

James A. Moredock
Veteran
Firecontrolman 3rd Class
US Navy
World War Two

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Interviewers

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Q: Could you give me your full name, date of birth, and place of birth please?

JM: James Moredock, and my date of birth is 07/30/23, my place of birth is Rices Landing, Pennsylvania, which is on the Monongahela, so...Pittsburgh.

Q: Ok, what was your educational background prior to entering service?

JM: Just the high school, I did go to college for one semester...I was thinking I was going to be an officer, but that was too late as far as the war was concerned, so I volunteered and went in.

Q: Do you remember where you were when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

JM: Yeah, I was in Baltimore. Baltimore, Maryland. I was working in the Glenn Martin Aircraft Factory, that's when I came back to Pennsylvania, went to college for a bond...worked in a coal mine, so...get a little money...and then into the Navy.

Q: Do you remember your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

JM: It was hard to believe.

Q: Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?

JM: Yeah, I knew where Pearl Harbor was...

Q: You did? Ok, a lot of people at the time didn't...

JM: ...A friend of the family, my sister's friend, was in Pearl Harbor...which we were quite concerned about that.

Q: Now, could you have kept a job in the defense industry, or did you want to stay?

JM: No, maybe I could, but they'd have taken me some time during the war and I'd rather...go when everybody else was going.

Q: Ok, now you said you enlisted. Why did you select the Navy?

JM: Well, a couple of my friends were going into the Navy, and I thought it was a good deal.

Q: You enlisted in '43?

JM: Yes.

Q: R243? Ok, where did you have your induction?

JM: Pittsburgh.

Q: And where did you go for basic?

JM: Bainbridge, Maryland.

Q: How long were you there?

JM: I think it was six weeks.

Q: What was basic like?

JM: Well...military...marching...we did some...boxing, and other calisthenics, and they kept us busy so that we didn't have to worry too much about what we were up to.

Q: Now you...ended up...you mentioned here, in the electrical area?

JM: Yeah.

Q: How did you end up in there?

JM: Well, at Bainbridge they interviewed us and they assigned me to the fire control school, up in Newport, Rhode Island, and I probably should have gone for the year-Navy Air Force-because I had worked on airplanes, but instead, I ended up in fire control, and it was a pretty interesting and likeable school.

Q: How long was that school, do you remember?

JM: I think that was another six weeks, or maybe two months, I'm not sure...

Q: Ok, what things did you learn there?

JM: Electric currents, mainly it was direct current, because that's what systems they made on ships. And...the servomotors and the solenoids...and how to keep them operating.

Q: Now, with fire control meant that you operated the turrets and so on, how were they and the guns?

JM: Well, yeah, but we didn't have turrets, we just had an open gun...

Q: Oh, that's it! You were on a Destroyer escort...that's right, ok.

JM: Then we had twenty-millimeters which had electrical sighting, and a forty-millimeter which had a sight that was offset from the gun, and that controlled the gun...and then we had another electrical system up on the ridge which controlled the three-inch guns, and there were three of those on board. But they had to use matching dials so that when you were sighting, we had to make sure the gunners on the guns had the dials match to where you were pointing. Otherwise, you didn't get near your target. That didn't work too good if you missed or were too quick.

Q: Were you kept busy with the electrical systems? Were there a lot of problems?

JM: No, I didn't have much (laughs), that's the odd thing, everything was all sealed up, if something went wrong you took it back to shore, you got another unit and replaced the bad one, and it wasn't that much. And one thing we always had to keep checking was the Hedgehog System, which, it had firing pins that you put the hedgehog in. So, you used an electrical tool to make sure that circuits would complete when you fired it...Most of the time I was working at the gunner's base.

Q: Ok, now, when were you assigned a ship?

JM: I think I mentioned it in there, I'm not certain...give me a minute (grabs paper).

Q: (interrupts) October, I think it is, October '40?

JM: Yeah, probably.

Q: So, what ship were you assigned to?

JM: It was a Flaherty, D-135.

Q: So, this was a Destroyer escort?

JM: Yeah.

Q: Alright, how long were you on the Flaherty?

JM: Well, I was assigned to it for 18 months, and then there was an interval in which I went to a fire control school in Norfolk for about six weeks, and that was the period of time it took to go across the Atlantic and come back, so I ended up there.

Q: So, you were assigned Atlantic escort duty?

JM: Yes.

Q: Describe your duty on the Atlantic with the Flaherty.

JM: Well, much of the time we were on watch for submarines, that was around the clock, a twenty-four hour watch...we stood watch for four hours, and I was usually on a twenty-millimeter gun, just in case they had come to the surface....and for them to get the crew to battle stations, and that was—depending on where we were—we were in the North Atlantic which was pretty rough duty, because it'd be pretty cold from the winds and the rain and the breeze off the lake—I mean off the ocean (laughs).

Q: Any encounter with subs?

JM: What's that?

Q: Did you have any encounters with German subs?

JM: After I was assigned, the first trip, we made over to Gibraltar, and we took a convoy, I don't know, there must have been a couple-hundred ships in it, and just as we got to Gibraltar we had a submarine contact, and then we escorted, but it didn't hit any ships. But we went on into the Mediterranean with them, and then

the British took over and escorted them on into Italy. And we heard, after we got back to Casablanca, that once that convoy got to Italy, the Germans' planes flew in and bombed it pretty badly. I think that submarine must have come to the surface when they didn't know they were coming, and then they had their German air force ready for them. So, they took a pretty good beating. And when we contacted that submarine, there was a troop ship-a big ocean liner-and the whole task force had a system for re-orienting the ships, and that troop ship disappeared in the middle of the convoy so that the sub couldn't get to it. I thought that was a pretty slick maneuver.

Q: How many trips did you make across the Atlantic?

JM: I'd say six or seven...we'd usually stop at Casablanca, except for one.

Q: What was the Atlantic like in a DE?

JM: Well, we were such a small ship compared to the...

Q: (interrupts) What was it like to be on that ship during storms, and so on, in the Atlantic?

JM: Well, you had to strap yourself in the bunk when you slept. Otherwise (giggles), you'd end up falling out on the deck. And...it wasn't the place to be, but...it was duty. The worst thing was that we got into a bad storm, and instead of going over the waves, we went through one. I was on watch, on the gundeck (which is quite high), and there was about a foot of water on that deck all of a sudden. That time, the storm tore the three-inch-gun shelves right off the front of the ship, we felt pretty lucky that the darn things didn't explode. Things flying around, and the magazines...all kinds of scary things as far as we were concerned, we didn't know what could have happened.

Q: How was the food aboard ship?

JM: Oh, it was very good, except for a short period of time, and when we would go to Casablanca, we'd have a supply. So, we'd get to Casablanca, then we'd end up resupplying the ship-and fueling it-and coming back so the food was a yearly-good supply.

Q: What kind of entertainment did you have on the ship-did you ever get movies?

JM: A movie once in a while. We had one movie that wasn't too good of an idea, they had one of Lon Chaney as Wolfman, he was howling at the man in the moon. And this one kid took it to heart, and he went out that night-he was walking around the ship howling-he even looked crazy! We had one young, little guy-he was pretty fond of him, but he went in and said, "I'm gonna cut your throat", and he had a knife! And he grabbed that kid, then the kid bounced out of that bunk and never went back to sleep (laughing)!

Q: Did you hear-kind of an amusing story-about one of the Stewart's?

JM: Yeah, well, when we got the first submarine...that was when Easter, and the skippers were asking where he was during the action! And he says, "I was down in the head, cleaning my skivvies" (laughs ensue)! For the whole crew, we got

scared pretty bad because...the following day I was replacing the shelves for the ammunition and magazines for the twenty-millimeters, and when the gunners chief came around, I was shaking so much I could hardly get them in the darn [unclear]...He asked me what was the matter, and I said, "Well, yesterday when the action was going on, it pretty calmly just watching what was happening. But now I'm beginning to think those could have been the lucky people that sunk us and (laughs)...we'd have been fish food. So yeah, I know what you mean."

Q: How many were in your crew?

JM: Well, I always thought there was quite a few, but I guess there were about 150.

Q: Now, how many blacks did you have on the ship—just the Stewarts?

JM: I'd say they were all Stewarts and...I think it must have been eight or ten.

Q: Now, what kind of assignments did they have during an action—did they have any assignments at all?

JM: Yeah, they were usually assigned to...repair, if they had a shell come through they had to plug it up and make sure we didn't sink.

W: What were relationships like within the crew—did everyone get along pretty well?

JM: Yeah, and the Stewarts, they mixed with the crew, and they were pretty good. Very nice bunch of guys.

Q: They probably took care of the crew too, giving them food and whatever they needed, right?

JM: Well, no, they couldn't get away with that because the officers bought their own food, but we ate well anyways, and the officers had their own food lockers. Which, I imagine they ate well, because they were in the officers' mess.

Q: What were your officers like?

JM: Well, there was good officers and there were not-so-good officers. And we were pretty fortunate to have one officer, because one night, one of the ships was channeling, and they thought we were a submarine and they were going to ram us! And this officer turned all the lights on, and realized that they were coming for us...we were lucky he was there to turn the lights on. There was another officer, though, that was in control of the forty-millimeter, and when we went into action, he wouldn't order to fire the gun! He just stood there and watched, he didn't want to get involved in the action. I never thought much of him, and one night he was on the deck on the bridge, and I swear that I saw lights flash on the horizon at different times because there was somebody who had opened a door...Red light...I reported it to him and he said, "Oh, that's just the stars bouncin' off the water," and he wouldn't call radar or sound the radars—just check out the area to see if they could pick anything up. He'd always avoid something that might cause some action, and I never thought that was a good idea, because they would end up being lucky and slip in where we are...

Q: Now, you also had a story in here about when you were firing at a German submarine...one of the German crew members...could you tell about that?

JM: Yeah, the young German sailor came out of a hatch. There was one halfway between the climbing tower and the bow, he'd come out of there, and he ran the whole length of the ship and dove into the water. And everybody on the ship: "Yay!" As though they were watching the Olympics (laughing). I always thought he was a lucky son-of-a-gun. I don't think anybody shot at him, I think they turned their guns away from him because...somebody made a deal with him on the ship.

Q: They didn't pick him up or anything?

JM: Oh yeah, they picked them all up, and they would always jump off of their submarine opposite from where we were firing at them, so they were protected...

Q: Now you were in on the capture of a German submarine that was a U505?

JM: Yeah.

Q: Could you talk about that please?

JM: Well, when we got the first submarine, it stayed up a long time and fortunately, we fired a torpedo and missed, so they had realized that the submarine was going to stay on the surface long enough. And the skipper, who was in charge of commanding the escorts for the carrier, he was a former submariner. And he said, "The next one that stays up that long, we're going to bring it back," and darned if it didn't. And he put a crew in a boat, and went over then jumped into the submarine, closed all the valves, grabbed the decoding machine, and got it back on the ship. Then they started towing it with a carrier, and that's when the food went bad, because we were on our way to Casablanca but we couldn't go to Casablanca-they didn't want anyone to know we had it. And so, we turned around and started to tow that thing, and that carrier couldn't tow it very fast. It took us several days to get back to Bermuda, there was eventually a tug that had some speed, and pulled it right into Bermuda. And then, we really ate well, but while we were coming back the only thing we had was corn bread. Day after day (laughs). The carrier stopped by and gave us some ice cream one day, and that kind of brightened us up. But it didn't look too good for us for quite awhile until we got back to where we could eat, and we ate real well in Bermuda.

Q: That must've been quite a prize to bring a German sub back.

JM: Yeah, they gave us a Presidential Unit Citation for it, and then the fellas that jumped on the submarine, they ended up with quite a few medals-a Navy medal and some others, I think.

Q: Now what happened to the crew?

JM: They jumped....

Q: (interrupts) They just went over to the side and thought it would sink?

JM: Yeah, and then after they captured it...one of the ships went over to pick them all up and escort them to the carrier, and that's what we did every time.

Actually, they didn't lose too many crew members because they did abandon and get away from that submarine so that they didn't get hit.

Q: What was the carrier group you were with?

JM: It was a Guadalcanal, and they had planes, when we first got in contact with them the pilots were from the Enterprise-the Enterprise that sunk in the Pacific-and these boys were pretty hot pilots, and they'd fly in any kind of a storm. You know, it was amazing, the way they'd flown in onto that carrier because it wasn't a long flight deck, but they managed to...In a storm, they'd wait until the tail of the carrier went down, that's when the planes would hit it, and then they'd land on the deck and be caught by a cable. I thought they were great, but eventually they'd have trained pilots that they had put to sea, they didn't do quite so well.

Q: Were there any other incidents that you would like to mention?

JM: The pilots-one day the plane went off the front of the carrier-it was the first plane off, and something happened, and he just went right into the ocean and that was the last you'd saw of him, and right away they put every pilot who was available in a plane, sent them off that carrier so their nerves wouldn't stop them. I didn't think I would be (laughs)...I wouldn't want to be in a nervous situation. But anyway, they did a good job, and then after we captured the submarine, why, we could tell what the Germans were saying when they talked to each other-they didn't love chattering over the radio because it must have been a lonely thing out there, but since we knew what they were doing we knew right where they were. One night, a plane was able to catch two submarines that were refueling-this sub was refueling and supplying this other submarine-and he went down and hit them with bombs and blew one submarine apart, I never knew whether he got two of them or not, but there was one German blown right off the deck, and they picked him up-he was pretty badly wounded. But he was determined that he was going back to Germany and that Hitler was going to give him the Iron Cross (laughs). He didn't know how far it was from the United States back to Germany!

Q: You were on the Flaherty the entire time you were in service?

JM: Yeah.

Q: Ok, when were you discharged?

JM: ...Was it '46?

Q: March of '46.

JM: ...I was on the ship about eighteen months, I was in the Navy for three years.

Q: Did you ever get to see any USO shows while you were in service?

JM: Well, yeah, at the school up in Newport, Rhode Island, before I went to sea, they had one there, and that's about the only one I got to see because we were running back and forth all of the time.

Q: You never got much time in other countries, then, you were just basically at sea most of the time.

JM: ...Africa. And then we stopped-I don't know how we happened to be in the area-but we ended up in Porta Delgada, Portugal. Of course, they were neutral so they wouldn't let us go ashore. But we refueled there, and the tanker that came in and refueled us didn't supply us with any food, so we ended up so we could get back to Casablanca and pick up the task force there. But that was a beautiful place, I always wanted to go back and see what the rest of the island was like.

Q: After you were discharged, did you make use of the GI Bill at all?

JM: Yeah, I went to Penn State and got a degree in agriculture...

Q: How about the 52-20 club-did you ever use that?

JM: 52-20?

Q: It was like an unemployment insurance, twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks.

JM: ...Yeah. I guess when I first got out, I only used it for a few months since I was working in a coal mine before I went, they let me come back to the coal mines when I came out so that I could make enough money to start the college, and I made a couple thousand dollars from a few years in college. That helped a lot.

Q: Did you join any veteran's organizations at all?

JM: American Legion.

Q: Are you active?

JM: Well, I belong, but I don't...I stop in once in a while and see how they're doing.

Q: Ok, did you ever stay in contact with anyone that was in service with you?

JM: No, I kind of wished I had, because the task force had a reunion at one time, and they had the reunion in Chicago where that submarine was. And they invited the German crew that was on that submarine to come over, and they were at that reunion. One of the things they were talking about-the captain of that submarine-he was so despondent after they captured him while he was in prison someplace in the states, so he hung himself. And I kind of think the crew (laughs) really gave him a hard time because they didn't think he should have given up the ship. If they hadn't, they probably would have been dead Germans.

Q: How do you think your time in the service had an effect or changed your life?

JM: Well, it made me realize I had to get myself educated (laughs), get a good position and work hard, but the one thing-I was on the ship one night, talking to the officer that was on duty...I said, "Gee, when I get outta this service I'm gonna have a big family." And he says, "This world's too terrible to raise kids, I'm not gonna have any." I said, "Ok, I'll have my three and your three also!" Darned if it didn't, I got six kids (laughing).

Q: Now do you ever go down to the Slater?

JM: I was there just the other day, I took some of my grandchildren with me, and they were quite impressed with the ship.

Q: How does it feel to you to be on a similar ship to the one you were on?

JM: Well, it kind of brought back a lot of old memories. And some of the things that happened on the ship, I thought it was good to have that one ship still going, so, wouldn't do bad at all.

Q: Ok, well thank you very much for your interview.

JM: You're welcome, glad to do it.