

## LEONARD CHRIST USN SERVICE DURING WW II

AUGUST IN THE SAND HILLS OF NEBRASKA IS NORMALLY HOT AND DRY, AND AUGUST 17, 1922 WAS NO DIFFERENT. A DISRUPTION TO THE NORMAL WAS THE SOUND OF A NEW BORN BABY BOY STRUGGLING FOR BREATH AND WANTING FOOD, AND THE NEED WAS NOT SATISFIED UNTIL HIS GRANDMOTHER MADE A MIXTURE OF SUGAR, COFFEE, AND BREAD. LEN CHRIST ADSORBED THIS AS STIMULANT, AND THUS A US NAVY CHIEF PETTY OFFICER WAS BORN!

BY THE TIME HE GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL IN 1940, HE HAD ATTENDED FOUR ELEMENTARY AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS AND THREE HIGH SCHOOLS, WITH HIS USUAL MODE OF TRANSPORTATION BEING A HORSE! HE TRIED TO ENLIST IN THE NAVY BUT AN ASTHMATIC CONDITION MADE HIM INELIGIBLE. DECEMBER 7, 1941 MADE HIM WELL, AND IN 1942, HE WAS ACCEPTED INTO THE NAVY, AND BECAME A GUNNER'S MATE. INITIAL SHORE DUTY WAS FOLLOWED BY ASSIGNMENT TO THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS LANGLEY (CVL-27) IN THE PACIFIC. HE WAS ASSIGNED TO A DIVISION OF DECK HANDS AND GUNNERS MATES, AND DURING GENERAL QUARTERS, HE WAS THE SIGHT SETTER ON A 20 MM TURRETT GUN. DURING BATTLE TIME, THE SKY WAS FILLED WITH EXPLODING SHELL FRAGMENTS, AS THE 5-INCH SHELLS WERE SET TO EXPLODE AT VARIOUS ALTITUDES TO CATCH HIGH AND LOW FLYING

JAPANESE AIRCRAFT, AND ONE KAMIKAZE PILOT GOT CLOSE ENOUGH THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO SEE THE SHELLS HITTING THE PLANE, AND THE PILOT WAS VISIBLE WHEN THE PLANE HIT THE WATER. THE SHIP ALSO TOOK A BOMB THROUGH THE FORWARD ELEVATOR SHAFT AND EXPLODED IN OFFICERS COUNTRY, KILLING 5 PILOTS.

THE LANGLEY WAS ENGAGED IN THE BATTLES OF OKINAWA AND IWO JIMA, AND WAS IN PEARL HARBOR REFITTING WHEN THE WAR ENDED, LEONARD WENT INTO THE RESERVES AND DECIDED HE HAD HAD ENOUGH OF DECK DUTY, SO HE BECAME A SUBMARINER, EARNING HIS DOLPHINS IN 1952. HE RETIRED AS A CHIEF PETTY OFFICER AFTER 30 YEARS OF SERVICE AND BECAME AN EDUCATOR AND ADMINISTRATOR, EARNING A BACHELOR'S DEGREE, A MASTER'S DEGREE, AND A PhD.

DURING HIS NAVAL SERVICE, HE WAS AWARDED THE GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL, THE NAVAL RESERVE MERITORIOUS SERVICE RIBBON, AMERICAN CAMPAIGN RIBBON, ARMED FORCES RESERVE MILITARY RIBBON, NAVAL RESERVE MILITARY RIBBON, NATIONAL DEFENSE SERVICE MEDAL, WW II VICTORY RIBBON, PHILIPPINE LIBERATION RIBBON, ASIATIC PACIFIC CAMPAIGN RIBBON WITH 2 BATTLE STARS, NAVY EXPERT RIFLE MEDAL, AND THE NAVY EXPERT PISTOL MEDAL.