

Interviewee: Herman Hinrichs

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date of interview: 18 October 2001

Location: the Hinrichs home, Roseville, MN

Transcribed by: Shannon Smith, July 2002

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, August 2002

Herman Hinrichs was born 23 January 1921 in St. Paul, Minnesota. He enlisted in the US Navy in February 1941 and, after Basic Training at Great Lakes Naval Training Center and machinists school at Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, was stationed on the battleship USS *Oklahoma* (BB-37). The *Oklahoma* was at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked on 7 December 1941; she was hit by a number of torpedoes and sank rapidly, but Herman managed to escape the crippled ship and swim to safety. After a brief time on the cruiser USS *Helena* (CL-50), in May 1942 Herman was transferred to the newly commissioned battleship USS *Massachusetts* (BB-59), where he remained until mid-1945.

The *Massachusetts* first saw action in 1942 in the Atlantic, providing support for the Allied invasion of North Africa; she then participated in numerous important campaigns in the Pacific Theater, among them the invasions of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands in late 1943 and early 1944, the Battle of Leyte Gulf/Philippines (October 1944), and support for the invasions of Luzon/Philippines (January 1945), Iwo Jima (February 1945), and Okinawa (March-June 1945). Herman left the *Massachusetts* in May 1945 and was transferred to the USS *Grand Canyon*, a repair ship; he remained on her until his discharge in December 1946.

Following the war Herman worked as a tool and die maker and foreman for the Donaldson Co., St. Paul, until his retirement in 1982. He married Lorraine (d. 1996) in 1948, and the couple raised two children. At the time of this interview Herman lived in the St. Paul suburb of Roseville.

Pearl Harbor survivor, 7 December 1941, on board USS *Oklahoma*.

Herman's interview provides the perspective of an enlisted man on a large ship in the Pacific Theater, 1942-45, with many details of a sailor's everyday life.



The battleship USS *Massachusetts* (BB-59) underway, most probably after her refit at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Washington (USA), circa July 1944. She is painted in Camouflage Measure 22.

Source: US Navy official photograph

Interview key:

HH = Herman Hinrichs

TS = Thomas Saylor

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

TS: It's the 18th of October 2001, and this is tape one of the interview with Herman Hinrichs. Herman, first of all, I want to thank you for taking time out of your evening to sit and have a conversation with me. Thanks very much.

HH: You're welcome.

TS: Let me ask you, Herman: when and where were you born?

HH: I was born in St. Paul; in fact I was born at St. Joseph's Hospital, on January 23, 1921.

TS: You went to school in St. Paul?

HH: Yes, I went to St. Bernard's [Catholic School].

TS: When did you decide to join the Navy?

HH: Well, I was working at the Donaldson Company, and there were mostly Scandinavians: Danes, Norwegians, Swedes. They were all so unhappy with Hitler and all that, and I'd tease them. Finally I told them it'd take the Germans in this country to beat the Germans over there [Mr. Hinrichs is of German descent]. Then with the draft and all that, I knew I was going to be going, and I did not want to go Army.

TS: Why not?

HH: I had seen Fort Snelling when I was a kid, and I didn't want no part of that life. So I figured, I'll go Navy. So I decided to take six years in the Navy, because they raised the enlistments up to six years at that time. They raised it from four to six because everybody wanted to go in the Navy. So I went down and I enlisted in the Navy for six years.

TS: Did your folks have to sign for you, or were you already eighteen?

HH: Oh, yeah. I was twenty. But they still had to sign.

TS: Parents had to sign for you?

HH: Because I was under twenty-one.

TS: What did your folks have to say about you joining the Navy?

HH: They didn't care. They knew I was going to go anyway. I came from a big family.

TS: Lot of kids?

HH: Yes. Nine of us. So, I tried to get my older brother to go enlist with me, but he wouldn't do it. I went in, in February of 1941, and he got drafted in June.

TS: So it didn't save him much time?

HH: Didn't make very much difference.

TS: Your brother was drafted before the war started?

HH: Yes.

TS: Did you have other brothers who went into the service?

HH: There were six boys in the family; all six boys in uniform.

TS: During the war, all six of you?

HH: Well, during the war there was three of us, during the World War II. The other three were in during the Korean War.

TS: And your other brothers: what branch of the service did they go in?

HH: My oldest brother was in the Army Air Force. I was in the Navy. My other brother was in the Army Air. Another brother was in the Navy. Another brother was in the Army, and another brother in the Navy. So three were Navy, and three Army.

TS: And your brothers who were in World War II came out of the war okay?

HH: Yes.

TS: So you thought even in early 1941, Herman, that something was going to happen?

HH: Oh, you knew it very definitely, because Hitler had gone through all of Europe now. He had gone into Denmark, and Norway, and all that. Like I said, I worked

with all these Scandinavians. These people were from the old country and they were taking it pretty hard. So I was well aware of what was going on.

TS: And you figured the US would be involved in this sooner or later.

HH: I knew it was coming, yes.

TS: When you went to Basic Training, where did you go?

HH: Great Lakes [Naval Training Center].

TS: Down by Chicago?

HH: Yes.

TS: Was that a new part of the country for you?

HH: No, I had been to Chicago before.

TS: What about Basic Training? Was that your first time away from home for a long time?

HH: No, when I was a kid I worked on farms and all that. I came from a big family during the Depression (*pauses three seconds*) so I had been used to being away from home for a couple months.

TS: What about Basic Training itself? Do you have anything good or bad to say about it?

HH: No, nothing except it was in February, and they had us marching out there and I never could figure out why we did that (*laughs*).

TS: Marching?

HH: Marching, you know: carrying our rifle—never did it again (*laughs*).

TS: Why did the Navy do all that, do you think?

HH: I think it was just to teach you take orders. Basically that's all. When you're told to do something, do it (*laughs*).

TS: After Basic Training, Herman, where did you go from there?

HH: Like I said, I was working as a tool and die maker apprentice before I went into the Navy. Then I went into what they call machinist mate school. I went at Great Lakes for about a month, and then they moved us to the Ford Motor Company, in

Dearborn, Michigan. Ford had opened up a school there for the Navy. It was brand new, so I was one of the very first guys to go there. So we went up to Dearborn, Michigan. There what we did was go to the Ford Motor Company, and I was in the die shop there. Monkey around, work around, see what you can learn.

TS: Were you just with other Navy guys?

HH: No, we had a barracks there but when we'd go into the Ford Motor Company, we were mixed in with the civilians.

[1, A, 106]

TS: So you were essentially doing a civilian apprenticeship, just in uniform?

HH: Yes.

TS: How long did that program at Ford last?

HH: Three months, I'd say I was up there.

TS: And so you finished this program and you were ready to go onto the next step?

HH: Right. We would go to sea.

TS: Did you volunteer for [duty on the battleship] *Oklahoma*, or were you assigned to it?

HH: I asked to go to sea. They had asked me to stay at the Ford Motor Company because of the experience I had. And I said no, because you couldn't advance in rate, so I asked to go to sea. Then in September of '41, we came back to Great Lakes, and then they assigned the ships there. And that's where I was assigned to the *Oklahoma*.

TS: Where did you join her?

HH: I took the train across country down to San Francisco, and caught the *Oklahoma* in San Francisco.

TS: So people who stayed at the program in Michigan couldn't advance in rate?

HH: No. That was all frozen at that time.

TS: So to get advanced in rate you had to go to sea?

HH: Yes. You had to have sea duty.

TS: And that was the reason you volunteered for sea duty?

HH: Right.

TS: You joined *Oklahoma* at San Francisco—was that ship stationed at Pearl Harbor at that time?

HH: Right. The *Oklahoma* had come back because she had lost a screw. She had gone in the Navy Yards—she was out of the Navy Yards when I got there. She was ready to go back to Hawaii when I came on board. I think I was only on board a couple of days when we pulled anchor and went out to Hawaii.

TS: What was the duty like at Pearl Harbor, if you can recall, for the three months before the war started?

HH: Well, I was supposed to go into the machine shop. But they had no room in the machine shop, so in the “B” division, which means *Boilers*, there was one machinist’s mate, and he was up for discharge, so they put me as a striker, and all I did on the *Oklahoma*—she was an old ship—she had these old poured bearings and that, and I think I was scraping bearings just about every day I was on her.

TS: When you say, “scraping the bearings,” what does that mean exactly?

HH: Hand-scraping, you know, to fit them. You’d pour them with (***) and that, and the machine shop would pour them too, but then you’d have to get down with a hand scraper, use pressured glue, and get them real nice and make little oil pockets.

TS: Was that hard work?

HH: Tedious. Yes.

TS: Was it time-consuming as well?

HH: Oh, yes. That machinist—I think he hated it, that’s why he had me doing so much of it. He stuck me with it. I was hoping for him to get off the ship so I could take over (*laughs*).

TS: Did *Oklahoma* go to sea at all before December?

HH: She was at sea most of the time. We would go out on maneuvers. Basically what they did—there were eight battleships out there [at Pearl Harbor], and there’d be four out, four in. That was basically what it was. The battle fleet that we were in was the *Oklahoma*, *Arizona*, *Nevada*, and *Pennsylvania*. The other fleet was the *Tennessee*, *Maryland*, *West Virginia*, and *California*.

TS: And it stayed in those groups of four?

HH: Yes. Well, the battle-fleet that we were in, those four battleships were all old ones, and they all had fourteen-inch guns on them. The other four battleships were newer ones, and they all had sixteen-inch guns. The *Oklahoma* and *Nevada* were sister ships; they only had ten 14-inch guns. But the *Arizona* and the *Pennsylvania* had twelve 14-inch guns. They were a little bit newer.

TS: So *Oklahoma* and *Nevada* were the two oldest of the eight battleships?

HH: Yes, and the *Oklahoma* was the only battleship out there that had reciprocating engines. All the rest had turbines.

TS: When you say “reciprocating engine,” how is that different from a turbine?

HH: Well, basically a turbine is rotary, where it comes like a fan going around. Reciprocating engines are basically like you have in your car, up and down, pistons. The *Oklahoma* had what they called “triple-expansion engines.” It had three cylinders, and it only had two screws, where the other ones had four, one engine for each screw. She was the last battleship built with reciprocating engines.

TS: When was she built?

HH: She was built in 1917, right at the end of World War I.

TS: Between the time that you joined *Oklahoma* and December 7th, when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, what was the scuttlebutt among the guys on board the ship?

HH: They knew war was coming.

TS: Did they know?

HH: Oh, yes, it was common talk, but we didn't think we'd get hit in Pearl. Actually, it was more or less with Germany. But we knew there was going to be trouble with Japan, because [the US government] had put the embargo and everything on Japan, but we didn't think they'd ever come as far as Hawaii. We figured maybe the Philippines, but we never figured Hawaii.

TS: So the fact that we got into the war: it wasn't the time so much as it was the location?

HH: Right. The location.

TS: Can you talk a bit about December the 7th, and how you experienced that?

HH: Well, we had been at sea, and then on Friday, December 5th, we pulled back into Pearl. Then we were going to have Admiral's inspection on Monday morning, December 8th. What we had to do was start getting the ship ready for Admiral's inspection. So we opened up the double bottoms and the voids and that, so they could be inspected. The reason why I'm mentioning this is that it all has a big bearing on why the *Oklahoma* went down so fast. For each one of those voids, you have a manhole cover. There's got to be at least twenty-four nuts that you have to remove on each one to remove it or put it back on. And they were all open on the *Oklahoma* for December 8th inspection. Now we opened them up—guys worked pretty hard because we wanted to go into town and get a drink or two, have a little fun.

So Saturday noon, we got done with the work and went over to Honolulu, and did some Christmas shopping. Then we had to be back to the ship—I don't know, one o'clock in the morning or something like that, unless you're top-rated, you know. All the rest had to be back, because there wasn't enough room in Hawaii for all those guys. I know we came back to Mary's Point, and we had a drink there. There was some music, we sat there and listened to some music. Then we went down, and we caught the motor launch out the *Oklahoma*, and came aboard probably about two o'clock in the morning. I went down to my bunk, crawled in the sack. Now Sunday morning, on the *Oklahoma*, we all had to get up in the morning so we could eat. We had no mess hall on the *Oklahoma*; you had to pull the bunks up, the tables would drop down from the overhead, the mess cooks would go get the food and bring it down, to serve us family-style in our living compartment.

TS: So what time did you get up?

HH: Probably about 6:30, because I think we ate at 7:00. When we got done eating, you had to wait because the mess cooks had to clean the tables, put the tables back up, and then they'd always swab the deck there. Mass was at 8:00 on the *Oklahoma*, and the chaplain's name was Father Alowicious Herman Schmidt, he was from Dubuque, Iowa. He was going to have mass at 8:00. I was going to go to mass but there was some time to kill. So I figured I'd take my white uniform and soak it while I'm at mass. So I sat on a bench by the table where we had to eat, and I had a bucket between my legs, and I take my whites out of my locker and throw them in the pail to soak them. **[1, A, 246]**

And all of a sudden over the speaker, the exact words were: "Air raid, no shit, they're bombing Hickham Field." Well I got up, and I ran—I had to go through the bull ring, which is the uptakes and the intakes for the boilers. I was on the port side, and I had to get over to the starboard side to get down to my battle station. Well, I got up and I probably went about ten, fifteen feet when the first torpedo hit. I went through the bull ring, I got over, and went down one deck to the boiler control, where my battle station was. A couple more torpedoes came in.

TS: Could you feel the impact of the torpedoes?

HH: The ship would kind of jar. The division officer was down there, his name was

Ed Trough, the ward (***) was there—there were about twelve of us in Boiler Control. Then there was a water tender key—he and I had become friends in the short time I was aboard *Oklahoma*—and he says, “I need help, my men ain’t showing up.” I turned to the division officer and said, “I’ll go help.” Swede Hanson had the Number Two Fire Room. So the Swede and I went forward up this passage, and we got to the Number Two Fire Room—some more torpedoes had come in—Number Two Fire Room, you can tell by the number that it was on the portside where all the torpedoes were coming in. Now the *Oklahoma* had airlocks, and you had to go through the airlocks to get into the fire room, because the fire rooms were under pressure. We went through the airlock—the ship was tilting, I’ll bet she was over close forty-five degrees when we did this.

TS: So was it hard to walk?

HH: Swede and I went through the airlock, and got to the fire room side. Here the fire room was half-flooded already. So we said, “Let’s get the hell out of here.” We came back through the airlock, and just as we came back through the airlock, the ship fell on its side. Then it was over ninety degrees. And there we were, down in this place, and right where we were, the battle lanterns didn’t work. So we had to work our way out to boiler control. There were lockers on the starboard bulkhead that had broken loose and landed. Of course we were in the dark, and the lockers, I think, had been there from World War I, and there was dust behind them. And I know that Swede and I thought we were gassed down there. We thought we were breathing something, but we were breathing dust. [1, A, 278] Then we made our way back to boiler control and there the battle lanterns were working. Then we had to work our way to the second deck [1, A, 280]—the ship was going under extremely fast.

TS: And you knew this by this time?

HH: There was no doubt. We knew we were fighting for our lives at that moment. We have to get off of this thing. We got back to boiler control—I’m going to make a point here that might not make sense to you—there was nobody there but Swede and I. And we had to work our way, I’ll say horizontally, to go up, because that was the only way out. But there was nobody in boiler control—which later I found out that every one of the guys in boiler control got killed. So I’d have probably been killed if I would have stayed there.

TS: What happened to them?

HH: I think when they went to get off they got killed. Now, the Swede and I got to the second deck, and all the hatches and everything were under water already. But the starboard portholes were still open.

TS: Open because they are actually up at the top now, right?

HH: Yeah—these windows here, were over where those windows are. (*pointing to a picture of Oklahoma to illustrate*) See? (*pauses three seconds*) No, they were this way! [1, A, 294] So, the ship was funny, but we got a hold of the upward bunks, pulled ourselves up, and got out through a porthole, and dropped into the water. Of course by the time we got out, the water was all burning, it was all on fire, and they were strafing us. So, all you could do was dive down, swim under water, come up and get a breath of air, and swim (*laughs*).

TS: And you swam directly to shore then?

HH: No, I swam around the stern of the *Oklahoma*, over to the *Maryland*. The *Maryland* had lines hanging down. I got to the *Maryland*, grabbed a hold of a line and tried to climb up hand over hand. But we were so full of oil, I don't know how many tries I tried before I made it up onto the deck of the *Maryland*.

[1, A, 305]

TS: Had she taken torpedoes or bombs as well?

HH: She was protected. She couldn't take any torpedoes because the *Oklahoma* was in her way. So she was well-protected, although she got hit with a bomb, but it didn't do that much damage to her. Then, after the bombing let up, this one officer on the *Maryland*, he didn't like us *Oklahoma* men, because we were really covered with oil. I mean, we were saturated, and we were getting their decks all full of oil. So he put us ashore onto Ford Island (*chuckles*). As only the Navy could do—get on Ford Island, and then they started siding guys. They didn't ask what your rate was, or anything else: "You, you, and you." I don't know how many there were. They went and they sent us down to the northwest corner of the island where there was an admiral's home. From the base of the admiral's home going out to the shoreline was a long tunnel, or cave, or whatever you want to call it. They put us there and they wanted to get all the women and kids on Ford Island in there. Then, as only the Navy could do, they came and they dropped a .50 caliber machine gun off. Not a one of us that were sent there had ever fired a gun, and none of us were a gunner's mate (*laughs*). They never checked to see if there was a gunner there—

TS: They just dropped the gun off and figured you'd manage?

HH: Yeah! (*laughing*) Until that we were all in the trades and not a one knew anything about guns. Then I was there for two days on Ford Island. Then they came and picked us up, and they hauled us over to the sub base. And we were so into oil and everything was so dried on us after two days, so they sent us through the showers. After the showers, it seemed like going into the Navy all over again—they figured everyone was a spy—the doctors checked you over, they took your fingerprints and everything. Then they issued you clothes—one set of dungarees, shorts, t-shirts, socks and shoes, and one hat, and then they fed us. Then we had to

wait until we were cleared. And it was after dark that I got cleared, I and some others—the Swede and I—and we got sent to the helm.

[1, A, 339]

TS: On the *Oklahoma*: from when she got hit to when she went under was eight minutes, you said earlier [before we began taping]?

HH: Yes.

TS: How many guys were lost off the *Oklahoma*?

HH: The *Oklahoma* had 429 men killed.

TS: What was her crew size?

HH: She carried 1300.

TS: So about one guy in three didn't make it off.

HH: Right.

TS: Herman, can you describe the sounds, or the smells, or the chaos on the ship, or in the water?

HH: You know, contrary to what the movies showed, when the *Oklahoma* rolled over—when the Swede and I got out and into the water, there weren't hardly any guys in the water. Of course, we were at the tail end. But there were boats fishing guys out of the water—these motor launches and whaleboats, they were all gone. And these other ships, they had lines hanging down to get the guys out of the water right away. Actually, I swam all that ways, and I didn't bump into anybody. I had all the room I wanted. There was no confusion.

TS: What about this oil? Did it have a peculiar smell or feel?

HH: Oh, you get used that smell, the fuel oil smell.

TS: Did it stick to you?

HH: Oh, it stuck to you, and it's grimy. And then it stains. Oh, does that stuff stain. It took maybe three or four months before you'd finally get all that stain off of you.

TS: So it stuck in your skin?

HH: Yes. You would scrub and scrub and scrub—

TS: And it wouldn't make any difference?

HH: *(laughs)* It's the darndest stuff.

TS: Did it make you sick at all?

HH: No, I didn't get sick from it. The Swede got sick—he was throwing up, but I didn't.

TS: You didn't swallow any of it?

HH: No, I didn't swallow any of it—he swallowed. Of course, I'll tell you—you tried to stay under because, as I said, they were strafing and you were afraid to come up and get a breath of air. So you stayed down, you had to *(laughs)*. You had no choice.

TS: And when you came up you had to go through the oil, since it floats?

HH: You came up, right through the oil, get a breath of air, and go right back down.

TS: What was the general mood on Ford Island the couple of days—December 8th and 9th—you were there?

HH: Well, they were expecting an invasion. Everybody was running around, there were jeeps and trucks, and everybody with guns, and—oh, God.

TS: They really were expecting an invasion?

HH: Yes.

TS: What were you feeling at that time, Herman?

HH: I just wanted to get off that little island and over on to the bigger island *(laughs)*.

TS: Did you feel safer over there, or what?

HH: Yes, well Ford Island was pretty small—no room to maneuver. There wasn't much place to hide or get cover *(laughing)*.

TS: Did you feel nervous or scared or angry?

HH: I don't think I was nervous or scared at all. It happened so fast that it wasn't until it was all over with—then some women came passing out cigarettes, and gave me a cigarette. When I went to light it, that was the first time I knew was nervous. It was funny as heck—I was waving at everybody *(laughs)*. But before that, I think I was too busy, too occupied to even think about what was happening.

TS: So you had energy that just came from—

HH: Well, you know, life or death—you're too occupied to even stop to think. All you're thinking is, "How am I going to get out of this?" You think what you're going to do next.

TS: So you didn't have much time to think?

HH: No—you didn't have any time (*laughs*).

[1, A, 376]

TS: Was *Oklahoma* raised, or was she left there?

HH: No, they had to move her. Then they spent a couple years raising her. They put dead ends over on Ford Island, they sank air tanks. They spent a couple years raising the *Oklahoma*. Then they got her raised, and they sold her for scrap. They took all the guns and armament off of her, and after the war—

End of Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

TS: So it wasn't until after the war that she was sold for scrap?

HH: Right. Then they started towing her back to Seattle. They had two tugs. They got about five hundred miles out of Pearl—I guess it was about midnight, I have the story here someplace—and she started going down. She broke the lines going to the one tug, and the other tug had to chop her loose. She sank in deep water. But they were just pulling the hull back, that's all.

TS: All the stuff had been stripped off of her?

HH: Everything was stripped off. The superstructure, everything was off. Well, the superstructure broke off when we rolled over in the bombing.

TS: Let me move forward with your experience. You next moved to the cruiser *Helena*, but you weren't on the *Helena* all that long, were you?

HH: No, I went aboard the *Helena* the evening of December 9th, and I left her (*pauses five seconds*) the early part of April [1942], I'd say.

TS: Back in the states you left her?

HH: Yes, we brought her back to Mare Island [by San Francisco], because she had a torpedo in the port engine port fire room. That's why went on board her—to strip her, and to fix her up so we could get her back to the United States. So we got her

back to Mare Island. Then I left her and went across country to Boston, and got the *Massachusetts*.

[1, B, 29]

TS: And she was a newly launched ship?

HH: I got there about two weeks before she went into commission. Those were the two weeks I think we were in the cargo ferries, but then we went down and went aboard the *Massachusetts*.

TS: You said earlier [before our interview] that you were one of the few guys on that ship who had sea experience?

HH: Right. The *Massachusetts*, when she went into commission, there were almost all guys from New England who had worked on the ship while they were building it. They had made a deal that anybody who worked on the ship while they were building it, who enlisted in the Navy, could serve on her. So there weren't many of us that had been to sea before that came to the *Massachusetts*. I was at the machine shop, by the way, on the *Massachusetts*, and when she went into commission, the chief and I were the only two regular Navy men [and not draftees]. Although there was a first-class sailor there who had put four years in the Navy earlier. He'd gone out of the Navy, and then came back in right after the war started.

TS: How big was your machine shop? How many guys were in it besides yourself?

HH: I think there were about twelve of us in there.

TS: So most of these guys were just new enlistees?

HH: Well, they had all served their time in private life as machinists.

TS: But they were new to the Navy?

HH: Right, they were new to the Navy.

TS: Did having a ship that had so many new enlistees make it difficult to operate?

HH: No, we had Captain Whiting, he was a very good captain. He had us guys do a lot of drilling—being in the machine shop, we did not have to—but the others, that. Then we'd go out on the shakedown cruises and that. He really worked on them. And the few guys who'd had sea duty, really imparted their training to guys, because once we went over to Africa—in November of '42, that was our first battle—she came out smelling like a rose. She had a real good day. She got [the French battleship] *Jean Bart* and a couple other ships. The *Jean Bart* was a French battleship, and we had sent a destroyer in asking them to surrender. But the French

Navy was run by German Army officers then [as France had surrendered in June 1940], and they wouldn't surrender, and the *Jean Bart* only had one turret that could operate, because she was up against a dock. Why they ever gave her orders to fire on us... She fired on us but we were all set, our guns were all set. So, she's the one that fired on us, and we opened up right away, and hit her with nine sixteen-inch shells.

TS: Did you sink her?

HH: Well, there wasn't much place she could go—she only went down a short ways (*laughs*).

TS: So the *Jean Bart* was sunk?

HH: Yes—well, down as far as she could go. Her decks were still above water, because that water was probably only about thirty-five feet deep there.

TS: How much water did a ship like that draw?

HH: When they're fully loaded, about thirty-five feet.

TS: So she was just barely—

HH: Yes.

TS: Was that your first experience with firing on another ship?

HH: No. No, the *Helena* had fired.

TS: What was the situation with the *Helena*?

HH: I think it was more nerves than anything else. It was right after war—they shot at everything that moved! (*laughs*)

TS: Was there a sense of heightened anxiety with the war started?

HH: Yes. They were trigger-happy.

TS: What was *Helena* shooting at?

HH: I don't think they knew (*laughs*). They thought they spotted something on the radar, and let them have it. On the *Massachusetts*, Captain Whiting did a real good job of working those guys into—and he just happened to have the right guys in the right places. So he did a real good job.

We got hit over in North Africa. We took one shell through our flag, which is hanging in the statehouse in Boston. We took one shell in the butcher shop; we took

another shot into the Marine compartment. So we got a few holes in us, but we didn't have anybody even injured. We came back to Norfolk, Virginia, must have been getting towards the end of November of '42. I know in January [1943] we were sitting down in Noumea, New Caledonia [in the South Pacific]. So that's a long way—Noumea, New Caledonia, is down by Australia. From there we went up to Efate [New Hebrides; now Vanuatu], and that's where we operated out of for a while. We operated out of Efate, and from Makin and Tarawa [both in the Gilbert Islands; now Kiribati].

TS: Judging by the map you showed me [of the ship's actions during the war], the *Massachusetts* traveled to most parts of the Pacific.

HH: That's right. And that's why I get so mixed up, because we'd go back and forth. We went up, now I know it was Makin and Tarawa. Then we came down to Ley, New Guinea for the last—now I may be getting them mixed up—we were at Kwajelein and Enewetak [both in the Marshall Islands]. We were at Truk [Island], Gap, and several other islands. We made all those islands. I could go on, but I don't even remember them all. Saipan, Tinian [both in the Mariana Islands], Iwo Jima, Okinawa, the Philippines—I got two battle stars for the Philippines. And the way I came into two battle stars in the Philippines was (*pauses three seconds*) what's it called, the second battle of the Philippines? We were up there, and we were in heavy action, very heavy action. The [aircraft carrier] *Princeton* was right off our starboard stern—

TS: This is in the Philippines now?

HH: The fighting up there, that's when we were returning. And I mean it was very heavy fighting. The *Princeton* was a carrier off our starboard stern, and she got hit, and she went up. They came over to her, but our guns were going full blast, and all of a sudden they passed the word that we were withdrawing. We couldn't understand why were withdrawing from that battle when the fighting was so heavy. We pulled out of that battle with a couple of carriers—there were a couple other wagons [battleships] pulled out with us, some cruisers and destroyers. We headed north—they didn't tell us what we were going to do. About two hours after you pull out, everything is serene again, calm. We went all the rest of that day and all that night, and we didn't know why. You know, we pulled out and left all those others back there fighting. Then in the morning we found out why: they had gotten word that Japan was running down a reinforcement fleet, and we went up intercepted that. So then we got right back into heavy fighting again (*laughs*).

TS: When you say heavy fighting—and you said *Massachusetts* was involved in a number of heavy fights—were you typically firing at other ships, or at shore?

HH: Actually the only time *Massachusetts* fired at other ships was over at Casablanca, in North Africa. We fired at islands and that, very heavy on islands. But at sea, it was all aerial, it was all aerial. In the early part of the war the Japs would

come in, and you'd have a 100-150 planes up there after you. Now, it really tapered off near the end of the war—some guys came in late [in the war] and they wouldn't believe you [how many enemy planes there had been early in the war]. So the skies would just be solid anti-aircraft fire. It was almost all anti-aircraft fire. But we'd shell the islands before they'd go and land troops.

TS: With the 16-inch guns?

HH: Yes. We'd give them heavy blasting with our sixteen-inch guns. They called us the "advance fleet." We would hit these islands before the other fleet would come and land troops there. We hit Iwo Jima—I don't know how much before they decided to land troops, but we shelled the heck out of it, I don't know how much. But then we pulled out and we headed north to Japan. We went ahead to Honshu and Kyushu [two main Japanese islands] and started shelling up there while they're landing down at Iwo.

TS: How far off the shore was your ship? In other words, how many miles could these shells be fired?

[1, B, 188]

HH: Depends on what kind of shell they fired. We could fire some of them thirty miles.

TS: No kidding? Thirty miles.

HH: Some would only be about twenty-five. It would depend upon the weight. We carried three different shells: we carried an armor-piercing shell, we carried a bombardment shell, and we carried an anti-aircraft shell, for the 16-inch guns.

TS: Anti-aircraft shells for the 16-inch guns?

HH: Yes—we'd set a fuse to go up x distance. And it would go up, and just fill the air full of shrapnel. You wouldn't be hitting the plane, the plane would be hitting the shrapnel, the sky would be so full of junk (*laughs*).

TS: Can you describe the sound, or the feeling, when those 16-inch guns fired?

HH: Well, I was down below the armor, so you didn't hear much noise. But the ship would roll, real heavy, when they fired.

TS: From the recoil?

HH: Yes. See, the ship could only fire the 16-inch guns either to port or starboard. They cannot fire straight ahead, or aft.

TS: Why's that?

HH: It would buckle the ship. See, the ship has to roll when the 16-inch would fire. The ship has to take the recoil.

TS: And it could take the recoil because it could roll—that is, if it fired straight ahead, the ship couldn't roll, right?

HH: No. In fact, when they fired the sixteen-inch guns around some of the forties and twenties [20mm and 40mm deck guns] they had half-inch boilerplate metal shields, and the concussion would roll up that half-inch boilerplate.

TS: Did crew have to be below decks when these guns were fired?

HH: No. Let's say they're going to shoot to starboard, the bells would go off while the turret is turning, and the guys on deck would all run on to the portside, and get down and lay and use the turrets and all that, the superstructure, for a shield to get away from the concussion.

TS: What kind of noise did these things make up on deck?

HH: I don't know, I was never on deck when they fired them. I was always below deck. But the guys on deck, they could watch the 16-inch shells go through the air. They said they'd go (*makes noise indicating tumbling through air*).

TS: So you never saw them or heard them?

HH: No, I was down below.

TS: And those guns were in action a lot of times, weren't they?

HH: The *Massachusetts* fired the first sixteen-inch shell of World War II, and the last one. The first one was over Casablanca—16-inch I'm talking about—and the last was on Japan. They gave her the honor of firing the last one, because she had fired the first one. She fired more 16-inch shells than any other battleship during World War II.

TS: Did the barrels have to be replaced every so often?

HH: No. Well, what happened after Casablanca, we had fired so many 16-inch shells over there... But all those barrels are sleeved, and those come back to the Navy Yard, and get the sleeves cut off. And we had this one guy—I had told you, he had been in the Navy, got out and came back in—his name was Richard Jack Herman, he was from Route One, Clayborn, Texas. He let everybody know that. He was the most brilliant mechanic I ever knew in my life. After Casablanca, he said, "We don't have to go to the Navy Yard, I can get those sleeves cut off." He and I were pretty good

buddies. He designed how we could cut off the sleeves ourselves. We went and we cut the sleeves off on the *Massachusetts*, and then when we went down to the South Pacific—which one was it now?—we went over to the *South Dakota* and showed them how so they wouldn't have to go back to the Navy Yard. Then they wrote up how to do it in the Bureau of Navigation. But this Richard Jack Herman, he was the one who came up with the idea—that guy was brilliant.

TS: Did he get any kind of recognition for figuring that out?

HH: Well, when he came in the Navy he came in first class machinist's mate, and they knew they shipped him in wrong. He had a big position with some Texas oil well drilling outfit before he came into the Navy. They wanted to give him a commission, but he was a wild Texan, and he didn't want any commission. Finally, they got him to take warrant [officer], so he took that.

TS: Herman, did the *Massachusetts* take casualties through any of these battles?

HH: The *Massachusetts* never had a man killed in battle.

TS: Never did? Through the war?

[1, B, 254]

HH: I mean, no one killed in battle due to enemy fire. We had guys killed in battle, but not due to enemy fire.

TS: How were they killed then?

HH: One time, they sounded general quarters, and there was a 40mm gun mounted on top of number three turret. Some Japs were coming in, and this 40mm opened up on them. Guys were running to their battle stations below, and one shell came out, and exploded prematurely, and it killed about a dozen guys that time. We had guys killed that way, but not by enemy fire.

TS: That must make the ship unusual, in that sense. For all the campaigns—

HH: It was. For all the battles she went through, she never lost a man to enemy fire. But we had quite a few guys killed aboard ship.

TS: That was one incident—how else would guys be killed on ship, if not through enemy fire?

HH: Another time we had a bunch of guys die—I forgot how many it was that time—of suffocation. That time, they died in the forward hull. Those hulls were closed up for a long time. The storekeeper took them up—it was these young kids, seamen second [class] and that, shortly in the Navy. The storekeeper was talking to

the electrician mate, the two of them were standing there. The storekeeper sent the kids down to get stores—they had to go down about three or four decks. Straight down and then in. Electrician and storekeeper kept talking, and these kids didn't come back. The storekeeper says, "Let's go down and see what those kids are doing. Probably got into something to eat or something." So they went down, and the electrician was the only one that lived to tell about it. They got down there, and they could see all these guys laying in there.

TS: In the storeroom?

HH: Yes. And the storekeeper went in to try to help, but the electrician was smart enough to go right back up to get help. It was closed off—there was no oxygen under deck down there, and that's why they all died.

TS: Storekeeper too?

HH: Yes, he died. He went in figuring he could pull some of them out.

TS: Why was there no oxygen down there?

HH: It had been closed up for so long. For a couple of years before they had to get the stores out of there. I forget how many died that time. And the electrician was electrocuted one time, and (*pauses three seconds*) well, we had accidents happen when some guys got it.

TS: I guess on a ship several thousand guys, things are going to happen.

HH: Yes, they're going to happen.

TS: Let me shift here: did you have shore leave or liberty any time while you were down in the South Pacific?

HH: No. After we left the Panama Canal, all you'd see was native women on all these islands like Efate and all these other islands. There were no cities or towns, except Noumea. When we got to Noumea, New Caledonia, we'd anchor way out by the lighthouse, and then they'd put sub nets around us. Then we'd have to ride a motor launch into Noumea. And we'd have to be back before dark, so we'd only have about two hours in town from the ride in the boat in and the ride out. All the time was spent riding in and out, and not in town. As far as being in Noumea, I think I was only in the town about three times during the war.

One time we were up in Manila, but I didn't get ashore in Manila. Some guys did, but I didn't. And another time we were in Pago Pago, but I didn't get ashore there. We were only in there for a few hours, so some guys would get off and others didn't. Sometimes you figured it wasn't worth getting off for. You couldn't drink beer aboard ship, but they carried beer. They'd come—the battle liners and carriers—they'd come along with the LCIs, take us guys over onto the shore and

issue each guy two cans of beer. Of course I had enough buddies that didn't drink, so I was well-supplied with beer! *(laughs)* We'd steal it aboard ship. We'd get it up in the machine shop, take a CO2 fire extinguisher, and cool it down that way *(laughs)*. Although we made brandy, and everything else aboard ship. We made our own booze.

TS: Did guys make their own booze on ship?

HH: Oh sure.

TS: How did you do that?

HH: We made apricot brandy, we made raisin jack *(laughs)*. The thing is, you steal a couple cases of apricots, the canned stuff, and then you have a good bootlegger from down Tennessee *(laughs)*, and then he'd go to work! One time, there was this guy whose name was McGee, he was from Tennessee, he was an old bootlegger. He didn't have anything to make the stuff in, so he took these buckets, these galvanized scrub pails, and he made it in there. Then we had to hide it, so nobody would know. So we put it up above the uptakes in the machine shop. There was quite a bit of room there. We had a t-shirt over it to keep the dirt from getting in it. Anyway, we had it up there fermenting, and finally this McGee says, "I think it's about ready." So we brought it down and we looked at it, and it had eaten the galvanizing off the side of the one bucket. Then we said, "Oh jeez, can you drink this stuff?" I shouldn't say this, knocking nationalities, but we had this one guy who was a Polack, and we said only a Polack would do it, and his name was Golumbowski, and he says, "I'll try it." So he was the only one. We got him drunk. He passed out, and we didn't know if he was going to die or what. When he came to, then we started drinking it, because we knew it wouldn't kill us. Then he wanted more and we told him he'd had his share *(laughs)*.

TS: *(laughs)* So he was the guinea pig but you still wouldn't give him any more?

HH: He was the guinea pig! He was one who'd try anything.

TS: What's raisin jack?

HH: I didn't do any of the actual making of this stuff. We had this one guy who was good at it. He'd take raisins and they'd ferment them, and you know...

TS: Did this stuff taste okay, or was it just kind of...?

HH: Everything tasted good *(laughs)*.

TS: Did your officers know what was going on with this stuff?

HH: Oh sure they did. We drank a lot of alcohol too.

TS: Even though it was forbidden?

HH: Well, electricians could get alcohol issued for cleaning search lights; they were supposed to clean them with alcohol. Your water tenders could get it for cleaning the sight glasses for the boilers. So, as top-rated men we hung together, you know, clannish, and the electrician and water tender would get alcohol, and the poor kids who had to shine the search lights would never see any alcohol. We'd save it and we'd have big parties.

TS: What kind of alcohol was it, just grain alcohol?

HH: 180 proof! Then we'd use that old grapefruit juice, you know, because you had to cut it. Oh, would you get stone drunk on that. Oh God, that was vicious.

TS: Leave you with a hangover, too?

HH: *(laughs)* You wanted to die. I don't know if you were ever in that shape.

TS: Well, not from that kind of stuff. Would you say that alcohol consumption on board ship was a problem?

HH: No. It was a rare occasion. We'd save it for a special occasion. Somebody's birthday—we wouldn't be drinking all the time. We had to have an occasion. Christmas of '44 we were up off of Japan, and we got in a little trouble that time. We got bombed Christmas Eve—but it was an occasion *(laughs)*.

TS: But there was some trouble that time?

HH: The skipper got pretty unhappy that some of us were loaded.

TS: Why was he unhappy that time and not other times?

HH: Well, you weren't supposed to drink aboard ship.

TS: And he didn't know about it until that time?

HH: No, no. Well, we were pretty open about it, we got a little wild. We were having a good Christmas party *(laughs)*.

TS: So what kind of repercussion was there for that?

HH: Just chew you out. You know, sometimes we'd get carried away, because some of us figured we were out there until we got killed. So the officers would come and they'd want to raise hell with you. And they'd sometimes say, "You know, you're looking at Mare Island." That was the Naval prison right in the base. They'd say, "Go

ahead, send me there—no one to shoot at you there.” *(Smacking sound)* They’d take off. I mean, what are you going to threaten me with?

TS: Was there a sense among a lot of guys that you were simply out there until you got it?

HH: Got it. Those guys were out there the whole war. I mean, what the heck? You’d be out there, they’d bring out new guys, they’d be with you for six months, and they’d go back to the States! There you’d sit, and then you’d get some new guys. All you’re doing is bringing in new guys all the time.

TS: Was that because you were regular Navy, or what?

HH: No, I don’t know. They just figured that maybe you were good at teaching them or something.

TS: Almost like it was too bad you were good at it?

HH: Yes. Oh man *(chuckling)*.

TS: Did a lot of guys—I mean the long-timers—share this notion that you weren’t going to come back from the war?

HH: You figured it out. Why do they keep you out there? They don’t give you a break. Even after Casablanca, when we came down, we got to Panama, they said that nobody could get off the ship. We pulled into Balboa. I was in charge of the machine shop—we had this old boilermaker we called—

End of Tape 1. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

TS: This is tape two of the interview with Herman Hinrichs on the 19th of October 2001.

Now tell me about this trip to Panama City.

HH: Well, like I said, we left the can [slang for ship] sit on the dock at Balboa. Caught a cab and we went to Panama City, and started getting drunk. The shore patrol picked us up, and they wanted to be nice. They put us in the cab and told the cabdriver to take us back to Balboa. We got about halfway back to Balboa, and we decided we wanted to go back to Panama City. We made the cabdriver turn around. We got to Panama City, and we did our share of drinking. And then I don’t know what happened—we got down to the red-light district, and we were going to convert them. All those places had latticework between their rooms, and we thought it would be a lot of fun to go from one room to the other, right through the walls. The girls were out in the street howling for the police. The Panamanian cops came, and at gunpoint they got us.

TS: At gunpoint?

HH: Yeah, they're little guys. They took us up to the corner, and they had about another dozen guys up there. I was against the building, and they were standing in the gutter—they had their guns out. This kid next to me starts to go for a drink, and I says, "I'll get us a drink." He said, "How are you going to do that?" So I says to the cop, "I gotta go to the can." He said, "Well, wait until we get you up in the jail." "I gotta go now—otherwise I'll go right here." So he said something to the one cop, and the cop says, "Well, I'll go in." So there's a joint there. We go in the joint, and go in the men's room—all the places down there are run by ex-military—ex-Army, Navy. So, how am I going to get a bottle? Finally, after I went the cop decided he was going to use the urinal. As soon as he stepped to the urinal I ran out and left the bar two five-dollar bills and the bar—this guy threw me a bottle and we got it out there. We got in that line, and started drinking. They said, "Give us that bottle." We said, "Come and take it away from us." They came with the paddy wagon, and got us loaded in, and we had the bottle in the paddy wagon. I don't know how we did it. And when we got to Panama jail, they unloaded us like they did cattle in South St. Paul—down a chute, and there must have been a half-dozen cops there, all with their sticks—I think I had knots from the top of my head to the soles of my feet (*laughs*).

TS: They were swinging?

HH: "When we tell you to do something, you do it." So we got thrown in the cell there, and we had to wait for the Navy to come and pick us up, haul us back to the ship. Oooh, was the skipper mad.

TS: What kind of trouble was there for you?

HH: I'll tell you what—we got back to the ship we had to right to see the captain. He just looked at us, he'd say "Petty Officer!" You'd say "Yes, sir!" He said, "No!" (*laughs*) You were busted right there on the spot. I got busted down to fireman—from machinist's mate first to fireman.

TS: How many drops down is that?

HH: Three. That's a big cut in pay. Anyway, I was in charge of the machine shop, but now I can't tell these other guys who are superior to me what to do. The chief engineer passed word for the boilermaker and I to go down to his office, so we went there. He talked to us—told me to go run the machine shop, and I told him I can't tell petty officers what to do. He said, they'll do what you say. And I said, they're going to tell me I'm not rated. Anyway the boilermaker went back to work running his crew just like he hadn't gotten busted. So I rode all the way out from Panama out to Noumea riding on the fantail, waiting for some petty officer to tell me what to do, but nobody would. In thirty days I got my rate back. I didn't go to work—I didn't do

any work in those thirty days. The boilermaker went to work and he didn't get his raise back for ninety days (*laughs*).

TS: You bring up an interesting point here—twice now. During wartime, they needed you, and there wasn't much they could threaten you with.

HH: What are they going to do to you? No matter what they do, you're going to be better off than what you were.

TS: Did guys ever get put in military prison?

HH: No, I don't know of anybody who got sent back to prison.

TS: Were there serious discipline problems on your ship?

HH: No. I'll tell you what—no matter how you act or how wild you get, when you get in battle you really do your job. No one's got to tell you—you do it automatic, because it's for your own good. You want to survive. Anybody'd do it—you don't need anybody to tell you what to do. Or somebody sees something they tell you automatically to do it—it's just: "Let's keep it up."

TS: Herman, let me shift to a new topic: when you were in the Navy, the Navy was segregated—were there blacks or Filipinos on your ship?

HH: Yes. Well, *Oklahoma* had them—I'd say the *Oklahoma* had more Filipinos than they had colored. Then on the *Massachusetts*, there were more colored than there were Filipino. But they were all mess stewards. That was the only thing they were. They served the officers, cooking and serving their tables. They were not with the whites at all. They were entirely, one hundred percent segregated. The first time I ever saw a colored guy who was a machinist's mate was after the war when I was down at the repair base in San Diego. Then I got a machinist's mate second who was a colored guy. That was the first time I ever saw any colored or Filipino that was anything else besides a steward.

TS: When you saw all these stewards, did you ever have any interaction with these guys?

HH: Oh, yes—there was this one steward on the *Oklahoma*, he went to the *Massachusetts* with me. When he got to the *Massachusetts* he was a head steward. He and I got along good. He was always sending me down cake, or something, down in the machine shop. Of course he always wanted his favors done too. But he was real good, and he'd always say, "Any trouble with my boys, just let me know." They were all deadly afraid of him. He was the head one, boy, and they respected him. There was nobody else got respect like he got from his men. He really got respect from his men. They were all deadly afraid of him.

TS: If you had liberty or went to one of the islands for an evening, did white guys and black guys tend to mix?

HH: No. Not at all. It was so segregated that there wasn't any attempt to do it. No one even thought of mixing.

TS: Did that change by the time you were on *Grand Canyon* [after the war]?

HH: On the *Grand Canyon* we did not have any regular sailors—there again, they were still stewards. They didn't have many, but they were not regular rates. They were always shore-based while I was in the Navy.

TS: So you saw blacks or Filipinos who were shore-based?

HH: Yes. But aboard ship they were strictly stewards.

TS: What kind of jobs did they do on shore?

HH: They had the same rates as any white man.

TS: So they could load and unload ships or be a machinist or whatever?

HH: In San Diego, I had a horizontal boring mill down there, and I got a second-class colored machinist's mate.

TS: What year was that?

HH: That was in 1945. Right after the war. And that was the first time I ever ran into one that was equal rate.

TS: He was under you, right, since you were machinist's first?

HH: Yes.

TS: What was that like for you, suddenly having a black man who was the same rate as you?

HH: It was something new to me!

TS: How did you adapt to that?

HH: I ignored him, I'll be honest with you. Just like he ain't there.

TS: How did he react to you?

HH: He wanted to be friendly.

TS: Was he a young kid?

HH: No, I'd say he was my age, or maybe a year or two older than I.

TS: But he was brand-new to the Navy?

HH: Yes. He was brand new. It's the same as—it wasn't until after the war was over that I saw a woman in uniform. Again, that was down in San Diego where I first ran into a WAVE.

TS: What was that like, seeing a women in uniform—because she was an officer, right?

HH: No, they had enlisted women.

TS: Enlisted WAVES too?

HH: Yes. I got in trouble right away down in San Diego.

TS: What happened?

HH: I had brought my records there, and I wanted to get paid. I went over and there was a WAVE there. She told me my records weren't there.

TS: Was she enlisted or was she an officer?

HH: She was enlisted, but then a woman officer came over. Well, my language wasn't the best—you could always tell old sea-going sailors. I told them what they could do, you know.

TS: Then this officer came over?

HH: The woman officer. Then she went and got a guy, who came over and he took care of me. Mainly when the guys were coming out of the fleet, right at the end of the war.

TS: Did you have less respect for that officer because she was a woman? Would you have talked to a male officer the same way?

HH: Sure, I didn't give a darn—don't tell me my records aren't here (*laughs*). I'd hand-delivered them.

TS: So they definitely had them?

HH: Yes, because I brought them there. When I transferred I carried them with me.

In fact, when I first came back I went to Boston. I got court-martialed there, it was only a short while.

TS: You got court-martialed in Boston?

HH: Yes, I was court-martialed a few times. Then, I got sent back to sea. That's why I went back to San Diego then. Then I took about twenty guys across country. I had all their railroad tickets, their meal tickets, all their records. So when I got down there, I had to turn them all in. That's why I knew all that stuff was there, because I was the one that had them, I was the one in charge of them. So don't tell me what I did and what I didn't do.

TS: Did she take offense at the way you were talking to her?

HH: Yes. She didn't appreciate that.

TS: Was that out of line for Navy talk, or what?

HH: No, guys would talk that way to each other. Of course, they don't dare use that kind of talk now.

TS: Things change, don't they? Herman, was there a guy—you were in the Navy a long time—who made a real impact on you, or somebody who you looked up to for a certain reason?

HH: Well, like I said, that Richard Jack Herman. He and I were very good friends. I really respect that guy. He was the best mechanic I ever ran into in my life.

TS: Was he somebody you liked on a personal level?

HH: Oh yes. You couldn't help but like the guy. He was a wild man—he was as wild as they came (*laughs*).

TS: Good guy to go on liberty with?

HH: Well, on the islands I'd be with him a lot. Go get drunk together and that. He let them know when the war was over he was going home (*laughs*).

TS: So he got out right away?

HH: Well, I imagine so, as soon as the war was over. I'm going to light my pipe if that's okay. Some people don't like it.

TS: Go ahead.

HH: I'll be honest with you—I only take one or two puffs, and then I lay it down. A pipe full of tobacco lasts me almost all day.

(brief pause for Herman to smoke his pipe)

TS: On again. You mentioned a moment ago when we were talking with the machine off about being a fatalist, wondering why some things happen to some guys and not to other guys. You mentioned the example of being on the *Oklahoma*, where you got off and other guys didn't.

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HH: Well, the guys in boiler control—I was the only one who left the crew to go with the water-tender. The other guys were there—the Swede and I talked about that later, and we figured they were in boiler control, and they waited. Then when they figured that the ship was so far gone, they went up. And like you've seen in the pictures, the torpedoes started hitting higher. They were still going to try and get out through a hatch. When they did that, probably the last torpedo came in and got them. They were all together as a group.

TS: How do you deal with something like that when you realize it could have been you? Did you think about it afterward?

HH: I didn't. I just figured I was just lucky *(laughs)*.

TS: Hopefully be lucky next time?

Switching topics here: how did you stay in touch with family and loved ones when you were away from home?

HH: I'd write letters.

TS: Were you a regular letter writer?

HH: No. Very poor. I always caught hell from my parents for not writing. But there was nothing to write about! We couldn't write where we were, we couldn't tell anything about our lives. So what the heck? I mean, it's like you and I in this room here—for a year. Now what are you going to write about? You can't say anything. I did a few times—one time they wrote I had a cousin on Guadalcanal. And they wrote cousin Bob was on Guadalcanal. So I did write, "I saw Bob the other day." That way they knew I was out in that area. That happened a couple of times where they'd write where they knew where somebody in the Army was stationed. Then I'd just say, "I saw him," although I was lying—I hadn't seen him, but that would give them an idea of where we were.

TS: So there was a way of sort of encoding things...

HH: Yes.

TS: ...to give people a clue, to get past the censors. Did you get a lot of mail?

HH: Oh yes.

TS: Was that important to you, getting mail?

HH: Oh, it didn't mean much. That again became the old stuff: you know, "...your brother's getting taller, your sister did this..."

TS: Did other guys look forward to getting their mail more than you did?

HH: The guys that were in love—they were the only ones (*laughs*). Waiting for their girlfriends—they were the only ones.

TS: Herman, was there a general flow of news about what was going on in Europe, or in other parts of the Pacific?

HH: Oh yes. We had a print shop—all the big ships had print shops. They'd print up a paper a couple times a week and they'd put in news and that. And when we'd go onto an island, they'd usually give us something about the island, the way the people are, the natives you know, some background. As an example, when we went into Mogmog, in the Ulithi group [in the Caroline Islands; taken over by the Navy in September 1944 and converted into a recreation center for sailors], that's atolls. You know what an atoll is?

TS: Sure do.

HH: Okay—some people think they're islands, and they ain't. On Mogmog the atoll—it's not like that any more, but at that time it was one of the few places in the world where they went completely nude. They were heavily tattooed, and a lot of them had blue eyes. So they'd put this out in the paper just to give you a background. They all said they were Catholic, although there were no Catholic priests there. The way it came about: in the 1870s or something like that, a Dutch ship was headed for Japan. And they hit the coral reef. The sailors made Mogmog, and there was a Catholic priest with them. And they were never rescued. They taught the natives tattooing, and that's where the blue eyes came from. And the priest converted them. And there hadn't been a priest there—the first priest died, 1870s, whatever—no priests there, but they carried on, passed it down. But when we got to Mogmog, we were only there a few days, then the government went and moved all the natives over onto another island. That time when we first got there, would you believe they used stones for money? Well, see, on an atoll you don't have any stones, so all that was brought in from other places.

TS: So this information was printed up, you had a little broadsheet?

HH: Yes, you know, 8 ½ by 11 inch pages—it's come out about four or five pages long, and they'd print up that and give you a background on it, and what was going on. They'd warn you what you could do and what you couldn't do. Down there on some of those islands those guys were running around with (***) legs, they could go through that jungle just like an animal and not even make a noise. It was unbelievable just how they could go through. One time down, this was in Efate, there was a group of us, we wanted to follow this one path through the jungle. We came across this gal, and she was carrying a big thing of bananas. Down there they wore a drop cloth. She was kind of shy, they were like animals, kind of shy. She looked at us, and we were talking to her, come up slow, you know, like you might to an animal. Then some guy came out of the jungle—that jungle was as thick as this wall, and all of a sudden he appeared. He's got this bolo-knife, and he says some mumbo-jumbo to her, and she disappeared right into that jungle, where you and I could probably hardly get into it. And she was carrying those bananas. But then he didn't want us to go any farther on that path. And we figured, "Why the heck is he trying to keep us from going this way?" So we kept going on the path and he was walking with us. We couldn't understand what he was saying, but we knew by Moses that he didn't want us to go there. Then we came to a stream, and all the women and kids were in there. The women were washing their loincloths and that. But on both banks those guys were sitting with their bolo-knives. "We're not sticking around here!" *(laughs)* Shake your head.

TS: So you got out of there?

In the news you got—was it also a place where people passed gossip, stories about what they thought was going to happen?

HH: Oh, they always had us going back to the States. You know, we were supposed to come back to the States in *(pauses five seconds)* February '44. Or was it January '44?

TS: But you didn't come back?

HH: That's when we were in *(pauses five seconds)* Kwajelein, and we were in battle there. They said as soon as this battle is over—I think it was tomorrow—we'd be going back to the States, because we'd been out there longer than any other wagon [slang for battleship]. Would you believe, that night, the *Washington* and *Indiana* collided? "Pass the word—we're not going back."

TS: Because those ships were damaged?

HH: Because they'd collided and they had to go back to the United States. We were about ready to turn our guns on them and sink them too *(laughs)*.

TS: Your ship never did make it back to the States, did it?

HH: Yes, we got back then in June of '44.

TS: That's right, you said you were back once.

HH: Yes, June of '44 we pulled into Bremerton [Washington], and (*pauses five seconds*) we weren't there long, because I think all we got is one week leave. Anyway, I'll never forget, the day before we were going to pull out and head back to the wild blue yonder, a gang of us were over in Seattle, drinking, having a party. Well, she's getting underway in the morning—let's stay here and watch her come up and go out in the [Puget] Sound. So, we missed the ship. In the morning we were all half-loaded, and we went down. We knew it would be about 8:30 or 9:00, and there she comes. The *Massachusetts* was coming up, she made some turns, starts heading up. We sat there, and said "So long." She gets out of sight and we go and turn in to the Shore Patrol. The Shore Patrol was real nice—"Okay, you guys—sit there." You know I think every ship that was in the Pacific had pulled the same stunt. We were back too late. We waited, and some more guys came and turned themselves in—

TS: From your ship?

HH: Yes. So then they got some buses in, and loaded us on buses. They didn't say anything to us. We got on the bus, and we went for a nice long ride, and ended up at Port Angelus. Here's the *Massachusetts* pulled in there to load us all back on. I think every ship before us—(*laughs*) they knew what the guys were going to do. All we did was miss a short ride from Bremerton up to Port Angelus, just out of sight.

TS: Were you disciplined for that?

HH: They didn't do anything to us that time. No, we were going back out—what are they going to do to you? When you're at sea they can't throw you in the brig (*laughs*). In peacetime they do, but then when you get in battle they have to let you out of the brig. What are they going to do to you?

TS: So that's why they were nice to you, the Shore Patrol?

HH: Well, they didn't want to tell us what they were going to do. We didn't know, they didn't tell us anything. We were figuring, "What the heck? We might get a little time, but what the heck? At least we won't be out there, we'll be here in the States."

TS: And a bunch of guys did the same thing?

HH: Yes—oh, I'll bet you it was a hundred altogether. And I think every ship that had been back before had pulled the same stunt.

TS: Well, they had those buses ready.

HH: Yes, they knew what was coming. That Shore Patrol was so used to—they knew when the ship went, those guys would come turn themselves in! You weren't gone, you were just—late, that's all.

TS: Yes, you weren't AWOL, were you?

HH: No, we didn't even miss four hours! We were probably about an hour or two, that's all. Hey, what the heck, you've been late to work that much.

TS: I don't get a nice bus ride to work then, though. *(both laugh)*

Let me shift gears again and ask you this: President Roosevelt died in April 1945—you were still on the *Massachusetts*?

HH: At sea. We were at sea.

TS: How did you react to that news?

HH: We didn't give a darn.

TS: Really? Why not?

HH: I'll tell you the truth—most Navy men hated Roosevelt.

TS: Why's that?

HH: We blamed him for Pearl Harbor. Still blame him for Pearl Harbor. He sold his country down the drain, no matter what anybody wants to say. Did you ever read some of those books? I was there. Did you ever read about the missing Congressional pages? Okay.

TS: So what is it that you hold the president responsible for?

HH: I figured he sold Kimball and Short down the tubes like no one ever was.

TS: Those were the admirals?

HH: The generals. They had withheld information from them. They gave them misleading information. Like with the Army—they were told to look out for sabotage. That's why all the planes were put in the middle, which made it good for an air-raid. But they weren't looking for an air-raid, they were looking for sabotage. And that's what the ships were—Roosevelt wanted to get us in the war. He had met with Churchill, if I remember right it was on the cruiser *Augusta*, and he made a deal with Churchill that he'd get us in the war. He was figuring out how to tell the people that we had to go to war. And he regarded us as lambs. If you really read history, the fleet should have never been at Pearl Harbor in the first place, because Pearl Harbor is a narrow channel coming in there. It's one big ship in—you can't come

two, three ships alongside of each other. It's single-file, where you're a pigeon. We did that to the Japs down there on the Philippines. I wasn't in on that battle—the *Washington*, that's when they crossed the T [naval maneuver]—but that's when they got all the Jap ships, when they had to come out single-file. And that's the way it would have been at Pearl Harbor: they could have sat out and picked off the ships when they came out, one at a time coming out of Pearl.

TS: So when President Roosevelt dies, it was no great loss to you?

HH: No great loss.

TS: And other guys on your ship?

HH: Most Navy men felt that way.

TS: Herman, when the Germans surrendered on May 8th, 1945, were you still at sea on the *Massachusetts*?

HH: Yes. That was just like another war to us guys out there. It was so far away, with them, and reading it was something entirely different.

TS: So it wasn't an event that had a lot of emotional impact?

HH: Well, we figured that maybe now we'd be getting more help out there.

TS: That's the way you saw it: no fighting over there means more help for us?

HH: Yes.

TS: Was there any kind of celebration on board?

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 000.

HH: *(in middle of comment)* ...figures and all, you know, like when they announced that President Roosevelt died "at such and such a time."

TS: And the same when the Germans surrendered? Just came on.

HH: Yes.

TS: When Japan surrendered in August 1945, you were off the *Massachusetts*?

HH: I was off.

TS: Where were you then?

HH: I was down in San Diego. I think it was my first day in San Diego. I think I had just got there.

TS: Did you think you were going to be in San Diego for a while, or just temporarily?

HH: I knew I was there temporary, because the court-martial said “back to sea.”

TS: What did you get court-martialed for this time?

HH: I got involved in the black market.

TS: On board the *Massachusetts*?

HH: No, in Fargo Parish, in Boston, Massachusetts. This was in July 1945.

TS: What were you involved with?

HH: I was supposed to get two years’ shore duty. And they made me master of arms in ship service. But instead of selling stuff to sailors we were taking it over to town and selling it.

TS: And pocketing the difference?

HH: We were making a buck (*laughs*).

TS: How did you get caught?

HH: The ship service was mostly civilians working in there. A couple of gals got nailed, and they blew the whistle on all of us.

TS: What was the punishment for that?

HH: I got sent back to sea. I was given my choice—I didn’t want to go to prison.

TS: That was the other option?

HH: Yes, they looked at my war record and said, “You’ve got such a beautiful war record, we’ll give you a choice.” There wasn’t any choice! (*laughs*) So I’ll go back to sea.

TS: So they sent you back to San Diego, where you were going to pick up a ship?

HH: Yes. Because the war in Europe was over already, you see? Send me back out to the Pacific. I think it was the day I arrived in San Diego that the war ended in the Pacific.

TS: What was the reaction in San Diego?

HH: A whole bunch of us, we got drunk (*laughs*).

TS: This was your war to celebrate now, right?

HH: Yes. That was one for us to celebrate.

TS: Did you go to downtown San Diego?

HH: Yes, we were mostly out on Vernon Parkway, I don't know if you know where that is. The Bucket of Blood, other places. Nice places (*laughs*).

TS: So you felt this much more than V-E Day?

HH: Yes. Then I went up from San Diego to Treasure Island, up at Frisco. I was assigned to the *Grand Canyon*, but they were just building it.

TS: Oh, it was a new ship?

HH: Yes, they were just building it and they weren't ready for anybody. There were only just a few of us, but we got to Treasure Island and they didn't know what to do with us there. It was basically for guys coming into the Navy, and not other ones. Finally they sent us up to Kirkland, Washington, and we stayed in the City Hall up there while they were building the ship. We'd go down to the ship every day while they were building it, and put her in commission— (*pause in interview*)

TS: Tape on. You must have heard right before you got to San Diego that the United States had used the atomic bomb on Japan. At that time, did you feel the US government was correct to use atomic bombs on Japan?

HH: I feel then as I feel now: we should have dropped about a dozen more. I still feel that way.

TS: And why is that?

HH: Why? Because they were always sneaky. Let me put it this way: we were not at war when they attacked us. I lost everything I owned in life when the *Oklahoma* went down [at Pearl Harbor]. Japan never gave us one penny for our personal losses. But they want to be compensated, like with that fishing boat at Pearl Harbor [that was accidentally sunk by a US naval vessel in 2001]. How come they don't take care of it? They used the guys for guinea pigs that they took prisoner-of-war. I got a couple of friends of mine who went through the Death March [at Bataan, Philippines, in 1942]. How come they're not compensated? Japan went and compensated the prostitutes that they had taken from Korea and those places. But the American servicemen, they stick their nose up to you. I don't feel sorry for any Jap, to this day.

TS: Herman, when you came to St. Paul, you hadn't been back in, what, four or five years? Was St. Paul the same place that you left?

HH: Yes. It hadn't changed during the war.

TS: Did people seem any different?

HH: Oh, I don't know. Most of the guys were gone during the war, so it was all pretty much getting back, telling different stories.

TS: Now you didn't get back to St. Paul until the end of '46, right?

HH: I came back the end of '46.

TS: What was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

HH: It didn't bother me. I was going to goof off, because I was still on government payroll, but then the Donaldson Company, who I had worked for before, called me and asked me to come out there. They talked me into coming back to work. So I was working for Donaldson's while I was still in the Navy.

TS: So you didn't have much dead time, then?

HH: I didn't even waste a month of goofing off. I was going to spend a couple of months goofing off.

TS: Did you go back to live with your folks when you came back?

HH: Yes, I lived with my folks up until I got married. And that was 1948.

TS: How was it to see your family and your brothers and sisters again?

HH: It was good. When I came home my one brother had gone into the Navy. They had grown up from the time I had left. My youngest brother, I'm ten years older than him, but I was gone for six years, and that makes a big difference.

TS: What was the hardest thing for you with readjusting to civilian life?

HH: I don't think I really had any problem.

TS: What was the easiest thing?

HH: *(laughs)* Well, I never had to look for a job!

TS: Was it easy not having the regimented life of the Navy?

HH: Oh yes. And it was good getting out—I played ball, and the first spring, I got on a ball team.

TS: Did you miss the Navy at all?

HH: At times.

TS: In what way did you miss it?

HH: Just getting around to different places, not stuck in one place. Being with a lot of guys.

TS: Did you ever consider going to the Reserves, or going back into the service?

HH: There were a couple of times I thought maybe I'd go back in. But then I got married and that changed everything.

TS: Your wife wasn't interested in being a military wife?

HH: No, no. And then when I got married I started [building] this house. With the Korean War [in 1950], they did come ask me to go back in. But I had started on this house, and there was no way I was going to let go of that.

TS: So they came to you and said, "Do you want to come back?"

HH: Yes.

TS: Would they have made it worth your while?

HH: *(pauses three seconds)* They said, "Well, you'd be chief." I'll never forget the guy that came to talk to me personally. He said, well, you'll be at Wold Chamberlain Field [in the Twin Cities]—they used to have a Navy base over there. They wanted me for an instructor, and I said, "Don't give me that—I sign my name, and I'll be sitting over in China." I had been down this route before! *(laughs)*

TS: So you didn't believe him?

HH: No, don't give me those stories—telling me what kind of duty I'll have after I sign *(laughs)*. I was around before you were. You ain't going to get me with that story. And because of my work, they couldn't get me, because I had been deferred. If I hadn't enlisted in the Navy, I'd have never gone into the military in the first place, because I would have got a deferment.

TS: Did you ever think about that while you were on board the *Massachusetts*?

HH: No, when I was working in the machine shop, I was doing the work I liked.

TS: Really doing the same job, just in uniform?

HH: That's all.

TS: Did your Navy experience help you in civilian life after you got out?

HH: Oh, you learn how to give orders. I came back to Donaldson Company in 1948, and in January of 1950 I became foreman. I think that's why they gave it to me so quick—they knew I could tell guys off.

TS: All those years in the war—what did the war mean to you personally at that time? Why were you doing it?

HH: I hated the Japs because of Pearl Harbor. I had a real hatred for them.

TS: Was that motivation for you?

HH: Yes. I was hoping I could kill every one you ever seen.

TS: What would have happened if you'd been sent to the Atlantic, to the European theater?

HH: Like I said, the only time I was over there was in North Africa. Otherwise, it was just something you read about in the newspaper.

TS: You wouldn't have had the same motivation over there?

HH: No. Pearl Harbor's what really set me off. I had a personal grudge.

TS: How do you reflect on it now? What's changed in the way you think about the war now, fifty-five years later?

HH: I disagree with a lot of things we do—I disagree with Israel. I think Israel causes a lot of our problems, I really do. We set Israel up, and we set up a nightmare. Intentions were good, but we set up a nightmare. And we can't back out of it, and that's what happens too often. My heart, in a way, has always gone for the Palestinians—I think they should have been set up with a homeland too. We took away the Palestinians homeland for Israel. I mean, we're all human beings, and nobody wants to give up their land.

TS: Has the way you think about World War II changed at all in the last fifty-five years?

HH: I don't know, I really don't know. I never gave it a lot of thought.

TS: In what ways do you think the war changed your life?

HH: *(pauses three seconds)* I think it made me more set in a lot of ways.

TS: How so?

HH: The way I feel with Japanese people—I don't think I would have ever felt the way I do if it hadn't been for that. I have real strong feelings that way, I have no love for them.

TS: Did your war experience change your personality, or your outlook on life?

HH: Well, that you'd have to ask somebody else *(laughs)*.

TS: Herman, is there anything else you want to add before we conclude?

HH: No, I don't think there is. You got everything very well covered.

TS: Well, let me thank you very much, and at this point I'll turn the machine off.

END OF INTERVIEW