

The National Museum of the Pacific War  
(Admiral Nimitz Museum)

Center for Pacific War Studies  
Fredericksburg, Texas

Interview with  
Eugene William Riester  
4605269  
USN

By John Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter  
November 20, 2004

Great Lakes Naval Training Station, Illinois  
DD 352 USS Worden; AD 3 USS Dobbin; DD 576 USS Murray  
Fleet Training Center, Oahu, T.H.  
Naval Air Base, Wake Is., Navy 1181  
Commander Marianas: 109th Construction Battalion;  
103rd Naval Construction

Eugene William Riester  
4605269  
Seaman 1st class  
USN

Pacific Theater

Medals earned:  
American Campaign Medal  
World War II Medal  
American Defense Medal  
Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal 7 Stars  
Philippine Liberation Medal  
Ruptured Duck

Original Interview by  
John B. Tombaugh and Peg Van Meter  
completed  
November 20, 2004

With reinterview of  
Eugene William Riester  
by John Tombaugh

My name is John B. Tombaugh and Peggy Van Meter and I are interviewing Mr. Eugene Riester.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Would you please give your name and address please?

**Mr. Riester**

Eugene William Riester, 404 Lakeshore Drive, Culver, Indiana.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where were you born?

**Mr. Riester**

I was born in Gary, Indiana on October 24, 1921.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What were your parents names?

**Mr. Riester**

Raymond and Augusta Stamgrijohn Riester. My mother was from Chicago, Illinois and my dad from East St. Louis, Missouri.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What is your wife name?

**Mr. Riester**

Catherine Mahalick Riester, we were married on March 19, 1952.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you go to school?

**Mr. Riester**

Lou Wallace School in Gary, Indiana and graduated in 1940.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you have any children?

**Mr. Riester**

Yes. Amy, Barbara, Susan, Margaret, William Jr. and Jeffery.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Why did you choose the Navy?

**Mr. Riester**

I was young and restless and wanted to get out and see something. I did not want to go to work in the steel mills so I choose the Navy.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Where did you go for your basic?

**Mr. Riester**

Great Lakes Naval Station.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What were the conditions like at that time?

**Mr. Riester**

Just basic training.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Prior to that it was depression era, and you had been suffering through that?

**Mr. Riester**

Oh yes, our family felt it also.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What kind of work did your father do?

**Mr. Riester**

My dad worked for a lumber company, he was what you called a glazier. He was lucky to get this job at this time. We still felt the depression everybody did, I was young, but yet old enough to know that something was wrong.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was school then compared to school now?

**Mr. Riester**

It was very simple, reading, writing, arithmetic. You used a pencil and paper, we didn't have calculators. We learned I think better then they do today.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When you got done with basic you went to specialty training?

**Mr. Riester**

I went to San Diego, California. I didn't have any special training. I was a Seaman Deck Force.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you remember the POW's working in the fields?

**Mr. Riester**

Yes, I do. If they could speak good English, they would mix right in with everybody else.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your rank aboard your first ship?

**Mr. Riester**

Seaman 1 Class, aboard the USS Worden a Destroyer.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Was that at Pearl Harbor on December 7?

**Mr. Riester**

Yes.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you want to share any memories of that time before War broke out?

**Mr. Riester**

We were training and out on maneuvers.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your position manning a gun?

**Mr. Riester**

I was on what they called a 5" .38 cal. D.P.(Dual Purpose) gun.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What gun, do you remember?

**Mr. Riester**

Midshipman No.3. Later on No. 1. Our training exercise was red sea against blue sea. We had lots of training maneuvers.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What were you doing on December 7?

**Mr. Riester**

Having breakfast and general quarters sounded. Usually Sunday was a day of relaxation. We wondered what was going on, so we went topside and thought it's air force police. Then it dawned on us, as we seen the marking on the planes. They were attacking the battleships. Then we realized this was no game. We went to our duties we were trained for then went to general quarters. We were along side the AD 3 USS Dobbin for maintenance, our guns were all torn apart, but we put them together in a hurry and got them going. We had ready ammunition boxes and maggies (magazines) were down below and we didn't have any trouble getting that. We didn't unload.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Was your ship damaged in anyway during that time?

**Mr. Riester**

No, we were on the horn. We were strafed a couple of times. One plane flew over really low, and this Quartermaster 3rd Class by the name of Ray Brubaker was manning a deck mount .50 caliber AA Gun and he shot it down and it crashed into the water.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

After the attack and clean up of the mess what was your assignment?

**Mr. Riester**

We were out at sea; we had gotten underway by that time. There was a lot of submarine activity at the entrance. We found out later that the Japanese submarine was supposed to sink every ship that came out of the entrance. We were very lucky for it never happened.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Were you aware of the plane that flew over Pearl Harbor later and took pictures. It was never challenged?

**Mr. Riester**

I was not aware of that. We were out to sea with the USS Detroit to search, but they were already gone by then.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When you were out on patrols with the USS Detroit, were there any other ships involved at that time?

**Mr. Riester**

There were other destroyers, but I can't remember their names.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

I understand.

**Mr. Riester**

Very few survivors. The fleet had been reduced to a small number.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

After you got done patrolling, were you assigned to a different ship?

**Mr. Riester**

I stayed full time on the USS Worden.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Who was the skipper at that time?

**Mr. Riester**

Commander W.C. Pogue, I understood he was also a pilot.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

During your time in the Navy, you met a lot of people. Have you kept in contact with any of them?

**Mr. Riester**

No, but it surprised me but Bob Roher who survived the Oklahoma sinking at Pearl Harbor and came aboard ship after the attack. I got very close to him but he's since passed away. We have a Pearl

Harbor Survivors Association and they keep track.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

How about your ship, do they have reunions?

**Mr. Riester**

Yes, they do, but I'm sorry that I never made it to any of them. I still would like to go back to Pearl Harbor someday.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Did you live off ship when you came into shore?

**Mr. Riester**

No, we stayed on the ship.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When you got your pass what did you do?

**Mr. Riester**

We would go into town, have some dinner and a few drinks and get our picture taken.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Wasn't the USS Worden involved in some of the action in the Pacific?

**Mr. Riester**

The Navy organized a rescue mission for Wake Island. We were on our way there and they called us back. Then we got into small operations and the next big thing was the Battle of the Coral Sea. This stopped the Japanese from invading New Guinea.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Do you have any humorous recollections while on board ship?

**Mr. Riester**

One time at New Guinea, we backed up some Rangers conducting a landing. Afterwards we patrolled to keep thing safe. We were attacked by two Japanese Betty's (medium bombers). We shot one down and the next day the wing and landing gear were found floating. We went out to see what it was and on the landing gear it said Consolidated Aircraft, San Diego, California. One guy in the crew said he had worked for them and he might even of built the landing gear. The tires were Firestone tires.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Were you on any special rescue missions?

**Mr. Riester**

No, just fleet operations. We picked up a pilot one time, put him on a refueling tanker and they took him on in to port.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

How was the food on the ship?

**Mr. Riester**

Okay, I'm easy to feed and every friday was bean day.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your worst time in the Navy?

**Mr. Riester**

Well they sent us up to Alaska to help up there and that is when we lost the USS Warden on 12 Jan., 1943. Fourteen sailors drowned before they could be rescued there was also a troop transport which drunk her anchors and ran hard aground during this time. They landed these troops from the transport USS Middleton in Amchitka Bay, Illusions, and coming out we hit and uncharted reef and the ground swells broke us up and we had to abandon ship, Roher and I dived in like at the old swimming hole but it wasn't like the old swimming hole, that water was cold! The worst part of it was when the landing parties picked us up and you got out in the air; that's when it really hit you. They got us aboard the Middleton and took care of our needs and gave us brandy, hot showers and clothes. That air's what really got to you, no winter clothes and we had taken our shoes of. Roher said twice in one lifetime of abandoning ship was enough.

The following is from the files of John B. Tombaugh:

Alaska

"1,200 American Army troops arrive from Adak Island and land unopposed on Amchitka Island in the Aleutians from the USCG transport AP 55 USS Arthur Middleton escorted by the DD 352 USS Worden, skippered by Cmdr. W.G. Pogue. This is only 69 miles east of the Japanese held Kiska. Now the Allied planes can attack both Kiska and Attu.

"During a gale force wind in the Aleutians during the night the DD 352 USS Worden, skippered by Cmdr. W.G. Pogue, losses power and is driven into the rock outcroppings on Amchitka Island. By the 17th the ship is no more. The crew is rescued by the ships boats from the transport USS Middleton."

**Mr. Tombaugh**

You got out of service on what date?

**Mr. Riester**

November 16, 1946 at San Diego, California.



**Mr. Tombaugh**

How did you get home from San Diego?

**Mr. Riester**

By train.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

What was your feelings coming home?

**Mr. Riester**

Relief. Glad it was over.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

When you got home what were the changes out there and here?

**Mr. Riester**

I didn't notice really too much at all. I remember the rationing and women working in factories.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

You have anything you would like to add?

**Mr. Riester**

Just that I was on the USS Worden; USS Dobbin; USS Murray; Fleet Training Center Oahu, Territory of Hawaii; Naval Air Base Wake, Navy 1181; Commander Marianas: 109th Construction Battalion; 103rd Naval Construction.

We took over the maintenance of the camps.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

Looking at picture and reading: USS Worden DD 352; USS Hull DD 350; USS McDonough DD 351.

Did you get into Japan?

**Mr. Riester**

No.

**Mr. Tombaugh**

I understand you went somewhere special this year?

**Mr. Riester**

Yes. The local VFW Post # 6914 sponsored me to the Dedication of the World War II Monument in Washington, D.C.. That is really something to see because words cannot describe it. You have to see it.

-END-

10 hours