

Edward John Morris interview July 11, 2007

E6, US Navy, January 1957 – May 1962

Ed enlisted in the Navy out of high school in January 1957. Military service was a tradition in Ed's family. His grandfather was in the Army and his father in the Navy. Another factor was that the Navy was all volunteer at the time and Ed wanted to serve with others who wanted to be there.

To enlist, Ed went down to Philadelphia for his physical. Part of the test was looking at color flash cards.



Ed couldn't distinguish between the various colors so he was guessing. The man administering the test didn't say anything, but he was laughing. Ed didn't think anything more of this until later when he found out that he was color blind. It turns out that this did not affect his Naval career.

Ed was given a date to catch a bus to Bainbridge, MD for basic training. The first night was pretty lonely, but after that they kept the men so busy there wasn't time to feel bad. A number of people, however, did drop out by faking illness. Training consisted of marching, understanding orders, learning to do as you were told. The men would march to breakfast in the dark and then return to the barracks before heading out to drill. Some men had to serve KP duty which Ed avoided because he had been selected to be the Company Commander.

The Privileges of Rank

Being Company Commander had certain perks. For one, Ed marched at the head of formation during parades and drill, but even better was that he didn't have to march to meals with the company. Food was good in the Navy in boot camp compared to the other services. (Later in his Navy career, Ed was even served lobster.)

All of boot camp took place on dry land although there was a mock ship there. Everyone did have to learn how to swim if they didn't already know. Graduation was a big affair with more than 800 recruits in formation and family and friends there to witness the event. The graduates passed in review and there was the playing of military music and Navy hymns. Ed felt that he had reached a milestone in his life. His Dad had been in the Navy in WWII and his uncle had tried to enlist, but was blind in one eye. As a result, he ended up in the Merchant Marines and he died after his ship was struck with a German torpedo.

On graduation day, they gave orders for where and when to report for the next phase of training. They were given two weeks of leave before reporting to first assignment. In Ed's case, this was electricians school in Great Lakes, IL. The men had been given choices of what they wanted to do in the Navy. The higher you scored on the tests, the more choices you had. Even though Ed had been tested as color blind, the Navy needed electricians so they allowed him to continue. Electrician's school lasted for three months and Ed applied himself and did well.

After Great Lakes, Ed received orders to report to the USS Davis (DD-937) which was a new ship in the newest class of destroyer in the fleet at that time. It even had air conditioning and people were pretty gung-ho about the ship. The crew was a mix of people who hadn't been on ships and veterans from other ships. It was a good mix and everyone got along.

Seeing the Sites in Europe

While on the USS Davis, Ed went to the Mediterranean with stops in Spain, France, Italy, Greece, Turkey and the Canary islands. Ed was able to get shore leave in all of these places. The people in all of these places treated Americans pretty well except in France where the people acted pretty distant. One of the more memorable sites was Pompeii in Italy. They went into the volcano where gasses were still coming out.

In France, the Riviera was memorable, but it was the first place where Ed felt discrimination of servicemen because they were not allowed to go into the casinos. At Gibraltar, Ed was able to see the famous monkey's that live there. The Canary Islands reminded Ed of the skyline drive in Virginia. Ed also went to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for training with the Davis.

Serving Under Lefty

The Captain who Ed served under the longest was Captain Levracus, nicknamed "Lefty." This Captain once hit a pier in St. Thomas head-on which caused the ship to spend a month in Boston being repaired. "Lefty" didn't interact with the crew very much, but Ed remembers one time when they were in the Mediterranean and a light bulb on the yard arm went out and the Captain told Ed to go replace it. This was a scary proposition as the ship was moving and rocking. This motion is exaggerated the higher you climb.



A Famous Commander

The destroyer squadron Ed served with was called Desron 12. For a time, the commander of the squadron was John Bulkeley. Commander Bulkeley had earned the Medal of Honor in WWII in the Philippines and was also famous as John F. Kennedy's PT boat squadron commander and the person who evacuated General MacArthur from the Philippines before it fell at the beginning of WWII. Ed said



Bulkeley spent a lot of time on the Davis and he saw him a lot. He was one of the most likeable and down to earth people he had ever met. He'd come to the electrical shop and just shoot the breeze with the men. He was closer to the men than any captain he ever served under. He was a sailor in every sense of the word.

Testing the Soviets

After the Berlin Wall went up in 1961, the USS Davis

became the first US warship to enter Istanbul and the Black Sea since WWII. Once the Davis passed into the Black Sea, Ed said it looked like a cornfield with periscopes sticking up out of the water. Three Russian destroyers approached and the Davis ran up their battle colors. With the crew at battle quarters, Ed was able to watch the action from a hatch at his battle station. Ed didn't think the Russians would fire because the US 6th fleet was backing them up out in the Mediterranean. The Davis visited a few Turkish ports and then left after about a week.

Another result of the Berlin wall was that Ed had a year tacked onto his enlistment. When the Bay of Pigs invasion took place, in April of 1961, another year had been tacked on then as well. During the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba, the Davis was off shore waiting to help, but at the last minute, was told to stand down. This was very disappointing to the crew who had hoped to help in the invasion. They were so close; men up on the bridge of the ship could see movement on the beach through field glasses.

A New Assignment

Ed was responsible for six to ten men on the Davis. Ed was at the rank of First Class, but then a Chief (the rank above) transferred on board so Ed knew he was going to go somewhere. He ended up being transferred to the USS Compton (DD-705) which was another ship in their destroyer squadron. The Compton was a WWII era ship, without air conditioning, and had not been well maintained. The Navy had also begun to take in draftees and Ed had to work with them which was not a positive experience. It was during his year on the Compton that Ed began to think he would not serve 20 years in the Navy.

The squadron was getting ready to go to the Mediterranean and Ed made it clear he was not going to serve another enlistment so he was transferred to the USS Hazelwood. This ship made the Compton look good. It was in bad shape, was full of draftees, and the officers were not very good. This sealed it for Ed, it was time to get out. In Ed's opinion, the Navy had begun to go down hill; they were behaving in a democratic way which is not the way to run a Navy.

Ed did have the opportunity to apply for the position of a patrol boat captain in Vietnam, but word came back that this was not a very safe position. So Ed was discharged in May of 1962. He remembers waiting for the bus as he was leaving Newport, RI in uniform with his discharge papers. Another First Class walked by who had three hash marks on his uniform (each hash mark means four years of service). Ed was also First Class, but only had one hash mark (he had at one point been the youngest First Class Petty Officer in the Navy). The older sailor looked at all of this with Ed holding his discharge papers and acted like he wanted to say something, but just kept walking.

Re-adjusting to civilian life was not difficult although Ed remembers that he had to be sure to "smooth the edges off a little bit" now that he was dealing with civilians. Ed didn't regret his decision to join the Navy, but didn't regret getting out either. He said he went into the Navy as a boy and came out a man. It was the best experience of his life. Ed feels that the time spent serving your country in the service is relatively short. In terms of how you live your life, it is probably the most important thing outside of your religion that you can imagine.