

Interviewer: What's your full name and where were you born?

Simmons: My full name is Gerald Julian Simmons and I was born in Carol County on the 29th day of October 1924.

Interviewer: And what branch of the service did you serve in?

Simmons: The U.S Navy.

Interviewer: And what type of what was your job inside the navy?

Simmons: My job was hospital core man medical field.

Interviewer: What were your parents' names and what were their occupations?

Simmons: My daddy's name was James Howard Simmons and my mother's name was Hailey Cornelius Porter. And they were born in the same vicinity that I was.

Interviewer: And what were their occupations?

Simmons: They were farmers.

Interviewer: So you have any brothers or sisters?

Simmons: I had four brothers and four sisters.

Interviewer: How long did you remain in school?

Simmons: I remained in school up until the 9th grade.

Interviewer: Do you have any memories about the great depression?

Simmons: Not really because we lived on the farm and we were poor. But we didn't really know it because everyone else was.

Interviewer: So it really didn't affect your family that much?

Simmons: I don't think it affected our family at all.

Interviewer: Were you able to hold a job before you went into the service?

Simmons: No

Interviewer: Before Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat from the Nazi's and the Japanese?

Simmons: I did not.

Interviewer: Did your father get a newspaper or

Simmons: No we didn't take a newspaper but I doubt that we could have afforded it really.

Interviewer: Did you have a radio?

Simmons: We did not have a radio but a next door neighbor did.

Interviewer: So you would go over there and get news occasionally?

Simmons: That's where we heard the news of Pearl Harbor over their radio.

Interviewer: So that's where you were that day when you heard about it?

Simmons: I was not at their house but they were our next door neighbor.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you heard that on the radio?

Simmons: Well I was upset for sure because we did have some knowledge of what war meant by daddy being a World War I veteran.

Interviewer: Did you listen to FDR's speech the next day?

Simmons: Yea I did.

Interviewer: What were your impressions of that speech?

Simmons: Very touching.

Interviewer: Did you approve of the way FDR handled the situation how he handled the entire war?

Simmons: Yes I did

Interviewer: When did you decide to volunteer?

Simmons: Just a few months before I reached the age of 18 and when I reached the age of 18 October the 29, 1942 I immediately volunteered the 18th day of November 19, 1942.

Interviewer: What made you decide to join the navy?

Simmons: I was influenced by a first cousin of mine who was also going to volunteer because I stayed at their house a lot and helped them on their farm since they had a bigger farm than they did.

Interviewer: Did you father say anything to you being a World War I veteran to you as you volunteered for World War II?

Simmons: He did not talk much about it and my daddy was not at home a lot then. He did a lot of trucking actually he didn't put much time on the farm usually it was my mother and us children that did most of the farming.

Interviewer: Where did you go when you enlisted where did they send you?

Simmons: I went to Jackson and signed up and was sworn in on the 18th day of November 1942 and after I was sworn in the next morning we went by bus or train I don't recall which to Memphis. From Memphis the next day we went to San Diego California by train real quick.

Interviewer: So that was your induction center?

Simmons: Right

Interviewer: So you remember receiving any kind of IQ test or any kind of test when you arrived there?

Simmons: I don't remember whether I did or not no.

Interviewer: After you arrived in San Francisco where did you receive basic training?

Simmons: San Diego

Interviewer: I'm sorry

Simmons: I stayed there and went through boot camp in San Diego California.

Interviewer: Were you selected for any kind of specialized training?

Simmons: Yeah I was selected for the medical core. And immediately went through what we call hospital core school I don't recall the number of weeks I spend there and I came out after going to hospital core school came out as a hospital core man.

Interviewer: What was your impression of your fellow recruits that you met there in San Diego?

Simmons: I was real impressed you know going from a farm to a large city like that and seeing so many people it was real impressive.

Interviewer: Was that the first time you had been an extended amount of time away from home?

Simmons: By all means the furthest I had ever been was to Memphis one time and maybe Jackson three or four times. Our home was in ____ of course we lived in ____ most of our life.

Interviewer: What kind of unit did they place you in immediately after you advanced training in the medical core?

Simmons: Well I don't know by unit I don't know what you mean but I went to from there I shipped out of San Diego to ____ California to the Bear Island ship the shipping yard construction yard it was a ship

building yard is what it was. And I was assigned to the hospital there at Bear Island California for a number of months and I received training there in the hospital.

Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

Simmons: From there I shipped out of California to a base hospital eleven anyway it was base hospital eleven in New Georgia Islands and stayed there I'm gonna say I'm gonna use approximate approximately maybe ten months. And from there I was shipped to base hospital fifteen in the Admiralty Islands where I stayed the remainder of my tour overseas.

Interviewer: When they were moving you to the base hospital eleven and fifteen tell me about those boat rides. How were they?

Simmons: No they were good boat rides to base hospital eleven and going to fifteen I went by plane they sent me by plane. I believe it was a C47 if I'm not mistaken.

Interviewer: What kind of living conditions did you have at the base hospitals?

Simmons: they were good they were quanza huts and you could close them up where the mosquitos wouldn't get to you while you were sleeping. Out in the amongst the trees you would cut down the trees normally and make a place to build your quanza huts sleeping quarters.

Interviewer: How busy was base hospital eleven in the South Georgia Islands?

Simmons: It was busy yeah it was real busy all the time. But we had a chance to have a little recreation.

Interviewer: What did you do in those times?

Simmons: We played softball a lot for recreation.

Interviewer: Did you ever have chance to write a lot of letter home?

Simmons: Oh yes yes we wrote letters and sometimes you would receive two or three because the mail was slow about moving because other more important things were moved faster equipment and so forth from the states.

Interviewer: What type of injuries would usually come through the hospital?

Simmons: Most of the injuries we had were from personal accidents you know as you are well aware of people have accidents on the job. And some of them were from shrap metal and what have you that occurred on the front line.

Interviewer: What type of injuries did you deal with at base hospital fifteen the same thing?

Simmons: Same thing all of them were basically the same thing. Of course you had other sicknesses malaria and things like that but we received good medical care as far as trying to prevent you from getting dieses and insect dieses and so forth.

Interviewer: Walk through one of your typical days that you would have gone through at one of the base hospitals.

Simmons: Well of course you would get up a certain time a particular time and you would eat breakfast which you would have some type of dehydrated food back then like eggs and things of that sort. And you would spend do many hours in the medical wards where the patients were doing whatever you were assigned to do.

Interviewer: What did your job usually entail that you did?

Simmons: Mostly just regular routine taking care of patients. I did assist some in changing bandages and helping in cleaning the areas mopping cleaning and scrubbing and of course when I was in the eye, ears, nose and throat clinic we did a lot of scrubbing before you go in and have sterile equipment. But I would give shots things that I could do with a medical degree and dispense medication that nurses would make sure that it was the correct medication. Take it in and give it to the patients and check on the patients to see if they were comfortable and see if they needed anything. Because most of our most of the core men back then were men and most of the nurses of course were women in fact those were all the women we saw when we were in the Pacific were nurses.

Interviewer: Did you have any contact with POWs that had been injured?

Simmons: I didn't no I did not no I did not have any POWs at all.

Interviewer: Did you ever feel sleep deprived or overworked at your base hospital?

Simmons: No I was young and vigorous and I guess you would say I enjoyed it. I was never scared as far as being close enough to the front line I don't mind because most of the areas were secured before our hospitals ever went in to establish its building and all.

Interviewer: Is there one injury that you saw at one of those hospitals that still sticks out in your mind?

Simmons: The hospital in ___ California because we had some badly burned and people there that bothered me because we did see some that didn't make it.

Interviewer: Where did a lot of the ones that were badly burned come from you said?

Simmons: Some of them were there from Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: Did you ever get to talk to them about the experience?

Simmons: No I didn't sure didn't.

Interviewer: Did you have any real close friends that you were stationed with during your time overseas?

Simmons: Yes you always had wherever you were you would meet new friends and you'd been you know one or two or three that you would be closer to. But we played cards at night and of course we

played like I said softball and we have a group from our hospital base hospital fifteen that meets annually now there's still a few left meets annually. In fact we're going to have a meeting in Memphis in September.

Interviewer: How impressed were you with the officers that were above you with their training?

Simmons: I was very impressed they were nice I never had any problem with the officers. I respected them very much my stay in the navy was an enjoyable one rally. I didn't regret any part of it because I was much better educated when I came out of the navy than I was going in.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the other branches of the service that you came in contact with?

Simmons: We didn't come into a lot of contact with the army or the marines but we did see a few marines them being actually a part of the navy marines closely associated with the navy. Real impressed with them I had two brothers one was in the navy and one was in the army.

Interviewer: Were you promoted during your time in the service?

Simmons: Yes I was went in as a graduated from school as hospital core man first class and I came out of the navy as pharmacist mate third class.

Interviewer: How long was your time at base hospital eleven?

Simmons: I'm going to say approximately eight or ten months and a little over a year at base hospital fifteen.

Interviewer: And from there you were shipped home correct?

Simmons: Right in September in and I believe it was around the first of November we departed from the Admiralty Islands aboard ship and arrived in the states November the I believe it was the last week of November into San Francisco from where I took a train through Chicago on to Milam came into Milam by train. That was but I came on I came from San Francisco to Milam assigned to Milam on a 30 day leave with orders to go to New Orleans for discharge on the I believe it was the last day of February 1946 by discharge.

Interviewer: How long had you been gone total from home?

Simmons: I came home on leave in November 46 I left here in November so I had been gone from home three years without seeing anybody kin mother and daddy.

Interviewer: How did you feel when you were in the Admiralty Islands when you received word that Japan had surrendered right?

Simmons: Right

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Simmons: I was glad because I knew I was going to get to go home eventually.

Interviewer: Were you more excited when Japan surrendered or when Germany surrendered?

Simmons: I think well I had to be more excited probably when Japan surrendered.

Interviewer: Did you ever have a sense of the strategy that was being used in the Pacific and what a part that the medical core played in that strategy or did you just focus on the job that you had to do?

Simmons: Mainly focus on the job but I could tell by the local situation that we had a good medical staff.

Interviewer: What's your overall looking back on it you overall feelings about your time in service?

Simmons: being in the service like I stated I received wonderful education but it was a good experience for me being on the farm all my life. I can't say anything but just good anything good about our government and the navy that I was assigned to.

Interviewer: What was your profession after you came home after the war?

Simmons: I immediately went to work at the Milam Army Ammunition plant which is outside of the edge of Milam here and worked there the rest of my life except for one short assignment out at _____ Range and outside of that profession.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your experience in the navy prepared you for the rest of your life?

Simmons: Yes my experience in the navy did help me to be fortunate enough to get a good job at Milam Ammunition plant and eventually to be the army safety director for 19 years prior to my retirement.

Interviewer: You said that they moved you for a short period of time to El Paso.

Simmons: That's right because the arsenal out here was reduced in size to kind of a skeleton crew in 1957 and I transferred to the pistol range in 1957 of October and returned here the first of April 1961. Then I retired from arsenal in 1980.

Interviewer: I forgot to ask you about how the weather was on your trip coming home can you tell me about that from base fifteen?

Simmons: Yes on our way home we ran into a very strong hurricane and we were tossed to and fro for a couple of days. And it became very scary because the waves were large and we had at least 40 foot waves to come over the ship much of that two days. And of course we were seasick also as a result of the rough weather and I was certainly glad when it was over.

Interviewer: Did a lot of hurricanes hit you in the bases?

Simmons: No we didn't have any in the bases while I was there.

Interviewer: So that was the first one you ever dealt with?

Simmons: First one and the last one I hope. Yeah especially in a boat or a ship.

Tape ended.