

DEDICATED TO MY GRANDFATHER

JOHN W. CONLEY

**Written and illustrated by
Matthew Thomas
Lakeside Farms Elementary School
December 7, 2004**

**MERRY CHRISTMAS
DECEMBER 25, 2004**

My grandfather's name was John William Conley. He was born in Bernardo, California, on July 11, 1917. Today it is called Rancho Bernardo. He died on April 13, 1992, at the age of 74. John Conley was my mother's father. When he was alive he used to always say, "Only the good die young". I guess he was right.

My grandfather's parents were Irish and Swedish. His father, Fred Conley, was born in the United States but his parents came to the United States from Ireland. I don't know much about my great grandfather except that he was born in Salinas, California, and came to San Diego County as a young man. He met and married my great grandmother while working and living in the San Dieguito Valley. He died in 1947 of a heart attack.



My great grandmother, Anna Jepson, came to the United States from Sweden when she was a young girl in 1891. She moved to the San Dieguito Valley in 1907. This is where she met my great grandfather and married him on August 23, 1909. My great grandfather said he married her because she was a good cook.

In 1925 my great grandparents started a business called "Conley's Dairy Farm", in the San Dieguito Valley. The San Dieguito Valley is a big piece of land by the Del Mar Fairgrounds. When my grandparents lived there, most of it was owned by a famous old movie star named Douglas Fairbanks Jr. Back then it had cows and animals. Today it has mansions and golf courses. The only thing that is the same is a place called "Mary's Tack Shop", a store for horse stuff.



My grandfather was about my age when his parents started the dairy. He had to work a lot and help his parents. He had to help take care of the cows. He had to feed them and he had to help milk them. They didn't have machines to do that then. He had to clean up the cow manure and he had to help the cows when they had babies.

My granddad went to school at a school called "Solana School". The school was started in 1872. His teacher's name was Mrs. Spenser Ward. He has a picture of the whole class and the school bus they rode on. He went to the same school until he was in the 8th grade and then he quit school to work on the farm.



We are indebted to John Conley, old timer resident of Solana Beach for this picture of a 1925 bus with the entire class. Mrs. Spenser Ward was the teacher at this time. The original Solana School is the oldest in the San Dieguito area. It was established in 1872.

My granddad had one older brother named Walter and three sisters. They all lived and worked on the farm. When my great grandfather died, my granddad's brother started running the dairy. I talked to my great Uncle Earl who remembers Conley's Dairy Farm and was a good friend of my granddad's. He said that the dairy was finally shut down so that people could build houses on the land.

My grandfather's childhood was rough. He didn't have a television or a computer to play on like I do. I know he had a dog because I have pictures of him. He had to get up really early every day and do his chores. I think he didn't have to on Sundays because when my mom was little my grandfather used to tell her, "Rise and Shine! What do you think this is, Sunday on the farm?" At night my grandfather and his family would sit around and listen to the radio. During the depression my grandfather was poor just like everybody else. But my granddad and his family were lucky. They were lucky because they had a dairy farm and they had lots of milk, eggs, cream and meat. This gave them plenty of food to eat and they could trade it for other things they needed because they didn't have hardly any money to buy things.

Even though my granddad's life was not as bad as some people, he wanted to find a better life so he joined the Navy on October 15, 1934, when he was 17 years old. For the next eight years my grandfather fought for his country so that all of America could be free.

La Ford #19

U.S. NAVY RECRUITING SUB-STATION
FOOT-C&E BROADWAY
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

J.W.Conley.
P.O.Box 126.
Salton Beach, Calif.

Sir:

You are advised that your application papers have been completed, that you are considered qualified for acceptance for enlistment and you are requested to report to this Sub-station at 8:00 A.M., 15 October 1934. You will then be taken to the Naval Training Station, San Diego, California for final physical examination, completion of enlistment papers and administration of enlistment oath.

It is recommended that you take advantage of this opportunity to complete your enlistment in the U.S. Navy at this time. Your failure to report at this time, unless there is a very good reason, will delay your enlistment.

Please advise me of your intention by filling the notice at the bottom of this letter, sign same and mail to this office at once in enclosed self-addressed envelope which requires no postage.

It is requested that you report for enlistment neatly dressed and in civilian clothes and be sent home or disposed of as you desire after arrival at the Training Station.

It is understood you are willing to defray your own expenses from home to San Diego and return if you are found physically disqualified or not accepted for other reasons.

Bring this part of this letter with you when you report here, sending in lower part regarding your intention.

Final payrol on 15th will be enlisted on 16th if accepted by doctor. Very truly,

Arthur P. Durrant, Chief U.S.

The most interesting thing about my grandfather is that he was a World War II hero. My grandpa joined the Navy in 1934 when he was 17 years old. In 1935 my grandfather served on the USS Oahu in China. The USS Oahu was a River Patrol Boat that was stationed in Shanghai and patrolled the Yangtze River in China. The USS Oahu was built in Shanghai in 1928. It weighed 450 tons and went 15 knots. The USS Oahu had a crew of 65 sailors and carried two 3"/50 AA behind shields, (anti-aircraft guns), and eight .30 caliber machine guns. It carried two triple expansion engines with a total of 1900 HP. The USS Oahu was sunk on May 4, 1942 by gunfire from Bataan, the Philippine peninsula that was taken over by the Japanese in early 1942.



As part of the Yangtze River Patrol, my grandfather and the other sailors aboard the USS Oahu sailed up and down the Yangtze River in China to protect American lives and property. America had investments in China and they wanted to protect China from Japanese attacks. My grandpa told my mom a story when she was a little girl about the "Coolies", Chinese natives that worked on the American ships. One time the sailors on my grandfather's ship found out that one of the coolies had stolen something from one of the sailors. The sailors sentenced him to death. Punishments were severe back then. My grandfather was a member of the Yangtze River Rats from December 1935 until April 1937.

During one of the Japanese attacks on China, my grandfather saw a wave of Japanese Zeros, Japanese fighter planes, while he was patrolling the Yangtze River. You could recognize these planes by the red sun on the side of the plane. This would help him later on during the attack on Pearl Harbor.



My grandfather patrolled the Yangtze River until April 1, 1937. My grandpa has pictures of China and Indochina, which is now Vietnam. In 1966 there was a famous movie called "The Sand Pebbles". This movie was about the Yangtze River Patrol in China. My grandpa said that this movie had too much fiction and not enough facts.

After one hitch in the Navy, my grandfather was discharged and went back to the farm. He worked on the farm for awhile but he didn't get along with his brother Walter. Then he became a milkman and worked for a company called Arden Farms. In March 1941, he was called back to active duty. The United States was not at war yet but the whole country knew it was getting close. After my grandpa was called back to active duty, he was sent to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Pearl Harbor was where the Pacific Fleet was based. On the morning of December 7, 1941, my grandfather was aboard the USS Dale, a Farragut class destroyer.

Photo # 81-G-425602 USS Dale underway, 28 April 1938



The USS Dale was one of eight Farragut class destroyers at Pearl Harbor during the attack. It had a length of 341ft, and a top speed of 37 knots. It carried four 5" 38 caliber guns, two 40mm twin anti-aircraft mounts, and two 21" quadruple torpedo tubes. It had a crew of 16 officers and 235 enlisted men.

On the morning of December 7, 1941, the USS Dale was moored with ships of Destroyer Division TWO at Berth X-14. My grandpa heard airplanes flying overhead. When he looked up he saw the Japanese Zeros. He knew what they were because he saw them while patrolling on the Yangtze River in China. My grandpa ran below deck to tell his commanding officer, who was sleeping, that the Japanese were attacking. At first his commanding officer didn't believe him and told him he was going to be put on report. The thing my grandfather remembered the most was that every thing was burning and everyone was running. Everybody was shocked and then they got mad. No one aboard the USS Dale panicked. Orders were carried out and the ship was made ready for sea and ready to fire within ten minutes from the time General Quarters was sounded. General Quarters means all hands go to your stations. No one on the ship was hurt and the enemy caused no damage. The USS Dale shot down at least one enemy plane and some of the crew said they shot down two other dive-bombers.



After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, America was at war with Japan. By this time my grandfather had been at sea for a long time so he asked to be given shore duty. So the Navy sent him to New London, Connecticut. Once he got there, they put him on a brand new ship named the USS Lyman K. Swenson, which was a destroyer.



The USS Lyman K. Swenson was named after the captain of the USS Juneau that was sunk by the Japanese off the Philippine Islands. The USS Lyman K. Swenson left for sea trials during February of 1944 and then it was sent to Okinawa, a large island south of Japan. The USS Lyman K. Swenson was an Allen M. Sumner class destroyer. It was 376 ft long and traveled 35 knots. It carried five 5"/38 caliber twin gun mounts, two quintuple torpedo tube mounts, two quadruple and two twin mounts of Bofors 40 mm guns, and depth charges.

When my grandfather was serving on the USS Lyman K. Swenson in Okinawa as part of Admiral Halsey's third fleet, they were doing picket duty. Picket duty was when the smaller ships like the destroyers surrounded the aircraft carriers to protect them from Japanese Kamikaze attacks. They were primary targets for the Kamikazes. The Swenson remained underway in Japanese waters until after the September 2, 1945 surrender of Japan. They spent a total of 71 days at sea. My grandpa's crew received a dispatch from Admiral Halsey telling the sailors what a good job they did.

NOTE --

THE FOLLOWING DISPATCH WAS SENT TO THE THIRD FLEET BY ITS COMMANDER, ADMIRAL HALSEY:

"REPEAT THIS OVER ALL SHIPS LOUD SPEAKERS. THIS HAS BEEN A HARD AND HISTORIC OPERATION. COM THIRD FLEET SENDS ACTION TO THIRD FLEET. AT TIMES YOU HAVE BEEN DRIVEN ALMOST BEYOND ENDURANCE BUT ONLY BECAUSE THE STAKES WERE HIGH, THE ENEMY WAS AS WEARY AS YOU, AND THE LIVES OF MANY AMERICANS WOULD BE SPARED IN LATER OFFENSIVES IF WE DID OUR WORK WELL NOW.

"WE HAVE DRIVEN THE ENEMY OFF THE SEA AND BACK TO HIS INNER DEFENSES. I AM SO PROUD OF YOU THAT NO WORDS COULD EXPRESS MY FEELINGS. SUPERLATIVELY WELL DONE. SINGED, HALSEY".

Dec. 30, 1944 to
Jan. 26, 1945

NAVY DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C.

No. 381-16-09

NAVY DEPARTMENT
BUREAU OF NAVIGATION
WASHINGTON, D. C.

August 26, 1938
Mr. John William Conley, Sea
Bx 126, Solana Beach,
California

The Bureau forwards this date a Good
Conduct Medal for your enlis-
ment ending 20 June 1938.

Please acknowledge receipt below and return.
Respectfully,

Chief of Bureau
By *[Signature]*

To the Bureau of Navigation,
Navy Department, Washington, D. C.

I have this day received

above mentioned.

Finally, on October 18, 1945, my grandfather was discharged from the Navy in San Pedro, California. My grandpa used to tell a story that he was hitchhiking from San Pedro to San Diego and was given a ride by Adolph Coors, the owner of the famous Coors beer company. After that my grandfather never drank any kind of beer except Coors.

After serving in the Pacific in World War II, my grandfather returned home to Solana Beach, California, to help his family with the farm. Eventually he bought and ran the "Flying C" gas station. The Flying C was right next to the farm.



After owning and working at the Flying C gas station, my grandfather started up a hay and feed delivery service for the North County of San Diego area. In September 1953, my grandfather married my Grandmother, Beuna B. Bevel. They lived together in a house just above the dairy where my mother was born. They raised five children, all of them girls. In 1961 they moved from the old dairy farm to another house in Solana Beach. This house was just one block from the Del Mar Race Track. My grandfather used to worry because he had to pay \$100 per month for the house. I guess that was really a lot of money back then. He sold the Flying C gas station and he and my grandmother owned a restaurant in Solana Beach called the "Sand and Sulky". Then they sold the restaurant and my grandfather started a fertilizer and top soil delivery business. He had a dump truck and skip loader, and hauled fertilizer and top soil to peoples' homes. He did this until he retired in 1976.



Even though I never knew my grandfather, my mom says that he used to always say that he wanted his kids to have everything he never had. When they moved to the house in Solana Beach, he built a swimming pool for his family so that his kids would always have a reason to stay home. They had lots of family barbeques and every birthday party was a pool party where all of the kids from the neighborhood would come to swim.



My grandfather used to take his kids camping in the desert and fishing in Mexico. My mom says that when she was a kid, they used to go to the beach and go grunion hunting at midnight. During the summer the whole family would build a fort out of blankets and sleep on the front lawn. My grandfather always liked to plant a garden, so every year he would plant lots of vegetables right in the middle of the front lawn and they would grow real big because he always used the best fertilizer and top soil that he sold. At the end of each summer, my grandpa would save the biggest watermelon from his garden and all the kids in the neighborhood would have a big pool party and eat lots and lots of watermelon. After he picked all the vegetables, he would bring more fertilizer and topsoil to the house and grow new grass again. My grandpa could grow anything. His favorite flowers that he liked to grow were Sweet peas.

Veterans Day and July 4th were important holidays in my grandfather's house. He was very proud of his country and told his kids all the time how lucky they were to live in the United States of America. His favorite television shows were, "Hogan's Heroes", and "Combat". They were all about World War II. He would never buy anything that wasn't

made in the United States, especially a car. He taught his children that family and country were the two most important things in the whole world.

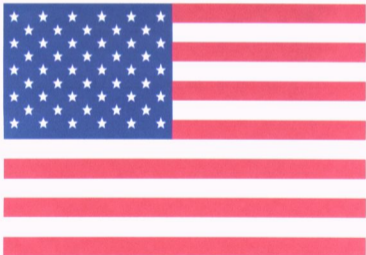
Before he died in April, 1992, my grandfather had ten grandchildren. He made sure that the whole family got together on birthdays and holidays. My grandfather also celebrated December 7th, the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. He told the story of Pearl Harbor and the Yangtze Patrol to his kids and grandkids, and taught them to honor and love their country and family. My grandfather had three more grandkids that he never got to see. One of them was me.

I never got to meet my grandfather but I still learned the things he wanted me to know. In order to get to know him better, I went and talked to my Great Uncle Earl. He knew my grandfather when they were young men and he helped me to remember all of the things that made my grandpa special, especially the stuff about World War II. My Great Uncle Earl also told me that he sent my grandfather's name and military information to the U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation. I went on the internet and found his name there and some day I would like to go to Washington D.C. and visit the U. S. Navy and the World War II Memorials.



I really like to read books and watch movies about World War II. It is really interesting and it makes it even better when I think about my grandpa who was actually there during that time. I really want to see the movie, "The Sand Pebbles", and I want to watch the series called, "Victory at Sea", which is about the war in the Pacific. It will help me to know my grandfather even better than before. In my house we also celebrate patriotic holidays. We fly an American Flag to show how much we love our country and we would never give up to anybody and we will protect her, even to the ends of the Earth.

I love my family and we always do things together. We go camping to the desert and boating on the River, and we celebrate all of the holidays together. My mom always talks about her father and what a special person he was and what a hero he was to everyone in our family. Even though I never got to know him, he still taught me the two most important things in life, to love your country and your family.



GOD BLESS AMERICA

JOHN WILLIAM CONLEY
JULY 1917-APRIL 1992