

**Veteran:** LEMMON, Paul F.  
**Service Branch:** NAVY  
**Interviewer:** Coates, Evan  
**Date of Interview:** August 16, 2002  
**Date of Transcription:** September 21, 2003  
**Transcriptionist:** Terry Moore  
**Highlights of Service:** **World War II; 1<sup>st</sup> Class Fireman; served on USS *Spectacle*, mine sweeper; participated in mine sweeping operations off of Iwo Jima; wounded in action**

Interviewer: Where were you when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Veteran: When I heard about Pearl Harbor, I was in Channelview working on a weekend job. I really didn't even know that Pearl Harbor was our territory. I was just 16 or 17 years old at that time.

Interviewer: Did you enlist?

Veteran: No, I was drafted.

Interviewer: When was that?

Veteran: That was in '44.

Interviewer: What was your training like in boot camp?

Veteran: Well, it was alright. Seemed like we had a little bit of fun, although it was drills, and they just taught us a lot of survival things getting you ready to do military duty.

Interviewer: When did you ship out?

Veteran: I boarded the USS *Spectacle* in October of '44.

Interviewer: Where did you go?

Veteran: From there we went to San Francisco, and we convoyed with some ships from Puget Sound in Washington to Pearl Harbor. Then we came back and took another convoy over there. We just stayed around Pearl Harbor and went on

maneuvers in November and December and were practicing for an invasion on Iwo Jima. We left, I think, in December and convoyed with the Marines to Anewetok. I was on a mine sweeper, so we left three days ahead. We left there on about the 15<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Iwo Jima on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February. I might be leaving out some stuff, but that's what it was. The Navy had the island surrounded. We swept mines there on the 16<sup>th</sup>, and they were kind of bombarding it on the shores. The 17<sup>th</sup>, we started out that morning and did about the same thing, sweeping mines. That evening by about three o'clock we got hit on the shore. Our flag ship was a mine layer. It was a terror, a really big ship. I got on it, and it was kind of like a hospital ship. Then we went back to, I think, Anewetok to an army hospital, and we stayed there until they could get us ready to go out. Then they flew us back into Hawaii and worked on us there. I stayed there about two weeks, and then they sent us back to San Francisco. There was a hospital there, and then they transferred me to the Oakland hospital, because they said that's where I'd have to go, but when I got there I stayed about two weeks, and they said they'd send us to a hospital nearest our home, and that was Corpus, so I came back to Corpus Christi, and I stayed there until I was discharged in '46.

Interviewer: When you were still on duty, what did you do on leave?

Veteran: Well, it was according to where you were. In Los Angeles, it was real good—real good. We had a lot of fun there. That was where I caught this ship to San Pedro, California. It was where these fish cannery places were. Our ship was pretty small, so it would go up in those kinds of places. In San Pedro, I never did go on liberty there. Then we went to San Francisco, and that was a real good liberty. You know, young guys are just out for fun. Then we went to Seattle, Washington, and I really did get mad because we had some work to do. They split the thing up, and I didn't get to go there. I really wanted to go to Seattle, because I heard that was a real good place. {Laughter} Then at Pearl Harbor in those islands, that was kind of our home base, and we'd go in and out of there. We went to Oahu and some of the other smaller islands. It wasn't really too good at that time, because when the fleet came it, it was too many sailors. Of course, they had all those Marines, too. We enjoyed it, but all you could do was go to

town and go to the bars and what have you, and of course that's what we did.

{Laughter}

Interviewer: Did you get any leave in the other countries?

Veteran: I actually did. Those little islands that we went to, there wasn't anything at them, so really and truly we'd have a beer party and take our stuff to shore, and we just kind of had to make our own. They didn't have any accommodations. Of course, my time in the Navy was kind of short-lived, because I went in late in '44, and then by the time we did all our things there, what I've told you is about all I really went to. It really wasn't all that exciting when you left the United States. You didn't have too many liberties, because you didn't have anyplace to go.

Interviewer: What were your impressions of the Japanese?

Veteran: Now really and truly, we never did go ashore at Iwo Jima. We went real near the shore sweeping mines, but as far as real contact with the Japanese, other than them just firing at us and us firing at them, I didn't have no contact with them. That's about the way it was with us. Of course, everybody had different things to do, and all that we were interested in was sweeping mines all the way to the beach.

Interviewer: Do you know who your commanding officers were?

Veteran: Yeah. (Evidently looking at photos.) Williams is his name. The admiral was Sharp, and he was the admiral of the mine layer. In other words, the mine layer just took our supplies. They had everything in the world on that. They could have built a mine sweeper, because they had everything you needed or might need. Our captain was a lieutenant, and he lives in Houston, Texas. He wasn't a full captain. Of course our ship didn't rate no high ranking officer.

Interviewer: What were the officers like?

Veteran: They were real good.

Interviewer: Did you trust them?

Veteran: Oh, yeah. All the dealings I had with them were real good. Actually, you don't think about it, and you think you had leisure time, but we didn't hardly have no leisure time. You were going all the time. There were usually three different watches until you got into a certain zone. You were on four and off eight if you were just traveling in a convoy. If you had night watch, you had to stand that, and then during the day you had your work or details on your eight hours. It was a pretty good deal and it would keep you busy, really, because it would be bad if you were just there leisuring along. You had to be on watch all the time, of course. I know people have asked us what we did in those convoys, and I told them, "When you looked out the side of those bigger transport ships and seen those little black dots out to the side, that was us." {Laughter}

Interviewer: You mentioned that during the day you did your details and your duties. What were those?

Veteran: I was a fireman, and my details was the anchor windness(?), and I just had to make sure it operated. Actually, I was pretty young and didn't know all that much about it. I know one time we were anchored out, and they started to raise the anchor, and it wouldn't run—the windness wouldn't run—so naturally they called me, and all I did was just grease it and make sure everything was in place. I didn't know that much about it. Anyhow, it wouldn't run and I didn't know what to do, so I grabbed a big old Ball Pein hammer. It was an electric motor, so I said, "What's wrong with it?", and they said, "Well, it won't run—it's hung up." So I went down there and started beating on that chain, and I said, "Man, I don't know what's wrong with this thing." I started to tell somebody they needed to go get somebody to do something about it, but all of a sudden it started working. {Laughter} I said, "Oh, man, that's gotten me out of something!" A lot of funny things happened out there. As a young guy, we didn't know that much about everything. We learned a lot about this and what we were supposed to do. I was a welder before I went in the service, and so that's the reason they made me a fireman. Actually, I was the only welder in the engineering department during the operations. If they had any welding to do, I did it, and made it pretty good. We didn't run across anything we didn't fix. I worked with the motor machinist, and he was a smart guy. The electrician and that motor

machinist, they had a little lathe there and some gears and stuff, and I'll tell you, they could fix it. They were on the ball. They were all first class petty officers, and I was just a first class fireman. Fireman and first class seaman were just about equal.

Interviewer: Were there any perks about the job you had?

Veteran: I did have a little bit of an advantage being a welder. I say it was an advantage in one way, but if anything broke down, then it wasn't. Those mines were copper lines and they were lead coated, and I had patches on top of patches on that pipe. If they sprung a leak, I had to fix it one way or another. We didn't have some extra pipe, and I just made a cold patch on it like on a tire tube and soldered it on there. I did have some patches that went bad—they just wore out. They weren't all that bad, but over a period of time, I did have quite a few leaks that they sprung, and then they'd have to shut the engine down. They didn't want you moving around too much while you were fixing it. Like I say, I wasn't all that experienced, but the thing of it was I was the only one that knew anything about welding.

Interviewer: Was there anybody on your ship that you knew from home?

Veteran: No. The only man that I met after I got out was a guy by the name of Woods, and he worked with a company in Houston, and actually he was on the gun when we got hit. He got hit at the same time, but he went back. I never did go back to the ship. When I left boot camp, it was a three-man draft out of boot camp, and there were three of us that were firemen. They pulled all three of us out, and then I went to Treasure Island off of Los Angeles, and was pulled out on a one-man draft on that, and I almost cried because I didn't know nobody. When I got there, I seen some other guys that I'd went through boot camp with. They put us on running the dishwasher there. This guy told me, "You get set, because you're gonna be here for about ninety days," and I said, "Well, good!" I was there about two weeks, and everything was real good because we had good liberty there in Los Angeles, and I was having a lot of fun. I came in there one evening, and a guy came in and called out my name and said, "Lash your sea bag. You're gonna be gone in about an hour." I said, "What in the world are you talking about?" He

said, “You’re going aboard ship.” They came and got me in an old station wagon. I grabbed my sea bag, and I went out there and went to San Pedro. That’s where I caught that ship. That thing, I’ll tell you what, I almost cried again! I said, “Dad-gum.” I didn’t know anybody. One thing about it, though, was there were several guys from Houston that were on it. A full crew was, I think, about eighty men and ten officers, and there were about ten of us from Texas, and two or three from Houston, and our captain was from Houston, but I knew nobody. I made acquaintances, but actually after you’re in there and you make a move, you’re alright in a couple or three days. Everybody’s just like you are; they don’t know anybody either. I got to be good friends with a guy from Beaumont. Later I went to see a guy in Mineral Wells, but he wasn’t on our ship. He was on a LCI gunboat, and he was wounded at the same time. {END OF SIDE A }

{SIDE B BEGINS} When I first met him, they were just trying to stop the blood on me, you know, and when I woke up he was laying on the floor. They had men everywhere, and he was on one of those rocket ships—LCI’s were converted from a landing craft to a rocket ship. We made the sweep with them on the morning of the seventeenth. Then they started in there, and the Japanese said over the radio that they were gonna invade that island on the morning of the seventeenth. There was eleven of those LCIs that started in, and they really opened fire on them. They knocked nine of them out of the mission, and three of them out of eleven fired. Some of those bigger ships went in there and threw a smoke screen around them and pulled them out. There wasn’t but forty men on them; twenty-eight of them were killed, and I don’t remember how many were wounded, but most of them were killed. I just visited him about a month ago.

Interviewer: Do you keep in touch with most of the guys from your ship?

Veteran: No, I don’t, because I didn’t know many of them. Me and the guys that were from Houston, I didn’t know them. When we got hit, there was one guy that was my gunner, and we had swapped places. What we’d normally do is go in on the starboard side facing the beach, so after making the two runs on the sixteenth and on the seventeenth that other run, the captain said, “Tell you what we’re gonna

do. Everybody port side is gonna change sides with the starboard side.” We were kind of on the fantail, and me and this guy were standing side by side, and I said, “There ain’t no use in me and you changing, because we’re right here anyhow,” and so we just sat there. When we went in the next time, that’s when we got hit. He really wasn’t my gunner; he should have been on the other side of me. I told him, “That was kinda unlucky for you, because you swapped over there and got messed up.”

Interviewer: What did you think when you heard about Hiroshima?

Veteran: The funny part about that, we were at Pearl Harbor on Christmas Day and this guy was making a speech that went all over the base, and he was telling about this and telling about that, and we had just got back off of maneuvers. He made this speech saying ‘they’ve got a device that they’re coming out with—he didn’t say a bomb—and we’re gonna be able to invade a place, and we’re gonna walk ashore and not gonna lose nobody.’ Like I said, we had just gotten back off of maneuvers, and I said, “You know you’re lucky if you don’t get hurt on maneuvers, because that’s the whole operation.” And I said, “You know how come the war’s lasting so long?” And he said, “No.” I said, “Did you hear that idiot say that they have a device that they was gonna be able to use, and they’d walk ashore, and we wouldn’t lose anybody?” I don’t remember where I was when I heard they had dropped the bomb, but I remember exactly when I heard that guy say that at Pearl Harbor. Later I said, “He knew what he was talking about way ahead of time.” I think I was back in the United States when the bomb was dropped. I couldn’t get over the destruction I heard about. When we were in Iwo Jima, and those bombers would come over twice a day, and I’ve never seen as many planes in all my life that were going over there, and of course we were pretty close and could see it pretty good. They’d come over that island and bomb them, and I mean to tell you they would set them on fire. To see something like that and then to think they had a device that could do more than that. I heard there were 14,000 Japanese troops on Iwo Jima, and the day before we got there, we found out they had manned 7,000 more. The bad part about it is all of their’s was casualties. Very few of their soldiers lived because they wouldn’t surrender. We gave them the opportunity to. They had a fighting chance, but they couldn’t

win because we had them surrounded, but they wouldn't give up. That was the only operation I was in. A lot of guys had pretty colorful things to tell about, because they saw more action. I really didn't see all that much action in the three days I was there.

Interviewer: While you were at Pearl Harbor, what did you hear from back home?

Veteran: We got letters, but the ones we sent got censored. We'd even get mail at sea. A ship would come by and shoot a line over to our ship and send the mail over. Actually, I didn't write too much. Every now and then they'd have to jack me up about writing. (Laughter)

Interviewer: What did you hear about what was going on over in Europe?

Veteran: I had two brothers lost in Europe. About the time we were on maneuvers, the war in Europe was at the upper end—it was coming to a close over there. I just heard different things. One of my brothers was on a troop ship in North Africa, and they were transferring them through the Mediterranean, and that ship got sunk. Lost lots of men, and one of my brothers was on it. I had heard he was on a ship, and that's all I had heard. Then my other brother was shot down in France. When I was going through boot camp, that's when I heard about him. You didn't hear too much of anything. When we'd come back to Pearl Harbor after maneuvers, we'd hear people talking in town, and some of our people were told the people in town knew where we were going, and I said, "We don't even know where we're going ourselves." We didn't even get our orders until we'd get out to sea. All I know is, when we left San Pedro the first time I was on that ship, they said they didn't know where they were going until they pulled out of the harbor.

Interviewer: When you finally made it back home, how did the public treat you?

Veteran: We were treated real good. At the hospital in Corpus, the civilian people would come in there, and they were really nice. They had big ticker tape parades in the big cities, and it wasn't that way here, but that was real nice for those guys. Then when this ship came into San Francisco with us on it, all the ships blew their horns, because it was mostly just wounded people on our ship. When you come



back with a lot of sickness, you don't really recognize a lot of good things, but you know they were trying to take care of you.

Interviewer: When the war was over, what was it like?

Veteran: When it was over, you just pretty well knew it was coming. I was in the hospital in Corpus when we heard it was over. I had five brothers, and all six of us served during the war.

{TAPE STOPPED—END OF INTERVIEW}