



Mel Goertz

U.S. Navy

August 1950-August 1954

Radioman 2nd

Mel Goertz graduated from high school in Enid, Oklahoma in 1949. A friend let him know that he and two buddies were on the Draft Board list to be drafted in November, later that year. Mel, therefore, decided to enlist in the Navy while one friend joined the U.S. Air Force and the other decided to wait to be drafted.

In August 1950 Mel was sent to San Diego to boot camp for about 12 weeks. He had decided that he wanted to be an air controller, working on an aircraft carrier or at a Naval Air Station. The recruiter gave him some bad information by telling him that he would need to go to radio school which was another 10 or so weeks. When radio school was complete, he was sent to the USS George C Clymer, an APA or amphibious troop and cargo ship as a radio operator. Typical of the service, they send you where they need you.

During this time, many of the WWII soldiers, sailors and marines were being called back to duty due to the escalating conflict in Korea (Korean War or Korean Police Action). Early in 1951, Mel reported to the Clymer as a radio operator and remained on the Clymer, home ported in San Diego, until he was discharged in August of 1954. During Mel's time on the ship, it took part in two amphibious operations (putting troops and cargo ashore) on the Korean peninsula. The Clymer was the 'flag ship' for a flotilla which included the USS Los Angeles, a cruiser, and an aircraft carrier, among others. 'Flag ship' meant that there was an Admiral or Commodore aboard during certain operations. Since the Clymer was a troop/cargo ship, one of their duties was to ferry troops to Hong Kong for R&R. Of course, some of the Clymer sailors got leave in Hong Kong as well.

Mel reported to the ship as a Seaman Apprentice (E-2) but was promoted through Seaman to 3rd Class Petty Officer (E-4) by late 1951. It turns out that there was a dearth of radio operators on active duty and, as an E-4, Mel was the senior radio operator among the enlisted men. He ultimately made 2nd Class (E-5) and probably could have made E-6 if he had taken the test in 1954 but opted out since he was planning to muster out of the Navy later that year.

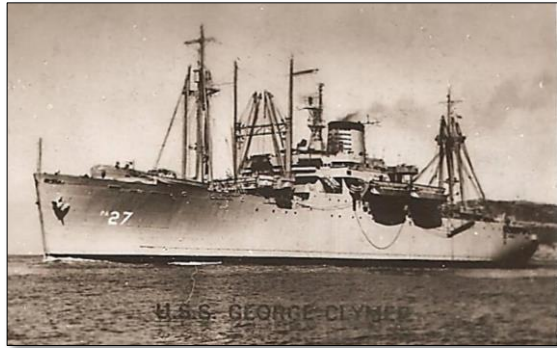


INTERESTING STORIES

Bed Check Charlie was a North Korean aircraft which used to harass the U.S. troops by flying toward the ships and ground troops around 10pm at night while staying out of range of the shore anti-aircraft batteries. This caused all of the sailors to go to General Quarters with everyone manning their battle stations. One night when

Charlie was approaching, there was the sound of anti-aircraft fire. Charlie never showed up again. Apparently, someone had moved shore batteries farther inland and Charlie bit the dust that night.

One day on liberty, Mel and friends went snorkeling in the LaJolla cove, just North of San Diego. They decided to go up to Mount Palomar in the afternoon....where it was snowing!



U.S.S. George Clymer

Over Christmas/New Years of 1951/52, the Clymer was tasked with swapping regiments of Army troops between Japan and Korea. During this event, the Clymer was asked to rescue a Japanese troop ship which had run aground between Korea and Japan. Meanwhile, a typhoon was coming through the area and, although the Clymer could not perform the rescue during the typhoon, they stayed on station during the high winds and high seas rather than seeking shelter in port. Talk about "rocking and rolling"! The following day was calm enough to pick up the Japanese troops.

One of Mel's commanding officers (CO) was expecting a radio message from his wife who was about to deliver a baby. Mel was instructed to wake up the CO as soon as the message came. Well, about 2am (0200 hours), Mel delivered the message..."fixtures mine, features yours". It was a girl who resembled her father.

While in the Philippine Sea one time, the water was as smooth as glass so the CO stopped the ship (dead in the water) and let all hands go swimming. When it was announced that the depth of the water at that location was approximately one mile, there were many sailors who decided to get out of the water. Meanwhile, after everyone was back on the ship, a 'very large' shark was seen swimming around the ship.

OBSERVATIONS

Mel found that he was well suited for the Navy and enjoyed his tour of duty. He found that his own self-discipline (raised in the Mennonite church) was of significant benefit. He also found that he was able to develop some leadership and teaching skills in his role as a senior radio operator. Since he had no idea what he wanted to do when he mustered out of the Navy in August 1954, he took the entrance exams for the University of Oklahoma and started out majoring in math but ultimately graduated with a degree in education. That was followed by more than 50 years in the education field. Mel also has served in various capacities at Stone Church for more than 30 years.

If Mel has any regrets, it is not following up with some of his shipmates and others he met in his four years in the Navy. His Naval service was pleasant and provided him with four years of maturity while he tried to figure out what to do with the rest of his life and he was able to travel to and see many parts of the world that would have been out of reach to him as a civilian.

~ by Bill Ribble