

Brother Otis G. Manchester Jr.



Otis Manchester of North Port, Fla. always wanted to go to sea and see the world. His father had served in the U.S. Navy during World War I and he volunteered for the Navy a year before the start of the Korean War.

After graduating from boot camp at Great Lakes Naval Processing Center outside Chicago in early 1949, Manchester went home on leave for a few days and then took the Santa Fe Railroad west to San Diego, Calif. It was where we went aboard the USS Antietam, a World War II Essex Class carrier.

“We took a short cruise aboard the Antietam, CV-36,” the old salt said. “It was her last cruise before we put her in mothballs after World War II.

“I served as a fireman apprentice aboard the Antietam. It was my job to help run the generators and the boilers in the engine-room. We



came back from our first cruise after several weeks and returned to Hunter’s Point, near San Francisco, where we helped put the Antietam in mothballs.

“I got to know San Francisco and that area pretty well. It was good duty for a 20-year-old sailor, but I wanted to get on a ship and see the world,” Manchester said. “After spending six months getting the Antietam ready for mothballs I took a Navy seaplane back to San Diego with a whole bunch of other Navy guys.” Manchester got just what he did not want, shore duty with the mothball fleet outside San Diego where some 200 ships of the line lay

rusting at their anchor chains.

“Our job was to inspect the ships in mothballs and write reports about their condition,” he said. “We spent many hours standing watch and

walking the decks of these ships with a night stick in one hand and a clipboard in the other.

‘It was a pretty soft job. I worked in the office filling out paper work for a couple of officers much of the time. While I was working I had my own radio I could play any time I wanted,’ Manchester recalled 50 years later.

After the outbreak of the Korean War, in June 1950, some of the ships in the mothball fleet went back to sea. He applied for positions aboard all of these ships but came up empty-handed.

‘Finally, after working for three years with the mothball fleet, I went to



sea aboard the LSD (Landing Ship Dock) USS Belle Grove, a repair ship that was headed through the Panama Canal on its way to Baltimore, Md.,” Manchester said. “After they put a superstructure on the ship, so we could carry bulldozers and other heavy equipment, we sailed for Thule, Greenland.”

“We were sent there to help build the American airbase at Thule. This was the summer of 1951 and the United States was building the “DEW Line”—a string of airbases and radar stations as protection against possible incoming Soviet missiles,” he said.

“Although we arrived in the spring the Coast Guard had to send an ice breaker out to us to break the ice so we could make port. I remember when the Coast Guard got close to our ship they were playing ‘Anchors Away’ over their loud speakers for our benefit,” Manchester said.

“During the summer months while we were at Thule we had to keep the ship’s engines running at all time so we wouldn’t get iced in. There was no darkness, it was daylight all the time up there,” he said.

When they returned in the fall to Norfolk, the Belle Grove became floating transportation for thousands of U.S. Marines sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for landing practice. They took boat after boat of Marines down to Cuba to assault the beach at Guantanamo.

It was October 1951 and Manchester was looking forward to getting out of the Navy after three years of service.

“Unfortunately President Truman extended my service in the Navy an additional year because of the Korean War. At that time, I did not have much respect for the President because of that. Since then I’ve decided Truman was one of our great presidents, he was quite a guy,”

Manchester observed.

Shortly after his service time was extended, he was reassigned to the USS San Marcos, another LSD. His rating was Machinist Mate 2nd class.

For his last year aboard the San Marcos, Manchester became a Navy tourist during a world cruise in which his ship took part.

“We made many of the ports in the Mediterranean, sailed onto to Greece, Gibraltar, North Africa stopping along the way stopped at many historic and picturesque cities and town,” he said. “I took a tour of Paris with four other Navy guys and it was great.”

At the conclusion of his three year, 11 month and 26-day Naval career he went back to night school and eventually ended up at Wentworth Institute in Boston learning to become a machinist. After graduation two years later, he went to work for Digital Computer in 1956.

He became a tool and die maker, and worked for Hewlett-Packard for years until his retirement at 61. He and his wife, Joan, moved to North Port in 1994.

They have four children: Linda, David, Nancy and Mark.

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