

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Utah C. Hamilton
San Marcos, TX
April 9, 2014
May 5, 2015
U.S.S. Mohawk, tug
U.S.S. Southhampton, aka 66

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is April 9, 2014. I am interviewing Mr. Utah C. Hamilton by telephone. His phone number is 512-392-3410. His address is 1615 Redwood Road, San Marcos, TX 78666. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Utah, I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Hamilton:

Thank you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is OK with you. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Hamilton:

Sure. OK

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, Sherry Branham.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for her?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, it's 512-396-5759. San Marcos, Texas. 2701 Summit Ridge.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birth date?

Mr. Hamilton:

11-16-23.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Hamilton:

I was born in Wichita, Kansas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sister?

Mr. Hamilton:

I had one brother and one sister older than me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your brother in World War II?

Mr. Hamilton:

He sure was. We joined together.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is he still living?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, he has passed on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did he do during the war?

Mr. Hamilton:

He was on a mine sweeper, U.S.S. Raven.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your sister involved in any kind of war work?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, she wasn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, you grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, it was hand to mouth and everybody was digging up work to put food on the table.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's occupation?

Mr. Hamilton:

When I was born, he was an actor in a wild west show sponsored by the 101 Ranch in

Oklahoma. We were entertainment.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did he do that?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, I was five years old when he got out of it. I was born in a tent on a bale of hay. I was in 26 states before I was six years old.

Mr. Misenhimer: (laughing)

I hadn't heard that before.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah, I was. They was taking down...they had played Wichita and they was moving on south.

My mother is expecting. The time came and they ordered a midwife.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, well, that's a new story. I hadn't heard that one. Then after your father left that, then what did he do?

Mr. Hamilton:

We settled down in Georgia West, Texas. My father was experienced in leather work so he put in a boot and saddle shop and repaired harness and stuff like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was this during the Depression?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was he able to keep pretty busy?

Mr. Hamilton:

We kids went out and worked when he could to bring in money, me and my brother and sister and brother, we went out and picked cotton. Did whatever we could to do find to do to help.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Hamilton:

I finished what we called then the seventh grade in Georgia West. Yeah. We both walked to school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year was that when you got that diploma?

Mr. Hamilton:

I got that diploma, let's see... I think I was fourteen.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were fourteen years old? That would have been about 1937?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what did you do?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, we moved to Rockport and at that time my folks had split up and one of them moved to the Valley and one of them moved to Rockport.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which one went to Rockport?

Mr. Hamilton:

My mother.

Mr. Misenhimer:

All three of you children went with her?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, the other two, they had a choice but my mother won me in court but I'd go back and forth each month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

My father had passed away in the Valley. All of us settled back around my mother there in Rockport. I was sixteen in 1939 and I went to high school and played football for Rockport High. My brother had already left school unfortunately and him and his friend was going to Victoria, Texas to join the Navy. That was in October of 1941. They had been there before but there was a waiting list. Anyway, I had an old Model A Ford and they asked me would I drive them up there. Of course I drove them up there and got there and the recruiting officer, Chief Quartermaster, wouldn't take them without me. At the time I was seventeen. I was eighteen in November. Anyway, I told them no, I wasn't ready yet but my mother wouldn't sign anyway. He said, "Take her these papers and see if she will." I took her the papers and I think they talked me into it and she signed. By the time we got in, we were sworn in in Houston, Texas on December 29, 1941. Of course Pearl Harbor had been hit and we waited until they called us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, speaking of Pearl Harbor, where were you and how did you hear about that Pearl Harbor attack?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, I came in off a shrimp boat on December 7, I had been working on a shrimp boat and my mother and brother met me. They said, "The Japs hit Pearl Harbor." "No kidding?" "Oh, yeah." We can get in the Navy now maybe. I said, "OK" so that's what we were doing up there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when you heard that, how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, I really didn't know much about it, only you know, we concentrated on working and making a living. We didn't worry about too much but we did think things would open up. We also knew that everybody needed to do all they could at the time to bring the country around and protect it. That was our feeling. Then when they went out and shook the bushes, all them old boys joined up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Hamilton:

They sent us to Norfolk, Virginia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you travel up there?

Mr. Hamilton:

By train.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that train trip?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, you know, I got a place to sleep and food and that was the main thing. I didn't have to work. I sat in a chair all the way up there. It was in December so it wasn't too hot after I got out of Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Had you been that far from home before?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, I hadn't.

Mr. Hamilton:

What all happened...did the three of you all stay together at boot camp?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, they split us up right away. That's what they called young platoon and old platoon and the strong platoon and the weak platoon. They did this kind of separation because we were brothers. Of course us younger ones kind of got toughened up. I was in Platoon 33 and my brother was in Platoon 32. My brother's recruit commander was Cannonball Johnson and he had cannonball jumps. Cannonball jumps, it got its name from having a guy hold a cannonball over his head for punishment and he lost control of it and of course he didn't make it. He got this name from that. That's what I heard. I don't know if it's true. Lot of the punishment then was they had the old cannonballs stacked in a pyramid and we'd have to restack them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in boot camp?

Mr. Hamilton:

It was supposed to be eighteen weeks but they kept cutting it. If I remember right, we got out of there in twelve weeks. Because of Pearl Harbor it was a hurry-up deal. They were just trying to get them on out of there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What are some things you did in boot camp?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, of course we did a lot of marching, lot of close order drills. We went to gunnery schools out at Dam Neck. Had lot of mock-ups of ships, compartments of ships you'd have to go through. Had to learn to tie knots, had to learn to semaphore. Had to learn Morse Code. Lot of plane recognition. I had to distinguish between a Jap Betty and a Jap Val and a Jap Zero. Lot of recognition things, lot of shipboard nomenclature.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any kind of weapons training?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, they trained us on a special rifle. They had a 22 on an '03 frame. We went to rifle range and most of us being from Texas, they couldn't believe the scores we made. Had one guy from New York, one guy from Brooklyn, and one from California. The rest of us had some Texas in us. Of course all of us was rabbit hunters and things like that so we couldn't understand what a heavy weapon was doing with a .22 caliber but you could hit anything with it. Then we ended up on special training. Then we went to Dam Neck. The 40mm quad and we went to training on the 20mm and the 50 caliber, which was air-cooled.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you had quite a bit of weapons training then.

Mr. Hamilton:

We sure did. I remember I was on the range with the M-1 and they said, "Ready on the right, ready on the left" I began firing, a big mistake. Because he handed me a whole box of thirty caliber ammunition. You could fire them at will. By the time I got done, I had a bloody lip, black

eye, a bloody nose. I never did that again. Never will forget that. Never did forget when they ask
“Ready on the right, ready on the firing line” I waited until they said “Commence firing.”

Mr. Misenhimer:

That’s right. That’s what I did. When you finished boot camp, then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, I went to some undercover training on the security project there on the naval station. I never did understand what that was for but anyway it was only a few weeks and then they sent us to Tugboat Row. Tugboat Row was in the Norfolk Navy Yard and they still had the old coal burning tugs. I was assigned to the Mohawk. All the old coal burning tugs. I spent almost eighteen months there. It was the fisticuff Navy. That’s where I learned, well you almost had to be on the boxing team to get along. The only school you had was gunners school, radar school and quartermaster. I didn’t qualify. I didn’t have the education. I didn’t even have a GED, I ended up I was going to be a fireman. They put me down in the boiler room, shoveling black diamonds (coal) and they didn’t teach me to bed the fire. Of course I didn’t stay long at that. I stayed on deck from then on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were still there in Virginia this whole time? You were there in what state was that, Virginia?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The whole time, OK.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, we would go out to the bigger ships and take the pilot to bring them in and anchor and tie to

the piers. You know, the early part of the war, the German subs was pretty potent off the East Coast. In the meantime, my brother got down on the minesweeper down in the windward passage. An ashcan was too shallow and it went off and he was blown against the bulkhead. It did a lot of damage to his head and chest. He was in the Norfolk Navy Hospital. He got a medical discharge. He came home early but then I was assigned after this training...

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of ship is that?

Mr. Hamilton:

The Southampton was an AKA 66, double six.

Mr. Misenhimer:

AKA 66.

Mr. Hamilton:

We was loaded up and went on down to the Panama Canal and went through the Canal with a load of cargo and 24 landing craft and took this load to Eniwetok. The Marshal Islands, Eniwetok. Then from there we went to Pearl Harbor and we was placed under quarantine because we had strep throat. We got checked out and finally traced it down to dirty silverware. We laid in there until the quarantine was lifted and took on a load to Guam. Of course the Mariannas was just finishing up. We got in on the tail end there in Guam. Then from there we loaded up, the Fourth Marine Division was leaving the Hawaiian Islands. We took them into Iwo Jima.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What day did you get to Iwo Jima?

Mr. Hamilton:

The invasion was February 19 so that would put us there February 16. They was still doing some bombardment when we got there. Then that lasted 33 days and supposed to be a five-day operation, ended up 33 days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do at Iwo Jima?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, we landed there on Red Beach One with the 4th Marine Division and we started taking in the 3rd Marines replacements. They were supposed to be just occupational but they ended up going on the beach. It was before they went to battle. I do know that they were right out of the training. They were all young kids. They were inexperienced. There's stories on that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I didn't know an AKA carried troops. But you carried troops then, right?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you were at Iwo Jima, were you attacked by enemy planes or ships or anything?

Mr. Hamilton:

No. They had big mortars. You know they had everything plotted on a grid.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Zeroed in?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, they could set the mortars to zero in a grid on any part of the island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You said something about big lights?

Mr. Hamilton:

D plus three. The beach got so cluttered in that volcanic sand that the beach master cleared all the landing craft out and everything they could get out of there and they lit up the beach. The Japanese started dropping mortars everywhere to clear the beach out for us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What else happened there?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, they had a hard time. There was some inclines, about 15-foot inclines, but the underwater demolition teams in all their surveys didn't actually get the height of it so we had to take those armored bulldozers in there and try to get them off shore in that volcanic sand and knock that down. Of course that was one of the biggest hazards that we had. Of course every hazard was, it was dug in like an anthill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was that?

Mr. Hamilton:

These holes, Mt. Suribachi, what was on it was like an ant hill from all over onto there and they were hard to get out of there. You slammed doors and the Corsairs and the planes from the carriers, they dropped enough bombs and the battleships sent so many rounds on Mt. Suribachi to literally the volcano by your sight you could see it actually the top blowed of it almost.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you see the flags raised?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, sir. I seen both of them raised.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Hamilton:

The second one was the most famous one. It was the second one that they did that became the most famous picture. Three of them that raised the flag never left Iwo. They got killed. Franklin Sousley, Mike Strank, Harlon Block.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's right, that's right.

Mr. Hamilton:

Then the sailor and Ira Hayes. Used to know all their names but I've forgot them now. Ira Hayes, I remember him, the Indian.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Navy medic was one of them, John Bradley. Ira Hayes and Rene Gagnon also survived.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah. He was a corpsman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, right. Now, when you left Iwo Jima, where did you go from there?

Mr. Hamilton:

We got out of there I think 31 or 32 days later. From there we went back to Maui in the Hawaiian Islands and we picked up part of the 3rd and part of the 4th Marines and we got ready to hit Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you pick up?

Mr. Hamilton:

We picked up part of the 3rd and some of the 4th Marines.

Mr. Misenhimer:

3rd and 4th Divisions?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah. They were kind of mixed in and we took them. Our job was to hit Okinawa on April Fool's Day, April 1st. There were five AKAs and APAs. The LST. And we went on the eastern side of the island and made a fake invasion. What we did, we put our troops in 24 landing craft and I think the Bayfield was there. Anyway we put on a faux invasion on that side of the island and after we drew fire, started drawing fire from the beach, we turned around and came back out and started circling again. We did this three times and it was supposed to be an April Fool's trick and it pulled a lot of the Japs to that side of the island and they hit the other side.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was very successful.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes. The first casualty, according to the story I've got, was a Marine got run over by a tank.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, the landing on the beach there was not challenged.

Mr. Hamilton:

No. It was the suicides that gave us hell later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, right.

Mr. Hamilton:

Kamikazes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you see many of the kamikazes there?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, they hit an LST on our side and they had barrels of oil. They was loaded solid with barrels of oil and there was oil barrels all over there. Then they hit an APA and there was supposed to be no planes over our area at all but a Jap Val came over our area and of course everybody fired at it. I was on a quad 40 at the time. It picked up our landing craft. We was fixing to go around the other side and I guess it was D plus 5 or 6. They ordered us out of there because there was no need for us really. They wanted to get as many transports out of there they could because the kamikazes was hitting things pretty hard. It may have been more days than that. I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long were you there then?

Mr. Hamilton:

I think it was almost a week. If I remember right, the Army was hitting the north part of the island. They were coming down south and the Rangers was going north. Anyway, they ordered us out of there to go then to New Caledonia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Hamilton:

We had a Second Lieutenant in the Marines and a PFC that we had played hearts with going over and we went on night retirement they called it. They picked all the boats up and they went out at night to get out of the way of everything and we buried him at sea. We had to give up on our body bags, the Repose, the hospital ship. So we had to take one of them and wrap him in canvas and logged two five-inch projectiles on his leg for weight. We put him on a piece of plywood and put a flag over him, two barrels, and then the Captain...Of course they couldn't fire rifles but they snapped them in, the Marines just snapped a 21-gun salute and we raised the plywood and let the bodies slid out from under it. Of course it was recorded in the Navy log of the ship, what longitude and latitude he was buried at. We buried two of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just two, OK. Now what did you do in the burials? What was your part of the burials?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, I was a Bosun Mate and I piped with the bosun pipe, just piped them over the side.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you played the bosun's pipes?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah. It was three sailors on one side of a piece of plywood and three Marines on the other.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sailors and Marines doing it.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes. Well, nowadays they got copters and we had to load them up on what we called a salmon board, those stokes stretchers. They would bring them down to the ship on the beach, bring them

down on the beach and we would place them on a salmon board, we called it. Sometimes we just place them on the rear deck of the landing craft. We'd take them to the hospital ship but our ship had an excellent surgeon aboard. We'd take most of ours to him and they'd hoist them aboard and operate on them. I never will forget, there's a fellow that was with us named VanDePutte. He owned a big flag company down in San Antonio after the war and his daughter-in-law just run for Lieutenant Governor. But he's passed on now. He was on the ship with me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was at Iwo Jima?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes. His name was VanDePutte. You may remember her running, his daughter-in-law ran for Lieutenant Governor just recently.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, I recall.

Mr. Hamilton:

The medical pouches we carried and also the Marines carried them too. In this pouch, it was a first aid kit, it was a little tube of morphine and if they was hollering and carrying on and in misery, we was allowed to give them that morphine and put a mark on their forehead. So they'd mark them to make sure they didn't overdose them. Then that's when we'd take them out to the ship. The story goes around that Arkie from Arkansas, his name was Snyder. He picked up a load of Japanese wounded and went to sea with them and lowered the ramp and made sure they didn't make it to the hospital ship. But if this is true or not, I have no way of verifying it. Just by hearsay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you take the dead aboard also or just the wounded?

Mr. Hamilton:

We took those two bodies.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just the two?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes. Most of them they buried on the island. They bulldozed a trench. They'd take their parka and wrap around them and just lay them in the trench. See, we had some, I've forgot what the fifth day we started getting rough. It started raining, drizzling and it got really...even though the beach was hot from tar and all that but it was miserable because it was like one of our wet, cold spells, you know. You just couldn't get comfortable. You know on an invasion that way, there's three things: you got to pee, you got to have a bowel movement and you got to eat. None of it was very comfortable. This is the part that people don't realize what you go through. You know, with rations and... We had, I'm sure you're familiar with this, emergency rations. We had a box in one color and another box

Mr. Misenhimer:

The K-rations?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah, K-rations. Each one of them had two wormy cigarettes and two pieces of toilet paper. The chow I liked was the cream cheese. It was pretty good. They had a cream cheese. The beef wasn't too good. Then you had hardtack and a chocolate bar. It give you some vitamins.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This was all at Iwo Jima.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went to Okinawa.

Mr. Hamilton:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened at Okinawa? How long were you there?

Mr. Hamilton:

We was there about a week.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did we cover everything that happened there?

Mr. Hamilton:

Pretty well. We covered that we knocked down that Jap Val plane and outside of that I think we pretty well covered it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then after Okinawa, what did you do?

Mr. Hamilton:

We took some of the wounded back and unloaded them at Maui. Then we took a load of cargo and dropped it off at Saipan and went on to Noumea, New Caledonia. In Noumea we picked up part of the 2nd Army. There again what we were to do, they called the operation "Golden Rod".

We was going to invade Japan. Well, we was to hit northern Honshu, northern part of Japan. What happened was, of course they dropped the bomb and then on the way north to the invasion, they dropped the second one. These days I do not remember. They hit Hiroshima and then Nagasaki. Of course I pronounced it wrong but that's how we pronounced it back then. They announced first that it was over and then it wasn't. They dropped the second one and then that was the end of it. We went on ahead, the thing I think was most exciting, when all the lights went out on ships and that you didn't have a darkened ship no more. We'd walk out on deck, smoking, you know everything just changed overnight. We went up the coast and we rigged our paravanes because the Japs had mined all along the coast with those horn top floating mines, contact mines. Of course we rigged the paravanes, we'd cut three or four mines going up. We went on ahead and occupied northern Honshu even though the war was over. We landed the 2nd Army up there. Really where we landed, they had skipped bombed it from the carriers and there wasn't nothing left really except the (can't even think of the name of it now) all that was standing was the walk-in place, office in concrete. Of course when we landed there the people was coming back out of the fields and mountains and greeting us the best they could. They let us accept anything they offered to give us. An old man gave me his stamp collection and I tried to get him to keep it but he wouldn't. He gave it to me anyway and insisted that I take it. I ended up back in the States with it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when did you land the troops up in Honshu?

Mr. Hamilton:

I was trying to think when it was. It was not too long after the second bomb was dropped.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The second drop was on August 9. August 15 is when Japan gave up and on September 2 was the signing on the Missouri.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Would it have been after the signing on the Missouri?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, we was on our way up there when they dropped the second one. After they signed it, we took part of the people we had aboard, I've forgot who it was now, part of the Marines, we took them into Tokyo Bay. An LST came along side and picked them up. We didn't even put our boats in the water. That's when a Merchant Marine broke loose from its anchorage and was coming towards us and me and another guy put a fender over the side and the ship hit that fender and saved some of the damage we got. That's when I got First Class.

Mr. Misenhimer:

First Class what, Bosun's Mate?

Mr. Hamilton:

The Captain could rate you yet and one fleet competitive. Of course I didn't make Chief until the Korean War in 1953. We didn't rate it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You said something last time about you had a surprise after you took down to Tokyo Bay also, is that right?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, when they had the surrender on the Missouri, where were you then?

Mr. Hamilton:

We were on the way to Tokyo Bay. We wasn't actually there in the bay. We went in shortly after.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now I understand they had a big flyover of planes. Did you see that?

Mr. H :

No, sir, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The tail end of it?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah. Just that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

From there we were running personnel from different islands back to the staging area that was in Maui. We brought them back there and that's when they came out with the 33 points. If the Marines or Sailors had 33 points, they were released. I think it was November when we got back to the States, if I remember right, because Christmas came shortly after that. We landed in Portland, Oregon. That wrapped up my World War II experience, right there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Here before you said “we took a lot of minor wounded, nothing serious.”

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Had a lot of minor wounded from different ships that we had accumulated and took them to Pearl Harbor. Is that correct?

Mr. Hamilton:

Right, right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

“When we got to Pearl Harbor we loaded out some supplies to take somewhere.” Where were you going to take them to?

Mr. Hamilton:

I think we took it to Eniwetok. They called that the Crossroads of the Pacific. They had a big supply dump.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it about the Marshall Islands? What happened there?

Mr. Hamilton:

I was trying to think. Maybe that’s where we picked up the troops and headed back to the States. My old mind’s foggy. I don’t remember where we picked up the last ones at. Seemed like every little island we’d hit, they’d need something and we’d offload it and pick up more wounded.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me read you what you said here: "We were supposed to head back to the States and they changed our orders and gave us another load to take to ...then we picked up another load in the Marshall Islands you said. That was the Crossroads of Eniwetok and some place." Where was it?

Mr. Hamilton:

Kwajalein Island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Kwajalein? OK. They had a lot of supplies there that they needed to move out. We took them over...I think we made three trips with supplies for the First Cavalry that went in first for the occupation.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I remember we went to Tokyo Bay and got liberty.

Mr. Hamilton:

Right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That would have been when?

Mr. Hamilton:

That would have been after they actually occupied Japan.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Immediately after or sometime later?

Mr. Hamilton:

I think it would have been in a couple of months.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, that's when we went back to Portland, Oregon. These people we were picking up was minor wounded. They also had enough points to get out. So we took them in there and they put them on a train, including myself, sent them to different areas for discharge.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About when would that have been?

Mr. Hamilton:

That would have been in November.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, you said here, "I got back to home in time for Christmas."

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes. Mr. Misenhimer:

"But all the celebrations were over and everything by the time I got back."

Mr. Hamilton:

That's true. Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go from there?

Mr. Hamilton:

They sent me to Camp Elliott and from there I extended for two years because everybody was getting out. I just extended and that's when I caught the O'Brien. An incident happened that had the whole troop train laughing. There was a lady on there with two little kids. They were singing the popular song "I Lost My Yellow Basket" Mr. Misenhimer:

A Tisket, A Tasket?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah. They were saying A Tisket, A Tasket put Hitler in his casket. Big fat Mussolini couldn't win. Everybody just cracked up because we ha'n't heard that. We thought that was quite a deal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now something about a Japanese bayonet?

Mr. Hamilton:

Oh, I had accumulated a Japanese rifle and a bayonet. When we hit Portland, Oregon they informed us we could not go on a train with any weapon. This conductor wouldn't let nobody go on there so we rounded up a couple of workers that worked for the railroad and they was getting newspapers and wrapping and taping so we could take them on the train. They had to be wrapped up and signed by a Lieutenant so we were authorized to take them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you got home with that bayonet then?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, sir. Somewhere, I don't remember where I got it, I think a Japanese had gave it to me, a garrison flag with the rising sun and it was a garrison flag. She was trying to help me get that rifle wrapped and everything. That's when the conductors took over.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you say, "Anyway in San Diego they took us to a train. I forgot the name." What happened there? Tell me about that.

Mr. Hamilton:

After I left the receiving station there before I caught a train home, they put me on a bus. I was in

a receiving station and they was going to put everything through a...Before they let you go you had to go down and listen. They had this big, like a semi-trailer and it had speakers on it. They would play the war over again, the noise, bombs dropping, mortars going off and all this stuff streaming. They made you go down and listen to that before they'd let you get out of the receiving station. Anyway, I walked off and went back up to the main office and Wayne told me I had to stay there, "yak, yak, yak" all that stuff and I told him forget it. He followed me a little way and gave up. I went on up to the office and I told the Chief personnel man, Chief Yeoman, that I'd have enough of everything and I just wanted to go back to Rockport, Texas and get me a fishpole started and go fishing. He said, "Well, you can't. You got to finish that." The Captain's office was right next door. The Captain came running out the other base, "Get that man home on leave and let him alone." I never will forget it because in about twenty minutes I was on my way home.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Good, good. Then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

I went home and I reported back in to Camp Elliott. Of course all this happened on the bus, you know. I had to pay my own ticket and all that. Of course I got paid for my unused leave. I had four years of leave coming, thirty days. They would only pay you for ninety and you could take the rest. Anyway I got back to Camp Hulen and I had two years to pull and I caught the O'Brien, Destroyer 725.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

We went on a big, they called it one of the biggest peacetime maneuvers in Navy history. The Blue Fleet against the White Fleet. Whatever fleet won got to go back to Australia, whoever lost went to Pearl Harbor. We had four submarines so we won. That's when we went to Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that?

Mr. Hamilton:

That was a good will tour.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get to spend any time in Australia?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, sir. It was just when the ship pulled in under the Waterloo Bridge and then we had liberty there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That was what town?

Mr. Hamilton:

Sydney, Australia.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sydney? Did you like that?

Mr. Hamilton:

Oh, it was wonderful. Then we came back and went on several fleet maneuvers and then I guess I was on there a year and a half, something like that by then, and they decommissioned it. They put it out of commission in Long Beach Navy Yard. As we was pulling into Long Beach Navy Yard, the Captain told us they had to lay to at the entrance buoy and all hands should come on

deck and watch Howard Hughes fly the "Spruce Goose". We didn't realize what the "Spruce Goose" was at the time but he was just supposed to taxi but he flew it a mile and landed back down to get his money which we didn't realize at the time. After they got through passing back we went in and they decommissioned it. My two years was up by the time all this was done. So then I was set to get out and jobs were scarce and it was rough out there. Everybody was getting out and looking for jobs you know, hunting jobs. I thought well, I had a seagoing rate to be a tugboat operator or something like that. Anyway I decided to ship over for China duty. So I went to Tsingtao, China and Nationalist Chinese with the 3rd Marine Division. In 1949 the Communists were going into war against Chaing Kai-Shek so they asked us to leave.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Hamilton:

They sent me down to Eniwetok and we were getting ready for the first H-bomb test and the Korean War broke out and I was down there at first with 13 sailors and we were kind of an advanced group going down to see what all we needed. We also had a crash boat down there that we'd cover everything from Johnson Island to Kwajalein in case there was a plane crash. Of course, there was bunch of ships around to take care. We only went out on one call. To make a long story short, after we moved out so they could drop the bomb, they sent me back to Pearl Harbor and I caught AOG, gasoline tanker. We was taking gasoline all over the Pacific. The Korean War was going on and I guess since I talked to you before, I got a form to fill out. The Madam President or whatever she is of Korea, awarded my ship a presidential, some kind of citation. I had to fill out a form and that's being processed. Then when I got off that AOG I was ordered to the States for my first shore duty. I went to recruiting at Farmington, Missouri. Of

course I pulled I think it was three years of recruiting. I really asked for Corpus Christi and by the way they sent me to Corpus Christi to Cabaniss Field as fire chief. I almost got settled in and then the civilians took it over and I had to give it up. I didn't last long there, not at this time when I come in. That's when I went to recruiting. I spent two years on the recruiting and then I went to the icebreaker Staten Island G-B-5. The Navy had all the icebreakers and the big one, Glazier. The U.S.S. Glazier, an icebreaker. I was on deep freeze station deep freeze and two trips north of the Arctic. That ended my Navy career. I lost a helicopter. I was flying ice observer and the only bad incident I got into was a couple of whiteouts and a helicopter crash. Of course I was flying ice observer to find Paliums, open center, leads to get the icebreaker where we were going. But we went down there to break the channel into Muriddo Sound so the cargo ships could get in there. When we finished we went over and partied, you know, all that good stuff. What's interesting is what happened now, you know this Amigo Red, like fish oil.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The what?

Mr. Hamilton:

Amigo Red is a little red capsule. Which makes that from krill. We carried a scientist from Johns Hopkins Hospital that was experimenting with that at the time. What it is, we called them little brown shrimp because when you'd break the ice, and the ice would turn over, there was jillions of them little shrimp but they were really named krill and there's so many of them in the Antarctic and everything that the doctors was trying to find a use for them. Long after I was out and everything they finally found out it's better than fish oil for your medication. You know you can buy it across the counter now. That's where that all started. I was in on that but I didn't know I was until I got out. Down there then we used to call them bird-watchers and kodachromers

because it was everywhere. Course all these scientists down there they were experimenting with everything. The last trip we chased the cold bug, trying to figure out what caused the common cold and they flew guys in there with a cold and they was there two days and didn't have nothing. The frigid weather, 50 below and all that, killed all the germs. So I don't know, they still haven't found a cure for the common cold. A lot of our scientists went on there was for that. On the last trip coming out, there had never been a ship in the Admonson Sea so the Staten Island, I was on the Staten Island, we went up in the Admonson Sea and got stuck for a week. That's where I learned to hate green lima beans because that's about all they had left. We got stuck down there for almost two weeks I guess. The pressure of the ice raised us up out of the water and the Captain said, "If it keeps on, we have to abandon ship if something don't happen." About that time the currents changed and the tide changed and the wind, it let us back down where we could go ahead and break out. It was quite funny. He said, "If we have to abandon ship, we'll leave the beans aboard." We talked to President Kennedy I think it was while we were down there, he told us not to give up the ship. They'd have somebody get us. The Glazier was in there with us, too. The Glazier had ten engines and we had six. She broke out and broke in towards us. Anyway, we finally got our way out. That's when I retired out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what?

Mr. Hamilton:

I went back to Rockport and I worked for the Red Cross and I can't think of that hurricane that went in there below Corpus Christi. Anyway, they hired me as a marine estimator. Then I went to work for the sign company. I went to welding school on the G.I. Bill at Del Mar College at Corpus. I got \$110 a month because I had three kids. Then the G.I. Bill. I got almost through it

and I went to work for Walton Signs, a big sign company. Worked for them twenty years. Then I quit and run a tug for Brown and Root. Then I quit that. I couldn't get relief. They couldn't find any Captains, they wanted me out there all the time. I said I'd stay in the Navy if I'm going to do this. I ended up on a crew boat and of course the helicopters cut that job out because the copters were running everything out to the offshore rigs. Then I went in business for myself. Of course Walton Signs has sold out. That's for a while, the oil men, they broke it right up. Then I ended up selling my company, shut it down. I had a beach house, shrimp boat I made. I made a decent shrimp boat and I was going to retire with it and just play. The government wanted to buy it so bad, they offered an enormous amount of money for it and I gave it up. It was just a hobby. That's when I moved up here on my daughter's ranch.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me go back and ask you some questions here. What about your first wife?

Mr. Hamilton:

That's exactly right. She followed me in the Navy. We was there nineteen years and the last trip to the Antarctic, she got hooked on the bottle and left. I had to raise my three kids. That's another reason I got on out of the Navy. The Captain of the ship, the Staten Island, he told me that he was going to send me to Corpus Christi, mainside, and let me have a little time to get adjusted

before my retirement which was very nice of him. So I went down there but see the state of Washington is real tough on the wife and kids. I couldn't help it, I was on the icebreaker in Antarctic but anyway I got back to the States and the chaplain met me to give me the information. Of course the neighbors was taking care of my kids out of their own good heart and they were a young couple stationed there and anyway the State or the County or whatever it was was going to take the kids but I flew my mother out there and they said I had to have a woman in

the house in 48 hours. I flew her out there. She helped me with them until we got back to Texas. Then I rented a place and she helped me off and on with them, you know. I think in 1968, I guess I raised them for six or seven years, you know they went to school in Portland, Texas and of course I was working and all that and my mother helped me. I hired this little Mexican lady to come in and clean. It was kind of like an old bachelor's deal you know. Through the neighbors I met this lady and we'd go to country dances together. We got married and she helped me raise my last two. She had two grown children, married, and one at home yet. So we combined our three kids and our debts, got married and got rid of the kids but we never did get rid of the debt until she passed away. She was a Polish Catholic and she was very good. We were married 42 years. She got Alzheimer's. I took care of her about 14 years, off and on, you know. Anyway, in the meantime I had esophagus cancer. All the smoking and everything was in my lungs and stuff. My stepdaughter had come down to take me to M.D. Anderson for treatment for five years and then when I got over that, I just couldn't take care of my wife any more and put her in a nursing home. I went down and she was in a nursing home and I sold everything out and moved up here so the other two girls could be near her. I had one daughter down in Floresville and had one in upper state New York and two stepdaughters here. Her youngest daughter, I was like a father to her and she's my guardian angel. She's the one that helps me here now. She does all my paperwork and everything. She became number one because the others weren't around. She married an Air Force guy that was a Lt. Colonel. He also retired Air Force. She worked for the State most of her life until she retired. I'm in a senior citizen place. They are very good to me. I've got my own little cabin. I can still drive. I got my driver's license with no restrictions. This year I got to renew it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you retire from the Navy?

Mr. Hamilton:

1961.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August of 1961?

Mr. Hamilton:

August 29 I think it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you came back from World War II, did you have any trouble adjusting to the life here then?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, I really did because I had those three kids, had a job and you know when you go out in the cold, cruel world. I must say that people was awful helpful. They understood and I got help a lot of times from volunteers and knew I was trying to raise the kids. I didn't get no monetary value but I got a lot of mental support.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, sir, for that welding school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, Right, the welding course.

Mr. Hamilton:

They paid me \$110 a month because I had three kids and my tuition. They paid my tuition too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now during World War II, what would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. H :

I'd say in the beachhead at Iwo and then we had a submarine attack when we took that trip down to Noumea, New Caledonia. We had two submarine alerts because a lot of the Japanese submarines didn't know the war ended. Of course we were still on what they called zig-zag plan six which made sure we dodged them. We got full alerts. Of course they also directed us out of Japan. They directed us into a typhoon. We were at the edge of it and like to lost all our boats. A couple of destroyers got...I can't think of the name of it, but it went under and never came up. It was during one of the typhoons out there. I'd say overall my most frightening time would have been Iwo.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, what souvenirs did you get home with?

Mr. Hamilton:

A Japanese rifle and bayonet.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And a flag?

Mr. Hamilton:

And a garrison flag.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you still have them?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, sir. The garrison flag, one of the hurricanes got it down on the coast. At the time I had my brother keep that Japanese rifle and he had it up over his fireplace and somebody broke in and stole it, stole a lot of his guns and stuff. Turned in the serial number to the cops in Corpus Christi and all that but they never could trace it down. There was a lot of them things floating around anyway.

Mr. Misenhimer:

During World War II, did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Hamilton:

Oh, yes. We got to go over to Guam and we seen Sonny James that was a western entertainer and of course...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see Bob Hope?

Mr. Hamilton:

Oh, yes, Bob Hope. I got to see Bob Hope and let's see...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Frances Langford?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anyone else?

Mr. Hamilton:

That's the main ones that I remember. We had a lot of USO shows that didn't have movies stars.

They were just bands and things. I don't recall...I know Guam had guards to keep the Japanese hold outs from coming up there and watching the movie. They even went through the chow line out there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

During World War II did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, some bad experiences. My sister got killed and they was going to notify me. My mother went down to the Red Cross and they were supposed to notify me. I never did. I got a letter edged in black at Pearl Harbor when we pulled in there and that was almost two months later.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Hamilton:

Oh, yes. She was on the ship's, they put it on the ship's comm every evening and it was a big joke but she made the statement at Iwo Jima, "we'll muster the 4th Marines in a telephone booth." Of course we laughed and thought it was a big joke. But you know where she got famous, you know the U.S.S. Southhampton, that was our ship, was sailing toward Iwo Jima and "I'd like to tell you Joe and Mack and Henry that your wives are having a good time back in the States. They're dating and living with someone else" but you know there's always a Mack and a Joe on any ship or a Tex. The names she was using was a common name, anywhere in the United States.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I heard she played good music.

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when Japan surrendered, did you all have any kind of celebration?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, we got to turn all the lights on and all the ships blew their whistle, their sirens.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions?

Mr. Hamilton:

There was one up in Seattle that I tried to make and I didn't make it. Me and the wife took off in our motor home and we went up there. I was hitting all these places. A lot of shipmates. I didn't get all the way up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Hamilton:

I got the Pacific Theater with...we had got in on the last of Saipan and the Marianna...I had three bronze stars, the Asiatic/Pacific. Then the Korean War I had a bronze star for Korea. I had a personal citation from the 79th Engineers at Eniwetok. But it was just I don't know what you'd call it, just a citation. I had two of those in my career.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you crossed the equator, did you have any kind of ceremony or anything?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, I became a Shellback on the Southhampton during World War II. After the war, on the

O'Brien I became a Golden Shellback because we crossed the 180th and the equator at the same time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now in World War II what did they do to you when you crossed the equator then?

Mr. Hamilton:

First time, of course I got dunked in the tank and Davy Jones came aboard and took over the ship and we all dressed up you know. Then when I went across on the O'Brien, of course I was a Shellback so I became a Golden Shellback. Of course a lot of schalleiegh beatings going on. They wet them down. Made a schalleiegh line. They had to kiss the royal baby's belly. Got a lot of mustard on him. Got the biggest, fattest guy we could find for that. Then they had to go before King Neptune Rex. Just a party. Of course Davey Jones took over the ship. He relieved the Captain for the ceremony then. When I was on the icebreaker, I became a red-nose, blue-nose and a sand crab.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you get those?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, when you go across the Arctic Circle, you become a blue nose and when you cross the Antarctic Circle down south you become a red nose. When you go around the Horn, you become a sand crab.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You've been to all those places then?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Hamilton:

Yes, sir.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What reaction did people have?

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, of course Truman took over and there were no changes that we were seeing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

People didn't have anything to say about it or anything?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, mostly they dipped the flag for thirty days. As far as all the sailors were concerned he was the greatest President that ever was. His wife wasn't too well thought of.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Hamilton:

No, sir because we wasn't involved in that war over there. I missed out on all the celebrations.

V-J Day, too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Hamilton:

I was trying to think of any incident. We had a couple drownings at sea that were quite exciting.

We had one guy that come back, fell over the gangway in Pearl Harbor and drowned. With all that stuff. He was suffering from a few too many.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, Utah, that's all I have unless you have something else.

Mr. Hamilton:

No, sir, that's the end and I'll say one thing, you must have a lot of patience to listen to an old bird like me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, I'll tell you, this is a labor of love. I've done 855 of these interviews.

Mr. Hamilton:

Who-ee. They ought to pin a medal on you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Just being to talk to all you people has been well worth it. I've talked to some wonderful people, just like yourself.

Mr. Hamilton:

Well, you know a lot of the fine points. It's funny that we can't remember them you know.

There's a lot of things that happened that I've probably missed but I'm sorry, I just can't remember it all.

End of Interview

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