

We Were Sailors



MY NAVY - WORLD WAR II YEARS

I returned home to Port Arthur, Texas from Nashville, Tennessee the last part of August 1942. We didn't know it at the time but the USS Houston had been sunk at Midway, and there was a drive on to get eight hundred recruits to replace the crew. The City of Houston even took up and donated the streetcar tracks for steel to replace the ship. My high school friend and I came to Houston to join the Navy right after Thanksgiving and it took several weeks to assemble the train roster. I recall that we had a trainload and the mood all the way to California was upbeat if not downright rowdy. I remember the whole bunch singing, "Praise the Lord and pass the Ammunition". Not a one of us believed that the war would last more than ninety days. Boy were we wrong. But you couldn't blame us for thinking that, just look at the map, see how small Japan is compared to the United States.

Christmas Eve found me in the Navy boot camp in San Diego, CA, where I trained for three months. When I say trained, I mean march, get shots, march, eat, march, and go to see get-mad movies, march, everything but sleep, and march some more. This lasted three months, and then I was sent to Iowa State College in Ames, Iowa for three more months, attending electrician's school.

The final week I got my orders to go to Boston, MA. The ship that I was assigned to was the USS Elden, and it was being built there. It wasn't completed. It was named for Lt. Elden who lost his life at the battle of Midway. He was from Chicago, Illinois, and represented by his young widow and their four year old son. They were aboard the day that the ship was commissioned.

When I arrived at Boston Navy Yard, I found that the Elden was Destroyer Escort 264 and was 19 days ahead of schedule. It was being built in a berth (space) right next to the USS Constitution (Old Ironsides). We didn't have long to wait, as the ship was finished 39 days ahead of schedule. We shoved off with a crew of 180 men, of whom only 11 had been to sea before.

We sailed down to Bermuda Island for a shakedown cruise. A shakedown cruise is intended to test the ship. In this case it turned out to be more of a test of the crew. We hit a hurricane the third day out and for a while I thought I was the only one seasick, and then somebody yelled, "Jake, you are puking into the wind." Then I went over to the to the starboard side and found everybody lined up. The Captain, who had been a professor of astronomy at Annapolis and had volunteered for sea duty was heard to say between heaves, as he leaned over the railing, "I can't believe I volunteered for this."

Well, we rode out that storm and finished our two weeks. Everyone who wanted to was allowed to spend half a day on the island; then, we started back to Boston. We were in sight of the city at about four in the afternoon when Captain

Adams decided to test our thirteen depth charge pattern.

We didn't know, then, the power of one depth charge, consisting of three hundred pounds of TNT, much less thirteen of them. We also found that the little dial on the end was to set the depth that they were to explode. The normal depth for a test would be three hundred feet; these were set for fifty. I can imagine what that would do to a submarine because of what it did to our ship. It lifted the fantail out of the water and put a wrinkle in the deck that was never removed, broke all the fuel lines on the engines except one and blew out nearly all of the light bulbs in the passageways, glass and all. We limped on in and got the ship tied up about midnight.

Since replacing light bulbs was my job, I took a blank requisition over to the Navy Yard and bought all of the new type shock resistant light bulbs that they had, the type with the rubber between the base and the glass part. It took three days to get all of those replaced.

Our next duty was to sail down to Norfolk, Va. and train some Coast Guardsmen. We would take about twenty aboard and go out past the harbor, eat lunch and come back in. Now these men had never been off the dock except in a rowboat, so you know how we lorded it over them because we had all of three weeks of sea duty. We did this for two weeks and on the last day coming back we turned too short and caught one of our screws (propellers) on a harbor buoy.

Since we were to leave the next morning before daylight with a convoy heading for Panama, they put us in dry-dock for a quick replacement. Our ship came equipped with a bicycle for the Yeoman to go get the mail when we were in port. Someone left a motor scooter and a wringer type washing machine on the dock and we had them both aboard when we left. That was the equal opportunity Navy way, I found out.

We joined a convoy of two merchant ships, and one other DE. Things went really well until we got past Cuba, then our sound gear picked up a submarine that was following us.

The next day was a dark, cloudy day with drizzly rain and the sub kept getting closer. The Captain had asked permission to turn back and drop depth charges and had been denied. They finally gave him the okay, but would not permit us to hang around afterward. We made a U-turn and were over the target in a few minutes and dropped the thirteen charges. As we swung around to return to the convoy, we could almost see an oil slick forming on the surface. We radioed the position to the nearest base and later learned that they sent out a PT boat. They confirmed that it was not a sub but a school of large fish.

We arrived at the East end of the Panama Canal late in the afternoon, and I

recall how impressed I was by the thick jungle on the south side. As we entered the first lock of the canal, we tossed a line from our bow and we were hitched to a small railroad engine and all of our ship's engines stopped. When the lock gate closed behind us they began flooding our section with water and we started to rise. We had taken a Panama Canal Pilot on board to supervise the operation from the bridge. It was weird at first to be moving with the engines silent. This procedure was repeated, lock after lock and by daylight the next morning we were docked on the Pacific Ocean side of the canal.

Going through the canal took all night and was an interesting experience. We had hoped to lay over for a day but no luck. We took on fresh water and a few stores and shoved off with the convoy, headed for the Port of Los Angeles.

The seas along the West Coast were the roughest that we had seen outside of a storm. There were giant swells, and I get queasy just telling about them. Our ship's Doctor told me that if I didn't get over being sea-sick by the time we got to L.A. he was going to recommend that I be transferred to shore duty. I didn't want to do that after all the training with the same guys, and I did get better. I got to the point that I was sick only on the first day out, and then I was all right.

We arrived in Pearl Harbor in late 1943, just as the operation to take back all of the islands that we had lost, and then some, was starting.

It was a day or two before Christmas in 1943 and we came in late in the afternoon and docked next to Hickham Field. I think we had been doing a little gunnery practice. It was almost dark when Cook Layton asked for volunteers to go over to the storehouse and pick up supplies, of course we went. This time John had secured a truck so we didn't have to walk.

The storehouse building was huge, must have been fifty yards square and packed with food. For some reason there was only one clerk on duty. We drove the truck into the building and up and down the isles while Layton and the clerk found things that was on his requisition. We loaded several cases of things we wanted, so when we left we had maybe twenty cases of stuff extra, like can cream, fruit cakes and cases of fruit.

When we got back to the ship Layton told us we couldn't have any of that extra stuff and that set the stage for the feud between "E" division and the cooks.

I want to take time to tell something about Joe Clark. He was one of the most unforgettable characters on our ship and we were lucky to have him.

What did Joe Clark look like? Take the character in "My Favorite Martian", dress him in dungarees and remove those antenna doodads from his head, presto, you have something that looks like Joe. I would guess he was in his early thirties, with close cropped gray hair. I never saw him laugh but he had a nice smile.

I don't recall who all went when Joe invited us to have lunch over near Harvard, his old stomping grounds. This was while we were still in Boston. There was Cullison, Agnew, and me plus two others. It was a chance to find out something about Joe. He never did talk about himself unless you asked. And that day we asked and found out a lot.

Joe had a degree from Harvard and was doing research at M.I.T. at the time of his enlistment. Story goes that some of his fellow workers at M.I.T. had joined the service as officers and when home on leave told Joe that the enlisted men had the best deal. So Joe put his occupation down as truck driver and was off to "boot" camp. I don't think that fooled our Eng. Officer Lee or Chief Electrician Breau, in a few weeks they made Joe lead electrician.

One day I asked Joe why I never see him at the movies on the fantail and his answer was, "I don't like movies but sometimes I slip back and watch the "mouse" pictures.

Joe had a way of asking you to do dirty jobs in such a way that you almost thought that you thought of it first. He would say, "Jake, that steel deck is going to rust if it's not oiled soon and I noticed that the rubber mat behind the ship's service board could stand to be taken out and washed down." All this time he is telling me why to use fresh water on the mat, giving me the conductivity of fresh water versus salt water. He never failed to thank me for doing a good job.

A year later while in Pearl and scheduled to screen a convoy in a few days the people in the radio shack notified the Captain that the radio message decoder was broken. Everybody was in an uproar because we couldn't sail with the fleet without it. They had a two specialist come aboard to work on it with no luck, even talked of flying in an expert from the States. We asked Lt. Lee, "Why don't they let Joe look at it." At first they said no way, it is top secret and Joe doesn't have that clearance. Then as the time grew short they decided it might not hurt if Joe worked on it. I don't remember the exact time it took for Joe to find the trouble and fix the thing, something like less than an hour. I later asked him what the trouble was and he just said something about a disconnected spring.

One morning I was on the 4-8 watch at the ship service board in the aft engine room. I decided on my own to transfer the load to the forward engine room. I went forward and had Lecklikner start up and get the diesel up to speed. When he had done that I started the DC motor-gen. set and excited the gen with 120 volts,

turned on the scope, closed the breaker and began transfer load. I then went back and sent the rest of the load forward and secured the unit.

One of the reasons I did this is that we had lost all power twice while transferring. I blamed it on the noise and the sound powered phones.

Anyway I was in the chow line with Joe Clark and he mentioned that today is the day to transfer from #2 to #1 generator and we will do it after breakfast. Then I told him I had already done it by myself. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Jake, don't do that again, cause if anything goes wrong a Boy Scout will out rank you." He never said another thing about that.

I don't know if Joe ever slept, or even had a bunk. I saw him asleep once about three in the afternoon stretched out on the bench in the electrician's store room.

One time after I got off watch at mid-night I went down to the electrician's store room looking for my flash light. Joe was in there writing a letter. He said, "Jake sit down, I'll be finished with this in a minute." I waited awhile and he finished writing. He had eight pages and read some of it to me. It was all about the life of some species of spider. I don't think he ever forgot a thing.

Another thing top secret thing that Joe repaired was our sonar. The thing that we pinged for subs with. It was the type of problem that mechanics hate most. When the switch was in the on position , it wouldn't work but when in the off position everything tested normal. It took Joe about an hour for figure out that a resistor was faulty and over heating causing a break in the power circuit.

We had a three cylinder diesel emergency generator, that worked every time it was tested but was unreliable when we needed it. It also had a habit of starting every time some one stomped on the deck or an depth charge exploded. Joe Clark solved that problem with a copper oxide rectifier. He took it apart and filed the corrosion off one side of each of the copper disks. Needless to say no more false starts.

Joe told us a year before the end of the war, that the first side that perfected the atomic bomb would win the war in four or five days. Somehow he knew that both sides were working on it.

The day the first one dropped he gathered all the electrician mates down to the store room and explained what type bomb that was. He drew a diagram showing how it worked and the TNT equivalent . Joe had to have picked up that information during his research days at M.I.T. . I can't help but think that if Joe had been working on that Manhattan project instead of riding the "Mighty Elden" all over the Pacific, the war might have ended six month earlier.

Well the word got out and the Captain wanted to know what Joe had told us and when he found out he wanted Joe to tell the Division Commander, so the story goes.

I always thought that maybe Joe got a "dear john" letter sometime before we got back to the states, don't know for sure but Joe didn't take leave when the Elden was in the shipyard in Oakland for repair and updating equipment. He stayed on the ship. He did have a gang-plank pass and quiet often you could find Joe in a nearby bar at ten in the morning. This confused the shore patrol and they checked his pass more than once.

Joe must have loved the USS Elden. He turned down the promotion to Chief Electrician because he knew if he accepted it he was sure to be transferred to another ship.

Let me first tell you something about a DE and what it was designed for. The main purpose was to escort and screen for enemy submarines with its very sensitive underwater sound gear, so we were protecting larger ships in the fleet from being torpedoed as we moved into enemy waters. There were two DE's assigned to each aircraft carrier and four to a convoy of five ships or more.

The DE was 280 ft. long and 27 ft. wide at mid-ship. We had 3, 3-inch guns. Two mounted forward and one aft, several 20mm gun mounts and a four barrel pom-pom anti-aircraft gun mounted atop mid-ship.

On the fan tail were two depth charge racks, each holding 6 (300# of TNT) depth charges and two Y guns, port and starboard, that could fire one depth charge about forty yards to either side of the ship.

The fastest that our ship could go was twenty-three knots (25 mph) and I wondered how we were going to protect the fleet, which was much faster. Well, ships don't need protecting while going fast. It's when in action at an island that we did our job, so they sent us on ahead.

Mail call was a special time for us. When we were down in the islands, or at sea for an extended period of time, that was the first thing we looked for when we arrived in port. I took the brunt of a lot of jokes about the mail. You see, I had worked for the Nashville Banner and when they found out my address they mailed me every morning and evening paper. So when we pulled in and there were five sacks of mail, three of them would be my newspapers. We had one sailor on the ship from Nashville and he thought it was wonderful.

In January 1944 we were on our way from Pearl to below the equator for our first time. Days of sailing in calm seas, standing watch after watch. About the

fourth day out several of us had just gotten off the watch at 1600 and sitting out on the deck talking. After we had exhausted things to talk about, Cullison said, "Damn, I'm tired of seeing nothing but ocean, I wish I could see a tree." That is when I said, "Well we could use our imagination and pretend that we are hobos riding in a box car, that might break the monotony." Someone else piped up, "Lets do it." So there we sat, two by two pretending to be looking out a boxcar door. Ever once in awhile some one would say something like, "Look at the size of that corn field." Then we would all laugh.

This went on for about an half hour when Boatswain 1/c Gorman showed up. He asked, "What are you doing?" I said, "We can't tell you." "Why not?" he asked. "Because you wouldn't understand," I replied. He then said, "I could put you on report," Cullison asked, "What would you charge us with?" Gorman said, "Silent contempt." We all laughed so hard that he just turned red and retreated to the forward part of the ship. I never heard of him trying to bully any EM's after that.

The first group of islands we retook was the Marshals. We thought we had sunk a submarine there, but it turned out to be a large school of big fish.

Since our fleet used lots of fuel, part of our duty was to meet the Merchant Marine oil tankers down near the 180th median and the equator, as their insurance wouldn't allow them to sail any further. We met them at an island called Funafuti, where they transferred oil to one of our Navy tankers. We would escort the tankers back to the fleet.

The first day at Funafuti, the one day it didn't rain, George Miller and I found out that Ship Service had some fishing tackle that we could check out. I recall that we were fishing about seventy-five feet deep and the three fish we caught blew up like a balloon when they reached the surface. I recall giving the fish to the chief steward Manzala.

It was on one of these trips and we were tied up next to one of the civilian tankers, when their Captain asked, "What would you take for that washing machine lashed to the deck?" Well, our Captain had been after us to get rid of it and now was our chance. We traded it for two gallons of ice cream for us and some green vegetables for the officers. We had carried that old Maytag for over seven thousand miles.

On this day we were leaving Funafuti, escorting two of our Navy oil tankers. We were heading west on a route to New Britain. The rumor had it that we were going to swing south below the equator, and the four sailors in our crew who had crossed the equator before began planning our initiation. We caught two of those the night before we crossed, in the sleeping quarters, and shaved their heads, being careful to douse the lights first, so they wouldn't know who we were.

They did get a big tub of water and dunked each of us before presenting everyone with a mimeographed certificate of the event. King Neptune did look kind of funny sitting on his throne with his shaved head showing through the makeshift crown. We were on a zigzag course and had crossed the equator twenty-six times in the last twenty-four hours, according to our quartermaster.

I recall the day that we went into the floating dry-dock in Majuro. I was leaning over the port railing watching as they pumped nearly all the sea water out when Chief Stewart Manzala got my attention. He told me that he would make us a nice sandwich spread if we would bring him some of the minnows left in the dry-dock bilges. With that he handed me a empty coffee can and we went down and caught quite a few. He was true to his word and it was delicious on crackers.

When we first arrived at Eniwetok a whaleboat load of our crew went ashore to view first hand the destroyed Japanese trenches and gun emplacements. The whaleboat returned in about thirty minutes with just Ensign Leggett aboard. He was fighting mad. He wasn't allowed on the beach because he had a beard. The officer in command of the island instructed the beach master that no beards be allowed ashore. The Elden was anchored less than a half mile from the beach and I noted two PBY's floating in an area about half way.

I said to Leggett, "If you get permission we could swim to the island." He did and we did, stopping by one of the PBY's and talking to the crew. There wasn't much to see and when we went to the dock area, the beach master put us on the first boat back to the Elden.

I want to tell about "Perk" Cullison and our second Christmas aboard the Elden. But first I will have to explain "water hours" to make it understandable. Our ship could carry enough fresh water for us to drink and cook with, but not enough to allow the crew to wash, shave and shower anytime they wanted to. To conserve fresh water we had water hours, one and one half hours in the morning and the same in the evening, the fresh water turned on in the washroom for use each day. All other times we had to use salt water. Now everyday soap will not lather in salt water so we had large bars of yellow salt water soap. You can take my word for it, you don't feel clean after a salt water shower.

The story goes that "Perk" and a few others were celebrating New Years down in the aft motor room drinking grapefruit juice spiked with a little grade "A" (searchlight cleaner) when our Christmas presents arrived. Someone had sent Cullison a bottle of "old spice" shaving lotion and he opened the bottle and drank it. Well it made him so sick we thought he might die, but he recovered in a day or two, but he was never able to go up to the wash room during water hours again because the very smell of shaving lotion made him ill all over again.

After each island was retaken, we would return to Hawaii and train with our subs. It went something like this. Early in the morning the sub would leave Pearl Harbor and go out to an area and hide. About 9 a.m. we would leave and try to find them. They could fire dummy torpedoes at us, set deeper than our keel, and once I saw the wake of one going right under our mid-ship. When we thought we had found the sub, we would drop an orange crate over the side and signal for the sub to surface. Quite often they would come up near the crate and we would cheer. (Then there were other times).

We didn't know at the time what a stroke of luck befell the Electricians at the time of our ship's commission. We were given a big box of master locks, and it was our job to distribute locks to each person for his locker and to each division for whatever reason they needed them and log that information. We complained of the extra duty at the time, but much later, when we got overseas and when at times food was rationed, we discovered a "gold mine."

The electrician's storeroom was just across the passageway from the cook's walk-in refrigerator, and it of course had a master lock on it. The routine was that after evening mess, the cook would bring down the leftovers, unlock the door, hang his keys in his lock and go inside and put things away. We would wait in our storeroom until he went in, then slip over and take his keys and put them in one of our locks. The cook would come out and lock the door with our lock and leave. Later we would go in and gather up stuff for a mid-night party in the engine room, always replacing their lock. We did that for almost two years and they never figured it out. We had six cooks on board and I always thought that they suspected each other.

One thing that is rarely mentioned is that we never let the fighting area on an island stay dark. Part of our duty was to cruise in a large circle, in line with other ships, and fire star shells to keep the area lighted. A star shell had a phosphorus burning light and was kept in the air longer by a small parachute built into the shell.

We had a gunnery officer that we called "Shoes" Miller. Mr. Miller was from Boston and was a shoe salesman there, thus the nickname. One night, Mr. Miller had the watch on the bridge as we were cruising in open seas toward Guam, when our radar picked up a surfaced enemy sub going in the same direction as we were. It was one mile to our port and about a half mile ahead of us. We would call that, "Sub approximately two miles plus at 10 o'clock." We were called to battle stations, and for some reason, Mr. Miller set our course hard port to get behind the sub to follow it, instead of angling across toward it. Anyway, we got behind and close enough to fire on it with our three-inch gun. Well, in all the excitement we were using the shells that we had in our ready box - the star shells. It was something to see those missiles streak out, and come to a stuttering stop when the little parachute opened. Their surfaced sub can out run a DE and that night they did. When it was

all over, "Shoes" Miller got reamed out by the Captain and we all thought he was not as brave as an officer should be. I heard that Mr. Miller became Captain of the Elden for a week as it cruised to San Francisco Navy Yard to be dismantled.

Shortly after, one of our sister ships was hit by aircraft, destroying the bridge and mid ship killing all the officers, they made some changes. It was decided by someone to disperse the living quarters of two officers to the rear of the ship. One of the two was our favorite Ensign, Mr. Leggett. He was a young and likeable Harvard graduate, who was not all that "gung-ho" when it came to Navy discipline. Said he was the grandson of the founder of Leggett and Myers Tobacco Co. I learned years later that the ship was designed with a shortage of living space for officers

Leggett told us that if he ever became Captain, we would park our ship at some deserted island until the war is over. He was still billeted in the ships' rear section across from the laundry room when I was transferred.

My turn to be Captain of the head came up early, partly because of my refusal to answer some questions by a first class petty officer from New York. He had told three of us he was going to put us on report. We chalked up his trouble to not liking or understanding people from the South, which most of us were. Being Captain of the head meant that I didn't have stand watches in the engine room, but was in charge of keeping the rest room of the E division clean.

Let me show you the layout. One room had two shower stalls and three lavatories. There was a passageway to the bunk or sleeping quarters, and on each side was a room with two urinals, a trough with three seats and water running through it to shipside drain at all times. This was the only rest room for eighty men. Cleaning this was no problem. I would just hose it down, mop and be done.

One day the Chief petty officer Pruitt told me that we were going to have an Admiral inspection in a little over two weeks and wanted to know if I could touch up the paint work. I told him I would take care of it. I went down to the paint locker and picked out my colors. I painted the urinals and the trough bright blue; the deck was blood red and the walls white. The evening before the inspection the Chief and his first class petty officer came by and I thought they were going to blow a gasket. Even though the place had never looked better, it wasn't regular Navy decor, and there wasn't time to change it. There it was, all red, white and blue.

The next day I was standing at attention as the Chief led the two Admirals through. One looked in and remarked; "Now this looks very nice." The other nodded his head in agreement. Later the Chief told me that I was lucky that those Admirals were in the Reserve and not the regular Navy as he and his first class petty officer were. That might have had something to do with my Captain of the

head duty being cut a month short.

I'm adding this for two reasons, one is that I have never read in Navy stories about "fighting lights," and two is the event that happened one night 150 miles south of Pearl Harbor.

Fighting lights were the way ships identified each other at night. Each ship or sea craft had two vertical clusters of colored lights. One was set to be energized at any time, and the other was standby in case a bulb burned out. I don't remember how many colors they had, but the Navy changed the combination command in Hawaii several times a month (you could have green, red, blue and orange in a vertical row one day and something else the next, but all of our ships would have the same.)

The orders were when approaching another vessel at night and if unable to raise radio contact, to flash your fighting lights. If no reply, destroy the craft.

We were docked at Pearl City this day and received orders to leave the next morning for Christmas Island to pick up and move some Marines. About sundown we got emergency orders to leave immediately due to a downed seaplane. We were to pick up the downed pilot on our way. We cleared the harbor and were going at top speed. It was some time before midnight that we were called to general quarters and a few minutes later we felt a bump and we continued on toward the downed plane. The following day we found the downed seaplane about eleven in the morning bobbing up and down on three to five foot swells. The pilot was glad to see us and when we brought him aboard, Captain Adams asked him what should we do about the plane. I was standing near and heard him say, "Ram the blankly blank blank!" He was so hungry and seasick. As we left to complete our mission we radioed the location and I guess someone picked up the plane.

That night we got the story. We had rammed a small craft that didn't respond to radio contact or fighting lights. I guess we will never know why, but it was one of ours, with a crew of eight, all lost. This is the event that I had blocked from my memory. I found out years later that this didn't happen but was just what we were told. The craft didn't answer but we didn't ram it.

I think it was just after our return to Pearl from the Guam invasion that I heard something hard to believe over the ship's loud speaker. "All men interested in spending a week at the Royal Hawaiian Hotel lay up to the quarterdeck." I went, and along with about ten others listened to the Officer of the Deck explain the deal. The hotel space was reserved for a sub crew that had not returned and it was decided that each DE would be given 5 spaces. Three of us signed up, I wish I could recall their names. It was for five days starting Saturday at noon.

The bus was waiting at the gate and we were on our way. We checked in

and I remember my room was on the fourth floor. The first two days were spent on the beach. We could put on our swim suits, grab a beach towel and take the elevator right down to surfside. The food was great and plenty of ice cream.

Monday I decided to take the bus into town and visit a print shop that I noticed on the way to the hotel. I didn't realize how much I missed being around printing. The manager was eager to show me around and introduce me to other workers. During the visit he asked if I could set type from a California type case. I told him I could and he offered me a job. I set type three hours that day and as I left he gave me a time card to punch. He told me that anytime I had liberty and wanted to work, just punch in and the jobs would be on my shelf. Taking the bus back to the hotel, I thought how upside down my world was.

Back on the ship in the little office in "C" division, Stoneham, Lambertson and I met to design a letterhead for the USS Elden. Lambert did all the art work for the for the ship's paper, The Elden Daily News. We ended up with a cartoon of a wolf's head with a sub in it's mouth and the motto of "Victory is Our Business" on the bottom of each sheet. On my next liberty I took the layout to town and had several thousand printed.

I think it was after we started sailing out of Pearl that Eddie Stoneham, our 1st Class Pharmacy mate, and I decided to start a ship newspaper. We called it "The Elden Daily News" published monthly. The idea hit us both when we heard over the loud speaker that we were to get ready for a locker roach inspection.

I interviewed Lt. Morrow for the ship's newspaper. We (him mostly) talked about the law and how it was all that stood between us and the uncivilized. We talked for over an hour. That is how I found out he had been Attorney General in Florida. We decided not to print articles on officers unless we could balance it with serious stuff about enlistment men. We couldn't so we left it there.

We knew that when we were at Iwo Jima Doug Leach was confined to quarters because Stoneham went to see him and took him a book to read. We wouldn't print that, but if we had known about the SNAFU in the radio shack, it would have been headlines.

We did have one story that fell in our lap, concerning a young officer. It happened on his honeymoon. Maybe you can guess who it was and he told it on himself. We didn't (couldn't) print it.

Officer blank and his new wife were spending a week in this nice house someone loaned them and he had orders to join our ship within the month. It happened that it was his wife's birthday and he was secretly planning a surprise party for her. While she was upstairs in the shower, he was busy quietly letting in guests into the living room below. It was so quiet you could have heard a pin drop

when it happened.

She leaned over the railing and yelled, honey, do you want a little piece before I slip into my girdle? Some of the guest burst out laughing and it took him over an hour to convince her to come down and join the party.

One time during a storm, I had been sea-sick and hadn't eaten for two days, I worked up enough nerve to go eat supper. I didn't realize what time it was and when I got to the bottom of the ladder the cook tells me the mess hall is closed. About that time the ship listed to the port and an apple pie slid from the bottom shelf and continued sliding, stopping at my feet. I scooped it up and to this day I don't recall how I ate the whole thing without a knife or fork but it sure was good.

One thing that we had aboard ship is something I wish we did here at our house. The cooks had a menu for every meal for a month and we bought enough of those things and stored them below. I don't know that I would like to have an officer sample each meal to insure that it was the same as the menu. My wife wouldn't even let me do that, but that is what we had on the Elden, one of the officers were supposed to eat each meal with the enlisted men and report back.

One day someone told me that Brooks was looking for me. Brooks was a likable guy and striking for a cooks rating. He finally found me out by the potato bin and told me this story. He began by explaining the menu and how important it was that everything on the menu was served. He finally came to the point, cocoa was to be served at the evening meal and they had lost a gallon of Hershey's syrup. I told him that I would help him look for it and sure enough I did find it right outside the electrician's store room. He was glad to get it but I thought I heard him mutter something about my heritage under his breath.

Lt. Lee was the man that knew those diesels' if you remember he could be upon deck, know what those engines needed at the same time. They were 16 cylinder General Motor diesels like the ones used on our trains today. Each cylinder had four head bolts (that held the top on) called studs, that were about one inch in diameter and about a foot long. Under normal wear they would last forever, but in rough seas the pitch and yaw puts extra torque on the stud causing them to break. I watched from my watch station how Lt. Lee, Flickenger and Brown wrestled with this problem. To detect a broken stud they used a three foot half inch metal rod, holding one end of the rod to the head of the stud and the other end close to their ear. A broken stud gives off a different pitch, and when each one was found, they marked it with chalk. After the engine was shut down they removed the top half with an air wrench and set up and attached a make-shift drill press over the hole and drilled out the remainder of the bolt. I saw this process developed by trial and error over a six month period. I think this had a lot to do with Flickenger making Chief.

I want to tell something about our pharmacist mate first class Edward I. Stoneham He could give you a shot and smile all the while, but he had as great a sense of humor as he did a sense of duty. Stoneham's Dad died at an early age and he was raised by his mother in Dayton, Ohio. They were very close and while we were at sea Mrs. Stoneham, a buyer for a large department store, transferred to a store on the West coast. She would send him books and I recall the waiting list for some of the racy ones ran as high as 27. He kept the list in the sick bay. Kitty Foyle, Mrs. Chadery's Lover and one other were all the rage at one time.

Eddie and I had the same kind of humor and I guess we started the Elden's newspaper out of boredom but grew to love publishing it. I kept up with him after the war, a Christmas card passed between us each year. I received a letter from him mid 1977 telling me his Mother had died and I got my last Christmas card from him that year.

I remember that one of the first headlines was, LINE UP YOUR ROACHES FOR INSPECTION. It got to be fun and was something different to do. One day the Captain called us both up to his quarters. He said, "Men, I want to tell you that the officers are enjoying your paper, but I want to warn you to be careful about the jokes. Keep them clean, because we are sending the paper home to our wives.

Well, it was about two months later that the wives started to send back jokes for the paper. I believe there was one, maybe two, clean enough to print. I kept track of about eighty of the crew and after I returned home, I printed and mailed two editions. They slowed down on sending in stuff of interest and all of us had other things to do. It died a natural death.

One of my other jobs on the ship was running the film projector. When we were in port I would go ashore and bring back a movie, rewind it and show it after dark on the fantail. One night we were docked beside Hickam Field in Pearl Harbor and were just finishing a movie. When one of the guys, who had been sitting on the depth charge on the outboard Y gun, jumped down, he tangled his foot in the lanyard and fired a 300 pound depth charge out into the middle of the harbor. It didn't explode, because it was set for three hundred-foot deep. The reason that this happened was that someone switched the controls from the bridge to local control and with local control we fired them by pulling the lanyard.

When we were down in the islands we couldn't always get a new movie. I remember that I showed "Up In Arms" with Danny Kaye six nights in a row and the last night it started to rain during the movie and nobody left.

I want to tell about the only food we pilfered by accident. The officer's boned turkey. It was when we were down in Seeadler Harbor and we began getting supplies from Australia and other nearby countries. They had a canned cream that was almost like "Eagle Brand" and made excellence cocoa. The boned

turkey came in the same sized wooden crate and the same size olive drab cans.

It wasn't until we had the two cases in the engine room and had disposed of the crates, that the word was passed, "There is a case of boned turkey missing and there will be an inspection to find it." That shook up all the below deck people and we were going to give it back until one of the old hands said hide it. So we did, down in the bilges next to the keel.

I was ashore after a movie when the "mother of all inspections" took place. I was told that every spare parts box was opened and every locker was looked into. It took a few days before it blew over. I recall that it tasted good but not as good as usual because of a tinge of guilt associated with it.

I had several different battle stations during my tour. The first two was below deck and that didn't bother me. I knew that I was sleeping below the water line because the degaussing cable went along side in my bunk. The first was in the emergency steering room back aft. That was a lonely one. Next was the ship's service board where I normally stood watch. The third was at the starboard hatch below the number two, three inch gun passing three inch shells to the ready box. I couldn't see who was passing the ammo out of the hole, the man passing it to me was a big black man built like Joe Louis named Medcalf. He handled those fifty pound boxes like match sticks. I recall once when we got word that some Jap planes were thirty minutes away and I looked down and I know Medcalf looked as white as me. He was a quiet and likeable man from Memphis, TN..

My last battle station entailed running up to the Captain's quarters to carry the Thompson sub machine gun out on the poop deck and give it to him. I never did know who made up these battle station duty list now that I think about it.

During those two years we took Saipan, Guam and Iwo Jima. We were just expecting to go to Okinawa when we ran aground and damaged our bow. We were ordered to go back to the first place available to get it repaired. In the meantime, four transfers back to the States came up and I won the draw for one of them. It turned out that we had to return to San Francisco, and we arrived back the day President Roosevelt died. The Elden under went an overhaul and back to the war zone. It was 75 miles from Tokyo when the war ended.

The last thing that I wanted to do is to be judgmental of the loss of men in the USS Elden's crew but you can't help but see that nearly all the loss of life was due to whaleboat mishaps. I thought when we lost Henry Duncan that the choice of recovering the whaleboat while we were underway was a poor one. What happened on September 27th 1945 comes close to "friendly fire" in my book. I rode many a mile in that whaleboat going for movies, so you can't tell me that putting 27 men in that small boat in rough seas was sane.

Claude Walker was one of the liberty party's twenty-seven that survived the whaleboat accident in Tokyo Bay the 27th of September where the following died.

**Smith, Andrew, Seaman 1/c; Newmes, James, Y 3/c; Doniel, William, STM2/c
Covington, Maurice CPhM and Centonze, Paul J., GM3/c.**

Here is the way Walker recalls that day. "My section had liberty that day and the four of us (Newmes, Covington, Centonze and I had been on shore together all day. A large boat came for us at six pm and took us out in the bay and put everyone off on this ship, and each ship was to sent it's whaleboat there to pick us up. Our whaleboat didn't arrive until about eight pm and when it started back to the ship there was a typhoon moving in and it caught us about halfway to the Elden and capsized the boat. There was 27 of us aboard. The big ships in the area launched their big landing barges to rescue us. Most of the guys hung onto the capsized whaleboat until they were rescued but three or four of us were drifting out to sea before we were picked up. When we capsized the boat came down on top of us and I was trying to get to the surface and others over me were kicking me in the head and when I finally got out from under them, someone grabbed me and I had to fight him loose. That is how I got away from the group. I was in the water about thirty to forty-five minutes.

I could ride one wave but the next one would go over me. These waves were about ten stories high. Each time I would surface there was a search light on this battleship looking for me. I was taken to a ship that was waiting to receive those rescued and when the coxswain tried to come along side a wave caught the barge and threw us into the side of the ship. It threw me up into the air and the captain caught me and pulled me aboard. They began to try to get the salt water out of me, I must have drank gallons, it came up like a river

The Elden sailed for Pearl, Oct. 2nd, 1945 and I was left behind on the San Juan an AA Cruiser to testify at the trial of the *officer in charge. The trial took twenty days and then we sailed to the states. I beat the Elden to the states and was discharged almost two month before the Elden crew. For some reason I can't remember the names of those who drowned nor the name of the officer in charged, I must have blanked it out."

I found the list of deaths in the DE Death list on my computer and the name of the officer in charge from corresponding with Paul Centonze's half sister who lives in New York, NY.

* The officer in charge of the liberty party was Donald F. Eschman, Ensign USNR

I was getting my first leave home after 29 months. I had seen all of the action

in the Pacific up until that time. The other day our pastor was telling the story of the six men planting the U.S. flag on a mountain on an island. I told him after the service that I was on my ship offshore the day that event took place on Iwo Jima (I'm just getting used to someone telling stories of long ago and finding out that I was there).

I spent the rest of my time of service in the Philadelphia Navy Yard rewiring English submarine switchboards. I was there when they announced that the war had ended and I was sent to New Orleans for discharge, then took the train home to Port Arthur.

Before I left home for the Navy, I was real serious about two girls. One said she would not wait for me to return and the other said she would wait. It turned out that the one that said she would, didn't and the one who said she wouldn't did. They call that fate where I come from.

I'm glad that we had to fight that war at that time. I'm not sure how our government leaders would respond today, but no one person can take credit for winning WWII; it took every person, in the service and out, with ONE purpose for that win.

I have at times complained about the three years, two months and ten days the war took out of my life, then I remember those who didn't come back, and I give thanks that it turned out as it did.

Robert D. "Jake" Jacobs