W H E N I W A S . . .

IN THE U.S. NAVAL RESERVE
DURING WORLD WAR II

by Earl E. Bagley

World War II Memoirs of

Earl E. Bagley

An Idaho landlubber at war with the sea, the sharks, and the shells. Give a short summary.

Introduction

There are probably very few American youth beyond 10 years of age who have not developed a resentment for phrases beginning, with "When I was." It is just as natural for a man learning fatherhood to say, "When I was your age," as it is for a baby learning to talk to say "da da." Who has not heard from a parent, a brother, a sister, a teacher, or friend such declarations as "When I was in the first grade" or "When I was on the team", "When I was struggling through the great depression", "When I was manager", "When I was in the army," etc., etc., etc. For some unexplainable reason, I have not resented the remark to the extent of vowing never to bore my children or family with such egotistical chatter.

The phrase is almost always used to draw attention to special irtues, sufferings or achievements of the narrator. Hence, for some 55 years, my wife and our descendants have endured, patiently or otherwise,

the frequent use of it. Because of their indulgence I begrudge no man the right to use it, and encourage our offspring to make the most of it. To them, is this work dedicated. Now let me tell you about "When I was ..." in the U.S. Naval Reserve. Some exaggeration is admitted but misrepresentation -- never!

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The Bait and the Hook

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, it was eight months to the day after I had taken over the Western Motor Lines, a single truck operation working out of Idaho Falls, Idaho, to all points in between Pocatello, Ashton and Driggs. It was beginning to look as if I was about to make a success of something, but within a few weeks the war effort had taken precedence over everything else. I needed a set of tires for the truck, but the government had frozen tire production and it would be almost impossible for a small operator like me to get a priority order for tires, especially truck tires. I got a chance to sell the truck line for what I had in it, so I let it go. Having been offered an accounting position with a local lumber yard, I

started with it February 2, 1942.

That was not using much foresight, was it? If the government needed to take control of all the necessary parts and supplies for the transportation industry, why would it not be taking control of building materials necessary to build defense plants and produce items necessary for the war effort? And that is the way it happened. I had only been at the lumber yard a few months when the government released everything to the trucking industry and took over the railroads.

July 1st I took over the delivery truck for the lumber yard in order to have a job. For the first two months, that mostly involved delivering merchandise we already had in stock, but later it consisted of unloading several railway boxcars of coal and delivering it to customers' basement coal bins. It was obvious that my future at the lumber yard would be cancelled as soon as our customers had their coal bins filled for the winter. During September and October, I had shoveled 400 tons of coal out of boxcars and delivered it into bins around town. I lost fifteen pounds of my own skinny weight in the process. Everyone else in Idaho Falls who could afford it had bought a saw and a hammer and taken a job as a carpenter on the navy gun relining plant being built in Pocatello; but that did not appeal. Commuting over 100 miles each day seemed like a terrible waste of time, and I had no means of transportation of my own.

One night between shows in a movie theater that Alice, my wife, and I attended, the navy had a commercial. It was seeking men who had some background in math and electricity to train to become technicians. We were married and had three children at that time. I did not expect to

be drafted into the service but this idea of getting some training in a vocation worked its way into my thinking. Math and science were of the most interest to me in high school, although I had graduated more than 12 years before. One day I just happened to get near enough to the U.S. Naval Recruiting Office to stop in and see what this was all about,and it didn't seem too bad.

First, one had to pass an aptitude test including a few general fields, but the emphasis was on math and science. Those who passed the test could enlist in the navy as third class petty officers and with the guarantee of going to the navy schools for eight or nine months before going into any combat. The recruiters were using every type of enticement except hypnosis. "What an opportunity," said one, "I would rather have it than a commission." Well, I didn't know what that meant exactly, but it sounded good. "Just think," he continued, "if you don't pass the test you are not obligated to join the navy. But if you do pass, you will be a third or even a second class petty officer to start, depending on the grade you get, and you will bypass boot camp and go directly into at least eight months of school in the very best establishments in the country. He also convinced me that there would be no harm in taking the test. I could at least find out how I stood. Maybe there would be an opportunity to enlist later.

Eventually, I took the test and when the results came, under date of 9 October, 1942, I was offered the rating of third class petty officer to enlist. After much discussion and thinking and talking it over with my wife, our bishop, and several other people I decided that I should enlist. With the navy pay and the allotment I would get for

dependents, I would be making a better living, financially, than I had ever made before. The idea of learning a trade that I could use throughout my life impressed me very strongly, so when the deadline came from the navy for me to say either "yes" or "no", I told them that I would enlist. On the 2nd of November I filled out the papers and sent them in. November 6th was my last day with Bonneville Lumber Company. On the 8th of November I left Idaho Falls on a bus for Boise, Idaho, where on Monday, November 9, 1942, I officially enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve for a period of the duration of the war and up to six months after the war's end. The United States was less than a year into this war, but there was no doubt in the minds of the citizens that we would win it.

After passing the physical examination in Boise, Idaho, several of us enlistees boarded a train and went to Portland, Oregon, and from there to Seattle, Washington. Most of our trip between Portland and Seattle was during the night time. The car we were in must have been one of the first the railroad ever built. It had a little pot bellied coal stove and a few sticks of wood in one corner. That was an awfully cold night of travel. Eventually, we arrived in Seattle the afternoon of the next day.

There were six of us lucky technicians in this group. We walked from the train depot to the skyscraper that housed the navy offices. I don't know which floor (deck) these offices were on, but they were a long way up. Since I was still in civilian clothing I didn't know whether I was supposed to use navy language (deck) or civilian language (floor). In my 32 years, this was the first time I had been more than

500 miles away from the place where I was born in Wilford, Idaho. I had ridden a few freight elevators and some hoist lifts, and once I was even hauled to the top of a hay stack by my suspenders with a Jackson fork, but I was in no way prepared for the push I got out of this aero gymnastic apparatus--the elevator. As the boy closed the door I suddenly had the feeling that I was being shot from a cannon. An instinct to look for a landing place in the rafters overcame me, but the thing soon stopped, and I didn't leave the deck more than a few inches.

After the usual navy wait we were admitted into the office where we presented our orders. Tickets were given to us to ride the ferry to Bremerton, and the way to the ferry was carefully pointed out. Then, we were on our way again. Going out of the office I saw a stairway and started for that, but the other fellows said it would take until after dark to walk down a quarter mile of stairs. So, with a feeling of uncertainty, I joined them on the elevator. Getting down required only a few seconds. I fell as fast as I could, trying to keep both feet on the deck (floor), and my diaphragm did a wonderful job of holding down my innards. With a sudden jolt at the bottom, both pints of blood rushed to my head and I staggered away probably giving the impression of an habitual imbiber or someone lit up. I thought that if I ever had to ride one of those up and down cannon balls again I would want to stand on my head on the way down. But then, that thing did stop awfully fast.

We almost reached the ferry without incident, but just as we started across the wharf to board it, there was a thundering noise like

the stampeding of several thousand head of cattle. Down the passageway came about five thousand sailors. The last coherent sounds I heard were, "Here comes the liberty party!" Everything in the center was swept before them. Women and girls from the sidelines ran right into the thick of it and grabbed some sailor's arm and hung on. I wondered if they just took pot luck chance or if they actually could find someone they knew or expected in a crowd like that. When it was all over, I was out on the sidewalk and a lady cab driver asked me if I wanted a cab. She said she had room for one more. I had a notion to say yes just to see where she would put me. She had a baker's dozen in there already. As suddenly as it had begun it was all over. There was hardly a sailor in sight. I found my suitcase near the middle of the arena. It was well battered but still intact. Right then a news boy began yelling, "Extra! Extra! Allies overrun all of North Africa." It was very appropriate and I wished the reporters could see what the sailors were capable of doing along the dock here at Seattle.

Aboard the ferry I spread my feet and tried to look like I thought a sailor should look after he had his sea legs. I didn't know whether or not to expect seasickness on this trip so I decided to keep quiet and see what happened. Nothing did and I still did not know whether I was a natural born sailor or if the ferry boat was a fair test. That was definite proof to me that seasickness is not merely a figment of the imagination.

At the Bremerton landing we caught a bus that went around to the Charleston entrance. I think that was the last time during the duration of the war that I ever had a seat on a bus or a street car. As hinted

before, the liberty party at that time of day was headed in the opposite direction. The bus however, still had a mixed payload of people and sailors. The sailors treated us like something new and strange from the Smithsonian Institute or a display rack. We had long since removed the conspicuous "Navy Volunteer" bands from our arms, but these mates had some way of knowing our eventual fate. They asked over and over where we were from and offered various types of advice and warnings while all the time from either the rear or the front of the bus jeering, taunting, musical voices persisted in, "You'll be sor-ree."

Eventually we reached the Bremerton Receiving Station. Going through the gate was the equivalent to a one way ticket out of the country for the next three years. Although I came out the gate several times, I never really escaped the snare I walked into on the first entrance. Some Marine guards stopped us to rummage through our luggage in search of cameras or liquor or other sabotage items that we might be trying to smuggle into this sanctum known as the PSNY (Puget Sound Navy Yard).

Our first night was practically uneventful except it was not raining, and we didn't know at the time that that was unusual. The various checking-in places were eventually found and disposed of one by one, and finally we found ourselves almost in the middle of the night headed toward the barracks with a mattress and two blankets over each pair of shoulders. Soon after we had made up our bunks and dozed off, we heard the familiar music of reveille. Before the last notes had sounded the dorm was a veritable beehive. Lines were already forming at the wash basins. There was a fervent desire in every man to hurry

and get started. It is a characteristic that carries over into all navy lines. Every line I saw forming reminded me of motorists racing to a stop light.

The two following days were hectic. We had our pictures taken for I.D. cards, were sent from one place to another to get gas masks, physical inspections, dental inspections, GI clothes, and to visit a dozen different desks and offices. Perhaps a man has no business joining the navy unless he is a mind reader, but why can't at least a few of those people who tell you so many places to go give you some idea as to how to get there? It must be one of the navy traditions you hear so much about. Someone would say, "Report to the desk in building such and such." Finding the building was the hard part. Everyone on the receiving station suddenly became as green as you and no one knew where it was. Finally, in desperation you ask a civilian, a yard worker. If you ever want to know anything about the navy, ask a civilian yard worker. He always knew the minutest details. He could tell you what ships would be in or out on what dates, where they went and where they came from, and all the other information that censorship prohibits sailors from writing to him about.

Well, now that we had found building such and such, we began searching for the desk. The first room we looked into had upwards of 50 desks, any one of which could have been the one we were looking for. After running the gauntlet from one end to the other and waiting at each desk for what I call "desk" jockey's pleasure for an hour or so, someone suggested that you see Miss or Mrs. G.I. topside. You proceed disgustedly and with a mounting desire to get out of such stupid

surroundings and back to where there are people with some degree of understanding. These are the first stages of homesickness. Upon arriving topside and asking for Miss G.I. you are politely asked, "Which one?"

The waiting time in this process is not exactly wasted because you have several pages of forms to fill out during your spare time. An efficient and fortunate man could get checked into or out of Bremerton Receiving Station in two or three days. One buddy of mine had been trying to get checked out to catch his ship for nearly four weeks. Finally one of the ship's officers went in and got him. The officer took only two days. You see, he could go to the head of the lines and the office help would show their patriotism and consideration to wait on anyone wearing gold braid. Line standing is such an art as well as a pastime in the navy that it should be treated in a section all by itself. There will be more about it later.

Back to the chronological order of things. After being outfitted and turning in his questionnaire a man is ready for the transferring stage. He goes out of the receiving door and into another barracks and by some strange coincidence two buddies are invariably assigned to two different barracks and put on opposite working sections. Consequently, I found myself, the second time within a week, placed among hundreds of men, among whom not one was an acquaintance of mine.

Upon reporting to the assignment desk I noticed a yeoman third class looking over some of the forms I had filled out. "Ah," he said, "I see you've had office experience. Can you type?" "Not really," I replied. "I only hunt and peck. I don't think I would qualify for

office work." I had spent over five years in office work and hated every minute of it. Still, in being shuttled around the navy yard the last two days I had noticed dozens of sailors in dungarees sitting in the ever present drizzle of rain on swinging planks suspended along the hulls of ships. I was informed that they were chipping paint and preparing the hulls for painting. Those hulls had more slime and barnacles than paint on them. When the desk man said, "Maybe you could handle a job on the paint chipping crew," I replied, "I'm a typist, and a real good one." I was told to report at the receiving desk at 0800 in the morning where Mrs. G., a civilian, would assign me some work.

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The High and the Low

It has always been my contention that a person who doesn't get homesick, when separated from his family and home, is indeed a sorry individual. I want to add to that. It is also a sorry individual who does get homesick. How I stood the next few days is still a mystery to me. It seems a little hazy now. I tried to write letters and was put on working parties or assigned to stand watches. Then the transfer routine started and I was kept so busy moving from one place to another that there was no time for self pity. Within the next seven days I was moved five times from dorm to dorm, but did not leave the barracks.

One of the important factors of checking in at this receiving station was a swimming test. They were separating those who could swim

from those who could not. Having been raised on the banks of the North Fork of the Snake River, in St. Anthony, Idaho, I had spent a great deal of my time swimming and diving in that river. In this test, where all the new recruits were being tried, we had to swim three laps around the swimming pool. On my third lap I passed several of the men who where still on their second lap and was far ahead of any other sailor. The final part of the test was to climb a rope ladder to a platform about 20 feet above the water and jump off feet first. In all of my swimming I had never jumped off of anything more than 5 or 6 feet above the water. It was against my athletic religion to jump if it was possible to dive,and that included from any height up to 30 feet above the water. To jump from 20 feet almost scared me out, but I did it and survived. After that, in subsequent swimming tests, it was not a problem for me.

From swimming we went directly to the hospital and everyone donated a pint of blood. I was still pretty much under weight and really run down. After I had donated a pint of blood, I was told to, "Sit in that chair with your head between your knees for about three or four minutes." I sat in the chair about ten seconds with my head down. A pharmacist mate, I presume, grabbed me by the hair, pulled my head up and said, "You're all right now, you can go." I got up and started to walk away. The next thing I remember I was lying on a table with a doctor working on me. I had passed out from giving that first pint of blood. Many subsequent donations totaled over two gallons of blood, and I never had any more trouble like that.

Back to the story. Mrs. G., with the help of a few girls and temporarily assigned sailors, was trying desperately to keep records of

the comings and goings of 15,000 sailors through that receiving station. I was assigned to work on her crew on what seemed to be a hopeless task. After two or three days, in talking to Mrs. G., we decided we needed a different system than they were using. I asked the Lieutenant who was over this particular assignment if we could have a meeting with him. One was arranged. We suggested that Mrs. G. and her daytime crew would keep track of all of the sailors who came into the receiving station and make cards on them, and that we have a night crew of sailors that would make entries on these cards of all the sailors that were shipped out. In order to ensure accuracy on this, all of the incoming and departing sailors were to be reported directly to our office immediately. I was assigned to manage the night crew of sailors. We had four men besides myself and eventually, after a few weeks, we had a pretty good system and a fairly accurate roll call of the sailors who were on station. There were a couple of real clowns on the night crew who kept things interesting for us all the time. They were very competent in all the work they were assigned to do, but still had great sense of humor, and we had no trouble staying awake at night for a ten or eleven hour shift.

When I weighed into the navy I weighed 150 pounds. From shoveling all the coal I had shoveled I was about 15 pounds under my normal weight. But after a few weeks of working on this night shift and eating two or three meals a day, plus one at midnight, I had gained about 30 pounds and so, was about 15 pounds over normal weight. The night crew was permitted to go to the chow hall at midnight each night and eat whatever they wanted.

The job in the files and cardex office lasted from November 15, 1942 to January 16,1943. On the 18th of January we rated men who were there to be trained as technicians entered boot camp. I had the understanding before enlisting that there would be no boot training, but there were many men awaiting school assignments and the best place for us was in boots. About 10 days before going into boot training they began giving us shots. We had to go to the pharmacy three or four times and get at least two and sometimes four different shots each time. The group of three shots I took one day which contained tetanus put me in bed for a couple of days. I think I must have really had the tetanus with that one. I just lay in the bed all day and all night. I didn't go to work a couple of nights, but the crew covered for me and I never was reported absent. I just suffered it out and finally was able to go back.

As mentioned previously, standing in line deserves a special treatise of its own as far as the navy goes. Perhaps while I am talking about shots it would be appropriate to elaborate a little on line standing. I wrote the following about this subject while in the navy.

It is estimated, by me of course, that standing in lines has angered more military personal and done more to lower morale than any other single factor in the service. Everyone has heard sarcastic remarks about chow lines, but did you ever get the real dope about the shaving lines in which your rugged serviceman stands from 30 to 60 minutes impatiently waiting the chance to use a mirror for this necessary operation. A purpose of this is to serve as a warm up for the

first chow line of the day. At the end of this, if he hasn't cut his own throat or someone else's, he has marvelous self control.

The first experience in line standing is somewhat of a novelty and occurs at a time when a victim is not in such a terrible hurry anyway. That is at the physical examination line at induction time. Most candidates are content to remain a civilian the little extra while they are required to stand in this line. Then follows all the various one-stand lines such as clothing issue, shots, photography, swimming test, finger prints, allowances and allotments, and blood donors. (This last line is usually comparatively short, perhaps because it is voluntary.) By now the novelty of the line has begun to wear off. These one-stand lines are so called because they do not occur quite as frequently as others. However, each of these experiences will leave lasting impressions on the person's mind and all added together will give him the air of a veteran line stander.

These hours, laid out end to end, will reach around the calendar sufficient to allow your He-man the $300 veterans discharge bonus. And don't think he has not earned it! Some amazing tales can be told of experiences in the shot lines. It takes real courage to bare your arm and walk in among that group of pin cushion testers. Most of them are just young kids without previous experience, striking to be pharmacists mates. In this case waiting in line serves a definite purpose. By the time your turn comes you are so perturbed and out of patience you do not care what they do just so they do it and let you out of that medicated atmosphere. So you stand calmly and relaxed while the pharmacist mate strikers practice driving home the point. After three or four times

through this line you can rest assured that you would not have to contend with it again for a couple of months, that is, if they shot you enough each trip through and the yeoman didn't get your shots recorded on someone else's record. I have seen men argue and swear that they had never had a shot of any kind and still their record was all finished. These fellows couldn't get the shots if they brought the chaplain to plead their case. Most of them do not try that hard however. Others are called up that are just as positive that they have had their shots the day before and have swollen arms with needle marks to prove it, but if it is not on the record all pleadings are in vein (vain) and the man with the needle may be a little rougher this time just to show who is boss. After all, the record is the important thing. If I had my way each time a man was called up who had definite proof that his record was wrong I would turn him out and give his shots to the yeoman.

Let me relate a couple of instances that I witnessed first hand. One day in the shots line, the third man in front of me passed out, fainted, just as the striker was going to give him his shot. He fell backwards into the arms of the man behind, who caught him. The striker stuck the needle into the arm of the man who was holding the fainting man and gave him the shot. When they revived the boy who had fainted, they took him out, but recorded the shot as given to him. Then they grabbed the arm of the man who had caught him and jabbed the needle into his arm and shot him the second time. He tried to argue with them, but it was not recorded on his record, so there was nothing he could do to convince them. To coin a phrase, he was just stuck with it.

The other instance was a fellow just in front of me. The striker

grabbed his biceps, pinched it and jabbed it with the weapon. The needle went clear through the little bit of flesh that was pinched together, and the wall got the shot. It went eight feet across the room and hit the wall. The striker put down on this boy's chart that he had received the shot. That is just about as professional as they were at giving those shots in the busy, busy navy where I was.

Standing in the photography line is not too bad, but the shock upon first seeing the picture that will identify you while in the service may be bad for your blood pressure. A few of the other lines that we stood in which required varying degrees of patience were the geedunk (ice cream) line, the laundry line, the barber line, sick call line, the pay line, the movie line, pay your laundry bill line, small stores line, and especially the liberty line. For some unexplained reason, most of the officers who inspected liberty parties came 30 minutes late or in some way delayed the party about 30 minutes to cut their liberty short. I wondered if it was because they could not bring themselves to look at the I.D. pictures on the cards and try to match them to the persons who were going on liberty. Many officers seemed to resent passing liberty party inspections. Line standing does serve a definite purpose in the military during war time. It keeps the fighting men mad enough to fight.

After two months of rather pleasant duty in the office of the Puget Sound Navy Yard at Bremerton, Washington, on the 18th of January, 1943 I entered boot camp. This was quite a let down after having been in charge of an office detail. There was no prestige carryover. The second day in boot camp, the 19th of January we awoke to about 18 inches

of newly fallen, heavy, wet snow. This was the first snow to cover the ground in Seattle or Bremerton for many years. It tied up traffic, closed down the schools, and provided a real opportunity for the men in charge to see that we earned our money that day. Until about noon all of the men in the boot camp were shoveling snow all over the place. In the afternoon we went to the drill field. We had been provided with four-buckle overshoes and so, to complete the day's endurance test, we did a double time around the drill field, which amounted to at least 440 yards, in about twelve inches of snow.

We took our last shots near the end of the first week in boots, and I developed a bad cold and sore throat. I coughed a lot during that second week, especially during the nights, and became very unpopular among the other boots. One Friday night we were permitted to go as a body to a stage production on the base of Arsenic and Old Lace. I was too ill to go, but wanted to get away from the pressures of the barracks so much that I went anyway. I had never seen the play.

It was late when the show ended, but I asked permission to go to sick bay to get something for my cough. Of course permission was gladly granted. Upon arriving there, I was set on a chair, and a Pharmacist Mate put a thermometer in my mouth. In about a minute a fellow came along and pulled the thermometer out. The first man told him that it had not been in long enough. The second answered, "It's long enough. His temperature is 103.5." They did not send me back to the barracks, but put me in a bunk in sick bay and began to give me something for the cough. I spent either four or five days there before they could get my temperature down to normal. As soon as it was normal they sent me back

to the barracks. I was there a couple of days, then back in sick bay. Of my five weeks in boots, seven days were spent in Sick Bay. The illness was called "cat" fever, short for Catarrhal Fever. It was common among those who took so many shots in such a short period. After recovering, it was a long time before I had any real sickness of that nature again. I was able to complete all my requirements in boot training. Having been a Scoutmaster for many years, things like knot tying, first aid, and signaling came rather easy for me.

It would not be fair to leave Bremerton, Washington without paying tribute to their cockroaches. They were the largest and most persistent encountered during my three-year navy career. The San Francisco tribe at Treasure Island outnumbered them per square foot of area, but were not nearly as resourceful. All west coast and other humid cities had a good representation of these nocturnal predators, but when you say "Bremerton cockroaches," you say it all. After only a few days I was impelled to write an article about them, but who would believe tales about a cockroach thrusting out a crooked leg and tripping a sailor or stepping into a pair of navy issue shoes and clanking across the deck in the middle of the night? Suffice it to say that if you got a piece of pie in Seattle or Bremerton in those days on which the crust had not fallen, you should open it and chase the cockroaches out.

A friend in the boot camp just ahead of ours, learned three days before the end of his boot training that his group would be leaving for Chicago to begin their electronics school the next week. He went to the higher up officers and asked permission to leave three days early to have that much time in Pocatello to spend with his family in route to

Chicago. He was given permission and told me about it, suggesting that I ask for the same thing. In going through Pocatello I would have to take a bus or train to Idaho Falls to be home but that was only 50 miles.

As anticipated, we got the word three days before boot camp was to end that we would be leaving for Chicago the next week. I followed my friend's advice. Instead of going to the main office I started with my platoon leader and asked him how to go about applying for delayed travel time. He advised me to go to the main office. There they gave me permission, the orders and all the authorization I needed to leave that afternoon. I could catch a bus and get to Seattle, then a train out of Seattle that evening. About one o'clock in the afternoon I heard my name called over the P.A. system advising that I was to get in touch with the officer in charge of boot training, which I did. He really rolled me over the coals for going over his head in doing what I had done, because it was highly irregular and he would not allow it. He asked me who gave me the authority, so I told him that I had talked to the platoon leader first and that he had suggested that I go to the main office. He called the platoon leader in, and he verified what I had said. The officer cooled down a little and told me to go ahead but that he was really put out about it. En route to Chicago I got to spend three days with my family in Idaho Falls.

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Schools: Pre and Primary

I left Idaho Falls on the 24th of February, 1943 and arrived in Chicago on the 26th. A few interesting things happened in Chicago. About the first thing we did after arriving at the Naval Armory was to have an endurance test. The navy had a test worked out in which we did a certain number of exercises. I think there were eight events, all totaled, and we had to participate, or do each exercise to the extent of our endurance. There were sit-ups, push-ups, chin-ups, stationary running, etc., etc. We did each one until exhausted. I was still about 15 pounds over my normal weight, weighing about 180 pounds. I remember how difficult it was for me to chin myself a few times, not nearly as many as I had been doing in previous years. It was the same with some

of the other exercises. There were at least 100 students in this particular class. I felt pretty good when out of the whole group I rated number eight in total points.

The school there was a four week school held at the Naval Armory. We were identified as Class 4, Company F, Pre-radio. In the four weeks there they intended to eliminate those who obviously would not be qualified to complete the entire school. They made it a point to flunk out the lowest 25% of the classes. Only two subjects were taught. One was electricity using the basic formulas and equations in electrical circuits. The other subject was plain math, mostly arithmetic. Classes were very intensive. They, with meals and calisthenics, consumed fourteen hours a day, five and one half days each week. We had liberty from 1 P.M. Saturday until 7 A.M. Monday, when classes resumed.

In these two classes, which were very elementary, I was able to get high grades. My average for the four weeks in electricity was 99% and 97% in arithmetic, where I had missed one problem. They offered me a position, if I wanted to stay there a few months, (it might be one month or two or three) and be an instructor. They wanted me to teach electricity. That frightened me a little because most of the students who were coming in at that time were men who had been in colleges or universities for a couple of years in this field. I knew they would be far ahead of me in knowledge of electricity and the formulas and the mathematics that would go with it. Although these were not being used in the school at that time, I still was afraid that I would not qualify too well as an instructor of the better educated men. By then it had been almost thirteen years since I had graduated from High School. I

decided to pass up the offer.

I had an aunt, my mother's youngest sister, who lived in Chicago. She had three daughters. The first Sunday there I went to church in the ward I knew they lived in. When I arrived, it was Stake Conference instead of the regular ward meetings, and the building was overflowing. They were setting up chairs in the foyer, and I sat in a folding chair close to the door. Every chair in the place was filled except the one right beside me. About 15 minutes after the meeting started, my Aunt came in and sat down in the chair next to me. She did not have any idea that I was even in Chicago. I spent the next two weekends with her oldest daughter and her husband and their little son. While I was there their son had his first birthday and took his first step in walking.

I didn't get around very much in Chicago other than what they called the Loop on State Street and that area was not far from the armory where the school was. This Naval Armory was practically out on a pier on the lake. A large ramp connected the pier with the city so all we needed to do was walk across the ramp and get on one of the streets, and someone would always stop and give us a ride. People in Chicago were very friendly towards the servicemen and would help them in any way they could. There were not nearly as many servicemen there as there were in the coast towns, and the people just seemed to enjoy helping us and getting acquainted with us. I walked across the ramp and headed toward a street car to go to my cousin's place and three people in a car picked me up. They wanted to know were I was from. I told them I was from Idaho Falls, Idaho. The driver said, "Idaho Falls, Idaho! Isn't that were all the people live that have a hundred wives?"

I said, "Yes. Are you talking about the Mormons?"

He said, "Yes, the Mormons. Are you a Mormon?"

"Yes," I said, "I am a Mormon but I don't know anything about them having a hundred wives. The practice of polygamy was abolished in the Mormon church back in the 1890's, and it isn't practiced any more." I had a chance to talk to him for a while about the Church. They were very nice, very gracious people.

There is one thing that was of interest to me especially. Mary Cohan, George M. Cohan's widow, was at the USO one Saturday afternoon. She entertained a little bit. She was very modest about her ability to entertain, but we did get to hear her sing a song that her husband wrote for her. The name of the song is HER NAME WAS MARY. I guess he wrote it to justify the name of Mary instead of Marie, You are probably aware of the words to the song.

Now back to the school. When I declined the offer to stay on as an instructor in Chicago, they told me that I could have my choice of several schools for the next twelve weeks of what they called the primary training part. Up until this time they had had one of these schools at the Utah State University at Logan, Utah. Of course, that was my first choice because that was close enough to Idaho Falls that I could get home on Sundays. But the month that I was in Chicago was the last month they had the school in Logan. Therefore, I had to make another choice. My second choice was the Bliss Electrical School in Washington, D.C.

We left Chicago on a train March 26, 1943 for Washington, D.C., traveling overnight and arriving the next day about noon. A strange

thing happened en route. Shortly after dark on Friday night, March 26, as we were slowly going through Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, we passed the railroad water tank that furnished water in those days for the steam engines. The fellow sitting in the seat with me on the train suggested that we rearrange the seats and put the backs down as far as they would go so we could more or less lie down over night, at least lie back instead of sitting straight up. He stood up to turn, facing the seat and I leaned forward to release the catch under the seat. Just as I moved my head forward something crashed through the window right where I had been sitting for the last two or three hours. It flew through, breaking the windows and hitting the wall on the other side with such terrific force that it dented that metal wall. It was a large rock about the size of my head. It has always been a mystery to me how anyone could have thrown a rock through there or how a rock could have come through that double window with such force. It came timed exactly right. If I had not leaned forward, it probably would have killed me. I felt the breeze of it go past my neck.

Upon reaching Washington, D.C. about noon the next day, we were bussed out to the school, which was actually in Tacoma Park, Maryland. It was about nine miles out from the center of Washington, D.C. or from Pennsylvania Avenue, on which the White House is located. The street running in front of Bliss Electrical School is the dividing line between Washington, D.C. and Maryland. Although the address for the school was in Tacoma Park, Maryland, the school was actually closer to Silver Springs, Maryland than it was to Tacoma Park. This was a beautiful place with a well kept private school. They did not have the normal

naval facilities and chow halls such as we had known. For instance, they had a dining hall, and meals were served. It was a lot more home style than we had been used to so far in the navy. We were housed in the school's dormitory, which was organized so there were four men to a room with individual bunks. Here again, assignments were made alphabetically. My roommates' last names were Badham, Ballard, and Barline. They were all men of very high moral standard, studious men who were there to do their best, very fine persons to associate with. Ballard had actually been a minister in one of the protestant faiths but had resigned his ministry to join the navy in this electronics program. Chauncey Costin, who was about as old as I, lived in another apartment in the dormitory, but chose to associate with our group most of the time. At most of the places we visited, there were Costin, Badham, Ballard, and Bagley.

The first Sunday we were there was the 28th of March. These fellows learned that there was a Community Church within about a mile of the school and they wanted to know if I would go with them Sunday night. Since I did not yet know where the L.D.S. Church was and how to get there, I went with them. I told them I would go with them this week if they would go to church with me the next week. They agreed to do that.

This congregational church was nice and the paster was quite informal and an easy man to get along with. I enjoyed the service there that night. The next Sunday these three men went with me to the famous L.D.S. chapel in Washington, D.C. The bus went right from the school down close to the chapel so it was very easy to get to. It happened to

be Fast Sunday, and at that ward, there were servicemen as well as some politicians and various catagories of people in the congregation. They were from all over the United States. I think I never attended a more inspirational testimony meeting. It was quite interesting to watch my fellow sailors, the expressions on their faces, and the tears in their eyes when some of the high ranking men bore testimony to the truthfulness of the gospel.

I know that they were deeply touched, but I could never get them to go again to one of the L.D.S. meetings with me. I think they were afraid they would be converted.

They had firesides on Sunday evenings for the youth in the Community Church. I went with my three friends to one of them. The Reverend turned the meeting into a question and answer session. One of the young girls asked a question that was bothering her. She said that she had heard from people of other churches that the second coming of Christ would be a coming of Christ into the hearts of men. The attitude of men would change to become Christlike and this was the interpretation of the second coming. She had always thought that Christ would come personally. The minister said that, yes, there were two schools of thought. He said that he just could not answer and tell her exactly which was true. Then he threw the meeting open to other questions. After a few other questions had been considered, my friend, Chauncey Costin, raised his hand. When the Reverend called on him he said he was not satisfied with the answer about the second coming of Christ. He said he was a Methodist and that his friend here was a Presbyterian and his other friend here was a Mormon. We would like to have a little more

definite answer to that question. As soon as he said his other friend here was a Mormon, the pastor seemed to forget there was anyone else in the place. He said, "So you are a Latter-day Saint, are you?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "Would you like to tell us what the Mormons believe about the second coming of Christ?"

I replied, "I would be glad to."

"Come up to the pulpit," he responded, "and tell us what the Mormons believe about the second coming of the Savior." I went to the pulpit and took at least ten minutes explaining to them. I quoted the Tenth Article of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:

> We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion will be build upon this, [the American] continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and will receive its paradisiacal glory.

Then I enlarged on that for about ten minutes. After the meeting, as we were going toward the door to leave, some elderly men on the back row of the chapel stopped me and thanked me for the explanation and the talk. I had mentioned that we believed that we were living in the last days and that this was the last dispensation. Probably it would not be really long until the Savior came the second time. I found that these men were there as Elders of the Community Church, and they explained to me that they thought I had the timing about right, that we were getting near to the second coming. They seemed to be very much in harmony with what I had said.

Our school at Bliss began on the 29th of March. This was the same

type of intensive schooling that had prevailed in Chicago, with somewhat heavier subjects. The school had not yet been completely taken over by the navy as far as the teaching force was concerned. We had several of the Bliss Electrical School civilian instructors as well as some navy instructors. It was a very high class school with a most comprehensive treatise of all of the subjects. Classes began at seven in the morning. During the noon hour we had calisthenics, which took half of the time, giving us only 30 minutes for noon chow. I recall one day some of the sailors were clowning and goofing off a little during these calisthenics. The officer who was leading us in them went past the thirty minute time. He kept doing things over and over. Finally it dawned on these clowns that we were just going to stay there until they got down to business and did it right even if it took the whole noon hour. We had only about 10 minutes for chow after they caught on. We had only that one experience of anybody trying to goof off during calisthenics.

The calisthenics served a very good purpose in that school. If it had not been for them our brains would probably have stagnated, but having exercises in the middle of the day really helped the circulation through the brain. Some days we had drill formations instead of calisthenics. That was good, too. It kept us reminded of some of the things we had done in boot camp. We had classes again until five and most nights from six until nine o'clock. It was a very intensive training. During the twelve weeks at Bliss, we covered six basic subjects. They were theory, mathematics, electrical laboratory, mechanical laboratory, radio laboratory and mechanical drafting. There

came to be quite a popular saying going around the school: "Ignorance at Bliss."

It would be difficult to believe the in depth coverage that these various topics received in a twelve week period of time. For example, we covered the full course of high school algebra in two weeks with two periods each day. We covered trigonometry and logarithms. Another course we had for a week was vector algebra. By the time we had finished this three month course at Bliss they had flunked out another 15%, leaving 60% of those who had started in Chicago. I was able to graduate with an 84% grade.

During my stay there I spent as much of my liberty time as I could seeing the points of interest in the area. I spent a couple of Saturday afternoons in the Smithsonian Institute and could see that I would only scratch the surface there, even if I spent all twelve Saturdays. One Saturday afternoon Chauncey Costin and I went to a place called Glenn Echo Park, about 18 or 20 miles out of Washington, D.C. We had a really fun time riding all the rides out there. That was my first ride on a roller coaster.

Another Saturday I spent the afternoon seeing the Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Washington Monument and those places not far from the White House. Of course the White House grounds in those days were off limits to everybody. I did ride the elevator in the Washington Monument to the top and back which was very interesting. I also spent some time in the Department of Justice buildings.

One Saturday afternoon I walked from the White House to the Capitol on Pennsylvania Avenue. While going through with a group on a tour of

the Capitol Building, as I passed the main door at the top of the steps, I recognized a man coming up the steps. It was an old school friend of mine from St. Anthony, Idaho. This was a boy that I had gone through school with. From the time we were in the seventh grade through high school, we were together. His name is Wid Coffin. I broke away from the touring group and went down to meet him. He had come to see a Representative from Idaho about some matter. It was surely good to see an old friend way out there in Washington, D.C. We spent the rest of the afternoon together catching up on old times. I had not seen Wid for nearly 10 years, and I did not see him again until March, 1986 in Costa Rica, Central America.

Although I was in Washington, D.C. during the cherry blossom time, I did not see any cherry blossoms. It was so cold that year that the cherry trees didn't blossom. I have always felt cheated about that. Will Rogers used to say, "If you don't like the weather in Washington, D.C., wait a minute." I think that is true, but one thing you can always depend on is that it is going to be humid.

One day I washed a pair of my dress blues pants, spread them out neatly with no wrinkles, and put them under my mattress to press them. After about seven or eight days I took them out to wear and noticed that there was a bunch of green stuff on the seat of the pants. When I tried to brush it off, I found it was mold. It had, in that length of time, rotted through the fabric. It cost me a pair of dress blues pants. They had specially equipped drying rooms there where we could dry our clothes by putting them under a fan, which could actually dry them in spite of the humidity. I never tried pressing pants under a mattress

anywhere after that.

Our graduation exercises at Bliss Electrical School, on June 18, 1943, were quite elaborate. We had the Navy School of Music Band and a couple of speakers. Some of the parents and friends of the students were able to attend. Once again, because of my grades, I was permitted to choose the advanced training school that I wanted to attend. The choice was between a radar for aircraft school in Corpus Christi, Texas, and the Radio Materiel School at Treasure Island, California, for ground and sky search radar and other electronic devices. The latter incorporated a very comprehensive course in electronic engineering. Inasmuch as I was in the navy to learn as much as I could and to have a vocation after the war, I wanted to get all the in-depth training possible. I chose the school at Treasure Island. Both schools were for a period of six months.

In the afternoon of June 18, 1943, the same day as our graduation exercises, those of us assigned to the Radio Materiel School on Treasure Island, boarded a train to Chicago. We changed trains in Chicago and headed west and south on the Santa Fe Route. We sailors were all in one car (or two as needed), going to San Francisco together. We crossed the Mississippi River, which at that time was in a very severe flood stage. It seemed to me there were almost 100 miles that we were crossing water in the area of St. Louis, Missouri, near where the Mississippi and the Missouri Rivers converge. Houses and buildings were floating in the water with signs of destruction everywhere.

An interesting thing happened on this train trek across the southern United States. A car just to the rear of ours had a

contingency of Marines. They were always in their dress uniforms and wearing their hot, wool jackets. At every stop, if we were going to be there a few minutes the Marine Sergeant had his men out of the train and on the platform or at the side of the tracks doing calisthenics, very vigorous exercising. At Albuquerque, New Mexico we were stopped for about 30 minutes. These Marines were out there in the heat and burning sunshine doing calisthenics for quite a while. Finally the Sergeant let them go into the station to get some refreshments - some pop or something. Most of them came out and got on the train in plenty of time, but a few of them were almost too late to catch it when the train started to move out. Everybody eventually got on but the drill Sergeant. He ran fast and was able to catch hold of the last bar at the end of the train, but he could not get his feet up onto the step. He finally had to let go to skid and roll in the gravel along the side of the tracks. In our imagination, we could almost hear the Marines cheering. At the next station stop the train had to wait for the drill Sergeant to get there, and it took a little while. When he arrived he had one arm in a sling, and he was patched up with scratches on his face and arms. We did not see any more Marine drills after that.

When we got to southern California we went north through San Jose and San Francisco, then out in the Bay to Treasure Island, where we arrived Friday, June 25. We had been a whole week making this trip, which was really very nice. We had an air conditioned train car and although there were no bunks, there were really nice accommodations, and meals were served. When we hit Treasure Island that life of luxury was all over. We were back in the real navy for the duration.

4

Treasure Island: The Final Test

The class scheduling here was similar to what it was at Bliss Electrical School, but the subject matter was much deeper and it kept 'ol man' Bagley really going to keep up and make a passing grade. Each month that passed, it seemed that I comprehended a little less and got a little farther behind. At the end of six months, I was probably one of the lowest in the class to graduate. In between the time we started the school at Treasure Island and graduation they had flunked out another 20% of those who had started the school in the first place. Now at graduation time we were down to 40% of those who had started the course. I did not feel too badly about getting low grades, especially when they began coming up with circuits where the electrons were running

in opposite directions from where we had been taught they were going in the previous schools. If it had not been that I was pretty good in the lab work, I would not be telling about this now. I got high grades in my lab work in putting things together. We had a few new subjects here at Treasure Island. There was a course in Navigation and one in Underwater Sound Equipment as well as the advanced courses in electronics. We did have some radar equipment to work on here that we had not had in the other schools.

For our graduation exercises on December 10, 1943 they had a navy admiral come and speak to us and rejuvenate us in our thinking. He explained that of all the applications the navy had received for this course they accepted only the top 20%. Only 40% of that 20% made it through to graduation. That placed even the lowest in the graduating class among the top 8% of those who had applied to take the training. That boosted our ego a little. The Admiral told us that every university in California, Washington, and Oregon would give to the graduates of this school two full years credit on electronic engineering courses. So when the war was over, if anyone wanted to present their diploma from this school to any one of the Universities in those three states they would receive credit for two years of electronic schooling. I have never heard whether or not this proved true.

We had excellent recreation facilities at Treasure Island with an hour off every afternoon for an activity of our choice. Those who could not swim had to take swimming instruction and practice. For others there was a variety of things including a gymnasium, a library for study and reading, and various games. I was able to make the basketball team,

playing center for our dormitory. There were four dormitories with approximately 65 men in each, with each dorm having one team. We had a tournament and, of course, our team won.

I am sure this recreation was necessary in order to keep fresh supplies of blood and oxygen stimulating our brains. In the evening we also had an hour before lights out after classes so that we could do a little visiting or clowning around in the dorm before the quiet time was started.

There was enough hanky panky here to keep things interesting in spite of all the regimentation. It was not uncommon for a man to come off of his weekend of liberty and find his bunk on top of the third bunk in a stack. It would take help to get it down. Or maybe his locker would be all wired up solid with bailing wire and padlocked. Such pranks as that, although no one seemed to get into serious trouble over them, had me trying my hand at it one night. We had a fellow named Curl (last name) who was quite a prankster, a real likable type of a guy but he was always making life interesting for someone. One night the inspecting officer came into the barracks after lights were out to check everything. From my top bunk I could see him through the window as he left. The windows were all open, so I said loud enough for him to hear, "My name is Curl and I can whip any officer in this man's navy." The officer (a Lieutenant) stopped and stood still there for about ten or fifteen seconds. No one else made a sound and he finally walked off. I had Curl thinking for a moment.

During the nearly six months that we were there, I attended various wards in the L.D.S. Church on Sundays. From Treasure Island, it was

easy to get to any desired location in the Bay area. Trains ran from San Francisco to Oakland every half hour, and vice versa across the Oakland Bay Bridge. They all stopped on Goat Island, at the south end of Treasure Island, in the Bay. Bus stops were in close proximity to the train terminals in the two cities. I visited the Sunset Ward in San Francisco, and a few others, but most of the time, I went to the Berkeley Ward in Berkeley, California because that just seemed the right place to go. They had a good system there for entertaining and welcoming servicemen. Instead of going to someone's home, during the time between Sunday School and Sacrament Meetings, various members of the ward brought a sort of pot luck dinner so that during the two hour break the servicemen could eat. Sometimes we had testimony meetings or just visited, getting acquainted. It was a real fine atmosphere and a place where the men liked to go. So that is where I went during the last three months of school.

I went to the San Francisco Zoo a few times, and also Fisherman's Wharf, Knob Hill, Twin Peaks, and all those places. I did a lot of hiking around on my Saturday afternoons off. Sundays between meetings when I went to the San Francisco Ward I sometimes walked all the way through the Golden Gate Park to the coast and back. That was about four miles each direction. There was a really nice USO facility in San Francisco that was located on or near Powell Street. On some Saturday evenings two or three of us would go there to enjoy the entertainment and play chess. There were several of us who played chess and found this to be very relaxing. Another thing interesting to me was to take the trolley up Grant Street which at the upper end is China Town. I went

there a few times.

San Francisco cockroaches were second in size only to those in Bremerton, Washington. What San Francisco lacked in the size of their cockroaches, it made up for in sand fleas. The sand fleas were terrific there and kept me chewed up all the time, especially around the ankles. I finally learned toward the end of my stay there that they nestled in the hem of the shower curtains and every time you took a shower you subjected yourself to them if they liked you. The majority of the sailors were not bothered by them at all. I guess they really liked my pure blood, or something, because they made life miserable for me.

In each of the navy schools I attended the students were grouped together alphabetically. Most of those I became acquainted with had last names that began from A to D.

As stated previously, I was about at the bottom of the class. I did not compare grades with anyone else, but I do not think many would have graduated with less than the scholastic grade in Theory of 67%. However, comparatively, my lab grades were quite high. The man who graduated in our class with the highest grade was a small fellow we called Chris. His name was Vernon George Christensen. He graduated from the school with the highest grade that anyone had ever made there. Chris who was about 20 years old, had been to the University of Washington for one year. I suppose his weight was not much over 100 pounds.

Because of his high scholastic achievement, Chris was offered his choice of any duty he wanted in the electronic field. He asked if he could stay on as an instructor at Treasure Island, but they talked him

out of it because of his size and the fact that he did not have a very strong voice. They feared he would not be able to command the respect of the sailors and keep the discipline that was required. That was a big disappointment to him, so from the options he had for other duty, he chose to go aboard a baby aircraft carrier that was being outfitted at Astoria, Oregon. He was told there would be two technicians aboard this carrier and he could have his choice of any man in the school to go with him. He gave them my name. That is quite a spread -- from the top to the bottom. I was called in and given my assignment. Naturally, I had to ask Chris why he chose me when there were quite a few smart guys there that would likely be of more help to him. He said, "I have watched you through ten months of school and you have always tended to business. You have worked hard. Some other men have asked me to choose them, but I know all they want to do is go with somebody that can do the work that needs to be done. I know that they have it in their minds that this is a chance to goof off and take it easy."

This was quite flattering to me, of course, but I later wondered if his choice had not been partially influenced by watching me play chess. He probably thought, "Here is someone I can beat."

There were two catagories of duty in the navy that I had always hoped to avoid. One was K.P. or galley duty in the kitchen, which I was fortunate enough to avoid all during my three years in the navy. The other was Shore Patrol. I got by about the first 11 months without any Shore Patrol, but in spite of the busy schedules we had at school at Treasure Island, during October of 1943 I was assigned to Shore Patrol twice. The first was on a Saturday afternoon. The second a Saturday

evening. The Saturday afternoon I was assigned to the Berkeley Stadium, University of California, to a football game. It was a game between the University of California at Berkeley and University of Southern California, Los Angeles. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon. My assigned station was in the student body section where there were practically no sailors. About all that duty consisted of was watching the football game, standing up.

On the Saturday night assignment, Richard Baggott and I were sent to downtown Oakland. Needless to say, there were bars and lots of attractions for sailors. We had four hours of walking up and down the streets hoping nothing would happen. A fellow came running up to us, all excited, and said there was a man about a block and a half away beating his wife. "She is down on the side walk and he is beating her." We ran there as fast as we could. This was not a sailor that was in trouble, and we were only assigned to the shore patrol for sailors. It was a dark street and sure enough there was this gal on the sidewalk and a man standing over her, but he was not beating her. He was trying to get her up onto her feet. As it turned out she was so intoxicated that she could not stand up and he was trying to help her. We got a policeman to come and take care of them.

As we were walking down one of the main streets, we heard a loud argument going on in one of the bars. We looked in and saw that it was crammed full of sailors. They were having some kind of an argument, as if they were almost ready to break into a gang fight. We were scared, but decided to go in. As soon as we did, everybody started to quiet down. After just a few minutes, the tension subsided and we left. That

was the extent of the problems we had that night on Shore Patrol.