

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an

Oral History Interview with

DONALD F. TOWNSEND

Quartermaster, Coast Guard, World War II;
Quartermaster, Navy, Korean War.

2000

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Townsend, Donald F., (1921-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassettes (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 70 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Donald F. Townsend, a Montfort, Wisconsin native, discusses his World War II service with the Coast Guard and his Korean War service with the Navy. Townsend talks about having difficulty enlisting in the Coast Guard because he was too short, limited preliminary training in Michigan, and armed guard duty on oil tankers using guns that he had not been trained to use. After attending Quartermaster school at Manhattan Beach (New Jersey), he touches upon assignment to the new Coast Guard cutter Buttonwood, rescuing men from a damaged ship on the Saint Lawrence River in Quebec, and escorting ships along the east coast of the United States. Townsend portrays his duties and the capabilities of the Buttonwood. Sent to the South Pacific via Galapagos, he mentions escorting oiler ships, R&R in Brisbane (Australia), and requesting a transfer to improve his prospects for promotion. Assigned to the PC-590, he states he spent weeks waiting on Navy bases because the ship could not be located, and he finally caught up to it in the Solomon Islands, where they escorted convoys. Townsend addresses riding the small ship through rough seas and its use of depth charges. At Saipan and Tinian, he describes doing air/sea rescue of B-29 crews, escorting a convoy to Iwo Jima, where they could see fire from flamethrowers, and returning to the United States. Townsend discusses going over the head of a personnel officer to get leave home, brief reassignment to overseas duty on the Cor Caroli (AK-91) as retribution for his actions, and transfer to Miami (Florida), where he kept track of ships returning from Europe. Sent to Key West, Townsend mentions doing air sea rescue aboard the Coast Guard cutter Ariadne between Florida and Cuba until his discharge. He expresses regret that he didn't know enough mathematics to pass the Coast Guard Academy exam. After the war, Townsend talks about looking for work, using the "52-20" GI Bill unemployment benefits, and joining the Naval Reserve while working at Oscar Meyer in Green Bay (Wisconsin). Called to active duty in 1950 for the Korean War, he talks about assignment to the newly recommissioned USS New Jersey as a quartermaster. He comments on taking aboard Vice Admiral Martin and becoming flagship of the Seventh Fleet, based in Yokosuka (Japan). Townsend describes patrol duty, supporting the Marines with Naval gunfire, and closing shutters over the glass windows so the gun's concussion would not break them. He comments on the excellent food aboard ship and entering ship positions and casualties in a logbook. Townsend discusses the short- and long-term damage to his health from being on the bridge when the guns were fired and his failed attempts to get financial support from the Veterans Administration for hearing aids. He speaks of being discharged, attending PC-590 reunions, and hearing about a situation when his ship's gunfire fell short and prevented the retrieval of a Marine friend's body.

Biographical Sketch:

Townsend (b.1921) was born in Montfort, Wisconsin. He served with the Coast Guard aboard the USS Buttonwood and aboard a PC 590 in the Pacific theater in World War II. During the Korean War, he served on the USS New Jersey. From 1947 to 1984, he worked at Oscar Mayer and eventually settled in Madison (Wisconsin).

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000
Transcribed by Hannah Goodno, 2010
Edited by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2012

Interview Transcript:

- Jim: Okay, speaking to Donald Townsend, and the date is 29 July, year 2000. Where were you born?
- Don: I was born in Montfort, Wisconsin. August 30th, 1921. Born on a farm.
- Jim: And you entered military service when?
- Don: I entered the service on the 7th day of July, 1942, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
- Jim: And what branch of the service, sir?
- Don: I went in the Coast Guard. And I'll give you a little history of why I went in the Coast Guard. I was about to be drafted—is this alright if I expound on things?
- Jim: I'll let you know. [laughs]
- Don: Okay. The reason I went into the Coast Guard, when I tried to enlist—I was put 1A, of course, when they started the draft and I didn't want to go in the Army. So I attempted to enlist in the service. And I was only 5 foot 4, and during the war, of course, you had to be 5 foot 6 in order to get in, so most of the services wouldn't accept me. And I was due to go in the Army on July the 10th, and I didn't want to go in the Army. So I had applied to the Coast Guard, so I went back down to Milwaukee and told 'em what was going on, and I says, "I don't wanna go in the Army." Well he says, "Stretch a little bit! Can't you stretch a little bit?" So I stood up against the wall, stood up on my toes, the recruiter says, "Mark him down." [laughs] So I was in service. And that was the 7th day of July—or I went in the 7th day of July, 1942.
- Jim: So where'd the Coast Guard send you?
- Don: They sent me to various camps over in Michigan. This was of course during the early part of the war and the Coast Guard didn't have training camps set up yet. So we went to a bunch of camps over in Michigan that were set up for Kellogg, I believe it was, they were called Kellogg camps for—I don't know what purpose they had, but I suppose young people. So I went to various camps in Michigan, and then after that was my boot camp, if you want to call it that. I went back to Chicago to a Coast Guard station in Chicago for assignment.
- Jim: What did they do in the way of teaching you in these camps in Michigan?

- Don: [laughs] That was the comical part about it; they taught us very little. Because I say, of course, the Coast Guard wasn't equipped yet to train people for World War II, so about the only thing we did was march. I am quite positive I never fired a gun, and I don't recall even rowing a boat all during the boot camp. So I say, it was mostly marching and standing sentry duty and things like that. Very little training.
- Jim: Okay. And then?
- Don: Then, I said, I went to Chicago, to a Coast Guard station there, and they put us out on Standard Oil tankers as armed guards. During the war, if I remember right, ships that went up and down the Great Lakes, and especially if they went under the bridges, had to have armed guards on 'em, two to four people. So of course, that was a Coast Guard assignment. So there would be anywhere from two to four of us on these ships and we'd stay on for, oh, a month or so. Maybe we'd make two or three cruises and we'd come back to the base and be assigned to another ship. And I—
- Jim: Armed how?
- Don: Armed guard.
- Jim: Yeah, with what?
- Don: Oh! [laughs]
- Jim: You said you hadn't fired anything, What'd you have, a baseball bat?
- Don: [laughs] Sometimes we carried a .45, sometimes we carried a .38 revolver.
- Jim: Did they show you how to shoot it?
- Don: No, never. But thank God, I had some pretty good training growing up on a farm. I knew how to handle a gun. But no, they never—I don't even recall—I think we had bullets, but I don't recall whether we did or not.
- Jim: [laughs] Oh, that's good, that's very good.
- Don: Sometimes we carried a rifle, too, a World War I rifle. An old bolt action Springfield, I think it was. So that's what we did, and I did that for quite some time, and then I believe in December of '42 I was sent to Manhattan Beach, New York to Quartermaster School. And I attended that school from December until probably early the next spring. And here again, the training was very, very basic. We learned a little navigation, a little signaling. Here again, I think—as I recall, I think I went out on a surf boat

or a boat maybe one or two times, with a little rowing instruction. That was about the training we got there. It was mostly book work. From there, I went back to Chicago again, because Chicago was our home—what do they call ‘em, they had ‘em set up in zones during the war, so Chicago was kinda my base always. So I went back to Chicago again and back on the boats as armed guard. And then, if I recall properly, in the fall of ’42, I went to Duluth, Minnesota and was assigned to a Coast Guard cutter that was being built in Duluth. And we put the cutter in commission and took it down the lakes and out through the Welland Canal, out through Montreal and Quebec. Quebec, we picked up a convoy, a small convoy, and the first night, as I remember—I think it was about the first night, one of these ships in our convoy was damaged. And here again, I don’t remember whether it was torpedoed or if it was fired on with a gun, but anyhow, we had to beach it. We had to put it up on the beach and take the men off it.

Jim: Where?

Don: Somewheres along the river going out of Quebec.

Jim: In the Saint Lawrence?

Don: In the Saint Lawrence, yes. But we ran the ship up on the beach because it couldn’t be salvaged, and we took the people off of the ship. I don’t remember—it was without a doubt was a Merchant Marine ship. And we took all the people off of it. Somebody gave us some kind of an award for taking the men off.

Jim: Okay. Now the ship that was sunk was your ship?

Don: No, part of the con—one of the ships in the convoy that we were escorting.

Jim: You were intact?

Don: We were intact, yes.

Jim: Did you have a chance to drop any depth charges?

Don: I don’t think—I think, as I remember, this happened at night. So this happened all of a sudden, and I say, whether the ship was torpedoed or fired on with deck guns, I don’t recall.

Jim: Okay now, before you get further, I want you to talk about the cutter. How big was the cutter?

- Don: Oh, the cutter—I think the cutter was probably a hundred and sixty, a hundred and seventy footer. It was originally built—I don't like to mention this, but it was originally built as a buoy tender. Now this was a flat-bottom ship that—and it came in handy out in the islands because it was flat-bottomed and had a heavy, reinforced bottom on it, so we could run it right up on the coral reefs. And when we got out in the Pacific, of course, most of those islands didn't have up-to-date charts, so that was part of our job once we got out in the Pacific, charting these islands out there.
- Jim: What kind of a gun did you carry?
- Don: Here again, I don't recall exactly, but I—no it wouldn't, it wouldn't be over a three inch. We probably had one or maybe two three-inch guns, and the rest would've been 40 millimeter, 20 millimeter—but depth charges, we always carried a lot of depth charges.
- Jim: But no torpedoes?
- Don: No torpedoes, no.
- Jim: And how many in the crew?
- Don: Probably in the vicinity of sixty, and four or five officers.
- Jim: Sixty crewmen and five officers?
- Don: Yeah, four or five, it would vary. And the same with the crew, because somebody would get sick, or somebody their time would be up and they would be transferred, so it would vary between sixty and seventy people and four or five officers.
- Jim: So how fast could you crank this baby up?
- Don: [laughs] At full speed, we could probably make fifteen or sixteen knots.
- Jim: Oh, my.
- Don: [laughs] You see, as I said, it was flat bottomed.
- Jim: You weren't a real threat to anybody. [laughs]
- Don: Oh, yes, but it was a flat bottom of course, so it wasn't built for speed.
- Jim: Yes, I understand.

- Don: It was built for durability. Not speed.
- Jim: Right.
- Don: The top officer on the Buttonwood—this was the cutter I was speaking of—as I remember, it would've been a lieutenant JG [Junior Grade].
- Jim: Oh, yes, that was the other question.
- Don: So we'd have probably a lieutenant JG and the rest would've been ensigns or maybe—there might've been two lieutenant JGs
- Jim: Last question about this; what was your rank at this time?
- Don: My rank at this time was Quartermaster Third Class.
- Jim: Third class?
- Don: Yes.
- Jim: Okay. And specifically, what were your duties?
- Don: Okay, Quartermaster mainly was steering the ship; your title was Assistant to the Navigator.
- Jim: Got it.
- Don: So this is what we did: we steered the ship, we took sights, we steered the ship when we were in port or when we was comin' alongside another ship, or when it was at GQ [General Quarters], otherwise the seamen would take that job. But we were on the bridge all the time when we were on duty. And we would stand watches of four hours on and eight hours off 'round the clock. Unless we were—if we were in port or coming alongside a ship, or at General Quarters, or loading things, then it varied, but normally it would be four hours on and eight hours off.
- Jim: Now specifically, to help these folks on the ship that was torpedoed, did you bring 'em aboard your ship and take 'em to shore, or was that—
- Don: Yes.
- Jim: You fished 'em out of the water, in other words?
- Don: Yes. As I remember right, we dropped 'em off at Halifax, Nova Scotia. I think that's where we dropped 'em off. And then we went on down the east coast and fitted out with more fitting out and more training and things

like that down the east coast. From there, I say we went down the east coast, and probably stopped at Key West for a while, and probably did some—Key West was a submarine base during the war, so we probably did duty with the submarines training for depth charges and things like that at Key West.

Jim: Did you operate in a group or were you alone?

Don: Most of the time we were alone. There might've been another small Coast Guard or Navy ship with us, but—

Jim: No exercises in a group then?

Don: Yes, we would have some target practice and firing of the guns, and they'd send up a sleeve[?]. As I remember, sometimes they'd send up a robot, automatic, small plane, radio-controlled.

Jim: And you'd try to hit it?

Don: Yes, [laughs] we would hit it sometimes. Sometimes we'd hit the target, sometimes we'd hit the robot and brought it down. [laughs] You must remember, we were green, so we were learning every day.

Jim: So from Key West, where?

Don: Okay, Key West, we went down to the Panama Canal, of course, where everybody had to go. Through the Panama Canal from east to west, and from Panama we went to—at that time we pronounced it Gal-ah-pay-gus Islands. Now I think they pronounce it Galapagos [Gal-a-pa-gos]. So we stayed there for a few days, again. I suppose we took on stores and—

Jim: I was gonna say, where did you get replenishments?

Don: In the canal, going through the canal we got replenishments. And then again, I suppose, at Galapagos. Because from Galapagos we left and went to the Pacific, to the South Pacific, and we had one or two small—we called 'em Yogis, which were yard oilers. They were small Navy oilers. So we escorted those Yogis down to Bora Bora in the Society Islands. And there we stayed awhile again for rest and recreation, and I suppose we picked up convoys again. And from Bora Bora, we went to Guadalcanal. And Guadalcanal, of course, was a big base, Navy base and Coast Guard base. And while we were there, I noticed that there were PCs, which are Coast Guard.

Jim: PCs?

- Don: PCs, patrol craft. Now they again were a hundred and sixty, a hundred and seventy feet, a hundred and seventy feet at the most. Had about the same number of men.
- Jim: Well, that's about the same size you were.
- Don: Just about the same size.
- Jim: About a hundred and seventy feet long?
- Don: Yes, but the patrol craft were built for patrol, convoy, and escort duty. The Buttonwood was built more, I'd say, as a buoy tender and harbor work. Charting the depths and things like that.
- Jim: On the other hand, you crossed the Pacific Ocean in this flat bottom boat.
- Don: We crossed the Pacific; yes, we'd become shellbacks, as they called 'em after you cross—
- Jim: Was that difficult on a flat bottom boat, going across the heavy seas?
- Don: Yes, it was.
- Jim: Must've rolled you in, out, and about.
- Don: You just floated on top of the water like a cork. When you got in heavy seas, you couldn't sit at a table to eat, you had to sit on the deck and eat out of a plate sittin' on the deck. And everything went from one side to the next. [laughs] It was very, very rough riding. But yeah, I mentioned the Coast Guard 590, because I noticed that the 590 was in Guadalcanal when we were there. So shortly after we got into Guadalcanal, they sent us—kindly, they sent us down to Brisbane, Australia for R&R, rest and recreation. So we went down there for—I think we were there about ten days. But I had asked for a transfer, 'cause I say, I was only a third class quartermaster and I wanted to be upgraded. And the complement on the Buttonwood only allowed for, I suppose, so many second class. So I asked for a transfer, and I got transferred off of the Buttonwood in Brisbane, Brisbane, Australia, along with my striker. And a striker was a young man that was learning a new rate, he wanted to go up, so this striker—he was kind of my assistant, but he was still a seaman. So he and I got off the boat together down in Australia. And we were Coast Guard, of course, and we went to a Navy base in Australia. And we sat there and sat there, and I knew that I was gonna be assigned to the 590, the PC-590. But the base couldn't find the 590. So we sat there for a while, and finally I went over to the office to find out why I was stayin' there so long, and the Coast Guard record book was a little different size than the Navy

manual, the Navy record book. So finally they found us, and they transferred Haliford and I from Brisbane to New Caledonia. And here again, we sat in the base, their Navy base again, and they did the same thing.

Jim: They were still looking for your ship?

Don: They were still trying to find the PC-590. And we sat there for I don't know how long; it was weeks, I guess. And finally I got a little antsy because I knew there were ships going north, up into the Solomon Island area. And finally—well, I'll go back a little bit on this—one of the men at the base in Noumea says, "I'm sorry," he says, "you're being assigned to the 590," and he says, "We can't find her. She took a convoy somewhere and we can't locate her. But in case we don't find her in the next ten days, we'll assign you and Haliford to the AK-91," which was the cargo ship Cor Caroli. And he said, "We'll assign you to it." So—I'm sorry, it wasn't the 91, it was the 94 [97?], the Serpens, and if you look back in the records, the Serpens was in Guadalcanal and loading ammunition, and somebody I suppose was smoking or lit a match or something, and the ship blew up while we were waiting for a transfer. Oh, everybody was lost except three or four people that were onshore getting papers, I suppose routing instructions. But anyhow, to go back to it, Haliford and I finally took a merchant ship out of Noumea up into the Solomon Islands. And I forget what island we ended up on; I think it was Green Island. And we sat there for a few days waiting for transportation.

Jim: To the 590?

Don: To the 590. And we took an old Army APC, I think it was called; it was a wooden ship. Probably—it might've been a hundred-footer. Here again, wooden. And we took that ship back down to Tulagi in the Solomon Islands, where we finally caught up with the PC-590. I could tell you what date—

Jim: No, that's not important.

Don: But we finally caught up with the 590, and then of course we were in the Guadalcanal and Solomon Island area, and we went right back to convoy and escort duty. We'd go over to New Guinea and up and down the Solomon Islands—

Jim: Escorting?

Don: Escorting convoys, small convoys. Usually it'd be anywhere from two to six merchant ships, and sometimes there'd be a Navy destroyer with us,

sometimes there'd be another Coast Guard ship. To my knowledge, there was only two or three Coast Guard PCs in the Pacific area.

Jim: Tell me the difference between life aboard the PC versus your first ship.

Don: Really, not too much.

Jim: Did it ride any better?

Don: That's just what I was gonna say. We always laughed about the PC; we said we should've gotten both sea pay and flight pay, because when you weren't out of the water, you were under the water. [both laugh]. And that was the truth. It was the same thing with the Buttonwood. If you were in rough water, rough seas, you had to sit on the deck and eat your meals because there was no way you could keep the plates on the tables, so we ate most of our meals—

Jim: So it didn't ride much better?

Don: No, it did not ride much better, and it didn't travel much faster. It probably would make sixteen, maybe eighteen knots. They weren't built for speed again. The armament was not much different. We had a three inch gun forward and aft I think we had a 40 millimeter and a number of 20 millimeters. And here again, a lot of depth charges.

Jim: Did you ever get a chance to use any of those? Depth charges?

Don: Quite often, yes. Quite often.

Jim: But any luck?

Don: This was hard to tell. We never actually had one that we saw the sub come up, but we did a lot of depth charges, [laughs] a lot a depth charges.

Jim: Killed a lot of fish?

Don: A lot of fish, yes. We probably wasted a lot of it on whales and porpoises and stuff like that. But it kept us on our toes. We slept lots of times with our clothing on. The skin—the plates on the 590, as I remember right, I think were five-eighths of an inch thick, so we always said you could shoot a 50 millimeter in one side of the ship and out the other. So that's why we slept in our life jacket and our helmet and everything right at the, at the head of our bunks, so if we had to get up—

Jim: And go swimming—

- Don: —our life jackets were there. [laughs] But from there, from Guadalcanal and that area, the Solomons, we took a convoy, as I remember right, to Iwo Jima.
- Jim: Oh, so it's getting a little later in the war then?
- Don: Yes—no, I'm sorry, before Iwo Jima, we went to Saipan and Tinian. And here again we ran air-sea rescue. We did a lot of air-sea rescue at that time, of the B29s. The B29s were just coming out to the Pacific.
- Jim: Tell me how that went. In the usual situation.
- Don: The 29s would go to Japan and various targets.
- Jim: Right, I know what they do, but how did you pick 'em up?
- Don: Okay. We would lay offshore, we would patrol offshore five or six miles.
- Jim: Tinian?
- Don: Off of Tinian, and Saipan—between Tinian and Saipan. And then when they would go out, we would make sure that they got off alright, and of course coming back was a little different story. Coming back, a lot of times they'd be shot up. And sometimes they could make the airfields and sometimes they couldn't. So they would come as close to the airfield as they could and they would ditch 'em in the water.
- Jim: And what would your ship do?
- Don: Then we would go and pick them up and take them on the shore.
- Jim: You could see 'em coming in so you could sort of plan on where to meet 'em and so forth?
- Don: Oh yes, yes. But we had radar then, of course. Radar was nothing like it is now. It was very basic, to say the least. But we could pick those planes up I suppose maybe out ten, fifteen miles, so we knew when they were coming back. And I suppose the radio aboard ship kept in contact with them, too. That's something else on the PC that I wanted to mention. On the PC, being a small ship, we all did each others' work. If the helmsman got sick, we would take over the helm. The radar and the sonar was right back of the bridge, as I remember, about a half a deck down, so if the radar man or the sonar man got sick or had to be relieved for some reason, the quartermaster would go back and take over his job until—or if the signalman got sick, we'd go back and take over the signalman's job. So we kind of, we kind of did everybody else's work. Even the bosun mate,

we did some of the bosun mate's work if we had to. So we were kind of Jack of all trades.

But anyhow, after running air-sea rescue there at Tinian and Saipan, we took the convoy then to Iwo Jima. And that was—the invasion was underway, but pretty much over with by the time we got up there. So we took the convoy up there and laid offshore until the convoy got in. We could still see firing, we could still see the, uh, what do you call them? The fire, the flamethrowers, we could see the flamethrowers on the beach, but we stayed there for a couple days, then of course, then we went back down to Saipan and Tinian for a couple days. And then we took a convoy, as I remember, back up in the Iwo Jima area and were sent to Hawaii for overhaul and refitting. So we went from there back to Hawaii. By this time, I had enough points—I can't recall how many points you had to have in order to go back to the States, but I had about enough then. By the time I got to Hawaii, I stayed there for a few weeks and had enough points to go back to the States.

So I went back to the States on an old four stacker, and here again my striker, Haliford, went with me. We went back to the States on an old four stacker destroyer which was a World War I destroyer, and I think at top speed he could make about six knots, as I remember right. [laughs] It was very slow. And we finally landed in—I think it was Long Beach, California. So I went to the—now here again, I suppose it was probably—without a doubt it was a Navy base, and I went into Security, and I was due for a thirty days rehabilitation leave, and the security officer says, “Townsend, I can't let you go home on leave; we're short on quartermasters around here.” He says, “I can't let you go home.” So I was very upset over this, and I was, “By gosh, I've been overseas long enough; I want to go home for a few days.” I was having a little trouble with my girlfriends by that time, I had been away from 'em too long, and he wasn't gonna let me go. So I don't know if I went to the personnel officer or whether I went to the chap, or whoever I went to, and finally got my leave okayed. But the security officer says, “Townsend, you went over my head,” he says, “to get your leave. When you come back from your leave, don't unpack your sea bag, 'cause,” he says, “you're gonna go right back overseas.” [laughs] So I went home on leave and I was home I guess thirty days and came back to the same base, and he was good with his word. He assigned me to the AK-91. Now this AK-91 was the Cor Caroli. The Cor Caroli was a sister ship of the Serpens that blew up in Guadalcanal.

Jim: Tell me the name of that ship—

Don: Cor Caroli.

- Jim: How do you spell that?
- Don: C-O-R, C-A-R-O-L-I. AK-91.
- Jim: Cor Caroli. Which was a—?
- Don: It's a cargo. AK.
- Jim: It's an AKA?
- Don: No, just plain AK. Just plain AK. So anyhow, that's where I went. I went— [laughs]
- Jim: And that was a cargo ship?
- Don: It was a cargo ship, yes. Manned by Coast Guard. I stayed aboard the Cor Caroli for a few weeks, and as I said, I had enough points again, so they couldn't send me back overseas. I forget—after you've been overseas for so long, they had to give you so many months shore duty.
- Jim: Where did the Cor Caroli go?
- Don: The Cor Caroli, when I was aboard it, was loading for the Philippine Islands. It was loading cargo for the Philippines.
- Jim: But you never went?
- Don: I had enough points to finally get off. And I got off the Cor Caroli and went back to the base, and went to Miami, Florida. And there I went to the Flagler Building right downtown in Miami and I worked with the Navy. And of course, the war was winding down then and they were bringing the troops back. So at this base or this office that we worked—I forget the name, but it was manned by Navy personnel. I think there were two of us Coast Guard people there. We kept track of all the ships coming back from Europe, bringing the troops back. So we had a big chart up on the wall, so we kept track of all the ships, so in case something happened, we knew where the troops were and what ship was involved in it so we could contact them. And I stayed there for a while, and the war was winding down—well, the war was over, of course, and my time in the Coast Guard was winding down, so I got transferred down to Key West. Miami. I was on subsistence and quarters in Miami—**[End of Tape One, Side One]**—and during the summer this was alright. But in the wintertime, when the people from the north came down there, of course, the cost of our subsistence was out of line for it. We couldn't afford to stay on subsistence, so I went down to Key West, Florida to Coast Guard Bay in Key West.

- Jim: So now we're at about 1946?
- Don: No, this is probably late in 1945. Late in 1945, or maybe early 1946. I went to the base down in Key West and went aboard the Coast Guard cutter Ariadne. Now this was a smaller one again. I think the Ariadne was about a hundred and thirty-five footer. And I don't remember how many we had on there. Probably, maybe forty people, and maybe three officers. And here again we ran air-sea rescue.
- Jim: What was the name of that ship?
- Don: Ariadne. A-R-I-A-D-N-E. I can't remember the number of it.
- Jim: And what was the designation of that ship?
- Don: It would be a cutter.
- Jim: A cutter.
- Don: Yes. I say, here again, we ran air-sea rescue between Key West and Cuba. The Cubans by this time were beginning to leave Cuba by any means, usually small craft. And of course, like they are now, they would get about halfway or two-thirds of the way out and we would have to go out and rescue them. And we'd take 'em into Key West and put 'em ashore.
- I stayed in Key West until I'd had enough, about enough points then to be up for discharge. And I was sent then from Key West, Florida to Saint Louis, Missouri for my discharge and I was discharged, I believe, in February. I could tell you exactly—
- Jim: No, that's not important.
- Don: In February of 1946. And from then I went right directly home in 1946. And of course, the war was over.
- Jim: Did you use your G.I. Bill?
- Don: No, I did not. I was sorry that I didn't. I didn't have the chance to go to college, of course, after I got out of high school, and I didn't have a lot of mathematics. I'll have to go back to relating to speaking of education. While I was on the PC, our captain was a very heavy drinker. And he would go ashore, and many times I would go with him to pick up the convoy papers. He, of course, could go to the officer's club and I couldn't, so he would come back to the ship under the influence. And I and the officer of the deck would put the 590 back into convoy, and the

captain would be under the weather. So he recommended me for the Coast Guard Academy, and I wrote the exam, but failed it because I didn't have enough math. I always regretted that because I really enjoyed the service and I would have stayed in, but had I gone to the Academy, I would have had to reenlist for another four years. And by that time I was anxious to get out, too. [laughs] So I didn't make that, but those are things that happened and I have no regret. But I said, I do—I kind of regretted I couldn't go to the Academy, but I didn't.

So I went home and got a job in civilian life. I went to—I got out in '46 and went on 52-20. Remember 52-20? You could draw twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. And of course, my old job in Detroit that I had left before I went in the service was a defense job that was no longer available, so we had no work. And everybody was coming back, and everybody was looking for work. So I took 52-20 for a while, until I finally got a job down to Beloit. I went to work in Beloit late in 1946 at the Beloit—at that time we called it Beloit Iron Works. We made paper machinery for paper companies. And I didn't like inside work, so I stayed there for a while and left there and went to Madison and got a job with Oscar Mayer as a salesman in October of 1947. And I stayed with Oscar Mayer from 1947 until I retired in 1984. But during this time—1950 of course, the Korean War broke out, and in October—I forgot to mention when I was working for Oscar Mayer in Green Bay, I signed up in the Navy Reserve.

Jim: The Navy, not the Coast Guard?

Don: The Naval—the Coast Guard didn't have any reserve programs, so I signed up in the Naval Reserve program in Green Bay, Wisconsin because my girlfriend at that time was living near Green Bay.

Jim: Perfect reason.

Don: [laughs] It was convenient for Oscar Mayer, too. But anyhow, I signed up in the Naval Reserve and then the war broke out in Korea in 1950. And the first thing I know, in October, I got a notice to be recalled in the Navy. So I went to Great Lakes for assignment to duty. And I was there, I think, about three days. And of course, with my interviews in Great Lakes, they want to know what kind of ships I had sailed on during World War II, and I told them I had sailed on small craft most of the time. And I said in case I had to go back to sea, I would prefer small craft. And they want to know what area I served and I said I served in the Pacific. So, of course I said I would prefer not going back to the Pacific. So in a couple days, I look up on the bulletin board for my name, and I find my name on the bulletin board: Don Townsend, assigned to the battleship USS New Jersey. One of the biggest ships they had afloat.

- Jim: And then—that was when?
- Don: That was October of 1950.
- Jim: They sent you—you went right to New Jersey?
- Don: Right from Great Lakes, right into Bayonne, New Jersey. And I think we got to Bayonne the first part of October, and we went to the Bayonne Center.
- Jim: New Jersey and Bayonne—
- Don: Bayonne, New Jersey. She was about to be recommissioned. So I went aboard with a crew, and we recommissioned her. And we went—
- Jim: What rank?
- Don: Oh, by this time, I was Quartermaster. I had been Quartermaster while I was on—I made Quartermaster Second Class on the 590, so I was now Quartermaster Second Class.
- Jim: US Navy?
- Don: US Navy, now. Yes. [laughs]
- Jim: Did they give you more pay?
- Don: I don't even recall now what the pay was, but—
- Jim: Didn't even notice it—you would have remembered if it was different, right?
- Don: Yes. So let's see—after I went aboard, of course, I said we recommissioned it, and of course we had to get all the work and the supplies on board, the charts up to date. And we went from Bayonne, New Jersey, down the coast. We stopped for a couple days in New York, and down the coast again, and down through the Panama Canal again. And from the Panama Canal, right directly out to Hawaii. And from Hawaii, we stayed there for a few days, and went from Hawaii to Yokosuka, Japan, the Navy Base in Japan. And there we took on the admiral and his staff—he was a two-star admiral, I think he was Vice Admiral Martin, if I remember correctly. We took him and his staff aboard, and we became the flagship of the seventh fleet, working out of Yokosuka. Some people—

- Jim: Yo-kuz-ka. It's the only way to pronounce it. The Japanese have no inflection.
- Don: Yo-kuz-ka. Yep, that's right. They always say Yo-kuz-ka, but it's Yoko—if you look it up on a chart, it's Yokosuka. But it's always pronounced—
- Jim: Yep, but Japanese have no inflection, so—
- Don: That's right, that's right. So we always refer to it as Yo-kuz-ka. So anyhow, from there, we were assigned patrol duty in Korea. So we would go to Korea off the east coast for thirty days. And we patrolled from the 38th parallel, up the coast as far as Vladivostok. And part of the time, we'd go—there was a harbor over there called Wonsan if you look at the chart—
- Jim: We know about—everybody knows about Wonsan.
- Don: You have been in Wonsan? Okay. We used to go in Wonsan, and we would go in the harbor, sometimes we'd anchor, but usually we would stay underway just enough so we could steer the ship. And we would clear the decks. Everybody would go below deck and we'd wait for the guns to fire, because the guns of course were in the caves in the mountains and there was no way to pick them up on radar. And you didn't have radar like we have now, so we would wait for the guns to fire on us.
- Jim: And then you'd have a target?
- Don: And then we would have a target. And we would fire according to the smoke that we saw over on the beach, or we'd kind of guess at it with our sixteen inchers. I remember we'd send, we'd send up a helicopter and the helicopter would spot us up. A lot of times the Marines would tell us if they had a target for us, so the Marines would target us in, they'd give us a target. If they had a target fifteen, twenty miles inland, sometimes we'd go up close enough to shore. I can remember going in so close sometimes that we would see the Koreans waving white flags at us. We'd be in probably within half a mile of the shore and the Koreans would be there waving white flags at us. But we'd go in close if we had a target twenty miles inland; we could fire twenty-two miles. So we'd go in as close as we possibly could to fire on the target, but usually we'd stay five, six miles offshore so they couldn't hit us. But we would do this for thirty days, then we'd go back to Japan for ten days.
- Jim: Alright, hold it there. Now, living aboard such a magnificent ship like this must've seemed like pure luxury for you.

- Don: It certainly was. It was a luxury.
- Jim: You had rooms, and—
- Don: We had rooms, we had laundry service, we had—
- Jim: It's like a palace!
- Don: It was like a palace. Being that we had the admiral aboard the flagship, we had excellent food. Excellent food. We had our ice cream, we had our dessert. When ships would come alongside of us—a destroyer, a lot of times when we'd refuel, we'd have a tanker on one side and a destroyer, or maybe sometimes two destroyers on the other side, and the tanker would refuel us and we would refuel the tanker on the other side. And we would send them ice cream and food—fresh food, and stuff like that, 'cause we had fresh vegetables and everything. So it was luxury.
- Jim: I saw the Missouri when I was in Korea. I was on a hospital ship there.
- Don: Okay. We relieved the Missouri in Korea when we went out there. Mentioning Korea and the Missouri, of course the Navy has their tradition, you know. The Missouri, if I remember right, while they were in Korea, fired somewhere over two thousand rounds of sixteen inch shells. So of course, our captain had to—
- Jim: Two thousand-one? [laughs]
- Don: No. Our captain had to do a little better. So we fired three thousand rounds. I have it in my logbook the day that we fired three thousand rounds of sixteen inch ammunition into North Korea.
- Jim: When the sixteen inches were firing, did that really rock the ship?
- Don: I'm glad you mentioned that. You probably noticed that I wear two hearing aids. [Jim laughs]. When we fired the ship, of course I was on the bridge all the time. My duty on the New Jersey was Quartermaster of the Watch. So my duty was to make sure that everybody had their stations manned, everybody was on the bridge. And when we fired, we had to roll the windows down in front of the bridge, on the conning tower as we called it. We had glass windows all around the ship. We had to roll them down when we would fire, because if we didn't, it would blow the glasses.
- Jim: It would blow the glass out?
- Don: It would blow the windows out, so we had to roll them down. Many times after we'd fire—and we'd fire sometimes all day and all night, depending

on the targets—I would come off the bridge sometimes, my arms would look like I had measles from the concussion.

Jim: Those are called petechiae.

Don: What's that?

Jim: Petechiae. Those are little tiny hemorrhages.

Don: Yes. Yes. [brief pause in tape] I had hemorrhoids because I was standing on those steel decks.

Jim: From standing?

Don: Yes. Our deck's up on the main deck, and even up on the bridge, we had sixteen inches of armor plating around the conning tower on the bridge and about eight inches, eight-inch thick steel decks, so you can imagine how hard they were. And of course, watertight compartments. But I would get hemorrhoids so bad that I couldn't pick my feet up, and I would hemorrhage so bad that I would have to go down to sick bay, and they'd put me in Sitz bath for a few hours with an ice pack, and sent me back up on duty. Many times I would have to pick one foot up to walk over to the watertight compartments, pick one leg up, then the second leg, to get over to the watertight compartments.

And I said, we fired, we'd fire on Korea for thirty days and go back to Japan for ten days and—

Jim: Tell me about your hearing. Did that go right away, or was that—

Don: No, I did not notice that I had a hearing loss until about 1960. I got out of the Navy, I was discharged in 1952, came home, of course, went right back to my work at Oscar Meyer. But I noticed in about 1960 that when I was calling—I was a salesman, of course, and I noticed that when I was talking to my customers, that sometimes I always watched people when I talked to them. I looked directly at people, and when I was watching people, I would notice sometimes that their expression would sometimes change, so I suppose that I gave somebody the wrong answer because I didn't hear what he said. But I went to the VA Hospital in Milwaukee, Wood Hospital, after I'd had hemorrhoid surgery, somewhere around 1960, to get it because it never went in my record. I went down to Wood to have a physical and I told them about my hearing difficulty, but nothing was done. I have been trying since 1960 to get some help from the Veterans Administration for my hearing aid. And they keep telling me that my hearing loss was not service-connected. And even to this day, just this past month—just yesterday, in fact, I made the final payment on my

two hearing aids, cost me four thousand eight hundred-fifty dollars. Over the past few years, I have spent about seven thousand, maybe over seven thousand dollars for hearing aids. And so far, the Veterans Administration will not give me any help whatsoever.

Jim: Strange. Did you have a ringing in your ears after your ship was firing for a while? Afterwards, you know, they stop firing—

Don: Yes. Our ears would ring for—I don't want to say days, but hours. I went to an audiologist, and I can't tell you exactly, but probably in the middle 1980s, finally went to an audiologist and had hearing tests, and I had severe nerve damage. All of my hairs or particles on my inner ear are damaged, and of course they never can be repaired. So I have been wearing hearing aids since probably the middle—1985, 1987, somewhere in that area. It's been a very bad experience with me and the VA because for some reason they won't give me any help.

Jim: How long were you in Korea?

Don: Okay, 1950, I was twenty-nine years old when I went to Korea.

Jim: How long were you there?

Don: Oh! I'm sorry. We went to Korea in 1950 and came home in 1952. So we were there short of two years. And then I got out of the Navy again when I got back late in 1952 when I was discharged.

Jim: You were discharged right off the ship?

Don: No, we went to the Navy base in Norfolk. I was discharged at Norfolk, and was given pay to go home from Norfolk to Manitowoc. So I went back to Manitowoc, and by that time my youngest daughter was probably about two years old. When I went in the service, by the way, in 1950, I was married and my little daughter was just a little over a year old when I went in the service.

Jim: Did you keep in contact with any of your shipmates, either in the Coast Guard or the Navy?

Don: Yes, I'm glad you mentioned this. The PC-590—I didn't mention this—after I got off, I was home on leave, the PC-590—I was home on leave, this was when the war was over, 1945, late 1945. While I was home, of course, the PC went back to the Pacific, ended up going to Okinawa for the invasion of Okinawa. And you'll probably remember, they had a terrible typhoon in the fall of 1945 and the PC-590 lost power because of the typhoon. The engines burned out, they lost all power, lost all

electricity, and finally ended up on a reef and broke in half and sank. In Okinawa on a reef—I can't remember the name of the reef. The Navy ship Mona Island took every man—they were lucky, they rescued every man off the PC, not one man was lost. The captain, of course, was the last man to leave the ship. When he stepped aboard the Mona Island out of the breeches buoy, the 590 broke up and sank, just almost the same time that he stepped aboard the Mona Island. So I have been very close with the boys on the 590, I've gone to a number of the reunions. Many of these boys are survivors of when she sank in Okinawa. In fact, this September, the last week in September, my wife and I are hosting the reunion here in Madison, and we're gonna have about thirty people here in Madison for a reunion, and looking forward to it.

Jim: Oh I'll bet, I'll bet.

Don: But I have corresponded with a number of these boys over the—almost fifty years.

Jim: Anybody from the New Jersey?

Don: And the New Jersey. In fact, a couple months ago, I wrote an article—well, I put a notice in the VFW magazine and in the Patrol Craft magazine about our reunion. So some of my old shipmates saw this reunion and saw my name in there, because of course, I put my name and my telephone number. So I had calls from some of the boys from the 590, but I also had calls from some of the boys from the New Jersey. Three of 'em, or two of 'em beside myself, both were quartermasters. One boy wrote me a letter—well, first he called me. He says, "Don, I have a daughter in Illinois." He says, "I'm coming to visit her this summer." She's going to have a baby or have an operation or something. "I'm coming to Illinois to Rockford," and he says, "I'd like to come to visit you." So he did, he came to visit me, and we had a very, very nice visit together. And another quartermaster on the bridge with me, he and I have corresponded. He lives in Poughkeepsie, New York. He and I have corresponded since 1952 and I just had a letter from him just this past week, relating some of the experiences about rolling the windows down when we fired the sixteen inch guns, 'cause he's trying to give me a little help in getting help from the VA. But I just got a letter from him this past week. I have never gone to a reunion of the New Jersey, because about the only people that I would know would be the people on the bridge.

Jim: There's just too many people to know very many of them.

Don: Yeah, that's right. And I won't go this year, because they're having a reunion in September, the same time that we're having a reunion of my

old PC. So I can't go to the reunion. So that's about the tale of my experience on the—

Jim: What medals did you win?

Don: I beg your pardon?

Jim: Did you win any medals or awards?

Don: Yes. We have quite a few medals.

Jim: First—World War II first.

Don: World War II, the only medal we got, well of course the Asiatic, Pacific campaign medal. We got one star, one battle star for Iwo Jima; that was the only one. We always kind of fell in behind because we were small. Even at Iwo Jima, I said we came at Iwo Jima at the tail end of the invasion, so we were too small to do any help, so we would kind of bring up the rear. On the New Jersey, we got, of course, medals on there. We got the—

Jim: Unit citations?

Don: We got the Presidential Unit Citation; we got two battle stars. But the Korean Presidential Unit Citation, we got that. And there was some other medal too, but I forgot which that was. But one just here recently. That's about all we got. The record department—service record department, I think it's in Saint Louis, are very confused when you try to find out service records. At one time when I wrote for citations, they said we got four stars for Korea, which we never, as far as I'm concerned, we never got four stars. But we did get two stars that I can account for, but not four. But that's about all the medals that we got for—we deserved 'em.

Jim: Our hospital ship did better than that. We were in there most of the time, we never left Korea much, you know, so—

Don: Oh, yeah. And you were on what hospital ship?

Jim: The Haven. There's Haven, Consolation, and Repose, there was three hospital ships.

Don: Yes, I remember them. Yes, yes, I can remember the big white ships with the red cross on the side.

Jim: Big white ship.

- Don: Yes, big white ship. I used to brag that I knew the number of every Navy ship in the Pacific. And of course, being quartermaster, I kept pretty close tab on 'em. And I also kept a good record in my logbook. And over the period of years this has come in very handy for me. Some years ago, I was reading the New Jersey bulletin comes out. New Jersey Bounce[?] they call it. And in there, a man was looking for information, anybody that was in Wonsan on a certain date when we were hit by shore fire, please contact so-and-so. I looked up in my book and I had it written down. I won't mention the man's name, but I had to log in the casualties. We were hit by shore fire, and we had—
- Jim: What damage?
- Don: Very little—well, they couldn't damage us very much. We were hit by, I think it was an eight-incher, but it bounced off of us. [Jim laughs]. The big damage was those that burst above the ship.
- Jim: Oh, yeah, 'cause they could kill people.
- Don: Yeah, they would—they threw shrapnel. And those are the ones that did the most damage. They wounded, I forget how many people, but I got the casualty list up to the bridge after we were hit, and I logged this one man into the logbook, you know, so many killed, and so many casualties at the sick bay. And this one man, I won't mention his name, but so-and-so was admitted to sick bay with acute hysteria. So this man that I saw in the New Jersey Bounce was looking for information for a medical claim, so I wrote to him and told him what happened and the exact dates, and that it went into the logbook, the date and the hour. I don't know what happened to this boy, I don't know why he had hysteria, but I found out later that he was on a destroyer during World War II, the invasion of Okinawa, and the destroyer took a terrible beating by the Kamikazes. And I understand that he was on one of these destroyers that was hit during the Kamikaze attack. So I suppose when we got hit—
- Jim: It brought all that back?
- Don: Yep, he kind of fell apart. So you have to feel sorry for him, you know?
- Jim: Oh sure, you bet. You bet.
- Don: I had something else happen to me. I had a brother, my youngest brother was in the Army Signal Corps during the Korean War, but he went to Europe. His buddy went in the same time he did from Dodgeville. Went into the Marines, First Marine Division, and went to Korea. The Marines, as I mentioned previously in my conversation here, the Marines many times would call us for fire support when they'd have targets that they

couldn't handle. But this one particular time, we got called to—**[End of Tape One, Side Two]**—give them support, and we did. I didn't know this happened until one of my brothers passed away here a couple of years ago. And this boy, this Marine from Dodgeville and I got talkin' about it. And he knew I was on the New Jersey, and I said, "Yes, Bill," I says, "we fired support for you many times in Korea." [long pause]. I'm sorry. "Yes," he says, "you did. Sometimes," he said, "your shells hit a little too close." [unintelligible] one of his buddies was killed. And I knew this boy very well.

Jim: Short rounds are a problem sometimes.

Don: Anyhow he says, "I went out to retrieve his body, and one of your shells hit." He says, "I had to leave him." His body was never recovered. That's always been very hard for me. 'Cause I knew both of these boys very, very, very well. [pause] Sorry about that.

So those are some of the things that, I always say when you're in the service you can tell sea stories all day long. Most of us can. Some good ones, some bad ones. And there was a lot of good ones, and there were a lot of bad ones too. But the good Lord, I always say, the good Lord is with us. We can usually forget the bad days. But there are times when we can't.

Jim: Okay, are there any stories that you forgot to tell me?

Don: [laughs] Oh, there's probably lots of 'em I forgot, but these are some of 'em.

Jim: Yeah, look over your notes. If there's something, I should get it on tape.

Don: Yes, I wanted to mention about the reunion.

Jim: Yeah, you did that.

Don: Well, I got one more I'll tell you that just happened to me.

Jim: Alright, one more story.

Don: [laughs] This just happened to me this week. My wife and I and my daughter were laughing about this coming up, just like being called here. I says, these things seem like they're all coming back now, because I suppose people such as you are trying to get records made of World War II and Korea. I went to my dentist this week and was sitting in the chair, and he says "Don," he says, "how is your 590, your PC reunion coming?" I says, "It's coming along very well, but," I says, "we don't know exactly

how many people we're gonna have yet, so it's kind of hard for us to make dinner reservations and hotel reservations." And I says, "Of course, you know, we're all getting up in years. So far this year, we've lost three shipmates that have died of various illnesses." So I says, "We don't know exactly how many we're going to have." "Well," he says, "my wife just had a funeral, just the past week or so." A man she worked with down in Milwaukee for many years—she worked in radio or television down in Milwaukee for many years, and this man worked with her as an engineer, and I think as an announcer. And he says, "Well, you know, this man was in the Coast Guard." "Oh," I says, "Jim, I was too." "Well," he says, "this man really had a military funeral. Had a full military funeral." And just casually, he says, "His name was Herb Norwicky[?]" I says, "Jim, you won't believe this; I was in service with Herbert Norwicky." He and I went in service just about—'cause he was from Milwaukee. I says, "We went both through boot camp together," and I says, "I don't know where we went after boot camp," but I says, "when I go home, I can look in my logbook and find out where we were." So when I got home I got my logbook out, and sure enough, Herbert Norwicky and I went to Quartermaster School in New York, came back to the Great Lakes. But while we were in New York, in Quartermaster School, I say, we were there December until the spring of 1943. In my logbook I have down, "Herbert Norwicky, Ed Payton, two or three other boys, went to New York on forty-eight hour leave and went over to Bayonne, New Jersey to see our girlfriends." We had the same girlfriends over in Newark, New Jersey, and I have pictures at home of this man, going way back in 1942.

Jim: Amazing.

Don: But my dentist says, "Don, isn't this sad?" All of these years, my dentist and his family and our family go back forty years. The dentist's father was our family doctor, the dentist has been our dentist for many years. We've known our families, I say, for probably forty years. "Isn't this sad," he says, "Herbert Norwicky had no family. He had a stroke in 1985 and was paralyzed, couldn't talk, had to write what he wanted, but he says he didn't like to write. And of course from the stroke, he says he was very—he says he cried, for lack of a better word, he says he didn't like to talk. But isn't that sad," he says, "here you were a shipmate of his way back in 1942 and we never knew that." So it's a small world. [laughs]

Jim: It certainly is.

Don: And I said, I just, just found this out this week.

Jim: Amazing. Absolutely amazing.

Don: It's a small, small world.

[End of Interview]