

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

STANLEY E. McDOWELL

Radioman, Navy, Troop Transport, U.S.S. General C.C. Ballou World War II

1996

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McDowell, Stanley E., (b. 1926). Oral History Interview, 1996.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 30 min.); analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Military Papers: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder)

Abstract

McDowell, born in Madison (Wisconsin), discusses his Naval service as a radioman with the General C.C. Ballou. He mentions growing up in Pontiac (Michigan), his father working for the Pontiac newspaper, and his mother working in a position that he refers to as a "Rosie the Riveter," for General Motors. McDowell explains that he graduated high school in January 1944 and was put on active duty in February. He talks about attending advanced training in the V-5, V-6 and V-12 programs, which sent him to Western Michigan University, the University of Michigan and the Great Lakes Naval Base in Illinois. McDowell expresses interest in leaving school and getting out to "Do something what I considered worthwhile." McDowell states that, after finishing the V-6 program, he was assigned to a radio school at the University of Wisconsin. He talks about the socio-economic status of fellow enlistees and schoolmates and the prejudices between people from the North and South and the attitudes towards Black crew members. McDowell explains that he graduated from radio school in June 1945 and joined the General C. C. Ballou in San Francisco (California), traveling to San Diego and San Pedro (California), to the Panama Canal and on to France. He reveals that they were halfway across the Atlantic when they heard of the Japanese surrender, and that his ship then become a transport ship. McDowell discusses sailing to France, India, Pakistan, The Philippines, Panama and Puerto Rico to pick up troops and enjoying the elated mood of everyone onboard, which he illustrates by mentioning concerts, boxing matches and gambling. McDowell explains the nurses were separated from the men and touches on radio work he was assigned to. He talks about the troops, civilians from other countries and Americans being grateful for the work of the armed services members.. He was discharged in May of 1946 and tells of attending the University of Michigan on the GI bill, studying electrical engineering, and living in Quonset huts on what is now the Detroit (Michigan) airport. While discussing his post-college life, he explains that it was difficult to find work, but eventually was hired at Evinrude in Milwaukee (Wisconsin) and later worked for Allis-Chalmers, from which he retired in 1986. He concludes by speaking of various ship reunions he attended and his work writing, *A History of U.S.S. General C.C. Ballou: From WWII to Korea and Beyond*.

Biographical Sketch

Stanley E. McDowell (b. 1926) was born in Madison, Wisconsin and grew up in Detroit and Pontiac, (Michigan). He volunteered for the Navy during WWII, and served on the U.S.S. General C.C. Ballou (Ship: AP-157). Upon returning to the United States, McDowell studied electrical engineering at the University of Michigan and later worked for Evinrude and Allis-Chalmers while living in Wisconsin.

Interviewed by Mark Van Ells, 1996.

Transcribed by Karen M. Emery, 1998.

Transcription edited by Christina M. Ballard, 2008

Interview Transcript:

Mark: ... cold?

McDowell: Yeah. I guess it's worked its way up to 6 below.

Mark: All right. Okay, I think we're ready to go.

McDowell: Okay.

Mark: Today's date is January 30, 1996. This is Mark Van Ells, Archivist, Wisconsin Veterans Museum, doing an oral history interview this morning with Mr. Stanley McDowell, presently of the Milwaukee area in Wisconsin and a veteran of the U.S. Navy in World War II. Good morning and thanks for talking with me this morning.

McDowell: Good morning to you, also.

Mark: I appreciate it. I suppose we should start at the top as they say. Why don't you tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised and what you were doing prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

McDowell: Okay. I was actually born in Madison. I don't remember living there. My family moved to the Detroit area in Michigan, oh, I guess I must have been about 1 ½ or 2 years old.

Mark: That's pretty little.

McDowell: Yeah, right. And eventually we ended up in Pontiac, which I considered my hometown at that time. I went through school. Well, I went through the third grade in the Detroit area and then the balance of education, through high school, was in Pontiac.

Mark: I'm going to interrupt for a second. What was Pontiac like before World War II. It's a very suburban area today but was it that way then too?

McDowell: No. Pontiac was, it's about 20 miles from Detroit and it basically was separated by, you know, countryside and so forth. Now you practically can't tell the two apart.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: 'Cause they've grown together. And Pontiac, at the time I was there and graduated from high school, I think the population was, oh, let's say in the area of 65,000 and it was comparable to the size of Madison at that time. I

don't know what the population is now but it's quite a bit larger. It had, the basic industry in Pontiac was General Motors, the Pontiac Motor Division.

Mark: Right.

McDowell: They had the truck and coach division that builds Greyhound buses and so forth and other smaller General Motors plants.

Mark: Now, these were the Depression years. Did the Depression affect Pontiac terribly, terribly much?

McDowell: Well, I can't remember the Depression years. I'm sure that there was some affect. My father was in the printing business and he worked in Detroit mostly, even though we lived in Pontiac. He worked for awhile, I believe, for the Pontiac newspaper. When the war broke out, my mother went to work in one of the General Motors plants so she was one of the "Rosie the Riveters" if you want to call her that.

Mark: Now, how did that situation go over in your family? I mean, did your father have any objections or was it a wartime thing that had to be done?

McDowell: No, not at all, no. I graduated from high school in January of '44 and just prior to graduating I took the exam to get into the Navy V5 program [Aviation Cadet Program], which was the Air Corps.

Mark: Right.

McDowell: And I passed that and when I graduated, which was around the middle of January, I believe, I enlisted in the Navy and was put on active duty in early February, February, 8 I believe.

Mark: I'd like to go over that enlistment process a little bit. I went through the enlistment process. Of course it was 40 years later. I'm sure it's changed somewhat. I assume you had to report somewhere and get sworn in and then go to some sort of basic training. Why don't you just walk me through those steps there.

McDowell: Well, the only thing that I had to do actually for the V5 program, I had to go through an extensive physical which was done locally at one of the Navy facilities in the Pontiac area and once I passed that — well, I didn't quite pass the whole thing. I had a few bad teeth so I had to go and get those taken care of. And then they finally passed me and I was put on inactive duty then until February, 8. And I didn't have any what you call basic training. I was put into the V12 program [Officer Training Program]

and went to Western Michigan University on the V12 program. Shortly after I started there they discontinued the V5.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: They had enough aviators I guess so they discontinued it, and I finished one year, well, two semesters at Western Michigan, and then they were discontinuing the program there and they sent me to the University of Michigan. Well, I decided I didn't want to follow through with that.

Mark: Why not?

McDowell: Well, I was interested in doing a little bit more than going to school.

Mark: Oh, you mean in terms of the war?

McDowell: Yeah.

Mark: You wanted to get out and get into it.

McDowell: Do something what I considered worth while.

Mark: I see.

McDowell: So I had them transfer me to the V6 [???] and was sent to Great Lakes [Great Lakes, Illinois], for let's see, I can't remember exactly how long, maybe 20 weeks or something like that, of basic training.

Mark: And this was more of the standard military basic training (unintelligible).

McDowell: It wasn't, if I'd enlisted directly into V6, the basic training would have been a lot longer than it was, than I had to go through. Those that transferred to V6 from the V12 program, since we'd had a lot of Naval orientation and, you know, the extensive physical education, our program was quite a bit shorter. And when I finished that then I went to, was assigned to a radio school at University of Wisconsin.

Mark: Ironically enough.

McDowell: Right. So, and that program I think was 20 weeks.

Mark: So in all these different schools and that sort of, those sorts of experiences you went through, I'm curious about some of the other young men who were with you. Where they came from in society and that sort of thing 'cause the V12 program and those sorts of things, as far as I know, they're

fairly elite. You had to qualify, have certain mental capabilities, that sort of thing.

McDowell: Oh, yeah.

Mark: I suspect it was kind of, dare I say, a cut above the regular sailor. If you could comment a little bit about some of the others who were in these programs with you.

McDowell: Yeah. When I went to Western Michigan, the people that were assigned to the V12 program there were almost 100% from the state of Michigan.

Mark: Really?

McDowell: And they, of course, were, as you say, they were people who would have gone to college anyway, had there been no war.

Mark: Now, as for yourself, would you have gone to college, do you think?

McDowell: Yes I would, definitely. I don't know how I would have afforded it, but I'd have gone somehow.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: And once I got into the V6 program then, you know, you were in amongst people from all over the country, really, and some were the people that would have gone to college. In fact, several of the people in our communications division did end up, oh, I'd say about 50% of them, probably ended up as college graduates. And the balance of them were, you know, from all different sorts of family backgrounds.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: So it was a novel experience—

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: --in that respect.

Mark: Now, in terms of age. I mean, you were pretty young. You were born in 1926.

McDowell: Right. I was, oh, about 17 ½ when I enlisted. When I got into the V6, or in the V12, I was pretty much, you know, the same age as those that were

just starting. And when you get into the V6, then again, you run into some of these people that were older, that had enlisted.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: So there was quite a, there was a bigger age spread when I got into V6 than there was in the V12 at the time I was in.

Mark: Yeah, and as you mentioned, different backgrounds and different parts of the country, I'm interested to know how people from these different regions of the country, different cultural backgrounds, all got along.

McDowell: Well, I think, no, mainly the people that I was associated with got along very well. I'm sure that there were the North and South conflicts in a lot of respects. I never got directly involved in it but I know that there definitely was prejudice.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: Because we had quite a few blacks in our crew.

Mark: Really?

McDowell: They were mainly the, you know, stewards and that type of thing. And we had a lot of people that were from south of the Mason Dixon Line and you know their attitude towards the blacks at that time.

Mark: By and large, yeah.

McDowell: But basically I didn't run into, you know, a lot of conflict. People got to be friends and you just took a person for what he was worth at that time.

Mark: Now, you're referring to your experiences in the Pacific as well as in the training, if I understand you correctly.

McDowell: Right.

Mark: I suppose it's time to trace your voyage to the Pacific then. As we left off, you were in radio school in Madison.

McDowell: Right, and once I graduated from radio school, which was, let's see, late, I think late June of '45, then I was assigned to the troop, to the General Ballou, troop transport, and I picked that up in San Francisco.

Mark: That was a brand new ship at the time, is that right?

McDowell: Right. It was commissioned on the 30th of June and I boarded it on the 7th of July in '45. And we had, we first of all had a shakedown cruise in the San Diego and San Pedro area; California. From there we went down through the Panama Canal and headed towards France, across the Atlantic. And we were about half way there when we got news of the Japanese surrender.

Mark: Oh, really?

McDowell: Right, and I happened to be on duty at that time and copied the message. Back in that book that I gave you, somewhere there's a copy of the message, 'cause I kept it.

Mark: I'm paging through here as we speak. So when you learned of the Japanese surrender, I mean, by this time you knew that the Germans had surrendered.

McDowell: Yeah. The Germans surrendered, I was in radio school at that time, of course, there was quite a celebration around Madison when that happened. I got, well, we didn't get leave particularly for that, but I know that they had a big special dinner and so forth, being in the middle of the Atlantic for VJ-Day [Victory over Japan Day], we missed all of the activities in the United States.

Mark: What was the reaction on the ship? I would imagine there was still—some sort of jubilation there.

McDowell: Oh, yeah, it was a lot of jubilation, the captain declared a holiday, and we had a special meal, the whole bit, complete with cigars, and the whole bit. Everybody was just overjoyed 'cause that meant now they could really look forward to returning home.

Mark: So the war's over and you're on your way to France.

McDowell: We were actually on our way to France to pick up some troops and take them elsewhere in the war zone, but when the, that was changed and we picked up the troops and we brought them home instead.

Mark: Yeah. So you landed like at Cherbourg [France] or someplace?

McDowell: Marseilles [France].

Mark: Marseilles.

- McDowell: Right, and then we brought them back to Norfolk [Virginia], and, of course, we were really greeted in Norfolk. Banners all over the place, bands and the whole bit, 'cause we were bringing some of the guys home. Then other trips that we made were mostly to, let's see, there were two to Calcutta [India], and one to Karachi [Pakistan], to bring troops home, and then our last trip we actually went around the world.
- Mark: Really?
- McDowell: Started out from New York, to Calcutta, to Manila [Phillipines], and then to San Francisco, and from San Francisco back down through the Canal Zone [Panama]. We picked up some troops in Puerto Rico and ended up in New York which is where we decommissioned.
- Mark: Yeah. It sounds like a kind of interesting job to bring these troops back. Did you— get a sense of their mood? What they were thinking and feeling?
- McDowell: Oh, it was. Oh, yeah. They were all elated that, you know, they didn't have to face the guns anymore or aim at some other human being. It was, we had a great time with the troops on board.
- Mark: So these trips will take two, three weeks or something like that. If you would, try to describe, if possible, a typical day on the ship coming back. What sort of activities go on, are there bands and that sort of thing.
- McDowell: Well, we had a ship band and they would perform concerts for the troops. And we had smokers where they'd have boxing matches. I'm sure there was a lot of gambling going on below deck, out of the site of—
- Mark: Which I'm sure you didn't see.
- McDowell: No, I'm not a gambler so I didn't, I really didn't. I guess I was afraid of losing.
- Mark: Yeah. Me, too, actually. I don't do it myself.
- McDowell: But our, in the radio gang until, it took us a long time to convince the captain that we didn't have to maintain the same watches that we did during the war. During the war we were four on and four off [hours].
- Mark: Yeah.
- McDowell: And he finally conceded to allow us to do a little bit more where we'd be on duty for four hours and off for eight, which was a lot better.

- Mark: Makes it much more amenable, yeah.
- McDowell: And he also made us take all the paint off the portholes.
- Mark: Why was that?
- McDowell: Well, to make the ship look better. See, the portholes were all brass.
- Mark: I see.
- McDowell: But during the war they were all painted the same color as the ship so that, you know, wouldn't give away the ship by lights reflecting off of the brass.
- Mark: Right.
- McDowell: So that kept us busy. Of course, luckily we only had two portholes in the radio shack. Typically, you know, when I was off duty most of my time was spent in either writing letters or reading or studying for, you know, the next higher rating. And chatting with the other people that were off duty, talking with whatever troops we could talk to.
- Mark: What did guys talk about?
- McDowell: Oh, they talked about their experiences. You know, those there were in combat and they told us, like, war stories so to speak. One trip, and I can't remember where that was from, I think it was one of the trips from India, we had, about half the passengers were nurses that were stationed over there, and, of course, they were off limits. They had everything roped off where you couldn't, you weren't even supposed to talk to them. Except the officers always managed to smuggle a nurse into their stateroom.
- Mark: Kind of funny how that works, huh?
- McDowell: Yeah, right. But basically it was interesting for me, you know, not having been, well, when I was, all the way through high school I was in Wisconsin, I was in Michigan, I guess I might have made it to Ohio once, and that was the extent of my travels. And then to join the Navy to see the world and that was about it.
- Mark: Yeah, that really did happen in your case.
- McDowell: Yeah, I really enjoyed the shore leave that we'd get, although they were very short.

Mark: That was one of the areas I wanted to question you about. Where did you get to hit the land, I guess? Some exotic ports I would imagine.

McDowell: Well, we, Marseilles we got about, I think we got one night in Marseilles, and, of course, that was interesting.

Mark: In what way?

McDowell: With all the people trying to solicit you, and, you know, trying to sell you souvenirs at ridiculous prices, but generally the people in France were very grateful to the Americans. In India, of course, we didn't speak their language but we did get shore leave in both Calcutta and Karachi. That was really interesting. They told us before we went ashore to become somewhat familiar with the Indians, you know, like the cow is sacred over there.

Mark: Right.

McDowell: They don't eat meat. So you happen to run across a cow, you give the cow the right-of-way because they're the sacred animal. Just seeing everything there was really great. We did get ashore in Egypt. We stopped at Port Said [Egypt], and some of the guys, I wasn't fortunate enough, got to the pyramids and so forth.

Mark: Oh, really?

McDowell: But I didn't get that much leave. Let's see, where else? Oh, in Honolulu [Hawaii], we got ashore in Honolulu. Manila we weren't able to get any shore leave, we were in the harbor and could see the city, but we didn't get to go ashore there. And San Juan, Puerto Rico, we did get, oh, maybe a four hour shore leave. Otherwise most of our long leaves were when we came back to the United States.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: 'Cause they were, they put new what do they call it? LORAN [Long Range Navigation].

Mark: Oh, the radar.

McDowell: Navigating system. So we were in New York, one time I guess for a period of about two weeks so I actually got to go home for a couple of days— during that.

Mark: Oh, that's nice.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: This was, you know, during the war, and I don't know if it will ever happen again but during World War II everybody in the country backed the service men.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: You know, they were all gung-ho, and the country really mobilized to win that war.

Mark: And so when you were say, in New York on shore leave or something, I mean this was quite obvious, you could tell this?

McDowell: Oh, yes. Very definitely. The people were all extremely friendly, would go out of their way to do anything for a service man.

Mark: If you talk to some old Army guys, or I suppose Navy guys do the same thing, when there wasn't a war going on sometimes near Army bases they would see signs in restaurants "No dogs or soldiers" or something like that.

McDowell: Yeah, right.

Mark: This was not your experience at all?

McDowell: No, I didn't have that experience at all. Never, you know, no place, basically, no place was off limits to the service men.

Mark: So you mentioned that you had a shift of duty between four and eight hours. When you were on duty with the radar—

McDowell: On the radio.

Mark: On the radio, I'm sorry. What was your typical routine there?

McDowell: The routine was to sit at the typewriter for four hours and copy code.

Mark: And was there much to do? Or were you sitting around a lot?

McDowell: Oh, yeah. Well, we usually had two people on duty so you did get a little bit of a relief periodically. I mean, I guess we'd alternate if I remember correctly. One guy would go for an hour and the next guy would go for an hour but you still had to stay in the radio shack because if any message

came that was addressed specifically to your ship, both guys had to copy it. Or if it was like an ALLNAV [All Navy] which was a message to all ships, both guys had to copy it. So, and it was all code until, oh, maybe three or four months after the war and then stuff started to come across in plain language. In fact, the message announcing Japan's surrender was in plain language rather than code.

Mark: Yeah, I've got, I found it here on this page. Page 38, actually. So, you know, there seems to be an irony here in that you're bringing the troops back, bringing these guys back home, and yet you've got some time in the service yet.

McDowell: That's right. You know, it didn't bother me.

Mark: Okay.

McDowell: I enjoyed my time on the ship very much.

Mark: I was going to ask if you're starting to get a little impatient to get out and get on with your life, apparently not.

McDowell: No. I wasn't really in that long. I'm on active duty, well, from July of '45 and I came home in, back to the States for good in May of '46 so it was a little less than a year on the ship.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: But I enjoyed it thoroughly. You know at that time they had a point system.

Mark: Right.

McDowell: Which you gained discharge, and I, being one of the younger guys, well, all of the guys in the radio gang, with the exception of the chief, our chief radioman and two of the other radiomen, were all about the same age. You know, in the, at that time, in the 18 to 19 year old age bracket. Our chief was actually quite young. He was only 23, I believe.

Mark: He must have seemed like an old man at the time, huh?

McDowell: They always called him the "Kid Chief." Yeah, he felt like, well, no, he didn't feel like an old man because two of our radiomen were older than he was.

Mark: So your points eventually came up, apparently, and you were discharged.

McDowell: Right. When we came back to New York and we actually went over to Hoboken, New Jersey which is where we decommissioned the ship and I stayed on through decommissioning, which for the radio guy, that involved disconnecting all of the transmitters and receivers and everything in the radio shack. Once that was over, then I was transferred to the Armed Guard Center in Brooklyn [New York], and from there to Great Lakes where I was discharged. I came, see I got, I think we got back around the 1st of May, '46 and my discharge from Great Lakes was May 24th, so it was a matter of, say, a little over three weeks after I got back to the States that I had the points to be discharged.

Mark: Yeah, that's pretty quick turnaround.

McDowell: Yes, it is.

Mark: So the war's over and you're discharged. And this is usually where these sorts of interviews and that sort of thing end but I've got some questions about the post-war period and how that perhaps affected your subsequent life. So I suppose I should start by asking you, you're what, 19 now, you're out of the service? Maybe 20.

McDowell: Right. That was '46, I was—

Mark: You were going to turn 20 some time that year.

McDowell: Turned 20 some time that year, right. In August.

Mark: So what were your priorities to get back into civilian life?

McDowell: Well, I wanted to finish college. That was my top priority and fortunately the G.I. Bill enabled me to do that.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: It paid for my entire college education.

Mark: And you selected the University of Michigan.

McDowell: Well, I went back to Western Michigan for one year and then transferred to Michigan because I wanted to take electrical engineering and the Western Michigan electrical engineering program was only a two year program. So that's why I ended up at Michigan. I tried to get into Madison, Wisconsin. I had an aunt and an uncle that were both graduates

of Wisconsin, but at that time they were so loaded they were not taking out-of-state students.

Mark: Well, see, I was, you know, the University of Michigan is comparable. I mean, Wisconsin, the university here and at Ann Arbor [Michigan] are quite similar and often compared. I've interviewed a lot of vets who went to school here and I'm curious to know what it was like in Ann Arbor at the time. I would imagine it was also very crowded with veterans.

McDowell: Oh, very much so. In fact, at the time I was there the Michigan football team, well, Elroy Hirsch, during the war, during the end of the war, Elroy Hirsch [running back] played for Michigan. But the football team was almost all veterans of service so it was an older, you know, an older team than you normally see now.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: It was great. I really loved the university, and of course, I like Madison too. My parents wanted me to go to Wisconsin but we just couldn't get in, you know. Now as I look back on it I'm not unhappy that I went to Michigan.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: It's a great school.

Mark: It is a great school.

McDowell: I got a good education.

Mark: So, in your classes, a lot of veterans I would imagine.

McDowell: Oh, yes. I would say most of the classes that I had in the electrical engineering curriculum were at least 50% were veterans, you know, all taking advantage of the G.I. Bill.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: Which was really great. I say my first year of college was in the V12 program which didn't cost anything. The balance was paid for by the G.I. Bill. I worked a couple of summers to earn a little bit of extra money but—

Mark: See, I was going to ask if it paid for your college completely. Apparently, it could have had you not decided to work.

McDowell: Well, see they picked up your tuition, they paid for all your books, and you got \$75, a month, and, you know, \$75 a month today would not get you much.

Mark: No.

McDowell: But with the little bit that I earned during the summer I was able to pay for my room and board. So, basically, if it hadn't been for the G.I. Bill it probably would have taken me twice as long to get through school.

Mark: As far as housing accommodations on campus were concerned, it's very crowded at this university. Was it the same there?

McDowell: Yes, and, as a matter of fact, I stayed at what was then called Willow Run Airport [Van Buren Charter Township, Michigan], which is now the Detroit [Michigan] airport. They had a bunch of Quonset huts [lightweight prefabricated structure of corrugated steel having a semicircular cross section] that were, or barracks, that were built for people that worked at the Willow Run plant during the war, and some of the other industrial plants, so I stayed out there. I think my first year at Michigan I was there and then I was able to get a room in one of the dorms on the campus, but it was crowded, for sure.

Mark: And you eventually graduated. You got a—

McDowell: Right. I graduated in, I was a January graduate in everything. I graduated from Michigan in January of 1950.

Mark: And when it came time to find work—

McDowell: That was a bad time to graduate.

Mark: I was going to say, there are a lot of other vets on campus and the economy is just getting, well, 1950 I suppose it had pretty much going by that time, but in terms of finding work, how difficult was it or was it not?

McDowell: Well, there were at that time, at least I couldn't find any engineering jobs. People weren't hiring at that time. I put in an application at Allis-Chalmers [American manufacturer of agricultural machinery] but they were not hiring. So a neighbor across the street in Grafton [Wisconsin] was the personnel manager at Evinrude [Manufacturer of outboard motors] in Milwaukee [Wisconsin] and he got me a job in the machine shop. I worked in the machine shop for Evinrude, oh, I think four months, something like that, and then I finally got a call from Allis-Chalmers that

they were hiring. So I started in July, toward the end of July with Allis-Chalmers at \$243 a month, which was a lot of money at that time.

Mark: Back in those days, yeah.

McDowell: Of course it was half of what I was making at Evinrude. I was, 'cause we were working 10 hours a day, 6 days a week at Evinrude trying to keep up with the demand for outboard. So I worked at Allis-Chalmers until October of 1986 when I retired.

Mark: So that situation seemed to have work out quite well for you.

McDowell: Yeah, it did. Even though it went through, it's now called Siemens of course. Siemens bought, they bought half of Allis-Chalmers.

Mark: Oh, I didn't know that.

McDowell: Yeah, they bought half of it. Then eventually they bought the rest so it's now called Siemens Energy, and my, the department in which I worked relocated to Raleigh, North Carolina and I opted not to become a Southerner 'cause I liked Wisconsin.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: And we have a summer home in Door County. I couldn't convince my family that we should move to North Carolina so I managed to stay on for, oh, about three years I guess after they moved, and then finally I got the notice that, you know, there is no more work in Milwaukee for you. So I decided to retire.

Mark: So we talked about G.I. Bill, we talked about your employment situation after the war. Now, there were home loans available to veterans. Did you avail yourself of that opportunity at any time?

McDowell: No, I didn't.

Mark: Nope.

McDowell: When my wife and I, my wife and I got married in June of 1950 and in the beginning of our marriage we lived with her parents and eventually we bought their house, and we're still in it. I was, you know, I didn't require a home loan at that time. Had it not been for the situation that I was able to move in with my in-laws and actually get along with them I probably would have taken advantage of that.

- Mark: These sorts of questions might not apply but it's part of my standard line of questioning — any sort of medical problems after the war that you had to deal with?
- McDowell: Uh, no, not until later years.
- Mark: In terms of being service-connected though.
- McDowell: Oh, no.
- Mark: Fall down and break your arm.
- McDowell: No service-connected problems. No, none at all.
- Mark: Okay. I've just got one last area of questioning and that involves veterans' organizations and reunions and that sort of thing. I know you've got, you've had some involvement in that. Did you ever join any of the major veterans' groups, like the Legion or the VFW or that sort of thing?
- McDowell: No, I never did.
- Mark: Is there any, is that on purpose or just because you never got around to it?
- McDowell: Uh, I wouldn't say it was on purpose. I just never got around to it. I did, going back to when I was discharged, they always asked people to re-enlist, and, you know, I felt, well, no, I want to go home so I didn't take them up on that. But I was home for maybe four months and then I enlisted in the Naval Reserve, went back into the Naval Reserve and I stayed in there. When I graduated from college I applied for and got a commission as an Ensign, and I attended a few reserve meetings in Milwaukee but then that started to interfere with my job so I went mainly into the inactive reserve. I was on the ready reserve but didn't attend any meetings, and eventually when I retired from the Navy I was up to a Lieutenant JG [Junior Grade].
- Mark: I was in the Air Force. I'm not quite sure what that is.
- McDowell: That, Lieutenant JG would be equivalent to a First Lieutenant in the Army. As far as reunions, I had kept in touch with one of the radio people, he lived in Missouri. On one of our company calendars there was a picture of a house in a little — he lived in Pacific, Missouri — and there was a picture of a house in Pacific, Missouri. So I tore that picture off and I sent it to him and I said, "You probably know where this house is." And then just off-hand I said, "Gee, it sure would be nice if we could get a bunch of our radio people together" and that was in 1990. So five of us, we were

able to get five people to the first reunion. Once we got those five, you know how it spreads, well, I know of this guy, and this guy, and this guy, and we started yearly reunions and through the notices that we put in the service magazines, for reunions, we ended up, we've located 70. And that's out of probably, I'd say over the period that the ship was in duty, we probably had a total of 700 people. You know, not all at once. Crew capacity was a little over 400, but with the transfers on and off, we probably had around 700 people that served on the ship at one time or another. We ended up, we got about five or six people that were on the ship during the Korean War 'cause it was put back in service in the Korean War.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: I guess that's, yeah, we've located 70 and that 70 is spread out over 31 states and we have one that lives in Spain, who was a dentist on our ship.

Mark: Seventy is not bad. It's hard to track people down.

McDowell: Well, you know, when you start 45 years after you've seen them, it is difficult.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: I got an unsolicited letter from some, from a person in Florida that does people locating and he does it as a past-time. He charges 50¢ a name, and you give him a name and a serial number and he's tied in with some government, well, the VA system and so forth, and he will run a list of addresses, you know, of people with that same name.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: It's amazing how many people have the same name.

Mark: Yeah it is.

McDowell: First and last, or first initial and last name. But I think that I've probably sent in maybe 20 names and 10 of the people that we located came from his list, and we managed to locate every one of our communication division though, which is the ones we were really centered on.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: Well, we had Army people and also Marines on the ship and we've got, I think we had four Marines that we've located and only one Army person.

And we also have some that were passengers on the ship. So it's interesting.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: And our reunions aren't very long, but interesting talking to the people. You know, the other people that you didn't meet on the ship or that were passengers and what their experiences were. We enjoy the reunion. We're passing this year. We couldn't find a suitable place, plus I'm doing all the reunion work and my wife is quite ill right now so I just don't have the initiative to worry about a reunion.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: Hoping to continue again next year.

Mark: It's an awful lot of work.

McDowell: It is.

Mark: What makes you do all that?

McDowell: Just like to get together with the people, you know. Really, when we started the reunion, it was intended to be just the communications division, but then when these other people would see the notice, you say, well, you can't turn them down. So it ends up that we run the gamut. We've got the Korean War people, passengers from the Korean War, passengers from World War II, and then our own crew. But it's fun just sitting there, most of ours is a gab session, just talking to people, what they did the last year and so forth.

Mark: I imagine you have dinner or something like that.

McDowell: Yeah, we have a short two hour meeting, if you want to call it a business meeting, then we have a luncheon together, and then we also have a dinner at night. Then the rest of the meals that were there are on an individual basis, although we always end up in a group.

Mark: What sort of locations do you normally have these at?

McDowell: Well, we've had, the first one we had at one of the radiomen's house, the guy in Pacific, Missouri. He decided that he would host that one, and every one since then has been at the Pere Marquette Lodge in Grafton, Illinois. It's right across the river from St. Louis [Missouri].

Mark: Yeah. I suppose it's centrally located.

McDowell: And it's a beautiful park and working with the people at the lodge, it makes it easy to plan a reunion. You just give them an estimate of how many are going to be there and you make the reservation and that's about it. To find a new place, which we were going to do this year, we were thinking of maybe going to the eastern part of the country, then you start looking for a place and there are so many places that that's when the work gets involved.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: I think I've got about three tons of literature from various motels and resorts and so forth. As I say, in '87 we hope to have another reunion and probably in the eastern part of the country but I'm hoping that somebody will help me. Somebody that lives in that part of the country can suggest a good place.

Mark: Well, good luck to you.

McDowell: Thank you.

Mark: You've exhausted my line of questioning. Is there anything you'd like to add or anything?

McDowell: No, I think we've covered just about everything that I can remember.

Mark: Okay.

McDowell: I think, you know, my book, I did a lot of research on although it's not the greatest piece of, greatest publication, the people that got it really enjoyed it.

Mark: Well, don't be too modest. It's quite informative. I appreciate you sending it over here.

McDowell: Yeah, I had to work with Sensenbrenner [Representative F. James Sensenbrenner (R - WI)] to get the Navy to pry loose and get me some information on the ship.

Mark: Oh, is that right?

McDowell: Yeah. He did a good job shaking them loose.

Mark: Well, I had it put in our library and with any luck someone's going to do some research with it some day.

McDowell: Yeah, mainly the problem I had was trying to find out what happened to the ship after the Korean War.

Mark: What did happen to it?

McDowell: Well, it, you'll have to go back and review one of the last pages in the book.

Mark: Oh, I'm sure it's in the book. I just thought you ...

McDowell: Yeah, it's on page 62. Ended up, after being in moth balls in Texas for awhile, in '68 they turned it over to the Maritime Administration, and from there it was sold to Puerto Rico maritime shipping service, and then it was sold to some Liberian corporation, and finally in May of 1982 it was completely dismantled and sold for scrap. So it was sailing around for quite awhile.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: That was one of the Kaiser-built ships.

Mark: Oh, was it?

McDowell: Yeah, and we hammered the ship together in about a week.

Mark: Yeah.

McDowell: So everybody always kidded about that. You know, we hope this thing holds together. But it was a good ship. I enjoyed it.

Mark: Well, you got back safely.

McDowell: Right, right, we brought a lot of people back.

Mark: Yeah. Well, thanks for taking the time to talk to me this morning.

McDowell: Okay, I appreciate your call. Nice talking to you.

Mark: Yeah, you too.

[End of Interview]