

**Robert Green
Veteran**

**NY State Senator Patty Ritchie's Office
Interviewer**

**Interviewed on November 11, 2013
At Oswego County Legislative Office Building
Oswego, New York**

Introduction by NY State Senator Patty Ritchie

Q: Robert, what year did you decide that you wanted to serve in the military?

RG: It was December 15, 1944. I didn't decide, I was drafted.

Q: You were drafted?

RG: I was in college at Syracuse University. I was in my first semester. I couldn't believe that they would drag me in there and not let me finish the semester. I mean, really!

Q: Were you surprised that after the attack on Pearl Harbor that you weren't drafted sooner?

RG: No, I wasn't old enough.

Q: Oh, so you weren't old enough?

RG: No. I was out hunting, it was on a Sunday, with my brother's father in law...future father in law, and I said to him, "Will I be drafted?" And he told me "no, it will be over before you are old enough to go." But it wasn't.

Q: So you were drafted in December of 1944? So which branch of the military did you end up serving in?

RG: The Navy.

Q: The Navy? So once you were drafted, where did you go for basic training?

RG: Sampson. (Naval Training Base, Seneca Lake, NY)

Q: Sampson? And what sorts of things did you learn down there?

RG: Well, we went through basic training. We did marching, and oh, rifles..and they just kept us busy with duties each week, like in the mess hall and all that. But I can't forget how cold it was. It was in February, and you could see cracks through the walls and we had our peacoats on at night and everything to sleep to keep warm and I noticed it, as we marched that our feet were freezing. We..(laughing) eventually got over it. We got use to it. I was really impressed.

Q: Wow. Were you use to those sort of cold temperatures?

RG: Well, yes. From being from this area (Fulton, NY), but not exposed that much. We had no choice. You keep marching.

Q: It took some getting use to?

RG: Yes. But your body adjusted. That's all I can remember of what I learned in basic training.

Q: How long did you spend at Sampson to finish your training?

RG: Ten weeks.

Q: Ten weeks? And did you get a little break? Were you able to go home and see your family?

RG: I don't remember doing that. Might have, but I really don't remember. I ended up going to Detroit (Michigan) to school there. Electricians school. I didn't quite get through that. I got shipped out to San Francisco, and I remember going out there on the train. We couldn't get off the train, because they were afraid (laughing) that the guys would jump over the hill, I guess, so they kept us on there.

We went to Buffalo first, and it was raining. We were in a car, and we couldn't sleep, couldn't lay down, so I just didn't have a very good impression of Buffalo after that. So then we went on to Detroit. I worked there as much as I could, and then went across country by train. I remember going into California, and it was the hot time of year. It was the San Joachim Valley, and we ended up on Treasure Island. We were there probably a week or two, and then finally we went on board the ship. We were on a reconverted Merchant Marine cargo ship called the Zoella Lykes, of all things. I had never heard that name before. There was I don't know how many servicemen there. We were in the, let's see, we were in the front of the ship and the back half was for the Captains and all that stuff. There was about four hundred men there, and there were about four or five times that many in the front of the ship. It was crowded and that's when we first went out in the harbor, and everybody was elated they were gonna' go out to sea. Then all of the sudden we hit those swells, and their faces dropped, and (laughing) seasickness set in after that. How much time do we have?

Q: You can keep going, please.

RG: Going over was uneventful. We were nervous because the war was still on.

Q: Scared nervous or anxious nervous? Just ready to kind of get over there and get going, or were you...?

RG: We were a little concerned about submarines and that kind of stuff. But, we got to Pearl Harbor, and that was quite a site to see. All of the sudden a little line of green was on the horizon. We finally got in, and went into the harbor where it was quite a site to see the damage of all the ships and that stuff. As luck would have it, or I don't know that you would call it luck, but our ship broke down and we were there for two weeks. I got off the base once for liberty one evening. They wouldn't let you off anymore, cause they, again, were afraid you'd skip. So, I lifted weights, and worked out and I swam, and that's about all that I did.

Q: In your two weeks in Hawaii?

RG: Yes...(laughing). I enjoyed the pineapple right off the plant. They were a different experience, and I drank a lot of (can't understand) Juice, and all that healthy stuff.

I remember I was in the pool one day, it was around noon time, and I was jumping up and down on the diving board. I was practicing the spring. I didn't know it, but there was a whole line in the mess hall, and the guys were clapping every time I did it. I got in the water and got the heck out of there. (both laughing)

Then we went on over to the Philippines, and ended up on the Island of Manicani. That's M.a.n.i.c.a.n.i., and I was on a ship repair base.

Q: So is that what you primarily did in your time in the service? You made repairs to ships?

RG: Well, no. I just got assigned there, but they were not operating because they weren't necessary because the war was over by that point. Did I mention that I was there on V-J Day? In Hawaii? I forgot to do that. That was quite an overwhelming experience to see all the

rockets going off all over the whole harbor, and the guys cheering and so forth. Unfortunately, we still had to go over, because we were occupational. I was lucky and didn't see any action.

Q: Were you nervous going over at the thought of seeing some serious action?

RG: Oh yes! Apprehensive! Everybody's in their normal life..... Our big experience was going over we ran into hurricanes, and I remember one time they wanted to clean up down cellar, and they made us all go up on deck in a storm. Holy mackerel! And the guys were seasick, I'm telling you. I don't know if I ought to tell you about it. It was kind of ugly. (laughing). The one part of it was, we started to get over it, and the sun was shining, and we were going along. It was morning, and the chow lines were on both sides of the ship, and the wind was blowing into our side. This fellow came up out of there sick, and he goes over to the side and threw up, and the wind picked it up and brought it all over everybody. The poor guy was so embarrassed. I hope I am not giving you bad news.

Q: What was your initial thought when you got over to the Philippines? What was going through your mind?

RG: I don't know. It was just interesting to see all the things and people. The gals just started wearing makeup, and stuff like that, and they were very proud of it. A couple of the guys, well, one guy in particular, had fallen in love with one. He got in trouble, and he got sent back from coming back, so naturally he gave it to the people there. I don't know how to explain it.

I know one night, we had movies every night outdoors, and there were six thousand servicemen there. This lady, he was attached to, and her mother, had come to the movie, and he was right behind them, and they had a fight. They were convincing back and forth and the whole place just picked it up and gave him a hard time. (laughing)

Q: Nothing like six-thousand of your closest friends giving you a tough time, huh? (laughing)

RG: One fella had a pet monkey, and he was attached to that guy. One night when I came in, the guys held onto the monkey and his chain, and the guy went down and hid in the audience. They unhooked that monkey, and that monkey went 'swish' and made a beeline for that guy. That's how sensitive they were. And during the movie, that darn monkey would sit up on top of the guys head. You could see a whole sea of guys and the monkey. That was quite interesting.

I ended up being a Master at Arms in the Mess Hall, which is good duty. It got me to the good food and access to the kitchen to make popcorn. The other poor guys didn't have that.

I worked out with the weights, and I also did some sparring...boxing with a friend of mine. I was invited to participate in a bout one evening with the whole crew. It was Thanksgiving, as a matter of fact. I was going to box this one guy, he wanted to box with me in the worst way. I didn't want to...well, I was a challenge to him, and finally I accepted. So after, it was Thanksgiving Day and I had a good meal, and I just went to my bunk to lay down. Fortunately I had beat him. I passed up a lot of chances to cold cock him. He always said he had been sick, and missed his opportunity.