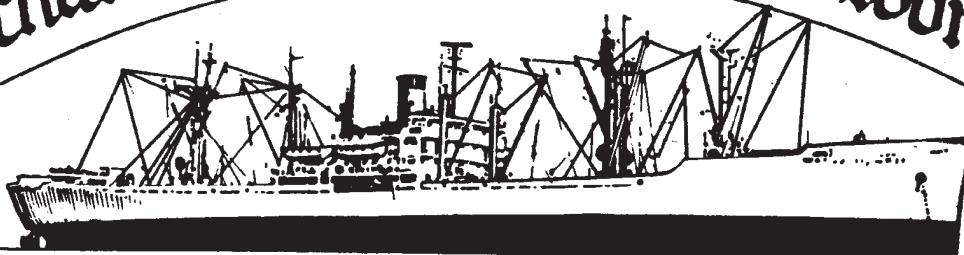


U.S. Merchant Marine Veterans World War II



Volume 27

The Anchor Light

Number 5
May 2009

BACKGROUND ON THE ILL-FATED ARCTIC CONVOY...

"SECRET – MOST IMMEDIATE – CONVOY IS TO SCATTER!"

By Keith Milton

First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, stopped tapping his pencil on the oaken desk and slowly leaned back in the oversized leather backed chair. With his head now fully back, he closed his eyes and tried to relax his body even more. He had a tough decision to make.

The room was quiet except for the ticking of the brass-bound ship's clock on the wall behind his chair. After a half minute passed with no further sound from the supine admiral, one of the junior officers nudged his companion.

"His Lordship's dropped off."

No one knows if the whispered comment was overheard or not, but the admiral now leaned forward and picked up a message pad. As he commenced to write, he announced his decision.

"The convoy is to be dispersed!"

A half dozen jaws dropped collectively. Only one of the admiral's staff had been in favor of this action; his immediate second in command, Vice Admiral Sir H. R. Moore. All the rest had counseled keeping the convoy together or at the very least, delaying the dispersal until more information became available.

Admiral Pound completed his writing and then raised both palms from the wrist at the unspoken objections of his

staff.

The meaning was crystal clear. The decision was his and was final. Thus was sealed what may have been one of the worst tactical blunders on the Allied side during World War II, as it brought about the largest one day ship loss on the high seas on either side during the course of the war.

The decision to dispatch Convoy P.Q. 17 at all had been purely political. (P.Q. was the designation given to the Iceland to North Russia convoys, and were so called because Commander P.Q. Richards had the job of writing assembly and operations orders for them.)

There was no sound military reason to continue the terrible losses being sustained by the North Cape runs. This had only been a concern since the beginning of the year 1942 when German presence began to make itself felt in Northern Norway.

During the last six months of 1941, twelve convoys had made the passage with the loss of but a single ship out of the 103 dispatched. It seemed too good to be true for the Allies, which in fact it was, as the German build-up in Norway intensified with the coming of spring weather. This was due partly to German fears of an Allied invasion of Norway,

and also to attempt to choke off the flow of war materiel to Stalin's Red Army.

The reason for the high priority placed on the Allied effort to continue this flow was two-fold. First and most obvious was the need to arm Russia's huge manpower reserves, which would tie down large German armies.

Second and perhaps even more important was the Allied fear that Stalin might conclude a separate peace with Hitler. Spring of 1942 saw the resumption of the German offensive in Russia, and it was going well. Rommel in Africa had taken Tobruk and was inside Egypt.

Alexandria was being evacuated and even Cairo was considered threatened. Should the Afrika Korps succeed in defeating the British Eighth Army, there would be nothing to stop a link-up through Palestine and Syria, with the German Armies in the Caucasus. This would seal the fate of Russia, and Stalin was well aware of it.

The situation had allowed Stalin to demand everything and concede nothing. He continued to press for the dispatching of the P.Q. convoys, but refused to provide air cover over the Barents Sea. He also refused to furnish destroyer escort from the Russian side of the North Cape to the Kola Inlet, or to allow the British

to set up a command post north of Murmansk to co-ordinate the defense of the convoys.

The Allies swallowed all this because they had no choice. They knew that Stalin was capable of anything, and even though he hated Hitler, he had signed a pact with him before and might well do so again if conditions were right for him. Hitler believed that Germany's best hope of victory lay in decimating the Allied merchant fleets.

Britain was an island and depended entirely upon shipping space for her conduct of the war, indeed for her actual survival. The new enemy, the United States, was 3,000 miles away and could not bring her productive capacity to bear without ships.

Churchill's greatest fear was that Allied merchant tonnage might be sunk faster than it could be built, and thus leave the United Kingdom isolated.

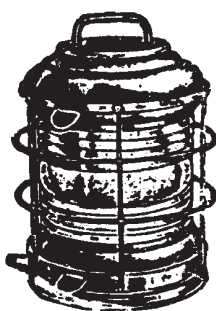
Accordingly, the German General Staff began the build-up of forces right after the new year 1942 began by transferring the new battleship TIRPITZ from the Baltic to Trondheim, Norway. She was sister ship to the BISMARCK and was considered to be one of the most modern and powerful warships afloat.

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"SECRET – MOST IMMEDIATE," CONT.

The Royal Navy held her in even greater awe since their intelligence service had discovered that the BISMARCK had gone down, not as a result of the damage inflicted on her by the large task force sent against her, but by scuttling when she could no longer be steered.

Her main armor was still intact when Admiral Lutjens ordered her scuttled to prevent capture by the British the previous May.

A month after the TIRPITZ arrived in Norway, two more battleships, SCHARNHORST and GNEISENAU, together with the heavy cruiser PRINZ EUGEN, were ordered to break out from Brest, France and join TIRPITZ.

They make good their escape, coming north-east through the English Channel and managed to avoid detection by the Royal Navy. During the dash, however, both battleships struck mines and had to put in at Kiel for repairs.

Ill-fortune continued to dog the Germans as the PRINZ EUGEN, having been joined by another heavy cruiser ADMIRAL SCHEER, had her steering gear damaged by a prowling British submarine, and had to return to the Baltic for repairs.

For the present, only the TIRPITZ and the heavy cruiser ADMIRAL SCHEER along with their destroyer screen, would be available for use against the Russia-bound convoys.

On March 1, 1942, Convoy P.Q. 12 composed of 16 ships departed Iceland enroute to Murmansk. Five days later the convoy was sighted nearing Jan Mayan Island and the TIRPITZ was alerted. She sortied within twelve hours along with three destroyers but was detected almost at once by a British submarine on patrol, who reported her course and speed to Whitehall.

The Admiralty notified Admiral Sir John Tovey, the Home Fleet commander, at sea with his fleet and the two-fold task of covering the North Cape convoys and preventing a breakout into the open Atlantic by German heavy ships.

He sent the battleship KING GEORGE V and the aircraft carrier VICTORIOUS eastward to meet the threat. An Arctic snowstorm moved in and for three days, neither side was able to locate their quarry. When the weather cleared, scout planes from the VICTORIOUS located the TIRPITZ and called in a strike.

TIRPITZ was already heading back to Norway, having been warned of the approaching heavy ships being sent against her. (Unknown to the British, the Germans had broken Admiralty ciphers as early as June, 1940.)

Captain Karl Tropp ordered his formidable flak batteries manned just as a swarm of 25 Albacore torpedo planes appeared and commenced their attack. Four separate ones were made, two of them simultaneously, through a veritable fire-storm of flak from TIRPITZ's 16 four inch, 16 twin 40s, and 48 20mm's.

She seemed to be literally surrounded by torpedo tracks and on fire from the blaze of her own flak guns, but by incred-

ible good fortune, she passed through unscathed.

The British dive bomber squadron failed to link up with the slower Albacores for a coordinated strike, arrived too late and lost the TIRPITZ in a fog bank near the Lofoton Islands. It had been a near thing and was to affect the thinking of the German General Staff in the months to come.

Hitler himself would order that no heavy ships should sortie without knowing the exact location of the British aircraft carriers and having sufficient air cover. Since the only German aircraft carrier, the GRAF ZEPPLIN, was not yet fitted out, this would have to be done by the land-based aircraft from the North Cape airfields. More Luftwaffe Staffels moved north as the weather improved.

U-boat activity was also ordered increased, and the famed Eis Tuefel ("Ice Devil" in German) squadron was formed up to operate exclusively in the Barents Sea. On March 21, the new heavy cruiser ADMIRAL HIPPER, completed her trials and left the Baltic to join TIRPITZ at Trondheim.

The next Russia-bound convoy in the series, P.Q. 13, was attacked on March 28 by three German destroyers. The heavier ships were not used due to a critical fuel-oil shortage. While the convoy escorts were busy fending off this surface attack, about a quarter of the merchant vessels were lost to U-boat and air attack.

One British cruiser, TRINIDAD, was struck by a torpedo (one of her own as it turned out), and the British destroyer ECLIPSE was put out of action by surface fire. This was accomplished without losses on the German side. Flush with this success, the Germans resolved to increase their efforts against the North Cape convoys.

P.Q. 14 sailed from Iceland on April 12, but 14 out of the 23 ships suffered ice damage and had to return. They had been trying to skirt the Luftwaffe air-power circle, and had run into heavy field ice. P.Q. 15 had little better luck and lost five out of 20 ships.

In addition, the British cruiser EDINBURGH was hit and disabled by a U-boat while patrolling in advance of the convoy, and lay stopped as the convoy proceeded with its escort diminished by three smaller craft ordered to stand by the stricken cruiser.

The Germans learned of it and sent out three destroyers to finish her off. They found EDINBURGH dead in the water with her turrets askew and her consorts circling nervously. As they closed in for the kill, EDINBURGH's turrets suddenly trained round and opened fire.

The German command destroyer, HANS SCHOEMANN, was hit by the first salvo and began to sink immediately. One of the others was badly damaged and had to be towed back to her base.

In the event, the EDINBURGH had to be abandoned and scuttled. The Admiralty now appealed to Prime Minister Churchill to call a halt to the P.Q. convoys until summer.

They had lost two of their finest cruisers within a month and considered the North Cape runs, "a millstone round our necks." Churchill probably agreed, but the political pressure was too great.

President Roosevelt and Premier Stalin were both clamoring for more convoys to be dispatched, and in the end they won out. Stalin even agreed to prior demands and started air-raids on Luftwaffe fields in northern Norway. He also sent some destroyers to assist in escort duties and allowed the British to set up a command post north of Murmansk.

The Admiralty's advice went unheeded as Churchill ordered the P.Q. convoys resumed. He felt that "The operation is justified if half get through."

The Admiralty did not agree but was bound to do as ordered. They decided, however, not to risk any more of their dwindling cruiser forces within the Luftwaffe air-power circle or the Ice Devil operating area. Destroyers, corvettes and trawlers would have to do the job alone.

P.Q. 16 was composed of 35 merchant vessels and the largest escort ever sent out. It was dispatched on May 20. Five destroyers, four trawlers, four corvettes and a mine-sweeper along with a CAM, (catapult aircraft merchantman), equipped with a Sea Hurricane fighter plane were to protect the convoy.

They got their chance five days later as soon as they passed Bear Island when 30 torpedo planes and five dive-bombers attacked. So furious was the defense that this raid and over 220 more sorties flown over the next two days were beaten off with the loss of but six vessels.

The Ice Devil U-boats got three more. A British cruiser force lay back out of sight but within easy call should heavy German surface units appear.

The German naval staff now decided that planes and U-boats could not do the job alone and that their surface units must join the action despite the critical fuel oil shortage. (Aviation gas and diesel fuel were ample at that time.)

Extra allocations were made so that all available forces could be sent against the next convoy, with the ultimate goal — the destruction of the entire convoy — down to the very last ship, including the escort vessels!

If this could be accomplished, it should stop the flow, regardless of political pressure. To add even further emphasis to the importance of the operation, it was given the ultimate badge: a code-name. Henceforth, it would be known as Operation Rosselsprung ("Knight's Move" auf Deutsch).

When Grand Admiral Raeder reported the plan to Hitler at the Berghoff the Fuhrer was not enthusiastic. He remembered the close call of TIRPITZ in March and reminded Raeder of his standing order that heavy surface units should not sortie unless the location of enemy carriers was well established. Nor were they to engage equally powerful opposite numbers.

The fact was, Hitler wanted to have his cake and eat it too. He always complained about the heavy surface units not pulling their weight for the resources

they consumed while under way, but the restrictions he placed on them practically precluded their being used at all.

Convoy P.Q. 17 departed Iceland on June 27 and was made up of 34 freighters and tankers, six destroyers, two submarines, two anti-aircraft vessels and 11 tugs, trawlers and sweepers.

A covering force of two British and two American cruisers along with their destroyer screen was to hover just out of sight in much the same manner used for P.Q. 16, where they would be within easy call.

Farther west was Admiral Sir John Tovey, Home Fleet commander, with the battleships DUKE OF YORK, and the brand new USS WASHINGTON, along with three cruisers, the carrier VICTORIOUS, and their destroyer screen.

At the convoy conference held just prior to sailing, the merchant ship skippers had been impressed by "all that Navy brass," and felt torn between feeling well protected and apprehensive about all the fuss.

While P.Q. 17 was forming up, the brand new Liberty Ship, RICHARD BLAND, ran aground and was damaged badly enough to force her return to port for repairs.

Early next morning, in heavy fog, the convoy encountered heavy field ice and three more ships were damaged. One was forced to return and the other two were further slowed.

The bad weather prevented Luftwaffe patrols from detecting the convoy the first two days.

The German naval staff suspected that it was at sea, however, as radio traffic around Iceland had petered out and had increased around the North Cape. Admiral Hubert Schmundt alerted his Ice Devil squadron of U-boats and had them form a picket line and dispatch two of their number out as scouts.

Confirmation came on July 1 when U456 made the first actual sighting. The first stages of Operation Rosselsprung were put into effect.

At Trondheim, the battleship TIRPITZ and her cruiser consort HIPPER were placed on three hours notice, as were both SCHEER, and LUTZOW who had just joined her at Narvik.

Next day, July 2, in late afternoon, the weather cleared enough to allow the Luftwaffe to make its first attack on P.Q. 17. The U-boats that had been shadowing the convoy provided homing signals for nine Heinkel 115 torpedo-floatplanes which appeared around 6:30. A determined attack was mounted, but was beaten off by the concentrated fire of the entire convoy.

The squadron commander's plane was hardest hit and was forced down some distance ahead of the ships. As the escort vessels closed in on the downed bomber to finish it off, another of the Heinkels glided to a landing near the sinking bomber and scooped up the three German crewmen. Under the astonished gaze of the seamen, the floatplane took off amid the geysers of shellfire and made good its

(Continued on page 3)

"SECRET — MOST IMMEDIATE," CONT.

escape. Grudging admiration for this feat of derring-do was coupled with satisfaction that P.Q. 17 had come through its first test unscathed.

Later that same day, the German heavy ships received their long-awaited orders and made their way north toward Altenfiord. While negotiating the tricky entrance to the fiord, LUTZOW ran aground, was extensively damaged and had to be scheduled for repair.

Several hours later, as TIRPITZ and HIPPER entered the sound, three of their guard destroyers, GALSTER, RIEDEL and LODY also ran aground in the narrow channel and were damaged. Plans had to be adjusted so as to conduct Rosselsprung without the services of these four ships.

Later that evening, RAF reconnaissance discovered that the heavy ship berths at Trondheim and Narvik were empty. The Admiralty then notified Admiral Sir John Tovey that TURPITZ, HIPPER, SCHEER and LUTZOW were at sea.

Accordingly, Tovey set a course for Bear Island, to put Home Fleet in a better position to cover the convoy against heavy surface attack. Rear Admiral L.H.K. Hamilton, commanding the cruiser covering force just out of sight to the north of the convoy, now swung south to get his ships into position.

Meanwhile, P.Q. 17 had passed the Ice Devil picket line but the U-boats had been unable to mount an attack due to the bad visibility and the strong and alert escort. They were following along behind, several running low on fuel, and constantly reporting the convoy's position.

In several radio rooms in the convoy, operators picked up a signal from Lord Haw Haw broadcasting from Berlin. In it he promised the Americans in convoy P.Q. 17 a lively fireworks display tomorrow, July Fourth, in celebration of their Independence Day.

About 2:30 a.m. it looked as if the prediction would come true as aircraft were heard approaching the convoy. Although it was still daylight at this latitude, the heavy sea fog prevented most of the squadron from finding the ships.

Finally, one bomber came under the overcast, located them, and delivered his attack. The torpedo passed between two vessels on the outside row and struck the lead ship in the next row, the Liberty ship CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT.

Hit dead center, her machinery spaces flooded almost at once and she lay stopped. Her crew abandoned in two lifeboats and was picked up by the rescue tug ZAMELEK. The other German planes returned to their base without making an attack.

P.Q. 17 plodded on, now blooded by their first loss. At eight in the morning, by pre-arrangement, all of the American merchant ships hauled down their ensigns, some tattered, some dirty and hayed, and replaced them with bright, spanking-new Stars and Stripes.

For General-Admiral Rolf Carls, head of the German naval Group North at Kiel, it was decision day. He must know the whereabouts of the allied heavy ship

forces, and in particular, the aircraft carriers. If the Luftwaffe could not locate them with certainty, he must at the very least be sure that they were *not* in the vicinity of the area in which he intended to operate his heavy surface ships.

At around one p.m., one of Admiral Hubert Schmundt's Ice Devil U-boat scouts reported, in error, that Admiral Hamilton's cruiser covering force contained one battleship, two cruisers, and three destroyers. Carls put Rosselsprung on hold.

Since the Luftwaffe was under no such restrictions, Fifth Air Force Commander, Colonel-General Hans-Jurgen Stumpff decided that he could wait no longer for the Navy to join in a coordinated strike.

Further delay would put convoy P.Q. 17 out of effective range altogether. Squadron one of KG 26 was alerted and briefed. Shortly after 6 p.m. they sortied with 23 Heinkel 111Ts (the T was the modified version of this excellent twin-engine medium bomber and carried two naval torpedoes).

Their attack was to be coordinated with a staff of JU 88 dive-bombers who were to distract the convoy's gunners from the more vulnerable torpedo planes.

At around eight o'clock the attack took place, although not exactly as planned. The Heinkels were late getting into position and the JU 88s were given such a hot reception they could not complete their dives. By the time the Heinkels had set up their attack, all of the convoy's guns were directed at them and only three completed their runs.

Three hits were scored; the American Liberty ship WILLIAM HOOPER; the British freighter NAVARINO; and the Soviet tanker AZERBAIJAN. As the convoy sailed on past the three stricken ships, rescue tugs and minesweepers moved in to pick up the crews.

Unknown to the convoy, two of the shadowing U-boats had also fired off torpedoes during the air raid, but all had missed.

During the next hour, the AZERBAIJAN signaled Commodore JCK Dowding that her fires were under control, and that she was sufficiently repaired to make convoy speed. The three rescue vessels were now straining to catch up after picking up survivors and finishing off the two freighters that were beyond salvage.

Spirits were high after this latest action in which the convoy had come through quite well considering the forces arrayed against it. Then, shortly after nine, three bombshells of another type burst on the bridges of the command ships — signals from the Admiralty — the first at 9:11 p.m.

"SECRET -- MOST IMMEDIATE. Cruiser force withdraw to westward at high speed!"

Hamilton had been told around 7 p.m. to expect further orders, but he had expected nothing like this.

Then at 9:23 — another. "SECRET - IMMEDIATE. Owing to threat from surface ships convoy is to disperse and proceed to Russian ports."

Before the shock of this could be digested or even discussed — another.

"SECRET -- MOST IMMEDIATE. My 21:23b of the 4th. Convoy is to scatter!"

To the commanders at sea, the startling messages, the sequence in which they were received, and their content, could mean only one thing. The entire German High Seas Fleet must be just over the horizon.

With misgivings, they went about putting the orders into effect, and the convoy of which they had all been so proud, was soon nothing more than individual ships scattered as far as the eye could see.

Unknown to the Admiralty at Whitehall or the commanders at sea, the German heavy ships were still at anchor at Altenfiord. Vice Admiral Otto Schienwind, commanding the fleet with his flag in TIRPITZ awaited orders from General-Admiral Carls of Naval Group North at Kiel, who in turn was waiting for authorization from Grand-Admiral Erich Raeder of general staff in Berlin.

The entire chain of command suspected that no battleship was with the close covering force and that the contact report was in error. Until this was confirmed, however, they dared not put operation Rosselsprung into effect.

In Whitehall, indecision was almost as bad. Admiral Pound's intelligence department could not state flatly that TIRPITZ and SCHEER were still at anchor. Nor could they state unequivocally that they were at sea, although they suspected not. Denning, whose job it was to keep track of German surface units, told Admiral Pound that his operatives would probably not notify him if the ships remained in port, but surely would if they sailed or were preparing to sail.

Pound then returned to his office with his staff to render a decision. He listened to each officer's opinion and then relaxed himself while he pondered a course of action.

The German heavy ships could not be located with certainty — so therefore he would have to assume the worst case — that they were either already at sea or would be shortly. He could see no good reason why they should not sortie — everything was apparently in their favor.

In that event, the cruisers must be withdrawn as they would be heavily out-gunned. If TURPITZ encountered the convoy while it was still in formation, she could sink every one of them—it would be like shooting fish in a barrel. To Admiral Pound, it was clear.

"The convoy is to be dispersed," he announced as he wrote out the message and signed it. Then he took it personally to the communications room and had it coded and transmitted.

When he returned to his office, Admiral Moore had a thought. The message had said "dispersed" which in the MERSIG code book meant to break formation and proceed at best speed to destination. This would leave the ships in more or less of a bunch, clearly not the Admiral's intention. Pound agreed. "I meant them to scatter."

In MERSIG that meant to disperse fan-wise and proceed independently. He wrote out a correction to the former message and had it sent out straightaway.

Admiral Hamilton in the cruiser covering force ordered the destroyers in the escort to join him on his westward course and the balance of the warships to make best speed for Archangel. He had no instructions for the trawlers, tugs and sweepers. They scattered along with the remaining merchant ships.

The U-boats and patrolling German aircraft could not believe what was happening. Nor could Admiral Schmundt. After receiving confirmation around 1 a.m. on July 5, he ordered his U-boats to attack the lone ships as opportunities came. Before breakfast, two vessels had been sunk by the Ice Devils and the others were being hunted down.

When news arrived at Kiel that the Allied cruiser covering force was withdrawing westward, Admiral Carls put the heavy ships of Rosselsprung on one-hour notice. When the morning air patrols reported no Allied heavy ships in the operating area, Hitler's approval was gained for the operation to proceed.

Admiral Schienwind, CIC afloat, was already underway when authorization came to weigh anchor. By 2:30, TIRPITZ, HIPPER and SCHEER, along with their destroyer screen, were pounding northeast toward the scattered and helpless freighters.

At the same time, the Luftwaffe's Fifth Air Force flew off everything available to join in the attack.

At 5 p.m., the German heavy ships were reported by a Russian submarine on patrol off the North Cape and soon after by a British sub.

Naval Group North at Kiel was now aware that their fleet had been discovered. An hour later, the Allies began jamming German wireless traffic. It was the first instance of this, and it convinced the General Staff in Berlin that the British Home Fleet heavy ships and carriers were being sent to cut off Schienwind's return route. After an hour of hand wringing, Grand-Admiral Raeder had Rosselsprung cancelled.

At around 10 p.m. Admiral Schienwind reluctantly reversed course and headed back to Norway. As it turned out, the battle-fleet was not needed anyway. The Luftwaffe and the Ice Devils had a field day, hunting down and sinking the individual ships, now without any protection save their own guns.

Fourteen ships were sunk the day after the scattering, and seven more over the next five days.

Only 11 of the original 35 merchant vessels made port, and 153 Allied seamen were killed. Also lost in addition to 150,000 tons of shipping space, were nearly 3,300 trucks, 200 aircraft, 435 battle tanks and 100,000 tons of other war supplies, ammunition and foodstuffs. Enough to equip an army of over 50,000 men. It was the largest single day ship loss on the high seas for either side in World War II.

(Continued on page 4)

"SECRET – MOST IMMEDIATE," CONT.

Although the news of this disaster was not revealed to the U.S. and British public until after the war, it became common knowledge among the seamen and the maritime community.

An investigation was undertaken by the House of Commons, in which Admiral Pound admitted making the decision to scatter the convoy and also giving his reasons for it. He even offered to resign his post as First Sea Lord, but his offer was refused. Admiral Pound suffered a fatal stroke three months later.

While the German heavy ships had not sortied until after the convoy had scattered, this was not known for certain until notes could be compared at war's end. Even Pound's critics admitted that the Allies had nothing in the area that could have stood up to the TIRPITZ for very long.

The Admiralty had, in fact, decided not to engage TIRPITZ as the Home Fleet was low on fuel and already heading for Scapa Flow when TIRPITZ sortied.

It is fortunate that the German General Staff also had bad information, and withdrew the heavy ships before they could engage. Had TIRPITZ and her consorts remained at sea, it is just possible that Rosselsprung's objective may have been achieved, and that the 11 ships and their escorts that did survive might have been destroyed.

The Russians were the most vocal critics and were scathing in their denunciation of Pound's action. After all, it was their cargoes that were lost. Stalin began clamoring almost at once for more convoys to be dispatched, and President Roosevelt joined in.

Vessels had been queuing up in Iceland since P.Q. 17 had sailed, and now over 30 were waiting. Again the Admiralty was forced into action, but this time provided a Jeep Carrier with the escort.

P.Q. 18 sailed on September 15 with 40 merchant ships. Ten were lost to Luftwaffe torpedo bombers and three to U-boats. The P.Q. convoys were then cancelled until mid-winter when darkness made the operation more feasible.

When they resumed in December, they were designated J.W. in an attempt to negate the P.Q. stigma.

Admiral Hamilton had the right of it when he complained that the British War Office had neglected their Fleet Air Arm out of deference to the Royal Air Force. Any communication line operated without control of the airspace over it is foredoomed. History has borne him out.

The ramifications of the loss of most of Convoy PQ 17 reached far beyond the site of the action, and would affect relations between the Allies right up to and including the years of the Cold War.

Most of the officers and men who had lost their ships and cargoes believed until their dying day that they had been sacrificed in an abortive attempt to lure Turpitz into a fleet action with the battleships and carriers of the Royal Navy's Home Fleet. We know now that this was untrue, but the seamen were not to be convinced.

It also soured what remained of the friendly relations between Britain and the Soviets. Most of the surviving seamen complained long and bitterly about their treatment during and after rescue by Russian coastal patrols.

It was not what they were used to, that is certain, but in truth the Soviets had very little to work with and claimed they were doing the best they could with what they had. This is still a matter of controversy.

Tactically, the experience taught a good lesson about furnishing air cover for future convoys, and even Russian air power was mustered around Murmansk and Archangel for covering them. All of the convoys dispatched after December 1942 had at least one "Jeep Carrier" (large escort carrier) with them.

Although it was the Luftwaffe that scored most of the damage to the Northern Route convoys, more pressure was brought to bear on Bomber Command against the shipyards in Northern Germany.

U-boat production had increased from 20 boats per month during 1942 to around one per day the following year. Increased bombing forced the Germans to move some of the production eastward along the Baltic shore as far as Danzig, to get out of range of the bombers.

Admiral Pound bore most of the criticism for the debacle. In one session of Commons, he faced down his detractors by asking them what they would have done in a similar situation. They had no answers, but apologized to the Russian representative present for the Admiralty's action.

This made Pound even more furious, and that was when he offered his resignation. It was not accepted, but the strain on Pound was obvious to all. He suffered a fatal stroke two months later, and many

blamed it on the pressures brought on by the inquiry.

Admiral Hamilton, who had criticized the War Office for its neglect of the Fleet Air Arm, was hospitalized for appendicitis shortly after the action. When his health was regained, he was assigned a desk job at the Admiralty and did not get another sea command.

Being beached was his reward for criticizing his superiors — Hamilton also bore criticism for taking the destroyers with him when he took his cruisers "westward at high speed."

It is unlikely that the destroyers would have been able to afford much protection to the scattered ships while they were not in formation, and very little at all against the torpedo planes. In any case, they were low on fuel and could not have made it to the Kola Inlet without being replenished.

While it was said, "There was blame enough to go round," Churchill never accepted any at all. While it was not his decision alone to sail the convoy, he had a big part in it.

No one believes it could have sailed without his approval. In his memoirs he wrote, "All risks should have been taken in defense of the merchant ships." This from the same pen that wrote earlier, "The operation is justified if half get through."

Strategically, the Germans accomplished more than they at first realized. The Russians had been deprived not only of the contents of the lost ships of PQ-17, but that of any convoys that would have been sent during the last quarter of 1942. (PQ-18 was sent out as a face-saving device and as a sop to Stalin.)

This could have amounted to over a hundred shiploads of goods sorely needed by the Russians. It created much discord between the Allies at a time when it was critical to maintain cooperation.

When the operation was resumed with the cryptic PQ designation changed to JW, the German High Seas Fleet failed once again to interrupt the flow of materiel. An enraged Hitler summoned Grand Admiral Raeder and announced that he was scrapping the battleships due to their ineffectiveness. Raeder resigned and Admiral Doenitz took over command of the German Navy.

Tirpitz was eventually sunk while at anchor by special units of the Royal Air Force, using a bomb designed and built specifically for that purpose.

LOCATOR COLUMN

FREDERICK SHERMAN LIEPTIZ

My father, Frederick (Fred) Sherman Liepitz, was in the merchant marine in the Pacific during the war.

I was wondering if there is a chance that there are any veterans out there who might remember my father serving on the same ship. If so, how would I go about finding them? He also worked for Matson Shipping lines in the late '40s. I would like to be able to add stories and photos on my family's site on Ancestry.com.

Please respond to Sue Phillips: suephillips503@yahoo.com.

BARKING ENCOUNTER

By Fred Coleman

It was recently announced that President and Mrs. Obama are getting their two little girls a dog. Their choice is a Portuguese Water Dog. I was introduced to this dog in 1946.

I was a young 3rd officer on a Union Oil tanker out of San Francisco bound for San Pedro assigned to the 12 am to 4 am watch. At 11:30 pm the 2nd officer woke me. He told me the fog was very dense and we were 17 miles off Monterey, no course change or speed change for four hours.

Because of the intense fog and darkness you do not go inside -- your eyes need to become accustomed to the darkness. The international rule of the sea is "In fog, mist, falling snow or heavy rain the fog horn is to be blown every two minutes." If you need anything you blow your whistle and the "stand-by" will come and take your order.

Around 1 am I thought I heard a dog barking and I asked the helmsman if he heard anything. He said, "I thought I heard a dog bark too," so I told him to go 90 degrees right and get us away from land. At 4 knots steering a large tanker is sluggish.

The barking got louder as we got closer. There was a search light on the bridge that I turned on and directed toward the water. I saw the biggest row boat I had ever seen in my life and it was painted every color of the rainbow. It was loaded with fish, nets, two men rowing frantically to get out of our way and a large brown dog standing at the front of the boat barking furiously towards land. The men yelled at me and I yelled back and they faded away into the fog. There was no collision so I didn't log the incident and told the helmsman to return to the original course.

Four years later my wife and I were on our way to Tacoma in our new Ford Coupe. We were hungry so we stopped in this little cafe. It was 7 am and we were passing through Monterey. You could drive onto the pier at that time and the little cafe was open so we ordered breakfast. I sat down next to a man in overalls and started up a conversation with him. I said I had been reading Steinbeck's Cannery Row and wanted to see the town. Then I remembered the incident with the row boat and the dog.

Before I could continue he asked me about the paint job on the boat. I described it to him and he said those boats were common in these parts. He went on to tell me they were the original Portuguese fishermen and were a menace to navigation. They bring a dog and no other lifesaving equipment. They stay out for two or three days and only give the dog water -- no food.

When they are ready to return to land, the dog stands at the bow pointing toward land and barks. The dog is their total life saving equipment as they have no foghorn or compass. They still fish this way and have been since 1950.

Now there is a moral to this story -- if you like deep sea fishing and I don't mean any of that pier stuff -- and you have tucked a compass in your rear pocket so it doesn't work any more, be sure you have a hungry dog and you didn't leave it on shore.

[Editor's note: Does this "starve the dog" navigation plan sound legit, or is it an "urban legend"? Has anyone else ever heard of it? In the meantime, no offense meant to our Portuguese brethren.]

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QUESTION CORNER

The Anchor Light and the USM-MVWWII office sometimes receive maritime queries and we thought that perhaps some of our informed readers could share any of their experience or information with their fellow mariners. Please feel free to call or write directly to the questioner.

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Nightmare in Bari, *The WWII Liberty Ship Poison Gas Disaster and Cover-up.* Gerald Reminick, \$22, #3338. On Dec. 2, 1943 in Bari Harbor, Italy, the German Luftwaffe laid waste to the busy port. Seventeen allied ships were destroyed. A Liberty ship laden with a top-secret cargo of mustard gas bombs exploded. The loss of life was appalling. Yet to this day few have heard of the disaster at Bari.

Gallant Ship, Brave Men. Herman E. Rosen, \$25, #3347. A spellbinding war memoir of a torpedoing and the fight for survival of 24 men in a life-boat. Hank Rosen, cadet-midshipman aboard a Liberty ship, tells the dramatic story of his 30 days adrift in the Indian Ocean.

Forgotten Heroes. Brian Herbert, \$27, #3344. Drawing from historical documents, government records, diaries and interviews, Herbert has constructed a brilliant history that details the heroism, self-sacrifice and grim determination that has been the hallmark of the United States merchant marine.

Extreme Waves. Craig B. Smith, \$30, #3354. *Extreme Waves* is a fascinating book based on the science and history of waves. Covering both the headline shores as well as incidents that are less well known but equally startling. The author-amateur sailor will keep you riveted from the first chapter to the last.

Ship Model Booklet. Ron Stahl, \$15, #3333. Full-color photographs of 27 finely crafted ship models displayed aboard the S.S. Lane Victory with a brief description and background narrative of each ship.

Thirteen Desperate Hours. Marill Johnson, \$22, #3339. A Liberty ship's crew and their Navy Armed Guard fight for survival while grounded on a Japanese-held island.

The Lane Victory. New edition by Capt. Walter Jaffee, \$30, #3130. An update of the 1997 publication of the history of the last active Victory ship, from construction in 1944 to the present-day living memorial to merchant seamen. Includes information about the Lane's use as a movie set as seen in many films and TV shows.

Action in the North Atlantic. Guy Gilpatric, \$30, #3324. This book was the inspiration for the Humphrey Bogart/Raymond Massey movie honoring the contributions of the Merchant Marine in WWII.

A Medal for Marigold. Michael Skalley, \$8, #3322. From the journal of Captain Robert Skalley. The story of the hospital ship Marigold began in Seattle when the Army converted the liner President Fillmore into a 765 bed sea-going hospital. During WWII she traveled 78,000 miles in the Atlantic and the Pacific. Though classed as a safe conduct ship with Red Cross markings, she experienced enemy shells, bombs and mines.

The Last Mission Tanker. Capt. Walter Jaffee, \$10, #3114. A documentary about T-2 tankers with construction details and voyages.

The Ordeal of Convoy NY119. Charles Dana Gibson, \$25, #3118. This book tells the story of a U.S. Army convoy of seagoing tugs, harbor tugs, yard tankers and barges on a 31-day passage to an English port in 1944. Cited by the U.S. Naval Institute in 1973 as one of the year's significant books on naval history.

Merchant Ships of WWII. Victory Young, \$30, #3101. Pictorial documentary of ships built during WWII.

Odyssey of a Merchant Mariner. Capt. Peter Chelemedor, \$23, #3139. The story outlines Capt. Chelemedor's adventures that led him to sea, his experiences during WWII and his attempts to find a place to settle down when ready to come ashore.

The U.S. Merchant Marine at War, 1775-1945. Bruce Felknor, \$36, #3321. Little known facts with anecdotes, chronicles and histories create a smooth-flowing account of our oldest, almost forgotten ocean service: USMM and Naval Armed Guard.

Operation Drumbeat. Michael Gannon, \$17, #3116. The dramatic true story of Germany's first U-boat attacks along the American coast during WWII.

The Presidential Yacht Potomac. Capt. Walter Jaffee, \$30, #3131. A wonderful biography of a ship, or in this case, "yacht" by Capt. Jaffee. A part of history...a tale worth reading.

The Homeward Bounder. Floyd Beaver, \$16, #3105. A collection of exciting sea stories that are squarely in the tradition of Conrad.

The Strange Voyage of the Malayan Princess. Capt. Frank F. Farrar, \$16, #3123. A fictional story based on two decades of life as a mariner.

Ships of the U.S. Merchant Fleet. Capt. John A. Culver, \$17, #3113. Facts and pictures of American flagships with historical events, names of ship builders and owners, 1939 to 1968 (revised edition).

Voyage of the Ship Revere. Madeline Rouse Gleason, \$16, #3106. This book traces the development of deep-water trade on the Pacific Coast beginning in 1849, with experiences on the sailing vessel Revere.

Appointment in Normandy. Capt. Walter Jaffee, \$30, #3102. The story of the Liberty ship Jeremiah O'Brien's historic voyage back to the beaches of Normandy.

Burning of the General Slocum. Claude Rust, \$11, #3125. The story of one of the most appalling disasters in maritime history, researched by the author whose grandmother was one of the victims.

Hog Islanders. Mark H. Goldberg, \$20, #3134. The story of an almost forgotten type of merchant ship, the passenger-cargo liner, built at the Hog Island shipyards of Pennsylvania.

Sailing West. Carl Marcoux, \$25, #3340. A must read based on what every maritime service school seaman will certainly associate with his own war time experiences, from the hiring hall loud mouths (being sent to the hall in his "sailor suit") to learning what it's like to be the low man on the totem pole on his first assignment aboard ship.

There is the excitement of war at Okinawa with the Kamikazes and the mother of all typhoons. As his ship, the Cape Blair, a C-1, circumnavigates the globe west with several stops in India and the Middle East, the reader will learn why Great Britain lost control in the area.

Many of the incidents are from Carl's own exploits, from the boredom at Ulithi to the sexy liberty ashore in Manila and his gives his interpretations of people and their customs.

WORLD WAR II MERCHANT TRAINING IN SAN FRANCISCO

By Tom Cotter

The establishment of a federally funded training center on Pier 5 for new seamen was a big win for the Sailors Union of the Pacific and the Seafarers' International Union.

As a 16 year old, 130 pound high school drop out from the mountains of Montana, I was excited to begin my training for ordinary seaman. The training consisted of learning to "box the compass", how to tie a few knots and a lot of seafaring terminology. There was also some pretty heavy union indoctrination.

We rowed life boats from Pier 5 to Fisherman's Warf and returned. San Francisco Bay had many tug boats moving about and they seemed to take a particular delight in trying to swamp the lifeboats. I was afraid that my skinny arms would not hold out and that I would be "washed out" of the program.

Our training was for four hours each morning. The need for seamen in the spring of 1945 was critical so the union reduced our training from 14 days to seven. Our lack of training was very apparent so the old time seamen referred to us in disgust as 'wartime sailors.'

War Time Sea Duty

I shipped out on the J. Maurice Thompson, an American President Line Liberty ship with war cargo. After we cleared San Francisco Bay, I reported to the bridge to steer the ship for 120 minutes. My indoctrination from the seaman that I was relieving lasted about 30 seconds and went like this, "Keep that needle on 271 degrees and if the ship is drifting left or right, turn the wheel in the opposite direction.

It soon became apparent that I was getting off course, so I began spinning the wheel, much like I drove the John Deere tractor back home on the farm. By the time the second mate grabbed the wheel I had turned the ship 180 degrees. The skipper was not happy but I was praised by the navy gunners on duty for trying to take them back home.

At sea the ordinary seamen and able seamen worked four hours on and eight hours off. The four hour shift was split three ways; steering the ship, standby and lookout. This last function was performed during the day from high aloft in the crows nest on the forward mast. Our job was to look out for enemy ships and submarines. At night the lookout was stationed on the bow.

After we crossed the International Date Line, we were awarded \$100 per month because of the danger from floating mines and \$150 per month for being in the war zone. These amounts were added to our \$100 per month base pay.

All of this largesse rankled the 27 members of our Navy Armed Guard. Their average paycheck was about \$60 per month. This could be considered one of the great inequities of the war.

However, these Navy gunners may have had the last laugh over the merchant mariners because they received the GI bill, while many of us ended up being

drafted into the army.

There were months of monotony when we were anchored at various ports in the central and north pacific. After the guns went silent and the war ended in mid-August of 1945 there were more months of waiting to sail home. Like so many ships we had cargo that was going to be used during an invasion of the Japanese home land. This, of course, never happened.

The ports on the West Coast were inundated with ships returning with their cargos intact. Because of this glut we did not leave for San Francisco until a typhoon hit Okinawa in November.

There were not enough troop ships to take the combat troops home in a timely fashion so the cargo ships and tankers became tiny troop carriers. The Navy Seabees came aboard and built plywood and canvas shacks on deck. They were referred to derisively as dog houses.

Well, two days into the voyage home we encountered heavy seas and a large wave smashed the starboard shack. The soldiers abandoned their accommodations and moved inside to sleep in the passageways and on the deck of the mess hall.

Although we had a meager amount of food left by the time we sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge, we never heard a complaint from any of the soldiers. Thanksgiving Day of 1945 was particularly joyful because I was riding a train home to the Big Sky Country of Montana to re-enter high school.

PEACETIME ADVENTURES

Over a period of seven years I sailed off and on from the East coast, Gulf coast and West coast. It seemed like I sailed the north Atlantic in the winter, the Middle East and South Pacific in the summer without benefit of air-conditioning. You never knew what challenges would be presented by the different types of cargo being carried.

The dustiest cargo was a load of grain bound for Korea. The most dangerous cargo was 10,000 tons of ammonium nitrate delivered to Germany. The most pungent cargo was that of crude oil pumped into our T-2 tanker in Aruba. The noisiest cargo consisted of a deck load of jungle monkeys in large cages transported from Calcutta, India to Baltimore, Maryland where they were used in medical research at John's Hopkins University.

I look back on my seafaring days with nostalgia. As the years slip by the hard times fade away but the good times are remembered. It is sad to think that most young Americans will never have the seagoing opportunities that I enjoyed since our American merchant fleet has pretty much sailed into the sunset.

RUMBLE IN THE HARBOR

We were on the SS Cape Elizabeth anchored in the harbor of Alexandria, Egypt. We were weighing anchor when the skipper noticed a "bum-boatman" had left his little merchant boat and was on our forward deck selling his products. The skipper was irate, so he commanded a pair



Reader challenge: tell us about the ship pictured above.

of able seamen to drop him over the side.

The seamen were reluctant to act so the skipper yelled to follow his orders. The seamen then dropped the terrified merchant into the drink.

The Egyptian pilot on our bridge was enraged by the action of the skipper so he said he would not guide the ship out. We dropped anchor so the pilot could desert us via the pilot boat.

The skipper radioed for a replacement pilot. After an hour elapsed we received word from shore officials that no pilot would be dispatched and that there would be an official investigation of the incident.

The skipper was faced with a big decision – should he stay and face the music or try to take the ship out of the harbor by himself? After reviewing the charts for sandbars while noting the tides and currents, he decided to get the hell out of the harbor and try to get three miles into international waters before the officials could confront him.

Maybe it was skill or maybe it was luck but we never went aground. It is safe to assume that the skipper of the SS Cape Elizabeth was forever persona non-grata in Egypt.

Tom Cotter received his master's degree from the University of Montana. After two years as a special agent in the US Army Counterintelligence, he spent nine years with Boeing, six years with Merrill Lynch and retired from Franklin Templeton in 1985.

Tom has been a long-time generous supporter of the Lane Victory and the Jeremiah O'Brien through the Cotter Charitable Foundation.

LORING'S "SHOUT OUT" TO THE AUSSIES & 20s

By Loring L. Bigelow, SM2/c, USN Armed Guard, emeritus, SS Lane Victory

Some 560,000 Australians served abroad. The Australian Imperial Force campaigned in North Africa, New Guinea and Borneo. The Royal Australian Air Force patrolled the Mediterranean and the Pacific as well as sorties over North Africa, Germany and Japan.

During WWII my ships took me to Australia many times. In fact, I was aboard ship and docked in Brisbane when WWII ended and if I could not have been home, then this was the place to be for the celebration which I survived.

A Salute to the "20s" in WWII

She wasn't big as naval guns went and she wasn't particularly pretty either, but she won the hearts of sailors wherever the Navy fought with them....because they did what had to be done especially when enemy bombers came in to attack. Happily the 20's simply blasted them to bits. My gun station, when not busy with signalman duties, was a 20 m.m. on the bridge.

How I loved that gun.

CONCRETE SHIP MEMORIES

The *Anchor Light* staff is working on an article about concrete ships.

If you have any thoughts, experiences or photos about concrete ships please send in your contribution today.

ROSE CITY CREW SAVES REFUGEES

By Gary Wayne Lueck

(Submitted by Edward Rittenhouse, Charter Life Member)

On the evening of Wednesday, 21 September, 1983 the 94,000 ton American flag tanker "Rose City" was steaming through the South China Sea at seventeen knots on a passage, in ballast, from Anacortes, Washington to Dumai, Indonesia.

The ship had cleared Balabac Straits south of Palawan Island the previous night and was now bound for the Singapore Straits, then Dumai where she would load 640,000 barrels of Sumatran light crude oil for a return passage to the United States.

The weather through the afternoon and early evening had been heavily overcast with frequent moderate to heavy rain squalls and winds of fifteen to twenty knots, with higher gusts during the squalls.

At about 1835 (6:35 pm) the bridge watch, comprised of Chief Mate John Freeman, Able Bodied Seaman Mike Ingram, Quartermaster and Ordinary Seaman Steve Mason as lookout, sighted a single small, faint, white light off the starboard bow at a distance of several miles.

The light, apparently from some sort of fishing craft it was thought, seemed to show intermittently as the boat rose and fell in the swell against the gray sea and fading light of evening. As the distance closed to about a mile Ingram remarked to Freeman that he thought the light, which would soon pass clear along the starboard side, appeared to be flashing Morse code.

The movement of the boat in the sea made it difficult to determine if this was in fact the case or simply a natural blinking when viewed from the bridge at a height of some eighty-five feet above the surface of the sea. A few moments later, as the attention of the bridge watch remained riveted upon it, the small, faint light rose on the swell and displayed a distinct and unmistakable Morse code SOS.

Freeman immediately turned the massive ship to the right to close the distance, notified the engine room to be prepared to maneuver, and informed the vessel's master, Capt. L.M. Hiller of the sighting.

IN MEMORIAM

Ned Oliver, formerly the secretary/treasurer of the Western Slope Colorado Chapter, died on February 26, 2009, at the age of 81.

Ned became a member of the World War II merchant marine at the age of 16 while still a high school student. After his service in the merchant marine, he returned to school for his senior year.

Ned cheerfully accepted the secretary/treasurer assignment and served until he was unable to attend meetings due to an extended illness of nearly a year.

Our remaining local members attended his services in Grand Junction, Colorado, where interment was in the Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

The time was entered in the bridge logbook as 1857 and not a single member of the 28 man complement of the "Rose City" could possibly foresee that at that moment the curtain was rising on an event that would deeply and indelibly touch the lives of 113 people.

For within the next three hours and thirty minutes the "Rose City" would recover from the sea 85 South Vietnamese refugees from a dilapidated wooden power boat estimated at less than 50 feet in length.

Upon reaching the bridge, Capt. Hiller ordered the engine stopped then backed to take way off the ship. Unable to bring the vessel to a full stop for some distance, however, we passed the boat close aboard on the starboard side and by the time the "Rose City" was dead in the water the boat was astern at a distance of about a mile.

With the ship now stopped the boat approached us under its own power until close under our stern. Due to the strange configuration of the small craft it was impossible to estimate at this time, with any degree of certainty, the number of people aboard or their nationality.

After some shouting it was determined that they were South Vietnamese and an original estimate to the bridge of from 40-50 people including some women and children were aboard.

The boat was directed to come alongside our starboard side as a pilot ladder and sea painter were rigged. In addition, all deck floodlights and house lights were turned on as it was now total darkness. As the frail little craft approached under the pilot ladder the wind increased to thirty to 35 knots, foretelling the approach of another heavy rain squall.

With all way off the ship and therefore no steering the "Rose City," in ballast, was drifting rapidly and wanting to head up into the wind. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain an effective lee; causing the boat to roll, pitch, and yaw wildly as it came alongside.

The violent motion, coupled with the darkness, overcrowded conditions aboard the boat, produced panic and considerable confusion amongst the souls in the tiny craft far below us on the main deck. It was during this period that a then unknown number of persons were seen to go overboard into the sea from the boat.

As life-rings and water lights were thrown over the side from the ship, a second and third pilot ladder was rigged and refugees began the long climb up the towering ship's side to the main deck.

At 1926 the first of them, a young man, was lifted over the rail and collapsed to the steel deck. It was immediately apparent that the sea conditions, panic, confusion, and the number of women and children in the boat could lead to great tragedy unless some order was restored and maintained aboard the little craft. With this in mind, members of the "Rose City's" crew began climbing down the ladders into the boat.

Their presence in the boat with the refugees had an immediate quieting effect by providing some authority and an obvi-

ous realization that we would not now abandon them until all were safely aboard the great ship now looming over them.

With "Rose City" crew members Jeff Kass, Gregg Turay, Charles Allen and Craig Caffee in the boat, those on deck were able to haul the elderly, women, children and less physically able directly to the main deck.

Lines tied in Spanish bowlines were lowered to the boat so that refugees could be instructed and aided in getting into them by those in the boat then lifted directly up the ship's side.

In addition most of the small children were brought aboard by the crew forming a kind of human chain down the length of the pilot ladder and passing them up one to another until they reached the safety of the main deck. Even scaling the entire 40 foot height of pilot ladder with a child clinging to his back was not beyond the ability and courage of some "Rose City" crewmembers that night.

In all 81 people, including two young pregnant women were brought aboard without a single injury or mishap. In addition to those in the boat, crew members George Smith Jr., Larry Long, Mike Ingram, Perry Greenwood, Steve Mason, Third Assistant Engineer Mike Sippo, and the two Kings Point Cadets, Clem Marino and Dave Cubberly continued to labor, with no thought whatever to their own safety, with few words spoken and fewer orders given as the boat continued to empty and the main deck of the "Rose City" filled with the haunted faces of men, women, and children safe for the moment from the unknown.

At 2025 it was entered in the deck log that all refugees were aboard the "Rose City" from the small boat, with only a few of her own crew remaining aboard the gallant little craft which had held 86 souls for, we were later to learn, six nights and five days.

As surely as the crew of the "Rose City" had been tested to this point, however, what was about to transpire over the next two hours would, for those of us who lived and witnessed it, remain as a testament to the noblest quality of man; his love for his brother.

We were aware that a then unknown number of refugees had gone overboard from the boat during the early frantic stages of the recovery attempt. It was decided that the most prudent manner to search for those in the water, in view of the wind and conditions, would be to utilize the refugee boat itself.

It was already in the water, was crewed by a number of our crew and, at that point, appeared to be in relatively good, seaworthy condition. Bosun Perry Greenwood and Third Assistant Engineer Mike Sippo joined Kass, Turay and Caffee in the boat along with the Vietnamese boat captain and engineer, who returned to the boat from the safety of the ship, and these brave men set out to search the drifting life-rings for survivors.

Soon Greenwood, in contact with the bridge by walkie-talkie, as Capt. Hiller maneuvered the ship into close proximity of a small group of drifting

rings, reported sighting a man and a small boy (his son) clinging to a life-ring. Our spirits rose.

Fate, however, would choose that moment to play her trump cards. First a large rain squall settled over us with strong gusting winds and pelting rain, reducing visibility to less than a hundred yards and then the failure of the steering gear on the small refugee boat.

Apparently the severe strain placed on the tiller and the rudder post by maneuvering the little craft in the heavy sea and swell had proven too much.

We now had two refugees in the sea and five of our own crew plus two more refugees in a small boat with no steering in heavy rain and strong wind in the total darkness of the night.

This would be the moment of the great test, as luck seemed to say "It's your move." It would be a 30 year old able bodied seaman named Jeff Kass who would not only make the next move but also answer Lady Luck that the crew of the "Rose City" stood ready to meet her greatest of challenges.

Unable to maneuver the boat to the people in the water due to the steering loss, Kass dove into the water and swam to the exhausted refugees clinging to the life-ring some distance off. At this same moment Caffee was washed from the boat into the sea to be pulled back aboard by Sippo, unaided, as the rest of the small group concentrated on Kass and the two refugees in the water.

For what seemed an eternity we watched as Kass and the two Vietnamese struggled to swim the distance between themselves and the uncontrollable little boat heaving in the sea. Frustration began to grip us all as, unable to maneuver the huge ship to any great advantage under the weather conditions, we could only watch and pray.

As rain continued to pour and the gusting wind whipped the sea into angry confusion, we watched as the souls in the water, at long last, reached the side of the boat and were pulled aboard.

With all safely aboard the boat the "Rose City" was maneuvered so that the boat could retrieve the sea painter from a heaving line thrown to it. This was accomplished and as the ship made headway the boat rode the painter alongside the starboard side.

Suddenly Mike Ingram, swinging the searchlight from the starboard bridge wing, caught sight of a third refugee clinging to a life-ring in the water about 75 yards off the starboard side amidships.

With the ship now making headway we would soon pass the person in the water and could easily lose him in the darkness, sea and heavy rain.

Down in the boat 26 year old able bodied seaman Gregg Turay and once again Kass, sensing this likelihood went into the sea and swam out to the young boy who was now beginning to fall astern. The young refugee was finally reached by Turay some distance off the stern as the ship was stopped, then backed toward them.

What followed were some of the
(Continued on page 11)

ROSE CITY CREW SAVES REFUGEES, *CONT.*

most anxious moments of the night as Turay and the child in the water would seem at one minute to be in danger of drifting off into the rain and darkness and then seconds later seemed periled by the stern of the ship as we came astern.

With what amounted to nothing short of a Herculean effort the athletic Turay was able to get himself and the child back alongside the ship and under the pilot ladder.

At 2139 (9:39 pm) it was thought that all the Vietnamese and our own crew were again safely aboard the "Rose City." It was still not over however; a final act remained to be played. As we on deck attended to the refugees and our shipmates, Ingram continued to search the darkness with the searchlight.

Suddenly the call came down from the bridge that a fourth person had been sighted in the water to port. From the port side of the main deck we could hear shouts and for a moment caught sight of another person clinging to a life-ring about a hundred yards off amidship. Visual contact was lost however when the rain, which had subsided somewhat, began to fall heavily again with an accompanying increase in wind.

We waited for what seemed an eternity for the visibility to improve and rigged a pilot ladder down to the water from the port side.

The bridge attempted to hold the ship in position despite the wind so as not to increase the distance between us and the now unseen person in the sea. The rain began to subside but still we could not regain sight of the refugee in the water. Finally he was sighted well off the port quarter miraculously swimming toward the ship.

The "Rose City," now under Freeman's con, was slowly backed down toward the swimmer and 23 year old ordinary seaman Craig Caffee, who had just returned to the safety of the ship from the adventure in the small boat, climbed down the pilot ladder into the water to aid the courageous young Vietnamese boy as he swam up alongside the ship.

At 2227 the young refugee climbed over the rail of the main deck followed by Caffee. It was over as all people, refugees and crew, were again safely aboard the "Rose City." With the relative quiet came the first creeping realization of the scope, in terms of courage, seamanship, and luck, of what had happened.

Four hours earlier Freeman and I had just begun our nightly ritual of coffee and empty conversation after supper. We now faced each other in the chart room fully aware, as was everyone aboard that night, that in some small way, we would never quite be the same.

In talking to the few Vietnamese who spoke some English we soon learned that one person remained unaccounted for. A 16 year old girl had been knocked overboard from the boat during the first frantic few minutes of the recovery. We remained in the area the remainder of the night waiting for daylight and steaming in slow circles searching for some sign.

None was found however and at 0800 the following morning we resumed our

passage. Not even the relief, the joy, the thankfulness, in the eyes of the 85 people recovered from the sea could erase our anguish and disappointment at the knowledge that one soul had perished, alone, somewhere in the rainy darkness of that memorable night.

Upon reflection, it must be said that in the past, rescues at sea have been accomplished under far more severe weather conditions. The degree to which the lives of the refugees were endangered at the time of the original sighting may be problematical. It is, however, difficult to concede how under any conditions greater courage, determination, and love for ones' fellow man could be shown than was displayed aboard the "Rose City" that night.

Of the 85 souls taken from the sea that night; 36 were men over the age of 16, 19 were women including two in advanced stages of pregnancy, and 30 were children under the age of 16, 18 of whom were under the age of ten. The oldest was a woman of 62; the youngest a baby of 11 months.

An adequate description of the emotion felt by all of us following the rescue and during the few days the "boat people" were with us is far beyond the feeble literary talents of this writer.

I am forced to ask that it suffice to say it bridged the spectrum from the look in a four year old child's eyes as she clutched the neck of Jeff Kass as he scaled the pilot ladder to the main deck from the heaving little boat; through the memory of wrapping a blanket around the shivering linebacker sized Gregg Turay after he reached the deck following his courageous rescue of a small boy from the sea; and maybe ending with the haunting knowledge that we had somehow failed a 16 year old girl at the very moment when, for possibly the first time, a future of hope lay before her.

On the night of September 23, the refugees were disembarked into the hands of the United Nations in Singapore. Even this held its moments of drama as one of the pregnant women had begun labor late that afternoon before we were anchored in Singapore.

She was hurriedly removed from the ship and taken directly to a hospital where the next day, we were later to learn she gave birth to a son.

The others were inoculated and late that night we watched them walk down our gangway to the waiting launches and the first day of their new lives. As we shook hands, embraced, and in a few cases fought back a tear, we knew they had given us as much as we them. They owed us nothing; the ledger of human gratitude was balanced.

For, you see, it is rare in this profession that one is touched by something warm, fundamentally human; memories are seldom cherished as the various ships, ports, shipmates, and voyages collectively blur in the passing years. It is a profession measured in boredom, union contracts, overtime sheets, seniority, and seemingly endless separations from those we love and hold dear.

But for us aboard this particular ship

the night of September 21, 1983, the memory will remain with crystal clarity. What we all saw, felt and did that night transcends a simplistic "best tradition of the sea."

It made us proud of our fellow man, bathed us in the love of one human for another, and to find that emotion at a time in human history when civilian airliners are being shot from the sky by missile armed fighter planes, is to be truly blessed.

The names Kass, Turay, Caffee, Greenwood and Sippo did not, and will not, appear on any evening news show. No camera crew recorded what happened that night; no instant replays. The players were a very large ship and 28 Americans and a very small boat and 86 South Vietnamese.

The stage was the South China Sea and the night, the wind, and the rain. All played a part; no bystanders, no spectators, no screaming fans in the stands.

Even the ship herself, the "Rose City," often a seemingly cantankerous brute in the past, displayed her compassion for these courageous little people as she nudged her enormous bulk alongside a swimming child so that one of her own could pluck him from the sea to begin the new life he was determined to have, and now so richly deserved.

One of the final entries in the deck logbook of the "Rose City" for the day Friday, September 23, 1983 reads, "2350 — All refugees disembarked. God bless them." It is difficult to imagine more being said in fewer words.

Somewhere in the South China Sea, near latitude 06.00 N., longitude 112-00 E., there may still drift a dilapidated, almost comical looking little wooden craft. She is empty now, abandoned, with her engine silent and her steering broken. She had delivered 86 souls from the darkness of despair and generations of war to the side of an American tanker and freedom.

She remained behind, however, because she, unlike her human cargo, was not worth saving. Yet we sense that had she been given her choice, she would have chosen to stay behind with the one member of her courageous flock, a young girl, we were unable to save.

She no longer has need of her engine and propeller and as for her steering, the hand on her tiller, from the moment she left Vietnam to the time of her abandonment, held no reliance upon a simple rudder.

Recently, the United Nation's highest Award was made to the master and the crew of the Rose City. The UN's High Commissioner, Poul Haartling, bestowing the Nansen Medal, said, "Their daring rescue of 85 Indochinese refugees in distress in stormy weather in the darkness of the night deserves to be inscribed in golden letters in the annals of maritime and refugee history."

The medal was accompanied by a \$50,000 grant that was donated to the boat people for medical rehabilitation.

Gary Wayne Lueck, a 1966 graduate from the Maritime College SUNY, was third mate on the vessel at the time.

THE LONGEST NAME & DID YOU EVER SEE...

By Captain Nick Roman

Again I have to thank Captain Moorhouse of Desert Hot Springs for sending the December and January issues of the Anchor Light — lots of interesting reading. I particularly liked Captain Joe Itson's item, so I am going to direct a couple of posers to him.

About four years ago I acquired some old issues of "Sea Breezes" magazines published in the Isle of Man, U.K. In the January 1949 issue there was a heading "The Longest Ship's Name — "Dankbaarheid a an de Nederlandsche Hendel Neatshaapig" which translated into English means "Gratitude to the Netherlands Trading Company."

In the March 1949 issue of Sea Breeze it said there was a Russian warship that had a name with 52 characters — "Tchetyrnadtsatala Godovstchina Ortiabrskoi Revolioutsil," which translated into English means "Fourteenth Anniversary of the October Revolution."

Many years ago I was a deck hand on a harbor tug for a salvage company in Vancouver BC. In either the late 1940s or early 1950s we towed a bunker barge to a steamship loading grain at a grain elevator in the harbor. The ship's name was Salina Cruz, registry forgotten.

At that time most of the ships that came into Vancouver were war surplus, like pork ships, Liberty and Victory ships but the Salina Cruz was different, much different.

It was about 250 to 300 feet long and built of all wood and painted white. About two days later one of the Vancouver newspapers reported the ship had caught on fire in the Pacific. All hands were saved. Any of the readers know about this ship?

And the third item (referring to "Did You Ever See...?") — another time we towed a bunker barge to the north face of the Canadian National dock in Vancouver while tying up the barge we spotted one of the cross beams under the dock a big white owl. I must have been about 24" tall and it didn't pay any attention to us.

Another crew took the empty barge away. The Canadian National Steamship Company maintained some bunker storage tanks to fuel up their coastal steamships Prince George.

I was a dishwasher on this one in 1943, a newer Prince George was launched in the early 1950s and I was a passenger on this one. Prince Rupert to Vancouver and we had a grounding incident. Back to the white owl, I had never seen one before or since — any bird watchers out there to give a story?

CONCRETE SHIP MEMORIES

The *Anchor Light* staff is working on an article about concrete ships.

If you have any thoughts, experiences or photos about concrete ships please send in your contribution today.

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U.S. Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II

This nationwide, tax-exempt, non-profit, non-discriminatory, non-biased, non-sectarian, pro-American organization, whose officers and crew serve without pay, extends a hearty welcome to all men, women and children who are interested in the following programs and activities:

1. To continue our educational program about the role the merchant marine played in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, as well as in peace time commerce.
2. To improve the scope of recognition and benefits for Merchant Marine Veterans, and to assist them in getting up-to-date information and applications for all benefits and awards due them.
3. To promote a stronger American merchant marine industry.
4. To help us with your advice, volunteer work, publicity or funding for the restoration and operation of the *S.S. Lane Victory*.
5. To provide a nationwide forum for communication and fellowship for all merchant seamen, active or retired, Naval Armed Guard personnel, and for all interested associates and well wishers.

All members will receive a membership card, our monthly publication, *The Anchor Light*, free admission to the *S.S. Lane Victory*, and notices of special events.

Membership Category
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Rank or rating: _____ Did you attend a maritime school? Yes No

Interesting information: _____

I'd like to know more about volunteering in the Office Engine Room Deck
 Gift Shop Museum Radio Other interests: _____

Mail to: USMMVWWII, P.O. Box 629, San Pedro, CA 90733

A COUNT DOWN TO REMEMBER

By Glen Randall

My days of flying airplanes had turned to history, but still were vivid and actual in my memories.

I was not looking for a job. I had a wide and varied list of experiences in aircraft. I had spent several years in aircraft manufacturing plants. This past also included testing aircraft parts as well as putting aircraft together.

Someone told me about General Dynamics, missile division, which was just starting in Pomona, California. Because of all my experience, I felt well qualified in this related industry.

I hired in at the very bottom of the pay scale. I felt that once they recognized my experience, I would advance rapidly – at least I had my foot in the door. Soon they saw me showing people who were making twice my pay scale how to do their jobs.

I was placed in "Experimental," where new projects were being developed. I worked in the development of several surface-to-air missiles. A few of us would develop and check-out a missile, and then I was usually the one who would take the missile to the desert and bring down a drone (pilotless) airplane with it.

One on trip, the missile was on our

launcher. I was out there in the hot desert sun, alone, and performing the tasks on the missile during the countdown. At T-60 minutes I was to connect the missile battery and take the missile off of launcher power. In order to do this, my hand had to go through an opening in the electronic section and be forced past electrical components and all the way down. This process took five minutes to get my hand in and then another five minutes to get it out.

I had just attached the battery cable to the battery and was lowering a small wrench on a string to sung-up the nut.

The speaker behind me went "10-9-8-7," and so on. If I pulled my hand out, most of it would stay inside. I just stood there, waiting to die. Even if I had my hand out, I knew the blast would kill me. I just listened to the count, and wondered how many people know exactly when they will die. "6-5-4-3-2-1-0-+1 – hey, it didn't blast off.

After I secured the missile, I went to the block house and asked "What happened?"

"Oh, that -- that was nothing, the count-down from another launcher ten miles down the road got piped into our system by mistake."

LEGAL NOTICE OF VETERANS DATA THEFT SETTLEMENT

If you are a veteran, the spouse of a veteran, or a member of the military, you could get a payment from a class action settlement. Your legal rights may be affected by this proposed class action settlement.

A settlement has been reached with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, and an employee of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in their official capacities (together called the "Defendants") stemming from the theft of computer equipment which was reported to contain personal information of military veterans, spouses of military veterans and military personnel.

The Class includes all veterans, spouses of veterans, and military personnel who had actual damages during the Recovery Period that were directly related to the theft of computer equipment which was reported to contain personal information from the home of a VA employee on May 3, 2006. The Recovery Period began on May 3, 2006 and ended on February

11, 2009. The Class also includes all representatives, heirs, administrators, executors, beneficiaries, agents, and assigns of Class Members.

If you submit a valid claim you will be paid the actual cost of your out-of-pocket expenses incurred during the Recovery Period up to \$1,500. The minimum payment for each valid claim will be \$75. However, if the total amount needed to pay valid claims exceeds the amount left in the settlement fund after deducting lawyer's fees, costs and expenses, each Class Member's payment will be reduced and paid in proportion to all Class Members' payments.

All claim forms must be postmarked no later than November 27, 2009.

For all necessary forms via the Internet, go to www.veteransclass.com. Please read the instructions carefully, fill out the Claim Form, attach the required documentation, and mail it postmarked no later than November 27, 2009 to: VA Settlement Claims, PO Box 6727, Portland, OR 97228-9767

Class Counsel recommends that you keep a copy of any Claim Form submitted as well as proof of mailing.

VOLUNTEERS -- THE NEW GENERATION

By Jim Shuttleworth, Underway Engine Room Tour Volunteer

Increasingly, volunteers donating their time and effort toward the preservation and operation of the *S.S. Lane Victory* are not World War II veterans of the United States merchant marine. The newest volunteers are too young to have served in any capacity during WWII. But they all share a common interest with the founding members of the USMMVWWII -- they love the *Lane Victory* and want to see her steam into the next century.

These new volunteers bring to the *Lane* a wide variety of experience and skills that will be critical to the survival of the *Lane*. They also inject renewed energy and vitality to this mission. Some have maritime experience or knowledge from having served in the Navy or other armed forces, or from avocation. Still others bring with them civilian organizational and management skills. Most importantly, they have enthusiasm.

The *S.S. Lane Victory* can sail forth into the next century and beyond as a living memorial to the merchant marine veterans of WWII - but only if there are future volunteers to stand watch!