

Veteran's Oral History Project

The Interview of World War II US Navy Veteran

Machinist's Mate Second Class John Psak

Trip Peters

5/30/11

Veteran's Oral History Project
MM 2nd Class John Psak

I have always been interested in history and wars. Since elementary school, I've been learning about castles, conquistadors, and conflicts, whether it was in the curriculum or free reading. At about this point in my life, World War II video games were all the rage, so naturally, I asked my Papa, John Psak, about his time as a sailor in the Navy during World War II. However, I never really sat down with him and organized a full report of his story until the Veteran's Oral History Project was offered at school this past year. This was the perfect opportunity; so I took it. I was fortunate to do so, because Papa passed away in January of 2011, two months after we completed the filmed interview. This project is not only a comprehensive report on John Psak, but it is a clip of his personality and his life that my family and I will cherish and remember him by. I am happy to honor my Papa's memory with this project.

John Psak was born on August 20, 1924, to a Slovak family in Donora, Pennsylvania, a small town on the Monongahela River, south of Pittsburgh. Donora is known for its steel mills and as the birthplace of baseball greats Stan Musial and Ken Griffey. Papa knew Musial distantly, as Musial's father and Papa's father worked in the same steel mill. Papa had a brother and four sisters, which was not uncommon at that time, because many of the Eastern European immigrants who inundated the area in the early 19th and 20th centuries also had large families to work on farms back in the old country.

Papa's parents came to America to find work in the growing steel industry. The area around Pittsburgh was perfect because of the numerous steel mills on the Monongahela River. Small towns formed around the mills, filled with various ethnicities, each with their own churches, delis, languages, and cultures. Donora was a

proud, working class community, whose inhabitants valued religion and family. Papa's family was Byzantine Catholic, and much of their lives were centered around their local church.

Papa was just a boy when the depression struck. His family was poor; everyone was poor. Papa recalls it as a time when "everybody was hungry." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) As a result of the depression, his whole family was used to working hard and making the best of what they had. Papa worked in the steel mills as a teenager, and took the whole paycheck home to his mother. However, he still swam in the river and played baseball like the other boys in Donora.

Papa was about 18, had just graduated High School, and was working in the steel mill when his draft letter came in the mail. "You have been selected by your neighbors," Papa remembers from the letter. (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) It told him to report to the Pittsburgh recruiting office. Papa was going to war. His father told him to join the army because "if things get too rough, you can hide into a foxhole," and to forget the navy, because Papa could "swim the whole [Monongahela] river, but not the whole ocean." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) So at the recruiting office, Papa asked to join the army. The officer replied, asking why he wants to go in there. Papa said he thought he liked it better than the Navy. The recruitment officer then leaned forward, shook Papa's hand, and said "Congratulations sailor," meaning he had just signed Papa up for the Navy anyway. (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

Papa was sent to the Great Lakes for his basic training for about three months, where he became a Machinist's Mate (MM) 2nd Class, because of his previous experience

as a machinist in the steel mill. Papa was also in charge of writing passes to personnel. His training included drilling, marching, and rowing.

Next, Papa went to Norfolk, where he was assigned to the USS Halsey Powell, DD-686, a Fletcher Class destroyer, just launched from Bethlehem Steel Co. from Staten Island on June, 30, 1943. (Willshaw) As a MM, he worked four hours on, and four hours off, on pumps, 600 and 800 pound steam engines. Nicknamed the "Black Gang," he and his mates worked in the engine room, where, at the bottom of the ship, there were no portholes and they couldn't see anything. (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) I asked if he was ever scared to be working in the bottom of the ship. Papa laughed, referring to being torpedoed or sinking, and said: "you didn't have to worry about surviving, you'd be dead anyways." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

From Norfolk, the Halsey Powell went on their shakedown cruise to Bermuda, which lasted about three months. Towards the end of their shakedown, around early December of 1943, the Halsey Powell escorted President Roosevelt on the battleship USS New Jersey back from the Tehran Conference. Papa remembers this as his favorite moment on the Halsey Powell. (Psak, USS Halsey Powell (DD-686) Crewmember Profile) He was "pretty proud to be escorting the President." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

For many sailors on the shakedown, this was their first time on a ship out on the ocean. I asked Papa if he ever got seasick; he replied "only once." I asked what caused the seasickness, thinking it would be rough seas or his first time on a boat, but Papa surprised me with his answer: "Greasy pork chops. Guys were getting out and throwing

up over the side, you know? And then I joined them.” (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

Back from the shakedown, Papa surprised his family by arriving home on leave just in time for Christmas 1943. Rejoining the Halsey Powell, it departed from Norfolk on January 20, 1944 to join the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor on February 12, 1944. Upon arrival at Pearl Harbor, Papa noticed that there were “quite a few more ships that were damaged and I thought that maybe this was the end of the war because I saw we got beat up pretty bad.” (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) However, Papa remembers enjoying Hawaii, and walking around Honolulu several times.

The Halsey Powell then went submarine hunting off of Enewetak in late March. Next, she steamed to the Marianas Islands for the invasions of Saipan and Tinian on June 11, 1944. Papa describes battles as noisy. “Shells would go over your head. The destroyers and the battlewagons just shot over into the islands, you know? Into the caves too.” (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) Despite the noise, Papa denies being fearful, even though he “was usually topside when we was at Saipan,” meaning he was on the top deck of the ship to watch the battle. (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) Throughout the interview and this project, I had to picture Papa not as an adult, but as a young man, who had just outgrown boyhood, because Papa was only about 19 or 20 at the time; college age; my age. I think if I were on a battle ship, I would want to be on topside all the time, to see what was happening, so I don't blame him for being up there.

Whenever the Halsey Powell crossed the equator, a rite of initiation took place; almost like a celebration. The ones who had crossed the equator before, called “pollywogs” cut the hair of the younger ones, and painted them up. “They cut our hair, I

mean they butchered it. And I was supposed to be one with the red hair, you now, and it was something about it that made them jealous because I had the red hair.” (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) Another funny event on the Halsey Powell occurred when they crossed the International Date Line. The time zones would change, and the skipper used to say: “Today is no longer today, but tomorrow.” It was something the men used to chuckle at. (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

After the victory at the Battle of Saipan, Papa and the Halsey Powell sailed to Guam, spending two weeks on screening and radar duty. (Toppan) The Halsey Powell then met up with Task Force 38, commanded by Admiral Halsey and Admiral Spruance. Papa explains their interesting situation of command: “They worked on ships for three months at a time. In other words, Halsey worked on it for three months and then he was relieved by Spruance.” (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) Task Force 38 was under joint command of Halsey and Spruance, and they each switched off after three months. This allowed them the fastest strategy possible, because one commander would be conducting an operation, while the other would be planning the subsequent one. This way, the fleet could go from one campaign to the next without stopping to plan.

During September 1944, Task Force 38 struck Peleliu and the Philippines. Papa's worst memory is the large typhoon that smashed into Task Force 38 on December 18, 1944 in the Philippine Sea. Many ships were attempting to refuel when the storm hit, and as a result, three destroyers sank and several other craft sustained considerable damage. The Halsey Powell escaped with only minor damages, but Papa remembers that “the ocean was dark blue, and it felt like we went to the bottom of the ocean, and then up as high as the Himalayan Mountains.” (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) Papa

estimated that about 65 men out of 1000 were rescued from the ocean, but the actual numbers were closer to 790 killed.

The typhoon not only affected battleships, but it brought down a few flyboys too. Papa remembers the Halsey Powell picking up eight or so bomber-men who had crashed into the water because of the waves of the typhoon. They went back to the states, and Papa went along with them. "They were so quiet; they didn't mingle with anybody." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) However, while researching, I found an interview of Sherman Garber, one of five flyboys who were rescued by the Halsey Powell after a water landing. (Garber) I don't know if these are the same flyboys Papa was referring to (he may have inadvertently confused the exact figures over the course of sixty-some years) but it is my closest guess that they were. Because Papa was so old, and the war was so long ago, I couldn't be sure of everything he was saying. For accuracy, I wanted to make sure I had some evidence supporting Papa's stories. This is why I was excited when I confirmed this flyboy rescue and the escort of Roosevelt.

Papa went back to the states with the quiet bomber-men for another leave. Even though he would never return to the Halsey Powell, it was better than never returning home alive. On March 20, 1945, the Halsey Powell was refueling from the USS Hancock (a carrier) off the coast of Japan, when kamikazes attacked. One dove straight at the refueling ships, but was destroyed by gunfire. However, fragments of the plane still bounced off the Hancock, but deadlier so, the engine and bomb slammed into the fantail of the destroyer (the stern), Papa's former sleeping quarters, killing about a dozen men, and injuring over 30. (Pahl) (Kerr) If Papa hadn't taken leave, he would have been "pushing up seaweeds," as he liked to say. (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) The

kamikaze left a gaping hole in the Halsey Powell, and the steering gear was jammed. Fortunately, she made it back to Ulithi Atoll for minor repairs, and later to San Pedro, California, for more attention. (Toppan)

Papa arrived in Seattle, and took a train to Donora to see family again. He then reported to New York to receive new orders. While in Brooklyn, Papa learned that President Roosevelt had died. "I was just walking around because I think we were being assigned to ships in New York. I was hurt. I felt like it was the end of the world. I was really sad. In fact, the whole world was. I voted for him. I liked him as a president. He brought the whole country back to its normal. Because it was at depression when he took it over. Then he got us out of the depression, and I guess then when the war started, I guess that's where it brought up more jobs and everything else, you know?" (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

From New York, Papa went up to Newport, Rhode Island for a new assignment, and then to New Orleans, Louisiana. He learned his new ship is the USS Hecuba, a supply ship. Papa then traveled to Galveston, Texas, to board it. Papa and the USS Hecuba were through the Panama Canal, and sailing towards Japan when the war ended on September 2, 1945 after the atomic bombing of Japan. (Miller) Many still debate the moral and strategic reasons for using the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Critics say the atomic bombs were inhumane, and the loss of life was unnecessary. But what some critics do not know, is that the Japanese were ready for an allied invasion, where every last man, woman, and child would fight to the death armed with only bamboo spears. Estimates depict allied casualties at approximately one million. The Nagasaki and Hiroshima death toll of 225,000 is less than a quarter of the predicted allied

casualties. Papa puts it plain and simple. "I thought it was a good idea, because that's what ended the war. Because if we had to fight the Japs on their own island, it would've been even worse than that." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

Now that the war was over, Papa sailed home and went back to his steel mill. From most war movies, every soldier returns to greet screaming crowds. I asked Papa if this was true. "Heck no. In fact, I went to the restaurant and one girl (I was still in uniform) she says 'What do you think you are?' I mean, how long are you gonna wear that? She just knocked the skids from out under me." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) Learning this again showed how movies are compared to reality. For example, sometimes those who have served for years are not even recognized. This is why it is important to recognize and honor all service members on Memorial and Veterans' Day.

However, even the armed services sometimes neglect their own soldiers. Papa never knew he earned medals or honors until he sent for his records in 1996. Nevertheless, he received the American Campaign Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with four battle stars (I believe for Saipan, Okinawa, Peleliu, and the Philippines), the World War II Victory Medal, the Navy Occupation Service Medal with Asia Clasp, the Philippine Defense Ribbon with one battle star, and the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation. (See appendixes; official documents)

Papa stayed in touch with his Halsey Powell mates. "There's a guy that calls me every two weeks. Gildea. Eugene Gildea. He didn't even get in on the typhoon, I don't think. I think he left the ship right before the typhoon. And he got into California, and he got married. But he's still in contact with me. And there's a couple more he calls." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project) On those phone calls, I remember Papa talking

and laughing on the phone like he did with no one else. He became even more animated when he attended the ship reunions and sat down with all his shipmates. I had the pleasure of attending a reunion one year. It is one of my fondest memories with my Papa. He would show me off to all his old friends, which brought forth compliments and remarks of our similarities and resemblance. They would all sit in a circle, and lean on their canes, with a distant sparkle in their eyes, recalling their boyhood. This was something they could not do alone; the more who showed up, the more they remembered, the harder they laughed, and the longer they sat together. It was easy to see they were all connected by a special bond. It was a total transformation of Papa from when I've seen him at home. I could tell he was proud to have served on the Halsey Powell. I could tell that those were some of the best years of his life.

Concluding the interview, I asked if he was proud to be in the Navy. "Oh yeah, I would tell anybody. You get three meals a day, you got a clean bed. I would tell anybody who pays money to get into the service to get into the Navy." (Psak, Veteran's Oral History Project)

Future generations will continue to read of World War II and the people who fought them, and through my project, I hope to show them a sailor's perspective of the war. My Papa's viewpoint is valuable, and I am glad to have honored him and his memory with this project.

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<<http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/686.htm>>.

Appendix I

Important Dates

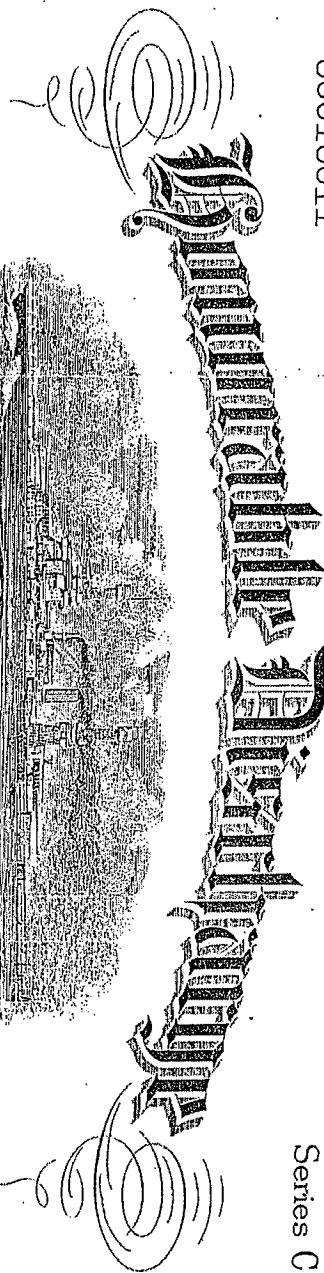
8/20/1924	Born, Donora Pennsylvania
6/25/1943	Inducted into US Navy, US Naval Recruitment Station, Pittsburgh, PA
7/3/1943	Reported to Basic Training, US Naval Training Station Great Lakes, IL
10/25/1943	Reported aboard USS Halsey Powell, Machinist's Mate 3 rd Class
12/29/1944	Departing USS Halsey Powell (sailing back to states)
2/21/1945	Reported RECSTA PNY Bremerton, WA (on leave)
4/11/1945	Reported RECSTA, Brooklyn, NY
4/13/1945	Arrived at Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island – Transferred to Naval Repair Base, New Orleans, LA
4/30/1945	Arrived at Naval Repair Base, New Orleans, LA. Transferred to USS Hecuba at Galveston, TX
5/2/1945	Arrived Galveston, TX to USS Hecuba for duty
5/5/1945	Aboard USS Hecuba, promoted to Machinist's Mate 2 nd Class from Machinist's Mate 3 rd Class
6/1/1945	Serving outside Continental US this date
7/11/1945	Crossed International Date Line at 13°27' North Latitude & 180 Meridian
9/2/1945	V-J Day (Victory in Japan Day), Japan Surrenders, End of World War II
3/26/1946	Received, Staging Center, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Transferred to USN Intake Center, T.I., CA, FFT to sepcen (Separation Center) as appropriate for discharge.
4/23/1946	Reported PSC Bainbridge, MD.
4/25/1946	Honorable discharge as Machinist's Mate 2 nd Class

Appendix II

Honorable Discharge Certificate

C3516811

Series C



UNITED STATES NAVY

This is to certify that

John PSAX JR.

A Mechanist's Mate Second Class USNR


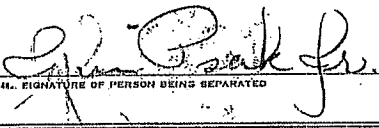
*Honorably Discharged from the U.S. Naval Separation Center,
Baltimore, Md. and from the Naval Service of the United States
Navy 25th August 1946.*

*This certificate is awarded as a Testimonial of Appreciation and
Gratitude.*

J. L. Kemmerer
Ensign, U.S.N.
Assistant Records Officer
By Direction of Commanding Officer

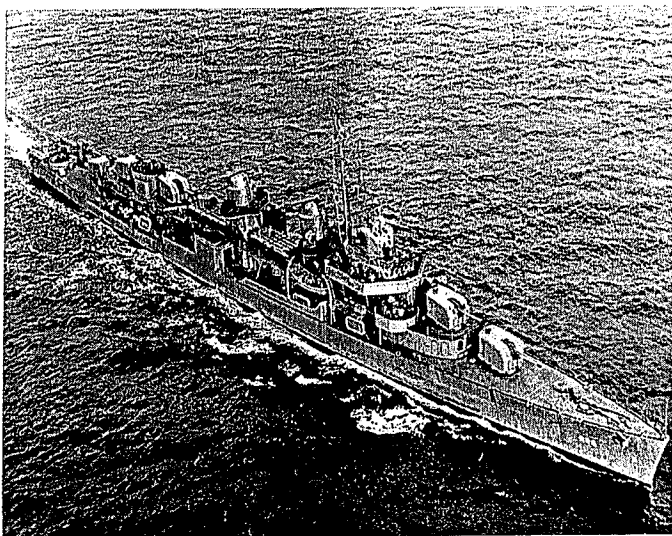
Appendix III Notice of Separation

NOTICE OF SEPARATION FROM U. S. NAVAL SERVICE NAVPERS-553 (REV. 8-45)

1. SERIAL OR FILE NO.		2. NAME (LAST) (FIRST) (MIDDLE)		3. RATE AND CLASS/ON		5. PLACE OF SEPARATION	
RANK AND CLASSIFICATION		4. PERMANENT ADDRESS FOR MAILING PURPOSES				USN PERSONNEL SEPARATION CENTER, BAINBRIDGE, MD.	
8 2 2 4 7 6 1		P S A K, John (N) Jr.				6. CHARACTER OF SEPARATION	
		Machinist's Mate 2/c, SV-6 USNR				Honorable	
		810 Heslep Ave.				7. ADDRESS FROM WHICH EMPLOYMENT WILL BE SOUGHT	
		Donora, Washington, Co., Pa.				810 Heslep Ave. Donora, Pa.	
8. RACE		9. SEX		10. MARITAL STATUS		11. U.S. CITIZEN (YES OR NO)	
W		M		Single		Yes	
12. DATE AND PLACE OF BIRTH		13. HOME ADDRESS AT TIME OF ENTRY INTO SERVICE		14. SELECTIVE SERVICE BOARD OF REGISTRATION		15. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	
8-20-24 Donora, Pa.		810 Heslep Ave. Donora, Pa.		LB #1 Donora, Pa.		7-2-43	
16. MEANS OF ENTRY (INDICATE BY CHECK IN APPROPRIATE BOX)		17. DATE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE		18. NET SERVICE (FOR PAY PURPOSES) (YRS., MOS., DAYS)		19. PLACE OF ENTRY INTO ACTIVE SERVICE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENLISTED <input type="checkbox"/> INDUCTED <input type="checkbox"/> COMMISSIONED		7-2-43		2-10-1		Donora, Pa.	
20. QUALIFICATIONS, CERTIFICATES HELD, ETC.		21. RATINGS HELD		22. FOREIGN AND/OR SEA SERVICE WORLD WAR II		23. SERVICE (VESSELS AND STATIONS SERVED ON)	
Those of Rating.		A/S, F3/c, F1/c, MM3/c, MM2/c:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		NTS, Great Lakes, ILL. USS Halsey Powell USS Recuba	
24. SERVICE SCHOOLS COMPLETED		25. WEEKS		26. INTENTION OF VETERAN TO CONTINUE INS.		27. NAME OF DISBURSING OFFICER	
				Undecided		T.C. CHRISTOPHERSON LT.	
28. TOTAL PAYMENT UPON DISCHARGE		29. TRAVEL OR MILEAGE ALLOWANCE INCLUDED IN TOTAL PAYMENT		30. INITIAL MUSTERING OUT PAY		31. SIGNATURE (BY DIRECTION OF COMMANDING OFFICER)	
\$ 288.06		\$ 20.20		\$ 100.00		LLOYD H. ELLIOTT LT. COMDR., USNR	
32. REMARKS		33. DATE OF LAST EMPLOYMENT		34. MAIN CIVILIAN OCCUPATION AND D. O. T. NO.		35. PREFERENCE FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING (TYPE OF TRAINING)	
ALNAV 76-46 Pacific Theater Ribbon (3 Stars) American Theater Ribbon Victory Medal Philippine Liberation Ribbon (1 Star)		Student.		Student.		Student.	
36. JOB PREFERENCE (LIST TYPE, LOCALITY, AND GENERAL AREA)		37. DEGREE		38. MAJOR COURSE OR FIELD		39. PREFERENCE FOR ADDITIONAL TRAINING (TYPE OF TRAINING)	
Student.						NYA - Machine Shop - 3 Mos.	
40. RIGHT INDEX FINGERPRINT		41. OFF DUTY EDUCATIONAL COURSE COMPLETED		42. DATE OF SEPARATION		43. SIGNATURE OF PERSON BEING SEPARATED	
		4-25-46		4-25-46			

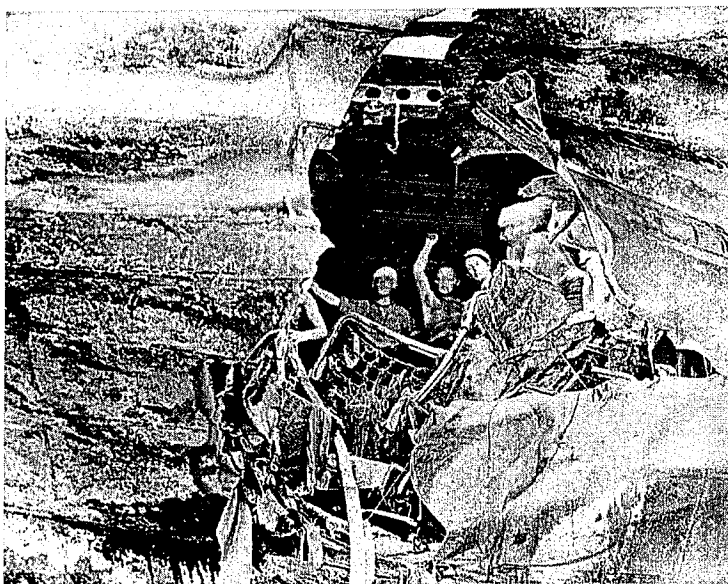
Appendix IV

DD-686 USS Halsey Powell



Halsey Powell –
Shakedown Cruise
<http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/0568604.jpg>

Damage to Halsey Powell from
kamikaze on March 20, 1945
<http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/0568617.jpg>



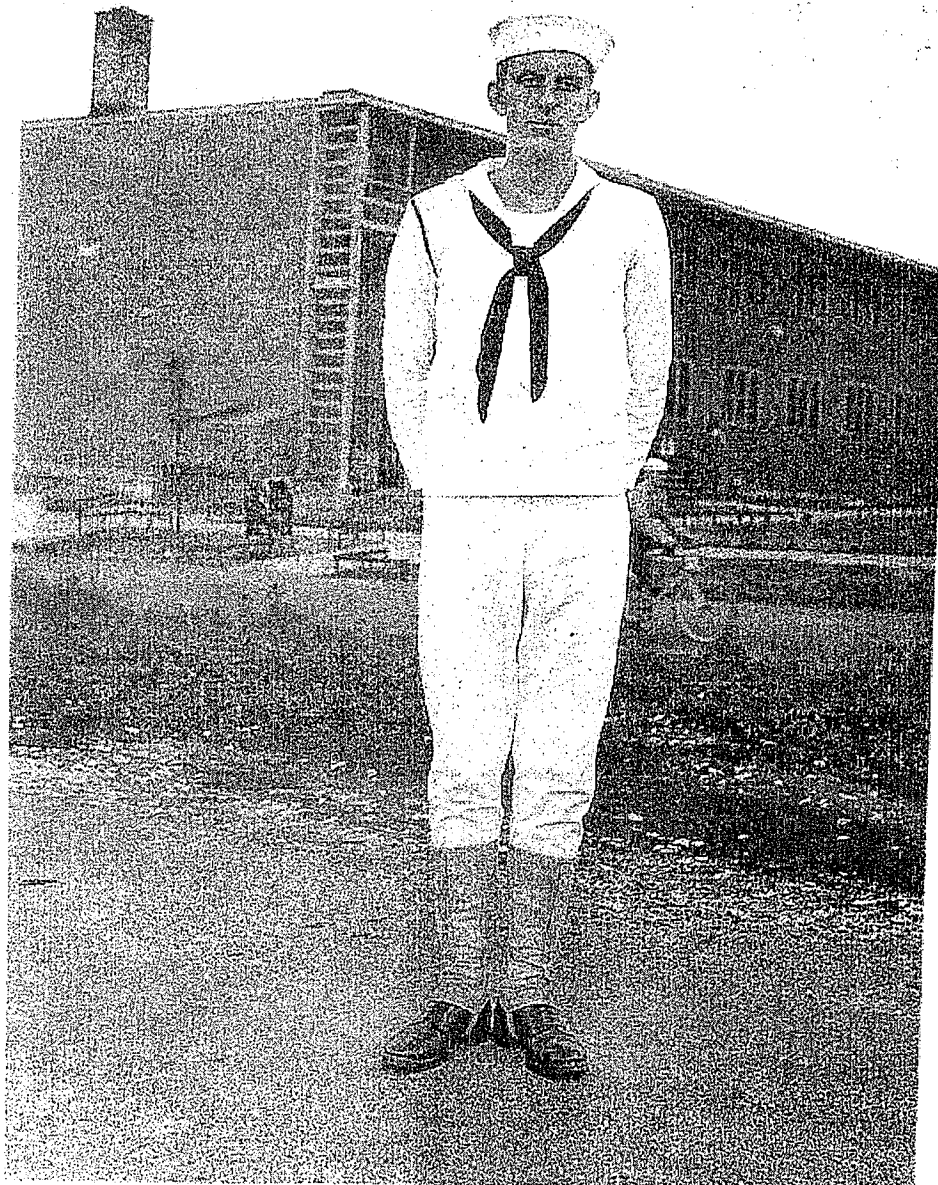
USS Halsey Powell & USS Hancock Kamikaze Attack
<http://www.navsource.org/archives/05/0568602.jpg>

Appendix V
John Psak



John Psak, Machinist's Mate 2nd Class

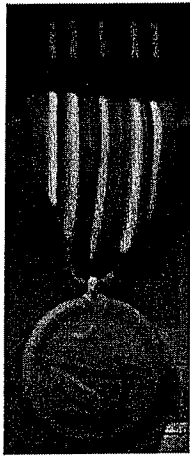
Appendix VI
John Psak



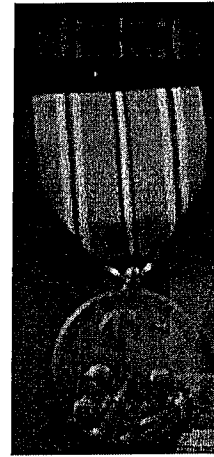
John Psak, Machinist's Mate 2nd Class

Appendix VII

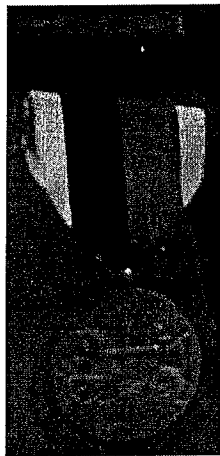
Medals



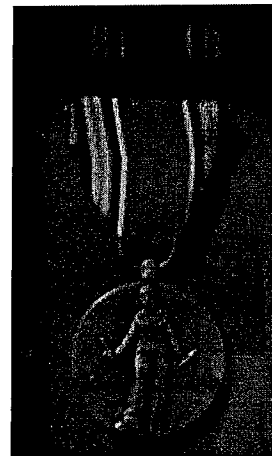
American
Campaign Medal



Asiatic Pacific Campaign
Medal w/ 4 Battle Stars



Navy Occupation Service
Medal w/ Asia Clasp



World War II
Victory Medal



Philippine Defense
Ribbon w/1 Battle Star



Machinist's
Mate 2nd Class

*Trip Peters**VOHP Transcript*

Trip Peters: Hi my name is Trip Peters, I am 16 years old, I am a junior at Cumberland Valley High School. I'd like to introduce you to my grandfather John Psak III. I'm doing the Veteran's Oral History Project for my grandfather; he's a veteran from World War II in the service of the Navy.

Papa (John Psak): The United States Navy

T: The US navy. The date is November 28, 2010 and I'll start the questioning.

T: Papa, tell us when you were born.

P: 8-20-24

T: August 20, 1924. Ok. And how old were you when you were drafted?

P: about 18

T: 18. Ok. What year were you drafted?

P: 1943

T: 1943 Ok. When were you discharged?

P: 1946.

T: Tell us how - what you felt like when you were drafted and tell us a little about how you were drafted.

P: Was I what?

T: Tell us the story of when you were drafted and what you did and -

P: I worked in the steel mill.

T: Ok.

P: - and I just graduated from high school

T: Did you work in the steel mill while in high school, correct?

P: Yeah.

T: What did you do when you got the letter for the draft?

P: What did I do?

T: Yes, what did the draft letter say to do?

P: You have been selected by your neighbors...

T: to do what?

P: To get into the service I guess

T: And where were you told to go?

P: I think to Pittsburgh.

T: Do you have any stories about the drafting when you went to Pittsburgh? About the recruitment officer?

P: Yeah. Recruiting officer.

T: Did you have the choice to go into any service you'd like?

P: Yeah. I asked if I go could into the army and he asks: 'why would you want to go in?' you know? And I says: 'because I thought I liked it better than the navy.'
'Congratulations sailor.'

T: What did your dad say? Where did your dad want you to go?

P: In the army. In the army because he says if things get too rough you can hide into a foxhole.

T: What did your dad say about the Navy? He said you can swim the whole river but ...

P: ...you can't swim all the ocean.

T: So. Anything else you remember? When were you set to leave?

P: What?

T: Where did you go after you were drafted?

Trip Peters
VOHP Transcript

4-23-11

P: Back to Donora to the steel mill?
T: What was the name of the steel mill? What was the company you worked for?
P: The Donora plant.
T: What was the name of the company? American Steel and Wire?
P: American Steel and Wire.
T: Where was it located in?
P: In Donora
T: Donora Pennsylvania. How many guys were drafted from your area?
P: 35 from Donora, and fifteen from Monongahela.
T: Where did you go after you were drafted? Where was your basic training?
P: We went up there ... Notskokee (?)
T: was it in Illinois? By the great lakes?
P: Yeah, Great Lakes is where it was.
T: OK. For about 30 days right?
P: I was there?
T: yeah.
P: more than that. About 3 months.
T: did you get homesick?
P: I didn't, no.
T: what about other people?
P: I'll tell you what, when they come back to the states, I mean from on leave, they kiss the ground.
P: We got tested on what we could do, and they put us on – like I was a machinist in the mill, so they put me in the machine shop in the navy.
T: What was boot camp like? What was basic training like? What were the conditions?
P: Which one?
T: The great lakes
P: it was nice; you could get around pretty easy. I mean, back then I was... I'm just trying to think what it was...you know what I can't even think of it.
T: That's alright.
P: I was in charge of the ...
T: were you a platoon leader or something?
P: no I used to write passes for people to visit. I forget what they called that.
T: That's ok. Did you do a lot of marching and rowing?
P: We had drill every day, yeah.
T: What time did you have to wake up in the morning?
P: probably about 8'o'clock
T: Did you like that?
P: Oh yeah. Maybe even seven.
T: What did you do for drilling?
P: marching, hiking, and exercising.
T: what was your rank at the time?
P: seamen, second class.
T: where did you go after Great Lakes?
P: To Norfolk Virginia, and that's where I was assigned to the Halsey Powell
T: what was the ship number?

Trip Peters
VOHP Transcript

P: 686

T: What kind of ship was the Halsey Powell?

P: destroyer

T: DD 686, correct? What did the Halsey Powell look like?

P: There's a picture of it

T: What did it look like? How large was it?

P: It was 300 feet long.

T: What's the size of that compared to other ships?

P: About 1/3 of a carrier

T: How new was it?

P: The Halsey Powell?

T: Yes

P: It was brand new. Just rebuilt and we went on a shakedown cruise.

T: What's a shakedown cruise?

P: To make sure everything is working fine.

T: Where did you go to on the shakedown cruise?

P: Bermuda

T: Did you get to go on the island of Bermuda?

P: I didn't go but I mean some of the guys did. You know what, maybe I did step off for a few minutes. Because they always – they didn't have any cars. All they had was bicycles.

T: Do you know why that is?

P: No. Maybe gasoline was hard to get down there, I don't know.

T: Where were you on the ship at that time? What was your station?

P: I was a Seaman. Third class, I think.

T: Where was your position, your station on the ship? Where did you work?

P: I was a machinist in the engine room.

T: Where's that at?

P: It's below the deck.

T: Did you guys have a nickname for it?

P: The Black Gang.

T: Why's that?

P: Because we couldn't see anything; there was no way to see nothing.

T: No portholes?

P: Nope.

T: What kind of equipment did you work with?

P: Working on pumps.

T: What kind of engines were they?

P: 600 pound, steam. They're steam engines. And then there was 800 pound super...

T: How was the steam?

P: 800 degrees and 600 degrees. And if you got hit, you didn't have to worry about survivorship, you'd be dead anyway. [laughs]

T: Were you frightened to work around it?

P: no.

T: Did you ever have any accidents with it?

P: No.

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T: how long were you on the shakedown cruise?

P: Probably about 6 months; no, 'bout 3 months.

T: Ok.

P: Cos I got on there in October and we left at uh ... for Christmas.

T: You came back to the states at Christmas time?

P: Yeah. We went into Norfolk. We also escorted New Jersey, it was brand new. We escorted it from Mediterranean to Norfolk. And we went, turned around, went back to Bermuda, I think.

T: What kind of ship was the New Jersey?

P: Battleship.

T: Why was it so important?

P: It had 16 inch guns on it.

T: Wasn't President Roosevelt on it?

P: Yeah.

T: What was he doing in the Mediterranean?

P: Well, maybe we escorted him on the New Jersey and that's why we went into Norfolk.

T: Was he coming back from Yalta?

P: Probably.

T: How did you feel about that?

P: Like I was pretty proud escorting the President. Yea, that's when they had the Yalta Conference with Stalin and ... what was the one from England? ... Winston Churchill.

T: Right, right. So you came back to the states; did you go on leave?

P: Yeah we went on leave.

T: What'd you do?

P: I went home. Everybody went home. [laughs]

T: Was your family surprised?

P: Huh?

T: What was your family's reaction?

P: Well my mother was so glad to see me, you know? She cried, you know? That was about it.

T: Did you get any Christmas presents that year?

P: I probably did but it wasn't much.

T: Yeah, you were just happy to see your family, right? Where did you go after that?

P: Back down to Norfolk.

T: Where did you go from Norfolk?

P: Back out to the Pacific.

T: How did you get there?

P: Going through the Panama Canal.

T: Well, from my notes it says you went to New York, to the Halsey Powell, then sailed down to Panama around December and January, went through the canal, and you stopped at San Diego to pick up more specialist soldiers. Is that right?

P: Yeah.

T: after that, it says you went to Hawaii and Pearl Harbor. What'd Pearl Harbor look like at that time?

P: There was a couple ships that were bombarded from the Japanese when it was...when the Japanese bombarded – I mean when they invaded – not invaded, they just ... knocked the heck out of the ships. In fact, one of them is still in there, with all the men on there.

T: Is that the Arizona? Which one was that? The USS Arizona? Is that it?

P: Arizona, yeah.

T: In my notes, it says that you – well, this is a firsthand experience, right?

P: What?

T: This is your first hand experience, right? Like, you saw ...

P: Yeah we saw a couple more of them. Going up the canal.

T: of ships? I meant in the Pearl Harbor. What you saw is your own, first-hand experience, right?

P: Well we went into town ...

T: At Pearl Harbor?

P: Yeah. And we went into Honolulu. It was like a leave. Or a vacation or something.

T: Did you like it there?

P: Yeah, I was there about three times.

T: It says in my notes you could see the Arizona, and you said: 'It was a mess' and that you could see 'quite a few more ships that were damaged and you thought that maybe this was the end of the war because you saw we got beat up pretty bad.'

P: Yup.

T: Where did the Halsey-Powell go next, after Pearl Harbor?

P: What was the name of that island?

T: My notes say you went to Enewetak.

P: Enewetak, yeah.

T: What were you doing down there?

P: Searching for submarines.

T: Where is Enewetak?

P: It's just an island.

T: Where is it?

P: Just south of Pearl Harbor.

T: What'd you do when you found a Japanese sub? What'd your ship do?

P: Nothing. They just dropped all their depth charges on it. Then we went back to Honolulu and got a kind of ... depth charges that go off on contact with metal.

T: What was the nickname for the depth charges? It says in my notes they were called 'ash cans'.

P: That was the ones before the ... the ash cans were first and then they got the other ones that went off on contact with subs, you know? The metal with subs.

T: Where did you go after you resupplied at Pearl Harbor?

P: Enewetak? Then Saipan and we went in for the invasion of Saipan and Tinian.

T: Do you remember what date that was?

P: I think about June the 5th. Because they invaded Europe at the time, and we were about five days behind them.

T: What year was that? '43?

P: '43

T: I bet you were glad you weren't in the army then, right?

P: Oh yeah.

T: What was noise like during battle?

P: Shells would go over your head like you know because ... because...the destroyers and the ...battlewagons just shot over into the islands, you know? They were told where to shoot, you know?

T: Tried to shoot in the caves?

P: Into the caves too. But that was only with smaller guns, 40 millimeter.

T: How long were you in the battle of Saipan?

P: Let's see, we went in there at June, about September we went to Guam.

T: About the Battle of Saipan, did you ever get nightmares from it? Or did you ever flashback to it or does your mind replay it in your head?

P: No.

T: Do you remember it vividly?

P: Oh yeah.

T: Anything else you want to say about the Battle of Saipan?

P: No.

T: Does it feel like you were just there? Or did it feel like a long time ago?

P: Oh yeah. We don't even think of it now. In fact, I never told Meribeth or Joanie, or David about it.

T: Well, my mom's here with us, so now she knows.

Meribeth Peters (Mom): When you were in that battle, was it something louder than something you'd ever thought you'd hear in your entire life? Were you fearful?

P: No.

M: How did you hear it? You were how many levels beneath?

P: Well usually I was at topside when we were at Saipan.

M: Why were you on topside?

P: because I was probably off of watch because we were on watch in the engine room until I think four hours on and four hours off.

M: Double bunks, triple bunks?

P: Oh single.

T: How were they stacked?

P: Like ... about four. Some of them were three, but ours was four.

M: So if you were four hours, as a machinist, then you got four hours off to be on ship somewhere? O you would go up and see what was going on?

P: I guess so, yeah. When we were off, yeah.

M: So you'd go topside?

P: Yeah.

M: Ok, and were you in uniform all the time?

P: Dungarees. That was our dress of the day

T: What were they?

P: Blue jeans and a shirt that...

M: Well how long did the battles last? I mean, did it go on for 24, 36-8 hours? Did it go on for days at a time, continually?

P: I guess so. Like Saipan, yeah.

M: So, I'm thinking what movies are like, and the sound effects of that; anything you can describe about the sound effects of being topside?

P: Oh yeah, they would...boom, boom, and that's about it. [laughs]

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T: Where did you go after the Battle of Saipan?
P: Down to Guam. To join the fleet.
T: Which fleet was that?
P: Halsey-Powell, I mean Halsey and Spruance.
T: Admiral Halsey, right?
P: He took time – they worked on ships for three months at the time. In other words, Halsey worked on it for three months and then he was relieved by Spruance.
T: You mean as the skipper of the ship? As the captain of the ship?
P: Yeah, they were all captains.
T: Who was Spruance? Who is Spruance?
P: Spruance?
T: Who was he?
P: He was the captain of the ship.
T: Oh, ok.
P: Division.
T: Where did you go after Guam?
P: Out in the pacific.
T: My notes say you went to Peleliu. Peleliu. Is that it, you went to Peleliu next?
P: Yeah, that's where we used to load up again.
T: Was the battle before or after?
P: Oh yeah, before, they was cleaned up when we got there.
T: My notes say after that you headed off to the Philippines.
P: Yeah, of the coast of – yeah we went off to the Philippines.
T: And that was about April, 1944?
P: That sounds good.
T: Why did you go to the Philippines?
P: I don't know why.
T: My notes say you shot it up to cover the marines.
P: Shot what?
T: You shot up the island with artillery and the big guns to cover the marines.
P: Oh yeah.
T: Is that right?
P: Yeah.
T: Ok. My notes say there was a large typhoon off the Philippines.
P: Was there what?
T: There was a typhoon off the Philippines. Can you tell me about that?
P: That was in '45. I mean '44. And the ship, I mean the ocean was dark blue, and it felt like we went to the bottom of the ocean, and then up as high as the Himalayan Mountains. We lost three ships in that typhoon. And out of those about 1000 men, we picked up 65.
T: So around 1944, there's a large typhoon off the Philippines. How long did it last?
P: Probably a week. Maybe a little bit longer. But it was a week anyhow.
T: Did you get seasick?
P: No.
T: Were others?
P: Oh yeah. A lot of guys, soon as they got aboard ship, they got sick. Seasick.

T: Were you scared during the typhoon?

P: No. At least I don't think I was; I'm not sure.

T: Well you're in the middle of a hurricane.

P: That was a typhoon, not a hurricane.

T: It says in my notes that about 100 out of 1000 survived from the three ships that sunk. And they sunk because they ran out of fuel -

P: - Right, right, they didn't get fuel before -

T: - and they were bobbing in the ocean and they capsized and sunk. Did you see the ships sink?

P: No, they sunk.

T: I mean; did you see them capsize?

P: No.

T: How did you pick up the survivors?

P: How many were there in the ocean?

T: You said 65.

P: And we just picked them up.

T: How did you do that? Did you use rowboats or throw down nets?

P: Probably we threw a net out and they climbed up on the ship.

T: It says in my notes that you were in the Philippines and you were shooting it up to cover the marines and I quoted you as saying: 'battleships, cruisers, destroyers sailed down to meet the Japanese fleet' off the Philippines. Is that right?

P: Yeah, I'll tell you what. We was over at Saipan and we found out that the Japanese ships were coming out of the Philippines so the battlewagons and the heavy cruisers went out to meet them. I guess they must have beat them because I never heard anymore about it.

T: Did you ever see any action in a ship battle? In a naval battle with Japanese ships?

P: No.

T: It says in my notes around June 1944 you were sailing up to Okinawa and you were bombarding it?

P: Yeah, probably Korea first, and then...

T: Korea?

P: ...Okinawa.

T: So after the Philippines you went up to Okinawa?

P: Yeah, maybe ... Korea first and then the...

T: to Okinawa?

P: Okinawa, yeah.

T: Where did you go after Okinawa? Well, it says in my notes that you bombarded Okinawa.

P: Yeah.

T: Where did you go after that?

P: I just don't remember.

T: Ok. It says in here you remember looking up your first cousin, George Psak, but you couldn't find him.

P: I was trying to find him on Okinawa, and I couldn't. He was in the army.

T: Did you figure out what happened to him?

P: No, I guess he was just maneuvering around, that's all.

T: He lived though, I mean, he was alive, right?

P: Oh yeah.

T: Ok, that's good. Then it says here you were sent back to the states for a 30 day leave.

P: After the typhoon, yeah.

T: It said you landed in Seattle and took a train to Pittsburgh. Right?

P: Right.

T: And then you found Uncle Mickey in New York, and found Uncle Paul back at a New York shipyard. Is that right?

P: Yeah. That's when Roosevelt died too.

T: You said you were in Brooklyn when you heard?

P: Yeah, I was in Brooklyn when he died.

T: What'd you feel like? Describe the situation you were in.

P: Oh I was just walking' around because I think we were being assigned to ships in New York.

T: Back in September, when we took these notes down, I have you quoted as saying: 'you were hurt. You felt like it was the end of the world. You were really sad. In fact, the whole world was.'

P: Oh yeah, that's right. When Roosevelt died, yeah.

T: Did you vote for him?

P: Oh I voted for him, yeah. I liked him as a president. He brought the whole country back to its normal. Because it was at depression when he took it over. Then he got us out of the depression, and I guess then when the war started, I guess that's where it brought up more jobs and everything else, you know?

T: What was the hardest part about the depression?

P: Just that everybody was hungry, that's all.

T: So, after you heard that Roosevelt died, where did you go next? My notes say that you were on the way to Japan when the war ended? Is that correct?

P: Yeah probably. I went up to Newport, Rhode Island and got a new assignment.

T: A new ship?

P: Assignment. From up there and they sent me down to Galveston, Texas ... no, New Orleans, and when I got down there, the ship was already down in -

T: The Halsey Powell?

P: - Galveston - yeah.

T: About what time was that, what year was that? What was the date around then?

P: ...

T: You were still on the Halsey Powell, right?

P: Then I got on the Hecuba.

T: The Hecuba?

P: The Hecuba.

T: What's that?

P: It's a supply ship.

T: Where did you go from there?

P: I guess the war was over and we went back to the states.

T: Where did you come from? So, you went down from Newport, Rhode Island, to Galveston or New Orleans and were assigned to The Hecuba, which is a supply ship?

P: A supply ship, yeah.

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T: And you went through the Panama Canal towards Japan, when the war ended?

P: When the war ended, we went through the canal, and up to New York to get decommissioned, and we got our discharge.

T: Did you ever go to Japan?

P: No. I was never on the island, no.

T: Did you want to?

P: I would've enjoyed it, yeah. The only thing was, we dropped the bombs on there, you know? And the people were all burned up, and everything else, you know? So that was my intention not to stay on that island, not to go on it either.

T: What did you think about the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

P: I thought it was a good idea, because that's what ended the war. Cos if we had to fight the Japs on their own island, it would've been even worse than that.

T: It says in my notes you got back to New York City. About what time, what date, did you get back to New York?

P: Probably about April or May.

T: Of 1945?

P: Yeah.

T: Where did you go next?

P: I went home and went back to my steel mill.

T: Did you get a big welcome coming off the ship?

P: Heck no. In fact I went to the restaurant and one girl (I was still in my uniform) she says, 'what do you think you are?' I mean how long are you gonna wear that? She just knocked the skids from out under me. [chuckles]

T: What did you say back to her?

P: I didn't answer, I was always shy.

T: Did you take your uniform off after that?

P: Oh definitely. I went right home and changed off.

M: You only wore it that one day because she made you feel like you should take it off already?

P: I wasn't working then,

T: The restaurant, the waitress; they were in Donora, right?

P: You know, I didn't want to go back to into the mill, but one of the guys who was across the street from where I lived says 'How long you gonna play around? It's about time you went back to work.'

M: How long were you home at that point?

P: Probably about three months.

T: Your family was all happy, right?

P: Oh yeah.

T: When did you get your medals?

P: I don't know. I sent for them and that's what they sent me back, those.

T: So which medals do you have? You told me you have the World War II Pacific Victory medal, with four battle stars, the Victory in World War II medal... This one is the Victory in World War II medal, and this one here in blue is the American Campaign medal.

P: Campaign.

T: This one, that's the World War II Pacific Victory medal, with four battle stars. And that one is the Asian Occupation Medal. And this one here is ...

P: Good Conduct.

T: Good Conduct. What rank were you?

P: Second Class Machinist. When I left the Navy.

T: Is that what the propeller means, machinist?

P: Yeah.

T: Wasn't there a kamikaze that hit your ship too?

P: No. There was one that ... I'm trying to think how it got...it bounced off a carrier and maybe it hit us, yeah.

T: But that was while you were on leave, right?

P: Yeah, that was in ... March of '45.

T: It says in my notes, "kamikaze, 1945, hit about mid-ship?" And you were about 20 miles from Japan?

P: Yeah.

T: But you weren't on the ship at that time, right?

P: I don't know; I was back home already.

T: But if you were on the ship...

P: I'd probably be pushing up seaweeds.

T: It's a good thing you weren't on.

P: Cos it hit on the back – on the rear end of the ship – on the fan tail of the ship, and that's where I slept.

M: So did it go in for repairs?

P: Oh yeah, they went into San Pedro, California, but I was off of it already.

T: Did you thank God that you weren't on the ship?

P: Oh yeah, it went up to San Pedro, California, and ... it went out to a couple of battles out there. I don't know if it was Korea ...

T: You mean the war afterwards, you mean the Korean War after that?

P: No I was off the ship already.

T: I mean, after the Halsey Powell was repaired, it was used in the Korean War too?

P: Yeah, they probably shot up the island too, and Okinawa.

T: Ok. It also says in my notes, in 1944, your brother Mickey was on a French ship in Seattle?

P: My brother?

T: Yeah, that's what it says in the notes.

P: I just went to visit them in Bayhome (?).

T: Was Mickey in the war?

P: No.

M: Because he was 18 years older?

P: Yeah.

M: Did they have a certain point where what age category did they enlist?

P: Yeah, or draft. And if you were married, you were exempt.

T: I have in my notes you saying that after the typhoon off the Philippines, you picked up some bomber-men, about eight bomber men, who were in the water for a couple of hours.

And you're quoted as saying: "they had so much fun bombing the Japanese on the Philippines, that when they got picked up by the ship, after they crashed in the ocean, that

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they didn't want to go back. They had so much fun bombing the island because there were so many targets.

P: No, you know what, those guys were picked up, they went back to the states and I went with them, and they were so quiet; they didn't mingle with anybody.

T: Oh really? Wow. Well it says in the notes there were so many targets they didn't want to go back and they ran out of fuel.

P: No, I didn't say any of that.

T: Oh ok, I'm sorry. What really happened, then?

P: What?

T: What really happened then? So the bomber-men crash-landed in the water -

P: Yeah, just upset and went down.

T: Were they shot down?

P: No, just from the waves.

M: Typhoon.

P: From the ocean.

T: Oh, ok.

M: Were you on deck when you picked up any of these men out of the ocean?

P: Yup.

M: What do you remember them saying?

P: Nothing.

M: Well did they say "Thank God you got me"? or...

P: They just were total quiet.

M: What do you think the quiet was from?

P: Being saved.

T: A happy quiet?

P: Yeah.

T: What did you guys do when you crossed the equator?

P: What did we do?

T: Yeah, was there anything special you did?

P: Yeah, we just had ... I'm trying' to think - they painted us up and everything else, cut our hair ...

T: The pollywogs? The pollywogs were the older guys?

P: The pollywogs was the ones that was like that made it - the first time we crossed.

M: So they made it a big celebration?

P: Oh yeah.

M: So you're coming out of where when you crossed the equator?

P: I don't remember that.

M: Who painted you?

P: Older guys that were crossed -

M: Was it like a rite of initiation?

P: Yeah.

M: How did they know who had never been across?

P: I guess they know right away.

T: It says in my notes that they cut the new guys' hair and painted them between the legs.

P: They cut our hair, I mean they butchered it. And I was supposed to be one with the red hair you know, and it was something about the prits(?) ... was jealous because I had the red hair. That was it.

T: They were jealous of it. So did they take your hair or something?

M: He was different, he had red hair.

T: Why did they do it?

P: Just a whadyacallit, a ceremony.

M: So it was a happy time, it made – just fun on the ship. Somewhere I remember you talking about, you'd have to have your uniform clean, and you'd go do laundry, and some people would pay other guys to do your laundry.

P: Yeah I used to do my own in a bucket. I'd get steam from the engine and wash it that way and then hang it up in the engine room – I mean in the boiler house, boiler room.

T: Did that work well?

P: Oh yeah.

M: Others who didn't want to wash their own laundry -

P: No, because they lost so many pairs, you know?

M: People would take them from each other?

P: No, maybe that too. But, they just disappeared. So I didn't bother.

T: Oh, when you paid other people.

M: But you wouldn't pay anybody else to do your laundry ...

P: See, they had a regular laundry ...

M: Did they give you money on board ship?

P: They didn't give it to us, they just told us how much we would get when we get our discharge. And then when we were discharged, they gave us a check for whatever they thought we were worth, you know?

T: How much did you get?

P: I don't know.

T: Was it over a hundred?

P: Oh yeah.

T: Over 500?

P: No. I don't remember.

T: What did you guys do when you crossed the International Date Line?

P: We just had that ceremony, that's all.

T: No, the International Date Line.

P: Yeah.

T: Didn't your skipper say: 'today is no longer today, but tomorrow.'?

P: Oh that was coming' over. That wasn't in the ... on the ... that was the International Date Line that we crossed. But this was the ...

T: ...equator?

P: ...the one where the pollywogs were.

T: The pollywogs were the equator, right?

P: Yeah, equator.

T: It says here on the notes, you got seasick on the shakedown cruise, but not after that?

P: Right.

T: And Grammy asked: 'What caused the seasickness?' And you said: 'Greasy pork chops.'

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P: Yeah.

T: Really? You said guys were throwing up in the mess line.

P: They were getting out and throwing up over the side, you know?

T: And then Grammy said: 'And then you joined them.' Right?

P: [laughs]

T: Are you still in touch with anyone from the Halsey Powell?

P: Yeah there's a guy that calls me every two weeks.

T: Who's that? What's his name?

P: You know, he calls me every week, every two weeks, and I can't think of his name.

M: From Illinois.

T: He's from Illinois, right?

P: Gildea. Eugene Gildea.(?) (Gill-dee-uh)

T: Were you guys friends on the ship?

P: Oh yeah.

T: What was his job? Was he a machinist too?

P: You know what; he didn't even get in on the typhoon, I don't think. I think he left the ship right before the typhoon. And he ... got into California, and he got married. But he's still in contact with me. And there's a couple more that he calls.

T: Are you proud to be in the navy?

P: Oh yeah, I would tell anybody. You get three meals a day, you got a clean sheet to -- I mean clean bed. I would tell anybody who pays money to get into the service to get into the navy. [laughs]

T: I think you told me before; they had a better football team than the army, right?

P: Aw, [laughs] maybe it was one of the times that they played. You ready to quit?

T: Thank you for your time.

P: Oh it's no problem.