

# THE P O I N T E R

OCT. 2008~JAN. 2009

## THE P O I N T E R

UNITED STATES NAVAL ARMED GUARD CENTER

16 Pages

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Dec. 24, 1943

# AGs TOP BOND QUOTA

— Story on Page 3



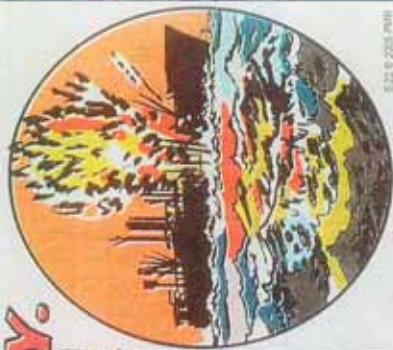
MERRY ~ CHRISTMAS



## FLASHBACKS

by Patrick M. Reynolds

SHORTLY AFTER WORLD WAR II BROKE OUT IN SEPTEMBER 1939 THE UNITED STATES WAS NEUTRAL. EARLY IN 1941 THE U.S. BEGAN TO SHIP WAR MATERIAL TO ENGLAND AND THE SOVIET UNION.

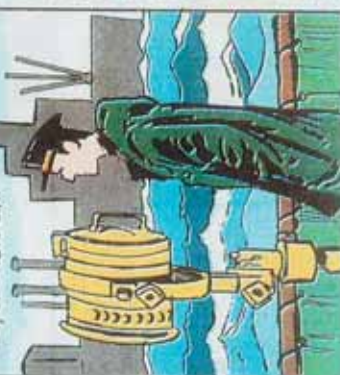


© 2005 PHN

THESE MERCHANT SHIPS BECAME TARGETS FOR GERMAN U-BOATS, MANY WITHIN SIGHT OF THE AMERICAN COAST.

## TORPEDO ALLEY.

CONGRESS COULD NOT AUTHORIZE THE PLACING OF WEAPONS AND GUN CREWS ON MERCHANT SHIPS BECAUSE OF THE 1939 NEUTRALITY ACT, SECTION SIX.



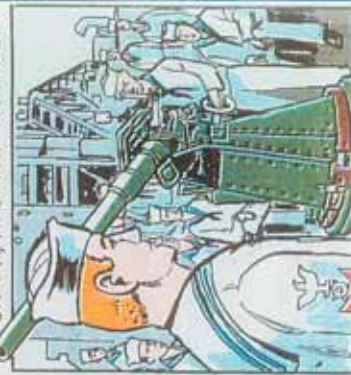
MEANWHILE MORE U.S. MERCHANT SHIPS WERE BEING SUNK.



CONGRESS FINALLY REPEALED SECTION SIX OF THE NEUTRALITY ACT ON NOVEMBER 17, 1941.



BY THEN THE U.S. NAVY HAD ALREADY ACTIVATED THE NAVAL ARMED GUARD. THE FIRST VOLUNTEERS WERE UNDERGOING TRAINING AT LITTLE CREEK, VIRGINIA. CONTINUED...

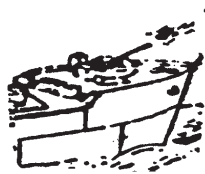


For more info read Unsung Heroes - The Naval Armed Guard in World War II by Justin Gechtauf, 456 pages, photos, paperback, \$24.95 from the Red Rose Studio, 358 Flintlock Drive, Willow Street, PA 17594. Call toll-free 1-888-839-5673. Website: [www.redrosetudio.com](http://www.redrosetudio.com).



# THE POINTER

AND



## THE PLANE SHOOTER

Our Motto: "We aim To Deliver" and "We Did"

USN Armed Guard World War II Veterans

"PLAIN SHOOTING FOR PLANE SHOOTERS"

Dear Every One,

Nov.28, 2008

Hilda and I wish everyone a "MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR." They sure come fast in the past few years but we look for more. This has been a very hectic time in the last few months with politicians fighting for power, the economy in a turmoil and the high gas prices. The gas prices are getting back to normal now and let's hope it stays that way. I know the truck drivers who delivers our food are relieved. I am, for one, as there are many mouths are to

be fed all over the world each day and it was bad enough as it was before.

I doubt if you can get this POINTER before CHRISTMAS as I held it up to see whether we would go through with the MM/AG reunion. "WE WILL NOT HOLD THE AG REUNION" for different reasons beyond my control and after all the turmoil of all the foreclosures, bankrupts, high gas prices at the time, plus our age, I finally decided that I did not want to stick my neck out as I did at Los Angeles at this late a date in my life. I do want to thank Jill Blaney (Our own AG Bob Stevenson's daughter) for volunteering to take care of the monies should we had gone through with the reunion, I want to thank Morris Harvey (MM) for his patience in trying to make it happen. I had started this letter several times, changed it and ended up deleting. It is to my sorrow, as I even delet-

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## ATTENTION

You know where you are.  
You know where we are.  
We know where we are.  
But we don't always know  
where you are.  
**Please notify us when you move.**

Non-Profit Organization  
Tax Exempt No. 74-2316668

*Remember, I "STILL" can't move  
as fast as I did when I was in my  
twenties! When you call, let the  
phone ring so I can get to it! -CAL*

## COMMANDANT'S MESSAGE

On this, our third Christmas of the present war, I extend to all officers and enlisted personnel, and to all civilian employees of the Third Naval District, my best holiday greetings and my deep appreciation of their loyal service to our Navy and to our Country.

In this global war, the organization and work behind the battlefronts is of utmost importance. You who perform those tasks are doing vital war work - work without which the war cannot be won. All of you should be conscious of the importance of the work you are doing and should be proud of your part in our nation's struggle, for each one of you, whether you are in uniform or in civilian clothes, is indeed a member of the great Navy team.

To each and every one of you a Merry Christmas and a Victorious New Year.

E. J. MARQUART,

Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy,

Commandant, Third Naval District.

## CAPTAIN'S MESSAGE

Armed Guards deserve the best Christmas possible for they have already accomplished the most difficult task of fighting off the strongest enemy attacks to get military cargoes and troops to the front.

The third Christmas we enjoy together makes us mindful of these accomplishments and appreciative of your family's wishes, thoughts and prayers for your return. To them I send my Season's Greetings, certain in the thought that they will fight on with us, pushing from themselves weakness and human longing.

'Merry Christmas' with more cheer than we have had for these past three years,' I say in saluting your fine work.

William J. Coakley  
Commander, USNR  
Commanding

# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

ed things that I needed to keep. I hope I can get most back in. It was a hard decision to make.

I have included one Itinerary for the Merchant Seamen as I think I owe Harvey that much to help him have a successful reunion. He welcomes the Armed Guard to still come and join in. AG are not obligated to pay any of the Convention Fees on the Itinerary, just the things you care to take part in. I hope to attend for I would love to sail the AMERICAN VICTORY in Tampa.

I have had two requests for our help. One is from: Demid Rabchevsky, Flat 9 20 Gagarin St., Murmansk, Russia 183034 who is writing research on Radio Operators on the Convoys to Murmansk. A little info would help a lot. Maybe you know of someone. The other is that of: Matt Booi, 317 Adelaide St. W Suite 805, Toronto, Canada M5V 1P9 416-979-8458-234. mbooi@creamproductions.ca . His company is in the process of doing a four part series on the men and ships of AG and the MM who sailed on them up and down the East Coast and after talking with him, he wants to extend it to all theaters. Write your story in FULL. Now is the time to save our history and let it be shown to the world. I have furnished a lot of material so far and places to look. Write while you are able.

Again, I would like to personally say THANKS to all who have donated in the past. This is what keeps the bills paid. Our POINTER cover speaks for itself. It brings back many of those memories of when we were united to defeat our common enemy and there were some dark days for so many of our AG and MM who went many months and some years without word from home. Those of you who went through those days, I know, remembers them.

Would it not have been nice to have had a cell phone then!!

To you wives who may loose your Ol' Salt, please let me know so I can post in the computer to let others know. If you still want to remain on the mailing list, please advise. If I go, so goes the POINTER. Will you volunteer to take over? My phone line is open from 8 AM until 10 PM, 7 days a week. I have caller I.D.. I will return the call when I can.

—calloyd

The Mariner's Museum Library is open again for ship's pictures,  
Contact: Patti Hinson  
The Mariner's Museum Library,  
100 Museum Dr.,  
Newport News, Va. 23606  
757-591-7782  
PHinson@MarinersMuseum.org

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Charles,  
Going through my Navy Records, I came across several voyage reports for ships I was on. One that I am enclosing is that of the S.S. FLOYD W SPENCER while in the Pacific. We left the Philipines on December 31, 1944 and one day out of port, we were attacked by a lone Japanese Torpedo plane. Our ship brought up the tail end of a small convoy and we became the logical target for the enemy. When the initial attack occurred, (the dropping of the plane's bomb) I was on watch in the radio room. When the ship's General Alarm sounded, I was relieved of that duty by the Chief Radio Operator. I hurried to my communication post on the bridge where I was an eyewitness to the action of our gun crew. As indicated by our gunnery officer, Lt(jg) William S. Birdwell, Jr.'s report, the response from our Armed Guard Gun Crew was magnificent. Official report is enclosed. Sincerely,

Ralph J. Rodriguez RM3/c 4286  
Grannis Rd., Fairview Park, Oh. 44126  
\*\*\*\*\*

*Thanks Ralph. Yes. Many brave incidents*

*by the crews were never known except on reports. These reports can be found at the Archives in College Park, Md.. (cal)*

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear C.A.,  
My wife, Shirley and I have just returned from a trip that was the fulfillment of my life's dream. We cruised the Norwegian fjords northward all the way to the North Cape and beyond, to Kirkenes at the Russian border. There, I thought of the Armed Guard who were rescued and taken by German planes from their lifeboats to a Russian P.O.W. Camp at Kirkenes, the first American prisoners captured by the Germans. It was a mild September weather while we were there, sunny but with a chill wind blowing from the Barents Sea where the Arctic convoys sailed in WW II. My own war-time cruises were all in the Pacific, but as I looked out across water off North Cape, I couldn't help but to imagine the cold, fear and tension gripping the Armed Guard and Merchane crews who were wondering if they would ever see home again.

On the way north of the Arctic Circle, our cruise ship stopped in the Lofoten Islands at Svolvær, the scene of a British commando raid on a German communication and supply center on March 4, 1941. We visited a war museum, Norway's largest exhibit of uniforms and military artifacts of the war. While I was casually moving about the museum, my attention was suddenly drawn to two, very long lifeboat oars, over 15 foot long. They had drifted ashore in that area in 1945. Plainly visible and stenciled on one of them are the words: "S.S. FAIRFIELD CITY". They were from one of the doomed Allied ships destroyed by German subs and planes in PQ-17, July 1942.

The oars did not drift into the Islands until 3 years after the disaster. The museum director is fully informed



# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

about that convoy and the part the Armed Guard played in taking supplies to the U.S.S.R.. Four lifeboats got away from the FAIRFIELD CITY and I wonder if any survivors are still with us. Enclosed is a donation and I wish to say, "The Lord Willing, I will attend the Tampa, Fl. Reunion next May." Keep the POINTERS going C.A. and God Bless.

Harold and Shirley Skinner, 2003 S. Lincoln St., Seattle, Wa. 99203

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Chairman Lloyd

I had the opportunity to take the HONOR FLIGHT-CLEVELAND to see the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. on April 16, 2008 with my 2 daughters, Peggy Callahan and Nancy McGuire. Peggy was my Guardian and Nancy was Guardian to Marvin King, a person that I had not met before. We flew into Baltimore and then, took a 50 minute drive into Washington. They even provided a box lunch. Enclosed is one photo showing (LR) Myself, Nancy and the Honorable Bob Dole, our Kansas Senator and a WW II Veteran.

The other is of the group taken just before boarding the bus to Baltimore. We arrived back in Cleveland, tired after a long day but the people who came to the airport to greet us made it all worthwhile. It was a great experience.

Wilbur G. Kitson, 701 Harvard Ave., Elyria, Oh. 44035

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Mr. Lloyd,

10/18/08

My name is Demid Rabchevsky. I am a pupil of the 8th forin. I study at Gymnasium #9 and last year, I started to work as a guide in our school museum of the Arctic Convoys. I am very interested in the histoy of the Arctic



Group photo just before boarding the bus from Baltimore to Cleveland



Will Kitson, Nancy McGuire(Kitson's Daughter) & Kansas Senator/WWII Vet Bob Dole

Convoys and I plan to write a research work devoted to the Radio Service during WW II and describe the lives of some of the Radio Operators who sailed in the convoys. I am very interested in radio technology, too and am also a beginner as an amateur radio operator. I have already gotten some good information from the British Veterans of the Convoys who were radio operators. Now, I would like to get information

about American radio service. Would you be so kind as to send me names and addresses of those you know. I'll be very grateful to you. I'm looking forward to hearing from you. Yours Sincerely,

Demid Rabchevsky,  
Flat 81, 20 Gagarin Street,  
Murmansk, Russia 183039

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...



Lloyd,  
Our USN ARMED GUARD here in Iowa had a very nice Honor recently. We were asked to be and were the GRAND MARSHALL for the Veteran's Parade on Veteran's Day at the Iowa State Fair, the biggest and best State Fair in the USA. Col. King (Ret) who puts the parade together, called and asked if we would do it, and if so, get as many men together as you can and that he would furnish the transportation for us. We were able to get 10 men to take part and Col. King furnished a 2ton Iowa National Guard truck for us to ride in.

We rode down the Grand Concourse, lined with spectators on both sides of

the street. The truck then turned around and instead of winding through the fairgrounds, they took us back to the reviewing stand where chairs were set up for us to observe the balance of the 40 minute parade from the reviewing stand. It was a special day for all of us. We were then recognized on the Iowa Public TV, where they showed segments of the parade.

*(Top photo)*  
*Waiting for the parade to start photo is:*  
*Back row L-R- Lee Nylen, Rusty Corder.*

*Middle Row: Ia. National Guard Driver- Lyle Ferguson; Grant Petersen; Gerald Bancroft; Arnie Latare; Ralph Turner and John Rudsill.*

*Front Row: Cliff Scholten; Tracy Corder; Lyle Ferguson and Myrt Van Dyke, our Wave Member who served in the mail room at the Brooklyn Armed Guard Center.*

*(Bottom photo)*  
*In the back of the National Guard truck( was: Grant Petersen, Ivan Edwards, Cliff Scholten, Tracy Corder; Lyle Ferguson; Lee Nylen; John Rudsill and Arnie Latare.*

I had the distinction of having had both of his grandfathers in the USN Armed Guard during WW II.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

To: All Navy AG Members and Supporters- July 2008

I have had the privilege to be a part of your history by writing and compiling the following books published by the Glencannon Press: 1-800-711-8905

Patriots and Heroes: True Stories of the U.S. Merchant Marine in World War II, Vols. 1&2 Nightmare in Bari: The World War II Liberty Ship Poison Gas Disaster and Cover-up Death's Railway: A Merchant Mariner POW on the River Kwai No Surrender: True Stories of the U.S. Navy Armed Guard in World War II Action in the South Atlantic: The Sinking of the German Raider Stier by the Liberty Ship Stephen Hopkins Seizure and Rescue of the SS Mayaguez (Currently under review for publication by Glencannon)

Lester Ellison is a very good friend of mine. His WW II Tugboat experience aboard an Army Transport Tug was briefly told in my Patriots and Heroes series. Les, maritime career led to his desire to inform the American public about the role of the American Merchant Marine in WW II. In reviewing his life and work, I have decided to write a book concerning the American Merchant Marine and the USNAG and their involvement with





# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

tugboats in WW II. Therefore, I am looking for stories from mariners and NAGs who served aboard any WW II related tugboats. These stories may involve all the theaters, training, first/last voyage, D-day, humor, battle, death, galley, life at sea and in port, etc. I look forward to compiling and writing this volume on our WW II tugboats. Thank you. Sincerely,

Gerald Reminick 83 Bayberry Dr,  
Huntington, NY 11743 (H) 631-421-3242 (O) 631-851-6557 [reminig@suny-suffolk.edu](mailto:reminig@suny-suffolk.edu)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Charles Lloyd,  
Tom and I were E-Mail buddies for at least 10 years. He encouraged me during the time I was just recovering from my husband's death with his humorous E-Mails, he encouraged me, corrected me, and was truly my mentor while I was researching and writing my book about the Armed Guard and the Merchant Marine ships they served upon. He encouraged me when I became a member of the American Warrior Support Group sending care packages to our troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, presently up to 51, including the 13 to whom we are sending over the past 4+ years. We never met; he called me once and that was the first time I heard his gentlemanly, southern accent. Unfortunately, that weekend I was out of town. Prior to his passing, he sent E-Mail addresses of his "circle of friends" all across the world and some of us to this day, are E-Mailing each other, knowing that we will probably never meet either. I wrote one lady that she was "God sent" and she promptly corrected me that she was "Tom sent". As long as I live, I shall miss him ... not only his E-Mails with his sense of humor ... but with corrections and encouragement to continue writing World War II true stories. He was truly a wonderful person, dear to many. Thank you for putting Tom's picture

on the front of The Pointer. GOD BLESS AMERICA. GOD BLESS US ONE AND ALL.

Bonnie J. Bryan American Legion  
Paradise Post 259 Paradise, CA

## "Bonnie's Tribute to Tom"

WHEN THEY SPEAK OF ME ..  
AND THEY SHALL .. TELL  
THEM HOW I EMBRACED LIFE  
TO ITS FULLEST, LIVING ITS  
TURBULENCE AND SERENITY  
THROUGH LOVING AND  
SHARING WITH MY LOVED  
ONES. WHEN THEY SPEAK OF  
ME ... AND THEY SHALL ...  
REMINDE THEM THAT I SAID  
"HOLD ON. IT'S GOING TO BE A  
BUMPY AND YET EXHILARATING  
RIDE ... MY LIFE, YOU  
KNOW. I DID IT MY WAY."... AND  
WHEN THEY SPEAK OF ME ...  
AND THEY SHALL ... LET  
THEM KNOW THAT I ACCEPTED  
ME, UNDERSTOOD ME  
AND OFTEN TIMES HAD TO  
FORGIVE ME, AS SO MANY  
OTHERS DID. WHEN THEY  
SPEAK OF ME ... AND THEY  
SHALL ... KNOW THAT I LOVED  
MY FAMILY, KNOW THAT I  
GAVE THANKS FOR MY CHILDREN,  
AND LET IT BE KNOWN THAT  
I WAS TRULY GRATEFUL AND  
BLESSED FOR MY FRIENDS  
WHO NEVER LEFT MY SIDE.  
AND WHEN THEY SPEAK OF  
ME ... AND THEY SHALL ...  
KNOW THAT I WAS AWARE OF  
THE DARKNESS. HOWEVER,  
I WAS SYMBOLIC OF THE  
PHOENIX THAT ROSE FROM ITS  
ASHES, SOARING TO NEW AND  
GREATER HEIGHTS. IT WAS  
UPON MY LAST JOURNEY THAT  
HE DID CRADLE ME IN HIS  
ARMS, BLESSING ME WITH  
HIS LOVE AND FORGIVENESS,  
"TAKING ME HOME". WHEN  
THEY SPEAK OF ME ... AND  
THEY SHALL ... TELL THEM  
THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD ...  
TELL THEM I

SHALL NOT WANT. TELL  
THEM ... I FEAR NO EVIL ...  
TELL THEM I AM AT PEACE.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Charles, April 30, 2008  
Thank you very much for the POINTERS. I thought you may find the enclosed of interest to your crew. The photo is of the gun crew on the S.S. ASCANIUS and was taken after SURFACE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SUB U-181. The gun crew were six D.E.M.S. Gunners and the rest were Merchant Seamen who passed us the ammunition. I am standing on right. Sadly, the tall lad, "Jack", with his hand on my shoulder was lost at sea a few weeks later when he was transferred to a Norwegian tanker at Durban and it was sunk shortly after leaving port. The S.S. ASCANIUS was in Port Elizabeth for two weeks for repairs. Everyday we saw survivors brought ashore from ships that had been sunk nearby.

When the engine was repaired, we were ordered to sail without escort to Cape Town, We guessed what would happen – and it did. We were barely out of sight of land when a U-Boat surfaced ahead of us. Our captain ordered "REVERSE COURSE" and ordered full speed. The sub opened fire and all its shots landed ahead of us. The 2nd mate came down from the bridge and took charge of the gun crew. He gave us a range and our first shot fell about 1000 yards short. The blast from this shot burst both my eardrums, blew the shells out of the ready box racks into the well deck and our accommodation which was just astern of the gun was blown back two feet. Its solid entrance door was blown off its hinges.

The 2nd mate then gave orders to fire at full range and the shell fell just ahead of the U-Boat which had closed the gap between us by a large amount. The sub started to zig zag and every

# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

shell we fired missed it by only a few feet. At that distance, we couldn't see if it had minor damage or if any of its crew were hurt. We didn't have a chance to find out because it lost no time in submerging. Maybe it decided to attack us on the surface because it had run out of torpedoes. Our captain resumed his course for Cape Town which we reached without further trouble. After the war, I learned that the sub was the U-181. We did hold them off, didn't we.

Charles, I hope you find the enclosed diary snippets interesting. I made the diary as shown while I was a gunner on the S.S. HIGHLAND MONARCH. As you can see, a lot of poor souls did not complete the journey. I suppose I must have seen at least fifty burials at sea because the ships I was on at the time were in convoy did not stop for any of the burials so they did not make much of an impression on me and right now, I can not recall any of them except the first one I saw. This was on the S.S. ASCANIUS in 1942 when we were in the Gulf of Aden sailing without escort. Jap subs had sunk a lot of shipping in the area. A soldier died at 12 noon and at 2 pm, the bosun and Chippy had him sewn up in a canvas. In spite of the danger, Captain Wilson brought the ship to a standstill and the only sound was the lapping against the side of the ship. In the port quarter of the well deck, one end of a board was placed on the top guard rail and the other to a trestle. Four soldiers placed their comrade on the board. He was then completely Covered with the Union Jack. The first mate read the burial service, then gave the order to lift the board. The corpse shot out from under the flag. In midair, it turned upright and came down hitting the sea with a loud splash.

The engines sprang into life and we were on our way. Strange, isn't it. I can't recall any of the other burials, but to me, this one could have happened yesterday. I can



S.S. HIGHLAND MONARCH CREW

still hear the corpse sliding down the board, then see it stand upright and hear it hit the water. Best to you and Hilda. God Bless and take care

Richard Clarabut, 321 North Ave.,  
SOUTHEND ON SEA, Essex, SS2  
4EH, England

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Mr. Lloyd, 8/11/08  
I want to take a few moments to drop a line to let you know the work you are doing is appreciated. The articles are first rate and it helps provide information on the Armed Guard in World War II. My father was a member of the Armed Guard during WW II. He did not talk much of his service in the U.S. Navy in the Pacific. After his death in 1993 did I contact you and the organization with what information I had and it has proven to be very helpful in filling in the gaps in my family knowledge of his military service. I am proud of his service and proud to be an "Honorary Member" of your organization. Thanks to each and every one of you for your service. I look forward to the next edition of "THE POINTER." I realize the cost, time and effort involved to print the POINTER so I hope you will accept my

check. I send it in memory of my father. I will close for now with best wishes.

Tom Franz, 2821 East Jackson St.,  
Ashland, Ky. 41102

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Friends in the U.S.A.-  
THE POINTER 8/18/08

Thank you for the Jan/Apr. 2008 POINTER Edition. In short note, you asked for the boy's family name and address of the boy who died and was buried at sea on an American ship north of Iceland in Convoy RA 64 of February, 1945. The boy's name was Oustein Hagerupsen. The family consisted of 5 children when they left Northern Norway in February 1945. When they arrived in Glasgow, Scotland, they had just 4 but being a pregnant mother, she delivered another baby in Scotland that spring. When the war was over, the family returned to Norway and during the next years, she gave birth to 4 more and became a large family.

Today, the parents are deceased but 7 of their children still live in Norway. One of them is Jacob Hagerupsen, Binneveien 13F, 3960 Stathelle, Norway.



# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

Jacob was 4 years old then so he is 67 now. He is not too good with the English language so he prefers that all of the correspondence goes through me. It would be great if any of your members were aboard the American ship at the time and we could find out a little of the circumstances how little Oustein died and I could tell the family the name of the ship and the position of Oustein's grave. I suppose that I have answered your question. May you have a nice summer and fall in the good old U.S.A.

A monument to THE NORWEGIAN WAR SAILOR was unveiled at Bygdoynes, Norway close to Oslo in 1980. The artist was Joseph Grimesland. On the pedestal is a metal plate with the following text:

DURING WORLD WAR 2, 1939-1945, MORE THAN A THOUSAND NORWEGIAN MERCHANT AND NAVY SHIPS PARTICIPATED. THEY CARRIED OUT COUNTLESS MILITARY TASKS AND CARRIED 145 MILLION TONS CARGO OF INVALUABLE IMPORTANCE FOR THE ALLIED VICTORY. THE MERCHANT SHIPS WERE ARMED AND MORE THAN HALF OF THEM WERE LOST. DANGER AND DRUDGERY MARKED MOST OF THE 35,000 WAR SAILORS. 4500 OF THEM WERE LOST/KILLED DURING THE LIBERATION OF NORWAY. THE COURAGE AND LOYALTY OF OUR WAR SAILORS WILL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED WITH DEEP RESPECT AND GRATITUDE.

Sent by Baard Haugland, Gamleveien 88B/10, 1476 Rasta, Norway.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Baard, I hope someone can come forward in our Armed Guard Crew or that of the Merchant Seamen who was aboard the ship at the time so as to give insight to the Hagerupsen family before we all join little Oustein. (cal)*



Joe Colgan, Admiral Reilly, Joe Wiczorek and John Confair. See Letter page 25.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Charlie,  
The Armed Guard of the DELAWARE VALLEY CHAPTER in Levittown Pa. of which I am the Chairman have decided along with Jack Remeter, our Sec. and Jack Harman, our Treas., that we three and those remaining will continue to have our meeting to the last one one of us are standing. Our numbers are dwindling but our spirit is still there. You have done a wonderful service to the Armed Guard by keeping us together. Many have made their last voyage and some still come to the meetings with canes, walkers and their wives who drive them to the meetings.

Peter J. Cugasi, Sr. 55 Indian Red Rd., Levittown, Pa., 19057 215-547-2450

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hi Lloyd,  
Yes. I pulled up the AG website, [www.armed-guard.com](http://www.armed-guard.com) and clicked on

THE POINTER and brought up the May/Sept 2008 POINTER. I look forward to get the actual POINTER to keep. Don Conley from Pueblo, Co. and I get together here in Fremont. It was the first time since we left the S.S. CALEB STRONG in 1943 after a 9 months "CRUISE". They were here attending a square dance festival. Take care and in touch.

Virgil J. Clark 1890 North D St., Fremont, Ne. 68025 402-721-1046 CLARKIMI@MSN.COM

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Excerpts from Theodore Shorr's ship EXTRA DUTY: Incidents out of routine: see article

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

C.A.,  
I thought I would tell you of the progress I have made on the Liberty Ship, S.S. ROBERT MONTGOMERY, sunk in the Thames River. Last night, I had the biggest surprise

# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

of my life. I received a phone call from Mr. Leonard Nadel who read my story in the May/Sept 2009 POINTER saying he was on the ship at the time and he was the actual one that I had quoted at the end of my writing as saying that "if they got hit by a torpedo, they would not need a life jacket but a parachute." He told me he had written an article in the December 2006 POINTER and I went ONLINE and read it. I am so grateful to you and as you can imagine, I still can't believe it. How wonderful it is now I can put all the pieces together and to actually be able to speak to a man who was on the ship that was sitting in my home town. I will write you more when I know all the "REST OF THE STORY". A BIG THANK YOU from someone who has never written anything before.

Beryl and Ed Lingenfield 55410 Delta Rd., Blue River, Or. 97413 541-822-3760 beryllingenfield@hotmail.com

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Charles, 9/7/08 - LETTER 1  
You can't believe what it means to me to hear from you about the flood we went through!

We were forced to leave our home on June 11, 2008. We were out for over 2 months but got back home three weeks ago. Fortunately, we had a friend that we stayed with during that time and because of a bunch of my friends, we were able to get it cleaned up and refurbished. FEMA helped some but not enough. There no place like home!!

Charlie, maybe you can help me. I lost a bunch of important papers including my DD-214 and how I can get another one? I know it goes through the Coast Guard but I don't know how to get in touch with them. I hope you can help me, I'd sure appreciate it.

You gave me four names of Armed Guard in our area on the back of your

letter and their addresses. I don't think they were flooded but I will call them and check them out and let you know when time available. Thanks for the letter and the POINTERS all these years. I know we will come through this flood as we did the North Atlantic in WW II.

\*\*\*\*\*

LETTER 2

Dear Chuck,  
You can't believe what it meant to me to get your letter of interest in me about being flooded here in Cedar Rapids, Ia. This year. It wasn't quite as much water I saw in WW II but this time it effected my home and my life. Your Armed Guard Bumper Sticker off my old Cadillac so thanks for the new one! We are the only ones in a 4 block area to be back in our home. Also, thanks for the 3 AG names you sent me that lived here! I did talk to Louvas. He is 92 years old who was on The S.S. MONTANA, torpedoed 6/1/43 near the Persian Gulf. He can't drive so I offer to pick him up to have a drink one day. I am trying to get some of the old POINTERS I have saved. They go way back and didn't get flooded. Excuse my writing as it was 13 degree out this morning. I can't make any reunions so I hope you can keep up the good work you've been doing. I really appreciate it. Have fun "Old Salt" from an "Old Salt".

Roger E. Karrick, 717-8th Ave. SW,  
Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404 319-364-0768

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hi C.A.,  
I'll use my good stationary today to let you know that receiving my POINTER always does something to my inner-works. Since I'm Merchant Marine, I always felt left out of the veteran's thing - even though I had a Reserve Navy Commission for about 15 years. Being part of the POINTER group and after a lot of lobbying, I picked up an Army Discharge and one from the Coast Guard and I feel sort of like part of your crew.

My first ship to sea as a 3rd Mate was on an old, old freighter-Army Transport with a skipper from "days of sail." I am sure he wondered if I could cut it at age of 19 going on 20 and new at that! The gun tubs were port and starboard next to the old wood open bridge.

What a Godsend those Armed Guard were for me---good lookouters, company and same age companions. I really wish I could see some of them again. One time in the Solomon Islands area, the Armed Guard in the starboard tub, alerted me to shallow water he noticed. The salty skipper hadn't seen it and so the kids put him on task. I wish I knew the boys name.

I loved these boys for their company and they really got a charge out of my equator crossing initiation. They made the most of it in a kind, considerate, fun loving way-toxic battleship gray paint and all. I had to find Davey Jones!! What a bunch, and I am so grateful that we are together now. Please stay on the job and keep bringing us together.

Roger Putnam, (MM) PO Box 2076  
Tulare, Ca. 93275 559-688-3656

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Lloyd,  
Do enjoy the POINTER but learned to not read some of the stories before bedtime. Kaye, a girl I met in Philadelphia when we volunteered and were together all of our navy days and had a few laughs from one of the POINTERS in the past showing the Waves getting their hair done in the shop and also playing basketball on the main deck at the Armed Guard Center in Brooklyn. We were night shift and didn't know of anything like that. We were there until the end and all we knew was we were there to work-1700 - 0200 hrs.. My friend still lives in Maryland. I do enjoy the POINTER. Thank you.

Helen Muntz Behler 102 Pine Ct., York,  
Pa. 17408 717-764-1500

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

Dear C.A.,  
Enclosed is my check to help the cause. I realize that there are not many of us left to participate in our group. But, We must face the facts of life. As the song goes, "Old Pappy Time is pickin' my pocket and I can't make him stop it."

I am a committee of one, having lost my dear wife about three years ago. But, I am slowly coming to terms with this situation and am trying to carry on. It isn't easy and most of it is uphill but I'm doing the best I can. Life really doesn't offer any guarantees and life is like hash --- "It's what you make of it." I've had my day in the sun and now I must deal with the twi-lite years.

It appears that the annual reunions are nearing an end. I am so glad that my wife and I were able to attend several of these while she was still here. She really enjoyed going to different places and meeting all the good people who were there. C. A., I send my best wishes to you and Hilda for a continued good health and much happiness in the days that lie ahead. Smooth sailing to all.

James L. Milton, 304 E. 2ND St.,  
Huntington, In. 47542

\*\*\*\*\*

*Thanks, Milton for your wonderful letter. Yes. We, too, have met many wonderful people over the years and I am thankful all our paths have crossed. (cal)*

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hi Charlie,  
I want to thank you for printing my story on Page 5 and 6 of the May/Sept POINTER. I would appreciate it if you would put in the next POINTER: Story was by: Eugene Beauchemin, 10 Aerial St., Lexington, Ma. 02421 Tel- 781-861-1261. He wrote it while on board the S.S. LIL- LIAN NORDICA, 12/17/44-4/31/45.



Photo enclosed shipmates - (LR) Kinder, Renkin and "Pop" Lane. I know you must have lost my name and address. Eugene.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Didn't exactly loose it--just failed to catch it not there. (cal)*

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Fellow Business Owners  
As a Business owner who employs 300 people making parts for GM automobiles. I have resigned myself to the fact that foreign automobiles are taking over about 60 per cent of sales, even though they are not as safe as American built cars, so I will have to lay off 40 percent of our work force. To compensate for this, I figure that we were one family here and didn't know how to choose who will have to go. So, this is what I did. I strolled thru the parking lot and got the license plate numbers from all of the foreign car owners and I have decided these folks will be the first to be laid off. If they foreclose on their homes and they can not pay their bills, I will not lay awake at night trying to decide whether to go bankrupt or keep my business open for my dedicated workers. I can't think of any another fair way to approach this problem. If you have a better idea, let me know. I am sending this letter to all Business owners that I know.

Sincerely,  
Their heart broken CEO boss.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The word "CHIT", familiar to all HANDS, is derived from the Hindu work, "CHITTE," Meaning a letter, note, voucher, or receipt. The old East India Company passed the term along to the British Army and Navy and it was probaly obsorbed by the United States Navy in Asiatic stations many years ago.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dear Charles,  
We send our big hug to you and all your shipmates in the USA on occasion of Veteran's Day. Let us rejoin your friends and families in common pray for those who passed away in battles against . We rise also a toast to wish you all Health and Happiness ahead. Hope that in the near future you can get two CD with documentaries made in cooperation with our organization. One of them was recorded over TV set, so it's quality isn't very good, but you can see some of us, including some veterans you never meet again.  
Peace and God's blessing to you ,  
Igor Kozyr on behalf of all members Arctic Allied Convoys Club, St Petersburg, Russia PS. May be it's not a case for sad thoughts, but I guess that these presentation remind what depends of us and our unity...

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ALL OLD SALTS! Now hear this: US Navy Armed Guard: You have earned an award from the USA. This award is granted to you by Congress (House and Senate) and signed by the President. It is not a Presidential Award, but it has just as much power since it is a Congressional Award. It is issued to you under Section 534 of Public Law No.105-261. To receive your award certificate, you must contact your Congressman, and he or she can get it for you. Be sure to have your Congressman put "Section 534 of Public Law No.105-261" on the bottom of your certificate. Lyle N. Kell, Chaplain 2821-180th St NE Marysville, Wa. 98271 360-652-0392 LNK@waveable.com Any Questions-Contact Kell

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# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

## U.S. NAVAL AIR STATION NORFOLK, VIRGINIA DISASTER

Undoubtedly, the loudest noise heard and one of the most devastating Navy accidents in Hampton Roads during World War II occurred at 11 AM Sept. 17, 1943. A NAS ordnance department truck was pulling four trailers loaded with depth charges on the taxiway between NAS and the NOB piers. Each trailer was designed to carry four aerial depth charges. To save time, two additional charges were loaded on top of each trailer. Compounding the problem, the charges on top were not properly chained down. One of the charges slipped loose and became wedged between the trailer and the ground. The friction of being dragged against the road caused the charge to begin smoking.

and notified the driver who immediately stopped the truck and ran to a nearby fire station. Assistant Fire Chief Gurney E. Edwards hurried to the scene and attempted to cool down the charges with a fire extinguisher. As soon as he started his attempt, the first depth charge exploded, killing him instantly. For several minutes, charges continued to explode. The blasts shattered windows up to seven miles away (10 km) and were heard in Suffolk, 20 miles (30 km) distant.

In the center of the explosion was a group of old enlisted men's barracks opposite the dispensary, the vicinity of the current location of V-88. A total of 18 buildings were destroyed by the blast. They were so badly damaged that they had to be razed. Thirty-three aircraft were also destroyed with a monetary damage of \$1.8 million.

According to official histories, the shock of the explosion found people scaling

fences that had been considered man-proof and impossible to climb. Other persons found themselves some time later with shoes in hand, waiting for street cars, with no memory of the event. The casualties amounted to 426, including 40 dead. Among them was Seaman 2nd Class Elizabeth Korensky, the only woman killed and the first WAVE to die in the line of duty in the war.

NAS Norfolk responded to the tragedy by building six new brick barracks to house the troops and added industrial space by building R-80, the largest airplane hangar in the world. Winning the war was a full-time effort.

*Researched by Charles A. Lloyd Chairman  
USN Armed Guard WW II Veterans  
\*\*SEE CENTER SPREAD\*\**

An alert Marine sentry spotted the smoke

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## WWII Armed Guard vets remain strong in spirit Members reminisce at reunion

BY JOE POTENTE jpotente@kenoshanews.com

A group of World War II-era Navy Armed Guard veterans from Wisconsin and Illinois met again this year in Kenosha on Thursday, down a few men but not lacking in spirit.

The organization convened for a wide-ranging reunion complete with official business, a brief ceremony at Navy Park and plenty of war stories.

"It's very important," said Bob Lizon, of Madison. "The group is getting so small; the World War II crowd is really shrinking."

But the group that gathered at the Best Western Harborside Inn was a hearty bunch.

Arden Sonnenberg, of Kenosha, got a few chuckles when he told his fellow sailors he had recently given up motorcycles — he'd only been riding them for 70 years.

The Armed Guard is a unique outfit that was charged with protecting merchant ships that delivered a wide assortment of goods to destinations across the globe during World War II.

During an afternoon gab session over snacks at the Best Western, Joe Esposito, of

Glen Ellyn, Ill., recalled picking up a load of 1,500 monkeys in Africa, to be delivered to the United States for medical research use.

"By the time we got to New York, there were only 900," Esposito said. "Six-hundred died."

Esposito, 84, said he was working at a New York shipyard, right out of high school, when he first saw an aircraft carrier up close and was inspired to join the Navy.

He was assigned to the Armed Guard, an unknown entity to most young sailors. The only time he came across an aircraft carrier thereafter was when he'd see one from his merchant ship.

"I don't know what it was," said Chicago resident Ed Domina, of the Armed Guard. "I really had no idea."

Armed Guard duty, said John Arnett of Kenosha, mainly involved cleaning guns, standing watch, eating and trying to sleep.

"We played pinocle, too," joked Domina.

However easy the duty may have seemed, it generated lifelong memories for the men at Wednesday's reunion.

"We all did the same thing, theoretically," Arnett said. "Not a damn one of us knew what an Armed Guard was until we got on the ship, and we've all got a story."

While earlier reunions attracted hundreds of attendees, Thursday's event drew about 40 people. Esposito, newly elected as the organization's skipper, noted a recent report stating that about 1,200 World War II veterans die every day.

Jay Wildfong of Sturtevant, organizer of the reunion, said he believes it is important to hold such observations, as the Greatest Generation nears its end. He said there are no plans to cancel the group's annual reunions anytime soon.

"We're going to try to keep this going as long as there's two of us standing," he said.



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY KEVIN POIRIER  
World War II Navy Armed Guard veterans take part in a memorial service at Navy Park in Kenosha Thursday. The dwindling group of veterans from Wisconsin and Illinois gathered for its annual reunion at the Best Western Harborside Inn.



# REUNIONS

**PLEASE NOTICE!! MANY ADDRESSES, TEL.#, E-MAILS, Etc.  
may change anytime so it's up to you to find out!**  
**REGIONAL---MINI-REUNIONS ---GET-TOGETHERS-- MEMORIALS, ETC**  
**SUPPORT THESE LOCAL MEETINGS**  
**NOTICE: ANY CHANGES or additional will be in the next POINTER IF NOTIFIED.**  
**If still holding meeting,**  
**Write down , Or E-mail WHERE-WHEN-HOSTS as I deleted my list in error.**  
**Include address-Tel-E-Mail if available**

The Merchant Marine will hold their 23rd Annual Reunion at the Doubletree Hotel, Tampa Fl. May 14-18, 2009. Contact: Morris Harvey 8055 Dacca Terr., Dunellon, Fl. 34433 352-564-0267 morrisharvey27@yahoo.com

*They have invited all Armed Guard to attend as they have program set up for both crews. Their Convention Fees does not apply to the AG. AG, fill out forms or just send in the things you care to attend and send to them. I hope to attend. (cal)*

The Lansing, Mi. Armed Guard 2009 MEETINGS: Mar. 18 and June 17 at the OLD COUNTRY BUFFET, Okemos and again on Sept 16 with a place to be announced later. Contact Carl Mescher 508 Wayland, East Lansing, Mi.. Their meeting at the Flegel Farm in Sept 2008 was a great success with Bob Applegate, a survivor of the S.S. JEAN NICOLE sinking and he told them of being taken prisoner by the Japanese.

The TEXAS USN ARMED GUARD ANNUAL Reunion will be held again in Fredericksburg, Tx. March 5-7, 2009 at the SUNDAY HOUSE 501 E. Main St. 1-800-274-3762. Host-John Shirley, 4128 N. Summerset Loop, Round Rock, Tx. 78681 512-671-3464.

DESA (Destroyer Escort Assoc.) will hold their 2009 Convention at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Old Town, Alexandria, Va. @ \$99 Sept. 10 -14, 2009. Contact: Dori Glaser, P.O. Box 3448, Deland, Fl. 32721 386-738-6900 with a Memorial Service at the Navy Memorial on Pennsylvania Ave..

Contact Tom Kidd tlk3636@juno.com if you can't get Dori.

Albany, NY Area Armed Guard and Merchant Marine meet the 4th Thursday of Month at the SCHUYLER INN, 545 Broadway, Menands, NY at 11:30 AM. Hosts are Art and Marion Fazzone, 3936 Albany St., Schenectady, N.Y. 12304-4371. 518-374-5377 Mamoong3@aol.com and Peter Falasco, 49 Monroe Ave. Latham, NY 1-518-785-7890.

THE BUCKLEY , WA. Contact: Hank and Sandy Harrison 27014 Lower Burnett Rd., E. Buckley, 98321 360-897-9381. Bng75@aol.com They still meet 2nd Wed. of each mo. at 12 noon at ELMER'S 7427 Hosmer, Tacoma, Wa. 98408-1220 253-473-0855.

LST CREW CONTACT: Mike and Linda Gunjak, 6641 Spring Beauty Ct. Curtice, Oh. 43412 1-800-228-5870 E-Mail: uslst@uslst.org Web Site. www.uslst.org

Topeka, Ks. Area ARMED GUARD AND MERCHANT MARINE meet on the "FIRST THURSDAY" of EACH MONTH at 8:30 A.M. at the AMERICAN GRILL on Gage St. with DON and Henrietta Gleason, 2405 NW CROSS ST, Topeka, Ks. 66606-2401 785-234-6087 as Hosts Hmgleason@aol.com

Contact the following Historical Ships for sailing dates.

S.S.JEREMIAH O'BRIEN, PIER 23, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94111 415-544-0100. www.ssjeremiaho-brien.org

S.S. JOHN W. Brown Box 25846 Highland Station Baltimore, Md. 21224 410-558-0646 john.w.brown@usa.net

S.S.LANE VICTORY BERTH 94, P O BOX 629 SAN PEDRO, CA. 90733-0629 Tel. 310-519-9545 www.lanevictory.org. They support the ship with summer cruises off Catalina Island in memory of Merchant Marine and Naval Armed Guard lost at sea during time at war.

S.S.AMERICAN VICTORY 705 Channelside Dr., Tampa, Fl. 33609 813-228-8769 (MM sailing date 5/16/09-AG welcomed)

Armed Guard Wm.L Mcgee has his long awaited Vol. 3 "AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC In WW II" ready. Visit www.BMCPublications.com ffhttp://www.BMCPublications.com ff and click on PACIFIC EXPRESS. To order THE AMPHIANS ARE COMING!, Vol.1 and THE SOLOMONS CAMPAIGNS, 1942-1943, Vol 2, vist the Order Room and click on Amazon.com, or print out and return the Order Form to BMC for signed and inscribed copies. BMC Publications, 98 Main St., #337, Tiburon, Ca. 94920 BMCpublications@aol.com tel-415-435-1883

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# IN MEMORY OF THE LATE TOM BOWERMAN

**From: "Thomas Bowerman" To: "Charles Lloyd"**

Sent: Sunday, February 27, 2005 7:14 pm • Subject: Re: Me---Tom Bowerman

I graduated from the Tuscaloosa Alabama High School in 1940 and joined the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and was sent to Camp Icicle in the Cascade Mountains of the state of Washington. While in the CCC I was a cook, a plumber, a carpenter, an electrician, ran the camp laundry, supply sergeant, tool room custodian, truck driver, ditch digger, cut down trees, a road builder, fought forest fires, planted trees, and a variety of other jobs at various times. I was in the CCC two years and joined the Navy right after Pearl Harbor, after being turned down by the Marine Corps due to having flat feet.

I received three weeks of boot training +at San Diego Naval Training Station, three weeks of gunnery training on the four inch fifty at San Diego Destroyer Base and one week walking the halls of Treasure Island Armed Guard Center and was put aboard his first ship, the SS Charles M Hall, a Liberty Ship, exactly seven weeks after leaving the recruiting office.

The Charles M Hall went from island to island in the Pacific, and mail never caught up with the ship. Tom and all the other gunners were Apprentice Seamen, there was a Signalmen Third Class, Radioman Third Class, a Seaman 2/c Radio Striker, A Boatswains Mate Second Class and a Lieutenant JG gunnery officer. I took and passed tests for Gunners Mate 3/C and Gunners Mate2/C but remained an Apprentice Seaman. Our ship went through the Panama Canal and to Brooklyn, where we were detached and sent to the Brooklyn Armed Guard Center. My records were at Treasure Island and I was then assigned to a tanker, the SS Esso Nashville, again as an Apprentice Seaman.

After one voyage on the Nashville, nine of us were removed and transported to the Brooklyn Armed Guard Center, to be charged with mutiny. The ship left again before the gunnery officer could file charges and we were required to sign in once an hour all day and given liberty at night. I finally got an appointment with Commander William Coakley and we talked about the charges; refusal to wash the Ensign's underwear and socks, and Commander Coakley dropped all charges and ordered that we each be assigned to different ships.

I was assigned to the SS Charles Sumner, a Liberty Ship, and found that my records had arrived from Treasure Island and I had been promoted from Apprentice Seaman to Gunners Mate 2nd Class, all in one day.

My next ship was the SS Lewis Luckenbach and we made several voyages. One of the gunners went on port director leave of four days and learned that his wife had a Navy boyfriend and came back to the ship. I put him on port watch and he shot himself with the 38 caliber pistol I gave him. He had been drinking and I was removed for an investigation of possible dereliction of duty on my part. Witnesses testified they had talked to him and could not tell he had been drinking and I was exonerated. Shortly after that the Lewis Luckenbach was converted to a hospital ship.

My fifth and final ship was another tanker, the SS Esso Providence. I was on it until the war ended in Europe and was then sent to New Orleans, where I repaired the guns on fleet ships that could not be repaired at sea. I was then sent to Galveston, Texas, where I was assigned to removing guns and Navy equipment from merchant ships. I volunteered to stay on that job until it was completed and was finally sent to Memphis, Tennessee for discharge. I had been away from home, with no leave for six years. I had worked mostly with Yankees for the last four years and when I got home I could not understand a word my Mother said, in her Southern drawl.

I then went in the Army Air Corps with the promise of equivalent rating, but President Truman did not make it retroactive and I joined one week end too soon and was a Private First Class. I stayed awhile and got out based on false recruitment promises. Later I joined the Air Force and got out again. I was discharged as a Private First Class, a rating I earned, without influence.

I have built and maintained the Navy Armed Guard and Merchant Marine web site for the past 13 plus years. It is: <http://www.armed-guard.com>

Email me anytime you want a list of your shipmates, with their names, addresses and phone numbers. It takes some of the work off the Chairman, who works for you and me many, many hours every day. He is a good man and there are not many of us left.

Tom Bowerman (Tom Deceased - 12/07)  
Navy Armed Guard 1942-1946, Gunners Mate Second Class

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*I had planned to put this in the May/Sept 2008 POINTER and I just overlooked it. Tom's remark about me will stay with me. He was my helper and friend. (calloyd)*



# THE FORGOTTEN BATTLE OF WWII

## The Forgotten Battle of the Second World War

On the 31st August 1941 the first of many Arctic Convoys, having the code name "Dervish", arrived in Archangelsk. To protect these Arctic Convoys a great 4 year battle between the Navies of the Allied countries and the German armed forces began.

More than 500 warships of Allied countries acted as escorts giving protection to these Arctic Convoys, but most of them were Royal Navy. There were 435 ships of the British Home Fleet, comprising 2 battle ships (King George V and Duke of York), more than 15 cruisers (Belfast, Norfolk, Sheffield, Trinidad, Edinburgh etc.), 2 escort carriers (Victories, Windex Avenger), more than 100 destroyers, frigates, corvettes, minesweepers and submarines. In the Eastern part of the Barents Sea the warships and air-crafts of the Soviet Northern Fleet also assisted in protection of the Arctic Convoys. The delivering cargos by the Arctic Convoys were part of the global system of delivery to the Soviet Union of ammunition, strategic equipment, materials and foodstuffs, being provided under the American Lend-Lease program.

There were three routes of delivery these cargos to Russia: The first. Through Pacific Ocean to the Soviet Far East. The second. Through the Persian Gulf – Iran to the Soviet Azerbaijan. And the third route of delivery was from ports in Scotland and Iceland to Murmansk and Archangelsk. The last one was the shortest and the most dangerous option. In total, through all routes of delivery to the Soviet Union was sent strategic cargos worth over \$ 11.3 billion or more than \$ 180 billion in today's ones. Such deliveries had a vital importance for the Soviet Union's

war effort and it was not surprising that the Heads of the Great Powers, Joseph Stalin, Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt repeatedly corresponded on this important subject and discussed it on the 'Tegeran' and Yalta' conference.

It is need to mention that after the War and up to now, Russian historians evaluate Lend-Lease deliveries at 4% of the Soviet war-time military production. But now, when the true figures are published in Russia, we can say that this estimation should actually be multiplied by 5 or 6. I have no time to tell you about all numerous Lend-Lease deliveries.

But let us consider for example the problem of transport – the artery of the war machine.

During 4 years of war, the Soviet Union received: more than 17 thousand (17,484) various air-crafts - fighters (Hurricane, Spitfire, Air Cobra), bombers (Boston, Hamoden), flyong boats (Catalina) and others. It is consisted to be about 20% of the Soviet wartime production; 2.7 million tons of high octane petrol - more than 50% of Soviet production; more than 400 thousand (410,000) lorries, trucks (Studebaker, Dodge) & jeeps - more than 1.5 times (150%) of Russia's manufacture; 2 thousand locomotives and 11 thousand goods-vans, flat wagons and tank wagons. All these products were not produced in Russia at war time. It is to add that each second rail was delivered from the USA. The Soviet Navy received about 530 various warships, including 1 battleship (Royal Sovereign), 1 cruiser (Milwaukee), 10 destroyers, 4 submarines (B1-B4), about 100 minesweepers and more than 400 (414) sloops, torpedo-boats, anti-sub boats and others.

There were received, also, 96 cargo merchant ships (Liberty type), tugs, 3 ice-breakers and 28 tankers. By the end of war, the number of warships of the Northern Fleet has grown by 3 times compared with the pre-war quantity. I did not mention of delivering foodstuffs worth of \$ 1.3 billion (or \$20 billion in today's prices), which saved Russia from hunger. 15 million pairs of boots and many, many others. And I need to say, that nobody knows, how would have turned the course of the Great Patriotic War without this help of our allies.

About 30 % of all Lend-Lease cargoes were delivered to Russia by Arctic Convoys. Convoy is a great formation of ships, consisting of a caravan of merchant ships (10 to 40 ships) and clear system of its defense: close or direct protection, consisting of several dozens of destroyers, minesweepers and trawlers. From 1942, in this defending group was included one escort aircraft carrier having antisubmarine air-crafts, and 1-2 submarines. The main task of the group was the protection of the ship's caravan against enemy air-crafts and submarines; near mobile defending group, cruising at 20-40 miles ahead of the caravan, comprising 2-4 cruisers and 4-8 destroyers and having a task to protect ships from German surface light forces; distant protection group, cruising at 150-300 miles from the caravan and consisting of one battleship, more than 5 cruisers and a dozen of destroyers. The task of the group was to intercept and destroy the enemy's battle group of heavy warships trying to attack the caravan.

Convoys sailed usually at intervals of 2-4 weeks. Their routes were at a distance of 150 - 300 miles from the Norwegian coast, according to the summer or winter route, which varied due to the ice barrier. Convoys speed were about 9-10 knots, taking 10-12 days for the 2000 miles long journey. Almost every convoy was attacked by German ships, sub marines and air-crafts especially in the region of the North Cape and Bear Island.

# THE FORGOTTEN BATTLE OF WWII

German submarines attacked the convoy usually by one or two so-called "wolf pack" each consisting of 3-4 submarines. The protection of the convoy against them was carried out by anti-submarine ships of the close escort. The task of anti-submarine aircraft of the escort aircraft carrier was to discover enemy submarines and direct the escort ships to attack them.

The German Luftwaffe attacked convoys in "waves" of diving bombers and torpedo bombers by 50-80 planes simultaneously in each "wave". The defence of the convoy against these attacks was provided by intensive anti-aircraft fire from all ships. After 1942, some convoys applied lifted fastened balloons to prevent from torpedo-bombers' attacks at low altitude. In some cases German's battle group, which included the Battle ships "Tirpitz" or "Scharnhorst" had sailed to intercept the convoys, as it happened with convoys PQ-8, QP-12, PQ-17, JW-55B and RA-55A.

As a result of these battles, the Germans succeeded in sinking 100 merchant ships.

In spite of this 811 ships from 41 convoys reached their destinations to Northern Russian ports. In the return (East to West) direction, 715 ships in 35 convoys passed through.

The convoys delivered about 3.4 million tons of cargoes compare with 3.7 million tons of cargoes taken on board at the start of the shipping.

It is important to mention that the adverse and harsh weather conditions, especially in autumn and winter, were extremely severe with gales and storms force often reaching 9-10 points of the Beaufort wind scale. The air temperature of 20°C below zero created further danger by causing the sea spray to freeze on the ship's superstructure.

At the beginning of 1942, the Germans concentrated in their Northern Norway ports about 120 warships among which were 2 battleships (Tirpitz & Scharnhorst), and 2 "pocket" ones (Admiral Scheer and Luetzow), 2 cruisers (Admiral Hipper & Prince Eigen), 3 destroyer's flotillas (Types "Z" & Fridrich Inn), 3 flotillas of minesweepers, 3 flotillas of patrol ships and anti-submarine boats plus 15-30 submarines.

There was formed 2 Battle Group, consisting of most these surfaced ships.

In April, 1942, the Germans concentrated on airfields in Northern Norway more than 350 bombers and torpedo bombers, comprising Junkers-88, Ju-87, Heinkel-III, He-115 and others. All these arrangements had one single purpose - to disrupt the delivery of strategic cargoes to Russia. Most severely and seriously affected were the Convoys PQ-17 and PQ-18, which lost 37 ships in total.

Afterwards, thanks to a number of measures taken by the British Admiralty, the German plans were broken and the convoy losses were considerably reduced. As a result, the Germans had lost during the 4-years battle 42 warships, including two battleships (Tirpitz and Scharnhorst), 3 destroyers, 1 minelayer, 2 antisubmarine ships and 34 submarines.

The German's Luftwaffe lost more than 150 air-crafts. The Royal and Russian Navies had lost (most of them were the RN) -36 warships, including 2 cruisers (Trinidad and Edinburgh), 8 destroyers, 3 sloops, 2 patrol-ships 1 frigate, 6 corvettes, 11 minesweepers and others. The Soviet Navy had lost also 21 submarines, which carried patrol service in Barents Sea. Losses of German sailors were approximately 9000. The Allies had lost 2000 naval personnel and 1000 Merchant Seamen.

It is necessary to note that for service in battle, many participants of Arctic Convoys have been awarded with governmental awards. So, for example, 24 Soviet seamen have been decorated by the British awards. Officers have been awarded with Orders of British Empire (Major General George Dzjuba, Commanders Nikolay Lunin, Aleksey Gurin and others), and petty officers and sailors - with medals. Many Soviet seamen have been also awarded with American military decorations. On its turn, the Soviet government by Decree of the 21st March 1944 awarded 44 British brothers in arms by Soviet state' awards, but Admirals Bruce Fraser and Robert Barnett were decorated with Orders of Suvorov of 1st and 3rd Class accordingly. And in November 1941, four British pilots were handed over Orders of Lenin by the USSR ambassador in London Ivan Maisky, for defending the Murmansk sky.

In conclusion it is important to note that since 1991, between the Arctic Convoys veterans of the Allied countries, strong and friendly relationships were restored and they are establishing even greater understanding to preserve the memory of the war events and sacrifices. However it is unfortunate that over the last few years the mass media of all ex- Allied countries have almost completely stopped to remind people about the 4 year battle for Arctic Convoy's defence and their important role in WW II.

It is for this reason my 'Paper' is named "The Forgotten Battle".

Veteran of Arctic convoys,  
Professor Anatoly G. Uvarov,  
St. Petersburg, Russia.



# GUNS IN THE NIGHT

## 'Guns in the Night'

### HMS Belfast and the Battle of North Cape, 26 December 1943

HMS Belfast, the 10,000 ton cruiser which now rests on the River Thames as a floating branch of the Imperial War Museum, is the largest, if not the oldest, veteran of the Arctic Convoys. The ship has a thriving veterans Association and this presentation has been largely drawn from their interviews, supported by the ship's logs held in the National Archives at Kew. It is an account of the Battle of North Cape as witnessed by Belfast's people. Inevitably, their memories can sometimes provide more of a series of impressions rather than strictly chronological recollections, but I hope you will all agree that they are no less powerful for that.

Belfast began her involvement with the Arctic Run on Christmas Day 1942, when she arrived at the Royal Navy's principal base in home waters, Scapa Flow, described by her Captain with characteristic understatement as 'a pretty grim bit of the Orkneys.' Belfast was the new flagship of the 10th Cruiser Squadron, providing cover for the Arctic Convoys.

Belfast's Captain was an experienced veteran, 42-year old Frederick Parham. The ship's company was well trained and the ship herself, extensively rebuilt after being almost destroyed by a magnetic mine at the beginning of the war, was a formidable fighting machine – Parham described her as a 'better ship really after she was rebuilt than she was when she was originally built.'

In command of the 10th Cruiser Squadron was Rear-Admiral Sir Robert Burnett. Formerly the Royal Navy's Director of Physical Training and Rear-Admiral, Home Fleet Destroyers, he enhanced his reputation just a few days after Belfast's arrival, on New Year's Eve, when he fought and

won the Battle of the Barents Sea, flying his flag in HMS Sheffield. Burnett, known on the lower deck as 'Nutty,' was remembered by one sailor as 'a little chap (who was) seasick swinging round the buoy in Scapa.' Captain Parham recalled that 'a more really lovable Flag Officer one simply couldn't have had.'

Inevitably, being flagship brought with it certain responsibilities. Radar Operator George Burridge recalled how 'it was quite clear that we had to be that much better than the other two cruisers in the squadron and I think that discipline was tighter as a result.' The ship's nickname was Tiddly B, 'tiddly' being naval slang for neat and tidy.

By the time Belfast arrived at Scapa the Arctic Convoy route had become one of the great naval battlegrounds of the Second World War, and her first year was a busy one, a mixture of convoy screening and endless duty on the Northern Patrol, the line of cruisers strung out between Iceland and Scapa.

In the Arctic the weather was arguably a greater threat than the Germans, as Captain Parham recalled: 'It is difficult to describe what conditions were like. It was of course desperately cold and in the winter desperately dark...around the shortest day, the sun never rose at all above the horizon... I was always afraid of running into solid ice...I'm reminded of the very lovely prayer...which asks God to "preserve us from the dangers of the sea and the violence of the enemy" in that order, and how right the writer was.' Lieutenant Andy Palmer remembered how on one trip to Iceland, the weather was so bad that it stripped the two and half inch armour plate from the turret roof of Belfast's half-sister Sheffield.

After more than sixty years the menace of the cold weather was still fresh in the

memory of Engineer-Lieutenant Charles Simpson:

'You weren't frightened of attack, you were frightened of falling overboard...40 feet waves, sea temperatures below zero, ice forming on the upper works, ice three and four inches thick that would have to be chipped by hand...down below, icicles four feet long hung from the ventilation.'

Just making your way around the ship could be lethal for the unwary, as George Burridge remembered: 'To get to your place of work there were safety ropes all along the low waist of the ship which you had to sort of clip on to and run along otherwise there was a strong risk of being swept overboard...It was made quite clear that if you went on the upper deck...unless you had gloves on if you touched any part [of the ship] with your bare hands then it would just stick there.'

Engine Room Artificer Ronald Jesse recollected a less dangerous but very unpleasant aspect of mess deck life in northern waters: 'The sides of the mess became coated in...two inches thick of ice, which was OK whilst it was still ice, but as you came further back south it started to melt, and this is condensation ice...most unpleasant, all swimming about on the floor. And if you were to be slinging your hammock by that side of the ship, as the ship rolled your hammock would get all wet.'

Boy Seaman David Jones was just 17 years old when he found himself in this inhospitable and dangerous environment. Sixty years on he recalled simply that 'it was frightening...I was frightened.' Mail and leave, the secret to any sailor's morale, were few and far between in northern waters: 'Sometimes we went two or three months without any mail... the first two and a half years, I think I had about ten days leave.' In Scapa, evening excursions to the Fleet Cinema and canteen on the miserable rain-lashed island of Flotta were all that was available.

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This, then, was life for the men of the Belfast during 1943: endless sea-time in foul weather, with little to break up the monotony. Debate still rages amongst historians about the strategic worth of all this hardship, and I shall leave it to other speakers to address this question. But whether their value was strategic or political, there is no question that stopping the convoys attracted an enormous amount of enemy resources

The convoy battles forced the Germans to allocate and expend their dwindling numbers of air and sea assets, something which by this stage of the war they simply could not afford to do. In particular, the Arctic battleground tied up most of the remnants of Germany's surface fleet. By December 1943, both the battleship Tirpitz and the battlecruiser Scharnhorst were present in Arctic waters.

Between the beginning of November and the middle of December 1943, three eastbound and two westbound Arctic convoys reached their destinations without loss despite attacks by U-boats and aircraft, and the Commander-in-Chief of the German Navy, Grand Admiral Doenitz, came under increasing pressure to sanction a sortie by one of these remaining heavy surface ships. At Christmas time the opportunity presented itself, as it became apparent that outbound convoys JW55B and homeward bound convoy RA55A would pass relatively close to one another as they rounded the North Cape of Norway, only a short passage from the Kriegsmarine's Norwegian bases.

Consequently on the evening of Christmas Day, 25 December 1943, the battlecruiser Scharnhorst steamed from Langefjord, her mess decks adorned with traditional Christmas decorations. She was accompanied by five large destroyers from the 4th Flotilla.

The operation was codenamed Ostfront and was commanded by Rear-Admiral Erich Bey, an experienced destroyer officer who had seen action at the Battle of Narvik in 1940 and the famous Channel Dash of February 1942.

Unknown to the Germans, the tempting target that presented itself was the bait in an elaborate trap. British Intelligence had intercepted German signals and within hours the Admiralty had informed the Commander-in-Chief Home Fleet, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, that Scharnhorst was at sea, giving him plenty of time to dispose his forces.

Burnett in HMS Belfast, with the cruisers Norfolk and Sheffield, was to screen the convoys and maintain contact with Scharnhorst. For the senior officers this was the opportunity they had been waiting for, and they accepted it calmly, although Admiral Burnett's young cousin Arthur, serving as his Flag Lieutenant, recalled the Admiral in a perhaps more unguarded moment, phlegmatically remarking that it was 'all in the hands of him up there'. On the lower deck, the news was greeted with a mixture of apprehension and disbelief.

Stoker Larry Fursland recalled how Christmas Day passed in the tense silence of anticipation, with the ship closed up at defence stations. Finally, on the day after Christmas, St Stephen's Day, the storm broke:

'The Padre gave a short service of prayer and we all had to go to our action stations... my place was down the port diesel, and that's where I went down and that's where I stayed for twelve hours... Chief ERA came down and started up the diesels and left me. I was clamped up each side, watertight doors, and just a hatch to go down'

While Burnett's 10th Cruiser Squadron screened the vulnerable merchant ships, Admiral Fraser, in the battleship HMS Duke of York, with the cruiser HMS Jamaica and four destroyers, deployed to the south, between Scharnhorst and Norway. The trap was set. If Fraser's Duke of York could bring Scharnhorst to action, she would enjoy an overwhelming superiority in firepower, with her 14-inch guns out-ranging and out punching Scharnhorst's smaller 11-inch. At 0730 the British superiority in numbers further increased when Bey's destroyers were detached to search for the convoy. Failing to make contact, they were ordered home as the weather worsened.

By this stage JW55B was 50 miles south of Bear Island, as the Germans headed north to intercept. Meanwhile Admiral Fraser was 200 miles away to the southwest and Admiral Burnett's cruisers were approaching the convoy from the east.

First contact took place at 0855 on the 26th when Belfast detected Scharnhorst by radar, heading south and only 30 miles east of the convoy. The ship's company went to action stations and the three cruisers engaged the German ship at 1040, HMS Norfolk scoring a crucial hit which disabled Scharnhorst's main fire control radar, leaving her almost blind in a gathering snowstorm. Scharnhorst was forced to resort to aiming at British muzzle flashes, but with Belfast and Sheffield both using flashless propellant, Norfolk was her only available target. Remembering his primary objective, Bey turned north and away, still trying to circle Burnett's force and reach the convoy.

Belfast had never fired a full broadside before, and some of the effects could not have been anticipated. Alone at his action station on the port diesel gener-



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ator Larry Fursland was faced with a problem: the vibration from the first broadside had knocked out the two circulating pumps which cooled it. Without the generator, two triple six-inch turrets – half Belfast's armament – would be out of action. Acting quickly, Larry diverted a fire main along the passageway above his position and down through the hatch. Without any tools, he connected it to the generator with his bare hands, bypassing the disabled pumps, and circulated salt water from the main through the generator for twelve hours. He was completely alone. For his actions he was later awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.

Admiral Burnett was faced with possibly the most significant decision of his career, as Captain Parham later recalled: 'The Scharnhorst turned north and made away at high speed, and this is where my Admiral, Burnett, had to make his really big decision, and I am absolutely convinced it was the right one. Which was that he was not to follow the Scharnhorst...because we couldn't possibly have kept up. The weather was so bad that he would have probably outstripped us and would merely have got round us and probably back on to the convoy. And so my Admiral's decision was to fall back on the convoy and wait and see, I remember him saying to me "I'll bet she'll come again."' "

Burnett was absolutely correct. Scharnhorst returned to the convoy, only to find the 10th Cruiser Squadron once more in her path. Contact was regained at noon and all three cruisers opened fire. In a twenty minute fire-fight Scharnhorst was hit again and Norfolk badly damaged by 11-inch shells.

The German ship now headed south away from the convoy, attempting to return to Norway, and this time Burnett shadowed by radar. With

Norfolk disabled and Sheffield suffering from engine problems, at one point Belfast was pursuing her formidable adversary alone. George Burridge was rather less than impressed by this development:

'I recall Admiral Burnett coming on and saying that we were at the moment alone and we were going to engage the Scharnhorst, which frightened the life out of everybody! ... [The atmosphere] was as tense as it could be, because we knew we were in real danger then.'

The men down in the engine rooms were entirely cut off from the activity on the Bridge. Without access to the upper decks, in a noisy and busy environment, they simply had to carry on doing their jobs, always aware that if things were going badly up above the ship might sink beneath their feet. Lieutenant Charles Simpson recalled the tension, as every ounce of power was squeezed out of the ship's machinery for seventeen hours

It is sometimes hard to appreciate the lack of information available to the small cogs in the wheel, the junior officers and ratings closed up at action stations for hours at a time, while the action unfolded around them in total darkness. Brian Butler, confined with 26 other men in one of the ship's six-inch turrets, recalled how 'During lulls in the action you'd sit there with your eyes closed, there was no way you could sleep... it was bitterly cold in the turret.' Ron Jesse's experience of the actual combat was fairly typical: 'The bangs started and we worked up to full speed and the bangs went on and the shudders and the bangs and then it all died away and the Commander said "she's made off."

In reality, things were going well. At 1230 Belfast had been joined by four destroyers detached from the convoys. By now Admiral Fraser in Duke of York was approaching to the south-

west, ideally placed to cut off Scharnhorst's retreat. Fraser made radar contact and closed in, contacting Belfast by radio at 1750 – it is not difficult to imagine the relief with which that message must have been greeted. Shortly afterwards Belfast illuminated Scharnhorst with starshell and at 1815, the ship's log laconically records that 'action with Scharnhorst began,' Burnett's cruisers engaging from one side and Duke of York and Jamaica from the other. Ronald Jesse's action station was at Belfast's steering position:

'I saw the gyro compass suddenly turn from going south...it went right round from going south...it went right round through west to east 270, degrees, I knew something sharp had happened and in fact that was the moment when...the Duke of York was setting about her.'

Duke of York hit Scharnhorst with her first salvo and began to inflict severe damage. Scharnhorst's forward 11-inch turret Anton was put out of action early, jammed to starboard with guns in the elevated position, and turret Bruno, the remaining forward turret, soon followed when an outbreak of fire forced the crew to flood it to avoid a catastrophic explosion. At 1708 a 14-inch shell hit Scharnhorst's aircraft hanger aft of turret Caesar, starting another fire.

At 1725 Admiral Bey signalled to his high command that Scharnhorst was surrounded by heavy surface forces. However at this stage his chance of escape was still good, as Scharnhorst's superior speed enabled her to gradually increase the range. Her greatest chance came at 1824, when a lucky shot severed the connection for Duke of York's main fire control radar, forcing her to cease-fire. A young officer, Lieutenant Bates, recognising the urgency of the situation, climbed the mast and reconnected the radar.

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By this stage, unknown to the British, Scharnhorst was already lost. A shell from Duke of York's last salvo had penetrated Number 1 boiler room and severed a steam pipe. Scharnhorst's only advantage slipped away from her as her speed dropped to ten knots. Bey sent his last signal to his superiors: "we shall fight to the last shell". By now his ship was ablaze from stem to stern, according to eyewitnesses like Bob Shrimpton, who had come up on deck, his Asdic unusable in the frantic high speed manoeuvring of a surface action: 'Once the Duke of York got in there, with those tremendous guns, it was horrendous to watch...they just smashed the thing to pieces...it was just one blaze from one end to the other...'

As soon as Fraser recognised what had happened he seized his chance, and ordered his destroyers to close in and attack with torpedoes. HMS Saumarez paid the price for this daring attack. Scharnhorst was mortally wounded but she still had teeth, and a German shell smashed into the flimsy director control tower of the destroyer, killing eleven men. But four torpedoes of nineteen fired found their target, leaving Scharnhorst dead in the water as Duke of York and the cruisers opened fire again.

At 1928 Duke of York ceased fire for the last time having expended nearly five hundred 14-inch shells, and at 1940 HMS Belfast was ordered in to deliver the coup de grace to Scharnhorst with Andy Palmer's torpedoes. Years later he described the moment:

'In that very last stage she was a very clear point of fire because ...she was a mass of flames all the way along the ship...we closed a bit [but] Scharnhorst was firing an occasional gun and Bob wasn't going to take the cruisers in any closer than 6000 yards...we swung the ship and fired the starboard torpedoes and I said to

Captain Parham, "swing her back the other way and we'll fire the other salvo" but by the time we got the ship swinging somehow or other the Norfolk had crept up...and I would have torpedoed her. So I had to say "I'm sorry she's fouled the range" so we turned round and when we turned back again the flames had gone out and she'd sunk...I was so certain that we'd got a hit that I had a swastika painted on to that particular tube.

In fact as Belfast turned a tremendous explosion had ripped through the German ship, probably originating from her forward magazines. She rapidly began to settle and at 1948, as Lieutenant Palmer fired, her radar blip vanished, to be followed by a series of muffled underwater explosions.

The initial reaction aboard Belfast was one of elation but as the full enormity of loss of life became apparent, for many this was replaced by more sombre feelings. All that could be seen were a pitifully small number of red lifejacket lights, each representing a man fighting for his life in the oil-covered water. Seaman Jack Wright was conscious that, when all was said and done, the Germans were just 'sailors like ourselves.' Bob Shrimpton remembered a moment of dead silence:

'I think a lot of people were thinking there's a hell of a lot of men on there the same as us, youngsters, families, wives, kids, and they're in that water. I think that was a subduing effect.'

Even in the engine room, the unmistakable stench of oil fuel came down through the ventilation shafts, reaching Charles Simpson and his men: 'I was so overcome with pity for those Germans swimming about in oil fuel that I had no other feeling than pity for several minutes...I don't think I felt like cheering the job had been accomplished.'

Just 36 survivors were rescued before the British ships were ordered to vacate the area due to the danger of attack by U-boats. 1,927 men died, many on board Scharnhorst but several hundred in the water. As a consequence the command has become the source of some controversy in recent years but the U-boat danger was very real: at 1911 Rear Admiral Bey had received a signal stating that all U-boats and aircraft in the area were being deployed to assist Scharnhorst. Moreover it is important to remember that in the frozen waters of the Arctic it is highly unlikely that any of the Scharnhorst men would have survived more than a few minutes wait for rescue. Their lonely, tragic deaths affected many of those involved in the battle, like 17 year old David Jones: 'I sometimes think of them, particularly about Christmas and say a little prayer for them. I'm not a religious person but I think of them sometimes.'

British dead numbered eighteen, on board Norfolk and Saumarez. Each was a small tragedy of course, but the completeness of the victory could not be denied. Shortly after dropping anchor in Murmansk Captain Parham gave the order to 'splice the mainbrace', an extra rum ration for all. In Murmansk eighteen year old Oscar de Ville was faced with the reality of battle, as the victorious destroyers, cheered by all the ships in the harbour, tied up alongside and their casualties were brought across Belfast's decks to the waiting ambulances ashore:

'I was detailed to be one of a hospital party to take some of the wounded to a hospital locally, which meant helping them across the deck of destroyers onto land and that was quite a harrowing thing at 18 to be doing. I thought they were very very brave guys – one felt very bad about leaving them in a hospital in a one-off village like Kola...goodness knows how good it was.'



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Although Fraser's forces entered the Kola Inlet in triumph, it was not without genuine regard for an enemy they believed had fought bravely in very unfavourable circumstances. In a moving ceremony aboard Duke of York the German survivors were assembled and the flagship's officers sombrely saluted them, after which Admiral Fraser paid tribute to the courage and determination of the enemy ship and her crew. Privately he later told his officers that 'I hope that if any of you are ever called upon to lead a ship into action against an opponent many times superior you will command your ship as gallantly as Scharnhorst was commanded today.'

The ship's company were very aware of the importance of their achievement. With the destruction of Scharnhorst any hopes the Germans had of mounting a serious surface threat to the Russian convoys effectively evaporated. Tirpitz, harried by aircraft and midget submarines, never sortied in anger again.

George Stanley remembered the triumphal return to Scapa: 'All the ships were lined up as we came through, fantastic, cheers, you know...we got leave just after that...and I came home...we went to a pub...and my sister told some of the people that I'd just come off the Belfast and they had me up on the stage. I didn't know what I was doing because I think I was drunk.'

The survivors of Scharnhorst were landed at Scapa Flow blindfolded for security and, perhaps rather ironically, dressed in the survivors' suits kept on board for torpedoed merchant seamen.

Their signatures, together with those of Burnett and Fraser, were collected on a unique document, now part of the collections of the Imperial War Museum. Small facsimiles of this were obtained by many of the British participants in the battle.

For their successful command of the battle, Fraser was later made the first Baron Fraser of North Cape, and Burnett was knighted. As for Belfast, her Captain, Frederick Parham, received the Distinguished Service Order. He also received a personal tribute from his friend and the former C-in-C Home Fleet, Lord Tovey, who wrote: 'The combination of the gallant attack you and the other cruisers made on the Scharnhorst, coupled with your magnificent shadowing, is as fine an example of cruiser work as has ever been seen.'

The awards did not just go to the senior commanders. On display on board HMS Belfast today are three Distinguished Conduct Medals awarded to Larry Fursland and two other members of the Belfast's crew for their actions during the battle, along with letters and other memorabilia. There are also a number of Scharnhorst relics, including the ship's spare battle ensign, landed in Norway before she sailed.

The fellow-feeling between sailors mentioned by many of the Belfast veterans when they talk about the Scharnhorst survivors cannot be overstated. The HMS Belfast Association enjoyed a genuine friendship with the Scharnhorst Survivors' Association for many years, several members travelling to Germany in recent years to attend the last meeting before the German Association disbanded. Time, apparently, really can heal wounds.

As for HMS Belfast, the ship went on to serve in Normandy and the Far East. Her distinguished active career lasted until 1963. Seven years later she was saved from the scrapyard at the eleventh hour, and brought to London, where she opened to the public on Trafalgar Day, 21 October 1971. All of us who work on board are proud to bring the story of the Arctic Convoys, and of this almost forgotten naval battle in the frozen north, to more than a quarter of a million visitors every year.  
Nick Hewitt  
Imperial War Museum

**Remember Pearl Harbor!**  
**December 7, 1941**



**Support The USN Armed Guard**  
**WW II Veterans Reunions**  
**Remember Also**  
**The Twin Towers**  
**September 11, 2001**

# APPLE OVER THE FENCE

## "Apple Over The Fence"

### FICTION

August 1942. Piotrkow, Poland. The sky was gloomy that morning as we waited anxiously. All the men, women and children of Piotrkow's Jewish ghetto had been herded into a square. Word had gotten around that we were being moved. My father had only recently died from typhus, which had run rampant through the crowded ghetto. My greatest fear was that our family would be separated.

"Whatever you do," Isidore, my eldest brother, whispered to me, "don't tell them your age.. Say you're sixteen." I was tall for a boy of 11, so I could pull it off. That way I might be deemed valuable as a worker. An SS man approached me, boots clicking against the cobblestones. He looked me up and down, then asked my age. "Sixteen," I said. He directed me to the left, where my three brothers and other healthy young men already stood. My mother was motioned to the right with the other women, children, sick and elderly people. I whispered to Isidore, "Why?" He didn't answer. I ran to Mama's side and said I wanted to stay with her. "No," she said sternly. "Get away. Don't be a nuisance. Go with your brothers." She had never spoken so harshly before. But I understood: She was protecting me. She loved me so much that, just this once, she pretended not to. It was the last I ever saw of her.

My brothers and I were transported in a cattle car to Germany. We arrived at the Buchenwald concentration camp one night weeks later and were led into a crowded barrack. The next day, we were issued uniforms and identification numbers.

"Don't call me Herman anymore." I said to my brothers. "Call me 94983."

I was put to work in the camp's crematorium, loading the dead into a hand-

cranked elevator. I, too, felt dead. Hardened, I had become a number. Soon, my brothers and I were sent to Schlieben, one of Buchenwald's sub-camps near Berlin.

One morning I thought I heard my mother's voice, "Son," she said softly but clearly, I am going to send you an angel." Then I woke up. Just a dream. A beautiful dream. But in this place there could be no angels. There was only work. And hunger. And fear..

A couple of days later, I was walking around the camp, around the barracks, near the barbed-wire fence where the guards could not easily see. I was alone. On the other side of the fence, I spotted someone: a little girl with light, almost luminous curls. She was half-hidden behind a birch tree. I glanced around to make sure no one saw me. I called to her softly in German.

"Do you have something to eat?" She didn't understand. I inched closer to the fence and repeated question in Polish. She stepped forward. I was thin and gaunt, with rags wrapped around my feet, but the girl looked unafraid. In her eyes, I saw life. She pulled an apple from her woolen jacket and threw it over the fence. I grabbed the fruit and, as I started to run away, I heard her say faintly, "I'll see you tomorrow."

I returned to the same spot by the fence at the same time every day. She was always there with something for me to eat - a hunk of bread or, better yet, an apple. We didn't dare speak or linger. To be caught would mean death for us both. I didn't know anything about her, just a kind farm girl, except that she understood Polish. What was her name? Why was she risking her life for me? Hope was in such short supply, and this girl on the other side of the fence gave me some, as nourishing in its way as the bread and apples.

Nearly seven months later, my brothers and I were crammed into a coal car and shipped to Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia. "Don't return," I told the girl that day. "We're leaving." I turned toward the barracks and didn't look back, didn't even say good-bye to the little girl whose name I'd never learned, the girl with the apples.

We were in Theresienstadt for three months. The war was winding down and Allied forces were closing in, yet my fate seemed sealed. On May 10, 1945, I was scheduled to die in the gas chamber at 10:00 AM. In the quiet of dawn, I tried to prepare myself. So many times death seemed ready to claim me, but somehow I'd survived.. Now, it was over. I thought of my parents. At least, I thought, we will be reunited.

But at 8 A.M. there was a commotion. I heard shouts, and saw people running every which way through camp. I caught up with my brothers. Russian troops had liberated the camp! The gates swung open. Everyone was running, so I did too.

Amazingly, all of my brothers had survived; I'm not sure how. But I knew that the girl with the apples had been the key to my survival. In a place where evil seemed triumphant, one person's goodness had saved my life, had given me hope in a place where there was none. My mother had promised to send me an angel, and the angel had come.

Eventually I made my way to England where I was sponsored by a Jewish charity, put up in a hostel with other boys who had survived the Holocaust and trained in electronics. Then I came to America, where my brother Sam had already moved. I served in the U. S. Army during the Korean War, and returned to New York City after two years. By August 1957 I'd opened my own electronics repair shop. I was starting to settle in.



# APPLE OVER THE FENCE

One day, my friend Sid who I knew from England called me. "I've got a date. She's got a Polish friend. Let's double date."

A blind date? Nah, that wasn't for me. But Sid kept pestering me, and a few days later we headed up to the Bronx to pick up his date and her friend Roma. I had to admit, for a blind date this wasn't so bad. Roma was a nurse at a Bronx hospital. She was kind and smart. Beautiful, too, with swirling brown curls and green, almond-shaped eyes that sparkled with life.

The four of us drove out to Coney Island. Roma was easy to talk to, easy to be with. Turned out she was wary of blind dates too! We were both just doing our friends a favor. We took a stroll on the boardwalk, enjoying the salty Atlantic breeze, and then had dinner by the shore. I couldn't remember having a better time.

We piled back into Sid's car, Roma and I sharing the backseat. As European Jews who had survived the war, we were aware that much had been left unsaid between us. She broached the subject, "Where were you," she asked softly, "during the war?"

"The camps," I said, the terrible memories still vivid, the irreparable loss. I had tried to forget. But you can never forget.

She nodded. "My family was hiding on a farm in Germany, not far from Berlin," she told me. "My father knew a priest, and he got us Aryan papers." I imagined how she must have suffered too, fear, a constant companion. And yet here we were, both survivors, in a new world.

"There was a camp next to the farm," Roma continued. "I saw a boy there and I would throw him apples every day."

What an amazing coincidence that she

had helped some other boy. "What did he look like? I asked. He was tall, skinny, and hungry. I must have seen him every day for six months."

My heart was racing. I couldn't believe it. This couldn't be. "Did he tell you one day not to come back because he was leaving Schlieben?"

Roma looked at me in amazement. "Yes," That was me! "I was ready to burst with joy and awe, flooded with emotions. I couldn't believe it! My angel.

"I'm not letting you go." I said to Roma. And in the back of the car on that blind date, I proposed to her. I didn't want to wait.

"You're crazy!" she said. But she invited me to meet her parents for Shabbat dinner the following week. There was so much I looked forward to learning about Roma, but the most important things I always knew: her steadfastness, her goodness. For many months, in the worst of circumstances, she had come to the fence and given me hope. Now that I'd found her again, I could never let her go.

That day, she said yes. And I kept my word. After nearly 50 years of marriage, two children and three grandchildren I have never let her go.

Herman Rosenblat,  
Miami Beach, Florida





# FATHER MITCHELL

## 81-year-old priest happy he can serve rebuilding church

By PRISCILLA GREEAR

A year ago, then 80-year-old Father Royce Mitchell walked in pitch-black darkness along I-610 for some three miles with thousands of others, carrying an overnight bag, praying and striving to support others while enduring a stifling sense of dread about the future.

During the interstate exodus in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, with everyone from babies to the elderly, from those with disabilities to those with diabetes, the native-Atlanta priest ate one granola bar from the box he had packed and gave five away — along with the rest of his food — to those around him in the crowd of nearly 5,000. Somehow he remained mentally “pretty good” — considering the circumstances.

“I tried to keep in contact with and help anyone that I could,” Father Mitchell said in a recent interview. “Everyone was having to encourage people. We were walking about three miles in total darkness. I was thinking about everything and praying and wondering how in the world we would get out of this.”

“The lack of communication was the worst thing. We didn’t know what was going to happen to us. The city was in total shock, fearful but supportive. ... It was the fear of the unknown, survival of the fittest.”

But the senior priest kept praying and kept moving. Nearly a year later, Father Mitchell reflected upon the disaster and his efforts to rebuild his own life and help others rebuild theirs in an interview July 26 in his tidy one-bedroom apartment at the Chateau de Notre Dame, a New Orleans senior continuing-care community, where he moved following the storm and now serves as chaplain.

He recalled his first return to his looted home in the Gentilly neighborhood that had soaked in nine feet of water for nearly three weeks from breaks in the London Avenue and 17th Street Canal levees. In his flooded study — where Bibles and other books were destroyed — his New Testament was left without a single water stain.

“(There was) no sign it had been



FATHER Royce Mitchell, 81, gave others encouragement while making his long trek to safety following Hurricane Katrina. (Photo by Michael Alexander, the Georgia Bulletin)

in the water,” he said. “How it survived no one knows — just a sort of miracle. It lifts up your faith and is a sign of hope. Even with what we went through, the suffering and destruction, there are still signs of hope, and our faith is not diminished. We came out and are better spiritually than we were, not financially but spiritually. And we enjoy more things in life than we would have in the past. Life is more valuable.”

Another small sign was a tarnished metal cross that now sits atop the white embroidered bedspread on his bed, which he found untouched atop his unruffled but flooded bed in Gentilly, where he rented a home while serving for 11 years at St. Frances Cabrini Parish, along with several other parishes.

With an unhurried and calming Southern way of speaking, he also pulled from a cabinet facing his bed a gleaming chalice given to him from the parish he attended growing up, Sacred Heart Church in Atlanta, and a silver pitcher that he salvaged from the house. He lost nearly everything else — clothes,

books, furniture, all his family and ordination pictures and certificates, and his Navy discharge papers.

He, of course, already knew that things are things and “you can’t take it with you,” but like hundreds of thousands of others he experienced a most painful lesson in detachment.

“What you have doesn’t really mean anything. Your faith and life and people around you are the most important thing,” he said.

The enervated priest eventually evacuated to the Atlanta area, where a brother lives in Stone Mountain and a sister in Carrollton, Ga. But he moved back to Louisiana by October.

“It was a shock when I came down to realize when you return and walk into the house everything is destroyed, things are out on the street, total houses devastated, neighborhoods devastated, furniture collapsed, nothing is intact,” he said. “And walking into the bedroom there is total chaos, everything is destroyed, but there is the bed totally made up with everything as you left it on the Sunday afternoon, being underwater for three weeks, with water, mud, oil and grease,” he said.

**THE WORLD** War II Navy veteran with a deep voice and gentle spirit acknowledged that this natural disaster was more distressing than it was as an 18-year-old sailor to be attacked by a Nazi submarine in the north Atlantic.

“This was more traumatic,” said the priest. “Everything is jerked out from under you, and you end up as a homeless person and don’t know what the future will hold.”

A few other salvaged items were displayed on shelves in his new apartment, including an angel figurine and a glass trophy he was honored with for his volunteer service to AIDS patients as early as 1984. A picture book from Katrina with photos taken from Louisiana newspapers lay on his coffee table.

Wearing black Rockport sneakers with his clerics, he recounted how he stayed in town as Katrina approached to celebrate a Saturday

funeral Mass. On Sunday he celebrated Mass and secured the church around 11 a.m. He packed an overnight bag with a battery-powered radio and moved to a safer, empty rectory, for which he had keys, at St. Leo the Great Parish on higher ground about 18 blocks away.

St. Leo was where he had weathered storms in the past. He figured it was too late to evacuate on Sunday anyway. Rain poured and heavy wind blew that night at St. Leo, and the electricity went off at 5 a.m. But Monday the storm abated in the afternoon.

“If the levees had not been broken we would have been OK,” he said. “There was no water in the streets Monday night after the storm. Also I figured I’d be around to help in case anyone needed anything.”

**HE PLANNED** to return home as he went to bed around 11 p.m. until he looked out Tuesday morning and saw flooded streets. Father Mitchell grew concerned as the water rose in the streets and crept toward the top steps of the rectory, and he heard on his radio Tuesday about the seriousness of the levee breaks and the flooding.

By Wednesday at 3 p.m. two volunteers from Shreveport and one from Baton Rouge rode by in a boat as he stood on the porch. “I waved at them and hollered for them. They asked me if I wanted to be picked up. I said, ‘Yes!’”

They later returned, and he waded through the water to get into the boat and was dropped off at an exit ramp off I-610.

“We rode around trying to get people off balconies who said they wanted to stay,” he remembered. “It was a great relief to be able to be picked up and get out of that situation,” he said, expressing gratitude for the good Samaritans, “people coming in to New Orleans, these nice people even some time not knowing what the situation would be ... even risking their own lives.”

They were bused to an I-10 overpass, where they were told they’d be picked up to go to the Superdome.

(Continued below)

But at about 9 p.m. police came through and directed them to backtrack and walk three miles to the Elysian Fields Avenue exit off I-610.

One tragic memory was trying to pacify a very confused elderly man who appeared to suffer from dementia. Father Mitchell gave him the peanut butter, saltine crackers and raisin bread that he’d packed in his bag in addition to his shaving kit, the granola bars and water.

“I tried to talk to him and encourage him,” he said. But he eventually got separated from the man who started walking in the other direction and believes that he walked into the water and drowned. He lamented his loss and the sight of bodies floating off the exits of the expressway. One person near him died while waiting to be picked up.

“We knew the important thing was survival and to take care of the living instead of trying to focus on the ones who had not made it,” he recalled. Upon reaching the exit, “we stayed through the night with-

out food, water, bathroom facilities. They started picking us up around noon.”

They boarded a bus Thursday that stopped at a rest stop outside of Baton Rouge where they ate their first meal of beans, rice, fried chicken and bread. They were driven to the Astrodome in Houston, arriving at 11 p.m. Thursday, but ended up in a Red Cross shelter at a Baptist church in Huntsville, Texas, by 3 a.m. Friday morning.

At the shelter he rested on a cot and was picked up by a cousin who lives in Wimberly, Texas, and stayed there until Tuesday before he eventually arrived in Atlanta to stay with his brother.

He was on the missing priest list for the archdiocese for a month, until he saw a notice in the Atlanta Journal Constitution for priests to contact the Baton Rouge Diocese.

His first few weeks back in Louisiana he stayed with a priest friend outside Baton Rouge, before moving to another New Orleans assisted-living residence where he served as spiritual director.

Loved ones encouraged him to stay in Georgia, but the 81-year-old, with faith and Bible intact, felt called back to Louisiana.

“That’s where I’m needed,” he said. “I’m happy with what I’m do-

ing, satisfied I can be back and can be of help and service. This is where I belong.”

(Priscilla Greear is a staff writer for the Georgia Bulletin of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.)



THE INSIDE of St. Frances Cabrini Church, where Father Mitchell served.





## PROJECT LIBERTY SHIP

National Maritime Day U. S. Navy Yard, Washington D.C. 22 May 2008- 1400

The speakers today were Admiral Robert D Reilly Jr. Commander Sealift Command and General Norton Schwartz Commander U. S. Transportation Command. TRANSCOM is the Department of Defense single manager of global air, land, sea transportation.

National Maritime day was observed by The Military Sealift Command to honor the lives and sacrifices of our civilian mariners who have been a large part of the American fabric since our Nation's humble beginning

Admiral Reilly went on to say that he was impressed by the enduring circle of national maritime service that today's audience represents- from veterans to midshipmen to young mariners to sailors to law makers. All of you have and continue to play a vital role in the national security of the United States of America. From the veterans and the fallen that we honor today to the cadets who represent our future—each and every mariner, from the able body seaman standing watch to the masters who lead our ships into harms way—all are a part of the circle of services and heritage. We're proud of our mariners, so it is fitting today that we express the great debt of gratitude we owe to them—the dedicated men and women of the U. S. Merchant Marine.

\*Seated in the audience I see John Confair, Joe Wiczorek, Joe Colgan all WW II U.S.N. Armed Guard veterans and Carlos Ralon a WWII Merchant Marine veteran, All served on tankers and ammunition ship that supplied Allied troops in the Atlantic and Pacific theaters. They are now part of Project Liberty Ship the organization that works to maintain and preserve the Liberty Ship S. S. John W. Brown the last surviving cargo/troopship from WWII.

\*A special welcome to the new captain of the S.S. John W. Brown Richard Bauman who is also a license Chesapeake Bay Pilot.

\*We're also honored to have another WWII veteran with us today, Retired U.S.N. Commander Bill Carter Armed Guard. In 1945, 35 U.S. merchant ship set out to cross the North Atlantic on the Murmansk Run, carrying urgently needed military supplies to Russia. Only 11 ships survived. Bill Carter earned a Silver Star for his heroism during this time, one of the Navy's most dangerous assignments in WWII.

General Norton Schwartz Commander of TRANSCOM concluded by stating "since America was last attacked, today's merchant mariners have helped the TRANSCOM team deliver more than 10 million tons of cargo and 5 billion gallons of fuel to battle today's enemies of freedom. This is the heritage of service and accomplishment of those who ensure that the promises we're made to our service men and women are and always and will be promises kept".

CA. this reminds me of our motto "WE AIM TO DELIVER AND WE DID"



# THE GREATEST TRAGEDY IN THE HISTORY OF

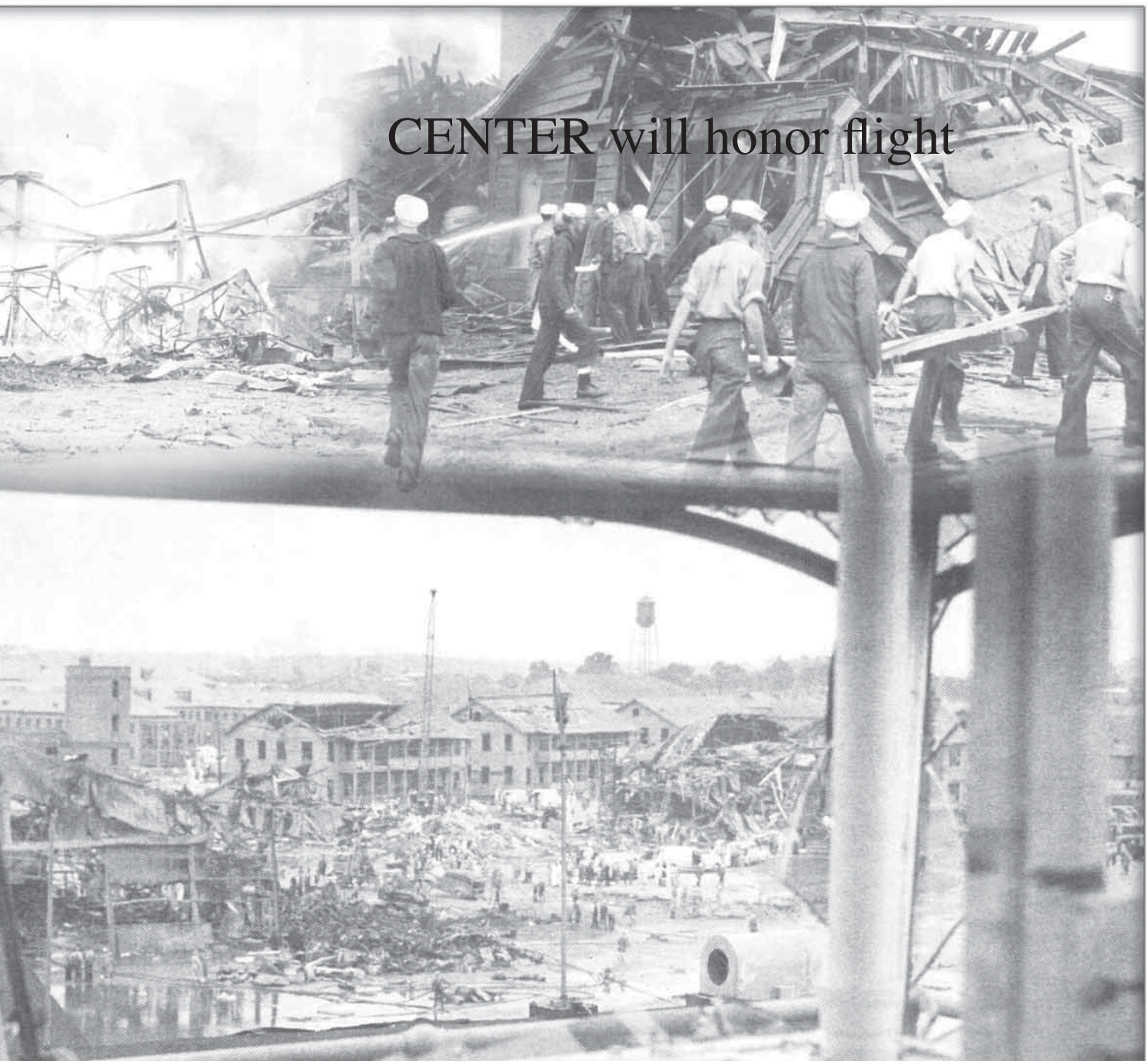


CENTRAL LIGHT

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# THE NORFOLK, VIRGINIA NAVAL AIR STATION



CENTER will honor flight

tragedy in the history of the Norfolk, Virginia Naval Air Station occurred on September 17, 1943 when a number of bombs exploded, killing 29 persons and injuring 426, and leaving the demolished wreckage of fifteen buildings. The explosion was triggered when a depth charge fell off a tractor as it approached Hanger V-30. Charles Sampson, U.S. Navy aviator from Wind Gap, Pa. was stationed there at the time and he stated he was in the Mess Hall when it went off and all the windows were blown out. I regret that I did not put this in the POINTER when Sampson sent the story and photo. I just located them in a stack of old POINTERS and material. Just maybe someone in the future will read this memorial to those 29 personnel who were killed and all the others who were injured. (calloyd)



# HIGGINS BOATS FROM THE N&O

## EARL W. NORWOOD PILOTED HIGGINS BOATS DURING THE WORLD WAR II INVASION AT NORMANDY. HE WAS 18. By Jay Price, Staff Writer

BEAUFORT - The young men piloting Andrew Higgins' craft onto the beachheads of World War II had to fight adrenaline and fear while precisely executing one of the most unnatural acts a sailor can be assigned: intentionally grounding a boat, then somehow pulling it off the beach. Earl W. Norwood, 82, who teaches history at Carteret Community College in Morehead City, piloted a Higgins boat in the third row of landing craft during the Normandy invasion in 1944. In his hands were the wheel and the lives of 36 soldiers and three other sailors as he steered around mines and headed for the beach. The roar of guns and explosions was like standing beside a freight train.

He was 18.

Norwood ran aground at full throttle, sliding the boat as far onto the sand as he could for the soldiers, he said. Then he gave the lone order of the whole maneuver: "Drop the ramp!" The crews were so well trained that the rest was done without speaking. Which was a good thing: He's still not sure how the man on the ramp's winch heard the order over the deafening din.

After the first row of four soldiers dashed down the ramp, a German artillery shell tore through the hull and exploded, instantly killing two men in the second wave and wounding the other two. The rest didn't hesitate, Norwood said, clambering over the bodies toward the beach.

In perhaps 90 seconds, the soldiers were gone. As a crewman cranked the ramp up as fast as he could, Norwood backed off the beach at full throttle. He had to hold the rudder perfectly straight or the boat would turn sideways and roll over in the surf, as many did that day.

Once in deep water, he spun the boat and headed to sea, the hole from the artillery shell leaking with every big wave on the five-mile trip to his ship. There, Norwood was given another Higgins boat. Its coxswain had been wounded by a round that passed through the thin steel ramp and entered his eye.

A front seat for a hellish battle

The battle was so hellish that Norwood lost track of the trips to the beach; he thinks he made four. Sometimes the incoming fire was so intense that commanders on the beach ordered him to leave after loading only two or three wounded. Still, his crew brought 16 to 18 wounded men to a hospital ship.

The worst part, Norwood said, was waiting while medics loaded the wounded. Under intense fire, he had to calmly feather the throttle to hold the boat straight so the surf wouldn't twist it out of the groove it had dug coming in.

By his second trip, the GIs he was ferrying to the beach had seen the wounded returning.

"There was no more standing up, trying to look over the sides

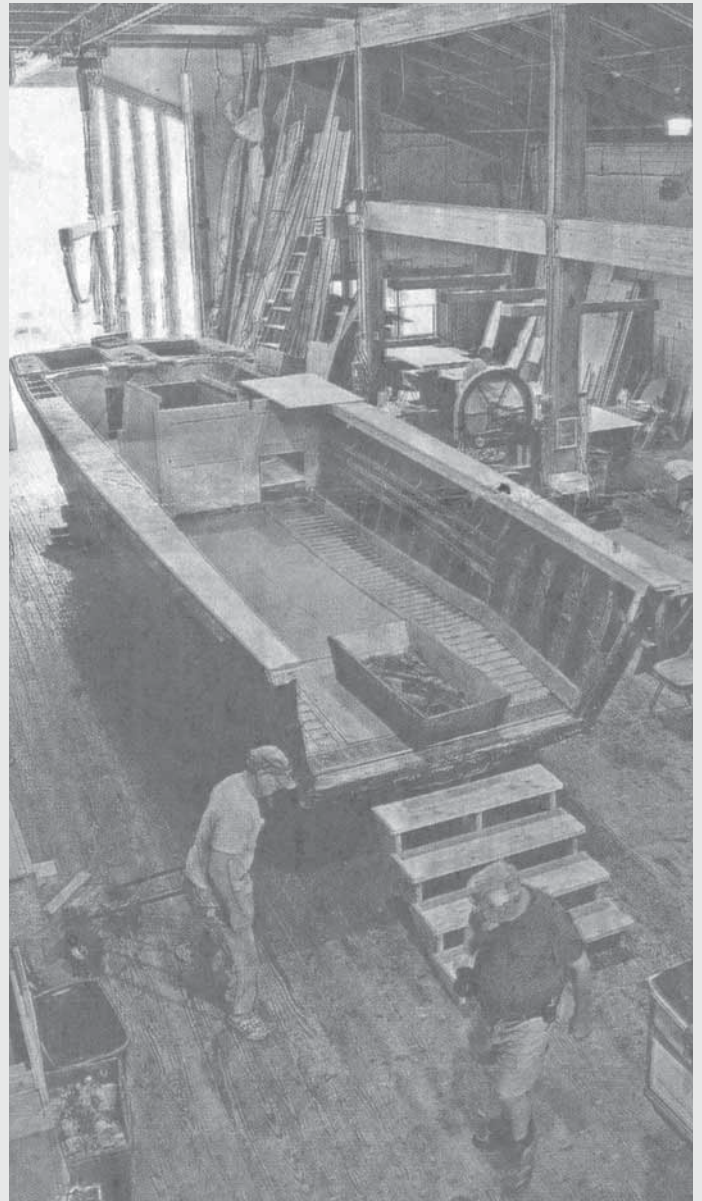
and see what was going on," he said. "They were all hunkered as low as they could get."

Later, he and his crew volunteered for another terrible job: cruising along the beach to pull floating bodies out of the water. After three days, they grew so distressed that they asked a senior non-commissioned officer whether they could stop. He reminded them that every dead GI they found was one more family that would know what happened. The crew returned to the somber hunt for two more days, until a storm blew the rest of the bodies offshore, Norwood said.

"I still have nightmares about that," he said. "Not bad ones now, I guess, more like dreams."

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Staff photo by Takaaki Iwabu

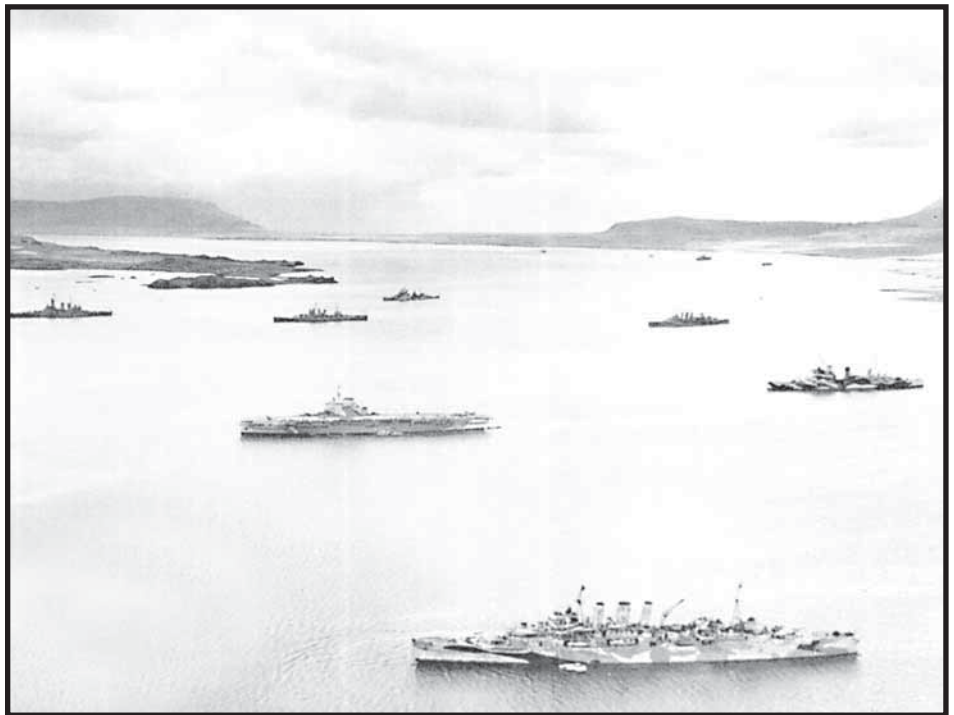




# THE NORTH RUSSIA RUN

## CHAPTER II THE NORTH RUSSIA RUN

The Armed Guard met its supreme test in the long and dangerous voyages to North Russia. Without doubt there were more hazards in these trips to Murmansk than in any other kind of naval duty. Gales were frequent. Ice fields were a common menace to navigation. Magnetic compasses became completely unreliable. Floating mines were often encountered. Choice of routes was limited. German submarines and surface craft were able to operate from nearby bases. German planes could shadow convoys for days and bomb ships from bases within twenty minutes flying time of Murmansk. Before escort carriers were used, only the weather and the guns of escorts and merchant ships stood in the way of wholesale destruction of every merchant ship which ventured to the relief of the hard-pressed Russians. Convoys battled their way to the approaches of Murmansk and then underwent constant attacks in the harbor as they patiently waited to unload their precious cargoes. Cargo handling facilities were very limited and the constant bombing of the city was not calculated to improve the situation. The story of the voyages to Murmansk, therefore, is one of almost unbelievable horror, or matchless courage, and of unlimited devotion to duty. There is nothing quite like it in all history. Ships which left the ports of the United States for Russia had about one chance in three of returning prior to the spring of 1943. After that date the odds were much better. Chances of rescue from sinking ships in sub-zero weather were not very good in spite of all efforts to save personnel whenever possible. Even if nothing happened, the long watches in severely cold weather made the trip one of the most trying experiences imaginable. But on most of the trips the Germans were encountered. Young men went to Murmansk in perfect health. They returned tired and



nervous from loss of sleep and the sight of men dying all around them. Few men could stand the strain of many trips to Murmansk. They would generally agree that it was the most horrible experience of their lives. Even the return trip was full of danger. Sea power was confronting land based air power under the most trying conditions imaginable. The odds were heavily stacked on the side of the Germans. Yet the convoys, or remnants of the convoys, got through. The life blood of victory never ceased to flow to the Russians. Fire power of merchant ships continually improved. Ship losses did not cease, but they decreased.

It is with the part the Armed Guard played in this drama of life and death that this chapter deals. American ships were almost constantly in North Russian waters either en route in harbor, or on the return voyage to the United States. They were under almost daily attack. It is obviously impossible and undesirable to mention every enemy encounter. We are interested, therefore, in describing the most spectacular clashes with the enemy and in presenting to the reader a description of what life for the Armed Guard in this

theater of the war was like. No attempt is made to describe the losses of British ships. Many of the escorts were British and the British merchant ships were going to Russia side by side with American vessels. But the story of the part played by escorts and ships of other nationalities must be told elsewhere.

Merchant ships going to North Russia required special installation. Their bows were strengthened to give some protection from ice. Heat coils were installed in their double bottoms and in water tanks to prevent freezing. The only ships which could undertake the voyage were those which had received the special winter treatment.

The records of the Arming Merchant Ship Section of the Fleet Maintenance Division of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations indicate that some 347 merchant ships were dispatched to North Russia through April 26, 1945. Most of the losses were sustained between January 5, 1942 and March 14, 1943. In this period 143 ships departed for North Russia and 111 arrived. Losses en route were 32 ships and on the return voyage 14 ships were lost.

# THE NORTH RUSSIA RUN

These figures indicate that about one out of every three ships was lost.<sup>1</sup> After this early period of heavy losses the tide turned; only 10 ships out of more than 200 were lost on the North Russia run for the remainder of the war, according to the records of the War Shipping Administration.

The Navy made every effort to give ships for Murmansk the best possible armament and large quantities of ammunition. These efforts began to pay off as expert Armed Guard crews gained experience in gunnery. While some of the early Armed Guard crews went to Russia with improper winter clothing, every effort was made to remedy this situation in 1942. The advice of Admiral Bird's expert on winter clothing was sought on the best available clothing for the North Russia climate and before 1942 ended these crews were being furnished with the best and most complete sets of winter clothing which could be obtained.

On December 6, 1941 the SS Larranaga left the port of Boston on a trip which was ultimately to take her to Murmansk. The Armed Guard on the Larranaga got its first taste of battle when it fired three rounds as a surfaced submarine on Christmas Eve, perhaps scoring a hit on the second round. Not until January 8 did the ship depart Reykjavik, Iceland, with British Convoy PQ 8 for Murmansk. The Larranaga was lucky. German submarines inflicted losses on the escorting vessels on January 17 while the convoy was about 60 miles northeast of Kilden Island, but the merchant ships had scattered during the submarine attack. High level bombing attacks on Murmansk on the last three days in February disturbed the stay of the Larranaga at Murmansk but did no damage to the ship. She was back in New York on April 20.<sup>2</sup>

The SS El Lago and the SS West Nohno went to North Russia in

Convoy PQ 9-10, but there are no Armed Guard voyage reports for these ships. The SS West Nohno carried an Armed Guard. Three ships were in PQ 11. They were the SS City of Flint, SS Makawao, and the SS North King.

Some of these early ships to Russia did not carry Armed Guards and were either unarmed or at best carried a few .30 or .50 cal. machine guns. Nevertheless, the urgency of their cargoes was such that they were not delayed for armament. PQ 11 arrived in Murmansk on 23 February. At least one ship, the SS City of Flint, engaged enemy planes on February 26 and 28. Nine planes, three of which were Stuka dive bombers, were able to straddle the SS City of Flint with four or five bombs on the latter date. On March 2 the Germans concentrated their bombing attack on the city rather than on the ships in the port. The return trip to Iceland was worse than the trip to Murmansk. Numerous floating mines were encountered and storms were a daily occurrence. A Russian merchant ship was torpedoed, but an escort accounted for an enemy submarine.

PQ 12 contained five merchant ships from the United States, none of which appears to have carried an Armed Guard. They were the SS El Coston, SS Capulin (later named SS Illapel), SS Artigas, SS El Occidente, and the SS Stone Street. The SS El Occidente carried guns but did not have trained men to man them. She was torpedoed and sank within two minutes on the return voyage from Murmansk on April 13.

PQ 13 was the first convoy to feel the full fury of the German attack. But even the attacks on this convoy were only a foretaste of what was to come in the months to follow. Of the 10 American ships in this convoy, three, the SS Raceland, SS Effingham, and the SS Bateau, were lost before the convoy reached Murmansk. No reports exist for the SS Gallant Fox,

the SS Elestero, the SS Mana, the SS Bateau, and the SS Ballot, thus indicating that they did not carry Armed Guards at this time. The SS Eldena, the SS Mormacmar, and the SS Dunboyne carried Armed Guards and their Armed Guard officers give a vivid description of events, especially of the heavy air attacks sustained during a month at Murmansk. The whole trip was a bad one for the SS Mormacmar. She left Boston on February 18. On her deck were barrels of phosphorous which would burn if it came into contact with water. She also carried tanks, trucks, and planes. When one day out of port, news came to the ship that another ship had been torpedoed about 60 miles ahead. Rather than risk her valuable cargo, the ship went to Portland, Maine. She sailed again on February 22. When near Halifax she passed a burning ship which had been torpedoed. While underway to Loch Ewe a severe storm, engine trouble, and fire on deck came as triple blows to the ship. The Armed Guard helped save the SS Mormacmar from fire when some of the barrels of phosphorous broke open and started burning. More trouble came on March 8 when a member of the ship's merchant crew broke into the slop chest and stole a case of rum. Three of the able bodied seamen were unable to stand watches because of drunkenness. At Reykjavik the merchant crew refused to work deck cargo and the Armed Guard was forced to work cargo from midnight of the 17th until the afternoon on the 18th so that the ship could leave port and try to join up with the convoy which had sailed on that day. Floating mines were spotted on two occasions on the way to Murmansk. Worse still, a severe gale caught the convoy on March 25 and scattered it. Only five of the original 20 ships were together two days later. A German plane began shadowing the ships on March 28, just out of range of their guns. Meanwhile five other ships,



# THE NORTH RUSSIA RUN

including a destroyer, had joined up with the convoy. It was on this date that the SS Raceland was torpedoed or bombed and the SS Bateau was lost from unknown causes. Fortunately four destroyers and a cruiser joined the convoy on March 29 in time to protect it in a surface battle with German destroyers about 150 miles northwest of Murmansk. The battle was fought in a heavy snow squall. Shells were falling all around the merchant ships in the convoy. The escorts sustained considerable damage and also inflicted damage on the attacking ships, including the sinking of at least one German destroyer. The convoy was able to plow its way through heavy ice fields towards Murmansk.

The Dunboyne witnessed much action on the approaches to Murmansk, apparently with another part of the convoy. A scout bomber attacked on the morning of March 28, but dropped its bombs into the sea after the Dunboyne opened fire with all nine of her guns. Later in the day a bomber dropped five bombs close to the SS Mana and five close to the SS Ballot. The Ballot developed trouble with her steering gear and dropped astern out of sight. She was not lost but apparently did not reach Murmansk. On the morning of March 30 the SS Effingham was torpedoed 150 feet astern of the Dunboyne, but was able to launch two life boats. Some of the men died in these boats from exposure. The Dunboyne joined the convoy on March 30 just before the entry into Murmansk. Only nine of the original twenty vessels were present when the entry was made into the port of Murmansk. Even the entry into port was contested by the Germans. When the convoy was abeam Kildin Island, about 20 miles north of Murmansk about four bombs were dropped ahead of the Eldena and two near the Mormacmar. One of the bombs damaged the Mormacmar slightly. Enemy submarines were also in the area and

were heavily attacked by the escorting vessels. The presence of Russian planes and the effective fire from anti-aircraft guns in the hills around Murmansk were welcome sights to the battle weary men as their ships slipped through Kola Inlet and came to anchor at Murmansk.

The convoy was at Murmansk until April 28. During this period it was under almost constant attack. One witness stated that there were 110 alerts and 54 actual bombing attacks. While this figure appears somewhat exaggerated, it is known that the Dunboyne manned her guns 58 times. None of the American merchant ships appear to have received any appreciable damage while in the port. On the other hand the Eldena was credited by the Russian government with shooting down three bombers and the entire crew was rewarded one month's pay. The Dunboyne was officially credited with two enemy planes and may have helped bring down another. This action took place on April 3 when the Germans used four-motored bombers against the convoy for the first time. At least three British ships were hit. Armed Guards suffered greatly from loss of sleep. A very bad day was April 15. In the early afternoon about 50 enemy planes were in the air at one time and late in the afternoon at least 125 planes became involved in dog fights. Two British ships were hit. Murmansk was taking a terrific pounding, but allied planes were hitting back at the attackers.

At last the long nightmare at Murmansk was over for the merchant ships. The men on these ships had seen bombs fall repeatedly all around them. Now they had to fight their way back home. The convoy left Murmansk on April 28 and arrived at Reykjavik on May 7. The most serious challenge other than from floating mines came on May 1. On this date four of six German planes delivered a torpedo or bombing attack without success. Shortly after

noon came a surface engagement with German surface units. During this engagement a Russian merchant ship was torpedoed, and went to the bottom in about two minutes. At times enemy shells hit dangerously near the merchant ships. On May 2 the escorts dropped depth charges and the Germans shadowed the convoy by plane, but the convoy was now safely through. On the next day friendly aircraft appeared overhead.

Only two ships had Armed Guards aboard in convoy PQ 14. These were the SS Yaka and the SS West Cheswald. They left Reykjavik on April 8 and arrived at Murmansk April 19. Many of the ships in the convoy turned back because of fog and snow. On April 15 the inevitable German plane appeared and circled the convoy out of range of the guns. The escorts made contact with three enemy destroyers. Next day a German plane appeared at about the same time but did not remain in the vicinity of the convoy very long. At 1235 the Convoy Commodore's ship was torpedoed and sank in about a minute. Rescue ships picked up 31 survivors from the icy waters. At least two more torpedoes passed through the convoy but missed all ships. On April 17 from one to three planes dropped bombs without doing damage. Torpedoes passed ahead of the leading ships in the convoy and the escorts apparently sank a submarine. The convoy entered the port of Murmansk on April 19, with its escort increased by two Russian destroyers and with fighter planes overhead. While in port the ships shared in the daily attacks which PQ 13 was receiving. The Yaka had a long stay in Murmansk because she required repairs to her bow and propeller, and missed sailing with the convoy which left on April 28. On May 12 and 14 she received damage from near misses and on May 15 a bomb hit her No. 2 boiler. Bombs on May 27 missed the ship, but bomb fragments on June 13 opened her deep tank and made 14

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holes in her port side. On this date the Yaka shot down one enemy plane. While in Murmansk from April 19 to June 27 the Yaka experienced 156 air raid alarms. Bombs were dropped on the town or ship 48 times and on 19 occasions planes dropped no bombs. The Yaka was attacked five times and about 50 bombs were dropped near her. On the return trip German patrol planes picked up the convoy on July 2. Near Iceland on July 5 the Germans sank at least seven ships and damaged another during a dense fog. The West Cheswald was lucky enough to escape damage from enemy action while at Murmansk, but a bomb fell fifty feet from the ship on the morning of April 23 and destroyed a 50 ton crane which had been used in unloading tanks from the ship. She left with the April 28 convoy.

PQ 15 included sixteen American ships when it left Iceland for Murmansk on April 26. Before most of these ships returned to Iceland on May 29 they had experienced constant attacks by the enemy and had inflicted some damage. The convoy ran into the dangerous season on the Murmansk run when ice began to force ships closer to Northern Europe and daylight endured for 24

hours. The late spring and summer was always the period most dreaded by men bound for Murmansk, for this season of the year permitted continual air attacks and brought ships closer to German air bases. The sixteen American merchant ships were the Alcoa Rambler, the Expositor, the Deer Lodge, the Mormacrio, the Texas (later the Kapitän Vislobokov), the Seattle Spirit, the Zebulon B. Vance, the Bayou Chico, the Paul Lukenbach, the Capira, the Lancaster, the Hegira, the Francis Scott Key, the Alcoa Cadet, the Mormacrey, and the Topa Topa.

Floating mines were encountered along the route to Russia. German planes began to scout the convoy April 30. On May 1 one of three enemy planes was shot down. Enemy bombs fell wide of the ships and did no damage. On May 3 five or more torpedo planes succeeded in sinking three British merchantmen in rapid order. The attack took place just after midnight. One of the enemy planes crashed in flames. A few minutes later an Expositor lookout discovered a submarine conning tower in the center of the convoy and just a few yards off the ship's starboard quarter. When the submarine changed course

the four inch gun on the Expositor was brought to bear and the top of the conning tower was blown off. A torpedo was avoided by banking the ship full speed. The Armed Guard on this ship consisted of only four gunners, a signalman striker, and an officer. They went without sleep for two days and nights on the approaches to Murmansk. The convoy reached Murmansk on May 6 and departed May 21, except for ships which had not completed loading or had been damaged in port. The Armed Guard voyage report of the Paul Luckenbach indicated that the Armed Guard went to general quarters 31 times in this fifteen day period and that enemy planes, mostly high altitude bombers were observed on about 15 occasions. Bombs fell around the Zebulon B. Vance on May 10, but caused no damage. The Armed Guard on the Mormacrio shot down one German plane during a low level bombing attack on May 12 in which four bombs were dropped within 50 yards of the ship. On May 15 bombs landed within 75 feet of the Francis Scott Key and showered the ships with bomb fragments.

On the return trip from Murmansk there was less than the usual amount of enemy activity. The high point on the return voyage came when a plane, launched from a British ship, shot down an attacking plane.

Conditions became worse for those ships from PQ 15 which remained at Murmansk after May 21. The Mormacrey experienced 166 air raid alarms and witnessed 56 attacks on the docks and harbor in 53 days. Her Armed Guard saw three ships sink and two receive damage. She was in the ill fated convoy which sustained such heavy losses from mines or possibly mines and torpedoes off Northern Iceland on July 5. The Deer Lodge was damaged on May 18 and was twice attacked after that date while at nearby Rosta. The attacks of May 27 and June



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29 were without serious consequences. Only the latter did minor damage. At the end of July she went to Archangel and, after additional repairs, was ready for sea with a cargo of chrome ore. Not until September 15 did she depart Archangel in a convoy which suffered heavy submarine attacks from September 20-22. On June 21 the Alcoa Cadet sank in Kola Inlet, apparently from a mine which had been dropped from an aeroplane into the mud and had eventually worked loose and struck the ship. The Capira Armed Guard officer reported that his crew went to general quarters 125 times in 53 days and that enemy planes actually appeared 66 times. He actually counted 250 enemy planes over Murmansk in this period. Planes approaching the port from the North were generally at high altitude. When they approached from the south they were much lower, often appearing to be as low as 500 feet. The common form of attack was dive bombing. In every determined raid German fighters accompanied the bombers. The Germans used Junkers 88 or 87 dive bombers, Messerschmidt 110 fighter-bombers, and Messerschmidt 109 fighters. Before each determined raid a Heinkel III generally flew over at great height on reconnaissance. The Capira Armed Guard officer counted 24 enemy planes shot down by anti-aircraft fire and fighter interception during his stay at Murmansk. He thought the German bombing rather poor because only two ships were sunk and two damaged by near misses while he was in port. His figure did not include the Alcoa Cadet, sunk by an enemy mine. The Capira and Lancaster left Murmansk on June 27 in convoy PQ 13, consisting of 33 ships from Murmansk and Archangel. The Capira witnessed the horrible spectacle of six out of seven ships in sight suffering violent explosions off Iceland July 5.

The next convoy to sail for North Russia, PQ 16, consisted of 35 ships. It left Iceland on May 20. The convoy split on May 29. Part of the ships continued

to Archangel, arriving on June 1; the largest part of the convoy arrived at Murmansk on May 30. The convoy departed from Murmansk on June 27 and those ships bound for Reykjavik docked on July 6. Behind these simple facts about ship movements lies a grim story. Without doubt the German attacks on this convoy were heavier than on any ships yet sent to North Russia, but the full fury of the German attack did not materialize until a short time later.

One of the merchant ships in this convoy already had a proud claim of success against the enemy even before she reached Reykjavik. The Mauna Kea Armed Guard reported four or more hits on a German submarine on April 3. When debris flew into the air, the Armed Guard officer concluded that the submarine had been sunk. Another ship, the Alcoa Banner, had no guns aboard until she reached Iceland. Even after five .30 cal. guns were placed aboard at Iceland there was no Armed Guard, only a Navy radioman and a signalman to keep the guns ready for instant use.

On this voyage, as on all voyages to North Russia, numerous floating mines were encountered. The Germans discovered the convoy on May 24 and for the next six days attacked it more than 25 times. Both submarines and planes were employed. Ships in the convoy were machine gunned several times. There was no night, only day, and, therefore, little rest for the Armed Guards. The enemy began attacking on May 25. On that date the Carlton was hit and had to return to Iceland. Bombs fell close to a number of ships, including the American Robin (later named Perekop), the City of Joliet, and the Michigan. The City of Joliet avoided an aerial torpedo by hard right rudder. The Michigan shot down two German planes. There was no let up in the attack in the early morning hours of May 26 as the convoy was off the north coast of Norway. At 0105 a submarine attack

developed. A torpedo passed just astern of the John Randolph. This ship led a charmed life on the outbound trip. She experienced four near misses from bombs and two from torpedoes. The Syros heavily loaded with TNT was torpedoed at 0100 on May 26 and sank in less than 2 minutes. Shortly after noon the Alamar was hit just aft on the mainmast and sank. All hands were rescued. The Armed Guard from this ship was on the Massmar when she too was sunk on the return voyage, thus making two ships which had been sunk from under that unlucky crew. May 27 was the worst day for the convoy. Perhaps as many as 108 German planes attacked. The American Robin was straddled by seven bombs. The Mormascul sank. The Mauna Kea was shaken by several near misses. When the day ended six ships had been sunk, three were listing noticeably, and two were on fire. An unfortunate episode of the day was the shooting down of a British plane which had been launched from the convoy. The American gunners did not recognize the plane as friendly. The pilot was rescued. The West Nilus received credit for shooting down one German plane.

The tide had turned by May 28. Russian destroyers met the convoy on that date. The City of Joliet sank from the damage of the previous day. The Armed Guards were saved and later placed on board the John Randolph. They were on board this ship when it struck a mine and was lost on the return voyage, but all Armed Guards were saved. The Richard Henry Lee found pieces of aluminum on her deck after firing at a four motored plane. Presumably these were shot off a German plane. This ship had a narrow escape on May 29 when she mistakenly turned to go with the convoy to Archangel rather than follow the ships to Murmansk. While recovering position an enemy bomb was dropped 10 yards from the ship. The Mauna Kea received slight damage on the same day. Russian fighters helped beat off an

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attack on May 30, the day the convoy arrived at Murmansk, but 13 bombs were dropped around the American Robin.

The Germans bombed Murmansk on every clear day while the ships from PQ 16 were anchored there. There were more than 70 alarms. The Steel Worker was sunk by a mine while standing out in Kola Inlet on June 3.

Relatively few enemy planes were encountered by the convoy on its return. The entire trip from Murmansk to Iceland was made in heavy fog which afforded some protection. But on July 5 grim tragedy stalked through the convoy. With visibility about 800 yards the ships ran into a mine field some 10 miles from the northwest point of Iceland. Three of the six ships lost were American. They were the John Randolph, the Massmar, and the Heffron. The Exterminator was damaged but reached Reykjavik. Many present at the disaster were convinced that submarines were present. The Nemaha reported near misses from shell fire. But it appears that the ships ran into a British mine field. The work of the escorts in rescuing survivors was notable. The Free French corvette Roselys was especially praised, for she rescued 180 men.

The ferocity of German warfare reached a new high in the tragic destruction of PQ 17. In no other convoy to North Russia were American losses so high. We lost more than three fourths of all our merchant ships in this convoy and our losses on this voyage alone were more than one fourth of our total losses in all voyages to North Russia. The reason for these losses in to be found in the fact that merchant ships dispersed July 4 and were left to shift for themselves. The escorts went west to meet heavy units of the German navy which were reported be steaming toward the convoy. The convoy left Iceland on June 27. Heavy ice floes were encountered by

June 30, for on that date, the John Witherspoon suffered damage to her forepeak water tank. A German plane sighted the ships on July 1. From July 1 to July 10 a large part of the convoy was wiped out. On July 2 the enemy made several attacks. One enemy plane was shot down and another landed to rescue the pilot. July 3 was an easy day. Enemy aircraft were over the ships and at least one bomb was dropped. Independence Day witnessed heavy attacks in which at least eight enemy planes were knocked from the sky by Armed Guards and two American ships, the Christopher Newport and the William Hooper were sunk by torpedoes. Patrick Hugh Wright, and Armed Guard on the former ship fired his .30 cal. gun at the approaching torpedo until it struck the ship. The Armed Guard on the Daniel Morgan claimed better luck, for they assumed credit for hitting a torpedo 20 yards from the Carlton and saving that ship to sink another day. About an hour and a half before midnight the convoy received orders to disperse so the slow and heavily loaded merchant ships were left virtually defenseless except for their machine guns and a few heavier guns.

From this point the history of the convoy becomes largely a series of separate attacks by German submarines and planes, most of which ended in sinking the merchant ships involved in the attack. Most of the ships headed for Novoya Zemlya and several sought safety in Matochkin Strait.

After being at General Quarters for over 28 hours, the Daniel Morgan witnessed the sinking of the Fairfield City by bombs on July 5. Five enemy planes then bombed the Daniel Morgan. Her Armed Guard shot down two planes but the ship was so damaged by bombs that she sank. Other American ships which sunk on that grim day were the Pan Kraft, the Washington, the Carlton, the Honomu, and the Peter Kerr. The men of the Washington spent

almost 10 days in their boats. After seven days in the bitter cold weather, they went ashore on Novya Zemlya and had seagull soup. They went down the coast again and two days later snared over 100 hell-diver ducks. This feast was shared with survivors from a British ship. Again they departed in their boats and came upon the Winston-Salem grounded on a sand bar. This was their first opportunity to have a real meal in 10 days. Not until 24 July did the survivors reach Archangel. More than a third had frozen feet. The men from the Daniel Morgan were rescued by a Russian tanker on July 6 and reached Molotovsk safely. The Pan Atlantic was sunk on July 6 with the loss of 25 men. The John Witherspoon was sunk by torpedoes on the same date. Part of the Armed Guard and ship's crew were in a boat for 53 hours before being rescued by the El Capitan. The remainder were in an open life boat even longer before a British warship picked them up. Far luckier were the Hoosier, the Samuel Chase, the Benjamin Harrison, and El Capitan. They were able to make Matochkin Strait, where several other ships had also found safety. On July 5 the Ironclad joined the Silver Sword, the Troubador, and a trawler. They too were able to make Matochkin Strait. Some of the ships, including the Ironclad, the Troubador, and the Benjamin Harrison were painted white so as to blend with the ice and snow.

On July 7 the Olopana and the Alcoa Ranger were torpedoed and sunk. The Bellingham took a fish, but this torpedo failed to explode and she was able to reach Archangel on July 10. Her gunners had been on almost continuous watch from July 3 to July 10.

Two ships which attempted to break out of Matochkin Strait prematurely came to grief. They were the Hoosier and El Capitan. The Hoosier was bombed and abandoned on July 9. El Capitan was bombed and sunk by escort



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on July 10. She was about 65 miles northeast of Iokanski.

The remaining American ships, the Benjamin Harrison, the Ironclad, the Silver Sword, the Troubador, the Winston-Salem, the Samuel Chase, and the Bellingham were able to get safely through to Molotovsk or Archangel. Two ships, the Benjamin Harrison and the Troubador used machine guns from tanks. The former also removed ammunition from her cargo to use in defending the ship.

Two more ships, the Silver Sword and the Bellingham, were torpedoed and lost on the return trip with QP 14 in September. Another, the Ironclad, went aground in Russian waters in November and was turned over to the Soviets to become the Marina Raskova. Only four American ships from the ill fated convoy were able to return safely from Russia to fight again. The loss of life had been very light because of the cooperation of all ships in rescuing men from life boats.

Survivors from the Carlton and the Honomu fell into the hands of the Germans and were not liberated until 1945. Nine of these men liberated were survivors from the Carlton Armed Guard.

PQ 18 took everything the Germans could throw at it, suffered tremendous losses, but pushed through to Archangel. In this convoy were some forty merchant ships and almost as many escorts. The British supplied an escort carrier, the Avenger. Twenty-three of the merchant ships were American, all defended by Armed Guards. Almost one third of the merchant ships were sunk on the voyage to Archangel, of which eight ships were American, two were Russian, and three were British. So dark did the prospects look for pushing ships through to North Russia in convoy that the United States and Britain experimented with a

"trickle movement" of ships into Arctic waters. Merchant ships would depart singly, without escort, every twelve hours. But this scheme failed to work. As a matter of fact, PQ 18 marked the turning point in North Russian operations. It demonstrated the value of escort aircraft carriers even in restricted waters. Further, it showed that ships which were given sufficient armament could fight through stubborn opposition and inflict heavy losses on the enemy. Up to this time ships for North Russia had been inadequately armed because guns were not available. But most American ships in PQ 18 were supplied with four or eight 20 mm guns and with a 3"/50 AA bow gun, as well as a stern gun for fighting submarines. This was the best armed and best defended convoy we had sent to North Russia up to this time. While the ultimate armament of eight 20 mm guns, a 5"/38 dual purpose stern gun, and a 3"/50 AA bow gun was not yet available, the ships of PQ 18 gave proof of what they could do against a land based aircraft when even a few suitable anti-aircraft guns were supplied. PQ 18, therefore, was a landmark in the war, a turning point in the battle of supply. It represents the dark hour which comes just before the dawn.

Reports of some nature are in the Navy Department for all of the American ships which took part in the action, except the SS Hollywood. While these reports do not always agree on details, such as the number of planes attacking, the time at which the action took place, and the exact results of the encounter, they allow no doubt as to the main pattern of the action and they present a clear and dramatic story of the main events which transpired. It should be remembered that a convoy of more than 75 ships takes up a lot of ocean. Armed Guard officers on individual ships were not able to report clearly on events which they could not see. Then too, men who were almost continually at battle stations for days at the time and

who went through the grim experience of leaving a sinking ship can be forgiven if they become slightly confused on dates and times when combats take place. After all, the Armed Guard officer was a busy man while in a war zone. He did not take a typewriter with him to the bridge when attack was imminent. He did not even have a typewriter furnished by the Navy Department. Normally the signalman kept notes during the voyage and entries were made in a rough log which every Armed Guard officer was required to keep.

Convoy PQ 18 slipped quietly out of Loch Ewe, Scotland, late in the afternoon of September 2, 1942. It carried the customary sinews of war, tanks, planes, oil, T.N.T., shells. It reached Archangel on September 21 and left that port on November 17, arriving at Iceland on November 26. Additional ships joined when the convoy was off Reykjavik, Iceland on September 7.

Throughout September 3 the barometer was falling and by evening the convoy was in a gale with seas reported at least 90 feet high. It became necessary to station Armed Guard forward gun watches amidships and for ships to turn into the wind in order to protect their heavy deck cargoes. Many ships lost life boats in the storm. With the return of better weather on September 5 the first enemy contact was made. This was a submarine sighted on the surface. No attack developed.

The presence of friendly planes over the convoy on September 8 and 9 must have been a reassuring sight, although on both days these planes sent Armed Guards to their battle stations. There was an atmosphere of tenseness throughout the convoy. Men were jittery as they realized that the zero hour was fast approaching.

A German four-motored bomber sighted the convoy on September 11.

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Next day a German seaplane received a rude surprise when planes from the British carrier interrupted the customary circling procedure. Both planes escaped and prepared the way for the heavy attack on September 13.

The convoy was between Jan Mayen Island and Spitsbergen. It was Sunday, the worst Sunday the men in PQ 18 will ever experience. Early in the morning German reconnaissance planes appeared on all sides. Shortly before 0900 German submarines struck twice and when their deadly torpedoes had done their work two ships from the convoy were at the bottom of the ocean. One of these was a Russian ship, the other was the Oliver Ellsworth. The latter, a Liberty ship, did not sink until destroyers finished the job with gun fire. Very few of the men in PQ 18 had any appetite for lunch as they watched the dull red glow on the horizon behind.

The worst attack came in the afternoon. First came a formation of bombers, perfectly camouflaged so that they could barely be seen as they skimmed through the heavy grey clouds. They met such a barrage of gun fire as had never been experienced on the North Russian run. One bomber was shot down, but not before bombs had been dropped all around ships in the convoy. It was a wonderful sight; ships which were judged to be relatively impotent were filling the air with tracer ammunition. The British also launched carrier planes. A short time later a very large formation of torpedo planes came in for the kill. It is impossible to state how many planes attacked. Figures vary from 20 to 50. They came in quite low; one account says at about 30 feet. Many were painted black with green or orange wing tips. They were weird and awful to behold. They darted up and down to confuse the aim of a thousand guns. Soon the water was alive with torpedoes. British planes were able to take to the air to help drive the Germans off,

but not until they had done their deadly work and sent eight ships to the bottom. Two were British, one Russian, and five were United States owned and carried Armed Guards. The United States ships were the Macbeth (Panamanian flag), the John Penn, the Wacosta, the Africander (Panamanian flag), and the Oregonian. In spite of German attacks on the ships crippled in the initial attack the loss of life was relatively small. At dusk more torpedo planes were over the convoy without doing damage. One fourth of the merchant ships had been wiped out in a single day. But at least ten German planes had been destroyed. It is impossible to assign credit to individual ships for planes destroyed. It appears that the William Moultrie led the field with four planes. One of the Armed Guard officers concluded his description of the engagement with the laconic report "No sleep tonight". This just about summarizes the normal routine for Armed Guards on the long voyages to North Russia.

Less than four hours past midnight a German submarine located the convoy, got a line on a fat British tanker and sent her to the bottom or rather damaged the ship so severely that she had to be sunk by her own escorts. Snow flurries did not interrupt the ever present reconnaissance planes as they stalked the convoy on the morning of September 14 like great birds of prey. Torpedo planes which came in shortly after noon in the hope of repeating their successes of yesterday met a warm reception from the guns of the merchant ships and their escorts, and also from planes from the British carrier. One Armed Guard officer counted six German planes in the water at one time. About thirty minutes later a seemingly unending line of torpedo planes and bombers approached the convoy from dead ahead and from the starboard side. One Armed guard officer counted thirty-five enemy planes before he became too busy with defending his ship and

had to stop counting. One of those bombers, on fire and rapidly losing altitude, drove his doomed plane with its deadly cargo of bombs on the forward deck of the Mary Luckenbach. The ship disintegrated. There was not a single survivor. She was one great mass of grayish black smoke and flame that must have reached a thousand feet in height. The smoke was so thick that it appeared the Virginia Dare and the Nathaniel Green were also hit. Actually, the Nathaniel Green did suffer considerable damage to her deck cargo and fittings. There were machine gun bullet marks all over the ship. But she had established a proud record of from five to seven planes destroyed. Next day the Convoy Commodore, a British rear admiral sent the following message to the ship "Reverence to your gunners, you are at the top of the class." The St. Olaf was hit just aft of amidships by a 3" shell, but suffered no casualties. This happened during an attack by high level bombers in which a large number of bombs were dropped around the ships in the convoy. The shell landed only a few feet from the No. 5 hold which contained T.N.T. Estimated enemy losses for this day ran to 14 planes. All enemy attempts to sink the British carrier had failed.

On September 15 German bombers returned in great numbers to drop bombs from high levels at the carrier and the other ships. Wave after wave came over to drop their loads for three hours and forty-five minutes. There were perhaps 60 to 70 bombers in the attack. The clouds gave perfect protection. The men on the ships could only gaze skyward and hope their luck would hold out. Men stood by their guns almost dead from lack of sleep. One Armed Guard officer reported that he had not slept more than two hours at night for the past three nights. He did not even leave the bridge for food. It was 21 hours out of every 24 on duty if men of the Armed Guard wanted to live, and there was no overtime pay.



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Next day enemy planes appeared, but a friendly Catalina also showed up. By noon a welcome snow storm covered the convoy completely and allowed tired men to relax slightly for the first time in days. The carrier and some of the other escorts left to take a returning convoy back west. The survivors were sent back with the escorts. For the next two days the only danger came from floating mines and very limited submarine activity. Enemy air activity was limited to reconnaissance on September 17. Russian escorts joined the convoy as it headed southwestward along Novaya Zemlya.

At daybreak on September 18 Russia proper came into view when the tip of the Kanin peninsula was sighted. Bombers and torpedo planes returned to the attack. Many ships had close escapes from bombs, but the attack by the torpedo planes was much more serious. The William Moultrie claimed that she exploded a torpedo by gunfire. The Kentucky took a fish and then was bombed to go down as the last ship lost on the trip. The enemy lost at least two planes.

On 19 September 1942 the convoy arrived in Archangel Gulf only to face a raging gale from the northwest. Several ships ran aground. The Germans made one last attempt at the convoy on September 20, but their bombs were ineffective. The convoy was safe. While some attacks were made on Archangel, the ships remained safe enough.

The Armed Guards were officially credited with the destruction of 28 enemy planes on the voyage, and voyage reports of Armed Guard officers would seem to indicate the possibility that this figure is too conservative. The Nathaniel Green led the field with eight planes destroyed, closely followed by the Virginia Dare with seven, and the William Moultrie with five. The exact number of planes destroyed by carrier planes and by the escorts is not known,

but it appears that the Germans lost more than forty planes, with many more damaged. This was big league shooting. The convoy had weathered the most furious attacks which the Germans could possibly throw at it. It had lost 13 ships, but it had modified the daring attitude of the German pilots considerably. They were not as bold after September 14. The battle for this supply lane had really been won, but no one could be sure of this fact at the time.

The return voyage from Archangel was relatively uneventful, except for foul weather which made it virtually impossible to keep station in convoy and which covered the ships and guns with ice and snow. The Lafayette (later the Novosibirsk) reported two torpedoes fired at her when she was separated from the convoy on November 21, but no ship received damage from the enemy. The weather was a powerful ally of the Armed Guards when it became very bad for it kept German planes away.

## Trickle Movement

At the end of October, 1942 a daring and somewhat startling experiment was initiated. Ten ships, five British and five United States flag, were to brave the hazards of the voyage to North Russia without continuous escort. Each ship was to travel independently. Ships would leave Iceland at 12 hour intervals, so that they would travel about 100 miles apart. This was the most hazardous undertaking which could be assigned to a merchant ship. It placed great responsibility on the Armed Guards. While the United States ships did not fare too badly, no doubt because of the element of surprise and secrecy and because of the protection which the fog, rain, and sleet afforded, the experiment was not repeated.

The Richard H. Alvey left Iceland on October 29 and had no contact with the enemy enroute to Russia. She was escorted into the White Sea, grounded

off Archangel on November 7, but reached Molotovsk on November 12. On December 10 she proceeded to Kola Inlet and two days later anchored 12 miles from Murmansk. Although there were 52 air raids while she was at Kola Inlet, the Armed Guard fired at planes only once and these turned out to be Russian. No bombs fell within a mile of the ship. The voyage in convoy from Russia was equally uneventful, although the convoy sailed south of Bear Island. The convoy departed December 30 and arrived at Loch Ewe on January 11, 1943. Two storms were encountered.

The John Walker, which left Iceland on October 30, 1942 with an Armed Guard crew which had never been attacked by enemy planes, had a more exciting trip. On the morning of November 4 six enemy planes engaged in an attack which lasted two and one half hours. Four planes first appeared and began dropping bombs, but one was quickly forced to retire with smoke streaming behind. Later, two additional planes joined. The ship underwent eight separate attacks by the Germans. On six of these attacks bombs were dropped. The ship was able to elude the attackers briefly when heavy snow was falling, but when the atmosphere cleared a plane approached at very close range. This plane was forced to leave the scene with black smoke trailing. In all some 30 bombs were dropped. The John Walker arrived safely outside Archangel where she went aground November 8. Not until 5 days later did she dock at Molotovsk. She anchored in Kola Inlet on December 16 and was sprayed with bomb fragments on December 26 when bombs fell quite close. Her return with the December 30 convoy was uneventful.

The Hugh Williamson was ship No. 7 in the Trickle Movement. A four motored German plane dropped bombs on November 7 and two unidentified planes circled the ship on November 9, but she arrived safely at Molotovsk. The William Clark was

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torpedoed shortly after noon on November 4. The ship broke in two after the second and third torpedoes struck. There was heavy loss of life, but more than half of the personnel were saved. Some of the survivors were in a life boat for about three days.

The John H. B. Latrobe turned back and did not complete the trip to Russia. She was heavily attacked by torpedo planes on the morning of November 4, but miraculously escaped being struck by seven or eight torpedoes which were launched by eight or nine planes in seven attacks. The planes flew in to launch their deadly fish at an altitude of 20 to 40 feet above the water. They attacked in groups of three with only one plane normally launching a torpedo. The other attacking planes strafed the decks. The ship avoided one torpedo; another passed within 20 feet of the bow; and still another passed within 16 feet of the stern. One torpedo either passed under the ship or close alongside to port. Two planes were definitely damaged and several others were hit. Fog, rain, and snow came to the rescue of the Latrobe from the afternoon of November 4 to November 8. On the later date she hit a small iceberg and was no longer able to maintain full speed because of the hole in her side. She steered badly and had much trouble with her magnetic compass. She anchored briefly in Isa Fiord because of snow squalls and high winds. In view of her condition, the reported attacks on her route to Russia, and the value of her cargo, the master decided to return to Iceland.

It will thus be seen that the trickle Movement did not result in higher losses to United States ships than had been sustained in previous voyages in convoy. What would have happened if the experiment had been continued can only be guessed. It is not known to the writer how many of the British merchant ships traveling without escort were sunk, but apparently they suf-

fered heavy losses. Perhaps one of the strongest arguments against sending unescorted ships to Russia was the small possibility of rescuing personnel from ships which were sunk while operating separately. There was small likelihood that ships could be sent through after the Germans discovered what was happening. Perhaps the experiment had value as a means of upsetting German tactics north of Norway.

Convoy JW-51A consisted of some 16 merchant ships and about an equal number of escorts. It left Loch Ewe, Scotland on December 15, 1942, and made the trip to Russia without making contact with the enemy. It traveled through perpetual darkness and low fog. On December 22 five ships continued on to Molotovsk. The remainder arrived at Murmansk on Christmas Day. The ships bound for Molotovsk arrived on December 27.

While the ships were at Murmansk there were from 60 to 70 air alarms and German planes actually appeared over 50 times. After two Russian planes were shot down on December 25, the Russians began placing two spotters on merchant ships to aid in aircraft identification. No American ships were damaged, although bombs fell close to at least one vessel. El Oceano probably shot down a plane on January 24 and the Greylock claims to have sent another away trailing smoke next day. Eleven merchant ships, escorted by an even larger number of war ships, left Murmansk on January 29. The only serious mishap on the return voyage was that the Greylock was torpedoed on February 3 when the convoy was off the Denmark Straits. She sank in thirty minutes. The Armed Guard got off in the last boat. The convoy arrived at Loch Ewe on February 9.

Convoy JW-51B consisted of some 15 merchant ships and almost an equal number of escorts. It left Loch Ewe on December 22. Among the ten

American ships was one veteran of a ferocious German surface attack days earlier. The ship was the Jefferson Myers which was in a convoy from London to Hull when E boats attacked it in "E Boat Alley" east of Yarmouth on December 12. Five ships from the convoy were reported sunk.

The first contact with the enemy appears to have come on December 24 when a Heinkel attacked an allied patrol plane sixty miles north-east of the Faroe Islands. A storm of such proportions struck the convoy on December 29 that some ships, including the Chester Valley, were forced to heave to. The Yorkmar also became separated from the convoy.

On 31 December 1942 a surface engagement took place between units of the German Navy and the escorts. The German force probably consisted of a pocket battleship, a heavy cruiser, and several destroyers. None of the merchant ships was seriously damaged, although shells fell all around them. Shells landed within 100 feet of the Ralph Waldo Emerson and fragments actually did minor damage to the Calobre. Aside from reconnaissance, German air activity was nonexistent during the remainder of the voyage.

The Ballot ran aground on Kilden Island on 2 January 1943, and was a total loss, except for guns which could be salvaged. The other ships arrived safely in Kola Inlet on January 3, except for four ships. The Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Chester Valley, the Jefferson Myers, and the Puerto Rican, which went on to Molotovsk. The ships which went on to Molotovsk had no action, although enemy planes were over that port three times.

Convoy JW-52 included only five American merchant ships. This convoy, consisting of about 15 merchant ships



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and a large number of escorts, left Loch Ewe on January 17. After its arrival at Murmansk on January 27 its history merges with that of JW-51B and a few ships from JW-51A. Ships in this convoy came close to floating mines, notable on January 20 and 22. An unidentified plane first appeared on January 23. An air attack developed on January 24 in which at least three planes participated. The weather was cloudy and there were frequent snow squalls which offered protection for the planes. Nevertheless, it appears that three planes were shot down and that only one torpedo was launched against the convoy. The Cornelius Harnett, El Oriente, and Nicholas Gilman each was credited with the destruction of an enemy plane. The Cornelius Harnett was one of the first ships to be armed with a 5"/38 gun. The Delsud aided in the firing. Nothing more eventful than the dropping of depth charges took place between January 24 and the arrival of the convoy at Murmansk, except that one or more enemy planes appeared on January 25. The Gulf Wing reported that four bombs were dropped and that one landed close to her. Only the Cornelius Harnett was late in arriving. She did not reach Murmansk until January 29, for she had become separated from the convoy. Five ships, including the Chester Valley went on to Molotovsk, arriving 7 January 1943.

Throughout February the Germans hit Murmansk heavily, but they did not initiate constant and consistent bombing until February 19. The Gulf Wing reported 102 plane attacks until she left with other merchant ships in the return convoy. The Executive from convoy JW-51B reported going to general quarters 52 times. It is impossible to describe the strain which was imposed on the Armed Guard during the month of February. According to the Armed Guard officer on the Nicholas Gilman, "The suffering they endured is beyond my power to express." Men on his ship

lost from 10 to 20 pounds. They manned four of the eight 20 mm guns constantly day and night and the other guns were action commenced. After the long days of strain from witnessing bombs cascading down around the ships, this officer wrote that ten seconds could mean a lifetime of caught unprepared. The Executive accounted for an enemy plane on February 5. On February 19, when bombing began in deadly earnest, the Nicholas Gilman was damaged by a bomb exploding 150 feet away. The Chester Valley, which had moved to Murmansk, was straddled by bombs on February 21. On the same day the Germans dropped mines in the harbor. The Nicholas Gilman shot down a plane on February 26 and the Calobre got another on February 28. The first and only ship to receive serious damage was El Oriente on 27 February 1943. A 100 pound bomb hit her poop deck, killing one Armed Guard and wounding three. Russian spotters on board identified these planes as friendly and probably prevented the Armed Guard from warding off the attack.

All hands on some 30 merchant ships were glad to leave Murmansk on March 1. Depth charges were dropped between March 2 and 5, indicating that German submarines were around. On March 5 they took their deadly toll. First came German planes which did no damage. Floating mines were encountered in the morning and early afternoon. Two torpedoes struck home at about 0930 with deadly accuracy. The Executive was hit and later sunk by gun fire from the escorts. The Richard Bland took a fish but managed to stay afloat. The Calobre reported that three torpedoes were fired and that one passed under her stern some 25 to 30 feet from her hull. In the early afternoon 12 German bombers came in for the kill. Each is reported to have dropped from three to six bombs, and one report states that a total of 44 bombs were dropped. One enemy plane left trailing smoke. Bombs were close to the ships, but they survived.

The next few days witnessed some of the worst possible weather. Ships were unable to keep station in convoy and became scattered. They managed to ride out the gale, but the J. L. M. Curry's hull and deck plates began to crack on March 7 and the ship was abandoned on March 8. On March 9 the Puerto Rican was torpedoed some 287 miles north of Iceland. She had straggled from the convoy in the gale. There was only one survivor. The boats overturned and the men froze on the rafts. All of the Armed Guard perished. On March 10 the Richard Bland took another fish early in the morning and still another late in the afternoon. She had lost two boats and all of her rafts and did not have enough boats left to take her crew off. More than half were saved, but 15 Armed Guards were listed as missing. Wayne Baker BM 2/c did an heroic act when he refused to come aboard a life boat loaded with 27 men. He stayed aboard the half of the ship which was still afloat and passed a knife to the survivors in the boat so that they could cut it loose from the sinking ship. For his heroism and sacrifice he was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

The men from the remaining ships which anchored at Loch Ewe on 14 March 1943 had the satisfaction of knowing that with adequate guns they could hold their own against the most determined attacks the enemy could offer. They must have sensed that the tide was slowly turning. But at the moment all that mattered was sleep.

Convoy JW-53 was a large convoy of about 30 heavily loaded merchant ships. It left Loch Ewe on February 15, 1943. Eight American ships were in this convoy. It became known as the "Lost Convoy" because American ships were held in Russian ports until November 1. Two American ships did not leave Archangel until November 26. The decision was reached to delay movement of the ships until the ice cleared to

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the north and total darkness came. This convoy is significant because it was one of the last to be heavily attacked on the North Russia run. But most of the attacks took place at Murmansk and were not primarily directed at the merchant ships.

German aircraft detected JW-53 on February 23. They apparently directed submarines to the convoy, for depth charges were dropped on the next day. Two enemy planes again appeared on February 24 and dropped bombs, but not until the following day did a determined air attack develop. About a dozen German planes made the attack but did no damage. Bombs fell near the Bering and that ship shot down an enemy plane. On February 26 part of the convoy split off to go to Molotovsk. High level bombing accomplished nothing. One plane came in at about 1500 feet to lay bombs 150 feet from the Francis Scott Key. Bombs also fell close to Israel Putnam. So accustomed had some of the Armed Guards become to the German patrol plane which circled out of reach of gunfire that they gave it the name "Peter the Leach."

Part of the convoy anchored in Kola Inlet on February 27. Incendiaries landed on the deck of the Mobile City and the Beacon Hill was strafed. The Bering, now in the White Sea with the Molotovsk bound convoy, had a close call when bombs fell only 50 yards away. The Molotovsk bound convoy, which included the Beacon Hill, the Bearing, the City of Omaha, and the Israel Putnam, arrived at Molotovsk on March 2. Some of the ships engaged in a shuttle service between Russian ports during the long stay in northern waters. The ships which remained at Murmansk were heavily attacked. On March 3 several planes dropped high explosives and incendiary bombs. A British ship was hit. The Mobile City accounted for one plane on March 10 and the Thomas Hartley got two. A bomb fell about 50 yards from the

Mobile City on March 13 and another bomb threw fragments on the ship. A British ship was sunk and incendiaries were dropped on the Francis Scott Key. In March, April, and May there were many heavy bombing attacks. On March 27 the Thomas Hartley accounted for her third plane. Another British ship was hit on April 4 and on April 11 bombs landed close to the Mobile City. The Artigas may have damaged two planes on April 13.

The return trip was uneventful except for the collision between the Francis Scott Key and the Mobile City which did only minor damage. On November 8 a few depth charges were dropped. Most of the ships arrived at Gourock, Scotland on November 14. Their stay in Russian waters had been a long one, but not an American ship had been lost. This was to set the pattern for the future. Only seven more American ships were lost in North Russian operations and two of these were marine casualties.

The first year and a half of operations to North Russia had brought to the men of the Armed Guard great suffering and destruction. By the fall of 1943 their chances for survival were good, although the trip was still a long and grueling experience. Behind this change in the situation were a number of factors. More and more of the ships going to North Russia were new Liberties armed with a 5"/38 dual purpose gun, a 3"/50 AA gun, and eight 20 mm guns. Proper clothes were being furnished to the Armed Guard. As the result of refresher gunnery instruction, they were becoming very adept at using the guns. Escorts were available in adequate numbers. Escort carriers rendered invaluable protection. Soon the Germans were experiencing a shortage of gasoline which kept their air operations in this sector at a minimum. The protective cover of friendly aircraft over the ships was constantly expanding. It was becoming unsafe for German

aircraft and submarines to attempt to knock out convoys. In all this much credit goes to those who administered the Armed Guard. They gave the ships to North Russia every preference in armament, amount of ammunition issued, and in necessary equipment. The hard and costly experience of 1942 paid off in a better Armed Guard in 1943 and 1944. Enemy land based planes were challenged by ships and defeated. This had hardly seemed possible in 1942 when surface units everywhere were taking such a terrible beating from enemy land based aircraft. It is one of the miracles which the Armed Guard help accomplish. Life had simply become unsafe for anything in the sky above a convoy in which all ships were manned with Armed Guards and fully armed.

Only two United States ships were in the next convoy which went to Russia. But this 19 ship convoy which left Loch Ewe on November 15, 1943 appears to have experienced nothing worse than the lurking presence of German submarines, enemy planes in the distance, and mines. A mine floated by within 30 feet of the Thomas Sim Lee. The return trip was equally uneventful. Only the sickening sound of depth charges reminded the Armed Guards that the enemy submarines were stalking their quarry on January 3 and 4. The return convoy arrived at Loch Ewe on January 8, 1944.

The United States ships, the Arthur L. Perry and the John Fitch, were in a slightly smaller convoy which left Loch Ewe on November 22, 1943. Neither ship experienced direct contact with the enemy, but the John Fitch reported enemy aircraft over Murmansk and floating mines and one enemy plane seen on her return trip. Depth charges were also dropped by escorts as she was making her way toward Molotovsk on December 2. These reports indicate that for the time being the enemy was doing little more than harass ships bound for North Russia.



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Before the six United States ships which left Loch Ewe on 12 December 1943 returned to the friendly waters of Scotland they witnessed extensive submarine activity, enemy reconnaissance planes, bombing attacks on Murmansk, and floating mines. But the ships themselves were never in any serious danger.

The high point in the voyage of convoy JW-55B to North Russia was the surface engagement between the escorts and the pocket battleship Scharnhorst which ended in the destruction of that ship on December 26. There were only five United States ships in this convoy and their Armed Guards played no part in the surface engagement except as spectators of the distant gun flashes as the escorts maneuvered for the kill. This engagement took place southeast of Bear Island. Earlier an enemy plane had apparently dropped four bombs at the escorts on December 23. But no merchant ships appear to have been in any serious danger either on the trip to Russia or on the return trip to Belfast in early February.

More than half the ships in convoy JW-56A were United States flag. The nine United States ships were part of a convoy which seemed to face hard luck throughout the voyage. Although the ships left Loch Ewe on January 12, 1944, they did not reach Murmansk until sixteen days later. A storm forced them to heave to on January 14. Not until January 21 was the convoy reformed at Akureyri, Iceland. During the night of January 25-26 disaster came thick and fast for the tired Armed Guards and merchant crews. In rapid order the Penelope Barker, the Andrew G. Curtin and a British ship which carried the convoy commodore were torpedoed. Such disaster had not befallen a convoy since early 1943. The return trip to Loch Ewe witnessed another sinking when a British ship was torpedoed on March 4, just two days out of Murmansk. The large number of depth

charge patterns laid by the escorts testifies to the presence on many submarines in North Russian waters.

Nearly all of the ships in convoy JW-56B which left Loch Ewe on January 22, 1944 were United States flag and carried Armed Guards. In this convoy were 12 United States flag vessels. Depth charges dropped from January 27 to arrival at Murmansk on February 1 were estimated to be 1,500. Enemy planes were circling the convoy from January 27 to 31. The customary mines were encountered. One enemy plane was reported destroyed on January 29. All of the ships got safely through either to Murmansk or Molotovsk. While at Murmansk enemy planes appeared 14 times. No ships were damaged by bombs. The history of this convoy merges with that of JW-56A for the return trip to Scotland. The voyage reports of the Armed Guard officers might almost be summarized "Depth charges as usual". The enemy is still able to send his submarines in for sneak attacks which do some damage, but he is rapidly losing his ability to inflict serious losses. Escort carriers shield the convoys from air attacks. If planes do get in, they are met with a curtain of anti-aircraft fire from the escorts and the now well armed merchant ships. Numerous destroyers and destroyer escorts drop seemingly inexhaustible numbers of depth charges, thanks to the system of having tankers carry large supplies of these weapons for supplying the escorts. Rescue ships pick men from unfortunate ships out of the water within minutes after their ships go down. We have already learned to use the favorable seasons of the year when darkness covers the ships and when ice allows them to go north of Bear Island. The convoys which go to Russia have become task forces of great striking power. Heavy units are able to deal with any German battleships or cruisers which dare to offer a challenge. The run to North Russia is still tough, but

the danger from Germans has been reduced to a point where it is little worse than the constant gales. Men no longer go out to die without hope. They have the ability to defend themselves. From now on the convoys of over 40 ships becomes the accepted size for North Russia. Escorts are practically as numerous as the merchant ships. Two escort carriers become the accepted standard.

The twenty-eight ships which carried United States Armed Guards in convoy JW-57 made up more than half of the large and important convoy. This convoy left Loch Ewe on February 20. It split on February 28. Part of the ships went on to Molotovsk; the remainder turned into Kola Gulf to unload their vital supplies at Murmansk. An enemy plane detected the ships as early as February 24. But enemy planes did not attack the merchant ships. Next day submarines made contact with the convoy. Late in the evening a red flame shot 200 feet into the Arctic sky and then mushroomed out to indicate that a German torpedo had found its mark on a British escort. Thereafter about 400 depth charges were dropped in the period before the convoy split. The only other serious incident came on February 29. As part of the ships were enroute to the White Sea and Molotovsk, the Charles M. Schwab collided with a Russian escort. The latter sank. There was some enemy activity over Murmansk while the ships were unloading. The Nathan Towson reported a dog fight between Russian and German planes on February 29. Incendiary bombs were dropped on March 12 and 25, but no ship was under attack while at Murmansk. The ships left Murmansk on April 7 and arrived in British ports on April 15. Many depth charges were dropped and a few mines were encountered.

Another large convoy was pushed through to North Russia before perpetual daylight set in. More than two-

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thirds of the ships in JW-58 were United States flag, for we sent thirty-five ships out of Loch Ewe on March 27 in this convoy. Depth charges were dropped in great numbers from March 28 until the ships reached Murmansk on April 4. More charges were dropped on April 5 as some of the ships went on to Molotovsk. Floating mines were seen on several days. It appears that much damage was done to enemy submarines. Enemy air activity was negligible. The Armed Guards had no actual contact with the enemy, thanks to the strong escort. The convoy left Murmansk on April 28 and by May 7 the last merchant ship had anchored in The Clyde., except for the unfortunate William S. Thayer. This ship was torpedoed late on April 30 when about 50 miles south of Bear Island. Two torpedoes struck the ship. Many merchant seamen, some Russian passengers, and seven Armed Guards were reported missing in the freezing water. The after section of the ship remained afloat for about three hours. Floating ice cakes and a school of porpoise confused the lookouts on the merchant ships and gave the appearance of many periscopes and torpedo wakes. As a result many of the merchant ships opened fire on alleged submarines. That enemy submarines continued to shadow the convoy is proved by the many depth charges which the escorts continued to drop until May 4. Floating mines were sighted at least six times on the return voyage.

The next convoy for North Russia left Loch Ewe on August 15, 1944. About half the ships were United States flag. The voyage was uneventful, except for the expected depth charges and floating mines. Not so uneventful was the return trip. The return convoy left Murmansk on September 28. On the afternoon of the next day two ships, the Edward H. Crockett and a British vessel were torpedoed. All of the Armed Guards on the Crockett were saved. Enemy submarines continued to shadow

the convoy on October 1 and 2. But no further losses were sustained and the remaining ships reached British ports on October 5.

Depth charges and floating mines summarize the activity of the convoy which left Loch Ewe on September 15 and departed from Murmansk on November 2. There were 22 United States flag merchant ships in this convoy. Perhaps the explanation why the voyage was so uneventful is that on only one day of the outbound trip was visibility clear for a brief time.

The convoy which left Loch Ewe on October 20 was made up predominantly of United States merchant ships, for twenty-one of our ships were in this convoy. The ships left Murmansk on December 10 and were back at Gourock on December 20. This voyage almost turned out to be as routine as other trips, depth charges and mines. But a determined air attack on December 12 in which 16 torpedoes were launched by German planes and avoided by skillful maneuvering of the convoy converted the trip from being entirely routine. Apparently carrier aircraft destroyed two German submarines on the return trip. The Harold L. Winslow was credited with an assist in knocking down one of the attacking planes on December 12.

The convoy which left Loch Ewe on November 29 was made up of about half United States and half allied ships. We had 17 ships in the convoy. Depth charges were dropped about a dozen times before the ships reached Murmansk on December 7. More serious than the ever present German submarines on the return trip was the weather. The convoy left Murmansk on January 11, 1945. It ran into three severe gales in eight days. So serious was the weather that the convoy took refuge in Thorshaven, Faroe Islands on January 18 to reform. The ships left on January 20 and proceeded to British ports.

The convoy which left Loch Ewe on December 30, 1944 contained 29 United States flag ships. It met with new enemy tactics, which were in themselves an admission of defeat in the battle for the supply lane to North Russia. German submarines now lay off Kola Inlet to pick off ships which arrived at and departed from Murmansk. On the afternoon of February 14 several ships were preparing to enter Kola Inlet in order to join the convoy which would leave for Scotland three days later. A Norwegian tanker and the Horace Gray were torpedoed. The latter was beached and no lives were lost. She was a total loss. As the homeward bound convoy was proceeding down the Kola River into Kola Inlet to form up, the Thomas Scott and an escort were torpedoed on February 17. On February 20 about ten enemy torpedo planes appeared. The John La Farge and the John Ireland were each credited with the probable destruction of a plane. A bomb fell within 50 feet of the Caesar Rodney. Then came bad weather which spelled ultimate disaster for the Henry Bacon. She weathered the hurricane, but was out of the convoy because of a breakdown of her steering engine. Thinking that she had passed the convoy, the Bacon was reversing her course in order to join up. About 23 German torpedo planes hit her with from 24 to 46 torpedoes. She did not have a chance to survive, but put up what must have been one of the finest battles of the entire war. She may have shot down as many as five planes and damaged three others, although some reports indicate a more conservative figure of three planes destroyed and two smoking. When an enemy torpedo finally struck home on the afternoon of February 23 the ship went down in less than an hour. There are many heroes in the Armed Guard service, but none perhaps set a finer example than Lt. (jg) John C. Sippola who was one of the seven Armed Guards lost. His whole interest was in the safety of his men. Finally he was too weak to grasp a line near him in



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the icy water and went down. He was awarded the Silver Star posthumously. There were 64 survivors out of 84 aboard. Some Norwegian refugees from the island of Soroy got safely away in one of the life boats. The Germans could still strike hard in spite of heavy armament on merchant ships, carrier plane protection, and large numbers of escorts. But this attack was to be next to the last major one on North Russian ships before the collapse of Germany in May, 1945.

A convoy which left Gourock, Scotland on February 3, 1945 ran into heavy air opposition on the way to Murmansk. Convoy JW-64 included 19 American flag ships. Enemy planes attacking on February 6 were met by carrier based planes which shot down two. Not until the convoy was about 120 miles off North Cape and south of Bear Island did a large plane attack develop. In this case the German airmen met a curtain of shellfire from the merchant ships. The Nathan Towson led the list with credit for a plane, for an assist, and for a probable. The Edwin L. Drake was credited with two assists. So many ships were firing at the same plane that it is impossible to give definite credit. The Armed Guards manned their 3"/50 AA guns with icy seas breaking over the bows of their ships. It seems fairly certain that at least four of from five to seven attacking planes were shot down. Bombs were dropped but did no damage. One serious incident was that ships fired at one of their own escorting planes. The remainder of the voyage was anti-climax, the usual depth charges and engagements between carrier based planes and the enemy on March 26 and 29. An oil slick was observed after 161 depth charges were dropped on February 11. About 100 depth charges were also dropped as some of the ships continued on to the entrance to the White Sea on February 13. About 100 depth charges were also dropped on March 24. It was a victori-

ous convoy which finally reached Gourock on April 1.

Convoy JW-65 was the last North Russian convoy to sustain loss from German submarines. It left Gourock on March 12, 1945. In this convoy were 18 United States flag ships and about half as many allied ships. The trip was largely routine, with the expected depth charges and floating mines, until the ships were almost at their destination. Then on March 20 the Germans struck. The Horace Bushnell was the first to be torpedoed on that morning while 24 miles due east of North Kilden Light. She was beached at Tereberski, but declared a total loss. No Armed Guards were lost and merchant seamen casualties were mainly in the engine room. Later in the morning an escort was hit and sunk. About noon the Thomas Donaldson was torpedoed while about 20 miles from Kola Inlet. No Armed Guards were lost. The convoy left Murmansk on April 29 and arrived at Gourock on May 8. Many depth charges were dropped, especially as the ships were leaving Kola Inlet. The high point in the trip home came when escort gunfire sank a surface target on April 30, presumably a surfaced submarine. About 13 floating mines were reported on the return voyage, thus indicating that North Russian waters would still be dangerous now that Germany had surrendered. Two other convoys went through to North Russia, leaving Gourock on 17 April and 12 May 1945. Even after the surrender of Germany we were taking no chances on action by fanatical submarine commanders. As a matter of fact the convoy which left before the surrender and the one which departed after that date dropped depth charges. But there was no action by the Armed Guards on the merchant ships. Ships in the 12 May convoy returned independently, but those in the April 17 convoy traveled with escorts on the return trip late in May.

Whenever men recall the brave deeds of World War II they will think of the North Russia run. It was by all odds the toughest assignment the Armed Guard faced. In spite of the large number of sinkings in the early days, the loss of life was almost unbelievably small. The North Russia run was tough, even without lurking submarines and vulture-like planes, but the ships went through. It represented the greatest single challenge of ships to land based planes. The ships took quite a beating, but won out. Credit goes to many men and many types of ships. The escorts and the carrier based planes formed a protective curtain around the slow merchant ships which plodded along, their hulls low in the water with the sinews of war. Without the escorts, mainly British, the North Russia run would have turned into tragedy of the first order. But much credit also goes to the Armed Guards who endured severe cold, who manned their guns through unbelievably long hours, and who left their mark on the might of the Luftwaffe. Their performance was in accordance with the highest traditions of the United States Navy and is one of the sagas of warfare. What higher compliment could be paid to a Navy man than to indicate that he had made the run to Murmansk or Archangel?

Special mention should be made of the great services which Captain Samuel B. Frankel, USN, the Assistant Naval Attache stationed at Murmansk, and his two assistants Comdr. G. D. Roullard, USN and Lt. Comdr. J. Harshaw, USN (Ret.) rendered to Armed Guards. Without the help of these men the trips to North Russia would have been even less endurable for the weary and battle scarred veterans of the North Russia run. These men rendered all possible assistance in all matters which concerned Armed Guards at North Russian ports.

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# MEDAL OF HONOR

**Medal of Honor citation**  
**The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR to PLATOON SERGEANT MITCHELL PAIGE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS for service as set forth in the following CITATION:**

For extraordinary heroism and conspicuous gallantry in action above and beyond the call of duty while serving with the Second Battalion, Seventh Marines, First Marine Division, in combat against enemy Japanese forces in the Solomon Islands Area on October 26, 1942. When the enemy broke through the line directly in front of his position, Platoon Sergeant Paige, commanding a machine-gun section with fearless determination, continued to direct the fire of his gunners until all his men were either killed or wounded. Alone, against the deadly hail of Japanese shells, he manned his gun, and when it was destroyed, took over another, moving from gun to gun, never ceasing his withering fire against the advancing hordes until reinforcements finally arrived. Then, forming a new line, he dauntlessly and aggressively led a bayonet charge, driving the enemy back and preventing a break through in our lines. His great personal valor and unyielding devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.

/S/ FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

**Medal of Honor citation**

On Nov. 15, 2003, an 85-year-old retired Marine Corps colonel died of congestive heart failure at his home in La Quinta, Calif., southeast of Palm Springs. He was a combat veteran of World War II. Reason enough to honor him. But this Marine was a little different. This Marine was Mitchell Paige. It's hard today to

envision -- or, for the dwindling few, to remember -- what the world looked like on Oct. 26, 1942. The U.S. Navy was not the most powerful fighting force in the Pacific. Not by a long shot. So the Navy basically dumped a few thousand lonely American Marines on the beach at Guadalcanal and high-tailed it out of there. Nimitz, Fletcher and Halsey had to ration what few ships they had. I've written separately about the way Bull Halsey rolled the dice on the night of Nov. 13, 1942, violating the stern War College edict against committing capital ships in restricted waters and instead dispatching into the Slot his last two remaining fast battleships, the South Dakota and the Washington, escorted by the only four destroyers with enough fuel in their bunkers to get them there and back. Those American destroyer captains need not have worried about carrying enough fuel to get home. By 11 p.m., outnumbered better than three-to-one by a massive Japanese task force driving down from the northwest, every one of those four American destroyers had been shot up, sunk or set aflame. And while the South Dakota -- known throughout the fleet as a "jinx ship" -- had damaged some lesser Japanese vessels, she continued to be plagued with electrical and fire control problems. "Washington was now the only intact ship left in the force," writes naval historian David Lippman. "In fact, at that moment Washington was the entire U.S. Pacific Fleet. She was the only barrier between (Admiral) Kondo's ships and Guadalcanal. If this one ship did not stop 14 Japanese ships right then and there, America might lose the Pacific war." On Washington's bridge, Lieutenant Ray Hunter had the conn. He had just seen the destroyers Walke and Preston "blown sky high." Dead ahead lay their burning wreckage. Hundreds of men were swimming in the water and the Japanese ships racing in. "Hunter had to do something. The course he took now could decide the war," Lippman writes.

"Come left," he said. Washington's rudder change put the burning destroyers between her and the enemy, preventing her from being silhouetted by their fires. "The move made the Japanese momentarily cease fire. Lacking radar, they could not spot Washington behind the fires. Washington raced through burning seas. Dozens of destroyer men were in the water clinging to floating wreckage. "Get after them, Washington!" someone shouted. Sacrificing their ships by maneuvering into the path of torpedoes intended for the Washington, the captains of the American destroyers had given China Lee one final chance. Blinded by the smoke and flames, the Japanese battleship Kirishima turned on her searchlights, illuminating the helpless South Dakota, and opened fire. Finally, as her own muzzle blasts illuminated her in the darkness, Admiral Lee and Captain Glenn Davis could positively identify an enemy target. The Washington's main batteries opened fire at 12 midnight precisely. Her radar fire control system functioned perfectly. During the first seven minutes of Nov. 14, 1942, the "last ship in the U.S. Pacific Fleet" fired 75 of her 16-inch shells at the battleship Kirishima. Aboard Kirishima, it rained steel. At 3:25 a.m., her burning hulk officially became the first enemy sunk by an American battleship since the Spanish-American War. Stunned, the Japanese withdrew within days; Japanese commander Isoroku Yamamoto recommended the unthinkable to the emperor -- withdrawal from Guadalcanal. But that was still weeks in the future. We were still with Mitchell Paige back on the God-forsaken malarial jungle island of Guadalcanal, placed like a speed bump at the end of the long blue-water slot between New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago -- the very route the Japanese Navy would have to take to reach Australia. On Guadalcanal the Marines struggled to complete an airfield. Yamamoto knew what that meant. No effort would be



# MEDAL OF HONOR

spared to dislodge these upstart Yanks from a position that could endanger his ships. Before long, relentless Japanese counterattacks had driven supporting U.S. Navy from inshore waters. The Marines were on their own. As Platoon Sgt. Mitchell Paige and his 33 riflemen set about carefully emplacing their four water-cooled .30-caliber Browning's, manning their section of the thin khaki line which was expected to defend Henderson Field against the assault of the night of Oct. 25, 1942, it's unlikely anyone thought they were about to provide the definitive answer to that most desperate of questions: "How many able-bodied U.S. Marines does it take to hold a hill against 2,000 desperate and motivated attackers?" Nor did the commanders of the mighty Japanese Army, who had swept all before them for decades, expect their advance to be halted on some God-forsaken jungle ridge manned by one thin line of Yanks in khaki in October of 1942. But by the time the night was over, "The 29th (Japanese) Infantry Regiment has lost 553 killed or missing and 479 wounded among its 2,554 men," historian Lippman reports. "The 16th (Japanese) Regiment's losses are uncounted, but the 164th's burial parties handled 975 Japanese bodies. The American estimate of 2,200 Japanese dead is probably too low." You've already figured out where the Japanese focused their attack, haven't you? Among the 90 American dead and seriously wounded that night were all the men in Mitchell Paige's platoon. Every one. As the night of endless attacks wore on, Paige moved up and down his line, pulling his dead and wounded comrades back into their fox-holes and firing a few bursts from each of the four Browning's in turn, convincing the Japanese forces down the hill that the positions were still manned. The citation for Paige's Congressional Medal of Honor picks up the tale: "When the enemy broke through the line directly in front of his position, P/Sgt. Paige, commanding a

machinegun section with fearless determination, continued to direct the fire of his gunners until all his men were either killed or wounded. Alone, against the deadly hail of Japanese shells, he fought with his gun and when it was destroyed, took over another, moving from gun to gun, never ceasing his withering fire." In the end, Sgt. Paige picked up the last of the 40-pound, belt-fed Browning's -- the same design which John Moses Browning famously fired for a continuous 25 minutes until it ran out of ammunition, glowing cherry red, at its first U.S. Army trial -- and did something for which the weapon was never designed. Sgt. Paige walked down the hill toward the place where he could hear the last Japanese survivors rallying to move around his flank, the belt-fed gun cradled under his arm, firing as he went. And the weapon did not fail. Coming up at dawn, battalion executive officer Major Odell M. Conoley was first to discover the answer to our question: "How many able-bodied Marines does it take to hold a hill against two regiments of motivated, combat-hardened infantrymen who have never known defeat?" On a hill where the bodies were piled like cordwood, Mitchell Paige alone sat upright behind his 30-caliber Browning, waiting to see what the dawn would bring. One hill: one Marine.

"But in the early morning light, the enemy could be seen a few yards off, and vapor from the barrels of their machine guns was clearly visible," reports historian Lippman. "It was decided to try to rush the position." For the task, Major Conoley gathered together three enlisted communication personnel, several riflemen, a few company runners who were at the point, together with a cook and a few messmen who had brought food to the position the evening before. Joined by Paige, this ad hoc force of 17 Marines counter attacked at 5:40 a.m., discov-

ering that "the extremely short range allowed the optimum use of grenades." They cleared the ridge. And that's where the unstoppable wave of Japanese conquest finally crested, broke and began to recede. On an unnamed jungle ridge on an insignificant island no one had ever heard of, called Guadalcanal. But who remembers, today, how close-run a thing it was -- the ridge held by a single Marine, in the autumn of 1942? When the Hasbro Toy Co. called some years back, asking permission to put the retired colonel's face on some kid's doll, Mitchell Paige thought they must be joking. But they weren't. That's his mug, on the little Marine they call "G.I. Joe."

And now you know.



**Lone Sailor**

**U.S. NAVY MEMORIAL  
Washington, D.C.**

# LETTERS FROM THE CREW...

## At Noumea on November 1

+ A lot of the material was garnered from a report to the Chief of Naval Operations from  
The Assistant Port Director of San Francisco on January 29, 1944.

At Noumea on November 1, a terrific explosion occurred at the base of one of the Finger Piers at 1305. The S.S. Turner was at anchor about 800 yards distant. Steel fragments fell into the bay around the Turner. One piece formed a collar around the forward mast. I was blown out of a chair into the bulkhead by the concussion coming through an open port hole at my back in my cabin. I ran out onto the deck adjacent to my cabin and the mate on the bridge ordered me back inside. I obeyed after glancing into the sky and seeing small black objects falling. Later, when I looked at the deck, it was pock marked from the falling debris. Obviously the mate had saved my life. A supply of explosives on the dock was the source of the explosion. One of the ships at the dock had to break her lines to get free of the dock.

On November 2 1943, the Turner departed from Noumea escorted by a sub chaser. We arrived at Suva in the Fiji's on November 5 and moored at Kings Wharf. She commenced taking on cargo immediately. We loaded ammunition and aerial bombs. On November 16, we took departure with a cargo of 5371 short tons of ammunition, bombs, and trucks and proceeded to Lautoka, Fiji where we arrived the same day. There, we loaded an additional cargo of bombs, trucks and boats making a total cargo of 6272 short tons. On November 22, 8 officers and 126 enlisted men, Army of the 13th airdrome squadron and one Pharmacist Mate came aboard for passage to Guadalcanal via Espiritu Santo.

November 23, we departed Lautoka escorted by the USS Radiant (YMS99) and by the PBY-5 which scouted around the ship until after darkness came. At 1830 on November 24, our stern lookout reported sighting an object out of the corner of his eye at relative bearing 170 degrees and 200 yards range. He wasn't sure whether it was a fish or a periscope. The area was watched and at 1840 the escort look out reported sighting something suspicious in the same direction. The escort dropped astern to investigate. At 1915 the escort made a definite under water contact 200 yards a stern of us and dropped a number of depth charges in two different runs. After the second run, the escorts Captain stated a large oil patch came to the surface. This attack took place in the Latitude 16 degrees 14'south, Longitude 170 degrees 33'East.

At 0200 a US plane arrived to assist the escort and to scout the area of the attack. At day break other planes arrived for escort.

At 1605 November 25, we arrived at Espiritu Santo New Hebrides and anchored in Pallakula Bay to await the formation of a convoy for Guadalcanal. December 4 at 0812, we took departure from Pallakula Bay and joined a convoy consisting of the S.S. Ashley, (A liberty EC2 vessel) and the S.S. Thunderer escorted by the USS Eaton (DD510) and the USS Osterhaus (DE164). At 1609 the same day we were joined by USS Serpens (AK97EC2), USS Alchiba (AKEC2) S.S. Cape Blanco and the S.S. Thomas J. Walsh escorted by USS Acre (DE167, USS Velocity (AM128) and SC 1046. The convoy reached Guadalcanal 0800 December 7, 1943. The vessel was then ordered to Purvis Bay to await orders. On December 11, we proceeded to Tenaru Beach escorted by the SC 518. The passengers were disembarked and some cargo was discharged. At 1930 we proceeded to Kukum Bay where all the cargo was discharged at the dock. On December 20 we left Kukum Dock and proceeded to Purvis Bay to await orders. On the way there was an air alert due to a number of Japanese planes approaching Tulagi from the North. The planes turned back before reaching Tulagi.

On December 22 we left Purvis Bay, Florida Island and joined a convoy consisting of USS Pawnee (Ocean Going Tug No.74), USS Octans (Navy Transport), S.S. Rose (Cargo Ship) S.S. Thunderer, S.S. Curtis, escorted by USS Sheldrake (MS-62), USS Swallow (MS65) and one other mine sweeper. We arrived at Espiritu Santo on December 25 and sailed from there for San Francisco on December 26 in company with S.S. Skinner and S.S. Thunderer escorted by the EC669. We passed through the gate in the submarine nets guarding San Francisco Bay at 1015 January 17 1944. The mileage on this voyage was 17,200. Average speed was 10.2 knots. It is peculiar to note that my next sea duty was on the USS Eider (YNG20). The vessel that was anchored to the bottom of the San Francisco Bay, between The Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz that had the winch that opened and closed the submarine nets that guarded San Francisco Bay



# S.S. MARCUS DALY

## THE SAGA OF THE S.S. MARCUS DALY As told by Bill Kirby, MM A/B Seaman

The S.S. Marcus Daly, a Liberty Ship, departed Long Beach CA on August 1, 1944, destination New Guinea, with a crew of 40 Merchant Marines and 18 Navy Armed Guard. Due to the shortage of Navy gun crew aboard, some members of the MM were trained to be loaders and to assist the gun crew. Bill Kirby, and two others from his fo'c's'le, Matthieson and Crawford, volunteered to be loaders for the gunners. Bill Kirby was assigned a 20 MM at station #9 and Matthieson and Crawford loaders on the forward 3"50.

On the 24th night out of Long Beach, Bill Kirby had the 12 to 4 watch in the bow. At approximately 3 AM he noticed a small red light off the bow and reported it to the bridge thinking it was a survivor drifting in a life jacket. The officer on watch called GQ and Bill was replaced at his watch and ran to his gun station #9 aft. At this time a submarine surfaced and turned its light on our ship. The gunnery officer challenged the submarine with Morse code blinkers. They answered with the wrong code and started to submerge. We opened fire with our 3"50 and fired 14 rounds some being tracers that bounced off the water. There was no further incident with this submarine.

On August 26, 1944 we arrived at Finchaven, New Guinea where they unloaded the fighter planes stowed in crates on our decks. Kirby quoted that on a weekend pass 4 from his ship and 6 soldiers hiked back to a village. They were told to never do that again because some of the natives there were head hunters.

After unloading the deck cargo, we proceeded to Oro Bay, twelve hours south of Finchaven to discharge the rest of our cargo. We then were loaded with 60 Sherman Tanks and equipment for

operating them. There was a general feeling at this time that something big was pending. We surmised the Philippines would be our next objective. We made several short trips between various bases in New Guinea hauling loads of war material for its final assembly. We were afraid we would miss taking part in the pending invasion of the Philippines.

Our time finally came to load for D day. The field kitchen was set up on number two hatch with a canopy over it. The latrine for the troops was constructed by the ship's carpenter, using planks to form a trough near the stern with salt water hose placed at one end of the trough effected sanitary requirements. Then about 1200 troops were marched on board. Their quarters were below the main deck. Brig. Gen. E.K. Wallender also came aboard to sail with us. There were forty-two cargo and troop ships in the convoy headed to the Gulf of Leyte, Philippines. We arrived at the Gulf at dawn and the enemy planes greeted us like a swarm of hornets.

The gunnery Officer, J.S. Feathers, Ensign U.S.N.R., ordered his Navy gun crew to hold their fire until the planes were within range. A high-flying bomber dropped a string of bombs on us but missed. The plane made a turn and made another run at us at a lower altitude when our gun crews let loose. The plane caught on fire and crashed into the bay. A few minutes later a dive bomber came at us and the 20 millimeter tracers were hitting the plane the bomb was dropped. It missed us by no more than ten feet.

While attempting to dock at Tacloban the channel was not marked and the ship went aground, not once but twice. The dive bombers came at us again but the gunners drove them off and their bombs all missed us. We finally were docked and for six days and nights, while unloading the troops and sup-

plies, the gunners stood by their guns fighting off dive-bombers trying to sink the ship at dock. One bomb struck the concrete pier and injured three gunners on the forward 3"50 and the ship's bow was punctured in several places. The gunners were successful in bringing down three of the dive-bombers. For this action, General McArthur personally commended the Marcus Daly for being the principal fire power of the American forces that saved the Tacloban docks. It was during this time the Navy Armed Guard gunner of No. 9-MM, Bill Roberts, suffered severe shock and the gunnery Officer put Bill Kirby on as gunner of the 20-MM. Kirby further states that at this point they went 104 hours without sleep or a change of clothes.

The S.S. Marcus Daly then returned to New Guinea and was loaded with supplies and 1120 troops. The deck load consisted of Jeeps and trucks that were fitted with 50-caliber rapid fire guns to supplement the ship's armament. Bill Kirby states that all guns mounted on the ship had stops to prevent hitting anything on the ship but the 50-calibers did not. He said they were almost more afraid of these guns than the enemy guns. After being loaded, with these troops etc. the Marcus Daly then joined a large convoy back to Leyte. Approximately 200 miles from Leyte the Marcus Daly was attacked by dive bombers and torpedo bombers. The ship was subject to a very near miss on the port bow and of a torpedo on the bow and stern during the course of the attacks.

A "Val" bomber and a "Kate" torpedo bomber were shot down by the forward 3"50 and 20-MM guns with a direct hit. A dive bomber approached from the stern and dove directly at the ship. The aft 3"50 and 20-MM blew the entire tail section off the plane. The plane then crashed through the deck under No 1 gun tub. It dropped as far as the t'ween deck of hold No. 1 and the

# S.S. MARCUS DALY

bomb exploded shooting flames and debris hundreds of feet in the air. The bow was laid open on both sides as far as the t'ween deck and the 3"50 gun and tub were destroyed killing a Navy GM 3/C and two MM loaders, Crawford instantly and Mattieson died later that night. It also wounded eight others. Of the 1120 U.S. Army troops aboard some 200 or more were killed, wounded, or missing and many were horribly burned. Matthiesen, a MM distinguished himself by saving two others of the No. 1 gun crew from the flames. The sprinkler system for the forward magazine was damaged therefore, the second Mate, Fred McKamy and Bill Kirby, armed with a sledge hammer and a crow bar opened the forward ammunition magazine and flooded it with fire hoses. Bill Kirby said the deck was so hot it scorched the soles of their shoes. The Captain said that if the magazine had exploded the entire bow would have blown off and the ship would have sunk.

The two dead MM, Matthiesen and Crawford shared the same fo'c's'le with Bill Kirby. He and other crew members gave up their quarters for the wounded and slept on the deck till the wounded were removed.

The next morning they were able to enter the Leyte Gulf to unload the troops and cargo. Bill Kirby quote: 'The Captain sent the purser, Roy Arsdel and myself ashore with the bodies of Matthiesen and Crawford to see about their burial. Their bodies were wrapped in blankets, dropped in a muddy hole and covered up. Very Sad.' End quote.

While we were tied to a landing graft unloading supplies, a twin enemy aircraft dropped bombs on us but missed. A suicide plane followed and crash-dived into the gun tub located on the port wing of the bridge. The bomb attached to the plane slid out of it's carriage, knocked off two life boats and

exploded in the landing craft loaded with supplies tied next to our number 4 hold. Bomb fragments penetrated the hull in several places. Several fires broke out but were brought under control and no one was killed however, the gunnery Officer and several of his Navy crew and merchant marines were injured.

Bill Kirby quote: Cleaning out No. one hold was heartbreaking. We had to remove body parts that had been in the water for a few days.

Some repairs were made and our battered ship returned to a hero's welcome in San Francisco on January 29, 1945. The S.S. Marcus Daly was credited with seven aircraft shot down. Four "Val" dive bombers, one "Kate" torpedo bomber, and two heavy "Zekes".

## DIARY BY DELMAR GOULD, GALLEYMAN

Aug. 26, 1944: Arrived Finchaven, New Guinea. Aug. 28, 44: Discharged deck load and now headed for Oro Bay. Sept. 15, 44: Loaded troops and equipment. 44th Tank Battalion. Headed for Los Negros in the Admiralty Island. Plenty of activity there. Big staging area. Sept. 23, 44: Arrived Los Negros, counted 6 aircraft carriers of small class, and the ENTERPRISE. Must be 200 merchant and Naval craft in the harbor. Something about to come off. Oct. 1, 44: Arrived at Finchaven and loaded our second load of troops and equip. 98th chemical outfit and engineers. Headed for Humboldt Bay. Oct. 14, 44: Have been loading cargo and troops for the Philippines or Saipan. A one star General, three Colonels + 25 other officers. We are headed for an island between Luzon and Mindinos in the Philippines. We are to arrive on D+4 days. We are sailing in a convoy of 87 ships. WOW. Oct. 24, 44: Arrived Leyte this morning. No excitement on the way but plenty here. We were attacked by 3 Jap

dive bombers. Our Navy gun crew shot one down trying to skip bomb us. That incident alone would have stopped the Marcus Daly for good if it hadn't been for our gunners aboard. While trying to dock, we became stuck in the mud and we have had 3 direct attacks on our ship today. BOY WHAT A DAY!!!! Oct. 25, 44: We were attacked all night long and it started again at dawn today, it is now 4:30 PM. Those little yellow bastards are good flyers. Five men on board were wounded today, 3 of our crew and 2 soldiers. It's too dam hot here and I'm not speaking of the weather I wish we had some air protection. The Navy Fleet is not far from here in battle with the Jap Task Forces trying to bottle us in. As yet there are no Army planes any where near here but are due in tomorrow. Another bomber let loose with bombs that landed on our starboard and two aft. One other of the planes cut across our beam and cut off one of our guy line on one of our beams with his strafing. All this happened while we were stuck on the sand bar. Oct. 26, 44: Some of our aircraft carriers were sunk in the battle not far from here and that explains why we saw quite a few of our Navy planes flying around trying to land on a vacant lot they called a landing strip. They were out of fuel and ammunition and had nowhere to land after their carriers were sunk. Before we left the Tacloban dock, the General that rode with us came back aboard and told the Captain and Gunnery Officer that Gen. Douglas McArthur had commended our ship for courage and fighting ability in doing a major part in saving the dock and for knocking 3 nips out of the sky. Nov. 18, 44: We are at Oro Bay and are loading part of the 38th Div. 1200 troops and equipment. Nov. 29, 44: Leaving Humboldt Bay in 38 ship convoy with our troops and 18,000 troops on other Liberty and Transport ships. Dec. 5, 44: At 9:15 AM, only 24 hours from our destination, we were attacked by a dive bomber who's bombs barely missed us. Dec. 8,



# S.S. MARCUS DALY

44: He describes the attack of the plane that dived into No. 1 hold referred to earlier. Dec. 10, 44: At 5:00 PM 4 planes came in and we shot down 2 of them. The second of these two hit the 20-MM gun tub on the port wing of the bridge destroying it and exploded in a LCT tied along side of us. Fourteen on our ship were wounded but none killed. I spotted a P-38 take after one bomber and shot it down. Tears came to my eyes as I thought of our boys who had been killed and said to myself "There's one dirty bastard for you boys". All this happened at a place called Tarragona Beach, 40 miles south of Tacloban. Dec. 22, 44: We were repaired enough today to be seaworthy and we pulled away from Leyte with no regrets. Dec. 25, 44: Christmas day. I have more to be merry about today, than any Christmas I have ever seen, because I still have a whole skin, and still very much alive. It's only by the grace of God that those of us on the S.S. Marcus Daly are still alive. Dec. 30, 44: Whoopee!!! We left Humboldt Bay this afternoon for good old San Francisco, USA.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND AWARDS

17 November 1944: From: Commanding Officer, U.S. Navy Armed Guard. To whom it may concern. Subject: Heroism and Bravery of Bill Kirby, recommendation for.

1. During the invasion days of October 24,25,26,27 and parts of 28 and 29 at Leyte in the Philippines, our ship was under constant air attack. Our ship repelled countless attacks and shot down three Jap bombers. About 30 bombs fell near the ship and there were considerable amount of strafing, also sniping from the shore. All attacks were repelled without being effective. We were the main fire power defending the vital invasion docks at Leyte. For our work in the invasion period we were personally commended by Gen. Douglas MacArthur

2. Bill Kirby was a highly essential member of the gun crew during all of this action. He is a member of the Merchant Marine crew. Not too much praise can be given him for his courage, heroism, and unflinching bravery during many trying hours day after day, night after night.

3. I should like to recommend Bill Kirby for any position he may seek at any time. He is a dependable, capable, courageous person who may be valued with the best.

Signed J. S. Feathers, Ensign U.S.N.R.  
U. S. NAVY ARMED GUARD J. S. Feathers, Gunnery Officer, and 17 Navy Armed Guard received the Purple Heart.

Fourteen Armed Guard received the Medal of Honor or Navy Cross, and ten received the Silver Star Award.

Some of these medals were overlapping.

## MERCHANT MARINE AWARDS

On April 30, 1946, Captain Opheim received the Marcus Daly's Gallant Ship Award, the fourth ship to receive this prestige's award, and all Merchant Seaman aboard were awarded the Gallant Ship Unit Citation Bar and the Merchant Marine Combat Bar.

Bill Kirby MM

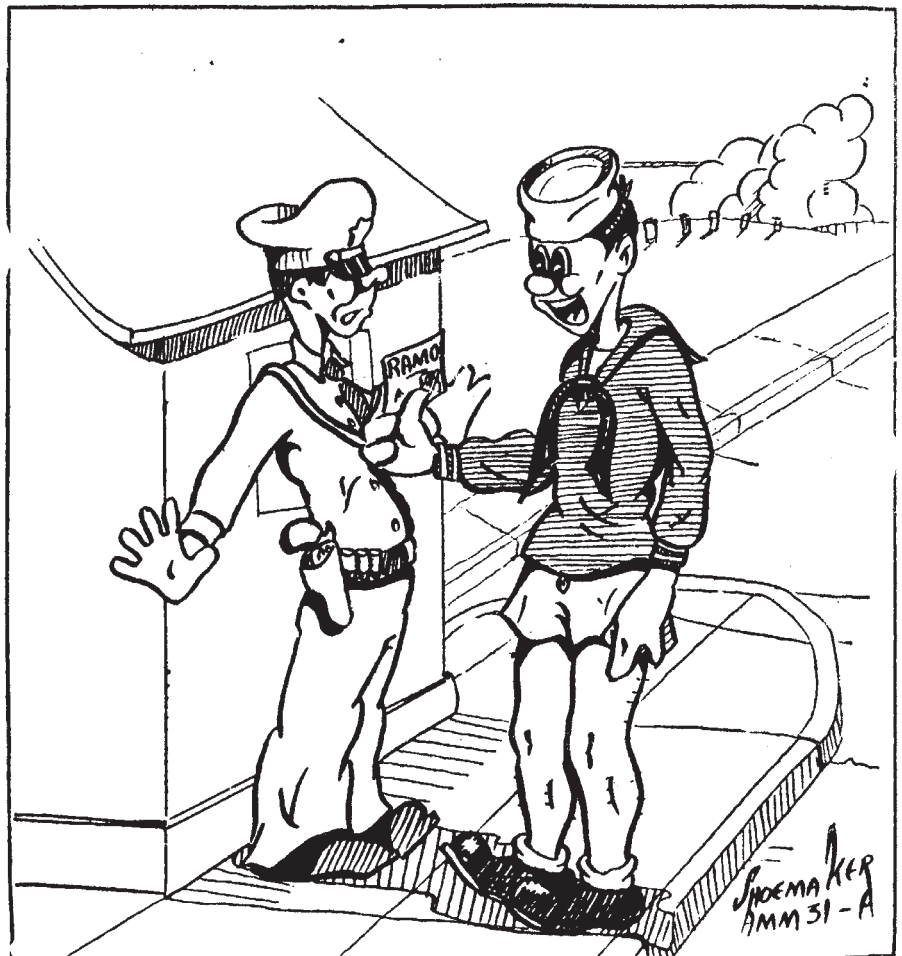
Excerpt for this story were taken from a book Bill Kirby had 220 West 28th Street published & was submitted by

Bill Patterson

GM 3C U.S.N.

Merced, CA 95340

AG. bbpatt25@jps.net



"I usually forget my ID card, but I remembered it this time!"

# 23rd ANNUAL AMMV REUNION



**DOUBLETREE HOTEL  
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### See below for Hotel and Victory Cruise reservation information.

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EARLY BIRD to February 15th:	\$60.00 x _____	=	\$ _____
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SE REGION PRE-CONVENTION: **Each \$28.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
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Buffet: Soup, choice of Salads, Rolls, Dessert, tea & coffee

LADIES LUNCHEON: (Friday Noon May 15) **Each \$28.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
Choose (# of each): 1) Salad – Caesar (chicken) \_\_\_\_\_; 2) Cobb (Turkey, Ham, cheese) \_\_\_\_\_  
3) Hot Dish: Pasta W/Chicken \_\_\_\_\_; All come with Rolls, Beverages & Dessert: NY Cheesecake

WELCOME DINNER: (Friday Evening May 15) **Each \$48.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
Choose (# of each): Medallions of Beef \_\_\_\_\_; Chicken Marsala \_\_\_\_\_; Pan Seared Salmon \_\_\_\_\_

BANQUET: (Sunday Evening May 17) **Each \$48.00 x \_\_\_\_\_ = \$ \_\_\_\_\_**  
Choose (# of each): Roast Prime Rib \_\_\_\_\_; Boursin Chicken \_\_\_\_\_; Grouper W/crab stuffing \_\_\_\_\_

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# THE NORTH EAST REUNION 2008

# THE NORTH EAST REUNION 2008



1. Dinner and a show! Chrm. Art Fazzzone & Co-Chrm. Peter Falasco get teased by the "80 year old Stripper" Laura Roth.
2. Rose & Walter Catlow, Gales Ferry, CT and John & Jean Ehlenberger, Norwich, CT, aboard the Lac du Saint Sacrement.
3. The Lac du Saint Sacrement Cruise Boat for Luncheon and Ceremony.
4. Hospitality Room - Seated L-R: Marion Covey, Art Fazzzone & Leland Page(all our Chapter), Richard Peters, Roosevelttown, NY, Peter Falasco, Diana Spenard(our Chapter), Gerry Greaves, E. Providence, RI. - Standing L-R: George Spenard, George Krehel & Frank Kane(our Chapter), Bartender.
5. Banquet Night - Authur & Marion Fazzzone, Renion Hosts, Schenectady, NY & Lou & Helentew, NE Regional Chrm. (Ret.) Gales Ferry, CT.
6. Wreath Ceremony, Lake George, NY - Lou Tew tossing wreath.
7. Banquet - No names.

-Sent in by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur A. Fazzzone • 3936 Albany St. • Schenectady, NY 12304-4371

