

**Paul Frament
Veteran**

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Interviewers**

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DMNA Headquarters**

This is an interview with Paul Frament at the DMNA Headquarters Latham, NY Feb 12 2002 at approximately 10:30am. The interviewer is Michael Russert.

Q: First what I would like to do is talk a little bit about your background. Where were you born and raised?

PF: Well I was born and raised in Cohoes, NY. I enlisted when I was seventeen. I went right out of High School and into the Navy.

Q: What year was that?

PF: 1943.

Q: Why did you enlist at that time?

PF: Well all my friends were going and my Guidance Counselor told me if I didn't graduate in three years they were going to Draft me. I was taking a college entrance course at the time. I was taking all the toughest subjects and I found it a little bit more than I could handle. So I said well, I'll go in; which I did.

Q: So when Pearl Harbor happened you were in High School?

PF: Yes.

Q: How did you hear about...

PF: It was a Sunday afternoon, I'll never forget it. It was December 7th, the news came over the radio. That's what we had then radio we didn't have TV. We all went outside and all our neighbors and everyone saying "well finally we're in", which we expected to be in anyway the War had been going on in York for quite some time.

Q: What was your own personal reaction to this?

PF: Well, that's been a long time for me to remember my own personal reaction that, uh, I would probably be going into the service, like one of my brothers was already in. We were four brothers, we were all in the service.

Q: What branches of the service were your brothers in?

PF: Of my brothers three in the Army, and I was the only one in the Navy.

Q: Why did you pick the Navy?

PF: That seemed more glamorous to me at the time. There was a lot of movies on about the Navy and I remembered when I was interviewed I said I wanted to be a machine gunner on a PT [Patrol Torpedo] Boat. Now if I had to do it over again I would be different but at the time that's what I thought I wanted to do.

Q: Where did you take your Basic Training?

PF: Sampson, New York.

Q: What were you training to do?

PF: Well Basic Training we were just trained to get in shape, I boxed Golden Gloves while I was at Sampson. Then since I asked to be a Machine Gunner on a PT boat, they sent me to Gunnery School in Newport, RI. From there I was transferred to Camp Bradford Virginia for amphibious training. I was assigned to a crew on an LST [Landing Ship, Tank]. After my training down there, and assigned to the crew I went to Boston to pick up the ship. The ship was just a hull then. We spent a couple of months in Boston...

Q: So this was an LST?

PF: An LST, yes. Well they worked 24 hours a day we used to go over on the ship even at night time, putting on supplies, getting it ready for shakedown cruise.

Q: So was most of your service on an LST?

PF: It was all on an LST. After that I spent my time on the LST until I came back and was discharged.

Q: Were you on the same LST?

PF: It was the same one yes, LST 926.

Q: Could you tell us about your experiences then, starting with...

PF: The time I was on the LST? Well we did our shakedown cruise and went down the Atlantic Coast... Well we stopped in NYC and we picked up a smaller landing craft on our main deck and then went down the coast to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba while we were waiting to go through the Canal. Those times you had to spend a couple of weeks when you were down there before you could go through the Canal. It was that busy, it was one ship after another. So after going through the Canal we went up to San Deigo, then over to Pearl Harbor where we picked up an outfit of Black Sea Bees. We took them to Guam. We were all alone and at that time there was a lot of Sub activity. If we wanted a Sub, we traveled alone which was unusual. We dropped them off and that night we pulled out and that Japs bombed the hell out of Guam that night. From Guam we went on down to Mantis and then down to New Guinea. From New Guinea, went down through

The Solomon's down to Guadalcanal. That was the farthest south we got, Guadalcanal. Guadalcanal by the way, I had a first cousin that was killed in Guadalcanal that has my same name. They named the Destroyer Escort after him, the same as the one here in Albany. So we came up through Guadalcanal to Bougainville. We picked up a Sherman Tank Outfit on Bougainville and we went and made D-Day Invasions at Luzon, in the Philippines.

Q: Could you describe your reactions to that. That was your first time in combat?

PF: Well the first time, before we made the invasion we were going up through The Straights in the Philippines and we had been under attack right along, ever since we left Guam there were nightly attacks. Then we started traveling in convoys, and there were a lot of flaks thrown up. The first time we got a plane was before the invasion in Luzon. This plane came right, they used to come out of the sun at night. They came right at us, in fact I could see the pilot. His wing guns were going and bouncing off my gun. I was the Gun Captain on the Forward Twin 40. We got that first plane and I got a call from...I also had the Com Talker Helmet on... I got a call from The Bridge and they asked me "why I didn't concentrate some of our fire on the second plane". I said "What Second Plane?" We never saw the second plane we were too excited with the first. The Captain wanted to speak to the Forward Gunnery Officer. So I turned around and he was crawling out from under my Gun Tub [Laughter]. I handed him my headset and he turned around and he asked me why I didn't concentrate some of my fire on that second plane. Well needless to say we never saw the second plane. Then we hit... It was New Year's Day... that we made our D-Day Invasion in Luzon, Lingayen Gulf. We hit the beach and then we pulled off the beach and we laid in the Gulf right under the guns of the Battleship California, it was firing over us all day long. The Japanese were coming out in small speedboats. They had these small speedboats and the front of them were loaded with TNT and they would crash into the side of the ship. One came up between our sister ship and our ship and crashed into the Shaft Alley and all the men in the Engine Room were drown in that ship. Their also coming out and swimming under boxes and they would throw grenades up in the Gun Tubs or they would climb up the anchor chains. So every man on the ship was issued a weapon if he didn't have one. I had a Thompson sub machine gun and everyone had a weapon. If anything floated around in the ship you immediately fired on them.

So that outfit of Sherman Tanks we brought into Lingayen Gulf went on down to Manila and most of the fellas, that we found out later, that we got real friendly with lost their lives in the Battle of Manila [Pause]. That's pretty much it on Lingayen Gulf, from there that was, I said it was... New Year's Day, January 1st we made that D-Day Invasion. Then we went on over to rendezvous [unclear] to go to the invasions of Okinawa. That convoy that we were in was literally thousands of ships as far as the eye could see, were all ships. I remember that we had a lot of Sub activity one night while we were standing gun watch, which we're always on the guns. At Sunrise and Sunset the gun was cocked we were ready to fire because

that's when most of the attacks came on. We got a warning that there was sub activity and a sub surfaced between our ship and another ship; one of the fella's thought it was a whale [Laughter], and that convoy opened up and those Sub Chasers came down in between and it was something to see. Boy if you were right on that Sub you didn't stand a chance.

So then we went on to the Invasion of Okinawa. We hit the beach D-Day at Okinawa and there was a lot of plane activity. One of our Spotter Planes came in low over us and Chief Gunner's made on the machine gun up forward, he gunned down one of our Spotter Planes. It was hard to know which plane was ours or theirs. It was an unfortunate thing. There was a lot of activity when we hit the beach at Okinawa. That week we pulled out into a convoy and left Okinawa. A typhoon hit within a couple of weeks at Buckner Bay and a couple of our sister ships were up on the reef when we got back. We spent about, I would say better than a month riding out that typhoon. When we got back as I said these ships were on the reefs. From there we started running Milk Runs between Saipan and Tinian to Okinawa.

Q: What do you mean by Milk Runs?

PF: Milk Runs, well in other words before we were making D-Day Invasions Okinawa was pretty much the decisive battle out in the Pacific. [Remembers] Well we made one more D-Day Invasion, Ie Shima. We hit Ie Shima that was our third invasion. From then, we would run these Milk Runs, bringing in supplies and ammunition from Saipan and Tinian which was our main Bomber Base that they were bombing Tokyo. I used to watch them all day long. The B-29's would take off to go out on their bombing missions to Tokyo and all of the next day they would be coming back. There wasn't a day that went by that you didn't see one drop in the Bay because they would come back with a shot up wing or something like that. We used to go over to the airfield and they would let us take a ride. We would go up in the B-29. One time I was in the Bomber's... right in the nose of the B-29... in the Bomber's seat. The plane had just gotten a new wing and the pilot took it up and went into a nose dive. That was quite a thrill looking at the ocean when you're going down, straight down [Laughter]. So I did that a couple of times but that was enough of that.

Q: Did you ever fly a mission in one of them?

PF: No, no. They just took us up after they had repaired the plane. They would take you up for a ride, you know. So then from there, we were on our way back to Pearl Harbor to pick up an outfit of Marines to hit Tokyo Proper. When they dropped the Atomic Bomb, that was pretty much, well that was the end of the war as far as the Pacific was concerned.

Q: What was your reaction hearing about the Atomic Bomb?

PF: [Sigh] Oh, very relieved because Tokyo Rose was coming on daily, you know. Saying "you fellas, were going to throw everything we got at you". They said they

“had so many thousands of planes left that when we hit the beach on D-Day in Tokyo Proper it wasn’t going to be any piece of cake”. I didn’t get back right away they named our ship a Military Government Ship and we went around to islands that were bypassed during the War.

Q: Could you explain what it means to bypass islands?

PF: Well there were so many islands out in the Pacific it wasn’t necessary to hit every island. If you just bypassed them and took over that island the other of them were just shut off. The Japanese Archipelago, really Okinawa was the key. That was the large one. We went to [Thinks] smaller islands in that Archipelago that we couldn’t even get into it with an LST. Which we normally hit the beach and we are able to open our bow doors and drop the ramp. In these cases the coral reefs were so massive that we had an amphibious duck aboard and we would go ashore with the duck and climb right up on the coral reef. We took the arms away, set up government. It was pretty much a peaceful thing.

Q: You never had any resistance?

PF: No, no resistance at all.

Q: Did you have anyone with you that spoke Japanese?

PF: Oh yes. We took on a Military Government Group which there were interpreters and lawyers and everyone that was necessary to set up or do the job that had to be done. I used to go ashore at many of these parties. I don’t remember exactly why, whether it was my choice or whether it was a duty I had to perform at the time.

Q: How long did you do this, act as a Government Ship?

PF: Well let’s see... that would be at least six months or maybe more. Probably along that time. Then our ship finally did head back. We stopped at Pearl Harbor again on the way back. We had made a couple of stops in Pearl Harbor during the War out for supplies and when we went back our ship was going to be decommissioned in San Francisco. I went from San Francisco to Lido Beach in New York for discharge.

Q: When were you discharged?

PF: The 18th of May, 1946.

Q: How did you feel when you arrived back home?

PF: [Laughter] Well, I told you that I was seventeen when I enlisted I wasn’t quite twenty yet when I was discharged. I spent a little over two and a half years, most of it out in the Pacific. It was probably one of the greatest feelings of my life to get back home. It was not what you would call enjoyable but it was an experience I am glad I had but wouldn’t want to do it again.

Q: How do you think the War changed your life?

PF: Well it took a lot of steam out of me at the time. I can remember when I was in High School I had lots of ambition and lots of things I wanted to do. When I came back I had a lot of the steam taken out of me. I would say it took a couple of years for me to get back to where I pretty much got over the way it was out there.

Q: What happened to you when you returned? Your education, did you continue your education?

PF: Well yes I went back to High School and that didn't work too well either. So then I went to the Veterans Vocational School in Troy and took Machine Design. I got a job in the Arsenal and I was able to work my way up to Production Planning Supervisor, which was a good job. I had a good job in the Arsenal. I would say the Arsenal treated me good.

Q: Do you belong to any Veterans Groups or do you go to any meetings?

PF: I am a life member of the DAV [Disabled American Veterans]. I tried a couple of Veterans Groups but I found that I wasn't too much of a "joiner". Like I said I am a life member in the DAV because I felt as though I should belong to something. I went to meetings for a couple of years and then I dropped out of it.

Q: Do you go to any of the reunions? Are you in contact with any of your...

PF: That's an unfortunate thing. I get the DAV magazine every month and I look for reunions of my ship, they never have any. We didn't have a very close relationship between the Officers and the Crew. It's unfortunate but that's the way it was. I remember when we crossed the Equator it was a real battle between the Officers and the Crew. Our Skipper was a Mustang who came up through the ranks. He didn't like his Officers and they didn't like him. We were more or less caught right in the middle. He sat out there on the Bridge all day long from sunrise to sunset while that celebration, whatever you would call it when you would cross the equator. It left a lot of bad feelings then. Some of the Officers took it real bad. They figured they weren't treated right. But they all got treated the same, that was the thing about crossing the equator. If you hadn't been across before, Officers or Crewman didn't make any difference, you went through the same treatment. I remember our Executive Officer, he had one of those small mustaches like Hitler had. Maybe a little smaller than yours [Referring to interviewer with laughter] but he was quite proud of it. They shaved half of it off on him. He went around the ship for at least a couple of weeks or more with just a half a 'stache until he shaved the rest of it off. It was an experience, for a War or two. All my brothers came back too. We all came back alive, we are very fortunate. No one was killed on my ship, that was fortunate too.

Q: You said that one of the first things you did was take a Black CB's Group. What was the relation between the sailors and....

PF: Oh well we had a couple of black men aboard our ship. At that time in the Navy they were Mess Men. We had bunks three high, I had the bottom bunk and one of the Mess Men had the bunk above me. We got along fine. No I never saw any racial problems between the blacks and the whites. I don't know how racial problems happen, I worked in the Arsenal and we had blacks in the Arsenal and blacks as supervisors and we never had any problems.

Q: How do you think about, I have read about LST's and how they handled in high seas, what is your reaction to that?

PF: They were like a cork, you know. We rode out maybe three typhoons when we were out there in the Pacific, and they're worse than the invasions. Typhoons are the scariest things I ever went through. The waves are like mountains. We had to stand Gun Watch, even in the typhoon. We were out on the bow, as I said I was a Gun Captain on the Forward Twin Forty and we would stand Gun Watch. The ship would go up a wave like this [Shows hands sloping upward], it actually climbed the wave. The bow of the ship would go out over the wave like you were hanging over it like you were looking into a valley until you got so far over and then your ship would go down, down into the valley and up again. You would walk along the deck in the Crew's Quarters, and the decks actually wave like that [Up and down motion] when you were walking on them. You wondered if the ship was going to hold together. That first typhoon there that we were in after the invasion of Okinawa, we started out with about forty- five ships. When it was over and we got back there was only about twenty-seven ships. It wasn't that they went down, if they couldn't stay with the convoy they just left them because you had to maintain a certain amount of headway to keep from floundering.

Q: Do you think there is anything you would like to add?

PF: I suppose there is things I would think of later if I remember. It's been over fifty years, can you imagine that over fifty years. It seems like yesterday. Some of the things I could probably add I couldn't add while my wife is sitting down at the other end of the table [Laughter]. They would probably mostly be personal things, you know. The fellas and I were young and single then when we used to go on leave.

Q: What were some of the places you went on leave mostly, Pearl Harbor?

PF: Oh Pearl Harbor, of course San Diego, we went over to Tijuana. We were right across the border at the time. After Pearl Harbor there weren't any places to go then. In fact there wasn't any. I can remember in Okinawa I used to run, when we were in the military government ship we used to be at the North end of Okinawa quite a bit. We had a small Jeep and Weapons Carrier and I used to take the Jeep from the North end to the South end, which was Naha at the time. There was nothing left in Okinawa then it was completely bombed out. I can remember coming around at night going around a little mountain road there that I used to take with that Jeep. It was quite dangerous then. No there were no Liberties then,

I would say that Pearl Harbor was it. Pearl Harbor then, my wife and I went back to Hawaii on vacation and I couldn't believe the change. When I was there during the War, Pearl Harbor was a huge Naval Base and the Harbor was always full of ships. Besides the ones that had gone down, the ones that stayed there. There was nothing there. It was all gone. The only thing was the Memorial for the Battleship "Arizona". We had taken one of these little cruise boats and the only thing coming out through the Harbor was a Submarine. A lone Submarine coming out and My God I remember when we were coming out it was just all the ships you could see, as far as you could see. They packed them right in.

Q: Bob, do you have any questions?

Okay well we would like to thank you very much.

PF: You are welcome. I hope I probably [Part of interview missing]

PF: In fact I would have got discharged sooner. I would have gone home on points but because we were on a Military Government Ship I was frozen on it. I spent several more months than I had to out there.

Q: Did you take any of the Japanese Soldiers that were on these Islands back anywhere or were they left on the Islands?

PF: As far as I know they were left on them, I don't remember bringing any back aboard our ship. No we never had any prisoners back aboard ship. I remember on the way back we stopped at Iwo Jima, and as an LST we were able to go right up on the beach. In fact when we got to Pearl Harbor we went right up on the beach where Waikiki beach is now and we stayed there about two weeks. The only hotels there were... what's that pink hotel? The Navy took it over.

The Royal something wasn't it [Wife says]...

The "Royal Ryan", the Navy took it over then and I used to go swimming on the beach there. They had another one next door, The Outrigger. The rest of the beach was just like any open beach you would find anywhere. We just opened the bow doors and dropped the ramp and that was our spot there for a couple of weeks. Coming back we stopped at Iwo Jima. In Iwo Jima, there was no beach. It was at the top of a Volcano. We had to keep the engines going to butt the ship against the shore line. As I said, if you stepped off the bow ramp you would just drop right down. There was nothing there. I can remember the center of the Island was just one big cemetery. My God, it was unbelievable. There were thousands of men that died and were buried there. So I hit a lot of those Islands and never had any desire to go back to them, with the exception of Pearl Harbor.

Q: Did you go to Mainland Japan at all?

PF: You say Mainland Japan, Okinawa of course is part of Japan Island. Now that's the closest to Tokyo but the islands that we passed around there were all part of the Japanese Archipelago too. No I never got to China. Got all the way down to Guadalcanal and never got to Australia. It wasn't much of a Liberty, after we left Pearl Harbor it was not a Liberty. From the time we got passed Manus

almost nightly we were attacked from Japanese planes. We mostly travelled in convoys that threw up a lot of flak. Constantly throwing up flak and then we would make smoke and you would watch for an opening in the smoke. You would see a plane come over and you would fire through it. I think it was mostly you scared him off more than you would hit 'em.

Q: You mentioned here that you shot down three planes.

PF: Yes we got credit on three planes. That first one I told you about, as we were coming up in the Straights before we made that first D-Day Invasion, we got that first plane. Then we got two planes during the Battle of Okinawa, during the Invasion of Okinawa. They said we lost about five hundred Destroyers around Okinawa at that time, and I believe it. The Destroyers were out there and I used to see the planes come in even though they didn't come at us they always tried to crash into an Aircraft Carrier or a Battle Wagon, some big ship. It was going on all the time. I never saw one come in and drop his bombs that he didn't end up committing suicide and crash into a ship.

Q: Did you see any ships hit?

PF: Oh yes. Aircraft Carriers were hit constantly. Saw a lot of our own planes come in to land on the Aircraft Carriers and drop off before they were able to land.

Q: Well thank you very much.

PF: Your welcome.