



*U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program*

**Interview of Coxswain Dale J. Palmer, USCGR**

World War II Coast Guard Veteran  
USS *Hunter Liggett* (AP-27/APA-14)

Conducted by C. Douglas Kroll, Ph.D., U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary

Date of Interview: 8 June 2013

Location of Interview: Hayward, CA



**Coxswain Dale J. Palmer, USCGR**

## **Biographical Summary:**

Born on 11 March 1922 in Reddick, Illinois, Dale Joseph Palmer grew up in Reddick with his parents and five siblings and attended the public schools there. After dropping out of high school he drove a delivery truck in Joliet, Illinois. He enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard on 5 October 1942 in Chicago, Illinois and was sent to recruit training at the Coast Guard Training Station, Battle Creek, Michigan. Following recruit training he went to Advanced Diesel training at Navy Pier, Chicago and Machinist and Steam training in Luddington, Michigan.

From there he was sent to Alameda, California for further transfer to the Coast Guard manned USS *Hunter Liggett* (AP-27) then involved in the support of the Guadalcanal invasion. Assigned to the deck force he advanced to Seaman First Class and then was re-designated a Coxswain, driving landing barges filled with troops on their way to enemy-held beaches. In February of 1943 the *Hunter Liggett* was re-designated APA-14. After Guadalcanal the ship supported the invasion of Bougainville, beginning in November of 1943. Mr. Palmer landed troops on both Guadalcanal and Bougainville. The *Hunter Liggett* returned to San Francisco in December 1944 to undergo repairs. In April 1945 she sailed to San Diego to become an amphibious training ship. With the end of the war Mr. Palmer was transferred to San Francisco for discharge. He was discharged on 18 October 1945. Rather than return to Illinois he stayed in California and joined the Oakland Fire Department for a 25-year career. Following retirement he opened a television repair and sales business.

Mr. Palmer's first two wives predeceased him. He had three children, a son and two daughters. His only son died at the age of thirty. He remarried in the mid-1990s. He currently lives with his wife, Virginia, in retirement in Hayward, California.

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**INTERVIEWER:** Where and when were you born?

**PALMER:** In Reddick, Illinois, near Kankakee, on March 11, 1922.

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell me briefly about your childhood and how you came to join the Coast Guard during World War II?

**PALMER:** I had five brothers and sisters and grew up in the town of Reddick. I attended the public schools in Reddick and after the attack on Pearl Harbor most of my friends were joining up and I wanted to do my part as well. I went to the military recruiting offices of all the services and none of them would take me because they said I was too thin. I didn't weigh enough for my height. The last recruiter I saw was the Coast Guard recruiter and I argued with him for about an hour. He finally told me to go home, and eat and gain some weight and then come back to see him. I did that and then was enlisted into the Coast Guard. I was happy because I wanted to do whatever I could to help out. I wanted to do my share.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did they send you for boot camp?

**PALMER:** To Battle Creek, Michigan.

**INTERVIEWER:** Do you remember how long boot camp lasted?

**PALMER:** It was only a couple of weeks.

**INTERVIEWER:** What do you remember about any of the training you received at boot camp?

**PALMER:** How to march. How to obey orders. How to use guns.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did you go after boot camp? Where did they send you?

**PALMER:** I had a choice to go to either the east coast or the west coast, so I chose the west coast. When I got to California I wrote my mother and told her I liked the weather so much, I wouldn't be coming back to Illinois when the war was over. After I got to Alameda they told me they were sending me to the *Hunter Liggett*, a transport fighting in the Pacific.

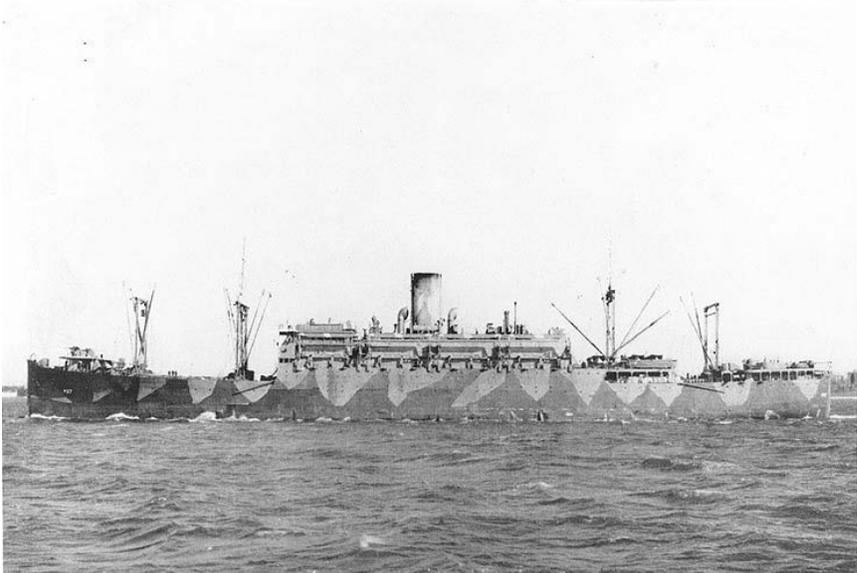
Photo # NH 86976 USS Hunter Liggett, 1942

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you volunteer for the *Hunter Liggett* or did they just send you there?

**PALMER:** I told them I wanted to see action in the Pacific, so they sent me there.

**INTERVIEWER:** What were your duties on the *Hunter Liggett*? What did you do on board?

**PALMER:** I was assigned to run one of the landing barges. I had never seen one before.



**INTERVIEWER:** Were you a coxswain driving one of the landing barges?

**PALMER:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** So they trained you on the *Hunter Liggett* to drive one of these?

**PALMER:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** [So] It was what you would call "on the job" training? What was a typical day like on the *Hunter Liggett* if you weren't involved in combat? When you were steaming from one location to another, what did you do as a coxswain?

**PALMER:** I maintained my landing barge. I made any repairs because my life would depend upon it.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the food like on the *Hunter Liggett*?

**PALMER:** It was good.

**INTERVIEWER:** What were the living conditions like on the *Hunter Liggett*?

**PALMER:** I was in a third bunk. The top one. They were three high. I was also near a port hole, which I thought was nice. If I had to abandon ship, I thought I could just crawl out the porthole.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did the ship ever pull in anywhere and grant liberty so that you could go ashore and relax?

**PALMER:** A few small islands; I don't remember their names. When we stopped there, we would take the crew in on our landing barges, but then I and my crew would sleep in the barges overnight---because it was safer.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have contact with members of the other armed services?

**PALMER:** Just the Navy.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was the relationship like between the Navy and the Coast Guard?

**PALMER:** We had a good relationship. We were doing the same thing. We both just wanted to get the war over and get out of there.



**INTERVIEWER:** What was the relationship like between the Chief Petty Officers and the rest of the enlisted crew?

**PALMER:** Good. We were all working together.

**INTERVIEWER:** While you were in the Coast Guard did you have any interaction with crewmen of races other than your own?

**PALMER:** No.

**INTERVIEWER:** What invasions did you participate in, landing troops?

**PALMER:** Guadalcanal and Bougainville.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was it like driving a landing barge full of troops toward the beach?

**PALMER:** It was scary. I told the troops and my crew to keep their heads down on the way in. I was only one that had to keep my head up so see where we were going. They were shooting at us, but fortunately I was never hit. I was the one who had to stand up and so was in the most danger. I would always remind my crew to keep down so they wouldn't be hit by enemy fire.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you have any contact with Douglas Munro? He was another coxswain landing troops at Guadalcanal. He was killed there and later received the Medal of Honor.

**PALMER:** I heard the name but never had any contact with him.

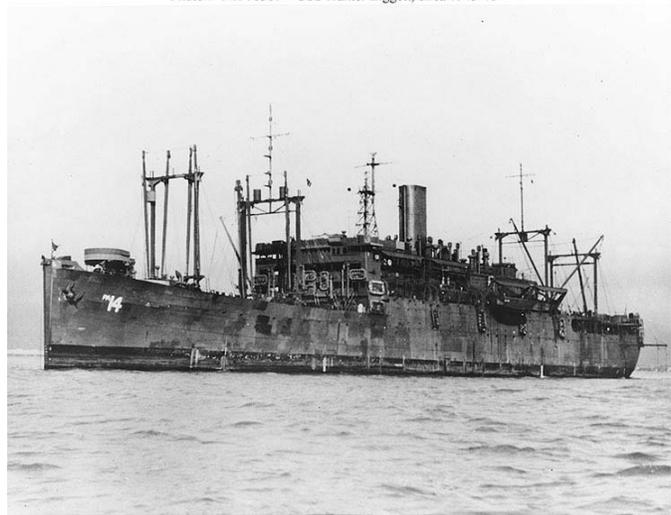
**INTERVIEWER:** So it was scary taking the boat in to land the troops. Were you the one to drop the ramp in the front once you reached the beach?

**PALMER:** No, I had an auxiliary release if the main release didn't work. One of my crew would actually drop the front ramp.

**INTERVIEWER:** Did you pull the ramp back up before you left the beach?

**PALMER:** I had to back into the surf without taking water over the stern. I had to wait until I back into deep enough water before I turned, or the barge would tip over. Even though I was always in a hurry I had to be careful not to take it too fast, or risk losing the landing barge.

Photo # NH 78567 USS Hunter Liggett, circa 1945-46



**INTERVIEWER:** Did you land just Marines or just Army or both?

**PALMER:** We landed both.

**INTERVIEWER:** How did you feel about the Japanese you were fighting?

**PALMER:** We had a job to do and they were our enemy, shooting at us. Our job was to defeat them, so we returned fire. They were just the enemy. It didn't make any difference what was their race or nationality.

**INTERVIEWER:** What was your most memorable experience while in the Coast Guard during World War II?

**PALMER:** The scary times heading into the beach, not knowing if I would be coming back.

**INTERVIEWER:** When the war in the Pacific ended you were still on the *Hunter Liggett*. Where did they send you to be discharged?

**PALMER:** To San Francisco.

**INTERVIEWER:** What day were you discharged?

**PALMER:** On October 18, 1945. That very day I called my mother in Illinois and told her I wouldn't be coming home, except to visit. I was going to stay in California because of its good weather.

**INTERVIEWER:** After you got out of the Coast Guard you stayed in California. What did you do?

**PALMER:** I joined the Oakland Fire Department.

**INTERVIEWER:** What comments, impressions, or thoughts would you like to share? Any areas that I have missed and that you think are important for future generations to know?

**PALMER:** I enjoyed my time in the Coast Guard very much. I am proud that I could do my share during World War II.

**INTERVIEWER:** Thank you.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

