

Interviewed by Judy Allen October 27, 2023 at the Choctaw Community Center, Idabel

Walker Davis, US Navy veteran

Idabel resident Walker Davis is a veteran of the United States Navy, having served six years, from September 1956 to September 1962.

“My dad was in the Navy,,” said Davis. “When I was 17, I decided to go in.”

Davis said his service was all sea duty. “I was on a sea escort carrier and we hauled troops and aircraft, getting ready for the Vietnam War. The escort was a small carrier, loaded with planes, and they would take off and land on a bigger carrier. The escort ship was USS Cape Esperance. I was on a larger ship the last two years of service – the USS Oriskany, CVA-34.”

Davis said he spent a year transporting personnel, supplies and aircraft between Japan, the Philippines and the United States, then went to Midway Island, where he operated a crash boat, recovering personnel after plane crashes.

After Basic Training in San Diego, Davis did a tour of duty. He went aboard the Esperance, then Midway Island, then aboard the Oriskany. “We had 5-inch/38 caliber guns instead of missiles during the time I was on active duty aboard the Oriskany,” he said. “The Oriskany is the ship involved in Vietnam from which John McCain took off in his airplane and was shot down over North Vietnam and taken prisoner. McCain was not released for five and a half years. This incident happened after my time! Now the Oriskany has been sunken off the coast of Florida and the sunken ship is used as an artificial reef for fish and stuff to grow and live.”

Davis said, “I was a gun captain on the 5-inch/38 caliber guns and I ran the officers’ boat and Captain’s boat when they went to shore. Some call us pilots, but really we are Boatswains. We carry personnel to shore for R&R and back to the ship. On Midway Island, I was Boatswain of a 63-foot crash boat. We were on duty 24 hours, and then off 48 hours.”

Planes took off from Midway Island every five minutes, with planes landing every three minutes, in order to fly patrols. Davis served with the “five-minute team”. He remembers that while on Midway Island, he and friends had opportunities to fish for a variety of local sea life. “We used to catch barracudas and sand sharks. The island is located on a volcano edge. We gave the fish to the Hawaiian Natives.”

Davis married Charolette in 1958. They celebrated 65 years of marriage in December of 2023. She lived in San Diego when the Oriskany was in port, but was alone most of the time, so eventually moved back to Oklahoma. It was expensive for her to live in San Diego. “Walker was only able to send me \$90 a month – and \$56 of it went toward rent!” She moved home to Muskogee for the last year of his service.

“I went to the unemployment office and got a shoe clerk position at Felts Family Shoes,” said Davis. He was promoted, moving to several of the franchised locations as manager, including Siloam Springs, Arkansas; Seminole, Oklahoma; and Bethany, Oklahoma.

While living in Seminole, they had a daughter. Nearing the end of his career with Felts, Charolette needed a surgery and Walker couldn’t get off work. “I knew it was time for a new employer,” he said. Davis found a job with Wagoner Buick in Muskogee.

In Muskogee at the Buick dealership, Walker had the reputation as top salesman. “Buick accepted me to a minority school for blacks, Hispanics, etc., to become an entrepreneur in a Buick dealership. The school was the GMC Dealer Development Academy in Flint, Michigan. He was the only Native American there. He education included earning a degree from Bacone

College. "After the two-year school, I bought the dealership in Idabel, Oklahoma," said Davis. The school even helped finance the purchase. He and Charolette also sold everything they had and put that money into the dealership. "I loved the dealership and I miss the people that you meet when working there," said Davis.

Davis was selected as the Choctaw Nation Outstanding Elder 2008-2009. He was chosen as Choctaw Nation Veteran of the Month in 2021 and again in 2023.

He may be retired from the Navy and the Dealership, but his warrior status continues. "I fight hard for the Choctaw Senior Citizens. I am President Pro Tempore of the Silver-Haired Legislators. For example, we created the Silver Alert for the Seniors," he said. "The Silver-Haired Legislators want people in nursing homes to have the best. Oklahoma is rated 49 and that is not good enough! We need to make them more comfortable and help them survive." He coaches a chair volleyball team for the Senior Citizens in his area.

Davis said he truly cares for other people. "The Chief asked me once, 'Why don't you ever ask anything for yourself?'" Davis said he was happy to work on behalf of improving lives of others. "I helped argue for the increase in minimum wage for employees and advocated beginning the law moving program for senior citizens."

His parents were Walker Davis Senior and Patsy Garland Addington Walker. He lived with them in Muskogee when he joined the Navy. He had two brothers, Stanley (United States Marine Corps) and Walter Lloyd Davis (United States Army), and a sister, Jane Frances Davis.

Davis had known Charolette since she was in the 8th grade, and she was in the 10th grade when he left. "They were taking school pictures the day he left," said Charolette. "He came and told me he was leaving for Oklahoma City. My school picture shows a big tear in my eye, but Walker must have liked the picture, because he had it made in silk when he got to Japan."

Davis said military life taught how to take orders and do what is necessary to complete the job. He feels he learned leadership skills. "The experience changed me for the better," he said. "I recommend everybody serve in the military and learn respect for others."

Davis talked about perceptions people sometimes have about soldiers and veterans. "It is kind of ironic that Vietnam veterans came back and were shunned. Now the attitude is different. To go through that and know that people have served our country, and see people are burning flags, etc. I am a patriot for our country and love it. This is the greatest country you can live in." He and his wife said they salute flags even when they pass one driving, such as the big flag at Valliant.

"We have a daughter, granddaughter and little great-grandson who will be two in January, said Davis. "He is the light of our lives! We want him to be a true patriot to the USA. Only one percent of the US population have served and defended this country."

Davis said, "My wife and I believe Jesus is the son of God and everything will be all right."