

Military History of James Ray Cannon

THE DRAFT – THE EARLY 40's:

I graduated from High School in June of 1943. A draft was going on to get people into the armed forces. Each day of the year was assigned a number, as result of a drawing. Rhett's and my number was quite low, so we knew we would soon be drafted.

It seemed that everyone in the Army was getting sent to Europe to fight Hitler and everyone in the Marines ended up on some beach in the Pacific, fighting the Japanese, "because we were fighting two wars at once." Neither idea appealed to the us, so we decided the Navy was the best way to get through the war alive. We figured if the ship went down you might have a long swim, but at least you'd have a chance.

I knew I would be drafted any day so I went to Des Moines and enlisted, "as an apprentice seaman, which is as low as you can get, unless you just stand on the beach and watch the ship leave." I viewed this as a defensive measure.

I went to Boot Camp at Great Lakes, Illinois for 3 months, then to Fire Control School for 3 months, before going to an outgoing unit in New York City. They shipped me to Sao Salvador in Brazil.

THE NAVY – January 1943-February 1946:

There was no ordinance department on that Naval base, so I could not get my 3rd class rating. I requested sea duty and I was assigned to a "destroyer escort." These ships were about the same size as a destroyer, but were not equipped with big guns. They were named for Navy heroes. I was first on the USS Donald Roy McCann, which was decommissioned and I later transferred to APD 104- the USS William J. Pattison, which was a new ship constructed at Bethlehem-Hingham, in Hingham, Massachusetts.

Cathy's Note: Pattison was launched 15 Feb 1944, Commissioned 27 Feb 1945, the same day Ray joined the crew)

They had a 20 millimeter machine gun, where the 5th shot was a tracer that lit up the sky so they could see what they were shooting at night.

The ship had 5 inches of armor plating and also carried 5 inch guns. These were very small guns compared to the battle ships, which had 16" guns and 16" armor plating. It also had the ability to have torpedoes, but we were not armed with them either.

Instead they carried 4 boats for a crew of underwater demolition teams. These men went 15 on a boat and there were about 60 of these men on the ship. They would leave the ship on the small boats, roll off the sides of them and then swim with flippers and snorkels, searching for mines and barbed wire planted in the water to disrupt the movement of our larger ships.

I had "enlisted" for the "Draft" so I was categorized as "USNI", meaning I had to stay in for the length of the war, but no longer. I was encouraged often to sign up for either the reserves, or a longer time period, like 4 to 6 years. But I refused, and as result, I was treated with prejudice.

I first qualified in Fire Control, but I was not given the rank, even though I scored higher than others who took the test. At the time, I was not given a reason why I did not receive the rank after earning it. It was not fair.

Later I tested and qualified for Store Keeper, which I felt would be a really good rank, because it would likely involve store duty or at the worse a cargo boat. I hoped I would be on shore, just getting goods on to the boats. There were jobs of this sort in Bahia, Portuguese Brazil

Again, I was not given the rank, because I had not signed on for a longer term. The result was I was forced to continue at very low pay. "No rate – No Pay"

One of my jobs on the ship was to watch the anchor as it was dropped. Another guy and I were supposed to be down in the anchor room when the Captain called down to drop the anchor, to be sure it was done smoothly. My partner and I decided this was a waste of time, so we took turns going down to do it, rather than going together.

One day, the other guy forgot to get out of bed and no one was there at all. The angry Captain made us scrape the sides of the boat, and we were not allowed to go home and get out of the Navy, which I was scheduled to do. This delayed my return home.

We were in dry dock twice, where every one on the crew, regardless of rank, participated in the scratching and sanding off of barnacles and repainting of the hull.

While in Brazil on a leave, I went swimming in the ocean with a bunch of my buddies and dived into a giant jellyfish, that stung me all over and left me in lots of pain.

I was shocked in Brazil by people urinating on the streets. They would just stoop down and do their business, then pull their pants back on and go on their way.

My immediate supervisor was a Lieutenant who we referred to as "Shaky Joe." Any time there were any enemy planes overhead, or any battle going on, he would disappear under the deck. I knew that if they were ever hit, "Shaky Joe" would some how managed to be the first in the lifeboat.

I really liked the "Captain" on the ship. We referred to him as "The Old Man" and he was not a Captain, but a Lt. Commander.

Though no gambling was allowed on the ship, it still went on. There was a certain area where we often went to play cards, in the bottom of the ship. One day we were playing there and the Captain came down. He said nothing and sat on the stairway and just watched for about 45 minutes, so everyone just kept playing as though they didn't notice that he was there. Finally, as he got up to leave, he said, "If you guys are going be down here, we're going to have to put an ash tray on this post" and then he got up and left.

Another time, we were going through the Panama Canal. I was out on the deck taking pictures when the Captain came up and stood beside me. He said, "This is a classified area, and if I saw anybody out here taking pictures, I would have to take their camera away from them."

I replied, "Gee, I'm glad you didn't see anyone. "And then, I scurried below deck."

Battle of Iwo Jima – February and March 1945

In Spring of 2008, Ray had a conversation with his daughter Cheri. He told her he had been involved in the Battle of Iwo Jima. He was sent out in a small rescue boat with another sailor to try to save pilots

who were shot down. This was a very scary experience. Their "escort boat" (or their home base) was tied to a much larger destroyer when they left. When they returned the destroyer had been torpedoed.

They had tried to maneuver their boats sideways to the approaching planes to make smaller targets.

To Note: this story is likely inaccurate, Ray was suffering from dementia by this time and died by 17 Feb 2010. Because the memory was so vivid, perhaps some portion of it is based in truth.

DEALING WITH A KAMIKAZE

One day, we were being strafed by a Kamikaze Japanese fighter plane. We had tried to shoot him with our big gun, but he came in so low he was below our range. The Captain was out on the deck shooting at it with his 45 pistol. You could hear the "ping" "ping" as the bullets hit the plane. The plane went right over the deck, lifting up just high enough to clear their tower. The destroyer escort was just "peanuts" compared to the aircraft carrier that sat behind them. The plane crashed into the carrier.

The Captain of the carrier was enraged that we had not been able to stop the plane.

ALWAYS THE PHOTOGRAPHER

When I left the ship, because my shipmates requested it, I made up 17 sets of the pictures I had taken on the cruise. I printed them up and sent them "COD." One set went to the Captain. All 17 people sent me the money.

Though I never signed up for more time and was penalized for that, I finally made 3rd class Petty Officer just one month before leaving the Navy, and finally got a decent pay raise.

- FROM SISTER CLOYDINE'S SCRAPBOOK -

From Scrap book of his sister Margarite Cloydine Cannon Camden Anselme a newspaper article, undated and of unknown source:

HOME FROM SEA DUTY:

James Ray Cannon, seaman first class, is spending a 15 day leave at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. C.C. Cannon of Van Cleve. He has recently returned to the United States from sea duty having been in a convoy escort. On his last trip, Cannon said one large German supply sub was sunk and his ship picked up 24 survivors. He flew 3000 miles to Miami, Fla. on the first lap of his journey home. (Includes Navy picture of "Ray Cannon")

Also from the same scrapbook:

Mrs. Ray Camden Receives Letter From Brother

Dear Cloydine,

I haven't written for awhile, so here I go again on one I owe. The taking for granted I have some from home on the way.

Surprise! Who should I meet today but Sam Severance. I was in the chow hall and Sam came over and said "Hello." We had quite a talk. He's been here about 2 weeks to my 5 days. He bunks on the second floor, and I bunk on the third. I guess I'll have to stop by and say hello to Sam every once in awhile. Sam has always been a swell guy and a friend to everyone. I can remember when I used to work at Butler's farm once in awhile, he was jolly and always on the go. I guess he never knows when to quit when it comes to working.

I finally got a letter today. It was forwarded on from Miami, from one of my buddies Bob Cogdill. You must surely remember him. I have several pictures of him, including one of us together and one of all three of our favorite

gang, Bob, Frank, and of course I was the only one who wasn't broke, so as long as I paid for the picture, they had to humor me and make me the third party.

I played basketball last night until my legs were sore. It was alot of fun.

I painted all day today. This old barn will look like a castle before I leave. My wonderful touch with the brush, you know how it is! Well, I can dream can't I?

Merry Christmas to all of you. Happy New Year, too. As Always, RAY (Cannon)

In the same scrapbook, a portion of another article reads:

Ray Cannon of the navy is now recovering from an appendectomy in a hospital somewhere in the south pacific, his parents have learned.

ANCHOR DUTY LEADS TO PUNISHMENT

I was on anchor duty with another guy. We were to go early every morning and every evening to the anchor room and be sure the anchor was being raised properly, when we received the order through the intercom. We quickly decided there was no need for two people to get out of bed for this duty, so we decided to rotate and he would go one day and I would go the next. We figured we would never get caught and no one would know the difference.

One day I got called into the captain's office, and grilled about where I had been during the raising of the anchor, that morning. I quickly figured out that though it was not my morning to be there, my buddy had slept in, so no one had been there, when the captain called down to lift the anchor.

When the captain figured out what we had done, and that we had been doing it on the whole tour, he was really angry! We were headed for Boston, where I was suppose to get out of the service. Instead, I was penalized along with the other guy and we were forced to stay an extra 6 weeks, doing cleaning and scraping duty. My marriage to Darlene had to be postponed, because I could not get home in time.

Ray said that he had crossed the equator 5 times during his experience in the Navy, and he was thankful that he had seen very little battle in his cruises through the South Pacific.

THE TRIP HOME – FEBRUARY 1946

Upon getting out of the Navy in Boston, I headed south to New York City. Here I visited the Empire State Building with my buddies before I got a train ticket out of the City, at Grand Central Station bound for Chicago, IL. The train was so packed with people leaving the armed forces that I had to stand the entire way to Chicago, which was many hours.

(Cathy's note: In a 2003 trip to New York City, Ray remembered the Old Grand Central Station as being architecturally the same, but being painted brown and not covered with the marble and travertine that it is today)

In Chicago I purchased another ticket on the "Denver" train. This took me towards my home, in Iowa, but missed Melbourne, by a ½ hour drive.

Since gas was rationed at the time, Dad came to get me with a neighbor lady, who had the necessary gasoline. She rode back sitting on my lap, as there was no other room in the car.

I had been in the Navy 37 months. Unlike others I knew, I was just glad to get out and be done with my duty. I never had any desire to go back. I got out in January and went back home and married Darlene on March 2, 1946.

I brought with me a few items that were useful parts of the Cannon household for many years. The Wool Navy blankets, which were beige and wore like iron and were used for another 20 years, a set of "USN" engraved silverware that served as our everyday silver, for many years. And my uniforms, that Darlene cut up and made into a winter coat for daughter Cathy, after she was born.

| MILITARY HISTORY TIMELINE: |
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| AS DOCUMENTED BY PUBLIC NAVY ROSTER SHEETS & NOTATIONS IN JAMES RAY CANNON SCRAPBOOK, FOUND AFTER DEATH OF HIS WIFE DARLENE KOCH CANNON IN FEBRUARY 2012: |
| 1. 29 Oct 1940 - Lottery for Draft Number/16 year old Ray gets a low number and knows he will be drafted when he is eligible |
| 2. 7 Dec 1941 – Pearl Harbor Bombed |
| 1943 |
| 3. 22 Jan - Ray enlists in Navy with identical twin brother Rhett Cannon, for the duration of the war, |
| 4. Jun 1943 - High School graduation/Ray leaves soon after for basic training in Great Lakes, IL for 3 months + 3 months of fire school. |
| 1944 |
| 5. January – to New York City, outbound unit |
| 6. Abt February Shipped to Sao Salvador, Brazil |
| 7. 20 May – Assigned to the USS McAnn |
| 8. 5 July – transfer to <i>USNH Navy #120</i> (perhaps a leave to Iowa) |
| 9. 31 July – received back on board the <i>McAnn</i> from <i>USNOF Navy #120</i> |
| 10. 15 Aug 1944 transfer from <i>McAnn</i> to Barracks, Miami Beach FL |
| 11. 15 Aug - <i>McAnn</i> decommissioned on this date in Natal, Brazil |
| 1945 |
| 12. 27 Feb – transferred on to the William J Pattison , ship was commissioned on this date (Rays rank =Slc (FC0) NSV |
| 13. Apr – Guantanamo, Cuba -Shake down training |
| 14. Early Apr – Hampton Roads, VA - Amphibious training |
| 15. 20 Apr-27 – Portsmouth, N.H. Repairs |
| 16. 1 May – Rendezvous with <i>USS Gen William Weigel</i> (Ap 119) – head for West Indies together |
| 17. 8 May – San Juan, Puerto Rico |
| 18. 12 May – Panama Canal-headed for San Diego, CA |
| 19. 17 May – Manzillo, Mexico- diverted for JRCANNON who has appendicitis emergency |
| 20. 22 May – San Diego, CA |
| 21. 25 – 29 May gunnery drills with <i>Begor</i> (APD 127), <i>Cavallaro</i> (APD-128) |
| 22. 30 May- Pearl Harbor |
| 23. 2 Jun - Oahu, Hawaii |
| 24. 3 Jun – Pearl Harbor, Hawaii |

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| 25. 4 Jun – 13 Jun – Maui - Underwater demolition team training |
| 26. 13 Jun – head for Marshal Island with <i>Cavalaro</i> & <i>SS Cape Meares</i> |
| 27. 21 Jun – Eniwetpk lagoon |
| 28. 23 Jun – heading for Ulithi Atoll in Caroline Islands |
| 29. 1 Jul – heading for Leyte, Philippines, 2 days |
| 30. 3 Jul-12 Leyte Phillipines |
| 31. 12 Jul – Return to Ulithi, Caroline Islands |
| 32. 13 Jul – Early Aug, Okinawa, 2 trips, under air raid alerts, but the ship saw no action |
| 33. 6 Aug – Hiroshima bombed |
| 34. 9 Aug – Nagasaki bombed |
| 35. 15 Aug – Tokyo Bay Surrender Ceremony - ship leaves Okinawa on way to Mariannas |
| 36. 17 Aug – Guam, pick up UDT 18 |
| 37. 20 Aug sailing with <i>Begor</i> & LST's tp join 3 rd fleet off Japan |
| 38. 24 Aug-25 – rendezvous with 3 rd fleet |
| 39. 26 Aug – sight Hanshu, largest Island of Japan |
| 40. 27 Aug – site Mt Fuji Yama, Mekeyeke Shima – Tokyo Bay to begin post war occupation |
| 41. 29 Aug – Yokosuka, 2 Naval bases to occupy |
| 42. 30 Aug – Nagaura KO, Japan, burnt hull of Nagato, Japanese subs, largest dry dock in the world – support UDT marines as they inspect harbor facilities |
| 43. SEP: demilitarization of captured Japanese war ships; traveling through Home Island reconnoitering to prepare for occupation by Marine Corps |
| 44. 8 Sep – blow up sub in Katsuyama |
| 45. 9 Sep – visit city of Katsuyama |
| 46. 16 Sep – Okia Onagawa, Oshika Penninsula, Village Cemetery, sub demolition |
| 47. 16 Sep – TYPHOON |
| 48. 27 Sep – Beer Party Guam |
| 49. 29 Sep – Tatayuma |
| 50. 30 Sep – head for home/ stops Guam, Eni-wetok, Pearl Harbor |
| 51. 22 October – San Diego, CA |
| 52. 16 Nov – JR Cannon receives new rank SF3c(T) IND to fill a vacancy/ finally a raise |
| 1946 |
| 53. 1 Jan – Last muster sheet found , showing JR Cannon as crew member |
| 54. Early Jan – ship moves to Green Coves, FL |
| 55. Feb – ship is in Boston, MA; then moves on to New York City, NY, where Ray visits the Empire state building, and leaves through Grand Central Station. |
| 56. Trip home is through Chicago and then south to Denver, Iowa; all by very crowded train. |
| 57. 2 Mar – JR Cannon marries Darlene Koch, St Anthony, Iowa |
| 58. 19 Mar 1946 – <i>William J Pattison</i> decommissioned in Green Cove, FL |
| AFTER THAT: JAMES RAY CANNON BECAME A PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHER WITH THE HELP OF THE GI BILL. HE BUILT THE FIRST COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY LAB IN IOWA, IN THE 60'S (KNOWN AS NATIONAL STUDIOS); PROCESSING FOR MANY PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY. HE EVENTUALLY BECAME A TRAINER FOR OTHER PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS, AND TAUGHT PHOTOGRAPHY AT A TECHNICAL SCHOOL. |