

DEAN NODINE recalls Navy time during Korean War

Vet, 85, says he'd go back

By Richard Hanners
Blue Mountain Eagle

Dean Nodine says he wouldn't trade his experience in the Navy with any of his other lifetime experiences.

"You always remember the good times and forget the bad times," he said.

Nodine grew up in Lake Preston, South Dakota. His older siblings served in World War II but never talked about it. He graduated from high school in 1951 and enlisted in the Navy one year later — one month after his twin brother, Gene, joined the Navy.

The Korean War broke out in 1950, but Nodine and his brother didn't have any strong



Twin brothers Gene Nodine, left, and Dean Nodine in Japan in late 1953. Gene passed away May 5, 2017.

Contributed photo

political feelings about the conflict.

"It was a good opportunity to see new places," he said. "I traveled to places I'll never see again."

Nodine ran into Gene in

San Diego after boot camp. His brother was assigned to a troop transport ship, and Nodine headed for Japan, where he stayed in a tent city for three weeks in winter waiting for his ship assignment.

"There were about 500 to 1,000 GIs there — Army, Marines and Navy — all headed to Korea," he said. "There were lots of card games and lots of jabbering in the tents as everyone tried to stay warm."

Nodine was assigned to the USS Lofberg DD759, a World War II-era destroyer, where he helped maintain radar and communications equipment.

"It was on-the-job training," Nodine recalled. "I was interested in that kind of work."

Sailors on the destroyer slept in hammocks atop their dress blues, which were turned inside out to maintain their creases. His personal gear was stored in a 3-by-3-foot locker.

"It was noisy," he said. "You didn't get much sleep during a storm — when the twin screws came out of the water, the whole ship vibrated."

The narrow 376-foot long ship was capable of doing 34 knots, but it rolled a lot. Nodine said the food was great, but he recalled some of the ship's 336-man crew being seasick, especially during a typhoon off Formosa.

"We went over one and through one," he said about how the ship handled big waves.

Nodine rotated back to the states on six-month tours over two years before being assigned to another destroyer, the USS Ozburn DD846, which shelled the Korean coastline with its six 5-inch guns.

When his enlistment ended in 1956, Nodine hitchhiked to Portland, where he worked at a home improvement company before returning to South Dakota and meeting his future wife, Joyce.

"She talked me into going to college," he said.

Nodine completed a bachelor's degree at South Dakota State College and was hired over the phone to teach industrial arts in John Day in 1962. He later completed a master's degree at the University of Oregon and served 25 years as superintendent of Grant School District 3.

"One main reason for going into the Navy was to take advantage of the GI Bill," Nodine said. "I got paid \$96 a month during college and \$126 after I got married."

Nodine said he had volunteered and he intended to make the best of his time in the Navy.

"I served with a great bunch of guys," Nodine said. "I'd go back tomorrow, but I don't know what they'd do with an 85-year-old guy."



Contributed photo

In the front row, third from left, is Bob Kimberling with his Navy basketball team, which played together in Maui.

WWII

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also receiving a Purple Heart. He passed away in 2002.

When Kimberling returned from war, Reynolds urged him to join Prairie City American Legion Post 106.

Now 92, Kimberling has

been a member for 70 years.

He said his dad was unhappy at first when he signed up for the service, but not long after he joined, he received a letter from him.

"He said he was wrong, and he was proud," Kimberling said. "... At that time, you needed to go defend the country as a duty."

SERVICE

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Regional Signals Operations Center when the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred.

"I got a call at my apartment from a friend in the Air Force early that morning," she said. "He said he was being deployed to New York for search and rescue operations. I didn't know what was going on. He told me to turn on the TV."

She recalled how concerned and heartbroken she was when she realized what was happening, and looking at herself in the mirror with her uniform on.

"I felt I had made the right choice in joining the military," she said.

It was common in the military to experience the frustrating "hurry up and wait" process, she said, but things changed after 9/11 — her top secret clearance, which involved extensive interviews with friends and relatives in her hometown, was sped up



The Eagle/Richard Hanners
Sophia Nicodemus works on her master's degree at the Java Jungle coffee shop.

and Nicodemus was soon at work.

Intel work

Support personnel in the military are sometimes called "desk jockeys" or POGs — short for "person other than grunt." But the military is like a corporation, Nicodemus said, and many of the supply sector jobs are necessary.

"The whole world is so

technologically advanced now, so apply that to the most advanced military in the world," she said. "Sometimes we did feel guilty about not being deployed to the front lines."

Nicodemus worked with a very diverse group at Medina — contractors and civilians from the National Security Agency along with British and Canadian military personnel.

"Many of them were highly intelligent nerds and socially awkward," she said.

There was no room for prejudice — Medina was the "epitome of the melting pot," she said.

"9/11 showed us a lot of good and bad — love of your country and patriotism, but also some fear-based prejudice," she said. "But we had a mission that was bigger than all that."

As a staff sergeant at Medina, Nicodemus was responsible for the training needs of 90 military and civilian personnel and oversaw the training of 20 new personnel in Southwest Border Narcotics. She was "handpicked" to work on the Analysis and Production Department staff, according to the NSA.

In recognition of her work at Medina, Nicodemus was awarded the Joint Service Achievement Medal from the NSA. The NSA cited Nicodemus' "critical mission input" for five joint Department of Defense and Law Enforcement Agency operations that resulted in the seizure of 61,000 kilograms of contraband with a street value of \$45.8 million, the arrest of 300 individuals and "the severe disruption of operations of three major criminal organizations."

The aftermath

Nicodemus had signed up for six years and decided to leave the Air Force when she was pregnant with her older daughter. Much of her Air Force training had translated into college credits that helped her obtain a bachelor's in psychology at Eastern Oregon University. She's now working on a master's degree in professional counseling with an emphasis on trauma.

It was after Nicodemus left the military that she found out she had noncombat-related post-traumatic stress disorder. She was in the hospital following a bad reaction to prescription medicine when a Veterans Administration counselor told her about a new group that met weekly in John Day to help vets with PTSD. She joined the group for about two years and "did a complete turnaround," she said.

"I'm married with four kids and have a better outlook on life," she said.

Her husband, Gary Nicodemus, was a private in the Army from 1991 to 1994 and served with the 3rd Division 12th Infantry Brigade in Germany.

Nicodemus credited Bob Van Voorhis for helping start the PTSD group. But the VA counselor has now retired, and the VA has decided to no longer send a counselor to John Day.

"They've told the local vets they need to travel to Burns or Boise," she said.

Nicodemus emphasizes the value of having a local group again.

"I went into counseling for this reason," she said. "I've seen the difference it made in my life."

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