

An Interview with Marv Morganti ~ Veteran, Educator, Hollywood Legend, Volunteer

Written by Jean Bartlett, October 18, 2018
(A Pacifica Historical Society Project)



You think you know a guy. In 1980, longtime Pacifican Marv Morganti retired from the Laguna Salada Union School District, now the Pacifica School District, as the District's Assistant Superintendent under Jim Brian. Then he went on to work at San Francisco State University. He taught and supervised elementary education students in the teaching credential program and retired from that 10 years later. The first time I approached him with some questions for a *Pacifica Tribune* article, it was back in July of 2010 in the parking lot of the City's historic *Little Brown Church. He was disguised as one of the community's most beloved residents, the late Rev. Herschel Harkins, who served as the Church's pastor from 1943 to 1965. (*Now the Pacifica Coastside Museum at the Little Brown Church.)

Then in a 2014 *Pacifica Tribune* interview with Mr. Morganti, it was revealed that he once served as a prisoner and a cook at the same prison that held such notorious criminals as Al Capone and "Machine Gun" Kelly. That would be San Francisco's prominent penitentiary for incorrigible prisoners – Alcatraz. Of course Marv served with another Pacifican, former Pacifica Fire Chief, Mayor and

Councilmember Cal Hinton. Though Hinton, as it turns out, was an Alcatraz guard. Both men were extras in the 1995 film "Murder in the First," directed by Marc Rocco and starring Christian Slater and Kevin Bacon. It seems that Marv has had a whole other career as a character actor.



The Many Faces of Marv Morganti.

Above left: Rev. Herschel Harkins, circa 2010.

Bottom left: Doing time as a cook at Alcatraz with guard Cal Hinton, 1995.

Bottom right: Dr. McCoy's double with director Leonard Nimoy, 1984.



Marvin Donald Morganti was born in January of 1924 to Epi and Celesta Morganti in Crows Landing, a census-designated area in Stanislaus County, California. According to the 2010 United States Census, Crows Landing has a population of 355. His father was from the Canton of Ticino, an Italian-speaking region in Southern Switzerland. His father, who would become a dairy farmer and a charter member of the Masons in Patterson, California, immigrated to the United States in 1894 when he was 17. His first wife, Misetti, was also from the Italian-speaking region of Southern Switzerland and she arrived in the United States in 1905. The couple had six children. Misetti died in the flu pandemic of 1918.

"My father sent for my mother to come and take care of the kids while he ran the farm. They fell in love and were married and then I came along. My mother was also from Ticino. I am the youngest of my father's seven children and the only one left. I am also a first generation American."



Marv, age 3, Crows Landing, CA, 1927.



Marv, age 7, on the way to his First Communion at Sacred Heart Church, Patterson, California, 1931.

Marv went to Bonita Grammar School in Crows Landing. Unlike his teenage brothers, Elmo and Henry, he did not get up at 4 a.m. to help run the dairy farm. "I really never worked on the farm," he noted. A graduate of Orestimba High School in Newman, CA, his first job was working as a soda jerk at a soda fountain. It was his first semester of college.

"After high school, I headed to Stockton College which became the University of the Pacific. I had enlisted for WWII under the threat of being drafted. I didn't want to go into the Army. But I knew I was going to have to serve so I joined the Navy. I figured it was cleaner. I didn't want to be in the dirt! But I thought it would be safer and as it turns out, it was safer. I participated in a lot of action but was never injured.

The Yeoman First Class wrote in his journal.

"High noon on the twenty-first day of April, 1944, found me in the Federal Building, San Francisco, California, with my right hand extended upward, repeating: *'I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; etc.'* Little did I know what was in store for me."

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Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

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Recruit training began in Farragut, Idaho. Marv was assigned to Camp Waldron. The days moved swiftly filled with long hikes to Lake Pend Oreille, drilling on the "grinder," learning the manual of arms and semaphore sending (a telegraphy system that conveys information at a distance by means of flags), and anticipating the day's best event – mail call. On the 25th of August, the Yeoman was transferred to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Bremerton, Washington. "My liberty and dough were spent in Seattle!"

On September 23, 1944, the Yeoman was on board the USS Ozark when it was commissioned in Portland, Oregon with Captain Frederick P. Williams in command. On October 2, 1944, the USS Ozark headed out to sea. On October 5, the Yeomen had their first practice firing on the ship's 20mm anti-aircraft guns.

"The firing, to put it mildly, was lousy!"



USS Ozark underway near her builders' yard, Willamette Iron & Steel Corporation, Portland, Oregon, on 16 September 1944. (Source: Wikipedia.)

After various port stops and gunnery exercises in California, on the 28th of October "we left the States for Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, operating singly without escort."

In mid-December the crew held a practice assault landing in the Huron Gulf area on the north coast of northeast New Guinea. Christmas was spent on Manus Island, part of Manus Province in northern Papua New Guinea. New Year's was spent at home. For Marv that meant the Firemen's Ball in Newman, California, a brief respite before heading with the crew for their first assault invasion on the Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippines.



"Although we had been passing close to enemy controlled territory for the past two days, by January 8th we had received no major challenge. However, about nine in the morning a twin-engine Jap bomber passed over our formation, making its approach from the sun. The bomber dropped one bomb which missed the USS Almaack, the ship next ahead of us in our column. No fire was opened up by any ship until the plane passed over. We began to get a little more excited on that day as around 5 in the afternoon, the General Quarters alarm sounded again and the harsh voice of the Boatswain's mate rang out. *'All hands, man your battle stations.'* Up we dashed to our 20mm gun, of which I was now the trunnion operator. Immediately we sighted four Val dive bombers around five miles away from the ship and steadily coming in." (The Aichi D3A Type 99 Carrier Bomber was the primary dive bomber of the Imperial Japanese Navy, nicknamed the "Val" by the Allies.)

"A combat air patrol was sent out from one of the baby carriers ahead of us and they made short work of the Jap Vals, driving

them into the drink with very little effort. At about quarter to six, we aboard the Ozark witnessed a Jap suicide plane make a run and crash into the escort carrier USS Kitkun Bay. The plane was out of range of our batteries. Then around seven o'clock the same night, we got the scare of our lives – thus far! A lone Jap plane which had been circling overhead just out of range, nosed over and commenced a suicide dive. All batteries commenced firing, and as every ship in the division was firing on the plane, there was a barrage in the air that resembled the Milky Way. However, the plane continued on through the mass of flak, evidently aiming for the HMAS Westralia. We on the Ozark believed it was headed for our ship, but the sharp barrage that was sent up made the pilot change his mind and he headed downward towards another ship closer to him. His attempt to hit the Westralia was not realized, however, as he crashed just a few feet astern of said ship. As the Division continued on its course, the Combat Air Patrol shot down another Jap bomber making a low level approach from the starboard while the suicide plane was making its approach from overhead. The suicide bomber was believed to have been an Oscar. Darkness set in as we set condition II watches and decided to remain alert throughout the night for more attacks. This had been the biggest day of War so far." (Code-named "Oscar," this Nakajima designed Japanese Army Air Force fighter aircraft was originally known as "Army Zero.")

On January 9, the USS Ozark approached Lingayen Gulf. There was enemy aircraft but the Ozark successfully commenced the unloading of dukws, boats and troops at 7:30 a.m. (Dukws is a code for a type of military wheeled amphibious landing-craft. "D" means 1942. "U" means utility/amphibious. "K" means all-wheel drive. "W" means 2 powered rear axles.)

"At quarter to eight, a Jap suicide plane made a dive into the USS Columbia. The cruiser was damaged and quite a few men were killed, however it resumed bombardment. At 9:30 we received word that the first and second waves had landed on Crimson Beach, and at about 11:15 we moved in closer to the beach to receive casualties. Throughout the day aircraft proving to be Japanese approached the area and several made crash suicide dives into our ships. The scarcity of casualties on the beach was compensated by the number of casualties accounted for on the various ships that were hit. In fact, the landing itself was practically unopposed on the beachheads. Only casualties to be taken aboard the Ozark were Navy men. At 6:30 we received orders to make smoke as there were a large number of Jap planes over the transport area. Darkness rendered more protection as we began to steam out of the Lingayen Gulf – our task well done. So happened our first initial assault invasion. Our minds were not at ease as yet however, as the trip back we thought would prove to be quite eventful.

"But our fears were all in vain as the trip from Luzon back to the Leyte Gulf was uneventful, save for a few General Quarters that proved unnecessary. On the 12th of January we were anchored in Leyte Gulf, having returned from the Ozark's first invasion safe and sound. On the 18th of January we got underway, bound for a couple weeks of rest then off to another invasion. At this time we were the flagship for ComTransDiv 33, but while at Ulithi Island, we lost the flag onto another ship. We remained at Ulithi Island until the morning of the 6th of February. While there, I celebrated my 21st birthday by going on a beer party with members of the crew. Plenty of beer was had by all and also hotdogs, potato salad, apples, etc."

On the 5th of February, the Ozark got underway for Guam arriving on the 7th after an uneventful voyage. While moored in Guam, the Ozark received aboard several detachments of Marine corpsman and doctors. That gave the crew official notice that the Ozark was to become one of the casualty-evacuation ships for the Invasion of Iwo Jima, 750 miles south of Tokyo. On February 19, the Ozark landed three waves of troops for the invasion of Iwo Jima. On February 23, along with all of the crew aboard the Ozark, Marv watched with binoculars when San Francisco Chronicle photographer Joe Rosenthal took the iconic photo of six WWII servicemen raising the American flag on Iwo Jima. On February 28, the Ozark evacuated 700 Iwo Jima casualties to bring to military hospitals on Guam. The Ozark then set sail for the Battle of Okinawa.

"Our stay at Iwo Jima was a gruesome one, staying seven days to receive casualties. Those we received were in terrible condition: arms and legs missing, minds shocked, paralyzed. It was a terrible scene and something never to be forgotten. The dead were stacked in the Troop Officers Wardroom, next door to our office.

"We all had to pitch in and help and did so by carrying stretchers, feeding the patients, whatever was needed. I had occasion to watch several operations, among them being the removal of several legs, something I'll never forget. When we left the Island of Iwo Jima, we were loaded down with hundreds of casualties, all of them in terrible condition. We headed to Saipan. We spent five days trying to disembark our casualties from Iwo Jima at Saipan, but as the hospital was full we were sent on to Guam. The smell of dried blood and wounds was beginning to be greatly noticed aboard ship and we were all eager to transfer the wounded. Our little job of feeding and helping to care for the wounded was a sickening one, and an unforgettable one. But all of the Marines, regardless of how terrible the wound, were in good morale."

In March, the USS Ozark headed out in company with Transport Squadron Thirteen for an amphibious operation against the Japanese-held Island of Okinawa Shima. By Easter morning they were underway to Okinawa. They would also set courses to New Caledonia, Guam and Pearl Harbor.

When Imperial Japan announced its surrender on August 15, 1945, the USS Ozark was en route to rendezvous with the 3rd Fleet at Sea off the coast of Japan.

"On the 16th of August we had a sub attack. Yep. After the War is over we start being attacked by subs! A Jap sub supposedly shot a torpedo at us but we averted it by making a fast right angle turn. The two destroyers that were screening us dropped ash-cans and later reported oil on the surface. But no one knows for sure whether they got it or not. Anyway, it was one of the closest shaves the Ozark had ever gotten but Lady Luck was right in there pitching and we got out of it okay. From then on, we were really on the alert for subs for we realized that most of them would probably not surrender, and as we got closer to Japan anything might happen!"

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Author: Jean Bartlett (www.bartlettbiographies.com)

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On September 2, 1945, when Japan formally surrendered aboard the USS Missouri, the USS Ozark was among the fleet of allied ships anchored in Tokyo Bay. The solemn ceremony was followed by a banquet aboard the Missouri for the representative delegations. Word was sent out to the witnessing vessels – food was needed. The Ozark provided 20 hams. Following the historic event, the Ozark boarded 950 American prisoners-of-war and returned them to the United States.

"They were in bad shape. Very thin and sick, it was shocking to see them."

The USS Ozark earned three battle stars and the Philippine Republic Presidential Unit Citation Badge for her service.

"I was there when the ship transited the Panama Canal and we arrived in New Orleans at the end of January, 1946. That is a memory! I was there when she commenced her pre-inactivation overhaul in Orange, Texas on March 14, 1946. When I left in May of 1946, I was a Yeoman Third Class.

"I was in six different invasions where my ship landed Marines. We never went ashore. We were a ship that was about the size of a transport; a good sized ship but not huge. On the bottom deck, we called them 'ducks,' we would load those with Marines, sometimes Army too. We would send them off. Some came back and some didn't. That was our role.

"My experience was okay. We had to fight the War, there was no question. There was real purpose to the Second World War. You felt you had to do it."

When Marv returned home from his service, he enrolled at the University of the Pacific on the G.I. Bill. In 1946, he met up again with his high school sweetheart.

"Claire and I went together through my first semester in college and then while I was gone, it sort of dissolved. We married on August 11, 1948 in Capitola and we went on to have five children, three daughters and two sons: Jeff, Karen, Doug, Chris and Cindy. We also have 12 grandchildren and three great grandchildren. We just had a wedding of a grandson a few months ago and everyone came over to the house. I lost Claire 27 years ago. She was smart and fun and she was a great mother. Damn cancer."



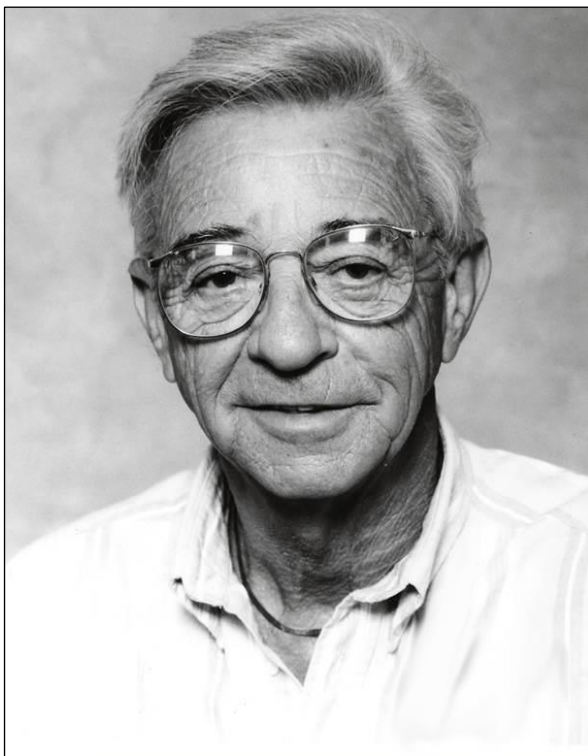
"I majored in journalism and I was going to be the world's greatest reporter." (In his senior year, Marv was elected president of Alpha Delta chapter of Alpha Phi Gamma, national honorary journalistic fraternity at College of the Pacific.)

"I could have had a job with the *Stockton Record* paying a fairly horrible amount per week when Claire announced our eldest, Jeff, was coming and I thought, 'I have to do better than that.' This was in 1949 and they were crying for teachers. I went into teaching because they needed teachers.

"I went to summer school and took three courses: teaching reading, teaching math, and teaching science. I got a job in a two-teacher school. I taught grades four through eight. The other teacher was also the principal and she taught first, second, and third. This was in the Delta – we lived in Stockton. In my class I had maybe 24 or 25 students from all those grades combined. Having never taught, I didn't know what the hell I was doing but I loved it and the parents were so supportive. They would send me home with asparagus. This was a farming area.

"Then I moved to a bigger school near Stockton and taught upper grades, 7th and 8th for a couple of years. Then I became principal at Woodbridge Elementary School in Lodi. It was a K through 8 and I was there four years.

"Claire and I decided we didn't like the heat. She particularly didn't like the heat. She was from Nampa, Idaho originally. So I decided I would look around for a job. I interviewed in Santa Cruz and in Morgan Hill, and I interviewed in Pacifica with Fred Lucas, Superintendent of the Laguna Salada Union School District (LSUSD). My sister Alyce lived in San Francisco and we thought that would be nice to have her so close by. And I fell in love with the location. You could go to ballgames, or the theater, and see the ocean. Pacifica is a hell of a good spot. We moved to Pacifica in 1961.



Marv's "Hollywood" headshot.

"I started here as a principal at Vallemar Elementary and then I was the principal at Westview Elementary, when we had Westview up the hill. Then I became a curriculum consultant. In those days we had four or five curriculum consultants and we went around to the schools and helped teachers. We had a math consultant, a science consultant, a physical education consultant and I was a general education consultant. We had offices in the Instructional Material Center, the building next to the main building on Reina del Mar. Our job was to hold workshops. Those were the days! After being a consultant for three or four years, I became the Assistant Superintendent. Jim Brian was the Superintendent."

After Marv retired from the LSUSD, his next job as a professor at San Francisco State included placing some of the teachers who currently work in Pacifica.

"My job included placing my 18 to 20 student teachers in practice classrooms throughout the Bay Area before they got their teaching credential. Some of those students went to our School District and some of them are still here in Pacifica teaching! Every week, I would go into the classrooms of my students and observe them and then work with them and their master teacher to be sure they were given any help needed to achieve their teaching credential. It was very rewarding work." While he was

doing that, Marv also decided to participate as an extra in a crowd scene being shot at the San Francisco Cow Palace. It was 1983 and the movie was "The Right Stuff." Marv is in the scene when the astronauts return home.

"I met an agent there who encouraged me and the next thing I know I am being signed by five casting agents.

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In 1985, he got a spot in a State Farm Insurance commercial. In the 1989-90 season of the San Francisco-located television show "Midnight Caller," he logged in ten performances.

"I got a bit part as an older Italian grandfather in the 1993 PBS-TV miniseries movie version of Armistead Maupin's 'Tales of the City.' I had to sit at a table at Club Fugazi (home to the longest running musical revue 'Beach Blanket Babylon' in theater history), with a blonde crawling all over me!"

Marv also had another restaurant customer scene in the Ted Danson 1994 film, "Getting Even with Dad." There were bit parts in other films, which included: "Sister Act," "Final Analysis," "So I Married an Ax Murderer" and "Angels in the Outfield." He worked in the 1996-2001 television series "Nash Bridges." He played the bartender. He played a traffic guard in "Mrs. Doubtfire." He's in The Coup's 1993 hip-hop video "Dig It."

"I play an unemployed guy who is riding on a bus. We rode around on that bus all day."

If it was filmed locally and it sounded fun, Marv would respond to the last minute call to audition.

"I did a lot of work. I made a bunch of commercials too that were shot in the Bay Area. You have to be at the set at 6 in the morning and stay there all day. You have to take a book or be sociable because it's boring. You do the same thing over and over. But I'm comfortable in front of a camera. I did enough work that I could have joined SAG (Screen Actors Guild) but I didn't. I didn't need to. You do get paid better if you are a SAG member and you also get royalties. But for me it was just an enjoyable experience and I did it for at least 10 years. I did get paid of course."

There were other things Marv did during his first retirement and they included being there to help create Pacificans Care, a "totally volunteer, community-based non-profit organization which raises funds locally to provide grants to social service organizations in Pacifica to build a broad and higher quality of life for Pacificans." Along with Marv, that 1982 Pacificans Care founders team was: Bill Growney, Robert Siebert, Sheila Hyman, Karl Baldwin, Grace McCarthy and Henry Budinot.

Marv is an active member of the Pacifica Historical Society and the Pacifica Lions Club, and a loyal supporter of Pacifica Performances and the Pacifica Spindrift Players. He has portrayed the Rev. Herschel Harkins for the Historical Society for about 12 years.

"I'm sorry to say I never met Rev. Harkins but he certainly was well thought of and there are many Pacificans today that knew him.

"The best way to go forward in life is to be aware of what happened in the past. Past, present and future, that is what the human race is constantly about and we are all a part of making history and we should all also be a part of saving history."

In 2014, Marv was a participating veteran in the Honor Flight Network.

The Honor Flight Network was created solely to honor America's veterans for their sacrifices. Top priority is given to WWII veterans and those who are terminally ill. The veterans, at no cost to them, are transported to Washington, D.C. to visit and reflect at their memorials. 2014 was the first time WWII veterans were flown from the Bay Area. There were 26 veterans from the "war to end all wars" and each veteran had a guardian. Marv's son Doug served as the Navy Yeoman's guardian for the extraordinary three-day journey. The World War II Memorial was the first stop on the tour.

"It's a beautiful memorial. It contains 4,048 gold stars; each star represents 100 soldiers who died in the War."

The tour also included visits to the Vietnam Memorial, the Korean War Memorial, the Air Force Memorial, the Naval Memorial, the Women in Military Service for America Memorial, and the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum. At the Naval Museum, Marv researched his old ship, the USS Ozark.

During the changing of the guard ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, the four eldest of the veterans from the Bay Area joined together to lay a wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier.

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"It was very moving.

"I am blessed with a wonderful family and wonderful friends. With the exception of losing my wife it has been a great life to date. I don't know when I'll be gone but it is inevitable. I have done what I can to make the Earth better. "I've lived a life that's full," Marv chuckled, quoting the Frank Sinatra showstopper *My Way*, "I've traveled each and every highway, and more, much more than this, I did it my way!"

"But in my immediate future, tonight, one of the City Council candidates is having a fundraiser at a local bar and there's dancing. I love dancing. I am so there."



Jean Bartlett photo

Marv at home with Roxi, who was visiting, in October of 2014.



Jean Bartlett is a longtime Bay Area features writer: Pacifica Tribune, Oakland Tribune, San Jose Mercury, San Mateo Times, Portraits & Roots, Marin Independent Journal, Twin City Times, Ross Valley Reporter, Peninsula Progress, Coastal Connections, Contra Costa County Times, Bay Area Business Woman and Catholic San Francisco.

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