

JACKSON SPIKING

Joni: This is a portion of the oral histories of Northwest Missouri 1940's program. The Nodaway Historical Society is sponsoring this program in partnership with the Missouri Humanities Council and the support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Today's date is February 4, 2009 and this interview is being conducted at TJ's Café in King City, Missouri in Gentry County. The interviewer is Joni Amthor and assisting is Margaret Kelley and the interviewee we're going to interview is Jackson Spiking and he was born on July 1, 1926, he lived during the 1940's and he joined the Navy in World War II and he was a Fire Control Operator. May I call you Jack?

Can you tell us a little bit about your background, your work, where and when you were born, a little bit about your parents, what occupation they had. Did you have any brothers and sisters and what was life like before the war?

Jack: My parents were farmers and let's see I had one brother, now what else was it you wanted?

Joni: What was life like in 1940?

Jack: Well I remember the 30's faintly, I was pretty young but it was better in the '40's than it was in the '30's. I was a paper boy here in town in 1940; I carried papers for 6 years here.

Joni: What was life like when the war broke out did you have any – what were your shortages and things like that – the rationing, did you have to deal with the rationing at all?

Jack: Oh yeah. I worked in a clothing store up here on the weekends and the days the shoe ration stamps were gonna expire we were really busy. Everybody was buying shoes. That's about all I can remember about the rationing part.

Joni: Okay, What did you think about the propaganda at the time, what was the United States saying about Europe and China? Do you remember on the radio what you might have been hearing or in the newspaper what they were writing about the war?

Jack: No I don't know as I remember much about that. I guess I believed everything I read in the paper.

Joni: How about what you were doing when they bombed Pearl Harbor?

Jack: I don't know exactly what I was doing when I first heard it but the newspaper got out an extry and I think it was the first and last they ever had an extry put out, so I had to sell newspapers that evening.

Joni: There were a lot – gave you another job to do?

Jack: Yeah.

Joni: So were you drafted or did you –

Jack: I enlisted.

Joni: You enlisted.

Jack: To keep from being drafted.

Joni: So why the Navy?

Jack: Didn't want to be in the Army.

Joni: What was so bad about the Army?

Jack: Well I don't know. When I was in the Navy I always had a clean bed, three meals a day, just as long as I didn't have to go swimming.

Joni: We've been hearing that the ones that are in the Navy they said they always had a clean bed to sleep in.

Jack: Yeah.

Joni: How about your basic training camp memories? Where did you go, different places, what was it like?

Jack: I reported for duty In Kansas City on the 26th of June in '44, they put us on a train that must have been a holdover from the Civil War because it was very rickety, pulled by a coal burning engine and we went to Farragut, Idahaho. Four days on the railroad and we was as black as your sweater there when we got there, but on the 1st day of July which was my birthday, that's the day they put us through the wringer up there. The officer at the head of the line wished me happy birthday and that was about all I got for that.

Joni: So what did you do there, what were your duties?

Jack: Well just basic training, they learned us how to march and that's about all.

Joni: Did you get any special training anywhere?

Jack: No, well they tested us for different things while we were there and they discovered that I had a stereoscopic vision. That was before I got these glasses and when I came home on leave and got married while I was here and went back and they sent me to a school in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida to learn how to operate a range finding telescope and down there the government had taken over 2 hotels on the beach. That was the only hotels out there. I haven't been back there since but I don't think I'd a been staying today. And I was there for 3 months and then they sent us clear across the country to San Francisco and on to Pearl Harbor and I was in a camp there waiting for somebody that needed a fire controlman and the carrier Hancock took a kamikaze I think it was on the 7th of April and they were back in Pearl Harbor in just a few days and we seen that ship come in that had been on fire and kind of beat up a little, it went right into the dry docks and in about a couple hours I was on board the ship. That's where I spent most of the Navy.

Joni: On that ship.

Jack: Yeah.

Joni: So tell us about your job, what was – what'd it entail – what did you do?

Jack: Well when we were at general quarters we aimed and fired the guns; when we weren't in general quarters we maintained the equipment that did this kind of work. And that's about it.

Joni: I recently was on the Missouri; the ship you were on was it similar to that ship?

Jack: Oh no.

Joni: It was a lot smaller?

Jack: Bigger.

Joni: Bigger than the Missouri.

Jack: Well I guess it was. The ship was 888 feet long ; the flight deck was 85 feet above the water line; and it was an Essex type carrier. It was one of the first line carriers in that day and let's see I don't know much...

Joni: Did you man the big guns or the littler guns?

Jack: The main batteries was 5 inch 38's and we aimed and fired them and then there was all kinds of 40 millimeter guns aboard and lots of 20's and we worked on all of them.

Joni: So how was the food aboard ship?

Jack: Good.

Joni: Good food?

Jack: Good food.

Joni: And your barracks were good on ship?

Jack: Oh yes. Yeah.

Joni: So you served aboard that ship; did you see any combat duty I mean other than – were you in any major battles?

Jack: By the time I got there in the summer of '45, the Japs had been beaten back so far that we come and went about as we pleased. We were in groups of 3 carriers, 3 battleships, and about a couple dozen destroyers and we were on a 5 day rotation. We struck for 3 days and then the evening of the 3rd day turned out and the morning of the 4th day we met the supply ships. We spent 2 days re-provisioning-- food, shells, everything and those 3 days the airplanes could burn all the gasoline we could handle and drop all the bombs that we could hold. And the groceries-- there was 4,000 boys on board that ship. It took a lot of food and so those 2 days we put in a lot of hours handling stuff, had to re-provision.

Joni: So did you see – were you in any major battles where you saw any destruction or

Jack: No.

Joni: So you really didn't see any – did you witness any casualties when you were aboard a ship?

Jack: No.

Joni: Did you form a lot of friendships and camaraderie?

Jack: With 4,000 boys aboard you didn't know anybody hardly except the ones in your own division and there were 5 of us that went through the fire control school and went all the way aboard that ship. I haven't kept in contact with all but one and he's since passed away.

Joni: How about your communication home; did you write a lot of letters and get a lot of care packages from home?

Jack: Oh, we wrote lots of letters and we got good mail. Every time we met the supply ships there was always mail there for us. I don't know how it got there so fast but it did.

Joni: I wondered how family and friends if they sent you food, how it was if it got there really fast or not.

Jack: I don't think that happened too much. I don't believe – I never received anything.

Joni: Did you celebrate Christmas on board the ship at any time?

Jack: No, not at war. I was still aboard the ship after the war and always had a big meal, and Thanksgiving we always got a big meal.

Joni: Were you close to – after the war was over in Japan were you there close by when they signed the paper work?

Jack: Yeah. The war was over on the 6th of August and on the 9th of September we dropped the bomb in Tokyo Bay. That's a big body of water and I think every ship in the Navy was in there at that time. As far as seeing the signing of Armistice, I didn't see that. That was on board the Missouri.

Joni: Did you ever get off the boat for any reason?

Jack: Yeah, they let us – I was in - the name of the town – I forget now – I went ashore one day. There wasn't anything there to see. It had all been burnt. You could see the sidewalks and the streets, but there were no buildings.

Joni: It was one of the cities that was bombed?

Jack: Uh hum, fire bombed.

Joni: Fire bombed?

Jack: And they told us to not bother the Japanese and we didn't.

Joni: So how did you feel about the atomic bomb when it was dropped, did you agree with Truman?

Jack: You betcha; agreed whole heartedly.

Joni: So were you ever around any of the – that day you said you were told not to bother the Japanese did you ever have any of the run ins with them anywhere else?

Jack: No, never was.

Joni: How about Tokyo Rose did you ever hear her on the radio?

Jack: When we left Pearl Harbor, after the ship had been repaired, she welcomed us back into the fleet, and we all heard it and she told us that they were prepared to blow us out of the water, but it didn't happen.

Joni: How do you think she was getting all of her information?

Jack: I don't know, but she was getting it.

Joni: Do you think you had – was there any worry of spies in your company?

Jack: No, no.

Joni: What about entertainment what did you do aboard ship?

Jack: Very little of entertainment. When you're striking 3 days in a row there's no – you're looking for a bed instead of entertainment.

Joni: So you really probably didn't have much leisure or recreation time there.

Jack: No, no.

Joni: But if you did, did you play cards or

Jack: Maybe some of them did, I didn't.

Joni: Is there any special thing that you remember – any operation that you did that was – when you were on tour that stands out in your mind that you'd like to share with us, something particular?

Jack: Well the day the war ended – I can remember that very well.

Joni: So what happened?

Jack: They – we had launched the first strike in the morning and the planes had only been gone just about a half an hour – we knew that they hadn't had time to go in and come back and we were all at general quarters as we were every time and the word come on the loud speaker to prepare to receive aircraft and we knew that they hadn't had time to make the trip, so they didn't tell us anything until all the planes were back on the deck, and then they told us the war was over.

Joni: Did you have major celebrations after that?

Jack: Well yeah there was.

Joni: What did you do?

Jack: Oh, nothing much, no beer on board.

Joni: I read – I heard some of the men talking about beer gardens – did you ever able to

Jack: Well yes, a few of them on Guam, Saipan. I didn't get to go ashore while I was on the carrier, but after the war was over I was transferred to a light cruiser, the Pasadena, and we spent the winter of '46 and '7 cruising around the Mariana's Islands. I don't know what we was doing. We was just cruising. We got to go ashore there.

Joni: What was it like there on those islands – how was the people?

Jack: Oh pretty primitive. The only thing there's a few buildings that the Navy or Army had put up. That's the only thing that I can remember.

Joni: Did you ever notice any of the jungles?

Jack: No, no.

Joni: How about when you came home did you receive a reception from your family and friends?

Jack: Oh yeah.

Joni: How was that day, tell us about that day.

Jack: Well when I got home, the first time I got to meet my daughter, she was 6 months old, I think, when I got home.

Joni: So you were married before you left.

Jack: I was married on boot leave in October'44. Only a few family gatherings, I guess, but that was about it.

Joni: So it was nice to be welcomed back to your new daughter.

Jack: Yeah.

Joni: How do you think the community treated you when you came home?

Jack: Very well I think.

Joni: And how did you adjust back into civilian life?

Jack: Went to work on the farm just about as soon as I got here.

Joni: Now did you have your own farm or did you go to a family farm?

Jack: No, I was with my father.

Joni: And did you farm with him after you got back for quite awhile, or did you go and have your own farm?

Jack: No, I worked there until he retired and then my brother and I took the farm. I been on the same hill for a long time.

Joni: How did you let's see – have you stayed in contact with anyone else that you met?

Jack: Well, here a few years ago, I joined the Hancock Association, which was the crew members of that carrier and the leading Petty Officer in our division, he was something in this organization, and his phone number came out in a pamphlet and I called him and talked to him for awhile. And he's about the only one I've ever talked to. There was one boy who lived in St. Joe that was in our division. He went to school when he got home on the GI Bill. Got to be a school teacher. He got a job in St. Joe and during the summer time he worked at the packing house in St. Joe and found out that the packing house paid better than teaching so he continued there, but he had diabetes and he passed away here about 10 years ago.

Joni: Did you join the American Legion or the VFW?

Jack: American Legion.

Joni: And are you proud to be a veteran of World War II?

Jack: You bet.

Joni: When you returned were you concerned about the Soviet Union and the spread of communism, was that a major

Jack: Didn't bother me.

Joni: Did you take advantage of the GI Bill yourself?

Jack: They had—it wasn't college education – they had a class here in the local school that I attended.

Joni: What do you think is the difference between the war of today and the war that you fought, what are some of the major differences in that.

Jack: It seemed like in World War II they went out to win the war and not prolong it the way they're doing now. It's mostly run by the Washington, DC, now, instead of the ones that's doing the fighting.

Joni: Did you ever meet any of the Generals or the people in charge of the war when you were there, anybody specific that you can remember meeting?

Jack: No.

Joni: Nothing stands out?

Jack: I guess at one time, was it Spruance, he's an Admiral in the Navy and he used the Hancock for his flag ship at one time but not while I was aboard.

Joni: Who was the commander on your ship?

Jack: I can't tell you what his name was. I don't remember.

Joni: Is there any one memory that sticks out in your mind that would be something you'd like to share with us that we may not have covered? Maybe some thing that happened with you in your – some of your division people that

Jack: No, not that I can remember.

Joni: No interesting little story that –

Jack: No

Joni: Is there anything you would like to share with – if a college student was to look at your research of your life? What was one thing that you think they should notice that stood out that you would like them to know?

Jack: Oh I don't know.

Joni to Margaret: Is there anything that you would like to add?

Margaret: Yeah, from your life experiences what is some core thing that you think you learned that you have followed all your life?

Jack: Umm, I don't know, can't think of anything.

Joni: Anything that you learned from being in the Navy that possibly changed you when you came home?

Jack: Well, I can't think of anything.

Joni: Well it has been really great speaking with you. I think you've given us a lot of good information and we enjoyed you sharing your story with us. Its stories like this that – they don't hear the local stories as much, so it's nice that you're willing to come in and talk to us about your stories. Thank you for sharing.

