



Irvin C. Blaszyński
World War II, U.S. Coast Guard,
Atlantic, Mediterranean, Pacific
and East China Sea

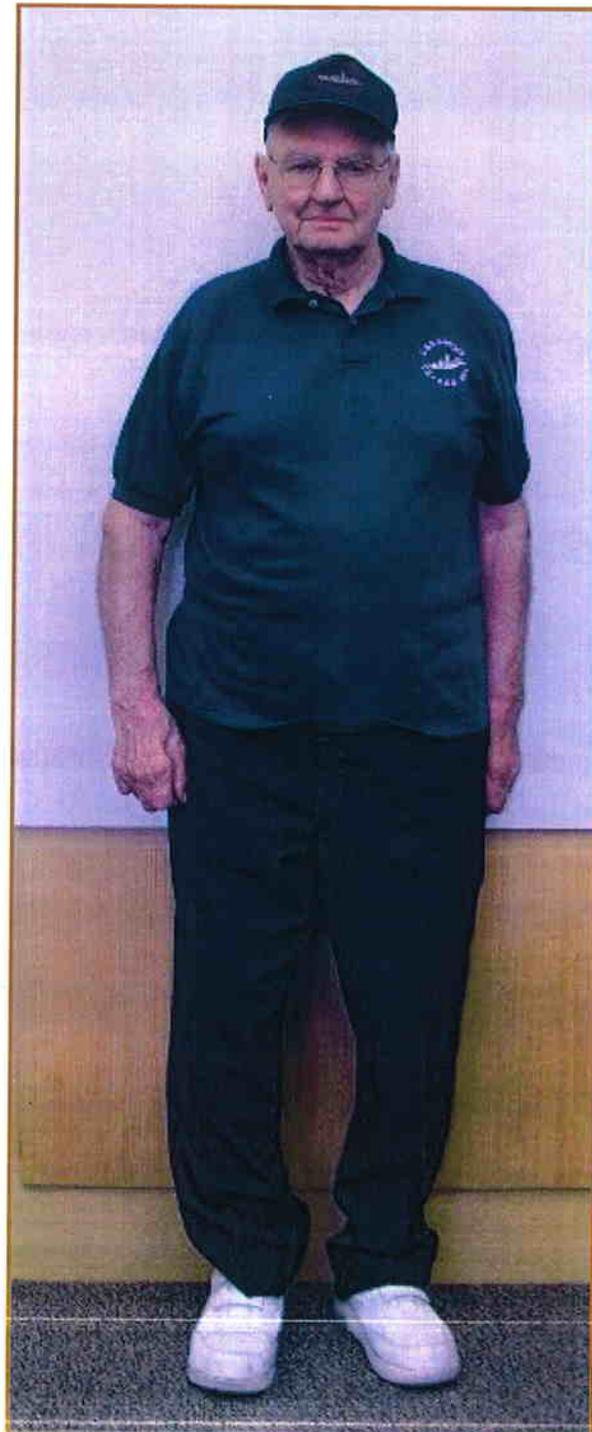
First Class Seaman

Irvin C. Blaszyński

**Veterans
History
Project
Transcript**

**Interview conducted
August 15, 2007**

**Niles Public Library
Niles Public Library District
Niles, Illinois**



Niles Public Library District
Veterans History Project Transcript

Veteran: **Irvin C. Blaszyński**

Rank: **1st Class Seaman**

Branch of Service: **U.S. Coast Guard**

Theater: **World War II – Atlantic
Mediterranean and Pacific**

Interview Date: 8/15/2007, 2-3:30 p.m.

Place: Large Room Meeting Room B

Equipment: Philips Digital Pocket Memo
Panasonic Cassette Transcriber

Interviewer: Neil O'Shea

We have our cassette tape recorder going, and we have our digital recorder going, and, between the two of them, we should have one good sound recording of this interview. This Veterans History Project Interview is being conducted on August the 15th, 2007, here at the Niles Public Library. My name is Neil O'Shea, and I'm speaking with Mr. Irvin C. Blaszyński. Mr. Blaszyński was in born in Chicago, and he now lives here in the community of Niles. And he has kindly consented to be interviewed for this project here at his local library. Mr. Blaszyński, may I refer to you-- may I address you as Irv? (Interviewer's questions are in italics)

Yes.

One Minute, 15 Seconds into interview – 1942, glasses and the U.S. Coast Guard

Thank you. So if we can turn back the hands of time, as it were, go back now, when did you enter the military service?

In 1942.

And did you enlist? Or were you drafted?

No. I enlisted in the Coast Guard.

And why did you choose the Coast Guard?

Well, I originally wanted to go into the Marines, but I wore glasses, and they wouldn't accept me. So they told me that the Coast Guard was waiving the glasses, so that's how I joined the Coast Guard.

And had you worn glasses in school?

Yes.

Since you were young?

Yes.

Much younger.

Yes.

What high school did you attend, if may I ask?

DePaul Academy.

Oh, the Academy.

Yes.

Yes. Down there in Chicago on Sheffield and Belden.

And Kenmore.

Yes, the—so, were you living down in that North Lincoln Park neighborhood at that time?

Not really. I lived at Ashland and North Avenue. That's where I was born and raised.

Yes. Have any of your-- had anybody in your family served in the First World War?

No, not that I know of.

Yes.

So, a lot of your-- a lot of your friends, did they also enlist, or?

Oh, yes. There was quite a few.

You didn't wait. You just enlisted, yes.

Yes.

Yes. Were you-- I think you mentioned that you were twenty years of age when you entered the Coast Guard?

Yes

3:30 – factory work and interest in service

So you would have been out of high school for a couple of years then, is that right?

Right.

What were you doing after high school?

I was working in a factory. And I wasn't very happy with it, and I was glad to leave.

Did your-- did the people at home at, in your house, did they think it was a good idea you were enlisting in the Service?

Oh, yes. Yes.

And you weren't worried, or anything like that, or fearful?

No.

No?

I was worried that they wouldn't take me.

You wanted to get in there.

That's the attitude of the people at that time.

3:50 – train ride to induction at Manhattan Beach

And then where did you-- did you have to go to Fort Sheridan or where was the-- where were you inducted?

No I went downtown to the train station, and they took me to Manhattan, Manhattan, New York. Well, they called it Manhattan Beach. That was a training station for the Coast Guard. That's where I started.

The--so, was that the first time you had been outside the city of Chicago?

I suppose so, yes.

It must have been pretty exciting, taking a train--

Oh, yes.

to New York.

Yes, but do you know how long that train took?

No.

We sat like, oh, it was, well, it was a long ride, because all the freight trains and everything were priority to us so it took a while.

So, in the Coast Guard, do you go through some kind of basic training?

Oh, yes, basic, yes.

And that was in New York, in Manhattan Beach, was that where the basic training was?

Yes. I was so homesick, if you look at the date that I went in, I went in December 12, 1942.

Oh. Yes.

A week before Christmas. In fact, I met my friend in Manhattan Beach, and I was so happy to see him! And he says, "I'm shipping out today." The first day, so....

Was that a buddy from the old neighborhood or from school?

He lives right here. Another one, there's two fellows that are, that were, in the Coast Guard that live here in Niles.

5:10 – Basic training in the U. S. Coast Guard

So, basic training for the Coast Guard is that done on a ship or is it done on land?

On land. Well, first of all, we went to the firing range and all of the-- right on the base. And then I was-- they put us in a private home in Sea Isle City, New Jersey. It's on the Atlantic Coast. And we were doing guard duty. We were doing guard duty for the, along the ocean, because they picked up some people from a German sub that were trying to get in our country at that time. So we had patrols day and night all along the Atlantic Coast.

So the basic training lasted probably, was it six weeks, or eight weeks?

Yes, six weeks, but it wasn't much of anything. You went for swimming classes for a couple of days but it wasn't--

So you probably could already swim?

Yes.

You weren't afraid of the water?

Yes. Yes. So--

Would the fact that you wore glasses, would that have kept you out of the Navy, too, or not, or could you--

Yes. The Navy also didn't want anybody but in time they all eased up, and they all accepted men with glasses - the Marines and everybody.

7:46 – Coast Guard’s manning of U.S. Navy Destroyer Escorts.

So, after this period of basic training in, around Sea Isle, New Jersey, did you get assigned to a unit, or a ship, or--?

No. I went to Sea Isle City, and, then from there, we went to Norfolk, Virginia to form crews for the destroyer escorts that we were going to man. See, we owned-- the Coast Guard didn’t own any ships. Not that type of ship. The Navy owned them, and they-- we manned forty ships for the Navy. In other words, we, it was all Coast Guard personnel on the ship, see, and it was a Navy ship, but it was manned by a Coast Guard.

I see.

Officers, and everything. And then we went to a lot of training in Norfolk while we were waiting for our ship to be built. It was being built in Galveston, Texas. And then after our ship was ready, they formed a crew right there. They put us all in, and sent us to Galveston, and we boarded the ship.

9:00 – Boarding the D.E. 384, U.S.S. Rhodes

You boarded the ship in Galveston?

Yes. And then we started our, what they call shakedown, that means that they put the ship through all kinds of maneuvers, and we went to Bermuda for that, then we started our, that booklet that tells you where we started.

Yes. Mr. Blaszyński has kindly given us a copy of the History of the U.S.S. Rhodes. (The 10-page booklet is appended.)

Yes, see--

Destroyer Escort 384, yes.

See, this was our skipper, (Irv points to picture of Commander E.A. Coffin, Jr.) and then (Lieutenant A. C. Wagner) was the next skipper, and then this (Lieutenant – W. K. Earle was the last skipper.)

So you were the first crew on this new ship?

Yes. It was brand new.

And did it have any things wrong with it, or was it okay from the beginning?

Well, little knicks and knacks, but nothing major.

So how big was the crew up on the--

I think we had a crew of something like 235 on there.

So this ship carried guns and--

Oh, it was complete.

We went out, what they call, for a shakedown, and we-- the shakedown was going through all the maneuvers of wartime, see. And after that, then we started escorting convoys across the ocean.

When you were in Norfolk, were you in staying and mixing with Navy personnel?

Oh, yes.

How did they-- What did they think of you guys? Was there any friction between Coast Guard and Navy? No?

No problem.

Before you went down to Galveston to get on the new ship, did you get a chance to come home or anything like that?

No, no.

Straight out.

The first time I came home, I can't even remember now. They worked it out between convoys that we could go home for thirty days. I don't even—I'm poor at records. When this guy gave me this, all these records, I couldn't believe it!

Yes.

12:00 – being a “jacket of dust”

So did you have a duty on the ship, or a title, or?

Well, I started as a first class seaman. And then I was a “jacket of dust.” What a jacket of dust is, he took the food from the hold, and gave it to the kitchen—well, the galley. And every day they'd give you an order what they needed. And that was my job.

Jacket of dust?

Yes. Jacket of dust.

Jacket of dust. The dust or something. That's an interesting term.

But I never had a problem getting help, because everybody wanted to get down that hold to get some food! (laughter)

When you joined the Coast Guard, did you think you would wind up serving like a Navy person out at sea with convoys, did you think that?

Oh, yes.

Oh, you knew that was coming.

I was. That was what my idea was.

Yes. You're—so, you join up in December of '42?

Yes.

And then when do you go out to sea then?

It was launched in June of '43, and commissioned in the same city in October 20, so as the product of, product of, the Brown shipping company.

Yes. So, you probably had like ten or eleven months to get ready?

Oh, yes.

Between the training and the work?

Yes. It didn't go overnight.

No, during, the ships, I'm trying to see if they put down when they made our first trip.

14:00 – protecting convoys from submarines

So, the first trip you were escorting ships?

Yes.

Supply ships?

There's pictures of all those ships. There was airplanes on there, and everything, on those ships.

And where were they all going?

How many do you think there were on one of those convoys? 150 to 200 ships.

Wow!

And we were escorting them, and we were on the outside protecting them from submarines.

And you were heading for, at that time, England?

The first one was Casablanca, North Africa.

Cool!

Yes. And when we got there, there was six inches of diesel oil on it, because they just bombarded the Germans and chased them out of Casablanca. And there were sunken ships all over the place when we got in there.

Did you have any shore leave when you were in Casablanca?

Oh, yes. Yes. We went to shore.

That must have been interesting.

Yes. And how! It was a different kind of life. It was poverty –stricken

15:00 – food on the ship

But the food was pretty good on the ship?

Oh, yes.

You didn't lose any weight when you went in the Coast Guard, did you? Some guys--

They didn't have K-rations on our ship.

You ate well. Yes.

That was the best thing, I tell you. If it was up to me, if my children wanted to go in the Service, I'd tell them go in the Navy. It was so much better.

Yes. The--so, on that first, on that convoy to Casablanca, were there any-- did the Germans threaten you at all?

No, not that one. But there was one when we went to the Mediterranean that we were attacked by German planes. But they knew that they were coming because we knew. The Intelligence told us.

And where did you dock in the Mediterranean then? Did you have to--

We went in-- let me see here. You know, this is fifty years ago. After Casablanca , we passed through the Straits of Gibraltar and docked at Oran, then Algiers, and then Bizerte, Tunisia.

Turning back the hands of time.

We had four antisubmarine attacks on that tour. Yes. I mean, that when we were taking those ships across, we were more like a killer group. We just about wiped out the submarines, but there was four hundred that were built for submarine warfare. See, the destroyer escort was designed to fight the submarines. (Irv refers to chronology in the “unofficial exploits” section of the appended History of the U.S.S. Rhodes)

Ah. And there were four hundred of those ships built?

Yes, the Navy had the most of them, and we had forty of them. There weren't any more built after the war.

Yes.

It looks like you might have landed in Tunisia.

This is Bizerte, and Tunisia, that's right down the coast.

19:00 – interesting episode in Tunisia

That must have been interesting, also, all of these places.

Oh, yes. It was unreal. I'll tell you a story. We were going into town, and I don't remember, because we went to Africa a couple of times, so we wanted to go in town, so we went on the highway, and we were hitching a ride, and a big truck like an Army truck, with the personnel on there in the back, there were all these big men, they were black, they were from Africa, these guys were twice our size. And they were so gentle to us, So if you read all this here, you'll get a good idea.

Yes, I think that will be very helpful if we add that chronology to the, to your remarks, yes. And then I see that you might have even gone up to Ireland, did you?

Oh, yes.

21:00 - the aircraft carrier and beautiful Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland.. We went to Ireland while we escorted an aircraft carrier. Actually, we were going to Cardiff, Wales.

Oh, yes.

And right at the buoy, there was a submarine sitting there, and our orders were just to bring it to the buoy, and then go back to where we were coming from. And a torpedo hit it from that submarine, but I don't know what happened, because our orders were not to go back,

A torpedo hit the aircraft carrier?

Yes.

Oh!

And they said, "Don't worry. There was no damage," So, the aircraft carrier went into Wales. I'd have to read this whole thing to remind myself of all this.

Oh, yes, you were up in Londonderry, yes.

It was beautiful there. It was in the middle of winter, and you pull alongside, and I don't remember, but the whole side of the mountain was green, and the other side was snow. This booklet tells a lot of stories.

Yes, it's jam-packed with details, and you were in all of these places. That's amazing. Did you ever get seasick? Did you have any trouble adjusting to--

A little queasy at times.. But there were some people that they had to take off the ship. That's how bad they were. As soon as they'd say lift the anchor, these guys would be sick as the dogs! They were fine when we were in port.

And then if they, if you got the word that there was a German plane or something, did everybody have to get a gun or something?

Everybody turns to the guns, like I was on the, let me see if I have a picture here, I was on the number two gun.

The number two gun.

That was-- I should give you a better picture of our ship.

We'll have to get a picture of the boats

This one here.

This is transferring a doctor from one ship to another on a buoy. Did you ever see one of these buoys?

Not like that.

They string a line across it.

Oh, right! Yes. Oh, right.

This was at sea.

Yes, it would be hard to transfer personnel at sea from one ship to another, right, so the easiest, yes.

See, nobody labeled these pictures, and I have no idea.

Yes.

I have a nice picture of our ship. I'll give it to you.

I'll make a copy of it.

I didn't bring one with me, but when-- you say you're going to be gone for a week?

Yes.

In the meantime, I'll be working on it.

Thank you. So did you-- it says the crew was granted liberty in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Did you go ashore then and enjoy it?

Oh, yes. We had the fish and chips.

Yes.

People were walking down the street eating fish and chips.

Yes.

It is just like a McDonald's here.

Right.

But everybody--their potatoes are great, you know! I don't know why they are so famous.

I guess it must be the soil. "Lovely Derry on the Banks of the Foyle," yes. And then you mentioned that, it's in here, it was a terrible-- full gale winds and tremendous seas. Were you frightened then?

Oh, yes, because the swells of the ocean were going over the ship, and we were in the English Channel, and we didn't think we were going to get out of it. That's how bad it was. I'm surprised that the ships didn't break in half. That ocean was so bad. The waves were higher than the ship which was going wherever it wanted.

Another time we were part of a priority convoy bringing 40,000 more American troop reinforcements to Europe probably at Cherbourg or Le Havre in France.

One of the saddest trips was escorting a hospital ship back to the United States when all of the men on that ship were missing a limb.

25:26 – heading for the Pacific

So, then, as things were winding down in Europe, you head back toward the United States, right?

Yes.

We went-- we went to-- we went through the English Channel to go to the Pacific..

It says you were down in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

Well, that was when we got the brand new ship and we were shakedown crews. In other words, we were testing the ship. when we first got the ship out of the shipyard.

We went to Bermuda and Guantanamo Bay as a cruise, and we were doing all kinds of exercises.

Yes.

Then they had planes flying over and they had this sleeve.. Did you ever see one of those sleeves? And you were shooting at sleeves.

Oh, pulls it through the air, yes.

It was just exercise to get us used to firing those guns.

Well, then, when you went to the Pacific, did you go back down there past Cuba to the Panama Canal, and then out into the Pacific Ocean to get to China?

Well, first, we went to the Aleutians. We were in the Aleutians for a while, and we were doing what they call plane guard duty, because they were bombarding Japan, and those planes were knocked down, and our job was to get the pilots out of the water. This is when we were coming back here.

Yes.

March of `45, you were leaving Southampton, England?

June `45.

Yes.

The war was almost over.

28:00 – Aleutian Islands

It seems like they're redeploying people from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

In this picture is when we were on the weather patrol that was up in the oceans, I've two. We were going to be fitted with larger guns in the Aleutian Islands but then the dropping of the bombs ended the war. And then, here, they don't tell this in there, but we anchored in Hinchinhook Isle in Alaska and that's when MacArthur flew from Washington to Tokyo to sign the papers for the signing of the Japanese surrender and, you know they had ships all along the way, if anything happened to his plane there was a ship there in the water. You realize how much that cost!

All the way across, they had ships.

And then the time they showed him getting walking in the water. You remember those pictures?

"I've returned," yes, yes.

Yes, and then I talked to some people that were there, and they said he didn't have to get in the water.

It seemed like he had an eye for a good photograph. Yes, he knew how well it would play.

Yes, the camera.

30:00 - back through the Panama Canal

See, in 1946, we came back through the Panama and went to Charleston, South Carolina. That's when I got off the ship, because they were going to put it in mothballs. What they meant by mothballs, storing it. That was when we got to Charleston. That was the last of the ship. That was in '46. Like I say, you could make a big story out of this, just these ports that I'm telling you about.

What did you say, from "Casablanca to China, right?"

Right.

Yes. You visited Okinawa?

Yes.

31:53 – Tsingtao, China

And Tsingtao?

Tsingtao was China.

Yes. That must have been an eye-opener, or--

Oh, yes. We went up the river. It doesn't say that in here, but we were going on liberty, when we got to China, The war was over, and we were an Army of Occupation. They were giving us a liberty to go up into Tsingtao. That was a big city. We had to take an LST down the river to Tsingtao, so, we had the cooks fix us sandwiches, and they put pounds of butter, just a hunk of butter on there! And, so, when we got on the train to go to, to get off the LST and got on the train, we were passing out the sandwiches among ourselves, and there was a lot of Chinese people on there too, on this train, and this one guy was looking at us, and he saw the butter. We didn't know how to talk to him, but we gave him some butter, and he started eating it.

You should see the beautiful stuff we bought in China to take home! Everything was silk.. I bought a housecoat for my sister at the time, and I sent it to her. She couldn't wear it out. That was pure silk.

34:00 – a rickshaw for 25 cents a day!

Is that where you saw the rickshaw?

Yes.

And how much a day was it? How much was it to rent?

25 cents a day, and he stayed there from morning `til night. If you went into your hotel, he sat there.

Yes.

But then the Army of Occupation came in there and they ruined everything! They started throwing money around like water. And everything was so expensive then.

Yes.

*So, you must have all been really happy to learn that the war was coming to an end
But you enlisted, so you had to serve a particular length of time.*

Well, I can't clearly remember but I was in for 3 ½ years.

Yes. The only thing I know is that when I was in China, my orders to be discharged came through, but they held us for ninety days. In other words, when your orders came through, they couldn't take everybody and send them home, because they needed somebody to run the ship!

Yes.

So, I was held back ninety days, and then when we were in China, my orders came through, and so did the ship's orders come through, that we were going to go home. So, the captain called me in, and said "I know we could put you ashore here, and you'd take your chances on how you're going to get home, because you could get on an aircraft, or you could get on a freighter, you

don't know what!" I said, "No, I'll stay with the ship." And I stayed with the ship all the way until we got to South Carolina.

You saw, for those, between those ages there, like twenty and twenty-three and a half, you saw so much of the world and covered so many miles.

Yes, we were in England. We went to London and everything.

It must have been a wonderful experience.

Yes, like one guy said to me, he says, "It was a wonderful experience, but I wouldn't do it again!"

Is that right!

Were there any very funny moments you remember, any memorable experiences that--

Well, there was a lot of funny things.

Yes. Yes. Did you ever go back to any of those places that you visited?

No. Not across the ocean, no.

So you stayed with the USS Rhodes back to Charleston.

Charleston.

And then you're mustered out there, or discharged.

No, they put us on a train and took us to Detroit.

Detroit.

And that was our discharge point. And they gave us a fare to go home. In fact, I was, I don't know if I took it with me, I just saw it today, and I didn't even know I had it. It was a ticket to go from Detroit to Chicago on a train. I don't remember who met me at the train station.

Your family must have been delighted. Did they meet you at the station, your family?

That's what I say. I don't remember this.

38:37 – adjusting to civilian life

Did you have a hard time adjusting to-- adjusting to civilian life?

Not really, no. I was an electrician for forty years. And I was just lucky to get started in that, and I went to apprentice school, and everything.

So, you didn't have too hard, it wasn't that difficult to find employment then after the war. Was it a little hard to get a job?

Well, they told me that I should go back to my old job.

Right.

And they gave me something like three or four weeks of vacation that I was entitled to, so I went there, and I got the four weeks. And then I quit. And my father was in the trucking business, and he gave me a job on one of the trucks, and I didn't like it. I said, "This is not for me!" So, then, I was in between going to school for, to be a salesman, because I went back to DePaul, and I wanted to know if I could continue my study. And they suggested I go into some company,, some company that has a sales program that trains you to be a salesman. And, so, my uncle was big in the meatpacking company, Wilson and Company. I don't know if you ever heard of them. Well they were a big meatpacking company, and they had a program going. So it was either me being an electrician, or a salesman for meatpacking, and I finally decided I wanted the electrician's job, so that's what I did.

40:48 – discovering service buddies

So, did you stay in contact with some of your friends from the Coast Guard, some of your buddies?

Oh, yes, we had twelve reunions, and, you know how I started - I met this fellow, Galassi.

Now, Mr. Galassi, it turns out--

Yes?

he lives in Niles.

Yes. I went to church, at these men's meetings, and they were discussing reunions where there's tables.

Surely.

And I didn't know him. I didn't know Galassi . I knew this other fellow that was on another ship. His name was Ed Lesniak. But he's in a hospital. And he's in bad shape. And he's the guy I knew, and I said to him, I says, "Ed, what are you talking about the Sellstrom?" He says, "Well, Galassi was on the Sellstrom." I says, "That was our flagship!" We traveled in a group, and we were Division 23. I started talking to him. Today, I am one of his best buddies.

Yes, small world! Yes.

And that's how we got started. They helped me find people from my ship. They wrote to the Navy Archives. And they gave us a listing of all the guys on our ship, and we went through telephone books.

Telephone books, looking for people with names, if you ran into a Sullivan, forget it, because you know how many Sullivans! But, anyway, I accumulated something like over a hundred people, and, I called people, and, I didn't know who I was going to get. And I called them, and I'd say, "Can I talk to so and so?" And I mentioned my name. "Oh, Irv!"

They were so excited about it. You know what I mean!

43:30 – organizing the reunions of the DE 384 Rhodes crew and participation in the VFW, American Legion, and NIDESA

Yes. So, you organized these twelve reunions around the country.

The first get-together was in St. Louis. We went there and we dedicated a model ship, not us, but this one ship took that on as a project, and they got high school kids from Arizona. Now, I don't know how this happened, but you should see the beautiful model they made. Oh, it was nine feet long! And they were going to put it-- they put it on this aircraft carrier that they turned into a museum in New York. And they left it there. And that was our first reunion, the first get-together.

One of the memorable sailors was Quartermaster Boyle who came from an influential family in Philadelphia and had an encyclopedia in his head. He would listen to the stories at the reunion and then shake his head, saying, "No!" And people would laugh knowing he was right. Mr. Boyle also said that the detailed chronology in the History of the U.S.S. Rhodes DE 384 was incomplete.

45:20 – DESA buys back a destroyer escort from the Greeks.

You're also a member of the VFW here in Niles, right?

The VFW, the American Legion, you name it, and then I belong to the Destroyer Escort Association, and then I belong to the Florida, see, there's-- Florida is national headquarters for Destroyer Escort Sailors Association. NIDESA is Northern Illinois DESA, so there are two different organizations. We are a charter chapter of the national headquarters, and we even brought back one of the ships from the Greeks. We gave away all those ships. We said we'd never have to use them again. So, this one was in Greece, and they towed it. They towed it back to this country. And I'll give you one of their newspapers, and show you what they're doing with they overhauled it. They got parts from all these companies free, and all they needed was people that would do it. And that's the big thing. It cost us a million dollars to tow that thing from Greece.

And that's down in Florida now?

No, it's in Buffalo, New York.

It's a museum there now, and they get people going there every year, volunteering to work there for a week, three days to paint, and they're painting-- doing everything for the ship, see, because the government doesn't give us anything.

46:50 – working as a radio striker with code

How then do you think your service in the military affected your life or your outlook on life?

I don't think it had any effect on me at all, not at all, because I didn't follow up anything from the service. Because I actually was in the radio room of our ship, and I was what they call a radioman striker.

Was that what you did most of the time?

Yes.

So you weren't always the--

“Jacket of dust”- that was a very short time.

Most of the time, you were a radio, a radio--?

A radio striker in the radio room.

Yes. I was a radioman striker. In other words, I had to do all the paperwork for them. And we even helped with decoding messages. They used to, there was nobody could send a message off their ship, nobody. It was what they called radio silence. And what they did is they had Radio New York and Radio San Francisco. And they were the ones that sent out the messages. And it was up to the ships to pick up these messages. What they were sending out, it was a lot of weather reports, and a lot of things, and, so, you had to copy all these messages, not the heading of the message. If it didn't pertain to you, you didn't type it out, so--

So, was there a codebook that you had to use--

Yes, it was a code.

What kind of code was it?

Oh, it was very complicated.

Nobody -- even the Japanese couldn't figure it out.

Yes.

So you must have known about some things before everybody else on the ship did, right?

Oh, yes.

And it was funny, because the captain called me in one time. And he says, "Who are you?" And I says, "Why?" He says, "You're always being paged." And I says, "Well, I'm in the radio room and they always need me or something.

So, did your time on duty, then, with different shifts in the radio room, like you might be on through the night, or-- When you -- Did you have certain shifts that you had to cover, certain time periods you had to be on duty in the radio room?

It was four hours on and eight hours off, that was the schedule.

So, sometimes, you'd be working at night?

Yes. Oh, yes twenty-four hours a day.

You couldn't even light a cigarette on the outside of the ship.

Because the submarines could pick that up.

Yes.

So did they have beer on the ship?

They did, but it wasn't available. Only in port.

Did they show you movies on the ship?

Oh, yes, but they didn't show them when we were at sea, because the ship moved so much..

Yes.

And we didn't have any high class equipment for that.

So, how did people relax? Did they play a lot of cards, or?

Yes.

Read, or?

Dice.

Dice.

Everything. Gambling, you know.

On your ship, did they do any of those, like when you're crossing the equator for the first time, or something? Did they play tricks on people?

No. We never crossed the equator. We crossed the time zone, but not the equator.

So, nobody played any tricks on people?

Yes. Well, yes, I think we're probably coming to the end of the interview. Is there anything that you'd like to add that we haven't talked about, or that comes to mind? As I say, we can always add something to this, if you think there's something else important.

Well, there's nothing important. But there's a lot of things that went on.. Like, I'll never forget this guy! He was a quartermaster, and he was a little guy, and he was so drunk, I brought him back on my shoulder. I mean, things like that would happen.

Yes. But you seem to have-- you seem to be very happy to-- I take it, it was a happy experience?

Yes. there was nothing bitter among the men.

And it was a well run ship, and? Did you enjoy meeting all these different people from different parts of the country?

Oh, yes. You wouldn't believe how successful some of these people are that were on our ship. They were ordinary sailors, and then, all of a sudden, they were very successful. One guy, he owned a printing company after he left the ship .

Well, Mr. Blaszyński, thank you very much for coming in.

I hope I helped you.

You did. I didn't realize the Coast Guard actually staffed Navy ships. Because I have interviewed men who were on the destroyer escorts, but they were Navy guys. I didn't know all that the Coast Guard did. I couldn't figure that out. And you were in the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean, and the Pacific, and the Chinese sea. And that's unbelievable! You covered a lot of miles.

54:00 – facing a typhoon

Yes, you pulled into some of these places like Okinawa. That was a disaster because they had a big battle right in the bay and there were ships sunk all over. And then we ran into a typhoon.

They gave us orders. "Everybody to leave the port," because it was safer for us to be out in the ocean than it was in the in the harbor.

In fact, when we came back, when we came back from being out of the harbor and, after the sun passed by, we came back in. There was some of these big freighters like you see in pictures, they were all were turned over from the typhoon.

Wow!

Mr. Blaszyński, you said something, that when you were discharged, they gave you an interesting physical? What was that?

50:20 – discharge physical

I told you that they lined us up. We were all nude, and this doctor walks down the aisle. There was a line of men from here to the other wall, and the doctor would walk by as we were facing each other, all right, and the doctor would walk down the aisle, and he then would say, “Reverse. About face.” And then he would come back out, and he’d say, “Okay, you guys are all all right. You can go home.”

So, that was an easy physical.

56:29 – touching reunion at Okinawa

Oh, yes. This is a real touching story. We pulled into Okinawa, see, and one of the fellows on our ship’s brother was on Okinawa. And he asked the captain if he could go ashore and see if he could find his brother. He did. He brought him back to the ship. And, so, the captain says, “Well, what would you like to eat?” He says, “What do you mean?” He’s been on K-rations for all these months. So, we had fresh eggs. We lived like kings compared to him. And we made him, I think, breakfast or something, with eggs, fresh eggs, and milk, and everything. And it was very touching to see this guy enjoy it. And then he had to go back.

So he would have been a Navy man then? Or was he Navy or Army?

No, he was in the Marines. Yes. That was all on Okinawa.

Yes.

You want this picture, right?

Yes. I think I’ll stop the tape recorder now and say thank you. And then I’ll go upstairs, and I’ll scan this, and I’ll make some photocopies.

Do you want this picture of the rickshaw?

Oh, I want to scan that, yes, if I may. So, I’ll turn off the recording now.

Yes.

Thank you, sir.

Reader's Note

Please find appended a photocopy of the *History of the U.S.S. Rhodes DE 384* with detailed chronology.

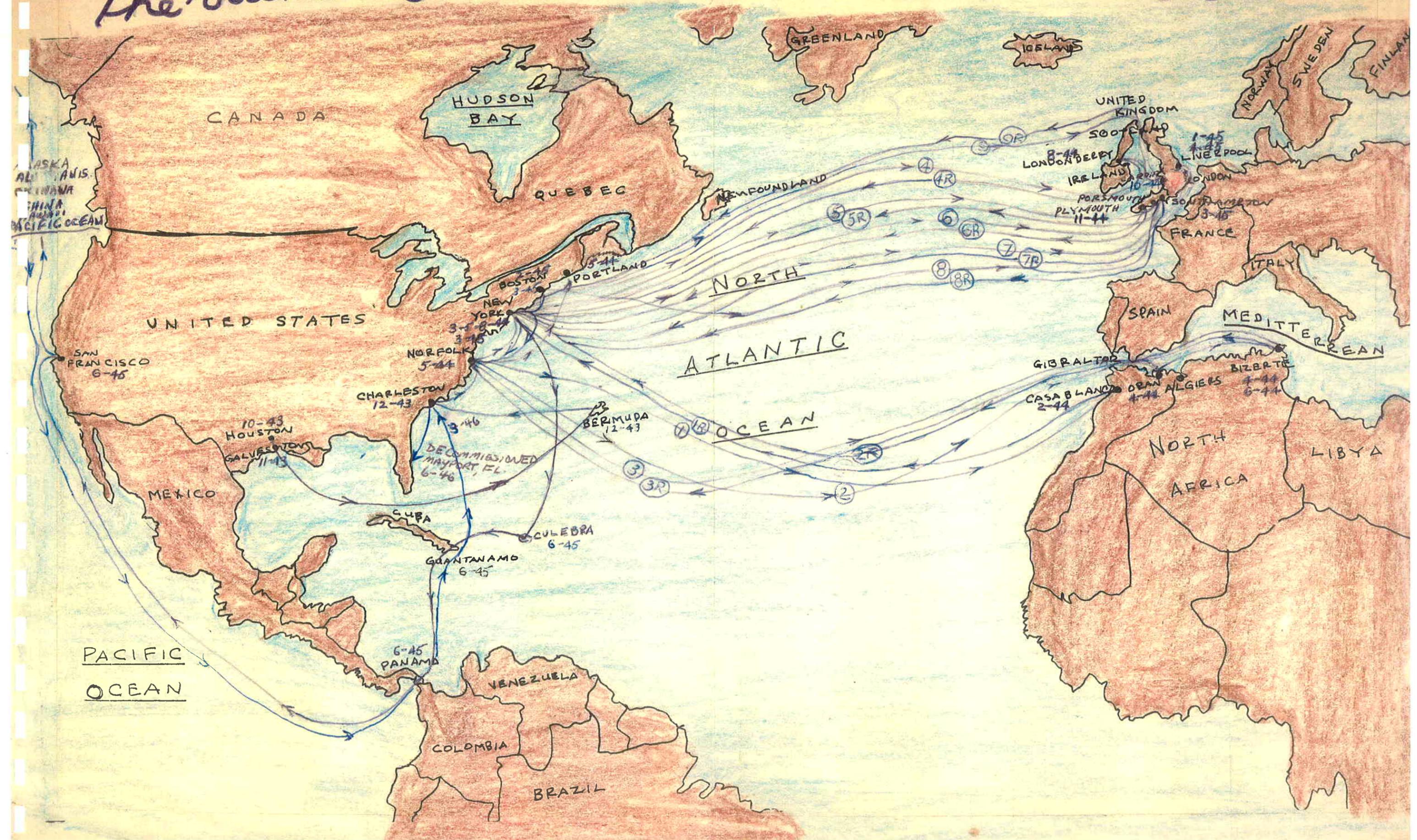
Also helpful is the fold-out scan of a map of the Rhodes' voyages, provided by Mr. Blaszynski and picture of the Rhodes in the Aleutian Islands on 7/12/45. The map shows 8 crossings and returns across the Atlantic.

There is also a scan of a picture of the Tsingtao rickshaw, provided by Mr. Blaszynski.

The last item is a copy of an article, entitled "China Station" and written by the last commander of the Rhodes, Lieutenant Commander Earle. His five-page article describes the ship's time in the Pacific and China.

Additional information about the destroyer escorts and the crucial contribution of that class of ships and their crews to the war effort can be found at <http://www.desausa.org/>, the website of the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association.

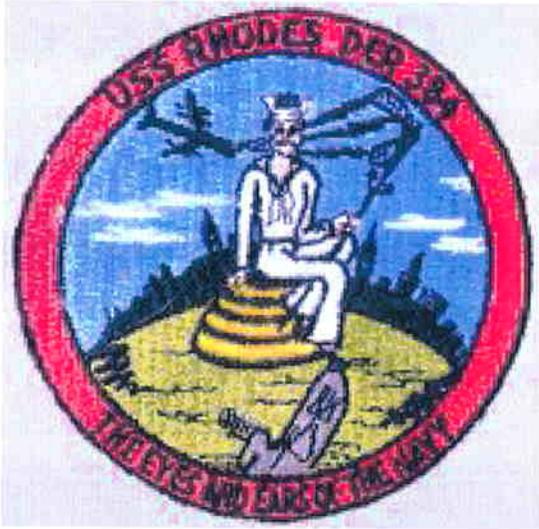
The Wake of the 'Hamblin' Rhodes 384





USS Rhodes DE-384
Attu-Aleutian Islands 07/12/45

Named for Lt. Allison P. Rhodes who died in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, the U.S.S Rhodes was commissioned in Houston, Texas on 10/25/1943. Mr. Blaszyński was an original crew member and served aboard until she was de-commissioned in March 1946. The USS Rhodes sailed thousands of miles, from “Casablanca to China” as described by Mr. Blaszyński. This photo is taken from the web site, <http://www.navsource.org/archives/06/images/384/0638406.jpg>.



Ship's patches courtesy of Mike Smolinski
posted at <http://www.navsource.org/archives/06/384.htm>



Submitted by Rick Eckert <http://www.uskretchmer.org/photos.html>



In Tingtsao a rickshaw fare was just 25 cents from morning until night.

The USS Rhodes and Mr. Blaszyński visited the city on January 17, 1946.

History of...



U.S.S. RHODES DE 384



29 JUNE 1943 13 JUNE 1946



Commander
E. A. Coffin, Jr.
FIRST SKIPPER



Lieutenant
A. C. Wagner
SKIPPER
29 Dec. 1944 - 20 Aug. 1945



Lieutenant Commander
W. K. Earle
SKIPPER
20 Aug. 1945 - 13 June 1946

*Dedicated to
all the DE sailors of
"The Ramblin Rhodes"*

*Courtesy Rixey Taylor and Harry Bischoff
Printing Courtesy - Joe Brand TM2/C*

U.S.S. RHODES (DE/DER - 384)

DE - escort ship

DER - radar picket escort ship

ALLISON PHIDEL RHODES, born in Walhalla, South Carolina, 8 December 1919, was appointed ensign, U.S. Naval Reserve, 2 June 1941 and after training was ordered to USS ATLANTA (CL-51). Reporting for duty in that vessel on 10 January 1942, he served in her during the Battle of the Midway, the landing on Guadalcanal, and the Battle of the Eastern Solomons. Lieutenant (jg) Rhodes was killed in action as his ship fought her last battle, the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, 13 November 1942.

THE USS RHODES (DE-384), launched in Houston, Texas, 29 June 1943 and commissioned in the same city 25 October 1943, is a product of the Brown Shipbuilding Company. After completing her post-commissioning fitting out period in Galveston, Texas, she pointed her bow into wind and wave for her first sea voyage 13 November 1943, bound for Bermuda and a six weeks shakedown and training period.

During this trip, while commanded by Lieut. Cmdr. (now Commander) E. A. Coffin, Jr., USCG, the RHODES first gained her reputation for having a "built in headwind," for she battled semi-tropical gales and heavy seas throughout the journey. Despite a green and seasick crew, most of whom were going to sea for the first time, she weathered the continuous series of storms without damage, mooring alongside the tender HAMUL on schedule.

By the time the shakedown training period was added to this initial taste of the sea, the RHODES returned to the continental United States with a crew still green but competent and rapidly gaining confidence. After a brief Navy Yard availability and Christmas holiday in Charleston, South Carolina, she cruised to Norfolk, Virginia, for orders, then to New York City for her first duty assignment.

THAT DUTY BEGAN New Year's Day, 1944, when the RHODES rounded Sandy Hook as an escort for the New York section of a North African convoy,

bound for Norfolk. The trip was completed without incident, and she remained in Norfolk as a training ship for prospective destroyer escort crews until 13 January 1944.

On that date, she departed Hampton Roads as an escort for a large convoy, bound for North African ports. Although the RHODES attacked four possible submarine sonar contacts during the voyage, no positive enemy activity was encountered, arising from a case of German measles which threatened to quarantine the crew in its first foreign port. However, the convoy was transferred to a British escort at the Straits of Gibraltar, the ill seamen recovered, and the vessel's first European-African theatre liberty was granted in Casablanca, French Morocco.

By 23 February 1944, the RHODES was back in the United States after escorting a convoy of vessels returning from the Mediterranean area. Following a Navy Yard availability in New York, N.Y., and a brief refresher training period off Montauk Point, Connecticut, she returned to Norfolk, departing as escort to another North African convoy 13 March 1944.

During this voyage, the RHODES' "built in headwind" again showed itself as the convoy wallowed through the high seas into the teeth of a series of North Atlantic gales.

While enroute to Gibraltar, the escort commander received orders to remain with this convoy, UGS-36, as far as Bizerte, Tunisia, instead of transferring it to British escorts at the entrance of the Mediterranean as had been the policy in the war thus far. Consequently, on 30 March 1944, the RHODES became part of the first United States ocean escort to enter the Mediterranean Sea.

EARLY ON THE MORNING of 1 April, 1944, while on station screening the starboard bow of the convoy, the RHODES intercepted a voice radio signal indicating that enemy planes were overhead. At the same time, armed guard crews in the convoy opened up with vigorous anti-aircraft fire. Immediately closing to her anti-aircraft screening station, the RHODES joined the battle, and for the next twenty minutes helped engage approximately 18 JU-88 and DO-217 planes. Twice her mast was nearly destroyed by low-diving German attackers, but each time her stubborn fire turned the enemy away.

When finally the planes departed, they left one of their number as a tribute to the marksmanship of the destroyer escort USS RAMSDEN while one merchant vessel was foundering badly, a gaping torpedo hole in her bow. However, a boarding party from the USS MILLS (DE-383) extinguished the fires aboard the stricken ship, and the vital cargo was saved. On 3 April 1944, the RHODES anchored in Bizerte, Tunisia.

After leaving Bizerte 11 April 1944, the RHODES arrived in New York with another convoy returned from North Africa. She spent the period from 3 May until 14 May 1944 in the Navy Yard, New York, and from 14 May until 18 May underwent a training period at Casco Bay, Portland, Maine. Between 21 May and 11 July 1944, she again proceeded to and returned from North Africa with merchant convoys.

Upon her return from this duty, the RHODES was assigned availability in Boston, Mass., and a two-week refresher training period at Casco Bay after which she joined a task group escorting convoys from the United States to the United Kingdom. She continued this North Atlantic escort duty from 11 August 1944 until 4 May 1945, seeing service in the Irish Sea and English Channel areas during the height of the submarine threat to these vital shipping lanes.

While engaged in this duty, the RHODES, on 9 April 1945, rescued six (6) survivors from the SS SAINT MIHIEL and SS NASHBULK, tankers which collided while in United Kingdom bound convoy. For his performance of duty that night, Lieutenant A. C. Wagner, USGC, the commanding officer who had relieved Commander Coffin, 29 December 1944, received a letter of commendation from the Commander Destroyers, U.S. Atlantic Fleet.

WITH THE ARRIVAL of V-E Day, the RHODES received orders to join the Pacific Fleet, and after a twelve-day refresher training period in the Caribbean Sea, she passed through the Panama Canal into the Pacific on 18 June 1945. From the Canal Zone, she made her way to San Francisco and then to Adak, Aleutian Islands, arriving at that northern base on 8 July 1945. Since that date, she has served under the Commander Alaskan Sea Frontier as an escort and air-sea rescue vessel, occasionally being assigned to duty under Commander North Pacific Forces and Commander Task Force 92. Between 15 July 1945 and 21 July 1945 she served under this latter command; escorting

the service group of Task Force 92 during one of its strikes at shipping in the Sea of Okhotsk and bombardment of the Kurile Islands.

On 20 August 1945, Lieutenant A. C. Wagner, USCG, was relieved of command by Lieut. Comdr. W. K. Earle, USCG, and the RHODES since that time has been assigned to Commander Fleet Air Wing Four for duty as guard and rescue ship.

Then resuming operations for the Alaskan Sea Frontier, she remained in the Aleutians until mid-November, when she sailed for Okinawa. Arriving at Buckner Bay 25 November, she joined the 7th fleet and in December got underway for Tsingtao, China, where she supported the occupation troops until 11 February 1946. She then sailed for the east coast of the United States.

RHODES RETRANSDITED the Panama Canal 19 March and arrived at Charleston, South Carolina, to begin inactivation on the 25th. Assigned to the Florida Group, Atlantic Reserve Fleet, she moved south in April and decommissioned on 13 June 1946.

RHODES remained berthed at Mayport, Florida, until 24 July 1954, when she got underway for Norfolk to begin conversion to a radar picket escort ship. Reclassified DER-384 on 1 December 1954, she recommissioned 1 August 1955 and on 12 September reported for duty in the Atlantic Fleet.

Assigned to CortRon 18, RHODES conducted exercises in the Caribbean until late November, then returned to Norfolk where she remained into the new year, 1956. Then sailing north, she arrived at Newport, Rhode Island, her home port, 10 January and commenced 8 years of service on the Atlantic Barrier Patrol, the seaward extension of the DEW (Distant Early Warning) Line. During that period she served on various stations from Argentina, Newfoundland, to the Azores, interspersing such duty with exercises and operations in the Caribbean, including, in October-November 1962, participation in the Cuban Quarantine. In 1963 RHODES was again ordered inactivated and in April she steamed to Philadelphia to begin preparations. Decommissioned 10 July 1963, she remained at Philadelphia into 1974, berthed there as a unit of the Atlantic Reserve Fleet.

RHODES earned one battle star during World War II.

USS RHODES (DE-384) was sold to the Union Minerals company in April 1975 for scrap.

Unofficial exploits of U.S.S. RHODES (DE-384) nicknamed "RAMBLIN RHODES."

- 1 January 1944 — Escorted New York Section, North African Convoy from New York to Norfolk. (What a way to spend New Year's)
- 2-13 January 1944 — Served as training ship for prospective destroyer escort crews.
- 13-31 January 1944 — Acted as escort for North African convoy. Four anti-submarine attacks made during operations. Stanley Johnson ostracized by all hands upon contacting German measles.
- 1 February 1944 — Accompanied killer group in anti-submarine sweep Gibraltar to Casablanca.
- 1-3 February 1944 — Granted liberty Casablanca, French Morocco, North Africa.
- 4-23 February 1944 — Acted as escort convoy of merchant ships returned from North African ports to the United States.
- 5-10 March 1944 — In training at Montauk Point.
- 13 March 1944 — Departed Norfolk, Virginia, as escort for convoy to North African ports.
- 23 March 1944 — With convoy at sea battling gale force winds and high seas.
- 24-26 March 1944 — Continue to battle high seas.
- 30 March 1944 — Entered Mediterranean with convoy.
- 1 April 1944 — Convoy under attack by approximately eighteen enemy planes. One merchant ship carrying vital war materials struck by aerial torpedo. Fire extinguished by boarding party from destroyer escort USS MILLS and towed by that vessel to the port of Oran. Ship and cargo arrived safe. Destroyer escort vessel USS RAMSDEN credited with destruction of one enemy plane.
- 3 April 1944 — Crew granted liberty Bizerte, Tunisia, North Africa.
- 11 April 1944 — Departed North Africa as escort to merchant vessels returning to United States ports.
- 23 April 1944 — At sea battling North Atlantic Gale and high seas.
- 24-29 April 1944 — At sea continuing to battle high seas and wind.
- 2 May 1944 — Anchored in outer New York harbor, awaiting orders. Executive Officer Lieut. A. C. Wagner madly pacing deck. Requested by blinker information as to whether he was new father. Return message: Affirmative.
- 3 May 1944 — Crew granted much deserved liberty at New York.
- 14 May 1944 — Underway from New York harbor to Casco Bay, Portland, Maine, for training.
- 18 May 1944 — Departed Portland, Maine for Norfolk, Virginia.
- 21 May 1944 — Departed Norfolk, Virginia, as escort vessel for North African convoy.
- 12 June 1944 — Arrived Bizerte, Tunisia, North Africa. Crew granted liberty.
- 20 June 1944 — Departed Bizerte as escort vessel for merchant ships returning to United States.
- 11 July 1944 — Arrived South Harbor, Boston. Crew granted liberty.
- 24 July 1944 — Departed for Casco Bay, Portland, Maine, for training.
- 7 August 1944 — Departed Casco Bay for New York, N.Y.
- 11 August 1944 — Departed New York as escort vessel for convoy bound for United Kingdom.
- 23 August 1944 — Arrived Londonderry, North Ireland. Crew granted liberty.
- 27 August 1944 — Departed as escort vessel to merchant ships returning to United States.
- 5 September 1944 — Arrived New York, N.Y. Crew granted liberty.
- 22 September 1944 — Departed for Montauk Point for training.
- 26 September 1944 — Returned to New York.
- 29 September 1944 — Departed New York as escort vessel for convoy bound for United Kingdom.
- 9 October 1944 — Arrived Portsmouth, England. Crew granted liberty.
- 17 October 1944 — Sailed for United States as escort vessel to merchant ships.
- 18 October 1944 — Proceeding down English Channel. This vessel in company with USS RAMSDEN (DE-382) being lashed by North Atlantic hurricane. Winds exceeding seventy knots. Seas exceeding ninety feet.
- 19-20 October 1944 — At sea, this vessel still being lashed with full gale winds and tremendous seas.
- 26 October 1944 — Moderate gales continue.
- 28 October 1944 — Wind increased to whole gale force. Seas continue to lash convoy.
- 29 October 1944 — Arrived New York harbor. Considerable loss and damage to ship's equipment sustained during crossing.
- 15 November 1944 — Departed as escort for convoy to European ports.
- 26 November 1944 — Arrived Plymouth, England.
- 3 December 1944 — Departed as escort of merchant ships to United States.
- 16 December 1944 — Arrived New York, N.Y.
- 29 December 1944 — Lieut. A. C. Wagner, USCG, relieved Lieut. Cmdr. E. A. Coffin, Jr., of command.
- 3 January 1945 — Departed as escort for convoy to European ports.
- 15 January 1945 — Arrived in Liverpool, England.
- 18 January 1945 — Departed as escort for convoy to United States.
- 2 February 1945 — Arrived New York, N.Y.

- 13 February 1945 — Departed for Casco Bay, Maine, for refresher training.
- 15 February 1945 — Arrived Casco Bay, Maine.
- 18 February 1945 — Departed for Boston, arriving early afternoon.
- 19 February 1945 — Departed as escort for convoy to European ports.
 - 2 March 1945 — Arrived Southampton, England.
 - 5 March 1945 — Departed as English Channel escort.
 - 8 March 1945 — Returned Southampton, England.
 - 10 March 1945 — Departed as escort for convoy to United States.
- 21 March 1945 — Arrived New York, N.Y.
 - 1 April 1945 — Departed for Montauk for refresher training.
 - 2 April 1945 — Arrived Montauk.
 - 6 April 1945 — Departed for New York.
 - 8 April 1945 — Departed as escort for convoy to European ports.
- 9-10 April 1945 — Assisted in rescue operations as a result of collision between SS SAINT MIHIEL and SS NASHBULK.
- 19 April 1945 — Arrived Cardiff, Wales.
- 23 April 1945 — Departed as escort for convoy to United States.
 - 4 May 1945 — Arrived New York for availability.
- 30 May 1945 — Departed for Culebra, Virgin Islands, with Escort Division 23.
 - 3 June 1945 — Arrived Culebra, commenced shore bombardment exercises.
 - 4 June 1945 — Departed for Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.
 - 5 June 1945 — Arrived Guantanamo Bay for refresher training.
- 15 June 1945 — Departed for Canal Zone.
- 17 June 1945 — Arrived Coco Solo. Reported to CincPac for duty.
- 18 June 1945 — Passed through Panama Canal enroute to San Francisco.
- 27 June 1945 — Arrived San Francisco, California.
- 30 June 1945 — Departed for Adak, Aleutian Islands.
 - 8 July 1945 — Arrived Adak. Reported to ComAlSeaFran for duty.
 - 10 July 1945 — Departed as escort of tanker for Attu.
 - 12 July 1945 — Arrived Attu.
 - 15 July 1945 — Departed as escort of USS SALINAS (AO-19) in company with USS RICHEY to rendezvous with Task Force 92 off Kuriles.
 - 18 July 1945 — Rendezvoused with Task Force 92. When fueling operations were completed, RHODES, SALINAS and RICHEY returned to Attu.
 - 21 July 1945 — Arrived Attu.
- 5 August 1945 — Departed as escort of USAT CHIRIKOF proceeding to Dutch Harbor.
 - 9 August 1945 — Arrived Dutch Harbor for availability.
- 20 August 1945 — Lieut. A. C. Wagner, USCG, relieved of command by Lieut. Cmdr. W. K. Earle, USCG.
 - 22 August 1945 — Departed for Attu.
 - 24 August 1945 — Arrived Attu
 - 29 August 1945 — Departed on plane guard duty.
- 5 September 1945 — Arrived Attu - Weather Patrol.
- 23 September 1945 — Departed Attu
- 24 September 1945 — Arrived Adak.
 - 18 October 1945 — Departed Adak.
 - 24 October 1945 — Anchored of Hinchinhook Isle, Port Eiehes, Alaska.
 - 25 October 1945 — Departed Hinchinhook.
- 2 November 1945 — Arrived Kodiak, Alaska.
- 8 November 1945 — Departed Kodiak, Alaska.
- 11 November 1945 — Arrived Adak.
- 14 November 1945 — Departed Adak.
- 25 November 1945 — Arrived Buckner Bay, Okinawa.
- 11 December 1945 — Departed Okinawa.
- 14 December 1945 — Arrived Taku, China.
 - 3 January 1946 — Departed Taku.
 - 4 January 1946 — Arrived Tsingtao, China.
 - 5 January 1946 — Departed Tsingtao.
 - 6 January 1946 — Arrived Taku, China.
 - 16 January 1946 — Departed Taku.
 - 17 January 1946 — Arrived Tsingtao, China.
 - 19 January 1946 — Departed Tsingtao.
 - 22 January 1946 — Arrived Taku, China.
 - 29 January 1946 — Departed Taku.
 - 29 January 1946 — Arrived Tsingtao, China.
- 11 February 1946 — Departed Tsingtao.
- 23 February 1946 — Arrived Pearl Harbor, Oahu, Hawaii.
 - 5 March 1946 — Departed Pearl Harbor.
 - 17 March 1946 — Arrived Panama Canal.
 - 21 March 1946 — Departed Panama City.
 - 25 March 1946 — Arrived Charleston, South Carolina
 - 1 April 1946 — Departed Charleston.
 - 15 April 1946 — Arrived Green Cove Springs, Florida.
 - 13 June 1946 — Decommissioned. Mayport, Florida.

CHINA STATION

By LIEUTENANT COMMANDER W. K. EARLE ('40), ComCortDiv 42

"From Aztec Shores to Arctic Zones

To Europe and Far East"

I always thought that the ". Far East" part of our song was stretching things a bit. But a few weeks ago, anchored in the Gulf of Pohai, North China, were the USS WAKEFIELD (AP-21), USS CEPHENS (AKA-18), USS CENTAURUS (AKA-17), USS RHODES (DE-384), USS SAVAGE (DE-386), USS RICHEY (DE-385), and USS MILLS (DE-383)—all Coast Guard manned. The WAKEFIELD was in to pick up a load of Marine separatees from the Marine Corps divisions in the North China Theatre. The AKA's were supplying the U. S. Naval activities in North China. The DE's were doing odd jobs and making escort runs through the mine areas. The Coast Guard shield is becoming a fairly common sight in Shanghai, Tsingtao, Tientsin, and other China ports.

The Destroyer Escorts named above are units of Escort Division 42 (formerly 23). This division, which also includes the USS RAMSDEN (DE-382) and the USS SELLSTROM (DE-255), came down from the Aleutians last fall via Okinawa and reported to Commander Seventh Fleet (China Seas Area) for duty on 1 December, 1945. After a short availability in Okinawa, the division was split up into two sections and sailed to China; one section joining Task Group 78.15 in Tsingtao, the other joining Task Group 78.19 in Taku. These task groups were engaged chiefly in carrying out or supporting large scale repatriation—clearing Japanese soldiers and civilians out of China and Korea, and repatriating displaced Chinese and Koreans. The actual transportation was done chiefly by LST's, of which over 100 were assigned, and so the Coast Guard-manned DE's were used for odd jobs and liaison work between the various ports. The SELLSTROM acted as a mobile Issuing Unit for a few weeks, issuing registered publications to Naval activities in Shanghai, Tsingtao, Taku, and Jinsin. The RHODES and MILLS made weekly runs between Taku and Tsingtao carrying passengers, mail, and light freight. All ships made occasional escort runs with "magic carpet" ships and transports, conducting them through the areas of possible drifting mines. Other odd jobs included rounding up of small craft that broke away during storms, going out on occasional distress calls, sinking derelicts, etc.

In carrying out these duties, all of the ships had a few minor adventures and saw a good deal of China. A total of seven drifting mines were sighted and sunk by ships of the Division. The SAVAGE, one day after a storm, found a derelict Chinese junk, deserted except for one dead Chinaman lashed to the mast. The body was buried at sea and the derelict sunk by gunfire. The RICHEY was sent out during a severe storm from Taku to recover a Chinese barge that had gone adrift. After several hours of searching, the

barge was finally located, and found to be loaded with about 15 half-frozen Chinese. The RICHEY took the Chinese aboard and towed the barge to safety.

The RHODES and the RAMSDEN were called out of Tsingtao on a distress case one stormy night, which ended rather humorously: The local Chinese naval authorities heard a weak distress call from one of their little 125-foot gunboats, the HAINING, en route from Shanghai to Tsingtao. This was immediately communicated to the U. S. Navy and in a short time the USS COLUMBUS (CA-74) and USS HART (DD-594), plus the RHODES and the RAMSDEN, were beating their way out of the harbor to search for the gunboat. A search was carried out all that night under rough weather conditions. Finally toward morning the RAMSDEN made radar contact on a small vessel, closed, and found it to be, from all appearances, a Chinese gunboat in no apparent trouble, headed for Tsingtao. The RAMSDEN tried to communicate with flashing light, but received no response. Then she tried bull horn, but still no answer. The HART, who had a Chinese interpreter aboard, came up and tried her bull horn in Chinese. But the gunboat disdained to answer, and merely continued on her way. Meanwhile, considerable time had elapsed, and the radio reports and situation in general were becoming very confused. Finally, in response to various combinations of international code flags, the vessel laboriously spelled out her name—and it wasn't the HAINING. It was another Chinese gunboat that had not been reported as being in the area. So the search continued. At about noon that day the search was cancelled and the four ships were ordered back to port. The HAINING had arrived in Tsingtao safe and sound. The story we got later was that one of her radiomen had become frightened during the rough weather and had sent an SOS on his own initiative, without telling anyone about it.

The anchorage in the Gulf of Pohai, off the mouth of the Hai Ho River, is a very lonely place. Only the LST's and shallow draft vessels are able to cross the bar and tie up at Taku. The others remain at anchor in a group about 15 miles off shore. The surrounding land is so low that it cannot be seen from the anchorage. Obtaining anchor bearings is quite a problem. We finally cut in the approximate location of the anchorage by a celestial fix.

About every third day strong northwesterly winds spring up suddenly and sometimes play havoc with the small boats and landing craft that operate around the anchorage. The wind velocity frequently reaches 50 knots, and the short, fast combers that build up knock boats loose from moorings and cause the LST's and barges to drag anchor. These winds are bitter cold and filled with dust from the flat plains of North China, and sometimes blow ice from the mouth of the river out around the anchorage.

The Tsingtao anchorage is much more pleasant. The ships anchor in the moon-shaped outer harbor, close to "Pagoda Pier,"

where liberty parties are landed. The city is in plain view and the holding ground fairly good. The anchorage is sheltered from the northwest by high land, and ships are not troubled by dragging. They are, however, troubled by swarms of bum boats that crowd around, begging for the privilege of removing garbage, trying to swap cheap trinkets and jewelry for old clothes and food, asking for work. Sometimes the occupants of the bum boats wave letters of recommendation from other ships, recommending them as good paint chippers, garbage can cleaners, etc. They will come aboard (if you let them) and do any kind of work for nothing—in hopes of picking up scraps of food and old clothing. It takes great determination, constant vigilance, and the occasional use of a fire hose to keep them off.

Occasionally the ships are given an opportunity to tie up to a pier in Tsingtao Inner Harbor for short "ship's maintenance" periods, and there the ship's force is generally augmented by coolie labor. A pool of coolies is maintained by the Navy for this purpose, and all that is necessary is to call the "coolie coordinator" and tell him how many you want. They appear at the appointed time—a tattered, ragged, fragrant, but cheerful lot—and go to work. They are very useful for such jobs as chipping and scraping decks down to bare metal, cleaning bilges, polishing brass, etc. During one period we had 45 of them every day for a week. Everyone in the deck force down to the lowliest seaman, assumed the status of an overseer with a small group of coolies working under his immediate supervision. In the week's time a tremendous amount of work was accomplished.

Shore liberty in China is very interesting. The ships in Taku anchorage were afforded opportunities to send liberty parties to Tientsin and Peiping. Tientsin liberty parties were loaded daily aboard LCS's or LCT's and transported 35 miles up the narrow, winding Hai Ho River to the heart of the city. The boat ride in itself is well worth the trip. The flat farmland, criss-crossed by irrigation ditches, the little villages of clay huts, the occasional pagoda or arched wooden foot-bridge, the colorfully dressed people crowding down to the river bank to wave as you go by, the crude fishing boats and sampans that crowd the river—all join to make the spectacle just as strange and interesting as your story-book impressions of China would have it. Perhaps the most memorable thing of that boat trip is the opportunity of seeing the Chinese "fishing birds" in action. These are tame birds of about the size of a sea gull that are utilized for fishing. Anywhere from two to six of them are tied to a native fishing boat by long strings. Detachable rings are fitted around their necks to prevent them from enjoying the fruits of their labor. The birds sit along the gunwale of the boat and peer into the water. Every now and then one of them flops in, comes up with a fish in his mouth, and is pulled back to the boat. The fisherman takes the fish and the bird tries again.

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I suppose the fisherman removes the rings occasionally so that the birds don't get too discouraged.

Tientsin is a fairly modern city which has been built up largely by foreign interests. Although somewhat run down as a result of the war and the Jap occupation, it is teeming with people and full of bustling activity. The streets are crowded with people of all sorts—Chinese merchants, ricksha boys, Europeans, ragamuffin youngsters, American Marines, white Russian girls, Chinese Nationalist soldiers, street vendors, etc. The Chinese people seem somewhat threadbare and not over-nourished, but they appear to be cheerful and enthusiastic. They laugh and grin and talk a lot. And they frequently grin, raise their thumbs, and shout "Ding hao!" (very good) or "Haba Haba!" to the American sailors and marines passing by. Rickshas have been replaced by pedicabs (rickshas pulled by bicycles) to conform with the increased tempo of the city, and these pedicabs jam the streets. Rugged youngsters run alongside your pedicab for blocks, saluting and yelling, "Comesha, comesha—no mommy, no poppy, no flight pay!" over and over again. It's the only English they know, and seems to be the stock beggar's expression everywhere.

There are many shops, restaurants, and night clubs, which, although somewhat handicapped by lack of stock, do a rushing business. In spite of the ridiculous rate of exchange (about seven thousand Chinese dollars to one American dollar) prices are not very low. Our marines and sailors rarely use Chinese money because of the large bulks of it required, and American dollars are readily welcomed. Liberty parties return to the ship laden down with all kinds of booty—silk scarves, elaborately embroidered mandarin coats, silk smoking jackets, vases, carved ivory, camphorwood boxes, swords, jewelry, dolls, second-hand cameras, China sets, silk pajamas, etc. One of the boys even returned with a small, frightened monkey peering out from underneath his peacoat. Haggling with the shopkeepers is lots of fun in itself. It is all done in pigeon English and pantomime, with much deprecation and wild gesturing on both sides. Usually if you are any good at that sort of thing you end up by paying one-quarter to one-half of the initial price asked. But the shopkeeper, of course, still makes a handsome profit.

Peiping liberty involves a two and one-half day trip. The parties are transported ashore by landing craft, then make the 130 mile trip overland by train. The coaches are very cold, dirty, and packed with Chinese, and the trip takes anywhere from five to seven hours. Chinese Nationalist troops and Japanese soldiers are stationed at intervals all along the tracks, guarding the roadbed against Chinese Communists. It is one of the few railroad lines in North China that is still operating. The train ride is very uncomfortable, but once in Peiping the trip becomes well worth while. It is the ancient capital of old China and is full of palaces, temples, parks, Buddhist shrines, and pagodas, all of which are very beautiful and colorful. It is much less commercial and far more cultural than

Tientsin. The Chinese people are more gracious and courteous here, and are not at all "westernized" in their manners.

The liberty parties are lodged in some dormitories of the old Peiping Medical College. Some of the officers are fortunate enough to get rooms at the Grand Hotel de Wagon Lit, which is a large and gracious hotel, reputedly the best in China. Rickshas are the only means of transportation, and the streets are crowded with them. Organized tours are conducted, but many of the men prefer to take in the city by themselves, riding rickshas and going wherever their fancy leads them. At every turn one sees sights which, to our western eyes, are strange and interesting. You stop in a Buddhist temple, smell the incense, watch the colorfully dressed priests go through their rites, and see the Chinese enter, kneel, and touch their foreheads to the floor. A wedding procession passes, accompanied by weird wailing of Chinese reed and stringed instruments. The bride rides inside an enclosed, red sedan chair, carried on the shoulders of colorfully costumed men. Musicians lead the procession, and other attendants follow, carrying tall staffs surmounted by carved symbols for wealth, health, fertility, and the like. You see sweating coolies pulling heavily laden, solid-wheeled wooden carts by hand. A dirty, ragged woman with a baby strapped on her back begs for "comesha." A Chinese gentleman clad in a cotton padded black silk robe and skull cap, bows and smiles as you pass. From all sides you here the ricksha boys cry, "Hey Joe—ricksha?" All Americans are "Joe" in China.

The Navy had planned to keep Escort Division 42 in the China Seas for several more months, but ALCOAST 12 soon created a critical personnel problem. Very few replacements were available from the Coast Guard Replacement Center in Leyte Gulf, and increasing numbers of the crew were being held as "military necessities." When it became evident that sufficient replacements could not be furnished, the division was reassembled at Tsingtao, detached from the Seventh Fleet, and sailed for the Panama Canal via Pearl Harbor. At present writing we are on the second leg of that long trek, the 4700-mile stretch from Pearl to Panama.

Our ultimate destination now is decommissioning. Although we will all be very happy to be "Stateside" again after nearly a year's absence, many of us will feel regrets at relinquishing our ships. Destroyer Escorts are trim, rugged, well-designed little fighting ships, a type the Coast Guard is well qualified to man during wartime.

The following appointments were confirmed by the Senate on 11 April, 1946, to the ranks indicated:

- R. R. Waesche—Admiral
- T. A. Shanley—Rear Admiral
- M. O'Neill—Rear Admiral
- L. W. Perkins—Commodore

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