

# Honoring & Remembering – Charles Schafer



Radioman 1st Class Charles Paul Schafer was born Dec. 14, 1962 to Jerry and Donna Schafer in Vermillion.

Charles enlisted at Yankton in June of 1981. He was sworn in at Sioux Falls in July of 1981. "My mother wasn't too happy, but my father thought it was good since he had also been in the Navy," said Charles.

On July 20, he flew from Sioux Falls to San Diego, CA for boot camp which lasted for eight weeks. From there he went to Radioman A School in San Diego which last-

ed about 20 weeks.

In January of 1982 his assignment was to Naval Air Station in Le Moore, CA for 18 months. This is located in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley which was desert and orange groves .

"I really wanted to be assigned to a ship, but this proved to be a blessing in disguise for two reasons. One I was able to move up in rank from E1 to E4 and second it was an easier way to adjust to military life," he said. "But the exciting things happened aboard ship. In August 1983, I was assigned to USS Pyro AE-24, which was an ammunition ship. There I made my first West Pac Tours, visiting Japan, Philippines, Korea and Hong Kong. I spent six months overseas.

"I flew over Japan to catch up with the Pyro which was five days out. There were about 25 men being assigned to different jobs while we were waiting. The head man kept calling Boatswain over and over and no one was answering. Finally he said, 'Boatswain 3rd Class Schafer are you here?' I answered and said my name is Schafer but I'm not a boatswain. I'm a radioman. The guy in charge said. 'Well, your handwriting is so sh\*\*y that it looks like Boatswain, so you will take your recruits and paint the sea wall. I did such a bad job that first day that they gave me a desk job checking ID'S.

"After boarding the Pyro we went out to sea. It took a while to get my sea legs.

"My first Port of Call was Subic Bay in the Philippines. After about three months I had a chance to call home. Mom was there because her hair appointment had been changed and I had the best 15 minute telephone call ever.

"We were on our way back to the States and two day out of San Francisco, when during a movie a fire broke out in the #1 ammunition hold. This was very serious because the majority of the 339 men were in General Quarters. For about the next 20 hours we fought that fire in which no one was injured or killed and the ship stayed intact. The ship went into cold iron and I asked for a reassignment.

"I had a choice of three ships and I asked for the USS Texas CGN-39, which was a Guided Missile Cruiser. Again, I had an eventful arrival. I flew out of Los Angeles to the Philippines, then to Diego Garcia for five days, then to Kenya for three days. When we arrived there we were told by the American Embassy that we had to stay in our hotels because AIDS was so prevalent. We also had to pay an airport tax, exchange our money for theirs, but when we left they wouldn't exchange their money for ours.

"After that we flew to Rota, Spain. The seaside community was absolutely beautiful and a few days later we flew to Catina, Sicily. Bahrain was our next stop. We were advised to walk in single file, look straight ahead, not to look to the left or right until we arrive at our vehicle. On this 500 ft. path were Bahrainian soldiers every three feet or so on both sides, holding guns which were pointed at our heads. Once we arrived at our hotels the Bahrainian people were extraordinarily nice. Five days later we were helo'd out to the USS Texas where Charles' good friend Ernie King was on board.

"The crew then spent 110 days in the Persian Gulf, supporting the Iraqis against the Iranians. During this time we shot down a few airplanes. We were also the flag ship and so I was the Radioman for the Old Man. Leaving this area we went to Tasmania for a week, a beautiful little country and then on to Brisbane, Australia for about 20 days. The people were very nice and we were invited to march in their Independence Day Parade. It was almost like being home in the States.

"Tanga was our next destination then to America Samoa. Even though we were only there for a couple of days, a young woman asked four of us if we would like to meet her family. After agreeing, she took us up through a beautiful jungle to her village. Her father was the local minister. We met all of the family and friends which amounted to about 60 people. They cooked us a Somalian meal, sang their native songs, and danced their native dances. Afterward they led us back to our ship. It was probably the most interesting and best experience I have ever had.

"California was our next destination and I was able to muster out a month early, June of 1985."

## ■ BICKETT

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men who are currently serving in the military.

"They all assist our servicemen and women in the execution of their duties," Bickett said. "They do this with their tireless support. They take care of business on the home front so that family members can concentrate on their missions."

He asked his audience to not limit their thoughts of veterans to just one special day a year.

"We need to thank them every day for what they have given us," Bickett said. "They are what makes this country great. We also need to provide support and encouragement for the next generation of veterans."



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