

Interviewer: Uncle Del when and where were you born?

Norris: Traver City 1925.

Interviewer: And what's your birthday?

Norris: November 2, 1925 yeah.

Interviewer: Do you remember the great depression?

Norris: Not really I remember a part of it. I remember we didn't have very much to eat and not very many clothes. We kind of scrimped around.

Interviewer: So how did your family get by?

Norris: Well my dad was a farmer and we kind of lived off the land I guess.

Interviewer: Okay did the family have a radio?

Norris: Yes we had a radio I think it came from Montgomery Ward's airline or something like that.

Interviewer: Sure was that your primary way of getting news?

Norris: That was our only news.

Interviewer: You never saw any newspapers or anything like that?

Norris: We always took the Grand Rapids Press so we always had a newspaper yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever perceive any threat by reading the papers or listening to the radio of any threat of Japan?

Norris: I can't remember any no I can't remember any.

Interviewer: Was it the same way with Germany?

Norris: You know as a kid back then I don't remember much about that part.

Interviewer: You just didn't pay any attention to it?

Norris: Didn't pay any attention I guess.

Interviewer: Okay when did you enter the service?

Norris: Let's see it was 1944 it was more toward the end of the war. Because I went in when I was 18 I spent my 19<sup>th</sup> birthday in Panama and Panama Canal Zone. And that let's see I kind of lost where. Oh when we entered the service 1944 and I went through the Great Lakes Naval training center.

Interviewer: Was that in Chicago?

Norris: Chicago or up toward Milwaukee.

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

Norris: I was drafted but I could have went in the Army or Navy so I chose the Navy.

Interviewer: Okay when you were finished at Great Lakes did you receive any specialized training?

Norris: Yeah they sent me out to Salmons Maryland where we started training with amphibious training. That was an amphibious training base in Salmons Maryland.

Interviewer: What was your job?

Norris: Well we did a little bit of everything it seems like it was mostly cleanup work at first. And then we went on a lot of cruises just learning how to run the ship.

Interviewer: Okay was the ship your first assignment?

Norris: That was the first assignment and that was my only assignment.

Interviewer: And that was like an LCVP.

Norris: It was an LCI landing craft infantry.

Interviewer: Now were those attached to bigger ships?

Norris: Well there was a flotilla of about 12 LCIs and we more or less traveled together.

Interviewer: Okay just in a group at all time?

Norris: Pretty much yes yes. We took our training in Salmons Maryland and then we went to Newark New Jersey to pick up our ship. And then after that we just sailed down the Atlantic coast. We ran into a typhoon we had to pull into Charleston South Carolina.

Interviewer: Those are pretty small ships to handle something like that.

Norris: They we had to get out of it or we would have been SOL. It was high winds and so we just got out of there. I guess really what we did we stayed out away from it because we knew where it was going.

Interviewer: Sure how big were those ships?

Norris: They were about 30 feet wide and about 157 feet long.

Interviewer: That's really really small.

Norris: Yes they were really small and they traveled about 12 knots.

Interviewer: Pretty slow.

Norris: Pretty slow. A lot of times once we got out to sea we didn't see land for several days.

Interviewer: Sure how were the living conditions?

Norris: We lived good. We had our I never missed a meal while I was in the service. I don't believe unless it was my fault. But we always ate good and everybody got along good.

Interviewer: The accommodations as far as racks and everything.

Norris: Yeah I think we slept about three high three or four high. And we could sit up in our racks so.

Interviewer: Better than you would have had it on any other ship?

Norris: Well I think so. I think it was really it was not a bad life.

Interviewer: Now you were just a Hans man on that right?

Norris: I was a Hans man.

Interviewer: Now how did you get over to the pacific? Did you actually did you sail?

Norris: Well we sailed down eastern coast and down through the Panama Canal.

Interviewer: This is on the LCI still?

Norris: Yeah that was the LCI was my home ever since I got that was all I ever did. We went through the Panama Canal and up to California. There at San Diego and Long Beach California we was converted into a mortar ship.

Interviewer: Okay and that was for ground support I assume?

Norris: Ground support troop support the troops you know.

Interviewer: Do you remember any particulars of how many mortars would be on there?

Norris: Well as I remember we had 2 sets of 2s on the one deck 2 on each die and then one forward. And that was we didn't have a lot we just shot them off in a hurry.

Interviewer: Sure well having a mortar attached to a ship I would think it would be pretty hard to fire mortars been a tedious process.

Norris: Yeah it was of course I didn't have much to do with that part of it so I never really learned a whole lot about it.

Interviewer: Sure now when you were performing those missions how close would they come to the beach?

Norris: We would come within two or three hundred yards of the beach. And we went in there just of course we had a whole line of them that just went in and softened up the beach. And about

Interviewer: So you had several other LCIs that had mortars as well?

Norris: Yes our whole flotilla was mortar ships.

Interviewer: Okay

Norris: Then of course there was LCS gun wallets in back a little further there were destroyers and heavier ships supply ships and all of that.

Interviewer: You would have had the LCIs for the troops too right?

Norris: Yeah there was probably LCIs they had a lot of APAs and cargo ships you know that had troops aboard and they took them in on LCVPs and I don't know what all LSMs. Different types of little boats to get them in there.

Interviewer: Sure now is that a LCBPs is that what we know as Higgins boats?

Norris: I think well a Higgins boat I believe was more like a boat these were little well I think you could haul 50 or so men in it and the ramp just dropped down and they ran them right up on the beach.

Interviewer: Okay very similar. How many officers did you have onboard the ship?

Norris: We had about 8 officers.

Interviewer: Did you have a good opinion of most of those officers?

Norris: Oh yes I really liked our skipper he was Lieutenant Osborne and he was one heck of a nice guys and he knew what he was doing. And I had a gunnery officer he was from Detroit Tom Ryan and I don't remember some of the other officers' names anymore.

Interviewer: You were on pretty friendly terms with a couple of them?

Norris: Yeah everybody was friendly and it was more like a great big family. Too start out we had about 25 men aboard. But they let us be the or they made us the command ship so when we did that they add up to 70 I think there was about 7 people aboard.

Interviewer: So it was a pretty laid back atmosphere most of the time?

Norris: Most of the time it was yeah.

Interviewer: Did you ever see any notable people like Admiral Nimitz or Admiral Halzie anybody like that?

Norris: I never seen any of those guys no I never did so those.

Interviewer: Nobody notable at all?

Norris: No not even from a distance.

Interviewer: They probably went to the bigger ships anyway.

Norris: Yeah I think they did. Yeah they marched onto the bigger ones.

Interviewer: Okay you said you went in in 44 and when did you actually get to the pacific?

Norris: Well I took I took the train and I think before three months was over I was headed out to the pacific and I spent all of the rest of the time in the pacific.

Interviewer: Do you remember about when you arrived there in the theatre?

Norris: Boy I would say we were probably out there this had been a long time ago.

Interviewer: Just a ball park idea.

Norris: I would say let's see I went in in May probably I was there in September.

Interviewer: Okay of 44?

Norris: September 44 well it couldn't have been that because I was in Panama on my birthday which is November 2<sup>nd</sup>. So it would be a little later than that,

Interviewer: Okay late 44.

Norris: Yeah late 44 I would say.

Interviewer: You must have got there right in time for Ewagama were you

Norris: Well I was a little late for Ewagama. Our only I don't know I think we were slowing down and getting ready to go into Okinawa at the time. And we stopped at Wake Island in Guam to take on supplies and we went to the Philippines. I think it was more or less killing time for the Okinawa invasion and we was there on Easter Sunday of 1945. And started about 8 o'clock in the morning and we watched I'm sure it was the first marine division went in there first. They went by with big grins on their teeth and knives in their big grins and knives in their teeth. They were showing us they wasn't scared of nobody.

Interviewer: Right let's go back to Wake Island for a second. When you went to Wake Island did you ever know what had happened there earlier in the war?

Norris: Not really no. In fact when we was at Wake Island we didn't really do anything I think it was like I said just to hold us up until we could be at a certain place at a certain time.

Interviewer: For Okinawa?

Norris: For Okinawa.

Interviewer: Okay how when we invaded Okinawa that was a pretty massive operation wasn't it?

Norris: Oh it was ships all over the place all kinds of ships airplane ships.

Interviewer: What kind of resistance did the American marines encounter on the beach?

Norris: Very little resistance where we were. They didn't really run into a lot of problems until I think was Yon Tong air field and at the north end of Okinawa there was a lot of caves and stuff.

Interviewer: So they pretty much landed unopposed?

Norris: Yeah

Interviewer: Did you have a lot of fire missions going on from your ship?

Norris: Yeah the first day that's about all we did was lob mortars in and shoot at anything that moved.

Interviewer: Okay did you see a lot of movement?

Norris: Of course in where I was I didn't see a whole lot because everything was closed up. All I did was what told.

Interviewer: Sure so you had a pretty safe spot back in the ship?

Norris: Really it was it was in the pilot house you know. They always walled everything up when you got ready to do something there.

Interviewer: Okay did they have air-condition or anything like that in the pilot house?

Norris: No

Interviewer: It got pretty hot in there.

Norris: It could be pretty warm in there.

Interviewer: Okay one of the big things we dealt with after the Okinawa invasion were the komokozzies did you see a few of those?

Norris: We almost every night we'd have a komokozzies and suicide bombs whatever you might want to call them. They came over everynight just about. After the main invasion was over all of the ships were protected by smoke screens when we'd get a radio call that the komokozzies were coming we'd go out on the outside of the bay where we were anchored. We had a smoke machine and we'd cover that whole thing with smoke and they couldn't see nothing. It was really kind of funny the way they did that.

Interviewer: You think that worked though?

Norris: I think it probably saved a lot of ships but they sometimes would sneak in on you. I seen them hit the battleship New York went right down the smoke stack. And Birmingham cruiser they hit that right in the gun terup but I don't know how many casualties there were. Usually at Okinawa they had they had lines of destroyers well the cruisers was out a ways right close to Japan. And they had a line of destroyers and then LCS gun bolts and if they made it through that mirage then we had to take care of them when they got down there on the bay where we were.

Interviewer: So it was kind of like a screen?

Norris: Yeah it was a screen.

Interviewer: What happened after Okinawa?

Norris: Well we did come up to Japan and we went up three just to do a little looking for mines and we'd go up there and shoot them and blow them up. We was only up there for about three months.

Interviewer: Did you find quite a few mines?

Norris: A few yeah they were big round black balls and if somebody ran into them of course it would probably blow the bowl right off of the ship. But we was pretty lucky everything went real good.

Interviewer: Was this was that close to Tokyo?

Norris: We was at Wakioma Japan and Sesival Japan. We worked out of Sesival Japan. And then after that we just started sailing back toward home after they gave us the okay.

Interviewer: You remember hearing the news that the Japanese surrendered?

Norris: Yes oh everybody was so happy. We just knew that one of these days maybe we'd be going home. I remember in order to you had to have a certain amount of points I believe it was to get out of there. But I didn't have enough so I stayed right with the ship until we got back to the United States again.

Interviewer: Did that frustrate you a little bit having to

Norris: Yeah it did but we went back to Galveston Texas and there it was dismantled and destroyed I guess it went out for scrap.

Interviewer: But you remember getting the news though?

Norris: Oh yeah

Interviewer: Was there a party atmosphere right after that?

Norris: It sure was. Yeah we had a nice party and everybody was happy and it was a big deal really.

Interviewer: Sure did you ever have a chance to encounter any Japanese prisoners or Japanese soldiers?

Norris: Never had anything to do with those no we never run into that part of the war?

Interviewer: Okay did you see them on the beach at all from a distance?

Norris: I never actually ever seen one as far as a Japanese service man I don't believe I never seen one.

Interviewer: So how long was it when you got back home to the United States before you got out of the service?

Norris: Well it wasn't too long because I got out I was in I was only in two years a little over two years. And we come back to Texas and they I think I left there for back to Great Lakes and there we were discharged back at Great Lakes.

Interviewer: Okay and what did you do after that right after you got out of the service?

Norris: Well I just went back and helped dad on the farm for a while and then I got a job working in the factory and after that got married. And still worked in the factory I had different jobs really a lot of different jobs.

Interviewer: You mentioned your dad he was a WWI vet did ya'll ever swop stories back and forth?

Norris: You know he never talked about it. He never really talked about it. I know he went through a lot over in France WWI and I know he went through a lot over there a lot of battles. The Battle of Argon Woods I heard him talk about that and I know he died because of that war. Because he got some mustard gas in his lungs and he always had a hard time breathing.

Interviewer: Was that in the Argon Forest?

Norris: In the Argon Forest yeah. I'm not sure where he got the mustard gas but I ?hey had a lot of he never really talked a lot about it but just a few things once in a while.

Interviewer: Sure was he an infantry man?

Norris: He was an infantry man. He was a sharp shooter I guess yeah he was a good man with a riffle yeah.

Interviewer: Good deal now you opened up a barber shop when did you open that?

Norris: Oh let's see I opened the barber shop in 1962.

Interviewer: And when did you finally retire?

Norris: 1994

Interviewer: Okay I remember seeing the paper where there I think it was in Kalamazoo.

Norris: Yeah it was in Kalamazoo out in south side on Oakland Drive and Park View.



Interviewer: Sure well when you look back on your time in service you know if I was to ask you about it what comes into your mind first? What's a story that you remember above anything else?

Norris: Boy I'd have to have a little time to think about that. Oh I know one thing I forgot to tell you about I think this is one of the things I really think about cause we rode out a typhoon one night in Okinawa. And I'm telling you I didn't think I would ever make it through that. That was a whole lot worse than any war I've ever seen. This the next morning I swear them waves were 50 feet high and we bounced up and down all night. It was like riding a roller coaster and when we would come down that ship would just shake all over I thought it was going to fall apart. I didn't think we would get out alive to be truthful.

Interviewer: And the next morning you were thank goodness for that.

Norris: Yeah the waves the next morning were big enough to eat us up and my gosh I've never seen anything like it. We fought that thing all night. But everything turned out alright and the next morning in the bay there there was a lot of assault chasers and small craft was beached yeah they was right up on the beach a lot of damage.

Interviewer: From the typhoon?

Norris: Yeah from the typhoon.

Interviewer: Not to mention anything that had been lost in the invasion?

Norris: Not as far as I know we didn't lose anything in the invasion but boy I'll tell you that was some night.

Interviewer: It was some experience.

Norris: Some experience yeah.

Interviewer: Well Uncle Del thanks for talking to me I enjoyed it.

Norris: Well I hope I did it.

Tape ended