

Korean War Veterans Armistice Day

Honoring Our Members

Kyle Lantz

Kyle Lantz grew up in Burchard, Nebraska and at the age of 18 he was selected to serve in the U.S. Navy. He took the various tests, and scored high in mathematics, so was trained to work in Supply. Kyle became a Storekeeper 3rd Class in ranking during his 4 years in the Navy from 1949 to 1953.

Kyle served aboard the U.S.S. Rochester. This ship was 679 feet from bow to stern and 4 stories high. It had 3 sets of 8 inch guns facing forward on the ship and one set facing to the rear. These guns could shoot a distance of 25 miles, and Kyle stated that as they cruised the seas near Korea's shore, they would shoot 7200 rounds of ammunition inland. There were about 4,300 men on board.

Their ship was in a fleet of about 125 ships which covered about a 50 mile radius in the ocean. They often went to sea for 8-10 weeks at a time, only docking in Guam periodically where the Air Force had a base, so they could restock their supplies of ammunition and food. Occasionally a supply ship would come out to sea to provide them items, and a helicopter would land on their ship about once a week to deliver mail. One time, Kyle recalls that they went into the Saigon River at about 5 knots on some time of "goodwill" tour. The Air Force protected them.

Kyle stated there were about 45 sailors assigned to working in Supply. The item they couldn't seem to keep in stock very long was chocolate candy bars! They always ran out before they could get to port. Another popular item was chewing gum, especially Dentyne Gum! Supply was open 24/7, to serve the sailors that worked various shifts, so they never closed. Kyle was also a pilot, so he could fly a supply plane to Guam or other islands to obtain fresh produce or other items as needed. There were 42 cooks on board, so they needed lots of supplies to feed the huge crew.

Admiral Hinze was in charge of the ship and its crew. Kyle admired this officer and liked working for him. One time he had to go provide the Admiral with a report on the crew members that weren't doing their job tasks properly – they were repeatedly tardy or didn't follow through as directed on tasks. He was a little intimidated about reporting to the Admiral directly, but the man was very friendly and asked Kyle if he'd like a cup of coffee. Kyle didn't drink coffee, but he wanted to be polite, so he graciously accepted and tried to choke down some sips. Once he reviewed the infractions with the Admiral, the Admiral requested that the 14 men on the report be ushered in so that he could talk to them directly regarding his expectations for their future work performance. The men came in, all trembling and nervous, knowing that they were in trouble. The Admiral provided them all with a bottle of Coke soda, and simply stated he wanted to voice



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his concerns with them over their behavior. He stated that when he was young like them, he was also not very mature either, and wouldn't take his job tasks seriously. He then told them it didn't take long to "grow up", as he watched his fellow comrades dying on either side of him during battle situations, and he realized how important it was to do his job and do it well, in order to survive and to help out each other. The Sailors all were contrite and worked much harder after that visit.



When asked about how they'd spend their time when not working, Kyle replied that they would often turn the guns at an angle on the front deck so that they could set up a basketball court and play games. Poker and dice games were also very popular, although Kyle didn't participate often. He can recall the sound of the dice as it rolled on the steel deck, and people either shouting in triumph or groaning when it didn't roll their way. He remembers one of his friends who was really good at dice, and routinely played to win extra money. At the end of their deployment, he had enough money to actually contact the mainland to order a brand new car from his winnings to be there when they arrived, because he was so skilled/lucky at dice!

Sometimes they got to go to "R&R" when they were at port in Guam. He remembers one time when there were a bunch of the Navy guys at a bar on shore, when some Marines came in, and after words were exchanged between the two groups, a brawl began. Suddenly, the commanding officer of the Marines arrived and shouted orders to his men, and they immediately stopped swinging and saluted. He then made them double time out the door and continue on running for over a mile, to calm them all down.

One time, when Kyle was on "R&R", he was able to purchase a soda sized bottle of "Evening in Paris" perfume for 75 cents! He then decided to start searching on the ship for small bottles he could recycle, and poured a little of this special perfume in each of those smaller bottles. The men were all eager to pay him good money to get this coveted perfume, so that they'd have a special gift to give their girlfriends or wives upon return to the mainland.

One of the drills that they had to perform was always memorable. Everyone on the ship had to report for the swimming drill. They dragged a net out in the ocean beside the ship, and each person had to jump overboard, swim to the side of the ship, and climb back up the side of the ship to get on board. The Marines would be out in the whale boats with their guns, so they could shoot at any sharks that came near, while the men swam back to the ship. Kyle only had to do this drill once, and afterwards, he always made sure he was the person holding the payroll clipboard with all of the names, and when he got to his own name, he would skip over it, and on to the next one. No one ever seemed to notice that he hadn't performed the drill and jumped in himself!

Upon return to civilian life, he first worked as a contractor in California, followed by becoming a Deputy Sheriff, and final working as a Civil Engineer. While in California, he met and married his wife and they had one daughter. Their daughter was killed in an automobile accident at a young age, and left behind their granddaughters, who they helped raise. Kyle's wife passed away about 9 years ago, and he now resides at the Central Nebraska Veterans' Home.

When asked whether he understood that through his service, he had aided the cause to stop the spread of Communism in the world, Kyle just shook his head and said, "I had never heard of Korea before I went into the service, and had no idea even where it was located on a map. We didn't really understand why we were there, or what the goal was. We just did what we were trained to do."

