
REMEMBERING
OUR DUTIES, MISSIONS
& LIFE ABOARD THE
U.S.S WITTER
DE 636



WORLD WAR II
A TRIBUTE TO OUR SHIPMATES
WHO DIED IN THE BATTLE FOR OKINAWA

*Printed by
Shipmate*

TONY SCALA



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DEDICATION

October 8, 2005 at the
Admiral Nimitz State Historical Site
in The National Museum of the Pacific War,
Fredericksburg, Texas.
It is affixed to the Memorial Wall

We thank JoAnn Spitsen, Jane Murphree and Dr. David Pipes Plinche
for their efforts in creating the design of the plaque and to the

US **Remembering** lation

Our Duties, Mission and Life Aboard

THE USS WITTER DE 636

by

***Members of the Witter
DE 636***

Reunion Association

World War II

Proud Of The Job We Did



U. S. S. WITTER DE 636

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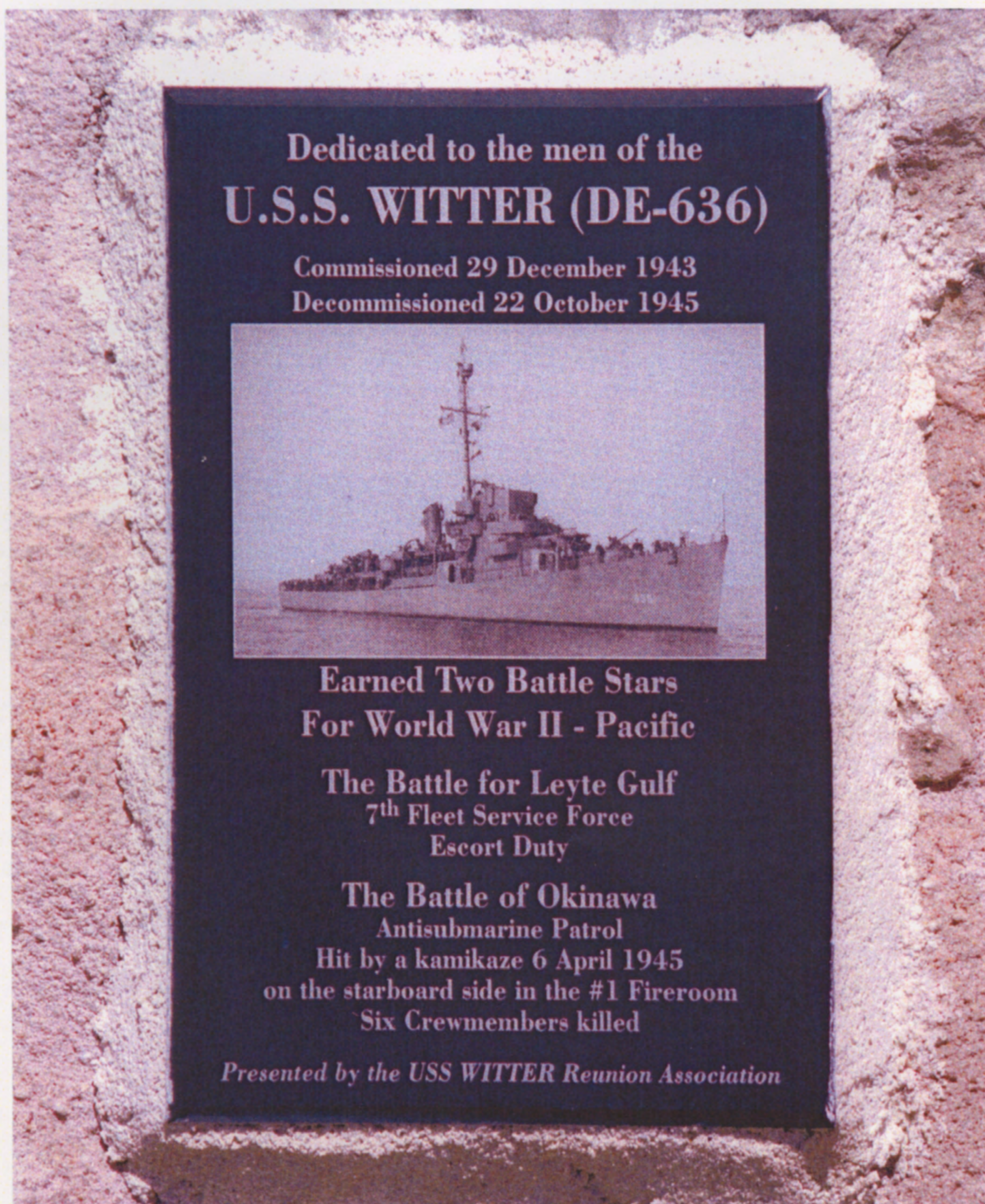


TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

God grants liberty only to those who love it and are always ready to guard and defend it.

Daniel Webster

The idea for a Witter Remembrance Book began to emerge a few years after the first USS Witter DE 636 reunion which took place in Chicago in 1988. The project was talked about at subsequent reunions but nothing much happened until around 1997 when Jack Aboff began to compile material about Witter history. An issue of the Witter newsletter, the "Witter Whaleboat" was sent to members with requests for personal stories and old pictures. Jack's enthusiasm for the project had been evolving over the years, and his goal was the production of a neat book about the Witter which would captivate crew members and their families.

The Witter story is but one of thousands of tales coming to light from World War II. Many Witter shipmates had already died by the time actual collection of these stories was begun. Thus, it is a small collection that appears on these pages compared to the number of men in the crew back in the forties, yet this fact does not diminish the importance and the poignancy of these memories. There is humor in some recollections — wonder in others that they were spared, while six young men were blasted into eternity by a kamikaze attack on the ship.

This book is a compilation of personal stories, history, tributes, patriotic writings and pictures. With regard to the pictures: as many people as possible have been identified through the information that was submitted. Some pictures were sent in with no names at all. Still, they are included because they are all a part of Witter history. The book, then, is a tribute to all those men who were eager to join the Navy so that they could defend their country against the enemy. We owe our gratitude to these men, and those like them, who have defended the United States in the years that followed, because we, today, are able to enjoy freedom and liberty in this, the greatest nation on earth. Therefore, this book will help to remind those who are young and who are living in today's confused world, that freedom is not free. Freedom must be earned, defended, cherished and protected every day. For these reasons, the USS Witter DE 636 story, and others like it, will forever be important.

To posterity— You will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it. *John Quincy Adams*

Joan Ogrodnik
Editor

April 6, 2005

Acknowledgments

Cover Design & Lithography - Tony Scala - La Scala Printing, Inc. - Upland, California

Dedication Page photograph by Kristopher Johnson, California

Thanks to Nancy Witter Bates and Malcolm Witter for the picture of Jean Carter Witter, Page 5

History of the Witter taken from the "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships" Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Washington, DC

Pictures dating back to the 1940's were submitted by Witter crew themselves or by family members. I have included almost all of the materials that were sent in. Not much editing was necessary. That which was done was for clarity. Some photographs were not identified by the sender. The roster which you will find in its entirety beginning on Page, was then divided and names were placed under the crew division pictures. I leave it to the readers to put names with the faces in each division. Errors here are not intentional - they are the "best that could be done with the information that was available."

Grace Petersen, widow of Wilton "Bud" Petersen, and Mrs. Howard Keleher have provided a number of pictures and photocopies. Any and all materials which could be clearly reproduced may be found in the section titled Part Four: The Witter Photo Album.

Thank you to Chuck Newton and J. R. Williams for giving moral support on some of the tedious tasks in organizing this volume. Your assistance in putting names to faces, spelling those names correctly and clarifying ratings was invaluable.

A Prayer for Peace - The Reverend Carl E. Bergstrom, National Chaplain Page

And now, - and always,-- I offer gratitude and love to my dear husband, Joe Ogrodnik, who helped me so much with ideas, advice, patience and encouragement

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ship's Picture.....	ii
Dedication of the Memorial Plaque.....	iii
Preface.....	iv
Acknowledgments.....	v
 Part One - The Travels and Adventures of the USS Witter DE 636	 1
Star Spangled Banner.....	2
History of the Witter	3
Jack Aboff Sets the Stage	8
Short Cruise on a Destroyer Escort - Ernie Pyle	10
A Letter of Thanks from Commander Davis and from the Crew	11
Lieutenant George Herrmann Sends a Letter to Jean C. Witter	19
The Witter Crew Rescues the Marines in September 1944	21
Lt jg Charles Newton Writes Home	27
Travels of the U.S.S. Witter DE 636 - Jack Spitsen	33
 Part Two - Kamikaze Attack - April 6, 1945	 37
Photographs of Damage to the Ship	38
Frederic William Hawes	39
Lieutenant George Herrmann Commends the Crew	42
Memorial Service	43
Scripture Readings	44
Remembrances of Three Who Died on April 6, 1945 - by Their Families	
Vincent LaSelva by his brother, Kelly LaSelva	45
Francis Ogrodnik by his brother, Joseph Ogrodnik	47
Benjamin Zack by his son, Dr. Arthur Zack	49
 Part Three - The Witter Men Tell How it Really Was	 53
The Chaplain's Corner	54
Robert S. Blair F 1/c - Remembrance by His Widow, Thelma Blair	55
William Brawn CRT	56
Paul Brunk MM 1/c - Letter From His Son, Paul Brunk	57
Keith G. Carney RM 1/c - Remembrance by His Daughter, Janice Cross	59
Kenneth Carroll EM 1/c	63
Joseph Cognac SC 2/c.....	65
Benjamin Di Florio Cox	69
The Handy Billy Blues	70
George Futch S1/c	71
Harry Johnson SK 2/c	73
Lieutenant Kenneth Johnson - Remembrance by His Son, Kristopher Johnson	75

Sol Koenigsberg SM 2/c	76
Kenneth Krukow SOM 3/c - The Saga of the USS Witter DE 636	77
Tuff Times on the Witter.....	78
Richard G. Linsmeyer FC 2/c	79
Wilbur L. McCracken WT 2/c	81
James O. Murphree RDM 3/c	83
Lieutenant Bruno Naczkowski Describes the Kamikaze Hit	84
Lt. Naczkowski and the Damaged Witter Hull	87
Ralph W. Nelson SOM 1/c	88
Celebration in Philadelphia.....	90
Lieutenant Charles Newton	91
Aaron "Mickey" Olem SK 1/c - Tribute by Joseph Ogrodnik	93
Alvin Peachman R2/c	95
Wilton Peterson Y2/c - Note by His Widow, Grace Petersen	98
David Pipes Planche RDM 2/c Crossed the Equator	99
Joseph Rodolico S1/c	101
Anthony Scala S1/c Tells How He Joined the Navy	103
Allen G. Schwartz Y 1/c	106
Paul Silance Y2/c - His Poetry	107
Lieutenant Robert T. Swengel Corresponds with Harry Johnson	111
Howard Thole MM 2/c	114
Kenneth Warriner WT 1/c	115
J. R. Williams GM 3/c	116
USS Witter 1944 - Charles Noble	118
The Story Behind TAPS	119
Ship's Roster - Jack Spitsen	120
Part Four -The Witter Photo Album	124
Crew Photographs from 1944-45	126
Present Day Photographs	137
Group Photographs of the Crew by Divisions	140
Photograph of Crew at the First Reunion	147
Albany 2003 - Four Who Attended Every Reunion	148
Historian Joe Ogrodnik and Book Editor Joan Ogrodnik.....	149
Epilogue	150
The Navy Hymn	151

Part One

THE TRAVELS

and

ADVENTURES

of the

USS WITTER DE 636

The Star Spangled Banner

(The Defense of Fort McHenry)

September 20, 1814

by

Francis Scott Key

Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
gave proof through the night that our flag was still there.
Oh say, does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, now conceals, now discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam.
In full glory reflected now shines on the stream:
'Tis the Star-Spangled Banner! O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

And where is that band who so vauntingly swore
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wiped out their foul footsteps' pollution,
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave:
And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Oh! Thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must for our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."
And the Star-Spangled Banner forever shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

USS WITTER DE 636

The History of the Ship That Made a Team out of Over 200 Men Who Sailed Aboard Her During WW II

The next paragraph is a brief biography of Jean Carter Witter. It is followed by a narrative which chronicles the Pacific Ocean adventures of the USS Witter DE 636. It is taken from the "Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships," Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Naval History Division, Washington.

ENSIGN JEAN CARTER WITTER, Jr. United States Naval Reserve



Jean Carter Witter was born in San Francisco on 31 January 1921. He matriculated at the University of California at Berkeley in September 1938. He graduated in the spring of 1942 and was commissioned an ensign in the United States Naval Reserve on 13 May 1942 as a result of his completion of the NROTC program at the university. On 25 May, he reported to the commandant, 12th Naval District for temporary duty while awaiting transportation to permanent duty on the *San Francisco* (CA-38), then active in the Pacific. Once on board the heavy cruiser, Ens. Witter participated in the assault on Guadalcanal and Tulagi early in August. He was present when *Wasp* (CV-7) was torpedoed and he fought in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. Ensign Witter was killed in action on board the USS *San Francisco* during an engagement between United States and Japanese forces off Cape Esperance, in the Solomon Islands, on 13 November 1942. He was posthumously awarded the Order of the Purple Heart.

USS WITTER DE 636

(DE 636: dp. 1,400; l. 306'0"; b. 37'0"; dr. 13'6"; s. 23.6 k (tl.); cpl. 213; a. 33", 41.1", 8 20mm., 8 dcp., 1dep. (hh), 3 21" tt.; cl. *Buckley*)

Witter (DE 636) was laid down on 28 April 1943 at San Francisco, Calif., by the Bethlehem Steel Company; launched on 17 October 1943; sponsored by Mrs. Jean C. Witter; and commissioned on 29 December 1943, Comdr. Alan C. Davis, USNR, in command.

Witter departed San Francisco on 18 January 1944 and began her shakedown training. During that cruise, she visited San Diego and then underwent post-shakedown repairs at the Mare Island Navy Yard before returning to San Francisco at the end of February. On 8 March, she stood out of San Francisco and steamed, via Pearl Harbor, to the Gilbert Islands, arriving in Majuro Lagoon on the 22nd. She departed Majuro on 26 March and—after side visits to Makin, Tarawa, and Abemama in the Gilberts—she arrived in Espiritu Santo on 3 April. There, she remained for 12 days escorting ships in and out of the harbor at Espiritu Santo. On the 15th, the destroyer escort stood out of Segond Channel to rendezvous at sea with SS William Charlie Yeager and escort that ship to the southern Solomons. They reached Tulagi on the 21st; and, while the merchantman put into Tulagi, Witter went on to Purvis Bay at Florida Island.

On 25 April, Witter departed the southern Solomons in company with the Task Unit (TU) 34.9.6, bound for Cape Gloucester on the island of New Britain in the Bismarck Archipelago. She arrived in Borgen Bay near Cape Gloucester on 28 April and remained until 1 May when she accompanied TU 34.9.6 to the Russell Islands subgroup of the Solomons. She arrived in the Russells on 3 May but departed that same day for her primary theater of operations for the next 10 weeks, the island of New Guinea. On 5 May, she entered Milne Bay at the southeastern tip of New Guinea. By the time Witter reached that port, American forces had already made almost simultaneous landings at Aitape, Tanahmarah Bay and Humboldt Bay, in actions known collectively as the Hollandia operation. Thus, for the next several weeks, *Witter* drew duty escorting resupply and reinforcement convoys to the three landing areas, making stops at such intermediary places as Cape Cretin and Cape Sudest. After the 17 May assault on the Toem-Wakde-Sarmi area located a little farther up the northern coast of New Guinea, she added that region to her itinerary. At the end of the first week in July, Biak Island—located off the northern coast of New Guinea, opposite the large bay which separates the Vogelkop from the rest of the island—came within Witter's sphere of operations.

In mid-month, however, the destroyer escort left New Guinea for a new field of endeavor, the northern Solomons. She departed Humboldt Bay on 15 July and, after a brief stop at Cape Cretin, arrived in the northern Solomons at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, on the 18th. On the 20th, she departed Empress Augusta Bay and, that same afternoon, arrived in the Treasury Islands subgroup. For almost three weeks, she remained in the vicinity of Blanche Harbor in the Treasuries, conducting antiair and antisubmarine warfare exercises.

Between 9 and 12 August, she voyaged back to New Guinea, stopping at Finschhafen and Langemak Bay before returning to Blanche Harbor on the 12th and resuming her exercise schedule in the Treasuries. On 21 August, she began a move farther north in the Solomons, arriving in the Green Islands subgroup that same day. Three days later, she moved on again, this time to Manus in the Admiralty Islands where she stopped overnight on the 26th and 27th. On the latter day, the

warship made the brief voyage from Manus to Emirau Island. She remained there for almost a month, putting to sea only once during that period— between 19 and 22 September— to rescue the crew of a downed PJB (the navy version of the Army's B-25 Mitchell bomber).

After returning the rescued aircrewmembers to Emirau on the 22nd, she returned to sea that same day on her way back to Manus. From there, she continued her voyage toward Milne Bay on 24 September. On the 26th, she paused near Porlock and Cape Nelson to help SS Richard H. Dana, aground on Curtis Reef. While her boats assisted in the transfer of Army troops from the merchantmen to Stratford (AP - 41), Witter patrolled to seaward to protect against possible enemy submarine attack. On the 27th, she resumed her voyage and arrived in Milne Bay that same day.

Between 29 September and 6 October, Witter made a roundabout voyage from Milne Bay via Treasuries and back to New Guinea at Humboldt Bay. At Humboldt Bay, she reported for duty to TU 77.7.1 for the Leyte operation. Her task unit, a part of the 7th Fleet Service Force, departed Humboldt Bay on 12 October to take up replenishment station at sea some 180 miles west of the already-invested Palau Islands. At mid-month, the oilers she escorted refueled the Leyte invasion force at sea and, on the 18th, headed for anchorage at Kossol Passage in the Palaus. After 2 days in the Palaus, Witter and her charges got underway to join the main force in Leyte Gulf. They arrived in the gulf three days after the 20 October assault.

The warship's visit to Leyte proved to be lively. Air attacks by the Japanese abounded. During one attack in the early evening of the 24th, a Japanese torpedo bomber started a run on Witter from almost dead ahead while she was maneuvering to change anchorages just south of Samar Island. Though he appeared to be hit by her 20 - millimeter fire, the plane traversed her entire length to starboard and finally burst into flames some 300 to 400 yards astern.

The air attacks continued intermittently the following day, and Witter observed many bogeys and picked up others on her radar but contributed no more downed aircraft to the American tally. For the remainder of her stay in Leyte Gulf, Witter and the oilers she screened continued underway to avoid numerous air attacks and conduct refueling operations.

On the 27th, she escorted the unit out of Leyte Gulf en route to a position about 120 miles east of Leyte. Sporadic air attacks continued but diminished as Leyte receded astern. On the 28th, her charges began refueling TG 77.4 and, just before noon the following day, completed those operations and set course for Kossol Passage. They arrived in the Palaus late on 31 October but, after the oilers refueled that night and the following morning, headed back to Leyte early in the afternoon of 1 November. On the 3rd, however, they reversed course on orders and reentered Kossol Passage the following day. The stay proved brief. She and her charges set sail again that evening and arrived in San Pedro Bay, Leyte on the 7th. She remained there— harassed by alerts but not by attacks— until the 11th when she departed, escorting her precious oilers. On 14 November, Witter and her charges arrived back in Humboldt Bay.

She was anchored in Humboldt Bay until 2 December when she got underway in the escort of a convoy bound for Seeadler harbor at Manus. Witter and her charges entered the harbor the following day, and the destroyer escort remained there until mid-month, conducting tactical exercises in the vicinity until her departure. Between the 15th and the 23rd, she made a round trip voyage from Manus to Ulithi and back. Following an availability and more exercises at Manus during the last week of 1944 and the first week of 1945, she repeated her voyage to Ulithi and

back between 6 and 14 January 1945. Another such run late in the month was followed by an availability at Manus which included a period in dry dock. During February, she made two voyages from Manus, one to Majuro between 5 and 20 February and the other to Humboldt Bay between the 21st and the 23rd.

On 28 February, Witter stood out of Seeadler Harbor bound for the Central Pacific. Steaming first to Ulithi, where she joined a convoy headed for the Marianas, the warship arrived at Guam on 7 March. After three days of patrols around Guam and Saipan, she departed the Marianas to return to Ulithi to prepare for the invasion of Okinawa. The destroyer escort entered the lagoon at Ulithi on the 11th and spent the next 10 days patrolling the anchorage and its entrances. On 21 March, she stood out of Ulithi with Task Force (TF) 54, bound for the Ryukyu Islands and the last great amphibious operation of World War II. On the 25th, she rendezvoused with a minesweeping unit about six miles south of Okinawa and began screening it as well as the heavy units of Admiral Oldendorf's bombardment group while both performed their preliminary functions.

For the next 12 days, Witter performed her antisubmarine screening duties for various units of the fleet off Okinawa. Though subjected to intermittent air attack and forced to witness several suicide attacks, she escaped unscathed until 6 April. Her primary duty throughout the period remained antisubmarine patrols at various points around the island of Okinawa. During that time, she made several sonar contacts but made no depth charge attacks.

At about 1611 on the afternoon of 6 April, while off the southeastern coast of Okinawa, she sighted two enemy aircraft about eight miles distant approaching her from the south-southwest. The warship went to general quarters, rang up 23 knots, and began radical maneuvers to evade them. Within five minutes, both Japanese planes showed smoke, evidence of hits registered by her guns. One of the intruders splashed into the sea, but his colleague pressed home his own attack and crashed into Witter at the waterline on the starboard side at frame number 57. His bomb exploded in the number 1 fireroom, opening that and several other compartments to the sea.

Witter lost control briefly but restored it again almost as quickly. Damage control took the situation well in hand, and soon Witter was proceeding under her own power at 10 knots. With the assistance of Morris (DD-417), Richard P. Leary (DD-664), Gregory (DD-802) and Arikara (ATF-98), the destroyer escort limped toward Kerama Retto. Morris left the formation at 1715 and, at 1819, also suffered a suicide crash. Richard P. Leary then also dropped out of the group to assist Morris while Arikara and Gregory continued on with Witter. The little flotilla entered the anchorage at Kerama Retto at a little after 2130 and Arikara towed the damaged destroyer escort to a waiting berth.

Witter remained at Kerama Retto until late June, undergoing temporary repairs and dodging sporadic air attacks by constantly shifting from anchorage to anchorage—a process which slowed repairs considerably. Finally, on 25 June, she appeared seaworthy enough to attempt the voyage home and departed Ryukyu Islands. Steaming by way of Saipan, Eniwetok and Pearl Harbor, she arrived in San Diego, California on 24 July. Two days later, she resumed her travels and headed, by way of the Panama Canal, for the east coast of the United States. The warship arrived in the Philadelphia Navy Yard on 16 August, shortly following the cessation of hostilities. She immediately began permanent repairs and conversion to a fast transport, which

she had been so designated the day before her arrival. The end of the war, however, brought a quick halt to her conversion. On 22 August, the work, hardly begun, was ordered stopped. She was assigned to the Atlantic Reserve Fleet at Philadelphia on 1 September and was decommissioned there on 22 October 1945. Her name was struck from the Navy list on 16 November 1945, and — almost 13 months later on 2 December 1946 — her hulk was sold to the Northern Metals Co., of Philadelphia.

Witter earned two battle stars during World War II. _____

The preceding was transcribed and formatted for HTML by Patrick Clancey, HyperWar Foundation.

JACK ABOFF QM 3/c

Jack Sets the Stage



Jack had been mulling over the possibility of organizing a book about the Witter for several years. As Witter Whaleboat editor and publisher, he had sent out a call for materials in the late 90's and he was looking forward to creating a ship's story that would be tangible evidence of the crew's presence in World War Two. Our best laid plans, however, don't always agree with what the Good Lord has in mind, and thus, Jack was taken from this world before he could see his project completed. This memoir, written by Jack, tells the reader about his source of inspiration and it gives us a hint of the enthusiasm he was bringing to the project when he died. Ed.

This book was written and produced so that future generations of our families (or friends) will know what we, the CREW of the U. S. S. Witter DE - 636 did to help America defeat the Japanese in World War II. By way of history, by 1941, the aggressive, militaristic Japanese army had conquered vast parts of China and Southeast Asia. In their conquests, they were very cruel and brutal to the people they subjugated. The United States, Great Britain and others set up an oil embargo and froze Japanese assets in an attempt to stop the carnage. This angered the Japanese who were bent on conquering and controlling all the countries in their part of the world.

During the later 30's, Japan was doing pretty much in Asia what Germany was doing in Europe. In fact, they were allied together. When America and her allies cut off Japan's oil supplies, the Japanese were very angry. The result was that both sides began moving toward a bloody conflict in the Pacific. Finally, on Sunday, December 7, 1941, that historic "day of infamy", the Japanese navy made a sneak attack on Pearl harbor in Hawaii. Pearl was the site of our huge naval base. The Japanese came with a huge armada of aircraft carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, and they practically destroyed the entire United States Navy fleet. They also destroyed most of our combat planes. Lucky for us, none of America's aircraft carriers were in port on December 7th. They were about 200 miles away from Pearly Harbor on a voyage to Wake Island. When America declared war on Japan, our Congress enacted a law which called for the drafting of men 18 to 35 years of age into military service. Most of the men who were drafted went into the army.

The U. S. Navy and the Marine Corps received most of their men through volunteers who avoided the draft by enlisting in these branches of service at the local recruiting office. The majority of us who "joined up" were just graduating from high school. Most of us had never been to sea or had any idea of what navy life was all about. We were Civilians!

Our first step was to go to "Boot Camp" for six weeks where we received our shots and

our uniforms. We also received training, discipline and physical "shaping up." After that, some of us were sent to a Service School to receive special training for jobs we would have on board ship. We learned to be gunner's mates, engineers, radio men and quartermasters. Those of us who did not go to service school were assigned to a ship as a seaman to be trained on-the-job, as it were.

Toward the end of 1943, the entire crew which was gathered from all around the country, about 225 of us, left for San Francisco, California. There we met up with our "home" for the next few years, the U. S. S. Witter DE - 636. Our ship had been built by the Bethlehem Steel Company in San Francisco. On December 29, 1943, our ship was officially commissioned and we became another combat (escort) ship in the U. S. Navy.

Soon afterwards, we began a series of shakedown cruises. These events put the ship, and the crew, through all kinds of rough tests to be sure that we were ready and fit to go to war. We were drilled.... and drilled.... and drilled night and day so that we would be ready to "fight the ship" with just a few moments notice. We really became quite efficient. In February 1944, we underwent a series of "post shakedown" repairs which made us 100% ship shape. And then, on March 8, 1944, we left San Francisco for Pearl Harbor---- and for World War II.



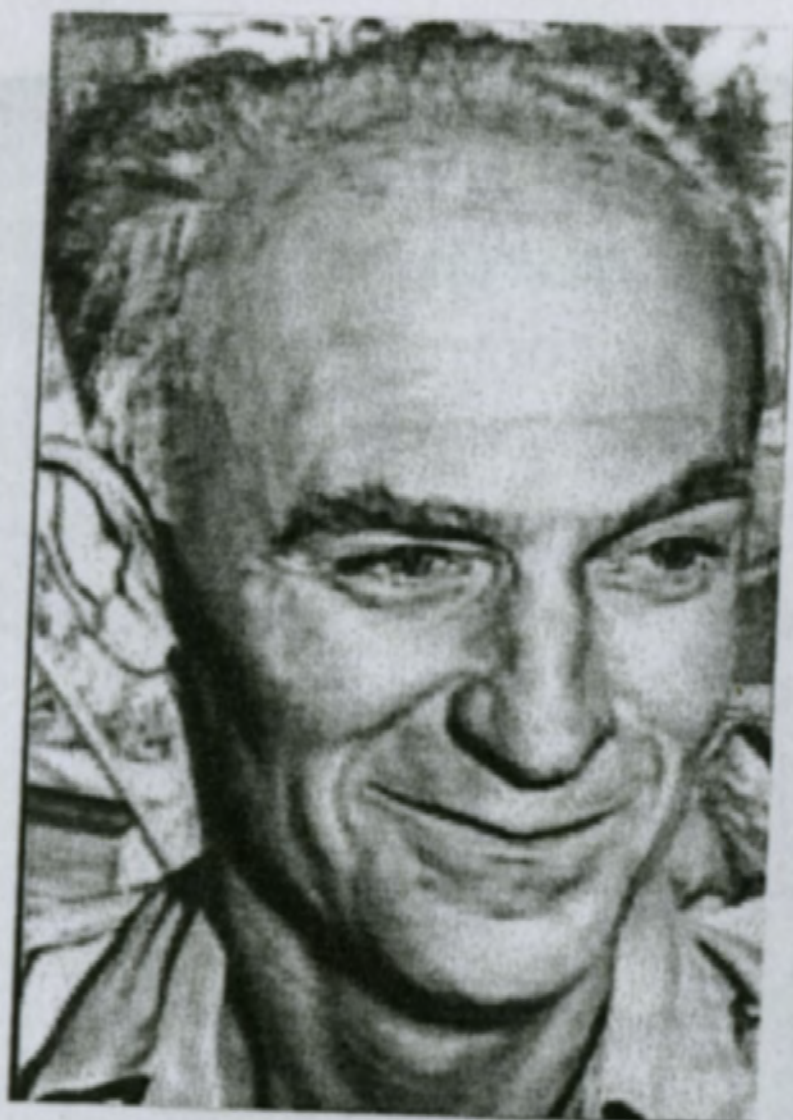
Joan and Jack Aboff

SHORT CRUISE ON A DESTROYER ESCORT

by

ERNIE PYLE

1900 - 1945



**Ernie Pyle was a WW II correspondent who by 1944, had established himself as one of the world's outstanding reporters. Time magazine hailed him as "America's most widely read war correspondent." He was born in 1900 in the Midwest and spent much of the war years in Europe and Africa. In 1945 Pyle was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for journalism. Later that year he went with the US troops to Okinawa. On 17 April 1945, Ernie Pyle was killed by a Japanese sniper while on a routine patrol. The following story which is credited to Pyle was submitted by a Witter crew member. Pyle's experience aboard a DE should bring back memories to all DE sailors who read it.*

In the Western Pacific - So now I'm a DE sailor. Full-fledged one. Drenched from head to toe with salt water. Sleep with a leg crooked around your rack so you so you won't fall out. Put wet bread under your dinner tray to keep it from sliding. Even got my Jesus shoes ordered.

And you don't know what a DE sailor is? You don't know the DE Navy? Better not let one of them hear you say that! They're 50,000 strong out here, and they pride themselves on their rough life at sea. So better be careful.

A DE, my friends, is a destroyer escort. It's a baby destroyer. It's the American version of the British Corvette.

It is the answer to the problem of colossal amounts of convoying: amounts so large that we simply can't take time to build full-fledged destroyers to escort them all. The DE was the result. It is a wartime ship, and it has done valiantly.

They are rough and tumble little ships. Their after decks are laden with depth charges. They can turn in half the space of destroyers. Their forward guns are almost never used because the waves are breaking over them. They roll and plunge. They buck and twist. They shudder and shake and then fall through space. Their sailors say that they should have flight pay and sub pay both. They're in the air half the time and under water half the time. Their men are accustomed to being wet and think nothing of it.

I came back from the northern waters on a DE. When a wave comes over and you get soaked and a sailor laughs and says, "Now you're a DE sailor," it makes you feel kind of proud. And I did not get seasick. I better have my stomach examined. My ship formed part of the escort of a tiny convoy returning to a southern base island for more planes and supplies, to be hurried back north into battle. We mothered ships that were big and slow. We were tiny in comparison. We ran way out ahead and to the side. We, and others like us, formed the screen, and there was nothing bigger than us in it. We felt like strutting. We felt like the little boy of the plains left at

home for the first time to protect his mother from the Indians - the only man in the place.

A DE carries more than 180 men and a dozen officers. That's small enough to know personally almost everybody else on board. Sailors always seem to be proud of their DE. So proud that they often get in a fight with crews from other DEs if they go ashore together. At some of our island anchorages, the Navy has set up island recreation centers, where a man can go ashore for a few hours and play, beef and drink a few cans of beer. It's really a pitiful excuse for shore leave: but it's all there can be. Well, on these recreation islands, they never let the crew of a big carrier anchor along side the crew of another one. They invariably get into a fight.

It seems we were tied up against another DE at some anchorage: they let parts of the crews of both ships go ashore together. The usual fight got started over there. They fought all afternoon on shore. Then they fought each other in the small boat as they were coming back. And, when they got aboard their respective ships, they continued fighting, reaching across the rails to smack each other, just like pirates of old. The boys howl with laughter when they tell you about it.

And since then, no two DEs of this same division ever go ashore together or even tie up to each other. That certainly could be called "pride in your ship" couldn't it?

I'm glad that this method of rivalry had been watered down before I came aboard, for I don't suppose there's anybody in the DE Navy small enough for me to fight with distinction either to myself or my ship.

**Taken from www.spartacus.schoolnet.uk/2WW/pyle.htm*

Commander, USNR,
Commanding.

P.C. Donahoe

Ensign, USNR

Ensign, USNR

Ensign, USNR

Ensign, USNR

Ensign, USNR

At first glance, the next few pages appear to be just what they actually are: a letter of thanks followed by the signature of every man who was aboard the USS Witter DE 636 on April 22nd 1944.

Take another look. Now, as you look at each individual name, signed over 60 years ago by men who were young,— who were boys,— really— and who had their lives ahead of them,--- imagine the hopes and dreams each one had for his future. Imagine the patriotism, the love of country and the search for adventure that prompted these young men to join the Navy.

Many have died since signing that letter. Yet, these signatures have now become permanent testimony to the participation of Witter men in World War II.

U. S. S. WITTER (DE-636)

c/o Fleet Post Office,
San Francisco, California,
22 April 1944.

Mr. and Mrs. Jean C. Witter,
52 Glen Alpine Road,
Piedmont, California.

My dear Mr. and Mrs. Witter:

The record player which you so thoughtfully provided for the ship has been doing yeoman service. It is in constant use and gives much pleasure to us all.

I take this opportunity to express my personal appreciation, and to assure you that your selection of a gift for the ship could not possibly have been improved. The officers and crew have requested that they be permitted to express their appreciation individually by adding their signatures to this letter.

I am happy to report that the ship stands ready for any eventuality, and it is the earnest desire of every officer and man on board that in any action against the enemy in which the WITTER may be privileged to participate, she will acquit herself in accordance with the highest traditions of the naval service and in a manner which will do credit to the name she bears.

Cordially yours,

A. C. Davis
Alfred C. Davis,
Commander, USNR,
Commanding.

G. Herrmann
G. Herrmann, Lieutenant USNR
Executive Officer

R. D. Bash
R. D. Bash, Lieutenant USNR
Cunnery Officer

K. C. Johnson
K. C. Johnson, Lieutenant (jg) USNR
Communication Officer

R. T. Swengel
R. T. Swengel, Ensign USNR
Stores and Commissary Officer

H. C. Griswold
H. C. Griswold, Ensign USNR
Ass't Cunnery Officer

P. C. Danforth
P. C. Danforth, Lieutenant USNR
First Lieutenant

E. R. McClain
E. R. McClain, Lieutenant (jg) USN
Engineering Officer

N. D. Ance
N. D. Ance, Ensign USNR
A.S.T. Officer

B. R. Maczkowski
B. R. Maczkowski, Ensign USNR
Ass't Engineering Officer

F. E. Adams
F. E. Adams, Ensign USNR
Ass't First Lieutenant

U. S. S. WITTER (DE-636)

L.G. Freas
L.G. Freas
Chief Boatswain's Mate USN

M. Meier
M. Meier
Chief Machinist's Mate USN

C.R. Campbell
C.R. Campbell
Chief Machinist's Mate USN

E. Zimmerman
E. Zimmerman
Chief Watertender USN

C.E. Moomey
C.E. Moomey
Chief Pharmacist's Mate USN

A.H. Caswell
A.H. Caswell
Quartermaster First Class USNR

S.K. Day
S.K. Day
Radioman First Class USN

W.J. Collins
W.J. Collins
Carpenter's Mate First Class USN

H. Crum
H. Crum
Metalsmith First Class USNR

J.G. Nickell
J.G. Nickell
Machinist's Mate First Class USN

J.C. Poller, Jr.
J.C. Poller, Jr.
Machinist's Mate First Class USNR

N.F. Walters
N.F. Walters
Machinist's Mate First Class USNR

E.A. Cooke
E.A. Cooke
Electrician's Mate First Class USN

A.A. Johnston
A.A. Johnston
Watertender First Class USN

A.H. Wonderley
A.H. Wonderley
Watertender First Class USN

M.H. Vinson
M.H. Vinson
Ship's Cook First Class USN

R.S. Rennie
R.S. Rennie
Boatswain's Mate Second Class USNR

M.D. Whetman
M.D. Whetman
Gunner's Mate Second Class USNR

F.W. Combs
F.W. Combs
Chief Torpedoman USN

H.C. Wright
H. Wright
Chief Machinist's Mate USN

J. Beauparlant
J. Beauparlant
Chief Electrician's Mate USNR

J.M. Pisias
J.M. Pisias
Chief Storekeeper USN

L.M. Aulgur
L.M. Aulgur
Gunner's Mate First Class USN

A.L. Lidstrom
A.L. Lidstrom
Signalman First Class USN

W.W. Brawn
W.W. Brawn
Radio Technician First Class USNR

D.J. Short
D.J. Short
Shipfitter First Class USNR

C.C. Gaetano
C.C. Gaetano
Machinist's Mate First Class USNR

W.F. Pask
W.F. Pask
Machinist's Mate First Class USN

E.E. Richter
E.E. Richter
Machinist's Mate First Class USNR

H.A. Carroll
H.A. Carroll
Electrician's Mate First Class USNR

A.L. David
A.L. David
Electrician's Mate First Class USNR

R.D. Hayes
R.D. Hayes
Electrician's Mate First Class USNR

E.C. Epham III
E.C. Epham III
Yeoman First Class USN

J.D. Huddle
J.D. Huddle
Boatswain's Mate second Class USN

E.W. Russell
E.W. Russell
Boatswain's Mate Second Class USNR

A.J. Amtmann
A.J. Amtmann
Torpedoman Second Class USNR

U. S. S. WITTER (DE-636)

H.T. Paschane

H.T. Paschane
Firecontrolman Second Class USNR

R.G. Carney

R.G. Carney
Radioman Second Class USNR

D.I. Lunge

D.I. Lunge
Machinist's Mate Second Class USNR

J.F. Conrad

J.F. Conrad
Electrician's Mate Second Class USNR

K.L. Warriner

K.L. Warriner
Watertender Second Class USNR

W.E. Petersen

W.E. Petersen
Yeoman Second Class USNR

F.T. Silance

F.T. Silance
Yeoman Second Class USNR

B.J. Rothschild

B.J. Rothschild
Pharmacist's Mate Second Class USNR

L.A. Ware

L.A. Ware
Ship's Cook Second Class USNR

C.L. Danford

C.L. Danford
Coxswain USNR

F.J. Pribanic

F.J. Pribanic
Gunner's Mate Third Class USNR

J.A. Williams

J.A. Williams
Gunner's Mate Third Class USNR

J.H. Seville

J.H. Seville
Torpedoman Third Class USNR

W.L. Bradley

W.L. Bradley
Quartermaster Third Class USNR

K.A. Howard

K.A. Howard
Signalman Third Class USNR

I. Mervish

I. Mervish
Signalman Third Class USNR

E.B. Nolley

E.B. Nolley
Radioman Third Class USNR

J.T. Caskey

J.T. Caskey
Radarman Third Class USNR

J.H. Bradford

J.H. Bradford
Radioman Second Class USNR

R.W. Nelson

R.W. Nelson
Soundman Second Class USNR

N.E. Marshall

N.E. Marshall
Machinist's Mate Second Class USNR

R.E. Fanny Jr.

R.E. Fanny Jr.
Electrician's Mate Second Class USNR

J.J. Venckus

J.J. Venckus
Electrician's Mate Second Class USNR

A.G. Schwartz

A.G. Schwartz
Yeoman Second Class USNR

A.M. Olem

A.M. Olem
Storekeeper Second Class USNR

R.L. Scheurman

R.L. Scheurman
Ship's Cook Second Class USNR

E.T. Wuest

E.T. Wuest
Baker Second Class USNR

C.F. Fair

C.F. Fair
Coxswain USNR

D.L. Gorham

D.L. Gorham
Gunner's Mate Third Class USNR

R.R. Gelinas

R.R. Gelinas
Torpedoman Third Class USNR

J. Aboff

J. Aboff
Quartermaster Third Class USNR

E.L. Davis

E.L. Davis
Quartermaster Third Class USNR

H. Good

H. Good
Quartermaster Third Class USNR

C.P. Brennan

C.P. Brennan
Radioman Third Class USNR

C.A. Walters

C.A. Walters
Radioman Third Class USNR

A.V. Goodpasture Jr.

A.V. Goodpasture Jr.
Radarman Third Class USNR

U. S. S. WITTER (DE-636)

J.O. Murphree
J.O. Murphree
Radarman Third Class USNR

N.P. West
N.P. West
Radarman Third Class USNR

R.A. Broshears
R.A. Broshears
Soundman Third Class USNR

S. Koenigsberg
S. Koenigsberg
Soundman Third Class USNR

F. De Liza
F. De Liza
Machinist's Mate Third Class USNR

H.L. Metz
H.L. Metz
Machinist's Mate Third Class USNR

E.K. Asbeck
E.K. Asbeck
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

C. Evaska
C. Evaska
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

J.K. McAnamy
J.K. McAnamy
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

D. Taormina
D. Taormina
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

G.D. Grohnke
G.D. Grohnke
Watertender Third Class USNR

W.H. McCracken
W.H. McCracken
Watertender Third Class USNR

H.E. Johnson
H.E. Johnson
Storekeeper Third Class USNR

J.A. Johnson
J.A. Johnson
Cook Third Class USNR

A. Brooke
A. Brooke
Seaman First Class USNR

B. Di Florio
B. Di Florio
Seaman First Class USNR

P.T. Guin
P.T. Guin
Seaman First Class USNR

B.F. Powers
B.F. Powers
Seaman First Class USNR

D.J. Byland
F.J. Byland
Seaman First Class USNR

C.W. Downey
C.W. Downey
Seaman First Class USNR

J.P. Lewis
J.P. Lewis
Seaman First Class USNR

D.H. Pressley
D.H. Pressley
Seaman First Class USNR

D.P. Planche
D.P. Planche
Radarman Third Class USNR

O.L. Bordine
O.L. Bordine
Soundman Third Class USNR

J.O. Jacobs
J.O. Jacobs
Soundman Third Class USNR

K.W. Krukow
K.W. Krukow
Soundman Third Class USNR

F.H. Diel
F.H. Diel
Machinist's Mate Third Class USNR

D.M. Thorne
D.M. Thorne
Machinist's Mate Third Class USNR

D.E. Bainter
D.E. Bainter
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

K.J. Long
K.J. Long
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

F.E. Murray
F.E. Murray
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

R.M. Wagner
R.M. Wagner
Electrician's Mate Third Class USNR

W.H. McCracken
W.H. McCracken
Watertender Third Class USNR

F.J. Ogrodnik
F.J. Ogrodnik
Watertender Third Class USNR

E. Davis
E. Davis
Steward Third Class USNR

G.G. Braswell
G.G. Braswell
Seaman First Class USNR

P.J. Criniti
P.J. Criniti
Seaman First Class USNR

S.D. Fanelli
S.D. Fanelli
Seaman First Class USNR

M. J. B. Newbill
M. J. B. Newbill
Seaman First Class USNR

P.A. Ruesseger
P.A. Ruesseger
Seaman First Class USNR

U. S. S. WITTER (DE-636)

J.R. Spitsen

J.R. Spitsen

Seaman First Class USNR

J.A. Wheeler

J.A. Wheeler

Seaman First Class USNR

H.F. Kelleher

H.F. Kelleher

Seaman First Class USNR

R.G. Linsmeyer

R.G. Linsmeyer

Seaman First Class USNR

V.L. Hagstrom

V.L. Hagstrom

Fireman First Class USNR

P.H. Kleinman

P.H. Kleinman

Fireman First Class USNR

J. Negru

J. Negru

Fireman First Class USNR

A.D. Shumway

A.D. Shumway

Fireman First Class USNR

L.V. Fritz

L.V. Fritz

Fireman First Class USNR

W.S. Chociej

W.S. Chociej

Fireman First Class USNR

K.G. Marquette

K.G. Marquette

Fireman First Class USNR

A.J. Fedorowicz

A.J. Fedorowicz

Fireman Second Class USNR

E.W. Barnes

E.W. Barnes

Seaman Second Class USNR

F.A. Brown

F.A. Brown

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.A. Corn

C.A. Corn

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.A. Daniels Jr.

C.A. Daniels Jr.

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.C. Driggers

J.C. Driggers

Seaman Second Class USNR

L. Early

L. Early

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.S. Stiffler

C.S. Stiffler

Seaman First Class USNR

J.F. Yanesh

J.F. Yanesh

Seaman First Class USNR

T.F. Zebro

T.F. Zebro

Seaman First Class USNR

R.L. Morrhead

R.L. Morrhead

Seaman First Class USNR

D.P. Hill

D.P. Hill

Fireman First Class USNR

V. LaSelva

V. LaSelva

Fireman First Class USNR

D.L. Pancoast

D.L. Pancoast

Fireman First Class USNR

D.R. Teague

D.R. Teague

Fireman First Class USNR

C.F. Ritchey

C.F. Ritchey

Fireman First Class USNR

M. Battilo

M. Battilo

Fireman First Class USNR

P.J. Quarrella Jr.

P.J. Quarrella Jr.

Fireman First Class USNR

V.R. Schmitz

V.R. Schmitz

Fireman Second Class USNR

R.T. Blake

R.T. Blake

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.H. Brown

J.H. Brown

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.C. Crayton

J.C. Crayton

Seaman Second Class USNR

D.C. Dillsaver

D.C. Dillsaver

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.L. Duckworth

C.L. Duckworth

Seaman Second Class USNR

L.H. Foster Jr.

L.H. Foster Jr.

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.V. Thompson

C.V. Thompson

Seaman First Class USNR

R.C. Cunningham

R.C. Cunningham

Seaman First Class USNR

D.J. Guimette

D.J. Guimette

Seaman First Class USNR

G.F. Croner

G.F. Croner

Fireman First Class USNR

L.F. Keeker

L.F. Keeker

Fireman First Class USNR

R.S. Blair

R.S. Blair

Fireman First Class USNR

H.W. Peterson

H.W. Peterson

Fireman First Class USNR

H.F. Thole

H.F. Thole

Fireman First Class USNR

F.L. Brunk

F.L. Brunk

Fireman First Class USNR

F.L. Dooley

F.L. Dooley

Fireman First Class USNR

R.M. Barend

R.M. Barend

Fireman Second Class USNR

C.J. Baker

C.J. Baker

Seaman Second Class USNR

R.E. Brazzell

R.E. Brazzell

Seaman Second Class USNR

M.M. Chilcoat

M.M. Chilcoat

Seaman Second Class USNR

F.E. Dale

F.E. Dale

Seaman Second Class USNR

L. Dowdy

L. Dowdy

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.E. Duval

J.E. Duval

Seaman Second Class USNR

S.A. Foster

S.A. Foster

Seaman Second Class USNR

U. S. S. WITTER (DE-636)

J.C. Fuller

F.C. Fuller

Seaman Second Class USNR

A.E. Grimm

G.E. Grimm

Seaman Second Class USNR

S. Hurley

S. Hurley

Seaman Second Class USNR

G.M. McDonough

G.M. McDonough

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.R. Osborne Jr.

J.R. Osborne Jr.

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.V. Rodolico

J.V. Rodolico

Seaman Second Class USNR

E.J. Sanovich

E.J. Sanovich

Seaman Second Class USNR

J. Spellman

J. Spellman

Seaman Second Class USNR

G.I. Storez

G.I. Storez

Seaman Second Class USNR

R.E. Wells

R.E. Wells

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.T. Wilson

J.T. Wilson

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.J. Schneiderman

J.J. Schneiderman

Fireman Second Class USNR

H. Brown

H. Brown

Steward's Mate First Class USNR

G.H. Futch

G.H. Futch

Seaman Second Class USNR

F.E. Haire

F.E. Haire

Seaman Second Class USNR

A.D. King

A.D. King

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.O. Mendenhall

C.O. Mendenhall

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.C. Page

J.C. Page

Seaman Second Class USNR

H.H. Ross

H.H. Ross

Seaman Second Class USNR

A.F. Scala

A.F. Scala

Seaman Second Class USNR

S.J. Stabile

S.J. Stabile

Seaman Second Class USNR

C. Street

C. Street

Seaman Second Class USNR

G.E. Williams

G.E. Williams

Seaman Second Class USNR

R.L. Woolard

R.L. Woolard

Seaman Second Class USNR

E. "B" Graham

E. "B" Graham

Seaman Second Class USNR

B.G. Herin

B.G. Herin

Seaman Second Class USNR

L.R. Lathrop

L.R. Lathrop

Seaman Second Class USNR

T.W. Norman

T.W. Norman

Seaman Second Class USNR

J.G. Raptis

J.G. Raptis

Seaman Second Class USNR

W. Russell

W. Russell

Seaman Second Class USNR

C.E. Smith

C.E. Smith

Seaman Second Class USNR

G.L. Stephens Jr.

G.L. Stephens Jr.

Seaman Second Class USNR

E.P. Walsh

E.P. Walsh

Seaman Second Class USNR

H.B. Wilson

H.B. Wilson

Seaman Second Class USNR

D.M. Worden

D.M. Worden

Seaman Second Class USNR

J. Shock

J. Shock

Fireman Second Class USNR

J. Richardson Jr.

J. Richardson Jr.

Steward's Mate First Class USNR

J.T. Wilson

J.T. Wilson

Steward's Mate First Class USNR

LIEUTENANT GEORGE HERRMANN
sends a letter to

Jean C. Witter

29 October 1944

Dear Mr. Witter,



I wish to take this opportunity to say hello, and pass on a few items of mutual interest.

Late in July, I relieved Commander Davis of command. By this time, you have probably had several long talks with him, and know just about what we have been doing. Things have picked up of late, and at this point, there is no rest for anyone.

I know you will be interested to hear that, wherever we go, no matter how small the harbor, there is always someone from the Commander of the Naval Base to a Seaman Second Class who knew your son, Jean. They all have a personal interest in our ship and wish us well. All hands aboard feel it an honor to serve on a ship named after such a fine and worthy young man.

After eleven months at sea, our crew, mostly young men from land locked states, are now seasoned sailors, and are doing a fine job.

Davis, one of our quartermasters, and a former employee of your firm, has done an excellent job. He has a fine spirit, and his attitude about everything he does makes operating out here much easier.

Please extend my greetings to Mrs Witter, Nancy and Bob.

Sincerely yours,

George Herrmann

U. S. S. Witter (DE-636)



Ann and Tim Herrmann

THE WITTER CREW RESCUES THE MARINES IN SEPTEMBER 1944

They Meet Again Fifty - Three Years Later at the

USS WITTER DE 636 - Reunion # Nine

in Nashville, Tennessee

The notion to find the four Marines rescued by the Witter crew back in 1944 was the idea of Dick Williams, formerly GM2c. This effort took several years of searching through letters and making numerous telephone calls. In October 1997, Dick located Bob Kleckner, the co-pilot, and shortly afterwards he found Ed Hemingway, the radioman/gunner of the downed plane. The other two survivors could not be found.

The search and rescue of four U. S. Marine airmen in World War II is a story you might see in a Hollywood movie, or read as a short story in the Reader's Digest. The final chapter of the story was revealed 53 years after the dramatic event, when two of the survivors told their side of the story at the Witter Reunion in Nashville in 1997. Back in 1944, when they were rescued, they were in pretty bad shape and couldn't give too many details about their ordeal. At the reunion, however, things were different. Bob Kleckner and Ed Hemingway shared with us their "their side of the story." Here is that story.

Ed Hemingway



Bob Kleckner

On September 17, 1944, the U.S.S. Witter was anchored in Hamburg Bay, Emirau Bay in the Western Pacific Ocean. The Witter was the designated "ready ship" ---- on 24 hour standby to respond to any sub-sighting or to search for survivors of any downed plane within the area of surveillance. Emirau Island was also the home base for Marine Bombing Squadron #443 (First Marine Air Wing) which consisted of about 20 PJB twin engine bombers, the Navy version of the Army's B25. These planes had a crew of six. PJB Bomber #302 were manned by the following officers and enlisted men: 1st LT. John L. Braden (Pilot); 1st LT. Robert K. Kleckner (Co-Pilot); Master Tech. Sgt. Gerald L. Griffin (Navigator); Staff Sgt. Edwin P. Hemingway (Radioman/Gunner); Sgt. Robert J. Talamine (Gunner) and Sgt. Monroe J. Wall (Gunner).

On September 18, 1944 a U. S. Navy patrol plane spotted an enemy convoy of 5 ships heading for Truk Island. Exact location of the enemy convoy was radioed to headquarters. They, in turn, assigned Marine Bomber Squadron #443 to attack those ships. The 10 plane squadron located the enemy ships, and proceeded to strafe and bomb them. Taking two turns, they sank one ship and damaged several others. During the attack, the squadron was under heavy anti-aircraft fire and on the second run PBJ #302 was hit. The starboard engine fuel line was shot off and gasoline was leaking into the fuselage. With only one engine operating, they left the formation and attempted to gain altitude so as to leave enemy territory and return to base. Unfortunately, there was no "wing man" which was a buddy system whereby another plane would stay with the damaged plane to see if the crew parachuted out or ditched into the ocean. The wing-man would then give the exact location to rescue operations. In trying to gain altitude, the pilot told the crew to lighten the plane — to throw out every unnecessary thing— and to do it fast. Unfortunately, one of the 6 parachutes hanging on the wall was knocked down and it popped open. This left just 5 chutes for the six man crew. The pilot then announced that he planned to ditch the plane. Wearing their life jackets, the crew braced themselves for the impact. The pilot reminded Ed Hemingway that as soon as the plane had settled in the water, he was to pull the handle in the overhead which would eject the six man life raft. This raft contained all the emergency supplies. Ed acknowledged the order, and suddenly... S-M-A-S-H... they hit the water with a bang. Ed opened the overhead panel but it was impossible to pull the life raft ejection handle because the entire overhead was ablaze with fire. Two crew members in the front of the plane were killed. They were the pilot, John Braden and the navigator, Gerald Griffin. Bob Kleckner, also in front, was seriously wounded. He grabbed the seat that he had been sitting on which converted into a one man raft. In his dazed condition he was somehow thrown out of the plane. To this day he still doesn't remember how this happened. He was revived by the cold water.

It was now growing dark. The two gunners in the rear of the plane, Talamine and Wall, also managed to find a one man life raft and they also left the plane which was now quickly filling with sea water. Ed Hemingway, who was seated at the radio station in the rear of the plane, had a big problem. When the plane hit the water, he was thrown forward against the bulkhead, imprisoning his right leg. He was unable to move or get out of his seat, and the water continued to rise. He tried to unlace his trapped right boot, hoping to pull his foot out, but no luck! There was a knot in the laces. Ed remembers yelling at the top of his lungs something like, "YOU'RE NOT GOING TO KILL ME!!" While he was shouting, he placed both hands under his right knee and pulled with all his might, freeing his right leg. At this point, the water was up to his chest. He took a deep breath and dove down to the open window in the fuselage which was now beneath him. He began to swim through the opening but his parachute harness caught on the window frame and once again, Ed was trapped. Thinking quickly, he rolled a few times freeing himself and escaped from the fast sinking plane.

All four survivors were now in the water, spread out near the plane. The night was dark, but fortunately, the water was calm. The men called out to each other. Ed heard someone calling out a short distance away. He swam toward the sound and found Bob Kleckner. Together, they popped open the life raft and they managed to get a severely wounded Bob inside. Bob was rather large, and he filled the entire raft. Now, what about Ed? Realizing their predicament, Bob

instructed Ed to get into the raft, crossways, on top of him. Telamine and Wall managed to get into their one man life raft and positioned themselves Buddha fashion facing each other. They then paddled over to the other raft. Removing their life jackets, they used them to tie the two life rafts together which created a space for Ed. This is how they spent their first night at sea, during which time their plane disappeared into the ocean depths.

On the morning of September 19th, 1944, the four men each took a tiny sip of fresh water from the canteens. The only food they had were two small packages of Charms candy which they found in the life raft emergency kits. The ration was one piece for each. They recalled later that the candy tasted like steak. A rain shower passed over them during this morning and they were able to collect some fresh drinking water. This day was Ed Hemingway's 20th birthday. What a way to celebrate!

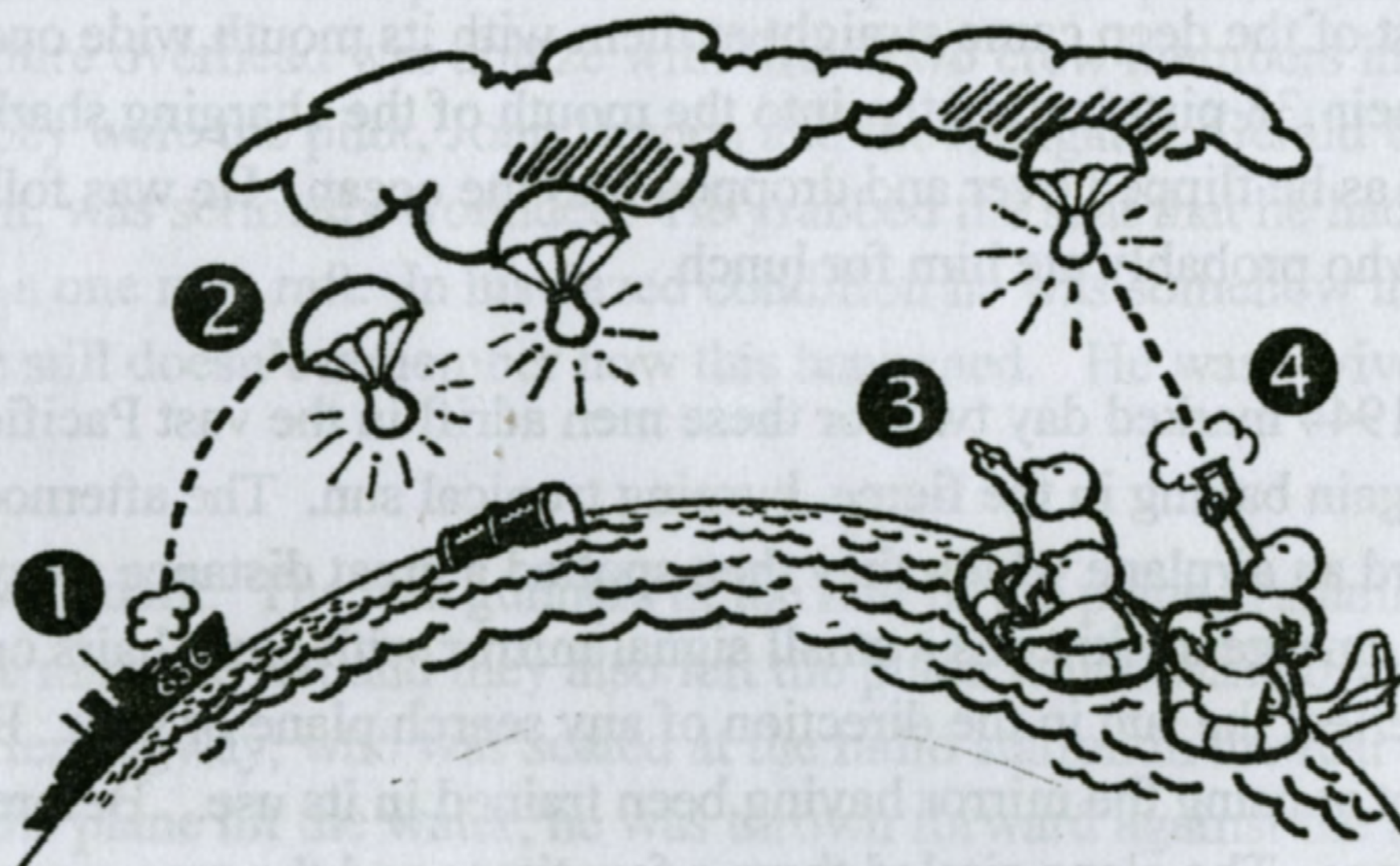
With nothing to do, Sergeant Wall decide to go for a little swim to get some exercise. Before too long, he saw a fin in the water, heading his way. It was a shark! Wall spun around and headed back to the rafts at breakneck speed. The men in the rafts watching him said that he must have set a world's record. It turned out that there were four sharks, each about 12 feet long, swimming around them and then under the rafts. By beating the water with their hands and feet, they managed to scatter the sharks but each time they returned, seeking prey. At one point, the most aggressive beast of the deep came straight at them with its mouth wide open. Both Wall and Talamine shot their .38 pistols directly into the mouth of the charging shark, stopping him dead. They watched as he flipped over and dropped into the ocean. He was followed by the remaining 3 sharks who probably ate him for lunch.

September 20, 1944 marked day two for these men adrift in the vast Pacific Ocean. Our four marines were once again baking in the fierce, burning tropical sun. The afternoon brought a lucky break. The men heard an airplane which they then spotted a great distance away. One of the items in the life raft emergency kit was a small signal mirror with cross hairs on its surface. The mirror was used to reflect the sun in the direction of any search plane or ship. Bob Kleckner turned out to be adept at using the mirror having been trained in its use. Before long, the search plane found the marines. The plane circled them a few times and the men recognized the aircraft as being from their squadron. They learn later on that the pilot was none other than their good friend Captain "Moe" Iverson. What happened next was almost a comedy of errors. The pilot dropped four emergency packages the first three of which hit the water and then quickly sank into the ocean. The fourth drop remained afloat.

The men paddled over to retrieve the box which contained much needed emergency supplies. Most important, there was a flare gun and a bunch of flare shells. Moe Iverson had radioed the exact location of the survivors which was then relayed to the U. S. S. Witter. Now the search by the Witter, once begun, continued without ceasing, all day long and into the night. The systematic step-by-step search examined squares of the ocean as described on the chart. The Witter's mission, on orders from the Commander of Naval Base, Emirau Island (Secret Dispatch # 190530) was to rescue survivors of PJB Bomber #302. Extra lookouts were on watch. They scanned the ocean out to the horizon. They wanted to find these men. Another incentive, a reward, was added by the Captain. The first lookout to spot the marines would receive a case of

beer. The sailor who won the beer was Joe Pribanic GM 3/c. Late at night Joe spotted the flare on the horizon (See diagram to follow). Joe was the only lookout on the stern of the ship looking back to where they had been. The ship had just completed a "square" of ocean search and had changed course to start the next square on the chart.... going away from the area where the survivors were drifting.

The end of the rescue story is given below. However, the final chapter of the story could easily have been a real disaster. As the Witter approached the life rafts, the four survivors heard voices coming from the approaching ship. The sounds were garbled. The men could not discern whether the language they were hearing was English or Japanese. After all, they were in Japanese controlled territory. They were quite close to Truk Island which was the site of Japan's big naval base. They had all heard the rumors that the Japanese did not take prisoners...they just killed them. So, as the ship was almost upon them, three of them (the badly injured Bob Kleckner remained behind) jumped out of the life rafts and tried to hide behind them.... with guns in hand. If this was an enemy ship, they would start shooting. Luckily, before any shootout took place, they heard Captain Tim Herrmann's voice — loud and clear---- saying over the loud speaker, "Stand by to take survivors on board on the port side."



Sequence of Rescue Events on Wednesday, September 20, 1944

1. At 2010 radar contact was made with small surface target. Witter goes to General Quarters. Arriving in target area (on a very dark night) star shells are fired to illuminate the area.
2. Port searchlight is added to help illuminate the area. Target is sighted and identified as an empty oil drum. Intense light is reflected on low hanging clouds.
3. Approximately 15 miles away are two life rafts with four surviving marine airmen. These are the guys the Witter is looking for. They see the reflection of the bright lights on the clouds a great distance away.
4. At 2122 the marines fire off several Very pistol flares. Lookouts on the Witter spot the flares. With the captain at the conn, the Witter closes at rapid speed to check out the flares and effect the rescue of the four survivors.

EDWIN P. HEMINGWAY t/Sgt. USMC, radio/ gunner FBS (B25) Bomber added to the story: Mine is a different point of view. There we were, lying there in the dark, four of us in two one man life rafts with a couple of life jackets wondering after 2 and one half days if we would be rescued. The drone of an engine was followed closely by the appearance of a huge silhouette against the night sky. Scary sight, scary feelings.

Japanese or American— That was the question. After all, we were in Japanese waters, yet our own people should be looking for us. The sounds coming from the deck seemed to answer the question: Japanese!

Three of us slipped into the water - (the fourth was too badly hurt) to escape the floodlight and expected spray of bullets.

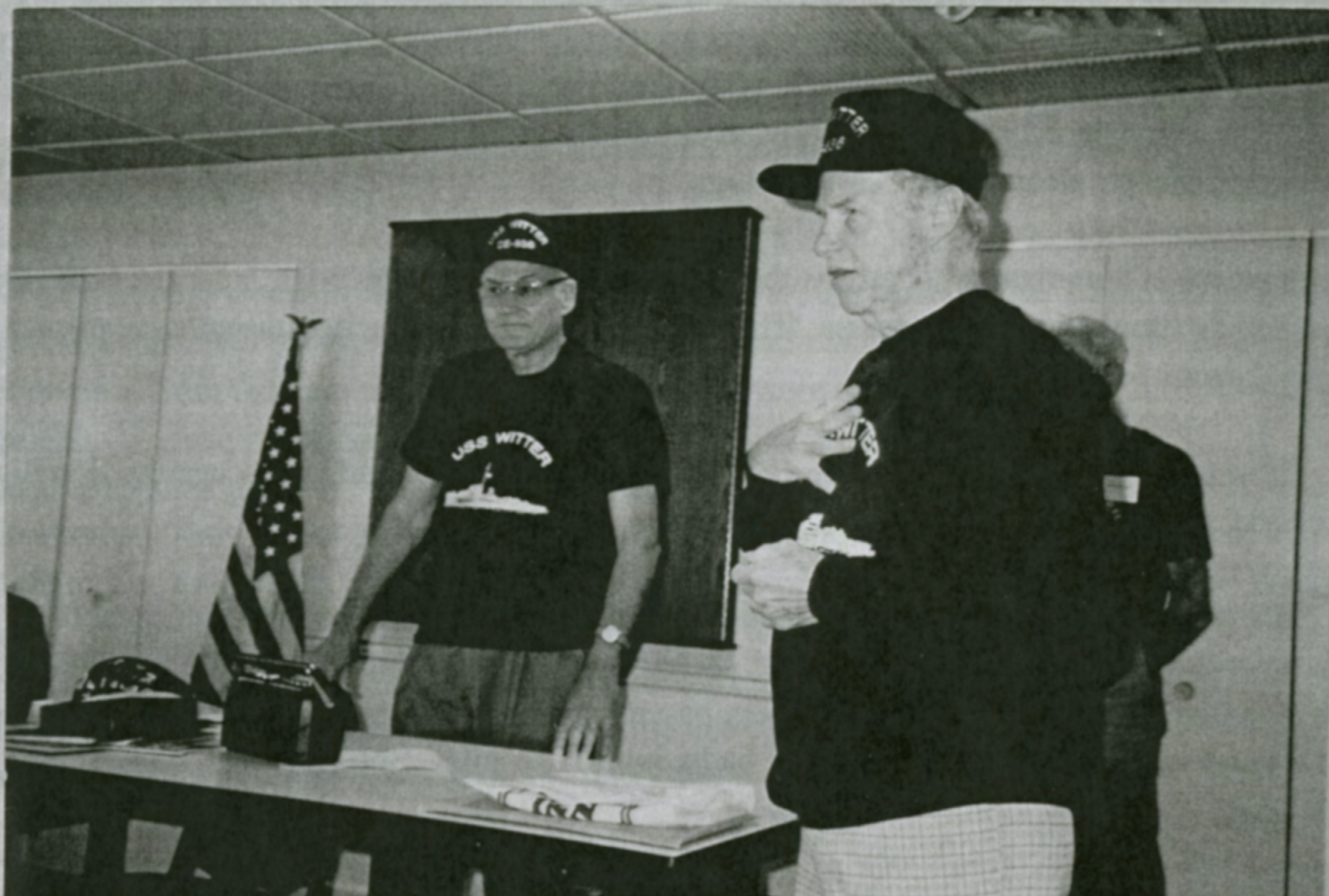
"Stand by for survivors on the port side" came a loud clear voice on the loudspeaker system. I can still hear that voice in my head. Men, who were clinging to the wide rope ladder hanging over the side, seemed to sweep me up, passing me on up the side until I touched the deck. Two other men came up the same way. The badly injured co-pilot, Bob Kleckner, had to come up on a stretcher.

I remember corpsmen controlling our water intake and feeding us soup which was about the only thing we could get past our cracked lips and swollen tongues. I also remember meeting the sailor who won a case of beer for seeing our flare from the stern as the ship was leaving the area. I also remember meeting Captain Tim Herrmann who came to welcome us. I met Tim again 58 years later.

Can't really tell you much about the ship, having slept most of the time until I became aware that I was in the hospital back at the base, a day and a half later. But, thank God, in September of 1997 in Nashville Tennessee, at a USS Witter DE 636 reunion, I got to meet some of the crew and to see many wonderful pictures of the ship, particularly the port side. It looked a lot different then, and this image replaced the huge silhouette of September 20, 1944, when our fear was turned to joy and we became ever grateful to the USS Witter and crew.

LIEUTENANT ROBERT KLECKNER RECALLS "ICE CREAM TIME"

Remembering my time on the USS Witter is recalling the most fortunate time in my life. From the time us four Jar Heads heard, "STAND BY TO PICK-UP SURVIVORS ON THE PORT SIDE," till we returned to our base at Emirau, we received the red carpet treatment. After having my thirst satisfied - water is what I missed most while on that raft - I was asked what I would like to eat. Never expecting that it would be available, I asked for ice cream. Within a short time, I received a steak followed by a big dish of freshly made ice cream. Man, those Sailors on the USS Witter sure did eat right - so did we while we were with them! How fortunate were we four from VMB 443 that we did not have to eat watered down rice!



Ed Hemingway

J. R. Williams

Bob Kleckner

LIEUTENANT (jg) CHARLES NEWTON

The following letter was written by Chuck Newton to his family. It is unique in that it was written in 1945 and it offers insight into the life of a WW II Naval officer as he was living it.

March 10, 1945

Dear Folks:



Today they made an announcement concerning security regulations and new censorship regulations in the mail. I just wrote you a letter last night that contained the usual run of news but since I can now write and tell you a little of the things we have seen and done and because I know you will be interested I am writing this to you again today.

I will start with the time I left home and arrived at San Francisco. I think that will tell you a lot. I spent four days in Frisco and then departed from there on the day that I was supposed to go to Aunt Hazel's. We left on a merchant ship that had been converted into a Navy transport and it was very crowded and hot. On the eve of our departure, we all got together and said our goodbyes to one another because we knew that we would all be split up from then on out. There were 15 of my classmates on the same ship.

That evening, we sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge and were on our way for a career at sea. It was just supper time when we went under the bridge and I was too busy eating to go top side and take a look as we passed under. Now, all we talk about is the day we will once again sail under that same bridge and believe me I am going to be up there three days in advance just to make sure I see it this time.

Our first day out was uneventful, and we spent the time looking around the ship and getting acquainted with Navy slang. We were a pretty green bunch, but I knew a little about ships from my experience at Bay City. Being passengers, we were not assigned any duties and we soon formed bridge games and sat around and harmonized on songs.

The second night out, they reported that they had a submarine contact. We all got up at about 3 in the morning and put on our clothes and life jackets. Time went on and I crawled back in my sack and went to sleep. About 30 minutes later, we could hear that there were two subs and that they were converging on us. Well, that woke us up! We were all on our feet. Nothing happened though and they soon secured from battle stations. It scared us plenty and made us realize for the first time that this wasn't just a pleasure trip.

About five days later we saw Hawaii on the horizon and spent the whole day watching it grow bigger and seeing the trees and buildings take shape from the many colors of the hillside. That day we saw our first whale and of course the flying fish were with us for the entire trip.

When we left Frisco, some birds started to follow us and they seemed to follow us all the way. We soon had pet names for them and as they would glide by we would call them by names. They soon disappeared though when we came into sight of Hawaii, so I guess they are still flying after ships even today.

I spent three enjoyable weeks in Hawaii sightseeing. Honolulu isn't pretty but it was different. We went swimming at Waikiki Beach and it is very nice. Went through the Dole pineapple factory, and when you go to a water fountain to get a drink, pineapple juice comes out. We had to be off the streets at 8:00 PM, so we would all go back to our bachelor quarters and start a game of bridge. Hampton would come over and we would make hamburgers or toasted cheese sandwiches and play bridge until 3 or 4 in the morning. We didn't have to get up until 10:00 AM so there was no hurry.

One day we finally got our orders to report to a certain pier and get on an army transport. We missed breakfast that morning and about 10 of us were still going on the next ship together. We thought we would get lunch on the ship, but an army transport only feeds two meals a day so we were starved by the time six o'clock rolled around. It was a good feeding ship, though, when they fed you, and nicer than the first one, so we were satisfied. We spent the days playing bridge again and the two weeks went by fairly fast. It was on this ship that we crossed the equator and were initiated into the "Royal Order of the Deep." Some of the initiation rites were quite funny.

About five days out of Pearl Harbor they announced that our destination was Guadalcanal, so we knew that we were finally getting out into the war zone. We passed many small islands, and finally, on a hot rainy morning we saw Guadalcanal. All of us started looking for our ships. A few spotted theirs, but not me.

They took us to the beach and here was our first step on a South Sea island paradise. It was raining and hot, and we sat there with our gear for two hours. Finally, a truck came up to take us to the Officer's Quarters. But, before we got there, the truck broke down and we had to wait for another. It was still raining as we transferred our baggage again. They finally took us to our quarters which were — tents. Four of us got into one tent together and we were ready to go to bed when one of the fellows spotted a large spider. I swear, every time that spider moved, he made the floor squeak. By shining a flashlight on him, we made him stop running around. By that time, we must have looked like a bunch of women standing on top of chairs and bunks yelling at each other to "Kill the spider!"

It was so large that it would have more than covered the bottom of your shoe so none of us had nerve enough to get that close to it. Finally, someone heard our yelling and brought us a broom. One guy stood on a chair and opened the door while another stood on the table with the broom and with one sweep that spider was out the door! As he disappeared into the foliage, we swore that we could hear someone holler, "Hi Yo, Silver!" No kidding, he was the biggest spider I have ever seen.

We finally got to bed, and after adjusting the mosquito netting over the bunk, (which was quite funny to see because we had ourselves all tangled up in it), (if there was a mosquito in there,

he could have eaten us up before we could get out) one fellow found a lizard in his bunk, so we all got up and took a look thorough ours. Finally---- we got to sleep. I spent three days there and then was transferred to Tulagi which is right across the bay.

Again I looked for the Witter but still no sign. There were only six of us left by that time. At Tulagi, we slept in a Quonset hut. It was very nice over there and I really did enjoy it. That is where we were having such a hard time for me to receive a letter. I never did receive one in the four weeks that I was there.

We spent the day playing volleyball and baseball and we made many new friends. It was there that I saw Bob Hope and his show. It was really good to see it because I was just beginning to realize the comforts and friends at home that I was going to miss.

After 4 weeks, they finally admitted that they didn't know where the Witter was, and they were sending me back to Guadalcanal. That was bad enough because Guadalcanal is nothing but rain and mud.

Two days later, I caught a plane and they flew me to Bougainville. Bougainville was nice, and the quarters were even better than Tulagi. They were still fighting the Japs back up in the hills, and I could see and hear the planes bombing them every day. But--still no Witter. However, I was getting closer to it because it had been there three weeks before. I spent two days there, and then they flew me to Green Island which was just a step over and a change of planes. We then took off for Emirau Island, and there was the Witter! I immediately hopped into a boat, reported aboard and I'm still here.

We sat in Emirau for three weeks before we moved, and we were the only fighting ship there so we had the best of food. One night, during the movie, we got orders to get underway and look for a crashed B-24. We finally found 4 survivors next evening and they were sure glad to see us. Two of the crew were missing. One of them was from Bay City, and I didn't know it until we got back to Emirau and had let them off.

The next day we left Emirau and headed for Manus Island. We arrived and turned around and escorted a ship to Milne Bay on the east coast of New Guinea. We spent a couple of days there and then went back to Manus. We operated out of Manus and then, after a couple of weeks, moved up to Hollandia on the northern coast of New Guinea. We escorted ships to Manus and then back to Hollandia.

We observed a great concentration of ships and supplies, and we expected that some big operation was coming off soon. Then, one day, I got orders to provision the ship to capacity. Soon, we were underway, not knowing where.

The captain called us to a meeting in the Wardroom and told us that we were on our way to the Philippines. This was really it. We were escorting four fleet tankers and an ammunition ship, and we were going up into the area three days before any of the fleet got up there so that we could refuel them. Don't think we weren't nervous about that, and don't think we didn't feel

important. Soon, we were refueling battleships, cruisers and aircraft carriers, a great number of transports and any other ship in the Navy.

We stayed out from Leyte about 200 miles so that the ships that needed more fuel could come out and get it. After two days of the invasion, we received orders to proceed and go into the Leyte Gulf. Leyte Gulf is about 30 miles long and 15 miles wide, and it's a very good place to anchor a great number of ships.

Things seemed to be pretty peaceful but we could see the American planes bombing the beach and we could hear the big guns of the army and see the explosions. We anchored about 4000 yards from the beach and watched the fireworks. The battleships would steam up in class and just blast the hell out of the beach, and as soon they were through, another one would take its place. We could see what was taking place, but we never heard a word from the Navy about it. Believe it or not, the first actual news we heard was from San Francisco and things were going well.

That night we got the word from the radio that Japanese planes were on their way as we hauled up the anchor and escorted the tankers around the Gulf. There was also the danger of submarines sneaking in, and a couple did, but they won't sneak around anymore.

That night we were under attack by enemy planes for a period of 35 hours, so you can see that we got very little sleep or food. We fired at many planes and got two of them. One of the ships we were escorting was torpedoed by a plane but was not severely damaged. We were just a small unit compared to some of the other groups there, so we weren't bothered too much. They always go for the big stuff.

Well, after our first battle, and a credit of 2 planes, we hitched up our belts, threw out our charts, and said "Let 'em come." But when we finally did leave there, we were very anxious to get away, and were very thankful that we came out all right.

During the daylight hours, we would steam around the tankers while they refueled the ships. But at evening, just before sunset, we would steam up toward Samar Island in the gulf so that we wouldn't be too near the big boys when the planes came over. The Japs would come over just after dark and leave just before daylight, so you can see how much sleep we didn't get.

The next evening, we were warned that a Jap task force was approaching from the North, one from the South and one from the East. There we were, boxed in, in the gulf and none of us knew just where or what we could do if the Japs steamed in there with their big battleships and carriers, cruisers and destroyers. Of course, we didn't know that a big part of our fleet was already engaging the enemy.

We got a radio message that the Jap fleet was coming in through Surigaro Strait so they sent us and the tankers back up to the other end to be out of the way. I guess they really had a battle and things were popping all night. We weren't too close to any of it but we sure could see the gun flashes and tracer bullets as they streaked through the sky. Of course, you have read of

that battle and it is ancient news now, but at least you know some one who was in it. The Jap fleet was defeated and they will never recover from that blow. If the tides had been turned, though, I think the war would have been extended by a year or more.

The next day, everything was calm, and not a single Jap plane came around. Many of the natives from the islands started coming out in their canoes, bringing bananas and fruit to trade for food and clothes. They were all friendly and they divulged the information that the Japs on the land had 8 inch guns hidden away that were trained on us. We relayed the information to the big boys and we started maneuvering around so that we would be hard target to hit.

March 25, 1945

After our fellow military men, the army, investigated, they reported that the guns were merely light machine guns with sandbag casings. We soon left Leyte Gulf as the tankers had expended all of their fuel. As we were leaving the next night, I saw Jack Love's ship get hit and knew he was on it, and I said a short prayer for his safety---- and also for myself.

We were sailing for Palu Islands to refuel the tankers. The next night I had the 12 to 4 watch and about 1:30 AM, we felt the ship shake, and knew that there had been some kind of underwater explosion. We soon checked with the convoy and they were all there. No one had dropped any depth charges so we were at a loss for an explanation.

We soon heard two ships talking on their radios, and one of them was a D E that had just been torpedoed by a sub. He was asking for help and we were hoping that the convoy commander would send us, but he sent another escort instead. They picked up survivors and they also sank the sub. The D E was torpedoed only five miles ahead of us so we weren't too far away when it happened, but we couldn't leave the tankers for fear of an attack on them.

After refueling the tankers at Palu, we took them back to Leyte, and things were much quieter this time. We stayed at anchor all the time we were there. After a few days, we left them there and we returned to Hollandia, New Guinea. We sat there for three weeks getting minor repairs to machinery, and then we were ordered to Manus.

We operated out of Manus for ten weeks, taking ships to Hollandia, Ulithi and various other places I have mentioned before. We took a ship out on convoy. She was headed for Pearl Harbor so we thought that we would take her all the way. . Instead they sent another escort to meet us and we turned around and stopped at Majure Island. That is where I bought the things from the natives that I sent home. I still have some more to send and will mail them some day. Majure was cool, the water was fine for swimming. It was really a nice place. From there, we returned to Manus. We received word that if we were there on a certain date, they would send us to Australia for 10 days of leave and recreation, but two days before that we pulled out so we missed our chance for Sydney. Who knows, maybe we'll make it someday.

I believe that brings you pretty well up to date on what I have been doing out here and I hope that you enjoy reading it. I certainly hope that since I have told you some of these things that you will not start to worry more than is necessary or more than you have been. The only reason for telling you is that I know it will be interesting to you and ease your mind some, I hope. This is

quite a long letter and probably the longest I shall ever write. Keep this letter for me as it will be good to read after this is over and will bring back some things that will have slipped my mind. Let the other folks read it because I know I won't have time to write another one like this. I started this on the 10th but didn't finish it then and kept adding a little bit each day. Today is the 15th, and I will end it now. We still cannot tell everything so I will have much to tell you and will fill in the blank spaces. I can't tell you where we are at present, but as things move along, I will be able to tell you what has happened recently and you will be right up on the news.

Will write again soon.

Give my regards to everyone.

Love,

Chas.



Mickey
Olem

Chuck
Newton

Harry
Johnson



Danford Newton Olem

JOHN R. SPITSEN GM

The next few pages are part of a diary which was written by Jack, illegally, of course. Should this book have been discovered by someone in authority, Jack might have been court martialed, or so the story goes.

**These pages were submitted by Jack's widow,
Joann Spitsen**

Kerama Retto, Nanse Shoto



March 25, 1945

Arrived off Okinawa at about 0600; steaming in company with the Maryland, Texas and Tuscaloosa, and several cans. All morning we covered the mine-sweeps, operating off the southern end of Okinawa proper. Sometime around noon, we left the sweeps, and bombarded the beach. Saw absolutely no sign of enemy resistance.

March 26, 1945

Operated with the Idaho, West Virginia and Biloxi today. Took all morning to find them, off the West-Central coast of Okinawa. We patrolled while they bombarded. Shore batteries opened up several times but never came close. Several fires were started on the beach. We retired northward into the East China Sea.

March 27, 1945

At about 0345, an enemy plane flew over the disposition, clipping the top mast off the Porterfield. Much ado about negligence. Not a shot was fired. After being detached from the main group, along with the Foreman and the Indianapolis, we were attacked by three dive bombers. The cruiser got one, the Foreman got one, and the third attempted to crash the Foreman. He clipped her midships, and fell into the water, with only slight damage to the ship. The Witter fired one round! More argument and griping. Retired with the transports tonight.

March 28, 1945

We fueled from the transport, St. Mary, today. Had a raid this morning but none of the planes were near us. This afternoon, we screened for the New York, Biloxi, West Virginia and Idaho while they bombarded the island. Retired into the East China Sea with the fleet tonight. Several of the cans got sonar contacts, but nothing definite.

March 29, 1945

Had a raid at about 0400 this morning. No planes came near us, though. They came over again at 0630, and again at 1030, but never within the range of our guns. We screened the New York and Indianapolis this afternoon while they pounded the beach. We got within a mile of the land, left the beach in a solid column of smoke when we retired tonight.

March 30, 1945

We drew the ping line today, between Okinawa and Kerama Retto. Sank a Jap small boat this afternoon. No raids at all for a change. Retired as usual.

March 31, 1945

Had a reported raid at 0200, and at 0400, a plane dropped a bomb on the fantail of one of the escorts. At about 0730, the Indianapolis was hit by a plane. All day we pinged while the big boys bombarded the invasion beach. Retired as usual.

April 1, 1945 * EASTER SUNDAY *

We were up from about 0015 till after sunrise for nuisance raids. As usual, we never opened fire. Today was the big day, and believe me, all hell broke loose just prior to the landing. Shore batteries opened up once or twice, and one shell landed about 500 yards astern of us. During the landings, and for the rest of the morning, we patrolled about three miles off-shore. At about 0800, our navy planes came over. What a sight!! Looked and sounded like a swarm of bees. The invasion convoy stretched for from ten to fifteen miles, north, south and west from the beach. APA's, LST's LCI's, etc., as far as the eye could see, and when the amphibtrucks and landing craft started in, it looked like a solid covering of beetles churning across the water. They kicked up a cloud of spray that looked like dust from a cattle stampede. In the afternoon, we moved out to about ten miles off, and screened the transports. We retired to the south with LST's tonight.

April 2, 1945

Up at 0020 this morning for supposed enemy planes. Down at 0215, up again at 0330, down at 0410, and up again at 0515 for dawn alert. So practically no sleep, and for no reason at all. We screened off shore about 5 miles all day, not screening anything in particular. Had several bogie reports at evening alert, but no positive results.

April 3, 1945

Up again shortly after 0000 this morning. About 0200, a group of nips flew over, dropped lots of flares around us and dropped one bomb which missed us by a wide margin. Some time later, what is believed by some to have been a 'betty', passed about a thousand yards off our port beam. We drew the ping - line between Tonachi - Shima and Kerama Retto for duty today. Had a couple of alerts during the day but nothing materialized. Stayed on the ping - line all night. Had a suspicious sonar contact about 2300 and made several runs on it. Nothing came of it but a lot of sleep lost.

April 4, 1945

We had the same ping - line all day today and nothing of interest happened. Got rather rough late in the afternoon and storm warnings were issued this evening. No alerts whatever!! Continued to ping throughout the night.

April 5, 1945

We went into Kerama Retto this morning to fuel, and picked up Freddie as well. God-a-mighty, what luck! Out on the ping - line again tonight, up by Zampa - Misaki.

April 6, 1945

We fueled underway this morning, and screened while the other ships fueled. This afternoon, we were assigned to a picket station east of Okinawa, and while enroute there, were attacked by two 'vals'. We shot one down, and at 1618, the second ran onto our starboard side, amidships at the water line, wiping out the I. C. room, forward fireroom, and flooding the aft mess hall and forward engine room, as well as other compartments below the mess hall. Casualties: 6 dead, 6 wounded. We lost headway immediately, and circled helplessly in the water until we could get steering control and power. A tug stood by till a tug came out. Then we were escorted to Kerama

Retto, making ten knots on one engine. We anchored at about 2100, then had sandwiches and joe on the tug.

After April 6, 1945, came 78 days of waiting. Long days, and long nights, many terrors, not knowing whether we would live to see another sunrise. Waiting impatiently to go home, where we could relax, rest, and sleep all the time if we wanted. Waiting while other ships came and left. Waiting our turn in one of the four drydocks that were there to take care of the dozens of ships that needed their kind of care. But finally our turn came, and we, too, left on June 25, 1945, just three months to the day after we had arrived off Okinawa.

Finis

Jack was a founding member of the USS Witter DE 636 Reunion Group, and he attended as many gatherings as his failing health would permit. Jack died on July 22, 1997.

SPITSEN— John R. (Jack), 72, died July 22, 1997. Retired Sales Engineer with General Electric Supply Company after 32 years and Stover & Associates after 8 years. Born in Brooklyn, NY to the late Herman and Lucy Spitsen. A veteran of U.S. Navy WWII. 1951 graduate of the University of Oklahoma and a member of the Theta Kappa Phi and Delta Sigma Pi. Past President of Mended Hearts. Survived by: loving wife, JoAnn (Maas) Spitsen of the home; daughters and sons-in-law, Irene and Jim Pollard, Christy and Lee Vincent and Mary Ellen and Terry Gordon; 5 grandchildren; brothers, Paul and Tom Spitsen and many nieces and nephews. The family suggests contributions be made in his memory to Mended Hearts Chapter 8, 5183 S. Vandalia, Suite 9-A, Tulsa, 74135 or Alzheimer's Association of Tulsa, 6465 S. Yale, 74136. Prayer service 6 p.m., Thursday and Mass of Christian Burial, 10 a.m., Friday. Both services will be held at Church of the Resurrection. Entombment with military services will follow at Calvary Mausoleum. The Fitzgerald Funeral Service, 585-1151.

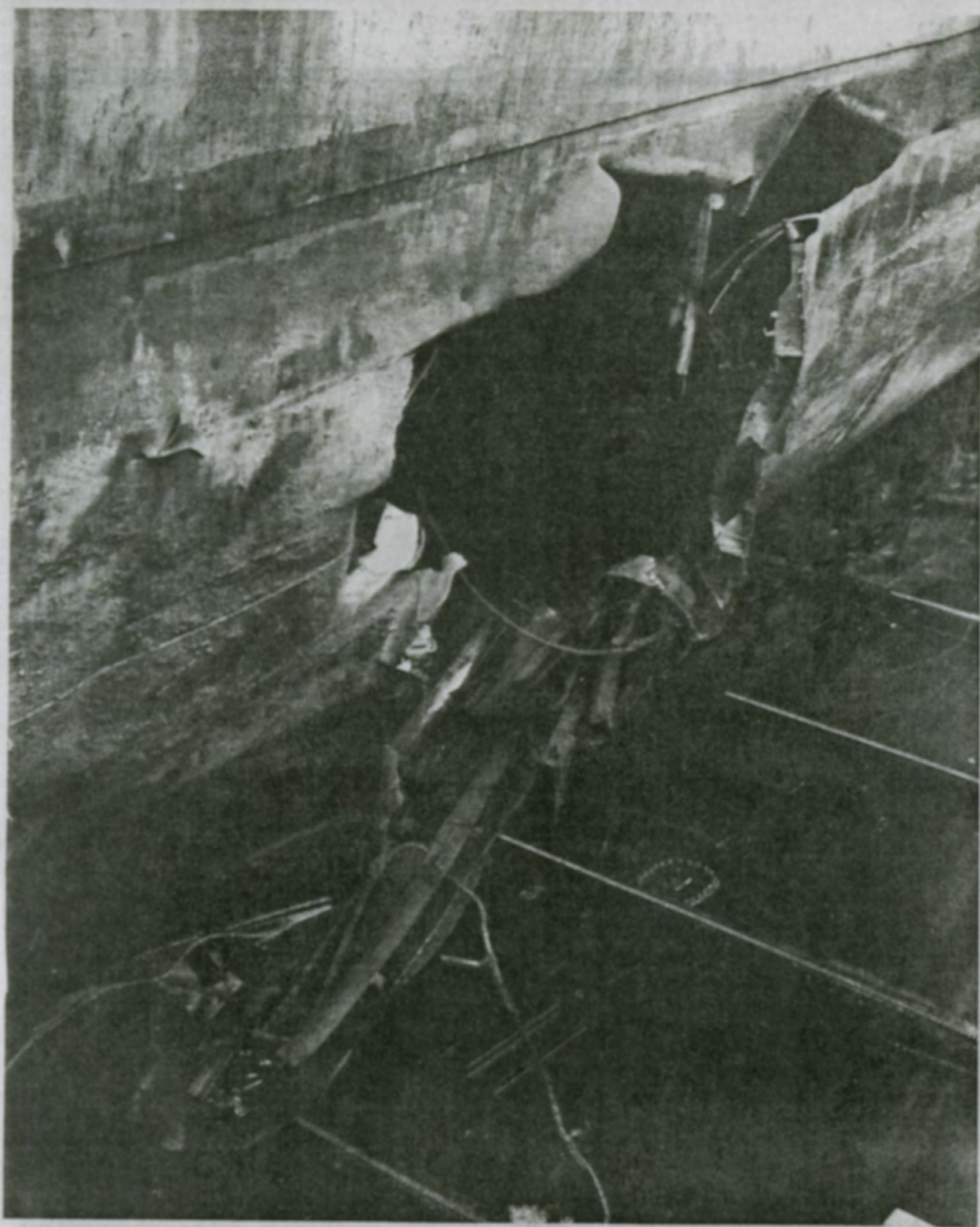


Jack and JoAnn Spitsen

Part Two

KAMIKAZE ATTACK

**Six Witter Men
Were Killed on
April 6, 1945**

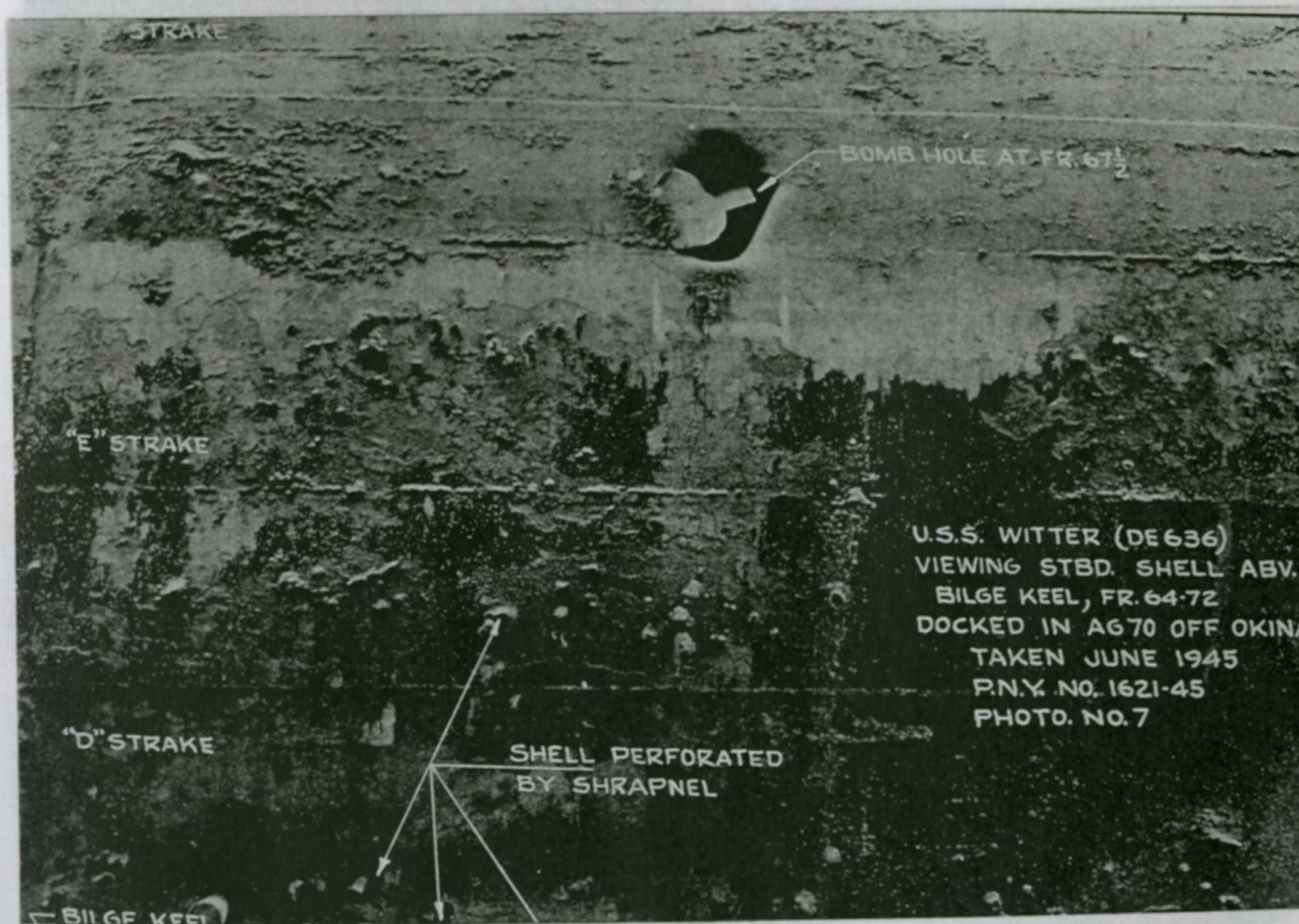


USS WITTER (DE 636)

KAMIKAZE HOLE

14 FEET BY 14 FEET

ALL DAMAGE IS
BELOW THE WATER LINE



FREDERIC WILLIAM HAWES
Commander Escort Division 40



Interviews with men who served under Commander Hawes give a curiously complex image of his man. There were some who claimed that he was a fine leader. Other Witter men were less generous in their evaluation of the Lieutenant and Captain who was to become known as "Fearless Freddie." Suffice to say that he made strong impressions on those who sailed aboard the Witter.

Commander Hawes' reports to the Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Pacific Fleet during the spring of 1945 tell of the kamikaze attack of April 6 which took the lives of six Witter men. He commends the damage control crew which put the ship back into action in a very short time. A recollection by Bruno Naczkowski describes these actions in detail. Bruno was named personally by Hawes as one whose foresight in planning brought about the speedy recovery of the US Witter DE 636 on that fateful day.

What follows here is taken from the obituary of Frederic William Hawes who died in 1992 as it appeared in SHIPMATE, Jul - Aug edition, 1992. Captain Frederic W. Hawes USN (Ret.) Died last January in Oakville, Washington. At his request the remains were cremated for later burial at sea hopefully near the sinking site of the USS Lexington (CV-2) the ship he served so long and so well.

After graduation from the Naval Academy, Captain Hawes served two years in Trenton and Dent before going to Pensacola. When a flight test crash aborted his hope of an aviation career, he joined the Lexington as a line officer, serving on her from the 1937 search for Amelia Earhart to her loss in the Coral Sea, where he was awarded the Navy Cross for his efforts in rescuing men trapped below decks. Subsequently he commanded PC-587 and Sturtevant in the Atlantic and Bowers in the Pacific, through the New Guinea and Phillippines campaigns. He served off Okinawa as ComCortDiv 40, earning a Bronze Star with Combat "V."

Captain Hawes retired on March 1, 1958. He was active in the community of Oakville WA and was deeply involved in supporting the USS Lexington Minutemen Club, attending all its reunion and helping build its membership. He was married three times. He had four children and a number of grandchildren.

Subject: General Action Report, Assault on OKINAWA, 20 March 1945 through 27 May 1945.

At 1618 (I) on 6 April 1945, the WITTER was attacked by two VALS. One was shot down

about 3000 yards broad on the starboard bow ; the other, despite numerous hits, crashed the starboard side of the WITTER at frame 57. The crash of the plane and the explosion of the bomb it carried, flooded the Forward Fireroom and the I.C. Room and adjacent spaces immediately. The bulkhead between the Forward Fireroom and the Forward Engine Room was badly ruptured and the Forward Engine Room quickly flooded. Smoke and flame filled the entire superstructure, the ship took a five degree list, and all communications were lost for a very short time. The officers and men of the Witter proceeded to carry out all necessary and proper damage control measures immediately, reestablished communications almost at once, shifted steering control aft, and made all necessary reports to the bridge. In five minutes the ship had way on again (one shaft). Shoring as necessary was started, the wounded were attended, and preparations were made to carry out the Jettison Bill if necessary. It was found that the ship could make ten knots without strain and she steamed to port at that speed. The Division Commander considers this action to have been properly conducted throughout and that the personnel of the Witter did a magnificent job of damage control. Six men were killed and six men and one Officer were burned - none seriously. This action is covered CCD-40 Serial 016 dated 25 May 1945. Recommendations as to awards for meritorious conduct during and subsequent to this action were forwarded by CCD-40 Serial 017 dated 27 May 1945 and initiated by CCD-40 Serial 018 dated 27 May 1945.

The following is taken from a communication of commendation from Commander Hawes, Escort Division Forty, USS Witter (DE-636), to the Commander-in-Chief of the U. S. Fleet dated 25 May 1945.

"I was on the bridge of the WITTER when the attacking planes were first sighted and I consider that the Commanding Officer of the Witter fought his ship well and that being hit was unavoidable. One of the two attacking planes was shot down and the other was smoking well over two miles off. I myself was numerous hits on this plane and I do not understand how it managed to hit the ship. My impression at the time was that the plane's controls were locked in place or that there was a robot pilot.

I have only the utmost admiration for the ability to control damage and to keep going displayed by the entire personnel of the WITTER. Smoke filled the entire superstructure and all communications were lost for a short time. An improvised messenger service was started immediately and communications were soon as good as could be expected. (The ship had way on again and steering control was regained in less than five minutes.) I alternated with the Commanding Officer in conning and in checking the damage and I was particularly impressed by the efficiency of the damage control and engineering personnel. They gave the decided impression (and results) of men who had been well trained and knew their business. This ability to "carry on" was based on a solid foundation for the WITTER had, for several months previous to this action carried out a well organized and comprehensive program of training to prepare for all types of casualties.

The ability of the USS WITTER's personnel to control their damage and to devise ways and means to keep moving resulted in her clearing the area in which she had been hit and in which a destroyer (USS MORRIS) (DD-417) was hit only an hour later. There seems little doubt but that another hit would have resulted in the WITTER's sinking nor that she would have been the target had she remained in the area. I consider that the ability and energy of her Commanding Officer

in training his crew and for controlling damage resulted in saving a badly damaged ship (attention is invited to Enclosure (B)) and is deserving of special commendation. Recommendations as to such commendation are being made by separate correspondence.

Frederic W. Hawes

MEMORIAL SERVICE

U. S. S. Winter (DP-108) ALL TO EDITOR

I wish to express my appreciation for the excellent job that was done during our action with the enemy 6 April 1944.

OUR COMRADES

EDWARD KEARNEY ASBURY, U.S.N. - Our ship was under attack by two Japanese submarines. One of our gunners shot down one of the submarines when he crashed.

VINCENT J. LA SELVA, U.S.N.

LEONARD FRANK KEEFER, U.S.N.

The excellent recovery following the crash was commended upon by Commander, Escort Division, and several members of CTF 31 Staff. Every man did his job in a manner befitting the highest traditions of the Navy.

Hail them all

Our Engineering Force never lost power and within 2 minutes following the crash, we were able to maneuver at will.

INVOCATION

Our ship's force prevented any fire to hinder our movement and localized the damage to such an extent, we were able to proceed at 10 knots.

SCRIPTURE READING

Your deeds and behavior in this world are in accordance with the highest traditions of the Navy.

To All Hands - WELL DONE.

The Apostle Paul

GEORGE HERMAN SCHULZ, Lieutenant, U.S.N.

MEMORIAL PRAYER

COMMANDING OFFICER

Chaplain CAUCHEY

BENEDICTION

Valley

Tapa

U.S.S. WITTER. (DE636)

9 April 1945.

NOTICE TO ALL HANDS:

I wish to take this opportunity to pass on to All Hands my appreciation for the excellent job that was done during our action with the enemy, 6 April 1945.

Our ship was under simultaneous attack by two Japanese Suicide Planes. With our main battery split, our gunners shot down one VAL, and had the other burning badly when he crashed.

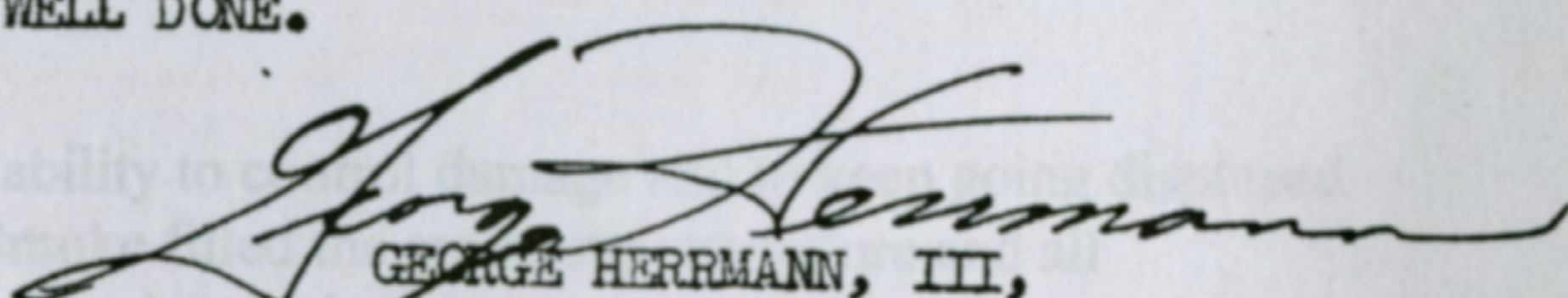
The excellent recovery following the crash was commended upon by Commander Escort Division FORTY and several members of CTF 51 Staff. Every man did his job in a manner befitting the highest praise.

Our Engineering Force never lost power and within 2 minutes following the crash, we were able to maneuver at will.

Our Repair Force prevented any fire to hinder our retirement and localized the damage to such an extent, we were able to proceed to port at 10 knots.

Your deeds and behavior in this action was in accordance with the highest traditions of the Naval Service.

To All Hands - WELL DONE.


GEORGE HERRMANN, III,
Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.,
Commanding.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

U. S. S. Witter (DE636)

Tuesday - - - -24 April 1945

OUR COMRADES

EDWARD KEARNEY ASBECK, EM 1/c U.S.N.R. -

FRANCIS JOSEPH OGRODNIK, WT2/c. U.S.N.R.

HAROLD ROYAL FAHRENKRUG, WT1/c -

VINCENT J. LA SELVA, WT 3/c

LEONARD FRANK KEEKER, F 1/c U.S.N.R. -

BENJAMIN ZACK, F 2/c

Assembly

Half Mast Colors

INVOCATION

Chaplain D, R. CAUGHEY, U.S.N.

SCRIPTURE READING

Chaplain CAUGHEY

The Book of Wisdom

Chapters 3 and 4

Holy Bible, John

Chapter 14

The Apostles' Creed

ADDRESS

COMMANDING OFFICER

MEMORIAL PRAYER

Chaplain CAUGHEY

BENEDICTION

Volley

Taps

SCRIPTURE READINGS

The Book of Wisdom

Chapter 3: 1-6

1. But the souls of the just are in the hand of God
and no torment shall touch them.
2. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;
and their passing away was thought an affliction
3. and their going forth from us, utter destruction.
But they are in peace.
4. For if before men, indeed, they be punished,
yet is their hope full of immortality;
5. Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,
because God tried them and found them
worthy of Himself.
6. As gold in the furnace, He proved them,
and as sacrificial offerings he took them to Himself.

The Book of John

Chapter 14: 1-2, 27

1. Let not your hearts be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me.
 2. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
- *****
27. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.

VINCENT LASELVA WT 1/c
Killed in Action on April 6, 1945
Recollection is by his brother,
Kelly La Selva

Six Witter crewmen were killed on April 6, 1945. The family members of only three of these men could be found as material was being gathered for this book. Two brothers and a son have submitted stories telling of how they remembered their loved ones before they entered the Navy. Vincent LaSelva is recalled in the following by brother Kelly in a letter he sent to Joe Ogrodnik



My brother Vincent was a great guy and is sadly missed by his family. He is always in our thoughts. I know that the families of the other shipmates that left us on that horrible day of April 6, 1945 feel the same way. I have pictures of Vinnie (that's what we called him), your brother Francis, and the U.S.S. Witter on my desk and never a day goes by that I don't look at them.

Vinnie was about four years older than I am, (12/24/23) and although he had his own bunch of guys that he hung around with, he still found time to do things with his brothers and sisters. He was a heck of an athlete, excelling in baseball (catcher), basketball and football. For that matter, he was good at whatever he did. Like the rest of the La Selva boys and girls, and Mom and Pop, he learned, at a very early age to work hard. The depression that we all grew up in made it necessary for everyone to contribute to the meager family income in whatever way possible. My father was a shoemaker and my mother the hardworking (hard to describe) glue that held our family of 10 kids, 6 boys and 4 girls, together. Some of the jobs that Vinnie worked at were shoeshine boy, working the streets and gin mills in Pelham, New York, caddying and many more. He was working in a wire mill in Connecticut when he enlisted in the Navy.

He loved being a sailor and wrote to every one of us whenever he could find the time to do so. As much as he liked being in the Navy, he always wished that he was home with his family and friends. In one of his letters home, he told us about the U. S. S. Witter's shakedown cruise and about what a great bunch of shipmates he had. And how there were some experienced gunners aboard who were crack shots. He mentioned how the ship could really move in the water, making quick turns, etc. that could dodge the subs' torpedoes. But his concern for the havoc the Jap planes could bring on our ships was truly prophetic. I just know that Vinnie, Francis and their four shipmate buddies are still together - - in heaven. We are so proud of them for the sacrifices they made to keep this country (and the world) as safe a place to live in as reasonably possible. Let's hope that the people and the countries of this world never forget to honor them on Veteran's Day, Memorial Day and every day.



Vincent LaSelva WT 1/c



FRANCIS JOSEPH OGRODNIK, Wt/3

Francis is Remembered by

His brother Joseph Ogrodnik

on the occasion of a street in Chicopee, MA being named in memory of Francis



Francis Joseph Ogrodnik, known to his family and friends as Sonny, was born on June 9, 1921. Our mother, Caroline, was born in Poland in 1887 and came to this country at the age of 8. Our father, who was of Polish descent, was born in Chicopee Falls, MA in 1890.

Sonny was the oldest boy, having an older and a younger sister. Then, there was his brother, me, the youngest in the family. Although Sonny was 10 years older than I, I do remember him fondly and I remember him well because we had lots of interests in common. My brother was interested in all kinds of machinery no matter what it was. I recall the

machine shop he built in a converted chicken coop in our back yard. This he powered with an old 4 cylinder Chevrolet engine. I also remember him rebuilding a generating unit for a Russian family who lived on a farm in the hills of Chester, MA. At that time, electricity was a rare item in that neck of the woods, so this unit really was a feather in that family's cap. Then I remember the Sunday afternoons we spent motor boating on the Chicopee River. We would launch his boat — he had built it, of course---- above the dam in Chicopee Falls, and we were able to go up the river as far as the cove and back. These were fond memories.

Sonny graduated from St. Patrick's School on June 23, 1935. He went on to graduate from Chicopee Trade School on June 22, 1938. His chosen field was machine work and tool making. After graduating from trade school, he took a job at the Perkins Gear Company in Willimansett. He worked there through the beginning of World War II and on April 13, 1943, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He did this even though he had a high government deferment. Most of his friends were in the service and he felt that he should be also.

Sonny went through boot camp at the U. S. Naval Training Station in Sampson, New York. On completing boot camp, he was transferred to the University of Minnesota for the Machinist Mate's course. He then went to Norfolk, Virginia for Destroyer Escort training and eventually joined the new crew of the DE 636 USS Witter at Mare Island, California. After several shakedown cruises, the USS Witter was sent to the Pacific area of conflict. The ship was subsequently engaged in many battles with the enemy.

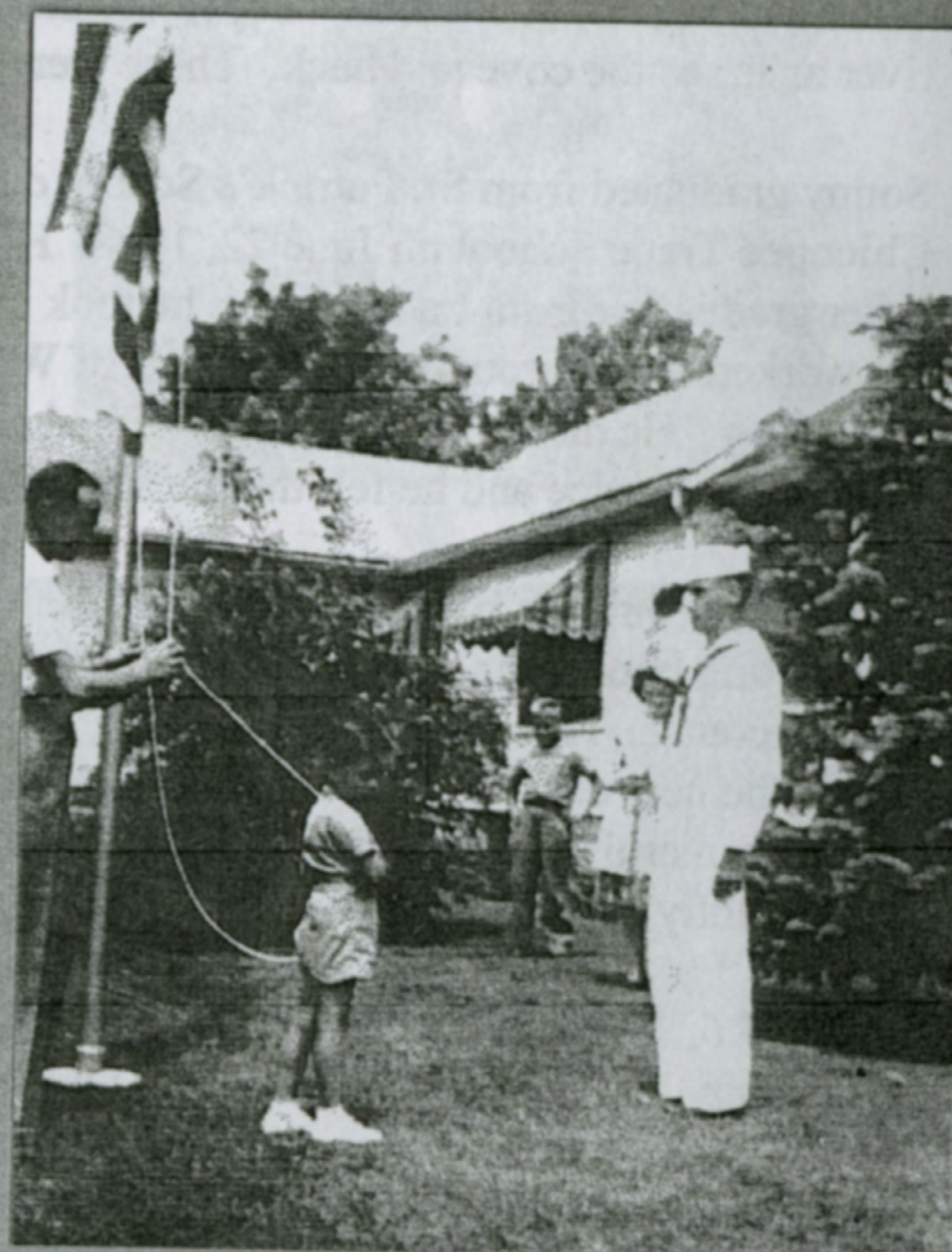
On April 6, 1945, at about 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon, while the USS Witter was on radar picket ship duty during the invasion of Okinawa, 2 enemy planes were picked up on radar. These aircraft were being flown by suicide pilots and they began to attack my brother's ship. The first plane was shot out of the air. The second plane managed to elude the Witter's antiaircraft fire and it crashed into the ship's mid section, completely destroying one engine room and killing six sailors, including my brother, Francis.



Francis Joseph Ogrodnik WT 2/c



**Raising Old Glory at Home
Joe Ogrodnik is in the
background**



BENJAMIN ZACK F 1/c
Benjamin is remembered by his son,
Arthur Zack



I was nine years old when the U. S. S. Witter came under attack by the Japanese. Even at this age, I followed the events of the war in the Pacific. I knew the silhouette of every plane and most ships and I knew everything the censors would let us know. I knew why my father went to war and I prayed for his safe return. I was proud of my Dad and I hung a flag with a star in our front window. At the age of nine, I didn't have much time to bond or make memories but after 53 years I remember my father well. He never sank an enemy ship or shot down a plane but he was a Hero just the same. He was a member of a crew where each man had a job to do, and working together they would all help to bring an end to the war. The men below deck

played just as an important part in battle as the men on the bridge or manning the guns. The ship and its crew were all heroes in my eyes. They left the safety of their homes, and traveled half way around the world to defend their country.

I'm sure the Captain and crew did everything in their power to avoid the plane that crashed into the ship. At the moment of impact, my life changed forever. I received letters from two Presidents and I have five medals framed on the wall. The thing I treasure most is the baseball style cap embroidered with the name U. S. S. Witter DE 636. I wear it with pride. It reminds me of a great ship and crew and honors the memory of my father, Ben Zack F/2c

In 1945 the world was at war and in the South Pacific, thousands of U. S troops were fighting to prevent the Japanese from enslaving the world. On one small island, a lonely sailor is waiting for his ship, a destroyer escort, to take him into battle. The days are long and lonely and, as he walked along the beach, he dreams of being home with his wife, Sarah, and his 9 year old son, Arthur. The beach is pristine, and small seashells are scattered everywhere. His eyes scan the beach and he picks up some of the nicest shells and places them in a small canvas bag. Back at the barracks, the canvas bag is tucked away in his duffel bag along with all his personal possessions.

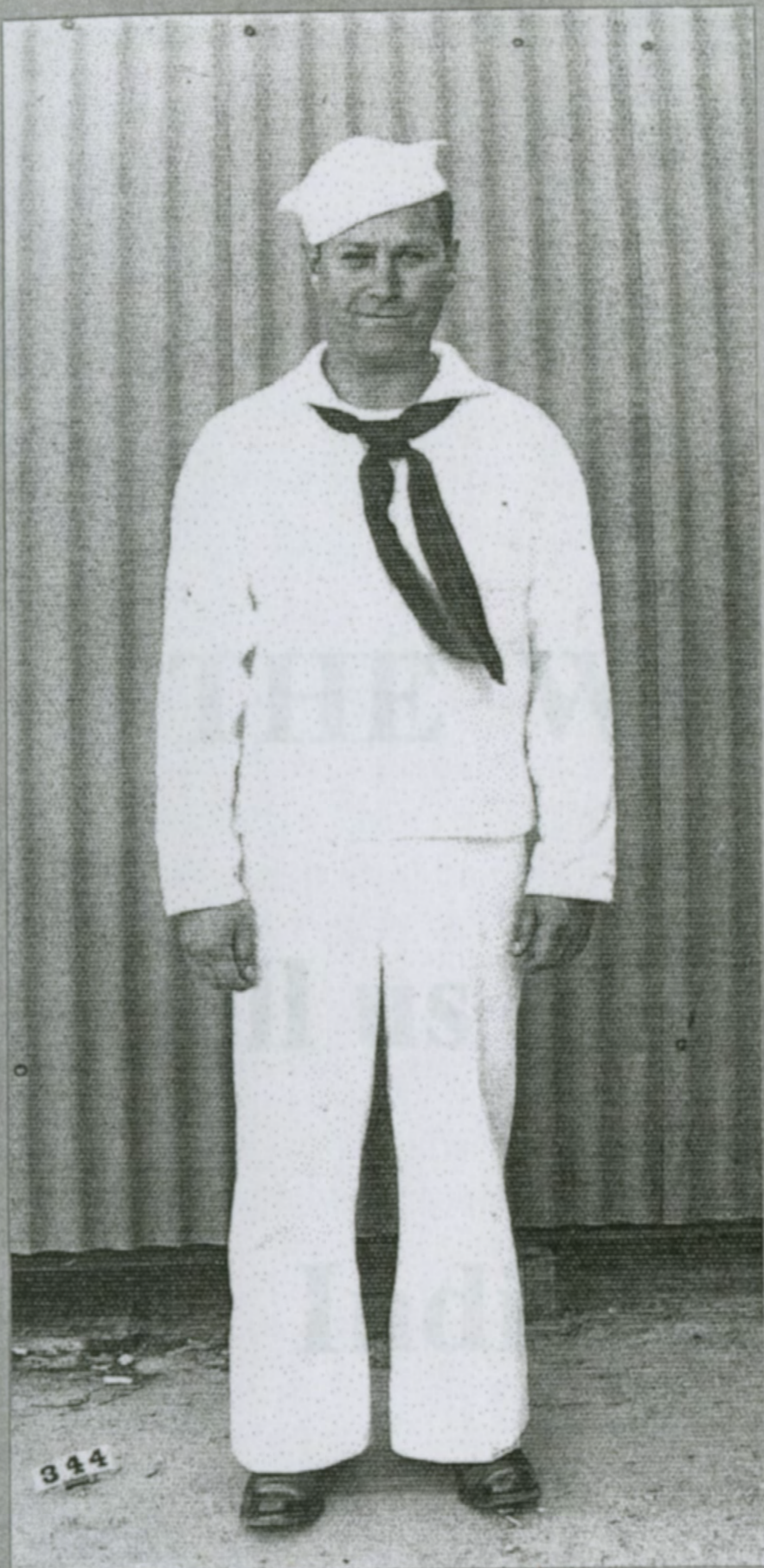
The U. S. S. Witter finally arrived to take Bennie Zack to war. On April 6, 1945, two enemy aircraft were sighted in the distance. The warship went to general quarters, rang up 23 knots, and began radical maneuvers to evade them. Within five minutes, both Japanese planes showed smoke, evidence of hits registered by her guns. One of the intruders splashed into the sea, but his colleague, who had taken an oath to die for his Emperor, pressed home his own attack and crashed into the Witter at the water line on the starboard side. His bomb exploded in the number 1 fire room killing six sailors, including Bennie Zack. His body was never recovered and

he is at rest somewhere in the South Pacific. After the ship regained control, someone was assigned to gather all of my father's personal possessions to ship them back to New Jersey. They arrived several months later and, packed between his uniforms and personal letters was a small ditty bag with his collection of seashells.

As I walked along the beach of a South Pacific island 55 years later on the anniversary of my Father's death, I was surrounded by the same type of cowery seashells that my Father collected. I, too, picked up some shells and placed them in my pocket. Under normal circumstances, on the anniversary of the death of a loved one, I would have gone to the cemetery and observed the Jewish custom of placing a small pebble on the headstone of my Father's grave, but there is no cemetery and no headstone, only the vast Pacific Ocean. I bent down and picked up a rock. It was smooth and flat after rolling in the surf for countless years. I coiled back my arm and tossed it as far as I could. It skipped twice and settled to the bottom. It looks like all the other stones on the floor of the South Pacific, but my Dad knows which one is his.

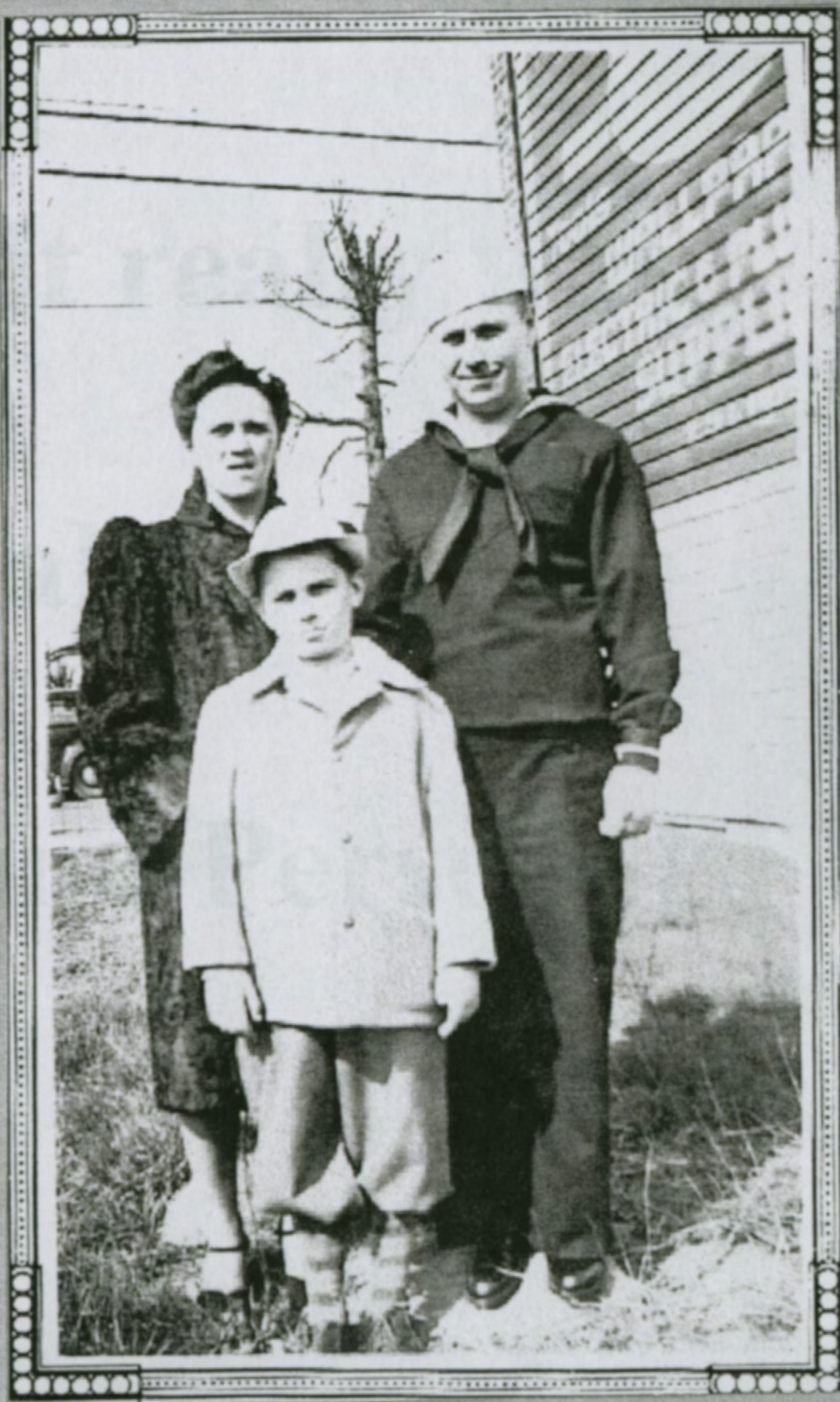


Art and Min Zack



**Sara, Arthur and Benjamin
Zack
1944**

Benjamin Zack F 1/c



Part Three

THE WITTER MEN

tell us how it really was.

Individual Stories,

Up Front and Personal

THE CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

A PRAYER FOR PEACE

Lord, grant us peace, not the peace that is won and maintained by force of arms, but the peace that grows within each of us. We ask not for the peace that marks the absence of hostilities, but the peace that enables us to live without fear. We ask not for the peace that offers a life of comfort, but a peace that enables us to live life to the fullest. Fill us with Your peace that we may reach out in love to those in greatest need, that your will may be done for us and through us always. AMEN

The Reverend Carl E. Bergstrom
National Chaplain

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

"So far today, God, I've done all right.
I haven't gossiped.
I haven't been grumpy, nasty or selfish.
I'm really glad of that.
But, in a few minutes, God,
I'm going to get out of bed;
And from then on,
I'm probably going to need a lot of help!"

ROBERT BLAIR F 1/c

**Remembrance is submitted by his widow
Thelma Blair**



Mrs. Blair had stated in a letter to Harry Johnson who was the Reunion Group's Skipper at the time, that the Group's officers were doing an excellent job in getting the news out via the newsletter "The Witter Whaleboat." She recalls that being aboard the Witter, and Serving with the crew was an important part of Bob Blair's life. She says, "God bless you all and thanks for serving our country, our beloved country."

Bob had told Mrs. Blair the following story. The Commander of the USS Witter had called for a volunteer to do some typing. Bob volunteered. Normally, he would have been in the boiler room at his regular post.

The Japs came over and one of their planes crashed into the Witter in a place where Bob would normally have been stationed. The attack blew a huge hole in the side of the ship.

Bob told this story many times and he would always finish with this punch line: That taking a class in typing while he was in high school, merely to fill an empty slot in his schedule, saved his life. He also credited Ken Warriner with saving his life, but Mrs. Blair was not sure of the details of that part of the episode.

Mr. Brunk was a member of the International Association of Machinists Union for 45 years. He also was a member of the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks in Destin, Florida, and the American Legion in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

THE CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

WILLIAM BRAWN CRT

Bill Brawn attended a number of the earlier reunions. He was not especially talkative since he was usually busy videotaping the events of each gathering. He generously gave copies of his tapes at cost to anyone who wanted them. The tape of Reunion Number One was six hours long. A viewing of this tape and of all the others is a sharp reminder of how fleeting is life and how we should joyfully live each day in the company of those we love. Thank you, Bill, for a job well done. The picture below is one of Bill and his son at the Witter reunion in Seattle, WA in 1999.



PAUL BRUNK MM 1/c

**This letter was submitted by Paul's son
Jon Brunk**

June 10, 2000

Re: Paul Brunk

Dear Harry (Johnson):

I regret to inform you and ship mates from the U. S. S. Witter DE 636 that my father passed away on March 4, 2000 in Bellingham, Washington.

At 86, he was in as good of health as could be expected but failed quickly over the course of three days prior to dying. It was a duty and a treat to have been his full time care giver for the past six years. It allowed some quality and correct time to be spent with the extended family. My joke to friends was that during the war that the Japanese tried to kill him and couldn't. He had twins at age forty, my sister and I. We tried to kill him and couldn't, so proper pay back seemed to be that I got to take care of him in his twilight time.

This difficult time you all endured during the war was rarely spoken of by Paul.. With a little prodding, we were able to hear some interesting personal accounts of life aboard ship from my father. Some years past, I was able to assemble a display board which reflects his time in the navy. We were able to contact Dick Williams in Everett, Washington a few years ago to reminisce.

In advance, I apologize for the delay in contacting you with this news but with any passing there is a lot of loose ends to take care of.

All the best,
Jon

*****8

**PAUL BRUNK
Obituary**

At his request, there will be no services for Paul L. Brunk of Bellingham. Mr. Brunk died Tuesday, April 4, 2000, in Bellingham, Washington. He was 86. He was born July 23, 1913, to Carl F. and Marie F. (Francis) Brunk in Niles, Michigan.

On February 10, 1940, he married Margaret McConomy in South Bend, Ind. She died in 1983.

During World War II, he served in the U. S. Navy aboard the U. S. S. Witter in the South Pacific during the invasion of the Philippines and the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Mr. Brunk was a member of the International Association of Machinists Union for 45 years. He also was a member of the Benevolent protective Order of Elks in Destin, Florida, and the American Legion in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

He had an astute interest in sports. He enjoyed knitting and giving away the coasters he knitted.

His sister, Beatrice Kirk, had died previously.

Survivors include sons Jon Brunk of Bellingham and James Brunk of Martinez, California; daughter, Janet Vinyard of Jacksonville, Oregon; sister Bonnie Checcio of Elkart, Indiana; four grandchildren, and many other relatives.



J.R. Williams & Paul Brunk

KEITH CARNEY RM 1/c
His memories of World War II
As told to his daughter, Janice Cross

Janice writes that she is the youngest of five children born to Keith and Ruby Carney. She lives in the house of the farm which was set up by her parents for the family. She stayed with them and cared for them when each one of them developed health problems. Her father, Keith, passed away on May 2, 1990, and mother Ruby died on October 5, 1999. Janice submitted three stories which her father had told her when she was a child.

THE PACKET

Keith remembers: I had to deliver a packet to the lookout post on Ulithi Island. It contained classified information and I was one of the few who could do this so it came to me to put it into the right hands. Being a radio operator, I saw a lot of information meant only for the eyes of the Captain. The responsibility for a safe delivery was mine.

When I started out, it was a beautiful, sunny day. I had my sea legs, so the ship's movement never bothered me. Still, it felt good to touch dry land and to walk without the surface moving on me. It would take me some time to get to the post, deliver my packet and get back to the ship before it sailed without me so I set out at a good walking pace. There were palm trees everywhere and the ground was sandy. The path I traveled was fairly well packed and easy for walking.

Even with all the beauty around me, I began to feel a certain unease. We had heard of encounters with the enemy in some of the most unlikely places. The island was supposed to be clean but I still felt the need for caution.

As I walked, I noticed several small doghouses or what were called pillboxes at the side of the road. There were about twelve of these boxes, six on each side, at various intervals. I decided that it would be a good idea to check out at least a few of these boxes. I was armed but I was hoping that I wouldn't find anything. I peered inside one of them. It was empty. I could see where a man could climb inside and be invisible to people walking on the path. Each box had a small window facing the road. Anyone in the box could stick his gun through that window and fire at unsuspecting travelers. The person inside the box could see the road but no one could see him.

I continued on my journey. It was hot, and I was practically soaking wet by the time I reached the post. I delivered the packet and waited a short time for a response. I was there for only a couple of minutes. I started back to the ship feeling more lighthearted.. I had delivered some crucial information and I was feeling more at ease even though I couldn't completely let my guard down. I too this time to reflect and I watched the ground pass as I walked back to the ship.

As I neared the pillboxes, something made me look up, and I saw three people standing in the road a short distance ahead of me. They appeared to see me at the same time that I saw them. They were three fully armed Japanese soldiers and their rifles had bayonets. While they looked

ready for battle, they seemed to be as astonished to see me as I was to see them. I had heard stories about how ruthless and savage Japanese soldiers were to prisoners of war, and I felt the hair on the back of my head and neck rising. I was sure you could have seen my helmet rising up off my head! I closed my eyes and prayed to God for help. Many ideas of how to avoid capture and inhuman torture were running through my mind. I was a good shot but how many foes could I take out before they got me. I had never shot a human being before. Could I do it now? What kind of marksmen were these enemies? In a matter of moments, it was almost like seeing my life pass before me.

When I opened my eyes, the three soldiers were gone. I didn't see retreating bodies so I figured that they had jumped into the pillboxes. I really didn't want to look into them but I knew that I had to do just that. I started looking into the ones closest to me, and I went down the line. All the pillboxes were empty. This was the longest walk I have ever taken.

I started back to the ship again. I wanted to walk back to the ship and appear unafraid. Ever after I always said that I walked back to the ship but I can guarantee that my feet were not touching the ground and that I was walking on air.

I have never understood why they didn't fire at me. Perhaps they didn't have ammo, or else ammo was in short supply. Maybe I was not a good enough catch on which to waste valuable ammo. I also never understood why they didn't attempt to capture me. Where were these guys when I was going toward the post and where did they go after I saw them? I will never know.

THE KAMIKAZE

This is the story of when the USS Witter DE 636 was hit by a kamikaze. The ship was on radar picket duty during the battle of Okinawa on April 6, 1945. Suddenly, we received word that enemy planes were headed in our direction and we heard the command, "**All hands to your battle stations!**" The guns on board were manned and ready.

Three planes were sighted, closing in fast and they were firing on our ship. You could hear the bullets hitting the water and the ship. The guns on the ship started firing and boy! were they loud! You could feel the ship respond with every report. One plane was hit and went down. The guns hit the other plane which had been circling and it burst into flame. You could hear the men cheering. The plane was 300 feet out and closing in, skipping the water. I felt sure that it would miss the ship so I went back into the radio room to be ready for work. Suddenly, the ship shook with a massive jolt. We had been hit. I was thrown against the steel bulkhead of the radio shack and must have been momentarily knocked out. When I regained my senses, I found blood running from my ears. I was badly shaken. After awhile, when I was steadier, I went back out on deck. The plane had hit us on the starboard side just above the water line. The only thing that saved us was the "**Hard right rudder**" turn that we had been in. I kept thinking about the men trapped in that section and their families, their loved ones.

I knew my job. It took me all night to send the injured and dear report to Washington. I started at 8 megacycles, then went to 12 and finally I got all the way up to 16 megacycles just trying to get the information out. The Japs would let me send for awhile and then would jam the channel. I kept hearing IMI (repeat) as the response to my messages. Information was sent this

way to Hawaii, on to San Francisco and then relayed to Washington.

The ship was towed in to dry dock. The mood of the crew was somber because of the shipmates we had lost, but we were thankful that we had made it through.

A HUMOROUS MEMORY ABOUT A SHIPMATE NAMED CHERRY

I was lying in my bunk, writing a letter to my family, when a shipmate named Cherry stumbled into my bunk area. My bunk was the top tier of three tiers. The middle bunk was Cherry's and the bottom bunk belonged to a big burly shipmate with a temper to match. He did not like anyone fooling around with his bunk. He wouldn't even let us use his bunk as a step to get into our bunks.

I said that Cherry stumbled into the bunk area because he wasn't walking steady at all. I was surprised that he was even standing! He had just come back from shore leave and he had had several rounds too many to drink. I looked over the edge of my bunk just in time to see him flop into the bottom bunk. Oh boy!! I knew that if that bunk's owner walked in and saw him, there would be hell to pay so I jumped down from my bunk and tried to talk to Cherry. There was no response. I shook him, but he just slept on. I even checked his breathing, hoping that if the bunk's owner walked in, I could tell him that Cherry was dead already. I knew that I had to get him into his own bunk before the owner returned.

I decided that if I couldn't get him to do it himself, I would have to do it for him. I pulled him into a sitting position, and before I could get his feet on the floor, he was lying back down on that dreaded bunk. I got him sitting up again and wrapped one arm around his back while inching his feet and legs toward the edge of the bunk with my other arm. I prayed the whole time that the owner would not come in and catch, not only Cherry, but also me on his bunk! I tried to get Cherry into a standing position but his legs kept collapsing under him. I finally determined that I would have to lift him onto his bunk. I grabbed him up in my arms and started moving toward his bunk, but he folded up like a sheet and slipped right through my arms down to the floor. He hit so hard I was glad he wasn't far from the floor. I was sure that the fall would waken him so that he could help me getting him back to bed but, - he slept on! I picked him up again and kept a good hold on him this time. I wasn't that tall so I had to lift him a little higher to get him into his bunk. I rolled him over toward the middle and breathed a sigh of relief. I - had - done - it! I straightened out the shipmate's bunk and climbed back into my own berth to finish my letter. I was almost through writing when I heard a loud thud. I looked over the edge and there was Cherry - out of his bunk and on the floor again. Well, at least he wasn't in someone else's bunk. I prayed that he wasn't dead. I climbed down from my bunk and was trying to decide what to do when our burly shipmate of the bottom bunk came into the area. He helped me get Cherry back into his bunk. We tucked his covers and pillow on the outside to keep him from falling out again. He spent the rest of the night sleeping it off.

Next morning when we got up, there was Cherry, stretching and coming alive. I asked him how he had slept and he said, "Never better." I asked, "Are you sore anywhere?" His reply was a puzzled, "No." To this day, I always laugh when I recall my adventure with Cherry.



Keith Carney
Winter 1942-1943
1937 Buick



Keith Carney
Seaman 1st Class
W. W. II Feb. 1913

KENNETH A. CARROLL EM 1/c
Electrician's Mate Petty Officer First Class

WHAT I REMEMBER MOST ON THE USS WITTER DE 636



When we crossed the Equator, we had a ceremony aboard ship. Neptune was there on his throne made from a fruit box. His hair was in big curls made from a mop. Don't forget the big fat belly we all had to kiss. Before we crossed the equator, a man was a pollywog which was nothing. We were lower than whale dung on the bottom of the ocean. After the crossing, a man became a shellback and could then be called a sailor.

We set out to find a Marine bomber. It had caught flak over Truk Island which was held by the Japs. We reached the plane as it was getting late and dark. We started circling and going out further with every circle. As darkness fell, they sent up a flare. We found the four Marines in a couple of rafts. The other 2 Marines had gone down with the plane. We left there in a hurry because we were close to the enemy Japs ---- too close.

When we pulled out of Ulithi Bay with the task force we were going to hit the Japs on Leyte Bay in the Philippines. It was a beautiful morning, I thought to myself. I sure was glad that I was an American sailor. We, the Destroyer Escorts, and the destroyers came out first and formed a big circle. Then the task force came out. It was a sight to see. I think the Witter mission was to escort the fleet tankers when we went into Leyte Bay. We had to go back out to sea and we were up all night. We went back into the bay and tied up to another ship. We almost got blown up because the bomb that hit the ship we were tied up to was a dud. The Witter went back to Ulithi Bay and I was transferred off and sent back to the States.

When I told Ed Asbeck goodbye, I didn't know that he was going to lose his life on the Witter. I later learned that the Witter was headed toward Japan somewhere. Ed was like a son to me. He was 18 years old and I was 29 at that time. We had gone through gyro school together in San Diego and then caught the Witter at the same time. We were assigned to the IC room where the master gyro was located and we worked all the repeaters and sound power telephones.

While on leave at home I learned that the war was over in Germany. At the end of my leave, I checked in at the East coast at Philadelphia and then I was transferred to Williamsburg, VA. where I attended an electrical school for 16 weeks. While there, I met a shipmate. He asked if I had heard about the Witter being hit near Okinawa by a kamikaze plane. I said that I had not. He then showed me a news paper clipping which said that 6 men had been killed, and that Edward Asbeck was one of those men. What sad news. Ed was a 3rd class electrician's petty officer from Cleveland, Ohio. He was really like a son to me.

I was still at this school in Williamsburg when it was announced that the atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima and that Japan had surrendered unconditionally. Within three days, I was discharged from the U. S. Navy. I caught a train from there and headed for home in Amarillo, Texas. On the way, I was thinking, "I am going home and I will never have to go overseas again. I will never have to leave my wife, Bertha Marie Carroll, and my family ever again. I have thought about my buddy, Ed, many times, and I want to tell him that he is not alone. There are

thousands and thousands of boys just your age out there in that big blue Pacific pond — boys who will never know what it is to marry a good woman and to have children because you paid the ultimate price for your country. You are truly the real heroes. God is with you out there the same as He is here on earth.



**Bertha Marie and Kenneth Carroll
and a Friend**

JOSEPH A. COGNAC SC 2/c
as told to his daughter,
Lucille Bourque

Joe Cognac was one of two cooks on board. There was one baker. With the help of several stewards, they prepared meals for over 200 men every day, seven days a week. When he was stateside, Joe received three months of training as he learned how to cook tasty meals in large quantities. The menu of a week's worth of meals which is included with this story is proof that our sailors were well nourished while at sea.



My first memory is when the kamikaze struck the Witter. I was in the galley with my striker, preparing supper for the crew. We were going to have liver and onions. The crew was at general quarters. All of a sudden, I heard this BOOM and to me it sounded like a bomb had dropped inside our stack and exploded. That wasn't the case. A flash of fire came through the vent. We had no idea that it was a kamikaze. That's why I thought they'd dropped the bomb on us. I had my hair singed a little bit and naturally, in the explosion, the deck came up a couple inches from the shrapnel. It's a wonder we got out unscathed. An ankle sprain resulted when the deck raised up from the explosion. Naturally, there was **LIVER** all over the galley!! It was really a mess! Right off, we came topside. It was just a matter of opening the hatch, and we then went to our respective battle stations. Where the plane hit on the starboard side at the water level, that's where our dry goods were kept, sugar, salt, etc., And all that was totally gone.

Another time, we were going along on a beautiful day. The waters were calm when, all of a sudden, the ship made a 360 without warning from the captain. Usually he warned the galley to hang on, but this time we had chocolate pudding all over the place. After that maneuver, he came back to the galley and saw the mess. He apologized for not giving us a warning, but something unexpected had come up, and there was no time to alert us. He was a "good ol' soul." He'd come back once in awhile and ask, "What's cooking, Whitey?" and then he'd take a sample here and there and smack his approval.

The galley was small but we managed just fine. It was very efficient. The only thing we didn't have was a mixer so everything had to be mixed by hand. The baker worked at night and he was a crackerjack! We had our own professional baker. He could put out any kind of dessert from peach cobbler to cookies, as well as the best bread we ever tasted!

A typical meal included dehydrated potatoes. We had to soak them to make them edible. One in a great while, we had real potatoes, and when we could get fresh cabbage, we used

BILL OF FARE FOR THE GENERAL MESS

U.S.S. WITTER (DE 636)

Week beginning 15 January, 1945

BREAKFAST	DINNER	SUPPER
Chilled Grapefruit Segments Dry Cereal Cold Milk & Sugar Creamed Dried Beef on Toast Fried Potatoes Bread - Jam - Coffee	Vegetable Soup Pot Roast of Beef Sage Dressing & Giblet Gravy Candied Sweet Potatoes Cabbage Peas <i>Cole slaw</i> Vanilla Ice Cream & Cake Bread - Butter - Iced Tea	Fried Ham Steak Mashed Sweet Potatoes Stewed Apples Buttered Asparagus Cherry Pie Biscuits Bread - Jam - Coffee
Chilled Figs Hot Cream of Wheat Milk & Sugar French Toast & Syrup Corned Beef Hash Bread - Butter - Coffee	Tomato Soup Lamb Chops Mashed Potatoes Buttered Green Beans Cole Slaw & Vinegar <i>Cole slaw</i> Lemon Layer Cake Bread - Butter - Iced Tea Pork & Beans	Grilled Frankfurter Tomato Sauce Corn Pudding Sauerkraut Escalloped Potatoes Butterscotch Pudding Bread - Jam - Lemonade
Stewed Peaches Dry Cereal Cold Milk & Sugar Baked Beans Canned Catsup Raisin Rolls Bread - Butter - Coffee	Navy Bean Soup Pan Roast of Beef Brown Gravy Mashed Potatoes Buttered Peas & Carrots <i>Cole slaw</i> Cardinal Salad <i>Cole slaw</i> Apple Pie Bread & Butter - Iced Tea	Meat Loaf Barbecue Sauce Creamed Potatoes Buttered Asparagus Harvard Beets Bread Pudding Vanilla Sauce Bread - Jam - Iced Cocoa

THURSDAY	Chilled Grapefruit Segments Boiled Hominy Grits Milk & Sugar Hot Cakes & Syrup Fried Canned Chopped Ham Bread - Butter - Coffee	Beef Broth with Noodles Boiled Beef Boiled Rice Brown Gravy Boiled Cabbage Boiled Green Beans Chocolate Cake Bread - Jam - Lemonade <i>Cole Slaw</i>	Spaghetti with Meat Sauce Stewed Corn Candied Sweet Potatoes Chilled Tomatoes Rice Raisin Pudding & Milk Bread - Jam - Coffee
FRIDAY	Chilled Prunes Dry Cereal Cold Milk & Sugar Scrambled Eggs with Chopped Ham Fried Potatoes Bread - Butter - Coffee	Creamed Pea Soup Fried Pork Steak Baked Macaroni & Cheese Buttered Silver Beets Sliced Beets Cherry Pie Bread - Butter - Iced Tea <i>Cole Slaw</i>	Grilled Hamburger Steak Potatoes Au Gratin Creamed Peas Pork & Beans Stewed Tomatoes Chocolate Pudding Bread - Jam - Lemonade
SATURDAY	Chilled Figs Hot Cream of Wheat Milk & Sugar Boston Baked Beans Canned Catsup Coffee Cake Bread - Jam - Coffee	Bean Soup Baked Ham Raisin Sauce Boiled Cabbage Boiled Carrots Mashed Sweet Potatoes Marble Cake Bread - Butter - Tea	Beef Stew Macaroni & Cheese Green Beans Stewed Rice Creamed Corn Vanilla Pudding Bread - Jam - Iced Cocoa
SUNDAY	Chilled Grapefruit Segments Dry Cereal Cold Milk & Sugar Scrambled Eggs Fried Chopped Ham Raisin Rolls Bread - Jam - Coffee	Chicken Noodle Soup Creamed Turkey on Toast Mashed Potatoes Buttered Peas Corn Pudding Cole Slaw Ice Cream Bread - Butter - Tea	Sliced Cold Cuts Sliced Cheese Macaroni Salad Chilled Tomatoes Sliced Pickles Mustard Boston Cream Cake Bread - Jam - Cocoa

Total estimated cost \$888.00

APPROVED:

George HERRMANN III

Lieutenant, U.S.N.R.

Commanding

Total estimated rations 1480

Respectfully submitted,

Estimated ration cost per day \$.60

C.E. Newton
C.E. NEWTON

Ensign Supply Corps, U.S.N.R.
Supply Officer

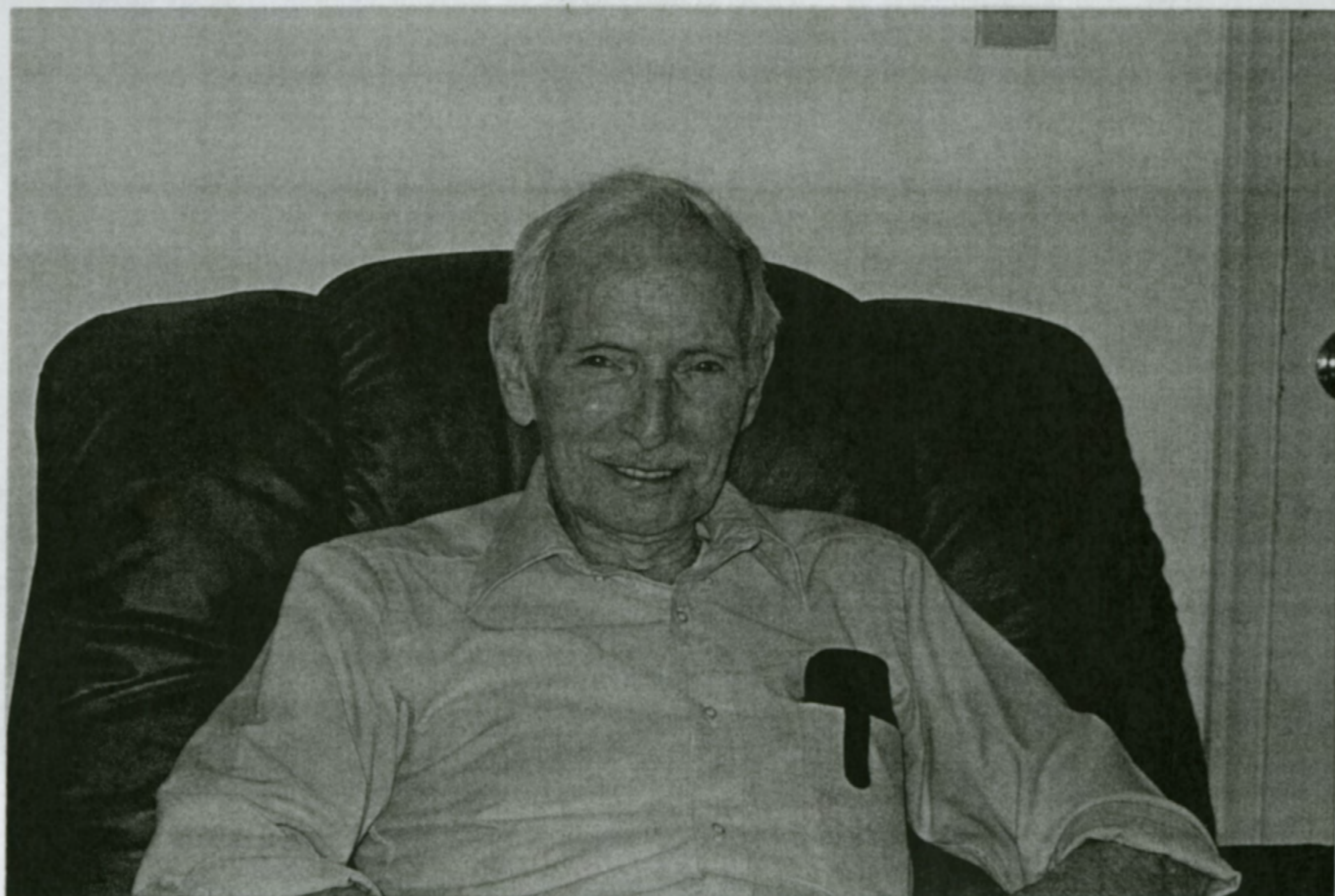
to make lots of cole slaw! We couldn't have sunnyside eggs because all we had were the powdered kind, but they did make beautiful scrambled eggs!

We were two cooks on the ship— one day off and one day on, so there was always a cook in the galley. That cook was on call for 24 hours, so if we had a boarding party, we had to make coffee and sandwiches, whatever was required. Speaking of coffee, we had a copper steamer that had coffee going 24/7 which was very much appreciated by the crew that was on watch. The coppers also served as cookers when we had fresh roast beef, and whatever was stuck to the sides made gravy. When we had turkey, we cooked ten turkeys in two huge ovens, and we made turkey soup in the coppers afterwards.

When we were lucky enough to have fresh potatoes, we had an automatic potato peeler which saved a lot of time, unless, of course, we forgot to time them. Then, instead of just taking off the skin, we'd end up with little marbles! We'd have to start all over a gain with another batch!

We used to get flour in 150 lb. burlap bags from New Zealand, and we had to strain the flour to pick out the bugs. We had one walk-in refrigerator and one walk-in freezer.

I remember New Year's Eve 1944 when the "S" Division toasted each other with Coke and Listerine cocktails which was all we had. I also remember one night we had orders to rescue two flyers who had to ditch their airplane near Truk Island. Truk Island was held by the Japanese at the time, and yet, we were out there with search lights, and we did rescue them. They sure were glad to see us! Needless to say, we left there at flank speed as soon as we got them aboard.



Joe Cognac

BENJAMIN DI FLORIO Cox

"BUSTER"



"Buster" Di Florio submitted a newspaper clipping from the Philadelphia Navy Yard Beacon dated September 7, 1945 which references the USS Witter DE 636 and also several members of the crew.

CRIPPLED DE KEPT FIGHTING OFF JAPS

Local Men Aboard Craft Which Survived

Blow by Kamikaze Plane

To the Witter goes the distinction of having been the only American naval vessel that did not catch fire after receiving a direct hit from a suicide plane. The attack occurred off Okinawa.

Local men in Crew

Her crew includes three Philadelphians: Bob D. Fanelli, 22, motor machinist's mate, third class of 722 S. Mildred St; Buster Di Florio, 21, a coxswain, of 727 Washington Ave., and Seaman First Class P. J. Criniti of

3318 Glenview St. Di Florio was helping operate a 20 millimeter gun that downed one of the attacking planes.

Attacked by two "Val" bombers the afternoon of April 6, the Witter scored hits when the planes were more than two miles away. Although one went down, the other, itself afire, crashed through the ship's starboard side amidships just about the waterline. In the bomb explosion which followed, six men were killed, and one officer and six enlisted men were injured. The forward fire room and engine room and the forward mess hall were ruined, fuel tanks were ruptured and escaping oil flooded several compartments to depth of three feet.

In less than five minutes, fast moving engineers and electricians had power back on and the Witter's skipper, Lieutenant Commander George Herrmann of Oak Park, Illinois, set a course for the anchorage at Keramo Retto, 25 miles distant.

Attacked While Helpless

This was only the beginning of the Witter's trial. For three months, she lay at anchor, awaiting the arrival of a floating drydock, while Japanese planes attacked as many as three and four times a day. When her men were not at general quarters, they were standing regular sea watch at the guns. There was little sleep and no let-up, for in that three month period, the wounded Witter played her part in driving off more than 200 separate enemy air raids. Temporary repairs were finally effected by the AR 28, and the Witter shoved off for San Diego, limping on her one remaining engine. When she arrived, more than fifteen weeks after being hit, some of her crew had not set foot off the ship for over eight months. When the Witter arrived at Philadelphia Navy Yard, August 15th, she was met by Lieutenant (jg) Bruno Naczkowski, who had been flown there from the Pacific to make advance arrangements for speedy repairs. On the bridge of the Destroyer Escort Witter, now at the Philadelphia Navy Yard for repairs, are painted three Jap flags. Lieutenant Paul C. Danforth, the executive officer, of Danvers, Mass, explains them thus: "One is for the suicide plane we shot down the day we were hit, one is for a light plane we got at Leyte and the third — well, that's the one we threw the ship at."

DE - 636

THE HANDY - BILLY BLUES

We do not have the music that was composed to accompany these stirring lyrics, however, the men who heard these verses sung while they were on board the ship will probably hear the strains of melody echoing in memory as they recall the voices of Gantano, Fair, Crum and Marquette carrying this message across the waters of the Pacific Ocean.

I GOT THE HANDY-BILLY BLUES, BABA BLUES,
I GOT THE HANDY BILLY BLUES.

WE WAKE UP IN THE MORNING AT QUARTER TO FOUR,
AND TURN THE HOSE OUT INTO THE SEA ONCE MORE.

I GOT THE HANDY-BILLY BLUES, BABA BLUES,
I GOT THE HANDY-BILLY BLUES.

WE SIT OUT ON THE FAN TAIL TO GET SOME SUN,
GENERAL QUARTERS SOUNDS AND WE'RE ON THE RUN.

I GOT THE HANDY BILLY BLUES, BABA BLUES,
I GOT THE HANDY BILLY BLUES.

WE HAD SIX GENERAL QUARTERS AND WANTED SOME REST,
BUT THEY TOLD US TO GIVE BILLY ONE MORE TEST.

I GOT THE HANDY-BILLY BLUES, BABA BLUES,
I GOT THE HANDY BILL BLUES.

WE TOOK BILLY #2 ON A FIRE AND RESCUE DRILL
BUT THE GODDAM THING WOULDN'T WORK 'TIL
WE DROPPED A NICKLE IN THE TILL.

I GOT THE HANDY-BILLY BLUES, BABA BLUES,
I GOT THE HANDY BILLY BLUES.

NOW YOU MAY NOT LIKE BILLY VERY WELL,
BUT SOMEDAY YOU WISHED YOU HAD IT IN HELL.

I GOT THE HANDY-BILLY BLUES, BABA BLUES,
I GOT THE HANDY BILLY BLUES.

BY,

GANTANO, FAIR, CRUM AND MARQUETTE

GEORGE H. FUTCH S1/c

George Futch was one of a small group of Witter crew members who got together in 1987 and a couple of times after that to plan the first ever ship's reunion. Chicago 1988 was a wonderful and memorable event for the 79 people who were able to attend.



We had four weeks of D. E. training at Norfolk Naval Base. I was assigned to the Ordnance Division (O div.) We traveled cross country by train to San Francisco to board the Witter at Hunter's Point. Our first trial run took us out under the Golden Gate Bridge. Large ground swells caused by the ocean coming into the bay made the ship go up and down. I was on the bow of the ship enjoying the ride. The Chief Boatswain's Mate was standing next to me smoking a pipe, and he asked me if I had ever been seasick. I said no. I looked around and saw about a dozen guys hanging their heads over the side. I guess you can guess that I was number thirteen but it soon passed.

We took the ship for a shake down cruise out of San Diego. On our way back to San Francisco we ran into bad weather one night. I was in my sack when a call came over the P. A. System, "Now hear this, Futch. Lay up to the flying bridge!" When I got to the bridge, the Officer of the Day, (OD) told me to go down to the 20

MM clipping room and lash down the ammunition which had broken loose. The ship was rolling and pitching, and waves were coming all the way up to the bridge. I had to climb down a ladder from the bridge to the main deck where the clipping room was. I secured the ammo and went back up to the bridge and reported to the OD that I had secured the ammo. Guess who the OD was: Hoxie Griswald, the Asst. Gunnery Officer. He seemed to get a kick out of giving me the lousy details. This was just one of many.

Another time we were taking on ammo, fuel and supplies, getting ready to go overseas. There were five or six of us lowering three inch shell (four to the box) down to the ammo magazine three decks below. Two of us were down in the magazine stacking the boxes of ammo as they lowered them down with a rope and tackle which was called a whip. 3/GM Gorman was lowering the box, when all of a sudden, the box slipped out of the rope and fell two decks below. McCarty and I saw it coming and we jumped out of the way. The box of ammo hit the deck and I thought we were goners but luckily, nothing happened. We looked up and saw Gorman laughing but we didn't think it was funny at all. Knowing Gorman, you never knew what to expect. Thank goodness for well boxed ammo.

One of my most pleasant memories was drinking coffee and eating peanut butter sandwiches made with bread hot from the oven, on the midnight watch. One man would go to the galley and get the bread as it came from the oven, and we had a coffee pot on our gun. We got our peanut butter from the Ship's Stores. I still remember how good it was!

The most memorable experience was when the Jap suicide plane hit our ship on the starboard side. I was on # 1 gun. It felt like a freight train had slammed into us. It knocked down every man on the deck except the pointer, trainer and sight setter. The only reason we didn't fall was because we were on the gun.

The men who were killed were the real heroes of the ship along with all the others from the other branches of service.



Millie and George Futch

HARRY JOHNSON SK 2/c

Harry was one of several crew members who met in different parts of the USA in 1987 to plan for the first reunion of the USS Witter DE 636. He has been an active reunion group member since then, and has served in various capacities throughout the years. Notably, he was Skipper of the Reunion Group from 1995 through 2002. In addition to chairing the annual business meetings, Harry was responsible for the newsletter and also for keeping track of changes to the active ship's roster. In these last two areas, Harry was very capably assisted by his wife Phyllis. In spite of her illness Phyllis managed to keep up with the paperwork, the phone calls and the correspondence. Phyllis died in 2004.



I was a store keeper and I also handled all the payroll accounts for the crew. In addition, I procured all the supplies needed by the ship such as carrying out orders for food, ammunition, paint, hardware, etc. I managed the ship's store. One of the most harrowing days of my life was on the afternoon of April 6, 1945. I was assigned to Gun Crew 2 and I was a trainer on the 3 inch gun. Jack Spitsen was the pointer. The pointer moved the gun vertically. The trainer moved the gun horizontally.

Gun 2 was the "ready" gun all of the time when we were underway. When the planes attacked, we were manning gun 3 on the fantail. Breckenridge was the gun captain at the time. He ordered open fire before he got permission from the bridge.

The attackers were bombing the APD off the starboard side when we first got sight of them. We opened fire. We know that we hit a VAL because the plane caught fire. I had him sighted in the telescope the whole time, and followed him all the way into the ship. We were firing at

him and we were hitting him, but we couldn't knock him out of the air. When there was a few seconds pause in the firing, I thought that the rest of the crewmen had left me at the gun. But then, Breckenridge put his hand on my shoulder, so I knew someone was there. I sat back down and kept following the plane.

The attacker was coming right down my sights, and all I thought of was "I wonder what my mother will think when she gets the letter edged in black." I followed the attacker until the gun hit the gun stop. At the last minute, the ship swung around. I looked up out of the telescope just as he was hitting the starboard side of the ship. I was standing there, not believing that I was still alive.

It was amazing to me how soon other ships arrived to help us. Later, in a discussion with Lieutenant Bash, we found out that he had never heard of anyone shooting a 3 inch gun as fast as we had. As you can imagine, there was lots of confusion after the plane hit the ship. We didn't know whether or not the ship was going to sink. The damage control crew took over and kept us afloat until we reached Kerama Rhetto.

Harry Johnson wrote this prayer — a poem— for one of the Witter Reunion Group's business meetings. It is customary to offer a prayer at each annual meeting, and it will include words of gratitude for those who served so long ago and for those who were gathered together now.

A Prayer of Thanks for the Witter Men

Thank you, Lord, for this group
Who, together, as a troop,
Sailed the waters from port to port
As a team on a Destroyer Escort.

Thank you, Lord, for this crew
Who knew exactly what to do
Guiding the ships along the way
Serving their country, the U.S.A.

Thank you Lord for each shipmate
Who, no matter what his rate
Was ever so proud to be
A member of the U. S. Navy.

Thank you Lord, for this group
Who, together, as a troop
Made it possible for us to say,
"Thank you, Lord, for this day."



Phyllis and Harry Johnson

LIEUTENANT KENNETH JOHNSON

Remembrance was submitted

by his son

Kristopher Johnson

Here is a quick story involving my mother, Gertrude A. Johnson. I was named honorary crew member at the 1999 Witter reunion in Seattle, Washington. My military service led me to being a Gunner's Mate on a heavy cruiser, Canberra CAG 2, in the Vietnam Conflict. Hell — it was a war, no mistake.

I was born late in my parents' marriage. They were married in 1935 and were trying to have a child until my father, Ken, joined the Navy and went to sea in 1942. After being hit by a kamikaze aircraft off Okinawa, the Witter made its way to a dry dock for repair. They then sailed for Philadelphia. At that time, many men were given extra leave, including my father, Ken. My mother met him on the East Coast and they rode a train across the country back to the West Coast and home.

My mother relates that they had a room in a Pullman car, and they never got out of bed for the entire East to West trip. She told me that there was no doubt that it was during that "Marathon Sexual Reunion" that I was conceived. That ended eleven years of trying to have a child. So, if it were not for WW II, the USS Witter, a little luck and a train ride, I wouldn't be here.



Lt. Kenneth Johnson



Kristopher Johnson

SOL KOENIGSBERG SM 2/c

Some Thoughts and Recollections of Service in WWII Aboard the U. S. S. Witter DE - 636

I was expected to be called to service and, like millions of others, I felt it a duty to defend and protect our country and the people in it. The Navy and Marine Corps only took volunteers, but they had quotas to fill. So, I was one of very many who were inducted as an SVV6 (selected volunteer). I only learned much later what an oxymoron was and, at times, found the term useful in my profession of community service.

Now we are in our seventies, some in our eighties. We were so young then! Look at those pictures! We were in our teens, barely out of adolescence, and at war. Perhaps some day humans will be able to settle their differences without playing at "He who kills the most people, wins." It hasn't happened yet. The thrilling and dramatic moments were very few. Mostly, we were on picket or escort duty and were at sea for more than two years (?) with no shore leave. We were occasionally sent to a beach with some refreshments and swam while at anchor, with a couple of sailors in a whaleboat who were armed with rifles watching out for sharks. We endured the boredom, drills and the seasickness as best we could. Yes, the "submarines" were mostly whales. It really was fascinating to hear them "sing" and to listen to the underwater sounds of marine life. I do believe, though, that our presence did protect those we escorted.

Being shot at by airplanes was unnerving and did prove deadly for our crew. Bombarding in the Gulf of Leyte in the liberation of the Philippines had meaning and was exciting. Being hit by a kamikaze was a terrifying experience. After all, most of these suicide pilots aimed for the bridge which was where my battle station was. I feel that the most dangerous and frightening occurrence was the typhoon we got caught in on the way to the Philippines. We listed at more than 45 degrees and nearly capsized. Scuttlebutt had it that a couple of destroyers did overturn with a loss of many lives. They were more top heavy than we were. We limped our way back via San Diego and the Panama Canal. VJ Day took place one day before we landed in Philadelphia. We tied up at the Navy Yard with hardly anyone there to handle our lines. No one was on hand to greet us. The streets of the city were deserted. We missed the celebration! That's OK... We are spending the rest of our lives in celebration.

Sonarman 2/c

Sol Koenigsberg



KENNETH W. KRUKOW SOM 3/c

Ken regularly attended Witter reunions and would often have a poem or a song for the crew which he would present at the reunion banquet. He was talented with words, was a composer and had many interests. This is one of his contributions. Sadly, we do not have the music.

The Saga of the U.S.S. Witter DE 636

Of the 636, we all proudly say
It was one hell of a ship
Fighting for the U.S.A.
(It was) always fit for battle
With courage it fought the foe.
Until it was hit by kamikaze
It took us where we had to go.

Chorus

U.S.S. Witter with pride
We salute her crew.
Lead by superior officers
And a captain tried and true.

We sailed from San Francisco
Then to the southern seas;
the Solomon's and Gilbert's-
Islands such as these.
Hollandia, New Guniea
and Ulithi too.
But we'd be in hotter places
Before the war was through.

Chorus

Leyte Gulf was awesome,
Fleet tankers we'd escort.
Then anxiously awaited
A victory report.
And watching those battleships,
Those Okinawa days;
Shelling everything on the ground
And even the underground maze.

Chorus

But then came the invasion,
And hell ruled the sky.
We couldn't avoid disaster,
But gave it a mighty good try.
A kamikaze blew out the bottom

From the starboard side;
The fire was smothered by rushing water,
But six of us were dead.

Chorus

We limped into Kerama Retto
and Huddled in protective smoke,
Fighting for preservation
And loving a damn good joke.
These were the hard times,
Helpless days of fear;
Rejoicing after a scarey night,
When told that the skies were clear.

Chorus

Waiting for a dry dock,
Then told to head from home;
Hoping for some stateside;
No more did we want to roam.
Victory came swiftly,
At Philly, we said Goodbye.
Now it's "Hello!" again,
With nary an eye that's dry.

Chorus



Ken Krukow

This poem was submitted for inclusion in this book of remembrances without a signature or even a hint as to authorship. Perhaps that it is just as well considering the pain and suffering described in these verses. Read on!

TUFF TIMES ON THE WITTER

The WITTER was a paragon of ships that sail the blue
The only trouble was fact the crew just never knew.

But on the fourteenth of January in Nineteen Forty-Five,
Fearless Freddy came aboard. For perfection he would strive.

At first he didn't look so tough with that smile upon his face.
No bogey-man was he and we'd put him in his place.

Sure we could handle a three-striper. No trouble there at all.
But he started pitching curves at us and never threw a ball.

It was drills and inspections. Inspections and more drills.
We were surfeited and saturated. Filled up to the gills

With the ceaseless cry of "Wolf" and the PA's blatant roar
"This is a drill." "This is a drill." And more and more and more.

It was GQ in the morning and GQ again at night.
And in between were drills and drills. Oh cripes it was a fright.

Freddy lashed out at the officers; that smile still on his face,
Bore down on the crew: God help us keep this pace.

Oh, we never knew how happy it was on this merry ship of ours
And we pined for other duty like lots of other heedless tars.

But we would exchange right gladly for the WITTER as before,
If Freddy just would leave now, I'm sure we'll yearn no more

For other duty; other ships and the spot that's known as "Gravy."
He's the second guy, three striper, that made me rue the Navy.

So listen all you sailor men as you sail the blue Pacific,
You may think that you've had it tough and your hell ship is terrific.

But if you hear a moan of anguish from a ship you pass at night
And chilling screams of torture that would make a Zombie fright,

Well let me tell you, Mac, an ear this way just bend;
It's probably the WITTER, and Fearless Freddy rides again.

RICHARD G. LINSMEYER, FC 2/c

The following letters were sent to Harry Johnson in 2001 by Mr. Linsmeyer's daughter, Jessica Berg. Harry was the Reunion Group Skipper at the time, and he, in turn, has submitted these items for the Witter Book.

July 2, 2001

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I am the daughter of Richard Linsmeyer, one of the USS Witter shipmates you correspond with. My mother asked that I write to let you know my dad died last July 17 (2000) of cancer. He had lymphoma for almost five years and did quite well until the last two months.

I'm not sure how much he corresponded with you, but I know he was a very proud veteran who enjoyed telling stories of his service history. My mom and I enjoyed your letters almost as much as he did! That's wonderful how you keep the shipmates in touch with each other - I hope you have a good turnout in Chicago.

Have a happy, healthy summer and Fourth of July.

Take care.

Sincerely,

Jessie Berg

Thanks so much for the recent correspondence after we notified you of my Dad's death. Enclosed is a picture of my Dad for the USS WITTER MEMORY BOOK. Hope it's not too large but it was the best one we could find! Sorry he's not here to include any stories but every April 6, my Dad would mention the significance of the day and talk about the bombing.

Even though my Dad is no longer with us, we were hoping you could send us one of the USS WITTER memory books— for us and for Richard's grandchildren— “to pass on to future generations” as you mentioned in your letter. We would also pay whatever the cost might be and it would really mean a lot to us. Also, my Mom, especially, asked that you still correspond once in awhile, if there is anything significant, etc., as she , and my brother and I have really enjoyed the letters and pictures, and learned a few things as well!

Take care and hope you have a great turnout at the reunion and that it is fun, successful and memorable. Again, please send us a memory book if you can. Thanks!

Sincerely,

Jessie Berg and Patricia (Mrs. Richard Linsmeyer)



Richard G. Linsmeyer



WILBUR L. McCRACKEN WT 2/c

As submitted by his daughter

Carolyn McCracken



I am proud to have been one of the original crew members of the USS Witter De 636. I took my boot training at the Great lakes Training Center, then went to Norfolk, VA, where we boarded a troop train to San Francisco, CA. We boarded the USS Witter at Bethlehem Steel Co, and this was my home for the next year.

I was assigned to the Fire Room on shakedown and this was to be my battle station as well during General Quarters. It turned out to be the only station I held while on the Witter. Victor Hagerstrom was in the Fireroom with me. He was a great guy and someone you would want to be with during GQ. He maintained the burners for the amount of steam needed to maintain the speed the captain asked for, either 1/3, 2/3, full or flank. Flank speed was 28 knots, or approximately 30 miles per hour.

I was Water Tender in charge of the Aft Fire Room on our regular 4-on 8-off watch, and GQ. Mt job was to keep the right amount of water in the boiler and the right amount of air to the blowers for a bright flame, and to make sure that the oil going into the boiler was the right temperature.

We were the only Turbo Electric Destroyer Escort in the Navy. We generated superheated steam that ran the turbines which, in turn, made electricity to run the screws. We were probably the fastest destroyer escort in the South Pacific.

Everyone got along well aboard ship, and the food was good if you liked it. We had baked beans for breakfast every Saturday morning. We slept in hammock-like beds that were three high. We received mail and were paid every two weeks, no matter where we were. We were able to buy a few things, like candy, cigarettes, and shaving supplies from the ship's store. We converted salt water to into clean water by using two big evaporators, which turned the water into steam, then it was condensed.

We didn't have any entertainment aboard ship, other than poker games or shooting craps, usually around payday. In my spare time, I'd sit on the fantail and watch schools of fish, or the birds. If a bird would land on the radar mast, which was turning, the bird would have to keep turning to, to stay facing the wind. When we were near the equator, it would rain for about 10 minutes every day.

When we would go ashore, we would each receive two beers and we could sell them for five dollars a bottle. In New Guinea, the native pygmies would meet us as we were getting off the ship, bringing real nice handcrafted miniature ships and whole stalks of bananas, hoping to trade them to us for a pair of Navy shorts.

I never felt like I was doing much toward the war effort. The work was monotonous, the same routine every day.....until we were called to rescue some U. S. servicemen whose plane had been shot down near the large Japanese naval Base, Truk. To be able to find those guys and to be able to see the look on their faces when we brought them back to safety was a good feeling and made my work as a Water Tender more important. I realized then that every job aboard ship was important and someone had to do it. I made WT 2/c, and I guess the big thrill came shortly after, on March 26, 1945, at about 2:30 PM, at Ulithi, when the officer in charge of the "Black Gang" (as we were called) called me in and said, "You have 30 minutes to get your things in your ditty bag. You're heading to San Francisco for another assignment." It took me 10 minutes and I was ready. I left Ulithi the next day on a troop ship. I spent about 10 days on a pineapple plantation in Hawaii, and I arrived in San Francisco the last part of April. I left San Francisco on a 30 day leave, anxious to see my wife and daughter who was only 9 months old when I left. After I returned from leave, I reported to Philadelphia, PA, to begin Oil Burning School for 5 weeks. I was hospitalized for emergency surgery and had to start school again. I was in Philadelphia for bot VE and VJ.

In August 1945, the Witter arrived at the Philadelphia Navy Yard for repairs and conversion to a fast troop transport. This is when I learned that she had been hit, on April 6th, by a Japanese Bomber off the coast of Okinawa, just 11 days after I had left the ship for reassignment. The plane had ben shot down, but crashed into the starboard side of the shipat the waterline, and its bomb had exploded in the Number 1 Fireroom. Although the Witter survived the damage, six crewmen lost their lives in the line of duty: three Water Tenders, two Firemen and one Electrician's Mate. I was sorry to hear of this loss, and I was grateful to be alive. At least I saw and served on the Witter when she was new and saw her again before she was sold for scrap metal.-- you might say, from start to finish. I was discharged in November 1945 at Great Lakes, and spent the next 27 years working at Swift and Company in UTAH, where I retired in 1973.



Wilbur "Stick" and Margaret McCracken

JAMES O. MURPHREE RDM 3/c

"Murph" loved to attend Witter reunions. He always added humor to these meetings and he was part of the organizational committee for the San Antonio reunion in 1998. We were saddened to learn of his passing in 2001 and we felt it was important to include this obituary in the remembrance book telling a little bit about his life. Ed.



James O. "Murph" Murphree

James O. "Murph" Murphree, 75, died Sunday, February 4, 2001, at the "Heart Hospital of Austin". Services were held Wednesday at the First Baptist Church with Dr. Tracy Watson and Rev. Randy Larpenteur officiating. Burial was in the Hamlin Memorial Cemetery, directed by Foster-Adams Funeral home.

Born September 29, 1925, in Hamlin, Murph was the son of the late W. H. And Bertha (McAnally) Murphree. He graduated from Hamlin High School in 1943 and immediately joined the U. S. Navy and served three years as a Radarman

on the destroyer escort ship, USS Witter, in World War II. J. O. married Jane Zellner July 18, 1947, in Abilene. He was employed by the Hamlin ISD for 19 years as Maintenance Supervisor and school bus driver. Murph was a member of the Hamlin Lions Club since 1964 and served on the Hamlin Volunteer Fire Department for 32 years. He was a member of the First Baptist Church. Murph was a longtime Hamlin Boy Scout leader. He was the recipient of scouting's Silver Beaver Award and the "Scouter Key" which is the highest award that an adult leader can earn in scouting. He recently moved to Kingsland on lake LBJ.

Survivors include his wife Jane Murphree of Kingsland; a son and daughter-in-law, Mike and Peggy Murphree of Arlington; a daughter and son-in-law, Patti and Bobby Williams of Lewisville; two grandchildren, Meagan Murphree and Jay Michael Murphree; and a sister, Odean Murphree of Abilene. A sister preceded him in death.



BRUNO NACZKOWSKI LT (jg)

Bruno Naczkowski attended the Witter reunions as often as he was able. At these gatherings, it was mentioned that the Witter would have been in greater difficulty had it not been for the foresight of Bruno in making rapid restoration of electricity possible. At the time that material was being requested for this book, Bruno had been asked to write his story, but he was having a bit of difficulty in "getting around to it." At the reunion in Asheville, he finally consented to an interview about the events of April 6th, 1945. The following chronicle is the outcome of that moving conversation. Ed.



Bruno recalls: On April 6, 1945, a Japanese Kamikaze pilot flew his aircraft into the Witter on the starboard side at the water about midship. When the aircraft was seen approaching the ship, the captain, "Tim" Herrmann called for flank speed and started evasive action with a hard "right rudder" thereby exposing the belly of the ship. The impact of the aircraft and ensuing explosion demolished the forward fire room and IC/gyro compass room, and ruptured several forward fuel oil tanks. A bomb, believed to be an armor piercing projectile, carried under the left wing of the aircraft, exploded in the boiler room and blasted a hole in the bulkhead between the forward engine and fire rooms.

A huge plume of smoke, steam and soot rose through the smokestack and our intakes, engulfing the superstructure causing the appearance, as observed, from a distance, of great damage to or destruction of the ship. In reality, a large hole was made in the hull from the water line down to the keel and extending the full length of the forward fire room. Water quickly poured into the damaged area in great volume, extinguishing any fire caused by the explosion or the red-hot metal from the boiler.

The bulk of the kamikaze plane's engine and a bomb under the right wing penetrated the forward part of the fire room, tragically killing six men. The men in the forward engine room received flash burns and shrapnel wounds from the explosion and superheated steam that was blasted through the breach in the forward engine room bulkhead.

The engine room was quickly flooded by the seawater entering through the hole in the bulkhead. Interior communications were lost due to the destruction of the IC/gyro compass room. At the moment, the engineering officer was unaware of the extent of the damage. With the help of damage control personnel, the men in the engine room abandoned the space when the flood water reached the upper level deck grating.

Under battle conditions, the ship was in a split plant mode. That is: the forward fire and engine rooms were operated as a single power plant to provide propulsion power for the

starboard propeller. The after engine and fire rooms were operated completely independent of the forward power plant, and provided power to the port propeller. So, with the loss of the forward propulsion system, the ship continued underway on the port propeller.

Ship steering was quickly restored by the personnel in the after steering room. Communications were made by sound power connections and by messenger. The magnetic compasses were used in place of the gyro compass repeaters.

Now up on the main deck on the inboard bulkhead of the interior starboard passageway was stored a short communication cable. When in port, the cable was used to tie electrical power from shore into the main distribution switchboard in the after engine room. The connection was made through an open hatch and was connected to the back or "live" side of the switchboard. Use of this connection at sea for damage control purposes would be dangerous. The engineering crew installed a "hard wire" armored cable connection from a "spare" circuit breaker on the main switchboard through a water tight connection in the main deck to a damage control receptacle on the bulkhead of the interior passageway. The damage control crew used it in setting up an emergency procedure well in advance of the hit by stringing the shore power cable, in a storage mode, from the damage control receptacle, along the passageway bulkhead, to the electrical circuit panels at the forward end of the interior passageway. The Engineering Division manned the engineering spaces during general quarters (battle condition) with approximately 1/3 of its complement. The remaining 2/3 were mostly assigned to damage control parties, particularly the chiefs and technical petty officers. Thus, during a loss of power forward, they could connect the cable to the damage control receptacle, make the required connections to the circuit panels and have the "spare" switch turned on to restore power forward. This procedure would preserve the water tight integrity of the after engine room by not having to keep open a hatch to pass through the damage control cable and it eliminated the need of connecting the cable to a "live" main distribution switchboard. When the airplane hit, the damage control crew went into action and in a short time, power was restored to the superstructure and forward part of the ship.

Bruno claims that the recovery was a stroke of luck. The afternoon of the hit was a bright day. The seas were calm. Had it been rough, the added stress and bending of the hull could have caused the ship to break in half and cause additional casualties. Had a third major compartment been flooded, the problem of survivability would have been much more serious. However, the right set of circumstances allowed for the saving of many lives that fateful day. The recovery of the Witter was a true team effort.

Bruno also noted the following: Commander "Fearless Freddie" Hawes, Commander Escort Division 40, was on the bridge during the engagement and observed the operation of the Witter crew. Our division commander had previously been a damage control officer on a large combatant and recognized the skill and foresight which had restored the power and kept the ship underway, albeit at a reduced speed. Cdr. Freddie W. Hawes had previously been commanding officer of the USS Bowers DE 635, another ship in our division. His method of operation was to spend time on each ship of the Division, particularly when they were assigned to an important mission. Cdr. Hawes and his staff spent a lot of time on the Witter and were quite familiar with the capabilities of our crew.

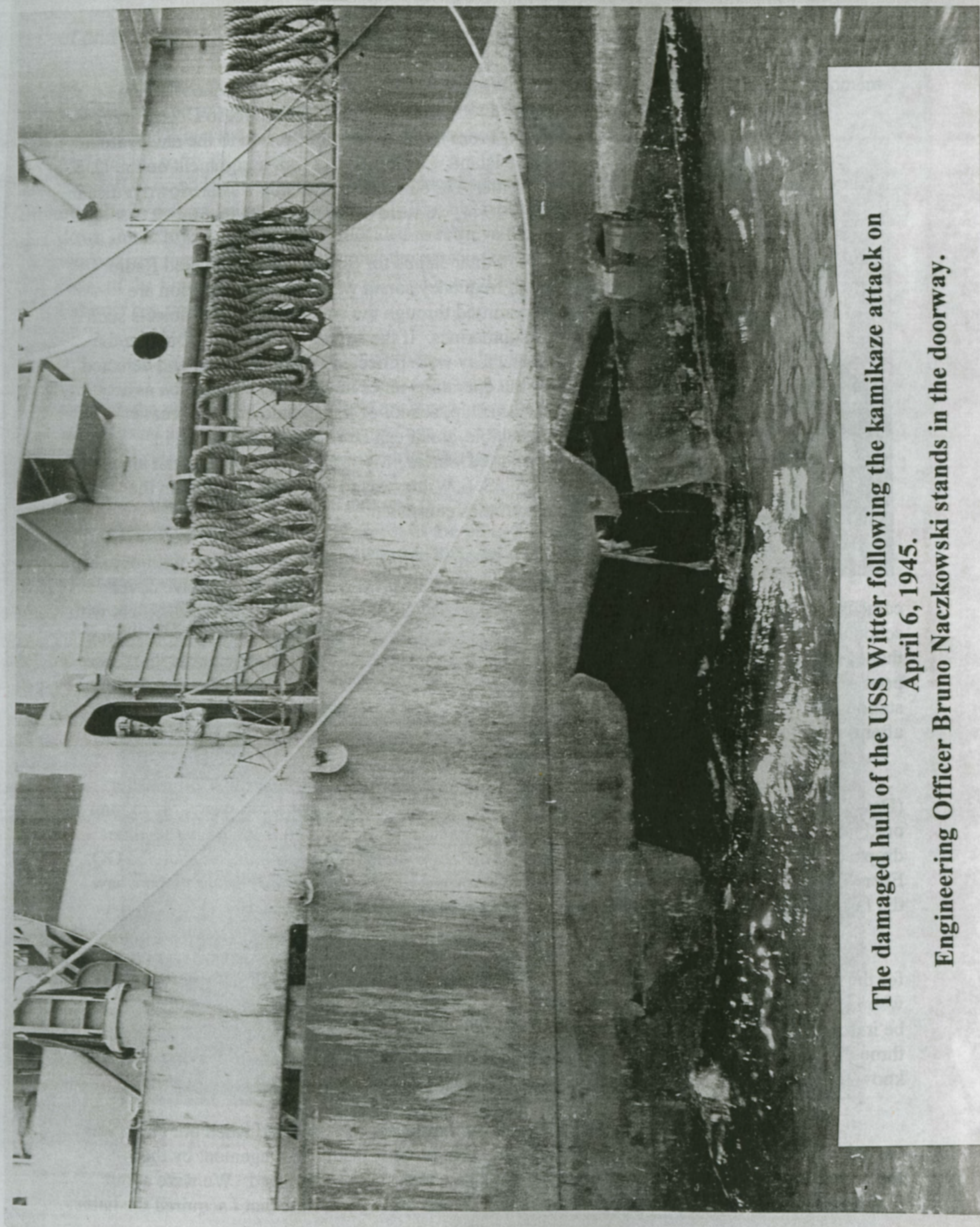
These quotes taken from ComCortDiv 40 endorsement on the Witter action report to the Commander -Chief, U.S. Fleet: "I have only the utmost admiration for the ability to

control damage and to keep going which was displayed by the entire personnel; of the Witter. Smoke filled the entire superstructure, and all communications were lost for a short time. An improvised messenger service was started immediately and communications were soon as good as could be expected. (The ship had way on again, and steering control was regained in less than five minutes.) I alternated with the Commanding Officer in coming in and checking the damage, and I was particularly impressed by the efficiency of the damage control and engineering personnel under the direction of Engineering Officer, Bruno Naczkowski. They gave the decided impression (and results) of men who had been well trained and knew their business. This ability to "carry on" was based on a solid foundation for the Witter had, for several months previous to this action, carried out a well organized and comprehensive program of training to prepare for all types of casualties."

Ed. note: Bruno Naczkowski had modestly omitted his name from the preceding statement. It was restored by the editor.



Edee and Bruno Naczkowski



The damaged hull of the USS Witter following the kamikaze attack on
April 6, 1945.

Engineering Officer Bruno Naczkowski stands in the doorway.

RALPH W. NELSON SoM 1/c



I finished the West Coast sound school at San Diego as a sonar technician, SoM 3/c, in December 1943. From there, I was transferred to the navy yard at Mare Island, California, to await assignment on the U. S. S. Witter, DE 636. After the ship's shakedown cruise in early 1944, we were off to the South Pacific.

Sonar stands for Sound Navigation And Radio. High frequency sound waves in short duration are transmitted through the water in search of objects such as submarines. If the sound waves hit an object in the water, they were reflected back to the ship and detected by the operator. Since any sizable object such as a surface ship, school of fish, whale or coral reef is detectable, sonar can be useful in navigating in uncharted waters. My job as Sonar Technician aboard the U. S. S. Witter was to service and maintain the electronics equipment.

From the time we left San Francisco until our ship was hit at Okinawa we were fortunate that we never came in contact with an enemy submarine. There were a few times when we came in contact with schools of fish that resulted in the officer on duty sounding GQ (General Quarters). This means that everybody had to man their battle station position and do it quickly! Can you imagine those poor souls who were sound asleep having to hit-the-deck, get dressed and head for their battle stations in the middle of the night? You can imagine how unpopular we sonar operators were after those false alarms?!

Speaking of false alarms, one night, as we cruised along in the Pacific, Commander (Davis?) got the crazy idea that we should find out how quickly we poor souls were able to man our battle stations. While cruising along peaceably one night, he ordered a depth charge to be dropped and exploded over the side or fantail of the ship. When it did explode, he sounded GQ. Everybody hit the deck thinking that we had been torpedoed! I'll bet my last dollar that we saw the fastest manning of battle stations in the history of the U.S. Navy!

I'm sure that there are many memories, some good and some bad that will stay with us for the rest of our lives. One of these events occurred when we crossed the Equator. Any sailor who had never crossed the Equator was ordered by King Neptune, Ruler of the Raging Main, to be initiated as a Trustworthy Shellback. The initiation involved, among other things, passing through a long belt or paddle line. Those who were already Shellbacks manned the belt line. I know this for a fact because I was there. I don't think that I sat down for the rest of the day!

The longest time that we had to stay at our battle stations occurred when our Navy was engaging the enemy in battle outside Leyte Gulf. That was the last big engagement by the Japanese Navy in the war. Most of their big ships had been sunk or damaged. We were at our battle stations for about 72 hours without a break. It was during this time that I acquired the habit

of drinking coffee. It helped me to stay awake and alert.

When we were preparing for the Okinawa invasion, everyone made sure his equipment was performing in tip top shape. For my part, I replaced all the vacuum tubes in the sonar equipment. When we got underway, it was discovered that the sonar steering gear was not performing correctly. The projector would creep (rotate in azimuth) slowly even though not directed to do so by the operator. I had replaced two thyratron tubes that drive the projector and must be in perfect balance conductivity. The old tubes had been were thrown into a trash can down in the lower sound room. I decided to retrieve the old tubes from the can since they had worked just fine. Much to my disgust, the person (I won't mention the name) manning the sound room at the time had gotten seasick and had heaved into the can. Boy!, what a mess to clean up!. I almost got sick myself.

Our ship was not big enough to rate a chaplain, so we did not have church services. However, I did read my Bible (the pocket testament my church back home had given me upon entering the navy) daily. Once, while anchored among other ships, I was privileged to go aboard a big ship and attend worship services. At one other time, I attended a worship service on a small island. It was a church that had been started by Australian missionaries.

Without question, mail call was the happiest of times while we were overseas. Since our escort duty kept us on the move most of the time, the mail had a hard time catching up with us. Sometimes, it would be weeks before mail came aboard. When it did, we might have a pack of letters from family, sweethearts or friends. We all really looked forward to mail call.



Hazel, Ralph and Janice Nelson



Pat Quarella Tim Herrmann
October 1945 in Philadelphia

Chuck Newton C. L. Danford
The youngster is C. Moomey's daughter

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CHARLES NEWTON Lt (jg)

Chuck Newton wrote a letter to his parents in March of 1945 which you will find it in Part One of this book. He also submitted this recollection of some moments of life aboard the Witter. Ed.

While waiting for a dry dock in Kerama Retto, the senior officer in charge of the area ordered me to pay ships which came into the harbor and did not have a disbursing officer on board. Harry Johnson would go to the ship and obtain pay records so that they could be worked on aboard the Witter.

On pay day, we would go over to the ship, and I would stuff the cash in my shirt. It was too much trouble climbing ladders on the sides of the ships while trying to hold onto a satchel full of cash. We enjoyed paying provision ships as Harry and Mickey (Olem) always managed to extract some premiums for the favor we were performing for them.

While in Kerama Retto, we were serving steaks for breakfast as we couldn't keep all of them in the ship's freezer. I also had to take the keys to the lockers when I learned that our crew was trading our food for Japanese souvenirs with Marines who would come out at night in small boats!



Chuck and Doris Newton

An Interesting Comparison

Chuck Newton also compiled the following list of significant dates. Notice the interesting comparison between the days of the months and the years in which the events occurred.

Feb. 19, 1945	U. S. Marines landed on Iwo Jima	Aug. 15, 1945	VJ Day - Japan surrendered
23, 1945	U. S. Marines raised the flag on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima		
Apr. 1, 1945	Invasion of Okinawa begun	Sep. 2, 1945	Formal Surrender of Japan
9, 1942	Fall of Bataan		
10, 1942	Bataan death march		
May 4, 1942	Battle of the Coral Sea	Oct. 22, 1945	USS Witter decommissioned
7, 1945	Germany surrenders	23, 1944	Battle for Leyte Gulf
8, 1942	Coral Sea Battle ends	13, 1775	US Navy established
Jun. 4, 1942	Battle of Midway begins	Nov. 20, 1943	Battle of Tarawa
6, 1944	D-Day allied invasion of Europe	25, 1944	Battle of Peleiu ended
15, 1944	Battle of Saipan		
Aug. 6, 1945	Atomic bomb mission, Hiroshima	Dec. 7, 1941	Pearl Harbor bombed
7, 1942	Battle of Guadalcanal	29, 1943	Witter commissioned
9, 1945	Second atomic bomb mission, Nagasaki	31, 1946	Official end of WW II

AARON "MICKEY" OLEM SK 1/c

Mickey Olem and his wife, Sylvia, enjoyed coming to the Witter reunions, and they attended as many as they could. Mickey died on January 4, 2000. Joe Ogrodnik attended Mickey's funeral and presented this tribute which he had written in honor and memory of Mickey. It was read at the funeral service by Rabbi Zoob. It is included here along with the obituary as it appeared in the Boston Globe. Joe's story reminds us that we can never fully know nor appreciate just how strongly our lives can be intertwined, and how, down through the years, our actions can impact those people we meet along the way. Ed.



A Tribute to Mickey

On April 12, 1945, my family received a telegram telling us that my brother, Francis, had been killed while on active duty aboard the USS Witter DE 636 in the Pacific. Our family was deeply saddened by our loss, but it affected my mother most of all, and she was finding it hard to accept that my brother, Sonny, was gone. Then, on April 19th, she received a letter from one of the USS Witter crew, a sailor who had returned to the states. In his letter, he said that Francis had asked him to let my mother know that he was doing fine. Little did that crewman know that Francis had been killed, because he had left the ship before it was hit. My mother, then, did not know what to believe — was Francis alive, or not???

A short time later, in June or July, my mother received a telephone call from someone who claimed to be from the Witter crew and who wanted to visit us. My mother did not know if she should believe the caller, and for part of the conversation, she told him that she did not believe him and that he should not visit us. After more talking, however, she agreed to the visit.

A few days later, on a Saturday, a sailor, dressed in his whites, appeared at our house. It was the man on the phone— it was Mickey! He stayed with us all that day and had supper - (hot dogs and beans, for that was our traditional Saturday evening meal) and he had to leave later that evening. My mother did not want him to leave then because by now she had adopted Mickey!

I never forgot that sailor in white although I did forget his name. Forty-two years later, I met Mickey again, this time at the Chicago Witter reunion in 1988. Since then we have had quite a few conversations about his visit to our home. I will always remember Mickey with love for the way his visit affected my family, but most of all for the peace of mind he brought to my mother about her son's death.

Obituary

OLEM - On Tuesday, January 4th, Aaron M "Mickey" passed away peacefully at the Ellis Nursing Center in Norwood. Of Walpole, formerly of Newton, beloved husband of Sylvia (Mann); Devoted father of Andrew and his wife Beverly Olem of Stoughton, John and his wife

Amy Olem of S. Windsor, CT and the late Wayne Olem. Loving grandfather of Matthew, Jenna and Joseph, dear brother of Mildred Schair of Brockton, Charlotte Maged of Weymouth and the late Sylvia Sandler and Florence Festinger. Services at Temple Beth David, 7 Clapboardtree St. in Westwood on Thursday, January 6th at 10:00 AM. Memorial observance will be at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Olem through Sunday afternoon. Remembrances in his memory may be made to the Wayne Olem Fund c/o Community Servings, 125 Magazine Street in Roxbury or Temple Beth David, 7 Clapboardtree Street in Westwood 02090. Arrangements by the Levine-Briss Funeral Home in Randolph.



Sylvia and Mickey Olem

ALVIN PEACHMAN R2/c



The First Story: Trained in radio theory, typing and taking code at a rapid pace at the University of Chicago, I found myself in the amphibious forces instead of joining a ship. At first, I was disappointed. I was thus surrounded by Seabees and Marines. We went into invasions to establish a huge radio station to serve Treasury Island. While there, I sent a lot of code as well as receiving it. After about a year, the Witter came to our island and I volunteered to serve on it because I wanted to be involved in sea duty. I learned that it had features I did not expect, but I adapted and I served as Radionman second class. While on the ship, we never sent code because the enemy would then know the location of the ship. Our job was to receive very fast code on several radios from fleet headquarters in Hawaii. We were a thousand miles away and we often had to take code through lots of static. I remember once taking code for eleven hours steady.

Our hours were officially eight on and four off but we were often assigned to do four on and four off, and we had to relieve our mates for meals and general quarters for one hour at sun up and one hour at sundown. All of the messages came in groups of five letters which then had to be decoded by a machine resembling a typewriter. The machine had a cylinder bar which was set differently each day. Our code was then put into plain English coming out in strips as it was typed by the officer. We then put the strips on paper and delivered the message to the captain. The message might contain information or it could be departure and destination orders for the ship. For example, we might be told to proceed to a certain longitude and latitude at a specific time on a certain day. You can see that our taking of code had to be very accurate.

While on the ship, I saw almost all of the messages so I knew what was going on. Many of the crew were very eager to get the news. Each evening, we also printed up a number of newspapers which kept us informed about world news such as the war in Europe.

The code was changed every day because the enemy was also copying it and trying to decode it. During the invasion, traffic picked up considerably so the enemy must have become suspicious. To this day, I have my own radio stations, and I have spoken to and sent code to thousands of people in the United States and also to about 120 foreign countries. This article briefly describes the job of a radioman. I believe that there were six men on the ship who could take code. The radio room was our window to what was going on, including what we were to do.

The Second Story

About a year or more before I joined the USS Witter, I was in an amphibious group. After being trained by the marines in Port Hueneme, CA, we set sail on the USS Robin Wentley, a beautiful merchant marine ship from Robin Lines which served from New York to Africa. It

seemed incredible to me but we sailed with over 3000 men, mostly Seabees which made up the construction battalion. There were about 300 navy men on our voyage of 7000 miles without any escort. On leaving California, we headed South to somewhere near South America, and several days later we crossed the equator. People who had never crossed this line were called Scallywags and we were "treated" to an initiation. I had to run the gauntlet while being paddled and then I was thrown into a pool of salt water. For this effort, I received a *diploma for crossing Davy Jones Locker.

Outside of water to drink, we had to wash and bathe in salt water. After several days, I thought I had a coat of armor on me. In addition, the bunks inside the hold were about 16 feet high and I landed the top one. I reached it by usually stepping on hands, etc., to the accompaniment of invective from all angles. In our bunk we had to keep our seabag, rifle, bayonet, helmet and a water pail. The water pail came in very handy, especially for the boys who had to vomit due to seasickness. Happily I was not troubled in that way.

The food was good and the weather pleasant. The men provided a good amount of entertainment by singing at night and so on. We did not see a single ship. We did see some of the islands like Samoa in the distance. We also saw a New Zealand aircraft near New Caledonia. After about three weeks, we arrived in Noumea, New Caledonia which is a large French Island off the coast of Australia. The country was large and the port was big.

Since they didn't really know what to do with us, we just remained on the ship for about two weeks, and then we Navy men were removed to the island. We moved into the forest where we trained for invasions and one day, another fellow and I went on liberty. We found the French people to be most unfriendly. After looking over the city which included a colony for people with leprosy, a nickel mine and a house of ill repute which had a line that was going out of sight, we decided to get out of there as fast as possible. I don't think our total liberty lasted two hours.

Back in the forest the mosquitoes were vicious but not of the malaria type and there were numerous deer. The natives were black and they had the largest feet I ever saw.

In the meantime, I had learned from a radio message that the USS Robin Wentley, our troop ship had been attacked by Japanese torpedo bombers and sunk. Several merchant crewmen were killed. One can only conclude how lucky, we, who had been passengers on that ship, were for having gone ashore.

**For more information about the diploma, see the following story about David Pipes Planche.*

The Third Story

One time when we were in New Guinea in the port of Hollandia, our sister ships were all having a leave in Australia and we were to have one also. However, something occurred in the upper ranks because I remember getting a message very early in the night that our orders to Australia were cancelled. We would instead transfer to take a convoy to Hawaii but before we reached the islands, we would be replaced by another ship which would complete the job of bringing the convoy into Hawaii.

I remember the next morning when crew members started to get out their uniforms in preparation for their Australia visit I told them that it was not to be. I told them that we were instead headed

to Hawaii but not to get their hopes up because we were not going into port. So – after about 5000 mile voyage, we were relieved just short of Hawaii and we were told to proceed to Majuro which was about 2000 miles away.

This atoll in the Marshall Islands group was very beautiful. As I remember it, the island was like a very narrow large ring and the atoll inside was a beautiful shade of green. We were told that half could go ashore now and the next day the rest could follow.

Given two beers each, and accompanied by a new and inexperienced officer, we went ashore. In the meantime, we convinced that officer to get us two more beers each from the naval base. As you may gather, this did not pan out to be a smart move. As I was enjoying the surroundings, I spoke with a native who quickly threw down his rake even though the Navy employed him. He reached into his shirt and took out a picture of Betty Grable. He then told me that he was going to Hollywood to find her. In jest, I responded that she was waiting for him and wondering when he would come. Quickly downing our beers, we played baseball. Some of the guys became inebriated and in that state were not able to perform their assigned duties when they returned to the ship. The captain was not at all happy and no more liberty was granted to anyone on the following days.

I recall that we took this trip two times. Once we went to Guam and once to Saipan where the captain permitted me to visit my brother who was in AA Artillery on the B-29 strip. I was permitted to stay overnight. I had not seen my brother for a very long time and I greatly appreciated the captain's gesture allowing for this reunion. There was no more going ashore for the rest of the war so we really adapted to life at sea from then on.



Gretchen and Alvin Peachman

WILTON E. PETERSEN Y 2/c

Grace Petersen responded to a flyer describing the 2003 ship's reunion in Albany which had been sent to all shipmates by Joe and Joan Ogrodnik, reunion planners for that year. It is a poignant of the brevity of all our lives, and it encourages us to live each day to its fullest promise. Here is that letter.

June 4, 2003

Dear Joan,

The reunion for the USS Witter DE 636 in Albany sounds like it will be a wonderful experience. As you know, my husband, Bud, passed away on September 29, 2002, and I know he would have wanted to be there.

He was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor in May, and after a round of radiation treatments, he died in September. He was never in any pain. We were married almost 60 years in February, so I feel blessed having all those wonderful years together.

As I was going through his desk, I found a "log" book he kept while on the Witter, and I am sending some of the pictures he had. I don't know any more about them other than what he has written on them. We were married on February 25, 1944 while the Witter was in San Francisco, and we had ten days before he shipped out. We lived in Chicago when he was discharged. He even worked for Tim Herrmann for awhile which brings back many memories.

I am still living in our home which we have owned since 1958. I have three wonderful children and three lovely grandchildren, a great church family who have given me such needed support. My best to all who will be attending the reunion.

Sincerely and God Bless,

Grace Petersen



** We are grateful to Mrs. Petersen for sending the pictures some of which include descriptions. They are located in the Witter Photo Album section of this book.*

DAVID PIPES PLANCHE RDM 2/c

Dr. David Planche attended every reunion until his death in May of 2003. The reunion site in September of that year was in Albany, New York, the berth of the only remaining WW II DE, the USS Slater DE 766. One of Dave's dearest wishes had been to visit the Slater and stroll her decks. Sadly, this dream went unfulfilled during his lifetime. However, Dave had been a generous contributor to the ongoing restoration of that ship, so the name of David Pipes Planche did reach the Slater even as Dave the man was unable to do so.

When the Witter historian, Joe Ogrodnik, sent out a call for the certificate awarded to those sailors who crossed the equator for the first time, Dave came through with the sixty plus year old document. No one really knows the origins of this ceremony, however it is faithfully observed by the US Navy even to this day. It is the time when pollywogs, or first timers, become shellbacks. The hazing ritual has included, but not been limited to, being paddled while running the gauntlet, being placed in stocks, being painted, and being required to kiss the revoltingly naked peanut butter and perhaps jelly smeared belly of one of King Neptune's henchmen. The initiation was planned by the shellbacks on board so each event was unique to that day and to that ship. Ed.



The certificate reads as recorded below.

IMPERIUM NEPTUNI REGIS

TO ALL SAILORS WHEREVER YE MAY BE: *and to all Mermaids, Whales, Sea Serpents, Porpoises, Sharks, Dolphins, Eels, Skates, Suckers, Crabs, Lobsters and all other Living Things of the Sea GREETING: Know Ye that on this 30th day of March 1944 in Latitude 000000000 and Longitude ———, there appeared within Our Royal Domain the USS Witter DE 636 bound south for the equator and for a sacred mission of war.*

BE IT REMEMBERED

that said Vessel and Officers and Crew thereof have been inspected and passed on by Ourselves and Our Royal Staff.

AND BE IT KNOWN: *by all ye Sailors, Marines, Landlubbers and others who may be honored by his presence that*

David Pipes Planche

having been found worthy to be numbered as one of our Trusty Shellbacks, he has been duly initiated into the

SOLEMN MYSTERIES OF THE ANCIENT ORDER OF THE DEEP.

BE IT FURTHER UNDERSTOOD: *that by virtue of the power invested in me I do hereby commend all my subjects to show the honor and respect to him wherever he may be.*

Disobey this order under penalty to our royal displeasure

Given under our hand and seal

Davy Jones
His Majesty's Scribe

Neptunus Rex
Ruler of the Raging Main

Dave Planche



Joe Ogrodnik

Now It Can Be told



During a visit to a remote island, the Captain went ashore and was able to persuade the Army people to give him some food supplies. Shortly thereafter, as we docked with the Captain's Gig, an Army jeep pulled up with several cases of fruit cocktail. When we got back to the ship, we helped ourselves to a case and we bunked it.

The next day we got underway. It got very rough but that wasn't going to stop our planned party. We stuffed ourselves until the case of fruit cocktail was finished. Needless to say, we all got sick as dogs, and we up chucked all day. You know what? Until this day, when I go to any affair, and they serve fruit cocktail, I feel nauseous just looking at it.

Paint Away

The Witter had pulled up to a supply ship one day out in the Pacific. I heard one officer say, "Don't forget the paint." That meant only one thing - - yours truly would be doing a lot of painting! I watched while loads of 5 gallon paint buckets were stored in the paint locker. Guess what happened during the night? Several of my mates and yours truly got into the paint locker unobserved. We threw as many gallons of paint over the side as we could. Wow!! They were like depth charges.

The next morning, the officers called for Paint Detail. Lo and Behold! The paint locker was empty! You can imagine what went on with all the questions, suspicions and finger pointing, but - true to the Witter tradition - no one squealed.



Ramona and Joe Rodolico

ANTHONY F. SCALA S 1/c

As told to his wife,

Dorothy Scala



"You'd better join the Navy, son"..... were words of wisdom and proved to be sustaining advice from my Dad one afternoon in 1942. Leonardo had served in WW 1 in the Italian Army before immigrating to the USA and realized the sheer weight of provisions and weapons would overwhelm my 120 pound 5' 5" frame.

The **NAVY** it was to be.....well almost. I first had difficulty convincing the recruiter that my Baptismal papers had been corrected from 1928 to read my correct birth year 1925. He enlisted several other recruiting officers to view the papers and one of them yelled across the huge room..... *"Hey, we got a lemon here...."* Then they proceeded to tell me to go home and come back in three years. It took me several days to secure paperwork that would prove my birth year really was 1925. Enlistment several days later meant I missed Boot Camp with my two Brooklyn buddies. I never saw those fellows again.

Recalling events of my service..... Boot camp at Great Lakes— short leave home to Brooklyn, NY. Boot Camp food fattened me up 15 or so pounds and when I came up out of the subway I was able to walk right by my Mother, without her recognizing me! The train ride across America to Mare Island, California where we were to board a new Buckley Class Destroyer Escort, the **USS WITTER**. Stops along the way were in out of the way areas between small towns. We would off load briefly to do daily calisthenics. Standing watch would be the MP's to be sure that no one deserted! The shakedown cruise to San Diego was just that.....my introduction to the next 25 months of my life. The ritual of turning from a polywog to a shellback as we crossed the Equator meant kissing the belly of the Royal Baby among other indignities! Standing watch four hours on and four hours off as a member of the deck force in the Radar Shack. Relaying messages to pilots so they could locate enemy planes. Talking back and forth to a pilot who was out of ammunition. He was chasing a Japanese plane and I could hear him cutting the enemy plane's tail with his propeller, then successfully landing on a nearby island as the enemy plane went into the drink. A "Betty" that was hugging the water to elude our radar with one of our fighter planes in hot pursuit. Our fearless fighter pilot bounced right on top of the "Betty" until it went into the water and then our pilot regaining altitude. Talk about nerves of steel and determined warriors. The Japanese held an island that was not on the maps but definitely on the radar screen. Camps, as they called them, where we were off loaded and given a couple of beers and an opportunity to walk on land for a few hours. Camp, my eye!

I remember well the night we picked up the "Marines." Flood lights... and telling them that we were friendly and not to shoot at us. April 6th.....the Japanese suicide plane... our shipmates who were injured and those whose lives ended in an awful instant. The efficiency of the repair party, engineers and electricians getting us out of the area so quickly. Bruno Naczkowski's splitting the electric circuits just days before our taking the hit by the suicide plane which enabled us to restore power so quickly. Anchored at what seemed like an eternity at Keramo Retto for our turn in dry dock...Storms we endured, especially the typhoon that brought us very close to capsizing. The officers, for the most part, were regular guys. Pearl Harbor and the un-describable devastation.

Boarding a refrigerator ship where a Boot Camp buddy was in charge of Stores. I came back with a couple of crates of fresh eggs (a rarity) and a barrel of Coca Cola syrup. As I boarded, Lt. Bass told me to put the eggs and the syrup in the wardroom. My reply... *"They go over the side before they go in the wardroom - these are for the crew!"* Taking on cheese and eating the grilled cheese sandwiches that we didn't share with the officers. Mail call. Cherry peppers my mother sent, looking like something sweet but actually fire hot that I shared with an unsuspecting shipmate from the south. Shipmate Spitsen walking in his sleep. Poker games when there was a payday. Rodolico's paint and endless humor. Fanelli: "Give us a song!" The Panama Canal and brief Panama City liberty! The Atomic Bomb. Our arrival at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Discharge before my 21st birthday in October. No re-enlistment for me....Brooklyn...Brooklyn.... Brooklyn....There was no place like Brooklyn!

Serving on the **USS WITTER** instilled a life long pride and appreciation for being born in the **USA**. It was an honor to serve with the men of **DE 636**.



*Tony Scala died shortly after his story was submitted
for inclusion in this book*

Anthony F. Scala of Glendora, California died Sunday, August 7, 2005, at Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena . Mr. Scala, 79, was born in Brooklyn, New York on October 3, 1925. Devoted husband to Dorothy, loving father to Paul and his wife, Claudine, Angela and Toni Leigh, and beloved stepfather to Robin (LC) Stewart, Robert (Honey) Newberry and Heidi Walsh.

He was preceded in death by his brothers, Joseph, Paul and Leonard, and his grandson, Jeremy. He is survived by ten grandchildren and ten great grandchildren.

He enlisted in the United States Navy in 1942, serving aboard the USS WITTER DE-636 through WWII.

In 1951, he moved to Pasadena, California, and established LaScala Printing, Inc., which, over the years, became a successful family business.

He remained an active member of Kiwanis International (Pasadena) until his retirement. He enjoyed family gatherings, breakfast with close friends, and traveling with his wife of thirty-four years.

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to Young Life Frontier Ranch. P. O. Box 520, Colorado Springs, CO 80901.

Interment at the National Veterans Cemetery Riverside , California

ALLEN G. SCHWARTZ Y 1/c

Sometime around 1982, Joe Ogrodnik began to search for Witter crew members who might have known his brother, Francis. One of the earliest responses came from Allen Schwartz in a nice letter dated November 5, 1983.

Dear Mr. Ogrodnik,

This letter will not be what I would like it to be due to suffering a stroke last August which somewhat affected my memory and sight. *(Due to the effects of the stroke, the letter was dictated to Mrs. Schwartz who recorded every word using excellent penmanship.)** Although it has been 38 years, I recall that your brother was a good Navy man and never in trouble. His ship carried about 186 men and 6 officers. The first part of our existence was lousy with a captain straight out of Mr. Roberts show and play. However, we finally got rid of him (Cdr. Allen C. Davis) and got Lt. George Herrmann as Captain.

Then the action really began. At the invasion of Okinawa, we participated - firing at the beach and maintaining an anti-submarine screen. I think it was April 6, 1945 when we were ordered to take a position where we could fight submarines and warn the invading fleet and men of any aerial attacks. Two other ships that had this patrol before the Witter were sunk by kamikaze aircraft. When we went to the rescue of a ship being attacked by three planes, one plane peeled off and started for us. We shot the plane almost to pieces before he reached us but he kept on coming in, hitting the ship in the center, right at the water line. A hole nearly 12 feet wide was torn in the side. Where the plane went in were two compartments. All five men in the forward fire room were killed, and the compartment was flooded. One man in the forward compartment (gyro room) was also killed. Your brother was in the forward fire room.

The ship was listing badly and needed help to get to Kerama Retto to anchor. Due to the condition of the ship, it was decided to leave the bodies until the compartments could be pumped out. Meanwhile, I was transferred to the Whitehurst DE 634, which had lost over 60 men and 40 wounded. The Whitehurst returned to Hawaii and I left it for the states, July 1945. I never again heard from any member of the crew of the Witter. I was in the Navy until 1963.

I hope this tells you something. Wartime restrictions and censorship left most of us with nothing but bad memories, and a desire to forget and get on with living.

I remember your brother as one of the good guys and I was proud to serve with him. I feel our lost ones died with our guns blazing and a just cause survived. They were heroes in every sense of the word.

Best regards,
Allen G. Schwartz

* Joseph Ogrodnik learned that Mr. Schwartz died shortly after sending this letter.

PAUL SILANCE Y2c

Paul Silance was one of the original reunion planners. He then took on the job of skipper for the business meetings and also wrote newsletters, following in the footsteps of Jack Spitsen. Paul died in January of 1996 before we began to gather material for this book. However, we do have some of his writings which have been submitted by his widow, Mary Silance. The first poem of this collection was written by Paul's Dad as a tribute to his son. The rest were written by Paul himself.

The USS Witter

Now here's to the Witter, that staunch little craft,
A fighter from keelson to truck;
May her radar be true to the Red White and Blue
And her long life be crowned with good luck.

Citations and medals are waiting for her
Out there 'neath the red setting sun.
You can bet she'll be in there, guns blazing away,
The first moment the fight has begun.

So drink deep, my hearties, to Six Thirty Six
And to the great things she will do.
Why she can't help but beat every ship in the Fleet;
Doesn't my Paul belong to her crew???

Dedicated to a swell son and a fine American example, by his Pop!

R. M. Silance, At Sea - August 8, 1944

Paul Silance wrote the next poem while at sea in the South Pacific in 1945

The Witter's Wail

We of the Witter would like to request
A six month leave so we may rest.
We've pinged; we've patrolled;
We steamed all around.
We made runs on reefs
Till we near ran aground.

We've drilled at "stations,"
Simulated "Fire!"
Nearly got torpedoed, bombed
And almost set afire.
We plowed through hurricanes,
Typhoons and squalls,
Till every damn one of us
was holding his -----!

Now if you don't think
The above was enough,
Just ask the Skipper
He'll call your bluff!

As you might gather from the preceding verses, Paul had a great sense of humor. He would liven up a room just by walking into it and saying "Hi." There was, however, a deeply spiritual side to Paul. His trust in God, his faith and love for God is evident in the next few poems.

A Prayer

Almighty God

With whom do live the Spirits of our departed comrades,
And with whom do all the faithful dwell as they are delivered
From the burdens of life?

We give you hearty thanks for the grace you have bestowed
On your servants who,
Having finished their duties in life,
Now rest from their labors.

We beseech you that you would keep them
and us in your grace,
Keeping us safe till we all are called home
together,
Resting in your love.

A Sailor's Prayer

The Lord is my Pilot: I shall not drift.
He lights me across the dark waters,
He steers me through the deep channels.
He keeps my log.

He guides me by the star of Holiness
For His name's sake.

As I sail through the storms and tempests of
life,
I will dread no danger, for You are near me,
Your love and care shelter me.

You prepare a haven before me
In the homeland of eternity.
You quiet the waves with oil; my ship rides
calmly.

Surely, sunlight and starlight will shine
wherever I sail,
And at the end of my voyaging, I shall
Rest in the port of my God.

*The reunion in 1995 was held in Norfolk,
VA. Paul and Mary were the organizers for
this year. Only a few people knew at this
time that it would be Paul's last reunion
because he didn't tell many who were there*

*that he had terminal cancer. For a number
of reasons, it was a memorable reunion.*

PAUL T. SILANCE USS WITTER (DE-636)

Paul T. Silance, 71, of Dallastown, formerly of Colonia, NJ, died at his home. He was the husband of Mary A (McCarthy) Silance. Mr. Silance was born Sept. 21, 1924, in Elizabeth, NJ. He was the son of the late Russell M. & Margaret A (Lyons) Silance. He was an operations manager for Norton Co. in Wayne, NJ, retiring in 1985 after 33 years of service. He was a member of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Dallastown. He was a U.S. Navy Veteran of WWII, serving on the USS Witter DE-636. He was a member of Hellerstown, NJ., American Legion Post 397, Colonia Post 6061 Veterans of Foreign Wars, U.S. Navy Destroyer Escort Sailors Assoc., & Susquehanna Chapter of DESA.

Mr. Silance also is survived by three sons, Michael E., Dennis L. & Thomas P., three daughters, JoAnn Ramskow, Rosemary Lewczka & Margaret E. Lyons, 10 grandchildren, 2 step grandchildren, a step great grandchild & a brother John E. Silance.

In September he wrote another poem, perhaps his last. It was a thank you letter to God. After his death in January of 1996, Mary wrote to Harry and Phyllis Johnson sending them a copy of the poem. The letter is transcribed here and it is followed by the poem.

March 21, 1996

5:00 PM

Dear Phyllis and Harry,

Someone said 'spring' popped in the other day, but I haven't seen it yet. It's about 38 degrees and raw. I was upstate to both my sons from last Friday, 3/15, to this past Wed - and while there, I saw 2 guys ice fishing. And all the ponds and lakes are still frozen There is still some snow up there in the mountains

I'm still buried in paper work. I get one pile cleared up and another one starts.

I've heard from quite a few Witter men and wives. Sylvia Olem called while I was away, but she said she'd call back.

I'm enclosing a copy of a poem Paul wrote this past September. I found it shortly before he died. My oldest daughter had it done in calligraphy for me, and my daughter-in-law here in PA is doing it in counted cross stitch. I guess it's more of a prayer than a poem. Thought you might like a copy of it.

I hope the two of you are in good health. I'm feeling pretty good - no colds or any major problems.

Take care, and love you both.

Mary

P.S. My son Dennis read the poem at the Memorial Mass here at our parish church. As you will see - it brought tears to many eyes.

I.O.U. LORD!

I owe you, Lord. For the many blessings you gave me.

I owe you, Lord. For the times you gave me six beautiful children.

I owe you, Lord. For picking their mother, their keeper, their instructor,

The director of my family.

For loving me, believing in me. For giving me all this.

I owe you, Lord.

For getting me out of scrapes. For opening my eyes and steering me away
from temptations that prey on my weaknesses.

I owe you, Lord. For the love in my wife's eyes. For the smiles.

For the arms that went around me on Friday nite Treat Nites.

I owe you, Lord. For the many times you kept us safe from harm..
 For finding little JoAnn when she got lost at the beach.
 For finally seeing Rosemary with fear in my heart getting off the opposite
 side of the Merry-Go-Round.
 For bringing back Denny who we thought had really strayed.
 For keeping them all from bodily harm, from things only You know about.
 I owe you Lord. For the light of love in little Andrew's eye when he sees me.
 For the kisses of all the grandchildren bestowed on me—so unworthy.
 For their Moms and Dads, I owe you, Lord.
 Most of all, I owe you, Lord, for your constant love of which I am the least deserving.
 Call in your markers, Lord - I'm ready
 I.O.U.

P.T.S.
 9/95



Paul and Mary Silance

ROBERT T. SWENGEL Lt (jg)

Harry and Phyllis Johnson and Bob and Charlotte Swengel had corresponded down through the years. The following notes are taken from several of these letters and are included as a matter of general interest. Harry received this letter from Bob Swengel prior to the first reunion of the USS Witter DE 636 in Chicago. At that time, Bob was living in Henry, Illinois and was a partner in the law firm of Swengel and Swartz.

June 27, 1988

Dear Harry,

You will remember that when we met in Chicago, I told you that I was going to send you copies of the pictures that were taken of the separate divisions when we were at Okinawa with the request that you try to identify as many of the fellows as you can. Well, I am enclosing those pictures at this time and the request still stands.

I received the most recent mailing pertaining to the reunion, mainly, pertaining to making reservations, etc., and I am wondering if that information was sent to Trudi Johnson, the widow of Kenneth Johnson who was a Communications Officer. It think it would be real nice to invite her. I am going to send a note to Jack Spitsen to suggest that he do this if it has not already been done.

We are fine, though it has been awfully hot and awfully dry. It is about to reach a critical stage here in this area from the point of view of the lack of rain. I think about another week without rain could mean a crop failure for the entire area. We don't really need that!

We went to our cottage at Ludington at the end of May and were there for about a week. At this point we aren't quite sure just when we will be heading back, but probably around the middle of July or in that neighborhood. Then, we will probably go back in August.

Do hope this finds you and Phyllis well and enjoying life.

Sincerely,

Bob

December 15, 1988

Dear Harry:

Received your letter, and I thank you for sending me the names of the fellows you could identify in the picture.

Before I go further, I want to set you straight on one point, and that is that I did not put your name in the Legion magazine. Had I thought of it I probably would have done it, but frankly I didn't even think about it. It is interesting to hear you report on the contacts that you had as a result of being listed in the magazine.

Since you did not have a copy of the so called Philadelphia picture, and since I had an extra one made, I am enclosing that one for you. As you will recall, the little girl is Chuck Moomey's daughter. I sent her a copy of this picture, as well as sending one to her dad. Also, since Chuck Newton didn't have a copy I sent him one as well.

Nothing in the way of news to report since my last letter and since our Christmas card. (By the way, I believe your card is in the mail today, but I have not read it before dictating this letter.) We are looking forward to our trip to Houston, and we just hope that we will have some nice balmy weather while we are down there.

Again, hope all of you have a real nice Chris mas. With kindest personal regards, I remain,
Very truly yours,
Bud

San Jose, California

May 11, 1997

Howdy,

It's a lazy afternoon - another beautiful day. We have had such great weather. It has been a little warmer, but not all that bad.

Okay - I will try to tell you about Charlotte. She came through the surgery in good shape. The surgeon was able to get a good fit on the valve. The surgery was on the 30th of April, and she came home on the 6th. As you can guess, she hurt quite a bit for a couple of days. She had trouble with lack of saliva, food not tasting good at all, and a general weakness. The most pressing problem was getting her pulse rate regulated. On Friday, her pulse rate had fallen to about 35, and this was a bit scary. Andy sprang into action and got hold of the doctors. The medication was changed and this did two things - (1) raised her pulse rate and (2) - got the heart to beating more regularly. It was an irregular heart beat. It would appear that we are over the worst on all of these items so we all feel a bit better. She is up and around, eating better and just generally feeling better. Andy will be here about two more weeks and we are hoping that we can handle things by then.

Natashia has taken another job - she just couldn't pass it up, but we have another lady coming to take care of my ails (?) and she also prepares our evening meals, and is available for grocery shopping, etc. We think we are doing okay. We thank you for your caring and your love. It's so good to hear from you. People here have been so nice and often helpful.

Our love to all,

Bud

06/17/97

San Jose, CA 95135

Dear Harry, (Johnson)

I have finally been able to get a copy of 4 pictures covering the crossing of the equator by the Witter, and I am enclosing a set of these at this time.

I have to admit that I have misplaced part of my Witter file so I do not have the name and address of the crew member who sent out a general request for this type of picture (crossing the equator), so I request that you send the enclosed ones on to him. (I am getting another set and I will send that one on to you. You may keep the one set for yourself, or do what you want to.)

I have just found the letter from you pertaining to the reunion and which has the name and address of the fellow I referred to above, so I will send the set of pictures to him, and then when I get the other set I will send those to you later. I don't think I will be too long in getting that to you. Sorry to be making all of this so confusing. Well, enough of that.

I think I advised you of Charlotte's heart surgery, and I am pleased to report that she is doing well. She still has a way to go, but she is so much better, though she does tire rather easily. All things considered, we are doing OK. We have a woman come in 6 days a week to help, and

that has worked out very well.

We have had some wonderful weather, though it's warming up and will be hot for the next 3 days. We could stand some rain, but we won't get any. Last year we went from about 04/15 to 10/01 with not a drop of rain.

I have not been feeling too good for the last week or so. As I keep saying to people, some days are not too bad and some not so good. It just seems that any exertion really poops me out. It can be so frustrating!

I do hope you have a real good reunion. Give everyone our best regards.

Sincerely,

Bud

07/12/97

Dear Harry,

It took longer than I thought it could but here are the pictures (crossing the equator). You may keep these and do with them as you desire.

Nothing really new. I am about the same, maybe a little worse. Char has done so well since her surgery. She still has some limitations but is doing more all the time. She looks great!

We still aren't doing any travel and don't plan to. I am on oxygen all of the time. I also use the nebulizer and I believe that helps me the most.

Lots of pretty flowers in bloom - the agapantha are so pretty.

Well, all for now. Do give our best regards to all. We wish we could be there. .

Sincerely,

Bud

Following his death, Robery Swengel was buried at sea, according to his wishes. Harry Johnson believes that Charlotte Swengel still lives in California in a retirement home.

**Bob and Charlotte
Swengel
Granddaughter Lindsey**



HOWARD THOLE MM2/c

September 7, 2001

P. O. Thole, McCracken used to call me, as a joke of course. He was a water tender who slept across from me in our sleeping quarters next to our laundry.

My job, the whole time aboard ship, was running the evaporator - plant which converted sea water into fresh water for use in the boilers and for general use. My battle station was in the Aft Engine Room, Lower Level. The Jap plane that hit us on the starboard side by the mess hall was pretty close to my station. I consider myself very lucky to come home alive. At sea, I also was whaleboat engineer for a period of time. The torpedo crew sometimes had practice torpedo runs and the whaleboat would have to go out and retrieve the duds. I must say I never liked that job very much, sometimes that water was pretty rough.

I remember many things, but one in particular. One of our firemen who was killed comes to mind often. Benjamin Zack was reading a letter from his wife after mail call. She was telling him about his son who was in school. Some of his friends asked him where his Daddy was. His answer was, "He's in the Navy, in the Pacific fighting the Japs." We could see the tears in his eyes. God bless him.

Another incident I often remember is someone throwing paint on the doors of the officers' quarters - maybe I shouldn't mention it, but it does come to mind. This happened after the new ratings and promotions were posted. Someone didn't like not being promoted. I don't remember how this was ever resolved.

Ahhh, yes! Movies on the fan tail was always a little diversion from the duties and daily rigors of sea duty.

I'm sending along a picture of the E Division, which was taken at Okinawa, I think, but I'm not sure just where it was taken. I have another one, so it doesn't have to be returned. I do have an original King Neptune Certificate, but I'm afraid to send it in the mail. So many things get lost, and I don't want to lose it.

Good wishes to my former shipmates.

**Dorothy and Howard
Thole**



KENNETH L. WARRINER WT 1/c



One of my most memorable memories aboard the U. S. S. Witter was when I was promoted to water tender 1st class and then put in charge of the afterfire room. I was much more familiar with the forward fireroom and the men down there because I went there every day in my job as oiling for the all the valves and the pump located in that area. I asked Fahrenkrug if he would consider trading firerooms. He had no objections.

I then had to get approval from the engineering officer Bruno Naczkowski which I did. He told me that the commodore was aboard the ship at this time and that he would take care of the switch when the commodore left. He asked me to remind him about the switch after the commodore had left. The commodore departed and we were shortly in Okinawa and I just never asked for the change again. As we all know, the suicide plane hit the forward fire room and all the men there were killed. I often think of this and I know that God had other plans for me.

I also remember the landing at Leyte in the Phillippines. We had anchored for the night when we heard a lot of gunfire. My GQ station as oil king was in the machine shop off the main deck. We all raced for the hatch to check out the gunfire. I was in the lead, so I spun it open, stepped out and then tried to get back in again. I couldn't get back because everyone else was coming so out I went again. Shrapnel was hitting the deck as an enemy plane went by! This was another close call.

**Dorothy and Ken
Warriner**



The Swimming Party



It's Sunday and we are anchored on the lee side of a lush tropical isle. It's holiday routine and preparations are underway for a swimming party. The signalman on duty sends a message to the port director requesting the shark report. It is something like asking about the weather. The report is favorable (light to moderate) so the preparations continue.

The whaleboat crew is assembled and told to stand by. Since I am in charge of the small arms locker, I am told to bring up three Springfield rifles and to give them to guys who are not going swimming. Two will go into the whaleboat and the third will roam the deck close to the swimmers. It will be their job to protect us in the event of a shark attack. Just before the guys get into the boat, one of the sharpshooters asks me, "If I have to shoot, do I just pull this thing back?" I tell him to get into the boat.

The boat proceeds to about 25 yards from the ship and the fun begins. About a hundred guys jump ship in various stages of dress, or undress. I am one of them. I dive in, and dodging the jelly fish as best as I can, I then retreat to the safety of the ship with lightning speed.

You see, it's not the sharks that worry me—it's those guys with the rifles!

Huddle to the Rescue

We were in San Francisco Bay and some of the "O" Division guys were on the fantail, taking on some ordnance. Despite the time of year, we had all worked up quite a sweat. Jack Seville declared, that for two cents, he would go over the side to cool off. Two pennies were produced and over the side he went. Going over was easy. Getting back aboard was a different story. Most of us didn't know the bow from stern at the time, and stood around seemingly helpless while Jack floundered about in the frigid water. Along came Bos'n mate J. D. Huddle, attracted by all the confusion. Seeing Jack's problem, he picked up a coil of rope, threw it to him and said, "Put this under your coat and marry the lines," to which Jack replied while shuddering from his exposure to the cold water, "Wwwwwwwhat the hell does he mean—'mmmmarry the lines???"

A Memory of TAPS

J. R. Williams recalls this event: "I'm sure all hands remember the very moving Memorial Service held aboard the Witter while we were still anchored in Keramo Retto. A chaplain came aboard, accompanied by a bugler and a sailor wheeling a small portable organ. Prayers were said and the names of our shipmates lost in the recent action were read. I believe a hymn was played and then the bugler sounded TAPS. A motor whaleboat a few yards off our starboard bow stopped dead in the water. The cox'ain, the engineer and the bowhook came to attention as best they could in their bobbing boat and saluted till the last haunting notes faded away."



Dick and Jean Williams

This historic document has been recently declassified and made available through the Freedom of Information Act. It was discovered by USS Witter DE 636 researcher, J. R. Williams, who astonished those in attendance at the Seattle reunion of 1999 when he read this important paper. Mr. Williams, you may recall, was the intrepid hunter who located two of the four Marines rescued by the Witter crew in 1944. They, Kleckner and Hemingway, were in Nashville, TN in 1997 where they told their stories to the reunion group gathered there. We are grateful to J. R. for providing this invaluable recollection of life aboard the Witter during WW II.

USS Witter 1944

The first annual meeting of the USS Witter was held in September 1944 in the enlisted men's head where a few seats were available for early arrivals. Harry Johnson presided and called the meeting to order at 0900 hours. Following a brief discussion, it was decided to renew Tim Herrmann's term as captain for another year. A strong move to trade Aboff to the USS Bowers for a cook was tabled when it was disclosed that since a cook was not available, they would be willing to part with "Fearless Freddie".

Tim Herrmann announced that he would be holding the captain's mast immediately following the meeting. Those wishing to attend should submit their names in advance. Harry Johnson's request for promotion to first class storekeeper was denied when Ensign Newton suggested that it be deferred until 1988. The motion carried.

The matter of sweatshirts was next on the agenda. Some wanted white with blue letters while others wanted blue with white letters. Del Worden wanted his to read, "This Bud's For You." Mickey Olem cautioned that whatever we decided, we should expect long delays in delivery since his supplier in Tokyo was now making Bonzai shirts.

Where to go next proved to be a troublesome matter. Some voted for New Guinea while others suggested the Leyte Gulf. Dave Planche suggested Sydney, Australia, giving as his reason the need to pursue his GYN studies. The chairman of the navigating committee resigned following an embarrassing disclosure last Tuesday. A sheet of paper found under his mattress read as follows:

Port means Left

Starboard means Right

Ken Krukow agreed to be the next chairman if he was allowed to keep the paper. Bruno Naczkowski announced that making raisin jack in the water breakers would no longer be tolerated since there was now an ample supply of Mennen Skin Bracer in the ship's store. George Futch reported that the search for the missing 20 mm continues.

Time trials for the cockroach race will be held on Saturday with the finals to be held on Monday in the forward mess hall. Roaches not qualifying should be returned to Joe Rodolico. The sailor of the month award was given to Mike Dattilo. He will receive an autographed copy of the Bluejacket's Manual and a reserved seat in the head for the next 30 days. Tonight's movie will be the same as last night's movie----- DeMille's epic production of "Tarzan's Last Gasp."

The articles for The Government of the Navy (Rocks and Shoals) were read. It was decided that the words "Hanging From the Yardarm" should be deleted wherever they appeared. Following a stirring rendition of "Anchors Aweigh" by the glee club, all hands retired to the ward room for Ovaltine and cookies.

Respectfully Submitted
Charles Noble

THE STORY BEHIND "TAPS"

The origin of the bugle call "TAPS," in its present form, is generally attributed to Civil War Major-General Daniel Butterfield, who commanded a brigade in the army of the Potomac during the peninsular campaign of 1862. After a particularly hard fighting day, as the weary troops settled down for the night along the James River near Richmond, Virginia,, the bugler sounded "Extinguish Lights" or what is more commonly called "Lights Out."

On this night, Butterfield felt that the day's final call should bring comfort and peace to the tired and troubled men. With the help of his bugler, Oliver W. Norton, Butterfield composed the music to what we know today as TAPS.

Later in the Peninsular campaign, a funeral was being held during a lull in the fighting. The bugler was ordered to play TAPS in place of the three volleys usually used to render the final honors to a deceased comrade. This was done because it was feared that rifle fire might cause the enemy to renew their attack. The playing of TAPS was eventually written into Army regulations as part of the honors to be paid at a military funeral. This haunting melody is now used at all military funerals. Hear it in your mind as you read these words.

Day is done.
Gone the sun,
From the lakes,
From the hills,
From the sky.
All is well
Safely rest.
God is nigh.

Fading light,
Dims the sight,
And a star,
Gems the sky,
Gleaming bright.
From afar,
Drawing nigh,
Falls the night.

Thanks and praise,
For our days,
Neath the sun,
Neath the stars,
Neath the sky.
As we go,
This we know,
God is nigh.

J. R. SPITSEN GM 3/c

These rosters were originally compiled by Jack Spitsen. No date is given for this moment in time when Jack was putting this material together, but some crew members recall that Jack may have done his research during the ship's stay at Kerama Retto. These lists may also have failed to include the names of some of the crew since not all the men who sailed on the Witter were on board at the same time. Nevertheless, we are indeed fortunate to have this much data so many years after WW II. The rosters were submitted by Jack's widow, JoAnn Spitsen

SHIPS OF THE 40TH ESCORT DIVISION

USS Foreman	DE 633
USS Whitehurst	DE 634
USS England	DE 635
USS Witter	DE 636
USS Bowers	DE 637
USS Wilmarth	DE 638

SHIP'S COMPANY

USS Witter DE 636 Commanding Officers

Commanding Officer - Cmdr. Alan C. Davis

Transferred Aug 1 to Mare Island, CA

Executive Officer - Lt. George Hermann

Replaced Cmdr. Davis as Commanding Officer

Officers

Lt. P. C. Danforth - Executive Officer	Combs, Farmer W.	CTM
Lt. R. D. Bash - First Lieutenant	Caswell, Alonzo H.	CQM
Lt. C. L. Mc Clain - Engineering	Lidstrom, Albert	CSM
Lt. (jg) Johnson - Communications	Cooke, Edward	CEM
Lt. (jg) Griswold - Ordnance	Beauparlant, J.	CEM
Lt. (jg) Naczkowski - Engineering	Lapham, Dale G	CY
Lt. (jg) Mc Dermott	Meier, Melvin A.	CMM
Lt. (jg) Ance - Sonar	Pask, William F.	CMM
Lt. (jg) Swengel - Communications	Wright, Herbert C.	CMM
Lt. (jg) Miller - Officer of the Deck	Campbell	CMM
Ens. Newton - Supply and Disbursing	Zimmerman, Ernest	CWT
Ens. Williamson	Wonderly, Alvin H.	CWT
Ens. Tucker - Engineering	Vinson, Melburn	CCS
Ens. Loeffler	Moomey, Charles E.	CphM

1st Division

Chief Petty Officers			
Youngblood	CBM	Blake, T.	S1/c
Breen	CBM	Braswell, G. G.	S1/c
Aulger	CGM	Brazzell, R. E.	S1/c
Freas, Louis G.	CBM	Brooke, A	SSM(L) 2/c
		Byland, F. J.	S1/c

Criniti, P. J.	S1/c
Early, L.	S1/c
Fair, C. A.	BM 2/c
Fanelli, S. D.	MaM 3/c
Foster, L. H.	Cox
Fuller, F. C.	S1/c
Grimm, G. E.	Cox
Hurley, S.	S1/c
Lathrop, L. R.	S1/c
Norman, T. W.	S1/c
Page, J. C.	S1/c
Pitcock, M. E.	Cox
Raptis, J.G.	Cox
Ruegsegger, P. A.	S1/c
Russell, E. W.	BM 1/c
Sanovich, E. J.	SSM 3/c
Stabile, S. J.	S1/c
Stiffler, C.S.	Cox
Street, C.	Cox
Thompson, C.V.	Cox
Wilson, J. T.	S1/c

2nd Division

Brown, F. A.	Cox
Brown, J. H.	Cox
Caskey, J. T.	RDM 3/c
Cunningham, R. C.	Cox
Danford, C. L.	BM 2/c
Daniels, C. A.	RDM 3/c
DiFlorio, B.	Cox
Duckworth, C. L.	S1/c
Goodpasture, A.	RDM 2/c
Haire, F.E.	S1/c
Herin, B. G.	S1/c
Huddle, J. D.	BM 1/c
McDonough, J. N.	S1/c
Mendenhall, C. O.	S1/c
Murphree, J. O.	RDM 3/c
Osborne, J. R.	S1/c
Planche, D. P.	RDM 2/c
Powers, B. F.	S1/c
Rennie, R. S.	BM 1/c
Rodolico, J. V.	S1/c
Ross, H. H.	S1/c
Russell, W.	S1/c
Scala, A. F.	S1/c
Stephens, J. L.	S1/c

West, N. D.	RDM 2/c
Wilson, H. B.	S1/c

C Division

Aboff, J.	QM3/c
Bradford, J. H.	RM 2/c
Bradley, W. L.	QM 2/c
Brawn, W. W.	CRT
Brennan, W. W.	RM 3/c
Broshears, R. A.	SoM 2/c
Carney, K. G.	RM 1/c
Davis, E.N.	QM 2/c
Good, H.	QM 3/c
Graham, E. B.	S 1/c
Howard, K.A.	SM 2/c
Jacobs, D. O.	RM 3/c
Koenigsberg, S.	SoM 2/c
Krukow, K. W.	SoM 2/c
Mervish, I.	SM 3/c
Nelson, R. W.	SoM 1/c
Nolly, E. B.	RM 2/c
Peachman, A. C.	RM 2/c
Petersen, W. E.	Y 2/c
Rothschild, B. J.	PhM 2/c
Schwartz, A. G.	Y 1/c
Silance, P. T.	S 1/c
Smith, C. E.	S 1/c
Spellman, J.	S 1/c
Walters, C. A.	RM 3/c
Wells, R. C.	S 1/c
Worden, D. W.	S 1/c

E Division

Blair, R. S.	F 1/c
Barend, R. W.	WT 2/c
Brunk, P. L.	MM 1/c
Carroll, K. A.	EM 1/c
Chilcoat, M. M.	EM 3/c
Dattilo, M.	F 1/c
DeLizia, F.	MM 2/c
Diel, F. H.	MM 2/c
Dooley, F. L.	F 1/c
Driggers, J. C.	F 1/c
Duval, J. E.	F 1/c
Evaska, C.	EM 2/c
Fanney, R. M.	EM 1/c
Federowicz, A. J.	MM 3/c
Foster, S. A.	EM 3/c

Fritz, A. J.	E.M 3/c
Gaetano, C. C.	MM 1/c
Grohnke, C. E.	WT 3/c
Hagstrom, V. L.	WT 3/c
Hill, D. P.	WT 3/c
King, A. D.	F 1/c
Long, K. J.	EM 2/c
Lunger, D. J.	MM 1/c
Marquette, K. G.	WT 3/c
Marshall, N. E.	MM 1/c
McCracken, W. H.	WT 3/c
McCracken, W. L.	WT 2/c
Metz, H. L.	MM 3/c
Pancoast, D. L.	WT 3/c
Peterson, H. W.	WT 3/c
Poller, J. C.	MM 1/c
Relick, E. G.	MM 2/c
Rhom, C. W.	F 1/c
Schmitz, V. R.	F 1/c
Schneiderman, J. J.	F 1/c
Schock, J.	F 1/c
Swanton, E. G.	EM 3/c
Taormina, H. F.	MM 3/c
Teague, D. R.	MM 3/c
Thole, H. F.	MM 3/c
Thorne, D. M.	MM 2/c
Venckus, J. L.	EM 1/c
Wagner, R. M.	EM 2/c
Walters, C.	MM 1/c
Warriner, K. L.	WT 2/c

O Division

Amtmann, A. J.	TM 1/c
Baker, C. J.	TM 3/c
Breckenridge, G. T.	GM 1/c
Carty, C. W.	GM 2/c
Downey, C. W.	S 1/c
Futch, G. H.	S 1/c
Gelinas, R. R.	TM 3/c
Gorham, D. L.	GM 3/c
Guin, P. T.	S 1/c
Keleher, H. T.	S 1/c
Linsmeyer, R. G.	FC 3/c
Moorhead, R. L.	FC 1/c
Ouimette, D. J.	TM 3/c
Paschane, H. T.	FC 1/c
Pribanic, F. J.	GM 3/c
Saville, J. H.	TM 2/c

Spitsen, J. R.	GM 3/c
Wheeler, J. A.	GM 3/c
Whiteman, M. H.	GM 2/c
Williams, J. R.	GM 3/c
Zebro, T. F.	GM 3/c

S Division

Brown, H	STM 1/c
Cognac, J. A.	SC 2/c
Dale, F. E.	BKR 3/c
Davis, E.	ST 3/c
Dillsaver, D. C.	SK 3/c
Dowdy, L.	SC 3/c
Johnson, H. E.	ST 2/c
Johnson, J. A.	ST 2/c
Olem, A. M.	SK 1/c
Richardson, H.	STM 1/c
Williams, G. E.	S 1/c
Wilson, J. T.	STM 1/c
Woolard, R. L.	S 1/c

C & R Division

Collins, W.J.	CM 1/c
Crayton, J. C.	CM 3/c
Crum, H.	M 1/c
Quarella, P. J.	M 3/c
Short, D. J.	SF 1/c
Walsh, E. P.	M 3/c

KILLED IN ACTION

E DIVISION

APRIL 6, 1945

ASBECK, E. K.	EM 1/c
FAHRENKRUG, H. R.	WT 1/c
KEEKER, L. F.	F 1/c
LA SELVA, V.	WT 3/c
OGRODNIK, F. J.	WT 2/c
ZACK, B	F 1/c

THE WITTER PHOTO ALBUM

Gactano, C. C.
Grohake, C. E.
Hagstrom, V. L.
Hill, D. P.
King, A. D.
Long, K. J.
Lunger, D. J.
Marquette, K. G.
Marshall, N. E.
McCracken, W. H.
McCracken, W. L.
Metz, H. L.
Pancoast, D. L.
Peterson, H. W.
Poller, J. C.
Relick, E. G.
Rhom, C. W.
Schnitz, V. R.
Schneiderman, J. J.
Schock, J.
Swanton, E. G.
Tatnina, H. F.
Trague, D. R.
Thole, H. F.
Thorne, D. M.
Venckus, J. L.
Wagner, R. M.
Walters, C.
Warriner, K. L.

MM 1/c
WT 3/c
WT 3/c
WT 3/c
F 1/c
EM 2/c
MM 1/c
WT 3/c
MM 1/c
WT 3/c
WT 2/c
MM 3/c
WT 3/c
WT 3/c
MM 1/c
MM 2/c
F 1/c
VI
F 1/c
EM 3/c
MM 3/c
MM 3/c
MM 3/c
MM 2/c
EM 1/c
PH
WT 3/c

Spiteen, I. R.
 Wheeler, J. A.
 Whitman, M. H.
 Williams, J. R.
 Zebro, T. F.
 Brown, H.
 Cognac, J. A.
E
 D. C.
 Dowdy, L.
 Johnson, H. E.
 Johnson, J. A.
 Olem, A. M.
 Richardson, H.
 Williams, O. E.
TEP
 Crayton, J. C.
 Crum, H.
 Quarella, P. J.
 Short, D. J.
 Walsh, E. P.

GM 3/c
GM 3/c
GM 2/c
GM 3/c
GM 3/c
STM 1/c
SC 2/c
BKR 3/c
ST 3/c
SK 3/c
SC 3/c
ST 2/e
ST 2/c
SK 1/o
STM 1/c
S 1/c
STM 1/c
S 1/c
n
CM 1/c
CM 3/c
M 1/c
M 3/c
SF 1/c
M 3/c

TM 1/c
TM 3/c
GM 1/c
GM 2/c
S 1/c
S 1/c
AL
S 1/c
FC 3/c
FC 1/c
TM 3/c
FC 1/c

ANDECK, E. K.
FAURENKRUG, I.
KEEGER, L. E.
UM
OGRODNIK, F. J.
ZACK, B.

Many of the pictures on the following pages were submitted as photocopies. Thus, you will find that they are lacking in some detail. Many other photos were sent in as originals. In both cases, names were sometimes given, and where this happened the names are included with the photos. Where no names are recorded, it is because none were submitted. I have attempted to include everything that could be reproduced with any degree of clarity since they are pictures of some of the men who once sailed the seas aboard the USS Witter DE 636.

Many of these photos were sent in by Mrs. Howard Keleher and the widow of Wilton "Bud" Peterson, Mrs. Grace Petersen, from their personal collections. We thank these ladies for their contributions. Other picture donations to this book have been acknowledged elsewhere. Our thanks to all.



S. J. Stabile S2/c

G. I. Stortz S 2/c

C. O. Mendenhall S 1/c

F. E. Haire S 1/c

L. H. Foster Cox



**C. L. Danford
BM 2/c**



**Harry Johnson
ST 2/c**



Jack Spitsen GM 3/c
George Futch S 1/c



Lizanetz



R. S. Blair F 1/c
H. W. Peterson WT 3/c



Denkow
E. G. Swanton EM 3/c
A. J. Fritz EM 3/c



H. Crum M 1/c P. J. Criniti S 1/c -----
 ----- A. F. Scala S 1/c E. J. Janovich SSM 3/c



PAUL GUIN

P. T. Guin
 S 1/c



H. T. Paschane
 FC 1/c



Dominick Taormina
MM 3/c
"Buster" Di Florio
Cox



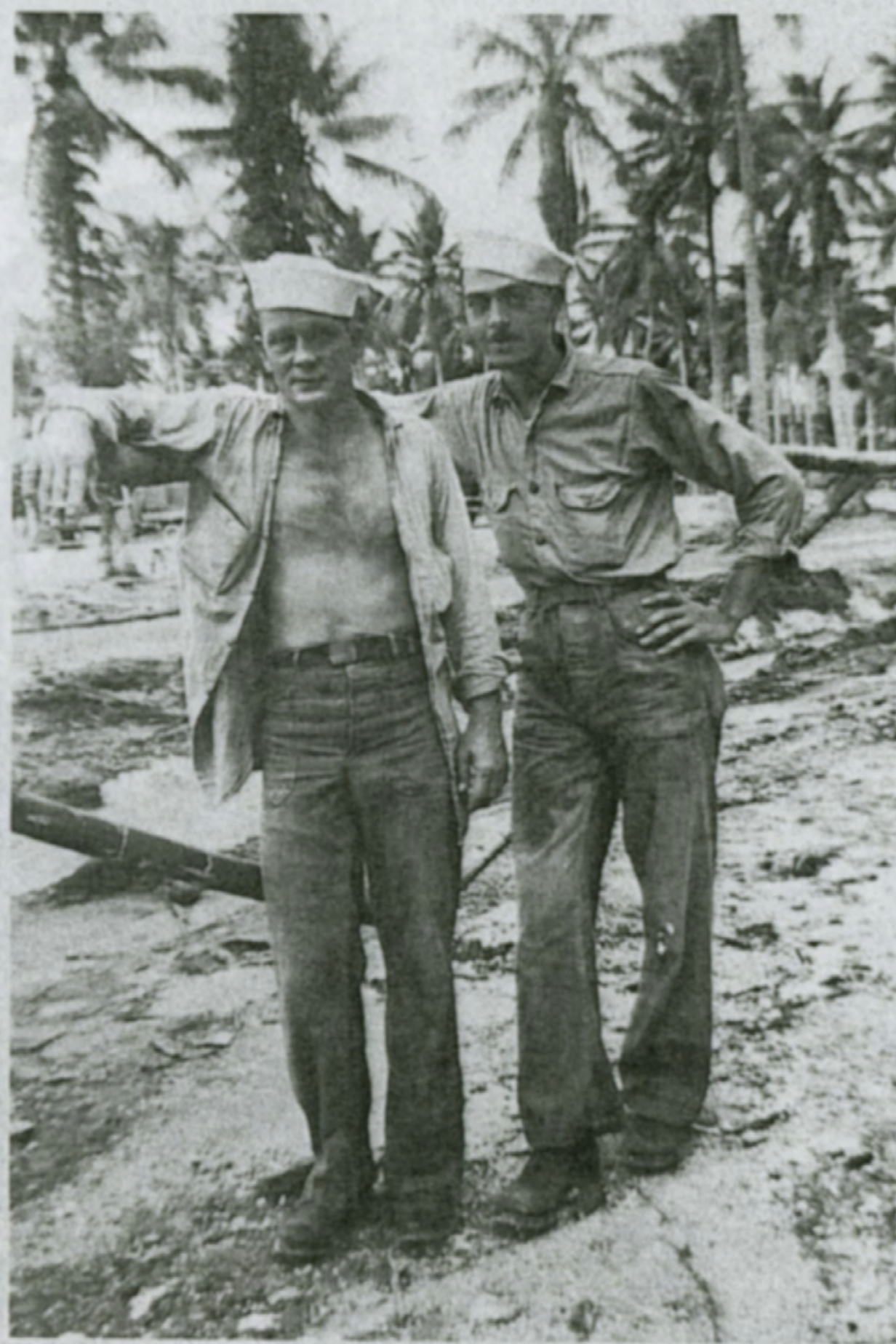
S. D. Fanelli
MaM 3/c



C. A. Daniels
RDM 3/c



Howard F. Keleher
S 1/c



W.E. Petersen
Y 2/c
O. L. Bordine
SoM 3/c



Emirau Island
Native Huts and
Coconuts Palms



Williams GM 3/c	Saville TM	Woolard S 1/c
Cunningham S 1/c	Newbill S 1/c	Murphree
	Brown Cox	RdM 3/c



F. E. Haire
S 1/c
C. J. Baker
TM 3/c



E. F. Schock F 1/c
C.E. Grohnke WT 3/c Ken Warriner WT 2/c
R. W. Barend F 1/c



Charles Moomey

as he was being
transformed from pollywog to shellback

This image is graphic and has been semi-redacted from the digital version of this item.

Image description: a black and white photo of a man squatting on the ground, smiling at the camera, and holding the severed head of a Japanese person.

To view this image: return to the item page (Ogrodnik-030), and click the hyperlink in the item description.

Honorary Sgt. U. S. M. C. Buzza

Some of Buzza's fingers are missing. The Japanese cut off his fingers and tortured him, leaving him hanging by his feet to die on Guadalcanal Island



The pictures on the next few pages were submitted without names. Perhaps a reader will recognize an old friend or relative









Albert King
Bob Fanelli
Buster DiFlorio
Chicago 1988



J. C. Page and
His wife in 1988



Albert and Nellie
King in Charleston



**Irving Mervish and his wife in
1992 during one of their
volunteer experiences in the
Israeli army**



**Howard and Rainey
Metz**



**Robert and Joy
Blake**



Jane Murphree



BILL BRAWN
at work videotaping the
USS Witter DE-636
Reunions



**Jim, Patty and Delbert
Worden**

USS WITTER DE 636

The following pages feature pictures of the USS Witter crew by divisions. They were taken during late spring of 1945 while the ship was tied up between a destroyer, the USS Badger DD 657 on the Witter's starboard side, and an unnamed Mine Sweeper on port side, at Kerama Retto. The Witter was awaiting her turn to enter dry dock for repairs. This happened on June 11. Witter was then on her way to Philadelphia by June 21st.

Each division roster that you will find below each photograph may include the names of some men who had left the Witter prior to her arrival in Kerama Retto, so there may be more names than men in the pictures. All available references for the names and rank of crew members were used to create the rosters. An interesting and helpful reference were the pages of the crews' signatures which are to be found elsewhere in this book



FIRST DIVISION

Lt. R. D. Bash and Louis Freas CBM

Blake, R. T.	S 1/c	Norman, T. W.	S 1/c
Braswell, G. G.	S 1/c	Page, J. C.	S 1/c
Brazzell, R. E.	S 1/c	Pitcock, M. E.	Cox
Brooke, A.	SSM(L) 2/c	Raptis, J. G.	Cox
Byland, F. J.	S 1/c	Ruegsegger, P. A.	S 1/c
Criniti, P. J.	S 1/c	Russell, E. W.	BM 1/c
Early, L.	S 1/c	Sanovich, E. J.	SSM 3/c
Fair, C. A.	BM 2/c	Stabile, S. J.	S 1/c
Fanelli, S. D.	MaM 3/c	Stiffler, C. S.	Cox
Foster, L. H.	Cox	Street, C.	Cox
Fuller, F. C.	S 1/c	Thompson, C. V.	Cox
Grimm, G. E.	Cox	Wilson, J. T.	S 1/c
Hurley, S.	S 1/c		
Lathrop, L. R.	S 1/c		



SECOND DIVISION

Lt. (jg) H. Miller

Brown, F. A.	Cox	Mendenhall, C. O.	S 1/c
Brown, J. H.	Cox	Murphree, J. O.	RDM 3/c
Caskey, J. T.	RDM 3/c	Osborne, J. R.	S 1/c
Cunningham, R. C.	Cox	Planche, D. P.	RDM 2/c
Danford, C. L.	BM 2/c	Powers, B. F.	S 1/c
Daniels, C. A.	RDM 3/c	Rennie, R. S.	BM 1/c
DiFlorio, B.	Cox	Rodolico, J. V.	S 1/c
Duckworth, C. L.	S 1/c	Ross, H. H.	S 1/c
Goodpasture, A.	RDM 2/c	Russell, W.	S 1/c
Haire, F. E.	S 1/c	Scala, A. F.	S 1/c
Herin, B. G.	S 1/c	Stephens, J. L.	S 1/c
Huddle, J. D.	BM 1/c	West, N. D.	RDM 2/c
Mc Donough, J. N.	S 1/c	Wilson, H. B.	S 1/c



C DIVISION Communications

Dale C. Lapham CY, Alonzo H. Caswell CQM, Lt. (jg) Johnson, Lt. (jg) Swengel,
Charles. E. Moomey CphM, Albert Lidstrom CSM,

Aboff, J.	QM 3/c	Krukow, K. W.	SoM 2/c
Bradford, J. H.	RM 2/c	Mervish, I.	SM 2/c
Bradley, W. L.	QM 2/c	Nelson, R. W.	SoM 1/c
Brawn, W. W.	CRT	Nolly, E. B.	RM 2/c
Brennan, W. W.	RM 3/c	Peachman, A.C.	RM 2/c
Broshears, R. A.	SoM 2/c	Rothschild, B. J.	PhM 2/c
Carney, K. G.	RM 1/c	Schwartz, A.G.	Y 1/c
Davis, E. N.	QM 2/c	Silance, P. T.	S 1/c
Good, H.	QM 3/c	Smith, C. E.	S 1/c
Graham, E. B.	S 1/c	Spellman, J.	S 1/c
Howard, K. A.	SM 2/c	Walters, C. A.	RM 3/c
Jacobs, D. O.	RM 3/c	Wells, R. C.	S 1/c
Koenigsberg, S.	SoM 2/c	Worden, D. W.	S 1/c



E DIVISION

Engineering

Ens. Loeffler, Lt.(jg) Bruno Naczkowski

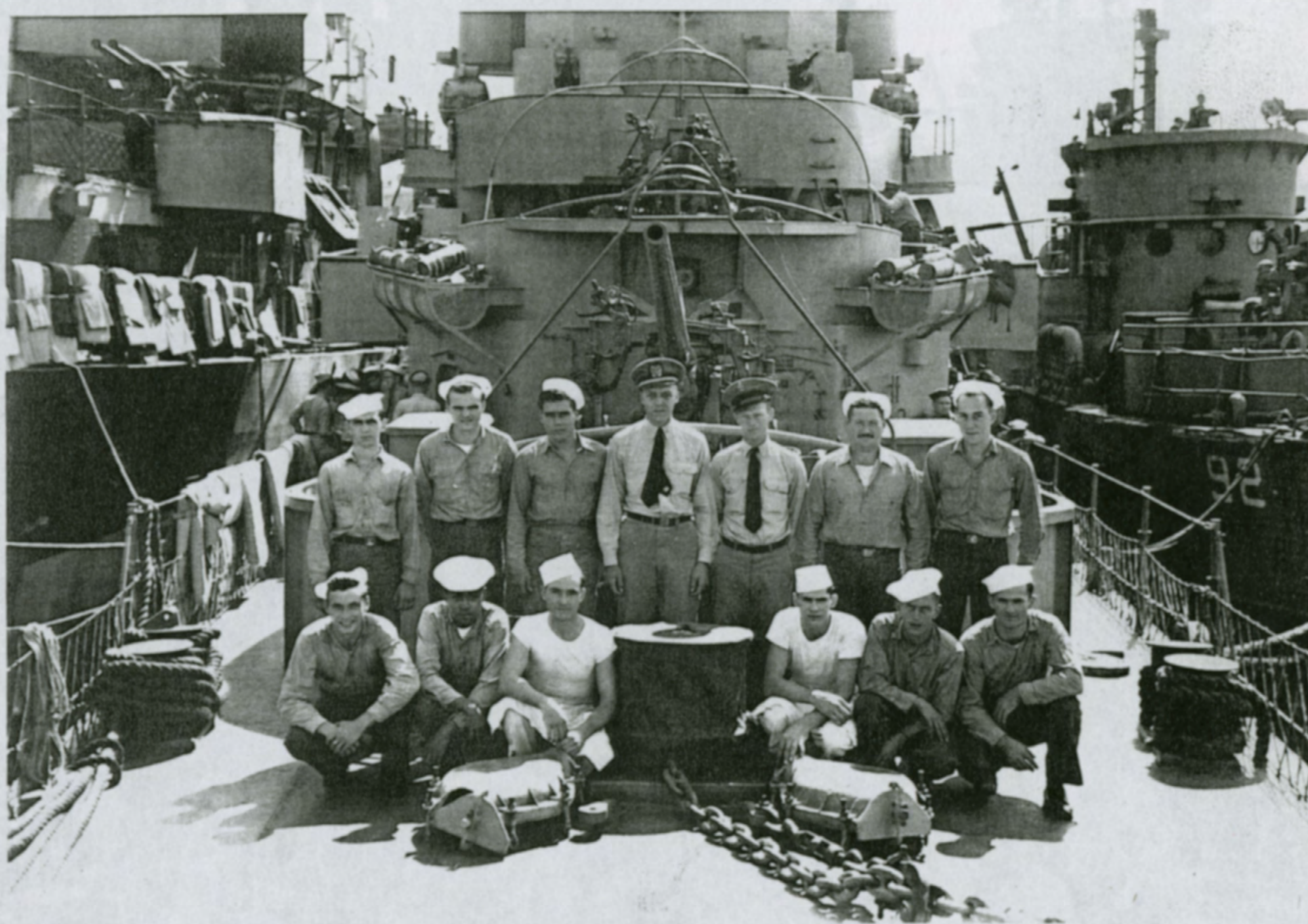
Blair, R. S.	F 1/c	Marshall, N. E.	MM 1/c
Barend, R. W.	WT 2/c	McCracken, W. H.	WT 2/c
Brunk, P. L.	MM 1/c	McCracken, W. L.	WT 2/c
Carroll, K. A.	EM 1/c	Metz, H. L.	MM 1/c
Chilcoat, M. M.	EM 3/c	Pancoast, D. L.	WT 3/c
Dattilo, M.	F 1/c	Peterson, H. W.	WT 3/c
DeLizia, F.	MM 2/c	Poller, J. C.	MM 1/c
Diel, F. H.	MM 2/c	Relick, E. G.	MM 2/c
Dooley, F. L.	F 1/c	Rhom, C. W.	F 1/c
Driggers, J. C.	F 1/c	Schmitz, V. R.	F 1/c
Duval, J. E.	F 1/c	Schneiderman, J. J.	F 1/c
Evaska, C.	EM 2/c	Schock, J.	F 1/c
Fanney, R. M.	EM 1/c	Swanton, E. G.	EM 3/c
Federowicz, A. J.	MM 3/c	Taormina, H. F.	MM 3/c
Foster, S. A.	EM 3/c	Teague, D. R.	MM 3/c
Fritz, A. J.	EM 3/c	Thole, H. F.	MM 3/c
Gaetano, C. C.	MM 1/c	Thorne, D. M.	MM 2/c
Grohnke, C. E.	WT 3/c	Venckus, J. L.	EM 1/c
Hagstrom, V. L.	WT 3/c	Wagner, R. M.	EM 2/c
Hill, D. P.	WT 3/c	Walters, C.	MM 1/c
King, A. D.	F 1/c	Warriner, K. L.	WT 2/c
Long, K. J.	EM 2/c		
Lunger, D. J.	MM 1/c		
Marquette, K. G.	WT 3/c		



O DIVISION

Lt.(jg) Hoxie Griswold

Amtmann, A. J.	TM 1/c	Moorhead, R. L.	FC 1/c
Baker, C. J.	TM 3/c	Ouimette, D. J.	TM 3/c
Breckenridge, G. T.	GM 1/c	Paschane, H. T.	FC 1/c
Carty, C. W.	GM 2/c	Pribanic, F. J.	GM 3/c
Downey, C. W.	S 1/c	Saville, J. H.	TM 2/c
Futch, G. H.	S 1/c	Spitsen, J. R.	GM 3/c
Gelinas, R. R.	TM 3/c	Wheeler, J. A.	GM 3/c
Gorham, D. L.	GM 3/c	Whiteman, M. H.	GM 2/c
Guin, P. T.	S 1/c	Williams, J. R.	GM 3/c
Keleher, H. T.	S 1/c	Zebro, T. F.	GM 3/c
Linsmeyer, R. G.	FC 3/c		



S DIVISION

Supply and Disbursement

Lt. (jg) Charles Newton, Melburn Vinson

Brown H.	STM 1/c	Johnson, H. A.	ST 2/c
Cognac, J. A.	SC 2/c	Olem, A. M.	SK 1/c
Dale, F. E.	BKR 3/c	Richardson, H.	STM 1/c
Davis, E.	ST 3/c	Williams, G. E.	S 1/c
Dillsaver, D. C.	SK 3/c	Wilson, J. T.	STM 1/c
Dowdy, L.	SC 3/c	Woolard, R. L.	S 1/c
Johnson, H. E.	SK 2/c		

C & R DIVISION

Construction and Repair

Since there were only six men in this division, they were regularly assigned to E Division and may have had their picture taken with that crew. There is no separate picture of them.

Collins, W.J.	CM 1/c	Crayton, J. C.	CM 3/c
Crim, H.	M 1/c	Quarella, P. J.	M 3/c
Short, D. J.	SF 1/c	Walsh, E. P.	M 3/c



USS WITTER DE 636
First Reunion in Chicago - October 7-9, 1988

ALBANY 2003
These Men Had Attended Every
USS Witter DE 636 Reunion



Harry Delbert Joe George
Johnson Worden Ogrodnik Futch

USS Witter DE 636
Historian Book Editor



Joe and Joan Ogrodnik

EPILOGUE

There are men of the Witter who are no longer with us, but whose legacy is the formation of the Witter Reunion Association, and ultimately, this book of memories. One day, nearly twenty years ago, an idea came to Jack Spitsen. With the exception of a few lifelong friendships here and there which had been established aboard the Witter, most of the crew had scattered across the USA once they were discharged from the Navy. After leaving the ship, very few of the crew kept on with their shipboard friendships. Thus, it occurred to Jack that it might be nice to have a reunion of the Witter crew. After mulling the prospect over for awhile, one day Jack called Paul Silance. He introduced himself and got right to the point, asking Paul, "How would you like to have a ship's reunion?" Awed by the idea, Paul was dumbstruck for one of the few times in his life. When he was able to speak again, he enthusiastically signed on and "Project Witter Reunion" was launched.

As I write this comment in 2005, recall the old time days of the nineteen-eighties. Communications technology was fairly primitive, what with folks having to rely on post office delivered mails and telephones that were connected to the wall with a wire and had something called rotary service. E-mail and the internet were not available. Energized by the challenge before him, Jack spent a great deal of time and effort obtaining a ship's roster. After several months of tedious work Jack had developed a list of over 200 names and, together, with Paul, began verifying addresses by telephone.

By this time, a Planning Committee had been organized. Members included Jack, Paul, Harry Johnson, Chuuck Newton, George Futch, Tim Herrmann and their wives: JoAnn Spitsen, Mary Silance, Phyllis Johnson, Doris Newton, Millie Futch and Ann Herrmann. The group met several times both in Florida and then in Chicago to work on making this reunion happen.

Finally, the weekend arrived. This first gathering was a marvelous experience for the seventy-eight people who came. Bill Brawn from Oregon videotaped about six hours of conversation, meetings, individual interviews and the banquet. He also videotaped quite a few other reunions. Tapes were made available to anyone who wanted them. These video histories become more precious as the years go by, and we are deeply indebted to Bill for his foresight and his efforts. The men of the planning group were elected to be the officers for the Reunion Association. Jack Spitsen prevailed as Chairman until he was succeeded by Paul Silance. The dynamic enthusiasm and leadership of these men for carrying on with the reunions was inspirational and they both set fine examples for others to follow. Norfolk, Virginia in 1995 was the last reunion for Jack. He had missed two previous meetings due to ill health. It was also the last one for Paul who died early in 1996. Jack passed away a year or two later. Harry Johnson was elected Chairman/Skipper in Norfolk and he led the group until he stepped down in 2002. Dave Planche succeeded Harry but he died in May of 2003. Joe Ogrodnik led the meeting in Albany 2003 where Joe Rodolico was elected Skipper but was unable to attend the 2004 reunion so George Futch was appointed Chairman Pro Tem.

The number of reunion attendees grows smaller with each passing year as friends die or are no longer able to travel. Yet, as we look at their pictures, and as we read their stories, we are ever reminded of the vibrant lives of these men. Even as they disappear from our midst, their spirits will forever be with us in our memories and in our hearts. We are honored and grateful to have been among them.

Joan and Joe Ogrodnik
August 19, 2005

THE NAVY HYMN

The Navy Hymn is well known to those who have sailed the oceans of the world. It is found in many hymnals, and it is often sung at the funerals of Navy personnel.

The first verse was written by William Whiting of Winchester, England in 1860. The author of the second verse is unknown. The hymn is included here at the recommendation of J. R. "Dick" Williams.

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep:
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

Lord, guard and guide the men who fly
And those who on the ocean ply;
Be with our troops upon the land,
And all who for their country stand;
Be with these guardians day and night
And may their trust be in thy might.

WORLD WAR II

Recruitment Posters

