

**Albert Wygant
Veteran**

**Interviewed by
NY State Senator
Patty Ritchie's Office**

**Interviewed on
November 11, 2013
Oswego New York**

Interviewer: Now if we could start sir, could you spell your first and last name for me?

Albert Wygant: Albert Wygant

I: Could you spell that?

AW: W-Y-G-A-N-T some people have a hard job pronouncing it, I don't know why. Because I have been called every name under the sun, Wigent Wygent(1:15). So, in boots we are standing in front of a medical building we're going to get shots. Okay, so we are standing there. I now see instructor, our PO he is standing up there and he hollers out my name, and nobody answers. Wygent, Wyant, no answer no response. W-Y-G-A-N-T "here sir." Why didn't you tell me this to begin with? And I spoke right up and said you didn't pronounce my name right. I got 21 push ups right on the ground.

I: (Laughter)

AW: Sure. And then we had a guy who was a joker and he was, he was kind of tall and this little guy was kind of terrified of the shots cause everyone was giving, it's going to be a torpedo needle, and all that stuff. So, this little guy walks in and of course you got two guys behind sides, and they got these guns. And you're looking at that guy, by the time you're looking at him you get the other one, bing, bing just like that. And they really drive them through it. So anyways, the kid comes out fine the big guy who had been, right you know, teasing him. He went had the shot, and when he did, he come out, passed right out on the deck. He was, just like that. And the little guy just sit there laughing his heart off.

I: Now Albert you served in the Navy, right?

AW: Yes I did.

I: Now where did you go for your basic?

AW: Basic is Sampson. We served as the head of several units are there, they had their, they had two sections. Top and Bottom. Bottom and top, second floor, first floor. Both different section of guys. And our unit was called G, so we called it the Gestapo unit. So, my instructor was a chief in the Navy, was a PL He was real muscular. But anyways, 5000 of us went through that day from all over. And I mean they were bringing them in by the bus loads. You know from Geneva and grey hound probable hadn't francized by that time. Because I came by grey hounds. And we got in there and of course we get in

this one room and you got a box in front of you. So, you strip you pack all your stuff in the box put your name and address on it and that's it. Now you are naked you go through this whole thing all different doctors, you know. So anyways when you're done with that then you get your clothing. So, you go in front of this guy and he got a bench in front of him. All kinds of clothes up there in the back so this measure your hat. So, he measured my head 6, 7/8 or something. He said what shoe size. I said eight sir, eight. So, he finds a pair at me, nine and a half. So, we had to try on all the clothing ahead of time so if it didn't fit you were supposed to raise your hand. I did and he said put your hand down. So, through the whole training I trained with nine and a half shoes. And the end of the shoe was curled right up just like this. I didn't get a decent pair of shoes till I left Sampson and went where I was going. And I finally went to the PX and I got a pair of shoes that fit me. Ture, and 5000 of us went, form after three months of training we board ship, board train, and they had two steam engines we toughed the tips of six different states before we hit Boston. I don't know why. Probably because different guys were going different places. True and I got, I arrived in Boston approximately about two, two-o'clock in the morning, and when we went to New York City the steam engines had to be disconnected because you couldn't bring steam engines through New York City. So, they had to use electric to tow us through, and then hook us back up. That was the reason for that. So anyways we got down to Boston and Fargo barracks I got in there and of course no mattress I am sleeping on springs. Yeah but you are so bone tired I didn't care. No pillow no nothing pure springs

I: You just had the chance to sleep and you were at it

AW: O man. I was whipped, I was whipped so that was my, my place where I stayed. For approximately three weeks. Now previously in Sampson you went before this guy, I called him professor, and he is like you he had this little stand in front of him. He has this book in front of you, each page had a different subject, okay. So, you would, he would give you ten minutes to study this and then he flip to the next one. So, then he would ask you questions about each page, go back and that way he evaluated what you wanted, what your mind was telling what you are. I hated shop. I hated wood. But they said I was a carpenter. So that is what they stuck me in, in the Navy. Was a carpenter.

I: What does some that does carpentry in the Navy do?

AW: Carpenters surprising even though there steal ship. There is a lot of wood on the modern Navy ships.

I: So, you were in charge of making-

AW: So, you know if you had a chair that broke or a frame of a picture or a leg on a thing that broke. You had to fix it.

I: So were you on a ship during your whole time when you served during World War two.

AW: Yeah

I: Now, now where did your particular ship go?

AW: Okay well, we didn't we didn't go nowhere. Because I will tell you what happened.

In Fargo barracks okay we were there waiting for assignment. Okay so all of a sudden, this morning we get the call. I say great we're going to go somewhere. So, they took us down in Charles town Navy yard and here is this ship this ship was called Frank Knots it was a destroyer, brand new. One of the, all of your older destroyers had one turret gun turret in the bow one in the stern. With a single 538 gun, okay. This Frank Knots came with a double turret in the bow and one turret in the stern. So, she had six combination guns. Of 538s okay but what was wrong with her is she had a degree of lift like this. A 20 percent degree and they would not figure out why. Now I mean this is a brand-new ship came right from being built they towed it in by tug because they didn't use the engines at all. And it was our job, us guy to go aboard ship and start getting her ready. Well we couldn't because she was tilted and they couldn't figure why. So, they final come up with the answer what we'll do is we'll take everything off the ship that isn't nailed down: pots, pans, silverware, cups, saucers, whatever. We had to take that go aboard ship take that all out. Mind was still tilted, okay put it on the deck, on the dock okay. And so that's what we did. They took everything off the ship and it still didn't correct her. She still had that little lift to the left to port side. So, anyways, they finally come up with the conclusion that something way radically wrong with the ship because it was not sea worthy you couldn't go out to sea with a ship like this it has to be level to go into the water, into the waves. So anyways, they towed it by tug to south Boston I don't know what happen to the ship. Us guys were left with all the goodies on the dock we had to load them on the truck I don't know what happened to them and back I went to Fargo barracks. No ship. So, I sit there for two weeks like that. All a sudden I get some orders, pack your gear, your gear consists of a mattress your duffel bag, a hammock, these old fashion hammocks that they used to have. And what you did is you curled your mattress up put your duffel bag in the middle tied it up, secured it that was 150 pounds. Now there is only one place you can carry it, on your shoulder. True. So, I had to pick it up put it on board the truck took me down the Charles town Navy yard and my ship that I didn't even know about was ten dock wide ten peers. So, I had to carry the 150, 200, 150 pounds ten all blocks I mean a distance maybe a couple miles. So, when I got there all I saw was this ship, okay. Now she is docked she docked in and I, I look at her and I couldn't believe it. To me that's not a fighting ship. It's a sailing ship! What am I doing here? So then I go aboard and when you go up the gang rig you have a duty officer, "permission to come on board", "granted." You go aboard and he assigns you to go down below. So, I went down to, to gun deck. Okay which was, augh there I met the camp thee Skipper and the chief. This chief this chief was called from retirement. Because they didn't have trained personnel that knew enough. This guy had so many hash marks on his sleeve that they were all the way up to here. That he had a hard job saluting because every, I mean you wouldn't believe it. Each one of them had so many years and they brought him out of retirement. His name was Flynn. (14:57) Okay so anyways, he took ahold of us took charge of me and o the other man that came aboard with me was named Zemic (15:04), and he was okay, but he wasn't happy, I wasn't either, here is a wooden ship what are we going to do with it, you know. I saw these great big canons there was, when I, you know, the mistake I think that society makes going back society makes is there is not enough social studies not enough history thought to these kid these days

they don't know if you ask a child today what the greatest war they can't answer you because they don't know, okay. For a second, now getting back to that they didn't know the history of this ship. And I liked history so what I did is all of the time I was aboard this ship I engrained all the knowledge. One thing that people don't know is she was designed in 1797, 17, 70 ... 17 wait a minute I have to go back. 1779 I sorry 1779. The guy his name was Sir Joshua Homfre (16:34) and he was the architect and the designer of this ship. And he came up with a bright idea with, in them days they used regular, probably regular dry wood he came up with the idea of using green oak. The ship is entirely made up of green oak. And the only place at that time that you could get green oak was South Carolina. So they did they brought the wood in and they built her. With, on this guy design and that's what she is and that's why that the balls when the British fired at us with their canons they bounced off, because the beams weren't dry, it was green oak. True.

I: And the ship got a nickname because of that right?

AW: The ship got the nickname Ironside because the British when it was in the fights, she mainly was in 1812, when we got into a fight with England. The English nicknamed her Old Ironside, because the balls were bouncing off her. Now getting back to the ship in 1945 what happened is approximately 2100 hours which is about nine o'clock at night. I was PO watch on the gang wood you had to have a PO and a regular sea man and because Old Ironside was made of wood they had fire watch. So, this sea man every hour on the hour would go down to different positions in the ship and they had these old fashion clocks had to key into them and it was his job to key into them and it would print the time that he went. And that was his job and he come back up on top side. At 20, nine o'clock at night or 21:00 I'm standing there on the gangway and I have log in front of me, and I have to log when he comes back, I have to write his name what time he got here, if anyone come on ship I had to log them in, it's my job. So, I am standing there and all of a sudden boom just like this I was pushed I distance from me to you. Okay, what had happened is a tug had come in back of us a sea going tug and normally, he was coming in to fast and when he put it in reverse, he couldn't stop it in time. Now a tug has an awful bow very strong reinforced. And mashed into the stern of Old Ironside and pushed, pushed her up. She was injured.

I: So, with you being assigned-

AW: I was PO I couldn't leave the gang wood. I couldn't leave. I had, I sent the sea man down to get the exec and he come up all startled and said he's trapped. Was he slept is, where the stern of the ship is, okay. We had to free him get him out. So, I instructed him to go down and wake up the crew. So, they did I still could not leave the gang wood, could not do it. So, I had to log it in what time and what happened. And when they told me, informed my that a sea going tug had rammed us in the stern, I had to put that down. With and I had to put my name underneath it. Now Old Ironsides when that built her, her whole haul is copper lined and it was copper lined because Paul Revere who was a medal smith. Had, had got the contract or whatever to put the copper on so they line that with copper over the (unknown 21:53), and he was his, they said he designed the brass that was on board ship. They had a bell, several things that were made of medal.

That was his job. So, he designed that, Paul Revere. I was very fascinated because of the history of it, very, what happened when, when we took the ship, they had to tow it to a dry dock. Put her in dry dock reinforce her and then check her out check out the whole ship and the stern. They had to rebuild it. True.

I: So once the ship gets fixed where do you go from there?

AW: Well then when the ship was repaired, they trefoiled her in the dry dock they just foiled it and the tug pulled her out and pulled her down, down to peer one. In Charles town and there she sat okay. Now the Navy got the bright idea because of world war two this, the difference between people was getting you know were spending money, money, money, money so the Navy says why don't we show them what we got. So, this ship because of the history was docked on peer one a distance of lets say between for the entrance of the ship yard, Charles town, a distance from probably here a cross the road. Guarded by marines so they invited people in during the war we still in war with Japan and, and I believe in June of 45 I believe the war was over in Europe. Anyways when that was over the Navy got the bright idea well we are going to bring people down to see it because the history of it so they brought people in you could come in board through the entrance through the marines through the ship your, you know guards naturally because we are still at war. And you come aboard. Now, we had, we got one morning we got orders there going to have a college come aboard.

I: And you're there the whole time?

AW: Wesley College, Wesley College all girls, all girls naturally that was great for us guys you know O boy you know. So, so there must have been about thirty of them, or more, all nice young girls, prettiest picture, O boy you know. So, they came and they ask questions we showed them. They could only go on the gun deck and top side they could not go down to birth deck because we had the crew down there. Some of them walking around in shorts whatever. Yup and that was it. So then periodically people would come on board, you know.

I: So, you pretty much stayed with this ship during-

AW: O yeah

I: During the whole war

AW: I did because I was stuck because I was a carpenter. True, and there was a lot of repair on that ship. I had to maintain, the gun ports have au, you have the port itself and then you have the canon poking through and you got a prominently I'd say almost o maybe three or four-foot-thick gun port that would come down, close over. In fall weather it would close over the gun say, so that the water couldn't come in. and it was my job to go and check everyone of them out periodically make sure they were okay if there were any problems I would report it to the captain and he would report it to the commander of the ship yard okay. Who was a captain, and he was in charge of every ship in the whole eastern part of the United States in the Atlantic Ocean. He knew where every ship was, okay. That was it.

I: So, if you could go back and do it again, would you?

AW: Well I mean history wise I was fascinated by-

I: So, it was a treat for you be able to work on that ship?

AW: Yeah because I am a history buff. Yeah but I was disappointed because I tried to get in in 43 and I when from Utica to Albany and so when I got there I went before this doctor and I was two pounds under. And he said well, and I said I was disappointed. He said I can't I can't accept you. I said to him I want to get in. I tell you what you do you go out to dinner and if you come back with the two pounds, I'll pass you. So, I went to the restaurant and I said to the girl, I heard that bananas were fattening, so I said to the girl do you have any bananas she said, yes how many do you want, one, two? I said give me 12. True. She brings a big plate of bananas I never was so sick in my life. I'm telling you. I went back figuring I had got it licked. I am going to break that two pounds. I was about two ounces under he wouldn't pass me, but know I understand when I got to Sampson why. Because I would have never made it with my weight. True. Well I tried in 43. Had I got in at 43 I would have gotten into the war. I was disappointed yeah but then I enlisted in 44, and went back in. Then the war was winding down. Because I enlisted in April right on my birthday and so I said to myself well the war is going down at least there was still fighting in Japan. And I tried and I tried and I tried to get transferred okay. Because I wanted to get in the thick of it. Couldn't do it they froze me. Navy would not do it. Could not get passed I couldn't get passed Old Ironside, true. So I was, served the boarder and I got discharged you had points if you have your points, when your points are up you are going to get discharged. Unless you want to reenlist. I couldn't see three years at \$88 a month. That aren't there too much money. So, I said to myself I'll go home go to work I could make more money that way. I couldn't see it. That where that where it ended. True.