

Myrven H. Cron Oral History Interview

CHARLIE SIMMONS: This is Charlie Simmons. Today is the 8th of November, 2014. I am interviewing Myrven Cron. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas, at the Nimitz Museum. 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. Now, Myrven, if you would, please state your full name and your place of birth.

MYRVEN CRON: My full name is Myrven Hollinger Cron, and I was born in -- I was conceived in Texas, but I was born in Casper, Wyoming.

CS: Casper, Wyoming. And what was your birth date there, please?

MC: Eleven, five, twenty-three.

CS: Twenty-three, OK.

MC: So I'm 91 years old.

CS: So you are three days past your ninety-first birthday.

MC: Yeah.

CS: OK. Well, congratulations on making it this far.

MC: Yeah. (laughs)

CS: So, OK, now, we're -- if you would, tell us a little about bit about your childhood. Did you have brothers and sisters?

MC: Yes, I had one brother, and he was 15 months younger than I, and he was born also in Casper, but we came back to Texas when we were two or three years old there.

CS: And what was your family doing in Casper, Wyoming?

MC: They were involved in the oil boom in Casper at that time. My dad was an engineer and was selling oil field equipment to the boom up there.

CS: OK. And then, after that, you moved back at a very young age to Texas, and where in Texas did you move to?

MC: Well, we were -- actually, to Fort Worth. And then, of course, during the Depression years, my dad took a job with the first natural gas line going to the East Coast. And after he -- after several years, he moved us out to the other end of the line because they didn't travel back and forth, you know, very often in those days. So we spent three or four years through my sixth grade in Newnan, Georgia, and then we moved back to Texas again.

CS: What was your father's job on the pipeline?

MC: He was an engineer and in charge of whatever he was in charge of. I don't remember now.

CS: OK, I see. Yeah, OK. So you spent, what, a few years in Georgia?

MC: Just two or three.

CS: You started school there then?

MC: No, I actually started school in Fort Worth.

CS: OK.

MC: The fifth gr-- I mean, when we moved out there, I was in either the fourth or the fifth grade, and then through the sixth grade. It was the latter part of the fourth, I think.

CS: I see, OK. And then you came back.

MC: And then, we came back to Texas, uh-huh, to Houston. So up until recently, I had lived in Houston then through my high school -- junior high school, high school, Rice University, and then business.

CS: So what year did you graduate from high school?

MC: Well, '40.

CS: Nineteen-forty, OK. So did you start into Rice University right away then?

MC: It was at 16.

CS: OK. So you were living -- which part of Houston were you living in?

MC: In the south, the Riverside area of Houston, and that's kind of the southwest part of Houston.

CS: Rice was a pretty exclusive university back in those days.

MC: Well, yes and no. My grades were the factor of getting me in, of course, but the cost of the thing -- I mean, my whole first year didn't cost -- less than \$400. I mean, as far as money was concerned --

CS: But I mean, you had to have very high academic credentials --

MC: Yes, yes.

CS: -- to get into Rice.

MC: No, back in those days, they were -- yeah, I was in a class of about, oh, a couple hundred guys, you know, and that's pretty small for a university these days.

CS: Yeah, yeah. So you were going to Rice, then, in 1941. Would that be right? You graduated --

MC: Yeah.

CS: -- from high school in '40, so, OK.

MC: Well, actually, it was still 1940 when I went in. My class was 1940 at Rice.

CS: Right. So when -- on December the 7th, 1941, where were you?

MC: Well, I was at Rice, and I went down the next Monday and tried to enlist in the Navy. (laughs) They wouldn't take me at that time, and I didn't realize it, but they were planning on a V-12 pre-midshipmen sort of a training course

at Rice. And I had been in the ROTC in San Jacinto High School, and I had a little bit of a military background there, so the commanding officer appointed me as being his battalion commander for the students while I was -- for the rest of my time at Rice. And his name was Commander [Whiteford?]. He was a Navy commander, a real fine gentleman, and I have enjoyed working with him. He taught me a lot about a lot of things besides even military, you know? One thing kids don't learn in college is how to get along with other people, you know. I mean, that's a shortcoming of college, I guess, in a way, because they stress the academics, and particularly in those days. So I learned a lot from Commander Whiteford, and, when I graduated, I graduated then in February of 1944.

CS: OK. Now, this was part of the V-12?

MC: I was in the V-12 program.

CS: The V-12 program?

MC: I was enlisted in the Navy in 1942, I guess, is about when they let me -- when they had the --

CS: OK. And you completed your college. You got your bachelor's degree.

MC: I got a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering.

CS: That's interesting. I was across town, majoring in chemical engineering.

MC: Oh, really?

CS: University of Houston.

MC: Oh, wow. Well, you'd know a lot about the town then and then that time --

CS: Well, yeah, I went --

MC: -- period too.

CS: -- OK. So, in '44, then, you graduated, and --

MC: February of '44. And, of course, they didn't know what to do with a chemical engineer anyhow, but I went to a pre-midshipmen's school from there, because they had -- the classes were all pretty crowded for midshipmen's school because they were taking guys right and left, you know.

CS: Well, had you had any military -- in the V-12 program, you were --

MC: Oh, yeah, we were --

CS: -- doing military --

MC: -- oh, yeah, we were doing military exercises and all that kind of stuff. I mean, we had a regimen of things we had to do, but we had some military training in addition to the high school ROTC. So from there, I went to Atlantic City, New Jersey, for a couple of months until there was an opening at Northwestern, where I went to midshipmen's school. And I've got my -- [what was it?] -- commission (inaudible) when I came out of there.

CS: How long were you in that program?

MC: At Northwestern, probably only three months or maybe four -
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CS: Three months?

MC: -- or maybe a little longer. It wasn't very long. Green
(inaudible) I was -- I couldn't even get a drink in Chicago
because I was too young. They said, "Sonny..."

CS: Even though you were an officer and a [gentleman?] in the
Navy, you can't get a drink. That's interesting.

MC: Well, of course, every experience you have you learn from.
And from then, they -- as I say, they still didn't know
exactly what to do with us, so they sent me to ordnance and
gunnery school in Washington, DC, and it was probably a
six- or eight-week course -- I don't remember whether it
was six or eight; it was not long -- to make a gunnery
officer. And I was assigned to the USS *Chicago*. They were
forming the crew in Newport, Rhode Island for the new
Chicago, who had already come off the waves and had been
christened, and they were forming the crew there, and we
were training those young men that were younger than we
were.

CS: So you were a plank owner of the *Chicago*.

MC: Yes.

CS: OK. And were most of the crew brand new recruits, or did you have a lot of --

MC: No, we had some -- you know, fortunately, we had some good gunnery officers and some good boatswain mates and things of that sort in our division. My division was the sixth division, and we had the 40 millimeter quads on the port side, forward. And my director station was up over those two quad 40s that were our division, right next to the stops for five-inch guns. So my hearing hasn't been the best in the world.

CS: Oh, I can imagine. You know, that's -- it was bad design or something, because I've --

MC: Oh, yeah, they stopped right at the -- so they wouldn't shoot us out of the box. But anyway, we went then -- well, after we got our crew together, and I think it was in Philadelphia that we loaded up the ship for the first time and took it out for sea runs and so forth, and we spent several months there. We had to go back into the harbor and have some modifications made and that sort of thing, and, finally, we went through the canal and joined the Pacific fleet in Hawaii.

CS: OK. And about what time -- do you remember the date, the approximate date about, when you got to Hawaii?

MC: Oh, no, actually, I don't remember the date. I could probably go back to my records and look it up, but --

CS: Yeah, that's OK. It's -- we're talking -- you got out of midshipmen's school in June or so, and then a couple of months forming the crew and a couple of months in (inaudible).

MC: Yeah, I was --

CS: So you're talking -- basically, the end of '44.

MC: Yeah, something like that.

CS: November or December [somewhere?].

MC: Yeah, something like that. It wasn't terribly long, but it was -- we got, you know, the crew working good and all the little problems worked out on the ship, and it was a very interesting experience. We spent some time in the North Atlantic there with bitter cold weather.

CS: Oh, yeah. Did you --

MC: That winter --

CS: -- OK, this was on your shakedown.

MC: On the shakedown. And then, we went through, as I say, to Pearl and joined up with the -- and I'm a little vague about this, but whether this was the time we joined up with [Halsey's?] -- it was -- I was thinking it was Halsey's fleet, but I'm not dead positive of that. But anyway, we had three heavy cruisers in our group, and the *Boston* and

Saint Paul, I think, were the -- I know it was the *Saint Paul* because, in the typhoon that happened that spring, she lost 40-foot of her bow in the typhoon.

CS: The St. Paul?

MC: Yeah.

CS: I didn't remember that one.

MC: And so we ended up escorting her back into Pearl Harbor, and they reinforced our bow as well as rebuilt her. But then, we were -- it was just -- there were aircraft battles and all sorts of things that were going on, and, finally, we ended up -- these things I don't remember much about the details of.

CS: Excuse me. You brought the *Saint Paul* back into Pearl Harbor?

MC: Pearl Harbor.

CS: OK. And they were able to do the work -- redo the bow there?

MC: Yeah, and they reinforced out bow.

CS: OK, because I didn't realize they had that extensive of a ship--

MC: Yeah, we were in dry dock. Yeah, they had a -- and let's see. We were involved in a bunch of air battles, but I don't remember any ship battles.

CS: Well, the Japanese fleet by 1945 had been pretty much decimated.

MC: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, so I don't remember any battles -- ship battles.

CS: How about Iwo Jima? Would you have been at Iwo? That was February of '45.

MC: I doubt it.

CS: OK.

MC: Yeah, I don't remember it.

CS: You would have been within sight of the island if you had been there.

MC: Yeah, no, I don't think so.

CS: Yeah, OK.

MC: The last real work we did, I guess, was bombarding the steel mills in northern Japan, in the northern island...

CS: Hokkaido?

MC: Huh?

CS: Hokkaido, the northern main island of Japan?

MC: Uh-huh. And we had our Marine division with the pilots for the planes that we had aboard, and they were single pontoon planes, and we -- I don't remember getting one of them back. We got the pilots. They'd land before we could get them hooked up and back aboard. They were flipped over.

CS: Oh, really?

MC: I don't remember getting a single one of them back.

CS: I'll be darned. Did they carry extra planes down below deck?

MC: Well, no, they flew us some more. They flew some more out there to us.

CS: Oh, OK. (laughter)

MC: But anyway, we had some extra, yes, of course. We didn't have -- we had I don't remember how many, but the Marines handled that part of our operation as well as the 20-millimeter guns, the smaller weapons. They were all nice kids.

CS: I was not aware that the Marines piloted the planes, those scout planes, off of those [captured?] ships.

MC: Yeah. Yeah, they were -- they had to swim a bit.

CS: I guess because they were more suicidal than the Navy guys were, maybe.

MC: Well, the next important thing that I remember is going into Tokyo Bay.

CS: Yeah. Well, back to some of these air battles that you said that you were in --

MC: Yeah, they were kamikaze-type things. They weren't big battles with a flock of airplanes. They were more kamikaze-type.

CS: Now, were you the director for your group of 40s?

MC: Oh, no, there was -- I was not the gunnery officer. He was a full commander. And then, there were four lieutenants that had the quad -- the four divisions that had the quads. And I was a junior officer to -- and I can't remember his name right now -- an awful nice guy. He was good to me. But I'll tell you that the boatswain mates and the gunner's mates were the salvation of the Navy. There weren't those (inaudible). (laughter)

CS: Yeah, no, that's -- well, I think just about all of the services -- Army, Marines, the senior enlisted NCOs --

MC: Yeah, carried the load.

CS: -- are the guys that run the show really.

MC: Yeah, you bet.

CS: Yeah, so -- well, were you -- did you ever have any close calls in any of those?

MC: Well, yeah, we had a few, but we managed to shoot them down, and that was -- it wasn't that close, but they were -- I had one or two of them that ended up going in the water on the other side of the ship, but they all were in the -- they didn't hit the ship. We didn't have any damage to the *Chicago*, the new *Chicago*, yeah. Next, as I say -- the next real experience was going into Tokyo Bay with the *Missouri*, and we were part of the fleet there.

CS: Now, what time of year was it when you said you were up shelling the steel mills up on Hokkaido? Was that pretty much shortly before the end of the war?

MC: Yeah, yeah.

CS: OK, so that would have summertime too.

MC: Yeah, that was -- well, no, I don't remember what month it was or anything, but it wasn't long before they dropped that bomb on Hiroshima and... (laughs)

CS: OK. Were you seeing some airplane activity then when you were close to the Japanese main islands?

MC: Not a whole lot, no.

CS: OK. It was mostly the other --

MC: Most of it was before that.

CS: Yeah, OK.

MC: And we were in close enough to -- we were shooting 20-something miles, you know, to those steel mills with the big guns, the nine-inch guns, and our Marine pilots were scouting our aims.

CS: How did you hear about the bomb being dropped? Was it announced through the (inaudible) system?

MC: Oh, yeah, we heard that in kind of the news type of thing.

CS: Do you remember how they -- what did they say? Did they say it was a new type of weapon?

MC: You know, I don't remember the details.

CS: Yeah. They just said it wiped out a city with one bomb.

MC: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh. So my experience with pretty much the end of the war, I hadn't -- when we got into Tokyo Bay the next day, this [LCVP?] came out with these ragged-looking guys and approached the *Chicago*, and, of course, they were very, very cautious. We had our guns trained on them because they didn't know who they were. They could have been anybody. But he hailed the ship and asked for permission to come aboard like a good ensign would do. (laughs) And the first I saw him on my --

CS: Now, who was this, for the record? Who is this coming aboard now?

MC: My brother.

CS: Oh, your brother.

MC: My 15-month-younger brother --

CS: Oh, OK.

MC: -- that I hadn't seen in several years.

CS: OK. And what was he doing in Tokyo Bay?

MC: He was in what they called underwater demolition.

CS: He was in UDT, the underwater --

MC: UDT 6.

CS: Whoa.

MC: So, yeah, that was a precursor of the Seals.

CS: Sure.

MC: Their training was exactly the same as those boys that went into the Seals later.

CS: I would consider them one step better because the Seals have got all the modern -- the really great equipment.

MC: Oh, yeah, those --

CS: Those UDT guys --

MC: -- they didn't have (inaudible).

CS: -- they just had a pair of goggles and a snorkel, you know.

MC: That's right. They weren't [bringing?] anything fancy, but they were cleaning out the harbor. And he came aboard, and I was -- at the time, I had drawn the duty and the five-inch -- one of the five-inch mounts and the director's station. I don't know why, but we weren't using the 40s. And obviously, they told him how to find me, and he stuck his head up through the hatch and said, "Hi, Myrv," and I, "Dick? What are you doing here?" And then, the captain got a big kick out of this, and so we had -- he got one of my khakis and dressed him up, and we took the picture and sent it back to the *Houston Post*, and that's the first my mother knew about it.

CS: I'll be darned. Well, what was his rank in the --

MC: Ensign.

CS: He was an ensign too.

MC: Yeah, he got his -- he went through midshipmen's school and got it.

CS: And I know this is your story, but I'm kind of curious about how did he get into the underwater demolition team. Obviously, he volunteered for it.

MC: Yeah, he volunteered for it. I don't know why.

CS: Was he a really good swimmer?

MC: Oh, yeah, he was quite a good athlete and a good swimmer, and he liked that tough life.

CS: He must be a very competitive guy.

MC: Well, he's not with us anymore, but he was a --

CS: Yeah, I have total admiration for those UDT guys. They wrote the book.

MC: Yeah, exactly.

CS: There was no book for them to go from.

MC: That's true.

CS: Well, that is marvelous. So he stayed aboard ship for a while with you and (inaudible) --

MC: And he had a meal with us, and then we got our picture taken, and the captain sent it back to the *Houston Post*. (laughs) Well, the *Post* is out of business today.

CS: Yeah. How did he find out that you were there?

MC: Oh, he knew I was on the *Chicago*.

CS: And he saw the *Chicago*.

MC: When he saw the *Chicago*, why --

CS: It's a pretty big ship.

MC: Oh, yeah. (laughs) And when he saw it, why, he knew there was something that he ought to attend to.

CS: OK, so you were there for the signing ceremony.

MC: Uh-huh.

CS: How close to the *Missouri* were you when they did the signing?

MC: Oh, I guess 20, 30 yards away.

CS: So you were just right there.

MC: Yeah, we bart-- both the heavy cruisers, one on either side of the -- in a way protecting them, because we didn't know what they were going to do.

CS: And you can't -- at that time, you couldn't trust them very far.

MC: That's right.

CS: Yeah, exactly, OK. I didn't -- so you could see onboard what was going on on the *Missouri*.

MC: Yeah, yeah, it was an interesting experience. And then, we went from there down to Kobe and cleaned out the harbor, hauling out the naval stuff and sinking it, and went ashore in Kobe. And I was walking around downtown, and I ran into my first cousin, who was a --

CS: Really?

MC: -- Navy seaman from California.

CS: Oh, this is -- it sounds like you're having a regular convention of your family over there.

MC: Well, (inaudible).

CS: Were you able to spend some time with him?

MC: Not a whole lot. I mean, we didn't have a lot of time to spend together, but we visited, and, you know, he had to get back to his ship, and so did I, and we just had a short time ashore. I mean, it was a few hours or something.

CS: Well, now, how -- did you feel comfortable just walking around in Kobe?

MC: Oh, yeah.

CS: I assume you didn't have a sidearm or anything. If the Japanese --

MC: No. Well, no, we carried our sidearms.

CS: Yeah? OK.

MC: You know, but we didn't have any problems.

CS: Yeah, the Japanese were very docile.

MC: Very, very -- they stayed away from us as much as they could. I mean, they didn't socialize with us. And then, we went down to Hiroshima, and I was -- we put our Jeeps ashore, and I asked for one and got it and drove to the town up -- I didn't go down into the town, but up on the

mountainside looking down into it, Hiroshima. It was quite an experience -- all by myself.

CS: All by yourself?

MC: Yeah.

CS: And they didn't have any barriers up saying, "Radiation zone," or anything?

MC: No, no, I just wasn't going down there. (laughter) By then, I'd heard what it was, what a mess it was, you know, but I wanted to see it. And I don't really understand. I still don't know to this day why a junior ensign was able to get a Jeep.

CS: Well, I was wondering the same thing if they only had a couple of Jeeps.

MC: Yeah, they were using them.

CS: And, I mean, on the *Chicago*, you've got dozens of higher-ranking officers. I mean, (inaudible) [JG?], for goodness sake. That's -- well, maybe they weren't as adventuresome as you.

MC: Then, from there, we went to -- I think we went directly to Shanghai, and that was an interesting experience. We tied up in the Yangpu River, and everything comes down the Yangpu river, all the dead bodies and the animals and everything else and the sampans with Mama in the back cooking and Papa off the front peeing. We'd try to get our

day-old bread down to them. They were hung around our stern, and we'd try to get our day-old bread down to them, and the first thing they'd do is dunk it in the river.

(laughs) I don't know how they managed to survive.

CS: Yeah. You said, when you were in Kobe, you were taking stuff --

MC: We were hauling stuff out of the harbor.

CS: Hauling ships, Japanese navy subs --

MC: Submarines.

CS: -- and things out and sinking them offshore. So how long did you stay in Kobe?

MC: Oh, I don't remember. It was not very long, maybe a week.

CS: OK. Then, you just sort of stopped over at Hiroshima to see the --

MC: Well, no, we stopped for -- there's a little harbor there. We were cleaning out those harbors all the way down.

CS: OK, so you were -- this was part of the job that you were (inaudible).

MC: Yeah, they were busy on the ship, but they didn't have anybody needing (inaudible).

CS: Yeah, so you weren't just sightseeing then.

MC: Yeah.

CS: Yeah, OK. And how about Shanghai? What was going on there? Was there --

MC: Oh, I don't know why the ship was there basically.

CS: The Japanese would have had some shipping in there, I guess, at the end of the war.

MC: Well, there wasn't -- we didn't see any. It was just a dirty river. But I had an interesting experience in Shanghai. My mother and dad had kind of taken a couple of Chinese trainees who were training to be pilots from Ellington Field and had them out to the house and entertained them and all this kind of stuff. And while we were in Shanghai, this older Japanese gentleman who was their uncle, he came out to the ship bearing gifts and invited me to come and have dinner with him.

CS: And how in the world did he know that you were -- because you were on the --

MC: Well, because I was on the *Chicago*, his nephews told him --

CS: So it was the same time -- simultaneous sort of thing.

MC: Well, no, they were being trai-- this was maybe six months ahead of that, because they were being trained.

CS: Yeah, OK.

MC: But he knew. He remembered that they had -- that those nice people in the US had entertained his nephews, and he was real nice to me and brought presents and took me to dinner. He probably spent more for our dinner than he made all month.

CS: Oh, so he -- well, that was really nice that he made that effort to --

MC: Yeah, yeah, it was.

CS: -- [it's what?] you get for having nice parents, I guess.

MC: Well, it was -- people were nice most of the time. I mean most of the time. There were a lot of bad ones going around, but the -- and I don't remember their names anymore.

CS: Well, sure. You were ashore for some time there in Shanghai. Did you see any aftermath of the war? Were the people --

MC: No, I really didn't, just life in that community. I mean, it was -- they didn't have much damage or anything like that for a war. I mean, Shanghai was not a major objective.

CS: Yeah, it wasn't a battleground city or anything.

MC: No. And then, my rotation came up, and I should have stayed on the *Chicago*, because it came back through the Mediterranean and had a lot of nice stops in Rome and France and different places, but I went home.

CS: Well, they got you out of there pretty fast.

MC: Well, you know, the number came up.

CS: Yeah, because you had gone over -- you got over there in early '45, so there were -- a lot of the guys had been over there for, by that time, a couple of years.

MC: Yeah.

CS: Of course, they all got to go -- yeah, they had more points than you would have had.

MC: Yes, right. Well, I got my JG then and came back to Houston and started a little business, and it grew to a pretty nice -- later, we called it the Chrome Chemical Corporation and sold it to a group of folks out of London who wanted it worse than I did in '83.

CS: What did you -- what were you --

MC: Raw materials that were used in the manufacture of all sorts of goods, pigments, resins, things of that sort that went into the manufacture of paint and rubber and plastics, and that's what we were (inaudible).

CS: So you were there in Houston for the rest of your career then?

MC: Until I retired from -- I sold the business. Then, we moved to Chapel Hill to get out of Houston.

CS: Yeah. Well, it sounds like you've had a very full and interesting life, Myrven.

MC: Yes, I have, and I've got three daughters. One is [Katie's?] daughter, and two are mine. We married 41 years ago, and we have nine great-grandchildren.

CS: OK, so you were pretty old when you got married then, right?

MC: Well, no, this is a second marriage.

CS: Oh, your second marriage.

MC: Yeah, for both of us.

CS: Oh, OK.

MC: Yeah, this is a second marriage for both of us.

CS: You have how many great-grandchildren?

MC: Nine.

CS: Nine? Congratulations.

MC: I never knew my grandfathers, either one of them, and here I am [perking?] along with nine great-grandchildren.

CS: Yeah, yeah. Do they all live close to you?

MC: All the grandchildren do. They're all in and around Houston. The others, all -- (inaudible) Muncie married my daughter Betsy, and they live in Dallas, and he was the one that kind of arranged this trip because his father had been in the Marine Corps during the war.

CS: Do you have anything else you think you'd like to fill in on your career here, or are you about ready to shut her down do you think?

MC: I think so.

CS: OK. Well, I want to thank you very much for coming in today, and I want to thank you very much for your service to the country.

MC: Well, I thank you, Charlie, for what you're doing. It's a --

CS: We don't say that --

MC: -- you forget these things easily.

CS: -- yeah.

MC: But just talking to you started reminding me of -- I should have looked in our Navy records, and that would probably be a little more accurate. (laughs)

CS: Well, no, I think we've got the gist of it, and that's what we were after, is what your part --

MC: OK.

CS: -- in the war was. OK, well, then, thanks again. I'll close her down --

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