

## Harold Fenn

As interviewed by Judy Hansen

Harold was born March 27, 1926 in Pomerene, Arizona the fourth son of Peter and Florence Lorena Jones Fenn. His siblings were Thelma, Evan L, Elora, Alva, Terry E, and Lester. He attended high school in Benson, Arizona where he completed his junior year. Harold said everyone called Pomerene polygamy town, Arizona.

His father was hunting jobs for his boys and he had a vision that things were better in Utah. He felt you couldn't go wrong there. Harold moved to Lehi, Utah in March 1943 with his parents. Harold worked for the Forest Service for a short time. He started working at U S Steel in Orem, Utah on a cement crew during the initial construction. The plant was finished in 1944 so he joined the service.



On February 11, 1944 he voluntarily went to Provo and enlisted in the United States Navy. They took Harold and a bunch of boys down to the depot station and said, "There you are boys get on that train" and they were sent to California. He went to San Diego Naval Training Station and they made him march. He did a lot of marching. They sent him overseas on a troop transport ship named Santa Monica to Nouméa, New Caledonia.

He served on the USS Rio Grande in the South Pacific as a shipfitter<sup>1</sup> or as he described, "the construction and repairman who was always carrying a big hammer." The USS Rio Grande was a tanker ship assigned to the Army Air Force. The army was over the Air Force because they didn't have a separate Air Force in WWII.

Nouméa served as the main supply and support depot for amphibious operations in the South Pacific.<sup>2</sup> The USS Rio Grande was assigned to the US Pacific Fleet as a unit of the mobile support group and carried petroleum products to help provide fuel for the fighting ships of the

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<sup>1</sup> According to wikipedia a shipfitter is an enlisted or civilian person who works on heavy metal like high-tensile steel, high yield strength steel, etc. Shipfitters fabricate, assemble and erect all structural parts of a ship, coordinate all fixed tank work performed on submarines and ships, and coordinate all sonar dome work. Shipfitters also use heavy machinery such as plate planners, shears, punches, drill presses, bending rolls, bending slabs, plate beveler, saws, presses up to 750 tons, angle roll (vertical and horizontal), dogs and wedges. Shipfitters are responsible for hydro and air testing of tanks and compartments as well as perform grinding, drilling, and fit up operations on submarines and surface crafts.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>2</sup> World War Two Pacific Island Guide, pg 71.

fleet to invade Japan.<sup>3</sup> It was the staging base in April 1945 for the Okinawa assault.<sup>4</sup> Harold said there were a lot of swap jockey's (the guys that were always cleaning the deck) on board the ship. There were always 'work details' that needed to be done.



USS Rio Grande (AOG-3)

The SS Indianapolis was a battleship that came out of the US west coast delivering one of the key components of the atomic bombs that were used to bomb Japan. It left the Philippines and was sent back to Pearl Harbor but was sunk by a Japanese submarine. Harold's ship the USS Rio Grande fueled the SS Indianapolis before it left for its mission. A gentleman requested the Captain's log of the SS Indianapolis but when he got it, there were pages missing out of it. The SS Indianapolis was a black-eye to the Navy. They didn't want anyone to know what was on the ship or what its mission was. It was sent back alone without an escort which is very unusual.

Harold served in the Navy for a little over 2 years and on May 2, 1946 he received his discharge in Clearfield, Utah.

After he returned from his military service he continued his employment with US Geneva Steel where he ended up as the head grinder in the Roller Mills for 39 ½ years. He ground rolls for the roll line. Each roll of steel was put on a lathe which had to be turned for 8 to 12 hours and all the blemishes removed so they were perfectly smooth with a flat surface. This resulted in the

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<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS\\_Rio\\_Grande\\_\(AOG-3\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Rio_Grande_(AOG-3))

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

finished product ready for sale. He left his employment there just before they shut Geneva down in 1985.

On May 15, 1947 Harold married Bertha Clark Courney in Ely, Nevada. She had one child Robert Lynn Courney by a previous marriage. On June 22, 1948 a son, Jerry David was born. Jerry was a lovable little fellow who romped and played with the neighborhood children, but one day Jerry became tired and listless. He was diagnosed with Wilm's Tumor which is cancer of the kidney usually found in children and rarely in adults. He was in and out of the hospital and everything that could be done was tried but he passed away after six months on February 2, 1954.

In 1957 Harold and Bertha bought a home with 1.67 acres located at 9058 W 8570 N county road in Lehi, just west of the Lehi Veteran's ball park. He lived and raised his family there.

Another son, Randy Blake was born on March 3, 1955. Randy brought a lot of joy into the home. Randy was a good son and also a good student. He graduated from Lehi High School.

Besides working at Geneva, Harold also farmed in Lehi. He took jobs cutting, raking, and bailing hay for his neighbors. He also harvested their beets. He rented 10 acres of field directly east of his home from Ray Stewart and grew hay. After his son graduated school, Harold and his brother Lester bought and developed a 640 acre farm 80 miles west of his home past Simpson Springs on the old pony express route in the river bed. They dug 2-16" wells for irrigation where they grew wheat and milo. They sold the sold this farm after two years.

Harold's wife died November 19, 1999. A black spot was found in her stomach but she never returned to get an official diagnosis. They suspect it was cancer. This left Harold living alone. His son Randy and wife Valerie have made sure Harold has been well cared for during his senior years.

Harold was baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint in a muddy river when he was a young boy. He had the opportunity when he was younger to be baptized for the dead in the Mesa, Arizona temple 22 times. He never considered himself a religious man but after his wife passed away he went to the LDS temple.

It is interesting to note that Harold's brother Evan served in WWII on the USS Monaghan that was capsized in a typhoon and he was one of 6 sole survivors. When he died he was the sole survivor of the six. Evan lived in Lehi for a short time prior to his service.