

Don Malak

Interviewer: Well for the sake of the interview could you state your full name sir?

Malak: Well I go by Don Malak my full name is Donald. Most of my friends just know me as Don.

Interviewer: Okay okay and obviously you were in the Navy what unit did you serve in during the WWII?

Malak: Well prior to going into PTs I served on a destroyer. I served on the 354 USS Monahan and I didn't spend too much time on there and they found use for my talents in other areas. And it was a motor torpedo boat squad because I was trained as a motor machinist mate at the University of Missouri.

Interviewer: Great well I would like to before we get into the actual WWII and some of your experiences I would like to know if you have any recollections of the great depression during the 30s?

Malak: Yeh I sure do.

Interviewer: How did that affect you and your family? First of all where were you born?

Malak: I was born up in its known as Garfield Heights, Ohio which is a suburb of Cleveland. And my dad was a steel worker, worked for the steel mills. Work had gotten very poor he was laid off and things were pretty slim around the house. I can remember my dad working for WPA which was the Works Progress Administration which was put into affect by President Roosevelt. Men worked on projects parks, roads places like that and they weren't paid in cash they were paid in script. And you would take that script you could take to the grocery store and it was redeemable there for groceries and it was a controlled way because you couldn't buy foolish things with it. It had to be groceries but that sustained us. But I can remember warring the same pair of shoes for I don't know how long and dad was able to get a kit which would rebuild the soles for me when I would ware them through he would put a new set of soles on for me. And I wore those shoes until I wore out the tops of them.

Interviewer: So when were you born sir?

Malak: 1924

Interviewer: Okay so you would have been in the 30s you would have been in your early teens toward the end of the 30s.

Malak: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay did you have any brothers or sisters?

Malak: No I was the only child.

Interviewer: Oh okay alright.

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Malak: Which I thought was unfortunate.

Interviewer: Did you when Roosevelt took office which would have been I guess in the ah

Malak: 32 maybe?

Interviewer: What were your what were your initial impressions you and your family of Roosevelt when he first took office?

Malak: Things had gone down hill so badly that when he came along he appeared to be to us the savior of our country because of the legislation that he enacted at the time. He enacted the WPA thing which put men back to work. He come up with the 3C programs which was the Conservation program for young fellow they can go to camp in the summertime and they got paid for that. The Army also come up with a plan and I don't know what it was called but they used to take a lot of young fellows up to Fort Benjamin Harris and they would go through some kind of a work program there. At the same time they were also getting the advantage of some military training. So when the war did break out those fellows that had been going to summer camp at Fort Benjamin Harris had the jump on the other fellows you know becoming leaders instead of just a grunt.

Interviewer: So initially was Roosevelt received in your community was the attitude more positive or where there people that doubted whether or not his benefit to the country and the situation would have been positive.

Malak: I think much were in a positive way. Of course what you have to realize I was born a democrat okay I'm a democrat now and I will die a democrat.

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: So you're getting somewhat of a bias opinion here.

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: But most of the men and the communities I lived in was a blue collar community. And these were working fellows and they welcomed the administration of Roosevelt.

Interviewer: Were you old enough to work in the 3Cs program?

Malak: No I wasn't.

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: Back in those days I was a paper boy.

Interviewer: Okay well I would like to move on to actually WWII. Is there anything you would like to add to the times in the 30s that you know of?

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Malak: I guess only this that we grew up in a time when things were lean and we didn't have fancy toys to play with there wasn't any money for that kind of thing. And we learned to do for ourselves we built more darn things if we needed a place to put up a baseball diamond we got out there with picks and shovels and we made our own place. And once in a while the city would jump in and help up we made skating ice skating rinks being from the north we would scratch up an area on an open field, dam it up and the fire department would flood it for us and that was our recreation.

Interviewer: Wow

Malak: But you didn't have money to go to the hockey games, football games, baseball games you made your own recreation. And as a result I think it made us a self sustaining generation that we really don't need fancy things to keep ourselves happy because we learned the lean ways of like and we just learned to do whatever was available to us.

Interviewer: There's a book the Tom Brokaw writes I don't know if you've heard of that.

Malak: I read that.

Interviewer: Oh really what were you did you get that same impression from the different stories was out of the great depression that was a

Malak: Yeh I could relate to everything that was in there.

Interviewer: I'd like to read it a friend of mine told me snippets of it but

Malak: I have his other book too he wrote a sequel to it.

Interviewer: Okay okay well I'd like to read those. What's the name of the sequel?

Malak: I can't recall it I could dig it up but for the lack of time.

Interviewer: Right well before Pearl Harbor actually December 7, 1941 the actual attack on Pearl Harbor took place how seriously did you and your family and the community at large where you were residing take the threat of a Japanese invasion?

Malak: Well very much so but you know when you're that age you can't visualize that it's ever going to affect you. You think that it's a conflict which is going to its happening and it's going to get over with in a hurry.

Interviewer: So you expected a short conflict?

Malak: A short conflict yeh sure did. See my dad was an Army man and he did 8 years in the Army during his young life he was a WWI veteran.

Interviewer: Oh wow what was his occupation in the military in WWI?

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Malak: Well he was a field field artillery he was coastal artillery in the states here and then when he went over to France he was a field artillery man.

Interviewer: Oh wow was he involved in any conflicts overseas?

Malak: Yeh my dad was gassed once.

Interviewer: Really wow that is that's actually a tempting detour for me but for the sake of this interview I hate to get off track. I'd like to know more about that maybe when we're done.

Malak: My dad was discharged as a I'm trying to a Sargent Major which is about I guess the highest noncom rank you can get in the Army.

Interviewer: Okay in the Army that is. Yeh I only experienced level of Sargent I never got past the higher ranks so now a days it takes a few years to get up there.

Malak: Yes it does you were an E5 then?

Interviewer: Yes sir yes sir.

Malak: We're my I came out as an E5.

Interviewer: And what is the

Malak: Second class petty officer.

Interviewer: Okay huh well that's a good lead in actually to Pearl Harbor. Where were you when Pearl Harbor took place and what were your thoughts at the time?

Malak: The day that it happened I was at a buddy's house and we had the radio on and we were listening to the broadcast which just came through. And it was kind of a spookiest feeling and yet like I mentioned before, we really didn't think it was going to affect us we were too young yet. But as things progressed we could see that this war was expanding and expanding rapidly because the Japanese were just expanding their parameters all over the Pacific area. And I guess it finally reality finally sunk in and we said well we're probably going to be a part of this somewhere along the way. And I guess it wasn't much more than well ten months later that I found myself heading for the Navy. I left school I didn't finish high school.

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: I completed my after I got home believe it or not the principle of our school found that there was 22 of us in the same boat. And we talked to her and she opened up the program to us and allowed us to come back to high school.

Interviewer: Oh wow after the war?

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Malak: After the war

Interviewer: Oh my goodness

Malak: And by this time you know what I'm 21 or 22 years old and it was kind of strange but we were serious about what we wanted to do and there was no messing around. We probably amazed some of the some of the same teachers that were there we had before I think we kind of amazed them because we were serious this time.

Interviewer: Wish you would have thought to send more children out to the conflict to get them straightened out. Well know you said that you entered before you left high school how old were you when you joined the military?

Malak: When I first went to the recruiting station I was 17.

Interviewer: Okay so you actually joined of your own accord?

Malak: Yes my dad had to sign for me.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Malak: You had to be at least 18 or you needed a parent's signature to get in.

Interviewer: Now you went to an induction center did they do any IQ tests or specialized skills?

Malak: Not much there it wasn't until I got to Great Lakes training center that we took aptitude testing and the asked us for three choices for what school we would like to go to. And I was always interested in diesel mechanics prior to that so I put in for diesel training school as number one and I think I took aviation mechanics as second and I forgot what my third choice was. But I got my first choice. Apparently my aptitude I had a mechanical background that focused me towards being a good candidate for diesel mechanic school.

Interviewer: Okay and they used the aptitude test back then to to move people in different occupations that they were in. You said Great Lakes Naval Training Center did you actually do your boot camp there?

Malak: Yes I did

Interviewer: Great how long were you there at

Malak: It was a fast training session I probably had 8 weeks of boot training. See they were moving me through so fast so rapidly that Great Lakes doubled maybe more than doubled their capacity. They built a new area called the Green Bay area and it was all wooden barracks. And the land was the most barren area they took all of the trees out if there were any got everything out of the way because all the had was what the Navy called the grinder which would be your drill field. They built those and we had very few inside facilities such as huts or the buildings or anything you had enough to take care of the housing

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you had a about a quanta huts which would take care of the medical part and your chow halls and that kind of thing. So it was a basic a very basic area. When we had to go for more extensive training we had to march clear over to main sights which was the original Great Lakes training center. We'd go over there for gunner practice and also recreational activities.

Interviewer: I'm interested in this because my brother went into the Navy and he just recently left the Navy and he went to Great Lakes Naval Training Center. So we're from Michigan grew up there so as a child it was a good experience my first real experience with the military exposure to drive over to the Great Lakes training center and see my brother in training.

Malak: We're going back there this summer in August because our reunion is going to be up in the Chicago area so one of our side trips is up to the Great Lakes training center that will be the first that I will see it since 1942.

Interviewer: Really wow

Malak: I haven't been back up in that area since. It will be interesting to see if those old wooden buildings are still sitting back up there.

Interviewer: Well I'm I live right outside of Fort Campbell and at Fort Campbell I don't know if you've ever been up there they still have some of the old buildings.

Malak: Yeh I saw them.

Interviewer: Chances are the way the governments going now their using what they can.

Malak: The interesting part about that was they had heating units boilers in there to keep the barracks warm and they were double deck buildings and there would be a company a full company of men at each level. But they didn't have hot water heaters so this is the month of November and December up there in Great Lakes we were taking cold showers up there.

Interviewer: Oh wow oh wow.

Malak: But it was okay cause that was the prelude of where they were going to send me next.

Interviewer: So you did your boot camp there at Great Lakes Naval training center. Where did you do your advanced training?

Malak: They I stayed in what they called OGU for maybe a couple of weeks which is an outgoing unit. And I was assigned to the University of Missouri that's where I went to diesel school.

Interviewer: Okay and how long did you stay there?

Malak: That wasn't very long of course that was about three months.

Interviewer: Did they have many soldiers or sailors enlisted in the program?

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Malak: They would be about 500 men at a time.

Interviewer: The University was already equipped by this time to

Malak: I don't know if they had a school there originally they had a building which was we called our lab area which had diesel engines in the lab. See in the morning you'd go to class and you had theory in the afternoon you had lab and you'd go down to the building where the engines were at and actually apply work on the engines what you'd learned in the morning. We'd set up what we'd call a pony break test and so forth to determine horse power of an engine and we did trouble shooting. The instructor would purposely screw something up and ask you to straighten it out.

Interviewer: Sounds formilure.

Malak: We did it to him onetime too. But he had trouble trying to straighten it out.

Interviewer: Just curious what did you guys do?

Malak: The diesel engine had injectors in it which injects the fuel this is what you call a full diesel there's no ignition system on it. And we he left the room and we unscrewed a couple of the injectors out of the they looked like a spark they go into a hole that looks like a spark plug hole. We unscrewed them out we put a piece of cardboard in there and screwed it back in.

Interviewer: Oh no

Malak: He came back in and he tried to crank up that engine and he couldn't start it for nothing. So he left the room and while he was gone we quick pulled the injectors out and pulled the cardboard back out. And when he came back we had the engine running. And he I don't think he ever figured that out he might have surmised something but.

Interviewer: Interesting well I know that in the army they did what's called the Louisiana maneuvers down in Louisiana but I'm not too formilure with the naval side of the house. Did you participate in any maneuvers once you left advanced training before you actually left?

Malak: No I being a motor machinist there was a big they would train a lot of motor machinist mates and the reason for that was the the invasion see at this point and time we're on the defensive they knew we were gonna being going back into these beaches and landing areas. And they were building a lot of landing craft and they were powered by diesel engines so they were going to need a lot of diesel mechanics to man these things. So we if you were assigned to an amphibious outfit you went through infantry training. And when I found that out I tried to shy away from it I said now what's a good navy boy doing on a beach with a gun. With a riffle I said I joined the navy to serve aboard a ship so anyway I did shy away from that every way that I could and I never really got picked there I left diesel school left the University of Missouri they stamped my orders that qualified to serve on submarines and amphibious duty and neither one appealed to me. And fortunately I never got assigned to it so I

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Interviewer: Oh so they just took you straight from training and up you into a unit?

Malak: I was after I got out of training I was sent to the west coast and it wasn't there were five of us that came out of that diesel school and we were very soon we were assigned to the Monahan which was a destroyer. And of course this turned out to be somewhat of a forest fire too because we were assigned to a steam destroyer. None of us knew for nothing about steam. We were trained as diesel mechanics so we chased that thing around all over the Pacific and finally caught it up in the Alutians and we didn't spend too much time I bet I wasn't aboard that thing more than four months or so. And it was only through a letter that I wrote home that was intercepted by the person who was doing the

Interviewer: Assigning?

Malak: Well screening letters so that no pertinent information would get out. But we I wrote a letter home to my dad which wasn't very favorable to the navy so I was called down for that. In fact I was brought before the captain of the ship.

Interviewer: Oh no

Malak: And there I had a chance to speak my cause anyway and he decided that we didn't really belong aboard a steam vessel so it wasn't long after that that they transferred all five of us off of that vessel. It was at that point and time that I really learned the chain of command.

Interviewer: I bet

Malak: Real quick I didn't go through my division officer I didn't go through my chief or my division officer you know a fresh smart recruit you know you think you know everything and I went right through the old man. Well you don't do things like that in the service. But I did and I felt ashamed afterwards because all these fellows that had a little tenure behind them realized what a smart jerk I was.

Interviewer: Now you mentioned the chain of command were there officers and noncommissioned officers that had in prior to the war itself or were most of them just pulled into the conflict?

Malak: That ship that I got on the USS Monahan had been at Pearl Harbor when Pearl was hit and they got underway real quick and got out of the channel before the Japs they Japs concentrated their fire and their bombing power right in the Pearl area and this ship got out to sea when that whole thing started. So they were never hit but these were pre WWII guys pre-Pearl Harbor guys.

Interviewer: So they were experienced?

Malak: Yeh they were.

Interviewer: Okay did you now from the UUS Monahan you moved on to the PT boat unit?

Malak: We got pulled off there and we got assigned to squadron 13 which was already in the Alutians they were at Adak. There was two conflicts that in the Alutian Islands and one was Adak and the other

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one was Kiska. Two major conflicts which involved the army more than the navy. But we were there for both invasions and retook the islands back from the Japanese.

Interviewer: And which islands were these?

Malak: Adak and Kiska.

Interviewer: Well I'd like to get to that in a moment. Now you were reassigned in the Alutians to squadron 13 what kind of equipment did you train with and how well did all of this equipment operate in combat?

Malak: Well basically the motor machinist mate which there were three of them on a PT boat and understand this is that was only an eight man crew of the Alutians and your talking about a vessel that's 80 foot long and 20 foot wide and it was our job to keep everything mechanical working on there.

Interviewer: Oh wow

Malak: But mainly the engines we had three Packard big 12 engines in there and it was our job to see that those engines were in working order at all times.

Interviewer: Could you explain some of the workings of the PT boat itself?

Well this this model is a stripped down version of what a boat all the armor that it really had and when Rebel which is the company that made this model made them they didn't equip them the way we really were towards the end of the war. For instance that's a 20 millimeters back there that was replaced by a 40 millimeters mid ship we had two twin 50s there were two styles of PT boats. This is a L-CO model I was on a Higgins model and a Higgins would have had two turrets one opposite of each other here we would have had two 20 millimeters which that is the 20. Right here we would have had a 37 millimeter.

Interviewer: Wow

Malak: Right over here we would have had a mortar the main purpose of the mortar on there was for lobbing star shells up in the air and lighting up a target at night. We used to operate in close to the beach down in the South Pacific.

Interviewer: Okay now what is the function of a PT boat what is its purpose and

Malak: Well it was a to start out with it was an attack vessel. We got a run on some big stuff we got a run on a Japanese task force up in the down in the Philippines. But later on we became known as the barge busters. And the way we got that name was when MacArthur started back into the Philippines he was using a strategy take an island jump an island take an island jump an island. And he was a brilliant strategist he was the biggest egotist I ever saw but he was a brilliant strategist. So as a result what happened was the Japanese were trying to regroup and they were trying to leave one island go over to the next one to try to strengthen their manpower. Our job was at night to catch these barges trying to

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jump from one island to the other and we blew them out of the water. So we got known as barge busters.

Interviewer: What were the barges they were troop carriers?

Malak: Yeh but they were big enough that they could carry they would carry equipment cannons small cannons. That's the artillery.

Interviewer: How well did the equipment function in actual combat?

Malak: We it was our job to make sure that it functioned right.

Interviewer: Okay so it functioned pretty good.

Malak: I to give you a classic example of that when we started back in the Philippines we started from Beack New Ginny and the PT boats those engines were designed to run fast high RPM. But when you're in a convoy your traveling at a snails pace you know. Well when we got to the place where we needed speed our engines were all carbined up but we knew that this was going to happen because they were super charged engines so we were we'd shut down one engine at a time and start changing plugs reworking our ignition system whatever we could to get that engine up to up to par.

Interviewer: Now you mentioned MacArthur briefly that he was a brilliant strategist did you and your crew and the other sailors that you were with did they have full confidence in MacArthur and his ability to lead or?

Malak: Yeh yeh

Interviewer: How did they respond to the Phillipian Island incident that

Malak: Well this is you follow the chronology of WWII in the Pacific the this would have been 19 the fall of 1944 and we had we had trimmed the clocks of the Japanese in several areas before this. And we had the Marians taken care of we had the Marshals taken care of we had New Ginny secured now we're pushing them back up north.

Interviewer: So by this time the Phillipian Island incident was forgotten practically?

Malak: No this is the beginning of the Phillipian campaign.

Interviewer: Okay I was referring to the actual when they had to evacuate the peninsula.

Malak: Oh yes well what you've got to remember there was a fellow by the name of Johnny Buckley. Johnny Buckley was a young lieutenant when he got caught over around Credidar when General Mac when the Japanese were taking the main land and capturing the the Phillipian group. Well there were about three boats left and they were hurting for parts and things they were ramshackle boats by this time but they were still running. So they recued MacArthur off of Credidar got him on the boats and his

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anotherage and a bunch of our officers army, navy and some air core guys. And we get them down to Mindenawa when I say we I wasn't in PTs at this point in time and I'm talking about our entire group of PT men. But they got them down to Mindenawa then from there MacArthur went to Australia they flew him we still had our an air field that was working and they got MacArthur out of there down to Mindenawa and they also took the President of the Phillipians down to Australia and he set up the government there. Which was you know sort of a puppet government but it still had that strong hold and the people knew his people knew where he went with the hopes that he's coming back to to rescue them.

Interviewer: Right

Malak: Johnny Buckley who was the skipper of this whole thing was sent back to the United States he got the Congressional Medal of Honor and then he set up a training program at Melville, Rhode Island. Prior to this we didn't have a central training station for training PT men. So they set up this one at Melville, Rhode Island and all the men that would come through there were trained at Melville. And at that time you couldn't be a married man and it was volunteer duty.

Interviewer: Okay so at this point you were you actually moved to the PT boat unit? What year was that that you actually made it to your unit off the USS Monahan?

Malak: 1943 early part of 43.

Interviewer: And by this time the confidence level in MacArthur's leadership was fairly high?

Malak: Yes

Interviewer: What about when you were on board the PT boat what kind of accommodations did you have sleeping arrangements that kind of thing?

Malak: Very tight

Interviewer: I bet

Malak: There was only sleeping accommodations for 8 men which was up in this bawl area

Interviewer: How many crew members did the PT boat have?

Malak: Up in the Alution campaign we only had 8 people. When we went to South Pacific they did something different to us because we brought the boats back from the Alutions on their own power to Primitive Washington and they come up with new innovations better torpedoes the torpedoes that we were using prior to that were terrible. You'd fire them and you didn't know where they were going to go. These were tubes and the torpedo was fired out of these tubes when they come up with the new torpedo they found out that they didn't need a tube so they tore off the tubes and put launch racks here. And the torpedo was them launched right off the side and a tripping mechanism set off the turbine which made them take off on their own power.

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Interviewer: Interesting so you did you consistently have someone awake on ship watching you take turns did you have people sleeping in the same bunk as you at different times different occasions?

Malak: We would trade off yeh.

Interviewer: Okay how did that work?

Malak: Well you we had sleeping bags that we brought down from the Alutians and of course they got a little warm down in the South Pacific. The fellows would just take the we had every navy man had a mattress which was about 2 inches thick you know and a hammock and we would roll these up into kind of just a donut or a roll just a plain roll and we would trade off one guy when one guy was in his sack when he was getting out he would roll up his put it down on the transom next guy would roll his out. But when you're out to sea on a mission if a mission on a PT boat usually didn't last longer than about 8 hours. So and of course we operated at night and day and when you went out on a mission in the South Pacific you were a condition red which is in the navy there was condition red, yellow and I guess did we have a green I can't remember that. But it was either a caution yellow or a condition red was everybody at battle stations so you could be out there 8 hours and you'd be right at your battle station continually right at your gun. The engineers which there were three of us we would trade off. We'd stand maybe 2 hour watches or maybe even a 1 hour watch a piece in the engine room and then you'd come out of there and you'd go to your gun station. So we would work the patrol that way the longest patrol I've ever been on was 72 hours and you were darn tired after that.

Interviewer: I bet 72 hours wow I have friends that complain over 12 hour shifts. Interesting well I am interested to know about your first experience with combat and what kind of reaction you had and some of the others had in your unit.

Malak: Well I guess our real first real taste of it was going into the Philippines as we approached Latté which was the initial landing going back into the Philippines from New Guinea the Japanese were very desperate people by this time. And they they went to the komokozi tactics using komokozi planes and instead of just shooting at you bombing you they'd throw the whole plane at you. The plane was loaded with TNT and up on impact everything blew up. So that was our first encounter going into Latté we encountered the komokozi planes and of course the fleet wasn't with us the big boys you know battleships and cruisers, destroyers.

Interviewer: What was your function at that time you were on a PT boat in Latté? What was your objective?

Malak: Coming into the landing we were we would strafe the beach heads prior to the army coming in there with their barges. And we'd try to soften up the beach heads as much as possible. Of course the big boys were lying off shore and putting in 5 and 12 inchers into the beach too. But that was mainly our function on that first landing.

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Interviewer: Were you ever concerned the actual fire off of the battleships were you ever concerned with fracture side at all?

Malak: Oh yes when these komokoziies come in they come in low the big boys were lowering their riffle barrels down low which means that you didn't get a big subjectory. And we would break formation coming into Latte Bay and the big boys were firing at these planes and we were getting splashed. We never got hit but we got splashed from our own shells. The water was hitting us topside and I was just praying that it all everybody's aim was good.

Interviewer: Well let me ask you what were your experiences what kind of reaction did you personally have to that your actual first experience with Latte combat?

Malak: I wouldn't fool you to believing that we weren't scared. We're here in the big stuff at this point and time oh we had been in the two landings up in the Alutions but we were never attacked. Now we're being attacked on the South Pacific and that was only the prelude to the whole thing because didn't stay at Latte long it wasn't I bet you two weeks we were out of there and heading to Mendora. Again MacArthur's strategy to move so fast and the fallacy of that was we had trouble trying to get fuel we had trouble trying to get ammo we were exceeding our supply lines. But on the way up to Mandora I think that fleet that we were with I think the battle the cruiser the Nashville was the flag ship and the Japanese hit it with a komokozie run into the bridge and killed a few people. But we were some distance from that but by the time we got to Mandora we got a real reception because the komokoziies came in on us on D-Day. And they I could show you pictures

Interviewer: That would be great actually maybe we could move to that now some of your photographs and some of your

Malak: Now I have more stuff I have more stuff on slides and books than I do photographs though I do have some.

Interviewer: Maybe we can look at some of your lot that you put together here sir if we can photograph some of this then we can move into some of the

Malak: This will give you want to hold it like this. This plaque that I made has of course it has we are the Cats of round 13 and I established that saying because of the fact that our insignia was a black cat and we were around 13 which there was nothing superstitious about us. Over it tells that our squadron was commissioned September 18, 1942 down in New Orleans we were build by the Higgins plant. The squadron went through the entire war and was then decommissioned and destroyed November of 1945.

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: The our boats were numbered from 73 to 84 which consisted of 12 boats. Our squadron had three squadron commanders during its entire tenure. I knew these two fellows and I didn't know the last one because I was I came back on rotation from the Philippians before the war ended.

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Interviewer: Okay

Malak: Of course this being our squadron insignia which was painted on the usually on the turrets of the boats I kind of came up with the saying if you want it done right ask a Higgins man because I kind of established a running feud with the Elko men at these conventions that we go to. They'd give me the business and I'd give them the business but it's a fun thing. I worked up another plaque here again using we are the cats. And we started out here with our campaign in the Alutions and all the places that we operated out of which was Adak and Chitka, Attoo and Kiska and of course from there after we came back to the states we went down to New Ginny. And we had a base set up at Mios at well it was base a Melody Bay at Dragon Harbor and then Mios Windy was a big PT base and that's what we jumped off from going back into the Philippians. I can't tell you how many PT boats were involved in that but they were just pools of us I don't remember how many squadrons were involved in that.

Interviewer: You didn't feel like such a minority back then?

Malak: No but then we went into the Philippians and of course we hit Latte and then our next stop would have been Manduro and then Luzon then between Luzon and Manduro were places that we operated in and had quite a few skirmishes in such as Maradookie.

Interviewer: I'm not formilure with Maradookie.

Malak: Maradookie is in the Straights there's only about seven pounds of water between Mazoro and Manduro. And Maradrookie would have been on the Manduro side in those straights Vernie, Rambulon and Samara. When the boats were decommissioned after the war they stripped them and burned them down at Samara. I'm glad I was there then cause I would have cried. I worked so hard to keep that thing going and keep it afloat and then to watch it destroyed would have been a real downer. Now I came back to the states after the Philipian campaign was secured the next campaign that they went to was Bornia and you see they went to Bornia Bay, Baruda and then Duravalgin and the last one was Coochingaurwac and that was the last campaign that my squadron had gone through. Probably right around I think prior to Bornia I think is when they hit where all the komokoziies came in.

Interviewer: You said in Manduro.

Malak: No up north further the name leaves me but anyway Bornia was the winding down point the war I probably came back in about May of 1945. And the the squadron of course the war ended in August so just sometime before August 15th I believe my squadron had gone to Bornia and cleaned up there.

Interviewer: Well I'm interested in your medals I see you have a few medals here.

Malak: Yeh I just became aware of the fact that I'm entitled to another one which was the Alaskan Campaign. And it was just published in a newsletter I get but anyway you can see my rate was Second Class Motor Mat which is a rate that no longer exists. They will have a rate that looks like this but it won't have the MO because they call those fellows engamen now the navy men.

Malak, Don

Interviewer: And you called them motor officers back then?

Malak: Pardon

Interviewer: What was the name?

Malak: Motor Machinist Mate.

Interviewer: Motor Machinist Mate.

Malak: And that would have been my squadron insignia these were our arm patches we had special PT men wore a special arm patch.

Interviewer: More occupational

Malak: Yeh and for my medals I was wounded in the Philippines so I got the Purple Heart there. And this was a navy good conduct medal this was the victory medal WWII Victory Medal. This was the this was the American Theatre War.

Interviewer: I'm going to do a close up here on these so everyone can see. (Showing a close up of the medals)

Malak: Is that in the way?

Interviewer: No its not.

Malak: And this one would have been the Asiatic Pacific medal. This last one if a foreign medal and that's the Phillipian Liberation.

Interviewer: Oh

Malak: Which was issued by the foreign by the Phillipian Government. On these on this one here was a navy unit citation which is not an individual but the unit citation given to a portion of our boats that were on special mission.

Interviewer: Okay these medals now do you feel like these medals were given out liberally or do you think that the medals at least in the naval operation were given more conservatively than most? Because I know in the army there was some talk that if you just showed up and you kept your act clean you would get a medal.

Malak: Yeh

Interviewer: Was there ever a time that you felt medals were given out liberally or were they given out pretty conservatively?

Malak, Don

Malak: Kind of conservatively. See I'm of course our the campaign ribbons which I wore on my uniform I never wore any of these and on there are battle stars for the major campaigns we were in several smaller conflicts but those were major battles that we were in.

Interviewer: Okay well that sire tells me that I have ten minutes remaining. I would like to just ask you about you said that you received the Purple Heart do you mind sharing some of you experiences how you were wounded?

Malak: Well this was at Menduro and the komokoziies were very desperate and they were coming in at us about the first couple of weeks they were coming in about three times a day. And

Interviewer: Now where excuse me to interrupt where was Menduro?

Malak: In the Philippians.

Interviewer: Okay now this was the second stop that your squadron

Malak: For my squadron

Interviewer: What was the objective at Menduro overall?

Malak: To take the island retake the island from the Japanese. It was a strategic place for an air field that was the object of taking Menduro.

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: And the komokoziie the fleet the rest of the fleet left the only navy that was left there was us the PT boats. And there was about a squadron and a half of us now those komokoziies were coming in and diving at us about three times a day until we got kind of nerve racking because its one thing for a guy shooting at you but another thing aiming his whole darn plane at you. And fortunately we were able to shoot down just about everything that ever came over this one day and we were in kind of a confined area a bay area we had a raid there must have been about 10 planes in that raid. And we had fellow that I thought he was aiming for us and he came over from out port side here heading in this direction and he went right over the top of us and I think if you'd been standing on something high up there you could almost touch the wing of this plane. But he missed us and there was another boat over on our port side here and he hit them square. And there was only 2 survivors by that time some boats had 12 and 14 men on them. And it was only two survivors out of there. When things settled down the only thing I saw floating was a portion of this bawl. But there was a terrific explosion because they were close to us and several the fellows on our boat were sprayed with shrapnel. Two of us got blown off the deck and I ended up in the water over there on the port side. And the unfortunate part about that I didn't have I wasn't at my regular battle station therefore when you go to a battle station you put your helmet on and your life jacket first two things. I didn't go to my regular battle station so neither of these objects did I have.

Malak, Don

Interviewer: Oh boy

Malak: So when I hit the water I didn't have the life jacket on and after things began to clear I looked over there and I saw the radioman in the water too and he had a jacket on so I swam over to him. The first thing I tried to do was get my shoes off I had high top shoes and I had leather laces and I had them double knotted because they used to come loose. Well after they get wet you try to unite a wet but I want to tell you that doesn't bother you because don't let anybody tell you that you can't swim with your clothes on because you can. I swam for all get out I swam over to him and he took his jacket off and we used it as a flotation and both of us hung onto it just kicked with our feet and all like a dog paddle and we stayed afloat until they realized we were missing. So we must have been in the water so they came after us and took us back aboard of course in the mean time I didn't realize it I had been hit in the arm with shrap metal so I there were four, three of us on my boat after they picked us up and they took us into the dock and we got aboard a truck they took us over to the sick bay and worked on us over there. And that was kind of a spooky day.

Interviewer: I bet I bet so was that as hot as it was for you in your combat experiences was that as arduous as it was in terms of combat experience?

Malak: Yeh

Interviewer: Okay

Malak: That was about the type of anything that ever happened to me.

Interviewer: Okay to digress a bit I missed a base that I wanted to cover. Before your actual exposure to intelligence and information that you gathered through the military what was the common perception of the Japanese in terms of their own abilities their your understanding of their attitudes and their intentions amongst the sailors in your unit.

Malak: Well I don't know about the sailors prior to going into the service you know when you were exposed to the treachery that had gone on prior to the Pearl Harbor thing. The envoys and the diplomats that were we were taking for face value you know they did us in. And the Japanese people we knew that there was a conflict going on because of the fact we were supplying a lot of scrap iron to Japan before the war and through a lot of things which were happening through Washington they cut off their supply. And this is what angered the Japanese that's the straw that broke the camels back that's when they decided that they were going to attack us. But you see we were exposed to that going into the service after that Pearl Harbor incident of course the men that I came in contact were pre-Pearl Harbor guys and they were very angry about the things that happened the deceitful ways the whole thing was came about. And they were prepared to do whatever they had to. (Someone enters the room)

Interviewer: We can stop the tape if we need.

Malak: Did your tape stop?

Malak, Don

Interviewer: I can stop it momentarily we can pick it back up in a second.

Malak: which I mean men that men that I was with way back then such as the fellow that just called me this morning Billy and I have remained friends what up teen years. And I have a heart regard for him and I think he does for me and we have other fellows from our squadron and we I do a lot of letter writing and at Christmas time I send a lot of Christmas cards out and I stay in contact with my fellows at least once a year. And we're losing fellows now it used to be when we went to these conventions my squadron was number two in attendance at these conventions but not anymore. Cause we're losing fellows so rapidly but we have had upwards of 1500 people at a convention and that's when we go to the east coast we change cities every year. When we go to the east coast that was our training area and we also have a museum at Fall River, Massachusetts which has two PT boats there. And when we go there we get a big attendance some of the other cities it's a little bit less but the camaraderie which still exists today you live close you know with to start out with only 8 men then after a while it was 12, 14 men. But you worked so close together and you depend on one another you know you watch my back I'll watch yours.

Interviewer: That was actually a question I was going to ask you about that I'm reading a book by Studs Turkol named The Good War, I don't know if your familiar with it. One of the things that he brings out in the books was that fact just the camaraderie that's developed there and just how people felt veterans felt coming out of the war that it was a good war.

We had a purpose and it gave us a reason to get this thing over with. Most of us weren't professional military people and we had a reason to get this conflict over and get home and get on with our lives. So yeh we had everybody had a schedule you know.

Interviewer: Now in terms of going back to your perceptions of the Japanese themselves to take that back into the situation that you were in actual combat were you really impressed with the qualities the enemy possessed their leadership their tenacity their bravery things of that nature. Their ability to withstand hardships did any of that resonate with you?

Malak: Yeh to a degree but you have to take into consideration the attitude and the culture of the Asian fellow. His value of life wasn't anything like ours you would take I don't know what it takes now but back then it used to be at least 8 support people to keep one man in the field. And I suppose that's was true with the navy too but the army always said that. Where the Japanese guy he was on his own they gave him a gun and whatever else he needs and he goes out there and he does what he has to. Our fellows were more objective in their fighting we didn't go in there blowing a horn and acting like crazy we tried to use tactical maneuvers to reach our objective. Those rascals would come running over a hill blowing horns and shooting their guns and expose themselves to whatever we would throw at them.

Interviewer: What were the feelings of I guess you said some of them but did you did you ever find yourself feeling a little bit of respect for the enemy at the time or was that just

Malak, Don

Malak: Oh yeh yeh they you never discounted what their ability was to you know for their next move. I came in real close contact with a Japanese prisoner in as much as my boat transported a Japanese prisoner from Mindoro down to Latte which was seven fleet headquarters. So we escorted the our task force commander Davis was with us he was in charge of this prisoner but we took this prisoner down to down to Latte and the unique part about this fellow was he could speak some English. And the reason he could was he was exposed to a Christian missionary school during his growing up years in Japan. And I don't think he was quite believing everything about this Shinto religion and the komokozie way of leaving this earth

Interviewer: So his way of capture may have been more than accidental?

Malak: It could have been on his part. I didn't know that but he the reason they we were taking him down there he was a good candidate to be interrogated because he was cooperative.

Interviewer: That's strange wow

Malak: Which was contrary to the average Japanese guy who was belligerent and if he had a chance he would do you in. But the attitude of the any of the allied forces which we had Australians in that area and our own Americana colors and I don't know some English guys they they always fingered on the Japanese guy being a treacherous person. And you he was not to be trusted even as a prisoner you better keep an eyeball on him. They would do things like there was another island called Mendinawa which was they hit right after Mindoro. Our marines went ashore and you never touch a building that has a red cross on it that's verbada. But here come these nurses and civilians and even kids out from the building and they had grenades tied around their waist and they run into the center of a bunch of marines and pull the pin. Well they'd go but look how many of our guys they took with them so there was this fanatic attitude going on don't get it was their attitude don't get captured.

Interviewer: Now the one of the final questions I had for you sir did you ever have a sense of the big picture meaning the did you ever know the strategy involved in beating the Japanese the axis powers at large. Did you ever have a feeling what it took to in the big picture to win the conflict?

Malak: Somewhat because if you wern'et upper antaeen commissioned officer or something like that you got a minimum amount of information. But with each conflict and each success that we would have we were getting a feeling of confidence and a feeling that we were subduing the people that we were sent out there to subdue. And of course when the war ended I was back in the when the atomic bombs were dropped I was back in the states in New Port, Rhone Island and we were well aware we knew what it took to get that far and we were grateful for the fact that yes it took a lot of lives but it saved a lot of lives too. Until this day I will never believe any money monk that's going to tell you that it was uncivilized thing to do to drop those bombs because what we found after we hit the main land of Japan after MacArthur moved his troops in there was tremendous. We could have really been up against the wall with some hard core suicide tactics if we had to hit the main land.

Malak, Don

Interviewer: Well sir I greatly appreciate your time I really enjoyed it. I just had one last question for you something that I feel that I am going to ask at all of my interviews. This is personally for me I'm 26 and I'm finishing up school I was in the military for about 5 years and I'm always asking the question now I feel because I am pretty young and there's a lot I don't know yet. Is with all the experiences you've had in life in general what would you say is important now that you've experienced as much as you have looking back over all the life experience you have. What would you say is really important out of life in general now? What do you value now?

Malak: Well of course starting back even prior to my time going in being a depression kid I went through that era I learned that the what the times when things were lean and you really had to conserve and now as I progress through life and I get to the point where I'm at now. Anything that comes along is sweet and I appreciate it I'm not taking it for granted it was a hard road getting up to this point. And the my military life it taught me self reliance it taught me that I better make myself the best that I can at what I do. And if I can maintain that and I think I still do through my retirement years that I take nothing for granted every day is a challenge. And I have to expect reach that challenge and react to it. Nobody's going to give me anything I'm going to have to earn my way all right to the day I leave this earth I feel like I've got to earn my way.

Interviewer: Well thank you sir I appreciate the time. Is there anything else you would like to add to the of your own experiences that you think are valuable that you'd like to throw in?

Malak: Oh I can't think of anything else. If you ever find the need I've got a slid program that lasts probably a good hour and I have done that slide program for different people at times. And I have you can look at my reach over there on that chair now if you wish and I don't know if it would be any use of you to keep it this is a history of my squadron from its beginning to its end. I have more than one copy of this but if you'd like to take this and thumb through it it will give you some we hit the highlights its going to give you some in between things that happened to us on the way some personal things. And in here it tells of each invasion that we were each theatre that we were involved in. And in here are the commendations that my squadron you've probably seen these things but there commendations here's one from the Alution campaign General Butler was the Commanding General there and Admiral Kincaid was the was the Naval Commander. There are several here's one from Kincaid.

Interviewer: Well I'm going to stop the tape here.