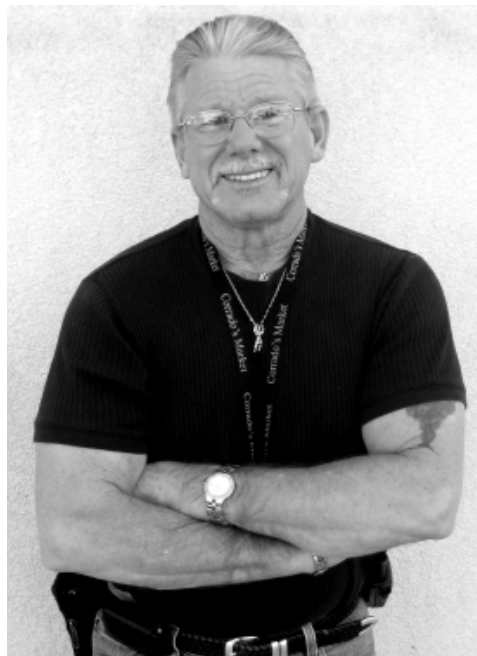


# Rosario LaCorte

## Vietnam Vet & Clifton Cop

Story by Joe Hawrylko



*Third Class Petty Officer Rosario LaCorte next to the artillery cannons aboard the USS Walke. He served during Vietnam and then went on to a career with the Clifton Police Department. Today, you'll see him keeping things orderly at Corrado's Family Affair.*

**R**osario LaCorte still remembers his mother's anxiety back in 1966, when the 19-year-old revealed his plans to enlist in the military.

The unpopular war was being covered by hundreds of media correspondents, bringing the brutality of the conflict right into the homes of Americans. LaCorte's mother knew her son was draft eligible and would be deployed to Vietnam soon enough, so she begged him to pick a safe branch of the military.

"I wanted to go to the Marines, but my mother didn't want me to go," he laughed. "I basically knew I was going to Vietnam." But LaCorte heeded his mother's advice and enlisted with the Navy in January 1966 and was shipped to Great Lakes, Ill. for boot camp.

After completion of his training, the 1965 CHS graduate was assigned to the USS *Walke* DD-723 destroyer as a high pressure pipe welder. "On a tin can ship, everything breaks and cracks because of the constant pounding," said LaCorte. As a result, much of his time was spent below deck, in the bowels of the destroyer, which carried roughly 200 personnel. "It would rock the ship if you turned starboard or port side," he said. "Because it was such a small ship, each shot would throw it right or left. On that ship, you were more apt to get sick. Our tables had metal edges so that stuff wouldn't fall off of it."

LaCorte and his shipmates were fortunate enough to not engage in direct combat. The USS *Walke* primarily served as a sea-to-land artillery craft, generally keeping the crew out of harm's way.

However, the heavy guns created an intense strain on the vessel, keeping LaCorte busy. Working so far beneath deck mean that there were few escape routes. A major accident could potentially trap him in the bowels of the ship. "The ship caught fire when we were leaving California [for Vietnam]," he recalled. "The hull caught fire and we didn't even get out of the harbor. The ship was on dry dock for months."

LaCorte was in Vietnam for 13 months before being reassigned to the USS *Shenandoah*, a destroyer tender repair ship. Despite leaving the war zone, he still longed to return home.

"You tend to stay in touch with family. That's how I was anyway," said LaCorte. "It's hard though, because even though you're making new family on the ship, your ties are back home. Especially on the destroyer, since there's only 200 some odd men on it. You opened up to each other constantly."

"You grow up real quick," he added. "You don't have the family support system right behind."

LaCorte was discharged in October 1969 as a shipfitter third class and returned home to a changed America.

"People know you're in the military. Your hair is short, especially at that time," he said. "People had pony tails, sideburns and facial hair."

But while the general reception to returning veterans was negative, LaCorte did not face any resentment back

home in Clifton. He assimilated back into civilian life, returning to his pre-war job at Frank Taibi Fuel.

In 1980, he applied to become a Passaic County Park Policeman. His military stint made him well-prepared for the police academy.

"It was nothing compared to Navy boot camp," LaCorte laughed. However, budget cuts forced the County to let go of a number of officers, and he was unemployed after less than a year on the force.

LaCorte then applied to the Clifton Police Department, and was hired in 1980.

"I was a patrolman. I was black and white my whole career," said the Allwood resident. "Lakeview Ave. and the Botany section is where I spent most of my years. I like those neighborhoods."

LaCorte was a member of Clifton's Finest for almost 25 years, retiring on Dec. 31, 2003.

Shortly after ending his Clifton Police career, LaCorte got a job as the head of security at the sprawling Corrado's Family Affair, between Main and Getty Aves.

Soon, he plans on ending his second career to ride off into the sunset with his fiancée of five years, Regina Carfora, a suiting end for someone who spent years serving the public.

"For about 19 years, I've owned a condo in South Carolina," said LaCorte. "In a year or so, I'm going to retire out there."

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