

ELIOT SKLAR NAVAL SERVICE

When I enlisted in the Navy, I was sent to the Sampson Naval Training Camp, upstate New York. Upon graduating I was transported to Casco Bay, Maine and assigned to the destroyer The U.S.S. Hambleton, D.D. 455, where I remained throughout the war. When Japan surrendered the Hambleton was awarded the honor to be one of the ships leading the surrender fleet into Tokyo Bay.

When the signing was completed the dignitaries were taken into Tokyo accompanied by two hundred shore patrol, all who were selected for their bravery and accomplishments during the war. I was one of those selected by our ships captain.

I will now give you a brief synopsis as to why our ship and I were selected. While in the European theater of war the Hambleton participated in three invasions, Normandy at the Omaha Beach Head, Sherburg, and Southern France. While in the course of combat the Hambleton destroyed or participated in the destruction of more than ten enemy aircraft, fifteen u boats, and ten or more e boats, e boats were similar to Jack Kennedy's P.T. but somewhat larger.

The Hambleton captured a German war ship off the coast of France. We found over fifty German soldiers trying to escape from France onboard. We disarmed them and took them prisoners aboard our ship to transport them to the U.S.S. Texas, a battleship where they could be held as prisoners of war. While they were on board our ship I removed the helmet of one at gunpoint. My grandson has that helmet. Upon completing our duties in the European theater we with ten other destroyers were sent back to the Charlestown Navy Yard to be converted to a destroyer mine sweeper. Our aft five inch gun was removed and mine sweeping gear was installed in its place, plus many fifty caliber machine guns in preparation for the invasion of Okinawa. Upon completion we left for the Pacific and the invasion of Okinawa.

I will now read to you a naval communiqué about our ship in Okinawa

Invasion of Okinawa

THE HAMBLETON PARTICIPATED IN THE CAPTURE OF OKINAWA DURING THE ENTIRE PERIOD FROM 19 MARCH 1945-25 JUNE 1945. DURING THIS PERIOD OF TIME THE SHIP WAS GIVEN DAY AND NIGHT ASSIGNMENTS CONSISTING OF MINE SWEEPING, ESCORT, RADAR PICKET AND SCREENING DUTIES WHILE UNDER CONTINUOUS THREAT OF ENEMY AIR ATTACK. OF THE NINETY NINE DAYS OF THE OPERATION, ONLY SIX WERE SPENT AT ANCHOR, AND THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING BOTH MATERIAL AND PERSONNEL AT THE UTMOST EFFICIENCY THROUGHOUT THE OPERATION, DESPITE THE LONG, GRUELING HOURS SPENT AT BOTH BATTLE STATIONS AND CONDITION WATCHES, TAXED TO THE LIMIT THE SPIRIT, ABILITY, COURAGE, AND FORTITUDE OF EVERY MAN ON BOARD. JUST IN ONE BATTLE ALONE THE HAMBLETON TOOK SEVENTEEN ENEMY PLANES UNDER FIRE WHILE MANY OTHERS THREATENED ATTACK, BUT WERE NOT FIRED UPON. TWO ENEMY PLANES WERE DESTROYED UNASSITED, TWO MORE WERE DESTROYED BUT DARKNESS PREVENTED CONFIRMATION, FOUR PLANES WERE SERIOUSLY DAMAGED, AND SEVEN OTHERS WERE TAKEN UNDER FIRE AT NIGHT AND OBSERVED BY RADAR TO BE PROBABLY DAMAGED ALTHOUGH RESULTS COULD NOT BE CONFIRMED VISUALLY.

At this time I will tell you that nine of the eleven ships that were converted to destroyer mine sweepers
Were either sunk or damaged during the capture of Okinawa with many lives lost.

I was eighteen years old when my gun crew and I shot down my first enemy aircraft, a Donner 217, a German dive bomber. At Normandy, many German gun emplacements had not been destroyed by our aircraft prior to the invasion so some of our ships were instructed to send spotters ashore with the first wave to identify the location of these guns and radio back to the ship to direct their gunfire. I volunteered and with three other shipmates was picked up by an L.C.T. (landing craft tanks) and transported to shore. Shortly after we jumped into the water, behind the tanks, my three ship mates were killed. I then caught a ride back to my ship on empty L.C.I. (landing craft infantry). At Okinawa under heavy attack by enemy planes I was at my battle station, a twenty mm anti-aircraft gun. One plane was approaching very close to our ship in my air space and when I hit the plane it exploded throwing shrapnel and body parts all over the deck. When the all clear was sounded I realized I had shrapnel in my kapox life jacket, dents in my helmet, and not a scratch on my head, face, or body. How lucky can one sailor be! Over the course of the invasion I received a Naval citation and a Naval commendation for my role in shooting down many enemy aircraft. I also received a special award from the French government for my role in the liberation of France. I want to thank you for your kind attention to my story. God bless you, God bless all our troops serving all over the world, and God bless America.