

## "He proposed by telegram".... A Navy Man's Story

"I've been trying to get him to do this for years!"



Betty Fisher had a big smile and tears in her eyes as she accompanied her husband, Leonard, to his storytelling session.

"I really wanted this so much for the kids, and the grandkids. He doesn't talk about it much, but when he does, he has all these funny little stories that crack everybody up. I'm hoping his personality comes through."

Leonard and Betty were taking part in the Veterans History Interview Event, on a sunny Sunday afternoon in Pittsboro, NC. And I was excited to be a part of it.

Leonard and Betty had been married 68 years. Leonard had served in the Navy for a couple of decades. Betty wanted to be sure that their family had a tie to all that time, with a real sense of what their lives had been like for all those years. **Betty tried everything - buying her husband journals, finding instructions on "how to write your life story," asking him to write down his memoirs.** Years went by and it just seemed like too much trouble. Leonard wasn't sure he had all that much to say.

And then, one day, the minister of their church sent the couple an email and said he thought they might be interested in hearing about the Veterans History Interviews. Leonard gave me a call, and told me he "had some interesting stories to tell."

He sure does.

**Leonard joined the Navy in 1937**, coming out of the Depression Era, when jobs were hard to find. **He didn't plan on making it a life-time career** - in fact, he was discharged and signed up again quite a few times over the years. The places he served reads like a history book: Pearl Harbor. Midway. Korea. But his personal account speaks of things I've never seen on the History Channel.

Leonard had taken part in the **retrieval of gold bullion** that the crew stashed in the brig for its journey home.

His ship had been **used as target practice** by the Japanese, with torpedos scuttled under its hull two years before Pearl Harbor.

He'd helped his captains avert disaster in dangerous mine fields. **Ships in front and behind his were bombed.** And he had his share of difficult commanders and unfortunate tours of duty.

But Leonard didn't dwell on depressing aspects. He focused on interesting occurrences, funny anecdotes, and his own personal conviction about serving his country.

Betty also had a fascinating story to tell, about life back home in the States. Leonard proposed via telegram.

For years, they mostly **saw each other through packets of letters** that took a while to catch up. They had two sons that Betty raised for the most part on her own, with help from her parents.



But Betty never faltered in her acceptance that **Leonard was doing what he needed to do**. She usually didn't know where his ships were heading. And she rarely knew when he would come home. But her memories also concentrated on the positive aspects of the 20 years he served, as she urged him to retell stories she'd heard him relay throughout the years, so that others could imagine what those times were like.

Their stories are now permanently recorded on DVD for their families to enjoy. They're also public records and will be stored at the National Archives, thanks to the National Veterans History Archival Institute and their volunteers and partners.

We're helping the NVHAI capture history and create video recordings that will become part of your family's history. I cannot tell you how fascinating it is to hear real people tell their real stories - giving all of us a sense of what was really happening in America's history.

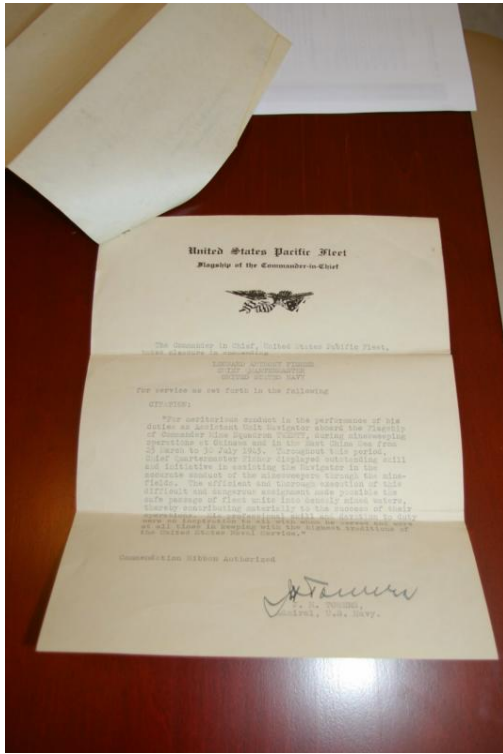
We're very proud and honored to be a part of this process. **It's free for veterans and their families, and a copy of the recording can be provided for each family member.**

More than just gathering stories, we're also trying to help reconstruct records. **Millions of military records burned during a 1973 fire**, and more were lost during Hurricane Katrina.

This has caused a lot of problems for veterans who seek medical help, or their families who are seeking military burials.

The kind of information we're helping gather is helping piece those records back together.

When service members **share their commendation, orders and awards**, they not only ensure that their own records remain intact, but also help provide information for others who served with them. **Digital photographs are taken of each record, which go into a local and national database.**



Interviews are open to any member of the Armed Forces, war or peacetime, from any period.

Whether you know someone who served in Iraq just weeks ago, or who served in WWII decades ago, encourage them to call today and schedule an interview.

**Or attend the next Veterans History Interview Event on Saturday July 19<sup>th</sup> in the Pittsboro/Chapel Hill area.**

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