Interview--Carl Barnett

By: John Feeley

Experiences during world war II

(1940 through 1946)

Interviewed October 12,1994

Marquette, Michigan

approx. 115 min.

State your full Name.

Carl Barnett

When and where you were born?

I was born in Warren, Ohio in 1924.

Your parents names'?

My dads name was Bruce, and my mothers name was Elise.

Did you have an ethnic background?

Well, the Barnett side of the family came over early in the 1700's, or late 1700's. I can't tell much about my family, because during the Civil War they split. My great-grandfather moved from the south to southern Indiana, and he fought on the North and all of his relatives fought for the South. He would never talk about them; so consequently, my father doesn't even know. But, there are a lot of Barnetts in the South, much, much more than there are in the North. My mothers father came from Burn, Switzerland. On my fathers side, were Pennsylvania, Dutch-- Befendals, Stalls, My great-grandmother, I can remember her, and her dad had fought in the war of 1812. She use to have his drum; he was a drummer boy. They lived in southern Ohio, Circleville, Ohio. She told me when the Civil War came they came to conscript her brothers and her Dad run them off with a shot gun. He had seen enough in the war of 1812, and he wouldn't let his boys fight. Consequently, they didn't. But, she could remember, Lincoln's funeral train coming through town. I wish that I had known her when I was a little older, there are a lot of questions that I would have liked to of asked. She used to tell us all these tales once in a while, about

Indians coming around and her dad having to run them off. It seems unbelievable to us today. Growing up, I had three grandmothers. I had two regular grandmothers and a great-grandmother; I never knew a grandfather. The one that was named Vonalman, that came from Burn, Switzerland was killed on a railroad. He was an engineer. A bum cut the switch and through the train on a siding. It was an express train. When they hit the siding, he knew it immediately, I guess they could feel it. I don't know enough about steam engines. But, they tell me that they have to brake them twice. They have to set the brakes and release them, set them a second time and then there locked. He did told the engineer, fireman to jump. He jumped and broke both legs. My grandfather jumped off the other way and the cab tipped over on him. The engine and the tender were the only two car that were derailed, all the rest of the passengers, they all stayed on. I can remember in 19 well it had to be maybe 40', 39' or 40' a lawyer came to my grandmother and wanted to sue the railroad. This had happened in 1924, because he was killed just before I was born. The lawyers were trying to get her to sue that railroad. She wouldn't, of coarse, because they gave him a special funeral train and she got a lifetime pass to the railroad--that was about it.

Did you get married before or after you joined the service?

Right after. I went in. I graduate from high school--the both of us--in 1942. I went into the service. We had gone to high school together, in fact, we kind of went around together in the 9th grade. Then she had a boyfriend and I had a girlfriend all the way through high school. Came back; well, we wrote occasionally while I was in the service. Her boyfriend married someone else. My girlfriend married someone else.

In the meantime she had moved from Monroe--we graduated from Monroe, Michigan. She had moved to Peoria, Illinois. We had written. We were going to Chicago to visit relatives and asked her to come up. She came up to Chicago and we spent the weekend there with these Aunts and Uncles. Then I was going to Eastern Michigan. That summer she came on up to Eastern Michigan.

So, you were in school. You went to school while you were in the service?

No, I am sorry. After I was discharged. I am talking 1946 Now. She had come up to visit friends we had gone to high school with--who were also going to eastern. We decided to get married. We got married in August of 46'.

You got married after the war then?

Yes, I was going to school on the G.I. Bill. Being married you got $90 bucks a month.

90 on the G.I. Bill?

Yes

It made a difference weather you were married or not?

Yes, you got, I think it was about $55 dollars a month. If your married you got $90 dollars a month plus your books and tuition.

Where were you when the war started?

Monroe, Michigan.

You joined the Coast Guard?

Yes

Was there a specific reason for the Coast Guard?

Well, I figured it was my best chance to get to sea. At that time they were looking for people with small boat experience. I was born right on lake Erie. I had been on the water all my life. They were looking

for small boat people, little did I know it meant landing craft. It was strange when--I never went to boot camp. They sent me right straight up to Sue Saint Marie. They were building destroyer escorts, I think at Duluth. They would shake them down coming around to the Sue. Then they but the crew on there and go on to the Atlantic. We were waiting there for a D.E. They came around and they tabbed me and sent me to Paris Island with the Marines. We trained down there on Higgins boats--landing craft. We spend three days we would defend the beach the Marines would land. Then we would have a couple days off. Then they would reverse it, we would land and the Marines would defend. I was a higgins boat operator.

Did you join the service because of the war?

Oh yes. The war started in 1941 and I graduated in 1942. Just about everyone in our graduating class, unless you were 4-F, ended up in the service.

How was the feelings in high school, knowing the war had started.

Several quit school and joined. I wanted to but my parents wouldn't sign for me and of course I wasn't old enough to join without their signature. They wanted me to go on to school. I finally talk them into signing. I went in--I guess I was seventeen when I went in. You didn't have much choice, really. Unless you could figure out a way to evade the draft, you were going to be gone period. Very few fellas that I knew tried to get out of it. I had a couple of friends who went to college and got in engineering or chemical engineering or something that would give them an exemption or a school that had an R.O.T.C. that they could join. That would keep them out of the war. There

were very few. I would say 95% of our class--the boys didn't make any effort to get out. A great majority of them, all of us.

Once you were in then you went up north for training, then were did you go after that?

I went to Parise Island and I was a higgins boat operator. During World War II, I don't know what percent, I can't tell you. But a great percent of the Coast Guard were on landing craft. The casualty rate in the Coast Guard was the highest rate in all the services--Marine, Army, Air Force, Navy.

They took all Coast Guard men and put them on naval vessels?

No, there are own vessels, but we were the ones who took the troops to the beach. As the war progressed you'd come back to the states or something, the Coast Guard had a little seal on your arm. One difference between the Navy uniform. The Navy had no use for the Coast Guard. Every time two or three Navy men would jump a Coast Guard man if there were a Marine around you had an alley; because the Marines knew who took them in and who brought them back out. The life expectancy, when I was a higgins boat operator, was a trip-and-a-half--a landing-and-a-half. If you made two trips you got off; you didn't have to make another invasion. I made one half of a trip. I went in North Africa and we got our barrage up on shore and the guys all got out. I don't know what kind of shell or mortar of some kind but it went down and stuck right in the deck. It was a dud, it didn't go off. We didn't wait in see. Here the thing sticking out of there and we took off. We had a crew of three. I was the coxin and we had a motormack and a seamen. When that thing stopped we were right over the side. We crawled up on the beach and let it sit there. We

laid there until the next barge was pulling out and we jumped in. It was two months before I got back to my ship; because the barge I happened to get into went to another ship. It was two months before I got back to mine. In the mean time my folks got a telegram that I'm missing in action. I didn't even have a scratch on me all I had was a wet butt. I don't think I caught up to the ship until we got back to Boston. Then they transferred me to Radio school. I didn't like it. We had guys going out of there mind; because, in thirty-two weeks, you had to learn to type twenty words a minute and take eighteen words a minute in code. We got eight hours of code a day. We had guys who would tear their ear phones off and run into the wall head first, throw type-writers out the window. I know I was sitting there pouring some milk and my hand was shaking so that I couldn't hit the glass--I thought this was stupid. I said I wanted to get out of here. I asked is there any way to get out of here? They said if you flunk your code two weeks in a row and you get kicked out. I flunked my next two test. I had a 98% average in theory so they sent me to Radio Material school which is radio repair. Then that was my rate; I was a radio technician. We repaired radar or loran and sonar and radio. The loran and radar was so secret in 1943 that there were only two people on our ship--we had a crew of 1200--were aloud in the radar transmitter room. The skipper was a full striper a full captain and he wasn't even aloud in there. This is where we played our card games and kept our contraband of all the crew. Because only two of us had a key, we could hide anything we want to in there or play cards or anything we wanted to do. None of the officers were aloud in there, not even the communications officer unless he was qualified. The

radar was so secret at that time and loran. My son-in-law is a radio ham. He can't understand why I'm not interested in it. I was some what a radio operator, which didn't appeal to me. I couldn't even fix a radio today because we had capacitors, resistors and vacuum tubes. Now, you have chips and all this stuff, all together different. We did it. If a radio or a radar went out we had to start working on it; we had to fix it. You had to check your circuits and find out where your problem was and get it fixed. If the radar went out; if it took forty-eight hours straight, you worked forty-eight hours straight because you were blind without it. Otherwise, we didn't have any other real duties. When I was at sea--you have your day workers that work everyday from eight in the morning until five, and you have your watch standers, your signal men, your radiomen. We stayed in a watch standers compartment which meant there was no reveille. The guys were four on eight off, four on eight off. Guys were sleeping and getting up all the time and we had messengers who would wake the guys who had to go on duty. We didn't have to go on duty, but we were on call for twenty-four hours--so I would always eat watch-standers chow, which was much shorter lines than the regular chow line. You could sleep until you wanted to get up, but there again if you had to work twenty-four hours you did. The Chief we had aboard the transport--I end up on a transport--was very high on preventative maintenance. All we had to do everyday, we had to make sure we dusted out every transmitter, we checked out all the power and anything that had to be oiled had to be oiled--this was daily. Consequently, we had very few breakdowns--so we didn't do anything.

Where did they ship you to on the vessel, where did you end up going?

We ran from Boston into North Africa, into Marseilles France; we ran into Liverpoole England. We took all kinds of troops over. One time, we brought a load of German prisoners back to Boston. One trip--the war was almost over in Europe--we took among others we took the First Calvery. I remember that because, after the war was over, one of my High school buddies was in the First Calvery and was on my ship. I didn't know it; we didn't run into each other. We took them from Boston to Marseilles--came back empty. No, no, we brought some troops back for rotation picked up another load took them back over and picked up the First Calvery; they had only been there two weeks. We thought, we are picking up the same guys that we brought over, strange. We left the Mediterranean and suddenly we realize that we are headed south. There was a lot of speculation--why are we heading south? We should had been heading almost due west or a little north west. Finally, they announced that we are heading for the Panama Canal and everyone would be able to send one telegram when we hit the Panama Canal and we were headed for the South Pacific. All these parents of the First Calvery started screaming at their Congressmen, that their boys had to go over and fight the war in Europe and now they are having to go to the Pacific. They hadn't been over there(Europe) long enough to earn the European Theater of Operations medal--which takes thirty days. We went around and made the liberation of the Philippines. We went from Marseilles to the Panama Canal, right straight to the Philippines.

At that time, had Germany been liberated yet?

No, I think we were at sea when they finally surrendered; but apparently it was quite evident because, that is why we were taking these people back and re-deploying them. I believe we were at sea when Germany surrendered and European war was over; we were headed for the Philippines.

Was your ship involved in the D-Day assault, or no?

No, it was in this respect, we took troops to England. There are a couple types of transports. Mine was an A.P. it was strictly a troop transport. They have A.P.A.s which were attack transports. The closest we ever got to an invasion would probable be ten miles off the shore. Landing craft would load off of us. We carried 1200 troops. Speed was are biggest defense. When ever we ran anywhere, we ran with two destroyers and that's all, no convoys or anything; because, we would make thirty knots. Submarines are not going to bother you at thirty knots. The only thing that's going to bother is going to be aircraft. We had two submarines that were assigned strictly to our ship and were ever it went they went. One time, they put us in an eight knot convoy. Being a radio technician I was always up around the bridge or on the bridge because of the radio shack. The old man was just screaming about being put in this eight knot convoy. Because no matter where you went a troop ship was like a magnet. An aircraft carrier and a troop ship they tried to get, because they could get 12,000 troops plus 1,200 crew that was 13,000 men they could blow up real quick. The Army scheduled us; we were hauling Army troops, so the Army Transportation Corps scheduled where we went--it was kind of a screwed up deal. We were in this eight knot convoy and they zig-zag. They've got like a round disk and everyone starts. It

gos round on a timer and it will say North Northeast and everyone turns--so it zig-zags. But, the whole convoy zigs and zags at the same time. When it is dark you can't see there are no lights anywhere, everything is blacked out. If one of them is a little slow, some ship run into each other if there not all zigging when they should. A ship got a submarine contact, or thought they did, and hoisted a flag signal for sub contact. The flag ship of the fleet hoisted the signal to fan out. The whole convoy instead of running in two lines, they just fan. When that went up the old man just kicked it in the tail and we headed right straight for France, and these two destroyers as soon as we took off they just swung around one on the bow and one on the stern--away we went. We had been at sea one day and we were down somewhere near Bermuda. We were somewhere in that part of the country. Normally, we went straight across the, what they call the great circle route, leave Boston and go up like this to come down--which is the shortest way because the earth is a sphere you don't go due east or west. We were about a day out when we broke formation. We went over discharged that load picked up a load, came back to Boston picked up a load. We were always there four or five days to re supply, re provision and load troops; went back and were discharging our second load when this convoy came staggering in. That's eight knots as apposed to twenty-two--that's what we normally cruised at, in forced traffic you could get thirty knots. It was, going over to the Philippines was one hell of a long trip. We had thirty Marines aboard too.

Were they Security?

Any captain or up--captain is the first step below an admiral, you've got your vice admirals and all that-- you go from captain to admiral. He was a full four stripper, we had thirty Marines aboard who were the captains guards. There are two of them right behind him all the time. If he turns around fast he runs into them. They fallow him all over, those are your bell hops, your sea going bell hops--the Marine Corps. Are thirty Marines carried the First Marine patch--Gudalcanal Patch. These guys hadn't been anywhere but in the pacific because there were no Marines in the European Theater of war during World War II. Except, Any that were attached to a ship that were the captains guards, security, or embassy. There were no Marines in combat in Europe. These guys were so proud of the Gudalcanal patch and they were boots. They hadn't been anywhere. We kept telling them that you would get it one of these days. The first load that we brought back from the South Pacific was the First Marine Corps. I don't think one of these guys spent more than three days without getting whipped. If a garbage detail didn't show up they would send them down, because we were carrying Marines. They would go down to this compartment and say this compartment is charged with garbage detail. No one would move. "Who's the First Sergeant," they asked? This one says what. He said "come here can't hear you." The guy said, "what did you say?" "Who is the First Sergeant?" The guy grabs him and belts him one and says, "I am." He said, "No garbage detail for my men." They really had a rough time; but they weren't near as cocky after that. Some of these guys had been over there since 1942, or 1941. They didn't have very much respect for them.

What year was it that you finally ended up in the Pacific.

We made the invasion of the Philippines and we brought this First Marine Division back to San Francisco. I know we took a load of Army back to Manila. The second trip back there, the first trip we could see the islands from a distance. We never got close they load all of our troops off of us. The second trip back we anchored right in Manila Bay. You couldn't tie up there were to many ships sunk in the bay, and everything had to be liared in from the ship. We got liberty then; we were aloud to go ashore. Liberty was up in four in the afternoon. Manila has an old city and a new city. The old city was a walled city--had a wall all around it. You could still hear them shooting in there. They were still digging them out one at a time. Corregidor, they had a lot of Japanese on there. they were just trapped; they had to go dig them out, out of caves and everything else. Some of them, as long as four years after the war had ended, they were still digging Japs out of there. They would hold up and no one ever told them to surrender. They even flew over and said, "Japan has surrendered, Japan has surrendered." They wouldn't believe them; they wouldn't give up. I don't know how many years--eight, ten years latter they would find a Jap hold up over there some where still fighting the war. We made the invasion of the Philippines came back to Frisco, went all the way back again. I was sitting on the beach when McCarther returned. We were up there drinking beer and playing volleyball. They gave us two cans of warm beer and put us ashore for recreation. The Army M.P.s made us move off the beach. We couldn't understand why we had to move up the beach. We could see these battle wagons out there; we could see all these barges starting in--landing craft. We were high

enough, I had been a barge operator, and you could read the water. Normally, you hit a false bottom that you got to jam over that and hit the deep water and then hit the real beach. If you don't read it and hit that first sand bar and drop the ramp and let those troops off, they go in right over there head. They were coming in on these barges and 95% of them were news paper people. Then there was McCarther and his staff and everything. We didn't know it at the time. They came and they all hit this false sand bar. I said they can't open those, they walked off the barges--McCarther got into water up to his arm pits. They went back out and changed cloths, came back in and slide over that sand bar and hit the real beach. Then he waded ashore with all the photographers and his corn cob pipe. They didn't have much use for him over there. They couldn't bomb down town Manila; because, McCarther owned so much of it, it was off limits from bombing.