

MEMOIR: Irwin J. Kappes, Seaman 1/C, USNR, Born New Castle, Pa., 12/8/24, Drafted 5/7/43, Honorably Discharged, 2/15/46. Assignments: U.S.S. CHAMPLIN (DD-601), U.S.S. MOALE (DD-693), FLEET RECREATION & MORALE, 14TH NAVAL DISTRICT, OAHU, T.H.

This will not be a flag-waving, vainglorious account of bravery against adversity. Rather, it's the tale of a reluctant warrior. It is easy to forget that over 50% of Americans before the Pearl Harbor attack were against any involvement in the war that was already underway in Europe. And our family was especially against it, feeling that neither the Germans nor the Japanese had the wherewithal to attack the U.S., and that, even if Hitler should conquer all of Europe, he would not have it within his capability to strike our shores if we maintained an adequate defense. We felt that Roosevelt was maneuvering to get the U.S. involved by sending aid to Britain, thus inviting the justified wrath of the Germans. And in fact, there were some incidents of u-boat attacks on U.S. naval interests before Pearl Harbor. But that event changed everything and the Germans, sensing that we were already at war with them anyway, declared war on the U.S.—“just to make it official”, so to speak. That was our view. Our family's favorite president was George Washington (“No foreign entanglements”) and we subscribed to the idea of a Fortress America. It wouldn't be the right strategy today, but I'm convinced it made sense in the 1940s and that our provocation of the Japanese involved the U.S. needlessly in World War II. It's a minority opinion but I stand by it and no one can prove me wrong.

I grew up in a grimy steel town in western Pennsylvania of ethnic German immigrant parents from Austria-Hungary—a people known as “Transylvania Saxons”. Their homeland makes up the central one-fourth of present-day Romania. Actually, it's the Transylvania that filmmakers like to fantasize about. Being surrounded for centuries by alien, and usually hostile, Tatars, Turks, Huns, Kumans and many others, they tend toward clannishness, self-sufficiency and a fiercely independent streak.

In my working class neighborhood, boys played “cowboys and Indians”, but we never played “soldier”. I recall very vividly that a veteran of World War I spoke to us at school when I was in the fifth grade. He had been gassed in France and spoke movingly about the true horrors of war. After that I always regarded Hollywood war movies as exactly what they were—fiction at best, and propaganda at worst.

Military life, even the relatively mild version offered by the Boy Scouts, never held much appeal. I knew my life goals from as far back as I can remember. I wanted involvement in the graphic arts: as a printer, graphic artist, cartoonist, sign painter, or advertising man. I was very ambitious. But regimentation of any sort, for any purpose, was anathema. I knew I would not respond well to military discipline.

Against that background, I was drafted without any enthusiasm and when offered the choice of Army or Navy, chose the Navy. In my view, a clean bunk, even in the bowels of a crowded, vulnerable ship that might be sunk at any moment was preferable to a foxhole on some foreign beach.

Many of my fellow boots at Great Lakes Naval Training Station had enlisted with an entirely different attitude. Most were fiercely patriotic and imbued with the idea of defending the U.S., to the death if necessary—but never really believing that it would come to that. These jingoistic fellows received a rude awakening. Having expected that the U.S. Navy would harbor the idea that we were all fighting for the same goal and that we would all work together in amity and mutual respect, they were astonished to find that they were routinely hazed, demeaned, humiliated and gratuitously degraded, usually by poorly-educated Southerners who had enlisted early to escape the poverty of the south and had risen in rating and authority. I had had no such illusions, partly because the one advantage of being a pessimist is that one is seldom unpleasantly surprised.

There was one early indication of the mentality that prevailed among those who ran the Navy. In boot camp we were issued two pairs of nice black Blucher-type shoes with leather soles. But these leather soles were quickly overlaid with a thick black rubber half-sole. The ostensible reason was that we were going to be undergoing lots of marching drills, and surely we wouldn't want to damage our nice new shoes. In reality, the barracks floors were purposely finished in unvarnished pine and were required to be kept neat as a pin. But the black rubber soles on two hundred pairs of feet would make lots of black marks, and all these marks would have to be removed daily with steel wool on hands and knees. The obvious intent of this small-minded maneuver was to demonstrate "who was boss". Of course, a more mature, intelligent and less demoralizing method might have been found to get that message across.

I soon began to realize how to "game the system". One morning at muster, the company commander, C.P.O. Chittum, an Arkansan with a rich southern accent, asked if there was anybody who could touch-type. I had been warned never to volunteer for anything because some petty officers would ask for volunteers who could drive and they found themselves pushing a wheelbarrow. But somehow I felt Chittum was a straight-shooter and put my hand up. I was immediately made battalion clerk, replacing a Yeoman First Class who was being sent out to the fleet. I was in effect, the secretary to the Battalion Commander, who was a Lieutenant-junior grade. He was seldom around, so I usually had the office to myself. More importantly, I was relieved of all drills and training except for the so-called "musts"—tests, shots, etc. I was a non-swimmer and we had been warned that everyone had to be a qualified swimmer in order to graduate. Meanwhile we had to attempt to qualify every weekend. Each time I had to jump in I sank like a stone and was fished out by someone holding a long pole. In the end, they gave up and I graduated with the rest.

Upon graduation from boot camp I felt certain that I would be sent to a trade school because I had scored very high in the aptitude tests. But at this time there happened to be very few openings in the schools and nearly all of my boot company was sent out to the fleet as deckhands. Now, for those who don't know, a deckhand is the underclass aboard a navy ship. Traditionally, they are normally the unambitious and unmotivated. They are conscripted to clean the heads (toilets), do the mess-cooking ("KP"), paint, scrape, and scrub decks and handle the lines when the ship docks and re-fuels. And I guessed that many of them took it in stride.

Chief Chittum had assured us that the lack of assignment to a school was no major problem. We could always request the privilege of becoming a "striker" once we were assigned aboard ship. This meant requesting assignment to, say, the radio shack as an "apprentice" radioman. After a period of training on the job, one could then take the test and become a Radioman Third Class. From there, it would be up the chain of command to Second Class, then First, and finally, Chief. But the road to the top can take ten years and more, and very few WWII draftees were promoted to First Class or Chief.

Along with hundreds of others I was hustled aboard a troop train from Great Lakes to New York's Pier 92. The pier had been converted into a receiving station for naval personnel and was much reviled among sailors who had been through there because the living conditions and food were abominable. Fortunately my stay was short and several of us from my boot company were bussed over to the Brooklyn Navy Yard where we were given our first sight of our new "home"—the U.S.S. CHAMPLIN (DD-601). My first reaction was wonderment that a ship this size could make it across the Atlantic. It was in total disarray—with cables and spare parts lying everywhere and civilian welders and shipwrights bustling about.

In a way I welcomed the idea of shipboard life, even under these circumstances because I had always had a fascination for the sea and for ships, and was somewhat looking forward to the experience. But meanwhile, I was a deckhand. The opportunity to "strike" for a rating was not forthcoming because no openings were available. The skipper of the CHAMPLIN felt the need only for deckhands.

Compounding this disappointment, the Bureau of Naval Personnel had assigned many more men to the ship than there were accommodations for. I was instructed to string up a hammock in the only place available, the mess hall. This was O.K. because a hammock is much more comfortable in the rough seas of the north Atlantic than a bunk. You could get tossed out of a bunk and in fact, each bunk had two straps for use in securing oneself against this danger. When I had the Midnight to 4 A.M. watch it meant I had the privilege of sleeping in rather than having to get up at reveille. But because my hammock was hung directly over the mess tables, I nevertheless had to get up at 5 A.M. and try to find a nook or cranny to stow it. It usually ended up next to the slop can where the men emptied their trays after breakfast. So my hammock bore many insults of runny egg and syrup stains.

It is important to understand that, like everywhere else, there is a hierarchy aboard every naval vessel. The officers were a class unto themselves. Of course, they had their own caste system, with ensigns being at the low end of the pecking order, and a sub-class of both officers and enlisted men was the Naval Reserve. Reservists were those who enlisted for "the duration" and Regular Navy personnel were those who were career Navy people. Reservist officers were usually held in mild contempt by Annapolis graduates and the enlisted draftees and voluntary enlisted reservists were also disdained by careerist Regular Navy people.

At the lowest end of the social order aboard ship were the blacks, who were not considered competent to do anything but serve as personal servants to the officers. It never occurred to most white officers and enlisted men how demeaning and unjust this was, and I include myself in this. Blacks were even assigned separate living spaces. However, conditions were simply too cramped to permit separate washroom and toilet facilities. And their battle stations were usually several decks down where they served as ammunition handlers. Any battle station was potentially dangerous, but these assignments were almost guaranteed to be deadly in the event of being sunk or receiving severe damage. I only became aware of the injustices inflicted on blacks later in the war when I became friendly with a fellow by the name of "Miller". His wife happened to be from my hometown and he had often visited there, so that established a sort of bond. He told me with tears in his eyes of incidents in which he had been humiliated by thoughtless officers. The Navy was far more backward in its race relations than the Army.

As small as a destroyer was, few sailors ever were allowed to venture into what was called "officers' country". The two under classes aboard a destroyer were the "First Division" and the "Second Division". The former comprised the deckhands and their supervisors, the Boatswain's Mates, who did the housekeeping chores as described above for the forward half of the ship. The Second Division did the same for the after-half. To make a comparison with civilian society you might consider the two deck-force divisions the "working class" folks. All other divisions were equivalent to the "middle class", the officers of course being the elite. The "O" Division (for ordnance) had charge of maintaining all guns and torpedoes, the "E" Division were the engineers who kept the ship running and supplied with fresh water, and the "C" Division (communications) were the quartermasters, signalmen, radarmen, sonarmen, radiomen, yeomen (office workers) and storekeepers. You might even stretch the analogy a bit and think of the "C" Division as the equivalent of the upper middle class because their work required a bit more intellectual rather than mechanical talent. (I'm sure this would be hotly disputed by members of the other divisions, however).

One thing that always intrigues me when I think of my time aboard the CHAMPLIN is that I remember a constant litany of woes, scurrilous oaths and condemnations of the officers—most of which I agreed with. It was "us" against "them". It was not unlike the attitude of rambunctious schoolboys against a principal or of street gangs versus the cops. This attitude extended even to boatswain's mates for the deckhands because the boatswains were in actuality the foremen of a crew who were for the most part unwilling and unmotivated shirkers. And that included me. True, we did have two officers aboard the CHAMPLIN who were really decent men and who often showed genuine concern for the men. But for the most part I—we—regarded them as arrogant and snotty.

However, at reunions today no one seems to recall all the acrimony and downright hatred. It's as though we were all happy-go-lucky comrades in arms, including the officers. I guess that's because most people don't nurse a grudge and the intervening years have served to gloss over all the anger. But then, maybe the ones with sharp, unpleasant memories are those who choose not to relive them, so perhaps they are not

among those who attend reunions. We have located a lot of former shipmates who simply have no interest in reliving the war years.

My embitterment with the CHAMPLIN began early. The First Division had the responsibility of supplying helmsmen. Now, every watch aboard a destroyer was boring: There was no way around that. But duty on the helm provided a bit of relief from the tedium. More importantly, it provided an opportunity to peek into the world of the officers. They populated the bridge and now and then a few tidbits of gossip and information as to our destination, etc. might be obtained. This job also provided some insight into the nature and character of the captain, which was always a topic of discussion among the enlisted crew. For example, we always assumed that the captain would have an iron stomach in the always- rough North Atlantic, but our captain proved to be as vulnerable as a society matron. And even when he was not seasick, he was a miserable martinet quite reminiscent of Captain Queeg.

One example will illustrate my point: I was once assigned as a surface lookout. There were four lookouts at all times and they were stationed high up in the barbette. Each one was given a sector to scan continuously and ordered to report anything in the water—especially periscopes of course, but any debris as well. I was new aboard ship, didn't even know how many degrees there were in the compass, and had been given no instruction whatever. Suddenly one day, the commodore of our squadron entered the barbette, focused on me for some reason and asked, "What degree range are you scanning?" I could only answer shamefacedly, "I don't know, sir, I'm just looking from here to here". It wasn't the answer he was looking for. The commodore was the captain's boss. He said nothing and went below. Minutes later the captain came up and, red in the face, read me the riot act. He had been criticized for failure to train his crew properly and didn't like it. This troubled man, who I never saw crack a smile the entire seven months I was on the ship, went on to become the captain of a capital ship, the commandant of the U.S. Naval Academy, and the superintendent of the Boston Naval Yard before his ultimate retirement as a Rear Admiral. This should tell a lot about the U.S. Navy in World War II.

I can cite another example of this man's ineptitude. The first watch I was assigned was on the searchlight. The searchlight was about 4 feet in diameter and mounted on a high platform amidships. In the rough and cold North Atlantic, it was a particularly onerous duty, but I never complained about that. What I couldn't understand was why I was given absolutely no training or instruction on the operation of the light! The ostensible purpose of having men on watch was to have someone immediately available to operate it should the need suddenly arise.

There are some who will say that the captain cannot be held responsible for his petty officers' failure to instruct the men properly. *Au contraire*. The captain is responsible for everything aboard ship, just as the CEO of a corporation is responsible for everything that happens on his watch. After all, if the ship's torpedomen sink an enemy carrier it is the captain who gets the Navy Cross, not the torpedomen. You can't have it both ways. It is one of the captain's prime responsibilities to insure that the men are

properly instructed, and the commodore was correct in chastising the captain over his failure to see that I was properly trained.

As a self-acknowledged maverick misfit, I was frequently insufficiently respectful to the boatswain's mates. On one occasion I was assigned to the scullery at a time when the automatic dishwasher was broken and every tray, cup, bowl and the flatware had to be washed by hand. I foiled this deliberate "gottcha" attempt by quickly determining a way to wash everything even faster than when the dishwasher was operative. There was a large, deep stainless sink which I filled with boiling hot water and to which I added a liberal dose of sodium triphosphate—a strong chemical which is the active ingredient in "Soilax". With a pair of heavy rubber gloves I would hold about 8 trays at a time, dip them in the solution a few times and they came out clean, needing only to be rinsed. (Inevitably, trickles of water would run down the inside of the gloves, the result being that I lost my fingerprints—my fingertips became entirely smooth). Being a poor sailor—and a disgruntled one at that, I neglected to tie down the racks holding the ceramic cups and bowls. Given the heavy seas of the north Atlantic, the night hours were punctuated by banging and crashing. Until we made port in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, most of my shipmates were deprived of coffee, breakfast cereal and soup. I noted a considerable drop in my popularity, but there were a few remaining cups and bowls that I was able to dole out to favored shipmates.

Another time when the boatswain considered I needed to be taught a lesson, I was assigned to go to the bow of the ship and then down two decks to paint the storage locker. The sea was rough so the hatch had to be closed, making the locker very stuffy. The ship's pitching and rolling was such that it was almost impossible to stand, much less work. The job was, of course, not urgent and could have been done while we were in port, but this was "payback" time. Afterward I sensed that there was a little displeasure that I hadn't gotten sick.

Fortunately, I never got seasick the entire time I served aboard ships. I came close to it the first day the CHAMPLIN left the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I had been overindulging in alcoholic beverages the night before in New York and, in preparation for the evening meal, was sent down to the frozen food locker to toss frozen poultry up to a shipmate on the deck above. Somehow, these motions and the temperatures made me start to get sick. I determined two things then and there. First, I might be on a destroyer for a long time in a long war and that my life would be absolutely miserable if I were to constantly suffer from seasickness. Second, I must put myself in a position where I simply could not afford to become seasick. The next question was how to accomplish that. I determined that, cruel and inconsiderate as it might be, I would poke fun at those who did get seasick. This purposely put me in the position where my life would become intolerable should I succumb to *mal de mer*. The contumely that would ensue would be unbearable. Seasickness would be out of the question. It worked and once again demonstrated the power of mind over matter. I never even came close to seasickness again, even during the fabled typhoon in the western Pacific in 1944 when 3 destroyers were lost in a "once in a century" typhoon. Needless to say, all this did not endear me to my shipmates, so there was a price. I am not proud of my meanness, but at the time I saw no alternative.

Incidentally, people prone to seasickness were never given shore assignments for the simple reason that many sailors would feign it simply to get shore duty—and I would cheerfully have been one of them. But life on a ship must have been sheer hell for some. We had a fellow from Wisconsin who got sick the minute the ship moved and he once told me that he often wished he would die, but the only thing that kept him alive was the knowledge that the ship would reach port and that he would then be well again.

In the latter half of 1943, the u-boat menace had nearly vanished and convoy duty in the North Atlantic, with visits to places like Northern Ireland, Casablanca and Algiers became much preferable for destroyer sailors to duty in the Pacific. First, with the home port being the Brooklyn Navy Yard, it was always possible to get a 3-day pass and get home for a brief visit. Second, once in the Pacific, it was understood that the ship wouldn't be likely to return to the States until war's end. Meanwhile, the war in the Pacific had heated up and destroyers were favored targets of the kamikazes. Of course, none of us knew of the development of the atom bomb and most believed that the war might last another three to five years.

The captain and his minions took advantage of these facts and the warning came down from the top: Tow the line. You have good duty. "Screw up" and you will be transferred to a new ship going straight to the Pacific.

Of course, they were right. It was far better duty than being in the South Pacific. Between taking convoys to Europe or North Africa we had the opportunity for liberties in New York. With as little as ten cents in your pocket you could have a very enjoyable liberty. First off you would jump the turnstile of the subway. There were no security guards, and besides, who would arrest a sailor in wartime? Once in Manhattan you might go to the U.S.O. at 99 Park Avenue where they distributed free Broadway stage show and movie tickets. And at the northern end of Times Square there was a Pepsi-Cola canteen for servicemen/women where they dispensed free Pepsi and the hamburgers and hot dogs cost 5-cents each. For real action entertainment, you could go and nurse a beer at Mickey Walker's bar on Eighth Avenue, next to the old Madison Square Garden (where Marilyn Monroe later gave her famous "Mister President" performance) and observe the fights that would break out with amazing regularity. It was probably the roughest bar in the city—but none of the drunks ever laid a hand on a serviceman.

None of this mattered to me. I was fed up with the captain, his schoolmaster-type dress inspections, and orders that were designed simply to exert his authority. And I had "had it" with being an ignominious deckhand on what I considered a hell ship. Furthermore, I simply couldn't believe that this ship could be a typical navy destroyer. I knew that the only way to get a transfer was to incur the captain's real disfavor. I got the opportunity one morning when a boatswain ordered me to do something while I was having breakfast. I responded that I would attend to it as soon as I finished eating. He responded, "No, you do it *now*". With that I suggested that he perform an act that would have been anatomically challenging and heaved a coffee cup at him. He put me on report, which meant that I would have to appear for the weekly "captain's mast"—Navy talk for "disciplinary hearing". That did the trick. I was given a deck court-martial, fined and

restricted to the ship for three weeks. More importantly, and to my great delight, as soon as the ship came into port, I was transferred, as expected, for further destroyer duty, to the Receiving Station in Norfolk, Virginia.

From the very beginning I knew that the U.S.S. MOALE (DD-693) would be a much different ship. During the several weeks in Norfolk we underwent training and got a chance to size up the officers and, most important of all, the captain. After all, as they say, "A fish rots from the head down". But this captain was a real gentleman. His name was Walter M. Foster, Commander, USN from Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Unlike the CHAMPLIN skipper whose name is best forgotten, he was also competent. (It's funny how officers leave so many little clues that enable even enlisted men to discern whether they know their stuff). For example, while the crew was being assembled in Norfolk, Va. the ship's executive officer came around asking if there were any men with experience on the helm. Most of the crew were new recruits and others with no sea experience so he considered the staffing of the helm watch critical to fill. Having been a helmsman I knew that there was really nothing to it and that it actually required no more than about five minutes of training. It was many times easier than driving a car. That told me something about the experience of the ship's second in command. I volunteered, and this was another instance in which the injunction never to volunteer proved wrong, as we shall see.

Foster was always confident and equable. Moreover, he seemed always able to discuss the inner workings of nearly every piece of equipment on the ship. A little anecdote will illustrate: We had two drinking fountains (scuttlebutts) on the ship, one fore and one aft. The one nearest to my bunk broke down one day and there wasn't a single man in the engineering crew who was able to fix it. For a week I always had to go back aft for a drink of water. One day when I went on watch I saw the captain sitting on the deck next to the scuttlebutt surrounded by tools and parts. When I returned from watch four hours later I was able to get a drink of water before turning in.

Another little anecdote illustrates the nature of our skipper. One of my shipmates was a southerner and he appeared at captain's mast for a disciplinary hearing over some infraction. The captain asked if the plea was "guilty or not guilty" and the response was "guilty, sir". Sensing the boy's southern accent, the captain asked, "Where are you from, boy?" The answer was "North Carolina, sir". The captain gave a half-smile and said, "That's close enough. Case dismissed."

The MOALE was one of the first ships of the new SUMNER-class and I remember thinking when I first saw her that it was the handsomest warship I had ever seen—with the possible exception of the French battleship RICHELIEU that I had seen steaming out of Brooklyn Navy Yard in late 1943. Our ship had one design feature which I believe was never before offered on a U.S. destroyer. You could walk from fore to aft without going out on deck. This may seem like a minor point to a landlubber, but in heavy weather, it was not unusual for large waves to sweep over the main deck and it was not unknown for sailors to be lost over the side. In such weather it would be impossible to launch a rescue

effort. The way we dealt with this problem on the CHAMPLIN was to make a dash for it in between waves. Sometimes we miscalculated and got drenched.

The SUMNER-class ships also had one other "crew-friendly" feature. The mess hall didn't do double duty as a living compartment as on the BENSON-class ship I had been on previously. This was an important distinction. For example, the watches were rotated weekly, but if you had the 8-to-12 watch that meant that you were on duty from 8 A.M. until noon, and also from 8 P.M. until midnight. Now, if you had the 12-to-4, you were entitled to ignore the call to reveille and sleep in. But if your bunk was in the mess hall you nevertheless had to get up when the sleeping compartment was turned into an eating station.

The eight-hour day that one spent on watch, for seamen at least, was not the sum total of the workday. If one was not on watch during the daytime hours, these were the hours during which one's cleaning station had to be attended to. (Being on "watch" meant "duty station". For gunner's mates, the duty station was of course, the guns. All guns were manned at all times when underway, but routine maintenance was also done during the watch).

Most sailors aboard ship had a "cleaning station", meaning a certain area for which they had responsibility to keep clean, and if necessary, scraped and painted. If one's cleaning station was outside, scraping and painting was almost a daily chore because ships deteriorate rapidly under the corrosive effect of saltwater. Among many civilians, the Navy has the reputation of being spotless, and on the surface it would appear so. But I can recall one incident that gives the lie to this notion. The cramped compartment in which my bunk was located was one deck below the mess hall. It was about 35x20 feet, and with approximately 40 bunks, arranged three-high. One day in port a sailor came back aboard drunk and vomited on the deck about 8 feet from my bunk. A boatswain's mate ordered him to clean up his mess, but he paid no heed. His rationale was that this was not his cleaning station. The standoff continued for several days, but meanwhile the stench was sufficient to make many of us go out and sleep outdoors on the main deck.

Actually, in warm weather, despite forced air ventilation tubes, the air in sleeping compartments was unbearably hot and humid. And the smell of bodies was also not an enhancement. Most men simply took their kapok lifejackets and went topside to sleep right on the steel deck, using the lifejacket as a pillow. My favorite spot was under the torpedo tubes. (But one had to be careful not to turn over because the torpedoes were coated with heavy grease).

When I came aboard the MOALE, as alluded to above, I found a totally different navy than the one I had experienced aboard the CHAMPLIN. In fact, I was able to exploit the inexperience of the officers to my advantage. Every morning the crew mustered and the roll was called, each division holding muster in a different location on the main deck.

On the CHAMPLIN the practice was to take their helmsmen from the First Division. On the MOALE, the helmsmen were drawn from the "C" division. This made better sense because radar and sonar watches required concentration and to spell the strain, these men were sent up to the bridge for helm duty as relief from the tedium. Well, because I was recorded as a helmsman, the First Division officer thought I was in the "C" Division but the "C" Division officer had no record that I was on the ship at all. When I attended the first muster of the First Division, where—as a swabby (Navy slang for "mop-wielder")—I really belonged, my name wasn't called. The next day I went to the "C" Division muster and my name wasn't called there either. Officially, I didn't exist. I have often wondered what might have happened had I simply walked off the ship and gone home. I had no watches to stand, and no work details. Now I was really convinced I was going to love this ship.

After about a week of just eating and sleeping I began to realize that this couldn't continue and that I would soon be in big trouble. After muster one morning I went up to the officer in charge of the "C" Division and let him know that someone must have made "a mistake" and that my name hadn't appeared on the muster roll. (But since I had been in the First Division on the CHAMPLIN, that's where I really belonged on the MOALE as well). I now figured I was in a position to choose the division that best suited me. At this point the lieutenant realized that I had taken a paid vacation for a week but he wasn't going to put me on report because he would have been in much more trouble than I. He sort of sheepishly asked which rating I would like to "strike" for and I replied that being a radarman would suit me just fine.

There were four of us on every watch, meaning a total of twelve radarmen in the crew. They were all likeable and companionable and the most experienced of them were very helpful in showing me the ropes. And I remain in touch with a few to this day.

While I was aboard, the MOALE earned battle stars for the Battle of Ormoc Bay, the invasion of Mindoro, the invasion of Lingayen Gulf and Iwo Jima. I personally observed no action however, inasmuch as my battle station was in the Combat Information Center (CIC), although from that vantage point I knew a lot of what was going on. This is in contrast to the fellows we referred to as "snipes" (the engineering crew) who got little information and must have been even more terrified than the rest of us.

People ask what it really felt like to be in combat. Actually, I was more terrified of Mother Nature than the Japanese. While on convoy duty in the North Atlantic we had storms that I once felt certain would be our ship's undoing. I was on the helm when the ship rolled to what must have been a 45 degree angle. I held onto the wheel for dear life with my feet barely touching the deck. In combat however, my first instinct was always survival. So I never worked more efficiently in my life. I didn't want any slip-up credited to me. Consequently, while I felt a terror throughout, I never came close to freezing or panicking. The feeling of terror became really palpable when we learned that our sister ship, the U.S.S. COOPER (DD-695) had just been sunk by a Japanese destroyer in what later became known as the Battle of Ormoc Bay. The danger was too great for us to stop

and attempt a rescue of survivors, but roughly half of the COOPER crew survived and were picked up the next morning by a very courageous PBY-Catalina seaplane pilot. His plane was so overloaded that he could barely get it airborne.

Our crew had been in a jocular mood when we learned from the Captain that we were going to see our first real combat. I think many of the fellows expected it would be like a John Wayne movie. They found out differently when we were attacked by Japanese planes even before we reached our target area. From then on it was mayhem writ large—continuing attacks from planes, but now also from small boats, shore batteries and ships in the harbor. Our leaders had never expected such a ferocious enemy reaction because in recent days, Ormoc had appeared close to being secured. And in fact, the original plan called for us to repeat the sweep of Ormoc Bay on the following night. That's what now had us terrified. The men had now experienced combat as it really is. And in contrast with the mood of bravado that prevailed in the afternoon chow line *before* our first battle, the mood was now solemn and hardly a word was spoken. But our commanders apparently figured that the scheduled raid didn't warrant the potential risk, and the operation was cancelled—much to the relief of everyone involved.

Destroyers did not rate having a chaplain, but there always seemed to be at least one sailor aboard who was able to do a creditable job of hosting a non-denominational worship service. On a normal Sunday, only eight or ten men would show up in the mess hall where the services were held. But a special service was held the evening before our first combat mission and this time the mess hall was chock full. No officers attended and I reasoned that they must have felt they had a special pass through the Pearly Gates.

One incident illustrates the courage of Captain Foster. During the invasion of Mindoro in mid-December, 1944, an LST (Landing Ship-Tank) was hit by a kamikaze and burned furiously. The Captain knew that the LST was loaded with aviation fuel and bombs and might be blown sky-high any moment, but he quickly went alongside to rescue some of the crew, including a grateful captain. This event was photographed from another ship and can be found on the Internet's Navsource site.

The radar officer on the MOALE was a lieutenant junior grade and I can truthfully say he changed my life in two significant ways. First, he continually urged his men to seek a college degree after the war, especially since the G.I. Bill had been passed. Secondly, he insisted that all of us who were not "rated" (meaning third- or second-class petty officers with the radarman specialty) should take the test and become petty officers. He was well meaning on both scores, but when he insisted that I take the test because he wanted all of his men to be rated, I respectfully declined. When he asked why I would turn down a higher rating and more pay I explained that it was my opinion that the war would last at least 5 more years and that my goal was to take the chance that I might some day be transferred to shore duty. (No matter how good a ship was, all that most men talked about—besides girls, life at home, was the faint hope of getting shore duty). It wasn't fear of combat that concerned us but rather the total loss of privacy, sexual deprivation, crowding, and being constantly surrounded by other men, some of whom made life even more unpleasant than it needed be. So since the radarman rating was a

“seagoing rating” and would condemn me forever to duty aboard a ship (as opposed to a yeoman rating, which was found more commonly at shore installations), I reasoned it wasn’t worth giving up the albeit slim chance for shore duty for an extra ten or fifteen dollars a month.

I was surprised when the lieutenant responded by saying he understood and that he would see what he could do for me. Not knowing him all that well, I took this to be an empty promise because a lieutenant junior grade normally would have little ability to obtain a transfer for a seaman to shore duty. We were on our way to Pearl Harbor at the time, after having been damaged (by heavy weather) after the Battle of Iwo Jima. And about two weeks after our arrival, orders were received by our Executive Officer for the transfer of Irwin J. Kappes, S1/C, to Aiea Receiving Station for reassignment.

You have to realize how extraordinary this was. Normally, a “draft”—or order for transfer of enlisted personnel—called for personnel by rating only—only in rare instances by name. A draft might read, “transfer 5 Seamen 1/C, 2 Torpedomen 3/C”, etc. When a specific individual was named in a draft this sent an immediate signal that a powerful individual—a congressman or a high naval officer had interceded in favor of a relatively insignificant enlisted man. And since someone obviously had gone over the head of the Captain and Executive Officer, they would both be outraged but powerless to do anything about it.

What I did not know was that my lieutenant had had a friend in civilian life who happened to be the commandant of the Aiea Receiving Station. He and his staff had the job of re-assigning personnel to either ships or shore installations, so their discretionary powers were very broad indeed from the perspective of a lowly Seaman. Now, men flowed into and out of Aiea at the rate of approximately 2,000 men a day, so decisions as to deployment received little individual consideration. But as soon as I reported aboard at Aiea I was instructed to appear at the office of the commandant. This was the second highly unusual aspect of this transfer. The third would be even more striking.

The commander shook hands with me (highly unusual between officer and enlisted man) and asked me to sit down and make myself comfortable. He then asked what kind of work I was qualified for. This question took me by complete surprise. Here I was—a seaman used to the rigors of destroyer duty—and suspecting only that I might be assigned to shore duty of one sort or another. I’d have been glad for any job ashore, even hauling trash or wading knee-deep in cesspools. I responded truthfully that in civilian life I had been a sign painter. The commander frowned and said, “Well, we don’t get too much call for sign painters but I’m sure we can find you something. Meanwhile, I want you to bunk down with ship’s company and when something comes along I’ll let you know”. Being a temporary part of ship’s company meant that I had much better quarters, somewhat better food and freedom from having to go on working parties. I was dumbfounded at this special attention but quite elated. While most of the other transferees at Aiea were housed in huge impersonal barracks, slept in bunks four-high, and had to go on work details, I was told to make my temporary home in a small barracks whose only other occupant was the base Master-at-Arms. He was a former sheriff from the southwest who seemed to

have no discernible duties or responsibilities to match his lofty title and he spent most of his time fabricating costume jewelry and selling it to the transient sailors who kept flowing through the camp. This was my first brush with the “shore duty navy”.

I enjoyed about two weeks of this easy life when the commander sent for me. In still another surprising development, he said, “I have something you might like. They need a sign painter at a Marine base in central Oahu. But if it’s not to your liking, I want you to promise you’ll tell me so and we’ll wait until something better comes along”. The treatment I had been accorded until now had been extraordinary but this was over the top. Here I was, a seaman, expecting nothing, and pleased as punch just to be on dry land, and I’m being encouraged to be picky about my next assignment!

The Marine base was comprised of several rows of Quonset huts in a sun-baked area of red clay and weeds, very unlike the Oahu one sees depicted in travel literature. The base sign painter had been re-assigned and he had been the sole occupant of one of the huts. Half of the hut consisted of his living quarters and the other half was his shop. It was a six-foot commute to work every morning. But there was one drawback. The corrugated steel hut was quite hot most of the time. Nevertheless, aboard ship, which was also hot and uncomfortable, I could only dream about an assignment like this. Up until now, I’ve been describing the inexplicable behavior of others. This was truly a “dream assignment”, not only because it was on dry land but because I now had the opportunity to do the kind of work I enjoyed most. Sign painting and lettering have always been almost therapeutic for me and I once briefly aspired to become a designer of type faces. When I think about what I did next I can only shake my head in wonderment at my gall and irrationality. I actually went back to the commander and said that, mindful of his promise to try to find something better if I didn’t find the new job up to my expectations, I would take my chances and give the process more time.

Less than a week later, the Commander called me in and smiled, saying, “I think you’ll like this one. Have a look and let me know”. A unit under the command of Commander Hickey was named “Fleet Recreation and Morale, 14th Naval District” and it ran about 7 or 8 facilities scattered around the island—some for officers and others for enlisted personnel. There was also a small beach club for WAVE officers. The commander explained that signs were constantly needed in all of the facilities and I could choose for myself at which facility I would like to make my headquarters. (The WAVE beach club was, of course, ruled out). When needed, a jeep would be at my disposal. I didn’t need to know any more. I went back to Aiea and told the commander that I’d found my new home. When I think today of the *chutzpah* it took to suddenly become “picky” about a shore assignment after having been on a ship where I had been dreaming about shore duty—*any* shore duty! But then, the commander had invited my audaciousness and I simply took advantage of it.

I chose to bunk down at the newly-opened Commissioned Officers’ Beach Club in the village of Kailua at 344 N. Kalaeo Avenue—a street that ran right along the beach in an exclusive district. The club was established in a home that had been built by a president of the Anaconda Copper Co. and it had a copper roof. It was built in modern

style, with a large and lavishly landscaped atrium. In recent years however, it had been owned by a Hawaiian businessman of Chinese origin. The property was planted in pandanus palms, royal palms, orchids and the rare white bird-of-paradise. When the owner leased the furnished house to the Navy he left behind his dog, a large and beautiful Great Dane named Kublai Khan, but the dog unfortunately had a growth on his hind quarters. One of the dozens of officers who came to the Club every day happened to be a compassionate surgeon and he tried operating on the dog but it was to no avail. We all grieved for K.K. He had become a mascot to the crew and we all loved horsing around with him.

As the sign painter for the unit, I later learned that I was replacing an artist who was a fine artist specializing in landscapes, but who wasn't very good at lettering. I was the exact opposite. One of the first things I was ordered to do at the Club was to paint an 8x30 foot mural on the most prominent interior wall of the house. Now, you have to know that there was *already* a mural on the wall, and it was a delicate and wispy landscape of a fir tree forest. It mirrored the fir trees that bordered the property on both sides so it was a fortuitous choice of subject by the Japanese artist who had painted it. You also have to know that the Navy had agreed to return the property to its prior condition at expiration of the lease.

But none of this mattered to Commander Hickey. He wanted a rip-roaring Pacific naval battle scene. First of all, I had been a dropout at the Art Institute of Pittsburgh and while I had done many paintings, I had never painted a mural of any sort, much less one on that scale. So I went to Lieutenant Jack Puryear who was the Club's officer-in-charge and pleaded to leave the existing mural in place on the ground that visiting officers were for the most part combat veterans who were coming to our club for a respite and relaxation. Instead of reminding them once again of the horror of battle, we should be creating an atmosphere of serenity and luxury. Puryear agreed and managed to convince the Commander. (In civilian life, Puryear had been a star college quarterback and after the war became head coach in the St. Petersburg, Florida school system. There is a large sports park there now named in his honor). I have never been fond of sports but he taught me the importance of sports in shaping the character of young men and in developing their leadership capabilities.

Anyhow, the avuncular Commander Hickey was not one of those officers who were officious and not subject to reason. I am ashamed to confess that if asked about my greatest accomplishment during my navy tour of duty, I would have to reply that it consisted of saving that delicate and wistful Japanese-style mural!

The Beach Club was an idyllic respite from everything I had known before in the Navy. I had had no idea that there even existed such assignments in the U.S. Navy. And when I thought about it, I realized that in a real sense, I had been in *three different navies*. Duty aboard the CHAMPLIN was like the so-called "Old Navy" of pre-war days. With no war to fight, the entire navy had apparently been like one big seagoing Marine boot camp. Unnecessary inspections, sadism thinly disguised as necessary discipline, an abundance of degrading "make work" assignments, petty harassment of the weak by the

genuine hardship cases were given air vouchers. Civilian air transport was in its infancy then and the planes were small, slow and unpressurized. When my turn came I plopped my seabag down in front of the desk with the neck of the Jack Daniels bottle showing. This attracted the attention of the Yeoman 2/C who was issuing tickets. I said "I hardly think this bottle is going to make it in one piece on my long trip. I'd gladly give it up for a small favor". The yeoman, being part of the "Third" Navy, immediately knew what I was talking about. Without a word he swept the bottle under his desk and wrote me out an air ticket. *The lieutenant had been right. About ten hours and six stops later I was in New York.*

Lest this not seem extraordinary, bear in mind that at this time there was a massive sealift underway transporting hundreds of thousands of soldiers and sailors every week from the Pacific to their homes in the U.S. Men were put aboard like cattle on supply ships, carriers—anything that moved, and most of them went the long way through the Panama Canal because the transcontinental railroads were also jammed. The power that our lieutenant wielded could get him almost anything he wanted on Oahu, and he had demonstrated that he had a long reach. This was the third navy that I sometimes heard referred to as the Cumshaw Navy.

But that shore-based third navy was as utterly incompetent as the Old Navy of the CHAMPLIN's captain. One example will suffice. Long before I was assigned to the Beach Club, President Roosevelt visited Pearl Harbor to consult with General Mac Arthur and Admiral Nimitz. (Actually, there was no need for such a conference and Mac Arthur strongly resented being taken away from his duties in the South Pacific, but FDR was at the time running for his third term and wanted to present himself to the voters as the "indispensable leader" fully in charge). Our Commander Hickey had just completed a swimming pool half the size of a football field near Pearl Harbor and it was his pride and joy. But when Nimitz and the other brass found out about FDR's intended visit and learned that he wanted to make a tour of Pearl Harbor, they panicked. They reasoned that FDR might consider the pool a frivolous waste when men were fighting and dying in the western Pacific, so they reluctantly had the multi-million dollar pool bulldozed.

The first part of this story had been related to me by a man who had served with the Oahu R&R unit from its beginning and knew about this episode firsthand. It was only three years ago that I read a book about the naval history of World War II and learned that, after his Pearl Harbor tour, FDR and Admiral Nimitz were enjoying a few martinis in Nimitz's home at Makalapa when the president leaned over to the admiral and said, "You know, Chester, what you fellows need out here is a swimming pool."

Although I cannot vouch for the exact words of quotations cited above, I believe them to have been faithfully reconstructed in their meaning and all experiences cited are, to the best of my recollection, true and accurate.

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