

THE CVE PIPER



ESCORT CARRIER SAILORS
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USS Gilbert Islands (CVE-107) in rough seas, sometime in 1945. TBM-3 Avengers with Marine Torpedo Bomber Squadron (VMTB) 143 and FG-1D Corsairs of Marine Fighter Squadron (VMF) 512 are spotted on her deck

US Navy and Marine Corps Museum/Naval Aviation Museum, photo # 1996.488.253.1578.

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Many past submissions to the CVE Piper were hand written, and some were difficult to read by our printers who are not familiar with Escort Carrier names and Navy terminology. The publisher had to guess. As a result, the editor received numerous letters pointing out the errors.

All future letters submitted for publishing must be typed or clearly printed, This may cause problems for some of you, but it will improve the quality of the Piper.



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My Hero - Ralph Magerkurth by Dawn Roth



Dear Daughter,

I enlisted in the United States Navy June 7, 1943. I was a Seaman first class on the USS Sangamon. It was a ship that was commissioned, decommissioned and re-designated many times. In July 1943, The Sangamon shifted her base of operation from Efate to Espiritu Santo in August. In September, she returned to the United States for an overhaul at Mare Island. Then on October 19th, we departed San Diego, embarked and sailed for Espiritu Santo. On the 20th, we arrived in the Gilbert Islands to support Tarawa. Our next operation was the assault on Kwajalein in Marshall Islands. At 4:51 on the 25th, during a routine flight operation a returning fighter failed to hook a wire on landing, breaking through the barriers. It belly tanked, tore loose, skidded forward, spewing flaming fuel. Fire soon spread among the planes. By 4:59, it was under control. Seven crew members were lost in those 8 minutes. From January 31 until mid-February, Sangamon supported the assault and occupation of Kwajalein. We departed the Marshalls and headed back to Pearl Harbor to complete repairs.

After the battle of the Philippines Sea, the Sangamon was detached from TF 53. From July 13 to August 1, 1944, we covered the bombardment groups engaged in the capture of Guam. September 9th, we departed Seadler Harbor to Morotai. Prior to the October landings on Leyte, Sangamon launched regular flights. On October 20th, planes covered the landing forces and the ships in the transport areas. That same day we came under enemy attack and took a hit at the main deck level. It tore a two by six foot section of plating loose. During the intense fighting, several of the crew were injured, one killed by strafing fire. November 3 we anchored in Seadler Harbor.

Six days later we headed back to the United States for a shipyard overhaul at Bremerton Washington. Mid-February, the CVE arrived in Hawaiian waters. March 5 we continued west; and on the 16th, arrived at Ulithi. We were assigned to the initial assault phase of operation "Iceberg" the invasion of the Ryukyus. On the 21st, we left Ulithi. On May 4th, the Sangamon put into Kerama Retto to rearm. At 6:30, the CVE got underway. Japanese attackers, however, were soon reported only 29 miles away. At 7:30, the kamikaze dropped bombs, crashing into the center of the flight deck, the fires were out of control. By 10:30, all fires were contained, and we had reestablished communication with other units. At 11:43, The Sangamon had 11 dead, 25 missing and 21 seriously wounded. We were then sent to Kerama Retto, from there we arrived in Norfolk where the Sangamon was decommissioned October 24, 1945.

I was discharged from the Navy, February 12, 1946. In later years I found myself trying to keep in touch with my service comrades being involved in the VFW. During that time I found most service men unwilling to speak about those years. Maybe a survivors guilt? I survived the May 4, 1945, kamikaze attack at Okinawa and 16 years later to the day you were born May 4, 1961. All the Birthday's and I never said anything about that date. I should have told my story to my kids sooner, but as you know time gets in the way. I am glad you and Bud had a chance to listen to my story.

We should never forget our service and our history.
Dad



My Father's Memorial Flag in Arizona



Before Royce Hall passed away June 18, 2014, he had submitted several articles from old Pipers that he thought other members might enjoy reading.

It doesn't seem possible that fifty-eight years ago have gone since I stood with other 100 other seventeen year old kids on the steps of the courthouse in Macon, Georgia, and joined the U.S. Navy.

The calendar doesn't lie and the few gray hairs I comb every morning in mute testimony to the fact that a lot of years have gone somewhere. Kike all of you shipmates of my youth, there are many things we all forget as time flies by; however, the events of combat we shared, and the bonds of friendship we forged in the crucible of war are as fresh in our minds today as they were more than a 1/2 century ago.

I was asked to write about my memories of the war years, but first I want to address the issue of the Enlisted Combat Aircrew Roll of Honor which was established on board USS Yorktown, CV 10, the National Memorial to Carrier Aviation in 1996. I was privileged to be among the third group of combat air crewmen to be so recognized this past October 9, 1998.

I was humbled to be honored along with so many men from the Battle of Midway in 1942, and other battles that followed that event. Included in the group of 93, some 46 men that died in that historic battle were inducted posthumously. It was a belated, but most fitting honor to those brave men that flew back in the back seat of old slow TDB's and some of the first men to be lost in the newer TBF's. I hope you will be able to spread the word via the Piper that the Navy wants to find as many combat air crewman from all the wars that followed WWII, so that they too can be honored for their service and sacrifice, if nominated by the selection committee.

Following is a brief chronology of my naval experience:

- Enlisted 29 November 1940 - Savannah, Georgia
- Sworn in 30 December 1940 - Macon, Georgia
- Boot camp and aviation ordnance school - early 1942, Norfolk, VA
- Ground school Gunnery instructor NAS Pensacola - 6/41 to 1/42

- Began flying in PBY's as Norden bomb sight instructor at NAS Pensacola in early 1942

- Plank holder NAS Bronson Field, Florida and instructor throughout 1942

- Leading air crewman and turret gunner VC 68 from 6/43 until end of war. I made Chief Ordnance man on 29 November 1944, and served as leading chief and squadron commander's gunner in second VC 68, which was formed as NAS Sand Point, Seattle, WA in January of 1945.

Second VC 68 was formed by veteran pilots and air crewman of the first VC68, after Mariannas and Philippines campaign in June and October 1944. We had just completed our syllabus and were preparing to sail to North Island, San Diego, CA when the war ended in August 1945. I had extended my "Diaper" cruise in January 1945 and served at Citadel in Charleston, SD, and a CASU (Carrier Aircraft Service Unit) outfit at NAS Oceana, Virginia during 1946. My discharge from USN was 23 January 1947.

I enlisted in a Naval reserve outfit in Vallejo, CA, when war broke out in Korea in 1950, but was not called to active duty. I was discharged from reserve in 1954. Relative to our war action, Fanshaw Bay was Admiral Bogan's flagship at Saipan and we, along with other Jeep Carriers including Gambier Bay, covered the Marine landing on Saipan, Tinian and Guam beginning on June 15, 1944. On 17 June 1944 while operating off Saipan we took a bomb through the after elevator that killed 13 men, wounded many more and put Fanshaw Bay out of action. Most of the aircrew and pilots were put ashore in Eniwetok, and Fanshaw Bay went on up to Pearl for repairs.

In late June or early July, Gambier Bay CVE 73, put in at Eniwetok for supplies and replacement of planes, pilots, and aircrew. My flight log shows my first flight with VC 10 on board Gambier Bay was 14 July 1944. Between that first hop and my last was VC 10 on 5 August, I flew 19 hops for a total of 85.6 hours. Most of these hops were with an Ensign Ben Hill Porter from Hawkinsville, Georgia. Most of the time my regular radioman, Bill Haskins from Kimball, South Dakota, was with us, however, my flight log show VC 10 radiomen Saint, Blaney, Murray, E. H. Burns, and Phillips flew with us on occasion.

VC 68 squadron commander, R.S. Rogers, recalled all of us back to Pearl in August 1944 to get us ready for the Philippine invasion which occurred in October. My flight log shows many of us flew from Eniwetok to Oahu aboard a Navy R5D (C54). With lunch and refueling stops at Kwajelin and Johnson Island, that flight took 16.3 hours.

In early September we rode the plane ferry, Altahama, from Pearl to Manus, Admiralty Islands, where we again boarded Fanshaw Bay for the run up to the Philippines. VC 66 had been operating off Fanshaw Bay at Hollandia and Morotal. They joined their ship at Manus before we departed for the Philippines on 13 September.

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My Hero - Glen Looney

After a two-month stay at Bremerton, on February 10, the Sangamon steamed toward Pearl Harbor, arriving and docking briefly at Ford Island. Moving on to the South Pacific to engage the enemy, the Sangamon left Ulithi in the Palau Island Group on March 21 to participate in Operation Iceberg, the invasion of Okinawa as a part of Task Unit 52.1.1 5th Fleet under the command of Admiral Chester Nimitz. Everyone knew this battle would be horrific as the Japanese were becoming more willed to win as Americans closed in on their homeland. The battle for Iwo Jima only months before was the first invasion of the Japanese homeland and resulted in great loss of lives for both sides. Ironically, the invasion of Okinawa was to begin Easter Sunday (April Fools' Day) April 1, 1945.

Shortly before the invasion, Admiral Nimitz became aware of large numbers of Japanese planes in the Okinawa area that would present problems to the invasion. After some reconnaissance, it was discovered the enemy planes were originating from airfields in the Sakishima Gunto island group located some 150 miles southeast of Okinawa Shima. Specifically, the Japs were flying kamikaze planes off Ishigaki Shima and Miyako Shima Islands, located in the island group, as well as other airfields on the Japanese homeland and Formosa.

To neutralize these airfields, the task was assigned to the American CVE Escort Carrier Group - to launch planes that would blast away the Japanese airfields and planes for a successful invasion of Okinawa. The Sangamon was particularly effective in this venture as the first CVE carrier that supported night fighter plane squadrons.

The Japanese had formulated a last ditch offensive operation code-named "Ten-Go" of which under the leadership of Admiral Seiichi Ito would unleash a new series of kamikaze attacks called kikusui. By the time the Okinawa campaign was finished, the Japanese had unleashed ten kikushui attacks, with the Sangamon caught up in kikushui #5.

As early as April 7, the Sangamon was flying Grumman F6 Hellcat fighters and TBM Avenger bombers off its deck toward the airfields in the Sakishima. With the expenditure of such large amounts of ordinance, all ships frequently restocked ammunition and supplies from a small group of islands known as Kerama Retto, about 20 miles south of Okinawa. To insure the harbor did not become clogged with ships, thus giving the Japanese an attractive target, ships arrived individually, restocked, and then quickly left Kerama Retto for another ship to reload. Such was the danger of Kamikaze attacks in this area that it was nicknamed "Kamikaze Corner" by veteran sailors.

At 6:30 p.m. on May 4, escort carriers Sangamon and Sham-

rock Bay CVE-84 maneuvered in Kerama Retto to take on munitions and supplies. Lavon Henson, a friend of Glen Looneys' from Willis was also a sailor assigned to the carrier, Shamrock Bay. Both ships had already survived the Battle of Leyte Gulf, however it would be years later as Lavon & Glen swapped stories before they knew of each other's ship locations and that they were both at Leyte and Okinawa together. The flight deck of the Sangamon was loaded with planes, supplies and ammunition. As the Sangamon slowly moved out of the harbor and the Shamrock Bay into the harbor for restocking, little did anyone anticipate the events that would unravel during the next several hours.

In only a matter of minutes a swarm of Japanese suicide fighters led by Corporal Saburo Mizukoshi would assault the Sangamon. Mizukoshi was born in Japan in 1924, the same year as Glen. Having graduated 13th in his class from the Army Youth Pilot School of Japan he led a group of 10-11 pilots on a suicide mission at Kerama



Retto on that 4th day of May, 1945. His responsibility was to act as navigator to pilots who knew only how to take off and fly their planes into American ships. It was unnecessary for these pilots to know how

to land their planes as they should not be returning home.

The evening of May 24 at 7:02 p.m., a Japanese kamikaze Tony was spotted as the pilot attempted to hit the Sangamon. By this time of the war the Japanese had learned to focus on hitting escort carriers because of their thin wooden flight decks – minor damage could easily set these ships ablaze. The Tony was shot down but came so close to the ship that it clipped off the transmitting antennae on the superstructure. Death" by the Japanese) leaving the fifth plane, a Japanese twin-engine bomber Nick piloted by Saburo Mizukoshi heading straight for the Sangamon.

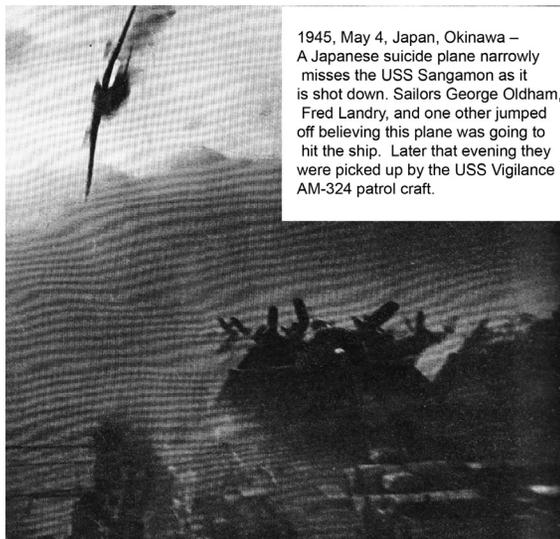
Continued on page 7

Glen Looney continued....Although Saburo Mizukoshi was to return to base after directing the Kamikaze group, he spotted the Sangamon and must have felt it (the largest of all escort carriers) was too good of a target to pass up. The majority of his planes had been unsuccessful in hitting an American carrier and he may have felt some disgrace in his mission. In his Kawasaki Ki-45 “Nick” twin engine fighter he singled out the Sangamon then pointed his plane downward beginning his descent onto the ship. With his plane smoking from hits, he somehow managed to fly through clouds and immense flack to crash his plane into the center of the flight deck of the Sangamon at about 7:35pm.

Glen Looney’s 20mm gun station was #5 behind the superstructure. His best friend Howard Burke operated a 40mm antiaircraft gun just forward of the superstructure.

As the plane approached the ship from slightly behind the two, Howard could not swing his gun around to get a bead on the plane yet had a good view of the plan coming in. The plane was diving almost vertically toward the ship. Kamikaze pilots were instructed to always try and hit the elevator section of the carriers. Howard recalls.....*“Both wings had been shot off and the fuselage was basically a missile heading for our flight deck. The pilot was wincing in pain as fire had engulfed the cockpit. He was gritting his teeth and bearing down on the ship right up until it hit.”*

Seconds before the plan hit the flight deck, Glen had to drop to his knees to turn and elevate his gun enough to continue firing at the almost vertical approach of the plane. The Jap plane hit and went through the flight deck, no further than about 50’ and 60 degrees from Glen’s gun station. The 500-pound Japanese bomb detonated below the flight deck in the hanger causing a tremendous explosion. So violent was the explosion that both forward and aft plane elevators were blown out of their tracks. Glen was fortunate that being on his knees in those final seconds kept him below the level of the flight deck where shrapnel and debris flew across injuring and maiming all in its path. Fires immediately broke out causing a concern for spreading aviation fuel and loose strewn ammunition.



1945, May 4, Japan, Okinawa – A Japanese suicide plane narrowly misses the USS Sangamon as it is shot down. Sailors George Oldham, Fred Landry, and one other jumped off believing this plane was going to hit the ship. Later that evening they were picked up by the USS Vigilance AM-324 patrol craft.

The explosion resulted in Glen being blown overboard into the water with 114 other sailors. For buoyancy support most sailors had only CO2 inflatable life belts. Glen, along with friend Howard Burke grabbed a sailor floating on his stomach to keep him from drowning. As Howard grabbed the sailor on one side and Glen on the other, Howard said, “We might as well let him go, Glen – he’s dead”. Glen, Howard, and two other sailors joined hands to stay together and provide support while treading in the dark water. Fortunately the water was calm and a warm 72 degrees with porpoises present, giving the indication there were no sharks in the area.

Many of the men in the water including Glen had single cell flashlights. As darkness was now on them and they could hear the drone of airplane engines someone yelled for everyone to turn on their lights and point them skyward to give their location. Another sailor, John Hoffman, yelled, “Turn off those lights, those planes could be Japanese!” The navy was so conscious of procedure but did not have a manual for every situation, leaving the sailors to trust their own judgment and common sense.

At this point the Sangamon was an inferno of fire and exploding ordinance from stern to stern. A landing craft support ship, the LCS-61 (no other name) pulled alongside to render help. As the Sangamon sailors were pushing burning planes over the deck, one of the planes landed on the fantail of the USS Dennis DE-405, an American destroyer that had pulled alongside to render assistance. That incident prompted the Dennis to pull away, leaving the Sangamon sailors to extinguish the fire on their own.

Glen, nor most of the Sangamon sailors had not heard of the fate of the Gambier Bay and St. Lo sailors at Leyte Gulf some six months prior, how they had not been picked up out of the water for days. The navy was trying to keep that blunder quiet. He once said that had he known of their fate he would have been scared to death of not being picked up. As it was, he told himself it would be a long night and they would surely be picked up by the Dennis the next morning. The Dennis had been faithful remaining close to the Sangamon providing submarine watch. (In his retirement years Glen would call any Dennis sailor he could locate, thanking them for picking out of the water that May 4 evening.)

As it was, about four hours after Glen hit the water at approximately 11:30p.m., the Dennis managed to locate some sailors in the pitch darkness, pulling Glen, Howard Burke and 66 other Sangamon sailors from the water. So tired of treading water, the men’s strength was gone as they were literally pulled from the sea by Dennis sailors. As Sangamon sailor Fred Landry was in the water alone, he continually blew a whistle to get the attention of any ship to pick him up. As he was finally plucked from the water he was so exhausted that he barely had the energy to speak his name.

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Glen Looney continued....“For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy forces in the air, ashore and afloat. The first escort carrier to prove the feasibility of complete night air group operations, the U.S.S. SANGAMON and her attached air groups struck with sustained fury at hostile warships, airborne and grounded planes and shore installations and remained on station to provide air support for ground operations. In the historic Battle for Leyte Gulf, these gallant officers and men aided substantially in turning back a large force of Japanese capital ships from San Bernardino Strait with heavy damage inflicted on the enemy. Despite the strain of constant alerts and long periods of unrelieved action, the SANGAMON launched her planes in day and night operations, contributing vitally to the success of putting assault forces ashore in landing craft and maintaining cover until air bases had been captured and established. Although seriously damaged when crashed by a Japanese suicide bomber plane on May 4, the SANGAMON succeeded in retiring to a rear area on her own power. Her outstanding record of destruction to the enemy’s vital ships, planes and emplacements is evidence of the SANGAMON’s fighting spirit and of the gallantry and skill of her officers and men which enhance the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

For the President, John L. Sullivan, Secretary of the Navy

The Sangamon began her final military voyage leaving Okinawa on May 5 for Ulithi Harbor in the Caroline Islands for quick repairs. From Ulithi they sailed to Ford Island at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii for additional repairs. Leaving Pearl Harbor on May

23 the Sangamon steamed for the Panama Canal where side gun turrets had to be removed for passage through the tight canal locks. Those sailors who made the final voyage claimed the shore liberties taken either on the southern entrance at Panama City (June 5th) or at Cristobal (June 6th) on the northern entrance were legendary. These guys knew the war was over for them and they were going to celebrate at all costs on their way home.

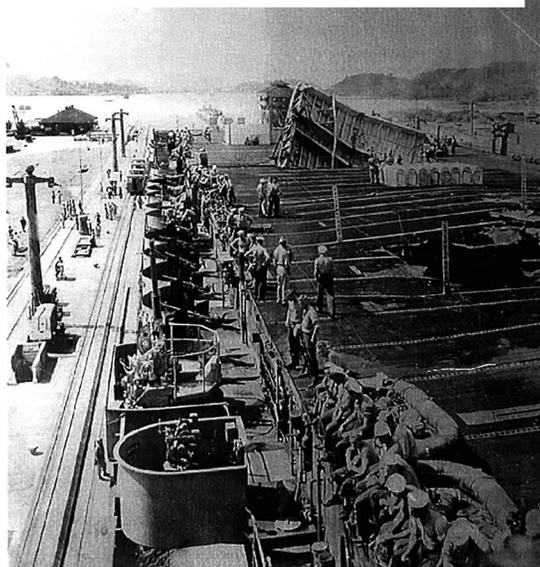
The crippled Sangamon reached Pier 7 at Norfolk on June 12 with grand fanfare from a local band as the locals had never seen a ship so battle-damaged returning on its own power. After the war it was observed that the Sangamon was the only aircraft carrier with a full hanger deck fire to survive. All but one plane (it was used for

interim communications until ship communications could be restored) aboard the ship was destroyed at Okinawa. It seemed that the adage “the Lord looks after drunks, little children, and CVE’s” had some merit.

The Sangamon was decommissioned on October 24, 1945 then sold to the Hill-cone Steamship Company in 1948 to resume peacetime service. It had a commendable war-time service record earning nicknames of “Queen of the CVE’s”, “Oil Can With Wings”, and “Sangy the Unsinkable”. The ship was converted back to a tanker in Mobile by the Alabama Dry Dock & Shipbuilding Company. In August of 1960 she was finally dismantled for scrap ironically in Osaka, Japan.

Submitted by Anthony Looney

1945, June 6, Panama Canal - The USS Sangamon passes south through the Gatun Locks returning to Norfolk. The hole in the flight deck is seen where the Japanese plane hit the ship. Glen Looney's 20mm gun turret is directly to the left of the impact area on the flight deck. The aft aircraft elevator is shown blown out of its track by the explosion.



The following tribute is dedicated to a CVE sailor who served in the V-2 division on the USS Kitkun Bay as a Torpedoman second class from late 1943 through early 1945. I am the step-son of this veteran. He and my mom attended many of the Kitkun Bay Association reunions. After my mom died, I attended one reunion with my step-father and after he crossed the bar in Feb 2001, I continued to attend these reunions. In 2007, I hosted the Kitkun Bay Association reunion in Herndon, Virginia (near Washington D.C).

Burt G. Douglas
Torpedoman 2/c
V-2
USS Kitkun Bay CVE-71

Burt was born in rural Hanover County Virginia to a farming family which included three sisters. He was graduated from high school after 11 years of schooling (there was no 12th grade then).

Shortly after the United States entered the war, Burt enlisted in the Navy citing his choice of the Navy over the Army, “I didn’t want to march or dig foxholes”.

He was trained in ordinance including torpedoes at the Norfolk Navy Yard completing training on xx YYY 1943.

After a short leave, Burt embarked on a Trans America rail trip terminating in San Diego, California.

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Burt Douglas continued....On the west Coast, Burt was engaged in outfitting a newly commissioned CVE for service, the USS Tripoli CVE-64. Shortly afterwards, Burt was reassigned to the newly commissioned CVE, Kitkun Bay CVE-71 engaging in the outfitting of this recently commissioned warship also.

There are several events that I would like to share about Burt's service on CVE-71. The first was when the Kitkun Bay was hit by a kamikaze during the battle of Lingayen Gulf on 7 January 1945. Burt was working in an ammunition clipping room close to where the Japanese plane struck the Kitkun Bay. When Burt heard the plane hit and saw the fire from the collision, he closed the watertight hatch on the ammunition clipping room in an abundance of caution. He told me later that a fellow sailor was killed outside of his battle station as a result of the kamikaze strike.

As a young teenaged boy, I asked my step-father, "Did you ever have to abandon ship?" "No" was his answer. My later research revealed that the Kitkun Bay was hit by a kamikaze strike during the battle of Lingayen Gulf on 7 Jan 1945. The bomb carried by the enemy airplane failed to explode and ended up in the aft engine room of the ship resulting in a loss of power on the Kitkun Bay. As a result of this kamikaze strike and the still potent enemy bomb, the crew was ordered to be taken off of the ship by destroyers in the task group.

I cross examined Burt on his response to my abandon ship query. He replied that he was asked if HE'D ever abandoned ship, to which his answer was truthful. He went on to explain that he volunteered to stay aboard the crippled ship as a member of the work crew to try to repair the damage and restore power.

At one of the Kitkun Bay Association reunions, a photo of the unexploded bomb carried by the Japanese airplane surfaced. This photo showed the damaged but still potent enemy bomb in the engine room suspended from two chain hoists surrounded by a handful of Kitkun Bay sailors. These men were greasy from the waist up and the facial expressions of these sailors amply portrayed the spirit of the American serviceman; unflappable courage and boundless determination – traits that were instrumental in defeating a determined enemy.

Another anecdote that Burt shared with me was being admonished by the Captain to "get below deck". At the time of this admonition, Burt was sitting on a cart of aircraft ordinance on the flight deck watching the battle unfurl and awaiting the return of the air group currently giving battle to the enemy.

One of the more humorous anecdotes that my step-father shared was how the torpedo men in the aviation section of the Kitkun Bay would use white bread to separate the alcohol from the torpedo fuel for use in "spiking" their libations. Another example of the ingenuity of the American serviceman!

One of the more moving memories that I witnessed was the cere-

mony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Leyte at the US Navy Memorial in Washington D.C. This ceremony commemorated the liberation of the Philippine islands and recognized the sacrifice and service of the combined American forces. Burt, my mother and I attended this special event. Burt was honored by the memorial service but was especially moved after the conclusion of the ceremony when a number of Filipinos who'd witnessed the ceremony came up to personally thank him for his role in liberating their homeland. I was likewise touched by their expressions of gratitude. It was apparent that the sacrifices and legacy of the American serviceman are not forgotten.

Burt's military service was part of a pivotal part of history and it doubtlessly shaped his life. As I got to know my step-father, especially more so later in life, I developed a sense that his service and the bonds forged during this time shaped his persona in many positive ways. He was a man who possessed admirable ethics. He married my mom – a divorced mother with two young boys and they jointly raised us in a loving cohesive family. He treated and nurtured my brother and me as he would a biological son; not an easy endeavor nor one that many men are capable of undertaking.

While Burt was proud of his service in the Navy and how this service had made him a better-rounded person, he never boasted or embellished his service in the Navy. He built a life from this foundation and earned the respect of many. The ethics and lessons that he imparted to me in my formative years shaped both my persona and my destiny. While he crossed the bar in 2001, I still revere his memory and am grateful for his mentoring of me.

Much has been written of the generation that shaped the destiny of the free world, brought the nation out of the Great Depression and forged a modern America. I've had the honor and privilege to have known a few of this elite group and am in awe of what this generation had to endure and was able to overcome. America, and the world, owes a debt to these individuals. May we commemorate their service, honor their sacrifices and carry the torch that this generation has passed to us. We owe that to subsequent generations.



<https://highlysensitivegirl.com/hsgblog/2020/09/02/im-lucky-to-have-been-born-at-all/>

I'm Lucky to Have Been Born At All!

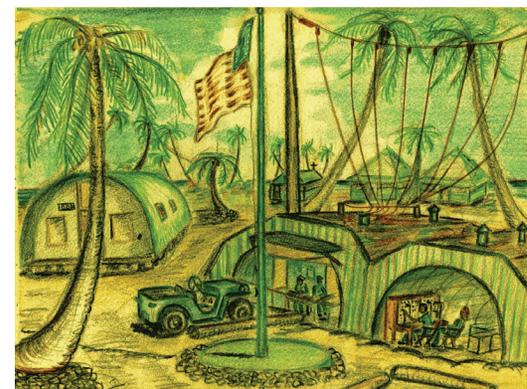
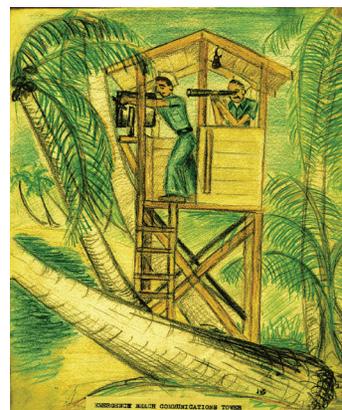
The USS Natoma Bay CVE 62 and The Battle of Okinawa
by Lucinda DeWitt, daughter of John W. DeWitt, Jr. (Feb. 5, 1926 – Feb. 14, 2018)



Any mention of The Battle of Okinawa reminds me how close I came to never even being born. My father, John W. DeWitt, Jr. served the U.S. Navy from 1943 through 1946. Most of that time was spent as an Electronic Technician's Mate on board the USS NATOMA BAY CVE 62.



Based on his stories across the years, dad's favorite time in the Navy was spent on Majuro (part of the Marshall Islands). Here are a photo and two of his drawings from that time.



While Majuro may have been dad's favorite place, by far his most memorable story is of what happened to the USS NATOMA BAY on June 7, 1945 (during The Battle of Okinawa).

(For a full account of the USS NATOMA BAY's participation in The Battle of Okinawa, please see: <https://natomabaycve62.org/logbook/Okinawa.html>)

As recorded in the LogBook compiled after the war by John Sassano and Bob Wall:

Natoma Bay is participating in her second of the ten greatest battles in history, the other being the Liberation of the Philippines. She is destined to see many of her group come and go during the long and perilous assault on Okinawa. Luck, the Grace of God, and her combat readiness is a determining factor in allowing her to survive the entire campaign.

Although we are not to emerge unscathed, we are to be fortunate enough to support and survive the entire campaign from pre-invasion to security of the island.

And later:

On 7 June we are to experience one of our most unforgettable days – here then is that day as recorded in the history of the USS NATOMA BAY:

At 0635, 7 June, after having maneuvered through typhoon weather, NATOMA BAY was closed by a Zeke, broad on the port quarter and low on the water. Changing course, it came in over the stern, fired incendiary ammunition at the bridge, and on reaching the island structure, nosed over and crashed into the flight deck. The engine, propeller and bomb tore a hole in the flight deck, 12 by 20 feet, while the explosion of the bomb damaged the deck of the foc'sle and the anchor windlass beyond repair and ignited a nearby fighter.

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I'm Lucky to Have Been Born At All!

Three of the CVE's crew and one officer of VC 9 were wounded. One ship's officer was killed. A second Zeke was splashed by the ship's port batteries. The damage control party immediately extinguished the blaze and set about emergency repairs. The next strike was canceled, but the following one against Miyako Shima, took place as scheduled at 1030. The kamikaze that hit the Big NB probably came from Formosa or an underground hangar on Myaka Jima. At the time we were hit, we were relieving a British unit that had gone out of the area to refuel. We had been assured that the area was quiet and we should expect no trouble. How unprophetic!

Further details from the War Diary of June 7, 1945:

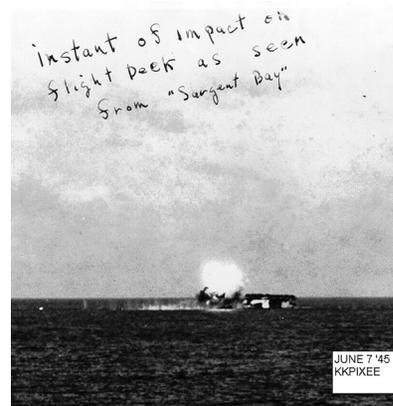
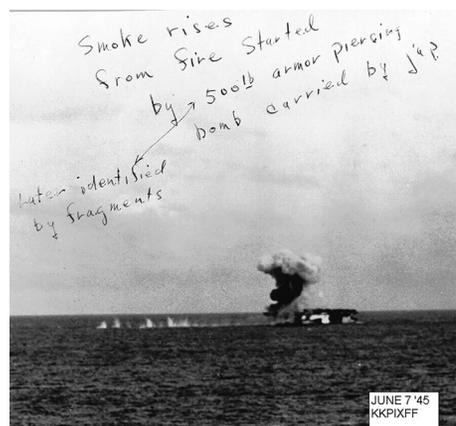
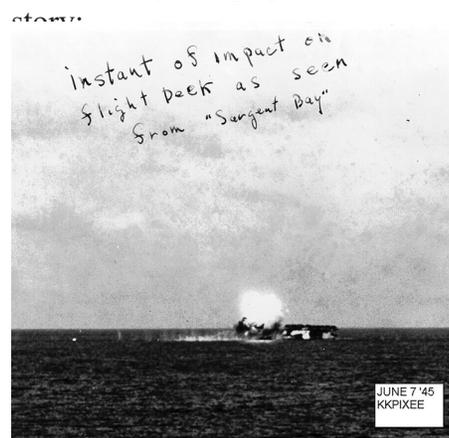
The blast and debris from the impact on the flight deck punctured the starboard gas tanks on an FM2 which was spotted on the catapult and set it afire. This plane, with its attendant risk, was quickly disposed of by catapulting it into the sea.....

Gasoline fires on the forecastle deck were quickly controlled. The 20mm strafing fire had caused smoldering fires on the deck planking where the bullets, apparently incendiary, had penetrated. These were chopped out and repairs were immediately started on the flight deck..

The attack had left a hole in the flight deck plating 12 feet wide, beginning two feet to port of the center line of the deck and extending to port, and 20 feet in depth from a point just aft of the forward end of the deck. This hole was decked over semi-permanently and the flight deck shored up and braced across its entire forward section sufficiently so that it could be used for flyaway and catapult-launches. These repairs were completed by 1500 while the regular operating schedule was resumed two hours after the attack. From recovered fragments, it is believed that the bomb carried was a type 99 Navy SAP 63 kg bomb.

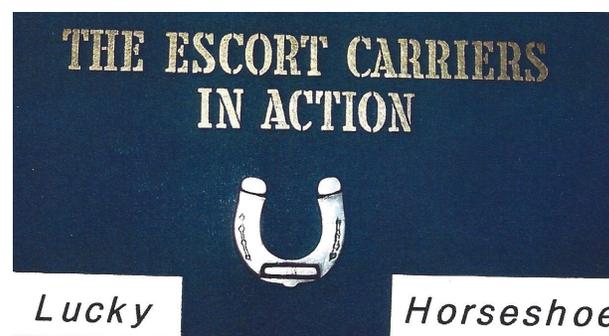
A series of photographs tell the

story:



See more photos at: <https://natomabaycve62.org/photogallery/>

This incident led to the USS NATOMA BAY gaining the nickname "One Lucky Ship". The remains of the kamikaze were melted down and molded into small horseshoe charms for the men to keep as a reminder of their luck.



Little did they know that Okinawa would be the USS NATOMA BAY's final battle:

After our escape at Sakishima (Myaka Jima) Natoma

Bay returned to her duties of supporting the troops ashore at Okinawa and flying our CAP and ASW patrols. On 24 June we were to leave the area and steam for Guam for repairs. No mention was made of retirement from the forward area and a return to the States. We were all pretty sure that with a new flight deck and a new camouflage paint job that our next destination had to be Japan itself.

By the time those repairs were made, the war was over.

As I read over the entire story of CVE participation in The Battle of Okinawa (in the August 2020 CVE Piper Newsletter), I was once again reminded of the huge sacrifices made by so many . . . and of just how lucky I was that my dad came home from the war . . . and 15 years later, I was born!

We Need



Your Vote



ECSAA is conducting its annual membership meeting by paper and electronic ballot this year since we did not have a face to face Convention for an in person meeting. Please use either the enclosed postcard, or go to www.ecsaa.org/ecsaa2020vote to

cast your ballot. Members who are Regular Members, Associate Members or Progeny Members are eligible to vote. Voting is now open and will conclude Jan 31, 2021. All votes cast online by Jan 31st or by postcard ballot received at ECSAA by Jan 31st will be counted. The ballot also includes an important survey question to get your input on a potential 2021 Convention. Please be sure to answer that question as well and provide any other input in the space provided for write-in comments.

Below is a sample card in case the postcard is lost in the mailing. You can always cut out the below card, place it in an envelope and mail it to: ECSAA, 1215 N Military Hwy #128, Norfolk VA 23502.

Your Name: _____

(Must be a voting ECSAA Member (Regular, Associate or Progeny))

Elect the following individuals to seats as Governor of ECSAA for the terms named (vote on each individual separately):

Walt Young	2020-2023	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Abstain
Art Hutt	2020-2023	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Abstain

As we plan for 2021 while keeping a close eye on the status of the pandemic, the Governors request your input concerning a potential ECSAA Convention in the September/October 2021 timeframe (pick one):

- Hold a 2021 Convention: I do expect to be able to and would want to attend a face to face Convention in September/October timeframe 2021**
- Make the next Convention be in 2022: I don't think that I would attend a face to face Convention in September/October 2021**

Please write any additional input that you have for ECSAA on a potential 2021 Convention, or any other suggestions for the organization:

IMPORTANT: Please stamp and mail the postcard before January 31, 2021

Alternatively, you may go to www.Ecsaa.org/ECSAA2020vote and submit your ballot online

*Holiday Wishes from
your ECSAA Governors*



My prayer for 2021 is that we come together as a Country in a spirit of unity, putting aside selfish differences to address the issues that truly affect this nation, that we engage one another with respect and dignity seeking common ground for Constitutional founded decisions.

Anthony

This has been a historic year of turmoil with COVID 19 and the Presidential Election. The one thing that has not changed is the appreciation we show our veterans and the active duty military members. This country is still the greatest country in the world. We will come out of this stronger and better.

Meeey Christmas and much happiness and a Happy a prosperous 2021.

Clay

Even though 2020 was a upside down year, I am still thankful for the Sacrifices and Service by my Dad and Father-in-Law and our ECSAA Members. It made me realize that compared to the horrors they faced in defended our great Country, the COVID-19 Virus pails by comparison. We should reflect on their resolve and can do attitude to help us realize we can surely defeat this virus which was inflicted upon the World by the Chinese Government. May God bless your friends and family and may God continue to bless America and her Veterans!

Bob and Janet Evans

I wish you a very happy New Year! We know that this past year has been full of challenges, and I pray that the coming year brings more certain times for you and your family.

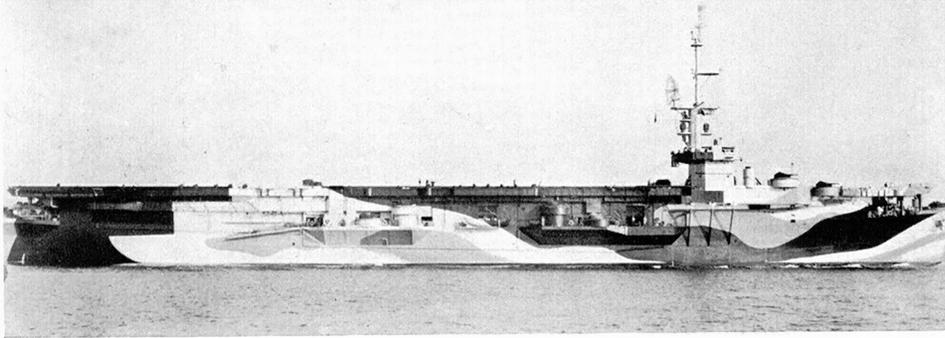
Sending good wishes for better days ahead.

Joyce



Post World War II

The years following World War II brought many revolutionary new technologies to the navy, most notably the helicopter and the jet fighter, and with this a complete rethinking of its strategies and ships



tasks. Although several of the latest Commencement Bay-class CVE were deployed as floating airfields during the Korean War, the main reasons for the development of the escort carrier had disappeared or could be dealt with better by newer weapons. The emergence of the helicopter meant that helicopter-deck equipped frigates could now take over the CVE's role in a convoy while also performing their own traditional role as submarine hunters. Ship-mounted guided missile launchers took over much of the aircraft protection role, and in-flight refueling abolished the need for floating stopover points for transport or patrol aircraft. As a result, after the Commencement Bay class, no new escort carriers were designed, and with every downsizing of the navy, the CVEs were the first to be mothballed.

Several escort carriers were pressed back into service during the first years of the Vietnam War because of their ability to carry large numbers of aircraft. Redesignated AKV (air transport auxiliary), they were manned by a civilian crew and used to ferry whole aircraft and spare parts from the U.S. to Army, Air Force and Marine bases in South Vietnam. However, CVEs were useful in this role only for a limited period. Once all major aircraft were equipped with refueling probes, it became much easier to fly the aircraft directly to its base instead of shipping it overseas.

The last chapter in the history of escort carriers consisted of two conversions: As an experiment, USS Thetis Bay was converted from an aircraft carrier into a pure helicopter carrier (CVHA-1) and used by the Marine Corps to carry assault helicopters for the first wave of amphibious warfare operations. Later, Thetis Bay became a full amphibious assault ship (LHA-6). Although in service only from 1955 (the year of her conversion) to 1964, the experience gained in her

training exercises greatly influenced the design of today's amphibious assault ships.

In the second conversion, in 1961, USS Gilbert Islands had all her aircraft handling equipment removed and four tall radio antennas installed on her long, flat deck. In lieu of aircraft, the hangar deck now had no fewer than 24 military radio transmitter trucks bolted to its floor. Rechristened USS Annapolis, the ship was used as a communication relay ship and served dutifully through the Vietnam War as a floating radio station, relaying transmissions between the forces on the ground and the command centers back home. Like Thetis Bay, the experience gained before Annapolis was stricken in 1976 helped develop today's purpose-built amphibious command ships of the Blue Ridge class.



By USN - Official U.S. Navy photo 19-N-69574 from the U.S. Navy Naval History and Heritage Command, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39506041>

Unlike almost all other major classes of ships and patrol boats from World War II, most of which can be found in a museum or port, no escort carrier or American light carrier has survived: all were destroyed during the war or broken up in the following decades. The Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships records that the last former escort carrier remaining in naval service — USS Annapolis — was sold for scrapping 19 December 1979. The last American light carrier (the escort carrier's faster sister type) was USS Cabot, which was broken up in 2002 after a decade-long attempt to preserve the vessel.

Wikipedia

My Hero - Royce Hall continued

Our carrier division designated 77.4.3 flew cover over the landing force on the way up, and the landing on 17 October. From the 17th until our task force was overrun by Admiral Kurita and the Japanese Fleet around day light on 25 October, we flew routing ASP, some strikes in support of the landing force and dropped propaganda leaflets on Leyte announcing MacArthur's "return to the Philippines".

For the edification of our shipmates who have not read the Battle of Leyte Gulf, I recommend the following:

1. Admiral Samuel Eliot Morrison's, "Leyte"
2. C. Vann Woodward, "The Battle of Leyte Gulf", Ballantine Books, Inc.
3. Thomas J. Cutler's, "The Battle of Leyte Gulf 23-26 October 1944", Harper Collins Publishers

Except for the narrative of my own experiences which follows I will defer any comments of those events of so long ago and leave final judgment to readers of the histories noted above to decide who was responsible for the fact that an entire fleet of Japanese ships plowed through San Bernardino Strait south of Luzon in the early hours of 25 October 1944, and ran through and over our carrier division which was under the command of Admiral CAF (Ziggy) Sprague. Admiral Kurita could have easily destroyed all of our carriers and escorts if he had pressed home his attack. To me the saddest memories of all related to this battle was the vivid picture of the Gambier Bay, laying dead in the water well astern of our ships while a Japanese cruiser poured salvo after salvo onto her burning hull. The other vivid picture I can see to this day was Saint Lo blowing up after taking a kamikaze through the flight deck about the same time. These two events occurred after our landing on Marcus Island CVE77 for armament and ammo. This event was after our dive on the Japanese fleet earlier in the morning. All that I have learned about the greatest battle in history I learned by reading the books noted above. However, on the morning of 25 October, I was not aware that Darter and Dace, U.S. submarines, had attacked Kurita's fleet on 23 October and sank two cruisers, including Kurita's flagship. Nor was I aware that the fast carrier air crews had jumped the fleet back toward Borneo. Also I was not aware that Admiral Oldendorf's task force had met a fleet of Japanese warships, cruiser and carrier in Surigao Strait south of Leyte the night of 24 October and inflicted heavy damage on that fleet.

In other words, we, air crewmen and as far as I have learned, our pilots knew nothing of the battles on 23 and 24 October, so when the word was passed for us to man our planes on 25 October I just figured we were getting ready for more of the previous dull routines. My plane was on the very aft end of the flight deck so when heavy caliber shells started bracketing the ships in our task force, I was looking up for enemy bombers. We were in and out of rain squalls and I could not see

above the clouds and could not discern the source of all the splashes for a few minutes, Just by chance however, I happened to be looking aft when I saw a huge glow on the horizon. At first I thought something or some ship had blown up but when eight or ten large shells fell all around our ship, I realized I had seen the muzzle blast of some very big guns on the horizon.

We were the last plane to leave the Carrier and as we inched forward toward the catapult, salvo after salvo bracketed us and I just knew any moment we would "Buy the farm". When we finally catapulted, my first thought was that I would never see any of the task force above the water again. After we broke out above the rain clouds, I could not see any planes at first; however, shortly I saw a large echelon of TBMs closing our position. When they got close enough, I recognized the tail markings of Commander E. J. Huxtable's VC 10 off Gambier Bay. I immediately advised my pilot of this fact, and he joined up on the tail end of the flight. It wasn't long before we pushed over into the dive and I got a glimpse of our target as we flew through a heavy barrage of ack ack fire.

Strung out below us was a huge armada of very large and very ugly enemy ships. The ordnance gang had loaded us with 4500 #SAP bombs and my pilot put one bomb under the fan tail near the propeller, and the other three amidships on a Mogami class heavy cruiser.

When he pulled out after the drop, we were right down on the water moving at high speed, flying parallel to a long line of ships some 150 feet from our plane. When I realized an awful lot of deck gunners were shooting at us, I cranked my turret out to the side and started doing that which the Navy had trained me to do.

I strafed the deck gunners on 4 hops before my ammo ran out. I then told Bill Haskins, my radioman, to load up the other can and went through the same routine, i.e., strafed 4 more ships until I ran out of all my 50 caliber shells.

I then advised the pilot of this fact, so he headed into the rising sun while I looked down the barrels of hundreds of guns throwing small stuff and then big stuff at us as we made our escape without a scratch. After clearing the Japanese fleet we were vectored South to another task force where we landed aboard the Marcus Island CVE 77 and was gassed up, reloaded with ammo and armed with a torpedo.

After wolfing down a sandwich, we were catapulted again and headed North towards a battle.

Except for one lone FM2 flying well above our position, we did not see any other planes in sight. In a few minutes, we began receiving heavy aircraft fire all around our plane. Mr. Lively, my pilot, veered starboard to throw the gunners off and it was then I saw a tin can alongside a cruiser fighting fires, so I knew the source of all enemy fire.

I like to believe that was the same cruiser we had hit earlier that morning, but I never learned for certain.

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My Hero - Royce Hall continued

After a couple of more runs at the ships, Mr. Lively broke off the attack which I will be forever grateful and we headed towards the last known location of our task force. We were not aware at that time our carrier had taken a number of shell hits and suffered casualties. We were told to orbit until further orders, because CIC had reported bogies on the screen.

I happened to look above our carrier where I saw a single enemy plane push over into a dive. I immediately opened fire and was happy to see a wing shear off and watched the plane narrowly miss our ship and our plane.

This occurred shortly before I saw the Saint Lo blow up. Needless to say I only learned the identity of the two ships after the battle, because we were too far away to see the ships numbers. One of the large caliber shells that hit Fanshaw Bay cut the catapult so we were ordered to land at Tacloban airstrip on the northern end of Leyte.

I initially could not figure out why we were not sent to another carrier, but I guess so many planes from the sunken carriers were landing on any available ship, we were sent on over to Leyte to land.

On our way to the island we passed four enemy planes heading towards our task force. The planes were out of range, so I didn't fire on them.

Mr. Lively jettisoned our torpedo and we made a good landing on the sand strip. However, a large number of planes weren't so lucky, and each side of the strip was littered with wrecked aircraft.

Shortly after landing, two enemy planes came our way. All hands hit the deck except C. J. Jungman RM2C of Pearsall, Texas, and myself. We had spotted a single 50 cal air cooled M.G. on a tripod near a makeshift tower the Army had set up. I immediately grabbed the 50 and took bead on the lead Jap plane which was just a few hundred feet above the strip. When I pressed the trigger, the gun fired one round and jammed. I charged the gun over and over again and fired one round at a time until the planes were out of range.

C. J. and I spotted a 50 cal water cooled gun on the other side of the strip, so we ran over there, loaded the gun and waited in case more planes came our way. We didn't have to wait long before two more came over the land and headed right at us just a few hundred feet up.

I again took a bead on the lead plane and pressed the trigger for another sure kill of one or both of the planes. I almost cried when the same thing happened as before, one shot and jam, one shot and jam. This time the two planes didn't get away because an FM2 with half of his starboard wing shot away, splashed both planes before they reached Samar.

Later in the day a group of us were loaded on an Army flatbed truck and were driven inland to a field hospital and kitchen.

C.J. and I charged a single 50 cal air cooled gun mounted behind the cab of the truck and hoped some more planes would come our way

because we just knew the Army ordnance people couldn't screw up all their guns.

Well you guessed it, we had driven about 500 yards inland when two more enemy planes were seen above the road headed toward the airstrip. All hands jumped off the flatbed and headed for the bush except C.J. and myself. The two planes were about 300 feet up and acted like they were out on a sight seeing trip. Again, I lined up on the third lead plane that morning and said a little prayer that the gun would shoot. I experienced the same sad feeling when I pressed the trigger and pop, jam, pop, jam until the planes were out of sight. For 53 plus years, I have seen those six planes that got away in my mind's eye.

In December 1945 when my five Army and Air Force brothers came home from the war, I told them the story of my experiences with their screwed up guns. Their response was, "hell son, you sailors have to be pretty dumb you stand out in the open shooting airplanes".

In a short while we arrived at the army encampment and lined up for show. A Field General sent his orderly over to the line and invited Bill Haskins and myself to join him and his aid for dinner.

After we joined them, the General asked any questions concerning the battle, but about all I could tell him was that which is written above.

When we had eaten and thanked him for the courtesy and suggested politely as we rejoined our people, that he would be well advised to have all his people fix their machine guns. That night we all lay down in our clothes for some much needed sleep. Just as I dozed off, 5-155 mm long toms cut loose about 10 yards from our camp. Since we did not know there was artillery anywhere near us, all of us airdales came away running. After the army caught all of us, they explained that the battery would be firing rounds at Ormoc over the mountains most of the night. Well, we didn't run anymore that night, neither did we sleep much because they fired the guns all night long. The next day we flew down to Dulang Airstrip where the Army issued a bunch of us a squad tent, army clothes, toilet kits, rifles and ammo. I had joined the navy before my five brothers, just to avoid the possibility of being drafted into the Army but there I was anyway,

We were also told, in case of any air raid, we should find a hole or a ditch to hide in, because the jungle was full of snipers who waited to pick off a few men when our guns were shooting at enemy planes.

Since I couldn't find any more 50 cal guns to shoot at the enemy planes, I spent most of that afternoon keeping my head down during the raids. Around 1700 hours, we got the word to fly out to Petrof Bay, CVE 80, for a run down to Manus where we caught our crippled carrier for the long haul back to San Diego and leave.

We arrived in San Diego on 27 November and I made CPO on my 21st birthday, November 29, 1944.

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Gilbert Islands (CVE-107)

1945-1961

An island group containing 16 atolls in the western Pacific Ocean on the equator, southeast of the Marshalls and northeast of the Solomons. On 20 November 1943 Marines made an amphibious assault on Makin and Tarawa Islands, seizing the former without difficulty, but winning Tarawa only after a 100-hour battle in which over 3,500 Americans were killed or wounded.

Gilbert Islands (CVE-107) was laid down on 29 November 1943 at Tacoma, Wash., by Todd-Pacific Shipyards, Inc.; launched on 20 July 1944; sponsored by Mrs. Edwin D. McMorries; and commissioned on 5 February 1945, Capt. Lester K. Rice in command.

After fitting out, Gilbert Islands departed Puget Sound and, after passing through the Straits of Juan de Fuca, headed south for California, on 20 February 1945. The next day a patrolling blimp reported a hazard to navigation and requested the escort carrier destroy the floating mine with gunfire. As the ship's war diarist noted, the crew received "some badly needed gunnery practice", as it took 431 rounds of 40 millimeter and 417 rounds of 20 millimeter ammunition to finally destroy the mine.

After loading fuel at Alameda, and ammunition at San Diego, the escort carrier conducted a month of shakedown training with Marine Air Group (MAG) Two embarked, comprising 12 General Motors TBM Avengers in Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron (VMB) 143 and 18 Vought F4U or Goodyear FG Corsairs as well as two Grumman F6F Hellcats in Marine Fighter Squadron (VMF) 512. Gilbert Islands then departed San Diego on 12 April 1945 for a week of air operations and gunnery exercises in Hawaiian waters.

After the short but intense workup period, the escort carrier sailed for the Caroline Islands on 2 May 1945, arriving at Ulithi on the 14th. The voyage was marked by repeated submarine contacts reported by her escorts Caperton (DD-650), Cogswell (DD-651) and Ingersoll (DD-652), all of which were later evaluated as "doubtful." That remark in the war diary was followed by the melancholy phrase "This war was tough for whales." Three days later the escort carrier steamed for the Ryukyu Islands, joining Task Unit (TU) 52.1.1 off Okinawa on 21 May.

For the first three days on station, the escort carrier provided local combat air patrol and anti-submarine (ASW) patrols for the task unit. Once the pilots got some combat flying experience the missions

broadened, and MAG Two began flying escort and strike missions against fortified Japanese positions around Shuri Castle in southern Okinawa. During these operations, a fighter piloted by Capt. Thomas Liggett, Jr., USMC, shot down a twin-engine Mitsubishi Ki. 46 Dinah reconnaissance plane, which turned out to be the only air victory for MAG Two and Gilbert Islands during the war. Attacks against concrete dugouts, trench lines and supply dumps lasted until the end of May, with one pilot lost on the 23rd when his F4U dipped too low during a turn and splashed into the sea.

Shifting to TU 32.1.3 on 1 June 1945, Gilbert Islands aircraft then heavily bombed and strafed airfields on the Sakishima Gunto group

for over two weeks, repeatedly striking installations on Ishigaki Shima, Erabu Shima and Miyako Shima with bombs and rockets. Radio and radar stations were also destroyed, with barracks, port facilities and villages repeatedly bombed and strafed. The intense air activity did not come without cost, with four planes, two fighters and two bombers, lost in combat. Two aircraft, a fighter and a bomber, ditched at sea following battle damage with the loss of one radioman. Two other aircraft were shot down over their targets, with the loss of two pilots, a radioman and a gunner.

After retiring to San Pedro Bay, Leyte, on 16 June 1945 for "rest, recreation and repairs," the crew of the escort carrier spent

five hectic days receiving fuel, bombs rockets and other ammunition, general stores and provisions in between badly needed maintenance work. Then, just as the crew was getting around to the "rest and recreation" part, the warship was ordered south to the Dutch East Indies. Underway 26 June, Gilbert Islands joined Task Group (TG) 78.4, comprising two other escort carriers, Suwanee (CVE-27) and Block Island (CVE-106), and six escorts and steamed south to Borneo, via the Philippine Sea, Celebes Sea and Makassar Strait. Starting on 30 June, Marine pilots began bombing and strafing Japanese buildings, troops and vehicles in and around Balikpapan in support of Australian landings there. One plane was lost during these strikes, when an F6F Hellcat flew into a flurry of anti-aircraft fire during a low-level strafing run, killing the pilot. With the beachhead securely established by 4 July, the escort carrier turned north for Leyte. During the two day voyage back to San Pedro Bay the warship crossed the equator and was deemed far enough away from "any Japanese held bases to indulge in some relaxation.

Continued on page 17



Gilbert Islands (CVE-107)

.” Unfortunately for some, the war diarist noted, “King Neptune and all of his Shellbacks exerted themselves so vigorously that the Pollywogs were not able to relax for several days.” Gilbert Islands finally received some rest and recreation at Leyte, spending most of the month there, before getting underway 29 July 1945 to screen logistic ships replenishing Third Fleet striking forces along the coast of Japan. This duty included helping escorts shepherd eight oilers and tugs away from a typhoon between 10-12 August. On that station 15 August she joined TG 30.8, which included nearly all of the Third Fleet, and heard Adm. William F. Halsey, Jr.’s laconic direction “Apparently the war is over and you are ordered to cease firing; so, if you see any Jap planes in the air, you will just have to shoot them down in a friendly manner.” They later heard his formal speech regarding the armistice where Adm. Halsey began by declaring “a barbarous and treacherous foe has been brought to its knees in abject submission,” and, as declared by the war diarist, the Admiral only then “gradually warmed up to his subject.”

Detached from TG 30.8 on 2 September 1945, the escort carrier remained at Okinawa for almost six weeks before sailing south to Formosa, where she covered the landing of the Chinese Nationalist 70th Army at Kii-run. She was then routed onward via Saipan (to embark passengers) and Pearl Harbor to San Diego, arriving 4 December 1945. She remained in port until 21 January 1946, then set course for Norfolk where, after arrival on 7 February 1946, Gilbert Islands decommissioned 21 May 1946 and was placed in reserve. The mothballed escort carrier was later towed to the Inactive Ship Facility at Philadelphia in November 1949.

Detached from TG 30.8 on 2 September 1945, the escort carrier remained at Okinawa for almost six weeks before sailing south to Formosa, where she covered the landing of the Chinese Nationalist 70th Army at Kii-run. She was then routed onward via Saipan (to embark passengers) and Pearl Harbor to San Diego, arriving 4 December 1945. She remained in port until 21 January 1946, then set course for Norfolk where, after arrival on 7 February 1946, Gilbert Islands decommissioned 21 May 1946 and was placed in reserve. The mothballed escort carrier was later towed to the Inactive Ship Facility at Philadelphia in November 1949.

Following the outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950, many mothballed warships were recalled to service, including Gilbert Islands which recommissioned at Philadelphia on 7 September 1951, Capt. Carl E. Giese in command. After a six month overhaul at Boston Naval Shipyard starting on 25 November, the escort carrier joined the Atlantic Fleet on 1 August 1952. The warship sailed eight days later with a cargo of jets for Yokohama, Japan, arriving 18 Sep-

tember, and returned to her new homeport of Quonset Point, R.I., on 22 October. Gilbert Islands got underway 5 January 1953 for a short training cruise to the West Indies, returning to New England waters in the spring to continue those duties through the summer and fall of that year. Following a cruise to Halifax and overhaul at Boston, the escort carrier stood out 5 January 1954 for a two-month Mediterranean cruise, returning to Quonset Point on 12 March for reserve training and other exercises. She became the first of her class to have jets make touch-and-go landings on the flight deck while she had no way on, a dangerous experiment successfully conducted on 9 June 1954. Gilbert Islands left Rhode Island on 25 June 1954 for Boston and decommissioned there on 15 January 1955. Reclassified as an aircraft

ferry (AKV-39) on 7 May 1959, Gilbert Islands remained in reserve until her name was stricken from the Navy List on 1 June 1961. Five months later, the



old warship was reinstated on the Navy List and she was reclassified as a communications relay ship (AGMR-1) on 1 June 1963. Renamed Annapolis on 22 June 1963, the communications relay ship recommissioned on 7 March 1964, Capt. John J. Rowan in command.

As the Navy’s first major communication relay ship, Annapolis was designed to provide a mobile command and control communications center for areas where shore-based communications do not exist or are inadequate. In addition to handling message traffic through teletype or multi-channel radio circuits, the ship had approximately 30 radio transmitters, with five major antenna towers installed on the former flight deck, now called the antenna deck. By relaying large volumes of routine message traffic through Annapolis, the communications relay ship lightened the traffic load on regular ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore circuits. This was a critical function during crisis response or humanitarian operations, as the large number of ships often clogged up the frequencies available. As part of her acceptance trials, Annapolis demonstrated those capabilities by handling fleet broadcasts and ship-to-ship communications during Operation Steel Pike, an 80-ship U.S.-Spanish exercise held in October, before officially joining the Atlantic Fleet on 16 December 1964. After operations out of Norfolk during the first half of 1965, Annapolis was assigned Long Beach as home port on 28 June 1965.

Continued on page 18

Gilbert Islands (CVE-107)

In September she got underway for the Far East, providing fleet communications services for Seventh Fleet units off the coast of Vietnam. The ship mainly served as the relay point by which Seventh Fleet units sent messages to ground-based Western Pacific communications stations but she also provided cryptographic support and rebroadcast fleet bulletins as well as daily news summaries to the Fleet. For such services, Annapolis received a Meritorious Unit Commendation for



Fleet operations in Southeast Asia from 9 January 1967 to 29 January 1968. With the exception of periodic port visits to Hong Kong, Formosa, and the Philippines for liberty and upkeep, as well as periodic overhauls at Yokosuka, Japan, Annapolis remained on station in the western Pacific for the next four years, conducting 19 communications patrols before finally turning for home on 9 April 1969.

The ship initially sailed into the Indian Ocean, visiting the Mauritius' and Angola in May before sailing around the Cape of Good Hope enroute to Senegal. On 19 May 1969 Annapolis crossed the equator at 00'00 latitude and 00'00 longitude, initiating her Royal Order of Trusty Shellbacks into the Golden Order of Shellbacks. Following a short visit to Dakar, the ship stopped at Lisbon, Portugal and Rota, Spain, before commencing two months of operations with Sixth Fleet out of Naples, Italy. Finally underway for home on 29 August, she arrived at Philadelphia via Norfolk on 1 October 1969.

Annapolis decommissioned at Philadelphia on 20 December 1969 and was placed in reserve. She was stricken from the Naval Vessel Register on 15 October 1976 and sold for scrap to the Union Minerals & Alloys Corp. on 19 December 1979.

Gilbert Islands received three battle stars for World War II service; Annapolis received a Meritorious Unit Commendation and eight battle stars for her service in the Vietnam War.

My Hero - Bernard Thompson

18 years old at Great Lake Naval Training Chicago – 4/25/1944 - 7/6/1947

Bernard passed away July 10, 2020

Bernard E. Thompson

4/19/1926 - 7/10/2020

Member of Escort Carrier Sailors and Airmen Association Inc

Served on USS Fanshaw Bay CVE 70 Signalman 3, USNR

Entered into active service 4/25/1944

Honorable discharge 7/6/1947

School: Signalman School Great Lakes IL

Service: NRS Toledo OH

Ohio USNTC Great Lakes IL

Service School Command Great Lakes IL

California - USS Fanshaw Bay CVE 70 and USS Puget Sound CVE 113

Ribbons - Asiatic Pacific, WWII Victory Medal, American Area, Bronze Star to Asiatic Pacific

Flagship of Adm. C.A.F. "Ziggy" Sprague and composite squadrons VOC-2, VC-66, VC-68, and VC-10, led the victorious battle over vastly superior firepower of UN Kurita's powerful Center Force of

battleships and cruisers. The Battle of Leyte Gulf, in the Philippines, occurred 25 October 1944 and was the largest battle in naval history.

The FANSHAW BAY earned five Battle Stars, two U.S. Presidential Unit Citations, a Philippine Presidential Unit Citation and the enduring esteem of the U.S. Navy as a premier WWII Flagship

Gloria Thompson

Top - Bernard E. Thompson



My Hero - Royce Hall continued

After 30 days leave, I reported to NAS Sandpoint, Seattle, Washington where we formed the second VC68 with a nucleus of veteran pilots and air crews from the original squadron. We went through our training syllabus with the new hands working our way down the coast from Seattle to San Diego (Brown Field). That's where we were when the shooting stopped on August of 1945.

We made a training run to Oahu in late August and did some exercises with submarine crews, but we soon returned to the States to discharge all of the USNR personnel.

My logs show I made my last flight with VC 68 on September 1945.

I had flown in the second VC 68 with our Commanding Officer, Commander I. E. Ewoldt USN, until the squadron broke up in late 1945.

After 30 days leave, I reported to the receiving ship at Charleston, South Carolina then went on up to Oceana, Virginia to serve out the rest of my hitch in a CASU outfit.

I was discharged on 23 January 1947 and went on to Napa, California (50 miles above San Francisco) where I served an apprenticeship as a carpenter. After four years as a journeyman and carpenter superintendent. I started my own company in 1954.

After the loss of my only son to a heart attack in 1989, and my first wife to cancer in 1994, I came back to Georgia, found a new wife, closed out my company, sold my California home, and settled down near all my remaining relatives.

As I reflect on the events of my past life, I find it hard to believe that I survived my childhood in Georgia, survived the war, and survived more than 40 years in the construction business.

As a boy of about four, one of my brothers accidentally whacked me in the head with a garden hoe while we were digging for fish bait. At about age 7, I was bitten by a rattle snake. At about age 8, I ate a peck of blackberries that had been sprayed with arsenic by our neighbor, as he tried to kill the dreaded cotton bowl weevil. At about 9, I fell out of a china berry tree trying to emulate Johnny Weissmuller "Tarzan of the Apes". While in Ordnance school in Norfolk in early 1941, two of us were caught in a rip tide at Ocean View Beach and almost drowned. In 1942 while flying practice bombing hops in PBT's at Pensacola, one particular pilot I flew with often would take a swig of peach brandy and flake out in the crews bunk after telling me to wake him up when the four cadets had dropped their water filled bombs. When I woke him he would yawn, get in the pilots seat and put the PBY in a vertical dive. After pull out he would hedge hop over cows grazing on Santa Rosa Island. After a few of those near death experience, I began to bombard the squadron exec for a transfer to the war zone where I could die an honorable death.

Like all combat air crewmen I had a number of close brushes with death. In fact, about every time we catapulted and landed on the ships

I flew off of, I would look aft to see if the plane guard destroyer was on the station, then say a little prayer that the LSO and my pilot could get us down safely.

The closest I came to buying the farm, in or out of combat, occurred on 26 January, 1994. On that date, some two or three VC squadrons stationed near San Diego conducted a training exercise with two tin cans coming in from San Diego from Pearl.

The planes were to fly coordinated attacks on the two ships with fighters, strafing and some TBM's skip bombing, etc. Our job was to fly out the plus 100 miles to destroyers, low on the water, and make simulated torpedo runs.

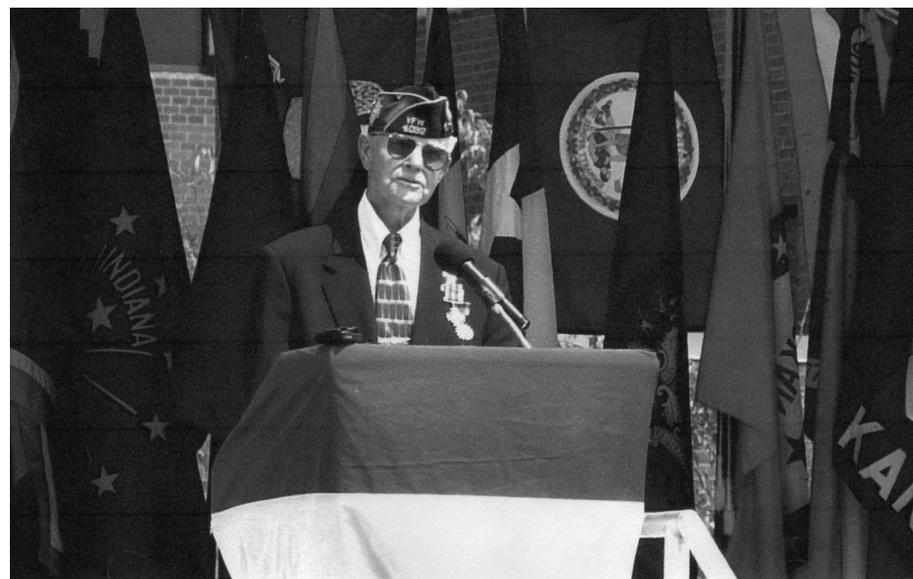
When I felt the pilot open the bomb doors, I looked forward to see the ships. At about the same time I felt us hit something, and when the pilot pulled up, I saw another TBM going straight in near the two ships. Our plane was bucking like a bronco because I learned after we got back to Brown Field that we had lost about 1 foot off of the two props, and the third prop was bent back close to a 90 degree angle.

We couldn't make a water landing near the cans because the other plane had but our bomb bay hydraulic lines and we couldn't close the bomb doors. Our squadron escorted us back to our field and as we lowered the gear for landing, only one wheel came down. My radioman and I braced for a ground loop, but the people on the ground told us after our landing that we were only inches above the strip when the stuck wheel dropped and locked into place.

When we crawled out of the plane we saw the engine angled out and was within seconds of falling off the airframe.

I never learned the identity of the men or the name of the squadron of the plane we hit.

There were many more close calls but the above event was about as close as you can get.



I found your web page <http://www.escortcarriers.com/page-1827105> which pertains to the USS Admiralty Islands. The information you have provided is not correct.

Here is what you have written

“Captain J. D. Barner in temporary command. Later that day, command of the ship passed to Captain M. E. A. Gouin.”

Which may or may not be true, however I think Captain Eldredge’s name at least bears mentioning?

Captain Edward Hastings Eldredge was commander of the USS Admiralty Islands from February 1944 to April 1945. She took part in the operations at Iwo Jima and Okinawa under his command as well.

My grandfather was commander of this ship during the Iwo Jima and Okinawa campaigns in WW2. The following link will take you to a photo, provided by Navsource.org which shows Captain E. Eldredge with crew.

<https://www.navsource.org/archives/03/099.htm>

Captain Edward Hastings Eldredge received a bronze star medal on 18



Ship in background, with entire crew in front, Captain E. Eldredge, Commanding. Taken by Thompson Photo, Los Angeles. Provided by Marvin Waid, son of Delbert Jay Waid.

Aug 1947 and a gold star medal 21 Apr 1948.

I have a retirement letter from the Secretary of the Navy and signed by C.S. Thomas July 1st 1955, which clearly states that Captain Edward Eldredge was commander of the vessel.

Please let me know if you need any other documentation proving that he was the captain of this ship.

Sincerely,

-Miles Eldredge

In October 1947, seventeen-year-old Charles Fecay enlisted in the Marine Reserves - discharged Oct 1949.

In 1946, he began boxing, winning his first amateur bantamweight championship title in 1948, and a second in 1950. From 1954 to the present he has been training/coaching teens and young adults, including Emanuel Steward, who won the 1963 national Golden Gloves Tournament of Champions title with Fecay in his corner. Steward also became regarded as the world’s greatest professional trainer, producing the most world champions of all-time. In 1997, Fecay was elected into the Dearborn Recreation Special Award Hall of Fame for his achievements and community work in boxing, and in 2001, received an award from the Metro-Detroit Golden Gloves for Outstanding Official. Today, he is 90 years old and is still giving back to the community as a trainer/coach and advisor at the Detroit Boxing Jungle gym.

In January 1950, Fecay joined the Navy Reserves, called to active duty January 1952, during the Korean War. During his time in the Navy, he spent his time aboard the USS Rendova CVE 114 (a small aircraft carrier) with admirals, scientists and atomic and hydrogen bombs. There were 100 ships (destroyers and cruisers)



surrounding his ship to protect it from the enemy. During “Operation Ivy” his ship was anchored out of Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands, 10 miles from the atomic bomb testing and 30 miles from the hydrogen bomb. After Elugelab was bombed and disappeared, he and his shipmates looked and felt like they had been severely sunburned from the radiation exposure. He was discharged in November 1954.

From 1955 to 1963, Fecay belonged to the Dearborn Jaycee’s, helping run Easter egg hunts for children at Levagood Park and helping families in need.

In the early 1960s, Fecay joined the American Legion in Dearborn, giving out holiday meals to families in need and sick veterans. He was also instrumental in putting on boxing shows at the V.A. hospital in Allen Park. Around 1970, Fecay and his friend, Russell Gilbert, started the Dearborn Amvets and was active in helping disabled vets and families in need. Fecay was a commander of the Amvets for 6 years. Fecay currently belongs to the DAV, which passes out blankets to vets at the V.A. hospital in Detroit. He is a 50-year Life Member of the Father Patrick O’Kelly Knights of Columbus, and is also the P.R. for the VFW in Dearborn.

William Owen Jensen, Jr.

Attention: Member Information Committee

Dear Committee:

About a year ago, I wrote a short note to either the ECSAA or the USS Sicily CVE 118, my ship, about the ship's assignment to Greece. The trip assignment was in 1949. The reason I wrote this note was due to the fact there was hardly any stories about my ship prior to Korea. As a result of this note, I received a call from, I guess one of your guys in Texas, who wanted to interview me over Google phone. And we talked for a good half hour. He thanked me and shortly after he sent me a copy of what we had talked about and requested that I look it over and send him any changes.

Unfortunately for this paper, I got sick and then we had the virus business. But now, still hunkered down, I now have some time to finish my tail.

First, some of this new change I found by Googleing USS Sicily CVE 118. The Google info stated that the Sicily left on 7/31/49 with a deckload of Greek Curtiss SB2C Helldivers for the HELLENIC Air Force, to fight the Russian. The planes were-- catapulted off the ship-- due to bad weather. "During the first two days of our ten day stay in Pireaus, our ship struck "General Quarters" and all liberties were canceled although intelligence suggested that we may be strafed

or otherwise attacked nothing happened.

Now, looking back at the times, the Marshall Plan, the Truman Plan, now called the "Cold War", our little ship, all alone with no escorts, was a "stealth" trip with little mention of it. Well what do you know? Of course, this cruise was only a "pleasure cruise", with visits also to Naples and Marseille. Didn't like Naples and took the Chaplin's trip to Paris instead of hanging around.

Marseille. Lucky me.

Finally, when we got back to Norfolk, the ship's entire crew's picture was taken in October 1949. I received a copy at a Sicily Reunion in Annapolis several years later. Back to 1949-1950 Truman and the Congress voted to require military to pay income taxes. The ship's Secretary said under the law, I could get out with a "Hardship" discharge. Not for me. I still had two years to go. The Sicily left Norfolk for Boston. The Secretary advised me that my time was running out. So I changed mine and put in for my discharge. Since I lived "South of the Mason-Dixon Line" I was transferred to Brooklyn for discharge-- and was so - discharged in March 1950. Korea started in June 1950. Again Lucky me.

That is it,

Go Navy - Beat Army

Bill Jensen, RMSN



The salmon trawler Rujac underway off Tacoma, Washington, 18 June 1947, with decommissioned Navy escort carriers moored in the background: Stern of ex-USS Hollandia (CVE-97), along with ex-USS Steamer Bay (CVE-87) moored outboard of ex-USS Lunga Point (CVE-94), all three ships part of the Tacoma Group, Pacific Reserve Fleet.

Source: Tacoma Public Library, Richards Studio, Photo No. D28441-4.



USS Ommaney Bay (CVE-79) about four minutes after being hit by suicide plane in Sulu Sea on 4 January 1945. She sank about an hour later. USS West Virginia (BB-48) in foreground. Source: Antiaircraft Action Summary, Suicide Attacks, April 1945, United States Fleet, Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, COMINCH P-009



George Manuel Feliz, 96, of Florence passed away on November 20th, 2020 in Florence with his family by his side. George was born in Florence, Arizona on February 22, 1924 to Manuel and Carlotta Feliz and was a graduate of Florence High School. He was a United States Navy veteran and a member of The Greatest Generation who proudly served during WWII. George was a Signalman 3rd Class on the USS Gambier Bay (CVE-73) which was destroyed on October 25, 1944 during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. He and his

fellow survivors tread water for 2 days and 2 nights in shark infested waters before being rescued. He remained in touch with his shipmates throughout the years; these heroes would gather annually to honor one another and remember those that perished. George and his family

attended ship reunions beginning in 1971 and continued the tradition through 2019.

George was a hardworking man who held several different careers. As a youngster, he worked on his family farm and farming was something he did throughout his life. In later years, he worked at the Arizona State Prison in different capacities for over 3 decades. George and his wife Betty were even restaurant owners, first running a small restaurant in Florence called the High School Drive-in and later owned Kelly's Deli in Pinetop for a short period of time.

George was a family man who enjoyed making memories with his loved ones. One of his favorite activities was attending the sporting events of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was the life of nearly every party and could always be found on the dance floor in the middle of the crowd. George's greatest legacy will be the generations of family who will miss him dearly.



Harold Clark Adams, 98, of Lucasville, passed away Thursday, August 20, 2020 at his home. He was born September 2, 1921 in New Boston a son of the late Arthur Morton Adams and Lydia Blanche (Bartlett) Adams. Harold served in the Navy on the USS Natoma Bay in the South Pacific during World War II. He was a member of the Victory Chapter of the DAV. He was a Baker for the Adams Baking Co. for 32 years and retired as a corrections officer at SOCF in

Lucasville. Harold had a passion for baking and gardening.

James A. Compson "Knobby", a member of the Greatest Generation, age 94, passed away peacefully on August 26, 2020 with his loving family by his side. He was born in Hoosick Falls, NY, on January 24, 1926, to Bessie and Gilbert Compson. He moved to Albany as a child and was attending Philip Schuyler High School when he left to enlist in the Naval Air Force. Upon completion of Aviation Radio School and Gunnery School, he was assigned to Squadron VC9 on the carrier USS Natoma Bay, returning home on leave to marry his high school sweetheart, Marjorie Miller. Upon the wars end, Jim returned home with an Air Medal, Purple Heart, Distinguished Flying Cross and a Presidential Unit Citation. Knobby retired from Otis Elevator after 30 years of service. He loved to golf and was a member of the Voorheesville VFW Post.

William A. Dyer, 92
November 21, 2020

William A. Dyer, age 92 from Legend of Lititz, passed away on November 21st from natural causes. Bill was born in Utica, NY on December 27, 1927 and was the son of the late Clarence and Nina (Kutner) Dyer.

He was a US Navy Veteran (1945-1947) and served aboard the U.S.S. carrier Siboney. On November 21, 1953 Bill married Joan Marie Lynch of Brooklyn NY in St. John the Evangelist Church in New Hartford NY and was a devoted Catholic.

Bill received a degree in Electrical Engineering from Purdue University and worked for General Electric in Utica, NY for 35 years as a Design and Project Engineer, primarily in the Missile Guidance and Space Engineering Sections. He was a member of Council #189 of the Knights of Columbus and Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity at Purdue.

Bill was loved by all who came into contact with him and will be fondly remembered for his kindness, compassion and his great sense of humor.



Jack Lock, 99, USS Gambier Bay, beloved father, brother, grandfather and great-grandfather, passed away at the Jewish Residence of Harrisburg on Saturday, November 28.

He was born to the late Anna (Minsky) and Mike Lock in Harrisburg in 1921. After completing William Penn High School, he graduated the University of Pennsylvania in 1942. He served in the US Navy

in World War II and the Korean War and then owned and operated Mike Lock and Sons Plumbing and Heating Supplies with his late brother, Bernard Lock. His sister, Charlotte Hyams later joined the team. Jack was an active member of Chisuk Emuna and Keshar Israel Synagogues.

On May 8, 1945, World War II in Europe came to an end. As the news of Germany's surrender reached the rest of the world, joyous crowds gathered to celebrate in the streets, clutching newspapers that declared Victory in Europe (V-E Day). Later that year, US President Harry S. Truman announced Japan's surrender and the end of World War II. The news spread quickly and celebrations erupted across the United States. On September 2, 1945, formal surrender documents were signed aboard the USS Missouri, designating the day as the official Victory over Japan Day (V-J Day). In the past two issues of *The CVE PIPER* we have had the honor of celebrating with photos and stories our CVE heroes. I would like to thank all who contributed. If you would like to read their stories at a later date, they are published on our website at www.ecsaa.org. For anyone who did not have time to send their stories, please continue to send them. We will be happy to publish them in *The CVE Piper* and on the web. All contributions are welcome. There is also a section for those who served during the Korean conflict. If there are any who served aboard the CVEs or converted CVEs during the Vietnam War or squadrons that were aboard the escort carriers, a section can be added.

Sun Ship's contribution to the Escort Carrier development played a significant roll in the establishment of future Escort Carriers, also known as 'Baby Flattops'. Sun Ship's Mormacmail (H-185) was converted into the first Escort Carrier Long Island (AVG-1, CVE-1) and followed by additional tankers and freighters of Sun Ship that were converted, by other shipyards, into Escort Carriers. Our current listing of eight Sun Ship vessels converted to escort carriers is as follows:

Hull: 173

Type: Tanker: T2 Class

Orig. Name: Seakay

Renamed: USS Santee A0-29, CVE-29

Hull: 174

Type: Tanker T2 Class

Orig. Name: Esso New Orleans

Renamed: USS Chenango AO-31, CVE-28

Hull: 184

Type: Freighter- C3 Class

Orig. Name: Mormacmail

Renamed: HMS Archer

Hull: 185

Type: Freighter- C3 Class

Orig. Name: Mormacmail

Renamed: USS Long Island AVG-1, CVE-1

Hull:186

Type: Freighter- C3 Class

Orig. Name: Rio Hudson

Renamed: HMS Avenger BAVG2

Hull:187

Type: C3

Orig. Name: Rio Parana

Renamed: HMS Biter BAVG-3, Dixmude A-609,

Hull: 188

Type: Freighter-C3 Class

Orig. Name: Rio de la Plata

Renamed: HMS Charger BAVG-4, USS Charger CVE-30

Hull: 189

Type: Freighter-C3 Class

Orig. Name: Rio de Janeiro

Renamed: HMS Dasher BAVG-5

Since the eight Sun Ship tankers and freighters were among the first commercial vessels to be converted into escort carriers, many changes and improvements needed to be addressed with the original design concepts. These improvements in the design and construction of future Escort Carriers, contributed significantly, in winning the war at sea in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters in WWII.

Sun Ship Historical Society's Newsletter:

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To find out information faster be sure to follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Escort-Carriers-144430398902720>