

Edward Morrissey Oral History Interview

QUAVERLY ROTHENBERG: This is Quaverly Rothenberg. Today's date is February 8th, 2018. I'm interviewing Ed Morrissey in his home in Florence, Massachusetts. This interview is being conducted for the National Museum of the Pacific War. So, Mr. Morrissey, if you wouldn't mind starting with telling me a little bit about your childhood... Where you were born...

EDWARD MORRISSEY: Okay. Well, I was born in Florence, Mass. And I've been here ever since. And I'm ninety-six years old. I've lived here and there, with my folks. I'll start off with the part that I can tell you about: what happened.

QR: Oh, well, if you wouldn't mind, to keep it in chronology, how about how you ended up in the service?

EM: Well, this is what I'll tell you.

QR: Great; I'm all ears.

EM: I was working in John Burgett's [ph. sp.] gas station, where that new building is, right in the center of Florence. I was pumping gas there on a Sunday. And there was four of us there. We were just talking, jabbering. And that's when World War II was declared.

QR: December 7th.

EM: That day. Of the four guys, three of them guys were able to go in the service. So, within two weeks, they were gone. But I couldn't go, because I was six months short of the age. So, as soon as the age came, in May of the same year, 1942, my friend and I went down and joined the Navy. We went from Springfield to Newport, Rhode Island. And after we were there quite a while, I left there and went to Noroton Heights, Connecticut.

QR: Newport was your basic training?

EM: Yeah. Well, boot camp, evidently.

QR: (off-topic; dialogue not transcribed) Okay, so from Newport you went to...

EM: To Noroton Heights, Connecticut. There was an old armory there. And they had a cook and baker school there. So I spent three months there, learning cooking, baking...

QR: Did you volunteer for that?

EM: No, no.

QR: How do you think you got chosen for that?

EM: They sent you there. They picked a group out of 90 of us that enlisted that day.

QR: Any idea why they chose you?

EM: No, no. They just picked somebody to go, you know what I mean? Some went there, and some went other places. So, I spent three months there, learning cook and baker school, which I enjoyed. It was small, not a huge thing. I left there and I went to Bainbridge, Maryland, the Naval base at Bainbridge, Maryland, which they had just started to build. There was only one building on that place when I went there. And when I left there, later on -- I was there for quite a while. Worked in the kitchen, learned, and met a lot of good guys. Some guys that were in World War II before and had sunken their ship, they brought them in there to rehab.

QR: So, you'd say that was your first assignment, working in the kitchen there?

EM: Yeah.

QR: What were you doing there, just cooking?

EM: Cooking, yeah.

QR: Were you also doing any kitchen service, dinner service?

EM: No, mostly cooking. And then they had six chow lines, because they were feeding over 10,000 there.

QR: So, guys were coming back from the war, and you got to know them?

EM: Some of them came back from the war, yeah.

QR: Some of those stories were probably not too comforting.

EM: Well, they weren't, but the guys were good. They were good guys, real good guys. And I was much younger than them. So that's where I ended up, for quite a while.

QR: I guess those guys would have been coming in from the Atlantic.

EM: They came right from near Japan.

QR: No? From the Pacific? Wow.

EM: Yeah. There was three ships that got shot down by the Japs.

QR: Do you know when about this was?

EM: Well, it had to be in '42, sometime in '42.

QR: And which ships were the guys on? Do you remember?

EM: Well, I can't remember the name now. One was the Vincent. It was three ships that they lost there that day, plus others, because they had so many other ships that were sunk there in another part of the time.

QR: Was there a hospital there?

EM: No, no.

QR: So everybody there was able-bodied.

EM: Yeah. Well, they built a hospital at Bainbridge after they had gone there. And I moved from one building to the next, because we were feeding 10,000 guys at lunch, in four mess halls. But it was a thing that was built up.

QR: What were your barracks like there?

EM: The barracks were upstairs, in the kitchens. So you just came down the stairs and you were right in the galley: not in the kitchen; in the galley. So, I stayed there for quite a while. Then I got transferred from there to Philadelphia Navy Yard. And I was only at the Navy Yard probably a month or six weeks. And they were building a new ship in Pittsburgh, an LST. And that's where we went out. We stayed at the Carnegie Tech College, I believe it is, out there in Pittsburgh.

QR: So you're a plank-owner.

EM: Yeah.

QR: Do you remember the number of your LST?

EM: Yeah.

QR: What is it?

EM: 661.

QR: I got some photos there I'll show you. So, we stayed there about six or eight weeks. They were finishing up. Then we went down the Mississippi River, all the way into New Orleans. And we stayed in New Orleans for about a month. And we loaded a ship with food and picked up different sailors, new guys, more guys. We left there, went across the Panama Canal --

QR: Interesting. That must've been quite a sight to see.

EM: Yeah, that was quite a thing, to go up in the air. And then they let the water out and you come down.

QR: Sure. Was it pretty packed there? A lot of ships, at the time?

EM: Well, they would come and go, because they didn't want to go way down around in the south and come up. This way, they made it across there in one day.

QR: Did you have your full complement at the time? Over 100 people or so?

EM: We had 160, all the time we were there, and when I was on it -- matter of fact, when we got off of it. So, we went out there. And when we got out there, we had visited several islands: Eniwetok Island and Saipan, Guam, Tinian, and several other ones.

QR: Those were secured by the time you got there?

EM: No. We were transporting people from one island to the next, so they could live, because they had nothing. The people had nothing there.

QR: Oh, the natives?

EM: Natives.

QR: Wow, so you encountered a lot of Pacific Islanders.

EM: Yeah.

QR: That's interesting. Did you get a chance to talk to any of them?

EM: Well, they didn't talk too much. They were there, but they wouldn't talk.

QR: Were they in pretty bad shape? Hungry?

EM: Well, there were a lot of young ones, young people, and some older ones. But not really interested in talking. A few would talk. But most of them would just sit there. So, we'd move them to one island, and then move somebody else onto another island. We were there at Saipan, the invasion of Saipan. We got there right after it was invaded. And they built an airbase there.

QR: So, in the summer of '44?

EM: Yeah. So, that's where we went out. We were there for a long time. And we stayed there for quite some time. Then we left there, and we went from there to Guam. Hung around Guam a while. We were making different little trips and moving things around.

QR: Do you want to tell me anything about the invasion of Saipan, before we leave it?

EM: The invasion of Saipan was done before we got there.

QR: So it was secure, and you're just transporting the Chamorro people.

EM: Yeah. And then we were getting ready to go to the Palau Islands.

QR: Did you know that you were heading there, at the time?

EM: Oh, yeah. We were there over four weeks, while they were bombing and shelling at Palau Islands.

QR: What were you doing during those four weeks?

EM: Just sitting out there, watching them. The battleships, five battleships, were out beyond us. And they would shoot right over us. You could see the big shells going over us, like a bushel basket, hitting the area.

QR: That would've been the Pennsylvania, Maryland, Mississippi... Now, what did you have on board? Did you know?

EM: We had loaded in Hawaii, with all kinds of equipment: bulldozers and backhoes and scrapers and all this.

QR: Did you have Seabees on board? Were you transporting any Seabees? Construction battalions?

EM: No, no. When we got out there, these guys all came by plane and landed by plane. And then they got on these trips into the island. And we lost a lot of men there.

QR: So you were waiting four weeks during the bombardment, which wasn't very effective, because the guys were all in the honeycomb tunnels.

EM: Oh, yeah.

QR: But you didn't know that, from the ship; as far as you knew, the bombardment was successful, and it was going to be an okay landing.

EM: Yeah. So that's what happened there. So, we hung around there quite a while. And we did go from one island to another, transporting people to a better island, where they had better conditions and things like that. And we got up near Japan. And there was two or three destroyers there. And we were just flat-bottom boats. So, one of the guys on a destroyer hollered over, with their equipment. They used to have signals, you know. And he says, "Get the hell out of here; this place is loaded with bombs, sunken bombs."

QR: Mines.

EM: So we got out of there. We ended back at Saipan. And we stayed at Saipan for a long time. We used to go and be able to get stores, food and stuff, that they would fly in. There were quite a few ships, what would be loading. And

then the big 29s were shelling Japan. And they used to go out every day at four o'clock. You'd see them. Not one: 50 of them. And they would go to Japan and bomb Japan. And they'd be coming back at four o'clock in the morning.

QR: Whereabouts do you think you were?

EM: We were in Saipan.

QR: You were in Saipan. You could see all that?

EM: The airport was there.

QR: When you were at Palau, you didn't run out of food to feed the guys? I mean, you stayed there longer than you thought you would.

EM: No, no.

QR: You were prepared?

EM: We had plenty of food.

QR: And you didn't have any -- besides seeing these big mortars and everything, you felt pretty safe where you were?

EM: Oh, yeah. We were down near the shore. The Japs were way inland, because our guys had chased them guys in. They'd chased them into the small airport that they had and killed all of them.

QR: And you weren't taking any wounded on, or anything like that?

EM: No, no.

QR: So a very low-action place for you.

EM: Yeah.

QR: That's good. So then you went to Japan. They told you to get out of the water because there were mines. So where did you guys go? That's when you went back to Saipan?

EM: Yeah.

QR: And that was secure and safe.

EM: We stayed there for a long while. We used to go in there and play baseball with some of the guys. You had to do something or you'd go wacky looking at each other all day long.

QR: Did your officers play with you guys, too?

EM: Not too much.

QR: Just the guys. How were your officers, in general?

EM: Well, we had a couple good and a couple bad. We had a good captain. He was a super guy.

QR: What was his name? Do you remember his name?

EM: McAyfee [ph. sp.]. His name is here somewhere, on one of these things. (off-topic; dialogue not transcribed) He was from down in, I think, Pennsylvania somewhere.

QR: What did you like about him?

EM: Well, he was young and he was good. He knew what he had to do, and that's what he did. And he got us out of a lot of scrapes, where we could have got into trouble. We were going to get some prisoners of war out of Keel [ph. sp.] Naval Base, the largest naval base in Japan. And there was three LSTs and a hospital ship and one destroyer. And we got into a storm that night -- and I mean a storm!

QR: Typhoon.

EM: Typhoon. And we lost two of the LSTs. But we didn't lose ours. It broached up on the shore.

QR: The other two? You got broached?

EM: No, we didn't; they did. And the reason we didn't get broached: our captain was following a hospital ship around all night. It was lit up. And he followed and followed. And the aircraft carrier lost all their planes. And the guys were trying to get the planes off of the main deck, get them down. And we lost a lot of guys there.

QR: Because of the storm and then also enemy fire?

EM: No, no. No enemy fire at all.

QR: Was this after V-J Day?

EM: No, this was way before that. So, they were bringing them out. The small boats were bringing them out, some of them that morning. And they were playing the Star-Spangled Banner.

QR: For a burial at sea?

EM: No, they were guys that had been three-and-a-half-year prisoner of war.

QR: Oh, they were bringing our prisoners of war out, not Japanese.

EM: Not Japanese people, but our people.

QR: Our people that had been three-and-a-half years...

EM: Yeah.

QR: Did you see any of those guys?

EM: You could see them. They went right by us, by the boat.

QR: Wow. How did they look?

EM: Ninety pounds... Living on nothing. A lot of them guys, they lived but... A long while coming back.

QR: That must've been a touching moment, with the Star-Spangled Banner.

EM: Oh, it was. It was terrible to see them, to see guys... They were real happy to get out of there, I'll tell you. So, we get out of there, anyway, and that was good. Then we went back around Okinawa. And we had another storm there. And we were in the bay.

QR: Is that Buckner Bay?

EM: Yeah. So, we were in there. And we stayed there for a while. The Franklin was there, the destroyer. We were watching a movie on deck, and the kamikaze came down and hit that Franklin and killed 13 guys right off of the main deck.

QR: Do you think that was a surprise? Was that the first kamikaze attack?

EM: Well, they had several before that.

QR: I'm surprised they'd be watching a movie on deck; it sounds a little risky.

EM: Well, it was pretty quiet around there. This guy was alone. Evidently, he got away, alone.

QR: And you were right next to the Franklin? Pretty close?

EM: We were probably from here to the end of the street, maybe a little further.

QR: Did you have to rescue anybody?

EM: No, all the guys were there from the ship, so they got them right away. But there were several smaller boats there, destroyers, small destroyers.

QR: It sounds like you guys were mostly just making yourself available to transport people as needed, at this point, not really equipment.

EM: Equipment and --

QR: You had been to Pearl; you probably picked up some stuff there.

EM: Yeah.

QR: And the ships would bring equipment to you.

EM: Well, they would fly it in on planes.

QR: And then you'd take it off of a carrier, pull up beside them?

EM: Yeah. They would bring it down to the shore and bring it on our ship. Or we could go to an island and go right up on the edge of the water. That's where we got in trouble,

because somebody goofed. There was a coral reef there. And they didn't know it was there. So, the small boats couldn't get over the coral reefs. So all these guys had to jump in the water, with packs and rifles and everything you can see. We lost a lot of guys when they hit the shore.

QR: That happened all over. Did that happen to you in any particular even that you remember, or place, or that was just a constant --

EM: That was the only one.

QR: Where was that, that that happened?

EM: That was at Saipan.

QR: And you were there?

EM: Oh, yeah.

QR: That was at Saipan after Saipan was secure? No, during the invasion. So we're going back a little bit.

EM: Yeah.

QR: But you didn't let off any... You guys had to go all the way to the shore, because you didn't have any amphibious --

EM: Pick that thing up and I'll show you. [Points to a model LST on the table]. See this thing here? This is where living quarters were for us, down below and up above here. And this is where they would come off, with all the heavy equipment. So they would get right up in the water, with the LST. They'd be pretty near up to land. And they would let all this equipment off.

QR: I don't think you had any of the LCVs or anything like that, right?

EM: No.

QR: So you had to go all the way to the shore.

EM: Yeah.

QR: That's pretty dangerous duty.

EM: Well, the shore was actually taken care of when we got there, because the guys had got in and had moved on in to the airport and around to where they were all living.

QR: And how about food for you? That would come in from the beach, as well? They'd fly that in and load it on, and you'd receive it in the kitchen?

EM: They'd take guys in there with them to do the cooking right away.

QR: So, you were responsible for feeding just the 160?

EM: Yeah.

QR: And maybe whatever islanders, earlier, that you had been transporting? You'd be feeding them?

EM: Oh, yeah.

QR: Did they like what you fed them?

EM: Oh, yeah.

QR: I heard a story once about a bunch of guys who tried to throw a Christmas party for some of those kids, and they wouldn't eat the ice cream; they didn't know what it was. Did you guys have any ice cream?

EM: Oh, yeah. We made ice cream on our ship, for the simple reason -- if we had a guy that fouled up, that did something wrong, he went down in the freezer and made ice cream. So, we had a lot of ice cream. And our captain loved ice cream. Lot of times, the guys would wake me up at night and say, "The captain wants some ice cream." I'd get up and go down to the freezer, in the big freezers, bigger than this, and get him a bowl of ice cream and bring it up to him. And he'd sit there --

QR: So you guys were on a first-name basis.

EM: Oh, yeah. He was good. So, every time I'd go up, he said, "You want a drink?" because they were allotted so much drinks over a quantity of time. So he was a real good guy. I had made third-class petty officer. And our chief that was chief of the galley got transferred. And that sucked me into being chief. I didn't make the grade. I took the exams, all the exams and everything. Passed them. And I was three months short of time. And the captain wouldn't sign the papers so I would've made chief.

QR: But you were acting chief.

EM: Oh, yeah. I was active as hell.

QR: Did you have any trouble with weevils in the flour or anything like that?

EM: No, no.

QR: Everything was good.

EM: Yeah.

QR: And you had some variety? It wasn't all powdered eggs?

EM: No, no.

QR: Good food?

EM: Sometimes we would come alongside of a transport where we could get stuff.

QR: Trade?

EM: They would just give you stuff. You couldn't say, "I want this" or "I want that." A lot of times, we would get, like, parsnips. The guys hated parsnips. So, we used to get underway at night sometimes. So, we'd have all that stuff on the fantail, in the back. "Get out of here. We don't want you." And then we had beef from Australia, lamb and beef.

QR: Mutton?

EM: Mutton that they used to freeze and ship up around different places.

QR: How was that? Was that pretty good?

EM: It was good. And I used to butcher that up a lot and try to save stuff. We had a meat grinder there and everything.

QR: Did you know how to butcher from your upbringing on a farm?

EM: No, I was here at Northampton. And in Florence, there was a guy right where the fire station is now, the old fire station. He had land in the back. And he raised chickens. So that's where the one of the firemen, Roy Davenport, used to kill the chickens and dress them. Friday, you could pick your chickens up. If you wanted two chickens, you can go to the house and she would be there and give you your chickens, sell them to you.

QR: Well, that's handy. Saves you some grueling chicken-killing.

EM: Well, it was not to them. The firemen, they were hanging around doing nothing then. It isn't like now. See, we got this ambulance service we're running now, and it's murder. They're going day and night, all day long.

QR: Understaffed?

EM: It isn't understaffed. People are calling. "I got a backache. I got a bellyache." A heart attack...

QR: What about you, though, on the ship: did you ever get sick?

EM: No. I just hurt my leg one time, but I got over it. We had pharmacists; we had two pharmacists there. And they put me in a cast. And I roamed around with that cast for a little while.

QR: How'd you hurt yourself?

EM: I was going down the ramp, and I slipped.

QR: What were you doing on the ramp? Just going to go explore the shore?

EM: I was going to look out at the other guys that had already gotten out there.

QR: Just to see.

EM: To see, yeah.

QR: You weren't on duty or anything.

EM: No, no. I had nothing to do with that.

QR: Did you have a battle station?

EM: No. I had a battle station for one night.

QR: What was that?

EM: It was right in back of the galley. It was a 20-millimeter gun. And this first sergeant, first lieutenant, put me out there. I says, "What am I supposed to do? I'm cooking 20 hours a day, and you want me to go out there and sit in the back?" "Yeah," he says, "you gotta go out." So I went out. So, we took off somewhere; I don't know where the hell we were. And we were shooting. But I just pulled the trigger, and I shot all the god damned shells that were in the thing. And he came out raising hell. "What the hell are you doing?" I said, "I told you, I didn't want to be out here." He said, "I'm going to bring you before the captain." I says, "Go ahead. What the hell do I care? I didn't figure I was going to get back, anyway. So if I get lost out there or here, whatever." So, nothing ever happened. The next thing I knew, he was quarantined: he couldn't come in the galley.

QR: So somebody was looking out for you.

EM: The captain was looking out for me. So we got rid of him!

QR: What was that guy's -- what do you think his rank was?

EM: Lieutenant, just a regular lieutenant. We had quite a few ensigns and lieutenants.

QR: They're not always so good, are they?

EM: They didn't get far enough into training.

QR: Yeah, some of them had never seen a pond!

EM: That's right. Yeah, we had quite a time there. Joe Carkless [ph. sp.] was on the police department with me, and he was at an auction or tag sale one day, and he spotted this and he brought it to me.

QR: Mr. Morrissey is showing me a model LST.

EM: Yeah, mine was 661.

QR: Well, do you remember V-J Day? Where were you?

EM: We were in Saipan, because that's where we got transported onto a travel ship, a big ship.

QR: Did you have any big celebrations?

EM: Well, there was nothing to celebrate, other than water. That's about all.

QR: No fancy dinners that night.

EM: No, no.

QR: Just ready to go home.

EM: Yeah, the guys -- we were just going with groups. Probably 20 guys would go at one time. But they had to get the paperwork done.

QR: On liberty, you mean, or to go home?

EM: To come to another ship, bigger ship.

QR: Yeah, they had the points system and everything. How about you: did you have enough points to get out?

EM: I had one point short, one day. Next day, I got it. That's why I got out. I came from there, from Saipan, into San Diego. And we were in San Diego three days. We flew from there to -- what the hell is the big airport in the Middle West there?

QR: Chicago? I don't know.

EM: Not Chicago. Christ... It was on the way back, anyway. And we got into a storm. And that plane went -- and when we landed, I was the first guy off. I says, "You bastards, you're not going to kill me now; I've got this far."

QR: Yeah, I've heard of some guys who didn't want to go home if it meant they had to go on a plane; they just wouldn't do it.

EM: Yeah. So, we made it into Chicago. And the welfare was there, and they really did good for us.

QR: You mean, like, Red Cross or Salvation Army?

EM: Salvation Army.

QR: I heard the Red Cross was not as good as Salvation Army.

EM: Yeah. So, they had a big thing in Chicago, food and everything. They had guys there -- "Take your clothes off, and go in there. We're going to wash your clothes." Real good, you know, and what you want to eat. They really were super people.

QR: Were you with guys that you had been with all along?

EM: Yeah, seven guys.

QR: You guys had been together for years?

EM: No, no.

QR: Just for the trip home.

EM: Yeah. So, we got into Boston. It was, I think, the day after Christmas. So then you had to go through paperwork, paperwork, paperwork. So I finally said to one of the lieutenants there, "I got all this time in, and I want to stay." He says, "I'd like to keep you, but I can't." He says, "I got about 60 guys here who want to stay in different things, cooks and bakers, or riflemen, or destroyermen, or whatever." So he says there's nowhere for me. I says, "Okay, bye-bye."

QR: So nobody else tried to get you to reenlist? Transfer?

EM: No, no. They was coming in there so fast. Every day, they'd bring a new load in.

QR: That's interesting because, a lot of guys, they tried to pressure them into staying; but in your particular outfit, they really needed to pressure you into going.

EM: Yeah. Well, it was the Navy Yard there in Boston; that's why.

QR: Yeah, that demobilization was a huge effort.

EM: Yeah, it was. So that's when I got back home. So, I came out of there, and I got on a train. And who do I run into but two people from Florence! And they had gotten married for New Year's. And they were down at the hotel there for New Year's Eve and another day. And I got on, and they're sitting there.

QR: In Boston?

EM: Yeah, in the railroads. So, I rode back with them. I got off in Springfield, and they were going to wait for another train coming up through. And I said, "I'm not waiting. I'm waiting long enough." Turned out, I came out near the railroad -- [phone rings; Mr. Morrissey takes the call]

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