# Daniel B. Morris, Jr., oral history interview

Signalman, Third Class, United States Navy
World War II – Pacific Theater

Interviewed: October 9, 2001
Identifier: VWM 231.232

**Keywords:**

World War II (1939-1945)
Minesweeper operation
Japan--Tsushima Straits
Boy Scouts of America
Raven-class minesweeper
Camp Perry--Virginia

**Repository:** Virginia War Memorial Archives

**Title:** Daniel B. Morris, Jr., oral history interview, 9 October 2001

**Collection (host):** Virginia War Memorial Oral History Project

**Interviewee (creator):** Morris, Jr., Daniel B.

**Interviewer:** Kennedy, Tom

**Date of interview:** 2001-10-09

**Decades:** 1940-1950

**Region of Virginia**: Central

**Branch of Service:** United States Navy

**Conflicts/Era of Service:** World War II

**Military Service History**
**Service Dates:** 1944-1946
**Highest Rank:** Signalman, Third Class
**Units, ships, etc.:** *USS Roselle* (AM-379); *USS Waxwing* (AM-389)
**Locations of Service:** Dam Neck, Virginia; Montreal, Canada; Boston, Massachusetts; Panama Canal; Korea/Japan minesweeper route
**Medals or Service Awards:** Good Conduct; Pacific Theater; Asiatic Pacific theater; Japan Occupation
**Extent:** 1:01:43; transcript (22 pages)

**Abstract:** Daniel B. Morris, Jr. was born in North Carolina in 1926. He talks about his desire to follow in his older brother's footsteps when he joined the military after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Morris reflects on his basic naval training and building close bonds with his colleagues. He recalls his first year of service in domestic training and patrol routes, and the popular response to the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Morris explains the necessary repair and firing procedures on Raven-class minesweepers, emphasizing the importance of tight-knit ship operations after a watch accident almost destroyed the ship. Morris also warns against potential complacency in disposal operations, citing the 30 men lost aboard the *USS Minivet (*AM-371) in December 1945. Morris ends the interview sharing his appreciation for the various foreign and domestic cultural opportunities experienced during his military service.

**Transcript Notes:**

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| Transcriber: | Cinebar Productions |
| Abstract by: | Aaron Rodriguez, VWM Volunteer |

**Interview Transcript:**

**Interviewer:** First thing we'll do is have you spell your name, last name first.

**Morris:** My name is Daniel Baxter Morris, Jr. Morris is spelled M-O-R-R-I-S.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Next thing we'll do is branch of service, rank, serial number.

**Morris:** Okay. I was in the US Navy Reserve, World War Two. The serial number is 2641842.

**Interviewer:** Okay. Let's start right at the beginning. When you joined up, tell me when you joined, why you joined, why the Navy, what your parents said, what your friends said, what was just sort of what was going on.

**Morris:** Okay. I was in high school at beginning of World War II, 15 and a half, when Pearl Harbor came along. My brother went in when he was 21, in January. So, he went over and did his thing in May of 1944, about just before I turned 17, before I turned 18, I, I volunteered for the Navy. And then, when I graduated from high school, I went into the Navy, and I did the swearing in. Why I joined the Navy. I guess I was in the Sea Scouts. That's a senior scouting. I got a little bit of taste of the uniform, and I had a couple of buddies who went in the Navy earlier and they came home. Of course, I think most of us back then were very patriotic. Probably we were gung-ho, and we couldn't wait to get in. So, I went in the Navy. I think I was ready, and I was proud to be in the service. I went in June 1944.

**Interviewer:** Now, where did they first send you and what do you remember of those first days?

**Morris:** I went to Camp Perry, Virginia, for boot camp basic training. Camp Perry is on the York River between Yorktown and Williamsburg. It was a Seabee training camp that started in ‘42 for training Seabees. By the time I came along, they were training young men like me, the basic training I went to in June, and it was pretty hot. Camp Perry was like, had tar paper shacks, and when the wind blew, it was muddy, I mean, when it rained, it was muddy. And when it dried out, it was dusty. But that didn't bother us. They had coal stoves in each corner with, to heat, but we

didn't need any heat. One interesting thing about when I got to Camp Perry, one of my best buddies had gone in the Navy a week earlier, and I says, “Well, I'll see you after the war.” So, I went to the, what we call the head. They have the showers, the commodes and lavatories. And there was my buddy, Jack Sandiford. “Well, what are you doing here?” So, they had two barracks on one side per company, and on the other side of the head with other company. So, he was a week there, so we got to see each other off and on. So far as training itself, it was pretty easy for me. I wasn't a football player or whatnot. And the Boy Scouts, we did a lot of hiking and camping, and we thought we were pretty tough.

I was kind of a skinny kid, but I was lean and almost mean, and boot camp was a lot of fun. And all of us were volunteers, kids, 18 and 19. And there's one guy, 40 plus, that made him real old. He had a son in the Navy. And “Pop” had a little, little pot belly, but he kept up with us on the training, whatnot. And we had a chief petty officer who was a deputy sheriff from Cheyenne, Wyoming, and he was sort of like a father. He gave a little talk. He says, “Boys, we're here to do a job and you do your job, and I'll do my job.” And we got along fine. And he had a assistant named Mike. He'd been in the Marines. He was actually the boot pusher. He was a seaman, second class. But he knew how to drill us. Ordinarily, a Navy guy's not very good drilling, but we could keep in step and do the left flank and right flank and all that. And I went to boot camp in June. I got out just before Labor Day in September. I got a ten-day leave. And oh, one thing it might be interesting, this buddy of mine, Jack, was a football player in high school, pretty good. So, while we were at Camp Perry, he went out for the football team, and we were still in boot camp.

And I went out there one day with him and the chief petty officer was the trainer. I got to talking to him. He says, “You want a job as assistant trainer?” I said, “What do you do?” He says, “We fill up the water buckets and put a little lemonade in the three and keep up the footballs.” So, I did that. So, remember boot camp, you're an apprentice seaman. Your hair is beginning to grow out from being bald. And I get on the bus, I take my leggings off, get a clipboard. If you had a clipboard that got you anywhere. Of course, I had a little pass saying I could go to the football field. So, this was in late August. I go over there every afternoon and be assistant manager. I was an apprentice seaman, supervising

about four seaman, second class, and they didn't know I was in boot camp. I didn't tell them. And I could have stayed with the football team all the way, but I got a ten-day boot leave to go home. And the yeoman says, “Morris, you better take that leave, because if you stay till December and you get transferred, you might not get a leave.” So D.B. took the leave and went home and I came back.

**Interviewer:** What was it like going home and now you're in uniform?

**Morris:** Good feeling, that you were something special. And you got to remember, when I went home on boot camp leave, it was still one year of war left, and we were considered heroes, even though I hadn't done anything. I'd done some basic training. And I went back to my high school and there was an English teacher there, and he says, “Come in and talk to these students.” And so, they were looking up to us. And so, I gave them a little talk, about two minutes. Of course, I was pretty nervous. But she says, “I thank you for coming by.”

**Interviewer:** So, when you got back home, you got back… when you got back after the ten days, what happened then?

**Morris:** Well, you stay in a place, outgoing unit, is a transition period. Stay there for a few days. And I got to go to a signal school in Bainbridge, Maryland. Back then, you could put down the choice of where you would like to be. I mean, I took some tests, and I qualified, and I wanted to be a gunner, a tail gunner and a radioman. But by that time, all the schools had filled up. So, I got to go to, I signed up to go to Bainbridge, Maryland, the Signal School. That was what they call a first class trade school. At Bainbridge, they had training for both signalman, radioman, gunner's mate and some others. And it was a big place, about 100,000 sailors there. I might say that the buildings there were more modern. They'd been built probably in the early 40s, ‘42. It was a small college in the rolling hills of Maryland on the Susquehanna River. It's about five miles from the Chesapeake Bay, a nice, beautiful place. I got there in October, and it started getting cool, and I stayed there till February. And that's one of the coldest places I've ever been. It snowed in December. I think the snow stayed on the ground till I left there in February.

And we marched around, and we had cotton dungarees and pea coats. But boy, that wind was whistling cold coming over those mountains, or little mole hills, there, whatever. I liked the Signal School. In the Boy Scouts, I learned Morse code and semaphore, you know, wave your arms, A, B, C and all that. And so, I fit right in. And it was pretty competitive. One thing I remember, I was one of about ten Southerners, and most of them other guys were from Pennsylvania and New York. When we got a big kick out of these New Yorkers, the ones down in Manhattan and lower New York, they called themselves the "downstate apes." And the guys up north called them "upstate apes." And they had a lot of competition. They sort of tolerated us rebels or southerners or whatnot. But we all got along fine. And being in Bainbridge, we got on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and we could go south to Washington, DC. That was a good liberty town. We could go up to Wilmington, Delaware. But Philadelphia and New York were the places to go, then. And I got to go somewhere every weekend, and I enjoyed it.

**Interviewer:** Where did they go… where did they send you after that training?

**Morris:** Okay, after Bainbridge, I got transferred to Norfolk. And one of the interesting ways of getting transferred, back then, you ride buses, and you buy a ride trains. But I went from Baltimore to Norfolk NOB on the *City of Richmond*. That's the old Bay Line. That's a, it's a poor man's cruise ship, back then. But they put cars on there and trucks and I think they were about six of us being transferred. Another guy and I shared a little, shared a state room and it's pretty nice. That little bar on there and they had a slot machine. And I put a couple of nickels, and I hit a jackpot, $12 a nickels. So, big deal. And of course, we had a nice dinner, tablecloths. That was neat. You know, we used to being in the mess hall with a table and trays. And we had dinner going down and all the way on Chesapeake Bay. We didn't see much at night, but the next morning. we had breakfast and then we docked in Norfolk and got on the bus and went to NOB.

**Interviewer:** And, and then what?

**Morris:** I went to a couple of schools, bounced around, and then finally I went to Minecraft Training Center. That was at Little Creek. That's right, back then, they had a ferry boat that crossed the Chesapeake Bay, didn't have the Bay Bridge

tunnel. And there was a fence separating us from the terminal. And this little base probably had a few hundred sailors, and we had a pier, and they were three or four training ships. This was training for minesweeping operations, and I was there till July. And we'd go out in the bay, and we'd learn how to be a minesweeper sailor Of course, I was a signalman, striker. I was the first-class seaman after the school went down there and we did a lot of training. We one thing we did, I learned to take a .45-caliber pistol apart, blindfolded. I don't know why, but we did that. And we'd had rifle training in boot camp, ‘03 Springfield, bolt action, which would kick you. And also, while we were there, we went to Dam Neck, Virginia. That's the noisiest place I've ever been in my life. They had Navy gun… this was below Virginia Beach on the ocean. We were there two days, and they had five-inch guns, which were pretty noisy. And then, come on down to three-inch, 50, which were the noisiest things I've ever heard, and 20-millimeter guns and 40-millimeter. And we learned to load those guns, because we had the 20-millimeter and 40-millimeter and the three-inch, 50 on the minesweeper I was assigned to. Going back to Little Creek Training base, we'd go out and learn how to put the sweep, mine sweep gear out. That's cables and these devices to keep the cable down and out. You'd string two of them behind you, one to the starboard side and one to the port.

And you learned to do that. And they had three different kinds of mines back then. There were the contact. They were the ones that had the little horns on there, and they hit the horns, they blow up. And they had the acoustical that motor noise would set them off as they'd be lying low or floating low and they'd go off. And then, there was the electronic or magnetic. When the magnetism of ship would come along, that set off the device. So, there was three kinds of mines back then, and we did that till July. And then, we finally were put on orders to go to Cleveland, Ohio, on Lake Erie, and we commissioned a minesweeper there. Little Creek was a lot of fun.

Oh, I might say while I was there, the V-E day was celebrated. That's the war in Europe. And just before that, FDR died. And that was a sad time, because he was like a big father to all of us. That was the only president I knew. I remember talking about Herbert Hoover, but FDR was president forever, between ‘33 and when he died. And Harry Truman became president, and I says, “Uh-Oh.” I

wondered. But he made a speech, and it was on the newsreel… no TV back then. And we didn't hear radio much around the Navy. So, the newsreel, and they have information sessions. Anyway, Truman gave a talk, and he says, "I'm your new commander in chief and I want you to pray for me." And that, that told me, well, this is a man who has humility. And I found out later on he was one of our best presidents in my lifetime. So, he did good.

**Interviewer:** How did you hear about FDR?

**Morris:** It was announced in the PA system. We had formation every morning. This was at Little Creek. We'd have formation, and if it was a big deal, they might announce something. Of course, we get newspapers from Norfolk, and we could buy them. Sometimes they'd have these morale meetings and bring you up to date with current events, or what there was going on in the Pacific, and what was going on in the European theater. But really, I didn't read newspapers much back then. We didn't have much time. Whereas a kid, when I was in grammar school, I read the papers and high school and so forth. But I guess the newsreel was a big thing. You know, you go to the movies, they have about a five-minute thing and a little bit of… that was big news. I think that was the way it was for the civilian population, too. That was things, you could see them and hear them and all that.

**Interviewer:** Now, where were you when you heard about V-E Day and what happened?

**Morris:** Okay, that was the end of Europe. I was in Montreal, Canada, on a minesweeper on the Saint Lawrence River, and that was a big celebration. But you know what? In Montreal, it was very quiet because they celebrated V-E Day, the war in Europe, because Canadians were mostly over in Europe, I think. And so, it's very quiet. In fact, we got on liberty, and you go into place and a lot of places were closed and there wasn't much to do. I went on Liberty one night. I might back up a little bit. We went to on train from Norfolk to Cleveland, Ohio in July, and we were there a couple of weeks. And that ship was commissioned at Cleveland on August the 6th. That was the day they dropped the first A-bomb. And we didn't hear about it. And it really didn't, it didn't sink in. You got to remember, we were getting ready to invade Japan, then, and the war in Europe was over. And so all these people were coming in to get ready to... I think Japan was defeated back in

the spring of 1945. But the warlords or the military leaders wouldn't concede. And if it hadn't been for the A-bomb, we would have been in the invasion. One time, in the mid-50s, I was in a Sunday school class. I was living up in western North Carolina. And some lady says, "You know, I think it's terrible they dropped the A- bomb." I says, "Hey, I think it's a good idea. If it hadn't been for that bomb, I might not be here now." And there have been thousands of Americans. They estimated a million casualties and most of them would have been Japanese. But that second A-bomb did the trick.

**Interviewer:** Now, when you went up and you had your, got a new ship. Tell me about the ship, because a minesweeper is a sort of interesting ship. Tell me about the size and how it's built.

**Morris:** Well, it was a brand-new ship. It was called the *Raven* Class. It was 220ft long, about 30ft wide. And we had a complement of 90 people, about ten officers and 80 enlisted men. And we had a three-inch, 50 gun on the deck. But we called it a pop gun. I think it was the noisiest thing the Navy had. Of course, it wasn't as big as the five-inch and 12-inch and all that. When I was at Little Creek, we'd go out in Chesapeake Bay and we fired that thing. We'd go up near Tangier Island, had a great big old target. It looked like a raft about 30ft high and 40ft wide, and had a big old target, and we'd shoot at it. And so, in training, you have what you call a guy sits in the right side, he cranks it and the guy sits on the left side and he goes this way. I might have it backwards. And then when the crosshairs meet, you say, "Fire." One of us had a little thing. We could fire it, whatnot, or a gunnery officer would fire it. And that was a big noise. Also, trained on the 20mm and the 40mm. So, I trained on three different things, even though I was a signalman, and I did signal watch. Going back to the you asked me about the minesweeper. Besides the three-inch, 50 and the 20mm which were on the flying bridge, up high, they were single barrels. The 40mm were twin barrels back near the fantail, about 30ft. And they were these big old tubs, and you had this control like a bicycle handlebar. You could move that and that moved the whole... and you had a little sight. It looked like a little dial, maybe a three by five, and it was electronic. And that was your aiming device. And you, you fired... it was about one out of four shells and have a tracer, and you could watch the tracers going to the target. And of course, a

main job on the sweeper was to sweep for mines. And we were equipped for that. And let's see. What else do you mean?

**Interviewer:** Is this one of the boats that had a wooden hull?

**Morris:** No, we were steel, all steel. I might say this was the last minesweeper in World War Two commissioned. And we went, we got to the Pacific. We did speed trials in Lake Erie, out from Cleveland. And we were kind of an oddity. There weren't many servicemen there when we got there, and it was really nice. Norfolk was okay, but there are too many sailors and soldiers and whatnot. Get to Cleveland, man, we were heroes, and we could ride the streetcars and buses free. And they had all kinds of little clubs, and they say, "Well, come on in," and whatnot and say, "Boy, this is really great, isn't it?" And we stayed there till about the middle of August. And then we started out, we were headed for Boston by way of Lake Erie. The Welland Canal goes connects Ontario and then Ontario goes up to Niagara Falls. So, you got to go around that. And they have a step-down canal that goes to the Saint Lawrence River, and then, from there.

**Interviewer:** That's a long trip from where you were just to the ocean. How long is that?

**Morris:** Well, from Cleveland to Boston is about 1,500 miles. And we were in one of these canals and a British freighter kind of nudged us and we bumped up against the concrete side and we bent a screw, the propeller. And so we stopped in Quebec about a week. We were trying to see if the Canadians could help us out, because we had a little vibration, and they were afraid that this bent screw could mess up the ball bearings or the shaft or whatnot. Anyway, they couldn't do us any good. Well, we liked Quebec. Ooh la la. Anyway, we left there, and while we were there, the Canadian Navy got us some 20-millimeter ammun... we didn't have any of this ammo back in Cleveland. We got it at in Quebec, Canada, on the Saint Lawrence River, 20-millimeter. 40-millimeter and the three-inch, 50. And we went up the river a little bit and we fired the ammo, tested them. It was some Canadian range, whatnot. So, we kept a few Canadians awake there one morning. And also, this was, I think, about just after Labor Day starting to get cool up there. And they loaned us some foul weather gear. We have light things, but when you get out in the Atlantic, it got cold. So, we had these, like coveralls, with woolen

lining inside and had these heavy coats go on. And then, the, the helmets that go on. When you get outside on the in the open air, wind blowing, that's cold. The Saint Lawrence River was a nice experience. It was almost like a cruise. Saint Lawrence River is one of the most beautiful rivers I've ever seen. And we go along the Thousand Islands area. And September, the people were still there. The beautiful homes, they call them cottages. In some places we'd be just a few feet in the water. So, we were on the bridge with binoculars, and we'd see the pretty girls and they'd wave back and all that, and people... we were sort of an oddity. I don't think there were many Navy ships up there that before or after.

**Interviewer:** So, when you got in and got down to Boston, how was Boston?

**Morris:** Boston is a great city, Old Beantown. That's one of my favorite cities on the Atlantic coast. As I said, we had trouble with the screw propeller, so we had to go in... Boston Navy Yard has a few sections. Chelsea in East Boston as across from the city of Boston. And we had to go up and, on the railway, and we got, I think, we got a new prop. And we went there about a week. And the Boston people were very friendly. They had USO clubs. We'd go there and visit, and they have dances and whatnot. Of course, it's a historic city. We got to see the *Constitution* and the old places and Paul Revere and all those good things. So, I liked it. I was there about three weeks.

**Interviewer:** Now, once you got fixed, where did they send you? Once you got fixed, where did they send you?

**Morris:** Well, on the ship we had a, what they call a sick bay. We had a first-class pharmacist's mate, and he had a first aid kit and whatnot. And if you got very sick, well, they had a little bunk. You could lay there. I had the flu one time on the ship when I was over in Japan, and I stayed in my bunk. I think what saved me, my mother gave me a bottle of Vicks VapoRub. You ever heard of that? Mentholatum. And I think I ate that. And I think I was in the sack for about two days, and I finally staggered out. That's the only time I was sick on the ship. But they did have hospital ships, and we had one guy that went there. They had doctors, nurses, and they could operate on people. I don't think they did a lot of operations, maybe an appendectomy or whatnot.

**Interviewer:** So, new prop was installed. And where did you go from...

**Morris:** Okay I got new prop in Boston. We had to do some more sweep testing, went out from Boston Harbor and also on a minesweeper. You have to be degaussed every once in a while. That's a process where you go in to a berth in the water and they got these cables going underneath the hull. And before you do that, you have to take the watches off. The guy comes around a little shoe box, takes everybody's wristwatch. We also have chronometers on the ship. You wind them up, they last for about six days. And one of my jobs, when I was a signalman strike, I'd go around and wind those things. And so, I helped get the clocks and put those in the box. I had to take them ashore. Okay, getting back to this degaussing business, they run some current through there and that's supposed to neutralize the magnetic flux. In other words, takes the excess magnetism from the steel part of the ship, so it makes us less susceptible to magnetic mines when we're in the out in the water. We had that done in Norfolk and then again at Pearl Harbor. So, I guess when you go along the water, you build up static electricity and you still retain some of the magnetism in the ship.

And then I guess we were training in Boston and then we left there to come down towards Norfolk. One thing had happened, we were off the coast of Atlantic City. You could see the lights and things and we had a fire aboard ship. Now this is a brand-new ship and we have an evaporator that converts seawater into fresh water. And something happened and it caught on fire, and it melted. Can you imagine a coils of copper just melting? Anyway, this was early in the morning, and we were dead in the water. And when you break down on the ship, you put up these breakdown flag, and it was serious business, A chief told me, he says, if it burned another ten minutes, that ship would have blown up, because they had fuel tanks down in the engine room and they were painted, and the paint was bubbling. B but the guys got it put out. And so, that was pretty serious. And we got down to Norfolk and we had have a board of inquiry that cost us another couple of weeks and we had to get a new evaporator. It was embarrassing, because we were a brand-new ship, and you have something like that to happen.

**Interviewer:** They figure out what happened?

**Morris:** Well, we're not really sure. I think one of the guys on duty had taken some medicine and it made him sleepy. And he and something happened, and it just got too hot. I don't think he was punished. I think the chief knew something or whatnot. So, they, I guess, it was smoothed over. But we did get to Norfolk, and we got that. We had to do some more training down there. Went back to the same training base at Little Creek where I had trained earlier, and we were there for a few days practicing up again, and we were there just before Thanksgiving. We left to go down to Panama.

**Interviewer:** How was it going through the Panama Canal?

**Morris:** It was really a treat. Going from Norfolk to... we got off… it was very cold in Norfolk. It's about 21 degrees in the water. That's cold. And but we got off the coast of Jacksonville and started warming, warming up. And there was a boatswain's mate on the ship. He liked to cut hair, so my hair was getting kind of long. So, I went back and says, “Hey, boats, how about giving me a haircut?” So, he gave me a real close one, and we got to Coco Solo Naval Base that's on the Atlantic side. We pulled in there and you could see the palm, palm trees and banana. I never had seen banana trees before. I was from a little southern town in North Carolina and the bananas growing upside down. Hey, they grow funny. Anyway, we were there two nights and then we got through the Panama Canal. We started at 8:00 one morning and it took us all day. Going through the canal… and it was very hot too. Even though this was November, it was pretty hot. It's not far from the equator, just a few miles above it. Anyway, you go up locks and you go to a lake, and you go several miles and you go through other locks to go down. So, this Gatun Lake is most of the canal, and you zigzag and all that.

And you have these little engines, they call them mules. They are, I think they're electric cars and they hook it up to the ship and they pull you through. And then, they closed the gates and pumped the water in. And one of my friends, my communications officer, took a picture and I've got it. That's, it shows our fantail and another ship, oh, about 100ft away. See, we are 200ft long, 220. And I don't know how big a ship can go through there, but the Franklin aircraft carrier, which was one of the biggest aircraft carriers at that time, had gone through just before

we did, and the sides had scraped. You can see where the concrete had been scarred. And they put these fenders, big old knots of rope, and they just burned those fenders right up. Then, we went to took us all day, and the afternoon, we came out to the Pacific, Panama City. I might say, Panama City was sort of a wild place back then. They didn't want Navy people even going in there. They had a pretty reputation of, you know, knives and bad thing. We went to Cristobal. That was a small city. Not much doing there, but we sort of walked around. Nobody bothered us. They were glad to see us when... so, we got through the Panama Canal.

**Interviewer:** So, now you launch across the Pacific to where, Pearl?

**Morris:** No, we were going to we went to San Diego on the way up to San Diego. It was a beautiful trip. No rain, smooth sailing. And one day we looked out and all of these… trying to think.

**Interviewer:** Were they humpbacks?

**Morris:** No, not whales. Porpoises, I mean, hundreds of them. And they were going along, and they were with us all day and they were keeping the same speed. We were doing about 14 knots. And then, the next morning, they were all gone. And this skipper, we had, asked permission to put into Acapulco, and a message came back negative. We all wanted to go to Acapulco. That's, that's the place, even now, isn't it? Anyway, we got to San Diego, and we pulled in and get more fuel and water. When you pull into a dock, you hook up the electricity. Of course, on the ship, you have generators that make their own electricity. So, the lights and everything will run. So, when you get to land, you rest those, and you get the AC plugged big old black cable and you also hook up the water line. So, that's vital. And all the places we went had that. We were in San Diego a couple of days and then headed up for Long Beach, California, San Pedro. While we were in, oh, Long Beach is one of the biggest harbors, busiest harbors in the country today, this country. It was pretty busy back then, and they have a breakwater. And behind the breakwater I probably saw as many Navy ships as I've ever seen in one location. They had cruisers and destroyers and whatnot, and we had a sort of zigzag to get in there. And we got to a channel that took us into some inner harbor, San Pedro,

and we went through oil fields and factory places and through a channel, Cerritos channel, and we dock, and it started raining. It rained the whole time we were there. Can you imagine that?

**Interviewer:** It never rains in Southern California.

**Morris:** In LA is a desert. Really. Of course, LA is 30 miles inland or whatnot. So, we left San Pedro after two or three days and headed for Pearl Harbor.

**Interviewer:** Was the trip over?

**Morris:** It was very nice. After being in Atlantic the first night in the ocean, it was the roughest thing we've ever had. It was near the middle of September, and it was cold, not icy, but after you've been in inland and shirtsleeves. And that was the first night above rough seas. We had these little bunks that like long chairs and there you have a little mattress, and you have these straps. You go across the bunk. So, when you fold them up, your mattress won't fall on. Well, that night, we were putting those little straps across your knees and across your chest, so you wouldn't fall out of the bunk. And after a while, I finally gave up. I was on the signal watch. I went up on the pilot house at 4:00, and I was down there to sleep and some guy, “What's he doing sleeping here?” He said, “Oh, he's going on watch soon.” “Okay, okay.” But going back to the Pacific, we had some pretty nice weather all together. And you get to Hawaii. To me, that's probably some of the most even temperature, even weather of any place I've ever been. I don't think it ever gets cold there, unusual. And we were Pearl Harbor for I think about a week, and I met my old buddy, and I was in boot camp with. That's something I haven't been in contact with him. I go to the Red Cross, and I say, “I'm looking for Jack.” And so, the next day he comes down to the ship. He had left Camp Perry, went to Hawaii, and he was playing football out there on the football team. And he was, he was taking some courses, University of Hawaii. So, he came by the ship. He picked me up at night, and we go into Honolulu. And through him, I got to meet some nice people. They invited him out to their home. And we went to a luau one time. And this family belonged to a beach club on Waikiki. So, that was really nice. So, I liked my stay there. I hated to leave.

**Interviewer:** Were, was there any remnants of the war?

**Morris:** Yep. Pearl Harbor had been cleaned up a lot, but we were tied up to a buoy about a half a mile from where the *Arizona* was, and we had a motor whaleboat, which was our way of getting from out in the harbor into the pier. And every time we go, we cross over the *Arizona*. Now you have a big memorial and it's the big platform. I don't know, it's about 75ft across. Back then, you could look down and see the whole, whole, one thing sticking up as part of the superstructure. Most of it was underwater and you could see a little oil thing, or oil bubbles coming up. And it was an eerie feeling. And now we have to go into Pearl Harbor on business, get the mail. And one of the things we had a movie projector on ship and that was a big, big deal at night. And we'd be in harbor. We try to get six to eight movies, so we'd have something to look at on the way. And I went with an officer at one time and one of my jobs was to get some move. We had to trade hours to get other movies. So, I think we saw some of the dumbest movies in the world back then, and we left Pearl Harbor to go towards Japan, then.

**Interviewer:** And what did you do in Japan?

**Morris:** Okay. We were sweeping between Korea and Japan. It's called Tsushima Strait. And the Japanese had mined that, long strings of mines and they attached them to concrete blocks, and they had them. So, they were about seven feet below the surface. Fishing boats could go across, but big ships couldn't. And so, that kept, kept them protected more or less. It was a big passageway between Korea and Japan. We got there in January, and other minesweepers had been working on it since after V-J Day. And it's one of the biggest operations of any minesweeping deal in the Pacific. Of course, we had charts, and I don't know, several thousand mines. And they'd gotten a lot of them up by the time we got there. But we we worked in January, February and March up to the middle of April. And we were in a place called Sasebo, Japan. That's in the southwest corner. We're down Kyushu. Kyushu is a southernmost island, and that's about 40 some miles west of Nagasaki, where they dropped the second A-bomb. Okay, from Sasebo, we go out, I guess it's about 30 or 40 miles, and we'd anchor. And we stay out there Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. And then each day we'd be sweeping and there

were probably six to eight ships, and we'd sweep in formation, and we'd cut the cables, and these mines would float to the surface and we'd shoot at them.

At first, we'd try it with a 20mm and a 40mm, and that wasn't, that's pretty expensive. That's wasting a lot of ammo. Oh, I might say December 29th, we lost one of our minesweepers out there at, they'd cut a mine loose, and the wind shifted and the mine hit the side of the ship and sunk it and they lost 30 guys. That was December 29th, the *Minivet*. And so, after that, it became very serious business. And we got there just a few days after that ship had sunk. We knew a little bit about it, but not much. Later on, I met one of the survivors that lived in Richmond, here, and we became good buddies. I'll tell you about that later. So, we'd sweep the Tsushima Strait, and we did that till the middle of April, and I think we finished. We finished. And I got on another ship just before Easter of April of '46, and we were getting ready to come back. I've kept up with a couple of people who were on the ship with me. My communications officer, George Danforth, lives in Chicago. He's a retired teacher of architecture, one of the colleges. He's, he's up in his early 80 seconds. He says, "I'm getting decrepit now, but I'm still..." and I've kept in touch with John Kogurt, who was an ensign.

Well, one thing one day when we were sweeping, we had to go on this Japanese freighter. We, the Japanese were getting more and more into shooting these bombs. We put a boat crew with about six riflemen, and they go up maybe 100ft, 100 yards from the mine, and they shoot at it with rifles, and they'd put holes in it, and then the water would fill up and the mine would sink. Once in a while, one of these bullets would hit that horn and boom, they'd go up. I got a couple of pictures of mines going off like that. We saw one in Saipan, and it was just floating. So, we, it had gotten loose. They weren't supposed to be in the mines. We got that. I think George Danforth took the picture and he gave me a copy of it after we came back. It was cold weather, January, February and March, and it was windy. And even though we didn't have a kamikaze planes shooting at us, it was pretty, pretty strenuous. We had long hours. And so, we'd come back to Sasebo on a Friday, and that wasn't much of a port, but it was nice to come back to... the ship would dock, and you'd be on land and you could go into some little rinky dink USA, USO club and relax.

**Interviewer:** Now, how long were you over there entirely?

**Morris:** Okay, we got there in January and. I was transferred to another ship, by the way, that was a training ship back in Little Creek a year before that we trained on. That, that left, I think, it left before we did, because we had all this trouble with the bent prop and the engine room fire, and we transferred. And George Danford and John Kogurt transferred the same time. There were about 12 of us, and we had enough points to get out. Back then, you needed so many points to get out. When I volunteered in June of ‘44, I volunteered for the war and the duration. Well, the duration was almost up. And so, we started our way back in the middle of April. Before we left, we got to go to Nagasaki. That's where they dropped the second bomb. And that was quite an experience. To get to Nagasaki from the water, it's sort of like going through a zig zag fjord, and all of a sudden, the valley opens up and there's Nagasaki, and the first thing you see is a big old brick building. We call it the missionary school. And you don't see much of Nagasaki because most of it is inland. When they dropped the bomb, it was pretty far inland, and the bomb was several hundred feet in the air. And I got to go to ground zero, and it's just like a glass beads and there was nothing there for about a mile radius, just swept clean. And the Marines had a baseball field. They called it “Atomic Field.” Now, I don't know why they out there, because there was still a few roentgens in the contamination one another, but the part of downtown Nagasaki was functioning. This is, you got to remember, almost a half a year after they dropped the bomb, August and this was like we were in there April, and I went to a movie house and that was a treat.

You walk in and all those people were smoking. It's like a so-called pool room. And we were standing at the back and there was a movie. It was all in Japanese, and there's two people. They were around Fujiyama, you know, given the Japanese bed, and we stayed there, but the cigarette smoke was too tough. So, we left. We went to a department store. It was about two or three stories. It was made out of solid concrete. I think it was a long way from the A-blast. And but they had things for sale. I bought a record, 78-rpm, Columbia. It was some Japanese orchestra... that was a souvenir. And I bought a few other things while I was there. So, going to the movie house and department store... I'll tell you a story about the missionary. Fast forward to, in the 60s, I belonged to a church in Colonial

Heights, and there was a lady who was a retired missionary. And I mentioned Nagasaki. She says, "Were you there?" And I said, "Yes." She says, "You know, I was a missionary there before the war." And so, we talked and I says, "Well, we docked right in front of the missionary school." She says, "That was where I taught." The Japanese kicked him out in 1940. And she said, "We had to really watch our step, because we had a chalk line. We could teach so much, but they were monitoring us. Of course, we taught them about the, the Christian life and so forth." And she said, she went back, the Japanese came out with the Bibles. That was some story, wasn't it?

**Interviewer:** So, when did you finally get back here?

**Morris:** Okay, June, I'd say. We came back from Japan by way of Eniwetok. That was kind of a staging area. And, oh, and we came into Pearl Harbor, and we had to wait. We had to stand off, as they called it. They were towing the *Nevada*, a battleship that was used in the atomic test. And that thing was painted a dark red, and it was being towed by a tub, tugboat. And it took them a long time to get it out of the entrance to the harbor. And they were on their way to this test site that came some months later. And I got to stay in Hawaii, I think, about two weeks this time. I had a lot of fun there. And then we came back to San Diego, and we decommissioned that ship. It was called the *Roselle, USS Roselle,* AM279. And that was a lot of fun, because you throw a lot of stuff over the side... deep six as they call it.

**Interviewer:** Pretty young ship to be decommissioned.

**Morris:** Yeah, well, it was commissioned before ours when I was on the *Waxwing.* I commissioned the *Waxwing*, UAM389 and then decommissioned the *Roselle,* 279.

**Interviewer:** Did they ship you back home?

**Morris:** Yeah. We got a train in San Diego, went up to Los Angeles, and then, we started a cross country. And it took us ten days to go from San Diego to Norfolk. But we didn't care, we were coming home. That was a lot of fun.

**Interviewer:** How did the whole experience change you?

**Morris:** Well, when you were 18 years old, you haven't been in many places, and you think you know a lot and you go into the service, you meet a lot of people from different places, different personalities. That was one thing. You learn a lot about human nature. You get to travel to places. By being stationed in Bainbridge. I got to go to, like, Philadelphia and New York. Washington. To me, Washington is a beautiful city, even now. It's changed a lot. And New York was a great place. One of my buddies and I went up there in October of '44, and we went to the Empire State Building. We went to the Statue of Liberty, and we went to the Rockefeller Music Hall. And I stood on the corner talking to a native New Yorker. And I told him, he says, "You know, I've been living here 30 years. I've never been up to the Empire State Building or the Statue of Liberty." And one thing about it, you could go up in this Liberty's fist, where a torch is. You can't go up there anymore, it's so rickety. But, boy, you go up in that thing is creaking and the wind's blowing. And I caught a ferry boat over to the where the statue was or is, and I saw one of the guys from my hometown.

I knew him when he was a kid, and he was a second-class petty officer. He'd go in the Navy. And he was glad to see me, and I was glad to see him. One other time, when I was in Norfolk, one of my high school buddies was on the battleship there and he was with the flag. That's the admiral in charge of a lot of other ships, and he was a signalman and that was what I was. And so, I went up there and he showed me where on the bridge, and he took me down to his bunk. Those guys slept on hammocks. They still did that in World War Two, and they had to fold a hammock. Now, we had hammocks with a little thing, but when we got aboard our ship, we stowed the hammock and the seabag away in some locker, and we had little, little lockers about a foot and a half square and about two feet deep. And you put your junk in there and had a little tray. You could put your trinkets and whatnot, and you could put a lock on it. But that's about all the storage we had. Visiting countries, I think that was a big impression on me. Canada was the first country I went to Montreal and Quebec, and I didn't think much of Montreal because I wasn't there long enough.

I was in Quebec almost a week and the people were very friendly, and they were glad that we were allies. I think the Canadians have always been one of our close allies in the country. And Chateau Frontenac in Quebec is an impressive place. And I think one of the first nights this other guy and I went out, and we were probably a mile and a half from the ship and had about an hour to get back, and I wasn't sure whether the ship was. So, we looked out in the harbor and our lights, our lights have two red lights, and they were horizontal position in the Canadian Navy lights they have up and down. So, I said, "That's it." So, we got a cab. He took us back. We just did get there. So, as far as Hawaii, that's a beautiful place, one of the most beautiful. And we stopped in Saipan, one time, and we got to go into the caves. This is like a year or so later, but you see a lot of damage there. They had rusted ships out in the harbor, and we were there one day walking around. As far as Japan, I only got the two cities, Sasebo and Nagasaki.

Sasebo is still a big naval base for us, and I got some pretty good pictures of Sasebo when a little hill about 900ft. I had a camera. I paid $1.25 for it, a Kodak Baby Brownie Special. It took the negatives about twice as big as 35-millimeter. And I got some pretty good shots. And I looked I got a shot of looking north and then northeast and then east, and our ships were down there, six minesweepers. They were about an inch long. And I've had those pictures blown up to the ships about six inches long and got a picture of a hospital ship and destroy minesweeper. That's, that's a big one, the *Toleman*. That's where the captain, he was in charge of all the minesweepers as a cruiser, *Atlanta,* at anchor and several other ships, I can't remember what now. Sasebo wasn't much, but it was a home base. Nagasaki was about the biggest. I got a picture of a little canal, creek and there was a hearse. It was a Chevrolet front and had a pagoda-like body on it and had little windows you could look in. I didn't get very close, but that's what they hauled the people to. Funerals in a Chevy hearse with a pagoda on it. I got a picture of that one.

**Interviewer:** Let me ask you this. When all these tapes were edited together and they put them in the schools, Virginia, and to try to teach the kids something about World War Two, what it meant, why it was fought, if you had some of those kids here and you could tell them some of those things, what would you tell them?

**Morris:** Well, at the beginning of World War Two, as we know it, I was a 13-year-old Boy Scout, and we went to a camp. I lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and we went to a little lake called White Lake. And one of the commissioners of our troop had a brother who had a hotel and little cabins around there. So, we got to go down there and it was a real treat. I think we paid about $5 for the whole week and we got three big meals a day, and we slept in a little cabin. But while we were there, September 1939, Hitler invaded Poland. That was the beginning of World War Two. And we, we'd known about the Japanese invading Manchuria, and Italy invaded Ethiopia back in the mid-30s, when they had little war spots all along. But this is the beginning, the big push. And so we were kidding around. We were kids, 13, 14, 15. And as an older guy, he was in college. He was 18, he was real old. And we said, "Okay, buddy, you be you be carrying a rifle before long." The ironic thing is he never got in the service. The rest of us guys went in the Army, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard. Okay. Later on, when Pearl Harbor came along. I was 15.5 years old, and I was living near Fort Bragg. And they'd been busy, they'd been getting busy since 1940, the draft, US draft. And I went to school with Army brats. Their dads were sergeants or officers or whatnot. About a third of our high school graduating class were kids from Fort Bragg. So, we got close to the war early on. And as I said earlier, I wanted to join the Navy. And I think that back in my time, was probably one of the most patriotic times in this country. I don't know, maybe Revolutionary War or Civil War or whatnot. And I don't think we had many draft dodgers back then. There were some, but I think everybody that wanted to serve could serve. I had a guy in my class. He was.

(Begin Part 2)

**Morris:** High school class. He was a chick. We called him Chuck. He was probably one of the smartest guys in... he's real small. Everybody liked him, but he couldn't... he wanted to go into service, and he couldn't pass the physical, so he was passed over. So, when I came back in 1946, he was almost crying. He says, "You know, you guys went, I didn't go." But I went to my high school reunion in '93, they had the Class of '43. And I saw him, and I talked to him, and he says, "I finally got to go into service." He went to med school, and he was a doctor. And he says that was one of the best times of my life. So, Chuck got to go into service. And I think in '42 and '43, those were the war years, we had rationing, automobile tires,

gasoline, sugar. And you had to do without some things. I was a Boy Scout, and we collected aluminum pots and pans and coat hangers, and people gave tremendous. They stacked stuff up. Trucking companies would volunteer the trucks, and we collected... we'd get grease, they send it in for munitions, whatnot. So, before I went in, we were behind this war effort and Pearl Harbor was a big blow. It was a stunner. And I remember when Jimmy Doolittle did the raid on Tokyo, you know, the carrier Hornet got close, and that was a big morale lifter. And I just read his book a couple of years ago, *I Can Never Be So Lucky*. And I really enjoyed that. He was one of my heroes growing up, he and Charles Lindbergh. And I think that being part of World War Two, it was, it was a blessing. And I was very lucky I came back. Cut here. Cut here.

**Interviewer:** It's real. That's what kids react to. That's. That's not bad. That's good because that's what they react. They react for real.

**Morris:** Well, there was a guy named Billy Maxwell. He was, he didn't come back. Cut it, will you? I was talking about a friend of mine. We were playmates. Oh. From about the fifth grade on. He went in the Air Force about a year before I did. And he was a tail gunner on a B-24. And when I came back, I found out that he got shot down. And the last time they saw him, the tail had dropped off, spinning and he was inside. Anyway, I came back and I talked to his mother and I was talking to her. I says, "You know, it's funny, Some of us come back, some don't." She says, and she gave me a big hug and said, "Don't worry about it." There was another neighbor of mine who was in, he was older. He was in a tank outfit. He had four tanks shot out from under him and survived. Now, that's one of the luckiest guys around. And he had some scratches and whatnot. And he says, he said, "I was a lucky son of a gun, wasn't I?" After we come back and been around, one of our Boy Scout buddies was still in the Air Force. He was flying the A-20s up in Alaska and he crashed, and he got killed. And his father was a commissioner, the scout commissioner of my troop. And so about a half a dozen of us went around to see his dad and talked to him or whatnot. And there was another guy who was an invasion of southern France. He was a, he's one of the ones that didn't come back. So, we go around and see his mom and that was something, whatnot. So, you always wonder, how did I come back?

**Interviewer:** Well, you all, all did your part. That was the deal. And if your generation added that up, we wouldn't be sitting here right now. And I thank you for what you did that. And I thank you for your time today.

**Morris:** Well, it's a pleasure to be with you because.

**Interviewer:** This is a good stuff. This is the stuff, you know, kids are to look at this and they react to real. And this is the kind of stuff that really makes them go, whoa! It's real. So, I thank, thank you very much.

**Morris:** Yes, sir. Pleasure.

**Interviewer:** I appreciate it. It was a great…