

Joe Garlitz

BY JAMES W. ROBINSON
STAFF WRITER

American Legion Immediate Past Vice Commander Joe Garlitz was no stranger to military service when he enlisted during the 1960s. Of course his father served, but so did people through the years providing him a connection back to the Revolutionary War.

Garlitz served four years in the United States Air Force from his enlistment in 1960 to an honorable discharge in 1964. After successfully completing his basic training at Lackland AFB, Texas, he completed Technical School at Kessler AFB Biloxi in Mississippi and graduated as an Early Warning and Control Radar Operator and gained a Top Secret Clearance by the OSI.

In October 1965, Garlitz completed his advanced training at the Airborne Early Warning and Control Operator Squadron at McClellan AFB in Sacramento, California. Upon graduation, he received his Aircrew Wings and was soon assigned to Operational Combat Ready Aircrew. Garlitz also was promoted to intercept control technician providing assistance as an weapons director and assistant crew chief. Garlitz took part in both the Cold War mission as well as the Vietnam War with 10 combat missions.

“Anytime we have fighters or bombers in the air, I was in the air. And we controlled their movements and put them on target, bringing them off target, and if anyone got shot down, I knew where the search and rescue teams were, I knew where the tankers were, I knew where the targets were... and then I also knew where the mags were. I ran four of our fighters on mags,” Garlitz explained.

“There might be anywhere from, I’d say 50 to 88 airplanes in the air, on target - attack

airplanes,” he said. “And you have to know where they all are.”

Garlitz shared some about his early childhood.

“I grew up in a small town. A lot of the older men were World War II veterans and they had a lot of boys, about 18 to 20 boys and about three or four girls, and so it was pretty masculine,” he recalled. “Like a lot of guys in the mountains of Maryland, we hunted. I got my .22 when I was 10 and my 12 gauge shotgun when I was 12, so I knew about guns. All my uncles, my grandfather and my dad were all veterans.”

Garlitz explained why he made the decision to join the military in February 1960.

“I always liked the Air Force. I always wanted to fly — I have a second cousin, my dad’s first cousin that he grew up with, (who) was in the Korean War and he became a pilot without a degree and I thought ‘maybe I could do that,’ but that door closed earlier in the year when I went in.”

He said he simply wanted to fly.

“I was a kid that made models of airplanes and stuff like that, and knew a lot about airplanes,” Garlitz said. “So, worked out pretty well.”

After he left the service in 1964, he went back to school that September. Before going into the military, he had given college a chance before his enlistment.

“I did try college which was... it was OK,” he said. “I was a jock and I made varsity, but I also... knew a lot about athletics, but not a lot about scholarships.”

However, after his honorable discharge in 1964, he went back to his studies at the GI Bill in September 1964.

Garlitz talked about his newfound college success.

“I recovered from all that, in four years I



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Above, Joe Garlitz stands alongside the Garlitz and Emrick family history, dating back to the Revolutionary War. Below left, Garlitz (3rd from right in back row) with his aircrew serving the Big Eye Task Force in Vietnam.

learned how to study, I learned how to discuss things with people, turned it around big time when I got out,” Garlitz said.

Garlitz’s family connection to Revolutionary War

Garlitz comes from a family that has military connections that run back to the Revolutionary War. Those connections are in both the Garlitz family and in the Emrick side — his wife’s maiden name.

“John Garlitz and Henry Garlitz served in the Pennsylvania Militia towards the end of the war. They served in other units as well. And they settled in Allegany County, Maryland after the war,” he said. “Each one was awarded a 200 acre farm and they lived there and the family grew from there. On the Emrick side, the Mason-Dixon line hadn’t been drawn yet and they lived ... just right above the Mason-Dixon line.”

Garlitz talked about how both he and his brother finally found this family farm.

“My brother and I finally found their farm, and lo’ and behold, the guy that owned the farm was a friend of my brother’s, who didn’t know it was our farm,” he said. “We were up on the top of the mountain on a wagon trail and looked down and sure, lo’ and behold, there

was a small graveyard in the middle of the field. Based on what we had, maps and information, ‘We said that’s gotta be it!’”

Emrick served in New York during the New York battle with Gen. George Washington and Col. Patton.

“Most of my relatives were enlisted guys,” Garlitz said. “They were enlisted personnel and sergeants, privates, first-class, and that kind of thing.”

American Legion

“I was the Vice Commander for the Virginia American Legion,” Garlitz said. He said he handled responsibility for the eastern region for the Legion that includes 10,385 veterans.

“We do an awful lot for the community,” he said. “We just had an outstanding year as far as American Legion goes in the program. Our membership grew, we exceed our membership goals... my region when all over to Chickateek on the eastern Shore, well on the eastern shore, there’s four posts. All four posts had over a 100 posts in membership, and I called that ‘the grand slam,’” he said. “Membership in organizations now is very, very important, so that worked out very well.”



James Knowlton

BY JAMES W. ROBINSON
STAFF WRITER

Retired Navy veteran James “Jim” M. Knowlton has spent the past 14 years since retirement in North Suffolk. Originally born in Arkansas, Knowlton describes his upbringing, his work in the Navy and beyond, and his advice for those looking to join, or are new to the Navy.

“I am a farm boy,” he said. “We grew up in the plains of Arkansas. The only thing that we had for quote ‘industry’ was farm life.” Predominantly they grew rice, soybeans and cotton in this little town of 250 people down on White River.

“You had either one or two industries, you were either a commercial fisherman or you were a farmer,” Knowlton said. “Other than that, there was nothing that you could put your sights on that you thought you could build your life on. We worked 12, 14 hours a day for \$ a day as a farmhand. I know for myself that when I hit the 10th grade in high school, I said ‘There’s got to be something better out there than this.’”

During that time in 10th grade, he was able to sit down with a Navy recruiter at the local post office to learn about another path for his life. Knowlton reflected on his time talking to the Navy recruiter throughout his time in high school.

“He said, ‘Well I got two things for you. One, keep your nose clean. Two, graduate from school.’ I said well that’s no problem, Mom and Dad won’t let me do anything other than that.’ ... So I kept my nose clean, went to school, and then January of 1966, I had just turned 18 and I walked in and filled out all the paperwork and stuff and he said ‘When do you want to go?’

Knowlton responded as soon as as he can. He told the recruiter he would be graduating



on May 15, which promoted the him to ask about May 25.

“I said Let’s make it happen,” he said.

Navy enlistment

After his graduation and his senior trip, Knowlton came back on a Friday, spent the weekend with his mother and father, and on Monday morning he met with the chief to begin his path in the Navy. On May 25, Knowlton was sworn in at Little Rock and sent on a C54 Airplane to San Diego and arrived at 1:30 a.m.

Knowlton reflected on his early time arriving as a new Navy recruit.

“There were 25 of us or so... they gave us a bed sheet that we tied around our waist and took us into our barracks and said ‘Get some sleep,’” he said.

Knowlton recalls thinking this wasn’t too bad and he got into bed at about 2 a.m.

“At 3:30 am, they took a 55 gallon trash can and threw it in the middle of the barracks and said ‘get up! You are not a formed company, so you gotta go eat before anybody else does,’” he recalled. That was the start of the day, and he said there was a bunch of 17 18, and 19 year old kids and all going “What happened?”

After having 15 minutes to eat, they were each lined up on a number with Knowlton’s being number 8. After a long time of standing, at 8:30 a.m. Knowlton’s future company commander Chief Milton arrived to form them up and told them to dispose of their belongings and to donate them to the Salvation Army.

Knowlton described what Milton said to him.

“You don’t need any of that. There’s a container over there for the American Red Cross, you might as well dispense of that,” he said. “So we did, we just walked over there and threw them in, came back and he said ‘Everything that you need, today he’s going to issue you and that’s that.’ I didn’t even have my driver’s license. I had a social security card, so that’s what I used to ID myself.”

Knowlton received his clothes, gained responsibility for his bunk bed and then got the order to clean his clothes.

His company commander pointed to some stainless steel buckets that had scrub brushes in them.

Chief Milton told them: “‘Take everything in your sea bag and go out and scrub it. New clothes or dirty clothes.’ And that was the philosophy. You can’t wear new clothes. You gotta clean ‘em.”

Knowlton said they didn’t tell them anything. They all got a box of Tide — the granules, nothing liquid.

“We go out here and scrub our clothes, not knowing that we have no clue what we’re doing,” he said. “And then, they tell us, ‘Now you gotta go hang ‘em up out there.’ Well, where are the clothes pins? ‘Uh-uh, you use these little eight-inch tie-ties’ and that’s what

they called them, tie-ties, ‘But every one of them gotta be tied in a square-knot when you hang them up.’”

If they didn’t do as ordered, Knowlton said they would cut them down, march over them and make everyone scrub them again.

“Welcome to the navy. That was the way it went,” he said. “It was an amazing turn around.”

After his 10 weeks of discipline, Knowlton graduated and was assigned to his first station, the USS Helena (CA3). Knowlton recalled before going to his station with his 18 comrades, he found that there was a space with a hole in the deck with crew members going in and out while laughing.

“I didn’t know what it was, no clue, but I hear a lot of laughing and joking, people coming out of that thing,” he said. “Now they’re dirty as hades, they’re doing fire signs which I didn’t know what that meant. And they’re all laughing and joking, and seem like a happy crew!”

Knowlton said he spoke to the chief of engineering, wondering about the crew members going into the hole and having a good time.

“Them guys that came out of that hole over there seem like they’re having fun,” he said. The engineering chief responded with a “What hole?”

Knowlton told him it is the one just outside his door.

“There’s a big ol’ hole, they were pretty dirty but they look like they were enjoying themselves,” Knowlton said he responded.

But he soon learned about the opening as he was led below deck by an officer first member of the crew. He led Knowlton to the fire room on the lower level that housed the boilers.

He said the first thing he was told was that he needed to understand where he would be working.

“Don’t touch anything that you don’t know what to do with,” he recalls being told. And then came a lesson that he would never forget.

The first class member pointed to a valve and told him to take off the bonnet.

Knowlton did what he said as he sat there waist deep in water.

Following the first class member’s instructions, Knowlton got a ballpin and hammer to crack loose the top. After the bonnet was loose, the first class member ordered Knowlton to stand over the valve. After that, he reached up and opened the valve and salt water blew out. The bonnet flew and hit Knowlton in the middle of his head. To this day, he still has the scar.

With blood running down his face, the first class member once again said, “Don’t touch anything that you don’t know what it does.”

He said it was soon revealed that this was part of the standard initiation of new men that come onboard — providing him with a phrase he carried with him throughout his life.

“It was quite an education,” he said.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Retired Navy Veteran James “Jim” M. Knowlton served in the Navy for 23 years before his retirement.

Knowlton became a border technician, made first class at 5 1/2 years, made chief at 12, senior chief at less than 14 years and master chief at 17. He served on the Helena, Interpreter, Arlington and Stein over his 23 years before he retired and began work as a defense contractor, which he did for 25 years.

“A lot of what I learned in the Navy I was able to take into the commercial world,” he said. “The company that I was working for wanted to build some unique jobs and I decided I wanted to chase a multi-year job to do in foreign military sales. And what the government decided it was going to do was going to outsource what the U.S. Navy had been doing for years and they were going to go private with the company,” Knowlton explained.

He said he chased after that for three years until they finally put it out on the street to do that, and his company won the contract.

“And it was the first time the U.S. Navy had ever let a contract for this type of work to outsource the total Navy’s infrastructure,” Knowlton said. “That means shipyards, planning yards, supply supports, the total baskets of requirements. And we won that.”

Knowlton landed his company a 10-year contract worth a little more than \$ billion.

“There was no looking back,” he said. “I got to do a lot of the same thing I did in the Navy. We took ships out of enacting fleet, rebuilt them, transferred them to foreign allies, sent crews over to train them to support it. The navy was a great thing for me, it really was. Taught me a lot.”



Curtis MacKenzie

BY JAMES W. ROBINSON
STAFF WRITER

Curtis MacKenzie is an example of how hard work in the Navy can help someone move up from the rank of ensign to commander through a career of service.

Cmdr. MacKenzie retired from the U.S. Navy in 2003 and moved to Suffolk in 2003, where he and his wife chose to settle.

In a recent interview, MacKenzie shared stories from his early days growing up, how he got into the Navy, the stress of Navy life on his family and offered a message to future enlisters.

Born in New England, Massachusetts in 1958, MacKenzie had a suburban upbringing. During his time in college, he learned of scholarships through the campus Navy ROTC programs and joined. While he did not get the scholarship, he made a commitment to the program and on graduation day in 1980, he participated in the commissioning ceremony and took his oath of office with the rank of ensign.

“I had to hit the road and went to my first ship,” Mackenzie said. “By the second week of June, I was on a U.S. Navy ship... and felt like ‘Well, I’m not sure this prepared me very well for what I am doing.’”

MacKenzie said he soon realized the major

commitment that he signed up for when he first started in the Navy.

“Probably the first thing that comes to mind is accountability,” he said. “Your leaders are going to identify things they’re expecting you to do and they’re going to hold you accountable to do it.”

He cited an example of a time he was driving from New England to the shipyard near Baltimore, Maryland.

“I ended up having a flat tire so I was delayed in route,” he said.

He called his commander to tell him that he had been delayed, but was not prepared for the dramatic response he received.

“You belong to me! You belong to this ship! You do not belong to the ROTC anymore, that affiliation ended the moment you checked out and you started off to meet us,” he said his commander told him. “You became the responsibility of us. So you’re now assigned to us!”

After that summer, MacKenzie participated in the Surface Warfare Division Officer Basic Course in Rhode Island, which brought him back to an academic standard of learning.

In January 1981, he reported to duty at the USS Raleigh in Norfolk, where he served for three years. With the Cold War still underway, MacKenzie said he got the experience of seeing the Soviet Union.

“Some of the things we dealt with when we

would deploy, for instance, we would head out at the southern part of the Chesapeake Bay out to the Atlantic Ocean and we’d get 12 or 15 miles off the coast... and boom who’s waiting to see you? The Russians,” he said.

“We knew they were Soviets because they’re spying,” MacKenzie said. “They’re sending information back to the Soviet Union, to the Soviet navy about what U.S. Navy ships are coming and going. But they would watch for us, so we knew they would be reporting what they saw everyday.”

During his time on the USS Raleigh, he qualified as a surface warfare officer. After that three years, MacKenzie had a permanent station change for shore duty at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy on Long Island, New York at a naval science department as an instructor. After that, he was selected as department head and went to training school for a few more months.

“The first portion of that training was all to master the Soviet navy threat,” he explained. They learned about the missile systems, radar and rates of fire for the Soviet navy and air force weapons.

“It was like fire hose treatment,” he said, noting how they repeated it to ensure they had mastered the information conveyed.”

As department head, Mackenzie served as the engineer officer steamship in Philadelphia for 18

months and a logistics ship in Norfolk for another 18 months.

By the time he moved to the second ship, MacKenzie was promoted to lieutenant commander.

And then came the beginning of Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. He was deployed to the Red Sea as part of this conflict.

Mackenzie remembered seeing a message from President Bush that he deployed the force “for the duration of this conflict.” He was gone for about nine months.

MacKenzie retired from the Navy at the end Summer 2003 and moved to Suffolk that fall. He currently works in a training capacity with the Department of Defense.

MacKenzie said faith helped him and his wife throughout all the difficult times.

“We have faith in Jesus,” he said. “That as a baseline of helping us to work through challenges has been indispensable, continues to be that way, ‘cause it’s really important.”

He said through all of the challenges he asked what would Jesus have him do.

“What does the Bible give me for some reference points for some of these challenges that we encounter day to day, that can endure,” he said.