

**William (Will) Washington Knox, Jr.** interviewed July 25, 2007  
E5, US Navy, December 1966 - December 1970

During High School, Will decided he would enlist in the military and did so in Phoenixville, PA. Will enlisted in the Navy through a program that allowed 17 year olds to join the reserves and then go on active duty six months later. Will departed Philadelphia by train the day after Christmas 1966 to Chicago and the Great Lakes Naval Training Center.

A leisurely beginning...

Because they arrived during the holiday week, Will and his fellow inductees did odds and ends for a week. Their company commander was a nice guy who let them take it easy and drink cokes whenever



they wanted. He came up with a sad story and the men took up a collection for him after which he went AWOL! The next commander told them their company had some catching up to do and not only would they catch up, they would be the top company by the time boot camp ended. This meant extra marching and training in the cold and snowy weather while the other companies were inside. But the work paid off, Will's company was named the color company meaning top company in the battalion.

Everyone was given aptitude tests during basic and Will qualified for radar and sonar. Even though he wanted to apply to aviation, he was advised to not even bother because aviation was full. Will applied for radar and sonar and was then assigned to.... Aviation!

Will's first job was cleaning offices at carrier headquarters in Norfolk, VA. While cleaning, an Admiral struck up a conversation with Will in a stairwell. Later, while in the office section of the building to deliver a message, a junior officer ran up to Will and said "You have to leave, you can't be here, this area is only for officers." At that moment, the Admiral happened to walk by and said "Hello, Knox" which left the junior officer with his jaw hanging open!

Next, it was on to "A" school in Memphis, TN. Will was to learn shop keeping which involved ordering and tracking plane parts, inventory control and other supplies.

Tragedy in Memphis...

While Will was in Memphis, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. The base was locked down for a few days, but trouble did not extend to the base. Another memorable event was a tornado. The men were warned of bad weather and ordered to report to their WWII era barracks to await further orders. The storm came closer and an officer stuck his head in and said "What are you guys doing here? Get out!" Everyone took off running for the chow hall which was a much sturdier building. The tornado veered around the base and took out a trailer park.

Will graduated as the top student in his class. Even beating out a guy who had attended college and thought he was hot stuff. From there, it was back to Norfolk to work for COMNAVAIRLANT which is the aviation command of the Atlantic fleet. Will worked in the Aviation Material Office which expedited

parts for overseas. One of the squadrons he worked with was the VX6 spy squadron in Spain. Because of their secret and high level status, this squadron got whatever they needed.

Finally off to sea...

Will was then assigned to the USS Boxer, a converted WWII carrier which now carried helicopters. By then, Will was 3<sup>rd</sup> Class (AK3) and put in charge of the fuel, accounting and store rooms on the ship. One of the advantages of being in charge of the supplies was the ability to get preferential treatment in the chow hall and laundry department through the “gift” of aviator sunglasses to the people in those departments. This meant Will didn’t have to wait in line to eat or fold laundry (to the Navy’s exacting standards).

A fortunate sighting...

The Boxer’s main duty was to patrol the Caribbean in rotation with her two sister ships. Will never participated in a full cruise, but did go on a shakedown cruise to Haiti and Cuba. While off the coast of Cuba in heavy seas, one of the sailors was jogging on deck when he saw three children floating by on an inner tube. A whaleboat was dispatched from the ship to pick them up. The oldest of the children was an 11 year old girl and they had been floating for two days.

Man Overboard! (Almost)...

Another incident was while preparing for rough weather. The crew was ordered to secure all equipment. Will was along the side of the deck, securing helicopter transmissions which were

stored in a former gun tub. He hooked a rope in to the edge of the tub, went to pull it tight and pulled himself overboard! Fortunately, Will held onto the rope and was able to pull himself back on board. He was much more careful next time.



Will Knox's boot camp graduating class, 1967.

One night, anchored in Cuba, the base asked for a rotorhead, and the Boxer had one. Will had to get the part into shore. The only way to get it onto the barge that came out to pick up the part was to climb down a rope ladder. Surprisingly enough, it wasn’t like a real ladder, when the ship swayed and the ladder came away from the side of the ship, you’d be almost upside down. This was Will’s crash course in rope ladders. He later found out the best way to climb a rope ladder was to climb up the side.

Once the shake-down cruise to Cuba was completed, the crew was kept busy for several days and nights loading and preparing the Boxer for a four-month cruise in the Caribbean. The ship was towed to the center of the harbor and then ordered to return to the dock for decommissioning. Will wanted to transfer to a sister ship so he could serve at sea, but this request was denied.



USS Boxer in San Francisco, prior to Will's time with the ship

So it was back to shore where Will was put in charge of setting up the store room from the ground up for a land-based squadron. Because the Navy wouldn't send him back to sea, Will declined to re-enlist

and returned to civilian life in the Pottstown area. He did, however, volunteer to continue in active reserve for two years to earn extra pay to restore a '57 Chevy.

Will is proud of his time in the service and would do it all over again.