

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With
Jack D. Owen
Houston, TX
July 23, 2020
U.S. Navy
U.S.S. Colusa APA-74
Pacific

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is July 23, 2020. I am interviewing Mr. Jack D. Owen by telephone. His phone number is 713-771-3240. His address is 6234 Wigton, Houston, TX 77096. His alternate contact is his friend, Alan Montgomery. His phone number is 713-249-5207. 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:

Jack, 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.

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. (agreement read) Is that OK with you?

Mr. Owen:

Absolutely. No problem.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good. Now. What is your birthdate?

Mr. Owen:

June 21, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, where were you born?

Mr. Owen:

I'm a twin. I have a twin sister and we were born in Lufkin, Texas on June 21, 1926.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Is your sister still living?

Mr. Owen:

She is still alive and they are doing quite well. She's, I think, a little better shape than I am.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have any other brothers or sisters?

Mr. Owen:

I have one brother but he's deceased in 2001 at age 81 from cancer but we were business partners together all of our lives. The only time we were separated was in World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your mother's first name?

Mr. Owen:

My mother's first name was Freddie Beatrice Montgomery.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was your father's first name?

Mr. Owen:

My father's first name was Hoy Owen. No middle name.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you grew up in the Depression. How did the Depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Owen:

We were victims of the Depression big time and my father was employed by the Lufkin Cotton Gin Company in Lufkin, Texas where I was born as chief engineer, quite responsible position, and Lufkin Cotton Gin Company did exactly what the name implies. It made cotton gin machinery for cotton gins that were built all over Texas but the Depression destroyed the demand for cotton gins because nobody had any money to purchase new cotton gins so the

company went bankrupt and my father, in 1931, found himself unemployed. I was age six when all this happened. Had just entered first grade with my sister and he was unemployed with no prospects of employment. But my mother had inherited some acreage of land in east Texas called Tennessee Colony, Texas and Tennessee Colony is located about 15 miles east of Palestine in Anderson County so we moved from fairly affluent circumstances with electricity, refrigeration, and all the amenities that you imagine in 1931 to Tennessee Colony which was in a rural area, no telephone, no electricity, no running water, no bathrooms and we went from a fairly affluent family to one in utter poverty. My father was very resourceful and being acquainted with the ginning business, he bought the local cotton gin and started to refurbish it. It took about a year to refurbish the gin from a steam-powered operation to one that was powered by gasoline engines and he modernized the gin. So we existed there in Tennessee Colony as a cotton ginner and for many years until the war started. My brother and I both worked in the cotton gin as ginner so you might say as child labor but I learned a lot of things in my father's footsteps who was quite a craftsman and he taught both of us a lot, self-reliance and how to accomplish a goal when you set out to do it. But we had a fairly meager existence all during the war. My sister and I attended the local school there in Tennessee Colony until we reached the ninth grade and at that point, we were shifted to the urban area of Palestine. We bussed 15 miles from Tennessee Colony to Palestine each day from the ninth grade through the eleventh grade and it was quite a change in our schooling because we went from a rural school to an urban school and that's a real change. But we made the transition successfully and we became one of, my sister was the most popular girl in her class and so we both graduated in May of 1943. At that time the war had started but to go back a little bit, my father's career as a cotton ginner continued fairly successfully with about a comfortable living but we also raised farm animals and had a garden so we existed quite well.

But disaster struck on December 6, the day before Pearl Harbor, when the cotton gin burned. Lo and behold, my father's career as a cotton ginner was consumed in flames. Fortunately we had insurance and so he emerged without any debt and so the next day was Pearl Harbor Day which we learned as we had gone to Palestine to see the holder of the lien on the cotton gin and tell him the gin had burned but it was covered by insurance. So we learned of Pearl Harbor in the afternoon of December 7 in Palestine. So those two things, the advent of World War II and the destruction of my father's livelihood changed our lives appreciably. My brother had enrolled in Texas A & M in 1938 and he made his freshman year but after his freshman year he had to drop out and secure employment because we couldn't afford to keep him in school and maintain the rest of the family. So he got a job teaching and earned enough to return to school in 1940 at A & M and continued until he graduated in 1943 which he was then commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant and subsequently joined the 7th Armored Division that was sent to Europe. In the interim my father needed employment so he came to Houston and through some people he knew, he struck up a deal with a car dealer named Earl North Buick Company whose business was shut down due to the fact automobile production had shut down and he was looking for some way to contribute to the war effort so he got some contracts to build ammunition boxes and he needed someone to run his factory and my father whose previous employment in the Lufkin Cotton Gin Company as a manager, he was hired to run the business for Earl North. So I came to Houston and worked with my dad there in the business of building those 75 mm ammunition boxes. So I was employed there all that summer and earned enough to pay my way initially into A & M which I enrolled in in September of 1943. So I graduated in May 1943 from high school, worked in Houston that summer and enrolled in A & M in September 1943. At that time A & M, most of the students had already been sent to war as my brother had been but A & M also had quite a

contingent of ASTP students who were sent to A & M to be educated there so A & M was operating pretty well normally. The upperclassmen were still in charge of the military operations but they were pretty few and far between so most of the students there were freshmen and sophomores who had not been absorbed into the armed services. Bear in mind that I graduated in 1943 at age 16 and I became 17 in June of 1943 so I was a freshman at A & M at age 17. I was pretty well unprepared for college because college education and a high school education at that time were two different things. I must admit that I was totally unprepared for higher education at age 17. But I persevered and I failed a couple of courses but I did get out of A & M in my freshman year with about a 2.2 GPA which wasn't too great but I did get through successfully. In 1943 and 1944 manpower situation in World War II was pretty dire and you had in the draft was the primary source of manpower for the war effort but if you volunteered before you turned 18 you had the opportunity to choose your branch of service and knowing what my brother had gone through in the Army I decided that the Army was not for me so I chose to enlist before age 18 in the Navy. So I finished my freshman year at A & M, returned to Palestine where my mother had moved from Tennessee Colony into Palestine due to seeking employment there in Palestine which she was successful in doing and she and my sister were living together and my father was in Houston running the plant. So I enlisted in the Navy in Tyler, Texas shortly before my 18th birthday and a few days after I turned 18 I reported to the Navy recruiting office in Tyler, Texas and along with a draft of about 30 or 40 men, we were all Naval recruits, we were sent to boot camp in San Diego, California. We had a Petty Officer 2nd Class assigned to us to oversee us as we were total boots but we did have the comfort of Pullman which was quite unusual but we had Pullman cars all the way to San Diego. We arrived in San Diego in mid-June or late June of 1944 at the naval training center there in San Diego which was boot camp for

most of the recruits. It was another boot camp in Chicago on Lake Erie but we were assigned to the boot camp in San Diego. Boot camp was a new experience and it taught me a lot of things and I didn't have any problems in boot camp and so at the conclusion of six weeks of boot training they gave us leave and I returned to Palestine to spend a week's leave with my mother and then returned by train to boot camp there in San Diego. If you had a preference for school to attend to, they gave you the opportunity to volunteer for the branch of the Navy that you wanted to serve in and there was a great opportunity but I chose to be educated as a radar man so I was sent, when I made that decision, they sent me and recruits to Point Loma, California which is just north of San Diego and was a Marine training camp but they also had a radar school there where they taught you the rudiments of how to operate and be a radar man and interpret what you're seeing on the screen and into a coherent something that you could give to another person who would then plot the information. The camp lasted six weeks and then we were assigned to sea duty on a destroyer to operate a radar under combat conditions on a training mission between San Diego and the channel islands. So two weeks after we got out of the radar school we operated a radar scope on a destroyer which we learned how to be a seaman because everything we'd learned up to then had not prepared us at all for life at sea. That two weeks on the destroyer showed us what to do. After that was concluded we were transferred to Treasure Island at San Pedro, California and we went into a pool of recruits to be assigned to wherever the Navy thought you could best serve. At that time there were a tremendous amount of new ships being commissioned and I was assigned to be among the first crew on a brand-new ship that just had been built and had been made seaworthy and was named the U.S.S. Colusa which is a county in northern California and its designation was APA-74, Attack Transport 74. An attack transport comes in several sizes and our ship was in the Gillam class and it had a tonnage of about 6500

tons and carried 8 LCVPs to put troops ashore. The Gillam class was a lightly armed ship and could accommodate a battalion of Marines or Army and the battalion of course is around a thousand men so that's how many people we could accommodate aboard ship and put them ashore. On December 20, 1944 I was among the commissioning crew on the U.S.S. Colusa and we were then commissioned and we had a four-striper Captain who (can't recall his name) but he was quite a martinet and he was a very strict disciplinarian and was a very short-tempered gentleman but anyway, we had sea trials off of San Pedro, California for two weeks and then we came back to Treasure Island and took aboard several hundred troops and then set sail from San Pedro to Honolulu, Hawaii. We arrived in Honolulu after a voyage of six or seven days without incident and disembarked our troops in Honolulu and then moved to Pearl Harbor which is just down the coast from Honolulu. We stayed there for several days and then we were assigned to go to Midway Island which was our first sea trip other than our voyage from San Pedro to Honolulu. We set out to Midway without incident. We spent about two or three days and I was able to go ashore and commune with the gooney birds and I think we were on East Island and came back aboard ship. Went back to Pearl Harbor and one of the main things that we did was on the trip to Midway was to haul quite a load of hay for the cows that were on Midway to supply fresh milk to the troops and the people that were on Midway. So that was kind of what we called a "milk run" I'd guess you'd say. But we came back to Honolulu and we were assigned to a convoy which was making up to go to Saipan. So our convoy consisted of about 15 ships. The Gillam class ships could make 17 knots but we had several Liberty ships aboard which could make 11 knots so that was our speed that we went. We first left Pearl Harbor and we sailed to Eniwetok. There the convoy was broken up and then we stayed at Eniwetok several days and then we were assigned to go to Saipan independently. So we operated independently from Eniwetok to Saipan

and arrived there in late January or early February 1945 and then shortly after the battle of Iwo Jima had started. The wounded were being evacuated to Saipan and subsequently back to Pearl Harbor. An APA has not extensive hospital facilities but we did have about eight or ten hospital beds. We had four corpsmen and one doctor and a dentist. So we took aboard some wounded that had been evacuated from Iwo to Saipan and they were pretty desperately wounded and they were given the hospital beds and the other lightly wounded were given additional bunks but we had two deaths of those Marines that we took aboard and were evacuating to hospitals in Pearl Harbor so we had two deaths between Saipan and Honolulu. When we got back to Pearl Harbor the wounded were evacuated and sent to the hospitals and the two people who had died were put in cold storage so they were evacuated and given burial there in the cemetery in Pearl Harbor. After laying at anchor in Pearl Harbor a couple days, we then set sail for Brisbane, Australia, which was quite an experience, going all the way from Pearl Harbor to Brisbane, Australia is several thousand miles. You cross the equator and you cross the date line so you were a polliwog. That was quite an experience to go over the equator and be initiated into that fraternity. Then you became a Shellback. We went from Honolulu or Pearl Harbor to Noumea, New Caledonia. We stopped there and picked up a few troops and then went on to Brisbane, Australia. There we spent two or three days in Brisbane and we picked up some people that had been on the crew of the Birmingham which had fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf and the Birmingham was attending to the aircraft carrier Preston and was alongside of it when the Preston had been hit by a kamikaze and was on fire. The Birmingham was lending fire suppresser support when the Preston blew up and it just absolutely decimated everybody that was topside on the Birmingham. So most of the crew of the Birmingham was evacuated to Australia from Leyte Gulf so we picked them up and then from Brisbane we took them back all the way from Brisbane, non-stop,

to Seattle, Washington which was a long trip, several thousand miles, took 21 days. We arrived in Seattle and stayed there a couple of days and then we moved down to San Francisco. From San Francisco the ship was authorized for some modifications so we were tied up there at the port of San Francisco and we received some new radar equipment that improved our ability to search both the air and surface with this new equipment and also new plotting equipment that we could plot the track of the ships that we picked up or the aircraft that we picked up. But we stayed there in San Francisco about ten days and had the modifications done. I recall particularly we were there the day that President Roosevelt died. That was quite an experience and we were also there in San Francisco when they were establishing the peace organization which held its initial meetings there in San Francisco and was organized there. But after that we took aboard several replacement people that particularly in our radar and radio section and so we set again off to Pearl Harbor. By this time it was May, late May, and we arrived in Honolulu at Pearl Harbor and they immediately sent us out over to the island of Hawaii. We picked up a battalion of Marines there at Camp Tarawa. We were berthed in Hilo and we received a battalion of Marines and for the next three or four weeks, we practiced invasion on adjoining islands there in the Hawaiian archipelago. There were several islands that the Navy used to practice invasions so we put some Marines ashore several times and practiced invasions. We didn't know where we were going. Thought where we were possibly going to invade but we knew we were going to go into action somewhere but after those practice invasions, we went to Pearl Harbor and I remember we were there the day that V-E Day was declared. Of course we were aboard ship but there were quite a bit of pyrotechnics and shooting very pistols and shooting stars and probably some live ammunition there in Pearl Harbor. Quite an experience there but shortly after that in early We continued to move in and out of Pearl Harbor and practice invasions. About mid-July of

1945 we gathered all our troops together and went to set sail again for Saipan. We knew we were going to Saipan but where there we didn't know. But this was mid-July of 1945 and so when we got about a day or two out of Saipan we picked up word over our regular radio set that the bomb been dropped on Hiroshima and shortly after that we arrived in Saipan. I neglected to mention that the first time we got to Saipan on our first trip that we were anchored off shore and we were in a, there was quite a swell running and our ship was going through about thirty degrees which made it difficult but the Captain, who I told you was a very temperamental gentleman, started to launch his Captain's gig so he could go ashore and in attempting to do so, the ship was rolling to such a degree that when they put the Captain's gig in the davits, and lowered it, it started to sway and then it banged up so severely against the side of the ship that it destroyed or damaged it so much that it was unusable. With that the Captain went berserk, literally berserk, and he was screaming, hollering, red in the face and I was witness to it because he was on the bridge and my place was right behind the bridge. I was witness to it and he completely lost it. So much so that he was relieved of duty and sent ashore. The Executive Officer, Lieutenant Commander Neil, assumed command of the ship and subsequently commanded the ship the entire time it was in active service. So the first Captain was such a martinet that he lost his sanity I think there in trying to launch his gig so he could go ashore but in any event he was relieved. I never heard what happened to him but I'm sure that he was given a medical leave. But anyway, Commander Neil, commanded us the rest of our career on our ship and was quite a naval commander and did a very credible job. I was proud to serve under him. But when we got to Saipan and peace negotiations were going on, we immediately got orders to move up to Okinawa and so from Saipan we moved up to Okinawa and we arrived there before the peace treaty was signed. So we were loaded with a combat battalion of Marines and so we knew by then that as the war

continued we were slated to be in the initial invasion of Japan. So we were quite relieved that the war had been successfully concluded and that we were spared the invasion. I've always said that I'm grateful that they dropped the atomic bomb because it spared a lot of people from having to endure another invasion and after Iwo Jima and Okinawa as bloody affairs as they were that I think they would have paled in comparison with what would have happened had we had to invade Japan. But in any event while the peace negotiations were being concluded we swung on the hook in the anchorage there at Ie Shima which is just an island off the shore of Okinawa and is quite a huge anchorage and there were hundreds of ships there. But immediately after the peace treaty was signed on the Missouri we received orders to proceed to Japan and in convoy with about ten other APAs we set sail for Japan from Ie Shima which about a two-day voyage and we arrived off the shores of Japan at a naval base at Sasebo. I believe it was around September 4 or 5, something, about two days after the peace treaty had been signed. We peacefully put our troops ashore without firing a shot and we then stayed there a day or two and then received orders to proceed elsewhere so we set sail down the coast of Japan. Sasebo is Japan's largest naval base and it's just about 50 or 60 miles north of Nagasaki where the atomic bomb was dropped. So we hugged the shore of Japan and we could see Nagasaki from about ten miles off shore through binoculars and what they had done to Nagasaki and so we were grateful that we weren't exposed to any of that. So from there we received orders to go back to Australia. So we sailed direct from Japan to Australia and this time we went to Sydney and we stayed there several days and Sydney at that time, the war was just over but the troops hadn't been repatriated to Australia so it was still a wartime experience but there were few Australian men available and so the girls from Sydney were most happy to see new people there. So they received us quite in a great fashion and we were great to see them because we had been a sea for quite some time

without feminine companionship. So it was a big party that we had there in Sydney. We took aboard a battalion of Marines that were there in Sydney and took them back to Pearl Harbor. So by this time it was late August of 1945 and from there we went back to Treasure Island in Los Angeles. There we received orders that the ship was going to be decommissioned and that we were all dismissed from the crew and so we would be discharged. So in early July of 1946 I was sent ashore, back to Treasure Island back where I had started my ship career and there I received orders to go back to Camp Wallace in Texas which is just south of Houston and was a naval built base and they were using it as a discharge center. So I came back to Houston and rejoined my mother and father here in Houston and had leave of 30 days and after that 30-day leave reported to Galveston Office of the Navy and I spent a week there in Galveston and then they sent us to Camp Wallace. There I was discharged. So Camp Wallace was just a few miles from Houston so I drove back to Houston. They secured transportation to Houston and rejoined my family. I worked that summer of 1945...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Let me interrupt a minute. What date were you discharged?

Mr. Owen:

That was probably in August then. No, no, it was July of 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Some of things you had been saying had me kind of confused.

Mr. Owen:

Yeah. I'm sorry about that. All the spring of 1946 we spent there in the Pacific transporting troops back. We made one trip back to San Francisco hauling troops and went back to Pearl Harbor and hauled some more troops back. We'd discharge them there in San Pedro and there

we got orders to decommission the ship and so everybody was discharged from there and from there I went back to Camp Wallace in Houston and was discharged in late July of 1946. So that ended my naval service and I worked with my father that summer and earned a few bucks and then decided to re-enroll in A & M and came back to A & M in September of 1946. Thanks to the G.I. Bill I got a free ride in my education. My two years in the Navy had matured me to such a point that I was a totally different student. Of course in my freshman year at A & M it was a military institution and after my service in World War II, A & M decided that you didn't have to rejoin the corps of cadets unless you wanted to because you already served your time in the service. So most of the students at A & M in the fall of 1946, about 10,000 students, most of them were veterans and did not want to be in the military but a few did and stayed and re-enlisted in the corps. But the majority of the students like myself decided to be civilians so they were not accommodating to us but A & M was very crowded and with all the influx of returning veterans and where I lived two to a dorm room when I was a freshman at A & M, now it was so crowded we had to live four students to a dorm room and it was quite crowded but we managed to survive. That situation alleviated itself and after a year or so when other dorm rooms were procured and so we could live normally two students to a room. My attitude as a student at A & M after I came back was quite different and my freshman record was somewhat lackadaisical. I was continually on the dean's list at A & M. I was in the school of accounting and graduated in 1949 from A & M with a degree in accounting. In my senior year my roommate was a fellow veteran who served in the Army and was a native of Madisonville, Texas which is about 30 miles from College Station and he took me home several times with him and introduced me to a young lady there in Madisonville and we became quite acquainted. Subsequently became engaged and was married there in Madisonville. After I graduated and I worked a year with my father who

had started a business there in Houston and I worked with him as an accountant. My brother subsequently came in the business and it became quite successful and my father retired in 1966 and my brother took the presidency and I became vice president of the company. By this time we had become fairly large and had about two hundred employees. We were making cooling equipment for internal combustion engines and gas compressors. There was quite a great business and subsequently were acquired by Waukesha Motor Company and my brother and I continued to be the main officers of the company and continued to operate it until we retired. My brother retired in 1982 and I became president of the company and operated as president until I retired in 1986. So we had quite a business career but I think this foundation was laid in the fact that we were both educated at A & M and more importantly we were educated by the services, my brother in the Army and me in the Navy. So I attributed whatever success I had in business to both my education at A & M and my career in the Navy and my brother likewise. So my career in the Navy, we never saw a shot fired in anger but we saw a lot of the world. We saw the Pacific from one end to the other from north to the south, from the east to the west so we covered it all. The radar department was part of the radio department and the quartermaster corps was part of our contingent that we lived with so we became quite familiar with the quartermaster duties and when we made our last voyage and signed the log for the last time, they said we had traveled 170,000 miles in 24 months of sea duty so it was my naval career consisted of a lot of travel but we never saw a shot fired in anger but we fired at a lot of targets. Fortunately, none of them in the enemy. So my naval career consisted of backwater sailing you might say. So that concludes it. Any questions you'd like to ask?

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale on your ship?

Mr. Owen:

It was great. We never had any problems. The only problem we had was with that four-stripe Captain. After he was relieved of duty, well it was quite exceptional. We were a pretty tight-knit group but that four-striper was such a spartan and disciplinarian that it was a different ship when he lost his command.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have any experience with the Japanese kamikazes?

Mr. Owen:

No. As I said we never saw a shot fired in anger. We always got to the places where we went after the battle had been fought. The nearest thing that we saw was in the anchorage there at Ie Shima. There were quite a number of ships that had been attacked by kamikazes that were being repaired so that they could be made seaworthy back to the States or to Honolulu where they could be repaired. But we never saw a shot fired in anger.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Owen:

No, I didn't because we always got there after the action was over. The place that we saw that had seen action was Eniwetok which was a fairly insignificant battle and Saipan but we weren't allowed to go ashore so we couldn't get any souvenirs. Same way at Okinawa and the same way at Ie Shima. We weren't allowed to go ashore. We could look at it through binoculars but we couldn't go ashore.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Owen:

Yes. They brought a U.S.O. show aboard when we were in Hilo, Hawaii. We had just embarked a battalion of Marines and they brought a U.S.O. show, nobody that I knew of importance was a star, guess it was a secondary troupe. Some girls sang some songs and a guy sang songs. To me they did a skit or two but that was pretty much it. That was the only show I saw that the U.S.O. put on.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the highest rank you got to?

Mr. Owen:

Started out as a Seaman Apprentice and wound up as a Petty Officer 2nd Class which is equivalent to a Staff Sergeant in the Army. That was in two years' service. I think mainly the reason that I was able to advance so rapidly was the fact that I was aboard a new ship and they were entitled to certain ranks so I was a radar striker when I came aboard but shortly after I reported aboard ship I earned a third class radarman rating and about eight or nine months later, maybe a year, I got the 2nd Class and earned a princely sum of another six dollars a month plus a dollar a month sea duty. So \$116 a month.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have any experience with the Red Cross?

Mr. Owen:

I did not and never saw...I think we saw some in Honolulu but they didn't approach our ship but I saw them on the dock.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever see that sign “Kilroy was here?”

Mr. Owen:

Many times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

It was everywhere I think. Now when you crossed the equator, did you all have any kind of a ceremony that fit the situation?

Mr. Owen:

Quite elaborate and I don't recall all the particulars of it but they had someone who had crossed the equator before was the presiding officer. I forget the title that they gave him but he initiates everybody into the world. You're a polliwog before you cross the equator and I forget what they make you after...

Mr. Misenhimer:

A Shellback. They called him King Neptune.

Mr. Owen:

All of the amenities...yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then when Germany surrendered in May of 1945 did you all have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Owen:

No, we were aboard ship and so as I said we were in the harbor there in Pearl Harbor and the only celebration that we saw was the fireworks and the ammunition that was shot off there in celebration in the harbor. So we weren't allowed ashore so we couldn't participate in V-E Day and we were aboard ship and then on V-J Day we were enroute to Okinawa so we couldn't

participate in any festivities. I missed out on all of the festivities that accompanied V-J and V-E Day.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on April 12, 1945 when President Roosevelt died, what kind of reaction did people have to that?

Mr. Owen:

Of course we were aboard ship and only news that we got was first we got it on all our radios and then of course we were tied up at berth at San Francisco piers and we weren't allowed ashore so I can't tell you what the reaction was. Of course it was quite sad aboard ship but we weren't allowed to go ashore so I can't tell you what happened on shore in San Francisco.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your ship after you've been out?

Mr. Owen:

I have not. I'm in communication with two or three people who were aboard ship through a site that I found online but other than that I've had no communication with any of my fellow seamen that were aboard our ship. We had a crew of about 350 men and about 30 officers but I've had no communication other than an online with two or three people that served. I doubt very seriously that there's too many of us left because I'm 94 and there were quite a few my age but a lot of people older than me so I doubt seriously that there's more than a handful of our crew still alive.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Owen:

Several times when we were in the South Pacific. Our radar shack was adjacent to the radio

shack so we were quite familiar with the radiomen and they would tune in to her and we could listen and so they would allow us to hear her. So I heard her several times.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did you think of her?

Mr. Owen:

Oh, it was quite amusing, some of the claims that she made and she never made direct reference to our ship so just pretty well listening to her. She was directing most of her comments to the Marines that were ashore and very little to ships that were at sea.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you were overseas, could you get your mail with any regularity?

Mr. Owen:

It was quite amazing to me that I don't know how the mail service did it but every time we put into shore to a port, we had mail. So generally it was a month or more old but we got mail pretty regularly every port we put in. Quite surprised at the fact that we received mail so regularly.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then on August 14, 1945 when Japan surrendered, did you have any kind of a celebration then?

Mr. Owen:

We did not. We were in wartime conditions and blacked out and we stayed that way until we got to Okinawa a month or several weeks after the war was over before we could display lights at night. There was absolutely no celebration after V-J Day. It was strictly stick to your duty.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get?

Mr. Owen:

World War II Medal, Pacific. Nothing important and I really don't recall what it was but I do know I got the World War II Medal.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you get any battle stars?

Mr. Owen:

No. We didn't participate in any battles so we had no battle stars.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got out, did you use your G.I. Bill to go to college?

Mr. Owen:

Absolutely. As I mentioned earlier, that was my mainstay to finish my education. Earned enough through my summer earnings in 1943 to put myself through A & M college which cost the princely sum of \$500 in 1943. That was my entire expense for education at A & M in 1943 and then Uncle Sam with the G.I. Bill paid the rest of it. So I was very fortunate that my college education cost me the total sum of \$500.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Owen:

Absolutely not. I immediately knew I wanted to go back to college and my father had started a business here in Houston. I worked for him that summer and of course I was romantically attached to my fiancée in Madisonville so I kept busy traveling between Houston and Madisonville quite often.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Owen:

Yes, in August of last year I was fortunate enough to be honored by the Honor Flight and we had about 30 individuals that made the flight. About 15 of them were Korean veterans and the rest of us were World War II veterans.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about this radar. What part, what did you do with the radar and what was that about?

Mr. Owen:

There's two type of radar that we operated aboard our ship. First was search radar which had a range of about 30,000 yards max. But really it was closer to 20,000 yards. It was an SG radar made by Raytheon. Had a scope of about 15 inches in diameter and we operated 24 hours a day and you stood a watch of four hours on, eight hours off and it was operated continuously while you were at sea. We also had an air search radar called an SC radar, also made by Raytheon and it had a range of about 150 miles to pick up aircraft. Its true range was less than a hundred miles but they said it was 150. You could pick up aircraft, ships and determine how far away from you, their bearing from your ship and their course and speed if you tracked them. The radar shack consisted of the SC and the SG and a plotting table and a radar watch consisted of five people, two on the radars which we would operate one hour at a time continuously and then we would assume plotting duties and then go back on the radar at four hours. You'd stand watch for four hours, then eight hours off and then back on watch. So you would actually look at that scope in a 24-hour period about three to four hours. The rest of it would be on the plotting board or else goofing off. The quartermaster shared the same quarters we did so we would assist in navigation of the ship. That's how I learned to be a quartermaster too because we had the quartermasters in our CIC (Combat Information Center) where we operated.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now what was your job on the radar?

Mr. Owen:

Well, as I said you either stood about an hour's watch on the scope looking at the beams circulating around the scope and then after about an hour you were relieved and then you worked at the plotting board if they had a target you were plotting. Otherwise you were pretty well at your leisure and you could do what you wanted to until you had to go back on the scope.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Owen:

I think we've pretty well covered the career. I was very fortunate I had sea duty but I was fortunate that we never saw a shot fired in anger. But I'm grateful that Uncle Sam took me in and showed me how to be a mature man and I think that my service in the Navy was a fact that the maturity that I gained in the Navy made me a successful student and a successful businessman. So I'm grateful for my service.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Unless you have anything else, that's all the questions that I have.

Mr. Owen:

OK. I don't have anything else to add but I'll send you that CD that we made before my brother died. It elaborates quite extensively on his career in the Army. He was in the 7th Armored Division and he went ashore at Utah D-2 and then then he fought in the liberation of Cherbourg, France and then they were attached to Patton's 7th Armored and he made the breakout with the 7th Armored and Patton's 3rd Army all the way to the Seine and then they were stopped there.

Then they were taken into the 21st Army and sent up to Holland and Belgium and he participated in the Market Garden Operation, the big fiasco that Montgomery ran there at the bridge too far and then he fought in the Battle of the Bulge and wound up at the Elbe River right next to the Russians so he had a very active war and he more than made up in the action he saw for the action that I didn't see. So he recounts his experiences in the war and our sister recounts her experiences as a civilian and getting married in World War II as a war bride. Then I recount my experiences which I just recounted to you. So you'll get three for one in that CD.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, good. Any charge for that?

Mr. Owen:

No, no. You're more than welcome to it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Well, thanks again for your time today, Jack, and for your service to our country.

Mr. Owen:

You bet. I'm glad to do it. Best thing that ever happened to me. Made a man out of me and I think any success I've had in life I owe to the time I served in the service. I'm grateful for having served.

End of Interview

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