

**This interview is being conducted on Tuesday, September 29, 2015. My name is Fran Prokop and I am speaking with Martin J. McDonald who served in the United States Navy and is a veteran of the Korean conflict. Mr. McDonald learned of the Veterans History Project through me and he has kindly consented to participate in the National Archives Veterans History Project. Here is his story:**

**Marty, when and where were you born?**

Detroit, Michigan on April 26, 1936.

**And what were your parents' occupations?**

My father was a checker, when I was born, at Chrysler Corporation, in Highland Park.

**That's in Michigan, right?**

Yes.

**And your Mom?**

My mother was a housewife.

**And did you have brothers and sisters?**

I had one brother, deceased, and two sisters.

**Were any of your siblings in the military?**

None.

**And what did you do before entering the service?**

I was in high school. I just got out of high school when I joined.

**You told me the dates you served were 8-24-54 – to 7-18-58.**

Yeah.

**So you were just like 18 years old, huh?**

Yes.

**Did any other family members serve in the military?**

Yeah, I had an uncle that was in the submarines – Little Creek, Virginia. I saw him down there when I was – in Norfolk. Charles Auge, Chief Electronics Technician.

**Was he in the Second World War?**

He sure was, yes, on the U.S.S. Sea Lion, a submarine. Other uncles were Charlie and Howard McDonald in the Army.

**How did you enter the service – were you drafted or did you enlist?**

I enlisted.

**And why did you choose that particular branch of service?**

Some friends of mine told me it was fun.

**Ha, ha, ha – did you join with other friends?**

No.

**You were on your own, right?**

Yeah.

**Where did you go to join?**

I went down to the federal building in Detroit.

**That was like a recruiting office?**

Yes.

**And then what happened after that?**

Well, this happened in July and then in August I started boot camp – August 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Where did they send you to boot camp?**

Great Lakes, IL.

**And how did you get to Great Lakes?**

All of us recruits, probably 50 or 60 of us, took the train from Detroit to Chicago.

**How were your early days of training – did you adapt to military life?**

I had some trouble. I had – I got in trouble – I smoked one day when I shouldn't have been smoking, and the young guard, a recruit like myself, reported us – there was two of us, and they were going to send me to the brig. And my mother was there the next day to visit me. She didn't know anything about this. So they sent me to 800 D – a nut

house – ha, ha, - and I was there about a week and they found out – they finally did a background check on me, and everybody said he’s good – so they apologized and took me out, put me back in a company. The new company commander, a first-class orange deal, machinist mate, gave me a squad, offered me any school I wanted and any ship I wanted on the east coast, were they needed my skills.

**Wow!**

Where they needed a radioman.

**Is that what you were, a radioman?**

Yes.

**Did you have experience with that – a job or anything before you went into the Navy?**

No. I went to school. They sent us to school at Bainbridge, Maryland.

**But you said your mother was there – what happened.**

Oh, she visited me for a day, then went back to Detroit, and she knew nothing about what happened.

**Oh, so that was on the Q T with her.**

Yeah. She never found out. I told my father later on.

**Was there a rule that you couldn’t smoke during training –**

No, it was just some impetuous young kid – me and another guy decided to have a cigarette instead of going to chow –

**Oh, I see.**

And then he said we threatened him – I didn’t. I asked him what did you do that for?

**Wow**

The Commander of the company later said – told the other guys that he felt awful. He would never do anything like that again.

**My God, you just got in the service and they’re putting you in the brig – for a week, I can’t believe it. They were pretty strict, I guess.**

Yeah.

**Well, with that, you're lucky, I guess that you made it through boot camp. How was your basic training – how long did you spend in Great Lakes?**

14 weeks, I think it was.

**What did you do during that time – I mean what did it consist of?**

It was typical boot training for recruits, running and marching and learning how to use a gun. They figure – they test you, they find out what kind of school you want to go to.

**So was there classroom training along with boot camp?**

Very little.

**Just testing – like what you're good at –**

Yeah, and showing you movies on VD and to stay away from women.

**Okay, that kind of stuff, ha, ha. So you tested out for radio?**

Yes, yes.

**Radioman – so did you then have extra training for that?**

Yeah, they sent me to school for six months in Bainbridge, Maryland.

**And that was a radio school?**

Yes, there was a big training center in Bainbridge; I had no idea how really big it was.

They train cryptographers and all kinds of technical –

**So you actually got training on radio contact.**

Yes, yes. Tuning transmitters and related equipment.

**Shortwave radio?**

Yeah, Morse Code and teletype.

**You learned that –**

They taught me how to type at the same time.

**Wow – Morse Code and teletype. So that was six months – so now this period of time was over – what happened after that? Where did you go?**

So then, then after radio school, me and a buddy picked a ship, this little ship here (indicating photograph) we had no idea what it was.

**What is it? Marty is showing me a picture of his ship called the U.S.S. Duxbury Bay?**

D-U-X-B-U-R-Y Bay

**And this ship is a – what type of ship is it.**

In Norfolk, and it was named after a small town in Massachusetts.

**Okay, but what type of ship is it?**

It was a seaplane tender – AVP—38.

**AVP 38 – a seaplane tender.**

Yes. Converted to a goodwill ship and painted white to deflect Persian Gulf heat.

**Well, now, you mean afterwards –**

After the war.

**So it's still in service today as a good will ship?**

No, as a matter of fact in 1965 they destroyed it because coming back from overseas they sandblasted the rust off it, and it was so rotten they sandblasted holes in it, so they junked it.

**Did they use it as a reef or something – they sunk it**

Oh, I don't know.

**You don't know what happened to it. Anyway, let's get back – you're out of radio school and you chose to be on this U.S.S. Duxbury – so what were your duties?**

I was a radioman on the Duxbury Bay.

**What did that involve?**

That involved taking all communications and giving them to the Captain or to the cryptographer –

**And responding to whatever --**

Yes, yeah.

**Was the war going on in Korea or not?**

No, in 1955 the conflict was over.

**The Korean Conflict was over.**

Yeah, that was over in 1953.

**So – right, right.**

But they gave you time for Korean War Service if you were in before '55.

**Oh, okay. So what was your job on board ship – where did the ship go and what did you do on board the ship?**

This ship toured the entire Middle East, and we had an Admiral aboard; he was Com Mid East. The Captain's name was H.E. Bonne, a former Navy fighter pilot.

**Do you know the Admiral's name?**

No, I don't. I can't remember it; I remember the Captain's name.

**So you sailed all the seas with this ship –**

We sailed directly to the Middle East and we toured all over like Djibouti and Abu Dam, Karamshaw (phonetic) and places –

**I don't know what you said –**

Karamshaw – Iran and Basra, Iraq, Haifa, Israel –

**So you were part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet?**

Yes, I think we were part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet; we were a separate command.

**Were you on this ship the entire time that you were in the service?**

No.

**Well, how long were you on it.**

I was only on it for less than a year.

**Okay.**

They called one day and I answered the phone and they needed a radioman at the Air Station in Norfolk, and I said, I'm your guy, I'll go.

**Ha, ha. You had enough of the ship, huh?**

And there was another flag – Com Nav Air Lant – and I stayed there till I got out.

**All right, so then you were on land in Norfolk, Virginia.**

At the Air Station, yeah.

**And your duties there were basically the same as your duties on board ship?**

There was very little – no radio contact at all; it was all teletype.

**Well, who were you contacting – other personnel?**

No, I was stationed with probably 60 radiomen and teletype specialists and we funneled all communications that came into that entity, and we responded to them.

**So you never were in any combat situation?**

No, I was in the Suez Canal during the Suez crisis.

**Oh, what did that involve? What year was that?**

That was 1956, I believe.

**So what did that involve?**

We were in the Suez Canal when Nasser took the Canal over for Egypt; he nationalized it.

**Nasser, okay.**

And so we were on our guard because – the only thing that happened was the galley caught on fire right above the kitchen.

**On its own or somebody shot it – fired upon?**

No, no it was just an accidental fire in the kitchen – in the galley.

**So that was your big excitement.**

That was our big excitement.

**A galley fire – ha, ha. You didn't really witness any destruction as far as land or homes or anything like that?**

Oh, no, no. It was strictly diplomatic.

### **Diplomatic missions.**

Yeah.

**During the time you were in the service, especially when you were overseas, how were your communications from home – being that you were a radioman – I'm thinking of letters or packages or things like that.**

Yes, the same as everybody else. The only time we had communications was mail that came in through the –

### **Written mail –**

Yeah, written mail – just strictly –

#### **Did they censor your mail at all?**

I don't think so. I wrote a letter to Eisenhower at the time -- asking him why the hell we were there.

### **No kidding!**

And the State Department answered about two months later. My Dad got it. They didn't send it to me because I would have got in trouble. I didn't know that the chain of command went all the way to the President.

### **Oh, wow!**

There was a chain of command.

### **Wow.**

My father said, Martin, what the hell are you doing there? And they explained it was simply for the oil – our interests in the oil.

### **Wow! Did you keep that letter?**

My Dad had it; I don't know what ever happened to it.

**Wow – that's interesting. As far as communications from home, I'm talking about letters, how long would you say it took for a letter to come from the U.S. and to reach you when you were in the Suez Canal or somewhere like that?**

I think a week –



**One week.**

Yeah.

**What did you do when you were off the ship – as far as recreational pursuits –**

You mean – oh, when we were there in the Middle East –

**Yeah.**

We couldn't leave the ship except to play baseball on the beach. I was in the Honor Guard and got to see the palace in Manama, Bahrein.

**Oh, you couldn't leave –**

Except for, when we came back the Captain asked me – he said where would you like to go -- because we couldn't go anywhere when we were in the Middle East enlisted men couldn't; officers could.

**Really?**

So he said you guys have been cooped up here for six months – where would you like to go? I said Rome would be nice.

**And ?**

We went to Rome and Sicily –

**Really?**

Pompeii and Valencia, Spain.

**How did you get there?**

On a ship coming through the Mediterranean –

**Another ship?**

Our ship, yeah, we were coming home.

**Oh, your ship –**

Yes.

**You were coming home and they stopped on the way home and guys got off, on liberty –**

Right.

**Oh, so it was Rome, Sicily, where else, in Spain?**

Rome, Valencia, Spain, Gibraltar –

**Those are all seaports, I take it.**

Yes, yes.

**So you stopped at all these locations and had 24 hours liberty?**

Yeah, yeah.

**That was nice. Wonderful.**

It was.

**Did you get to see any sights of any kind or just –**

In Rome I was gonna see the Pope but he was sick that day.

**Ha, ha.**

And Valencia had – we stayed for a few days – and had just a marvelous time.

**I'm sure – ha, ha.**

**Where did you go after you left these –**

We came back then to Norfolk.

**Okay.**

And that's when I reported to the Air Station –

**Oh, I see.**

For duty for the rest of my enlistment.

**So that was your farewell to the Middle East.**

The Middle East and Duxbury Bay, yeah.

**Were you on any particular ship there or just at the air station in Norfolk?**

We were in the air station barracks.

**So you spent about two years or more there?**

Yeah, yeah.

**How did you adapt to that?**

I adapted real good. I got there and I don't know why, but people expected more of me than I was ever able to give.

**Why do you think that?**

I have no idea. I was there at the Air Station about three weeks and the Chief told me, he said, "I'm not gonna let you take the test for promotion." I said Why? He said "You're not living up to what we expected." The new Chief, Howie Holcombe from Milwaukee, was much better to work for.

**Really? What did they expect you to do, I wonder?**

I have no idea, but I did finally take the test. I got out as a radioman 2<sup>nd</sup> Class, which was very good for a four-year stint.

**So that's a promotion, right, second class?**

Yes, yes – like a sergeant.

**So was that the highest rank you achieved?**

Yeah, RM 2.

**Radioman 2?**

Yes, yes.

**So you were at Norfolk when your term of enlistment was up, right?**

Yes. Five of us guys rented a big house on the beach and just had one party after the other.

**Oh, ha, ha – a house on the beach. Was that after you got out or while you were still in?**

No, that was while I was still in – yeah.

**So did you finally get orders stating that your time is up?**

Yeah.

**How were you notified?**

Yeah, they sent – they told my Chief that I would be reporting at so and so to go home.

**How did you return home – by ship, by plane?**

No, they flew me in a Navy aircraft.

**Like a M A T S – Military Air Transport Service**

Yes. Very good.

**And did you fly to –**

To Willow Run, Michigan, which is a suburb of Detroit.

**Oh, so they flew you right home.**

**How was your readjustment to civilian life?**

I had no trouble.

**Oh, okay. So, have you had any contact with fellow veterans over the years?**

**Any guys that you met there?**

Yes, D. D. Alangun from Chicago (now deceased.)

**Did you make friends while you were in the Navy?**

Oh, yes. I'll tell you what – I was in the Navy for four years. I was in the FAA for 25 years. All my pleasant memories are of the Navy – just wonderful memories.

**But you don't keep in touch with any of these guys?**

Called Steve Mahalis in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. I can't find any of them; they're dead -  
- the ones that I've been able to locate.

**So are you a member of any veterans organizations?**

I've been a member of the VFW and American Legion.

**What did you do when you came back from the service – go to work –**

I went downtown and got a job. A policeman told me to go to the Penobscot Building. I went on a Friday and I started at a bank on Monday morning.

**Doing what?**

As a teller.

**Teller at the City Bank there.**

In Detroit – it was C-I-T-Y Bank - not C-I-T-I. I got fired a month or so later.

**Oh, why?**

Because the head teller told me he expected me to do -- I scored real high on a test. Every time a pretty woman walked in to the bank he was afraid I would give the bank away.

**Oh, geez!**

And that's the only job I ever lost.

**Okay, so what did you do after that.**

I had an uncle, Ed Graham, who got me a job in a department store and then I worked for an industrial supply outfit for five years – another job my uncle Ed Gruhen got me.

**You didn't pursue your radio stuff – you didn't try to go –**

No, it wasn't – Morse Code was a thing of the past.

**Oh, right; it was gone; but there was like experience you could use with a radio station – an actual radio station.**

They may have been but I didn't have sense enough to pursue it. I did have a 25-year successful career in the FAA though. Stan Hapiuk, an uncle by marriage, got me that job.

**You didn't explore it, right. Sometimes we don't follow up on things. How do you think that your military experience affected your life?**

I think very positively.

**What life lessons do you think you learned from the military?**

I think only that you should really try to do your best.

**So over all –**

Overall it was a very pleasant experience but I wasn't in during wartime –

**Right.**

I had a lark – I had four years of fun.

**Right. You were out of high school when you went in –**

I just graduated –

**So you already had your high school diploma.**

Three weeks after I graduated.

**Oh, you went right in.**

And three weeks after I went in I got a telegram from Ford and Chrysler and from the Police Department – you know I was accepted as an apprentice at the two motor companies. Then as a recruit policeman – fireman at the Pleasant Ridge, Michigan Public Safety Department.

**Really?**

Yeah, but I couldn't do anything about it; I was in the Navy.

**Did you kick yourself?**

I sure did, yep.

**Yeah, if you would have waited a little bit longer.**

Yeah, my Dad said, I told you you should be patient –

**Yeah, wow! But I guess you're not sorry now that you went in – look at all the places you saw –**

Oh, yeah, you know –

**You traveled –**

The day that I got into Great Lakes Naval Training Center – that night a sailor told him it's a rotten outfit; it's really changed. And that affected me, you know, for four years I thought, well, I'm not gonna stay in this outfit.

**Huh – but you liked it. You did like it.**

Afterwards, after looking back on it, yeah; it was a wonderful experience.

**Well, that's good. Okay, so is there anything else that you want to add to the story – any little anecdotes from your travels or places that you've seen, or anything?**

No, except that all this trouble in the Middle East, and I've been to that – every place that they mention –

**Quite an experience –you've got your picture of it, but of course that was fifty years ago.**

Yes, it was.

**But you can say that you've been there.**

Yeah.

**Well, I think it's good going into the service. I'm all for the service; my son was in the Navy four years.**

**But I want to thank you for this interview and thank you for your service to our country.**

Thank you. Thank you.

**Martin J. McDonald  
605 S. Edward Drive #385  
Romeoville, IL 60446  
815-267-6041**