

Seaman 1/c Larry Harvell

Born: 1928
Litchfield, IL
Died:

Period of Service WW II
Navy

Sources: Himself , John Gay
interview

Entered service April, 1969.

Released April, 1975.

See attached interview for the Military Archives of the Library of Congress.



VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT

Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Larry Harvell

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

October 11, 2010

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We're sitting in Larry Harvell's home on Wickman Road on Washington Island, Wisconsin on October 11, 2010. This is John Gay interviewing Larry. We're going to ask him how he got into the service, what he was doing at that time and where he went from there.

So, Larry, if you'd like to proceed ...

Entering Military Service

I was basically raised in Litchfield, Illinois which is about 55 miles north of St. Louis – it's a little farming community of about 6,500 people; they count dogs and cats, you know.

High school – it was, of course, during the war. And June 3, 1945 I enlisted in the Navy. I was 17 at the time, and my grandmother had to sign the papers to let me get in. I had intentions of getting into the naval aviation program, which was a V6 program, which they have recorded. I signed up for that, but the minute that I got in and got up to Great Lakes Illinois, where I spent my training for 13 weeks, the war came to an end. They had an abundance of fliers who were coming over from the European theater. As a result they closed the V6 program and I never had been to it.

Duty Assignments

So I ended up to be a 'swabbie' coming out of Great Lakes and was shipped from there to Treasure Island in California. We went out on a 'cattle' troop train. We got to California. From there we were transferred to the USS Admiral Benson, which was basically a troop ship. We spent about – it seemed like forever – probably about ten days in cruise to Okinawa, where, at that particular time they were just recovering from a tremendous typhoon.

At that particular point I was pulled off the ship and put on an LST – Landing Ship Tank, which is an amphibious ship. The officer in charge at the time asked if there was anybody in the group – there were three of us who went aboard ship – who could type. I said I could type, and he said, "Then you're a 3rd class storekeeper." And I was promoted right there on the spot (both chuckle).

So I served aboard the LST 222. We were the first basic ships into Fukuoka, Japan as an occupation. We followed the minesweepers in.

I had a great time aboard the LST. We had a fine crew. She was an extremely clean ship – the captain was a stickler for personal hygiene, and for his ship.

From there I went to the 697. That was, I think, in Yokosuka, Japan. We had about maybe about ten ports in Japan, carrying supplies and just making presence.

I spent, I can recall in Tokyo Harbor, we spent Christmas Eve and New Years Day of 1946. From there we spent a couple of months traveling around Japan. Then we got orders to report back to Bremerton, Washington.

How long were you in the Japan area?

Probably about, all together, five months.

Then we went back to Bremerton, Washington. At that particular time they were looking for a storekeeper to help decommission two LST's. That was the 1039 and the 733. So most all of the fellows ...

What do you mean by decommissioning? Do you have to pull everything off?

What they do is moth-ball them, if you will. I had the responsibility of accounting for all of the pieces of equipment that were aboard the ship, down to the stopwatches – from machine guns to stopwatches.

Did they take them off and put them someplace?

No, no.

They kept them on the ship.

Most all of it was kept on the ship. Some stuff was pulled off. We got rid of most all of our ammunition before we got into Bremerton

By getting rid of it, do you mean it went overboard?

It went overboard (chuckles).

They really moth-balled them. They put all the valuable stuff – the binoculars, the navigational equipment and that sort of thing – in storage rooms and lockers and sealed them with a seal.

So no humidity would get in there?

Yes.

From there I don't know what happened to the ships. I know a lot of them, of course, went to scrap. LST's were 55' wide, 310' long. They floated like a cork when they were empty, and even when they were full. They were quite an effective ship. Without those ships, the landings at the islands out in the Pacific would have been a terrible risk.

They could get right up on the shore.

Yes. They could drive them right up on the shore.

In fact, we had a funny incident. One of the captains who was aboard the 222 misjudged how far out he was. What we do is we drop an anchor so far out. The anchor digs in and a big winch helps pull the ship back off. He misjudged and the anchor just spooled right off and away the anchor went. So we had to have another LST pull up

behind us and help pull us off. He was very nice. He said, "How are you going to take care of this loss of anchor?" I said I would figure out something (both chuckle). So we lost it in heavy weather.

Anyhow, from there I was discharged as a third class storekeeper. At that particular time – that was June 10, 1946 –

You were in about a year by then?

A year and a month. I had accumulated enough points because of my duty overseas that I got out. I was still in the Naval Reserve. In fact, I was in for nine years in total – in the Naval Reserve.

Then, Lois and I were married in June, 1950. In September we were coming back from our delayed honeymoon and I had a letter in my mailbox to report to the Naval Supply Depot in Chicago.

What year was that?

1950.

So you had only been out three or four years?

Yes: 1946 to 1950; four years. Then on September 25 I was called in to report to Great Lakes. And we reported to Great Lakes. Primarily most all of the fellows they were calling – there was a draft of 250 as I recall – and most all of them were amphibious. The rumor was going around that we were heading for the Inchon landings in Korea.

We were put again on troop transport trains and sent out to Treasure Island, which is the separation area in the San Francisco Harbor. At that time I picked up the USS Mower – that's a troop transport. We were headed eastbound out to what we thought was the Korean area. We got into Hawaii and we had a lay-over of about a day-and-a-half to take on supplies.

All of a sudden I heard over the loudspeaker, "Storekeeper Harvell, report topside immediately," along with another yeoman. So we went up and reported to the officer of the deck. He said, "Go down and get your gear. You're getting off." I said, "I beg your pardon, sir." He said, "Go down and get your gear. You're getting off. Didn't you hear me?" I said, "Fine sir. Is there a problem – a death in the family?" "No," he said. "You've got orders."

So I went down and got my gear. They were pulling – there was a boat alongside, a captain's rig or something – and they were starting to pull up the stairs that were going down. We just got down to the bottom and jumped into the boat, away we went, and they took off. They were weighing anchor at the time. So I don't know if somebody goofed or what – it was that close – because had I not got down and got my gear I would have been gone. And once I had been sailing they wouldn't have come to get me.

Anyway, I reported to the Naval Supply Center at Pearl Harbor. I was extremely fortunate, in that somewhere along the line Commander Stockinberg, who was a very fine gentleman, was the head of the Naval Supply Center. He got wind that I had some

industrial engineering experience with Bell & Howell Company – time study engineering and industrial engineering. So he pulled me out of the unit I was in and said, “I would like for you to go to work directly for me and Commander Smith.” I said, “Wonderful! I’d be happy to.” So they gave me a lot of different assignments of the nature of making things more efficient and that sort of thing.

Specifically he wanted me to develop a system where he could immediately know, by looking at a big chart, who was in charge of what divisions and all of the people who were under his command. So I developed an organizational chart that went on to be pretty well used throughout that part of the Navy at the time. He could go up there and look exactly from the Admiral all the way down to the lowliest of the clerks. And our personnel department, anytime there was a change, that particular yeoman would come in and make the change on the chart by just gluing on the new person’s name.

I served there. Fortunately, Lois joined me in January, 1951. We got a little apartment down near Waikiki Beach. So I would traverse back and forth.

Was that at Fort DeRussy?

It was right at Fort DeRussy. In fact, Lois and I used to walk over to Fort Derussy to go to movies for 25¢.

One of the perks.

Yes, one of the perks. And had a delightful experience there in the Korean War.

Were you right off Kalakaua then?

As a matter fact, we were right on Kahakai Drive, which is right off of Kalakaua. You’re familiar with that?

We were there in February, and we’re going back in January.

Yes. Right at the corner. They called it ‘Kau-Kau Corner’ at the time. There was a great big frosty, milkshake restaurant right at the corner that was a drive-in. So we had a fine time. I was lucky enough – Lois and I were the first ones in to this apartment complex; there were six units. And five Navy fliers moved in alongside in the other five units next to us. We became very dear friends.

One of the pilots flew for MATS – the military air transport. He said, “Larry, would you like to learn to fly?” I said, “Of course I’d like to learn to fly!” He said, “You pay for half the gas and I’ll teach you how to fly.”

That was in Hawaii. What air base did you fly out of?

We flew out of Hickam.

So you’d drive up to Hickam and fly out of there.

Yes. It was a little Super Cub. So I solo'd over there. I got about 37 ½ hours. It cost me \$37.50 – a dollar an hour (both chuckle).

So at that particular time I was fortunate that Admiral Bauerschmidt gave me a letter of commendation for outstanding performance of duty for working for these two commanders. I'm kind of proud of that.

I was recommended to continue a career in the Navy and to go to officers' training school. But Lois and I were just married a short time, and Lois' father was extremely ill – dying of cancer. I found out, then, if I did go I would have to serve from four to six additional years at sea – a lot of over-the-sea duty. I thought, "Forget that. No way."

So we came back to Chicago at that time.

Discharge and Return to Civilian Life

Had you been discharged in Chicago?

I was discharged. Well, I was officially discharged ... on July 10, 1954. I had nine years and a month in the Naval service.

That's about it. When I was discharged ...

So you were about two years altogether in active service.

A little less than three years, between the Second World War and the Korean War – probably about 33 months.

You mentioned something about being in a typhoon.

Yes. That was a typhoon out in the Pacific in 1945. It was an awesome typhoon. We were just at the tail end of it, fortunately. We came into Okinawa and that was where I picked up the LST222. And we went out to sea then because the remnants of it were stirring things up pretty bad. The typhoon had passed through there and had hit the Okinawa city area where the harbor was, and there was just mail spread all over the side of the mountain with parachutes and all kinds of stuff. It hit the post office and just blew up everything. It was interesting.

You saw some big waves, then.

Yes. And I had an experience when I came out of the Navy in 1945 – I was discharged in St. Louis and lived there with my grandmother and my father for a year. I joined the Missouri National Guard – I was in the Missouri National Guard there for a short period of time; maybe eight or nine months. Then we moved to Chicago. So I got a discharge from the National Guard, too.

And then you went to work ...

Then I went back to Bell & Howell Company. I was an industrial and time study engineer.

In Lincolnshire?

Yes, in Lincolnshire. That was their main plant. Charles Percy was the president.

The senator from Illinois.

Yes. I knew Chuck Percy – Lois and I – we were kind of active in the Bell & Howell Benevolent Association, which is an association for the employees. And we got to know Chuck pretty well. He was a brilliant, brilliant man.

He lived in Kenilworth. What happened to his daughter?

His daughter was murdered in her bed. He was destined, as far as I was concerned, to be President of the United States. He was a very brilliant man, a great orator and a very sincere guy.

He had a great voice – a great, deep voice.

And he went to the Senate and they chewed him up and spit him out. These old-timers, you don't get your foot in there very easy. He had all kinds of ambitions. But, then, just a short time after he was in the Senate his daughter was murdered. And that just took all of it away.

Was that ever solved?

Not to my knowledge. In fact, I don't know where Chuck is now. He's probably dead.

I think he is. I think I read that. Now, you worked for Bell & Howell for a while.

I worked for Bell & Howell for a total of about seven years total. I only had a high school education, and I was the only engineer – I think there were 30 engineers in the department – who didn't have a college degree. I figured that in order for me to get anywhere – I continued my education while I was there and went to Illinois Institute of Technology for night school.

Where were you living at the time?

We were living on the north side of Chicago.

So you had to go all the way over to the IIT campus?

Yes, all the way to the south side. I drove down there. I went down, as I recall, twice a week. I went through some time study engineering courses, ... , and a kind of unique system that had never been tried – they called it the ‘work factor system,’ which was time study engineering without a stopwatch. It was all by motion. I graduated from that, and was one of the few engineers who had.

It looked, that for me to get anyplace at Bell & Howell I had to step over 30 engineers to get my boss’ job. I decided I wasn’t making that much money. I found out my boss wasn’t making much more money than I was! So that gave me the incentive. I figured there was only one way to really make a living if you didn’t have an education, and that was in a position where you’re paid what you’re worth. And that was in sales.

So I went to work for the Thrifty Stamp Company. It was a merchandising stamp company like S&H Green Stamps. And I worked for them for about a year. And Lois worked for Prudential Insurance Company.

Downtown?

No. She worked on the north side of Chicago at Clark & Belmont.

I worked at Prudential in the Mid-America home office – not in time study, but in methods and procedures.

No kidding! Downtown?

Yes. That was 1958.

I worked for them from 1947 to 1950, and then I was two years in the Navy, came back and worked for another couple of years. So that would have been 1955-1956. Then I found out one of Lois’ dear friends was an agent with Prudential – she was the acting office manager because the office manager was ill. To make a long story short, this fellow talked me into coming to work for Prudential as an agent. So I worked for Prudential as an agent and had 33 years as an agent. Then I was promoted to staff manager where I had seven agents. Then I was promoted to district manager where I had altogether about 50 employees – agents and staff managers.

My dad was an agent for Prudential in the 30’s, up until about the Second World War. He had a debit out of the south side – out through Beverly Hills and around there.

I started my debit at Clark, Belmont and Halsted. How long did you work for Prudential?

I was only there about a year. I’ll tell you what happened. I had an assignment in method and procedures working in the Mid-America home office. It was to straighten out production and get the processes a little more economically tuned. A lot of the managers at that time were from New Jersey, because they’d just come out to establish Mid-America. And there was an awful lot of padding – they just didn’t

seem to work as hard as they ought to. And I would get an assignment. I'd go see all the people, write up my procedure, make the forms and give them to my superintendent. They'd lay on his desk for weeks, and in the meantime he'd give me another assignment and I'd work on that. It began to pile up. I was so frustrated that I couldn't take it. My wife, who had been working at Merrill, Lynch and established a branch office with a guy from another New York Stock Exchange firm, had gone over with him to open the office. She said, "Why don't you come over and talk to Morgan McDonnell and see what it's like." He hired me on the spot.

I went back and told them I was going to leave. I typed up my resignation at that point, and they sent me, from the personnel office, a form which was pretty standard asking why I quit and so forth. So I filled it out. I was still seething because I saw the inefficiency in this department. So I sent the copy back to the personnel guy, and a copy to Carroll Garrethy, who ran Mid-America. He called me a couple of days later and asked if I'd mind going down and just visiting with him. I said okay. So I went down there and his office was filled with high ranking officers from Mid-America. They were pretty skeptical. One guy had his feet on the windowsill looking out. They kept me there for three hours, and I guess I said more than I needed to, perhaps. But they made some changes.

Carroll Garrethy asked me to come back as his assistant. And I said I really would like to do that because I thought he had a handle on things, but I had made a commitment and I thought I really needed to follow through. So I cut it off. But it was an interesting experience.

What year would that have been in?

That was in late 1958 to 1959.

I was the manager for the north town district in Chicago at that time. Jim Rutherford was ..., succeeded by Cobb.

Carroll Garrethy went on back to New Jersey.

I remember the name.

He was quite a guy. I liked him a lot.

That's about it. I was discharged in July, 1954 – totally, from the Naval Reserve. Lois and I moved down to Sarasota, Florida [as a snow bird traveling between Washington Island and Sarasota] and I joined the Civil Air Patrol there – the auxiliary for the Air Force.

You've been in Sarasota for quite a while.

We've been down there for about 15 years. I've been with the Civil Air Patrol for about 13 – 14 years. I'm a lieutenant colonel for the Civil Air Patrol. I'm a mission pilot and transport pilot for them, and fly counter-drug stuff.

And is that an assignment where they suddenly say they need you to do something?

Well, being a pilot – I was a licensed pilot when I joined – then you have to go through specific training programs to become a transport pilot or mission pilot. As the Civil Air Patrol, they do 95% of all the search and rescue for the military and civilians of the United States. So when a plane goes down ...

You fly out of Sarasota?

Yes.

You're still doing that?

Yes, fortunately. At my age I'm lucky. I enjoy it very much. It's a great bunch of people. They're doing a lot of tremendous work down there with some really state-of-the-art photography, in that they fly down particular areas of the county and take these pictures in series. Then they can go back and put them together, and if a hurricane strikes, they can know what was there at the time. And after the hurricane passes, the Civil Air Patrol goes up takes pictures again and can pinpoint exactly where the damage is and call out whatever people they need – FEMA and that sort of thing – to take care of the situation.

Is that a paid thing?

It's all volunteer. We pay for everything. Our flying time, of course, is paid for, with the exception that our training to keep our proficiency – that we pay a portion of; the gas, really.

Are you going to fly down to Sarasota?

No. Besides, that's a club airplane. That stays on the Island. No, the car is pretty well filled going back and forth.

Well, Larry, thanks. I appreciate the time spent here. It's been very interesting. Thanks a lot.

You're welcome. It's been my total pleasure.