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INTERVIEWEE: Clive Jenkins

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Jenkins: --and they organized a convoy and the convoy consisted of about 187 ships, one of which I was on. I got on in Mobile, Alabama in 1939 and we had to go coast (?) all the way to Newfoundland, Canada and that's where they put the convoy together. And then from there, we went across with the Canadian Navy guarding us.

Unknown1: [whispers] Was it dangerous?

Unknown 2: Was it dangerous?

J: Very dangerous. The submarines were out there from the Germans in the Atlantic-- [audio cuts off] --and the planes came over and shoot at us in the daytime from the coast of, I would say France and Italy-- not France and Italy, but Spain and France. They came over and shoot at us and go back. We lost about eighty ships out of 187.

U2: Did you have any friends or close--

J: Yes, myself and two or three schoolmates, we were all on one ship. We joined the ship in Mobile and I don't know what they were loaded with, but later on we found out we had dynamites-- dynamite caps and stuff like that on board. That was part of our cargo.

U1: [whispers] Ask him if he was ever-- [audio cuts off] -- [inaudible]

U2: Were you were afraid of losing your life while on board the ship?

J: We were scared of (it?) day and night. We only traveled at night; we never traveled in the daytime.

U2: Why is that?

J: Because the German subs were out there looking for us. So at night time, we went with blackout- no lights. You couldn't-- all the crew that smoked couldn't stand on deck and light a cigarette. If you wanted to smoke, you had to smoke below decks. And you couldn't show no lights at all. And we only run short distance; like we left Mobile and we went to Pensacola. We lay out there during the day. We left Pensacola, we went to Tampa and we lay out there during the day. And from Tampa, we came around to between Key West and Miami and lay up around there. And until-- we did that until we got all the way to Canada. That's what they call coast (?). And then when we got to Canada, they assembled the convoy to go across the following (?) and that's where we ended up.

U2: What was the state of America before the war?

J: Well, America was in good shape and all the factories-- the war helped us. All the factories were in operation helping to build what they couldn't do in England because the Germans were bombing England day and night by plane and everything else. And people were getting hurt and bombs were falling all over the place so the factories in Canada and America is what produced all the stuff. Then later on, the United States and Great Britain and Russia got together with Churchill and President Roosevelt and Stalin and they would (order?) some battleship out in the Atlantic and discussed it and they joined together and-- because the Germans were fighting the Russians at the same time. And they got together and fought the Germans and beat them.

U2: Did you volunteer to fight or were you drafted?

J: No, no, no, this one, not a volunteer. I was hired, I wanted to be on the ship because I was looking for work and this was the only way I could find work--

U2: So it was a job?

J: -- with a decent job with decent pay even though it was taking a chance on your life. But it was a way of making a living for yourself and your family. In World War II, that was shortly after the Depression.

U1: [whispers] Ask him about his family. [inaudible]

U2: Did you leave any family behind when you went to go participate--

J: Yes, I left my mother and sisters and brother and I wasn't married then, I was only nineteen years old. [laughs] So just my mother and father and my family is all I had.

U2: How did they feel about you participating?

J: Well, they didn't know because they were in Central America. They didn't know what I was doing in the United States. I told them later on after, then they all got scared.

[laughs]

U2: What type of damage did the war do to some of the soldiers that participated?

J: Well, from what I heard, it did a lot of damage; we lost a lot of soldiers. Have you heard about part of, I think, Omaha Beach? You probably heard the history about that. And the desert fight that they had there with The Desert Fox and that was part of the World War II and then you had a lot of the bombing that went on over Germany and that was another (?), we lost a lot of people there and a lot of planes.

U2: [whispers] Ask him the conditions of the ship. What they ate and their work schedules.

U1: How were the conditions on the ships that you were on?

J: Well, the conditions were [chuckles] I would say fair. That's the best I can say of it during that time because in those days, it wasn't like today where you got a lot of modern equipment. And for instance, on some of the (first?) ships you didn't even have a toilet-- not for the crew, not for the ordinary crew. You had toilet for maybe the officers but for not the ordinary crew. Some of those ships-- it was terrible but we managed to survive. It was rough but we survived.

U2: How did the higher ranking officers treat, like, maybe (the pilots?) or crew members?

J: Well, the officers-- you just didn't see them unless they were giving you orders. And then when you got where you were going in a place, they went one way and you went the other. So you only saw them on the ship when they come around to give you orders and to tell you what to do.

U1: How did the soldiers interact with each other?

J: Well there weren't any soldiers on our ship. They had the crew ships that carried soldiers from the United States over, but there were larger ships that were like passenger ships and they were loaded with soldiers that were enlisted to go in and help the American-- help the British fight, and they were shipped over but they didn't go in our convoy because they would have been subjected to the submarines and been torpedoed, so they went by themselves.

U1: What was the significance of the ship that you were on?

J: Well we were the supply boats, we were the suppliers. We took all the supplies: oils, arms, and ammunitions, all the fuels and stuff for planes, parts for airplanes because a lot

of the planes were made in the United States and assembled in England. So they were loaded on the ships and taken over there and assembled.

U1: What was the state of America after the war?

J: Well, America just came out of the Depression and the United States was moving along pretty good. When we returned, it wasn't-- the war wasn't completed yet after we returned from that convoy. After we got back before it was the next year we were given a choice to either go to Panama because they were building a submarine base in Colon in a little place they call Coco Solo, Colon, you know, building a submarine base there. And you had a choice: you can go home or you can go to Colon and continue working and make some more money, so I went there. And I stayed a year and a half in Colon building the submarine base. And during that time was when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor while we were in Colon- that was in 1942 on a Sunday; we were off that Sunday.

Everything closed down that Sunday afternoon and thereon we were told that there was some Japanese aircraft carrier not far from the canal hoping that they would conquer Hawaii and they can come in and join the command- they didn't make it so they had to go back.

U1: How did the Depression affect the war?

J: Well the war helped the Depression to get better because people were able to go back to work and make money and get enough food to eat. The Depression was completed after the war.

U1: Would you say that the Depression led to a lot of people voluntarily participating into the war because they--?

J: Yes. Yes, because that's the way to find work and get food for the family. That was-- the war was a big help for that especially what the United States was doing, (you volunteered?) (?) to go after Hitler.

U1: What was your life like after you came-- came back?

J: Ooh, it was very good. I enjoyed it, I had fun, lots of fun. [laughs] Young man, I get back, I try to make up the best of it. Got married and had a family of my own and then the work really started. [laughs]

U1: How did the people welcome you when the participants came back?

J: Well, I was welcomed all over throughout the United States and at home because when we stopped here, the people here that we knew- our friends- they were all glad to see us and when I went home it was the same thing- all glad to see us.

U1: Did the government provide any programs or anything like that for the soldiers or participants in the war after they came back?

J: Well, not at that time. The only thing that the-- chance that they gave us was a, you know, a chance to go to Colon and work and make extra money. And the company was a company from New York and that was the opportunity that we had. We didn't have nothing else because we worked-- we (weren't?) actually in the armed services, but we (were?) in service.

U1: Do you feel that the war fought was worth it?

J: Oh, yes it was worth it. We saved a lot of-- we killed a lot of people but we saved a lot, too. [laughs] We saved the countries. Britain and Canada and the United States prospered from that because we achieved what we set out to do.

U1: Do you have any mementos or keepsakes from your experiences of war?

J: Uh, not really. No, I didn't keep anything-- have anything that-- all I have is memories.

[chuckles] That's the only thing I have.

U1: Thank you.

J: Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**