

Interview of Neil K. Holbrook.

Interviewer: All right, what's your full name?

Neil K. Holbrook: Neil Kohler Holbrook.

Interviewer: And you were born where?

Neil K. Holbrook: In Malad, Idaho, in 1925.

Interviewer: And you went to high school where?

Neil K. Holbrook: East High School, Salt Lake City.

Interviewer: I'm just curious, what's your family's background? Is it farming, or what?

Neil K. Holbrook: No, my father was a real estate man, but we were also farmers because we owned a farm out of town over on Redwood Road, and we worked that farm as youngsters. I still went to East High School.

Interviewer: So you went to East High School, what years did you attend? Do you remember?

Neil K. Holbrook: It would be about 1938, '39, '40 -- give or take a year.

Interviewer: And, tell us what you were doing -- you had a real interesting story about December 7th, 1941. Tell us about that day.

Neil K. Holbrook: That touches me a little bit. I was in the Ensign Ward in Salt Lake City on 9th Avenue and D Street, and also in that ward was a man named Heber J. Grant, and we had three meetings in those days. We'd have an early morning meeting, and then an afternoon meeting, and a night meeting. The afternoon meeting was Sunday school, and the

least important of the three. Heber J. Grant would fairly often attend that afternoon meeting because he didn't have obligations in the other two meetings. And he would attend with his family, and he sat in the middle. He didn't like to sit on the stand, in the middle section, about the second or third row back, with all of his -- I think five daughters, maybe six. And they sat all around him, and most of their young family. And I was sitting over on, facing the pulpit, the right hand side. And the bishop stood up to start the meeting, went to the pulpit, and just as he got to the pulpit, somebody was signaling to him from out in the lobby. And I suppose it was important, so he left, and went out to the lobby. When he came back, now, this was the Ensign Ward in Salt Lake, Ensign Stake, Ensign Ward. And, he came back and he stopped by President Grant, and whispered. And President Grant broke into tears. And significant enough tears that we knew. What could he have said that would cause that? And his daughters converged around him closer, the daughter standing behind him was nurturing him. And that had to be important, it doesn't happen like that. Well, you got to remember that he was the first and at that time, only mission president of the Japanese mission. So there was some significance in that. Well, the bishop went back up to the stand and he says, "Brothers and sisters, I've just learned that Japan has attacked Hawaii and San Francisco." Incorrect about San Francisco. "And, you are to go home right now and we are dismissing the meeting, and turn on your radios, and you will get further instructions." That's what happened when the war started, and that changed my whole life from then on.

Interviewer: So, what did you do that day?

Neil K. Holbrook: Went home and we did turn on the radio, and we turned on the radio and we listened. We were getting some information, and some misinformation at

that time. But we didn't know -- I would be at that time 16 years old. A month and a half later to be 17. At 18, you were drafted definitely. So, my job was to see what I had to do in the war.

Interviewer: So, you decided that you were going to do something?

Neil K. Holbrook: I decided I had to do something. I didn't want to, but I had to. And so the end result is that I joined the Navy Reserve, and some of the guys around me, some of the Heber J. Grant's grandsons, and we all went down to San Francisco and we worked on Treasure Island in the Navy Reserve. That kind of kept us out of the war for awhile, but then it didn't and then they drafted us. I was stone color blind.

Interviewer: Okay, before we get there, what did you do in the Navy Reserve?

Neil K. Holbrook: I worked on Treasure Island. I was a guard for the China clipper and some of those -- I think they called them PBM's that would fly and land on the water. In those days, they did that. Quite a few ships that would land on the water. And so, I did the job of guarding them, but they drafted me.

Interviewer: And tell us, again, about your color blindness.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, I was very color blind, and they don't want anybody colorblind in the Navy, so I got into the Navy and they started giving me charts, and I was memorizing them because I wanted to get into the officer's candidate school. And, I had high hopes for that, but they caught me with some charts I didn't know about. And I was -- they said, "Well, we got to get rid of this guy. So we'll put them in the CB's." The CB's were the Construction Battalion.

Interviewer: And they did what?

Neil K. Holbrook: They were really the engineers for the service in putting things together. But in this case, I was sent to the CB's. They wanted somebody to blow up and destroy obstacles and problems that were on the island that would impede the landing troops. So, that was the idea that started all of this for the men that became the Seals today.

Interviewer: Before we get there, tell us about the day you heard about this thing you were going to volunteer for. Tell us about what you saw?

Neil K. Holbrook: I was put in the potato locker in the CB's. That wasn't adequate. I would have to peel potatoes for the rest of the war, and there was no way. A brand new 18 year old guy isn't going to do that. So, I heard about this demolition squad that was forming in the CB's to blow up those obstacles, and that's how I got into it. It was actually a very small group that was in elimination process, they called them, "The suicide squad." That was the nickname, but suicide was fine. No potato peeling though. And --

Interviewer: Did you read about this? Did someone come and ask for volunteers?

Neil K. Holbrook: It was volunteers totally. But I don't remember how I got word of it, how I got wind of it.

Interviewer: Do you remember what they kind of said about it, what made it sound so dangerous?

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, there was an elimination process, and there was a fellow named Commander Coffin, whose father was the famous Admiral Coffin. And he, by the way, had some terrible vision problems. He wore goggles here. And, but he was doing this elimination process to get a handful of men that he could use, not quite materialized in his

thoughts yet, in making the way for the landing troops over in the Pacific. And later on, they tried it over in Europe.

Interviewer: How many men volunteered, do you remember?

Neil K. Holbrook: There probably were 50 and it boiled down to eight or nine, depending on how you're going to count them.

Interviewer: And how did they eliminate all those other guys?

Neil K. Holbrook: We would, one thing, they sent us down into the bottom of Chesapeake Bay at 10:00 at night.

Interviewer: What were you dressed in?

Neil K. Holbrook: We usually had a full rig on.

Interviewer: Which was?

Neil K. Holbrook: A big canvass suit with a helmet and they'd pump the air down. But it was a weird feeling, believe me. And it tested your guts. It, you just didn't want to stay down there. And we had to stay about 15 minutes, and then they put us on a mat, and they put 12 on that mat, which was about a 12 by 14 by 14 mat, maybe, outside. And the last guy on the mat was the one guy that would be preserved.

Interviewer: And what does that mean? What were you doing? Was this fighting?

Neil K. Holbrook: It was the last man to stay on the mat, and they do anything they could do, and two guys got together when there were three of us on the mat, and they just broke my leg.

Interviewer: So, again, this is fighting? This is punching?

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, we didn't punch. We didn't punch, but it was fighting. Trying to stay on that mat. Now, if they throw you off that mat, you're out of the deal. But it was pretty severe.

Elizabeth: Can you have him tell the story kind of continuously because there's a lot of interruptions.

Interviewer: Yeah. Tell us; just tell us kind of in a chain of events, for someone who doesn't know what we're talking about. I do, so I can follow it. Again, the training. Tell us -- again. How this unfolded, because people are so intrigued -- no one had even heard of any of this stuff. So tell us about, you know.

Crew Member: Going in the Chesapeake Bay?

Interviewer: Yeah, going in the Chesapeake Bay and all the things you guys were making up as you went along because no one knew. Kind of tell us more about the details of training.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, it was not really well-defined, because this was brand-new, the concept. I don't think it was even that well-defined in Commander Coffin's mind, but he wanted to find some guys that were sturdy guys, that would do the job and had the guts. It takes guts to go down in Chesapeake Bay and stay under that water at midnight. It's pitch black, and your imagination will let you think of a swordfish pronging you like a shish kabob or whatever. It wasn't easy. Those are the kind of things he made up pretty much on the spur of the moment, and it really wasn't solidified yet. Frogmen was not a word that was heard.

Interviewer: What was the physical training like, like the running and the swimming? Tell us about that.

Neil K. Holbrook: We didn't train, none of us trained. The idea was to eliminate for future training, to bring a bunch of guys -- a handful of guys together then to be trained. After that, after I had my leg broken, then I lost track of them. I was in the hospital with a cast.

Elizabeth: Hold on just a second, there was something buzzing.

Interviewer: That was my cell phone, buzzing. Sorry.

Neil K. Holbrook: How many times do we have to tell you about that phone?

Interviewer: I apologize everybody.

Elizabeth: That was a nice description.

Interviewer: And I was killing my phone. I'm going to put that way over here.

Elizabeth: It's off, right?

Interviewer: Yeah. Hold on, I got to get it turned off. I don't do it that often.

Neil K. Holbrook: Did you get it off?

Interviewer: Yeah, I think so. I'm sorry to make you do this.

Neil K. Holbrook: It's all right.

Interviewer: Your Honor.

Neil K. Holbrook: "Your Honor." Good one (laughter).

Interviewer: Let's go through that again because my phone was buzzing.

Neil K. Holbrook: Let's see, where were we?

Interviewer: We were talking about training, and so I asked about physical condition. Tell us again about -- I don't mean to beat it to death. Let's go again and talk about what they had you do in Chesapeake Bay and this hand-to-hand combat elimination stuff.

Neil K. Holbrook: There's absolutely no training in it. It was just to find some guys who had the guts to go forward and do what they were going to train you for in the future. That training really took place in Camp Perry, Virginia. That's when I got my leg broken, went home, they said to report to Camp Perry, Virginia, and that is where officially the idea took shape of what might later be the Frogmen. Then we trained real hard, and we trained by swimming out to sea. We would train with these long Bangalore torpedoes, they called them, placing them and blowing things up. Um, for example, they took us out to sea a mile or two, dumped us, and said, "Now, we're going to have people along the shore and they're going to catch you when you come in. See if you can evade them for a week." And I did, I swam up the shoreline about a mile to Vero Beach, Florida. And that's next to; I don't remember the name of the place we trained now.

Interviewer: Fort Pierce?

Neil K. Holbrook: Fort Pierce, right. And Vero Beach is right next to Fort Pierce, up from it. And I just swam in there, and then I would wait till night and I would go sleep in their hammocks in their backyard and I'd steal the milk off their front porch because they had home delivery of milk in those days. So I had plenty to eat, and plenty of sleep, and went back a week later and said, "Okay, here I am. I made it." That was kind of an elimination process, also. But we did an awful lot of swimming. Then, after just not much -- maybe six to eight weeks, then they took us to the island of Maui in Hawaii. That is when we first became officially what we called the Under Water Demolition Team. And they had several teams. Under Water Demolition Team number seven. And, we really trained then. We'd get up before breakfast and swim a mile and a half out to sea and back in, and have breakfast. And then we'd really start swimming. And it was just training all day long, intensive training. Some hand-to-

hand combat, not a lot, training. But we became pretty good swimmers, and that was the beginning -- and there was a newspaper man in Honolulu, and he called us the "Paddle Foot Commandos," and the name didn't stick, and about two or three months later, we were very secret. It was a top-secret organization, and another reporter got wind of it and he called us the Frogmen. That stuck. And every since then, they've called them the Frogmen. Now it's evolved into the Navy Seals. But, that's how it all got started, Seals and Frogmen. And then we went from there to various places in the Pacific. The idea of the war, at that time, was to, you know, invade an island, secure it, and then skip one or two islands on the way to Japan, invade another island, skip more, and all the way up to Japan. And we did those all of those islands into right in Tokyo Harbor.

Interviewer: Now, when you joined the Navy, did you know how to swim?

Neil K. Holbrook: No, but I had a lot of guts, and I was a sturdy person. You wouldn't know it.

Interviewer: So the Navy taught you had to swim?

Neil K. Holbrook: Pretty much, yep.

Elizabeth: Can you have him say that in a full sentence?

Neil K. Holbrook: Oh, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: It's all right. Just tell -- "the Navy taught me --"

Neil K. Holbrook: The Navy taught me how to swim because we, our, you know, we swim out to sea every morning, a mile and a half and back in, and that started the day. Then all day long, we were swimming, shooting off charges in the water, blowing up things, learning how to handle demolition materials, things like that. We'd become water-logged. And I

suppose we would spend, oh, heavens, in the water itself, probably, I don't know. Maybe 10, 12 hours a day. We were all shriveled up like prunes at the end of the day.

Interviewer: Tell me about your teammates.

Neil K. Holbrook: They were a variety of people. And of that original group, there's only five of us left now. And I get calls from them almost daily. And it's quite camaraderie, and they can't much get around. They can't catch a plane easily and meet in Fort Pierce, Florida, which is the converging place for old Frogmen. But they are trying to get a meeting together to see if they can make it there this next November. I doubt that they'll make it, but some might.

Interviewer: How many men were in UDT-7?

Neil K. Holbrook: 64, let's see, does that come out with eight times eight? Eight in a small group, eight groups of eight. So the idea for that was that we would distribute those eight swimmers, plus eight more, plus eight more, in certain beaches along the shore and the way they would do it is we would, we had LCPR Landing Crafts. That means Landing Craft Personnel Ramp on the front of it that would come down into the shores we'd go in and they would go racing out of it into the battle. And, we would take those LCPR's. We didn't need the ramp at that time. But we would go speeding maybe 25 miles an hour parallel to the shore, attached to that LCPR landing craft was a rubber boat. And that -- and so, it would be speeding along. And the rubber boat was out on the seaward side, not the island side. So, when the commanding officer of that particular group of eight men would say, "Number one swimmer out." And he would go over the seaward side where he couldn't be shot out by the people on the shore. He was out of their sight, and lay flat on the rubber boat and then he'd say, "Number one swimmer over." And you just let yourself go into the water, and spin around. And you imagine

you come off and everything. And we put ourselves back together. And they drop a buoy, and that buoy was our marker. Well, the first time I ever went in, the ship somehow got caught on the marker and it dragged it. So, I lined up some smoke stack way back in the nearby tree that had all the fronds blown off as my marker, and then I swam straight in that line so I could then -- and there were, it was about a 50 yard channel that I would cover on that. The other swimmers would cover the next one, and the next one, and the next one. So we'd cover the entire beach. And then, I would swim in on top of the water at first, and as we got closer and the bullets started coming, then we'd go under the water. And go down in and up and take a breath and down in and up and take a breath till we came into where we would be -- where the boats might get hung up, say, on coral pieces that would stick up in the water. Ovals, and on man-made tetrahedrons with three railroad tracks embedded in concrete. Or sometimes in just a lot of big, heavy rocks. And, railroad pieces, one piece at a time, all of this just below the surf, so that when the boats would come in, they would hang up on that, and the next boat would then hang up, and then the war is over because they're going to win that particular battle.

Interviewer: The Japanese.

Neil K. Holbrook: The Japanese. So, we -- we didn't want a lot of disabled boats in the water there. That was our job, to make sure they got in. When we would go in there, did I tell you we had Plexiglas slates tied to our knees?

Interviewer: Tell us all about it.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, we had a little Plexiglas slate tied to just one knee, actually, tied around our knee, and then we would see what we could see. If we saw a channel, we'd mark the channel there. If we saw the coral ovals coming just below the surf, we'd mark all that down. We'd map what was under water, and then we'd go into the beach only a few yards,

and map any pill boxes that might be there. Then you ask how come we could do that when it was still an enemy held island. And the way we did it is, they had a lot of ships out there. Battle ships and cruisers and destroyers shelling that shore, just over our heads, three or four feet over our heads, so we always kept close to the water. And if we stayed down real well, we would be away from those, unless some boat wasn't aiming right, and that happened a lot. They'd our own shells would be exploding around us. But, we would get in and the Japanese couldn't come down to the beach because the beach was being shelled. So, we could get around pretty much and do what we needed to do and get back out and give our report.

Interviewer: Were you receiving sniper fire from the Japanese?

Neil K. Holbrook: A lot. They would go up in the trees, the problem with that, for them, was that, with all of this shelling from the shore, those trees looked like stubs with a few fronds hanging on. And, they were shelled out of the trees. I, I used to see them a lot up in the trees. Pretty soon, they'd be gone. But, and they would be shooting at me. But I could see, I mean, there's a lot of noise, this is a war, and there is a lot of noise. But I could see that he was shooting at me because his bullets would come around, you know. In that case, I'd take a dive and stay out of the way for a little bit, then come somewhere else. But, they -- they were there. And they were kind of a menace.

Interviewer: Tell us about your equipment, what you wore doing that mission.

Neil K. Holbrook: We would wear just a few things. A little hard rubber face mask and we would sand -- not like today. Those are nice, soft rubber. We would sand paper that mask all around, particularly around our eyes, and just get it to fit perfectly around here. And we'd take a month sand papering after each use of it to get it down to where we really

had a perfect fitting mask. We wore swim fins, which were also hard rubber. Not like the modern day fins. And we wore a knife. Mostly not for defense, but cutting the Primacord we would have attached in rolls about that big around, about that long, which was an explosive thing. And we'd have a knapsack later on our back later when we'd go in to blow up things, not on the initial reconnaissance. The initial reconnaissance lacked all those other things. We did take the knife on the initial reconnaissance. And we would have canvass type shoes, with just a bare sole on the bottom, maybe just two layers of canvass so that we could walk on the coral which always just ripped the heck out of ya, and not get all cut up. And that was pretty much it. Oh, we had a little belt around our waist, and had two CO 2 tubes in it, so that if we got shot, and I had that happen quite a few times, or an explosion shell around me, I could reach down and push on that, and those two CO2 tubes would inflate that belt, and hold us above the water till another swimmer would come and help us, or till we could get our self back together again, and either finish our reconnaissance, or swim back out to sea.

Interviewer: You had a little cape, too. Tell us about the cape.

Neil K. Holbrook: We had, from time to time, we didn't always use them, sort of a canvass, silver painted canvass that we would wear right against, put it all around like this and around out here. And that was silver painted so that when we would come up in the water, if there was wind that day, we would look like white caps in the water. So we made less visible targets, less identifiable targets. So when we would come up, and we only wore them when it was pretty windy, and there were white caps. And so we could be a white cap in the water, and we wouldn't be so obvious.

Interviewer: All right, tell us about Tinian and Saipan.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, I don't know how to go about that. Tinian, no, Saipan we did first. And that was my first action in the war, and all of us, our team. And we were pretty somber about going in that island and reluctant, and all of us were telling -- sorry. Were telling each other to write to our families or our friends or whatever if something happened to us, or what to do with our baggage and letters and things like that. And, we were very sober. Now, it didn't happen as we got more involved in the war. We were just another day's work. But I remember in Saipan, that first one, that was very hard. All the guys were the same, and they weren't real heroes. I don't think any of them considered themselves heroes; they wanted to get that war over with and get home. And they knew that if they didn't get the war over with before we got home, our parents would be in jeopardy, our families. So, they really did serve with a deep feeling of responsibility. And, so when we went in, we get in the water and start swimming, it was about on that particular invasion, we were about just a little more than a half mile out from the shore. And we swam in and the water at that time would be maybe 80 feet deep, and then it would be less deep and less deep till we got in close to the shore, and there would be lots of coral. And so, maybe just got a foot deep on top of the corral, we'd pull ourselves along, but we couldn't go in the water and hide from the snipers that were shooting at us, so that made it very hard. So we try to zigzag and find a little channel and get a little deep and try to get down in there and a lot of guys got shot, kept going. Did their job. And we finished doing our job no matter what. When we got injured in the war from those days, from shrapnel, and I got plenty of shrapnel. And I have the bullet holes in my body still. We would go to sick bay or to the nearby hospital ship. They'd take care of us, and they didn't have anybody behind ready to take our place like so many other troops. So we just kept going in the war from wound back into business again.

And, we had to wait a little while longer than you normally wait for a wound to heal because if you get back into salt water with an open wound, it's going to open back up again. So as soon as it healed, we were back in business and the next invasion and the next and so on. We went from invasion to invasion

Interviewer: So, at Saipan, you went back in and planted explosives, right?

Neil K. Holbrook: We planted explosives and blew up the obstacles we found around the beach after we'd gone to the admiral's boat and he said, "This is the ones we want." Picked out the beaches we would go in on. And then we would go in and if ours was one of those beaches, we would blow up the obstacles. Then we'd go back out to sea and we'd pick up the Marines, who were coming in first. And once in awhile, we'd put a sign on the beach, "Not you, Marines. We were here first. Signed, UDT, Underwater Demolition Team 7." It was a joke, but we had a lot of fun doing it. We'd take those Marines in that LCPR landing craft, let the ramp down, and it was only about that wide in the front, and they'd just go ramming into the beach. Then, as soon as he could back off, the boat was empty, the coxswain would turn around, and we'd go back and get another load of Marines and bring them in. So, we made free trips on some invasions.

Interviewer: So, after you've been in the water and done your job, then you're helping shuttle in Marines?

Neil K. Holbrook: Uh-huh, to show them where to go, where the channels were that we knew were there, or we'd blown up the obstacles so they didn't get hung up. So, we'd stand in the front of the boat and tell the coxswain to go this way or that way and get them

into the beach. And then, as soon as they're in there, we'd duck down and the Marines would go in right past us and then we'd go back out to sea and get another load.

Interviewer: So, first came Saipan, then Tinian?

Neil K. Holbrook: Tinian was a different story. We did more reconnaissance on Tinian than we did blowing up things. For example, on Tinian Island, was it Tinian? They don't have snakes on these islands, I don't know if you know this. But once in awhile, somebody introduced some snakes on to an island and they'd multiply and be a lot of them. But normally, you don't find snakes on Pacific Islands. It was on this particular island, I believe it was on Tinian where they had snakes, and we were going in on a reconnaissance, and it was night time. And so, we went into shore and we would, because the shells were sometimes going over our head, a lot all at once, we'd stay very low and keep our ear to the water or to the sand if we went further inland. And so, we'd creep in with our ear down and they had told us about snakes. Well, I didn't like snakes. And I'm crawling along and I put my hand on something real funny, not so slimy, but I thought it was a snake. It was slimy, and the star shells were being lit to light the way so we could see, and I turned around slowly, and I was about a foot away from the eyes of dead Japanese. I had my hand in his stomach, open. And when I saw his eyes, there was no snake there. But it was a lot worse because I wasn't expecting it. And I stood up, which you can't do, and ran back out to the surf and started swimming to sea and when I got out into surf where I could tread water a little bit, I put it back together again, went and finished my job. But I can't forget that. It was a night time reconnaissance on Tinian.

Interviewer: Now, I don't want to get morbid, but you had some pretty -- I read your diary you allowed me to read. And that was pretty stuff, Tinian, Saipan, those casualties you saw there. You saw friends and sailors and Marines really hurt.

Neil K. Holbrook: Yes, yeah.

Interviewer: What was your reaction to that?

Neil K. Holbrook: You know --

Interviewer: We don't have to talk about it.

Neil K. Holbrook: It, I don't think there's any of the guys that didn't break into tears. We had some pretty tough guys, and I don't think there's any of them that it just didn't get to them. Because you see that many dead bodies, and you see that many blown apart bodies, and friends, some of them, it just deeply affects you, really. Even the toughest guys. If you were with them when they were shot, they'd tell you where they were shot, or where the shrapnel entered, and right away, we would attend each other. We watched each other's backs. To this day, I feel like I owe a lot to them because I know on many occasions, those guys saved my life. And I was blown up in the water, and they'd come over and help me till I got conscious again. You know, I had that tube around my belt. And they all helped. We helped each other a lot. But still, you know, it affected you when you saw one of your comrades go down, especially if he was killed, or a big part of his body blown away. It meant a lot.

Interviewer: You went onto, your next action was, I believe, Okinawa. Is that correct?

Neil K. Holbrook: Probably, I don't remember.

Interviewer: You went all over the place. You went to the Philippines, New Guinea --

Neil K. Holbrook: All around.

Interviewer: You were doing training and setting up things.

Neil K. Holbrook: Exactly, or some -- what do you call it. Resting and recreation. R&R?

Interviewer: Yeah, so tell us about your next combat. I believe it was Okinawa.

Neil K. Holbrook: Okay, Okinawa was -- that was a very interesting battle, because there were many, many ships there. I would say, when we got up to the island of Okinawa itself, there had to have been, I didn't think the Navy had that many ships. 1500 ships up there in the ocean behind us. They were shelling the shore over us because we were close to shore getting ready to do our job. And, I never saw so many ships, and battle ships. And cruisers, big ones. It was a very substantial invasion. Is there something you wanted to bring out about that?

Interviewer: I wanted to ask you, first of all, describe Okinawa to us. How big an island is it, and what your job was.

Neil K. Holbrook: Oh, Okinawa was a very big island. I would say, if you would take the -- heavens, it would be from here in Salt Lake City up north to Logan. It was a big island. And, let's see, I can't remember. What was the island right next to it? Tsugen Shima. We did a lot of action in Tsugen Shima. On Okinawa, we just went in and re-canoidered, and, I don't think we had a lot of casualties.

Interviewer: Now, your next action on that small island. Tell us about that.

Neil K. Holbrook: Tsugen Shima. Well, Tsugen Shima was kind of an island that projected out from Okinawa, and when we swam in, there were a lot of snipers up in high caves about a thousand feet up close to the end of the island, where they could see us swimming in. And, they would shoot at us. But also, there were a lot of women and children who would go

to the cliffs there and jump over the side and take their babies with them and crash at the bottom not too far from where we were. It wasn't pleasant thing, and I have often wished if they knew a little more and had to do it over again, would they have taken those little babies over the side?

Interviewer: What was your job for that invasion, for that island?

Neil K. Holbrook: Was to find out about that end of the island where they could do further invasions. They'd already invaded the island, but they still had more coming, and our job was to find out what kind of terrain they would be meeting up with at that time. And the water around it. I can't remember everything.

Interviewer: It's okay. Now, and then after that, you, again, you occupy Japan. You were part of the occupation force, but you had a very interesting mission into Hiroshima.

Neil K. Holbrook: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Neil K. Holbrook: That was a very secret mission, and I don't think some of the officers in our team knew about it. They never talked about it. And one of them, I know, was still alive. I'd like to ask him if he knew. What happened there is we went into Tokyo Bay and we anchored right -- had the armistice been signed? I believe it had been signed. Or a day or two before it was signed, I'm not sure. And it was peace and you could go in there and the Japanese would ogle you and we would ogle them and we were both interested in each other, you know. From the ship in the bay to the shore, that's the way we were -- we didn't go into the shore right early on. But, a small LCPR came along side our ship and they took a group of about seven or eight of us, and didn't tell us why or where we were going, and we had one commanding officer, and we went over to this destroyer, a very nice, modern, destroyer with all kinds of -- the

best, they even had fresh milk. And I hadn't tasted that in a year or two. And all kinds of good things. We thought we'd died and got to heaven. Well, they put us on that ship and it started down south. We didn't know where we were going. And they assigned one guy from the admiral ship, officer, and our own officer, one officer. And then they told us we were going on a secret mission. Well, I thought the war was over after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And so, we went fast down there. I remember it fast because our boats didn't go that fast. This destroyer, you could go on the forecandle of the ship, and you could feel the breeze on your face. I was fascinated by -- everything was so well put together and organized and just handled well. Well, they took us down to Hiroshima, which was probably a 14 hour trip, maybe not that much. 12. And there, they let us off into a small landing craft, and we went in and there were a lot of man-made channels, nobody around. Nobody. And we thought we'd at least see somebody, well, now we learned that it was Hiroshima. And nobody knew anything about contamination by, what is it?

Interviewer: Radiation?

Neil K. Holbrook: Radiation. Nobody -- that was not heard of at that time. Or at least, we didn't know it. And we went in and got out on one of those man-made channels and we went on shore and walked maybe 700 or 800 feet, and then saw what had happened. And it was blackened, all the way around. It was charcoal. And then as you look out way back in the distance to the mountains, that charcoal would turn to a gray color. And then less gray and so on so that it didn't burn everything, but right on, what do you call it, the center of a bomb? Ground center. They -- that was black. And as I would go along there, they assigned us to go this way in a square and out that way and then crisscross back, and different ones went different ways, and that way we could report on the whole area. And it was charcoal. It was black. And so, if I saw

something and wondered what it was, I'd kick it. And, I was either kicking a human being, or a roasted pig, or sometimes dogs. And it just roasted everybody, everything. They had to have died in a split second, no suffering, thank goodness. And quite a bit of that. And everything was down. Now, there was one big concrete thing down near the waterway that was sticking up maybe six or seven feet. And rebar was poking out of it, but it was bent over. And that had to have been a big blast, bent all that rebar and everything. And, one thing that was existing, you won't believe this, was church. And I knew it was a church because it was a cross and a big dome that had blown off onto the ground and stayed pretty much together on that ground, and there was that cross. And so I guess it was made out of concrete, I don't know. Yeah, it was made out of concrete, had to have been. That survived, and that was just, oh, 150 feet from ground zero, a great big hole or tub in the middle of the ground. The bomb exploded, I'm told, about 1900 feet from the ground. Still made that kind of an impression in the ground. I walked around it and then further on out. Nobody was around there. Once in awhile, we see a Japanese person, but they look sick and tired and unsmiling, unlike Tokyo where they all smile at us. They open up that big row of teeth and smile brightly and we'd smile back. They didn't smile. It was just kind of a sad sight.

Interviewer: What was your feelings on the bomb? Did you feel it was necessary?

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, when we found out about the bomb, and even our commanding officer knew nothing about the bomb coming, everybody cheered. And I'll tell ya why. It did a terribly lot of damage, but it saved our lives because we couldn't have gone much longer. I did see, I was team yeoman, that was the guy that did the paperwork for the team. And I'd see these communications come in, and I saw a communication about Nagasaki, I

thought that was going to be an invasion thing, it wasn't. But also about a place called Sendai, S-e-n-d-a-i above Tokyo. We then later did a reconnaissance at Sendai to see what was there, and so we would have been invading that island then. There would have been millions of people killed, millions of Japanese and our guys. I think that bomb saved a lot of lives, sadly so.

Interviewer: Sendai, did you do recon after the war was over?

Neil K. Holbrook: After, after the signing of the surrender.

Interviewer: And you got to see the defenses?

Neil K. Holbrook: Mm-hmm, everything that they had ready there.

Interviewer: And did they have a lot ready?

Neil K. Holbrook: They had a lot of those tetrahedrons in the water, man-made. It would have been -- it was an excellent island to go in on because you could get in and get into shore, and establish yourself before you really had to do much fighting. But, they would have made that nearly impossible with these tetrahedrons. We couldn't have blown up that many. It would have been a bad battle. And on inland, see, to the bigger cities there, a lot of people would have been killed. We wouldn't go into Tokyo directly, by the way. We were to come up to the northern part of Japan and down into Tokyo, the way they had it put together then.

Interviewer: You were a yeoman; tell us about your secret diary.

Neil K. Holbrook: Now, we weren't supposed to keep diaries, as you can probably understand. But being the team yeoman, keeping track of the records and sort of things, I would -- we'd bury a lot of our dead at sea. We had to make a detailed record of everything that happened to everybody, including those that were buried at sea. And I would go to great efforts on that. I would see the communications coming in, and I never told anybody

about some of these other things. I just mentioned to you Sendai and Nagasaki. I always thought those were going to be invasion points. I would see the commands that would come to our ship's commander. Now we, our commander, we were just passengers on that APD, they called it. That's a converted destroyer, and an old-fashioned one at that. But they made it sort of a troop ship for bringing troops fast across the water. And I would see those various communications to the ship's commander and to our commander. And I got a fair sense of where the war was going.

Interviewer: Tell us about your diary and why you weren't supposed to keep it?

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, of course they censored all of our mail, no matter what we did. So if we would send letters home and they just cut out with scissors all of those places in the mail that might have revealed information. And we weren't to keep diaries, but I kept the troop's records, the team's records. And, I had instructions on throwing them over board, you know, if we needed to do it. And I put my diary with those things and kept them hidden. And nobody found my diary. And it hasn't been until last, let's see, Thanksgiving that I got out and looked at that diary since the war. I never read it in all those years. But I had a diary which was about, oh, about 75 pages, type written. Right at the time of the event or near it, so it was pretty accurate. And it told what was happening. Now, I was a young kid and in my own eyes, I was seeing a different war from probably what you see and others see. A very young kid, and impressionable. It did get to me because I went home to be discharged, came back to the United States, and as everybody was going home, suddenly I started having battle dreams. It got inside. And I was having these dreams of the Japanese, dead Japanese, all of them walking towards me, slowly all the time. All the time. Never slowing down, never stopping. Reaching

out, not quite touching. And I'd wake up yelling. And my rascals, they turned me in and I went to a sick bay and they took me to a place in San Diego, the Balboa Hospital, which was the funny farm. And I was given to some shrinks, I shouldn't say that word. The care of these psychologists. And they gave me all this insulin, and shock treatments, and other things. Truth serum, and they made me worse. So I did my own treatment. I won't tell you about it now, but I did my own treatment.

Interviewer: So, this diary, you were not supposed to keep?

Neil K. Holbrook: No, no there was an absolute real against it. And one time, the commanding officer came in and he saw that I had a paper and a typewriter, and he looked down and said, "What's this?" And I sort of hum-hawed and so on and said, "Oh, it's nothing." Pulled it out and tore it up and threw it in the waste basket. Then re-wrote it after he left.

Interviewer: So, if this diary had fallen into enemy hands, it could have done -- I'm not trying to.

Neil K. Holbrook: You're getting my conscience. Yeah, it was not supposed to be. They definitely forbade it, and I kept it anyway.

Interviewer: What, tell me about, what is an underwater recovery stroke? I kept reading this term.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, we just do under water strokes so that you don't show above the water. You're not swimming like this, you're doing this, or a side stroke, or even a back stroke sometimes, if you want to turn it into something different. But you only did underwater recovery because you don't -- recovery's not a good word because that seems like

you're recovering from something. But still, we'd doing underwater strokes so that we weren't identifiable.

Interviewer: Um, let's see. Tell us about Jud. Your friend, Jud.

Neil K. Holbrook: Oh, well Jud was the only other frog man from Utah. Now, I heard the other day about a fellow, who said he was a frog man from Utah. He wasn't. Jud was. And I think Jud lives here in Salt Lake City out somewhere in the southern part of the valley. His name is -- now, Jud is his nickname. He objects to that, I found out later. But he's the one that gave me the nickname, Jud. His name is Jonas -- J-o-n-a-s E-r-e-k-s-o-n. And I think he's still alive.

Interviewer: Jonas Erikson?

Neil K. Holbrook: Jonas Erikson. Now, he was in team, and a good guy. Very, very -- their team didn't get quite much action. Now, if you're trying to do the teams in terms of team 7, he was a team 16. That doesn't mean anything because, in terms of their longevity or their time. Because whether we were at Hawaii, all of us were together. They just assigned us a team and you could have been the first man in, and you were in team whatever. And I think 16 were the total teams. A lot of teams did not see as much action. I'm not sure Jud did. The last time I saw Jud was, he was swimming out to sea, I think in training. And after about half a mile out, in the Hawaiian Islands, he swam into a -- let's see. Man of war.

Interviewer: Jellyfish?

Neil K. Holbrook: Jellyfish. Portuguese man of war, they called them. And, they were jellyfish with big tentacles coming down, and they would go maybe 50 feet down. They were long, some of them. The big ones. And if you weren't watching where you were going, you'd swim into that ray of tentacles just dangling. And they had a poison in them. And

that poison, it could kill ya. It certainly did paralyze. And if it was severe enough, they would take them, and if they had available, an iron lung, which in those days they used for the people with infantile paralysis. And they would put them in an iron lung to help them breathe. Jud ran into one of those, and they took him away real fast. And I never knew what happened to him till I got back to Utah, and then, 60 years past and he came four years ago to my wife's funeral.

Interviewer: So, it was nice to have a fellow from Utah there.

Neil K. Holbrook: I was very comfortable with him. We had a lot of fun doing things together, and we could confide in each other, and we did a lot of swimming together and working out and things we were required to do, but we did it together. So I liked it and we could chum around.

Interviewer: What's it like to be an LDS boy in the US Navy in World War II around a bunch of warriors who may not see the next day?

Neil K. Holbrook: Yeah, it was different. I can tell you, honestly, I wasn't really afraid of getting killed. I didn't want to, and I avoided it where ever I could, but I knew I had a job to do. And I think the non-LDS guys felt a lot the same. We were very much the same. And, but you had to be an example. Now, those guys, they wanted to get me to smoke and to drink and do the tea/coffee thing, and I didn't. And I worried about it because I needed camaraderie; I needed them watching my back. And I didn't want to, you know, disturb their feelings. But, I hung in and it got to be a joke, so we could all laugh about it. And they still do.

Interviewer: Now, after a mission, they'd give you a rum ration? Tell us about that.

Neil K. Holbrook: Yeah, we got little bottles like that of I guess rum and also alcohol of some kind, I don't know what it was. It was alcohol, and that was a big deal. Well, I

accumulated mine, and I'd trade them off for favors. And it worked real well. They were glad to get it, and I was glad to get what they had.

Interviewer: Tell me one more time about, because we, my phone went off. Tell us about Massachusetts and going down in that diving suit.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well see, that was at Chesapeake Bay. And yeah, we would put on a full rig of canvass diving suit with a metal helmet. Sometimes, that was called a full rig. Sometimes we would wear what was called a Jack Berg, which was just this much, and nothing on the body. And, but they'd pump the air down to us, and so it had an incoming air and outgoing air tube. And we'd wear one of those two rigs. And going down in the water at 10:00 at night, and it was pitch dark, and muddy on the bottom, and sea weed coming up around you. And you could feel it, it was weird. Eerie feeling. And I have a good imagination. And I figured I was going to get pronged and taken by a swordfish for shish kabobs or something, you know? None of that happened, but you could visualize it.

Interviewer: And this was to test your courage?

Neil K. Holbrook: Your courage, that's all it was for. It wasn't to learn anything, because we didn't use that type of a diving rig in the actual war. That was only just to see whether we could handle it or not. That's what Commander Coffin was looking for, and listen, anything to get out of that potato locker.

Interviewer: Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Well, I'm confused how he broke his leg. Could he --

Interviewer: Walk us; tell us about getting your leg broken, because people don't understand.

Elizabeth: And the fighting mat.

Interviewer: And the fighting mat and all that, what that was a test for and why they did that and tell us about -- describe the scene for us.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, that mat was a big mat, and I'd say it's about probably 14 by 14, 15, maybe 16 by 16 square.

Interviewer: And how many men were on the mat?

Neil K. Holbrook: 12, always 12. They'd put 12 ob.

Interviewer: And you were to do what? Square off?

Neil K. Holbrook: And the idea was, they could throw a guy off the mat, they could make him surrender and say uncle, whatever it took. Several of them did get their legs broken. That seemed to be the theme for some, because when I went to the hospital, when I hobbled in, they said, "Are you one of those demolition guys?" And I said, "Yeah." And they put me in with a bunch of other guys who also had their legs broken. But I was fighting. There were three of us left, and I was fighting this one guy, and they both said, "Let's get him." And they got a hold of my leg, and one held it and the other one broke it. And I walked myself off the mat and over to the hospital with that darn broken leg, and it was a compound fracture.

Elizabeth: Why didn't they eliminate him?

Interviewer: That's a good question. Why didn't they eliminate you?

Neil K. Holbrook: I have the same question. I don't know what happened, but they sent me home for my final part of my recovery, laying in the thing with the cast on and then traction. And when I got back, they told me to go to Fort Pierce, Florida. So, I don't know the answer to that question. But I was happy it turned out that way.

Interviewer: Maybe they saw something in you.

Neil K. Holbrook: I don't know, well, I'd like to think that, but I don't know.

Elizabeth: How long, I'm interested. I need you to explain that you didn't know how to swim, when did they first throw you in the water? If you didn't know how to swim -- (inaudible).

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, I knew how to swim; I didn't mean to say that. But I wasn't a swimmer, a big-time swimmer. As it turned out in the war, I became a very proficient swimmer. But before, I was just the same as anybody else that got in the swimming pool and swam. I was sturdy, and I could do well in the water, but I really wasn't a swimmer before I got into the Frogmen. They taught me to swim. I can swim, but not like they teach you.

Interviewer: So, did you learn in a pool here in Salt Lake?

Neil K. Holbrook: Yeah, up in a pool at Ensign School in Salt Lake City on the avenues, and they had a pool at that school. So I'd go swimming there on the summer like everybody else, but I wasn't a proficient swimmer. I didn't think I was. And but, I wanted to swim and swim well because I wanted to stay with the team. So I worked hard in the training, and I became a good swimmer. It was nothing at all -- I used to think that if our boat went down in the middle of the ocean, I could swim to Hawaii if I could navigate. I had no compunction about getting in the water and swimming north, east, south, or west in the middle of the ocean. And we did shut down often in the middle of the ocean because of some problem with the ship, and we'd dive off the ship and going swimming in the middle of the ocean, and it was no different from swimming anywhere else, you know? I had confidence that I could just keep swimming. I could sleep in the water, in the salt water. If you'll lay back on your back, and the salt water is significantly buoyant, it will keep part of your face out and you could go to sleep. I learned how to do that. So you could sleep, and then you could swim. And you could sleep, and then you could swim. The only thing is, you couldn't eat.

Elizabeth: How long did you have to, and could you stay under water?

Interviewer: That was my next question.

Neil K. Holbrook: Maximum, almost three minutes. We would train a lot of training to do that, and they'd time us. And we'd get some smack points the longer we'd stay under water.

Interviewer: So, would you go down and grab something and hold yourself down?

Neil K. Holbrook: Now, usually be at a fixed facility or off a boat. There would be a large group around there timing it. We trained what today they called water boarding. We did that, actually. Now water boarding is very simple. It's just, what they do is put something across your mouth so you can't breathe through your mouth, and then they put a lot of water around your nose, and it makes you feel like you're going to drown. Now, when a person, they panic in water, they first thing they do is take a big gulp and that's drowning. They have officially drowned; they filled their lungs full of air. We were taught never to take that breath, if we could help it. So, the reason they taught us this water boarding things was so that there was just a little bit of air in the nasal system, and you could get maybe three or four more seconds of time by closing your mouth and breathing in bubbles, and you'd get some air in your lungs. And I used that, many times for that little extra time I needed to get to the surface to get my gulp of air, because if I took that gulp of air first, I'm dead. When you get that water in your lungs, it's over. It's really over. And, you're buoyancy is gone because now you've got that little air bubble in your lungs that you once had is full of water. So, you very, very slowly sink down. And I seen the guys do it. The arms are just out like this, and they just -- they sink maybe four, five inches a minute or something like that. Very slowly. So, we were taught to get the last bit

we could out of us. And that tendency to take that gulp of air is overwhelming. You almost don't have the ability to resist it, and they tried to teach us how to do it, and I think we used it. I did, and I got that little bit of extra air I needed to get up to the surface. It worked.

Interviewer: Tell us about the time you were -- one of the times you were wounded. What happened?

Neil K. Holbrook: Um, let's see. I'll take the first time. And I, I was taken to sick bay, and from there transferred to the hospital ship. And a bullet went through my leg here and out the other side, the back side. And where the bullet comes out makes the biggest indentation in your skin, where it goes in that much because it tears the flesh open. I think that's the case always. They had to treat me from behind my leg where I couldn't see me, because I couldn't see that part of my body in the hospital ship. But, I was there only about a day and I came right back to my ship, and then, I recovered --

Interviewer: Tell us about when you were wounded, how that happened.

Neil K. Holbrook: It was a Jap up in a tree, and I was just coming into the shore, almost to the sand, and pulling myself along the coral, and I saw him, and he had been shooting at me, and I saw his splashes of his bullets around me, so I knew I had to get out of the way. But I didn't have enough deep water, so I turned to go back out where I could get a little bit deeper water, and that's when he shot me. And, the bullet went through my leg. I saw the blood in the water, and I kept going out because I didn't know how badly I was wounded, and at that point, I decided I better swim out to sea because there was a lot of blood. That part of your leg is a vein there that can let a lot of water out. A vein or an artery or something. Let a lot of blood out. A lot of blood. So I figured I better get back out to sea and in a ship somewhere. I did that.

Interviewer: And you were wounded again after that?

Neil K. Holbrook: Shrapnel wounded my back. And, yeah. I got quite a bit of shrapnel. And after the war, I still had shrapnel in me. And one time, I was back in Alabama, in Birmingham, Alabama. And I suddenly went paralyzed. And the doctor X-rayed me and he found that shrapnel. It went away, I guess it dissolved and went out of my system.

Interviewer: So, you also write something very interesting about myths about sharks and under water things. Tell us about -- because you have blood, you know, you're wounded. Tell us what you knew about sharks and underwater --

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, I'm not a professional on sharks. A lot of people are, but I'm not. But they taught us some professionals, and sharks have an uncanny ability to smell blood from a great distance away. I don't know how they do it, but they can smell blood in water from some distance. And I saw a lot of sharks, big sharks, some of them. And a lot of little ones, too. But, you know what I found out? I don't know whether this works with everybody or not. But if I kept my eye on that shark, they tend to go in a circle around you when they have some prey, and they swim in a circle. And when he'd swim around me, I would tread and go around and watch him every minute. If I turned back around all the way to catch him again, he'd shorten the circle. They somehow sensed that we were seen, and they never would do anything, shorten as circle if you were looking at them. And I understand their vision is not that great, they do a lot by smell, but if you looked at that shark, he didn't decrease the circle. I was never attacked by sharks, others were. And it wasn't severe.

Interviewer: And tell us about your instructors. Do you remember anything about your instructors who taught you all this?

Neil K. Holbrook: I don't remember a lot about the instructors.

Interviewer: Were they on your side? Were they trying to help you?

Neil K. Holbrook: I think they were learning, like we were learning. I don't like to say that, but how many people do you have in 1942 or 43 who knew something about that, that could become instructors? I don't know where they got them, but I think they were learning about like us. Now, they did bring in professionals. They brought in professionals about sharks, and they taught us. But I, like a college professor. But they weren't -- they didn't; they weren't members of our organization at all.

Interviewer: You had an interesting story about how the Navy you were on an island, were bivouacked, and they gave you a pretty rough, an unpleasant place, and you made refrigerators -- tell us, they kind of, they didn't treat you well. They had kind of a feeling against you.

Neil K. Holbrook: There was a feeling, and our guys had a chip on their shoulder. They were warriors, they were fighters. They could handle everything with their two fists, and they did sometimes. So, they didn't make a lot of friends. And so, they would exclude us from meal time from the lines and we had to go around about or do something different. And they serve the first food, the first guy got the meat and the last guy just got potatoes in the mess line. Out on an island, not in a building, just in an open space. They didn't, and you know, I sometimes thought they were jealous of us. I wasn't sure. But they didn't treat us right, and they didn't treat our officers right. They didn't get a fair shake in the officers' quarters and living standards and things like that, which they objected to. But we managed our own things. Our guys would, I don't like to say it. They'd steal food and facilities and events and circumstances and we managed to get in through all the side doors. We couldn't refrigerate our food, and one of the guys came up with the idea of digging a hole deep in the sand under our tent. So we dug into the sand, about, oh, maybe almost six feet. And we had a good refrigerator. It was almost

the temperature of the refrigerator at home. And we kept that, and so we would store refrigerator-able food down in there, and also hide it from other people.

Interviewer: Plus, you had a cool spot on this horrible, tropical island.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, it wasn't a cool -- the sand we made cool. But we weren't cool.

Interviewer: But you had a place, a way to beat the heat.

Neil K. Holbrook: In the tent, that's where it was. We didn't really beat the ambient temperature, we got into the soil, and that gave us coolness. And the officers eventually took over our tent because we had that refrigeration in there, and there was a little bit of refrigeration coming out of the ground. Maybe five degrees cooler than outside, the ambient temperature outside.

Interviewer: One more thing. In your diary, you talk a lot about being on ship, and sleeping out in the open because of the conditions down inside the ship. You preferred to sleep on the deck.

Neil K. Holbrook: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Neil K. Holbrook: I title my diary when I first wrote it, "A Swimmer Sleeps Top Side." And we always were passengers on a ship going from invasion to invasion, and we would be in very crowded troop quarters, so invariably, I slept on either the forecastle or the fantail, mostly the fantail. And I could do that on a little cot that I would purloin from somewhere and keep and hide, and I slept top side every night because it was clearer and clean. Once in awhile, I'd swing my hammock between the boat davits. Boat davits are the things that come out the side of a ship and go like that, and then they let the boats down into the water on

those davits. Uh, I would swing my hammock out there on the davits. And one night, I was in the hammock, and something hit me in the rear. Well, it was heavy seas, and the boat tipped sideways, and I was dipped in the water. And you know, I've often thought I could have come right out of that hammock. I didn't, but I didn't swing it between the davits anymore. I slept on the -- right on the fantail in a cot.

Interviewer: Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Oh, I can't resist. Tell us about MacArthur and what and you friends thought of MacArthur, and you can go right into Kennedy after that, if you'd like.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Neil K. Holbrook: Nothing wrong with Kennedy.

Elizabeth: Just curious.

Interviewer: MacArthur, that brings on an interesting question. You talk about MacArthur what you know, what you feel about him, but tell us about the captain of the ship that you didn't like very much. You were on a ship and there was a captain that kept doing all these wrong things.

Neil K. Holbrook: Yeah, we had gone across the equator at that time for about the third time. And when you go across the equator, they make you what's called a shell back, and they blind fold you and they put liver in your mouth or this or that, and it just makes it -- you gotta pass. And our team didn't think that was too fun. Now remember, we're passengers on the ship. And I told you, they were pretty two-fisted guys. Well, they just took over the ship, including the captain's thing where he drove it from, up in the super structure. They took it over, just totally over. And so, we had control of the ship. And the ship's company, the people who belonged to that ship, weren't too happy about it. Neither was the captain. Well,

our captain, our guy, had to go up there and get on the loud speaker and tell us, "C'mon, knock it off guys. And we'll all meet on the forecastle of the ship." We did, the captain never forgot it. So, we had some captains of ships that did funny things. For example, one time, we were being re-fueled at sea, and they would shoot a big gun with a rope that would go over onto on next ship, that was an oil ship, a tanker. And then they would pull these re-fueling lines on that own over to the ship and connect it up and pump fuel onto our fuel system on our ship. Well, the captain kept coming over and almost crashed into the next ship. And the captain of the other ship said, "Stale off, stale off." And he would yell at him on the loud speaker, and pretty soon, he'd in again and out again and in again and way far out, and he broke the lines. Oil all over the water. We had a few captains that weren't too sharp. And, we didn't hesitate to let them know. They weren't used to that. Our guys were just a little bit, I don't know. A little bit out of line.

Interviewer: So, tell us about, when we first brought up the name MacArthur, you had a reaction to the name. Tell us why.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, because when MacArthur, see, the real war was done by Admiral Nimitz. It was an admiral, not a land guy. The troops, the Army, I guess you call it. But MacArthur was in charge. When he was driven out of the Philippines, he made the statement, "I shall return." Now from time to time we'd see him. When you see a guy in the war, he doesn't usually go with a corn cob pipe. That was out of place. He lived with that corn cob pipe, where ever he went. He also, if you see pictures of him, you'd see his hat pulled down over here in a war type thing. He probably, you know, punished one of his soldiers for wearing his hat that way. It wasn't the proper attire. But he always put on that hat inside out or outside out like he was a warrior. When he went in, he said to the Philippines when he was chased out of there, "I shall return," and that was made famous by the writers. Okay, comes time for him to

return. We go in, we secure the island, we get it going. The Marines go further deeper into the island half a mile or so, now he comes ashore. And he brings his own cameramen. And we take him into shore in an LCM, that's Landing Craft Machinery, and it's got a great big wide ramp about, oh, 12 foot wide that goes down and you can walk right on to the sand. You don't get wet. We take him in, and now he's going to make his official landing. First he did it in the LCPR, small, small ramp. That didn't work because he had men with him. Then, he did it again in the LCPR, this time he said, "Stop the LCPR back from the sand so that we can get the picture." And so he could go in with water up to here with his corn cob pipe and the hat turned down. That wasn't the war we were in, and he got his publicity pictures.

Interviewer: So you actually saw him?

Neil K. Holbrook: We saw him; we had to prepare for him to come in. You know, and we were -- we saw this, too, up in Tokyo when they signed the deceleration, the surrender. Huh, see, when they signed that surrender, they then pulled only one battle ship into Tokyo Harbor, kept the others out at sea in case there was trouble. And the, and the aircraft carriers and the, they named them after the cruisers. And, so, they were staying out there and they had that big battle ship. Well, from our little ship, the battle ship is very high in the water. From our little ship, we had to climb half way up to the mast to see what was going on that deck. Now, they had some of our group take -- he came in on a captain's gig. Prior to his coming to the Battleship Missouri, all of those Japanese signers, Hirihito and Tojo and some of those, I think there were about five of them were wearing tuxedos and stove top hats, all of them. And, they were to sign on behalf of Japan, and there were maybe five of them altogether. And then we had our guys. Now the war, since it was in the water, it was managed mostly by Admiral Nimitz of the Navy. Admiral Nimitz, the Japanese came aboard first and they went to this table

that was just a make shift table set there on the Battleship Missouri, we could see this barely by poking our heads up on our mast and looking. And our LCPR was told to go and sit at the bottom of the, it was stops that would hang over the side of the thing, and he would walk up steps with ropes and things to guide up the steps. After all the guys were seated at the table, and over here were the five Japanese guys, and over here was first Admiral Nimitz, and then Admiral Turner, and then Admiral McCain. Admiral McCain is the father of the current man who is running for president, and they were all in place. Now, MacArthur comes. Now, he, you know, he'd flown all the airplanes into the Tokyo Airport and done all of that and took over the Grand Hotel and kicked all the Japanese out and had his guys come in, all this was done first. And really, the terms of the agreement must have been discussed first, because everybody signed so readily and quickly. They knew what they were doing. And, he is piped aboard, piped aboard means they blow the whistle and the certain tune to it for the bigwigs coming aboard. He was piped aboard, the others weren't. He came aboard, and he came and sat right in the middle of all this group, and it didn't take 15 minutes, they all signed it. And he was piped off. Got in his gig, we had an LCM and an LCPR down at the bottom in case something happened, ready to go and take him away out to sea, actually, where the big battleships were, nothing happened, it went off like clockwork. But he was the big cheese, and he called it, "My war." I don't know, I never saw him once during the war except at the Philippines where he committed, "I shall return." Always had that corn cob pipe, which was out of place in a fighting group. And that hat turned down. Pompous.

Interviewer: I have a question that you didn't write about. Tell us about coming home.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, we --

Interviewer: Tell us about something home to Salt Lake.

Neil K. Holbrook: That was, of course, the big event. We were all taken to San Diego, California. And then, everybody left immediately upon arriving in California, they mustered us out, and they gave us, I think it was 200 or 300 dollars in cash, and we went home. I had been having the battle dreams; I think I mentioned them to you. And I was taken over to the darn hospital. That was the last thing in the world I wanted, I wanted to get home. And that's when they started giving me the shock treatments and the insulin, I don't know why insulin in those days, but they give you huge quantities of insulin. And some sleeping medicine and some truth serum, and then after we come back to consciousness again, they would have us drink these terrific glasses of orange juice just loaded with sugar, which was great. And, I guess to make up for that insulin. And it didn't do any good.

Interviewer: So, did you come home by train, or how did you come home?

Neil K. Holbrook: I hitchhiked.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Neil K. Holbrook: Uh-huh, I wanted to save my 200 dollars. So I hitch-hiked from San Diego to Salt Lake City. But I was mustered out in San Diego.

Interviewer: What was it like to hitch-hike all that way?

Neil K. Holbrook: They were always nice to you. They always took care of the servicemen, I never waited more than five minutes for a ride, and I came right straight to Salt Lake.

Interviewer: What did you think seeing the desert and the mountains?

Neil K. Holbrook: It was beautiful, and when I got in to Salt Lake Valley, and I looked around and saw the mountains, I was the happiest guy in the world. I thought I had

everything. I had my own room at home. I had my quiet, I could sleep in, it was -- it was heaven.

Interviewer: Where was your house?

Neil K. Holbrook: 7th Avenue in Salt Lake City. 7th Avenue between "F" and "G" street.

Interviewer: What was the exact address?

Neil K. Holbrook: 483 7th Avenue.

Interviewer: And tell us about why.

Neil K. Holbrook: Um, ordinary home, average, pretty much. Still there. I think we paid, if I remember right, something like 30,000 dollars. I went up there recently, and it was for sale for 430,000 dollars.

Interviewer: Tell us about walking up those steps when you came home.

Neil K. Holbrook: Oh, I don't remember. They came and got me or something, I forgotten. I came home with the family in the car. I think I called them when I got into Salt Lake, and they came and got me.

Interviewer: What was their reaction? Were they expecting you?

Neil K. Holbrook: It was a big deal, everything. The family, my mother had five boys in the service, all boys. And you put a star in your window those days, I don't know if you remember, but they'd put a star in every window. And she had five stars, and two of those boys were wounded, well anyway. She held up pretty well. And she was glad to see me, and all the other boys had been mustered out by then, so it was quite a reunion for the whole family.

Interviewer: So, you became an attorney?

Neil K. Holbrook: Yes, I became an attorney.

Interviewer: Where did you go to school? Did you go to the U of U or what?

Neil K. Holbrook: No, I went to three different law schools because I needed, I wanted some special courses. But I went to Boalt Hall in San Francisco, to the University of San Francisco, and the University of San Diego. My father, I told you, we had a farm out of town in Salt Lake City, out by Redwood Road. And dad was a dairy farmer. Now, I didn't think we were always getting the right price for our milk. It was unfair. They'd tell us the price we would pay, and it didn't work in a free market. I wanted to see that my family, my father, got more money for his milk. So, I decided I would specialize in antitrust law. They don't have it much today. That's the segment of law that deals with fair trade practices, predatory pricing, that kind of thing. And I wanted to see that the pricing was fair for all the dairy farmers, so that's why I went and I got a doctorate in antitrust law. And I'm glad I did it, I enjoyed it. It's good law, it's clean law. It deals with clean dealings in the marketplace.

Interviewer: Yeah, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: I want him to describe the feelings or reflections on the whole war effort.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Neil K. Holbrook: I didn't hear that.

Interviewer: Tell us about, you look back on these years. Tell us about what you think about it, what you feel about it, what America's role was and is in the world. Tell us about World War II, your feelings about it now.

Neil K. Holbrook: Well, you know, I have a feeling that almost all the guys felt the same. You know, we'd rib each other and talk once in awhile. And I really think the whole theme was, if we didn't fight this war, and they won, we would be speaking Japanese

today. It's just about a given. An unfortunate situation, but it was there, and we had to deal with what was handed to us. And I think their whole idea was to finish it up and win it and get home. We knew, as we went island by island and won those islands, that we were eventually going to win. But would we survive to the final thing? And what if we invaded the main land of Japan? That was the big thing that worried all of us, it never happened because of the bomb. But there would have been millions of Japanese killed, and maybe a million or so Americans killed, I don't know, but all had that camaraderie in the singleness of, "We gotta win this war as fast as we can so we can get home." We didn't question about winning, it was when we would win.

Interviewer: So, your feelings about the war looking back now, all these years?

Neil K. Holbrook: I wish it had never happened. I would -- I'd, war isn't good. It just shouldn't happen. And I don't want to know into any of these personal philosophies, but I don't like war. It's a terrible thing.

Elizabeth: How did you feel about the Japanese?

Interviewer: Yeah. How did you feel about the Japanese as an enemy at the time?

Neil K. Holbrook: I have to tell you something, very interesting. Before we were drafted into the service, before we -- they revoked my -- we were drafted. And, before we went off to San Francisco, to Treasure Island where I went, and other guys with me, my neighbors and friends. Heber J. Grant called us together, his grandson, Grant Madsen, his brother was Truman Madsen. His brother was killed in the war. But he was my close friend. We were very, very close. And, a fellow named Roy Stevens. If you know Stevens-Henager College, Roy Stevens was the Stevens of that college part. And, myself and I think Paul Smith

one of his other grandsons. And he said to us, "You know, I know what you have to do. And you should do it the best you can. But don't hate. Just don't hate them. And they don't hate you, and you've got to understand that." Well, I didn't think that was that important, but I did remember it. I remember, in the war, and I was down just coming out of the surf onto the sand, and there was a Japanese fellow up in the palm tree. And he was shooting at me with his rifle. Very poorly. And, I was thinking, "He doesn't want to hit me, and he doesn't hate me." Well, he really did want to hit me. But I went through that war with that kind of naïve attitude of I don't hate them, and they don't hate me. I never once could say I hated the Japanese. I don't think I ever hated them once. Just doing what they had to do. And I'm not so sure the other guys did. Now, we did have some who wanted to shoot prisoners and things like that, and we wouldn't let them do it. But, there were some that hated. There were a few. But, I don't think the guys for the most part ever hated for a moment. I sure didn't.

Interviewer: Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Anything that we should be asking him?

Unknown Person: You've actually done a pretty good job covering most of it.

Elizabeth: Okay.

Interviewer: All right. I think we're done.

Elizabeth: Is there anything we should be asking you we haven't?

Interviewer: Is there anything you want to tell us that we haven't covered, that you'd like to make sure that we get?

Neil K. Holbrook: Um, not really.

Interviewer: Okay, all right.

Neil K. Holbrook: You do a good job of interviewing, by the way.

Interviewer: Thank you. I just keep my mouth shut. Well anyway, you have your diary back to you now.

Neil K. Holbrook: Thank you I appreciate you doing that.

Interviewer: I know it's very sacred to you.

Neil K. Holbrook: It is.

Interviewer: So I haven't copied it, sure was tempted.

Neil K. Holbrook: I appreciate that a whole lot.

Interviewer: We are going to keep the photos a little while longer --

End of recording.