

Veteran: MARTIN, Clarence
Service Branch: NAVY
Interviewer: Vargas, Laura
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Highlights of Service: World War II; GMM2/C; With D-Day Invasion forces

Interviewer: Today is April 23, and my name is Laura Vargas. I am interviewing Clarence Martin about his experience in World War II and his overall war and military experience. Are you aware that our conversation will be recorded and that the tape and transcription will be placed in the Lee College library? Do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes, you do. I went into the service in January of 1942. We pulled into Pearl Harbor and saw all of the ships that had been hit by the Japanese, including the *Arizona*, which was still on fire. We had to remove corpses from the USS *California*. From there, we were on convoy duty from San Francisco to the South Pacific, and did that until November of 1942 when our ship was transferred to the Aleutian Islands. I was on a cruiser, the *Detroit*, and we stayed in the Aleutians for a period of five months during the winter of 1942 to March of 1943. When I was transferred to the USS *Frankford*, it was transferred to the Atlantic Fleet, and we escorted convoys to England, Ireland, North Africa, Egypt, Russia. In 1944, I was transferred to Portland Harbor in Great Britain, and became the flagship with the Destroyer Squadron 18 and participated in the invasion of Normandy. We were out of ammunition onboard and had to return to England to reload. After Normandy, which we were there for about two months, we were transferred to the invasion of Southern France, which was in Toulon. We engaged in several battles with German gunboats and took a bunch of prisoners, which I've got pictures of in case you want to look at them. After that, I returned to the United States and was transferred to the ordnance school in Anacostia, Maryland, near Washington, D.C., and studied there for six months. Then I got shipped out and transferred to the USS *Providence*, which was another light cruiser. We entered the east side of

the Panama Canal headed for the Pacific when Japan surrendered, so we returned to Boston where I got discharged. And that's about it.

Interviewer: Describe what your daily life was like—what you ate, what you slept in.

Veteran: Well, you got kicked out of your bunk at 6:00 in the morning—I mean literally kicked out. The chief bossons mate would come through there, and if you're not out of your bunk he'd whack you across the feet with magazine. Then we went to chow, and from chow you went to whatever your duty station was. I was a gunner's mate, so I had to go up and maintain my gun station, which included cleaning the guns, firing them, loading them, keeping them ready for action at different times. We were also generally on an eight-hour watch at least once a day. We had a watch station where we had to stand and observe any action out in the water like periscopes or other ships. We had to clean the gun station with soap and water and hose it down and load what they called the magazine, where they keep all the ammunition. That and a lot of coffee! {Laughter}

Interviewer: What time would ya'll go to sleep for the night?

Veteran: It depended what watch you were on. If you're on the eleven to seven watch, usually you didn't go to bed. If you're on a day watch like seven to three or three to eleven, you usually went to bed at ten o'clock. The ship had to be blacked out at all times. We weren't allowed to light cigarettes onboard deck. If you were gonna smoke, you smoke below decks. Some ships, like the old *Detroit*, had no air conditioning or water tight hatches topside. All they had was canvas tie downs, and when we were in the South Pacific near Samoa and Guadalcanal, the temperature was 100 degrees, and below deck it was about 130, so you had to sleep on deck most of the time. Of course on the *Frankford* we did have some air. Our daily routine was rise, do your job, stand your watch, eating lunch and dinner, and sitting around with the guys visiting and playing cards, and try to listen to radio if we had one so we could keep up with information about the war and things that were going on.

Interviewer: Did you like it?

Veteran: Loved it.

Interviewer: Did you ever get homesick?

Veteran: No, and as a matter of fact I wanted to reenlist, but I had just gotten married, so that put a kink in that, and I got out.

Interviewer: When you were in Panama, was there any disease there?

Veteran: No, they didn't have any diseases that we were aware of, because we were pretty well confined to a certain quarter of Balboa or the other city on the other side—I can't remember the name of it. When we'd pull into those harbors, they'd allow you a four-hour liberty, which didn't give you any time to really get out and do anything except just sightseeing, then you had to get back.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded during the war?

Veteran: No, but the man next to me was.

Interviewer: Was he your friend?

Veteran: He sat on a 40mm gun, and I stood behind him, and he was hit by shrapnel. That's when an explosive goes off, and it just throws metal all over the place.

Interviewer: What was your most memorable experience?

Veteran: That's when a torpedo came straight at us. We could see it, and we couldn't do a thing about it, and somebody was with us, because it hit the ship and didn't explode. It just made a big dent in the bottom of the ship, we found out later.

Interviewer: Do ya'll know who that came from?

Veteran: A German submarine.

Interviewer: In the questionnaire you filled out, it said that ya'll had sunk submarines.

Veteran: Yeah, we sunk a submarine somewhere around the north of Cuba while escorting the British carrier *Arkroyan* (spelled by veteran), which was an aircraft carrier that the British had. We were taking it from Panama to Norfolk, Virginia.

Interviewer: What was the worst part of the whole thing?

Veteran: Loading stores and ammunition from the dock onto the ship. It all had to be hand-carried.

Interviewer: Was that heavy?

Veteran: Yeah, every shell weighed fifty-eight pounds, and a box of 40mm shells weighed about eighty-four pounds.

Interviewer: You took part in Normandy on D-day. What was that like?

Veteran: It was bad—very bad. I saw more people dead in that forty days than I've ever seen. You walk through a graveyard, and it was like that many people just laying there. They were everywhere. It says in this book that there was a troop ship that had a Dutch captain on it, and it got sunk. Some 500 G.I.s drowned when the ship went down, and the bodies were floating all over the place. Another man named Gibson, that was also in the gunnery department, and I went out in a whale boat with five inch projectiles and wire and had to take the dog tags off of their bodies, run the five inch projectile through the body—what parts were left of it—and then sink it. I know we sank at least thirty to forty, and there were about ten boats out there working the area.

Interviewer: So ya'll wouldn't take them back.

Veteran: You couldn't taken them back, because there were just parts of bodies. We had some guys going by with no heads, some with no legs, or half a body. Whatever came by is what you sunk. We tried to get the dog tags or any identification like a wallet—just something they could be identified by.

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard about the atom bomb being dropped?

Veteran: We were on our way to Panama.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about the bomb? Do you think that was a good way to end the war?

Veteran: Yes, definitely. It cost a lot of lives, but it saved a-many of them, too.

Interviewer: So, overall you think the bomb was a good thing.

Veteran: Yes. Nobody's dropped one since. We had to send some kind of message to the world.

Interviewer: After the war, where did you go? After Panama, you said you went back to Boston.

Veteran: Yes, I was discharged from the Navy there.

Interviewer: How many years were you in?

Veteran: Total service time, they've got me listed as six years, six months, and six days.

Interviewer: So, overall you enjoyed your whole experience?

Veteran: Absolutely.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Veteran: There was a lot of humor in the service when you think back on it. One thing I remember in Tulon, after our troops had pushed the Germans out of the city limits, they sent me and another fellow down as Shore Patrol which gave us a badge with 'SP' on it, and we we're standing in town and the Germans are coming in with machine guns, hand grenades, and everything else and saying, "Comrade, comrade," and we're saying "That way—that way." {Laughter} We sent them on down to where they were supposed to turn themselves in. Then on the way back, we saw a machine gun that was on wheels—weighed about five hundred pounds—so we figured this was a good souvenir, so we pushed it all the way back to the dock. We were going to put it in the whale boat and take it back to the ship, and just as we pushed it over the side to put it in the whale boat, the whale boat tipped like that, and the darned thing went to the bottom of the bay. {Laughter}

Interviewer: Anything else?

Veteran: That's about everything.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}