

he was in Howell, and my granddaughter moved to Howell. I came here and we met in the coffeehouse.

" I saw him through the window. He had long hair, and I thought he was an old lady sitting here," Leone, of Los Angeles, laughed.

"I thought he was a bum," Highland Township resident Williams joked back. The two quickly began sharing stories as if no years separated them.

Shipmates

Leone said young men were "anxious" in the 1940s as World War II loomed on the horizon.

Then one day, letters arrived in their mailbox telling them they are "now a selective volunteer" of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Leone was 18 and Williams was a mere two years older.

Both were assigned to the USS Nemasket, a gasoline tanker assigned the dangerous mission of transporting gasoline to warships in the fleet and to remote Navy stations.

"When people ask me what I did in the war, I tell them I helped run a gas station in the South Pacific," Williams said. "The Marines could never have gotten on the beach without the fuel for the boats. . We supplied the fuel for the B-24s bombing the Philippines Islands."

Williams, a farmer from Alabama, was a deckhand in charge of painting the ship while Leone was a motor machinist mate in the ship's engine room.

"A lot of people never knew this, but we painted the ship every month or so to try to confuse the Japanese to make them think we had more ships than we did. We really did," Williams said.

Also aboard were five officers and about 123 other sailors. While the ship was small enough that everyone knew everyone, Leone and Williams said they were not buddies on the ship.

However, Leone remembers Williams, who was one of the "bad boys" aboard the ship.

Hijinks in the Pacific

Leone recalls one particular night when the sea was calm and Williams and three or four other shipmates "were wavering.

"They were singing and it didn't sound natural," Leone said. "It sounded like someone had something to drink." Williams laughed, explaining that a pharmacist mate aboard the ship was able to get raisins, which they turned into hooch.

"They call it raisin jack," he said.

Williams then surprised Leone when he relates a story about the time some of the seaman sneaked prostitutes aboard the ship at the end of the war.

"I never noticed them," Leone says aghast. "You weren't supposed to," Williams laughs.

Close calls

Despite the few fun moments the men aboard the USS Nemasket could find, they were many close calls that reminded them that they were in the South Pacific in the middle of a war.

As a fuel ship, they were a prime target for the enemy. "No other ship wanted to be near our ship," Williams said. "We were really a floating time bomb."

In February 1945, the Nemasket was anchored about 1,000 yards off the volcanic island of Iwo Jima when the Marines invaded. The ship fueled more than 200 ships in 20 days.

Leone recalls the men "huddled in a landing craft, rifle ready and nobody was smiling" as the men aboard the Nemasket wished them well.

"No one waved back," he said. "Their faces are still in my mind. . . I'm in my gun position and they are probably looking back at us as we stay anchored and they go in. "They were floating back to us later."

Williams likened it to a bucket brigade. He said the Marines continued to move forward to the island despite knowing they were most likely walking to their deaths.

"They died knowing they were next," he said. "We would have given our eye teeth to get over there, but we were ill trained. ... Those guys were trained to do that and to accept that as a way of life."

When it was over 36 days later, nearly 7,000 Marines were killed and another 20,000 were wounded.

Leone said the men of the Nemasket witnessed the flag-raising, atop Mt. Suribachi, which took place Feb. 23, 1945, and was captured in a photograph by Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal.

Leone said that at first he wasn't sure whose flag flew until he looked through his binoculars. "I saw the stars and stripes. It was our flag!" he said.

Following the battle at Iwo Jima, the Nemasket received a cargo of fuel from an A059 ship whose captain suggested the Nemasket stay tethered, but the Nemasket captain decided there was enough light for the ship to return to its anchorage, Leone said. At around 4:30 a.m., he was jolted awake when the signal to man the weapons sounded,

"I jumped out of my sack, grabbed a life jacket and went to my gun position," he said. "I saw the sky smoking like crazy. I'm looking in the air for a plane thinking the Japanese came in

We were told two suicide submarines torpedoed this oiler we were tied alongside. Had my captain decided to stay tied up, we wouldn't be here. It burned for hours."

The ship was the USS Mississinewa, which was sunk at Eniwetok while the USS Nemasket shifted toward Okinawa. The ship and her men spent three months amidst kamikaze attacks and spent hours at "general quarters," which Williams said meant they were at their weapons ready to fight.

Leone was at his gun when he saw the Japanese kamikaze coming toward him. He knew he had no chance of surviving since the ship was full with aviation gasoline.

"Just before it reached our ship it went down," he said. "Our captain signaled a 'thank you' to another ship for shooting the plane down. He gets a, 'Hell no, it wasn't us.' They said they were covering the Marines and (the Japanese kamikaze) crossed our line by accident. To me, it was an act of God.

"Nobody wins in a war really. Both sides lose," Leone added.

Returning home

Williams left the military in February 1946 and Leone followed in April that year.

Williams returned to farming and rum running from Tennessee to Alabama, where there were many dry counties — meaning alcohol could not be purchased.

"I didn't deal in moonshine because it was easier to deal with what they called bonded whiskey, meaning taxes were paid on in the state you bought it," he explained, adding he sold the liquor to Alabama friends.

Leone met his wife and they were married 56 years when she died in October 2005. They were each other's first and only love. He worked for the transit authority in 'New York before accepting a calling to the ministry.

"I think the lord allowed me to come back because the lord was preparing me for ministry although I had no intentions of becoming a minister," he said.

As the two men shared stories, a stranger approached Leone, who was wearing a cap that identifies him as a World War veteran and is decorated with pins, ribbons and medals representing the battles he served. He shook the man's hand and accepted his "thank you" humbly. As the stranger walked away, Leone and Williams agreed that they are not World War II heroes.

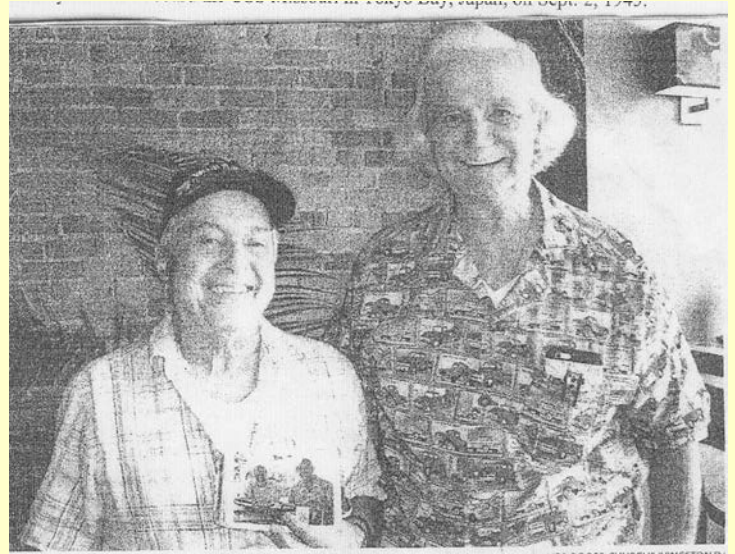
"I consider myself to be a World War II survivor," Leone said. "In my eyes, the real heroes are the ones who made the supreme sacrifice, who laid down their lives to make it possible for us, including me, to enjoy the freedoms. Many of them are not even buried where they were born. Some were buried where they fell; some were buried at sea and some were never found."

Williams added: "Have you ever seen a graveyard of Germans or Russians or Chinese or Yugoslavians here? We have graveyards all over the world. We have lived and died for the freedom of other people."

Anniversary Approaching

The 70th anniversary of the surrender of Japan in World War II, effectively ending the war, is approaching. The initial announcement of Japan's surrender was made in mid-August 1945, days after the United States dropped atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The formal

surrender ceremony was, held aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, Japan, on Sept. 2, 1945.



Barney Leone, left, and Marvin Williams served together aboard the USS Nemasket during World War II. They met recently at the Uptown Coffeehouse in downtown Howell. Leone is holding photographs of himself and Williams as sailors and when they met a few years ago.

2015 Armand Arabian Awards Photo and copy by Mike LaVere

On October 1, 2015 the Encino Chamber of Commerce hosted this year's Justice Armand Arabian Awards. The event took place at the Warner Center Marriott Hotel. The event honors and recognizes the selfless efforts of our community leaders. The honorees of the Award are individuals who consistently demonstrate integrity, honesty, perseverance and a genuine concern for the well being of their constituency.

Each of this year's nominees have contributed in many ways to making our community as successful as it is today.

Along with the celebrities and city officials who were present, a number of Wings Over Wendy's members also attended the luncheon. The Honorees for this year's awards were,

Lily Bauer, 90 year old Daily Volunteer, Mitchell Englander, L.A. Council member, District 12, Michael Harwin, Judge, L.A. Superior Court, Joan Maltese, President / CEO, Child Development Institute, Joe Mantegna, Actor, Star of TV's "Criminal Minds". Diane and Ron Ross, Proprietors of Wendy's Restaurants, Victor Sampson, Vice President, Coldwell Banker



Diane & Ron Ross
Proprietors



Diane & Ron Ross
Owners of Wendy's

Ron Ross started working for Wendy's as a manager-trainee in 1979 in Indianapolis. He worked his way up to District Manager and transferred to Chicago but his dream of becoming a Franchise Owner led him to California. Ron attended Wendy's conventions and met other Franchisees and thought, "Man, that guy is not very bright, how can he run 10 or 20 restaurants?" Ron was confident he could at least run one Wendy's restaurant!

Ron went to work for a Franchisee that shortly was in financial distress and was selling several restaurants. There was one restaurant nobody wanted because it was old, ugly, and had lousy sales. After working out a deal, and his wife Diane agreeing to refinance their house to provide two years of income for the family, Ron bought that restaurant. Twenty five years later, the Ross family has four successful Wendy's restaurants throughout LA County.

Ron received the Founder's Award this past fall, which is awarded to the top Franchisee in the Wendy's organization who best exudes Dave Thomas' philosophies in the Wendy's system: quality first, take care of the customer, be respectful, and share your success to benefit others. Ron also received the Golden Spatula Award for the highest sales percentage increase and the Wendy Award for the highest sales in the Western Region. Inspired by Dave Thomas, Ron and Diane have loved giving back to the community. They continue to donate 600 hamburgers as well as labor to homecoming games at their daughters' school, even long after their kids' graduation. They also help put together a post-prom party every year so students can go somewhere else besides a hotel room. Ron and Diane support many local schools' sporting teams, churches, school and non-profit events within a three mile radius of their four restaurants. Ron is the President of the Franchise Owner's Association, former President of the

West Hills Chamber of Commerce, and is the Treasurer on the Board of Directors for Southern California Swimming.

An unexpected adventure for Ron started when three men decided to have lunch every Monday at his West Hills restaurant to talk about their years in the service. They called themselves "Wings Over Wendy's" and Ron gladly welcomed them. What started with three turned into twenty to forty men on any given Monday at 9 a.m., enjoying each other's company and reminiscing about their adventures.

Ron and Diane have two daughters, Jen and Kristine. Jen is the Chief Financial Officer/Chief Operating Officer at BRG Sports and lives with her husband in Newbury Park. Kristine is a burn center nurse, married and lives in New Jersey with Ron and Diane's two grandsons.

What Is A Veteran?

A "Veteran" – whether active duty, discharged, retired, or reserve- is someone who at one point in his life, wrote a blank check made payable to "The United States of America" for an amount of "up to, and including his/her life."

That is honor. And there are way too many people in this country today, who no longer understand that fact.

November Birthdays

- Ray Rodriguez November 9, 1939**
- Bill Blair November 10, 1922**
- Guy Chookoorian November 15, 1923**
- Eli Baker November 20, 1920**
- Richard Stilling November 23, 1922**
- Clyde Reynolds November 24, 1923**
- Glen Sherman November 24, 1928**
- Gerald Detamore November 29, 1947**

Submit all articles before the last Wednesday of the month to Wingsnews@gmail.com

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