

Maureen and Mike

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INTERVIEW WITH KEN McCONNELL

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- C: When did you join the service and what branch of the service were you in?
- K: I joined the service in August of 1942. I joined the Signal Corps and subsequently took training at the University of North Dakota in radar and radio repair. After that I went into active service. We trained at Camp Kohler, California, Western Signal Corps Replacement Training Center, and was assigned in November of 1943 to the Los Angeles Port of Embarkation in the transportation full ships complement ship radio operator. From there I made a number of trips from the fall of 1943 through November 1945--all of my trips were in the South Pacific. Especially in 1944, we used to constantly listen to Tokyo Rose. We were able to get Japanese Domei news and she had regular broadcasts. I don't recall the days, but it was a regular, consistent broadcast. During that time she would reference to particular soldiers, had them by names and by units, and the islands that they were serving on. Another thing, she used to have prisoners of war--that they had already captured. Most of them came from the Philippines and they would be . . . she would have three or four of them every few nights and they would give just a radio report stating the same things in a

very perfunctory, uninformative and unenlightened tone, about they were receiving the Red Cross packages and all was well and that everything was going fine. From listening to them it was quite obvious that it was reading nothing more than what was written for them to say. The program was very entertaining--we used to be able to, when I'd pick it up on the radio--lots of time the crew would request that we plug it in through the PA system. She played real, real good records. They had all of the American records. I recall that when "White Christmas" first became available, they had it available within a week or so of the time when it came out in the United States. And it was a wire-recorded version, it was excellent. So, instead of being kind of a depressing thing, it didn't seem to depress anybody--everybody was kind of amused by it. They looked forward to listening to it, and the only thing that seemed odd was how she was able to actually get people's names and the units they belonged to and the fact that they were on Kwajalein, maybe they were on Guam, might have been in New Guinea, Bougainville--some of those places. But she knew units, and she knew their names. And of course she would tell them about the fact that they should quit and that their girlfriends or their wives back home were running around with somebody else, and in that means she was

trying to depress the morale. But it really . . . I don't think it actually ever served that kind of purpose. So from the time that . . . I used to listen to it with the intent of writing letters to the parents of the servicemen that were prisoners. But after listening to about three or four it became quite obvious that there wasn't anything that the parents would be interested in because, outside of the fact that the person was still living and you weren't even sure of that, there just wasn't anything worth mentioning or worth doing anything about.

C: Did you listen when you heard the names of the prisoners of war?

K: Oh, yeah. You bet. When I first started doing that, I thought it might be interesting to take the information down because they would tell their home address, who their parents were, and I thought, well, I'll take this information and drop them a letter and tell them I heard from their son or their husband or whatever, and that everything was fine and everything was . . . But after listening to about, oh, two or three months of that, every single particular one was exactly the same and then you became totally uncertain whether they were just having somebody do this or whether they actually had anybody, because they were not receiving the Red Cross packages as they maintained they were. Everybody

knew that. They were not being distributed by the Japanese. Prisoners that were re-captured, I mean prisoners that were taken back again after the United States forces consolidated position, told them that there was never any distribution of Red Cross packages. Whether they even received them or not, I mean whether the Japanese received them or whether they went to the Japanese mainland, they just stayed wherever they were--they never got anyplace.

C: Were you monitoring the radio? Did you say (unintell.)

K: Oh, yeah. That was my job on board ship. I was the ship's radio operator. And we had regular schedules and I would listen to what is called BAMS--it's Broadcast Allied Merchant Shipping. So four times during the day I'd have to turn the radio on and go into that schedule and during the off-times we could just tune in on Radio Tokyo. We could pick up her broadcast, just a regular . . . the same as it would be in the United States--it was a regular set scheduled broadcast.

C: Did you like it?

K: It was interesting. They had good music on. She went on and on about things we knew were not true, but it was information fed to her by the Japanese propaganda department, telling about how badly beaten the Americans were in such-and-such a place and what a

beating they were taking and all the things that were happening, which similar to, whose was it, Lord Haw Haw did the same thing and unfortunately, neither of them seemed to have the proper and correct information. But it worked very good as far as propaganda was concerned.

C: Did you look forward to hearing the music?

K: Sure. Sure. It was interesting, and they played all the big time bands. They had records of Jimmy Dorsey and Tommy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman-- everything. Everything they did was tape-recorded off American stations.

C: Did it make you homesick?

K: No. Not that. I don't think that had any effect. It was just something different that you could kind of look forward to. I suppose it was one of those sessions where you could vent your frustrations listening to it, knowing that it was a bunch of just junk, it really was. But nevertheless nobody took any terrible offense to it or nobody put any big personal feelings towards it that this is gospel or anything like that, because about the time--the early part there in '43 and '44 and '45--American forces were moving so fast through the Pacific that actually most of the troops in the Pacific had a fairly good knowledge really about what things were, and so when they would relate to the fact that she was saying "the terrific

beating they took on Guadalcanal" or something like that, they already knew it was not true. So it was just something different, something interesting to listen to.

C: So you had access to news, and you knew by the . . .

K: Yes, that it was not true, right.

C: Do you think if you didn't have access to news it might have been different?

K: Yeah, I would imagine that if you were on an island someplace . . . Of course, we didn't make the habits that the Japanese did. I mean, we created situations there by island-hopping and leaving various islands totally--just by-passing them, left them there. So I would imagine that they still had radio equipment there and those Japanese that were still there listening to that, they must have felt terribly elated about it. It must have given them a big charge, to think that everything was going great. But the United States didn't do that. We didn't leave anybody alone anyplace; we took a place, we consolidated it, left what was there that was necessary to manage it, and moved on, so that the Americans for their part were pretty well up to date with what was happening.

C: Did she seem attractive to the men?

K: Oh, I don't think so. You know, you couldn't tell anything--I don't recall any pictures of her until

after the war. Then it seems like Life Magazine, after she was charged with prisoner-of-war and she had a trial--she was trained in the United States, lived in the United States for a long, long time and then went back to Japan shortly before the start of the war. She had just a normal voice. I mean, nothing . . .

anything about it. She had a good radio voice. But I can't say anything else about it. She was just like on radio--it's different with television--but with radio you can't really tell anything from the voice anyhow.

C: Did people feel that she was pleasant or on their side or anything?

K: She was definitely against the United States. There was no question what her broadcasts were beamed for. Her broadcasts were essentially--that was the whole idea of it--was to lower morale. Because she would spread all this about all the things that were happening back home and "Think about your girlfriend or your wife," or somebody back there is running around with the fellows that are back home on furlough, and "Don't you think you should get out of the service and go back home." Her motive was definitely to decrease morale. But at the same time, the fellows were receiving letters from their family and their friends and their girlfriends, so it kind of knocked that position out of the way a little bit. I think by and

large there may have been a few that felt something to it, but, especially the guys on the islands--lots of them looked forward to it. They used to get a big kick about it, listening to where they were supposed to be and where they were going to be, and how badly they were being beaten--when they weren't. So they got a kick out of it.

I know on board ship every time we'd get it in we always plugged it in to the PA system so everybody could listen to it and hear what she had to say.

C: So you felt safe, you didn't feel like . . .

K: Right. Everybody looked forward to it. Every time we'd get the broadcasts we'd just plug it through the PA system and . . . her broadcasts used to last somewhere from around one-half hour to 40 minutes, depending on how many prisoners of war that she had. And usually she didn't have more than five of those. I don't know what the . . . I guess that was basically time, but she would interview each one of them. She didn't interview them--they would just perfunctorily read and you assumed or you felt certain that that's all they were doing. They were talking in a very monotonous voice and "I'm so-and-so and I belong to such-and-such outfit and I come from so-and-so. I've been taken prisoner on so-and-so, and receiving the Red Cross packages and they're treating me well and

everything is fine." It was just a canned speech.

C: Did you know they were being treated . . . Could you tell . . . ?

K: No, you couldn't tell from that, but from seeing places that were re-taken that the Japanese had prisoners you knew darn well how they were being treated, and it wasn't like they were talking about. Especially when they recovered the prisoners that had been taken on the Philippines, and Corregidor and Bataan, when they took those guys back again--you knew darn well the kind of treatment . . . If they had the available food and medicines, they never made it available to the American prisoners. Medicines, medical treatment, anything like that--they just didn't make it available, if they had it--I don't know if they had it or not. But nevertheless it was not a thing that was made readily available.

C: But you didn't regard this announcer with hostility?

K: No, never did. I always thought it was kind of interesting.

C: And you knew it was being done for your benefit.

K: Oh, yes, you bet.

C: So, when she named the different ships in different ports . . .

K: Well, she didn't name ships but she knew islands. For instance, some of the--I'm trying to think in

particular--she knew that--I came in to Kwajalein not for the invasion but after Kwajalein was taken--but several months before I came in there when the engagement was still on we heard her broadcast where she was addressing something to a particular sergeant who was stationed or who was involved in the invasion of Kwajalein. And she would really use that because the invasion of Kwajalein was mainly 100% naval and air engagement, but she used it for people in Guadalcanal and she used it again in Guam and Saipan, where she actually had the names of particular servicemen and units that they belonged to. That was always wonder-- somehow she got it, I don't know, but she did have it.

C: Or spooky.

K: I imagine they wondered how she got it, and we spent some time trying to figure out how they could have done it and I'm sure that the government knew how they were doing it. I'm sure that our military intelligence knew what was being done and how it was being gotten. But she didn't have a massive amount of that, but she would pick every once in a while when she would address something to somebody, in such-and-such a unit on . . . that he was in, and then she would mention to him about didn't he worry about what was happening back home in the United States with his wife or his girlfriend or whatever the matter happened to be, and . . .

C: She named . . .

K: She named the person, right.

C: And she knew what unit . . .

K: Yes. She knew units that he belonged to, what unit he belonged to. And knew he was on a particular island. So, that's what I say--it was . . . I would imagine that somebody in the intelligence in the United States so it was done. I never really bothered far enough to try and check that but that's what I mean, it was interesting listening.