

Harry Bowersox interviewed September 19, 2007  
Seaman First Class, US Navy, October 1944 to May 1946

Harry was working on a farm in central Pennsylvania before he volunteered for the draft in late 1944. He volunteered because his three brothers were in the service and he figured it was his time. He tried to enlist in the Marines and the Air Force, but both were filled, so he opted for his third choice; the Navy. Before leaving for basic training, he and Evelyn were married.



After induction, Harry was sent to Bainbridge, MD for basic training. There, they marched and marched and marched some more and learned to do exactly what they were told. Harry had a bout with Scarlet Fever while in boot camp, but this only laid him up for two days.

Because of his farm background, after basic, Harry was assigned to Camp Perry, VA to logistic support where he learned to drive trucks, tractors and other vehicles. Then it was on to San Bruno, CA for another month of training. From there, he boarded a ship for the week long trip to Okinawa where he landed on his birthday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1945.

Twelve Hour Days...

At Okinawa, he worked on the dock and drove trucks for the Sea Bees (Naval Construction Units). The island was not completely clear of Japanese at that time so they travelled in convoys and sometimes carried guns, but never had armed guards for escorts. One of their first tasks was to unload cement in the harbor, presumably to build an airstrip. This was accomplished by working 12 hour days. The cement was unloaded from the ships by a conveyor, but someone had to load and unload the conveyor belt.

On the island, they would transport supplies for the Army. A careful "inspection" of the cargo by the drivers was always in order to see if there was anything they needed. The Army would often ship beer in the trucks and the Navy drivers discovered that a can of beer would fit through the gas tank opening of the truck. They fed the beer cans into the fuel tank one at a time. The MP's searched the trucks, but couldn't find the missing beer. Back safely at camp, the cans were retrieved from the truck gas tanks and set out in the open so the gas could evaporate and the beer could then be drunk.

In another incident, one of Harry's comrades helped himself to a case of genuine leather wallets that was meant for some officers. The higher-ups knew that the case had been stolen and came looking for it at the support unit's camp. Harry's commander, Lieutenant Greeves, told the search party they needed a warrant to search the camp. As soon as the search party left to get the warrant, Lt. Greeves turned to the men and said "bury it." The search party returned and parked over the spot where they had buried the wallets, but never found them. After that, they called themselves "Lt. Greeves and his fifty thieves."

Harry stayed in a 10' x 10' tent with three other men. While he was on Okinawa, a great typhoon came through and some of the airplanes on the island were smashed by the wind, but Harry was not affected too much. When they rain did come, it would last for a month. The roads would quickly become knee-

Harry Bowersox

deep puddles of muck. Oil would be applied to the roads when the weather was dry to keep the dust down, but this would only make things worse when the rains came. Fortunately, pulling out stuck vehicles was one of the things they had practiced back at Camp Perry.

A typical day consisted of driving equipment and materials from one place to another. They used to park the trucks to watch movies while on duty and one time, he couldn't start his truck after the movie. He told an officer that his truck was broken. The officer pulled out the rotor he had taken out of Harry's truck and said "Don't do it again." Harry had been caught, but nothing more came of the incident.



At one point, Harry had the opportunity to go up in a C-46 plane for a sightseeing tour over the island. While on the flight, the plane hit an air pocket causing a drop down to about tree top level and that was enough sightseeing for Harry.

In mid-August of 1945, Lt. Greeves announced to the men that Japan had surrendered. This was a great relief as they had expected to be part of the invasion of Japan. Harry stayed on Okinawa for some time after working on building up the facilities at the island. When he left, the ship first headed to Sasebo, Japan where they docked for one day. Then, it was on to Shanghai, China to pick up some nurses. They stayed there for three days which gave Harry a chance to go ashore.

Harry recalls that the shops in Shanghai were beautiful and well stocked. He was able to buy a kimono for his wife and pajamas for his new son. There were also good restaurants there and Harry said the steak and mashed potatoes dinner he had there was one of the best he's ever had. One of the strangest sights was of the Chinese scooping seaweed straight out of the ocean and eating it raw.

Almost Home...

Once the ship left Shanghai, the trip back to the states took longer than getting there. Harry arrived in California and was there for four days before boarding a train to Lido Beach, NY for his discharge in May, 1946. Along the way, however, the train broke down as it was heading through Pennsylvania, only ten miles from Harry's home. Because the train was so close to home, yet he couldn't go there, this was the first time he became homesick since entering the service. The train eventually made its way to New York where Harry was immediately discharged, turned around and headed back to Harrisburg and home. He had to hitch hike the 60 miles from Harrisburg to home and nobody would pick him up until he put on his medals and ribbons.

At home, he was able to see his new son for the first time. Evelyn had rented a house for \$12 per month and they had one cow. The cow was eventually sold to put a down payment on a new refrigerator. Harry worked for the railroad briefly and then farmed before moving to work at Laurel Locks farm.

Harry never regretted his decision to join the military and is proud that we beat the Japanese. He also notes that now he is driving one of their cars.

Harry Bowersox