



United States Coast Guard
U.S. Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Interview of **Seaman 1/C James Gabriel, Jr, USCGR**
Coast Guard LORAN Mobile Detachment "G", World War II

Conducted by **C. Douglas Kroll, Ph. D., U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary**

3 July 2013
Vancouver, WA



Seaman 1/c James Gabriel, Jr.

Biographical Summary

Born 24 July 1925 in Stockport, New York, James Gabriel, Jr., moved at about the age of six to Wayne, New Jersey with his parents and an older brother. He dropped out of high school in 1943, and joined the Coast Guard at the age of seventeen. He enlisted in New York City on 30 June 1943 and was sent to the Manhattan Beach Training Center in New York City for recruit training. After recruit training he underwent shipboard gunner training. He was then [not supported by his discharge records] assigned to USS *Woonsocket* (PF-32) which was bombed on the bow, which sent the stern of the ship into the air, causing him to fall off his gun mount and injure his back and break his tail bone in a fall through an open hatch. After hospitalization in the Naval Hospital at Portsmouth, Virginia he was assigned to Coast Guard LORAN Mobile Detachment "G". The detachment was sent by rail to the Pacific Coast where it established a number of LORAN stations in California, Oregon and Washington.

After the war ended he was discharged from Seattle, Washington on 23 May 1946. He met his wife while establishing the LORAN station at Point Grenville, Washington and they got married shortly after he was discharged. They traveled back to Wayne, New Jersey where he resumed working in the family business, a hotel and restaurant. His father resented him joining the Coast Guard and abandoning the family business during the war and the two of them did not get along. He left the family business and bought a dump truck and loader. After working in Wayne, New Jersey he was employed by the City of Wayne, New Jersey in the Public Works Department. They later sent him to Rutgers University to get his degree so that they could make him Superintendent of Public Works for the City. He went to night school for a number of years and when he finally graduated, he and wife went to Florida for a week's vacation at his parent's condominium there. While there, he noticed in the Want Ads that the city of Tamarac, Florida was looking for a Chief Engineer of Public Works. He applied, showed him his degree and was offered the job. He explained he needed to return to New Jersey and give the City of Wayne thirty days notice. He and his wife relocated to Tamarac, Florida and he worked as the Chief Engineer of Public Works there for the next fourteen years. His wife became seriously ill and he decided to retire from his job and move near his wife's family in Washington State. He feared that if something happened to him, his wife would be all alone in Florida. They settled in Montesano, Washington. After living there a short time he was approached about becoming a Deputy Sheriff. He accepted and after training became a Deputy Sheriff for Grays Harbor County. After seven years he retired again and he and wife traveled around the country in their motorhome. His wife died a few years later, while they were living in a mobile home near Vancouver, Washington. He made his retirement home in Vancouver and about ten years ago married Joan. The two of them now live in Vancouver after ten years of roaming the United States.

INTERVIEWER: When and where were you born?

GABRIEL: In Stockport, NY on July 24, 1925.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me briefly about your childhood?

GABRIEL: My father worked at the brickyard in Stockport and I had an older brother.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to the public schools in Stockport?

GABRIEL: No, the public schools of Wayne, New Jersey.

INTERVIEWER: What age were you when your parents moved to Wayne, New Jersey?

GABRIEL: About 5 or 6 years old.

INTERVIEWER: Your father got a job in Wayne, New Jersey?

GABRIEL: Yes, he was made the superintendent of the brickworks in Wayne, New Jersey. He got transferred there.

INTERVIEWER: Did you graduate from high school in Wayne, New Jersey?

GABRIEL: I was 7 years-old before I could start school there because I didn't speak a word of English when we moved there. Stockport, New York was an Italian community. Everybody spoke Italian there so that was the only language I knew when we moved to Wayne, New Jersey. I had to be able to speak English to attend school in Wayne.

INTERVIEWER: Did you graduate from high school in Wayne, New Jersey?

GABRIEL: I did attend high school in Wayne, New Jersey.

INTERVIEWER: Did you join the Coast Guard before you graduated from high school?

GABRIEL: Yes, I graduated after I left the Coast Guard. I joined the Coast Guard in New York City on June 30, 1943.

INTERVIEWER: Why did you decide to join the Coast Guard?

GABRIEL: I wanted to go into the Marines, but they wouldn't take me unless my folks signed [giving their permission]. Same way with the Navy, because my buddies went there. I went to the Coast Guard and they took me.

INTERVIEWER: You were 17-years-old, and they would take you without your parent's permission?

GABRIEL: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Where did they send you for boot camp or recruit training?

GABRIEL: To Manhattan Beach, New York.

INTERVIEWER: What do you remember about your time there?

GABRIEL: The food was o.k. They taught me about sea duty, about a little bit about everything.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how long boot camp was?

GABRIEL: About two months.

INTERVIEWER: Where did you go when you got out of boot camp?

GABRIEL: There was an emergency right after I graduated at Manhattan Beach. There was a German submarine spotted in the area, so they put us all on beach patrol, two men at a time. We were looking for two to four men who supposed had come ashore from the submarine.

INTERVIEWER: So that was what you did right after boot camp?

GABRIEL: I did that for about four months. Then they sent us to Ellis Island to guard prisoners.

INTERVIEWER: How did you look at the prisoners on Ellis Island?

GABRIEL: Ninety percent were women. They [enemy aliens] were going to be shipped back home.

INTERVIEWER: So these were all civilian prisoners?

GABRIEL: Yes. They also gave my Shore Patrol duty in New York.

INTERVIEWER: Did the different armed services get along? Was their animosity or resentment between Navy and the Coast Guard?

GABRIEL: We all got along. Our orders were to protect the United States. I met a lot of soldiers and sailors and was told to keep them in hand but don't touch them.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after Shore Patrol?

GABRIEL: After that I went aboard ship.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the name of the ship?

GABRIEL: No, we just went aboard for more training. Training on the 40mm guns, 3" 50 guns, 20mm guns and all of the small arms aboard. I was then stationed on the USS *Woonsocket* (PF-32) which was bombed on the front of the ship by a Nazi bomb, which sent the back of the ship up in the air, which caused me to fall off my gun into a hatchway and broke my tail bone.

INTERVIEWER: What happened?

GABRIEL: They operated on my back at the Naval Hospital and I was laid up for about two months. They later put me in this mobile LORAN [Long Range Aid to Navigation] outfit. It was all in trucks.

INTERVIEWER: It was a mobile LORAN station?

GABRIEL: Yes. They loaded all the trucks on to flatbed cars on a freight train. They assigned me to the first five trucks and gave me a Reising submachine gun. My duty was to guard those trucks on the train. Because everything was classified they wouldn't even tell us where we were going. So I rode with the trucks on top of the flatbed cars. We started traveling, but every so often to get water because it was the old steam engines at the time. We'd be at every water station for four to six hours and I would have to guard my five trucks. Everyplace we stopped, people welcomed us, but we didn't know where we were going! I took us eight days to go across the country. We landed in San Francisco. There we took the trucks off the flatbeds and put 24 men to an outfit [detachment]. My group [Detachment "G"] was sent to southern California. We had seven trucks, 24 men. We had "scope men," radiomen, mechanics, a cook, hospital corpsman and whatever a LORAN station needed. We had a LTJG in charge. I was made his chauffeur. They made me the man in charge of all the guns. My duty was to guard everything. We got down to southern California and set up a station there.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember where?

GABRIEL: Somewhere near Los Angeles. [Point Arguello] I was a Seaman 1/C so my job was to set up the 40mm [gun] and guard their entire area.

INTERVIEWER: You were the security person?

GABRIEL: Yes. I was protecting our portable LORAN station. They then assigned us to set up another station in northern California, after a permanent crew had been brought in. After we established one in northern California we moved into Oregon and from there to Washington. We were six to eight weeks at every location.

INTERVIEWER: Setting up new LORAN stations?

GABRIEL: Yes. Our final station was Moclips, Washington [Point Grenville LORAN Station]. We set up another station near Tacoma, Washington, right up by the rocks. We took over the barracks there in MoClips, Washington. We parked some trucks there and three went down to the point and we started operating. I was in Washington when the war ended. My next step was supposed to be the Marianas [Islands] but since the war was over I never got there. They kept me there in Moclips, Washington. There as a Navy base nearby where we used to get our supplies. You had to have so many points to be discharged. I think you needed 27 points and I only had 25 points. It was there I met my wife. I stayed there until I was eligible for discharge.

INTERVIEWER: Did they send you to Seattle for discharge?

GABRIEL: Yes. I was discharged on May 23, 1946.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do after you got discharged from the Coast Guard?

GABRIEL: I went back to New Jersey and I went to work for my folks at Gabriel's Hotel and Restaurant. They had bought a hotel and restaurant before I joined the Coast Guard. My father and I didn't get along and that's why I decided to go into the service. I wanted no part of the hotel because I wasn't old enough to tend bar. My father was bitter towards me because I went into the service. He thought I should have stayed home and worked for the family in the hotel and restaurant. He thought I was roaming around the sea having a good time while I was in the service. So he held it against me. Every time something came up my brother got favored and I'm working twelve hours a day down in the cellar, sorting out bottles and stuff for the bar. I had an argument with my dad and left the hotel. I was twenty-one by then and he finally put me behind the bar, but I was working twelve hours a day tending bar. I felt like the black sheep of the family. I walked out and bought an old GMC, single-axle, dump truck because construction was booming. I soon bought equipment to load my truck and did well. Eventually I sold my truck and equipment and went to work for the town in public works.

INTERVIEWER: What was your most memorable experience in the Coast Guard during World War II?

GABRIEL: The things we did setting up LORAN stations on the Pacific Coast.

INTERVIEWER: Is there anything I didn't ask you about, or something you'd like to share with future generations about your time in the Coast Guard during World War II?

GABRIEL: No, not really.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you for sharing your memories.

END OF INTERVIEW

