

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
MELVIN C. JACOB
Guard, Marine Corps, World War II.

1999

OH
263

OH
263

Jacob, Melvin C., (1926-). Oral History Interview, 1999.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 44 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 44 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 44 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Melvin C. Jacob, a Manitowoc, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the Marine Corps aboard the *USS Indianapolis*. Jacob talks about boot camp at San Diego, brief duty as a guard at a naval prison, and assignment to the *USS Indianapolis*. Jacob discusses the use of an airplane hanger to hold a heavily guarded box, and comments on later learning that the box held one of the atomic bombs that was dropped on Japan. He describes guard duty and other tasks such as brig watch and gunnery training. After leaving the atomic bomb at Tinian and loading supplies at Guam, he states his ship was heading to the Philippines when it was torpedoed and sunk by a submarine. Jacob describes his actions when the torpedo hit, being told to jump off the boat even though there was no abandon ship order, and finding a life preserver among the debris floating in the water. He reflects on how, though they were supposed to arrive in the Philippines the next day, nobody noticed that they did not get there. At sea for five days, Jacob comments on the morale while in the water, shark attacks, taking turns supporting the wounded sailors, and being sighted by a Naval patrol plane on the fourth day after the sinking. He tells of being pulled out of the ocean on the fifth day. Jacob states that thirty out of his thirty-nine-person detachment were killed, and out of the entire 1200-person crew only 316 survived. He talks about being startled by a whale shark and suffering from saltwater ulcers and sun blindness. After spending time at Base Hospital 114 (Philippines) and a submarine rest camp in Guam, Jacob mentions his return to the United States and having a thirty-day survivor furlough. Stationed at Marine Corps Headquarters (Washington, D.C.), he addresses the court martial of Captain Charles McVey of the *Indianapolis*, states people were just looking for someone to blame, and mentions interest in having Congress exonerate the captain. Jacob recalls that news of the sinking was held off until announcement of the war's end. He speaks of his discharge from service, attending survivors' reunions, and having unanswered questions about the lack of rescue after the ship sank. He comments on books and movies that cover the sinking of the *Indianapolis* and efforts to get a memorial built.

Biographical Sketch:

Jacob (b.1926) was born in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, grew up in Detroit, and served with the Marine Corps during World War II. Aboard the *USS Indianapolis* when it was sunk by a torpedo, he waited for rescue for five days. After the war he settled in Madison (Wisconsin), worked at Oscar Mayer for thirty-two years, and became chief flight instructor at Four Lakes Aviation (later bought by Wisconsin Aviation).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 1999
Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2009
Corrected by Channing Welch, 2010
Corrections typed by Erin Dix, 2010
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2010

Transcribed Interview:

- James: Melvin Jacob, the 24th of June, 1999. He was in the Marine Corps in World War II. [Approx. 6 sec. pause] All right. Describe your training. Now when you went from Manitowoc you went into the service where?
- Melvin: The Marine Corps Depot in San Diego.
- James: That was in 1944.
- Melvin: Right.
- James: You did your basics—
- Melvin: Basic training—
- James: In San Diego.
- Melvin: And that was—I'll say one thing about the Marine Corps training, I mean I came out of boot camp with muscles I never heard of before [laughs].
- James: I'll bet.
- Melvin: It was rough, but they sure put you in good shape. I have to admit that for the Marine Corps. Done an excellent(??) job.
- James: Did they train you for any specific duty or just as—
- Melvin: Well, going through boot camp, no. But unfortunately I got 'em—I wish I would have went to radio school or cook and baker school like some of 'em did, but unfortunately I didn't. A friend of mine, he was—went into a cook and baker school. He's one of the head chefs in a big hotel in downtown Detroit. He's done excellent, excellent training. But, no, I had no special training.
- James: Where did you go from San Diego?
- Melvin: Camp Pendleton for advanced training. And then from there I was stationed at a Navy prison as a guard. Then they, then I got assigned to the *USS Indianapolis*.
- James: Do you recall when that was? Month and the year?
- Melvin: I'm not quite sure.
- James: Roughly. Six months after you—

Melvin: '45 I think. Someplace in there.

James: And where did the *Indianapolis* go with you aboard?

Melvin: Oh, it was the *US Indianapolis* that took the two atomic bombs off that were dropped on Japan.

James: Was that the first trip you took on the *Indianapolis*—

Melvin: Mm-hmm.

James: When you went to Saipan to deliver those?

Melvin: Yeah, well actually it wasn't Saipan. It was Tinian.

James: Tinian. Excuse me.

Melvin: Right, yeah.

James: So that was your first trip on the *Indianapolis*.

Melvin: Yeah, we had a—I was one of the Marine guards assigned to the atomic bombs. Actually what they did, they put it in— we had two hangars aboard, I mean aboard ship, and then what we would do is keep the airplanes in there. And then we would shoot them off for reconnaissance, what they did you know. And then they had a crane to pick them back up again.

James: They were seaplanes.

Melvin: Seaplanes, right. Put them back up before they [unintelligible]. Except this one hangar is where they kept the two atomic bombs.

James: You were one of the guards of those bombs?

Melvin: Yeah.

James: I'm sure the security was very, very tight.

Melvin: Oh, it was very tight. Yeah. Four watches, nobody could come anywhere near that hangar.

James: I was gonna say you wouldn't allow anybody in that area. Is that right?

Melvin: Yup(??).

James: No matter who.

Melvin: No matter who. Yeah.

James: How many of you were guarding?

Melvin: Well, we had a Marine detachment of thirty-nine which we revolved between guarding atomic bombs and captain's orderly. Brig watch, we had several prisoners aboard, and—

James: What kind of prisoners?

Melvin: Navy prisoners. Guys that go out and hang one on.

James: [unintelligible] beach(??), right.

Melvin: Yes, and unfortunately had maybe ninety days. I wouldn't say ninety days, but about thirty days in the brig or something like that which was aboard the ship.

James: Right. I understand. We used to have one aboard our hospital ship.

Melvin: Oh, you were in a hospital ship. Oh, that's right, you were a doctor weren't ya? Yeah.

James: Tell me about your standard day. You would be on for how long and then what?

Melvin: Well, we'd be four hours on, four hour off. That was the standard procedure.

James: I see. Around the clock.

Melvin: Around the clock, yeah.

James: So you would stand four watches a day then.

Melvin: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Not exactly on that job but other jobs too. Four hours cleaning the deck and stuff. [laughs] Normal.

James: Less pleasant things.

Melvin: Yeah, and gunnery training and all of that sort of stuff.

James: Oh, you did some of that.

Melvin: Oh, we had a lot of that.

James: What type of gun were your Marine boys—

Melvin: Yup, 40 mm.

James: 40 mm antiaircraft.

Melvin: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

James: Where did you learn how to shoot that? On board or did you—

Melvin: On board.

James: You didn't do any of that on shore.

Melvin: No. No, it's a funny thing. I mean I didn't go to Sea School, but I guess Captain Clark of the Marine detachment didn't want anybody to go to Sea School. He wanted men he could train himself so that's what we did. We trained and trained and trained.

James: But you never had a chance to shoot anything.

Melvin: No, no.

James: As a matter of fact you didn't encounter any obstacle going from the United States(??).

Melvin: No, we got through to San Francisco to Tinian in nine days.

James: Nine days.

Melvin: Yeah, we hold that record still stands today.

James: I have another record. We came back on the hospital ship from Korea in eighteen days.

Melvin: Eighteen days, [laughs] oh my goodness.

James: Well, so and then how long were you in Tinian? Just briefly to drop the bombs off?

Melvin: Mm-hmm.

James: Then turn right around?

Melvin: No, then we went to the island of Guam which is headquarters of the *Nimitz* and—or headquarters—what did they call that? Sea Pac or something? Well, anyway where the headquarters—

James: Far East headquarters.

Melvin: Far East headquarters.

James: Did you get to go ashore?

Melvin: No.

James: Was anybody aboard ship allowed ashore or not?

Melvin: No, no, well, actually even when we left San Francisco we knew we had something important. I mean because there was more admirals and brass around than you can shake a stick at. Even when we got to Tinian, and like you mention at Pearl Harbor they tended to stop two, three days. We refueled, got supplies, and then away we went.

James: Those crew weren't allowed on the ship then either.

Melvin: Mm-hmm.

James: What did they tell ya you were guarding?

Melvin: Nothing. They wouldn't tell us anything. Everything was top secret.

James: Oh, I understand that, but they had to describe *it* in some terms.

Melvin: No, nothing.

James: They said you were guarding something? And that was about it.

Melvin: We were guarding that *box*. *That box*. That's all we're guarding, yeah.

James: But you must(??)—

Melvin: Even the captain, Captain McVay didn't even know what was aboard ship.

James: All you knew it was a box.

Melvin: Right.

James: And you knew it was important that was [unintelligible]—

- Melvin: Important box, yeah, 'cause we were running at wide open. In fact, our ship could do a little over 30 knots. Yeah, wide open all they way to Pearl Harbor. Stopped at Pearl Harbor, refueled, fresh supplies. And away we went to the island of Tinian, and there, too, was a lot of brass and stuff. But we didn't know what we were carrying until the war was over. We were on the island of Guam when that happened. Nobody knew about the atomic bomb that we were carrying until the war was over. Even the captain of the ship. In fact in one movie—what was it? *Mission Impossible*? See, there's been several movies made of the *Indianapolis*.
- Mrs. Jacob: Yes, six(??) documentaries.
- Melvin: Documentaries.
- James: Yes, I've seen a couple of them.
- Melvin: Oh. Well, anyway, at least we didn't know, maybe the captain did, I don't know, I rather doubt it. But we got to Guam. Then we left for the Philippines. Then it's after we left the Philippines is when at twelve minutes after midnight was when we got sunk by the Jap sub the I-58.
- James: What was the nearest island from you were struck by the torpedo?
- Melvin: I wouldn't know. I heard that we drifted fifty miles from the island of Yap, but I don't know. I really don't; I'm not familiar with that part of the country [laughs].
- James: So, I mean, well let's go at it a different way. How long were you in the Philippines after you left the package? You say you went to Guam for a day or two and then where did you go?
- Melvin: Well, then we were on our way to the Philippines is when we got sunk.
- James: Oh, I see. I misinterpreted.
- Melvin: Okay. No, we were on our way to the Philippines—
- James: I see.
- Melvin: And we were going to rejoin the 5th fleet. Admiral Spruance, because that was Admiral Spruance's flagship. He had admiral quarters right aboard [unintelligible]. That's when we got hit, 12 minutes after midnight.
- James; On what day?

Melvin: July 30.

James: July 30th.

Melvin: 12 minutes after midnight.

James: Okay. What were you when that thing smacked you?

Melvin: Oh, I just got off of watch. I had the 8:00 to 12:00 watch on brig watch, and I was relieved by McCoy, Giles McCoy. I had just gone up in the fo'c'sle to sleep up there. He saw the [unintelligible]. It was hot. He knew somebody [unintelligible] workin' on. It was hot and so we always went up on deck. Well, right across from me when the first torpedo hit—luckily it didn't do any serious damage to me anyway. It just picked me off the deck and threw me against the railing. Then, well, that's when all—I shouldn't say chaos went on, but then another one hit. I don't remember too much about the little details, but I know I went down to the Marine Corps Compartment. That was all burnt out. And then we were putting life preservers and stuff on some of the ones that were wounded, and then we went to our gun station. Then the ship started to roll, and I was with Lieutenant Stauffer and we were up on top and he says, "Well, we better jump." So we slid down. He jumped, and then I jumped in after him.

James: That was how long after the first torpedo?

Melvin: Well, she went down in 12 minutes. The ship went down in 12 minutes.

James: Surprised you got so much done in 12 minutes.

Melvin: Yes, yes.

James: Aren't you—

Melvin: It went down pretty fast. Down into Marine Corps Compartment. We helped put some preservers on, then to the station, but I didn't even reach the gun station. Lieutenant Stauffer said, "This is gonna go over." See, there was no "Abandon Ship." There was no "Abandon Ship," no.

James: You didn't have much time for anything.

Melvin: No, [laughs] no.

James: So the next thing you know, but you had a life preserver, of course, or hadn't you?

Melvin: No, I got one later in the water. I didn't think it was going to sink to be honest with you.

Jim: I'm sorry.

Melvin: I didn't think anything that big would sink. I mean that was a big heavy cruiser. And a lot of times people get lax on different things, but unfortunately there was a lot of debris and stuff from the ship itself.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Melvin: Oh, yeah. Then I did get a life preserver. It's an odd thing but we had a double supply of life preservers. All—there were—

James: Turned out to be fortunate.

Melvin: Yes, it did, very fortunate. But I didn't put it on. I just laid across it.

James: Yes.

Melvin: I wasn't quite sure how to put it on when [laughs] I couldn't stand.

James: You'd never practiced that maneuver.

Melvin: I didn't practice that maneuver, yeah.

James: Well, then your assumption was that you hit the water that we have to be here until somebody picks us up.

Melvin: Well, we were due in port the next day.

James: So you knew that they were—

Melvin: Yeah, be no problem. We could [unintelligible].

James: How far away then was the port? More than 50 miles(??)?

Melvin: Oh, no, no. From the Philippines I'm not quite sure. There's a map.

James: Can't tell from [unintelligible].

Melvin: I don't know. But, no, we were quite a ways from the Philippines when it sank, yeah.

James: What do you think about—how did they lose ya?

- Melvin: Well, it's just a Navy blunder, and this is coming up. It's between(??) Congress now.
- James: Yes, I've seen this argued back and forth.
- Melvin: Yeah, well, we're due in port the next day, and as far as I could see, a guy goes up, "Oh, *Indianapolis* due today." Erases it.
- James: 'Cause it's gonna be here.
- Melvin: Yeah, erases it. Nobody checked to see if we arrived.
- James: That's the port to which you were supposed to go to.
- Melvin: Yes, in the Philippines, yeah.
- James: When you didn't show up I would think somebody would be asking some questions.
- Melvin: No, nobody bothered.
- James: I suppose that's the key, isn't it, to how you got lost because nobody asked that question.
- Melvin: That is correct. I believe it 100%. In fact that came up at, you know, Captain McVay got court martialed. But this is what I claim we(??) knew. You know, in fact spirits were high the next day outside of the people that were badly hurt which we had in the few rafts that we did have. And of course you know the rafts had netting all around it so people could hold on to the netting and stuff, and then we had the problem with the sharks. And not so much the people.
- James: When did that start?
- Melvin: Must have been on the second day. I don't know. It's kind of blurry in my mind yet.
- James: Sure.
- Melvin: It's been, what? Fifty, sixty—fifty-four years or something. Yeah, but then later on as the days go by even when we'd see ships, not ships, but airplanes flying way high over head it didn't do any good to wave or anything, but—
- James: Too far.

Melvin: Yeah, but on one of the rafts they did have some flares which they would fire off. We weren't large. On the fourth day a Lieutenant Gwinn who was flying a PBY overhead, and actually he saw an oil slick so he actually thought that they had a Jap sub or something. So he opened the bombay doors, and he was gonna blow us out of the water too yet [laughs]. No, but then when they got down low enough that he—

James: Saw some Americans, not Japanese.

Melvin: Yeah, anyway, a lot of people waving at him.

James: That was the fourth day?

Melvin: I believe it was the fourth day because we got picked up on the fifth day.

James: Fifth day.

Melvin: Yeah, yeah.

James: Did any of the sharks come close to you?

Melvin: [laughs] Oh, yes, but they told me—well, they were yelling at me that there was a shark coming, but it was a—

Mrs. Jacob: Whale shark.

Melvin: Whale shark.

James: Did you kill the [unintelligible]?

Melvin: No. But they'll scare you to death when you look at 'em [laughs].

James: Oh, yeah, they're huge.

Melvin: [laughs] They are huge. I mean he ran right smack underneath me, you know, and I just—geez, they just scared the hell out of me just looking at him. Yeah, he didn't have to bite you or anything.

James: Was everyone hollering?

Melvin: Oh, yeah. When we would have shark we'd all—yeah, and then when somebody did get bit we tried to move as a group away from the blood.

James: Yes, that just attracted more.

Melvin: Just attracted more sharks, yeah.

James: So they would come in schools—in other words there'd be several sharks at a time.

Melvin: Yes, mm-hmm.

James: And then they would disappear awhile.

Melvin: Yeah, I don't know, it just seemed every once in a while somebody would let out a scream, you know. Then we would take turns to help holding up the wounded, you know and stuff.

James: That must have been very difficult to keep those guys alive.

Melvin: Oh, it was. In fact one of the corpsman—I was holding up one guy, and the corpsman came along and said, "Well, you don't have to hold him. Let him go under(??)."

James: He's gone?

Melvin: He was gone, yeah.

James: Of your Marine detachment how survived after?

Melvin: Nine.

James: Nine out of how many?

Melvin: Thirty-nine.

James: Thirty-nine.

Melvin: We lost thirty Marines.

James: On the ship there were eleven hundred men and—

Melvin: Yeah, 1,100 and—well, close to 1,200.

James: Of them, how many survivors?

Melvin: 316.

James: 365?

Mrs. Jacob: Sixteen.

Melvin: 316 survived.

James: All total.

Melvin: All total. Of course, some went down with the ship too.

James: Yes, I understand that [unintelligible].

Melvin: Yeah, they went down with the ship or got hurt or killed by the torpedoes.

James: Were you injured at all?

Melvin: No, not to speak of outside of saltwater ulcers and stuff like that.

James: Your skin was I'm sure was burned. The exposed parts just from being in the sun.

Melvin: Oh, gol, yeah, and then being sun blind. You know, sun blindness, you know, you can't see.

James: When did that start?

Melvin: Well, it started, you know, the sun during the day and reflection off the water.

James: I'm sure it burned your eyeballs.

Melvin: Of course one thing that did help us, we did get into the fuel oil and—

James: It'd cover your skin.

Melvin: Cover your skin and stuff like that, yeah—

James: Your face.

Melvin: Yeah. I don't remember too much about the face, but you know my arms when they wash that stuff off then there were cuts and nicks and stuff [unintelligible] [laughs].

James: So finding—after the PBY some destroyers came by?

Melvin: Well, no, then—what's his name? Adrian Burrows, he came. He had, no wait a minute. Let's back that up a little bit. Adrian Marks is the one that had the PBY. He's the one who dropped boats—no, he's the one that landed in the water.

James: I see.

Melvin: Yeah, I have to kind of recall.

James: I understand.

Melvin: He's the one who landed in the water against regulations that they're not supposed to do. And he's the one that started picking up survivors and puttin' 'em on the wings. You know they're tryin' to get people out of the water, and that's when the first thing about the *Indianapolis* got out. When he picked up the first survivors.

James: He radioed in.

Melvin: He radioed in.

James: Yeah. Then they realized what—

Melvin: What's going on, yeah. Then that's when the *USS Bassett*, *USS Doyle*, and all the ships started coming in.

James: Transport ships.

Melvin: Transport ships—well, no, the destroyers.

James: Destroyers, okay. Now, what interval are we talking about now from the PBY to when you saw the first destroyers? Hours?

Melvin: Yeah. Quite a while 'cause see then this was at night, and if I remember correctly we got picked up the next day by the *USS Bassett*. See, the trouble is the groups were scattered all over. In fact, after they got done they took a sweep of all the ships and covered, I don't know, 200 square miles or something like that to make sure they got all the debris and all of the bodies. Lots of bodies still in the water, some that still in life jackets.

James: [unintelligible]

Melvin: And be sure they got everything out.

James: They took you where?

Melvin: Okay, they took us to the island of Samar. New hospital there, just went up(??). 114 it was. I can't think of it, it'd be like Base Hospital 114 in the Philippines.

James: For how long?

Melvin: I—

James: Approximately.

Melvin: Roughly two weeks, maybe three weeks. This was really out there in the boonies.

James: Then you were back from there to [unintelligible].

Melvin: Then we were on stretchers. Then they took us to, flew us to the island of Guam. Then they sent us to a submarine rest camp. All we did was lay around [laughs].

James: Where was this?

Melvin: In the island of Guam.

James: Oh. From there?

Melvin: From there, well, then the war was ending, and they had to use all the planes for the invasion of Japan or—

James: Preparation for—

Melvin: Preparations and stuff like that. So they put us all on an aircraft carrier, *USS Hollandia*. And that too was a *long* trip to San Diego from the island of Guam. I think you mentioned eighteen days.

James: Right.

Melvin: Yeah, this was a long one, too. We used to kid ‘em about, you know, “Great, here comes a sailboat to pull us in” or something [laughs].

James: A big sailboat.

Melvin: Yes [laughs].

James: That when you went from there to San Diego? Either there or San Francisco, one or the other.

Melvin: Yeah. We went to San Diego. When did we get back into—maybe that was at San Diego. We got a reunion coming up next month so maybe I can figure it out there. Maybe if we all put our brains together we can find what really went wrong.

James: Where were you discharged from, San Diego?

Melvin: No, no, no. We all—one thing that really kept me going is in the water was we got word or somebody passed around we're getting' thirty days survivor furlough. Anytime a ship goes down it's an automatic thirty days.

James: [unintelligible] six months. Cruise(??) ship.

Melvin: Well, we were savin' money.

James: [unintelligible]. In Korea, six months off [unintelligible]. It didn't always happen though.

Melvin: Well, in our days it was only thirty days. That's all I got, and I took advantage of every day.

James: Right.

Melvin: Yeah. Then after that I got sent to Camp Lejeune in the North Carolina. Then they stationed me at Marine Corps Headquarters in Washington.

James: They discharged you there.

Melvin: Yeah, well, Bainbridge, Maryland which was the latest, the closest.

James: Right. Were you satisfied that the training that you had for your mission was adequate?

Melvin: Oh, yeah, it was.

James: More than adequate, right?

Melvin: More than adequate.

James: You were over-trained.

Melvin: I was over-trained [laughs]. Let me tell you, I felt good when I came out of the Marine Corps.

James: I'm sure you did.

Melvin: Yeah. Well, you know how it is with your health.

James: Full of muscles.

Melvin: Full of muscles and stuff. Yeah.

- James: That's tremendous(??).
- Melvin: In fact I was stationed at the Marine Corps Headquarters when you had the trial of Captain McVay.
- James: Yes.
- Melvin: But I wasn't ask to testify or anything.
- James: Your captain was tried and court martialed. How did you feel about that?
- Melvin: And, well, they used him for a fall guy. That is a fact. And another thing, when they, you know, they held up the sinking of the *Indianapolis* for the news about the *Indianapolis* until the war ended. The day the war ended was the day they released.
- James: Announced it.
- Melvin: Announced it, and there was big headlines up here, you know, "War Ends," and then down here the small article about the *USS Indianapolis*. They didn't want for anybody to know that the *Indianapolis* went down until they could release it without raising too much [unintelligible]. It's like Pearl Harbor. They had to put the blame someplace. I mean we lost 880 men for what? You know. We were due in port the next day. I mean if the Navy didn't blunder and, you know, that—
- Mrs. Jacob: The lying [unintelligible].
- Melvin: Yeah, oh, then there's a lot more to it. We were denied a destroyer escort.
- James: The captain(??) didn't want to attract attention apparently.
- Melvin: I don't know. It just ah, they didn't let anybody know that there were subs. They didn't even let the captain know that there was Jap subs.
- James: That was very bad.
- Melvin: I don't know if you read about that in the paper or not.
- James: [unintelligible] for an SOS. I assume they took a straight course rather than zigzag.
- Melvin: Well—

- James: Even though I've noticed the Japanese commander of that submarine said it wouldn't make any difference whether you zigzagged or not.
- Melvin: Well, even our own commander, the submarine commander on our own side said it wouldn't have made much difference anyhow. It's just tradition, you know.
- James: Right.
- Melvin: But they had to have a fall guy.
- James: And this is not—this matter isn't resolved yet.
- Melvin: Well, it will be.
- James: Oh. In the next few months(??)?
- Melvin: Yep. We were just in Washington, D.C. last April.
- James: What did you do?
- Melvin: Well, we were invited to Washington, D.C. by Universal Studios.
- James: Yes.
- Melvin: And they want to make a motion picture of the *US Indianapolis* with the story by Hunter Scott. I don't know if you seen him on 20/20.
- James: No.
- Melvin: No. Well, this Hunter Scott, he's a young boy from [unintelligible], Florida who got sort of interested in the movie *Jaws*. I don't know if you saw the movie *Jaws*.
- James: Yes.
- Melvin: Do you remember down in ship when they were talking to each other about their wounds and cuts?
- James: Yes.
- Melvin: He mentioned how he got his on the *USS Indianapolis* and how he was in the water, and then he asks his father(??), "Do you think that really happened?"
- Mrs. Jacob: He was 11 at the time.

Melvin: 11 at the time. So he did research and research and interviews. He interviewed all the survivors. And he put all his stuff into not a book but a project in a school project, and then Universal Studios wants to make a movie of it.

James: In Washington, what were you doing there?

Melvin: Just an invite from—

James: Oh, well, that's about the movie.

Melvin: Yeah.

James: Has nothing to do with Congress.

Melvin: No. No. Well, yes—**[End of Tape 1, Side A]**

James: The same time.

Melvin: Yeah, we were supposed to meet with our senators, you know, and stuff like that. Of course we wrote them all letters. In fact just—

James: Complaining about the court martial?

Melvin: Yeah, and there was a bill, not a bill. What do they call it? Resolution?

James: Resolution, yeah.

Melvin: Yeah, up before Congress now, and right now it's in—

James: To say—it says what?

Melvin: Well, I don't have a copy with me.

Mrs. Jacob: They want to exonerate the captain.

James: Well, roughly—you just want to exonerate McKay.

Mrs. Jacob: Exonerate the captain and get a review—

James: McVay, is that?

Melvin: Yes, Jim—

Mrs. Jacob: [unintelligible] unit citation to the—

James: That's right, and then get your unit citation finally.

Melvin: Right. Well, I'm not interested in that, but it would be nice for the 880 men who were lost and to their family.

James: Sure. Well, they deserve it.

Melvin: They deserve it, right. Yeah. To me, especially my close friends in the Marine Corps that didn't survive. They are the ones that deserve it.

James: How many of these guys do you keep in contact with?

Melvin: Of this, just—see, in the Marine Corps we didn't associate too much with the Navy. We all had our own—

James: Sure.

Melvin: You know, things to do aboard ship and stuff like that. I knew a lot of the Navy personnel but not like I knew the guys in the Marine Corps. Yeah, we still do. Like we've got a reunion this coming July 30th in the city of Indianapolis which we had 'til nearly five years. With three years it's getting closer and closer you know.

James: How many survivors are in Wisconsin?

Melvin: Four.

James: Are they Wisconsin boys or they came from elsewhere and moved to Wisconsin afterwards?

Melvin: I don't know, they—they're all listed there in that magazine.

James: I'll look at that. Maybe I can get hold of them.

Mrs. Jacob: One is in Mont Horeb.

James: He is there. Does it say which one is in Mont Horeb?

Mrs. Jacob: Florian Stamm.

Melvin: Yeah, Florian Stamm.

James: Yeah, I'll call him. What does he do, do you know?

Melvin: I'm not quite sure.

Mrs. Jacob: I think everybody's retired.

Melvin: They're all retired.

James: We all retired [laughs].

Melvin: Yeah.

Mrs. Jacob: What do we do besides that?

James: [unintelligible] always retire.

Melvin: Yeah, right [laughs].

James: That was a terrible experience. He's pretty lucky to have survived.

Melvin: Well, they—I'm really interested in this court case exonerating Captain McVay.

James: Have you talked to him, McVay?

Melvin: Well, McVay committed suicide.

James: Oh, he did?

Melvin: Yeah.

James: Oh, and I'd forgotten that.

Melvin: Yeah. No, he—

James: When was that?

Melvin: Well, after his wife passed away—see, and one of the first reunions we had Captain McVay wasn't even sure if he should come because he didn't know how the men would feel about him.

James: Mm-hmm.

Melvin: And, but he did come and he got a royal welcome from all of us, him and his wife. But then after his wife passed away, but the only thing he really wanted to know even at the court martial was, "Why did it take you so long to pick us up?"

James: Right. No answer.

Melvin: Well, nope, to be honest with you, another day I don't think there would have been any survivors.

James: If what?

Melvin: If there was another day or two days I don't think there would have been any survivors.

James: Oh, you think you were that close.

Melvin: Oh, God, yes.

James: Because of your lack of food.

Melvin: Lack of food and [unintelligible] and water and stuff, and then a lot of them, you know, would drink that salt water. Well, you know what that does.

James: You'd have some dead [unintelligible], yeah.

Melvin: We were trained never, never, never to do that. Yeah. I remember somebody one time put it in my mouth. Pthu! And spit it out there. [unintelligible] wouldn't try to drink it—just—

James: The amount of thirst you must have felt. It must have been enormous.

Melvin: Well, especially during the day, you know, when the sun is out. Then the nights were cold, I remember that. And it's an odd thing to—of all the time in being in the water, I don't ever remember going to sleep. I must've.

James: You must've dozed.

Melvin: Yeah, but you'd think my head would have fell in the water, or somebody must have held it up for me. I don't know. I just don't ever remember—

James: More or less or stay in the same position all this time?

Melvin: Except when we move as a group.

James: Right. Otherwise you were sort of laying on this—

Melvin: That was a bad time, too, on the—the most terrifying noise you want to hear is somebody getting' bit by a shark.

James: Yeah, that must have been terrifying.

Melvin: Yeah, that was.

James: There wasn't much they could do about that.

Melvin: No, I'm afraid not.

James: When you were bit they usually were taken down and—

Melvin: Pulled down.

James: Not many guys that were bit and survived, is that right?

Melvin: Not that I recall. I don't recall any. There are still a lot of unanswered questions.

James: Like what?

Melvin: Well, like I don't know how we had burial at sea. And to this day I don't remember who got buried at sea. I don't remember how we, you know, how the chaplain sayin' a prayer to the water. And another thing, too, about—I didn't know until we were in Washington, D.C. that we did get three SOS's out. Nobody knew anything about that we really did get some SOS's out.

James: Oh, my!

Melvin: Yeah. I didn't know that until a month ago when I talked to this Scott Hunter.

James: Yes.

Melvin: Yeah, and he was telling us that. Hunter Scott—

James: Hunter Scott.

Melvin: Hunter Scott, right.

James: Who did that? A radioman or—

Melvin: Well, he finally got in contact with different radiomen, and one, let's see, how did Hunter Scott—talked to him on the phone, and he told him all about how they got the SOS, and one of them didn't believe it that there was a ship that went down. And one, oh, one actually said that they sent

ships out, and one of the higher command turned the ships back. Because he didn't believe it that it was, you know, and so—yeah.

James: Did you have any permanent disability? You said no.

Melvin: No. [Approx. 25 sec. pause]

James: All right.

Melvin: One thing, I had a nice talk to with, ah, Marc Norman. I don't know if you know who he is.

James: No.

Melvin: He's the one who wrote the movie *Shakespeare in Love*. He's the one that won the academy award.

James: Yes.

Melvin: He's the one that's going to write the book, write the story.

James: Oh, that should be fine(??).

Melvin: Yeah, but now we have another problem. It's with Main Line Pictures. They want to make a movie, too. See, what we're trying to do, if they do want to make a movie, fine, but we want somethin' for our rights for our future media(??)—

James: Well, they gotta pay ya, of course.

Melvin: Yeah, right.

James: That's right. Now that you're a movie star you're not gonna give that away.

Melvin: No [both laugh]. I told them, you know, I says, I offered my services, but if they want Robert Redford or somebody like that, well, that's their problem.

James: Only if they pay you.

Melvin: Yes. Well, there's been—a lot of it, you know, like there's been at least five book written about the *USS Indianapolis*. I mean there was—

Mrs. Jacob: Sidney Boyd. Dan Kurzman.

Melvin: Sidney Boyd.

Mrs. Jacob: Dan Kurzman—how many thousands did he get?

Woman: Dan Kirsten how many thousand did him get

Melvin: Right.

Mrs. Jacob: So he sent money to the organization. Guess how much he sent. \$100.

James: \$100?

Mrs. Jacob: After he got about \$250,000 for one.

James: Right. Who did that?

Mrs. Jacob: Dan Kurzman, I believe. *Fatal Voyage*, he wrote.

Melvin: Then there's a book *Abandon Ship!* by Richard Newcomb. And then there was—oh, there's a lot of books. Lot of—

Mrs. Jacob: *Ordeal by Sea*.

Melvin: Yeah, a lot of different magazine articles and stuff.

James: I see. Well, super. See, it was painless.

Melvin: Yeah.

James: Now I'll have to wait until the movie comes out.

Melvin: Yeah.

James: I trust you're going to star in it now we've decided that.

Melvin: Sure.

James: You know what you ought to do is talk to him and see if you can't get some bit part in the movie.

Melvin: Oh, yeah. [Melvin and Mrs. Jacob laugh]

James: I mean, really. You know, just a walk on, you see, so that you're on camera in that movie.

Mrs. Jacob: There you go.

James: Like, you know, in that movie *The Memphis Belle*, you know, that movie, the survivors from that Memphis Bell all—they did a documentary and all this on them, and they all had a part in that.

Mrs. Jacob: Bravo!(??)

James: See, so, it makes it more meaningful to see.

Mrs. Jacob: Oh, sure it does.

James: Thank you.

Mrs. Jacob: Good for you.

James: Appreciate it.

Melvin: Mm-hmm.

James: All right. See, now you've done a good job.

Mrs. Jacob: Yes, see—

Melvin: I don't know about that.

James: The State of Wisconsin will appreciate it. You're the 257th interview we've done.

Melvin: Oh, I didn't know that. Well, how interesting.

James: From all wars—last two weeks ago this day, two weeks ago today, I was in Barron, Wisconsin. You know where that is?

Melvin: Mm-hmm.

James: Up near Rice Lake I interviewed Golden Barritt, World War I veteran.

Mrs. Jacob: Oh, wow!

James: 99 years old. Interesting, and then the next day I went to Scofield, Wisconsin, a nursing home there and interviewed Andrew Small. Andrew Small was 107. He was in the Mexican Expedition in 1916, before WWI, the year before. They were down in Mexico chasin' Pancho Villa around. You know, Pancho Villa was a bandit down there who wanted to rule Mexico, and in order to get power he needed money so he'd cross over to the United States and rob a few banks and get money, and of course, killed

a few people doin' that. Then, so the President, Woodrow Wilson, sent down a small army after this guy. An expedition force of about 10,000 men went down to Mexico to capture and get rid of this Pancho Villa because all the citizens of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico were complaining this guy was taking their bank money and killing people. So that Mexican Expedition—he's probably the oldest veteran in the United States of America.

Melvin: Really?

James: And certainly the only—last person who was ever on that Mexican Expedition. One left from the entire war. Interesting guy.

Mrs. Jacob: Oh, I bet! And you got it on film?

James: I got him on film.

Mrs. Jacob: Oh, that's great!

James: Isn't that wonderful?

Mrs. Jacob: I think it's a wonderful thing that you're doing.

James: [laughs] I love it!

Melvin: Yeah, oh, that's great, yeah.

James: Yeah. Well, you know when these guys are gone they're gone. I mean there's nothin', see.

Mrs. Jacob: That's right.

Melvin: Yeah, true.

Mrs. Jacob: I even hear stuff, like when you're talking to him, I hear stuff that I've never heard before [laughs].

James: It sort of—it feeds on itself. You start to start to think about it and brought somethin' to mind you can talk about.

Mrs. Jacob: Sure, yeah.

Melvin: Yeah, it's all up here. It's just a matter of recall.

James: Right.

- Mrs. Jacob: Tryin' to find it.
- Melvin: Tryin' to find it, yeah. Then once when somebody would mention something, then it's a recall. You know it's like you're walking through the woods and you smell a certain thing.
- James: Right. It brings something to mind.
- Melvin: Right, yeah.
- James: I got a kick out of this Andrew Small. I said, I asked him, I said, "Well, what weapon did you use down there?" I says, "Rifle?" "Yeah!" 103, from 1903, yeah.
- Melvin: Oh, my heavens(??).
- James: And then I said, "Didn't you fire anything else?" He said, "We're not allowed to talk about that." [All laugh] I said, "I think it's safe now."
- Melvin: [laughs] Is that ever cute! That's good.
- James: I said, "Well, we don't have to talk about that." [All laugh]
- Melvin: Oh, that's great.
- James: Yup, that's great. Well, thank you folks.
- Melvin: Yeah—
- James: I sure appreciate your stopping in, and thank you for this article.
- Melvin: Mm-hmm.
- Mrs. Jacob: Now a book(??).
- James: That's wonderful.
- Melvin: Well, it's a—like ones that I—see, actually this guy wanted to— Milwaukee Magazine thought it'd be better as a group. So we invited 'em all over to the house. Then we had food catered in, and then he flew in to the airport, and I picked him up, and then I think we had that interview that afternoon. But like one of them called me, he said, "Boy, there's a lot of misquotes in here!" I said, "Those are writers."
- James: [laughs] [unintelligible]

- Melvin: Yeah, I mean—
- James: Who's gonna argue?
- Melvin: Not only that, you know, they gotta make the story interesting.
- James: Of course.
- Melvin: So they may have to add or subtract or, you know.
- James: Make the sharks bigger or [unintelligible]. Whatever, say that's show biz, right? [laughs]
- Melvin: That's show biz. But yet when my son read that down there in Dallas he says it went past him(??). You know, he says, "I couldn't put it down because it's not so much the story itself, it's the way he wrote it." To make it that you don't want to put it down.
- James: When they make the movie are they going to pay you something?
- Melvin: That's what the big problem is now.
- James: I don't know why not.
- Melvin: I don't know why not either. A lot of our stuff is donated, too, like, oh, what's that town of(??) that one survivor who went around to all these different companies, and they're so much for a hotel room. Like I'm so surprised Overhead Door is paying \$300 towards my hotel room.
- Mrs. Jacob: That's the first time they've ever done that. He's quite a go-getter. He lives in Washington but he goes around to big businesses trying to get contributions to help maintain the organization because they built this beautiful memorial in Indianapolis. They have all the men's names.
- James; Where is that in Indianapolis?
- Melvin: Right on the river.
- Mrs. Jacob: Right on the river.
- Melvin: There's a walk, you know, along the river somethin' like the one in San Antonio. Well, not quite as elaborate as that one, but it's a river walk with dogs, grass and stuff, and the river going through town, and then towards the end down there is the one for the memorial for the *USS Indianapolis*, and they got all, everybody on there. All the survivors and all of the ones that passed away. That was very touching when they had that dedication.

James: They have all 1200 men?

Melvin: Yes.

James: Their names, good.

Melvin: Yeah, and there was a lot of survivors—

Mrs. Jacob: They set(??) a star by the ones that are survivors.

Melvin: And there was a lot of people that come, you know—in fact a lot of kids would come, “Did you know my father?” or “Did you know my grandfather?” Mostly my grandfather.

James: If he was aboard ship why didn’t you know him? [laughs]

Melvin: Yeah.

James: They forget there was 1200 people. You can’t know them all.

Melvin: No, no. Well—

James: All right, super.

[End of Interview]