

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
William C. Smith
Cincinnati, OH
March 12, 2020
U.S. Marine Corps
U.S.S. Iowa BB61
40mm AA Gun
Pacific

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is March 12 , 2020. I am interviewing Mr. William C. Smith by telephone. His phone number is 513-521-6919. His address is 4231 Endeavor Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45252. His alternate contact is his daughter, Debra A. Dittmar, P.O. Box 88179, Colorado Springs, CO 80908. Her phone number is 719-651-1925. 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.

Mr. Misenhimer:

William, 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. Smith:

O.K.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, the first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure this is OK with you. So let me read this to you. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Smith:

That's fine.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now I've got some questions for you. What is your birth date?

Mr. Smith:

5-13-26.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Smith:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's where you're living now?

Mr. Smith:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah. I've got a sister and a brother.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your brother older or younger than you?

Mr. Smith:

My brother died. He was 100 years old. He was a Lieutenant in the Army.

Mr. Misenhimer:

He served in the Army. He was in the Army during World War II.

Mr. Smith:

Yes. He was in Europe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

But he's passed away.

Mr. Smith:

He passed away about two years ago.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Otherwise I'd like to interview him. What were your mother's and father's first names?

Mr. Smith:

My mother's first name was Florence and my father's name was William.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You grew up during the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Smith:

I was born right before the Crash. Yeah, things were a lot different then. I think I wore some of my sister's shoes. Everybody was poor but we all knew we were poor. We leaned on each other then. Times were bad but really they were good. Worked hard at 12-13 years old, I put in many a ton of coal. Put it in bushel baskets and walked up about 15-20 steps and dump it in the coal bin. You weren't afraid to work. That's for sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Smith:

High school was Hughes High School, Cincinnati.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate?

Mr. Smith:

1944. Stop right there. The high school that I went to had a deal that if your grades were up, you could get out and you could join any of the services. You could get out two months early. So three of us in school, three of us, two buddies of mine and myself, we said, "What are we waiting for?" So we went down and joined the Marine Corps in April. We got out of school.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you actually go into the service?

Mr. Smith:

I enlisted in April but I actually didn't go in until August.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August?

Mr. Smith:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August of 1944. Do you know what day in August?

Mr. Smith:

That's a good question. Should be somewhere in my records but I don't have it right at hand here. It was early in August, I remember that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's OK. Now on December 7, 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Do you recall hearing about that?

Mr. Smith:

Oh, yeah. Everybody heard about Pearl Harbor back then, yeah. There was radios then, you know. You listened to radio. Used to listen to President Roosevelt's weekly address on the radio. We always listened to that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you think that would affect you?

Mr. Smith:

Well, it was just a question as to how long it was going last. What do we do? We knew if it lasted long enough we were going in. That's for sure and when I graduated from high school in 1944, you knew if you didn't join something you were going get drafted. Because everybody was going in then, everybody.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How did you choose the Marines?

Mr. Smith:

Well, actually the one fella I joined with, his brother was killed early in the war in the Marine Corps. So we decided we'd do him an honor and go fight for him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go for your basic training?

Mr. Smith:

Parris Island.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was that basic training?

Mr. Smith:

Well, it was interesting. I'll say that. The D.I.s were pretty tough on you, I'll say that. They had a lot of different ways of teaching you the rules. The rules were the rules and you better follow them. I remember we were out on a long march one time and they would stop every once in a while and let you have maybe a five or ten minute break and if they said canteens open then you could drink. If they said canteens closed, you couldn't drink. They caught some kid drinking when it was canteens not open so they asked him, "You like to drink water?" They said "Come on over here and sit under this shade tree." Then they started pouring water in him and I thought

they were going to drown the poor kid. That was the way when they said you don't drink, you don't drink. It was follow the orders; that's all. Had a lot of ways to teach you that. I was on a march down Parris Island and I had a pith helmet It's like an African hat and I remember it blew off while we were marching and I ran over to get it and they halted everybody. I remember the D.I. said, "Don't that hat fit you, Marine?" I said, "Yes, sir, Sarge." "We'll go make it a little tighter" he said. He took both hands and he hit down on each side on the brim and the darn thing went down and just about covered my eyes. Then I marched the rest of the day with that helmet like that. Other ways they just taught you, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were your Drill Instructors combat veterans?

Mr. Smith:

I don't know that. I really don't know. I'm sure they were.

Mr. Misenhimer:

They were pretty tough on you, though, weren't they?

Mr. Smith:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else happen in boot camp that you remember?

Mr. Smith:

No, it was just you learned a lot of discipline and they tried to get you in shape, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when you finished boot camp then what happened?

Mr. Smith:

Well, after boot camp you had a ten-day leave and then they sent me back to Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened there?

Mr. Smith:

Well, let me tell you a little story there. Let me go back a little here. In high school I was too small they said for baseball. They'd never heard of Peewee Reese. I was too small naturally for basketball. I spent 4 years in gymnastics so when I hit Camp Lejeune all I heard about was, "Wait til you see this obstacle course. Wait until you see this obstacle course." So there it was. I ran the obstacle course and I never will forget. I looked and there was nobody behind me and I remember, the Sarge says "Darn, you're good." He said, "You're really good. He says, "Run it again." Well, I was in great shape, being a gymnast and anyhow it learned me a lesson. I never came in first again and I never came in last. I always came in around the middle of the pack. Because they always had something if you were first or if you were last. I found that out.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then what happened?

Mr. Smith:

Well, then this is where you start going out on the range and shooting the M-1 rifle. By the way, I forgot to tell you. Before I got enlisted in April, I went with this girl for four years in high school so we decided I'd never get married after the war so we decided in May to get married. We were both 18 and when I went to Camp Lejeune she came down to Camp Lejeune and the hostess house was full so she rented a little cabin across the road from Camp Lejeune and it was a shack. I mean a shack. When it rained, the roof leaked. It had a coal oil heater. But anyhow she

came down and one day her neighbor that lived in another shack, her husband worked at the base. He was a Sergeant and one night she told my wife that they were taking a hundred Marines to sea school. Send them out to San Diego. One of them had to go to the hospital so there was an opening for one Marine. So my wife said, "Will you please ask if you can replace him?" I said, "I trained with these guys." I really didn't want to... You know, I was ready to stay with them. I had some friends. I said, "I'll go up and ask." So I got up early the next morning and I waited for the top to come in and when he came in...this is what they always said. "What did you do or what didn't you do?" That was always their statement when you went to see them. So I said, "No, Top, my wife told me last night that there's an opening for one man in Sea School out in San Diego." "How'd you find that out?" he said, "I just found out about ten minutes ago." I said, "Well, my wife told me." He said, "Come on. Sit down. I got to hear this story." So I told him about the neighbor and how she told my wife and all that. He said, "That's right. There is an opening." But he said, "You're too small." I said, "What do you mean, I'm too small?" He said, "We don't want to send anybody out on battleships and aircraft carriers that are too small. They're going to be with 2,600 sailors." I said, "How tall do you have to be?" He says, "Five foot eight." I said, "That's exactly what I am." He says, "I don't know about that. I'll tell you what. Stand against the wall. He says, "Sergeant, get that ruler there. Mark the top of his head." He said to the other on, "Somebody hold his feet. I think he's trying to grow." I said, "I'm not trying. I am five foot eight." So finally the guy that was measuring me, he says, "Top, he is exactly five foot eight." He said, "Well, OK, I'm going to put you down for Sea School. You go home tonight and you tell your wife you're going to Sea School." So that made her happy. I didn't like it but remember I was doing that for her. That was kind of interesting.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, that was. Right.

Mr. Smith:

That's how I got to Sea School. One man ... The outfit I trained with. They went into Iwo Jima. You know what that was. That was a trap. I think she saved my life, tell you the truth.

Mr. M :

What was Sea School like? What happened there?

Mr. Smith:

Well, there was a hundred of us they sent out to Sea School in California. In a way it was different. I mean just for an example you were eating in chow lines. Now they had tables and they put stuff in bowls. Gee, I never ate like that. They put you on parade, did a lot marching. We spent a lot of time on 20mm aircraft and 40mm aircraft guns. That's what we were really trained for on the ships. The Iowa battleships and the aircraft carriers all carried 40mm anti-aircraft guns. That's what we trained for and that's what I wound up doing on the Iowa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You were an anti-aircraft gunner, then?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah. You would shoot at the drone and I was shooting one time with a 40mm and the guy says, "You're getting too close to the plane." I said, "I'm trying to shoot the cable." Anyhow, that's what we did at Sea School. Then while we were out there, we was on the playing field and I remember the Sergeant saying, "Tonight when you go back to the barracks, you write your wife, your girl fiend, your mother, whoever and tell them just please, don't come to San Diego. There is no place to stay. Just everything is broke." He never got that out of his mouth and a messenger

came up and said, he says, "Who is P.F.C. William C. Smith." I said, "here." He says, "Your wife is over at the hostess house." So she came out there with her cousin. She came out to San Diego and you couldn't do that today. Two eighteen-year-old girls; her cousin was 19. Wife was 18 and she was 19. You couldn't do that today, two young girls like that, trail all the way to California. Then we stayed in a hotel out there, they did. It was called the Kokley Hotel in San Francisco. Let me go back. First in San Diego we had a hotel and after seven days you had to move, to get out, to keep traffic going. So every seven days we'd move from this hotel to that hotel. Until I left there and we were sent up to San Francisco. I think it was Hunters Point, to wait to be assigned to a ship. The two of them, my wife and her cousin, they followed me up there and they stayed in a hotel up there called the Kokley Hotel and it was a dump. It was really terrible. But hotels in San Diego were about \$2.50 a day. That's about what they were. Things were different then. But they stayed up there and I was waiting for a ship. I was getting liberty every day and I just had to make sure to make the roll call until I caught the ship. Then I was assigned to the Iowa and that was in the dry dock at that time when I was assigned to it. I remember up in Frisco, the two of them, I says, "I don't get paid. I'm running out of money." I said, "You two girls got to get a job or something." So they got a job in a little place called Allison's Dress Shop. One of them she was a pretty good secretary. My wife was putting I think tags on clothes and I couldn't wait to get that first check and when I come back I said, "Did you get paid today? Did you get your check?" They said, "Yes, but we bought dresses." That was eighteen-year-olds, the way they thought. Anyhow then I got assigned to the Iowa and then from then on we were in the war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What were the number of the Iowa, BB-what?

Mr. Smith:

61. The Iowa was the first one. There were four of them there, the Iowa, the Wisconsin, the Missouri, and the other one?

Mr. Misenhimer:

The South Dakota?

Mr. Smith:

The South Dakota and the Wisconsin.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, right.

Mr. Smith:

I think the Wisconsin is on the west coast or the east coast. I think it is. But that was in dry dock and then they took it out for a trial run. Then we went off into the war. I think the first place we bombarded was...well, all the islands. We bombarded Iwo. I tell you what we were doing. We were outside actually. The ones that were really on the outside when they shot these 16-inch guns. If you weren't holding on to something, the concussion would knock you down. We'd stuff cotton everywhere, in your nose, anyplace you could find an opening you'd put cotton in. With the concussion, that's why I'm hard of hearing today, really. That concussion was something else. We were right outside you know so we had no protection. Like the 5-inch guns, they were all concealed. Everybody was except the...I got out in Okinawa. We were outside all right. Anyhow we bombarded...we bombarded Iwo. Okinawa was the biggest one. They'd send up...when we bombarded Okinawa they would send up, the Japanese, about 350 planes at a time. All kamikaze, all kinds with bombs. They sunk about 17 ships I think, something like that. I don't know how many they damaged. What they were after really were the aircraft carriers.

That's what they wanted. They'd come up to us but we had too much firepower. There was no way they could get into us. But if the 5-inch guns didn't get them, then it was our turn with the 40mm. They just wanted to get through, that's all. We had one come in. He got through the 5-inch and he was coming right at us. I said, "OK, this is it." And he got, he went over the top of us at about 30 feet maybe and you could tell he was dead, he was slumped over. He went over the bow, right into the ocean. That's about as close as we got and said "Oh, boy." The sky was lit up with anti-aircraft. That was the biggest, was Okinawa. We bombarded every night. Every night. Then really we'd lay around and we would slip into Tokyo Bay and they would fire at different factories or different military stuff. Whatever they could. Then they'd slip back out in the morning.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tokyo Bay you say?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah. We'd slip into Tokyo Bay at night and then we' go back out. They would send up reconnaissance planes to see what the damage was, you know. I never forget it, I was doing orderly for the Captain and they had a meeting to see what kind of damage they did and they missed one target by about 14 miles. They were laughing. They said, "Well, we blew up something." The war was about over then. Then when they dropped the two bombs. That was the end of it. We told him you could put these big 16-inch guns away. They're useless any more. Anyhow we were right alongside the Missouri. That was in September of 1945 I think if I remember right. September 2 I think it was. We got alongside the Missouri when they were signing the peace treaty. But let me tell you: President Roosevelt's flagship was the Iowa. It took him to Yalta and over there where he met Churchill and Stalin. That was his flagship. We had a

clean ship. I mean we really had...because it was his flagship, the President. But when he died then Harry Truman took over and Truman was from Missouri so he had the signing on the Missouri. Otherwise it would have been on the Iowa. But we were glad because we got to be then the first Marines to go into Japan. There was a hundred of us on the ship. We completely had our gear. We had all our rifles, we were completely ready to go in. But we didn't know they were signing the peace treaty when we went in and we went in the 1st of September. We went in on landing craft and they wanted us to surprise them. So they put a top over the landing craft. I'm sure guys were throwing up and finally we threw the top off. Let them know we were coming. We didn't care. There was no problem. We met no resistance whatsoever. We marched up, all of us to I think it was kind of a military school or something. Anyhow we took that over and when you went up there, you never seen a soul. You might see a curtain move, somebody looking out. That's about it. But we were up there and we had a celebration up there of the surrender and that and I think one Admiral and a lot of Captains. We were in charge of bringing the whiskey. Some of that was gone by the time we got it there. That was when we went into Japan, first ones. It was kind of interesting. We were there about, I'd say, about a week or ten days and then everything you see about people would be coming by, looking in the gate and we got a little liberty. You had to go out with two guys at least, two or three. I found a little shop. I guess we were in a little city. I can't remember. Anyhow, saw this little shop and they had a picture of a tiger up on a wall. An old Japanese, real old Japanese guy, ran it. They had two daughters who looked might have been in their teens or twenties. Anyhow I took that picture down off the wall, giving motions. I couldn't speak Japanese and he couldn't speak English. How much money, you know. What did he want for it? You know what he did? He reached inside my shirt and got hold of my long underwear. It was cold there in Japan in the winter. He

wanted my long underwear. I didn't care. We won the war, what do I care? So I took all my clothes off and gave my long underwear and these two girls were giggling. My buddy was laughing. I said I don't care. Anyhow that picture of the tiger my daughter took it and it's pretty good sized and she framed it in bamboo and she had it hanging on her wall. I guess she still does. I don't know. That was the first occupation of Japan. We got a certificate I think it was. Let me see if I remember what they called it. It was the Task Force 31 and it was a member of the Tokyo Bay Occupation Force, Task Force 31, precipitated in the initial landing in the occupation of Tokyo Bay, the capture of a Battleship which symbolized the unconditional and complete surrender of the Japanese Navy. There must be a date on here somewhere. I got a certificate for that occupation. That was about it and then we went...there was a typhoon coming and we were supposed to pick up some World War II prisoners, Marine prisoners, down where MacArthur was down there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

The Philippines?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah, that's it. We went down there and that's when we put on some of these guys that were prisoners to take them home. Then we got word that liberty was cancelled, no liberty at all because there's a typhoon coming, we can't be docked there. We got to go out and then we went out and, boy, you talk about the waves. That put the ship right smack into it. I was up on the bridge with the Captain as his orderly and I never seen waves like that. We're up about seven stories high on the bridge and these waves would come up that high. The front of the ship would go down and you'd think it was a submarine, the bow would go down like it was going to dive and then it would come back up and oh, man, that wave over the top of it. I'd never seen

anything like that. We went through that and then we come back, I think we came back to Seattle if I'm not mistaken. Seattle or Hunters' Point, one of the two. Then I got liberty then and I came home to Cincinnati and then my wife came back out to California with me with my aunt and we stayed in a mobile home. It was in I think where we came back to. I think it was Hunters' Point we came back to. Anyhow she stayed in a mobile home and then when I got word we were going leave, we're going back to Japan, she got morning sickness. I got home on a liberty. I think I was home about eight days, something like that. She went back with me to California and she was there about a couple of weeks and she started getting morning sickness. I guess I got her pregnant. Anyhow I went back to the ship and she went home with my aunt. Then we went back to Japan. I told the Top. I said, "Hey, Top, we had enough points to get out when we'll be about half-way to Japan." He says, "Can you swim?" I said, "I hear you." He says, "You're going to be with us until we get there." Which was a good trip. The war was over and you know we didn't have the exercises and the alarm systems like we had during the war. We went back and we got into Tokyo and got into what was a bar. I think they served us a sake brew or something like that and I met a...It was the strangest thing. I met a kid I went to high school with and he was in the Navy. And I met him in the bar. What were the chances of that? But we stayed there about, I don't know, a couple of weeks, and then we went back to Seattle. I remember we went back there. The war was over. Back to Seattle and the guy says, "Where do you want to get discharged?" I says, "As far away from home as I can." I think you got twenty cents a mile. He discharged me in San Diego. I couldn't get a plane out and I took a bus home. I think it was four days and five nights or something like that. I didn't think we'd ever get out of Texas. That was a long trip. Somewhere in Texas you know you get about a fifteen minute layover in some of these small towns where you could get out and stretch your legs, maybe get a sandwich or

something to take aboard. The guy that was driving the bus when we were in there when we got back on the bus, he said, "Hey, by the way I wanted to let you know, your whiskey or whatever you're drinking, is out on the curb. If you want to get it, another bus goes through here in a couple of days." The only way you could go to sleep was drink. So we gave him a tip but I stayed up...we didn't like it at all but anyhow I finally got home. I got home June 1st. My wife was waiting at the bus depot. She was pregnant and had my first son in August. Got home June 1 and my first son was born in August. Then when he was seven years old he died of leukemia. Then she got pregnant again and she had Debbie and she got pregnant about a year or two later and she had Diane, our other daughter. So that's what I got, two daughters left. That's about my story. Anything else you want to know I can tell you.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, I've got several questions for you. How was the morale on the Iowa?

Mr. Smith:

Morale was good. Basically good. Yes, it was. Discipline was good. We got along well. We got along with the sailors, too. We really did well. You know what I told one sailor one time. I said, "Do you guys play cards? We got trouble, you know. There's 2,500 of you and there's only a hundred of us. But we're the ones with guns." When we'd go to dock or something it would get pretty dirty. Our main purpose on the ship were the 40mm. There was a lot of duty, worked in the kitchen, whatever. They kept you busy you know. Guy asked me, that museum guy in New Orleans, "What do you do all day?" I said, "Don't worry. They kept us busy." You got your time off, you know but you were busy ten hours a day. That's for sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Smith:

Never. We got close and I'll tell you I'm glad we didn't. What do they call it, polliwog or whatever it was? We didn't get initiated but we got close but we never crossed it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Smith:

No. I don't think we had radios on the ship. I don't think we were allowed to. I'm guessing here but I don't know of anybody who had a radio. I remember letter writing because I've got a hundred letters I wrote. My wife, she saved every one I wrote. Now I'm starting to look at them. It brings back memories. Like, it was my birthday on the ship and you didn't let anyone know it was your birthday. One guy was a good friend of mine and I told him and the word got out. You know what they did to me? It was different how they celebrated your birthday. They'd put you in a shower with all your clothes on and turn on the cold water. Man, they'd leave it on and you'd think it was cold water. Your uniform would be soaked with water, your shirt. That's the way they celebrated your birthday. Nobody wanted to tell when your birthday was. I don't know what the sailors did but that's what the Marines did. You got another question?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died? Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Smith:

No. We never heard Tokyo Rose. I don't know why but we didn't. Maybe they didn't want us to hear her.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you hear about President Roosevelt when he died in April?

Mr. Smith:

Oh, yeah. This was his flagship. We heard about that. Let me tell you something else. Whenever I see a sailor with a hat on, you know, a Navy hat, I ask him the same question. There was one guy, I guess I must have asked a hundred people. One guy had the answer. Here's the question I asked them. "What's the only ship in the Navy that has a bathtub on it?" None of them get it. I said, "The U.S.S. Iowa." When we took Roosevelt over to Yalta to meet Churchill, remember he had had polio. He couldn't stand up in a shower so we put a bathtub in it. They all laugh and say, "We didn't know that." One guy out at the Colorado at the cathedral out there at Colorado Springs, the Air Force cathedral, one guy he was in the Navy, he was in the Air Force and I don't know he was in about three services and he said, "Oh, yeah that was the Iowa. That was Roosevelt's flagship." I about fell over. That's the question I asked them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now April 12, 1945 President Roosevelt died. Did you hear about that?

Mr. Smith:

Oh, yeah. That was announced on the speaker. That was the announcement that President Roosevelt died.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now May 8, 1945 Germany surrendered. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Smith:

Yes we did. We heard that and when Roosevelt died and when Truman dropped the big one we heard about that. Then we heard that they were going to surrender and that's when we... Let me

tell you something else while they were signing the surrender...I never seen so many ships. Lot of aircraft carriers, lot of any kind, cruisers, destroyers, battleships. All the aircraft carriers sent up planes. I'll tell you it was absolutely shocking to see that many American planes in the sky that flew over Tokyo. It took your breath away. I'll never forget that. All those aircraft carrier planes, American planes, when they were getting ready to sign the peace treaty.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Smith:

Yes. When we stayed the first time we were over there, we stayed in...like I said, in some kind of military school. There was a big building there that I had guard duty on. I forgot to tell you this story. I had guard duty on it. They always gave me guard duty at night. They said I seen better at night. I think they just wanted to get rid of me. I don't know what it was. Anyhow I had guard duty on there and there was a door went into this big building and I had charge of the building and he came around in about 35-50 minutes. I got to think about this big door and you could see that it wasn't locked or nothing. So I walked in there and there was nothing but hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of suitcases. I went through a couple suitcases and I had my weapons but the war was over. It was over. Anyhow I found some Japanese money. Still got a lot of that today and some chopsticks. That's about all. Little Japanese flag. That's about it. Let me tell you what. The guys, there were about eight of us that went in there altogether and we all got this kind of itch and it was the only room we went in because I guess nobody was in there for years. I don't know. Anyhow anybody that went in there. They didn't know I went in when I was on duty. I had the itch. There was about seven or eight other guys that had the same thing. They were probably authorized to go in. I don't know. Maybe they did the same thing I did. So we

went back to the ship and we were kind of quarantined, eight of us. They had this soap and we took a shower and we dried down and they powdered us from head to foot. I think it was DDT. It was a powder, white powder. Then they gave us some kind of robe to put on, a white robe. The sailors were scared of us. They thought we were some kind of spook or something. It took about three or four days and the itch was gone. What it was, some kind of bug. They never did tell us what it was. I don't think they knew but the DDT seemed to cure it whatever it was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see any U.S.O shows anywhere?

Mr. Smith:

No, never seen a one of them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Smith:

No, never had any experience with them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Nothing with the Red Cross.

Mr. Smith:

No. I think when we were...there was times when I was in San Diego where people would put on bulletin boards "If you would like a nice Sunday dinner." Me and another guy went up, I think it was Buena Vista and we had a nice Sunday dinner. That was by an individual. Then we had up in Seattle we were invited to a big dance. They were having a dance for the servicemen from the college girls. That was nice. Other than that, it is about all. One thing they gave us was

cigarettes. We didn't know any better. They gave you tons of cigarettes. They was trying to get us hooked. They knew what they were doing.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Smith:

No. Well, I was happily married. I was tickled to get back home. My wife was pregnant and I took a month off. I said I'm going to absolute nothing for a month. She said, "I don't blame you." Then my father was a bricklayer and he got me on as bricklayer and I ran a lot of big jobs in Cincinnati, hospitals, schools. I did make very good money. I was in the union and I was the foreman on a lot of jobs. I made good money. I'm still spending the last of it now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you use your G.I. Bill for anything?

Mr. Smith:

Yes. I went to night school. They did bring me some tools and that. They gave my mom and dad because we had no money and my sister got married to a veteran who was in the Army and had one leg blown off in Sicily. She moved in with mom and dad and my dad said, "This is not going to work." Then my wife had the baby and the baby would cry at night. My father said, "This has got to stop." So he went out and bought a two-family, it was nice. It wasn't the best in the world but it was nice. Me and my wife took the downstairs and my sister and her husband took the upstairs so the old man got rid of us. It was too many in the house, that's all. That was nice of him.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Smith:

P.F.C. You got that when you came out of Sea School and you never had no opportunity to go any further. This was it. You were on a ship. What could you do? You were a P.F.C. and you manned a 40mm anti-aircraft.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were on that ship overseas, what you consider your worst day?

Mr. Smith:

Okinawa by far. Oh, God, yes. Iwo was bad but Okinawa was worse.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you attacked by the kamikazes there?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah. They tried to. Like I say, we just had too much firepower. I don't know how many five-inch guns and I don't know how many 40mm. I don't know they might even had some 20s. I don't know but I don't think so. 40s were. We just had too much firepower for them to get us. They tried, believe me. We read about Okinawa about how many ships got sink and how many were damaged. I knew there was at least 17 ships sunk. They were crazy and every once in a while you might see one who said, "I'm not going to do this" and he'd land his plane in the ocean and we'd go pick him up maybe.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of the people on the Iowa?

Mr. Smith:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How were they?

Mr. Smith:

I went to one out in California and I went to one in Kentucky. They didn't get hold of me until the best buddy I had was from Texas. Me and him really got along well. Any liberty we got we went out together. He was really a nice guy. He was going to come up to the one in Kentucky and he died. I never got to see him after the war. We wrote each other and I got a lot of pictures of me and him. But I never got to see him after the war. Boy, we went on any liberty we got we went together. He was a nice guy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the last reunion you had? When was that?

Mr. Smith:

I guess the last reunion was I guess out in California on the Iowa, going back you know in April.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Of what year?

Mr. Smith:

This year. If this darned virus don't stop everything, I've got me and my two daughters and their husbands, my grandson lives here and my granddaughter and Debbie's son. I think there was nine of us and we're renting a house out south of San Pedro. I didn't want to get in L.A. That's too big a mess. So we're going out in April. I think it's April 9 we go out. We're all going to meet on the ship that Saturday. I will have my uniform on. You know my daughter, she's so involved. She called and for three years she's been talking to the coordinator on the Iowa and she said, "How many people come on the Iowa and don't even realize that there was Marines on? He

says, "Quite a few." She said, "Well, I've got my dad's uniform hanging in my closet for 30 some years. Why don't you put it on display and at least let they'd know the Marines were on it?" The guy's going to do it. So we're going out to see it. My Marine uniform will be on display on the Iowa. That's what my daughter tells me. I don't have anything to do with it. She does all that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Smith:

Oh, boy. There was the Bombardment of Iwo, the Bombardment of Okinawa, the Occupation of Japan, there's another one in there somewhere. The South Pacific, you know.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How about battle stars? How many battle stars did you get?

Mr. Smith:

I think there's three. Three battle stars.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Iwo Jima and Okinawa for sure.

Mr. Smith:

I think...I know where's it at but it would take a half hour to find it. I think there's three. I don't know if there's more. I'll tell you what it could have been: we bombarded Japan, Sagami Wan Bay and then Tokyo. So we bombarded two places in Japan. I think that's what the other one was. I don't know. I think that's what the third star was for.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Smith:

Yes, I have and it was very enjoyable.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When was that?

Mr. Smith:

I would say it's been three or four years ago, I guess. You know it's funny, the guy that sponsored me, I think he was kind of disappointed. He thought he was going to get somebody from Europe. You know, the Europe war and by the time we got done when he got home he said, "You know, I'm glad I got to go with you. It's really been interesting with the stories that you tell and that from World War II." So, yeah, it was very nice.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were over there on the Iowa what was some close calls you had?

Mr. Smith:

I would say Okinawa was with that plane coming in. He was on top of us, about 35 feet. I'm not sure he was dead but he had no control of the plane. We were lucky.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever wounded?

Mr. Smith:

No. My buddy that I went in with, he got shrapnel. See I would have went to Iwo Jima if I wouldn't have gone to Sea School. Like I say, I'm a great believer in fate. My wife wouldn't have bugged and that I would have been on Iwo Jima. A buddy who came in after me, he was in Okinawa. He got some shrapnel metal in Okinawa. Okinawa, they went in like it was a cake walk, you know, no resistance and then boy did that Japanese general have that figured out.

When they started to get up there to where the high ground was, it was another slaughter. They lost an awful lot of men. Those two islands, like I say, I think they lost more there than they did in the invasion of France. If I'm not mistaken. They lost a lot of men in those two islands, a lot of Marines in them two, not just sailors and soldiers in the invasion of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. I should look that up some time. I did know those numbers. I don't know where it's at now.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening period?

Mr. Smith:

The bombardment of those 16-inch guns. You can't imagine the concussion and the shock you get. Like I say, we were the only ones outside. It wasn't fun, I'll put it that way. They were shooting the sixteens. We had to be manning our 40mm. There was a couple of them but the one I remember the most was the one that went right over the top of us. Okinawa was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What you consider your worst day?

Mr. Smith:

That was them. I would say the bombardment of Iwo, Okinawa and Japan and the Okinawa was probably the worst. To see that many Japanese planes up and all looking to blow you up was kind of frightening. They had their share. I think there was 17 sunk and 26 that were hit but not sunk. It was a mess. 250 at a time. It was something to see.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of the officers you had over you?

Mr. Smith:

They were good. They treated you fair.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Didn't have any problem with any of them?

Mr. Smith:

No. They were fair.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You ever see that sign "Kilroy was here"?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

I think that sign was everywhere.

Mr. Smith:

Yes, it was. They were like the old Burma Shave. Down on roads Burma Shave. It was a shaving cream. Have to go back further. Used to be signs on the roads. One would be "Round a car, lickety split, beautiful car, wasn't it? Burma Shave." That's before your time.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were in Japan, did you ever see any of the prisoner of war camps where people were kept?

Mr. Smith:

No, no.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you see any of the prisoners that were turned loose?

Mr. Smith:

Well, we picked some up down in the Philippines.

Mr. M

They were in pretty bad shape, were they?

Mr. Smith:

Yeah, they were thin, that's for sure. I didn't personally talk to any of them or anything but I did see some of them when they came aboard. I got fungus in the Philippines. I was in sick bay I guess about three days. Got it somewhere in the water down in the Philippines. Fungus was all over me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Smith:

No. I can put it this way: I'm glad it's over. When Truman dropped the bombs, we kind of celebrated that. It was, like I say, I'm a great believer in fate. If it hadn't been for my wife and that one man that didn't get to go, I wanted to stay on the ground, but I did it for her and I guess she might have saved my life. I don't know. Everybody went in. I don't care, if you could walk, you went in. There were about 350 dying a day. There aren't many of us left.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now on August 15, when Japan surrendered. Did you all have any kind of celebration that day?

Mr. Smith:

Well, we were getting ready to go into Japan, you know. We were tickled that we were going into Japan. We were going to fight somebody but nobody showed up. We were ready to fight. We were complete battle ready. About a hundred of us. I think there were about 90 of us.

Mr. Misenhimer:

William, anything else you've thought of from your time in World War II?

Mr. Smith:

Well, no, I think we've pretty well covered it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, thanks again for your time today.

Mr. Smith:

No problem.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Smith:

Like I say. I would say right now that you have to be at least 91 to be in World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah.

End of Interview

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July 24, 2020

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