

National Museum of the Pacific War

Center for Pacific War Studies

Fredericksburg, Texas

**Interview with
Dana Anderson
United States Navy**

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This is Ed Metzler. Today is May 13, 2004. I am interviewing Mr. Dana Anderson. This interview is taking place in Fredericksburg, Texas. This interview is in support of the support of the Center for Pacific War Studies, Archives for the National Museum of the Pacific War, Texas Parks and Wildlife for the preservation of historical information related to this site.

Mr. Metzler: Let me start out by thanking you for taking the time to share your experiences with us. When and where you were born, your family, your high school years, and then we can go from there....

Mr. Anderson: I was born in Manhattan, Kansas. My parents went to school there and got married and nine months later I was born. They moved back to Topeka, Kansas.

Mr. Metzler: When were you born?

Mr. Anderson: November 30, 1924. When they graduated school they went back to Topeka, Kansas, they built a house and I have a brother that is five years younger than I am. We lived there, I left when I turned eighteen, joined the service, joined the Navy.

Mr. Metzler: So you went to high school, got your diploma...

Mr. Anderson: Yes, yes.

Mr. Metzler: Decided to go into the armed forces?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, but I couldn't wait long enough to get in there. I turned eighteen and I was gone. That was December 2, 1942.

Mr. Metzler: So it was roughly a year after Pearl Harbor?

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Then I left and went to the Navy and my parents were going to help out the war effort. They went into, my dad went into being a person who went around and checked the workmanship quality of things that needed to be used in the service of our country.

Mr. Metzler: Kind've quality assurance job.....

Mr. Anderson: Anyhow, I went on and went through boot camp in Chicago, went down to San Diego and asked to be shipped out as soon as possible...

Mr. Metzler: Why did you pick the Navy?

Mr. Anderson: I can't see well and my eye sight is not very good. I can't see very well. I wanted to get into the paratroopers but I couldn't get into that because of bad eyes. I wanted to get in the submarine service and I couldn't get into that because of bad eyes and so I waited. There was a lull in the strictness of people getting into the service so they allowed me to get in. I just rolled into that real easily.

Mr. Metzler: So you went to boot camp in the Chicago Navy pier.

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Great Lakes Training Center in Chicago.

Mr. Metzler: That must have been a little different than Kansas.

Mr. Anderson: Same snow. Same cold weather. Same wind off the prairie.

Mr. Metzler: Instead it's a lake rather than a prairie.

Mr. Anderson: So that's what brought me into the service. I have one brother and he's five years younger than I am and I thought, well, if I can get into the service maybe I can help him not show up in the service. I was going to save the world so that's what I did.

Mr. Metzler: So after boot camp, it's off the San Diego. Is that correct? And then what happened in San Diego?

Mr. Anderson: In San Diego we did basic training for invasion and keeping engines working and that sort of stuff...

Mr. Metzler: Had you had any training like that when you were in the Chicago area or was this the first time you got involved in engines, in San Diego?

Mr. Anderson: No, that was in San Diego. All we did, or all I did in Chicago, Illinois, was just get in and do your basic training. Then in San Diego we were sent aboard the *USS Ashland* which was doing the shakedown cruise between San Francisco and San Diego. I don't know all the details and somewhere along the line the ship shot off the bow gun and broke all the mirrors in the head. The captain shot the shells it vibrated so that was that and they had to repair that before we started.

Mr. Metzler: Did they get that repaired? Did it happen again?

Mr. Anderson: No, no, never happened again.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me a little about this ship. I understand it was an unusual ship.

Mr. Anderson: LSD#1, meant every word of it, they had all the problems of developing a new piece of Navy equipment to solve the problems. We did all of our training aboard LCMs which carried the 34 ton General Sherman tanks to do the invasion.

Mr. Metzler: How many of these could be carried on a ship?

Mr. Anderson: I don't know, eighteen, twenty, a lot of them. A tank is six feet wide and twenty feet long, whatever it is, and these boats on which I was trained to keep the engines running in case problems come up.

Mr. Metzler: These are on the LCM?

Mr. Anderson: Landing Craft Mechanized. And we went to school to learn how to keep filters clean that would allow the engines to run. That was our sole purpose.

Mr. Metzler: How did you get hooked up with diesel engines?

Mr. Anderson: I'm a good mechanic. When problems come up, I'm a problem solver I guess. So when things happened, you have a way of a 34 ton tank, and I don't know what they cost, plus two other men. One man's a coxswain, he drives the boat, and the other guy is a deck man and he opens the gate or whatever he does. With that training, that's the way we went into things. After

being assigned to the boat, we went out to Baker Island to build a landing strip. Baker Island is one mile in diameter atoll and we carried all the Seabee equipment in to the atoll to allow them to build the landing strip. That was a little step-off to where we were heading at that time.

Mr. Metzler: What kind of equipment was that you delivered for the Seabees?

Mr. Anderson: We delivered cranes and diggers and boxes of dynamite to drill into the Coral Sea and they had two swimmers from Hawaii, they would take dynamite so we could get in there...

Mr. Metzler: Blast the coral?

Mr. Anderson: Yes.

Mr. Metzler: Did you get to know those guys at all?

Mr. Anderson: We, the three people on my boat, worked almost twenty-four hours a day to get this thing blasted in so we could get our boats in and then when that's all done we ... there were three of us on this one boat. There was another supply ship where we were working, taking stuff out of and landing it on the island. We got our food off of this LCM, this supply ship, we were working twenty-four hours a day and not getting any real food. I went aboard the supply ship and there was a little kid, what I thought was a little kid, sitting there and it was a guy I'd known in high school. I thought that was strange because he's sitting there, all mourning, all terrible and I said hi and we had quite a talk about what he was doing there.

Mr. Metzler: So you ran into him and he goes back to your high schooling.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, it was different. I could tell you his name after a while.

Mr. Metzler: So how long were you there on Baker Island?

Mr. Anderson: I don't know. Enough time to get equipment in there, get it done, get the equipment back out and on our merry way.

Mr. Metzler: So it's back onto the Ashland and then what?

Mr. Anderson: Then I think, I don't know, I suppose we went through some more training because after that we headed to Tarawa and Tarawa we carried the Second Marine Division in to make a landing.

Mr. Metzler: Did you go back to Pearl first and then make a landing?

Mr. Anderson: I guess we had to, yes. Those things are just kind've day to day stuff and I don't remember.

Mr. Metzler: I guess that's true.

Mr. Anderson: Some people do. I've got a son who just remembers every little thing but I don't.

Mr. Metzler: So the old *Ashland*, she couldn't make too much time in the water, she wasn't designed for speed?

Mr. Anderson: I suspect not because she did a lot of rolling around. The thing was, it's not being on a ship nowadays like being on a cruise. I've been on a cruise line and those ships are just like that table top but not the *Ashland*, she didn't do that.

Mr. Metzler: Were you ever bothered with sea sickness?

Mr. Anderson: No, I've never been sea sick.

Mr. Metzler: Were there others who were?

Mr. Anderson: Oh yes. Quite a few. The electrician, and I don't know if he was the head electrician, I can't place that in my mind, but he was a guy who did his shift down below and he kept a bucket between his knees because he got sick every single time we left port and came back to port.

Mr. Anderson: Yes, he was an electrician. Good man, good sailor.

Mr. Metzler: So after Pearl you went and picked up elements of the Second Marine Division and this is tanks, right, and took them where?

Mr. Anderson: Tarawa. Yes. That's what we did. We'd give the Marines their training on I suppose the Strand, I don't know where we were. We'd take the Marines in, get them on the beach, get the chance to fire their shells and do their thing. And they'd practice and learn to do it.

Mr. Metzler: Had there been any practicing done in San Diego?

Mr. Anderson: Well, we did our Navy training. We did our wind sock training and
we did our man to man combat. You're trained for that and Uncle Sam has a lot of money mixed in there and he doesn't want to waste it someplace. They say, here's what you do when you get in a bar fight and here's what you do to stay alive.

Mr. Metzler: What about landing and operating the LCMs?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, we took them in. They had a chance, they were supposed to go in with their hatches closed and they don't and they get their heads blown off but those things happen. Anyhow, they're suppose to go in and do the right thing by their people and their crew. I don't remember how many men they had in each tank. Somehow it sits in my mind for six but I don't know that. So you take that there and they get their training and we get our training and you can do that when there's not a bunch of bombs lighting around you. But when the bombs come around you, it's a different story.

Mr. Metzler: So, these diesel engines, were they your friends or were they problem children?

Mr. Anderson; They're the best engines. They're just a wonderful two stroke six cylinder engine.

Mr. Metzler: Two stroke, six cylinder, water cooled?

Mr. Anderson: Yes. Sea water cooled off of two screens that filter out all the sea weed and everything and when one gets unable to run it switches over to run another and they are just a fine engine.

Mr. Metzler: So they were pretty reliable?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, a fine engine.

Mr. Metzler: Who made them, do you remember?

Mr. Anderson: Gray Marine Diesels of General Motors. We went to school in a General Motors school and after that I went to school to learn the B6 1000 horsepower. It ran a sea going tug boat. After this stuff was done, we were done with this invasion property, they sent me back to Cleveland, Ohio to learn that.

Mr. Metzler: Tell me about Tarawa. How did that go?

Mr. Anderson: Well, as I understand it, it wiped most of the Second Marine Division out, nearly done. Invasion came and it was lined up. It was well planned, well thought out. We took our tanks in, we hit the beach, the tanks were released, the ramps went down, the tanks went down and that's when all the problems started because the Japanese were pretty well organized with all of their problems too. If our, the guys who were in charge of the tanks, they shut down the hatch, they went in and they didn't get into any chuckholes, if no bombs came down to blow a hole, if they're not careful, they go in deeper and the engines die and they die. And that happened. The boat I was on, the LCM, we had a Japanese mortar come and blow a hole in the side of the LCM after we unloaded the tank and the tank got out. So a Japanese mortar came in and blew a hole about four or five feet in

Mr. Metzler: In the side, where the engines are.

Mr. Anderson: In the side, blew out both engines, I climbed down in there. I couldn't imagine it but both engines had quit. We're on the beach, we can't move. So we came out, I talked to these two guys, one guy's name was Harry Greenwood, I don't remember the other one's name. The way it's set up, it's supposed be away from the beach a mile, boats picking up problems...

Mr. Metzler: What kind of boat was picking up the swimmers.

Mr. Anderson: Personnel boat. Just get them out of the water, send them back to fight another day.

Mr. Metzler: So this was to get the people out.....

Mr. Anderson: Yes. We've done all of our stuff. I told these guys, you've got life jackets on, but you look out in the water and you see this *spitz, spitz, spitz*, and those things got a shell for you. And I said, I'm a good swimmer I peeled mine off, and I said, I only want my little head out there and that's all, they can't see any more than that. I peeled my jacket off and I said, I'm going to swim out to those boats. I've been in swim races and swimming all my life and so I just peeled it off and went. So they left their jackets on. I was picked up out there too. The others were too eventually.

Mr. Metzler: How far would you guess you swam?

Mr. Anderson: I don't know. I suppose six city blocks. I don't know. They're just there. I know I've got to be there in order to save myself so that's it. Those things happen.

Mr. Metzler: Did the rest of the crew of your LCM make it?

Mr. Anderson: My crew did but the crews next to us, one of the fellows got his head blown off but the one right next to me, I see him and then I don't see him. He stuck his head up above, there's a square, the coxswain steers there and he stuck his head up above and that's all.

Mr. Metzler: So this was a sniper?

Mr. Anderson: No, it could be anyone. He's got a gun in their hands and they shoot them. We do the same thing. It's not that big a problem.

Mr. Metzler: So you made it back to the personnel ship that was picking people up ... and back to the *Ashland*.

Mr. Anderson: After they pick you up, they take you back and I suppose it's what today they would call a debriefing. They ask you questions and stuff. That's all I can remember about that. I think I seem to shut out a lot of this... my mind it not all that great but I shut it out.

Mr. Metzler: I understand. So the *Ashland* is there and she has only a small fraction of her LCMs that come back, is that correct?

Mr. Anderson: I don't know that...

Mr. Metzler: But there were some...

Mr. Anderson: Not all of them got hit like I did. I don't remember.

Mr. Metzler: So back on the *Ashland* and she goes where...

Mr. Anderson: I don't know that I know that either. I suppose we went back to Hawaii but I don't know.

Mr. Metzler: That was your first real taste of combat action?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, it was. Then we, I guess, I don't really remember...

Mr. Metzler: Did you feel any different after Tarawa?

Mr. Anderson: No, no.

Mr. Metzler: It was what you expected?

Mr. Anderson: Yes, yes. I went back sometime between when the ship left in the area. sometime between the ship being anchored out there and us doing things, running things back and forth, I was on another boat. They put me on another boat and we took things in and out. I can't even tell you the name of it. But we did that and I remember the invasion part was done and I remember walking on the beach and seeing all the dead people around..

Mr. Metzler: How old were you at that time?

Mr. Anderson: Eighteen.

Mr. Metzler: That must have been an eye-opener.

Mr. Anderson: I can remember that but I don't remember much of anything after that....

Mr. Metzler: Did you ever have any contact with the Japanese?

Mr. Anderson: Those I stepped across when I was on Tarawa. And, and then Inowekok, those two are the same, same procedures going through.

Mr. Metzler: So you were involved in the landing of Inowetok. Quadulane?

Mr. Anderson: Same thing. You go in, deliver the tanks.

Mr. Metzler: Same thing? You have it down pretty well.

Mr. Anderson: We didn't have any problems. I think we had it down pretty good to start with or we wouldn't have made it through. Our training was excellent.

Mr. Metzler: So after Inowetok and Quadulane , then what?

Mr. Anderson: I was taken to Pearl Harbor. I had a depression, concussion from this Jap mortar, blew a hole in my ear drum so when all this other stuff was going on, I used to have great fun smoking a cigarette and blowing smoke out my ear... (laughs) They sent me to Honolulu to some hospital and they put some antibiotics in my ear and the ear healed. It went pretty quick. I've had the same ear drum blown out several times. I've blown it out water skiing, in my water skiing days. Anyhow, my mother put a big stink with one of the Congressmen to get me out. I gave her ulcers and a hard time I guess. And she finally raised such stink that I think that's why I got shipped out of Hawaii and to San Francisco. That's where I got V12 training and they put me on a seagoing tug boat, if I'm on a seagoing tug boat then I can't be on an invasion, can I ?

Mr. Metzler: So you went where to get the training on the big engines. What was the engine called?

Mr. Anderson: V, like a V6 only the pistons are this big around. Thousand horsepower and run by electric. They took us all through the training ground in Cleveland, Ohio, and we had to see how they worked. We had to take them apart and put them back together and after we did that, they sent me to Miami, Florida and then they sent me to Port Arthur, Texas where in Port Arthur I was aboard a seagoing tug boat and we took cement docks through the Panama Canal and out to the Phillipine Islands and that's where we used these seagoing tugboats to take these cement slabs to the Phillipines.

They do the same thing the LSD does, they have tanks and you blow the ballast out and they sink. You put three of them together at a time and tow them back and forth. I've been through the Panama Canal many times for that kind of stuff.

Mr. Metzler: So the seagoing tug boats carried these cement docks all the way across, that's a long haul.

Mr. Anderson: At three knots.

Mr. Metzler: How many days, how long?

Mr. Anderson: I remember doing that a long time.... terrible!

Mr. Metzler: What time frame is this in? '44, '45?

Mr. Anderson: Got to be '44. I don't know.

Mr. Metzler: The war's still on though?

Mr. Anderson: Oh, yes. We had tug boat. The tug boat I was on had a tow on of a destroyer escort somewhere around the China Sea, somewhere in there. And we're towing it back when the war ended. We did that little number with the A-thing and that saved my life as far as I'm concerned.

Mr. Metzler: The A-Bomb. How do you think it saved your life?

Mr. Anderson: Without it the war would still be going on. And when this started, A-Bomb wipes them out, they say, we're through and they say, Goodbye Anderson.

Mr. Metzler: So you think you would have been in the invasionary force if this hadn't happened?

Mr. Anderson: Why certainly. Absolutely.

Mr. Metzler: When you were there in the Pacific, how was communication back home, you wrote letters, you had packages?

Mr. Anderson: Oh, yes, all that. We had no way of telling people where we were or where we were exactly. And there was no way to develop a code between the three of us. They had a bunch of knowledgeable people looking at it and they'd say, "this guy's got to be kidding". I had no problem with it.....

Mr. Metzler: Your folks were still in Kansas?

Mr. Anderson: No my father went to work for Todd shipyards as an inspector. My mother stayed home, she didn't work. But he became an inspector while they were still building ships. He got through on the west coast and we were turning out a lot of ...it was Todd Shipyards but I don't know anything else, maybe Long Beach.

Mr. Metzler: Yes, there were Todd Shipyards all over and there were some on the gulf coast as well. What did you think of the food?

Mr. Anderson: (laughs) Mostly alright. You can bitch about it, you can complain about SPAM and some of these things but most of it was pretty good food.

Mr. Metzler: So they didn't have chefs but they had cooks.....

Mr. Anderson: Yes, put some beans on there and the rest of it, I don't have any problem with any of it. When I was aboard the seagoing tugboats, I made a key to fit the officer's mess freezer and so I could get in the freezer, grab a bunch of steaks and take it down to the engine room. There's exhaust fans all over the engine room so they keep the air nice and clean. You put a little hot plate over by the fans and we'd have steak. We'd have steak when nobody else had steak. And we had wine because we made five gallons of wine at a time and we'd put it beneath the exhaust fans and when the wine was through fermenting, everybody in the engine room goes out and gets smashed. So here we are in the middle of the Pacific and we're all smashed.....

Mr. Metzler: Where did you get the raw materials to make wine....

Mr. Anderson: Rice and chigger... wine is wine. We'd use whatever to make it. Oh, yes, it's a fine brew. If you don't drink it quick it would turn to vinegar.

Mr. Metzler: What did you think about the officers that were running the Navy, that were directing you, what's your opinion?

Mr. Anderson: Well, that's alright I don't know that I have a great opinion. The problem is that most officers, they're trained, an officer is trained to manipulate people, that's their job, you can't whip it to them but you have some unique ways to make a person to do something. A case example, we were in a big storm out of Port Arthur, Texas. Big storm came along. There were little tow boats rowing back and forth and the engine wants to stop because of salt water, salt water is deadly on them. I happened to have the watch that night and in order to alleviate this and get rid of the problem you have to isolate the diesel oil tank, you've got to shut One tank off and bring in fresh diesel oil from another source. out of that source then we can pick up and run the diesel some more, they change the injectors as you go along. This engineer that was my superior, he came along and said, I'll open them, we're talking about valves, he said, I'll open them you tell me what you want me to do. And he followed me and I just went *bang, bang, bang*, you're talking about a lot of valves. And he's doing All these things, we start the engines and it's fine. I think he should know almost as much how to do that as I know. That was my thinking. That's not true, I shouldn't think that way.

When you have seagoing tug boats you have a tug and a unit and you're connected by a huge heavy cable (about that big around), so you're not traveling, if you're dead in the water, what happens, the cable sinks and it pulls the two together. So If you don't get started in time, what happens, they clash together. you have a certain amount of time to get going.

Mr. Metzler: Did you have some close calls?

Mr. Anderson: Only one. Then after that, everybody knows that you don't get sea water into an air lock.

Mr. Metzler: How big was the crew on these seagoing tugs?

Mr. Anderson: I think about a hundred and forty.

Mr. Metzler: This is a big ship!

Mr. Anderson: I have no idea why I'm saying that.

Mr. Metzler: I have this image of a little harbor tug...

Mr. Anderson: No, no, this is about a hundred forty feet long...

Mr. Metzler: How many engines did it have?

Mr. Anderson: Twin, twin engines, twin screw.

Mr. Metzler: So even if you lost one, you always had another engine.

Mr. Anderson: Not if the problem is created by the same unit of contaminated fuel; fuel gets contaminated and goes into this second engine.

Mr. Metzler: Well, as you think back over this whole experience of the war, what was the most trying time, you know, tense, worrisome, when you were the most scared? Anything come to mind?

Mr. Anderson: I'm a pretty easy going guy, I don't pick on anybody and nobody picks on me. It's my job to take care of things and whether my creativeness or something else.

Mr. Metzler: And what was the most humorous moment to come to mind?

Mr. Anderson: There's no humor in the Navy. I caught pneumonia out in the Pacific and it was in the days of no penicillin so the only thing you had was this other stuff, sulfa drugs. They took good care of me. I was out of it for a couple of days and he sat with me and he said, you've been out for two days and I nearly lost you. He was a pharmacist out of Texas. And he was the one who saved my life. I don't know, that's probably a low point but I came out of it.

Mr. Metzler: You said you'd gone through the Panama Canal several times.

Mr. Anderson: It was pretty interesting. They have all these mules pulling things back and forth.

Mr. Metzler: These were mechanical mules or real mules?

Mr. Anderson: Mechanical mules, that's the terminology. We had just been through there many, many times.

Mr. Metzler: Did it seem to be heavily fortified, to defend it in case it was attacked?

Mr. Anderson: You know I don't know that. I just never thought of that. It was busy. You always had one boat after another going across the Gatune Lake and it's just a kind've a slow. There's nothing you can do to hurry it. You can a kind of different place. Everybody wants to go to Panama and you don't really care whether...

Mr. Metzler: So you mentioned what you were doing when you heard that the war was over, so what happened?

Mr. Anderson: They asked me if I wanted to become, I was a First Class Machinist, they asked me if I wanted to become Chief, they'd give me Chief if I stayed in and I said not one chance would I be anywhere near.....What would I want to be in the Navy for? I've solved the problems of the world! My brother isn't going to have to go in because there's five years difference so we worked that part out. I just couldn't wait to get out . They said, don't you want to sign over and we'll pay you a few dollars. And I said, not one chance, not one penny, let me out of here. (laughs)

Mr. Metzler: So when did you muster out?

Mr. Anderson: I don't know, you mean dates?

Mr. Metzler: I mean, soon after the war was over?

Mr. Anderson: Just as quick as I could get out. You came out on the point system and you're allowed so many points for how long over seas, and when you ended up, you got a total and whenever you hit those points, you were out. I believe I was in Pearl Harbor, went to San Francisco on a troop ship, I think the bunks were something like ten or twelve high, and I thought, man, I've got to get out of here too!

Mr. Metzler: Just reinforced your desire to get out. So you went back to San Francisco, got out, and the rest is history I guess.....Did you go back to Kansas?

Mr. Anderson: No, I was raised in Kansas and it was twenty below, twenty above, I don't need all that.....so I lived in California. My folks were there then too. So they were here in California and I stayed there.

END of TAPE

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