

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

WWII-Pacific-On Board Ship

Personal Experience

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Robert Jamieson

Interviewed

by

John Jamieson

on

July 13, 1989

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JJ Tell me a little bit about your childhood like where you grew up and where you went to school?

RJ Well, I was born in Girard. First I went to the old Wilson Avenue school when I started school. It was right where the bank and that parking lot are on Wilson Avenue now. I went there because we lived on St. Claire. I went there three years then I went to Maple Avenue school that's still there, but not in use. I went there for three years then I went to Prospect for 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th grade. Then I went to high school. They had seven grades in grade school then I graduated in January of 1942 and went in the service in April 1942.

JJ Did they have a half year semester thing so you could graduate early?

RJ Yeah they had a half a year class. That was the last one in fact in Girard.

JJ You had older brothers?

RJ They were all younger than me.

JJ You were the oldest?

RJ Ken was next to me.

JJ Now Ken, how old was he?

RJ He's two years younger than me. He'd be 63 now, but he died in September of 89.

JJ So he would have graduated in 43, 44?

RJ He graduated in 44. No, he didn't. He quit. He had to quit school and went in the service a year after I did in 43. He went in the armed guard and his first year was on a merchant ship. The ship was later torpedoed off the coast of Ireland. After his service years he graduated from Y S U. When I went in, I went to Great Lakes naval training station for my boot camp and I was there for three months. I was chosen to go to radio school. They give you a test to see where you would be best suited. Even though I was a meat cutter before I went in. I had applied for cooks and baker school but they thought I'd be better as a radio man. I went to Chicago University and was there for six months for radio training.

JJ When you had joined the navy the war had been on for almost a year or a little more than a year?

RJ No. The war started December of 41 and I went in April of 42 so it had only been on for four or five months. I came out of Chicago University as a first class seaman. The top 10 percent of the class got some sort of rank. That would be the equivalent to a corporal in the army. Then we went in the amphibious corp. We went to Camp Bradford, Virginia for amphibious training. All they had were old Quonset huts with pot belly stoves. It was a real make-shift operation in those days. And Camp Bradford is about 20 miles from Norfolk. Then we went to Pittsburgh in late summer of 42 and picked our ship up there. They built L S T 's, which is what I was on, in

Pittsburgh The old AM Buyers Steel Mill, where Grandpa worked

JJ They built them there How did they get them to New Orleans?

RJ. They float them down the river

JJ All the way to New Orleans?

RJ Yeah, All the way to New Orleans In fact we got on the ship and they don't put the mast on until you get to New Orleans It took us seven days to get down the river We had to go through the locks and everything When I got to Pittsburgh we'd stayed at Carnegie Tech The ship was built in Ambrige, PA.

JJ That's a steel town isn't it?

RJ That's where American Bridge Company was there. I got to stay with Martha and Bob Hall because they were still there then even though Grandpa was dead then. We sailed down the river It took us about a month when we arrived at New Orleans because we were waiting for the ship to get finished They'd build them right along the river and then they'd just flop them into the river when they were finished

JJ Were you there before it was finished then?

RJ Oh yeah before it was finished. In fact, I watched them build almost the whole thing

JJ How long do they take to finish them?

RJ It took them about three months to finish a ship They were about 300 feet long, about the size of a football field And they could hold about 120 men So in the time we waited we got all of our radio equipment on and I supervised that since I was first class seaman. I got all the codes together and all the different books we had to have

JJ Was that in Morse code still?

RJ Oh yeah, That's what our training was We got on the ship and met all the guys They came from all over the country It's funny how they assemble a crew and I was the head radio man I had three second class seamen So we sailed down to New Orleans in about August of 42.

JJ About this time the war had gone bad for the United States

RJ. Oh yeah, really bad In April when I came in that was only five months after Pearl Harbor

JJ What was feeling about getting into the war at that point?

RJ Things were going bad for us but we didn't know it All we were concerned about was our daily life I don't know how, but we somehow thought we were going to win it from the start We never thought we'd lose I don't think it even entered anyone mind that we might lose the war It was something that had to be done and we figured we'd do it We got to New Orleans and outfitted the ship Got her guns on her, and mast We couldn't have the mast because of the bridges on the way down We went over to Florida for our training and we landed on beaches near Panama City, Florida

JJ: Easy beaches to land on?

RJ Yes. Real flat ones And that wasn't too far from New Orleans either

JJ How much time did you get to play around down there?

RJ About two weeks

JJ Was that any recreation time?

RJ Oh yeah We had liberty every other day That's where I learned to like oysters When I was in New Orleans I ate raw oysters I still love them We were tied up right in the French quarters in New Orleans and the ship was right there. I visited New Orleans 2 years ago and I was right there where we were

JJ. A lot of changes in the City?

RJ Oh yeah A lot of changes

JJ You mentioned getting the guns on What type of armor did you carry on that ship?

RJ We had 7, 40 millimeter guns

JJ Twins?

RJ Twin 40's. And 14, 20-millimeter and then we had machine guns on the bridge which we manned on general headquarters We were there in New Orleans outfitting and getting guns on and storing food. When we left New Orleans we went down through the Panama Canal I remember we hit a storm in the Gulf on our first night out I was on duty with a bucket sitting beside my chair and I got sicker then hell

JJ You hadn't been on too many ships growing up?

RJ Oh I hadn't been on any ship, but we hit such a ferocious storm It took us about three days to get to Panama and three days to go through the canal We had a couple liberties there in Panama City and Balboa, a city on each end We went from there through the canal and all the way up the Coast of Mexico to San Diego. I forgot that we loaded 2,000 cases of beer in New Orleans This is what we took to Pearl Harbor, eventually to Honolulu We found a way to get into it to and we had beer parties It took us another two weeks to get to Honolulu We found out how to get into the beer, which they penalized us for later on They charged us for it

JJ Did your captain know about that?

RJ We got caught in Pearl Harbor when they unloaded the ship and found out there were two hundred and sixty some cases missing when we got there Anyway, we got to Pearl Harbor and we were there two weeks I know because we had about a half a dozen liberties there

JJ You left there empty when are they going to put the tanks on?

RJ We didn't carry tanks We carried armored cars the first time Our first trip was from Pearl Harbor to Quada Canal and it took us 21 days to get there Cruising speed on an L S T was only 10 knots and it only had a depth of about 6 feet in the stern and 3 feet in the bow

JJ So you could go pretty shallow?

RJ Oh yeah That's what you had to have to get up on the beaches

JJ Was it a rough ship to be on in the open seas?

RJ Yes it was It was a roly ship since it had no keel That's why when you hit some rough waters a lot of the guys got sick I remember we hit a storm outside of Pearl Harbor a guy lost his false teeth up over the side.

JJ Now when your in Pearl and they sent you out to Quada Canal did you have any conception as you were leaving where you were going or was that kept secret?

RJ No, we didn't know Just loaded up and took off We didn't know where we were going We didn't see any action there I forget when the invasion of Quada Canal started That was our first stop anyway I don't know if they'd even invaded there. We never went ashore there either We went from there up to New Suneau, which was controlled by the British at the time They made me a mailman for the ship Our first invasion was the islands We hit an island called Anguai We went on the beach and took these armored cars that we had on board

JJ. How many did you have?

RJ About 18 of them

JJ Were these half track type things?

RJ Yeah There was a mixture of armored vehicles Of course L S T stands for landing ship

tank

JJ Did you have army or marine guys to man those?

RJ Oh yeah we carried them. If we had 18 vehicles, we had 18 guys to drive them and they went right along with us. We were at this island for about a week. Then there was a lot of action going on. We went to a place called Melee Bay before we hit Hollandia, New Guinea. Our first invasion was Anguar Island, the L S T group was the first one.

JJ Was that landing a hot one?

RJ No, it wasn't a hot one at all. We did capture a Japanese. We hit the beach and they were trying to sabotage the ship or something. Two of them came out in the water, one of them got away. We had our doors down and we had a guard at the doors. We had emptied all of our cargo and they went inland and didn't hit any resistance at all. This Japanese guy came out with a machine gun. He must have been crazy. We had two guys on the bow as guards and were really close to him with their machine guns and missed him. The Jap must have come to his senses because he threw his gun down and we captured him. I remember I was sleeping on the Starboard side. They brought him down with his hands up in the air and we kept him in a small pen for about two days. We were there on Anguar for about four or five days.

JJ Did you take the vehicles with you?

RJ No, we didn't. We came back down there and they were empty. We went to Anguar from Quada Canal and then from there to Anguar, then from there to Hollandia, New Guinea. We were there another three months. Then we invaded Leyte in the Philippines late in 44.

JJ: Were you a part of a big battle group at that point?

RJ Oh yeah. There were ships we couldn't see. You could look in all directions and . . . I couldn't remember the numbers. Somewhere around 700.

JJ Leyte was October 44. Iwo Jima and the Marshall Islands both happened in between.

RJ Okinawa was after the Philippines. It was April 1st of 1945. In fact that was when we really got into fighting.

JJ OK, so Leyte in the Philippines was your second landing?

RJ Yes. In between we went to the Marshals but they had already been invaded by that time. And we went to Guam and the Marianas. That was after the Anguar invasion. I can remember I got appendicitis in 44 and lost my ship for about four months.

JJ I ended up in Guam. We were going to the Russell Islands to pick up pontoons for the invasion of the Philippines. I got it at sea and they transferred me at sea because I was critical at this time. They spotted an A.K., assault cargo ship, but we couldn't break radio silence. They iced me down and kept me as comfortable as possible. I had it for three days. They got this A.K. by light signal. They had a doctor.

JJ What was an A.K.?

RJ Assault cargo ship. I was on that ship for about a month. They evidently knew, I didn't know it at the time, that my ship was going to come back to Guam. I was waiting for reassignment, but my ship did come back to Guam and I got back on my ship again. Had to be four or five months.

JJ Did they operate on you on that ship?

RJ Yeah, on that ship.

JJ Any apprehension about that?

RJ Yeah. The doctor hadn't done an operation in over a year. They actually killed me one time.

They had a pharmacist mate that was giving me the anesthesia and he choked me to death. They told me this later that I had stopped breathing. It was good duty there. They were going the opposite direction that our ship was.

JJ: How did they get you across to the A K ?

RJ: They lowered a boat into the water. I remember how rough it was. Then they lowered a basket and took me up on board there.

JJ: Now you ended up in Guam, but you hooked back up with your ship, the L S T.

RJ: Yeah my ship came back to Guam.

JJ: What was the name of it by the way?

RJ: L S T. 662.

JJ: They didn't have names on them?

RJ: They didn't have names for L S T 's. I think destroyers were the last things to have names. L S T.'s, I don't know when was the first one they started, but ours must have been the six hundred and sixty-second one to be built. They went up into the thousands though in the end, but that's just one type of a ship.

JJ: You were at Guam, where's the next assignment?

RJ: We got to Guam, then we went back to Hollandia, New Guinea again and we got loaded up for troops and equipment. There was probably eight or nine months between there from Palalau to Leyte. From Leyte we went up to Lengayen Gulf and that's when General McCarther did the loop and came up and invaded Luzon.

JJ: Were you at that one too?

RJ: Yeah we were at that one too. We didn't see anything there.

JJ: Was Leyte very hot?

RJ: Yeah it was the original invasion of the Philippines. We didn't get there on the initial day. It was probably five or six days after they landed there.

JJ: Did you have any air attacks by that time?

RJ: No. Not by that time. We had general headquarters would maybe see a plane 10 miles away, but they were never close enough to see them.

JJ: So you went from Leyte to Luzon was the mainland of the Philippines.

RJ: Yeah, Lengayen Gulf is that Gulf that goes up between the two islands there. It wasn't too much there. Then again we were a little late getting there because the initial invasion had begun. But we got a battle star for it because it was within a week or so. We got one for Leyte and for Lengayen and the other one was Okinawa. April of 45, Easter Sunday, was our 4th one.

JJ: Now Iwo Jima had gone right before Okinawa and there were tremendous casualties.

RJ: Well they wanted Iwo Jima to get the landing strip so they could bomb Japan.

JJ: And they wanted Okinawa as a stop over. What was the feeling knowing that things had gone bad there at Iwo Jima?

RJ: Gosh we were young. I was 19 and you don't really think about those things. You go about your daily business. Go on duty eight hours a day and you kind of leave the decisions up to the upper brass and stuff. We heard about Europe by this time and we thought it was just a matter of time and that we didn't know. We thought for sure hell we were going to have to invade Japan.

JJ: Describe a typical day on board ship. What was your routine?

RJ: We were up at 5:30 of course and had breakfast at six. Depending on whether you were on four and off eight depending on how your watch was. The rest of the time you were free to do

what you wanted to. Since we were radio men we were up on the bridge so we could stretch out up there. Sleep, read, write letters. Do things like that, whatever you could.

JJ: When you were on radio silence did you listen for other ships?

RJ: We couldn't send out anything, transmit, but we always received because all the messages came from MPG in San Francisco which was a major communication. I think that all the time we monitored this MPG we typed every move. We get there and they sent out code at 18 words a minute. We only had two messages and they were pertaining to our ship the whole time I was there. And we copied the code and everything for three years.

JJ: How often did they change the codes?

RJ: The codes just came in numbers. Five block numbers and we didn't know anything about change at all. Whatever it meant we handed it over to our communication officer and he would decipher the code and whatever it meant. We used to get press releases to from San Francisco. Later on I even got to copy press, which came at 45 words per minute and that was pretty tough. All the other radio services came over at 18 words a minute. You could do that with a pencil without typing, but you couldn't write 45 words per minute.

JJ: How accurate was that news? Do you think they kept some things from you?

RJ: Oh yeah. Since I was on the bridge and head radio man I got a little more information. Everybody would be asking me what's going on, what's going on and I was the King.

JJ: The war had gone pretty good by that time. Did you keep up on that?

RJ: We were able to know that the war had been ended there and so forth. We just thought it was a matter of time. We always knew we would invade Japan. We went to the Russell islands again. When I got my appendix out in late 44, we were going to Russell islands for pontoons for the invasion of the Philippines. After the Philippines in April of 45 we left and went back to New Guinea and picked up pontoons to take to Japan.

JJ: These were bridges?

RJ: Yeah. We carried them until we got back to the States.

JJ: Okinawa would have been your last live invasion.

RJ: Yes. That was our last invasion.

JJ: How was that one?

RJ: That was hell. We were the first L S T on the beach.

JJ: What type of things were they throwing at you?

RJ: Suicide pilots.

JJ: By that time they had the kamikazes?

RJ: Yeah. That's when they started them. We were close enough to Japan. We had one come right at me while I was on the bridge of the ship with a machine gun. In the first stages of the suicide pilots they carried a bomb and they'd try to drop the bomb and crash the plane into the ship. This guy dropped the bomb about 100 yards off and we were on the beach too.

JJ: You were a stationary target?

RJ: We were stationary, you couldn't miss us. But it took a funny bounce and skipped up onto the beach. Just missed us by about 30 yards. It exploded up on the beach. I fired at him, but I didn't hit him.

JJ: Were you with a 50 then?

RJ: 50 calibers, yeah. He came up after he dropped the bomb he came up and went around and was coming back at us, but our 40's and 20's got him then. You could see him going into the

cockpit as he was making his turn. He came down about three or four hundred yards down the beach. In our group there were 7 L.S.T. when we hit Okinawa. I was about three hundred yards from Ernie Pyle when he died. He was a famous war correspondent.

JJ: He was on an L.S.T.?

RJ: No, he was in a jeep on the island. Just a short ways inland when he died. Him and this officer were riding in this jeep and they said duck and he didn't duck. The captain who was driving the jeep ducked and he escaped.

JJ: Where'd they get him at?

RJ: Right through the head. I saw him to. He didn't come on our ship, but he came onto the one next to us. I saw him from a distance and I didn't know who it was at the time. Later on they told us. We got attacked seven times. We were on general quarters for almost a week solid. Whenever I wasn't in the radio shack I'd be in general quarters. I was out on the wing of the ship. We even sank a suicide boat. A boat that came along side us and tried to.

JJ: What size ship was that?

RJ: Just a small, motorboat type thing. They tried everything. I saw tankers exploding. Anyway, we were there for seven days.

JJ: Were there any other direct attacks on you?

RJ: Yeah. There were about eight of us L.S.T.'s lined up along the beach and they were after all of us. All the time there were planes everywhere, it seemed like every hour. We were firing all the time too. Seven ships there and all high, but that one plane was the only that really came at us.

JJ: What did you guys think about that attitude? They were willing to commit suicide to come get you.

RJ: We thought they were crazy, which they were. They didn't even teach them to land, they only taught them to take off. Three or four days training and once they got air born they were fanatical. I saw one hit a tanker out in Okinawa Bay. Man that thing flew. It just lit up like the whole Universe. Okinawa was the main island, but they had a couple of other small ones around it. Ieshima was the actual island that Ernie Pyle was killed on. They had other small islands that were maybe 1 mile long that were part of that Okinawa group. The Japanese, we could see them from the ship, we were that close. They were just farming and everything else.

JJ: How long were you there at Okinawa?

RJ: We were there for about two weeks all together. We damaged our rudder when we landed. After the original invasion of Okinawa we went to this Ieshima, where Ernie Pyle was killed. It was about two or three miles from Okinawa. It was very shallow. We were there for about three or four days so probably all together 10 to 12 days.

JJ: From there....

RJ: From there it was all over.

JJ: But you were getting prepared for the invasion of Japan.

RJ: Yeah.

JJ: Where did you go to get resupplied?

RJ: We went to Russell Islands to pick up pontoons, which took us about a week after Okinawa. We had the pontoons when we invaded Okinawa because they thought we'd need them there, but they didn't. We kept them on. Yeah we went to the Russell Islands to get them. We damaged our rudder while landing at Ieshima and we were out of commission. Then there was a big



typhoon that hit around that time I know that the Pittsburgh was one of the cruisers that got damaged in that typhoon cause it was after Okinawa we were on our way back to Pearl Harbor to get repairs and that's when we heard that the war had ended and that they had dropped the atomic bomb What month did they drop the atomic bomb?

JJ That was August 6th and August 9th Now, you were heading back to Pearl to get fixed up Did you consider that maybe you were fortunate that you wouldn't be in on the first invasion of Japan?

RJ Yeah We did at the time We did think that since we did get banged up We could go about 3 miles per hour. That's what our cruising speed was. It took us almost a month to get back Anyway, we heard the news that they dropped the atomic bomb We did feel fortunate too

JJ Before you had to go back to Pearl Harbor, what was the over all feeling about going to Japan knowing what you saw with the kamikazes and that spirit?

RJ Yeah. That made us figure it was going to be really tough because if they were that fanatical to kill themselves we knew Of course in the Navy you feel a little more secure cause you have your food and your bed there We didn't think we'd get in on any of the actual landing Take some troops in and pull out I remember that was one of the things you really thought about then Going into Japan with the fanatical way that they come at you with their airplane We were concerned and relieved when we got our rudder broken

JJ Were you still on the way to Pearl when you heard about the A- bombs?

RJ We were on our way to Pearl

JJ Did you get news of the first one and later the second one?

RJ Yeah After Okinawa, which was in April, we went back to the Philippines to Leyte They had floating dry docks That's what we did We went back to the Philippines and they worked on our ship, but they couldn't do it there We had to go back to Pearl Of course a couple months it was summer by this time, we move so slow We went back to Leyte, I remember being in that mailboat every day for months And then on the way back to Pearl was when we heard they had dropped the atomic bomb and we knew we wouldn't have to go back Everything happened so quick then

JJ Was there any feeling that they bombed the civilian cities?

RJ No, we didn't think anything about that We never heard what had happened All we knew was that they dropped the bomb

JJ What was your concept of the bomb?

RJ It was a funny, scary feeling at that time What kind of a bomb is this? It was the first time we'd ever heard anything about it Atomic bomb We never even knew what the hell that was It was all new words to us I don't even know if the American people even knew what an atomic bomb was

JJ So V-day happens and you are still on board ship, do you think you missed out on some of the celebrating?

RJ We had our own celebration We were with other ships too and we were all tooting the horns Actually we were still on our way there when they signed the peace treaty in September It took us three weeks to get to Guam because we were traveling so slow cause we couldn't go full speed We got back to Pearl and we were there from September to December. Because we got back to San Diego in the first part of December Because I got home for Christmas that year

JJ So you were home for the holidays?

RJ Yeah, I was home for Christmas of 45' We got back on Christmas Eve

JJ What did you know about your brother, Ken, and his actions over in the Atlantic?

RJ Well when we got back to San Diego, I met him there

JJ Did you know he was going to be there?

RJ No He knew I was coming in He looked me up on our ship He was stationed at the Naval reassignment base there at San Diego cause he had lost his ship He was on a ship and lost it over around England some place He came back and was getting reassigned over to the Pacific We spent about two weeks together there Getting liberty there every other night, we had port and starboard liberty, we spent a lot of time together In fact he was on my ship one night

JJ What kind of ship was he on before?

RJ He was on a cargo ship In the merchant armed guard they call them

JJ You were home for Christmas, were you discharged then?

RJ I was discharged in January of 46'

JJ Looking back on the war, what was the attitude toward the officers? Did you feel that they mistreated you guys?

RJ Well, there was always that division there We had some real pricks as officers They hadn't had any training either and they were pretty much the same age as us only they wore stripes Some you liked and some you didn't like I remember my communications officer, his name was Hodapt, I remember, I guess he went through school, but he didn't know beans about communication

JJ What attitude in terms of, they made a bad decision or they made what you guys thought was a bad decision, was there any way of expressing that or did you just swallow?

RJ You just swallowed orders We had a captain He'd been working intelligence for the Navy He was an attorney from Minneapolis They had so many ships they just had to get anybody and he was kind of a chicken-liver We didn't think much of him either. And our executive officer was a boozer He was a full captain too, as a matter of fact he had more service time than, Johnson, our captain There were some good officers too We played basketball with some When there was nothing on the tank deck we made a basketball court out of it We played about 20 games throughout all the whole time on different ships. We played the aircraft carrier, Saratoga That was right in Pearl Harbor I remember how good it was getting back to Pearl Harbor Pulling in they had fresh milk, which we hadn't seen for almost two years

JJ What about the food on board ship. Was there a routine that you got pretty tired of?

RJ We probably didn't realize how well off we were I gained weight so I must have been alright We had three meals a day Powdered eggs and stuff like that for breakfast When feeding 120 guys on a 300-foot ship It was quite an experience to see them feed that many people They had their problems too Our communication group was stationed on one part of the ship Ours was the first one on the port side Had an air hatch in it It was pretty comfortable

JJ After the war, what was the feeling towards the war and the Japanese in general?

RJ Totally different than it is today. We were bitter. We had heard all sorts of things that they did like torture and the suicide pilots and stuff like that Today, they just seem like us They are so much different today I can't believe they could get young me to give up their life

JJ Do you have any trouble reconciling that?

RJ Yeah, even today I do I remember how bad it was and I wondered how they could do this

How did my superiors do this to me? Get me to give my life up For what? Of course these pilots were 16 or 17-year old kids at the time cause they had run out of all their experienced pilots They were all dead They suffered tremendous losses

JJ How would you compare the attitudes toward the Germans after the war, was it easier to forgive them?

RJ Yeah, because we didn't fight them We heard all the treacheries they did too, but we didn't know what they had done to the Jews at the time That didn't come out until after the war Only a few people knew that This war and peace that was on War and remembrance Just a few people knew how bad the Jews were getting treated and killed

JJ Did you know during the war how they treated our prisoners, the Japanese, say at Baton?

RJ We had heard about Baton because that was so early

JJ Did you know about the POW's being tortured in

RJ We did then When you hit a port you would get the latest gossip and all the news and stuff. And we heard about how it was in Baton and the death march and all that. We'd get a news reel from home, but when we got there it took too long to catch up to us I'm surprised I can talk about it so easy

JJ Do you think that changed you tremendously or had a big impact on the way you are?

RJ Yeah, I think so I learned how to appreciate life a lot more I know that For years after I could still see that plane coming at me It looked like it was from, maybe here to the next house It probably was, not much further, when it dropped that bomb we didn't know whether it was a torpedo plane or whether it dropped a bomb, but the way it hit the water and skipped off and got buried in the beach and exploded there we figured it had to be a bomb

JJ Did you count your blessings then?

RJ Yeah I'll say I remember how scared I was I was firing that machine gun I think I hit the plane too, but I didn't hit the pilot