

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education and Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With  
Robert W. Pratt  
Boerne, Texas  
August 17, 2016  
LST-781

My name is Richard Misenhimer: Today is August 17, 2016. I am interviewing Mr. Robert W. "R. W." Pratt by telephone. His phone number is 830-755-8551. His cell phone number is 210-710-1003. His address is 8506 Fairway Bend Drive, Boerne, Texas 78015. 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:

R.W., I want to thank you for taking time to do this interview today and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Pratt:

Thank you very much

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Pratt:

That's OK with me.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in contact with a veteran, he's moved or something. So do you have a son or daughter or some one we could contact if we needed to?

Mr. Pratt:

Sure.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Who would that be?

Mr. Pratt:

Robert W. Pratt. He goes by Robert.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's your son, right?

Mr. Pratt:

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have a phone number for him?

Mr. Pratt:

He's a retired Captain in the United States Navy. Now flying for Delta. He's an international captain. In fact he's in London right today. His number is 214-732-4245.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Do you have an address for him?

Mr. Pratt:

His address is 5216 Stone Arbor Court, Dallas, Texas 75287-7515.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Hopefully we'll never need that but you never know. Now, what is your birth date?

Mr. Pratt:

June 14, 1922.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where were you born?

Mr. Pratt:

I was born in Superior, Nebraska.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Pratt:

I had a sister.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was she involved in anything during World War II?

Mr. Pratt:

No, she was too young. She's six years younger than I was.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Pratt:

My family was a 19<sup>th</sup> century family and you know, work hard, God and country and the Depression...I've got to move you to San Antonio for the Depression because I was born in Nebraska but we left Nebraska, my dad and mother did, when I was about four I guess or five. I'm not sure but I went to school down there in Texas. My dad graduated from the University of Nebraska and so did my mother. He was a dentist called up for World War I but got deferred until he got schooling or something. Can't remember but he had a deferment because of going to school getting his medical thing. Anyway he was a dentist and my mother taught school. Sometime thereafter about four years from my birth we moved to Texas and in a round-about way but San Antonio was where we ended up. When the banks closed, City Central Bank there in San Antonio went flat broke and that's where my dad had all the money. I remember him coming home to a little house they'd rented and said, "How much money have you got, momma?" Some way the number twenty-seven dollars and thirty cents and that was it. There

wasn't anybody stepping in. So anyway it was just hard work. Had one car and dad took the bus back to work. He collected a lot of his fees in produce, things like that. You're familiar with all that good truck farmers down below San Antonio on west of Castorville. He personally had some patients in that area. So anyway we survived. It was fine and as soon as I could, did whatever I could to earn money, you know, for myself. I didn't have to furnish any money for the family. I don't know how far you want me to go but that's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Pratt:

Went to Beacon Hill Elementary School, San Antonio, Mark Twain Junior High School and then Thomas Jefferson High School.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What year did you graduate there?

Mr. Pratt:

1940. Class of 1939 but I had a bad case of pneumonia during my junior year in high school and in those days if you missed about a month, they wouldn't take you back in school. So I had to lay out a whole semester so when I came back, I lost a semester which in those days meant a year. So Class of 1939 was the class I grew up with. In those days we didn't move much. All the families progressed through the north side of San Antonio and the same kids we went to elementary school with without much money and stuff, their families got better and better, moved. About two moves took you up to Jefferson High School. Kind of that routine. Then graduated from high school and the war was just coming on and we thought that was pretty grand because we was all broke. I had a job at the San Antonio Public Library. Earned ten cents

an hour but I could do my homework there. It was all right. It cost three cents to ride the trolley and sometimes they didn't take our three cents, just gave us a free ride home. Everybody took care of everybody. So the money started flowing, there was a war coming on. We all thought we were going to go up and join the Spanish Revolution so we talked romantically about that but we never did. Thank God. So I was in ROTC all the time but all of us were. Jefferson High School was run by the ROTC. The elementary school, Beacon Hill, we had a thing called the Junior Yanks and we were always in uniform, us kids. Only time I wasn't in uniform in school was in junior high school. So ROTC and then the war came along and the draft, why I already matriculated, went to San Antonio Junior College when I graduated which was the old Army barracks down by the Alamo. I wanted to go to A&M but there wasn't any money for me to do that. Couldn't earn that much money. You know wasn't much money. Then I spent a year there in San Antonio Junior College and things got a little better. My father paid my tuition to St. Mary's University so I went out to St. Mary's in San Antonio, thank goodness. Good school. So I was there, the war started, December 7 came along and everybody was enlisting and the registrar out there kind of knew about me, small school with 12 people in a classroom and stuff. Really kind of knew and he said "You don't want to enlist now. We've got a program for the Navy. You always wanted to be a Naval officer. So you can enlist in this program as D-7." So they sent me the documents and papers. The registrar was real good about that and so I went trotting myself down to the Navy recruiting office and they said, "We can't have you. We'll sign you up for the next." I said, "no, no, no. The registrar at the university told me not to do that. That you were going to do that to me." We left. I had to go to Houston. Went to Houston on the bus and went to the recruiting office up there which knew about the program. Went through that, spent the night and came back and then they said, "You're going to get some orders." So shortly

thereafter I got some orders that said "Keep going to school. Make your grades and we'll call you when we need you." So that's what I did. I went back to St. Mary's and about some time in my junior year there at St. Mary's the Army got a little upset with all of us bright young guys were Navy and not in uniform in the Army. Couldn't get them. So they called us and well, I guess they got organized. We were supposed to go to a prep school. The training program called for a prep school since we all weren't easterners and went to prep school. So we were supposed to go to prep school at some university. Then we were going to go to a shortened version of the service school at Annapolis. That was the program as I remember. Annapolis did shorten it to three years but they still couldn't turn out enough. I think with the pressure from the service needs, they established Northwestern University as a satellite to the Naval Academy, Columbia University. So I got orders then to \_\_\_\_\_ and to report to Georgetown University up in Georgetown, Texas, in uniform where they issued us uniforms and all that. I can't really remember when that was but that was probably junior year. I've got it right here in my notes. 1 July 1943.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when you were activated?

Mr. Pratt:

Yeah. Went up there in July and school was, couldn't \_\_\_\_\_ in what we were doing.

We had \_\_\_\_\_ scores. They filled us with a lot of calisthenics and physics and math and all those engineering courses from the Academy, political science course I remember that was different for us little boys. Then all of a sudden we went home for Thanksgiving in November and came back after a week of Thanksgiving and we had our orders on our bunks and the train stopped at the school and picked us up the next day to go to Norfolk. So we went to Norfolk and

went over there and got some boot camp training and chipping paint and all that stuff. By the time we got to that it was November. It was cold in Norfolk and snow and I remember being taken out to a pretty good sized oiler. It was probably an oiler to chip some paint, work on it. Cold, ice stuff on the outside. Remember looking into a porthole into a ward room and there was some kid in there with one stripe on his sleeve, warm and drinking coffee and I said, "Hm, I am not going to flunk out of this program." I remember that to this day. I was cold and he was warm. RHIR. You know what that means? Rank Has Its Responsibilities. So that takes me to Norfolk without any more funny stories. Then we were there til November and first of December we got orders and they took us up on a train that I'm sure Jesse James robbed because it had those swinging lamps in the middle of the car, to Chicago to Northwestern University. So we got to Northwestern University and the Navy became real. It was tough, the Naval Academy all over again I'm sure. Had a Captain there by the name of Waggon, very much retired, probably came out of retirement. I can't remember. He was a little older, four striper, carried his handkerchief up his sleeve, old world. He was quite a gentleman. Became first time in the auditorium there at the University, the part that had been taken over for the midshipmen's school and then he came out of it and addressed us all as young gentlemen. That was really a step up from what we'd just been through, being kicked around in the bottom of the bilges cleaning those ships down Norfolk. Anyway, so we were midshipmen by the grace of God and the United States Navy. So you want me to tell you about midshipmen's school?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Go ahead and tell me. Give me a detail.

Mr. Pratt:

OK. It was difficult, particularly for these little boys from Texas. There weren't many like me



because most of the Texas guys joined the Army or a lot of them went into Army Air Corps as it was known then. Of course, West Point of the Air was here supposedly, Randolph Field. So everybody thought it was pretty silly that I wanted to be a Naval officers but I'd read all the books, everything I could get. Lord Mountbatten. He was kind of my hero at the time, my alter ego hero, and English Lord Mountbatten, four striper, later became Viceroy and a few other things. The Irish Republican Army killed him if you remember right. Set off a bomb after the war. Anyway, I'd read all, you know, I knew more about British Naval history and the wars, Trafalgar and the battle of the Nile. I'd been sailing small boats all my life. I forgot to tell you I built my first little sailboat and sailed it on Woodlawn Lake. Stole the wood from construction jobs. Anyway, it was pretty good. It was a lot of fun. But anyway, I was well up on Naval nomenclature, rank, protocol and all that. I think that's the only thing that saved my life because I had to work my ass off on the math. I had never really learned fractions any more in our school down here. I knew what a half was and two-thirds and quarters and sixteenth but we didn't know how to do fractions. Navigation was tough but I made it. I was never on the tree. I think back and wonder how I did it. The tree being if you were flunking a course and we had I guess you could call it exams every week that said are you going to be here the next week or not because if you were on the tree and they posted the tree supposedly they did every Friday after the last class and everybody ran up and we were on the fourteenth deck and everybody had to run 14 floors for our maneuvers. I never was on that tree because they gave you one more week to make it up and you never showed up on the tree twice, just once. If you didn't make it in that course, you came back one day and that guy's bunk was just all rolled up in the corner and he was gone. Didn't get to say good-bye. But it was a wonderful experience, really, for this kid from Texas. Learned a lot and we were in Chicago and we were in downtown Chicago. They took over part of the medical

school and we were downtown. We weren't out on campus. So when we got off, our quarters were in Abbott Hall and Towe Hall. I was in Towe Hall as they named it and it had been...it was a 15 or 16 story building...right by the water tower in Chicago, downtown district. Couldn't be better. It was a woman's club so it was just full of rooms for people, lobbies, and there were a couple of lobbies scattered out and it had a swimming pool on the 16<sup>th</sup> floor I think it was, kind of unusual where we did our swimming at least indoors. It was a great thing except they only had one little elevator meant for two or three little ladies at a time and so we ran the stairways which is probably the reason I'm still alive walking around. There was a lot of calisthenics. So that was good for us but anyway to be out in Chicago and the Downbeat Room where Gene Krupa was, went to a couple Broadway shows there. I've forgot but the theatre is still there. It was just a wonderful experience. Everybody was very nice to us in Chicago. Chicago is a great liberty town. You never paid for a taxi if you were in uniform. You never paid for a drink in a bar. I don't believe I ever paid for a meal. I know I didn't anywhere. Somebody always picked up the check and then all the young ladies of the society in Chicago would send notes down and through some protocol that the midshipmen powers that be set up, they would post these invitations on the same bulletin board that you had the tree and your grades posted on for the week. So Friday those were up there and were invitations to dinner or to church and dinner. Some of the invitations were for Saturday and because we were through at Saturday noon after inspections and review, things like that. If our grades were good, we were gone. So we'd just jump on the transportation there and go visit these girls. It was amazing. Anyway, so we finally got through that and I don't know how I did it but I did it. I think I did it because I was always a reader and I'd read so much about all the wars and I could fill in the blanks just about anywhere when it came to world events, that sort of thing, and seamanship I knew how to tie all the knots

and I knew about the terminology. I don't know that I'd ever seen it or touched it but the terminology was familiar. I knew how it worked. I knew what \_\_\_\_\_ was and a five-inch gun. I knew a five-inch 38. I knew how you measured it. So the only thing I really had to concentrate on was the math, navigation and the rest of it I guess I fell into but I really worried about that navigation and the math and physics course. So, pays to read, pays to work in a library, young man.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When did you graduate from midshipman school?

Mr. Pratt:

OK. Graduate from midshipman school in 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer:

You got commissioned at that time?

Mr. Pratt:

Got commissioned as Ensign at that point.

Mr. Misenhimer:

An Ensign, OK. Then what happened?

Mr. Pratt:

Well, then I got a set of orders which is kind of funny. I got a set of orders. We all got our orders in about three or four days and they did it abrupt. Just like the academy. The midshipmen ball and the girls we had been dating, some of the boys probably got kind of serious with them. I never did. Had a nice young lady whose father was the county judge for the whole county for Chicago there. So it was kind of fun with him because we had kind the run of lots of places so I enjoyed. She was my date there. I don't know whether I asked her or what. We were all so

excited talking about our orders I think the girls were kind of, I don't know why they wanted to come to the dance. But anyway it was fun. Three or four days we were waiting for our orders and they came in of course. My first orders were to Wild Bill Donovan's Scouts and Raiders. How they got me for that which is a volunteer deal so I said, "I didn't want that. I wanted small boat. I wanted PT boats" and when they asked for your wish list I put down PT boats and PCs, small stuff. I was totally unfamiliar with amphibious work there at the time. Nobody knew anything about it. It was brand new to the Navy. They had the word but they used the motor whale boat and stepped over the sides with puttees wrapped around their pants, you know, before that. So I didn't know anything about these amphibious boats. So I said, "I think there's something wrong." And I went to the Executive Officer and he said, "We'll get this changed right away." So then I got orders, one more day that I got to hang around Chicago, so they got me orders then all mimeographed out to go to report to \_\_\_\_\_. Then they let us go home. I knew there was a skip in there. That's it. So we got orders so we got a couple weeks leave. So went home. My buddy who had been my buddy all through midshipman school, you know, took me out to the airplane and I got on some propeller driven Braniff Air Way. Went to San Antonio and saw my folks for about ten days or something and then got on a train. Couldn't get a plane back. Got on a train to Camp Bradford which is part of ... it's where Seal Team Six trains now in the Chesapeake. Camp Bradford is gone. It's been taken over. The name has slipped my mind, maybe I'll think of it where the Seal Team Six, you know that's the Seal team nobody ever knew about. They train there. That still is their spot. So that was the first of amphibious training. Went there for amphibious training. Also we had orders to a ship which was the LST-781, which was being produced if you use the word, or put together in those shipyards in Pittsburgh at the time. So we had orders down there to train and the whole crew showed up down there, including the

Captain, the officers and all that for the crew, living in tents down there at Camp Bradford, learning how to swim with a knife in your teeth. I don't know what all we did. Went out to the gunnery range. That's what ruined my hearing. My hearing went with three-inch 50s because the original LSTs had some three-inch guns on them so we trained with three-inch guns. They had an awful crack and these things were mounted on land. \_\_\_\_\_ Neck is the gunnery range for Virginia there. So anyway we were taking turns with this thing and this one of those firing wedge things where you shove a big shell in with your hand and as soon as that baby gets in there you better get your hand out of there because this block goes up and a cam hits the firing pin that rolls it over and fires the damn thing. You can't get away from it and they gave us cotton to stick in our ears and by that time the cotton had fallen out. Bam! They had a terrible crack. That was the end of my ears. I remember they said keep your cotton in your ears. But anyway so then we went through there, formed up our crew, Captain showed up and eventually and I was the gunnery officer, hence all the gunnery practice was the fun I had while the other guys were running around, picking up other things. I don't know what they were doing but I was having a lot of fun though with all that stuff. So supposedly we made out a watch quarters station. I was supposed to make it out. I had never heard of a watch quarter station before, which was when you put watch, had all the positions which fire, gunnery, general quarters, everything on there. I knew that was my biggest headache, doing that. So we were there I can't remember the amount of time, probably 30 to 60 days and then we went to Pittsburgh and they put the men up, I can't remember where they were. There's a Navy base there that they built some quarters down at the old shipyard but they put us up, the officers, in the hotel, William Penn Hotel, downtown. We were supposed to make sure the supplies were all right and everything was coming in while they were putting this thing together and welding it all together. So we were there about two or three

weeks, I guess, and then we were on a scavenge thing and I found a piano to bring aboard. I remember that. I got it from the University of Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh. Certain division officers were checking the inventory in the ship of their superiors and making discrepancy lists of things they didn't have. Personally I had a good first class Gunner's Mate that had been in the Navy for about seven years by that time, thank God. They knew our limitations and so they put some pretty good first class...we rated one Chief if I remember right. The ships we didn't rate two Chiefs, they were in short supply. That was a job and they kept us up pretty well but we had a lot of fun. Pittsburgh was nice. Living in a hotel was nice. One of my girlfriends came up from Washington from when we were in Washington, D.C. to visit. No, she was working down there. She came up and spent a few days. It was kind of fun. Anyway, then we commissioned the ship. Can't remember what date but you can look that up. We went down the Monongahela River into the Ohio, down the Ohio, down the Mississippi. For a kid who read all the time. Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, it was a trip of a lifetime. I couldn't have enjoyed anything more. My first little while in the Navy was a lot of fun. We had a Captain that was another piece of work. G. D. Straight was his name and somebody who's listening to this thing, they might want to look him up. George "Dog" Straight we called him. He was so mad that he was still in the service he didn't know to do. He was in the Spanish-American War. He was ready to retire. He had a girlfriend that had been a chorus girl in the Follies back in New York for years and he brought her down there. She was straight out of Central Casting for a 50-year-old ex-Follies girl which the eyes of the Vaudeville were on, you know, and sailors were sailors. But he didn't have much sense of humor except when she was around. But he was fine though. he knew what he was doing. He couldn't quite understand us. He'd been raised, he was a different breed, raised in a different world. Anyway he was the Captain. So we went down the

Mississippi. great trip down. We had pilots all the way. From all my books I knew all the nomenclature, I knew what Mark Twain really meant and the pilots and I got along just fine. I was going through my mind with Huck Finn and where the pilots all knew when we went by Hannibal and all that. In fact one of them was stationed out of Hannibal. That was for short ranges on the Mississippi and they knew it well and it was just fun. I got to play pilot because they just said, "You do it." So it was great. We went on down to New Orleans. We didn't have any weapons aboard or ammunition or anything like that to keep the ship as light as it could be and make the draft to go on down the Mississippi. So we got down there. It didn't take them long, a couple of weeks to put the guns on and we were again back waiting for orders for spare parts, engineers, everybody helped everybody else. It was a busy, busy time. Running all over in a world of... It's amazing how fast we acclimatized to it. You know, Com 8, that's where he is, Commander 8<sup>th</sup> Naval District. Good thing I learned all this stuff overnight. I never knew what the different trade numbers of the...I can't remember...like the crane operators I think were 51 and just amazing. So we finally we got everything we could get and steal, spare parts and everything got on there. So we left there and took a shakedown run over to Panama City and did what we call rubber docking, learning to dock that damn ship. Nobody'd ever docked it, the Captain, the Exec, me, anybody else. So rubber docking is where you throw some boxes over the side over by Panama City because we went in there because that was our place to get ammunition. So we went over there. Rubber docking and just went ashore to tie it up to get ammunition on board that we were allowed to take overseas. So we loaded ammunition there at rubber docking which you put these boxes over the side and then try to come alongside of them and stop alongside of them. Kind of silly when you think about it but that was the drill. Practiced just overnight. I can't remember, not long, just a couple of days. Maybe to pick up some more

stuff that had come in and then we were gone. I'll never forget when we got under way from those shipyards and by ourselves, one ship, and had orders to go down through the Panama Canal and to Pearl Harbor. The ships before had mostly gone up to the West Coast to San Diego but they said, "No, you're going to Pearl." So we take off and we're running down through there and they said, "They're German submarines down there." I don't think we ever felt we were going to get torpedoed but anyway, I'm pretty sure we had a sub follow us for a while but we weren't worth a torpedo. As it turned out there wasn't that many submarines over there and the Nazis were having a hard time keeping them supplied although you know, being from Texas, we found out that they were being supplied right off the Texas coast. You know that. They found when they sunk one they found Fairmaid bread wrappers from San Antonio Fairmaid Bakery came up. So they'd been coming up through Alice probably, you know. I can tell you another story someday about my father-in-law and seeing some of the Germans in his \_\_\_\_\_ down there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Then you went through the Panama Canal. How was that?

Mr. Pratt:

Well, that was interesting. We spent again because of all the ships going through the Panama Canal, it's just like it is now. They expect you but you might be held over a day or two. So we got on Coco Solo side, which is our side here and they wanted us to stay. We were there two days and we had to furnish, these guys wanted liberty, so we had to furnish Shore Patrol.

Gunnery Officer always got those kind of jobs because he had all these weapons and so I armed myself and I went over with Shore Patrol officers in Coco Solo for 24 hours. That was a real experience for this old boy from Texas. The people that came in, the drunks and the stuff and all,



it was funny, and making all the bars and around to see that everything was in line. I had two or three Petty Officers with me. Quite an experience. Got under way, went through the Canal, great. On the other side it was just, when we got through it was "go." So the next stop was Pearl Harbor. I think that was the longest cruise we ever made without stopping. I can't remember how many days it took. I think it was around 15, 18, 20 days. Something like that because we could only do...LSTs only did about 8 to 10 knots at the most, you know. That's it. It gave us a good chance to get to know our men, run a lot of drills on the gunnery. Gunnery was just drill, drill, drill. Some of these guys had never even shot a pistol. All the boys from the south had pretty well up on it but some of these guys from the east, guns scared them, I mean literally scared them to death. Couldn't touch them, just scared. We went through all that and got through that. The Captain stayed in his little sea cabin that they'd built and knotted up pretty stuff. He was an ex-Chief Bosun so he made a lot of Irish lace that they hung around and stuff. He was all right.

Mr. Misenhimer:

About what date did you arrive at Pearl Harbor? June of 1944?

Mr. Pratt:

No, I graduated in August.

Mr. Misenhimer:

August of 1944 when you got to Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Pratt:

Got to Pearl Harbor. I should have looked that up for you. I just never thought about that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

When you got to Pearl Harbor was there much damage still there from the attack?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, yeah. In fact they'd just had blown up about 20 LSTs. They had an explosion loading ammunition with a bunch of LSTs out on the west loch. What remained of them was still there. I think four or five of them had a lot of casualties but they didn't tell anybody about it and so we were in Pearl...I don't think just again resupply and load supplies that we were in the area, around the theater now, to take to our first stop which was Eniwetok after that. So we loaded up with supplies. We were in business now and supplies for us, supplies for the war effort you might say, specifically for the Marines. So we loaded up as soon as we could and got out of there and was on our way to Eniwetok. At Eniwetok offloaded. Eniwetok had just been liberated I'd guess you'd say because I don't know if we'd owned it before or not. There wasn't a tree left. There was one tree left on the whole damn island that had missed the bombardment. That was back when the powers that be figured that the best way to keep from getting killed was to bombard these islands with the battleships, cruisers, whatever they could get, you know. Had a lot of good old guns out there. So they just leveled these islands but they didn't learn much because the Japs were all in the ground and the type of ammunition probably helped some but talk to the Marines and they'd say "Those Admirals had it all wrong." No, no, no, didn't do any good. We went there, offloaded there and then we went on to Guam and unloaded a bunch of stuff there. That's all we did, load and unload. We were just a cargo ship. Then we loaded up to go down to Guadalcanal. When did it happen?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Guadalcanal was August of 1942.

Mr. Pratt:

August 1942. We were way behind those but they needed backup and supplies. Making kind of

permanent bases at some of those places, kind of permanent, you know, and so we went on kind of a long run as I remember...

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK, you got to the Russell Islands and then what happened?

Mr. Pratt:

Went down to Peleliu and Kwajalein

Mr. Misenhimer:

And this was in the fall of 1944?

Mr. Pratt:

Hard to get it all...in 1944. I didn't know we were going to do so many dates and things. But we just went through...I'd have to start all over to do that. I'd have to do looking up, find the dates.

Mr. Misenhimer:

On Peleliu the fighting started there on September 15, 1944.

Mr. Pratt:

Yeah. But we were down in Luzon right after these islands were secured or semi-secured. We were not in any of the invasions, initial invasions of those islands when they got cleared. But we were in there when the bloody remains were there and the snipers and some of them were still kind of active. You know, had to be careful and went up to the Marshall Islands and the Gilberts and we got over down through...anyway, some way we went down through the slot to...we did a little operation on the point of New Guinea. We moved some Australian men, I guess you call them manhunters. They lived in the brush and they were trying to keep the Japs down. They were snipers that killed the Japs, took their ears off. We would go in there at night and pick them up and there was a little red light, you know, and we picked them up on one end of the island of

New Guinea and took them around to another side and turned in at a certain point in absolute darkness and turned them loose again. But mainly we went down through and we ended up in New Caledonia which we had all sorts of fresh supplies. We had farms down there, the Navy did, and we loaded up on all sorts of fresh stuff and then came back up through, delivering fresh food and stuff through a bunch of the islands. I can't remember where. Then we ended up in the Marshall Islands again. We're into the beginning of 1945 and the end of 1944 because we got there and we started dealing with the Marines. It was the Marines, somehow we got tied up with the Marines, Marine Air Group 31. Marine Air Group is a big bunch there. Couple of LSTs aren't going to do a lot but we worked with the squadrons out of Marine Air Group 31. I don't know but we went to \_\_\_\_\_ we were getting ready for the Okinawan invasion.

Gosh, I skipped the whole thing. Somewhere in there we got back up to Guam in between there.

Does this ruin your story?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, go ahead.

Mr. Pratt:

Somewhere in between there we got back up to Guam and we started, just had the end of the Battle of Saipan was just over and Tinian and Saipan. So we began hauling supplies up there to Saipan and then we started hauling stuff to build the airstrip and they had to clean out the Japs and we took some Marines into Tinian to clean out some more of the Japs that had been kind of bypassed on Tinian. Then we started bringing in the equipment for the B-29 airstrip for Tinian opposed to the one on Saipan which we had done, too. So we made I don't know how many milk runs from Guam to Tinian, Guam to Saipan, Guam to Tinian but Tinian became the big deal. So that's where we didn't know what they were doing but they were kind of showing us where they

loaded Big Boy, looked like a grease pit to me, to load the atomic weapon. Of course we didn't know what they were doing at the time. But we'd go over there and somebody said something and said that's where they've got a big bomb. I can't remember exactly what. I remember looking at the place and there was no guard around it, just looked like a grease pit that they'd built. But did that til we got that off because I know when we were there B-29 groups were really pounding Japan. So then we got ready for the invasion of Okinawa.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you involved in the Iwo Jim?

Mr. Pratt:

I was supposed to be but we hit a reef and didn't get there. We left Guam to go but we didn't get there.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now you're going to Okinawa, is that right?

Mr. Pratt:

Yeah.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Tell me about that.

Mr. Pratt:

We loaded for Okinawa in Guam. We had gone back down to the Marshall Islands to pick up a squadron that belonged to Air Group 31 which would be the Marine Air Groups...they were all flying the Corsairs you know. They put those on a carrier, they could put 10 planes on a carrier then they'd put 10 pilots and maybe some of their repair, enlisted people. But then the reserve pilots and all of their equipment, because the Marines lived out of tents, they were a little

different, and trucks and all the equipment, the field kitchens and all that in the Pacific. When they set up an airbase it was not just their strip, they did it all. Went down there, there were four ships of us if I remember right, to pick up this part of Marine Air Group 31 for the invasion of Okinawa. We stayed down there for a while, loaded them up and then took them to Okinawa for the invasion. Our orders were, we were supposed to go in on April 1, and be kind of at the foot where Yontan airstrip was on the island, the Japs still of course had it. So first of all though we went to Ryukus Island. There was an island down there that was a pretty good little staging place. It was another one of those volcanoes that stuck out like the moon. It had an entrance to get in and it felt like you were in the crater of a volcano which actually you were. We got strafed in there. It still had not been completely under control but they wanted us to go in there so we didn't have so many ships just milling around because for the invasion of Okinawa...I remember waking up and from there we staged and we were supposed to go up there and be there for April 1 to offload our Marines when we got notice to do it. We left and headed for Okinawa from the island in the Ryukus where we were stationed and headed for Okinawa and we had that air group squadron aboard. The night before I'd never seen so many ships in my life. I woke up that morning and it was kind of a hazy misty morning. We were steaming along there. My God I saw even the battleship Texas over there. Because we were getting everything from the Atlantic now. I've never seen so many ships. They were out to the horizon, battleships, cruisers, everybody wanted in on the action I guess. They also knew that the next stop was going to be Japan. So they were there for the invasion of Japan and they were getting logistic support ready to do the Japanese landing. So we came away and we get up there and the first night, of course there's no lights on the ship, there's all of these ships milling around within a circle of 20 miles of each other I guess or 30 and I don't know why we didn't have collisions because there was no lights

on and we had so many close encounters that night and then we had warnings of small boats, you know, torpedo boats, enemy, out there and I guess there was some. We didn't see any but somebody raked our deck with a few, probably friendly fire. People were edgy. There was lots of things going on that night. I'll be damned if I know what was going on. We just kind of found an area and our radar, surface radar, wasn't that good but it could do close in surface pretty accurate for surface. We just found a little area in the general area. We'd all been allotted certain areas to be in but no GPS and gee, we didn't know where we were when it was daylight most of the time if you couldn't see the sun and take a shot at it. To put us in places that were 500 yards this way and 1000 yards that way but they had to try I guess. So we found a little place in there that seemed like it was pretty close to where we were supposed to be so we just ran up and started doing reciprocal courses all night, up and back in this whole area. Then when it came time for us, at least we had a form of, you know we had no real communication in those days. I had for my reading I had to stay on the bridge as Gunnery Officer. I think I was 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant by that time but was still Gunnery Officer. Nelson at Trafalgar and I had the same communications problem. He had flags and I had flags. He had lights, I had lights. He had semaphore, I had semaphore, OK? At long range communication to talk to Pearl and we could get messages through C.W. The radioman came up and said there's a message that he had interpreted and put on strips of paper and put on that but we couldn't pick up a phone and talk to the ships that we could see. So that being said, we just followed our previous orders and it was quite obvious that things weren't going too well on the beach because we being amphibious we were so close I was watching the action and the poor damn Marines on the beach, it was almost theatrical. I'm sitting up there with my binoculars watching because on general quarters that was my job in the con. I watched these poor guys over there getting their ass shot off. There was all sorts of...it was a tough slog.

Okinawa was a bad experience for the Marines and the Army, too. So we went in, we eased on in where we were supposed to be but we said, "Well, we're supposed to be at this point in the beach" so we headed that way. When we go in to hit a beach, we go in as hard and fast as we can. If we don't, if we start unloading we're going to broach and we're going to be a casualty, never get off the beach. So we stayed out and what did we do, we hit a damn reef. Wasn't supposed to be there. So we're stuck on a reef, 200 yards, 300 yards maybe 500 yards in the front, 300 or 400 yards on the port side. Starboard side quite a bit so we're out there, can't move back, forwards or anything. We're loaded with ammunition, gasoline, full of trucks, ammunition, spare pilots and mechanics, good thing we hit the reef because we didn't take Yontan Airstrip for several days and we would have gone right into a beach loaded full of Japanese and it would have been all hell to pay. That's one time the reef was good. So we sat there and so we finally when things, I can't remember, it was several days later. But we sat there, it was interesting. We sat there and they were still, the Japs were taking planes off the Yontan Airstrip. That was kind a cliff. I can't remember how long it was but it was a couple hundred feet, maybe even more, high, that was just to our starboard side forward. Turned out they knew we were there so they tried to bomb us but their forward speed, they couldn't hit us. They tried a couple of times and their bombs went far behind us. The bomb when they dropped it was going as fast as that airplane was going so it couldn't hit us. They tried a couple of times and gave up on that. So we felt pretty safe from this standpoint. They weren't going to worry about strafing us or anything like that and losing airplanes when they could put one out there to sink a ship and so we were still there until April 7<sup>th</sup> rolls around and that's when all, I've never seen so many Jap airplanes in the world. That's when the Japs came over two or three days straight, night and day, you know. That's when they sank more ships, killed more Navy personnel than were sunk or killed in any war, any



group of wars. I think in all the wars by that time if you can believe that. There was Jap planes diving, all suicide planes, and they were not supposed to have any planes left when you read what they expected. It wasn't what they got. So we sat there and a gunner's mate, he came up to me and he said, "I want to put a couple of rounds of black ammunition (black is armor piercing) up there at the point where the planes are catching, coming off of Yontan Airstrip." He said, "I want to zero in on them. I'm going to get the next airplane that comes off of there." I said, "Sure, give it a try." So we're stuck, stable. We get a few clips of the black armor piercing and kept plunking away with the twin 40s that we had mounted forward, twin 40mm, and three or four rounds shooting at just single shots you might say, just two rounds at a time. He got zeroed in on the range of that airstrip and so he said...we could hear them start their engines and when an engine starts. I'm going to count and see how long it takes for him to get in the air and I'm going to have it set and the next one is coming. So he did that and sure enough, the next plane that took off...the first plane he had to let go because he had to get the count...so he waited for whatever that count was, ten seconds, 15 seconds, and then the guy's committed and he can't do anything and he pulled the trigger on the 40mm and started sending a series of shells up that way. So we got our first Jap and we got number two and then they changed directions. They started taking off at an angle where we couldn't get them. So a lot of fun. Then sometimes they'd take off from there, too. But we didn't seem to have as good luck from then on. So we sat there through that and then we were wounded and so we couldn't do any work. Finally they took Yontan Airstrip and we got into the shore and off-loaded the Marines. That was maybe ten days later and the Okinawan invasion was still rough, going on. A lot of people being killed. So they sent us back to Ulithi to get our screws fixed and the damage repaired. We weren't taking on any water but bouncing on that reef had bent one of our screws so we only had one engine capable of doing

about four knots. So we got out and they sent a destroyer with us and we could only do four knots and he stayed with us one day and he was supposed to stay with us for quite a while but I think he got, he wanted to get back to the action, so he just left. So we just poked along at four knots, a wounded one, and going back down to Ulithi. It looked like all the ships were anchored in the water but it was a big repair base there. So after we got to Ulithi that was our central repair base out in the Pacific Ocean. We got down there and sooner or later, it took a while but they got us into a dry dock, floating dry dock, and put us in a new shaft. We carried a pair of shafts. We got under way again and then from then on we went back to, I think we went straight back to Okinawa. I know we did. We might have gone to Guam to pick up supplies to take to Okinawa. I would say we probably did that. It would make sense and then back to Okinawa. Then we got orders for..we finally secured Okinawa...and then we got orders to report back to Guam. We went back to Gaum and we got orders that we were going to be attached to a mine squadron for the invasion of Japan. We were going to be a supply ship and tanker for those little minesweepers. You know, some were wood for the anti-magnetic mines, because they probably only had legs long enough to go probably about three days, something like that if they were really working, you know, without being refueled. I can't remember but three or four days so we carried enough fuel for us and we used to top off destroyers that were running short until they could get to an oiler, carried that much fuel. So we were a tanker and a good supply ship. So we went back to Guam and they put on extra reefers, you know, refrigeration, on our tank deck. Filled up about another half of our tank deck with food storage, an ice cream machine, extra laundry equipment. I don't know why that was. When I say extra I guess some big commercial laundry equipment instead of the little kind of residential that we had on board. Everything to maintain these minesweepers for a while, for a good long while. So we became a \_\_\_\_\_

amphibious force attached to the amphibious force but loaned out to online minesweeping squadron, 109. We were going back to Okinawa and get our orders. Our orders were to go on up to the invasion of Honshu. On the way back we were about a day out, two days, so this will give you a date. So about two days out of Okinawa so that would be 500 miles out of Okinawa, I'm a ham radio operator, too, and was then. So I was up in the north of the radio shack. I had a lot of fun working on all these toys. So I was hanging around the radio shack again because they let me play with it, ham radio. So I was playing ham radio I guess but anyway, listening and I heard on one of the broadcasts that we had dropped some sort of bomb on Hiroshima, atomic bomb, what the hell is that? So it was about four o'clock in the afternoon and I went down and everybody was kind of knocking off about that time because we were just kind of cruising back. So two or three of my friendly officers standing out there and I said, "We just dropped a bomb on Hiroshima, wherever the hell that is and do you know anything about an atomic bomb?" There was always some smart guy who says, "I know what an atom is." And he says.... But nobody really knew what it was. We didn't have the slightest idea. It took a long time before we ever did read. So anyway, it was evidently pretty devastating because we killed a lot of Japs and it was considered a success and all that so hooray. We didn't know what to do. A day later we get to Okinawa and we get our orders for the invasion of Japan. We were to go to Honshu and be with these minesweepers and we were supposed to go in I think it was seven days before D-Day and knowing what we know now we'd have lasted ten minutes. I don't, maybe we'd been lucky to make it but we were to go up there and to supply these minesweepers before the invasion because they all knew that inland sea and the first thing was operation, I think they called it Cornet, Operation Cornet, in lower Japan which was Honshu and the inland sea in there. That's a big naval base that's in there, a Japanese naval base there at \_\_\_\_\_. Anyway, so it

was mined completely and we were supposed to go and we're just sitting there waiting and then all of a sudden they dropped the next bomb on Nagasaki. So then we hear...what date was it that they surrendered?

Mr. Misenhimer:

August 9 was Nagasaki, August 6 was Hiroshima.

Mr. Pratt:

August 6, August 9 and then finally 24 hours August 10 or something like that when the Emperor said they were going to surrender. So we said, "Oh-oh, they're going to surrender" but we get word that we're not going home. We're still standing by and we're going to go on and follow the same operational orders as the invasion. Got it?

Mr. Misenhimer:

I'm with you. OK.

Mr. Pratt:

Orders are still in effect. Same thing. Meet up with the same minesweepers, do the same job. Only the date's going to be different, OK, and they won't be shooting at you hopefully. The Jap surrender is...

Mr. Misenhimer:

September 2 is when they had the ceremony on the Missouri. August 14 is when they actually announced that they were surrendering.

Mr. Pratt:

August 14?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Right.

Mr. Pratt:

Well some place in there we left early to go in there and start sweeping mines. Can't remember the date. But some place after the second bomb of course, and then a week or so later after the Emperor said, probably a week or so after that, they said, "Go up there and sweep the mines." So we got under way and went up to Japan and started to sweep the mines. This is kind of a good story. Are we too long on this?

Mr. Misenhimer:

No, keep going. You're fine.

Mr. Pratt:

So we get up there and it's beautiful. It's a beautiful day and we are where we're supposed to be and everything, the charts are accurate enough that we had that we know where we are for a change and we're in the Inland Sea just getting ready to go around that big island down there before you get into Honshu. We see some minesweepers kind of behind us, working way over there, barely in sight, probably...we're supposed to, this is what people at the desk could do, our orders say we're supposed to go up into the Inland Sea about four days, two days' run up there. I can't remember, two days' run maybe, to a little town of Hiro. I still remember the name of the town, Hiro. We're supposed to anchor there and that's supposed to be our headquarters to supply these minesweepers. That's pretty silly. The minesweepers are behind us, sweeping mines. There were mines between us and where we're supposed to go. Got the picture?

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yeah, I got it. Go ahead.

Mr. Pratt:

So how we going to do that? So all of a sudden we get or before we've gotten orders that, the

Japanese sent an officer that got straight out of the Japanese Naval Academy for sure, he is all starched up, comes out in a little motorboat with an enlisted person with him and I think he told me he went to Harvard or Yale or some place. I don't know. He spoke English very well. I think he was a Lieutenant and he's got a map and he's there to show us. So he came aboard to show us how to get through the mine field to get to where we're supposed to anchor. So the drill on this thing is kind of silly. The orders were to keep all the men topside that you could. Well, on those LSTs there's no wires to run the damn thing. You've got to have men in the engine room, evaporator room, generator room, after steering, could take them out of after steering, but you need people down below deck. But everybody else is supposed to bring their mattresses on deck and stand on them in case we get blown up, to keep their feet from getting blown off. Now that makes about as much sense, doesn't it? Blowing that ship up, I mean mattresses to keep your... Anyway, that's what they did so that's what we did. There's all of our men standing on their mattresses like a bunch of idiots out there. It's a beautiful day, thank God. There isn't a ripple on the water and the sun is just, it's just a beautiful day and no wind fortunately. I will inject this. One reason the Skipper always had me, I'm a sailor, and an LST has more sailor area than anything else. The engines are way in the back with the screws and the turning point is under the con and so if you to get some steam up you got to treat the current and everything for a sailboat that you can't do to sail. Because when the wind catches that bow, it's gone. You got to know what you're doing. I mean...I was usually on the con. So I'm watching this chap ahead of us about a mile or half a mile in there and he's waving his arms, standing up and waving his arms occasionally in a little rumba. I guess he wasn't that far, 500 yards up there and so this guy comes aboard and says this is the way to go and we're looking at the chart and we're only doing, we aren't doing knots, we've got the engines just turning very few rpms, just enough to keep us a

little steerage way and with no wind or anything, we can kind of sit in one spot because we're worried about those mines. So he comes aboard and he says this is the way we go, this is the way we go and we're looking and all of a sudden this guy's rowing toward the boat to our ship and the Jap is still in uniform out there and rowing. Finally we say, "OK" so we ease up a few rpms so the ship starts moving again and this little guy in front of us coming into us stands up and starts waving his arms frantically. So we all stop. The Captain says, "Let's bring him aboard, don't you think. Let's bring him aboard." So we put down a ladder, wait for him to come alongside and he comes aboard. Poor guy, almost crawling, as Japs are. Gets up there on the con and sees this Lieutenant and he just about falls dead with that Lieutenant up there but he jabbars and the Lieutenant translates and he said, "He says we are going into a mine field and he's just laughing. He says this is what we're doing. There's no mine field. This is the chart." This guy looks at this chart and he can read a chart because this is his home territory there and he says, "No, mines, mines, mines." And he's punching the chart and that ain't where the chart says the mines are for damn sure. So the Skipper looks at me and says, "So what do you think we ought to do." I said, "I don't know. What do you think, Captain?" He said, "I don't know." So I just motioned. I said, "Well, as a sailor I always liked local knowledge. I always if I was racing, I went and talked to the local people to find out where the dangers were, where the obstacles were and how the wind was tacking around." He says, "I think we'll go with this guy." We didn't tell, so we told him OK, tell us where to go. Well this Lieutenant got so pissed off he just left in a hurry. Probably went home and committed hari-kari or something. Never saw him again. I don't know how the Skipper...this isn't the same Skipper by the way. We lost that first Skipper as soon as we hit Pearl. I didn't tell you that story but he left and we got P.D. McFarland as Skipper who was a great guy from California. P.D. McFarland was the Skipper and he listened and he

was also a yacht from California. We started edging up through this mine field and we do fine and we get to the point where we were supposed to anchor and we don't anchor there, we anchor where he tells us to anchor. Give him I guess a bunch of sugar which is what they like. I don't know for sure what we gave him but I'm sure we gave him a lot. He had tied his little boat to take alongside anyway and put him in that and never saw him again. But he deserves a medal. The minesweeper started moving up to us and we still had the chart of course and the Skipper went over to where the first mine Skipper was that came alongside for fuel or what have you and looked at the chart and said, "That's right." He said, "In fact where you were supposed to anchor was the next mine field that we're going to go in there and clean up." So that's a good story. So anyway, we stayed there for the duration. We stayed there, gosh, maybe a month, maybe six weeks, I don't know, quite a while. Moving in the Inland Sea, sweeping mines and making sure the mines were up. Then I can't remember I think we stayed in Japan, I don't think we made another run back to Okinawa. We might have. We might have made a couple of runs back to Okinawa for supplies and things. Can't really remember but we stayed mostly in Japan then. The war was over and the treaty was signed and we stayed there. We moved to a dock, furnishing some sort of service. I can't remember what we did but we were there long enough that we didn't leave there until I can't remember. But I know that we started taking people off ...I had enough points to go home but I wasn't married so we sent home people that were married and had the points. So our crew gets smaller and smaller and smaller because if you don't have to fight the ship you don't need all the people for the guns. We got smaller and smaller in crew. Finally we got orders to...we loaded up equipment and we took it out and dumped it in the ocean. Brand new trucks, etc. Heart-breaking but that's what we did. We spent some time doing that and finally they said you can go home and that was...I should remember...October, probably in



October. I should have found that out for you, what that was. They loaded us up with people to return. I think we had some Army, and what have you and sailors. I know we had some extra Naval officers. I can't remember their names or anything which was fine so we had plenty of people for one watch a day. Plenty of people to stand watches and do all that. So we went to San Francisco. We stopped at Pearl and then went to San Francisco. I think we picked up some more people in Pearl to go to San Francisco and then we acted as service to some more minesweepers because they couldn't make it on their own without being fueled. So we tagged along and they came along with us. Got to San Francisco and thought we were going to be let out but they said, "No." They kept us tied up there in the back end of San Francisco Bay, anchored for about a month and finally taking people off the ship and finally we were down to about forty people and they said, "Well, got orders now. You can take the ship back through the Panama Canal and back to Galveston, Texas and decommission it in the yards in Galveston, Texas." I thought I was never going to get out of the Navy. So we went on just another cruise. We leave San Francisco, through the Canal and back to Galveston, Texas and we decommission the ship, get rid of the rest of the men and I guess I'm the last one that leaves the ship because my family lives in San Antonio and they were going to come over and get me. So I know I was the last one to spend the night on the ship. Didn't have any place to go. Kind of force of habit. I said, "Going to a hotel." I said, "I just went back to the ship." It was tied up to the dock and it was sold to Humble Oil and Refining Company, now Exxon, and they made a shallow-water drilling platform out of it. So I went home. That's about it.

Mr. Misenhimer:

OK. Did you stay in the Reserves or did you get out?

Mr. Pratt:

No, I got out. I was released from World War II, I've got that, 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1946.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's when you got out, OK.

Mr. Pratt:

I got out then and then actually I went back to school like everybody did. You want to continue this through...

Mr. Misenhimer:

I've got some questions for you. When you got out, did you have any trouble adjusting to civilian life?

Mr. Pratt:

Yes. I didn't think so at the time but now that all this has grown up, we laugh about it now. That first year I went back to Texas University, I'll give you a story about attitude. I got out in August so I got home in August and we didn't have any clothes, we were still in uniform and you couldn't buy clothes. You know that. There wasn't any clothes in the stores. So we were in uniform. So I get home and Lewis Seidel, fighter pilot, he'd been hurt, got out of the hospital and he got home and he called me up and said, "It's a pretty day in San Antonio." I answered the old straight-up phone you know in my dad's house and he said, "I'm going to go to Texas University." He said, "I'm going to go up there and get a... You want to go?" I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well, I'm going to drive up there today and find a place to stay, rent a house or do something." He says, "You want to come along?" I said, "No, I got a date." So you can see how important we thought all this stuff was. So he said, "OK, I'll let you know when I get back." So I guess I went on my date. Lewis comes back in a couple of days and he says, "I've rented a little

duplex right by the law school.” (I thought I wanted to be a lawyer) and about three blocks from the capitol. I got one of my dad’s trucks and a driver and he says, “In the next few days we’ll load up some furnishings that we can steal from our families and we’ll just drive on up there.” So we did that and so we drove on up there, drinking beer and throwing beer cans out of the back end of that old Rossman highway. Anyway, we got our little house up there, a little duplex, and went over and just said, “Well, here I am. Sign me up.” I mean, you know, I didn’t have a transcript, I didn’t do nothing. I told them, I said, “Just go get it. St. Mary’s and San Antonio Junior College.” So we made them round up some stuff. I mean we were awful. Went to school and in the classes some of the professor weren’t...everybody was in a hurry. We all felt we were old I think or something but I can remember being in a classroom and we just ran a professor out one day. You know we didn’t come back to hear you chit-chat, seemed like you could learn some. Get your act together or we’re gonna all walk out of this classroom. You know, things like that. So we weren’t bad but looking back on it, I had a friend of mine that came up there and pitched a tent in front of the law school, took a band that was a Marine pilot, two fighter pilots, friend of my friend, and put a band up in the ground and put a sign up there “Keep Out”. We talked to him and we said, “Gordon, why don’t come over and stay with us. You can sleep in the kitchen or something.” He said, “No, this is fine. Better here.” He said, “I study in the library. I bathe and shave in the gym and I’m close to my classes until they get me a room over in the engineering building and dormitory because I want to stay with the engineers.” And he stayed there until they got him a room in the engineers and they wanted to move him and he said, “No, get me a room over there in that dormitory and I’ll move.” So is that what you want. That was the first year and then we all flunked out. By the end of the first year at Texas University I thought I was too old and they had a program where I could go to law school and I’d already

matriculated there and I said, "I don't want another two years. I can go back to St. Mary's" and all my friends, some of them had got married and the school had changed and I wanted to back to St. Mary's and finish up and get out. So I went back to St. Mary's and got a degree in finance and marketing. Didn't go to law school which I regret so I went to work for General Motors in their finance division in one of their programs, get-ahead programs, and so I was fine and got married in 1950, a girl from Alice, Texas there and got recalled in the Korean War and I called them up and said, "Call Com Aid up" which I was familiar with. Said, "Look, I resigned my commission, remember?" They said, "We know that but we got you for eight years. Sorry, Lieutenant." I said, "OK" but they promoted me to Senior Lieutenant. I was jg then. I was discharged as jg but they promoted to senior Lieutenant and then I went back in the amphibs and reported to Com Cinc Pac in San Diego, get a ship out of mothballs, the 735, and that's the Korean War. So that's the Korean War story and when the Korean War was over I got out 2<sup>nd</sup> of October or somewhere around there. No, no February. In 1952 I got out and stayed in the Reserves then. Had two much active duty. I'd gotten smarter and I wanted medical and a few things like that so I stayed in the Reserves and was C.O. of Corpus Christi and C.O. of Laredo and C.O. of Kingsville Naval Reserve Station. Plus having my civilian work. Fortunately I had a good civilian job for a while and then I became a builder, developer and sailor and got me a little yacht, had a lot of fun. So that's about winds that up. I ended up as Commander, retired as Commander with ...

Mr. Misenhimer:

What date did you retire?

Mr. Pratt:

I retired 14 June 1982. 21 years 8 months and 23 days.

Mr. Misenhimer:

At what rank?

Mr. Pratt:

Commander.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, back in World War II, on that 781, how was the morale on that ship?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, you know it was great. It was strange, amphibious forces and small ships, I am so glad I chose that. We were not even accepted really. Now the Marines loved us obviously. I felt I ended up wearing Marine uniforms. I mean, not their total uniform, Marine shoes because I didn't have shoes any more. That's overseas you know. Marine jackets. We dressed like Marines most of the time except for our hats. We maintained our hats and caps. But the regular Navy or those that aspired to be Admirals didn't think we were very good, you know. So we didn't pay much attention to them either. I got lost there, what was the question?

Mr. Misenhimer:

How was the morale on your ship?

Mr. Pratt:

Our morale was just fine. We were gung ho. Had a lot of fun, we shot a lot of shells. Had a lot of gunnery practice. Had good laundry and since we were amphibs we didn't get transferred. I had the same people that I started with. My Gunner's Mate. Toward the end they got moved out a little and then you had a few attrition, couple of guys got hurt and you never get them back in those days. If you got to a hospital you were a thousand miles away by the time they got well or

something so they put them on another ship. Ninety-nine percent of our crew was together the whole war.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What would you consider your most frightening time?

Mr. Pratt:

I never got scared, never got scared. We were too smart to get scared. Scared's going to get you in trouble, you know that. Scared's going get you killed.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you attacked very much by the Japanese airplanes and things?

Mr. Pratt:

Strafed one time and I guess we were potshotted a few times but they couldn't hit much with those rifles that they had. No, the only time we were really in what I would call imminent danger, was Okinawa. There was a lot of ways you could get hurt there. But yeah we had a lot of small arms fire going on around us at Okinawa and...

Mr. Misenhimer:

Was your ship ever damaged?

Mr. Pratt:

I guess concern, there was always concern when you were going in to the beach. So if you're ever on pins and needles, not scared, but just concerned like when we were taking those manhunters down around New Guinea there and pulling in there at night. That could have been a real...but as it turned out it was just a piece of cake. But there was concern there. I'll tell you we were all concerned about that one because we could have been, the guys on the beach could have

been compromised and the Japs could have just been sitting there. Once you get on that beach you're there til you offload some stuff. So, no, young and strong and healthy.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Were you ever in any typhoons?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, boy, you betcha. I was in the one that sunk all the ships, the one off Okinawa. Ran us out of Buckner Bay. It hit Buckner Bay without warning. We didn't have very good weather control and it was already picking up, it was probably blowing 60 and some of the ships and the word just came out, you know, "Get under way. You're on your own." Helter-skelter, you know. Flying no course flags, just get for the entrance there of Buckner Bay and so we charged out of there. We made it out of Buckner Bay. Some of the ships didn't but we managed it through that. We were pretty good shiphandlers. We got through that narrow channel and got out to sea and then we were on our own and then we did get, about mid-day and that was a mistake, when you get one of those real bad ones, mid-day can be damn near as dark as midnight. It's just howling winds and you can't think and you can't see and you know, you can't see without goggles and the way our ship is built you had to be outside in the con and thinking back, that was foolish we couldn't have done anything because there was no visibility except the...and it was dangerous. To get to the con the final step onto that deck the con was on was a straight up and down ladder, you know, about twelve feet. You know, you're not hanging onto much. It was dumb. That was dumb, we should have stayed down in the wheelhouse because you couldn't see anything. We're getting radar reports up and...but what they did was we got one of those fox messages that you could get from Pearl and they said, "You can turn on your lights" and we had never conned a ship with lights on. We were used to shadows. That was the most dangerous thing in the world

because lights, we weren't used to lights, and I was kinda used to them just because sailboat racing at night and we had our little twelve-point lights and twelve points of lights and stuff and the Navy guys could understand twelve, they could draw pictures of that but if they hadn't been out in a ship looking at those lights, you know, guessing just because you see a red light and a green light that means they're headed right for you or what about if you see a little bit of the white of the range light you know. That means you might be. But it was a mess. I was on the con a lot, all the time, and anything was close but finally we got away from the ships but when you have that many ships going to sea, helter skelter. We ended way up in the China Sea. Figured that was a good way to get in the quadrant that I wanted to get in because it would get you out quicker and the way it seemed to be blowing. Although we didn't have any information on it at all. It was just seat of my pants and I was the only one there that had ever been in a hurricane before in the whole ship.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, yeah, we heard her. She played good music.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Yes, I've heard.

Mr. Pratt:

She was up to date, pretty good on the news. I mean she was pretty good, particularly in the early part of the war. If you wanted to find out what was really happening you had to read between the lines but you know she'd tell you what group was there and supposedly that was supposed to take, to influence our ability to think correctly but if they know that much about us but if you



listened to her you'd find out where certain Marine divisions were and stuff like that. And she was pretty damn accurate. Everybody listened to her. The only reason that you ever turned her off was if you wanted to go to sleep.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now the first time you crossed the equator, did you have any kind of ceremony?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, yeah. Crossed the equator twice.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What did they do to you?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, us polliwogs, we had the full thing, you know, the bosun with the big fat tummy and we had one. His name was Bolin. He was regular navy. He's a good guy, good bosun and drank too much when he got ashore but that's all right. He knew his business as a bosun, that's all. He was Neptune and they dressed him up with a proper mop of hair and we had a gauntlet and we had to run through the gauntlet and boy, those guys could really hit us. No belt buckles but belts were pretty good. Walked on our knees and kissed his belly and we did the whole thing. The only thing we didn't do, oh they poured paint on us and paint in our hair and stuff but somebody was smart and they made them dilute it. That old red lead paint, you know, so you would have...we had it in our hair for some time but red lead is kind of thick and they diluted it so it gobbled up. We got through it, no script. It was fun. I'd felt bad if they didn't do it. These people say they didn't have time to do it, I feel sorry for them.

Mr. Misenhimer:

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

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, yeah, we heard about that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What was the reaction?

Mr. Pratt:

I think everybody had had enough of President Roosevelt, you know. I don't remember him being a hero to anybody. I mean that's kind of sad to say but I don't remember him being...I know the question you're asking. I don't believe and I shouldn't say hero. I don't believe he was ever the personal leadership of a man, of a group. Maybe he was if you were close to him but he wasn't Churchillian to the men. Nimitz was in the Pacific. Nimitz and believe it or not, MacArthur. You know everybody had bad news about MacArthur but that was just his temperament and the way he was raised by his mother. I mean you go back to lots of reasons there but guys in the South Pacific understood him. One thing about MacArthur and everybody said you know he was a glory hunter and wanted to be better than and wanted to be President and all that. They kind of laughed at him in a way but they knew he wasn't going to get them killed. MacArthur was very careful about, in fact he was not aggressive at all on his own.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Have you had any reunions of your ship?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, yeah. You know reunions at least in my ship and the rest of them, most of them, maybe not the battleships, all enlisted people run them, OK. We had, I bet you we had, we just stopped them about three years ago. I didn't go to the first probably ten. It was probably ten years before I saw that group again. I was so busy trying to earn a living and make some money. They got the

Korean War in there for me, you know, so it wasn't until after the Korean War that I got back to that, to the reunion. They called me up and then I didn't miss a one after that. It was very heart-warming, very fun. I mean a lot of my old gang and I had a few times, my crew said I was the best officer aboard ship. I said, "That's because I didn't write you up every time I should have or why." They said, "No, it's because you wrote us up fairly." So I take that. No, I got along with them good. You got to lead on a small ship. I got along real well.

Mr. Misenhimer:

What ribbons and medals did you get from World War II?

Mr. Pratt:

Well, all the usual ones. I didn't get any hero medals, no hero medals. You know, Pacific War with a couple of stars.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Two battle stars?

Mr. Pratt:

I guess I only get one, don't I. Iwo Jima didn't count. We never really got there. I wouldn't wear that.

Mr. Misenhimer:

How many battle stars do you think you got?

Mr. Pratt:

I think I only got one.

Mr. Misenhimer:

One battle star, Okinawa?

Mr. Pratt:

Iwo Jima would stretching it. I'm not going to do that. Because they had to unload us and somebody else had to do our job for us, OK.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now I understand you went on the Honor Flight recently. How was that?

Mr. Pratt:

Oh, it was wonderful. It was a great, the best thing about the Honor Flight besides going to all the memorials, which was, you know I get teared up thinking about it. Because we all lost friends. I shouldn't do that. Oh, my goodness. I'm sorry.

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's fine. OK. Anything else you recall from your time in World War II?

Mr. Pratt:

No. You know coming back you say about coming back. The hardest thing for me coming back was all of my friends that didn't come back. Boy, I had a bunch of them. I mean just all of them. You know so many of our guys here in south Texas, San Antonio, were all together and I know a lot of their wives and they all...Jefferson High School never gives up those girls and we had Jefferson High School reunions of our class of 1939 and 1940 til really four years ago. We quit. You know it's sad when you read in the San Antonio paper one thing if they graduated from Jefferson High School, these girls would put that in there. But anyway I had a lot of good friends.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Now, on your ship were many people killed or wounded?

Mr. Pratt:

No, we had some people hurt but I wouldn't call them wounded. The Korean War they had this wound business down to you know where if you fell down when you were under fire in a battle situation you got a Purple Heart. But no, we didn't, we were lucky.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Thanks again for your time today and thanks for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Pratt:

Well, I thank you for doing this. You know my wife has been after me to do it. Now that I know a little bit more how to do it, I could have been a little better prepared.

Mr. Misenhimer:

This R. W. Pratt again. He has an addition.

Mr. Pratt:

You remember when I said that when we were in the minesweeping operation and we finally got to the little town of Hiro. We got to the little town of Hiro, jump back a little bit, we called all those guys from the B-29 over on Saipan and Tinian, just before we left we knew we were going back to Okinawa and the invasion of Japan, why the Colonel came down that we'd been hauling a lot of his stuff and his equipment, came down aboard ship and Captain P.D. McFarland, they liked to drink a little whiskey together, so they did and the Colonel came down with a nice Jeep and we were on the beach like we usually were with the bow doors open and the O.D. was down there. So he comes in a parks his Jeep, he's invited to dinner, so he goes up there and we had dinner with the Colonel and everybody and then they move into the Captain's quarters so they can drink a little illegal booze on ship which is fine and so somebody comes up to the O.D. and says, "Why don't we just steal the Colonel's Jeep?" In those days we stole Jeeps every day if we

could. So I said, "Suits me. I'll go for it." So I don't know who was O.D. at the time down there but I said, "Go down and tell the O.D. I said it's OK." I mean I'll take the rap for it. Gunnery Officers always do these things and so anyway they took the Jeep and pulled it clear back in the back corner of the tank deck and turned out we had rows of lights in there. It was a big place. So we parked it and it's just like a toy back there in the back and turned out the lights. We had the lights on just one side which was the gangway where they come down and walk down the ladder to the tank deck and then walk on out to the front of the ship. So the Colonel comes down rather inebriated at maybe twelve or one o'clock anyway. I'm asleep so whoever's con he comes down there and the word comes back. He says, "The Colonel wants his Jeep. He wants to leave." So fine. So we've got a field phone down there that they've brought us. So we went on the field phone to the guys down there and said, "Colonel ABC wants his Jeep. Would you please send him a Jeep?" Well, fifteen minutes later here comes a guy driving a Jeep out of the Colonel's motor pool. So he climbs in the Jeep and he's off. Well, we decide we're getting under way tomorrow morning, we decide we'll get under way about four o'clock in the morning. So we were kind of independent, so we just haul off the beach. We don't need anybody, we just pull ourselves off the beach and we head for wherever we're headed. I think it's back to Guam and then we went on to Okinawa and then we went to Japan. Now we got the Jeep on board and we are in Japan and we're at Hiro and the minesweepers are sweeping mines. I get to looking at the chart we had of Japan there and I said, "H-m-m Hiroshima is just down the road, a little road here." We had maps and stuff for the invasion and I said, "Hiroshima is just down there, a pretty good sized city. I think I'll run down there and see what that place looks like." So I said, "I'll take our Jeep and I'm going to run down there while you all are doing whatever you are doing up here with these minesweepers." He said, "Fine, go ahead." So we unload, I got some weird

pictures of us trying to unload that damn Jeep with our cherry picker over the side with a makeshift thing we did. Got it into the LCVP and take it into the beach because we're not on the beach, we're on a hook, anchor. So we get on the beach and I've got these guys and we finally get it over the seawall. Had to climb a seawall with it, rocks and seawall. Anyway, we get in there and go down to Hiroshima, about 20 miles away. On the way down there you don't see anybody. I mean they have locked up. They think we're going to rape and pillage and shoot and kill and they hear that Jeep and there isn't another...Japan is full of people as you know. There isn't a sign of a dog, cat. I guess there was birds and things but anyway, so we end up going down and we get to Hiroshima and there it is. There ain't nothing left. I mean there isn't anything there as far as you can see. It's like looking across downtown San Antonio and the highest thing there is about as high as a desk, high as a desk. That's all. So we drive down through the streets there slowly and one of the Gunner's Mates driving, I've got three Gunners' Mates with me, and we're armed of course. We're bouncing there and we're seeing people's photographed in the pavement, you know, the image of them. Just nothing, nothing solid. Everything just powder and dust. There's just a few broken pieces of pottery around and things but no furniture just busted up and things like that, nothing. So we turn around through the center of town and then way on back toward the mountains where it kind of sweeps up a little bit, and that bomb blast evidently got kind of caught up and went up and there's a few buildings, a church or two, and a building or two solid concrete but there's nothing in them. Everything is blown out but the concrete structure without even a window frame in it is all that's left but that's way back, miles, towards the mountains in the back but everything down in the lowlands is gone. Anyway, so we ride around there for a while and I say, I mean I'm ready to get out of there. I say, "Gentlemen, this is a little too eerie for me." There wasn't a bird, a person, a rat, a mouse.

We couldn't see anything. We started looking for bugs. You couldn't find a bug. You couldn't find anything alive in that whole place. We went clear across it a couple of times. Stayed there a couple of hours I guess and some of the guys got out of the Jeep. I never got out of the Jeep. One time I did when we first got there. We saw some people on the pavement and I got out because...and then when I got back in I said, "I'm going to drive. So you guys be the lookout." So I got in and was driving so we come around and finally I said, "Let's get out of here. Nothing else to see." So we got on back to the ship and everything's fine, you know. The men came in with their few little souvenirs that they got and I didn't think much about it except talk about it. Never went back, wasn't interested and then we found out about radioactivity. But nobody told us about radioactivity and they sure as hell knew about it. So what happened was, I wasn't interested in going back but we were there as I said earlier on about a month, maybe longer, while they're sweeping all these mines and stuff on the north, south, east and west of us and moving around a little bit. That was the ship and bringing fuel back to them. Anyway during that period of time we started having liberty parties. You know what that means. You know, the guys get together and go on liberty. There's nothing else to do. So the cook makes ham sandwiches and two cans of beer apiece or three. We had plenty of beer aboard. We'd stolen that from the Marines. That's another story. But anyway, we didn't drink it on board. We'd go down there and spend the afternoon or two or three hours, looking for souvenirs and playing around down there. Nobody still has told us about it and we haven't seen anybody down there. So I've come to two conclusions. I know what happened but I think myself and my Gunner's Mates, I think we were the first ones that were ever on site at Hiroshima because absolutely as soon as things were found out, you couldn't go down there any more. They had MPs down there. They had Military Police



around that thing. You know somebody's going to be there. There was nobody so I think we were the first ones there. I really do.

Mr. Misenhimer:

Did you ever have any problem with radiation then?

Mr. Pratt:

Well, that's the other part of the story. We lost about a third of our men to cancer. A lot of them or more. We finally got through the effort of the crew, our ship is on the cancer list there in Houston and we've got a number to call and everybody's called it that had cancer. But we had lots of our crew had cancer and died. A lot were treated there for cancer. Nobody told us anything about it like we're stupid. Now, to make it even worse is that when on our last trip to Guam, we're going to the invasion of Japan we loaded stuff aboard and with this stuff aboard there were some big crates of things that we were not to open, sealed without Captain's orders. He had authority to open the locks. So we got all those boxes aboard. Also, all of a sudden our LST some place in the line got equipped. There were two ways you got to officers' country on the main deck. Officers' country is the ward room and the state room. They went clear through ship, port to starboard, was a passageway. It had a big hatch on it and it was painted green and black and they had put in showers and heavy curtains, showerheads all through this passageway on both sides. You could walk in and shower and walk out the other side and they said, "That's for the Marines. They come in dirty and stuff and you can wash them off and clean them up." That was the story. Well, hell, it was decontamination. But they didn't tell us and probably the guys that were welding those pipes in, it was no big deal. It was just pipes for something and they attached them to our water system, fresh water system. Anyway, it didn't take those guys time, pre-fab, take it, do it. They knew. Rascals. I thought that was kind of interesting so I've

come to the conclusion. I've got a picture right here on my wall that in fact I had one of the photographer that's taken a lot of pictures of Marines and stuff heard my story and wanted one of my pictures and he took one of my pictures of Hiroshima that I had taken or one of the guys had taken. It's not a published picture and I've got it on my wall out here, blown up. But how about that?

Mr. Misenhimer:

That's quite a story. That's something different, right.

Mr. Pratt:

That's the best story I could give you, yeah. My part is that we didn't know anything about and in fact they didn't tell us anything about it. I didn't know anything about it until after I got back to the States and things. Nobody make much of a fuss over it. I don't know why.

*End of Interview*

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