

**Donald Stuart Holmes
Veteran**

**Michael Russert
Wayne Clarke
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on August 27, 2003
Beltron Center, Colonie, New York**

Interviewer: This is an interview with Don Holmes. The Beltran Living Center Colony New York. It's the 27th of August, 2003, approximately 11:15am. The interviewers are Mike Russert and Wayne Clark. Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

Donald: Donald Stuart Holmes, born in Darby Pennsylvania, October 21st, 1923.

Interviewer: Okay. What was your educational background prior to entering service?

Donald: I was enrolled in college, at Muhlenberg College at the time. Joined the V12 program.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

Donald: Yes I was in the recreation room in West Hall at Muhlenberg College. It was probably, must have been my first year. First year in college.

Interviewer: How did you hear this?

Donald: On the radio. They had gathered a bunch of us together in the recreation room to say something important was coming up. A bunch of us went down.

Interviewer: Do you remember your reaction or the reaction of the group you were with?

Donald: Just amazed, startled and probably starting to worry, but not immediately.

Interviewer: Okay. Did you enlist or were you drafted?

Donald: I enlisted.

Interviewer: Why did you select the Navy?

Donald: Oh I don't know it just sounded good to me. My father had been in the Navy and so it just ...

Interviewer: Had you ever been on a ship?

Donald: No. Not really.

Interviewer: Okay. When did you go into the Navy?

Donald: Let's see it had to be 1943 I think I joined the V12 program.

Interviewer: Okay. Could you tell us about that program, what it was?

Donald: It was a program designed by the Navy to recruit college level people for officers training.

Interviewer: Okay. Where did you go for your training?

Donald: I went first to pre-midshipman's school because they were clogged up at Columbia. That was in Asbury Park and we were there probably six or eight weeks. Then we went to Columbia, New York City.

Interviewer: Okay. How long were you there in the program?

Donald: I was a 90 day wonder so it must have been about three months.

Interviewer: Okay. Where did you go from there?

Donald: I was assigned to a mine sweeper, AM308 and being built I think in Seattle. It was coming down the river and we were going to man it.

Interviewer: You were the first crew?

Donald: I was on the first crew of that ship, yes.

Interviewer: Where was your assignment with the mine sweeper? Did it have a name?

Donald: Yeah it was the smallest of the ships. It was the Strategy, USS Strategy. The guy that placed above me in midshipman's school went to the Strength with was the AM309.

Interviewer: Okay where were you assigned by your ship? Did you go on the first cruise was a shakedown cruise then?

Donald: Oh yeah. We did a shake down in Seaside Oregon. It was close to it anyway because that's where we had a house. We went down to San Diego for the shakedown crew but we did a lot of work in and around the ship in Seaside and went down to San Diego.

Interviewer: Where did you go from there?

Donald: Went from there to Hawaii. Spent my first Christmas overseas in Hawaii, on the deck of the mine sweeper watching some inane movie.

Interviewer: Could you tell us about your duties out of Hawaii? Were you based out of Hawaii?

Donald: No we went from Hawaii we went directly to the staging area for Iwo Jima. We participated in Iwo Jima invasion. We stopped at a small island along the way. I don't remember which one it was. I kept looking forward to a good officer's clubs where they could get ice cream and there weren't any. You could get boos but you couldn't get ice cream.

Interviewer: What were your assignments during the invasion of Iwo Jima?

Donald: I'm not sure when I became gunnery officer. I was assistant navigator. I was commissary officer. I was general deck officer. Commissary. Assistant navigator.

Interviewer: I know you were a mine sweeper but what kind of duties did your ship do during the invasion?

Donald: Oh we were sweeping the mines around the shore of Iwo Jima prior to the invasion.

Interviewer: Were there mines?

Donald: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us the process of how you swept mines.

Donald: The mines we were sweeping were what were called board mines. Board mines sinks a big weight down to the bottom or the ocean and a mine comes up on a cable. Sink it down below the surface of the seas so you can't see them. Then we sweep mines were what were called, we put a paravane on a long cable. A paravane was a set of things like a venetian blind but made of steel. It would pull the cable out away from the ship and along that long cable were cutters, just a knife blade type of thing. The cable of the mine was like this, the cutter came along and cut it and the mine would pop to the surface. Then we had to destroy those mines.

Interviewer: How did you detonate them?

Donald: Rifles and machine guns and anything we could get. It was one of the sports of the war was to kill the mines ones you've gotten them up. I don't know if you know anything about mine sweeping or not but there was a lead ship who sweeps in relatively secure water, you hope, deep water where they don't readily more mines. Then you have an echelon of ships behind it that are all traveling in this guy sweeps out where there aren't any mines so everything should be clear for the second ship and the third ship is cleared for ships. It's a long line moving at a diagonal so that everybody's behind a protected line. I

know there might be six to eight minesweepers in a line sweeping the fields. If you cut a mine, the guy behind you got the chance to fire at it and shoot it and try to sink it or explode it.

Interviewer: Were there a large number of mines around Iwo Jima?

Donald: Yes a large number of mines around Iwo Jima.

Interviewer: How long did this procedure last normally?

Donald: I don't know how long we were there, probably maybe two months? I don't know all together.

Interviewer: Did you clear the entire coastline?

Donald: Just where they were going to land. Then if there were other spots that we would go sweep where they wanted to have clear water, straits or bays or stuff.

Interviewer: You were there two months prior to the landing then?

Donald: Oh probably a week, two weeks maybe before the landing.

Interviewer: Were you ever under fire? Did the Japanese fire at the ships?

Donald: A couple times but very light fire because they were holed up in the caves and the battle wagons were sitting out beyond us. Couldn't see them but we knew they were there. They were hoping that they would fire on us so that they would be able to pinpoint where they were but the Japanese were equally clever and they wouldn't fire at us because we weren't big game. They waited until the real invasion came. We had miscellaneous light fire occasionally come, but nothing serious.

Interviewer: Okay. Where did you go after Iwo Jima?

Donald: It's amazing what I don't remember. The next scene of action was Okinawa. I don't remember how much later that was. I think Iwo Jima was in February and Okinawa was probably in April, May.

Interviewer: May, yes.

Donald: I would think.

Interviewer: You worked. You did Okinawa then. Was that the same procedure?

Donald: Same procedure.

Interviewer: Did you find more mines there?

Donald: Plenty of mines there.

Interviewer: Oh yes.

Donald: Plenty of mines there. One of the things about that was the Kamikaze started to come into play at that point. They hadn't been there previously.

Interviewer: Were you ever under attack by the Kamikazes?

Donald: Yeah. Yeah. He fortunately saw a bigger ship just before he got to us. We were firing at him. Coming 90 degrees to us and turned because there was a big merchant ship over there so he went over there.

Interviewer: What kind of armor did your ship carry?

Donald: A three inch. One three inch gun. Two forty millimeters. I don't know how many twenties. Probably six.

Interviewer: What kind of hull did you have on these?

Donald: Metal hull, yeah. It was a metal hull. They used that one below us was YMS, yard [inaudible 00:11:50]. They were quite often wood.

Interviewer: How long were you on station at Okinawa? Do you recall?

Donald: I was there until, in that general area until the first part of December. I had an arthritic problem in my left ankle and it was giving me fits walking on the metal deck and I finally said I need some help and they put me on hospital ship and they sent me home.

Interviewer: Were you there at all for the typhoon?

Donald: Oh yeah we rode out a couple typhoons. They're amazing things. Lose half of a destroyer. You could get into a trough and couldn't see the top of the next valley anyway.

Interviewer: How did your ship handle in the typhoons?

Donald: It rode it out. Up and down, up and down. Kind of rough.

Interviewer: So you went on a hospital ship then when did you arrive home or back to the states?

Donald: I must have been somewhere around 21st or 22nd of December because I got home, went by train to Philadelphia and from Philadelphia to Harrisburg Pennsylvania and got home Christmas Eve.

Interviewer: This was 1945?

Donald: 1945.

Interviewer: Do you recall your reaction at all when you heard about the death of President Roosevelt?

Donald: Yes I came from a very staunch Republican family. Need I say more? They were all saying that he had caused the war at the time and aggravated the situation enough to cause it. I wasn't as sympathetic as I might have been.

Interviewer: Do you recall the reaction when you heard about the victory in Europe?

Donald: Yeah I thought that was great and that we probably would be looking forward to seeing some more help them over in the Pacific.

Interviewer: How about your reaction when you heard about the dropping of the atomic bombs?

Donald: We were in the Philippines getting outfitted because of the Kamikazes we had, we were mounting machine guns, fifty calibers all along the railings of the ship so that we could have more people firing at the ones that came in. We were all surprised, didn't know that it was in the works but could see that it would likely cause the end of the war. We were kind of happy about that.

Interviewer: Okay.

Donald: Not happy about the deaths but happy about the fact that it wouldn't be us.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you ever make use of the GI bill?

Donald: You bet. Yes sir I finished my undergraduate degree and started working on my graduate degree and undergraduate I finished. I started Muhlenberg. Came back from the war. Had a family and one son and they didn't have housing for us at Muhlenberg so we went where my wife had gone to school. They had housing so we finished off at Juniata in Pennsylvania. Went from there, so I did Juniata and a couple years at Purdue on the GI bill.

Interviewer: Did you ever purchase a home using it?

Donald: Yes I did. First home was Atlanta Georgia. I went to teaching.

Interviewer: How about the 52-20 clause. Ever make use of that?

Donald: I vaguely remember that. What was it?

Interviewer: It was 52 weeks, \$20 a week. It was like an unemployment insurance after.

Donald: No I don't think I ever needed that. I'm not sure. I think with the GI bill and stuff I think we had. It wasn't that we were rich or anything and my mother in law was very sad when she heard we had macaroni for Christmas but we got by alright.

Interviewer: Did you ever stay in contact with anyone that you were in service with?

Donald: For a while I stayed in contact with the guy that I guess I was forty-ninth in my class and he was forty-eighth or I was fiftieth and he was forty-ninth. I had contact with him for a little while. Then that just sort of dried up. Never, I don't know that there was ever a ship's reunion or anything. I haven't heard of it if there was.

Interviewer: Did you join any veteran's organizations?

Donald: No I didn't. I joined the Naval Reserve while I was in Atlanta and served in that for a couple years and was working on and I came out as a Lieutenant JG working on being promoted to a full lieutenant and decided that I'd had enough of the military.

Interviewer: You weren't called up for Korea or anything?

Donald: No.

Interviewer: How do you think your time in the Navy affected or changed your life?

Donald: Well the war in general made young people mature more quickly. My wife and I were married, we were both nineteen at the time. We had our first son when we were twenty. Between the war, and the family, the military service certainly helped you mature in a hurry. You had to to survive.

Interviewer: Okay. Alright well thank you very much for your interview.

Donald: You're welcome.