

Jud McDannold,
An Interest in Electronics Led Him to the Navy

“The education I got in the Navy affected my whole life,” Jud McDannold concluded about his five years in the military. That education focused on various types of technical training. He exhibited an interest in electronics at an early age. Born in 1921, the day of Jud’s birth occurred on a month and date--December 6th-- that would come to hold a certain significance for those members of the American military who served at Pearl Harbor. It proved to be their last day before the United States entered WW II. When Jud reached his 20th birthday in 1941, little did he know what a historic day would follow it.

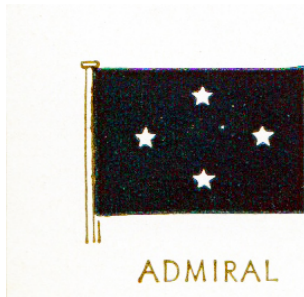
Jud spent his early years in Kansas City, Missouri with his parents and one brother, four years younger than Jud. His father owned a garage and filling station there. Jud did not have many strong memories of his childhood years, although one stayed with him because of the specialty he had when in the Navy. While living in Kansas City, Jud built his first radio with a crystal set. In those years, like almost all Americans, the McDannolds felt the Depression in a very personal way. Jud’s father lost the garage and the family moved to Phoenix, Arizona. His dad had a brother who owned a farm on the outskirts of the city, and all four McDannolds moved in with him and his family. (The “farm” was one in name only; the total livestock consisted of one horse and a cow named “Bubbles.”) The home of Jud’s uncle stood on the edge of the desert. In the mornings Jud knocked scorpions out of his shoes. In the hot months, he considered himself to be a desert rat, with the sun baking him so much that Jud’s skin became black.

The McDannold family’s move to Arizona coincided with Jud’s freshman year in high school. He enrolled at Phoenix Union High School, along with over five thousand other students. Jud’s father drove him to school in the mornings. In the afternoon he either walked the four miles home or he hitchhiked. Jud did not consider himself to be very athletic, so in his freshman year he signed up for ROTC to avoid gym class. Jud stayed in ROTC all four years. He enjoyed his high school years, characterizing them as “something to do all of the time.” Union High organized a yearly fundraiser called the Mask of the Yellow Moon that Jud and many other Phoenix residents attended. Another important moment in his high school years that Jud remembered was qualifying for a driver’s license. Decades later he still recalled one of the exam questions on the driving test--name the location of Phoenix’s five stoplights. Jud learned not only to drive a car, but also to fix one. Auto shop proved to be his favorite class. Jud’s technical abilities were also apparent outside of school. He fixed radios for people and became a ham radio operator. (Jud’s knowledge of Morse code served him well after his enlistment in the Navy.) Jud enjoyed his high school experiences so much so that after he graduated, he returned to Union High for one more semester, taking a class in biology and another one in algebra.

After Jud’s 1939 graduation, he did not have many job opportunities with the Depression still going on. Jud ended up bagging groceries. His employment problems

ended on April 13, 1940 when he enlisted in the Navy.¹ He knew that he could study electronics in the service. The recruitment office in Phoenix arranged for Jud to take a bus to Los Angeles where he was sworn in. From there, the Navy sent him by train to San Diego where boot camp awaited Jud. Because of his ROTC background, he became a boot camp sergeant. While Jud enjoyed those weeks, there was a downside to boot camp--only one other recruit was from Arizona. All of the others were from Texas, a group Jud identified as “a different kind of people.” After graduating from boot camp, Jud received orders to remain in San Diego to attend radio school. It is not surprising that with his background, Jud graduated at the top of his radio school class. With that status, the Navy assigned Jud to what he called “the Admiral’s Flag Group.”

Those sailors were also identified as the Admiral’s “flag allowance” or “the flag complement.” It was a select group. The Navy assigned an Admiral extra



communications men to deal with what one sailor called “the additional communications traffic” that grew out of the daily responsibilities of an admiral. These “signalmen, radiomen, and yeomen” accompanied “the admiral wherever he went.”² For better or worse, throughout his years in the Navy, Jud stressed that he was never considered part of the “ship’s company.” Although Jud ate and slept in the same quarters as the sailors assigned to the ship Jud was on, he was always a member of the

communications staff attached to an admiral or commodore. By the end of 1941, Jud was in Honolulu, serving on board the light cruiser the *U.S.S. Detroit*. Such ships have been described as “essentially small, fast battleships with lighter armor and guns.”³

On December 6, 1941, Jud could not celebrate his 20th birthday because he had duty that day. To Jud, that was okay since he could “party” the next day by going on shore to Waikiki. But of course, December 7th turned out to be a very different type of day--the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. That morning, Jud was on the bridge, in the conning tower. “I could see the large pillars of smoke bellowing up from Battleship Row, just across Ford Island & all of the explosions and smoke from the burning planes on the island.” He believed the *Detroit* sent out the very first radio dispatch to Washington D.C. announcing the attack. (Read Jud’s own account of that day elsewhere on this web site.) The crew of the *Detroit* responded to the enemy planes overhead by manning the ship’s antiaircraft artillery guns. These Pearl Harbor Defenders also fired the cruiser’s machine guns. The *Detroit* and the *USS Curtiss* together shot down two Japanese planes. One enemy aerial torpedo fell some ten yards off of the *Detroit*. Jud’s ship sustained no damage, however, on December 7th. And although two crewmen were wounded, no one on board the *Detroit* died that morning.⁴

In the few weeks that followed, Jud copied code with a radio group on Oahu. A request came down from above, however, that a Destroyer Group needed a radioman. In order to decide who would leave the islands, about eighteen men drew cards; whoever held the lowest one would be the sailor who would transfer out of Hawaii. Jud lost. His next station, therefore, was with Command Destroyer Group Two (CD Two). It took

about six months for Jud to connect with them. First, the Navy put him on a tanker that went from Oahu to San Pedro and San Francisco. (Jud joined it after the tanker delivered oil to Hawaii.) While on board, Jud worked in the mess, sitting “on the fantail and peeling potatoes,” as he recalled.

Around December 1942, Jud arrived on board the *U.S.S Nicholas*, a destroyer that served as the flagship for CD Two. During the war, Jud pointed out that “radio work was the same no matter where you went.” His duties were not unlike those he had on board the *Detroit*, namely to receive and send messages, using code when required. Jud first saw combat with the *Nicholas* at Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, when the destroyer shelled Japanese positions on that island. Jud remembered more than

one trip “up the Slot” to bombard islands held by the Japanese. (The Slot is a phrase Americans used for the New Georgia Sound in the Solomon Islands.) As it turned out, an officer in another destroyer group that was also assigned to similar duty in the Slot would later become Jud’s father-in-law. In March 1943, the *Nicholas* became part of



Commander Destroyer Squadron Twenty-One. The ship performed escort duties, searched for enemy submarines, and rescued Americans in Pacific waters. Before he left the Pacific for duty back in the States, Jud enjoyed two liberty trips to Sydney, Australia. He recalled both R & Rs there with fondness. Jud visited Australian families who opened their homes to him and other servicemen, he dated young women, and he experienced blackouts like Americans back home. Because there were limits on how much could be charged to servicemen for various goods, Jud was able to make \$200 last for his whole liberty.

At the end of 1944, the Navy sent Jud to electronics school in Chicago. He flew from New Guinea to Oakland, California. From there he hitchhiked to Phoenix for a few days at home. His family had not seen Jud for almost four years. Upon arrival in Chicago, he vividly remembered the change in climate he experienced with the change in duty stations. Jud had left islands near the equator and arrived in Chicago during the winter months. In the Windy City, he studied the repair of radar, sonar, and radio. Jud was still in Chicago when V-E Day and V-J Day occurred. The Navy tried to tempt him to re-enlist, offering him a Chief’s rating. But Jud declined.

After the war, he went home to Phoenix. Eventually, Jud moved to the Los Angeles area where he went to work for Hughes Aircraft. Jud stayed with the company for twenty-five years. Before and after he retired, Jud and his wife Evelyn vacationed, driving a truck and trailer to different states. In time, they had two sons who accompanied them. Over time, Jud enjoyed the company of eight grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren. With them, he shared stories of his life and lessons he learned throughout

it, particularly those while he served in the Navy. Jud died in May 2016, a loss felt by his family and by all who knew him.



Jud (on the right) with other Pearl Harbor Defenders, April 2010

¹ Jud's enlistment date is found in WW II U.S. Navy Muster Rolls on www.ancestry.com; muster rolls from the ships he served on can also be found there (accessed July 29, 2016).

² Quotations are taken from the memoir of a WW II sailor, Floyd Beaver, *White Hats, Stories of the U.S. Navy Before World War II* (Palo Alto, 1999), pp. 198, 230. Beaver enlisted in 1938, and this memoir contains stories that are both enlightening and entertaining. Another memoir by a different WW II sailor uses the phrase "the flag complement." This second book is by Theodore C. Mason, *Battleship Sailor* (Annapolis, 1982), p. 208. Mason was a radioman on board the *USS California* on December 7, 1941.

³ Pat Martin, *USS California (BB-44)* (Paducah, KY, 1995), p. 13.

⁴ On December 10, 1941, the *Detroit's* Commanding Officer filed an action report on what happened aboard his ship on the morning of December 7th. It is available at www.wiiarchives.net/servlet/action/doc?Arc1812101941 (accessed July 27, 2016).