

R.L. Hawkins Oral History Interview

JOHN FARGO: OK. Today is November the 13th, 2014. My name is John Fargo. I'm a volunteer at the National Museum of Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. I am interviewing R.L. Hawkins, concerning his experiences during World War II. This interview is taking place in Mr. Hawkins' home. This interview is in support of the Nimitz Education Research Center for the National Museum of the Pacific War Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to World War II. That's my introductory remarks.

R.L. HAWKINS: Sounds accurate.

JF: OK, Russ. Let's talk about a little bit about your background. When were you born and where?

RH: I was born May 31st, 1924, in Springfield, Illinois.

JF: Springfield, Illinois. What was your father's occupation?

RH: Electrical contractor and public address system contractor.

JF: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

RH: Had a sister and a brother, and they're both passed away.

JF: Sister and a brother. Where did you go to school?

RH: Springfield, Illinois through high school. Then, the Navy. Then, the junior college, because my major in high school was football, track, Model T Fords, and girls. So, my transcript didn't look too good for transferring to a

college. I started out in a junior college. A Jesuit junior college in Springfield, Illinois. Being mature after three years in the Navy, I ended up with straight A's. I said, OK, now I've built a base. Let's get married and leave here, because the calf always does better away from the cow according to the country. I did. So, we went to Denver.

JF: Let's back up a minute. What year did you get into the Navy?

RH: February 10th, 1943.

JF: Forty-three. Did you enlist, or did you get drafted?

RH: Well, I had to push my letter like everybody else from the president. If you went down the day before due date, you'd be inducted or drafted -- whatever you call it. You could pick your branches in the service. I definitely did not want to go into the Army. I didn't like brown. I liked blue. I was a boat nut from the age I was five years old. If you went into the Army, you had to ride in an electric train to St. Louis. I'd already done that. If you went in the Navy, you'd got to ride a real train to Chicago in the Great Lakes.

JF: Great Lakes Naval Base is where you wanted to --

RH: Yeah. So, I wanted to ride a train, not a streetcar again. I remember going there and the doctor said they're doing

examinations for inductions, and they don't know if you're a volunteer inductee which lets you pick your branch of the service or whether you're just there because the law says you have to be. So, I told them when he got through, he said, "Get in that line." I said, "What's in that line?" They said, "Well, just get in that line. Move along. We've got a lot of people here lined up." "What is in the line?" I said, "What's that line for?" He said, "That's where you go in the army." "No, Mr. I'm here a volunteer inductee. I'm going in the Navy. Where's that line?" He said, "Son, you can't see well enough to get in the Navy." I said, "Well, what do you mean I can't see? I can see you." I knew the man. You know, small town, I knew the man -- family did. He finally said, "Well, get on over in that Navy line. They'll take care of you." So, I did. I got to go to the Great Lakes, so, I went into the Navy.

JF: So, you were in the Great Lakes for about what? 90 days?

RH: Well, we went there for a 12-week boot camp. They put that nice suit on you -- wooly, sort of scratchy thing. They said now you're a sailor after 12 weeks of boot camp. I enjoyed boot camp. We learned a lot of new things.

JF: What kind of experiences did you have in boot camp?

RH: Well, I learned to do the Great Lakes shuffle. Those G.I. shoes had black composition soles, and we had un-waxed, untreated pinewood floors in those barracks. You would actually scuff them up. Come Saturday inspection, they'd put some steel wool under your shoes, and you'd shuffle. You'd steel wool that whole cotton-picking barracks. They called that the Great Lakes shuffle. The biggest shock I had was the first morning of chow -- the breakfast is chow. The first morning, I went through the line. I got my food. I got to the end. I said, "Where's the milk?" They said, "Son, you in the Navy. You don't drink milk. You drink coffee. There's the coffee. Help yourself." So, that's when I learned to drink coffee. I never drank coffee before in my life. So, that's kind of an interesting start to it. I don't remember anything else significant from the boot camp. Except, I did learn something about human beings in the Navy. I was always kind of a friendly person. So, the chief, as they called him, was a tall big guy. He ran that place with a whip almost. Somehow or another, I got to where I could talk with him. We had some personal camaraderie you know. All of a sudden, one day he said something, and I commented back like he was a friend or an acquaintance anyway. Boy, he snapped back, "You're in the blah, blah, blah -- Navy. You don't do that to

commanding officers," or some nonsense, you know. That's when I said, "Whoops." I'll catch on. When a man's in a uniform, and he's doing his job, if you don't like it or you can't accommodate it, just put your mind in neutral. From then on, on any occasion, I just put my mind in neutral. Came out the other side just happy as can be. Those were some of the major things I learned in boot camp. But, they had an aptitude test. I turned out to have an aptitude to do for something they called fire control. So, I came back from the Great Lakes and spent 12 more weeks going to school.

JF: What kind of school?

RH: Fire control school. They had a school there. That was very good for me, because I had been to high school. Even though I thought I had learned a lot, compared to the fellows coming back from the fleet -- I was just sharp as a tack on math or things at that nature. So, I flew through that with the greatest of ease and came out -- what do you call it? Petty officer. Third class petty officer. Just for the 12 weeks. So, I thought that was pretty great. They thought I was either pretty great at fire controlling stuff or else they didn't have any other place to put me. They put me in Washington, D.C. to go to advanced fire control school.

JF: How long was that?

RH: That was six months. Yes, that was a serious thing. That war during D.C. was good duty during the war. Oh my goodness. There were so many girls. They had so much money to spend. The people of war in D.C. were so kind to the service people. The US's -- that was one of the best vacations I ever had. We went to school two weeks a day, two weeks at night. When you went to school at night, you started at 4:30 in the afternoon and went to midnight. When you got up in the morning with the rest of the guys -- when you were on the night shift, they kicked you out of the barracks -- for two weeks of liberty every day if you wanted it. So, the war in DC was such an interesting and wonderful place. On that two weeks of night school, I'd hit the buses which were free. Street cars were free to service people. I saw all the sights of Washington. Some of them three times. It was just a great, interesting city to have all that time to do things in. There was no homework in the school. You did all your work in the class.

JF: Was it difficult?

RH: At times, it was difficult, because the advanced school pertained to, basically, line vessel equipment. By that, I mean cruisers, destroyers, battle ships, and there was lot

of complicated equipment with that. That was before the days of computers. They had a computer. It was about a third of the size of this room, and it was all mechanical. They had cams, and they had this. I remember one cam. It was the [second E cam?]. That was the angle of elevation. It got down to where that cams that took account of the time the projectile was in the barrel on a battleship with a 16-inch gun. While it was in that great long barrel -- 20 feet or so long -- the ship was moving. They had to take account of that. Which direction to go to when it comes out the end. So, I was just amazed with all the details, but I loved it. In fact, I even had a chance to go off on a trial to somewhere on a destroyer. I don't know where they went. They just said, "Did you anybody want to go for a ride and do this?" It was school -- to see what it's like aboard not just here in the laboratory. I jumped right on that. They went out, and they had an electronic computer or some kind of ward that took place of all that mechanical bag stuff.

JF: This was a destroyer?

RH: It was a destroyer. It was a new one too. It wasn't an old Forrest decker. But, they fired the guns -- one of the turrets. There went 2,000 vacuum tubes. The (inaudible) and that was headed to 2,000 vacuum tubes. So, back to the

laboratory with that one. That was an interesting break in the routine.

JF: When did you join the fleet?

RH: Well, I've got the exact date I finished fire control school -- advanced fire control school in Washington. But, they were accumulating the ship's company for a vessel. I wasn't familiar enough to know what they were putting me on. I didn't know if it would have changed or not. But, we went to Providence, Rhode Island, and started accumulating. The only thing exciting that happened in Providence, Rhode Island was we went to gunnery training -- any aircraft gunnery. The plane would fly by off there with this big sock on the back. You'd try to shoot the sock. Well, you had no way of knowing whether you hit the sock or not until you came down, and there would be, maybe, 20 guns firing at it at the same time.

JF: What kind of guns?

RH: Oh, there were 20 millimeters and 40 millimeters -- any aircraft gang mounted guns you could. The 20s were singles, but the 40s were quads or duels. Anyway, I think we probably shot down more of those socks than anybody. We didn't hit the sock. We hit the cable -- not by aiming at it, but it just -- I don't know why I had that sense that we were the ones that did it. Every time they flew by,

somebody hit the cable, and the sock would fall off. That was interesting, you know. That was the first time I was in the presence of a big gun going off, except that one little trial one. So, that was very interesting. The other exciting thing is I got the measles. You know, that kind of broke up the monotony. When you're in a place like that -- Providence naval station -- unless you're going out to the shore and doing gun things or something, you're just bored to death. You're just sitting around waiting for them to say it's time to go to your ship. Every day, new guys are coming aboard, and you're coming into the company area. So, finally, they said, "Hey. Anybody with certain ratings -- and fire control was one of them -- want to go to the ship in the Brooklyn Navy Yard?" "Heck, yeah. Put me out there, boy."

JF: Did they tell you what kind of ship?

RH: By then, I knew it was auxiliary. Here, the train out of Dickens for a line vessel. I said, well, I knew a lot of people who had been trained as painters and they ended up cooks and so forth, so I said, that's just whatever they need. So, I just went along. I wasn't too worried about it one way or another. So, I ended up on this auxiliary. It raised three fire controls. First, second, third, and a striker. Fourth one, excuse me. Striker was a guy trying

to learn to be (inaudible). Myself was the only one that went down. I guess the other guys weren't there yet, maybe. I don't know. I didn't ask any questions. I thought, "Heck, yeah. Get me into the Navy Yard. That sounds fascinating."

JF: Brand new ship?

RH: Brand new. It wasn't even commissioned when I went aboard. It was laying long side the dock on the Brooklyn Navy Yard. They brought it over from the ship yard where they built her. They were outfitting her in the Navy Yard with the ordinales and stuff like that.

JF: So, you were one of the original ship's company?

RH: Yes. Oh yeah. I was the only fire controller on the board for -- oh, maybe a month or month and a half or something.

JF: What was the name of the ship?

RH: USS *Diphda*.

JF: How do you spell that? How do you pronounce that?

RH: D-i-p-h-d-a, I believe. Diphda is a star in the constellation. I forgot the constellation, but it's a pretty high level light star.

JF: OK. So, how long did it take you before they got the whole compliment of men on board the ship?

RH: I think the commissioning would indicate they had the full compliment. They were ready to get underway for shakedown.

I think that was about two and a half months. It was the most valuable two and a half months for me, because I ended up being the senior fire control man of all the badges aboard. I started out -- because I'd been to the advanced school. What was the question?

JF: How long it took before...?

RH: OK, yeah. So, they came aboard pretty fast. Gunner commissions -- great long streamer thing there. We got underway for shakedown, and there wasn't much more for the ship. I can't remember days, but we were off and running -- had our flags flying and full crew. Ready to do our part.

JF: How many of men in the crew?

RH: About 400. We had two crews aboard, basically. Sort of like how an air craft carrier has a flight crew and a ship's crew. We had the boat crew and the ship crew. An AKA stands for Auxiliary Cargo Attack. So, we had holes -- just like a cargo ship -- five of them. We had all the rigging for all kinds of loading and unloading situations. We had some very fine people trained in that area after we finally got a chance to get trained on that. I think it was probably about evenly split -- well, there was probably about 300 in the ship's company. I never really did make a count of it. Back up a minute to the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

One of the benefits was the manufacture of the material was installing it, and I could be there looking over my shoulders. I could be there getting copies of all the instruction books and asking questions. I got a lot of education in those two months or so. I had those fellows there, present, to share their knowledge with me.

JF: What kind of equipment are you talking about here, Russ?

RH: well, we weren't elaborate. The basic little sight and gun correcting material we had was on the 20 millimeter. Basically, it was two gyros. One was horizontal. One was vertical. As you tracked, they target through this optics. It would pick up the amount of lead and the amount computed and all this that you needed to do to fire the gun. Most of the time, the 20s were being fired at will. It's commence firing at will. So, to each operator of that gun to track and that little light would come on saying it's had enough time to compute -- the gyros were the main sensing elements. Then, they would operate on a computer to time. At the time, I didn't know what it was. Frankly, I wanted to focus to get inside of that. Anyway, that was what the 20 millimeters did. The quad 40s had the same basic thing, except bigger gyros and faster response time. It could take more ship roll and so forth into account. So, they were, supposedly, a little more accurate. You're

throwing bullets that big around and that big around. They could do more damage if they hit the target. But, they can't fire fast. The 40s gunners took care of those. The drives on the mounds were more concise, because they were power drives. That fell under the jurisdiction under the fire controllers -- the actual drive system on the mounts, as well as the gun-director. That same director on those gun decks -- there were four of those directors on board and four quad mounts. The (inaudible) could be shifted to the five inch 38 -- which was on the stern. It was on any up-to-date aircraft offensive or defensive. We didn't even know what the projectiles were. We later found out they were called buck rogers. What it was -- it was a proximity sensing. So, if you fired the projectile, and it got within so many feet of something, it would sense the proximity and explode after it had been armed by being in flight. So, you could shift over and run the five-inch with them, but we hardly ever had occasion to fire that at aircraft.

JF: So, specifically what was your job as a fire control?

RH: Well, number one -- they signed people to operate the machinery. I don't know how they assigned them. That was their business, not mine. So, the fire control people trained them. We had a little shore time here and there to

help train them there. That was strictly training them. It had an elaborate air filtering system, because these were air driven gyros. They were internal to the thing, so you had to keep the air dry in there. They had some drying elements. You had to check those out and make sure they were working. The most sensitive part was the drive of the mounts. That was the most challenging. They had a motor and control system called [Empladon?], which turned out to be a General Electric trade name. That's what drove the gun mounts. You could drive one manually with a wheel and all that. Normally, the motor guys just sit there and load it and load it. You had elevation and train operators standing there or on board the mount moving around with it -- ready to go into hand drive if the power drive failed. It was training those fellows to just sit there was hard to do. They wanted to be a part of it. We finally got them trained to be ready, but don't do anything. So, I had to exercise those, and I had to change them out, so they didn't function. They had back in two -- a bunch in them. Every time we fired, we burned up a bunch of vacuum tubes. It kept me out of mischief almost.

JF: That's great. So, when did the ship take off to go to your first station?

RH: This is when that memory gets filled from 68 years. I can't exactly remember the date.

JF: Well, forget the date. What was the ship's first assignment?

RH: To go to the Norfolk Naval Yard and take on a full five cargo hold of materials. I think we took on some more ammo to keep too many people sick from being tattooed. I think that was one of them. The tattoo joints in Norfolk closed after the beer joints. Everybody wanted to be a man -- you know, get a tattoo.

JF: I was stationed there for about 9 months.

RH: Were you? Do you know what Norfolk folks were like? We were there about two weeks. Gosh, it was interesting -- cargo. We had two holes in that vessel filled with steel, structural steel, paint -- oh man, we were going to fight a war out there -- building materials. The other three holes were the real important part. They were full of beer. Three holes of a vessel full of beer. That's a lot of beer. But, that was our first assignment -- to get that to Pearl Harbor. We got to go through the Panama Canal -- what kind of excitement was that. Boy, that was something. I had never been through the Panama Canal. Never would have been through the Panama Canal if I hadn't been in the Navy. The ordinance gang, which was the gunners' mates,

and the fire control men were in charge of guarding that beer all the way to Pearl Harbor. We almost got to the point where we were selling tickets. We had a rule, amongst ourselves -- when you go through the door to sit on the beer, you leave your gun at the door. Don't you dare take your gun down there. Some of the guys, we had to bring them out of their own stretcher. You know, warm free beer. I guess I won't tell you where we had to relieve ourselves, but it happened. Then, we got to Pearl Harbor, and if you said you were in the Marines -- you may have been one of them though you weren't at Pearl Harbor. The ship tied up and even the first line was on the dock. We had Marines all over that vessel. Marines on the dock with Thompson machine guns. They were ready to fight a separate war right now to get that beer off of that ship and into the storage area of Pearl Harbor. Some of those beer cases went over the side. So, we stood there on the gate -- the rail -- we couldn't help but laugh. They were guarding you know what.

JF: What did you do in World War II? I guarded beer.

RH: No, I drank it. I have to admit -- this might get me in jail, but, anyway, I've told my family about it -- I had a lot of hiding places. I had electrical control panels, and I had a room that was as big as a bathroom full of them.

I'd been an electrician so forth before I went in the Navy for a while. So, I knew where in this control panel you could put things without starting an electrical fire. So, I had beer in all those control cabinets. It came in mighty handy out in the middle of the Pacific -- nice beer. Of course, we'd mess up. We'd cool the beer with CO₂ fire extinguishers.

JF: So, where did you go from Pearl Harbor?

RH: Where did we go from Pearl Harbor? John, I think we went directly to the Philippines. I'm not sure. I don't really remember. The first thing that happened that was unusual after that was the Philippines. Now, that was the first combat we experienced where we fired guns and things like that to protect ourselves. There were no incidents, that I recall, going over. It was still kind of new, and I was still pretty serious about the equipment. I just didn't have time to worry about navigation. I didn't even know where we were going. I didn't care. It wasn't my business. Chow hall, restroom, a place to sleep was my business. Oh, you asked about the cargo? Yeah. I think it was in Pearl Harbor that we took on the cargo of a ton of cast T and T. Which means just T and T that was in a block with some sawdust or something. Then, you put in a fuse in it and you'd make a big boom. It came in big boxes

about like ammunition for small arms. Where'd they store it? They stored it right in my private office -- not office, but shop, on the half gun deck. I told you, I'd been an electrician. At a time or two in my life, before I got in my life, because of the family business -- well, somebody told me while I was in the Navy Yard, you ought to have a fan blowing in that shop that you say you work in. I was working in there as a shop, and I was off the gun deck. So, I used my knowledge to get some drawings, some wiring, schematics of the ship, power wiring. I bypassed all the switches and all the breakers on the fan that fed the chamber. So, nobody could ever turn that fan off. So, I had a fan blowing all the time I was in the Pacific. So, that was where I slept and ate when I had a chance. I didn't mind sleeping on that TNT. I figured if I'm going, I'll go in style. So, how did I get off on that, John? I don't remember.

JF: I don't know. When you got to the Lingayen Gulf, what happened there?

RH: Well, there was the biggest display of fireworks you've ever seen. I'll say that. I don't know. There might have been 500 ships in that arm on it. All the line vessels and all the personnel -- there's a corresponding vessel for an APA, which is Auxiliary Personnel Attack -- carried all

these boats to get people ashore -- all those ramps in the front to drop and get them down. There must have been 500 vessels in that armada. You know, I was on a ship and you look around and all you see is other ships. You just follow them around. All I'm doing is standing around, waiting for somebody to say general quarters. Then, I've got to go to work. The rest of the time, I was looking and smelling and eating and sleeping and doing everything. The first night in, everybody, I think, was kind of trigger happy and over excited. Next morning was when they were going in. They'd been bombing the shore a lot, and they'd been bombarding it and trying to soften it up, I guess. So, nobody slept too much that night. If a star blinked its eye up there, 100 vessels would fire at it. They didn't know what they were firing at. There was just something up there. One ship would fire. Another would fire. Pretty soon, 40 of them fired just burning up that ammunition like crazy, and they don't even know what they're firing at by conclusion. I said that's not my decision. That's up there on the bridge. They know when to say fire. When you do, they say fire and you fire. If you don't fire at the right target, that's your problem. One of the most exciting things that happened there was one of the guys I was overseeing -- we were firing, and he quit

firing without an order. The order didn't come from me. The order came from these sound-hard phones from the bridge. He quit firing, but I could hear all the conversation. I jumped over. I thought, maybe, he had been hit or something. No, he was standing there. I said, "Why aren't you firing?" "Well, I don't want to hit the ship." Well, that was one of the little points from training we forgot to tell them about. Part of my job was to set the stops on the gun drives, so that it can't shoot itself. All he saw was he was training around and there was a super structure coming into view next. He didn't know that I had a set that couldn't shoot the super structure. So, that was kind of a hairy, quick realization that we needed to do some more training on some of these little details. But, the night went off, and I don't think any ships were hurt unless they hit themselves or somebody hit them shooting low. The next morning, the invasion went off.

JF: Did you carry any troops in your ship?

RH: Oh yeah. At different times, we'd have different marine or army and one time we had Australians.

JF: At the Lingayen Gulf?

RH: I don't remember what we had aboard at the Lingayen Gulf. Again, I wasn't with the boat company. I had my guns to

worry about, my directors, I had all on my plate that I wanted to carry. So, I don't know who's -- I probably did at the time, because you know you can't help but get friendly with the guys. If a guy looked like he wasn't sleeping well, they'd put him on cots down at the holes and gave him two meals a day and gave him room on the rail topside, so they could puke. A lot of them got seasick. One guy -- I thought he needed a little help -- I gave him my bunk down below, because I didn't sleep down below. I kept my bunk in my locker there, but I didn't sleep. I slept in my air conditioned -- quotation marks -- fan. I had light stopping on the hatch, so you couldn't open the door when the lights were on it and all that. But, I don't know who we carried in there, but they all got ashore some way or another. We pulled out of there.

JF: How did they get ashore?

RH: That's where the boats came in. They had LCVs -- landing craft vehicles -- landing craft personnel.

JF: They pulled up alongside your ship?

RH: Well, we carried them on our ship.

JF: Oh, you had them on your ship?

RH: Yeah, that's what the attack is about on the designation of the ship. Yeah, we had in the holes just in front of the back gun deck -- that was hole number five. There were two

LCMs, I believe -- landing craft machines or mechanize to carry a tank. It had a big truck load on here and all that. Inside, there were smaller ones for personnel. All five holes were topped off with these landing craft type vessels. Boy, those were tough little boats. They could run those things up on the sand, load it, drop the ramp, people move out, head in, just like in Normandy -- they show those boats a lot. That's why there were so many auxiliaries. When we went in somewhere, we the United States, we weren't there to play. We never were held off, I don't think, any time we had to plan the attack. We had good intelligence. We had good four bombing and good clearing it up. We lost a lot of people, of course, but they went off and we lost the boats. We lost the first of them. We lost a boat.

JF: A boat?

RH: A boat -- like one of the LCPs -- a smaller size, the smallest one. We literally lost them or they lost us. I don't know which.

JF: When you say lost, what do you mean?

RH: They didn't leave when we did. We left. The ship left. They put these boats up to put them back on the ship, and then you're gone. Our bunch got to be really good, even in some fairly rough seas. They go around to the side and go

around the seas if they could and get picked up if they could. That was the most dangerous part was getting that hook on that big old crane that comes down. There were two hooks basically. The cables are already on the boat. They have a big steel ring. You've got to get that hook in the ring. And here's the boat going, "Uhh, uhh". It was a very dangerous operation, but there was no substitute for the thing. A lot of busted things through that happening. Once they got the boat, they've got to get it up. Now, it gets about halfway up, and the waves are listing in, jamming around, so I'm about to jump off the hook. So, that was tough. One of these vessels, as we say, we left the Lingayen Gulf without one of our boats. We had no idea where they were or what they were doing. We assumed they were lost. Then, about eight or ten months later, we were in some place just laying over. There they show up. They'd been living off the other ships, Navy style, and all that stuff. All of that beer and stuff. Their boat was still running. In the meantime, we'd replaced them. So, I don't know what we did. I don't know what they did with them, but everybody was glad to see them.

JF: Well, during the whole time you were in the Gulf there, what about the Japanese? The planes?

RH: Well, Lingayen -- I think we must have well softened them up. It was awfully quiet. We never did fire at a target that I saw. We fired, because they said fire. They gave us a bearing and elevation. So, whether the guys were faking or not, I think they were. They just were there told to fire. So, they got to the thing. Whatever they said to do, and fire. I don't know whether we hit anything or if there was anything to be hit or not. I never did see a target in the Lingayen Gulf.

JF: Where were you actually? Were you behind the guns in some protected area?

RH: No. In five holes, there was a structure after the last hole, and it was elevated above the main deck level. There was a ladder that ran up to it -- a stairway that ran up to it. That was also the interest to the magazine -- ammunition magazine. It went down a tunnel. We had ready ammunition in one building. Then, the offices or compartments or whatever they were -- were probably about 10-foot square floor space -- maybe 12. So, that structure also served as a support for the biggest cranes. The number five hole had two of those big tank hauling boats. It had tremendous cranes -- two big cranes. They would come down and cradle on this same structure. My battle station was two director tubs on each side of the crane

cradles. They were only about 4-foot diameter. They were just tubs made out of quartered steel, and here's the gun-director in the middle of it. It's free to move about as it needs. You hook it up to those hard driven tourists down there -- not tourists, but gun mounts. It runs them. When it turns, they turn. So, my battle station was those two directors and the drives and the two mounts that were associated with them. The directors were up here and the mounts were down here about 10 or 12 feet lower on the gun deck. I got so I could hop across those train tops if they were in place. I could hop across those like a rabbit from one gun-director to the other. There was another occasion where the people operating the gun-director froze up. The plane was there, and you could see it. It was coming right at us. They said, "Fire, fire, fire." He wasn't firing them. He just froze up. I took my helmet off, hit him right on the top of his helmet, and I woke him up. I screamed at him, "Fire." If he didn't, I was ready to jump in there and knock him down and start running the gun-director. That was my job. But, he woke up, and he started firing. That guy flew right in the water. He never fired around. He never hit anything. I think he got hit, maybe, and was dead -- a Japanese pilot.

JF: Did you see many Japanese airplanes? You said there were no targets.

RH: Well, in Lingayen Gulf. Now, this occasion was Okinawa. Okinawa was a lot tougher. We went from Lingayen Gulf to Leyte. That was where the next invasion of the Philippines was. That was a relatively minor thing. We already had Marines and army aboard the Philippines. They were already on there, and they had Japanese at each end of the island. They still had to mop them up. So, they were trying to go out and go around -- the Japanese were -- and come back in. But, the torpedo boats and things like that were taking care of most of that. So, we did go in on Leyte. It was a relative minor scrimmage as far as the Navy was concerned. It coordinated with the land forces. So, we finally pinched them off there at the end and took over somewhere or another.

JF: From there you went to Okinawa?

RH: Oh my, you don't just go from one to the other out there at that time. Every one of those things was planned out and planned out. They'd get the storage aboard. They'd get everything piled up and ready to go. We spent an awful lot of time just hanging out in a bay somewhere with repair ships and backwards secure off the battle front thing. I guess all battles and fighting and wars are the same. You

spent an awful time just training and sitting around and waiting and waiting until it's time to go. It seems like we spent six months just waiting and waiting sometimes. I know it wasn't that long.

JF: Where?

RH: I don't know. We went to New Guinea. I don't remember the log of the vessel that good. I had some nice, interesting liberties here and there. We went to some island that had -- what is it the people that had the disease? Back in Biblical times? Oh, I almost said it. Anyway, they had a colony for these people on one of the islands. We went there. They said, "Don't worry. They're not contagious." I said, "Well, OK." But we visited some of them. That was sort of like being on a tour while you're waiting. You fish.

JF: Leprosy.

RH: Pardon?

JF: Leprosy?

RH: Say again?

JF: Leprosy.

RH: Leprosy. Leper colony. That's exactly right. Thank you, John. I'm going to have a sip of water here.

JF: Do you want to take a break? (pause) You may have been in New Guinea or someplace like that where you retooled, if

you will, or got new cargo and did some additional training and so on and so forth, before you set sail for Okinawa.

RH: Yeah. There was quite a time spent. In the meantime, the line vessels of the Navy and the Japanese line vessels were about to rendezvous. They were both looking for each other. They both knew each other was underway in mass, but these were the line vessels. The auxiliaries were not involved. There may have been some ammunition on the auxiliaries or something or ammunition carriers or something, but most of them were line vessels: destroyers, carriers, air craft carriers. Finally, that conflict came to a head and that was before Okinawa. It came to a successful head for the United States. I do recall -- we had to pick up a lot of what we knew as a crew off of Tokyo Rose and then filter it. We were sunk three or four times by Tokyo Rose. She'd named the vessel, so it was too bad. We were sitting in a harbor -- all just sitting around doing nothing.

JF: So, she mentioned your ship's name?

RH: Yeah. They had ways of making that stuff up. They didn't have to stick to truth. That was supposed to break your morale. Yeah, we spent a lot of time training. You had to train. You had to keep sharp. You had to be ready, because you could tell when you were going to go. They started

bringing aboard people -- Marines or Army. Again, I can't associate these things with a particular event. One of the loads we carried somewhere had a duck. Now, a duck is popular today. It runs on land. It runs on water. We had a duck and his captain -- his coxswain and his crew. Somewhere or another, they fill in the likes with the ordinance gang. Now, the ordinance gang had a small office right next to the brig on the ship. It was right down the passageway from the chow hole. So, it was a pretty nice place. First deck down and had a good blower in it to keep them cool in the tropics. So, this guy became a friend. He kept describing over and over, "When we get to where we're going," -- and that might have been Leyte -- "When we get there and unload -- you guys unload me. I'm taking that thing to shore. Drive up on the shore, and I'm going to grab me a woman. Then I'm going to fight the war." Yeah, yeah, OK, we've heard that one before. Then, 10 minutes later, he's telling us again what he's going to do. He had that planned out to the finite details. Well, the big day came. Over the side they put him, and he fired up and got his engine going -- had a load of folks aboard. He was going to take them ashore. He went around the stern of the ship and a wave kind of went "Woop" and he went "Woop". Down he went. He didn't get any further than the stern of

the ship. So, he was back aboard telling us how he's going to go ashore as soon as he gets another dunk. I don't know what ever happened to him, but he was a funny critter. I don't know where he was from, but he was funny.

JF: Did he lose all the troops that was in the duck?

RH: Oh, everybody was rescued. All of our boats were out there and able to pick them up. They had cargo nets over the side to climb up. Nobody drowned. I'm surprised they didn't with all the care they had to carry. I guess they abandoned the care and ducked out with their bodies and came back aboard. Somebody hauled them later on. They appeared.

JF: Let's talk a little bit about the invasion of Okinawa, Russ. One of the things I read about was the Kamikazes big in Okinawa.

RH: Well, now that I recollect on it a little bit, that's where we had this occasion where the boy froze up. That was the closest we came to being a successful target to the Kamikaze was Okinawa. It was the night before the operation. The operation started, I think, on Easter. I remember a chaplain came aboard. He was going around. That must have been a 700 ship armada, I'm sure. It was just ships and ships as far as you can see. He came around, came aboard, and got on the PA system and said

something about God blessing us and so on and so forth and so he got on a boat and go to another one. That's how we celebrated Easter. We were general quarters when that was happening. At Okinawa, we were general quarters, I'll bet you, five days continuously. The cooks were shoveling out coffees and sandwiches. We had that one guy that came oh so close. It was probably about a thousand yards or so out there. I know my mouth was probably hanging out open looking at him too. That's where that fellow froze up too. But, he just wasn't firing. He was dead set on our stern. I figured maybe he knew T and T was in that stern -- my favorite workshop. Then, that night, thing that didn't get much publicity was the Kamikaze boats. The Japanese used any kind of a boat that they could get to -- go speeding around out there in the harbor. They'd load it up like a Kamikaze plane, and then drive it in to a ship or something out in the harbor. They picked this up again. This was dark. He's down in the water -- firing at something in the dark on the water is dangerous. You're able to hit 10 other ships. You could do damage to them. So, they never did yell, "Commence fire," or not yell, but give the command to commence firing. They had everybody on 50 calibers -- 30 calibers -- 20s, 40s, they even had the crew on the 5-inch gun ready to fire. But, they didn't. He hit

one of our boats now. Our captain was pretty sharp, and the Navy was sharp. They picked those boats on an invasion thing where you were in dangerous waters and bring them around the outside of the ship. They were protection from just that sort of thing. But, he took out one of our boats, and we lost a couple of personnel, I think. One of them was kind of a crazy guy -- he ended up in another boat before it came to. He was sitting on another load of TNT. I'm glad he didn't pick that one when he came in. So, that was our closest calls in combat. We fired along with many of the vessels at other aircraft that were identified as bad guys. I'll tell you, one of the nicest sounds in the world, was that hellfire and wildcat of the Navies -- funny sounding engine. Their engine sounded like an old, one lung washing machine motor on the front porch of a cabin down in the Ozarks. That's what it sounded like to me. It just had a funny sound to it, like it was a single celled engine. When you heard that overhead, you knew the situation was under control from any Japanese airplanes. So, boy, that was a sweet sound. We liked to hear that. We had weather problems there too. Maybe it was the first night. We had to leave -- go out and get under way. It was rough. Oh man, I remember that was rough. Our captain was an old ex marshal Marine. He knew liberty vessels. He

knew C3 holes. He knew all about cargo holes. So, he filled her tanks and sunk her in the water, the best he could, without harming the fuel and the cargo. We rode that thing. They ordered everybody out of the anchorage area. They said get underway, because you had a better chance than you do hanging on the hook in a weather situation. Particularly, I guess the battle wagons and aircraft carriers could ride it. They ordered us underway. That operation, too, we had a lot of ammunition for the [Missouri?], I believe, -- battle wagon who was helping out in the softening up. I was kind of glad to get rid of that.

JF: Why?

RH: Well, that's a lot of explosives.

JF: Oh, you mean carrying it.

RH: We were carrying it -- two or three holes of it. We pulled alongside of it, but we came back in, I think, and unloaded with it somewhere.

JF: You pulled alongside? How'd that work?

RH: Pulled alongside -- I think we anchored. Darn, I can't remember. I think we anchored and ran a line across or something. It was still awfully, awfully rough. I can't see us pulling alongside the -- there's no fenders big enough to make it possible. So, I think they ran the cargo

back and forth that way some way or another. I watched it from my general quarters station. I thought it was fascinating, but I don't really recall the details for some reason. I know my hearing took a beating. It was just too close. You'd get in a compartment, and the concussion would hit all sides of that compartment at the same time, "Boom," you know I think I bugged up a couple ear drums or something. I, later, got kind of hard of hearing. But, Okinawa was long. I don't know -- five or seven days. We had to really be on general quarters the whole time. We were lucky. We only lost a boat and a few people. A boat crew of people, because they had people aboard those boats. They were tied alongside the ship.

JF: So, after the invasion of Okinawa, where did you go?

RH: I don't know.

JF: Did you go back to the States?

RH: We went somewhere back. We had throttle problems. I think after Okinawa, they excused us to go to Pearl Harbor, because we needed a major yard to fix the throttle problems on the main engine of the ship. I think we went back to Pearl, which I was, frankly, glad to do. I just thought that was great. They worked on us, and they couldn't fix us. So, somebody ordered us back to San Francisco. I said, "Oh man. Wonderful. Wonderful" Nobody fix that

problem. We went back to San Francisco -- the great Northern route. When you navigate, the shortest distance between two points of a sphere is a circular route. It's not a straight line. So, we took the Northern route. I may be getting mixed up, John, on which trip was which. But, I know we went the Northern route, and we got very close to Alaska. It got cold, and they turned the heat on the ship for the first time through the shake down. Nothing got out of those air ducts.

JF: Nothing?

RH: Nothing. No heat. No cold, no nothing. The problem was they were all full of beer. People put beer in there when we loaded up in Norfolk, and they forgot it was there. That's why I say, men in the Navy or in the wartime or any other organization, you do a lot of standing around doing nothing. The things were just full of beer. That was the favorite hiding place. They were going to have a beer, and they forgot where they put it. I knew where my beer was, and it didn't involve a ventilation system.

JF: Did they ever correct that? Get the beer out and get the heat back down?

RH: The ship had a locker for recreational gear like baseball bats and stuff. They had some beer in there. Some of this (inaudible) beer -- black and white labels. I know they

had beer with formaldehyde in it. You drank one bottle of that stuff on shore, and you hadn't had anything to drink. You'd get the worst headache you ever could imagine. I said I bet they had formaldehyde. That was the story that got around the ship, anyways. We had formaldehyde, and the beer was supposed to make you sick, so you wouldn't drink so much. I don't know. That was another crazy thing. As a fire controller, I had to clean the lid on all these directors. Oh, and I also had a great huge optical stereoptic range finder under my control, along with binoculars on board for some reason. They had to assign them to somebody, and they were assigned to me. So, I had to maintain this range finder. I couldn't use it. I never did train anybody to use it, because I couldn't see stereotypically. Boy, if you want to take a look at what was going on ashore or another ship or something, this was the best telescope you could ever find -- broad field. It was like this big around -- maybe six or eight feet long. Some of the guys could operate it. They would say, "Oh yeah. That's 270 yards" or something.

JF: So, finally you got to San Francisco, though?

RH: Oh yeah, we got to San Francisco and had some nice liberty, I recall. Then, I think we went up to the Port of Chicago.

JF: They fixed the throttles in San Francisco?

RH: Apparently they did.

JF: We got under way. The day we got under way, we were going under the Golden Gate Bridge when the radio announced that ceased hostilities with Japan. Out bound. Heading back to Japan. We went to Okinawa. The ship went to Okinawa. I think I needed a half a point. You got out of the service on points. As soon as I heard that the war was over, I said, "I don't need to be here anymore." But, I did. So, I got another trip across the Pacific.

RH: Where were you going? To Japan?

JF: Oh yeah. Well, I know we went to Okinawa. I know we went to Japan, because I went ashore in Japan. I was anxious to see what I could pick up in the way of culture and souvenirs and stuff, you know. We used to tape cartons of cigarettes to our legs, so we'd go ashore with cigarettes and trade them for souvenirs or whatever you had ashore. So, I got some nice stuff to bring home. I wish, later on -- I left the ship on 30-minute notice. So, we came back from Japan that trip. All the guys on it -- when we were going underneath the bridge and got the news that the war in Japan was over, all the guys wanted to shoot every gun on the boat. I had to fight them off of that 5-inch. I didn't think we needed to shoot that 5-inch gun. They shot a few pistols and a few rifles and 45 calibers and so

forth. We didn't turn around. We just kept going. Then, we ended up in Japan.

RH: Where about in Japan? Do you remember the city?

JF: No.

RH: Kobe?

JF: No. The Japanese names don't mean a thing to me. All I know is we went ashore and wherever went ashore had been bombed pretty good, so it must have been in that industrial area there of whatever that town was. They were living like animals almost at that particular place. I didn't stay very long. It was pretty dirty. I just got myself and kind of moseyed back to the ship. The ship was cleaner than the town, for sure. That was one nice thing about the Navy. We had a good laundry on board. We always had a pillow and blanket and sheet that was clean. Except, the guys coming back -- every time we came back, they didn't need a blanket. We were on the Equator crossing that once in a while. They didn't need blankets, so they would just come back and sleep on the gun deck, because it was out doors. But, then they'd blow the tubes on the ship at night, and here comes soot. The next morning, they're covered with soot. They're blankets are covered with soot. So, I said those are good white, wool blankets. I used to tie a rope on them and drag them on the back of the ship

when we were under way. That would clean them up pretty good and dry them and fold them up. I said, "By golly, I'll just take those home with me." Or I said, "I'll sell them back to them when we get where it's cold." I gave them back to them when we went north and it got cold. But, I did end up with more than one of them.

JF: How long were you in Japan?

RH: Oh, on that trip -- gosh, John -- probably less than a week. We went there and unloaded something, up alongside the dock and unloaded and got back out there.

JF: Where did you go? Back to the states?

RH: Very soon after that, but I don't recall exactly where we went. I had another job aboard the ship. I read in every book in the library, and one of them or two of them were on magic card tricks and stuff. So, another guy and I started doing card tricks together. That was our morale builder and entertainment. Every once in a while, they'd have a party on the ship with amateur talent and all that. We'd do a few card tricks. To me, that was more important to us, once we got under way. I didn't care where we were going. I had no control over it.

JF: The captain didn't come? The captain didn't tell the crew where they were going?

RH: No, there was no need for us to know. I guess if the ship were sinking and they captured you, you wouldn't know anything to tell them anyway. Maybe they didn't want you to tell them. I don't know. The navigators knew. The guys on the bridge knew. If I was really curious, I'd go dig up one of the guys and ask him, "Where the Hell are we going?" But, I didn't really care. It wasn't my job to run the boat. I just kept my equipment going. Any time -- I did the best I could to keep my morale up. So, the poor dog, I remember -- the captain had a dog -- a little Boston bull. Really, the doctor took care of it. The poor little doggie got ashore in Japan somehow or another. It came back aboard, and he was aboard about an hour and a half. He started shivering. In two hours, he was dead. He went over there and got himself some kind of Japanese thing or another. It killed him. So, I think the doctor told someone, "Well, I hope you fellows kept yourselves clean when you were ashore, because the dog just died." The captain -- he interfaced with his people that ran his ship for him and all that, but with the crew, I think I hardly even shook him -- maybe once.

JF: That was Captain Wilson?

RH: Yes. Yeah, how did you know his name?

JF: Well, I read about it.

RH: Oh, you read about the *Diphda*? OK. My daughter dug up an article on the *Diphda* for me. That's how you know all these names, OK. That's why I went to the Pacific Museum in Fredericksburg. I couldn't remember a lot of stuff, and I was on an honor flight from Austin. Yeah, going to Washington to see the thing.

JF: When did you do that?

RH: The 5th and 6th of September of this year. So, I went over there to try and get re-familiar with what it was. You know, I kind of got the willies from looking at all that stuff again for a couple of days. It went away, but I was surprised at my reaction to it. Just the recall of it was -- at 18 years old, I thought nothing bothered me. Apparently, it did. Nothing detrimental -- I didn't fall down or anything.

JF: This was your visit to the museum?

RH: Pardon?

JF: You're talking about your visit to the museum?

RH: Yeah. It brought back a lot of feelings that I didn't remember. Since then, I've gotten over it. I was feeling quite uncomfortable with anxieties and stuff like that. I guess that's the difference between 18 and 90 years old. You feel things differently. I went over there to kind of get reoriented, so that I would have some feeling about

what I was going to see in Washington. The honor flight people did a great job. My goodness, that thing was organized to the finite details. I fainted going up. I fainted going back on the airplane. Yeah, so this is nothing to do with World War II. At 98 -- 90 years of old age, you find an experience that you find out you can't do. Then, you better find some new things that you can.

JF: You have any idea what caused you to faint?

RH: I don't know. They never did give me a name for it. I went to my own private doctor, of course, when I got home. I was out for about a minute one time -- the last time. I sit in my seat and eat and get up and go to the restroom, and I never get back to my seat. I never remembered either case.

JF: Going and coming?

RH: Both, yeah. Up there, they took me to the emergency room in the hospital. They did tests and all that. It ended up that they couldn't see anything wrong.

JF: Did that interfere with your visit to Washington?

RH: No, I didn't let it, I guess. The first night, they had a nice dinner. They passed out a lot of information. I wasn't there. I was sitting in the emergency room in the hospital. Then, the next morning, I got up and got dressed and went zinging off. I was kind of tired, but I ended up

with a really fine, interesting gentleman who was in the Navy as my guardian on the tour. He pushed the wheelchair. They made everyone ride in a wheelchair, so they wouldn't get hurt or anything. He had just made commander. He was heading for Seattle, Washington. He had sold his house and everything. He was ready to leave. He said he'd been wanting to do this guardian thing. So, he said, he was doing it before he left town. He was in the Navy, and he had been in our P-35, our latest fighter. We were trying to decide whether to bill or not. He had flown in it and did his thing, which was radar blocking and so forth. So, that was an interesting trip. I really appreciated it.

JF: That was in September of this year?

RH: Yeah.

JF: Well, Russ, it's really been great. Your memory is phenomenal.

RH: It is?

JF: Well, yeah, you were recounting all these details and experiences and so on. I'm impressed.

RH: Well, I don't know if you need to be impressed or not, but I think it's a sign of my mental makeup. I've always had a positive attitude, even when I couldn't do well in sports or something in high school and so forth. My father was that kind of guy. He could always find something that was

interesting. So, when I went into engineering, I had so many hobbies -- interesting hobbies -- amateur radio. I became a celestial navigation instructor for boats. Still, I just carried my boat right out of the Navy with me. I lived on sail boats. I always had something exciting and fun to do. If it wasn't, then I would just have to go around it. I remember in college, we had an industrial psychology course. The guy that taught it was a professional psychologist. He would sit up there on the podium and smoke his pipe and expire on it. He said, "The secret to a truly good life is have a broad interest. Stay in there and be active in it." I'd never had a problem. I've never been bored in my life, and I've never been out without a job, unless I wanted to go on vacation or something. I've been so fortunate in my life. It's been wonderful. My wife fit right in with it. I'm not an extravert, but I'm -- I don't know, I guess I'm just an interesting person. Anyway, we're getting off the subject here.

JF: Well, I think we're about over anyway. So, I really appreciate the time that you gave me here.

RH: Well, it was fun, John. It was fun meeting you.

JF: I really thank you for your service in World War II.

RH: Thank you for your service.

JF: Thank you. So, that would conclude our interview today,
Russ. So, I'll just shut this machine off.

RH: Well, I'm just right along. I wasn't any great hero, and I
just did my little job.