

VETERAN: WILLIAM STEWART
HIGHEST RANK/GRADE: CHIEF M.M. MACHINIST 1ST CLASS
INTERVIEWED BY: NANCY SELLERS

It was the year 1942 in Atlanta, Georgia, where a young man by the name of William L. Stewart decided he wanted to join the Navy to help defend the country that he so deeply loved. At the time, he felt that the 1940 draft was necessary during war time, but it didn't take the draft to make him join--he signed up all on his own. To this day, he supports the draft policy and would fight if he was needed. He felt a sense of responsibility to keep his family safe.

The recruit training came from Williamsburg, Virginia, Camp Perry. Later he trained for special forces, Navy Seabees, heavy construction, then took on ground duty because there was a need for more men. After training, he was stationed at Little Creek, Virginia. It was there he found out that they were being shipped overseas. The reaction was, "I'm ready--let's go!". The ship's destination was Germany, departure was the Potomac River, Maryland. The men aboard didn't know the destination until they arrived. With the surroundings being very different, he accepted and adapted to the change on a day to day basis. The Navy briefed them really well about the country in which they were stationed, and they handled the civilians overseas before, during, and after hostilities like any good American would in time of war.

There were not any unlawful acts of looting or drugs in his unit, and fraternizing with local women wasn't much. Of course, keep in mind that these men were fighting a war, and not taking an easy vacation. The only type of entertainment was an occasional movie, most of the men in their spare time would play cards or dream of coming home.

When Pearl Harbor was bombed, the news came over the radio; the men knew it was time to fight, and fight to win! Leadership at this point was really put to the test, and it came shining through with no problems at all in his unit. The weapons they were issued were mostly good, but they did get some bad ones.

As far as discipline and military courts of justice, there were no harsh or particular punishments for breaches of discipline, and there wasn't time for deserters. They were all dedicated sailors. Papers like *Stars and Stripes* were okay, but being on a ship they were always on the move and didn't receive newspapers very often. When papers did arrive, they weren't current.

Combat action was against Germans and the Japanese. All he could think of was doing his job well so he could go home. There were times of bitterness among the men, but mostly it was good. Some things that helped morale were letters from home and time off to take a deep breath. He felt that the Army Troop Information program did the best they could with all the bad enemy propaganda that was going around.

Most of the men took comfort in knowing that God was real and He was the Supreme Being. Mr. Stewart said that his reaction to being a replacement on the front lines was completely unnerving, because it was the unknown--but that's fighting a war. He explained his reaction to the "baptism of fire" as having only the thought of trying to survive. A typical day when his unit was committed to the front lines was a time to be alert, face and overcome any task that presented itself. Their fire support was good, but when the enemy gave them an air attack, his first thought was to take cover, while your mind is running in circles. The medical care really depended on the circumstances as to whether how good or bad it was. His unit always had enough supplies and rations.

Talking to this man gave me a sense of pride and comfort just knowing that if there was a need these men would, without a doubt, stand up for our country. Mr. Stewart made it home, just like he dreamed, but he will always carry the scars of war. This man gives of his time freely to any organization, and has been a Mason for many years. He works closely with the Shriners Hospital and would do anything for a child in need. I feel that the younger generation could learn a lot from these men and women. The one thing that drives him to do better and help others is his thankfulness for his own life. Pappa's closing statement was, "God bless America, the land of the free."