

**Carlton Earl Davidson  
Veteran**

**Wayne Clarke  
Mike Russert  
New York State Military Museum  
Interviewers**

**Interviewed on March 10, 2004 9:30 AM  
Marine Center  
Moriches, New York**

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

**CD:** My name is Carl Davidson, and I was born in Sheepshead Bay, New York in 1922. So I'm eighty-one now.

**Q:** Before you went into service, what was your educational background?

**CD:** Very poor, to say the least. I lived in twelve or thirteen different houses, so consequently I never really learned to read or write, but I never had any problem other than I only had one eye. And so in school, my name was Quasimodo, which was kind of rough. However in school, I was very very good at track and field and stuff like that. I always made my medals, and coaches liked me. The teacher that taught math and stuff like that - he liked me, because he also taught manual training-like, and during that period this was a [unclear], I did build a diving helmet in school that worked. We used it in the C-Scout ship. Whenever the ship wasn't clean enough, we'd break out the diving helmet and throw a C-Scout plaque overboard, and I'd put the diving helmet on and go down and pick it up and we'd get extra credit, kind of bring us up a little bit. [Laughter]

**Q:** Do you remember where you were and your reaction when you heard about Pearl Harbor?

**CD:** Absolutely. I was a stock clerk in Hempstead for a place called "You Need Clothes?" and I remember we all walked out on the Main Street, which would've been Franklin Avenue, I believe. And we saw planes coming out of Mitchell Field. That part - up to there, I remember. And right after that, that was December seventh. That following week, I went into New York, and found out what Mayor Chapman had, which was salvage company. I guess by January fifth, I was already in. I banged around the harbor doing different things for Mayor

Chapman: loading tanks and whatever had to be done. One of the things there, when you come right out of school with Chapman- everybody in Mayor Chapman spliced wire. And in a later date in my life, that became very important... because when I had left Chapman, I went in that Harbor pool. When I brought one of those boats back and we put it up on deck, the Chief inquired about my background. And I told him I worked for Mayor Chaplin, and I'd been on Normandy, and I'd been on a lot of other wrecks up and down the coast. And he said he bet I spliced wire, and I said yes. So, he said, "How would you like to go to England tomorrow?" And I said, "I can't go to England, he wouldn't let me go with you!" "Yeah, he'll let you go!" And I do have papers in my pouch there that show that they requested me to go on the C-Train. And on the C-Train, we went to Cart up in Swansea and we just unloaded tanks, cause we had to-

**Q:** Now, what was a C-Train?

**CD:** I have a picture of it here, you want to see it?

**Q:** Well, yes, and what was its job?

**CD:** Prior to the war, it carried one hundred freight cars refrigerated out of Florida and Texas. And so when the war came, naturally the government took it over. There were four ships like that. There was New York, New Jersey, Florida and Texas. But, I had only seen two of them - the one I was on was Texas. It only has one hole in it, and what the army did was they cemented over all the decks, because we had four railroad tracks thick, and four railroad tracks wide to carry all that. And so all the refrigerated stuff, they took out, and they made a place there for the soldiers that would run these tanks. And we could load... I believe around one-hundred and sixty, we took at a clip. So we were a wanted ship. Sometimes, we went by ourselves. Other times, in convoy. And we would go from here up to Boston, pick up a convoy, then go all the way up and then come down into the Irish Sea, and then go into the Bristol Channel. And we could go to any doc, because we unloaded it ourselves, we didn't have to have the big cranes over the water. Cause the water cranes, they could work them all night because you can't hear them. They just pump water back and forth, and make the weight and pick stuff up. And then from there, I made four crossings, four trips, so it would be eight crossings, and that was all in early forty-three. While I was working at Chapman, they had asked me about that splicing. Which, you know, a lot of the fellas didn't do. But in Chapman, everybody did it because it was part of the job.

**Q:** Now you were in the Merchant Marines at this point?

**CD:** Not yet. I was in the Merchant Marines at Mayor Chapman [unclear]. And at that time, with the Chief engineer I was working with, he took me down to the barge office and got me my papers.

**Q:** Now, then with the C-Train, were you considered just a seaman or...?

**CD:** Actually, they called me a Day Man there, because I had the one eye. And I was not supposed to wheel, but I wheeled an awful lot.

**Q:** Now, what do you mean by "wheel?"

**CD:** Steer the ship.

**Q:** Alright. Okay.

**CD:** And that happened at another time - I was bringing a tanker out of Houston, Texas and they had an "ordinary," and he told them he could wheel - and he couldn't. And the captain came out and said, "Can you wheel?" and I said, "Yes, sir." And he said, "You're an able-bodied seaman now." I can't carry an able-bodied seaman, it's not even on my ticket. Then I wheeled all the way back up to Jersey. Up the gulf, the gulf port there in [undecipherable].

**Q:** So, at this time - was it with a private contractor?

**CD:** Yeah, well, we were the shipping company. L.L.B. Gulf of Gulf, at that time. And I was with Sinclair Robaline (?) on another ship - a tanker. Later on, while I was on a victory ship, I think I made nine trips. So, that'd be eighteen crossings. First, we took soldiers over, and prisoners back here. As it went on, first we'd bring soldiers over to England, and later on we were picking up the German soldiers in Marcé - so that'd be in the Mediterranean - brought them here, and then we'd bring soldiers back to Le Havre. And then from Le Havre we were taking German soldiers back here. Later on, it switched around the other way: we were bringing the Americans home and taking the Germans back over there. And one trip into Antwerp - it was Marcé, Le Havre, Antwerp, and Bremerhaven - and this was as the war was moving. So then, one trip we took over the dignitaries that were going into Antwerp. We had ladies on the ship and everything. Once in a while, we did carry wax over. And that was fun too, because the captain had to come down and talk to all these people - we were carrying about twelve hundred soldiers at a clip. And he'd come down, and he'd talk to the waxers. He'd say, "I need to have a secretary. You, the blonde! You must type!" Just a couple of fun things on that trip. As Bosun, I'm all over the ship. Because the first thing the Bosun does in the morning is sound all tanks, check all lifeboats, everything like that. You just go around and check all the safety stuff. And the reason for

checking all the tanks is they sometimes get too much water on one side, or too much oil, and you always have to keep leveling the ship up. So, this one time in the evening I was walking around and I saw the second mate, and he was up on the bridge, but he was on the outside of where they steer. And the captain's room was right below it (and that's the deck he was on). And he knocked on the window and yells, "Open up the window!" and he crawled in there, because the captain and one of the transportation officers were having a meeting in the big room there on the ship. And so at a later date, we're standing with the second mate and I say, "What's all over your pants?" and he says, "What do you mean?" and I say, "Looks like porthole paint!" So I had a good trip on that one, no one bothered me there! And as far as the Merchant Seaman's things on the ship - we actually were in the magazines, and loaded the containers of whatever - blue, green, white, red - mostly twenty [unclear] forties. And we would bring them up out of the magazines - because the magazines were below the waterline on those ships, and we would put them in the 'ready' boxes. And they're always tipped, as the ship rolls, they can't fall out. So in the tubs themselves, the only thing the merchant seamen did were "hotshells." Otherwise, when they shot something, as soon as that came out, you had to get it the hell out of the tub. And the only other job that I had was dropping the anchor and picking it up, or checking the deck. Because when you get to sea, that's when your work starts. You paint stuff, and check all the blocks, because if everything isn't running when you get there, you've got a problem - because that's time.

**Q:** Now you mentioned on the ships you were on, you were in the Atlantic, and the Pacific, and the Mediterranean?

**CD:** Oh yeah, I was in all of them.

**Q:** Now did you ever receive campaign ribbons or anything?

**CD:** No, we have to buy those. Merchant seamen buy them, and then you get letters from the president, and all that kind of nonsense, too.

**Q:** So, you received these...

**CD:** No, you go over and buy them at King's Point. They send you a letter of what you can buy, and you can go over and buy them if you want them.

**Q:** But in a way, you were "awarded" them because you were in all these different theaters, but you had to purchase your own.

**CD:** Yeah, they didn't hand them out to you, you went down and paid for them. In fact, this still has the price on: twenty one dollars.

**Q:** So even if you were in the Navy, or so on, you wouldn't have earned these, but you had to purchase them on your own.

**CD:** We had to purchase them on our own, it was just different that way. I have letters from Truman and stuff like that, which is kind of nice. [He pulls out the ribbons]

**Q:** [Points to specific ribbon in box] Now, what are these in this...?

**CD:** Well, it should say right on it: Mediterranean, Atlantic, Pacific. These are for like on your hat, and these are for your belt...

**Q:** Okay, so this is your Atlantic Theater, this is when you were in the Pacific...

**CD:** And that should be Mediterranean.

**CD:** [Looks at another set of pins and ribbons] Oh that says Mediterranean on the bottom.

**Q:** Oh yes, I see that. Middle East, and the Marine victory medal.

**CD:** I thought you might be interested looking at them. I've never worn 'em.

**Q:** Yes! I was never aware you had to purchase your own.

**CD:** Oh yeah, like I said before, you go down to King's point.

**Q:** Yes, but I mean anyone else would have been awarded them in the other branches, you had to purchase them on your own.

**CD:** Well see, merchant seamen actually were civilians employed by the army, navy or whoever it was we were working for on the ships.

**Q:** Now could you maybe give us some stories about some of your trips that you thought were the most interesting?

**CD:** I think every trip has something that's fun. I mean, we knew it was a war and everything like that, but a lot of the older fellas, this was just their trade. And the younger fellas... you know, you have one kid, you have half a man; you have two kids, you have no men! And that's true! But I only had one problem with one ship, and it was between me and the captain. He was twenty-one, and I was probably twenty. I picked him up in Boston, and it was a hot-job, so...

**Q:** Now, what do you mean by a hot-job?

**CD:** They were waiting for the last man to get there so they had a full crew. When that last man steps on the ship, the gangplank goes right up behind him, and

you're gone. And they didn't have somebody up in Boston, and I was in New York at the time, and they wanted a Bosun... if you were a merchant marine, you throw your card in, and if you have the oldest card that you haven't worked... like, three guys throw it in. Maybe one guy got off a month ago, two months ago; one guy, three months ago, but he automatically gets the opportunity to take that ship, if he wants it. And then so they sent me up to Boston, I walked on the ship, they pulled the gangplank up behind me and we went out of Boston down to Norfolk. We loaded ten thousand tons of frozen food. Then we went to Panama, and in Panama, you go in on the Atlantic side, and then you go through all the lox, and then La Bou Boa. So we stop at La Bou Boa, reload water, reload all the oil we need. And in the meantime, we couldn't go ashore other than where the fence was. So you go up to the fence, and there's always a couple of people up there that want to help you - they go get you bananas, they get you ice cream and things like that. And so, the crew put the money together, and we got ice cream, and we took it and threw it in the hole, because the hole was frozen anyway! Those holes, they were all made that way. And then we got green bananas, and we used to put them in the starboard side hanging outside because the sun was on the other side and would ripen them too fast. So we had bananas all the way over to Pearl Harbor. And then we went to Fort Island in Pearl Harbor, and we unloaded there. And then from there, we went back to San Francisco. And most of the way, the captain didn't like me, and I didn't particularly care for him too much. And that particular ship was originally made for lumber, so the rigging is entirely different than any other ship - because they have to swing heavy lumber around, and it's just made different. Normally, a boom sticking up like that would have two lines on it to move it. Well, these had two lines out here, and a cross line up there so the lumber didn't hit anything. And I had never worked with that, so I screwed that up once - and I figured it out, but still the once was enough for the captain not to like me. So when we came back to San Francisco, I got off by mutual consent - which is normal with merchant marines - you come and go as you want, because you're still just a civilian at that time. That's when I came back to New York, and I got that MIT victory. I don't know what else I can tell you about that stuff. Now, let's see... the trips over to England were very, very nice because I met nice people there. I had a girlfriend at the time, so I wasn't fooling around with anything. I never drank, so my job was when we got ready to go, I had to go down to the gin mills and pull the guys out because if you sent a guy down to drink, he'd stay there - we'd lose two rather than one!

**Q:** Were you ever fired upon or under attack at all?

**CD:** No, I was in a bad convoy that there were submarines about us. And another time, one of the guys had a motorcycle and he had it down in the Bosun's dorms in the rear of the ship - right in the stern - and he was playing with it, getting it going. And when he did, they picked up the signal, and thought there was a submarine underneath us, so they were there, throwing depth charges all the hell around us, and that was fun. But that was his last trip on that ship! So there's a lot of little fun things that happened on the ships, you know at different times. Because you can't go anywhere - you walk five hundred and forty feet, and you step in the water!

**Q:** Now, did you ever do salvage diving during the military or during the war?

**CD:** Yeah, only with Mayor Chapman I did diving. I didn't do a lot of it there because the stuff that I would've done - or could've done - I didn't have the background, you know. I just came out of school. But I knew how to dive, that's still a fact - because I still dive. I dive regularly.

**Q:** By salvage diving, did you use a cutting torch underwater?

**CD:** No, but the fellas I worked with, I generally tended, so I knew what the rigs were. The torches would have three different tanks: one for burning, and the other two made a cone of air to keep the fire on, because you lit it and then took it down. Today, they strike it underwater and light it up, but they couldn't then. And the fellas I dove with, they were mostly mechanics off the heavy industry - so they had a background of tools and the whole bit, which I didn't have. I mean, I knew the mechanics of the diving part, and that's from reading books. One of the teachers I had was called Bill Lelsure, and Bill Lelsure worked for Chapman, and he brought up the hull of the first ship in the United States - it was called *The Philadelphia*. It was about forty feet long and it had a canon on the bow and it was up in the lakes. You probably remember that, I think that's down in the Smithsonian. And he lived in Mount Gacama - Bill Lelsure - I've got pictures of him here, later on you can look at 'em, give you an idea, when you're putting this thing together. And I've got pictures of the Chief. Also, we're with him - my chief. And he liked me, thought I was a nice kid. But they still use that thing - "one kid is a half a man," no matter how you do it, that's what you were.

**Q:** Okay, do you want to show us some of the pictures you brought in?

**CD:** Okay, uh...

**Q:** Why don't you show us the family picture there first?

**CD:** I got the ladies in the card, too, but...

**Q:** If you just hold it right there, Wayne can focus on it and move across it as you talk about it.

**CD:** This is the father that raised me, and he was a very good man. He was in World War I and World War II. When my one brother wanted to go in service, in the navy - his name is John, he's over here - my mother said, "No, I don't think so. Your older brothers are in, and I don't want more in." So, Pops said, "Well, I'll go down with him and make sure everything is alright." Well, of course when Pop came back, he went in too.

**CD:** [Points to pictures] So, this would be my father that raised me. This is my older brother, Charles... and my Pop was one of the guys on the DE. He was with a killer group. There was a small aircraft carrier called the Guadalcanal, and he was with that group, and it was the killer group. And they had training - if they ever got a submarine on the surface, they'd go in and jump in the submarine. These were all volunteers - which Pop was. And they got the code machines, and he got a presidential citation for that, but he couldn't tell anybody about it until after the war. However, I have a package of cigarettes that came off the five oh five submarines over in...

**Q:** So they're the ones that captured the five oh five and brought it to the surface?

**CD:** Right, right. As I said before, I have a pack of cigarettes off that submarine. I'll show it to you in a little while.

**CD:** [Points to another picture] And this brother - from early schooling, he was always in boating. By the time he turned twenty-one, he had enough time in to take a captain and a merchant marine. And the last thing that I remember that he was doing was he was running the ferry boat between Fort Island and Hawaii - that's where he got his papers, it's all written down. And then I come next, and I only had one eye, so I couldn't get into anything, but I did get into the merchant marines eventually. I was in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Mediterranean. This brother, he went into the Seabees, and he was in Alaska. This brother was a medic, and he was down in Florida, he had a base where the water planes came in on the crash boat, and later on, he went into Iwo Jima. And one of the [undecipherable], I don't remember which is the other one, and eventually he was in Japan and China. And this is my young born, he was in the Vietnam time... this boy was too young, that's my son.

**Q:** So all of your family, though, survived?

**CD:** Yes, there are no gold stars in our flag - notice that.

**CD:** [Pulls out a flag in a glass case] I don't know where you want it.

**Q:** Hold it right there for a minute.

**CD:** Yeah, no gold stars on that.

**Q:** And this hung in your mother's front window of the house?

**CD:** Right, that's where it was. And the funny part of it is, I had given this to a very, very big collector of military stuff. And when I put [the picture frame of my family members] together, I went back to see him, and he'd given it to somebody else! I had to go find *him*, and I brought this big picture with me at the time and said, "You still have that five star flag?" and he says, "Yeah." I said, "I'd like to buy it back." So when I showed him the pictures, he said, "You can't buy that back, I'll give it to you." And he gave it back to me! He said, "That's where it belongs."

**CD:** [Looks through bags, trying to find cigarettes] Here are the cigarettes from the five oh five. Those are the German cigarettes my father brought me back, but he couldn't tell me where he was. [Pause] Oh, I have to give you one more little thing here that you must know. The father that I said raised me, he married mom in 1933. My real father was a sea captain also. He was in World War I, World War II, and he got blown up in Korea. And he had a big write up on him in *Reader's Digest* - that's my real father. And he's named after me, because he kept the name of Roy. We were all Roy to begin with, and then we all took Davidson so that we'd be like our mother in school. As I said before, this is the write up from *Reader's Digest*.

**Q:** Okay. Anything else?

**CD:** No only that the background of going to sea still carried me through to diving when they brought out scuba. And I still do it, and I still trace around and raise all heck.

**Q:** Now, are you able to join the American Legion?

**CD:** Yes, I am. I have it here. I am now a veteran. Of course, before, I wasn't.

**Q:** Now you also joined the VFW?

**CD:** Yes. Right. I have it here somewhere. [Looks through his wallet]

**Q:** Have you been able to take advantage of any veteran's benefits at all?

**CD:** [Still looking through his wallet] Yes, I have.

**Q:** Now, were you ever able to use the GI bill at all?

**CD:** Yes, my wife is in Calverton, and I'll go in with her later on. And I have very, very nice friends over there. I made pictures like this for them over there. One particular picture... I should've had that thing here, but I don't know where the heck it is. But I do have a VA card.

**Q:** Well, that's alright if you can't find it.

**Q:** How do you think being in the merchant marine service - obviously it has - but how do you think it has affected your life?

**CD:** In many ways, very nice. First, you know what your fathers did and things like that, so... that's why all these things here represent... shoot, it must be here somewhere. [Continues to look for VA card]

**Q:** Well, that's alright...

**CD:** Oh wait a minute, here it is, and I've got it. [Pause]

**Q:** Alright, well thank you very much for your interview!

**CD:** You're sure welcome.