

David (Doug or Mac) McCormick Sr

Born Mar 29, 1914
Poverty Island

Died: Mar 12, 2012
Traverse City, MI

Period of Service: Career
US Coast Guard

Source: Cemetery, JG, DCA
newspaper clippings

David Douglas McCormick was born on Poverty Island, one of twelve children, where his father James was lighthouse keeper. His mother was Mary. He graduated high school and joined the Coast Guard in 1935 as a Surfman at Whitefish Point, MI. He married Marie Stover from the Island on 7/2/1937. Dave and Marie lived on Plum Island when he was in the Coast Guard. Plum Island is a remote 266 acre island midway between Northport, the tip of mainland Door County, and Washington Island. Eight families lived there at the Coast Guard Station.

Prior to WWII, Doug was assigned to the attack transport *USS Hunter Liggett* which was stationed in the North Atlantic. After Pearl Harbor attack, the ship loaded troops in New York City and sailed to Wellington, New Zealand for amphibious training with the US Marines.

He landed on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942 where he was one of 27 Coast Guard personnel who remained there with the 1st Marine Division in the 1942-43 campaign. He later served in both the African campaign and the European Theater campaign, participating in four major battles. Later he commanded a 'sub chaser' based in New Orleans.

After WWII, Doug was assigned to Coast Guard stations in the Great Lakes region, including a return to Washington Island where he served until his transfer to the Philippines in 1952. While in the Philippines, Doug's wife passed away suddenly on the Island. He immediately returned and was assigned to the Coast Guard station in Sturgeon Bay. 'Sis' and Spencer Nelson took care of the two boys under Mac returned. While in Sturgeon he met and married Pearl Boudwin (Steinmetz). There he was responsible for 18 lighthouse stations both in Wisconsin and Michigan. He went on to assignments at the Officer Candidate School in Yorktown, VA, and the Coast Guard station in Sault Ste Marie, MI where he retired in 1965.

After retirement Doug moved to Burlington, VT where he worked as a ferry boat captain on Lake Champlain for the next ten years. He returned to Sturgeon Bay, becoming a captain of charter fishing boats on Lake Michigan. In 1981, Doug moved to Traverse City, MI, where he was active in local affairs. He was a member of the first board of directors for the restoration of the Traverse City Lighthouse, which was similar to the one where he grew up on Poverty Island, and is now a museum with a room in it called the McCormick Room. He lived at the lighthouse where he was caretaker through 2002. He was a member of VFW, Disabled American Veterans, Knights of Columbus, and a tribal elder of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. He died at the age of 97.

Mac spent three stints on Plum Island while in the Coast Guard and was one of eight families living there. Winter was a hardship for those families whose only connection to Washington Island or the mainland was a Coast Guard utility boat the *Valiant* commonly called 'The Bull'. In 1938, for instance,

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during a terrific snowstorm they took Ralph Goodlet out onto the ice to where the Bull was in the middle of the channel because it couldn't get closer. It took a couple of hours to get to Northport with ice chunks going over the Bull. They walked to Gills Rock through snow as high as the telephone wires in some places, where they hitched to Landin's team and sled. Ralph and Dr. Farmer met the plow coming up from Sturgeon Bay and Ralph was transferred to the hospital. But his appendix had burst and he only lived seven days. He died at age 33.

Another storm on Armistice Day in 1940 the Coast Guard got a call from *The Empire State* which had lost its steering because of an electrical problem off Chamber Island. On the way to pick up some electrical workers to help them, they noticed another ship the *Sinaloa* which had lost its anchor flukes. Because the wind had shifted to southwest they advised the *Sinaloa* not to go down the lake but it came adrift and landed over in Michigan where it was rescued by another Coast Guard crew. Meantime the weather had become so rough the Bull couldn't get the electrical workers within 300 feet of the *Empire* so they returned the electrical workers back to Fish Creek. "The waves must've been 40 feet high. Marcus 'Ole' Oleson and I were together in the Bull.... It started to get freezing cold and we got all iced up. We went back to Plum Island to fuel up. We had an awful time refueling because the sea was so high..... We took off and got around Boyer's Bluff and you could look down on Washington Island, the sea was that high.... We clocked the wind at 109 miles per hour and that was in an open boat. It had a little canvas over it, but that didn't last long. The wind took the canvas and the spray shield."

When Mac was left in Guadalcanal he "was made a beachmaster. I unloaded stuff from the ships. I was with Edson's Marines, the Marine Raiders. It was at that time, I happened to get Ole Oleson, the man I served with at Plum out of the water.

"I was sleeping in my tent on the beach when this big Jap cruiser came in with big 8-inch guns. We had these two old WWI attack destroyers (which were cut down and made into APDs, or attack destroyers; they'd take the Marines and push 'em on to the beach) The Jap cruiser pinpointed us and fired, blowing up the ships and sinking them.

"We got on our boats to see what we could do. It wasn't too far off the beach. This guy came up out of the water with all this bunker C oil all over him. I recognized his Norwegian brogue and I said 'Ole Marcus'. I got him ashore, cleaned the bunker oil off him, got him in my little tent and gave him some coconut juice that I'd made. I didn't even know he was on those ships. This happened in the waters known as Iron Bottom Sound..... because there's so many ships sunk in it.....

"I was standing on the stern of the ship *McFarland* when a Jap torpedo came down and blew the stern off. I was blown into the water. I lost a couple of my good buddies. They couldn't get out of the fire. I swam under.

"I think I was the only to get hit by a live torpedo and live. I was sitting on a log on the beach when this Japanese submarine appeared and fired three torpedoes. One went through the middle of the ship and it blew up. One went around the stern. So I'm sitting there watching and the torpedo came up and hit the beach, curved and came right at me.

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“It hit me in the leg. That thing was 21 inches in diameter. I was stunned. It took me a while to come to. It was a live Japanese torpedo. We couldn’t do anything about it so we sandbagged it and kept it there for a couple of months until the Navy men could get there and take the mechanism out... because they wanted to see how it was made.

“We were left over there....the ships couldn’t get back to get us....all we had to eat was Japanese rice with worms in it. This went on for a month. I developed malaria....They tried to evacuate me once, but I couldn’t get on the plane because there wasn’t enough room. The plane took off and blew up. Wasn’t anybody come out of that one.”