

This is a story about my time in the Navy.

When my friend Larry and I quit school in January 1950, we and lived in Redwood City The Korean war started June 27, 1950. . We both went down and signed up to join the Air Force and to learn how to fly. Two years of college were needed for this and we qualified. But we were never called so I went back to college to finish my degree in Civil Engineering. At that time the draft was on and if you could complete and pass an examination you would be deferred until the end of college. This I did and I had applied to the Navy then to go into the Civil Engineering Corps. But they were full and I was not accepted. So I took a job at the San Francisco Naval shipyard just after I graduated in 1952. While I was in the shipyard they were teaching me Naval architecture theory. At that time I was about to be drafted and I had reapplied to the Navy, this time for a general commission. I was accepted to go to OCS in October 1 of 1952. I had also received my draft notice and had gone down to take my physical exam... The Navy called me and said report report on October 5, 1952. If the draft would've called me first I would have gone into the regular Army and I don't know where I would've been assigned. After four months of training at OCS in Newport Rhode Island, I was commissioned as a Navy ensign in February 1953.. My assignment was to the Navy shipyard in Long Beach. I am sure that was because I had some experience in San Francisco at the shipyard learning naval architecture. At graduation from OCS, they asked if anyone wanted to transfer to the Civil Engineering Corp., but I was happy with my assignment so declined.

I reported for duty in Long Beach in the February 1952 and served there until May 1955. The war ended July 12 1953. I was promoted to Lt. Junior Grade after 14 months .My job there was various. At first I was assigned as a ship superintendent. Ships that were under repair, had a ship superintendent to follow the progress and make sure jobs were completed so ships could be returned to duty as soon as possible. My one job was to oversee the overhaul of a large floating drydock. This had been used in Guam during World War II and had been quickly taken down and shipped back the United States and to Long Beach. This drydock was large and could take a small cruiser. It had four sections built on pontoons and very large wing walls. When a ship was to be brought into it the

pontoons and walls would be flooded and the drydock would sink into the water; the ship would then be pulled into it and the water pumped out and the drydock would rise and float on the water. Then the under parts of the ship could be worked on and maintained. While working one day they were working on redoing the big hinges. One worker was working with a torch and cutting out one of the hinge pins. He then stuck his finger in the hole to clean out the debris from the work and suddenly the attachment gave way and he cut off the end of his finger. Of course it shook me up a bit and I did get him to the medical area and they asked me to be sure and find the end of the finger. I did this and got it to the doctor so it could be reattached. I never heard how successful that was.

After being assigned as a ship superintendent I was transferred to the Supervisor of Shipbuilding. This group managed all of the new shipbuilding that was accomplished in the area. The main work was being done on wooden nonmagnetic minesweepers. Korean waters had been mined, and our ships were having problems with them in Korea. So a nonmagnetic minesweeper was developed. They were small boats from about 75 or 80 feet long two large ones about 400 feet long. They were made of wood and all of the engines were made of aluminum and nonmagnetic materials. All the utensils and equipment on board had to be nonmagnetic. I was assigned to look over the fleet of small minesweepers, called M SB, and I referred to them as mighty small boats. We would go out on sea trials when they were close to being finished to make sure they operated correctly.

While on duty there are other tasks that we had to accomplish. Before very many days while I was still a young ensign, the commanding officer ask that we take a tour or lead a tour of young people around the shipyard. That was before we really knew all the details but we knew enough to tour these young people around the yard. About once a month I would be assigned the duty of watching the shipyard at night. I was the only officer present at that time. There were security guards, but at that time there was really not much going on and security was not a problem, but we checked the facility to be sure. I did carry a 45 revolver and had to make rounds of the shipyard three or four times during the night.

As you can tell by my story, I was never in harm's way. I really would like to have served on a destroyer and gone to Westpac but I really did enjoy my time working in the shipyard. It was almost like a job where I would get up in the morning and go to work and then come home in the evening. My first few days at the yard there were two other young Ensigns that had been assigned to the shipyard. There was no housing on the base for us, so we were authorized to find a small apartment on shore. The three of us stayed together and became good friends. We also did a little partying of being together. The Miss Universe contest was on one year during my stay. I did not apply to become an escort, but a friend did and he was.

Most of my high school friends were drafted. Three of us became officers. Some were assigned to places such as France, Germany and Japan. Those that went to Korea suffered then most. One had frosted toes because of the severe cold. And two good friends were lost. One was my cousin.

Because of my experience at the shipyard, in 1967, when the Vietnam war was on, I went to Hawaii to manage a Naval Architecture consulting office for Pearl Harbor Naval shipyard. I was there for two years and had an office of about 30 people at one time. Our main work was on submarines. The nuclear submarines were somewhat new and the biggest task was to sound isolate them. This was a major job for our mechanical group because they had to go through all of the piping and design connection systems where the pipes were connected and to isolate them so there was no noise from vibrations. We did have a Naval Architect that worked for us and a project we had was to design a small fishing boat out of aluminum that could be converted or used for any kind of a engine system that the potential buyer would like to have.

All of this was very interesting to me. I did not want to go to Hawaii in 1967, but I'm glad I did. We had a good time there. Mark and I learned how to surf.

Veterans Day is here .It used to be called Armistice Day because the armistice was signed for World War I on November 11, 1918. Vici and I were able to visit

Flanders Field on one of our trips. It was interesting to see and experience what was going on a little bit in WW1. World War II was quite different and even now the Iraq war and what is going on now is quite different. I sincerely hope that none of you have to serve unless you really want to. The military is a good career if you like it. I was eligible for the GI bill and took advantage of it after the service to get a Master's degree in Structural Engineering at UC Berkeley.

Jim Willis 11-11-2016