**NAVY MILITARY LIFE**

[After being in Florida] I went to Anacostia Naval Air Base in Washington D.C. That’s where they sent me and I stayed there until the war broke out. The war broke out on Dec. 7 [1941] when they bombed Pearl Harbor. I was assigned a destroyer [U.S.S. Herndon #DD638] on the 20th of December in ‘41. [U.S.S. Herndon was launched on February 2, 1942] I went to sea. I did convoy duty in the North Atlantic from February of ‘42 until May of ‘45, I guess it was.

Like I said I was on the North Atlantic convoy duty until the Spring of ‘43 when I went in on the invasion of Africa, Casa Blanca, we were just gun or fire support. The next thing was when we invaded

Sicily. Then from there we went to invade the Northern part of Italy. Then from there we went to Normandy on D-Day. I was on the ship 3 years and 5 months. We docked several times over the years, whenever we came back to the states, we’d get a leave. When I got on that thing they had commissioned it a new ship; U.S.S. Herndon, her number was [DD]638. and that was in December the 20, 1942. I stayed on the ship until May of ‘45.

Seaman Paul Kenneth Fox - U.S. Navy

Dress Blues Whites



I was a gunners mate. The fellow who takes care of the guns. I worked on the 5 inch when I was a seaman. I was the powder man in the magazine that loaded the guns. I sent the powder packets up to the turret from the arsenal down below deck. Then they put me on the 40 mm to keep them repaired. I became a loader on 40 mm up on the top deck. I can show you on the picture in the garage [Dad had painted a scene, in battle, of the ship on the front wall of the garage. He did a very good job-all by memory]. The 40 milimeter, well, it can be used for either ground fire or anti- aircraft.

We took out two gun emplacements (Normandy), we shot down 7 airplanes (coming out of Straights of Mescena), sunk two submarines (North Atlantic), these are what we know we did and one English barrage balloon (Gilbralta). You’ve seen pictures of them. A balloon with a steel cable coming down below them and it gets airplanes as they come below.

We got the submarines with depth charges. They are, you’ve seen 55 gallon drums, that’s what they look like, exactly. Except they have a stem coming out that sits down inside of there. It’s about that big around (6 inches) and it shoots out. It shoots up in the air and comes down in the water. That’s one kind, the other kind rolls off the racks at the back of the ship. The destroyer when it’s dropping depth charges you go fast, real fast, because you’ve got to get away from that thing before they blow up or you’ll blow yourself up. So you see a destroyer speedin’ up he’s getting ready to dump some big charges at top speed we were probably only going 30 mph. The Herndon could go about 38. It’s fast enough to get away. You set the charges for depth, they call them depth charges, they go down, if you put 200 on that thing it’ll go down 200 feet and it’ll go off. Put 300 on there it’d go down 300 feet and it would go off. By the sound equipment you would just try to figure just where the destroyer sub is, just how deep. Sonar sends out a signal just like a, a lot like a radar, expect it will hit and you’ll hear a ‘ping, ping’. Every time it hits something you hear a ping. And you follow that sound and that’s where you drop your depth charges. It’ll tell you how deep they are and which direction they’re goin’ basically. We knew we had a hit when we saw the debris and oil and a few bodies.

The funniest thing though was when I came up the gangway [in the Brooklyn New York Navy yard], I was drunk now and then. I was about three sheets to the wind. I got up to the top of the gangway and I turned to salute the flag, turned around to salute the Officer of the Day, and I lost my balance. I grabbed the first thing that was closest to me. It was his tie. I fell overboard and I still had ahold of that tie as we fell into all that greasy water. They fished us out. It didn’t sober me up, but it made him... I never heard such language in all my life. Never heard, nobody should of heard it. He called me everything but somethin’ human. I had a Captain’s Mast. Now this is like a lower court. The captain sits and listens about the conduct from the Bosun’s Mate, or whoever. In this case it was Lieutenant JG who was Officer of the Day. And you have the victim, which was me. I figured I was victim in this case. The Captain asked the Lieutenant, ‘Tell me about this charge here against ‘Guns.’” Which was just short for Gunners mate. That’s what they called me or else the men called me PK, which were my initials. So this Lieutenant told him and this Captain had a little pencil-like mustache. And he says to me, he says, he looked out there to me, and said, “What do you gotta say for yourself?” And I said, “Nothing. I don’t remember much about it,” I says, “that’s not very much of a loss to me.” The Captain says, “I understand,” he says, “been there myself.” He come from Charlottesville, Virginia and I came from Staunton which is 35 miles away. So he says, “Thirty days restriction to the ship starting immediately.” Well, he knew something that I didn’t know, my Lieutenant didn’t know either, We were goin’ to sea at 6 o’clock the next morning. So I was stuck to 30 days aboard ship out at sea.

NAVY-AFRICA

When I was in Africa I was on the 5 inch 38 as a loader down below. Powder man. I’d send the powder up to the gun turret [from below]. Before I went to Sicily I transferred to deck hand, to the gunnery crew, Gunners Mate.

That bottle that took that chunk out of my neck back here was a ‘free for all’ in Algiers. Somebody threw a broken bottle and caught me right in the back of the neck and took a hunk out back there. You should have seen what it did to my white uniform. Oh, red hot mama.

[On the way from Africa to Sicily] The ship behind us all of a sudden just disappeared. It totally disappeared. We figured that a 500 pound bomb probably went down the stack [from an airplane] and it blew that ship right out of the water. Talk about being blown out of the water. You couldn’t even find anything floatin’. Just a little debris and that was it. The destroyer is made up of two things basically, quarter inch aluminum steel, aluminum deck and steel plate on the outside. And fuel oil and ammunition. You’re just a floatin’ bomb. You’ve got five torpedoes and on the gun deck, you have all those racks of depth charges. And when the magazines blow up, everything blows up. There’s nothin’ in the world don’t go. And when they all blow like that there’s nothing you can do. You can’t get off the thing. It’ll blow you apart. Stuka dive bombers are the ones that blew up the ship we saw. It could have been German or it could have been Italian. The Italians were still flying at that time

NAVY-SICILY, ITALY

From Sicily I was loader on the 40 millimeter. That’s the ones that go bop-bop-bop-bop [one gun arm shooting one at a time, one right after the other], if you’ve watched the war movies. I did that in Sicily and in Normandy. In Sicily, I was up on the top but the only thing that I could see during the war, during combat, was the guy would hand me a clip of 4 shells, he’d hold them on the bottom and hand them up like that [laid out across] and I’d grab ‘em and stick ‘em down into the gun. Four shells at a time. You don’t have time to see anything except the gun and the ammunition. Just [moves hands from one side of his body to the other, watching his path] just about that speed all the time.

[That was where] we were on our battle stations for a hundred and five hours and 20 minutes. Which is a long time. We got to go to the tin buckets, they had tin buckets up there because we couldn’t go to the latrine. We had our food past up through our ammunition chutes. The cooks didn’t cook outside they just come from the back of the ship and hand them up. We didn’t fight for the whole hundred and five hours but we were on our gun stations. From the time general quarters sounded until the time that we left our guns was a hundred five hours and 20 minutes. That was consistent.

I never saw an allied airplane. It was always Germans and Italians. The first time I saw any planes. We fought them off. They’d drop bombs and the bomb would hit the water and it came pretty close, at the time, in fact it came closer to us there than it did in Normandy. When a bomb hits the water it throws a water spout about as high as, probably, 25, 30 feet in the air. And 10, 12, 15 feet in diameter, somethin’ like that, and it was white, pure white, the water was, the water spout with red flecks all through it. It was pretty. Real pretty thing. Until you realized that the red flecks were shrapnel. There was a lot of pieces of steel in that water spout. But we never got hit. We were very, very fortunate. They’d land all around us but we never got touched. It wasn’t because I was, it was savin’ me for anything. We were just lucky.

We went up, when we invaded Italy we went up to Masceno. The boot of Italy comes down like a ‘J’ and Sicily which is about like a triangle hooks right onto the toe of the boot. There is a little strip of water called the ‘Straights of Masceno.’ The night before we went in there they sent a squadron of eight torpedo boats in there to find out how the Germans were getting from Sicily over to Italy. They were evacuating Sicily. The Germans caught ‘em and sunk all 8 of the T-boats. So the next night they sent one ship in, the U.S.S. Herndon. We went in there quiet. We were maybe doin’ 3 knots, not over that, she was just barely easing along. The ship was completely blacked out. There wasn’t a light anywhere. The only light in there on that ship was down in the engine room and in the pilot house, the binnacle, which is the round thing that the compass sits in, it had a green glow, light down in there. Just glow enough that you could see the compass. That’s all the lights we had on board ship. We went in there real quiet like, didn’t see anything, but we could hear them on both beaches. But they weren’t going across at the time we were in there. So we didn’t learn anything except the fact that that’s what they were definitely doing. They were preparing to cross that night. So we turned around and eased back out of there.

Well, they caught on to us but we were out of range of their guns. So they called their aircraft, airplanes out. We shot down 7 aircraft that night and we called for air support to meet us to fight the airplanes off and we got back into Gilbralta before, oh, it took us about a day to get back to Gilbralta, but we got back to where our squadron was right off of Naples, Italy. So we made out alright. We weren’t as busy in Sicily.

NAVY-NORTH ITALY

After that we went into Gibraltar, we laid over Gibraltar for about a week, I guess. While I was there we would practice with our anti-aircraft guns. And we were good. We had a good crew. Both bigger guns, which are 5 inch and the smaller guns which are 40 millimeter. Our twenties were a little too small for hittin’ the [target] sleeves that followed. What they had was a sleeve towed behind [an airplane] on a thousand foot cable, or 500 foot cable, which ever it was, I forget now, it’s been 50 years ago. Better than 50 years ago. But they were towed by an airplane [the cable had a big sack on the end of it so that they would shoot at the sack-not at the airplane for practice]. We cut two of their cables between the airplane and the sleeve so they put a longer sleeve, longer thing on behind it. The sleeve was an air filled thing probably about two feet in diameter and 20 feet long pulled by a steel cable attached to the plane. It was quite a ways ahead of it. I said after we cut a couple of cables they’d put a longer cable on there. So we got an idea. I say we; I got an idea. I was still ornery. Do you know what a barrage balloon is? Have you ever seen a picture of barrage balloons flyin’ over England? They look like a big sausage. It’s a rubber-type dark gray or black thing. It looks like a small dirigible, really, except it had big wings on the back of it. They were hooked by steel cables to the ground. The purpose of them was, if a plane came in low he would hit those steel cables and shear his wings off. Well, we were having gunnery practice that one day and we shot the sleeve down. We got rid of that thing. I looked around looking for something else and saw that a barrage balloon wasn’t too far away and told my crew, I said, “Get him!” We shot that barrage balloon down.

You never heard such carryin’ on in your life. They got ahold of the Captain of our ship, up in the bridge, and they just reamed him out good. Of course at first, they couldn’t get me because I was down in the gun brigs. They found me. I went up there and he chewed me out royally. I mean he really read me the riot act. I would like to have heard those Englishmen. They were upset. They were goin’ to make us leave the harbor and everything else. But somebody smoothed it over. They didn’t do anything to me except bawl me out good. Well, there wasn’t much we could do. We didn’t have a brig aboard ship. They could put me in the brig when we got back to the states or something but by then everything was over.

NAVY-NORMANDY (D-Day, June 6, 1944), FRANCE

[On D-Day] we ran parallel to the beach at 3 knots. About 4 miles per hour. When we were 15 hundred yards off the beach then we would sit there as a decoy. The Germans had big guns and would shoot at us. Then battleships back on the horizon would spot them and would shoot them with the big guns. Yes, the whole time we were in front of the beach.

We were the first ship in enemy waters on D-Day. We were in there as a decoy. You’ve got the writing of, the account of that. I was a loader on a 40 millimeter, which is topside. We were at our battle stations. We got there about 5:00 in the morning.

We had 8 destroyers and two of us came back out of there [in Normandy]. “The Navy had it better than those poor troops that were going ashore.” Well, that depends. Now for instance, we were going out to make a turn, with eight destroyers... at Normandy we were on our battle stations from 3:30, 4 in the morning we went to battle stations. We were goin’ across the channel at that time. At 6 o’clock sharp [a.m.] we went in. We were the first ship to go in, into enemy waters and our job was to attract, draw the fire from the big guns that they had, they had big gun emplacements. They had 11" guns up there. We drew their fire so the battle ships behind ‘em who were layin’ back about, well 10 to 12 miles. They’d fire in there [gun emplacement shacks] and get ‘em. But we knocked two of them out. Our ship took out two of those big gun emplacements on the beach at Normandy. We didn’t have many [enemy] planes at Normandy. The enemy lost all of them.

We never got hit. Just lucky, I guess. Was it just absolutely frightening? I never got... it sounds stupid, well I guess it was stupid, but I never got scared. Did my job like everybody else was tryin’ to do. Kill all we could kill. The more you killed the less were shooting at you. There was no morality at all, no moral problems, never even thought about it. All you thought about was doing your job and hopin’ that everybody else was doin’ their job. I got off the ship for the last time in May or June of 1945. I was assigned to go to Anacostia Naval Air Base in Washington, D.C. for more gunnery school. I left the Navy January 10, 1946.