

## Richard Purinton

Born Sep 22, 1947

Died:

Period of Service: Viet Nam

Source: B10, B10F2 J Gay  
interview

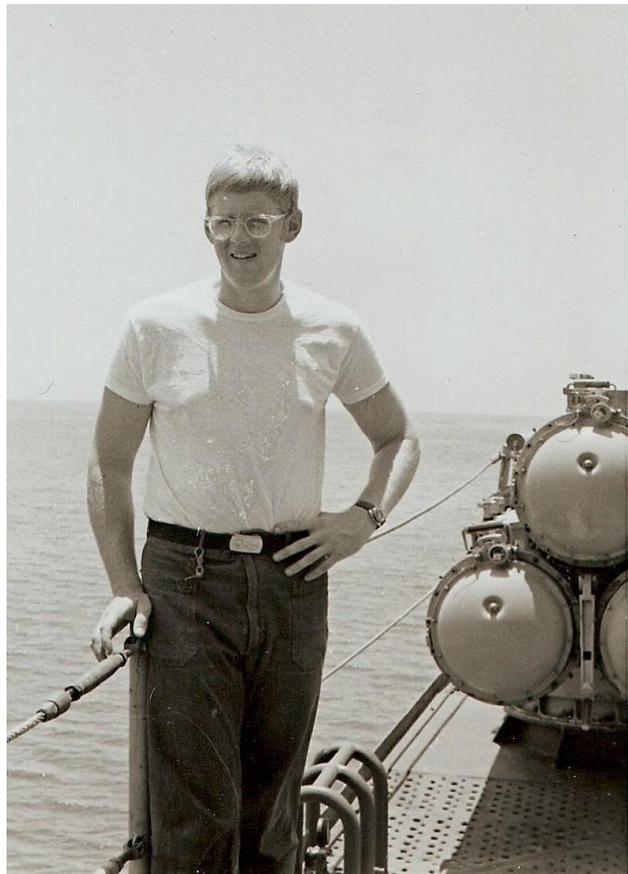
Enlisted 11/1970 at Great Lakes. Released October, 1974

Trained Great Lakes, IL, San Diego Quartermaster school.

Joined American Legion Post 402 in 1976. Commander of the Post 1977-78, 1990.

Runs the Washington Island Ferry Line. Wife is Mary Jo Richter. Has three children one of whom, Hoyt, also works on ferry line. Thor is a boat maker in the Upper Peninsula, and Evie lives on the Island with her family.

See the accompanying interview.



**VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT**  
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

**Richard P. Purinton**

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

September 15, 2011

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library  
in partnership with the Library of Congress

**We're sitting here in Dick Purinton's office at the ferry dock. Dick is manager of the Washington Island Ferry. We're going to talk with Dick about his experiences in the military.**

**So, Dick, why don't you let us know what you were doing prior to the service, where you went in, how you got in and what happened after that.**

I'll begin with saying that my service, if you will, really began the night I was listening to the radio. They had a fishbowl drawing of names – it was the first time they'd had a lottery drawing for military service. My number – my birthdate – was 169, which is right in the middle of the pack of 360, more or less. So I was quite certain that once I left school, graduated, I would be drafted.

**This is in 1969?**

I think it was in December of 1969 when that drawing took place. That was the first time they had done that for a long time – where they had drawn numbers. I was about to finish school at UW Madison in January – I had one extra semester as I'd transferred from Valparaiso to Madison in the fall of 1967. So I had 1967, 1968, the fall of 1969 and then I would wind up completing a journalism degree in January of 1970.

And, of course, the draft, serving in the military, was pretty heavy on students' minds at the time. There were many who probably had signed up prior to that and were evading. And Madison was considered to be a liberal hotbed in many ways. I think there was the full spectrum of attitudes and opinions, and people's viewpoints on what was going on there. But the mood that was most prevalent in the papers and the media was of protesting. And Madison, for whatever reason, wound up being a hotbed of some of the activism and radicalism and so forth in the Midwest. And most of that took place in 1968-1969.

Coincidentally, during that time, when I transferred I wanted to be involved in sports in some way. I had been in track and field at Valparaiso. And I knew I was limited – I wasn't going to be able to do much in that regard. But I was interested in water and water sports because I had sailed grown up around the water.

**Was that in Sturgeon?**

Yes. Sturgeon Bay is where I grew up, and spent a lot of my time sailing. In fact I continued to sail and had an opportunity to sail on a racing sloop, which was owned by Palmer Johnson. He's also chairman of Texas Instruments. But that was his side business – Palmer Johnson's. And during his ownership they went from wooden boats to fiberglass, and then began building aluminum boats. And this was an aluminum racer designed by Sparkman-Stevens, which was very competitive.

**Was this for the Mackinaw Race?**

Well, among others. He campaigned all over with that boat – not just on the Lakes, but down in Florida. And I had a chance to sail on it – probably the youngest guy on the crew, but I was fortunate; probably through teaching connections in Sturgeon Bay.

Anyway, when I initially transferred to Madison I got involved with rowing right away. And I also enrolled in journalism as a major – that was my junior year. There was a guy who looked familiar to me, both from the rowing and a couple of the classes I was attending. It turned out that it was Leo Burt, the guy who later – I'm fast-forwarding two years or more – became a frustrated rower. He wrote some articles for the student paper, *The Cardinal*, which was the campus paper. But he became kind of a frustrated athlete. I think really say because of his size more than anything else. He was 5'10", and generally oarsmen were 6' and taller. He kind of turned 180<sup>o</sup> over a period of time, although listening to people talk there was always a lot of 'hot air.' Anyway, he became one of the four people who were involved in the bombing of the math building – Sterling Hall.

### **I remember that.**

It was quite a surprise to me and yet it wasn't because he was a little bit of a determined ... I didn't see much of him in the last year or so. He had dropped out of journalism and went to several other majors. But I did on occasion cut his hair, so I had some association with him.

So that was kind of a background prelude of going into the Navy.

I remember that summer I was both teaching sailing and sailing on this ocean-racing sloop, being visited by the sheriff and a man from the FBI asking questions because of this bombing that had taken place. I was quite surprised at that turn of events. Of the four, I think within the next several years the other three were captured. I think they all turned themselves in, actually is what happened. And they spent minimal jail time, even though a man had been killed in the bombing. Burt, however, was never found – never caught, never turned himself in. So I've always wondered what happened to him.

Anyway, that's the background in Madison.

I'd always thought of myself as kind of an observer, but I never had strong feelings either way – for, against the Vietnam War. I had a general sense that there were people who always knew more about what was going on in the government and the world than I did. I guess the long and short of it is, by March of that year I was out of school and needed to make a decision as to what I would do. And I chose to enlist in the Navy because I liked the water. And I enlisted in what they called the 'delayed enlistment program,' so I had 180 days before I actually reported for active duty. Which was great, because I sailed, worked and did other things I'd wanted to do, including following up on the America's Cup that fall. I drove out to Rhode Island and watched the America's Cup.

Anyway, prior to my induction in early November of 1970, I kind of felt – once I made that decision I felt good about it and I continued to through my four-year enlistment. I had some thoughts, if anything, that I'd made a mistake by not joining the ROTC in college, which would have helped out. I could have become an officer at that point. I did apply for OCS, but by the time I was approved my four years was just about in. And my decision at that point was not to stay.

So, anyway, I attended boot camp at Great Lakes. It was a twelve-week boot camp at that point.

### **This was early 1971?**

Late 1970, early 1971. And then I was transferred to San Diego where I attended quartermaster school. I wasn't the greatest student, I wouldn't say, but I wound up being the top of the company in boot camp, so I had the opportunity to pretty much choose where I wanted to go. And I chose San Diego. I wanted to go to quartermaster school because it had something to do with navigation – ship movement – which I was enjoying and was familiar with.

Quartermaster school was going to be a four or six week course, and I wound up getting the top score there. So I was pretty much able to pick the ship I went on. And I chose to go on a destroyer because I thought it was a kind of medium-size ship, and would be more involved, perhaps, in what goes on the vessel.

Once I finished quartermaster school I just basically walked about 300 yards to where the vessel was tied up, as I recall, and reported for duty on the USS Hamner, a DD-718, which was Gearing-class destroyer, built during the last of World War II. To me that was kind of exciting because it represented some history. It had the old three-man type berths – stacked up three-deep, where you couldn't turn around, or I couldn't, at least, without hitting the butt of the guy above you because these were canvas bunks that sagged. But all of that I kind of enjoyed.

They had just returned from a western Pacific cruise which, at that time – of course they're always training with other ships, practicing, firing and doing different things. But they had an itinerary which I was looking forward to the opportunity to go on – a western Pacific cruise – because of the places that the ship would stop, the ports.

So we had first a yard period to go through – extensive – where they tore down boilers and the guns, basically chipped and painted, in the shipyard in Long Beach. It was about a four-month yard period, at which point we went out to do training.

Then we were scheduled to go after the training, which the ship passed all the tests and so forth with flying colors. It actually did very well. There was maybe the right combination of people or whatever, but it seemed to have a very good group both in the engineering below deck and above deck operations. Everyone seemed to work quite well together.

So we went on the western Pacific cruise. I think we started in mid-March and we arrived, after stops in Hawaii, Midway and Guam, we were supposed to stop in the Philippines, but as soon as we got really beyond the timeline, there was already something really happening in Vietnam. There was a spring offensive taking place.

We were asked first to observe two Chinese trawlers. These were vessels, I remember thinking at the time, that they were about the same size as the ferries – maybe about 80' long and probably a small crew. But they were supposedly bringing arms from China down to the south end of Vietnam where's there's a delta area with a lot of places to hide. Either that, or around to Thailand. But they were supposedly bringing weapons and so forth.

### **Was this the Mekong Delta?**

Yes.

So there was already a little bit of activity, sort of an eye-opener as to what might take place. So we trailed these two trawlers for about two-and-a-half days in fairly rough seas, going slowly – about 7 or 8 knots, if that. The thing I remember about it from a navigational point of view – and I was a young quartermaster; I don't even know if I was third class yet at that point. I think I had just gotten out of boot camp, so I might have made third class at that point. But on the watches that we had it was so overcast and heavy, kind of oppressive air, there were no sun lines. The LORAN was crazy, which was the kind of electronics we had at the time. So the only thing that we really had to go by was 'dead reckoning' from our last known position and depth sounding. The counters were so fantastically close together – they dropped off so very rapidly – that we could tell where we were pretty much just by remaining on the contours. And we were following these trawlers, of course, maybe within 100 to 200 yards of them. And that continued on for about two days. We tried to signal, but they ignored us, basically. But because they were suspected to be Chinese we couldn't do anything but follow them.

Once they got up toward Hainan Island – the southern island of China – I was instructed to draw a 25-mile arc – to swing an arc from ...

### **The southern island of Japan?**

No, China. Hainan is in the South China Sea, south of Hong Kong a ways – but a large island.

So I drew an arc. I happened to be on watch at that time, so that's why I was asked to do it. Once we approached that arc we were not to go any further, so we turned around and went to Subic Bay. And then had a kind of one-month yard period, re-provisioning, refueling and so on. Then we headed out after three or four days to the coast of Vietnam. And we spent close to the next three months pretty much continuously – which is usually a fairly long time for one of those vessels before something breaks, needs to be fixed, or goes for a yard period in the Philippines. But there was a lot of activity.

They day we arrived off of Vietnam we could see activity on shore. There was, I think, the North Vietnamese were overrunning the DMZ – the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel; 15 miles on either side of that was supposed to be declared a neutral zone. But it wasn't, and you could see activity on shore – the shelling and so on. I think the afternoon of that second day, which I believe was Good Friday, there was a Navy lieutenant who was a spotter in a piper cub plane – which seemed like a crazy thing to do; a small airplane circling overhead that's supposed to be a spotter for ground forces, supposed to direct their fire – and his plane was shot and he ditched in to the ocean. So our ship went in as far as they dared go, lowered a lifeboat and picked him up.

Then, later on in that period, our cruise, which was supposed to include New Zealand and Australia with a couple of stops in Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, etc. – because of the activity, the only place we got to other than Subic Bay in the Philippines was Hong Kong. And that was about five months into the cruise. Everyone was pretty well tired and ready by that time, because we had a lot of underway activity both night and day – general quarters and so on. All of that, which is kind of an exhausting routine

after a period of time. And as a result we never go to the pleasure spots other than Hong Kong, which was a great stop – about a five-day period of time in Hong Kong.

### **A destroyer can stay out five months without provisioning?**

No. We were what they call “unwraps,” underway replenishment, regularly. About every third or fourth day we’d get either fuel or munitions or supplies, food supplies and so forth. Sometimes, if it was a carrier that we were actually replenishing with, which we did on a number of occasions, then the carrier generally would have both food – not munitions – but they would have food and fuel for us, which was the bunker sea black oil -- heavy thick black oil; they’d extend a pipe across.

But being the quartermaster I had an opportunity. I was always on the bridge for that because it was considered a high level activity. They’d put quartermasters on the wheel at that time, so some of the time I got to steer. Other times I was either recording or doing some navigating. Of course, there’s other people doing some navigating back in the radar room – combat information center. They would do it by radar. But we would use visuals whenever we could, or other means. So there was a kind of check and balance on our positioning.

I don’t know how many unwraps we had over a period of those months, but many. And they would send across first a messenger line that would be shot over, then a heavier line and a cable would be brought over. And the cables would be attached to a couple of posts on our vessel. Usually they’d have a couple of those cables, which actually more or less tied the ships together.

Now, if you diverged too much in course you could break that cable. But the idea was to be as close and as accurate. And we would steer by a quarter of a degree one way or the other. There was an art to the approach. And all of that I found to be pretty interesting stuff. And, of course, during that underway replenishment you might be actually tied or attached to that other vessel, whether it was a large munitions ship, a large oiler or an aircraft carrier, for maybe 45 minutes at a time.

### **Now, you couldn’t do that under heavy seas, could you?**

It had to be moderate seas. They would choose the course and direction to try to make that an easier operation. You generally wouldn’t be beam to, you’d either be with it or going away from it.

The captain we had – the first captain, and we had several during this cruise – I think his time on the vessel; it was time to move on and another captain replaced him. But he was the gung-ho sort who had come up through the engineering department as a young officer, then became an operations officer. But he knew the engineering system very well as a result. But he was kind of gung-ho. And during this time period, which was 1969, roughly 25 years after World War II had ended. And there hadn’t been a whole lot of naval activity to kind of ‘earn your stripes,’ so to speak. So I could tell that certain of the officers, and he was one, were certainly excited to have this opportunity to

...

**Prove himself.**

Yes.

But in the previous cruise, I was told by the other quartermasters that I joined, he had made a couple of decisions that were not good for his career. There's a certain method of approaching a ship for the underway replenishment – you're supposed to go in at 2/3 power, and initially you have to steer in toward the ship to get past the stern wake. Then, as you clear that stern wake you have to steer away from the ship to the suction doesn't bring you together. And he went in apparently full bore, threw it into 2/3 reverse or some crazy thing, and the bow got sucked right into the other ship, which I think was the Camden – a big oiler – and pushed the anchor flukes right through the side of the narrow bow to the other side. Anyway, that resulted in a hearing of sorts, and I think probably ended his opportunity for advancement beyond captain. Actually, he was a commander – he was the captain of the ship, but he was a commander in terms of rank; but someone with a great deal of experience who might have gone further if he had not made that kind of mistake.

But I could see in other ways he was a 'John Wayne' type. There were some things I didn't question openly, but I questioned privately.

And some of the missions that we had. They had a group that they named – I don't know if it was from the local command – that they called it "freedom train," but they had some title that was given to a number of ships, and the make-up of the ships generally varied, although ours was often one that was included, and others would be added to her. And we would go into shore, probably within three miles of the coast. This is rugged coast and off North Vietnam, north of the DMZ. And at about three or four miles off shore we would turn and parallel the shore and fire at some targets that were designated. Whether they were fuel supplies or known enemy positions, I don't really know. Although at night we did hit what must have either been ordnance, ammo supplies or fuel supplies, because you could see secondary explosions. But we turned a parallel to the coast line. And at that time, at least on a couple of occasions, the signalman on top of the wheelhouse of the destroyer, who were looking through powerful binoculars, said they could see the glint of windshields going up the mountains. These were mountains that came right down to the edge of the sea – pretty rugged terrain. And it turned out they were mobile guns of some sort, and once they got into position, quickly they would begin firing. It took them a while to get their range, but it was almost like inviting return fire. So that happened on a number of occasions. And we wouldn't outrun them until we were ten miles or more from shore.

### **Were you going north at that time?**

We were north of the DMZ. Almost all of the activity was within a hundred miles of the DMZ or further north. We actually ...

### **When you went parallel, though.**

We went northward direction, yes, then turned if we were getting return fire. A couple of the ships that were near us received – I don't know if it was secondary bursts or direct hits. I don't think it was direct, but shrapnel enough that there were people injured.

So there was some activity that went on. In terms of being smart about things, it didn't appear to me to be a very smart way to operate, because it was inviting fire. And the further we got out, the more accurate they became with their shots. And all of our ammunition was dated from World War II. In my estimation they were looking for ways to use it up, because within a three month period of time – and we'd gone through the yard period and had completely redone all of the weapons systems, so there were new gun barrels, or gun barrels which had been re-rifled, I don't know which – but within a three month period of having arrived there we had fired over 12,000 rounds. And I think at 10,000 you're supposed to re-barrel because the rifling gets worn and the accuracy reduced. So that shows the number.

We had two gun mounts – fore and aft; twin-barrel gun mounts. And they were semi-automatic and had to be handfed. We operated with another vessel that was built in the early 1960's – the Buchanan – which had a single barrel which was supposed to be automatic and shoot faster, but they had many more problems with inaccuracies. The whole ship had mechanical glitches.

### **How heavy were the rounds that the guys were putting in?**

I'm trying to remember, because when we would be alongside we'd have to help pass those down to the magazine, which was well below decks. I'm guessing about 50 pounds apiece. They had carriers that would carry them up to the gun, but they had to manually pass them to put them on a lift to bring them up to the gun, and then they had to be manually placed in the gun. But working with teams, and they really seemed to be experienced – they were really good at what they did – they would feed those very fast. It was not only the rounds themselves, but they had powder. I actually never did see one, but as I understand it they came in bags and in aluminum canisters.

### **That's pretty heavy work.**

Yes. And to be doing it repeatedly for any period of time was hard and very hot. And, of course, there's always the danger of jamming or something going wrong. Because everything just got so hot they had to just hold off and clear things for a little.

The gun mounts were to be manually sighted-in. But then they were tied in with the radar so they could, for instance for anti-aircraft or for a target, if they got it close to a target they could lock it into a radar which would take over and it would be automatically trained both for elevation and for horizontal angle. But they had some rocket-assisted shells, which I was told would go between 12 and 14 miles. That was the range. I was quite surprised at that. So you had an opportunity to reach targets much farther away.

So, to me, I guess I occasionally questioned the overall mission. You never know because you don't get all the pieces of information. But, on the other hand, probably very few individuals do – even at a command level – understand the entire effort that is being made. But I found the type of things we were doing to be of interest. I had to believe it was in some way helping what was going on.

During that time Nixon ordered the mining of Haiphong Harbor. We were among the first ships – I think there were six vessels. It was a Sunday morning that we were asked to go all the way north into the outer area of Haiphong Harbor. Evidently that was

the first time in 20 years that U.S. vessels had ventured that far north. It was a clear, beautiful Sunday morning. We were following a ship at half-mile intervals in a long train. I think they had a couple of light cruisers.

### **What year was this?**

This would have been 1971 or early 1972. I think it was 1971.

Anyway, they had ordered us to fire on some targets on the peninsula on the outer area of Haiphong Harbor. And the reason for doing that, it turned out, was to kind of provide some cover of sorts for some jets that would be flying overhead to make some strikes in North Vietnam near Hanoi, from aircraft carriers. And just shortly after we began this firing, there was a puff of smoke and a parachute opened up, and it turned out it was the man who was the wing commander – his actual rank was commander; Moss was his last name. He wound up in the water. Our vessel asked for permission to pick him up and break from the group. That was done. So that was the second pilot we picked up. Do Son was the peninsula.

This map is something I had made from a chart to show where he had been. I guess the cross is to show where we had picked up this pilot who was shook up after being ejected at several hundred miles an hour – legs tangled in the cords of the parachute and so forth.

### **Was he hurt?**

He was okay. He was bruised and a bit shook up, but he was okay.

This is the book that most of the vessels put together. It's activities and a summary of what we had done. And because I had been in journalism, I guess, I put this together. I was also going to show – there is one page: They had an insignia for the vessel. I guess each vessel had one. I was asked to do some kind of a written deal which went into the book describing what the vessel's mission was, in so many words. I can't find it right now.

Anyway, I was anticipating getting married to Mary Jo about mid-July, and thought we'd be back comfortably by the middle of July for the wedding. But by late June I could see this wasn't going to happen. And instead of the six-month cruise, which was the normal time, I think we wound up being eight months or more. And we postponed it to the end of September. And on our return from the western Pacific I got permission to fly from Hawaii back to San Diego ahead of the ship and then to fly home to make the wedding.

### **You had met Mary Jo prior to this at Sturgeon?**

Actually, Sturgeon Bay. A youth group from the Island came to Sturgeon Bay, and our church was the sponsor for that weekend event, although I didn't really in effect meet her then. My sister met and talked with her, and I began corresponding. The following fall, our group came up to the Island. It was set up by Chester Nerenhausen who was the minister up here then – Mark Nerenhausen's father. I think they had an

active youth group. They'd never been to a basketball game, most of them, and didn't get off the Island much in the winter.

Anyway, we had corresponded and continued to correspond, and over a matter of time we got a little more serious. During the time I was in the Navy, Mary Jo was teaching in Northbrook, Illinois. Her sister, Carol, lived in San Diego; her husband was in the Navy. So we met again there, and that's how that came about. So we were married in late September, 1972. So 1972 would have been the year – not 1971 – when we returned.

### **So you still had another couple of years to go in the Navy.**

I did – two more years. We lived in San Diego. In late September, 1973 – just about one year later – we had Hoyt, so that changed the picture a little bit more.

I had an opportunity to stay in the Navy and go to officer candidate school. But that was still in the future, and although it probably would have happened, it would have required another year or more and then a guarantee of more years of service. At that point I decided that we both needed to return to the Midwest, which we both liked better than San Diego.

I was going to show you one photo which was quite typical. Because of the amount of ammunition that was being fired – and I mentioned that all of this was World War II munitions; it was stamped 1945 for the most part. I think they were anxious to get rid of it. And of all those rounds, a good portion of it was just pushed overboard – all the aluminum cases were thrown over. This is just a picture here of the empty aluminum cases, and pallets of ammunition that was being sent across to our ship. But the bottom of the shell was a brass casing that would be ejected. It's about so thick on the sidewalls, and about that thick on the bottom – just an enormous piece of brass. And prior to knowing that we were going to Hong Kong they started saving all the brass instead of throwing it overboard. So the foredeck was filled with brass shell casings.

And that was then used to pay a woman who went by the name of 'Hong Kong Mary' and had a painting crew. They painted the vessel basically by hand using rollers and rags, inside and out – whatever surfaces you wanted. They would get the brass and also had an opportunity to get whatever leftovers there were from the meal periods. They would use and redistribute – either sell or whatever, I don't know. That was theirs. And so the entire hull was painted within about a five-day period of time while we were in Hong Kong. They did it all from san pans. And they did it for all the ships that stopped there, and received brass shell casings in payment.

It was sort of an odd situation, but, of course, for all of the Navy vessels they could let the crew go ashore, which made them all happy. Some had to stay on the ship, obviously, and continue to either supervise or do other things to make sure things were running well.

### **So they got paid with shell casings. What did they do with them, then? Did they melt them down?**

I suppose. I don't know. I mean, they would be worth a tremendous amount today to have that much brass.

**I'd like to have a copy of that if we could. So you spent a year, then, in San Diego?**

Two years, and got out in November of 1974. So it was a four-year enlistment.

**Did you take anymore big cruises while you were there?**

I did. Not too long after our ship had returned from the western Pacific, it was put into ... It was considered to be one of the older vessels, although it was in really top condition during that time period that we had underway. But it was put into the reserve fleet that we had in San Francisco, and an even older destroyer – the Rogers – was brought out of the reserve in San Francisco and was given to Brazil.

I was asked, as part of an interim thing, to be part of that turnover crew. So, for a two-three month period of time I went from the Hamner to the Rogers. We had Brazilians whom we worked with, because they were getting this ship basically for nothing. I was supposed to show them the ropes. I don't know if that was necessary, but this was an even older destroyer with a very small wheelhouse, and still had portholes instead of the big plate glass windows in front. So it was again a kind of an oddity. But we went out, maybe, on two or three different under ways.

**So you trained them in the area and then they took it back down to Brazil.**

Yes. And then, at that point, I was transferred to yet a third vessel. I chose at that time to try a little larger vessel just to see what difference there was in the operations, so I went to a landing platform dry dock – the USS Vancouver, LPD-2, which carried helicopters. It had two large helo landing pads on the afterdeck. It had a transom that would drop down into water – they would fill side tanks. It was like a dry dock. The ship would actually sink a little into the ocean and they would run small landing craft up inside. They could fit four, I think they called them Mike 8's. They were probably like 40'-45' landing craft up inside, as well as other amphibious – they weren't ducks, but they were on that order – they were troop transports that could go in the ocean. I rode one of them ashore. It's like being in a noisy tin can with water all around, and they're not particularly tight – very inefficient. They're designed to take troops ashore during an assault. Our mission with that vessel was primarily training with Marines and with other ships.

During that time ... I met the ship, actually, in Subic Bay, Philippines, when we had a training exercise shortly thereafter. I counted somewhere between 35 and 40 vessels on the horizon – which was a huge, huge fleet of vessels, all in training. The Vietnam thing was still going on, but these were, for the most part oilers, supply ships, amphibious ships, some destroyers and some other vessels mixed in. And the exercise was to land Marines on one of the southern Philippine islands. And once we did that and put them ashore, we went on our way and continued to do other things. We went into Japan, Okinawa and a few other places. That was an altogether different type of mission.

And when we had Marines on board, the Marines had the pipe berths and the sidewalls. The middle of the center of the after portion of the vessel was all like a boat well – a huge area for equipment: jeeps, trailers, 'mules' I guess they're called, and other

equipment that the Marines used onshore. That would all be stowed below decks. And the sidewalls, which were narrow – probably no more than 12’ in width with an aisle down the middle and pipe berths about four high on each side. And they could cram in about 600 Marines in those pipe berths.

They weren’t on board for a very long time. We would pick them up in the Philippines and deploy them wherever it was – if they were going ashore or just to transport them to another port. That was always a little different. We had very little to do with the Marines and they didn’t have much to do with us. You get that many people together – it’s interesting.

### **How big is a destroyer?**

I think it was around 300’, and the beam on it not much greater than 45’, if that – very, very slender bow and profile – and lightly built.

### **For speed and flexibility?**

Surprisingly. When they had all four boilers on the line, after we came out of the yard we could do 28 knots and get up to that fairly quickly. If they had steam up on all boilers they could accelerate to 25 knots fairly quickly. It always amazed me that we could cut across the ocean in all kinds of weather and you could be water skiing behind that thing with the speed we were going! It was really kind of amazing. And yet, we couldn’t keep up with aircraft carriers. They would never tell you what the speed of the aircraft carriers were, but the larger ones were supposed to be going 40 to 45 knots, particularly when they launched planes. They would head into the wind for the launching. And their speed over bottom, plus whatever prevailing wind was coming over the deck, would add to the lift and allow the planes to launch more easily.

But we couldn’t, when they had launching exercises with the planes, they weren’t just exercises. They were sending planes on missions over Vietnam. We couldn’t keep up. They’d run for maybe 45 minutes upwind when they were launching. And yet they were supposed to maintain a general station, so they’d turn and go south and we’d cut the loop short in order to catch up with them again.

But our job at that point was plane guard duty. If somebody got blown off the flight deck, a plane had to ditch or so forth, we had to pick them up. And occasionally you’d hear about those things on the radio – somebody getting blown off the flight deck.

### **Did you, as a destroyer, drop depth charges? Was that part of a destroyer’s ...**

We had depth charges. We had both what they called a ‘hedgehog.’ We’d shoot quite a number of depth charges. And we had anti-submarine warfare capability. We practiced that in training, but never utilized that underway in Vietnam. But we had that capability. Also torpedoes, which supposedly could be the type that could be armed with nuclear warheads. I’m sure that ours weren’t, but you weren’t supposed to know if they were or weren’t. But the ships had that capability. I think there was always a ‘cat and mouse’ going on with Russian submarines at that time.

**What was the compliment over there of a destroyer?**

I think it was around 240 people. It was actually huge.

**What were your daily duties on a generally dull day? Did you have to monitor supplies and things like that sort?**

No. On a dull day it would be chart corrections, and periodical corrections. You'd get those from the Naval hydrographic officer and other sources and you'd have to make the corrections and updates. There's also be ...

**For contour maps and things of that sort?**

It could be that – chart corrections on lights and contours and so forth. You'd want them to be up-to-date if you had to go into a port. You'd want to make sure. I was amazed in studying some of the western Pacific charts that occasionally you'd find places – there was a Marianna's trench west of Guam where they had a number and a line beneath it which would mean they never did find bottom – the surveyors never found bottom. And there were others that would show small figures in italics – the number of fathoms – and it would be R for British. And you'd have to think that was back in Captain Cooks' day! Somebody would have sounded it from a British sailing vessel, and that's the best they still had.

I think some of that has changed today. But I found that to be kind or interesting. But we were responsible for the space that was the bridge – for cleaning and maintaining it, keeping it in order. We didn't fix the electronic things, but if something wasn't right we would have to notify the electronics specialist on board who would fix it. That wasn't a common thing, but it was possible for steering to go out for instance. So there was an after-steering – emergency after-steering.

**So the quartermaster duties were really much larger than what I had thought of as quartermaster duty when I was in the Army.**

Quartermaster is supplies in the Army. Quartermaster in the Navy is navigation only.

**There is quite a difference.**

The quartermasters generally are the helmsman and also do the plotting, usually under the supervision of the officer of the watch; officer of the deck. But you would advise when to turn – how many minutes to turning point; advise a course – you could only advise a course; it was up to the officer what he wanted to do. But if you were transiting a long distance, say San Francisco to Hawaii, you'd lay out the course in advance – usually a great circle route. That is usually more efficient than a straight line. The charts are not reflecting the great curvature of the earth, so you'd have to use a great circle route which is actually the shorter distance.

### **Is that a ‘rhumb line?’**

Usually a rhumb line is a straight distance between two points. But for a long distance you want to imitate the curvature of the earth. On a flat map it actually looks longer, but it’s not. So you lay out that course. That’s usually reviewed by the officers, the captain, and any adjustments are made. And daily adjustments are made.

The quartermaster works ... usually there’s either a chief or first-class quartermaster, or navigator who’s a junior officer designated as a navigator – could be a lieutenant, but usually an ensign or lieutenant JG. And they would both be active with and supervise the general navigation, so that in mid to late afternoon you’d work up a list of all the celestial bodies you were going to shoot in the evening if you were out at sea.

Say you’ve got six or eight bodies you’re going to shoot angles or bearing and elevations, so you’d know where to look for them. Of course it helps to have an older, experienced person doing this. But there usually would be two or three of us. One person would be recording – have a stopwatch time and record the sightings and go down to the chart room to work out the celestial readings. And not everybody comes up with exactly the same thing, but the idea is you wind up with at least three lines if not four. A very, very pinpoint crossing is the ideal, but sometimes it’s a small triangle. You have to assume you’re somewhere within that small triangle.

### **Does GPS obviate some of those things now?**

Yes, it does. I think they had some GPS available, but only on the largest vessels – the aircraft carriers and perhaps some guided missile destroyers or cruisers would have that capability. But we were an old vessel. We had some electronics. There was LORAN A, which was not a good navigational system – the waves tended to bend.

### **Have you talked to Allen Thiele about his LORAN experiences?**

No, I haven’t.

### **He was in charge of a lot of that, I think.**

On the LORAN stations: The Coast Guard was actually responsible for maintaining the LORAN stations.

So you had to use the LORAN as a kind of secondary check, but you never believed in it completely. But we had to keep a dead-reckoning plot always, based on time – speed, course, currents; allow some for currents. But there were occasions when we were with a carrier group and it was overcast for days. We never felt confident in our own dead-reckoning position. I think every six hours – probably twelve for sure – but six hour intervals we’d get an update from the aircraft carrier saying this was their position. So we’d just modify what their position was, because we felt that they were ... That’s not the right way to do it, but we had nothing else to go by other than dead-reckoning. And after twelve hours of course changes, speed changes all over the place following this carrier, it was really very difficult to track. GPS would, of course, correct that completely.

**When you were doing that, did you find that you were off?**

Sometimes. But the rewarding thing was we were very, very close. After maybe a day or two of dead-reckoning and all these various changes and adjustment, we still were pretty darn close to where we were – surprisingly close.

**That's kind of rewarding in a way.**

Yes, it is.

So we would be active always on the bridge – always one quartermaster on the bridge. We had the log duties – recording every course change, speed change; anything of significance that happened on the vessel. And we had to be very, very careful about that because it was considered a legal record as well. It could be examined, used in a court of law – maybe in defense of what a ship had done, or to reconstruct something at a later time. There were always some horror stories about what happened to certain vessels because of miscalculations.

**And discovering who was responsible for it.**

Ultimately. Always.

**Well, then, at the end of service – you got out in 1974?**

Yes, in November of 1974. I had asked my father-in-law in 1973, it looked like I'd be getting out of the Navy at a certain point and said our preference would be, certainly, to move back to this area. And I was interested in working somehow, somewhere in the marine field, whether it was sailing for a Palmer Johnson or something like that. But we thought maybe we would try living on the Island. Mary Jo maybe was not all as excited about that. She was kind of interested in getting away from home – away from the Island at a certain point. But now we had a one-year-old – he was just over that when we came here.

So I asked Arnie if I might be able to work for him as a deckhand and go from there without any expectations. We'd see how it goes, how the adjustment went, whether it worked out or not. Although he never told me, I think he was happy with that decision. I got that indirectly.

So I began working, actually, within a week; actually less than a week. I thought I'd have a few days to put things away. But he stopped over and said he had to make an extra trip and would I throw a line. I said I could, so went with him on an overload trip of some kind – on the Voyager, I think it was. So I started the next Monday.

**And here you are.**

Yes.

**Well, that really is interesting. I'm really glad you took time to talk with us, Dick. And for the record I must say you were Company Commander here of the Post at one point.**

I could add that in 1975, within maybe six months or less of settling here, I was asked by Emil Johnson and Lonnie Johnson – I don't know if one or the other was the commander at that time. Ray Krause, who was the REA manager for years and years and year – Ray was the adjutant for many, many years of the Legion Post. He was the one who kind of held it together. And I was asked after attending maybe just a couple of meetings would I be interested in joining the Post. I decided I would.

I felt then, and still do, whether it was the experience of growing up, learning more, seeing a little bit more of the rest of the world ... I think, as much as anything, it was the cross-section of people I encountered. I knew that college – Madison – young people, basically an ivory tower; it's set off and certainly not representative of the rest of the United States. I don't think Madison was. It was an interesting place. I learned something there, too. But I think I learned much more once I got out of school.

And I felt, for me, at least, experiences were basically positive.

**Well, thank you, Dick. It's been very interesting.**