

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

Nimitz Education and Research Center  
Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Peter D. Williams

Grapevine, TX

March 22, 2019

U.S. Navy

Radioman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class

Mr. Misenhimer:

My name is Richard Misenhimer, today is March 22, 2019. I am interviewing Mr. Peter D. Williams by telephone. His phone number is 469-881-5656. His address is 3900 Grapevine Mills Parkway, Grapevine, Texas 76051. 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. His alternative contact is his son Andy Williams 5204 Saddle Drive, Flower Mound, Texas 75028. His phone number is 972-670-5280.

Pete, I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today, and I want to thank you for your service to our country.

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

*"Agreement Read"*

Is that okay with you?

Mr. Williams:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What is your birthdate?

Mr. Williams:

January 13, 1929.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Williams:

Newark, New Jersey.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Williams:

I did, I had two brothers.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were they older or younger than you?

Mr. Williams:

They were both younger than me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Ok, so they probably were not in WWII either.

Mr. Williams:

No, I think the closest to my age, was just after WWII, he was in the Air Force.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Okay, what were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Williams:

My mother's first name was Charlotte, my father's first name was Leo.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Williams:

It caused my father to move from New Jersey to western New York City to keep a job. He worked for the DuPont company, and they closed the factory he was in and told him if he could find a job in any of the other factories, they would let him stay. He had to go through the Eastern States looking for a job, and he did find one in Niagara Falls, New York, and we moved there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, he was able to keep working during the depression?

Mr. Williams:

He was, he had two brothers and a sister who were all married and had children too, and he was the only adult in that family that had a job throughout the depression, and he helped all of them financially.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, you got along OK then?

Mr. Williams:

We were fine. *(laughter)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Williams:

I went to the Lewiston Central School, it was in the village of Lewiston, New York, which is about 10 miles north of Niagara Falls.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Williams:

1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, December 7, '41, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Williams:

I do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you, and how did you hear?

Mr. Williams:

I was growing up, my father told me, I don't know where I was, it was a Sunday as I recall it, and I was out playing with other kids, I think, and when I went home, he had his radio on, and was telling us to sit down and listen to this. So, we decided we better listen to this. I don't remember what part of it I heard, or anything, just we were going to war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you think it would have any effect on you?

Mr. Williams:

Didn't have the vaguest idea, didn't mean much to me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, so then, when did you enter the service?

Mr. Williams:

I didn't go into the service until 1945.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date, do you remember?

Mr. Williams:

I've got my discharge here; does it tell me? July 1, 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You turned 17 in January; you went in in July.

Mr. Williams:

Yes, I turned 17 and I had already enlisted and they would not let me quit high school, I was a senior in high school, and they told me they would not take me until I got my high school done.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You volunteered, is that correct?

Mr. Williams:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Which branch did you go into?

Mr. Williams:

I went into the US Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Navy?

Mr. Williams:

I just thought it sounded like the place I wanted to be. I didn't have any real knowledge of it certainly, I was near the ocean, Atlantic, you know, I was in New Jersey, that was my closest, I just wanted to be in the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you went in, how long did you sign up for?

Mr. Williams:

I signed up for 4 years or until the end of the second WW, whichever of those happened first.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The war was already over when you went in.

Mr. Williams:

Well, not technically. They were still trying to get some kind of a document from Japan. Therefore, technically the war was still on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I think it was 1951 before they finally declared the war over.

Mr. Williams:

It was somewhere like that, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your boot camp?

Mr. Williams:

Bainbridge, Maryland.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was boot camp? Was it pretty tough, or what?

Mr. Williams:

Well, I don't know. I don't know what you would call tough, it was all new to me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do in boot camp?

Mr. Williams:

A lot of marching and I don't know what else we did. I really don't have any memory of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have swimming?

Mr. Williams:

Yes, we did, and at one point we went to a submarine test in a long high tower that had water in it and we were sent down in that. I failed because one of my eardrums had an infection when I was younger, I didn't know, they put me down in the water and I could not pass the test because I was in pain in my ear. After the training, they sent me to Little Creek, Virginia where they put people on, I can't remember what they are called, but they were the ships that landed the Marines basically whenever they tried to take an island or into Europe, and that sort of thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Back in boot camp, did you have any kind of weapons training?

Mr. Williams:

Yes, we went to a range and fired rifles, and we did that sort of thing several times. We did some others, but I can't remember exactly.



Mr. Misenhimer:

Any other kind of military training in boot camp?

Mr. Williams:

Not in boot camp, after yes, but not in boot camp, other training, I learned to work in the kitchen, and other exciting places like that, the garbage. No other things that really stand out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There in Virginia? Was this the amphibious landing training?

Mr. Williams:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What all did you do there?

Mr. Williams:

Not much. *(laughter)* I managed to get through some of the training and I passed out in a marching drill and I wound up in a hospital in Norfolk, Virginia and they took my appendix out and it was about a month and then they sent me back. When I went back to Little Creek, everybody else had gone away. They had a sign "Finished the training and gone to sea". I was in a barracks pretty much by myself and they just used me in the headquarters and things, and I did various things.

But then they did after that was assigned to a ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ship were you assigned to?

Mr. Williams:

The first one was the USS Montague AKA Navy Troop Transport ship.

It was a troop ship, and its specialty was a whole lot of small, I forgot what they were called, but landing craft and they were used for invasions.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your job on that ship?

Mr. Williams:

I was a radioman. I reported as a seaman. And I applied for the radio job and was sent to radio school. I finished that school. Back to the ship and I was a radioman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You left the ship and went to radio school, is that correct?

Mr. Williams:

Yes, I can't remember exactly, but I think it was either six or eight weeks.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where was that school at?

Mr. Williams:

I don't know, it was around Norfolk somewhere, I don't remember.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About how long were you on the Montague, the ship?

Mr. Williams:

About a year, it was assigned to both the European Theater and I only, they told me that I would be released out of the Navy because they were about to have the end of the war, and so they took me off of the Montague and assigned me to another AKA named the Winston, it was AKA #94 and it was about to be decommissioned, and so they put me on

that ship and it went to Baltimore and shared a dock with the USS Texas. In the Navy, that's where you would decommission ships. I forget where it was, but it was out of town, kind of out in the open country in the bay somewhere and we shared a dock with the USS Texas. We stayed there and that's where I was when I got discharged.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You say you went to radio school?

Mr. Williams:

Yeah. That would be after, when I got out of the hospital pretty much, I reported to the ship and they were asking for people that were wanting to go to radio school, so I volunteered for that. After that, I just enjoyed being active again.

Mr. Misenhimer:

After the school, where did you go?

Mr. Williams:

Back to the USS Montague.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Back to the Montague.

Mr. Williams:

Yes, I was there, I guess for close to a year. I think and then they took me off of the Montague because it was going to Europe, and they did not want to send me because I was likely to be discharged because they were sure that they were going to officially end the war. I went to Baltimore and decommissioned the ship, and I got discharged from there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date were you discharged; do you have that?

Mr. Williams:

The 4<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1948.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, you were in two years.

Mr. Williams:

Yeah, that sounds about right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

For just about two years.

Mr. Williams:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in the Navy, what were some of the things you remember that happened to you?

Mr. Williams:

I went to Guantanamo after a year. We went down there for training in Island hopping I don't know how many several hundreds of Marines down there and sent us down to Guantanamo Bay and then from there we went to Puerto Rico, and of course an island, I don't remember the name off Puerto Rico they used as a training area because there were no people living on it, and we went down there and practiced landing Marines there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was that on the Montague?

Mr. Williams:

That was on the Montague, yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you do in that training?

Mr. Williams:

I was a radio man.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Radio man, ok.

Mr. Williams:

Yeah, after I was trained for that, they had a whole lot of radiomen because every one of those little landing ships had to have a radio man on them to get your instructions and that sort of thing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the landing craft, were they the Higgins boats, or what were they?

Mr. Williams:

I forget what they were, but they were not the ones you were talking about, those were smaller, these were a little bigger, and they were big enough to have maybe up to 50 men onboard , they could have bigger loads because they load things as big as tanks and some of the big trucks that they used.

Mr. Misenhimer:

There's something like an LCM, was it an LCM or something like that?

Mr. Williams:

I think that's what they were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were larger and they could take a tank in. Did you go into the beach or did you stay on the ship the whole time?

Mr. Williams:

Never got off the landing ship, no. Not on the beach.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What's some other things that happened?

Mr. Williams:

That was about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale on your ship?

Mr. Williams:

Everybody wanted to be somewhere else. They did not put well trained people on

The ship, the only other people on the ship would be Marines, but the sailors were in there like me, many rookies and there were a bunch of guys that had been in the Navy for years mostly all been in trouble or something, and they put them on there to show us young guys what it was like. But they were more likely to tell us how to get a drink or something like that but they weren't very good for us, but it was kind of a funny crew, because there was a number of us old timers that had been there but hadn't been in trouble and then there were all the others being trained there, but some of the other ships that didn't have those men.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any trouble with sea sickness on the ship?

Mr. Williams:

I can not tell you how bad, but I never had sea sickness more in my life than there. When I was at sea, I was sick every time we would go into a port for a few days for training or shore leave or whatever it was, I was fine, but every time we went back out to sea, I was sea sick again. It seemed to me I was getting sea sick often. I was not a good sailing person.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from being in the service? Not really, huh?

Mr. Williams:

The fact that I had signed up for the duration of the war until there was a peace agreement made me almost impossible for them to place anywhere because they didn't know when it was going to happen, and they didn't want to put me on any ship that was going somewhere else, they wanted to keep those of us like myself back close to the US, and so no, I got invited a number of times to please sign up for another 4 years and we'll send you too, and then they would, and that's why they took me off the first ship and put me on one that's being decommissioned because they said if you're not going to stay around, we're not going to put you on any other. That was the end of it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Williams:

Not really, because most of my time was on a ship, but it was on a ship that didn't go very much, maybe for a couple of months it would go out for training some Marines, but otherwise it was in Norfolk. There were lots of places to go, we went all over the place, so no, I did not have any particular trouble.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Williams:

Radioman Seaman/R RMSN 11147. I have no idea what that means. That was my ranking, Radio Seaman.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get home from your time in the service with any souvenirs?

Mr. Williams:

No, I don't have a single one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any USO shows?

Mr. Williams:

No.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your ship people?

Mr. Williams:

No, they had several of them, but no, I did not attend them. When I got out of the Navy, I went to college, and so if they were somewhere having something when I was in college, I stayed in college to finish whatever year I was in. I did not go to those.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your GI bill to go to college?

Mr. Williams:

Yes, I did.

Mr. Misenhimer:



Where did you go to college?

Mr. Williams:

State University of New York which is like 20 or 30 colleges most of them, I went to a teacher's college, so when I graduated from there I was licensed to be a teacher in New York State. I did not look for a teaching job because during my last year in college they send you in to practice teach, and I found out very rapidly that I did not work well with younger children. So, I just figured I was not the person for that job, so I looked for work as a civilian til I got one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

So, you went to two years of college, is that correct?

Mr. Williams:

No, I went for 4 years, I got a Bachelor's degree.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you get your Bachelors from?

Mr. Williams:

The State of New York, the college I went to was the teachers college in Rockport New York which was a little town and that was the total of the towns the claim was to have a college in the town.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I have to ask you some questions, this happened before you went into the service, but April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died, what reaction did people have when they heard that.

Mr. Williams:

I didn't understand what had happened, and I was a Junior in high school or something like that, I guess when that happened, and I don't remember having any particular, I don't think I understood what was happening.

Mr. Misenhimer:

May the 8<sup>th</sup> of '45, Germany surrendered, any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Williams:

Oh yes, we did, we had a parade, that's what we did with everything, we had a parade.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August the 15<sup>th</sup> of '45, Japan surrenders, any celebration then?

Mr. Williams:

I don't think so, but I'm thinking I was still in the Navy at that point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, this was before you went in, this was August the 14<sup>th</sup> of '45.

Mr. Williams:

Oh, OK, yeah, I didn't get discharged until May of '48.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You didn't go in until '46, this was in '45.

Mr. Williams:

Yeah, OK, yeah, they did, they had a parade, I was too young to go into bars, so I didn't see that part of it. I don't know what they did. They all cheered, I know there was a parade of some type in my small little town. I'm not sure who was in it, I would presume that the only men around, would be older men that were beyond military age, they were probably WWI veterans and they did some kind of a march.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On August 6<sup>th</sup> of '45, they dropped the first atomic bomb, did you hear about that?

Mr. Williams:

Yes, of course, but we didn't understand it very well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you think it was a good thing to do?

Mr. Williams:

Yes, I did because, they did two of them didn't they, two bombs?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's correct, August 6<sup>th</sup> and August 9<sup>th</sup>.

Mr. Williams:

We were generally whatever the radio was saying basically was that this should end this war, so it sounded like a good thing to us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you been on the Honor Flight to Washington, DC?

Mr. Williams:

No, I've visited Washington, but it was on my own, I didn't know there was such a trip available.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm not sure exactly where, but there's quite a few of them around the country.

Mr. Williams:

I'm sure there were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in the service?

Mr. Williams:

No, you pretty well covered it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Are you retired now?

Mr. Williams:

Of course, nobody wants a 90-year-old guy. *(laughter)*

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right, right. Well, Pete, that's all of the questions I have unless you've thought of anything else.

Mr. Williams:

No, you sure made me think about some old-time things to me. Other than that, no, I didn't.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thanks again for your time today, and your service to our country.

Mr. Williams:

Well, thank you. I hope it was helpful to you in some way.

*(End of interview.)*

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