

INTERVIEW OF EVERETT IKE McKAY--Tape No. 1805

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Transcriber: Larry Rabalais --8/6/13

This is Ed Metzler, today it is April 19, 2007, I am interviewing Mr. Everett Ike McKay located in Laramie, Wyoming., by telephone. I am located in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the Center of Pacific War Studies, which is the archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Historical Commission for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

ED: Let me start out Ike by thanking you for spending the time today to share your experiences with us to add to our archives and I'd like to get you started if I could, by just introducing yourself, when you were born and a little bit about your early family life and the like.

McKay: OK, yes, my home was originally in North Dakota and probably is about as far from both oceans as one could get. I enlisted in the Navy and anyway that was my choice, I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I was born in 1919, on December 13, so I've had several birthdays on Friday the 13th, and that's always been my lucky day Instead of what they say about Friday the 13th, anyway my folks were successful farmers. I come from a large family of 8, seven boys and one girl.

Are you the oldest?

No, I'm way down the line, I'm third from the bottom. The oldest boy was born in 1910 and the youngest boy in 1926, and I was born in 1919, so I'm third from the bottom. They had a real family, whose father was a progressive farmer, and he had one of the few modern homes in North Dakota. And running water, electric lights all back in 1919 which is very unusual. So we, our family were hard working, my Dad and Mother taught us to work, anyway seems like we were always busy, anyway I went at the time of WW 2, when war was declared, I was home on the farm, I was attending a State Teachers College, my intention was to be a teacher and I was home that Sunday afternoon when the Japs attacked Pearl Harbor.

So what was your family's reaction to that when they heard that?

They were horrified. Because there was a family of seven boys, And to me it means the idea was with that many boys and a girl, some of them were going to have to end up in the service, of course I think you had a flow of patriotism seemed to be everywhere. I went On Sunday afternoon I went back to school, I was a senior there. I had all the intentions of dropping school and joining the Army or Navy or something, the patriotism just , so instead of joining the Army good sense prevailed, and I was involved with the gal whose been my wife for 63 years, and so I talked to my parents, I wanted to join the Air Force, but ended up with my wife and my parents said please not the Air Force seemed to be the thing I should do but.....

What did they have against the Army Air Corps?

I think it was just the fact that they thought I was going to fly somewhere in an unknown entity, the Air Corps was rather new at the time , so they all knew the Navy , so I chose the Navy., and I had , I was so close to my degree, I had a title, school teacher, I decided I wanted to be a teacher so I went to a teacher's college, I had some athletic ability, I went to my coach and I got a little old scholarship That helped me pay my way to school and play a little basketball With the State Teachers College outfit. So, I was a senior when this happened in '43, I joined the Navy , I ended up being drafted , because I was the right age, I went down to the draft board and asked how soon, they said you maybe have two weeks before you'll be drafted, so there had to be something better than that, so that's when I decided to join the Navy after talking to my folks, and I, there was a V-7 program coming out and it sounded good so that's when I enrolled in the V-7 program and

And what was that?

It was a program that when if you finished school got your degree, you would be called in at the convenience of the Navy to attend Midshipman school , the Midshipman School was in Chicago, Illinois, At Northwestern, so as a senior I was waiting, in the meantime I took a few courses that I thought would serve me well my math wasn't

always the greatest, so I had to take some trigonometry, geometry, some of those courses that may be of benefit, once I went into the V-7 program, it was recommended by the guy in charge of recruiting. So, actually, I got called into the service, I sat around waiting, I joined the U.S Naval Reserve, I waited until January 1, 1943, they finally called me and sent me to Chicago. At Northwestern University, and there we were given a very rigid course we were known as 90 day wonders,

I've heard of the 90 day wonders-----

I was one of those, and I was called in with 7 others from the same college I was attending , I had my degree, I had not had my graduation formally, but I had my degree, so this was a requirement to enter the V-7 program . And I was scheduled to get out the 31st of March. Midway through the program we were getting all kinds of instruction, including some judo program, a judo expert, I was paired up with this young man and there was an accident, to this day I don't know how it happened, I think you don't have the right hold on me here, he gave it a twist and I heard something break, so that put me back, the doctor came, fixed me up, sent me to Chicago , sent me to Great Lakes for rehabilitation, and of course I was missing out on a very rigid and soft (sic) program for a 90 day wonder.

How far were you into your 90 days?

I was about 6 weeks into it, and so by the time I got my arm straightened out and back in there was nothing they could do but set me back one class, they said you would never catch up and so I was set for the next class, notime at all, there was nothing I could do but wait for the next class that would be coming in. So I, finally the time arrived, I had a real good time in Chicago...

I bet you got to know City pretty well....

I had lots of leave, I had to report in every nite at 4 o'clock,but I was not attending class, I had a ..., Chicago is a good town at that time there was a streetcar, you had all kinds of privileges, servicemen, they were special people at the time, and everywhere,

So that's what happened to me,
I started on the next class, March 1, I guess it was, yes because in,
March, April and May, 90 days, I graduated and got my commission,
on July 1, 1943, I had a short leave at home, my wife, Christine she
was a school teacher also, she came and joined me in Chicago and
on July 1 we were married on the day I got my commission.
Came home with 7 days leave and I had further orders to a
minesweep school, I had never heard of a minesweep school I didn't
know what they were, was sent toVirginia (near Norfolk) to learn
the minesweeping business, reported down there, and you got all the
basics of minesweeping, ship handling, all those things for
preliminary instruction before going aboard.

Now was that your first trip kind of away from the Midwest when you
went to Virginia? That must have been an eye opener for you.

Yes, it was an eye opener for me, and I realized how little I knew
about the ways of the world. That's exactly right. I had learned an
awful lot in the 6 months I had been away from home. I was hoping
when I got my broken arm that I would get to go back for a short time
but there was no leave again I just had to make the best of it. So my
wife and I got married the day I got my commission, she had come
down to Norfolk, Virginia, and there I learned the minesweeping
techniques in a very short time.

Was this instruction on ship, or a classroom or a combination...??

It was a combination. Yes, we would have an orientation, then go out
and do what we were shown to do. And we learned anti-aircraft
instruction, ship handling instruction, we had sonar instruction for
acoustic mines, we knew we would have to learn to sweep 3 different
types of mines, at that time we knew there were acoustic mines, there
were contact mines, and magnetic mines. That's a far cry from what
they swept and ended up with. That was the 3 types of mines that
we knew we were going to be in contact with. So we learned from
ship handling, for it was all book learning up to this time, not
knowing where some aircraft, gunnery instruction, cause we knew
there would be some anti-aircraft, .. Gunnery practice andso,
that was about a 6 month tour of duty down in Virginia in the Norfolk
area,

I got , graduated , was ordered to the West Coast, to San Francisco, to pick up the YMS 293. The YMS was a wooden ship that was wooden because it had a minimum magnetic field surrounding it. And that's why the YMS's were so popular.

You don't want to be attracting a magnetic mine while you are busy sweeping.

That's exactly right. So there was a lot of that type , when I got to the YMS 293, they said it was located in San Francisco, we got to San Francisco, I reported to Naval Command and they said I'm sorry , the 293 is being built up in Bellingham, Washington, and have to get up there aboard the ship and outfit it, check it out, and have a shakedown cruise and whole bit and check it out. So that's how I found the 293 in Bellingham , Washington.

So how far along was she when you got up there?

About a month before it could be shipped out to the San Francisco area. For a shakedown cruise and acceptance by the Navy. So we had to outfit it and accept the crew as they were reporting aboard, and learn the Navy lingo and the whole bit. This was not my first preference. When I had gotten out of school they said where do you want to go and I said want to get on a destroyer or a destroyer escort And go to the European theater for action, I ended up in the South Pacific on a minesweeper.

Why did you want to be on a tin can in the European theater?

I just liked the idea of being, I wanted to get in the action, That part I have to say, its part of my being, I wanted to be part of it.

And you didn't think there was enough action in the South Pacific?

I don't know, I can't explain why I chose the Atlantic situation, except, I am not sure why, but that's what I asked for. But my orders came through for a minesweeper in the South Pacific.

Now the YMS 293, she was given a name I assume?

The YMS's, there were over 500 built, another says, 488, the YMS's never received a name, there were so many of them built, it was an oversight, like all the other ships, there were so many of them, they were trying to give all ships a name but the YMS's were overlooked, they were never given a name, through negligence of someone. Even the smaller AMC, Auxiliary Mine Crafts had names, but the YMS's, the wooden ships, that were rather utility ships, and I tend to brag, we served in so many capacities, on the YMS's that they were,

Supposed, the term YMS means a Yard Mine Sweeper, there was a big yard, they were designed not to be sent overseas, but to sweeping coastal areas, for the mines that the enemy may have laid, but they were such a utility ship, so maneuverable so available, that they did their job, they ended up going overseas they did everything from a mail ship to a convoy escort, to a minesweeping situation, she did all of those, and there were times we laid smoke screens for the big boys. Such as the destroyers, cruisers and battlewagons.

So when did you depart, so you went down to San Francisco for shakedown,.....?

We were accepted by the Navy after our shakedown cruise, we went thru all the maneuvers necessary sweeping, beach.....? The whole thing, we had a short time sweeping the coast of the U.S. down the West Coast down to San Diego area before we got our orders. So our orders then were to go overseas....

So excuse me, were you operating alone or was there a group of these YMS ships ?

On our shakedown we were alone.

OK, so you were alone.

We were alone but then we were joined, when we got our orders on July 1, 1943 to go to Pearl Harbor for further assignment in the South Pacific, we had been accepted by the Navy, for the shakedown cruise, make sure that the ship was seaworthy, and that the crew was capable of operating the ship. Had an officer compliment of 4 and a

crew of 28 to 30. Ship had a length of 136 feet and a beam of about 24 and a half feet in width,
What did you have , a couple of diesels in there or what...?

We had two diesels two 8 cyl. Diesels, 500 h.p. General Motors,
And also, about the same description, for electricity for the ship ,
And for the electro-magnetic mine detector....(cutting out)

The three type of mines we swept, the contact mines, the magnetic mines and the acoustic mines, the magnetic mine was cut off by the,
...we never in the South Pacific, swept a magnetic mine that I know of. No. We swept lots of contact mines, those mines were anchored at various depths, and were exploded by contact we also swept for acoustic mines, but I never , in the time that I spent, swept an acoustic mine, I don't but we swept many contact mines, those mines were anchored at various depths, and the reasons , they were explosives , they had horns on them, the horns were broken on contact, and a fluid would create the contact and they would explode. So that they would be swept by sweepers, as ourselves, and they would cut the anchoring cable, they would be anchored to the ocean bottom, by electro cable up thru the top and in order to sweep the mine you would have to cut the cable. And then they would float. And then they would be destroyed either by gunfire or by a hole shot and they would sink to the bottom when they were allowed to.

So you plinked them with guns on board.

Oh yes,

What were you using??

We were using the 50 cal. Or the 20 Millimeters. That wasn't the
When we swept we swept with about 7 other ships, between 5 and 7 ships, in formation , and then we were followed up either by sub-chasers or another small craft destroying and exploding the swept mines, our job was to sweep them then the sub-chasers or some ship that was following us tag along behind us and they would have the marksmanship to shoot them and by shooting and them and hitting the explosive device. Once in a while we'd have that kill ourselves.

But it would give you a little fun once in a while...

Exactly. Usually we'd have a formation of 5 to 7 ships.

Well lets go back to kind of a chronology here, now you guys were headed to Pearl and you were going alone out to Pearl, from San Francisco,...

Yes, we were accompanied by an LST, we had an LST going with us because it was a 7 day trip, from San Francisco to Honolulu, and we got out there and we had some more training and we werethe course, and they put some gear on us and they called it radar jamming gear, I told you we were a utility ship, they assigned a warrant officer and two seaman who were expert in their job was to take the gear and mount it on our mast and jam the radar of the enemy. Now how it works I have no idea, that was their expertise.

I didn't even know the Japanese really had much radar. I thought..

Yes they did. And the grill for the radar jamming gear was mounted on our mast, these two seaman , one might have been a first class, and one warrant officer who was in charge, of those two guys and their job was to see that the radar jamming gear was working at all times.

Now what was your role on the ship, were you a

I was , you know this is ironic, I was the signal officer, for someone who had never been to sea, we had a skipper who was a marvelous guy, he was an ex football player from Chicago, from the Seattle area, who played professional football, and was a full lieutenant in the Navy and he was the skipper and because of my serial number I was made executive officer. There were other duties also, I was in charge of the minesweeping because I had the minesweeping training down in Virginia, so my job was the minesweeping officer , there all 4 officers aboard we had all ship duties, except duty officer there was the skipper never stood duty, and the 3 other officers aboard, did deck duty and standing watch. I was executive officer in charge of personnel, Also in charge of the minesweeping activities. And some of the officers, we had engineering officers, in charge of all

3 of the diesel engines, and engine maintenance duties.

So you got this radar jamming devices installed. This was going on at Pearl right?

Yes.

So how long were you in Pearl and where did you go to next?

We were headed to the area of Manus and that was our next station. In Manus were part of the invasion at Palau. You've heard of Palau. That was our first activity in engaging in warfare. The first sweeping of enemy mines, so that was our first activity in Palau.

So were you assigned to a particular fleet or particular designation like that?

Yes , we were part of the invasion forces. And the saying "Where the fleet goes you've been." And that always been true , so we always sweep the beaches before the troops went in, and that's the pride for the minesweepers for a long time, "Where the Fleet goes, we've been". is the motto that minesweepers have gone by, that was our first invasion.

So when you were sweeping those beaches, were you taking any gunfire or anything like that? Or did they leave you alone?

Well, no, I must say that on Palau they were so busy , we always had adequate air coverage , and also the big boys, the battlewagons and the cruisers, they never came in until we swept the beaches, and even there I recall, and this is ironic, sweeping close enough to the beaches that we could see the gun ports of the emplacements, and also on Leyte and Okinawa. We could see the gun emplacements, they never opened up and showed their colors and we had enough air coverage that and the big power from the battlewagons and the cruisers that they could see further in on firepower, so we were covered pretty well. I do recall more than one time that they would ,engage us they would shoot over the top of us and I could feel the heat as I stood on deck , the firepower from the battlewagons and the destroyers and the cruisers.

That must raise the hair on the back of your neck.
It did.

I understand you could hear them coming in too.

Oh yes, definitely, Palau was our first engagement . I remember seeing the first mine as we were sweeping we looked over the side, I could see the mine in the harbor , the water was clear, those mines, were not, we had a very shallow draft on our minesweepers, on the wood ships, about 6 feet, a maximum of 8 foot draft, the reason for that was that we swept close to shore, and we were a small ship not hardly worthy , the mines were set for the larger ships, the troop ships that would be coming, and all those type things. That gave us a feeling of security somewhat.

Although I bet you were a bit on pins and needles.

I was, the first time I, saw one, the first time I swept a mine I couldn't believe that was designed for us. So that was Palau, and after that one we were sent down to Manus Island and there the ships were massing for an invasion, and that was where we were in Manus Harbor ,we were tied up, we were getting ready for the next invasion When the Mt. Hood, an ammunition ship was being unloaded and the morning of , we were being outfitted,to get ready to go, four of us were going to go in to shore, pick up supplies and pick up the mail and do the whole bit, and we were headed in ready to leave and it was too early in the morning I said I think I'll wait to take the 10 o'clock liberty boat in instead of going at 8 o'clock. Two of the enlisted men and the pharmacist mate said we'll go in and pick up the supplies that we need I said I'm going to hold up and take the 10 o'clock liberty boat in and I would be in the wardroom and censor the mail. Yes, that was one of the other jobs that was Because there were 3 young men who went in I never saw again, the Mt. Hood blew up, they left, I went down to the wardroom, I heard this massive explosion the Mt. Hood blew up, you've heard all sorts of stories, one of them was that a Japanese sub blew it up, I was just sitting in the wardroom censoring mail, and the darkness like night, I heard an explosion and the ship shuddered,I heard a lot of cussing, I didn't know what it was, I thought we had, the crew was working

cleaning up some of the depth charges , you know, resting, and so forth, so the Mt. Hood blew.....

So how far was your ship away from her? Just a guess?

Less than a quarter of a mile.. We were tied up alongside a repair ship And when I came out it was completely gone, the Mt. Hood was never seen again and I never saw the 3 shipmates I had sent in to shore for supplies. The shipwas hanging in shreds. We were in direct line of the explosion. The Mt. Hood,....we were in the line of fire., We had to be repaired, they sent the carpenters (ie. ship fitters) had to put us all back together, the ship was never the same after that, they got us under way, eventually, we went to Iwo Jima after.....

How long before you were seaworthy again.?

About 6 weeks, that we were held up,

So What was the next step after that tragedy?

Our next stop was outfitted to go to Leyte. Along with quite a few out of my group, we were part of the invasion of Leyte. We rendezvoused with all the rest of the ships, we were all headed for Leyte, another unfortunate situation, on the way to Leyte we ran into a typhoon.

The famous typhoon I all heard so much about. Well tell me about it. What was it like.?

We headed in and doing very well until the storm hit. I think, and this is what was agreed, we were taking on fuel on the YMS 293, and I think that somehow or other the fuel, it was mixed with water in some manner the tanker that had brought the fuel had taken on , on the way back to load up the fuel, they would fill their tanks with water and then go back and pick up the fuel and empty the water and I think they did a bad job of

Getting the ballast out of the tanks.

That's exactly right. And so were heading and the storm hit, and it was pretty rough, the typhoon was, and all of a sudden one engine

quit, the injectors are fouled up, the engine quit and the electricity quit, because the generators quit, we ended up with only one engine running, we were not able to keep up with the convoy. So we had to pull out, and heading into the storm, with one engine, our electricity was gone, one engine dead, one engine running so we did nothing but

You want everything operating when you go into one of those storms.

Absolutely. The injectors fouled, the electricity quit, the engine quit, except one engine continued to head into the storm, with one engine going only, the electricity was gone, the power steering was gone the helm was manually steered by two men, riding out the typhoon. We ran,... electricity was gone, we did nothing but, we were taking water aboard, we thought that it was the end

Yes that's right, because I imagine your bilge pumps not working.

They were not, and the water was into the wardroom and lots of prayers were said.

(Pause to change tape and reconnect to better phone connection)

We sent out an SOS on a battery operated SOS signal, all of a sudden the storm started to let up we knew we had a chance then and we looked up and there was a destroyer way out on the horizon, Of course we had no lights, had no running lights, we had nothing, and morning was breaking, it spotted us and started toward, and was it Jap or American, friend or foe? We got out the signal flags, we had no idea where we were because we ran all nite with one engine heading into the waves, and ...plotted our position, we found out it was a destroyer friend, one of our ships, we got our position, everything cleaned out, they cleaned the injectors, got our engines running, we headed for Leyte. We found our way into Leyte, joined our crew, and the morning of the sweep we did our part.

So you are sweeping shoreline again?

Right. In the battle of Leyte. That was at the beginning of our acquaintance with suicide planes.

The kamikazes.

Right, we got involved with those.

Well, tell me about that.

Not much to tell about, except we always felt rather secure, we were working with the larger ships, we always felt they were not going to waste their time on a YMS when there were troop ships, and battlegroups, and destroyers, and destroyer escorts and aircraft carriers that were in the crew although as a last resort I have seen several minesweepers go as a result as a last resort they were taken out and bomb the wooden ships.

Have they ever taken a shot at you.

No, we did not. They always avoided us. I have one story about a minesweeper in formation that went down. We never had, we did a lot of anti-aircraft shooting they were very prevalent, that and suicide boats were being introduced at that time.

Did you see any of the suicide boats?

Oh yeah, they always operated at night, it seems like, they would come in, we had night vision on watch, we were kind of a utility group, even at night, there was no rest for the wicked, I guess we would set up smoke screens for the larger ships that were anchored, so we were doing smoke screens all night long, It was almost a continuous duty, day and night sleep in the daytime and then smoke screen patrol at night.

Now did you do that at Leyte? Did you do mine sweeping first and then utility role with the fleet.

That's right, and we did that also at Okinawa. When we got to the Okinawa invasion.

So then where were you in the invasion at Leyte.

We were kind of a utility ship. We did what was necessary. We

were rewarded by having some pretty good supplies issued by to us by the larger ships that had supplies, because ours was a pretty Spartan ration.

So they appreciated your work. So tell me the kind of stuff they sent to you.

Well, the ideal stuff was the ice cream, they sent us, there were steaks, we used to get a lot of food from Australians, this was not good, I don't want to say too much about that.

So you weren't that fond of the Australian rations. You don't like mutton huh?

You said it. Got a lot of that and a lot of that went overboard. It was not our favorite dish. We were in the Leyte invasion and got our battle star and all that and then our next assignment was Okinawa. We gathered and got our supplies and shipped to Okinawa. And we were there 7 days before the troops landed, we were sweeping the shoreline. Where the Fleet Goes, We've Been. That was our motto, in fact the night before the landing we were anchored in the harbor.

If I remember, the Japanese held off on their fire until the invasion was, until everybody was on shore, the idea was to entrap everybody and mow the down.

That's why we were waiting and ready to go, we had done our sweeping, and had the channel cleared and then...

Did you find anything to sweep, were you pulling up a lot of mines?

Yes, we found mines in the harbor there, and again, they were all contact mines, I never swept an acoustic mine, although we were set up to sweep acoustic, we had the hammers on the front of the ship,

Something to make noise as a trigger.

Yes, make a noise like a drum sent out the acoustic signals ahead of the ship.

Now when you would use those just in case you had acoustic mines or you just quit using them because it never helped?

We used them because they were easy to do so just in case.

So you were in the harbor when Okinawa was invaded?

That's right.

So tell me what you saw and what you heard.

The American forces were so prevalent and so powerful there that there was just no doubt as to what the outcome was going to be. At the time I thought I had my time in and I even was getting relieved, and I had orders, to be replaced by my proper replacement I had a orders back home. That was from Okinawa, I never feared for my life until I got my orders in.

And you never thought you'd see home again.

And all of a sudden I had orders back home but not until my replacement was found and the replacement didn't show up. I waited and waited and I don't where he was , now I know where he was, finally we got orders to go home because our ship was really beat up, we were taking water faster that the bilge pumps could take care of it , could empty it.

Was this all go back to the Mt. Hood.?

All from the Mt. Hood, we were never the same ship. And we got orders back home, and I thought he would show up any day, but when finally we got orders, I shipped to Okinawa because that We got as far as Pearl Harbor on the way home in the company of another LST, and because of our experience and expertise, I'll brag a little about that, we were the ship that got the LST back to the Honolulu area and we anchored and went to shore. I thought I want to find out where my replacement is.

And where did you find him?

On the beach. He had a nice sun tan, I went to his quarters and If I'm nice, was his quarters, and they said he is usually on the beach and I are you, or you or you, and finally he said who are you and I said I'm the guy you're going to replace. He said I've been looking for you, and I said , Yeah, I can see that.

You've been looking real hard on the beach.

He had a nice tan. So I got a leg down , I went to the skipper, we had a new skipper too, our skipper had been transferred, we had a new skipper, I forgot his name, I told him I found my replacement and I want to go back to the states. He said, "McKay if you think I'm going to take some new guy and make you go and take him back to the states, and spend your time in the states you're going to ride this sucker right back to San Francisco with me!"

So you were too useful, they couldn't let you go.

I suppose that was it, we had a really good crew, he said this guy doesn't know which way a, in 7 days we'll be back anyway, he said so I'll not release you so I rode the ship back to San Francisco. Treasure Island. We got into Treasure Island, and I told this guy, my replacement we got the movie tonite buster. The engineering officer and I, we called our wives and they said we're on our way out, we hitchhiked into San Francisco from Treasure Island. A guy picked us up, and said Hey Sailors, I understand you just got in and we're going to celebrate tonight. He took us to a hotel, and took a room in the hotel, lay down and took a short nap and did the town, woke up at 5 o'clock the next morning, that was my first nite back in the states.

Actually I would have expected, that if you would have been on another minesweeper besides the one you were on that hadn't been in such bad condition you probably would have stayed on and then targeted for the invasion of the Japanese mainland.

I was, I had a 30 day leave, my orders read 30 day leave, I went back to North Dakota, and my wife came to San Francisco and we went back to North Dakota and I was called back after , with 11 days leave left, I got a telegram sending me back to Washington D.C. for further

training and then further sea duty back overseas on a larger minesweeper, on an AM. I reported to Washington D.C. and I was in Washington when D-day (ie. VE Day) was.

As far as you knew you were headed back for the “Big Dance”

I was, I was headed, back, with orders to Pearl Harbor with further orders to be assigned in Pearl Harbor. So one day on a Sunday afternoon when I had some time off I wandered around looking at Washington D.C. , I walked over to the Personnel Office, I was walking through and just looking in the Pentagon Building and Another kid that I knew I had played poker with aboard ship ,he was not on our ship but we were a small potatoes and we knew each other pretty well, and he said “what are you doing here” and I said I’m just exploring the situation seeing how thing are going and finding my way around. He said where are you headed. And I said I’m headed back overseas. I said how did you get a shore job. He said I don’t know , I lucked out. He said you want to go back overseas, and I said are you crazy. Of course I don’t, I’m married now and I don’t Why don’t you go back to your class and I’ll see what I can do. I said are you in that position . He said Yes, I said I know better than to ask and shortcut the chain of command. Don’t worry about it he said . Maybe I can help you out if you don’t want to go back overseas. I know I’m married. I went back in class the next day, all of a sudden I was singled out and they said Lt. McKay , I went out to the messenger , this is very strange you’re being pulled out of this class. I said what is the situation.? They said you’ve got further orders to go a demobilization school. Well, I’d heard of demobilization, they screen Americans, those that had their time spent, you will go to demobilization school as ordered and further orders to Walt Chamberlain Field in Minneapolis. Whoever did the ordering got me situated knew North Dakota , somehow got me to Minneapolis, which is about as close to North Dakota as you can get. So I went to demobilization at Great Lakes learned the ropes and so forth, for further orders to Walt Chamberlain Field in Minneapolis. An amazing situation.

So things wrapped up pretty well for you.

Yes, they did , I went to Minneapolis I went to demobilization school. I

learned the ropes of what I had to do to demobilize all our troops that were coming in, and my wife joined me there. I told you I played a little bit of basketball. And so they had a base team and I was young enough and I played some, we played the Harlem Globe Trotters, we had a pretty good basket ball team on that base. And I was on that team and I had the honor of playing against the Globe Trotters.

And did you win.

No, No No, they beat, we weren't that good. They let us make a game of it. I signed, up they said I was eligible for release. I said what am I going to do now, so I said can I sign up now, so they said you can sign up for another 3 months, so I said O.K. give me another 3 months. I had good duty there. There were people that were still being demobilized for a couple of hours, play a little basketball in between and go home every night, then 3 months later, my time was up again and they said now what are your options, well you tell me what my options are, can I sign up for 3 more months, I didn't know what I wanted to do. They said if you sign up you are going overseas again. I said show me my papers.

That focuses the mind.

I know my way out. See you later. I went back to North Dakota. I was not given a discharge though, they put you back in Inactive Service released to Inactive Service with no pay. I was released from active duty I was on Inactive Duty subject to Call.

In case something comes up.

To this day I've never been discharged. As far as the Navy is concerned, I think they think I'm dead. Ha. My last order said you are released to Inactive Service without pay. And for years I kept notices from the Navy Department asking for donations here and there and bringing me up to date, on all the activities, finally, I got older, I wanted to go over to the VA hospital and get some of my medication that I take, they said we have no record of you. I had all my orders, I showed them the orders from day one that I joined the Navy, all the stations that I served in, my time overseas. They said would you

like to see a counselor? What for? Its strange you have all this experience in the Navy and we have no record of you. I said I can't believe my records are lost somewhere. And they are. I am one of the few people that has never seen a discharge. Its alright, its no big deal.

It does make it tough if you want to go to a VA hospital.

They finally found a record of me when I was at Midshipman school in Chicago, because otherwise I couldn't get in the VA. I get all medication from the VA now that I need.

I want to take you back now, and think over your whole experience in the Pacific, what comes to mind as to what was the darkest, most down in the depths ,thought it was the end type of a day in the Pacific, when were things at rock bottom for you.

I think of the Mt. Hood explosion.

I had other veterans say I don't understand why I was spared and others weren't.

I have no idea why I was spared. Why, that morning, I got out of the whaleboat and walked down to the wardroom and start censoring mail, I was out of harms way, when the Mt. Hood exploded and the three young men, who I was with, 15 minutes prior to that time, and I never saw them again. When the explosion, and this is hard for me, I walked up on deck, and there was a young man, laying dead ,on the deck, he had been blown from the Mt. Hood all the way over to our ship, on top of the ladder, I picked him up, I don't know where I got the strength, took him down to the wardroom, and put him on the table, and he was gone, I left him their, it was too late. I saw he was Their at the He was a friend of one of our crew members, he was blown from one of the other ships to ours, because of that tremendous explosion that occurred. Our ship was in tatters, and on a lighter note, one of the signalman ran up the snafu, "Situation Normal, All Fouled Up" we ran up the flags up for that, and there is no reason, the flag , we rolled so far during the typhoon that the clinometer in our deckhouse went off the peg, we thought she was going to go the rest of the way over and capsized , the Good Lord took over and

brought her back.

You had two really close calls , with the typhoon and the Mt. Hood.

That little old wood ship righted itself and we did our job.

What was one of your most lighthearted moments over there. You know there's always the funny moments and the serious moments.

I think possibly in Pearl Harbor when we were undergoing, you know this was a whole new experience for the whole crew, was a skipper that I had , the 2nd captain, the ex-football player that I told you about , he was a big guy and he confided with me, because of my position as executive officer, he used to smack me, he called me Mac ,because of McKay, and he'd say, one of his famous sayings, he'd say," What'd you think about that Mac", we played poker with him, and he seemed to always win, He was always lucky.

Thinking back again, over the period of time you were in the Pacific, how do you feel it changed you as a person.?

I think, I ended up as an elementary principle, I became more aware of the deficiencies of the kids that I needed to work with, that depended on me for leadership . I think it made me a man, something that I could take an accept the less than perfect I thought everyone should be. I think I became more accepting for everything I did, and for the people that I love.

How do you feel about the Japanese after all these years?

I had a very hard time , yes, but now you get away from that. I now understand the situation, they were people just like myself who were doing what was expected of them. Yes, I had a hard time for a few years, but no longer.

Do you still have nightmares, or did you ever have any nightmares....?

Yes, I did, but I don't anymore. I had a hard time sleeping. But those

days are passed. I sometimes get nostalgic. You think of those kids , I could have been one, you why not me. You don't get over that.

You can come to peace with it.

Oh yes.

Well, what else can we talk about before we wrap this up.

I really am proud of my Naval experience , I hope it was what it was expected. The neatest part of the whole thing I got married to a wonderful gal, I got 3 good kids, who have made us proud. Very much so.

ED: I want to thank you for what you what you did for our country.

