

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Edward J. Davis, Jr.

COLLECTION: 4700.1139

IDENTIFICATION: World War II navy veteran; Purple Heart recipient

INTERVIEWER: John Alberts

SERIES: Military

INTERVIEW DATES: April 11, 1999

FOCUS DATES: 1941 - 1945

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1665

Tried to join the navy after Pearl Harbor but denied until after high school graduation; his mother signed for him to join in July 1942; he was colorblind but memorized the test pages; sent to range finder school due to his excellent depth perception; assigned to USS *Kalk* as a range finder operator; the *Kalk* was a Benson-class destroyer; explanation of his range finding duties while in the Aleutian Islands in late 1942; patrolling with the old USS *Detroit* and other ships in the Aleutians to prevent Japanese from bringing in supplies; picking up survivors from the USS *Worden* and a merchant ship; four trips to Casablanca and Oran bringing a quarter-million troops for Operation Torch; each trip lasted a month to six weeks; started to take over some gunner's mate duties and made gunner's mate third class; in May 1943, convoy from Boston to Murmansk and escorting other destroyers through the Panama Canal; assigned to MacArthur's Navy; stops at various locations in Papua, New Guinea; ship was bombed at Biak Island, June 12, 1944; thirty of his shipmates were killed and forty wounded including Davis; description of the bombing, being blown out of his shoes, seeing his shipmate mortally wounded, neglecting his own injury (shrapnel wounds to his scrotum, buttocks and ankle) until another shipmate told him he was bleeding; confusion of leaving his post to get topside for treatment; ship's doctor killed in the blast; Davis and other wounded directed to get on a boat that would take them ashore; shipmates joking with him because he had no shoes; treatment for his injury and worry over the swelling of his testicles; doctor suggests he smoke a cigarette to take his mind off things; complaining to the doctor while they operated on him; seeing his badly wounded shipmate in the operating room, shipmate died while Davis' was being operated on; after surgery, extreme need to evacuate his bladder and bowels; blood in toilet caused worry about internal injuries but it was just blood from his buttocks wounds; transferring to a hospital ship, unable to explain to the nurse where he was injured; a fighter pilot buzzing the ship scared him out of his bed; sent to Brisbane, Australia for shore patrol for three weeks; returned to the *Kalk* and ship's captain gave him choice of duty, he decided to stay on the *Kalk*; ship was assisting supply ships that were being bombed by kamikazes; *Kalk* has seven battles stars but was entitled to nine; getting caught

in a typhoon off the Philippines, he was on the wheel during ninety-foot seas; recounting his experience on the wheel that night, ship's captain ordering him to head into the wind, dropping down from the crest of huge waves, rolling from side to side, nearly sinking the ship; his nickname is Pelican because his shipmates thought he had a nose like one; at a reunion years later, a shipmate told him that a toolbox had fallen into the steering shaft and that's why Davis almost sank them; three American ships sank in that storm; explanation of how they took on a whole load of fuel before the storm, luck of the draw because the ships behind them could only refuel partially due to rough seas; two of those ships ran out of fuel and sank with all hands on deck; later heading to Tokyo Bay to witness Japan's surrender, the *Kalk* is in some pictures from that event; Davis could see the emperor on the deck of the *Missouri* up close through the range finder, usually people disbelieve this story but he has a photo to prove it; they went ashore in Tokyo; he dislikes the British because they didn't take care of their ships, their clothes were dirty and they stank; he thinks MacArthur was alright; many older enlisted men by the end of the war; he had two friends from high school who also joined the navy, one of them was killed in Okinawa; after the war he settled in Baton Rouge; on the way home, being responsible for a group of thirteen seamen; sassy waitress in New Orleans who put her breasts in their faces, Davis refused and made a joke about a roach crawling out of her cleavage so she tried to kick them all out of the bar; that was the end of the war for him and he wouldn't give it up for anything; when he started at LSU, learned that he could apply for disability but didn't feel the government owed him anything; someone helped him complete the paperwork for the Purple Heart and disability which he was awarded; a complication with his injury led to a doctor asking that his disability payment be increased, he's been getting thirty percent ever since; he uses the money to go fishing; end of interview.

TAPES: 1 (T1665)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 46 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 40 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Correspondence (3 pages); Obituary (1 page)

RESTRICTIONS: None