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Interview with

COMMANDER HAL LAMAR

October 9, 1994

Place of Interview: Kerrville, Texas
Interviewer: Calvin Christman
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and
University of North Texas Oral History Collection
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Dr. Christman: This is Cal Christman. I'm doing an interview with Hal Lamar, who was Admiral Chester A. Nimitz's flag lieutenant and aide--he was a lieutenant commander and commander--during much of World War Two. The interview date is October 9, 1994.

First off, could you give me some biographical information: where were you born and when?

Cdr Lamar: I was born in Los Angeles, California, on January 10, 1911.

Dr. Christman: How did you get into the Navy?

Cdr. Lamar: Well, I graduated from college in 1933, and at the same time one of my best friends graduated from the Naval Academy. His father died, and he had lots of brothers and sisters. He had to resign. Being the eldest, he had to help the family out. In 1936 it was easy to get out of the Naval

Academy, but they made him go into the active reserve. We both lived in Virginia, across the river from Washington. The reserve drilled at the Washington Navy Yard on Tuesday nights.

So Creighton suggested to me, "Why don't you apply in the special services program and get a commission in the reserves. They'll take college graduates who have had some experience with sailing or know something about the ocean." So I applied and was made an ensign. I drilled every Tuesday night at the Washington Navy Yard. Every summer we went to Guantanamo on the old four-stack destroyers. We were inspected every year by officers from the Bureau of Navigation, which is now the Bureau of Naval Personnel. I got asked several times if I wanted to have this job or that job.

In May, 1940, the detail officer at BuNav [Bureau of Navigation] said, "I've got a lovely job for you here at the Navy Department. Would you like to have it?" Well, I was working at a bank in those days. I asked my vice-president if he would let me go. He said I could go if I gave him three weeks to get a replacement. So in May of 1940 I entered in the BuNav, and I was given the Congressional Desk. With the suggestion that we might go to war, many, many hundreds of Navy veterans wanted to come back, but

they all wanted to come back as lieutenant commanders or commanders. This mail from congressmen was pouring into the BuNav, so I had to answer it all. It got to the point to where I had nine gals writing letters. Admiral Nimitz was signing all of them. I had met him, of course, when I reported, but that's all.

Christman: Now he was in charge of the Bureau of Navigation at that time?

Lamar: Chief of the Bureau of Navigation. As I say, I met him when I reported for duty, but then he always signed my letters. If it was to the chairman of the Naval Affairs Committee in the Senate or the House, the girls shifted the stationery to the SecNav [Secretary of the Navy]. The admiral would initial it and send it on to Colonel [Frank] Knox.

Well, this went on until February of 1941. One day the admiral's orderly came down and told me that I was invited for dinner that night at his quarters, at his apartment on Q Street, black tie [formal], at seven o'clock. So I got dressed up, and away I went. When I got there I was quite surprised to see that I was the only guest. The admiral had a great, big silver cocktail shaker and poured me a very strong martini, which I played with as long as I could. He came by for a second, and I took the second one, and then I realized that what he was doing was trying to

get me drunk. So at two I said, "Knock it off, Admiral, I can't take anymore." So we had dinner, and both Admiral and Mrs. Nimitz asked me question after question. We had a nice dinner, and after dinner the admiral's favorite relaxation was listening to classical music. I stayed until about ten o'clock, then thanked them and went home.

Monday morning I sent Mrs. Nimitz some flowers, and I thought that was a nice gesture. That afternoon his orderly came down and found me, and he said, "The admiral would like to see you." So I went up to see him. He said, "Lamar, I'll show you why I asked you to come up here today." He handed me a typewritten dispatch: "All Nav to all flag officers. Today I am taking a Naval Reserve officer as my personal aide. You will do the same and send your Naval Academy graduates to sea immediately." That's how I got to be his aide.

So until December 7, the admiral and I played tennis, and we went to football games at the Naval Academy. I began to know his habits, when he wanted help and when he didn't want help.

Then one day the phone rang, which I answered, and it was the White House calling. I put the admiral on. I always listened in on the beginning of the conversation to see if there was anything I should

know about. The first thing I heard was the President's voice saying, "Chester." (chuckle) Anyway, he came out and said, "Well, get my automobile. I've got to go to the White House." That was the day he got the news that he was going to be Commander-in-Chief Pacific and Pacific Ocean Area.

Who was going to relieve him? Admiral Jacobs, who was then at sea, had been the assistant chief of the bureau under Nimitz in the early days. It so happened that he met Jacobs in the hall of the Navy Department, and he grabbed him and told him he was going to be his relief. The admiral said, "I'm taking Lamar with me." Jacobs objected. He said, "You've got to leave somebody here for turnover." The admiral said, "How long?" Jacobs said, "I think three or four weeks." But I didn't get loose until July. Every month Jacobs would get a signal from Nimitz, saying, "Where is Lamar? I need him."

So in July they finally let me go. That's how I got to be the aide. I was the first Naval Reserve officer to be an aide to a flag officer, and I was the only who was an aide to a five-star admiral.

Christman: You were his aide through the rest of the war?

Lamar: The rest of the war.

Christman: You continued in the Navy, then, after the war?

Lamar: Well, I had a minor defect in one eye, and they asked

me to go over into the Regular Navy. As a matter of fact, I considered it and then said, "They're not going to take me with my eye." So I did not put in to be...the admiral was relieved as the CINCPAC [Commander-in-Chief, Pacific] on November 1. I asked him to send me to China. For some reason I wanted to go to China. So he assigned me as executive officer of the Blue Ridge, which was the flagship on the China station in those days. He left for Washington, and I was headed for China. When I finally got to the Blue Ridge, the captain had been waiting so long for an executive officer that he had promoted a first lieutenant to the job, so I had no job. There I was, in Tsingtao, in China, and how the hell was I going to get out? So I sent a personal message to Admiral McMorris, who had been the chief of staff, saying, "Please don't forward any mail. I don't have a job." He came back with a vicious letter from CINCPAC to the commanding officer of the Blue Ridge, asking what the hell was going on over there. So right quick I got orders to be the executive officer of another command ship, the Appalachian. So I got back to Pearl and stayed with Admiral [Raymond A.] Spruance until the Appalachian came back. She had been Admiral [Richard L.] Connelly's flagship for the Guam invasion. I got on the Appalachian and relieved the executive officer,

and we headed for the West Coast.

We got word we were going to be the flagship of the Commander in Chief Pacific. So we went down to Long Beach [California], and we began to get polished and painted and decorated to be a flagship. Then we awaited waiting for some instructions.

Along came a message from Admiral Nimitz, who was then the Chief of Naval Operations, asking me to report by air to him as CNO, which I did. He sat me down, and he said, "I've got a real tough job for you. The Secretary of the Navy has approved three hundred correspondents to go to the atom bomb test at Bikini. He's also assigned the Appalachian that responsibility. You've got to go back to Long Beach and have your quarters changed so you can accommodate three hundred correspondents. Now here's the part I expect you to do personally. In order to get the correspondents interested, the SecNav has approved them drinking on board. We're going to have a couple of ice machines. It's approved but I don't want any drinking going on where it's observed by any of your crew. I'm holding you personally responsible for that."

So we went to San Francisco and boarded on the three hundred correspondents. We're going out under the Golden Gate Bridge. I'm on the bridge, at the

conn, looked down on the forecastle, and here are two young correspondents with highball glasses. I don't know whether you know it or not, but the correspondents, like the diplomatic corps, have a dean, and the dean of the correspondents on our ship was a gentleman from the New York Times. I don't remember his name--an elderly fellow. So I sent the messenger down to have him report to the bridge. I said, "This is what we cannot have. If it doesn't stop, I'm going to turn around and go back." He assured me, "Commander, it will not happen again." And it didn't. Not once did it appear again.

We got out to Bikini, and the first message came from Admiral Hill's flagship, saying, "Have you any lettuce on board?" I thought the admiral wanted it for his mess. So we sent over a case of lettuce. The next day I reported to him on board for a conference, and I said, "Admiral, did you enjoy my lettuce?" He said, "No, I've been starving for lettuce for two months." I said, "Yesterday I sent you a whole case." He said, "Goddammit, those scientists are probably using it to see what the effect of radiation is going to be!"

Well, we went to Bikini and had a nice cruise. I was amused by it. We were told that we had to let the reporters send anything they wanted--the dispatches--

back. But the admiral said, "I want you to read it before they go so you know what's going on." You know, in the Navy when you have movies, when the captain or the executive officer come in, it's "attention on deck," and everybody stands up. Captain Reese, who was the commanding officer, never went to the movies, so I went. He said [the correspondent], "This commander who is running the ship has the crew stand up at attention. It's a very segregated sort of situation." But I let it go.

We came back to Pearl, and we went into Long Beach to have all these bunks and so forth taken out. I said, "Hell, I might as well get out." I put in my application, and Admiral [Louis E.] Denfeld was then the Chief of Naval Operations. I got a message from him for me to report to him in Washington. He said, "They told me that you have put in to go on inactive duty." I said, "I'm afraid if I try it my eye defect will go against me." He said, "Go down and see Admiral Swanson, the Surgeon General, and he'll examine you with a specialist and give you the results." Swanson did and he said, "The defect is minor, but it does require a waiver. You've got plenty of admiral friends who would make you last for five or seven years. But you're going to come up against some Naval Academy graduates who are still mad

that you had this job and see this waiver, and out you go."

So I went back to Denfield and told him, "I guess I better get out." He said, "Well, you deserve something from the Navy. I understand you speak Spanish." My stepfather was the ambassador to Chile. He said, "We'll send you to the Naval Academy as an associate professor in the language department. We have a lot of trouble with discipline down there because the PhDs and masters [degrees] in languages let the midshipmen run all over them. He said we need some three-stripe walking around to keep order and discipline." Well, it was lovely duty. I asked the dean of the faculty...we were supposed to teach twelve hours a week. I said, "Dr., I'll teach fifteen hours if you'll give me no classes on Saturday and no classes on Monday morning." He said, "You're willing to do fifteen hours?" I said, "Yes, I'll do fifteen hours." The scholastic field believes you should only have twelve. Well, he gave me that, which gave me nice weekends.

Then the first summer came in 1947, and the admiral who was in command of the midshipmen training squadron, which was scheduled for Europe, came in to see the superintendent, and he said, "I need somebody who knows protocol because there are going to be gun

salutes and visiting gentlemen and kings and queens." Admiral [Aubrey] Fitch says, "There's Lamar. He's an old hand. He's been doing it for four years." So each summer I used to cruise with whoever the admiral was commanding the midshipmen squadron. I met the king of England and Prince Olaf of Norway, King Haarkon VI, Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden, Prince Rainier in Monaco. Lovely duty. But I'd been there three almost four years living the "Life of Riley," and they didn't have any quarters for me, so I had a rental allowance. I had a nice apartment.

But a friend of mine, who was then BuPers [Bureau of Personnel], said, "We've got a nice job as an executive officer of an APA, a naval transport. Why don't you try that and then get out." Well, I went to the transport and had a hell of a time cleaning it up. The captain and I did not see eye-to-eye right away. The first job we got was taking a battalion of Marines to Vieques. Then we went down to Aruba and Curacao for R&R [rest and relaxation].

Two weeks later, we came back to pick up the battalion. We had a medical officer on board, and during the reembarkation he said, "We've already got thirty cases diarrhea." I said, "Why are they coming to us?" He said, "We're the only ones who have a doctor in this task force." We got up to sixty cases,

and I told the captain, "We got to knock this off." He said, "What do you suggest?" I said, "Let's go into Puerto Rico and get rid of them."

Well, we exchanged some dispatches, and they ordered us sent into San Juan. When we came up to this dock, they had this long table built with faucets, hot and cold water. So we were told that the Marines had to scrub their clothes. We had to scrub the ship. We had to send people who were still suffering from diarrhea to the hospital. Of course, the Marine Corps immediately asked for an investigation. Well, I came out beautifully because not a member of my crew had diarrhea. So it was obvious that they brought it with them.

So we got back to Norfolk, and then we were told to unload a number of our landing craft and prepare for a journey to the cold weather up north to test out various engine oils in the landing craft. So off we go without heavy underwear to the north. One night it's raining like hell, and the visibility is terrible. I'm in my bunk fast asleep, when I hear the collision signal. I get dressed and go up on the bridge. We're backing down because we had run into the Vermilion. I asked the captain, who was a nervous wreck by that time, what had happened. He said, "The repeater on the port side of the bridge was not

working properly. And what I didn't notice was that we were ordered to make a left turn, but the repeater didn't show it, and I asked for more rudder, and then we hit her." Well, I stopped the engines, and I made an inspection of the ship. Admiral Holloway, who had been my superintendent at the Naval Academy, was the commander of this task force in the Albany. Our call sign was "Imperial Uncle." He said, "'Imperial Uncle,' report your status." I told him, "We've got a ten-foot gash in the port bow, which we can handle." We'd lost our jack staff in the bow and the boat boom, which swings out. But we were able to proceed under any conditions. He waited a few minutes and then came back and said, "You will stand by the Vermilion until she is ready to get under way. She predicts that she can make four or five knots. Go into Halifax. The Canadian government will put her into dry dock, and then you are relieved."

So back we went. Of course, the captain had gone off the bridge. I had all the night watches from then on. He was a complete wreck. We got into Norfolk, and he sent for me, and he said, "Now any mail coming on this ship or any messages that come on my ship are to be delivered to my cabin. That's everybody's mail." He knew that something was going to happen. Several days later, he got the word that there would

be an investigation. I was not summoned because I had been in bed. But that Saturday I went ashore, and when I came back, I had orders transferring me to the commandant of the Navy yard. He wanted to get me out of the way. So I sent in my resignation after that. I got out.

Christman: You got out then? That was 1951?

Lamar: Yes.

Christman: Let's talk about Admiral Nimitz. In working with him, what would you consider his most outstanding attributes?

Lamar: He knew he had seen the records of every flag officer in the Pacific and most of the senior captains. As a matter of fact, I understand that's why FDR picked him, because he knew the people he had to work with, and if he needed somebody he knew where to get him. He was definitely a personnel man. He knew what he wanted, and he knew how to get it.

Christman: What do you consider his greatest weaknesses, or do you think he had...you worked with him for many, many years, and you saw him very closely. Did he have weaknesses?

Lamar: Well, it used to upset him very much to see the casualty lists. He indicated to me that that was one of the hardest things a commander-in-chief had to do, was order men to die. He expressed it more vehemently

on the island of Tarawa, where we saw corpses all over the place. The admiral said, "This is the first time I've smelled death." After Tarawa the mail from mothers who lost their sons was terrible. The admiral got some awful notes, which, after sending him one one day, I said, "I'll only send the nice ones." He said, "I understand your stopping my mail, but I want to see all of them." So I wrote the letters, but he signed them.

Christman: Admiral Nimitz, when he replaced Admiral [Husband] Kimmel, kept on much of Kimmel's staff. Rather than having a thorough out cleaning, he kept on [Charles] "Sock" McMorris, he kept on [Edwin] Ed Layton.

Lamar: "Sock" McMorris wasn't there then.

Christman: Hadn't he been with Kimmel?

Lamar: He had been, but he was at sea then.

Christman: Okay, because I knew he had worked with Kimmel.

Lamar: He brought in Spruance as chief of staff. When Spruance went back to Fifth Fleet, then "Sock" McMorris came from sea to be chief of staff.

Christman: But he kept Ed Layton, and he kept some of the others on. Is this because of his knowledge of personnel that he still felt these were the best people despite...

Lamar: Captain [Thomas R.] Hill was the fleet gunnery officer, and he had great respect for Hill. There

were a number of others that he kept on. The only people that I had to get rid of when I got there was...he had kept Kimmel's chauffeur, and he had kept Kimmel's yeoman. The first thing he said, "I need a yeoman." So I sent to Com 12 and asked him via BuPers for a qualified yeoman. A couple of weeks, later a little, short bald-headed guy in a uniform too big for him, hat on the back of his head, reported, and he had on a first class yeoman's badge. I said, "Oh, my God! What have I got?" We were doing a court-martial at that time with a lot of fancy words in it. So I said, "Adams, sit down. I'm going to dictate something." I read from this court-martial as fast as I could for a long time. I said, "There's the typewriter. Let me see your work." [Imitates rapid typing] Back it came, and there wasn't a mistake in it. I said, "What were you, Adams, before you joined the Navy?" He said, "I was the court reporter in Fresno, California." The admiral loved him. The only trouble was that everybody found out that Adams was the court reporter, so they always asked the admiral if they could borrow Adams for this investigation or this court-martial. But he worked with us all during the war, and the admiral made him a ship's clerk when he got out.

Christman: In working with Admiral Nimitz, what are the personal characteristics that you recall that are perhaps most

vivid in your mind?

Lamar: Well, the first thing I found out when I got there was that the admiral had the bad habit of getting up at three or four o'clock in the morning, putting on his bathrobe, and taking off on a walk. Admiral Spruance found this out in the admiral's house. I didn't live in the admiral's house at that time. Spruance said, "I want a Marine behind him twenty-four hours a day."

You know, we didn't have a flagship. On a flagship the captain of the flagship commands the flag allowance. Well, we didn't have a flagship, so I was made commanding officer of the flag allowance. So I selected some topnotch Marines. We made them sergeants. If they did well, and if the admiral liked them--some of them he liked; some of them he didn't--after a year's duty he would send them to officer's training school. Our top sergeant retired as a lieutenant colonel. He got sent off to school.

The admiral, as I say, you could see he was upset on every casualty or when we lost a ship. It got so that I noticed he was beginning to shake a little bit. So the fleet surgeon and I said, "We've got to do something about this." He said, "I'll write the Surgeon General and get the experts to tell us what to do." Swanson came back with the suggestion that "you get the admiral interested in target shooting." He

said, "When he learns that he has to keep a steady finger to pull the trigger, I think this will cure him." And it did. So the gunnery officer, Captain Hill, made us a gallery range on the side of his office. All the ammunition people sent us target pistols of various kinds.

One day everything was set up, and I said to the admiral, "I bet you a dime that you can't hit a target." He said, "Hell, I used to fire at the Naval Academy." So we went out, and he enjoyed it. From then on, after the eleven o'clock morning conference with commanding officers, we went shooting. I bet we shot millions of rounds, and we both got very good.

We had a gunnery sergeant in the Marine detachment who came up to give us instructions. He used to put a quarter [on the barrel of the pistol] for a dry squeeze. If we knocked the quarter off when we pulled the trigger, the gunnery sergeant would give me hell, or he would give the admiral hell as if he was just another Marine, and the admiral never objected. He always said, "Thank you."

He was very interested in enlisted personnel. When we went out for an evening's entertainment in his limousine. He'd say, "Hal, have the boys [meaning the driver and his orderly] been fed?" I always answered yes because I found out early on that the wealthy

Honolulu families had Japanese maids, most of them, and they always invited the admiral's driver and his orderly to have a little food in the kitchen.

One night we were coming back from a dinner party. The admiral was in quite demand socially, but he wouldn't go but about once a week. We were coming back from a dinner party, and we saw this drunk sailor along the road, and the admiral said to the driver, "Stop the car." He told the orderly, "Go back and tell that guy we'll ride him into the Navy Yard." The guy was so drunk he didn't know who he was or who he was with. But we did find out in talking to him that he was a Seabee, construction battalion. He didn't even know who the admiral was. He told the admiral that his commanding officer was...he used this word, he was so drunk. He said, "The commanding officer is a son-of-a-bitch!" So the driver found out by questioning where he was quartered, and we got about a block away and dumped him out.

The next morning we were walking down to the office, and the admiral said, "I'd like to inspect that Seabee battalion at ten o'clock." So I called ahead to the Seabees right away, but it didn't give them much chance. We got out there, and we found very much what the drunk had reported. As we went down the ranks, the admiral in uniform and me in uniform, we

passed this Seabee, who by then had sobered up, and he turned as a white as a sheet. I thought he was going to die (chuckle).

[Tape 1, side 2]

Christman: If you could further talk about his interest in the enlisted personnel.

Lamar: One night, at nine or ten o'clock, we were coming back with dimmed-out lights. We saw this drunk sailor on the side of the road. The admiral told his driver to stop, and he sent his orderly back to invite the enlisted man to ride with us to the Navy Yard. Well, the guy was so drunk he didn't know where he was, and he talked a lot, and the admiral asked him questions, and he called the commanding officer an "SOB." The driver by questioning him found out where we were to take him, and we went there and let him out about a block from where he lived. The next morning the admiral said, "I'm going to inspect that Seabee battalion at ten o'clock." So I called the head Seabee in the Navy Yard and didn't give him any chance to get ready. We went out at ten o'clock, and we found the conditions very much as the sailor had reported. We went to a personnel inspection, and they were all lined up in their white uniforms. We passed the gentleman we had picked up, and I saw him go white. I thought he was going to faint. We got back

to headquarters, and the admiral wrote a little note to the head Seabee that he wanted him to make some changes.

Christman: Did Admiral Nimitz have much of a temper? Did he always have strong self-control, or were there times that you saw temper flare up? What types of things would cause him aggravation?

Lamar: Well, if a thing didn't go the way he wanted, he would get mad, but he never showed his madness except that his eyes would sparkle like there were rays coming out of them. I could tell by looking at his eyes that he was really "teed" off at this person. But he never indicated it. If he had to dress somebody down--and he dressed people down when they needed it--the admiral always believed that you praise them in public, but you chide them in private.

I remember, for example, when he took Admiral [William F.] Halsey down when Admiral Halsey was getting all the publicity about riding the emperor's white horse through the streets of Tokyo. The admiral was the only person in the Navy Department who said, "You cannot do anything to the emperor. Do not damage his reputation in anything. He's the only guy who is going to hold these people together."

Christman: Along with Admiral Nimitz, or because you were working with Admiral Nimitz, you came in contact with many

other officers. Can you give at all a capsule summary of your impressions of their personalities--what they were like, any insights you might have into a person such as Spruance or McMorris or Halsey, [Marc A.] Mitscher, or any of the others.

Lamar: When I first got there, the admiral said, "I don't see any commanding officers on ships. I want to see every commanding officer who comes into Pearl for the first time. I don't care if it's a j.g. [lieutenant junior grade] in an LST or the captain of a new battleship." So I notified all the type commanders that that was the admiral's instructions. So every day at eleven o'clock, up came the commanding officer. One thing is that the admiral was just as cordial to the lieutenant (j.g.) of an LST as he was to the captain of a battleship. He'd sit them down and tell them how he was glad to have them in the fleet, so the captain of the LST felt just as important as the captain of the battleship. They were part of the team--his team. That's the way he got them pulling together.

Of course, as an aide you get a tremendous view of the very powerful. The admiral had warned me in Washington: "If I see you wearing my stars, you are gone." [meaning that Lamar was not to use his association with Nimitz to pull rank on others] But it was hard. When I came to call on a commanding

officer of a ship to give a message, they considered that I was speaking for myself. They never thought it was the admiral. I had to be very careful in my duties. Everybody was very nice to me--admirals and generals and what-have-you.

Christman: Could you give me an idea of your daily routine on an average day--how it started? For instance, you mentioned you normally met new officers at eleven o'clock. Run through for me an average day--when you got up, the types of things normally you would do, how the day closed, this type of thing.

Lamar: The admiral went down to his office at seven-thirty. I was living in a house about a block away from him on Makalapa. So I would start walking down, and he and Admiral Spruance would come out about the same time, and we would walk down to the office. The first thing that happened was that we read dispatches. The admiral scanned his board, and I had my board. He had more on his than I had on mine.

Then at eight o'clock he had the morning conference, and all flag and general officers on the island were invited. Layton would give the summary of had happened during the night. The admiral would ask the flag officers present if they had any problems, if they needed his help.

From then until eleven o'clock he was busy with

various people. He was reading operation plans, and I was busy with my job. At eleven o'clock, as I say, all the new commanding officers coming into Pearl arrived for their meeting. After that meeting, we went shooting. Twelve o'clock was lunch break. He went to his quarters, and I went to the flag mess. He normally took a nap after lunch.

After lunch, when I came back, I had command of the Fleet Signal School, being flag lieutenant. I would go down and see my signals school. I would go up on the signal tower and look around. Then as commanding officer of the flag allowance, the admiral's yeoman ran the paperwork for me, and we were moving people in and out.

Then the admiral would come back, and at about four o'clock, he would get ready to go home. He'd say, "Do you want to take a walk?" Or he'd ask Spruance did he want to take a walk. We'd both get in casual clothes, either Spruance or I, and he used to walk the hell out of us. We'd walk two and three, maybe four, miles. We'd come back all sweaty and get dressed for dinner.

He was greatly in demand by the society of Honolulu. Mrs. Walker, who was wife of the president of American Factors, was one of his favorites. Mrs. Dillingham, who considered herself queen of Honolulu,

he would only go there occasionally. But when Mrs. Walker invited, he always accepted. He in turn would invite the Walkers back on Sunday night. He'd go there Saturday night. The Walkers had a lovely place on Waealai on the other side of the island. We frequently went there for weekends. I'd drive him over. We had a small Plymouth; we didn't take the limousine. We'd go swimming and have a big steak dinner and a few drinks, only two. Then he'd play classical music, and then the next morning we'd get back about ten o'clock.

The admiral always wanted to get back before eleven o'clock. He'd asked the communications staff to put a very strong radio in his office so that he could get broadcasts from the States. There was some symphony--I don't know what symphony orchestra it was--that came on at eleven o'clock. He always pushed his intercom, and would tune me in. Then he would pick out a senior staff officer and push their button so they could listen in. Only one officer at a time. Major General [Edmond] Leavy of the Army came out to join the staff. One morning after eleven o'clock, he came running down, and he said, "What goes on? All at once my intercom starts playing symphony music!" I said, "You should be honored, General because the admiral is inviting you to share with his morning

concert."

Christman: What are your recollections of Admiral Spruance? Are there particularly outstanding traits that you recall?

Lamar: Admiral Spruance never sat down at a desk. He had a desk elevated, so he worked standing up all the time. The reason he did that, he said, "I don't want anybody sitting down in my office telling me long stories." He was very careful, and he was very precise. The admiral had great confidence in him and frequently took his advice. When the time came, he made him Fifth Fleet commander.

Christman: Same question on Admiral Halsey. What recollections do you have there?

Lamar: Well, the admiral knew that Halsey was a fighter and that he was good for morale. He almost got court-martialed twice. The typhoon incident that came up, they had a board of investigation that went all the way to [Admiral Ernest J., Chief of Naval Operations] King, and King took it to SecNav [Secretary of the Navy] and the SecNav took it to the President. The President said, "You'd better not do it. The publicity would be terrible." In connection with that accident--those two accidents--after the first one, the admiral said to me, "I read somewhere that there was a French monk who did a treatise on typhoons when he was at a monastery in Asia. Find that. I want to

see that." So I sent a signal to ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence], which had the naval attaches, and they asked the naval attache in Paris, "Research this treatise. If so, have it translated and ship it to me by air mail." Two weeks later, we got it. The admiral read it with interest. In fact, he wrote a letter of caution on how to behave in typhoons. One of the things he said--not in these words, but it gave you the idea--was that if you were the commanding officer of a ship in a typhoon, and the flag officer in command wasn't paying attention to you, referring back to Halsey, "You tell him, 'I'm going to do something.'" In other words, he gave them the authority to get out of the formation if the task force commander was doing something wrong. Then the damned thing happened again. That was one time I saw his eyes really sparkle.

Christman: I've read that there was a perception near the tail-end of the war that Halsey was really exhausted, that perhaps he was very, very tired. Did you have any impression of that in anything that was said?

Lamar: He was getting tired.

Christman: Of course, I can imagine everybody was terribly tired at that point.

Lamar: I don't want this on the tape. I better not say it.

Christman: Let me pause it. [Tape recorder turned off]

Christman: What special preparation did you and the admiral go through for the arrival and visit of President Roosevelt when he arrived in Hawaii to meet with MacArthur in July 1944? What are your recollections from the admiral's point of view--special preparations, special things you might have had to do, and also the admiral's view of that meeting with the President and meeting with MacArthur?

Lamar: The admiral said, "We got to do everything according to the book." He said, "I want every ship in the area in "whites." If it rains tell the harbor pilot, I'll go out on his tug, and I'll take General [Robert C.] Richardson with me to meet the Baltimore."

Two weeks before he came, Mr. Reilly, the chief of the President's Secret Service detail, came out. He gave us very explicit instructions. He said, "It's got to be understood by everybody that no one photographs the President below the waist. The President will have no meals outside of his quarters in Chris Holmes's villa." He made that very emphatic.

The admiral also stopped the mail the day before he was to arrive, and it was stopped going to the States until he left. He thought that was a precautionary measure. The admiral, of course, invited all the flag officers in the islands--in "whites"--to meet the Baltimore.

The admiral, of course, was on the Baltimore when she came in, and McMorris had us lined up in single file facing the Baltimore as she came into the dock. As she edged up to the dock, he gave the order "right face," so we'd all be facing the gangway. Admiral [John F.] Shafroth, who hadn't done close-order drill for many years, went left. He was the biggest admiral there, and he bumped into everybody else (chuckle). The crew of the Baltimore had great amusement at that. You could hear the laughter. Everybody went on board to be introduced, and then everybody left.

They were waiting. Where was MacArthur? We found out that his plane had landed an hour earlier, but he had gone over to see General Richardson. So an hour later, he comes driving up in an open car with a beat-up flight jacket on and his field marshall's hat that was dirty as hell. He posed on the gangway so the crowd could cheer. I wasn't there, but Admiral [William D.] Leahy bawled him out. He said, "Doug, don't you know how to dress when you come to see the President!" I later found out from Admiral Nimitz that the President was quite upset that he came that way, with the admirals in starched "whites." I think he may have personally said something to Doug.

Well, the President went into town. We went back to quarters, and the next morning General Richardson

had arranged a parade to pass by at Fort Shafter. Our headquarters were on the road to Fort Shafter. It was this long procession of cars. I was way in the back. We stopped at our headquarters to let us out, and I got out. This motorcycle policeman comes up and says, "Commander, the President wants to see you." So I ran up to the first car, and he remembered me from the days when occasionally he needed an extra aide at the White House. Me being an epaulet wearer, I would get the duties, so I knew the President. I also knew him from the fact that in the Reserves we took Saturday and Sunday overnight cruises down to Colonial Beach in a submarine chaser. We frequently would pass the Potomac [the presidential yacht], and we had to man the rail and give salutes. So he knew who I was. He said, "I'm going to have lunch with you tomorrow." I said to myself, "Oh, God, we were told there would no meals out of his quarters!" He said, "I understand that there's a very famous and delicious fish called mahimahi. If you can arrange for your cook to have that, I would like it. I would like you to make sure that I have three very dry and very cold martinis." I looked at the admiral, and the admiral looked at me, and I said, "Yes, Mr. President." He said, "See you tomorrow," and off he went. We both said, "Didn't Reilly say he wasn't going to have a meal anywhere?"

I said, "Admiral, you don't say 'no' to the President. I couldn't say, 'You can't do that, Mr. President.' I wasn't going to do it."

So we went back to the quarters, and here came another police escort with an automobile and Mr. Reilly, mad as hell. He gave the admiral and me a piece of his mind. He said, "Let me see where you're going to have lunch." The admiral's quarters at Makalapa had a slope of about five steps to get up to the house. He said, "You've got to lay a marston mat [steel mesh flooring used for temporary walkways, roadways, and runways] so the president's car can drive up the mat and around to the back door. Take those three palm trees out." We got inside, and he said, "That door has to be rehung because of the President's wheel chair." We had to rehang five doors. We got to the bathroom, and he said, "You've got to raise the toilet seat five and one-eighths of an inch so the President can slide from his chair onto the throne." Then he left, and he said, "You all are really upsetting me."

I said to the admiral, "What do we do now?" He said, "Get the Seabees." There was Texas battalion of Seabees stationed on the island at that time, and the admiral, anytime he needed something done, would say, "Get the Seabees." So I called the commanding officer

of the seabees, and he came up. I'd made a written list of everything that had to be done. He said, "No problem." We had two hundred people in on it. They had these big bulldozers to get the palm trees out. Then they wrapped them all in burlap sacks and watered them down. They put those things back the next day, and it never bothered them a bit. They rehung all the doors.

Everything was lovely when the President came for lunch. All the flag and general officers arrived, and I counted the stars. There were 146 stars.

Christman: What was your impression of President Roosevelt at that point? How did he look? His color?

Lamar: He looked terrible. As a matter of fact, after lunch, when they were chatting, I said to Admiral [Ross, FDR's personal physician] McIntire, "He ordered three martinis." Admiral McIntire said, "That's the only way we can keep him going all day. We've got to give him a stimulant."

Christman: Did Admiral Nimitz comment at all on how President Roosevelt looked, or after the meeting did he ever indicate to you his impression of President Roosevelt, as far as how President Roosevelt looked, how he acted, how he carried out the meeting that he'd had with General MacArthur and with Admiral Leahy?

Lamar: Well, his first impression, he said, "The President

looks like hell." General MacArthur did most of the talking. The admiral never pushed himself. The admiral...I remember, when we went to Brisbane in 1943, I guess it was, Admiral McMorris asked him when he came back, how did he find MacArthur? He said, "Fine, when I could get him away from the mirror."

Christman: (Laughter) I had never heard that one before.

Lamar: The other thing is, if anybody asked him about General MacArthur, he said, "He has a lot of personality. He poses a lot, and he very often pontificates." I laughed like hell when he told the part "when I could get him away from the mirrors."

Christman: That is a marvelous line. Can you remember another recollections you might have or Admiral Nimitz had about that meeting with MacArthur and the President?

Lamar: He didn't make many comments to me. He was a little upset about the President's condition, but he said, "He's marvelous because he smiles and talks well, and he uses his hands, and everybody looks up to him." We saw what terrible shape his legs were in.

Christman: Did...go ahead, please.

Lamar: In the daily routine, once a week we went up to Aiea Hospital to see the wounded. The admiral enjoyed going and made it a point of going through and talking to all the wounded people.

Christman: Getting back to the meeting with MacArthur--and I

realized that Admiral Nimitz was not going to talk a lot or that he was not one to share private information--did he comment at all whether the President seemed sharp during the meeting with MacArthur and Nimitz? His thought process, was that sharp, or did his mind tend to wander?

Lamar: The only remark he made to me, he said, "The President knows he's commander-in-chief."

Christman: Okay, that's interesting. I personally tend to think Roosevelt very much did feel and was determined to play that role of commander-in-chief.

Lamar: Yes. You know, at one time he wanted Admiral King not to use the title commander-in-chief. He was the commander-in-chief. But that never went anywhere. King, you know, was a "sundowner" from way back.

Christman: What perhaps are your most vivid memories of that whole period, of the war? Are there any memories that particularly stand out in your mind?

Lamar: I never will forget going to Tarawa. The admiral told me, "One of the most horrible duties of the commander-in-chief is to send people to die." As we walked around, he said, "This is the first time I have smelled death." The letters after that were terrible. They upset him terribly. I tried to hide them, but he wouldn't let me.

Christman: This is getting a bit off the subject, but I had not

realized until our conversation that you were at the Bikini atomic bomb test. Do you have any particular recollections of that, that particularly stand out in your mind?

Lamar: We were ordered to be fifteen miles away, and we were instructed that everyone was to turn into the bulkhead. Nobody was to look. Everybody was to put their arms up like that [gesture]. I remember that when the thing went off, the ship must have gone up at least a foot. You could feel it rise and fall back down again. We had, by the way, one of the first televisions on board for the correspondents to look at.

Christman: Any other memories particularly of that?

Lamar: I remember when the Prinz Eugen came in, the German cruiser. It was good-looking, and it came in very smartly, and they booed at it.

Then we had a few congressmen who came out to visit. It scared me to death because both coxswains that were taking them off the ship came and stayed with me. In taking them back to the ship, I had instructed the coxswain what course to use to avoid some contaminated water. He went right through the contaminated water. I worried a whole year that something was going to come out of that, but nothing ever did. Apparently, he was going fast enough that

they didn't notice.

Oh, we did one interesting thing at Bikini. The crew hadn't been ashore for some time, so I suggested to the captain, I said, "Let's put three or four boats over the side and give them some beer and let everybody take a couple of turns around the ship and have a beer." The captain said, "Fine." So they did that for morale purposes.

Christman: Anything else you'd care to...

Lamar: Well, I have to tell you that, when we moved to Guam, I got a letter from Mr. [James] Forrestal, who was then the Secretary of the Navy. [As the advance across the Central Pacific progressed, Nimitz moved his headquarters to Guam after the fall of the Marianas.]

Christman: Now this was...

Lamar: Guam.

Christman: Yes, but this when? In 1945?

Lamar: We moved in January, 1945.

Christman: All right.

Lamar: I got a letter from Mr. Forrestal, and he said, "I hate to do this, but I am inviting the presidents and the CEOs of all the companies that have done things for the Navy to come out and visit you." He said, "They will stay overnight, and I expect you to handle the situation." Well, they came and I spent half of

my time at the airport greeting them and telling them "Good-bye," and assuring that they had a good time. One night our guest was Mr. [Andrew J.] Higgins of the landing boat fame.

Christman: From New Orleans, which was where he was based.

Lamar: Yes. And Archbishop Spellman, who was the vicar-general of the Armed Forces, came out in his purple vest and so forth, and he took off his coat. His shirt was all faded from perspiration. I said, "Your Eminence, I'm going to give you a khaki shirt. I'll give you a chaplain's insignia, so they'll know you're involved with the church." "Oh, that'll be wonderful!" So he had the khaki uniform."

But that night at dinner...Mr. Higgins was a story-teller from way back, and every story got a little more risque. Finally, the archbishop said, "Admiral, it's time for me to say my evening prayers. If you'll excuse me." And the admiral said to Higgins, "I'm afraid you've insulted the archbishop." Higgins said, "I'll fix it up tomorrow." So that morning, after breakfast, I saw the archbishop...he was later a cardinal. I keep remembering him as a cardinal. I saw them talking, and I asked Mr. Higgins, "Did you get it settled?" He said, "It cost me \$5,000."

Christman: (Laughter)

Lamar: [He said], "I gave him a check for \$5,000."

Christman: (Laughter)

Lamar: The other thing was, there was Spanish Bishop of Guam. Of course, they were all Catholic. He had fled Guam-- had gotten off of Guam right at the Jap takeover--and we had heard some terrible stories about things that went on. [He had] left his flock with nobody to baptize or christen or marry them. So the admiral said, "I don't want him back." Lo and behold, I went down to Agaña and found that he had come back. I told the admiral that, and he said, "Send for him and have him come up." The bishop wouldn't come, which upset the admiral quite a bit. So when Spellman was there...

[Tape 2, Side 1]

When we got to Guam, we found out that the Spanish bishop had fled the island when the Japs arrived. We also found out that the Guamanians were very much upset that they couldn't get baptized, they couldn't get buried, they couldn't married, because all they had was a young intern. So the admiral said, "I don't want him back. I went down to Agaña and found out that he had come back. So we knew that Archbishop Spellman was coming within the next two or three weeks, and the admiral said, "Remember, when he comes, tell him the problem, and tell him that I want to get

rid of him." So I told archbishop Spellman about this." He asked for a driver and a car to take him down and see the bishop. He said, "I'll let you know when I come back." When he came back, he said, "I would like to send a coded message to the Vatican. Can you do it?" I said, "Write it out, and we can send anything." I said, "We'll send it to Washington, and Washington will send it to the naval attache, Rome, and the naval attache, Rome, will deliver it in person to the Vatican. He said, "I have to do this to get him relieved." Well, a month later we got notice that the Bishop of Rochester was going to be the new Bishop of Guam. So the admiral knew, and, in a very thoughtful way, sent his plane to Pearl to bring him down to Guam. A very nice gentleman.

Christman: Well, I want to thank you very, very much for the chance to talk with you. You've been very, very helpful in your answers. Let me, as a historian, say that we're very appreciative because this is a chance for your recollections to, in the future, be used by historians, and we find it ever so valuable. And so I personally want to thank you and say how much I've enjoyed talking to you.

Lamar: Well, I appreciate that. Admiral [C. D.] Grojean, you, know, is the director of the [Admiral Nimitz] Foundation. He said, "We have found in listening to

the tapes you always tell it as it was." He said, "Frequently, they elaborate on the thing, and we know that isn't right. But you always tell it as it was."

Christman: Well, I might say, because of my own paper [presented at the Admiral Nimitz Symposium], I have done quite a bit of research into the meeting with MacArthur and Nimitz with the President, and one of the things I...yesterday, in hearing you, I was checking. I have gone through many of those records, and your recollection is right on target. Absolutely right on target. So thank you again.