

Interviewer: This is Jeff Pennig on December 27, 2004 interviewing Warren Pennig. What's your full name and when and where were you born?

Pennig: Warren Edmond Penning and born in Rochester Minnesota 1924.

Interviewer: January

Pennig: January 27, 1924.

Interviewer: What branch of the service did you serve in and what was the primary unit that you served in?

Pennig: Well I served in the Navy and I served on three ships the Barrel, the Hide and the Storm King. That's basically it.

Interviewer: And before we get into that what were you parent's names and what were their occupations?

Pennig: Well my father's name was Edmond Joseph Pennig and his occupation was the construction business road construction business eventually for the longest period of time. Previously he was a salesman selling various things such as coal or refrigerators. My mother was a house wife and after they were married she did not work outside the home. So that was my background my parents.

Interviewer: When you get to the service part when did you enlist?

Pennig: October 30, 1942.

Interviewer: And after you so you were 18 at that point?

Pennig: That's right I would be.

Interviewer: Wow and where were you when you heard about December 7th?

Pennig: I was underneath I was on highway 36 in St. Paul under the Right Street bridge in a car coming back from ice fishing. We had the radio on and they announced the attack on Pearl Harbor and I remember it almost like it happened yesterday to the minute. I know right where I was I can visualize it I know the reaction very very very completely surprised.

Interviewer: You were completely surprised?

Pennig: Oh absolutely yeah.

Interviewer: Did anybody have any idea any inklings that anything like that?

Pennig: Well see then they didn't right or talk about it yeah they probably did I think our government must have had some ideas. But as far as publicity see we didn't have TV then but newspapers. But I don't recall every seeing anything in the newspaper or on the radio that would indicate that there was an evident or possible remote chance of an attack by the Japanese. Right out of the roof.

Interviewer: That was Sunday morning right?

Pennig: Actually when I heard about it I guess it was Sunday morning but when I heard about it it was in the evening Sunday.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Pennig: Time differential.

Interviewer: And what did you feel emotionally when that happened I mean?

Pennig: Well I just really felt as a kid that age I was so completely surprised I knew it would immediately mean that things would change. But I really didn't make an analysis of it I wasn't well like you would say terrible upset about it. I felt confident that for whatever reason that the country could handle it. And didn't have really very much of picture of what actually happened at that point because they just simply announced there was an attack on Pearl Harbor and they didn't go into detail of any kind. Just that there was an attack.

Interviewer: And did you at that point you were still in high school right?

Pennig: No 18 let me see in 42 I was in college then I was in McAlester. I graduated from high school at 17. So I went to McAlester starting that fall. Wait a minute that was 42 that would have been 41 when Pearl Harbor was in 41.

Interviewer: December 41.

Pennig: And I was 17 but I had graduated that previous June so I was 17 years old and a freshman at McAlister.

Interviewer: So when you actually went in you said it was October of 42? So at that point you were 18 years old?

Pennig: Then I was 18.

Interviewer: Did you get through your whole freshman year at McAlister?

Pennig: Oh yes

Interviewer: And what point did you decide that you were going to enlist?

Pennig: Well I don't know it sort have involved gradually and young people were expected to step forward and volunteer more or less. There was a war and we expected we were attacked which we were American citizens and would be going into the service. There wasn't any question about avoiding it or ducking around it any of that in those days is just a thing that wouldn't happen. So then it got to a question of what to do how to handle it. I wasn't determined to get into it right away but I was concerned with the things I could do or wanted to do. One of them thought that ran through my head of course is that I might join the try and join the Marine Core because my father was in the Marines and I

thought about that. And I guess about the time I was thinking about it at McAlister they said that there was going to be a program that the government was going to offer a program where you would be taken into the Navy and you'd be sent to some school. Not some local school but somewhere in the country you'd be sent to a school and would get training at that school and also take more college courses all headed in the direction of becoming a Naval Officer. And so I thought well that sounds like a good thing to do then I guess what I got to I had no I had an inclination of being in the Navy because I spent a lot of time in and on the water when I was a kid. So I grew up swimming, fishing, duck hunting lots of time maybe two or three times a week I'd do something like that. So I had no fear of being around the ocean or on the water in fact I liked it. And that was one factor I guess immediate factor and of course it seemed like a good thing to do. You go in and get some education learn what you have to do and carry out whatever you felt were your duties and I thought that would be a good thing to do. So I just did that's all.

Interviewer: And why October? Had you started a sophomore year at McAlister?

Pennig: Well let's see now yeah I guess I had because I would have been going to school at that time the sophomore year yeah that's right. So yes that's exactly right I was in the sophomore year and then I don't know I just thought it out and when it was presented it didn't take me too long to figure it out. I just thought yeah that's what I'm going to do and I did it. I didn't know when I would be called I didn't know where I would go I didn't know any of that. I probably wouldn't know couldn't know so why I just.

Interviewer: So when were you called?

Pennig: I was called I was notified ahead of time that on July 1, 1943 that I would report to the university of Duke in Iowa. Which was a Presbyterian school the same as McAlister see. They put some of that in there too they sent the kids to some of the places that fit their religious background. It worked out real good.

Interviewer: Now did you finish your sophomore year at McAlister then before reporting so you had two years at McAlister?

Pennig: Yeah I did that's right I did yeah I got to finish that. Then I started right at the Duke with some courses and that was a good school.

Interviewer: Was it a combination of classes regarding the Navy and general classes or was it?

Pennig: Yeah some classes were the Navy and some were just a continuation of whatever program you were on and I was headed towards engineering so I tried to stay with that as much as I could. But and I was studying German I could take German and economics, business things like that. We were you had the option they weren't all courses designated by the government or the Navy you had some choices. It was a combination but you did have to take some Navy courses too.

Interviewer: What was the nature of the commitment in terms of time for you once you volunteered? Was there a finite amount of time you had committed to? Was it two years, four years or something?

Pennig: No you knew you would be then in the naval reserve so that meant you didn't know how long you'd be in. Whatever time certainly as long as the war lasted and then maybe another in depth of time beyond that. I don't really think about that to tell you the truth you've got to get in and do it. And what actually happened was I was on active duty for July 1, 1943 to sometime in June in 1946. Three years of active duty but then you didn't get discharged you got a certificate of satisfactory service from Forestall who was in the Navy Head Chief of the Navy James Forestall. And you got a certificate of satisfactory service which meant you completed okay to this point we will release you to conduct yourself as a civilian. But you are in the Navy and I was in the Navy until 1955 or 56 or something like that it might even have been longer but about that. I think it was 14 years total and of course I got married and had children and I was a little bit more than a little bit apprehensive then about the Korean War because I could have gotten called. All they had to do was say you know why don't you go overseas. I didn't want to take another 18 day trip across the Pacific.

Interviewer: Well how long were you in Duke?

Pennig: I was there from July 1st of 43 until let's see it was two semesters late spring of 44 and then reported to Plattsburg New York about June 1st of 44 something like that. Yeah I think I've got that right I think that's about right. And then we had three months of training in Mid Shipman's school that's all navy. Everything was Navy you'd go out on some boats on Lake Plattsburg and they actually took a drill you know drilling and doing military things no civilian attitude or atmosphere at all about that strictly the navy. Boxing championships but it was tough until I and I was winning a couple of bouts you know a couple of contests the whole Navy was there I don't even know how many probably a thousand or two. And I had won a couple of matches and then I found myself sitting across from a guy that was about as wide as he was tall from Vermont farm kid I guess I don't know. But anyhow he just he did everything but knock me out I ached from I had a hard time walking from one barrack to the next. I ached for about three days from that but anyway that was part of that was all military type attitude about the whole thing.

Interviewer: So it wasn't boot camp exactly but it was completely military?

Pennig: It was military yeah you had military people training you and you would learn from those people. Professional navy or career navy very formal very you know everything was very regimented. Which was obviously that's why he got into the service was for that you might say kind of a Marine Core attitude it wasn't a game in any sense. And you had these young people gathered together that came from all different backgrounds. And some of them handled it pretty well and some of them it was hard for them to adjust.

Interviewer: Was it?

Pennig: Yeah I didn't have a problem but some did.

Interviewer: Now was everyone at Mid Shipman School from the same general academic background as you were at this point?

Pennig: Yeah I never spent that I never really tried to figure that out or study it but yes I got the definite impression that they had some college they were intending to go to college or had some college. And I think the Navy figured well if we're going to try and make an officer out of this individual we better have some indication that they can do what they think they can do. You know instead of just getting somebody into it that hadn't had any academic experience or proven that they could do that pass some test or IQ test or whatever they wouldn't be there. In other words yes I'm sure they were all considered to be qualified by the navy.

Interviewer: And was everybody about the same age there?

Pennig: Yeah they were yeah it really.

Interviewer: So you're all 19, 20, 21 years old?

Pennig: Yeah all the same kind of people pretty much. Personalities of course were different you will find that anywhere. But the basis for being there would be that they were reasonable intelligent people with some training that could be further taught. That's the way I looked at it and that proved to be pretty true of the guys I didn't know anybody who got thrown out or wait a minute I've got to take that back. Now this wasn't at Shipman School but the other deal was down at Duke Iowa some of the guys and one of my closest friends thrown out of the program at Duke because East Duke is right across the river from East Duke and East Duke is pretty rough territory. And the navy guys at the University of Duke were told that's off limits don't go over there. But they did I think there was about a half a dozen of them and they were all dismissed. That's a one strike ball game one chance if you're wrong you're out.

Interviewer: What would happen to them after they were dismissed as far as the service goes?

Pennig: Well they didn't send them back to be a civilian. What they did was they sent for instance my friend and others they sent them to a boot camp. A regular Navy they were trained to be seamen. So that's a whole other story but I could write a book about it. I know what happened there he got into he lived with seaman and ended up down at Panama Canal he had a way of getting in trouble so. Anyway he stayed in the Navy for a full term but I imagine he found a way to get into trouble no doubt about that it was just his nature. The guy he would just end up someplace.

Interviewer: He was not officer material huh?

Pennig: No probably not in some ways yeah he still was but he just had that rough side to him liked to fight and wouldn't really look for one but he didn't mind it.

Interviewer: When you got out of Champlévé then when you got out of Plattsburg off of Lake Champlévé were you then commissioned at that point?

Pennig: Yes

Interviewer: So that was the end of the training at that point?

Pennig: That was the end of the training I was commissioned at that point. And then I think came home for just a little while in St. Paul and then got shipped out to California San Diego. And the idea there was to get some training because I found out I was being assigned to what they call small boats or landing craft. And that's how that was the next step to actually do that.

Interviewer: So you were you found out you were assigned to that that was not you didn't have a choice in what you wanted to do after

Pennig: No

Interviewer: Okay

Pennig: No you did whatever no I never heard of anything it was just that's it you're going to do that. Yeah so I went out there on Corneille Island that beach. Took a train ride out there five days on the train no bunk sit up and stand up or do whatever you want to do. No shower nothing like that you know get out there. And so that's what we did got there and I was going out to report to this base Coronado base and on the way out there I think I must have been in a cab I guess I was and I saw this Corneille Hotel. And I didn't know but that was a very very famous elite type place a very very nice and expensive I'm sure. So I went in and I told them I said I'm on my way to the Corneille Beach to report to the navy and I want to get a shower I want to get a room expecting to pay for it and the guys said so that's alright go ahead which was nice. And that was a beautiful beautiful hotel so anyway that was kind of a nice way to do it. So I went up there reported and then got in this small they called them small they were big enough to handle 36 troops.

Interviewer: Really?

Pennig: Oh yeah had powerful diesel engines and a lot of power very good they are called Higgins boats. LCT Landing Craft Personnel they are square you know and the troops just stood in there and then when you got on the beach you'd have to rev up the engine to keep it up on the beach and then they would just drop the ramp which was about maybe 10 feet tall in front. They'd drop that ramp down and the troops would all go out and your job was to get them there get them off and get the boat out of there.

Interviewer: What size crew?

Pennig: Well actually the boat itself had a cockson and I think there was one other guy there one other seaman and I was in charge of six of these boats. And well you were hardly in charge you were hardly in charge of anything when you were out there you don't know you might be in charge but you can't do anything about it not much. Because you just kind of go in in a row but there was definitely constants that steered the boat and get it up on the beach get it off the beach and then there was one other seaman there that's what I recall.

Interviewer: How long was the training course?

Pennig: We kept making landing for let me see of well months I know that two or three months yeah. We went to Ocean Side and places like that where the surf was really tough and we landed on Corneille

Island too but the surf wasn't bad it was a good place to learn. Then when you went to ocean side places like that sometimes the surf would get I don't know I'm guessing maybe 10 feet big waves. We'd go in you know and you would have to learn how to handle those to handle the boat because that's pretty marginal whether you would make it or not they call it breaching. If you go sideways you are out of business if you're just practicing it doesn't matter much but if you're being shot at or under fire why that's about it.

Interviewer: So you're stuck if you breach you can't get back out you can't do anything?

Pennig: No it's really hard that's the that's why if you've got a good cockson a guy who really knows how to handle the boat you are very very fortunate. That came to pass while I was around Iwojima I was very very lucky to have more than one excellent cocksman who had experience. One of them was in North Africa and the other one was in the Aleutians and they had done it before and they knew what to do and I can tell you later on while we're talking about a few instances whatever that meant something. But that's what we were doing we did it over and over and over did it in Hawaii a lot too. Got out there see we went from Corneille to Hawaii didn't know where we were going to onto a ship the U.S. Barrel.

Interviewer: What size ship was it?

Pennig: Well it was I would estimate about 400 feet long pretty good size. It carried these landing craft on the sides hung down by cables and pulleys and they were called David forms they would let the boat down from that position. I know we were out there we went on the Barrel and the Barrel had about 90 percent of the crew out of Dolphin California were amateurs they weren't on a ship before. We had about 10 percent that I remember that were experienced. It really meant something to have that experience even those few it helped an awful lot all of this new equipment and everything. So anyway we went out we practiced around California a lot and got some experience there. That was kind of mild it wasn't too tough we got around Hawaii and we found some areas that were really tough. High seas especially as I recall on the north side. The Captain on our ship was new too he hadn't had a ship before. So we were out there one day around Hawaii practicing and he had the ship the sea was moving across cutting across the ship. In other words he didn't have faced inland and of course we young guys we weren't supposed to tell the Captain anything obviously the Captain was the ruler and he was responsible for everything. But anyway I did approach him because this was going on and I suggested Captain he's a nice guy and he said what's that and I said well if you turn the ship into the wind you cut that roll out because when you put the boats down you see you let them down and then the ship is in position and if there is a big swell a ten foot swell and that swell drops out and the things are hung up on cables the whole boat goes down like that. And hell people could fall out and get hurt in fact we did lose one man there.

Interviewer: Really

Pennig: Yeah we did because what happened was it was going like this and up and down and this soldier he was up here someplace and when it did that he lost his brick he had all this equipment on and everything he went down between the boat and the ship and he was gone. But anyway the Captain said yeah I need to change it around and so that worked out.

Interviewer: So it would be a 90 degree turn?

Pennig: Yeah 90 degree turn just change it. It seemed like it was pretty obvious but people generally don't say anything what are they going to do. A lot of Captains would have said out of here forget it.

Interviewer: When you got to Hawaii did you have reports as to how the war was going? Did you have a sense of how it was going?

Pennig: Oh no not really you know you get some information but you didn't have time to look for it. If you found it you probably wouldn't have time to read it. It really didn't seem to make much difference because when it got down to it to a situation it was not what anybody else was doing you've got your own world and that really does occupy you. You know it would be interesting but no I didn't know we were going to Iwojima until they cast off and we were out to sea a day or two. Somebody said we're going to Iwojima and I was where's that? I didn't know and I don't think anybody else did either you know on the ship they might have but I didn't know. There isn't much of that information thing don't have any don't listen to a radio people on the ship don't have radio there are not stations to listen to. So you just don't know.

Interviewer: How long were you in Hawaii?

Pennig: Well I think we were there let me see we landed in Iwojima February 19th we were at Saipan before we went there. I don't know a month or two I don't know a short time.

Interviewer: So February 1945 was when you and Saipan was before that? Was that the first place you went after Hawaii?

Pennig: We went there but of course Saipan had been taken the United States had control of it so we just went there to make a stop and get in position to go to Iwojima. In fact I don't really think I knew we were going to Iwo until after we left Saipan I don't think they told anybody.

Interviewer: And again did anybody anticipate anything that was going to happen at that point? Did you have a sense of what you were going into?

Pennig: No not really no it was just like we were going to go make another landing. No I mean I knew there would be some shooting. It was occupied by the Japanese I knew that but I didn't have any idea really. Yeah I didn't know there were 20,000 Japanese on that island 20,000 and after six weeks there were about 200 left. That's about it.

Interviewer: Now were you with the same group of people after you got to Hawaii and you were there for a couple of months then you leave to go to Iwojima are you with have they divided you into units so that you know your people so you can differentiate among them and you know

Pennig: Yeah that part of it was quite interesting because there was six of us insons. And of course we were all rank amateurs all six were young kids we didn't know anything I remember all of them vividly.

That was quite a thing six guys in a room half this big. That's where we were we were close you know spent time together talked to each other got to know each other.

Interviewer: Were you from different geographical regions?

Pennig: Oh yeah

Interviewer: Everybody from a different place?

Pennig: Yeah yeah Walter D. Wallace Pennington was from Alabama and Dwayne Dunkel was from Pennsylvania and Nelson was from Indiana, Newfield I don't know where Newfield was from but anyway we were different from different areas different backgrounds. Interesting so anyway that's the sequence got to Saipan then went to Iwojima.

Interviewer: And then what happened?

Pennig: Well the first things that happened it wasn't exactly the first I don't know whether it was first or not but anyway I realized that we were going to have to land these troops. We were anchored off shore maybe a half mile or something like that and then somebody says to me towards the end of the day well you know we're going to get up early tomorrow morning because we are going to have steak breakfast. What I don't eat much of a breakfast yeah that's a traditional thing you eat a steak just before you go into combat. That's a first so anyway we did that and then we were I didn't realize this either but we were gonna take troops in from another ship not from our ship. We were just going to take our boats go over and pick them up now why I don't know.

Interviewer: And you're not on the Barrel at this point?

Pennig: Oh yeah

Interviewer: You're still on the Barrel?

Pennig: Oh yeah still on the Barrel yeah. And so anyway we got into the boats probably 8:30, 9 o'clock. The weather was not too bad it wasn't sunny or anything like that but it wasn't too bad it wasn't raining. And a little windy and that sort of thing I analyzed all of that just because we have to deal with it to run the boats in you know. Then we went over and picked up these troops from another ship I can't remember just how they did that. I think they picked our boats up then they'd get in the boats then they dropped our boats it doesn't matter. Maybe they went down the carts too that was another way to do it when it got too rough. Anyway got the troops on and then we would go and make these form these circles and just circle around waiting and then take off from that point just rondavuing.

Interviewer: How far off shore?

Pennig: That's all I'd say half mile or so. And while you're doing that their lobbing the battleships in back you know a quarter of a mile or so and their lobbing these 16 inch shells over your head you know you could just hear them coming you could hear the sound of them coming. They weighted about as much as a Volkswagen they were gigantic shells and then they hit the shores and of course the Japanese were

in the teams and so forth so. I don't really know how much it meant but they lobbed a lot of them over then oh and there was some activity aircraft activity and our attacks. And then all kinds of shooting back and forth but when we started in as we started in and we progressed then the firing got more intense. And they were lobbing mortars out in the waters they would fall in an ark because they are set up that way I guess. Our boat was fortunate enough not to get hit but you could see some boats did get hit too as they were going in and it was kayas. And so as we are going in we get I don't know maybe five or six hundred miles off shore maybe more than that I didn't really pay attention but there was a fellow standing right next to me a Marine and he's standing there reading a comic book. Yeah he's reading a comic book he was one foot from me. He started singing and after a while I says aren't you interested or something like that because all of this stuff was going on I mean the machine gun bullets are falling in the water mortars are dropping and people are jumping out of boats and getting hit by fire. All of this and this kids standing there and he looked at me and he says well I don't know I've done this before and he said if you're going to get it you're going to get it. Just like that and that's all he said and I didn't ask him anymore. He read that comic book until we got to be oh I would say a couple hundred yards off shore you know as you go in the swells develop see. When you go in its fairly calm as you go in it gets bigger and bigger. And finally I guess he realized we were going to land he takes I watched him he unbutton his coat like this he takes comic book bends it over like that real neatly creases it down the side like that opens his coat like that tucks it inside his jacket like that and buttons it up. Head straight ahead just straight ahead well frankly when I think about it I have thought about it I didn't really you see when that's how they can be conducted because when your 20 years old and you don't plan or think it out or anything else but you are immortal. They might get hit but you're not going to get hit so anyway I realize that now but I didn't realize it at the time so then we go in.

Interviewer: So that's how you were thinking at the time you were going in. That's how everybody was thinking?

Pennig: I really wasn't that was subconscious but I know it now see I didn't even know it then but now I know it. You're not going to get hit that's all because you're not that's all because you're a young guy indestructible. So anyway now we get in there and coming in on the last one and this is one place where I had this really good cocks and I could still see him I remember the name too I'm sure it was Howe. Anyway he had experience and he handled the boat very well and we came in right into the beach and then they dropped the ramp and when they dropped the ramp that's when I figured I wasn't immortal. It suddenly struck I thought my god because all of this is going on right here and they could shoot right into the boat. To my knowledge they didn't but they could and you are exposed to whatever is there. And I thought boy I want to get off of this beach right now.

Interviewer: Were there troops already on the beach?

Pennig: There was some. Because they had started earlier I suppose they started 6:30 maybe 7 o'clock this is a couple of hours later. But they weren't very far because they really they had them pinned down on the beach and so the only things was then get out of there. And we did and he did a good job.

Interviewer: Now were you supposed to be in charge of six boats?

Pennig: Yeah yeah

Interviewer: And somehow keeping them all even going in together?

Pennig: Yeah we were keeping them going we did a good job of it they were reasonable close. They all dropped their ramps at the same time pretty much. That was the idea it was called a wave sixth wave seventh wave first wave. So they would drop the ramp then we pulled out of there and yeah they were really shooting bombs and everything else going off and everything else. But anyway that was the first day and then let's see what did we do after that I don't see I guess we went back. I don't really recall but I think got back took the ark boat back and I got some kind of an assignment it was at that point I'm pretty sure that the Captain or the executive officer one of them told me to take a couple of two or three men with me and we took his boat the Captains called the Captain's Gig. And I don't really remember what the assignment was but we were supposed to go in and patrol and just I suppose try to help other people or keep things organized or whatever it was. Well we did that and we were patrolling around out there and this one nobody's going to believe but I'm going to tell you anyway. There was a guy swimming around a half mile off shore an American obviously and we go over and pull him out of the water and he's a Marine. This must have been sometime early afternoon and he was drunk he got a hold of some sake someplace. You know I mean he just he was drunk and so I don't remember if I asked him how the hell he got there or whatever I don't know how he got there. But he was in the water half a mile off shore so we pulled him in and we I think we must have dropped him off at another ship I don't know what we did with him but that was one thing that happened. And then we stayed out there for a long long time and doing this kind of thing just looking around trying to do something I guess was the idea the Captain had. You're not going to do anything here go do something in any even that's what we were doing. Now I think that had to be the same night it got to be dark and we were in this boat and it must have been I would estimate it was maybe 9, 10 o'clock. And I hear some American's yelling for help and of course you had to be sure they were American's weren't somebody else but it turned out to be some Americans they were in an Amtrak. An Amtrak is an armored vehicle they go in on the first wave generally and they do that because they are armored they are not subject to take some artillery shells and things like that. So Marines go in on those well what happened I found out later on that some of these Amtrak's a fair number of them to one track on one side they were powered by the tracks.

Interviewer: Okay like tank tracks?

Pennig: Tank tracks.

Interviewer: Okay

Pennig: And one side of the tank tracks stuck on a number of them hundreds of them I believe a hundred or two there were a lot. But anyway this particular one this is what this was of course I had no idea. But why are they out here in the dark at this time.

Interviewer: In the water?

Pennig: In the water and why don't they just go on land. Because one track was stuck and they were going in circles that's why. Somebody on those Amtrak's were yelling for help we're sinking so I said to the cock I think that was a kid named Damson he was a good cockson pretty sure he was piloting that he was out of Detroit. But anyway I said well let's go see if we can help them so we went over there we went up alongside of them to try and get them off. I didn't even know how many of them there were but I mean we were going to try this so we went along side of them. Well it was a heavy sea and so the Amtrak was down we go up it was shifted some came down with the boat we had right on the corner of this Amtrak. Poked a hole in the plywood in the front of this boat this gig we had about a foot and a half or so around quite a big one. Well that happened and there was nothing you could do about it but the cockson that was running the boat I didn't tell him what to do but he immediately threw the thing into reverse complete wide open in reverse. You would go backwards to keep the water from running in you knew that and then full ahead to raise the bow out of the water and headed for the beach. You know just boom boom boom he just had it all figured out instinct I guess plus he had experience. So now we're headed for shore wide open the waters coming in can't get it up high enough to keep it all out. So one of us I don't know who it was hung over the outside the other one or two hanging onto his feet and tried to stuff a cushion or a jacket or something in there. Didn't work I mean we got it in there but it didn't stop the water. The waters coming in and you know that the bilge pump can only handle so much water toss it out of there. At some time the waters going to get high enough to kill the engine and you have to dig a hole for the water or you're going to sink. Well anyway we made it about right on the last swell we went in the engines still running then it quit. We went in on the last swell like that and then dropped down about maybe 20, 30 feet short of the beach the edge. Fortunately though there was enough there it caught the front of the boat it did sink but it didn't sink all the way. So we jumped out you know we jumped in the water at the end of the boat went up on the beach got up on the beach. And of course this is in the dark and the Japanese were afraid of moving around in the dark well there was an LST there that's a landing ship tank that's that big thing with a front that opens up like that. And so I saw the front end was open and I told the guys I said let's get on this LST we'll find someplace we'll be out of you know fairly safe we'll be out of off the beach anyway. So we did we went in there we found a place and we laid down and went to sleep. Wake in the morning and we're out to sea so I found somebody found the officer of the deck somebody up there and I told him who we were and how we got there I said well where are you going hoping he'd be going to Saipan or someplace else. He said well no there's an air raid and we pulled out for the air raid so we are going to go in and land again pretty soon. So I said alright and we did that it was an hour or so got in in the morning or something like that. And then out of the LST and the job was to get back to our ship so I found a small boat there and asked him for a ride and he found our ship got us back there. And then I went to the Captain and said I hate to tell you but your gig is gone. He said well that's not too important something like that he was not too upset about it he wasn't really at all he was just well you're here. So anyway that was the end of that and then on and on and on and on. I had oh I don't remember maybe three or four separate assignments from time to time from then on. One of them was I think that might have been the same day I got back on there maybe one day or two later. And the executive officer called me and in and he said I want you to take, it must have been later than that because by that time our ship had been turned into a hospital ship a lot of casualties. And he called me in and he said I want you to take 50 white casualties over on the beach

we were over loaded we don't have any place to keep them we've got more coming in so he says we've got to take them over and turn them over to the Marines.

Interviewer: And where would you do that on the beach?

Pennig: Yeah so we had we got an LCM that's a landing ship anyway it's a big boat it will carry 50 and these 50 Marines are all wounded they've got damages here and there. This one now I remember it was later on in the day to it was must have been 2 or 3 o'clock because I know it was later in the day. And they don't have any really have any equipment they're not armed they don't have guns they don't have helmets some of them just get them on the island turn them over to the Marines. Well anyway got on the LCM take them in there those guys were something else I'll tell you they never complained or they never argued they were very stoic about it just call quiet. So I get them in there and we go there and we make the landing and they were still doing shooting on the beach so I got up on the beach made the landing and now I've got to find a Marine Core officer try to turn them over to. And I got up on and I had to go up on the beach you know two or three hundred yards but there was still a lot of shooting going on up there. And finally I got a Marine a guy running around with an insignia on the collar you know and a couple of guns and just wild. So I approached him and I said I'm from the APA 61 and I tried to explain it to him. Something like he said well that's your last order now I'm giving you your next last this is your last order now get them off the island we don't just get them off the island. I think he was ready to shoot me what the hell are you doing crazy I mean what's he going to do for some of these taking care of wounded. Nothing to eat no equipment nothing to drink you know just crazy. So I said well yes sir and went back down there and the guy was standing there it was getting dark and its getting dark and I think what in the hell am I going to do. Well anyway there was a I know how that was I found another LCM and I got them all in there and then I headed out someplace.

Interviewer: Could you just commander anyone if it was there?

Pennig: Oh yeah any one nothing formal about it you know yeah just any one. So anyway I got another one we got them in there took it out and now its pitch black dark and when the air raid comes the ships scatter pull anchor and get out of there. Well it was a few ships left I don't know how many but at least I got one I pulled up alongside of it a guy yelled he pops on the deck and said who are you identify yourself. I yelled out there and told him you know APA 61 name and so forth and he said what do you got. I think I told him ammunition I told him something I lied to him because I wanted I didn't want what was I going to tell him. So anyway I told him that so he pulls he says well what do you want I said well pick us up. So he flipped the holds down and he picks up the boat and we get up to deck level and these guys walk out 50 of them. He says who's in charge I said I am he said you told me you had ammunition or whatever it was. I said yeah I did he said well what's going on here? I said well these guys are all woudned and I want them on a ship I want them taken care of. And he said yeah go find someplace to lay down or sleep get out of the way or whatever. So we did and we again I think we might have pulled out of there overnight I'm not sure but it doesn't matter. I took them in the next day and you know they finally did they finally took them though.

Interviewer: On the beach?

Pennig: Yeah

Interviewer: Had they set up any type of hospital situation my then?

Pennig: I don't know I don't know what the heck they had I suppose they must have had something by now. But anyway well I'm going on and on I don't know if you've got any questions.

Interviewer: No that's great how long did that take and of course I've got to ask you about the flag raising. Tell me about the flag raising.

Pennig: Oh the flag raising. Well

Interviewer: What did that feel like and where were you?

Pennig: Well it was quite a sensation because there again I was on the beach and I don't really know why it doesn't matter I was I got on and off about three or four times. And I looked up to the west to Serbatchi I was on Yellow Beach about the second one over and I looked up and I actually actually saw a flag go up from that distance. Wow but had no idea that they could be there. How in the world did they ever get there with all of this chaos going on all of this combat and everything? But I saw it happen and I don't know whether it was the first or second flag I never tried to figure it out I don't care. It was just the flag went up and I thought well things are getting better my feeling was there's hope because you began to wonder. What in the world how can we ever get this things done.

Interviewer: And how long was that into it do you remember about?

Pennig: Well I would say that it was about the third or fourth day something like that and that was really a feeling that made a turning point. Up to that point it was chaos absolutely. Now another thing that happened I can't believe it started myself but it did happen the next one was that Captain and the executive officer again called me and I don't know why they kept calling me but they did. Anyway he says I want you do go over and find, this was in the morning one morning, find the command ship and go up on the command bridge and find out why these troops aren't unloaded from this ship they were still on the ship. And I think this was four days after we got there maybe five but at least four so I get a small boat and I go over and I found the ship I board it I go up there on the flying bridge and I find the guys all the brass are up there mulling around and al and trying to figure out what's going on handle things. And so I approach one guy and I said I'm from the APA 61 the troops aren't unloaded yet and the Captain wants to know why. So he says wait a minute he comes back in about three or four minutes and he says we've been looking for that ship for about three or four days. We didn't know where it was he says go back tell your Captain to unload the troops right away right now we're looking for them. So I went back and I told the Captain to do this and the reason the Captain wanted to get the troops off was that he wanted to go back to Saipan he wanted to get out of there. He didn't tell me that but I knew he did well he might have told me a little bit I don't know. Anyway so I go back and tell him and immediately unload the troops and all out of there. And within a few days I don't think it was right away but shortly after that within a day or two at the most that we did go back to Saipan got out of there. But you know what he did he asked for permission to go alone he didn't have to go alone but he wanted so

bad he wanted to get out of there he went alone. And you know the submarines were still working so we went all the way back alone.

Interviewer: And how far from Iwojima by sail was it to Saipan? Miles or time wise how long did it take you to get back?

Pennig: I'm going to guess a couple of days.

Interviewer: A couple of days?

Pennig: Yeah it might have been four or five hundred miles or something like that I don't really know. But those were some of the experiences.

Interviewer: Now what happened when you got back to Saipan? Now it's the end of February of 45 right end of February 45?

Pennig: Yeah

Interviewer: Did you feel changed at that point did you feel like a different person at that point or were you more numb from that experience or did it take a while for it to sink in?

Pennig: Oh it's hard to explain it it's sort of an experience that after I'll tell you what did happen yeah. You don't realize what's happened to you but after that experience I never really felt anything when I looked at a dead person except when we lost Gary that broke it that's the first time that I felt it. All the way from then to 1947.

Interviewer: Thirty years

Pennig: Thirty years just numb. One day and I don't know why again I can't figure out why I'm there I'm just complete confusion but I was on the beach for some reason and I got this assignment to find something out. And I'm up there a hundred or two hundred yards or so and there's still some shooting and so forth going on but I'm talking to somebody over here I suppose it was a Marine I'm talking to him and I look around over to the east and as far as I could see there were Marines lined up for dead people and all of their toes were absolutely in a straight line just absolutely laid out like with the ponchos over them. So many dead people and in the midst of all of this killing and everything you don't react you just to so I don't know what it is. But yeah I felt no emotion really you kind of turn it off it terrible. Another thing that happened people have no idea they can't know but in those days flame throwers were legal. And I watched when we were off the shore or maybe on the shore sometimes they'd be using a flame thrower the Marines. They shoot a flame about this big around (making a large circle with his arms) and shoot that about maybe a hundred yards a long way maybe two hundred a long long way it never dropped it just went straight. And they'd shoot that into a cave you see I will never forget the men running out of those caves on fire. Waving their arms and hands you know and things like that. It's impossible to think.

Interviewer: Did you talk about it at the time with other with any other guys?

Pennig: No

Interviewer: So you all kind of kept that to yourself?

Pennig: I don't know nobody ever really said anything to me about it and I didn't do it on purpose just didn't. But that's just the way it was I guess I figure it was a defense. Well anyway after Iwojima yeah it got to be in Saipan and then we find out the next place we're going is Okinawa.

Interviewer: What state was that in at that point what status was that at that point?

Pennig: Well they were it was about one more step to Japan.

Interviewer: It's still held by the Japanese at this point still?

Pennig: Yeah and they were going to invade and so we went up there and we were part of the decoy thing because we didn't really my group this large convoy at least didn't actually land any troops up there. We were there but we didn't land any troops we were off the beach a large large convoy. And the only thing that I had an experience with at Okinawa was those kamikaze planes. You anchored there and then your radio would say this they called them bogies. There was 20 bogies at 100 miles up not 20 more like 12 or 10 Japanese and you assumed that they were going to be kamikazes. Well then they keep coming down and they would there would be 12 then there would be 9 because the ticket out there or the destroyers or whatever they were shooting at them. And they would get down so when they were coming in you knew they were only a few miles away and there would be maybe 6 of them left or 4 of them left. And you could see them and then they would get to a certain point and then they just started down then you questioned where they were going to go at. I had them go right at the ship I was on and hit the ship next that close yeah right into it tried to hit the bridge mostly. But there were a number of them oh yeah one other thing that happened in Okinawa we were out there one of the early mornings and just big convoy maybe a couple hundred ships way up at the north end without any radar announcement or anything else there was a biplane. Two wing biplane airplane coming low oh he couldn't be much up there hardly at all and then as he came down they started shooting at him see when he started coming down. And then when he got close enough it's got the Japanese insignia on it. Then when he got closer than that he got closer to us I could still see him it's a guy in tactic in this open airplane whatever the hell he was doing. And he got through that whole thing everybody shooting at him all that flack and everything he got through that whole thing. But he got out there about a quarter a mile on the other end somebody knocked him down then I guess the destroyer.

Interviewer: He wasn't armed or anything?

Pennig: I don't know I have no idea what the hell he was doing. I suppose he was a reconnaissance plane. But what's the study I don't have any idea what he was doing. That was crazy it was just like a dream. And then they start flying I think they call them black widows a New America plane. And some reason or other once and awhile one of them would fly out from over the island and low and everybody's trigger happy see on this convoy somebody would take a shot and somebody else would

take a shot. They were doing some of that too just trigger happy stuff. But I think I told you pretty much everything about Iwojima.

Interviewer: So at the end of that you turned 21 in January so you were just 21? You would have turned 21 in January of 45.

Pennig: Yeah that's right.

Interviewer: This would have been February.

Pennig: That's right

Interviewer: So you were 21 years going through that. And then by the time you got to Okinawa this is what March or April in there.

Pennig: March 1st or April 1st one of those two I think March.

Interviewer: So is that where you were when VE-Day happened?

Pennig: No I was in St. Paul I was on leave.

Interviewer: For VE-Day?

Pennig: I don't know why but I was. Well I think I do know I think I got transferred see I got transferred to two more ships.

Interviewer: Okay after Okinawa?

Pennig: After yeah after I left the Barrel I was on the Storm King was the name of one of them and the one was the Hide the USS Hide. I was on three ships.

Interviewer: Now were these different kinds of ships or were they still the same?

Pennig: No they were all attack transports.

Interviewer: Attack transports

Pennig: So then I got to know new crew new people you know a whole new all those guys you were with you leave that bunch and you take a whole new crew a while there and then a whole new crew. Which was fine met a lot of good people I liked that. But then we went to hauling prisoners oh God that was an event oh later on. I don't know whether it was the Storm King or the Hide but it doesn't matter we went to Philippines and I don't know why but we got there. You never knew why you just did what you told to do. But we got there and we were going to bring back Japanese or American prisoners of war some of whom I think were in the Baton March and boy what an experience that was. I mean these guys you can't believe it I mean they'd be about your size you know 6'3", 6'4" some of them 6 feet tall weighed 100 pounds I think. Just nothing left of them just skeletons all the misery and all that time they spend there. We picked those former prisoners up brought them back oh I did a lot of different things. Here's

another deal we were down in the Philippines I think it was on that trip and the Japanese had sunk a battleship or a cruiser a big ship down in that area before we got there. The ship was traveling alone wanted to chose to and a torpedo got him anyway I'm on this ship and I think I was even on watch when that happened but it was at night time and you hear these guys in the water see yelling for help and so forth. The ship that I was on ran over a Pilipino fishing boat so the Captain stops the ship turns on the flood lights to pick them up which is very very dangerous because of a torpedo when those things are out you an easy target. Picked up all of those guys spent a half an hour or so doing it. Got them on the boat and took off made it but. A lot of you know unbelievable stuff.

Interviewer: You got leave then back to St. Paul at some point.

Pennig: Yeah I was back here when they dropped the A-bomb.

Interviewer: Yeah now did you again I know you were saying you just went from place to place and did what you were told and weren't that aware of the big picture. But did you have any idea that we were going to have to invade Japan other than the A-bomb or any of that?

Pennig: Well let me tell you that one. Yeah I had an idea in fact I planned on it. We were going to have to do it and so I had no idea. Except for one thing I was in the bar in Saipan officer's club having a drink or two with some we called them Zoonies then you know fly boys guys that flew. And I had a drink or two with the guy and I said something about the coming invasion of Japan and he said don't worry about it.

Interviewer: Really

Pennig: I said what do you mean he said I'm just telling you it's not going to happen. And I thought well your pretty you know have another drink good lord and this was maybe along about June or so something like that. He was very confident about it he said it's not going to happen. And I said well he obviously had some knowledge of what's going on. He's the same guy that invited me he said if you want I'll take you on a ride up over Japan we'll make a bombing run. No thanks I've got other things to do why would I do that. I just said no. But anyhow yeah that I wondered about it I dind't have any idea I said what's he talking about. But then when that bomb fell and I was in St. Paul in fact I was with Grandpa I think and the news came and I thought that's what he was talking about. I suppose you know that the Japanese dind't quit even after two when they quit was when the emperor said quit. Otherwise they would have marched till

Interviewer: So even after Nagasaki they still didn't surrender the day? Not only not after Hiroshima but not after Nagasaki either.

Pennig: No there were two and they dind't quit after either one. So that's why they dropped the second one but that would not have done it either if the emperor hadn't said. He went on the radio and he told the Japanese people to quit that's it it's over then they quit. Otherwise they would have all gone down no matter what and we would have lost an awful lot of people an awful lot of people.

Interviewer: Now did you celebrate in any particular way when at VJ-Day at the point when that was over?

Pennig: I don't really think so. No I just I always thought we would win you know. I couldn't see how we wouldn't win when we started to get a lot of power military power. Well the other things I've got to tell you about is at Saipan those B29s would fly up over Japan and bomb you know and of course of them would get shot well that's why Iwojima was so important apparently. They figured if they got it then they could have a landing strip there for the ones that were disabled and they said it saved about 10,000 lives it saved a lot of lives. To what was done lost a lot but saved a lot too. But anyway that was part of the whole thinking but what I was going to tell you or mention to you was these on Saipan when I was around there and they were still doing that bombing some of those bombers would come back they wouldn't they still had evil. And they'd come back and there would be maybe just one wing and engine part of the wing might be shot off part of the landing gear might be gone and I don't know what all. But they'd fly in sideways almost but some of them would be able to somehow or other make the landing and be okay and others when they come down they are going to land that plane. I don't know how much of that took place but some did. It was different.

Interviewer: Now how long were you in after that? You got out in 46?

Pennig: Well I got out in 46 and I got a discharge in 54.

Interviewer: In 54.

Pennig: I'm pretty sure it was 54.

Interviewer: What did you do for that last year between 45 and 46 when you were still in, you were still on active duty?

Pennig: They sent us on these other ships and go out in the Philippines and get the prisoners.

Interviewer: Oh okay

Pennig: And by then you know just moving around doing things. I was in Norfolk Virginia for a while up through the Panama Canal six weeks in San Francisco at one point. In a hotel if you imagine the Mark Hawkins the top floor of the Mark Hawkins the Navy had that the top floor. And when I got there I was going to wait for a ship so I got a room up there. There was only me and one other guy another officer a naval flyer flyers were always a little you know considered themselves a notch above the ordinary boat officer. So we didn't socialize so basically it was almost like being alone. But the hole floor at the Mark Hawkins you know stuff like that you know then to go through the Panama Canal you know that was kind of a nice thing to do I enjoyed it but I don't really see much reason for it. Well the real reason for it I guess was they couldn't get that many people out of the service that fast. I think I mean that's the story I got anyway. They had to process them I got this judge out of the Great Lakes who knew all that stuff. But I don't know I did get around a lot down to the Guadalcanal once Esperanto Santo I remember that name Philippines. That first ship of mine too that Barrel ended up in one of the atomic experiences.

Interviewer: I'll be darned.

Pennig: Yeah they had some ships I don't know why but they scuttled it that way. Short career go out and get the job done.

Interviewer: That's great I'm going to put this on pause. I'm just going to read a couple of these because their kind of fun. Did you write a lot of letters and receive mail from relatives and friends?

Pennig: Not a lot.

Interviewer: Not a lot. Did you play cards or read or play sports to pass the time?

Pennig: I played a lot of cards.

Interviewer: Did ya?

Pennig: Yeah I'll tell you a story about that.

Interviewer: Okay

Pennig: Can you turn that off a minute? (The tape was turned off and then started again)

Interviewer: One of the questions is were you impressed with the qualities of the enemy their leadership, their tenacity, their bravery, their ability to withstand hardships and so forth? What was your overall impression of the Japanese as an enemy?

Pennig: Well I have to be frank about it my feeling about them is or was that they would they would commit suicide or that they would do anything in combat that they thought was necessary. They were ruthless and I did I think at that time realizing what they had done previous to this in China and so I fully realized that anything was possible. You would have to be not look for any kind of relief from them. So I don't know I guess the overall picture was that you had this on your hands you had to do whatever you had to do to win. I can say this I didn't really have any reservations about using the A-bomb. Because look what was required and so if you want to figure it out in your own war if you're at war if there's one casualty or a million casualties it's still war and that one is important to anyone related to that one life. I just I don't think you deal with that it's not a mathematical thing so I can't think of one thing I admire them for I don't know what it would be. Any act of humanity that they might have that I have knowledge of I have none. So I just knew we had to win.

Interviewer: And what was your overall feeling when the dust settled by say 1947 or 48? Did you think about it a lot or much or not at all or?

Pennig: Well I didn't really think about it a lot that it was consciously but subconsciously I can't tell you how grateful I was for the fact that we could win. Because if we would have lost your life or your family's life or American life or democratic life all of that is all gone without question. So very very grateful for winning somehow and but as far as dwelling on the activities and so forth no I can't say I was consciously did that but I certainly subconsciously and still to this day I mean when I start talking about some of these things in my mind's eye I can see it as clearly as I'm there 60 years ago. It's indelible and these things are only I won't say a small part but their apart of a continuity when you are in a war in

combat and so forth all of these events that they place they all intertwine and related and I could really tell a lot more about what people did. And some Americans too because its war it's too bad that humans are like that but they are. There's got to be a better way than war there has to be and there is I know there is. You start by talking negotiating and forgiving and realizing that it is possible it is possible I know it's possible. So if we don't do that we're just repeating what's happened over and over and over and over.

Interviewer: Thanks

Pennig: You're welcome

The interviewer shows photos of Mr. Pennig's metals. Tape ended