

Interviewer: Okay if you could just say your name and the year you were born.

McClelland: Bervin McClelland born 1924 April 12<sup>th</sup>.

Interviewer: And where were you born?

McClelland: On Jones Creek Dickson County.

Interviewer: Okay so from right here practically. And what branch of the service did you serve in?

McClelland: Navy

Interviewer: Okay what was the primary unit that you served with?

McClelland: I was an electrician and I served on the USS LST 519 during World War II. And then during the Korean War I was in the Pacific but I was not in combat.

Interviewer: Oh okay. What did you do during the Korean War?

McClelland: I was an electrician. I was an electrician in both wars.

Interviewer: And what were your parent's names and what did they do for a living?

McClelland: Bervin McClelland Senior was my daddy's name and Bertie McClelland was my mother's name.

Interviewer: And what did your dad do for a living?

McClelland: He was a farmer.

Interviewer: And did your mother work at all?

McClelland: She worked in the home.

Interviewer: Well she had 12 kids so that's a busy job.

Woman in the background: She had twins.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness so you were the oldest of 12?

McClelland: Yes

Interviewer: How long did you stay in school?

McClelland: Through high school.

Interviewer: Okay did you graduate?

McClelland: Yes

Interviewer: Okay what can you tell us about what you remember about the great depression?

McClelland: Well times were really tough. My family my parents and siblings at time lived with a grandmother and an aunt and uncle all of us in the same house.

Interviewer: Oh wow what did your father farm what crops did he grow?

McClelland: Well he grew corn, tobacco, hay.

Interviewer: That's exactly what my great-grandpa grew. Did your family take a big hit during the depression because I know sometimes farmers had it a little bit easier?

McClelland: No they was they were sharecroppers we didn't own our farm.

Interviewer: Oh okay

McClelland: We didn't own our property.

Interviewer: What do you remember if you remember anything about the family that your dad worked for that owns the land?

McClelland: We worked for different families they were all good treated us good. Gave us an opportunity to grow our own food vegetables and furnished a place to live and of course I don't remember the exact portion of how the crops were divided but they always treated us fair.

Interviewer: That's good that's good to hear.

McClelland: All of them were all of them belonged to the Methodist church.

Interviewer: Okay were you old enough you were born in 24 so were you old enough to have a job before you joined the army, nave?

McClelland: No I worked on the farm all the time.

Interviewer: Okay before Pearl Harbor happened how seriously did you take the threat to America from the Nazis and Japan?

McClelland: I think I had a sense of it. I was elected to Boy's State from Charlotte High School I this it was the first one to be done that way. And we went to Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon for a couple of weeks and that was an eye opener for me. I began to get a taste of military existence. And that was of course an academy for military people in a younger generation. And I began to go a sense of it then but I didn't really understand the Nazi threat really.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: I'd never we'd never been taught anything about it anywhere in school or anything else. I'm sure it was in some publications but we seldom ever got a newspaper and we had a radio but we listened to that on Saturday night.

Interviewer: Right do you remember where you were when you heard that Pearl Harbor had been bombed?

McClelland: Yes I was at school.

Interviewer: Do you remember what your teacher your classmates said about it?

McClelland: No I don't remember much of anything it's kind of to me you know it's kind of numbing and they didn't know what to make of it I don't think.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: And I one of the big differences younger generations now I don't think can comprehend the idea of communications. Back in those days we didn't know anything for two or three days after it happened.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: It wasn't a secretive process it was just the way news traveled.

Interviewer: Right just how long it took.

McClelland: And there was not all these instant communications that you have now the news is out before it happens really.

Interviewer: Right do you remember speaking of communications do you remember listening to President Roosevelt on the radio?

McClelland: Yes

Interviewer: Did your whole family gather around?

McClelland: Yes

Interviewer: Did your family approve of the way that Roosevelt was handling his presidency and the war?

McClelland: No I don't think generally they didn't they didn't approve of Roosevelt a lot of his social ideas.

Interviewer: They didn't like his new deal programs?

McClelland: My family's always been republican and they were fiercely opposed to a lot of Roosevelt's ideas.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: But he was commander so they supposed him.

Interviewer: Yeah I think that's something that's kind of different today. But do you know anybody who was involved with any of FDRs programs any of his new deal programs?

McClelland: No

Interviewer: Were you drafted or did you enlist?

McClelland: I was drafted.

Interviewer: How old were you? You were 18.

McClelland: Eighteen

Interviewer: Did you have a preference for the branch that you would service with?

McClelland: No ma'am

Interviewer: Just where they sent you I understand that.

McClelland: No I became draft eligible April the 12<sup>th</sup> on my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and the draft board said go ahead and finish school.

Interviewer: Oh okay

McClelland: So I finished graduated in May. And then by June the 6<sup>th</sup> I was in the navy.

Interviewer: Goodness that's fast. When you were drafted did you go to an induction center?

McClelland: Yes went to Fort Oberthrope Georgia.

Interviewer: Oh okay I actually was talking to my professor about Fort Oberthrope. Were you do you remember any of the tests that you had to take when you got there?

McClelland: Well I don't remember taking test there when I got into boot camp and on into boot training we took tests. I don't remember what all they were but when it came time to leave boot camp and do some other assignments the officer that interviewed me said you're going to electrician school. And I said well I said they don't even have electric lights where I come from.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: We didn't have them.

Interviewer: My grandmother didn't get electricity in her house until almost the 50s it was like 48.

McClelland: And he said well you're going to electrician school get over there.

Interviewer: Yes sir

McClelland: So I got over there.

Interviewer: Right exactly so where did you go for basic training?

McClelland: Bainbridge Maryland

Interviewer: Okay so was that the furthers away you'd ever been from home?

McClelland: Yes

Interviewer: So you remember your impression of the other young men that were at basic with you?

McClelland: Yes there were all kinds. The first thing I was confronted with I was asked if I was a rebel. I said what? Are you a rebel? I said I'm sorry I don't know what you mean. I'd never heard the term before well I had heard it but not in the terms that I was a rebel. He said where are you from? I said Tennessee. Oh you're a damn rebel. I said okay so I'm a rebel.

Interviewer: Alright where were you were you sent to a different location for your more specialized training like where was your electrician school?

McClelland: My electrician school was at Bainbridge I went there for six months schooling at Bainbridge.

Interviewer: Okay did you participate in any maneuvers stateside after you finished or did you immediately ship out?

McClelland: After I finished school

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: I was transferred to Camp Bradford Virginia which was a kind of holding unit for a lot of people. And it was a hell hole it was nothing but mud and water everywhere cold.

Interviewer: What were you're sleeping conditions like?

McClelland: Well I think there was four of us in a hut had an old oil heater and it didn't work. And water was everywhere mud and it was pretty it was a big drop down from Bainbridge.

Interviewer: Yeah what kind of food did you have?

McClelland: Well at first there I was there for about three weeks I think I was first assigned to guard duty walking up and down the coast looking for whatever. And then I was assigned from that I went to the kitchen to KP duty and that was something else. That mess hall fed about four or five thousand and everybody that come in tracked in mud there was mud and water everywhere. And we'd go to work at four o'clock in the morning and get off at ten at night.

Interviewer: Oh goodness

McClelland: And I got into it with the head honcho there Chief Golson he had an assistant running around with a badge on his arm. Me and my buddy did get out the night before and have a few beers and wasn't feeling too good but I sat down to rest and this kid told me to get up and go to work. And I said wait a minute I've got to rest just a minute. He punched me with his stick and when I come up I hit him and knocked him over a chow table and here he goes holding his eyes. And the chief come in there and lined everybody up against the wall goes down one by one did you see this man hit? I said lord if somebody squeals I'm done. But nobody said they saw anything well the chief said I'm gonna get you well that night I went in and I was on the board to be shipped out the next day.

Interviewer: Wow

McClelland: I went and got went to Centerville Illinois to pick up an LST.

Interviewer: How prepared did you feel getting ready to ship out to fight? Did you feel like your training had prepared you?

McClelland: Well when I went to sea it was entirely a different world and it was you know most of the crew were young men like me had never been anywhere much. And we thought we were gun hoe but we had a lot to learn. It was a new world going to sea was an entirely different world.

Interviewer: Where did you land?

McClelland: Well we had a convoy that when we finally left the states we went down the Mississippi River to \_\_\_\_ New Orleans and loaded a lot of supplies and picked up some more personnel. And we left there and went around to Norfolk Virginia finished loading supplies and picked up the rest of the ship's crew. And when we shipped out we were in a large convoy I don't remember how many ships were in it a huge convoy. So we were headed for the Mediterranean we went into North Africa. And that was we were in our first combat in the Mediterranean one night all this time that we're going across the Atlantic we're drilling. You think you're going to get to sleep and another drill starts we're up and we're down. We're getting to be a mad bunch of people. Well when this attack happened I was coming up out of the engine room getting out at midnight and something picked that ship up and shoved it around and I fell off the ladder. And all the guns commenced shooting and they fired all night and here h I'm below all the time and you never see what's going on. The next morning when everything cleared we cleared quarters and I went up to get a cup of coffee and when I was on deck looked around and I could tell an enormous difference in the crew. We had been a bunch of boys yelling and carrying on and a lot of foolishness. But there was a demeanor that came over the crew that was definitely changed they said wait a minute we're in a war. I looked back in the distance where we had been and the sea was floating with oil and fires and they had sunk the Germans had sunk two oil tankers and all of those crews were destroyed. And it created a sense of real seriousness about the crew we were a different group of people from then on.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: It was and we were credited with a major battle there. And went in to Brazoria was North Africa and the LSTs are equipped with are able to carry another vessel on top of it so they put another

vessel on our LST and we went to carried it to Plymouth England. And then on until the invasion of Normandy we were floating around the Mediterranean we were on a lot of different islands Sicily we went to we were headed for Italy. And somehow or another my ship got turned back and didn't go into Italy but from there we hit a lot of islands in the Mediterranean and came back to Sicily for a few days. I had an experience at Sicily that was you know stayed with me for a long time. By that time there was food that we wouldn't eat much so we were not allowed to feed the people we were not allowed to give them anything to eat.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: So they were hungry you could tell they were starving. And the cooks had decided that they'd clean out the garbage cans and cook all of this other stuff that we wouldn't eat and put it in the garbage can and let the people come to the docks and get it. They did they fought over it over our garbage. It was a terrible experience to see those people starving to death I mean they were hungry people. And that stayed with me for years because I you know I just couldn't believe that there was people in the world starving to death.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: Now we'd been you know we'd been in the depression and we didn't have a lot of good fancy food but we had stable food. But I just couldn't believe that there were people like that being starved but they were.

Interviewer: Did you ever have other civilian contact? Did you ever get to go into port and

McClelland: Do what?

Interviewer: Did you ever have other civilian contact like did you ever get to go into port and look around?

McClelland: Yeah I would go in we'd get sometimes we'd get liberty. And but a lot of the times we wouldn't. When we began to operate out of England after the invasion of Normandy we would get liberty occasionally maybe every two or three weeks or something.

Interviewer: Do you remember civilians being happy that you were there or were they negative toward you?

McClelland: They were happy. Well there were some negatives but I think generally the English people were they were marvelous people. And didn't have as much contact with the Italians as I did with the English but yeah they and they were hard pressed. You'd see people walking around streets bandaged up that we think ought to be in the hospitals but there's no room in the hospitals. The badly hurt people were in the hospital and yeah they were but they had they always had a bright and cheerful outlook they were not depressed. They felt like they was gonna win.

Interviewer: Who was your commanding officer?

McClelland: Pardon

Interviewer: Who was your commanding officer?

McClelland: The commander of my ship was a fellow by the name of Brenner.

Interviewer: Do you remember feeling like the officers were doing a good job did you respect them or?

McClelland: Oh yeah I had all kind of respect for them. My division officer of the engineering crew was full blooded German decent.

Interviewer: Oh wow

McClelland: And he had been in the navy for several years and when the war broke out he was a chief mechanist. And when the war broke out he was sent to this to our ship and they promoted him to lieutenant. And he was an interesting character I had a lot of had some run-ins with him. But he was a real good leader.

Interviewer: Do you think that the other men in your unit was there a sense of bonding did you all get along?

McClelland: Yes we got along pretty well. Oh you'd have your fights every once in a while and some disagreements but generally I think the crew was pretty abatable they got along pretty well as far as I could tell.

Interviewer: What did you guys do in your free time did you plays cards or read?

McClelland: You'd play cards or read and sometimes we'd get movies to see.

Interviewer: Oh okay

McClelland: And that was always if nothing else just not do anything.

Interviewer: Did you have people that you wrote to back home?

McClelland: Yeah I wrote to my parents and my girlfriend and some other acquaintances that I made.

Interviewer: How often did you get letters?

McClelland: Well mail was irregular sometimes you'd get several letter that you were behind on but it was not too bad. They'd get mail onced in a while get mail from home people you know.

Interviewer: Right I'm sure it was nice to have updates to feel connected.

McClelland: Yeah sure

Interviewer: When you were on the ship and then in the field did you what were your living conditions like where were you sleeping what was your food I know you told me a little about the food.

McClelland: Well the food back then in the navy was all storage.



Interviewer: Right

McClelland: And I've heard a lot of guys complain about it but I got fat on it so I picked up weight on it. But it was not bad it was you always had beans for breakfast on Wednesday.

Interviewer: Beans on Wednesday how often did you get that chance to you know shave and.

McClelland: Oh every day uh huh.

Interviewer: That's a lot different than some of the guys we've talked to in the army sometimes.

McClelland: Yeah they wouldn't get to shave.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: They had a different I can tell you a story about shaving.

Interviewer: Go ahead

McClelland: Well I was black headed curly hair pretty and so I let my side burns grow out and every once in a while I'd run into my division office and he called me hillbilly. He said hillbilly you Re looking good boy he said you're looking great he said I bet the girls go for that. Oh yeah well I was in ship quarters one morning and everybody was in formation about time they got ready to dismiss he hollered my name out front and center. I thought oh what have I done. So I saluted yes sir and he proceeded to undress me he said I want you down below to get that hair off your face in fifteen minutes and de back in my cabin in dress blues. And I thought lord how am I gonna get this off in fifteen minutes. But I did I got it off and I got in dress blues and I went and knocked up on his cabin door and he said now look McClelland I think you're a good sailor he says you've done an excellent job on this ship and he said you've began to get a little bit careless. I want you to remember that you're in the greatest navy the world's ever seen you represent the greatest country this worlds ever seen. And I want you to act like you're proud of it and I want you to look like somebody every day when you come out of your quarters down there I want you to be clean and neat. Because he said you're a good sailor and I think you'll stay around a while and he said I just don't want to see you drift off into that kind of lazy days dress. Said I'm not gonna have it and he aid I just want you to remember who you are and who you represent and be aware of it.

Interviewer: I like that I like that story.

McClelland: Yeah he was tough but he was good.

Interviewer: Fair that works.

McClelland: He was strictly a navy man.

Interviewer: Were you impressed or do you remember your impression of the enemy during this time did you think they were fighting well?

McClelland: Yes we after the invasion my ship made fifty something trips into Europe hauling supplies, men, and material. And we would haul back a lot of army equipment that was being sent back for test or

whatever. But I did have a short encounter with a German prisoner one day we had picked up a group of prisoner in the harbor. And they were what they called they were wounded some of them were walking wounded. And I came out of the galley with a cup of coffee just to kind of relax and these two guys were standing close to where the barrier was. And I thought well I'll just say something to them see if they speak English. I did I engaged them in a conversation and one of them was an older guy and he was really concerned about what was gonna happen to him. And I said well I said he said where are we going and I said we're going to South Hampton. Oh no he said South Hampton's not there anymore and I said well it is. And he said he was just adamant he said no we've been told it was blown off the map. And I said no sir I said I left South Hampton about four days ago and it's much still there I said it's not. And they wanted to know what they were going to do with them and I said I don't know but I said as long as you behave yourself their not gonna do anything with you they're not going to hurt you. Just carry out your orders and you'll be alright and I said at that time rumors had developed that they were sending some German prisoners back to the United States.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: And I said that's happening that's just scuttle bug here but I'm pretty sure that's happening because it's come pretty straight. And I said you might get to go back to the states I don't know. Well he didn't believe any of it and I said well I'm sorry I said we'll be two or three days getting to South Hampton but you'll see it when you get there. And then and that was the only encounter I had with German prisoners which was short you know it wasn't much. And he looked over where we were coming out of France and he said everything I love and hope for is over there. I said I understand you'll get to go back one day I said no doubt I said you can make it just keep on doing what you're supposed to do.

Interviewer: After the fighting was over were you ever part of an occupation force?

McClelland: No

Interviewer: Were you wounded in your time during World War II at all?

McClelland: No I never was wounded.

Interviewer: That's good do you remember any of the kind of treatment that other people received if you knew people who had been wounded?

McClelland: Well I don't think we had any casualties on my ship. I don't believe we did I think one time I remember a shell hitting the bawl an 88 millimeter exploded in the bawl where there's a 20 millimeter gun mount. And this guy that was in strapped in the 20 millimeter he fell out and they thought he had been hit. They rushed him down to sick bay and stripped his clothes off to find out he had just fainted.

Interviewer: I don't blame him.

McClelland: And he became extremely mad if you made fun of him. That's the nearest to anybody that I ever knew of getting wounded.

Interviewer: Right and you remember like trusting the medical care you thought it was adequate?

McClelland: Well we had a pharmacist mate.

Interviewer: Okay

McClelland: And yeah I'd go we called him doc called him doctor. But yeah I think the medical care was alright didn't need much sometimes you'd get I think I had pneumonia back at one time. I got a cold or something and I guess he gave me some pills and in a day or two I was out doing work again.

Interviewer: Were you promoted during your time during World War II? Well talk about Korea here

McClelland: Was what?

Interviewer: Were you promoted at all throughout World War II?

McClelland: Yes I was promoted when we came out of boot camp I was a seaman first class. Okay and by the way I was making \$30 a month.

Interviewer: Oh wow

McClelland: And I sent half that home to my mother. And yeah and then when I finished electrician school I was promoted to fireman first class. And I would imagine the navy's restructured their ratings I'm sure they have. But back then if you were in the engineering division if you were below decks you had what is called a left arm rate. And if you were on the deck and in the seaman ship part of it you carried a right arm rate. And that included most of the mates, the quartermasters, the signal men, gunner's mates' people like that. Whereas people that worked below decks all the time were classified as an engineering group. And fireman first class was what I came out of electrician school as. And when I got aboard ship I was real lucky to be an original crew of a ship because they had a certain amount of compliment of officers and men that they were allowed to have on each ship. So I was made I finally made second class electrician.

Interviewer: Okay

McClelland: I was promoted to second class.

Interviewer: Do you remember being able to tell a difference between people that you served with that were in the navy before the war began and the young men who were drafted?

McClelland: Yes there was quite a difference. I wasn't with very many men that had been in the navy before. We had two men that I recall that had been that had ships shot out from under then. And one of them was a gunner's mate and I believe he was on a destroyer and he had been in the navy for some time. And he was a different character he approached things different.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: And a lot of people in my crew they wanted to do the job but they wanted to get out as quick as they could.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: Most of them now a lot of them stayed but most of them wanted to get out.

Interviewer: Now did you stay in after?

McClelland: No I came out.

Interviewer: Okay

McClelland: And I went back in during the Korean War.

Interviewer: Were you drafted for the Korean War?

McClelland: No I just volunteered.

Interviewer: What year of the Korean War did you serve?

McClelland: Nineteen fifty

Interviewer: Okay I'd like to ask you a few questions about it. Did you hear of or did you have any experience with anyone who was involved with task force Smith?

McClelland: With what?

Interviewer: Task force Smith.

McClelland: No

Interviewer: It was an operation okay. What did your unit do during the Korean War can you tell us a little bit about that?

McClelland: Okay I was sent to Midway Island and probably 150 men were sent there to reopen a submarine repair base.

Interviewer: Oh okay

McClelland: And reopen the island for air transport. It was a was a stopping off point for airlift for out of Korea. Bringing wounded and people like that back and so I was there for a year or more and I had a brother that was killed at Korea he was in the Marine Core. And he was killed in the late 1950s and by that time I had met Mrs. Mary over there and we had married and they opened up housing on Midway for certain ranked and I signed up for housing. As soon as I signed up they transferred me.

Interviewer: Oh no

McClelland: Yeah they transferred me to Hawaii.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

McClelland: to open up an AFBD1 was a floating dry dock it was supposedly the biggest the navy had. And they were gonna assemble that dry dock it was in ten sections and they were going to assemble

that dry dock in Guam. And I was assigned to the first section that was brought out of \_\_\_\_ and tugged by sea \_\_\_\_ and tug to Guam. And we began to set it up then.

Interviewer: What was your impression of General McArthur?

McClelland: Well until later on I was very impressed until I began to read later on in years about some of his escapades. And that to me kind of diminished his lure in a sense that he was a great general I think I think he was a great strategist and he was a politician. Now you get out in the pacific and you see his name plastered everywhere on all kinds of businesses. And later on I become to understand that he was bypassing the United States government dealing with other governments. And that to me is a no no that ought not be allowed and of course I was adamantly opposed to Truman firing him. But later on I became when I began to read and understand some of the things he was doing Truman was correct he had to fire him because you just can't have a general running around here in the White House. Now that won't work not in this country and that I thought was a bad example he set.

Interviewer: What did you think of Matthew Ridgeway who replaced him?

McClelland: Oh he was a great general. I think he was a soldiers general.

Interviewer: Did you know anyone who had an experience with the Inchon landing?

McClelland: I don't know if my brother did or not I don't think he was in that landing. I think he went in on the land side.

Interviewer: Okay after the success the initial success of the Inchon landing drive into North Korea did you expect the war to be over quickly?

McClelland: Yes I did.

Interviewer: Was there do you remember conversations or how people felt when they started to realize that it might drag on longer?

McClelland: I think a lot of people were unhappy with it and they began to get a little war weary. And but I think it was necessary the communist were at least blocked for a while and I was not happy with the way it was carried out. I thought they ought to carried it deeper into the Chinese territory and at least cripple their advances for a while.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: But there was a lot of things we didn't know about it but I think when all was said and done it was a necessary fight.

Interviewer: When you look back on your time in Korea what image is the first that comes to mind?

McClelland: Well I don't know a lot of good times and a lot of bad times. I loved the navy I really liked in fact I would have stayed in if it hadn't been for my dad he kept urging me to get out. And after a while and when I went back in the navy had changed and I had too.

Interviewer: Right

McClelland: So but anyway we I went back in. But I did I enjoyed the navy.

Interviewer: Going back to World War II just a little bit I know a lot of people say that when they look back at World War II and that time in their lives they remember it very positively even though it was a very hard time for the country I wonder how you look back on World War II.

McClelland: Yeah I think it brought this country together it showed what people could do if they set their mind to it. And there was a lot of people sacrificed a lot. And to me it showed what this nation could do if the people decide what they want to do. But they could change things.

Interviewer: Well that's all the questions that I have.

Tape ended