

National Museum of the Pacific War

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with

Mr. Charles E. Thorney

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Interview in progress.

Mark Cunningham: This is Mark Cunningham. Today is November the ... 17 ... 18th, 2016. Today I'm interviewing Mr. Charles Edward Thorney from his home in the Woodlands. This inter..uh, this interview is in support of the Nimitz Education and Research Activities and archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Texas Historical Commission, for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Thorney, the first thing ... I'd like to thank you for your service to your country, and I'd also like to thank you for doing the interview on behalf of the ... on behalf of the ... the Museum.

Mr. Thorney: My pleasure entirely.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Let's start at the beginning of your military career. When and where did ... uh, well, when and where ... where were you on Jan ... on December 7th, 1941 when the war broke out, Pearl Harbor Day?

Mr. Thorney: I was at Northwestern University at ... uh, in Illinois; had just recently, about a month or so earlier, joined the NROTC at Northwestern and was officially in the Navy at the time of Pearl Harbor.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, had you taken any training at that point?

Mr. Thorney: Not naval training at all.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: No.

Mark Cunningham: So, what happened after that?

Mr. Thorney: Well, after that, uh, those of us in the ROTC ... were left to ... stay in school and get more schooling, and then just prior to ... Pearl ... uh, just prior to ... the ... the invasion in Europe, they were running short of

personnel apparently because they commissioned our entire class almost a year ahead of time.

Mark Cunningham: Wow! That was in 1941?

Mr. Thorney: Well, after it was ca ... uh, in 1941 I was officially in the Navy.

Mark Cunningham: Ah!

Mr. Thorney: But ... did not get a commission itself until 1944.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. And ... what did you do between '41 and '44? Were ... were you in school?

Mr. Thorney: What ... what?

Mark Cunningham: What did you do between 1941 and 1944, were you in school?

Mr. Thorney: I stayed in ... uh, Northwestern at ... still in the NROTC in their ... training program there ... for those months. And ... then ... then was commissioned in ... September 1944 which was almost a year early.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. And when you got commissioned ... when ... when did you start your active duty ... in '44?

Mr. Thorney: When did it start ...?

Mark Cunningham: Act ... active duty in '44?

Mr. Thorney: Active duty; I started actually in 1943 when they ... changed our ... situation; kept us still in school but was not commissioned until ... later in the year.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. What did you do during that period of time; what kind of work were you doing?

Mr. Thorney: Well, I was ... in engineering school.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: At Northwestern.

Mark Cunningham: But when you started doing ... when you got ... when you finished engineering school, what did you do?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, I (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: When you finished engineering school what did you do then?

Mr. Thorney: Well, I was still in engineering school when we were commissioned in ... in ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay. But when did you really start doing the active stuff in the Navy?

Mr. Thorney: The ... the active stuff in the Navy was when we were commissioned early which would have been September of 1944.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, and where did you go to do that?

Mr. Thorney: That was ...

Mark Cunningham: What was your first ... post?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, my first assignment ... was really a training program for small ship duty and was ... occurred over a period of about two months at ... North Carolina, South Carolina and ... most ... most predominately at Miami, Florida at ... Subchaser Training School.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now you said that you ... you told me when we talked that you had kind of an unusual ...

Mr. Thorney: Sorry?

Mark Cunningham: ... you told me when we talked that you had kind of an unusual ... career in the Navy.

Mr. Thorney: Really did.

Mark Cunningham: Why don't you start telling me about that.

Mr. Thorney: Well, I was assigned to the USS PGM-2.

Mark Cunningham: PGM-2; what does that mean?

Mr. Thorney: Nobody ever heard of it; it's Patrol Gunboat Motorized. Now, I didn't think we had a sailing Navy, but that was part of our title, and we were a converted ... subchaser.

Mark Cunningham: Did you ... wait a minute; back up. Did you say sailing? Not with a sail?

Mr. Thorney: Well ...

Mark Cunningham: It was a motorized boat?

Mr. Thorney: It was a motorized boat, yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, okay (chuckles).

Mr. Thorney: Yeah. That's always been strange. But ... the ... we ... we ... I picked up the ship in September of 1944 in ... in the Solomon Islands, South Pacific as the Executive Officer on the PGM-2. We were ... uh, just eight ships in the whole Navy ... were ... were this category of ship. And we were ...

made ... they ... we were converted subchasers and took the place of a lot of the work that the ... the PT boats did 'cause PT boats, in the type of operation we had, had to have some staying time onsite ... in contact with the enemy and PTs just drank gasoline and didn't have storage for food or ... anything that would let them stay on a station much over a day.

Mark Cunningham: Right. Now, what ... what kind of training did you have prior to the time you picked ... what kind of training did you have prior to the time you picked this boat up?

Mr. Thorney: Well, the training was small craft handling, gunnery and ... uh, of course, traditions in all of the Navy. Mostly at night ... it ended up ... of ... of the entire time that I was on this ship ... which was ... well over a year ... probably only a couple of weeks were ever spent ... in contact with the enemy ... over a couple of weeks. We worked entirely at night ... the whole time.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Now, and what were you ... you were ... you were seeking out and destroying the enemy?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, we started in the Solomon Islands.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: And of course, if you're fam ... familiar with the ... Pacific at all, it's islands everywhere.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: For instance, there's over seven thousand islands in the Philippine Archipelago; it's amazing, they're everywhere! And at ... this period of time, which was ... well, not too long after we invaded Guadalcanal, uh, the ... the Japanese were running a lot of ships down from the north at their main naval base at ... at Rabaul on New Britain, and we had control of the air at that time, so the Japanese could not move troops or equipment or men ... in the daytime at all 'cause air covered ... covered us. But at night, we couldn't operate our aircraft there, so they had our ships ... initially, they were PT boats, but PT boats had no staying power, and most of our operations were ... often well within three hundred miles from the closest

American base, so we had to have staying power on station. And we could stay ... uh, we had diesel engines which were good, and ... food and drink ... or ... water was a problem for us, but we could stay on station about ten days.

Mark Cunningham: Wow! Yeah, so ...

Mr. Thorney: And this is ... this is three hundred miles inside of Japanese territory.

Mark Cunningham: And ... okay, then you would work ... work your ... you were going out ... you were going out at night, right?

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: You were going out at night?

Mr. Thorney: We ... we worked only at night. And what we did ... we did most of our work outside, initially, outside of Rabaul which was three hundred miles from the closest American base, so we were three hundred miles from home with no friends around at all. So ... and we could only operate at night, so we would ... operate at night hunting the Japanese and they were hunting us and all of that. But in daytime, we would ... retire ... uh, just ... just outside of ... artillery range of ... Japanese ... shore installations. So, we're out ... we're over eight miles from ... the nearest Japanese ... artillery that could reach us, and we ... we would just be out there in the open ... in plain sight of the Japanese.

Mark Cunningham: In open water?

Mr. Thorney: In open water.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, you didn't go to an island or something like that?

Mr. Thorney: Couldn't, they were full of Japanese.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: Uh, Rabaul had ... reportedly fifty thousand troops, something like that, and there were Japanese troops everywhere. But they could not reach us in the daytime.

Mark Cunningham: The patrol ... because of their ...

Mr. Thorney: Because their artillery would not ... reach far enough.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, but how ... but didn't they have some kind of small boats, too, that they could come out and get you?

Mr. Thorney: We, well ... we were able to protect ourselves.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: Our biggest hazard was ... uh, coral reefs and ... and ... and mine ... moored mines because to get there, we had to go through mine fields. But we had a very (unintelligible) draft about three and a half, four or five feet, and ... and we just went over the top of the mines; didn't even worry about them.

Mark Cunningham: Wow! Wow.

Mr. Thorney: And ... and we had engagements, of course, we were operating at night, and the Japanese were attempting to ... move troops and equipment and all, and ... and had escorts for that, and we're out there ... hunting for both of them, and they're hunting for us, and everything happened in a hurry. Radar surely was nowhere near what it is today, not even remotely so, and you ... all of a sudden, you ... on a dark, dark night ... you pass right alongside of them; you didn't even know they were coming. And ... everything happened in a hurry, everything happened in a hurry.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, what size ... ships were you ... engaged with?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, much ... much ... like what we were on. It was ... they were Japanese gunboats.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: Uh, and ... and about the same length and all, and ... armament as ours. And then they escorted ... all kinds of ... barges loaded with troops, equipment and ... food and things from station to station ... because ... all of these islands were held by Japanese.

Mark Cunningham: Wow!

Mr. Thorney: So, actually, I ... things really happened in a hurry. We ... we had to sleep at our battle stations because you ... you just passed each other. You ... neither one of you knew for a while sometimes that anyone else was there. And we almost rammed a Japanese ship, a Japanese gunboat, and we always worked in pairs ... not ... in that ... that case, I got ... I was in the

lead ship and radioed our counterpart behind us, and they ... they sunk that one, but ... but you had to sleep at your battle stations, rain or shine, because things happened so fast.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Now, give me an example of a typical engagement.

Mr. Thorney: Typical engagement; well, a lot of times, contrary to a lot of ... things the Navy does, we would just totally stop and ... and try to ambush them as they came by. In ... in a typical operation, you'd be going a little while and you ... you'd just stop and wait ... wait for them to come by or not come by as the case may be.

Mark Cunningham: And you would torpedo these ... guys or torpedo or ... uh, use gat guns?

Mr. Thorney: We ... we did not carry torpedoes. Our ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay, then let ... how was the ship armed?

Mr. Thorney: The ship was armed with three-inch, fifty caliber ... rifle ... of one forty millimeter, uh, gun; twelve ... machine guns, an Army mortar because we got close enough to Japanese stations we were shooting mortars at them. What else did we have? Well, that was pretty much it.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, what's ... what's ... what was the size of the crew?

Mr. Thorney: We had twenty-five, routinely. Uh, twenty-five enlisted men and three officers.

Mark Cunningham: Now, was the ... were the accommodations ... as ... they ... this was a bigger ship than a PT boat?

Mr. Thorney: Yes, PT boats, uh, depending on who made it, were about seventy-eight to eighty feet long, and then we were a hundred and ten feet long.

Mark Cunningham: How were the accommodations?

Mr. Thorney: Far better than on a PT boat. Everybody had a ... their own ... their own bunk, but ... back to ... combat ... (unintelligible) times, you had to sleep at your battle stations ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: ... because things happened so fast.

Mark Cunningham: Is that everybody on the ship?

Mr. Thorney: Everybody.

Mark Cunningham: Everybody (unintelligible) at their battle stations?

Mr. Thorney: If you happened to be the cook in the back ... in the stern of the ship, and your battle station was up at the bow, you had to sleep, rain or shine, at your battle station. So, the cook would have to go ... have to be at that sight, his combat sight, when things happened. Because they happened so fast you, wouldn't have any time to get to your battle station.

Mark Cunningham: Speaking of the cook, how was the food?

Mr. Thorney: Good question (chuckles). Uh, I ... I ... we ... we ... ate well, but a lot of dehydrated ... dehydrated scrambled eggs, by the ton, and ... and ... uh, very rarely fresh food. It was all nourishment; we ... ate ... had ... adequate food to eat, but no goodies, no fresh fruit or vegetables unless you happened to come to a friendly island and ... and get some there.

Mark Cunningham: Alright. Now, you said that you were ... you spent most of the day just ... idling around?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, actually that; you just ... you ... want to conserve fuel, so you're just ... well, limping along ... like ...

Mark Cunningham: That's kind of what ... that was kind of boring duty during the day, wasn't it?

Mr. Thorney: Well, that's when you slept.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: 'Cause literally, when you sleep at your battle station ...

Mark Cunningham: 'Cause you actually sleep at ...

Mr. Thorney: ... if your battle station is outside, you're outside in that weather, rain or shine, and you slept on the deck, right beside your battle station. So, you did not get much sleep at night.

Mark Cunningham: Did you get much sleep during the day?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, (unintelligible), fairly, fairly much.

Mark Cunningham: It's ... the weather was ... hot and humid, right?

Mr. Thorney: It's what?

Mark Cunningham: Hot and humid?

Mr. Thorney: Oh yeah! And wet! That ... that part of the world is wet an awful lot of the time ... rain.

Mark Cunningham: So, you guys were out in the elements most of the time?

Mr. Thorney: Is what?

Mark Cunningham: You were out in the elements most of the time?

Mr. Thorney: Yes, that is correct.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. And ... okay, then you ... I think I heard you say early on you were out for ten days and then you would go in?

Mr. Thorney: We would have to return to our base or ...

Mark Cunningham: And how far ... how far out were you?

Mr. Thorney: We ... our ... our patrol station as largely three hundred miles into Japanese territory.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. And ... and what did you do when you went in? Did you get leave?

Mr. Thorney: It ... got ... to stay in for a couple or three days and ... and refuel and replenish your supplies and then it's back out again.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. And again, how long were you in this ... in this role?

Mr. Thorney: How long did I what?

Mark Cunningham: How long were you in the ... on the ship? How ... how many ... how ... what length of time?

Mr. Thorney: Oh, my whole time on the ship was ... uh, a little ... little bit over a year, yeah.

Mark Cunningham: That's a long time.

Mr. Thorney: It is on a hundred and ten foot of wooden boat, I'll tell you (laughter), especially when you run into weather.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: And we *really, really* ran into some bad weather at times.

Mark Cunningham: Right. How did you ... what ... how did you handle that? Did it bot ... did the bad weather bother you?

Mr. Thorney: It was the most scared I was ever in my life ... in a typhoon at Okinawa ... and ... unbelievable. It had a hundred and fifty knot winds, so those winds

got up to about a hundred seventy, seventy-five miles an hour, and *that* is a lot of storm!

Mark Cunningham: Particularly in a small boat.

Mr. Thorney: We ... we had an inclinometer which shows you how much you have rolled at a given time, and we showed seventy degrees. Now, I won't vouch for its accuracy or not, but if you roll seventy degrees, your ship is about like that (showing the ship's roll).

Mark Cunningham: Wow!

Mr. Thorney: Scary, scary ...

Mark Cunningham: How did you hang on?

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: How did you hang on; what'd you ... grab anything you could hold onto?

Mr. Thorney: I ended ... I was the Executive Officer and ... without going into details, I ... stayed ... at the bow ... at the bridge right in the front ... in ... in the open and actually tied myself to ... a ... uh, a light post to keep from getting swept over side. We ... we lost, I think ... as I recall, some sixty-five ships, major ships in that typhoon alone ... right ... at Okinawa.

Mark Cunningham: Is that the only typhoon you went through?

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: Is that the only typhoon or were there more?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, that's the only ... big one I was in, and it ... we had the eye pass right over us. It's really fascinating because you've got big, big winds coming at you from this ... direction and all of a sudden, they stop. I mean, just a calm, and you could actually see stars overhead. And then just as quickly, it's going that direction because of the circular ... well, circular uh, storm.

Mark Cunningham: Right. Okay, now tell me a little bit about your Captain.

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: Tell me a little bit about your Captain.

Mr. Thorney: My Captain? Uh, was Lieutenant Junior Grade; he was from Milwaukee, Wisconsin area ... anyhow ... was a musician ... and ... and a good musician with ... with instruments; he wasn't ... wasn't a singer. And ...

(chuckles) he ... he did everything to do that he possibly could do to ... to stay out of harm's way (chuckle), but he wasn't necessarily successful.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now you ... there were three officers – the Captain, you were the Exec and what was the other officer?

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: You said you had ... there ... you were one of three officers.

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, I was the Executive ...

Mark Cunningham: You were the Exec.

Mr. Thorney: ... Executive Officer, Second ...

Mark Cunningham: Who was the third guy?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, he was an Ensign. He was Supply Officer primarily, uh, Entertainment Officer ... that's where ... were a bad word; he had nothing to entertain with anyhow (chuckle).

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: But primarily Supply Officer ... which is pretty full-time job.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, I ... I imagine that, or I'm guessing that ... if you ... you were on that ship for a year, same crew?

Mr. Thorney: Largely so. Uh, we had one ... in particular, young man ... all he had to do was look at water and he got sea sick, I mean genuinely got sea sick. We ... we had to ... release him. We had no casualties; we were very fortunate ... there's no casualties at all. So, generally speaking, other than routine advancements in the rank or so, we had the same crew at the end that we had at the beginning.

Mark Cunningham: I would imagine in that length of time you probably made some pretty ... pretty close friends.

Mr. Thorney: Yes, you do. Uh, my ... you mentioned friends, uh, of course, we were a division of eight ships, and ... and you do make good friends. And ... there were three of us that were very close be ... after the war – an Irishman, as Irish as they come from New Jersey, a ... a Cajun from Opelousas, Louisiana and me from the middle west. But we ... we got ... they were good friends.

Mark Cunningham: And you kept ...

Mr. Thorney: Yes, we ...

Mark Cunningham: ... you kept in touch after the war?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah, that's ... I ... I ... I would say that a lot of guys don't ... don't have that ...

Mr. Thorney: No.

Mark Cunningham: ... that I've talked with ...

Mr. Thorney: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: ... that I've interviewed; they ... I ...

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, that's ...

Mark Cunningham: ... when I ask that question say, "No, I never had much contact with anybody after the war." That's great though that you do!

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah. Are they still alive?

Mr. Thorney: As certain ...

Mark Cunningham: Are the two ... the other two still alive?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, I've lost track of one; the other one has died. Uh, my Cajun friend from Opelousas ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: ... uh, has died. I lost track of my ... New Jersey friend because ... after the war, a large group of young naval officers were not re ... allowed to ... to resign after the war. You ... you were forced to stay ... in the Navy; you had three options when the war was over. You could join ... as a regular; we were reserve, of course. Uh, you could ... join the Navy as a regular officer at the rank you were at the time or you could go into the ... the reserve, inactive reserve, uh, and ... and well all of us chose to go in the reserve because we ... we did not have a ... desire at that time to ... go into the regular Navy.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Where ... now, where ... refresh my memory if I ask you again ... if I've asked you this before, I'm sorry, but ... where did you ... where were you when the war ended?

Mr. Thorney: When the war was ended, I was at Okinawa ... which ... one of my hobbies ... since I was that high, very low, very, very young, I've had an interest in the ... in ... the Navy and ... and sea ships. I ... I've got a library of about, I would guess, at least a hundred books about naval history and all back to the days when they used oars and all of that ... just always fascinated me as a kid. And so ... where ... where am I?

Mark Cunningham: Yeah. Okay, at the end of the war ...

Mr. Thorney: Oh, at ... well, at the end of the war, uhm, this large group of young naval officers were not allowed to resign, and we had ... quite a ... session with that.

Mark Cunningham: Now, were you ... were you allowed to resign?

Mr. Thorney: No. I was not. I couldn't get ... I could not resign from the Navy until 1954.

Mark Cunningham: Wow!

Mr. Thorney: Yeah well, that's a long story in itself. Moving, jumping on to Korea ... in ... in the early 1950s we were getting badly beaten by the Korean troops that were reinforced by the Chinese, and they had ... driven ... uh, our forces down to Busan which is at the very southern tip of ... Korea and ... uh, they ... introduced what I figure from a military point of view is really smart thinking, too, that ... they formed a mobilization navy, and I don't know whether the other services did it or not.

Mark Cunningham: Was that what's called MacArthur's Navy?

Mr. Thorney: It was what?

Mark Cunningham: Was that what was called MacArthur's Navy?

Mr. Thorney: No, no, that was not Mac ... no, we were in MacArthur's Navy and we ... didn't like that. But no, this ... this was after ... this was 19 ... or ... 1950, I guess, uhm, the ... the Koreans were about to ... wipe us out of ... the ... Korean peninsula, and they formed a mobilization force, and in 1950 ...

very few people knew of this ... uh, and I ... I've got papers to prove it. They formed a mobilization force and you got mobilization orders which I received, as did my friends, that ... call for what the name just implies ... mobilization in a hurry. We received orders that we had to be aboard ship ... now, you're not in the Navy, you're in the ... you're civilian now, but you're still ... in the Navy ... got orders that ... within three days, including travel time, no matter where you are, you had to be aboard a specific ship at a spec ... a specific location with specific ... job to do. I got orders to go a ... aboard a ... search and rescue ... PCER, uh, boat which was somewhat bigger than I had served on. I knew what my job would be; I knew what my rank would be, and I had three days to board. Also had ...

Mark Cunningham: What is the name of that ship?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, the name of the ship, I don't know. It was a PCER which is Patrol Search and Rescue.

Mark Cunningham: Oh, another patrol boat?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, but ... but a bigger one ...

Mark Cunningham: Bigger.

Mr. Thorney: ... than I had been on. And I also had a three-year-old daughter and a one-year-old son, and it ... for about four or five years, I had those orders that ... had they been called ... MD, mobilization day, uh ...

Mark Cunningham: But you were ... you ...

Mr. Thorney: ... I had to be in Orange, Texas in three days.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, but you were still in the Navy at that time, right?

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: You were still active duty or were you ... uh ...

Mr. Thorney: I was inactive duty.

Mark Cunningham: Inactive duty?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, but you were under orders to report within three days of call?

Mr. Thorney: Under written orders.

Mark Cunningham: Wow! And ... and you didn't have to do it?

Mr. Thorney: Didn't have to do it; they never ... they never called MD ... because we began to strengthen our forces in the Korean peninsula and they never had to call MD.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. When'd you get out of the Navy ... '54?

Mr. Thorney: When did I get ...?

Mark Cunningham: When'd you get out?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, I think it was '54.

Mark Cunningham: So, you went in ...

Mr. Thorney: It was either '54 or '55 because ... while ... , and of course, we were talking to ... I ... I still have a lot of service to do, in a sense. Backing up to ... when the war ended and ... I was at Okinawa, we ... were transferred to China to ... to sweep mines in the Yangtze River because the mouth of the Yangtze River was one of the most heavily mined areas in the world, and they were our mines that we were sweeping. And, of course, these mines are moored, many of them, a lot of them were not, were moored by cables. And ... a mine sweeper, if you're not familiar with them, uh, you ... you work in teams, and you have the sweepers that cut ... cut these cables and they float. This is about six hundred pounds worth of explosive, and then if you hit them, you're history ... for sure. So, you have ... one series of ships that are ... sweeping these mines, cutting them lose, and then a ... a second series of ships behind them, at a reasonable distance, trying to detonate them which is *really* hard to do.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: You ... talk about try to hit something about that big, and ... uh, you can't get too close to it ... six hundred pounds worth of explosive is ... is a *bunch!* And ... but we were in this ... in the shoot-em up group, and you didn't ... you didn't sink many of them; couldn't get close enough.

Mark Cunningham: Right. Okay, in 1954 what ... what ... what pr ... you'd been in the Navy for ten years?

Mr. Thorney: What pro ...?

Mark Cunningham: You'd been in the Navy for ten years with ...

Mr. Thorney: Uh, active and inactive, yeah.

Mark Cunningham: ... active and inactive. And what prompted you to get out?

Mr. Thorney: Well, of the three ... very close friends, and I'm changing the subject a little bit, we all had got these mobilization orders, but very few people ever heard of them, but ... by that time, you had close to eight years in ... in active service, I mean, you were on ... on the payroll anyhow, or on occasion, and of the three, uh, I never heard anything. My friend from Opelousas, Louisiana ... uh, did not hear anything. My friend from ... uh, the east coast got called up. So, when the ... when the whole thing shook out, he had so much time in, and he had the option of really getting out or not, uh, at the end, uh, he had so much time in service, he went into the active Navy. It just made sense, because he had a lot of ... all this time built up for it.

Mark Cunningham: And you didn't have that much time?

Mr. Thorney: I had ... about as much time, but I did not have any desire to ...

Mark Cunningham: No, no ... desire to be a Navy ...

Mr. Thorney: ... to go permanently.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah.

Mr. Thorney: Uh, nor did my friend from Opelousas.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: So, our other friend from New Jersey, I lost track of him entirely, and then Johnny Swallow (sp?) has since died. (Pause)

Mark Cunningham: Okay, there's one thing ... (pause) on here we didn't talk about. You have something, I think it says prisoners.

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: You have a note here that says prisoners?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, we ... well ...

Mark Cunningham: That was ... tell ... first off give me a little background. Where ...

Mr. Thorney: ... (unintelligible) ... we ... we covered the Pacific Ocean in this little ole ship.

Mark Cunningham: Okay, now this is back to World War II days?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, yeah, but ... let's ... let's see, the question was ... ?

Mark Cunningham: About the prisoners.

Mr. Thorney: Oh, the prisoners! Uh, this was when we were up in the Philippines. We ... we went from our duty in the Solomon Islands north to the Philippine Islands doing the same type of operation, but ... uh, in the Philippine Islands, we made contact with the ... our guerilla forces which were ... Americans that were not captured by the Japanese when ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: ... when they took the Philippines. Uh ... so, they had guerilla forces which were harassing the Japanese all the time, and we ... we were ... when we got to the Philippines, we were hunting them, and ... and they were hunting us. But they, on occasion, uh, did take prisoners alive, but they had to get them up to ... uh, farther north into ... friendly territory. So, we had two Japanese prisoners on our ship, little old wooden ship, and there's no brig or jail on the ... on the ships like that. You don't know what to do with them, so ... and one ... one happened to be a Korean and the other one was Japanese ... we ... kind of figured that out. And so ... the only thing we could do was put them on the bow of the ship ... under armed guard; didn't tie them up or anything; figured ... if they wanted to escape, let them jump over side because you're ... you're (chuckle) way at sea anyhow. So, that ... that was an interesting experience ... really was.

Mark Cunningham: They probably got better treatment on that ship than they got in their own ... navy.

Mr. Thorney: They what?

Mark Cunningham: They probably got better treatment on your ship than they got ...

Mr. Thorney: Very ... very possibly, very possibly. Then when ... when we got up ... uh, into the central Philippines, we turned them over to the ... to the Army. And ... and they didn't choose to jump over side, over the side, but they had the opportunity if they wanted to.

Mark Cunningham: Okay tell me ... did we talk about ... you working with the coast watchers and the guerillas?

Mr. Thorney: Working with what?

Mark Cunningham: Coast watchers and guerillas.

Mr. Thorney: Well, the coast watchers were back ... back to the Solomon Islands. Uh, a lot of coconut plantations down there, and of course, when the Japanese took over all those islands, they ... they got rid of the ... operators and all, but most of them escaped, and they were Australians and New Zealanders for whom I have a lot of respect, an awful lot of respect. The ... now, you ever hear of the slough?

Mark Cunningham: No.

Mr. Thorney: Well, we ... you can't see it on here, but ... there's ... there's just a ... a whole string of ... parallel islands in the Solomon Islands, and the Japanese would send their ... ships down at night, uh, in this ... chan ... channel might be a couple of bows wide, but most of these ... uh, ex-employees of the ... coconut plantations stayed behind with radios, big, bulky things, and I've got pictures of them in fact. And ... and they would stay there and ... and ... escape ... constantly from the Japanese and radio ... uh, what our ... what the enemy ships were doing at night, not well described but ... they ... they were ... fantastic guys. A number of books have been written about the, and ... and that was in the ... uh, Solomon Islands. Then in the ... Philippines, we had a lot of guerilla forces in little bands throughout the Philippines of ... of men that had escaped ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: ... Bataan and all of that, and we made contact with them and ... and we supplied them with a lot ... with ammunition, food, information.

Mark Cunningham: Did you do that at night?

Mr. Thorney: Largely so. Here again, we were in Japanese territory.

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: But not as badly as ... uh, back in the Solomon Islands. So ... so, we had a lot of activity with them.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: Also had a really interesting situation as the war progressed. Uh, some of these islands, the Japanese just evacuated, and we were the first ship, since the war began, that ... landed at this little Japanese island, Kamigwa (sp?), and ... and when we got ... they knew we were coming, they had a band down there to greet us, and they ... we could have anything we wanted. I mean, just ... it ... a great ... well, a great welcome; they were so glad to see us, and we were glad to see them, too.

Mark Cunningham: Just because ... these ... these were the ... ?

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: Who were these, who were these folks? I missed something up front.

Mr. Thorney: I ... I missed that.

Mark Cunningham: Who were the ... who were the people that were so glad to see you?

Mr. Thorney: Oh, all the ... all the ... uh, inhabitants of this island.

Mark Cunningham: Ah okay!

Mr. Thorney: It was a relatively small island, but everybody in town was there to greet us, and they greeted us with everything they could, flowers and food and ... band and the ... and the ... (unintelligible).

Mark Cunningham: Now, had they been occupied?

Mr. Thorney: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Yeah, okay. And the Japs had already left?

Mr. Thorney: Yes, oh definitely!

Mark Cunningham: They were gone?

Mr. Thorney: Int ... really interesting; it's really interesting.

Mark Cunningham: Now, in ... in any of those islands did you get ... uh, were there still Japs left on some of them?

Mr. Thorney: Oh yes! In fact, we were patrolling not too far from that particular island ... uh, our activities were the same as in the Solomons, but we were ... uh, patrolling Mindanao which is ... which is possibly the biggest island in the Philippine Archipelago and ... and the same thing ... hunting there ... traffic at night. We were shooting at trucks at times because they ... they

ran their trucks right alongside of the ocean, and they had to have ... dim lights on, and you'd ... we were shooting at trucks and ... that's ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: ... that's probably the closest we ever got to ... actually getting hit. Because, here again, you would ...

Mark Cunningham: You were shooting from the ship?

Mr. Thorney: ... the ship. The Japanese had midget submarines. Well, you've got one at ... uh, Fredericksburg. Never thought we'd get hit by a torpedo ... uh, we were too small for it, but typically, we ... were on patrol, but we just ... stopped, literally came to a dead stop, and just waiting for something to happen. And ... it happened that, on a pretty good moonlight night, you could see well, and of course, anything running in the water down in those waters ... just like ... the light, I mean the ... uh, the barnacle ... not barnacles, the ... uh ...

Mark Cunningham: I know what you're talking about, I can't think of it.

Mr. Thorney: ... well, what I'm talking about is ... is the ... the ... the trail, the path that something running through the water ...

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: ... just lights it up. And uh, we were in ... in station with other of our ... of our ships and we both looked up and at the same time, we saw these trails of ... coming straight at us, one for each boat with ... and they were torpedoes! You never torpedoed a ship of our size! We (chuckle) ... we were ... they were worth more than our torpedo, but they did, and they went right underneath us.

Mark Cunningham: Huh.

Mr. Thorney: And that darned thing ... just that close to me. But we ... we only drew about three or four feet ... of water, so they just went right underneath us. That's ... that ... if, in fact, we were right and they were torpedoes, then we think ... we're sure that we're right, you'd never could have found pieces of that ship.

Mark Cunningham: Now, was that ... a flat-bottom boat?

Mr. Thorney: It's not flat-bottomed, no. Uh ...

Mark Cunningham: 'Cause ...

Mr. Thorney: Yep, oh yeah, the ... the ...

Mark Cunningham: Okay, but it just didn't draw that much ...

Mr. Thorney: Sir?

Mark Cunningham: ... it just rode high in the water.

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, yeah.

Mark Cunningham: Okay. Alright, well when did you finally ... come home from ... your service in the ... Pacific?

Mr. Thorney: Uh, when I ... when I came home from ... uh, (unintelligible), it was November ...

Mark Cunningham: You were in Okinawa when the war ...

Mr. Thorney: ... Christ is the 25th. I guess it was November 22nd that I ... got home with orders to go back out because I didn't have enough points to ...

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Thorney: ... get released. And I was to re ... report ... uh, two or three days before Christmas of 19 ... '45. And ... had to go.

Mark Cunningham: War was still going on in that time.

Mr. Thorney: Well, no, the war was over.

Mark Cunningham: No, no, no, that's right. '45 the war was over ...

Mr. Thorney: Yeah, the war was over.

Mark Cunningham: ... over in September.

Mr. Thorney: So, I got out ... to San Francisco ... to report in ... to go back out overseas, not very happy about it, this ... this ... just a few days before ... before Christmas. And ... of course, I got out there and nobody was working or doing anything at all. And ... the receiving officer was amazed they'd even sent me back because I'd had enough points to ... to come right back again within a few weeks, so we ... we got to talking about it. And he said, "I'll take care of you." And he gave me orders, temporary duty at Treasure Island. I get treasure and treasury mixed up some times, at ... Treasure Island, San Francisco Bay.

Mark Cunningham: That's pretty good duty, right?

Mr. Thorney: Oh yeah! Yeah, here again, though, I was working at night, on guard duty ... when ... it ... it's not the San Francisco today, it's pretty safe place.

Mark Cunningham: Right, okay. Well, what ... uh, how do you want to end this thing? What ... you got anything else that we hadn't covered that you want to talk about?

Mr. Thorney: That I want to talk about?

Mark Cunningham: Yeah.

Mr. Thorney: Well, on a happier note, in a sense, uh, got married July of 1944.

Mark Cunningham: Okay.

Mr. Thorney: And ... uh, lovely, lovely lady, but ... it almost didn't happen. I was ... at the ... when I got orders for a week, one week, leave, I was at Southport, North Carolina at a little Navy base there, and I had to get ... from South Carolina to Illinois ... and ... get married ... and ... then go on. And ... man, the airlines are not like they used to be! So, I ... in this little ... inky, dink town, (chuckles) in South Caro ... in North Carolina, I got on a ... a bus to ... an airport probably at Wilmington, North Car ... North Carolina, I don't recall, and ... airlines were just jammed. You couldn't get on an air ... airplane to save your life! But ... uh, the first..airline representative said ... what really defined trump ... find ... a ... a place for me to get to Chi ... Chicago, I was going there ... by air ... and he said, "Well, I could get you to Pittsburgh, but I can't get you past there." So, I flew to Pittsburgh, and they really took care of me; got the same treatment at Pittsburgh. It ... just welcomed me and did everything they could to get me to Chicago; no planes going to Chicago. And as I recall then, "But we can get you to Cincinnati," I'm inching closer all the time. Finally ended up with a flight to ... uh, the Chicago airport; O'Hare wasn't there I don't think at the time. So, they got me there, and ... I got there in time to ... have a one-day honeymoon at ... at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (chuckles). And ... I had the good fortune, I was going to another leg ... of my training still, and ... we

had a one-day honeymoon in Lake Geneva, but went to Miami together, so that worked out nicely.

Mark Cunningham: Right, right. Kids? You have kids?

Mr. Thorney: Oh yeah. I have three. I have two girls and one boy. Uh, they all are a bit older right now (chuckles), but ... my son, well my oldest is ... is a daughter and she has ... a ... a very high-powered job ... with Entergy, a power company, and she's in purchasing, but ... she does contract purchasing. And what she buys runs in the millions of dollars. This is not buying pencils and pens and all. She has a *real* high-powered job. Then my ... my son is a Presbyterian minister and just retired, and ... and he had been in the Air Force during the Korean War [s/b maybe Vietnam], but had no problems there. And then ... my other daughter ... uh, let's see, uh, my other daughter ... went to work in ... uh, Memphis, Tennessee with the ... Tenn ... Tennessee Police Department.

Mark Cunningham: Alright.

Mr. Thorney: And ... as a ... as a worker, not as a president (chuckles).

Mark Cunningham: Right.

Mr. Thorney: So ...

Mark Cunningham: Well good. Well, let's see, I think I'm going to go ahead and ... if it's okay with you, I think we've covered it pretty good.

Mr. Thorney: Well, I think so. There's ... there's a lot ... that doesn't come ... come out, but ... uh, it was a great experience, a great experience!

Mark Cunningham: Well, I want to, once again, say thank you for doing the interview and thank you for your service.

Mr. Thorney: Well, I thank you for the privilege of ... of speaking to you. I hope it was not too disjointed, uh ...

Mark Cunningham: Naw!

Mr. Thorney: Naw.

Mark Cunningham: No.

Mr. Thorney: You're very kind.

Mark Cunningham: Well, I'm ... I'm a pretty lose interviewer. I ... I kind of let ... let it go where ... where it ... where it goes; that's usually the best way to do it.

Mr. Thorney: Yeah.

Mark Cunningham: I have some ... a few things that I want to get out, but I think we've covered everything I wanted to get. So again, I'm going to go ahead and shut this down.

(end of interview)

FINAL copy

CD – #OH04882 – Mr. Charles E. Thorney

Transcribed by: K. Matras

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