

This is an interview with Mr. George Harris and O.C. Terrell in reference to the USS Lexington in the Pacific Theater 60 years after World War II on Memorial Day. Would you both please state your full name and when and where you were born?

Mr. Terrell (seated on my right): My name is O.C. Terrell and I was born on September 6, 1926.

Where were you born?

Mr. Terrell: I was born in Stewart County.

Okay.

Mr. Harris (seated on my left): My name is George Harris. I was born July 10, 1925, Southside, Tennessee.

What branch of service did you two serve in and what was your primary, well I already stated Lexington, but what branch of service?

Mr. Harris: I served in the Navy on the aircraft carrier, Lexington.

You both served on that right?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

We will back up to your early childhood. What were your parent's names and their occupations?

Mr. Terrell: My parent's names?

Yes sir, your parent's names and occupations.

Mr. Terrell: My dad had the same name I've got. My mother was Ursula Tucker. They are both deceased.

What did they do during your childhood?

Mr. Terrell: My dad sold insurance. My mother was a housekeeper.

Mr. Harris: My dad's name was Herbert S. Harris. My mother's name was Girdie Walls-Harris. My dad was a farmer all of his life and my mother was a farmer too I guess you would say.

How many brothers and sisters do you two have?

Mr. Terrell: I have four brothers and four sisters.

Mr. Harris: I had five brothers and two sisters.

Let's talk about your recollections of the Great Depression. We will start with you Mr. Terrell. The depression, was it particularly hard for your family?

Mr. Terrell: Yes, we were all very well of the depression was going on. Money was just almost impossible to come by. In school you could get, if you could afford your lunch and bought it, it on cost .06 cents. You got a little bottle of milk, a bowl of soup, and a piece of fruit; for .06 cents.

What about insurance? You said your dad was an insurance salesman?

Mr. Terrell: Yes, he did.

How did the depression affect his business?

Mr. Terrell: Well he helped me get my agency started and then I had to go into the service after I had just got my feet on the ground and got going.

Do you remember the first job you had?

Mr. Terrell: I was a newspaper boy.

Did you have like a couple of routes or something of that nature?

Mr. Terrell: Yes sir. I had a regular route.

How about you Mr. Harris? How did the depression affect farming?

Mr. Harris: Well if we hadn't of raised what we eat I guess we would have starved to death. We moved one time from one farm to another. My dad was a sharecropper and we moved nearly every other year. That was in 1930. He said we only had 13 cans of blackberry was all we had to eat when we moved. I was only five years old and I remember the time. I don't remember what we had to eat, I just remember him telling me that later. He went to the bank and borrowed money on the crop he was going to raise and we managed to get by.

What kind of chores did you do as a child on the farm?

Mr. Harris: Well, worked the field mostly; shucking corn, suckering tobacco from the time probably I was five years old. There were certain jobs you could do when you were just a kid like drop _____ setting tobacco and things like that.

What about your sisters? Did they have different jobs on the farm?

Mr. Harris: They helped in the fields too.

So it wasn't exclusively for the young men to do?

Mr. Harris: More so for the boys, yeah.

What do you guys feel about F.D.R and how he handled the depression?

Mr. Harris: I thought he was a wonderful President. I thought he done good.

Mr. Terrell: What did he say?

Mr. Harris: How do you feel about F.D.R?

Mr. Terrell: He was a wonderful guy. If it hadn't been for him, George and I wouldn't be here. He was the one that initiated the building of the atomic bomb. We were just ready for the invasion of Japan, George and I both, and he by Harry Truman having that bomb dropped he saved at least a half a million lives just on the invasion. There is no telling what it would have cost before we took them completely.

What about Pearl Harbor? Do you recollect the day that that happened?

Mr. Harris: I remember it. I don't know whether I heard the original broadcast from F.D.R or not.

How did you feel that day that that happened?

Mr. Harris: Well at my age I just figured the war would be over before I was old enough to go into the service. I didn't think it would last long and it didn't work out that way.

How about you Mr. Terrell?

Mr. Terrell: I was really astonished that Pearl Harbor was bombed. I was like George Harris; I didn't think the war would last long enough for me to be involved in it. I was drafted right out of Clarksville High School and put in the Navy.

Now you guys didn't know each other in Clarksville before you went overseas?

Mr. Terrell: I knew his cousin in Clarksville and he knew some of mine in Clarksville, but we didn't know each other personally.

Why don't you tell that story real quick? We will fast forward and go ahead and tell the story of how you guys met on the Lexington.

Mr. Terrell: Well my mother wrote me a letter and told me that George Harris from Southside had been home on leave and why didn't I look him up. I wrote my mother back and I said, "There are from 3,000 to 5,000 of us on here. Please give me his address and I will look him up immediately." She did, she wrote me right back. George was sitting on his bunk with blonde hair and a crew cut. I came into the room where he was and I said, "Is George Harris in here?" He said, "Right here." From then on we have been friends ever since.

Mr. Harris: He knew my brother before we was in the service. You knew Walton, my younger brother. I didn't know O.C. at the time.

Were you drafted Mr. Harris?

Mr. Harris: Yes, I was drafted. They called me to volunteer. I went regular Navy. They didn't draft me in the Navy. They drafted and then they asked me if I wanted to go in the Navy or I believe Marines. I told them I would like to go in the Navy, regular Navy. I was listed as a volunteer but really I was; they were going to draft me in the Army.

So pick your poison right?

Mr. Harris: I had my choice, yeah.

Do you ever regret that decision?

Mr. Harris: No.

You would rather be on a ship....?

Mr. Harris: If I had to go with it again I would do the same thing.

How about you Mr. Terrell, when you got drafted?

Mr. Terrell: The same way.

You are happy that you went in the Navy?

Mr. Terrell: Yes.

I can't really blame you. So you did have a preference of branch, Mr. Harris, you did?

Mr. Harris: Yeah.

And you did too, they asked you?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Was there any type of aptitude test?

Mr. Harris: Yeah.

Ok. What did that consist of?

Mr. Harris: I don't remember but you had to pass tests before you could get in the Navy.

So they were looking for higher caliber, somebody more intellect and more technical skills?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, that is the way they explained it, yeah. You had to have a certain grade before they accepted you in the Navy.

So if you were, and I'm not trying to be derogatory towards the Army or Marines because I am in the Army, but the guys that didn't meet those requirements would be put in those branches. What about the first place they sent you, how quickly after you were drafted did you go to basic training?

Mr. Harris: I went to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. I took a bus there from here for induction and everything and that is where I had my choice of going in the Navy or the Army. I went down there and of course they examined us and all that and then they sent us home, I believe it was seven days, to take care of your business and get ready. I had to report over here in Clarksville and shipped out. They shipped me to Great Lakes Naval Training boot camp.

How about you Mr. Terrell, where did you go to basic training?

Mr. Terrell: The same experience.

The exact same thing?

Mr. Terrell: I went down to Fort Oglethorpe and from there to Great Lakes and after training to service school.

Now what years were you drafted?

Mr. Harris: It was 1943.

Mr. Terrell: 1944.

Ok, so you weren't at the Great Lakes at the same time?

Mr. Terrell: No.

Mr. Harris: No.

Okay. What was training like there?

Mr. Harris: I didn't think it was that bad. I lost 20 pounds while I was there. I was a little overweight when I went. I didn't think it was really that bad. They did get you up early and made sure you exercised good.

Do you find that working on a farm and being from a rural area helped you?

Mr. Harris: I'm sure it helped me a lot, yeah.

How about you Mr. Terrell? Did you, what was your experience at Great Lakes?

Mr. Terrell: Well, my experience was that I had been in the band at Clarksville High School, and when I went into the service I had an opportunity to join the drum and bugle corp. and I did that. I enjoyed my boot training because drum and bugle corp. was a big part of it.

Did they train you to play or did you already have experience? You already obviously knew how.

Mr. Terrell: I already had experience.

What kind of things did they have you doing there? Would you play at graduations and things of that nature? How did the band, the drum and bugle corp., fit into the training?

Mr. Terrell: We played for all the graduation exercises of all the boot camp fellows and we played for special occasions. We were given some special privileges like we didn't have to stand watch at night. Everybody in boot camp has to stand watch but drum and bugle corp. members didn't because we were called out when all the rest of the guys were on leave or liberty or at ease and special occasions. It was enjoyable.

About how long was this basic training; boot camp?

Mr. Harris: Six weeks.

What kind of specific exercises did they have you do there?

Mr. Harris: Well you had a lot of marching and you had to run obstacle courses and calisthenics and jumping jacks every morning.

What about, what type of weapons did they train you guys on?

Mr. Harris: I had a dummy rifle. I never had a real rifle. I didn't, did you?

Mr. Terrell: We shoveled so much snow that we didn't have time to do much. We were shoveling snow all the time.

Mr. Harris: You know you done...

Mr. Terrell: They put us through everything.

Mr. Harris: They trained you with a dummy rifle but you had to go through all the, what do you call it now when you are using that rifle to different positions?

Manual arms.

Mr. Harris: Manual arms, yeah. You had to learn all of that and how to handle a rifle and everything.

Did you ever have a chance to shoot it while you were there?

Mr. Harris: No, I never shot one.

What kind of specific things did they teach you as far as being in the Navy there; like any kind of fire fighter skills or anything of that nature or was it more basic stuff?

Mr. Harris: More basic stuff. We had what they called a rigging loft. We learned how to tie knots. I remember that.

Explain what these knots are used for?

Mr. Harris: Well, it's for tying up ships.

Mr. Terrell: Hammocks.

Mr. Harris: Hammocks, yeah; tying them up.

Mr. Terrell: We tied our clothes up on a clothesline with a couple of knots.

Mr. Harris: Clothes on the clothes line. You didn't press your clothes. Your dress blues, your dress clothes, you put under your mattress and you slept on them; that is the way you pressed everything.

Not enough time to iron them huh? Did you have any advanced training after that six weeks?

Mr. Harris: I went to a trade school in Dearborn, Michigan; machinist school.

That is probably going to be like a kiosk thing or just more of a computer thing.

More a computer thing. It really doesn't matter that much that you talk over the tape because they're going to make it how they want it. This might be a little blurry. It's trying to focus.

You aren't going to hold copyrights are you?

No. Why don't you guys explain.....

Mr. Terrell: This is the coast of the United States over here. Here we are in Hawaii. The green lines are where the ship went and the activities of the ship in 1943. The brown lines are the activities of The Lexington in 1944. The red lines represent everything we did in 1945 which you can see that our activities in the year 1945 were tremendous compared to the 1944 and 1943.

You were all over the place.

Mr. Terrell: This is a copy of the ship's newspaper. This is the daily edition of the newspaper.

So the ship had a printing press on it?

Mr. Terrell: Yes, we had a press but I had the Leaf Chronicle to put this together as a book for me when I got back.

I see. What about this next thing right here. This book right here, *Men of the Blue Ghost*?

Mr. Terrell: This book was by Lee Reese and her husband. He was aboard the Lexington and he was also with Jimmy Doolittle on the hornet. Lee and her husband compiled this book. It had everybody in it that was on board the Lexington from 1943-1946.

Alright and next; what do we got here? Show us your sea bag here, Mr. Terrell.

Mr. Terrell: This is a parachute bag. It happened to be mine that the riggers on board the Lexington would make these for you when you were going on leave or a liberty. This was our answer to a suitcase. It was easy to throw under the seats of a plane if you were flying home or wherever or if you were just going off for a weekend.

What about these books?

Mr. Terrell: This is the history and the story of the USS Lexington starting with the minute man up in Lexington, Massachusetts, and all the way through history of the Lexington and all of its officers and men.

Mr. Harris: How many different Lexington's were there?

Mr. Terrell: There were five in all; five Lexington ships.

Now that picture on the front of that cover is your ship right?

Mr. Terrell: CV-16 yes.

Okay. You want to hold that up and let me see it? Okay. Hold up the other one too. Let me pan in on this. You said this ship had approximately, what, 3,000 to 5,000 men on it?

Mr. Terrell: Yes.

Alright Mr. Harris you were talking about your advanced training at....

Mr. Harris: I went to machinist school at Dearborn, Michigan. I think it was 16 weeks.

What kind of equipment did you learn; lathes?

Mr. Harris: Lathes, yes.

What else?

Mr. Harris: Milling machines, lathes, shapers.

Was this because obviously on a ship you don't have, you can't just order up something. If you have to repair something you have to do it yourself.

Mr. Harris: Right.

So you had to be self-sufficient on the ship?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, they had machine shops on the ship to make things; repair things.

How about you Mr. Terrell? What kind of advanced training did they send you through?

Mr. Terrell: Well I went to fire fighting school and then I went to a gasoline school. That is where we learned to make CO₂ and that is what I did on board the Lexington.

Where was this at, this gasoline CO₂ School?

Mr. Terrell: The inert gasoline station was below the living quarters. The living quarters started just below the hangar deck. We would bring all the planes down from the flight deck to the hangar deck and fold the wings and stack them ready to be shot back up another way and launched. Our living quarters was the first floor underneath that so we could get up, hit the planes in a hurry, and get them on the flight deck and get them going.

Was this in Michigan also, this training, the CO₂?

Mr. Terrell: My training, I went to inert gasoline school in California and I also went to fire fighting school at Manchester in California. I'm sorry that was in Port Orchard, Washington. The ship was at port in Seattle. What was the name of the port?

Mr. Harris: Remington.

Mr. Terrell: Fort Remington, Washington.

Approximately how long was the training?

Mr. Terrell: The training inert gasoline school seemed like it was about four or five weeks. Manchester was only about a week's training fire fighting.

Now did they allow you two to take leave after all your training was completed?

Mr. Terrell: No.

They got you ready to put you on a ship?

Mr. Terrell: Yes.

Mr. Harris: I had leave.

You did have leave? About how long was it?

Mr. Harris: I'm not sure. It wasn't a long one I know; maybe two weeks at the most. It might have been a week.

How did you family react to you coming back with them knowing that you were just going to leave again to go?

Mr. Harris: Well it was pretty upset when I had to leave again of course, especially my mother.

Now what about your siblings; were you particularly close with them? Did they have a hard time seeing you go too?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, I was very close to my siblings. They all hated to see me go.

So you Mr. Terrell, you went directly from your training to your unit right?

Mr. Terrell: Right.

Okay, we will start with you. Where did you go after you were in California, where did they put you to get you ready to go on the ship?

Mr. Terrell: Well, we went to Remington, Washington, and I went to inert gasoline school there for several weeks and then I went to fire fighting school after that. We were aboard the Lexington anxiously waiting to leave because we had been there a pretty good while having repairs made.

Now, you were drafted in 1943. Were you aboard the Lexington; how long were you aboard the Lexington before Mr. Terrell?

Mr. Harris: I went aboard the Lexington in June of, no wait a minute I'm not sure. I got it in that book. Do you got a copy of that here?

Mr. Terrell: June of 1944.

Mr. Harris: It was 1944 when I went on board but I left; I'm trying to think when I went on board the Lexington. I had to take a transport ship out of California

You went out all the way to....

Mr. Harris: I went all the way there. I got on it out in the Pacific. It wasn't here in the states when I got on it.

You left the USA on Flag Day, or excuse me a month before Flag Day in 1944. You finally were at your unit on the Lexington in August with several stops in between. One of your stops was Pearl Harbor wasn't it? Yeah.

Mr. Harris: I was stationed in the ____ hills there back in Hawaii for about a month I think waiting on another transport to take us on out.

What was it like in Pearl Harbor three years after the actual attack?

Mr. Harris: Well, of course, they had cleaned everything up you know pretty good. The ships still sunk. I knew they were down there, but the actual surroundings they had it in pretty good shape.

Go ahead and describe what you did on the ship, your primary job.

Mr. Harris: They assigned me to #4 fire room. I was boiler attender. You had several jobs down there like a firing the furnace, cutting in and out the furnace according to what the speed you wanted to go. Sometimes you were on water watch which meant that you had to regulate how much water was going in the system because the faster you went and the more steam you got up; you had to get up more steam for more speed so you had to control the water with the big valve. You had a lot of work in the _____ just cleaning the tank too.

How did they heat the water to build the steam? What did they heat it with?

Mr. Harris: Fuel oil.

Okay so there were large quantities of fuel oil on the ship?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

How many boiler rooms were there?

Mr. Harris: Four.

Okay so you were on the 4th one. Where would that be located on the ship?

Mr. Harris: In the aft part.

Okay. About approximately how large was the room and how many boilers were in each room?

Mr. Harris: I think it was two boilers, the best I can remember, in each room. They were a good size. You didn't have a lot of room for all the equipment and everything there. The room itself was a pretty good size.

What would the temperature hit on an average day in the boiler room?

Mr. Harris: You had to have ____ there sucking fresh air down from the top side. You couldn't live down there. I would say it would get to 140 or 150 probably down. If the air went off you just couldn't stay there.

What was your shift like? You would start at what time in the morning? Was it like a 12 hour shift or a 24 hour shift or how did it work?

Mr. Harris: When we were in battle conditions we were on duty, your battle stations continually until you got out of battle. Ordinarily it was four on and four off, the best I can remember.

Four hours?

Mr. Harris: Four hours on and four hours off.

So was that due to the excruciating heat down there that a man just couldn't handle that kind of condition for more than four hours?

Mr. Harris: Well, I didn't think about it like that but it could have been. I don't know why it was four on and four off.

About how fast would four boiler rooms with each boiler push that ship; about how many knots?

Mr. Harris: 36 knots was the top speed I believe. Wasn't it O.C?

Mr. Terrell: About 40 miles an hour.

Mr. Harris: Yeah, about 40 miles an hour.

So about 40 miles an hour it could travel on the....?

Mr. Terrell: That was about the maximum.

How about you Mr. Terrell, go ahead and describe your specific job duty on the ship.

Mr. Terrell: The Lexington had many gasoline stations on the flight deck and hangar deck and my job was to make CO₂ to purge all those lines as soon as all the planes were gassed. I had headphones on all the time around the clock. I would tell the person in charge of the gassing the planes up on the flight deck he would tell me when to send up the inert gas. I would open up all my valves and send inert gas to all the different stations. If someone had left a pump open the inert gas would all go out without going into the lines. That happened quite often. I would have to tell them that I was running out of inert gas because someone had their hose open. They would close it off and I could tell immediately because the gage would start going down slow. I would make gas when we wasn't at general quarters; when we were coasting at night I would make inert gas and put in all these huge accumulators and I sent it up when it was needed.

Now why would they purge the lines? I'm not very familiar with this. Why would they purge the lines of the fuel and put inert gas in it? What does that do? What is the purpose of that?

Mr. Terrell: Inert gas is just like CO₂; it is CO₂. It purges the lining and keeps it from exploding.

Okay so if you left the fuel in there, there is a possibility of it exploding and then creating a fire.

Mr. Terrell: It would be it there wasn't any inert gas but the inert gas would neutralize it.

I see, okay. Approximately how many people were in each of your divisions?

Mr. Terrell: Well, the V-6 Division which I was in was composed of several other subdivisions. The inert gas people were one and the ____ people were another one. The catapult, that is the things that shoots the plane up into the air, was another big part of it and the arresting gear was a big part of it. So there were about five or six different divisions of the V-6 who were all a part of the air department but we were listed separately and we worked separately.

Mr. Harris, how long; was it ever allowed for you to go on top deck or was there certain times you could go up? After you got off your four hour duty shift were you allowed to just kind of go where you wanted?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Were you on call? How did it work?

Mr. Harris: I could go just about any place.

Did they have recreational things for you to do during down time or were you just so plumb tired from working that you just went to your rack?

Mr. Harris: They showed movies on the hangar deck. I don't remember other activities.

Mr. Terrell: Boxing.

Mr. Harris: Boxing, yeah we had boxing.

Did either one of you participate in boxing?

Mr. Harris: No I didn't.

Mr. Terrell: We had some real good boxers.

Mr. Harris: Yeah.

Mr. Terrell: Fred ____ was just out of this world.

Mr. Harris: Yeah he was a champ out there.

Mr. Terrell: Oh he was a knockout.

Mr. Harris: He was from our ship. Different ships, you know, would send up different boxers in and everybody would try to have a champion; each ship would.

How many other ships did he box and beat?

Mr. Harris: I don't know. Quite a few.

Mr. Terrell: We had several ping-pong tables. A lot of our boys played cards; blackjack and a lot of dice.

Mr. Harris: A lot of card playing going on.

What about a lot of betting going on?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah.

Did people lose their wages that way?

Mr. Harris: Yeah; they had no way to spend their money so they just gambled.

Mr. Terrell: We would come along to another ship; they had movies and we would send them out movies over and they would send us theirs. We would take a tank cord over to them and they would pull a rope over to them and we would pull it back. It was like a clothes line.

I didn't ask you Mr. Terrell, how long; where on the ship were these CO2 tanks are and your division?

Mr. Terrell: They were about three decks below the hangar deck and they were in the inert gas room which was also a part of the flash gear. If a plane caught on fire the guy would sit in there all the time with that asbestos suit on ready to shoot up the elevator to the flight deck and get the guy out of the plane when he crashed. We had 200,000 gallons of 100 Octane gasoline.

100 Octane; so the....

Mr. Terrell: 200,000 gallons of 100 Octane gasoline and that was floating on sea water, it was the reason it looked green; when you would look at it, it looked green. We used it up tremendously. We would have to get a tanker every few days to come by and let us, bring on gasoline and fuel to run what George was requiring us to have to run the ship.

Now were there ever planes that caught on fire on the top deck that when they landed or anything like that nature that you recall?

Mr. Terrell: I did not understand you.

Whenever planes that were on fire that you had to go....

Mr. Terrell: When an airplane came in if he missed the arresting gear which is the little cable at the rear end of the flight deck for them to hook, for the hook to attach and if they miss that they went into the barriers. That was three or four lines stretched across up in the air at the propeller level so the propeller would hit it and pull them right down into the deck. They would catch on fire a lot of times because a 50 gallon torpedo belly tank that was under all the planes, sometimes they would break loose and hit the propeller once the arresting gear slammed them to a stop, jerked them to a stop. It would jerk the belly tank loose and the propeller would hit them and here we have 50 gallons of gas on the flight deck and we are trying to put it out. The guy with the asbestos suit on is up there trying to get the pilot out and we are spraying the whole foam and everything on the flight deck.

Did that happen often?

Mr. Terrell: All the time.

All the time. What about your barracks, your bunks? Were they hot bunks where you had to switch out with another guy?

Mr. Terrell: You folded up after you....

You had your own bunk?

Mr. Harris: You had your own bunk.

Okay. After you're arriving on the Lexington how long was it before you were in combat?

Mr. Harris: Well, when I went on board, right away. I had been assigned a bunk but no battle station and planes came over dropping bombs. Everybody was running to their battle stations and I didn't have one. I didn't know what to do so I was running up and down the corridor; I didn't know where I was going. I said where am I going, you know, and what am I doing? I just sat down on a hatch cover and waited until everything was over because I didn't know where to go. I was sitting on the hatch that went down to the #4 fire room so that is where I was....my battle station was in the #4 fire room and I was sitting on that hatch and had no idea that I would be there.

When were they called battle stations? Would it be just like everybody would be scrambling from wherever they were to get back to their.....?

Mr. Harris: Everybody had a certain place they had to be so you had to get there in a hurry.

What was they called that and you had to go to your position, your battle station? What was the call to say, "Okay you don't have to worry? We are in the clear now." What would they say? Would they get on the intercom and call or would they go around individually and tell?

Mr. Harris: No, they had loud speakers. They announced everything over that; when we were going in battle or to get to your battle stations; battle orders.

What were your co-workers like during those time periods? Were they, obviously people were scared; would you be able to lean on them? Did you work with guys that were, you know, solid?

Mr. Harris: I found most of them to be level-headed under fire. They took it good. We had some that couldn't take it and they had to send them back to the states, but one once in a while. They called it going Asiatic; battle fatigue. The Navy had to express it as going Asiatic.

Mr. Terrell: There was a little crash whistle or shriek noise that they would blast over the speakers if a plane came in, you know, and was going to crash or did crash and we all knew that there was an upset of some kind on the flight deck if they sounded that. You remember that whistle that they would sound?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Mr. Terrell: It was a crash whistle or a sound. It was just like a police man going out and turning a siren on. It was not a siren but it was short and stop. They would do it many times if it was a severe crash. When pilots were under so much stress coming back and landing sometimes three or four out of five would either bust a tire. Tires then were not as good as they are now. Some of them would over shoot the tail hook and hit the barriers. Some of them would hit the barriers and then go over to the side on the cat walk on each side of the ship. There were all types of; wouldn't you say just minor crashes all the time?

Mr. Harris: Oh yeah.

Mr. Terrell: We didn't pay too much attention after we got used to it.

What was it like when you first saw that happen? Did you ever have a fear of "Oh crap, this is real!" How did you feel the first time you saw a plane come in hard and catch on fire and was all shot up and things of that nature? What were you're....?

Mr. Terrell: Well if he didn't set the deck on fire any of us that were there had to stay at our battle stations. If we left that it was pretty rough. If we weren't tied up we would assist them sometimes if they were carrying ____ and getting guys out of the plane because we were right there in the middle of it. Sometimes when they landed they landed right in front of me where my station was on the flight deck where the telephone was that I directed gas operations. Many times _____ was so long that I would run out with my earphones still on me and help someone get in the door. My station, the gasoline quarters, were to help them go down decks to the infirmary for medical treatment.

Did you think that your leaders that were in charge of your individual sections knew what they were doing or did you ever have a feeling like they were kind of....?

Mr. Harris: I thought the one's I had done a good job.

Were you ever scared? What was the most scary time in your period on that ship?

Mr. Harris: I guess we got hit by a suicide plane. I would say that was scary.

Why don't you describe to us the situation.

Mr. Harris: Well, of course I was the #4 fire man way down below where the suicide plane hit and got word we were on fire and that a plane had hit us. We didn't know how bad. Down there we didn't; we felt a jolt you know. You get what they call near misses a lot of times. You think you were hit but the bomb would just explode close to the ship and sort of knock it aside. Down in that fire room a lot of times we would think we were hit and we wasn't. When that suicide plane hit I would say that was the scariest time for me. When I first went on board ship I really wasn't scared. I thought, "Eh, they aren't going to kill us all. I'm going to have good luck." After we had been in so many battles I got a little worried a little. At first I wasn't really that scared.

That worried feeling, about what time period after what battle; there had to be some point in there that you...?

Mr. Harris: I don't know exactly how long. We had been in several battles before I really got to getting a little upset.

Did you ever feel like if you were hit and let's say your boiler started taking on water that you would be able to get out? Did you feel like you were trained well enough to do that?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, we had an escape hatch they called it that you just climbed up. It was water tight. This escape hatch went up several decks in case you got flooded you were supposed to go up the escape hatch. I thought it was a good chance of getting out.

How about you Mr. Terrell? Did you feel that if you were hit and your section started taking on water that you would have sufficient amount of time to get out?

Mr. Terrell: I think we probably did. I was real close to my quarters; sleeping quarters, and the sleeping quarters were just one deck below the hangar deck. You had access to go anywhere on the hangar deck. I think our chances of survival were real good. The only thing, if a torpedo had hit us on the starboard side which I was on with the inert gasoline station it would have got me because I was right on the water level.

How often did those types of thoughts come into your mind?

Mr. Terrell: Well you were so busy that you didn't have time to. Directing a gasoline operation with the sound powered phone you were constantly answering and talking on the phone. You didn't think about it too much and I'm sure George didn't either because he was waiting for signals. They were turning the ship and sometimes full speed left and on a zigzag course or dodging torpedoes.

Okay let's talk about that. How would, what was the mechanism to turn the ship? Did one broiler room run a certain propeller? Is that how it worked?

Mr. Harris: You had four broiler rooms and you had two engine rooms. Number one and two fire room supplied the steam to the number one engine room. I think three and four supplied the steam to the other engine room.

He mentioned how the ship was turned and dodged. Was that solely based on the fire rooms, how much steam you burned in each boiler?

Mr. Harris: No; to turn it of course you had the wheel you know, you just had to turn the wheel. If it needed more steam they had a level to push and it notified, it rang bells in the fire room you know, to get ready to cut in more burners or cut them out. Whatever you needed. Steering it no didn't do it by the fire room.

They called you a lot when they were dodging things because they had to continually adjust the steam.

Mr. Harris: Yeah. You had to man the fire room all the time and had earphones on to relay messages.

Mr. Terrell: The initial alert, we had 125 Marines that were highly highly skilled and trained in lookout and observations. Those Marines were on duty constantly when we were under attack. They gave all types of information signals of torpedoes coming or enemy planes coming. We relied on information from those Marines and in fact when the suicide plane hit, it hit on the starboard side of the flight deck and it completely wiped out all those Marines. Do you remember that?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Mr. Terrell: He came in right under the squadron that was coming back to land and he waited until he got right between the sun and us and then he came right down. We were just you might say playing cards. We were loose; we didn't think.....we were landing planes. We thought this fight was over with and it was and he hit us.

So this suicide plane, did you respect the Japanese for doing it that way or did you...?

Mr. Harris: No, I didn't respect them for doing it that way. I thought it was just a bunch of nuts the way they was acting.

After that first suicide plane did you ever worry that was going to happen again and how much damage did it create to the actual ship?

Mr. Harris: Well it hit a gun mount directly I believe. Of course the fellow that was on the gun he was just _____. How many did it kill? It killed several.

Mr. Terrell: 125.

Mr. Harris: 125.

So he killed practically that whole Marine...?

Mr. Terrell: The whole mount.

Mr. Harris: In that area where he hit he just killed everybody.

Mr. Terrell: He had that phosphorus bomb on there and he burned more than he hit.

So one man in a plane took out 125 guys so it was an effective tactic. It wasn't exactly the smartest thing to do for your individual life.

Mr. Harris: That was a big problem there toward the last of the war.

Do you think that was a sign of the Japanese maybe breaking?

Mr. Harris: I think they would get desperate. They knew they were losing.

What was chow like?

Mr. Harris: Good.

You had good cooks?

Mr. Harris: Yes. I thought it was good.

How about you Mr. Terrell? Did you think the chow was good?

Mr. Terrell: We ran out of provisions; almost out because we knew the war was almost over. We were just going at it every day all the time. The food they gave us came down to a lot of times a piece of toast with a ladle full of stuff like stew. It was more soup than it was stew. They called it SOS.

We all know what that stands for.

Mr. Terrell: We had that.

So, did you ever get tired of SOS?

Mr. Terrell: We just got a lot of that.

Mr. Harris: Yeah, I got tired of it.

Mr. Terrell: We just got tired of it.

Mr. Harris: It wasn't bad food but after you eat so much.....

You eat the same thing over and over.

Mr. Terrell: They spammed us to death you know. They had stations where you could go get your hot cup of coffee.

Mr. Harris: Sometimes you would have fried eggs for breakfast as though you were at home and have a good breakfast. On Thanksgiving you had turkey and dressing and stuff like that. As a whole we ate pretty good I thought. Of course I wasn't used to no fancy eating when I went in there. I was raised on a farm.

Right.

Mr. Harris: They had them powdered eggs but they weren't too bad.

Did you get to shower every night or were there sufficient showers for that many thousands of people on the ship?

Mr. Terrell: They had showers.

Mr. Harris: Sometimes we had evaporator problems, remember, and you would have limited showers because they couldn't get enough fresh water or water that wasn't salty. In fact on one of them transport ships I was on we had to take salt showers. They just had enough to drink until they got.....

What was it like taking a salt shower?

Mr. Harris: It felt sticky.

Just sticky all the time?

Mr. Harris: Yes. After you got out of the shower you were clean I guess but you felt sticky.

The Lexington obviously had more sophisticated, you know?

Mr. Harris: Yeah, I never did have to take a salt shower on the Lexington.

How was the longest maybe you had to take, you had to go without taking a shower because of the evaporation problem?

Mr. Harris: I don't remember.

It was obvious long enough to etch something in your memory.

Mr. Harris: A couple of days anyway I would say.

Mr. Terrell: You couldn't use salt water to make steam with

Mr. Harris: No.

Mr. Terrell: The guy from Miles City, Montana, who was in charge of that, he accidentally put salt water in the boilers and we never, never, ever stopped moving once we were on board the ship and in combat because an enemy sub could get us if we did. The USS Lexington stood still the day that this guy put salt water by accident in the boilers. We had to pump and clean all those out and of course the little tin cans of what we called destroyers, they circled us all the time we were dead still in the water hitting them.

Remember that?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Mr. Terrell: ..getting the boys cleaned out.

What was that like being still when you were used to being...?

Mr. Terrell: Well no one knew what was going on. We were just kind of at ease you know at peaceful times.

Was that in your boiler room four?

Mr. Harris: No, that was not in my boiler room.

So did you know of that guy? Did he get chewed out?

Mr. Harris: I didn't know him.

Mr. Terrell: This fellow has taken a lot of kidding through all of the reunions you know.

Oh you know him?

Mr. Terrell: Oh yes; his wife if a school teacher out in Miles City, Montana. They are very nice people; a real nice couple. We kid him every time. At every reunion we say, "Here is the fellow that stopped the biggest ship there was in the Navy in World War II in the middle of the Pacific, dead still!" He gets embarrassed.

That could have been something that could have been really, really bad.

Mr. Terrell: Disastrous! Of course the tin cans and you got to understand the little destroyers took many torpedoes that would have got us if it wouldn't have been for them.

Mr. Harris: That was their job. If they saw a torpedo heading toward the battleship or an aircraft carrier or something, they were supposed to run in front of it. I don't know whether they always done it or not but they took a lot of....

Mr. Terrell: They deserve a whole lot more credit probably more than we do; all the tin cans.

I think anybody that served in World War II deserves credit. Did you, how many tin cans were organic to your carrier at one particular time?

Mr. Terrell: At least six or eight.

Like you said their primary job was to be like a screen on the outside of the carrier?

Mr. Terrell: Yes and a lot of times we had maybe one or two cruisers when I would work task force.

Mr. Harris: Yes, and a battleship.

Mr. Terrell: Several battleships.

Now in your diary Mr. Harris you talked about subs. What do you remember about that experience?

Mr. Harris: I was sleeping on the flight deck; we were at anchor you know. I was sleeping on the flight deck and all of a sudden I heard this big explosion. Of course I jumped up and headed for my battle station and what it was, I didn't know then what it was, but the destroyers got in the way and started dropping them depth chargers. Do you remember that?

Mr. Terrell: Yes.

Mr. Harris: I heard later on they were Japs one man subs that came in under our ship the night before. About day break they hit that tanker but that is the only ship they sunk, was one tanker. They got all the subs, I don't remember.

So one man Japanese subs?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

So one dude, there again, like a suicide....?

Mr. Harris: Yes, like a suicide.

So they were operating in extremely small units hoping to take out large persons of your element.

Mr. Harris: Yes.

There again do you think that is a sign of them breaking; them losing?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Mr. Terrell: The big mother ships would take the suicide ships out and launch them because they didn't have power to go a long way. There were several of them at Pearl Harbor. They still got one out there that is still under.

Mr. Harris: Yeah they used them at Pearl Harbor.

Mr. Terrell: They ran up on the beach; one of them did there at Pearl Harbor.

During combat did you ever feel overworked?

Mr. Harris: I never really thought about it like that. If you were in battle a long time you got pretty tired you know, but you had a station you had to keep manned. You didn't really think about it.

What was the longest that you stayed up during a battle?

Mr. Harris: Probably a couple of days wasn't it?

Mr. Terrell: Most of the time that was getting airplanes in and getting them degassed and getting them refitted and ready to go on the next flight and if we were in a real tight situation we maybe worked 20 hours or maybe 15-18 hours and then off.

Mr. Harris: Maybe what you had to eat then was K-rations or stuff like that.

How would that work? Would they bring; would somebody go around and bring you your food or was there food at your battle station already there?

Mr. Harris: No you already had the K-rations in the fire room.

So that was like emergency food.

Mr. Harris: Yeah, in case you were in battle and can't cook or nothing.

That's pretty smart. What about water, drinking water, was there some type of water fountain or something like that that you could drink at your station too?

Mr. Harris: Yes.

Mr. Terrell: Yes. When the city of Tacoma, Washington, had a power breakdown the Lexington happened to be there on the coast and went in and furnished all the electric power. They had these two giant _____ on the Lexington, one forward and one aft, and they furnished all the power for the city of Tacoma.

Really, that's a large city too.

Mr. Terrell: They had cables they pulled on board the Lexington and hooked on. It got them through the power outage that they had.

Being on a carrier was like being on a small city or a small town.

Mr. Harris: Yes.

There was no way possible for you to know everybody on that ship because there were just too many people. Let's talk about the Japanese; were you impressed with their fighting capabilities.

Mr. Harris: Yes, from what I heard about them they were good fighters.

Do you ever; what did you see of the enemy?

Mr. Harris: That is what I started to say, we didn't; on board ship you didn't see the enemy that much, just the planes that would come in. We picked up those two that were shot down; picked them up out of the water and had the brig there.

Let's talk about that.

Mr. Harris: That was the only two that I saw, you know, close up.

So two enemy Japanese pilots got shot down. They picked them up in the water and they brought them aboard. What happened from there?

Mr. Harris: They put them in the brig and kept them in the brig but they treated them good and fed them good.

Were they ever seen as like prizes like "we got these two guys" or was it kind of just another thing that happened that you know really didn't make a difference and you just keep on driving on with your mission?

Mr. Harris: Well it was sort of a prize I guess just because we didn't, like I said, we didn't actually see them you know. To see them you know actual Jap warriors was....

Did it give you a feel of accomplishment?

Mr. Harris: Yes, maybe to know more of what was going on looking at them and seeing; they were short and heavy built ones. When I saw them they only had on shorts. They had all the clothes off of them. They had on shorts.

How about you Mr. Terrell? You were talking about I guess you were in the chow hall or something of that nature?

Mr. Terrell: The brig was right by the, we called it the D dock, the ice cream stand. I always was going to get an ice cream bar and I tried to talk to them. We only knew a little Japanese. I would speak just a little Japanese to them and they would look at me out of their peripheral vision. They never would look up and they stayed in the back of the brig against the wall.

They never would look at you directly?

Mr. Terrell: No.

They never talked to you?

Mr. Harris: They probably understood him because a lot of them knew English enough to talk to you. When we went to Tokyo, when you would go on liberty, you would be surprised how many of them could overcome and say something to you.

How was liberty? What kind of things did sailors do on liberty? Get drunk?

Mr. Harris: Get something to drink if you could get a hold of it. I walked around and I went by the, of course they had the moat around the emperors palace you know. That is as close as you could get to it. I went and looked at it. Tokyo was tore up pretty bad from bombing; lots and lots of damage was done.

Let's talk about the planes that you guys had on the ship. What kinds of planes were they? Did you have several different types or was their mainly one type of plane?

Mr. Terrell: Planes that we had?

Yes.

Mr. Terrell: They were F6F Hellcats, fighters; TBM ____ fighters; SB2C hell divers, they were diver fire bombers; and then we had the TBM torpedo bombers, that was the big pregnant plane that had the big belly and the torpedo door would open for us to drop torpedoes.

Mr. Harris: Then we got the F4U course air.

Mr. Terrell: That was the last fighter.

The course air?

Mr. Terrell: It was the fastest one we had.

Mr. Harris: We didn't have that one to start with.

Mr. Terrell: No we didn't.

Mr. Harris: It came on later.

Did you think that the air planes were capable of handling the Japanese?

Mr. Harris: I thought so.

Did you think any of our planes were lacking in certain areas?

Mr. Harris: No, I never thought about it like that.

Let's get into specific battles and what you remember about each one. The first one I think that I read in there was the Philippines. What do you guys remember from that specific engagement?

Mr. Harris: You talking about the battle of L____?

(End of Tape)