

My name is Bill Monteith

I joined the navy in 1951 as a young 17-year-old. I went to Cornwallis for basic training and from there I boarded a train for the west coast. After arriving at Esquimalt, BC, we went aboard the ATHABASKAN. Within a month we sailed for Korea. We were trained in warfare on the way over.

I was a supply number for the twin Boffin guns. They were situated mid-ship on the ATHABASKAN.

One of the most vivid memories I have of that time while patrolling off the east coast of Korea, was the rescue of a boatload of people – old, young, sickly, and badly frightened, fleeing the war zone. The leader was a 16-year-old youth. He was badly wounded with a 9mm shell lodged in his stomach.

We were able to get them aboard ship. We fed the hungry passengers, bread, peanut butter and jam. They loved this combination. We made sleeping arrangements for them all. At the advice of our chaplain we sang “Auld Lange Syne”. The tune was similar to their national anthem. (They sang all day, and all night). On the trip down the coast of Korea, on the way to Inchon, and in all the mass confusion, to our surprise, a young mother gave birth while onboard to a beautiful baby girl. The 16-year-old youth, leader of the group, was able to receive medical attention.

One night while on patrol off the east coast of Korea, the Captain of my cruising station, Able Seaman Robin J. Skavberg, on bringing a hot pot of coffee to our guns crew, closed up at “B” gun during night cruising stations. He was lost overboard on a cold winter night. We believed he slipping on ice and went over the guard rail into the sea.

As it was extremely cold, we can only believe that he did not survive very long in the icy water. We broke protocol by turning on all the lights on the ship. We searched the area with our search lights for two hours ... we could not find him. We were at night cruising stations with light on (we were taking a big chance) and had to return to cruising with all lights extinguished. (We were in a war zone).

On my Canadian Korean Veterans return visit in April 2014 we were taken to numerous war memorials in Seoul, I came across the memorial plaque for Robin J. Skavberg. For me there was finally some closure.

It made us very proud to be returning and we were warmly welcomed.

God bless them all

William Glenn Monteith #14400-H