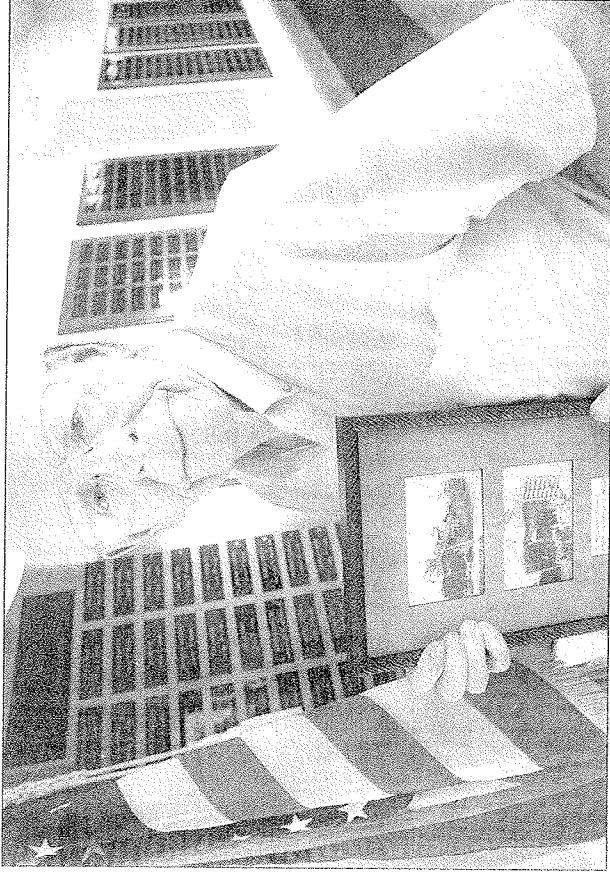


REGION

TRIP OF HONOR: WORLD WAR II VETERANS VISIT MEMORIAL



World War II veteran Bill Gill holds photographs of the ship he served on during the war in a memorial hall of Pines Village Retirement Communities in Valparaiso.

LISA SCHREIBER/POST-TRIBUNE

Pharmacist's mate saw plenty while on South Pacific duty

Coast Guard veteran mixed medicine, sewed up wounds for fellow sailors.

BY DIANE KRIEGER SPYAK
Post-tribune staff writer

VALPARAISO — Bill Gill had finished two years of chiropractic college in Indianapolis when he learned he'd be going to war in 1943. He chose the Coast Guard. Because of his background, the military made him a pharmacist's mate.

"I had a little hospital on the ship," said Gill, who pretty much took over the job of medic for the ship's 300 men after the ship's doctor had to leave shortly when the ship set off to the South Pacific.

Gill mixed medicine with a mortar and pestle, and dispensed medication, as well as stitched up the other guys on board. He learned to mix medication from a book in the ship's hospital. Fortunately, nobody was ever

shot.

"But one guy got stabbed in the butt and I had to close his wound," Gill said. "He got in a fight peeling potatoes."

He found a friend on board in Don Mendez, a photographer by trade, from Lebanon, Ind., who became the ship's photographer.

"He was the only one who could get film," Gill said.

Several of Mendoza's photos featured Gill in the ship's hospital, mixing medicine, and sewing up wounds.

Other photos show Gill standing outside a cave in the Pacific Islands holding items he found inside. One was a German helmet, another an artifact he didn't recognize.

"Inside the cave I found a lot of bodies in urns," Gill said. "There were about 20 of them and they were buried. There was also the unburned body of a woman lying face down in the cave.

Gill said he saw only one Japanese airplane during the war.

"But our destroyers and warships were coming back with the tops knocked off of them," he said. "We had anti-aircraft guns on our ship, but we only had to use them one time when they were coming at us and

Editor's note: This is part of a series of profiles looking at some Porter County veterans who will travel to Washington, D.C., in October to honor comrades who didn't return home.



PHOTO PROVIDED
Bill Gill worked as a pharmacist's mate during World War II.

William F. Gill

Birthplace: Indianapolis
Birthday: Jan. 5, 1922
Military service: U.S. Coast Guard, 1943
Family: Married Shirley May Thompson, 1943. Shirley died Sept. 6. Three children.
Education: Graduated from Lincoln Chiropractic College, Indianapolis
Employment: Guard and firefighter; General Motors, Indianapolis, 30 years.

Tour of Duty, Taking our Veterans to D.C.

Pines Village Retirement Communities has raised \$98,582 toward its \$115,000 goal to send 40 veterans and support personnel on the Tour of Duty, Taking our Veterans to D.C. trip Oct. 4-8 to see the World War II Memorial, Arlington Cemetery and other historical points of interest. To donate to help raise the remaining funds needed for the Tour of Duty, call Pines Village, 465-1591.

started shooting."

As pharmacist's mate, Gill was also in charge of drinkable alcohol.

The ship's captain called Gill in his cabin one time.

"He asked me 'What's happening to my alcohol?' because they were half empty," Gill said. "I said, 'It evaporated.'"

"I traded the other guys' alcohol for fruit," he said. Fresh food was hard to come by in the ocean.

"The first thing we did when we got back to the United States was get a glass of milk and lettuce," Gill said.

When he first went into the service Gill was sent to Cape Canaveral in Florida before he went to sea.

"At the time they had raised cabins along the Florida coast," he said. "Men and dogs were walking the beach day and night watching for enemy ships."

Gill's ship carried ammunition, machine guns, and airplane parts.

"We went to a lot of islands. I remember we had fresh water to drink, but it was never cold. We had a machine remove the

Gill and Mendez spent as much time talking together as they could, including a lot about dying and going to heaven from what they found in the Bible.

"We said a lot of prayers. It helped us get through it. We didn't know if we'd even get back home again.

One good memory of the war was that the water in the Pacific Ocean was really pretty, clear, and with a lot of fish.

"We built our own boat," he said. "We put two empty gas tanks together and attached a motor. We made our own fishing poles."

Sometimes the guys would throw a grenade in the water to make fishing easier.

Gill wasn't too surprised when the war ended. He was at sea at the time.

"The enemy was in bad shape. They didn't have anything left. They used up all their airplanes," he said.

"They called everybody on the deck and told us. Everybody jumped up and waved their arms around."

"There were a lot of tears," said Gill, his eyes welling up at the memory.