

**Joseph R. Malfucci  
Veteran**

**Margaret Addeo  
Interviewer**

**Interviewed at his home  
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Hi, my name is Joseph Malfucci. I reside in PA., right now. I am originally from Brooklyn New York and my time in the Navy was approximately 2 and a half years. I went into the Navy in 1943 and I was discharged after VJ day in 1945 October. I had certain experiences in the Navy that are funny and one of them is, as some people would know, in the Navy you go through a ritual when you cross the equator. And before you cross the equator, if you have never been across, you are known as a pollywog. Once you cross the equator then you become a shellback. But there is a ritual that you have to go through that I will explain to you. This is on board ship, on my destroyer. They saved the garbage for one week. After saving garbage for one week, you will have to use your imagination to get the feeling of the smell. So the ritual goes like this: as a pollywog you have to crawl through this garbage trough, it is a big trough they saved the garbage in. And at the end of the garbage there is a fellow, usually the fattest one on the ship, that sits at the end of that garbage trough and he is known as King Neptune. He is fat, very big, has a big belly and on that belly they put grease, pepper and you have to kiss it at the end of that garbage trough. And when you kiss it, they rub your face in it. Then they cut big chunks of hair out of your head if you have long hair. After that I couldn't have long hair, it was all shaved off.

**Interviewer:** that is a funny story.

**Malfucci:** The other funny story is when we went through the Panama Canal. The tide difference between the Atlantic and the Pacific side is quite a difference because of the two oceans there is a big tide difference. At that time we went through the canal half of the crew was allowed to go on liberty early in the morning and they had to be back by 6 PM. At that time when half of the crew was getting off the ship they had to climb what is called a gangplank. The gangplank is pretty level at that time but when they came back due to the tide difference the ship had dropped quite a bit and the gangplank was on an angle. They had one heck of the job getting these guys back on the ship. Because they had been drinking and it was hilarious.

**Interviewer:** So everybody watched them trying to negotiate the gangplank?  
Yup that is right! So that is the funny part.

**Interviewer:** Tell us a little bit about where were you? Where were your general campaigns and theater?

**Malfucci:** I was in the Pacific, South Pacific. Six months in Hawaii, going to school. I was a radar technician. My duties aboard ship were to maintain the radar. I also was responsible for a few other things on the ship but basically it was maintaining the radar. I can remember one experience where the radar antenna which is on top of the mast of the ship had stopped working. It was my duty to find out why. We found out there was a problem up on top of the mast. I had to climb up that mast while we were out at sea. Fortunately, it was pretty calm and we were able to climb the mast. I didn't go alone. One of the officers came with me. We climbed the mast and

when we got to the top we strapped ourselves in and I was able to fix the radar equipment without too much trouble.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell us what was wrong with it?

**Malfucci:** It was just a broken part in the radar housing. It had an access panel which we opened up, replace the part and then we went down the mast.

Interviewer: So that was about 50 feet high you say?

**Malfucci:** It was about 50 feet, yes. We also had some fun time while I was in the Navy. The ships carried their own beer for consumption but you couldn't drink that beer while you are on duty or out at sea. When you got into an area near the islands someplace, the Seabees would construct on these islands, they had big refrigerators and you had your quantity of beer which you took on the island and you exchanged your beer for cold beer which was in the refrigerator. You had your little party and by sundown you had to get back to your ship. We were in a battle area. We weren't sure how long the Japanese would be around. Fortunately, we did not have too many problems. With all the action this ship was in, my most fearful time was when we went through a typhoon. We almost lost the ship but fortunately we had a good captain and he knew exactly what to do and how to control that ship during a terrible storm.

**Interviewer:** Why is a storm so dangerous to your ship in particular?

**Malfucci:** Well, let me explain a little about what happens when you use one of these ships.

Interviewer: I don't think we mentioned yet what type of ship you were on.

**Malfucci:** Well it was a destroyer. A destroyer is one of the smallest ships in the Navy fleet. It is about 300 feet long and carries about 250 men. Basically a destroyer is to the Navy what an infantryman is to the Army. The destroyer is the part of the fleet that investigates what may be possibly an enemy target or an enemy ship. They are the first ones out there to inspect a target. And the destroyer did that job. There were larger ships in the fleet besides the destroyer; battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers which are all part of the battle fleet.

**Interviewer:** What was the name of your destroyer?

**Malfucci:** The USS, the name of that ship was the USS Hickox, HICKOX. This is a picture of that ship, right there. And you can see that my station on that ship was right, between the two stacks, was in a compartment there that housed the radar equipment. We were in the South Pacific and at that time there was no air-conditioning on the ship like there is today. So, I at night, at night being in the south Pacific it gets pretty hot and sticky. So I would, instead of sleeping in a pool of sweat, I would get out of my bunk at night, take my life jacket, crawl under the torpedo tubes which were in the middle of the ship and carry my life jacket with me in case the ship went down. Your life jacket was your best friend when you're in the Navy. The rifle's the best friend to an infantry man when he is in the Army.

**Interviewer:** So what would happen during the typhoon?

**Malfucci:** Well the typhoon had gotten so bad, let me tell you a little bit about how a ship operates. When they consume fuel you have oil tanks which run the ship. But as you use that oil you have to take into your oil tanks, you have to take in seawater. And the reason for that is you have to keep the ship at a proper balance. And it has to ride in the water properly or it won't work right. It's like, well if I can make an analogy, if the ship is not balanced properly it does not run properly. You can't steer properly and it doesn't ride the water. So you have problems

operating that ship if you don't take in the seawater. When we encountered this typhoon we were very low on fuel and we were about to take on fuel because we had rendezvous with the oil tankers and we were about to fuel the ship. So Capt. Wesson had a very hard decision to make when we hit this typhoon because of the lack of fuel which was very low he didn't know whether to fuel the ship and get rid of the seawater. Because if you got rid of the seawater the ship would of been lighter due to the weight of the water being gone so now you're riding in the water like a cork and your chances of the ship being flipped over are very strong. We did lose three destroyers that flipped over and exploded. Because the seawater got down into the stacks and the boilers blew up. So we were lucky, Capt. Wesson knew what he was doing and brought us through the typhoon. We got banged up a little bit, we couldn't steer any more. We had to steer with our engines since we couldn't use our propeller, I mean, rudder to steer because all the electrical equipment was out of order. The rudder on a ship is steered by electricity and the commands you give it from the bridge of the ship.

**Interviewer:** So you had a manual way of steering?

**Malfucci:** We did have a manual way of steering. The after apartments were flooded due to the storm. Once they pumped them out we were able to steer manually because we were in contact with the bridge where the captain was, who directed the commands as to what way we should go. And that is the way we steered the ship manually, there was a hand crank that turned the rudder whatever direction you wanted to go.

**Interviewer:** So during a typhoon what's the best, what direction should you head?

**Malfucci:** Well during a heavy storm like that, the best way to ride that storm out is to head into the wind at a slow speed and just ride the storm out which is what Capt. Wesson did. He kept the ship going into the wind at about 3 knots which is about 6 miles an hour which is very slow. And we rode the storm out and when it calmed down we headed to a direction to the South Pacific islands that had repair ships. These repair ships were very large and destroyers used to pull up alongside of them if they needed repair work. They also had large, what they call, floating dry docks. These dry docks were big enough to take a ship out of water and do their repair. Our ship came out of the water and we had to work on it all night. We got it in the dry dock. We were there with a submarine which was getting repaired. And this is the funny part because the crew had to work on the ship all night. They sandblasted the bottom of the ship because when you're in seawater a long time the bottom of the ship accumulates barnacles. And these barnacles, if you don't get rid of them, eventually slow down the ship. So when we got into the dry dock they sandblasted the bottom of the ship and then we had to paint it with this thick gunk. I call it gunk. That's what the submarines use on the outside of their sub to keep the barnacles from forming. So the crew had to put this stuff on the bottom of the ship and most of it was on us because we started to play with it by throwing it at each other. That was the funny part. Other than that I will say my experience in the Navy was something that I will never forget. Some of it was funny, some of it was scary and I can say the biggest fear I had was going through that typhoon because you had no control.

**Interviewer:** Was that more scary than a battle would you say?

**Malfucci:** Yes because at least in a battle fighting planes or a Japanese ship you had just as much equipment as they did and you are sort of on equal terms. But with a typhoon you had no control, no control at all. And you were just left at the mercy of the weather.

**Interviewer:** Will one thing else we would like to know is how did you feel about your equipment and the ship as compared to the enemy? Did you feel you were very well-equipped, did you feel that the equipment worked well?

**Malfucci:** Well I will say this; I think the American Navy was very well equipped. We had good equipment made by big companies like Raytheon, which was big electronic equipment, they made radar. General Electric was one of our suppliers. And Western electric was another company that made equipment for the Navy. So we had very good equipment. The Japanese were very, very competitive. They had a good Navy and they gave us a lot of trouble.

**Interviewer:** How did you feel about daily life on the ship? Did you enjoy, was a pleasant surroundings, was the food good? Tell us about daily life.

**Malfucci:** Well if you weren't in a battle area, it was like being on a cruise. The weather was fine, was hot sometimes, hot and sticky in the South Pacific. Basically, it was very pleasant. The food was pretty good on board ship. Not as good as being on a big ship for the larger the ship the more food you could carry. We had refrigeration and we kept a certain amount of meat in refrigeration. The food was adequate. But if you are out at sea for a long time being a small ship you couldn't carry that much food. So we used to get resupplied by either a larger ship that had extra food or meeting the supply ships when we would get supplied with oil, would get extra food.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever get any decorations, medals or commendations?

**Malfucci:** The ship was, commended, yes, by the secretary of the Navy at that time, I don't remember his name. Adm. Nimitz gave us a commemoration for the ship and the action we were in. We were in the battle of the Philippines. We were also in the battles of Guam, Tinian and Okinawa which was a chain of islands leading up to Japan. And these islands had to be secured because the Air Force who flew B-29s used these islands as landing places before they attacked Japan with the atomic bomb.

**Interviewer:** Now how did you feel about the use of the atomic bomb?

**Malfucci:** Well, I felt that it was a necessary thing to do and the Japanese, at the time, didn't look like they were going to give in to well. And it meant saving lives. Because if we had to have attacked the Japanese islands with the Army and the Navy there would be a lot more lives lost both on the Japanese side and the American side. So they felt that, I think it was President Hoover, no, what was his name, Pres. Truman gave the order to use the bomb. There were two bombs, two cities were bombed, Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**Interviewer:** Now do you think that most people feel that as terrible as that was that it would've been worse that more lives would've been lost if that bomb wasn't used?

**Malfucci:** Yes, there would've been many more lives lost both on the Japanese side and on the American side. Definitely and when I heard that the bomb, bombs were used, I felt that it was the best thing that Pres. Truman did and it saved many lives.

**Interviewer:** Can you remember where you were when you heard about VJ day?

**Malfucci:** I was already out the Navy. I was discharged in St. Albans Naval Hospital on Long Island. And I was already home.

**Interviewer:** What was it like on, was there a lot of celebrating? Do you remember what it was like on VJ day?

**Malfucci:** Oh yes, I was home in Brooklyn New York and we had a grand old party.

**Interviewer:** Where was the party?

**Malfucci:** On the block, it was a block party.

**Interviewer:** Did a lot of neighbors attend? Were there a lot of servicemen there?

**Malfucci:** No, it was mainly neighbors and the block party was basically on the block that I lived.

**Interviewer:** How did you feel after all you had been through? What were your feelings about this victory?

**Malfucci:** Well, I guess I was one of the happiest guys to get home in one piece and it was just a glorious feeling.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever think you would want to stay in the Navy longer than you did?

**Malfucci:** Yes I did. I definitely wanted to stay in but my dad said to me I think you have seen enough.

**Interviewer:** I remember you telling us, when we were kids, and you would tell us stories about the Navy that you wanted to fly and that you were underage and your parents would not allow it. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

**Malfucci:** I did want to fly but flying in the Navy was one of the most dangerous things, you actually had to be nuts to fly in the Navy. Because the life of a naval pilot wasn't very long especially during the war, it's a lot different today. I did want to fly but my mother and father would not sign me in as I was under age. You had to enlist for that type of duty. You couldn't be drafted. And that is the story of my life in the Navy. I enjoyed it very much. I went in as a young man, I would say a young kid at 19 and I came out, I would say as a man.

**Interviewer:** And how did it change, do you feel it had a way of changing your life? How did the experience, did it have any general effect on your life? Would you say it changed your life in any way?

**Malfucci:** Yes, I think it did. It made me think more about life. And by being in the Navy and seeing what I did see and the action I saw, in the men I saw getting killed, I guess it made me realize that war is a waste of time. It solves nothing and the sooner the world gets rid of having wars the better off they will be. That is my story.

**Interviewer:** Well, we thank you dad. That was a great story and it certainly imparts to all of us things we wouldn't otherwise know and we thank you so much.

**Malfucci:** You are welcome! I am glad to do it for you.