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Interview with William D. Wolfe

William D. Wolfe

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview VHP #022
WOLFE, William D.**

WOLFE, William D.

Enlisted: 1944 - 1967

Interviewed: October 20, 2003

Interviewer: Alan Garmendia

Index by: Michelle Dubert-Bellrichard

Length: 00:49:18

Abstract: In his October 20, 2003 interview with Alan Garmendia, William D. Wolfe recollects about his time in the Navy during WWII, the Korean War, and Vietnam. Wolfe shares the details of his work in the Navy on an experimental destroyer testing new sonar. The interview concludes with reminiscences of the South Pacific and pastimes of soldiers. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Navy, Pacific, Philippines, destroyer, PT Boats, Basic Training, food, mines

Interview Session (October 20, 2003): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 *Start of Interview/Interviewer's Introduction*

00:03:22 *Question:* What war, branch, rank, and where did you serve? *Answer:* Navy in January 1944. Destroyer Escort. Went to the South Pacific until the end of WWII. 3rd Class Petty Officer.

00:04:00 *Question:* Drafted or enlisted? *Answer:* It was either enlist or be drafted.

00:04:20 *Question:* Where were you living at the time? *Answer:* Gastonia, NC.

00:04:35 *Question:* Why did you pick the Navy? *Answer:* WW went with a friend to be inducted. WW wanted the Navy and his friend was disqualified.

00:05:10 *Question:* First days? *Answer:* Boot camp in Great Lakes, Illinois. Cold. Freezing standing in chow lines. Instructor was a chief petty officer – nice – not what WW imagined.

00:06:14 *Question:* Got through easily? *Answer:* No problem. Since the weather was so bad,

- WW did most of his training indoors.
- 00:06:25 *Question:* Korean War? *Answer:* In the Navy but didn't have to go to Korea or Vietnam. After WWII, WW on an experimental destroyer in Charleston, July 1949. Destroyer operated out of Key West, FL. Tested sonar equipment. Anti-submarine warfare.
- 00:07:44 *Question:* Combat? *Answer:* Participated in invasion of Borneo. Exploded 300 mines in a mine sweep – no casualties. WW had a small piece of shrapnel hit his back.
- 00:09:10 *Question:* Memorable experiences? *Answer:* Remembers the first mine detonated.
- 00:09:50 *Question:* Awards? *Answer:* Service ribbon.
- 00:10:15 *Question:* How did you stay in touch with family? *Answer:* V-mail. When soldiers came into port, mail was the first thing they looked for.
- 00:10:42 *Question:* Food? *Answer:* Technology didn't advance then. Butter wouldn't melt. Potatoes were terrible. Few fresh fruits and vegetables. Natives would have bananas – soldiers would buy.
- 00:11:45 *Question:* Pressure/stress? *Answer:* Minesweeping. First and second passes to find mines.
- 00:12:35 *Question:* Good luck routines? *Answer:* WW's sisters taught him to knit. WW couldn't make anything. WW tells story about knitting.
- 00:13:50 *Question:* Entertainment? *Answer:* Played cards and read. Didn't listen to the radio. Soldiers just worked.
- 00:14:40 *Question:* What did you do on leave? *Answer:* Didn't get much. Liberty parties – ship carried beer. Soldiers allowed two cans of beer. Soldiers had to go ashore to drink alcohol – couldn't drink on the ship. Navy regulations.
- 00:15:50 *Question:* Liberty Parties? *Answer:* Go on the beach and play softball. WW recalls seeing a dead Japanese sniper in a tree in Borneo.
- 00:16:55 *Question:* Travelling? *Answer:* Not really. Went to Philippine islands. China and Japan. "Didn't stay long in any one place."
- 00:17:53 *Question:* Unusual events? *Answer:* WW recalls a man falling overboard – survived. WW remembers seeing another ship being painted on a stage. Stage gave way and officer came to take picture of the soldiers.

- 00:19:25 *Question:* Photographs? *Answer:* No. There was an unofficial photographer on the ship. WW doesn't know what happened to the photos.
- 00:19:55 *Question:* Officers and fellow soldiers? *Answer:* WW in awe of anyone with "bars". WW got along well with people. The longer WW in military, the less "awe" he had.
- 00:20:39 *Question:* Day service ended? *Answer:* Discharged in San Diego, California. Family there. Drove to Charleston.
- 00:21:30 *Question:* Did you work or go to school? *Answer:* Worked for the railroad – didn't last long. WW describes his work in the railroading industry. Agent Operator in the railroading industry. Worked for the county – Director of Emergency Preparedness for 18 years.
- 00:24:05 *Question:* Friends in the service? *Answer:* WW lists the few friends he's stayed in touch with.
- 00:25:05 *Question:* Join a Veterans organization? *Answer:* Fleet Reserve.
- 00:25:20 *Question:* Did your military experience change any preconceived notions? *Answer:* WW liked the Navy, while he was in it. There have been so many changes that WW doesn't like.
- 00:26:03 *Question:* How did service affect life afterwards? *Answer:* Not sure it has affected it. WW doesn't regret having done it.
- 00:26:55 *Question:* How did you meet your wife? *Answer:* Came into Charleston on a submarine. Met her at an oyster roast. Married in 1954. Wife came along with WW when she could. Cape Hatteras.
- 00:29:25 *Question:* How the public viewed the war? *Answer:* The only contact WW had from news came by radio. WW speculates the Navy is easier these days. The biggest open areas were in the mess halls.
- 00:31:45 *Question:* Wouldn't do it again? *Answer:* No. WW says it would be easier because of the amenities. "The monotony was terrible." On Sundays, soldiers didn't have to do anything, if you weren't on watch. No air conditioning. WW talks about a space under the "spud locker" that he would crawl under and nap. WW could recognize everyone from the knee down. The bad part was not having anything to do. "I had it a lot easier than other people." WW describes going into Borneo. PT Boats. LSTs.
- 00:36:50 **[no question]** WW keeps talking about PT Boats.

- 00:37:45 *Question:* Any other stories? *Answer:* Going ashore into Manila. WW remembers all the ships' masses that were visible. WW says it had potential for being pretty – at the time it was bombed and burned. Hong Kong was dirty then, says WW. WW remembers fireworks going off in Hong Kong.
- 00:40:55 *Question:* Attend USO shows? *Answer:* No. WW talking about Bob Hope. Gypsy Rose Lee – came to Key West – striptease artist. “Lot of girls available back then.” WW talks about going to Milwaukee – remembers girls on the street trying to pick soldiers up.
- 00:44:30 *Question:* Do you think people don't remember Korea and Vietnam Wars like they should? *Answer:* Didn't get the play that WWII did. Nuclear war. Turmoil in Vietnam today.
- 00:49:18 *End of interview*