

OLD TIMERS' MEMORIAL PLAQUE

16TH NAME ON THE PLAQUE -- NORMAN MCLEOD

I was born of woman on December 21, 1916. At birth I shared my mother's womb with a benign tumor as large as I was. For that reason she was unable to bear more children so I was raised as an only child, in Duluth, Minn.

Upon reaching school age I entered a parochial school when tuition was only \$1.00 per month. I graduated from parochial high school in 1934, during the Great Depression. Unable to find a steady job I served in the CCC for six months in 1935, at the end of which time I was working as the Forestry Clerk, a position I enjoyed.

In 1936 I found work with Marshall Wells Hardware Co. in Duluth. This firm billed itself as the largest wholesale company in the world. I remained with this company as an order clerk until early 1941, when I left to accept a job with the Great Northern Ry. in Duluth, as an office clerk in its engineering department. My salary at the time was \$210 per month.

On December 7, 1941 Japan bombed Pearl Harbor and I volunteered to join the U. S. Navy during March, 1942, to avoid being drafted into the U. S. Army.

I entered the navy as a Yeoman 2nd Class, which is an office worker able to use a typewriter and take shorthand. Both skills I learned in high school.

After going through basic training at Great Lakes I was sent to New York City for permanent assignment. This did not occur readily so I was billeted for approx. three weeks with a family living in Brooklyn. The mother person here had a young son in the navy also so she treated me like her own son.

I was having a good time, attending Broadway plays and going to USO clubs for meals and dancing. I once was assigned by the navy to a wartime task, namely standing guard over the passenger liner Ile de France with an unloaded rifle. This big ship lay on its side at the dock, after a disastrous fire.

Further orders finally came through and I was sent to Norfolk, Virginia to await permanent assignment. I found myself one of a

large group of yeomen, drivers and personnel clerks. We were all put aboard an ex passenger liner, the SS Wakefield, formerly owned by the United States Lines. We were told we were to sail through the Panama Canal, then cross the Pacific all the way to New Zealand where we were to become the headquarters staff of COMSOPAC (Commander South Pacific).

We were 31 days aboard this ship. Sailing with us were 5,000 marines, who were the first to attack Guadalcanal at a later date. The food aboard ship was awful. At the end of our trip we were living on candy bars.

We sailed alone without escort and we navy boys took turns standing on the vessel's flying bridge, looking for Jap submarines. Finally we landed in Wellington, the N. Z. capital on a Sunday. We were met at the dock by a military band, a fine one.

Next day we took a train north through the center of the North Island, a full day's trip. That same day we landed in Auckland and we were marched in loose style down one of its major streets. On both sides of us throngs of natives cheered us as conquering heroes, which we weren't.

The people of N. Z. welcomed us with open arms. Most Yanks fell in love with the country and its people.

We worked in an office building in downtown Auckland. Our boss was Rear Admiral Ghormley, COMSOPAC. I spent five months in Auckland, then was transferred north to the French island of New Caledonia. In Noumea, its capital, the navy took over a downtown school building that became our headquarters. I was assigned to the Office of War Plans where I worked for a marine Lt. Colonel, a navy Lt. Commander and an army Major - fine gentlemen all. Our job was to plan the future invasion of the Phillippines, which we did. I was supposed to take dictation from these three officers but they preferred to write everything in longhand, then give to me for typing.

They finished their task but in the end the war plans were never used.

I was stationed in Noumea from the fall of 1942 to the middle of 1944, when I was transferred back to San Francisco. During this period our new boss took over. He was Admiral "Bull" Halsey, a good man. When he finally took to the sea with his battleships he left me behind -- with others.

I was in San Francisco about three weeks awaiting future assignment. During this time, because of my chief's rating, I was placed in charge of a shore patrol crew. They were tough-looking rogues who more or less advised me to sit tight and let them handle their duties, which were mainly the rescuing of drunken sailors. I kept quiet and sat tight.

When I finally received my new orders I was pleasantly surprised. They were given to me by a fellow I used to know in Noumea.

My new job was office manager at the Clearfield Navy Supply Base in Utah, five miles south of Ogden. If I'd been single this job would have been as close to heaven as any man can get, with three lovely waves working under me. Actually, I was single... but engaged.

On September 15, 1944 I was wed to my engagee, Esther Drewett. She rode the train all the way from Duluth - 1500 miles - to marry me. We were married in a Catholic pastor's house with the housekeeper and my best friend as witnesses. It was like a miracle. Esther and I spotted him walking along Ogden's main street so we stopped myr car and hailed him. He was my best boyhood pal. He was serving as a military policeman on the train between Cheyenne and Ogden. He quickly became my best man.

A year later - on July 4, 1945 our first child was born. We named her Nancy Anne. She grew into a lovely young woman that never disappointed us. She married, had two lovely daughters of her own. She died in 1995 from a brain tumor..

I was discharged from the navy as a Chief Yeoman in early September, 1945. In looking back I can say honestly that the military life was not for me.. Though it had its moments. When I was discharged I was earning \$150 per month.

I returned to my old job with the railroad. Because I saw no future for me in its engineering department I requested a transfer into its marketing or sales department. For this I underwent a personal interview by its vice president in St. Paul. Apparently I passed the interview for shortly thereafter they transferred me to San Francisco, at their expense. I came

west first, mainly to find a home for my family. When I did I sent for my wife and daughter who also made the trip at the railroad's expense.

I paid \$8,000 for a cottage-type home in East Oakland on a 4% G. I. loan. This was in 1946.

My salary was still \$210 per month and we soon found out we couldn't make ends meet on my wage. Reluctantly I informed my boss that I had to have more money or I would quit. My boss's hands were tied, no raise was forthcoming so I quit.

I answered an ad in the paper for doing the same kind of work for Richfield Oil Corp, at \$260 per month. We were able to live off this wage. I worked 30 years for this oil company, that later became ARCO. When I retired in 1977 I was an office manager at the Richmond Marine Terminal. ARCO was good to me.

In 1978 we settled in Foresthill, in a nice home on Pond Drive.. Almost immediately we joined the local historical society, I became its historian and ever since my life has been tied to the society.

I had long been interested in writing so in 1987 I wrote and published my first book, "Gold, Guns and Gallantry" followed by "Distant Voices, Different Drums" in 1990.

I've also done newspaper work. At one time I was writing Sunday magazine articles for the Auburn Journal, five years of them, all historical.

In 1984 I served as president of the historical society. My wife Esther and I have been married 54 years. It's been a great trip.

I should mention we were given two additional daughters, Kathy and Lenore. We also received four granddaughters and now we have two great granddaughters and a great grandson. We have been blessed. We also have another great grandson by marriage.

The End

By Norman McLeod
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