

Commander Jacob R. Ellefson

Born:
Island
Died:

Period of Service Coast
Guard

Sources: Father

Entered service. August 1982

Discharged: 2003

He entered the US Coast Guard Academy in August 1982 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in science in civil engineering as an ensign. He then went through the Navy's flight program, graduating from Pensacola and Corpus Christi where he received his wings. He then flew C-130's for the Coast Guard from Tampa, North Carolina and Alaska. After that he was assigned to the Coast Guard Station in Washington DC where he was one of four pilots flying G-5 Gulf Stream jets for the admiral of the Coast Guard.

He retired from the Coast Guard after 21 years of service with the rank of full commander. He now flies the Gulf Stream jets for a private company.



VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Jake Ellefson

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

September 10, 2010

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This is John Gay, September 10, 2010, interviewing Jake Ellefson at his home on Town Line Road on Washington Island, Wisconsin. We're going to ask Jake about his military experiences and what he did afterward.

Entering Military Service

Jake, will you tell us how old you were when you went into the service, where you went in and things of that sort.

Yes. I'm Jake Ellefson. I guess a little background information: My parents had three sons. Both of my brothers had already enlisted, one in the Army Air Force and one in the Navy. I was the third son, the youngest, and just before my eighteenth birthday I was gung-ho to do the same thing. So my dad took me to the Green Bay naval recruiting office and I signed my name to join the Navy. I think it was the 22nd of August, 1944.

Then they sent me home, because the training station was crowded. They didn't have any immediate room for us. So I believe I actually arrived at Great Lakes late in September, 1944. I was assigned to a regular boot camp company. But then, during the process, I had about three physical examinations and they finally found out that I had some bad teeth. Then I was sent back for thirty days. They put me back in a dental company. I had teeth pulled and they gave me a denture. So I was in Great Lakes until Christmas.

I graduated at that time and I got a few days leave to go home for Christmas, and was assigned to a quartermaster school at Gulfport, Mississippi from the Great Lakes station. I arrived there early in January, 1945.

The purpose of the quartermaster school was to train men to help the signalmen on the bridge of naval vessels to take flashing light signals and semaphore as well as keep the ship's log, care for all the navigational instruments, and steer the ship. So I was assigned to that school. I went through the school at Gulfport that winter, and was graduated from the school – I think it was late in April or early May, 1945.

Then I was assigned to the receiving station at Boston. There were several of us – eight or ten, probably – and we were put on a troop train that wound its way up the country for Boston. They might have been the first Pullman cars ever manufactured (chuckles). They were as hard as they could be – old red velvet upholstered, velour or something or other, but hard as rock. They had porters aboard to make up our bunks at night. It took several days.

Anyway, on May 8 we were coming through Philadelphia and we noticed that every house had a flag. We were wondering what in the world was going on. Well, a day or two later we got a hold of a newspaper and discovered that Germany had surrendered on May 8. By that time we were in Boston and were waiting in the receiving station for orders to board a ship.

There was a squadron of destroyer escorts that had been assigned to a small aircraft carrier for anti-submarine warfare in the north Atlantic. They arrived in Boston a few days later. Most of the crew went home on leave for a few days and then reassembled.

We proceeded down the east coast to rendezvous at Cape Hatteras, off the shore of Virginia. There we assembled a convoy of 40 merchantmen. We were one of four destroyer escorts, called a squadron of destroyer escorts, with a commander aboard a full-size destroyer leading the group. So we got the merchantmen organized and the convoy underway. We were about 1,000 or 1,500 miles out in the Atlantic by the 30th of May. At that time we were notified that all German U-boat commanders had been notified the war was over, and they were no longer hunting ships. So we were relieved of our duties and we proceeded back to New York Harbor.

The destroyer escorts would do about 20 to 22 knots. Of course, the full destroyers were much faster – over thirty knots. Of course, the destroyer was out ahead of the convoy, and when we got that information – I can't remember if they broke radio silence; I think we got it by flashing light by the commander of the division from the destroyer and ordered us back to New York City at full speed.

We thought we were doing pretty good, really cruising. And by us this destroyer is coming doing thirty knots, with a big rooster tail behind his stern. We looked like we were standing still! He gets out ahead of us and says, okay, reduce speed to 15 knots. Then we were conserving fuel all the way back to New York City. So we get back to New York City and we were in port maybe a week awaiting orders.

Then we got orders to proceed to Brownsville, Texas. They were going to install huge radar systems on the ship. We would be assigned then to the Pacific fleet.

What was happening in the Pacific was that the kamikaze – the Japanese kamikaze's – were very active. The Navy needed some kind of warning system out ahead of them. So they were using their smaller ships out ahead of the fleet, loaded with radar, to let the main fleet know when the kamikazes were coming in so they could have their gunners ready and be prepared to take evasive action or whatever was needed.

Well, we proceeded down the east coast. I think it was just a day or two after the Japanese surrendered. We weren't aware of it on the ship. We were off Key West. In fact, we were close enough to see the buildings in the city. Proceeding around, there's several small islands west of Key West called the Dry Tortugas. The Navy used them for gunfire practice. We were just about in that area when we received word that the Japanese had surrendered. So we were ordered back to New York City. I think Boston – I think they sent us back to Boston.

So we proceeded to Boston and there we unloaded all of our depth charges. We had three-inch guns, all that ammunition; we had .40 mm and .20mm and small arms. All of that was unloaded at – I can't remember what they called it in Boston – but anyway, it was a place where armament was stored.

Then we were ordered to proceed to the St. Johns River in Florida, and we were in the company of a heavy cruiser.

So you went from Key West up to Boston, then back down. Is that the very end?

I'm not absolutely sure. My memory is a little shaky. But I think that's what happened.

What was life on the destroyer like? How many men were on there?

I think we had 250 men. The ship was 300' long. I think there were about 50 gunners mates, and they were strictly for that purpose – to man all of our weaponry. We had three-inch guns. Some of the destroyers had five-inch turrets. Ours were a three-inch open gun tubs. But I think we had three of those – two at least – one or two forward, and one aft. Then we had several tubs of .40mm and some .20mm. And the gunners' mates, that was strictly their job.

How many men to a gunnery?

I can't remember how many men were assigned to a gun tub, but I think in each tub – on each side of the ship there were twin .40mm in each tub. I think there were three or four tubs. I can't remember how many men they had in the three-inch gun tubs.

So you were pretty well armed.

There had to be four, anyway. They were shells about 18" to 24" long, and three-inches in diameter.

What did they weigh – one of those shells?

A pure guess, I think they were two feet, maybe thirty inches. I'd have to think 25 to 50 pounds.

So hauling them over there was pretty arduous activity.

Yes. You opened the breech and shoved them in, and they were like a rifle bullet. When the thing fired, the breech opened and ejected the empty shell. But I think you had to hand-load it every time.

So it was pretty active work.

Absolutely. If you were firing steadily, they were busy. But we never had an encounter with enemy forces of any kind – planes or submarines.

Did you have some good friends on the ship that you kept in touch with for a while?

I did not. I had a pretty good friend who was a first class quartermaster – a very intelligent guy. He had been an actor in New York City and here he got assigned to be a sailor on a destroyer escort. Nice man – Bill Hawks – but I never kept in touch with him, really. We wrote a few letters, but I suppose within ten years we had forgotten all about each other. I never really knew what happened to him.

So then you came back from ...

And part of the reason we didn't have long-term friendships was because so many of the guys were getting discharged who had been on the ship during the earlier part of the war. Then I was only on that ship from May to September of 1945.

I got aboard in May, we begin to take a convoy over and they remove us from the convoy duty and we head for Brownsville and came back because that was scratched, and then we head for Jacksonville, Florida for the St. Johns River. So I think I was off that ship by October – only on it for three or four months.

Anyway, we head down the east coast.

Our chief quartermaster – our navigational officer – was very sharp at navigation. And they liked to do it with celestial navigation. We had a big Loran unit; they were brand-new at that time. They did help, but the chief quartermaster navigated and shot the stars and the sun a couple of times on the way down the coast. After we got south of Cape Hatteras we could set a straight course for the lightship off of Jacksonville. So he did that.

I was on watch at daylight on the morning of the day we arrived at the entrance to the St. Johns River – it was just breaking day. The skipper comes up. Of course he had to be in charge when we came in. He said, “Well, have you sighted the light yet?” I was so green I wasn't even looking for the light (chuckles)!

But that quartermaster was so sharp, his course was within one degree of that light. They needed to be directly on, and he was within one degree of that. That's good. I think that's sharp.

Anyway, we enter the St. Johns River. It's not so wide at the mouth – it goes straight west from the coast of Florida through Jacksonville; maybe twenty miles. Then goes straight south; a left angle turn. Then it widens out like a great big swamp. I think we went south about thirty, forty miles or more to a little town called Green Cove Springs, Florida, before there were any bridges. South of that there were bridges across the river. So we stayed north of those. There they anchored us in the river.

The purpose there was to mothball those ships. They put a couple of people aboard who had a lot of expertise. They knew how to do it. So we anchored there. The ships kept coming. By the time I left there must have been a hundred ships there.

Of all various kinds?

Yes, but nothing larger than a destroyer escort. If I remember right, they anchored four in a group – one bow this way, the next one alternated, with anchors off the bow. They moored them together, one group after another. Of course the Navy had a lot of smaller ships, too – 100' and 200' – and they were coming all the time doing the same thing. The plan was to build a bunch of piers there that were supposed to be 1100' to 1200' long out from the beach, with a lot of distance in between so they could really fill them up. That did not happen while I was there.

In September or October of 1945 – I got on that ship in May – I was reassigned to another ship, the Fowler – a DE222. We were doing the same thing – mothballing. This was in October. I think I was on the Fowler for three or four months and then assigned to the Roberts. All the time we were mothballing.

Where did you go and get these other ships? Did you have to go back up the coast?

No. They came in. All I did was step from one to the other. They were just in various processes of mothballing.

It was a pretty interesting process. The ships that had the gun tubs – that did not have the turrets – such as the one that I was first on, the USS Varian on the 798, they put the gun, the rifle, straight up in the air – the three-inch gun. They had tape about 2” wide, a plastic of some kind, and they fastened that. The gun tub rim perimeter was maybe about 3’ high, and about 12 feet in diameter. So they’d take these strips of plastic from the top of the gun barrel right down to the edge of the tub and leave an area about 6” wide in between the strips. Then they had a paint gun. It was fiberglass or plastic that came out of it, and they could bridge that 6” with that stuff.

Really.

And they went over it time after time until they got it a quarter of an inch thick or more, so that it was perfectly air tight. The first thing they did was grease everything heavily – make sure it was well painted and greased everything, all the moving parts – before they did this. There were openings to the main hull in each one of these tubs. Well, when they got done with all of that – and at the same time everything in the engine rooms are getting this heavy grease treatment – the last thing they did was put a great big dehumidifier in the pilot house. It would just barely go through the water-tight doors. It was heavy. They had to swing it in with a boom and move it with blocks and tackles to get it right in the pilot house. There was room for one – they had this figured out. But it wasn’t big. I think, if I remember, about 6’ or 8’ long. It would just barely go through the doors, just so it would go through the doors both ways. I think it was 4 ½’ or 5’ high. Those doors must have been 5’. So they were probably 4’ high, 18” wide and 6’ to 8’ long. And that was supposed to get the humidity down under 5%.

Where was the discharge?

I don’t know that. I never got to the final point where they really finished the job. I don’t know what they did. They must have had a plastic hose running over the side. There had to be a way to get rid of that water.

So I went from one ship to another and finally got discharged. They reassigned me to Great Lakes for discharge. I came home about the 1st of July, 1946. I was honorably discharged.

Returning to Civilian Life

Otherwise Shirley wouldn’t have married you! (Both chuckle)

Anyway, my father had been a commercial fisherman here at Washington Island. My brothers and I both decided – they were both home ahead of me; they had a lot more points than I had, of course – so we decided we all wanted to live on the Island. We

wondered what we were going to do, so we decided to build on my dad's fishery to start with. That's what we did. That's what we were doing the rest of our lives.

You did that for 35 years or something like that?

Longer than that. We got home out of the service in 1946 and started fishing right away. So about 60 years, or over 60.

But with Miss Judy.

We bought a number of different boats. By 1965 we needed a good boat, and we bought the Miss Judy. We had her for 34 years. So I've lived my life on Washington Island.

What was your allotment for white fish?

For many years there was no quota – allotment or quota. But about 1990 the Department of Natural Resources was very concerned. They were afraid there would be too many fishermen, which was very poor judgment on their part. Nobody likes this – not many young people – like this business. They couldn't seem to understand that there were not going to be too many fishermen.

It's a very tough life. You've got to get up before breakfast!

Yes. Quite a bit before.

Anyway, they came up with a system of allotment for each fisherman, depending on past production. So each fisherman was assigned a quota. Over the years they've gradually relaxed that, realizing the fishery is almost becoming extinct instead of becoming more numerous. So they finally have realized – they'll never tell you they were foolish, but of course they most certainly were. (Both chuckle)

That's something they certainly don't do.

So now, they're a number of fishermen with a 100,000 pound quota. And some have much more than that. Most of them are not catching that quota at this point. But the numbers of fishermen have decreased dramatically because it's just so much more difficult to make your living because the non-native species have reduced the abundance of feed for the fish. So, of course, there's less fish.

There are very few chubs. There was a strong chub fishery, and that's almost extinct because the chubs have not adapted. They're plankton eaters and, of course, the non-native species are also plankton eaters. Not only that, but they survive on the food of the plankton, which is very small organisms in the water that provide feed for the plankton. Things such as zebra mussels are filters, and they filter out the very feed that the plankton need to survive. So they've reduced the abundance of plankton by about 90% lake-wide. So, of course, the supply of chubs is way down.

Most of the year it's not feasible to catch them, even though they're worth about \$3 a pound. But if you can't get a fair amount of them, what good does it do. If you go out and get 25 pounds you don't pay for your fuel, even at \$3 a pound.

But the white fish are still in pretty good abundance because they've adapted. They eat a lot of small minnows now. When I was young they ate nothing but plankton. We never saw a minnow in a white fish when I was a young man. And they were abundant. But they were not always abundant. They would hit highs and lows.

But then we had about 30 years of fairly level abundance. Fishing was good before these non-native species had much of an impact. But their impact is greater than ever, and increasing. So it's very tough on the native species.

Do the minnows stay abundant even though there are these changes?

Well, there have been a couple of non-native species – the jury is still out – but like the gobies reproduce very abundantly. They're up to about 5" to 6" long. When they're small, of course, they're good feed for any predator, including white fish. So the white fish are eating the minnows of everything they come in contact with, I'm sure – lots of smelt and alewives and gobies.

The alewives have kind of disappeared. I remember when they used to float up on the shore in great abundance.

The thinking was, when they planted salmon for which the alewives were the natural feed, that would be perfect for the whole system. Well, of course, they do eat alewives, but they also eat some of the native species, naturally, although the DNR doesn't admit that. What fish is going to turn away from a nice little white fish if it's right ahead of him. It's not going to happen; he's going to eat it. The white fish have been able to survive fairly well, but we have an awful time right in this area.

Right now, for three or four months it's hard to get enough to eat. And, yet, not very far away, Peterson Brothers at Fairport, Michigan – north of St. Martin's Island – they've had great fishing for a couple of months. And had good fishing in the spring. They're trap-net fishermen. The Michigan-Wisconsin boundary is just north of Rock Island. Of course, those fishermen can come pretty well close to us. They have, and there's not much fish close to us for some crazy reason. They seem to kind of circulate a little bit. Probably what they're doing now is going into an area, eat up the minnows and then leave again. That's probably what they're doing.

They're foraging.

Exactly. That's the way it is.

Family Members' Military Experiences

Your brothers were in the service as well. You were mentioning that they had some experiences.

My oldest brother was Steve Ellefson. My brother Steve was married to Ginny. He had an interesting life story. He was born and raised on the island, just as I was. But he was about ten years older than I am – nine-and-a-half or something. He went through high school on Washington Island, and just a year or two later he and a friend of his decided it would be fun to go to California. They thought, if nothing else, they could get a job at the World's Fair. Of course, this was in a time of the depression – 1938.

So they assembled enough money between them that they went to Milwaukee and bought a Model A Ford for \$100. It was only 12 years old. Then proceeded to drive to California. This was in February of 1938, I think. Anyway, it was winter. So they headed south right away trying to find some warmer weather. As soon as they got south far enough, they slept in the car every night. Once in a while they'd find a motel and get a shower, maybe once every week or two (everyone chuckles). But, of course, it was a slow procedure. They were doing about 25 or 30 miles an hour. There was no cross-country highway at that time. So they went straight south and got down into Texas and New Mexico just north of the Mexican border and headed west. There were even areas where there was no good road at all, where there was grass in the middle between the tracks. They encountered some of those roads.

They got to California in April or May and they only had one flat tire! Can you believe that!

That is hard to believe.

That wasn't bad. Those Model A's were great cars.

Well, the reason they went to San Francisco was there was an Island boy there already – Gerald Hansen, Ray Hansen's cousin. So they stayed with Gerald and his wife for a few months. I don't know what kind of work they picked up, but they did get a job with the World's Fair in San Francisco in 1939.

By that time Hitler was really scaring all of Europe. The British were ordering a lot of airplanes from the United States. There were several airplane manufacturing companies in California, so that was a good place to get a job. So as soon as they got through working at the World's Fair, they got a job with the airplane companies. Steve, I think, got a job with Douglas Aircraft. They taught him how to repair the fuselage, and he became an inspector for them.

Well, then Pearl Harbor came along a year or so later. Steve enlisted in the Navy just a month after Pearl Harbor day. And because of his aircraft experience he was assigned to an aircraft carrier – to a flying group on an aircraft carrier. His rank was aviation metalsmith, and that's what he did. He was able to repair the fuselage.

He was on the Saratoga. There were two original large carriers – the Saratoga and the Lexington. The Lexington was sunk by about five or six Japanese torpedoes, and I can't remember the battle. {The Coral Sea?} That ship probably would not have sunk, even at that, but she had so much paint that once the fires got going they couldn't put the fires out. She had a layer 1/2" of paint all over the ship. So of course, as soon as that happened every ship in the Navy was chipping paint off.

Anyway, Steve's on the Saratoga and then transferred to the Randolph, I think.

What they did in the western Pacific, they had several battle groups – the Navy called them battle groups – two or three carriers in each one, battleships, cruisers, destroyers – and they would be in the forward battle area until their supplies ran out, about two to three weeks; food, ammunition, fuel. And then they had a reserve battle group that would take their place while the first one came back, refueled, re-provisioned and everything.

Then they had service areas well behind the battle front so they could bring up supplies whenever they needed them. They didn't want to have too many supplies immediately behind the battle group, in case they were shoved back.

Anyway, he's on, I think, the Randolph. They had torpedo planes that would carry a full-size torpedo. So they would carry quite a load of stuff. Well, they were short of parts – the air group was short of parts of various kinds. So they took three of these torpedo planes ...

Now this is at a time when there was no Air Force – the Navy and the Army both had an air force.

Exactly.

Anyway, the skipper ordered three aircraft to go to the furthest base back, 500 miles away, to pick up a load of supplies that they did not have any closer because they needed a bunch of parts. So they go and find the island that was on, and they get refueled and take all the parts they need and everything, and take off and head back. And the navigator can't find the ship! So, for some reason or another he goofed – the chief navigator of the three planes. And apparently he either would not take the advice of the navigators on the other two planes – I can't remember the sequence there and I don't think Steve knew that. Anyway, they did not find the ship. So they're flying around and don't know what to do and they don't know if they're over American-held territory or Japanese-held territory.

They finally found an island and figured there wasn't anything to do except set them down as they were too heavy to land on the beach. There were some boulders on the beach and it was very narrow as it was tropical foliage with trees right down to the water's edge. They were equipped with a raft. They would be able to stay afloat for half a minute or a minute. There were eleven men on the three planes. There was a big bay – something like Washington Harbor, but with a creek running right down into the middle of it. They figured there was fresh water, so they'd have water. So they set them down ...

These were seaplanes?

They were TBF's – torpedo planes for aircraft carrier duty, not seaplanes at all.

But there was nothing else to do because they couldn't find a place to land. So they decided they had to put them in the water. So they landed in the water and got their rafts out. Steve was there waiting for the rest of the guys – he was a very fine athlete – he had the raft ready to go before anybody else. So they paddled ashore and the planes sank behind them.

Would you believe – one guy took his shoes off; a lieutenant took his shoes off so he was barefoot. I don't know if it was on Steve's plane, but this one guy took his shoes off and left them on the plane. You do crazy things.

So they get ashore, and it's almost dark. They didn't have a choice because they were nearly out of fuel, so they were lucky to find any island at all. It seemed like a fair sized island. So they go up the little stream. They had side-arms. The officers had side-arms. But that was all they had. They settled in for the night.

But you can't sleep, so they were up first thing in the morning and back down on the beach in this little bay. And they can hear, 'bang,' 'boom.' And around the point come these huge whales. And they're slapping their tails and making this huge noise. And they just circled the beach and go around the other point. They're no sooner out of sight than around the point come two dug-out canoes. They wondered: Are they Japanese, or are they natives? Well, they came close and saw they were natives. They had their machetes with them and they disappear into the jungle. They were back in ten minutes with an armful of coconuts. They had done this before. And they cracked them open so everyone had something to eat. Of course, they couldn't talk English, but indicated to follow them. So they did because they didn't have anything else to do.

So they started walking through the jungle – eleven men and these four natives. And on the morning of the fourth day, the youngest and most athletic of the group came up to Steve and said indicate to go with him. They ran as long as they could, then walked for a while and ran again. They wanted to get ahead of the group.

They came to an opening where there was a plantation. {It must have been Eromongo Island.} An old Englishman had a plantation there. He was about 70 years old and had sent his family to Australia because he was afraid of the Japanese. He didn't want to leave it himself or his life's work would be gone. I think it was bananas and sugar cane, but I'm not sure. Anyway, they wanted to let him know there was a group of men coming and they needed to eat. So he got a big pot of mutton ready, and they had fresh bread. Well, when the men arrived they were a couple of hours behind Steve and this native.

When the men arrived they couldn't eat the mutton because it smelled so bad. The bread was okay. They'd picked the boll weevils out – he had done this before. He had strawberry jam, so they ate a lot of bread and strawberry jam. The next day he killed chickens.

Anyway, when this happened the Navy Department notified mother and dad that Steve was missing, I think about the first of January, 1944 or something like that. Well, in about a week – and he had a radio so he could contact the Navy – in about a week they sent a PT boat in loaded with flour and sugar. This guy made out pretty good! And supplies that he might need – they really took care of him for taking good care of these men. One of the men was Admiral Halsey's son, and that didn't hurt, either.

So within ten days they're back aboard ship. I don't know what they did about parts, but they were short three torpedo bombers. Anyway, Steve never saw heavy duty. They launched a lot of planes, but they were never under heavy fire. Some – they had a few planes come at them and they were able to knock them down.

They sent word to your parents, then, that he had been found?

Well, what happened was the Navy Department notified mother and dad that he was missing. But they never notified them that he had been found! So from January, 1944 and on they figured he was gone.

Then, about the first of June they got a call from California and it's Steve on the phone. He'd come back to California on leave. The ship had come back to California for some repairs, probably. Man!

There was a big celebration on the Island.

Yes, absolutely. So he influenced me to join the Navy. And that's what I did, and I was gung-ho, ready to go.

Anyway, here he is. How they could goof! It was a typical government foul-up. But Steve survived the rest of the war in good shape.

My other brother, K., was four years younger than Steve. While this was happening, he had always wanted to enlist. So he goes to the Army Air Force recruiter and enlists in the Army Air Force, probably 1942 sometime – I don't know the dates. They promised him pilot training. Then they sent him home because the schools were full.

He waited for a month or two, and then they assigned him to a school in Alabama or someplace. They told him they had more pilots in training than they'd ever need, they thought, because already they could see they were getting a handle on this and we were going to defeat the German Air Force.

But they said they needed flight engineers, and it was a very technical job and they thought he would like it. So he was trained to be a flight engineer for a B24, which were the largest which were the largest bombers in the Army Air Force.

Now, is that the same as a navigator?

Well, the duties of a flight engineer – he inspects the entire plane before takeoff. And every system has to be working. If he's not satisfied that they are, that plane doesn't take off. He's in complete charge, and it's his responsibility. And if that plane takes off and something fails that he failed to find, that's not good.

But he apparently did his job well. He was trained in the south somewhere. They flew their squadron, I think, to Newfoundland, Goose Bay or someplace up there. Then I think to Iceland and then to England. Then he was assigned to the 8th Air Force. They flew night bombing missions over Germany.

The Liberators were night bombers, {they were the B-24's}. They carried the heaviest bomb load. They were a little slower than the B17's. They couldn't fly quite as high. So those planes were used in the daytime and they had heavier losses. Cliff Young was on one of those and got injured. Somebody told me – you know Cliff and Harold Greenfeldt fished for years, and I think it was Harold that told me they didn't know whether to put him in a parachute – Cliff – because he was pretty badly injured, and drop him so he could get to a hospital in Germany someplace. But he said not to do that, if he didn't make it home he wouldn't make it, he said he was going back to England with

everyone. They took him off the plane and the paramedics were saying they didn't think he was going to make it, and Cliff could hear this.

Anyway, my brother was on a Liberator and they did 35 night missions over Germany. Then, by that time they had full command of the air, by the end of his set of missions. So General Patton was running wild across Europe with his tank corps, and he was moving so fast they couldn't keep up to him with his gas supplies. So they fitted I don't know how many squadrons of B24's with gas tanks in the bomb bays, and they ferried gas as close behind them as they could get – the nearest airfield behind the advancing tanks. I don't think this was their first trip – they made some other trips, I think, and here they are coming across the French coast. I'll be darned if there wasn't a German gun battery that they had not told them was still operating, can you believe that? Well, the guys weren't completely accurate, but they filled the plane full of holes and almost shot the tail off. Luckily they didn't have their main target quite right. But why she didn't blow up, nobody could figure out. So the only way they could turn their plane was with the engines. So they turned her back, got over the Channel, jettisoned the fuel, got over England and everybody had to jump. She was so badly damaged they couldn't bring her down. So everybody jumped and nobody got killed. Everybody made it without getting badly hurt.

My brother. They had a front pack and a back pack for their parachute. I think the front pack was a small chute that opened the full parachute. So he pulls the ripcord and when the first small chute opened, the straps on the darn thing ripped. The whole thing was going up! He grabbed it, brought it down to himself and that saved his life. Otherwise, he would have spiraled and would almost certainly have died.

So the big chute never opened?

Yes, it opened all right. The problem was if that had disappeared above him instead of being anchored it would have been bad news. He probably would have died. But he made it all right.

Wow. Those are really interesting stories.

All I did was live on the Island!

But I should tell you further, these two brothers of mine turned out to be really wonderful citizens.

Kay., the guy we just talked about, we all became partners together – Ellefson Brothers Fishery, and we also had a small mink ranch. But in the community, K. was a wonderful church member. He was the secretary-treasurer of the town insurance company for ten years. He was a Scoutmaster for ten years. Just a very fine, dedicated citizen.

My other brother, Steve, was a wonderful brother also. I believe he was a charter member of the fire department. He was the president of the school board on the Island for ten years – maybe only five years, but he was a member for ten years at least. Great baseball player. He's a member of the Door County Baseball Hall of Fame. Tremendous athlete. He managed that team to at least one championship after he quit playing ball. As a member of the school board, he was a member of the school board at the time the new

community center was built. He was one of the people who were instrumental in making sure that the new gym would be close to the school. In fact, the school district bought the property at Steve's insistence and gave it to the town of Washington so there would be property adjacent to the school for the community center. They also use the school well. It's still jointly used by the school and community center. And he was a fine member of the Lutheran Church; just a wonderful Christian man, great citizen and really fun man.

Your father raised three good men.

I'm very proud of my brothers.

Well, thank you, Jake. We'll conclude now, having talked to Jake Ellefson about his military experiences. Thanks a lot, Jake. We really appreciate it.

{Added by Jake after the interview:}

My life on the Island. My brothers and I became very experienced fishermen and gradually acquired a successful business. We fished pond nets, trap nets, and gill nets. Fishing was very bad from 1956-57 to 1966-7. We started a mink ranch that was successful enough to pay its way but not a money maker. My Brother Kay managed our mink ranch. When he was ready to retire in 1985 we "petered out", ending the business. Steve and I were the fishermen and we worked and fished together until he died in 1978. That was a very difficult time as I had to train a 'new' man to fish with me and become a fine fisherman, and we fished both gill nets and trap nets. I developed a successful fishery. About 1992 Randall bought his own boat and Walt Jorgenson fished with me. I sold our trap net operation in 1992 and our gill net operation and boat in 1999. Since then I have fished a few years with Jeff McDonald and now repair nets for Jeff and Koyen Fisheries. In 1962 I married and had two sons and a daughter. I did not encourage my sons to be fishermen because fishing seemed to be going down the tubes. One son attended the Coast Guard Academy and is also a pilot. The other son attended Augustana College at the Quad Cities and now works as an accountant for Disney at Orlando, Florida. My Dad had bought dock property in Jackson Harbor in 1907 and we still own it. Renting some dock space to recreational boats.

I have been active in the Community. A lifetime member of Trinity Lutheran Church and twice President of the congregation. For more than 40 years a board member of the Community Center Committee—for 15 of those years was president. An American Legion member of Post 402 for more than 60 years. A board member of the Washington Island Electric Co-op for 25 years. I have a wonderful wife Shirley, and we live comfortably in our home here on the Island. Life is good!! Thank you for the opportunity to tell my story.!

Jake Ellefson