

Howard's Naval Journey

Howard [La Favre] entered the Navy on February 26, 1943. The following is his route across the Pacific:

He left from Terminal Island – Long Beach, California – in January of 1944.

The ship to which he was assigned was called a PGM [PGM-7] (motorized gun boat). It had – 110 ft hull, 27 man crew, 3 officers (highest – lieutenant)

It first stopped in Pearl Harbor (Honolulu). The next stop was at Palmyra Atoll. Then it went to American Samoa and landed at Pago Pago (pronounced Pango Pango). It's a natural harbor created by a volcano. The harbor was a crater.

The International Date Line was crossed next. Before you pass you are "a polliwog". Cross the line and you become "a Shell Back". The PGM then landed in Suva on Fiji. The next stop was Noumea on New Caledonia.

Then the crew went north to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. Still travelling north, they landed on the Solomon Islands. Howard was based there for a year. He was stationed there on Treasury Island. During his time there, he patrolled the area to keep barges from bringing supplies to the Japanese who had been left on the Solomons to secure them. The big battles were already over. The Americans were to starve the Japanese soldiers out. Also, he patrolled islands to the north of the Solomons called Bismarck Archipelago.

On one occasion, while performing a night patrol off Bougainville Island (in the Solomons), and running without any lights, a friendly ship began firing on Howard's ship because of a mix-up in communications. They thought the PGM was a Japanese ship. At the same time, Howard was on deck helping load a mortar to fire at a beach installation belonging to the Japanese. The ships in the area were not using their radios so that the Japanese would not pick up their location. But when one of their own ships started firing on them, they quickly called them to stop it! No one was hit. There were places on the ship where the shells hit and did some minimal damage.

It was on the Solomons where Howard and Connie Greenlaw hooked up and became good friends. Connie passed away around 1985. In 1999, we still communicate with his widow at Christmas time. Her name is, also, Connie. Howard was transferred to Connie's PGM [PGM-3] after another attack as a result of poor communications. This second friendly ship, of the same size as the PGM [PGM-4], rammed Howard's ship in the middle, knocking the motor clear into the other motor. Again, this friendly ship thought it was crippling a Japanese ship. Howard does not know what happened to his old ship because they left shortly after. [other accounts indicate that this was an accident, not an intended attack on a suspected enemy]

Sometime after the above accident and while on patrol around Choiseul Island (still part of the Solomons), another snafu occurred. This time it was an airplane (a PBY) that tried to destroy them. The bomb they dropped fell off the stern (the rear) approx. 100 yards away. This really scared the crew! Guess Howard's crew got on the radio pronto!

Another bit of information about how the guys managed to avoid a catastrophe. Whenever the Japanese fired on them from the shore, they always kept out of the way because the crew knew exactly what the capabilities of the Japanese installations were.

Special information regarding the PGM's guns: a three-inch 50 (3.50) = largest gun, two 20 mm guns, one 40 mm gun on stern, mid-ship had two twin 50 caliber guns.

Finally, they left the Solomons and headed toward the Philippines. They stopped at New Guinea on the way. Howard was based on Samar Island across from Leyte in the Philippines for one year. He travelled up off Luzon to Manila (capital). Also, he went south and stopped at Cebu City. He patrolled off Mindanao and at the end of the war, travelled south of the Philippines to an island named Morotai (Dutch East Indies then-now part of Indonesia). They were there for two nights, but Howard didn't know why.

Next, they were on their way north again and around August 14th, they received news that the Japanese had surrendered. The ship kept going north to Okinawa at Buckner Bay. They stopped there around October 1945. In that bay, they were caught in a typhoon. They decided to head for the other side of the bay where there was better protection. It took all night to get over there because of the strong winds. Over 100 ships were driven up on shore in Buckner Bay. Howard's Uncle Hervy was there in Buckner Bay during the typhoon, too. Hervy was Ethel Shutt's husband. Ethel (Christensen) was Agnes La Favre's youngest sister. She was the author of "The Dirty Danes". Hervy was an executive officer (2nd in command) on a repair ship there. It had no motor and had to be towed wherever it travelled. There was a second typhoon that caught Uncle Hervy, but not Howard. He and his crew had sailed north to Shanghai and missed it. During this time the Navy started to discharge sailors who had the most service points. The crew stayed in Shanghai for one month and then returned to Luzon and to Subic Bay. This was the naval base close to Manila.

While in Shanghai, Howard had his first experience of eating at some elegant French and German restaurants and one special place called "The Seventh Heaven". It was on the seventh floor, of course. It was at these restaurants that he tasted his first shrimp cocktail and plate of Wiener schnitzel (a delicious breaded veal cutlet).

Howard stayed a few weeks in the Philippines (at Subic Bay) until he boarded an aircraft carrier named the San Jacinto which was used to carry troops. He was going home. At one time, George Bush was attached to the same carrier. You know, he was the youngest pilot in the Navy. Howard and the San Jacinto sailed from the Philippines directly to San Francisco. This ship berthed at Treasury Island in January and Howard stayed there until he was sent back to Terminal Island in Long Beach. He was there for just a few days and then was discharged on February 13, 1946.

[this account prepared by Barbara and Howard La Favre over Christmas vacation, 1999]