

Interview with Oval Darrell Randolph

In Darrell's opinion, Brubaker was an ideal place to grow up. He had a friend there the same age as he. They both went on to join the Navy and briefly see each other at Great Lakes Naval Base, Hawaii, and Okinawa during World War II. Darrell's grandfather ran a store in Brubaker beginning in 1920. During the Depression, he let people who couldn't pay charge groceries, and some never paid. By the time he sold the store in 1944, he wound up about broke.

During the Depression, no one had money to do anything. Darrell's family rented an old house in Brubaker. His dad worked for another farmer and made \$2 per day. They hunted wild game and had to resort to accepting free government food. He remembers eating canned beef that was tough, but it was something to eat. By the time the family moved to Alma in 1943, conditions were better. They had 40 acres of land, a cow, a few chickens, a team of mules, and a garden.

When he was 12, Darrell was working on a 266-acre farm in Brubaker valued at a little more than \$10,000. Land prices have certainly increased since that time. If a farmer used a Sulky Plow with 3 horses, he could plow two and a half acres in a day. With a four wheel John Deere tractor and two 12-inch plows, he could plow 10 acres in a day if he worked hard.

Darrell held many different jobs. If he didn't like a job, he quit and found another. His first job after farming was as a printer's devil at the Marion County Democrat and Printing Office. He cleaned presses, set up type, and ran the presses. He soon realized that he preferred working outside and went back to the farm. He would not have had to serve in World War II because he was granted a deferment. Realizing that his friends were all gone to the military, Darrell decided to join the U.S. Navy in July of 1943.

After basic training at Great Lakes, he served in the Pacific for 30 months in the amphibious force. Darrell thinks his military service was a good thing. He received training in diesel mechanics for his job on a LCT (landing craft tank.) Starting in Mare Island near San Francisco and then to Hawaii, the job involved disassembling the tank for transport aboard the Liberty, a merchant marine ship. In Hawaii, the LCT was unloaded using ramps and tilting the Liberty. After unloading in three pieces, it took two days to put it back together and load it on LST 122, a landing ship tank weighing over 100 tons and spanning 114 feet long by 35 feet wide. Serving on the team for LCT 1339 and navigating the waters near the shore of Okinawa was his job. It was crucial to land at the right time with the tides. In the event an LCT landed at high tide, the crew might be stuck on shore for a month before the LCT could return to the ship. Darrell's group experienced this first hand one time, giving him time to explore the shore looking for relics. Among the items he found were a Japanese flag, Japanese war bonds, a Japanese captain's samurai sword, and a hari kari knife. Fortunately, Darrell came home without sustaining injuries, but the experience was stressful. He remembers one occasion while on guard duty that he

thought the enemy had found him, but it was the group's adopted cat. He can laugh now, but it wasn't funny then. Darrell still prominently displays a picture of his ship, the LST 122.

After the war, Darrell worked at Salem Fabric, General Motors, and Metropolitan Life Insurance before taking an exam to become a railroad mail clerk. Many took the test, but Darrell was one of the few passing the test. In the beginning, he worked at the Chicago Post Office. Then he became a clerk on a train sorting mail as the train travelled from Pittsburgh to Indianapolis to St. Louis. With this work schedule, it was like having a vacation every nine days, giving him time to spend with his family.

Darrell grew up with little financial means but with a strong work ethic and a positive attitude. He loves the rural Marion County area where he grew up. Darrell loves his family and speaks with pride when talking about their accomplishments. He served his country and feels proud of his service. Darrell is a part of what Tom Brokaw called "The Greatest Generation."