Interviewer: We’re doing this interview with Mr. Garland Huey in his house in Baytown, Texas. The date is April 24, 2003.

Are you aware that our conversation will be recorded and that this recording will be placed in the Lee College library? Do I have your permission to do that?

Veteran: Yes.

Interviewer: Could you tell us what war you were in?

Veteran: World War II.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you join?

Veteran: I joined.

Interviewer: How old were you when you joined?

Veteran: I joined when I was 18.

Interviewer: Were you married at this time?

Veteran: No, I wasn’t.

Interviewer: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

Veteran: I had a brother and four sisters, but they were all married except for two. I lived with two sisters on Mapleton Avenue in the Brownwood addition of Baytown. When I went into the service that broke up the home, because my parents had already died.
Interviewer: Was anyone else in your family involved in this war?
Veteran: None of the others, except I had a sister that was married to an Army lieutenant. He was on one of the anti-aircraft batteries here in Baytown before they left—Paul Jennings. Her name was Beatrice Jennings.

Interviewer: What role did you play in the war?
Veteran: First as a seaman, then as a lookout about the ship. I later became a radar operator.

Interviewer: Where were you stationed?
Veteran: I was stationed on the USS Raleigh, a light cruiser No. 7 in the North and South Pacific and then finally in the Caribbean and the Atlantic. If you’d like I’ll take it from the beginning and go over it briefly.

Interviewer: Yeah, that would be great.
Veteran: It was in late January 1943, and I was working for Kellogg Construction Company in Baytown. We were building a high octane unit for aviation gasoline, and J. W. Lounsberry, Sam Kenny, and a boy named Phillip came over to my house on Thursday evening and said ‘let’s go into Houston and join the Navy.’ That sounded like a good idea, so on Friday we went into Houston. Sam Kenny, J. W. Lounsberry, and I joined the Navy. Phillip went into the Marines. I can’t remember his last name. Sam, J. W., and I found ourselves in San Diego, California in about a week for boot camp, and we were there from the first of February until May. Then we were allowed to come home on leave and spend a few days, and the reported back to the base in San Diego. I was told to report to my ship in Bremerton, Washington, near Seattle. I got aboard the ship about four o’clock in the afternoon. The ship got underway at about five o’clock. I was assigned a gurney, what they put people in when they’re injured, which was tied up in the aft gunroom. This was a light cruiser. On the way up Puget Sound to get out into the Pacific, they had firing practice for the main battery, which was six inch guns, and of course I wasn’t able to participate because I hadn’t learned the station yet, so I was there and just standing around watching. I heard what they called a ‘hang fire,’ and that means one of the guns (in that particular
gunroom) didn’t fire. They had loaded it, and it didn’t fire, and they tried two or three efforts to make it fire, but it didn’t. Anyway, nightfall came on and I was up in my basket, or gurney, up there and was asleep, and all of a sudden—BOOM! That thing went off! I had heard about submarines and that sort of thing, and I heard the guys talking down below, and I didn’t want to get up and start asking, because I was afraid I’d make a fool of myself, so I just laid there shaking like a leaf. Finally, it turned out that it had fired. That’s kind of a rule in the Navy. You don’t want to open the breech, because it might fire then and kill everybody. In a few days I found myself in the Aleutian Islands off of Alaska. The Japanese had taken the Aleutian Islands, but the Navy and Air Force had moved them back to the western end of the islands. We were running with the fleet up there, and the home base was Adat(?), Alaska, which was about midway in the Aleutian Chain. We were there for several months and then got in on the bombardment prior to the landing of the troops on Atu Island, the western most island. That was, you might say, my first battle. The Army took that island from the Japanese. They were imbedded in what they called ‘spider holes,’ like a foxhole, and they had vegetation pulled over it. When our Army guys walked past, they’d lift and shoot them in the back. The Army conquered them. Then, we were involved in a raid on the northernmost island of Japan, Tamashuro. We had a number of ships that consisted of two or three light cruisers and some heavy cruisers—Salt Lake City, Portland, Cincinnati were some of the heavy cruisers that were with us. They would have eight inch diameter shells. Ours were six. We had destroyers, too. There was a radio base there, too. We went in there like geese in a row in the dark of night. We had destroyers that were escorting on the fringes, and about a hundred miles out, one of the destroyer’s radar detected an advance scout of the Japanese. It was a fishing boat and scouted to protect the homeland, but we had radar and the Japanese didn’t have that. We could look in the dark of the night and see how far they were and where they were. When the destroyer was in range, it was given permission by the admiral to fire one salvo, and it blew that ship up. They didn’t have time to send word back to their base, so at about two a.m. in the morning we went from east directly west toward the southern tip of that island. They sent about four destroyers to the southwest part, where they used their artillery to destroy a ship base over there. The rest of us
turned and went northward. We were about two thousand yards off of the island, and we were all in a line. When the last ship got in line, the admiral gave word to fire star shells. I was in what they called the crow’s nest—I was a lookout at that time, and I happened to be on the shore side, and I was to report submarine wakes or that sort of thing. There wasn’t anything between us and the shore. We had about ten guns on our ship that could focus. We had turrets that could turn. About six or seven of those guns were loaded with star shells that would shoot up high over the area and then burst, and a parachute would let a magnesium flare just light everything up like daylight, and every ship did that. Our ship rolled with that salvo and reloaded and came back over. Each gun had been given their particular place to fire, and when all those ships fired at the same time, there was a big explosion and dust, and what was formerly barracks and everything was just a prairie. It was just mass destruction. There were a couple of freighters that were close to the shore, because they knew they were going to get hit, and if they were in the shallow water they wouldn’t get sunk. They did fire on us, and I guess that was the one time I had a chance to give my life for my country, because me being up in the crow’s nest was a more prominent place for the gunners to aim, so I saw a splash in the water about three or four hundred yards out from the ship, and I reported that there was that shell splash. I figured they were aiming at the crow’s nest—at least it makes a good story. Thank God that it fell short. {Laughter} The Japanese report a large loss of life of from that. They did have a naval base on the northern end of the island, and we were at the southern, but as soon as we finished with that we went on back to Alaska, where our home base was. Later we were assigned to go to Panama and be more or less protective of the canal. Our ship and two, three, or four other ships. I had liberty in Costa Rica, went to San Jose, and Panama City. Then we went to Chile and Peru, then to the San Juan Islands. That was kind of a fun thing, because we weren’t battling anybody, so we had liberties over there. Later I was sent to school in Norfolk, Virginia, for radar technology, and then went back aboard the ship, and the ship was assigned to train midshipmen. We were taken to Annapolis, Maryland, and picked up a load of midshipmen who were training to be officers in the Navy. We’d go down to the Caribbean and have firing practice. The first nuclear submarine, the Nautilus, came and gave them practice with
submarines. I’ll tell you this—that a submarine is very difficult to detect. You think you might see the periscope, but they’d poke it up shortly and it would be looking, but we wouldn’t see it. They were very hard to see. Eventually, in October of ’45, the war was over and we went to Philadelphia, and the ship was assigned to be decommissioned and torn up. I begged to stay over an extra month. They offered me an opportunity to get out in September, but I was having a good time over there skating and so forth, but finally they said, “You either sign over or get out!” So, October 16th I was mustered out over here in Hitchcock, Texas, close to Galveston. I really had a good time out there most of the time. It was an education. So, that’s kind of my story. Ended up with the rank of radarman 2nd class—petty officer. At first I was apprenticing. When I got out of boot camp, I was a Seaman 2nd Class, but I studied real hard and passed, and then when the time came that I could have another rank I was ready. After being Seaman 2nd Class I became Radarman 2nd Class, and then Radarman 3rd Class.

Interviewer: How long were you in the war?
Veteran: It came to two years and eight months and a few days. My time wasn’t as long as some that went in the early part of the war. Of course being in the Navy, we could have showers every day. We had a laundry aboard ship, and we could be clean. It wasn’t anything like the Army or the Marines had to go through, where they’d be out there for days wearing the same clothes. We had a warm place to sleep and hot meals every day, so it was kind of like a vacation.

Interviewer: What was the toughest part about it?
Veteran: Really, I didn’t find it bad, but the one thing was you had to be subjected to the people that are over you and telling you what to do, and a lot of times they weren’t real diplomatic in that. They wouldn’t say, “Would you please go and scrub the deck?” They’d just say, “Get that swab right there, and go scrub!” That bothered me a little bit, but I took all of that. I really enjoyed it though.

Interviewer: Did you ever write letters?
Veteran: I did write letters back home mainly to my brother. He lived in Baytown and worked in the refinery. One time I even wrote him and told him to send me
money fast. I had been ashore having a ball spending all my money, and I received a lot of kidding from my nephews over that.

Interviewer: Who wrote to you?
Veteran: My sisters wrote and my brother may have written once or twice, and I had some girlfriends. The Navy has this thing about having a girlfriend in every port, so I had a girlfriend in Seattle, and I guess that was the only one that I really got close to. I was writing to about five girls at one time.

Interviewer: How were things when you returned to Baytown?
Veteran: They were very nice. I had gone to Lee College and had ten hours of college credit when I went into the service, which was very beneficial. It allowed me to get special consideration sometimes, and also with knowledge I had in chemistry and algebra and trig and geometry, and all of that helped. I actually had taken a post-grad geometry course at Robert E. Lee and did well in it, and that helped. I also took an architectural drawing course at Lee College after the war, and it was one of the most beneficial courses I ever took.

Interviewer: What did you think about the a-bomb being dropped?
Veteran: We had been told something special out of Washington that had been developed. At the time I thought it would be a special fighter plane. I welcomed it, and it was sad about the loss of life in Japan, but if we had had to go in and fight there, there would have been that many people killed and a lot of us, too, so the fact that it ended the war made be approve of it. I hated to see the loss of life, though.

Interviewer: What do you think of the status of the United States today?
Veteran: I think that, like we were talking about the Iraqi people, that they should take a real close look at the United States of America and realize that we are the only country in the world that would go in there and help those people and not run off with all their gold, money, silver, and stuff like that. We’re not in there to take from them. Yes, we’ll buy their oil, but we’ll pay for it, whereas a lot of countries would just take it. Hussein went into Kuwait and stole all their gold, and silver, and money. We don’t do that sort of thing. The money that our Army
is finding over there is being turned over, except for a couple of guys that the devil got to, and they tried to send some home. But I feel those people ought to try to have a government like ours. They should have religion and government separate. That’s what’s worked here in the United States. In some of the countries, they have the religion running the country, and that restricts their freedom. Like if a man wants to set up a little stand over here to sell something, they might say, “God doesn’t approve of that,” but if you have it separate, you go down to the city to have your stand, and religion isn’t involved there. You don’t have to work with God, right? So I hope those people would rise up and have a separate state and religion, and be free to worship whatever they want.

Interviewer: Is there anything you want to say about your experiences?
Veteran: Well, for a farm boy from Central Texas, it was a good experience. It’s too bad that it had to be, because so many people had to give their lives or have their lives upset, but in my case I wasn’t injured, and it was an education. It was like having a tour. I got to go to California and Washington and Oregon, Alaska, got to go to Central and South America, the Caribbean, to Cuba, to St. Thomas, to Jamaica, went to New York City, and it was all paid for—the Navy took care of it. I didn’t get across the Atlantic to Europe or to the Orient, but I just saw the western hemisphere, so for me it was a good time. It didn’t happen that way for everybody, of course. I did come back to Baytown and took some more courses at Lee College, and then went to Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos and got a degree. I became an elementary principal near San Antonio and was there three years, then went to Balmoray, near Pecos, for three more years.

The dust started flying while we were out there, because the farmers started plowing, and our son was affected by the dust so we had to move back to Baytown. I got with Dr. Gentry, the superintendent in Baytown, and he hired me for Horace Mann, where I taught science for thirty years, and retired in 1985. I enjoyed it tremendously. I taught air conditioning part-time at Lee College from 1984-1989. Baytown is full of good Christian people that go to church, and it’s
just a good place to be. I do a lot of volunteer work with the childcare center on Louisiana Street and help keep up their electrical and air conditioning work and also with their yard work. I’m a Sunday School teacher at my church, too. I work for Senior Citizens in charge of the dance group, and am the master of ceremonies when the seniors have their parties. I’m in the American Legion and work with the Boys State Program, and this year we’re sending twelve boys to Austin to learn how the Texas government works.

Interviewer: Thanks for doing this interview with us. {TAPE TURNED OFF}

{END OF INTERVIEW}