My Grandfather, the Navy, and Korea

Abstract: My grandfather served in the Navy for four years during the Korean War. He chose to enlist in the service rather than risk being drafted. My grandfather saw very little real action in the war as he served on two different auxiliary ships during his service. He served first on the oil tanker USS Quadalupe whose job was to fuel the US Naval 7th fleet. It was during his time on the Quadalupe that my grandfather faced the only two times that his life was in danger. After two tours on the Quadalupe my grandfather served on the fleet issue ship USS Pollux. It was while on this ship that he received word of the birth of his first child.

Key Words: grandfather, Korean War, enlistment, training, Navy, supply division, equipment, marriage, Quadalupe, Pollux

In the aftermath of the second World War the world was divided between the Democratic nations of mainly the US and Western Europe and the Communist Nations of mainly the USSR, China, and Eastern Europe. This was the time known as the Cold War. The eastern and western worlds were locked in a race both to have the superior arms and also to have the most countries under their control. Therefore, when Korea became divided between a communist northern nation and a democratic southern nation the US and other western nations decided they had to prevent South Korea from falling to North Korean forces. During this event, known as the Korean War, my grandfather served in the navy for four years.

The hostility in Korea started in 1949 and North Korea crossed the border on June 25 of 1950. During the war the draft was in effect and so, rather than get drafted into the service, my grandfather enlisted in the navy on December 3, 1950. He was discharged in early October of 1954, four months after the Korean War ended. My grandfather feels that the Navy was probably the safest branch of the service to be in during the Korean War, though he hadn't considered this when he enlisted.

My grandfather's first choice of service was actually with the Coast Guard, partially at the urging of a cousin who happened to be going to the same college he was going to at the time.
Both of them were signed up for the draft and chose to enlist in the service rather than be drafted, and so they went to San Francisco to try to enlist in the Coast Guard only to be rejected. My grandfather was rejected due to a few incidents when he sprained his ankles while playing baseball so he instead went to the Navy recruiter nearby and was accepted while his cousin enlisted in the Air Force.

After being accepted into the Navy my grandfather went to boot camp in San Diego for nine months and then storekeeper school for another twelve weeks. Boot camp for the Navy included some military training such as how to march, the about face, etc. in order to teach the recruits to respond to orders without question, but most of the training was in classrooms where they would learn Navy terminology, what it was like on different ships, what the purpose of the navy was, what they might face if they had to go to Korea and the like. The training was very concentrated: the recruits would usually be woken at about 4:00 AM and they would go out to the grinder, a large asphalt field, where they would march and do callisthenics and other exercises to get in shape before they went to the classrooms. The training transformed my grandfather, who came in being six feet tall and weighing 157 pounds to weighing 180 pounds of all muscle which he has kept to this day.

After completing boot camp my grandfather went to storekeeper school for twelve weeks. There he was trained for his specific service which would be in the supply division. The purpose of the supply division was to keep their ship functioning. The supply division would take inventory on all the ship's supplies. If any supplies were getting low it would be the job of the supply division to order the required supplies. It might not seem like a very important job, but it was. If it weren't for the supply division the ship might run out of a critical spare part and may break down in the middle of the water which would obviously be very bad.

The safety of service in the Navy was accounted for by the fact that North Korea had no
navy of their own, so the US Navy had complete control of the Korean waters and very few lives were lost. Most of the action that the Navy was part of was with the battleships and the aircraft. The battleships attacked a railroad that delivered supplies to the North Korean army in South Korea. The North Koreans would respond by repairing all the damage the battleships inflicted on the railroad and the battleships would in turn respond by attacking and damaging the railroad once more. The aircraft were sent to bomb parts of North Korea. The US aircraft carriers also had a few jet fighters that would engage the North Koreans' Russian migs in the air. My grandfather, however, had no direct experience with this as he served on two different auxiliary ships, whose purpose was to keep the fighting ships fully and properly equipped, during his 46 months of service.

My grandfather first served on an oil tanker, the USS Quadalupe, where he served two tours of duty over 28 months in Korea, the first tour lasting thirteen months, the second lasting about eleven months. He was assigned to the Quadalupe in April of 1951. Not long after receiving this assignment he married the woman he loves and to whom he has now been married for now more than 60 years. He got married on April 29, and in September he was shipped out. For the remaining 37 months of his service they saw very little of each other.

The job of the USS Quadalupe was to fuel the US Naval 7th fleet. Two to three times a week over the course of about thirty days the Quadalupe would fuel all types of fighting ships and aircraft. The oil tankers such as the Quadalupe carried 140,000 barrels of black oil for the ships and 30,000 barrels of aviation fuel for the aircraft. At 42 gallons of oil or fuel per barrel, these ships were carrying 5,880,000 gallons of black oil and 1,260,000 gallons of aviation fuel for the US 7th fleet near Wonson harbor in Korea. When the supplies of fuel were expended or very nearly expended, the Quadalupe would go to Sasabo in southern Japan to pick up fuel. They would be there for about a week before returning to Korean waters.
It was during his time on the Quadalupe that my grandfather faced the only two times during his service in the Navy in which his life was in danger. Ironically, both of these incidents would have been by friendly fire. The first event took place in the winter of 1951-1952 while the USS Boxer, an aircraft carrier, was being fueled. The aircraft carriers took a lot of black oil and aviation fuel and took about two hours to fuel. The ships were only about 50 to 75 feet apart and moving at a speed of ten knots, which is just a little more than ten miles per hour. About an hour to an hour and a half through the fueling my grandfather happened to look down between the ships and saw a mine floating between the ships. Mines had been set up along the Korean waters by the US and this one had apparently broken loose and was now floating between the Quadalupe and the Boxer. If it had drifted just a little bit to either side, especially if it had drifted towards the Quadalupe, both ships would have been blown out of the water. Fortunately, the mine drifted harmlessly past the two ships and once it passed the ships it was fired on until it detonated so it wouldn't be a danger to any other ships.

The second of these incidents was at Wonson harbor during the spring of 1953. An aircraft was returning to its carrier with a bomb hung up under it. It was supposed to drop the bomb, but somehow the bomb got stuck and couldn't get loose and so the aircraft was returning to attempt to get rid of the bomb. Finally, about 500 feet from the Quadalupe the bomb got loose and dropped into the water where it detonated harmlessly. The force of the explosion lifted the bow of the ship out of the water for a moment before dropping back into the water, but that was the worst of the event.

The Quadalupe was in Korean waters during the winter, when it was incredibly cold. Crew members could only be outside for fifteen to twenty minutes without running the risk of getting frostbite. The cold also interfered with the fueling of other ships. The fuel pumps had to be steamed to keep them from freezing. My grandfather was always grateful when they had to
return to Sasabo where it was much warmer so he could warm up for a week before heading back up to Korea and the bitter cold.

After his second tour on the Quadalupe had ended, my grandfather served on the USS Pollux, an AK54 fleet issue ship, for a tour of 14 months. The Pollux carried frozen food, spare parts for ships, extra clothing and other materials for the ships. In total the Pollux carried over 8,000 items. The Pollux was stationed in Yukuska harbor in norther Japan, well away from the fighting in Korea. Ships that needed supplies would send flat-bottomed boats called launches to Yukuska harbor to pick up the supplies. By about February or March of 1954 the Pollux went from Yukuska to Suvik Bay in the Philippines to issue supplies. It was during this time that my grandfather learned of the birth of his first child born on April 9. His daughter was supposed to be born by late March and so the lack of news made him anxious. All he could think of was something going wrong and was not sleeping well until he finally received the news that his wife had given birth to a healthy baby girl. The absence from the birth of his first child, along with the fact that his wife didn't want him to re-enlist convinced him not to re-enlist when he got his discharge.

After serving his tour on the Pollux, my grandfather was discharged and he returned home to his wife and daughter and took up a job with the California Highway Patrol where he continued to serve the people for many years before retiring at the rank of Captain. His service in the Navy trained him physically as well as mentally and he believes that it has made him a better person. I can well attest to the person that he is now and believe that he is right.