

## CHAPTER VI - I ENLIST IN THE NAVY

Now as a legal adult, I no longer needed my parent's permission to join the military. The Navy and the Marine Corps had replaced the Army as my first choice. The Marines had a slight edge over the Navy because they seemed to be in the thick of things in Korea, and I wanted to be a part of it. I decided to join the Marine Corps as soon as I could. I entered the recruiter's office all gung ho and ready to sign. Instead of just letting me sign up, the recruiter felt a need to "recruit" me. He went into a recruiting spiel that covered all the reasons I should become a Marine. He finished his routine spiel and then, just as I was about to sign, he started up again. He just didn't know when to shut up. He told me that if I joined one of the other branches I would have to sleep with "niggers", (his words, not mine.) Less than a week before, I had read a news item stating that President Truman had just signed an executive order desegregating all of the Armed Forces. He didn't say everyone except the Marines. Catching him in such a blatant lie, I walked out of the Marine Recruiters office and stepped into the Navy recruiter's office next door. I joined the Navy.

I felt good about joining the Navy. My Uncle Ira was a Chief Boatswain Mate in the Navy and I wanted to be like him. Uncle Ira was one of my childhood heroes. He was married to my mother's sister, Aunt Margaret. He had joined the Navy before the start of World War II. Our entry into that war led to a period of intense patriotism. Americans stood tall and our men in uniform stood even taller. Almost immediately after the shock of Pearl Harbor, the American Navy took the initiative and began winning this global war. Uncle Ira was a big part of that. Uncle Ira had the honor of serving aboard the historic USS Indianapolis.

The USS Indianapolis was the Heavy Cruiser that transported the atomic bombs to Tinian, a forward base in the Pacific. These were the atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ending the war. After unloading her lethal top secret cargo the Indianapolis was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese submarine. Uncle Ira had been transferred off of the Indianapolis only a few months before this fateful mission. This tragedy cost the lives of almost every friend and shipmate that Ira had. This tragedy would haunt Uncle Ira until the day he died.

By joining the Navy, I was following in Uncle Ira's footsteps. I wanted to start out as a Coxswain as he had in his earlier years. Coxswains are the sailors that land the Marines onto hostile beaches for the glory of God and country. I wanted to progress up the ranks and eventually become a Chief Boatswain Mate, just as my Uncle Ira had.

Before accepting my application to join, the recruiter had me take an aptitude test. Unfortunately for me, I aced it. The recruiter said that mine was the first perfect score that he had ever seen. He then told me that I was too smart to be a boatswain, those persons with high IQ's were all placed in submarine service or into naval aviation. Since I was obviously too tall to be a submariner, I would be assigned to Naval Aviation as an airman recruit. I told the recruiter that if I couldn't be a seaman recruit and be allowed to strike for boatswains mate that I would go down the hall and join the Army. The recruiter relented, and I was enlisted as a seaman recruit.

## NOW ALL I NEED IS TO PASS THE PHYSICAL

Even though I was enlisted as a Seaman Recruit and had received a recruiter's promise that I would be allowed to become a boatswain mate, the Navy had other ideas. It seems that the Navy already had enough boatswain mates but was short on aviation technicians. In those days, aviation technicians were referred to with contempt as "airdales" by general service sailors. Now for the good of the Navy, I was destined to become a contemptible airdale.

Airdales and boatswain mates didn't exactly run in the same circles. Historically, boatswain mates have always been a prestigious "left arm rating." Men serving as boatswain mates have stood as the backbone of the Navy since the glory days of John Paul Jones. From my point of view, the Navy had promised me a shot at becoming a boatswain mate and then had reneged.

The next day I was in Houston for my physical. I was strip naked standing in line among a hundred or more shivering recruits waiting to receive my induction physical. During my physical, I was measured, weighed, bent over and ordered to cough on cue. I was also questioned about my sex life and given a series of inoculations. Of all the inoculations, the most feared was the "Square needle in the left nut" shot. This wasn't really a shot. It was a joke that some idiot had thought up to scare the gullible. Having shared a good deal of pain and humiliation at this point, most of us were mentally prepared to believe in the fictitious square needle. It never happened of course but most of us were ready to believe almost anything.

Except for the height-weight part of the physical, I had passed with flying colors. I cheated to stay under the height limit by slumping down a bit. I stepped on the scales, and the needle measured me as being ten pounds under the minimum for my recorded height. The height-weight chart only went up to 6'4" and the minimum for that height was 169 pounds. The doctor looked at the scales and asked me, "How bad do you want in?" I answered, "Pretty bad, Doc." The doctor gave me a little grin and added the ten pounds I needed to qualify.

Following the physical we were "sworn in," loaded into busses and taken directly to the Houston train station. We then boarded our train and, we were on our way to the Naval Training Center (NTC) at San Diego. After the 1500 mile train ride to San Diego, we were treated to another bus ride. After a short 30 minute ride we arrived at the Naval Training Center. The bus took us to a large outdoor assembly area on the base where we were met by an old Chief Petty Officer who informed us that he was our Company Commander. The "old" 704 had graduated, just before we arrived and we would have to stand around until they vacated the barracks that was to be our new home.

## BOOT CAMP

NTC, also referred to as Boot Camp, was operating at full capacity, in the summer of 1951. NTC was training recruits as part of the build-up that was necessary to win the Korean Conflict. For the first five weeks, our entire company was in routine quarantine. We were kept in minimum contact with the rest of the camp so that if any of us had anything contagious, it could be localized. On the first full day of our quarantine period, we were given a boot camp haircut, a full sea bag of clothes and an M-1 rifle, for marching. Then with our rifles on one shoulder and our sea bags on the other, we marched to our barracks. Marching was the routine of

the day. We marched everywhere we went. We marched to chow. We marched to lectures. We marched just to be marching. At the end of the day we were marched back to the barracks, told to shower, and then ordered to write a letter home to our mothers.

In the weeks that followed, we spent a lot of time learning the Navy way of cleaning ourselves and our barracks. We also learned how to wash and “roll” our clothes and how to stand a proper military watch. In the Navy, you turned the shower on just for a second, just long enough to get your body wet. Then you lather up and scrub your entire body. Next you turn the shower back on just long enough to rinse off the soap. The barracks floors had to be clean enough to eat off of. Your clothes had to be hand scrubbed and tied to the Company clothes line using clothes stops. Clothes stops are short lengths of heavy cord that are used like clothes pins except that the clothes are tied to the clothes line instead of fastening them with clothes pins. After the clothes are dry, they are taken down and “rolled.” After each item of clothing is “rolled” it is tied off using clothes stops and stored in the sea bag. They are now ready for wear, or ready for inspection.

About midway through Boot Camp, the Navy began granting us “Liberty.” We were allowed to leave the base from noon to 10:p.m. every Saturday unless you had the “Duty.” “Liberty” is the word that the Navy uses to describe the time a sailor is legally away from his ship or base that is not charged as “Leave” (vacation time). Having the “Duty” is the time a sailor is required to remain on board his ship or station to maintain security and keep things running on an even keel.

### MY FIRST LIBERTY

I was absolutely thrilled when I was granted my first Liberty. Aunt Margaret and Uncle Ira who lived in Navy housing in La Jolla, a suburb of San Diego, met me at the main gate and took me to their house for a good home-cooked meal. Afterwards they took me out to Mission Beach to soak up some sun and have some fun. My idea of fun was hanging out with Uncle Ira and playing “acey-ducey.” Acey-ducey is the Navy’s version of the civilian board game, backgammon. Aunt Margaret had other ideas, however. She thought that now that I was an all-American Bluejacket, I needed some sex in my life. As Ira and I played our game, Aunt Margaret scouted the area trying to find me a girlfriend. I was relieved that Aunt Margaret failed in her mission to get me laid.

On another Liberty, I decided to take the bus out to Aunt Margaret’s instead of asking them to pick me up. To get to their house, Aunt Margaret told me that I had to take the La Jolla bus. What I heard her say was La Hoya and not La Jolla. I stood at the bus stop for a couple of hours waiting for the La Hoya bus, but the only buses that ever came around were the La Jolla buses. I finally asked one of the La Jolla bus drivers about the La Hoya bus. He explained that La Jolla was the Spanish spelling for what was pronounced La Hoya.

About midway through boot camp, we spent a lot of time taking aptitude tests. As I remember, it was a series of four tests each having a time limit of about two hours. These tests covered general aptitude, mechanical ability, mathematical ability and clerical ability. I scored in the top ten percent on all four tests. This was good in that it documented that I wasn’t an idiot, but it really hurt my chances of ever becoming a Boatswains Mate. The counselor that was assigned to me said that my IQ was too high to be Boatswains Mate. He gave me a list of all the

career fields in the Navy and a piece of paper for me to sign indicating my first and second preferences. I listed Boatswains Mate as my first choice and Photographers Mate as my second. The Counselor thumbed through a notebook and an assortment of documents and then told me that I was qualified to strike for Photographers Mate, but I would have to go to Airman School as a prerequisite. I signed the document and upon graduation I was issued orders to Airman School at the Naval Air Technical Training Center (NATTC) at Jacksonville, Florida.