

## **Interview of Don E. Hammill**

Interviewer: Okay, tell us your full name.

Don Hammill: Don Hammill.

Interviewer: And where were you born, Don?

Don Hammill: Ogden, Utah.

Interviewer: And just, you don't have to answer short. We want you to answer relaxed and just fill in blanks so I don't, I'm not necessarily asking. Like, where were you born and what year and what high school.

Don Hammill: I was born in Ogden, Utah, February the 4th, 1923. I lived there till I was four years old, then I moved to Salt Lake City. I spent the rest of my time in Salt Lake and Murray.

Interviewer: And you went to Murray High? Where did you go to school?

Don Hammill: I went to Roosevelt High.

Interviewer: In Salt Lake City?

Don Hammill: And Roosevelt Junior High and West High.

Interviewer: When did you go into the Navy?

Don Hammill: I joined January 5th of 1942, one month after Pearl Harbor.

Interviewer: And where were you when Pearl Harbor -- tell us about, what you were doing on the day of Pearl Harbor?

Don Hammill: I was upstairs sleeping. My mother woke me up and said, "Come down and listen to the radio." That's when I knew that Pearl Harbor had been hit. I had friends already in the Navy. I wanted to join, but my father wouldn't let me. Once Pearl Harbor was attacked, he said, "That was okay." I was 18 at that time, one month later I turned 19, February 4th.

Interviewer: So, where did you go for your training?

Don Hammill: San Diego, California, the recruiting station there, the big base. We spent two weeks at base and then they took us over one week to Balboa. That was the third week or boot camp. We joined the other animals over there on Balboa.

Interviewer: Did you know what you were going to be when you were enlisted? Did you have anything you wanted to be and how'd that happen, that you became a sonar man?

Don Hammill: It just happened, I was just an apprentice seaman at boot camp. They made the assignments and I was assigned the USS Crosby. It was DD 164.

Interviewer: Now, tell us about the Crosby and DD 164 and what people may not know about that ship.

Don Hammill: Well, it was World War I four-stacker destroyer, a real tin can. It had been in "red lead row" in San Diego.

Interviewer: For how many years?

Don Hammill: Well, since after World War I. Many of those ships were given to Britain to escort convoys in the Atlantic, but the fleet of APD's in Pacific, there were 32 of us.

Interviewer: Hold on, tell us what an APD is and what its mission is and why it's different from other ships.

Don Hammill: Okay, I got a little ahead of myself here.

Interviewer: It's all right, relax. We have plenty of time.

Don Hammill: After the three weeks at boot camp, then I was assigned to sonar school for six weeks, and that was at the base. I'd go from there to the Crosby on anti-submarine patrol up and down the West Coast. We did that for a year, and the only encounter we had with a sub was, we were at anchor in San Diego Harbor and a Japanese sub surfaced near Santa Barbara, fired two shells into the beach at an oil tank farm -- didn't hit anything, I don't think they could shoot straight. So the admiral ordered us out to sea and we were to close off the southern end of the San Clemente Straits and other destroyers on the north end. Then we worked our way in, trying to capture that sub. Never had any contact. They may have gone down to the bottom or the side of the channel and hid from us. We weren't able to get them. In February of '43, they sent us to Mare Island Navy Yard, and that's whether we were converted to an APD. That's a fast-attack destroyer transport. They took out two boilers, so we were a two-stacker

Interviewer: Now, what's the mission of an APD. Does that stand for what -- APD?

Don Hammill: Well, several things: All Purpose Destroyer ,or Fast Attack Transport Destroyer. The mission was to haul Marines and soldiers, make landings with them, and we also were assigned picket duty around the fleet.

Interviewer: Now, didn't they give -- tell us about it, some of the modifications. Did they put extra landing craft on this or, guns? Tell us about that.

Don Hammill: Yes, after they took out the boilers and the torpedo tubes, they put davots on each side of the ship so we could carry four Higgins boats. Then they put extra guns on our ship, 20 millimeters, .50 calibers. Our main guns were three inch. So that was the conversion.

Interviewer: And you were expected to get out close to the enemy in this ship?

Don Hammill: We had to go really close. Depending on the coral and the bottom, we would get in as close as possible so the troops would not have to wade too far through the water. So we had to go in close and fight the shore batteries when we were in there, plus the guns on the island that are shooting at us.

Interviewer: So, all right. Tell us about your first, about going to the South Pacific in your first invasion, or your first combat.

Don Hammill: Okay, should I tell you about our trip?

Interviewer: Sure.

Don Hammill: We went out of San Francisco bay, headed west, to Pearl Harbor. That was our first refueling stop. We went from Pearl to Palmyra Island for refueling, and that's located a thousand miles southwest of Pearl. From there, we continued our trip west. We crossed the equator, and went through the initiation that all ships do, which was rugged. These initiations in high school and college are child's play with what we had to go through, but we became a shell-back after that. So after that initiation, we continued on to Samoa for refueling. From Samoa we went to Suva, Fiji. From Fiji to Noumea, New Caledonia, and from there to Espirito Santo to the base of operation.

Interviewer: This is what year, what month?

Don Hammill: That would be in about April/May of '43. While at Espirito, we trained with the Marine Raiders and they were commanded by James Roosevelt, the son of the President, Colonel Roosevelt. We trained and practiced landings with the Marines and soldiers and then we would make trips from Espirito to Guadalcanal to land more troops and we would load 50 gallon drums of aviation fuel on our deck for Henderson Field on Guadalcanal.

Interviewer: So, the Battle of Guadalcanal, tell us about that. It's raging at that time?

Don Hammill: No, it had been pretty much concluded, but the Japs were still coming back and attacking it, although we had secured it and Henderson Field was taken over by the Americans.

And

Interviewer: Were there still Naval battles going on around Guadalcanal?

Don Hammill: There sure were. When we took in those drums of gasoline fuel, it was in the day time. We would get as close as we could, about 100 yards from the shore, roll them off into the ocean, get them out, turn around, and high-tail it back to Espirito because at night, the Tokyo Express would come down from Rabaul. That was their big naval base, and we didn't want to be caught by the express, so we took off and went back. We made several trips that way.

Interviewer: What's the Tokyo Express, for people who have no idea what that is?

Don Hammill: Well, Rabaul Harbor was the big Japanese naval base between New Britain and New Ireland up in the Solomon chain. They would get together their battle ships and cruisers and destroyers every night and come down and take on the American fleet. They came down the slot, they called it, so we wanted to get back as quick as we could. The first part of June, we were assigned to the harbor at Tulagi. That was across the channel from Guadalcanal. On June

16th, went to general quarters, and 120 Japanese planes from Rabaul came down the slot. there were planes, American planes and New Zealand planes on Henderson Field and anti-aircraft guns. Out fleets came out from Tulagi and the Florida islands that were right close to Tulagi. Out of those 120 planes of the aircraft, the AA guns and our ships shot down 24 of them.

Interviewer: How many Japanese planes in the air?

Don Hammill: How many what?

Interviewer: How many Japanese planes and how many American planes in the air?

Don Hammill: Well, there were 120 Japanese planes. I don't know how many American planes in that battle, but we only lost 6 and we recovered two pilots.

Interviewer: Now, what was your job during that battle?

Don Hammill: My job at that bottle was to land my 20 millimeter as a gunner.

Interviewer: And tell us what it was like. Tell us about that day and tell us how busy you were.

Don Hammill: Well, we were extremely busy. The Japanese planes were just like a swarm of bees coming around, all the dog fights above us and we were firing in the air. I don't know how many planes our ship got in that battle, but we were firing steady with our 3 inch and our 20 millimeter. Some of our APDs had 40 millimeters. In addition to the six American planes that they shot down, the only other damage that I observed was they dropped a bomb on an LST that was on the beach at Guadalcanal. I kidded a Marine buddy of mine after the war, that LST was loaded with beer for the Marines, so they didn't do an awful lot of damage. We survived that one. That was the first real action we were involved in, and that was the time that I really knew we were in a war. Up to that time, at age 20, I was invincible. See, they couldn't get me and I

was a tough sailor, but after that battle, I finally realized this was serious. We went back into Tulagi to load troops and then we started our island-hopping from Tulagi on up to Vella Lavella and all those other islands in the Solomon chain, up the slot.

Interviewer: All right, I'm trying to get you to tell me. Describe for me what it's like to be a 20 millimeter gunner. Tell us about the noise and the confusion and tell us what you're doing and how you're doing it and everything you're trying to accomplish. Tell us -- make a movie for us with your words.

Don Hammill: All right, I was strapped in to the gunner in the 20 millimeter. On my left side, I had a fellow that had asbestos gloves on. His job was to take the barrel out when it got so hot, it would jam -- pull it out and put it in a thing with water. On the other side was my loader. He would put the magazine in the gun and so we were shooting steady all the time, it was only a split second while he'd take off one magazine, put on another. Each magazine held 60 cartridges, and it would shoot at a rate of 60 cartridges a minute. It's pure bedlam is what it is, a constant roar. I had ear phones on and I had an extra large helmet. So I didn't get all the blast in my ears because I was on the phone with the bridge.

Interviewer: And they were telling you where to fire?

Don Hammill: Well, they would report incoming bogeys, of course, we could see them coming, but they were controlling it from the bridge. I was firing mostly straight ahead and my big event was at Bougainville in the Solomon Chain. I'd operate radar and sonar on the regular watch, but at battle stations, I was a gunner on the 20 millimeter. So at Bougainville, we were landing Marines and New Zealand troops at general quarters, and the boats were on their way to the beach and two planes came in. One dropped a bomb on our starboard side. It exploded and

didn't do any damage. He missed the ship. It did take the hearing of Al Johnson, my friend. It took out his ear drum from the blast. He was in boat number 1 going ashore. One of the planes came in low and turned, it was about 20 feet off of the water coming directly at me. So I had a good shot. I could just look through the scope and fire at him as he came in. And, uh, I emptied the whole magazine right in his nose and a split second before he was to hit the bridge, he veered off and splashed into the ocean.

Interviewer: And--

Crew: Hold on one second. Okay, when you're ready.

Interviewer: Okay, here we go.

Don Hammill: So, the shoot down at Bougainville, I had an eyewitness to that. The signalman, Al Johnson, was in boat 1. When the bomb dropped, then he turned around. He saw me shooting, so he gave me an affidavit to prove that I shot that plane down.

Interviewer: What it's like -- do you feel the heat? Do you feel the explosion? Tell us what it's like.

Don Hammill: Well, there's a terrific shaking. Because I had the ear phones on, it wasn't too loud but. With all the guns firing and all the planes coming in, it's just pure bedlam is what it is - - blasting all over.

Interviewer: So, tell us about -- you did how many amphibious landings?

Don Hammill: We made 25.

Interviewer: And what are some of the more memorable ones, the more hairy ones?

Don Hammill: Well, I'll tell you about the one at Cape Gloucester. That was at one end of New Britain Island, that was one of the big battles.

Interviewer: Explain to us what was going on that day.

Don Hammill: MacArthur and Nimitz had decided to perform a cart wheel. Instead of attacking directly on Rabaul, they were going to take the islands and cut off the supply lines because the Japanese had 100,000 troops at Rabaul, and also a tremendous, big fleet. That's where they kept sending the express down the slot from Rabaul. Well, shortly before Christmas, we, in '43, started landing on some of the other areas down from Rabaul. The big battle occurred at Cape Gloucester the day after Christmas. On the morning of December 26th, we had a tremendous fleet there and the battleships opened fire with the bombardment just after 06:00, and the then cruisers were firing with their eight inch guns and their 40 millimeters. The destroyers were firing their five inch guns and their 40 millimeters. I can only describe it as if you're caught in the middle of a tremendous lightning and thunder storm, there's just absolutely blasts going on *everywhere* for almost three hours of bombardment. The island was lava rock, like so many of them were, and they were trying to get the Japanese out of those caves, so they kept firing directly into these, above the beach, into the mountain side. After the battle ships, cruisers and destroyers bombarded, then we would move in, fired our guns, and moved as close as we could to land the troops. They had plenty of resistance while they were landing and we talked to some Marines afterward. They said, when they got ashore, the Japs were running out of those caves bleeding from their eyes and their nose and their mouth and just screaming. They were blasting those caves and come running out and so the casualties were higher, but it had to be just like a terrible thunder and lightning storm going on for three hours. Fortunately, I had my ear phones on again.

Interviewer: So, what was the mission that day?

Don Hammill: It was to take Rabaul because then we could move from Cape Gloucester up and take on those 100,000 Japs that were there and neutralize that base at Rabaul.

Interviewer: So, what was the Crosby's mission in particular?

Don Hammill: We were landing troops at Cape Gloucester. Another side note on this Rabaul Harbor was between New Britain and New Ireland -- opened at both ends. So, 31 Arleigh Burke was with us.

Interviewer: Who is that?

Don Hammill: Arleigh Burke was a very famous commander in the South Pacific. In fact, they named 62 ships after him. All of our new destroyers are Arleigh Burke class. He would take his squadron and just go on little missions on his own. One day, he decided to, in broad day light, take his squadron in one end of Rabaul Harbor and out the other, firing both sides at the Japanese ships that were either at the docks or anchored, blasting those ships as he sailed through it at 35 knots. Suffered no casualties, no damage to the American ships, but just really took care of a lot of Jap ships at the base.

Interviewer: So you were in on this? You were a part of this?

Don Hammill: We weren't there at that time. This was one of his own little trips that he would make. Halsey and Nimitz didn't care for his *ad libbing* like that, but he didn't care. He was a legend in the Pacific.

Interviewer: Tell us about the Green Dragons and what the Green Dragons were and why they call you the Green Dragons.

Don Hammill: Well, we had the camouflage of brown and green.

Interviewer: Tell us what the Green Dragons are, first of all.

Don Hammill: We became the Green Dragons because the Marines named us that. We had a real bond with the Marines, and they said, "You're the Green Dragons." We hauled so many Marines and many soldiers, but the Marines called us the "Green Dragons" and that's the name that stuck.

Interviewer: Why?

Don Hammill: Because of the camouflage.

Interviewer: Remember, we don't know anything about that. So tell us about all that.

Don Hammill: Well, it was, because of the camouflage and because we were taking the Marines in so close and picking up casualties, they figured we were Green Dragons.

Interviewer: What I'm trying to get at is, what made your ships look so different from other ships? Why were you painted green and tell us what it looked like?

Don Hammill: Well, the islands were jungle, and they were green, so the camouflage was to help hide us a little bit as we got in close to the island.

Interviewer: So the Navy painted the ships?

Don Hammill: Yes, uh huh.

Interviewer: So, again, tell us--

Don Hammill: All painted with the camouflage, and then the Marines said, "You're the green dragons" and that's the name we had from then on .

Interviewer: So they were green and browns and yellows.

Don Hammill: Yes, all different patterns on it.

Interviewer: All right, what was the technical name for your division?

Don Hammill: We were in Transitive 22.

Interviewer: What does that stand for?

Don Hammill: Transport Division 22 and there were five of the APDs in that division, but all together, there were 32 APDs in our fleet in the South Pacific.

Interviewer: Transitive 22, is it?

Don Hammill: Yes.

Interviewer: And transitive 22's mission was amphibious landings?

Don Hammill: Uh huh, that's right. It was to take the landings and instead of a destroyer division, we were transport division 22. All the APDs were in separate divisions of four or five ships in each division out of the 32.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell us about some more amphibious landings.

Don Hammill: Okay, in Kolombangara, another big landing in the Solomon chain, we made night time landings there. There were Japanese subs in the harbor. That's where the Destroyer Strong and the Cruiser Helena were sunk. We picked up survivors of the Helena, who had

drifted over as far as Vella Lavella Island. We picked up about 50 of those survivors later. But the Japanese sunk the Strong and the Helena it and it was pitch black. The admiral in charge of the fleet in the harbor had picked up on the radar a Japanese sub at the entrance to the harbor that was surfaced. He told us all to train our guns and our radar on this sub, and he said, "When I give the signal, open fire, turn on the lights. All the search lights came on, the guns fired, and the conning tower of the Jap sub disappeared. That was a real site in Kolombangara, and we eventually took the island. It was Kula Gulf and Kolombangara, and that was a major landing.

Interviewer: Now, you were Okinawa?

Don Hammill: Okinawa, that was at the end of the war.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Don Hammill: We had a lot of action in between. So we continued island hopping, some of them were tough. Biak was a tough landing. We landed Army troops there and the Japs were so fortified and had so many personnel that that drove the Army troops back into the ocean. So we had to go up and take Marines up. They landed. We picked up the soldiers that were back into the ocean that had been driven off to take them back to Guadalcanal and then we'd move them up later to other islands.

Interviewer: Were you under fire when you picked them up?

Don Hammill: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Don Hammill: Heavy fire. The shore batteries were firing at us on practically all the landings.

Like I said, they couldn't shoot straight because they never hit us. They hit some of the ships and

there was shrapnel that would fall on our deck but we never suffered any serious damage from the shore batteries. They were always there firing and later on at Corregidor, they had caves up on that rock and they had the guns on railroad tracks. They would come out to the entrance of the tunnel, fire at us, and then pull back in. It was so bad, we were taking so much fire that the admiral ordered us to pull back away from our guns and we landed a bunch of paratroopers on Corregidor, take them to an air base that we'd established there and MacArthur dropped those paratroopers on top of Corregidor so they could work their way down through the caves to clean out the Japs.

Interviewer: So you could see this?

Don Hammill: Oh, yes, it was night, but we could see the shells coming out of the side of those caves. The admirals just told the fleet to move out of range so we didn't take heavy losses there.

Interviewer: Tell us about the invasion of the Philippines.

Don Hammill: Okay, that was the big one -- Leyte Gulf. It was the biggest naval battle in the history of the world. We had 1,200 ships and besides the transports, I would say we had 700 or 800 warships involved in that. The 7th Fleet was under the command of Admiral Kincaid, the 3rd Fleet was under the command of Spruance, the 5th Fleet was Admiral Bull Halsey. His job was to cut off the Japs coming down to the San Bernardino Straits into Leyte Gulf. He decided that the Japanese had turned around and were going back in the South China Sea, so he was chasing them, when he should have been in the San Bernardino Straits. Kincaid was sending these distress calls to Halsey, "Send us some help down here. Send us some ships and carriers and battle wagons." Halsey finally turned around after he realized that the Jap fleet was not what he was chasing in the China Sea, and that's when Nimitz was aware of what Halsey was doing

and he sent a message and said, "Where is Task Force 34? The world wonders." Halsey took umbrage with that. He was mad at Nimitz for saying he wasn't in position.

Interviewer: What was the Crosby doing in all this?

Don Hammill: Well, before all that big battle started, we landed the 6th Army Rangers on Samar Island, which was near the entrance of Leyte Gulf. That was a recon group, and another one of our ships picked them up after they done their job. The Crosby, we went into the gulf, took out shore batteries and hit radar installations and also landed some troops. We had mine sweepers with us, we cleaned out the Leyte Gulf in the entrance so that three days later, MacArthur could come in on the Cruiser Nashville. He sailed in with this big battle fleet and said, "I have returned." (Laughter) We had already made it fairly safe for him to return. Then after we landed troops besides the Rangers, we landed Marines at Dinagat Island, which was also near the island. Then we went in the harbor. When MacArthur entered the island, we were lined up by the entrance to the harbor so his fleet could come in. He made his grand entrance, he had the boats stop short of the beach so he could wade ashore with the cameras rolling, and said "I have returned," and made a big speech to the Filipino people.

Interviewer: So tell us more about what the Crosby was doing and after that.

Don Hammill: Well, after we had cleaned out the harbor and landed the troops, then we went back to Hollandia, that was MacArthur's forward base on New Guinea. When went back and picked up more troops so we made several trips back and forth from Hollandia to Leyte Gulf.

Interviewer: You were at Okinawa, correct?

Don Hammill: Yes, that was at the end of the war.

Interviewer: Okay, tell us about Okinawa.

Don Hammill: First, let me tell you about the big battle of Leyte Gulf.

Interviewer: Oh, of course.

Don Hammill: The Japanese had decided to come in three directions, three different channels into Leyte Gulf. Halsey was supposed to stop the northern group, which he didn't do. That's where commanded by Admiral Sprig, or Admiral Barby, I think it was. He had some light carriers, some cruisers and destroyers, and the Japanese fleet that was coming down had the biggest battleships ever built along with cruisers and destroyers. And Taffy 2 with destroyers were battling that big fleet.

Interviewer: We actually interviewed several of the sailors that were on those destroyers there. We actually covered that quite well. We had some first-hand eyewitnesses. So what were you seeing? What were you seeing that day?

Don Hammill: Well, we were down below landing troops, so we weren't involved with Taffy 3.

Interviewer: I see.

Don Hammill: But Taffy 3, the commander of one of the destroyers laid a smoke screen across to hide his fleet from the Japs. The Japanese admiral, because he was taking so much fire from the destroyers and the carriers -- he thought that there must be a big American fleet there -- decided to turn around and go away. Eventually, all of Taffy 2 was destroyed, the carriers and the destroyers. Those survivors were in the water for several days, covered with oil, many were killed by sharks.

Interviewer: We actually interviewed several of those guys that were in the water.

Don Hammill: That was a terrible ordeal. They just floated in that water for several days and finally they got picked up or they floated in toward the islands and they were able to take that.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Don Hammill: So the Japanese fleet is coming at us from three directions, and fortunately, we got out of the way. After we did our job, we went back south and Kinkade had his 7th Fleet and placed along the side of the channel where the Japs were coming, and he trapped them. They came right into the trap and then he opened fire and practically destroyed what remained of the fleet.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Don Hammill: Then he took on the ones in San Bernardino Straits that Halsey didn't do and Spruance the 3rd Fleet took on the 3rd Jap Fleet.

Interviewer: What we really want to know is what the Crosby was doing. We want to know, see, we've interviewed guys who have dive bombed the Yamato. We've interviewed all sorts of people that were there in those battles. What we need is *your* first hand descriptions of what you saw at these times.

Don Hammill: Okay, well, we would land the troops. On Bouganville we had--

Interviewer: I mean personal experiences of yours. We know these overviews, we want to know what Don Hammill saw and what you felt and what you are saying to your buddies and things like that.

Don Hammill: Well, Leyte Gulf, it was a tremendous, we were present when the battle took place in the gulf. I was not only manning my gun, I was watching the ships that were with us --

the Ward, that's where the Ward was sunk. I was watching the air battles overhead. There was a Navy pilot named McCampbell. He was flying a P-38, and those were so maneuverable that we could watch him and he took out nine Japanese planes by himself. So, I guess I had three eyes. I was watching my gun firing, the other ships, and the air battle overhead, which was just filled with planes, Japanese and Australian, New Zealand, American. I observed all that. Then I saw a Betty bomber, which was a twin engine Japanese bomber, came in low on the water and hit the Ward on the port side and its engines came out the starboard side. We observed all of that.

Interviewer: I want to know what you're feeling at that time. You're 20 years old, you're in the middle of war. How do you feel in the middle of a battle like that?

Don Hammill: Well, you're pretty scared, I'll tell you that. You just, but you're doing your job and it's something to watch, being an observer of all that's going on. But it's great fear, too, because you never know if you're not going to get hit at Bouganville when I got that plane, another plane came right at us. We fired at it and hit its starboard engine, it was on fire, and it went past the Crosby and hit the Belknap, which was another APD behind us and sunk the Belknap. So, we had a chance to observe that. Also at Bouganville, we were right in the middle of the fleet, so we could see all -- there was ammo ships, oil tankers, troop ships, and a whole bunch of APD's and other destroyers.

Interviewer: So, that's a lot of combat. Does it begin to wear on you?

Don Hammill: Well, in later years, it came back in flashbacks. One of the, in the, at Bouganville, another, I know this is in Lingayen Gulf, this is in the south, in the Philippines. This Japanese plane came across our bow, wasn't after us, it was headed for an ammunition ship called the Elmira Victory, and it was headed straight -- suicide attack on. We watched that. We

were firing at it, and we hit it before it got to the Elmira. It exploded and the fire erupted on the deck of the Elmira, but that was quickly put out, so we saved that because the Elmira was still loaded. It hadn't unloaded any of the ammo and our skipper had drawn a thing along with his war logs. The Crosby was right in the middle and all these ships were around us. If that Elmira had been hit, it would have probably taken out the whole fleet and us along with it. Of course, when I look at those two Japanese pilots in the eyes, that would have been it for me because I was up on the flying bridge. In fact, I have a picture that shows you the flying bridge. That's on top of the main bridge. Al Johnson was the eyewitness from the boat in Bouganville and Lingayen Gulf, he was on the search light right above my head. His job was to train the search light into the eyes of the Jap coming in while I was firing. So he was a good eyewitness to the second one that I got.

Interviewer: Was that during the daylight?

Don Hammill: It was a little after 06:00 in the morning, just getting daylight.

Interviewer: I'm really interested in Okinawa. What did you do in Okinawa because that was such a horrible battle with Kamikazes.

Don Hammill: That was the, their fleet was gone. All they had was the Air Force. They trained their pilots just to take off because they were suicide planes. They were not going to return. They would send a wave of anywhere from 50 to 250 planes at once to attack our fleet. The landing at Okinawa involved 1,700 ships and 180,000 soldiers and Marines.

Interviewer: And Don Hammill, what was he doing in all of this.

Don Hammill: We were a picket ship there. We were on the outside of the fleet making sure there were no submarines coming in. We shot down another plane at Okinawa, and then they'd told us to move to north portion of the picket line and the destroyer that took our place was hit by a Kamikaze and sunk. So, the Crosby led a charmed life. We moved at the right time and avoided these things. The landing of all these troops, after a tremendous bombardment.

Interviewer: Did you witness the bombardment?

Don Hammill: Oh, yes.

Interviewer: Tell us about what it's like, could you feel the concussions?

Don Hammill: The whole world is like it's coming to an end. The blasting and the roar and the shaking of the ship. We were back away because we waited for the bombardment of the island before we would move in with the troops. So, the battleships, cruisers, and destroyers were bombarding. The dive planes were coming in and again, it was lava rock. We just had to try and dig those guys out of those caves with the bombardment, but it wasn't too successful. When we finally were ordered in to land the troops, we went in with a whole -- all the APDs and the transports laid back away. They couldn't get in the shallow water.

Interviewer: But you could?

Don Hammill: Yes, we could. We had a very short draft on our ship.

Interviewer: Were all your guns blazing?

Don Hammill: We were, we were firing a three inch and the 20 millimeters and the 40 millimeters wouldn't do much since the battleships were 16 inch couldn't do much. We went in

and unloaded the trips and then came back out. That was the largest concentration of ships, except for D-Day, in the war.

Interviewer: So, tell us how the war went for you from there. Where were you when the war ended? What were you guys doing?

Don Hammill: Well, first, while we were attacking Okinawa, the Japanese had told the Okinawans that that Americans would take them captive and torture them. So, it is estimated that from those lava cliffs, about 75, 70,000 Okinawans committed suicide jumping off. We could see them.

Interviewer: Tell us what you could see. We want to see what you saw.

Don Hammill: They were coming to the edge of the cliffs and diving down. Women and children, men, and we could see them diving down at least 70,000 that we estimate.

Interviewer: What were you thinking, what were you feeling personally and what was the conversation like on this ship when you were watching this?

Don Hammill: Well, it just, there's really no conversation. We're in the middle of a battle, we're seeing what has happened and it was just incredible to see all of those people coming off of the cliffs and killing themselves.

Interviewer: How did it make you feel?

Don Hammill: It's sick to my stomach. Really terrible. We were after the Japs, but not the Okinawans. So the troops moved in, we were still observing on the picket line at that time after unloading the troops. The Marines had 7,000 killed and they killed almost 70,000 Japanese once they were on the island. In our fleet, we had, all the battle, we had all the battleships, as I recall,

there were 30 battle ships, 35 to 40 small and large carriers, plus all the carriers, 200 destroyers. That was the group that was standing off Okinawa. Suicide planes came in and sunk 68 of our ships. We lost 5,000 sailors and 5,000 were injured.

Interviewer: So, we'll come back. Where were you when the bomb was dropped in Hiroshima? What were you doing?

Don Hammill: We were, let's see. We had gone back to Ulithi. That was the big base in the Central Pacific. And we'd gone back there and it was Guam, I believe, where the A-bombs were taking off. So we just, we were aware of what was going on when that took place.

Interviewer: Did you hear the news? What did you think when you heard about the bomb?

Don Hammill: Well, we were happy because we were planning the invasion of the mainland of Japan. The plan that was called Operation Olympic had all planned. Everything was set. They were bringing troops from Europe to the states and then out to us. When we heard of the bomb, then we were relieved because we knew we were not going to see anymore action and that we would be relieved and we could go back home.

Interviewer: Were you tired of combat?

Don Hammill: Well, I'll tell you how Skipper Moffit referred to it. He sent this message to the admiral and he said, "I'm asking you to relieve my crew. Their actions now are only perfunctory." He said, in fact, "I have one word for my crew: They're Asiatic," which meant a little crazy in the head from all the combat and all we'd gone through. We were still performing our duties, but not too well.

Interviewer: So you had combat fatigue?

Don Hammill: Definitely. We were in very bad shape.

Interviewer: So that, when the bomb dropped

Don Hammill: It was a big relief for everybody because the troops that were coming from Europe didn't want to go to the mainland of Japan.

Interviewer: What would have happened to the Crosby in the invasion, do you think?

Don Hammill: We were scheduled to be relieved and go home. By that time, our ship was so battered and worn, the skipper said that also in the message to the admiral, he said, "We need chewing gum, duct tape, (inaudible) wire." The ship was just falling apart. So, in June of '45, we were ordered to head back. I didn't come with the Crosby to the states. I was taking off at Kwajalein and flown to Pearl Harbor. I thought, "Boy, this is great. I'm going home first class." After a few days in Pearl Harbor, they put me on a troop ship, an old liberty ship filled with Marines and soldiers going home, nine days from Pearl Harbor to Bremerton, Washington. And that is when I really got sea sick. Those big ships, they roll and they jump and that's just, it was terrible. That's the worst trip I had in the Navy.

Interviewer: I can't imagine after all that time at sea you getting sea sick.

Don Hammill: Well, it was because, we were just packed. There were hundreds of us on that troop ship and the rolling and it's just moving slow. If you get in rough seas, then you really get sick. So after all the action in the Pacific, I got real sick on that trip home. Even in a typhoon that we were into after Leyte Gulf, we had winds of about 200 knots.

Interviewer: Tell us about that typhoon. Tell us where you were and because people don't know that, however much damage that typhoon did to their ships.

Don Hammill: We were were anchoring Leyte Gulf and the storm started there. It, uh, got so violent that it sunk three destroyers, newer destroyers, so our old tin cans were well built. They had armor plating less than an inch on the side. We survived that but we got to the cruiser St. Louis in case we were sunk, then maybe we could swim to the St. Louis and be rescued. The skipper of the St. Louis radioed to us and said, "Move back. We don't want you here because our ship was being thrown up into the air, and if we were too close, we may come down on top of the St. Louis." Our skipper said, "No, we're going to stick close to you. We're not moving." So we stayed there, but after we moved out of Leyte Gulf is when the typhoon really hit. It was about 200 knots was the wind. The waves were 70 feet high. It would take our ship up, and all of a sudden the ocean was way down below us, and we would slam back down and we'd roll. We had a list of at least 50 degrees on our ship sideways. On the ships that listed more than that sunk because they went over and took on water and sunk.

Interviewer: It sounds as terrifying as combat.

Don Hammill: It was called the second enemy in the Pacific, and it is probably more terrifying than fighting the Japs. There, you could do something about it. All you could do in a typhoon was hold on. I was on the radar, or the sonar, couldn't operate that anyway. I was in the shack, the radio shack, and the water was two to three feet deep up on the bridge, the deck. So I put my feet up on where the sonar and the radar gear was to keep from the water getting me. The waves would come up over the ship, fill the wheel house, which was where I was then, my flying bridge was above that. I wasn't at the gun at that time. We lost three ships in that typhoon. They were torn right in half. The only damage to the Crosby was when the wind and the waves came over, we had a cat walk from the bridge to the galley deck house, and it ripped that loose -- the only

damage to our ship. We continued to steam north to get out of the typhoon, but it was about three or four days of typhoon that we were in. Just terrifying.

Interviewer: So, I'm going to skip ahead here. Tell me about coming home and reunion with your family and what that was like.

Don Hammill: Well, I rode that troop ship to Bremerton. I was there and I thought, "Boy, this is great. I'm going home now, discharged and out of the Navy." And after about three weeks, I went down to the yeoman's office and, "Should I still be here. How about a discharge or how about leave?" He said, "Oh, I got your orders here right in my desk drawer." So they sent me home to Salt Lake City for 15 day leave. When I got home, I opened the door and I threw my sea bag into the kitchen and my mother screamed. She didn't know I was coming. She had no idea. I just threw the sea bag in there and that was a great reunion. Poor little mother, she worried every day every minute for four years while I was out there. After the 15 day leave, I was sent back to San Diego. I didn't, and they said this is a refresher course on sonar. So I took some refresher course on sonar and then they sent me to San Francisco. I thought, "Now I'm really going to be discharged." I was in a building on Market Street and I asked them when I was going to get my discharge papers and they said, "We're making you a shore patrolman now." So, from that building, I was put on the trains. There was a pharmacist mate, ensign, and me as shore patrolman. We took train loads of sailors to Chicago, Norman, Oklahoma and Long Beach, New York.

Interviewer: So you'd ride the trains.

Don Hammill: I rode the train as a shore patrolman. Our duty was to keep those crazy sailors in tow because we stopped at Reno for awhile and they all got off the train, went over to the casinos

and the liquor stores, they came back and our job was to stand there by the train, take all the liquor bottles and break them on the tracks -- very sad sailors then. So then we boarded the train and headed back east.

Don Hammill: So when were you discharged?

Don Hammill: I was discharged November 25th, 1945. So I was one month short of four years in the Navy.

Interviewer: Liz?

Elizabeth: I'm curious, did you actually -- talk to Jeff -- about the Nashville and MacArthur as he hit that beach, did you actually witness that?

Don Hammill: Yes, MacArthur came into Leyte Gulf on the Nashville. So we watched him come in. He had a big battle force with him, and he was on the Nashville.

Interviewer: Was he on the deck? Could you see him?

Don Hammill: Yes, he was out there. He was a great showman, that MacArthur.

Interviewer: Tell us what you could see. Remember, you are talking to people who have no idea who MacArthur is and what he was and his presence. Describe for us that moment.

Don Hammill: Well, he had on his big jacket. He had on his cap, and the front of it was about that tall with gold braid on it, and all of his medals, and he was just an arrogant fellow. A good, good officer, I think, but he was considered pretty arrogant. As he came in, we were just at anchor at the side of the channel. We just, we were joking with each other and saying, "There's a

Dugout Dug and we were here three days before you, MacArthur. We made it safe for you to get in." So we watched him pass by and we were just on deck watching the proceedings.

Interviewer: Why did you call him "Dug out Doug?"

Don Hammill: Just a name that stuck with you because, I guess he spent an awful lot of time in Sydney, not in the frontlines. When he decided to attack the Philippines, he moved his base to Hollandia, and that, the Japs had been all killed and moved from there. That the operating base for the assault on the Philippines.

Elizabeth: Any reflections on the whole conflict and the big meaning?

Interviewer: Yeah, the big meaning of World War II. What it was like, try to take us back into time and let us feel the whole purpose of that. World War II.

Don Hammill: It was just, we absolutely had to do it. It was a day of infamy at Pearl Harbor. It was just our objective to wipe out the Japs all the way across the ocean, and there was never any question after the Battle of Midway we were going to defeat them.

Interviewer: But the spirit of America.

Don Hammill: We had a great crew on the ship. We were like a band of brothers, in fact, when I finally had to leave the ship, I was depressed. It was like leaving my family. You get so close to those guys. You're buddies for four years. It was just great to be able to fight. We looked forward to it. If we go back to Tulagi and be at anchor for two or three days, we got bored. We'd say, "When are we going to get on another trip?" We looked forward to it. It may sound a little cocky, but we wanted to be involved in it and keep moving forward. We just felt that we were in a great cause and we loved it.

Interviewer: What was the cause?

Don Hammill: Defeating the Japs.

Interviewer: But in a bigger sense, what about America, what was your feelings about the United States?

Don Hammill: Tremendous patriotism. All the people back home were working and selling bonds, Rosy the Riveter was building ships. So there was great patriotism. We liked to get together and read the mail, which was not very often, but it would come by with a supply ship and we would throw bags of mail on. Then we would all gather around and read our mail to everybody on the ship.

Elizabeth: These band of brothers still people that he sees or people that he has seen throughout his life?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Don Hammill: Yes, there were three or four from Salt Lake City that were with me on the Crosby. So we'd gone together and to high school before the Navy. Then we served together. It was mostly the same crew that bordered on San Diego.

Interviewer: Do you remember their names?

Don Hammill: Clyde Thomas was one of them. Ralph Thomas was on the New Jersey, so I didn't see him much. But we had a radarman from Montana that was good repairing the radar and the sonar. He was excellent at that, and it's a good thing because the sonar kept breaking down. Al Johnson asked me in one letter, "Do you remember when you operated from the lope lower sun room?" I went clear down to the bowels of the ship to manually operate the sonar.

Interviewer: Now, was he your best friend?

Don Hammill: He was the closest, in fact, I have a picture of he and I in San Francisco. He was a signalman and we were part of the bridge gang. I was probably closer to Al than anybody. We went on liberty to Sydney together.

Interviewer: And how did he feel about you?

Don Hammill: Well, we were very close. When I finally got his name and phone number and called him, he was thrilled. He was in ill health, but it was such a thrill to be able to talk to old Al again. That's when we discussed the shooting down of the plans and the affidavit that he gave me. We talked a lot about our life on the ship, but my last conversation with him, he said, "I'm going to have to quit talking. I'm having a hard time breathing." Shortly thereafter, he died of congestive heart failure and his daughter called me and told me of his death, that it was, he was really close. We had a lot of other close friends. There was Dink Everett. He was from Chicago, little redheaded guy. No, he was from Boston, excuse me. Had a Boston accent. Dink Everett and Malard was one of my sonarmen. He was from Chicago. We did get some replacements as we were ready to leave San Francisco as an APD. They brought in 12 from the brigs at Mare Island. Our skipper thought, "Well, I've been out to the brig and they've been out to the war zone. I'll give them liberty." Only three of them came back from liberty. Of course, they were picked up and transported out. I forgot where we got them. We probably got them back at Pearl Harbor. They shipped them out there

Interviewer: How are we doing on time?

Elizabeth: We are at about 12:15.

Interviewer: So we're getting close now. Don, I think this is what we need right now. And if we need more--

Don Hammill: The feelings I have from the bombardments and the typhoons and everything, um, in later years, I, especially after the planes hit the Twin Towers in New York, I couldn't even watch it on TV I had such flash backs of remembering, looking those Japanese straight in the eye and nose of the plane. I had panic attacks and real depression for quite awhile after the 9/11.

Interviewer: Because of that connection.

Don Hammill: But, it, I have taken medication for the anxiety and the panic attacks because it just, it will come back. If they show the Twin Towers and the planes hitting them on TV, I change the channel or turn it off.

Interviewer: What about when you see war footage on TV, of Kamikaze attacks? Does that bring the same feeling?

Don Hammill: No, that really is interesting for me. Victory at Sea, there were several episodes of that, and the Crosby and the sister ships were in that series of Victory at Sea.

Interviewer: (Inaudible).

Don Hammill: I like to watch those.

Interviewer: Alright.

Don Hammill: So, I can watch the war pictures, and it takes me back, but I just can't watch the plane hitting a tall building like that. It does something to me.

Interviewer: All right, well, we're so happy you came in today. Don, thank you.

End of recording.