

An Interview with Deacon Dominick Casadone
WWII Navy Veteran
By Michele Starkey

We recently had the opportunity to interview Dominick Casadone who serves as a Deacon at Sacred Heart Parish. Casadone almost was not able to serve in the Navy because of a birth defect but told us, "After the surgery to correct the birth defect, I volunteered to join the Navy." He was 20 years old when he shipped off to basic training at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

What duty were you assigned after basic training?

"Everybody and their brothers were volunteering for submarine duty because you received 70% more sea pay and I wanted that also but didn't receive it. I ended up being assigned to the USS Nashville."

Tell us about your job on the ship.

"I became the Captain's Yeoman. I was the sailor who handled all of the Captain's orders and was his right-hand man. For instance, I did the court-martials and important paperwork. I stayed on the bridge with the Captain most of the time."

Where did the USS Nashville serve?

"While I was a member of the crew of the USS Nashville we made a total of 25 missions and participated in many different raids and invasions. We escorted an aircraft carrier to the Pacific and in April we took part in General Doolittle's first raid on Tokyo. It was called the 'Doolittle Raid on Japan' and we were escorting the aircraft carrier, Hornet."

You actually met General Douglas MacArthur?

"We took part in the raids on the Solomons, Marcus and Wake Islands and supported landings in Bougainville, New Guinea and Cape Gloucester. The USS Nashville was General Douglas MacArthur's flagship and I have to share a funny story. I met the General many times – I even tried on his hat and held his corn cob pipe. He was genuinely down-to-earth and easy to talk to. I was standing near him and part of my name was blocked, so instead of Casadone, the only part that was visible on my uniform was, 'sadone,' and MacArthur called me "Sad One. We spent a great deal of time together chatting about our lives back home and ordinary things. I even have his autograph which he readily gave out to any of the sailors who asked him for it. One day, he spotted my St. Joseph's Missal on my desk and he told me, 'You'll never go wrong reading from this book.' I believe that General MacArthur was a man of God," and he autographed the inside cover of my Missal. Then, he and his staff autographed a one dollar bill for me."

What was the worst day aboard the ship?

"It while we were en route to the Philippines to assist in some amphibious landings to support MacArthur's invasions. It was December 13, 1944, and a Japanese kamikaze pilot crashed into the ship and killed over 150 men and 150 more were wounded. It was a tragic day for so many."

Where you injured in the attack?

"This is one of the many blessings in my life and reaffirms that God was with me always. Our crew was serving in four hour shifts around the clock – four hours on and four hours off. You had to grab shut-eye when you could and because the confines of the area below deck were so stifling, many sailors would grab a blanket and go topside to get some shut-eye. I headed below to find my blanket and it was missing because someone had taken it.

I decided to stay below and climbed up on my rack to sleep. The next thing I knew I woke up to explosions and guns firing and I was not able to get topside to my battle station. We had been attacked by a Japanese kamikaze pilot. It was an unbelievably sad day but I know that God pulled me through for a purpose and for that, I am thankful. We buried those Americans at Leyte Gulf and years later their remains would be returned to American soil. ”

What happened to the USS Nashville after the attack?

“We limped back to the Puget Sound Navy Yard and the repairs were made to the ship and then we returned to War in May of 1945. We participated in operations in both the South China Sea and the East Indies. After Japan surrendered, we headed to Shanghai and we took part in Operation ‘Magic Carpet’ returning sailors and marines back to the U.S.”

How long did you serve in the Navy?

“I served for 3 years and 3 months. After I was discharged in April of 1946 I married my childhood sweetheart, Frances Tino, and we have two children, Carol and Richard. We just celebrated our 65th wedding anniversary in May of 2011. I received the Asiatic Pacific Campaign Medal with 7 Stars, Philippine Liberation Ribbon with 2 Stars, American Theater Medal, Victory Medal and the Good Conduct Medal. I was also recommended for a Commendation Ribbon for Performance of Duty by the Commander of the 7th Fleet and Commended for Performance of Duty by the Commanding Officer of the USS Nashville.”

Where did you work after the War?

“I didn’t have two nickels to rub together but we had to eat. I worked in sporting goods temporarily and finally went to work for Stauffer Chemical in Dobbs Ferry in the Research Department. I ended up at IBM in White Plains for 34 years until I retired and was ordained a Deacon in 1974.”

When did you relocate to Newburgh and why?

“We moved to Newburgh to be closer to our daughter and enjoy our grandson. I became active with Sacred Heart Church and having been serving as a Deacon for the past 24 years now. I am involved with Catholic Charities, the American Legion and of course, VFW Post 1161. In 2000, I was named ‘Man of the Year’ by the Holy Name Society of Sacred Heart. I am very proud of that. In 2004, I received the Catholic War Veteran’s Walter T. Kunowski Memorial Distinguished Service Award for Community Service and in 2010; IBM submitted my name to the White House as a retiree who is actively involved in community service. I received the President’s Silver Star Volunteer Award.”

The VFW Post 1161 meets every third Friday of every month in the City of Newburgh Post 973 Bldg. The meetings begin at 1:00 pm and you can call Quartermaster Steve Fanizzi at (845)236-7295 or Commander Donald Ruckdeschel Sr. at (845)562-7828 for more details.