



Robert Shaffer

United States Marines

Captain

Pacific Theater

Date Interviewed: 4/25/05

Location of Interview:
Eccles Broadcast Center, Salt Lake City, UT

Interviewer:
Rick Randle

THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT EDITED FOR CONTENT, LANGUAGE OR HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Rick: We're happy to have with us today Robert Shaffer. Robert could you please spell your name for us?

Bob: I'm Robert D. Shaffer. Lieutenant Colonel US Marine Corps retired. Like I say, those with the other spelling made pens and they're the rich branch.

Rick: Well, we're really glad to have you here with us today, is it okay to call you Robert?

Bob: Well Bob's better because if you call me Robert I'll think you're talking to my dad behind me.

Rick: Okay, we'll just call you Bob. Tell us about your early life leading up to December 7th.

Bob: Well, how long do you have? I was born in Vandal Illinois. Do you know where that is? Draw a line between St. Louis and Terahote and it's half way across the state. It was the first capital of Illinois and the charter for Chicago was granted from there. I brought a picture of the statehouse and there's a legend that when Abraham Lincoln was a member of the legislature which met upstairs, they were coming to have a vote whether to move the capital to Springfield. Lincoln realized he didn't have enough votes so supposedly, according to the legend; he hung by his hands and dropped out the window so that there wasn't a quarrel. The next day he made sure he had enough of his supporters and they voted to move the capital to Springfield.

I went to school there – from elementary through middle school and high school. I graduated and I went to the University of Illinois. And what's surprising, I had a scholarship then and it was worth \$35 a semester. If you look at the scholarships up here and what it costs to go up here to the University of Utah I really had a bargain. But anyhow my dad used to send me \$20 a month – ten dollars paid for my room and I had ten dollars spending money and I had a meal job. I don't know if they have such things here today or not, but I worked at the residence halls and I started out washing pots and pans. The next year I was promoted to running the dishwasher and the next year I got to wait tables. The two halls together was a girl's dormitory and you had no

idea how many dishes 300 gals can dirty. After that...the University of Illinois is an honored Military School and I was in the Cavalry Unit and at that time we were awarded two direct commissions into the Marine Corps and I was lucky enough to get one of them. I went to the Marine Corps basic school at the marine barracks in Philadelphia.

Rick: What year was that?

Bob: Let's see, I went there in 1940. I was commissioned on the 25th of June 1940 and by then they had shortened the course to seven months. The preceding class had been there for a year. They saw that we needed to start building up the armed forces so they cut our class short and some of us went out to recruiting duty and I recruited at the University of Illinois. We had two programs – the Candidates class and the Platoon Leaders class. The Candidates class was for graduating seniors and this was held at Quantico Virginia, which was the Marine Corps schools. The Platoon Leaders class was held in the summer time for primarily juniors and sophomores. They would go each summer and eventually end up as the Second Lieutenant Marine Corps Reserve. After that I left to the barracks of Portsmouth Virginia and served there for a while until the Hornet was commissioned and up to the time I'd seen the Hornet I'd never been in anything bigger than a rowboat.

Rick: This is still prior to December 7th?

Bob: Oh yes, this is prior to December 7th. The flight deck on the Hornet was a little over 800 feet. Now against today's carriers it would look kind of small but at that time it was big. The ship was commissioned and then we were moved over into the Portsmouth navy yard to have the guns installed. The armament on the Hornet consisted of eight five-inch, 38 caliber, open mount guns. We also had two mounts of one-point-one guns. Now if you're familiar with the British Navy, at that time they had an excellent quick firing cannon called a '*pom pom*' but the US Navy wanted to develop their own so they developed this '*one-point-one*' gun. The people that invented it didn't understand the coefficients of expansion of metals because the bolt on the thing consisted of interlocking fingers and some of these were made of different metals so as it warmed up the guns jammed. They had two cradles and once you'd fired the ammunition from

this one it was supposed to shift over to the other one but you never got through the first one because the guns jammed. Eventually later in the war we got the Bofers which were Swedish guns and the Erlican – quick firing machine guns from the Swiss. So there I was aboard and had the duty on the Hornet on December the 7th.

Rick: And what went through your mind when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Bob: Well Commander Apollo Sucheck was the Navy Duty Officer, he was in effect the Commanding Officer that day and he had ordered all officers to wear side arms, you know a pistol belt, the holster and a pistol. I guess it was a gesture to show that we were at war. I was just trying to think what went through my mind then and I thought *'well we're at war, we've got to do something about it'*. But I don't recall that there was much anti-Japanese feeling you know before this occurred. Once it occurred of course we were all adamant about doing something and then we went out into the Chesapeake Bay through the Degaussing Range. Are you familiar with that? It was...do you know what magnetic mines are? Okay the Degaussing Range was to take the magnetic fielding in the ship which when you put metals together it creates a magnetism so this was to remove that – this was out in Chesapeake Bay.

Then we recovered our first two aircraft. I had, at that time when I was in basic school, I had a very good friend that wanted to become a Naval Aviator so I thought *'maybe that would be a good thing'* you know to become [a pilot]...these were two Brewster Buffalo Fighters. They were about a second line fighter at that time, but the first one it caught the wire and fell apart and the second one caught the wire and burst into flames and the sailor in the asbestos suit had to go out and save the pilot. Well that kind of dimmed my enthusiasm for being a pilot. But then we went on to a *'shake down cruise'* down the Gulf of Mexico and once we came back we loaded two B25 bombers and went back out into the Chesapeake and lost them. Now we were told at that time that we were going to take these bombers to Hawaii, there wasn't anything about Doolittle's raid at all but the point being that the only way you could get them off was to fly them off once we got to Hawaii.

Rick: So that's what they told you when they put those bombers onboard?

Bob: That's what we were told, yeah. There wasn't any word about Doolittle's raid at all. So then we went around through the Panama Canal and at that time the Hornet was the biggest ship to go through and the harbor pilot somehow slipped and the only damage to the Hornet was the port life raft. We'd gotten too close to the side and scraped it off and so forth and we got out into the Pacific and stopped at San Diego and then went up to Alameda and loaded the planes and then went up to San Francisco and like I say we were told that we were just ferrying them to Hawaii.

Rick: How many B25's did you have then?

Bob: There were 18.

Rick: And they were all loaded on right there?

Bob: They were all loaded on the flight deck, yep. And we sailed out in the daytime which I always thought was kind of odd but I found out later that because our crew was (they felt) so inexperienced and the currents there in San Francisco harbor are so bad they were afraid we might run aground so we went out in daylight. And then we got out and we were told where we were going and what we were going to do.

Rick: Now give us as much detail of that as you can.

Bob: There isn't a lot, I can tell you what I saw though. There wasn't much communication between Doolittle's pilots and the ship's crew.

Rick: They were all on board?

Bob: They were all on board, yeah but they were segregated. Being onboard a carrier there isn't too much interaction between the flyers and the ships crew anyhow. The flyers think that you're

there just to provide a platform for them and so forth. But we got out into the Pacific and then we were told what we were going to do and then we joined up with Admiral Halsey.

Rick: Do you remember the exact words that they said, in other words – ‘*you’re going to attack Japan*’ and they’re going to fly bombers off of the aircraft carrier?

Bob: I don’t. It was just announced along the ship’s loudspeaker that these planes are going to attack Tokyo and that was about it.

Rick: And you didn’t know at that time they were going to be launched from the aircraft carrier?

Bob: Oh yes, we realized they had to be launched Rick because there was no other way to get them off unless you went in and lifted them off with a crane.

Rick: And did you realize in any way how significant that mission was going to become?

Bob: Well we thought it was a good propaganda thing, yes. We realized it would be quite something, yes because if you recall everything else had been done in the Pacific other than Halsey’s raid and the Marshall’s hadn’t been much of a success so like I say we joined up with Admiral Halsey. He was onboard the Enterprise, we had some cruisers and destroyers and we headed west and have you ever been on the Pacific? It’s big! It’s big, there’s not a lot to see and anyhow I was going up...General Quarters had sounded and that’s, you know, the call to battle stations so I was going up. My battle station was after the island, I had a small director to control. The one-point-one mount that was below me and all of a sudden I heard gunfire and looked over the port side and there the cruiser Nashville was firing at a couple of fishing boats and their gunnery was rotten. So Admiral Halsey ordered two destroyers with a screen to go ram them which they did and sank the boats but by that time we figured they would have alerted the Japanese Headquarters that we were coming. If you read the book ‘*On the Raid*’ which is quite extensive, they had quite a screen of fishing boats out there. They knew we were coming, now where their intelligence came from whether it was some disloyal Japanese in the states, some of their intelligence system...they knew we were on the way but what they thought was that we

would have to launch carrier aircraft from about 200 to 300 miles. They didn't realize that we could launch land-based bombers.

So after the episode with the fishing boats Admiral Halsey decided that we had to launch and at that time we were about 800 miles out. The plan had been to get in to about 600 miles and then the planes of course were to bomb Tokyo and then fly on to China. At that time Chaing Kai-Shek had been informed of this but he told President Roosevelt that *'if you do it then the Japanese will retaliate against us'*. Well anyhow, we launched and it was quite a stormy day and the ship was pitching you know up and down and we got... Colonel Doolittle flew off and we got all the planes off without any incident except the last one. It was back on the fantail and the seaman pulling the chops from under the left wheel slipped and the propeller cut his left arm off but that was the only tragedy. And then of course they got up in the air of course and formed in formation and we held up numbered plates to show them the heading of the ship. The true magnetic heading so they could set the compasses of the plane and know exactly how they were going.

Rick: Let me ask you one question. When these planes were taking off was it a *hairly* takeoff? I mean did they go below the deck after they left or...?

Bob: No, no, most of them gave it so much gas they kind of jumped.

Rick: And so there was no problem or any worries about those guys ditching when they took off?

Bob: No, no. We'd learned that in the Chesapeake that they could get off successfully and so forth. Then we turned and ran eastward. We had a Lieutenant Jurica aboard who had been a naval attaché in Tokyo and he could understand Japanese so he turned on the radio to pick up the Japanese stations and after awhile you could hear this babble of Japanese and of course none of the rest of us could understand it but he told us basically what was happening. That the Japanese realized we were attacking their capital and I think that all of us applauded or yelled or something like that. And then we went back into Pearl Harbor and this was the first time that we

had been there and I hadn't seen the destruction of course and it was pretty awful to see it. The Pennsylvania was resting on the bottom; the West Virginia was resting on the bottom. The Oklahoma had turned over and do you want to hear a story about the Oklahoma?

Rick: Anything about Pearl Harbor from an eyewitness we want to hear.

Bob: Well I wasn't the eyewitness of this but I had a classmate at the University of Illinois named Bill Mulder. He joined the Marine Corps one year before I did and he was stationed on the Oklahoma. Now this being Sunday morning he'd been out on a wild party Saturday night and he'd just fallen into his bunk when the first torpedo hit and he realized something was wrong and he ended up (when the Oklahoma had turned over), he ended up in one corner of his stateroom with a pocket of air and he realized something had gone wrong. He was smart enough to realize where the closest porthole was and he swam down and got through the porthole and got out. I met him later at Camp Catlin and he showed me the scars on his hips and I measured mine and I realized I couldn't have gotten out. Oh the damage was terrific to see it.

Rick: Now you pulled into Pearl Harbor what month of '42?

Bob: Well it was after the raid, I would say it was in the spring. I don't have the exact date of the raid but it was in...it was before summer.

Rick: But you still saw a lot of damage, nothing had been done to correct it? The Utah had been sunk I guess.

Bob: Yes the Utah had been sunk.

Rick: And the Arizona was sunk and...

Bob: I had a classmate aboard the Arizona who was killed. Another classmate Gaver was awarded the West Virginia, he was killed. Those are not the only two. Going back though to our graduation, we had...there were slots in the embassy at the barracks in Shanghai, you know we

had a marine detachment there. Three of my classmates went there, a fellow by the name of Conister, a fellow by the name of Chaveau and I don't remember the third one and of course they were...the minute the war started the Japanese invaded and they were captured and executed.

Rick: Now tell us leading up to the battle of Midway now.

Bob: Okay, leading up to the battle of Midway we loaded four or nine Marine Corps fighters and at that time the Marine Corps was flying the F4, F3's which had rigid wings. So we loaded those on the flight deck and we headed off for the South Pacific or the Coral Sea actually and when we got within range we flew these planes off to Efate and then we turned and by that time Admiral Fletcher had brought on the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Lexington had been sunk and the Yorktown had been badly damaged. Well by the time we got there there wasn't anything we could do. We sailed around the Coral Sea I guess for about a week or two and then went back to Pearl Harbor.

Rick: So how long were you there after that battle at Coral Sea?

Bob: I'd say a week or two; yeah I mean we were standing at that time at '*condition two*'. Do you know what condition two is? There are three conditions aboard ship. One of course is condition one – all hands at the battle station. Condition two is – half the crew is on; you're on for four hours, you're off for four hours. Condition three is – you're on for four hours or you're off for twelve.

Rick: How many total aircraft carriers did we have at that time?

Bob: At that time we had...there was the Enterprise, the Hornet, the Yorktown, the Saratoga, the Wasp and the Ranger and then the Langley.

Rick: That's seven huh?

Bob: Yes, the only fleet carriers were six. The Langley of course was a converted ship that had been...well they numbered the aircraft carriers – Langley was CD#1 and then we know the Lexington and the Saratoga were converted from battle cruisers. Under the 1925 Naval Treaty between Great Britain, Japan and the United States – you had only so many battleships, so many battle cruisers and so forth so this exceeded our limit. They were being built as battle cruisers. And you know a battle cruiser carries 16-inch guns, not too much armor but is fast, so they converted both the Lexington and the Saratoga to aircraft carriers. Lexington was CD2, Saratoga was CD3. Ranger was CD4 and she spent the war off the east coast as a training ship. Now the Ranger was unique because she had six funnels, there were three on the port side and three on the starboard side so when they were landing aircraft these funnels had to be lowered so that they'd be flush with the flight deck but she never got out into the Pacific. Then the Wasp was number five and she was sunk down off the Sotheby's. I had a classmate by the name of Kennedy that was aboard there and supposedly the torpedo struck his stateroom. The Enterprise was six, the Yorktown was seven, the Hornet was eight.

Rick: You were at the Coral Sea area and you were just leaving, you spent a couple of weeks there then where did you go after the Coral Sea?

Bob: Back to Pearl.

Rick: And then were you privy to any of the code breaking that occurred as part of the Battle of Midway?

Bob: No, not at my level Rick. If you remember I'm kind of junior in the command structure.

Rick: All right well tell us about Pearl Harbor. How long were you there?

Bob: A week.

Rick: A week and then you shipped out to ultimately ambush the Japanese fleet at Midway.

Bob: Yes. Let me tell you something else now. Admiral Halsey was a Naval Academy class of 1904. He went to flight training in 1934 as several Senior Naval Officers did. Now how extensive their flight training was I don't know but at least they were given wings and the idea was that any Commanding Officer of an aircraft carrier had to be a flight-qualified person. So we got back into Pearl Harbor and Admiral Halsey took ill and in those days there was quite a bit of animosity between the Admirals that had been pilots and what they called the '*Blackshoe Admirals*'. These were Admirals that had grown up in destroyers and cruisers and battleships. So Admiral Spruance who was a Blackshoe Admiral was appointed to command the task force – Raydon Spruance and supposedly he didn't have much humor but he was a very brilliant man and we soared and went out and ended up north, northeast of Midway.

Rick: Let me ask you one question. How did the crews feel about Halsey verses Spruance?

Bob: I don't think any of us knew the difference.

Rick: And so you didn't care, it didn't matter to you? It seems to me that Halsey has given the impression of being a real *blood and guts* kind of a guy where Spruance was a little more mild mannered.

Bob: He had a little more brains I think. If you read that book '*Miracle at Midway*'. The author describes Halsey as being ugly and bullheaded and Spruance having a more mild temperament and better suited. But anyhow, the Yorktown had limped into Pearl and was being repaired and they came out and joined us northeast of Midway but their Admiral Fletcher was an aviator so he wouldn't serve under Spruance. So we had the Enterprise and the Hornet and the cruisers and destroys say here and the Yorktown and her supporting ships were off to the east about I'd say ten miles.

Rick: So did you, at that time, know what your mission was going to be and that the Japanese fleet was apparently going to attack Midway?

***** Tape Interrupt *****

Rick: You were leading up to where you were going to get the message about what your mission was...

Bob: Well it wasn't a message we were just told over the loud speaker as to what we were doing. But there was a Japanese invasion fleet heading to Midway and we were going to do something about it. Let's see, about the first thing – you know how big the Pacific is so we were sending scouting missions, not from our ships but the PBM's and that type trying to locate the Japanese fleet and they didn't. Occasionally they would pick up some slight sightings of Japanese ships but if you remember the operation, they were also sending a task force towards the Aleutians so sometimes they spotted some of these ships on their way. But anyhow we had a... Torpedo Squadron Eight had a Commanding Officer who insisted that his aviators exercise, you know, running in place and that type of thing. They didn't like it but he was the only one that did it. The rest of them lounged around and drank coca cola and so forth and so on. But I guess the first thing that we got was the order to launch aircraft and if you remember or if you don't know – in those days you had to have 25 knots of wind over the flight deck to conduct your operations so the fighters took off first because they take the shortest amount of time and each fighter would come up to a line opposite the island and the Flight Deck Officer would have them rev up the engine and if it sounded okay he'd give him the signal to take off. So we launched all the fighters then the scout bombers came next – the SBD's and he did the same thing of course to those and the last ones would be the torpedo planes from Torpedo Squadron Eight and each of them carried a torpedo. They were TBD's made by Douglas and they'd lumber down the flight deck and then some of them would kind of dip down like they weren't going to make it and finally they all got off. But the tactics in those days was the combined attack of the torpedo planes and the dive-bombers that is to attract attention to both. Well the commanding officer of Torpedo Squadron Eight was a Lieutenant Commander by the name of Waldron and he was the only one that found the enemy to begin with. He'd read you their location but by then the dive bombers weren't close enough to do anything and Waldron had to attack because he didn't have enough gas to just stay around. So they attempted to do an attack but they were all shot down. There was only one survivor and that's a pilot by the name of Gay, I don't remember his first name but he survived by hanging on to a floating cushion after his TBD had gone into the water

and he was picked up by an American destroyer later. Later that day of course the dive-bombers, having gotten the location from Waldron, came and attacked and did very well of course. We sank three carriers that day. There was one that escaped but we got it the next day. But going...during the action...

Rick: The fighters were just up there to engage the airplane?

Bob: The fighters were to protect the dive-bombers and engage *Zero*'s and if you've read anything about the *Zero*'s they could out maneuver anything in the sky. But we got a warning that we were going to be attacked so the pilot or the Officer of the deck had the rudders shut to *back and forth* – the *Hornet* was weaving like this. After a while we weren't being attacked so we settled down but it turned out that the Japanese had followed the *Yorktown*'s planes back to the *Yorktown* and they bombed the *Yorktown* such that she couldn't recover her planes. So they directed the planes to land on the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet* and we settled down and we got several planes aboard.

And then there was one of the fighters that came in – as he caught the wire his right wheel collapsed under him and his starboard machine guns went on and raked the back of the *Violet*. Lieutenant Angersol was in charge of the after guns...he was standing above here and Edson Hopson was even closer to him but he was killed. Hopson and I survived. It raked down after the island and killed all of my marines that were manning the one-point-one gun down on the flight deck and after that there was a harbor clipping room where we would fill the ammunition trays for the one-point-one guns and there was a young marine by the name of Humfleet who stuck his head up to watch the plane land and it blew his head off.

After that the *Yorktown* was so badly damaged that they sunk the destroyer *Hanlon* alongside the takeoff bay and the *Yorktown* stopped, the *Hanlon* stopped and a Japanese torpedoed both of them. So they were trying to get the *Yorktown* to French Frigate shores to beach her there so they could repair her but she went up. After that we went off to the east and northeast and circled around, by then it was fairly late in the day so the next day we went after the remaining

Japanese carrier the Huriu which we finally caught up with and sank and another crew – I think the Nogali. After that the rest of them got away.

Rick: How many total aircraft carriers did the Japanese have?

Bob: They had four.

Rick: And we got them all?

Bob: We got them all. There were six in the raid on Tokyo but these were the four best they had. The other two were in the Aleution Task Force so they had six all together which they'd used at Pearl Harbor and we got four of them.

Rick: Did the crew or you guys realize how significant that was when you got four aircraft carriers?

Bob: I don't think so at the time, no. No we read about it later, it was the turning point of the Pacific but if you'll recall there were much more deadly battles than that. But after that we went into Pearl Harbor and the populous there thought they were great, we had saved them. I didn't know that but anyhow after that we went out to sea and...oh I forgot to tell you too that when we were out northeast of Midway, we were told that we were backed up by the battleships, you know, if something went wrong. They were back in San Diego. So we had really no back up.

Rick: Well how realistic was the movie '*Midway*' compared to the actual thing?

Bob: Wasn't that the one Charleston Heston was in? I never cared for him.

Rick: Well how about the details of the movie was it accurate?

Bob: I'd say some of it was. It's like most war movies, some of the things are not realistic at all. Well we had an Air Group Commander, Commander Stanhope C. Ring who flew...his idea was

he'd be up directing the planes in the battle and he was protected by a couple of fighters and they both ran out of gas and had to ditch in the water. One of them fell by the name of CheChe said he'd never fly with him again because of that. But after that we operated...the battleships finally came out and we operated with them out west of Hawaii, west of Oahu for a while, then we came back in and I was detached. I was ordered back to the states and I left the day the Hornet headed for the South Pacific again. If you remember she was sunk in the battle of Santa Cruz but by then I was back in the states and I headed up onboard the Montpelier, a cruiser – a light cruiser.

Rick: What was the significance of this Bill Gay that was out there? The only significance to him was that he was rescued and got saved?

Bob: Yeah, no one resented that they thought he was very lucky.

Rick: And they gave him the big spot in the movie that he was an eyewitness to what was going on.

Bob: Well he was an eyewitness certainly. We used to play bridge aboard the Hornet, one of our fourth was a torpedo pilot and of course he was killed so we never played bridge again.

Rick: You had no idea about – they hit those Japanese carriers right in the middle of changing from torpedoes to bombs?

Bob: Yes, they were re-arming and we caught them at an opportune time.

Rick: Did you know that at the time?

Bob: No.

Rick: None of that information got back to you?

Bob: No, we heard about that later. No, we caught them at an opportune time because had they re-armed and re-fueled and gotten off we would have suffered much more.

Rick: Well that story of Midway, we haven't had the opportunity of talking to anybody that ever experienced that so...

Bob: You mean I'm not the only survivor?

Rick: Did you bring any Japanese sailors on board or anything like that during recovery?

Bob: No.

Rick: Did you recover a few Americans that were at sea?

Bob: No, not that I know of.

Sally: So when you said that they would go up and then down did that mean everybody was killed on the ship?

Bob: No, what I meant was the TBD's were so underpowered that (like Rick asked) they'd go off the end of the flight deck and kind of head down until they got airborne again.

Rick: These are torpedo planes and when they would take off from the aircraft carrier, they would sink until they could get enough power to get up.

Bob: The weight of the one torpedo was hard to get off with.

Rick: After the battle of Midway you went back to the states and got on your cruiser and take it from there.

Bob: Let's see Cape...

Rick: What was your duty onboard that cruiser?

Bob: Well I was Commanding Officer on the marine detachment.

Rick: But not of the boat, just the marines?

Bob: No, marines don't command ship Rick. Marines don't get that high. We left Philadelphia and do you know where Cape Hataras is? We hit a hell of a storm there. We rolled about 30 to 35 degrees and I had the mid watch and I got up out of my bunk and vomited and then went up and stood the watch.

Rick: You know a light cruiser verses an aircraft carrier was a little different wasn't it?

Bob: A little different. But anyway we got through the Panama Canal and went out to New Caledonia and I ran in to the aerologist from the Hornet (I'm trying to think what his name was), anyhow the junior officer's on the Hornet always said he had a miserable temper or miserable disposition – well he had to get up at 3:00 every morning and use the theodolight to track the weather balloons and so forth so I ran in to him there in New Caledonia. He was waiting for an assignment. Then we went up into the Solomon's and our first mission was to cover some transports leaving Guadal Canal, we were supposed to go up and provide protection for them. Well we got up there and there was a Lieutenant Striker who was in air control in charge of the guns and we were expecting some US planes to come in and land on Guadal Canal and there was this flight of planes. They thought they were the US planes, they weren't. They were Japanese *betty bombers* and they attacked us. We ran shooting like mad and so forth and finally got away – this is when the Chicago was torpedoed though and it sank. I had a classmate aboard there but he got off.

But most of our experience there was up and down the slot. Admiral Ainesworth had a cruiser division and Admiral Merrill (our admiral) had our cruiser division and we would take turns. Sometimes we'd go up the slot and Ainesworth would go up south of the slot. The other times

we would reverse and he'd go up the slot and we'd go up. But he had bad luck up there; most of his ships got torpedoed. The Salt Lake City was one, the Honolulu was another, they got an Australian cruiser up there called the Leander – she'd been badly damaged earlier and they got her repaired and she joined Admiral Ainesworth's task force and the first night up the slot she got torpedoed.

But anyhow we covered...we went and bombarded in the Kulu Gulf on the island of Kulu Mangaro and the firing key on the main battery is on what's called the '*stable vertical*'. It's a gyroscope and it gives an angle and so forth and the sailor pushing the firing key, when he fired he said "*rebel you bastards*". So we got out of there, I thought we were going to get sunk in there because going into Kulu Gulf the entrance is quite narrow and so forth. But then we operated up and down there until the Third Marine Division landed on Bougainville and we'd been up and bombarded the Japanese camps at Buccavolness which is the north end of the island and came back down and we were alerted that there was a Japanese force coming down to attack the Third Marine Division. So Admiral Merrill put us in column, four destroyers ahead of the cruisers – there was the Montpelier, the Denver, the Cleveland and the Columbia; they're all Cleveland class like cruisers and we went to meet them and of course Admiral Merrill's idea was that the destroyers would launch torpedoes first and when the torpedoes would be about there we'd start firing the guns. Well the torpedoes didn't get there or they didn't hit anything but we started firing. The Spence Destroyer behind us was a torpedo but then we fought back and forth – we'd go this way and fire, turn, all ships would turn, fire again. We sank three Japanese cruisers and about four of their destroyers, they were about the same equal distance.

But we learned one thing or two that if somebody launches a spread of torpedoes towards you the best thing to do it is to turn toward them, you don't run away because you can't outrun them and they'd hit your propeller or your engines. If you're hit on the bow it damages your ship but it doesn't sink it but if you're hit on the beam your gone. But after that we came back down and off the short ones and we were attacked by air and Admiral Merrill and his staff had figured out a circular formation for the cruisers going one way in the circle and the destroyers going in the other way such that we could all fire at the attacking aircraft which we did. And I don't remember how many we shot down, we shot down quite a few and then we headed back down the slot to re-fuel. One of the things...

Rick: Was this in 1945?

Bob: No it was in '44.

Rick: '44, and so the Kamikaze's were not prevalent at that time?

Bob: Kamikaze's were not prevalent there no. By '45 I was in the Third Marine Division on Guam but we went back...the destroyers were the Fletcher class destroyers. They were excellent ships except that their fuel capacity wasn't too great, so we had to go back and get them fueled and we ended up in a place called Pervis Bay which was a harbor in the Florida Island and it was sort of a land-locked harbor. There was the entrance of course which was quite narrow and then there were hills on this side and hills and that side, so it was hotter than the dickens. You didn't get much air.

Rick: Okay now tell us how eventually you got sent off that cruiser and then tell us a little about Guam and then we want to hear about the war crimes trial.

Bob: Well, let me go back a bit. Are you familiar with the British carrier *Illustrious*? It was bombed very badly in Tirano Italy and the British at that time were wearing short sleeve shirts and shorts and they had a great number of casualties from flesh burns so we had to wear long sleeve shirts and long sleeve trousers and when I was on the *Hornet* they even gave us anti-flash suits we had to wear on top but they were impermeable so they were...you sweated so much you couldn't stand it so we dispended with those.

But when I was on the *Montpelier* – on a normal day your shirt would be wet here and here and down the back and an abnormal day your pants would be wet and we used to smoke cigarettes, that's only how I got through the war was coffee and cigarettes but you kept your cigarettes up here and they'd get sweaty and so forth. And we got a shipment of Pall Mall cigarettes that were moldy and if you've ever tasted a good cigarette, you taste a molded Pall Mall that's been sweat soaked – so there. Anyhow we had to spend the whole war in long sleeve shirts and long

trousers in hot and humid weather. The other thing would be that if you were up on watch and you see a rain squall it didn't matter whether you put on the oilskins to keep the water off and get sweat soaked or go and leave it off and get wet from the rain squall which I usually did I just said "*to hell with it*".

Rick: It's interesting how you got on Guam, I guess after we invaded Guam it was still a US possession when you were on there?

Bob: Well, I was sitting on the Montpelier and we went up to Saipan and Tinian – the invasion of the Mariana's and then we went back to Guam during the invasion of Guam and I had...by that time I had been promoted to Spot One which is – I was the top spotter in the main battery. Are you familiar with directors and so forth, okay well anyhow it had an optical range finder, about a 24-power range finder and we were given the mission of '*targets of opportunity*'. That means you search and if you see something you shoot at it. So I was searching through the telescope and I saw this one little Japanese soldier down at the water's edge and he was washing his face. He looked up and saw the first wave coming in and looked around and went back to washing his face and disappeared into the jungle. He couldn't have been more impressed at all but the impressing site I have there of the first wave going in – there was an LCI you know Landing Craft Infantry flying the American flag leading the first wave. It was a very impressive site. But after that, after Guam we went back up, finished up Tinian and then came back to the states and the reason I stayed aboard was because I was experienced as Spot One and we got another Marine Officer on board so we had three and I was surplus by then so...

Rick: Where were you when you heard about Hiroshima?

Bob: I was on the way back from Hawaii to Guam. I was back there on the...by then I was the Naval Gunfire Officer of the Third Marine Division and I was back in Maui for the planning session of the invasion of Japan. Are you familiar with that at all?

Rick: A little, yeah.

Bob: Okay, the Third Marine Division was to land on the west coast of Kyushu so that's what I was there for and I remember the Medical Officer speaking and he said, "*we've got to plan for a million casualties. We've got to have medical facilities, hospitals, coffins for a million casualties*".

Rick: That would be on both sides though wouldn't it?

Bob: No he was talking about...the plan for the invasion of Japan was that the Fifth Amphibious Corp would land on Kyushu then the Tenth Army would land in Tokyo Plain and that was under General Vinegar Joe Stillwell. But they figured that we would suffer a million casualties because there were a number of things that maybe you don't know about. The Japanese built some *Suicide Boats* and we recovered one up in the Bonin Islands, it was a boat as long from about here to there. It had a very powerful engine and the bow would be loaded with explosives and the idea would be that when the invasion force transports anchored to unload their troops into landing boats they'd send these torpedo boats up and of course the pilot on the boat would be killed but it would still be very dangerous.

The other thing the Japanese had was a Female Suicide Corps that they had organized and the idea was this – they were armed with pull charges (you know what a pull charge is?), anyhow it's a long pull with an explosive charge on this end with the idea being that when they saw the landing boats coming in these women would dive under the water with their pull charge, come up under a boat and blow the boat out with the pull charge. So between those and the suicide boats and of course by then they had invented the kamikazes, we would very well have suffered a million casualties – dead, wounded and whatever.

Rick: And so you were back there at that planning thing when the bomb was dropped?

Bob: Yeah, I was on the way back to Guam. It was on my birthday – August the 11th.

Rick: And did you realize how significant that was?

Bob: I think so, yes yes. I thought *'here we're going to save a hell of a lot of American servicemen'*.

Rick: And then where were you when VJ-Day occurred?

Bob: I was on Guam. And I don't remember if this was the same day we heard about it. It wasn't...we heard about FDR's death when I was on Guam. Archbishop Cardinal Spellman visited the island and held an open mass and I guess there were about a thousand of us even though I wasn't catholic I went to hear him. The other time I came close to getting killed was...do you know what *star shells* are? Well one of the ways we had practiced the 5 inch guns would be to fire star shells at another cruiser of ours but the star shell computer was supposed to offset the angle and the height by about a thousand yards so that they would burst behind the cruiser. We were firing one against the Columbia one night and I guess they didn't set their star shell computer because the shell went right through my radar antennae just over my head. But that's my experience with friendly fire Rick, it isn't very friendly.

Rick: Take us from there to VJ-Day and then the war crimes trial.

Bob: I got back to Guam and at that time the Third Marine Division was to go into China. We all had plague shots and yellow fever shots and so forth to get ready to go and then it turned out that we weren't going, we were disbanding the Third Marine Division and I was Assistant G3 at that time of the division and the First Battalion Third Marines had a commanding officer Jim Tensley who was a reservist. He noted out and his Executive Office had been at the Officer's Club, we had a small club on Guam and he'd gotten very drunk and then assaulted some people so they shipped him out and they thought I'd be a good replacement for him. So I joined the First Battalion Third Marines as an Executive Officer and then there had been an advance party under Colonel Ricksy who was sent up to the Bonin Islands and we loaded out an LST to go up there (the First Battalion Third Marines) and we got up there and at the entrance to the harbor there's a big rock that the natives call "*welcome rock*" and the harbor is called "*Futomi Cove*". So we got in there and we're going to land except that the crew of the LST couldn't get the ramp down and the Japanese were all standing in ranks waiting to surrender their swords and so forth

and we were working to get the damn ramp down so finally they got off and we marched out and fell in formation opposite the Japanese.

Colonel Ricksy made a speech and then the Japanese General made a speech none of which we could understand and then they turned in their swords and disbanded and we set up camp...they had had two buildings there that we called *'the white buildings'* that we took over. These were on the – I guess you'd say the south of Chichi-Jima. Chichi-Jima is kind of like this and...

*** Interview Interruption ***

Rick: Let's get up to the war crimes trial, in other words was there anything significant about VJ-Day and what were your thoughts were when this war was over and how elated were you?

Bob: I thought I was alive. By then I was on Guam, this is before I'd gone to Chichi-Jima. Joe Quilty was the Air Officer and I and we went out to Tumon Bay which was a beach on the north of Guam and both of us realized we'd lived through the war which was...Joe Quilty was an Air Officer and we took off in a Piper Cub and toured the island but this was before I went to Chichi-Jima.

So we got to Chichi-Jima and the Japanese had had a story that they'd captured some American aviators but that they had been killed in American bombing raids. Colonel Ricksy appointed me the Senior Member of the Board of Investigation for War Crimes and I had Wilber Neskasky who was the First Lieutenant, Eugene F. Putoss who was the doctor and Robert Parcel was the recorder and we had a young Marine by the name of Booth who could take shorthand. So first of all we...the Japanese had some horses there and Colonel Ricksy and I used to ride and a ship came in from Japan – they were bringing ships down to repatriate the Japanese and these members that got off were members of the Savory Family.

Now the Savory Family consisted of a New England Whaler who married a Chamura girl and settled on Chichi-Jima. Well when the war came they weren't considered friendly Japanese so they shipped them back to Japan; but this crew came unannounced and so forth and one of them,

Fred Savory, was very fluent in Japanese and in English because his grandmother had insisted that while they learned Japanese in school they had to speak English in the home. So he could shift from one language to another and normally we had...Norm Williams was a Lieutenant JG who was our interpreter but again if you can't think in the other language you've got to think what you're going to say and translate it in Japanese so Fred could shift from one to another without question. There was also a Chinese man by the name of Konimorro who had lived there. He was a fisherman and somehow the Japanese had left him there.

Well anyhow the Japanese came up with this story as to how our American pilots that had been captured there were killed in an American air raid. Konimorro came and talked to the board of investigation, he said he didn't believe their story – the Japanese story. Colonel Ricksy and I – and there was a Major Horrey who was a member of the Japanese delegation that we would meet with everyday, he went riding with the two of us and he was an excellent horseman by the way. He had been wounded in China and he had a limp, he had a lame leg but anyhow we ended up in a little house on the north coast of Chichi-Jima that had been built by the soldiers of the 308th Infantry Battalion and Colonel Ricksy had brought along a flask of bourbon and we each had a drink or so and Major Horrey began to talk and he said “*that story isn't true about the American pilots*”. So we proceeded to question him and then like I say the Board of Investigation was formed and we talked with Major Horrey at some length and encouraged him to name Japanese officers that would be willing to talk.

But first of all we interviewed three Korean Ganzuku's, now do you know what Ganzuku's were? They were labor troops, they weren't allowed to be first line troops but anyhow, they came up with the story that they'd gone to draw rations and they'd seen these bodies of dead Americans hanging on hooks and they thought they were being furnished human meat. It didn't turn out to be true, it turned out they were sheep carcasses but anyhow this was the first break we had in the story that the Americans hadn't been sent back to Japan. So then we started questioning and questioning. I'd offer the witnesses a cigarette and a cup of coffee as a way, you know, to get them to talk and finally we got the story that there'd been ten Americans captured on the island. The first two had been sent back to Japan, the rest of them had all been executed

and we got the story finally – Fred Savory acted as our interpreter because he was so good at it and we finally got the story that eight of them had been killed.

There's a picture here of a Marine who was beheaded at Kurasawki Butai which was a torpedo boat squadron. But finally we got the story out of them and decided who we were going to prosecute. Now some of them...one thing, the Japanese thought if you ate a part of somebody's body you would inherit the soul. This Major Butoba and General Tashibana the Commanding General and a couple of others had a Sake feast with the liver of one of the Americans. Major Butoba's orderly, a man by the name of Konishi was a tailor in civil life but he wouldn't cook the liver he ran away. I've got a little Sake cup he gave me that he'd won in a tailoring outfit. But anyhow; we loaded them all aboard, the criminals and the witnesses all into the LST and headed back to Guam. The horses, cows and pigs. We ran into the edge of a typhoon and everybody got sick. One of the horses died and it took two days before we could get him up and over the side. The pigs were the only sensible ones, they'd lay down.

Rick: And then you took them back to Guam and had the trial there?

Bob: The trial was held there. There were a number of them; I've got pictures of them if you'd like to see them. General Tashibana, Major Butoba, Captain Nakagima were all convicted and hanged. Most of the rest of them were sentenced to prisons with various terms.

Rick: I'd like to go back to one area...when you found out that you'd survived the war with your buddy back there and you realized you had survived, it was on VJ-Day. I want you to go back and explain that again and tell us in the most dramatic way as you can how you must have felt and how that moment was.

Bob: I really don't know. I mean we were glad the war was over. You know the war had ended and we were both alive, we could go out and take a swim and we figured we'd eventually end up back in the United States. I wasn't married; I was still a bachelor so I didn't marry Betty until much later.

Rick: But the impact of your future was at least a little bit more certain.

Bob: Well, I was a regular. I had planned to stay in the Marine Corps. Back when I entered, the idea was that you'd...those of us that weren't Naval Academy graduates, I put in for service afloat. I thought that was real interesting to go out to sea and normally you'd spend two years at sea and then get promoted to First Lieutenant and Captain and serve a tour in the marine barracks and so forth. This was even before the Marine Force had been organized, there was still...there were regiments of course and battalions but not the fleet Marine Force. When I was at the barracks at Portsmouth I roomed in an apartment with Frank Mandel and Phil Horn and Frank Mandel went down to New River North Carolina when they opened Camp Lejeune. But as to my feelings I guess I was just glad I was alive.

Elizabeth: Can you explain exactly what you were doing and exactly what your function on the ship was on the battle of the Midway?

Bob: Do you understand what a director is? I had a little gyroscopic director up on the platform after the island which controlled the one-point-one gun crew down below.

Rick: Your Marines were on the guns and you were directing that one gun.

Bob: Yes, well it's a quad. There are four barrels on the mount, I directed it. You know what a Self-Syn Motor is? It's called a '*self synchronization motor*' and as I would turn the director the motion would be transformed to the mount and it would turn with me.

Rick: But you could control those guns from where you were?

Bob: The one mounts, yeah.

Elizabeth: Were you shooting a lot with that one-point-one gun?

Bob: No Elizabeth it jammed usually after about five rounds. Like I told Rick, we finally got the Bofor guns from the Swedes. Do you know what the Erlicans were?

Rick: I don't but I understand that they finally got some good guns for you. But during that battle of Midway if those Japanese pilots had gotten over there you'd have been sitting ducks.

Bob: The only thing we had to fire were the five-inch. But the Erlican was a gun that had a heavy spring on it. The bolt was never closed, the spring was strong enough that you could fire it and it had an explosive bullet. So there...

Rick: Well thank you so much Bob.