

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Hartzell L. Sherrill

Wharton, Texas

January 10, 2018

Navy Armed Guard

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is January 10, 2018. I am interviewing Mr. Hartzell L. Sherrill by telephone. His phone number is 979-282-2988. His address is 610 Lakeshore Drive, Wharton, Texas, 77488. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

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

Mr. Sherrill:

Well thank you very much, I appreciate that. I was over in Bay City yesterday and I went in to a restaurant there to eat and first thing you know, I had on my World War II cap and I got swarmed like bees on a honey nest. But I enjoy that, I really do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the first thing I need to do is read this agreement with the museum to you to make sure this is okay with you.

Mr. Sherrill:

Okay.

Mr. Misenhimer:

"Agreement Read"

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Sherrill:

That's okay with me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact, we find out that sometimes several years down the road try to get back in contact with a veteran he's moved or something. Do you

have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact if we needed to, to find you?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes, actually I have a son that lives here in this area and he's about five miles from me, and his wife. And I have his telephone number if you'd like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, what's his name?

Mr. Sherrill:

His name is William Sidney Sherrill, he goes by Bill. And he's 979-532-1789.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And he lives there in Wharton?

Mr. Sherrill:

He's here in Wharton.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hopefully we'll never need that but you never know. What is your birthdate?

Mr. Sherrill:

My birthdate is May 26, 1922.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you born?

Mr. Sherrill:

I was born in a little town, it's non-existent now, but I was born in a little town called Weeks, W-e-e-k-s, Lafayette Township, Scott County, Arkansas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Sherrill:

I have two brothers and one sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were either of your brothers in World War II?

Mr. Sherrill:

My brother just younger than me was in, I think he was in for about maybe a couple of years right at the end of World War II. And I'm the oldest of four children and the only one left. He is deceased, natural. He died of leukemia. And my one brother, younger than that, was in Korea and he died of Alzheimer's of all things. And I had a sister that was a part of the group as well and she and her husband were killed in a head on. So that leaves me without any brothers or sisters in the livelihood.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Sorry to hear about all those things.

Mr. Sherrill:

Well it happens and now it's gonna happen to me one of these days because my age keeps adding up.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Sherrill:

My father was James Oscar Sherrill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And your mother?

Mr. Sherrill:

My mother was Ovie, O-v-i-e, Ovie Zella Meeks Sherrill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up during the depression, how did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did that affect you and your family?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well we didn't have much money, we didn't have much of anything really during the depression as others. And we were hard workers, dad was one hard worker and we were farmers and ranchers. And he was able to always have enough food going and we could keep us going and keep us upright. And he was a pretty, pretty honest, pretty honest man. Had a lot of good reputations, which I appreciate. I tried to follow in those footsteps as well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He was a farmer you say?

Mr. Sherrill:

He was a farmer, rancher.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did he own the farm or y'all rented?

Mr. Sherrill:

At that time when I was growing up we were renting it, we were sharecroppers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you had enough to eat then?

Mr. Sherrill:

We had enough to eat, we surely did. A little bit later when I was in the military, when I was in the Navy in World War II, I received a letter on an occasion and I found out and the letter was from my dad, he hardly ever wrote one because his writing wasn't very good and he asked and mom would always do the writing. He wrote me a letter and he told me that he had bought this track of land in Matagorda County, 156.4 acres. We still have that in the family, it's divided up now but into different groups of inheritance, but it's still in Matagorda County.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go to high school?

Mr. Sherrill:

I went to high school in Eagle Lake, Texas.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what year did you graduate there?

Mr. Sherrill:

1940.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what did you do when you graduated?

Mr. Sherrill:

When I graduated I went to a business school first and that was Southwestern Business School, I believe it was on San Jacinto Street in Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then what?

Mr. Sherrill:

After that, after I graduated from the business school I went to work for Houston Land and Trust, it was a banking organization. Of course I was kind of low on the totem pole and didn't make much money but at least I had a job. And that's about the time when we got into World War II, well Pearl Harbor took place and then I resigned from my job at the Land and Trust and I enlisted in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now about Pearl Harbor, how did you hear about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well it came fairly quickly. We didn't have any real good radios or anything like that, but it was something that seemed to be just, everybody seemed to know about that, and everybody was talking about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And when you heard that how did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well it affected me to the extent that I was mad as I could be, you know other people as well. And I decided well if that's the way it's going to be then I'll just go ahead and enlist and see if I can get in the act.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So when did you go into the Navy?

Mr. Sherrill:

I went in, I'd say it was December, I think 27, that was either the enter or the exit. I think it was December 27, 1941.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So just a couple of weeks after Pearl Harbor then?

Mr. Sherrill:

That's correct.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you went into the Navy?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And how did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Sherrill:

It seems like it was something that always fascinated me with those ships and everything. And it seemed like, I guess that's one of the reasons, I didn't want to be a foot soldier, an Army person. And so that's the one reason. The time that I enlisted, I enlisted in the Naval Recruiting that was in the, I think the second floor of the downtown post office in Houston on San Jacinto Street.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Sherrill:

Actually I had desired to go into communication, and I'm going round-about here on this one, but I was sent first in communications, along with about five of us chose that. And we went from there to Los Angeles to a Naval Base and actually it's in Chavez Ravine which is where they had the Dodger Stadium awhile back, Houston came out number one, Astros. But anyway, we went there first and they didn't have enough room for us. We slept on pallets for about three nights and then he said, "Well, we don't have enough room here, we're going to send you on down to San Diego and you can go to boot camp." Well I thought we were going to miss that, but we didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So you had boot camp in San Diego?

Mr. Sherrill:

That's correct. And then following that they sent me back to Los Angeles for the communication school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about boot camp, what all happened in boot camp?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well they seemed, I know it seemed like us fellows that were getting into that, our younger ones, we were learning things that we didn't know existed (*laughing*) so. But we did a lot of marching, we did a lot of rifle shooting. We learned to respect those that needed to be respected and not to call maybe some of the higher ups and commissioned people, not to use the word "Mister", you give them by Admiral or Colonel or whatever. So we learned a lot of stuff. Learned how also, we were taught how to use and fix a bayonet on the rifles and then they had a bag it was hanging down there that we practiced on that. And it kind of boggled my mind because I didn't realize that I would need a rifle with a bayonet while I was aboard ship. But anyway, it was kind of a comical thing for me at that time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have knot tying?

Mr. Sherrill:

Oh, oh, oh, I don't think I had very much of that. Things were moving so rapidly that usually the boot camp and also the communication school was supposed to be about sixteen weeks and as I recall we did not ever make the sixteen weeks. We made about thirteen weeks because things were moving so rapidly at the beginning of World War II that we got hurried through there quite rapidly. I think it was about thirteen weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have swimming?

Mr. Sherrill:

I did not, I did not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything you recall from boot camp that stands out?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well, I don't think there was anything in particular that would just jump out on me right now because it was so new. Well actually one of things I can think about too, we got our shots and we got all our medicals and all of that in boot camp. And one of the things that I recall very distinctly was that they put all us young men, must have been about thirty or forty of us, put us in this one building and we were facing one another and they said, "Okay, strip and leave your shoes on." And I said, "Good Lord, you mean I'm going to be sitting up here all us here naked?" And about that time the pharmacist would start coming down the line and one of them would punch me in the shoulder with one shot and next thing you know I had one on the other side of me. I must have got about a dozen shots at that time and that's very memorable.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did people pass out when they were getting those shots?

Mr. Sherrill:

I didn't see anyone that passed out but I came near to it. Right at the very end and they told us to go ahead and we could get dressed again and to put your shoes on and those items, and one of

the guys that was on the opposite of me, about eight or ten feet from me, he's looking at me, he said, "You're getting white as a sheet and I thought you were gonna just pass out." And when they told me that I could go ahead and get dressed I leaned down and I guess the blood got back into the system and I kind of brightened up, said, "Oh well I didn't pass out, but I almost did."

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your drill instructors pretty tough on you?

Mr. Sherrill:

They kept us pretty busy, they really got the marching and trying learn how to march and how to salute and who to call, you know who to recognize and so forth that were our superiors.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened after boot camp?

Mr. Sherrill:

After boot camp and I completed that phase of my training then I was transferred back from San Diego to Los Angeles and gone back to the building that I had gone to originally for my communication training. I went back there and I entered into the communication school and where I completed that. And that was, I think that was about fifty-three of us in the class. And I graduated number eight in the class of all things.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what all did you study in that school?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well mostly the studying was for visual communication, radio communication was totally out. And visual communication would entail the closest communication would be with semaphore, which we didn't use much of that. But we also, we used the flashing light whether with a big beam or your dot-dash-dot-dash and so forth. And I used that frequently and there's some other types of flashing light that were required at nighttime. And also when we had, if we're in a convoy which we were early on, we'll talk about that in a little bit, but anyway we used the international alphabet flags. And one of the ships was designated as a Commodore of that

particular phase and we kept an eye on that ship constantly. I was the only Naval signalman on the ship that I served on and I was on call 24/7. We kind of kept a close watch on that one ship where the Commodore was and anytime when a flag went up then we had to read that flag and then go to the codebook and see what it said. And going back across the waters there, in the North Atlantic, we had several times that we had to do evasive maneuvers. Well flashing lights worked out pretty good in the daytime, but it was a no-no at night.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you learn the Morse Code?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was it to learn that?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well it wasn't too difficult to learn it, I learned it fairly quickly. And the dot-dash is, I don't know it just came without too much trouble.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long was this communication school?

Mr. Sherrill:

It was, I believe it was thirteen weeks at communication school. Ordinarily it was standard was sixteen weeks, probably it was thirteen weeks in our situation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then after that school then what happened?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well at that point then we started to be sent around to different places. And so the five of us that came from Houston to the communication school when we graduated some went to New Orleans, some went somewheres else, and I was transferred all the way from the West Coast to the East Coast to Brooklyn Armed Guard Center in Brooklyn, New York.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What kind of center was that?

Mr. Sherrill:

It's Armed, it's a Naval Armed Guard Center.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And what did you do there?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well at that point that was really the jumping off place I guess before I went aboard ship. At that time we were prepped for going aboard ship. And I actually as an old country boy, I had never seen a doggone ship. But this ship I was on it was a tanker and it was a maritime ship, in fact all the ships I served on prior to getting into the World War II all the way through, we were losing a lot of ships to submarines, but at least the Merchant Marine was doing that. And as a result Congress passed a law to arm all the merchant ships. And so they put one big gun on the back, I think it was a four inch-50 and they put in one on the bow, which was anti-aircraft gun three-inch-38. And then we had several of the lesser anti-aircraft guns on the ship, on either side.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And you all manned those guns, is that right?

Mr. Sherrill:

That is correct. I did not, my job wasn't on the guns themselves, my job at that point was to be in communications and to cover all of that phase. But if we got into some problems where there was shooting and so forth and maybe my gunner was wounded or killed it was my job, I was trained to operate that gun as well. And so I would just move over, otherwise I would be a loader for that gun.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you get trained on those guns?

Mr. Sherrill:

I got most of my training actually after I got on board ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many people on a ship in Armed Guard?

Mr. Sherrill:

The Armed Guard, they had a gun crew that had one Gunner's Mate that was in charge of the gun crew, I had nothing to do with the gun crew itself. But I think there was twenty-four men in the gun crew, counting the Gunner's Mate. And then I moved into that from time to time as needed. But mainly most of my time was spent on the bridge with the Captain and the deck officers going back and forth because if a message came through I would need to be up there on the bridge with everybody to read the message then pass it along to the Captain.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the Captain and all those people they were all civilians, is that right?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And the Armed Guard were the only military on?

Mr. Sherrill:

The maritime had about roughly fifty or fifty-five men that would be operating the ship itself. And then the gun crew itself would have been, I think twenty-four in the gun crew and one Gunner's Mate that would be in charge.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, about twenty-five total?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your first trip on that?

Mr. Sherrill:

My first trip when I went aboard that ship we had to get acclimated to the ship and I'd never

been on a ship in my life, I've been on boats, little boats, fishing boats. But went aboard that ship and we got acquainted with every item on there that we could, where your quarters were, where my station would be and all of that. And then my first ship was a tanker, it was a slow rascal. I bet you I could of probably walked as fast as it was going. But it was kind of scary because the submarines were working out in, along the coast and in the Gulf. And so we had to be very, very careful and be on the alert all the time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the name of that ship?

Mr. Sherrill:

Hadnot, SS H-a-d-n-o-t, *Hadnot*. Well it was classified as I recall, U.S. Naval Merchant Vessel, *SS Hadnot*.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did it have a number?

Mr. Sherrill:

I don't recall, it may have had a number but I don't recall that I've ever, ever remember it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How big a ship was that?

Mr. Sherrill:

It was probably around four hundred, maybe a little over four hundred, four hundred to four twenty-five maybe. It wasn't a big one and it was an old one. And it probably would go maybe ten, twelve knots and that's not very fast for a ship. We went around, we started in Brooklyn, went out right at the harbor there in New York. And we went parallel to the East Coast and came on down into the Florida Keys and then to the right got over into the Gulf of Mexico. And we were on the alert all the time, but we didn't see any of the enemy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on your way down was your ship loaded or empty?

Mr. Sherrill:

It was, let me see, it was empty. We went down there and we loaded up while we were down there. And I think it was one of the lesser ones, I don't recall now the exact number of barrels that it had, but seemed like it may have been as many as eighty or ninety thousand barrels.

Whereas the larger ships I was on later on would have over a hundred.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where did you pick up this oil at?

Mr. Sherrill:

We went into the Caribbean and Aruba and Curacao had some Dutch refineries. And we, I think we got most of our fuel at that point. And it wasn't very far, many miles by water on over to Columbia. And there was one spot over there that we were able to get fuel over there as well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went to those three places this first trip then? Then what happened?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well after that we came back and I don't remember, it seemed like we came back from being in the Gulf and we came back, I believe we came back to Norfolk. And then I was transferred to another ship. I was on about four or five ships altogether during my tour.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long did it take you to leave from Brooklyn down to Curacao?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I'll tell you, it was a slow doggone ship. And like I say it was about ten or twelve knots and that's not very much. But anyway it would take us about twelve to, I don't know maybe twelve to fourteen days to go on down to that point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About two weeks.

Mr. Sherrill:

Something like that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you came back to Brooklyn or where did you come back to?

Mr. Sherrill:

We came back, I believe instead of coming back to Norfolk I think we came back to Baltimore. And at that point I had a few days leave from the ship and returning back to the ship then I was assigned to another ship. So I think altogether I was in about four, maybe four or five ships.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was your second ship and where did you go to on it?

Mr. Sherrill:

The second ship, let's see I think I've got it here somewhere. Was a tanker also and I had that name here right before me. It was a tanker that was a little bit bigger, I think we had about somewhere close to ninety to hundred thousand barrels of fuel.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on your first trip were you ever threatened by German submarines?

Mr. Sherrill:

The only time that I saw a periscope was actually on that first trip that we took out on that first ship, on the *Hadnot*. And we got into, around the Keys and we moved on down just a few miles down and I looked out towards the shore line and maybe a mile or so out I saw this periscope, it was skimming through the water. And there was another ship that was a service ship that was actually, they had a flag hoist up and it said, "Do not fire, friendly submarine on training mission." And that kind of relieved my mind a little bit there when I learned that it was one of ours that was operating. But I had a good friend that actually his ship was torpedoed in the English Channel. And he was injured rather badly and he lived here right here in this area for a number of years until he passed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on your second ship where did you go to then with it?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well on the second ship I think we loaded up and we went across from the Caribbean. We went

across to the Mediterranean. And we went into the Mediterranean and we went to Oran, let me think a minute, Oran, Algiers, North Africa. And that's where we tied up there and we discharged that fuel. That's along about the time that things were getting kind of red hot in the African Desert. They needed all the fuel they good get.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did that ship get loaded up at?

Mr. Sherrill:

We loaded at, I think we were at either Aruba or Curacao.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On the second ship you went back to Aruba or Curacao, got loaded up.

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then you went over to the Mediterranean?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now how fast was this ship?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well it was probably, it wasn't any speed demon, but it was probably around fifteen, sixteen knots.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How long did it take you to wind up in Oran?

Mr. Sherrill:

I'll tell you it's a long distance across that dadgum water, there's a lot of it out there I'll tell you what I didn't think we'd ever get there. But it's from the Caribbean it took us across the, we were still in the Northern Hemisphere. It took us about twenty, twenty-one days to go across, to

finally get into the Mediterranean, also down to Oran.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now were you in a convoy on that trip?

Mr. Sherrill:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

By yourself?

Mr. Sherrill:

The only time that I was in a convoy is a little bit later when we prepared for the invasion at Normandy. But we of all things, we never had an escort. We travelled alone of all things, that's always scary. So we were just extremely fortunate that we didn't run into something that was going to sink us, but we were lucky I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On your second trip were you ever threatened by German submarines?

Mr. Sherrill:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So on both the first two trips you never saw any German submarines?

Mr. Sherrill:

Actually the only time that I saw a periscope was on that first trip out and we moved into the Gulf of Mexico and that's the one submarine was on training mission. And that's the only time, it kind of scared me pretty badly because I looked out there and I saw that periscope and I turned to the Captain. I pointed out there and I said, "There's a submarine! There's a periscope!" And the Captain he kind of chuckled a little bit and saw I was about to have a heart attack. And he said, "Why don't you just read the flag hoist that's on that escort there and look it up in the code book." And so that's what I did, I looked up the international code flags and looked it up in the code book. And it said, "Do not fire, friendly submarine on training mission, stay clear."

(Laughter) So that relieved our minds.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now after you went to Algiers where did you go from there then?

Mr. Sherrill:

We came back to, I think we came back maybe to Baltimore or somewhere and I got on another ship that was a more of a cargo type ship rather than a tanker. And this time we took a trip to get over into the Pacific actually. We left Baltimore and we were a supply ship so to speak and we had all of our supplies and such as that loaded on and we left there. We went into the Gulf and we went to Panama and in the Panama Canal went across into the Pacific and at that point we moved into Pacific waters and then we kept going. And the first stop of aid was in Wellington, New Zealand. And we didn't run into any encounters of any kind, we just stay on the alert all the time. And then from Wellington, New Zealand we entered the Tasman Sea and moved around in between Australia and Tasmania to the other side, the southwestern side of Australia. I think the name of that port was Perth, P-e-r-t-h, I think. And we were there for a short period of time leaving supplies and also taking on our own personal supplies for our needs. And we left there and we went across the Indian Ocean to the next stop, we ended up in Sri Lanka. And we stopped there for a period of time and discharged whatever their needs were. And then a few days later we went a little bit further on to Bombay, India. And we were there a few days and trading out what they needed and what we needed. And then from there we went on into the Persian Gulf. And we stopped there in the Persian Gulf, we were a little bit of short of entering in to Iraq. Because other ships that were waiting and there's one body of water. As I recall as I look at some of my Bible history that there was two rivers that came down from along about Turkey, that one of the rivers was Tigris and one was Euphrates. And somewhere before they got down to the Persian Gulf they came together as one body of water and that's where we went up that body. And we went up to a place where they had docking and we were able to go in there and then discharge the equipment that we had for that part.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And then what happened?

Mr. Sherrill:

Then from that point then we came on back and I guess we kind of kept going from one place to the other taking supplies that were needed. I believe that we were still on that same ship when we came back from the Persian Gulf. And I think that river was called the Shatt-al-Arab, and that may or may not be correct. But anyway, when we left there we came back through the Persian Gulf and we came on back down and I believe at this time we came across and Tasmania was down below, south of Australia. And we went in there for a period of time and we were able to supply our own personal needs as well as picking up other needs that needed to be transported to other points that were up in the Solomon Islands. And so we left, went up there through the Tasman Sea one more time and this time we were up in the area of Eniwetok. And we were moving in one direction away from the action that was taking place behind us. And there was a plane, one of the Naval planes, it was a two-place, pilot, radio gunner. And that plane must have been hit because they ejected and one of the chutes came down. We didn't see the action as it happened, but we knew something was happening and then we knew it truly did happen because this pilot ejected and he was floating down, he hit the water about three hundred feet from our ship. And a lifeboat was launched immediately and they picked him up and brought him safely back. But the radio gunner, we never did find him. And so when we came back to the ship and I went up to my duty station on the bridge and I could see a flashing light way off in the distance. And there was a submarine that was trying to get our attention and wanted to know if we were successful in picking up the crew. And I responded, I was told to respond, "Yes we did, but we couldn't find the radio gunner." And so they came back at me one more time and said, "Congratulations, you did a good job." And so that's the last time we saw that or had any conversation there with that situation.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well another item that, I'm trying to think, I think I got on one more, oh I know I did get on one more ship. I was transferred from the East Coast, I got transferred a lot and mostly it's by train, that's a slow train to nowhere. But I came back in, I had a few days of leave. And when I came back then they said okay we're sending you to the West Coast. And my records and my orders and so forth ended up in Treasure Island at San Francisco. And from that point then I was sent on up the coastline, I was up at Portland, Oregon. And there was a receiving station where you'd be looking for orders to move to a new location. And there was a new ship that was being commissioned in Seattle. And it was a, called it a Victory class ship. And so I was one of those that was sent up to be on that ship. And I continued the signalman communication portion all the way through on every ship I was on. And so I was put on that ship and the thing that, I got to checking around and it was new ship, first time out. And it was about eighteen, twenty knots, it travelled pretty good. And we got ready to leave and I got to looking around, I said, "Good Lord, this thing got ammunition on it." And so they had loaded that thing with all the ammo you could put on anything. And there's all kinds of ammo. And so we headed out and our destination was to be Okinawa. And that wasn't a very good thought because Okinawa was being invaded about that time. And so about three days out before we reached Okinawa we received orders to change course and go on down to Saipan, which had already been invaded and was under control of the U.S. personnel, had it under control. So we went on down there. And then since we were, some of us were much larger and what we were carrying they needed that ammo over in Okinawa. And so several LSTs came along side and we discharged into each one of those as they could carry. We carried so much. And it took two or three of those LSTs to take this cargo on over to Okinawa. And then we headed back to the States again. And this time we were supposed to go into San Francisco. And what we learned as we got back to that area, the Bay Bridge was visible, we go under the Bay Bridge and we continued on up a few more miles and there was an ammunition depot called, I think it was Cape Chicago, it's got a Chicago in the name, I don't recall now. But anyway, we went in there and we tied up and started receiving more ammo to be loaded on to us for another trip. And so I'll tell you, I don't know we must

have been leading a charmed life because we didn't have any real problems when we would leave one point and go to another point. But thank God for that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now that number three trip, how long was that?

Mr. Sherrill:

The one over to, with the new ship? It was probably about sixteen, seventeen days. But the others would have taken probably at least you'd have to add about another week to it, because some of those of others that were slower but they would last about sixteen, seventeen days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm talking about your number three trip, that's where you went ..., Baltimore?

Mr. Sherrill:

That would be number three or number four ship. When we were in Okinawa and then it was, shortly we finally went back to Okinawa one more time. And that was about, we got there about three or four days after those two "A" bombs were dropped on Japan, Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The time we left going through the canal, we could do that in just a few hours going through the canal. It was a little bit slow because you're going through the locks to get into the canal and then you go through the locks to get out of the canal when you're on the Pacific side. So that would have been probably about two weeks to go from there on over to ..., New Zealand.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You went all down to New Zealand and everywhere like that, right?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That should have been several months probably, I'm not sure.

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I'll tell you what, we spent a lot of time on the water. And I used to think about this one poem that we had in English in high school, it was "Water, water everywhere and not a drop to

drink.” So we saw plenty of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was it like going through the Panama Canal?

Mr. Sherrill:

That was a real experience, I'd heard about that. And I never had any real reason to learn much about it, but when we got there we learned that the Panama Canal on the Caribbean side had three locks. And then there was a rail up above and parallel to that, I think they call that a mule or a donkey. They'd tie it on to that when you come in. In order to get into the first lock we would be anchored to, and at high tide, then we would go on in. The gate would open, we would go in on high tide. They would close the gate behind us and then they'd start pumping water in that compartment. And it would raise our level up so that we could go in to the next compartment. And do that until we could go into the next compartment and on out into the Panama Canal proper. Quite an experience.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say there was a fifth trip, or just was four of them all of them?

Mr. Sherrill:

Let's see we made two trips with ammo. I don't remember whether it was four or five trips. I think we may have had five trips.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you know about how long you spent on the sea altogether on ships?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well we, as far as the total amount for every ship and I'm just thinking of that one ship there that comes to mind right now. The name of that one ship that was the fastest . . .

(End of side one of tape.)

(Beginning of side two of tape.)

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, I missed part of that last, what did you say there at the last?

Mr. Sherrill:

The name of that last ship that I was talking about?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Colgate Victory, right?

Mr. Sherrill:

The name was, well it was classified, all of the ships that I was on under the Naval names they called it the U.S. Navy Armed Guard SS. That would be the maritime designated, SS Colgate Victory.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now did you go to Japan?

Mr. Sherrill:

I didn't get to Japan at all. And sorry to say I didn't get to go much of anyplace else except in those areas down there. We wanted to go to Honolulu and over in there but that didn't work out, never.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you mentioned the atomic bombs being dropped, where were you when you heard about those?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I didn't hear about those until after we got back to Okinawa, we anchored at Naha. And then we learned that those two bombs had been dropped. And we were, at that point as I recall we were a scant three hundred and fifty miles from the Japanese mainland. But that's when the Japanese then gave up and capitulated.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now where were you when Japan surrendered? That was August the 14th.

Mr. Sherrill:

We had left, in fact I know we had left because something else of great importance took place about the time, shortly after those bombs had dropped. We got orders to leave Okinawa and

head out to sea. And I thought, what in the world? And it was a typhoon that came right through the area where we were. And if we had stayed there in that one spot in Okinawa, which I believe the name of that city along there was Naha. And if we had stayed there we'd have either been sunk or we'd have been grounded, one or the other. And once we went out to sea I wasn't sure we were going to make it even then. But I'll tell you what those waves were something else. You're up and down, over almost. And the ship would be rolling in the water and we were also, someone had said the rule of thumb is if you ever turn over to the left or right more than forty-five degrees it will not right itself again. And so since I was on the bridge and I saw the indicators and I'd see it get on to forty and forty-one and forty-two and it would quiver a little bit and finally it dropped back. So we got through that, but I'll tell you what other ships didn't. Many of them did not.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was that the only typhoon you were in?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, that was really bad.

Mr. Sherrill:

I'll tell you what that was enough, that was more than enough.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Would that have been in October or was that before that?

Mr. Sherrill:

I think it was along about in October.

Mr. Misenhimer:

October the 9th of '45 it was what they called typhoon Louise at Okinawa. That was a bad one, that's the one you're talking about I'm sure.

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes. I'll tell you what I have one item that I think I need to go ahead and plug in somewhere. This one, you'll have to forgive me for this, but I didn't get Normandy invasion in this, what I told you earlier.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Oh, go ahead.

Mr. Sherrill:

So the ship that I was on then was a transport, a converted transport, cargo transport. And also we had Navy personnel and we had soldiers and such as that. And we had quite a lot of equipment. And we left the New York Harbor in April of 1944 headed to the English Isles. And we were in a one hundred ship convoy. And that was pretty frightening going that many. We were told, I was able to go with the Captain to the convoy conference, and we were told that we could expect losses of ten percent. And I'm thinking ten percent, that's ten ships. Which one of those will I be on? But we didn't lose a single ship but we did have to make emergency maneuvers three different times. And submarines were really bad. And we had destroyer escorts that were really super. They dropped lots of depth charges and kept us safe. We finally got on in to the English Isles and then at that point we began to disperse. And our dispersal took us to Glasgow, Scotland where we went into the dry dock area. And we had some equipment on there that had to be taken off and we had others that needed to be kind of beefed up. And we took on supplies and such as that getting ready. And then we had to go ashore and take training with, in case we were gassed, gas masks and all of that. And then mustard gas and they gave us a lot of training on that thing, thank goodness we didn't have to use that, but never the less that was just part of it. But then after we did that we moved up to northern part of Scotland where there was anchorage up there, a lot of ships were there. And at the time of getting ready for the invasion at Normandy, our ship was to go in to Omaha Beach, and so we went in, our group went in. There were two columns and we were the second ship in the right hand column. And we went in to a certain point and then the little landing craft would be coming along side and they would then take the personnel, Navy personnel that were on our ship. They'd get down on there and they'd

head to the beach. And there's no telling how many were lost in that encounter, but we lost a lot of men there at that beachhead.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How close were you to the land?

Mr. Sherrill:

We were probably less than a mile from the land and as I recall the battleship *Texas* was cruising off shore parallel to the shoreline and firing their guns at those pillboxes up there on the cliff. So that brings back a lot of memories too.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever shot at by German guns there?

Mr. Sherrill:

We were bombed in the, right at the beginning of the invasion. And at night they would come over and then our guns became active as well. Of course I never did have to be a part of the gun crew. At that point I was able to do that if my gunner was killed, but I didn't ever have to do that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Sherrill:

Oh golly, I think I've been around the world twice now (*laughter*). Oh I got quite an experience for an old country boy that never had been anywhere. Now you've really got a history to talk about. I learned a lot about the world, I got a free geography lesson.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've got some questions for you. How was the morale on your various ships?

Mr. Sherrill:

Our morale was great, it was great. We had no problems at all with that part of it in our particular ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April the 12th of 1945 President Roosevelt died, did you all hear about that?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

And where were you then?

Mr. Sherrill:

I think we were out in the Pacific somewhere, but I couldn't, right now I couldn't recall exactly where it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When y'all heard about that what reaction did people have?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I think we were pretty excited about it and we couldn't hardly believe it. But he'd been kind of having health problems all along, but thank goodness, he was a great man.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in the Pacific did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Sherrill:

I never did, but I did hear of her and knew of that by others that were telling me about it. But I don't think I ever heard her.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when y'all crossed the equator did you have any kind of a ceremony then?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well luckily, some of the ships did and some of our friends that were going across the equator, they got in that little deal. But actually our ship was a kind of small personnel, number of personnel. And we never did, I never did get involved with that. They called it, what do you call it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

On May the 8th of '45 Germany surrendered, did y'all hear about that?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Any kind of a celebration?

Mr. Sherrill:

Absolutely.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well, of course there's not much you can do on a ship when you're out at water like that. But you just have to say oh boy, we got through the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you heard about the atomic bombs what reaction did people have to that?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well, I had no concept in my mind as to exactly what one of them looked like or the damage that it would do until after I learned the damage that was reported and I can't believe that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then August the 15th of '45 Japan surrendered, did you have a celebration then?

Mr. Sherrill:

Actually in the ships that I served on probably the celebration are taken more on the true Naval ships and the Admirals and those folks than ours. But we knew about it and we congratulated about it and all that. But we didn't have any real celebration per se that I recall.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So then when did you get discharged?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well actually from the time when we were in Okinawa, we came back across and went back into the States. And then we left the ship, I'm trying to remember, we left the ship and actually they

put us on a train I believe. We were supposed to go into Frisco but Frisco didn't have docking space for us and we had to go into San Diego and the Marine base there. So at that point that's where we left the ship and took all of our gear with us. And then we stayed there two or three days until they put us on a train. And they said, "Okay, you're headed home." And so, I said that's like a slow train to somewhere, but it was slow, I didn't think we'd ever get there but we finally got there. And once we got into Houston and the train pulled into the station there, right about where the stadium is right now, NRG stadium, and we were backing in. And then we were taken off of the train, we had transportation to Camp Wallace, which is near the Galveston area. And that's where we were mustered out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date was that?

Mr. Sherrill:

That would have been about the 13th or 14th I believe of December 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now when you got out did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I'll tell you what, my father had bought this property in Matagorda county, five hundred plus acres. And since he was a farmer and rancher I worked with him for a period of time. I didn't have transportation, he had a truck but that wasn't much good for me. But I finally was able due to his pull of the Ford Dealership, I was able to get a new 1946 Ford two-door sedan. I bought that rascal for \$1180.77. And on the way of coming back into the town, just before we left going over to Camp Wallace, I must mention one other thing. I stayed in contact, the lady that I met prior to going into the Navy, in fact she was with me when I left on the first trip out from Houston by train. And was Vera Marie Rather who became my wife, became a Sherrill. She was waiting in the station at the time that we were backing in and I was standing on the side of one of the steps of the train that I was in. And I was looking way in the distance and I could see some lady and I said, "That looks like my girlfriend." Sure enough when we got on down

there a little bit closer then I actually jumped off, we were moving slowly and I just jumped off and I started running. And once I got down there to the gate I picked her up and we hugged and I slung her, you know we went around and around and around. I said, "Golly, great we're back home now." And we got married a few weeks after that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill for anything when you got out?

Mr. Sherrill:

I did, I entered the, there was a college, Wharton County Junior College was in progress and I went there for the first two years. And then I transferred to the University of Houston and I graduated University of Houston.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your outfit?

Mr. Sherrill:

No, there's a few of the people that I was with that lived in the Houston area. And I think actually since, I'm almost 96 and I think I've outlived all the rest of those guys. I don't think I've seen any of those guys. Over in Eagle Lake there's two or three or four of them that were in the Army Air Force and each one of those that were close friends and like classmates, they were shot down and so they lost their lives. But anyway, we lost one man this past week that was in Okinawa, was stationed there. And I don't know, you know I've been very extremely fortunate, the V.A. has been extremely good to me. And I have taken my medical and my medications, and everything that's needed and I'm still, I just finished taking a medical checkup recently. And everything, I'm still just walking upright and not having any problems and others are, you know falling and all that kind of stuff. I'll be 96 in May and so golly. I lost my wife about six years ago, we'd been married 66 years. I've been living alone, I'm actually I'm legally blind. I have a paid driver and I also have a paid person that comes, I don't have anybody living with me, but they'll come to clean my house and maybe cook something or you know something like that. But other than that I've been extremely lucky from that standpoint. And I just wish that I still

had my wife, we had a great family and she was a great lady. And I married in, I probably I think I said this, her name was Vera Marie Rather, so I married into the Rather clan. And she is Dan Rather's aunt, which makes me his uncle I guess.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Sherrill:

Signalman 2nd Class. I was up for 1st Class at the time and I never did go ahead and follow through.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now were you in any particular unit or what unit were you in, what was it called?

Mr. Sherrill:

No, I was in just, the only way to call it a unit would be the type of service that each of us in this group, which it was called the Armed Guard. And we were the ones that were chosen for that particular phase of each, each ship had a crew of twenty-four men, on guard gunners, and they had one signalman. I never did know hardly any of those. Once in a while we'd be in the harbor in South Hampton or somewhere like that, and I'd get the semaphore flags out and I'd start flashing them around and I'd begin a conversation with some other signalman from another ship. But I don't think I have any connection with hardly anybody, especially in these last few years, it's been a long time. Some of the guys that I was close to are gone long before, I'm still around.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Sherrill:

I don't have any real special medals other than the medals that were given in the invasion and the various ones that were akin to that. And I don't have, I have, my two boys were in Vietnam and my younger of the two boys come home with several medals, both of them did. And my younger boy came home with a purple heart. And he's living in Wharton with me. He's the one that I gave you his contact, William Sidney Sherrill.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about Battle Stars, did you get any Battle Stars?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes, I did, Okinawa. Not Okinawa but Invasion of Normandy, Omaha Beach.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got one Battle Star then?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes, just one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.?

Mr. Sherrill:

I have, about two or three years ago I went on Honor Flight to Washington, D.C. from Houston. And it was a terrific, terrific flight. My daughter, she is now 62, she was my escort. It was a great trip, just a great honor. We have some of the vets here in Wharton, two of them that physically that are not well, they are both 99 years old. And they will be a 100 in February, that's next month isn't it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Sherrill:

I don't have any, well I have some things that I got in different places. Maybe something that I got, I got a table that's made out of teak, it's carved and so forth, legs that have like elephant trunks, and I got that in Bombay. And I had some others that I got in one of the islands. I got just a few things like that, so there's nothing that was great in the collection.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows anywhere?

Mr. Sherrill:

I did. But I did most of those after I was back in the States or when we were there either in

between going or coming. And we did see several of those shows that were there and it was quite interesting. Red Skelton was one, he was a character.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Sherrill:

Yes, the Red Cross, I didn't have any particular need but they were kind to me and others that were there. And they helped any way they could. If they saw a need, they tried to help take care of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's all the questions I have, unless you've thought of something else.

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I'm just about run out I believe. I almost forgot about that invasion at Normandy because at the invasion at Normandy, that was the Omaha Beach, we were back and forth across the channel about fifteen times. Then we went to the next beach down would be Utah. And then after things kind of moved the Germans back away, so it was safe, we went up the Seine river about half way to Paris to Rouen. And we were there for a short period of time before we finally headed back, back to wherever. A lot of these things I can't remember exactly when. I'll tell you what I have, my wife and my kids urged me for a long time to write about my experiences. And so after we moved down, we've been down here about twenty years, I started out in Wharton many years, 1927 when I was five years old. And so it's just like going back and forth. But anyway, I finally got started writing that with no notes, just memory. And I have about fifty, sixty pages that I've written. And I wrote that primarily for my children and for my wife and any of my kin that are interested in it. In fact one of the ladies here in Wharton who is Pat Blair is a member of the D.A.R. and she interviewed me with a DVD. And she said that she wanted a copy of my write up as well as that copy of that DVD, which I have both of them here. But she was going to send that to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. for records. And about three or four months later I got a note from the library telling me that it had been received and

had it cataloged there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well Hartzell, I want to thank you again for your time today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Sherrill:

Well I feel honored you asked me to share my service and records, I didn't get in to any of the real battle stuff. I guess my younger son was in the Army and he was in charge of a search and destroy group in the DMZ and that's where he was wounded. And then the older boy, he was in Headquarters Company and he didn't have any problems you know. But my younger son, actually I'll tell you my younger son is 68 years old, my older son is 70 years old. I'm an old codger. Anyway I appreciate all of this and I'll look forward to getting a copy of the transcript.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It may be a couple or three months like I say, we're all volunteers. Thanks again for your time today and for your service to our country.

Mr. Sherrill:

Well thank you for calling me up to get me involved in this. I have ended up in several different situations here in Wharton. There's a lady here in Wharton, the Wharton paper that writes an article and interviews veterans, or soldiers, or Naval man, war stories. And so she's interviewed me two or three times and I've got some good write ups from her, Sarah Huggins.

(End of Interview.)

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