

Dana Kozak

ENGL 562

Dr. Maxwell

9 April 2019

Vietnam Veteran, Husband, Father, Grandfather:

The Equal Parts of Bill Kozak

Born March 17, 1952, William “Bill” Paul Kozak, Jr. was raised in Dearborn, Michigan, where he lived with his parents and three sisters. His father, William Paul Kozak, Sr. served in World War II as an Army infantryman. As a child, although he did not know what he wanted to be when he grew up, Bill loved watching and playing baseball, following his favorite player Al Kaline of the Detroit Tigers.

While in high school, Bill flipped through a copy of Life magazine, staring at the graphic pictures of the war. He found the pictures horrific yet exciting. He had a low draft number, and the idea of going off to war created mixed feelings of fear and excitement. After graduating from high school, he wanted to leave his hometown to travel the world, so he decided to enlist in the Navy. He chose the Navy because he felt it was his best chance to serve his country while also being able to return to his family.



He spent thirteen weeks in bootcamp, and, near the end, he took an aptitude test which would determine where he would best fit in the Navy's large infrastructure. Bill didn't feel he would excel in anything, so he went into the fleet as an undesignated sailor. But he was later rated as a Commissaryman. He was a mess cook for his first 6-8 months on the ship; his duties entailed cleaning up after the crew and washing dishes and pots and pans. He slowly worked his way up the ranks, becoming a night mess cook, an attendant, a baker, and then to supply division. In order to advance through those positions, Bill attended two different training schools. The first school was Commissaryman A-school concentrated on perfecting the bases, sauces, gravies, and stews. Later, his Commissaryman C-school trained him to be proficient in management, preparing him to be confident in taking charge over junior sailors.

Bill described his first days on the ship as rocky, considering on his very first day he fell



down a ladder well with his big green sea bag on his back. But it did not take long for him to adjust to ship life. When asked what his favorite part of his job was, he responded, "Taking care of the crew. Their only highlight for the day, especially at sea, was the meals."

Bill's first duty station was Long Beach, California where he was attached to the USS Henderson (DD-785). Bill's second duty station was the USS Macdonough (DDG-39) and the USS Nimitz in Norfolk, Virginia. He was also stationed in Sigonella, Italy for three years where he was attached to the USS John Rogers (DDG983) before he traveled to his last duty station, Jacksonville, Florida.

One of the toughest things to do on deployment is to pass the time. Deployments on aircraft carriers are a little easier because they are large, floating cities, but smaller ships have less entertainment available and more time to work with. Bill explained that cards were a major source of entertainment for the sailors. He said he played once for a couple of hours, but once he lost his \$20, he was done. Many sailors stayed up all night, trying to pass the time. Some couldn't sleep and some simply didn't want to sleep. Bill said there were many mornings when he would enter the mess hall to get breakfast started and the sailors were still sitting at the table, playing cards, passing the time.

Other than cards, another source of entertainment was jokes and pranks. Most of the pranks were pulled on junior sailors as a way to wet them behind the ears. Bill's most memorable moment was the new sailor's transition from a Sellback to a Pollywog. The initiation takes place when the ship crosses the equator. In that tradition, new sailors crawl around the top deck in their underwear, covered in grease while the senior sailors spray them with water hoses. He said it was much funnier once his initiation was over.

The pranks and jokes were a way to cope with everything they knew was happening around them. Bill saw his only combat on his first deployment. On Christmas Eve in 1971, his crew's boat was approaching Tonkin, Vietnam with a sister boat. As they were approaching the shore, shelling the land as they got closer, they noticed large splashes in the water. It took a

moment for them to realize that it was the Vietnamese shelling them. No one was injured on Bill's boat, but one of the men on the sister ship, a young man he'd gone through boot camp with, was injured by one of the shells.

Bill made many friends during his time in service, but in the era before technology advanced to smart phones and social media, it was difficult to stay in touch with friends. Once they were attached to another ship, stationed in another city, or separated from service, it was difficult to continue communications. But in the second half of his military career, he had a friend he couldn't lose touch with: his wife.



Monique, his wife, managed the household while he was gone. She raised the children and they were all there with open arms when he arrived from deployments. Bill describes himself as fortunate because many of the sailors returned to very different circumstances. He says, "It was tough being gone so long, getting home off deployment, knowing I'm not going home to manage the household; I tried to fit in, pick up where I left off; it didn't work; the household was running smoothly - good feeling because a lot of guys would go home to a disaster, bills not paid and wife was out with someone else." When he got home from deployments, he knew he was coming home to a life he could just jump into and enjoy his family. His favorite thing to do was play baseball with his boys and enjoyed taking them to the RiverDogs games and watching them play in their little league games.



Bill's last duty station was Jacksonville, FL where he worked inside the Naval Hospital for the last two years of his contract. When asked what emotions he felt when he finally got his DD214, he said he felt "a sigh of relief; I finally made it; done with the deployments; I was on my way home." After 24 years in the Navy and achieving the rank of Senior Chief, he was finally retired. Bill also said he didn't have any regrets after he got out. He didn't miss it because things changed within the Navy; sailors had to be treated more as employees rather than sailors, and the job became more about paperwork than anything else. Bill ended his service as a valued, decorated veteran; upon his uniform sat rows of ribbons, including four Navy Achievement Medals, and a Navy Commendation Medal, presented to him for sustained acts of heroism and meritorious service in Vietnam.

Finally a civilian, Bill took courses at Jacksonville Community College. He decided to use his military experience in the civilian world. He took and passed a test to become a Certified Dietary Manager at hospitals and nursing homes. But although he received a few offers, the money wasn't great, so he started applying at different restaurants in the Charleston Area. He

was soon hired by Olive Garden; the company sent him for eight weeks of training, and he began his Olive Garden career in Charleston. Bill managed the North Charleston Olive Garden for a few years, but he continually struggled with managing civilians. He says managing civilians is very different than managing sailors; there are so many rules and guidelines that do not line up with his military training or his instincts. After leaving Olive Garden, Bill worked a few different jobs but finally decided to embrace his retirement, spending his time with his boys—sons and grandsons.

