

Barbara's Stories

Barbara Graduated from BYU in Nutrition and Food Services June 9, 1943 and was offered the position of managing the dining room in the old BYU Joseph Smith Memorial Building. Her parents were thrilled. Shortly afterward, however, she was walking down a street in Salt Lake City and noticed a large poster in the window of the Marine recruiting office. It advertised a new organization in the Corps referred to as the Marine Corps Women's Reserve (MCWR), which was designed to free up male Marines for combat duties. Barbara felt the urge to join, and immediately did so. She said that her parents were shocked by this and tried to persuade her not to go through with the enlistment. However, Barbara entered training at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina where they soon found out that she was trained in cooking and food services. She was promoted and put in charge of training Marine cooks. She told about how many of the male Marines were a bit miffed by her quick rise in rank. (When Paul and Barbara were married, she out-ranked him because of her promotion.)

As part of Barbara's duties, she oversaw the officers' mess or dining hall. One day, one of the cooks was way behind in getting the salad prepared. Barbara moved in to assist and began mixing the large bowl of salad with her hands. (In those days, gloves were not required.) The meal was prepared on time and Barbara breathed a sigh of relief. In a few minutes, however, as the senior cook and supervisor, she was summoned to the mess area where one of the officers had found a ring in his salad. Barbara very quickly discovered that it was her engagement ring. The officer gave it back and then gave her a scathing rebuke, stating that this would never happen again. Despite the incident, Barbara retained her rank and her position, along with getting back her engagement ring, which from then on, she wore on a chain around her neck.

When Barbara and Paul were married in Wilmington, North Carolina, he was on leave from the Navy and she was still in the Marines. However, after their short honeymoon, and just before Paul was to leave to return to his unit, Barbara was called to come to her commander's office. He pulled out a sheet of paper from a stack on top of his desk. It was an order discharging Barbara from the Marine Corps. She was not being discharged because she was now married, but because of a request she had made for a compassionate discharge to return home to assist her ailing mother. Barbara had not expected her request to be considered as quickly as it was, much less to have it approved so quickly. However, due to the discharge, Paul and Barbara were able to travel together by train back to Utah where they were met by both sets of parents. Because of the ongoing war, an exception was made to the one-year waiting requirement, and the newlyweds were sealed in the Logan Temple within a few days of their return to Utah.

Barbara told how during the train trip back to Utah, the passenger cars were filled to capacity. Since Paul and Barbara were in uniform, they were given priority ticketing. At one juncture, another couple was bumped to give she and Paul their seats. Whenever Barbara talked about this experience, she said how sorry she was for the two who got bumped and always wondered if they had made it to their planned destination on time.

Paul's Stories

Dear Shirley,

Actually, there were several stories that Dad used to tell. If you or anyone else has others, I'd love to hear them.

The one you refer to was when Dad was standing watch on a ship steaming toward the Pacific Islands where he would spend most of his time during the war. A watch was for several hours at night. During wartime to avoid enemy submarines the ships sailed without lights and with radios silent. The main part of the watch's duty was to keep a close lookout and report anything out of the ordinary - especially enemy activity. During this particular watch, Dad was scanning the horizon when he saw an explosion in the distance. No one else on the watch saw it. Dad immediately notified the officer-in-charge, who had not seen the explosion either. The OIC ordered the ship into zig-zag maneuvers that were designed to make the ship harder to hit by torpedoes. The evasive maneuvers continued throughout the night. By morning, many of men on board were sick from the violent motion of the ship. The men aboard the ship were not told what had happened. Later Dad found out that another ship carrying fellow Sea Bees and Marines was hit by an enemy torpedo and sunk. This was the explosion that Dad had seen. None of the other ships in the flotilla returned to assess the damage or to attempt to rescue anyone because enemy submarines would usually hang around the area of a sinking or damaged ship to destroy any other friendly craft that might come to their rescue. Dad always felt sorry for the men on the other ship and figured that it could just as easily have been his ship that was hit.

Another story that Dad liked to tell was when he and a Sea Bee buddy were manning an antiaircraft gun battery on a mountain position above the harbor near New Caledonia. Manning such gun emplacements was a duty that fell to the "fighting Sea Bees" on a regular basis, especially once they had finished building the airstrips and other facilities on the islands where they were based. While at anchor, the ships in the harbor would put up large helium-filled barrage balloons that were attached to cables of varying lengths to ward off enemy air attacks. That day, one of the balloons broke loose, and the ship's captain called the fire control center to ask that the shore batteries shoot it down. The task fell to Dad and his buddy. They lowered the muzzle of the antiaircraft gun and fired an explosive round at the target. It was an easy shot and they hit the balloon direct on. However, the round punched cleanly through the balloon and did not explode. The barrage balloon immediately fell into the water, but the unexploded round continued on. Since their firing position was in the hills above the ships, they had unknowingly aimed their gun directly at the deck of another ship in the harbor. The round hit the second ship and exploded. Luckily it caused only minor damage and no casualties. Dad and his buddy received a frantic call from the fire control center asking if they knew who had fired the round. They said that they didn't, but that they would let them know if they found out. They remained mum about their experience until they were safely transferred out of the area.

A third story Dad that told on a few occasions was about a time when he was alone in the hills above the harbor where he was watching as the Navy unloaded cargo from one of the large ships at the dock. Military trucks were filled with ammunition and began to convoy away from the ship. As they did, a Japanese plane appeared out of nowhere and hit one of the trucks either with

a bomb or gun fire. Dad watched in horror as the first of the trucks disappeared in a fireball. Then, one by one the rest of the trucks exploded in succession like a string of firecrackers. He said that the noise was deafening and that his ears bled for some time afterward. He figured that this was one of the reasons he had poor hearing the rest of his life. I suspect that it may also have led to some of the emotional difficulties that hospitalized Dad for a time and for which he received a small VA check each month for the rest of his life.

A fourth less-repeated story was about a Navy pilot that Dad and one of his buddies had befriended. The pilot told the two Sea Bees that he would take them up in his plane when he did his periodic tour of scanning the area for enemy aircraft and submarines. The two men were excited to take the promised rides. When they drew lots, it fell to Dad's buddy to go up first. It just so happened that on that day a huge Japanese submarine entered the harbor (A while ago I found a web site that, based on Dad's descriptions, described it as probably one of the largest submarines in existence at the time, which the Japanese used for cargo hauling - it may have been damaged or lost its bearings and entered the wrong harbor). The Navy pilot immediately dived to engage the sub, which he did over and over until the submarine sank to the bottom of the harbor. In a few days, Dad went to get his promised ride with the pilot. He was told by the angry airman that there would be no more rides for Sea Bees because the other one had cried like a baby and became frantic during the engagement with the submarine, almost causing the pilot to crash. Dad felt badly that he had missed his promised ride in a war plane. (I think that this is one reason Dad loved his balloon ride in Cedar valley, parakite rides in the field, glider rides in Heber - especially when he paid for some of us to go up too - and the ride Joan arranged for him in the gyro copter in Springville.)

Dad often talked about swimming in the harbor by himself. He described beautiful coral reefs and exotic plant and animal life. He also talked about sting rays, barracuda and sharks always in close proximity to where he was swimming - one reason being that the navy cooks discarded leftover food directly into the water. Dad said that he swam calmly and cautiously and was never bothered by any of the menacing creatures. (I often thought that it would have been fun to take Dad to Hawaii to swim in the bays. However, he refused to ever fly again after he, Mom and Betsy's parents had a near crash when flying home from visiting us in Virginia for my promotion ceremony while I was stationed at Fort Monroe.) One day, one of the sailors decided to take Dad's lead and go swimming alone in the area. Later that night, they reported him missing. He was never found. Dad figured that one of the sharks got him. However, this did not deter Dad from his frequent swims.

At times, Dad told of the horrendous tropical storms that often hit the bivouac areas where the sailors lived in tents. In whatever tent Dad was in at the time, he would lay "dead-men" (large logs buried in the sand) and attach the tent ropes to them. As a result, he never had any of his tents blow down, while most others did. After a while, the other Sea Bees followed Dad's example when pitching their tents in the tent cities.

One of my favorite stories is how Dad built a small, portable device to extract fluids from fish, which were to be used for drinking in emergency situations. As I think about the smelly and off-colored liquid extracted by Dad's invention, it would not have been very appetizing, but it would definitely have been utilitarian and a life saver. He envisioned his device being used by seaman,

pilots or others who might find themselves stranded in the ocean with nothing to drink but sea water. Anyone in such a situation would soon find that after a few days or even hours, sea water would dehydrate and seriously injure or kill anyone who drank it. When Dad was leaving the Western Pacific, he threw the device into the ocean rather than bring it back home. (I often felt that this may have been related to the fact that when he was a young man his step mother discarded or destroyed his inventions whenever she found them because she wanted him to become a civil engineer, while Dad wanted to be more of an innovator and inventor.)

Another invention Dad came up with in the hot and humid Pacific islands was a tent air conditioner, which kept his tent comfortably cooler than anywhere else on the island. He used discarded equipment parts to build it. This is kind of reminiscent of his "projects" around home and the greenhouses. (In later years, I loved the fact that Dad was always inventing something new or modifying some piece of equipment to do a chore around the house or for the business. After I retired from the Army, Dad and I often went to the Desert Industries to buy items that tickled his fancy. He modified several of them into things he used in his shop room in Pleasant Grove. He also designed and built a sprayer platform for the back of the motorized chair that we purchased from the DI.)

During the Second World War, the military issued packs of cigarettes to the men along with their meals. Dad saved his up and traded them for ice cream, candy or other food that he especially liked. The guys he traded with never quibbled about swapping to get some good American cigarettes. Another thing about the food; after Dad got home, and for years while I was living at home, Dad always piled his foods one on top of the other - said he got used to it in the Navy and always liked to eat that way afterward. He also preferred using a table spoon when he ate and a large metal shaker for his salt - both remnants of his military days. (To this day, I find that I also prefer a large spoon and an ample salt shaker with my meals.)

Finally, my favorite story is about how Dad salvaged discarded stainless steel strips and pieces of aluminum that were plentiful around the naval base on. He cut, ground and polished the steel into knife blades while crafting the handles to fit a man's hand. He then melted the pieces of aluminum and dipped the handle end repeatedly into the molten liquid until a comfortable handle was formed and the correct balance was achieved. Dad sold and bartered these knives to the Marines who came through on their way to Guadalcanal and the Solomon Islands where they met the enemy in some of the fiercest battles of the Pacific campaign. I imagine that some of Dad's knives were used during the deadly hand-to-hand fighting by the Marines in that area. I would certainly love to see or acquire one of Dad's knives now. (A number of years ago, when Gary told Dad and I that he would take us cross-country skiing and snow caving, Dad fashioned some snow knives out of two foot long pieces of aluminum and plastic handles. We used those knives to cut snow blocks for our shelters, so I got to see firsthand a bit of Dad's knife-making ability.)

Over time, I may remember other stories that Dad used to tell. If so, I'll send them on.

Charles