

# James “Jim” P. Haston

By MARY DRENNON Special to the Tribune-Herald (Waco, Texas)

The horrors of war are beyond description, said Robinson resident James P. “Jim” Haston. For this reason, the Temple native doesn’t talk about what he saw or did in combat. All he will say is that he served in three operations during World War II in the U.S. Navy in the Commander, South Pacific Force and Area under the flag of Fleet Admiral William F. “Bull” Halsey.

The former Navy man, who turned 95 on April 14, served in operations in the Northern Solomon Islands and the Gilbert Islands, but he prefers to focus on his more positive memories.

Growing up in the Great Depression in Temple, Haston joined the work force early. He had a service station job after school and also threw newspapers. When he got the chance to drive a cattle truck, he did so. (He’d been driving since he was 11.) He also worked in a mill.

Haston joined the U.S. Navy — even though he had an exemption — and was sworn in in August 1942. “I wanted to do something for my country,” he said.

After boot camp in San Diego, he left the States in February 1943 aboard what had been a French luxury liner. “But there wasn’t much luxury left,” Haston said. To make matters worse, his bunk was in the bow of the ship, just behind the compartment that housed the anchor chain, which clattered continuously.

The ship carried 4,000 men who didn’t know where they were going. For the first few days out, it was escorted by a blimp. After 48 hours, however, the blimp returned to land and the ship and its crew were all alone. Word came that they were headed for New Caledonia. Haston found out later they had gone south to cross the equator to avoid Japanese submarines and then went west, where they stopped for three days in New Hebrides. Though there was no ceremony for those crossing the equator for the first time, his “Shellback” certificate was signed by Halsey himself.

## First brush with danger

As they left, Haston said all hell broke loose when they were hit by a typhoon with 40-foot swells. It was an unnerving experience for him.

Arriving in New Caledonia, Haston was among a work detail on a ship in dry dock. That’s when he discovered he was part of COSMOPAC, though at the time, the crew was unsure what that meant. The headquarters was in Nouméa, and Haston was assigned as a driver on the line, carrying officers where they needed to go, including Halsey himself at least twice.

He soon made assistant dispatcher of vehicles and boats, and later, chief dispatcher.

## Lateral move, better job

Haston was assigned to pick up Vice Admiral John Henry Newton, who eventually persuaded Haston to join him instead of the Third Fleet. After serving with Halsey for 19 months, he went to work for Newton, whom he referred to “his admiral.”

“Admiral Halsey was a man you would follow to the end of the world,” Haston said. “Admiral Newton was great, too.”

In February 1945, Newton was assigned to Commander in Chief Pacific Headquarters at Pearl Harbor. Haston went with him. He said he ate the same food as Newton and stayed in the back of his house.

In the meantime, Newton decided he didn’t like the fact that Haston was a 1st carpenter’s mate and urged him to go to school. He was promoted to 1st class coxswain, then 2nd class boatswain mate and, finally, 1st class boatswain mate. Newton offered to get him into officer’s candidate school if he would stay in the Navy, but Haston declined. He was discharged in October 1945.

Haston came home and went back to the mill, where he worked from some 30 years. Later, he took a second job at a dairy cattle auction business, which covered seven states. He was extremely busy. When his mom was in a nursing home, he met a woman that worked there, and in 1975, he married Joyce Kurtz; they’re still together. They honeymooned in Searcy, Arkansas, as Haston was working and couldn’t take time off. In 1978, he retired for good.

Today, Haston is happy that he served during the war. “There were good times and bad times,” he said. “If I had to do it again, I would.”

He says he’s no hero. “There were three heroes in World War II: The ones who gave their lives, the ones who came back crippled and scarred, and the civilians back home that sacrificed and built our war machinery.”