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The Luckiest Veteran on the Block

By Sophie Braccini



John Scheuerman at Aegis in Moraga Photo Sophie Braccini

John Scheuerman was at some of the most dangerous scenes of the Second World War, aboard a destroyer. His boat landed at Normandy, the South of France, and was part of the Pacific War; but as Scheuerman puts it, "It's like I was on a pleasure cruise." Too far from the line of fire, or too close to it; away when a major disaster hit, the sailor never exposed his life and returned home to marry Marguerite, the girlfriend who is still his companion today at Aegis of Moraga.

Scheuerman joined the Navy in June of 1942 at age 22. He trained in Boston as a sonar maintenance and repair technician and found himself on his first destroyer in May of 1943. In naval terminology, a destroyer is a fast and maneuverable yet long-endurance warship intended to escort larger vessels in a fleet, convoy or battle group and defend them against smaller, short-range but powerful attackers; they were one of the most frequently sunk ships. Scheuerman was sent back to Boston a few months later for more training and assigned to another destroyer, the USS Rodman, at the beginning of 1944. The boat was part of a task force that went to Africa, England, and took part in the Normandy Landings. "The USS Rodman was affected to the outer screening force that protected the invasion ships," explained Scheuerman, who never set foot on land and never felt the bullet whizzing past his ear.

From there the ship was sent to the South of France landings operation. "Our vessel had its torpedo removed and served mainly in enemy detection," explained the veteran. "One day, we found

ourselves facing the south coast of France, close enough to see the German artillery ready to fire and we had nothing to defend ourselves." But luck didn't abandon Scheuerman on that occasion; when the Germans started to open fire they aimed way passed the USS Rodman, targeting the troop transport vessel behind them.

As the invasion force went inland, Scheuerman and his crew returned to Africa, then back to the US where he embarked on the USS Plunkett, a destroyer that was converted to a high-speed mine sweeper. As the ship engaged in the Pacific War, Scheuerman had to be sent home for minor surgery. While he was gone, his ship was the target of a kamikaze attack. "When the boat was repatriated to the United States I saw the plaque with the names of all those who had been lost during those battles," remembers Scheuerman sadly, "the names of all the maintenance crewmen were there, but mine."

After the war, a YMCA counselor convinced him that he was Harvard material, and off he went. After graduation, he worked for General Electric in the Financial Management Program, retiring in 1982. Life dealt him a blow when he and Marguerite lost their daughter to cancer when she was 42. They now live close to their two sons and their families.



Military archives: The USS Plunkett

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