

Winner of the 2014 Living History Essay Contest

An Old Ship and Sailor

by MeLisa Haynes

"There's no right way to do the wrong thing." This was Jerry Ray Galler's mission statement for life. A native Texan, veteran, civil servant, husband, father, and a well-known citizen of Denton County and the city of Lewisville, Galler remembers growing up in a small farming community. Attending schools both in Denton and Lewisville, Galler was known for his athleticism and ambition for life. During a time when America was recovering from World War II, the Great Depression, and the civil rights movements, Galler understood the responsibility and duty calling him to military service. His father served during WWII as an Army Sergeant. After finishing two years at Ranger College, west of Fort Worth, Galler enlisted in the Navy Reserves. The choice to follow in his father's footsteps demonstrates the common social ideology rooted within the American family of that time. Jerry Ray Galler's beliefs match this idea through his dedication and service to his country.

The invention of the television brought Americans the first televised presidential debate between Kennedy and Nixon into their living rooms. The election of 1960 brought a Democratic victory and Kennedy's first priority of business was world affairs. During the interview, Galler remembers newspapers discounting Kennedy for his Catholic religion but for the most part, Lewisville citizens were more concerned about the fact that he was a Northerner, or Yankee, and not from the South. Additionally, he recalls the debate, and he spoke of Kennedy's charisma and ability to speak so well against Republican candidate Nixon regarding foreign affairs ranging from Cuba to Berlin, which intensified reasons for young men to courageously step forward to protect American freedom.

After Kennedy's assassination, with Lyndon B. Johnson as president, and shortly after the landslide victory in the election of 1964, Johnson's goal was to deal with international issues such as the Vietnam dilemma. In 1965, America, now fully engaged in war, was a topic for

discussion. Reluctantly Galler shares the details of his experience in Vietnam.

His work title was store keeper, managing and maintaining the ships equipment as well as orders and supply. Interestingly, the ship Galler served on was used during WWII. The once decommissioned class tank landing ship, for U.S. Naval use, was re-commissioned for Vietnam War service. Galler describes the ship, "as the ones you see in the movies." The tank landing ship's primary purpose, both for WWII and Vietnam, was for military operation from sea to land. This gave U.S. Naval military the ability to move large amounts of shipments and supplies, troops, cargo, and large vehicles for deployment of land operations. Galler remembers this particular military strategy due to the rigid terrain of South Vietnam's shores. The use of these ships made it possible for naval military to reach U.S. troops in order for supplies and equipment to be delivered promptly and without delay.

Most deployments for navy soldiers lasted twelve months, but Galler spent eighteen months stationed in Saigon and serving up and down the rivers of South Vietnam. As the war was coming to an end, the smile on his face told a great story about a soldier's dedication and service, in addition to a faithful old ship. When news came that it was time to return home, Galler escorted the ship to San Diego, California and on to its new home retiring with the Greek Navy. It was a bitter sweet goodbye but none the less, after a long six weeks in San Diego, Galler returned home to Texas. Reuniting with friends and family, Galler decided to pick up where he left off before the war by joining the family business.

His grandfather and dad managed an old gas station in downtown Lewisville. It was shortly after his return when fate led him to the profession in which he served with so much passion and zeal, the City of Lewisville Police Department (LPD). His involvement with the LPD has touched many lives. In addition to his many accomplishments, in March 2014, the city named the new police and fire training facility in his honor. Much of Assistant Chief Galler's success in life, whether serving in the military, familial responsibilities or civil service, holds true to his mission statement. America is a great country with men and women everywhere who lived through some very pivotal moments in this country's history. Respect, honor, loyalty, and duty to do the right thing no matter what led this man during a turbulent time in America's history, and his story represents a part of this great nation.