

Wisconsin Veterans Museum
Research Center

Transcript of an
Oral History Interview with
WARD D. MCDONALD
Signalman, Navy, World War II.

2000

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McDonald, Ward D., (1926-). Oral History Interview, 2000.

User Copy: 2 sound cassette (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Master Copy: 1 sound cassette (ca. 75 min.), analog, 1 7/8 ips, mono.

Video Recording: 1 videorecording (ca. 75 min.); ½ inch, color.

Transcript: 0.1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Abstract:

Ward D. McDonald, a Seattle, Washington native, discusses his World War II service aboard the USS Goodhue as a signalman striker in the Pacific theater. McDonald talks about enlisting in the Navy, boot camp and signalman school at Farragut (Idaho), and amphibious training at Coronado Beach (California), where he trained as signalman for a wave of amphibious craft. McDonald discusses volunteering for submarine service but not being assigned to it. Assigned as the signalman aboard the *USS Goodhue* (APA-107), he describes the ship and tells of working in the steering engine room. McDonald mentions joining a convoy, being on alert for Japanese submarines, landing troops at Leyte Gulf (Philippines) for mopping up operations, guiding boats using semaphore signals, and transporting supplies and casualties. He addresses the *Goodhue's* being made a squadron command ship. McDonald details training at Kerama Retto for the landing at Okinawa and facing constant attacks from air raids, suicide boats, and swimmers with hand grenades. During the attack on Okinawa, he speaks of looking into the eyes of a Japanese kamikaze pilot, witnessing a kamikaze plane hit the *USS Henrico*, the celebration shipboard when a machine gunner shot down a Japanese plane, and the wreckage and casualties aboard the *Goodhue* when it was hit by a kamikaze. McDonald states he was knocked unconscious by the explosion, tells of waking up to discover his jacket was on fire, and speaks of his actions in the time following the attack. With the ship's gun crew killed, he tells of working with the guns as the ship got underway. He addresses being told not to move a dead body from under a boat and later hearing that the man had only been wounded; the man later died of blood loss in sick bay. McDonald talks about the ship's casualties and burying over twenty dead at a cemetery on Kerama Retto. He describes assisting in the first wave of the landing at Ie Shima, being forced to spend several days on a troop landing boat without food, and being under mortar fire. He describes pulling c-rations out of the water after creating waves with his boat so that a passing supply pontoon lost cargo overboard. McDonald tells of transporting wounded from the beach to an attack hospital ship, finally returning to the *Goodhue*, and nearly being crushed while boarding. After the *Goodhue* returned to the States for repairs, he tells of hitchhiking home and being late to report back for duty because the military plane he caught a ride on crashed in a field in California. McDonald talks about transporting personnel, preparing for the invasion of Honshu, and, after the Japanese surrendered, transporting ex-prisoners of war from Japan to Manila. After the ship was decommissioned in Virginia and he was discharged, he details stopping at Arlington Farms to see the "Acres of Women" before hitchhiking home. McDonald tells of using the GI Bill to attend college, getting married, his varied career after the war, and

eventually moving to Wisconsin. He touches on his membership in the VFW and having a ship reunion in Goodhue County (Minnesota).

Biographical Sketch:

McDonald (b.1926) enlisted in the Navy in 1944 and served aboard the USS Goodhue. After the war, he worked for a time in Seattle (Washington) on tug boats, in his father's marine engineering company, and as a salesman. Eventually he moved to Richland Center (Wisconsin) and worked as vice president of a bank. He had three marriages and five sons.

Interviewed by James McIntosh, 2000
Transcribed by Katy Marty, 2008
Checked and corrected by Joan Bruggink, 2011
Abstract written by Susan Krueger, 2011

Transcription of Interview:

- Jim: Okay. We're off and running. Talking to Ward McDonald. It's the 28th of August, the year 2000. When were you born, Ward?
- Ward: I was born on March 11, 1926.
- Jim: Where?
- Ward: In Seattle, Washington.
- Jim: When did you enter the military service?
- Ward: I was 17, had to be, I guess, officially March 4, 1944.
- Jim: '44?
- Ward: Yes. I had inquired of the Navy and the Coast Guard earlier, but I officially went in, I believe, on March 4.
- Jim: The Coast Guard?
- Ward: I attempted the Coast Guard first and they rejected me
- Jim: Um-hm.
- Ward: Because of a skin condition of eczema inside my arm and the back of my neck.
- Jim: So you turned to the Navy?
- Ward: So I turned to the Navy, and they accepted me.
- Jim: You were a volunteer?
- Ward: I was a volunteer, and I come from a sea-faring family, so it was very important that I stay at sea.
- Jim: Of course.
- Ward: Both my mother and my father's side were all seafaring people.
- Jim: No kiddin'?
- Ward: Oh, yeah. I went to sea.

- Jim: Well, in Seattle, of course.
- Ward: I went to sea when I was 15, and I had small boat handling and navigation, all inland navigation, Morse code, semaphore. I had all of this before I ever went in.
- Jim: So you were well prepared.
- Ward: Yes. And I worked on the towboats in Seattle Harbor at fifteen with a permit.
- Jim: Oh my goodness.
- Ward: Or sixteen, so I was suited for the Navy. I knew more about small boat handling than anyone else.
- Jim: [Laughing] I'll bet. Where did you get your basic training?
- Ward: They sent me to Farragut, Idaho for basic training, and I already knew course order drill, I knew command, I knew respect of officers, I knew boat. I knew it all except standing in line for [laughs] a lukewarm tray full of beans.
- Jim: For everything.
- Ward: Yes.
- Jim: Okay. And then did they send you to a core school?
- Ward: Yeah, they put me through your aptitudes: the normal rigmarole.
- Jim: Yes.
- Ward: And then I ended up in Signalman's School, staying at Farragut, Idaho. And that was pretty much a repeat of what I had already learned in Sea Scouting, just a little more of a toner, honing up on things. I finished the Signalman's School, and then they knew about my small boat handling experience, so they sent me to San Diego, to Coronado Beach for the amphibious training. I took my amphibious training there with a lot of fellows from Nebraska and Oklahoma.
- Jim: [Both laugh]
- Ward: Never seen a wave in their life.
- Jim: Don't even know how to swim, right?

Ward: They learn to swim in a hurry.

Jim: Tell me what that training involved, because that's such a big term.

Ward: It was strictly amphibious.

Jim: Right.

Ward: Landing a small craft, discharging and on loading, and--

Jim: LCVPs?

Ward: LCVPs, LCMs, that type of thing. Surviving in the surf. Um, I don't know whether running up and down a sandy beach for a couple of miles every morning was necessary, but we did it. We rolled over a couple of boats because the coxswains, they didn't know--forcible wave, and they didn't have the respect for the ocean, and they learned the hard way. Yeah, we came close, a couple times.

Jim: Mm-hmm. So after you became an adequate driver, they --

Ward: Well, there--

Jim: Put you to work?

Ward: Yes. Well, they didn't want me to drive, they didn't want me as a coxswain.

Jim: Oh, really?

Ward: I was gonna be the signalman, and that's all there is to it, McDonald.

Jim: I have to know what a signalman does on such a small craft.

Ward: All right.

Jim: Seems like an unnecessary--

Ward: It wasn't needed.

Jim: Right.

Ward: The signalmen, there was one per lineup of waves of boats, one, and he had to stand in the--

Jim: That might be, what, eight boats?

Ward: We had maybe a dozen, depending on how many we could get through the breakwater, through the coral reefs.

Jim: I see.

Ward: Then he'd stand in the engine hatch and signal by semaphore or light to the wave.

Jim: No radio?

Ward: No, no radio.

Jim: Okay.

Ward: To disperse so much they came in according to lieutenants and stuff.

Jim: So they all followed your directions?

Ward: Yeah, they followed our directions.

Jim: And how did you get your directions?

Ward: From the lieutenant. The lieutenant was in the lead boat with me and it was a--it wasn't a little LCVP, it was an LCV, but it was an R; it was a special little boat for the captain's gig—powerful, had a small ramp that one or two people could go off on, twin-mounted, 30 caliber, air-cooled guns.

Jim: But those weren't your responsibility?

Ward: Well, they turned out to be eventually.

Jim: Well, we'll get to that.

Ward: The coxswain and Ward McDonald were running the boat, so we would lead the first wave onto the beach and discharge all equipment and troops.
[pause]

Jim: Go ahead.

Ward: Then we would return under instructions to either bring wounded back to some of the offshore ships or come back for some more troops, so that was really simple enough, was the way it was explained to us. But it was never the way it turns out to be, because you lose your boats,--

Jim: That's always the way.

Ward: You get shot at, you live a day and a half on the floorboards of the boat on your hands and knees. It's really--

Jim: So how much training did you have in San Diego?

Ward: That was about three months, but about halfway through that training I volunteered to sign up for the submarine service. [laughs] Bonus pay of twenty percent, and twenty percent of \$52 is a lot of money. So I decided I'd sign up for the submarine because I could make more money. There were fifty-two of us, and they needed two. So we went through all the tests, aptitudes and psychological and you name it. And we narrowed it down to ten and down to five. And then they got it down to just two of us. And fellow by the name of McClain [?] and McDonald were the two left.

Jim: Hey, super.

Ward: I am going to be in the submarines.

Jim: So they sent you to the east coast at New London?

Ward: The next morning they printed it and they only need one, instead of two, and they took McClain. [laughing] From Texas.

Jim: That's life.

Ward: And he ended up in the S-boat or training sub out of San Diego for the rest of the war, just on the training missions.

Jim: Oh well, so you didn't miss so much after all then.

Ward: Well, I missed the twenty percent pay.

Jim: That's true.

Ward: And I caught all the hell and he was home every night in San Diego.

Jim: [Laughing] Tough war.

Ward: Yes.

Jim: Okay. So after your small craft training--?

Ward: After amphibious training and everything they sent us to San Francisco. We were sent down to the harbor and we were sent out in boats to the brand new ship just launched in San Francisco called the *USS Goodhue*. She was a freighter, a C-3 type freighter designed by the Maritime Commission. Her original name was the *Sea Wren*, and she was going to be assigned to whomever bought her. Well, the Navy confiscated all the ships and called her the *USS Goodhue*. The attack transports, which was what she was going to be, were named after counties in the United States. Goodhue County is in Minnesota and Redwing is its county seat. We had a marvelous reunion there a few years ago. So in San Francisco we came on board and they loaded ammunition.

Jim: Was that designated an AKA?

Ward: No, that's a freighter. AKA is an attack freighter.

Jim: Okay.

Ward: They were also--most of those were ___ ships. There were a few C-2's and some C-3 cargo.

Jim: My hospital ship was converted from one of those.

Ward: Was it? All right. Okay. That was probably a C-3 hull then, and--

Jim: I think so. My recollection is kind of vague.

Ward: They were great ships. They were a good ship.

Jim: Well, it only had one screw; that bothered me.

Ward: [Laughs]

Jim: 'Cause when you come into port it was a real adventure to get it in there.

Ward: Yes, yes. Well the--

Jim: Because they couldn't back—

Ward: The AKA was the cargo ship.

Jim: Right.

Ward: And the APA was the attack transport personnel attack, auxiliary personnel attack.

Jim: Which was the one that had the presidents' names on them?

Ward: Those were APs.

Jim: APs?

Ward: Yeah, APs. Like the, ah--

Jim: They were General something--?

Ward: Yeah. Yes, yes.

Jim: Those were pretty good-sized ships.

Ward: Those were good-sized ships and they belonged to the American President lines and some of the large steamship companies

Jim: When I was there they were always named after a general.

Ward: Yes, whereas the APA were all little freighters converted to attack transports and named after counties across the United States.

Jim: And that's what your ship was?

Ward: And that's what we were on.

Jim: And your ship was how long?

Ward: Four hundred ninety-two feet.

Jim: Oh, that's smaller than my hospital ship.

Ward: Five hatches, five cargo holds, steam turbine, built right in south San Francisco.

Jim: Its purpose?

Ward: Its purpose was to take the troops to the beachheads and unload.

Jim: Yeah, but it's not an LST. It couldn't [unintelligible] in front.

Ward: No, we carried about thirty boats; I think we carried maybe twenty-two LCVPs on davits and in stacks above the hatches, and we carried about six LCMs or LCVMs, the larger ones, and then we carried just one LCVR, the little one that's the command boat. And that was about it.

Jim: Is there a picture of your command boat in here?

Ward: Yes, yeah.

Jim: Good, because I can't visualize it.

Ward: I'm pretty sure. It's just about the same size as an LCVP, slightly smaller, with one little small ramp that one person--

Jim: Rather than two on each side?

Ward: Yes.

Jim: Okay. I'm getting it.

Ward: And being a little smaller, we were a little faster. It was a nice maneuvering boat; we could handle it very well.

Jim: Diesel?

Ward: No, had a big Buddha diesel—no it wasn't a Buddha diesel, it was a gas engine. Gas line about yea to the ground. [laughs] We went through a lot of gas. But it was reliable. It was a pretty good sea boat considering it was shallow draft. There was just two of us on there most of the time. Once we discharged troops we had to get the hell off the beach.

Jim: Right.

Ward: Or snipers would pick you off.

Jim: This is good, because you just answered some of my questions that I've been thinking about for a long time. Go ahead.

Ward: All right, so we loaded in San Francisco. They loaded a lot of foul weather gear and the number four hats. **[break in recording]**

Jim: So anyway, you left--?

Ward: The ship was anchored in San Francisco Bay.

Jim: Right.

Ward: And we loaded supplies, ammunition, a lot of foul weather gear and the number four hats, and I thought we were going to Alaska, obviously. Well, it was a ploy, and I think it was probably because there was a lot of Japanese influence in San Francisco and they had to be, I don't know--We

sailed out of San Francisco. I was assigned--when GQ was sounded and we practiced our general quarters I was assigned to the after steering engine room dispersing our communications people such as myself. I was at the steering engine, put the earphones on, and you have a gyro repeater. And so they had me take the ship out through the Golden Gate standing backwards with the propeller underneath me and the rudder and I was running the gyro repeater on just a test-type thing; and it worked fairly well. No problem. I knew we were out in the open when we got the surge of the sea going into it. So about the next twelve hours at sea you generally run into a little heavier weather when you get off the coast a ways, and so we had a lot of kids from Kansas and Nebraska, and Oklahoma—[laughs]

Jim: Throwing up.

Ward: At the rails.

Jim: Um-hmm.

Ward: Some of them on the windward side, some on the leeward side.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Ward: -- yeah.

Jim: Lean over.

Ward: Seventeen days at sea, without sight of anything except some squalls. Crossed the equator, pulled into the Admiralty Islands. The Admiralty Islands are probably three or four hundred miles east of Hollandia, New Guinea. We went over to Hollandia; we teamed up with a convoy heading for the mopping up operations of the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. We picked up a Greek tramp ship, about a hundred foot black stack and black smoke out of her, and every submarine in the Japanese fleet could find it. [laughs] And we could only go as fast as the slowest vessel, and that was about eight or nine knots and we just toyed, and the Japs' subs were everywhere. Constant alert.

Jim: And that made you nervous?

Ward: I was nervous.

Jim: No destroyers?

Ward: Oh, yes. We had a lot of DEs and destroyers themselves patrolling us. There were probably forty, fifty ships in the convoy. We hit the beaches in

Leyte Gulf, Mactan Island, a couple of islands around there and secured them. That was our first taste of war and our training was put to the test, but it was a good beach. No problems. We--

- Jim: Tell me now, when you get ready to land some troops, did you do that there?
- Ward: Yes, we did.
- Jim: So your boat is out first and they line up by [unintelligible]?
- Ward: Yes, we pulled in offshore--
- Jim: They had an equal number on either side of you?
- Ward: Yes. Then they'd go in a circular pattern off the starboard and port quarters of the stern.
- Jim: How do they see you?
- Ward: Well, they know our boat because there's a coxswain and the lieutenant.
- Jim: You don't have a flag or anything?
- Ward: Oh, yes, they know who I am.
- Jim: They can see it?
- Ward: It's a different type of boat; they know me, and they know us. Once they give the command for us to leave, we follow 'em, we lead in.
- Jim: You say you didn't have a radio; therefore, the command was by signal?
- Ward: By signal. I'd use either semaphore--
- Jim: From another ship?
- Ward: Yes, mostly semaphore signals.
- Jim: Now when you drive boats off, all those small boats that you're taking to shore, do they all come from your ship?
- Ward: Yes, they are strictly ours, and then the next APA over and they would--
- Jim: Right.

- Ward: We would form our--we were designated as a Squadron Command ship. I don't know why they picked on us, but we were probably the better ship, a better officer staff, better everything, I think.
- Jim: And they had you.
- Ward: [Laughs] A small ingredient.
- Jim: [Laughs]
- Ward: Our captain was a graduate of the academy.
- Jim: Trade school boy?
- Ward: Yes, a very, very fine man. He went on to become a Rear Admiral before he retired. And we had a Commodore brought on board, which is sort of a complimentary officer's position of both Captain and he was the Squadron Commander for the ships. We had about, I think, seven or eight of them in our squadron. So we would lead them into the beach. There was no coral problems in the Philippines where we hit the beach, and we would take the orders from the lieutenant.
- Jim: Was this at Leyte?
- Ward: At Leyte.
- Jim: Was this the first day?
- Ward: No, it was not. This was more of a mopping up operation. I think most of the Philippines, the main invasion of the Philippines had taken place--
- Jim: November, I think
- Ward: About November of '44.
- Jim: And you came in there when?
- Ward: We came in there right after--we were in there in October, should be October '44 when we hit the beach.
- Jim: And that's before the--
- Ward: No, I'm sorry. You're right. That would be--
- Jim: About November?

Ward: It was about November.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: November when we came in. And we hit the main islands there in Leyte Gulf, and then a couple of offshore islands. Resistance was minimal.

Jim: This is Army that you brought in?

Ward: Yes, yeah. I don't remember the division.

Jim: Where did you stick them aboard ship?

Ward: Amarical Division, I think. Well, these APAs, we slept in the cargo holds. On those freighters, you had your lower deck, you had your lower tween decks, upper tween, and then your hatch on top. And they filled 'em all in, put the passenger ways in when they built them and they took the holds and converted them to--.

Jim: But you had better quarters than they did, I hope.

Ward: Well, we had a little better.

Jim: Not much bigger.

Ward: No. And of course, all your bunks are fore and aft on ships because of the movement. I suppose we were a little more comfortable than they were because we were a little bit more at home, that was our home; each bunk was your home, whereas the troops that was just a bunk.

Jim: You had your own bunk, though, you never had to share that?

Ward: No, I had my own bunk and a locker. I was on the lower tween deck, so whenever we had GQ I had to get up the ladder through upper tween and step out on the deck between number two and three hold. So we finished up the Philippines. We did a little exercise with the Amarical Division out of Cebu.

Jim: When you put these guys ashore, once they're gone--

Ward: They're gone.

Jim: Your interest in them is zero.

Ward: It's zero. Unless we have to bring them back wounded or dead.

Jim: Right. So then I was going to say, what's your next function once these guys hit the beach?

Ward: Then supplies. Many of the troops are there and we get them all ashore and then we hang in there awhile and bring in some supplies.

Jim: Go back to your ship and bring in some more?

Ward: Come back to the ship, take more supplies off the AKAs.

Jim: Okay.

Ward: Bring back the wounded and the bodies to offshore.

Jim: Yeah, but a small craft like yours doesn't bring back many--

Ward: Well, we brought back quite a few.

Jim: [Both laugh]

Ward: Yes, surprisingly enough. Not so much in the Philippines, because they had some field hospitals set up and they were in pretty good shape.

Jim: Sure.

Ward: There were a few that we brought back. There were some, few supplies, broken down, that we brought back, but we were there for--I don't know, maybe we were there three weeks and then we dispersed.

Jim: After they're all in and then stabilized, then you didn't have much to do?

Ward: No. No. Their supplies can be flown if they can get an airport.

Jim: But they had to have a base so they don't need you?

Ward: Yes. Then they'd bring the freighters in, AKAs and--

Jim: Then they'd put a regular--

Ward: Oh sure, then they can start building some pontoons and restoring the docks.

Jim: Alright.

Ward: Ah, we tied up to--in Cebu; we tied up two different times to sunken Japanese trips waiting to take stuff ashore for them and pickin' up some

troops. So then we finished with that, and then the next operation we were training for would be Okinawa. But first we had to go into Kerama Retto, which is off the southern--I believe it's a group of islands south and west of Okinawa itself. And Kerama Retto was where we got our first taste of the enemy, because we were no more than four hundred-fifty, five hundred miles from Japan and they could throw a lot of things at us.

Jim: So then it was a little hairy over there?

Ward: Then things became real hairy.

Jim: What would they be shooting at you with?

Ward: They weren't so much shooting at us. We ran into the broad screen of kamikaze that came out from the islands, from Japan itself.

Jim: But they wouldn't waste an airplane on--.

Ward: Oh yes, they would. Oh my, yes. They wanted us.

Jim: Any boat?

Ward. Well, they'd take the ships.

Jim: Oh, yeah. Okay.

Ward: They'd take the ships and warships and anything, because I don't believe they had enough fuel to get the plane back home; they had to get something. When we came into the Kerama Retto we had eighty-two days of consecutive air raids.

Jim: Every day?

Ward: Every day. Oh, just continuous day and night. You didn't get much sleep.

Jim: Did they ever hit you?

Ward: Oh yes. We finally got it. Yeah, that time--

Jim: Where on the ship?

Ward: It came over aft. Twin engine Jap—Japanese; why, I have to correct myself.

Jim: No you don't.

Ward: Ah, Betty. Twin engine Betty, and she blew up all over. Hit us on the stern and killed everybody in the stern of the ship but one.

Jim: Wow.

Ward: Phew.

Jim: So tell me about that moment.

Ward: I'll lead up to it.

Jim: You were standing there looking around?

Ward: That wasn't the beginning. That was maybe more the end of it.

Jim: Okay.

Ward: We hit the Kerama Rettos. They had kamikaze and they had the suicide boats. These suicide boats, you don't hear much about 'em. They're small boats from here to the other side of the wall. Got a small engine in 'em.

Jim: They're not a submarine?

Ward: No, no, no, they're just service. They're not very high, maybe eighteen inches high. They got a powerful charge in the bow of it, and the Japanese would lie down in the bottom prone and fire the engine up and just plow into the side of you at the waterline.

Jim: Could you see 'em coming?

Ward: Oh yeah. You could hear 'em. You couldn't see 'em if they come out at night, but you could hear 'em.

Jim: How did you get them down?

Ward: Not very easily. [laughing]

Jim: I was going to say.

Ward: Small arms fire. We had our 20 mm.

Jim: 20 mm?

Ward: 20 mm. Twenty couldn't get down over the--low, its range.

Jim: That didn't stop 'em?

Ward: No. So we would have to have our small boats. We take the boats out, our LCVPs and the machine guns and break out and just run a perimeter around our shipping.

Jim: You did that every night?

Ward: Oh, all day long. Day and night.

Jim: You had small boats?

Ward: We had our machine guns; you could pick 'em off

Jim: Yeah. I understand. I didn't realize there were that many of those suicide ships.

Ward: Well, there were quite a few. There's about four, five, six little islands: Amami Oshima and _____[?]. There was--I think we hit three of those five islands. And we had quite a few of those little boats, but we finally thinned them out. Then the Jap would come out of his dugout into the hillsides after everything was taken and he would get an orange crate or something to put over his head and he would swim out and he'd hold a hand grenade and hide it and throw it up on the deck. So we were--I stood a lot of watch with a Thompson machine gun to shoot anything that was in the water, I don't care if it was a grapefruit.

Jim: [Laughs] I got it.

Ward: You bet, because you just couldn't take a chance. But one of those nights--

Jim: An orange crate?

Ward: Anything over their head to disguise them. Just an orange crate floating along, you wouldn't think anything about it.

Jim: But there's a guy underneath it?

Ward: That could very well be. Not many orange crates in the ocean. [laughs]

Jim: No, you don't often see them.

Ward: No, but they were there. Any old thing that--

Jim: Unless there was an LST around or something.

Ward: Before we left the Kerama Rettos they brought in eleven destroyers that were hit by kamikaze and were just hulks.

Jim: What were they doing? Just--

Ward: Brought 'em into one of the anchorages and tied them in nests. Everybody gone off of them.

Jim: Yeah there--

Ward: Yeah.

Jim: They're hulks?

Ward: Yes. Yeah.

Jim: It didn't look like they were planning to repair them at all?

Ward: They brought in eleven still floating, and I don't know how many they lost. Kamikazes just cleaned them out. Then we left the Kerama Rettos; that was on March 20--

Jim: In '45?

Ward: --28, 29 and 30. March 31, 1945. On the first of April, April Fools Day.

Jim: Ah, the day we invaded Okinawa.

Ward: Yes. We were steaming--actually it's one day ahead of us. So it would've been the 31st of March.

Jim: Got it.

Ward: We were scheduled to hit the beach in Okinawa on the southeast, southwest shore--

Jim: With your troops. Excuse me, how many soldiers did you--?

Ward: We carry about four hundred fifty.

Jim: Four hundred fifty?

Ward: Yeah, around that, maybe five hundred. We always had one Marine officer on board as a liaison between ship's command and the troops.

Jim: Okay.

- Ward: And we were, came under another attack by kamikaze. I was in the lower tween decks trying to catch some sleep. It was about, maybe eighteen, nineteen hundred hours. GQ sounded. I grabbed my jacket, I grabbed my helmet, like you're supposed to, and run topside. I came out of the hatch between number two and number three hold and turned, a horrible noise going on, and I turned, and about from here to that building was a Jap kamikaze. I could see the pilot, I could see in his eyes, I turned around--
- Jim: Coming right at you?
- Ward: And he looked right at me.
- Jim: He was coming right at you?
- Ward: Right at me.
- Jim: Just like he identified you, had you picked out.
- Ward: Yeah. My number is up. He wasn't shooting, but there was a Navy bobcat behind him that was trying to shoot him down and chunks of the plane are falling off. I don't know if the Jap was dead or not. But I turned to fall to the deck [pause] and a hell of a roar going over the top and they missed us. Went over the top of the rigging, I don't know how, I don't know how he didn't hit us. The bobcat peeled away, or something peeled away, to get out of there because we were going to shoot him down.
- Jim: Right.
- Ward: And he plowed across the way about several hundred yards and went right into the *Henrico*, one of our ships, just like us, under our command.
- Jim: Another AKA?
- Ward: Another AP, and just blew a hole right onto her, killed all in the command, everybody in the bridge was dead and there was some in the engine room. She was a dead hulk in the water. And, you know, that's--now things are getting really close at hand. [choked up]
- Jim: Yeah, this wasn't what you mother promised you.
- Ward: What went through my mind was--and I'll never forget the expression on that pilot's face, and my feeling of the time of this was this is what they call gettin' your numbers called, because he was--you know; in a second or two he was gonna hit me. Um. But he didn't.

Jim: Right.

Ward: So I don't know if he was a damned poor pilot or he just was dead and he drifted up, I don't know. Ah--but my number wasn't called. And I allude to that in the book.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: I had my jacket on by that time, my chief crew jacket, and then I ran aft down the port side. My station was back aft, on the fantail. Five inch 38 sittin' back there, five man crew, and then up above me, behind me on the after decks, were 20 mm and some 40 mm, twins. Got back, there wasn't time. The five inch 38 would come "bam," we got a Jap. We hit a bogie coming in on one of our ships. God. We all cheered and it was a wonderful example. Beautiful marksmanship.

Jim: Just like in a book?

Ward: Well, yeah. It was about, probably eight hundred yards out and then we got 'em. Um, they got one more off--they had already gotten one already, so this was their second one; they were really doin' a good job.

Jim: You did that primarily with what gun?

Ward: A five inch 38.

Jim: A five inch 38?

Ward: Yeah. Good gun. A good gun.

Jim: Good shooting.

Ward: We were using proximity fuses. Anywhere close to it—

Jim: Ah, that's what did it.

Ward: I was standing there watching them and cheering with them. I was about from here to that nest of chairs from the gun. They swung the gun around to its stops, off its forward starboard. You have to stop so you don't shoot yourself. It was balanced on the stops and they were sitting there waiting, and then I looked at the gunner and his eyes--just horror filled his face, absolute horror. And then there was a hell of an explosion. The Betty had come in off of our bow. Our bow, five inch 38, had lifted her up a ways and she came through and hit our after rigging, probably fifty, sixty feet above the after end of the ship and everything--two bombs, the plane. I remember seeing a ball of flame, huge ball of flame coming down, it must

have been one of the engines, and another one coming at me, and I turned again to my left only, and a good thing I turned left instead of right, because I think if I had turned right the force of the explosion would have blown me off the end of the ship. But I turned left and then I don't remember any more.

Jim: This happened the same day?

Ward: Yes.

Jim: Both these explosions?

Ward: Same--only about a couple hundred feet apart and about five minutes.

Jim: Both these--

Ward: And the Jap coming out missing me and then coming around, running down the stern. I wasn't in the stern five minutes and then this happened.

Jim: Well then, in thirty minutes it was all over.

Ward: Oh yes; it was all over in thirty minutes. We lost a fourth of our crew. Killed probably about twenty, twenty-two of us or something like that.

Jim: In the boat?

Ward: And wounded. We lost, wounded over a hundred of us. And a lot of our boats were damaged. And everybody--the gun crew was completely obliterated.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: I, um, it blew me inward for some reason, I don't know. But it blew me inward towards, not a steel bulkhead but a companionway, from the after, it went in about fifteen feet into the inner part of the cabin and then ladders down aft to the steering engine room and that type of thing, but as you go through this corridor in order to prevent light from coming off they have blackout doors.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: Two steel doors overlapping and about, maybe four or five feet between. You weave in between them.

Jim: Right.

Ward: When I woke up I was inside slammed up against the bulkhead. I would have been out for, I don't know--I never realized how long I was out, I just don't know. Um, and this was--I had been slammed against the wall and I just sort of slumped into it. Um, when I came to it was very hot, awfully warm, that was--didn't know what that was.

Jim: You had sensation then?

Ward: Yes. I was on prone, on my stomach and my watch was right in front of me. My arm was in front of me and I focused on my watch and I could see that the crystal was shattered. And Jerry Baxter, my buddy who was also a signalman down in the after steering engine room, had come up to see what the explosion was, and he was lookin' at me from down the ladder, about ten steps down. He thought I was dead because I was on fire. Then I had a sensation I've never had before, and that was um, I was afraid to move. I feared it was gonna hurt like hell. But I had to do something.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: I was very uncomfortable and I was awfully hot, and so I--my hand moved and my arm moved and then I moved my leg and my other leg and I straightened myself out and it didn't hurt.

Jim: What about the fire?

Ward: Well, I didn't know what it was. **[End of tape 1, side 1]**

And that was what was frightening Jerry. He was down there—he was motionless. He couldn't--speechless. So I got up on my hands and knees and then I realized my jacket was burning and I--so I just got out of my jacket, it was burned through to my shirt, but it hadn't burned me, so I just left it there.

Jim: Right.

Ward: And I got my helmet straightened on and I go outside and there's no doors. The blackout doors were all hanging--gone and--on the hinges. It had blown me through them. I don't know how it did that, but it took 'em-

Jim: Two of 'em?

Ward: There were two of them, overlapping doors.

Jim: And you went right through 'em?

Ward: I went through both of them and their stops and everything that keeps them from swinging. Tore them all out and went on in--I must of led with my head when the helmet was on, but it wasn't sore, I had no bruises, no burns. And I came back out in the fantail and the gun crew was just, um--

Jim: Splayed around?

Ward: They were everywhere. There was hardly an identifiable part.

Jim: I suppose.

Ward: But there was a Lieutenant--the Marine Lieutenant was sitting on the capstan, there on the port side, and his right arm was shattered and bleeding badly. I went over and--"Sir, can I help you to sick bay?" and he was in shock. He had--he wouldn't talk, just stared. He was in shock. And we had cloth belts, we didn't have leather belts, we had those woven cloth--I yanked my belt off --

Jim: [unintelligible]

Ward: --took it around his arm, tied an overhand knot and tied another one, and I looked around and found a chunk of shrapnel, and I stuck it in, and I wrapped it up tight as I could and it stopped bleeding.

Jim: Good.

Ward: And I asked him if he could hold it there while I find somebody to help him down to sick bay. We had an after emergency sick bay in number five hold. And he wouldn't talk to me. So I tucked it up under his arm and held it there. The bleeding had stopped by then, so I ran around the afterdeck and I yelled it, and the pharmacy mate was coming out of the deck down below. We got a stretcher and we went around and we loaded the Lieutenant on. Another fellow came by to help and took him off. So I went in to see Jerry Baxter and tell him, "I'm all right back here," and he said, "I've already told them and they want you to stay here. Told the bridge, just stay back here." So I thought, "Well, I'll see what's goin' on up above." So I went back in the fantail and climbed the vertical ladder to the first deck where the 40 millimeters were. There was nobody. Gone. So I climbed the next one, which was the upper deck, immediately below where the plane exploded, and as I came up over the deck and over the coaming, a vertical ladder, I reached up over and here's a finger with a wedding ring on it.

Jim: Hmmm.

Ward: That's the only part of the whole thing I could identify was one finger.

Jim: Not much. Not much.

Ward: And there were about, ah, ten of 'em up there.

Jim: What about the ship's integrity by this time?

Ward: The ship's integrity by that time, ah, was--

Jim: Compromised or not?

Ward: No, not too bad, but they put her under flank speed and get out of there and we left our convoy; er, we left our group of ships.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: The *Henrico* had been hit; she was dead in the water. We had to get out of there.

Jim: How'd you get hurt? You pull her?

Ward: No, we just leave her, she's a hulk. We can't help.

Jim: People were off anyway by that time.

Ward: No, they were still on board the ship. It had been only a half an hour earlier when they were hit, so they were trying to recover their fire and get their wits together themselves. Our ship went under flank speed, which is--the whole thing was just a shaking. [crying] We got out of there as fast as we can.

Jim: Flank speed of course isn't very much.

Ward: No, we could do maybe nineteen or twenty at flank.

Jim: So where did you head?

Ward: [Sigh] Well, then I came back down from topside, where I saw all this mess, and somebody yelled, "McDonald!" and I turned, and it was Lieutenant Ned McDonald, our Beach Master. "Do you know how to handle--do you know how to fire a 40 mm?" I said, "No sir, but we can learn."

Jim: Right.

- Ward: "Come on, get over here." So we went over to the starboard side and twin forties. He sat up in the platform with the joy stick and I had bodies all around in the pit from the gun crew that was there originally, so I had to drag them out of there, and I had one on the turntable; it was quite-- [crying] Tell him to stop turning for a bit, so I could use my other foot and lift out the clip of four shells, and ring across and put it in the other and then [gun firing noises] get her goin' again. But we did hit a plane.
- Jim: Oh, good.
- Ward: Hit a kamikaze, knocked some pieces off it, and we're doing pretty good. I had a hard time keepin' up with him and his firing.
- Jim: But you were under way you said?
- Ward: Oh, yeah, we were really flying, and then he says, "That's it," and I turned around; he was gone. Well, he had been hurt, he was injured and was bleedin' pretty bad, but then I think he might have just passed out if he didn't get below, so he went on down below. I didn't see him again. Then I stayed back aft until they got the--there were some fires. They got the fire squelched and they got thorough control. I came back forward of that after area and I found on the top where the boats are stacked up, the LCMs are up there and then the LCVPs stacked inside--underneath was a body, back up under on top of the hatch. So I got down and I started crawling in, and a group of guys were over here, "Forget it, sailor, he's dead." Okay, I didn't think about if he was dead, I wanted to get him out of there, but he was dead; I just took their word for it. The next day the guys were talking and I heard them saying that there was somebody, I don't know who it was, part of the deck crew, First Division, Second Division seaman, was on the number five hatch, badly wounded and they found him in the morning and they took him out in the sick bay, but he had lost too much blood and he was gone.
- Jim: That was the guy? Yeah.
- Ward: I should have not listened to them. I should have reasoned--
- Jim: Dragged him out, and then if he was dead, he's dead.
- Ward: I said, "Hey, if he's dead let's get him out of there."
- Jim: Right.
- Ward: And I took their word for it and I didn't think.
- Jim: Well.

Ward: The guy was only eighteen. [crying]

Jim: I know. Well, these were perilous times, too.

Ward: Yes, yeah. You have to think--

Jim: Your thinking isn't like it is.

Ward: No. So we made it back to Kerama Retto. We buried twenty-one of us, I think, twenty-one of them on Amami Oshima.

Jim: [unintelligible]

Ward: Twenty-one.

Jim: What is your normal crew? You didn't tell me this.

Ward: Well, we had a crew of about three hundred eighty, four hundred, including the boat crew which I was on. We lost a hundred of them wounded, one hundred plus; I don't know, a hundred and twenty wounded. I think we lost about twenty-two or twenty-three dead. Ah, we lost seven or eight Army men and we wounded, um, some of them

Jim: That's right; you hadn't put your boys ashore.

Ward: No, we brought some of their howitzers up out of the hold. Welded some clamps and tied 'em to the deck for extra fire power. Because they were good aircraft but they didn't have any stops, so we had limited--we had somebody stand there, don't go any further.

Jim: To keep them from shooting the skipper, right?

Ward: That's right. Don't shoot yourself in the foot. So we lost some Army personnel. But we were severely hampered, and so the next day when they hit Okinawa we could not participate. We had lost a quarter of our boats, a quarter of our crew. We were in no position to go in under stress again. And we had the dead and the wounded and screamin'; it was a mess. So I-

Jim: Tell me about that now. How did your one pharmacists mate, is that all--?

Ward: No we had crew in the medical end of it, in the pharmacist end of it. We had--I think we probably had two doctors on board.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: Pharmacists mates were well trained.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: We had the main sick bay in the main part of the superstructure. We had an emergency sick bay back in number five hatch.

Jim: And they were intact?

Ward: They were intact. They were down in the upper tween decks and they were safe.

Jim: You had a place for these wounded that were savable, anyway.

Ward: Yes. Yes. Ah, geez. It was a mess. It was terrible.

Jim: You must have been busy.

Ward: They worked around the clock.

Jim: Because I know what that's like, that experience, though.

Ward: Yeah. Around the clock. [pause] I left. We secured GQ, we got out of the danger area. I reported to the bridge for instructions. We made it back to Kerama Retto and our anchorage, which was pretty secure by that time. Ah, we sort of licked our wounds, so to speak. Buried our dead in Amami Oshima, a little cemetery. There's a picture in the book on that, I believe.

Jim: Where'd you take the wounded to? A base hospital?

Ward: The wounded--of course, we had some seriously wounded. We just didn't have facilities to accommodate 'em. But we were at sea the next day, we pulled out of there again, and we rendezvoused with--it wasn't an auxiliary hospital ship, it was larger, like a destroyer cruiser.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: We off--breeches buoyed across, not very far, we were pretty close together.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: Some of the seriously wounded. And then we offloaded onto some passenger ships, the rest of our wounded.

Jim: They had been commandeered for that?

- Ward: Yeah. Then we feigned a landing on the southeastern shore of Okinawa. But on the 16th of April of '45 we regained our command, though we were a bit handicapped. We didn't have as many boats and troops with us, but we hit the beaches in Ie Jima. Ie Jima that's I-E--
- Jim: I know it is.
- Ward: Off the coast of Okinawa, and that was just awful, just awful. We really got it. We were lickin' our wounds for a long time after that one.
- Jim: Because?
- Ward: Because of the overwhelming determination of the Japanese not to give up that island and the airport that's on it. The *Indianapolis* stood offshore and fired and there was also a battleship out there, I don't remember which one, but the *Indianapolis* was our overseer and she did a good job before they lost her. We hit the beaches first wave again on Ie Jima. Now Ie Jima is a rather short beach; you have to go through a coral reef that the Navy had broken open for us; we brought 'em inside. Once you're inside you're under attack by mortars.
- Jim: Right.
- Ward: I don't know *how* they ever survived the offshore pounding they took. [pause in interview] On that beach--there wasn't anything on that beach that wasn't turned upside down. So shells are coming in above my head--I couldn't see them but I could hear them whistle right above my head, and they'd hit the beach maybe eight or ten feet above.
- Jim: Oh, from some other ship?
- Ward: From the *Indianapolis* and the battleship. [makes gun sounds] You could hear 'em.
- Jim: You begin to wonder what side you're on?
- Ward: Yeah. You stick your hand up and you're liable to get it blown off. And they hit the beach about ten feet above you. So I got on the engine hatch aft and we gave the signal according to instructions. We're bringing the breech party in, and bringing the first wave in. You hit the beach. It's a short beach; you have to be careful, because if there's any kind of wind blowing you can still get a little chop inside the reef. We made it through the reef, made it to the beach, dropped the ramps, everybody got their troops off, but there were a couple of boats hit by mortars when we were stationary on the beach. They zero in on you, and once they've got you,

you better get out of there or they're going to nail ya. There was an LCM, I never knew how it got through the reef, but it made it through the reef, but it was beached there, but it was getting just hammered to pieces and finally they had to just abandon it. We got out of there. The beach party got in and dug in on the beach and we had communications with my buddy, he signaled there. Ned McDonald was back on duty, Lieutenant McDonald. That afternoon we finished taking all their troops off and some supplies with our waves of boats, and it was getting towards dusk, and you could see the ship turning and then counting the prop speed, because the prop was out of water, or it was half submerged. You could count and you can determine that it's up quarter speed, getting more--it's leaving us.

Jim: Oh, my.

Ward: So I flashed a signal to my buddies on the bridge. "Hey, where the hell are you going?" [laughs]

Jim: Right. Wait a minute.

Ward: "Request permission to come aboard." The coxswain fire went out through the reef and we were out in heavy seas and we were going as fast as we could and "bam/splash" and they say, "Request denied." So we slowed down in the trough in the sea and it was about you know, four or five foot waves. We turned around and got back inside the reef, and then, "Now what the hell are we going to do? We don't have any food."

Jim: No home.

Ward: No, no home. We have the floorboards of the boat, and we're sure not gonna go into the beach. So there were a couple of other boats left, ships left, and had left their boats, so we had about eight or ten of us there.

Jim: They left because of the--?

Ward: Kamikaze attacks were expected and they had to get out of there. And they could sacrifice us for the safety of the ship and the crew.

Jim: A couple of you guys wouldn't amount to much.

Ward: No. So I thought, "Well, this is going to be fun, we don't have any food." So--

Jim: Did you have enough gas?

Ward: Well, yes, we did all right. We were doing okay that way. So they, well, they didn't show up for three days.

Jim: Jesus.

Ward: You know you can't eat the stupid fish in the water.

Jim: [Laughing]

Ward: So we found an AKA [unintelligible]. Now this is ingenuity. And they had portable pontoons lashed together and they had a couple of LCMs pulling 'em, taking these rations to the beach. So we thought, "Well, there's four of us. Let's just circle that boat and get the waves going, and, geez, you know, things are wobbling around they might lose some of their cargo." And sure enough, we had one fifth boat back there as the one to dive in to get it, and we split our spoils. By God, some of these cases fell off and they were C-rations. We never had C-rations before, we always had the K-ration, which you're hardly able to survive on that. Anyway, they fell off and we dodged in and came back out and everybody was cheering for us. We tied up in a nest.

Jim: [Laughing]

Ward: We open up the C-rations. I'd take a sheath knife and punctured it and set it on the manifold of the engine to get it warm, and we ate dinner. That night the Japs picked us up with some flares and started dropping mortars and we had to get out of there.

Jim: From the beach?

Ward: From the beach. And they could reach us almost to the reef.

Jim: How far off the beach?

Ward: Well, it was probably--I don't know.

Jim: A hundred yards?

Ward: Oh, yes, so we really thought we were safe.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: Well, we weren't. So we had to move down and go out into the ocean.

Jim: Wonderful.

Ward: Yeah. So we thought, "Well, just lower the anchor." Well, it doesn't do any good, so we got a couple of boats together and we tied the anchor

ropes together and lowered the anchor down; we still couldn't get the bottom. [laughs] We didn't want to drift in the open sea.

Jim: No, no, no, no

Ward: So we decided we'd go back inside the reef and just keep traveling around so they can't pick us off.

Jim: You separated again?

Ward: Yeah. Some of 'em thought to go into the beach and I don't know what happened to them, but I wouldn't--we didn't think that was a good idea. So--

Jim: The beach just wasn't secure.

Ward: No. It was secure, except for snipers, and the enemy could sneak down-

Jim: Up in the hills?

Ward: --and pick you off, or they know you're there and the mortar line up on you and "boom," they got ya. Now, your boat is vital; it's the only way you can go from point A to point B and back to point A, so we lived three days in that boat. So the--a little more than that, because the third day I saw some of the ships coming back. And I looked at one of 'em and from my fifteen and sixteen year old service in Seattle on the towboats, I recognized it as one of the United Fruit Company ships; very streamlined, beautiful ships, beautiful looking ships. I looked at them and I thought, that's either the junior or--I don't remember the names of the other ones. They were all white, Pacific Fruit Company, United Fruit Company. They were banana boats from Central America and they made the west coast and they carried like twelve passengers and they're very, very nice. I saw that and she wasn't a hospital ship, I didn't think, but sure enough, I get communication from her. She's an attack hospital ship.

Jim: This is by signals you were making?

Ward: We were instructed to take the wounded off the beach back to that ship. So we go into the beach and we go under sniper fire. Ernie Pyle was killed right there where we were.

Jim: Ie Jima, yeah.

Ward: Just--Tony was only--he was less than hundred yards from us when he got picked off. We left--we could carry about six or eight, ten fellas on stretchers, maybe a couple sitting up. We get back out, we had to get out

of there in a hurry. The mortars are picking us up again. And then we get out in the deep ocean, “bang, slosh,” it wasn’t too comfortable a ride, but we had to get them out to the hospital ship, so we made some trips out to the--and sure enough, it was one of the old fruit banana boats; it was an auxiliary hospital ship. So that night we were awfully tired. We hadn’t slept. We were a little low on fuel. No water, no food.

Jim: What’d you do about water?

Ward: We asked if we could come aboard.

Jim: I mean, three days, though--

Ward: Yeah.

Jim: On your craft no water.

Ward: No. We would bum some wherever we could.

Jim: That C-ration was all the moisture you got?

Ward: Yeah. But there was just the coxswain and me. There were just two of us on the boat. So let’s go aboard. God, we can’t go on any more out there, so we asked permission to come aboard. “Sure.” So they hoisted us up, but they had no accommodations for a boat, so they lashed us to the deck alongside. That was fine, we could step up on firm--it was nice to stand on something.

Jim: I’ll be that felt good.

Ward: Oh yeah, because you’re living on your hands and knees for two or three days. So they got us some food. I remember they brought us a loaf of bread; that was the first thing. [laughs] We had to have some water or something, milk or something to wash it down, and we got that going, and we felt pretty good. So that night we were cruising. We went offshore again and the boat was lashed alongside the deck and I was back under the overhead of the boat deck above me in the companionway, and it was a lovely night. It was quiet. And then there was a lot of firing and shooting and--but I felt secure, and then there was an explosion in front of me about from here to the end of the room. Bright flash.

Jim: On the hospital ship?

Ward: Yeah, on the hospital ship. And I rubbed my ear because something had whipped like that, like a little breeze, and I heard “ooo” and moan “ahhh.” And I turned around and there was a sailor right behind me with his head

over my left shoulder and it missed my ear and took it right through here and killed him instantly. He was--he hadn't even fallen over yet when I turned. He was clenched. Just a breeze.

Jim: That was something out there.

Ward: You bet. Well, I decided I'd better express my appreciation, so as I mention in the book, I spent the night on the floorboards of the boat in a blanket.

Jim: How damaged was the hospital ship?

Ward: Not too bad. It was just--we don't know what it was. A shell from, maybe from one of our own shells, we don't know.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: We don't know. You never know. You don't really have an opportunity to take a moment to think about 'em until it's over. The next day we were lowered over the boat with some supplies to survive for another day or two and then we left and we brought some more out, and then the whole armada was coming in. Five or six boats, ships coming in, and sure enough, the *Goodhue* was there. We went ashore. The *Goodhues'* flag was given to the Army and they took it to the top of the mountain. It's sort of like Iwo Jima, Mount Suribachi, they had a little mountain like that, cone, only a much smaller scale, and so the *Goodhue's* flag was hoisted on top by the Army. The Army secured the island and we pulled out of there and they got us back to the boat. We were the last boat to be loaded onboard because the others have to go in their order, and then our boat's first, so we're always first in the water to control as the boats are unloaded, and then they load first, we're the last ones in. They were on the port side. The ship was swung around to give us some lee. We swung around, you have your hooks to hook on and hoist us up. Well, the hook hung up on the corner of the, I think the engine hatch or something, so we came up a little G-gone[?], that's all right, so we get up and then the ship rolls.

Jim: Jesus.

Ward: In the sea. Sort of dead in the water, we're just rolling. So we got up there and I got up and stepped on the gunnels and I was ready to step off onto the deck of the ship when she rolled out and the cable--and she dropped out from underneath me. I dropped about four or five feet, swung out, I grabbed the net, hung onto the net and the boat was out there and I knew what was gonna happen.

Jim: It was going to swing back and crush you?

- Ward: It was going to swing back and crush me.
- Jim: Right.
- Ward: Somebody yelled, "Look out!" and screamed at me, and I don't know how I did it, I could never do it now, but I had my hands on the net and was about a foot or so underneath the deck and I swung my feet up over my head, just one swoop and "bam" the boat hit the deck right under my butt.
- Jim: Geez.
- Ward: Stayed there a little bit because the ship would lurch again, I just stood up and I stepped onto the ship. [sighs]
- Jim: Incredible.
- Ward: My number still wasn't called. So, we got the hell out of there. We were badly--we were damaged enough that they sent us out and replaced us with somethin' else and we headed for San Francisco for repairs.
- Jim: Alone?
- Ward: We came back to Ulithi, sort of a little staging area. We were there maybe just a half a day to do a little swimming and get our bearings.
- Jim: You never replaced any of the men you lost at that time?
- Ward: Not at that time. A couple came over from other ships, I learned later, but I didn't know about 'em and they—then we left Ulithi and we headed back. We went into San Francisco. Just before San Francisco a change of orders--we went to Long Beach, California and went on dry dock there at Todd Shipyards at Long Beach. And I had ninety-two days leave.
- Jim: Can't beat that.
- Ward: And I lived in Seattle. Airports--nothing; train--nothing. Can't get anything home at all. Oh cripe, I can hitchhike to Seattle in less that so I –
- Jim: Thumbed your way up?
- Ward: Took the A train into town and hitchhiked, and in three rides I was in Portland, Oregon. Picked up a truck, took me to Seattle. And I walked in and surprised my folks at six in the morning. But I had to watch the time. So then comes another thing. All of a sudden I can't get back in time to Long Beach. Well, planes--there's a huge flood, a lot of rains and flooding

in Oregon. Railroads are stopped, the highways are stopped, no bus traffic, airlines were booked solid. What the hell is McDonald going to do? I go out to Sand Point Naval Training Station in Seattle and they have Gnats and Naval air training. They have a C-46 going to Alameda. Hey! Got a 25 cent lunch from the Red Cross, I climbed on board, and away we go. And there's no seats, there are just benches

Jim: Right.

Ward: So I'm sittin' on the bench, and you lash your seat and there's bouncing--

Jim: [unintelligible]

Ward: Yeah. Well, that's my first airplane ride. Thrilling.

Jim: Ah.

Ward: I could look out; I could see my neighborhood, couldn't quite see the house. So we fly down and we hit fog. Northern California, we're fogged in. Supposed to land at Alameda; can't get into Alameda. Can't get into San Francisco. They go back up to Sacramento; can't get in.

Jim: Jesus.

Ward: And ya know, you can't even see the wingtip. Terrible. So someone comes back, "We're going to go down, everybody, and it's going to be a little rough, so you better fasten everything, put your sea bags down in between your legs and hang on." He closes the door, [laughs] the cabin door in front of us and--Okay, whatever that means. We're going down.

Jim: How many were there--?

Ward: How in hell can we go down, you can't see anything. Can't even see if you're--

Jim: How many people?

Ward: Oh, probably fifteen, twenty of us.

Jim: Passengers?

Ward: Yeah, there was an ensign sitting next to me, ensign that was going to go to San Francisco, and he knew I was going to Long Beach. And down we go, and we crashed, and I mean we went sideways, backwards, forwards--horrible noise.

- Jim: You landed on the landing strip but--?
- Ward: It wasn't a landing strip.
- Jim: Oh.
- Ward: When we finally screeched to a stop and "shoong" the plane was, had to have been a total wreck, but there was no fire. And the ensign said, "Get the hell out of here."
- Jim: Right.
- Ward: So we unfastened everything, and bodies and people that weren't hooked down and gear was every which direction; they were hurt. We ran to the-- they had a door a couple of seats, sliding down the bench, we opened the door and we jumped out in grass, crop up to about my armpits. And the lieutenant jumped right behind. "Let's get out of here. It's gonna fire." So we grabbed our gear, I grab my gear and he had a satchel or something. We went running full bore, and I hadn't run more than thirty, forty feet and I hit a barbed wire fence.
- Jim: Oh no.
- Ward: I couldn't have done it better if I'd planned. I hit that sucker full bore and it knocked me back on my butt. And I shook my head; I was flat on my back, I didn't even know what it was. Dark as midnight or something. Lieutenant got hit same way. So we went back up and we realized what it was and we crawled under it, went down into a ditch and crawled up the grass onto a concrete highway. I stepped on it; it's concrete. "Where are we?" "I don't know?" "Where's the plane?" "Ah, it's over there; I'm not going back to there." [laughs] And it wasn't three or four minutes and along comes a fella in an old pickup truck, going down this highway; it happens to be U.S. 99, the main thoroughfare.
- Ward: "Hey, what the hell you guys doing out here?"
- Jim: Laughs.
- Ward: Geez. "We just crashed in an airplane; we have to get somewhere to notify officials." "Well climb in." And we were close to Modesto or—if I remember right. So the lieutenant said "As soon as I get to the base I will notify your ship that you're on your way. You can't help it if you crashed in an airplane." So I said goodbye to the ensign and I hitchhiked. And it wasn't just a few more rides we were down in Bakersfield, pretty soon we were in Los Angeles, and I think I took a taxi all the way to the base, and I was twenty-four hours late. But the lieutenant--the ensign had contacted

them and I called him and they sent a boat in to pick me up and I was Okay. Back to the Pacific we go with five hundred engineers.

Jim: Same ship?

Ward: Yup, we're all repaired. All spit and polished; it was nice. Back to the Pacific. I was Second Class Petty Officer then and they made me Master at Arms for the ship. The police department. Five hundred engineers. Now these black gentlemen had never been to sea.

Jim: Again.

Ward: So, again, about twelve hours out or so they get seasick.

Jim: [Laughing]

Ward: We had a mess. But anyway, we went back through to the Philippines and then from there we headed for Yokahama. The atomic bomb had been dropped.

Jim: What'd you do in the Philippines?

Ward: We discharged the engineers. We picked up the Americal Division, some portions of it, went up to Lingayen Gulf to practice invasion with probably sixty or seventy ships.

Jim: The war wasn't over yet?

Ward: Oh no, not yet. We were preparing for invasion of Japan.

Jim: Yeah.

Ward: We didn't know at the time, but our island was Honshu. We were to hit the main island, Honshu. We were in training in Lingayen Gulf when the atomic bombs were dropped; the two of them were dropped. Um--they surrendered. We immediately set sail with some troops, and I don't remember how many we had on board, but we made it into Yokahama, I think six days after the formal surrender on the deck of the *Missouri*. And we loaded on about a hundred and fifty or so prisoners of war: New Zealanders, Aussies, British, Dutch, a few French and two Americans, if I remember right. [pause in tape] We took them back to Manila, discharged them to faster passenger ships for various nations, and we said good-bye to them. They were a sort of a mess; some had the same clothes they had on when they were captured in the Malaysia--Malaysia and Singapore were secured earlier, five years earlier. Then we headed home. We made it as far as about three days out of San Francisco and they rerouted us to San

Diego. We pulled into San Diego and I thought, “Man we can decommission. I’ll just hitchhike to Seattle.” We were there a couple of days. Much to the chagrin of the Californians onboard, we were pulled out of San Diego and we were decommissioned in Norfolk, Virginia. [laughs] So a couple of fellows were allowed to bring their boats on board. We brought ‘em out with the LCMs and we hoisted them onboard. We went down through the canal, back through the Caribbean, and up to Hampton Roads Virginia, Newport News and Norfolk.

Jim: Real efficiency. Mm-hmm

Ward: Got to Norfolk and one of the highlights of the war. We always remember this; it’s in my book. During the war there was an article in the Reader’s Digest about Acres of Women, thousands of them, like ten thousands of them, and they had named it--Alabama and all the different states all the way up through Maryland or something, housing these secretaries during the war. And an article in there would be a sailor’s heaven if he’d ever get there. Well, we remembered that article. “Let’s go to Acres of Women on our way home.” So we hitchhiked up to Washington D.C. and we had our dress blues and so we get--

Jim: You’re ready?

Ward: We’re ready--

[End of Tape 1, Side 2]

--into a taxicab and we drive out to Acres of Women; Arlington Farms they called it. Ah. Sailor’s Heaven. Thousands of ‘em—hundreds of ‘em, wavin’ out the window and whistling and running down to greet you and hug you and-- [laughing]

Jim: Incredible.

Ward: Incredible. Just couldn’t believe it. We had a marvelous time, wonderful. They had a little dance floor in each one of these buildings, and they have a canteen. We danced and sang and music on the radio. We stayed there all day. That night they had dinner for us. We danced until the wee hours of the night, then there wasn’t any place to stay, so we pulled back into Washington D. C. itself, across the river.

Jim: They didn’t have those arrangements there?

Ward: No, no arrangements. That’s one thing they didn’t say.

Jim: I was waiting for this, yes.

- Ward: Yeah, no such arrangement. It seems to me it was sort of across the street from the Arlington Cemetery.
- Jim: So other than that it was perfect?
- Ward: Oh, yeah. It couldn't be any better. So we made it into Washington D.C., no place to stay, so we stopped at a tavern to have a beer and asked if we could sleep under the pool table. [laughs] Freeloaders. [both laugh] Took off our pea coats, rolled 'em up into our sea bag, crawled under the pool table and stayed all night. The carpeting's always nice and plush under the pool table once you get underneath it.
- Jim: Yeah. They haven't trampled it down.
- Ward: Yeah. So we stayed there that night. George Prinz[?] flipped a coin to see if heads, we go to the Bronx and he'd show us New York, or tails, we'd say good-bye to George and Jerry Baxter and I would hitchhike out west. It was tails, so we hitchhiked as far as Ogden, Utah. I said good-bye to Jerry and I've never seen him since, and I hitchhiked home from Ogden.
- Jim: Incredible. So you were out.
- Ward: I was out. I had saved \$600 when I was onboard and I had thirty days leave and fifteen traveling time, so I hitchhiked across the country, and I don't think I spent \$50 in the whole time it took me to go across the country; everything was free. Motel was free. Meals free. [pause] People were grateful.
- Jim: You must of gotten awards for this.
- Ward: The ship was awarded meritoriously. Captain got the Bronze Star.
- Jim: You should have at least got one of those.
- Ward: A hundred and some of 'em got the Purple Star.
- Jim: Purple Cross.
- Ward: Purple Heart.
- Jim: Well, you deserve one of those. Didn't you get one?
- Ward: No, I didn't get any of those.
- Jim: Well, I was thinking you'd be up for a Navy Cross for all this.

Ward: [Laughs] No, I didn't do anything, except I was lucky.

Jim: You saved that Marine officer's life.

Ward: I don't know.

Jim: Yeah. Huh.

Ward: Maybe, I don't know. I don't even know where he came from or how he showed up. He was not supposed to be stationed back aft, but he might have been blown down there or something, I don't know. Ah, I was just lucky. Plain and simply and simple luck. Everywhere, everywhere I turned.

Jim: You're right.

Ward: Even the crash of the liberty boat coming back in Hampton Roads. We lost three men. Lieutenant Harris—or Lieutenant Spencer was one of them.

Jim: Oh, you mentioned [unintelligible].

Ward: Yeah. After the war was over. She tore the bottom out of the boat when we hit the dredge head and lost three men.

Jim: That's too bad.

Ward: So I made her home and out of all of it, I'm thankful for the GI Bill.

Jim: I was going to say, what did you do with your GI Bill?

Ward: Well, I wanted to go to school. I was the only McDonald that decided to go to college; they're all sea-faring people and they went to sea. And I had some money saved and I had the GI Bill, so I thought I better go to a small school--I had been out of school for a few years, go to a small school where I can really do some concentration, and then transfer to the University of Washington. So I went down to St. Martin's College, a Catholic college, and signed up for undergrad work, just the basics. I wanted to be an engineer, I think. So I took all my freshman and sophomore classes and I did quite well. Then I transferred to the University of Washington my junior year. My GI Bill was going to run out in another year and I thought I'd better start taking what I want to take rather than what is required for a degree. So I transferred my emphasis from math and sciences to a year of accounting, business law, this type of thing. I was done with my GI and I got married. I had two little boys. I was working the summer months on the towboats. I came back--when I

came home in '46 went down to see Captain Davis' [unintelligible] barge. He says, "God, Mac, how are ya? You've got a job. Come on down tomorrow morning 4:00 o'clock."

Jim: You did.

Ward: And any time you're in port, winter or summer, come on down; we'll get a job for ya. You'll be here until then, until September. You go down and see Swen Swenson over there on the _____ [?].

Jim: [Laughing]

Ward: I went down to see Swen Swenson, and he and I got along great, so I always had a job. But I remember my GI bill ran out; I didn't finish my senior year, and that's I've kicked myself, I mentioned the Bernice a while back. If I had to do things over again, it's in here--

Jim: Right.

Ward: I'd finish my senior year. I didn't. And I regret that.

Jim: So.

Ward: The GI Bill helped me. So I was broke. Two little kids. Married. So I went back to sea on the boats. Made some good money.

Jim: What kind?

Ward: Towboats. Workin' the towboats. I had a little seniority by then. I was a good seaman.

Jim: What'd you do on the towboats?

Ward: Well, I was a mate on the towboats taking ships in and out of the harbor.

Jim: They never left the harbor?

Ward: No, I didn't want to leave the harbor; I wanted to get home every night.

Jim: Oh. I understand.

Ward: So it's a ten, twelve, fourteen hour day, but that's all right, and a six day week. And I made some good money and I'd saved it, and right up to the day I'd go back to school. I'd go buy some clothes and some things--

Jim: Sure.

- Ward: And they'd have a job for me next spring. So that's how we did it. And then I got out of school my junior year and I stayed on and worked the entire year around my senior year. My car was shot, we didn't have any creature comforts anywhere; we were just getting along. so I thought I'd better stay out of school a year and earn some money and replace the car and--but I didn't go back to school. So I went into marine engineering with my father's company
- Jim: Oh.
- Ward: And I worked there six years, consulting engineering and ship repair, damage repair, maintenance type of thing.
- Jim: Good.
- Ward: Loading cargos. I was there six years, but I couldn't work with my father; he and I were two different breeds of cat. We loved each other dearly, but we just didn't think the same. And so I left there and I didn't know what I was going to do. I went ashore and I got into sales. I was a salesman for an office equipment company and about ten years—no, six years later I was vice president of the company. I had four or five salesmen under me, but I could see the handwriting on the wall. It was coming up with computers, not so much computers, but technology and electronic calculators. And by then I'd remarried. My boys, my earliest marriage boys, they wanted to go to Germany with their mother. So I gave them permission to go to Germany, and they were ten, twelve, and fourteen. I thought they would get an education that I could never give them here.
- Jim: Sure.
- Ward: And they were gonna be gone a year and a half, so I granted permission for them to go. The kids were excited. Well, they were gone four years instead of a year and a half. The oldest boy graduated from high school in Nuremberg, middle schools for the other boys. Anyway, I remarried and um, my father-in-law offered me a job to go into banking. A pretty good job. Little town of 5,000 people in Richland Center, Wisconsin, and I thought, "Well, now let's see here, I'm in sales here—"
- Jim: That's a way from Seattle.
- Ward: Yes, and the salt water. The kids at Bellevue High School were driving nicer cars than the teachers and they were just the students. Built a new high school every other year in Redmond, Washington, Bellevue; it was just becoming a very, very fast lane. Everyone had ulcers. So came back to Richland Center to look over the situation and I thought, "Ah, you don't

even lock your houses.” There was not a case of ulcers in the entire Richland County.

Jim: [Laughs]

Ward: So I thought, “Well, I guess I’d rather be a big frog in a little pond than a little one in a big pond,” so I changed careers at the age of forty-three.

Jim: Fantastic.

Ward: And then my wife divorced me. I don’t know how many--twelve years later, ran off with another man, and that was good riddance, but the boss--it was the bosses’ daughter. I thought my job would end. He said, “No, you stay.” He let the daughter go. “You stay.” Then Bernice and I met a few years later and we have been married twenty-four years.

Jim: Fantastic. What a story.

Ward: So I am in Richland Center; still got the wife.

Jim: That was the right move.

Ward: Yes, it was, and no regrets; none whatsoever. We might be going back next month to visit the family.

Jim: Did you keep in touch with your boys?

Ward: Oh yes. I talked to my oldest boy last night.

Jim: Where do they live?

Ward: The oldest boy, Bruce, is a geologist. Put himself through college working at sea and going to work on the Yukon River on boats. He has his own consulting firm.

Jim: Where?

Ward: In Seattle or Tacoma, and he’s heading for the--this morning he’s on his way to Dutch Harbor for the U.S. Corp of Engineers; they’ve retained his services for something up in Dutch Harbor. So he’s gone for a month. Next boy is a sea captain for the--

Jim: Oh my goodness.

Ward: --West Coast Towing and has been--he was the captain of a towboat on the Yukon River for eighteen years. The next boy, Ward, is a deep sea

captain for West Coast Towing on the big flagship of the fleet. He had twenty years' experience in Yukon, so he's out at sea. Right now he's on a big oil barge going out to the Gulf of Alaska for the Bearing Sea, I suppose; get the last fuel supplies in before the ice sets bad. Number four son is Alan. He's a driver for UPS workin' out of Woodinville, Washington. Number five son is Gerrit. He's thirty-one and he's assistant vice president of the Richland County Bank.

Jim: Oh.

Ward: He's learnin' the ropes.

Jim: The last two boys are from your second marriage?

Ward: Yes, and I stay at the bank. I'm still on the Board of Directors of the Richland County bank, but I've retired as an officer, as the Vice President of the bank.

Jim: What a career.

Ward: Yeah. A few changes.

Jim: A lot of changes.

Ward: You have to follow your gut feeling on things.

Jim: Did you join any veterans' organizations?

Ward: VFW.

Jim: I saw that.

Ward: I'm a VFW member since back when.

Jim: Is it an active group up there?

Ward: Pretty active. I haven't been that active in it. I've, um, I became aware I guess, of some civic consciousness several years ago when I created a number of programs in Richland County that are still going: drug and alcohol councils got underway; I was a town Chairman; I'm on the Board of the University of Wisconsin campus out there on their activities.

Jim: Mm-Hmm.

- Ward: I still have a few things going on in town. But I remember my career as a Navy man with a lot of fond memories. There was a lot of hell, and from those you learn.
- Jim: Of course.
- Ward: And I don't hesitate a bit in recommending going back in the service, having anybody go into service for a stint. You owe it to 'em. You owe it to your country.
- Jim: I think so. I'm in full agreement.
- Ward: So, here we are.
- Jim: Here we are.
- Ward: I'm so grateful that you were the Madisonian that we should look up, Jim.
- Jim: Well, that's nice.
- Ward: Because when I saw your picture, and I didn't remember your picture so much as the name, and I thought, "By jingles, I owe my life to that gentleman."
- Jim: Yeah, well, that's good. Small world.
- Ward: It is, isn't it? It really is not very large.
- Jim: Good. All right. You did great.
- Ward: [blank tape] –in Redwing and everybody in Goodhue county never knew there was a Navy ship named after them. I don't know how they got their names, if they just threw darts at the wall in whatever county and they gave the name, I don't know, but the people in Redwing, Minnesota never heard of the *USS Goodhue*. So two years ago we staged a reunion and had about forty-two shipmates and some of their wives. Since then three of them have died. Goodhue was a county; the village of Goodhue rolled out the red carpet. The city of Redwing really rolled it out and Goodhue gave a permanent exhibit in their Historical Society.
- Jim: Great. So you're really active and keep in contact with these guys.
- Ward: Yeah. I've been to the reunions. There's another one right now going on in Cape Cod, but we're going to go west and see the kids--
- Jim: I see.

- Ward: --while we can still travel. And so our wishes will be with them.
- Jim: Sure. Do they meet every year?
- Ward: Every two.
- Jim: Every two. That's pretty good.
- Ward: Yeah. We're still doing fine. Our officers are gone.
- Jim: They're a relatively small crew.
- Ward: Yes, and our officers are gone, because most of the officers when I was seventeen, eighteen, the officers were twenty-five, twenty-six, so they were seven or eight years older than I am.
- Jim: They're old men.
- Ward: And I'm seventy-four, so, you know they're up in their eighty-tuos.
- Jim: Lost my train of thought. Now I can't think of it. Okay, thanks.
- Ward: Thank you. I appreciate the chance to see you again.
- Jim: Well, it's awful nice to see you, too.
- Ward: Yeah, we're doing just fine.
- Jim: Yeah, I'd say.
- Ward: I'd certainly--

[End of Interview]