

An Interview with J. Leo Glynn
WWII Navy Veteran
By Michele Starkey

J. Leo Glynn grew up in the City of Newburgh and after graduating from NFA, he began working at the Navy shipyard in New Windsor. When he was drafted in the Navy and during his physical, they detected a small scar on the inside of his eye that had been there since birth. He shared with us, "It only held up the induction process for a short time." After clearing the physical, Glynn was sent to the Great Lakes for seven weeks of basic training. He was just 18-years-old at the time.

He would be sent to Bainbridge, Maryland, and trained for sixteen weeks on how to handle equipment, accounting and store keeping. During this time, the Navy assembled the Spare Parts Distribution Control or SPDC and Glynn was sent to Pennsylvania for an additional five weeks to learn the SPDC ropes.

What exactly did the SPDC do?

"We handled all of the automatic supply parts. In other words, wherever replacement parts were needed to keep the naval fleets up and running, we would send out what they needed – anywhere in the world."

When did you ship overseas?

"In April of 1944, we boarded a troop ship that was formerly the SS Panama and converted to a troop ship named the James L. Breck. We traveled across in a convoy of six ships and the crossing took us about 13 days. Destroyers escorted us over, about 300 sailors and hundreds of Air Force troops heading for Oran and Naples."

What did you do on board the ship?

"There were about 24 Petty Officers and we became temporary Pharmacist Mates who handed out aspirin and medicines to the sailors and airmen."

What did you do when you arrived in Oran?

"We set up an operating base and handled all of the engine parts and mine sweeping gear. We sent out everything from the tiniest O-ring that could fit on your little finger to a 16-cylinder propelled landing craft. The receiving deck at the SPDC transferred about 1,000 ton of material every week."

You stayed in Oran for while?

"Yes, we were in Oran for about 16 months. Going into the Strait of Gibraltar, was like entering a mine field and I remember the armed guards standing on the deck and firing at the mines to explode them so that the ships could have a safe passage. We arrived in May of 1944, just before D-Day."

What happened around D-Day?

"All of the Navy ships congregated at Oran and the French naval base called Mers El Kebir. The night before the attack in Southern France, we had a battle drill with anti-aircraft about 1:00 a.m. and the sky was full of tracers. I slept through the entire thing and a sailor came to wake me up and said, 'You might want to see what is going on.' I almost missed the entire thing!"

Did you stay at Oran?

"Yes, we stayed at Oran. There was an Australian officer who was in charge of the auxiliary floating drydocks or AFD. He was going to tow one of the AFDs to Singapore. The drydock had a 18,000 ton capacity and it had been built by Chicago Bridge and Iron

Company in New Windsor. One of my jobs at the shipyard in New Windsor before I joined the Navy was as a clerk for the Navy. It was interesting that the AFD8 drydock that was going to Singapore was one of the drydocks that I had worked on. It launched after I left for the Navy.”

Tell us about one of the most memorable moments you had.

“Well, I had a run-in with a French officer. I was just 20-years old at the time but I was in charge of the SPDC when this French Admiral showed up for supply. He had about seven trucks and needed a couple of tons of engine parts. We loaded him up and then I handed him the paperwork to sign and he said to me, 'Monsieur, how do I know it is all here?' and I stood my ground and said, 'Take it all off of the trucks and get out of my warehouse!' He emptied the trucks and left. A few days later, the guard called me and said, 'Hey Glynnie, that 'Frog' is back again.' The Admiral came back and we loaded his trucks and again, he said to me, 'Monsieur, how do I know it is all here?' Once again, I told him to get out of my warehouse. Then a few weeks passed and sure enough, the guard called and told me that the 'Frog' was back and this time, the Admiral signed the paperwork and took the engine parts!”

Tell us about your trip home to America.

“We came home on a Liberty Ship and it took about eleven days to sail into NY Harbor. It was VJ Day and we were on a twenty-sailor rotation. There were 17 French war brides and they were all pregnant. I came home to Newburgh for one-month leave and gained about 30 pounds. I went back to Brooklyn to work at the armed guard center where we handed out ration coupons for shoes and it was October 1945. Then I went to Mechanicsburg, PA and was in charge of the inventory crews. I did that until May of 1946 when I was discharged. When I came back to Newburgh, I returned to work at the Navy shipyard in New Windsor building drydocks.”

Did you stay with the shipyard?

“I didn't stay at the shipyard. I went to work for Dun & Bradstreet for a few years as an investigator and then I worked at the Post Office in Newburgh until 1951 as a rural mail carrier. My G.I. Bill was running out, so I decided to pack up my wife and young son and we moved to Miami, Florida where I got my degree in Business Administration. I completed a four-year degree in 25 months and worked nights at the Coral Gable Country Club. After graduating, we returned to Newburgh and I went to work for a Thruway contractor until 1955. I ended up working for Central Hudson and stayed there for 33 years until my retirement in 1985.”

J. Leo Glynn has been a member of the American Legion for over 49 years and recently joined VFW Post 1161 after his granddaughter, Allegra Guarino, entered and won a \$25,000 scholarship in the VFW Scholarship Contest called “*Voice of Democracy*.” She won out of 94,000 entries worldwide in the competition.

Glynn and his wife, Genevieve, were married on December 1, 1946 and will celebrate their 66th wedding anniversary this year. They have two children, Jim and Kathleen, and five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. The Glynn's continue to reside in the Town of Newburgh.

The VFW Post 1161 meets every third Friday of every month in the City of Newburgh Post 973 Bldg. The meetings begin at 1:00 pm and you can call Quartermaster Steve