

This interview is being conducted on Thursday, June 21, 2018, at Blue Sky Home Care and Transportation. My name is Fran Prokop and I'm speaking with George W. Meyers, who served in the U.S. Navy and is a veteran of World War II. Mr. Meyers learned of the Veterans History Project through me and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans History Project. Before I go into the interview, George is here with his representative, Shannon Rapp, who stated that he did do an interview in 2012. George was born in 1918; he will be 100 years old next week.

The interview he gave in 2012 was for the National Museum of the Pacific War, in Fredericksburg, Texas. There is a verbatim transcript of the interview plus a letter stating, "We are happy to inform you that one copy of the oral history as well as the original interview tape has been placed into the archives of the Nimitz Education and Research Center at the Museum. As such they will be made available to family members and to generations of students, historians and researchers for historical research."

**In addition to this interview today, George has an interview on file with the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Here is his story:
When and where were you born – the date and the city.**

I was born in Corbin, Indiana, 1918 – June 27.

What were your parents' occupations at that time?

My parents – only had one – my Dad and he was a coal miner.

Did you have any brothers and sisters?

Ha, ha. I had 13 – I'm the 13th.

You're the youngest?

Youngest – and they're all gone now.

Could you tell me how many girls, how many boys?

I think 7 girls and the rest were boys.

And did any of your brothers ever serve, like in World War I – that you know of?

No.

What did you do before entering the service?

Oh, I worked in construction –

Did you finish high school?

No, I didn't even go to high school.

How far did you get to in school – your educational level?

About 7th, maybe 6th grade and I only went part time there.

Once you left school, what did you do?

I joined the construction company.

Right off the bat – when you were a young boy?

Yep, I was 15 years old, going on 16. yep.

So how did you enter the service – were you drafted or did you enlist?

I enlisted.

And what's the story about that – when did you enlist?

Actually there's a story on that -- I worked for International Harvester as a welder and my superintendent of the welding force there was a Navy guy, retired. I think he was an officer in the Navy, and every day I went to work, that's before the war - he said, "George, you gotta get in the Navy". I said, "I don't want to be in the Navy". We argued every morning before we went to work. He said, "If you get in the Navy, I'll give you a rate". I said, "No, I don't want the Navy."

So then the war broke out – and he said, "I got a meeting tonight downtown – you want me to sign you up?" I said, "Oh, yeah, go ahead and sign me up."

So you're talking about Pearl Harbor – December 7, 1941.

Yeah.

And you signed up –

On December 10 - I left on the 19th. So he had the meeting and in the morning he said, "You're in the Navy now; you gotta go down today and fill out your papers."

Do you remember this guy's name?

Steve Foll.

So what happened – how was your departure for training camp and early days of training - what happened after you signed up?

Oh, they said – "You're going to Great Lakes the 19th." You gotta get your business all settled and everything. So on the 19th I caught a train or a bus or something and went to Great Lakes.

Where were you living when you signed up?

I was living in Chicago.

So you just went downtown – to Navy recruiting downtown?

No, well, right near us they had an office.

So you went there and they took you to the train or the bus to get you to Great Lakes?

Yes, they was waiting for me; they had it all – they took care of me. So he comes in and he says, “You’re a 2nd Class Petty Officer”, ha, ha, I don’t even know what rank was or anything, see?

So you went in as a 2nd Class Petty Officer.

So I went in and about two months later I made 1st Class.

But at that time in 1941 you were 23 years old.

Shannon: Don’t forget to tell before you went how you ended up getting married – you have to put that in there.

Yes, that’s – tell me that – you tell the story.

Shannon: Tell us the story, how you met Kathleen, how long you knew her.

Well, I worked at International Harvester – actually I had two jobs – I worked there in daytime and then Pettibone & Markin (phonetic) was making 6” guns for the Army and they was crying for welders, so I went there – I worked from 6 o’clock till 12 o’clock; they was on Cicero Avenue, I think.

So how did you meet Kathleen –

I worked there for awhile and then the war broke out – and then my boss at the -- got me in the Navy –

Yeah, but what happened with Kathleen?

Oh, you want that –

Yeah, just briefly – if you can.

She worked in the 5 and 10 cent store – Woolworths on Crawford and Madison – and it was strictly – I gave her a quarter and she said “I can’t take it; I can’t take it.” I don’t know – I got eggs and bacon that morning and she said, “I can’t take it.” I give her a tip --

Oh, at the breakfast counter –

She said, “I got to ring it up.” So, one of the girls there had a quarter in her shoe and she left it in her work shoes and they went in at night and checked all the shoes out in the lockers and they found a print in there and the next morning they fired her.

Oh, my God, for taking a quarter!

Yeah, well, and she went right across the street to Kresge's – and there was – inaudible – so she went to work there.

How did you and Kathleen plan to get married before you left?

We didn't plan – so

How did it happen then?

I only went with her for about six months, I guess, and the war broke out. My thought – I didn't have enough time to have a family and I didn't want to be tied down, and so, we talked it over, and then when I went in the Navy, that was a different thing then. They sent me to – way up above New York City – along the coastline –

Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine –

New Hampshire, something like that, because they didn't have – there was 1,200 of us kids from all over –

You're talking about your basic training at Great Lakes –

Who joined our outfit and they didn't have no place, so they sent us up there – we was only up there two weeks, then they sent us back to St. Louis, Illinois – there was a CC Camp down there – so we was down there about 3 or 4 weeks –

That was your basic training?

That's where I got married, so --

You got married in St. Louis? While you were in basic training?

Yeah, well, not exactly St. Louis – St. Joseph, because we got to the Courthouse 15 minutes late and it was shut up, so I said what do we do then – and they said well you can get married by a Justice of the Peace. So we went to St. Joseph, Missouri, and got married and I was with her for the rest of the day there and next day was Sunday and that was the end. She said good-bye to me and I said good-bye to her and we didn't see each other for two years.

Wow – two years.

Shannon: You missed the best part

Shannon knows George and she will speak up for him.

Shannon: I'd like him to explain how he got engaged to his wife.

We're on the phone and I said, "You want to get married?" "I don't know; got to talk to Mom." "Well, you go talk and I'll hold on." So I held the telephone and she come back

about 15 minutes later, and she says, “Well, Mom says I can get married providing I’m true to you while you’re gone.” I said, “That works both ways.”

How old was she when you got married?

She just got out of school, so -- actually she was only two years younger.

Okay, so you didn’t tell me – I want to go back to basic training – what did you do in basic training – what kind of training did you get?

I did not get very much.

Well, what did it consist of?

My basic training was taking recruits around and taking them for shots and things –

Oh, you took other people around – you were older being 23 – you were older –

Well, I had the 2nd Class Officer’s rating.

Oh, that’s right; you had the rating. So you never got any gun training –

No, I never handled a gun –

Or classes or tests, aptitude tests. You had none of that.

No, no.

So you really didn’t have any basic training.

Then when we got on board ship they put me on a 5” gun – gun crew – ha, ha, and never had a gun in my life. And then after we got overseas, I was unloading bombs.

I have to take it step by step – you’re jumping way ahead. I’m back in basic training – did you ever get any classroom teaching or specialized training of any kind?

No, no.

Now, how did you adapt to military life – to being in the barracks, being with other guys, the food, and stuff like that – how did you feel about that?

Well, I felt good because I tell you what – we’re all civilians; we’re all Sea Bees – that was working for their self – no military – and even every morning they had that 90-day-wonder officers – they was supposed to be First Officer in the Navy – and the first thing they’d want to do is say “Get out there and have exercise every morning.” And my Commander says, “Listen, these guys have been working day and night here and you don’t tell them what to do.” They tell you what to do.

How did you get overseas? By ship – in the Navy.

By ship.

When you finished basic training, what happened?

After we got down to St. Louis, about three weeks later, we got our orders to go overseas.

How did you get overseas?

Ship in Norfolk waiting for us.

Norfolk, Virginia, okay, was that a regular Navy troop ship?

Regular navy transport. I didn't know they had one, but they did.

Where did you go – where did you land?

Well, we went through the Panama Canal and made one stop on the way there – Unintelligible – the island – there was about 50 boys there already.

What's the name of the place – an island? Not Bora Bora ?

Yeah, yeah.

How was your time on the ship – details of the trip abroad – how was the sea –

Was it a rough crossing? Did you get sick? Did any other guys get sick?

Ha, ha, did I get sick? I was so sick I thought I was gonna jump over the side.

You were seasick.

I was so sick I didn't care if I – so they took me down to the lunch room or galley and everybody was heaving their guts out down there and I turned around and came back up

How did you sleep – did you have hammocks – five in a row.

I got underneath a lifeboat and I stayed underneath there for a good week or so.

So on the ship you got in a lifeboat?

Underneath the lifeboat – it was like in a saddle –

And you slept there.

There were several of them. I didn't even get up to go to the bathroom – and the guys brought me oranges and apples and stuff like that – that's my meal.

That's why we ask for details of the trip abroad – very amusing. How long did this trip take – how long were you on the water?

I bet I stayed down there a week –

For you – but how long did the whole trip take – from Norfolk till you got to where you were going?

I think 45 days.

And where did you go – where did you land?

Tonga Tabu (phonetic) – it was a big Navy – French island and they made a Navy base there – which they did.

And how long were you at that Navy base?

I stayed there for two years.

You helped build this Navy base on the French island when you were there – as a sea bee?

Yeah; that's why they sent me there. See, I was a welder and they put up four big tanks there and it was supervised by Standard Oil Company – big tanks.—two tanks for bucket fuel and two tanks for aviation fuel. We had two big pipelines – we'd weld about a mile long, each pipeline –

And you were welding those?

I and one other guy – and it happened that – we were always working and when we run out, then I went back on loading ship – bombs, bombs, he liked me. Another thing, after I got there then the Hornet Aircraft Carrier came in to the harbor and it had a bomb hit and torpedo hit – two hits. So we was standing there and it came into our dock – just the nose came in because it's so damn long. A torpedo – when it hit the ship it was right at the water level – and Jimmy Doolittle was just going to take the ship to Japan on that secret mission – with 15, 16 planes, which he did, and he was crying because it's not in – it's not ready and everything, and it got hit, so – it came in our base and the Captain started laying it over, see – and he laid it over 40 degrees, and he said, "That's all boys; we can't go any further without turning the ship over." And it was an aircraft carrier –

Wow – and 40 degrees is a lot. You mean they had to do that to repair it.

Try to get it more out of the water, see, and the hole was patched from the inside too, but the water was coming in so fast.

So, probably patched inside and outside.

And we would – I was standing with my Commander, see, and I said, "Get the hell out of here; that ship is coming over." And you could reach it from where we were standing and we all run up to the box so in case they break or something, it can't fall over. But he kept going over until he came to 40 degrees and he said, "That's it!"

Then you were welding it?

No, then I says, "Oh boy, I get to weld on this." And my Commander said, "No you don't." I said "Why, I'm a welder." He said "You're a better winch man than a welder

right now; we got three ships coming in loaded with bombs and you're the best bomb guy we got.' I said, "Okay." So he said "You're in charge of the bomb detail; three ships coming in." So I said, okay, they was all unloading out at sea; so I went on the first ship and said, "Okay, guys, I'm in charge of this ship; we're gonna unload these bombs fast." They said, "What're you gonna do?" I said, "You've been unloading these bombs one at a time, going over and dropping it and coming back; we're gonna take two at a time." Two bombs at a time. And they was 500 pounds apiece – so that's a ton – so we unloaded it –

We discovered the name of the island that George was on for the first two years – it is Tonga Tabu – okay, George, continue.

I went out the next morning and I took over the ship and I unloaded that day and that night; we didn't even go back to our bunks. We slept on the deck of the ship. And my Commander come out the next morning and he kicked me, he said, "Get back to work." I was sleeping. And I said, "It's all done." "All done! It can't be." I said, "It is!"

Wow!

He didn't know because I was supposed to get permission – order on everything you do and I did not get any orders.

Good for you. How about friendships formed and camaraderie of service – did you keep in touch with any guys that you served with after you got out?

Oh, a few, yeah, Kelliherr was one, but he passed away; and O'Connor was another one. His Dad had a plumbing shop.

Did you ever see any combat? Did your ship ever get hit or your island bombed?

It never got hit but I was on shore when they hit one ship and five ships went down.

How did that happen – tell me about it.

A freighter come in from the States loaded down with ammunition and everything and it anchored out in the harbor. Two destroyers got on each side of it to unload from the freighter to the destroyers, so that made five ships all together. All night long they unloaded from that freighter to the destroyers and in the morning, break of day, three zeros came in and dropped a bomb right on them. And half an hour later the water was calm again. That's the deepest water in the world, right there, off the Phillipines.*

But at least that freighter was unloaded already, so they had a chance to –

No, the detonator wasn't in there; each bomb got a detonator and a time relay.

Did you get any medals, honors or awards during your service?

I got two medals I don't even know what for. My daughter took –

Your daughter has your medals and things?

I don't know whether she has or not.

But you remember that you received two medals. You were there during war time so you never were really “off duty” – you were constantly working; you didn't have any kind of recreation time, did you>

No. All we got was two – a year later we got two cans of beer a day. And I didn't drink it and I had an old orange crate there and I filled it up with beer. When it got full, they said, “Hey George, we're gonna have a party tonight.” So they all come over and have a party.

Did you ever get to go on R & R during the war – just to get away from the battle?

Yeah, I got the B-29, that's the biggest bombers we had at that time – they bombed Japan. I and the Commander was good; I liked him, he liked me, and we got along good. So it was the night before and he was saying we're sent our first bomber over to Japan and we lost it – nine boys on it. I asked “How come?” He said, “They got lost; they didn't know – they were flying higher than the guns could reach them and they lost communication to the ground and they didn't have no communication with nobody. And they decided they knew how to get back and they went the wrong way and they run out of fuel.”

They crashed in Japan probably.

Yeah, nine on it. But the plane was already empty, see. And he said we gotta do something about that. Okay, what are we gonna do. He said, “I'm gonna tell you in the morning.” Everything is secret now, see. I couldn't even tell anybody that there was gonna be a meeting in the morning or anything. So in the morning he calls us all out together, and he said, “Now, raise your hand, we got a secret mission to go on; you don't have to go if you don't want to go.” “The ones that want to go, raise your hand.”. So I raised mine first. He said, “George, you always raise your hand first.” I said, “Yeah, I want to get off this damn island, I've been here since – inaudible” He said, “Okay, you're in charge of the group; 120 men.”

Wow – where did you go?

We went to an island near Japan homeland and we had to put a light up on top of that island called a beacon light that shoots up in the clouds. It's a green light; and when the

bomber drops their bombs on Japan and getting ready to come back, they see this light and they come back towards the light.”

They follow the beacon. They know they’re going the right way.

Yeah. And actually when we got through, they was coming, the bombers – the first day after they lost that one, and one bomber saw us down there and he tipped his wings – he came down a little bit and went (indicating). We knew that they saw us.

That’s good.

Now, just here last year in McDonald’s I was in there, went to the bathroom and came back, there was a man and woman sitting in the booth, and I went and sit down with my girl friend, we always – Sophie –you know her – and so this guy says, he called me over there –

You had your hat on? (George is wearing a WWII Veteran baseball cap).

I don’t know if I did or not. Maybe I did. He says, “Come here – I’m a B-29 pilot and I dropped lots of bombs on Japan. Are you the guy that put that green light up there?”

You’re kidding! Really?

Yeah, that happened in McDonalds.

Did you get his name – who was he?

And his wife was sitting there and I looked around, I was gonna buy his breakfast, which he already had, and he went out the back door, and I says, “Where is the guy?” He said, his wife didn’t want him to be talking about that. She heard enough about that; she wanted to leave.

Oh, too bad! So you didn’t know him – he was just a flyer – a pilot aided by the green light that you installed. Very good. That’s a good story. How long were you on this island – Tonga Tabu?

Then I got a leave, first leave, I was there about two and a half years; and then I come back for 30 days and then back again to the same island.

Where did you go for 30 days leave?

Well, I came home –

You came home during the war?

I did, and then I and my wife went to California because she had a sister down there. And her husband was working in the shipyards and she spent more time with her, and I was sent back again, same place, and we started making barges for the invasion of Japan.

So you spent the rest of your time back on that same island – you were there the whole war, doing different jobs, like you said before. Now you're making barges.

We didn't have no drydocks in there for ships or anything and then they brought one drydock in there – folding drydock – it would take a battlewagon – now that's a big thing when you can take a battlewagon. And then they had another one that took destroyers – smaller ships. I didn't get to – I went on them but I didn't do any work on them.

So were there surrounding islands or was that island alone?

Oh, there's so many islands out there.

Did you ever go on any of the other islands?

Yeah, one day we started going fishing – and what we'd do is take a hand grenade and tie dynamite to it and throw it in the water; you don't kill the fish you just stun them. So we'd take the natives with us and they'd get all the fish and we'd take what our cook wants and the natives took the rest.

How were the natives – did they speak any English – did you understand them?

After a while you'd understand them.

What did they do speak French or their own language or what? You said it was a French island –

Yeah, but there was lots of French islands there, lots of AMISH islands there. You wouldn't imagine, so many islands, if you was there – I was amazed. You don't want to travel at night because you would hit one of them.

Wow! That many.

And then we were going somewhere else one time with the ship and we had to travel at night, and we had lights on our ship and there were Japs around – but we had the men – and if there was any shots the boys on shore would catch them. We'd pass another ship passing them each – there was a strait between two islands there – I think Gorafinala (phonetic) was one of them.

So that's how you spent your time there – what you call fishing is throwing hand grenades, ha, ha, and the natives would get the fish.

We got in trouble on that too because we forgot that there was Navy divers down there and it hurt their ears; we almost ended up in the brig.

That was your only recreation, right? I mean the guys must have played cards or baseball games when there was no work to do?

Well, they played games with their – I'll tell you another thing – on board ship we got pennied (phonetic) coming home that first time – everybody has money now. They had a big game going – a big one – and the Captain of the ship and his First mate was up on second deck up there looking down watching it see. And they waited until they got more money in there, more money in there and they come down and said, "Boys, I'm sorry but the rules are you can't gamble in the Navy."

Wow – and what happened?

They just shoved it all in a big bag and took off – went back up watching us. They started gambling again.

Whatever happened to that money? Did they give it back to the guys?

Oh, no, no, they kept it.

Oh, it was gone – ha, ha – you learn your lesson.

There wasn't enough bathrooms in our ship; we had 1,200 men on there – so they built a potty over seas a little bit –

Over the rail?

Yeah, and the guys go down there and drop their pants and when they pick them up their billfolds full of money would drop over the side. We'd all chip in so the guy would have his own money when he got home.

Wow – interesting stories you don't hear about!

Where were you when the war ended in August 1945?

We was over there getting ready to make the invasion of Japan. I wasn't coming back that time at all because I was on the barge detail.

So when did you actually get off that island? What month?

We knew something big was gonna happen.

So you were on that island when the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshime and Nagasaki ?

No, not on that island.

Where were you?

Oh, we was probably 50 miles from there – 100 miles.

But you were still on an island in the Pacific when the atom bomb was dropped --

Yeah, oh yeah.

And how long did you stay on those islands after August 1945?

How did you get off? How long was it before you were able to go back home?

When they announced the war was over, we packed up that very next day or that same day and, I tell you, they had machinery in boxes, brand new, lathes, and bolts and everything. We loaded them in a truck, and we was up high a little bit, and the truck would run towards the edge of the cliff and the driver would jump out and let the truck go over and down.

Why?

I asked by Commander, I said, "Why don't they ship these back?" He said, "We got orders not to ship anything back because they'll flood the state with everything." Oh, you couldn't imagine the stuff that went down in that – and that was deep water –

A deep water port, huh.

Trucks and everything, brand new, anything like that – went down.

Well, they really couldn't leave it for the natives – what would they do with it?

Well, they did leave lots of stuff for the natives.

But not that kind of materiel.

No.

So how did you return home – by ship?

Yeah.

Where did you come back to?

Well, the first time we came back to Norfolk –

The second time we came into Houston, Texas. And when we got through Panama we hit a hurricane –

How were you on the ship this time – were you any better?

Oh, the hurricane was worst of all –

What happened – tell me about the hurricane.

My buddy, he was from Germany, too, a nice guy – I liked him – and he wanted to go up top to get something on deck. Everybody was on their – the hole – and I told him "Don't go. You'll get washed off." That ship was going up (indicating) and down and the prop comes out of the water and vibrates that whole ship because the waves was so high and everything. So he went out there, he never came back. We made two circles and the

water was all muddy, you couldn't see anything. The Captain said, "You couldn't see him if we hit him" – so –we went on.

He was lost overboard. How long did that trip take coming back home – how many days were you on the water.

I forgot how many days. But the first time we come home we came in to California – first trip, and we set out there for a whole day waiting for the Health Department to come out and give us the okay to come in, because they had to check everybody out. And the second time we came right in, nobody even checked us out or anything.

Where did you go from Houston, Texas? How did you get back here to Chicago. Where did you get discharged from?

Great Lakes. (turn tape, end of side 1)

George just said that he came home by train and was discharged from Great Lakes. How was your reception by family and friends?

Well, they was all waiting for me.

Did your wife come to pick you up?

Her mother did. She had a job for a big coal company,

Did she pick you up at Great Lakes or did you come in from Great Lakes?

No, they came to Great Lakes.

They picked you up by car?

Yep, yep.

How was your readjustment to civilian life?

I don't know. I come back , we had a party, went back to work. Actually I was working in the Navy just the same as I was out here.

Did you get your old job back – what happened – where did you work?

I went to work for a gas company as a welder and I didn't like it. It was so dirty.

Did you ever use the G.I. Bill to further your education?

Yeah. When I got the job at N.S. Archer, they had a – if you take a job they give you ten per cent off your grades, you know. And actually, there was so many people taking that job too. And they would take the first – if there's one guy they want, then they'll have three people take that – one of the three, the highest one, gets the job.

Oh, I see. So you had to take a test to get the job?

Yeah.

Did you ever go back to school or anything with the G.I. Bill?

No. I wish I had though; I didn't.

A lot of guys do that. So, did you have contact with fellow veterans when you first got out?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Did you have reunions?

I'm in the union now, Plumber's Union – 70 years –

Yeah, but I'm talking about Navy reunions.

No, they didn't have any --

Shannon: You never got together with any of your buddies?

Oh, Yeah.

That's what I'm talking about.

There was a group of us every year have a party somewhere –

Oh, a different state?

Yeah, different state. And we went to New York a couple of times; went to California.

We didn't like New York – oh, we were down in Florida a couple of times.

Did you drive down there for the reunion?

No, we flew down.

But you did go to several reunions?

Yeah.

Are you a member today of any Veterans' Organizations – like the VFW?

Yeah, the American Legion.

But not the VFW –

I don't want to be attached to anything, oh, yeah, I belong to a Sea Bee organization at Great Lakes too. But it costs you so much money to keep up with that.

Yeah, it does. So, now, looking back, after all these years – George will be 100 years old next week – how do you think your wartime military experience affected your life.

I don't think it did.

You don't think so?

No, not mine.

It had no impact – I mean the travels around the world and all the things that you've seen –

Well, I traveled before that, see. I was out on my own when I was 16 years old.

What life lessons did you learn from the military?

I don't know – to me it was just – before the war broke out I was thinking about getting married but – have I got a job to support her and all this stuff. I thought about this and everything. To this day, they give me a job and I picture that job out in my head and I can figure how much material is gonna go in there – and I did several jobs – and people say how did you figure that you didn't have no material left over? I said well, I don't know, I – my brains, I guess. But I do that. I tell my two sons the same thing. And Skip is pretty good doing it – he figures it out too.

What I'm getting at is – just your time spent there – you spent over four years in the Navy – just that amount of time that you spent – the military, what I hear from most guys is that you learn about discipline. No?

Actually, we didn't have it strict – we had a good group of guys all the time.

You were a little bit older than the average boys or 19 or 16 that went in – you were a little bit older; you were 27 when you got out, so you were a bit older than the average. Just the routines in the Navy and the work you had to do – it didn't have a big impact on you? I'm sure you were glad you did it – but, you wouldn't do it again, probably – but were you glad that you did go in at the time?

When I was in the service all these guys were gambling and stuff like that, I didn't take any money on my account in the Navy until I got back to the States. They paid me off at one time. And the guys when you're on the ship, they couldn't wait until the ship stopped at the dock – they had to jump off and hit these beer joints and the women – and I wasn't like that.

That's what I'm saying; you were a little bit older; these guys were younger.

But see I was out on my own when I was 15 years old going on 16.

So you were a veteran even then, before you were a veteran. Is there anything else you would like to add.

I'll tell you when I'm 16 – my mother died when I was two years old and my dad died when I was 11.

That makes a difference.

And there was 13 of us, so four of us was under age so we had a sister or brother who took us. And the brother who took me, he worked me, boy. He got me a job, thirty cents an hour, and I worked from 12 to 12 every day, six days a week.

So you were really a worker before you got into the Navy.

And he worked me on welding, so –

Before we go further, how did you like the food in the Navy – in general.

Food was good; always was good. We only had about two months of bad food – goat liver – you could smell that a mile away; they ran out of beef.

Where did you have that – on the islands.

Australia – we was right near Australia; and we got meats from them.

Australia is noted for lamb – did you get lamb?

No.

Another question: How long did it take for mail, hand-written mail to get back and forth, would you say?

Sometimes 2-3 months –

Really?

Yeah, at the beginning because some ships never made it back, and stuff like that.

Yeah, I guess so; all the mail went out by ship.

Yeah, it all came off – well, I don't know, maybe later it came off planes, but in the beginning we didn't have no planes.

Wow – that's the longest – I always ask that question – usually two weeks. Okay, that's about it for my questions. If you have anything else that you wish to add, please do so.

No, but I thought I had a good life – and I'm gonna tell you, we never cheated on each other in life, so –

You had a happy life.

Had a happy life.

Shannon wanted to add something she saw in his previous interview –

Shannon: The name of the island was Admiralty Island. And then I came across the Beugainville. And the island he was on was Wallace Island, which is in the Pacific and it was owned by the French. You never told her about the coconut trees – that was pretty interesting.

Tell me about that.

I was in two hurricanes – one at sea and one on land. We got that storm and the big coconut trees were laying down, right down to the ground, and look here, look here those poor trees are all dead. And in the morning (indicating) they came all up – like a rubber band in there.

Shannon: Tell her about going up the mountain to build the radar – when you only had a few days to cut all those trees and make a path to get the radar up there.

Oh, that's when I had the 120 boys with me. Our job was to take that green light up there and it was nothing but coconut trees up to 9,000 feet and then after that it's clear; nothing grows up there. And my job was to cut a path to get the stuff up there. And I told them guys, I'm gonna tell you guys right now, we got to have this done by 5 o'clock in the morning and we have to have this light up and going by 5 o'clock in the morning. And we gotta cut a path up there. And they all agreed with me. They all went to work; they worked all night – we only had a few hours from 3 o'clock one day until the next morning.

So because he went in as a petty officer – they have a specialty and his was welding.

Petty officer is half below the Chief.

Right and he went in like a boss already – and then he became 1st Class Petty officer.

Shannon: George, to finish that story, you said that at one time you had to keep a count of the trees –

Oh, yeah, going out there, he's got a sealed envelope the Navy gives the Commander – and doesn't open it up until he gets 4-5 miles out in the ocean so there's no secret – for the guys to be with you and tell Japan that we're coming and doing this and doing that.

So, he opens up the letter and he passes it out – Marines was with us at that time – they had a couple of 6" guns and all kinds of iron and stuff – their job was to set the guns up while we was making this path up there, and so in case we was invaded. We should have been invaded up there and we wasn't. And the Japs I don't think even knew it.

Anyway, he said, "Oh, George, this is a letter for you." So I took it, I opened it up, I looked at it, I said, "Look, they want me to take count of every coconut tree we cut down – and you know how many trees I'm gonna cut? Five, for them." Five trees, and it was loaded with trees.

Shannon: We had to pay for every tree we cut down.

My Commander said, "You're the boss!" Ha, ha.

So you told them you only cut five trees, huh?

So at the end of the job he said you got your report out? I said "Yep." He looked at it and he laughed.

Who's gonna argue with it, right? Ha, ha.

I said we're fighting a war and we have to keep count of trees, ha, ha, ha

Well, George, it was very interesting talking to you. I'm glad it all worked out and I came to interview you. So thank you very much for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.

Oh, I'll tell you too, when we went fishing, we didn't go right out there in the bay or anything. This was a pretty long island – Tonga Tabu is – and we went way up at the far end of it where there was nothing but trees and bushes and everything; it was overgrown. So while we was waiting to get the fish and everything, I said, what the heck is that on the shoreline there? So the guy runnin' the boat, he went up there, and he said, "That's a gun, a Big gun!" The Japs planted guns on some of these islands which wasn't long before the war and covered it over with trees so nobody knew about it.

All hidden.

And he said them Japs are smart.

So you found the gun; what did you do about it -- dismantle it?

I just reported it to the Commander and he reported it to the Army. The Army was in charge of everything, so –

All right; is that it – anything else? Any other stories about the island?

(miscellaneous conversation not transcribed)

Thank you Shannon, for arranging it.

One time they decided to go back to the island after the war was over, maybe 10-15 years after; they went back there, some of the guys. We didn't go because it was too expensive. So they went back and said you should see it; there's paved streets and big hotels and everything on there.

So you're saying that some of your friends that you served with went back to the island after 10-15 years.

And their wives, yeah.

But you never did, but those guys did.

Shannon: Every once in awhile – I know a lot of George's stories because I've known him for a long time, but every once in awhile he'll throw something in there that I've never heard before.

Sure, you can't remember everything in one sitting. George is pretty accurate for his age and everything. You are a very good storyteller – I appreciate it.

You do forget things.

You do – but as you're talking about it, it comes back to you.

Yeah, it does.

Okay, I'm going to end the tape; thank you again, very much.

(further comments by George)

Work in the daytime and they come in there – Jeep come in there. The Japs got some boats and starting to come over to the island there to take it. And they was loaded with guns too and everything. So they come out with the big truck there with a bunch of guns and everything – all these were made in 1910, I think it was – ha, ha, they give me a gun – I said this damn thing don't even shoot. I threw it down on the ground and everybody threw their guns down. We had one Tommy gun – he puts it across his shoulder and pulled the trigger – he jerked it away from him and said don't you know better, you're not supposed to shoot it in the air. He said I just pulled the trigger ha, ha –

You guys never got any training with guns or anything?

No, no training.

And usually sailors don't – the Army does.

The whole stock was from World War I – never shot and there was no ammunition. So here comes the Japs; they were gonna take us over and I know they would, but the Navy got wind of it and they came in too. So they high-tailed it back.

George was describing an invasion that the Japs tried but didn't succeed. Okay, we're going to end it.

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*** P.S. Referring back to the incident where the Japanese zeros bombed five ships – one freighter, (supply ship) and four destroyers – 880 men were on board and they all died even people on shore got killed from flying debris. George was asked this question by Shannon Rapp after the interview and provided the information.**

Unfortunately, George W. Meyers passed away on July 23, 2018, age 100.