

# Burnell Grogg, Navy WW II Veteran 70 Year Member of Post 200



Burnell Levere Grogg was born on December 20, 1925, only child to Curvin and Garnett Krug Grogg. He graduated high school in 1942. The war started in 1941 and he remembers that school was shortened by a few days early so that those who were going to college could start summer school. During the war, college ran all year round.

After high school, he worked in a canning factory, a furniture factory in Glen Rock, Pa., Snyder Body Works in Greenmount and Wertz Garage in Lineboro with his father. He bought a 1939 Ford Coupe that took him roller skating and on fun trips to Forest Park in Hanover, Pa.

In December, 1943, he joined the Navy, getting sworn in just before Christmas on December 15<sup>th</sup>. He wanted to join the Navy and if he hadn't signed up before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he would have been drafted and would have to go where they sent him.

Basic training was at the United States Naval Training Center (Bainbridge) in Port Deposit, Md. and from there he was sent to diesel school in Chicago at Navy Pier and on to Cleveland for another six weeks of basic diesel school at the GM plant. After a short time in Virginia, he was sent to Fort Pierce, Florida to train on LSVP 36 foot landing crafts (Higgins Boats). He remembers riding out a hurricane and the pesky mosquitoes and sand flies on the beach.

At this point, he was assigned to the U.S. Caswell AKA 72, which was a cargo transport for amphibious forces. It was commissioned on December 13, 1944 in Charleston, S.C. It had 24 landing craft, eight 50' LCM's (Landing Craft Mechanized aka Mike Boats), fifteen LCVP's (Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel aka Higgins Boats), and one captain's gig. He remembers leaving the commissioning dock and heading into Charleston City Harbor to load. Their skipper who was a Puget Sound pilot, had apparently never had a big ship of his own and they ran head first in to the dock and almost demolished it. They left on the 28<sup>th</sup> and headed into the Chesapeake Bay for a shakedown for a couple of days and that same pilot ran them aground. They had to wait until high tide to continue on.

On January 9<sup>th</sup>, they arrived in Bayonne, New Jersey where they picked up their first load of an entire shipload of beer and headed for the Panama Canal, arriving on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. The weather was very hot. After going through the Panama Canal, they proceeded to Guadalcanal. They unloaded the ship in Tulagi (part of the Solomon Islands) in the Pacific. While there they took a boatload of gunners over to one of the islands where they were to practice aerial gunnery. An airplane towed a sleeve that they fired at. A native boy who spoke very good English came up to them and asked if he could have a sleeve. They asked why he wanted a sleeve and he said that he could then buy a pig, raise the pig and buy himself a wife. He also showed them how to climb a tree and get a coconut and hack it open. They couldn't manage to do it with a sharp knife and the boy had no problem doing it with his dull knife.

Ulithi, (an atoll in the western Pacific in the Caroline Islands) was the next stop with a load of motorized vehicles and other cargo and a small detachment of Marines aboard. He remembers having to take an officer from their ship to another into a harbor in the dark where there were many boats waiting to join a convoy. Burnell was a motor-mack but for some reason he was running the boat along with a bow-hook. The officer had been drinking and as they started out, he opened a fifth of Black Label and shared it with the bow-hook making him useless. The officer kept ordering him in different directions until they were lost. By hailing different chips, they found his ship. Burnell finally delivered the officer and managed to get back in time as they were leaving next morning.

From there they went to Saipan with supplies and for the invasion of Okinawa and remained off the beaches for the next week, landing cargo to support the 6<sup>th</sup> Marines in their rapid advance across the Motobu Peninsula. They soon learned that the war was over. Burnell said; "We were one happy bunch!" That night before we invaded Okinawa, one hot night their ship hit a ground swell and it threw the ship to the starboard and something cracked and when it came back to port, a LCM (Landing Craft) with a VP (Personnel Vehicle) in it slid right off the deck into the water. Because it was so hot, there were some Marines lying on the deck and one was critically hurt. Luckily none of them went overboard because it had taken the guard rail and everything with it.

Another time during the same trip, Burnell was up on top of the ship (k/a sky lookout) in a swivel chair where he was supposed to be spotting planes. There was a big set of handle bars with a big set of binoculars set up in it. The night was so black you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. An officer came in and Burnell was scolded for not looking through the binoculars. A short time later, something swerved off to the side of their ship. It was a Jap Betty (Mitsubishi G4M "Betty") a big bomber shaped like a big brown cigar. The gunner thought it was an American plane and said not to shoot. They were in a 30-ship convoy and another ship down the line knew it wasn't American and brought it down.

After the war, they loaded and unloaded army material, personnel and headed to Jinsen, Korea; Chinese troops to Taku (Tienstsin), China; Koowlan, China; Koowloon, China; Tsingtao, China; Sasabo, Japan. Because they were a cargo ship, they didn't have accommodations for troop transport, so conditions were not the best.

At that point his ship was returning to Pearl Harbor for overhaul and replenishment. He didn't have enough points, which you got for time served, age, dependents, etc. So on December 6<sup>th</sup>, he was transferred to a little Landing Craft Infantry where he stayed a night or so. They were on alert because December 7<sup>th</sup> commemorated the attack on Pearl Harbor and it was thought that the Japs might start something. Everything remained quiet.

He was transferred to the U.S. Palawan RG 10, a converted liberty ship which was turned into an auxiliary repair ship. This ship was built in Baltimore at Bethlehem Steel; launched August 12, 1944. They stayed in Sasabo for a short time and sailed for the Yantzee River in China and on to Shanghai.

Finally on March 29<sup>th</sup>, he was headed home. He was hoping to have a relaxing trip home, but three generator engines (GM 8 CYL V8) were having trouble running and his time was spent working on them. When they arrived in San Diego, they learned that the railroads were on strike. After five days of waiting around, they got on a 23 car troop train and headed east. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, they were in Bainbridge and Burnell was discharged on June 5, 1946.

During his time in the Navy, he earned the American Campaign medal, the Asiatic/Pacific Campaign medal with a bronze star, the World War II Victory medal, Navy Occupation Service medal for Asia, the China Service medal, Philippine Liberation medal with bronze star and the Philippine Presidential Unit Citation. Burnell spent 30 months in service to his country and is glad that he was able to serve.

He went to work as soon as he got home. In the spring of 1947, Dorothy Sellers and Burnell started dating and they hit it off right away. They were married in June of 1948 which was a leap year. Their first daughter, Carolyn (Phillips) was born on August 15, 1950.

Burnell was working at a garage trucking machinery and did some welding. Because the garage didn't sell cars anymore, they brought in the Westinghouse line of appliances and he started learning to service them. Televisions were becoming popular and he learned how to service them. In August of 1954, Winter (Boots) Wright of Wright's TV & Radio in Hampstead offered Burnell a job and his work in TV, radio, towers and base stations began. Their son, Steve was born in January of 1952 and a daughter, Janet (Gross) was born in June of 1957.

He had many work experiences while working for Boots, several different fire companies and many commercial companies; one of which was servicing the mobile radio system for the news cars of WJZ-TV, Channel 13 in Baltimore. The base transmitter was located at the top of the candelabra (1000 feet in the air). They had to ride a very small elevator to the top (it is actually a small steel cage that rode on rollers against pipes). There was no steel grate to step off on when you got to the top, mastering just two eye beams while carrying a tool bag. These were scary times, especially once during an ice storm when they couldn't get all the way up. In 1983, he went to work for Comel with the early Cellular systems. Burnell and his wife have enjoyed traveling all over this country and Canada, mostly by camper. In June of 2014, they moved to Homewood at Plumcreek in the Hanover area. It was a pleasure to visit with Burnell and his lovely wife, Dorothy and we thank him for his service to our country.