

Andrew Meyers
WWII



When did you enter the military?

“Let’s see...Nineteen-forty.”

How old were you when you entered and how long were you in the military?

“Seventeen, yep”

What boot camp did you go to? How long was the boot camp? Did you go to a second Boot camp? If so then why?

“I went, um, to Newport Rhode Island. Let’s see, I think it was about eight weeks. See what I did, I filled out that paper, so...sixteen weeks! It was sixteen weeks. Oh I went to a radio training school in San Diego, California. I was a radio-man, yep.”

Did you join the military voluntarily

“I volunteered. Yes, I wanted to see the world and I wanted to learn a trade. Electronics.”

What branch of military where you in?

“The navy”

What equipment did you use on a daily basis?

“Well, ship radiomen, they had loads of equipment, you know they had transmitters, and receivers, and they had radar equipment and, um, that was it.”

What rank you did you achieve?

“Aviation radioman first-class. See, we were hit at Pearl Harbor, and after that I went into the aviation unit and then I flew planes as a gunner and a radioman. So I was a radioman in the planes but also a gunner and so I flew, you know, in a plane. It was a scout observation cruiser. The ship was called the Helen helm.”

Was the ship ever in Pearl Harbor?

“Yeah, we were hit. On December 7th. We were hit there, and about thirty guys killed, about a hundred casualties.”

Were you actually on the ship?

“Yes, yep. I was a radioman on there.”

Were you wounded while you were in the military? If you were in what way were you wounded?

Were you in any famous campaigns or battles?

Did you receive any awards or medals for your service?

“Well, here’s the thing, at the end of the war, you know, they gave me medals. Let’s see, this here is a, well, we had planes, four planes and these are the guys, the division here. Oh, to answer about the medal...well...”

What did you do on a “normal or average Day” while you were in the military?

“Well, here’s the thing, it depends. Peacetime was one thing, and during the war was another. And approaching a battle is different completely so when, uh, you

say the normal day, do you mean the peacetime or wartime? Peacetime, I guess I was just, eight hours I would just fly in the planes and just work the radio. But I would also stand watch four hours a day. Wartime, see what happens, if they're getting ready for a battle, before the battle starts you're on like a well your just on like standby and then when the battle starts, well the battle starts. So it all depends whether peacetime or wartime. Or are you getting ready for a battle or whether you in battle."

So for preparing for a battle...?

"Preparing for a battle? Well you have a battle station, see everybody's assigned a station, and see if the planes flew, I might fly. Or, if I didn't fly, the turrets, they fire. See there's five turrets, and the turrets are three muzzles and so what they do they fire at a hundred and eighty rounds per minute and shell cases come out and you have to keep room for the cases to come out so we would, you know, move the shell cases, we'd move them aside and they didn't want them in the water because the people might think there's submarines, you got to keep the water clear. So, I was the ships be a fire fighter, in other words, if there was a fire we'd fight the fire. I was also the talker, see the captain's on the bridge and everybody's got to be in communication with the captain. So as a talker, you had officers and they might say, you know, 'pass this message to the bridge' and you tell the bridge what's what, and afterwards you might say 'hey, there's a fire'. That make sense?"

Did you use Morse code or did you just talk normally?

"Well, the way it is, they had radio silence, you know, so we didn't do much talking we didn't use code. So, for the most part there was radio silence. In the event that there'd be a battle, then there'd be radio communications, I didn't talk, the pilot talked, cause he was up front while I was in the back seat. And he had a microphone, and we talk to each other on an intercom and...what was your question? Oh yes, we used voice, if it were used. See, we used search lights too. So we would send code with the lights."

What type of firearm(s) did you use?

“Well, when I flew in the plane I carried a revolver, you know a forty-five. And I also had the machine gun, six hundred rounds of ammunition.”

Wait, like a Thompson?

“What?”

You said it was a machine gun, did you mean a Thompson?

“Oh, I don’t know what make it was, but there were six cans, and each can had a hundred rounds in it. See the cans, they had tracer bullets, armor piercing bullets, they had different types of bullets.”

Did you use any heavy weapon Artillery?

While at war, what helped you pass the time?

“Well you could read, you could play cards with the guys, you could hang out, or lift weights. And, well that was it, you know, we could do exercise and that was just about it.”

After you came home from war, did your perspective on anything change? Did you carry anything from the military with you after the war?

“Well, see, the service was a great experience. It helped me get a job and I became an engineer, see I have a commercial radio license, a HAM radio license.”

Did you acquire those in the military?

“Well the way it is, it helped me learn electronic and you know I went to radio school and, so, I got my background in the navy which helped me get into the phone company.”

I see you brought a picture, where was it taken?

“Where was it taken? Beats the hell out of me, but it was a nice photographer.”

Is there anything you would like to add or say that I missed or is there anything that you would like to talk about?

“No, just, you know we were in a battle, we were sunk and went swimming. We were in a battle and were hit with three torpedoes and that cut the ship. So I swam and was picked up by a Destroyer.”

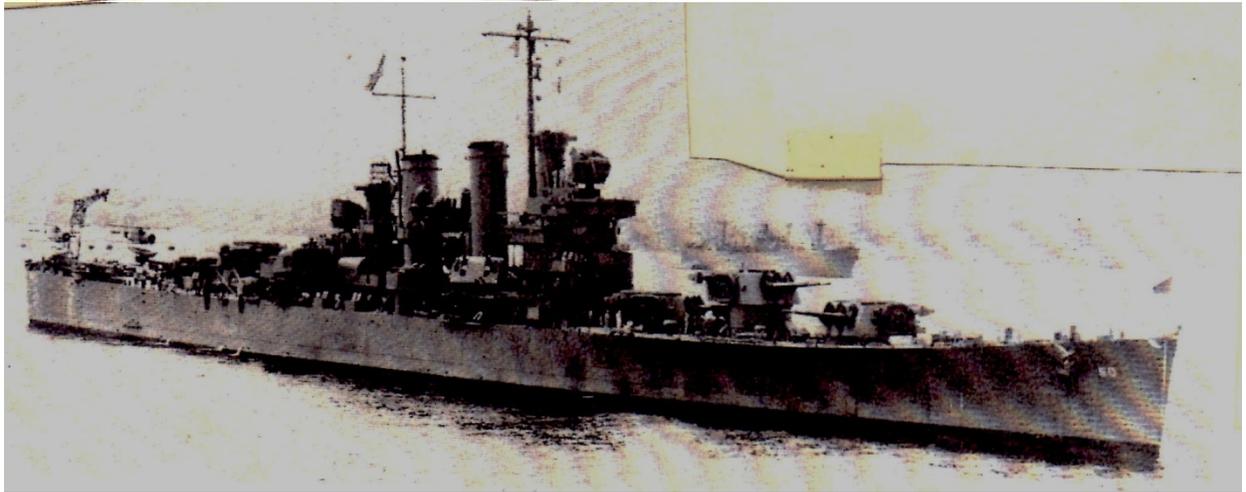
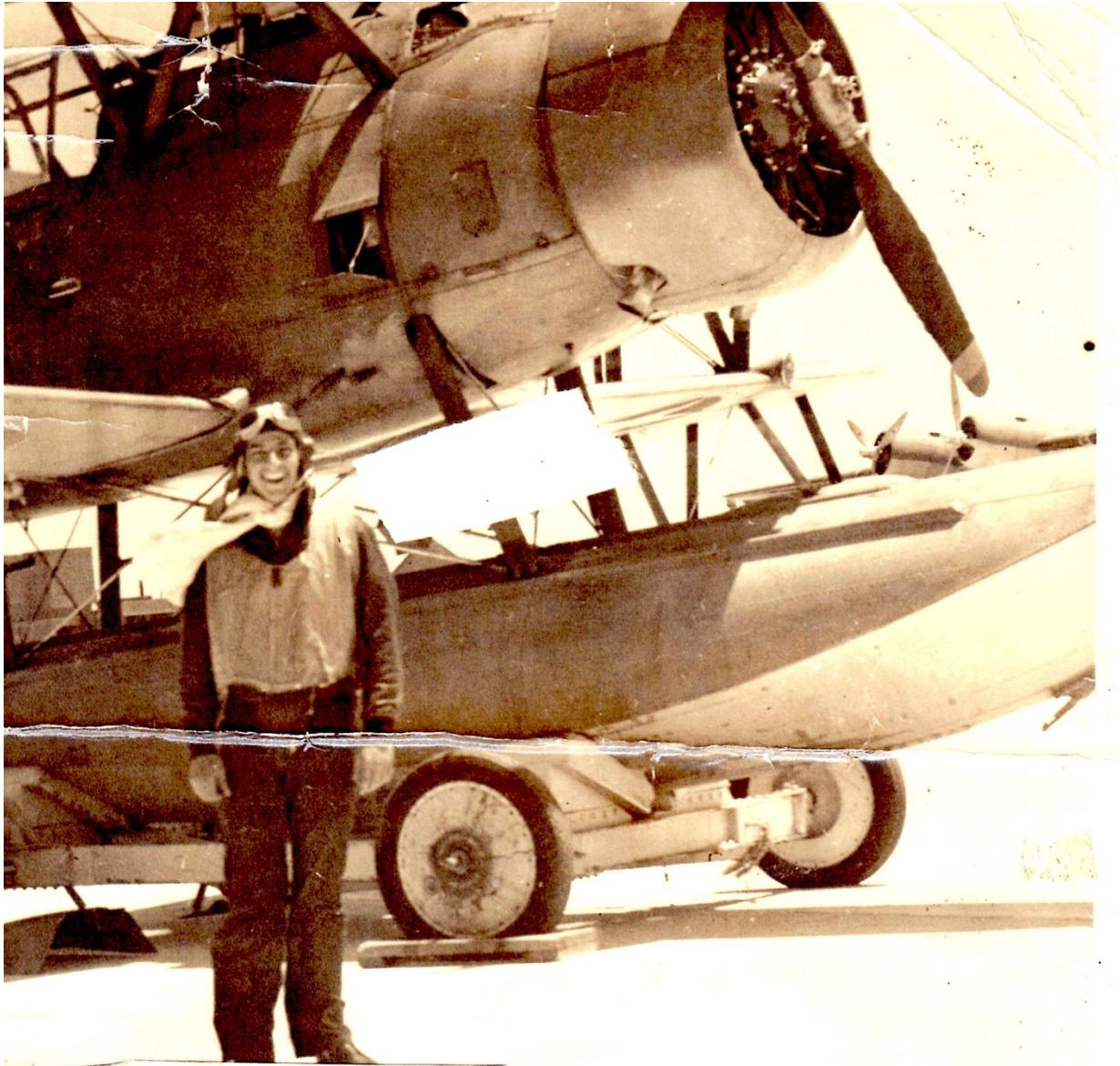
What was your most memorable experience during the navy?

“Well, it was fun flying in the planes, and you’re doing about sixty or seventy miles per hour, so the flying was lots of fun. And, um, oh jes’ it’s just so much. We went to Australia, but most of it was around an island in the Pacific. For about six months around that island, then we went to Australia for about six weeks and came back. And in another six months we were sunk. We were sunk in the battle of Kula Gulf.”

So you were involved with the Pacific campaign?

“Yes, yep”

Thank you so much for coming sir



Pearl Harbor attack painful to recall, 69 years later

Spotlight

Who: Andrew W. Myers of Closter

What: Aviation radioman first class, United States Navy

Service: Served from 1940 to 1946 with service aboard the USS Helena light cruiser, which was damaged at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii Territory, on Dec. 7, 1941, by a Japanese torpedo. Twenty service personnel aboard were killed, and 100 were injured.

Medals: Unit Commendation; Combat Air Crewman, 3 stars; American Defense, 1 star; Good Conduct Medal; Asiatic Pacific Medal, 7 stars; American Theater Medal; Victory Medal.

U.S. losses at Pearl Harbor: 2,402 service personnel killed and 1,282 wounded. There were 57 civilians killed and 35 wounded. Four battleships sunk, four battleships damaged, two destroyers sunk, three cruisers damaged, 188 aircraft lost, 155 aircraft damaged.

The USS Helena survived Pearl Harbor but was eventually sunk at the Battle of Kula Gulf in July 1943. The ship was the first awarded the Navy Unit Commendation.

Closter man, then a radio operator, was on ship when it was torpedoed

By EVONNE COUTROS
STAFF WRITER

Andrew William Myers doesn't speak much about the USS Helena – torpedoed by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. But when the 87-year-old does, he chokes on his words and the tears flow.

Myers, of Closter, was an 18-year-old Navy radio operator aboard the 10,000-ton light cruiser 69 years ago when a single torpedo tore through a boiler and engine room. He was honored for his service on Sunday at the USS Ling in Hackensack.

"I had just come off watch the morning that we were hit," Myers said. "I went to eat, then went to my bunk. The uniform of the day was white short pants, sneakers, socks, undershirt and the hat. I'm undressing ... I had one sneaker on ... and BOOM ... we're hit. The General Quarters whistle goes off to man your battle stations."

Myers wasn't contemplating war and not many other sailors seemed to be, either, he said.

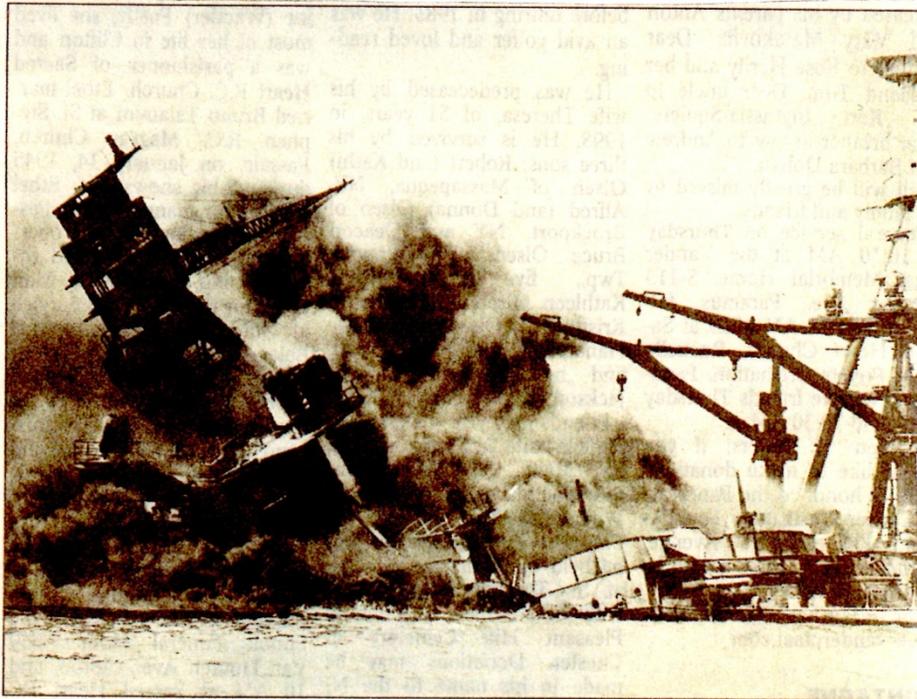
"The ship went up about 6 feet. ... It just oscillated," Myers said. "I thought a boiler must have blown up ... never thinking war. Some guy said, 'Ain't this a hell of a thing on a Sunday morning?'" ■

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CARMINE GALASSO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Andrew William Myers was an 18-year-old Navy radio operator who had just come off watch when the USS Helena was torpedoed during the Dec. 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor.



ASSOCIATED PRESS

69 years ago: The battleship USS Arizona belching smoke as it toppled over into the sea during the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on Dec. 7, 1941. The ship sank with more than 80 percent of its 1,500-man crew, including Rear Adm. Isaac C. Kidd.

Pearl Harbor: Radio man

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• Myers rushed to his battle station and the reality of the sneak attack hit fast and hard. The ship was burning and some of its crew seriously injured.

"I was passing guys that were all bloodied and bleeding," Myers said, holding back tears. "I crossed the deck and I hear machine gun bullets. I say, 'What the heck is this?' not realizing it's Japanese planes."

As he reached his battle station in the superstructure, Myers' shipmates were talking war. The Helena's anti-aircraft guns were being manned and fired and the locks knocked off ammunition magazines to fight the enemy.

The messages reaching the radio room announced a Japanese attack, Myers said. The audio announcements repeated, "This is no drill. This is no drill."

"They kept emphasizing that because we always had drills," he said. "Then a message came in that there was a [Japanese] midget sub in the water."

When the phased attacks ended, Myers could not fathom the devastation.

•• He was rescued from the oil-laden water 2½ hours later by one of two U.S. destroyers involved in the battle. Nearly 170 of Myers' shipmates were lost.

"Andy is a gentleman, a class act," said Joe Organo, a 36-year resident of Closter and American Legion commander of Leroy S. Mead Post 111. "He's our finance officer and our only Pearl Harbor survivor. He does not get up and pound his chest about his service or Pearl Harbor. He's not like that at all."

Organo calls Myers a treasure in the community and someone younger generations in the area have tapped into for American history.

Veterans of that era deserve credit for serving their respective posts after the fighting is over, say members of Veterans of Foreign Wars posts.

"Andy is the only Pearl Harbor survivor who belongs to our VFW Post 162 in Northvale," said its commander, Paul La Touche, 85. "It's difficult to get World War II vets to the post these days because of age and driving. ... Many use

canes or walkers and it's kind of tough. But they do it. And we all respect their trying to muster up and do what they have to do."

Arthur Herriford of Sherman Oaks, Calif., is the national president of the Pearl Harbor Survivor Association. He plans to attend events at Pearl Harbor when many can't because of age.

"We have approximately 3,000 members," Herriford said. "We're losing one member a day."

Myers, a 55-year resident of Closter and a retired telephone company engineer, said he has much to be thankful for these days. Though his wife, Priscilla, died in 1999, the father of two adopted children has four grandchildren.

He also walked away from Pearl Harbor, a Navy aircraft crash of Tulagi in the Solomon Islands and the sinking of the USS Helena in the Kula Gulf.

"I guess the only time it gets me is when I talk about it, but I don't talk about it that much," he said of his life in the Pacific campaign. "I look back. ... I'm lucky to be alive."

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tation.

"The whole place was burning," he said. "The [minelayer] Oglala was capsized and sinking next to us. The damage was so extreme."

The injuries were great aboard the Helena, in part, because of the military uniforms — or lack thereof.

"The guys were burned so badly because their uniform was short pants, so their skin was exposed," he said.

Reports say 2,402 service personnel and civilians died in the attack on Pearl Harbor, with 1,282 injured.

The USS Helena did not sink and was capable of leaving Dock 1010 at half its 30-knot speed, but did not, Myers said.

"We were hit with one aerial torpedo," he said. "The size of that hole ... you could drive a Mack truck through it. But the ship has 375 watertight compartments."

Myers stayed aboard Helena through the attack and after dry dock repairs at Mare Island Navy Yard in California, boarded the ship again.

"It's like a dream now," Myers said of the attack. "It's sort of hard to realize that it happened. I was just 18 and I was too young to be scared. There were married guys with families and they were worried, but being young, I had no one."

It was not the first time Myers cheated death. There were battles and engagements throughout the Pacific campaign. On July 6, 1943, the USS Helena met a final fate, torpedoed three times in succession during night surface combat in the Battle of Kula Gulf. The cruiser broke apart, and Myers abandoned ship in the wee dark hours with about a thousand other sailors.

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Veteran recalls Pearl Harbor attack

Andrew William Myers wasn't contemplating war on Dec. 7, 1941, and not many other sailors aboard the USS Helena seemed to, either.

The Closter resident was an 18-year-old Navy radio operator aboard the 10,000-ton light cruiser docked at Pearl Harbor when a single Japanese torpedo tore through a boiler and engine room.

"I had just come off watch the morning that we were hit," Myers, now 87, said. More than 2,400 service personnel and civilians died in the attack on Pearl Harbor, with 1,282 injured.

— Complete story on L-1