

Wisconsin Veterans Museum  
Research Center

Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with  
OMER H. MICKELSON  
Master-at-Arms and Boat Driver, Navy, World War II.

2004

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**Mickelson, Omer H.**, (1926-2006). Oral History Interview, 2004.

User Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 45 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

**Abstract:**

Omer H. Mickelson, a Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin native, discusses his service with the Navy in the Pacific theater of World War II aboard the *USS Darke*. Mickelson talks about leaving high school at age seventeen to enlist in the Navy along with some friend and attending boot camp with Navy Company 1172 at Great Lakes (Illinois). He discusses amphibious landing craft school at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, assignment to the *USS Darke* (APA-159), and practicing amphibious maneuvers in Hawaii. He speaks of his duties on watch, as a master-at-arms, and as a coxswain on a troop transport boat. Mickelson describes the ship's personnel capacity, food, and life at sea. He tells of landing Marines on Iwo Jima, hearing the bombardment of the shore, seeing the water turn red, and working straight through three days and nights. He touches on bringing casualties back to the ship and burying bodies at sea. Sent to deliver 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry troops to the Battle of Okinawa, Mickelson discusses constant bombardment and being hit by a kamikaze plane. He characterizes some of his friends aboard the *Darke* and tells of having liberty with beer on small islands. He touches on getting ready to invade Japan and, after the atomic bombs had been dropped, delivering troops to Tokyo Bay for occupation duty. Mickelson tells of going through the Panama Canal, decommissioning the ship in Norfolk (Virginia), taking the train to Green Bay, and hitchhiking home on a mail truck. He comments on his homecoming, using the GI Bill for vocational training in meat cutting, and hearing loss caused by not wearing earplugs aboard the ship. Mickelson mentions being involved with the VFW and American Legion and serving as the first commander of AMVETS Post 51 (Sturgeon Bay).

**Biographical Sketch:**

Mickelson (1926-2006) served in the Navy from 1944 to 1946. Discharged at the rank of Boson Mate Second Class, he worked for a few years as a meat cutter at Pleck's Ice Cream and Dairy, and he operated Mickelson's Texaco for twenty-eight years. He served on the Board of Education for Sturgeon Bay High School for nine years, the city council for thirty years, and as Red Cross chairman for Door County, and he was an active member of AMVETS and the Kiwanis Club.

Interviewed by Terry MacDonald, 2004

Transcribed by Mary Lou Condon, court reporter, 2007

Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

### Interview Transcript:

Terry: Interview is with Omer H. Mickelson, who served with the United States Navy aboard the *USS Darke* during World War II. The interview is conducted at 11:00 a.m. at the following address: 1227 Superior Street, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, on the following date of July 19, 2004. The interviewer is Terry MacDonald.

Omer, can you tell us a little bit about the background, your life circumstances before you entered the military service?

Omer: Well, I lived in Sturgeon Bay. I was born in what they call Sawyer, Wisconsin on the west side, 107 Pine Street. And our family stayed there until later on when I moved over on Jefferson Street in an apartment because I had a sister, which was named Wyola [??], she was the oldest one. And I was Homer, the second boy. And then I had a brother, E.B. or Peter they called him. He was born on the same day two years apart as I was, May 20<sup>th</sup>. And then later on I had another brother, Robert J., and he was born in 1930, better known as Huncie.

And we lived all our life in Sturgeon Bay, and I went to St. Joseph Grade School. I graduated June 1, 1941 from 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and then I went to Sturgeon Bay High School, and I played in the high school band. And I had left in my junior year to join the military, the U.S. Navy with two other fellows from town, John McCormick and Bill Smelzer. And we all left Sturgeon Bay at the same time for Great Lakes, Illinois Company 1172.

Terry: What made you join the Navy?

Omer: Well, at that time you really didn't know what to do. I was a junior in high school, my junior year, and I had enough credits that I could almost graduate. And I wanted to be able to get in the Navy and help out and do something for my country due to the fact that I had a job to do and I wanted to sleep in a warm bed. That's what they always told me, that if I would join the Navy I would be in at least a bed and not a foxhole. So I decided, the three of us, we went down to the Navy recruiter and joined the Navy. And then we had a good experience –

I was only 17 years old and I had to get permission from my mother and dad to sign the letter To Whom It May Concern to join the Navy. And I still have a copy of the letter. And it was interesting because it didn't take long and all of a sudden we were on our way by bus at that time to Milwaukee for our physical. And then we got in the line for our physical, they picked some of the boys from the Navy and put them in the Marine

Corps, but fortunately the three of us stayed in the Navy, and we went all the way through Navy Company 1172 in Great Lakes.

And the first day after we were there we got out for our physical exercise, and the instructor up in front took a look at them and said, geez, you know that guy is from Sturgeon Bay, Stan Kramer, was our physical advisor and he'd run us through the exercises. So Stan, he played for a short time with the Packers, and of course Sturgeon Bay wasn't that big, so we knew everybody practically.

Terry: What kind of barracks did you have at Great Lakes and how many people were around?

Omer: We had two companies in each barracks. There must've been about 200 of us in the company. They kept us busy. John McCormick slept above me, and he was a late sleeper all the time so he depended on me to wake him up in the morning. And I was an early riser, I always got up. For physical in the morning a lot of times you'd get up and you'd run out to the main gate and back for exercise besides when you're not at work. But you always got an early start.

Terry: What kind of training did they do in boot camp to prepare you for the military?

Omer: Physical training and then swimming because a lot of fellows that joined the Navy couldn't swim very far. I was one of them. I told the guy, I said, "I can't swim very far." He said, "You will when we get done with you." And they had us on a tower and they dropped us, you jumped off the tower. You didn't go down right away, you dog-paddled or whatever you did to get out. And then after that, if you passed it but you were a poor swimmer, then you'd go back for more swimming exercises so that you were able to keep yourself above float.

And then after Great Lakes they come home on a week's pass, and then we all left back to Great Lakes. We were real salty then; we had about four weeks in the Navy, but that's all the Boot Camp training we needed because they needed us on the other end. And I got shipped out to Shoemaker, California, and John McCormick got shipped out to someplace in California, but he got a destroyer and I got on the amphibious landing craft school in ATV Coronado.

Terry: The amphibious landing craft, what kind of schooling was that?

Omer: That was a complete six-week course of running the landing craft, getting acquainted with them, landing troops. They were other members of the class, but we found out how to operate them. And when we come out of

that school, and we were first class seamen, which helped a lot as soon as we got aboard ship because we already had a head start on some of the other new recruits. And it was interesting, and I learned how to run a 40-foot landing craft, and an LCM which is 50-feet.

Terry: And that's a landing craft medium?

Omer: A landing craft mechanism. They carried heavy equipment, and they had twin screws, where the other LCVPs only had a single screw, and that was about a 40-footer.

Terry: And that was to carry personnel?

Omer: Personnel. And all the LCMs carried personnel, too, a certain amount of them; and tanks and heavy equipment. And then we'd hit the beach, drop the ramp, and we'd carry 36 Marines with their loaded equipment on their back into the beachhead.

And then, of course, we did a lot of maneuvering and practicing beforehand over in Hawaii. We were there a couple times. We picked up different troops, and we ended up taking the Marines. We could take 2,000 Marines aboard the ship.

Terry: When did you get assigned to your ship, after you got out of your amphibious landing craft school?

Omer: Right. We got out—

Terry: And where was that at?

Omer: We got transferred up to Oregon where the ship was built, in the Oregon shipyards up there.

Terry: What type of ship was it?

Omer: An APA-159, amphibious personnel attack. And it carried 450 as a crew, and 50 of them were officers, and the rest of them were white-hat sailors or crew members.

Terry: Was this a brand new ship?

Omer: Brand new ship. She was commissioned, and W.C. Wood was our first captain, and we took her out of port and commissioned her, run maneuvers back and forth around Hawaii, so we got acquainted with it. And did heavy gunfire out in the ocean and practicing maneuvering in a regular battle.

- Terry: What was your duty as a first-class seaman? What were your duties aboard the ship?
- Omer: I was in the after crow's next watch, and then later on I got to become a master-at-arms because then I got to be, after aboard ship awhile, they made me a coxswain because I had already been a first class, which meant that I was a driver of one of the boats, so the captain for the boat.
- Terry: And what was a master-of-arms? What position was that?
- Omer: I was a police officer, like an MP in the Army. But a master-at-arms was your law enforcement on the ship. And firefighting, we did that too.
- Terry: What was it like living aboard the ship as far as living quarters and meals and things?
- Omer: The living quarters were sort of close because we had to get everything—we carried our troops and our bedding and our food and things along with us aboard the ship, and then all those Marines or Army or whatever we carried. But we had a laundry aboard, we had a barbershop, we had a pharmacy, first-aid station.
- Terry: How were the bunks high? Just one or two?
- Omer: Oh, they were six high in some of the old cargo holds. The center cargo hold were larger, they had more. Then what we'd do is take on coming during the maneuvers we had all those men aboard the ship besides our own crew.
- Terry: About how many people was that total?
- Omer: Oh, we could carry Marines the first time, 2,000 Marines, and we only dropped off 900 of them at Iwo Jima. We hit the beach with 900, the Red Beach Two, at 10:00 in the morning on February 19<sup>th</sup>, and that was hot.
- Terry: But when you were outfitting before you got into any battles, when you were doing the training and stuff, what was your job when they called general quarters?
- Omer: After crow's nest we were out there on the lookout for any planes or anything coming in, the suicide planes, because, after Okinawa, that's when the first suicide planes come in. But just other bombing runs could come anytime.

Terry: What did you do on board the ship after you got your breakdown and you were out on the ocean? What were your job duties aboard the ship?

Omer: Well, you had four hours of duty, four on and four off, and then four on again and eight off. And then I was put into the Master Arms Division, which meant that I watched the chow line, get the people up for their different watches, and made sure that nobody got into a tangle playing cards illegally or doing things that they weren't supposed to. Never heard about anything like drugs or anything at that time, at least, and it was all new to us.

Terry: You served in the Pacific Theater. Where did you pick up your troops? What time span was this, in the early 1940? '44?

Omer: We picked up the troops in 1945 because the ship, in 1944, August or October, she was built, and then we did maneuvering and testing out the ship, and then we started to pick up maneuvers in the end of '44 in October and November. And we were training off of Hawaii, different groups. We had the 1<sup>st</sup> Army and then we took on the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry and a division of each one of those. But the main one we got ready for, Iwo Jima, that was a big battle, the heaviest battle fought in the South Pacific.

Terry: When did you know you were going to go into that type of battle?

Omer: Everybody had a job to do and orders to follow, and that's what you did. You didn't know where you were going from one day to the next. Fortunately, after we got out, one of the crew members that kept a trail of the *Darke* day-by-day, which helps bring back memories on a lot of things.

We crossed the equator and then I had a summons they gave me for crossing the equator because I was a polliwog. That means that you were like a little frog. My two blue papers that I received was one for being a chow hound and the other one was a sack hound. The reason why they were chow hound and sack hound is I always guarded and watched the chow line so nobody would get in front of one another. And a sack hound is you had to go and wake up the other guys early in the morning for whatever watch they had on and keep an eye on them.

Terry: Speaking of chow, how was the Navy chow?

Omer: Navy chow was good. We had a lot of rice, and I don't care for rice to this day, but I eat it. But we had oatmeal in the morning, and we had eggs and whatever. Scrambled eggs we'd have, we'd get bacon once in a while. It was basically good food. And it we run into a lot of heavy storms or where we were running into typhoons and that where we had to pull in, then it was strictly sandwiches.

But we didn't starve, we kept going, and we had three meals a day except during the time when we had the troops on. Then the troops got two meals a day because the chow line was running 24 hours right around the clock. They'd break it off for the ship's crew and then we'd go and eat and get back to our duties.

Terry: How did you get all the supplies for all the men?

Omer: When they get into port we loaded supplies. Like when we were in Hawaii and that we had supply ships, we had fuel, and we picked up things as we went along. And they had ships pull alongside and would give us what we needed. They had supply ships right out there in the fleet.

Terry: You went with a convoy of several ships?

Omer: Several ships. There were quite a few of us. I would say there was probably 500 to 1,000 ships that were in.

Terry: After you were out at sea for quite a long time, your Marines on board, you didn't know where you were going. How did that come about?

Omer: No, we had no idea except that we had orders that we'd be making a landing. And there'd be no difference in the maneuvers that we would do. And when we got ready, we put the boats in the water about three o'clock in the morning off the ship, and we'd run round a view[??] and circle and circle and work our way into the beach.

Terry: Did the Navy bombard the island prior to--

Omer: Oh yes.

Terry: Can you describe what that was like?

Omer: We were about 300 yards out, where the big ship was, and then we went in. But the battleships were out shooting over the top of us while we were going in. They were softening up the beachheads and making it easier, but the Japanese were still buried in and hidden in the hills.

Terry: What did that sound like?

Omer: It sounded terrific. I mean, it was just like thunderstorms and lightning, something we never heard before. Plus then they had air raids, too. They had their planes and things that were coming in, sometimes run as far as eight hours under bombing before we get the full Marines onto the beach.



But then we'd run back and forth and go back to the ship, and we always had a compass that we went by; we went by compass, and we had usually a control boat in front of us that would lead us away.

Terry: What was it like, the first landing that you made? Was there any opposition?

Omer: Oh yeah, there was a lot of opposition. We didn't bother to say no, we didn't want to go; we had orders and that was our training, to go. We had a job to do and we did just exactly what we were told to do. We landed the troops and people, small craft were getting shot out alongside of us and wounded people were laying there. Like I always say, the water was red colored, and it wasn't because they had a bunch of red beets in the water, it was because it was casualties and men that got shot up or killed.

But we kept on going anyhow because there was no way to back out. And we'd better not back out because we had a job to do. It was hairy, I'll tell you that. I wouldn't want to go through it again. I was young enough then, though.

Terry: How big a crew was on your landing craft?

Omer: There's four of us.

Terry: Did you have any weapons aboard your landing craft to protect yourself?

Omer: Yeah, we had weapons. We had two small machine guns and that to protect them. But the Marines and that, they had their stuff, and other ships were standing by for air raids and that. When we were all on our ship in the *Darke* we had twin forties and we had a five-inch cannon on the stern, single forties, and we did practice in shooting, and they knocked down planes and kept them from coming in and air raiding and hitting us.

Terry: And how many trips did you make into Iwo Jima on your landing craft? I mean, continuously?

Omer: Continuous. Three days and three nights we were out, and finally we were running low on fuel, and I was wondering. I look back and I wonder how I got hungry or had to go relieve yourself to the bathroom or something, but it didn't bother anybody. You just kept on going because you had a job to do.

Then finally we pulled up alongside a destroyer escort because we needed fuel, and he gave us fuel, and he said how long has it been since you men had a hot meal, and we said three days. He said, come on aboard, I'll have my crew watch your landing craft, and they served us bacon and eggs and

we thought we were king and queens. We were treated like gentlemen. Afterwards they put us back on the water and away we went. We stayed out for another three, four days before we got back.

Terry: Now, when you made those several trips in and out, when you came off the island, did you ever haul anything back off the island?

Omer: Later on, after the heat of it was over, we took back casualties. And we brought back around 200-some casualties between our 26 boats and landing crafts.

Terry: And did they bring them back to your ship?

Omer: Yeah, we brought them back to our ship, loaded them, and then later on when we pulled into Tai Pan [Saipan], I believe it was, with a big hospital or where a big hospital ship was laying waiting for us, anybody who didn't make it during the night while you were underway the bodies were put in the morgue, and the next day they took the bodies and slid them off the stern of the ship, and they put either five-inch shell casings on them or concrete block to hold them down, and they were buried at sea. That's the only way we could do it because there were too many of them that were handling them back and forth. And we made it.

Terry: So after the major battle of Iwo Jima was done, did you get any relief then?

Omer: No. After we got done, then we run right back into maneuvers because we knew the next battle, we knew we were going to another battle, we didn't know which one it was, but we found out later on it was Okinawa, which is the mainland of Japan.

And that's when we first run into suicide planes, in Okinawa, and we had eight hours or better of solid bombing from Japanese because they were protecting themselves. And they'd come in with suicide planes. We got hit, but we had fires in the galley and fires aboard ship, and we managed to put them out because we had our own firefighting crew.

Terry: Can you briefly describe what that was like when the Japanese planes were coming at your ship?

Omer: You just figured the gunner mates would do their job and keep them off of you. If not, then you take a hit. And some of them come awful close, but we only got hit once. It wasn't much; fortunately, they sort of missed it. And then later on, then that's when the first suicide planes come in.

And later on the Japanese had their subs with manned torpedoes where one man would ride a torpedo. And they were on their way. They were going to go over and blow up the Panama Canal, one end of it, so we couldn't get our ships back and forth across. But then, by us hitting the mainland, they took their crews away and put them in Okinawa. Fortunately they never did hit the Panama Canal. But they were dangerous because they come up under the sub, one man on a torpedo, and it was a one-way ride.

Terry: How did Okinawa compare to, then, Iwo Jima?

Omer: Okinawa was milder. A lot of air raids and planes come over the top, but opposition on the shoreline was nowhere near as bad. First we brought in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, part of a division of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry, that was Army troops, and it wasn't as hairy as the Marines going into Iwo Jima. But it was more dive bombing and bombing and air raids constantly than it was in Iwo.

Terry: As a young man at that time, did you feel pretty lucky?

Omer: Oh, yeah. We figured we were pretty lucky. And if we wouldn't have been young we probably wouldn't have been able to go through with it. But it was all a new experience because you never had that when you lived in town in Sturgeon Bay. It was sort of peaceful-like.

Terry: Then at the end of the Okinawa campaign pretty much there were a lot of wounded Marines at that time.

Omer: That was the Army. We took on the Army and took the Army back. Two hundred-some were wounded that we took back to the hospital ship and dropped them off. I believe it was Saipan, I believe. Like a lot of times we didn't know the ports we were in, we just went along with the ship. And the main thing was to keep our crew and our ship safe besides doing our job.

Terry: Did you run into any interesting people aboard your ship? And did you make any friends that you kept?

Omer: George Sandoval, who was one of my boat crew members, he lives in Silver City, New Mexico, and we still communicate at Christmas time. And I call him once in a while. He's still going strong. He's a Spaniard, but he's a very good-hearted one.

And then we had a fellow by the name of Rope. He was a Native American, a big, tall, husky man, and he'd usually run on the bow of the boat when we were in the landing craft. Or we'd go up into Davis[??] a lot of times because I had the control boat for a while, and that would be just hooked up under two ends[??] with the LCVPs. When you had them,

you had a big hook. You'd have to pick that hook up and get it over the block and tackle, and then they'd hoist you up. And sometimes the sea would be pretty rough and you'd get some awful--

Terry: Speaking of that, did you run into any severe weather when you were out on the ocean?

Omer: Oh, yes, we did, sure. Not the crew as much as the Army and the Marines or whatever we had. They'd get sick; they couldn't take that, they'd get seasick. As a matter of fact, afterwards I got out and I'd always tell the kids and the people that we talked to, I'd say, I'll tell you a few stories, but you be sure and put a life jacket on and have a five-gallon bucket in case you get seasick. It was, it was rough, no doubt about it. I mean, the bow would go up and the stern would go down, and you'd always have to walk straight up.

Terry: And what size was your ship?

Omer: The ship was 460 feet long, 62 feet of beam, and just half the size of 1,000 footers they're building in they[??] ship when they did. But it was big enough it took the seas, and then when we come out of Okinawa on October 13<sup>th</sup>, we blew a boiler on the ship, and we had to fall back out of the convoy. And the APA, the Cecil [Sandoval??] 194, they stayed behind to give us some protection because we were way down in speed; we couldn't make any speed.

Terry: Was the Japanese submarine still pretty active at that time?

Omer: Oh, yes, they were. They had quite a few times that we were followed by subs, but they didn't do anything because they didn't know whether it was an American sub or a Japanese because they all run so quiet underneath the water.

Terry: So then what happened after Okinawa?

Omer: After Okinawa, then we went into Hawaii again and picked up troops and got things ready to go into the occupation of Japan.

Terry: Did you get any liberty at all?

Omer: Liberty would be on some small island. We'd have a short liberty where you had three-two[??] beer. It was real light and you'd get three cans of beer and you'd go out on this island, off the ship of course, and three cans of beer of that light stuff, and of course it was hot and sunny and warm, so sometimes some of the boys acted up pretty easy with it. But never was enough to salt anybody away.

Or we'd have gunfire out practicing, and we took all the beer from the other ship that was with us, and practiced gun-firing because we shot the target more times than they did. So they claim we took all their beer, but it wasn't all of it because they had an awful lot of storage room aboard the ships.

Terry: So then, when you picked up your troops from Hawaii, then, to go back across, where were you headed then?

Omer: To Japan. We left Hawaii, then we went on our way to Japan and made a few stops at islands that were, I think, three or four days out of Japan by ship.

Terry: Had the atomic bomb been dropped yet?

Omer: No, the atomic bomb was dropped. And we went up there, we got up there in Japan on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup>, and we unloaded troops so they could take the occupation, and also the supplies we had. We carried a lot of supplies for them, too, and heavy equipment, so we pulled into Tokyo Bay in the harbor there **[end of Tape 1, Side A]** those three days, and then later on we went back in there with another fresh bunch of troops we brought in and picked up some guys that were ready for retirement or getting out of Service on the point system.

Terry: What did it feel like when you heard that they dropped the atomic bomb?

Omer: The first bomb was dropped in August, and then later on, the first part of August, I believe the 28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup>, something like that, and then they dropped another one later. But by the time we got there on September 2<sup>nd</sup> it was the signing of the peace treaty, and our mail and everything was stamped V-J day in Tokyo Bay, Japan.

Then we had a chance to pick up mail, and things were pretty well-organized because they knew we were going to evidently win the war at that time because they had things set up and had all those ships out there. It was surprising when you'd look out over the seas where you wrap[??] and you'd see nothing but ships.

You wonder how they could control them all and keep them under orders, but they did. They made a good job of them. There were all kinds of LSTs and LCMs and LSMs and troop ships where they handled strictly troops, and that's why we had the landing crafts, the amphibious, to help unload and things like that.

- Terry: So then, after the signing of Japan when the war was really over, you briefly said that a lot of troops had their time to head back to the States. What was your duty then, the ship's duties?
- Omer: We were shoveling troops back and forth to San Francisco or on our way to other stops to pick them up. Then we dropped the troops off in different spots, new recruits and that that were going over, and we were on our way back, and then we went around through the Panama Canal to decommission the ship.
- And when we did have any liberty or anything on the West Coast, I'd always tell the fellows, well, that's all right, you that live over here can take my shift and take my liberty and I'd wait for mine until we got to the East Coast because that's where I lived. So I figured I didn't have anyplace to do, I didn't know anybody.
- Then come to find out we went through the Panama Canal and then we went in for decommissioning. Then in October of that following year we decommissioned it in Norfolk, Virginia. Then, after the ship was decommissioned, we took our supplies, our own personal supplies and gear, and we were shipped home. And I had to take the Chesapeake & Ohio train out of Norfolk, Virginia--[phone rings].
- Terry: The ship was decommissioned in 1946 and you were describing your trip home, your trip back to Sturgeon Bay.
- Omer: I took the Chesapeake & Ohio out of Norfolk, Virginia, and I was on the way and had to make a transfer to get to a train to Green Bay. And I remember cashing a \$20 bill, and I had \$10 change coming, in the excitement and hurry to get home I left it laying. I felt bad, it really broke my heart because we never had too much money aboard. We got \$50 a month as seaman or officer or boson mate, and I felt bad about that.
- But then we got all the way to Green Bay and, when I get into Green Bay in the train depot, there's nobody around. It was way early in the morning about 5:00, but I didn't much care because you're on your way home. You didn't care. You had the gear you had and the orders you had.
- Terry: And what did you get discharged as? What was your rank?
- Omer: Boson Mate II; second class Boson Mate, in other words, is what they call it. And so I was walking around the train depot there and all of a sudden I saw a guy in the mail truck from Sturgeon Bay, Door County. I said, "Say, where are you going?" He said, "Hey, Sailor, where you going?" I said, "I'm going to Sturgeon Bay, I'm looking for a ride." He said, "Hop aboard. We're not supposed to do it, but I know you're all right, so throw

your gear in the back.” He took me all the way to the Sturgeon Bay post office.

I got out and I put my sea bag over my shoulder, and I walked all the way home up to Quincy Street, 928, that’s where my folks lived, and I went to work and rapped on the door. They were just having breakfast and my Dad said, “How did you get here?” I said, “I walked from the post office.” He said, “You know better than that.” He said, “I always still pick up the mail every day.” Well, I didn’t much care, I was on my way home.

Then we got organized and sat home. Then I had to go out, of course. I hear that from the lady with the white hair, that’s the lady I live with. She says, “You were gone for all those years and then the first week you had to go out with the boys, and it took a week before you come to look her up.” She said, “I should’ve told you to go to H,” and I said, “I already was there because that’s when \_\_\_\_\_ when I was in Iwo.”

Terry: What did it feel like getting discharged, then? Was it pretty good?

Omer: Yeah, it was interesting. They asked a lot of questions. They wanted to know if you wanted to reenlist, and I knew I had to reenlist in the Naval Reserve because I only had two years and a half, roughly, in active duty, so a total of eight years in the military. And I got discharged with an honorable discharge as a Boson Mate Second Class.

Terry: When you got home, then, in Sturgeon Bay, did you work? Did you go to school?

Omer: As soon as I got home I went right back to my first job I had when I left. I was a meat cutter in Ray Paul[??]’s and Leo Nesbitt’s National Brand Grocery Store. Later on it was called the Piggly Wiggly. But I went right back to work for them, and I worked as a meat cutter for four or five years, and then I went to Pleck’s[??] Ice Cream and Dairy.

I got home in 1946, and it took four years before I could make up my mind to finally get married, and then the rest of it’s what you call history. But it was interesting to come back.

And then, of course, I ended up being interested in veterans’ organizations, so I was the first Post Commander and organized AmVet’s Post 51 in Sturgeon Bay. And in 1945, Walter Boller[??], who was a member of the VFW, signed me up. My dad signed me up at the post office because Walter was a maintenance man at the post office and my dad was a maintenance man at the hospital, so he’d always go down there and pick up the mail, and that’s how they got communicating, and I’ve been a

member of that. Then later on I joined the American Legion, so I'm a life member in all three organizations.

Terry: You were entitled to veteran's benefits. Did you use any veteran's benefits?

Omer: Yes. For a while there we went to veteran's training. You went to the vocational school for meat cutting to service what you were doing. And it only lasted six or eight weeks, they were retraining you, and now later on I'm entitled to--let's see.

My hearing is going because of going underneath heavy battleships battling and shooting, and they didn't issue us any earplugs or anything to compensate it to keep it away. Now we're trying to get something paid for. Then the stress, too, because of being under heavy strain. But we're working on it, and Mitch is doing a good job. Mark Foster did a wonderful job before he got us started. He got me signed up into an Appleton clinic, and I've got a good doctor down there, and I go every six months for a checkup.

Terry: Has your ship had any reunions at all?

Omer: Yes, the ship had a reunion in September of 1996 over in Wausau. I was unable to go, but I communicated and wrote. That's where I have this. This was all the members. It was only 19 fellows they contacted, and 12 of them showed up. But the rest of them we communicated back and forth by letter. I have a picture of all of them. Some of them who remembered sent pictures in. And some of the gunners mates I don't remember. I didn't remember them because they're all--appearances changed a little bit. Everybody aged but me, I guess.

Terry: Looking back, how do you feel about your military and war experiences? What's it meant to you?

Omer: Oh, I think it's been a terrific help to me, getting into the military and getting out into the community and the world. I mean, we got all around the South Pacific and enjoyed it, in a way, except for the battle time. But it was a good experience. You learn how to work and how to get along with other people and survive.

Terry: And then, after you got out and you got married, you had a family and a business in Sturgeon Bay.

Omer: Yes. In 1953 our oldest son was born, Paul. He's a deputy sheriff now for the Door County Sheriff's Department. And we have a daughter, Bev. She's out in Portland, Oregon, and she's an adult fitness instructor. And



Tim, the youngest one, he's a salesman down in Brookfield, Wisconsin, for the Milwaukee area. Then I went into business in 1953 for myself, Mickelson's Texaco; been in there for 28 years. Then we sold out. But after I come back out of Service right away I went back to meat cutting, then I worked for Pleck's for a while, then I went to my own service station.

And how come I got into the service station, I was selling milk and ice cream and Pepsi-Cola for Pleck's Ice Cream and Dairy, and I stopped into the station and tried to sell it to the new owner or operator a Pepsi-Cola cooler. And we got \$10 commission, and I thought that was big money then, and I could use it. We just got married and had a family started, so I got in there, and Bill Busman[[?]], who was from the Texaco, he said you come back next week, then I should have an operator and we'll talk to him.

So I went back the next week and he said, "How about you, would you be interested?" I said, "Gee, I don't know." I had just putzed with my own cars and did my own work. And he said, "Well, we'll train you." Then Bill Gary[[?]] went in as partners, and we were there about a year-and-a-half when Bill pulled out. Then I took 'er for the next 28 years on my own.

Terry: You also did a lot of community service. Can you describe just a little bit about your public service?

Omer: I was on the Board of Education for Sturgeon Bay High School, and I served nine years on there, three years as the President. Then in 1952 I was also Red Cross chairman for Door County, where I was the fundraiser chairman for the county.

And then in 1971 I served on the city council I went on, and I served there for 30 years, served every committee there was possible. And I made it, and I come off the senior member. Nobody else has hit the record of 30 years on the city council.

But I also did community service in between for AmVets and Kiwanis. I'm a 50-year member of the Kiwanis Club. We put on their fish boil and their Christmas parties. I also had the job of playing Ho-Ho or Santa Claus. I did that for quite a few years and enjoyed every bit of it.

Then I was checking pretty close with the Sturgeon Bay Fire Department, going down there to keep them boys on their toes. They did a good job so I didn't have to worry.

Terry: That pretty much brings us to the end of the interview here, Omer. Have you got anything else you'd like to say about your military experience?

Omer: I said outside it was a good experience, and now I'm finding after I'm out all this time how important it was, and the history of it, and the things that federal government or the military have out there that we can get for benefits. We were unaware that they had all those things, but it's sure a good experience because my trip down to Milwaukee here last the 15<sup>th</sup> of July was very exciting. Went down to the big hospital down there in Milwaukee and found my way around. Fortunately, I made a couple of blunders, a few trips, but that's how you get educated and you find out.

**[End of Interview]**