

Vivian Hunter Interview (2)

Mark Hoeksema

VH: Next I got discharged. No, I never did get a discharge. I was separated from the service. They could call me back at any time. I went home to my family because I'd been gone for all that length of time overseas. I'd made up my mind that I was not going back to Oregon on a train. I was going to fly back. Well, you didn't just call up and make a reservation in 1946. You had to wait until there was an opportunity. I didn't get to go back until March. So we were separated for almost three months right after we were married. Then I did go to Astoria, Oregon, and set up housekeeping with my husband. We lived in military housing, which was much more basic than what I have now.

MHH: And he was still in the service at this time?

VH: Oh, yes, he was in the service for twenty years—active duty. He only had ten of it in when we got married.

MHH: Was it his intention originally to stay in that long?

VH: Well, he never had a real good relationship with his mother. She told me one time that she really never enjoyed him until he was old enough to help on the farm. She was very dictatorial. That was the main reason why he went to Washington, DC, to try out for the Navy band. He didn't make the band. So then the recruiter got hot on his tail and said, "You want to be in the Navy? We can put you in the regular Navy." He was not quite nineteen, so they had to call his parents to get permission. He didn't know at that time whether it was going to be a career or not. So after his first four-year enlistment, he was discharged from the Navy. Every time you re-enlist, you're discharged first. And he had thirty days' leave. So he took his leave and went home, and he decided he wanted to go back in the Navy after one month at home. From then on, it was to be his career. I knew when I married him that he was going to stay. He told me that; it was one of the first things he said, "I don't plan to leave the Navy just because the war's over."

MHH: So now you're both together in Oregon. What happened next?

VH: Next, his officer's rank was a temporary because it was a wartime appointment. So in September of the same year we got married (in 1946), he reverted back to enlisted chief. He knew that was going to happen. We were prepared for it, but it was kind of a disappointment.

MHH: A step backwards.

VH: Two steps backwards, because he had both warrant and chief warrant. He enjoyed the chief's rank too. After ten years in the fleet reserve, after he retired after twenty years (and they never did call him back the ten years he was in the fleet reserve), he reverted again to a chief warrant and received that retirement pay for the rest of his life. So there were advantages in his having been a wartime officer. He did get that permanently after thirty years.

MHH: Did you stay in Oregon for a long time?

VH: No, no. We only stayed there from January to September, and then he took some more leave. His first assignment after we left, was to the USS Antietam. He had never been in the Navy Air arm before. They really didn't love the Navy there, either. He went there in October of '46 and then the next March, (I was pregnant) they went overseas to China. I don't know where else they went in that time. I, who only had had a drivers' license for a few months, had not had my baby yet before he went overseas. So he was gone when she was born. He came back in October of '47 and then we were in Richman, California for awhile. And then we were in Alameda was where the flat-top was stationed. We were there until Vivian [*VH's daughter*] was about a year old. Then they went to sea again, so then I drove back from the San Francisco area to Philadelphia with my year-old child all by myself, and I stayed there the nine months that he was overseas.

MHH: With family?

VH: With my family, yes. I stayed with one of my sisters and worked the 3 to 11 shift at the hospital. She had three children, one the same age as mine, so I had a built-in babysitter and a family atmosphere for her and for myself. Yet I wasn't in the way all the time, but I could help out when I could. So then after that we went to Corpus Christi, Texas. He was the fire chief of air station down there—Cabot Field. We were there almost four years, and then we went to Guam the first time.

And that's where we met up with the Reformed faith for the first time. We had been going to a chapel. We were satisfied with it—a nice chaplain was stationed there. One Sunday morning we went to chapel and there was a whole different atmosphere. There were at least twice as many people as normally came to chapel, and it was an atmosphere of expectation. When this chaplain came in, there was just something about him that you knew why all these people were here. That was Chaplain Len Wade. He was a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

There were people in that audience who had been under his command, been where he had been before, some aboard ship, some on other stations, different places in the world. But they were all in Guam at that time, and he was stationed on Guam. He was so enthusiastic. He not only did all of his Navy requirements, but he also had missionary efforts going on in other places. There was a camp that used to be a Philippine Camp and there was a chapel there. He utilized that, and he ministered to the Philipinos and the Guamanians. This was not required, but on Saturday mornings he would take his vehicle and go around the islands where the Navy people were, pick up children, a whole batch of them, and he had the Children's Bible Hour in the Navy chapel. He gave these children what he called the Bible alphabets to learn—they were to learn a verse for every letter of the alphabet because that was a good way for them to remember. As they went along, they learned a certain number of verses, I think about 8, and they would get a small prize. When they finished, they would get Vos' *Children's Bible Storybook*. Then they would start on another alphabet. Every Saturday morning, he would come to hear my daughter say her verses. When he first came, his preaching antagonized us. We could see that we were nowhere beginning to measure up to what he says the Bible says we should measure up to in many ways—in Sabbath observance and just the whole thing.

MHH: But this was all news to you?

VH: Yes. I never heard the words "the sovereignty of God" before I heard that man preach.

MHH: Really?

VH: The Evangelical Church was completely Arminian, and it was your choice to become a Christian or not become a Christian or to know Christ in any way. I used to weep into my dishpan on Monday mornings. Finally, I just prayed, "Lord, show me the way. Either we go

somewhere else” (because there were many other chapels on the island—we didn’t have to go to that one) or, “Let me understand what you’re trying to tell me.” And one day my husband came home and said, “Rev. Wade’s going to have a series of Lenten sermons at noon.

MHH: By the way, he was attending with you, correct?

VH: Yes, yes. From the day we were married he went to church with me every Sunday.

MHH: And he went to this chapel of the Orthodox Presbyterian man?

VH: Yes. I wasn’t on Guam when he first went there. We had to wait awhile—Vivian and I—until they had housing. He’d gone to chapel all the time that I was not there. I don’t how much he understood at that time. But he could use his lunch hour to go hear him instead of just eating and resting. So we did that. And somehow everything just fell in place during that week.

MHH: Yet it seems from what you’re saying that you were somewhat conflicted about what you should do.

VH: Right. We were. But, like I said, somehow (and I don’t know whether it was his subject or whether the way he presented the Passion Week or what it was), we just felt that we could follow his leading, and we enjoyed it from then on. We changed our lives in many ways from then on. Before we left Guam the bishop of the island of Guam went to see the Admiral and said to him: “Get that man off my island!”

MHH: When you say “bishop,” what do you mean?

VH: Of the Catholic Church.

MHH: Because obviously he did not like...

VH: No, because some some of the Catholics were coming to this chapel that he had outside of the Naval chapel—some of the Philipinos and some of the Guamanians. We had a radio program called the Challenge to Faith. I really think that what God presented to us was a challenge to our faith to bring it to where it should be, because it was really understood what was in his work. That was the first time I’d ever heard of TULIP. I knew nothing about the Reformed faith before that. Gone to church all my life, made profession of faith when I was twelve years old, but it was a whole new life, really. So then he was removed from Guam and the Navy went even further. He was within four years of retirement. And they removed him for

the good of the service because he believed every word of the Bible to be true and expected all of the men to do the same.

MHH: How did they get rid of him?

VH: They discharged him under those reasons—separated him from the service.

MHH: Really? Within four years of having his twenty years in. Wow!

VH: But he left behind this little group that he was pastoring outside of the Navy. And two men, who had belonged to First [*Protestant Reformed*] Church somehow or other got word of it. There was a sailor who had become converted to Christianity when he was in the brig because he had been drunk and disorderly. The only thing he had to read was the New Testament, and when he read the twenty-first chapter of Revelation he said he was so scared he had to believe. This man, who had not even had a high school education at that time, learned the word well enough that he could expound it—maybe not the way you're used to it. Anyway, these two guys, who had left our church in '53, heard of this mission work that was going on.

MHH: Were these men...

VH: They were school teachers.

MHH: In Guam?

VH: Yes, they were on Guam at that time because the man who was superintendent of schools in Guam was Christian Reformed. And he had an advertisement in *The Banner* that he needed to raise the standard of education in Guam to the standards of education in California or the Navy was going to build its own schools because the kids got back in the States and they didn't meet the standards there and they couldn't manage to go from grade to grade as they should have. So he was advertising for State-side teachers to come and teach for two years, and they would give them a free trip around the world. So that's why these two guys were out there.

MHH: And these were two men who had left...

VH: Our churches in '53 and were members of the Orthodox Protestant Reformed Church.

MHH: And this would have happened approximately in what year? Obviously after 1953.

VH: It was somewhere between '56 and '60.

MHH: So now you're back in the States.

VH: We're back in the States.

MHH: But you know about these men who went to Guam to help.

VH: Well, we found out about it. We didn't know at that time. We didn't know what had happened to the little group we left behind.

MHH: Because you're in the States now.

VH: We were in the States. Johnny Reynolds was carrying on even before we left. We knew them. He was part of that group of people who were so excited to have Rev. Wade there because, after his conversion, all by himself just reading the New Testament, he was on a ship that Rev. Wade was on. So don't talk to me about the providence of God (laughter). When my husband retired in 1956 we bought a farm in Bend, Oregon.

Before Rev. Wade left Guam, he had started instructing us to become members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, even though there was no Orthodox Presbyterian Church on Guam or even a mission. He was almost finished when he had to leave. We had talked about where we were going to go because we knew that retirement was going to be within a year. My husband had a vision that retirement from the Navy meant hunting and fishing and that kind of stuff. He didn't know he'd still have to support his family (laughter). Anyway, it sounded to him like the best place for us to go was Bend, Oregon. Preaching there at that time was a protégé of his, Rev. Robert Sander. Through classis and presbytery, they had made arrangements that we could become members of that church while we were still on the island of Guam. Rev. Wade had to leave, so he left the finishing of our instruction with John Reynolds. And when Johnny finished it, he came with the same questions that were asked of anybody that came into the Orthodox Presbyterian churches. We were able to answer those questions to his satisfaction.

MHH: I'm going to read the pertinent part of the bulletin into the record because it is relevant.

This is the bulletin of the Westminster Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Newport Avenue and Drake Road, in Bend, Oregon. Robert D. Sander is the pastor. The bulletin is dated July 24, 1955. Appearing in the "announcements" on that bulletin is the following: "Mr. and Mrs. Chester E. Hunter, on the island of Guam, were examined by elder D. Reynolds for membership into our local church at Bend. Mr. Reynolds reports: 'They have met all the qualifications for membership into the visible church of Jesus Christ.' We wish to welcome the Hunters into our fellowship. They have one covenant child, Vivian, 8 years old. They write: 'I cannot tell you

how our hearts are thrilled to be one with you. God bless you for receiving us. We are so happy to be no longer orphans without a church home.’ The Hunters have left the Presbyterian Church USA to become affiliated with ours. They would like to hear from members of our church.

Their address: Chester E. Hunter, US Naval Magazine, c/o FPO San Francisco, California. Let us remember them and elder Reynolds in our prayers as they seek to establish a true witness for Christ on Guam.”

VH: We went to San Diego before we went to Bend when we left Guam. We were only there about 9 months. Skipper was born there in the Naval hospital (he really is Chester Hunter, Junior). Then it was time for my husband to retire from the Navy. His twenty years were up and he was ready to go. We already had our membership in the Bend church, so that’s where we went. We went up there the summer before he retired and looked at property and found a farm that we liked (40 acres), and we bought that. Then we went back to San Diego until October. He retired from the Navy on October 8, having served twenty years and one day (laughter). And then we lived there. The town was beautiful. It was a wonderful town. But as we found, the longer we belonged to the OPC, it was not like our PR churches where you go from church to church and you hear the same doctrine, the same preaching. It’s consistent. You know where they’ve been trained. Here it depended on who was the minister. They had absorbed people from other denominations, as is common in these days, even as we have done some in the PR churches.

The man that was minister had been CRC, and he was more controlled by the consistory than he was the controlling factor in many ways, and he bowed to their wishes. There was one man on the session who was opposed to infant baptism, and he was an elder in the church.

MHH: Amazing!

VH: So we were really not church-happy there, not like we were under Rev. Wade’s preaching. In the meantime, he had been discharged from the Navy, and the work on Guam went on under the leadership of John Reynolds. The two men who had belonged to the PR churches in Grand Rapids, who were school teachers, came out there and affiliated themselves with the group. They said to themselves, “We need a missionary. Who we really need is the man [*Wade*] that started this work, who is now a US citizen, so there’s no way that the ship can keep him off the island of

Guam unless he's been a criminal or some such thing." So they got in touch with him. He consented to go, and he had the permission of presbytery to go. In the meantime, just before he was ready to go, he became aware of the fact that he had lymphoma. It had settled within his kidneys. He was very blessed in the fact that his association with the Navy was so recent that it was considered "duty-acquired" and the Navy took care of him medically. After he'd been back on Guam for a couple of years, he came back to the United States for cobalt treatment. He received that at the Naval hospital near Portland, and while he was there, he came to see us on our farm. He said, "I need help. I need help that knows me and knows how we operate, what our church stands for." He knew we were not real happy where we were. "Would you be willing to come and help me?" My husband said, "Find me a job and I'll come." I about lost (laughter) my cool. It wasn't too many months later till the phone rang one morning. My husband was out plowing a field. This lady said, "I'm in Oakland, California. I have a few minutes. I want to speak to Mr. Chester Hunter." I said, "Will you give me your number, I'll have him call you back." I have to go get him." She said, "Just go get him. I don't have enough time to wait around." So, I went out and got him to come answer the phone. And I heard him say to this lady, "When do I have to be there?" This is March. She said, "June 1." I had a ten-month old baby and a two-year old, plus my mother-in-law was living in her trailer on our property. So we had to find a place for Mom to live, and we had to get ourselves to Guam by June 1. And we did. I made a trip to Philadelphia so I could say good-bye to my family too.

MHH: What happened to the farm?

VH: We sold it. We left with it unsold. It wasn't sold for several months after we left. But we just trusted the Lord and left it.

To be continued...

Originally published in:

Volume 77 No. 7 July 2018