

Interviewer: Please state your name and date of birth for the camera.

Smith: My name is Bill H Smith. I was born in 1925.

Interviewer: Okay where were you born at?

Smith: Talahanie Oklahoma.

Interviewer: What was the size of your town?

Smith: It was really hard because there was only three of us in the family and they didn't know too many names. It was Jack, Mary, and Bill. I've always said that you know they didn't know too many of these fancy names you've got today.

Interviewer: Most of the people I've interviewed so far have had real big families it's been surprising. They had 12 people in their family and I was like oh my.

Smith: Yeah well my mother passed away when I was born. I was left under the what you call the lady that takes over the hospital I don't know what they call her.

Interviewer: I'm not sure

Smith: She picked me up and my dad he went the other way that was it. These people raised me I would have never known that they weren't my real mother and father if they had never told me when I was old enough to understand. So they raised me and put me through school sent me on my way.

Interviewer: What was your family life like during the depression?

Smith: What

Interviewer: What was your family life like during the depression?

Smith: Well I knew very little about that except that they used to talk about it and my mother used to for some reason couldn't get enough sugar. They rationed sugar and when I went in the service which was 17 I guess and sometime after that they gave you checkbooks. You know \$10 checks and I wrote and told my mother I've got \$30 and she said oh son send me some money. I said momma they ain't no good ain't no good momma I said they are paper money in a checkbook. They didn't have any money you know my parents didn't have any money. They owned a farm a big farm but you know money didn't come easy in the depression and all and you know I was too young to understand really. Of course now I can understand what it was on them. So lucky to raise me and put me on

Interviewer: Did you work on the farm with them?

Smith: Yeah what little I could do I couldn't do too much. They usually did a lot of plowing my mother never could let us she would never let dad or me or Jack or Mary she said you stay out of my garden. Well that was a good thing but she took care of her own garden and she wouldn't even let Perry go in the garden she said you stay out of there. After you turned it under, plowed it seed it you turn it over to

me and that's the way it was in those days. I've heard so many others say their wife took care of the garden because you know that was the main supply a lot of stuff.

Interviewer: Right

Smith: And everything we never had what you would say want for anything to eat ware or stuff but we didn't have no money very little money. That of course didn't make any difference then I don't guess. Of course I guess you could use money everywhere we went was a wagon team farm to farm to farm and to the store. Mostly country stores you know didn't have a whole lot. A lot of stuff was on credit at the end of the season you'd sell the stuff pay the bills that's the way you know. I don't know if they still do that today or not.

Interviewer: Did your father have any other jobs besides working on the farm?

Smith: No he just stayed there on the farm, farmed all his life.

Interviewer: Okay did you ever have before you went into the service did you ever have any other jobs before that?

Smith: No

Interviewer: What was your schooling like? Did you go to school in Oklahoma?

Smith: Oklahoma what was that?

Interviewer: Where did you go to school at?

Smith: I went to school in Pine Valley Oklahoma. They had consolidated Hughes and Pine Valley a coal company was there and that's where people worked in. It's kind of like today there was a parish of people that travel and they traveled from coal company to coal company, lumber company to lumber company. And worked and made their living see they didn't have a farm or nothing they rent they just had these places like you have up here on 41 trailers you know people live in. That's what the places I was born and raised of course we owned a farm there and that ____ coal company that came in there provided you can imagine how much money that provided for the community.

Interviewer: Right

Smith: Because those people would go to the store and everything. It was an incentive for them for us too because it was money that's the only

Interviewer: You were living on a farm so I would assume you didn't have many close neighbors.

Smith: No we were about 5 or 6 miles apart. And I had to be taken to school up until I got about high school I had to be taken to school by horseback. My father took me on horseback until I was able to go myself. Then I got my own saddle got a black saddle patent leather thing and this that and the other. I took care of my own horse naturally I used to ride him to school when I got up in high school. Which all of us this is something everybody you always come you know.

Interviewer: I think it would be much nicer having ridden a horse to school. I wish I would have ridden a horse to school rather than riding a bus.

Smith: They didn't they only had buses in the towns and communities that was all. Whenever you lived five miles out on the farm you didn't have no way of getting there.

Interviewer: Right

Smith: You took care of your horse you took care of your saddle you took care of all this stuff. That was your main incentive and they had a place at the school where your horse could be out in a pasture part. It was something like today you know your kids get a car and you go out and check the oil. You go out say you've got a good pony you won't go out and check him. I guess that's what they do today.

Interviewer: Okay let's go back to the school. How big was your school like your classes how big were they?

Smith: Classes?

Interviewer: Uh huh

Smith: Oh we had anywhere from 60 to 70 in a class and Mrs. Pitts, Mrs. McCarthy, Mr. Vansel, Mr. Stansel I still remember them by name. Very disciplined very disciplined man when they said something it was no messing around. You don't get that today not in school.

Interviewer: It's a lot different.

Smith: Oh sure a lot different. But goodness I you know those teachers then they are all dead now my goodness. I'm 75 years old and you know good and well they couldn't live another 25 or so. They still set a mark I still remember their names perfectly. They did something that was good it was really really something you don't have that today. Maybe they do in the country.

Interviewer: Some teachers are very helpful and some are not. It all just is the luck of the coin talk I guess. Okay how old were you in 1939?

Smith: In 39 oh let's see I was born in 25 so that would be about what

Interviewer: : Fourteen?

Smith: Yeah fourteen or fifteen somewhere in there.

Interviewer: How

Smith: Forty three I went in the service I was 17.

Interviewer: Okay how aware were you about political developments in that time period?

Smith: Where?

Interviewer: How aware were you about what was going on with Germany and Japan?

Smith: Well very little except I heard a lot about the poor boys that's about the greatest extent. My cousin went in the service and I heard a little bit from him but not very much he come home once in a great while whenever he felt like it I guess out of the army and that was the extent of the fighting and there were people getting killed. Of course understanding it then wouldn't be like today it's a different understanding something you have to do. If you lost your own buddy or something it would be different. All of my group that I know and come up with I don't run into very few of them since I went in the service that we grew up together went in the service together very seldom run into them.

Interviewer: How did you find out about events outside that were occurring?

Smith: Well we had a radio and a T-Model Ford and my dad would take the battery out of the T-Model Ford at night and set it in the house and he'd hook the radio up to that. And we'd listen to the radio listen to Roosevelt and all that you know this is war and I used to hear this story this is war. I used to stand in front of that and he had a lot of sayings you know and I thought he was a great president of course you know looking at it now.

Interviewer: How did your family approve of how he was handling things at the time?

Smith: At that time well as far as I was concerned I thought things must be going along pretty good. I heard so much about him and Eleanor his wife you know. I heard more about his wife. But I've heard that well I'll tell you he was just a good president I guess for that particular time. And low and behold for years I didn't know that he was crippled.

Interviewer: He kept it well hidden.

Smith: And somebody said one time you know you've never seen president Roosevelt walk have you? I said no why worry about walking when he can sit in a chair. He said no he said that holds him then that was a thing within itself. I don't think very many people knew that unless you were in college or something and you studied it.

Interviewer: Or close to him

Smith: Yeah

Interviewer: Do you recall where you were and how you heard the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Smith: On Pearl Harbor? I was in high school getting ready to graduate and came home and living on a farm like that the farmers kind of all get together and they were all talking about it around the wood stove and they said the attack at Pearl Harbor. Well I didn't know much about Pearl Harbor but they told all about it you know attacking Pearl Harbor you know. Then after that I asked my dad I said I want to join the service. What do you want to go into? I said navy. Why do you want to go in the navy? I says after I hear about all them ships at Pearl Harbor I'd just like to go in the navy. Get me one of them Dixie cups and be happy.

Interviewer: So you did finish high school then.

Smith: Yeah

Interviewer: What let's see so where did you enlist at?

Smith: I enlisted in Muscovy Oklahoma. I just I went home I told momma said I enlisted said they are gonna be sending for me and they sent for me. I went to Muscovy got on a train to San Diego California.

Interviewer: Were your parents sad?

Smith: Huh?

Interviewer: Were your parents sad to see you go?

Smith: Well yeah they hated to see me go because you know I had been with them so long. I guess because I wasn't their blood child I hated to leave them because they were getting up in years and they always done good by me and they taught me the right ways everything that I needed you know I didn't have to want for you know anything monetary wise you didn't have no money. I used to wear clothes and everything that I didn't appreciate but there was nothing I could do about it because some of my friends worked the coal companies and stuff coal companies and ____ they all had money and they could buy the better clothes see. So I didn't get the better clothes I got to wear hand me downs or bib overalls or something. My mother used to make shirts for me and make my underwear and stuff and didn't bother me because I never had the other stuff and all that you could buy until I got in the service.

Interviewer: So when you wanted to join the navy was there anything specific besides was there anything specific you wanted to work at or to do?

Smith: When I

Interviewer: When you went in to join.

Smith: Well I didn't have anything in mind you know. I guess the reason why I got they asked me what I wanted to be when I went in training. I told them I wanted to be a weapons man because my father he had guns he deer hunted he done all kinds of hunting and I was acquainted with a rifle. I knew how to handle a rifle knew what they were used for that's where we got our food. When I left my training when they asked me when I left my training where I wanted to work and I said I'd like to work with guns that's when they put me in the gunner department.

Interviewer: Where did you do your training at?

Smith: San Diego

Interviewer: Oh San Diego that's right. What was that like?

Smith: Oh a bit different from what I really couldn't explain anything we just came together a bunch of us boys we came from the same town and a couple of us got put in a different company but that didn't make any difference. We'd see each other every on weekends and stuff when we'd get a long weekend go to San Diego and downtown to joins and stuff what you'd normally see in any city Chicago, New York it didn't make a difference you'd wind up in the lower part of town. You was on liberty you was free in

uniform you had money in your pocket and you were own your own you could walk and hold your head up high. You were somebody I'll put it that a way you belonged to something and I think that was very important. Now a days of course then you could probably wish for a number of other things but that was my training what I had I thought it was good.

Interviewer: Was San Diego a big change from Oklahoma for you?

Smith: Oh goodness yes they had big buses there. And you know that's where I got my first experience on water. We had whale boats and 13 guys in a whale boat just rowing this thing all day long out in the bay. It never did tire me out but I just thought there was some better way to go to sea. Yeah I enjoyed my training in San Diego and I met a lot of people and we mingled with a lot of people from other states. They had all states from Oklahoma to Nebraska what have you Iowa, North Carolina, South Carolina had different companies. And they were all state companies and they were well you know an all-state company feels a little bit proud and they were prouder than that and they had some problems with the because they would try to run over a regular company that were a mixture. So the services being as aristocratic as they are they tried to keep those people down for show. Show boat that's what it was oh look at this Nebraska Company man they've got their big flag oh Nebraska Company prettiest state in the world. We were just a little ole dust stop we never did even get mentioned. But that was the army center they asked me if I wanted an all-state center when I became a company commander I said never. Because then you're teaching different you're going to have to teach not to tread on somebody else your good but you're no better than they are.

Interviewer: It's hard to get past.

Smith: It's very hard and why go into that when you don't have to.

Interviewer: Right

Smith: You just get a regular company and go through you've got a mixture of all of them. I tell you I used to have a lot of fun with my companies. When you take a company through you learn from the first one and the next one you learn better and the next one you learn better the next one see. So then after two or three years you're able to sleep at night. I used to get kids a lot of kids and I had a lot of colored people too from North Carolina they came Southern California. And I had a little boy named Jackson very good boy and he was so high you know and he was the blackest boy you ever seen in your life. He was so black that he might near turned his white hat black. And one day we were out on the back porch and this I was up there and the companies fell out I had a group CPO you had 13 companies 13 officers recruit CPO assists, master sergeant, squad leader, squad leader, squad leader so you had all these officer in your company you know to care of stuff. They did all the hard work you told them what to do and stuff you know. Anyhow this boy Jackson he came from South Carolina and the company liked him and used to see him I'd look out the back and I'd look out there and Jackson there'd be about 15 of them around him and he'd be telling them something. And that was good because a colored one being able to have others laugh and this that and the other and not be disgraceful to him or anything you know. Of course you tell them early in training that there is none of this one side or the other we're all together one side that's it. But Jackson was a typical example so one day I thought to myself when I brought the company I told the recruit CPO to bring the company out the back and I said we're gonna move out and go to the grinder where we did all our training exercises and everything. SO he got them out there he come in there Mr. Smith this company is ready to go. I went out there I stepped out on the back porch and I said attention and boy they snapped up you know and I felt something a little different

you know. Now why did they really snap that up there you know but I never heard it that away. And we was up under the tenth and eleventh with the training you know. So I said Jackson can I ask you a question, yes sir Mr. Smith what is it? I said how do you tell when you're clean? Boy the company looked around and everything. Well Mr. Smith said when I shine I is clean. I'll tell you I could have went home and slept the rest of the time that company went right on doing training. But I think he broke the ice for a lot of other people who were prejudice against coloreds.

Interviewer: Well let me skip ahead just for a moment because I don't want to forget about this. How did colored sailors do how did colored sailors do compared to some other sailors? How did they perform?

Smith: The what?

Interviewer: The colored sailors who did they perform compared to some of the other sailors.

Smith: I'll tell you it never did bother me I never did have any trouble with then because I think you I think it's in you, you have to be the one to instill in them to instill something in them. Hey you're okay put your arm around them once in a while. You know a lot of people around here in Clarksville I come up talking to them this that and what and the other. And I put my arm around them and I say you doing okay? Sure, you like what you're doing? That's the way I think you instill something from a colored person. I see all this hatred they have and they even white trash had hatreds. So but they don't bother me you know I can be around them I'm just as comfortable around them as I am other folks.

Interviewer: Okay let's go back to your training real quick. How good do you think your training was for the task ahead of you? Do you feel you were getting a good amount of training? It seemed to be coming worth wild.

Smith: Where at?

Interviewer: Where you were back at your basic training.

Smith: Oh yeah Mr. Rogers our company commanders and I know them they were our company commanders when I was in the company I was in the 4332. And company commander he was the chief Mickey come out he used to come out and he said I'm the chief quarter master Mickey and said that's what it will be from here on yes sir, no sir, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. We was a bunch of dud head out there you know looking up at him and Mickey was fine I liked his system and a lot of the other guys did they liked him thought he was a good company commander. He taught us a lot about being you know like this and that. And that's when I got my first notion someday that's what I'm gonna be company commander.

Interviewer: Okay when you were doing the training at that time were you in specialized training were you actually training for weaponry or were you doing more basic.

Smith: Basic

Interviewer: Basic okay

Smith: Just all basic.

Interviewer: When did you go on to specialized into weaponry?

Smith: When I went aboard ship.

Interviewer: Really

Smith: They asked you when you went aboard ship what you like you know you go aboard on the deck force working on the decks scrubbing decks working on the _____. Of course you do that all through your life anyhow you know in the service. But that was the main thing when you get aboard what you want to get into. So the only thing that I could see when I walked aboard that ship on the gang way and saluted the flag first and you salute the officers deck permission to come on board. And you go on your way and this division CPO took had the names of people he had so that's the way you went to different divisions. And that's how I went to the deck force and they told me said Bill you're gonna have to be in deck force here for a while to get orientated then said you can to in the gunner department then get up in the guns you know that's the way it worked. You just didn't walk into rank you had some experience on the deck keeping the deck up, anchoring the ship, cleaning the sides. Oh you had so much work to be done you had to work yourself into that. And if they didn't see fit for you to become this other profession.

Interviewer: Didn't happen

Smith: Never gonna happen. I've seen some of them just still you know they never got what they wanted. They stayed a mess cook the rest of their life.

Interviewer: So when did you come aboard the ship. When you got done with basic when did you go aboard?

Smith: I went aboard ship it was up in Burlington Washington it was in the navy yard after it came back from Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Okay now I know you told me earlier but can you go back and reiterate it. What ship did you come up to?

Smith: The USS Tennessee BB43 that was in 1943. She was in Burlington Naval shipyard being repaired from the damage at Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Okay when you came up when you first saw Tennessee I'm sorry I forgot Tennessee right?

Smith: USS Tennessee

Interviewer: I'm sorry

Smith: That's alright

Interviewer; When you first saw her how much battle damage did she still have?

Smith: Well just showed the top of it because the Arizona which was right next to it in front of it they sunk it they sunk the Arizona. And the Tennessee was in battleship row battleship, battleship, battleship, and battleship. The Arizona was over there so in Pearl Harbor coming in the Arizona was subject to really

getting it to where all of us you might near had to wipe all of them out to get to it you know. So that's why the Arizona got it worse. I had some good friends on the Arizona Philistine and Ralph Billing best friends I ever had and they made it. Now they were Indians they were full blooded Indians and came from Oklahoma and they just happened to get transferred to the Arizona instead of the Battle Wagon you know. And when the ship turned upside down the Arizona well then when everything kind of lightened up the attack on Pearl Harbor and other ships it seemed like they kindly moved on out you know. They figured they had done their damage because so much smoke and so much stuff. So Philistine and Ralph they were good swimmers an Indian is a good swimmer. So when the ship turned upside down them knowing if it's upside down you can't go out because it's the bottom and those two brothers went down ladders and down hatches and down ladders and came out the bottom and came up.

Interviewer: Wow

Smith: They both got medal of honors later on. They arrived some other place they were that smart and intelligent. I thought boy I would have never thought of that.

Interviewer: That's very impressive.

Smith: Sure is and you know when you think you know my goodness you know all that turmoil you don't know what's coming on bay. We weren't in war they just come in and tried to guy. But you know where the mistake was made?

Interviewer: Where

Smith: They didn't land. They didn't land of course he knew this later but he didn't know it then. What could Pearl Harbor do tell me? They know it President Roosevelt said the same thing they know it. They made their fatal mistake if they would have landed on Pearl Harbor my goodness we'd have been fighting probably well not still but.

Interviewer: A lot longer?

Smith: Yeah

Interviewer: How long before the Tennessee was battle ready you ship was in battle?

Smith: How long?

Interviewer: Yes

Smith: We stayed in the yard until I guess it was oh stayed in the yard about six or eight weeks. Then we went out made our fist ___ cruise they call them. You go out test everything test the guns test maneuverability anchoring everything for the crew and for the ship. And pick up anything still missing that they didn't get in the ship yards. And I believe the after getting through with that they sent us on a mission up to the Aleutian Islands campaign Dutch Harbor Alaska. And we did our first bombardment up there in Alaska which turned out very well. So that put us on the road we came back down south to the Pacific.

Interviewer: What size was your force then how many ships did you have in your fleet?

Smith: Well we had four battle wagons at that particular time. Of course later on they got the new ones the big ones the Missouri, Iowa and all that huge outfit. But the old Cameroon and the New Mexico, Arizona well not the Arizona but New Mexico, Mississippi they went through it and they provided one hell of a campaign throughout the whole war. And then these new battle wagons come in and of course they are faster we could only make 17 knots and the new battle wagons could make up to 25 or 30. So you're talking about a different thing and they had 16 inch guns where we only had 14. But that's it the reason why we made the around the world cruise I spoke to you is because the older battle wagons had voids put on each side of the ship big voids on each side coming down each side there. That prevented us from going through the Panama Canal. So that's why we wind up making the world around.

Interviewer: Right

Smith: All the other ships cruisers, destroyers and even the newer battle wagons they could go through the canal. A shorter trip from the Atlantic to the Pacific. So we would up going around the horn as they say South America going around the horn. Some of the roughest water in the world.

Interviewer: Oh yeah

Smith: We had a hole in the side of the ship you could drive a freight train in. Boy I'm telling you I didn't know if that old Cameroon was gonna make it or not that was rough water. And it's that way where the Atlantic and the Pacific meet.

Interviewer: So the Aleutian Islands that was your first experience in combat?

Smith: Yeah that was a test experience for the ship and crew.

Interviewer: So the fighting was pretty light?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: The fighting there was pretty light then for the Tennessee.

Smith: We just did some we had spotters and stuff just seeing how good we could support could hit you know the target and there was a lot of training. From the spotter telling us what to do up so many yards down so many yards see there it was just training is all. That's where they got ___ Dutch Harbor. The Aleutian Campaign that was about the extent of course it was cold up there and none of us were used to that.

Interviewer: I bet

Smith: Boy it was cold.

Interviewer: Okay how well did your fellow ship mates work together?

Smith: Oh good yeah good harmony very good. We had a good mess hall we had a tremendous had good cooks and things you know. It was something different than we were used to as kids. Something very different. We had some old powers on there you had to have from way back been in the navy before. So they knew the score and they taught us a lot. But you had to have those you just couldn't put

a bunch of raw guys and expect them to do things that's are supposed to come automatic you know cooks and you've got cooks and labors, and medicine men and machine smith you've got every kind of job there is. Deck force and all its I thought they worked together good.

Interviewer: What was your crew size like how many people were on your ship?

Smith: Oh we had right at 3,000 men close to it.

Interviewer: Small city

Smith: Yeah oh yeah and a city within a city because we you know they used to take a lot of navy ships tie them up alongside the dock and stuff and they'd bring hosed over supplies, water and supply fresh water to the community supply electricity. They still used ships for that in a lot of places.

Interviewer: So by the time the Aleutian Islands were you ___ already?

Smith: Oh yeah

Interviewer: What all were you doing with that?

Smith: Oh just loading shells ammunition cleaning the guns and all that it's a lot of work on the guns. But that depends on gun house you work different jobs.

Interviewer: Did you just work on the big guns or did you work on some small guns as well?

Smith: Just on the big ones. I didn't care about the small ones they were outside so I was inside. Had 14 inch armor around it.

Interviewer: Feel pretty safe?

Smith: Oh yeah I didn't have to worry we took two suicide planes and I don't think if you weren't topside you never would have knew we took them.

Interviewer: Wow

Smith: Killed a lot of people a lot of friends. But you know you just look at it and think I'm glad I wasn't there is the only thing.

Interviewer: Did you feel pretty close to those who shared your time in the service on the Tennessee?

Smith: Oh yeah anytime I don't see too many of mine most of us well probably a lot of them are gone already I don't see I see very few. Because I know there's some papers and stuff that this one guy that was on the USS Tennessee I never heard of him I don't know when he was on there or how long he stayed on there or what. But I guess the people that's most important to you your division and battery officer which was mine was ___ White and Jim Crawling. They change every so many years they transfer some other place and there's always experienced people with experience older and they taught us the same way with the commanding officer they taught us the same way. There was just a quite a community and you was kindly proud to wear the thing on your arm USS Tennessee.

Interviewer: What did you do with your free time while you were onboard ship?

Smith: Most of our free time we played cards and you couldn't gamble of course your cards were a gamble too but you couldn't shoot craps or nothing like that. Anybody catch you you'd be in trouble but they had a police force too they called them master at arms. They were pretty well taking care of but that was the biggest thing play cards sat around and played rummy a lot of rummy. All the time movies all the time every night you could go to the mess hall and see a movie every night.

Interviewer: That was nice

Smith: Yeah well that was the only thing you had.

Interviewer: Did you ever write any letters home?

Smith: Oh yeah you had v-mail and I guess it took pictures but just all had to be you couldn't tell them where you was at where you were going and what. So there was very little you could talk about at all your daily life or nothing.

Interviewer: Did you ever get mail in return from your family?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: Did you ever get mail in return from your family?

Smith: Oh sure always mail call was a big thing boy everybody gathered for mail, mail call mail call sounds the bugler would sound mail call boy everybody would run to their division get their mail. Get down there and see if you got a letter. And the division officers we had and senior COPs and stuff there was a lot of kids wasn't getting any mail and the Chaplain would call them up and talk because they were down hearted you know. They let the captain know I guess the captain's responsibility is might great. When he has people their parents don't write them or family don't write them there's some reason for them not getting and sometimes they just didn't have any parent's so it's a different story. But the captains they're under a big load.

Interviewer: Oh yeah

Smith: Take 23 2400 men they walk alone and man what they think of things that happen put that ship in action you know. And getting under way anchor sound every call oh man. But when it's all over with you know it's something to be proud of.

Interviewer: How did you find out about the process of the war in other theaters?

Smith: Huh?

Interviewer: How did you find out how the war was going like over in the Atlantic and Europe.

Smith: Well they tell you when you was on the ship and stuff you got word every day.

Interviewer: Really

Smith: Every day kindly like a certain time of day everybody sit down and listen to it, it comes over the speaker. It would tell exactly what's happening where it's at and that's where you got your information.

Interviewer: Did everyone seem optimistic about how things were going?

Smith: Well yeah we all wondered how this was going how close they were getting same way with the battle. (Stopped tape to let the dog in)

Interviewer: Okay let's see where were we? Where did you go after the Aleutian Islands where did you go after that?

Smith: We came back to the United States and had a leave and back overseas to the South Pacific. We went through everything from the South Pacific on all the way up Tokyo.

Interviewer: And what was the Tennessee doing?

Smith: Bombarding support all support for the troops and well let's see we only had on sea battle and that was the end of that.

Interviewer: That was in the Philippines?

Smith: Yeah

Interviewer: Can you talk a little about that what do you recall about that?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: I know you told me about it earlier but can you reiterate go over it just a little more?

Smith: Well what they done they knew that the Japanese admiral was coming down there with their fleet. We found out about it that they were coming with a fleet. Gonna destroy us. And that's when we lined up out line of defense. From small craft destroyers to battle wagons and you could tell how close they were getting from the other ships. They were getting pretty close you know because we were about 15, 20 miles of cruisers. Naturally whenever you start firing them 14 inch guns boy they are very close and they didn't have too much left from PVRs to cruisers we lost a lot of ships too. But line of defense was all it was they whenever we got the word to stand by load and lock and commence fire lord did we put out the ammunition. And it was kind of healthy to see the cease fire whenever it came. I guess we went out on deck most of us and you could see all the ships smoking we got them. So that ended the Japanese navy. They come all the way down there to the Philippines going to wipe us out didn't happen.

Interviewer: Were you and your shipmates were you impressed by the quality of the enemy their you know their tactics their tenacity?

Smith: No

Interviewer: How did you feel about the Japanese?

Smith: I don't have no animosity toward them at all it's just something of war you know. The I've known a lot of Japanese friends we went ashore in Yazaki where they dropped the first bomb and it's after seeing that in Yazaki where they dropped it you really wondered. Because that's the first atomic bomb that ended the war. I'm telling you there is nothing there is nothing there where that bomb dropped and I'm talking about for miles around that I'm pretty sure well it had to be that was the end. Because it was just too destructive and we had tow we had been testing that thing I believe in the Pacific that atomic bomb for so long they knew what it would do. And right today in our worried times the we're probably in they don't like these weapons of destruction because they can wipe a country out just like that. And it's just seeing that papers and on TV they don't like Iraq and these countries over there having weapons of destruction like that because they can be used. And little did they know that it would cause all this turmoil and what happened in New York you know. It's just a thing there I don't really know what they was trying to accomplish really. I thought about what were they trying to accomplish they just fowled themselves up ___ and that organization. But they had been doing this we had a cruiser had a cruiser that was attacked and they run into the side of it out there someplace out there I forget where but it's all over the world about that. But they I don't know thinking about what they do today. If you know did you know really that ___ man that the fathers couldn't whip them did you know that? He tried to and he couldn't do it they just couldn't look where we're out today. Their on the run ___ their on the run brother. And I just saw it today they're moving trying to get out from under him and of course that's due to our own we've got to enforce that. My goodness they I really don't think that maybe we'd do what we did after New York. And I don't see how any human being but of course I don't human being can figure out they can never accomplish anything other than hate American is about all. Hate Americans and this that and the other but just kill a lot of people. And they're gonna pay for it I'll bet you I bet you.

Interviewer: Let's go back to the ___ when you were on the ship were you promoted?

Smith: Oh yeah I went from a seaman, seaman apprentice all the way up to chief petty officer. All the way up that's seaman 1, 2,3,4,5,6,7,8 and 9.

Interviewer: Were there a lot of promotions on the Tennessee?

Smith: Oh yeah

Interviewer: Did they seem to be merited?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: Did they seem to be for good reasons people who deserved them?

Smith: Oh yeah it depends see it depends on how much you apply yourself to a rating. If you want to move up the ladder you have to study you just can't go over there and swab the decks clean up and wash paint work forget it. You have to study and you have to take courses etcetera etcetera to move up. The more of them you take every services come out right today if you went in here army, navy, marines. I see them down here in the army all the time every so often there is an opening they open it up and people can take a test see if they wasn't to advance and go up. That's happening it's no different today than it was then just today they impress it more on you to do that but then they didn't. They didn't care too much for you know if you wanted to do it you could and if you didn't.

Interviewer: Okay you were with the seventh fleet right?

Smith: Seventh fleet.

Interviewer: Okay when you rode to the Pacific and the island hoping did you ever have any contact with civilians or refugees on those islands?

Smith: No

Interviewer: No

Smith: Never did

Interviewer: Was the Tennessee ever pulled out for repairs?

Smith: Oh yeah we had to go ever so often you'd go in the ship yard for overhaul they called it. You'd have maybe a new weapon so you'd have to have that put on taken off guns repaired looked at and over hauled. It's like over hauling anything you have to have it over hauled engines, screws, your anchor everything on a ship it has to be taken care of. And that's typical you bring it in for overhaul.

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: Were you ever wounded while you were on the Tennessee?

Smith: No

Interviewer: No was anyone that you knew any friends that were on the Tennessee that were wounded?

Smith: No I never did know. I never did know any of the ones.

Interviewer: Let's go back to your you were telling me earlier before we started recording of the landing process how you told me a couple of stories about how the Tennessee was brought in close. Could you go over that a little bit?

Smith: Well what they done is they'd bring them in to the beach pretty close to the beach but not too far. But anyhow they would bring them in and we a spotter and the spotter would have to be up either up in a plane or something in a piper cub or something you know these ships had it we had a plane ourselves that landed on the water then we'd pick it up and set it on the deck. So these were spotters they would spot on the beach in certain places tell you where to shoot what to shoot etcetera etcetera and that's the way that worked. And you could just make a pattern you go ahead in order you'd probably knock out the bunkers you'd probably knock out a lot of other things in order to let the troops move in and go off the beaches. Some of the marines used to come aboard ship they'd ask to see these guns that made these holes. I remember very well we used to ___ Chief Pollack one of our tour captains he protected us through there and they would sit down in that gun room and look at that and they'd say wow wow they said that's the thing that makes them big holes. They couldn't believe that they had to see what the navy had in order to make holes like that so they could jump in.

Interviewer: I bet they appreciated it.

Smith: Oh well saving lives saving the men. And if it rained real hard it took in rain water you had a lot of water holes to take a bath in too. So they would tell a lot of stories about that. And they'd like to come aboard and get a hot meal that was a big thing they loved that. They would sit down in the mess hall and get a hot meal that was their thing.

Interviewer: That was worth anything to them.

Smith: Oh sure you couldn't give them a pocket full of money that was something to them.

Interviewer: Did they ever bring any souvenirs on board?

Smith: No

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Smith: When some of them rangers would come aboard ship they'd ask to see guns that made these holes. And I remember very well Mr. Bobbin Chief Bobbin one of our tour captains he would take a group through there and they'd sit down in that gun room and look at that and they said well well. They said that's the thing that makes them big holes. They couldn't believe that they had to see what the navy had and what would make holes like that so they could jump in them and use them.

Interviewer: I bet they appreciated them.

Smith: Oh well saving lives with them. And whenever it rained real hard because it rained a lot of water holds in it they could take a bath too. So they tell a lot of stories about that and they liked to come aboard and get a hot meal that was a big thing. They loved it they would sit down in the mess hall and get a hot meal that that their thing man.

Interviewer: That was worth anything to them.

Smith: Oh sure you couldn't give them a pocket full of money that was something for them.

Interviewer: Right did they ever bring any souvenirs onboard to trade with you?

Smith: No I never did get any at all from overseas I didn't mess with them. A lot of them brought them back. I just tried to encourage them you know.

Interviewer: What was one of the toughest time for the Tennessee like what was one of the heavier invasions or shore landings?

Smith: Well I guess the biggest one we had was the battle preparing for that battle down there. Which that was a sea battle now see that's totally different that's what the troop is the navy ship is designed for sea battle. And these bombardments naturally you can use them for that you know you can use them for that too. But truthfully that's what they were designed for battleship fire control men. That's I guess that was the biggest the most that we had. We took a suicide plane Japanese.

Interviewer: Komokozies

Smith: Hey komokozies the Japanese tried that that didn't work. We took two of them killed a lot of soldiers but didn't affect the ship we went on operating kept right on operating.

Interviewer: What about carriers?

Smith: Well they were after carriers too but see we had to protect the carriers to an extent too because carriers only had the planes and sonar and stuff was what they were worried about on the water protection. And we had two we had to have destroyers we had to have them because they had the underwater protection to tell us when the submarines were around. See the carriers didn't have that their only protection is the destroyers and the other small craft small ships that have the means set up for that you know. About all we can do is zig zag they call it task force zig zags. They don't ever do straight and that's the purpose of well not to get sunk. You know if you go straight all they have to do is

line up you know. And hey we can shoot a torpedo up here going up here and that tank and they're going to run into it. And so they zig zagged.

Interviewer: Did you ever have any submarine scares on the Tennessee?

Smith: Oh yeah we had a lot of them.

Interviewer: Really

Smith: Yeah but your destroyers and ships took care of them before they ever got to us as far as we know you know. You could tell them that on the radio they just came in contact with a couple of submarines ____ they would drop depth charges. And whenever you would see a big black spot a huge oil spot in the water mark your calendar that's one gone there. I guess they didn't get a way.

Interviewer: Was the Tennessee at Okinawa?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: Was the Tennessee at Okinawa?

Smith: Yeah

Interviewer: How did that because that was one of the big Japanese offensives with the komokozies. Was that real hectic?

Smith: No that wasn't bad that wasn't bad for us. Okinawa wasn't it wasn't nothing like you know some of the other missions we had to go on because it was so huge you know. And we did very little bombarding on Okinawa because the troops could get in might near any places that was such a big island.

Interviewer: Right

Smith: They of course they done a lot of fierce fighting but we just supported if they need something call for it and you'd have to go in support them give them ____ fire spotters you know. And that's about it but they didn't use very much. But see we lost more people in World War II than you ever could imagine. God we lost a lot of people marines, army, coastguard everything.

Interviewer: Did you work how did you work with the British navy at all over there?

Smith: No

Interviewer: No

Smith: They were there we operated the ships but we didn't work with them.

Interviewer: Right because I know they were there.

Smith: Oh yeah they were there we had British and them ____ they're something else.

Interviewer: Really why is that?

Smith: Boy well you know they're they used to tell us you know said you people go ashore and get drunk you sailors. Said us ____ we go back aboard ship and get drunk.

Interviewer: They had a wine ration not a wine ration a whiskey amount or something like that throughout the British navy.

Smith: It was rationed.

Interviewer: Yeah

Smith: They had grog and they all got their grog every day. And our American ship captains wouldn't let us go aboard their ships because they had grog and they would drink it all the time. But that's that ____ I'll tell you the Japanese hated them.

Interviewer: Really

Smith: They would just knock you in the head they wouldn't mess with you. A ____ he wouldn't mess with you he would just knock you in the head. That's the difference you know.

Interviewer: How did you see the different navies' how they worked with or against each other like the British navy or maybe the Japanese navy?

Smith: As far as operation they worked together fine American and French different thing they worked together fine as a group you have to. This is something you just have to I guess you can see more of the ships than you can with the army, navy and marines as such I don't know what they call them in England you know their armed forces. But you don't get to working together like you would if a ship a ____ ship here and an American ship you know. So that's the only difference they are something them ____ are tough man they are tough oh boy. I've been in ____ Japan and boy let me tell you fight is their second work.

Interviewer: Really

Smith: Yes sir you don't walk around that the ____ have got it.

Interviewer: What about the Japanese navy as a whole did you see it as a

Smith: We didn't see very much of them. We didn't not even now I don't know about now it's been years since I was over there. You don't see too much of them they had some good ships though. They had some I think their ____ wasn't top so that's where they messed up. They are altogether different you know our way of life and stuff. Of course I used to go ashore in Japan even after the war was over with Japan, Tokyo, Yokahama went to all them places. Just normal people you know they loved the American people American sailor you know.

Interviewer: Did you ever find any hostility toward you as an American?

Smith: No never did never did they drank sakie you know and boy that stuff makes you meaner than a county dog. Man I've seen them Japanese I don't know and eat sushi I don't see how they eat that sushi. I don't boy

Interviewer: It must be an acquired taste.

Smith: It must be. They take it and they eat that they think that's great man. They'll tell you Japanese will tell you good for you good for you winter time will keep you warm. I said it won't keep me warm I'd die from eating that stuff.

Interviewer: I guess when you're raised on it it's different when it's fed to you as a child you know.

Smith: Oh yeah as a diet as a regular diet. And if you've noticed Orientals wear glasses ____ ninety percent of them wear glasses. Their eye sights not too good I don't know why that is.

Interviewer: I don't know.

Smith: Just something you see them here in America too an oriental most of them will have glasses.

Interviewer: So you were present during the surrender?

Smith: Yeah in Tokyo Bay.

Interviewer: Tokyo Bay

Smith: Tokyo Bay and they brought them out and boats and stuff and flags a waving and stuff and brought them aboard our ship and changed commands and Tokyo ceased the war.

Interviewer: How did everyone feel about how everything was going?

Smith: Huh?

Interviewer: How did you feel about how everything was going?

Smith: It was alright to me I just went along with the parade I figured that's the way the boat ride is. But it was something you know to know that the war was over. They had us go ashore right after that day or the next day or so I forget what it was two or three days there or the next day. We went ashore and people were just as nice it was over with.

Interviewer: Were the places very ravaged because of the bombing?

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: Was the places you visited were they very ravaged by the bombing?

Smith: No they were just so many thousands of them lost their homes and lost their relatives and loved ones cities and lost their businesses. It cleaned it out you couldn't have taken a road digger and dug it any cleaner it just wiped it. The whole it was a whole block after block we're talking about one bomb.

They got the plane since then it's over here at Fort Campbell I think that carried the bomb I think. It's still over there today.

Interviewer: What did you do after the war?

Smith: I just went out went to college got me a degree landscaping. I asked them in college what I should do and they took a record of my history and I had been inside all of my life. Inside of a ship in home never been outside never worked in a civilian job never had nothing. So they told me in college why don't you go to NLT I said what's NLT. I said what's NLT? Nursery and Landscape Technology, so I went to Nursery and Landscape Technology got me a degree and went out and got me a truck and went to work on my own. And I landscaped homes and stuff I didn't I just did it myself individually worked when I wanted to work it worked out pretty good that was in San Diego. I started once to go big time and I said it was too much trouble so I just stayed with jobs here and there. I would go to construction people like build these homes and stuff whoever they were and I said would you I talked to the builder and said would you mind kindly passing the word along that I'll landscape their place for them? No said I'd be glad to said I don't have to do it.

Interviewer: Good

Smith: So I did that and I got tired of that and I just went them out in the city and did this, that, and the other you know. Ask people if they wanted this done or that done etc. etc. The only thing they wanted done was that dumb grass mowed everyone I talked to said do you mow grass? I said yeah but my trade is not just mowing grass. But I worked in that for a long time for one you know one here and there that's a lot easier contracting one home say well I'll mow your grass every month or whenever you want it done for so much. And that way you're not tied down.

Interviewer: When you look back at the voyage during World War II when you were in the navy? What's the one thing that sticks out in your mind that most that you remember fondly?

Smith: Remember doing what?

Interviewer: During World War II what's the one thing you remember the best while you were at sea on the Tennessee? What's the one thing you look back and recall fondly about everything that you had done?

Smith: Oh I guess most of that messing around with the small arms the weapons that was the only thing that I was really intrigued with. I was intrigued to the difference they had you know of course my dad when I was growing up we had a 30/30 a 22 a 20 gage shotgun and a double barrel shot gun and that was the extent of what we had. Well what intrigued me so much about the arm that they had in the service you had all kinds of weapons form a 45 caliber pistol to a you know on up to a carbine and M1 those things fascinated me you know at that time. I asked a soldier one time I said why don't you like them carbine weapons? He said no I wouldn't have one. I said you wouldn't no he said they're the worst weapon in the army. And that's the little one the little carbine and I said how about an M1? Yeah M1 said _____ said I can get that guy across the field over there and he'll never know what hit him. See

Interviewer: That was a good rifle for the time.

Smith: Huh?

Interviewer: That was a good rifle for the time compared maybe to the German the one ___ that they were using.

Smith: Sure but they don't go the ___ like one a recon delta a nice ___ you know the recon delta. The old man used to ___ up on a bridge and he would tell me Bill bring the M1 up here and some weapons and some bullets. I said alright he'd sit up there on the bridge and just tare ___. And we'd be going down the river and you know we'd go down maybe we had the PBRs the patrol boat river craft the PBRs. And we had a mother ship for them and had a lot of ___ and he would look over at a field over there and he'd see some Korean working. And he'd point that over there and ___ and you'd see that guy turn upside down. He said captain I said do you like to do that? I said that poor farmer he probably didn't know what the hell happened and he didn't. He didn't know what hit him he said best take him alive said he'd probably kill you tomorrow. Well that might be right but you know I said he's out there working his field and you know it makes you think or it does me it makes me think maybe he had a wife and kids or something. He probably didn't know what the hell hit him you know he couldn't hear us so far off. So it was just shit like that you know I didn't care about of course if a captain wants to do that. He can do whatever he wants to do anyhow he ain't gonna stop him.

Interviewer: No

Smith: But them weapons them small weapons intrigued me you know the 45 that 45s gonna be here for many years I guess because that's sucker will put a hole in you that big around. If it hits your arm it will blow it off and you really don't have to kill a guy where as some of these others the 38s and things.

Interviewer: It's not happening?

Smith: No he can hit you in the arm or back or shoulder and you'd probably keep on going but not with that 45 slug in the shoulder or some place in the leg. You're down buddy you know I've heard so many guys tell about that. But that 45 was their life blood I guess it was I never did have to kill a guy so I don't know.

Interviewer: Well Mr. Smith I want to thank you. I think that's about enough for now.

Smith: Huh

Interviewer: I want to thank you I think that's enough for now. You've been a lot of help.

Smith: Well I'm glad I helped you.