



## Joseph Richard Macan

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Born and raised in midtown Detroit, he was a proud graduate of Cass Technical High School. Between graduating from high school and turning 18, Richard had a big decision to make. As an eighteen-year-old, he would be subject to the draft. Not wanting to be drafted into the Army, he chose to be proactive and enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve.

The first step as a trainee was to ship out by train, from Corktown's Michigan Central Station to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center in Illinois for boot camp and Basic Engineering Service School. Then off to San Diego to board an ATA Troop Transport and head overseas. Imagine what an eighteen-year-old would feel like on this adventure.

Two days out to sea, after picking up two more troop transports, the trip turned into a hair-raising affair, at least for young "baby-faced" Richard. In fact, his crewmates fondly nicknamed him "Baby" because of his youthful appearance. The convoy of transports was led by a destroyer and flanked on each side by two destroyer escorts. The convoy faced peril when a signal was picked up of a Japanese submarine eyeing the convoy. The destroyers moved off from the convoy toward the signal, and the transports were ordered into a zig-zag pattern in case of a torpedo attack. A short time later the destroyers returned and, again in single column formation, they arrived at Leyte on the Islands of the Philippines.

The USS Vestal, a repair ship, was scheduled to be Richard's ride to Okinawa. Unfortunately, this voyage was not going any smoother than his trip out of San Diego. At sea, the Vestal was caught in a typhoon and tossed around until the ship was safely able to pick up the crew at Buckner Bay in Okinawa where they were waiting for the Vestal to return.

When word came the Vestal was about to return, Richard went back to his tent to pack, heard someone scream "tripwire" and off he ran to the safety of a mound of earth. Sure enough, the wire had been stretched across the path with hand grenades attached. The Army "Bomb Squad," not a job Richard said he would fancy, was able to disarm the trap and the Vestal was on its way to Hong Kong.

On the USS Vestal, Richard was assigned as the mechanical technician, and another seaman was the electrician. They were responsible for the AC and DC steam-driven turbines on the ship. Early one morning Richard and the electrician were sent a message to distribute electrical current through the ship's hull. This order was given so they could demagnetize the hull because the ship would soon be going over a magnetic minefield.

While on the USS Vestal, the crew experienced more typhoons and almost capsized with the ship listing to maximum degree-Richard said they were saved by only a one-degree list. They typhoons were the cause of several ships capsizing at a significant loss of life. The crew on the Vestal spent two day picking up survivors from the ships that had not been as fortunate as the Vestal.

While onshore in Hong Kong, Richard was assigned a safer job as shore patrol and enjoyed meeting Chinese people selling peanuts and rickshaw drivers waiting for riders. In early summer, word soon came that Richard and

his fellow shipmates would be heading home.

First, there was a stop at the Bikini Atoll Coral Reef near the Marshall Islands. It was here that the A-Bomb was to have two tests to have the bomb explode: (a) above a ship surrounded by smaller ships and, (b) out of water. The important part of his Bikini Atoll story involves another choice Richard made at the end of his career with the Navy. Richard and his crewmates were asked if they would like to participate in the test. As an incentive, they would be given the next rank higher. Now honestly, why would sailors heading home want to participate!?! There were no takers.

Off they went to the Bremerton shipyard across from Seattle, Washington. While enroute, Richard happened to be in the signal area when he spotted a quite anxious Captain come out of the bridge about something he saw in the water. Suddenly his Captain commanded a sharp right- they had just cleared a five-foot diameter mine with horns sticking out of the water that had broken loose from its mooring and floated to the surface. The Captain radioed the GPS coordinates, and they kept heading home. Just another day at sea?

"Home, finally! Halleluiah we were home," Richard says, "and then I had to get myself in gear and go to college!" His adventures and decisions continued in a fascinating career of purpose, life enjoyed, and active healthy lifestyle. One ponders . . . all of these certainly brought Richard to the grand age of 96!