

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Howard Arnold

Conducted Kevin Haney

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Part 1: Introduction

My name is Kevin Haney, and I am doing an interview with Mr. Howard Arnold today July 29th 2006 at the Indian Prairie Library in Darien, Illinois. Mr. Arnold was born on August 3rd, 1925 and is a resident of Willowbrook, Illinois. Just to open up, Mr. Arnold, give us your thoughts, you're a veteran of WWII, describe the situation, how you came to be in the military, obviously you were alive during the attack on Pearl Harbor and kind of take us back to those days if you could.

Well I went in quite a bit after Pearl Harbor... I was drafted February 18th, 1944. They allowed me to finish up high school. I went to Hyde Park High in Chicago, so I was able to finish up, get my degree, and in a couple of days I was in the Navy, and they sent me to [boot camp in] Farragut, Idaho... I was I thinking it would be Great Lakes a little bit closer, but they don't want you to go over hill, so they had mountains all around us. The um head of the boot camp in Farragut, Idaho and after my training, I went home on leave and then sent [me] back to uh San Francisco, California, Treasure Island which was the navy base at that time, and I attended a class of signal school to learn all the communications necessary to handle all of our communications aboard the uh merchant ship.

Ok, now um, boot camp take us back a little bit and describe what boot camp was like, basic training and that sort of thing.

Well, basic training they have the uh, they instill a sense of discipline in everybody, and we had to learn close order drills and that kind of exercising getting everybody into condition, and um uh have rifle range and a few things like that and other than KP-duty, and then I finally got out of boot camp, and I went to signal school in Treasure Island, and that's where I learned to do semaphore, Morse code, and handle the high frequency radios and uh flag hoist, and you had to learn um a lot of the codes and everything else that the Navy uses and so on.

What do you mean by semaphore and flag hoisting?

Flag hoist they have what they call a flag bag, and they have all the letters of the alphabet, A-Z and 1-0 as far as the uh numerals are concerned, and then you have a halyard where you have to attach ... the flags and put the flags in certain combinations, and you uh formulate the message, and of course you have to refer to your code book to determine what flags you put on the flag ... [hoist] and you haul them up on the halyard so all the ships around can use your binoculars and read what you're trying to tell them.

Ok, so you're basically saying out a whole string of flags that are individual letters

Yeah

or numbers

Right

And is that why is why is that used as opposed to radio communication?

A little quieter so to speak. In other words if there are ships around that you can take err hear your radio, then you're alerting the enemy perhaps, so this is when you're at sea of course you can be a good distance apart, and you have to have high power binoculars in order to see the flags, and of course you need to be able to recognize all of the flags, the combinations of course, then you have to refer to your signal book as to what specific instructions they want you to carry out.

What would be some of the typical information that would be sent out, now this would be going to any any ship in your in your convoy?

Yeah.

Ok what were, what were the kind of typical information that would be sent? Routinely.

Well it uh information pertaining to a change of course, 'cause when you have the whole convoy, the whole convoy must go into operation, and uh in order to get on the right course or else it might say uh they had enemy vessels in sight or whatever you know so.

This is this is some of the stuff you were learning at

Yeah.

Communications school

Yeah and um after signal school I was assigned to what they call the liberty ship *The Horace V. White*.

Ok now a liberty ship is with the merchant marine and can

Yeah.

You kind of explain the distinction between the merchant marine and the navy at that point?

Ok. When when I was assigned to the um uh to the ship, it was well we were we were working onboard the uh ... merchant marine ships, but we were the navy crew, and uh in my case I was handling all the exterior communications, and I also had another ... in case

of attack. I was a loader on a 20 millimeter, so that was my battle station, and so uh so everybody we all had our different battle stations. The gun crew of course we had uh um uh a six inch gun up on the bow, and then there were 8, 14 different 20 millimeter stations.

Ok now 20 millimeter is what type of weapon? What would that be used for?

It would be uh considered a small automatic cannon to uh to uh have more explosive power, and uh it was faster ... [in] the shooting.

So that would be typically for aircraft or submarines or both?

... Basically for aircraft. [But could be used against submarines or other small craft.]

Ok.

The six inch gun ... and that uh that would be for possible submarines or small crafts of whatever sort.

And what what percent how many people would be posted to a liberty ship, and what percentage if you have any idea would be naval personnel versus merchant mariners?

Well, the um the gun crew and signaling and navy signaling and such would be, I don't know, maybe say 15% something like that. The uh the gun the merchant crews are not huge onboard those ships. They have enough to stand on watchers and of course the navy crew stand watch as well, and we always continue to stay looking to make sure if there's any any aircraft uh submarines or whatever kinda be able to.

What was the total, what was the total crew would you in terms of numbers 150 to 100 whatever.

Mmm the total I would say is about 100.

Ok.

And um lets see from San Francisco we sailed out of San Francisco went to we were shipped to we were alone. We didn't have any other protection other than what we carried on the ship itself which was 20 millimeters, and then and we sailed through what was the torpedo junction at one time that was at the Solomon Island group.

Why was that called torpedo junction?

Because that's where so many ships were sunk by submarines by enemy submarine and all that well mainly submarines yeah. So beginning of the war, many, many ships were sunk, a great deal more were sunk in the Atlantic of course - there were the Wolfpaks. The Japanese didn't have some of their things work out I guess. But uh from there we went to Hollandia, New Guinea where we gathered together and after all the ships were together, we went out in convoy, and we went to um uh Leyte Gulf in the Philippine Islands.

Ok now this I'm sorry this would have been when in 1944?

Um, let's see, maybe about July something like that. And that's sketchy. Um and when we went in convoy, and that was the invasion of the Philippine Islands, and their troops we got our assignment where to anchor, but before we got anywhere near that, a Japanese kamikaze or uh what the pilot just crashed his plane into the ship.

A suicide pilot

A suicide pilot. Yeah. So they they wanted to get rid of as many troops as they could at that time, and they crashed suicide pilots, and it went into the ship that was on our port bow or port ... [port side. Many of our troops were killed. The next day a dive bomber tried to sink our ship, but fortunately he missed.]

Did you have any briefings on the on the idea that the Japanese were using kamikaze pilots and were crashing into your ships at that point, or was that a new thing you experienced?

Well that was fairly new when we were coming around there. It was uh not unheard of, but basically new, and um let's see, the uh a lot of a lot of our troops were killed in that crash, and um there were what else do I say? After after Leyte, we were in some of the islands around Samar which was quite close by. We went up the eastern coast of the Philippines, and we went up to Lingayan Gulf which was where our next assignment was, so we brought supplies and that to that area.

Ok. What type of supplies were you bringing generally?

Uh we had PX supplies and then drums of gasoline.

By PX you mean

Um PX supplies would be toothpaste and all kinds of stuff that you had to have, and then um as far as the actual Lingayan Gulf, and this this is where covering a few months then we went back to the States, and I was there, and then I was put aboard a different ship which was a transport ship to bring troops home from Hawaii to the States.

Ok now this this were you on the liberty ship which was the merchant marine ship throughout the war period and then you were sent to be put on the transport ship?

The transport ship [S.S. Cape Canso] was a merchant ship as well.

Oh ok.

And uh I was on that ahem liberty ship most of the time [approximately one year] until they took us off and put us on the transport [Cape Canso] ship to bring troops from Hawaii back to San Francisco.

Ok, so you were on the liberty ship which was a supply ship until when in terms of like a month til sometime in 1945?

Well, I was on the liberty ship [Horace V. White] about a year.

Ok so that's pretty much was the war over by the time you were during by the time you were leaving the liberty ship?

No, the war was pretty well over when I was assigned to the transport ship [Cape Canso].

Ok.

They get the troops back home, and uh so that was all the experience on the liberty ship it was still wartime at that time.

Ok, and now the merchant marine were the people who you were serving with, were they considered civilians or what were they?

They were civilians. The merchant marines were the civilian people who run the ship. They uh Navy's duties were to handle all of the guns, guns onboard, and uh visual communications between uh our ship and the visual communications were the semaphore, Morse code, flag hoist, and high frequency high frequency radio and um that's about it.

Ok now the Morse code would with be with lights?

Lights, yeah, you have a flashing light, you have a lantern, and you have uh a control to give your dot signal because usually with light, and I tell you that you can go miles by that. You can point it off a cloud, and they can read it uh miles and miles away.

Ok, what was the mood since you were, how many sailings did you do back and forth between Hawaii and the United States, what was the mood of the troops as they were coming home as you recall.

Well the troops that we come to were really happy about going home. Um the uh let's see, the mood of the as far as the um mood of our people they were, we were all happy about the war being over. Ahem.

What was a member's conversation like I guess.

Well you can use a lot of your war stories about experiences, yeah, things happened to other people, and uh so of course they were glad to be going home and go back to civilian life.

Ok, where were you when the war actually ended and how did you hear about it?

Well, let's see, I was our ship was uh um it was in the Philippines at that time and, of course that's another thing. We had communications with we heard about President Roosevelt dying, so that I guess was a lowest point in the end of it all. And after uh I got out of the Navy, I actually signed on for a second hitch, was not an active thing, it was just uh something I did.

You were in the reserves after 1946 then?

Yeah. See that looks does it yeah? So my final discharge was May 29th of 1946. Signing out.

Oh um what was the uh um what was the mood in the country when you get got back and did you you know were people still talking about the war, did you talk about the war?

Yeah they were still talking about the war and of course great jubilation yeah everybody, service people as well as the uh civilian people, were quite happy to have the war over and um that's about it. Um. Everybody got their discharge and they went home.

How do you feel that your military service impacted your outlook on things would you say? Or did it?

Yeah, well, when you go to war even though my experience in the war wasn't that involved. ... It wasn't quite as strenuous for a lot of us that are onboard ship. You're your living conditions of course are are better...

But of course it's about the kamikaze attack too

Yeah, well, we usually had tried to have our dessert first if we could. 'Cause if anything came up, then we wouldn't miss that. You gotta have dessert.

**Ahehehehe. Yeah, well what were things like in the country when you came back?
Um.**

Well, uh the war was over, and they passed bills, they had the GI bill

Ok.

People were trying to get into schools and all that sort of stuff.

Ok.

But um everybody was happy that the war was over.

Ok did you attend uh anything on the GI bill at all? College or?

Yes. I went to uh Grinnell College in Ibron, Iowa on the GI bill. Yeah.

Ok, and uh how long were you in the reserves for?

Well it was just it was just a couple years. It was it was a case like that time where you'd go down to a navy pier and um join a group down there that was packed with stuff.

Ok. Did you have anything uh else that you would want to say about the interview or about your experiences at all? Observations?

Experiences in the war?

Yeah.

I've just been talking to you about that.

Well, uh the war you were talking to me.

Yeah, yeah. It was it was sometime back and there was a lot of details that you think you're never going to forget all those things, but uh I find that uh I should have written down some dates when I had the chance, but anyway that was basically the experience I had in the service and all. That's about it.

Ok and about the kamikaze

And the kamikaze of the them first came into Leyte Gulf, that was when the one kamikaze flew across the bow of our ship into the cruise ship and of subsequent attacks. Um uh our ship was credited with downing two Japanese planes, and um there was a

segment as my job was a painter in fact, we got two planes on a smokestack which was typical of what people did.

Ok so you you were you physically the one who painted the painted the images of the planes on the side?

Yeah, yeah, we painted Japanese flags on the smokestack, one for each aircraft that we knocked down. That was pretty typical of all of our navy ships, too, but um merchant ships did that part of the record.

Mmhmm. And uh what um did you get you got clearance to do that, but how how did you feel about that?

Well, there was nothing to really feel about that I don't think. I just did a job of a sign painter to paint and little more than that. But um we were happy as the gun crew and our crew that we knocked down two planes that could have taken care of us too.