

Eric Walz History 300 Collection

Warner Fisher – Life During WWII

By Warner Fisher

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Oral Interview conducted by Deryk Dees

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

DD: Who are you, what's your full name and where were you born?

WF: My full name is Warner Douglas Fisher, I was born in Sharon, Tennessee.

DD: How old were you on December 7th 1941?

WF: Let's see...I was eighteen.

DD: Do you remember anything about that day?

WF: Yes, I was in school over at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville and it was a Sunday morning when I heard the news. That's about it.

DD: Did you ever serve in the armed forces before this war?

WF: No.

DD: How did you feel when you heard about Pearl Harbor and that tragic event?

WF: Well, it's kind of hard to describe it. In fact it was kind of a shock. Of course immediate thought was, we're into this and we're going to be in the service before too long.

DD: How long after that or at what point did you join the service?

WF: I joined, it was the navy reserve. I joined in November of 1942. It was just a little bit before I, well, I joined before, I volunteered before they lowered the draft age to 19.

DD: Did you have to wait then until you were nineteen?

WF: Well, I was 19 when I joined.

DD: Did you join out of just patriotic duty?

WF: Well, yes, it was that, and at that time I knew I'd rather be in the navy than in the army so, and that was kind of the deciding factor at that time.

DD: Where and in what position did you serve?

WF: About a year in the navy college training program at Purdue University and then I went to mid-shipping school at Northwestern and I got to mid-shipping school with a commission as an ensign and then I went to a training school in Miami and then for another five weeks in Key West before I got on a destroyer escort in the North Atlantic.

DD: How long was it before you saw any combat action, or did you see any?

WF: Well, the destroyer escort I was on Deryk was assigned for a hunter killer group. We were assigned to hunt submarines and this was getting on pretty much toward the end of the war but there were quite a few German submarines in that North Atlantic area. Our ship did get credit for sinking one. And then when the Germans surrendered there were 3 or 4 submarines that surfaced within just a few hundred miles from where we were located.

DD: Can you describe the experience when you did sink the German submarine?

WF: Well, you know, it was kind of an impersonal thing in a way actually I think the submarine, we forced it to the surface, and I rather suspect they scuttled it. We did save the crew. There's an interesting side to that Deryk, I've stayed in touch with the crew members of the ship that I was on over the years and about four or five years ago they invited our crew over to Germany that is the survivors of the submarine we sunk for a reunion over there. And then the next year, well first of all we invited them over here and the next year they invited us over there and we are slated to go over there again this year. But I don't expect ya'll to make it. They said they only had about 17 or 18 members of the submarine groups left.

DD: How was it when you reunited with these fellows, and what was the interaction like, it sounds like it was pretty good.

WF: There was not an animosity there at all Deryk, because each one of us were fully aware that we were doing just what we had to do and it wasn't a personal thing at all. They were nice groups of people.

DD: Did they talk about the experience?

WF: Yes to some extent.

DD: It wasn't something that they felt so bad toward, it was pretty open.

WF: No.

DD: Can you describe some of those meetings, and how often you meet.

WF: Well Deryk, it's been going on. They put out a news letter once a year. That puts us up to date on the crew address's or crew members a little bit of that and all that sort of a thing. And they started this sort of meetings several years ago but when I was working the meetings were usually in fall of the year around October and that was the busiest time of year for me at work and I have never been able to make the reunions. But I do get the news letter every year and interesting enough the last one I had there they had the crew members that were deceased and the ones that were alive and there's more of them gone then there is of them alive now.

DD: When they did meet with the German submarine that they did sink, were you there on that one or did you just read about it?

WF: I wasn't at the reunion.

DD: But you did read about it in the news letter.

WF: Oh, yeah. Right.

DD: When you were serving on the submarine did you meet any friends from home?

WF: The ship I was on the destroyer escort there wasn't anybody there that I knew previously at all. The crew was mad up from a great extent from people living in the New England area. Yeah, the skipper was, the captain of our ship was David Tuss and his brother was a movie actor Sunny Tuss. He was from what I call New England blue blood class up there.

DD: Did you become pretty good friends with some of the crew members then?

WF: Oh yeah, I was over one of the junior officers and our quarters were below decks right back on the back end of the ship just above one of its crews and it was a noisy place. There were two guys there Raft Jackson and Frank Juden that were with me there and that's the men, and both of them are dead now. The Germans had a torpedo that was, that would zero in on sound and the noise on the ships crews would attract the torpedo's so we called up the back room over back there in that back room we called it "torpedo junction." But there was an outfit that they tailed out behind that made some noise that was suppose to kind of distract the torpedos from the ship so I guess maybe it was effective at least we never did get hit. One of the other things that I think I told you about, on the sunk German submarine, the ship we were on had a torpedo tube and it would be trained 4 and a half on the deck and the standard procedure would be that the thing would be swiveled out at rope side and would be ready to fire. Well the kid that was on the torpedo, he kind of panicked and he pulled the firing pin on the thing and it went right up the deck. Of course it wasn't armed but it tore a hole in the smoke stack. The biggest danger was making a dry run there was no resistance on the propellers and you could generate heat on the thing. They wetted it down, and kept it down with water and everything so really there was no great damage done. But this kid, they transferred him off the ship next opportunity.

DD: What was your specific responsibilities on the ship?

WF: I was a assistant gunny officer. We had three, three inch guns, we had some forty millimeters and some twenty millimeters guns, and I was in charge of the twenties and forties.

DD: Did you ever have to fire upon the enemy?

WF: No. When the submarine was sunk we didn't have to fire on it. It was forced to the surface by depth charges.

DD: What was your thought on some of the enemy leaders like Hitler, Mussilini, and Japan and their leader? Do you recall any specific feeling you had towards them? Or that were prevalent in the military?

WF: I wouldn't say hatred but it was certainly pretty much sad I don't shall we say blaming Hitler, Mussilini and the Japanese for starting the war and for what they did. Yeah, there was a pretty strong feeling among the people in the service on that score. Not necessarily against the people themselves but their leaders.

DD: What's your feelings on the Japanese and Germans today?

WF: Well, after a period of time the Japanese and the Germans became our best friends. Again, they get rid of the leadership and that sort of thing and Japan did a complete turn around as far as their government was concerned and the Germans pretty much too, by and large I think the animosity disappeared. Although some of the guys that were at war with the Japanese probably never did quite get over it. You know, I was never involved in that.

DD: How did you life change as a result of WWII?

WF: Well, I guess it did Deryk for one thing it gave me an opportunity to finish my college education by the G.I. bill of rights. The other thing my father died in 1945 while I was still in the service and having been in the navy and going to different place and all this sort of thing I guess you can say I kind of cut my root a little bit. I wasn't reluctant to go somewhere else. Of course I finished up at Purdue, that's when I went to Utah State.

DD: Would you say it played some role with you now in being a member of the church and meeting Grandma, is that what you're kind of saying too?

WF: Yeah, it's one of those things Deryk, sometimes seemingly unimportant decisions in your life makes a world of difference. For example my decision to go to Utah Sate made all the difference in the world.

DD: How did your religious beliefs affect your view toward your service, toward your philosophy of life?

WF: I belonged to the Methodist Church Deryk and my family were regular church goers and were active in the church, and I always went to church when I was younger as far as the wars concerned there wasn't any reluctance on the part of my religion, we needed to get in and help the country and fight. But as far as my family was concerned they were quite tolerant of any religion. Whether they're Methodist, or whatever.

DD: During your service on the boat, how did your relationship with God play into your experience?

WF: Not big, I always believed in God and everything actually I wasn't very active in any kind of organized religion at the time. Of course on board ship we didn't have anything. And some other times when I was at mid-shipping school at Northwestern, we had a religious service every Sunday night for about an hour. You know it was one group, not any sort of religious denomination at all.

DD: What kind of activities did you do on the destroyer escort at the time?

WF: There wasn't much time for entertainment Deryk, if you had a submarine contact or false alarm you had to go to general quarter so to get sleep more than three or four hours at a time was kind of the premium. While we were at sea there wasn't much in the way entertainment except to take advantage of what time you could sleep. Now when we were in port we had access to some movies but at sea there wasn't any.

DD: What was your experience with the food you had to eat and stuff?

WF: Well, I don't know, they made a quite a few changes of course. One thing that it did, you know during the war women got into a lot of the industry, you know, in the work force that they hadn't been in before, and this trend continues, and it has continued till this good day. Of course the period following the war was one of economic recovery and actually in the 50's the general prosperity of the country was pretty good. And we didn't have too much of imminent wars at the time.

DD: Did you know any other young men that may have gone to war and not returned?

WF: Oh yeah, there was one guy in my high school graduating class that went into the air force and he was killed in the Mediterranean somewhere and I knew two or three others that I was acquainted with that didn't come back too.

DD: Were you close to the families to remember how they felt about that?

WF: Not really, this boy's mother was an art teacher in the school there and it was their only son too, and the father died not too long after that. I guess they took it pretty hard.

DD: Did you have any brothers that served in the war?

WF: Yeah, my brother Wayne was drafted and went into the Navy at age 37.

DD: Did you keep in touch with him?

WF: Yeah, I did. In fact he was at Great Lakes at the navel training station there and I was in mid-shipping school at Northwestern. I was able to go up and visit with him on the weekend. We were able to keep in touch to some extent.

DD: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

WF: Well, I don't know Deryk. I kind of would like to reiterate kind of about the fact that being in the navy and getting sent to Purdue and that sort of thing there for a country boy who've never been anywhere much, that's kind of what you might say, I kind of cut my traces a little bit. I wasn't as reluctant to move out to somewhere as I might have been otherwise. Of course my father died while I was at war and I didn't really have any close ties at home. Of course my mother was still living but with my father gone I lost some of the ties that I had there.