



THE JERSEYMAN

10 Years - Nr. 75

"Rest well, yet sleep lightly and hear the call, if again sounded, to provide firepower for freedom..."



**Rear Admiral W. Lewis Glenn, Jr., USN Retired
1940 - 2012**

Rear Admiral W. Lewis Glenn, Jr.



Rear Admiral W. Lewis Glenn, Jr., (USN-Ret) a highly decorated career Naval Surface Warfare Officer was surrounded by his family when he died on May 15, 2012, at the Carriage Club in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was 71 and had bravely fought a long battle with a debilitating cognitive condition.

Lew Glenn was born on September 7, 1940, the younger of the two sons of W. Lewis Glenn, Sr. and Evelyn Lide Glenn, of Anderson, South Carolina. He graduated from Boys High in Anderson in 1958, and went on to the U.S. Naval Academy, where he graduated in 1962. Lew and his wife of 48 years, Julia Meeks Glenn, were childhood sweethearts and married on April 4, 1964. In addition to his beloved wife, he leaves three children: W. Lewis Glenn III, of Charlotte, North Carolina; Margaret Glenn Chapman, of Atlanta, Georgia; and Russell Warren Glenn, of Grosse Pointe, Michigan; son-in-law Tobin Chapman; daughters-in-law Krista Newkirk and Jacqueline Glenn; and seven grandchildren: Tinsley, Conrad, Will, Eliana, Russell, Holden and Adeline. Also surviving are his brother, R. Lide Glenn; sister-in-law, Ada Moorhead; and brother-in-law, Richard Meeks and wife, Adya Meeks; six nieces, four nephews, and many great-nieces and nephews.

Lew's naval service included a tour of duty in Vietnam in 1969 as Flag Lieutenant to Admiral E. R. Zumwalt while he was Commander Naval Forces Vietnam, and Command of the USS Mahan DDG-47 from 1978 to 1980 while it was the evaluation and testing platform for the SM-2 surface-to-air missile system. His shipboard service culminated in Command of the USS New Jersey, from 1985 to 1987, including a Western Pacific deployment. Rear Admiral Glenn led a full Battleship Battle Group deep into the Sea of Okhotsk, at the heart of the Soviet Pacific Fleet's sphere of influence, on a freedom of navigation demonstration, leaving behind a plank of the warship's teak decking as a symbol of the freedom of the seas. His other shipboard tours included USS Vesole (DDR-878), USS Richard E Byrd (DDG-23), USS Tattnell (DDG-19), and Executive Officer of the USS Vreeland (DE-1068). His staff service included a tour as Commander of Training for the Pacific Fleet, and several at the Pentagon including both aide to Chief of Naval Operations and Executive Assistant to the Deputy Chief Naval Operations Surface Warfare. His last duty station was as Commander Combat Logistics Group 2 in Norfolk, Virginia.

Lew received his Master's Degree in Oceanography from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in 1968, graduated from the Harvard University Advanced Management Program in 1982, and from the National Defense University, Industrial College of the Armed Forces in 1983. His military decorations included five awards of the Legion of Merit, and the Bronze Star with Combat "V".

Lew was a man of strong belief, and his unshakeable faith in God fortified him throughout his life. He served as a Deacon, Elder and youth advisor for Vienna Presbyterian Church (VPC) and as Co-Chair of its Capital Fund Drive, resulting in a new sanctuary. He participated in numerous mission projects, including Habitat for Humanity missions throughout the United States and Mexico. We know that his advice to all of us would be his oft-repeated farewell to "Go with God", and we rejoice in the knowledge that he has done so.

Lew Glenn's quiet strength, abiding love and support for his family and deep commitment to God, country, and the sailors with whom he served, will be remembered by all those whose lives he touched. He was equally at home on the bridge wing of a warship and reading to his grandchildren. He led a life marked by service, selflessness and honesty, and we are all better people for having known him.

The family will be forever grateful for the competent and loving care provided by the excellent staff at Clare Bridge of Carriage Club and Hospice Palliative Care Charlotte Region.

For those wishing to make a donation to the Battleship New Jersey in remembrance of Lew Glenn, please call the Battleship New Jersey offices at **856-966-1652**.

A service to celebrate the life of Lew Glenn was held at Myers Parks Presbyterian Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He will be interred with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery, on Thursday, August 30 at 3 pm. The Glenn family asks all those attending to please gather with us at the Arlington administration building at around 2:30 pm. There will also be a memorial service that morning at Vienna Presbyterian Church at 10:30 am followed by a reception in the Great Hall at Vienna Presbyterian Church. All are most welcome...

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RELIEVING THE WATCH...

HAVING MADE MANY NEW FRIENDS OVER THE PAST 10 1/2 YEARS, THE TIME HAS ARRIVED FOR ME TO PASS *THE JERSEYMAN* ON TO A NEW WRITER/EDITOR.

THIS ISSUE WILL BE MY LAST, AND A NEW GROUP OF CORRESPONDENTS, ALL VOLUNTEERS OF BATTLESHIP NEW JERSEY, PLAN TO TAKE ON *THE JERSEYMAN* BEGINNING WITH THE NEXT ISSUE.

I PLAN TO CONTINUE ON AS THE WRITER/EDITOR OF *THE IOWAN HISTORY LETTER*, AND FOR THOSE INTERESTED, PLEASE SEND ME YOUR EMAIL ADDRESSED TO: THELVIG@AOL.COM.

***THE IOWAN HISTORY LETTER* IS AT: www.ussiowa.org**

IN A WEEK OR TWO, THOSE WANTING TO BE INCLUDED IN A NEW DATABASE FOR *THE JERSEYMAN*, ARE ASKED TO PLEASE SEND THEIR EMAIL ADDRESS IN TO A NEW DATABASE MANAGER (TO BE ANNOUNCED.)

FOR THOSE THAT HAVE PROVIDED ARTICLES, PHOTOS, CARTOONS AND ASSISTANCE FOR *THE JERSEYMAN*... - *MANY THANKS!*

FAIR WINDS...

CMC TOM HELVIG, USN/RETIRED

LOOKING BACK... USS UTAH - DECEMBER 7, 1941

Warren “Red” Upton, seen here on the left, and John B. “Jack” Vaessen, on the right, were shipmates aboard USS Utah (AG-16) on 7 December 1941, but at the time, they did not know each other. Their personal stories of what happened at 0800 on that Sunday morning were very different, and for the next few hours, their stories took very different paths. Today, “Red” Upton is 92, and Jack Vaessen is 95 years old...

With this issue of *The Jerseyman*, and with the help of Naval Author Paul Stillwell, and the permission of Ms. Janis Jorgensen of the US Naval Institute Staff, we are able to include a special feature with the oral histories of both of these men. This oral history meeting was brought together thanks to retired Chief Ron Welker, a friend of mine now living in San Jose, California, and who was able to bring Upton and Vaessen together at Jack Vaessen’s home on April 28, 2012 to record their stories.

The oral history of Warren “Red” Upton, and what he remembers of that morning as he was reached for the shaving gear in his locker, is provided in the next few pages of this issue. Jack Vaessen’s story, and the full oral history that he completed in 1987 for the US Naval Institute, is included in an “Oral History Supplement” to *The Jerseyman* 3Q-2012, and will be distributed as a separate publication that is to be combined with this issue of *The Jerseyman*. - TH

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RON WELKER: Can you tell us about your experience, Warren?

WARREN UPTON: Yeah, okay. I'll do that. I was just getting up in preparation for going ashore, and I was just reaching over to get my shaving gear out of my locker, and going up a couple of decks to the wash-room. As I was reaching, the first torpedo hit, the aerial torpedo, on the port side. Within seconds, the second one hit. By that time—I believe several light bulbs were broken from the concussion.

We didn't know what it was. The radioman on watch, Barry, first class, said something about a collision because we had no idea what was going on top side. But shortly after that, the second one hit. The ship started to list and we figured it was time to get out of there. Most of the radiomen were asleep, but they weren't asleep too long. They got out—we got cots in the sleeping compartment which was next to me in radio. It wasn't long before all of us were up on the ladder going up to—we had one deck before we went to the main deck.

Within a few minutes—I can remember going up one of the ladders—they had a battle briefing. Somebody, I guess that was the general [inaudible...] station, was lowering this. He was soon persuaded otherwise. We got up to the main deck; the top of the ladder was located near the—what they used to call the “air castle.” It was under the superstructure.

JOHN VAESSON: Oh, air castle. I remember that.

WARREN UPTON: Just across from there was the [inaudible] stand, the ship service where you got your Cokes and what not. Of course, they weren't operating then! And I can remember someone, some of the men ran out but they were being heavily strafed and there seemed to be some kind of an explosion and we took on a little more list.

Lieutenant Commander Windsor, I can remember, said, “Abandon ship!” The general alarm was out of service by that time from the concussion of the torpedoes. I went up the starboard ladder to the next deck up and over the side from there and went over. Some of them were jumping but that was rather hazardous. One fellow was strafed, he had his life jacket on but I didn't get a life jacket—they were pretty well out of them by that time I got there.

I went over the side. I can remember scratching—I had those white shorts on that Jack mentioned. We were—our chief radioman Putman was pretty regulation when it came to uniform. He was a great guy, though, he was.

But we—I slid down to the bilge keel and dived into the water from there. The ship service officer, Lieutenant Al Jones, says, “Can you swim, Red?” I said, “Yes, sir. I can.” Then he said, “Will you come back and give me a hand?” I'll just kind of side stroke over and help him to be—it was a mooring quay there where our ship was.

And from now on they were taken by one of the motorboats over to the—a little further to the float where the island. After that we more or less immediately went into a ditch over there that was being dug for some kind of system, sewer system or water system, we didn't know at that time, but that was our main place of refuge for quite a while.

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During that time, we could see other ships standing out, the destroyers. The USS Monaghan was underway and they had a contact and they made a hard right in an attempt to ram one of the midget subs. They let go a couple of depth charges which were at that time called ash cans; maybe they still are, but blew a lot of mud and everything. I think that midget sub was destroyed and was raised later, several days later.

After a while, a flat bed truck drove up and we piled on, to take it to the north, to the central part of the island. They took us to near the ship service was for uniforms or what was left, and we were pretty well soaked with oil and good old salt water.

We salvaged some dungarees, anything we could. I almost had a full outfit of clothes. I got some of those tennis shoes. Some of the yard workmen gave us rags with soap with paint thinner to get some of the grease off, the oil, muck or oil. That was some of the things I can remember. I went to—some of us were over, just about the time of the second attack, breaking out ammunition in the old warehouse.

I remember one other—there was a bomb landed close to the warehouse and blew some concrete up. Some of it went through the roof and I can remember the strafing went right through the hull. That's close as they came to getting and I think I've seen the machine guns from one of the planes, the dive bombers that was attacking.

After—we broke out the little tin hats and things and got some ammunition passed around but—then we were mustered in our barracks on Ford Island by the second officer; actually we had been mustered several times before that. It took—Commander Wares, he was a real nice guy, he was the second officer. He took us by motor launch over to the USS Oregon which was the flagship for the Admiral Calhoun. It was later called Service Force.

For our quarters—sub's quarters as they say, some place to sleep and some place to get your food. That was the first time I'd had food since Saturday night. I wasn't too hungry. This keeps going here.

RON WELKER: The adrenaline keeps going.

WARREN UPTON: Adrenaline. Correct. We were issued gas masks and I was just - bare bunk and my gas mask for a pillow, sleeping, and I heard this commotion. We went up to the mess deck of the Oregon and I think the USS California had some gunnery, I know they had these machine guns, 50 caliber machine guns. They opened fire, low and that wounded one of the Utah survivors and killed one of the men that didn't make it off the Utah. A yeoman striker, I learned later. It was quite a time. I was assigned the mid-watch of the radio shack of the Oregon and that was at a circuit watch.

I can remember chief radioman, the name was Galley, said, "Reddy," he says, "You look kind of—" I said, "My legs are kind of hurting" and we had hammered five-inch ammunition on the Oregon before that. I had neglected to mention that. He says, "Why don't you knock off a little early and go down that?" So I went down and turned in.

The next day on the Oregon, most of the radiomen that made it off, sat around and talked about their experiences. I guess that was our so-called "debriefing." Gave us some time to think about what happened.

Second night, I had—relieved another radioman, third, named Gerkovich off the Utah, had the first evening watch with the radio telephone watch. We had with the USS California, they had a radio set up over there. The Comm. 14 Commander, Commandant of the 14th Naval District.

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Most of the time we spent up, was just testing more or less. In the morning, just about dawn, the USS Enterprise they come in, they were leaving with their plane loads. Going out, standing out to sea and the destroyers were sweeping the channel. I notified the officer of the deck. Edmund Calhoun was there and looking things over. It was a mess.

From then on, when I was assigned temporarily, I went down below, thought I'd get some sleep and a messenger from the communication officer was down waking me up. He says, "You're wanted up, at the communication office." I went up there and Chief Putman had arranged for a kid from Berkeley, striker, a radio striker off the Utah and I'd go to the USS Caster which was going back to the States in a few days. He and I boarded the launch to the Caster over at the sub base.

That was the end of my experiences. We sailed in a few over to Honolulu, loaded up some pineapple, caroused and shoved off for the States, without escort. I can remember headed south to [inaudible] then headed east.

RON WELKER: Did they ever muster the whole crew after the attack?

WARREN UPTON: No, only the ones that were up there in that barracks. I don't know, and Jack wasn't there, I know and from what, talking with him. But they mustered what was a good part of the crew up there, and Commander Morris again.

RON WELKER: So the whole crew was never together after that?

WARREN UPTON: No, not to my knowledge.

RON WELKER: You got transferred to ships all over the place.

WARREN UPTON: Right, right. A good many of them went to the USS Detroit. But that was something to remember; never forget that, that's for sure. I know Jack won't be here. He had a little more experience than I did, just getting out!

JOHN VAESSON: Well, the man I relieved, supposed to relieve at a quarter to eight, his name was Joe Borden and he was from Hollywood. Everybody says, "Why aren't you in the movies?" that kind of stuff. Well anyway, he showed me these canvas bags, make sure that everything is in there. Before I went down, I was late going down the steps to get in and there was a water-tight door.

So anyway, they says, "Tell your relief to cross the [inaudible] dining room and go up on the other side." So I told Joe at that time and they closed the door. I was late coming down and they closed it so he couldn't get out but he could go up on the other side and go out. Well, he got over there and he got in and went up one deck and the battle grate was down. It took two people to lift it. He couldn't do it, so he's still in there.

RON WELKER: Still down there in the [inaudible] dining room?

JOHN VAESSON: He crossed the [inaudible] dining room, went to the other side. And then another thing I wanted to tell you there was a headman of the storeroom, and he said—I met him up in Kentwood California—he had a walnut grove there and he showed me the flag they were going to raise. On Sunday, they raise a bigger flag.

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So he says he was bringing that to wherever they raised it. That's when the ship hit when he got off. But he later lost his walnut grove. He hired a young man to shape the trees, get the walnuts down, and so he swung his big hook around, hit a high tension line, and was electrocuted.

RON WELKER: So you say he brought the flag with him when he—

JOHN VAESSON: He was bringing it up, but he kept it.

RON WELKER: He kept it when he abandoned ship, huh?

JOHN VAESSON: Yeah. Oh, also before the ship hit, you know the Utah had 50-foot motor launches; all of the ships had 40. I guess they used to make them that way, but they used to tie it up on the propeller guard and I knew the engineman Bailey, but the coxswain I didn't know, but he told me later. While they were there untying the ship to pick up the people going to church and he says they were untying it, Bailey started the engine and they looked up and says, "Oh, look at that submarine out there." It was the torpedo...

JOHN VAESSON: And all the church people getting ready to go to church were killed. In the boat.

RON WELKER: It hit the motor launch?

JOHN VAESSON: No, I don't know, they were strafed, I guess, I don't know.

RON WELKER: Oh.

JOHN VAESSON: It was what I was told later. I can't think of that, the coxswain's name, he lived in Texas, on the side of the river that goes by the Gulf of Mexico. But he says he's untying the ship, Bailey's starting the engine, he looked up and said, "Oh, there's a submarine out there."

RON WELKER: So he saw one of the torpedoes hit the ship. He saw—

JOHN VAESSON: Well, you can just see the water. The wave it was making or whatever.

RON WELKER: Yeah... Well, I guess we ought to take some pictures...

USS UTAH MEMORIAL PEARL HARBOR



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USS UTAH (AG-16)

The attack on the fleet at Pearl Harbor lasted a little under two hours, but for Utah, it was over in a few minutes. At 0801, soon after sailors had begun raising the colors at the ship's fantail, the erstwhile battleship took a torpedo hit forward, and immediately started to list to port.

As the ship began to roll ponderously over on her beam ends, 6-by-12-inch timbers-placed on the decks to cushion them against the impact of the bombs used during the ship's latest stint as a mobile target-began to shift, hampering the efforts of the crew to abandon ship. Below, men headed topside while they could. One however, **Chief Watertender Peter Tomich**, remained below, making sure that the boilers were secured and that all men had gotten out of the engineering spaces. ***Another man, Fireman John B. Vaessen, USNR, remained at his post in the dynamo room, making sure that the ship had enough power to keep her lights going as long as possible.*** (Bolded italics by Editor)

Comdr. Isquith made an inspection to make sure men were out and nearly became trapped himself. As the ship began to turn over, he found an escape hatch blocked. While he was attempting to escape through a porthole, a table upon which he was standing-impelled by the ever-increasing list of the ship-slipped out from beneath him. Fortunately, a man outside grabbed Isquith's arm and pulled him through at the last instant.

At 0812, the mooring lines snapped, and Utah rolled over on her beam ends; her survivors struck out for shore, some taking shelter on the mooring quays since Japanese strafers were active.

Shortly after most of the men had reached shore, Comdr. Isquith, and others, heard a knocking from within the overturned ship's hull. Although Japanese planes were still strafing the area, Isquith called for volunteers to return to the hull and investigate the tapping. Obtaining a cutting torch from the nearby Raleigh (CL-7)-herself fighting for survival after taking early torpedo hits, the men went to work.

As a result of the persistence shown by Machinist S. A. Szymanski; Chief Machinist's Mate Terrence MacSelwiney, USNR; and two others whose names were unrecorded, 10 men clambered from a would-be tomb. The last man out was Fireman Vaessen, who had made his way to the bottom of the ship when she capsized, bearing a flashlight and wrench. (Bolded italics by Editor)

Utah was declared "in ordinary" on 29 December 1941 and was placed under the control of the Pearl Harbor Base Force. Partially righted to clear an adjacent berth, she was then declared "out of commission, not in service," on 5 September 1944. *Utah's* name was struck from the Navy list on 13 November 1944. Her partially submerged hulk still remains, rusting, at Pearl Harbor with an unknown number of men trapped inside.

Of Utah's complement, 30 officers and 431 enlisted men survived the ship's loss; 6 officers and 58 men died-four of the latter being recovered and interred ashore. Chief Watertender Tomich received the Medal of Honor posthumously for his selfless act in ensuring the safety of others.

Utah (AG-16) received one battle star for her World War II service.

(Source: Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships - DANFS)

LOOKING BACK... Building Iowa Class Battleships

The Jerseyman does a great job of describing the Officers and Sailors who crewed the Big “J”, and their stories, but what about the men who built these mighty ships? I was one of them and this is my story about building USS Iowa. The tours aboard New Jersey are getting more difficult as we are all getting older but I still enjoy passing on my personal bits of history to the young or old that visit our ship...

In 1938 when I graduated from high school in New York, the depression was not yet over and jobs were very scarce. My parents could not afford to send me to college, so I started to work at whatever jobs I could find, and attended Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute at night, studying engineering. As Civil Service examinations were announced, I applied and took several of them. The Police Department, Fire Department and others were considered good jobs with security and good benefits. I also recall lining up in a “shape up” gang outside the Brooklyn Navy Yard on several mornings hoping to be called for a days work. I watched as foremen picked their favorite buddies day after day, but I was never chosen. When the Navy Yard went on a Civil Service basis and announced an examination for Apprentices, I applied.

A few months later the examination was held under strict supervision at several New York high schools. Several thousand men took the difficult three-hour examination dealing with math, mechanics and general questions. About two months later I received notification that I had scored 100% on the examination, with about 300 other applicants.

There were only eighty job openings, but there was no way to fairly choose 80 out of 300 candidates with 100% perfect scores, so they hired us all. I was assigned to the “ship-fitters shop” and began work for \$14.89 per week.

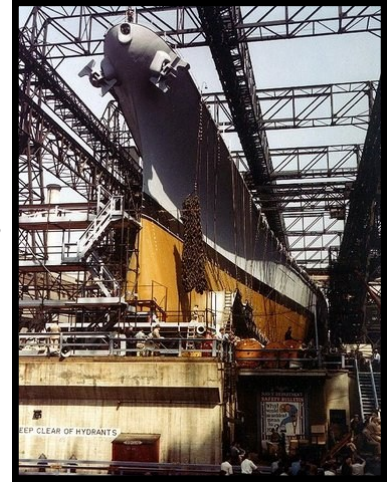
In October of 1939, I was photographed, given a security badge, and was assigned to Charlie Cosgrove, a lead-man who learned his trade working in the shipyards of Scotland. Charlie placed me with a crew of a fitter and helper working on the double bottom of the USS Iowa. The Iowa was about two months into construction and only the keel and bottom were down. Cosgrove approached me one day and gave me an order for a tool kit. This was recognition that I was capable of being trusted as a ship fitter capable of taking on work assignments on my own. I was given a helper, a blueprint and an assignment. I was now on my way and I completed my apprenticeship working on many parts of the Iowa as she progressed. I installed boiler room stanchions, bulkheads, 16” gunpowder magazines, side tanks, deck sections and gun mounts. As I showed progress, I was given more difficult assignments.

The work was exhilarating and challenging. After the December 7 attack on Pearl Harbor, the work schedule increased markedly and we increased to 60 hours per week work with raises and lots of overtime pay. The workday was long, starting at 7:30 am and ending at 6:00 pm, with a half hour for lunch. We worked in hot and cold weather, and I remember that the temperatures in January 1942 reached 11 degrees below zero. We worked in the cold with no relief except at lunchtime with the cold, biting winds coming off of the East River. Over two thousand men, covering 70 trades, were involved in building USS Iowa to her launch.

Many of my associates were college graduates. Among them were playwright Arthur Miller, who later wrote many Broadway plays including “Death of a Salesman”. Howard Zinn, who became the historian of the “Hippy Movement” and who is now a professor of history at Harvard University. But, as WW II progressed, many of us left to enter military service. Howard Zinn, several others, and I enlisted in the Army Air Corps, the Navy and the Marine Corps.

Working on the ship was dangerous. There were many falls, broken arms and legs, crushing accidents, and several fatalities. More men were killed building these battleships than were killed sailing in them. There was also no government compensation at the time. If someone were killed or badly injured, fellow workers would take up a collection to send to the family. It was very risky and dangerous working with such heavy steel components.

One day another ship fitter and I were told to place two special keel plates on the adjoining shipways. Several days later Navy Secretary James Forrestal, Admiral Ernest King and several junior Navy Officers, arrived to press the buttons that riveted the plates together. That was the Keel Laying ceremony for BB-63, the USS Missouri. I was later also given work assignments on the “Big Mo”.



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As part of the apprenticeship program we were required to attend a special school for two half-days each week. We studied ship design, strength of materials, drafting, shape development, geometry and trigonometry, all of which were necessary for ship construction. With all the overtime we completed our four-year apprenticeship in just over three years. I was assigned to the “mold loft” where the templates for the ships members were designed before being fabricated in the ship-fitters shop. The shop was immense, with roller, punches and shears that could shape and bend the plates for the ship. The work was very exacting, indoors and yes, it was warm.

As skills developed, the assignments became more and more demanding. I worked with “outside machinists” as they erected vertical milling machines to finely finish the bearing surface of the barbettes, and which were to accept the turrets. I worked on boiler room stanchions and watched as the huge steam boilers were lowered into position. I installed the bearing runners and blocks in the magazines to hold the powder cans that contained the sets of three powder bags for the 16 inch rifles.

I was present at the launching of the Iowa on August 27, 1942, the largest ship ever built at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I recall it being a nice summer day. The ways were cleared of all building materials and several hundred well-dressed guests lined the ways to watch the launch. There were naval officers in their dress whites and ladies in summer dresses. When the bottle of champagne was broken on her bow, the mighty ship began its slide down the greased ways. As she picked up speed a cheer arose from the crowd. Unexpectedly though, 40,000 tons of water was displaced and it momentarily rose above the ways, soaking the nearby attendees in dirty East River water. My helper and I helped and lifted several people who had fallen. Fortunately no one was injured. No one had anticipated the rise of the water.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, the nation went on alert expecting additional attacks, and soldiers were assigned to protect us. The country was so unprepared that the soldiers assigned to protect us wore WW I uniforms, and carried wooden poles as there were no rifles available. They stood guard on the roofs of the buildings and we sent them coffee to help keep them warm.

The ships of the Iowa class were all identical, and I remember that templates we made for the Iowa and Missouri were later carefully shipped to the Philadelphia Navy Yard to be used for the USS New Jersey and Wisconsin. The Iowa was the first, and the namesake of her class to be constructed, so some lessons were to be learned.

The ships were both riveted, and welded. Rivet technology was well established but welding technology was relatively new. One of the results of welding is shrinkage, and distortion of the steel from the heat. Steel plates were cut slightly oversize to allow for welding shrinkage, but as the construction advanced, the keel of the Iowa began to rise from its keel blocks because of the shrinkage from the thousands of welds. Work was temporarily slowed while Navy Officers and engineers came from Washington to determine a way to correct the problem. They tried weights, chains and turnbuckles, but the keel remained the same. They had no choice but to continue and the stern of the Iowa is still several feet out of line to starboard. To further complicate the problem, all of the propeller shaft holes had already been cut in the shop. All of these huge holes had to be welded closed with plating, and new shaft tunnels were cut to house the propeller shafts. This required hundreds of hours of extra work, with surveyors eyeing transits to be sure that the shaft tunnels were true. Word was also sent to Philadelphia to increase the shrinkage allowance so that the same problem did not occur on the New Jersey and Wisconsin.

In June of 1943, I left the Navy Yard to enlist in the Army Air Corps and was accepted for aircrew training. In 1944 I was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, and Navigator in a B-29 Squadron. I was honorably discharged on December 24, 1945. As I served as a Docent on the New Jersey, I often recalled the days working in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, though when I was discharged from the Air Force, the yard was slowing down. I chose a different career path after the war, but I still remember the shipyard days and building these beautiful battleships.

Submitted by:

**Art Hill, Lt. USAAF Navigator, World War II
Former Docent Battleship New Jersey
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**



“This photo was taken at Grand Island AAF Base in 1945. I am standing in front of a B-29 at temperature of 17 degrees below zero.”

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GUST JUNIOR SWENNING SF2c, NAVY CROSS Nov 30/Dec 1, 1942

SWENNING, Gust J. 356-10-76 (posthumous) SF2c USN (Dec)

USS NEW ORLEANS

Solomon Islands

Recommended for NAVY CROSS by CinC Pac -Serial 30

Awarded: NAVY CROSS--Mar. 25,1943 Bd.Awds.Mtg.

For extraordinary heroism in the line of his profession as member of the Forward Repair Party of the U.S.S. NEW ORLEANS during the engagement with the Japanese naval forces off Savo Island on the night of November 30, 1942, when his ship was struck by a torpedo forward which detonated the magazines and gasoline storage. The tremendous explosion blew off the bow of the ship. Immediately following the explosion, though severely shocked, he dived through oil and water in a flooded compartment and closed a watertight door. His courageous action contributed directly to the accomplishment of bringing his damaged ship to port. Thereafter, he labored continuously for over twelve hours following the action and gallantly gave his life in the service of his country. His courage, devotion to duty, and determination were in keeping with the highest traditions of the naval service.

My name is Henry Wristen, though most people call me Hank. I retired from the Navy in 1963 as a Senior Chief Fire Control Technician, qualified as a 1st Class diver, and I am now almost 89 years of age. This event, that I am writing for *The Jerseyman*, took place in 1942. It was an act of amazing bravery when **Gust Junior Swenning**, only 22 years of age, and a Shipfitter Second Class, knowingly gave up his life for his country, for his ship, and for his shipmates.

At the time of his death, Gust Junior Swenning had been in the Navy for Four years. He had enlisted in the Navy in September of 1938 from his home in Texas, and following Boot Camp he was assigned to the heavy cruiser USS New Orleans. Gust was a quiet person, well liked, and competent in his job. During General Quarters his assignment was as a member of a Damage Control Party directed by Ship's Boatswain John Zehner, and Chief Warrant Officer Francis Malley, known as 'Chips'.

Before getting into the story of Gust Swenning's bravery, some background on our ship... The USS New Orleans, CA-32, was a Heavy Cruiser since she carried nine 8" guns and displaced (weighed) less than 10,000 tons. However, during the period of World War II, and with added anti-aircraft weapons, additional ammunition, splinter shields around the 5" guns, new radar and personnel, she displaced approximately 12,600 tons. She was 588 feet long and had a maximum beam width of 61' 8 inches. Her top speed was 32 knots, with a wartime complement of approximately 60 to 70 officers and up to 1,250 enlisted men.

Just 1 month before I reported aboard in January of 1942, USS New Orleans was one of two heavy cruisers in Pearl Harbor on the December 7, 1941. She was undergoing repairs at Pearl, and all of her power, water, etc., was being supplied from dockside. It was during the Japanese sneak attack that our USS New Orleans' **Chaplain Howell Forgy**, uttered those words that soon became a famous naval expression and an even more famous song from World War II, titled: *"Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition."* Not many would know that the phrase originated with our Chaplain aboard USS New Orleans, but it did.

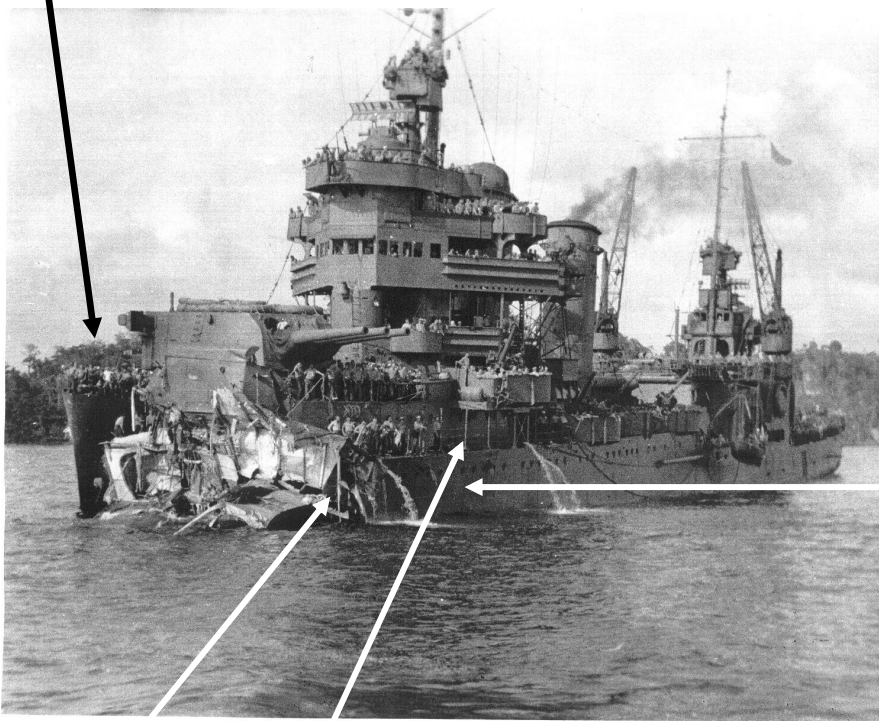
As we fast forward to the action in which Gust Swenning possibly saved his ship, USS New Orleans, it was during what was known today as the Battle of Tassafaronga. The action took place on the evening of November 30, 1942 near Savo Island, located between Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Solomons and was the 4th, and last, of the bitter fighting of the Night Surface engagements in that area. Of the 4 US heavy cruisers and 1 light cruiser engaged in this action, the USS Northampton was sunk, USS Minneapolis was hit by two torpedoes and was heavily damaged, and USS Pensacola was hit by a torpedo and suffered serious damage. The USS New Orleans, following 1000 yards astern of the Minneapolis, turned hard to Starboard to avoid her and ran into a Torpedo. The 1,100 pounds of TNT in the warhead exploded sending shrapnel into the bomb and mine magazines igniting 6,600 pounds of bombs and mines, a total of almost 4 tons of explosive power. The two explosions caused her

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bow to completely rip off at the base of Turret Two resulting in the deaths of 182 sailors and officers, the wounding of 20 more personnel, and flooding along more than 1/3 of her length. (See photo...)

USS MAURY (DD-401)

**ENTERING TULAGI—0630
1 DECEMBER 1942**



**APPROX. LOCATION OF
FRAME 53**

MAIN DECK 01 GUN DECK

With the assistance of the destroyer Maury, USS New Orleans made it to Tulagi, and the crew became lumberjacks, cutting down island trees to make timbers to shore up the forward compartments. After almost two weeks the ship departed Tulagi for Sydney, Australia where a false bow was affixed and she then set sail to Bremerton Navy Yard for a new bow.

The New Orleans would surely have gone down if the bow section had remained attached to the ship. The fact that the ship was in a hard turn to Starboard, apparently applied enough pressure to completely sever the bow section from the ship. It is my belief that the action of the Executive Officer in ordering "Lighten Ship" and the efforts of the ships repair crews to contain flooding and commence de-watering the affected compartments saved the ship. The ship was sinking. When the men from Plot and Central escaped up the hatch to the Wardroom on the Main Deck. They stepped into knee-deep water. This was in the Wardroom on the main deck at frame 53 (212 feet from the bow). By the time the open door had been shut and dewatering pumps put into action, that water had reached 4 feet and was exerting tremendous pressure on the damaged bulkheads that were holding water, but leaking.

Some few of the crew escaped from the Sick Bay on the second deck immediately aft of the Turret II Barbette at frame 48½. However, the Starboard door to the Marine Compartment was left open. It was this door that Gust was trying to close, and he *did* close it. **HAD HE NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN CLOSING THIS ONE DOOR, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE SHIP WOULD HAVE BEEN FLOODED AND SUNK. *For that act he was awarded the Navy Cross (Posthumously) as he was one of the men who was seriously injured in the explosion and died of Pulmonary Edema after many hours of continuous labor on the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th decks***

I am a qualified 1st Class Navy Deep Diver, and I am still amazed that Gust was able to accomplish the closing of that watertight door as he did. Further, I feel with this information and the comments of John Zehner in his discussions with Gust Swennings' nephew John Swenning, that Gust was deserving of the Medal of Honor for his actions that were far above and beyond what would have been expected.

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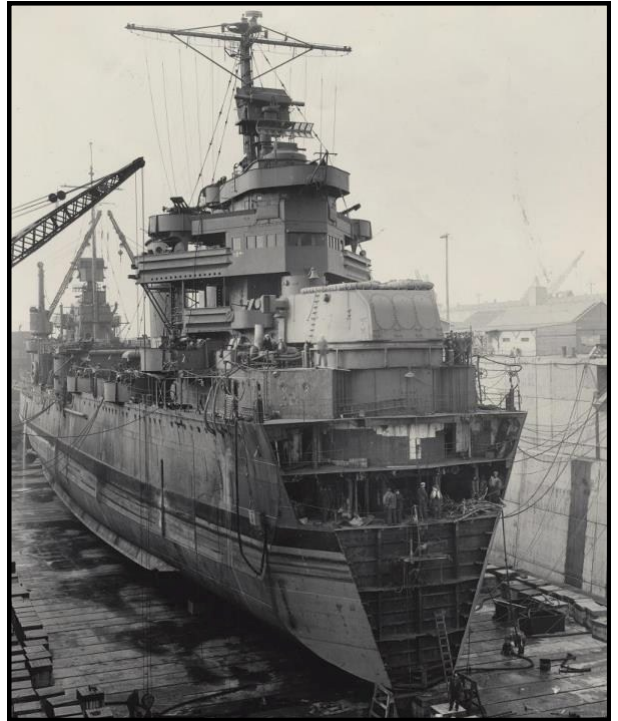
When I read the article in the May 1998 issue of the USS New Orleans Reunion Association Bulletin (*The Pelican*) about Gust Swenning being awarded the Navy Cross it was a complete surprise to me. I had always wondered who it was that had closed that critical hatch leading into Sick Bay. The Baton Rouge reunion, in 1998, was the first reunion I attended, and until that time I had never discussed Tassafaronga with anyone. At that time I got the impression that it may have been Zehner who performed that brave feat although I did not ask, and I don't remember anyone telling me that. I guess it was because I understood that he was in charge of that Repair Party. At the time I thought that Zehner was really lucky to get out of that alive and that he should have been awarded a Navy Cross or maybe even a Medal of Honor.

For background, I had helped remove bodies from the Sick Bay area the day after we tied up astern of USS Jamestown. I volunteered to be part of a working party of 4 to 5 guys (don't remember exactly how many), and I did it mainly because a friend of mine from boot camp, Randolph Nelson, was in Sick Bay and he had been killed. We entered on the 2nd deck around the Starboard side of Turret II Barbette. The entire area from the Barbette through Sick Bay was a mess. All bulkheads, decks, overheads and everything else was covered with black bunker oil with no lights - only Battle Lanterns. A mixture of water and oil with everything imaginable filled the deck up to the top of the hatch coamings. There were mattresses, blankets, bunks, bottles, furniture, and bandages mixed up with bodies. It was difficult to free the bodies and to get them onto a stretcher. The smell was really strong - mainly Oil, broken bottles of medicines and other smells that I could not identify. I am sure that decomposition of the bodies had also set in. Without the Gas Masks, we would not have been able to spend any time in the area.

After we removed the bodies (I don't remember how many), the Officer in Charge, a LT(jg), directed us to search the Pay Office on the Port side of the compartment. He was looking for a canvas bag that apparently contained the medical and pay records. I found a leather satchel but he was not interested; he wanted *that* canvas bag. However, after we found the bag, then he directed me to get the leather satchel, which I did. As an aside, the satchel contained \$170,000 in cash. Some of the Crew may remember the Marines washing the money with diesel oil and drying it out on the wing of the bridge.

The LT(jg) had us open the portside Water Tight door going into the Marine Compartment. I believe it was A-208-L. It was the one left open and later closed by Gust Swenning. That compartment was also a mess since the door was opened immediately after the explosion and the compartment had filled with water mixed with bunker oil. As a trained diver, I could not imagine a person finding their way through that compartment to close the open hatch even if they did have a diving mask and an air supply.

Without the mask I thought that it was an impossible task. The Ladder from the Main Deck (Officers Country) came down athwart ships to the Starboard passageway next to the after bulkhead at frame 53. I figure that the compartment was approximately 18 feet fore and aft, because the forward bulkhead was at frame 48-1/2 and the after one was at frame 53. I had assumed that Gust had come down the hatch, proceeded forward on the starboard passageway, past at least two rows of bunks lengthwise, crossed over to the Port side, and closed the Water Tight door. I don't remember which way it opened; most probably to the stern (Up and Forward Starboard -Down and Aft Port). However, I knew that just closing the door had to be very difficult because there would have been a lot of junk in the way that he would also have had to clear. I have always believed that he had to have an air supply, and wondered how they even knew the hatch was open. The book by his nephew, John Swenning sheds some light on that subject. It is based on interviews with New Orleans Shipmates who were with Gust and gave their oral recollections of the events.



USS New Orleans

Tulagi drydock 1 December 1942.

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The first thing that I discovered, is that the repair party went immediately from Damage Control to the Marine compartment and that it was in the process of flooding with water rushing in through the open hatch. This explains how they knew there was an open hatch. However, it does not explain how they entered the compartment. I assume that they entered through the aft starboard hatch of the compartment while the water in the after end of the compartment was less than a couple of feet deep and closed the hatch after them. Gust apparently worked his way forward and across to the open hatch and then dove down to close it.

Water had to be rushing in, and for him to be compelled to dive down to the hatch; water was already over the hatch and close to the overhead. There would have been an air pocket below the overhead and from the statements to John Swenning, he made as many as 5 separate dives before he succeeded in closing the hatch. He would have taken air from the decreasing air pocket in the overhead that would have been loaded with oil and other fumes. (The ship's doctor, John Higgenson later attributed Gust's death to pulmonary edema (due to the horrendous shock and compression to the lungs caused by the massive explosion) and that breathing the heavily contaminated air could only have hastened the end.

I am at a loss as to why none of the people interviewed by John Swenning could not clarify how the escape was made. Staying below decks for those few minutes to close the hatch in a rapidly flooding compartment with no lights, and with water pouring in from above, had to be one of the most courageous acts that I know of, especially since Gust had also been hurt so badly from the initial explosion. I know that I will never understand exactly how Gust closed the door and escaped that death trap. Even those who were with him when they entered the compartment have never been able to explain it.

DOCTOR HIGGENSON

John Swenning interviewed several of the men involved for his book including John Zehner (Bos'n) and Doctor Higgenson, the only doctor to survive the battle and the man who saw most of the horror resulting from the battle. Lieutenant Higgenson said in part: "In the meantime, they kept bringing in injured people. I don't know how many men had been injured, but there were many. I was using one mess compartment as a kind of examination room. All of these men were foaming at the mouth, like cotton candy, all over their mouths and faces. They'd spew out this white foam, which I recognized immediately as Pulmonary Edema fluid, even though I'd never seen anything like it before. There were so damn many and I felt so helpless."

"Later on in the war, I learned more about this phenomenon. A booklet was also published which described a similar thing that happened to victims in the Battle of the Coral Sea aboard the carrier that sank,--the Lexington I believe it was. It would happen when explosions occurred. It was so-called 'shock lung.'

There are a lot of different names for it. The lung is severely bruised by a tremendous shock that comes from all around, either in the air or water. The lung is suddenly, and violently, compressed and it beats on anything that is in the water or air. It is especially bad if the person happens to be in a closed compartment at the time of the explosion. "The air compresses with great force in closed compartments and the men would get ruptures of the frame structure of the lungs. This would cause an outpouring of blood and plasma fluid, which then becomes pulmonary edema, which then lessens the space and surface of the lungs. And victims will then die, essentially, of suffocation."

Most, if not all, of these men died soon after they were brought to me, theoretically drowning in their own fluids. We didn't have any oxygen to give them either. I remember a Mess Boy begging me to please do something, but there wasn't anything I could do for him. I found out later that there really isn't too much even a doctor can do with this type of injury." "During the entire time, I stayed incredibly busy. It was very frustrating because there was not a lot I could do, especially for the patients with the pulmonary edema problems.

JOHN ZEHNER

"I wasn't with Gus when we were hit. I was actually one deck above where he was. We stayed so busy afterwards that I frankly don't really remember much in the way of details. I may have seen him while we were trying to save the ship, but I don't remember for sure. I do know I saw him the next day. "When we were getting close to Tulagi, I was walking through the Mess Hall, which had been turned into a sick bay for the wounded. I went there specifically to find Gus and a couple of others I knew that had been wounded. I had already heard about what Gus had done and I

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wanted to find him. I remember him lying there and it really hurt me to see him. I could tell he was dying because he looked really bad. He had foam coming out of his mouth, he could hardly breathe, and he was in a lot of pain."

"I remember that, as soon as Gus saw me, he said, 'John, I think I'm going to die. I can't breathe and I hurt something awful', I tried to cheer him up, to give him some hope, but I know he knew better. "I asked him, 'Gus, why in blazes did you stay down there so long?' He said just what I would have expected him to say: 'We thought there might be some guys down there that needed help. I did what I had to do. I didn't want her to sink.'

After we were hit, Gus spent most of his time near where the storage batteries were kept. When salt water gets into the batteries and mixes with the acid, it turns into chlorine gas. That may be what eventually killed him. I also remember the doctor saying something about a concussion and that could have had something to do with it. "Either way, he stayed down there way too long in spite of knowing full- well what would happen to him.

"I spent a long time with him in the mess hall trying to comfort him and take his mind off the pain. He seemed more concerned about never seeing his family again than he did about dying. He asked me to get in touch with them if I could. I seem to recall he also said something about a brother who was in the Marines. "Like I said, with Gus it was all or nothing. He was just the type to stay down there and go all out. He was an amazing boy. I still think about him from time to time. They just don't build them any better.

"I know that 'Chips' (Francis Malley) wrote up the report about Gus's action and submitted it along with our Exec (Executive Officer of the New Orleans), requesting that he get a Navy Cross. I also made a special effort to personally make sure that they recognized Gus. I mean here's a guy that died for his shipmates and his country. 'I have been blessed by God so much to be surrounded all my life by people like Gus. Anything I have ever done is because of them.

Gust Junior Swenning was mortally wounded in the initial explosion that tore the ship apart but was instrumental in saving the ship from sinking. He saved many of his shipmate's lives and he truly gave his life for them I still see many of the casualties in my mind and I mourn for, not only the loss of my close friend Nelson, Gust, and my other Shipmates, **but also in the way that they died**. It is still hard for me to get over it. I cannot read the Citation without thinking of how painful were those hours that Gust labored below decks. To me, he was a HERO in every sense of the word.

Submitted by

**FTCS Hank Wristen, USN/Retired
Hudson, New Hampshire**

Editor's Notes:

The official description of USS New Orleans at the Battle of Tassafaronga, and as recorded in the Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships (DANFS) reads:

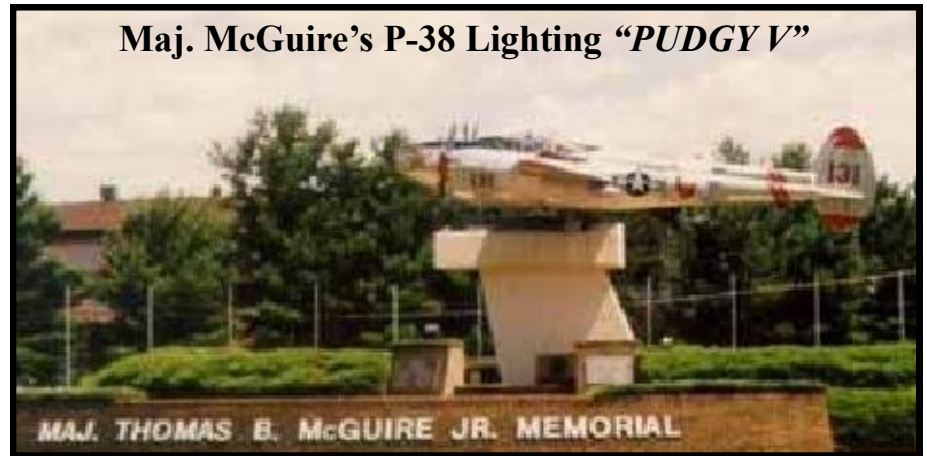
With four other cruisers and six destroyers she fought in the Battle of Tassafaronga on the night of 30 November, engaging a Japanese destroyer transport force. When flagship *Minneapolis* was struck by two torpedoes, *New Orleans*, next astern, was forced to sheer away to avoid collision, and ran into the track of a torpedo which ripped off her bow. Bumping down the ship's port side, the severed bow punched several holes in *New Orleans'* hull. A fifth of her length gone, slowed to 2 knots, and blazing forward, the ship fought for survival. Individual acts of heroism and self-sacrifice along with skillful seamanship kept her afloat, and under her own power she entered Tulagi Harbor near daybreak 1 December. Camouflaging their ship from air attack, the crew jury-rigged a bow of coconut logs, and 11 days later *New Orleans* sailed to replace a damaged propeller and make other repairs in Sydney, Australia, arriving 24 December. On 7 March 1943, she was underway for Puget Sound Navy Yard, where a new bow was fitted and all battle damage repaired.

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JOINT BASE McGUIRE-DIX-LAKEHURST MEMORIAL WREATH-LAYING CEREMONY Featuring the Annual Parade of Wreaths - - May 24, 2012 @ PUDGY Circle

The below photo was taken May 24, 2012 at the Joint Base-McGuire Ft .Dix-Lakehurst PA-RADE OF WREATHS Memorial Day ceremony.

The BB-62 volunteers presented a wreath on behalf of all BB-62 volunteers. This was the 10th. year of battleship New Jersey participation with a wreath presented on behalf of all Battleship New Jersey volunteers.



(Photo below, L/R... *Ed Miller, Harry Ruhle, Russ Collins, Charlie Stewart, Chief Joe Boyle, Dave Boone, Bab Catando, Carl A. Williams, Ken Wiegand, Tom Weber, Joe Low, Lee Grat.*)

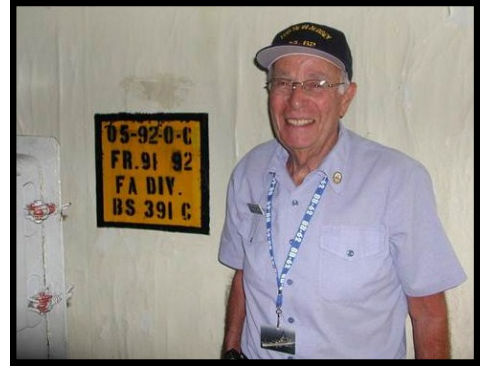


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LOOKING BACK... Hitting against Bob Feller in 1944, or, "How I heard the ball go by..."

This story is by **Rich Silvers** a long time Docent aboard Battleship New Jersey.

Rich is also a World War II veteran, having served aboard USS South Dakota (BB-57), known as SODAK and, as the Japanese knew her ... as Battleship "X". - TH



Tom - This is a story, almost seventy years old, about a negative event that for me, turned out to be unbelievably positive! It is how an incident that lasted only seconds, lived on for me for many years, is one that I will never forget.

This event took place in 1944. I don't remember exactly what month, or whether it occurred in Pearl Harbor, Espirito Santo or at Ulithi in the Pacific. I was a fire controlman on USS South Dakota and was playing baseball on the ship's team. On this particular day I was in the lineup for a game with the USS Alabama, a sister ship of ours.

There on the mound was the opposing pitcher, Bob Feller—who, prior to his military service pitched for the Cleveland Indians. I never saw his three (3) pitches to me, But I heard them go by (they make like a *FHOOOMPHH* sound...) and I wasn't the only one to hear that sound that day.

Fast forward to 1990. Philadelphia had a sports station, WIP, and one of the broadcasters was the famous Tom Brookshire—a former Philadelphia Eagles defensive back. He was holding a contest called "What was your Malox Moment in Life". I entered the contest, told the above story, and I won!

The prize was a trip for two to the Super Bowl in New Orleans between the Denver Bronco's and the San Francisco 49ers.

My wife and I flew to New Orleans, all expenses paid, with the owner of the Eagles, Leonard Tose, Julius Erving and his wife, Tom Brookshire, and a plane loaded with many other celebrities. We were invited to all the parties and to the game.

It just shows that something can start out wrong (like being struck out in 3 pitches by Bob Feller) and end up with a wonderful lifetime memory.

Submitted by:

**Rich Silvers, BB-62 Docent
King of Prussia, Pennsylvania**



**Bob Feller, pitched for the
Cleveland Indians from
1936—1956,
with time out during
World War II.**

**266 victories and
2,581
strikeouts**

**and this was after missing almost 4 full
seasons during the war!
Plus... in those days, a major league pitcher was
expected to pitch all 9 innings!**

RIP Chief Bob Feller

Thursday, December 16, 2010 8:22 AM



The Naval History & Heritage Command joins a grateful nation in mourning the passing of our shipmate Chief Bob Feller, the Ace of the Greatest Generation. When asked once what was his most important victory, he replied, “World War II.”

Dr. Ed Furgol of the National Museum of the U.S. Navy has prepared a short vignette about Chief Feller’s naval service which originally appeared on Naval History Blog on 9 December 2010 – the 69th anniversary of his enlistment in the U.S. Navy. It is reprinted below:

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941, Major League Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt, asking him, “What do you want [baseball] to do? . . . We await your order.” The President replied, “I honestly feel it would be best for the country to keep baseball going.”

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941, Major League Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt, asking him, “What do you want [baseball] to do? . . . We await your order.” The President replied, “I honestly feel it would be best for the country to keep baseball going.” With this recommendation, the league began a massive effort to support the war. However, some players chose a more patriotic path. Waiving his draft deferment as the sole provider for his family, pitcher Robert Feller enlisted in the Navy on 9 December 1941, becoming the first Major League player to join the service.

Already a national star, Feller was first assigned as a physical training instructor. However, his desire to go into combat led him to volunteer for gunners’ school in 1942. Chief Petty Officer Feller was placed in command of a 40mm antiaircraft mount aboard **USS Alabama (BB 60)**, and served through the campaigns in the North Atlantic and throughout the Pacific theater. In March 1945 he reported to the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, Illinois, where he managed the baseball team. In August he returned to the Cleveland Indians and resumed his Major League career.

Feller got his nickname, “The Heater from Van Meter,” due to his lightning fastball and **his hometown, Van Meter, Iowa**. Some baseball experts have credited him as being the hardest throwing pitcher in history. An 8-time All-Star and a World Series champion, Feller’s number 19 was retired by the Cleveland Indians, for whom he played his entire 18-year career. He retired from baseball in 1956, and in 1962 he was elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame on the first ballot. Bob Feller also holds two other great distinctions: he never played a game in the minors after being signed by the Cleveland Indians, and he is the only pitcher in Major League history to throw a no-hitter on opening day.

Chief, you stand relieved. We have the watch.

(From the Naval History Blog, U.S. Naval Institute, Naval History and Heritage Command)

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Editor's Notes:

With more than 37,623,000 hits to date, (that's 37 MILLION - ranked #3 in the highest number of viewed teacher videos on *TeacherTube*), and well worth the time to view it...

Check out "*In memory of the fallen...*" A video account of D-Day in Normandy produced for teachers world-wide, and created by Battleship New Jersey volunteer Peter Fantacone. It tells Pete's story as a crewman aboard USS LCI (L) 492 at Normandy on 6 June 1944.



Figure 2
USS LCI(L) 492
"round con" version

One of the comments generated from the video:

"Tears welled up in my eyes with pride for my country while I watched. My father was in the artillery with the 91st division in Italy and served in 3 battles during WWII. Mr. Fantacone, thank you for honoring our veterans and our soldiers who never saw their loved ones again. I will always be grateful for my freedom which would not have happened without brave men and women like you and my dad. Thank you and God bless you for your service to our beautiful country."

http://www.teachertube.com/viewVideo.php?video_id=155454



Volunteer RM2 (Radioman 2nd Class)
Pete Fantacone
USS LCI (L) 492 – (Normandy Invasion WW2)
USS Columbus (CA 74)
1943 - 1946

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LOOKING BACK... The legacy of a USS New Jersey Plankowner...

My dad, **Chief Frank Wilson**, served 23 years in the Navy. In 1940 he enlisted at age 17 in the Minority Cruise Enlistment program and attended boot camp at Great Lakes but he can't remember his company number. Dad first served on the battleship USS Texas, the USS Bayfield, the USS Opportune, and in 1943, he was transferred to the USS New Jersey. When he told me he was a plankowner on the New Jersey, I was confused about what that meant. He then told me that "Plankowners" are those assigned to a ship when a ship is commissioned for the first time.

This past May my dad turned 90 years old and I was hoping that his World War II story could be recorded in *The Jerseyman*. I can only imagine that just a few of the World War II USS New Jersey's original "plankowners" are still with us.

Dad served in the Fourth Division and told me that he was assigned to man and fire the 5" 38-caliber guns. On page 64 of the War Log for the USS New Jersey is an article about my dad. The third paragraph states, "*Whenever there's work to be done [which is practically always] the division officer, Lt. Petix, invariably asks, "Where's Willy?" After looking around, he usually finds Wilson, BM1c, the leading P.O. who has the task well under way while his boatswains mates, coxswains and seaman are busy carrying, rigging or pulling something. Somewhere on the scene Ens. Bacich and Ens. Clark will be giving the boys lots of support – [moral]! Wilson often lets the officers supervise but no one has any doubts as to who is "boss" around here.*" That is my dad! Even though I did not serve in the military, I take pride in growing up under my dad's command.

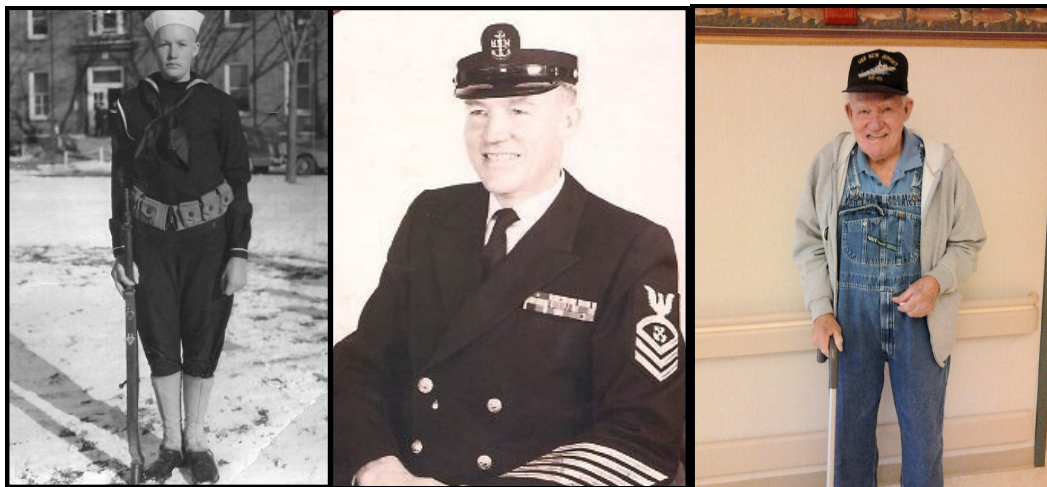
My dad has shared many stories about the USS New Jersey. One involved a Japanese Kamikaze plane that was headed straight for the ship. One of the gunners was able to shoot down the plane before it hit the ship. Another incident involved the dentist office, and when someone had moved to the front of the line. My dad then asked "*Who thinks they can cut in on this line?*" He was then informed it was Admiral Halsey! He also told me that he didn't think the Typhoon known as Cobra was too bad for the New Jersey because it was such a big ship.

Following service on the USS New Jersey, he served on destroyers, and he served as a Navy Recruiter in Hutchinson Kansas; he was stationed in Yokosuka, Japan at the SRF (ship repair facilities) and in Puerto Rico. In 1963 he retired. Eventually he returned to farming, raised a family and Dad currently resides at the Veterans Home in Cameron, Missouri.

He has attended a couple of reunions, and I know that he certainly would enjoy receiving a card or letter from any veterans from his era or maybe from those who served after he did. His address is Frank Wilson, 1111 Euclid Ave, Cameron, Mo 64429. Those with email can please send it to Dad in care of me... garywilson1433@Hotmail.com.

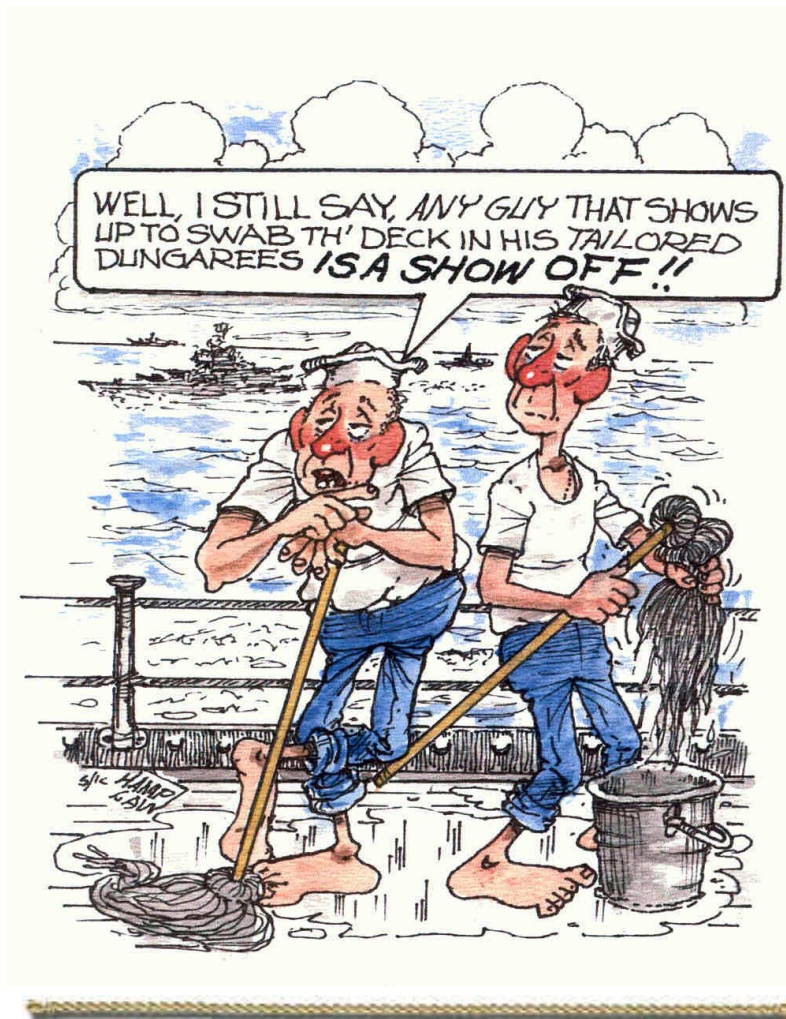
May God bless and keep you all and a special "Thank you" to all who have served. Freedom does have a price and I will always try to remember the many that paid with the ultimate sacrifice.

**Sincerely,
Gary W. Wilson
Emporia, Kansas**



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BATTLESHIP DAYS... BY HAMP LAW (1923 - 2010)



Disclaimer:

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