

Interviewee: Hutson, Joseph
Interviewer: Andrew J. Waber
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Andrew Waber: Give us a little back ground information. When were you born and where were you born?

Joseph Hutson: November the 7th, 1921.

Waber: What did your father do for a living?

Hutson: He was a ship carpenter. In a brick mason and he built ... and all that stuff. But he never did pass it on to us. My brothers. No way. There was seven brothers and three sisters and he didn't transfer none of the [knowledge]. No, he never did. He was a brick mason and he could lay bricks and I wanna tell you something. He was good. He built floos and all that and he'd take a handkerchief and hang it up. And if it... enough, the handkerchief would move. He built trestles, and a ... sawmill, Joe Hubbard, 23 Llama (?) Company.

Waber: Was that here in Jacksonville?

Hutson: No it was in Georgia. Hopkins, Georgia. He never did transfer none of us whatsoever the knowledge. He built trestles, sawmills, executives, I mean he had all the ... at that time. But that's just the way it is. I can't holler about him not transferring over to us...

Waber: What was it like growing up during the Depression?

Hutson: Tough. It was tough. My brother, back then, was a butcher.

[pause]

Waber: You were saying about your brother being a butcher?

Hutson: Yeah particular times he would at one time he gave me a bunch of cowlights, hoglights or whatever you call them, and I was going to go home and take my daddy. He took the hoglights or cowlights, whatever it is, and [laughs] he said "you won't get none of this because I'm gonna make a stew out of it." [laughter]

Waber: Where were you and what were you doing when Pearl Harbor was attacked? In December 7th, I believe it was, 1941?

Hutson: December the 7th I was in the Gulf of Mexico and we were laying it aft on the hooks and, the anchor or whatever it is, and we made a prediction at that particular time that subs would be in the Gulf in six months. They were there three months.

Waber: Why did you choose the Merchant Marine during the War?

Hutson: Well I had to really—I was 4-F, 1-C or 1-G. Yeah 1-G on the draft board. That was to keep me from [being drafted]. My brother, he was a seaman too. And they was looking for him, and I went up there and talking to the RMO and he said “we can’t ship you.” I said “what do you mean they can’t ship me?” He says “because one thing about it, you don’t have a rating.” I said “I’ve had a rating since 1942.” He says “well let me look at your papers.” He said “we don’t need you, because you’re a seaman.” I think if my brother, he was sailing that particular time, and he would wait til the last day to ship out.

Waber: Many people see the government understating the number of casualties in the U-boat war, to try to boost the morale of the country and not give the enemy any sort of propaganda. Did you have any idea what you were getting yourself into when you first went into the Merchant Marine?

Hutson: No. In December the 7th, I actually didn’t know. I had sailed this particular ship, and we went to sub-infested waters. It was rough real rough.

Waber: You mentioned that you were in sub-infested waters. Were you ever in any convoys that got attacked by U-boats?

Hutson: No I was in 9 convoys in the North Atlantic. This particular ... [name of a ship], when was going into Belgium, and was coming out, I said “you gonna be sorry.” When we came back into Belgium with bridgework, she was sunk. She hit a ... mine. It was a cluster bunch of mines and that broke her back.

Waber: Did you ever attend some sort of Merchant Marine training school?

Hutson: No. I had training onboard ships.

Waber: So basically, when the war started you jumped right on a ship right?

Hutson: No I was on a ship. The old *Benjamin Brewster*.

Waber: The Merchant Marine, they remained under private control, but they still had to deal with a lot of Navy and Coast Guard regulations. Did you ever witness any sort of friction that went on between the Merchant Marine and the Navy and Coast Guard?

Hutson: None whatsoever. No.

Waber: I showed this article here [points to article] in December 21st, 1942, *Time Magazine* summed up well many of the misconceptions many people had about the Merchant Marine. It labeled the seamen as “slackers” and “profiteers.” What do you make of this and did you ever experience this sort of misconception personally?

Hutson: Well at times I really couldn't say. We didn't have much friction with the Coast Guard or the US Navy. We stayed up in the North Atlantic and that was all escort by corvette and English destroyers.

Waber: During the War, what theater did you serve in and what sort of ports did you visit. Was there any particular port that stands out in your memory?

Hutson: Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Emmingham, that's where they unloaded the ammunition. And Glasgow—I liked Glasgow, I liked that it was a nice port. Manchester, I liked that port. And Liverpool I met a little old gal over there and she was real nice. Was no hanky-pank [laughter].

Waber: When I first got in here, you mentioned a story about picking up four British seamen in a life boat?

Hutson: Yeah.

Waber: Could you give us a little information about that—what ship you were sailing on and what ship they...

Hutson: Well the old *Dean Emery*. When we picked the life boat up, about the mid-Atlantic, she was—at times, after a while, a British ship came by, and wanted to know—we was going into ... cruise, and he wanted to know if we ever seen any German ships. And I told him no but that was some trip. I got back to Charleston, I got off it. The dead seamen made an impact on me. [The four seamen died from dehydration]

Waber: Do you have any idea what kind of ship they were coming off of?

Hutson: No. There was no markings on it because the British got rid of the markings. They sunk over 2,000 ships, of the British, not counting the—the Norwegian ships, they sunk about 400 ships. These British ships, they took a beating. Oh I want to tell you something they took a beating. When you sailed down onto London [laughs]

Waber: That was not an easy run right? [laughs]

Hutson: No, it was no easy run but that was 1943.

Waber: The U-boats operated well throughout the War.

Hutson: We was the first ship to leave port. Can't remember the ship. We were the first ship to travel with the running lights on.

Waber: That was during the War?

Hutson: Actually the Germans surrendered. And we didn't know as seamen at what particular time a U-boat surrendered. Say that the War wasn't over. We were scared to death.

Waber: Do you remember what kind of ship it was?

Hutson: Yeah it was a Liberty ship, and I can't remember the ship's name.

Waber: What do you make of the Navy's failure to adopt the convoy system right when the War began?

Hutson: Well one thing about it Admiral King didn't believe in ship convoys. We put that on him because one thing Admiral King was the man. We didn't actually understand, because one thing about it, they was sinking so many ships. There was 267 ships sunk in the Gulf of Mexico and the east coast.

Waber: And in the Caribbean right?

Hutson: No that ain't the Caribbean. No. It aint' the Caribbean. It was the east coast and the Gulf of Mexico.

Waber: And there was also a major security issue with the cities leaving their lights on at nighttime, silhouetting the ships.

Hutson: Yeah, well one time on the *Benjamin Brewster*, we put burlap sacks over the running lights. In that particular time, we picked up a sub's red light blinking off shore. And the old man says go in shore. And I was at the wheel. And I said "ram him. Get rid of him." He said "that's what I'm gonna do." And the light went out. That was on the old *Benjamin Brewster*.

Waber: Did you destroy the ship [the U-boat] or...

Hutson: No.

Waber: It just went away right?

Hutson: Just went away.

Waber: Did you ever join any unions during the War?

Hutson: Yeah. National Maritime Union.

Waber: That was the big union...

Hutson: The big, big union.

Waber: Did they improve the...

Hutson: working conditions?

Waber: Yeah the conditions for seamen?

Hutson: Oh yeah. Joe Curran, he was all them years, he was president. He looked out for the seaman because he was a seaman himself when he first started.

Waber: You were in the Merchant Marine right when the War Shipping Administration took into effect correct?

Hutson: Yeah

Waber: What do you make of Admiral Emory Ford's [actually Emory Land] contributions to the war?

Hutson: Well put it this way, we— Admiral King, he was a King, and he was the admiral. He didn't believe in convoy systems. And that's the problem with all the ships was sunk in the east, on the Gulf of Mexico.

Waber: They ended up replacing them didn't they?

Hutson: Oh yeah they replaced him.

Waber: I remember reading in several sources that Eisenhower and Churchill they both stated that what happened earlier on in the War basically prolonged the War at least 7 to 9 months longer than it should have been. With the sinking of the ships, ships being sunk faster than they were being built. What do you make of this statement?

Hutson: They built 87 ships in this port [Jacksonville] and I sailed a bunch of them. As far as we understood the problem, I don't know. I just don't know.

Waber: You also mentioned right when I came in here, you mentioned something about your brother going down on a ship? What do you know about that?

Hutson: Well he was a *Pan-Atlantic*, and he was on the Russian run plus—Archangel, that was right across the port from Archangel. They dropped a bomb right down the stack and broke his

neck. This oiler grasped him on the pants, course he was dead, and he came back later and came up to Mayport [Florida] and he was telling my sister about this incident. He was thorough.

Waber: Was your brother on a convoy? Do you know what convoy number [he was on]?

Hutson: Yeah he was on a convoy. *PQ-17*.

Waber: Oh he was on the infamous convoy?

Hutson: Yeah that was torpedoed and bombed.

Waber: Do you remember what your brother last told you in a letter or what he last said before he left?

Hutson: Well I was in the south Atlantic. I was in Cape Town, Mombasa, and Durbin. When he lost, his life, I didn't know it.

Waber: From what I remember, this was a very—I mean I'm sure you've read plenty of stories about this convoy, they headed out, and some rumor spread around about the German pocket battle ships attacking so they, instead of staying with the convoy, the escorts just sort of bailed out and left them sort of running by themselves.

Hutson: Oh yeah, on the Murmansk Run, to Archangel, at times they had to run by themselves.

Waber: Do you remember the name of your brother's ship?

Hutson: *Pan-Atlantic*

Waber: Oh, ok the *Pan-Atlantic*. That was the name of the ship. Ok. Have you ever made the Russian Run?

Hutson: No... it was the *von Tirpitz* and the *Schwanhorst*. It was a battle ship and light cruiser. When the British run to Red assistance, we was scared to death of that *von Tirpitz*.

Waber: It would come out of nowhere basically right?

Hutson: Oh yeah. It had a lot of guns on there. 20 inchers.

Waber: Another thing people forget about Norway is that it had a pretty sizable Luftwaffe base there too.

Hutson: Yeah right.

Waber: And a lot of convoys that came around from north of Norway and Finland, they had to worry about the Luftwaffe base over there as well.

Hutson: Oh yeah, right. But I tell you one thing, they was something else and we was scared to death of that *von Tirpitz*. They baited us, the convoy system, down the coast of Norway to try to get her to come out.

Waber: There has also been some questionable actions from the U-boats during the War. One of the most infamous treatments that they would give was machine gunning the crew that was already in the water. Was there any fear of that?

Hutson: I don't know. See when I went up in the north Atlantic, I was [on] the *Eli Whitney*, it was about over [the War].

Waber: So you never had to deal with the...

Hutson: Didn't have to deal with the subs. Except along the Gulf and east coast run.

Waber: From a lot of stories that I've read, a lot of stories that I've heard, there's always some of mention of the most unusual cargo. Some guys would say you know—they're talking about a cargo of baseball gloves and a cargo of beer. What was the most unusual cargo that you remember hauling during the War?

Hutson: [laughs] Bombs. Nothing but bombs [laughter]. We had to go down and chock everything because, the ...[ship name], I remember that ship. There was bombs coming every direction. They was slipping and sliding [laughter]. We had to chock everything down and latch everything down [laughter].

Waber: That sounds like it was really scary [laughter]. These bombs were all armed too right?

Hutson: Well I don't think so but if it caused a spark inside, we'd went up [laughter]. It was something else [laughter].

Waber: What were your career goals heading into the War and how did the War affect your career goals at the end? Did you want to stay aboard? Did you want to do something else? Did your career goals really change as the War progressed?

Hutson: No. I was seaman before the War, through the War, and after the War. We didn't have to worry about subs right after the War. I was on the old *Crown and Diamonds*, we were supposed to go to the Pacific. She was a heavy rigged ship it was something else. When we took and secured the booms, we had to lift up, manhandle up, to where it would secure those booms.

Waber: From what I could recall, my grandfather was in the Army Air Force, and he told me several times that when the European war came to an end, all the guys they were starting to be

sent towards the Pacific and there was a lot of doom and gloom because many people thought that after Okinawa, that there would be several Okinawas on Japan. Was there any of that sort of attitude on your ship?

Hutson: No. We didn't possibly understand—going into the Pacific, this particular ship, the *Crown and Diamonds*, we would leave the port of Tampa. And they changed orders, and picked up sugar at Cardenas and Havana.

Waber: The big controversy after the end of WWII has been about the veteran's status of Merchant Marines. Although non-military and reserve military personnel, they have full veteran's status, the Merchant seamen only got partial veteran's status in 1988. What are your opinions on this?

Hutson: It's bad. Because one thing, the way they've treated us, was bad.

Waber: Of all the veteran's benefits, what do you feel was the most important one that the Merchant seamen missed out on?

Hutson: Actually I can't say. I sailed everything through the War, before the War and after the War, and they were not going to do anything for us whatsoever. They gonna wait for us to die off, then maybe there'll be very few that are gonna get it.

Waber: The Merchant Marine to begin with wasn't really that large it was actually smaller than the major branches.

Hutson: Now, there's not much Merchant Marine under the American flag.

Waber: Do you feel it's going in a good direction or a bad direction? How do you feel about the Merchant Marine today?

Hutson: I'd say bad.

Waber: A lot of the Merchant seamen that I've talked with they say that probably the worst thing in their opinion is that a lot of the shipping jobs are going out to foreign companies and foreign workers where the living standards aren't as high.

Hutson: On the *Dean Emery*, she was under the stars and the checks(?), it was Panamanian flag. Actually now the seamen would actually get more now than they ever did. Because one thing, we fought, fought, fought and fought in the unions and they actually don't understand the particular times that we—they don't understand whatsoever. They actually didn't fight for anything cause we back through the War and all that, we—back in 1952, they sent a bunch up to get the Communists out of the unions. They went up there and they took care of them Commies. They bloodied a many a head.

Waber: That whole McCarthy scare really hit home with the unions because there was already a perceived—there was some Communist connection, but the biggest thing was the perceived connection between the Communists and unions.

Hutson: Yeah they actually up went up there and took care of the Commies.

Waber: Did you face any sort of Cold War restrictions in the Merchant Marines? Any particular town or port you couldn't go to?

Hutson: No. We was on that run when they built a ship here, and we'd ship out, it went to England. Like I said Glasgow, Hull, Emtingham/Immingham, Manchester and Liverpool. Actually there was no restriction whatsoever.

Waber: What do you feel about the public remembrances of World War II 60 years later?

Hutson: Sixty years later?

Waber: Yeah what do you about public remembrances of WWII today?

Hutson: All of them is good. Everything is good. We took care of the War, and then we actually went ahead and took our seamen jobs after the War. There's no way that they're gonna survive...

Waber: Do you feel that there's no way that they could survive the war today?

Hutson: Yeah, there's no way.

Waber: What do you hope that the world would learn from the Second World War to prevent that—so it would never happen again? [laughter] It's just a philosophical question.

Hutson: [laughs] Yeah well there's [laughter] going to be wars and after the wars are fought [laughs] they going to fight regardless [laughter].

End