

Transcription: Melvin Meaux

Today is Thursday, March 5th, 2009, and my name is James Crabtree. I'm interviewing Mr. Melvin Meaux. This interview is being done in person at the William Courtney Texas Veterans Home in Temple, Texas, and it's being done to support the Texas Veterans Land Board's Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Mr. Meaux, thanks for taking the time to talk with me today. This interview is your interview, so we can go as long or as short as you want. I usually start off by asking the veteran just to let us know a little bit about their background, maybe tell us about where you were born or where you went to school, or maybe talk about your family or that sort of thing.

Melvin Meaux: Well I was born in Eunice, Louisiana in 1926.

Tell us a little bit about your family, your folks, or your siblings.

Melvin Meaux: I was six of seven kids, and I had a younger brother, and we were born and raised right there in Eunice, that's St. Landry Parish, and back in probably '39, I left Eunice and went to live with a sister. My dad died when I was 2, and that left my mother not very well off to take care of four kids, so I lived with my sister and my brother-in-law and we moved to Opelousas, Louisiana, and then war broke out and we moved to Lake Charles. Then I went in the service from Lake Charles.

Do you remember where you were when you heard that Pearl Harbor was bombed?

Melvin Meaux: Yes, we were on our way from Opelousas to Baton Rouge for my sister's birthday which is December the 7th, so that's in my mind. I mean I know exactly.

Did you hear it on the radio?

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, we were in the car between Opelousas and Baton Rouge.

What was your initial reaction to that?

Melvin Meaux: Well, being at that time probably 14, I had never heard of Pearl Harbor, so to me it didn't ring a bell until oh, probably after they got talkin' about it, and Roosevelt declared it day of infamy and stuff like that, then it began to sink in what it was. So all of us at that time, only one thing we had in mind is join the service.

So you knew at that point then that if the war went long enough, you were gonna join up.

Melvin Meaux: Oh yes, I knew then.

When did you finally join up? Did you finish high school?

Melvin Meaux: No, I quit when I was 17 in '43 and went in the service, went in the Navy.

Because you were under 18, did you have to get permission?

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, my sister and brother-in-law signed for it.

And tell us where you went as soon as you signed, I see you were in the Navy, where did they ship you off to first?

Melvin Meaux: Well I went through boot camp in San Diego, and then course school right there at Balboa Park, and then I probably spent the better part of a year there at the naval hospital in San Diego, and then I went overseas.

When you joined the Navy, did you know what your specialty was gonna be?

Melvin Meaux: Not at the time, no.

So they told you just what you're gonna go do.

Melvin Meaux: Of course at that age, I was a John Wayne. I just wanted to get in the midst of a battle. I was too tall. Thank goodness I was too tall for submarines and at that time, the Navy didn't have big planes, so there was no place for a boy that was 6 foot tall. So I ended up in the Medical Corps.

You said you spent a year there at Balboa, which I've been to Balboa. That's a beautiful spot. Did you live in barracks there?

Melvin Meaux: Tents. They had tents. We had a sleet storm come in one night.

Boy, that's rare.

Melvin Meaux: And my clothes, my pea coat and my blues dropped between the tent flap and the floor on the ground, so I had to dig 'em up from that and I couldn't put 'em on naturally, they were wet. But that was probably the worst part of Balboa because that was in San Diego and it was relatively warm.

Yeah, it's beautiful. While you were there, were you going through training during that time you were at Balboa?

Melvin Meaux: I was there for medical school, Medical Corps, yeah.

Tell us a little bit about what that was like.

Melvin Meaux: They were teaching us how to give shots, how to check for shock and such things as that, broken bones, and our job particularly was just first aid. I mean we had doctors aboard the ship I was on we had doctors, but some small ships didn't. But that's all they taught us at Balboa Park was just first aid and that was about all we learned there.

So you spent a year?

Melvin Meaux: I imagine six weeks, probably longer. I had an ear infection and I had to drop out, but I caught up with the next course.

After you finished at Balboa, where did you go to next?

Melvin Meaux: From Balboa, I probably went to the naval hospital right across the street.

OK, so you had a permanent assignment then at the hospital.

Melvin Meaux: Oh yes, and then I guess I was there about a year, I don't remember.

So you saw a lot of the wounded troops then I guess that had come back.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, one in particular was probably a lieutenant that had been on a destroyer and one of the mounts had caught him between the bulkhead and he had crushed his hips. We watched them operate, and of course he died, but when they opened his body to get to his broken bones, all the blood had seeped into that cavity I guess, so when they cut it open, blood just gushed out.

So you were able to witness or watch some of the surgeries that were taking place.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, we were there and I guess there was a place the interns watched operations and we saw that, but that was probably the highlight of my stay there at the naval hospital.

What were most of the patients like that were in the hospital?

Melvin Meaux: All types. We had one young man that had crashed. He was pilot training and he crashed, and he was probably 20, 21, lost all his teeth, broke his jaw. Then we had two men who were pilots, trainees, and this plane was coming in damaged wherever they were located, and they said instead of running into the plane, they ran away from it, which the plane caught up with 'em and when it blew up, it burnt both of them. But that and broken bones and amputations, whatever.

Did you ever feel like any of that got to you emotionally, seeing guys that are beat up like that on a daily basis?

Melvin Meaux: Not then, no.

What was a normal day like for you? Did you work a long shift?

Melvin Meaux: I was aboard a carrier, flight deck first aid, from the time I went overseas.

I was talking about at Balboa during the year you were there, did you work 7 days a week or 6 days a week?

Melvin Meaux: It was probably 5, and then we had to stand watch. I think it was 4 on, 8 off, or something like that. It was just a training for young men unaccustomed, in other words, a day for us probably ended in school and we went out and played. But then when we got off of work from Balboa, we probably ate and then they even had maybe an 8 to 12 watch, or the 12 to 4, whatever.

Did you get to see much of San Diego while you were there?

Melvin Meaux: A little, not very much. We didn't have time.

Stayed at the hospital mostly. So after you'd been at the hospital for about a year, then where did you go to?

Melvin Meaux: I spent about three months at El Camino del Rey I think it was. It was a rest home for officers that had been overseas, and I was there probably maybe six weeks, two months or something like that.

And that was in San Diego, too?

Melvin Meaux: It was at Encinitas I think.

OK, and then from there, how much longer was it before you were put aboard a carrier?

Melvin Meaux: Then from there I went back to San Diego and then immediately the draft came up and of course like I said earlier, I was John Wayne, so I signed up for it, and overseas we went.

What carrier were you aboard?

Melvin Meaux: The Hancock, number 19.

Tell us a little bit about the Hancock.

Melvin Meaux: Well it was sponsored by the Hancock Insurance Company in Boston, and when I got it, I caught it at Pearl Harbor. It was built I guess on the east coast because they came through the locks. I wasn't with them. But they came through the locks, and I've always laughed about it. I left San Diego, San Francisco, Treasure Island, Pearl Harbor, and the same ship, same route the ship followed, and went from where they built it to the war zone.

So it was pretty much a new ship when you went aboard.

Melvin Meaux: It was brand new, yeah. It hadn't had any action. In fact it was still in what they called it the shakedown cruise.

Had you ever seen an aircraft carrier before when you went aboard the Hancock?

Melvin Meaux: Yes, I thought it was, in those days it was the biggest thing afloat.

Did you ever feel like you were gonna get lost aboard that thing?

Melvin Meaux: I did at the beginning, but I guess I was on it a year and a half, and I knew my way around because I was first aid on the flight deck and there was two pharmacists, a mate and a doctor, and when we weren't busy, then one of my jobs was checking the first aid boxes all throughout the ship which was all the way down to the double bottoms where the engine was. So I got to know it pretty well.

How many men were aboard that ship do you think?

Melvin Meaux: I think they said about 2,500.

That's really a ton of folks.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, and you think 2,500 is not much. When they're assigned to go to general quarters and everybody running, it gets crowded. Then everywhere you go, you work by the whistle, the pipe they called it, and I remember when we were in the war zone and the enemy was attacking, they would call over the loudspeaker for the torpedo defense first, and then gunner department, and then we knew 10 or 20 seconds after that was man your battle stations. So we automatically when the whistle blew, you started running. So they had to quit that. Until the war was over, we had no pipes aboard ship because the minute he blew it, we went to general quarters.

Where was your assigned spot during general quarters?

Melvin Meaux: Right on the flight deck.

And what was your role to be during general quarters? Why did they have you on the flight deck?

Melvin Meaux: First aid. See, I was I guess you can say forward of one of the 5-inch mounts. I was at a hatch there, and the doctor and another pharmacist and mate were on the island structure. That's what we did. We had to be there whenever they were working on the flight deck which was respot the deck for another raid or whatever.

How often did you have to do first aid while you were aboard the carrier?

Melvin Meaux: One day it was damn near all day. We had a dive bomber come in that had a 500 lars in the bomb bay and they didn't know, and when the man on the flight deck told them to open the bomb bay, the bombs fell out. It killed about 50 people right immediately. And the doc and the other pharmacist and mate were standing right in front, and I don't know if he ever got his hearing back, but it deafened him, and I don't know the other boy's name, he had shrapnel in his face. My position when they landed, I was supposed to move out of the way so that they could bring the plane up and land another one, so I had walked to the side of the island away from the bombs, so when it went off, it didn't bother me at all. It just hurt my hearing, but that was it.

Did it tear a hole in the flight deck when that bomb went off?

Melvin Meaux: It was, it had the island structure and then you had two 5-inch mounts, and I just went from the flight deck, I just turned around and went behind the island structure. I always did that when the plane come in because you never knew when he jumped that cable it would come at you. So I was always out of the way. But I didn't even see when the dropped the bomb. I was on the other side of the island.

So you immediately had to go into triage and -

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, we had to come out then and one of my friends was hit. He had died of a concussion. And I had a foul weather jacket, and the boy painted his logo on the back, and when I saw this boy, I took my jacket off and covered his face, and I forgot my jacket. So when we finished that night on the flight deck, I went down below and of course they saw the jacket and

thought I was in it. So immediately, Meaux was dead. But I wasn't, thank goodness. But getting back to the first aid, during the normal raid, unless we got hit, it was minor, oh a finger mashed, toe mashed, or a plane swinging into somebody, or maybe the landing cable popped or something and cut somebody. But that was the only first aid we had.

What about just during the normal day at sea, when guys got sick, needed surgery or anything, did they do operations?

Melvin Meaux: Oh yes, we had I think there was three surgeons below deck, but I didn't participate in any of it because I was up on the flight deck and had business to do there.

What type of surgeries would those be normally? Was it pulling an appendix?

Melvin Meaux: Appendix, tonsils, and at that time when we got hit, when the bomb went off, we transferred all our badly injured to the hospital ship Mercy. Our sick bay I guess would hold maybe 100 people.

That's a lot.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, it's pretty big.

I just can't imagine doing a surgery on a ship. I know it's a big ship, but still, being at sea and having to do a surgery is challenging.

Melvin Meaux: Oh yeah, and during regular operations, you break an arm and go down and they set your arm, or maybe sew up a gash, because if you lost an arm or a leg or something like that, you automatically went to a hospital ship after the first aid.

During the time aboard the Hancock, what were some of the battles that you guys took part in?

Melvin Meaux: Iwo Jima, and that other one right behind it, one of the larger Japanese islands. Okinawa. And then the South China Sea, in the Philippines for the invasion there.

Speaking of Iwo Jima, were you close enough at that time that you could actually see the island?

Melvin Meaux: At one time I was, I watched it from the flight deck through the binoculars. As a rule, we weren't that close.

Yeah, a little farther out.

Melvin Meaux: You could see the landing craft, and my younger brother was on the Jeroah tack transport and he was putting Marines aboard the shore then.

Were you close enough that you could see the big flag when they raised that atop Suribachi?

Melvin Meaux: I could see the fire from the island hitting all the landing craft and stuff like that. I wasn't close enough to see it. I could spot it just like you would 12 miles off on the flight deck of a ship. You're almost looking downhill.

What was the morale like amongst the men on the Hancock most of the time?

Melvin Meaux: Well, I think our morale was real great. We had some good commanders and good captains, and I remember the Big Ben, the Benjamin Franklin, they brought it in, we were sitting at anchor, no we weren't we were in battle, and our captain had us up every morning at sunrise. We went to general quarters at sunrise and sunset for an hour, and I think that saved us a couple of times because when the men got hit, talking to some of the people that were on that, one man woke up and burning gas was pouring in from the hangar deck which when we went to general quarters and they slammed those hatches down, we couldn't get below deck until they opened it up. So I think we were better trained or prepared for what we would than most ships. Now we had incidents that I remember one time in Hawaii we had all bought I guess you call 'em penny loafers, and a new exec came aboard and we had to get rid of 'em because you had to wear your GI's because they were tied. If you had to jump overboard you'd lose your shoes. Well of course we griped, but he had a reason.

Did you ever see any kamikaze's during the time you were aboard?

Melvin Meaux: I think yeah, about three different days, and it was easy to knock a kamikaze out there than it was to catch a bomb coming. I think that was a minus on that part because when they hit us, you could tell, they'd come at you from the sun and you could tell when he picked his target, because he wouldn't vary, but coming down in a big aircraft all you had to do is blow him up. So we had one, he came down about like this from the fantail, and he was so low, when he dropped his bomb, it didn't hit on the nose, it hit on the side and it came up. Well it hit the back of the bottom of his plane and came back down, but it was forward of the elevator, and all it did was blow him out of the sky and it knocked a hole on us, but it didn't hurt us at all. It was scary, but it wasn't bad.

What about the Japanese submarines?

Melvin Meaux: No, we didn't have any problems. Of course like I told my son, you've got to see the size of that fleet, and what everybody did, you had the picket destroyers out there and we never saw 'em, and that was their job to clear any submarines out there.

You guys would be in the center of the formation, right?

Melvin Meaux: Well, they had us stepped. We weren't exactly in the center, but the more experienced carrier was to the attack side because when they come in, they wanted a carrier. That was the idea. So the carriers were like this, and we had aircraft cruisers to protect us other than our guns, so it was dangerous but not that bad.

What type of planes did the Hancock carry?

Melvin Meaux: We had F6F Rummen, the firer, the torpedo bomber, the SV TBM, and SV2C dive bomber was what George Bush flew. Then as the war continued, we got the F4U Corsair to be able to compete with the Japanese Zero.

Then I imagine, did they fly a lot at night as well, or were most of the flights in the daytime.

Melvin Meaux: Most of our bombing flights were during the day. A lot of times they had to fly at night because we were attacked, but that was only in the first part when Japan had a big fleet and big aircraft. In fact all of our bombing took place during the day, and we have, I've been to

the Nimitz up here at Fredericksburg, and he has the history of the Navy at that time. For some reason our planes were late coming in, and there was a storm brewing, so we had to bring the planes in, we had to use our landing lights, our spotlights, everything to bring them in, and boy, the minute we got 'em in, the lights went out and it was back to regular. But out there, there's no place for them to go.

Exactly, got to be scary.

Melvin Meaux: The Hancock had so many planes and that's all we had room to land. So if another carrier got hit, then we could take what we could, but that's it. And we got hit one time and some of them had to land on other ships until we got our deck ready.

Were there any guys you were particularly close to during the time you were aboard the ship, some good friends?

Melvin Meaux: No, see, the Navy does it that way. You're not normally in a place where you stay to be friends a lot. Now I had three good friends we were in course school together, and when we went to Pearl, then we split up and never saw each other again. But that was the Navy's routine. I mean you didn't move in a group.

I understand that, but I mean aboard the ship during the time that you were there, did you get to be pretty good friends with some of the guys you were serving with?

Melvin Meaux: Two or three of 'em, yes, but after a certain time, after the war, just – two of them from New York and some of them from Indiana.

But during that time, I imagine you had men that would rotate on and off the Hancock. Were you getting new guys occasionally aboard the ship?

Melvin Meaux: Yeah.

What was that like when some guys would leave and others would come aboard?

Melvin Meaux: Well, fortunately it never happened to me in the medical department, because none of our medical crew got hurt. Like I said, one had shrapnel in his face and another one after had broken an arm, but in those days, that was nothing. You stayed aboard ship. It was too hard to replace people.

How long do you think you were, what was the longest stretch that you were aboard ship without going ashore? Do you remember?

Melvin Meaux: Without coming ashore? Good Lord, I'd say two months, maybe longer. We had a base in the Pacific, it was I think the Marshall Islands, it was Ulithy or something like that. That's where the fleet would go in when we'd go for supplies, and then they'd give us a day off. But that's all, we just went to the island and had a couple of cans of beer and that was it. From the time I went aboard ship, until the time we went to Pearl Harbor for repairs, I had never – I'd been to Mog Mog and had those two cans of beer, but that's all. I'd never been on dry land.

You went back to Pearl at one point for ship repairs, what was Pearl Harbor like when you first saw it?

Melvin Meaux: It was amazing how fast they had built up after '41, because we had to go into dry dock. We had taken a bomb about the middle of the flight deck, and it warped our forward elevator. All the ___ stock carriers were built off of the same blueprint, so one of the other carriers, the Intrepid I think, they were hurt more interior than we were, so they gave us their forward elevator and they went back to the States. But we were there for long enough where I had I don't know, two or three weeks of R&R, not all at one time.

Yeah, I'm sure that was a welcome change or relief to have a little time off like that.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah. When the bomb hit, we had metal plates about as big as this wall, and they just covered the hole and weld 'em together and we kept flyin'. After that, the war was ____. They dropped the atomic bomb. We were beginning to get ready for the invasion, and I think we were in the process of swapping flight crews because the flight crew had it already, had their action, so they were getting the other crews ready which had trained for bombing Tokyo. But that stopped.

So you were actually in Hawaii when it was announced that the war was over.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah.

Tell us a little about that, the moment you heard Japan had surrendered and the war was over. Was it euphoric?

Melvin Meaux: Yes, at the time, yes. Actually it was hard to believe a bomb would do that much damage. At first it was hard to believe, and then it was true. Our main problem then is we weren't prepared, or the Army wasn't prepared to put a crew in there yet to take over running the island. So the Navy had to make do. And our Marines went ashore, but I went with 'em and it was no big deal. We went into Yokosuka Naval Base and that's what they were supposed to do. Then they flew some men in from the near Bahamas and soldiers for occupation duty. After the signing of the peace and clearing up the debris, well we came home.

So you were at Pearl Harbor when you heard that the war was over –

Melvin Meaux: No, we were over there. We were right there.

OK, so you were at sea then.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah.

How did you find out?

Melvin Meaux: It came over the PA system. Like everybody else, a bomb was dropped over Hiroshima, and Nagasaki, and the war was over. As they say, put your ___ in ease, and that was it. I remember Halsey, he was on the Missouri, and word came over, like I say we were out to sea, and the word came over that the Imperial Japanese had decided to have a peace treaty, and he told us, he said now if any Japanese plans come near your ship, he said shoot 'em down, but shoot 'em down in a friendly manner.

Yeah, you had to be careful.

Melvin Meaux: So that was it. Some of the boys had more trouble. But like I said, I think our ship was well managed, had good food.

Did you get mail from home fairly regularly?

Melvin Meaux: Yeah, but it would be six months late. I remember one time, my birthday is in September, and my sister had sent me, or that Christmas before that, she had sent me a cake in a metal can and had put rum or whiskey or something on it, and my brother-in-law had made me divinity, and he had a fountain pen I always liked that had a little chip of diamond on it, so he sent me that for Christmas. I got it the following September for my birthday. The cake was delicious that was in the can.

So the cake was still good?

Melvin Meaux: Oh man, but the divinity fudge was in a powder. Well it was almost a year, nine months from one place to another.

It's amazing it even got to you.

Melvin Meaux: It had been mashed, I mean the carton had been rerouted many times.

That's about as long as you can go having late mail. Was it always that late?

Melvin Meaux: No, a lot of times we'd get it within two months, whatever time it took going from Lakeshore, Louisiana to fleet post office San Francisco and then find where our fleet was. There was two or three fleets out there. No, mail was pretty regular. Food was good, we had a Catholic priest, a Methodist preacher, and a group of Jew boys one of them had picked as a rabbi, and the same thing with another sect. I don't remember what it was, but they picked their own preacher.

What about news from home? Did you guys get any sort of news reel films delivered to the carrier where you could occasionally watch a news reel or something like that?

Melvin Meaux: No, we got for entertainment one time we went Eulithy, Bob Cross and his group came over.

Bing Crosby?

Melvin Meaux: Bob.

Oh Bob? I'm not familiar with him.

Melvin Meaux: He had a band, the Bobcats. And one time in San Diego I saw Bob Hope. He was at Balboa. And then I saw Jimmy Durante and the Andrew Sisters in San Diego.

Where did you see them?

Melvin Meaux: I saw them in San Diego at one of the football fields.

That was at Balboa Stadium?

Melvin Meaux: No, there was no Balboa Stadium in '41, '43 when I was there.

I know there was a stadium there that's still kind of used for track and field -

Melvin Meaux: No, see when Bob Hope came by and his group, the building was so small we had to sit out and look through the windows to see him because we couldn't get in. It just wasn't big enough. No, there was no stadium in those days.

That's interesting. How long after the war ended and you were in Japan, how long did you spend there in Japan before you came back home?

Melvin Meaux: We came home probably in November of that year, whatever year it was.

'45.

Melvin Meaux: And then I went, came home on leave, which is my first time since I went in. Then I went back aboard ship and we made one more trip, whatever we were supposed to do.

Where did you go on that last trip?

Melvin Meaux: We went back to Japan to that area, the Asiatic Pacific. And then I don't know, we came back and I had enough points.

Yeah, got out.

Melvin Meaux: They sent me from San Pedro to New Orleans and I was mustered off in New Orleans.

You mentioned before that you had your first leave. How much leave time did you get?

Melvin Meaux: I think I had, I think it was four weeks because I got a telegram telling me the ship was going back out, and it wouldn't be back a certain date, and that was my date to return.

What was that like when you got home for the first time after having been away?

Melvin Meaux: Oh, it was nice, it was just, plus I had left school, my wife, she and I were in English together, and when I left school to join the Navy, when I came back, they were all in their junior year, and they were all strangers. I mean to me they were young, they were silly, and then I took that GED test, I passed and I graduated with 'em.

Oh wow.

Melvin Meaux: So it was all right, but I don't know, I guess I had aged too much, too much experience for what they had.

You weren't married when you were in the Navy -

Melvin Meaux: Oh no, we were sweethearts, but we were writing.

I guess you took a train back home when you got to California, took a train to Louisiana?

Melvin Meaux: Yeah. It was nice that I could graduate with the class. There was quite a few of us that took that GED test at that time, and they graduated in caps and gowns and we graduated in our uniforms.

That's pretty cool. That was a high school graduation then.

Melvin Meaux: Oh yeah.

And you wore your Navy uniform.

Melvin Meaux: We were the first group to take that test, and the first group to graduate on the strength of that test.

Wow, that's pretty awesome.

Melvin Meaux: It's a funny thing, I went to the University of Houston at night in the 50s to take up business management, and the entrance test to the University of Houston was the same as the GED test I took back in '45, so I had no trouble with it. No, when we got our paper, it was brand new to start our test however many there were, and then I talked to some boys that oh, maybe six months later took the same test, and you could see on the side where men had, some of the questions they asked were math, you had to do it, and you could see where they wrote. I know I wrote on mine.

That's funny. So after the war, you got out and the girl that you'd been writing to was who you married, and then you said you were in Houston, so I guess you moved to Houston?

Melvin Meaux: We were married in April of '49, and I came to Houston in November. I was workin' for this doctor in Lake Charles as an x-ray technician and he had heart problems, so he had to cut down. So I went to work in Houston with an x-ray company. I moved in November and my wife came over after the first.

So you kind of stayed in the medical field then after that.

Melvin Meaux: Yeah I stayed, I was in x-ray until I don't know, it started getting, I don't know the word for it, it wasn't a male thing to do, an x-ray technician, plus the machines got so hard to operate, to work on. When I was working at Gilbert, we repaired x-ray machines. I repaired them in the Navy. Of course over there all you had was the little portables and that was nothing, but we took care of that and it just didn't work out with x-rays. I guess everybody that had been in the medical department was either a male nurse or x-ray, so I quit and I went to work for Moncree for ___ building supplies and stayed in that all the rest of my working life.

And then stayed in Houston then?

Melvin Meaux: Oh yeah, we stayed in Houston from '50 until, well I came here six months ago.

So you saw Houston really change then.

Melvin Meaux: Oh Lord.

Kind of a small town in the 50s to a metropolis today. That's something. Did you ever keep in touch with any of the guys that you served with in the Navy?

Melvin Meaux: We used to. We did in the beginning and then it got, well to show you, I went to the reunion about 1977, or maybe about that, and I met a lot of the boys there that I knew, but I don't know, their memories, one boy, we had gone to Pearl City Tavern, and they shoe you out. They stay open 24 hours a day, but about noon they shoe you out so they can clean it, and sort of get rid of the drunks that are too drunk. This one boy, oh, he was a cut-up, but anyway I met him at the ship at the reunion, and his wife was with him, and he was a much different man than he was back in '44.

That's funny.

Melvin Meaux: And I found that to be mostly true with everybody because one of the boys that was in the medical corps with me, he was from New Orleans and he was at the reunion, and he called my room, and I said yeah, meet me down in the lounge. He said no, I don't drink anymore. So I mean we met and we talked, but and some of the others, they just remembered different things that maybe I'm rememberin' wrong, I don't know.

So what ended up happening to the Hancock? Did you follow the Hancock after you left?

Melvin Meaux: Oh yes, in fact about two months ago my daughter was here, and my grandson and my son, and we went to the VFW on Airport, and we were shooting shuffleboard, and I asked my daughter-in-law, I said what's the name of that ship up there, the carrier? For some reason, it rang a bell. She looked up and she said USS Hancock.

Yeah, it was a model?

Melvin Meaux: I said is that number 19? She said yeah. So it was in either the Korean or Vietnam War. Yeah, I kept up with it until they cut it up for scrap iron. They were strictly built for the war.

Oh yeah, I'm sure they were built pretty fast.

Melvin Meaux: And then after that, I had a brother-in-law that he was with Westinghouse, and he said that he had been at one of the graveyards there wherever they were, and he said the carriers were side by side, you could walk off each deck, just waiting to be cut up.

Yeah, that's amazing, wow. Well I really appreciate you, sir, taking the time -

Melvin Meaux: Well, I enjoyed it.

...to chat with us about this. I mean it's important and everybody at the Veterans Land Board and Land Office from Commissioner Patterson on down appreciates your service and sacrifice, and this is a great thing to be able to record your story and your memories and save those for posterity, and what we'll do, too, is after I get back to the office tomorrow we'll make copies of this and we'll put it on disk for you and we'll send you those so you can give those to your family

or friends or whatever, and then if you have any photographs of yourself in uniform or from that time -

Melvin Meaux: No, the only photograph I got is of the ship and it's hanging in my room.

Your family doesn't have any of you in uniform at all?

Melvin Meaux: I sent one from boot camp, and we don't know what happened to it, and I had sent some home from San Diego when I met two friends and their wives, but other than that there was no, I didn't have any.

Well if you have any of even just after you got back from the service, anything like that, we'd love to get a copy of it because we can put that in your file as well and put on our website or something along those lines.

Melvin Meaux: In fact I'm looking for one from the VFW, and they didn't have one.

I can understand photography wasn't always a priority when things are going on. Well are there any closing thoughts you would want to leave the listeners with?

Melvin Meaux: No, we pretty well covered three years of war. It's just I remember when I heard about the bomb, I was glad that the war was over, but today I can see where we might have held off a little bit longer. I mean that was quite a thing to do to a nation – but then again when they -

Trying to invade that island would have been suicide –

Melvin Meaux: We probably wouldn't have had to invade it. We could've just put a ring around it and let 'em, bring 'em to their knees, but then again, they didn't look at it when they hit Pearl Harbor.

That's right, exactly.

Melvin Meaux: But I've always said that to me, now, we didn't need the bomb. But now if they demand it's gonna have to hit that island, I can understand where he would think -

Yeah, it's easy for people to say we shouldn't have done it, they weren't in those guys' shoes.

Melvin Meaux: I've talked to men here that one of them, I forget who he was, said that he was in the Army, he was in training, they were getting ready to go aboard ship -

Yeah, to invade Japan.

Melvin Meaux: Head out that way.

And as you could see by the kamikaze's, those guys would go to the death.

Melvin Meaux: Well by the time they dropped that bomb, there was nothing left of the Japanese army or the fleet particularly. The army was still there. And I talked to a white Russian when I went into Yokohama, and he said that you couldn't buy anything, no food. He

had a corrugated iron garage. He went to work and when he came back at night it was gone. So he asked the warden, they had area wardens I guess, said yeah, the army got it, they had to have it. So we had 'em pretty well, there was nothing left, but then again, I had a warm bunk when I could get to it, good warm food.

That's right. Well sir, I really appreciate being able to interview you today, it was an honor and we thank you for your service and thank you for taking the time to talk to us today.

Melvin Meaux: I enjoyed it.

Great.

[End of recording]