

VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #5

2005



The VWOA Email Newsletters Edition 3 and 4 with the reproduction of the letter to Edwin F. Pleuler by Earl W. Korf evoked a lot of nice comments from the Membership. This was one of the most enjoyable.

A NOTE OF THANKS:

Thanks for putting me on the e-mail List for the VWOA Newsletter. I have received the election ballot and will mail it in.

I knew Earl Korf very well. He sponsored me for membership in VWOA many years ago. I paid him a visit in Lincroft, NJ several years ago when I was on a biz trip to the Bell Labs in Holmdel, NJ. Another time, on a similar trip, I went to one of the famous Colt's Neck luncheon meetings and saw Earl again. We became close friends via SOWP radio skeds. He was a very skilled CW op with a great fist that was always easy to copy.

I moved east from Ohio in 1999. Lived in Newark, DE for 5 years and continued radio contacts with Earl. I edited the SOWP newsletter for about 10 years and published several stories written by Earl. I still have his MS for some of them. He was well known and greatly respected by hundreds of fellow brass-pounders in VWOA, QCWA, SOWP, Morse Telegraph Club, museum groups etc. Even though he became a Silent Key in Nov. 1963, he is still missed on the air.

-73 de Ted Phelps, W8TP

*T.K. Phelps W8TP
His XYL, Jodie & Grandson, Karl Nieberding*

Bernard Flatow to be the Keynote Speaker at the VWOA Fall Luncheon. The 80th Annual Business Luncheon will take place on Saturday, November 19, 2005 at the Top Deck of the Seamen's Church Institute, 241 Water Street, New York City. Notices with Reservation Forms will go out to VWOA Members in October.

SILENT KEYS:

The following announcement was received in the mail. If anyone has more information on this sad news, please contact us at the VWOA!

We regret to inform you that pensioner William Bohn whose last ship was the OMI Charger passed away on 28 July 2005

VWOA Member William B. Devoe AA3YR tells us about Diaries kept by him while on World War II Voyages in Liberty Ships and now has them told as stories to entertain his Grand Children. He has a very busy every day schedule taking care of his ill wife Helga. She is an ISU Gold Medallist in Ice Skating. In 1945 she won the Austrian Figure Skating championship. We all wish him well in helping his Wife and entertaining his Grand Children.

I am sure, after reading, you will wish that each one of YOU kept diaries as detailed as he did.



William B. Devoe AA3YR

War Time Voyage Number Three - 10/9/43 - 2/16/44 (Bill Devoe)

Baltimore to Khorramshahr to New York.

I signed on the brand new Liberty ship SS Joyce Kilmer KTLR at Sparrows Point, MD as Chief Radio Operator on October 9, 1943. We sailed from Baltimore to Hampton Roads where the transatlantic convoy staged.

The convoy formed up and proceeded east with four corvettes and one destroyer as escorts. U-boat attacks started after when we crossed about 50 W. long. We did not have any air cover until close to the coast of Portugal. There were a number of ships torpedoed. We had a Dutch seagoing tug designated as a rescue ship and she was very busy each morning.

The convoy made quite a few course changes signaled from the Commodore by flags. It was a grand show when the flags were lowered and the convoy swung over to its new direction. We must have had 50 ships spread out over many miles. The Kilmer was in the second column on the port side and we kept station very well.

About two days out from Gibraltar the Commodore ordered those ships so equipped to lower their anti-torpedo nets. We lowered our booms and strung out the nets like draperies on either side of the ship. The convoy had to slow down at least a knot when the nets were deployed. I don't think they were very effective but I never heard of a ship with the nets deployed being torpedoed.

The next afternoon, when in sight of land, we formed up into two columns to go through the Straits of Gibraltar. We were then attacked from the air by radio controlled gliding bombs.

There was a plane circling the convoy at an altitude safe from our 22 mm guns which were firing. These glider bombs were being directed by the circling aircraft and made spectacular explosions when they hit the water. None of the ships were hit by the bombs but we took plenty of friendly fire as the bombs lost altitude. The Kilmer had 22 mm holes in the stack and these went right through the fiddley where we hung our washed clothes to dry. I think that the controlling aircraft was not able to accurately estimate the altitude of the glider bombs and so could not hit their intended targets. This was a first for all of the crew. I never saw another glider bomb attack after this first one.

The two columns of ships proceeded past the "Rock" and as night fell the action began again. This time it was Stukas. They came roaring over at mast height and scared the hell out of us. There was a lot of 22 mm action, some bomb drops and lots of noise. Our escort must have called for air support because after about 30 minutes the Stukas suddenly left. I could see four burning ships but since it was night time couldn't see if any were sinking. It was a really bad scene.

We proceeded to Port Said without any additional attacks. We did have air cover from the British. The trip through the Suez canal took two days. We anchored overnight at Ismailia about in the middle of the canal. This was the beginning of November. There was nothing but desert on either side. Using binoculars, I looked at some of the gun emplacements on both sides of the canal. I was surprised to see that they were wooden dummies.

When we got to Port Tufic at the Red Sea end of the canal, we anchored among about five other freighters and waited for orders to proceed. Four of the other ships were Liberties and by using the Aldis lamp I was able to talk to two of them. This exchange of private signals led to an interesting adventure.

The radio operator on the Liberty nearest to us signalled that they were having a little get together the next night and we were invited. The Bosun said no boats were available but when my friend Flagg heard about this he cooked up a scheme to get over to the party ship. I went right along with his idea and helped fashion a raft with two empty 55 gallon drums two planks and some lashings. We dropped this contraption overboard the next night and with cork life jackets on paddled and pushed it about a quarter mile to the other ship.

We were welcomed as if we were royalty and had a really good time. Just before morning we decided to head back to the Kilmer. The water was very warm but a cool breeze had come up and much to our consternation there was a heavy mist so we couldn't see the Kilmer from our raft. Evidently the Kilmer's mast was visible from the deck of our host ship and we were told which direction to paddle.

That was a long quarter mile of water but we finally found the ship and scrambled on board. I was told to report to Captain Wilson ASAP. Boy did I get it. He told me that I was never, ever to leave the ship without his express permission, that I was jeopardizing the ship's mission and besides all that these waters were infested with sharks and I was lucky not to have been bitten.

After this incident, I was very careful to please the Captain and one time was able to fix the gyro compass when it went out of whack, which put me back in his good graces.

Early in December 1943 we finally were instructed to proceed to the Persian Gulf. I set radio watch and we upped anchor that evening. The next night is one I'll never forget. The second assistant and I were on the main deck smoking our last cigarette before the sunset and the black-out curtains were pulled shut. We were watching the sun go down when suddenly there was what appeared to be a torpedo boring straight as an arrow right for the starboard side of the ship where we were standing. We were riveted to the spot when this thing suddenly veered without hitting and we saw a huge hammerhead shark swim away fast. The thing must have been nine or ten feet long.

There was one other interesting event on the way to the Gulf. The red tide had bloomed and I had never heard or seen such a thing. It was early afternoon, we were in the Gulf of Oman proceeding independently towards the Strait of Hormuz when the sea literally turned red. At first I thought there must be some sunken ships rusting away under us but then I realized the red water was too extensive. There was a bucket nearby that the crew used to drop over side and then hold over head to cool off. I grabbed this and got a bucket of the water. It was colorless when I hauled it in so I stayed puzzled until I looked in one of my reference books and found out that there really is such a thing as the red tide.

We reached Khorramshahr and unloaded our cargo of trucks, mines and ammunition. This took some time and when we were empty we anchored in the Shatt el Arab and loaded ballast (stones) from lighters. This was where we spent Christmas 1943,

anchored in the dirty river formed by the Tigris and the Euphrateus which comes together just above Basra.

The temperatures were extreme. During the day it was about 115 deg. F. and at night it dropped to about 100 deg. You perspired continually. I gobbled atabrine to ward off jaundice but I lost a lot of weight.

One day Armed Guard Lieut.. Kerrigan asked me if I would go to the officers club in Khorramshahr and pick up the mail for the ship. He must have received word that there was some for the Kilmer.

I took a water taxi to the docks and hitched a ride on the main highway for about a half mile to a road leading to the US Army's Officers Club. I turned over the note from the Lieutenant and got the mail. The fellows there were very friendly and we had quite a few beers until I realized that I should be on my way to deliver the mail.

When I came out of the club house, the main road back to the docks was about 1,000 feet to my right and there was an obvious short cut to the main highway right in front of me.

So I walked (actually I probably staggered) across this field to the main road just beyond a low fence. When I climbed over the fence I saw a sign that immediately sobered me up. It said "Achtung Minen" with skull and cross bones. I must have been guided by the angels through that mine field.

We upped anchor and sailed away from that very hot and dirty place on December 27, 1943. We made a one day stop at Bahrein Island and pearl divers swam to the ship and climbed up the anchor chain to try to sell us pearls. The pearls were embedded in wax on a small piece of cardboard

which they carried in their mouths. I don't remember what they wanted for these gems but I didn't buy any. They looked pretty small to me. Several days later we had an good scare. We were steaming along in the Arabian Sea headed for the Red Sea when at about 7 pm, ships time, we sighted a sail on the horizon. The sailing vessel was hull down so we couldn't identify it, but it was going against the prevailing wind. We changed course and the sail also changed course. That's when Captain Wilson called me to the bridge and told me to transmit a QQQQ signal. QQQQ means unidentified raider. Bombay immediately responded and my message was rebroadcast by Bombay, Mombasa and Bahrein Radios. I sent a coded amplifying report at 11:00 pm to Aden.

We increased speed to about 11 1/2 knots and zig-zagged all over while running for Aden. This speed was well over the design speed of our (3) cylinder steam engine. There was quite a bit of vibration all night long. We were running away from that sail as fast as we could. In the morning we reached Aden, a pilot came aboard and we dropped anchor.

The Chief told us that they had burned out the bearing on the No. 3 (low pressure) cylinder in escaping from the Q ship. I was very interested in watching the disassembly of the crank rod and the pouring of a new babbit bearing. The wrench that is used to loosen the bearing cap nuts was too heavy to handle by hand so the overhead travelling crane was used. The bearing was reinstalled with three lead strips and the engine was turned over once and then disassembled again. The lead strips were examined and the babbit was scraped to conform to the crank rod. This procedure was repeated three times. Each time the leads looked more even until the Chief said they were good.

I took my turn in scraping the bearing to get that perfect fit. When it was all done the Chief had Chips make a picture frame and we hung the three final leads in the wardroom for all to see.

We arrived in Suez at 9:30 AM on Monday, 1/10/44 (I kept a diary) and we rigged a large searchlight which had been delivered by lighter. This operation had been performed on our way down from Port Said also. The pilot came aboard at 11 AM and we steamed into the canal, anchoring at Great Bitter Lake for an hour and a half, then proceeding on and arriving at Port Said at 10:00 PM.

There was no shore liberty due to bubonic plague but the Lieut. and Purser did go ashore - no mail. A lighter came along side and for the next two days we loaded sand ballast. This was done manually by local labor. Then, on January 14th we had a barrage balloon tied aft with about 200 feet of cable. It wasn't completely installed when a strong gust of wind blew it into the aft gun of a passing British freighter and it fell into the sea. It was recovered, repaired and flown successfully later.

The next morning I went, with Capt. Wilson and the Leut. Kerrigan to the convoy conference in Port Said. I went on watch at noon and we left at 3:15 pm taking position 32 in the outside column of the convoy. There were several general alarms sounded but attacks didn't materialize. The seas were rough and there were rain squalls. The convoy formed into 4 columns to go through the Strait of Sicily and later I could see Malta on the port and Sicily on the starboard at the same time. There was a lot of air activity and every evening we raised our barrage balloon up 1,000 feet until 1 hour after sunset. We did this again in the early morning. Some of the ships lost their balloons but we kept ours OK.

We had a new ordinary seaman join the crew in Egypt and he was mentally unbalanced. He told the crew that he was Jesus and stood his watch in bare feet. He scared Capt. Wilson on several occasions. One morning, after more air activity, we sighted two bodies that looked like airmen floating by about 100 feet off the starboard. The crazy threw his mattress over the side to help the dead airmen. He was then confined to his cabin with an armed guard. A day later this guy got loose and ran up to the captain's cabin scaring the hell out of the old man. He was then locked in his cabin and I sent, using the Aldis lamp a message to the Commodore.

A day later, while we were off Oran, a U.S. Trawler came along side and took the crazy off to everyone's great relief. This guy misjudged the jump between the vessels as they rose and fell. He leaped 25 feet to the trawler's pitching deck and landed hugging a ventilator probably with his teeth marks in it.

Every day more ships had joined the convoy and the air activity was picking up. On January 24th my diary indicates that 3 hospital ships were being bombed. The St. David was sunk and the St. Andrew which had rescued survivors had been crippled by bombs.

The Kilmer was now in column 3 but during the night, first mate Snyder somehow managed to get us into column 8 during the 12 to 4 watch! We lucked out and didn't hit any other ships. Captain Wilson was really upset as we raised our position pennant and steamed back to where we belonged.

The trip back across the Atlantic in convoy was uneventful except that we broke down (oil line ruptured) and the weather was quite rough. On

February 15th I took an RDF bearing on Ambrose and by 4 PM the next day we were inside the submarine nets and docked at pier 74 (34th St & 12 Ave.) NYC.

I weighed 155 when we departed Baltimore and weighed 130 when we arrived in New York. I had been gaining weight steadily after leaving Egypt so could only guess that I was about 125 when we left the Red Sea. This weight loss was due entirely to the terrific heat in that part of the world.

The End of the 3rd Voyage

We at the VWOA Newsletter would like to hear from you and try to pass along to the rest of the VWOA stories of events that you have experienced and that you feel the rest of the membership would enjoy hearing about. Send us a picture or two and we will try to include it in one of our Email Newsletters.

We would prefer to hear from you by Email at: 71147.1437@att.net

or

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but if you must, send mail to:

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