

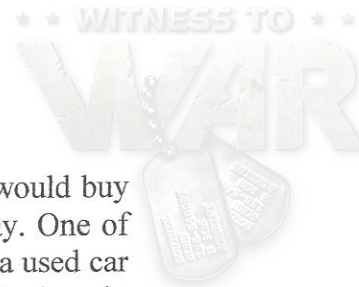
HARLAN AND THE NAVY

In mid June I graduated from high school and on June 26, 1943 enlisted in the Navy. Sometime in my senior year I had read a new book called "Guadalcanal Diary". Rarely in the annals of American military history have our soldiers and marines endured the hellish conditions as they experienced in the steamy jungles of Guadalcanal deep in the Pacific. The book convinced me that service to my country would not be in the Marines or Army. I was willing to serve and even put my life on the line....but not as a foot doggie. The day I departed for Naval service my Dad and Elaine drove me to the train station. Mom could not bear to see her boy leave the nest and go to war so she bid me a tearful goodbye from home. The train went to the Great Lakes Navy Base in Glencoe, Illinois.

Boot camp lasted 3 months. I was in Company 1130 and our Chief Petty Officer was a fellow named Boyce Warren a former University of Tennessee football star. I took up with some slow talking lads from Tennessee. They were a fine bunch and I did appreciate their acceptance of me, a Yankee. A major ordeal for me at Great Lakes was the need to pass a swimming test, a bad omen for it suggests that ships may sink. The problem was....I couldn't swim. So I had to spend extra time in the too-big pool in order to accomplish the four long laps as required. At some point we were tested in order to determine where in the naval service we were apt to do the least harm. We were also given some mostly meaningless preferences as to how we might like to serve. I liked my brief experience in the radio room of the D&C boat and was always fascinated with airplanes so my choice was Naval Aviation, radio. I was granted half which was better than the zero that many of my friends received. I didn't get aviation but I did get radio and after a one week liberty at home was dispatched to Northwestern University in Evanston where the Navy had a school for radiomen.

There we learned the international code of dit-dahs and how to send, receive and type messages. We had to learn to type a minimum of 30 words per minute and some fat fingered fellows actually washed out. Radio school was of four months duration and after a couple months I was making adequate progress but then was befallen with the misfortune of double pneumonia. I was transferred from the sick bay at the radio school to the hospital at Great Lakes and there, over the next 6 weeks, was brought back to good enough health to assume active duty. Sulfa drugs were then new and they saved my life. Having completed only half of my radio training I was worried that I might get sent directly out to sea as a lowly swabbie but to my relief the Navy sent me back to Northwestern where I joined a brand new class where, owing to my previous 2 months of training, I had a leg up on the others. I could already type at 30 words per minute and the new-comers watched in wonder as my nimble fingers flew over the keyboard.

Mother's cousin Oline lived in Oak Park on the west side of Chicago and when I had week end liberty I would often go there so as to experience real home cooking and a soft bed as opposed to Navy chow and a canvass bunk. It was a long walk to the train station and then two train rides and yet another long walk to her place on Humphrey Avenue so I thought it would be good to have a car and I had a hundred bucks in my pocket with which to make such purchase. New cars were not being produced, used cars were in



demand and prices were on the high side. But back then, one hundred dollars would buy quite much and that sum represented almost two months of a lowly sailor's pay. One of my friends was of a like mind and had the same amount of money. We went to a used car lot in Evanston and there I purchased a 1930 Ford Model A Sports Coupe and he bought a 1933 Studebaker President sedan. It was good to have wheels again.

Before and after the car purchase we sometimes went to Downtown Chicago to the USO, United Service Organization. These were halls nicely decorated with comfortable furniture, writing desks, snacks, soft drinks, magazines, books and kindly volunteers of all ages including young women, some single and some married to service personnel. Far from home and loved ones, it was nice to have someone to talk to instead of the guy in the next bunk. The idea was to offer a home away from home for those in military service and as near as could be expected the USO did that very well. Also, the USO enlisted volunteers among celebrity entertainers to put on shows overseas as well as in the USA for the benefit of service men and women. It was at a USO show that I saw the great songstress, Lena Horne.

Most people were very kind to service men and women....but not all. One day I was driving to Oline's home and while traveling through the suburb of River Forest was stopped by a two man police car, a 1937 Ford it was. I was asked for my liberty pass and could not find it on my person or in my car and so, as far as the policemen were concerned I was AOL (Absent Without Leave) and his proper duty would have been to take me in and call the Navy Shore Patrol. Instead, while his partner looked the other way, one of the officers....the one with the gravy stains on his tie.... took me behind a tree and asked me for my wallet. He opened it up, took out my entire thirty dollars (over half a month of pay) and told me to be on my way. Young and innocent babe that I was, prudence told me to skedaddle as ordered and that I did. It had been my initial first hand experience with corruption by a government official. Another would follow in a couple months time.

Then the time came for graduation from radio school. There were fifty sailors in the class and we had been told before final exams that the top three would go aboard a fighting ship and the others would all go to Little Creek, Virginia, the Navy Amphibious Base. That was not good news as it meant duty on an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) or similar slow turtle. Amphibs were regarded as the least desirable sea duty as they were slow, maybe 10 knots maximum, rode poorly because they had little draft, had sparse gunnery and more often than not made their landings in the teeth of heavy enemy fire. Because of my head start from the others, I had the good fortune of a top three finish. Moreover, only the top three were given ratings as Third Class Petty Officers. That meant a nice pay raise and an insignia on my sleeve denoting some skill, limited authority and prestige. Next stop after a one week liberty would be the United States Navy Base at Norfolk, Virginia, the largest navy base in the world and the home of the Atlantic Fleet armada.

But before leaving the radio school I had to do something about my one hundred dollar Model A. A Navy Chief wanted to buy it but said he was bit short until payday and so, he gave me fifty bucks with the promise that when I sent him my new address he would



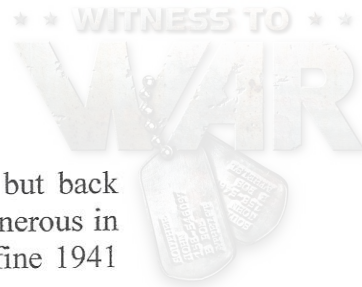
send the fifty dollar balance. I did and he didn't. I never heard from that short, beady eyed cull. He was related to the River Forest cop...if not in fact, at least in kind.

Upon arrival at Norfolk we three star radio students were assigned to serve aboard U.S. Navy Destroyers, each of us to a different ship. Mine was to be the USS Soley then in the final stages of construction at the Federal Shipbuilding Works in Kearny, New Jersey. I could not have received better news. The naval war in the Atlantic was mostly against German submarines. Large ships like battleships and heavy cruisers were of little use in fighting the U-boats which had regularly decimated Allied shipping. Destroyers were used to escort convoys and to seek out the underwater enemy. Further, while the bigger ships rode heavy seas with less motion and consequently more comfort, they had a reputation of being very rule and regulation happy. Destroyers, with crews of 345 sailors, had a much more informal atmosphere and that was an appealing factor. Destroyers were well armed with abundant firepower; torpedoes, five inch guns, anti-aircraft guns, depth charges.....and they were nimble and very fast. "Greyhounds of the Sea" they were called and real fighting ships they were. The downside was that they were relatively small and thus offered a rough ride in heavy seas and in order to facilitate the need for speed the hull and decks were clad in thin steel. Thus, they were also called "Tin Cans".

Our first weeks were spent in classroom studying drawings and the many elements of the ship as well as acquainting ourselves with the other crewmen, some old salts and others, like myself, pure unwashed rookies who had never been to sea. The skipper was Commander John S. Lewis. He had served as Communications Officer to Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner who had won fame in the Pacific Theatre. Our Executive Officer (second in command) was Lt. Commander George T. McDaniel, a naval hero who had earned the Navy's highest award, the Navy Cross, for his courageous actions aboard a Destroyer in Pacific waters. Both were Annapolis graduates and career Navy. We were in select company with leaders of such distinction, experience and ability.

One would think that labor strikes would be non existent in war time production. Not so. The electricians in the shipyard struck and completion of Soley was delayed by a month. During this time we had little to do beyond the class room and so, received generous liberty. Norfolk and the surrounding Tidewater Region was overrun with service men and there was little to do except hang out in the many bars. I wasn't much of a drinker and the bars got little of my business. USO to the rescue. Many of the Norfolk natives saw sailors as a nuisance. I remember going to a nice restaurant. Enlisted men lined up to gain entry, officers and civilians were ushered directly in to their tables. Under those circumstances, it was wise to get out of town and that we did on a few occasions.

Richmond wasn't too far away but the better destination was Washington, D.C. Sight seeing was plentiful and.....that's where the girls were. Thousands of young women flocked to the capital to gain employment in the many government offices although we quickly learned that the abundance was of marginal help to us as they seemed to prefer officers who had much the nicer uniforms and more money. Hotel rooms were impossible to come by but across the river at Arlington was a small army base where servicemen and women could obtain a bunk and breakfast for fifty cents a night. Getting to Richmond or



Washington was easy....we hitchhiked. Today hitchhiking can be dangerous but back then we rarely waited more than a few minutes for a ride. People were very generous in sharing their autos with service folk. One nice lady allowed me to drive her fine 1941 Plymouth all the way to Washington.

Soley was launched in September, left the shipyard in tow to its berth at the Brooklyn Navy Yard where it was to receive final outfitting. Our crew was then transferred from Norfolk to Brooklyn. On December 7, 1944, the third anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Soley was christened by relatives of its namesake James Russell Soley, an early Assistant Secretary of the Navy. The colors were hoisted at the Commissioning Ceremony by Signalman Third Class Earl Chaffee who was so honored because on this date three years earlier Chaffee had fought fires on the USS Downes which had been struck by Japanese bombs at Pearl Harbor. It was Chaffee's one moment of glory during his Soley tenure. The next day Soley was underway for the first time as a Navy ship on a one day cruise to test fire the guns and make ready for the shake-down run to follow. It had been five months since I had arrived in Norfolk and those of us on the first crew would forever be known as Soley Plankowners, a proud identification then and now.

Our Communications Officer was Lt. Vaughn McLoud a tall, rangy Texan who brooked no nonsense and seemed to us to have avoided the germ of friendliness. The officer with whom we had the most contact was Lt. Junior Grade Orrin Tovson, a Norwegian from Decorah, Iowa. Lt. Tovson was a survivor of the sinking of the USS Corry at Normandy and a favorite among us because his status as an officer never compromised pleasant relationships with enlisted men. To his face he was Mr. Tovson but we referred to him privately as "Mickey" because in looks and effervescence he reminded us of the actor, Mickey Rooney. Our Radio Chief was Radioman First Class Helmer Carlson, a Minnesota Swede. We liked the good natured and fair Carlson, a six year Navy veteran. In addition to Carlson, there were nine others in the Radio Shack, six rated Petty Officers and three Strikers, Petty Officer wannabees. Underway as well as often in port we were three to a watch, four hours on and eight hours off around the clock, 7 days of the week. .

The purpose of the shake-down cruise was to test all systems in preparation for wartime service. On December 29th we left our Brooklyn berth for the shake-down cruise. All went well and after a week at sea we put into the harbor at Hamilton, Bermuda where each crewman was granted a short liberty of a few hours. Along with friends Norman Yeoman and Bob Butterworth we made a stop in a tavern and then moved on to a nice restaurant. In that restaurant was a cute waitress. I asked her if she had matches and in short order she returned with a book of matches which I stored in my pocket. On returning to the ship I encountered the Officer of the Deck, Lt. Joe Hutchison, a crusty Mustang. (Those who had worked their way up from enlisted to officer rank were called Mustangs). Hutchison asked me if I had a light. I pulled out my book of matches and when he opened it we both saw a girls name and phone number written thereon. With neither apology nor explanation he requisitioned the matches and that night went off on liberty. The next day I went up on the ships bridge and there was the overbearing Mustang with a huge black eye. Served him right for the stealing of my matches.

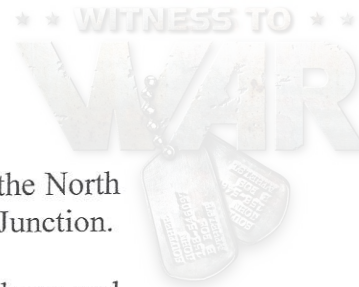


Shake-down continued with three more weeks at sea and at the end of January in rain, high winds and heavy seas we were sent to patrol a specific area. Our purpose was to join other Destroyers in forming a safety network of ships across the Atlantic while President Roosevelt flew overhead to join Uncle Joe Stalin and Churchill at the top secret Yalta Conference. On leaving that area we found ourselves in a winter Atlantic storm of menacing proportions. Our last cooked meal was sauerkraut. The ship was pitching and rolling fiercely and rookies were throwing up sauerkraut everywhere, the odor of which was carried throughout the ship via the ventilating system. Never since have I been able to partake of sauerkraut. By the way, I never did get seasick, then or later. Destroyers have been known to capsize in horrific storms and we nearly did, in one instance enduring a fifty six degree roll, men and equipment falling and tumbling everywhere. The storm swept away a couple of our life rafts and with sea water washing over the entire ship each time we burrowed into a monstrous wave we actually took some water down the front stack. Bulkheads caved, rivets began to pop, a depth charge broke loose on the fantail and a mid-ship seam began to separate indicating the possibility of the ship splitting. We rookies were scared spittleless and even the old salts clung to their rosaries.

I was literally hanging on in the Gunnery Shack when a Bos'n's Mate came in and announced that a depth charge had come loose and was rolling around on the fantail (fantail is the absolute end of the ship just a few feet above the water). He sent four sailors out to secure the dangerous missile and the four included me, a Radioman who should have had enough sense to have fled to my warm and cozy home in the Radio Shack. I served mostly as cheerleader while the guys who knew what they were doing wrestled the menace into its proper place. It got done in just a few minutes but the icy cold water washing over the ship from bow to stern absolutely drenched us and gave me a painful bout of pleurisy which resulted in a few days time in sick bay.

On February 1 we limped back into New York harbor and waved a grateful salute to The Statue of Liberty. We were mighty glad to make port but the ship was in bad shape. For twelve sailors the storm experience was so traumatic that they went AOL (Absent Over Leave) and on eventual return were either busted in rank or restricted for a period of time to the ship. Navy officials swarmed over the ship inspecting the damage. It was determined that Soley had to go into dry dock. Repairs were made and this included the welding of a wide three foot band around the entire vertical inside circumference of the ship where the seam split had begun. In later times we learned that following crews always wondered about that unusual band of steel. We were in the yard for three weeks and liberty was liberal. After my short stay in sick bay I received a five day pass and elected to make a trip home, my first time aboard an airplane. It was a DC-3. Home again felt really good but knowing I would be going back out to sea was hard on my parents.

My best buddies were the before mentioned Norm Yeoman and Bob Butterworth, both fellow Radiomen. Norm had been in the Navy for awhile and had served at the U.S. Navy base in Recife, Brazil. Bob lied about his age and got his mother to sign a form stating he was 17, when in fact he was just past 16. At that tender age young Bob was one of the few survivors when the destroyer USS DeHaven was bombed and sunk in February of 1943 at the battle of Savo Island in the Solomons. Yet another survivor in our group of

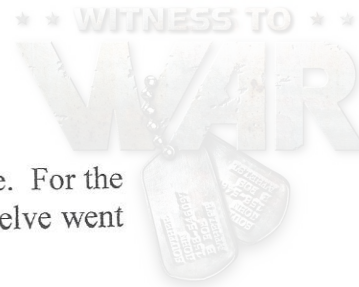


Solely Radiomen was Ramon Cook who was plucked from the frigid waters of the North Atlantic when the USS Fisk was sunk by a U-boat in an area known as Torpedo Junction.

The neighborhood around the Brooklyn Navy Yard was quite pleasant with shops and good restaurants. The people were friendly but talked funny. Norm and I made liberty in Brooklyn and occasionally went to New York City and Times Square, my first venture into the Big Apple. Bob would use his freedom to return to his home in Philadelphia and Betty, his betrothed. Just before leaving the Brooklyn Yard for our new assignment at the Norfolk Navy Base, Bob failed to return to the ship from a Philadelphia visit. He was AOL when we got underway. A few days after docking in Norfolk Bob turned up. He had to go before the Captain for punishment. When he told Captain Lewis that he and Betty had gotten married our gracious Skipper let him off the hook at the urging of Lt. Tovson who then broke out a bottle of spirits in the Radio Shack, yet another reason why "Mickey" was our favorite officer.

We had been in and out of the Brooklyn Navy Base for four months. When we arrived in Norfolk at the end of February we were assigned to the Combat and Escort Piers. From there we were sent on anti submarine patrol up and down the coast as a member of "Operation Teardrop" which was designed to rid the U-boat menace from the U.S. coast to the Caribbean. In World War II our non-domestic oil was coming from South America and scores of Allied tankers were sunk along the Atlantic seaboard. On one such junket while at General Quarters (battle stations) my good friend, Dave Latshaw, had duty on the bridge. Off on our starboard (right) rear quarter Dave sighted a torpedo as it passed the bow of another destroyer and proceeded to pass us at our stern. Another time an enemy sub was picked up on sonar, a mysterious machine that picked up underwater sounds. In both instances we made search and destroy runs in ever widening patterns but the U-boats eluded us, lucky them. On the first of those two runs the Officer of the Deck, Lt. Fulham, failed to observe convention which was to turn to port (left). He commanded a turn to starboard, right. Captain Lewis made the correction but from that time on Fulham was known as "Wrong Way Fulham", a take-off on Wrong Way Corrigan. (He made headlines in 1938. Look him up on the internet...it's interesting.) Of the many times we were on anti-sub patrol those were the only times we brushed the enemy.

Many of our Gunners Mates were experienced and had come off other ships. One day we were sent out to practice gunnery by firing our 40mm and 20mm guns at sleeves towed by aircraft. We suspected, correctly, that this exercise was to prepare us for duty in the Pacific where Japanese kamikazes were killing and maiming the many Destroyers guarding our Aircraft Carriers. Another clue was that our aft torpedo tubes had been removed in favor of added anti-aircraft guns. The Navy's observer aboard our ship was greatly impressed by our inerrant marksmanship and reported our excellence to the Fleet Office. Thus we were assigned as a training ship to teach other Destroyer crews how to do it. Some other ships from the Combat and Escort group that we had either operated with or trained left for Pacific waters leaving us behind, an event that did not please us although in retrospect it may have saved our bacon for among those eight or ten that went west, the destroyers Drexler and Abele were sunk at Okinawa by kamikazes. The Douglas Fox, Purdy, and Hyman were struck with major damage and loss of life. Out of a



crew of 345 officers and men, 158 souls went down with Drexler, 82 with Abele. For the Destroyer Navy, the kamikaze attacks at Okinawa constituted a blood bath. Twelve went to the bottom and forty eight others sustained damage and loss of life.

Across the fifty foot wide pier was another ship with a name I do not recall. It was an ugly ship with an uglier crew and insults were regularly exchanged across the pier, our insults for good cause, theirs not. Every ship has its barroom regulars and one day groups of such bar habitues from Soley and USS Ugly happened to be in the same establishment, probably a place with a dirt floor. Insults were followed by a fight and the entire bunch of miscreants were thrown out of the barroom which had sustained much damage. Navy Shore Patrol escorted them back to the pier where yet another fight started, this time causing scores of sailors to pour down from the decks to join in the melee. One of the leading participants was Pearl Harbor survivor Earl Chaffee. Shore Patrol finally quelled the fight but it wasn't easy. The next day our Skipper heard harsh words from his superiors and short order we were on our way to the Pacific. It took a riot on the pier to get us into the still ongoing war against what was then referred to as "the yellow peril", a term which now would surely be considered demeaning and politically incorrect as would our then use of the terms "Japs" and "Nips".

We stopped at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba for a few days and then transited the Panama Canal en-route to San Diego where we picked up a few new crewmen including two Radio Strikers. Then on to Pearl Harbor, graveyard of the USS Arizona and its eleven hundred entombed sailors. Liberty wasn't inspiring in Honolulu as the town was teeming with sailors and even the USO had long lines. Just before arrival at Pearl Harbor we heard of the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was clear that the war would be over before the Japanese would feel the sting of the USS Soley. Even so, we rejoiced that lives would be spared and we could all go home. But our duties were not yet done.

We departed Pearl and steamed on to our next assignment, Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall-Gilbert Islands. En-route we crossed the 180th meridian and thereby became trusty Dragon-backs of "The Order of the Golden Dragon", a centuries old maritime honor conferred as sailors cross the International Date Line for their first time. Stretching from pole to pole, through the Bering Strait and just west of Attu Island in the Aleutians, then thousands of miles southward, the violent and turbulent seas within the control of this mythical creature are known by men of all ships as the Domain of the Golden Dragon. From Kwajalein we proceeded with the newly repaired USS Hyman to Kusaie (now Kosrae) in the Eastern Caroline Islands (now The Federated States of Micronesia) to take part in the surrender of the four thousand member Japanese garrison on the island which had been bypassed by American forces. On September 8th, Lt. General Harada signed the surrender documents officially turning his troops over to Commodore Ben Wyatt who was in command of the two-ship Navy unit. Later that day and after a ceremony of raising the stars and stripes, Commodore Wyatt departed Kusaie on board Hyman. Soley remained as station ship charged with disarming the Japanese, disabling weapons, destroying ammunition, segregating the Japanese from the natives, dispensing food and medicine, and maintaining order. The Jap garrison had been on the island for three years, were part of General Yamashita's Army of Malaya, had taken part



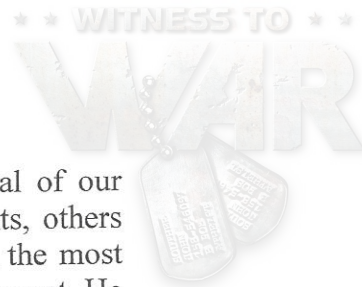
in the infamous rape of Singapore and had never been defeated in battle. They were a surly lot. Some hid in the hills and had to be flushed out by our armed guard.

Kusaie is a ten mile long, six mile wide beautiful tropical island with a mountain range topping two thousand feet, completely surrounded by coral reef and with a fine natural harbor. American whalers first discovered the island in 1806 and it became a rendezvous station for whaling ships, mostly from New England. The crews of those ships were a rough and brutal breed. Many had been shanghaied. They abused the Kusaie women they didn't abduct and left a legacy of foreign diseases....so much so that over time the population declined from two thousand to two hundred. When the American buccaneers of the whaling fleet had done their worst and only a pitiful remnant was left of the people of Kusaie, then came other Americans, also buccaneers in a fashion, to repair the damage done by their countrymen. They came aboard a square rigged sailing ship named Morning Star. They were missionaries, come to convert the heathen to the Christian faith. One hundred and fifty years later the Christian Mission is still there, the island now with a population of over seven thousand deeply religious souls.

On arrival at Kusaie, we were amazed to find two Americans, Hermann and Youngstrom, operators of a small copra plantation. (The missionaries had left before the Japanese arrival). Though they had been held in captivity, Hermann and Youngstrom appeared to be in fairly good health. It seemed General Harada was a bit more humane than many of his contemporaries. None of the natives had been executed but food was meager so some were near starvation and all had been worked hard. But never on Sunday. They refused to work on the Lord's Day, good practicing Christians that they were. The relationship between Captain Lewis and General Harada was cordial. On one occasion the General was invited to the ship by our Captain for dinner and an explanation as to how his country had lost the war. Interpreting was Yeoman First Class Dick Crandall of California who spoke some Japanese. (A Yeoman's duty station is the ships office).

In addition to our prescribed duties at Kusaie, we did some other things to help the natives return to normalcy. For example, a dispensary was set up using the small building that had housed the two incarcerated Americans. It was pretty well run down but was restored at the skillful hands of our Shipfitters. The Electrician Mates overhauled a Japanese motor-generator and set up "Main Plant #1, Kusaie Light and Power Co." to allow Dr. Clancy (assigned to us on temporary duty) and the Pharmacist Mates the facilities necessary for proper lighting and sterilization in the medical ministering of the natives. Every year since, September 8th has been celebrated on the island as Soley Day.

One day we received much welcome mail. It was delivered via PBY, a twin engine amphibious airplane which landed in the harbor. As the pilot was taking off he struck a reef which tore up the hull and the plane sank in four feet of water. After that the PBY flew over the island and dropped the mail, sometimes in the drink which action greatly annoyed Storekeeper Karsten, our mail clerk, and served to intensify his naturally crabby nature. Equally unhappy were those of us who had to read soggy letters.



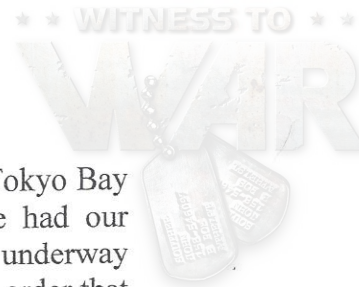
On October 13th we returned to Kwajalein where, as at Pearl Harbor, several of our Plankowners left the ship bound for home. Some left after expired enlistments, others with points earned based on length of service and overseas duty. Those with the most points left first. Among the earliest to leave was Earl Chaffee, the Day of Infamy vet. He was the most accomplished of the Signalmen but the irreverent and often undisciplined Chaffee was also a pain in the hindmost of some officers, Lt. Tovson an exception and whom Earl respected. Another to leave early was Chief Sonarman Don "Sandy" Sanford, a well liked and much admired leader. He had been a Screenwriter in the movie industry as a civilian and was writing a novel while aboard Soley. The name of his book was "Midway" and from that book came the outstanding film of the same name starring Henry Fonda, Charlton Heston and Robert Mitcham

A week later we were sent to the island of Majuro to pick up forty five Japanese prisoners. Our freight was carried on deck in a sitting position and at some point their leading officer complained about the lack of exercise. Cox'n Bob Smith took the forty five up on the fo'castle (front of the ship) and exercised them until their Nipponese tongues were hanging out. Today, human rights zealots would want Smitty severely punished for having abused the little POW darlin's. .

We made similar runs to other islands and in early November proceeded to Wake Island to pick up our most notorious prisoner, Rear Admiral Sakaibara. Wake had been captured by the Japanese after furious and sustained resistance by severely outnumbered Marines under the leadership of Major James Devereux. At a later time in the war the Japanese positions at Wake were devastatingly bombed by American aircraft. Admiral Sakaibara was so incensed that he marched ninety nine Americans down to the beach where they were summarily executed, Sakaibara himself beheading one of them. Our prisoner was placed in a small compartment under guard. One of those guards was Torpedoman John Aives. Sitting above a ladder leading down to the compartment, the armed and sleepy Aives nodded off and in the doing fired off a burst down into the compartment. There was a scream. Not because he had been hit but because the Admiral thought his execution was imminent. It was a short reprieve. Admiral Sakaibara was tried by the War Crimes Commission, found guilty and hanged for his crimes.

Kwajalein wasn't bad. The Seabees (Navy Construction Battalion) had built a baseball field of which we made frequent use. On December 7th, the first anniversary of the commissioning of our ship, we had a party of sorts. Our excellent Ships Baker, Roland Labby, created a big cake and the Army provided us with some 3.2 beer. The low alcohol content was guaranteed to keep all sailors in a sober state.

December the 18 saw Soley depart the Marshall Islands bound for Japan and duty with the occupation forces. Stops were made to pick up or discharge military personnel at the islands of Roi, Eniwetok and Wake. We felt like a water taxi service. We were due to arrive in the Land of the Rising Sun on Christmas day but encountered a savage storm of near typhoon intensity. The cooks couldn't cook, the baker couldn't bake and our meals consisted of Spam from a can and..... coffee. The one staple we always had was Radio Shack Coffee and crewmen would stop at our place at all hours of the day and night for a



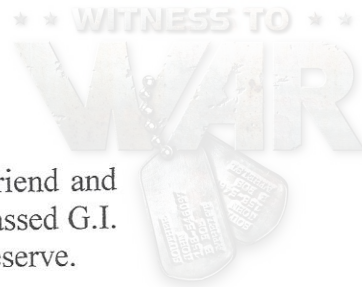
good hot cup of “Joe”, a Navy term for coffee. On Dec.28th we steamed into Tokyo Bay for mooring at the Yokosuka Naval Base. There on the following day we had our Christmas dinner of turkey with all the trimmings. While in Japan we got underway several times, once to bring a Navy Doctor to a merchant ship well out to sea in order that he might tend to a critically ill sailor. The Japanese knew we were coming and they had mined all approaches to the island of Honshu so each time underway we kept a wary watch for those killer mines lest we encounter one missed by our minesweepers.

My liberty in Japan was confined to just one visit to Tokyo via train. Passing through Yokohama we saw a city of near complete devastation. Yokohama was the industrial capital of Japan and had been bombed virtually into oblivion by our Air Force. Tokyo was damaged but less so. A few stores were open but goods were sparse. Street merchants sold Sushi but I had no appetite for raw fish.....and still don't. For my mother I did buy a ring clad with a large pearl and a few yards of pure white silk but better shopping was to be had at the Army PX. The people were thin, ill clothed and generally unfriendly. Some of the fellows did go in search of willing girls. These they found and some shipmates were left in distress and needing medical attention. I hasten to add that none were from the radio gang. I saw no reason to go back to such a depressing place. My preference was staying on the ship and tending to my duties which included the creation and production of the ships weekly newsletter, “The Soley Scoop”.

Just a brief comment on the use of the atomic bomb. History revisionists have been severely critical over our use of those bombs which killed 80,000 at Hiroshima, 50,000 at Nagasaki. Few beyond President Truman and a handful of scientists knew of Project Manhattan, the development of the atomic bomb. Believing an invasion of Japan was the only way to achieve total victory, the American military was making plans for landings on the Japanese mainland. Experience had taught that resistance would have been fanatical and it was estimated that there would be casualties at a minimum of one million Americans and two million Japanese. That the atomic bombs spared the lives of many hundreds of thousands is a certainty. Captain Lewis told us that our squadron of destroyers was scheduled to take part in the planned invasion.

By January I had accumulated more than sufficient points to see myself homeward bound. I contacted the Transportation Office and inquired as to when and on what vessel I might depart. I was told that the only transit available just then was as a passenger on one of the landing ships, i.e. an LST. The idea of many weeks of sailing half way across the world on such a slow, rough riding turtle did not appeal. I had learned from one of the Yeoman-in-the-know that Soley would be returning to home shores in another month so I opted to remain on my fast man-of-war with my buddies. One month turned into two and in March we left the far Pacific waters en-route to American shores. It had been a long cruise.....almost eight months since we had departed San Diego.

I had come to like Navy life and about this time gave brief thought to re-enlisting. Earlier I had been elevated to Radioman Second Class and while not yet appointed, I had passed the written exams for the Radioman First Class rating. With so many leaving the naval service, I knew it should be only a few short years until I would be eligible to become a



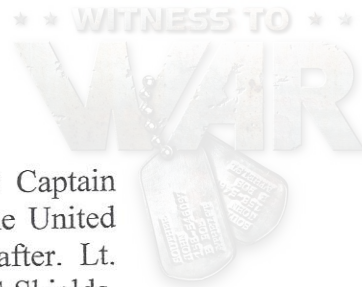
Chief Petty Officer. Chief Radioman, that is. However, discussions with my friend and superior, Lt. Tovson, convinced me that I should take advantage of the newly passed G.I. Bill and attend college. But I've always regretted having not joined the Naval Reserve.

With only a brief stop for provisioning at Pearl we steamed on to the California coast over friendly seas at a twenty five knot clip. It was the most pleasurable of trips for a happy crew. On docking at Long Beach, we were greeted by a welcoming group of civilians which included a band of musicians. This was a far cry from the experience of returning Viet Nam veterans years later. The ship was due to go on to Casco Bay, Maine for extensive maintenance owing to the thousands of miles of hard running. I elected to leave the ship at Long Beach, then after a few days of pleasurable liberty I entrained east to Great Lakes and discharge from the United States Navy. It was April and I had served my country for just short of three years.

Nowhere in this long epistle of my naval service have I touched on my Christian faith. When we left for military duty our church, then named St. Olaf, presented each of us with pocket New Testaments. I still have mine. For the most part, the reading of that bible was my church, although I did from time to time attend Protestant services at the Norfolk base. Of course there were prayers-a-plenty during the frightening Atlantic storm that nearly did us in. On the ship Sunday was a work day just like any other day of the week. There was an enlisted man from the engine room who conducted a bible study in the mess hall each Sunday. One day I stopped in on that group of six or seven. It became clear to me that these lads were bible thumping holly rollers of a kind I had never experienced and I never went back. As the humorist Gaylord Keiller has said, tongue in cheek, "Lutherans enjoy a quiet religion".

Reader, you may wonder why it is that I have written so very extensively of my naval experiences. I expect much of it may be of little interest to the wonderful women of my family....'though the chronicle may benefit any Grandson who someday might be curious enough to want to learn more of what his Grandfather did in the war. So I offer this explanation. World War II was the defining war of the twentieth century and apart from matters of faith and family, my years of military service constitute the most significant period of my life. As minor as my contribution may have been, I can think of no greater privilege and honor than to have served my country in time of war. An enhancement was my attachment to the good ship Soley and the fine men aboard her. It is said that on his tombstone W.C. Fields suggested it should be written, "Better here than Philadelphia". And on a gravestone in rural Alabama is inscribed, "He Done His Damnedest". I would like mine to read:

Harlan Arthur Dahl
United States Navy
World War II



Where are they now, some of those valiant Soley sailors mentioned herein? Captain Lewis left the ship at Casco Bay to join the American Military Mission to the United Nations in New York. He retired as a full Admiral and died shortly thereafter. Lt. Commander McDaniel left Soley to take command of the Destroyer Escort, USS Shields. In retirement he lives and plays golf in his hometown of Lynchburg, Virginia. Lt. Tovson, a graduate of Luther College in Iowa and a mathematician, became Chief Actuary of a major insurance company and lives in Indiana. Norm Yeoman had a career in law enforcement and lives in Pennsylvania tending his garden of prize winning chrysanthemums. Bob Butterworth took over the family business, retired to Florida and died there 3 years ago. My closest Soley friend, Dave Latshaw, became Chief Claims Examiner for the Continental Insurance Company and lives in Pittsburgh. Chief Sandy Sanford was the Screenwriter for the movie "Midway" and went on to a prominent career in Hollywood. He now lives here in Atlanta. Every time you watch a showing of "Midway" on your television screen, Sandy gets a royalty check. And then we have Signalman Earl Chaffee. If ever there was one crewman who we thought would come to no good end it was Earl. At a 1998 Soley reunion in Hampton, Virginia, Chaffee drove up to the host hotel in the most expensive of Mercedes convertibles. He had become a Real Estate Developer and the owner of mobile home parks in Arizona and Florida, a very wealthy man.

The bond of seagoing shipmates is strong and everlasting and I have seen and enjoyed the company of many of my old friends at Soley Reunions where we swap war stories and gather under a banner which reads, "The older we get, the greater we were".



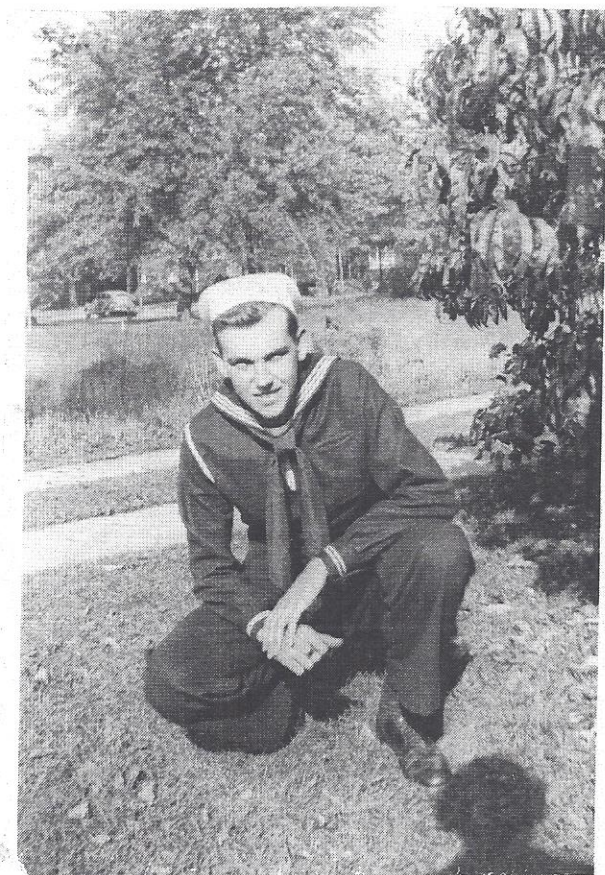
The Destroyer, U.S.S. Soley, DD707



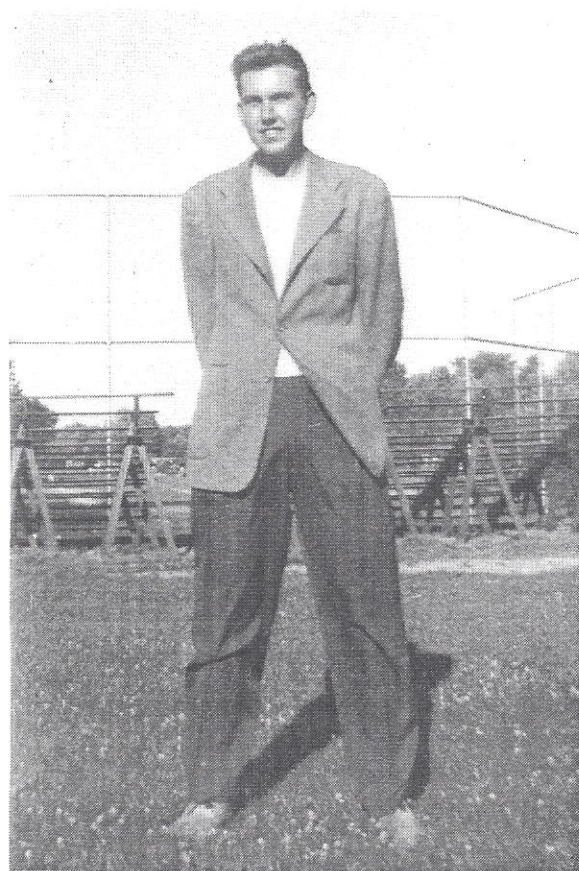
Aboard the U.S.S. Soley at Kusaie, Sept. 8th, 1945. General Harada of the Imperial Japanese Army signing the terms of surrender. The officer on the right with the scrambled eggs on his hat is Commander John Lewis, skipper of the Soley.



On duty station escorting the Navy carrier in the background



Home on leave from
Boot Camp.



Home from the Navy and
the war. Slim, fit and
tanned.