

**Mr. Neal:** I was born January 21, 1924

Did you serve in the Army, sir?

**Mr. Neal:** I served one term in the US Navy, a three year term in the US Navy, and a 24 year term in the US Army.

What was the primary unit you served in?

**Mr. Neal:** In the Army?

Yes sir.

**Mr. Neal:** I started out in the aviation field and was in the aviation field for a number of years until they came out with a Command Sergeant Major and then I commanded the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade and three or four more units.

Can you briefly state your parent's names and occupations?

**Mr. Neal:** My father's name was Elijah Kelton Neal and my mother's name was Geneva Neal. My daddy was a district manager for General Telephone Company.

Did you have any other brothers or sisters that served in the military?

**Mr. Neal:** I had one other brother that lives in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, that is retired from the telephone company and I have a sister deceased.

Do you have any recollections of the Great Depression growing up?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

How did it affect your family?

**Mr. Neal:** I was small but my daddy had a good job at the telephone company and it didn't really affect us that much. We had a decent living.

Were you old enough to have a job before you went into the service?

**Mr. Neal:** Oh yes. I worked for the A & P on weekends when I was going to high school. Later on I went to Fort Knox, Kentucky, and worked up there in the summertime in the PX when I was about a junior or senior in high school.

What year did you enlist or enter the Navy?

**Mr. Neal:** I entered the service in September 1942. I was discharged from the Navy in October 1945 and went back into the Army in November 1945.

Before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor how seriously did you take the threat to America by the Japanese sir?

**Mr. Neal:** When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor I guess I was a senior in high school. It had a real affect on the young people at that time, that was the seniors in high school and everybody was singing, we had already had some troops you know that went in from the National Guard and they were singing "Goodbye dear I will be back in a year." But they weren't back in a year.

Do you recall where and when you were when the news of Pearl Harbor came out sir?

**Mr. Neal:** I was sitting in a place called Humpkies Confection Area. It was a drug store. It was on a Sunday afternoon I believe. I don't remember when we got the word. A bunch of us were around the tables drinking Coke's and eating sundaes.

How did you hear about it, radio or newspaper?

**Mr. Neal:** On the radio.

What was your first reaction?

**Mr. Neal:** We couldn't believe it. We couldn't believe anything like that was happening.

You said you enlisted, you weren't drafted?

**Mr. Neal:** No I wasn't drafted, I enlisted.

What was your job in the Navy, sir?

**Mr. Neal:** I was an aviation mechanic in the Navy.

You had basic training in the Navy?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes, I had basic training in Pensacola, Florida, and I went to aviation school at 87<sup>th</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ in Chicago, Illinois.

During your initial entry what was your impression of your fellow recruits, sir?

**Mr. Neal:** Well at that time when I went into the service in 1942 there were very few people in my unit that had a high school education. I was about the only one or two or three in the whole unit that had a high school education at that time.

Was this your first time away from home the longest distance away from home?

**Mr. Neal:** It was my first time, yes.

Did you participate in any maneuvers stateside?

**Mr. Neal:** You mean in the Navy or in the Army?

In the Navy.

**Mr. Neal:** No, no Navy maneuvers in the stateside.

What about overseas, any maneuvers?

**Mr. Neal:** I was on the aircraft carrier USS Croitan. I was on it my whole length of service in the Navy from the time I got out of boot camp until I was discharged.

How good do you think your training was?

**Mr. Neal:** At that time it was excellent. It was good training at that time.

You said you were with the aviation unit right after you got out of Chicago?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

Where did you go from Chicago sir?

**Mr. Neal:** I went back to the USS Croitan; it was an aircraft carrier.

Where was that at?

**Mr. Neal:** Norfolk, Virginia. We went from there to Casablanca, Africa.

Was that in 1943?

**Mr. Neal:** I guess it was. We were there on the invasion of Casablanca, whatever year that was. I don't remember.

So you left from Norfolk and went to Casablanca.

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

How good were the living conditions on your aircraft carrier?

**Mr. Neal:** Great! Good living conditions. Good quarters and good food. If a man likes that type of life, it just wasn't the life for me.

As soon as you got to Casablanca did you go right into combat or was there a period of time once you arrived to the attack?

**Mr. Neal:** It was quite a bit of time in between. We had several conflicts with German subs but other than that we didn't have any actual...we dropped depth charges and stuff like that but we never had any actual on the beach contact or anything at that time.

When you arrived overseas did you do more training while you were there?

**Mr. Neal:** You mean in the Navy now?

Yes sir.

**Mr. Neal:** No, we stayed on the aircraft carrier the whole time.

What kind of equipment and arms did your unit train with sir?

**Mr. Neal:** In the Army?

In the Navy, this is for World War II.

**Mr. Neal:** We had 20 mm guns on the aircraft carrier and all types of 50 calibers and that type of arms. We didn't have any real heavy arms on there.

Did they perform accurately, the weapons systems?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

Casablanca was your first experience of actual combat?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

What kind of reaction did you have knowing that the enemy was right outside?

**Mr. Neal:** The Joan of Arc was burning in the harbor when we went in there. There was a lot of firing going on and you could hear the bullets hitting walls and ricocheting off and all that. Being a young man it didn't faze me a whole lot then like it would now. I don't guess I was what you call ready to run but I'm sure I was scared.

What rank were you sir, in the Navy?

**Mr. Neal:** In the Navy I was an aviation machinist mate 1<sup>st</sup> class.

Did you guys have free time, a lot of free time?

**Mr. Neal:** Yeah we had free time on the aircraft carrier.

What did you do in that free time?

**Mr. Neal:** We had badminton, volleyball, basketball, everything. An aircraft carrier is a pretty good sized ship. You got a lot of room. All of the planes are up on the top side and you use the hangar deck for a gymnasium.

Did you write a lot of letters back home, sir?

**Mr. Neal:** Yeah I wrote quite a few. I wasn't married but I had two or three girlfriends that I wrote to.

What kind of food did you get on the carrier? I know the carrier had pretty good food.

**Mr. Neal:** We got a lot of Navy beans and fried beans for breakfast, but we had good food; good nourishing food. We had pork chops and eggs; ordinary food that you would have in a mess hall.

Did you stay in Europe the whole time that World War II was going on or did you guys go out somewhere else?

**Mr. Neal:** We stayed in the North Atlantic the whole time.

Did you go from Casablanca?

**Mr. Neal:** From Casablanca we went back to Norfolk, Virginia.

Were you promoted during your time in service?

**Mr. Neal:** Yeah, I was promoted.

What were your impressions of your officers and you're NCOs?

**Mr. Neal:** In the Navy?

Yes sir.

**Mr. Neal:** I had good officers; well-trained officers and good NCO's.

They were competent and knew how to accomplish missions?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes, very competent.

Did you come across any enemy POWs? Did you capture any?

**Mr. Neal:** No we didn't really capture any. In Casablanca, Africa, the Army had captured a battalion company there and while we were there we had to furnish some guards to guard them but we never had anything to do with capturing them.

Did you hear anything about like Germans or battalions of Japanese prisoners like how respected they were or weren't?

**Mr. Neal:** Not really.

Were you ever wounded sir?

**Mr. Neal:** No.

Did you receive a medal for your actions in the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

Which ones did you get sir?

**Mr. Neal:** Are you talking about the Navy now?

Yes sir, during World War II.

**Mr. Neal:** I got some medals but I couldn't tell you what they are; a bunch of Army medals.

Did you have any fellow sailors that were injured or wounded?

**Mr. Neal:** I don't remember of anyone being real wounded on our ship real bad. We may have had some people that got hit by a stray bullet or something but I don't remember of anybody getting killed.

Did you have an overall picture of the allied strategy throughout the war?

**Mr. Neal:** Not really.

It was just vaguely mentioned and that was it?

**Mr. Neal:** That was it.

Your ship went back to Norfolk in 1945?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes. We would into port at Norfolk and have repairs made and take on more fuel and back out. We were more of a sub chasing aircraft carrier than anything else. We carried a lot of TBFs, that's bombers; Navy bombers with torpedoes on them. We did a lot of sub chasing in the North Atlantic.

Was that successful?

**Mr. Neal:** Very successful. They lost two aircraft that I remember.

Did your ship ever get compromised or anything?

**Mr. Neal:** No, the ship never did get hit. We were fired at several times by submarines but they missed us.

The Germans had a lot of submarines out there.

**Mr. Neal:** Yeah they had a lot of submarines in the North Atlantic but they were looking for transport ships more than they were anything else; ships that were carrying ammunition and stuff like that.

Were you part of an escort of a transport ship ever?

**Mr. Neal:** Yeah, we escorted some transport ships. We had one, I remember one got hit going with us one time. That was our main job I guess was to patrol the North Atlantic for submarines and escort transport ships and stuff like that.

You got out in 1945?

**Mr. Neal:** I got out in October 1945.

Was that the end of your enlistment?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes that was the end of my enlistment.

You got back and in the Army.

**Mr. Neal:** I went in the Army in November of 1945 because at the time there wasn't a lot of work out there. The war was over and people were coming home and getting the jobs and everything. I lived in a small town in Kentucky and there just wasn't anything else to do. The military was a pretty good life so I thought I would try the Army.

Were you part of an occupation force after the war in the Army?

**Mr. Neal:** Yeah, I went back to Germany, V Corp, right after the war. There were a lot of occupation forces there but V Corp Headquarters was the overseer. I was in the V Corp Headquarters with the Army aviation group. It was a section then.

That was your job in the Army as well, aviation?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

What was your area of responsibility in the occupation force?

**Mr. Neal:** We had five L19s and L5s that I had a crew of men that I had to look after and everything to keep them flying.

How did that go, your experience after the war was it. Was there much resistance you think?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes, after the war was over and everything you know, occupation forces, we were trying to rebuild Germany and give the Germans jobs and everything. It was a good duty, it wasn't a bad duty.

How long did you stay in Germany after 1945?

**Mr. Neal:** I spent two tours in Germany; 3 year tours are what it was. I went back in 1951 I guess.

Back to Germany?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

Were you there during the Berlin blockade?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes. I had nothing to do whatsoever with that; not a thing. Most that was involved in that was the Air Force.

What did you do when they shut off Berlin, the Russians?

**Mr. Neal:** Where was I stationed in?

No, what did you think? Did you think there was going to be a war, a second coming war; when the Russians shut off Berlin at \_\_\_\_\_ Crisis?

**Mr. Neal:** Oh when they shut it off?

Yes.

**Mr. Neal:** I don't remember how we looked at it. We just felt like that was another one of their ways of doing things. I went to Berlin with a group of Sergeant Majors when the Berlin wall was still there and everything. Of course we couldn't drive, we flew in. We even went over there to the Russian sector to checkpoint Charlie. It was just like a town that was isolated, sitting out in the middle of the ocean you know. The only way you could get into it was to fly into it. The only way you could get out was to fly into it unless you, military convoys could travel by road if they had special passes and permits and all that.

What was the overall, what would say about World War II and how it changed the world in your words?

**Mr. Neal:** World War II changed the way that people lived. It changed the way that people looked at things. It changed the economy of the world more so than anything else. During the war there were all kinds of people that were left at home had great jobs in ammunition factories and everything and got paid good salaries. After the war was over we kindly went downhill because there were so many people in this country out of work at that time. It played a big part in this country in the history of it and the economy of it too.

So you say you went back to Germany in 1951?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes I went back in 1951.

You stayed there for how long?

**Mr. Neal:** I stayed there another three years.

You said you retired a Command Sergeant Major?

**Mr. Neal:** Yes.

Where else did you go after Germany, sir? What other places?

**Mr. Neal:** Like I said, after World War II was over and I went into the Army I was a Sergeant Major of the 24<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion and then I left the 24<sup>th</sup> Aviation Battalion and took over as the Sergeant Major of the 24<sup>th</sup> Division. I stayed there and came back to Fort Campbell as Sergeant Major of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division that was supposed to come into Fort Campbell. We came in here and got set up and it lasted about three months and they deactivated it. Then I went as the Post Sergeant Major. I was also the Sergeant Major of Campbell Army Airfield. At Fort Hood Texas I was the 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant of the 501<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion and then I was a Sergeant Major of the 501<sup>st</sup> Aviation Battalion and that was in the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division. I went to Vietnam and I was the Sergeant Major of the 11<sup>th</sup> Aviation Group of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav and then I was promoted to Sergeant Major of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Brigade in Vietnam which was the largest unit in Vietnam; the largest brigade in Vietnam. I came back to Fort Campbell and I made Command Sergeant Major on the second list that came out guess. I was the post Command Sergeant Major of Fort Campbell until I retired in 1969.

Do you have some good things to say about the Army sir; your experience in the Army?

**Mr. Neal:** The Army to me is any man that wants to go into the Army, keep his nose clean and do what he is told there is no limit to how far he can go. It's the best thing in the world for a young man. I would recommend it for my son if I had one. My grandson is in ROTC now; high school ROTC. I think the Army is a great place. It's a good life; a good life for a married man. Of course it's like everything else, you have to be away from home some but all in all it's a good life. There isn't very many places you can stay 20 or 30 years and retire with a good retirement. I would recommend it to any young man.

Okay sir; is there anything else that you would like to add about anything?

**Mr. Neal:** Not really. It's hard to sit here and give you a run down because it has been so long since I got out of the service. I served in so many different types of units and everything. Overall, my time in the military was well spent. What I accumulated from it is of great value and like I say I would recommend any young man that wants to widen his field of vision or his experience or whatever, I would recommend the military service for him.



Thank you sir!

(End of Interview)