

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR  
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CENTER FOR PACIFIC WAR STUDIES  
Fredericksburg, TX 78624

Interview with

WILLIAM F. McDOWELL  
U. S. NAVY

## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WILLIAM F. MC DOWELL

My name is Brainerd Parrish and we're taking the oral history of William McDowell and it is September 19, 2004, and we're in the high school of the Fredericksburg High School. The oral history is for the use of the National Museum of the Pacific War to preserve the history of the Museum. As I said, we certainly thank you for agreeing to this oral history.

Can you tell us when and where you were born?

MR. McDOWELL: I was born in Bristol, South Dakota, in 1921.

MR. PARRISH: What were your parents named?

MR. McDOWELL: Dad's name was Samuel W., Mother's name was Encie.

MR. PARRISH: Where were they from originally?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, Dad was born and raised in eastern South Dakota and my Mother I'm not sure whether she was born in South Dakota or northern Minnesota because the family was kind of split between Dade County, South Dakota, and northern Minnesota, Park Rapid. Part of the family was in International Falls.

MR. PARRISH: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes, I had two brothers and two sisters.

MR. PARRISH: Where are any of them surviving?

MR. McDOWELL: I have one brother that's in Phoenix and two sisters, one's in Iowa and one's in Brookings, South Dakota.

MR. PARRISH: Where did you go to high school?

MR. McDOWELL: I went to high school in Clark and Elton, South Dakota.

MR. PARRISH: When did you graduate from high school?

MR. McDOWELL: 1941.

MR. PARRISH: Do you recall where you were when Pearl Harbor happened?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes, I was out in the north of Brookings working on weekends wiring school house for lights and stuff. That's when REA first came to that territory and I was working at the time for a gentleman that owned a radio shop and appliance store in Brookings, so the three of us were out there that Sunday doing the wiring on the schoolhouse loft. The store didn't have to be open and there were no kids around.

MR. PARRISH: What was your impression when you heard about it?

MR. McDOWELL: Heard about what?

MR. PARRISH: Pearl Harbor.

MR. McDOWELL: Oh, well, it certainly was a shock. I didn't have any serious thoughts of horror or major, I can't come up with the right word but that's alright.

MR. PARRISH: When did you join the navy?

MR. McDOWELL: I enlisted on Navy Day, October 27<sup>th</sup>, '42.

MR. PARRISH: And where did you go for your training?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, the first part of the training I went to Bremerton Navy Yard Receiving Station. I was there for about a month or six weeks and then I was put into boot camp. They had a small boot camp there that they operated and before I had the first week done I found my name posted for transfer to Chicago Naval Receiving Station, Chicago.

MR. PARRISH: What did you do in Chicago? What sort of training did you have?

MR. McDOWELL: Basically it was a refresher course. What the navy had done at that time had gone out and contacted a lot of people that were looking for recruits and particularly some with training. When I signed up, first thing I did was a little negotiating because at that time I was working for the army port of embarkation. The coast guard was also around looking for recruits and so I had a chance to kind of try them all out and the navy offered me the best deal from two standpoints; one, the best rate of second class PO but also the opportunity for continuing education. I was involved in electronics. At the time I owned a radio shop in partnership with my dad and repair shop. He fixed cars and tractors and trucks and anything else that once ran.

MR. PARRISH: What was your position or job in the navy?

MR. McDOWELL: At the end I was the chief radio technician, which is basically now known as the electronic technician, at the time I got out of service.

MR. PARRISH: Where did you go from Chicago?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, went to four weeks of school there at the armory on Lake Michigan, the Chicago Armory. That was called a refresher course. Then from there we had a secondary course and this started getting into more detail. The first four weeks was just kind of seeing what they had to work with as much as anything. Then from there I was able to negotiate assignment to the Naval Research Lab for the next phase because they were bringing in people for electronic work from all over and all kinds of experience. This refresher course was to see if you could add and subtract and a few things like that and most people made it but the ones that didn't had something hanging over their heads. The standard thing there was if you flunked out of here you went to the ampits(?) It was a powerful incentive.

MR. PARRISH: What did you think of your training? Did you think you were trained properly?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, I felt that I got the meat out of a four-year college engineering course. Not just that but the whole course of training because the program at the Research Lab was actually in three phases. One was the general radio engineering and things of that type, designing antennas, building circuits and things of that type and the second part of it was more of the same advanced but we began to get into some of the navy equipment and stuff like that. In fact, the students all wound up with some kind of a job to do at the laboratory because the school was just getting fed up, expanding I think is probably a better term. I wound up putting in my daily stint at the high frequency transmitter lab and what they were doing then was installing one of those big transmitters. I can't remember the nomenclature of it but it was a good sized transmitter, big amplidone-type, not amplidine, I stumbled on that one but it was motor generators that supplied the power for it. I suppose a lot of the equipment later on used transformers and rectifiers and stuff like that for getting the high voltage that was needed.

MR. PARRISH: And where did go after that?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, that was just while I was in that particular phase. Of course, I stayed through until I finished there and I went to radar and sonar school there.

MR. PARRISH: Where was the research lab that you went to?

MR. McDOWELL: This was in Washington, D. C., actually the address was Anacosta. Across the parade ground was the Naval Research Laboratory where electronics and things of that type.

MR. PARRISH: You went to radar sonar school at the Research Laboratory also?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes.

MR. PARRISH: And you know about how long that took?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, we started getting into it, training I think was seven or eight months altogether, with what I had a short time in Chicago and two or three stints at the Lab program there was broke up there into several parts. The last two months I know was on radar because by that time our security clearances come through so we could get behind the door and get our hands on the equipment because we actually studied on equipment there at the school. Our future assignments were geared to class standings and they put a great deal in store of class standings. I guess it was how fast you could observe that stuff . There were four of us that went up there from Chicago and we kind of stuck together as a group. One of the fellows had been to college and so he got commissioned before we were very far down the line so we kind of lost him. The big contest there was between this group from Chicago and the group that had stayed on longer. That reminds me, now I know where I am on the times. The refresher course in Chicago was four weeks, the primary school was another twelve weeks and then they were up for reassignment. That's all they had there in Chicago was that far and you could ask for where you wanted to go. A lot of this intermediate training was being done at the colleges around the country and you could ask for your choice of assignment but your chances of getting it were based on class standings. That was a powerful incentive. Of course the four of us coming in from Chicago were not supposed to be the top of the crop anyway so they developed a little competition there. So we started picking off the upper swat numbers and by the end of the next to last week, I was up at number two. So that was a push to make that number one the next one because if as you watch the classes

ahead of you, you had assignments. The class standing made a big difference in where they went, also I noticed that one or two of them pulled out of each class as lab assistants to work in the laboratory itself. My goal the first part of the time there in D. C. was Anacosta to get over in the laboratory because I knew there was education to be had over there. It was a bit of a disappointment when that promotion list came, not promotion list but the assignment list came out. I made my number one standing in the class, the only thing is the next ten got laboratory assignments.

MR. PARRISH: What was your assignment?

MR. McDOWELL: I was assigned to a new destroyer being built at Boston. After I got into it I found out it was being outfitted as a fighter director ship. It wasn't long before I got used to the idea and began to see opportunities there. I was transferred up there and with the rest of the pre-commissioning details they had there. Captain Cooper was already aboard. Of course, he had an interview with me at the time and I was real happy to find that I had been assigned to a ship with a skipper who knew what radar was.

MR. PARRISH: So you were there when they built the ship.

MR. McDOWELL: When they finished it. It was being built. It was a new ship went out on trial run, went out one trip for an overnight and the next time we went up for a run up to Maine and back. I always remember that trip to Maine because the commissary steward made a trip over to the beach and came back with a whole whale boat full of lobsters. And we had lobster. That time I was down in crew's quarters, crew's messes are big long tables that seat about eight people. Not too many of us land lovers liked lobster. I don't know whether I just liked it or I developed a sudden taste for it but I wound up with four whole lobsters for a meal.

MR. PARRISH: How do you pronounce the name of the ship that you were on?

MR. McDOWELL: BANYON, USS BANYON.

MR. PARRISH: Where did you go from Boston?

MR. McDOWELL: From Boston we went on a shake down cruise to Bermuda and that was about four to six weeks. I don't remember the exact time but it was one to check out the ship, check the operation of it. We had a little problem with getting to Bermuda. The exec had a little problem with the radio direction finder, but I'm not sure it was the direction finder or the exec, but anyway we wound up a hundred miles the other side of Bermuda. There was never a dull moment.

MR. PARRISH: What was your job on the ship?

MR. McDOWELL: I was in charge of radar maintenance. We had an authorization for five techs but the navy never quite got to where they were producing enough techs so we could get our quota. After I had been there awhile they brought in the operating crew just the night before commissioning. Incidentally it was commissioned in December of '43. There was a second class radio tech in that group but he didn't stay with us too long, transferred off pretty fast. Towards the end of the war there was another tech assigned then but things were pretty well reduced to a routine by then. Our Bermuda shake-down run was pretty uneventful. The one thing we did do there, when we went back to Boston they put us on a high speed run. They're talking today about how long you can sustain high speed. Of course, I realize we were in cold water and that makes a difference, a big difference in how long you can run and how fast you can run those turbines. They decided we made that trip in thirty-seven something knots, as I remember, and I decided



we still had some steam left. So we went back to Boston and they changed the reduction gears so we could get a little more but we never was short speed and our skippers used it.

MR. PARRISH: You said your first skipper was a commander Captain Cooper?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes. This was basically his ship that he was seeing outfit. He had been in the North Atlantic and related to me that experience with radar so it made things easy. His charge to me was keep it running and if you need anything and don't feel you're getting support, come see me. And that proved handy more than once. Let's skip ahead a little bit, when we got out to the Pacific we were working out of supply ships and our store keepers would go over and sometimes they would come back with what I needed for parts and what I didn't. Our surface search radar had four tubes in it about the size of that water bottle and they had to be balanced, couldn't have one that was half weak in the strings, they had to pull together. So one thing happened is I managed to get a good supply of them before we left the yard because the set didn't come with very many spares, don't remember how many it was maybe four, eight at the most. I don't remember how many we had there but the thing is by the time we left the yard I had eight sets. I never ran out of tubes.

MR. PARRISH: Where did you go after the shake-down cruise in Boston? What happened next?

MR. McDOWELL: We went back to Boston they changed those reduction gears and we let out for Philadelphia. We went down there and picked up a baby flat top. I think Banon was the Captain of the WEST VIRGINIA and he was killed at Pearl Harbor. His widow participated in our ship's reunions for several years.

MR. PARRISH: So you're at Philadelphia and you picked up a small carrier, one of the light carriers.

MR. McDOWELL: One of the light carriers and escorted that around through the Canal up to San Diego.

MR. PARRISH: What was your impression of going through the Panama Canal?

MR. McDOWELL: A good sized ditch with detente. I studied a lot of those kinds of things before hand.

MR. PARRISH: So then you went to San Diego?

MR. McDOWELL: Then we went to San Diego and left the carrier there and I don't remember what kind of a group we went in to Hawaii. Once we got to Hawaii I went on into additional light fire training, depth charges and stuff like that. In fact, we had one credible contact with a submarine while we were out one day doing something, I don't remember just what. So we got a start early.

MR. PARRISH: Was it a friendly submarine or enemy submarine?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, we never saw it.

MR. PARRISH: Was this while you were testing your depth charges?

MR. McDOWELL: Testing underwater sound equipment.

MR. PARRISH: How long did you stay in Hawaii?

MR. McDOWELL: Probably there six weeks and from there one of the things we were doing was getting ready to go on an operation. Our first operation was Saipan.

MR. PARRISH: What was your destroyer's duty at Saipan?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, we had multiple task assignment. We went in with the bombardment group and with that it was fleet protection. Of course, whenever we were

traveling with the convoy we were always out on the edge somewhere with anti-submarine detection and radar detection. Of course, that didn't come in particularly high use until we got over into the islands but it was there that things began to take shape. At Saipan we did picket duty during the day and night and generally changed ships on the picket stations in the daytime, sometimes it was morning, sometimes it was afternoon, but during daylight. When we weren't on picket station we were in doing protection with the landing operation, firing star shells for the beach to keep things lit up or doing bombardments in support of the troops ashore, pretty much an all-around operation.

MR. PARRISH: Did you participate at all in that great Marianas turkey shoot or were you near there?

MR. McDOWELL: No, we didn't get in on that one. We were busy down in the Philippines that time.

MR. PARRISH: Then after Saipan, were you supporting the landing and everything? Where did you go next?

MR. McDOWELL: Tinian, next door. We went through the same procedure there on Tinian and then we went from there back to, don't know where we went back to, one of the other bases out there.

MR. PARRISH: You went back to some base?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes, went back to where our supply ships were and from there spent about a week supplies and repair and formed up with a bombardment group and went out and did the same thing over again. We kind of did that all the way across the Pacific.

MR. PARRISH: Did you have any recreation stops?

MR. McDOWELL: About nine months after I was on there we had a stop one afternoon, got a chance to go over to a sandbar with a couple of palm trees on it and two bottles of warm beer per man, two cans of warm beer. Needless to say just getting out and walking around was the big benefit of that little foray. I don't remember what I traded my beer off for but it was a high demand for it. I wasn't drinking beer at that time, I was a clean kid yet.

MR. PARRISH: After you refitted, after Saipan, where did you go next?

MR. McDOWELL: Bataan.

MR. PARRISH: Was the carrier BATAAN?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes. I knew that sounded familiar when it came up in the meetings last couple of days, Part of the PHILADELPHIA 3 March escorting the BATAAN CDL29 to the Pacific, arrived Pearl Harbor 22 March. We actually stopped at San Diego there, too. I think we left the BATAAN there. March trained and patrolled the Hawaiian waters until 24 May moving westward she served as fire director and radar picket ship during Saipan seizure, 15-24 June Tinian occupation, you can probably read this just as well as I am. If you have a copying machine that would be...

MR. PARRISH: Oh, I'm sorry. I think we got. So after the Tinian occupation, were your duties on the destroyer basically the same?

MR. McDOWELL: Basically the same all the way through the campaign, just some places were more interesting than others.

MR. PARRISH: What fleet were you attached to? Were you part of Halsey's Third fleet or part of Kincaid's Seventh fleet?

MR. McDOWELL: We got reassigned so many times I'm having trouble knowing which one we were when. It might be in here.

MR. PARRISH: What were your duties after Palalu, you went to the Leyte Gulf? What were your duties there?

MR. McDOWELL: Leyte we had a little different operation when we got there. We were there and bombarded the shore, patrolled, provided support at our arrival at Leyte. During our time at Leyte, we had one lieutenant struck by enemy fire, he lost an arm, and this was off the shore. The only other casualty we had, I'll look in this book and tell you just where that happened, but that was at this beer party and he dove off into the lake and hit his head on the coral reef and killed himself. The only other casualty that was significant was one afternoon we were firing at a Jap airplane that had come down through our formation and it was between us and the COLORADO. Our ack ack had secured but the COLORADO didn't secure quite as quick and we got a 40mm in our 40mm nest and we lost one man there and some shrapnel there. That's the only two gunfire experiences we had with the Japanese. Of course we had numerous opportunities with the kamikaze.

MR. PARRISH: At Leyte, were you part of that battle of Terragau Strait?

MR. McDOWELL: Very much so.

MR. PARRISH: What happened there?

MR. McDOWELL: Squadron 56, notice the map they had on the board today there, shows Squadron 56 in the upper part of that. We had completed the initial bombardment and we were supporting troops ashore. The big reason for taking these islands was to neutralize them and the other one was for air runways. So our objective there at Leyte

was twofold, one to provide stepping stone to the Philippines but we kind of skipped ahead here a little bit. We had ??? in between Saipan and Tinian and before we went to...

MR. PARRISH: So you were part of Destroyer Squadron 56.

MR. McDOWELL: We had been part of 56 from the beginning but this is the first time we had been using that type of an operation. Before that we did strictly bombardment and radar picket and shore bombardment, shore illumination, mail runs.

MR. PARRISH: What was your mission there at the battle of Surigao Strait?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, our mission at Leyte was to help make a successful landing on Leyte and capture the facilities for the army. The battle of Leyte Gulf was something that just happened while we were there. One thing they discussed the other day was the fact that the knowledge of the coming of the Japanese fleet through the Strait there. We had knowledge of that at least a day, at least 24 hours before it happened. I didn't skip in on the first part of these kind of things because it wasn't part of my job. I was in the CIC regularly and having had a pretty high security clearance at the time, there wasn't too much I didn't find out one time or another. We had information early in the day that this fleet was coming up through the Strait. We had information from the Coast Watchers and the PT Boat Squadron which was down further. So the plan, I can't say who developed the plan, but anyway we were up there. We had a couple of battleships and the older battleships bombardment group. I think there was a couple of cruisers with us and I think three squadrons of destroyers.

MR. PARRISH: Were you in the east or the central or the west?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, this was more in the southern or eastern part of the deal but we had Squadron 56 and 54 and 24 all involved before it was over with. The number of ships was pretty well documented in here.

MR. PARRISH: Do you recall seeing any of the Japanese ships?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes, what happened was getting ready for the Japanese visit to us the plan was they would act as usual and not let anybody know we knew they were coming, not get excited, not tip our hand. The plan that was devised was it all settled down for the night and as soon as it got dark then we'd make our move because all our ships had good radar coverage and the Japs weren't known for their radar at that time. So as soon as it got night, all except a couple of them, the screening ships there and heavy fighter power pulled anchor and moved down into Surigao Strait took up positions along the shore on both sides and sat there and listened to the radio reports until they come to us. We were one of the first ones designated to go out and don't welcome as best we could. This was long after midnight before we started anything and our assignment was to make a torpedo run and then retire and let the capital ships have at 'em. So we went out and made our first run when they got within range. We fired our first spread of torpedoes about 10,000 yards and kept on going in, as soon as we knew we weren't going to run into our own torpedoes, and followed them on in and laid a second barrage at about 7,000 yards. Of course, at that time we were making speed and so we were in to about 4,000 yards before we got turned around. As soon as we got turned around and got back out of there then we went back and sat over alongshore and sat there and watched the fireworks.

MR. PARRISH: Do you know if any of your torpedoes hit the target?

MR. McDOWELL: We got credit for the hit on the battleship as it was listed later on as assist but I don't think we actually sunk it but we inflicted some damage. Then as daylight came we were one of the ones that were designated after the Japanese got turned around and getting out of there. It was all damaged, some of them sunk and some of them managed to get away. That's pretty well documented in here, too, probably better than my memory. We were to go follow them down through the Strait there because there was a destroyer down there that was burning and our mission now was to go down and keep any of them from escaping and the other one was to take prisoners. By the time we got down there the ship we were particularly interested in was not going any place. The other two or three that were there that got away were out of range besides the airplanes was taking care of them, by that time it was daylight. The Japanese that we went down tried to take prisoners wouldn't have anything of us. They were in the water but wouldn't come up where we could haul them on to the ship. About that time we got a change in orders. That was to get back up to the other end of the Strait there because the group that was coming through the central was bearing down. By the time we got back out (Side 2). We didn't get any, they didn't want to cooperate and we didn't have time to mess around trying to take them by force.

MR. PARRISH: So you had to high tail it back?

MR. McDOWELL: We had to high tail it back to see what we could do in the way of covering the landing at least. We left that pretty bare when we went down to meet them. I think we gave them a pretty good welcome.

MR. PARRISH: And then what happened after that?



MR. McPARRISH: Well, things pretty well settled down after that. It was all over in a matter of a day or so.

MR. PARRISH: So looks like your ship kind of also participated in the Philippine landings at Mindoro.

MR. McDOWELL: Yes.

MR. PARRISH: You supported the Iwo Jima invasion?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes, we went to Leyte and Mindoro and Luzon. Luzon was where we ran into Tacoma.

MR. PARRISH: What was that like going into a typhoon?

MR. McDOWELL: It was rough, no other way of putting it. We spent seven days in south of China Sea in that typhoon. You could hardly walk around and nobody at the top deck, well, maybe a little bit because destroyer being what it was to get to the engine room and the after bunk room in a few places like that they had to get outside. We had pretty good protection that way. We had built a solid wall across the back of the forward super structure and doors set at an angle so the waves would come up on the deck and run down the deck and then hit that bulkhead there and drain off into the sea. Then we had a solid protector back for hallways back down the side so it didn't wash up onto the ship. We had to get back quite a ways, almost back two-thirds of the length of the ship, before you didn't have a bulkhead along the other side. Then the very back part of it was the cable and we had one set of cables there on the ??? board and then inside of that we had another set of stanchions with cable on inner and outer lifelines.

MR. PARRISH: Where was your position located on the ship, the radar?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, my battle station was the radar maintenance room which was just ahead of the based mast on the main deck.

MR. PARRISH: When did you first observe your first kamikaze?

MR. McDOWELL: We started seeing kamikazes in the Marianas but they were few and far between. They got more numerous as we went along. Iwo Jima we had quite a few of them there and, of course, they finally figured out what we were doing or something by the time we got to Okinawa because they zeroed in on us those picket stations.

MR. PARRISH: Did a kamikaze ever hit your ship?

MR. McDOWELL: Yes, we had two incidents that were kamikazes.

MR. PARRISH: What happened in those incidents?

MR. McDOWELL: One I'll speak of was an afternoon, a sunny afternoon but a bogey showed up at high altitude. I don't remember if we were at general quarters, if we weren't we were pretty quickly. Our antiaircraft guns started firing and they just weren't blowing him apart. So skipper put the deck watchers up there and the bridge watchers on watching, that was the orders. As soon as he started tipping over into his dive let him know. Sure enough we didn't get him blown apart and he started to make his dive so the skipper ordered flank speed ahead on one engine. We were in general quarters, I remember that now, because we had full power available. Flank speed ahead on one engine and emergency astern on the other and full rudder. Talk about shake rattle and roll, and pretty quick he came down just about where he was aiming except what he was aiming for wasn't there anymore. We'd turned it a little bit. He went across just over number one stack but he was enough out of control that he left a section of wing in number one stack. We steamed for quite awhile with that, I think there is a picture of that

in here, too. Went across and left some junk in the whale boat (Lots of of crackling from microphone, transcriber could not understand several words) number 2stack and the back of the bridge and also up to the mast, the ??? , and he clipped a couple of those antennas. The first thing I did, I saw that because my alley was right out within ten feet of my duties G2 station. Their standard aiming for smaller vessels particularly was the base of the mast and there's a companion way between the super structure and part of the cooling fans some of them above deck structures right through behind the mast. My G2 station was just the bulkhead in front of that. So I heard racket out there and I went out to see what was going on. The first thing I did I made radio shack and pulled the switches on the big transmitters. The antenna was laying on the deck and we were the damage control party out there..

MR. PARRISH: What was the other second incident that you encountered a kamikaze?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, the second is one day we were firing bogies, we were trying to use up our transgressor station there. They were meeting back there but I don't remember the outcome of that particular fire fight there. They were ??? and number one and number two guns was both turned around into the ???. The first class boswain mate we had there, McClerk, was the gun captain on number one. He opened the hatch up on the top and stuck his head up out there to see what was going on. Lo, and behold, there was one bearing down on us just off the water on the port ??? and so rather than try to get the main battery in and follow procedures they had in this ??? what they called suicide and what this thing would basically do the same thing make ??? since it was manual. He just pulled thing out and put it on him and put one shot right in the middle of his propeller and that was the last thing anybody seen of him. In fact, he got through inquiry

of why he broke lock, took a little while to substantiate his position. The bridge watch seen what happened, there weren't very many people that seen what happened.

MR. PARRISH: Did the plane miss?

MR. McDOWELL: No, it didn't miss, it went to the bottom. He put one shot right straight in the propeller of that thing.

MR. PARRISH: When you were in the Iwo Jima invasion, did you observe the battleships firing on the islands before the invasion?

MR. McDOWELL: Oh, yes, we were part of that squadron.

MR. PARRISH: What was that like?

MR. McDOWELL: It was impressive I guess the best way to describe it. Talk about impressive, going back a ways, on the Leyte invasion we sat off to the side then and shot our fish. We didn't have anymore heavy stuff we could add to the foray so we basically had a grandstand seat. We could see the tracers coming both from our ships and the Japanese ships. We could see the Japanese ships coming up and turning as they stagger in their shows, never thought too much about that thing until we were out on deck. I mean we were completely out of the action being off to the sides but that was the first time I really got my sugars on that because watching those star shells and lo, and behold, one come up directly astern of us, sat up there. I began to get nervous about that because it takes a few seconds for those things to travel. A tracer went out, it was numerous anxious minutes there; decided it didn't have our name on it.

MR. PARRISH: What was your most frightening experience when you were serving in the navy?

MR. McDOWELL: I think that was it.

MR. PARRISH: What was your most humorous? Can you think of a humorous incident when you were in the....

MR. McDOWELL: No, there wasn't much to be had for humor.

MR. PARRISH: Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose?

MR. McDOWELL: Oh, yes. We laughed at her pretty much. They put her on the squak box there, you could hear it all over the ship, laughed at her. She had a spot of action several times and there is some comments about that in here, too.

MR. PARRISH: So after Iwo Jima you went to when they invaded Okinawa?

MR. McDOWELL: Okinawa was the next one.

MR. PARRISH: Then you went to Japan?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, after Okinawa, first thing is we went loaded for bear when we went to Okinawa. We had a humongous fleet, I wouldn't attempt to tell you how many ships were in it; it isn't in here. We did go up there with forty primary fighter director ships and only had twenty that had capability. They weren't fully certified ships but they were getting their range pretty often. To digress a minute, we'd been doing picket duties and dodging aircraft for quite a few months before we got there and the skipper pretty well figured out how to shamle 'em. One of the things, we always went to general quarters an hour before sun rises and an hour before sunset. When we secured depended on how active things were but generally an hour after sun went down we come off. His standard operating procedure with general quarters was light all four boilers, light all four super heaters, and maintain at least twenty-five knots. With that type of steam flow he had enough there if he kicked that thing the gear would literally jump. We were fast. When we came back from Bermuda we were in a speed trap. I think I mentioned

something about that earlier, and speeded us up a little bit more. So for a short distance we could really sprint. After awhile then we went into this business we started overloading the condensers. You couldn't pull it over rpms but on this deal we had the speed. We could turn it enough so that when, I think the pilot was dead by that time otherwise he would have done a little better correction, but he just went that close, he wasn't even close, he clipped us. This was one of several times that speed was a help to us. Our destroyers are kind of known for being fast anyway. In fact, our second skipper Captain Holmes, his nickname was "flank speed Holmes."

MR. PARRISH: About when did you get your second skipper?

MR. McDOWELL: It was about half way through, June 21, '41 when Banyan died.

MR. PARRISH: So your second skipper was with the ship during the battle of Leyte Gulf and Okinawa.

MR. McDOWELL: Yes.

MR. PARRISH: Do you recall hearing about the dropping of the atomic bomb?

MR. McDOWELL: Oh, yes.

MR. PARRISH: Where were you then?

MR. McDOWELL: We were up in the Aleutians. What had happened, we went from Luzon up to Aideck and our purpose up there, no, we didn't go directly there. We pulled back and went back to Saipan after Philippines. Then we went to Aideck I think our whole squadron was going up there. Our mission then was to take a squadron of jeep carriers off northern Japan to keep the sea lanes open to Russia because Russia was about to put their oar in the water. Needless to say I was real tickled when I found out that they weren't going to do that. They threw in the towel before we got there but by the time we

got to Aideck. I think we were in Guam, getting back to your question. I think we were in Guam when they dropped the A-bomb.

MR. PARRISH: Then where did you go from there?

MR. McDOWELL: Then from there we went to Omanada(?). That was to be our destination when we went to Aidack and part of our trip to Aidack was to get a little marine training and so forth because we were going over there with the idea of monitoring the surrender. We were at Hampf, took awhile to get people out there to take care of all of that kind of duty. We went on up to Omanada and we stuck around there from the ninth to the twenty-sixth of September. That's the reason why it's a lot easier to get here, just dig a hole to the south.

MR. PARRISH: When did you go to be decommissioned, or what happened next?

MR. McDOWELL: We went back from there to Saipan as I remember. Yes, at the end of the war we were in Saipan. Then we went back to, we weren't at Saipan we were at Guam. We went from there back to San Diego. I think we stopped at Pearl on the way back, too, but I don't remember for sure. I could dig it out of here but...

MR. PARRISH: When was your enlistment up, was the ship decommissioned before you got out of the navy?

MR. PARRISH: Well, no, I was on a reserve assignment, navy reserve actually, basically I think it was a two-year deal, if I remember right, but everybody was duration anyway at that time. Age didn't mean much. We went back to San Diego and then from there to Bremerton for decommissioning overhaul. In the meantime I had been put up for commission and so when we basically got tied up, a few housekeeping things taken care of, I had orders to go to San Francisco. By the time I got to San Francisco they decided I

hadn't had any leave for a couple of years and maybe it was time, well, not quite that long, but it had been over a year. So I got thirty days leave out of there and report back into the navy receiving office in Minneapolis. I managed to get a ten-day extension to that so I got married before I went back. When I got to Minneapolis or St. Paul, I'm not sure which now, they had a group to go to the Great Lakes. So I even got to Great Lakes before I got out. I got my discharge at Great Lakes.

MR. PARRISH: What was your rank when you were discharged?

MR. McDOWELL: CRT.

MR. PARRISH: Did you have any difficulty transitioning back to civilian life?

MR. McDOWELL: No. I mentioned earlier I was in partnership with my dad in shop, went back to shop.

MR. PARRISH: What medals did you receive while in service?

MR. McDOWELL: You know, I can't tell you that. I've got some paper work at home. The one medal that (so much rattling of paper and crackling from mike, transcriber missed several sentences) Kamikazes survivors I've been pushing for. That's a recognition and honor for not just the destroyer people but for all the ones that come under kamikaze attack.

MR. PARRISH: Is there anything else you want to add?

MR. McDOWELL: Well, let me think on that. Went to Pearl, I remember that was twenty-three months of sea duty.

MR. PARRISH: Do you remember when you first crossed the equator?

MR. McDOWELL: No, but I've got a certificate to prove it. In fact, I can probably even come up with the date here.



MR. PARRISH: What was the getting your mail like?

MR. McDONNELL: Sometimes it was every three or four days and sometimes it was three or four weeks, sometimes it was fairly fresh and sometimes it was a month old. We were moving a lot. They did put a lot of effort in the mail service. We got our mail generally after we went up and made a landing. We'd get our mail generally three or four days after that and then it would be fairly regular for awhile. This has got all the sections of the crew in groups and someplace in here they are all listed by name, too.

MR. PARRISH: Well, I want to really thank you for giving this oral history, Mr. McDOWELL.

Transcribed January 18, 2010, by Eunice Gary.