

Interview of **CDR Mitchell “Art” Perry, USCG (Retired)**
World War II veteran
USS Arthur Middleton (APA-25)



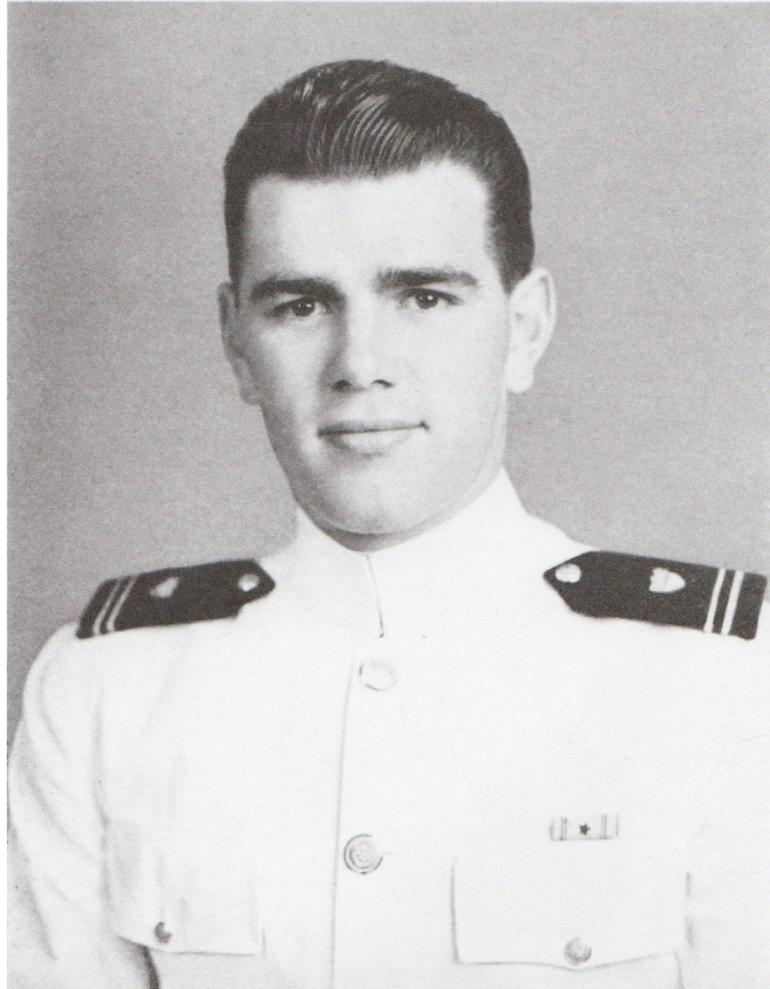
Coast Guard World War II Veteran Mitchell “Art” Perry and Doug Kroll in 2015.

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

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Corvallis, OR

Biographical Summary

Born in Oakland, California on 27 June 1922, Art Perry (Pereira) grew up with a half-sister and half-brother. Graduating from Oakland Technical High School in January 1940, he entered the U. S. Coast Guard Academy in the summer of 1940 as a member of the Class of 1944. With the United States' entry into WWII the course of instruction at the Academy was shortened to three years and Art's class graduated in 1943. He reported to USS *Arthur Middleton* (APA-25) in July 1943 and saw action at Tarawa where he commanded Boat Divisions Seven and Eight on the fourth assault wave on Red Beach 1. On 16 March 1944 Art changed his last name from Pereira to Perry, because people were constantly mispronouncing and misspelling his



Portuguese last name, "Pereira". *Middleton* later participated in the attacks on Kwajalein, Eniwetok, Saipan, Leyte Gulf, and Luzon. In December 1944 he transferred to the staff of Commander Transport Division 33 as navigator. He detached from staff and reported as the commanding officer of the Coast Guard Operating Base, San Francisco in June 1945.

In October 1946 he reported to flight training, initially at NAS Dallas, TX. Completing flight training in March 1947 he was designated Coast Guard Aviator # 500. He later served at Coast Guard air stations Port Angeles, WA, Traverse City, MI, Sangley Point, Philippine Islands and San Francisco, CA. He commanded Coast Guard Air Detachment Corpus Christi, TX and served as executive officer of Coast Guard Air Station Brooklyn, NY. His final assignment was the Aviation Division in Coast Guard Headquarters, from which he retired in December 1963.

Art then was employed briefly by the Livermore Radiation Laboratory as a mechanical engineer. He served many years as an estimator for Les Kelley Inc., a general contractor in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties, making his home in Foster City, CA. He was also involved in the Civil Air Patrol and traveled. He now resides in Corvallis, OR near his son, Cliff.

He married Jocelyn Chilton in 1945 and they had two sons, Bruce (1948) and Cliff (1949). Art and Jocelyn divorced in 1964. He married June Bartell in 1968, who already had three children, Susan, Beth and Charles. Art and June Perry were married for 46 years until her death on 4 March 2015.

INTERVIEWER: When and where were you born?

PERRY: In Oakland, California on June 27th 1922.

INTERVIEWER: Can you tell me briefly about your childhood? Did you have any brothers and sisters? Anything stand out?

PERRY: I had an older half-sister and a younger half-brother.

INTERVIEWER: What high school did you graduate from and what year did you graduate?

PERRY: Oakland Technical High School on Broadway and 44th, in January 1940. I got straight A's in everything but typing which I took again in the spring of 1940.

INTERVIEWER: How did you learn about the Coast Guard Academy?

PERRY: They had officers going around to all the different high schools. I had always been interested in West Point and Annapolis.

INTERVIEWER: So a Coast Guard officer came to your high school?

PERRY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What attracted you to the Coast Guard Academy?

PERRY: Its rescue duties---saving people's lives.

INTERVIEWER: You entered the Academy in the fall of 1940, correct?

PERRY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: When you first got there, or your first week, what was your initial impression?

PERRY: I don't remember, the courses were hard.

INTERVIEWER: While you were a cadet the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. How did you learn about it?

PERRY: One of the cadets had a radio, illegally, in the barracks [Chase Hall] and it came on the news.

INTERVIEWER: You were in the barracks and the word just spread through them?

PERRY: Yes. He was an upper classman and he talked to the lower classmen, spreading the news.

INTERVIEWER: Do you how you or the other cadets reacted when you heard the news?

PERRY: We were surprised and quite interested, but we could find out much news since we didn't have radios.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember them handing out ammunition to the cadets the next day for the rifles in their rooms?

PERRY: No. We had surplus Army Springfield rifles. The Army was going to junk these Springfield rifles, so we got them to march with. Then later the Army decided they were going to recondition them and ship them to Britain. By the end of my time the Army had taken all the Springfield rifles and we had to march with some kind of plastic thing.

INTERVIEWER: How did things change at the Academy after the attack on Pearl Harbor?

PERRY: That first class, that hadn't completed four years were graduated almost immediately.

INTERVIEWER: Did they announce right away that they were shortening the course of instruction to three years?

PERRY: No, not right away, the 2nd Class cadets right away became 1st Class cadets.

INTERVIEWER: How did life change at the Academy after Pearl Harbor?

PERRY: They eliminated a lot of the non-engineering courses. We had ten weeks of instruction, a week of finals, and a week's leave. That went on the rest of the time.

INTERVIEWER: Did you still have summer training?

PERRY: Yes, the first summer we went aboard a merchant ship and made a cruise to the Caribbean.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember the name of that ship?

PERRY: It was the *American Seamen* [WIX], an old merchant ship. All I remember about it is that we had lousy food to eat and it had an old piston steam engine for propulsion.

INTERVIEWER: What did you do your second summer at the Academy?

PERRY: We got aboard the *Atlantic* [WIX 271] schooner. That was quite an experience climbing the rigging.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever sail on the *Danmark* [WIX 283]?

PERRY: Yes, I did.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember Jack Dempsey coming to the Academy to referee a boxing match between the Academy and West Point in 1942?

PERRY: Yes. It was only time we ever beat West Point. Probably because most of the West Pointers were out fighting the war.

INTERVIEWER: Did you go to that boxing match?

PERRY: Yes, in the old gymnasium [Billard Hall].

INTERVIEWER: While you were there they were training reserve officers on the Academy grounds. Did you have any contact with them?

PERRY: They were all passing us in seniority because they were getting their commissions fairly quick.

INTERVIEWER: Did you have any contact with them?

PERRY: No. They had separate buildings.

INTERVIEWER: Where were chapel services held, since the chapel had not been built yet?

PERRY: I used to go to mass, but I don't remember where.

INTERVIEWER: Were chapel services mandatory?

PERRY: Yes, I had to go to Catholic mass in order to get liberty on Sunday afternoons.

INTERVIEWER: According to your *Tide Rips* [biography] you were involved with something called "Surf n' Storm". Was that some kind of publication?

PERRY: It was a [cadet] monthly magazine.

INTERVIEWER: Published by cadets?

PERRY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: How were you involved with it?

PERRY: In the editorial area. I wrote articles, but wasn't the editor.

INTERVIEWER: During the time you were a cadet, what would you say was the most memorable event?

PERRY: The attack on Pearl Harbor.

INTERVIEWER: Anything else stand out?

PERRY: We I marched in the Inaugural Parade [1941] for President [Franklin] Roosevelt. They took us on a train to Washington and issued us bayonets.

INTERVIEWER: You graduated a year early, in 1943. Do you remember where graduation was held?

PERRY: Yes, in Billard Hall.

INTERVIEWER: Before you graduated, how was your first assignment determined?

PERRY: We could request certain assignments and I requested a west coast 165-footer out of Alameda. But of course, I never saw that.

INTERVIEWER: I noticed in your year book that you had a different last name then, Pereira. Sometime after you graduated you changed your last name. Can you tell why and when that occurred?

PERRY: Well, everybody couldn't spell it or pronounce it [my Portuguese last name]. I went to the District Legal Officer in the 14th District in Honolulu [and he] did it for me. He filled out a form and had me sign it.

INTERVIEWER: When was this?

PERRY: It was right after we returned to Hawaii from Kwajalein [March 16, 1944].

INTERVIEWER: When did you report aboard the *Middleton* and where?

PERRY: I picked up the MIDDLETON in Bremerton, Washington. The *Middleton* had gone aground and sat on the rocks and Navy tugs brought it back to Bremerton to fix all the holes in it.

INTERVIEWER: You arrived in July 1943. Do you remember the captain's name? Was it Perry or Olsen?

PERRY: It was [CAPT Severt A.] Olsen [USCG].

INTERVIEWER: The ship's records indicate it left Bremerton in September and sailed to San Francisco to embark troops.

PERRY: We picked up a bunch of Army troops, including Army nurses and headed to the South Pacific to relieve New Zealand troops and then took the New Zealand troops back to New Zealand. Then we picked up Marines and went out and practiced landing for Tarawa. We didn't know it was for Tarawa until later.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any memory of landing the troops on Tarawa? What was your battle or general quarters station on the *Middleton*?

PERRY: For landings I had a group of eight landing craft that I commanded. On the ship my general quarters station was a three-inch-50 gun up on the bow.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember what you did after Tarawa?

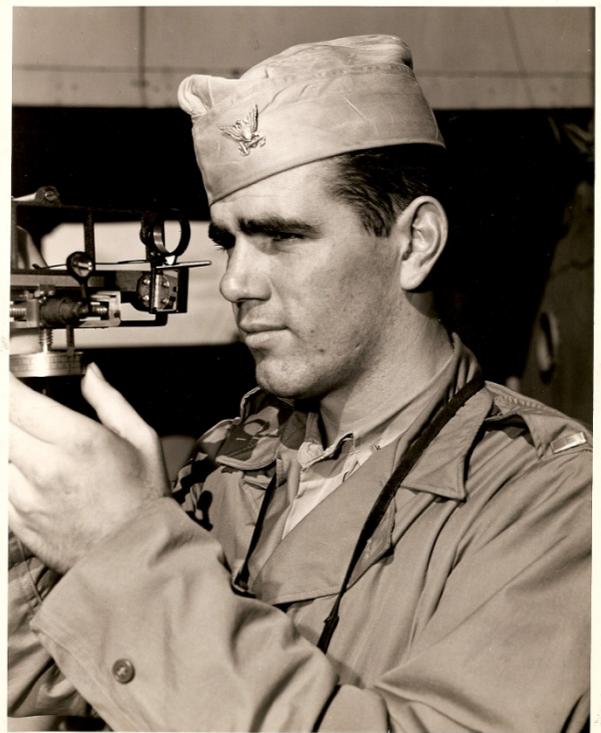
PERRY: We went to Eniwetok.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any memories of the landings an Eniwetok?

PERRY: Actually I was only in the boats for Tarawa. Right after that a Commander Smith asked me if I was interested in being the assistant navigator. I said “yes.” From then on I was up on the bridge for all the landings, taking care of the charts and helping the navigator, sending and receiving messages. I did what the navigator told me to do. I didn’t have time to look outside and see how the landing was going.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any kind of an epidemic on the ship?

PERRY: We were in quarantine [24 March – 1 May 1944]. We had an outbreak of dysentery. We couldn’t leave the ship. The Navy was kind of disgusted with us because we couldn’t do much while in quarantine. They sent us out at night with no lights or anything, to pick up a Coast Guard-manned LST. We met them in the dark, not knowing who was the enemy. We then escorted them into the harbor in Hawaii. That’s all I remember.



INTERVIEWER: After Eniwetok and Kwajalein the ship next went to Saipan. The records indicate that at Saipan you took aboard Japanese prisoners. Is that correct?

PERRY: We had some children. I think we had five or six kids and a woman who was in charge of them, a school teacher. We had to separate the Japanese prisoners from the troops. They had their own hold in the ship and a guard put on them. They were allowed to come up every day to get some fresh air. We also had to take Japanese prisoners off of Navy ships—another dirty job for the Coast Guard. We had to take Japanese prisoners off of [Navy] cruisers.

INTERVIEWER: You took all these Japanese prisoners back to Pearl Harbor and then the next assignment was the Yap invasion, but then that was canceled and your ship was diverted for Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands, correct?

PERRY: Yes. We were supposed to travel by night. We had something called paravanes that were strung out from the bow of the ship some way or another and were supposed to cut loose mines in the water. Here we are steaming in the rain and the dark and I am standing on the wing of the bridge on watch and giving RPM orders to the engine room. We had to stay a thousand feet abeam of the nearest ship and six hundred yards behind the ship ahead of us. I remember the Captain coming up to me in the dark and asking "How are the paravanes?" I replied that I didn't know because I couldn't see them. [laughter]. That's about it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember Japanese aircraft attacking in Leyte Gulf?

PERRY: They couldn't see us at night.

INTERVIEWER: What about during the day?

PERRY: The sun came up and there were ships in all directions. Whenever a Japanese plane would fly over everyone would go to General Quarters and start shooting. They would shoot up in the air and when the flak came down it would give us some thrills. I remember the Division Commander fell down the ladder going to General Quarters and was injured.

INTERVIEWER: The records indicated that Jack Dempsey was aboard your ship during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. Were you aware of that?

PERRY: No, I never knew that or saw him. I only remember him coming to the Academy.

INTERVIEWER: After Leyte you went to Ulithi Atoll to prepare for the staging point for the invasion of Okinawa. Anything happen at Ulithi?

PERRY: While we were anchored at Ulithi Atoll, before Okinawa our old Division Commander, a Naval Academy graduate, didn't like his staff because they were all reserve officers. He found out that I was a Coast Guard Academy graduate so he transferred me from the *Middleton* to his staff, Commander, Transport Division [Thirty-three]. I was now a Coast Guard officer serving on a Navy staff.

INTERVIEWER: What was your job on the staff?

PERRY: I was the navigator for the whole division. It was a great job. I would send up a signal for the ships in the division to send their position reports. I would add them up and get a great idea of where we were. I let all the ship's navigators do the work and I just combined all of them for my position report.

INTERVIEWER: So you were on the Division Commander's staff for the invasion of Okinawa?

PERRY: Yes. We were to be the floating reserves for the invasion of Okinawa. However, we had to get in close to anchor off Okinawa. We had to put out six times the depth of the water to anchor.

INTERVIEWER: What ship was the Commodore's staff on?

PERRY: The *Clay* [APA-39] as I remember.

INTERVIEWER: There were a lot of Japanese Kamikazes at Okinawa. Was your ship attacked?

PERRY: No, but another Coast Guard ship was hit on its flying bridge.

INTERVIEWER: During the war did you have any chance for liberty where you stopped. On liberty or on the ship what was the relationship between the Coast Guard and the Navy, the Marines and the Army? Were there rivalries? Animosities?

PERRY: There was a little bit of rivalry but we were all on the same side. [laughter]

INTERVIEWER: What was your opinion of Captain Olsen?

PERRY: We hardly ever got to see him. He had his own mess, so he never ate with us. CDR [Donald Edward] McKay, the Executive Officer, ran the ship.

INTERVIEWER: Did you notice any difference between the Academy and the Reserve officers?

PERRY: No, but there was a rivalry between the mustangs and the reserves. The Academy officers had to occasionally step in to keep the reserves and the mustangs from going at each other.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how many Academy officers were on the *Middleton*?

PERRY: The C.O. was from the Class of '23 and Executive Officer from the Class of '27, R. J. [Richard?] Smith, [Class '36?], the Navigator, my classmate [Daniel John] Scalabrini, and myself.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember how the *Arthur Middleton* rode at sea?

PERRY: It was over 500 feet in length, so fairly large and rode fairly well.

INTERVIEWER: Of all your time on the *Middleton*, what is the one thing that stands out in your memory?

PERRY: I was too busy standing watches. All I can remember was that the Chief Engineer was a Naval Reserve officer and he came with the ship. He thought the ship was his. He didn't take any crap from the Executive Officer, or even the Captain. He gave us thirty minutes of fresh water three times a day---when we were either going on watch or coming off watch, so we had a choice of fresh water or eating dinner. I think he had his own mess, too. The Executive Officer ate with us in the wardroom, but we never saw the Chief Engineer or the Captain.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember his name?

PERRY: No. At the time I called him “.....”. Now I think I was too hard on him and he was trying to save water.

INTERVIEWER: When did you detach from the Division Commander’s staff.

PERRY: In June 1945 I was reassigned to San Francisco. My mother had medical problems and I was her only son and needed to be near to help make arrangements and care for her. After some leave they assigned me as the Commanding Officer of the Coast Guard Operating Base, San Francisco. It was at Pier 47. That’s where I asked for an application for flight training. They put out an ALCOAST asking for applicants for flight training. I’d actually requested flight school in 1944 while I was still aboard the *Middleton*. I applied and the 12th District Engineering Officer talked the District Commander into letting me go. I was accepted and had to go to Dallas [NAS Corpus Christi] for primary training in the old yellow bird with an open cockpit. Then after a month we went to Pensacola, Florida

INTERVIEWER: Any specific memories from flight training?

PERRY: I remember we became one of the very few Coast Guard pilots who had to land on an aircraft carrier as a part of our flight training, except the ones that came over from being Navy pilots. I can still remember being up in the air and looking down and the carrier looked like a postage stamp. I thought, “I have to land on that thing!” A Marine flight student was killed the day I went up. He was coming around and picked up the landing officer’s signal at the 180 position and just kept coming in way wrong so he had to go from full left rudder tab to full right rudder tab and ended up crashing.

INTERVIEWER: What year did you earn your wings?

PERRY: My first flying assignment was Port Angeles, Washington in 1947

INTERVIEWER: In your later career as a pilot, any experience that stands out?

PERRY: The toughest flight I had was 8.3 hours at night with IFR from Sangley Point in the Philippine Islands [January 1953]. I was the operations officer at Sangley Point. We were fighting the Chinese in Korea. They had shot down a Navy P2V [along the shore near Swatow]. [LT John] Vukic [flying a PBM-5G] found them in the water and landed to pick them up. It was getting dark and he thought he’d better take off and get out of there but when he took off the right engine failed after he fired the JATO bottles and the plane crashed a broke up putting the crew in the water with the survivors they had just picked up.

They called me up and said “You have to go out.” I said, “I don’t have the duty.” They told me that [LT] John Vukic had the duty and he went but he crashed on takeoff from the water. He was taking off with JATO bottles, but something went wrong and he crashed taking off. A Navy destroyer [USS *Halsey Powell* (DD-686)] was in the area but had 1880 charts of China from the British. They requested us to

drop parachute flares so they could find the survivors in the water. I was up front in the left seat, but after hours of flying I'd had enough of it, and the copilot [LT Frank Parker] was a sharp guy so I asked him to take over and went back to help the Aviation Ordnanceman drop these [parachute] flares. I think I am the only pilot that dropped 32 million candle power [parachute] flares. Every so often the ship (destroyer) would ask to let go two flares and we would drop two more of them. They lost five Coast Guardsmen. I think they all got this funny medal.

INTERVIEWER: The Gold Lifesaving Medal.

PERRY: It wasn't an aviation medal, it was an old Coast Guard medal.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you for sharing your memories.

END OF ORAL HISTORY

