

U. S. NAVY 1942-1945

Terah L. Smiley

These are several of the experiences, as I recall them, which come to mind regarding my four years in the U. S. Navy during World War II. There are many gaps and undoubtedly several inaccuracies in regard to timing of events and names. I have in all probability stretched a point here and there but, heck, what is the fun of writing memoirs without enlarging the scene.

On the day of the Pearl Harbor incident, I was working for the U. S. Immigration Service in Nogales, Arizona. This was supposed to be a "frozen" job which meant that we could not be drafted for the military as long as we continued in this position. As something of a pacifist who did not like physical and mental violence, I admit I was doing a lot to keep from being drafted. Several incidents, however, occurred two or three days after that Black Sunday, which caused an abrupt change in my thinking. The first was that when working on the Morley Street Gate one evening, I was requested to go over to the railroad tracks and unlock and open the gates over the tracks between the U. S. and Mexico. The Southern Pacific had backed a long line of passenger cars almost to the gate, and the Sud Pacifico train had backed a long train to the gate on the Mexican side. After the gates were opened, a regiment of Mexican soldiers, fully armed and in battle dress, alighted from their train and marched across the border where they boarded the Southern Pacific. They

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were being transported to Baja California via Southern Pacific to San Diego and Tiajuana. To my knowledge this was the only time a foreign army was peacefully allowed to enter the U. S. territory fully armed and equipped for any emergency. This incident began to make me see the seriousness of the entire situation. The next day I learned that several friends had lost their lives in the Pearl Harbor attack, and later I learned that several others had been captured at Corrigador.

With the entrance of the United States into war with Japan and Germany, our duties at the border were increased many times over and we worked long hours each day and seven-day weeks. On my first day off which was approximately two weeks after Pearl Harbor, I came to Tucson and even knowing that I was in a "frozen" position for the duration, I enlisted in the U. S. Navy figuring I would let the Navy Department fight it out with the Justice Department. Evidently the Navy Department won because on 12 January, 1942 I received a U. S. telegram ordering me to report immediately to the Naval Base in San Diego for indoctrination into the navy.

On 13 January I was sworn into the Navy along with hundreds of others. I was assigned to Company 13, and after the evening mess, the Chief Petty Officer (regular navy) in charge of our group came around and assigned me as cadet commander for the company of 160 other land-lubbers. I recall being awakened very early the next morning by the "watch" beating on the three-tiered



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bunk beds with a stick. On getting out of bed I noticed that the bunks filled a very large room and there were what seemed like thousands of grumbling, swearing men in that room. I had always been something of a private person and to suddenly find myself as merely one in an uncounable number of people simply terrified me. It was a completely new life-style for me. To make matters worse, the CPO (Chief) came around and handed me a sheet of paper saying to read it carefully and follow its outline. He said it was my responsibility to see that all the company got where they were supposed to go that day, then he left and I did not see him again until that night. What a nightmare that day was. I didn't know where any of the buildings were located nor did I know any of the navy language. I was ready to quit right then and there and return to the peaceful calm of the border station in Nogales. But I had to muddle through and somehow the day ended with only a dozen or so lost at one time or another from the company (but they were returned by the ever present Shore Patrol). That evening the Chief gave me another sheet of instructions for the next day, but he had time to sit a bit and chat and we soon became friends. I was grateful to him for the simple reason that he never interferred, never gave criticism, and let me make my own mistakes.

Company 13 spent 13 days in Boot Camp (the last seven were in Balboa Park) which turned out to be a nightmare of medical examinations, shots of every variety, and other forms and

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procedures. I recall that on about the tenth day, only ten could get out of their bunks - all the others were running high "cat" fevers from all the shots. As company "commander" I had to practically beat them over the head to get them out of their bunks and walk around the compound to help break the fever. At the end of 13 days, our orders came through and odd as it may seem, 13 of us were sent to the Destroyer Base in San Diego. The remainder of the company were put on a naval transport and sent to the South Seas as replacements for naval vessels in that area. I later learned that this transport was sunk in the Coral Sea with the loss of all hands. I might mention at this time that my given name of Terah is the Erdu word for "thirteen" (and it also was the name for Abraham's father). All these 13's made a believer of me that the number is quite lucky.

One incident in Boot Camp caused me considerable concern then and later - on about the tenth day of Boot Camp I took (was given) a third tetanus shot and I woke the next day with my arm and shoulder so swollen I couldn't put on my shirt. The camp doctor told me to never take another tetanus as it would really lay me out, and he so marked my record. My arm and shoulder stayed swollen for several days. I had a duece of a time doing my work (I don't believe I ever felt so utterly miserable in my entire life as I did during those days).

On arrival at the Destroyer Base, I was assigned to the electro-hydraulic school with 30 other "boots" in my class. We



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had long tedious hours in various courses in electro-hydraulics, as well as seamanship, ordnance, and other such courses as to prepare us for duty on a destroyer. The normal school day ran from the start of classes at 7 am, a half hour lunch break, and ended at 7:30 pm. After a one-hour dinner, we had various watches we kept at different times during the night. I recall many a night standing watch at a mounted 5-inch gun pointed seaward. It was the only operable gun on the base, and we had one live round of ammo for it. There were four or five old four--stack destroyers tied up but they had no live ammo either. This reminds me that while in boot-camp, the CPO in charge of our section was unable to find any type of side arm which he was supposed to wear; the navy did not have a single side arm in their stores. I remembered that when I was on the Tucson police force, I bought a 38 caliber pistol, and I had also carried it when I worked as a Special Agent for the C. B. and Q. railroad in Denver. I sent for the gun and sold it to the Chief (I even had some shells for it), but I hated to part with it as it was an extremely accurate shooting gun, and the only one I have ever owned.

I recall one day walking across the base on some errand and I ran across Frank Eyman in a navy commander's uniform. Eyman had been chief of detectives for the Tucson police while I was on the force. He was now with Naval Intelligence and after talking several minutes, he asked me if I would consider transferring

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to his group. Needless to say I was not overly happy over the prospect but I was not totally against it either as I had no knowledge of what it entailed. Several days later though, he came to the afternoon class room and told me that he was unable to obtain a transfer because fleet destroyer people did not allow any transfers once one was in their program especially at that time. I was not sorry that it didn't work out.

After five weeks of intensive schooling I could take down the driving mechanism of a 5-inch gun and turret and put it back together even in the dark. I am not saying that it would work properly if I had to do it but then who is perfect. At the end of this five-week program I was armed with a number of certificates saying that I had passed this and that course, several of which I had never heard of. At the completion of the program, I received orders to report to Pier 92 in New York City for further assignment. This was disappointing to me since I had hoped to go to the South Pacific. Also, Pier 92 meant being reassigned to either the North Atlantic or the Mediterranean. This was a real blow for me. Here I was, a hot desert loving guy being sent to the roughest and coldest waters imaginable. No complaints were accepted either.

After a five-day journey across the country in a hot, crowded, stuffy, smelly, coal burning train, I arrived in New York City and went to Pier 92. Pier 92 had a notorious reputation up and down the East Coast because the Commandant, a retired Navy Captain



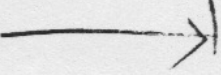


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called back to active duty, loved to have all the food cooked in cod liver oil. This included eggs for breakfast as well as meat for dinner. For this reason, every one based at Peir 92 could be identified for many feet away as they walked around the base smelling like an over-ripe codfish. I had to take most of my meals there since the \$21 a month I was being paid did not go far, especially so when \$10 a month went for GI insurance. The only saving grace while I was at Pier 92 was that the Stage Door Canteen was within easy walking distance. One could get refreshments and sandwiches at the Canteen and since cod liver oil made me somewhat ill, I practically lived off the sandwiches. The Stage Door Canteen was a wonderful place, as I recall. Most of the women working there were actresses from the near-by theaters or Junior Leaguers, or other similar types. Each evening could be seen live entertainment put on by visiting celebrities, or local celebrities. All free to enlisted people but then they were the only personnel allowed in the Canteen. I remember that I became fairly well acquainted with one young lady, Ruth someone or other, and I spent hours listening to her tales of woe. Her fiance was a Scot and flying in the Royal Air Force. After a few weeks I had saved up enough money to ask her for a date to visit Coney Island as neither of us had ever been there but had wanted to see the place. The night before the date, I was roused out of my sack at 10:30 with orders to be ready to leave from the Pennsylvania Station at 11:30. So I had to ship out

without keeping the date or even saying good-by. There were 8 of us who had received these orders and we caught the train south to Charleston, S. C., for duty on a new fleet destroyer about ready to go into commission.

At that time the Navy, in building smaller ships, nearly always built two exactly alike in companion "ways" and these were known as sister ships. The destroyer to which I was assigned was the U. S. S. Tillman, DD - 641, under the command of Lt. Commander F. D. McCorkle. She was a fleet destroyer of the Livermore (originally Fletcher) Class. Our "sister" was the U.S.S. Beatty, DD - 640 and was started several days prior to the Tillman hence her lower number. After reporting aboard the Tillman (or The Mighty "T" as she became known to her crew), I was raised to Seaman 1st. and assigned to the "O" Division (ordnance) as a gunner striker (a result of all the work at the Destroyer Base in San Diego) and I soon became well acquainted with all the gunnery aboard. I have forgotten how long it took us to get ready for commissioning but almost every day there would be more assignees coming aboard. About the last part of our preparation for commissioning was putting on the four 5-inch gun turrets, getting them clamped down, and testing their hydraulic and manual drives. I recall one day when we had completed work on three of the mounts and were working on the fourth and last mount when we received orders to proceed to sea immediately. I forgot to mention that the boilers and engines were the first items



completed and steam was kept up at all times. We steamed to the mouth of the Charleston River where a few hours earlier a U-boat had sunk a small coastal oiler. The Base Commandant was afraid the U-boat was going to come right into the harbor and do more damage. We stayed out cruising around for several hours then went back to the dock. We couldn't have done anything even if we had found the sub because of a total lack of any live ammunition on board. The next day we moved up-river  to the ammunition dump and took on a full load of ammunition for all the guns on board. This included all the 5-inch powder and shells, 20-mm, 40-mm, 50-caliber, 30-06 shells for rifles, and 45-caliber for the hand guns, <sup>as well as a full load of depth-charges</sup>  This was one of the longest, hottest, and hardest days work I ever put in. It started off by an order from the Skipper for two of us to go on the dock and take the hawse rope and tie it around the bitt on the dock. It was a new 2-inch hemp rope and stiff as could be. Trying to tie a bowline knot was more than we could manage so several other sailors had to come down and help us out. Everyone on board ship was hooting and hollering at us wrestling with that damnable line. But we fooled them and finally got the job done. I don't think I ever worked so hard and sweat <sup>s</sup>o much as I did  that day storing ammunition in the magazines and "ready rooms" as well as top-side in the anti-aircraft mounts. The entire crew of 300 hands had to turn to for this task. From here we went back to the navy docks where the formal commissioning took

place the next day. That evening a party was given by the Base Commandant for the entire crew. The Commandant had requested a number of the young ladies in Charleston to attend as dancing partners. I recall meeting a southern belle and asked her if she would join several of us at a table which she and several other women did. I monopolized her time for the evening and the next day I was called to task by the Executive Officer because she was supposed to be his blind date. Such is life.

The next day we pulled away from the dock and really went to sea for the first time. I will never forget that first ride up the coast past Cape Hattaras to the Norfolk Navy Yard. Cape Hattaras is well noted for its rough water and I simply did not understand how something as fragile as that destroyer looked to be could possibly bend, twist, and jump up and down without breaking. I do not get sea-sick but I felt on the verge of it during the entire ride. After receiving several more officers at Norfolk, the Tillman, the Beatty, and two other new destroyers (I forget their names now) took a shake-down cruise into the Carribbean and operated out of Guantanamo Bay on the eastern tip of Cuba.

I was given the No. 3, 5-inch gun as gun-captain for this exercise and during night maneuvers we fired star-shells for illuminaing the target areas. Since I had never been around guns much at any time in my life, handling the 5-inch was quite a thrill for me, at first. I soon learned that it made a god-awful



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racket, lots of smoke, and could operate almost as fast as an automatic shot-gun. After going through all sorts of maneuvers for more than a week, we cruised around Trinidad and Haiti for several days. We then went over toward New Orleans and picked up an oil tanker and escorted her up the coast to Norfolk. During this time I learned the difference between a torpedo wake and that made by a playful porpoise. The saving grace was that all the lookouts were making the same mistake. The Skipper was very tolerant but being in known submarine waters, he checked out every wake.

After taking on supplies and ammunition at Norfolk, we joined seven other destroyers in our squadron and steamed up to the Nova Scotia area for a squadron shake-down. The Squadron Commodore was aboard the Tillman for a number of days determining, I guess, if he wanted to keep her for his flagship. We did almost everything but sink the ship during these maneuvers and we soon learned what battle conditions were. We had a lot to learn too, as only about 15 of the 320 crew had had sea experience. Conditions on board were tight particularly since the skipper wanted to make an impression on the Commodore. At the end of each 48-hour exercise, the squadron sailed into the harbor at Bangor, Maine. Shore leave was rotated among the crew.

Since I was one of the first gunner strikers to report aboard the Tillman, I had become rather well acquainted with, and even friends with, the Chief Gunners Mate. He was a career

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navy man and he felt he was tough enough to bite nails in two. One evening in Bangor, after imbibing a bit too much we started back to the ship at the end of the liberty period. I recall that the two of us walked down the middle of the street daring anyone to try and stop us. This evidently had happened before because even the S.P.'s sort of turned the other direction and we arrived back at the ship very disappointed.

After 10 days of these maneuvers, the Commodore decided the Tillman was not up to being a Flagship so he transferred to our sister ship, the Beatty. I think our skipper heaved a sigh of relief to see this transfer made as the Commodore wanted a very tight ship. The squadron split up at this point and to my knowledge only got back together during the invasions of Africa, Sicily, and Italy. It remained, however, as the only squadron of U. S. fleet destroyers in the Atlantic. The Tillman took up a patrol station extending from the Great Banks to Bermuda. This continued to be a sort of shake-down exercise particularly in regard to anti-submarine warfare. I know that conservationists today would raise hell because at that time we could not tell by sonar the difference between a whale and a submarine - and the U-boats were very thick in the North Atlantic at that time. Many a whale paid the price of our ignorance but so did several subs.

In early August, I believe it was, we pulled into the Chesapeake Bay and started learning maneuvers for invasion landings. Four



of our group operated with the old battleship Nevada, I believe it was, which was set-up to give us heavy fire support. The Nevada, during these maneuvers, also operated radio controlled drones for AA (anti-aircraft) practice. By this time the Tillman was getting quite good and I must admit that several times we cut aircraft practice very short by destroying the target drones at the beginning of the runs thereby depriving other ships of much needed anti-aircraft practice. After several weeks of these maneuvers, we went back to our patrol station out of Bermuda, and again running up to the Great Banks every few days.

It was during one of these patrol legs that we lost the first destroyer out of the squadron. One night in a heavy fog off the Great Banks, a fast convoy got way off course (there was no radar in those days). One of our cans (a destroyer to you) attempted to get close enough to signal them back on course. They got too close and a big tanker rammed her broadside just back of the rear stack cutting off the rear third of the ship, but she stayed afloat. The convoy went on while we put a line to her bow and took her under tow until a sea-going tug could come out and do a proper job. We screened for them until they cleared the Boston yard entrance then we raced like mad to catch up with our group. We later learned that the stern section was being dragged along because one of the propeller shafts had not been torn off and it was dragging that section. About 40 or so sailors had been trapped in the stern and all had drowned

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in the accident but all bodies were recovered in the Boston yard.

Not long after this in the Burmuda area we had our second encounter of a similar nature when one day on patrol north of Burmuda we received an emergency message from ComFleet (Commander of the Atlantic Fleet) that four large freighters had collided in a fog about 200 miles to the north and they requested us to go see if there were survivors. After arriving in the area we set up a search pattern and finally located one of the freighters which had lost her bow section but the rest of the ship had held together and had not sunk. We learned from them that two of the ships had sunk immediately and the third had gone down a few hours before we made contact. All had been carrying much needed cargo so we put a line to the stern of the crippled ship and attempted to keep her into the wind and waves. Many of the survivors from the sunken ships had been able to swim to the one still afloat. We had notified ComFleet as soon as we had made contact and they had sent out a sea-going tug with a small YP craft as escort. The YP's were small private yachts taken over by the navy and were not made for open ocean travel - but went out anyway. It took them about 36 hours to reach us and in the meantime, the seas had been making up with a strong southwest wind and swells were running about 20 feet high. We were afraid we would either lose the towed vessel or she might tear us to pieces because she outweighed us about 50 to 1. The tug and



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the YP were having a difficult time with the seas as they were tossed around even worse than we were. Once the tug got ahold of the crippled ship, she settled down but the little YP continued to bob like a cork. We were very happy to cut our lines to the big hulk and turn her over to the tug. Time and again I recall seeing the YP ride up on a high swell and be completely turned around so that she was headed in the wrong direction. It took us about three days to escort all of them back to the Charleston harbour. We then returned to our patrol north of Bermuda.

I would like to go back in time a bit here. Following the training we underwent in the Chesapeake Bay in August, the Tillman and the Beatty accompanied the heavy cruiser USS Augusta and the small original flattop (aircraft carrier) the USS Ranger up into the Norwegian Sea. The enlisted men were not in on the specific ship communications but the scuttlebutt was that one of the German pocket battleships had broken out the English blockade along the Norwegian coast, and was headed out to sea. This, plus the fact that we were losing many, many ships to German U Boats in that area, necessitated a heavy concentration of antisubmarine vessels, mostly British, but much too small to tangle with a pocket battleship. We spent a number of weeks cruising around those waters much to my discomfort. The seas in that part of the Atlantic were always rough, even on a calm day, and when the weather kicked up, they really became nasty.

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Time after time, I recall, the Ranger's mast head which must have been at least 120 feet above water line, would completely disappear when she hit the bottom of one of the swells as we went down the other side. The rolling and pitching deck of the Ranger was much too unstable for the landing of aircraft once they had taken off so the pilots had either to make landfall somewhere in Scotland or ditch their planes near one of the destroyers in which case we had to recover them within two or three minutes, that was as long as they could stay alive in those cold waters. We did not encounter the pocket battleship (we later learned that she had retreated back into one of the Norwegian fjords) but we did manage to get two very probably U Boat kills. In late October we headed back toward Bermuda and the Ranger and Augusta went on their merry way.

Shortly after this, preparations were underway for the invasion of North Africa. Many small landing craft and other small ships were sent out from the east coast of the U. S. and were to converge on Bermuda for refueling and training. In many instances the navigators on the small vessels had had almost no training so they missed the islands and soon ran out of fuel. We took a small oil tanker with us and set out to round up as many of the boats as possible. For the next four or five days we would locate a boat, refuel it and give it specific directions to get to Bermuda. Almost without exception, however, they decided not to go on their own. They dropped astern of the tanker and



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trailed us around. We finally got back to Burmuda trailing 30 or so ships in line. This created, I know, somewhat of a stir in the Navy for the need to improve training procedures. After several weeks of patrolling around Burmuda, the task force began massing in earnest. The squadron was divided into three main groups for the African invasion with three destroyers in each group, and the tenth was slated as a back-up. Our group, with the heavy cruiser Augusta was slated for Casa Blanca, the group with the Beatty was slated for Oran, and the third group was for Dakar. Our main job was to find a way through the mine field around the harbor and to drop a small red buoy every 100 yards or so. Another can was following us and would take over if we happened to hit a mine. It would make a new approach marking it with buoys from where we left off. I might add that everyone on the Tillman was a bit disturbed at being the first to go into the harbor area. As soon as we cleared the harbor area, we were to go north along the coast and block any incoming ships from that direction. Our companion destroyer moved to the south to perform a similar task, and the third can stayed out to herd all the landing craft and transports into the harbour.

Everthing went well and we started north on our first leg. We soon encountered a small coastal steamer carying a French flag which we took to be Vichey French. I forgot to mention that this landing was early in the dark hours of the night. I can

still vividly recall when we turned our searchlight on that steamer and hailed her in French, telling her to stop, reverse her course and clear out. She refused to do so and kept right on steaming south. I might mention that during our training, the skipper had requested that crew members who had a good command of any foreign language declare themselves and we found that there were over 15 different languages native to the crew, thus we had someone who could speak fluent French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Arabic, and so on. Our hailing the ship was tried in French and Arabic so it was done in proper form. After our hailing, the ship continued on down the coast. The Skipper ordered the port-bridge 20 mm to fire a warning burst over her bow. When this did not stop her the Skipper ordered the Number 2 mount to put a five-inch armor-pericing shell into her bow at the water line. I can still hear Wheeler, the gun-captain of No. 2, remark, "Jusus Christ," you really want me to shoot her?" I thought the Skipper would explode, but he calmly said, "yes." Anyway, after taking a big hole in her bow, her skipper ran her aground. This seemed to open up the firing all along the coast because from then on all night the sky and horizon was well covered with tracers of various sizes and the sound of gunfire was continuous. By morning the harbor was, we thought, reasonably well secured. Except for the three destroyers, the remaining ships went into the harbor, moored, and started to unload soldiers and supplies. As I recall, the Vichey French



had one or two destroyers, several cruisers, an unknown number of submarines, and the battleship <sup>Jean Bart</sup> ~~Richelieu~~ moored or tied up at docks. The French commandant had promised that there would be no trouble and they would comply with the British admiral. We stayed out on partol all that day keeping other coastal shipping from entering the harbour. Our Skipper was a nut on conserving fuel, a fact which probably saved our necks several times over. But that day we were swearing at the "powers that be" because we had been constantly moving since early August and we had no relief or fresh food in all that time. Destroyers can only carry fresh food for about four or five days, perishable food for maybe ten days, after that everything was dehydrated or canned. Thus after four months we were sick of beans, sardines, and other canned goods.

During that day, a small navy tanker had pulled into the harbour and one by one the various ships tied up to her and refueled. Early that evening the patrolling destroyers were to come in one by one for refueling. On signaling the other destroyer nearest to us, our Skipper found she was much lower on fuel than we were, and outranking her skipper, he had her go in first. That destroyer had just tied up to the oiler and started taking on fuel when one of the Vichy subs sent two torpedos into her blowing her completely apart (both halves stayed afloat though and later the navy put them back together minus one stack and one engine). She served in the African coastal

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waters for a long time after that. All hell broke loose at that point, and the other destroyer joined us in racing into the harbor dropping depth-charges, firing at the Vichy surface ships and in general, ready to sink every French ship in sight. I recall that we lost three transports, the tanker, the destroyer, and several other small freighters. For several days, the harbour was filled with floating bodies and debris from the sunken ships. We, needless to say, did not get refueled that night but after "neutralizing" the harbour, we went back out for patrol. The army assured the navy that they had boarded every French ship and spiked all their guns, and this included the battleship <sup>Jean Bart</sup> ~~Richelieu~~.

The next afternoon we were on a return leg of a northern sweep, still at modified general quarters in that one-half the crew was at battle stations, when suddenly the entire ocean seemed to erupt about a hundred yards off our starboard beam. We were alerted by the Army that the <sup>Jean Bart</sup> ~~Richelieu~~ had been able to activate one of their turrets and were firing their main battery (approximately 17-inch shells) at us - as if we needed to be told. Needless to say, poor Tillie returned their fire with our 5-inchers which was about like a little poodle taking on a lion. This was, however, when I found out what a gun captain's job was really about because after the first round from my own No. 3 5-inch, the next powder round stuck about half way into the barrel. Evidentially in the excitement of our first real battle, one of the loaders forgot to remove the packing grommet



and the shell stuck in the breech.. The hydraulic ram was unable to force the shell and powder case into the breech so I had to stand on the loading tray and using a heavy rawhide maul, pound the powder case into the barrel. This was somewhat ticklish with the ship rolling and pitching under battle speeds and me trying to hit the edge of the case knowing that if I hit the center of it, I would set off the charge and eliminate the gun crew and probably the entire ship. I finally got the case hammered home and knocked the breech closed when, because I had not told the Gun Pointer to open his firing pin, the damn thing went off, and so did I. The recoil knocked me across the entire mount and I tore loose several electric heaters, doing minor damage to other parts of the enclosed mount. I was quite sore in places for <sup>several</sup> days after that. I found that after a few choice words to the loading crew, they were exceptionally good because later we discovered we had fired more rounds than any other mount (maybe it was that we were more scared than they were).

During this time, the Skipper had been putting Tillie through some fast maneuvering trying to evade the monstrous 17-inch shells from the Richelieu. The big shells made a hell of a racket going overhead but we were happy to hear them pass. From time to time we did get some spray from a near-miss. After what seemed like hours but probably not over ten to fifteen minutes at most, our heavy cruiser <sup>Jean Bart</sup> Augusta came over the horizon and opened on the ~~Richelieu~~ with her 8-inch armor-piercing shells. At the

same time, our own air cover did a bit of dive-bombing and finally put several 500-pound bombs down the stacks of the Frenchman blowing a large hole in her bottom so she settled at the dock and all firing ceased. This taught us a lesson we were never to forget as long as we were in the Med and that was that we could not trust the Vichey French.

The 5-inch 38's were a superior gun at that time. Each round of ammunition was comprised of a brass powder case about 36-inches long and filled with 20 pounds of a supposedly smokeless and flashless powder. The 18-inch long shell was separate and weighed about 30<sup>-55</sup> pounds depending on the type of explosive it contained, e.g. star shall for illumination, armor piercing, shrapnel, time-fuzed for aircraft, etc. It could be elevated to about 80 degrees for high-flying aircraft. The guns could, thanks to all electro-hydraulic power, fire about 25 to 30 rounds per minute. Each gun crew was made up of 15 to 20 men somewhat dependent on how full our ship-board crew was at that time. There were seven men at each gun itself, the powderman, the shellman, the range finder, the hot-shell man, the pointer, and the trainer, and naturally the gun-captain. We normally had 8 to 10 men in the ready room below the turret, and 2 to 4 men in the magazine several decks down. We spent many, many hours drilling at the training machine, and in actual gun practice. The crew knew their jobs well enough that they could operate almost as well in the dark as they could with lights. I found at Casa



Blanca that I had an excellent group of rough-necks that took pride in their work.

Following the set-to with the <sup>Jean Bart</sup> Reichlieu, we went back into the harbor and systematically depth-charged the entire area driving any hidden submarines out to sea. We then went back to our patrol station where we refuelled while underway.

After the landings at Dakar, Casa Blanca, and Oran, most of the squadron went into the Med and were assigned to Oran as our operating base. Here we were to pick up fuel, food stuffs, ammunition, and other supplies. However, Tillie and the Beatty were again sent up north along with the Ranger and the Augusta. It was at this time I believe, that our Skipper asked the carrier if we could borrow a ton or so of flour. We were almost completely out of any food-stuffs. They sent us over about a ton of flour via a line after we pulled alongside. Our cooks soon found the flour to be almost nothing but maggots so it had to be discarded. I learned a few new cuss-words when the skipper found out about the flour. I said earlier that the O division stood all helm watches and I drew what seemed like my fair share of standing at the helm on the bridge. The helm, like everything else, was hydraulically operated so the 2-foot wheel was very easy to turn and the rudder responded very fast to the helm.

We finally returned to the warmer waters of the Mid-Atlantic and pulled into the harbor at Casa Blanca where we actually tied up at a dock and shut down the engines for the first time

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since August. We didn't get much rest though because we were visited rather irregularly all night by German dive bombers. We spent most of the night in a rather relaxed state of GQ (general quarters) I must say since several crewmen broke into the survival kits on the life rafts and obtained the brandy rations from them. The entire ship paid for this caper since the Skipper got so mad he would not grant any shore leave while we were in port. Since it was Christmas Eve, however, we were treated to music over our ship's communication and I swear that "White Christmas" was played six or seven times. Every time I hear that song even today, I am reminded of that night in Casa Blanca.

After several days of loading supplies and relaxing a bit, we again started the engines and pulled out for Gibraltar. Here the "heavy elements" of our task force dropped out and the destroyers went into the Med to serve as an advanced escort for a convoy headed for Malta, and to keep tabs on the Italian fleet holed up in southern Italy. The heavy elements were the old Nevada, the Augusta, and the old Ranger (flat top) which were considered to be too slow to escape the combined attacks of the German dive bombers, E Boats, and U Boats. But the British had plenty of old timer heavy elements in the Med - this was something I never could understand.

This was our introduction to what the British called the "Tunisian War Channel." The "Channel" extended for perhaps 100



miles between the Tunisian coast and Sicily. It was about one to two miles wide and was called a "channel" because the Germans had heavily mined that entire area of the Med but the British managed to keep the channel swept clear of the nasty mines. Since all Allied ships going in or out of the Med had to pass through this strip of water, the Jerries had set up a regular complex of E Boats, U Boats and dive bombers whose sole duty was to harass any and all Allied shipping going or coming and this they did with lots of vigor. I might mention at this point that the German E Boat was much like our PT Boat except it was a bit larger and faster. I don't know if anyone kept track of all the ships sunk in the Channel but there must have been hundreds. I know on that particular convoy we lost about 15 small ships going and coming from Malta. Our group was attacked several times during our passage through the area. The Germans had an excellent surveillance system because Berlin Mary, as we called her, each evening would broadcast via their radio that such and such a ship had been sunk by their brave fighters, and they even named the ships. The trouble was though that later she even reported Tillie as having been sunk six or so times which was news to us.

It was along about this time I saw the largest number of planes in the air I had ever seen at one time. The Mediterranean Command wanted to open the Tunisian War Channel a bit so ships could maneuver properly so they called a massive bombing on

the Island of Pantelleria to eliminate the German bases there of their planes, E-Boats, and U-Boat pens. I was standing AA watch then and I know that for 25 to 30 minutes the sky was literally covered with bombers and the noise was really deafening, and there was no place to hide. We later learned that there were over 700 planes in that strike. I might add that Pantelleria ceased to be a problem after that.

Various types of duty in the Med followed and we were in and out of Oran rather frequently. One rather funny incident took place once while we were doing something or other up in the Tyrrhenian Sea all alone. As we passed by Corsica the British sent us one of their Wellingtons for a cover plane. All night long we could hear the plane circling overhead and I guess we got some comfort from it. I recall going on gun watch at 4 am that morning and as the sky became light at about 5, we looked up and lo and behold, the plane circling overhead was a German Heinkel. What ever happened to the Wellington we never did discover but the Heinkle took off in a hurry at the same time.

It was only a day or so later during the middle of the night that we suddenly came up in the center of a large armada of ships and the Skipper sort of sneaked us right in the middle of the group thinking, I guess, that we were in the middle of the Italian fleet. Anyway he began asking for identification by blinker light and by radio. Getting no response at all, he flashed the international call for identification before opening



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fire. We soon received a message from one of the ships stating that it was a British Mediterranean Fleet and we knew that it was made up of two aircraft carriers, two battleships, several cruisers and four destroyers. They were looking for the Italian Fleet supposedly in those waters. I often wondered what might have happened if we had opened fire. We spent a day or two with them then headed back south.

Numerous other trips back and forth in the Med kept us busy until early March I believe, when we hurried into Oran, loaded fuel and supplies including ammunition, and at flank cruising speed, went steaming through Gibraltar and north toward the British Isles. We kept on going however, and were soon off the Norwegian Coast. The O Division had not been warned of this and we were unprepared for the cold and the next morning we found the water jackets on the AA water cooled guns had frozen and burst the jackets. We had to do a hasty job of welding. Not only that but our North Atlantic clothing was not up to the cold so we suffered. We spent several weeks cruising around in those waters looking, I guess, for one of the German pocket battleships. We kept racing back and forth in some of the worst weather and heavy seas I had ever seen. Since we were operating under the British Admiralty, the Skipper had sick bay keep pure-grain alcohol ready so that those going off watch could take a coffee cup and have it filled with those warming spirits. This made for a good off-duty rest period. After several weeks of such

pleasurable duty we pulled into the Firth of Clyde near Glasgow and dropped anchor. We had had no shore leave for months so half the crew took leave and went into Glasgow, and the half still aboard visited sick bay quite often. By midnight every one was feeling much better. About 2 or 3 am we received an urgent message from the two British destroyers who had been with us and had stayed up north, that they had sighted the battleship and they needed help. We were so low on man-power and fuel that we couldn't get under way until late morning so we stayed anchored. By late morning we learned that the battleship had retreated back into the fjord.

After several other forays in this general area, we headed back into the Med to help out in the North African drive which had bogged down in eastern Tunis so we heard. We and another can, the Beatty I believe, went into the harbor in Tunis and dropped anchor. There were several army transports and supply ships anchored in the bay along with several British naval vessels. I had not been ashore for several months so I requested a short shore leave to see how solid land felt under my feet. There were four of us in the group and we went prepared for any emergency. The only living thing we found in the entire city was a half starved cat, all the people had fled when the fighting was going on in the city itself. The city was a mass of rubble with very few streets clear enough to drive a tank through without a lot of trouble. We soon had enough and headed back to ship. We had



planned to spend the night at anchor but just at dusk, wave after wave of German bombers passed overhead heading, we thought, for the Allied lines in eastern Tunis. We decided to give the army a bit of help so we opened up with our 5-inchers and the 40-mm's. We soon had a sky full of flack. A number of their bombers came down into the bay area and at water level, started shooting at the ships. This gave us lots of trouble because we were afraid of hitting our own ships so the Skipper had the anchor hoisted and we cleared the harbor at flank speed. As it was, we had our decks littered with shrapnel from our own guns and the other ships. One of our 20-mm gun crews had been hit with a small caliber shell (probably a 20-mm from one of our own ships). We were very lucky to have had no more damage than that. The next day, I recall, we went west at full speed to Gibraltar, loaded a full supply of fuel and with three other destroyers from our squadron, continued on west to the Long Island Sound where we picked up a fast convoy of troop ships which also had several small destroyer escorts. We turned and without stopping, took off for England.

After leaving the convoy in English waters, we went back to the Med where we spent more time doing our thing - what ever it was. Late one evening we made a fast run into Oran, took on a full supply of fuel, food, and ammunition and at flank speed headed west through Gibraltar then north to Land's End in southwestern England. We were to meet the Queen Mary and,

being joined by three other destroyers, escort her to New York. The Queen, we heard, had most of the British government aboard. We arrived on station the next night at the appointed hour but try as we would, we could not locate the Queen. She was supposed to be using "black light" for identification. Finally the Skipper broke radio silence with the TBF and requested an update on our target's position. The Queen replied that she wondered what the hell we were doing because she could clearly see our own signals. Finally one of our lookouts glanced up into the sky and there she was, towering way overhead. Our masthead came to about her lowest scuppers, she was a monster alright. Following the contact, we picked up station and headed west at 36 knots which we had to do to screen for the Queen since she was making 32 knots herself. As we neared New York, one by one the other destroyers had to drop out because they were running out of fuel. We were the only one to make it into the Brooklyn Yard and we had only enough fuel for several more hours run. As I said earlier, the Skipper was a nut on saving fuel.

I believe that this was a time when, because we were already there, ComFleet decided that we needed new engines so we faced a long, tedious six days in the Brooklyn Yard. The Skipper threw a big party for the crew in one of the large hotels with all the free food and drinks one could want. There were also many young ladies from one or more of the various USO clubs. Many of the crew were married and, since New York was our home port,



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their wives were living nearby. All in all, it was a hell of a good party.

We were soon, altogether too much so, back at sea doing our thing. what-ever-it-was. After several months back in the Med and around England, we headed back to the States to undergo a degaussing in the Norflok Navy Yard. The Jerries had brought out a new type of magnetic mine and Tillie was quite hot, magnetically speaking. We knew the Chesapeake Bay was well guarded and heavily mined but we had charts and pass-words and all that sort of thing. We passed the picket ships and after a few hours were glibly moving along at about 20 knots when one of the foreward lookouts spotted a large round object in the water off our starboard bow. About the same time, our ship's radio started squaking wanting to know what the hell were were doing in the middle of that mine field. It seems that, typically Navy fashion, they had moved the mine field around but had not told us about it nor had they given us a new chart when we passed the picket ships. We thought that this was a stupid time to let us know. Finally a small cutter came out to us and with their help, we threaded our way through the field and believe me, there was a big sigh of relief when we cleared the area. The Skipper had cleared the bow area of all personnel as soon as we found where we were thinking that maybe if we did hit a mine, we would lose only the bow.

This was only the beginning though. We finally pulled into

the drydock and spent a number of hours clearing the ship of all equipment which could possibly be effected by magnetism such as clocks, compasses, gyros, etc. After the dock was pumped dry, we spent a miserable 12 hours moving heavy cables, clamps, and other equipment used in the degaussing. Finally the job was done and the dock was flooded, equipment put back on board and we were ready to pull out. The Bridge watch spotted strange acting compasses at about the same time the engineering group reported the gyros were absolutely nuts. The Yard people came back on board and started checking. Lo and behold, instead of being degaussed, they had poured enough magnetism into Tillie that she would have set off a magnetic mine at least 1,000 yards away. So the dock was pumped dry and once again we went through all that damned heavy work. The ship was thoroughly tested though before we even moved a watch or clock back aboard. So, about 30 hours after first coming into dock, we pulled out. Every one was really pooped by this time and would gladly have drowned all the degaussing technicians. We moved out to a refuelling dock and spent a leisurely 10 hours taking of fuel which would normally have taken only one hour at most. During this time our navigation group had gone to the base and picked up new mine charts of the Bay. What a fiasco this trip had been.

It was this time, I believe, that the scuttle-butt around the ship was that just before we arrived, a British carrier that had been holed by a torpedo somewhere in the North Atlantic



area had been in the Norfolk Yard being repaired. After completion of the repairs, the carrier started back to sea. The small picket ships at the mouth of the Bay really meant business because on trying to clear the Bay in the dead of night, she failed to give the proper recognition signals and the pickets put another torpedo into her sending her back to the Yard for another two weeks repair. I know that there was a British carrier in the Yard while we were there messing with the degaussing.

I recall another incident about this time when for some unknown, to me, reason or other we were making a fast run back to the States. The Navy had a large number of anti-submarine planes such as PBY's, B-24's, etc., stationed in Burmuda flying anti-submarine patrols from that island. Twelve of the pilots were long overdue on state-side leave and we were passing close by Burmuda, we were asked to make a quick stop to pick them up and take them to New York. A small barbor cruiser brought them out to the ship to save us time from entering the harbor and docking. We stopped long enough to bring them aboard then high-tailed it for New York. The weather was beginning to make up a bit and the seas were getting rough. We were getting close to the coast when we received an urgent message from ComFleet telling us to proceed to a point off Cape Hattaras where we would meet the new battleship, USS Missouri <sup>or Iowa??</sup> and screen for her during her trial runs. The monstrous battle wagon was fast so we had to do flank speed to do any screening. The seas were

really rough by now and the swells were about 20 or so feet high. The battle wagon just plowed through but Tillie was riding the swells which meant that it was a hell of a rough ride for us. Each time we cleared a swell, the entire bow section would ride high and clear of the water then as the swell passed, it would plunge down to the bottom of the trough jarring one's teeth like a punch in the jaw. We were not only going up and down like a roller coaster but we were also rolling from side to side sometimes at 30 or more degrees. Riding on a destroyer at 38 knots in heavy seas is about the wildest ride one can take.

I might mention here that when sailing in rough, heavy seas such as in the North Atlantic where it is rough most of the time, you soon learn to never, never let go of a good hand hold at any time. When you crawl into your bunk you wrap your arms and legs around the steel frame and hang on for dear life. Quite a number of sailors, including me, were thrown out of their bunks when they forgot and it was no fun landing on the deck especially from the fourth bunk high off the deck.

Our poor passengers, pilots they may have been, were soon so sea-sick that they had to be strapped in their bunks. I don't believe I ever saw a more sea-sick group. I must add, though, that even the old veteran sailors were a bit queasy, even the Skipper. Thank heavens I knew the Chief Cook quite well so I lived on canned grapefruit, coffee, and cigarets.



We kept up the screening for over two days while the Missouri tested all her equipment, including her big 16-inch rifles. After the Missouri gave us the all clear signal, ComFleet sent us another message telling us to return immediately to Burmuda, refuel, and get the hell back to Oran. The poor pilots almost had to be carried off ship in Burmuda vowing to never, never again ask for or accept a ride on a destroyer no matter what. The poor devils never got to New York.

It was about this time that the German army had been driven back to the African coast and bottled up in an area called Cape Bon. Here they were attempting to evacuate their entire army to Sicily and Italy. They were using every type of transportation available such as planes, ships, boats, and the like - and naturally we were trying to help them out by destroying as many of their personnel as possible. It was a horrible experience. The Germans lost many, many thousands of their troops in this evacuation as well as much of their equipment. For weeks the waters around Cape Bon were littered with debris. With their withdrawal, the Tunisian War Channel became a much safer way to travel but there were many mines floating around so we still had to tip-toe a bit in this area.

With Africa cleared of Germans, the Allies began building for landings in Sicily or southeastern Italy. By this time I had been promoted to Gunner's Mate 1st which amounted to being the leading gunner under the Chief, and was assigned the No. 2

mount which was immediately in front of the Bridge. This gave me a nice view when at General Quarters. The army did not intend to land heavy guns during the initial landings - rather they were going to rely on the naval ships for the heavy fire support. The army used a different fire control system than we did thus I got the job of going ashore with our fire-control officer and on shore we met the army spotters. We moved inland about six miles to where we were completely out of sight of the Tillman (and about 10 miles east of Oran). We set up the army radio system and spent a bit of time cross-referencing our two fire control coordinates. We finally contacted the Tillman and called for a salvo of 5-inch on a hill-spot about a half-mile from us where we could make fairly good measurements. The radio was a bit rough so we moved to another hill where we had better contact. We called for another salvo and thank heavens we had moved because that salvo landed right where we had been standing. Even though Tillie was firing dummy shells, they still dug a good sized hole where they hit. After several more tries, we worked out all the bugs and we were hitting right on.

Several days later we topped off our fuel, ammo, and other supplies and headed out to sea. We joined up with a big task-force of ships loaded with thousands of soldiers. The task-force was soon divided into three units and our unit had three other destroyers, several mine-sweeps and for heavy fire-power we had a British Monitor. The Monitor was a big lumbering brute



and had seen lots of service. Its fire-power was, besides the usual AA guns, etc., comprised of only one turret carrying 3 18-inch guns (hence the term monitor). The turret was located on the after deck so when she wanted to fire, she had to turn her rear end to the enemy.

We sailed east as though heading for the Eastern Med then reversed course and went north to Sicily. Our group was to land in Gila, another group went around to the north to Palermo, and the third went east to Messina. Just after dark (no moon) Tillie sneaked into the harbor at Gila and picked up two British Commandos from a British sub that had been hiding in the harbor. We quietly went back out and dropped them off at Eisenhower's flagship. The British had been scouting the harbor and nearby area for gun emplacements and other fortifications. I had the AA watch up near the fire-control that night so I had a good view of what was going on, almost too good. The seas had been rather rough and from what we heard, there was a chance that the landings would be postponed. All of the army people were quite sea-sick. We had not been back on our proper station but a short time when I could hear an extremely loud roar which grew and grew. Soon wave after wave of planes came swooping in toward land almost at masthead level. They might have cleared our mast by 15 or 20 feet but I felt sure they were even closer than that. I looked around the watch station but there was no hole to crawl into. We later learned that the planes

were supposed to drop their paratroppers behind the German lines in Sicily but they missed and instead dropped them deep in Italy. The soldiers were plenty glad to get off the transports as the seas were quite rough and even getting into the small boats became a problem. Tillie took up her patrol station about 1500 yards off shore so back and forth we steamed watching the small boats go into the beach.

We were soon engaged in plenty of action because the German Panzar tanks started moving toward the beach and our job was to knock them out of action. Their Panzar tanks had rather heavy armor plate in front and it took a good sized shell to do them any damage. We soon found though that a 5-inch armor-piercing shell would pop them open like a ripe melon. We would shell any tank that came into view. The going was rough for the GI's (this includes the British units and other with us) and little progress was made for quite sometime. My GQ station, as I said, was in charge of the No. 2 mount immediately in front and below the bridge. The gunnery officer, a full Lieutenant, was stationed in the fire control station at the very top of the superstructure. He used the No.2 gun as his spotter so we were firing quite often. The Jerries were pestering us all the time with dive-bombers and torpedo planes but our own air planes, as well as the two outlying destroyers, were giving us fair coverage.

Our 5-inchers were quite good for tanks and open gun placements but they had little effect on the heavily reinforced bunkers



containing the German heavy rifles, so our friend, the lumbering British monitor, opened up with its 18-inch guns. Their big shells made an ungodly noise as they passed overhead but they soon made shambles of the bunkers which pleased us no end because shells from several of the German big guns were getting entirely too close for comfort.

Later that afternoon, we had been at GQ for over 24 hours and were getting rather tired, and had finished the sandwiches and coffee sent around by the galley slaves, when several Stukas came in attacking the various warships as well as the 60 or 70 supply ships unloading into barges for transport to shore. Soon the sky was full of German planes and a royal battle was developing. The sky was full of smoke and flack and several transports were severely damaged. We were getting a fair number of planes and their splash when they hit the water, plus the splash caused by near-miss bombs, was giving Tillie a good shower-bath. I didn't know where our own air cover was but it certainly wasn't there. It was getting quite dark and the air battle was still going on when we noticed another swarm of low-flying planes coming right in through the battle. Tillie was very busy firing at the tanks on the shore as well as nearby planes and we, and the other destroyers, were accounting for a large number of planes, when our sister ship, the Beatty, patrolling 6000 or so yards off shore, radioed that many of the low-flying planes were towing gliders and a number of them had been shot down

near her. They had stopped long enough to pick-up several soldiers in familiar looking uniforms, from the water. The soldiers turned out to be GI paratroopers. It was one of the worst disasters we encountered as there were about 32 planes and gliders shot down all loaded to the top carrying capacity with battle-ready paratroopers who would have very little chance of swimming with all their gear. All because of a very, very stupid Air Force Colonel who for some unknown reason led his strike force right into one of the heaviest air raids we had, until that time, been in. I think every sailor from the Skipper to the lowest seaman would gladly have torn the guy limb from limb. We never learned what happened to him but we hoped that he was one of those downed in the sea. (Add a P.S. here. In the early 1970's we hired an electronics technician for our C-14 lab whose face and hands were badly scarred by fire. Sometime later we were talking over a cup of coffee and I learned that he had been a paratrooper and was shot down over Gila in that horrible fiasco. Neither one of us ever talked of it again)

That particular air strike went on most of the night. The Germans were going all out to block the invasion and were throwing everything they had at us. By morning the action was calming a bit when one lucky bomber made a hit on one of our ammo ships that had not yet unloaded. There was a terrific fire-ball as the ship blew, almost like what we now know as an A-bomb blast, but we didn't know about A-bombs at that time. We could feel



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the heat even several miles away. It was the only ammo ship I ever saw be hit in such a fashion and I never want to see another.

The other two landings at Palermo on the north and Messina on the east, did not have as much trouble. I guess the Germans did not expect any landings at those points. We stayed off Gila for several days slowly steaming back and forth, occasionally firing at a tank which poked its nose into view. All in all I think we destroyed 8 definite tanks, and several other probables. Some wise guy painted 8 Panzar Tanks on our fire control station. This later caused much comment when we would go into port especially in the U.S. where no one knew what they were. But all were mystified as to why a Fleet Destroyer would knock out a land based tank.

We stayed in the Tyrhenian Sea for some time and one of the items that amused us was Berlin Mary. The only radios allowed aboard ship were the official ones in the Radio Shack. Every late afternoon if we were not otherwise engaged, the radiomen would tune in to BBC or the main Berlin station to get news of what was going on in the rest of the world, and if conditions permitted, they would pipe it over the ship's intercom, as if other parts of the ship mattered. Anyway, the Chief radioman (Sparks) kept track of the number of times Berlin Mary reported that the U.S.S. Tillman and many other ships, had been sunk by their gallant air force. The Germans had a exceptionally fine surveillance system and they even had our numbers and names

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correct. The number, as I recall, had reached 6 or 7 times. Lord knows that there were many, many Allied ships sunk in the Med, and several were from our squadron of destroyers. And the British had lost many more. Anyway, if the Germans had sunk nearly as many ships as they said they had, the water level of the Med would have risen 25 or so feet. Strange, but under such conditions, one can find humor in the most unlikely places. Berlin Mary did have a very pleasing voice and she played many beautiful songs - one of which became my favorite and was titled Lily Marlane (?). It was sort of a theme song for her.

Our patrol continued between Oran and the southern coast of France. After the Allies secured Sicily, we started building up for the landings at Salerno and Anzio on the west coast of Italy. Again the navy played a critical role in these landings. As in Sicily, a 5-inch shell set to explode on contact, made a usable fox-hole for 2 GI's or 2 Tommies. We dug quite a few at Salerno. These landings were really tough and it was several days before the beachheads were secured. We also had a chore which was not too pleasant in that we made several fast runs to Oran to pick up ammo for the 6-inch guns on the light cruisers also bombarding the Germans heavy guns on the coast. We had to stack the ammo in every available space and tie it down securely because the seas could get rough which they often did. This was rather a touchy job for Tillie because the extra weight made maneuvering difficult and we often had the Jerries overhead.



Sometime during this period, our Skipper had picked up a Navy Cross and was elevated to a full Commander - and sent back to the States. Our new Skipper was a stickler for regulations and a "tight ship". He held dress inspection every afternoon at 16:00 hrs and all hands not on watch had to turn out. It didn't take the Jerries long to find out what was going on and about the fourth afternoon just after we had all lined up in our nice whites, we were hit by three or four dive bombers. Needless to say, those white uniforms were no longer white, and after three or four washings, they were even a poor tattle-tale grey. After the fourth day of such damnable nonsense, the Skipper cancelled our afternoon inspections.

He was not to be denied though and he requested from our base in Oran a physical fitness officer. When we next went into Oran, here was a nice young ensign so fresh from school the ink on his commission wasn't yet dry. The Ensign immediately set up a series of exercises for the morning and afternoons so everyone got in one once a day. This was fine while we were in port and for a day or two at sea. About the third day though the sea was a bit rough with six to eight foot swells. There was nothing to do but go ahead with the exercises, and about the third jump the crew made turned out to be a disaster. The deck was suddenly about fifteen feet below where they started. A good half dozen sailors wound up with badly sprained ankles and a number of bruises. Our beloved Skipper tried several other

stunts like this and the crew was about ready to toss him overboard. His ability under battle conditions was horrible, as bad as it was with handling the crew. Evidently the Squadron Commodore got word of this and so during our next call in Oran, we had a new skipper. The new skipper was exactly the opposite and he soon had the full respect of the crew. He not only knew destroyers and destroyer crewmen, he also knew battle tactics and maneuvering we soon learned.

By this time the armies had moved north toward Naples. It was rough going we heard. One day we received an order from the Admiralty. Our four destroyers immediately turned, pulled out of our patrol stations and under flank speed, headed for Gibraltar. At Gibraltar we stopped long enough to refuel, load ammo, and pick up our usual British rations of horse meat, sorghum sugar, kale, and tinned goods. We found that we were to help convoy about 8 large ships fresh from England and loaded with Canadian soldiers badly needed to join the fighting in the Naples area, and one large ship load of Canadian nurses. There were also five or six British destroyers going with us. Along with our sister ship, the Beatty, we were in point position out in front of the convoy. The first few days went by with only an occasional German plane being sighted. We would also see on occasion, one of our own planes which sometimes gave us lots of trouble. Our pilots would sometimes simply get bored with flying around so they would buzz one of our ships. They had



strict orders to do so only at a certain elevation and from a certain direction. If they didn't do so, we had orders to shoot them down because there was never enough time to tell them from a diving Jerry loaded with bombs or torpedos. We did occasionally get one of our own too, much to our regret.

I'll never forget this one action, however. We were steaming along some distance east of Oran late one afternoon when one of our lookouts spotted a German Hinkle circling around just out of gun range. Soon a much smaller plane dropped down below it and started diving our way. We opened fire on it but it was maneuvering so much that we couldn't get a clear shot - and it was much faster than normal. It missed us on its first pass, then banked around to make another approach. It was not a plane but rather it was the first radio-controlled rocket V - 2 used in the Med and we hadn't even heard of such. Anyway, one of our young 20 mm gunners sort of froze on his trigger and when the rocket banked around, lo and behold he managed a hit which upset the radio control and the darn thing soared up and after the Hinkle. The last we saw was the Hinkle making all kinds of tracks away from there. I don't think there was a pair of dry scivvies on board after that pass. In an hour or two, we started getting lots of spottings and soon we were hit with many dive-bombers. They were soon joined with the E-Boats, and probably several subs but we could not be certain of the latter. This turned out to be a battle royal and continued far into the night.

Tillie turned and started racing around and through the convoy laying down a dense and dark smoke-screen. My battle station, as I said, was the No. 2 5-inch. Soon the gun was so hot that the shell-man and powder-man were burned as they touched the breech. My clean-up man was having a hard time trying to catch and discard the spent powder cases from the turret. These cases were also darn hot as they were rejected from the breech. I got down from my lookout perch and was giving him a hand when one of the spent cases caught me across the face. It cut a good gash and burn from my right eye curving around over my cheek to my jaw. I also burned my hands as I did not have on a pair of asbestos gloves which the hot-shell man wore.

As the battle wore on, we gradually got word from the other destroyers and from the convoy ships. Several convoy ships had been sunk including the large transport carrying the Canadian nurses. Our sister ship, the Beatty (DD - 640), was hit amidships by torpedos and sunk, and the British lost two destroyers. We stopped and picked up a number of nurses in the water (I never did find out just how many but it must have been 40 to 50) because the ships were churning the water so severely, it wasn't safe unless you were in a large boat. Even life-rafts would be cut to pieces by the destroyer screws as we raced back and forth. Several of the nurses, I later learned, were so scared by the battle actions on board that they jumped back in the water thinking it was probably safer in the water. Our Damage Control crew



managed to get the remainder below deck in the officers quarters as well as in the enlisted men's quarters where they were at least safe from the flying hot shell cases.

The fight wore on for what seemed like hours. No one could account for who shot down what but there were many planes downed and many E-Boats sunk. The Jerries finally pulled off about midnight and we had a respite to stack and tie down the 5-inch cases, clear the decks of 20 mm and 40 mm shells and resupply from the magazines our ready ammo in the ready-room. We also had time for a few sandwiches and coffee. I went down to sick-bay and our doctor treated my cuts and burns. Yes, fleet destroyers carried one regular surgeon and at least two first-class medical assistants. The Doc was a good egg and was not above having his fun. He treated my face and banaged it I know so that it was at least ten times as large as needed and he even smeared some dried blood on it to make it look real. It did get me some symphatic looks from the nurses. We did not, however, secure from GQ that night as we thought The Jerries would be back.

With the break of day, our small boats along with those of the other fleet ships, had picked up everyone within sight while we cruised around looking for trouble - which did not come. It must have been that finally, our own air cover came alive and gave us some protection. We redeployed the escort vessels and the rest of the convoy, and slowly made our way toward Phillipville. During the night, one of the transports

took in tow another transport that had been hit bad and had lost her engines. I recall that seeing about 9 AM the towing transport cut the lines to the other ship and within minutes the damaged ship sank by the bow until her fanny was almost upright in the water before she slid beneath the waves. It was the only time I ever sat and leisurely watched a big ship sink. A day and a half later we pulled into a harbor at the port of Phillipville where we transferred the nurses to a regular troop transport. This was a big relief to us (and it must have been the same for them) because now we could use our bunks and toilet facilities. We refueled from our tanker, and borrowed some 5-inch ammunition. I know that No. 2 expended about 300 shells during that fight. Tillie must have shot off at least one-half her total ammunition. As soon as we could, we reassembled the convoy and under full steam went north to Naples.

We skirted Sicily and, late one beautiful, clear afternoon, we slowed and gingerly made our way into the Naples harbor. The transports moved on in and unloading began immediately. Across the bay, Mount Vesuvius was in spectacular eruption. We had gone to GO long before entering the harbor area and everyone topside was watching one of nature's most wonderful pyrotechnical displays. Before long however, we were visited by Stuka dive-bombers but still everyone watched Vesuvius and paid no attention to the Stukas. The Stuka bombardier was rather bad because his bombs fell out in the bay, a long way from any ship. After the



second or so bomber came our way and no shots were fired, the Skipper got on the bull horn and stated that if every gun on board was not firing at the next wave of bombers, he would himself come down and shoot every damned gunner on board ship. I think he was mad because he couldn't watch the eruption. We had a rather hot several hours protecting the unloading ships from the Stukas, and we wound up knocking down several planes before our air cover drove the others away. The fighting was severe in the east and north sides of Naples, and when we were quiet, we could hear the distant rumble of heavy artillery. I must say that we missed our sister ship even though we had teamed up with another can in our small group by this time. We spent the night still at GQ, and alert for Stukas I might add. By early morning we could see the last of the Canadian soldiers and nurses being trucked away from the piers so we limbered up the screws and headed back out to sea.

We had been severely using our 5-inch and 40 mm guns and the rifling was quite worn in all of them so that occasionally a shell would tumble instead of going where it should. The Skipper notified the Admiralty and requested new guns. We headed back out through Gibraltar and up the coast to Belfast. Even though Belfast was our base, we seldom got in there because the docks were always crowded and we couldn't wait our turn for repairs. This time, however, we had top priority and workmen swarmed over the ship as soon as the lines were made fast. Putting

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new barrels in even a small 5-inch is no small job and we knew we would be in port for several days. It was good to be on a solid non-moving deck for a few days.

For some reason or other, I decided that instead of a pub that evening, I would attend a dance being given by the the Belfast Red Cross. I could at least hear some good Irish music, I thought; but all they played was jazz. However, a pretty young colleen hostess came over and asked if I would dance with her, which I did. I think we were about equally versitle in dancing so we got along quite well. My feet soon began to hurt since I was quite unused to dancing. The evening passed rather fast, and a bit after midnight, unthanking I asked if I could see her home not knowing that there were no taxis or other means of transportation at that hour. So we walked -- and walked -- and walked. After a bit I recall asking her how much further we had to go and she stated that it was just down the road a piece. After a bit more walking, it was just down the road a piece. We finally made it to her home on the outskirts of Belfast. I still had to walk back to the ship and when I did get there I had such large blisters on my feet that I went barefoot all day aboard ship. Like a fool I went back to the dance the next evening but I did no dancing - we sat out and only listened to the music. That evening she made certain that she had a ride home with a friend.

I may have forgotton to mention earlier that near the docks



was a good little pub. We had visited it earlier on several of our short visits to Belfast and had become acquainted with one of the barmaids. All liquor was strictly rationed all through the British Islands and this pub was no exception. She told us though that if we bought a bottle of Irish whisky, she would keep it in a special place under the bar for us. So we pooled our resources and bought a liter of their best Irish whisky. I had found that when coming into port (which we so seldom did, it seemed), a bottle of Irish or Scotch whisky was the best way to relax and sooth the nerves. This was helped along by having a pint of stout to wash down the whisky. We soon found that no matter how many drinks we had from that bottle, it was never empty. We compensated for this good service by bringing along several candy bars, canned fruit, a sack of navy coffee, or some other goody to her. So, no matter how many times we were in the pub, the bottle never went dry.

I believe that it was on this trip that when going down the Irish Sea, as we neared Liverpool we witnessed one of the heavy V-2 bomb attacks the Jerries were making all over England. All we could do was to increase speed and be certain none of them came our way. We couldn't have done a darn thing about it anyway except to dodge the thing.

I recall once coming out of the Irish Sea (south) when we ran into a very strong hurricane as we turned into the Atlantic. It was really beating us up so we turned into the wind and tried

to hold station. The clouds were right on the water and visibility was only 30 to 40 feet. Poor Tillie rolled and pitched, shook and shuddered, rose high on the swells only to come crashing down with a breath-taking drop. She squeaked and groaned all through the night. Everyone was hanging on for dear life so there was very little sleep for anyone not on watch. The next morning the sky cleared a bit and visibility extended for several miles over the water. Lo and behold, about 5 or 6 miles sternward we could see high cliffs of land beneath the clouds. During the night we had been driven so far astern that we were deep in the Bay of Biscay and this was the heavily armed French coast where the Germans had some of their largest coastal batteries. Needless to say, the Skipper ordered full speed ahead and we plowed through the heavy swells getting the hell out of there. The Germans evidently thought that no one in their right mind would try anything on a night like that so we remained undetected, at least we did not get fired upon.

I recall one other time when we came out of the channel and hit the open Atlantic where a very strong storm was raging. We battled the heavy seas all night trying to get to some (unknown to me anyway) destination. We found that during the night the heavy seas had bent the armor plate on the front of our No. 1 5-inch back around the gun mount to an extent that the turret could not be trained nor could the gun be loaded or fired. This armor plate was a good inch and a half thick so the force of



the water against it must have been sizeable. Anyway, we had to turn around and go back to Belfast where the yardmen had to cut away the armor plating and make up a new one from scratch. This was a three-day job so it gave us a chance to visit our favorite pub once again.

We made a short run up off the coast of Norway for some reason, then headed south into the Med to help keep open the supply lines to our armies in Italy.

By this time the Med was relatively calm and our air patrols had little to do so they took to buzzing the ships. As I said earlier, the pilots had strict orders to approach any ship at a certain elevation and from a certain direction otherwise we had orders to open up with the AA flak. It might have been daring for them but to those of us who had been in the Med for a long time, it was a matter of life or death. And we never hesitated. I know we shot down several British Spitfires and several American P-38's. I recall one very quiet day when we were on patrol with the squadron flagship and a new destroyer replacing one that had been lost, and with small clouds almost on the water. We could hear a plane circling around in the clouds and I was trying to follow him with the No. 2 5-inch where I was on watch at that time. After five or ten minutes of working out the gun crew, firecontrol said to desist so I had the gun trained in to the ready position. After several minutes had gone by, out of the clouds came a Hinkle torpedo bomber and he dropped two

big fish headed right for us. The Skipper managed to get Tillie headed right at the plane but by then the Jerry had turned and disappeared into the clouds. Not a shot had been fired at him. I sat on the top of the mount and, like others on watch, kept my eyes on the two torpedo wakes heading for us. There was a great sigh of relief when we saw the wakes pass down either side of the ship and get lost in our wake without exploding. We made darn certain after this that no plane came within range unless it was in the proper position giving off proper identification.

It was soon after this that when off the coast of Italy, one of the Jerries got lucky and dropped a darn big bomb just off our port beam. The explosion caved in the port side of poor Tillie about 10 to 12 inches. Although destroyers look to be very fragile (and they really are), they can and have taken some terrible beatings and stayed afloat. This cave-in was no problem but what really hurt us was that the explosion bent the ten-inch steel port shaft causing it to freeze in its housing and before the engine crew could shut down the port engine, the superheated steam crystallized the turbine blades and the entire engine fell to pieces. We were a long way from home and in somewhat dangerous waters to be wandering around with only one engine and screw (the starboard side was untouched). There was nothing to do but to head for our good old home port in New York. This was a lot easier said than done however. We could



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make only 7 to 8 knots with the starboard engine screw otherwise we would shake poor Tillie to pieces because we had to compensate for the drag of the port screw by keeping the rudder opposite to the swing of the bow. I stood a number of helm watches on this trip and it was a hell of a job to keep proper station. We limped westward, out through Gibraltar, and headed on west into the Atlantic. I had never before realized just how big the Atlantic was until this particular crossing. We were a sitting duck for a U-Boat all the way across and everyone had to be extremely alert for periscopes and underwater sounds. In spite of a rather calm sea all the way across, this was one of the roughest crossings and slowest crossings I ever made. The journey dragged on and on, and I thought it would never end. It did, however and we were most delighted to finally sail up the river past the Statue of Liberty and on to the Brooklyn Yard.

Replacing a turbine is no easy task and we estimated that it would take five or six days. So the Skipper set up a big party in one of the Broadway Hotels to be held in three days. Lots of food, drinks, and USO girls. Everyone was looking forward to the party and time passed very slow. The morning of the third day came and we found all shore leave cancelled. The new turbine was in place and the yardmen wanted us to make a trial run out into the ocean. About 10am we pulled away from the dock with about 20 yardmen aboard so we knew we would have to return to port to at least let them off. Needless to say, we were quite

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anxious about the party that evening. We steamed around off Long Island giving the new equipment a good test. Soon we saw a Coast Guard cutter come alongside, and take off all the yardmen. Tillie kept on sailing east in spite of some rather choice swear words from the entire crew. The Skipper was as mad as anyone. He had to have the yardmen call the hotel and cancel out all the arrangements.

We returned to the Med and did another series of patrols when one morning the Chief Gunners Mate came around to chat. I had been a Gunners Mate 1st for some time now and the Chief Gunner decided it was time for a change (I think he thought he might be sent to shore duty) so he took me up to see the Skipper and requested that I be advanced to Chief. The Skipper looked at me for several minutes then remarked that the navy was really run by the Chiefs and they had to be the brains to keep the ships operating as they should. He would, he said, be glad to recommend me for a commission however. I politely thanked him and said "no thanks." I did not want a commission. I had seen too many "smart" ensigns fresh from school with only brains enough to sign their names. As it was, as leading gunner I had a free run of the ship and could get by with almost anything. I really had too good a life to foul it up by becoming just another shave-tail ensign.

After this tour of duty in the Med which lasted for several months, we turned back to New York. Tillie had been steaming



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almost steadily for well over two years and she was getting loose at the seams. Much of our equipment was worn bad or was quite obsolete. We were scheduled for a complete overhaul in the Brooklyn Navy Yard for a three week stay. Many of the crew were given leaves of up to two weeks duration. I had orders to attend an advanced ordnance school at the Anacosta navy yard in Washington, D. C. with a five day leave preceding the school session. I caught a train to Chicago, then up to Milwaukee where my brother Harold and his family were living. Several telephone calls before leaving brought my brother Marion, a Chief Electrician in the Sea Bees, and my mother in Clay Center, to Milwaukee. We had sort of a reunion at that time. I also stayed overnight in Chicago and had dinner with several old friends (not exactly old in a chronological sense), yes, female to be exact.

I had been in the Anacosta school about five days, and it was a tough school too, when one afternoon I was paged to report immediately to the deck officer. I tried to think of something I might have done to be called in in such a manner but could come up with nothing. I reported in and was handed an official telegram telling me that I was hereby detached from the U.S.S. Tillman, and ordered to report to the Naval Commandant's office in Anacosta to be sworn in as an Ensign in the U. S. Navy. The orders had been sent to the Tillman while she was still at sea and then were only now catching up. I didn't want a commission but I had no choice because of the orders, unless I flunked

the physical that is. Well, I checked in, took the physical, and received a uniform allowance at an official navy tailor shop. It took several days for the uniforms to be ready so I had to go find a room which was not easy in Washington at that time. My orders gave me ten days leave before reporting in to the officers training school in Hollywood, Florida.

I had several friends in Washington so they gave me a good time during this period. One of them was married and had a good job in the naval research laboratory. He was a good physical chemist and was working on several projects having to do with solar absorption light. He knew his way around the the entire area so we visited many historical areas all within a days train ride there and back.

After the uniforms were completed and fitted, I went out to the air station and caught a plane to Kansas City. However, we stopped in Cleveland and damn, the plane was diverted back to Washington for some unknown reason so I had to lay over and catch another flight the next morning. I finally arrived in in Kansas City where I caught a train to Clay Center (Kansas). After a few days in Clay, I rode back to Kansas City via the train. I went to the air base in Kansas City, Mo., and tried to catch a plane for Miami, Florida but they had nothing going that way. I finally went to the train station and using my overseas fleet pass, secured a berth on what was supposed to be a regular passanger train. I went out to get on the darn thing and found it to be



a troop train. It was too late to do anything about it but I certainly let the conductor know that I had paid for a first class pullman. He marked the ticket and when I arrived in Miami I raised hell with the station manager. He refunded me the difference in pay. It was a fair ride at that but somewhat uncomfortable.

I reported in at the center in Hollywood (about 20 or so miles north of Miami), and was immediately assigned to Company ????. There were about 1,000 new shavetails in that particular group, and as usual in the military, 160 of us were assigned to a company. I had learned by now to goof off just enough to not get stuck with another "cadet" position even though I was the only one in our group who "came up through the ranks" and had over two years of fleet sea duty. I did later wind up as company CPO which was no work and almost nothing but honorary. I never did understand just what good this school did me except to give me six weeks of shore duty.

I only managed to get back on a boat but once during this period. About the fourth week three of us with experience in boat handling, were sent up the coast to a small community to take a small yacht already taken over by the navy, and tying it to another small yacht that had been out of commission for some time, sail the two down the inland waterway to the Miami shipyard. It was sort of fun doing this as I had never been on such a small boat at sea. We made it to Miami alright but coming back with the other yacht we had to go out to the open

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sea, and this was a mistake. The winds had come up and the swells were running about ten feet. That stupid little boat did not respond to the helm like Tillie had done and I kept overcompensating with the rudder. I finally turned the helm over to another of the crew and let him fight it out. We finally arrived back in the boat yard at Fort Lauderdale about 4 am.

Why things happen is sometimes hard to understand. One evening after dinner, several of us were standing on the veranda on the sea side of the hotel watching three navy torpedo bombers flying around out over the water and going through certain manuevers. For some reason or other, all three collided - and there were no parachutes coming down. The navy had to scratch three planes and six airmen.

The worst part of my stay at Hollywood was when D Day took place in France. Tillie was in the thick of the landings and here I was stuck in on shore. We had worked and planned for several years for this day and I had to miss it.

After "graduating" from this school, I had orders to procede to Norfolk, Virginia for further assignment. I drew a two-day pass and so I stopped in Charleston, S. C. to visit a southern belle whom I knew there, then I went on to Norfolk. On arrival there, I had further orders to report to the U. S. S. Balch, DD - 363, commanded by Commander E. J. Oseth. The Balch was a heavy destroyer with 4 twin 5-inch mounts and had a crew of about 360 men. I went to the transportation officer to check



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in for getting to the Balch only to find that she was in the South Pacific operating in the Salmon Sea but was scheduled to return to the east coast for extensive repair. My orders were changed so that I was to wait in Norfolk for her return to the east coast. No one knew just when this would be so I obtained a room in the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ). Life was easy there, I checked at the Commandant's office every morning then had the rest of the day free.

Several times I went out to the Naval Air Station in Norfolk and caught a ride to Washington or New York, had a good liberty and caught another plane back in time to report in the next morning. I soon learned one of the privileges of wearing brass rings on my sleeves was that it was the easiest thing in the world to get a date. All I had to do was to visit the nurses' quarters or the WAVES', go to the officer of the day's desk and over the building intercom, say that if any of ladies would like to go out for the evening, please come to the OD's desk. One never knew what you would come up with but it was always interesting.

It was altogether too short a time when one morning I was handed orders to procede to the Navy Yard in Boston and report to the Commanding Officer of the Balch which had arrived there. On reporting to the Balch and meeting her Skipper, he informed me that my duties would be Assistant Gunnery Officer and Wardroom Officer. The first part was welcome but the latter part filled me with dread. The Wardroom Officer was in charge of the officer's

mess which included all food and small items-sometimes needed for a prolonged tour at sea such as playing cards, records, magazines, and so forth. Me, I had never eaten in a ship's wardroom and knew absolutely nothing about what needed to be done. The Skipper, a pleasant sort of person, stated that I would soon learn by doing. I immediately got hold of the chief steward, we had six serving the wardroom, and told him that I needed help and if he screwed me up, I would personally serve him up for some shark's dinner. He was a good egg though and we got along fine, and he really came through. Officers on destroyers have to pay for their meals and the wardroom officer has to collect from each officer the amount due wether they eat on board or not (except when on leave). A good wardroom officer could keep the mess charges to a minimum yet see that there was good, ample food at all times. I let the steward do all the purchasing and see that everything was delivered and stored. He really worked his five assistants.

The Balch carried about thirty officers ranking from the Commander to me, a shave-tail ensign. The Ordenance crew was made of the three full lieutenants and three lieutenants junior grade, and this poor ensign. Lt. Baldwin, the Gunnery Officer, often left me in charge and I sometimes had trouble trying to tell any of the officers what to do since they all outranked me. The Balch as I said earlier, was an old destroyer leader and her main battery consisted of four turrets each having 2



5-inch twin mount rifles. She also had ten torpedos and a battery of 20-mm and 40-mm guns. She outweighed the Tillman by 1500 to 2000 tons, She was a bit longer and much wider which made her turning radius considerably larger.

The Gunnery Officer and I soon became good friends. He wasn't above making friends with someone who came up from the ranks. After all, my experience came in handy for him. It seemed like I put in about 20 or more hours each day trying to find out just what a wardroom officer was supposed to do, and keep up my duties as the assistant gunnery officer.

The extensive repairs the Balch was to receive had to be postponed so we spent about two weeks in the Boston yard while the navy department made up their minds about what to do with her. We soon received our orders though for serving as a convoy leader so we had to prepare for sea. The Balch had been at sea for some time and I found that in checking our powder magazines, there was a large loss of nitrates. This meant that we had to exchange all powder on board ship for safety. So, I had to find the Navy yard supply officer and make arrangements for a later transfer which had to be done out in the harbor since ammunition lighters were not allowed in the yard. It wasn't all work though.

Shore liberty in Boston was excellent so I didn't mind the work. I took in a number of good quartet concerts at the Boston music conservancy, saw several good plays, and even met several young ladies none of whom had the slightest idea of

where Arizona was let alone Tucson. Oh well, I did.

One morning our orders came through. We were to sail south to New York and serve as a convoy leader for a large flotilla of ships bound for England. First however we had to move out into the harbor, tie up to the ammo ship and make the transfer of powder after we had aired and cleaned the magazines - no small task.

The Balch was a destroyer leader, as I said, so she had quarters for a convoy commander and he moved aboard before we left the yard. I had no opportunity to find out what his likes and dislikes were regarding food, etc. so I figured that he would have to eat what the rest of us did.

As we left the Boston harbor, I almost jumped overboard as I suddenly remembered that Christmas was but one day away and I had not picked up a tree for the wardroom. What to do, I went down to the machine shop and had a long talk with the Chief Machinest. We discussed the problem a bit then we had an idea. He went to the supply racks and pulled out a ten-foot piece of copper tubing, put it on the lathe and soon we had a large bundle of beautiful copper shavings. A five foot piece of copper served as a tree trunk, and around this we bound the shavings. It made a beautiful tree. I was forever grateful to that Chief. My chief steward had managed to buy enough turkeys that we had a turkey dinner with all the trimmings for Christmas at sea (my third as I recall).



Life aboard the Balch was quite different from what it had been on the Tillman. It moved at a slower and more relaxed pace. Of course I was in an altogether different situation too. I had watches to keep and duties to carry out but there was the fact that now I gave the orders instead of receiving them.

Convoy duty was also quite a different matter and especially since we were the overall boss in charge of the escort ships as well as the total convoy. The Commodore was an old hand at convoy duty so he kept a firm but gentle hand in all things connected with the ships. Drills were a daily exercise and gradually the men became a crew. I had charge of the 5-inch battery so I held additional loading and firing practice as well as daily gun inspection. It was during a general GQ drill that I discovered how far down the man-power situation the armed services had reached. We had received about 30 new seamen in Boston and this was their first sea voyage. During this first GQ drill, several gun captains phoned in that they had a number of missing men. All new men had been told to check the GQ Roster before we left the dock, find out where their station was and get acquainted with it. Evidently they had not done so and I had to go around and try to find out what had happened to them. I finally located seven or eight of them standing around in the head in a lost manner. I began reading the riot act to them and finally I asked them if they couldn't read a simple notice. They admitted that none of them could read but they were ashamed to admit it. I

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finally got them to their proper stations. They had to be transferred to shore on our return voyage.

Our first convoy was, as I recall, made up of approximately 70 transports and eight escorts. The transports were nearly all Liberty ships, and the escorts were nearly all small, what were called destroyer escorts. The latter were small navy vessels loaded with sonar gear but with a minimum of surface guns except for 20-mm and 40-mm. They were made to hunt down and destroy subs.

As flagship, our position was out in front of the convoy. We had two escorts far out in front with the others to the sides and in the rear. I'll never forget my first OD (officer of the deck) watch. I had never personally conned a ship before even though I had over two years experience on the helm of the Tillman and so was somewhat familiar with what needed to be done.

I was a bit nervous especially since the Commodore decided to be on the bridge at that time. The Skipper knew this so he sort of stayed close in case I fouled up. I did manage to keep the Balch fairly well on station. I think I only drank about ten cups of coffee during those four hours. I was quite relieved when my watch was over. I soon got used to it though and soon the Skipper felt safe enough so he didn't come to the bridge too often while I had the watch.

A freighter convoy of this type was much slower than the few we had made with troop transports, and the days and nights



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dragged a bit. Finally, we arrived at the southern end of the Irish Sea and turned the convoy over to the British escorts. We picked up another convoy at this point and took them down into the Med leaving some in Naples and some in Malta. We then went back to Oran where we refueled and picked up other supplies.

We passed through the strait of Gibraltar and were beating our way back toward England one morning and I happened to have the OD watch. One of our scouting ships broke in on the TB radio reporting that they had run into a "wolf" pack. I immediately called the full watch, alerted the Skipper and was ready to sound the GO alarm when our own sonar room reported that they had picked up a school of whales two points off our starboard bow and about 6000 yards distance - this was exactly where our scout had reported the wolf pack. The scout continued with their report that the subs were surfacing and that they were being fired upon by the subs - there were waterspouts about 1000 yards from them. By this time the Skipper and the Commodor were on the bridge and were getting something of a kick out of the reports - but as the Commodor said, it showed the weakness of the training of new sonar people manning a new ship on her maiden voyage, and this had to be corrected. I really felt for that crew as I remembered the troubles we had when the Tillman first went to sea. I recall another incident in this area when we were running near the Azores and I had the watch - midnight to 4 am. I was watching the radar screen when I noticed a blip

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far out on the edge of the screen. The blip kept moving in closer and closer to us. Our scouts reported absolutely nothing in sight or on their screens - but we had it cold. I could not make heads nor tails of it so I called the Skipper and when he came to the bridge, we both watched the blip. It moved in on us, through us and on through the convoy finally disappearing to our rear. None of our radar people could give an explanation for it.

We made several crossings during this period of time usually with little trouble except once in a while, one of our port or starboard patrols would pick up a sub and usually they drove them away. Sometimes the patrols would stay and continue the hunt for a number of hours. One night during such an alarm, I had the con and was moving the Balch closer to the side of the convoy where the patrol had picked up the sub. I went a bit too far so I had the helmsman give a hard right rudder to compensate - and the damn rudder stuck. We were coming around in a tight circle right into the middle of the convoy which was no place to be. So, I called the skipper and after he came to the bridge, he turned on our masthead warning light and a black light for a disabled ship. The convoy ships in that line finally passed us up and I gave a sigh of relief. It took the engineering crew about three hours to clear the rudder. They found that it was so worn that anytime it swung in that position, it would stick - another reason for our long overdue overhaul.



Once after taking a convoy to Gibraltar, We had orders to go on to Oran and make a patrol up toward Corsica. We had been cruising around that general area for a number of days and the radio was going constantly regarding the status of the German army. Rumors were thick of a forthcoming surrender. We pulled into Oran late one afternoon, dropped the anchor in the bay as there were too many ships already tied up. We had finished the evening meal and were showing a movie on the fantail of the ship because of the quiet conditions, when we received word that the European war was over, Germany had quit. I think every ship in the Harbor started firing all their guns as a celebration. Our Skipper got a bit worried because shells were exploding everywhere. He lifted anchor and we went hell bent out of that area finally slowing after about 20 miles where he thought we would be safe.

The next morning we were ordered to make a sweep in that general area as all German subs were to surface and hoist a white flag. We were to take them into Oran where the shore navy would complete the process. After a three-day sweep, we wound up with zero subs. There were none in that area. We then moved toward Gibraltar and as we moved out, other American navy ships joined in the procession. However, the Balch kept on going toward Boston and our long awaited overhaul. Before we arrived in Boston, the yard radioed us that they were about six months behind and suggested we go to New York. No one minded this a

bit, but after waiting in the Brooklyn yard for about a week, we were told that they would not be able to make the repairs for a month or two, there were too many ships ahead of us. So our orders were changed to go to Charleston. Before we arrived in Charleston we found that they could not make the repairs in their yard. The Philadelphia yard could do so and could start immediately - so we sailed up the river into the Philly yard one cloudy night. What happened that night, I do not know, but the gyro compass in my head must have tumbled and for the first time in my life, I awoke the next morning with a 180 degree switch in direction. Even now, when I go to Philadelphia I have the old navy directions.

The Balch, as I recall, was to be completely striped and new engines, and ordnance installed. She was to retain several 5-inch dual purpose guns but also she was to have several batteries of rockets. New radar gear was to be hooked into the firing system so that all ordnance could be fired by radar. The Balch was to become a new form of picket ship and be as safe as possible from the Kamakazi planes of Japan.

After docking in the the yard, all crewmen were moved off ship and billeted in quarters on the base. There were no BOQ billets available so the officers were given quarters on the 12th floor of the Ben Franklin Hotel in downtown Philadelphia. This turned out to be not too bad a deal since the 11th floor was occupied by Waves and other naval female workers and staff.



Oddly enough, we very seldom saw any of them.

Since this remodeling was to take several months, the ship was completely stripped of all small gear, e.g. everything not fastened down, and many of the crew and officers were reassigned to other ships. There were about 100 men left in all ratings to do what was necessary during this work. The gunnery officer had enough "points" that he was given an outright discharge from the service. The next in line, a full lieutenant, was sent to a new ordnance school, and the Skipper made me the Acting Gunnery Officer. What a mess it was too as I was junior officer on board with every officer outranking me. I recall one incident shortly after the work started, when I had to contact the Captain in charge of the yard about some foul-up the yard workers were trying to cover up. Of course I had to give name and rank to get through to him. He wouldn't believe that a shavetail ensign could possibly be a gunnery officer and so he called the Skipper for verification. I thought for a bit that I would be arrested for impersonation - but all finally went well, and later he even invited my out to his home one evening for a party celebrating the graduation of his daughter (from high school). The word must have been passed around because after that I got along quite well with all the yard personnel.

The next several months were spent checking every piece of ordnance equipment placed on board. This even included checking for missing bolts and nuts in the mounts, the hoists, and the fire-control systems. The automatic shell and powder hoists

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were given a continuous 18-hour test because if they were to break down, I wanted it to be in the yard rather than out a sea with enemy planes coming in at us. The work on the Palch was going about as well as the Skipper thought it should and we seemed to be well ahead of the schedule.

It was along about this time that I was promoted to the the exaulted rank of Lt. Junior Grade and was no longer a boot Ensign.

At about this time, the Skipper decided that a ship's party was in order and so he set up one in a nearby hotel. I don't recall much of what went on that night because about dinner time, a friend gave me a bottle of rye whiskey. About an hour later I became so sick I wanted to die. This was only the second time in my life I did this, and both times it was on rye whiskey. Even to this day the smell of rye whiskey makes me ill. A shipmate finally got me back to our room in the Ben Franklin. I seem to be allergic to the damn stuff, but I don't miss it.

I made several week-end trips to the beach in New Jersey with some civilian friends so the time passed quite well. My brother Marion, a chief in the Sea Bees stationed in Rhode Island, used to come down to visit me on a week-end. He could get away much easier than I could. However Marion was sent to the South Pacific after several months and I didn't see him until after the war was over.

I was in no real hurry to finish the work and go back to



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sea on the Balch since the duty she was being prepared for would not allow a peaceful existence. Radar picket duty off the Japanese coast was asking for trouble. It was not too long after this that we heard of the atom bombs being dropped in Japan. No one in our area knew what in hell an atom bomb was or how it could work. We were amazed at the amount of damage they were supposed to have caused.

Several weeks later, I recall, my shipmate and I were on a double date going to a party about 30 miles outside Philly (one of the women had a car and because she worked in a war related job, she had a gasoline allowance so we were going in her car). About half-way to the party, the radio programs were all interrupted with the announcement of the surrender of Japan. We turned around and drove back to Philly because everything shut down tight. By the time we got back into the city, the streets were completely jammed with people whooping it up. I felt so let down that I said goodbye to my friends and went back to my hotel room to be alone. It was a very strange feeling for me - one that I never fully understood.

The next day I was to start a 30-day leave so I went to Newark to catch a plane toward Tucson. I got on a Connie flying non-stop to Los Angeles where I knew I could catch a flight back to the air base in Tucson. We were waiting on the end of the runway ready to take off, and we waited, and waited when finally the pilot got word that all planes were grounded for

three days. He calmly taxied back to the terminal and we vacated the plane. I went back to Philly to wait out the 3-day period which was a mistake because during that time, all leaves were cancelled with the notation that soon nearly all personnel would soon be granted permanent leaves. This did not displease me too much. Soon the crew and many of the officers were transferred to other duties or given discharges from the service. I recall that there were four of us junior officers kept on and it became our duty to decommission the Balch and prepare her for scrapping. The yard workmen gradually removed the equipment that had been installed and transferred it to the general navy stores in the yard.

I recall one afternoon while standing around the gangplank watching a large navy helicopter flying around the base. Suddenly the thing seemed to come apart in the air and pieces of it went in all directions. Two men dropped clear and I could see their parachutes open. One fellow landed on the roof of the naval hospital and the other landed on the lawn next to the building. I never did hear why the accident took place - but it left me with a bit of anti-helicopter feeling.

Several days later, the yard commander notified us that the Balch had been decommissioned. I received that day my orders to report to the Commandant, Eleventh Naval District, San Diego, California for separation from the active naval reserve. So I went to the transportation office and had them cut me a set travel vouchers for the 11th Naval District Headquarters in



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San Diego where I had first entered the naval service so many, many years ago - it seemed. I also got them to make the orders for a first class compartment on the New York Central and the Santa Fe railroads. This was almost the exact opposite from my ride from San Diego to New York on that troop train back in '42. So for five days I lived the life of Reilly. It was one of the most pleasant rides I ever had taken.

During those five days (actually about four and a half) I spent some time reflecting back over what those four years had meant to me. At times life had been very interesting, and at other times, I sincerely wished I had been some other place. I had crossed the U. S. six times, I had crossed the Atlantic 18 times by ship, I had gone by the Rock of Gibraltar so many times that it seems like our front door. I had learned to get along with my fellow man at very close quarters having to live with him day in and day out for over three and a half years in a space no larger than 30 by 350 feet. I had truly learned the meaning of fear, and I learned to have a deep respect for the ocean waters. I also knew that a military life was definitely not for me.

Arriving much too quickly in San Diego, the personnel officer sent me immediately to the Separation Center in Los Angeles, and on 1 November, 1945, I was transferred to **INACTIVE SERVICE.**

## ADDENDUM

U. S. Navy, 1942 - 1945

During the course of typing up these notes on my recollections of World War II, several other incidents have come to mind thus I am adding them in here just for the record.

One evening we had made a quick stop in the Brooklyn Yard and some of the crew were granted leave until 24:00 hours. I was on board (without liberty) when about 22:00 the Yard Commander issued an all points call for all sailors to report back to their ships immediately. Oddly enough there were only five or six from the Tillman who did not get the word. Anyway we had orders to get underway at the quickest. We had a Torpedoman 2nd Class who was a mean, surly cuss and could not get along with anyone. He had been broken in rank several times but even that did not help his personality. That evening he decided that he had had enough so he rushed the gangplank hoping to get off ship. The Gangway Watch had strict orders to allow no one to leave the ship without the Skipper's permission. Anyway there was a tussel between the Watch and the Torpedoman, and finally the Watch had to shoot the Torpedoman. The wounded man was rushed to the base hospital where, we learned later, he died the next day. By then we were well out to sea rushing madly for Gibraltar for some reason or other. The Gangway watch had to be court-martialled where he was found guilty and fined one dollar. Such a procedure was necessary otherwise the civil authorities would have to make charges against the Gangway Watch, and the Navy could not allow that to happen. About two weeks later we were



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near Gibraltar when a recently arrived corvette hailed us and sent over our missing sailors - they had brought them over from Brooklyn.

Shore leave from a fleet destroyer was not too common and it was usually for only several hours except when in the Brooklyn Yard. In foreign ports we could not go more than several kilometers from the port. We were in and out of Oran a good deal since it was our base of operations, but I seldom went ashore for one reason or another. The few times that I did I found the bars and the cabarets to be interesting. Nearly all of them had their quota of exotic dancers including the well-known belly type. Every bar was crowded with soldiers and sailors and fly boys from all nations. There were always countless Military Police so one could not get into too much trouble.

After the Sicilian campaign ended, a certain regiment of GIs was sent to Oran for a bit of R and R. They had been all through the African campaign plus that in Sicily, and they were "rough and tough." Within a few days after their arrival, trouble began when the GIs started raising hell. They pulled some horrible atrocities against our own soldiers and sailors as well as against the natives. I realized how bad it was when one day I pulled Shore Patrol duty along with three other gunners from the Tillman. When we reported to the Shore Patrol office on the dock, we were each issued a 45 side arm and a 45 Tommy Gun. We were given strict orders to shoot first when trouble started otherwise

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we would probably be the ones sent to the hospital. We were also issued a jeep and told to stay in it or not go more than several steps away. As luck would have it, we rode around till about 4 am and even though looking for trouble, all remained calm and peaceful. I didn't complain a bit. We later learned that the Army had disbanded that group and scattered the individuals among other units.

One other time while in Oran, the Chief Gunner and I requested a jeep to visit several outlying areas near Oran. These native "villages" were usually quite small and entirely enclosed by a thick, tall wall of living cacti bearing long spines. Everything lived within this enclosure, dogs, camels, goats, and people. A blind person could have spotted one of these villages from miles away. They had a very strong odor that simply shouted at you when you got near.

Liberty in Belfast, Glasgow, or any port in the UK was always welcome even though every place was teeming with soldiers, sailors, and fly-boys. I recall once when we came into Belfast after months in the Med, and I had an errand across the yard. I noticed any number of British sailors wearing skirts, yes they were women and they were really running the port as well as actually doing the work in the repair docks. I had never heard of nor seen such before thus it was a bit of a shock. We found this to also be true in the US on our next visit to this side of the pond.



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Liberty in New York was one that I never missed - and could never get enough to suit me. I have to admit though that it was much, much more fun when I was wearing bell-bottoms than when wearing the gold braid. One of the activities I often took advantage of was the Rockefeller tickets. The Rockefellers had made arrangements to have a large number of tickets at their place on 5th Avenue. A person in uniform could go there and obtain a free ticket to any movie house on Broadway, as well as to the various plays, ballets, and even the operas. The line of people waiting for the movies was always very long and as I hate lines, I took in the plays as well as the operas. It was on one such pass that I saw the opening night of Oklahoma from a front row seat (and I must say that I liked it). The opera tickets were always for the first balcony but if you wanted, you could turn in that ticket and paying the difference, sit in the orchestra or a loge. Of course there were always the friendly (if you were far away from the Navy Yard, say in uptown Manhattan) bars and other places to visit.

Several years after VJ Day, a former shipmate from the Tillman stopped in Tucson and we spent a day together. One of the things we talked of was the Tillman. After VE Day, Tillie was sent to the Pacific. My friend had been gun captain for the No. 3 mount but had luckily been moved to No. 1 on the bow of the ship. A month or two after Tillie arrived off Japan, a Kamakazi plowed into the No. 3 mount and did considerable

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damage wiping out completely the gun and crew of No. 3 plus the crew of a nearby 40-mm quad and other nearby personnel (all in all, about 40 sailors). Tillie was still sea-worthy so she was sent to Pearl Harbor for repairs and was there when VJ Day took place. Her repairs were nearly complete so she was put in moth-balls, and may still be there for all I know.