

This interview is being conducted on Edgar Harrell.

When you found out that it was indeed the atomic bombs that was the secret cargo that you were carrying to Tidian, did that spook you out in any way? Did that make you a little nervous to have the most powerful weapon humanity has ever had as cargo when you were at one time in charge of guarding it?

Mr. Harrell: To go back 60 years and tell you what I might have felt then, it's hard to know. Number one, I was in the hospital stretched out, just finishing four and a half days swimming with the sharks. I wasn't in too good of a frame of mind. And, possibly two, I didn't know too much about atomic weaponry at that time, in that they had not up until the day we left San Francisco, we really didn't know how successful atomic weaponry might be and of course, possibly we in the lower echelons, peons as we were, we didn't know still too much about. And even after they dropped it, other than to know that we were successful, I guess you could say successful, in killing hundreds of thousands of people and bringing the war to a close. I guess my reaction is more today than then and today I look back on it and say, "Well, to me it was the providence of God that America had the atomic bomb and not Japan or not Germany, even at the time." We could be speaking German or Japanese today. I look at the European theater and think that had Russia not come in on the Eastern front against Germany, we might not have been so successful in Europe. Likewise, when I look at the European, or the Pacific theater, that had, oh, I forget the Admiral's name now, the Admiral that led the raid against Pearl Harbor, had they not come and hit and run, had they stayed where they were and continued to destroy everything that came in their sites we would have had a big problem of recovering. Now, something I've said early on...

When did you first realize, or when did your crewmembers who survived the sinking that the Navy was covering up the scuttling of the USS Indianapolis.

Mr. Harrell: I think nearly immediately, while we were even in the hospital there in Guam, in that we knew that they were having a court-martial. We knew that Admiral King was pushing hard for a court-martial even before they had a, so to speak, a hearing to determine who all could be guilty of doing what. And then from there, it's not long until we're moved out. Well, I say not long, I don't know exactly when the court-martial was over, but I think even by August, something is in the works that we know that the court-martial is in the making. After October 2nd, I'm back in the states but on October the 4th I'm in Balboa hospital in San Diego with a perforated appendix. I'm there for 29 days, 11 million 800 thousand units of penicillin before they could operate. But it was when I was in the hospital there, and I don't know just the date; I have it in my book. I wrote a letter to Captain MacVey and offered to come to Washington to testify concerning the visibility there at night and also the fact that word was passed to abandon ship and so on. Then after they court-martialed him, we begin to hear then, in fact I had a marine buddy that went to Washington and was his driver and drove him around Washington. Then sometime later now, he's telling me of all that's happening, of the unjustified trial that he had to

go through and the fact that they got Commander Hoshimoto over to testify against him and the fact that they didn't allow any others that were culpable in many of the things that happened. They just basically got a slap on the wrist and then most of those even after a little bit later, then that was expunged. Then I guess the real test was the next 15 years. It was 15 years later before we had our first reunion. Then one of my Marine buddies, in fact the one that was with MacVey in DC at the court-martial, he got in touch with me and wanted to do something to organize our survivors to see what we as an organization could do to get the Captain exonerated. So, I know I was in Indianapolis in 1960 then for that. In fact, I wrote Captain MacVey a letter to invite him to come to be our speaker. I was kind of the program chairman or something or other at that time. He responded favorably to come, however, he was really reluctant to come because, if you could imagine, 880 people knowing that he was responsible as they thought he was responsible for the loss of their son or their husband. He was having a tough time with that. But nevertheless he came. When he came to Indianapolis that day we knew when his plane would come in, so there was 220 of us survivors that day, that first reunion. And most of us had our wives with us, and many of us had children, of course in 1960. So I had a 12 year old son with me then. All of us basically, nearly everybody at Indianapolis, we held it at the Sevrin? hotel in Indianapolis, all of us were out to meet Captain MacVey at the airport. Well, you can imagine 400 and some odd people meeting him, we never think we'd just stop traffic. We greeted him and I recall that as he began to come through the receiving line. well everyone wanted to be seemingly at the front. And my wife said to me "Look at everybody breaking their necks to be the front in line. He's got to come through here, so why don't we just wait?" And so we waited. Well, it so happened that when he came through the line, we were the next to the last couple and when he came through the line, he came in front of me and he recognizes me. I was his Orderly for a good while. And he reaches out his hand and he shakes hands with me and a big smile on both of our faces. Well, the Indianapolis, I forget the paper, anyway, the big Indianapolis paper, they made the picture. And that was the official picture that went into the newspaper the next day. My wife said "Well, it pays to be last in line rather than first to be in line." But then, from there then two things that we were determined to do. To get the Captain exonerated, number 1 and number two: to get a memorial built for the Indianapolis. The ones that didn't make it as well as those of us who were fortunate. So we set out to do that. Well, it takes a good while until we can get the powers that be in Indianapolis, even though they bent over backwards, everyone. Every government, both sides: Republicans, Democrats. Democratic administrations coming in, all of them wanted to help up because they could see that we had a just case. But then, it was after 50 years, or after '95 before the archives were open. And then when the archives were open, we have sufficient fodder, so to speak, to go before the armed services committee, and many of the survivors, I think maybe there's 8 or 10 or so, together with a little boy. I say a little boy, at that time he was a little older but, I 13 year old boy Hunter Scott, down in Florida saw the movie Jaws. And, in that it portrays something about a survivor of the Indianapolis being bitten by sharks, or the sharks attack, etc.. And he asked his dad if that was factual, and he dad said "Well, why don't you take it on as a school project to find out." And he's a sharp little boy. Well, he was 13 years old at the time.

And here, he begins to do some checking. And as he progressed a year or two, now the archives are opened and he begins to pilfer in, so to speak. He begins to just undo a can of worms. And then from there, we glean enough information from that and seemingly, there was those that wanted to listen to him that hadn't listened to us. At least it was a new voice and they could see that he was ambitious and he was qualified to do what he was doing. And so when we had that information we kind of teamed together with him, and he was the catalyst for taking that information then, and then to documenting it and then getting that in the hands at the time were Senator Warner and Senator Bob Smith. I believe Bob Smith, maybe New Hampshire or something. Anyway, they were kind of the ones that led us along and from there then we got finally a joint resolution from both the house and the senate and it was approved and President Clinton signed that. I believed he signed that in 2000. Anyway, so we get him exonerated, but you know, about 1970, Captain MacVey had already committed suicide. Well, anyway, we were able finally, I guess at a very late date, we finally got him exonerated. And then it's a little late for many of the people though, who felt that he was so guilty back at that time because they lost their son or their husband or their brother or whatever. And so at least we did our job. So now we have a wonderful memorial there in Indianapolis. And just recently now we have a museum that has been granted us there, I believe it's at the war memorial building there at downtown Indianapolis. We have a section of that now that will be the Indianapolis Survivors' museum. What all that's going to be, I don't know, but I know of several things that are going to be in it. One being the clock off of Commander Hoshimoto's submarine. We have that. And my son and I have been successful in getting that forthcoming, so that will be something. And I don't know what else we'll be able to have, but it will be a lot of little things and maybe a few big things, but it's kind of hard to go back and take something off of the ship of 60 years ago. I'm sure we'll have a nice museum coming up soon there in Indianapolis.

After you realized the extent of the Navy's behavior, as far as the coverup and making Captain MacVey a scapegoat, did it make you second guess any other events that occurred in WWII that didn't go so favorably for us, such as Operation Market Garden in Europe or the Baton Rouge Death March, or the first invasion of Guata Canal. Did it make you question your faith in the United States' military establishment?

Mr. Harrell: After their ability to do what we set out to do?

As to their ability of not giving you the information you need and pretty much allowing you to make a terrible, terrible mistake.

Mr. Harrell: Well, you know, it's kind of hard to come along today and kind of second guess. I don't know why any branch of service maybe have misled. I look at the whole politics today and say that so much of it is misleading, but I'm able to read enough in history to see many of the clandestine things that happen before and during and even since WWII. I guess that's just part of America today. I don't know if I want to be overly critical. And I don't know that I could be, so I'll pass on passing judgment.

How did you feel Truman handled the war when he took it over from FDR when FDR passed away. How did you feel that Truman handled himself as war president.

Mr. Harrell: OK. I think this about Truman: I think he was honest in when he was saying that basically the buck stops here. I think he realized that we were in a grave situation and maybe more so in Japan because Europe was just about over then. I recall when it was announced aboard our ship that president Roosevelt had passed away. But then my hat's off to Truman when it gets down to the point that he's got to make a decision as to which direction we're going to go in the Pacific. He can try to negotiate with the Japanese and hopefully something can be done. We can go in and continue fighting and knowing they would fight to the last man. It'd be an Iwo Jima over and over, because there was no way that they were going to give up. And even though we were destroying just hundreds of square blocks of Tokyo every day in our fire bombing. Or he could use the atomic weapon that we had and kill a lot of people and save hordes of people, both Japan and America. And we knew that we would be invading the islands of Japan, and that would be an Iwo Jima, magnitude hundreds of time over. And yet, here my hat's off to Truman in that he had the opportunity to use the atomic bomb and I think he made the right decision by using the atomic bomb. There was no telling, no way of knowing the lives he basically saved for Japan. It was a Godsend for Japan as well as a miracle. It was providential, I think, that America had the atomic bomb. Had Japan had it, they would have used it at that time. We had it and we used it. We put an end to a bloody war, and my hat's off to Truman for having the fortitude to do, I think, the right thing, which is what he did.

Did you experience with the Indianapolis, did it motivate you to not pursue a career in the United States Marine Corps?

Mr. Harrell: Let me tell you what I never did did. Aboard ship, you can only make an advancement when somebody else goes off. And I'd been aboard for those part of two years. But I'm up for Sergeant, but I can't go up until that Sergeant goes off, so to speak. So anyway, there were some transfers while we were in port the last time. And so, I go through some kind of exam, me and another Corporal, and we made Sergeant. And we did that the next day or so after we left Guam on the way to the Philippines. As fortune would have it, I guess, that didn't get off the ship. So, I was not a Sergeant, after all. And my top Sergeant aboard ship, he survived and he stayed in. He made a Major, and he wanted me to stay in. He tried to talk me into it, and probably I would have had I not ended up in the hospital in San Diego. I might have stayed in. I'd done my time, the war was over, and most everyone was coming home. But they still needed

a force. And I could have stepped up the ladder. I could have been a Sergeant right off. And I was a survivor of the Indianapolis and that maybe would have had some weight. I don't know. But I considered it. In fact, I told my top Sergeant, "OK, I want to go home on my leave and then I'll come back." Of course by then, I had trouble at first even getting my records because they were in Washington and they could care less about me out in San Diego in the hospital. So, anyway, I might have, but anyway I didn't. I think, I look back on life and say with a, I don't like to say it lightly, but the ball has kind of bounced my direction many times and I've been fortunate these years and happy with life and the Good Lord has been good to me. I just thank Him for every day and all the blessings that comes my way.

But looking back on your wartime service, are you proud of it? And, did you feel and do you feel now, that you were serving at a time that was absolutely critical, that was truly a battle between Good vs. Evil?

Mr. Harrell: There's no question about it. Number one, I think I can say, I'm proud to be a Marine. I'm proud to have been in WWII. I'm certainly proud of the fact that we were victorious. That was a war that we set out to win; we had to win it. Had we lost that one, well, that'd been the end of America. Some of the others we've managed to still stay a nation and not win. And in most cases, we haven't really tried to win. In Korea, we could go so far, but don't go any further. And in Viet Nam, you know, whether we should have been there or not, that's not for me to decide, but at least we didn't necessarily try to win. We were held back, as I understand it. And even in Iraq today, if we were determined that we were going to win come Hell or high water, we would do something different than what we do today. There's too much of this going in today and capturing a few and maybe a few things get blown up and then come back under shelter and then tomorrow to go back again over the same thing and find out there's IED's and they destroy several of our boys and so on. Rather than to realize that we're at war and we've got some bigger weapons that we could use and if we would go ahead and use those, and I'm not talking about nuclear, but we've got some weapons that we could use that would let everybody around the world know that we are a force to be contended with and that we're going to win this somehow, some way, and the quicker the better. So, yes. I look back on WWII and say we did the best that we could with what we had, and what he had was probably superior than what maybe others had. Then I like to say, we had the Good Lord on our side too, I believe all the way through, and therefore we were victorious. But I look at the moral downfall of America and wonder how much longer the Lord will protect us, we as a nation. And whether or not we're going to be successful in Iraq is another big question. Of course, if you listen to some, they want us to pull out tomorrow. Well, if we pull out tomorrow, they'd be here the day after tomorrow. I'm not for that. I'm for doing whatever needs to be done today, as quick we can do it, and then to get our boys home. Well, I could go a few steps further and it would tell you where I come from, from a spiritual standpoint. I see that there's too many so called nations of the world that when the moral condition gets as low as where America is today that somehow, some way, that those countries are no more. Those civilizations are no more. So I wonder how much longer that the Lord will

tolerate America in the way that we see ourselves going. That's my copy as to where we are, in the world today. Everyone hates us, but maybe they hate us for different reasons anyway.

Well, unless you have anything else you would like to add to the interview, I'm all out of questions.

Mr. Harrell: Well, I think we covered a lot of bases. I don't think of anything that I've missed.

Alright, well, behalf of Austin Peay, as well as myself, I thank you very much for sharing your experience with me and for meeting and for allowing us the opportunity to get this on tape, and I thank you.

Mr. Harrell: Now then, one of these days you will...