

Oral History

**Commander
Edward Martin Duran
USN (Ret.)**

*Oral History
Conducted with
Commander John Kirk Ferguson, USN (Ret.)*

*11 June 2003
to
6 October 2003*

*Center for Pacific War Studies
Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War*

Introduction

Edward Martin Duran was probably the only active duty, U.S. Navy sailor to have witnessed the beginning and the end of World War II, with the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 7 December 1941, and then rode in his bouncing jeep with three armed U.S. Marines through what was left of the city of Nagasaki, Japan, several days following the city's destruction on 9 August 1945.

While living in Dixon, Illinois, Ed Duran was a grade school classmate of President Ronald Reagan and he stayed in touch with Ronald and Nancy through the years. Two years ago, when Commander Duran was 92 years of age, he donated \$10,000 to the Alzheimer's Association on behalf of President Reagan.

But, Commander Duran's most compelling stories are about World War II. Enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1927, he watched Japanese war planes use the portside porthole of his amidships stateroom on board the battleship, USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB 48), as a bull's-eye to sink it in shallow water at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, killing over 100 sailors, including the Captain. This is but one of the many stories from his incredibly interesting thirty year naval career.



Warrant Officer Edward Martin Duran, USN, on board USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB 48) at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 1941

Subjects Covered

Was born 12 September, 1910, and died about 17 December 2003

Enlisted in the Navy 27 October 1927 and retired in 1958

Present at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii at the beginning of World War II

Present in Nagasaki, Japan several days after the end of war

Salvaged one of five attacking midget Japanese submarines

Had discussion with Admiral Nimitz regarding the midget submarine

The sub is now on display at the Admiral Nimitz State Historic Site

Supervised loading of ammunition on board a submarine at Pearl Harbor
for transfer to the besieged island of Corregidor

Same submarine secretly loaded \$25 million in gold and silver at

Corregidor and returned it safely to Pearl Harbor

Survived ditching of a PBV in the Pacific Ocean

Participated in the capture of Yontan airfield during the Battle of Okinawa

Hosted movie star Tyrone Power for return trip from Guam to
Portland, OR

Navigator on board attack transport taking Admiral Byrd to Little America

Recovered Admiral Byrd's ice covered office headquarters left from
previous winter and now on display at the Navy Historical Center
Museum, Washington, DC

11 June 2003

Ferguson: This is Commander Kirk Ferguson, USN (Ret.), today is June 11, 2003, and I am conducting an oral interview with Commander Edward Martin Duran, USN (Ret.), at his residence, 6854 Millbrook Street, San Diego, CA 92120-1029. This interview is in support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

My first couple of questions relate to your family, Ed. Would you please give me the names of your parents?

Duran: My father's name was Arthur James Duran and my mother's maiden name was Mable May Martin. Since her initials were three "m's," I used to tell her that her name was one "m" sweeter than M and M candies.

Ferguson: What was your date of birth?

Duran: September 12, 1910.

Ferguson: Where were you born?

Duran: I was born in Syracuse, New York.

Ferguson: Why did you join the U.S. Navy?

Duran: My father had a strong feeling of allegiance toward Great Britain when World War I began. As a result he went to Canada, joined the Canadian Army and was shipped off to England and thence to France where he was fatally wounded. My mother placed my sister and me in an orphanage in Burlington, VT. Mother's sister, Georgiana, lived in Burlington and I remained in the orphanage from three to eight years of age. I then left the orphanage and lived with various relatives until mother met her second husband, who lived in Dixon, IL. I didn't know my mother very well and after she passed away in 1921, I returned to Connecticut to live with various relatives and my mother's youngest sister, who was married to a physician, until I was 17 years of age. I wanted to be on my own, and enlisted in the Navy on Navy Day, October 27, 1927 and retired in 1957.

Ferguson: Before discussing your career in the Navy, please comment on the fact that your career in the U.S. Navy took you from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, the beginning of World War II, to Nagasaki, Japan, immediately following the explosion of the second atomic bomb over the city, which ended the war.

DURAN: Yes, I was present at the alpha and omega of World War II, the beginning and the end. I am probably the only living person today who can claim that distinction.

Ferguson: What were some of the significant tours of duty you had from the time you enlisted in the Navy until December 7, 1941?

Duran: After completing Recruit Training, Boot Camp, in Newport, RI, I started a school in Hampton Roads, but soon went to sea on board USS ANTARES (AG 10), a repair ship, and remained on board for duty for about one year, then was transferred to USS VESTAL (AR 4), where I was able to strike for a Shipfitter petty officer rating. After being discharged from the Navy, I had planned to attend the University of Chicago, but needed financial assistance. I had been told I would receive my board and room by being a waiter in the dining room, but the deal fell through and I decided to reenlist in the Navy and make the U.S. Navy my career's work. I was assigned to USS WHITNEY (AD 4), but had an automobile accident, which resulted in my being hospitalized on board USS RELIEF (AH 1). Not only was the medical treatment excellent, I liked the quality of the food and berthing on board, and was able to make a duty station swap with another sailor and served five years on board RELIEF. I departed the ship as a Shipfitter First Class in 1936 and was assigned to the Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was promoted to Chief Petty Officer and assigned Shore Patrol duty at the headquarters in downtown Honolulu. During this time, I successfully passed the examination for Warrant Carpenter, was promoted, and assigned to USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB 48) in early 1941.

I was on board WEST VIRGINIA for about one year before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. I was the Ship's Carpenter, in charge of the Carpenter, Shipfitter, and Welding Shops, and was responsible for the ship's watertight integrity. There were about sixty sailors working for me.

The week preceding the Japanese attack, WEST VIRGINIA had been conducting exercises at sea, returning to Pearl Harbor on Friday afternoon. I was in the duty section for that weekend, December 6 and 7, however, I had been invited to attend a party in Honolulu on Saturday. The ship's Warrant Boatswain, Earl Weaver, took my Saturday duty assignment until Sunday morning when I would return to the ship and relieve him in order that he could make a golfing date at 1000, Sunday, December 7, 1941.

Ferguson: Now, describe the events occurring on December 7, 1941, as you remember them happening.

Doran: I was on the officer's landing, at the U.S. Naval Shipyard, Honolulu, Hawaii, on Sunday morning, December 7, waiting for a launch to take me to Ford Island when the Japanese aircraft commenced their attack at about 0755. I looked out at the harbor and everything was on fire, it seemed. Ships burning,

the water was on fire from all the fuel. Sailors jumping from ships into the harbor. The motor launch that was supposed to pick those of us waiting on the pier was out rescuing sailors in the water. Just then, a Japanese Zero came in strafing us! We scattered like quail and I threw myself behind some concrete steps and stayed there thinking he would turn around and come back, but he didn't.

USS ARIZONA (BB 39) was destroyed when a bomb detonated the forward magazine.

WEST VIRGINIA, moored outboard USS TENNESSEE (BB 43), was heavily damaged by six or more torpedoes and settled to about half way to the Main Deck, bow to stern, with a six degree list to port. Warrant Boatswain Earl Weaver survived the attack.

As this was all going on, I was standing on the pier's officer's landing, I heard WEST VIRGINIA's General Announcing System call away my Fire and Rescue Team to assist on board the capsized USS OKLAHOMA (BB 37). The ship, moored at Ford Island, capsized, turned completely over, upside down, directly in front of us. I could see the propellers and the keel. My Fire and Rescue Team boarded OKLAHOMA and cut holes in the hull to release trapped sailors and they were coming out of the holes as late as Sunday night.

OKLAHOMA capsized very quickly after being torpedoed because many of her watertight doors below the waterline had been opened for an inspection I was to conduct on Monday morning. The ship had been involved in a collision during the previous week's exercises at sea and I was to conduct an inspection of the affected hull and compartments for signs of damage and/or leaks.

While several others and I were standing on the pier's landing in awe, a spent Japanese torpedo sped across the harbor and came within five feet of the landing before it stopped and sank to the bottom. If it had hit the pier, all of us would have been killed.

My stateroom on the ship was about amidships on the port side, with one porthole close to the waterline. This porthole was apparently the Japanese torpedo planes target, so that was another good reason I wasn't on the ship at the time or I would have had a special delivery from the Japanese Empire, right in my room.

So, WEST VIRGINIA sank to the bottom and just sat there with a six-degree list to port; at high tide water would come up on the main deck about halfway from bow to stern. Many of the lower holds and compartments had been flooded and several sailors died in adjacent compartments. They lived from the attack on Pearl Harbor until December 23, we could not get them out because if we opened up the ship, like was done in some cases on board OKLAHOMA, the water pressure would have drowned them. Later, when the ship was in drydock,

we found all the sailors bodies. My ceremonial sword was also found; it had been hanging in my room when the ship sank and it had been bent into the shape of a pretzel. A metalsmith was able to bend it straight again for me, but it took some doing.

Ferguson: One of the little known facts among the general populous is that the Japanese Imperial Navy also deployed five midget submarines to attack U.S. Navy warships lucky enough to escape from Pearl Harbor to the sea. Please comment on this less publicized segment of the attack.

Doran: Yes, it is quite a story. There were apparently five midget submarines manned by two man crews: the captain, an Ensign in the Imperial Japanese Navy, and an enlisted assistant. All five of the midget submarines were either sunk or captured with only one ensign surviving.

Each submarine was powered by an electric battery with a range of about 100 miles at two knots, they were assembled in three sections and were about 80 feet long with about a five to six foot beam, and had two torpedoes in their arsenal as well as a bomb with a fuze such that the captain could destroy the submarine if need be.

I know one midget submarine was sunk off the harbor entrance to Pearl Harbor by a U.S. Navy destroyer and was much later found by SCUBA divers. The submarine was offered to the Japanese government, accepted and returned to Japan.

Another midget submarine was sunk by gunfire and ramming by a destroyer, I believe USS WARD (DD 139), inside Pearl Harbor by firing shells at the submarine's conning tower killing the captain and the drowning the crewman. The submarine was later raised and brought to Mary's Point Landing, where the stench of the decaying Japanese sailors bodies was so great that the submarine was rolled over into a dock being excavated and buried at Mary's Point.

A third submarine probably entered Pearl Harbor fired its two torpedoes at OKLAHOMA and later the crew destroyed the submarine since the hull was never recovered.

A fourth submarine was following ANTARES to Honolulu harbor, was depth charged by a destroyer, sank outside the harbor, and not recovered.

The fifth midget submarine wandered off course and ran aground on the reef at Bellows Field, on the Windward side of Oahu.

A survivor of these midget submarines was Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki who had been the captain of the midget submarine, which ran aground on the Bellows Field reef. Later he told of how his compass malfunctioned and with this faulty

equipment he became lost enroute to Pearl Harbor. After he lighted the fuze on the bomb, to blow up the submarine, he and his crewman escaped from the grounded submarine, but the enlisted man drowned in the surf. Waiting for the bomb to explode, he apparently made an attempt to swim back out to the midget submarine to check the bomb's fuze to see why the bomb had not exploded, but Ensign Sakamaki was so fatigued that he lapsed into unconsciousness and awoke to find an American sentry aiming a pistol at his head. The ensign reportedly told the sentry to shoot him, but kind of second-guessed the American, knowing he would not be shot. Though I never talked to him, I was told that he spoke good English. Ensign Sakamaki became the first Japanese Prisoner of War and was sent to a prisoner of war camp in Tennessee where he remained until the war was over. He then returned to Japan and became an executive for the Toyota Automobile Company, journeyed to Brazil for an automobile sales assignment and later returned as a guest of the United States Government and among other destinations, he visited the Admiral Nimitz Museum, located in Fredericksburg, TX, before returning to Japan.

Ferguson: What happened to the midget submarine grounded on the reef at Bellows Field?

Doran: The three sections were unbolted once the submarine was towed into the beach. While inspecting the submarine, I found the bomb with the fuze partially burned which indicated the captain had attempted to ignite the bomb before he swam ashore, but it was extinguished in one way or another. The three sections were placed on flatbed trucks and transported to my staging area at the Pearl Harbor Submarine Base.

Ferguson: Please describe the occasion when you met Admiral Nimitz.

Doran: Admiral Nimitz established his office at the Submarine Base after December 7; it was in the Supply Department building in the vicinity of my office in the Engineering and Repair Office. I talked to the admiral about the two-man midget submarine at Bellows Field and he wanted to know more about the submarine's details and indicated he would send someone who was knowledgeable. The individual was a U.S. Marine lieutenant who understood the Japanese language; he inspected the submarine and made his report to Admiral Nimitz.

The submarine was reassembled, placed on a pedestal at the Submarine Base and transported to the Mainland United States where it appeared as an attraction for war bond drives, and was ultimately presented to the Admiral Nimitz Museum, Fredericksburg, TX, where it continues to be displayed.

I continued in my job as Ship's Superintendent, preparing submarines for their next patrol until I was transferred in March 1942.

Ferguson: In early January 1942, you assisted in preparing a submarine for a special mission to the Philippines; please tell me about it.

Doran: I was the working officer to crib anti-aircraft projectiles into the forward and after torpedo rooms of USS TROUT (SS 202), storing one torpedo in place of the ship's skiff. The emergency supply of anti-aircraft ammunition was destined for General Wainwright, at Corregidor in Manila Bay, Philippines, and U.S. gold bars were to be returned to the United States. TROUT deployed from Pearl Harbor on 12 January 1942, with 3,500 rounds of ammunition for the besieged American forces on Corregidor. On 3 February, TROUT unloaded the ammunition at the island fortress in Manila Bay, refueled, loaded two torpedoes, and twenty tons of gold bars and silver pesos valued at \$25 million being evacuated from the Philippines. TROUT arrived at Pearl Harbor on 3 March and transferred her valuable ballast to a cruiser.

Ferguson: That's a fabulous story, Ed, tell me about your experience of being on board the PBY that had to ditch in the Pacific, in 1943.

Doran: I need to preface the story with the reason I had to make the flight in the first place. In the summer of 1943, when I was a LTJG, I was completing my tour of duty as Hull Repair Officer on the staff of Ship Repair Unit One embarked on board USS PROMETHEUS (AR 3). The ship had just towed a floating drydock from Seattle, WA, to Noumea, New Caledonia, and my Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders were taking me back to the United States, so I started my trip from the harbor at Noumea on board a four engine, amphibious plane, I believe it was designated at PB2Y3. The plane's captain, a Captain Hamilton, had been a PANAM Clipper pilot for a number of years and all went well for us, there were 13 passengers, until after we had refueled in Somoa. About 850 miles south of Honolulu, flying over a fierce storm, one of the engines had to be feathered and after flying on three engines for a while the pitch motor on the No. 1 engine went out and Captain Hamilton was forced to land in the trough of the stormy seas. The plane remained afloat on its pontoons, but the crew and we passengers were tossed about the plane's passenger cabin for three days until one of our destroyers found us. The ship laid an oil slick in order to get a whaleboat into the water and everyone on the plane was rescued, but we were beat up from having been knocked about the plane during the storm and we were dehydrated from having run out of drinking water. We were so lucky the destroyer found us, she took us into Pearl Harbor and from there we were flown to Oakknoll Naval Hospital, in Oakland, CA, followed by Balboa Naval Hospital, in San Diego, CA. I was a junior lieutenant by this time, and after some recuperative leave at home, in Rialto, CA, I was eager to get back into the action again.

For the remainder of 1943 and 1944, I served on board USS EURYALE (AS 22), USS SOLICE (AH 2), and then was transferred to USS MARVIN H. MCINTYRE (APA 120) as the Executive Officer in 1944.

Ferguson: And speaking of the MCINTYRE, you had some pretty hair-raising experiences on board the ship during the Battle of Okinawa, didn't you?

Duran: Yes, everyone on board the ship had some real stories to tell. On the first day of April 1945, MCINTYRE steamed into the East China Sea, thinking we were on a suicide mission, to capture the Japanese Yantan airfield on the Island of Okinawa. So, I guess it was appropriate that it was both Easter Sunday and April Fools Day, since we didn't know if it would be the day of resurrection or HA, HA, the joke's on you.

Colonel Allan Shapley, USMC, commanded the 320 Marine Raiders embarked on board MCINTYRE. He knew the beach on which they were to land, Red Beach Three, was protected off shore by a coral reef under just five feet of water at high tide. The Raiders boarded the landing craft from cargo nets and sped across the reef at 0900. Their incredible assault and capture of the airfield was successfully accomplished in record time. Ernie Pyle, the famous war correspondent, had been scheduled to accompany the Raiders on the amphibious assault, but a change in schedule reassigned him to the assault on the island of Iwo Jima, where he was killed by a sniper's bullet. A well-known writer of mysteries, Ring Lardner's son, John, too Ernie Pyle's assignment and lived to tell the story.

An interesting post-script to this part of the story is that after we had offloaded the Marine Raiders, communications broke down between Captain John Hourihan, and me on the bridge. As I scrambled up to the bridge, I looked over the side and saw the wake of a torpedo streaking straight for the ship's bow. I was so excited; all I could do was point at the torpedo just as Captain Hourihan turned to see it zip under the bow. Since we had just offloaded the huge tonnage of the invasion force, the ship was high in the water and the Japanese submarine's crew either miscalculated or had aimed for another target.

During that Easter Sunday amphibious assault, my heart swelled with pride when I looked out and saw my old battleship, WEST VIRGINIA, in the heat of the battle, her guns blazing at the Japanese held island, taking and surviving a Kamikaze hit. My old ship came through Pearl Harbor to fight again. The work of my crew to stabilize the ship really paid off since it continued to serve gallantly in the war.

Ferguson: Later, Ed, while still the Executive Officer, USS MCINTYRE, you were involved in another incredible event in the city of Nagasaki, Japan, please tell us about it.

Duran: I saw World War II go full circle, from Pearl Harbor to Nagasaki. As you will recall, the first Atomic Bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, Japan, on

August 6, 1945. The second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki three days later. My ship, USS MCINTYRE, was the first ship into Nagasaki several days later to survey the damage. We arrived alongside the Mitsubishi Shipyard pier with about 300 U.S. Marines on board. For once, they didn't look that eager to go ashore. Nagasaki had been a busy industrial city during the war, but that day everything was quite, like a ghost town. As the Executive Officer, I was the first man into the abandoned shipyard for security reasons. MCINTYRE's boatswain's mates offloaded a jeep onto the dock and three armed Marines came with me to scout out the area. As I stood there, in that shipyard, I realized I was the sole inhabitant of the city at that moment.

Ferguson: In a lighter note, MCINTYRE played host to a Hollywood celebrity, please tell us about this special event.

Duran: After the war was over, MCINTYRE made a port visit to Guam to pick up soldiers and sailors returning to the United States. One of my quartermasters begged me to take one more passenger on board our already overloaded transport for the trip home "before Christmas." The young U.S. Marine lieutenant standing on the pier was strikingly handsome. He was movie actor Tyrone Power.

I remember a standing joke I had with Ty. Every time I visited his stateroom, he was in his upper bunk, always reading the same book, "The Captain from Castile." I would say, "Haven't you finished that book yet?" And, he would say, "I'm not reading it, I'm studying it. It's going to be my first movie when I get out." And, it was.

Among the 4,000 troops on board MCINTYRE, there so much talent that a 25-piece band was organized and Ty made sure there was always entertainment. We served food 24 hours a day; it was one big floating party from Guam to Portland, Oregon. I still have a snapshot of the smiling actor, with me at his side, appearing rather dour by contrast.

Ferguson: In the 1946 to 1947 timeframe you saw another part of the world very few others have ever seen, where was it and why did you make the journey?

Doran: I was the Navigator on board USS MERRICK (AKA 97) and the ship had embarked Admiral Richard Byrd and his staff for transit to the Little America, the United States' reporting station in Antarctica. In addition, MERRICK had loaded U.S. Navy Construction Battalion (CB) personnel and Marston mats for an airstrip at Little America. After offloading the admiral and his staff, as well as the CB personnel and their cargo, I had a memorable photo taken of me, in the snow, holding hands with a penguin! And, it was a big one too; must of stood about two and a half feet tall, and there he was with his flipper in my hand.

We found the tops of the stovepipes of the admiral's previously abandoned headquarters, sticking up through the top of the snow pack, so the CB's dug down and uncovered the office. When we got inside, it looked like the day they had last closed its doors.

Ferguson: Yes, in fact I have heard the office was disassembled, transported to Washington, D.C., and reassembled inside the Navy Historical Center's Museum. With that, I think we have covered the highlights of your memorable career in the United States Navy, and will bring this oral history to a close.