



Being a Loudmouth

An Interview with Stanley Bryk
By Cody Inglis

When I first arrived at the Royal Palms Retirement Home, I wasn't sure what to expect. I had done interviews in the past in varying circumstances: a workplace, a home. Upon entering Stanley's room, Mrs. Hatch and I were warmly greeted by Stanley, his son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. It was an excellent setting for an interview. Everyone was comfortably seated and everyone contributed in some way or another. The feel of the interview was equivalent to what one would experience when talking with an old friend. Stanley, with the help of his son and grandson, recalled his service in the Navy and his civilian life immediately afterwards. The story that follows is one drawn from memory with the addition of research on the part of Stanley's son Mitch and grandson Michael.

Stanley Bryk was born on October 4, 1921, to Polish immigrants who settled in Cleveland, Ohio. Before enlisting in the Navy, Stanley worked at Thompson Aircraft Products as an aircraft inspector. His life as a civilian came to a close with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Stanley, realizing his duty as a citizen, enlisted in the Navy the day after the attacks. He was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Base for basic training. He was there for roughly 6-8 weeks before he was shipped off to Norfolk, Virginia. Upon his arrival, he was assigned to the *USS Joseph T Dickman*, a Harris-class attack transport ship. After a few days, he was reassigned to the *USS Lyon*, a destroyer.

The majority of Stanley's time on the *Lyon* was spent during the invasions of North Africa. He participated in the invasion of French Morocco—Operation Torch—and the transporting of supplies from the U.S. to Oran, Algeria, directly after the invasions. His duties on the ship included taking care of and supervising the weather deck, manning a 20mm gun towards the bow of the *Lyon*, and completing his day-to-day duties as a self-proclaimed "loudmouth." As the boatswain's mate (colloquially called the "bosuns"), his duties typically would have included supervision of ship maintenance, assistant to the First Lieutenant on the ship and, on occasion, acting as the ship's helmsman. This required shouting out orders so they could be clearly heard on deck, thus requiring a "loud mouth."

During the invasion of North Africa, Stanley can remember German planes dive-bombing the ships docked offshore along with U-Boat attacks, one of which came frighteningly close to the *USS Lyon*. Stanley and his crew were waiting to dock at a port in North Africa when a ship

was requested to go in front of them to dock sooner. When that ship pulled in front of the *Lyon*, it was struck by a torpedo and subsequently torn in half, right in front of Stanley's ship. They had to go on clean-up duty afterwards. The experience was one of many that, in Stanley's words, "makes you want to forget what really went on, because you don't want to keep remembering it."

Not all moments of the invasion were punctuated with such tragedy. On occasion, Stanley would take the Higgins boat he piloted out on the Mediterranean and go water skiing. The Higgins boat, or LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) was a landing craft used extensively in World War II to ferry a platoon-sized complement of men to shore, such as in the Normandy invasion. Stanley and a few of the men would take planks from the *Lyon*, tie some rope to the boat, and have at it. At one point during one of their shenanigans out on the high seas, Stanley decided to try it out. Being a novice, he had no idea what to do with himself once on the planks. Well, needless to say, Stanley fell off and was left behind while his buddies hauled off in the Higgins boat. He was picked back up after a short time when the men he took out couldn't find him behind the Higgins boat.

After a few transport runs and water skiing trips on the *Lyon*, Stanley was once more reassigned, this time to LST-372 as a Boatswain's Mate First Class. On LST-372, Stanley participated in the invasion of Sicily and the invasion of Salerno two months later in September of 1943. During the invasion of Salerno, Stanley dodged another torpedo attack, in which he had to take out his Higgins boat once more to pick up the survivors of the ship that was hit. Thankfully, most of the men abandoned ship before it sank, giving Stanley and the crew of LST-372 less of a tragedy to clean up after the fact.

Towards the end of Stanley's tour of duty in the Mediterranean, the ship brought a dog onboard as a sort of pet. The dog—Chelsea—proved extremely useful because of its good sense of hearing. It wasn't uncommon for the dog to start shaking before the sound of an artillery attack reached the ears of the crewmembers. One day, the dog started barking towards the direction of an object in the air—what turned out to be a *Messerschmitt* on a strafing run of LST-372. Stanley jumped on one of the guns he operated, turned the gun in the direction of the plane, and began shooting like there was no tomorrow. He helped take down the German plane, which was an impressive feat on its own. What was even more interesting about the occurrence was the fact that the *Messerschmitt* was directly in front of the sun, facing the boat. After the pilot of the plane was picked up, he was brought onboard as a prisoner. The German pilot demanded to know who shot him down and how he managed to see him. During our interview, Stanley laughed it off, but revealed that he had put his face close to the shields on the sides of the sights, which allowed for some shade from the sun.

After LST-372 was no longer needed in the Mediterranean, Stanley and his crew headed back to England to prep for the invasion of Normandy. Sometime between that and the invasion on June 6, 1944, LST-372 returned to the States to be refitted and rearmed. During that trip, they made a short stop in New York Harbor where Stanley took the payroll master to Wall Street to fill the pay slips for the sailors. They took the Higgins boat out, docked, had the slips taken care of, and attempted to return to the LST-372. But, the fog in the harbor posed a problem. They motored around looking for the LST, but gave up and landed back on Manhattan. Well, they thought they did, at least. Stanley Bryk successfully invaded Ellis Island in that fog. His nickname, in Polish, is Stashu—short for Stanislaus. Jokingly, they renamed the Statue of Liberty the "Stashu" of Liberty as one of the spoils of war for Stanley.

After the trip to New York and its return to England, the LST, per its name Landing Ship Tank, was loaded with tanks and relayed equipment for the invasion. His LST was slated for the 3rd wave of landings at Omaha Beach. Upon arrival, Stanley had to man a gun on the bow of the LST to defend against the possibility of planes flying overhead. After the tanks, equipment, and personnel were all unloaded, the LST had to sit there because of low tide. Although the specifics of the situation were difficult to recall, Stanley did tell us that they had to sit there with the doors of the bow open until high tide came back in.

Once the invasion itself was over, LST-372 made over thirty trips from England to Normandy on supply runs—one of the most of any ship during the invasion. A Philadelphia newspaper, hometown of the ship's Captain Marvin Studebaker, coined the LST 372 "the luckiest ship in the Navy." Making those trips back and forth allowed for a lot of R&R. Stanley became the ship's unofficial barber, picked because of his efficiency with the clippers. Men fished, rested, and kept up the great work on the logistical side of the war effort.

In December of 1945, Stanley was discharged per request of the base commander of the New Orleans Naval Base. He had participated in four invasions, led the enlisted sailors of the *USS Lyon* and LST-372, shot down aircraft, swabbed the decks, and supervised the day-to-day operations of both ships. In a touching letter from Stanley's commanding officer, Marvin Studebaker commended Stanley, stating,

The enemy has surrendered unconditionally and, by Divine grace, we are again safely home in the United States. In handing you papers for a well-earned leave, I give you the time honored commendation of the sea. Well done, good luck, and God speed.

Stanley's war was over.

Stanley returned to Cleveland, Ohio, after the war to return to work at TRW (Thompson, Ramo, and Wooldrich) as a quality control inspector on the assembly lines. That job posed too much stress for Stanley right after the war since he was, in a sense, demoted from his role as a "loudmouth" from his time in the Navy. He left TRW, married his sweetheart from before the war, Mary Chapman, and moved on to work for the next 44 years at the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* as a supervisor. Stanley and Mary had a family of three children—Bonnie, Donna and Mitch—and watched his family grow up. Stanley now has six grandchildren and three great grandchildren. Mary, his wife of 64 years, died of Alzheimer's in November 2009.

If there was ever a stereotype for the hardworking, leather-handed sailor, it would be Stanley. During his time in the service, he developed a drive and focus like none other. He got things done but knew how to mix work with play. Stanley Bryk is an example to follow, someone that people should look to when they experience bouts of laziness, and, above all, a man of integrity and perseverance.

Cody Inglis was a member of Veterans Heritage Project for 3 years, interviewing four veterans, including Stan. He traveled to Washington DC to present Veterans Heritage Project to the National Council for the Social Studies and also visited the White House. Cody is currently a sophomore at Arizona State University.

Stanley Bryk worked at Thompson Aircraft Products as an aircraft inspector from 1941-42 until he joined the Navy on June 6, 1942. His career in the Navy started off on the aircraft carrier USS Joseph T. Dickman, but he was quickly reassigned to the USS Lyon right before the invasion of North Africa. After Operation Torch was completed in November of 1942, Stanley was once more reassigned to LST 372 as a Botswain's Mate First Class. On that ship, he participated in Operation Husky (invasion of Sicily), the Salerno Landings of 1943, and, finally, Operation Overlord in June 1944. After he was discharged in 1945, he returned to Cleveland, Ohio where he worked at the Cleveland Plain Dealer for 44 years. Stanley moved to Phoenix, Arizona in 2005 in order to be closer to his family. Stanley passed away on November 13, 2011.