

Charles L. Gott

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Question: So, it's interesting, cause you've touched on something that, without me even asking the question, it sounds like the camaraderie-ship was pretty unique.

Answer: There is no, there's only a few things that meet the criteria of a shipmate. A shipmate is a guy you're confined with over an extended of time and you're all in it together regardless of what your background is. I mean, you all have a common objective.. is to kill the enemy and go home.. and hope that you live. And it's, a shipmate is a unique relationship and it is apparent that every one of these reunions that I go to cause you could meet people that you've known all your life and you don't have this same relationship that you have with a "shipmate." It's, it is a unique relationship that develops.

Question: Unspoken bond.

Answer: Unspoken bond. That's good, that's good, yeah. It's that.

Question: Cause I know when uh... a lot of the Marines I've talked to whichever branch of the service you're in, that when they see the patch or they hear the hoo...yah or there's something that is..

Answer: Absolutely, yep, uh huh.

Question: And you just, and it doesn't care if they were in the same battle together, the same war together, they understand.

Answer: They understand what it's like, what it is to be in the service. Many of them think the same way, you know, it's a.. Their purpose in life is to do what they've taken the oath to do is to protect the country and protect themselves and do whatever your commander in chief tells you to do. And in the main, that's, they're dedicated to it. That's been my experience in it.

Question: What was the best part?

Answer: Well, the best part of being in the Navy was really going to sea and that's...I love going to sea. I just think the ocean is normally a great place to be and there are a few things you know... you run into storms and, but you have your good parts and the up, the (inaudible). If you haven't been... if you've never seen the green flash from a ship at sea it's hard to understand but it's all part of the life at sea, and it's good... I liked it. It's very pleasant and you could be out there in the middle of that ocean. A lot of times I've been in ships, particularly in the icebreaker. We were the only ship around, the only one and we traveled independently most of the time. With destroyers you frequently are in groups of, battle groups or divisions, seldom travel independently but some ships you do and that's really a wonderful experience. Now I've just, the best part about it was just going to sea. I liked that.

Question: What's the best time of day on a ship?

Answer: Sunset, absolutely, after an evening meal and you go up on the watch on the bridge. For me this is, I was a deck officer all the time. I was never an engineering officer so I didn't spend a lot of time on duty below deck. But after evening meal and to go up and watch the sunset and the stars come out it's just a gorgeous time, a great experience. But I suppose you could do that here but it's a

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different environment, different occasion so it's, to me it was really the best part of going to sea.

Question: We've talked to a lot of pilots and we've talked to them about their bond to their plane. To some a plane was just a plane. To some it almost had a life. Was your ship just a ship or..?

Answer: Well, when I was a sailor or a junior officer attached to a ship it was basically a ship. You would change duty stations every two years, something like that. And you go from one ship to another ship so it was a ship and it was a job you had to do. But I've been commanding officer of two different ships, a minesweeper and an icebreaker. And when you're the commanding officer of it, it's a different situation. It's, it is your home and it is your complete responsibility to see that this thing functions as a unit and it's different when you're, when you're the commanding officer of it. And I suppose it's sort of like them pilots, their airplanes, they're the only guy up there. They're responsible for it and it's, it's their thing so I think that a ship is different when you're the commanding officer of it than it is when you're just an officer attached to it or a person attached to it for duty for a period of time.

Question: When you get together at your reunions what do you talk about? Do you talk about the war or about everything other than the war?

Answer: More sea stories are told about the war and they're told over and over again every two years when we have these things. And people bring their memorabilia and it always shows up and you hope somebody new comes around so that you can tell them about it. Yeah, it, a lot of people talk about what's going on in the world today and situations in international tensions and that sort of thing. But that's not the purpose of this reunion. This reunion is to get people together who you knew fifty, sixty years ago and you served with and you were along side him when that torpedo hit and you both had the same scared feeling and it's just a get together of old friends. And you don't intend to solve the problems of the world, we intend to have a good time together.

Question: Do you, if you were to close your eyes or to, I don't know if you dream about your time, in your mind is it still all those young boys..

Answer: Yes..

Question: On that ship?

Answer: Yes, yes, that's the way I remember; that's the way I remember. Even though I see them every two years now... whatever is left ... whoever shows up. It is still, it's sort of like that picture I showed you when I came in here of me as a youngster. That's the way I visualize all these kids, all these people and I, the guys, you know; you're not playing with that old thud, you're talking with the guy you knew fifty years ago and reliving things. I don't know, a lot of people say it's a waste of time but I enjoy it; and they're still very good friends.

Question: What are some of the names and nicknames that, because a lot of times history books have de...personalized war? They aren't real people, but you served with real people..

Answer: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

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Question: Who are some of the names and nicknames that..?

Answer: Well there was Spud. His name, his name was Henry and I'm not exactly sure what his real first name was but he's Spud and he's still alive and he lives back in Virginia, near Norfolk, not in Norfolk but anyway he lives back in Virginia. He comes to our reunions. There's Flags.. and Flags, Flags was a signalman and his real name is ... it doesn't matter his, can't remember right now, but, Fred Lamp; that's his real name, Fred Lamp and he was a signalman and he was always called Flags. And there was a man by the name of Peck, Peck Brown; and Peck was a great guy from Minnesota. He was a troublemaker. He led me astray a number of times but Peck was a great man. When he got out of the Navy after the war he went back to Minnesota and he became a high school teacher and a football coach and he had a reputation in the state of Minnesota and just was unbelievable. So he was great for kids and Peck is, recently had a stroke and he sponsored the last reunion. He was sponsor of it up in Duluth, Minnesota. His daughter did most of the work but Peck was there.

Question: It sounds like he didn't have to work too hard to lead you astray though..

Answer: We, we, we were, we were friends. We were friends. We enjoyed the same sort of things and he was all right.

Question: Do you think, and again I guess it's kind of a fitting time, with all that's going on and here we are on the brink of war today it sounds like and, is there a message or something that the history books have left out that we need to let the future generations know about World War II?

Answer: Well, I, not being a history teacher or anything that, I don't what everybody knows about it anymore, I do know that my grandson doesn't know a lot about what went on, doesn't know much about what World War II was about. I don't that he cares but he certainly asks me a lot of interesting questions when we're together. So there's a certain amount of curiosity about what went on and the current situation may instill some questions that people want to know. Okay, what was it like when? And I hope it does because it, they should know these sort of things. There was a lot of people made big sacrifices during World War II so that this country can be what it is today. And I think they should know it.

Question: Did it change the world do you think?

Answer: World War II? I'm not sure that it did. I'm not sure that it did. We still have tyranny. We still have power plays and all around the world and the same kind of problems we're approaching that we looked at then. It, a lot of people don't recognize today the problems that are there and they don't want to get involved. It's too bad. I'm not sure that, well you know, the war to end wars was World War I. I mean, there was never supposed to be another war that and how many have we had...big wars, so I'm not sure that there was any real lessons learned from World War II. A lot of scientific advances, lots of new technology developed and, but may have been directed the wrong way.

Question: Are you proud of your service?

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Answer: Oh absolutely, absolutely. And if I was a small boy on a farm in Kansas I would want to be back in the Navy again. I would do it all over again. It's a different Navy now, much more, much more modern and much more efficient and probably more effective but I'd like to be a part of it, oh yeah.

Question: Now I've never served. I was too young and too old and I haven't been in a war. I've been real fortunate to talk to well over 200 veterans on this project. I've always had a fairly patriotic part of myself and the flag means one thing to me. When you see the American flag go up the mast or in a parade what do you feel as a veteran?

Answer: Oh I feel very proud. I feel very proud. I, I, sometimes it brings tears to my eyes and, but it's, it is a symbol for me and to watch people burn it, it just makes me cringe. I can't understand that mentality in a person who's a citizen of this country. I just can't understand it.

Question: Now you got married after World War II?

Answer: Yes, after World War II. I was married in 1949.

Question: Well, thank you very much.
now.