

Bernard Sam Myers

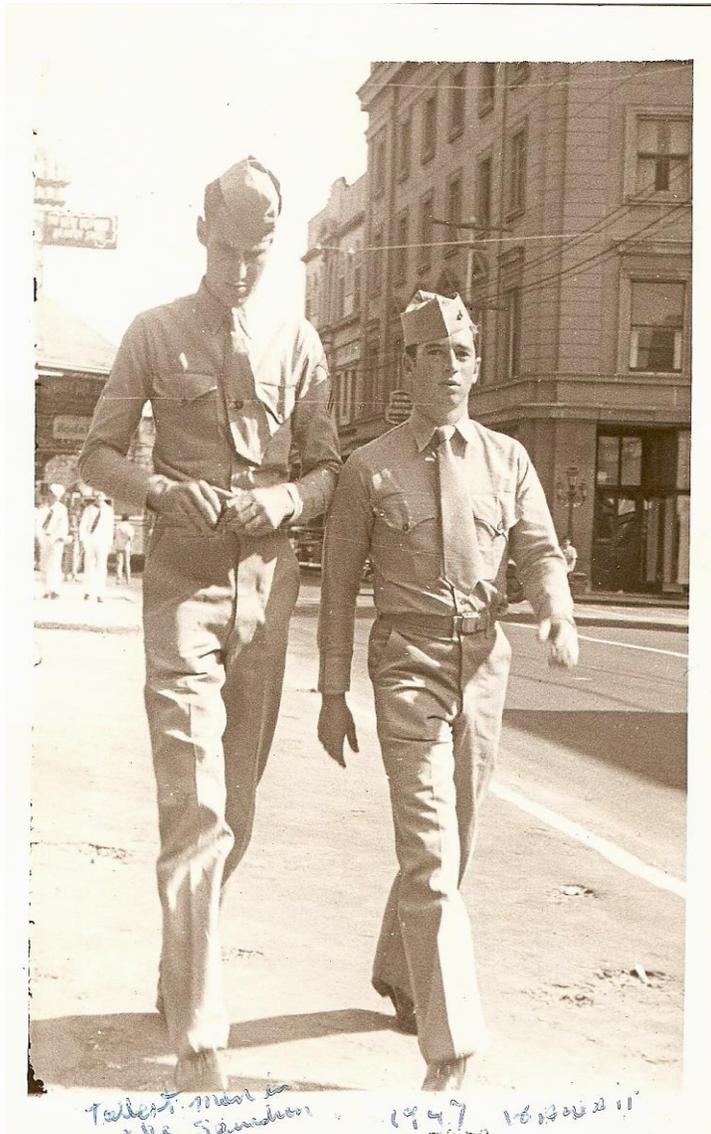
Born: 1929
San Diego
Died:

Period of Service WW II
US Marine Corps

Sources: Himself

Entered service April 12, 1946 Released June 14, 1947.

See attached interview.



See attached interview .

VETERANS HISTORY PROJECT
Preserving Stories of Service for Future Generations

Interview with

Bernard Sam Myers

Conducted by Mr. John Gay

August 6, 2010

This project sponsored by the Indian Prairie Public Library
in partnership with the Library of Congress

This is John Gay interviewing Sam Mrs on his military service. Today is August 6, 2010, and we're at Sam's house on Michigan Road on Washington Island, Wisconsin.

Entering Military Service

Sam, when did you go into the service and what were the situations at the time?

I was attending high school, and I quit high school and joined April 12, 1946.

So World War II had ended, you were going to be drafted, so you signed up?

Well, I thought I'd do something at that time. I didn't expect to be drafted because I expected to go into the Navy. That's what I thought earlier. But another friend and myself joined together: quit school and signed up.

I had the same kind of experience. Another friend of mine was going to join the Marines. I said I'd go down with him, so I went down. I had to wear glasses at the time and they said, "No. We want triple 'A' guys and you don't qualify." So the other guy went and I went back to school. This was in where?

This was in San Diego: I was born and raised in San Diego.

So you did your training in the Marines ...

In San Diego, also.

That was April of 1946. Boot camp lasted ...

I think it was around twelve weeks.

Did you have an assignment after that for further schooling?

I thought I was going to go to Florida, because I had signed paperwork and so forth that I wanted to be a radioman, and radio school was in Jacksonville, Florida.

Was boot camp kind of a surprise to you, or did you know what to expect?

Quite frankly, I had no problems in boot camp whatsoever. I had been raised in an orphanage and foster homes until I joined the Marine Corps, so the regimentation was not unusual, in my view anyway.

Duties weren't too tough for you? You were able to handle them alright?

I was in athletics in high school. I was a runner. I found the physical activities were not exceeding my level.

You didn't go to Florida, then. You went elsewhere?

Yes. I went up to Miramar. That was when Miramar was still a Marine air station, before it became a naval air station. It has since reverted to a Marine air station. But I was sent to Miramar along with a whole bunch of other guys. We were in what they called an overseas draft to replace a bunch of guys they were sending home.

Where is Miramar?

Miramar is just north of San Diego, about 20 miles.

So you were still in the same area.

Oh, yeah.

And you spent some time there at Miramar?

About a month.

Was there any particular school there?

No. As a matter of fact it was a rather short time, and we were just a so-called reserve company waiting to get on board a ship to go to Hawaii.

Duty Assignment

And that's where you went then?

Yes. I got on board ship in San Diego and we sailed to San Francisco and then boarded another ship there and continued on to Hawaii.

That was your duty station then?

I was in VMR352 in Hawaii. It was a naval air station.

Is that on Oahu?

It's on Oahu.

On the north end?

Yes, pretty much – adjacent to Barbers Point: Ewa Air Station.

We were there in February. What were your duties?

Immediately I was an aircraft mechanic and I was working on large airplanes which were DC3's and R4D's – that's a transport squadron. I was a striker because I had not gone to any formal military schools except the boot camp.

There were many people just like me. There were one or two sergeants left here and there, and they were training all of us out of boot camp to be aircraft mechanics. I was really replacing spark plugs, doing menial tasks. It got me interested in aviation, however.

You used the term, 'striker.' What does that mean?

That means you are trying to become classified ...

To get a certain MOS? (Military Occupational Specialty)

Yes, to get that MOS.

We were all 521 riflemen coming out of boot camp.

How long did you continue that duty?

One month (chuckles). Then I was put on mess duty. I wasn't doing anything spectacular on mess duty – kind of waiting tables. Then a few months later – you only did 30 days a year and I did 60 days, but I was on pots and pans the second time around and that was much more difficult because they didn't care how they burned the food on the pots and pans.

You had to get them clean, anyway. I had that experience as well. So you'd been there a couple of months.

Well, I was there my entire time until I came home again. I spent a lot of time just learning stuff. I'd go up to the naval air station, Barbers Point, by truck. They'd go back and forth between the two. The odd thing was I was 17 and I couldn't drink beer on the Marine station, but I could drink beer at the Barbers Point Naval Air Station (both chuckle).

Did they ask for ID or were you just able to walk in?

They did ask for my ID on the Marine air station. But on the naval air station they did not.

How long were you in those duties? You had KP ...

I had KP. Then I think we left for home 30 days before we got out. And I got out in ... Oh, I've got to tell you about this. I'm looking at my discharge papers. I think it was around June 1, 1947. June 1 is my birthday, by the way. Yes. The 17th of June.

So you were in service for only two years?

Yes. When I signed up, I signed up for two years. Then, while I was in Hawaii, the Marine Corps came out with what they call "ALMAR" 27. It said that anybody who signed up for two years could extend for a year, or they could get out. All of us who had signed up for two years had to be interviewed by a major in the squadron. He asked us if we wanted to extend or get out. I asked if we could just finish our enlistment and he said, no, we had to extend a year or get out then. Well, when you're 17 years old and you're looking ahead, one year seems like a long time. It's not really, but it seemed like it at that time, so I took the deal to get out.

That's kind of unusual, isn't it? They actually drew down the forces after World War II – that was the reason for it. It's interesting. So you said working on the DC3's got you interested in aviation.

Yes. As a matter of fact, it was actually the R4D's – the four engine airplane that I spent more time with. I learned to fly when I was in Hawaii. I would go down to Hickam Field and would fly a piper cub there. I soloed when I was in Hawaii. I've been flying ever since. I paid for that myself.

I was going to say – that was not subsidized in any way.

No.

So you got out on June 17, 1947, and you came back home. Did they fly you home?

No, they put us on a boat coming home.

And you wound up in San Francisco?

Yes, and we took a train from San Francisco back to San Diego.

Did a bunch of guys go with you?

Oh, yes. We made up the whole train.

So a lot of guys were discharged at one time.

Right. Coming home I remember the ship – it was the USS Breckenridge. I don't remember the two ships that I was on when I went over there.

I had some interesting duties when I went over there. We left San Diego and they said, "Myers, Smith, [and so forth] follow me." We went to the rear of the ship – the

fantail – and I was dumping out garbage into the ocean. I was bitching about that and they said not to worry about it – that they would get me another job. So when I got on the ship going to Hawaii I was put in the bread room – that was where they brought in hot bread, and it was my job to run it through the bread slicer. It was about 140° in there. I thought I was being baked! I learned not to bitch!

It doesn't get you much (both chuckle). So you were on bread duty for the trip out.

Yes. Coming back I just laid around and didn't do anything.

That's not bad duty.

No. Actually, we went down to El Toro Marine Air Base down in Santa Ana. I got paid 5¢ a mile to go from El Toro to my home. Well, I lived closer than almost anybody else because it's only about 80 miles from El Toro to San Diego.

So you got four bucks (both chuckle).

Yeah.

Returning to Civilian Life

What did you do when you got out of the service? You got involved in aviation?

No. As a matter of fact I went to college for a while. But the first thing I did was to get a job. I worked for two guys who were partners. They made wooden Venetian blinds. I didn't know anything about them, but I learned in a hurry. That fall I started at San Diego State College.

I wondered what to sign up for – I didn't know. So I put down psychology. I took physics and a few other classes. The worst class I did was in psychology. I liked physics. I went to college for a short time – just about a year. I never went back because they still had this hazing and the beanie cap stuff. For some reason these people going to school were virtually the same age I was, but they were acting like children. So I decided that wasn't for me.

The service changes your perspective on life.

Right. So I did go to school finally in Chicago. I learned television, and I was in television for many years.

What part of television?

Television repair. Then I worked for a television studio in San Diego – Channel 10.

You went back from Chicago to San Diego?

Yes. And that's about the time I got married, too. I first came up to Wisconsin in 1948. I was with a guy who had spent a summer here – actually all year. His aunt and uncle were the postmasters. There were four of us and we actually were headed to Alaska. We were going to go chop down trees and make big money. But we made a stupid vow that all of us would have jobs or none of us. Well, we got as many as three jobs at one time, but we never got that fourth job. We ran out of money. We picked berries in Washington – strawberries – and did various farm work to get more money.

One guy spoke up and said, "Let's go to Washington Island." I said, "What's that?" He said it was a little island up in Lake Michigan. So we went up here to work.

Two of us came back the next year, and I ended up marrying a girl who was born and raised in the house right down in front of us where the horse corral is now. Unfortunately she died in 1996. I've since remarried.

After I retired I wanted to come up here and live. We bought – my first wife and I – had bought this piece of property from her parents. Her parents gave the rest of the property – it was 29 acres – to the other kids. We used to send her parents money – people up here were virtually penniless in the '40's. So I built this in 1997 and have been here ever since.

I remember. Did you pick cherries for John Quincy Adams?

My wife picked cherries when she was a kid. There were no cherries left here – almost by 1950 they were gone. There were a few milk cows – they sold the milk to the cheese factory. Then the cheese factory burned down and they had no place to sell the milk. They did take it off island on the ferry for a while, but it got too expensive.

While I was here I went out with some of the fishermen. I decided that was something I didn't want to do – to be a fisherman. It was a little bit uncertain then, but you can't make a living now.

We would vacation up here – visit Louise's parents and the boys liked it here. Of course, my three sons are in California and Oregon; they're all raising families of their own now.

So you were married about 50 years before your wife died.

Forty-six years.

And the boys are all on the west coast.

Yes. My oldest son is an unemployed electrician. He's been unemployed for almost three years out in California. So it's been kind of rough for him. My second son is deaf, and he's married and has one child – she's going to be up here a week from today; she's 17. My youngest son has a set of twin girls who are 15, and he's very well employed – he works for Southwest Airlines as a captain. He joined the Navy and flew off the carrier, Enterprise.

Is that docked down in San Diego?

Yes, at the north end.

I saw it. We went on it. We were out there within the last year.

He got out. He was in for 12 years and opted for a 13th year in the Reserves. But then he resigned, but with no pension or anything like that – he just wanted to spend more time with his family. He makes pretty good money as a pilot for Southwest Airlines. I think the fact that he flew off a carrier helped him get his job with Southwest Airlines.

That's interesting. So you spent most of your working career in San Diego?

In San Diego and Sacramento.

So you were out here in Chicago for just a couple of years and learned TV repair.

Yes. I went to Coyne Electrical and Radio School. Then, when I got back to San Diego I went to work for Consolidated Aircraft and I was supposed to be a radar technician. Only they put me to work bucking rivets. So I got a job as a television repair guy out where I lived in La Mesa, California – that's just east of San Diego; not far. I stayed there for five years and bought into the company. Then I went to work for Channel 10 and stayed there for five years. And then I went to work for an electrical contractor and stayed with them – I was the branch manager in Sacramento; they sent me up there. Then I went into business for myself in 1969 and retired out of my business in 1994.

So this was a television repair business?

No. I was a general electrical contractor when I went into work for this company. They put me to work, initially the job I had was installing wave guide, only it was nothing like television at all. Of course they didn't know the difference – the people who hired me. It was not really that difficult, but the wave guide was probably about 3 ½" in diameter. It was the wave guide they used when sending missiles off for experimental purposes and so forth. I was working in underground silos and on towers and all kinds of stuff.

A wave guide is some electromagnetic kind of thing?

No. It's something to guide the wave from the source of where it's generated until it's broadcast out into space. It's a very, very high frequency, and it's oriented to go and follow the missile or rocket.

So you had your own business for 25 years or so?

1969 to 1994 – whatever that was.

Well, we got you out of the service in a hurry, anyway. You're one of a few who was able to have such a short duty and still be able to work out your commitment.

Yes. In retrospect I would have stayed in the service longer. But it was either stay longer now and not make up my mind, or get out now. But I couldn't just stay in for the term I had signed up for.

Keeping in Touch

Do you stay in touch with any of the guys you were in service with?

There were a couple of guys up in Oregon, and I lost track of them many, many years ago. There was a guy in Texas who was in my same squadron. Of course, when I came here in 1948 I met my wife. I met Wayne Boshka and a whole bunch of other people. Wayne was in the Marine Corps, so he would come to the studio where I was working in television. Frank Hansen.

That's Marcia's father?

No. Frank and Kim Hansen. Frank was in the Marine Corps. Why he doesn't come to our meetings, I don't know.

We'll have to get a hold of him.

Wayne normally comes.

And Merwyn Nelson was in the Navy. He was in submarines. Merwyn is pretty tall, so he hit just about everything above his head.

Doug Huffman was in submarines as well, and he's pretty tall.

So there were a lot of guys who were in the service after I was out but would visit me because they not only knew me, but they also knew Louise. But this was after I got out of the Marine Corps.

Did you find the guys pretty much compatible in the Marine Corps?

Yes. I had no problem with them. I got in a couple of fights when I was in boot camp – mostly after I got out of boot camp. I got in a fight with a guy. I could picture my teeth scattered all over the floor. Some guy grabbed his arm and got my head out and said, "Get out!" I left the barracks in a hurry and waited at least a half an hour before I went back because this guy was huge!

Not to be messed with. Sam, thanks for your time with this interview. We'll conclude here unless you have something else you want to add.

Yes. I just qualified as World War II duty by the time. The war had been over and guys like me, at that time, if they had not dropped the atomic bomb there would be at least a half-a-million of us invading Japan's beaches ...

And getting killed.

So I feel I was very fortunate. At the same time, when you're 17 years old and it's looking like, "Gee whiz. The war is going to pass me by and I haven't had a chance to do anything except go to school."

Thanks, Sam.