



Byrne Fernelius

United States Navy

Captain

Pacific Theater

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Interviewer:
Rick Randle

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Rick: We're happy to have Byrne Fernelius with us today. Could you just say your name and spell it or us so we can make sure that we get it accurately?

Byrne: It's Byrne – B-Y-R-N-E, C is the initial and the last name is F-E-R-N-E-L-I-U-S, Fernelius.

Rick: Well we're really happy to have you with us today and could you tell us a little about your early life, where you grew up and lead us up to December 7th, 1941.

Byrne: I was born in Uintah Utah which is south of Ogden Utah about 3 miles and I spent most of my time there and when I was a kid I went to Birch Creek Junior High School and from there I went to Weber County High School and from there I went to Weber College and from there I went up to Utah State – an agricultural college at Utah State and from there I went out to Indiana University and got my PhD.

Rick: So on December 7th 1941, Pearl Harbor day can you remember where you were and what you were doing?

Byrne: Exactly. I was in Ogden Utah. Gene and I were visiting with her folks, we were sitting down for lunch and one of the neighbors come over there, a good friend of her brother came over and said that we'd been bombed by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor and that's where we were and I knew right then that I was going to have to do something.

Rick: How old were you at that time?

Byrne: I think I was about 21.

Rick: And then what happened after that? Did you decide to join right away?

Byrne: No we went back to school and at about March I started looking around because every guy...my draft number was one of the first ones and they were going to draft me but I talked with my wife's father who knew somebody down at the city hall and he said if you got married he could postpone it so we got married and I had graduate assistance and I was teaching at Utah State in the Graduate Department.

Rick: Could you describe a little of the feelings of your classmates and friends and family as to what that war was going to mean?

Byrne: It meant that we were going out and going to shoot somebody. We were ready, we wanted to get these people that had stabbed us in the back so to speak (well that's what they really did) and so we were ready to go.

Rick: And then when did you...you enlisted then I guess?

Byrne: Yes I was looking for...I had my degree and I was looking for a place where I could get a commission to be an officer and I couldn't find it because they were all filled because people were getting in to the service as fast as they could. And so all the select spots, the commissioned spots were filled up. Then they had another article in the paper that Gene Tuney who used to be one of the Heavy Weight Champions of the world – he was meeting people over in Denver. So my dad got a railroad pass and I took the train over to Denver and we had quite a number of athletes there because that's what they were recruiting – were athletes. In fact Ev Shelton from the University of Wyoming had his entire basketball team there. Frosty Cox from the University of Colorado had his football team there. I picked up a lot of friends there and we took this...well Gene Tuney interviewed me and he said "*well if you pass the physical we'll sign you up*". So that afternoon I took the physical and I passed it and so I went on the train and went back to Ogden Utah and hitchhiked from Ogden Utah up to Logan Utah where we were living at the time and told them that I'd enlisted in the Navy and that I would report back to Denver around about March.

Rick: So that was in 1943?

Byrne: I think it was pretty close to being 1941.

Rick: Pearl Harbor was December

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: So you enlisted there with Gene Tunney up in Denver and then...

Byrne: And then in March I went back to Denver and we met and we got on the Silver Streak railroad train and we all got in and were singing happy songs and headed for Norfolk Virginia to be assigned to a spot in the Navy and I was in Squadron 16 back there.

Rick: Did you take your basic training then in Norfolk?

Byrne: In Norfolk Virginia I took the basic training learning how to tie knots and how to go out and visit ships. In fact we went on a lot of the aircraft carriers that were tied up in Norfolk Virginia and went and visited those. Then we went out and hiked nearly everyday and at noon hour we'd come in and have lunch (a real good lunch incidentally) and then we'd go back in and have classes on ordinance work about the war and how to identify planes and boats and that sort of thing. We did that every afternoon and in the evening at about 5 o'clock we broke ranks and went back to our bunks and got ready for dinner and later on that evening we had classes also in gunnery and knot tying and whatever the Navy had at that period of time. In fact incidentally we had a lot of people back there in this PT Boat program; we had many of the Stanford basketball players, Wyoming basketball players and also from Colorado we had Frosty Cox's football players. We all met then we would eat or study that night and the next morning we had to get up at about 5 o'clock and do what they call '*the Tuney exercises*' and they had

certain exercises that we were going to give our recruits when we were shipped out as a company.

Rick: Well then right after basic then you signed up for the PT Boat program?

Byrne: No right after basic they asked us where we wanted to go and I said "*I want to go to the west coast*". So they assigned some of us out there to the Naval station there in San Diego and that's where we went through the same training again of how to prepare ourselves to teach the new recruits coming in from civilian life how to tie knots, how to row boats, how to be in public and that sort of thing.

Rick: So in San Diego you enlisted in the PT Boat program?

Byrne: In San Diego I had one company, I was assistant company commander of one company of 120 recruits and we took them through all the things that we had just gone through – how to tie knots, how to row boats and how to do all that sort of thing and also how to get out of the smokescreen or if a bomb would land and then we would go out and recruit ourselves and hide in the trenches. We went right through the same thing.

Rick: Did you go overseas right after that?

Byrne: Well a little bit later I got assigned, Jean and I bought a home there in San Diego near the Naval Training Station right there down on a place called Emerson Avenue and we could walk from the station down to where we lived on Emerson Avenue and we were there as I pushed one company through with the help of Dr. Clara Anderson and we took this company right through all their procedures then about three weeks later I had a call from the company commander and he said we're being assigned to a new naval training station in Farragut Idaho which was to be the second largest recruit training station in the United States. The place in Chicago was number one.

Rick: So then you went from San Diego to Farragut?

Byrne: To Farragut to become a company commander and because of my swimming abilities and my training in swimming while I was in college they put me in charge of the swimming program there. So all of the new recruits coming in, when they started coming...there were no recruits at the time being we were just there about maybe 6 weeks or so before (this was camp Waldron – the first camp, they had about 8 camps) we were to go through all our training again and then our first company that came in we were assigned a company and because of my swimming ability or background they put me in charge of the swimming program and all the different camps there at Farragut Idaho.

Rick: That's interesting that they would have a big Naval base in a landlocked place like Farragut.

Byrne: Yeah but they were on lake Coeur d'Alene which is a French name and it was one of the biggest and deepest lakes in the United States.

Rick: So they had plenty of water to train on?

Byrne: There was plenty of water to train. We had whale boats down there and all kinds of boats.

Rick: So how long were you in Farragut?

Byrne: I was in Farragut for maybe about three years I think and before that they were building housing for married couples. Jean and I being married, they built houses so we moved in to it. We went over to Spokane Washington and bought furniture for the new apartment and we furnished it and stayed there for awhile and later on Ray Flaherty who used to be the coach of the Washington Redskins came in with his entire football team and they were assigned to different areas in Farragut and he asked if I would be in charge of the swimming program and I said (of all of the 8 camps) and I said "*sure I'd be happy to because of my background*". So my job was to travel around to all of the 8 camps and

see the different swimming instructors and tell them what we expected for the Navy and how to jump off a 3 meter board and a 10 meter board with a full pack on and how to swim and how to put out the flames if we had to jump into a fire where the water was on fire we'd teach them how to get around.

Rick: Well then where did you go after Farragut?

Byrne: At Farragut I looked at these people who had their commission and I figured '*boy I've got a college degree so I'll apply for a commission*'. So I applied for a commission in the United States Navy (of course I was in the Navy) and the first orders I had we had to sell our home and we'd already purchased a dog and went down to San Diego and we had the dog mixed up with another male and they had about 6 puppies and we gave those away. But then we decided...I was assigned to Tucson Arizona – the University of Arizona at Tucson and we were allowed about ten days or so before we had to be there so Jean and I packed the car and drove it down to Ogden Utah and visited our folks for a few days then we went down to Tucson Arizona and signed in for the Navy to be ready for our recruit training work there at Tucson Arizona.

Rick: And then did you go overseas from there?

Byrne: Not yet. In Tucson we went through different knot tying and marching and we did all that sort of thing and Jean was there when the Navy wives would come out and watch us drill in the field and all that sort of thing and after 6 weeks we had a graduation from Tucson from that particular school so I reported to New York City for further duty and so we went back to Ogden Utah and visited with relatives again and got on the train and went all the way to New York City and got off the train in New York City and looked for a place to live and we went to the Navy requirement there where they assign you different rooms or you can buy or rent different rooms. We rented a room that was all covered with mirrors all around, but it was right near there and so we went there and I reported for duty there. I was assigned at a place nearby and Jean and I we rented another house out there and I would go to duty out there on Long Island Sound.

Rick: When did you get into the PT Boat program?

Byrne: Well I'm going to get to that. And so when we graduated from there after about 4 to 6 weeks we had our choice of where to go to and I wanted to go to the west coast around the Pacific somewhere so I was looking in a book and it had one called '*PT Boats*' it was supposed to be dangerous but it was exciting. We were assigned at Newport Rhode Island where I was assigned to Melville Rhode Island, which is a PT Boat base. So we went there for about 3 months and we learned the different nomenclature of the PT Boat works and we'd go out on the sound and we'd get in a PT Boat and travel down in fact I got picked up down near Manhattan in Long Island Sound because we were going too fast in our PT Boats. PT Boats are made out of plywood – wood and they were 80 feet long and they had... PT stands for '*Motor Torpedo Boat*'.

Rick: Go ahead and describe what one was like.

Byrne: Well it was 80 feet long and it had room for a captain's little bunk and also a war room where we'd sit next to it and we had crews quarters up in the bow of it and we'd have 17 crew there – crewmates and the captain and I and the third officer would be in our bunks and live in there and then we'd come up on deck when we needed to where we had general quarters. We did a lot of drilling, in fact they had reports that the German submarines over at Naraganset Bay out there from Boston so we spent all day and night looking for this German submarine but we couldn't find it. But we'd come back into the base and finish the training and at the end of the training we had another graduation and we had our choice of where we wanted to go and I said "*I want to go out in the South Pacific out where the water was warm*", I didn't want to go over to Europe you know where the water is kind of cold in places. So they assigned us to...assigned me to pick up my boat there at San Francisco. So we were there for about 6 weeks or so until our orders came and then we were to report to the French luxury liner '*the USS Roshambo*'. So we were assigned to go overseas, so we got on this new luxury liner and got in and we had to travel with all the lights off so that the submarines and the different people could

see us. So the lights were off and I went to bed that night in a real nice bed because we were in the officer's quarters and woke up the next morning and I looked up and there was the Golden Gate Bridge and I called down, I said "*How come we're coming back*". "*Well we lost a propeller,*" they told us so we went back there so I called up Jean who still happened to be with her girlfriend there in San Francisco. So we were there for about three days and then we got back on the USS Roshambo and started out for New Guinea and about half way across where they initiate you into crossing the equator and they had us do that and then we arrived in New Guinea.

Rick: Let me go back just a minute, I want to talk about trying to chase that German submarine down off of the Boston coast. Did you ever find it?

Byrne: Off of Martha's Vineyard. No we never did find it. We just didn't find it, it probably went down under water like submarines do and we even contacted New London where they make the submarines or put the submarines out there near Boston and we couldn't find it so we had a dry run.

Rick: Did you have any sonar on board?

Byrne: Yeah we had sonar, yeah sure.

Rick: Okay now we're back on that troop ship heading from San Francisco over to...was your port in New Guinea?

Byrne: New Guinea, yeah there was a port there. Upon arriving we unloaded and they put us in a tent and our assignment was to contact our squadron and I was assigned to Squadron 24 and that was up at New Amsterdam up one of the tips of New Guinea and it took us about 8 hours or so to go up there but before we were assigned there we had a couple of air raids dropping...the Japanese or the enemy was dropping bombs there at New Guinea where we were. And so we went in the trenches but the next day we got in

our LCI (Landing Craft Personnel) and got on that and we went about 8 hours or so up to New Amsterdam up in northern New Guinea to join the squadron.

Rick: And they had your PT boats there?

Byrne: They had our squadron 24 waiting for us. Yeah, we had about 24 PT boats.

Rick: Now are we talking 1944 at this point or do you remember what year that was?

Byrne: Probably '43.

Rick: Okay well then you're up at New Amsterdam and tell us a little about what New Guinea was like in those years.

Byrne: Well it was hot and the enemy or the Jap's were dropping bombs all around and it was hot but we got to swim in the ocean but it had a lot of coral reefs there and we'd cut our feet a little bit but it was okay. And then we got on this LCI and went up to the squadron and I was assigned to the 3rd Mate on the PT boats and we had 17 crew members and 3 officers.

Rick: Tell us about the native population of New Guinea.

Byrne: Well the native population of New Guinea, they were sort of a dark skinned and we would go out on some commando raids and we'd hop on our boats and go out and go as close as we dared go without being shot you know from the enemy and we captured about 10 or 15 of those...see our job was to stop the enemy or the Japanese from supplying their troops between different islands. Our job was to get in between those islands (that's where old Kennedy got shot) and stop the troop movement. One of them we sunk the troop ship and we picked up these 10 or 15 Japanese soldiers and we tied their hands behind them and we put them on the bow of our PT boat and took them back in for interrogation.

Rick: So you were intercepting these supply ships that the Japanese were using (and troop ships) and you put all these prisoners on your PT boat on the bow...

Byrne: We tied their hands up there and there was about 10 or 15 and we tied their hands behind them and put them there and took them in to our Naval Intelligence there at the base.

Rick: I guess none of them spoke English.

Byrne: We didn't talk to them so I don't know if they did or not. But you know some of them probably could do a little pigeon English.

Rick: Well that's interesting, what other experiences did you have there out of New Amsterdam?

Byrne: Well every night we'd go out on patrol and we were out on patrol one night and we got a lot of heavy shooting from one of the shore batteries and my gunner got hit in the carotid artery here in his neck and so I took a hollow pen and put it up and put it together and the blood could go back to the head and then we turned around and left. But every night we'd go out and the shore batteries would shoot at us because a PT boat at night time you can hardly see them, they're way down in the ocean and they're hard to see and we were painted dark colors so it looked like we were part of the ocean.

Rick: So you mainly did your operations at night then?

Byrne: Our operations were at night because they assumed we would drop off different personnel, scouts and then they would paddle in and go see what they could see getting ready for another landing and we would take the scouts up there and we would... see the stern on our boat was only about one foot into the water so we could back our boat up real close but we always had our hand on the throttle ready to get out of there fast in case

they were going to start shooting at us. And so we would do that sort of thing and we'd do that every night, we'd travel about maybe 140 miles to 300 miles at night. They're always at night.

Rick: And then during the day you'd go back to your base?

Byrne: And tank up with 100 octane gasoline and get our boat ready to go out the next night or maybe we'd rest two nights then go out.

Rick: And you were sleeping, I guess the guys would sleep during the day?

Byrne: They were always sleeping.

Rick: When you'd go on these missions did you have meals out there?

Byrne: Oh yeah we had meals and the meals were real good in fact at one place our cook went over...we had tenders you know where we'd be tied to a tender and we'd go over there and the cook would get the meal for our squadrons and come back to the boat. In fact at one place a kamikaze came in and banged into the ship where our cook was and he never did get back, he was killed. That was at Mendoral but I'll get to that later.

Rick: Then did you stay at New Amsterdam that whole time?

Byrne: We stayed at New Amsterdam and then we came back to a place called Beyak and I remember we were supposed to get our boats all ready to go up to Leyte Gulf because the Japanese or the enemy was till there at Leyte Gulf and so we stayed there and got our boats all in shape and one night we started out with the squadron and headed for Leyte Gulf and on the way to Leyte Gulf we had 88 separate air attacks from up and in fact I've got one of the commendations from the president, I mean our whole squadron did. In fact one of the kamikaze's, some guy was out on the bow taking care of himself

and the old bomb just hit that boat and blew it up in the air and the guy he flew into the air but he wasn't killed and we picked him up. This was on the way to Leyte Gulf.

Rick: How far was Leyte Gulf from New Amsterdam?

Byrne: Oh it was a couple of days.

Rick: So you were a couple of days on the water.

Byrne: Yeah, and then we were to meet the fleet up there at the Leyte Gulf and our job was to go around the fleet and lay smoke screens because the most effective weapon at that time of the whole war was those kamikaze divers because they'd pick out a ship and dive in and sink it. But our job was to lay a smoke screen all over in Leyte Gulf so that the Japanese couldn't see our ships and some of them were hit and they would leave our PT boats alone because they were so small and they were hard to see. Well we could always out maneuver the air craft anyway if they'd dive at us we could turn and get away from them.

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: Okay Byrne, let's go back about this young man that was shot in the neck and tell us as much detail as you can about that episode.

Byrne: Okay, we were out of New Amsterdam and we were out on patrol one evening and we got...we'd go about 100 miles or so and all of a sudden we had a lot of shore batteries started firing at us and all of a sudden the guy who was up running the twin fifty guns he said "*oh, I got hit*" and I looked up and yeah he was bleeding like a stuck pig. But you know he was bleeding and so I pulled him down out of there and I had a pen that had a hollow bottom of it and so I put that in, inserted that into his jugular vein or whatever vein that is up there (carotid artery) and he survived. We brought him back, we

turned around and went back right after that and got him to the hospital and he survived and he's raising kids in Idaho.

Rick: Did you ever have any other individuals get wounded on your ships?

Byrne: Well not per say, we had one of our guys you know because we had about 88 separate...we were out there one time and he lost his marbles, he went crazy so we had to take him over to a tender and ship him back to land or back to the naval hospital nearby.

Rick: How would you get...did they have rope ladders to get on those tenders with?

Byrne: They had rope ladders and metal ladders and we'd come right up close and we could just walk out...they had these steps coming right on down and we'd get on to those and walk on up.

Rick: So they transferred food to you?

Byrne: Yeah our cook would go over and get the big container of food, he had all the dishes in there and we were in this one place when this kamikaze came in and he hit the...well the officers were having a meeting there and he killed all the officers and the cooks who were over there getting the food for us.

Rick: So he hit the tender while you guys were close by?

Byrne: Well we were close by waiting for the cook to come back with our food.

Rick: And then the cook was killed did you say?

Byrne: He was killed and most of the officers in that meeting were killed, we had to change our plans.

Rick: Did you participate in what is called *'The Battle of Leyte Gulf'*?

Byrne: Yes, our job was as I told you a minute ago was to circle the fleet, we had part of the fleet in there, the circle of fleet laying smoke screens down so the kamikaze's couldn't dive in and get our ships. Like I told you a minute ago the most effective weapon in my judgment were these kamikaze flyers. They had already dedicated themselves to Hiroshima our whoever it was and they had their ribbons on and they would pick out a ship and they'd dive right to them and boy all the ships would be shooting there and sometimes they'd hit each other there was so much lead in the air.

Rick: Did you ever have any severe cases where you're ship was in danger like in rough weather or anything like that?

Byrne: Oh yeah we had a big typhoon or hurricane there in Leyte and it came in and we went up one little lake or stream up there in Leyte Gulf and tied the stern and the bow onto a tree and just stayed there until it got over with but we were going up and down and when it was over with we went out and headed for our next invasion.

Rick: And tell us about that, where was your next invasion?

Byrne: The next invasion was up at Mindanao or Mindoro or one or the other and we were to go up there and divert the enemy and make make believe landings so that enemy would bring their troops down toward the seashore, that's up near Manila bay or whatever they call it. And so our job was to go up there and make diversion attacks on the land to bring the Japanese army's down there to try and intercept us. So we did that a few times and then we left there.

Rick: And then where did you go after Mindanao?

Byrne: To a place called Zambawanga where the monkeys have no tails, you've heard that song. In Zamabawanga we made a landing there on Mindoro island or one of the

islands and we started unloading the gear from our squadrons (we had three squadrons right in there and there's 24 boats to a squadron – some of them had been missing because they had been sunk) but we made our landing and all of a sudden the Jap's came in and drove us out of there. So they drove us and the army didn't protect us like they were supposed to so we backed and got out of Zambawanga and went to a little island called Basilon about miles away and we went over there – a beautiful island, it's got all sorts of things. That's where we picked up a monkey and assigned him to our ship and he used the bilges for the toilet and it started stinking so we got rid of the monkey.

Rick: The monkey would use the bilge did you say?

Byrne: He'd get in the bilges yeah, he wouldn't go out, he'd stay on board ship and use the bilges for the toilet.

Rick: Well, when you were on this island when the Japanese attacked were they already on the island?

Byrne: No they were on this big island of Mindanao or Zambawanga or...I had in Zambawanga and they drove our PT boats away because the army didn't hold them back, they drove the army out too.

Rick: Were these ground troops?

Byrne: Yeah.

Rick: And they started shooting at you right then?

Byrne: Oh yeah, well they were driving to the sea where we were right out there in the harbor so we got away and we didn't get shot there because we got away soon enough and went over to this little island called Basilon.

Rick: Okay and that's where you picked up the monkey?

Byrne: That's where we picked up the monkey. They had fruit there and it was just beautiful, all kinds of banana's that I'd never eaten before but they were delicious.

Rick: And were the natives very friendly to you?

Byrne: Yeah, the natives were friendly because we were rescuing them. We didn't capture any of them we'd just sell them our cigarettes and you see we were allowed so many packages or cartons of cigarettes and we'd trade those for bananas and food that you know we liked from the island. Then we got our boats ready because we were going to make another invasion further down to Mindanao at the Davao Gulf – we were the first boats in there since Macarthur left.

Rick: So the native population were always glad to have you? And brought stuff down for trade and so forth?

Byrne: At that particular island yeah.

Rick: Okay then tell us about the next place after.

Byrne: Well each weekend there at Zambawanga after the army had driven the Jap's back we had places where we'd take our crews over for prostitutes. They had whorehouses there so we'd take them over there every Saturday.

Rick: You'd take the troops?

Byrne: The troops that wanted to go, all of them didn't want to go. Well in Zambawanga, yeah we would go back in there because the army had driven the Jap's back out of there again but we stayed over in this island called Bason because it was protected by water all around it.

Rick: That was kind of interesting duty then on the weekends.

Byrne: For them, yeah. I had to take the boat load that wanted to go.

Rick: All right and then what happened after that?

Byrne: Then we went on another excursion down in the Davao Gulf they called it. We went down there and started trying to find where the enemy was and again we'd go out at night time and make our patrols. One night we were...the water is florescent, you can see it for miles and all of a sudden we heard a big '*boom*' and our boat jumped over like that because some Japanese pilot was up there dropping bombs on us. So we just laid to in the water because traveling in the water we had...it was just like an arrow pointing right to where we were so we just laid to in the water and waited for them to leave because they couldn't see us.

Rick: Did you ever have any problems with sea mines or hitting mines or anything?

Byrne: No we didn't but we'd go in and the army had it pretty well marked off where the mines were so we'd go in and wiggle or weave in and out away from the mines because we didn't have much of a...you know our boat would only take about two feet, three feet and we would go out there. But here's again where I got my bronze star is we went out one night and we found five Japanese PT boats. The army had found this nest of PT boats in a cove away from there and so we were ordered to go out there and shoot them up. So we went out and shot these five Japanese PT boats and set them on fire and we didn't get any fire back from them so we assumed everybody was dead or gone somewhere and then we came back to our tender there in Davao Gulf.

Rick: Did you ever...you had torpedo's on board your boat?

Byrne: We had torpedos onboard. When they first started out they had slots where you can shoot them out but later on they were too heavy because they wanted us for speed so they just put the torpedo just laying there in the racks...my torpedo man in fact he would drink all of the juice out of those torpedo's and get drunk on them but that's neither here nor there. But we'd set the thermostat on these torpedo's and point them towards our target – a Japanese vessel or whatever it was and we'd shoot it out and we'd get out of there.

Rick: Did you ever sink any ships or anything like that?

Byrne: Oh yeah we sunk some, not big ones but smaller ones.

Rick: Well now this must have been...did you hear from Tokyo Rose at night and stuff?

Byrne: We'd hear Tokyo Rose, she'd tell us where our next invasion was going to be. She'd say "*Tokyo...and PT boat so and so*" and "*they're going to strike*", she'd tell everybody where we were going to go. I don't know how she knew it but she did.

Rick: So she had a lot of information that she would relay?

Byrne: She had a lot of information, yeah.

Rick: Would she try to dissuade the...

Byrne: She would talk and say that we were losing the war. That the Japanese army was winning the war but they weren't, we had them.

Rick: Did you hear about the '*Battle of Iwo Jima*' and '*Okinawa*' while you were there?

Byrne: Yeah we had a radio on all the time.

Rick: So you kept up with the news.

Byrne: Yeah.

Rick: Where were you when victory in Europe occurred or do you remember that?

Byrne: No I don't remember about Europe. I wasn't even interested in Europe. But the one there in...we were at this Basilon Island when we dropped the bomb that stopped our war and were getting all prepared to go up and invade Japan. We were getting our boats and putting new engines in them. In fact we would change new engines like you do sparkplugs but you know that costs a fortune but our big supply ships would come in and drop off a couple of...we had three airplane engines in there anyway and we'd put the engines in and we had some good 'Motormac's' that would put them together and we were getting all ready to go up and invade Japan...

Rick: Were you aware of the great risk of doing that and the possibilities that you wouldn't return from that?

Byrne: Yeah sure, we knew that there was going to be a big killing when we got up there because they were all land based and we were on the water. But we had our guns; we had seven of each 50 out on the stern all pointed and all greased there. We had all of our guns ready, we had 37 millimeter on the bow and twin 50's on each side and we were a gun boat really.

Rick: And so they had you all outfitted ready to invade the island of Japan?

Byrne: We were getting ready to invade, yeah when they dropped that...

Rick: Tell us about when you heard about the first bomb that was dropped.

Byrne: We celebrated; they had a party that night there on the island. Because they knew that the war was over, I mean the Jap's would surrender because they had nothing to go by, I think it was two cities that were demolished. We were all happy. So from there after that was over with we had orders to go back to San Francisco and three of us...

Rick: Hold on just a minute. So they dropped the first bomb and you heard it on the radio and then I guess you heard about the second bomb which was two days later and then where were you when you heard of the official surrender – VJ Day, were you still...

Byrne: Well we were on our way; I think we were on our way home coming to San Francisco. We'd hitchhiked a ride back on a merchant ship and we were 21 days on it and boy they had good food on that merchant seaman.

Rick: Let's get you back to where the first bomb was dropped, you were preparing to invade Japan and then you must have heard about the surrender right then or soon after that and then tell us about the feeling that you had and your crew.

Byrne: Oh we were real happy because we could all go home. We were all through fighting there and got rid of the PT boats and burned them up, not right there but later on. In fact they got one over down in California...one old Higgins boat, they had two kinds of boats that we were in, one was a Higgins and the other's an Elcho (the Elcho's the newer kind, the Higgins was just like an old slow truck) but we were all happy...

Rick: How soon after that did you head for home or whatever after VJ Day?

Byrne: Well it took us 21 days and we listened to the radio and watched the movies on board ship and it took us 21 days to get back to San Francisco and when I got there I think I called my wife up and said, "*I'm coming home*"!

Rick: And can you give us your thoughts when you first saw the Golden Gate Bridge?

Byrne: Oh it was great to be home! You know when you go out and see it departing and out behind you you think *'well I don't know whether I'm ever going to come back or not'*, you often think, but we came back and we were real happy.

Rick: I bet you were. Well those are interesting experiences. Then did your wife meet you right there in San Francisco when you got back off the ship?

Byrne: She was teaching school and I met her up in Ogden Utah. I had a few days before I had to report back to Newport Rhode Island and so I had a few days and we stayed home for a while and then went back to Newport Rhode Island. I think Jean developed kidney stones in her kidneys, I guess that's where they were – they'd have to be if they were kidney stones. So she had to go to the hospital and the doctor said *"well she can ride back with you if you take care of her"*. So I took care of her and we went back and signed out and then we rented a room for a few days and we wanted to drive out so they had a '34 Chevrolet car for sale up in Boston. Some little old lady had it parked up in the garage during the war so we went up and bought it and filled it up with our stuff and headed out west. The doctor said Jean had to sit on a bedpan all the time waiting for that kidney stone to drop or whatever was going to drop.

Rick: We're not going to put that in I don't think.

Elizabeth: Can you explain what a tender is?

Byrne: A tender is a ship where the PT boats tie up to it and the tenders are where the repairs that has to be done on the different machines or the PT boats. They have engines in there and they have ammunition and it follows on most of the invasions. If the invasion is going to be too difficult they'll stay back and maybe come back in a day later and the cook would have to use what supplies he had in our galley and cook our meals that way. But the tender would usually...we had a number of tenders and they would usually follow at each invasion and take care of the boats.

Elizabeth: What was the lifestyle on the PT boats, how did they live? When I see pictures it looks pretty casual.

Byrne: It was real casual, we were half naked over there because the weather was warm and the boys would have a pair of shorts on and I had my khaki's on, I had a pair of shorts and we'd sleep out on the deck at night. They wouldn't go down on their bunks at night so they would sleep up on the deck and I got to the point where it got so hot in the boats that I'd go up and sleep on the deck too.

Rick: Where there a lot of mosquito's around in those very little islands?

Byrne: No, we didn't run into any mosquitos.

Rick: Tell us about when they made you captain and how did that come about when you got to be captain of your own PT boat?

Byrne: Well this one guy got transferred back home, he had served his time and so they...Hogland the commander called me and wanted to know if I'd be captain of this PT boat 335 and I says "*sure*"! And so I was captain and I felt a lot of responsibility because of the two boats that would go out I'd be the lead boat leading the other boat behind me and it was my responsibility not to get us into some reef or into something we shouldn't be hitting. So I was the captain and I felt all right, I felt a little more responsible.

Rick: Did you have charts to see where the reefs were?

Byrne: Oh we had charts, I had a real good Yeoman and he could read that board – I went to school and I studied the charts but I couldn't remember all of them, but he had it right there in the pilot house and he'd have it opened all the time and I'd look down from driving the PT boat and look at the charts and see where we were going and we had all

kinds of maps and charts for everything! We even had lights where we would flip a light if we had to reach a place where we couldn't have oral music coming out or talking, we'd have to use the signal of the lights you know the semifor signals.

Rick: And he would have your position plotted on this chart so that you could look down at any time and know just where you were?

Byrne: Oh yeah in fact he stood right there off the cockpit (it was called a cockpit) and he'd stand right there and if I was driving he'd say, "*yeah, go right, go left*". But we had all the charts we needed right there.

Rick: When you'd go to these little islands and stay over several days you guys would get out and mingle with the natives and all that?

Byrne: Well no, they were told not to mingle with the natives, to stay away from them because the natives they sometimes had diseases and they had to be a little bit careful. But they would...this one place (in Zambawanga I think it was) we ran into a school teacher and his daughter and they were teachers there and they were real interesting people.

Rick: And they would eat the fresh fruit that was on the island?

Byrne: Oh yeah they would eat the fresh fruit, yeah. In fact in my stateroom I had bananas all around the ceiling, all over. Anytime I wanted a banana I'd have a banana and they had all different kinds of bananas, not just the kind that we have here but they have bananas – all different kinds.

Rick: Well that sounds like it was a pretty interesting and exciting life even though...

Byrne: But my hair turned from black to white though. You're scared all the time.

Rick: And you're aware that there is danger everywhere you go probably.

Byrne: Everywhere you go, yeah you never know when you're going to get...somebody is going to shoot you.

Rick: Tell us about your hair turning, was that a particular incident that made it go gray or was it just...

Byrne: Well when you're out there in battle fighting all the time you're scared all the time and when you're scared all the time things happen to change your body and looks and my hair started turning from black (it was coal black) it started turning gray, just like my son's is starting to turn gray right now and it started turning gray. But I've got most of it; I'm not too bald.

Rick: Were you in your late 20's? When you got discharged were you in your late 20's?

Byrne: Well I was in there 4 years yeah.

Rick: And so you were still in your late 20's I would assume?

Byrne: Right, yeah.

Elizabeth: Were PT boats fun? Was that a good assignment?

Byrne: Yeah they were fine. That's one reason I went on them because they were fun and we were the fastest ship that the navy had at that period of time. We could make that boat go 30 or 40 miles and hour and we always had to have somebody sit up there on the bow to look for hitting logs because if you hit a log just right you're all through, you have a big hole in it. But they were fun, they were interesting. That's one reason I selected the PT boat job because it was thrilling. It was scary too.

Rick: Well they're made out of wood and no fiberglass or metal, didn't the water absorb into that wood over time?

Byrne: No. No the water just shed off of it. It was sort of a plywood.

Rick: So they had it treated I guess?

Byrne: I think, yeah. They had two or three different layers of wood so if it went through the first layer it wouldn't go through the second layer.

Rick: You had three big engines onboard?

Byrne: Three Packard airplane engines.

Rick: So if you lost one or two you could still get back?

Byrne: One engine ahead, in fact we could go across the Pacific with one engine ahead. Just one engine. They were good. I had three good Motormac's. They kept those going all the time.

Rick: And Motormac means Motor Mechanic?

Byrne: Motor Mechanic yeah, I had three good ones. They could speak English too.

Elizabeth: Was there good camaraderie with the crew. Was everyone buddies on a PT boat?

Byrne: Oh yeah. They'd play poker most of the time or some kind of card games and sometimes somebody would win them all, the good players would win and the poor players would lose then they'd have to borrow money and they owed money to some of those they had to borrow money from.

Rick: And the same guys would win most of the time I guess huh?

Byrne: Yeah they knew how to play. The other guys were just killing time.

Elizabeth: How did you feel when they burned those PT Boats?

Rick: After the war when the war was over instead of shipping them back they burned the boats did you say?

Byrne: They burned the boats. They took them somewhere and burned them. In fact some people bought one or two of them, in fact this one down in Newport Beach – they've got a Higgins boat there. The Higgins was made in New Orleans and the Elcho was made out in Manhattan up in New York somewhere. But we always liked the Elcho boat because it was more like a real pleasure cruise. It was a real fast boat. The Higgins boat was like a real old sort of a truck.

Rick: Did you see the movie PT 109?

Byrne: I think I've seen it yeah with Kennedy?

Rick: Was it a pretty accurate description of what life was like?

Byrne: Pretty much so but you know they had to dress it up a little bit. But it was okay.

Elizabeth: What did you think of PT 109 when you heard about it?

Byrne: Well first of all he shouldn't have gotten hit. He should have paid attention to where he was going; he was trying to go on his own and this cruiser or whatever it was cut it in half. But he saved a couple of people and made a name for himself and became President of the United States.

Rick: You didn't ever run into him or see him over there?

Byrne: No I didn't see him. He was in right at the beginning of the war and I was there a little bit later in the war.

Rick: How did your troops feel about Macarthur?

Byrne: They didn't talk much about him. They thought he was an egotist you know, he thought a lot of himself and we understood that that's one reason Truman took him out of command anyway. They had nothing against him because it was the PT boats that rescued him. There was a guy by the name of Blakely or Buckley or somebody that brought he and his wife and son away from Mindanao or Leyte Gulf or something? (Curragador)

Rick: Can you tell us about Tokyo Rose again?

Byrne: We kept Tokyo Rose on all the time on the radio because she had good music and it was American music and she'd tell us where the next invasion was going to be and tell us a little bit about the war.

Rick: And she had intelligence enough to know where the next invasion was supposed to be when it was supposed to be secret.

Byrne: Yeah that's right. Tokyo was a real...she finally died or they killed her or something happened to her. But she had the latest information.

Rick: And would she be on all the time or just come on in the evenings?

Byrne: No they'd have her on off and on.

Elizabeth: And what sort of things would she tell you?

Byrne: She'd tell us where our next invasion was going to be and that we were losing the battle here and there and she'd tell us we were losing the war and that they were winning it which we didn't believe because we knew we were winning it.

Rick: That's interesting. Jean are there things we missed or are there things that you can bring out when we interview you?

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: So Jean, what was it that you wanted to correct?

Jean: Okay, first the wedding was in July of '41 and when he was talking about his schooling then I mean he was talking about his schooling and when he went back to get his Master's and so forth and he says "'42" but it was '41...

Rick: It was a peacetime draft and they got married in order to extend his education and then you enlisted in January of '42 which is a month after Pearl Harbor?

*** Tape Interrupt ***

Rick: Okay now let's just recap prior to Pearl Harbor.

Byrne: Prior to Pearl Harbor I was at Utah State working on a degree and I was married and we lived in an apartment west of the campus and we went home to Ogden Utah for lunch or for dinner with her folks and that's when the news came that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor and we knew right then that we were going to have to do something. Because I had a degree I was going to try to get the best job I could get in the service.

Rick: And then in January, that's when you went to Denver.

Byrne: I went over to Denver because the Hamilton program was all filled up with people and so I wanted to go to the Tuney program, they called it the "*Tuney Fish*" and so I went over to Denver and met Gene Tuney and boy did he have a hand that was big as an axe. He had a big hand, I shook hands with him and he said "*well if you pass...we need people over there that know how to teach swimming*" he says "*if you can teach swimming*" he says "*come on over if you pass the physical, join*".

Rick: Okay so that was in January just about a month after Pearl Harbor when you signed up?

Byrne: I guess.

*** corrections regarding previous questions ***

Byrne: Each one of the bases there, they had eight bases, they each had a big field house and they each had a swimming pool and I was finally put in charge of all the swimming pools and all the instructions that were there and the Chaplain and I would go fishing every afternoon when I wasn't busy and he wasn't busy preparing his sermon and that's on Ponderay Lake. And then they had me build...Ray Flarity who was the coach of the Washington Redskins wanted to know if I'd set up a swimming area for the staff and their families on Coeur D'Alene and I said "*sure*" so I did and right after that I applied for my commission and I got it.

Elizabeth: Tell us again why they picked Farragut Idaho.

Byrne: Well they got the land probably almost free because all they had at Farragut in northern Idaho was just pine trees and they had this big lake called '*Ponderay*'. They had this lake there and they knew they could build different types of ships and practice their different types of swimming...the water was real cold, the swimming wasn't any good

but it was good for a family to go out and play on the beach and that sort of thing and that's why they picked it. They had a lot of land there. A lot of land! It's all pine trees.

Elizabeth: Was it pretty?

Byrne: Beautiful, it still is!

*** corrections ***

Jean: He said that we owned the houses in several places but we did not own any houses, we rented. He didn't mention that when he went to New York he went to Fort Skyler.

Elizabeth: The commendation you got on the night patrol, can you tell us that story?

Byrne: Well we were under 88 consecutive attacks from Leyte Gulf up to Mindoro and the President of the United States gave each person in that squadron or that fleet (we were in a big fleet with supply ships and tenders and squadrons) and they gave us all the Presidential Citation for that. But I got the Bronze Star down there where we shot five Japanese PT boats and shot them up and got rid of them.

Elizabeth: What year did you go out into the Pacific?

Byrne: I went out into the Pacific in early 1943 I guess but you're telling me it was '44. I went into the South Pacific in November of '44...

Byrne: I was shipped out to the Pacific in early 1944.

End Byrne Fernelius interview.

Begin Jean Fernelius interview.

Rick: Jean will you say your name and spell it for us?

Jean: Jean, J-E-A-N Fernelius F-E-R-N-E-L-I-U-S.

Rick: We're really pleased that you guys came in today. Can you tell us a little about your early life and where you were born and raised and what it was like prior to December 7th.

Jean: Well I was born and raised in Ogden. My father was with the Wingright Lumber Company, my maiden name was Wingright. I went to Madison Elementary, Central Junior High, Ogden High School, Weber College and graduated from Utah State after the war had started, I graduated in '42.

Rick: I understand that you were married prior to December 7th 1941.

Jean: Well I met Byrne at Weber College, he was a sophomore and I was freshman and he was on the swimming team and so we started dating at that time and we continued to date once I got up to Utah State he was already there. We were going together the summer of '44 but his number was one of the first 50 drawn out of the fishbowl and so he was going to be drafted in July and he had a fellowship to go back and work on his Masters at Utah State. There was no war and so we felt (this was in '41) and there was no war and so what we did we decided to get married. We got married in a hurry because one of the gentlemen had told my father that he would not be drafted if he was married. But all that changed in December.

Rick: All right, tell us about what you recall about that Sunday December 7th, 1941.

Jean: Well we'd come down from Logan and we were sitting at my parent's table eating and my brother's friend Lawrence Jansen called on the phone and asked if we had heard that the bomb had been dropped. No, but immediately Byrne looked at me and I looked at him and we knew our lives had changed.

Rick: Right then. And did you feel that...did you make your minds up right then that he was going to eventually enlist and go into the service?

Jean: Yes, we knew he'd have to or he would be drafted.

Rick: What about your friends that you had, did you have friends that were in similar circumstances?

Jean: No, most of the fellows were single.

Rick: You were married then, was it September?

Jean: July.

Rick: July of '41 and then in January did you go with him to Denver?

Jean: No I was in school. I was taking classes so he went on his own.

Rick: Then tell us about what happened in his various areas and what it was like being naval wife while he was in basic and going through these various schools.

Jean: Well the first problem was that my parents wouldn't let me stay in the apartment. They wanted me back on campus living if I was going to be alone so I applied to go back in the dorm where I had been before I was married. But they were hesitant about taking me because I was a married woman. But eventually they did take me in so I lived in the dorm until graduation and in the meantime he was in Norfolk and he came to San Diego and when I graduated in June I joined him in San Diego and we had a very nice apartment right near the Naval Base. So as was accustomed with most navy wives they were getting jobs and so I applied at Consolidated Aircraft and I was going to school to be, I guess you'd call it "*Rosy the Riveter*" but anyway to work on the radios in B24

bombers but he got transferred before I finished my schooling. So he went on up to Farragut and my brother came down from Ogden. My parents were watching over me and my brother came down from Ogden to help me get back to Ogden. So I went back to Ogden and stayed until he was settled up there.

Rick: Did the rationing that occurred during the war affect you very much? Tell us some of the hardships that you remember at that time.

Jean: I don't remember that the rationing was a hardship except I loved shoes. It was a little difficult sometimes to get the shoes I wanted, and gas rationing really didn't affect that much. I don't remember...of course I lived with my parent's when he was overseas and I don't recall sugar and anything like that really being a hardship.

Rick: After Farragut did you go to...

Jean: After Farragut he received his ??? Commission and we went to Tucson Arizona. We went down by bus from Ogden and we were only there six weeks so instead of getting a job I'd join the other Navy wives and we'd go up to Bearden up on the University of Arizona campus and watch the fellows going through their drills and so forth and toured around the town a little bit.

Rick: So it was called '*Bearden Gymnasium*' even in those days huh?

Jean: Yes.

Rick: Then where did you go from Tucson?

Jean: We came back home and then took the train to New York City because he was transferred to Fort Skyler and as we got off the train in New York we were dumfounded to see the size of the town and everything. You know after all we were only 21 and 22 and getting out of Utah was really something to see the world like that. So the nearest

place we could find was a room in a lady's house so we took it and it was...and they had a doorman and he...Byrne would go out on the base and was out there for the week so I was alone and the doorman kept his eye on me whenever I left the building to go someplace he wanted to know where I was going and when I would be back which was very nice.

Rick: Was this right in Manhattan?

Jean: Yes.

Rick: So you were staying with a family?

Jean: No, we had a room in an apartment where a single lady lived. But we didn't stay there long because Byrne decided it would be better if he was closer to Fort Skyler so when we were able to find a room...that was mainly what you had when you were out like this if you didn't have children you just took a room in a house with a family. So we found a room out there and so that's where I spent probably four out of the six weeks.

Rick: Tell us a little about New York City and Manhattan and I guess this was 1942?

Jean: Yes and it was large. It was different than Ogden.

Rick: Were the Broadway shows going on?

Jean: Oh yes and we went to the Hit Parade and it was...I can't remember what we saw all the time...but anyway we went to the Hit Parade all the time and we went to shows and I loved to go to the museums and to Bloomingdale's just really was something and then I went to Lord and Taylor's. I was fascinated by all of everything in the big city and at that time I think when I was there it was probably a little different than it was later on in the war. That was right in the beginning.

Rick: I think they closed some of those Broadway shows during the middle of the war and they cancelled the baseball season and stuff. Well then after New York what happened after that?

Jean: Well we had a month off so we took a tour of the New York area so we saw quite a few states and quite a few scenic places and then his assignment was to Melville to the PT School and so we lived in Newport Rhode Island and when we were stationed there I got a job at the Naval Officer's University or I mean the Naval Officer's (I've forgotten what it's called) but anyway it was a Naval Officer's place and I got a job there. I worked at Farragut incidentally too. I worked in the insurance office in Farragut and we were there a year, not three years.

Rick: Tell us, then he was shipped to San Francisco?

Jean: Yes. Then we stopped off in Ogden again and you know we had friends that were also in the same school that went along with us and so when we got into San Francisco there were quite a group of us that...the fellows were going with the PT boats out there in the same area. So we had to spend, as he said, we had to spend time there because of the ship, the break down. So the group of us really enjoyed touring around and having our restaurant meals and so forth. We had quite a good time there and then when he shipped out I went back to Ogden and taught school.

Rick: Tell us specifically, did you know way before hand when he was shipped out or was it an immediate thing?

Jean: You know they told us one time that he was going to ship out and so we got all prepared and everything and we all decided...and then they even cancelled it before he even got on the ship. And so then the next time all of them went several days after that, maybe even a week, I don't know we were in San Francisco a long time and maybe it was a week I'm not even sure. But anyway then he got orders again and this time he

went but like he said he had to come back because of problems with the ship and us wives were still there when they came back because they'd only been gone a day.

Rick: So you said goodbye to him thinking you're not going to see him again until the war was over and the next day he's back again?

Jean: That's right.

Rick: That had to be pretty tough on your emotions.

Jean: It was, it was very difficult to even think of him going out there but he was so prepared to go and he really had his mind made up to go and if you know Byrne when he makes up his mind you go along with it.

Rick: So describe your feelings then the second time that you knew you were going to say goodbye to him. Was it as emotional as the first?

Jean: It was more. It was more because I was prepared to go back to Ogden after he went out the first time and then when I couldn't get a ticket to get out of there right away and so he caught me at my friends house and I was shocked when he called and said he was back. And then that was a rough time!

Rick: So he came back for one day and then you had to say goodbye to him the next day. Did you go down to the ship or did you say goodbye in the apartment?

Jean: I don't recall.

Rick: I've heard that in those days as the girls instead of having silk stockings they had to paint seams on their legs, did you ever experience anything like that?

Jean: No.

Rick: And so while you were traveling around, basically except for shoes was the only...

Jean: Oh I had shoes but I just loved them I wanted more.

Rick: You could only get so many a year because of that.

Jean: Yeah.

Rick: Tell us about the letters from him and how you communicated with him.

Jean: We had a code before he even left to go out. We had set up a code and so he was able to tell me quite a bit by using this code and so I knew pretty much where he was quite a bit of the time. So when I'd read the paper I knew if it was affecting what was going on with him.

Rick: So they would censor his letters and then you would get V-mails, is that what you got or was it regular letters?

Jean: Regular letters.

Rick: He would say a word or two that would help you know where he was?

Jean: Yes

Rick: Do you remember what those signals were?

Jean: Nope. If I'd known this, I have all of that information at home. In fact I have some of the letters.

Rick: And so when he was over in New Guinea and Leyte Bay did you...how often did you get letters?

Jean: I don't recall that either. But I got enough to make me feel comfortable that he was all right. The only time I really got upset was during the Lingian Gulf because of the 88 air attacks and so forth that it really quite worried me.

Rick: And were you following the war in the news?

Jean: Yes and the newspaper.

Rick: Tell us about where were you when VE Day occurred and VJ Day. Do you remember those?

Jean: I don't remember specifically. I was probably teaching school but I don't remember.

Rick: I imagine you were quite elated when VJ Day occurred.

Jean: I knew he'd be coming home.

Rick: Then tell us about him coming home in as much detail as you can, when you first saw him and...

Jean: Well I went to San Francisco and met him.

Rick: Did he wave onboard the ship?

Jean: Oh no, let's see, I can't be sure about that one either so I wont even...but anyway it was great to see him but it was kind of short lived because I had an illness and I was down for awhile and by the time I was better why it was time for him to go to Newport

Rhode Island to be checked out and so I did get to go back there with him. But I don't remember whether I went to San Francisco then or not. I was teaching school and I had just signed a new contract and he came back in September and I had just signed the new contract so I had to go tell the Superintendent that I wasn't going to be teaching and he wasn't too happy.

Rick: So how long after he returned before he was discharged?

Jean: Almost immediately. He went back to Melville and he was only there several weeks and then he had to go to San Francisco again to check out. I guess he got his papers at Melville and San Francisco is where he checked out.

Rick: When he left he had dark black hair?

Jean: Oh, coal black.

Rick: And then when he returned tell us about that.

Jean: It was a shock to see his pretty white hair. Now it's pretty but then I was shocked. I could see then when I saw his hair, I could see then what he had been under. You know it showed. The pressure he'd been under, the situations.

Elizabeth: I just want you to describe that whole thing about him going to war and what his hair was like the last time you saw him and then contrast to now.

Jean: When he left he had beautiful black hair and of course it was kind of kinky back here and it was just beautiful and when he came back and I saw him he looked like he was a little older with that gray hair up in front where he'd had his pretty curl and he of course he was older in his actions. You know we were just kids to begin with but that kind of changed with him going over seas then I guess we grew up.

**** End Interview ***