

A Lifetime of Accomplishment for this Lafayette Veteran

By Daniel Smith



Jim Fernandes

Photo Andy Scheck

Jim Fernandes was lying in a hospital bed on Aug. 15, 1945, when he learned of the Japanese surrender. The then-Naval Aviation Cadet was receiving shots of penicillin, clearly misprescribed, for a sprain he had suffered in gymnastics. The war was over, though Fernandes' desire to be a pilot was not: "I was gonna earn my wings of Navy gold," he says.

Forty years of unpredictable twists and turns – all par for the course in Navy life – left Fernandes, now 89, far from his goal. Instead of flying a jet, Fernandes had a four-decade Navy career, a captaincy, three tours of duty in the Pentagon, the command of four destroyers and three land bases, five prestigious service medals, and a pivotal place in ushering in computer technology to the armed services.

The itinerant chaos of Fernandes' life was set into motion just after the war, when the Navy sent him to Saint Mary's College for training. "I have no idea why we had to come cross the country," recalls Fernandes, who genuinely remains baffled to this day. Nonetheless, Fernandes and his fellow cadets, stationed in North Carolina, hopped into a cattle car – with bunks stacked four high – and rode the railroads from Durham to Oakland.

Fernandes was quite smitten by California: "The smell of orange blossoms was everywhere and it was a nice sunny day. That kind of did it for me," he says; but even more so when he met his future wife, Rosemary, a student at Cal.

In the early '50s Fernandes was a reservist ensign on Treasure Island, focusing his time on his wife, three children, and a career selling advertising space for the San Francisco Chronicle. That is, until the Navy recalled him to active duty. Unknown to him at the time, he would remain active until his retirement in 1983.

Throughout the decade he worked his way up to commanding

officer of the USS Vammen only to be summoned back to dry land in 1961. Specifically, to the Pentagon. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara wanted Fernandes to compile records and 20-year projections for every dollar in every ship in every fleet. His tools: a pencil and a very long piece of paper.

Fernandes wanted access to the Pentagon's IBM 650, which at only the size of several refrigerators, was state of the art. "I went to my boss and said this pen and pencil stuff is really ridiculous. Let me put (the data) on EAM cards," to be read by the 650. His boss acquiesced, but there was one major problem: "I didn't know anything about computers."

Fernandes audited after-work classes at IBM until he learned the 650. Then the Pentagon decided to update to the IBM 1401. Fernandes, undeterred, studied the new model and tirelessly converted all the data to the 1401. On the day he was set to enter it, "the guy who runs the computer floor came and said, 'Guess what! We're going to have an IBM 7090!'" More classes, more converting. After that, though, there were no sudden upgrades and everything "worked just dandy."

In 1964 with the Vietnam War escalating, Fernandes returned to command the USS Wilhoite in combat against enemy patrol boats. After several more moves, which took Fernandes from Vietnam to England to San Diego, Fernandes wound up at the Office of the Chief of Naval Material where he simultaneously worked to outfit ships with modern computers while appealing to Congress for funding. "It was very tiresome," he says of the latter.

Fernandes developed a thorny relationship with one particular senator, who at Fernandes' request remains nameless. "(The senator) had no idea about the military," according to Fernandes, and he leaked inaccurate information to the press.

Beholden to his chain of command, Fernandes was unable to rebut the senator's statements in a timely manner – allowing the senator's damaging statements to smolder. That was until Fernandes realized this: The senator's press releases followed a model; he was plugging in words and themes into a premade structure, not unlike a Madlib. Fernandes used this to create his own generic counter; all he had to do was insert

the senator's own words and themes. This expedited the rebuttal process and within months, Fernandes says, the senator stopped.

Following several more moves – including Japan – and Fernandes' retirement in 1983, his wife longed to return home. The Fernandes' settled in Lafayette and now as a 15-year resident, Fernandes seems to finally have put his nomadic Navy lifestyle behind him – save for the occasional visit to

Ocean Beach. "Lafayette is what California should be," he says.

In this reporter's last conversation with Jim Fernandes – which followed hours of interview and multiple follow-up phone calls trying to stitch together the maddening chronology of his life – I told him, "I think I might finally be able to sort this all out."

"If you ever do," Fernandes laughed sympathetically, "please explain it to me."

Care. Comfort. Compassion.
When you need it most.

Your Lamorinda Senior Checklist ...

- Find cook for better nutrition ✓
- Get driver to appointments, groceries ✓
- Get help with laundry & changing sheets ✓
- Find somebody for companionship, exercise, puzzles ✓

CALL SENIOR HELPERS ✓✓✓✓
We can assist with these activities and more.

Call for a free assessment 925-376-8000

Bonded and insured.
Senior Helpers locations are independently owned and operated. ©2011 SH Franchising, LLC

Senior Helpers
Care and comfort at a moment's notice

We offer care that matches your needs 24/7

Care Indeed™
YOUR 24/7 HOME CARE SPECIALIST
(925) 317-3080
www.careindeed.com

Safe, reliable and affordable

- Our caregivers not only meet Care Indeed's standards, they meet your standards. If there's ever an issue, you can notify us immediately and we'll do something about it right away.
- Call us. We can send a caregiver within hours of your call.
- We price-match! No contract or deposit is required. We'll even reward you with a \$150 gift certificate after one week of service.

Your choice matters.
Choose the best care for less!

Dedicated to giving your personalized care and attention at every level

Do you know someone with Memory Loss?

Oakmont Memory Care

Resident-centered care is the cornerstone of Oakmont of Mariner Point's Traditions program. Our highly experienced care team will assess your loved one's needs and provide compassionate care for all stages of memory loss associated with Alzheimer's or other related dementias.

- Full-time Nurse
- Diabetic Wellness Program
- Enriching Activity Program
- Indoor and Outdoor Dining
- Respite Care available
- Courtyard and Resident Gardens

For More Information Call 510-328-3170

Assisted Living & Memory Care
Oakmont
of Mariner Point

2400 Mariner Square Dr
Alameda, CA 94501
510-328-3170
oakmontofmarinerpoint.com

RCFE #019200550

Tours Available Daily!

Veteran's Day Ceremony at Moraga Commons Nov. 11

A Veteran's Day Ceremony is scheduled from 9 to 10 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 11 at the Moraga Commons Park, honoring all who served in times of war and in times of peace. There will be speakers and refreshments at the free event, sponsored by the Town of Moraga and Moraga Boy Scout Troops 212, 234, 246 and 249.

Mary H. Smith D.D.S. • Cecelia Thomas, D.D.S.
A Professional Corporation
Family & Cosmetic Dentistry
96 Davis Road, Suite 5 Orinda, 925.254.0824



Taking care of all dental needs for you and your family. Emphasizing cosmetic dentistry with implants, and Invisalign. Nitrous oxide is available. Consultations are complimentary. Dentistry with Excellence.

YOUR SMILE IS EVERYTHING