

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Clint Morse

Date of Interview: March 12, 2014

**National Museum of the Pacific War
Fredericksburg, Texas**

Interview with Mr. Clint Morse

Interviewer: Ed Metzler

Mr. Metzler: This is Ed Metzler. Today is the twelfth of March, 2014. I'm in the home of Mr. Clint Morse in Houston, Texas. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Center Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the Preservation of Historical Information related to this site.

So I'd like to start first, Clint, thanking you for being willing to sit down in your own home with a stranger and talk about something that happened seventy years ago, and I appreciate that, but let's get started by having you introduce yourself. If we could have your full name, date of birth, place of birth, and then we'll take it from there.

Mr. Morse: My name is Clinton Frank Morse. I was born June 16, 1920, in Alta Bates Hospital in Berkeley, California. My dad, at that time, was a professor at the University of California in geology, and so we lived in East Oakland on Seminary Avenue when I was a youngster.

Mr. Metzler: And, brothers and sisters?

Mr. Morse: Well, I have an older brother, he's now passed away, Robert, and I had a younger brother, Stanley, who was a second lieutenant in the mountain troops and was killed in Italy during the war. So those were my siblings.

Mr. Metzler: Was he in the, what do they call it, the mountain division?

Mr. Morse: He was initially in the ski troops and when they no longer had a plan for going anywhere with ski troops, they were incorporated into the mountain troops and were part of the force that was marching up through Italy.

Mr. Metzler: That was some tough duty over there, I'll tell you. What a shame that you lost him. I'm sorry. Well, okay, so your childhood, was that in the Oakland area as well?

Mr. Morse: Well, in 1925, when I was five, my dad was employed by Shell Oil Company as a geologist in the Los Angeles office, and we moved to Pasadena and then South Pasadena and I grew up there, and my grammar school and junior high school and first year in high school, and then he was transferred to Houston, Texas, as a geologist, and we moved to Houston in December, 1945. And so I've lived in Houston--1935 it was--and so I've lived in Houston ever since except for a period of time during World War II and also a couple of years when I was going to law school at the University of Texas.

Mr. Metzler: So let's see; that means you came to Houston when you were about fifteen. So you must have done high school in Houston.

Mr. Morse: The last two years of high school at San Jacinto High School in Houston.

Mr. Metzler: And so let's see, if you were born in '20, you were getting out of high school in like 1938 or something like that.

Mr. Morse: Yes, I got out of high school in June of 1938 and had been accepted at Rice Institute in those days, and so I went to Rice from 1938 to '42.

Mr. Metzler: Ah, my alma mater, I've got to get that in. And my father's and two of my aunt's alma mater. We'll chat about that a bit after the interview's over.

Mr. Morse: That's great.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. So you weren't old--well, I guess you were old enough to be drafted. This is--

Mr. Morse: Yes, I had a draft notice to--in early 1942, I think it was January, and I decided that I would rather be in the Navy. And I went down to the Navy recruiting office in Houston, and they found out that I was majoring in accounting at Rice and so they said--well, and I was going to graduate in June of '42--so they said, "I think you should sign up for the Supply Corps," which is the accounting arm of the Navy, and so I did, and was accepted and

as a result of that I was--didn't have to report for duty until I had my degree in June of 1942.

Mr. Metzler: So they let you go ahead and graduate.

Mr. Morse: Yes. They wanted college graduates in that particular branch of the Navy, and so that was a good thing. I was able to delay going into the service until I had my degree.

Mr. Metzler: Did you say your brother who was killed in Italy was younger or an older brother?

Mr. Morse: He was my younger brother.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. So he was too young to even be into the military yet.

Mr. Morse: Well, he was two years younger than I.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, only two years.

Mr. Morse: Yeah. So I don't exactly remember when he decided he would sign up with the ski troops. He liked to ski; he went to Pomona College in California, and so that was--at some point in his college career, he signed up for the ROTC out there.

Mr. Metzler: Right, right. Now, so when you got your degree from the Institute, off you went to basic training?

Mr. Morse: Well, I went to Supply Corps School, which was in the Harvard Business College facilities in Massachusetts.

Mr. Metzler: Cambridge?

Mr. Morse: Cambridge, Massachusetts, and that lasted from June until October of 1942. Then I was assigned to the Destroyers Pacific,

and headed out to San Francisco by way of Houston and signed up my girlfriend to be my wife when I got back from this sea duty.

Mr. Metzler: You signed her up, did you? (Laughs) She didn't volunteer?

Mr. Morse: (Laughs) She was willing. So, I'd gone to high school with her and also Rice. She was a classmate at Rice.

Mr. Metzler: I'll tell you, these Rice Owls are everywhere. (Laughs) In this story.

Mr. Morse: (Laughs) So that was what brought me through to June of '42 and to October of '42.

Mr. Metzler: What kind of training were you receiving then when you were up there?

Mr. Morse: It was teaching us--they knew that this group was going to be assigned to destroyers, so they were focusing on what does a paymaster on a destroyer have as his responsibilities, which is first, having the responsibility for paying the officers and crew. So that there was the indoctrination into the payroll forms and the procedure for calculating the pay in the Navy manner. And then the other part of it was, you were also the supply officer, and that included the responsibility for the supplies, food supplies, and all of the supplies for the ship except fuel and armament. Thank goodness I had great chief commissary

stewards and chief storekeepers that knew what they were doing.

(Laughs)

Mr. Metzler: They're the ones that really make the Navy run anyhow, I think.

Mr. Morse: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: So, when you came out of that training, did you receive your commission?

Mr. Morse: No, I was commissioned from the day that they accepted me, which was sometime in early 1942, but I was deferred until I graduated.

Mr. Metzler: Got it. So you really had already been commissioned, but you were deferred. So then, after your stint there in Harvard, and how long was that, about?

Mr. Morse: June, say July to October 1942.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, and so in October then, what did they do with you?

Mr. Morse: Well, they gave me orders to report to San Francisco to go out to Pearl Harbor, and there I was to report to the commanders of the destroyer divisions, whatever that office was called.

Mr. Metzler: But you hadn't been assigned a ship yet, at this point? Not until you got out there?

Mr. Morse: No, not until I got to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. But you knew you were going to be on a destroyer, because you'd had specific training for that size and type of ship.

Mr. Morse: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: So, did you get to--okay, now it's coming back to me. You said you got married before you left?

Mr. Morse: No, we got engaged. I gave her the engagement ring, but we deferred getting married until my sea duty was over. The supply corps generally has you on sea duty for eighteen months to two years, and then shore duty for eighteen months to two years, because there's as much work done for supply officers on the beach as there is at sea, so that--my two years was up in 1944.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. So we had a little bit of a tearful departure then? Newly engaged, then going off to war.

Mr. Morse: (Chuckles) Yes. I had decided when I was at the Supply Corps School that I would apply for the Pacific rather than the Atlantic, because we'd go down to the Boston Navy Yard. It was one of our requirements to go on board destroyers down there, and they came back in from the Atlantic with the bridges caved in, and I said, "I just don't believe that I want to be in the Atlantic Ocean on a destroyer."

Mr. Metzler: Maybe the North Atlantic is not such good duty (laughs).

Mr. Morse: That's right (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Pacific means smooth (laughs).

Mr. Morse: Smooth (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Okay. So, how did it feel to be leaving your fiancée and your family and going out to war?

Mr. Morse: Well, it was exciting. I was looking forward to enlarging my life. I'd always lived at home. I lived at home when I went to Rice, and I just never had really been out in the world on my own, and so from that standpoint I was excited. It was--my mother was ill, and we knew that this was the last time that I would be seeing her, and it was. She passed away while I was up at Supply Corps School.

Mr. Metzler: Oh man! These were emotional times, weren't they? In a lot of ways.

Mr. Morse: Yes, a lot of ways (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: So, you lost your mother even before you went overseas.

Mr. Morse: Yes, I was at Supply Corps School.

Mr. Metzler: Did they allow you to come back for the funeral?

Mr. Morse: They probably would have, except transportation would have been days of getting home, and my dad said don't--he said you're doing something more important; don't bother to come home for a funeral, and so I didn't.

Mr. Metzler: So, first time you really were at sea was when you departed the west coast to--?

Mr. Morse: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: You said you went to Pearl, right?

Mr. Morse: From San Francisco to Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Metzler: On what, a troop ship, a destroyer, or what?

Mr. Morse: No, it was a transport--troop ship, and Thanksgiving 1942 was on that leg of the trip, so it was--

Mr. Metzler: Yummy. Did they feed you good?

Mr. Morse: Yes, they did.

Mr. Metzler: Really?

Mr. Morse: Yeah, and that was--I got to Pearl Harbor right after, probably about the first of December.

Mr. Metzler: Now, did you know anybody else on board on that troop ship? Were you with some buds that had kind of gone through training together?

Mr. Morse: Yes, that's correct. They had been assigned to destroyers and we were on the same ship to Pearl Harbor. And so, when we got to Pearl Harbor and checked in with the appropriate office, they were assigning us to various destroyers, and I was assigned to the Mugford.

Mr. Metzler: What is her DD number again?

Mr. Morse: Three eighty-nine.

Mr. Metzler: Three eighty-nine. Okay, I wanted to get that down.

Mr. Morse: And so it was a surprisingly slow and long trip to finally get to the Mugford. I left Pearl Harbor after--every day we went down to the transportation office and some of them were called and said okay, your transportation is here, but it was several more weeks before they said that mine was available. And so I went

on a transport from Pearl Harbor to Noumea, New Caledonia. And I got off there and checked in with the appropriate office, and they gave me a place to stay down on the beach, in a tent, and every day I'd go to the transportation office and they'd say no, we don't have anything. Finally--

Mr. Metzler: On the beach, in a tent, waiting for your assignment?

Mr. Morse: Yeah (chuckles) waiting for further transportation.

Mr. Metzler: Wow!

Mr. Morse: Well, and so--

Mr. Metzler: This is still pretty early in the war. Things were--I mean Guadalcanal is still a mess, and everything right down in that area.

Mr. Morse: So, in some time in January, they said okay, you're supposed to report for transportation to the USS West Point, which had been a big passenger ship prior to the Navy taking it over, and they carried me from Noumea, New Caledonia to Brisbane, Australia, and when we got to Brisbane, I went to the executive officer of the West Point and said, "I'm supposed to get off here." And so he said, "Why would you do that? We're going to go on around to the cape and back up to New York. Why don't you just stay on board?" (Laughs) And I said, "No, I've got to go, got to catch my ship."

Mr. Metzler: I have a job (laughs).

Mr. Morse: So they put me ashore in Brisbane, and then for several weeks, I would report down to the transportation office every day, and they, "No, we don't have anything." And about two weeks went by of doing that, and I went down to the--and I would go down to the Brisbane River, which is their harbor, and one day there was a destroyer there, that had one number difference. It was number three ninety instead of my three eighty-nine, and so I went on board and I said to the supply officer that was there, who I was, and he said, "Well, I've been looking for you. I've been carrying your payroll on my ship here for months." And I said, "Well, I've been coming-- (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: So, where's my ship? (Laughs).

Mr. Morse: So, I got on the Patterson, USS Patterson, and went on the Patterson from Brisbane up to behind the Great Barrier Reef, where our division had its tanker, behind the reef, and they put me off on the tanker, and about another week went by and the Mugford showed up and I got on. (Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: At last you're home! My word!

Mr. Morse: That's right. I had a big stack of mail already there from my--

Mr. Metzler: Well now, did the Mugford have a supply officer at the time?

Mr. Morse: No, what they were doing in those days was putting a paymaster on every destroyer. In the peacetime Navy, one paymaster took care of four destroyers, and then they got it down to two

destroyers, and then they--because in the old days, a division of destroyers would go together, wherever they were going. Well, the war, it didn't work that way.

Mr. Metzler: It got a little wild, yeah.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, and so, as a result, I was the first paymaster that actually served on the Mugford.

Mr. Metzler: Now the Mugford, was she an older ship?

Mr. Morse: Yes. It was commissioned in 1937. It was a Bagley class destroyer, and it was--I would say it was probably the newest of the old destroyers when the war broke out. The Fletchers were the first really good new destroyers.

Mr. Metzler: Right, really up to date.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, who could go-- Well that was what--what was his name, thirty, thirty-six knot, what was his name? Oh well, anyway. The Fletchers were what could go up and down the Slot in Guadalcanal to--and the Mugford and that class were a little slower and a little more apt to shake apart if they tried to go at high speed and so it was an older destroyer.

Mr. Metzler: I've got a couple of questions here before I forget them. First, when you first went to sea, did you get seasick?

Mr. Morse: When I first went to sea on a destroyer--now the Patterson, we stayed behind the barrier reef and I was okay but when we went out through the barrier reef on the Mugford, out into the Coral

Sea, which was our area of responsibility, it's a choppy sea to begin with, and I was sick. It turned out as time went on I got to where it didn't affect me as badly, and other people were sick and I wasn't, so--(laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Well, you were coming slowly out of it.

Mr. Morse: Well, I think it's partly psychological, too. I think if you're not sure whether you're going to get sick or not, well you probably are (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) Yeah, it is and it's not pleasant, either.

Mr. Morse: No, it's not pleasant (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Now, so you were for several weeks ashore in Australia, in Brisbane. Tell me what that was like.

Mr. Morse: Well, they put me in a hotel, not far from the river where their port was, and as I said, I would go down every day to the office and also down to the river, and if there wasn't something going on, I went to a golf course that was not far away and played golf. (Chuckles). That was all there was to it. Now that was what life was like during those several weeks.

Mr. Metzler: What were the Aussies like? I mean, were they friendly?

Mr. Morse: Yes. I had no difficulty getting along with them. Brisbane struck me as a city or a town that was behind the times. It wasn't a modern type city as compared to Sydney. Later on

when we got to Sydney, it was a very impressive place, but Brisbane was sort of a laid back town.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it was a little bit of a provincial town as opposed to--in fact, I've heard even Melbourne and the other big cities, that Sydney was apart in that it was an international city, and the rest of it was pretty back-woody--

Mr. Morse: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: --in the Australian vernaculars, you know.

Mr. Morse: But the people were friendly as far as that goes.

Mr. Metzler: So anyhow, you're finally aboard ship, your home. What was it like aboard? I mean, tell me about the ship, and what it was like.

Mr. Morse: Well, it was a good group of officers. There were some regular Navy and (talks to unknown person) and there were some reserve officers, so it was a mix of Academy and reserve officers that was totally friendly. We were all--developed friendships that we kept forever on the Mugford.

Mr. Metzler: So it really was a close-knit community?

Mr. Morse: Yes. Now, I had good storekeepers and I had good commissary stewards, and cooks and bakers. All did their job very well and as a result, it was not a difficult assignment at all. The pay work was easy to handle, and it was not a hard life. Our duty at that time, from 1943, was escorting convoys from Noumea, New Caledonia to Brisbane or Sydney, through the Coral Sea, and

that was what the Mugford and the rest of the division of destroyers did for that period of time.

Mr. Metzler: Did that division have a number or name or something?

Mr. Morse: Yes, but I can't remember what--now we were part of the Seventh Fleet, which was General MacArthur's Navy, and so we were not part of the destroyers that were carrying on the war in the South Pacific, and the Central--.

Mr. Metzler: The island hopping and all that stuff, yeah. That was Nimitz's Navy up there.

Mr. Morse: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: You were MacArthur's Navy.

Mr. Morse: You're exactly right.

Mr. Metzler: That is so interesting. It's always intrigued me how that worked.

Mr. Morse: I think--actually, I had fun. I enjoyed athletics and so when I reported on board, one day I noticed some of the crew playing catch on the pier with a softball, and so I said, "Do we have a team?" And one of them said, "No, we don't have a team." I said, "Well, we're going to have to cure that." So I became the unofficial athletic officer and scheduled softball games with the other ships in the division and also a couple of--the cruiser Phoenix, all of whom used that tanker that was anchored behind the barrier reef at Palm Island. And we took over and made a softball diamond on Palm Island and had afternoon ball games.

We did various exercises if we weren't convoying in the Coral Sea. We did various exercises and practices in the morning and then in the afternoon we'd just--I'd get my ball club together and we'd go over and play baseball (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Hey, I'm expecting combat stories and you're telling me baseball stories (laughs).

Mr. Morse: We had a good fast pitch pitcher, and that's the key to a softball team, and so we did well with our team.

Mr. Metzler: You mentioned Palm Island. Now, is that just kind of like a rendezvous point, or was it actually a port that you were using?

Mr. Morse: No, it was just a rendezvous place. The tanker was anchored off of Palm Island, which was north of Townsville, Australia, behind the reef, and so--

Mr. Metzler: Now where is that compared to, is it Cannes?

Mr. Morse: Cairns.

Mr. Metzler: Cairns. I always (unclear) put the "R" in there.

Mr. Morse: That's right. It's not far from Cairns. Cairns was another place that we would go into sometimes. You could smell Cairns before you could pick it up on the radar, because of the mutton that they--

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs). Ah, another mutton story. I've heard a lot of those, too. (Both laugh).

Mr. Morse: Well, we always said you can tell an Australian ship was approaching before you picked it up on the radar (unclear) smell like mutton. (Laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Did you have to eat much mutton?

Mr. Morse: No, we had a solution for that. We had to take it when we went to an Australian supply ship, or a supply depot, but somehow between the time our little craft that I was in charge of to get the food; by the time we got from there to the Mugford, the mutton had trouble and it fell overboard.

Mr. Metzler: You had a hard time keeping it aboard. (Laughs).

Mr. Morse: Yeah, you couldn't--(laughs). So in order to get a certain amount of beef, you had to take a certain amount of rabbit and mutton, and both of those things just sort of got lost before we got to the--(laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, it's sleeping with the fishes now (laughs).

Mr. Morse: Yeah. (Both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: Although the sharks probably enjoyed it.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, that's right. We caught a big shark. Someone was fishing off the fantail one day and hooked a gigantic shark, and we had to get it--they finally worked it around to where they could get it on the lift that would lift the captain's gig up or drop it down, and they hauled this huge shark up on that rigging and the doctor, our doc, came out and slit it down its belly and it just

seemed to me like it was hundreds of baby sharks fell out. It was a female shark and it was--

Mr. Metzler: And she was with child, huh?

Mr. Morse: --with children, right. And then that day, we tried shark steaks, but they were not very good.

Mr. Metzler: Fishy? Oily?

Mr. Morse: (Both laugh) Yeah, a little, a little oily. So to me, I guess I've always just sort of been a sort of just a (unclear) happy person, but it was not bad duty at all. I can remember the fun things more than anything else.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I mean, you're very fortunate that that is the kind of duty that you had.

Mr. Morse: Yeah.

Mr. Metzler: So, most of the assignments the Mugford and your other sister destroyers had was convoy duty protection across the Coral Sea.

Mr. Morse: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: New Caledonia back to Brisbane or Sydney.

Mr. Morse: Brisbane or Sydney. And that was what we did in 1943.

Mr. Metzler: Now did anything ever occur where you guys came in handy doing your, during your--?

Mr. Morse: Well, one particular thing. We were convoying through the Coral Sea at some point, and an Australian Air Force plane came over and circled around us and circled around us, and then

would go off in a certain direction and then would come back and do it again. So, the captain concluded that they were trying to lead us to something.

Mr. Metzler: No radio contact?

Mr. Morse: No, it was just--they flashed lights, but we couldn't read--the quartermaster couldn't read what they were signaling. But at any rate, they did lead us to where a whole bunch of Aussies on wooden rafts were floating around. An Australian hospital ship had been sunk, and these were the crew off of that ship. Apparently, the ship did not have a lot of patients on board, if any, because the people that were floating around were the crew and so we picked up the crew and took them to Brisbane, and the crew--our crew--collected some money from the others, just to give something to these guys from this Australian ship, and we got a nice letter from some higher-up in the Australian Navy commending us for--

Mr. Metzler: That was soon after?

Mr. Morse: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: But not years later.

Mr. Morse: Oh no, soon after.

Mr. Metzler: That was very (unclear). That was nice of them. It was nice of you guys, what you did, and nice of them to thank you, officially.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, that's right. So that was about the--we would have some submarine contacts, or thought perhaps they were submarine contacts, but that was the only thing of any real importance that occurred during that period of time that we were convoying the Coral Sea.

Mr. Metzler: No Japanese aircraft or (unclear) aircraft.

Mr. Morse: No. The battle of Coral Sea had put an end to their hopes of moving--

Mr. Metzler: And that had happened earlier, hadn't it?

Mr. Morse: Yes, that had happened before I got out there. And so the closest place that there would be any Japanese airplanes was at Rabaul, New Britain, and that's a--they just couldn't fly that--

Mr. Metzler: That's a long haul.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, it was just anti-submarine was our duty.

Mr. Metzler: And there were no contacts, to the best of your knowledge, with any of the other submarines that were in your task force?

Mr. Morse: No, I don't remember--I don't think that I ever heard of any real confrontation with a proven submarine. We had contacts, which easily could have been something else, and dropped depth charges but nothing ever--nothing was ever established.

Mr. Metzler: Now, what was your station in general quarters?

Mr. Morse: The coding machine. My responsibility during the day, not at general quarters, was the coding machine. The chief engineer

and I divided the work of coding and decoding messages, but my general quarters station was the coding machine.

Mr. Metzler: And did you go to general quarters at all during your convoy, I guess what (unclear)--

Mr. Morse: Yes, every night and every morning and every night--just because that's the most time when the submarines can see you better than you can see them. But that was routine and it wasn't until we moved up to, I guess in late '43--oh yes, let me see, it had to be maybe as early as--could've been as early as the middle of '43, we moved from behind the barrier reef up to Milne Bay, New Guinea. That was our next base for '43 and '44, for the last part of '43 and '44, because our job then was convoying the Marines or Aussies up the New Guinea coast. There was battles at Buna and Salamaua and Finschhafen on New Guinea, and so we landed--helped get their convoy to the beach and then served as their artillery until they got set up. And that continued for--on into landings in Cape Gloucester, New Britain, which was the far end from where Rabaul is. Rabaul is at the north end of New Britain, and so during that period of time, we would have occasional forays of Japanese fighter planes and bombers and dive bombers and high-level bombers, trying to interrupt what we were doing on the northern

side of New Guinea, and so it got a little more active warlike in that period of time.

Mr. Metzler: And so, did you actually sustain attacks by Japanese aircraft?

Mr. Morse: Yes. As far as damage, we had just near misses that would do some damage to the ship, and we only had one casualty during the time that I was on board. One of my cooks was on a forty millimeter midships gun, and a near miss, shrapnel came up and hit him and killed him. That was the only casualty we had the whole time that I was on the Mugford.

Mr. Metzler: And what about the other destroyers?

Mr. Morse: Well, one of them was sunk. The Helm was torpedoed off of northern New Guinea, but none of the others of our division were damaged any more than we were, where we'd just have some near misses that put holes in the hull and that sort of thing. So it was not what was going on in central Pacific where they were having a lot more hand to hand combat.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah. Storming the beaches and that kind of stuff. What was the food like? I know you had kind of the commissary thing underneath you (unclear) the food.

Mr. Morse: Well, we had great cooks and bakers, particularly the bakers. They kept us supplied with good fresh bread, and I think our food was basically good. Sometimes it would get pretty low. One time I had to report to the captain that there were--to the

executive officer, rather--that there were weevils in the flour.

And he said, "Just add raisins." (Chuckles)

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) It's all protein, anyhow.

Mr. Morse: (Laughs) So, add raisins. So, I'd say we had good food. We were able to get to supply ships reasonably often--

Mr. Metzler: And you didn't have to fool with mutton.

Mr. Morse: (Laughs) That's right.

Mr. Metzler: You'd figured that out.

Mr. Morse: Well, we--(laughs). Well, I think my chief commissary steward had figured it out before I got on board (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Okay. You inherited that system (laughs). Oh, my gosh. Well, you never fooled with the rabbit either. You didn't serve rabbit?

Mr. Morse: No, the rabbit got lost, too.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) Well, let's see, so the Mugford basically had two theaters of operation that we've discussed so far, Coral Sea down to Palm Island and then the northern--the New Guinea, southern--

Mr. Morse: Papua, New Guinea and New Britain.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, New Britain. So, what--where did she go next, then?

Mr. Morse: Came back to Mare Island Navy Yard for modernization and overhaul in April 1944.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so that's that photograph there--

Mr. Morse: That's the photograph right there.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, April of '44. Well now, what was your captain like, on the Mugford?

Mr. Morse: The captains were great. The first captain was Captain Corey, and he was--both captains that I served under were Naval Academy--and he had served on the Panay in China.

Mr. Metzler: Really? How interesting!

Mr. Morse: But he was a good captain and our executive officers were both good; I had two of those during my time. Both of them were Navy Academy, too.

Mr. Metzler: Now what was your ranking at this point?

Mr. Morse: I was an ensign to start with, and made lieutenant (j.g.). I guess I was a lieutenant (j.g.). Then I became a lieutenant, I think it was during my shore duty, yeah, during the next two years.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. And you had mentioned that you were athletics officer, so that gives me a feel for what some of the crew would do when they needed recreation or weren't, you know, busy. What other kind of activities went on aboard ship? Did you have movies, did you have gambling, any gambling going on?

Mr. Morse: No, none that was official (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: I understand that (laughs).

Mr. Morse: But movies were a regular thing if we were at anchor somewhere, either behind the barrier reef time, or Milne Bay, New Guinea, or if we were anchored up on the north side of

New Guinea. One of our sailors was in charge of getting the movies, trading movies with the other ships, and seeing what he could do.

Mr. Metzler: So you wouldn't have to watch the same thing over and over.

Mr. Morse: (Laughs) That's right.

Mr. Metzler: Re-runs.

Mr. Morse: The nightly movie was that entertainment. Now, if we were somewhere like Cairns or Townsville, then of course there was liberty sections, and part of the crew could go ashore and part of some of the officers each night, depending on which liberty party--liberty section they were in, and just do whatever the community had to offer.

Mr. Metzler: What did the communities have to offer?

Mr. Morse: Well, there was--if you had, generally, just somewhere to go and drink was about the main activity. They had bars and that was about it as far as the shore entertainment was concerned.

Mr. Metzler: So then, back to Mare Island. So, tell me what happened there and what else you did.

Mr. Morse: I had received notice that an ensign in the supply corps was going to relieve me of the duty and I hadn't known that for about a month and--

Mr. Metzler: Was your time up? I mean, it was a normal time (unclear) shore duty.

Mr. Morse: That's right. It was time; my eighteen months was up. So, one of the humorous things was that some--we convoyed ships from Pearl Harbor up to San Juan Islands north of Seattle, and then came down the coast to San Francisco and Mare Island. While we were somewhere out in the Pacific on that leg, there was a meeting of all officers to discuss what was going to happen when we got to Mare Island, and I didn't think that--for some reason I didn't think that meeting applied to me and so I was not in attendance. So the captain said, "Well, where's the paymaster?" And here we are out in the middle of the Pacific, and the executive officer says, "He's on the quarterdeck watching for his relief." (Laughs)

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) Make it sound like your work ethic was where it needed to be.

Mr. Morse: But at any rate, that was one of the funny comments (laughs). It was a good-humored--I'd call it happy--ship.

Mr. Metzler: And a lucky ship. Never really got hit. I mean, you only had the one casualty.

Mr. Morse: Now, the Mugford was one of the first ships damaged in the Guadalcanal period, and then they went to Sydney for overhaul. That was before I got on board, and so it was (unclear).

Mr. Metzler: What kind of damage did she sustain, do you know?

Mr. Morse: Yes. A dive bomber hit the number four gun and killed quite a-- about twenty-five or so of the crew. And so, that was a more serious thing that occurred to the ship but before I was aboard, and then after I had left and the ship was repaired and overhauled and went back out to war, it was one of the first damaged ships by a dive bomber at Leyte Gulf. And so, it had two serious damages, but neither--they didn't occur while I was on board.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, you caught it in the sweet spot in between.

Mr. Morse: That's right. Sort of a quiet time. All we were doing was convoying in the Coral Sea for one half of my time, and we were convoying people, soldiers and Marines, to the beach going up the New Guinea coast for the other half, but it just wasn't as nearly the strenuous life that so many of the destroyers in the central Pacific and the southern Pacific--south Pacific--had.

Mr. Metzler: Did she ever encounter any storms or typhoons while you were aboard?

Mr. Morse: No, no.

Mr. Metzler: That tended to be further north, I think.

Mr. Morse: Yeah. No, we had never had anything of that--

Mr. Metzler: Now the first time you crossed the equator, did they do one of those things that they had a tendency to do?

Mr. Morse: Yes, and let's see, that was on one of the transports. I guess it would've been the transport from Pearl Harbor to Noumea, New Caledonia. So we all got our--whatever they call that club that you--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, yeah. And I knew you--I have to think about it. I've heard so many of those stories, but--

Mr. Morse: I can't remember the name of the--

Mr. Metzler: But they make you do silly things, and--kind of like hazing at college, when you're a freshman (both talking together).

Mr. Morse: That's right (laughs). What the sophomores put you through.

Mr. Metzler: (Laughs) Okay, so what was shore duty like?

Mr. Morse: Shore duty at Mare Island was, I didn't think was challenging. I was--until I organized something that really did interest me. But I was the officer in charge of the follow-up section of the supply department and they had a bunch of civilians there that were doing the paperwork, and it just seemed to me that I was sort of unnecessary, in really accomplishing anything. But then I talked to the executive officer about being a ship's liaison officer, and knowing when ships were coming into Mare Island for overhaul and repair, when they came past San Francisco and heading for Mare Island, I would know that they were coming in and I would meet the ship down on the--and meet the supply officer as soon as they got to Mare Island, and I knew where

they could get the milk and the ice cream and whatever the things that they hadn't had in a long time, and what to do with the food--the meat and supplies that were on the ship when it was going to be going out of--into overhaul. So I worked out this liaison job and I really enjoyed that. There I felt like I was--

Mr. Metzler: Actually contributing.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, doing something.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, right. Now was that unofficial or was that an official change in your duties?

Mr. Morse: That was an official change.

Mr. Metzler: Okay, so you requested change and you got it.

Mr. Morse: Uh-huh. And they agreed that that was a good idea, and I think it was certainly more useful than what I was doing as the officer in charge of the follow-up section of the supply department (chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: Now on your personal side of things, you were back in the good old U.S. of A, and you, you know, you had a fiancée, so is this when you tied the knot?

Mr. Morse: That's when we got married, yeah. I had thirty days' leave after the sea duty, and during that thirty days, I came back to Houston and we got married and went out to San Francisco, and so then I reported to Mare Island Navy Yard, and that was--so I was--that's where we were first married.

Mr. Metzler: So, what kind of housing did you have access to?

Mr. Morse: Well, it was pretty sparse. We started off staying in a motel, McNally's motel on the Lincoln Highway and (chuckles) that was okay, except there was no kitchen facilities, but we could go in to Mare Island, to the officers' club and get food. At any rate, then we got, oh, a room with kitchen privileges and then we got an upstairs apartment, and finally got some Navy housing that they were building there at Mare Island. It started off as just sort of catch as catch can--

Mr. Metzler: I know housing was always a challenge, you know, to find it or to build enough when they were around those military installations.

Mr. Morse: So, it started off pretty hand to mouth, sort of, just trying to find a place to more organize during the two years that we were there.

Mr. Metzler: Now when you were aboard ship, jump back for a moment, did you write home much? Did you get letters from home, from family and fiancée?

Mr. Morse: Oh, yes. I wrote, what did we call those letters--V-mail?

Mr. Metzler: V-mail, yeah.

Mr. Morse: V-mail to my dad and to my fiancée, and to others, and also some friends that were in the Navy, to other ships and places where they were, and to my brothers. And we received mail

pretty regularly. Sometimes it would stack up at some place and we'd get a batch of it, and then I would ration it. I would say I'm just going to read one letter every day (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Stretch it out a little bit (laughs).

Mr. Morse: Yeah, that's right (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: Now did you have to censor any of mail going out that the guys that reported to you?

Mr. Morse: All of the officers had to just regularly sit down and censor the mail so that it was always--all had to be censored. Very little of it did you ever have to change anything.

Mr. Metzler: Because they knew the rules after a while.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, they knew the rules. I always sort of hated that duty because you were just sort of prying into somebody else's life. But, that's the way it was.

Mr. Metzler: See any Dear John letters come in?

Mr. Morse: No, (laughs) because we didn't have to censor incoming mail, just what was going out from the crew.

Mr. Metzler: I've heard a lot of stories from a lot of veterans, who participated and utilized their own personal codes to let people know--you're not supposed to say I'm on this ship or that island or anything like that. It gets censored out immediately.

Mr. Morse: That's right, it would be.

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever do any of that?

Mr. Morse: No, I never felt like I was looking at anything that had a secret meaning, because it was just ordinary letters. I never heard of any of the other officers feeling like they had seen something like that.

Mr. Metzler: So, how did the liaison work go then, the ship liaison work? That sounded much more fulfilling to you than being the head of a paper shuffling department.

Mr. Morse: Yes, it was. It was exciting to get down there and see the ship and meet the supply officer and give him all the information that I knew from experience is what he wanted to know.

Mr. Metzler: What he needed to know.

Mr. Morse: (Chuckles) That's right. While I was doing that job, the Mugford came in from that damage at Leyte Gulf, and so I had a chance to get together with some of our old officer friends and some of the crew.

Mr. Metzler: So did she get damaged pretty badly?

Mr. Morse: Yes, another dive bomb, and it was a straight hit.

Mr. Metzler: Was it a kamikaze or a bomb?

Mr. Morse: No, bomb. Kamikazes came along a little bit later--

Mr. Metzler: Well they first showed up at Leyte Gulf but it got worse later.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, that's right.

Mr. Metzler: Any other ships stand out in your mind as to, you know, being particularly beat up, or an interesting anecdote from your interaction with them?

Mr. Morse: No, I can't say that I had anything special that stands out in my mind.

Mr. Metzler: So, this is all different classes of ships, from escorts to minesweepers to carriers, or--?

Mr. Morse: No, Mare Island couldn't take carriers. It could take cruisers, but that would be about the biggest that they could handle there at Mare Island, and submarines, a submarine base, but I don't come up with anything.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. So were you ships' liaison officer until the war was over?

Mr. Morse: Yes, and so that was my job until my points built up to where I was relieved.

Mr. Metzler: Was that after the war was over or before?

Mr. Morse: Hmm, after.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, so you were still in when V-J Day came around, and they announced the dropping of the atomic bombs and that kind of stuff?

Mr. Morse: Oh, yes.

Mr. Metzler: Was there a bit of a celebration when any of those things happened?

Mr. Morse: Yeah, there a celebration at the officers' club at Mare Island Navy Yard that was pretty good.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get liberty into San Francisco at all, to see the town, do the town?

Mr. Morse: Oh yes. Just had to be back at Mare Island for, I guess at about eight o'clock the next morning, but we could go in to San Francisco. They had Navy busses that transported workers, the Mare Island Navy Yard workers, all the way from San Francisco and Oakland and the other cities around that area, and brought them in to the Navy Yard, and so that was the way we traveled, was by the Navy busses. I guess the busses didn't run to San Francisco; they went to downtown Oakland, and then you caught the commercial transportation from there. That was our means of transportation in and out of Mare Island, was the Navy busses.

Mr. Metzler: So, the war was over, you got your points, you got discharged. When were you discharged, '46 or was it in '45?

Mr. Morse: No, it would have been, let me see, hmm. Nineteen forty-five, probably late in maybe November, 1945. My orders were to go back to Houston and down to the--whatever that base was.

Mr. Metzler: Ellington?

Mr. Morse: Hancock.

Mr. Metzler: Oh, Hancock. Okay.

Mr. Morse: I think it was called. And that's where I was discharged, and then from there, I signed up to go to law school at University of Texas. I was still on terminal leave when the school started in January of '46.

Mr. Metzler: So what do you think about the Japanese? They were the arch enemy of our nation and all of you guys fighting them. What do you think?

Mr. Morse: Well, I certainly didn't have any feeling except try to beat them in any way we could during the war. I haven't hated Japanese for my lifetime, but--(chuckles).

Mr. Metzler: At the time it's certainly understandable.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, and you heard such bad things about what they did to prisoners and things like that, that kept you pretty well stirred up.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, atrocities. But you'd drive a Toyota now if you were given the chance.

Mr. Morse: Exactly. That's what I have.

Mr. Metzler: That's where you draw the line (laughs). You know, it's interesting. I've talked to a lot--I won't say a lot--but some veterans, particularly ones who really came face to face and mano-a-mano combat, and they won't buy anything Japanese if they can help it.

Mr. Morse: That's right.

Mr. Metzler: And I'm telling you, you know, it's--

Mr. Morse: It's down to this day.

Mr. Metzler: Absolutely. In a way, it's a shame, because that's seventy years of your life that you're harboring that hatred.

Mr. Morse: I know that those who survived the--what was it called, Bataan death march?

Mr. Metzler: Yes.

Mr. Morse: And their annual meetings that they held, that was absolutely a rule that none of those people would buy a Japanese automobile.

Mr. Metzler: Well, they were really right at the tip of the spear when it came to atrocities. Okay, how do you feel that your experience on the Mugford and subsequent to that changed you as a person? You were a pretty young fellow when you went in, and--

Mr. Morse: I think that it was a great experience for me. I think I grew up during that period of time. Just looking back, going to high school and Rice and living at home, I really hadn't developed very much, in retrospect, and I think it was a very valuable experience in how to handle yourself in the real world, so that to me, it was a very fortunate and valuable experience.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, I've often debated with myself whether that's something that we should require all citizens to do. I mean, it wouldn't be the first country to do that. Even in time of peace, quote-unquote peace, if you, you know, a year, eighteen months, or

two years of commitment to your country and doing something useful would help new generations grow up.

Mr. Morse: I think it would. I think that would be a valuable experience for people and a useful time and develop more of a feeling of what the world is all about.

Mr. Metzler: Well, what other things can we talk about, Clint? What other sea stories are you holding back from me?

Mr. Morse: (Both laugh) Well, one of my things that I did was, when we came to a new place, like the first time we went to Milne Bay, New Guinea--

Mr. Metzler: How do you spell that, by the way?

Mr. Morse: M-i-l-n-e.

Mr. Metzler: Okay. I want to make sure I got that right.

Mr. Morse I always wanted to be on the first boat, or the gig, from the ship heading for shore to go see whether I could scrounge up something that we needed in the way of food that we didn't have, that would be something the crew would want. And so that was--and of course, the first--always on the first boat ashore was the enlisted man who was in charge of our movies, because he was going ashore to see what he could do to trade a movie and so forth. Well, one of the stories that I like to tell is the first time we did that in Milne Bay, I got out of the gig and started walking down a dirt road. Pretty soon I came to what was

obviously a softball diamond. And I said, "Well, that's interesting." And so I wandered around and I found an Australian officer that was in charge of an anti-aircraft base--

Mr. Metzler: Position.

Mr. Morse: Position there, and I said, "Well, I see you've got a softball diamond there. Who uses that?" And he says, "Oh, we do. We dabble a bit in the game," he said. And I said, "Well I'm off this destroyer that's anchored out there, and I think we're going to be here at least through the day, so why don't I bring my baseball team over here, and we'll have a game?" He said, "Very good. We'll put some beer in the river and be ready for you when--" (laughs). So, when I got there, of course, I assumed that we were a lot better than they. I said, "Shall we divide up and I'll take part of your players and you take some of mine?" "No," he said, "We'll take you on." Well, they we all cricket players and, they didn't care--in cricket you defend the wicket, and so they could hit anything whether a good pitch or a bad pitch. They could really hit well.

Mr. Metzler: They controlled the bat.

Mr. Morse: Yeah. And so, they beat us that afternoon.

Mr. Metzler: How humiliating!

Mr. Morse: (Both laughing) But the thing that was fun was that they had the beer in the river, and we had a good swim after the game, and

that was--I've always told that story. "Oh, we dabble a bit in it."
And they were good (laughs).

Mr. Metzler: They did more than dabble (laughs).

Mr. Morse: So I imagine he enjoyed telling that story when--

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, somebody interviewing him back in Australia, I bet he told that story.

Mr. Morse: (Both Laugh) That's right. This Yankee comes in and says I'll take some of your players so we can have a nice easy--

Mr. Metzler: An even game.

Mr. Morse: --an even game, and we beat the hell out of them. So--

Mr. Metzler: They enjoyed that.

Mr. Morse: Yeah, oh sure they did. But that's about the only thing that crosses my mind.

Mr. Metzler: (Chuckles) The story of a softball game with the Aussies--

Mr. Morse: Yeah, at Milne Bay.

Mr. Metzler: At Milne Bay. I've got to get that down. I'm sure that's probably the only time we will have in our data base a story of a softball game with the Aussies in Milne Bay, so I don't want to miss this, I want it down in the data base (both laugh). So anyhow, well all right, we've covered a lot of ground.

Mr. Morse: Well, I've enjoyed the visit. It's always fun to talk about that period of time. Now down through the years, just as an aside, the group of officers that I served with on the Mugford sort of

formed a group that kept in touch and after we all got to the point where we were retired and so forth, we started having get-togethers. We had several here, and one of the meetings that we had was in Austin, and we made a trip to the Nimitz Museum, and dedicated a plaque to the Mugford that's down on that wall of plaques, and had a very nice meeting with the staff there.

Mr. Metzler: How long ago was that?

Mr. Morse: It was probably, let's see--

Mr. Metzler: Twenty years ago, you said.

Mr. Morse: Twenty years ago, I think at least.

Mr. Metzler: So let's just say early nineties.

Mr. Morse: Yes, that's right, early nineties. During the late eighties and on through the middle nineties, we met a number of times, but it got to where it was a smaller and smaller group, and finally--

Mr. Metzler: Hard to travel and--

Mr. Morse: Oh, I know. We were going to have one here in Houston, on nine-eleven, the year of nine-eleven, what was that, 2001?

Mr. Metzler: Yes, sir.

Mr. Morse: And we were scheduled to have the meeting shortly after that, and we called it off.

Mr. Metzler: Yeah, had to, almost. You couldn't even travel there for a while.

Mr. Morse: That was our last meeting that we were going to have.

Mr. Metzler: Well you know, just as one little sidelight, we've had some volunteers actually at the Museum, working to try and update all the files and the displays of where all of these memorials and plaques and what have you are, and updating the maps and everything.

Mr. Morse: That's great.

Mr. Metzler: And we've got twenty-six hundred plaques and memorials now. They've had to build more walls.

Mr. Morse: More walls (both laugh).

Mr. Metzler: So it has really, really, you know, become a huge deal.

Mr. Morse: Yes. Well, the staff was very helpful and put on a nice formality to the event that was very good. That's the way we sort of wound our Navy career, with that group. I stayed in the reserve for another, after I was--active duty was over--for another, let's see, up until the middle 1950s. And was active reserve, but then I got to a job where I was traveling all the time and I couldn't go to the weekly meetings, and so I resigned from that. That was my Navy career.

Mr. Metzler: Well, it's interesting. There's, you know, the old thing, what they say, you know, there's fifteen million stories in the U.S. military servicemen of World War II. I mean, that's (unclear) people, and yours is one of them, and I thank you for spending the time to share them today.

Mr. Morse: Well, I've enjoyed the visit, Ed, and appreciate you coming by.

Mr. Metzler: Well, I want to say that we appreciate what you did for our country during World War II. We still don't thank you guys enough. So here we are; here's another one. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Morse: (Laughs) Well, I think down through the years, there's been an equal amount of sacrifice and contribution and so I don't think it's anything special.

Mr. Metzler: Well, it's not unique, but it is special. Okay, I think I will end it at that. Thank you again, Clint.

OH04129 - Clint Morse
Transcribed by: Joel Keefer
Fredericksburg, TX
March 22, 2014