships at different places around -- different islands in the Philippines.

MC: So as you go through your Coast Guard career, you're getting farther and farther from the U.S. coast?

MS: Yes, I sure was.

MC: So you hit the Philippines?

MS: Yeah, and then --

MC: And what year was this? This would have been in '44 maybe?

MS: Probably in '44. It's hard to remember the years. We weren't paying much attention to the calendar. It was just another day of the same stuff.

MC: Now was the Murzim similar to the previous ship? Was it a new ship or an older ship?

MS: It was an older ship. It was -- I think it was -- what do they call those ships? (inaudible) built. I mean it was all right. It wasn't fancy or anything, but it was an all right ship.

MC: What was the size of the crew on something like that?

MS: About 60-70.

MC: So it was a sizable ship?

MS: Yeah. We would go to where a ship needed ammunition, and then we'd pull up alongside it and unload the ammunition on the ship.

MC: At sea?

MS: Yeah, or close to the harbors but on the outskirts of the harbors. We wouldn't go into the harbors and unload.

MC: Now where did you pick up the cargo initially?

MS: I don't remember with it was (inaudible) or (inaudible), a big ammunition dump (inaudible) full of ammunition.

MC: When you say ammunition, what kind of it? Was it small arms or big naval guns or what?

MS: It was big.

MC: The big stuff?

MS: Big stuff and little stuff.

MC: All of the above?

MS: Yeah, and smoke pots and everything. While we was there loading ammunition, one of our smoke pots started burning on deck so we jumped off the ship to get away from it. Of course, what we did, we ran up into this ammunition area which was 10 times as much ammunition as the ship had, and it was after we got up there, we thought it was stupid to run up here. Of course, there wasn't any place to go. They finally got the fire out on the smoke pot, and everything was all right.

MC: Now being an ammunition ship, I suppose -- well, obviously you're in danger from having the ammunition onboard, but you were susceptible to Japanese attack, right?

MS: Yeah.

MC: Were you ever attacked?

MS: Well, a couple of times -- we was in the outer -- way out in the (inaudible), and they didn't pay that much attention to us. We'd shoot at them.

MC: Well, that was my next question. Were these ships armed in any way?

MS: Yeah, we had -- I think we had a three inch and a five inch gun. Well, we weren't very dangerous to the Japanese. Most of the time we wouldn't even bother shooting. We didn't want to draw fire.

MC: Right. All right, now this is in sometimes during 1944, and you're sailing around in the Philippines delivering ammunition to various ships. Is that correct?

MS: Yeah.

MC: And where did you go from there?

MS: Well, we was all over the South Pacific. I remember (inaudible), Manus, and a few of the others that I didn't remember what they were. Oh, while I'm thinking about it, when I was on that transport, we went to Guadalcanal, and we went to New Caledonia, Noumea, New Caledonia, to meet back with that other transport.

MC: That was on the Admiral Capps?

MS: Yeah, but that harbor at New Caledonia was probably the most beautiful harbor. It took us a whole day from the

outside to the islands in Noumea as far as it was.

(inaudible) the palm trees was gorgeous.

MC: Now did you get an opportunity for some liberty during any of these stops or were you able to get off the ship or what?

MS: Well, it was New Caledonia I'd like to have gone, but the crew -- you know, they have a port and starboard, and I was on the port liberty. Starboard had liberty one night, and they went ashore. I guess they got a little exuberant, probably drank a little too much, and we weren't allowed to go ashore the next night.

MC: You were not allowed. [laughs]

MS: Yeah, Captain (inaudible) said no more.

MC: That's too bad. Okay, now where did you go after the Philippines? Did I understand you to say that you sailed - - did you do any East Coast sailing?

MS: No.

MC: Okay, so you were all in the South Pacific?

MS: Yeah. I was in Samar and Philippines and --

MC: Let me ask you this. Have you -- I'm sure you probably made quite a few buddies during that period of time. Is that correct?

MS: Yeah.

MC: Have you kept up with any of them?

MS: No. Those guys weren't that kind -- they weren't (inaudible). In fact, in some of the Navy movies they show guys -- four or five guys going on liberty together. We didn't do that for some reason. Maybe one or two of us would go, but most of the time you went by yourself.

MC: Now what about your officers? What were they like?

MS: Like anything else. Some of them were good, and some of them were terrible.

MC: Really?

MS: Skipper of the ammunition ship was (inaudible).

MC: Was what?

MS: He was very -- one way -- he didn't want us -- he'd been on a merchant ship -- a merchant marine, and they made him a commander. And he lorded over it everybody because he was an officer.

MC: Big hotshot.

MS: Oh, yeah. I think he drank a lot because we would -- part of our duties was chipping and scraping and so forth on the decks to keep them from rusting, and we'd get out there, and they'd make us quit because we was making too much noise. So I don't know that he drank, but it must have been what bothered him -- the noise because he had a hangover.

MC: All right, now what was the food on these ships like? Was it good? Was the food decent?

MS: Well, on the transport, we had very good food. On the ammunition ship, we had spam and (inaudible) tea.

MC: Oh, man. [laughs]

MS: And we had it for a couple of months. Then we got some fresh fruit and stuff.

MC: Now how long were you on this duty in the Philippines? When did you come home?

MS: Forty-five.

MC: Wow, you were gone a long time. Two years?

MS: Well, altogether it was -- yeah, about two years. Yeah.

MC: And when you came home, where'd you come into?

MS: Come into Whidbey Island up around Everett, Washington.

MC: What was the name of the island?

MS: Whidbey. W-H-I-T-B-Y I think. Whidbey Island.

MC: All right, now was that before the war ended or after?

MS: After.

MC: So you were gone from really sometimes late '43, early '44 all the way to the end of the war?

MS: Yeah.

MC: When did you get out of the Navy?

MS: When we got the ship unloaded there at Whidbey Island.

MC: Or the Coast Guard, not the Navy.

MS: They sent us to a Coast Guard station at Oakland, and we stayed there for about a month. I was doing the discharge papers and so forth, and then I was discharged from there.

MC: When was that after the war? What month?

MS: Let's see. Those days are all -- run together.

MC: Pardon? Yeah, okay.

MS: I don't remember when the war ended.

MC: Well, the war ended in -- I think it was September 1945.

MS: Well, this must have been October or November.

MC: Now which ship did you come home on? Do you remember?

MS: The ammunition ship.

MC: So you were on that ship the whole time once you were assigned to it?

MS: Yeah.

MC: That's a pretty long time to be on that ship.

MS: Yes. Well, you know, after you get used to it, it wasn't bad. If we weren't loading or unloading, we'd have nothing else to do so it wasn't too bad.

MC: Now what about the high seas and things like that when you came across the Pacific when you came home? Was that -- did you have any problems there?

MS: No.

MC: No problems?

MS: No. Of course, it took us a month to come home.

MC: Oh, really? You were at sea that long?

MS: Yeah. I don't know how many knots we was making. I would say probably 12-15 knots maybe. We weren't -- it wasn't a real speedy ship. I left something out. On that ammunition ship, we went down to Australia, to Brisbane, for some outfitting. We were there a month.

MC: Now when you were in port like that, were you able to get off the ship and see some of the countryside?

MS: We had liberty every day.

MC: Well, that was good.

MS: But we -- just in the city. The outskirts was off limits. We weren't to go out of the city.

MC: Right. Any good memories of those days on liberty in Australia?

MS: Oh, yeah. Food was cheap. Steak and eggs for about \$0.16.

MC: What was the weather like?

MS: It was good. I don't remember it raining at all while we were there. We had to come back at -- [coughs] excuse me -- we'd leave the ship at 1:00. We had to be back the next day by 12:00. I think that was so they could keep track of everybody. And then we'd come and have our lunch.

MC: Then go back again?

MS: And then take off. Go in and have a shower. Change our clothes and have lunch and take off.

MC: So now were you a single man during your military --

MS: Yes.

MC: You got married after the war?

MS: Yes.

MC: What did you do after you got out?

MS: First, I went through the (inaudible) aluminum company. I was there a year or two, and then I went and got a job in the [L.A.?] County as an ambulance attendant. (inaudible) the county for 28 ½ years.

MC: And your family -- your wife and how many kids?

MS: Two.

MC: One is Michael.

MS: I had David. He died.

MC: I'm sorry to hear that. Is your wife still living?

MS: Yes.

MC: So you guys are doing okay I trust?

MS: I think so. When you get (inaudible) you got all kinds of things wrong with you.

MC: Right, well, do you have anything else you want to tell me about or -- it sounds like we kind of got a pretty good picture of your military service?

MS: I don't think I missed anything.

MC: I want to thank you for doing this with me.

END OF AUDIO FILE