

# **VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**

**Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations**

**Interview with**

**Dennis R. Greene**

Conducted by Kevin Haney

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## **Part 1: Introduction**

My name is Dennis Greene. I am a naval veteran, and I live presently in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

**This interview is taking place on October 14<sup>th</sup> at the Indian Prairie Public Library in Darien, Illinois as part of the veterans' interview program. I am the interviewer, my name is Kevin Haney. The interviewee today is Dennis Greene. He is a veteran of the United States Navy and with us also today is Melanie Wicker. Let's get started by asking where you began your military duty.**

I graduated high school immediately, and a ... [day] or two later I was on a bus to the Great Lakes for boot camp. Boot camp right here in Illinois.

**And that was 1958?**

Yes.

**What was, you had boot camp in the Great Lakes, what was that like?**

Boot camp was, let's put it this way, no one likes boot camp. It's... you're with a bunch of guys you didn't know from all over the country and some of them snore (laughs) and it's a way of getting used to, let's say, living with other people and you're not home with mommy.

## **Part 2: Training**

**Ok. So a lot of physical activity and then did you move into advanced training for your specialty?**

Yeah, I started going to radio school, but I didn't like radio school. I dropped out of that. Then I went to a ship and that was the [USS] Maloy. The Maloy was a destroyer escort, EDE791. She was out of New London, Connecticut and I started in the Atlantic Ocean. That was the first time I ever saw salt water freeze. Then I saw green water over the bridge many times and there was even a hurricane off the coast of the Carolinas. Let's put it this way, we weren't sure we were gonna come home at that time.

**This was a destroyer escort, about how many men would have been on a destroyer escort at that time?**

Gee there weren't that many men. I'm not sure how many. I could only take a guess there, I estimate only about 100 or so, [maybe less].

**What were your duties on the Maloy?**

I started out as a deck ape which means chipping paint and painting, and I worked with the gunners mates cleaning things up. I also started striking for storekeeper later on. I'd say I was on that for a good 6 to 9 months. One of the things that helped me out was that I could type and since I was working with the boson, we were referred to as deck apes of course; he used to stick me in the office a lot to do their typing and take care of their paperwork since I had a high school education, not a GED.

**What type of duties were the Maloy performing at that time; this would have been about 1959?**

1958, 1959. Probably early 60s. What we did, as I said before, we made a bunch of circles in the summer and winter and we also went into Operation Springboard which was ... about a month, where you serviced with the fleet [of planes] guarding [for the carriers] and things of that nature. But our ... primary duty was, we had what was called a variable ... depth sonar ... [rig] which we referred to as ... a fish, which we used to flop this huge mass ... under the ... [hull] of the ship and this [was a] new type of sonar we were experimenting with. ... Our basic experiments [were] with sonar trying to get information. I believe that type of sonar is quite common now on the larger ships.

**What were you testing for? Were you checking out for Russian submarines or were you running tests?**

No we were testing the scientific feasibility of the equipment itself. It was a scientific ship at that point, and we even had scientists aboard that I never saw; they were there, but you never saw them, they were like ghosts. They would drop [the] fish over [the side] and I remember one time we ... [hit] a school of fish underneath the water, [and] we thought it would rip the whole thing right up off the deck. But the reason it was such a problem was the fish, the sonar ... [rig] ... was very heavy and since it was so heavy it made us top heavy so we had ... taken off the guns and the depth charge racks, ... [they] were all gone. It was just a rig but if you go into a big storm you couldn't weather as well as you could if you were in a destroyer that was, let's say, designed as a destroyer. Our design was a little off at times being top heavy.

**What was morale like on the ship? This was peacetime maybe you know.**

Well actually it wasn't quite peaceful because Vietnam was going but not that much at the time, but morale was pretty good. We didn't hit too many ports. We hit some ports in the Caribbean. You know like Kingston, Jamaica, Haiti, and I can't remember the others ..., a few ports we hit out there. Most of our duties were, like I said, go out and do a lot of circles then come back in with the scientific information ... back to New London, but a lot of times we would pull out like Operation Springboard, [and] we would go to the Caribbean and stop in at Key West and then we would go off and stop at Miami, [and]

maybe ... [show off the] ship and have people come aboard. ... They all thought we were a battleship; they never saw a ship before if you know what I mean.

**And then you transferred to the Bushnell, when was that?**

Oh gosh. Bushnell, what happened was I left the Maloy and I went to storekeeper ... [Class A] school and I just made third class ... [petty] officer. From there I went to Bushnell and Bushnell was a submarine tender. As a submarine tender, submarine tenders normally stay where they're at held in port by the coffee grounds but the fact of the matter was that the government was coming up with new what they called ... [fram] jobs which was basically a redesign of the submarine tenders because of the nukes in particular.

**These were the nuclear submarines?**

Right, the nuclear submarines that were coming out because we were changing over from [a] diesel navy to the [nuclear] submarine, [and] a new type of navy, which was nuclear power. When I served on the Bushnell, we started moving around a little but we spent a lot of time in Key West ... . Of course, we serviced Key West during the hurricane, we went out to sea when the hurricane came in and then when the hurricane left we came in and I remember there was a town called Marathon and they had ... a lot of people ... in real bad shape. We came in, we supplied them with water to the people on the shore, actually the ... [sailors performed] all kinds of work trying to help the people of Marathon ... . The ship was really looked upon as a friend of the town.

**Ok.**

My duties there were basically as a storekeeper, I was [in] the electronic stores, and I was in the metal hole, which was basically where they kept all the sheet metal. Basically I was a worker, a storekeeper. I wasn't one of the office storekeepers.

**By store you mean supplies for the ship?**

Yes, all supplies for the ship.

**More so than a PX or something else?**

Yes

**Typically how many men were on the Bushnell?**

There would have been several hundreds.

**So this would have been larger than the Maloy?**

Oh yes. ... [Submarine] tenders are pretty large ships because we need to provide services to the type of ships that we were servicing and anything that breaks down you would have to be able to fix it, patch it, and install it. It's a city on the water.

**Kind of like a floating construction company?**

Yes. A floating repair shop, multiple repair shops.

**You were on the Bushnell for what period of time?**

Possibly two years.

**So from about 1961?**

I would say, 59, 60, 61, I would say 60 to 62. One thing that I didn't mention was that on the Bushnell, I think I mentioned this off the record before, one of the submarines that came in was ... [the] Thresher and at that time I was assigned [as liaison] to the Thresher because I used to [aide in] and go out and put supplies on the submarines and that was, I could come in and be a supplies specialist ... making sure they had everything ... [they] were ... [going to need]. I would go out with the officer and when the Thresher came in they assigned me to work with the Thresher storekeeper and the Thresher being a nuclear submarine, the only nuclear submarine in port, they were king, you know what I mean. Everything was priority one. That was prior to them going to the yards and of course we all know what happened to the Thresher, she went in to the yards then she came out and she sunk with all the hands. [I ate] ... dinners, watched movies on the Thresher, ... [being] very friendly with the storekeeper; I don't know if he was on ship when it sank or not.

**That would have been about 1963?**

Somewhere around there, maybe a little earlier.

**How did you feel, there you are somewhat in the peacetime military and then a ship you worked with had gone down with all hands, lost with all hands?**

Well I mean, everyone, when we had a tragedy like that we [all] felt bad of course, but that's what you're there for. You fly in the Air Force and anything can happen. [Same with the Navy.]

**Part 3: Going Overseas**

**Now you were in the Caribbean on the Bushnell during the Bay of Pigs?**

Well, [during] the Bay of Pigs I was actually in Key West, but it just so happens that we thought we were going to war during the Bay of Pigs. That ... [was] a political ... [crisis], it was ... really fouled-up historically and ... I was in the radio room with my friends, and we were listening to the SOSs coming from ships that were being sunk off the coast of Cuba. They were the Cuban invasion force so it was not a nice thing. We had people standing by the lines with axes. We didn't know if they would cut the lines ... [or not]. ... [We never] went.

**Ok so you were monitoring the radio broadcast from the Bay of Pigs?**

Well I was sitting in there while the radio ... [men] were listening to it.

**Did you have any prior notice of this invasion or did it just kind of**

No I was just ... [listening]. I didn't know what was going on. People said ... [a] war was being fought (laughs).

**Were you also in the Caribbean during the Cuban Missile Crisis then the next year?**

No during the Cuban Missile Crisis which came about, I'm not sure of the dates; I was stationed in Kamasaya, Japan. What happened was that I left the Bushnell and I went to storekeeper school and from there I went to Kamasaya, Japan which was a naval intelligence unit. We used to call ourselves international spies and we had a big spy radio station with CTs, communications techs, and they would do different types of jobs and they would monitor everything, etcetera, and at that point in time when they had the missile crisis going on I was in charge of the ... [electronic hut]. [It] had all the electronic ... [repair parts for] ... all the ... spy equipment. I was real busy there because I was the only storekeeper in there, and I had one Japanese gentleman who was a civilian who worked with me during the day but at night he ... [went home]. I just happened to be on duty that night, ... and believe me, we were expecting everything to blow. We were getting the messages and they would be relayed to Washington DC so we knew what was happening before Washington did.

**Where did you get the messages from, you were in Japan, were you getting them from the Soviet Union or China?**

Probably the Soviet Union I would guess but probably China too because we monitored everything. Of course you have to understand I wasn't a CT so I never worked with their equipment.

**When were you in Japan approximately?**

Let's see, I was in Japan for a little over a year, so since I head out in '67, you go back it would have been '62 or '63.

### **Then you were transferred to the submarines.**

From Japan I went to, wait a sec, it would have been earlier, because I went on two submarines, two years, so it wouldn't have been 63, you have to go back 4 years from 67 so it would be like 63-62 Japan. ... I went to submarine school in New London, Connecticut and from there I was assigned to the USS ... [Rock AGSS-274].

### **What did submarine school consist of?**

Oh submarine school was a lot of fun. We had to go through the tower and boy if you didn't make the tower you weren't a submariner ... .

### **What are the towers?**

This one tower [in New London]; they also had one in Hawaii, ... [they were] flooded with water and it was just like [a] large circular cylinder ... . It was filled with water and it goes down, the ... [tube] was like, 50 ... [to a] 100 feet, something like that. [There were] ... various depths ... and what they do is they take you ... [as] the cylinder has an inner casing [and] an outer casing and a walkway around it so you go there, and you open a water tight door and you go in a dry room; then you close that water tight door and then there's another water tight door that leads into the cylinder. So you flood that compartment you are in and you bring the water over the hatch coving so you can open up the hatch and then you can go step into the cylinder, and what you are doing is that you are doing a mock-up of an escape from a submarine. I must have done it 4 or 5 times at different places at different times in my career. You have to do it every so often to re-qualify. ... The last time I did, well maybe the last times we did it we used the escape ... [Steinke hood] which was like a life jacket with a hood that goes over it, and when you go ... [up] the tube you keep yelling because you don't want your lungs to explode with the difference in the pressures. And you go straight up. Then if you don't do it right, you ... [have] frogmen down there with breathing apparatuses and they will stop you so you don't get killed. The first time I did it, we did what's called a blow and go. Which means you go into the tank with a life jacket on, but that's it and ... you have to let your air out as much as you can and if you're not letting your air out they hold you ... .

### **And this is to prepare you for the submarine?**

Oh that is ... necessary for submarine duty and [in] the submarine school itself, they just teach you about submarines. When you ... [transfer] submarines like [from] my first submarine, ... you have to re-qualify to earn your dolphins [again] which means you have to be able to ... [dive] the submarine, know how it works, know every little button and knob on that submarine. A submarine is different from a surface ... [ship]. You never know what's going to happen, when it's going to happen, ... [or] where you're going to be and you have to be able to assume everyone's duties. As a storekeeper I had

to ... [know] all ... [the jobs including an] electric. ... They had the propulsion board ... and if you didn't know the basics, you didn't earn your dolphins because your life depends on everyone else's abilities and their lives depend on yours and you never know what is going to happen.

**By dolphins you mean your certification?**

No, dolphins are more than certification, you earn your dolphins. It's a little badge ... that you wear on your chest and it has a dolphin on each side with a submarine in the center and if you see that you know that you are qualified in submarines, and usually we have what's called a re-qualify which means that every time you go to another submarine you have to re-qualify on that submarine because submarines are different, not all the same.

**Your first submarine was the Rock.**

Right.

**When were you on that and where?**

That would have been 4 years before I got out, I got out in '58.

**You went in '58.**

I'm sorry, '67.

**So '63?**

That would be ... so ... I would have left the Rock approximately ... ['65, '63 to '65]. I'm not sure how that fits in because we were playing with the dates a little.

**Yeah probably more like '63 on the Rock.**

I was there two years.

**Ok and what was a typical, and what were your typical duties on the Rock, and what were the Rock's duties at this time?**

Well the Rock's duties at that time, we would go out on patrol, we went to Vietnam where we made two patrols, we worked with SEAL teams, and we worked with the Korean marines. We took pictures of ships going up the Haiphong Harbor; we went up the river way over there. We were over in the South or North Korea, but we were never allowed to go into South ... [Vietnam] ports. Submarines would have been too vulnerable in a South ... [Vietnam] port.

**South Korean or South Vietnamese?** (The veteran deleted both question and answer.)

**Now what you would offload a SEAL team to do an operation in North Vietnam or wherever?**

Yeah. I didn't know exactly what we were doing, I just know [what] we did ... (laughs). ... In Vietnam our primary duty was to monitor, we weren't allowed to torpedo anyone, not that we didn't want to (laughs). We did see shipping but you can't sink a Russian ship going up ... [to] Haiphong Harbor with war supplies, you know, that would have caused problems.

**Right so you were monitoring Russian ships?**

Oh, allied ships too, you would be surprised how many different nations were sending materials up there, but we just didn't know what the materials were, food or ammunition but we also hit a lot of ports and we were of course [in] Thailand a couple of times, Bangkok. We were in Formosa, we went to, let's see, I have to keep my cities right, Kowshung and Keelung, that would be in Formosa. Then we went to Korea. We were in Puson in Chinghey. We went to the Philippines a number of times, we went to Japan, we were in ... Subic Bay, and of course we stopped off in Hawaii on our way up and back. We hit quite a few ports.

**Ok and then you were on the Bancroft which was another submarine?**

Well ... yes, I was on the Bancroft. Now the Bancroft, I helped to build the Bancroft. I got on it when ... she was under construction. She was in the shipyards ... [at] General Dynamics and I was a storekeeper there, it was pretty important because you need to have all of the supplies. ... You're working with the people who are building the submarine ... [and] you are setting up the spare parts. We were working our tails off and we were working seven days a week. If you got a day off you were real lucky. Well, at that point in time, ... [I was] staying at the YMCA because we didn't have a place to sleep until we got our barge. [When] we got a barge, ... I slept on the barge and that was after a few months I guess, at least a few months. ... I'd have to drive in to town and I'd stay at the Y then drive to the shipyards. I had to go across the bridge ... [between New London and Groton]. The shipyard ... [was] pretty big.

**And you went out to sea with the Bancroft then?**

Yes I made two patrols, I was in gold crew but prior to patrols we had to shoot off our missiles, testing to make sure we could shoot missiles. ... We were in missile shoots and we also had to shoot torpedoes.

**Where were the shoots conducted?**

Um, I'm trying to remember, I know we did some shoots in the, I think the torpedoes were in ... [South] Carolina; the first time I ever had grits (laughs) for breakfast .

**Over by Virginia.**

Yeah (laughs). And then, I think we had to shoot our missiles in Florida. We had an island we shot them at and I have some pictures I brought ... [home]. [The] pictures were taken by my friends ... on the ship.

**Typically would these missiles have nuclear tips?**

Oh no no no. These were just, we weren't blowing anybody up. These were just practice.

**I mean, when they were armed.**

Oh when they were armed? Oh yeah. At that time, when we were talking about, we had multiple warheads I think they were talking about them recently but we had them way back then. The government does keep some secrets, not too many (laughs).

**You were off; you did some patrols off of Scotland?**

Well actually not ... off of Scotland, our ship was in Scotland. Our patrols were out of Scotland. What we would do, we would leave [on] our patrols, you know, our patrols, we would come out into the water and then we'd dive under the Russian trowler, I don't think ... [they] ever caught a fish over there, but they were monitoring us. The Russian trowler is supposed to be a fishing ship.

**That was their intelligence ships?**

Yes. They were fishing for submarines (laughs) that's what they were fishing for. We would go out and that's the last time when we went to the surface til we went back in. First patrol was three months, second patrol was four months.

**And you didn't surface?**

Oh no, you do not surface. It was sort of funny on one of the patrols, we got a radiogram saying that the Russians were the first to launch a new ship, I think it was a trowler or something and you know, one of the things you want to do is to be able to identify ships by ... [recording] their sounds. So ... [we went] over there ... [to] find [the] ship and we were told that if we run into a new ship to get ... recordings of it. Well, we ran into one, and of course, they were cutting our wire and we were taking all the ... [recordings] we could of them. ... It was pretty interesting. We lost a lot of wire but we did our job, and of course the ... [recordings were] then brought to Washington.

**The trawler would have been serving an intelligence ship?**

Right, but let's put it this way, since it was brand new, by us taking all the ... [recordings] we could on them electronically, our intelligence would know a lot about the ship itself.

**Ok because you could interpret a lot from the sound information?**

Yeah, well let's put it this way, you ... [tape] a Russian submarine, then you go and take the ... [recording] and that will tell you what type of submarine, what duty and who the captain is and what he had for breakfast (laughs)

**Was it grits?**

(laughs) grits, I don't know if the Russians eat grits, I think they eat cabbage.

**And so what was a typical, typically you would be out in the North Atlantic?**

Typically we were under polar ice. We had to transverse the polar ice and we'd be off the coast of Russia and had our missiles all set up wherever we were, you know, and whatever our target areas were. I didn't know what they were but we had games we played all the time and believe me, you work on one those submarines, you don't go in and just sleep. Something is always going on whether you're having a war game or a mock radiation problem or gas problem; they keep you in tip top shape.

**So you were pretty much on station in case war broke out?**

Oh yeah.

**And after the Bancroft then you decided to exit the navy and go to officer's training school?**

Well what happened was that I put in for an officer's program and I was a few months too old and ... [I] said well the heck with it, [I'll] go back to college. When I was in Japan I was taking college courses. I was taking University of Maryland courses, they were offered in Yokohama so I traveled from Kamasaya to Yokohama to do my courses, and when I was on the Bancroft when we were doing patrols and even though we had leave we also had courses we could take from colleges. We could go through Harvard, ... [and Tufts], and one of the other colleges that would come in ... [on the base]. Their professors would come down or we could actually go ... [on campus]. And we used to call it ... [Polaris] U or ... [Polaris] University, sort of a nickname ... . I picked up courses that way and I felt that I was doing ok ... . I figured I didn't want to be a second class petty officer all my life since I passed the exams in the navy [for 1<sup>st</sup> class] and what

they do is you wouldn't get the rank, you'd get quotaed or you'd fail the test. Well I never failed a test. I always got pretty high grades, but I always kept getting quoted because you only need so many [first] class ... [petty officer] storekeepers, and ... [one would] get credit for time in service, medals, and a lot of other things and during that period of time we had people that had been a long time with war medals that didn't get their name on the paper and they already had more points than I could get ... . That's how you become ... [advanced at] that point and time. [I couldn't make first class.]

#### **Part 4: After the Military**

##### **So after that you decided to go to school?**

Yeah, I got out, a couple of months early, I went to Morton Junior College over at Morton East and graduated there and I had my associates ... [in] three semesters. Then I went to Northern Illinois University and [in] three semesters I got my bachelors and I had about three years, [total]. I did go to summer schools by the way, so it wasn't all that easy.

##### **Now do you feel that your military experience guided your career and your view of things?**

Well you learn a lot in the military, you see a lot of things and you meet a lot of people, and I think it changes your views in a lot of ways. I think that you see a lot of things that people who have never left home and never, shall we say, been involved in anything such as we have, they just don't realize what's going on ... . I ... know I [have] discussed political and worldly affairs with other people and I walk away shaking my head because they don't know what's out there. If they did, I think they would change some of their attitudes. You know, everyone doesn't love you. There are some people who down right don't like us and never will.

##### **And are you a member of any veteran's organizations?**

Yeah, I've been in the American Legion. I was, I still am ... [in] post 38 and I used to be very active, third vice commander, second vice commander, first vice commander, then I was commander. We had one of the commanders who were very sick; I took over his position for about half a year and then I became commander so then I really served about a year and a half as commander. Then I stayed pretty much with it ... [but] the post is downtown and then I wasn't working downtown anymore and of course I'm married and I have two children ... . As they grew up they needed more time so I sort of didn't ... [stay as active]. [I didn't] ... take advantage of a lot of the benefits that would have been offered to me or involvements, although I will ... [say] that ... [I still] used to go to Hines Hospital [and] ... distributed Christmas gifts to the paralyzed veterans. [The post] ... [is] very much involved with paralyzed veterans, PVA. They have Christmas parties every

year for them, different restaurants, sometimes I head to those but they say I haven't been ... [active] now at this point in my life. ... [I] really can't be that active.

**Anything that you would like to add that we haven't covered in the interview?**

Well the only thing is that one thing we didn't mention is that I mentioned the Thresher going down, I didn't mention that my guard ship, when I was on the Bancroft, was the Scorpion and shortly after my discharge she also went down with all hands. And, since she was tied up [along side of us and the Tender, I lost some more friends]. ... I ... saw movies and ... [ate] ... on ... [The Scorpion], and their storekeeper visited me and we worked together to make sure that both our ships were, shall we say, good at sea and had everything we needed. The other thing that I think might be interesting is that when I was in Key West on the Bushnell, I was there when Macmillan and Kennedy came down for talks.

**That would have been Prime Minister of England Macmillan?**

Right, and they took all of us and made us like honor guards. I always thought that if anyone tried to shoot them, they'd hit one of us first and the bullets would bounce off our heads and not hurt anyone (laughs). But they were both [in a] red Chevy convertible which was something I wondered about because that was a heck of a target. I was, maybe say 10 to 15 feet away from them because I was right on the side of the road, and they drove right by me and you know, it's a part of history.

**The prime minister and the president were sitting together in a red Chevy convertible?**

Yes, they were, of course, in the back seat; someone else was driving, but they went through and ... they were going to the sub base ... [where] they had talks ... . Every time you see history, you see history go by and that was one of the historical sights I saw.

**Did anything come out of those talks if you ever heard about on the news?**

Yeah but I don't know what it was.

**Well all right, I think that's**

That's a pretty good tape.

**All right then, thank you so much.**

I appreciate it.