



United States Coast Guard
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U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Interview of Radarman 2/c George O'Leary, USCGR

Service During World War II on the Beach Patrol in California and On Board USS *Gallup* (PF-47)

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Radarman 2/c George O'Leary & His Wife, Nadine.

Biographical Summary

Born in Toronto, Canada in 1923, George O'Leary moved with his family to Los Angeles, California at the age of 11 and attended schools there, graduating from Cathedral High School there. Enlisting in the Coast Guard in 1942, he attended recruit training on Catalina Island, off the coast of southern California. He initially served as a part of the Beach Patrol in the Santa Barbara area, using a dog on his patrols. When the Beach Patrols were discontinued in 1943 he was assigned to the Navy radar school at Point Loma, California.

After completion of radar school he reported to the USS *Gallup* (PF-47) which departed San Diego on 1 June 1944 for the Pacific war zone. Conducting antisubmarine patrol en route, she arrived at Noumea, New Caledonia, 21 June, and continued her escort and patrol duty in the waters of New Caledonia, New Guinea, and Australia until 12 October with Escort Division 43. On 17 August she bombarded enemy strongholds to support landings on Biak Island at Blue Beach, north of Wardo River by units of the 41st Infantry Division. She continued to fire until the troops had completed their landing and secured the beach. Again, on 26 August, *Gallup* lent support to the conquest of Biak by shelling the beaches between Menoerar and Cape Warari as the Army and Navy continued the successful New Guinea offensive.

Departing Hollandia 12 October 1944, *Gallup* was part of the screen for the vast task force which returned General MacArthur to the Philippines. On the 17th she shelled the beach area of Dinagat, and the next day she swept the channel into Leyte Gulf, P.I., as U.S. forces poised for the invasion. She then began antisubmarine and anti-mine patrol near Black Beach, screening vessels engaged in landing operations. Stationed most of the time off Desolation Point, she collected tide and hydrographic information, served as dispatch boat and as escort through the cleared channel in Leyte Gulf, guided incoming ships and convoys through the channel, and served as harbor entrance control vessel during landing operations. She performed these duties, most of the time in gusty, stormy weather, with *Bisbee* (PF-46), *LCI(L)-343*, and *LCI(L)-344*, before being sent on an escort mission to Humbolt Bay 28 November, touching San Pedro Bay and Kossol Roads, Manus, en route. On 3 December she left for the West Coast stopping to drop men at Seeadler Harbor, Admiralty Islands, and Pearl Harbor. She arrived in San Francisco on Christmas Day 1944.

O'Leary got married on 28 December and he and his new bride enjoyed a brief honeymoon before the *Gallup* departed San Francisco 9 January 1945, and steamed via Seattle to Dutch Harbor, Alaska, where she arrived on the 20th. She patrolled the North Pacific until she decommissioned at Cold Bay, Alaska 26 August. The next day she was transferred to the U.S.S.R. under lend-lease.

Following his discharge from the Coast Guard at the end of World War II O'Leary pursued a successful business career with Scott Paper Company, where he progressed from salesman to Chairman of the Board, CEO, and President. He is now retired and lives with his wife, Nadine, in British Columbia, Canada in the summer and Palm Desert in the winter.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you born?

O'LEARY: I was born in Toronto, Canada, in 1923.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me something about your family and education (before joining the USCG)? What high school did you graduate from?

O'LEARY: Dad died in 1934 when I was eleven years old. Mother took us from Toronto, Canada, to Los Angeles, California. I attended Catholic grammar school, the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and graduated from Cathedral High School, and was an average student. Lettered in football and basketball - had great school spirit.

INTERVIEWER: Did you enlist or were you drafted? If you enlisted, why did you choose the Coast Guard?

O'LEARY: After Pearl Harbor, everyone was joining up. I grew up as a beach boy on the West Coast. I loved small boats. I didn't want to be on a big battleship.

INTERVIEWER: I understand you enlisted (rather than being drafted). What recruiting office did you go to?

O'LEARY: I enlisted at the 9th Naval District in downtown Los Angeles. Attended boot camp at the isthmus of Catalina Island. It was a good facility; well run, good commissioned officers, and non-commissioned officers. Good Training. Spent time on 40- to 60- foot sailboats loaned to the Coast Guard by their owners. Good Seamanship, i.e. throwing the lead line to measure water depth, reading the taff rail log, towed for boats' speed. Learned knot tying, flag signaling, and Morse code. I boxed on Sundays. Rodriguez from Ventura coached me - I won all of my bouts. After boot camp, was sent to do beach patrol near Santa Barbara, but I wanted sea duty. Selected for radar-operator school at Point Loma, San Diego. Was good training for later tasks aboard the USS *Gallup* [FF-47].

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go through recruit training?

O'LEARY: I was sent to Catalina Island for boot camp.

INTERVIEWER: What were the living quarters (barracks) like at Two Harbors on Catalina Island?

O'LEARY: Living quarters at boot camp Catalina Island, I suppose typical of military - bunks in large room, reasonably clean and airy.

INTERVIEWER: Tell about that training.

O'LEARY: Some wealthy people donated yachts so we could practice our skills. We learned about seamanship there.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after boot camp?

O'LEARY: I was assigned to beach patrol duty near Santa Barbara. The Coast Guard had 5-mile beach patrols. A Japanese submarine had come close to the coast, about 10 miles north of Santa Barbara in early 1942, and lobbed shells at an oil refinery. Anytime I was on patrol I was accompanied by a "war dog". He was a boxer-bulldog mix and was one tough cookie. He also had a soft side. I would keep a Baby Ruth candy bar in my pocket as a treat for this canine companion. He would take the candy bar out of my pocket, set it on the beach and open the wrapper. He'd take a bite and smile at me.

INTERVIEWER: You said you were "selected" for radar operator school. Did you apply and were then selected or were you surprised to be selected (because you hadn't applied)?

O'LEARY: I was surprised to be selected for radar school.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about your World War II service in the U.S. Coast Guard.

O'LEARY: I was aboard the USS *Gallup* when it departed from San Diego in June 1944, conducting anti-submarine patrol enroute to Nouméa, New Caledonia. It continued patrol and

escort duty in the waters of New Caledonia, New Guinea and Australia. As a radar operator, I and my fellow radarmen kept watch for the enemy, searching the air, land and sea for any sight of Japanese movement. Our ship was responsible for getting soldiers ashore along the New Guinea coast. We put these guys in rubber boats and put them ashore to find the Japanese installations. They were dropped off under cover of darkness. The Japanese had hidden guns in sandstone caves along the beach. They were camouflaged. We watched and waited and when we saw the camouflage move, we fired into the cave and blew them up.

On October 17, 1944 we escorted minesweepers into Leyte Gulf in the Philippines where they cut a safe channel for the troops, readying for the invasion. The minesweepers cut the floating mines free and aboard the USS *Gallup* our 20 mm guns would explode the mines. After the channel was cleared, the ship assumed anti-submarine and anti-mine patrol duties near Black Beach, screening vessels engaged in landing operations. On October 25, 1944 we watched as a "Betty," (a Japanese bomber) approach in the distance. It wasn't 100 feet over us. The bomb bay doors were open. He went over the bluff and hit a ship on the other side, and it exploded. We later learned it was the USS *Gambier Bay* [CVE-73], a flat-top escort carrier. We were among the ships picking up survivors from the devastated ship.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else you would like to share about your World War II service?

O'LEARY: Experience aboard ship in getting along with fellow crewmen and officers, and completing one year's university education via the armed forces institute, at the University of California, all helped me in a successful business career with Scott Paper Company, where I progressed from salesman to Chairman of the board, CEO, and President. Highlight of all this is my family, and my 65 years of marriage to my wife, Nadine (shown in the picture from the Desert Sun).

INTERVIEWER: What was a typical day like for you aboard USS *Gallup*? (Watch-standing, drills, free-time, etc.)

O'LEARY: Typical day watches - four on, eight off – [typically] stood an 8 - 12 watch in the CIC room monitoring other junior operators' level of alertness, and reporting. Keeping officer of the deck apprised of information for navigating or possible enemy targets. After watch, I would eat lunch in mess deck, spam sandwich and canned beans. The deck was usually noisy with numerous other crew members. Sometimes better respected officers would visit the mess deck and eat a meal with the enlisted men. Afternoon, unless at general quarters, I spent time reading, doing correspondence courses, and working out. We did push-ups and gym exercises on a bar supporting the 20mm gun control. I had the record for most pull-ups/chin [ups], etc. Often fire and gunnery drills.

INTERVIEWER: What was the food like on the USS *Gallup*?

O'LEARY: Food was adequate, but quite limited, as we were away from any sophisticated ports most of the time. At times, we were down to unleavened bread and Spam. Sometimes we had only two meals a day. We longed for ice cream, a good hamburger, or steak. When loading supplies, we sometimes managed to acquire cans of Australian cheese and peaches. The cheese was very hard, but we built a hot plate, and hooked it up in the sonar room, and made grilled cheese sandwiches and had canned peaches. This was our best meal for some time.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me about the liberty you took, especially overseas? Did you take any leave?

O'LEARY: Seldom in port for liberty. In Cairnes, Australia, traded a carton of cigarettes (cost 50 cents) for a bottle Gilbey's Gin and a pair of kangaroo-skin sandals. Liberty in Pearl Harbor -- visited Royal Hawaiian Hotel, occupied by submariners on leave. It was pretty beat up -- saw a hole in the wall between rooms for easier movement by sailors. Leave in California, after ship arrived from Philippines, under Golden Gate Bridge, December 24, 1944. Hitchhiked from San Francisco to LA. Got married December 28th. Few days honeymoon in LA, and back to ship.

Sailed for Aleutian Islands via Seattle. Nadine, my wife, came to Seattle by train, and we had a few more days at the Fry Hotel before shipping out to Dutch Harbor-Adak-Attu, etc.

INTERVIEWER: What was your most memorable experience aboard the USS *Gallup*?

O'LEARY: Most memorable experience was escorting the minesweepers to clear a safe channel into Leyte Gulf three days before troop ships were to arrive for the invasion, October 20th. There was a typhoon raging with 75 knot winds, and 35-foot waves. The mines that were cut loose were floating these high waves - our job was to explode them with 20 mm guns. It was very tricky. The skipper [LCDR Clayton M. Opp, USCG] came into the CIC, said to me "Irish, hope to hell you chartered courses into the beach, so we can reverse course and get into the mined bay safely." I had chartered the course, and the ship received a presidential citation. Skipper promoted to full commander, and I from 3rd class to 2nd class Petty officer. My pay went to \$65 per month.

INTERVIEWER: What as the relationship like between the petty officers and the chiefs? What were the officers like? Was there any notable difference between reserve officers versus active-duty (Coast Guard Academy) officers? Did you trust those in command over you?

O'LEARY: Petty officers had deep respect for most chiefs, because of their valued experience, know-how, and often inclination to help us learn. Some officers were great - some not so good. The skipper was outstanding - as a leader, as a seaman, and the crew felt highly of him as he got us through harms' way. Several others were very good. Mr. Taylor took an interest in us, and gave me good direction for education. Two officers were weak in physical and mental leadership - one needed to be transferred to a harbor patrol craft due to his incompetence. It seemed regular officers were generally superior to reserves, but mainly it was the individual who made the difference. I trusted most officers, especially the Skipper but not some others.

INTERVIEWER: How were the "relations" between Coast Guardsmen and the other armed services personnel? Were there rivalries, animosities, or did you get along well?

O'LEARY: In home port, LA or San Francisco, there were some minor differences. They sometimes called the Coast Guard the "Hooligan Navy". But overseas there was mutual respect, as most of us were in harms' way. In our boxing matches and basketball games with other crews, it was very competitive. We generally got along well, as we respected the Marines, the Navy, etc.

INTERVIEWER: Please describe any experience you had of working with the British, Canadians, and other allies, if any. Was there a good working relationship with our allies?

O'LEARY: In Australia and New Guinea, we operated with an Australian anti-aircraft cruiser. They had beer, which we did not have, and would sometimes trade a bottle of Foster's for a US souvenir. In the Aleutians, we eventually turned our ship over to the Russians as part of the Lend-Lease bill. Twenty Russian sailors would replace 20 of our men when they were transferred. The Russian sailors for some reason were issued US money. They wanted to buy our watches and our low oxford black dress shoes. I had acquired three pair of GI boots in New Guinea, and put them in my sea bag. I got a hack saw, and cut off the GI boots, and put black shoe polish on them. They were pretty ugly, but I eventually got \$60 per pair, which was a month's salary in those days.

INTERVIEWER: How did you feel about the people you were fighting, the Japanese? Was there animosity, hatred, respect?

O'LEARY: After Pearl Harbor and the sneak attack, I felt animosity toward the Japanese. Also, their publicized attacks of cruelty increased that concern. My main interest and my shipmates' interests were to defeat the Japanese, and I believe President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb saved countless lives.

INTERVIEWER: Do you recall the day you left the Coast Guard after the war?

O'LEARY: The day I left, I was excited, and a bit apprehensive as to how I would look after my new spouse and possible family. The GI Bill was most helpful, and aided greatly in my continued desire for education. Also, having a special person to come home to gave me a special feeling of appreciation and optimism.

INTERVIEWER: How did your wartime service in the Coast Guard contribute to your later career?

O'LEARY: Experience in the service helped me greatly. First of all, as mentioned, I realized I was capable of education at the university level. Most importantly, it taught me how to get along with people of difference backgrounds. It also showed me the importance of leadership, which I tried to pursue in my business experience. I started at the bottom as a salesman with Scott Paper Company, and worked up to Sales Manager, Vice President of Marketing, and Executive Vice President, Chief Executive Officer, and finally President, CEO, and Chairman of the Board. After retirement, had a second career serving on numerous corporate boards of directors, i.e. Campbell's Soup, Lowry Foods, the Dutch Bank, International Forest Products, and am still on Belkorp Industries, a private company.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think of today's Coast Guard?

O'LEARY: I believe today's Coast Guard, with its ecology responsibilities, and rescue work, is an outstanding branch of service, and has very capable and brave members.

INTERVIEWER: Please add anything that I missed that you think might be important for future generations to know.

O'LEARY: I believe that military experience is good for many young people, as it teaches the importance of discipline, teamwork, and getting along with different types of people. I think the world situation is very challenging, and will require a high level of leadership and commitment that we experienced in the Second World War, for the United States and the free world to continue to prevail.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

