



John M. McCann

World War II

U.S. Navy

**Southwest Pacific
and Northern Pacific**

U.S.S. Case DD-370

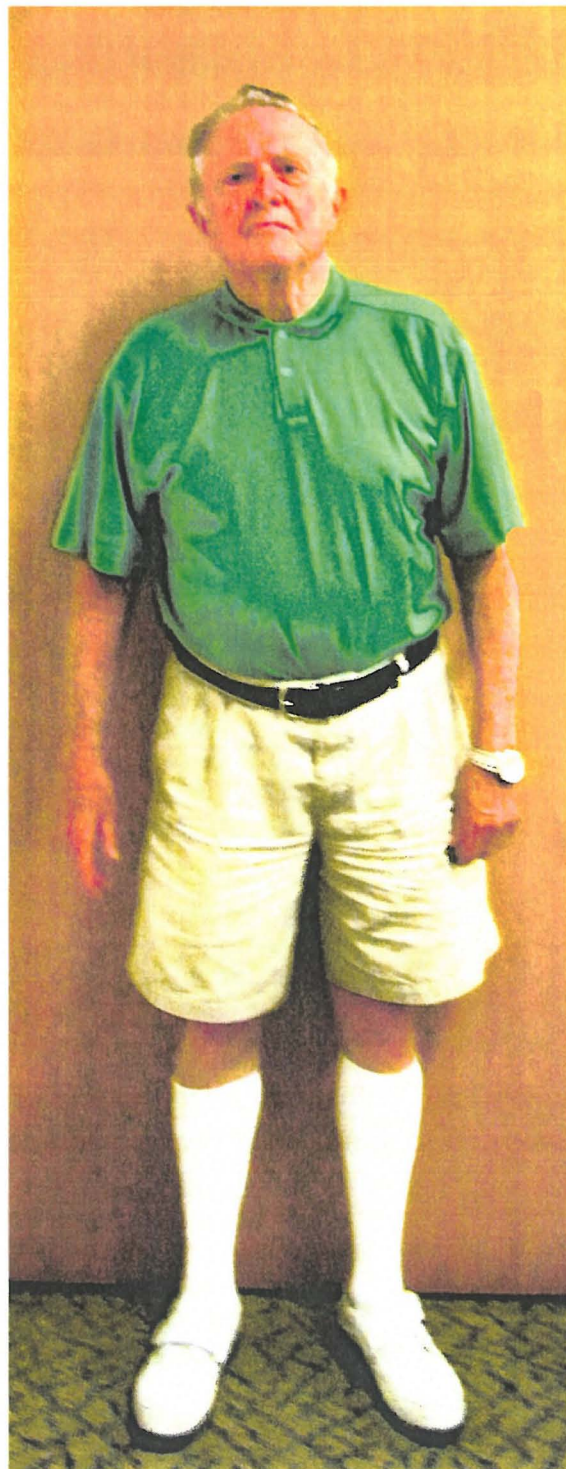
Radarman 2nd Class

John M. McCann

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
July 6, 2011**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



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Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **John M. McCann**

Rank: **Radarman 2nd Class**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Navy**

Theater: **World War II – Southwest Pacific,
and Northern Pacific**

Interview Date: July 6, 2011, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Place: Group Study Room

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo Recorder

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

This Veterans History Project interview is being conducted on Wednesday, July 6, 2011, here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I'm a member of the reference staff. I'm speaking with Mr. John McCann who was born in Chicago on October 5, 1924, and he now lives in Prospect Heights, and Mr. McCann learned of the Veterans History Project here at the Niles Library through his son Kevin and Kevin is present here in the room as we conduct this interview here in the Group Study Room of the Reference Department here at the Niles Public Library. Mr. McCann has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project, and we're grateful for that. (Interviewer's words in italics.)

So Mr. McCann, Do you recall when you entered the service of the United States Navy?

Well I was going to DePaul University, and luckily I had gotten a deferment until June of '43. Then my number came up in the draft. I went down with a friend, another fellow who lived down the street. At the time you didn't get your choice of service. Whatever they needed: Army, Navy or Marines – that's what happens. So we went down and one of the guys told me "Kid, I'll give you a tip, -. "Get behind the biggest, strongest guy you can find and get up near the front of the line." So, ok, I found a guy and he looked like Dick Butkus. He got up in front of me. He was 2nd I think, I was 3rd. And they asked him: "Army, Navy or Marines?" And he said "Navy!" Marines he got! And I thought aw-oh . So I'm next - puny, little 150-pound me. And they said "Army, Navy, or Marines?" I said (squeakily), "Navy." And I got Navy. So that was a lucky day for me. (Mr. McCann's words)

So we went home that night. We were supposed to report the next morning. This friend of mine and I, we got back the next day, and they told us to go home. They didn't need us for another day.

So I went home. My mother was hanging the wash in the backyard. I told my mother that the Navy didn't want me. I said that I was only kidding and that I had to go back tomorrow. So we go back the next day

It is July of 1943. Hot, humid days, I got a t-shirt on and a toothbrush. I don't even know if I was even shaving then or not and that was it. So we get on the North Shore train. We're going to Great Lakes. That's wonderful. So we're on the train for 3 hours. And somebody said "What the

heck, we been on this train for 3 hours and Great Lakes is only 25 miles away.” Then someone says “You’re not going to Great Lakes, Lads.”

So old John McCann, expert on topography, I look out the window and I says “Good, we’re going southwest. We’re going to San Diego - couldn’t get a better spot.”

So we get to Colorado and all of sudden we’re going Northwest..So I said, “What the heck is this?” So four days later, no clothes, no toilet articles, nothing, we all stink. We end up in Spokane, Washington. We spend overnight in Spokane because they weren’t ready for us. We were going to a place 30 miles away, called Farragut, Idaho.

Farragut, Idaho was a piece of land that Eleanor Roosevelt’s family owned and sold it to the government. It was a naval base up there, 30 miles south of the Canadian Border.

The next day, a bus took us over there. We got our clothes, our shots, the whole bit, and we were all set to start on the following day.

Boot camp took about 8 weeks. Beautiful countryside and the only thing I knew about it was that the Bing Crosby had a house on Lake Pend Oreille. He used to come and do trout fishing.

We had a tough, commanding CPO, Chief Petty Officer. His name was Dotson, and he really put us through a terrific amount of drilling. Every once in a while he would be stuck with the midnight to 4-shift - to supervise the area. What he would do we found out later, he would come in around ten after 12 and scatter papers on the floor. Then, he would turn the lights on and say “Alright, what the hell is this stuff all on the floor? That’s terrible so everybody out on the grinder” (the parade ground or drill field.) He probably couldn’t stay awake. And he’d take us to the grinder and run us for an hour or so! That was one thing he always did, but he was a very good instructor. We learned a lot about the Navy.

When it came time to leave, we were entitled to an 18-day furlough. I had already applied for radar school. First, I wanted to be an Aerographer’s Mate that would be a weatherman, but I didn’t get that. I got radar school so I went home. It was an 1850 mile train ride.

When I came back, we headed for San Diego and I went to radar school in San Diego for four or five weeks in a place called Point Loma, beautiful. I fell in love with San Diego; the weather was great. On the train going there, I met a fellow from St. Paul, Minnesota. Jack McMonagel and we were together then until the end of war, just happened to be lucky. We went to radar school together and when we finished radar school we were sent up to San Francisco to get our ship.

Well, what you would do is, there was this big room and a big bulletin board, listing all the ships and the names of different people and you would look to see your name on a ship. So we had a few nights that we were free for liberty. So one night, he came and told me “We’re on the same ship! We’re on the USS Case.” I said “How’d you find out”. “I looked at the bulletin board and there’s our names” So lo and behold we went over to the Case, a 1938-commissioned destroyer, 1850 tons. It was being repaired. It had gone to Alaska in November. It had suffered damage

from high waves. They wanted to get us out as quickly as possible. We spent time there and we left just before Christmas of 1943, heading for the Hawaiian Islands.

I remember going to Mass in the Hawaiian Islands and hearing the Hawaiian choir of kids singing, terrific. They were really good. While we were there, we would go out during the daytime and practice firing. We would shoot at air targets. They would tow a sleeve, and we would fire at the sleeve. They would tell you how well you did. Then all of a sudden, we get the word, we're shipping out.

On the way to the Hawaiian Islands, we passed underneath the Golden Gate Bridge. Every one of the new recruits were sicker than dogs - sea sick. And the more seasick we were, the regular crew guys would say "I'll tell you what to do, rookie, eat." "I can't eat." "Force the food down." So we listened to them. Here we are forcing our meals down and it is coming up and over the side, and they are there laughing like heck. That's the only time I was seasick in my 30 months in the Navy even during typhoons and bad storms. I never had another siege of seasickness.

So we head out in January of 1944 for the Marshall Islands invasion. We went out there and Eniwetok was one of the islands we encountered and Majuro. Another one was Kwajalein, the biggest of the three and it was an important Japanese base. I remember that the Marines had gone in there and everything was pretty much laid to waste. And we would go through there and the Marines would swim out from the island, selling Japanese flags, tokens you know, but we didn't fool with that because we were moving all the time.

We headed out to sea again. We had a captain. He was an old navy man, Commander Howe, terrific, he treated everybody well, he knew his stuff, and suddenly he got transferred out. And this young whippersnapper, Commander Wiley, he comes in to take over the captaincy - real cocky. And I said "Aw-oh, we're going to have trouble with this guy." And sure enough we did.

We're heading down for New Guinea, and on the way down. We cross the Equator and we had to go through being inducted into King Neptune's Court. And the advice that guy gave me about being up in the front line, paid off again for a 2nd time. I got up behind the biggest, strongest guy. They always brought up charges against you in King Neptune's Court, and one of my charges was that I knew more about basketball than one of the shellbacks. Another charge was that I was a "boon sissie" or a "cow sissie" and things they would make up and so on.

They would force you drink the most distasteful concoction of diesel oil plus many other things. You would drink it and when it hit bottom, it would come right up again. And you're sitting in a chair and there is a canvas pool behind you. "Guilty" or "Not Guilty." And naturally you're guilty. So then they push a button, the chair is charged and you go over backward into the pool. And they're pushing you up and down in the water, yelling "Pollywog." And you're yelling back "Shellback" - that's what you want to be. And the pollywog is the lowest form of life, lower than a whale's belly, they say.

So the good part was that I was number 3 in line. Once you finish all the initiation, now prior to the court date with King Neptune, they had you doing all kind of things. - like going down to the engine room in winter clothes - running up to keep warm. It was about 180 degrees in the engine

room. They had you looking with two coke bottles over the side to see if they were any Japanese ships. To make a long story short, after I finished I got in line. and once you're in line – I knew ahead of time, you could paddle anybody who was behind you. There was a long line as I went through and they paddled my backside pretty good. But then I got to the end of the line and I got my paddle out. And there were a few guys that I wanted to paddle. Well this new captain, he got his ass tanned pretty well because they couldn't do anything to him legally but in his introduction to Neptune's Court they let it go.

We went down to Hollandia, New Guinea and while down there we were involved with a Japanese midget submarine that had sunk a tanker. We came across the Japanese midget sub and the Quartermaster was the one who did all the work; he went and they split the sub in half, but the Captain took the credit for it. The captain was the one who did this and he did that. And the Captain got the awards and that's the way it happens.

Later on then we went back north to the Marianas Operations that was Tinian, Guam and Saipan – that was pretty tough, had a lot of Japanese planes.

Then after the Marianas they went over to the Philippines and the invasion of those islands. While there, that was the famous "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" (June 19-20, 1944) when our planes shot down most of the Japanese air force as well as sinking much of the Japanese fleet. They were coming in and most of the destroyers were assigned torpedo attack on the Japanese battleships. We were scared stiff because the largest battleship afloat, the Yamato, was supposed to be one of the battle ships. As luck would have it, they went so far through the Suriago Straits, and they decided it wasn't going to work out and they turned back and went south. So that was the Battle of the Philippines Sea (October 24-25, 1944).

Next we go up to the Iwo Jima invasion. The surprising thing about that invasion, our Task Force 58 bombarded Iwo Jima five different times from one end of the island to the other end. And at the same time the Air Force dropped bombs 65 straight days. And afterwards we found out, it only killed 20 Japs out of the 20,000 that were on the island. Then comes the invasion of Iwo and there was a terrible slaughter for our men. Now we were out in the water so we were pretty well safe.

And the Japs at this time started using the Kamikazes. Japanese planes with pilots who were willing to sacrifice themselves as they would try to run right into your ship. At this time Okinawa was the hot spot but we were over by Iwo, by the Bonin Islands.

One night I'm on the radar and I see a contact far away, and I said to one of the guys next to me, "Take over the set I want to go out." I look and I see lights in the distance. I told the Captain about the contact and I said, "Captain, facetiously, "Captain, it's either a gambling ship or a hospital ship." "There are no hospital ships out here," he said. "Well, that's what it looks like." So lo and behold he checks the books if there is a hospital ship, so he wants to board the hospital ship with an armed crew. He contacted the Commander of our Task Force, and the Commander told him, "Absolutely not. No."

We found out afterwards that they were going into Chichi Jima, which is the island north of Iwo with troops and ammunition and other military goods. Had we boarded it, it would have been a real coup for the captain. That was right, just before the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Then we went over to Chichi Jima and we brought back all kinds of guns, Japanese rifles. Everybody on the ship got a Japanese rifle.

So this Captain of ours, I was telling you the story about the time he didn't think it was a hospital ship

One time we got a message. And all ships had code names, and the code names were changed periodically. And one night about 9-9:30, "Tulagi this is Stagehand, Nancy Hanks." The Captain calls down, "What was that? What was that?" Dancing Tanks?" "I said, "No, I think he said "Nancy Hanks." All of our code books were named for different people. And he said, "I never heard of Nancy Hanks," and I said, "That was Abe Lincoln's mother's maiden name." So they looked in the book and the book said man your night signal center. They had a special deal for night; they wanted to send a message. And they finally did that. So after that I was in pretty good paper with the captain.

He would call down and he would say, "My radio frequency is not too clear. Can you do something about it? Let McCann handle it." So I'd go over to the table and there was a jar – nothing in the jar – just a jar we used to put stuff in. And I would twist it around twice. "How is it now, Captain?" "Much better, thanks a lot, Mac."

So we go back. We were waiting for our orders to go back to the states for Navy Day. We were lucky to be sent to New York City for Navy Day in October of 1945. We go through the Panama Canal which was a great experience, went around through Panama, Colon, up the Atlantic.

And I thought we were going to go down off Cape Hatteras. It was the roughest water we had endured. You could see North Carolina in the distance, but it was rougher than heck but luckily we got by. We got to New York. and so were on the Hudson River and Truman was going to come by and review the fleet.

We were staying in a hotel in New York, the Dixie Hotel. We had free liberty. We had a wonderful deal. We were there for like 5 or 6 days. After that we went down to Norfolk, Virginia to decommission. And decommissioning - I thought they would take inventory of all the stuff on the ship.

"Take what you want." "What!" "Take what you want." Guys were taking radio sets and everything. We had all kinds of things to inventory." "Inventory-Nothing! Deep six it. Throw it over the side of the ship." And I couldn't believe it so we did all that stuff and we end up in Norfolk, Virginia and we got the word - we had to wait for our discharge.

And my friend McMonagel And in order to stay out of working parties, guy told me, "Keep moving. Don't stand too long in one spot." So we'd be going, moving. They had these military films. Reagan was in a lot of them. There was one film. It was about getting the V.D. and so on.

So McMonagel is in there. He tells me, he's looking up at the screen and he had put it up there. "John McCann, come out to the lobby." Just when they're skinning guys down.

So I come out to the lobby. He says, "We got our orders to go home." We got our orders to go home so we hop our train and come back to Chicago in December, 1945. And we're sent to Navy Pier, awaiting our discharge. From Navy Pier we went to Great Lakes, and we were discharged, effective January 22, 1946. And four days later I returned to DePaul for my sophomore year.

Well done!

Did you have any difficulty re-adjusting to civilian life?

No, because I went to De Paul during my freshman year. And I was on the G.I Bill so Uncle Sam was paying for everything. And it was a terrific deal for me to be able to start into school right away.

I originally, back in 1943, started at St Ambrose College in Davenport, Iowa, but I got very homesick and my dad came and got me. Luckily DePaul hadn't started yet so I still had time to start my freshman year at DePaul. It was a very smart move

After I got out in January of 1946, I started at DePaul. I was a year ahead of everybody. By doing that and by going to summer school, I was able to graduate in June of '48. I was able to start my Master's Degree. It was all on the G.I. Bill.

So on the graduation day or when I graduated, I got a call from Father Wangler, down at DePaul. There were eight of us that got the call. "Would you like to teach at the Academy, (high school)?"

I said, "I never thought of it; I sure would." Different priests or professors had recommended different students. Fr. Jeremiah Lehane who taught Irish literature. - I had him for a couple of classes, terrific guy, he had recommended me. Never knew about it until I got to the Academy. One of the priests told me, "Fr. Jerry Lehane recommended you." Jeez, I was so glad to find out and I found him and thanked him.

So I started teaching at the Academy in 1948 and spent four years there teaching. It was a great experience. I met a lot of good people. Then when I finished in 1952 I came to the Board of Ed. And at the Board of Education from a teacher to an Assistant Principal to Principal and spent my days in education.

When you started at DePaul that fall after you switched from St. Ambrose, did you know that you would be going into teaching at that time?

Not really, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But somehow I started taking courses. I remember taking certain teachers and then eventually in the first year I thought I want to be a teacher.

"Tell him about your father's military service."

(Mr. McCann's son Kevin, also a retired Chicago principal)

Oh, as a kid we'd be in a bar and these guys are talking about the Battle of the Marne and Château Thierry and World War I. And the old man would say, "What are you guys talking about? Did you ever try to get on a Grand Avenue street car on a Friday night when Montgomery Ward would break?" He was at Navy Pier. He was a plumber. He was told the first day he came there, "Carry a wrench around. Anybody stops you they want you to do something. Tell them 'I can't the Captain wants me to take care of the urinals. He spent 9 months there. He got discharged; they gave him a nickel. That's all it cost on the Grand Avenue Streetcar to go home. He loved it there."

Tell him about the Spanish Class at DePaul. (Kevin speaking)

I had taken Spanish, 1, 2, and 3 during my one year at DePaul. So I came back and not only me but other guys too – Conversation Spanish – forget it, forget it. Guy told me, "Take the class. Everybody else in the class, they are all GIs, and they don't know anymore Spanish than you do." So I took the class. The first day whoosh we're down to about twelve, the third day we're down to about 8 and I remember the teacher Dr. Saba. He wasn't going to have a class if he keeps going so we didn't talk too much Spanish conversation. The final report was a two-minute speech in Spanish. I memorized "en el congreso de los Estados Unidos" FDR's Day of Infamy speech, - it was all about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I just memorized it. If he would have asked me a question about it, I don't think I would have known the answer. So I passed the course. Instead of repeating Spanish I, Spanish II and Spanish III, I finished my language background at DePaul. It was a great thing for me.

What neighborhood did you come from in Chicago?

We always talked in parishes. I came from Presentation Parish on the West Side, 756 S. Springfield. My dad had gone to Presentation Grammar School. My mother and father were married in Presentation. Actually I went into the public schools, my first 3 ½ years. We lived west of Presentation; it was too far to go so we moved in 1934 to 3939 Polk Street and the school was right down the street so I went there and finished there.

Then I went to St. Philip in High School (3141 W. Jackson) I really should have gone to St. Mel but for one thing. You know what it was? They had the ROTC. You had to wear the ROTC uniform and I said that's coming soon enough. I'm not going to go through that. So I went to St. Philip and I graduated in '42 from St. Philip and I made a lot of good contacts. That's when I went to DePaul before I went into the service.

So your father was in the Navy?

Yes. He was a plumber. They didn't call it a plumber. They had some name for it like Machinist's Mate.

And did that affect your choice of service?

Oh I think so. And my uncle, my father's brother, who lived with him during the end of his life. He was on the Merchant Marine Armed Guard. And the armed guard would man the anticraft guns. The rest of the crew were regular sailors. They were being paid, and it was very dangerous work going across the Atlantic. The losses were heavy.

So after your service and then DePaul did you stay in touch with Mr. McMonagel?

Yes, I did stay in touch with him. And I eventually started working at DePaul for Coach Meyer in sports publicity and we went up to play Minnesota up in Minneapolis. And that would be the last time I saw him. That would have been '60, '61. We used to correspond and eventually we stopped writing.

Did you have brothers and sisters that were affected by World War II?

My brother Bobby was younger than me. He was too young to go in World War II, but he was ripe for anything that happened afterwards. So in 1947 out of the clear, blue sky, he told my mother and dad, "I joined the mountain troops out in Colorado." No wars on at this time.-just before the Korean War. He went onto Camp Carson and did his time and he got out just before the Korean War started. He lucked out.

My youngest brother, Jim, who is dead now, he joined the Navy. And the reason why I didn't join the Navy on the draft deal if you joined you had to go for four years. When I got in the draft, it was duration and six months before you got out. So he did his four years probably between the Korean War and the Viet Nam War started. He lucked out.

How do you think your military service and your experiences in World War II might have affected your life?

Well, one thing I wonder about is my eyes from watching that radar set all the time. I had trouble with my eyesight. I got glaucoma. And I just wondered if that might have been caused by that, but it is just a guess.

Do you think your military experience has influenced your thinking about war or about the armed forces in general?

About life in general, right, yes. We had people on the ship. We had one guy, he was a radio technician, which was the most important job on the ship. He took care of the sonar, radio, radar, everything.

And one captain, going back quite a few years, had given him permission to be the first in the chow line. Boy that would rankle everybody else. He was a Mexican-Swede. You don't find too many Mexican-Swedes. And so when we're in the States before we left to go out to the Pacific. Everybody is ashore on liberty. Andy is carrying boxes on. "What the hell is he doing with all these boxes and stuff?" He had a place to put it because he had tube lockers and other places. Nobody else had that kind of space. So we'd be out to sea and we'd have a few ship stores – not

much. We'd be out to sea two or three weeks. All of a sudden a little note would go up on the bulletin board: "Candy Bars - \$25, Planters Peanuts - \$35, Playing Cards- \$10." He was in business. He'd say, "You don't have to buy a chicken." That's how he would sound. "He had chronic seasickness. You and I could be sitting at the table. You could be Andy, I'd go like this, (moving left to right) he'd get sicker than a dog. He got permission from the captain to sleep topside. He had a hammock. He would hang it at night and sleep topside. So one night we said, "We're going to fix this guy." We tied him in the hammock. "Abandon ship. All men abandon ship!" He outfoxed us. He had a knife; he was able to cut his way through. He was able to get out of the hammock. But everybody detested him. He was just that type of a person.

But I suppose he was good at his job.

That's why the captain...he could fix anything having to do with electronics.

That's a remarkable interview, Mr. McCann, being able to just go right through all these periods of service without hesitation. Is there anything you would like to add to the interview that you think you we haven't covered?

Well, one thing.

I didn't have a girl friend. In Spring of '43, I went over to St. Anne's Hospital. One of the kids on our basketball team, Red Gibbons, Hubert "Hubie" Gibbons. had a knee operation so I went over to visit him at St Anne's. He was a year behind me at St. Philip, and lo and behold in the room were these two gorgeous girls. Excuse me. (Mr. McCann pauses at the recollection).

One with dimples and I said "Boy, look at her," that's the girl for me." Then I found out that she had a boyfriend in the service. She was two years older so I said that's it. I told Red, "Forget about it." So I get a note from him in service that her boyfriend was killed in Operation Market Garden. He was a paratrooper And that was Montgomery's mistake - "a bridge too far." They jumped and they all ended up in the water or dead before they hit the ground. Luckily, his name was Bill O'Keefe, he was alive, but he was shot up pretty bad and he died.

So I wrote to Cay, my future wife, (Mr. McCann pauses) who is now in nursing home for fourteen months. She corresponded back and when I got out of the service. I went over there. She only lived about a block and a half from me. So I asked her out. We went to see Sonja Henie at the Chicago Stadium and that started our relationship. And she said that I realize that you're a student at DePaul. Forget about date night. Wednesday was called date night. Every Wednesday you were supposed to you take your date out.. She said if you can come out Wednesday, ok, but if you can't, forget about it. And then near the end of my second year, and then I was going to go into teaching. She said, "I'll wait for you until you graduate and get a job. I'll wait for you. - which was really something not many girls would say.

So I graduated in '48 and I got the job at DePaul Academy (a high school) and so we made plans then. I said we'll get married in '49 she was agreeable except my mother got cancer in April of '49 and the doctors gave her 4 months to live. In September of '49, I am teaching a class at

DePaul Academy and the principal called me down to the office to tell me that my mom had passed away. She was so good that morning when I left the house.

So we had a set our date. And my mother told me before she died, "Don't change the date because of me." We were married December 17th, 1949. The reason we got married then was that I had 2 weeks off from the Academy. And it was Advent. And you weren't supposed to get married in Advent, but Father Ryan, the Principal, says, "Go ahead. I give you permission."

So we go down to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. We took the train down. We went to the Trade Winds Hotel and we're walking in with the luggage and so on, "Hi, Mr. McCann." "What!"— a kid from the Academy, a senior, Dan Allen is sitting in the lobby with his parents. They had gone down to the same hotel. So they were real nice to us down there and they took us out and we had a good time. What are the odds of getting a kid from your high school when you go on your honeymoon like that?

So then we moved in then with my in-laws. They had a two-flat on 179 N. Lamon. The deal was we would spend the first year there and then the 2nd year we would take over the first floor. Well, after we're there the first 9, 10 months. The guy on the first floor, he is making no move. And he was heavy politically. His uncle was Superintendent of the Sewers. So we had to take him into court. Somebody told me – "Forget about it: it's fixed. Don't waste your money going into court."

I told my Dad and my dad knew a guy, Al Horan, he was the Chief Bailiff, and he was very powerful politically. He said to him, "What do you do in a case like this when the case is fixed. It's their building, my son and daughter-in-law, they want the flat. The other people aren't going to move. How do you unfix the fix?" I never heard that term before and so we get to court. And the guy downstairs his name was Morehead. He was stunned. when the judge said, "I'll give you thirty days to get out." "What." See, they had unfixed the fix. And so we ended up we spent another nine years there.

And in '59, well, Kevin was born in '51 and John was born in '56 and Mary Erin in '59 we bought a house in St. Ferdinand's. Nice, well-structured, well-built in the 20s by craftsmen that took credit for their work. And we had a goal of \$25,000, and my father was a plumbing contractor he said, "This is the place you want - 5643 W. Henderson. "I'll give you the \$2,000." We paid \$27,000 for it and we had a lot of good years there. We were there until '85 when I retired from the Board of Ed.

My sister-in-law and brother in-law, he was the Chief Executive Officer of the Federal Railroad Retirement Board, 844 N. Rush. They just called the building another name, - the William O. Lipinski Building. He was 57, heavy smoker, died of aspergillosis, never heard of it, is a term with the lungs. And my sister-in-law, 41 years at the Telephone Company, supervisor, retired, breast cancer, one monthly pension check when she died. So I said, "I'm getting out at 60."

So I'm the Principal of the Agassiz School (2851 N. Seminary Ave,) and I had a Chinese Assistant Principal and that was funny because I had an Irish lady as my assistant principal and when she retired, they told me to hire a minority, meaning Black. So I looked around and I knew

this guy, Charlie Lee, from a neighboring school. So I asked him if he wanted to come over with me as the Assistant Principal. And he said, "Absolutely."

So I get a call from downtown, "I thought we told you to hire a minority." I said, "If a Chinese-American is not a minority, then I don't know who is." So they had no answer to that question. So I got out in '85, on my 60th Birthday. I had Charlie Lee and I said, "Charlie, someday I am walking into this office, and I'm handing you the keys." He said, "You're too young." "I'm telling you now." So on my 60th Birthday I'm walking into the office with keys, Charlie says, "No, no I don't want them." "Here are the keys, Charlie. I don't want a retirement party or any of that stuff." And I walked out. And I had enough vacation and sick days to take me to March of 1985. I had left on my 60th Birthday, which was October 5, 1984.

So I retired and Kevin was home with us. And we would go to Florida every year. My wife was in good health then. We would go to Florida for the winter. Kevin came down with us. We drove down and he drove back with us. So eventually I said, "Ah, hell, I'm not going to be taking care of property now. Let's get a smaller - we had a four bedroom house, a beautiful place. So we decided; Kevin bought the house from us. And he looked like he was going to be a confirmed bachelor until they fixed him up on a blind date one day with a Dunleavy girl, a fine Irish name.

So we moved to a place called Rob Roy and at the time it had formerly been a 27-hole golf course and now it was nine holes. We said to Kevin, "You want to come with us?" We'll get a bigger unit - and the price was out of this world \$84,500 at that time so we got a two bedroom, two bath. I've been there 26 years now. My wife, I told you is sick.

When you met your wife in the hospital while you were visiting Mr. Gibbons that was before you went in the service?

Yes, that was April or May 1943 before I went in the service.

And then did you have her in mind then when you were in the service?

Absolutely.

But then when I found out from her brother that her boyfriend was a paratrooper, I didn't write to her or anything. It was when I found that he was killed that I wrote her a sympathy note. And she wrote back and that started it.

Sixty-two years married! Her brother was "Red," Mike Gibbons's dad, we called him Red -. He had a knee operation. He was a good basketball player but he got jammed up with the knees. He went to De Paul. About 7 of them went to DePaul from St. Philip. Di Benedetto, Kachan, Condon, Gibbons, but the knee - he didn't make it with the knee. Then we went to work at the Retirement Board as a young 18 year-old punk, or he had been in the Navy, I take that back. He worked his way up. I can remember when I lived with them. He'd get a phone call, 2 o'clock in the morning, "Red? Computer. Nobody knows what the hell to do. The computer's not working. We gotta get this..." He'd say, "I'll be there." He'd get in his car and go there. He studied

everything about computers - not a college student but he knew all about computers. He worked his way up from the lowest job to the Chief Officer of the place. Great Guy!

When you took that great train ride and you thought you were heading to Great Lakes, or maybe it's heading to San Diego and then it's going to Spokane. Was that the first time you were away from home for any length of time?

No, I had gone to St. Ambrose.

Homesick!

My father came and got me. During the war, the 1,850 mile train ride. – not a bit homesick. It's funny. You must have it in you and then once you get it out of you.

It must have been quite an experience meeting all those people from all over the country.

The biggest surprise at Farragut, Idaho, the guy in the bunk below me John Oziol, he was from Chicago. 2 o'clock in the morning. I hear a commotion. I say, "John, what the hell is going on?" He says "Go back to sleep. That's the Mormons; they're playing dice." I said, "Playing dice?" He says, "At home they couldn't gamble; they couldn't drink; they couldn't do anything. Now they got freedom. They go wild!"

It is amazing talking to the World War II veterans. Your generation was the

Greatest Generation.

You were, and you had great high school educations. You were so competent. You get into an Army, or a Navy, or an Air Force. They you give you different jobs and you can adapt, form a unit and go forward, and not question and accomplish and you do your job and you come home. It's amazing.

I wasn't sorry I didn't go into officers training. From DePaul they had ASTP, for the Army, the Army Service Training Program. And they also had a Navy deal. You could go to John Carroll (University); all my buddies went there. I thought about it and I said, "I don't know." I think I would rather just be an enlisted man. My dad was an enlisted man. And I was young. I really didn't know. And that's when they got the 90-day wonders. On our ship now, they went ninety days to college, these guys and they were made Ensigns. And they were sent out to battleships, destroyers, cruisers. "You're in charge of communications. You're in charge of engineering." They didn't know what the hell was going on. And they had to run their ship, certain parts of it, and I said, "I don't think I'm ready for that."

Mr. McCann, when you taught at the Academy what subjects did you teach?

Civics and English. My prize student, Fr. John Smyth, former President of Maryville Academy. "Jeez," I said, "Father, if I had known, I should have given an A, you'd be a Bishop!" He said, "I don't want to be the Bishop."

That's terrific, Wow.

Four years there, I taught Civics, English, and Vocational Guidance. I still go back for the reunions. Kevin went with me in October. And Jim Maniola. Remember Jim Maniola from the Academy? He went from the Academy to the University (DePaul) He was Registrar. What a terrific guy. He died at ninety. So we went to the Academy Reunion. And, as a matter of fact, they're having another one next October with Harrington's, corned beef and cabbage. We really like that.

I was the only faculty guy left. They are all dead. All the priests that I knew from the Academy and from the University - all gone.

Is there anything, or subject, Kevin, you think we should have covered? Does anything come to mind?

Kevin. He covered quite a bit. It's nice hearing these stories again that we've heard especially with the grandchildren.

I went on the internet to show him the things about the USS Case and different things that way. It's good that he has a lot of good memories, because you hear about the war and a lot of the bad things about it. But there is a certain camaraderie, I think, that was built up with his shipmates and different people like that that he was friends with for a lot of years.

I repeat the words of Lou Gehrig, 1939, in Yankee Stadium on Lou Gehrig Day. He died of an incurable disease - now it is called Lou Gehrig's Disease, and his answer was "I consider myself the luckiest man alive." That's how I feel. I still have my wife, my family, eight granddaughters – one more beautiful than the other. Great.

Kevin: I'll agree with that.

That's a beautiful note, on which to end this interview. Thank you. Mr. McCann.

Interview resumes

We are just returning to the interview for a minute. We've been discoursing pleasantly on many of the wonderful ideas and notes of Mr. McCann's service and life. Kevin and I both agree that Mr. McCann would have made a wonderful officer in the Navy. And we were just moving on to the G.I Bill which, Mr. McCann, like the other vets, speaks highly of because in your case

Oh yes. My father could not have afforded it after I came out of the service in January of 1946. Times weren't that good although it was much cheaper tuition, but the GI Bill opened the door for me. I would have never gone for a Master's Degree. I would never have gone for a specialist degree.

Was your Master's Degree in

Education. It was a wonderful deal. We got books and supplies and \$75/month, and \$75 took care of my dates, the whole bit. It was wonderful.

The GI Bill ensured that you had a strong, timely start in education.

Absolutely.

And your son, Kevin, he is in the field of education. And he has the connection to DePaul University.

He followed me - teacher, Principal - a better principal than I ever was. He won a \$25,000 Milken award for teachers back in 1990-91

\$25,000 cash.

Well, it was a nice experience today. Thank you for having me.

Well, I can understand why you say that, sir, you are the luckiest man in the world, quoting Lou Gehrig.

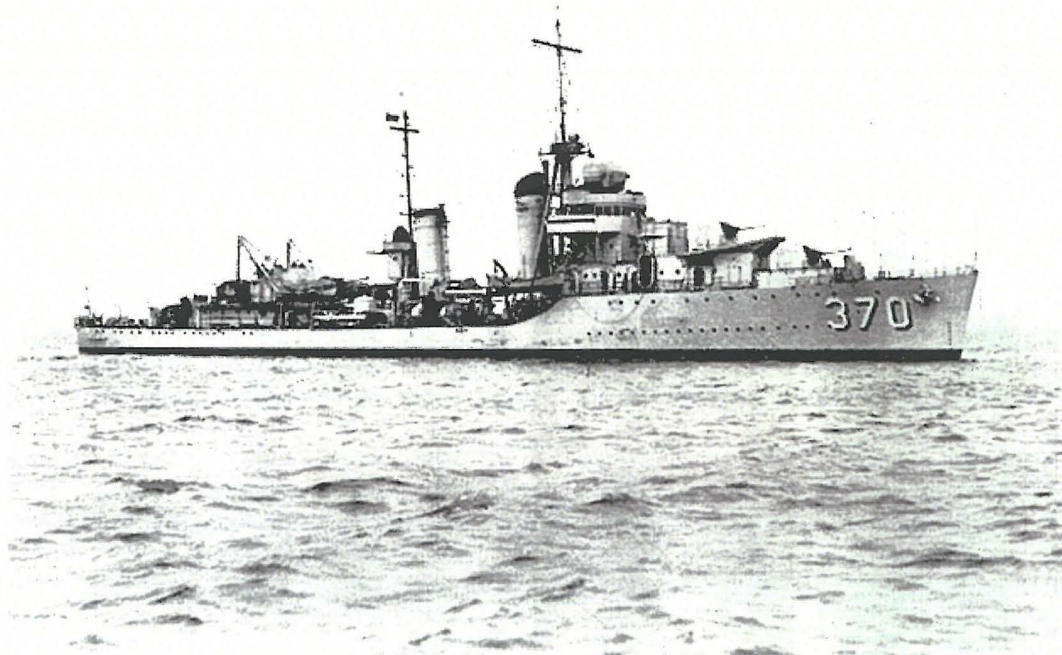
That's right.

Thank you.

Reader's Note:

The next two pages of photographs illustrate the interview and Mr. McCann's Honor Flight Chicago trip to Washington, DC with his son, Kevin, on Wednesday, August 31, 2011.

Radarman John McCann and his ship, the USS Case, during World War II in the Pacific.



digital.lib.ecu.edu/.../ph/NPCS/3NPCS001.jpg

The USS Case DD 370, a *Mahan*-class destroyer in the United States Navy during World War II. According to Wikipedia, "She was in a nest of destroyers at Pearl Harbor Navy Yard on 7 December 1941 during the attack on Pearl Harbor." She won 7 battle stars before being decommissioned on December 13, 1945 in Norfolk, Virginia.. Her complement numbered 158 officers and crew, and her speed was 37 knots.

Photographs taken of Mr. McCann on Wednesday, August 31, 2011 during his Honor Flight Chicago trip to Washington, DC. His companion for the day was his son Kevin who appears below in the green shirt with his Dad. More photos can be viewed online at <http://honorflightchicago.zenfolio.com/p882617271>.

