

U.S. ARMY TRANSPORTATION SERVICE

Water Division
Small Boat Department

World War II



THE LITTLE SHIPS

BY

RON STAHL

TO MARY

These stories and tales could not have been written without the encouragement from my wonderful companion, true love and wife.

Her editorial skills go far beyond periods and commas. She once remarked, “You know what you are trying to say but the reader also has to understand. Details and descriptions are very important.”



A NAUTILUS PUBLICATION

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This booklet is not for sale. It is intended as a recollection of events I was involved in many years ago, and is for distribution only to my family and friends. All photos and graphics used are credited to their sources and are used only as examples and do not represent actual vessels used in the stories.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly twenty years I have been associated with the “United States Merchant Marine Veterans of World War II”. These men are all volunteers and have successfully restored the S.S. Lane Victory, a World War II Victory Ship, into a fully operational, U.S. Coast Guard and Bureau of Ships certified vessel for limited passenger service. Among the crew are many men who began their life at sea with the Army Transportation Service. After gaining sea experience many would qualify to receive documents and certificates to allow them to ship out on off-shore cargo vessels or tankers, hiring out of regional union dispatch offices.

The following events are my personal recollections about the little known quasi-military organization that I served with, its ships, and the men that sailed them.

During World War II the U.S. Army Transportation Service, which later became the Army Transportation Corps (Water Division), was the largest sea-going force on earth; larger even than the U.S. Navy at its peak. It included more bottoms (hulls)....greater tonnage, and operated around the globe in more areas than any other maritime entity.

Many crews of the ATS vessels were of mixed nationalities; in one instance that I was very familiar with, several Swedish officers said that to be allowed to sail aboard American vessels had to change their identities to Norwegian because Sweden was a neutral nation (mentioned in the stories ATLANTIC CONVOY and MULBERRY). There were Aussies and New Zealanders (OCEAN LIGHTER and ZAMBOANGA MONKEY CAPER), Chinese (OCEAN LIGHTER), and Filipinos (FITCH the BITCH). I=ve heard of many other nationalities serving on the American flagged ALittle Ships≅.

What is amazing....as I understand the law which passed in 1987 giving

I hope the following short but true story will invite the reader to a glimpse into the formative period of my youth. Captain Noble opened a window of adventure at sea I found almost unreal or found hard to believe even existed. His artistic ability to paint a picture with words cast a spell over me I have as yet been unable to break.

CAPTAIN CHAS. NOBLE

As a lad of 13 or 14 growing up on the beach in the mid to late thirties at Las Flores, California, I was isolated from the normal activities that most youths of the big cities experienced. Don't get me wrong, I'm not complaining, but it did make me seek out ways to entertain myself like surfing, tending my lobster pots, or one of my more enjoyable hobbies, surf fishing. Bait was always available from the rocks or in the sand at the surf line.

During the weekends and summer breaks I would fish in the early mornings and late afternoons at a spot just a few houses up the beach from our house, because some large rocks sat offshore and I believed that the bait on the rocks attracted the hungry fish. I kept the big fish but released the small ones.

When setting up to fish, I would always look up to a two-story house which had a very large bay window, and wave to an elderly, neatly trimmed bearded gent who always sat in the same spot at the window, and he would always wave back.

Word among the few boys around my age who lived along the beach was that this mysterious man was a ghost, and that his house was haunted. Nobody ever saw anyone enter or leave the house, and we never saw him except in the window.

Halloween came around and for something to do, we (the three teen age hellions) let the air out of tires and even jacked the wheels up on some of the cars parked along Pacific Coast Highway, or forced potatoes in their exhaust pipes.

Walking up PCH we saw some telephone logs laying in front of the so-called



A MIKI-MIKI TUG

I lost my job as a machinist helper at Los Angeles Shipbuilding and Dry-docking (Todd Ship) for fighting. I also lost the right to live at Wilmington Hall, a housing development for defense workers.

I.U.M.S.W.A. Local 9 sent me over to Long Beach for a job interview. I boarded the big red Pacific Electric street car in San Pedro and struck up a conversation with a gentleman seated next to me. He introduced himself as George Emblem Master of a new ocean going tug. After listening to my woes he suggested that if things didn't pan out I should get in touch with him, and he gave me his card with directions to his ship sketched on the back.

After filling out applications and interviewing for several jobs it was obvious no one wanted to hire a trouble maker. I was out of money, no job and no place to stay. I thought I'd look the Captain up, so boarded the ferry to Terminal Island and followed the directions on the back of his card. I came to the front gate of Hodgen-Greene-Haldeman Boat Works and showed the Captain's card to the guard. He pointed out a path through the new hulls in various stages of

TAR-BABY

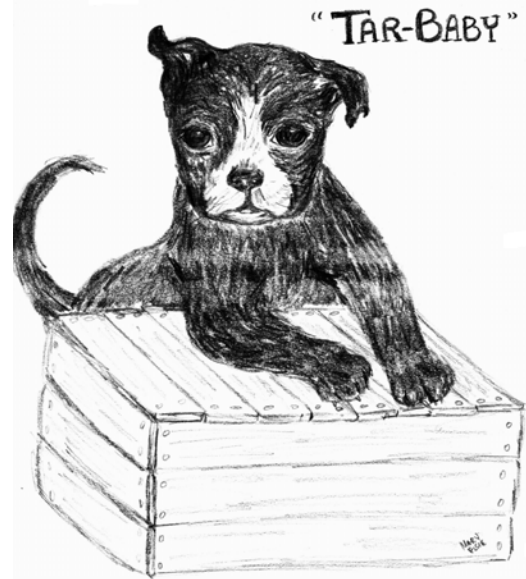
We were steaming at a good clip for a seven ship convoy, originating out of Christobal, Canal Zone. Our greatest fear lay ahead at the 60 mile gap between Cuba and Haiti, named the Windward Passage but better known by merchant seamen as the beginning of ATorpedo Alley≡.

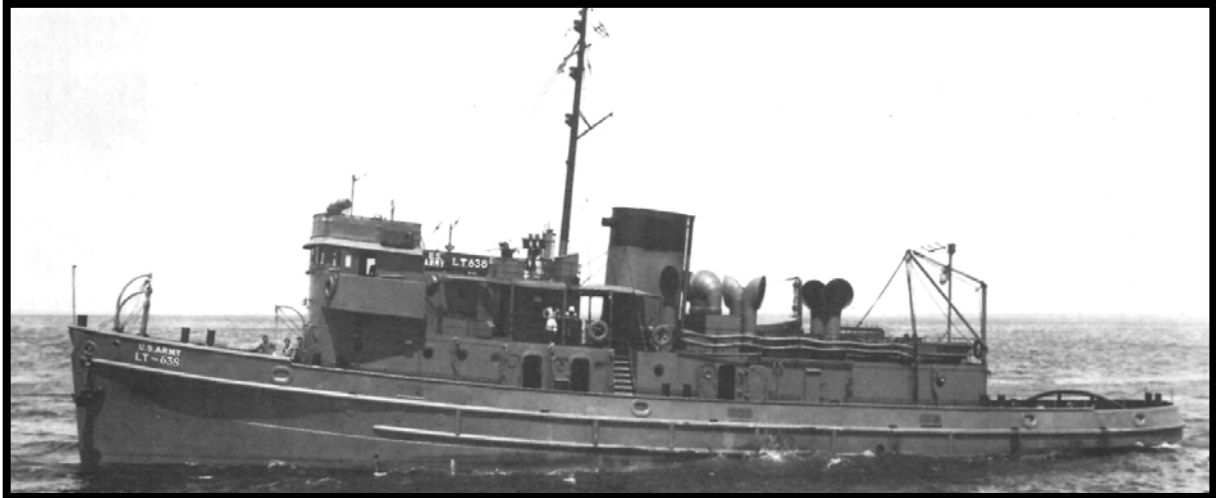
The afternoon of our third day out was miserable; the wind freshened to 20-30 knots and the seas were coming over our starboard rails. We couldn't maintain the pace or the course, so our Captain informed the convoy leader, by blinker light, that we must adjust our heading and reduce speed for our ships safety.

Of the six other ships, four resembled C-1s and C-2s, one was an old tanker, and one a passenger vessel of the type that plied the waters of Puget Sound. We were just a 127 foot ocean going wooden MIKI-MIKI type tug, en route from San Francisco, to be delivered to Brooklyn, New York for the Army Transportation Service, with a crew of fourteen men aboard.

After receiving permission to withdraw from the convoy we changed course to a more easterly direction to take on the large seas at a quarterly approach, and at a reduced speed hoping to come into the lee of Haiti during the coming evening. We also started monitoring the radio more seriously since we were now on our own.

On the 4-8 watch we heard a Mayday distress call, coming in over the radio, giving his position some 30 miles to the south of our position. We could hear a dog barking in the background. The poor fellow was trying to tell the name of his ship but all we could hear that was recognizable was something that sounded like "Point Saint Cir". He kept repeating his latitude and longitude coordinates but he kept mixing them up. He said they were hit in the engine room at the stern with a torpedo and that they were two days out of Aruba.





NORTH ATLANTIC CONVOY

Early winter 1944: A cold and windy New York City was not the most ideal weather condition for a Southern Californian lad (just arriving from the warm climes of the Canal Zone aboard an ocean-going tug) possessing only light warm-weather clothes.

The crew of our Miki-Miki tug decided to return to California on completion of their delivery assignment, but an opportunity for me to sign aboard a new large steel ocean-going steam tug heading for Europe was presented and seemed to offer more excitement and adventure than what another boring delivery job had to offer.

I met with the Captain and Mates of the new tug and with exception of the Norwegian skipper, the other officers were not much older than me. I guess it can be told now; all the officers were really Swedes but had to claim to be Norwegian before the US government would hire them. The officers seemed satisfied with my experience and had me sign the log. I learned that the bulk of the crew would be reporting aboard in the next day or so from Sheepshead Bay Maritime Service Training School. I was appointed temporary Bo's'n; only because I was the first deck-hand assigned. Besides, there were a lot of last minute stores and supplies



Notice rough sea at bottom of photo, then a first row of concrete caissons, followed by a second row of sunken ships (corncocks) and then the calm waters inside the Mulberry Harbor.

OPERATION MULBERRY

A little known episode, not publicly acknowledged, was the participation of civilian Merchant Seamen during the Normandy invasion. Many were involved in one of the most secret of all secrets in World War II. Code named operation “Mulberry” and “Corncob”, the formation of artificial harbors off the beachheads to protect the landings.

“Mulberry”: orderly lines of large concrete caissons placed end to end by tugs, most of which were crewed with civilian merchant mariners and civilian seamen of the U.S. Army Transportation Service. Tug crews of both the U.S. and British Navies along with crews of several foreign flag vessels received recognition for their



PEA SOUP on the POTATO PATCH

No, it's not a menu item and it isn't about food. But if you have ever sailed out of, or around, San Francisco Bay you should be familiar with the term “Pea Soup”, and you would certainly recognize the name “Potato Patch”, a large area on the left side when approaching the Golden Gate from the sea with its confused and bumpy waters.

Both of those terms, as told in this story, left such an indelible mark in my memory that I sometimes shudder when the thought crosses my mind and the scene again becomes all too vivid.

Monterey Bay in the summer of 1944 was a flourishing fishing port. It was also host to the large Army Training Center at Fort Ord, just to the north of town. Our purpose for being there was to hook on to two barges loaded with deck cargo of heavy duty army construction equipment that was too large for rail, truck or land transport destined for the Oakland Port of Embarkation, then to be loaded on a ship.

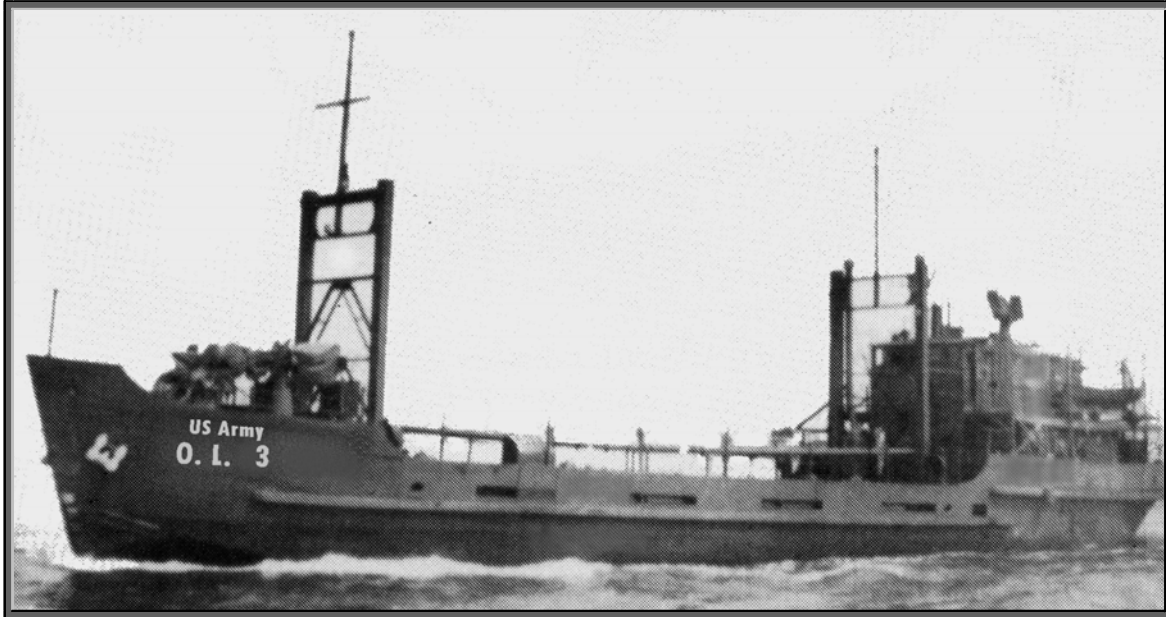


THE F. BOATS

They were called by many names, F's, FP's, FS's, AKA's. Every branch of the armed services, including the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and even the Army Air Corps, had large numbers of them. Do you remember the USS Pueblo or the ship in the movie "Mr. Roberts"? What sleek little freighters they were, ideal for inter-island duty.

I joined my first FS boat at Wilmington, California in October, 1944, almost one year from the time I signed on the Miki-Miki tug out of the same office. Because of my previous towboat experience my first duty was to assist rigging up a towing arrangement for a wooden 85' high speed QS boat to the South Pacific.

Prior to leaving on our trip a mate asked me to inspect and change, if necessary, all the black-out lights. The lights were just inside the entry hatches from the weather decks (these lights came on when as all the other lights went off when a door or hatch was opened, so we wouldn't show any lights to the enemy subs). There were so many bulbs to prepare that I decided to set up a production line to paint them. I strung out a string of twenty bulbs tied so they would hang down, and then, by dipping them in a coffee can of what I thought was dark blue lacquer, they would dry hanging in place. That evening I replaced all the bulbs and waited for dark to put them to the test.



OCEAN LIGHTER

It is now....as it was then, hot as hell with enough humidity to swim in. Time hasn't changed the weather, or I'm just not as acclimated to it as I was nearly 60 years ago. The beautiful green foliage has recovered its territory that we so ruthlessly cut and or bulldozed away so long ago.

Time has altered my memories. I thought by returning with my wife and first-hand describing the scenes as I remembered them that it would be exciting, but hell I don't recognize anything. It's like visiting a strange place I've never been to before and only proves that you can never go back again.

Most likely the warriors that charged the beaches have memories they wish they could forget, but out of it all I'll bet even they had moments they'll cherish forever. Such are the moments I remember as a crew member aboard an Army Transportation Service vessel. A steel 120 foot Australian built Ocean Lighter (resembling a North Sea Trawler but was really not much more than a self propelled barge), she had a speed of 10 knots flank, loaded or empty.

ZAMBOANGA MONKEY CAPER

As Monkeys go he wasn't much to look at. Just your average brownish-orange primate. Mugsy was ten to twelve pounds of pure devilment with a pot belly from the good life he led as mascot aboard our ship.

Our ship was a wooden, Australian built 112 ft. AFairmile B≅ U.S.Army Transport vessel supplying the Army forces that held small secured perimeter areas along the New Guinea coastline in that far-away battle area of '44-'45. (And yes, Virginia, it's true..... "The monkeys have no tails in Zamboanga!")



Our unit of three similar vessels was being moved up to the Philippines. We were to be towed in tandem to conserve logging time on the twin high-octane Stirling gas engines that powered our FSA's. The night before leaving Finschhafen we took on stores for our ten-day trip. After loading we were invited to what turned out to be a



TURMOIL ON TAWI-TAWI

The United States has a long history of dealing with the devil, especially if it suits its needs and if in return Satan will, for a price, play havoc with the enemies of the U.S.

I observed first hand some odd occurrences in and around the area of the Sulu Archipelago in the summer of 1945. Contact was made with members of the Philippine liberation groups to offer arms and advise them of our needs to dislodge the Japanese from the many islands in the Southern Philippines. Several cells of the Liberation groups were afraid that giving weapons to certain entities would give an

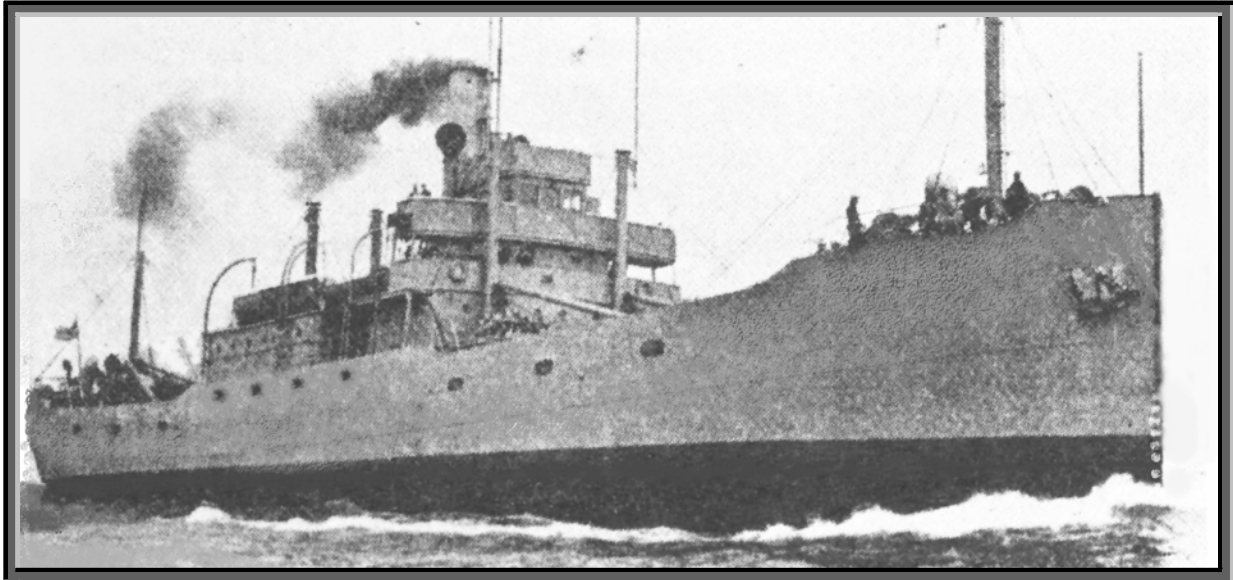
*JONAH
AND THE
MARK OF CAIN*

Men of the sea have long been accused as being a superstitious lot. That especially applies to fishermen as they think that when paying their debts at the full moon good luck will fill their nets in the coming month. A few will filch something off a successful competitor's vessel in hopes of bringing a bit of good Karma along with it, and a true mariner won't whistle while at sea for fear that the devil will unleash his one mighty power (the winds). Nor will a seaman kill a seabird for fear of destroying the soul of a departed seaman, or will he lay a line or hose counter-clockwise for fear of invoking the wrath of God or that of his skipper. But.... none of this really means that seamen are superstitious...they say, of course, that they are only following "wise sea traditions".

Long before the 1900's, Priests or Ministers were often employed to christen a new ship at her launching by breaking a bottle of wine spirits on the ship's prow, a custom reverting back to the dark ages when sacrifices of blood were used beseeching God's mercy and good fortune for the vessel and her crew. Seamen continue to follow proud traditions that have been handed down through generations. Many seamen, including fishermen, hesitate to sail on a Friday, the day of Christ's crucifixion, for fear of that old prognostication of trouble, that a voyage begun on a Friday is sure to be an unfortunate one or, as the fishermen say, "A Friday's sail, Always fail".

I never considered myself a religious person. I do believe in a greater being and have done a fair amount praying in my life.... and that is about the extent of it. On a Friday in mid February 1945, while anchored off the beach at Tacloban on Leyte

PIER-HEAD JUMP



A 250 foot “Laker” Class cargo ship built on the Great Lakes towards the end of the first World War, but completed too late to see service during that war. Many saw service during World War II with several being sunk by enemy action.

Had I known the outcome of this journey before hand I doubt that it would have made any difference. Just the opportunity of going to China was enough to excite any young man, but Shanghai....that conjured up visions of adventure that I'd only read in books.

I was sitting in a replacement depot in Manila, Philippines, summer 1946, awaiting transportation home to the States. So many men ahead of me had higher priorities that it was like waiting for a miracle to happen, when along came a note to report to the Transportation Officer at the docks and bring all my gear. I was endorsed as an ordinary seaman but had been sailing as an AB, Oiler, Cook, Mate and even one trip as Super-cargo. With almost two years of discharges and now, having completed



A REQUIEM FOR A FRIEND

Why, When a man has all of the opportunities in the world does he let them slip from his grasp, allow them to fall by the wayside and then deny, to others and to himself that the opportunities ever existed?

The majority of Merchant Seamen are responsible and conscientious individuals. Most are proud of their profession and work hard to advance into positions offering better than average incomes than comparable employment ashore. Then there are those who like the regimen of the sea life, and dislike the complications of competing against everybody ashore.

Thomas Womack fit in this latter mold. He was raised in an environment of



*J.E. GORMAN, another ancient castoff, converted to a Marine Repair Ship;
similar to the WILLIAM F. FITCH*

FITCH THE BITCH

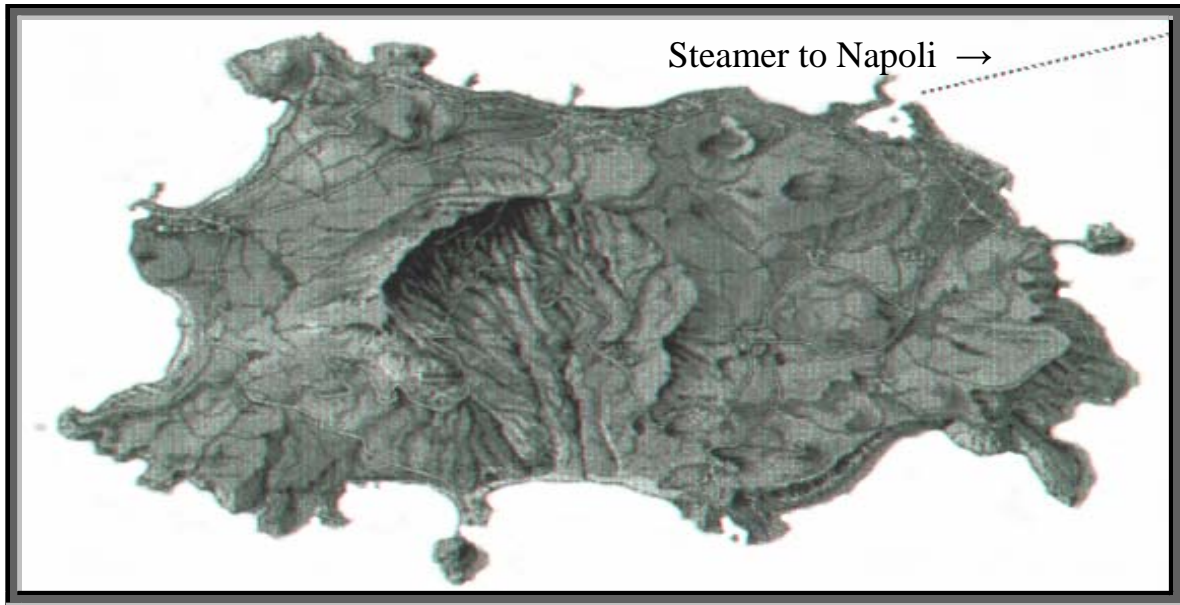
Most crewmen develop an attachment for their ship that is hard to describe to a non-seafaring person. You could compare this affection to a man-woman affair. "You treat her right; she'll do anything you ask of her." Of course this does not mean that all women or all ships fit into this scenario.

I was only two days aboard the "Fitch" when she and I started developing a hate-hate relationship that was to fester and grow for the entire two and a half months it took us to travel from Manila to San Francisco.

Crews aboard ships calling at the port of Hollandia, on the North West coast of New Guinea, Netherlands East Indies, in late 1944 and early 1945 will surely remember a large turn-of-the-century ship lying at anchor in the main roadstead with a large work barge tied along side. The S.S. William F. Fitch was a marine repair ship. Her keel was laid in 1898; she was made of riveted iron plate, and was launched at Detroit, Michigan in 1902. At 354 feet she was rated at 4,000 Gross Tons. She had a single screw powered by a 1500 H.P. triple-expansion steam engine, with three old

ADDITIONAL
FICTIONAL SHORT STORIES
BY AUTHOR

(OVER)



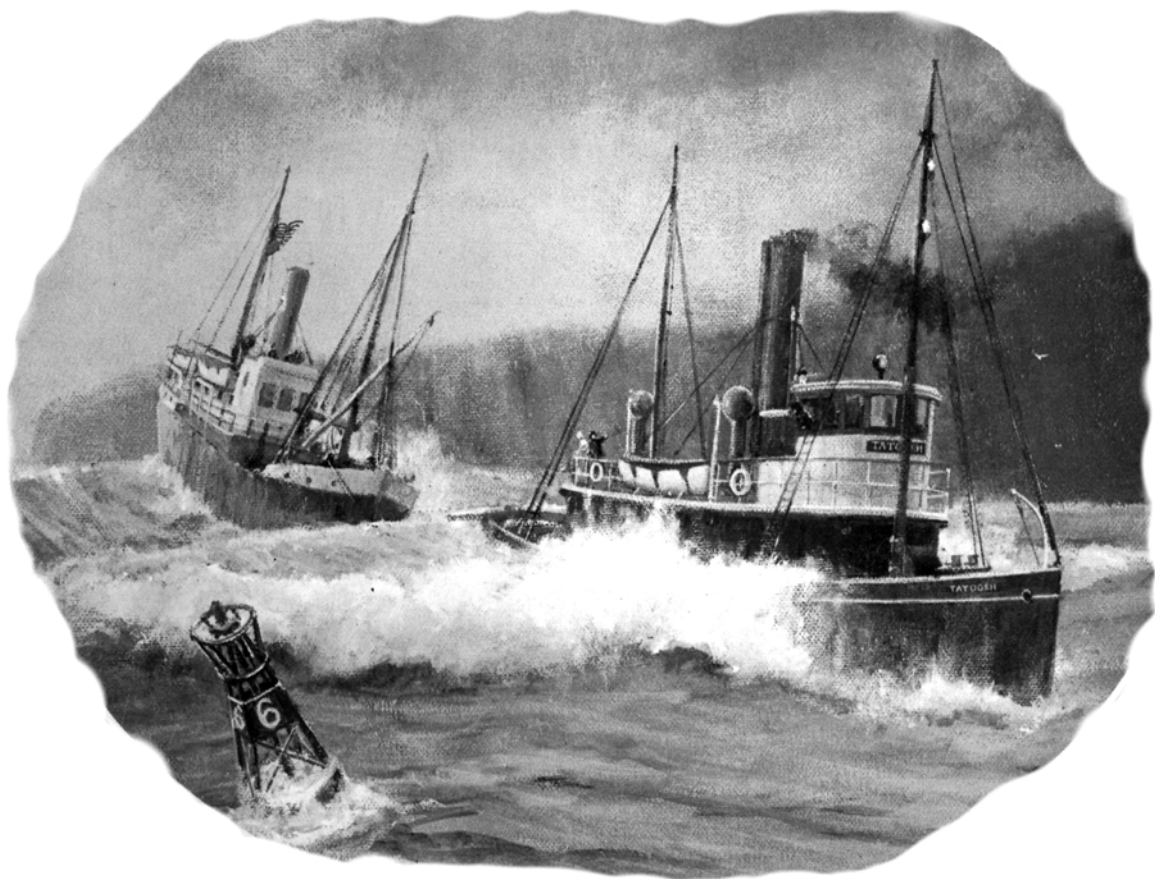
ISCHIA

ISCHIA is an island of only 18 square miles, with a population of 30 thousand plus, and lies 18 miles off the coast of Napoli in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Because of her well publicized neighbor Aisle de Capri≡, known as a playground for many wealthy tourists, Ischia is seldom considered for more than a quick glance in her direction except for those who know of her or were born there.

There are few places on this earth, including my home town of San Pedro, that I know any better....even though I have never been to Ischia, or for that matter, to Italy.

My mother, father and older brother came to America shortly after the AWar to End All Wars≡ in the early nineteen twenties, at the urging of uncles on both sides of the old families who had already migrated here.

Having family already established in San Pedro was the primary motivation. Fishing and all its environs were major factors, add to that a similar climate to that



A REAL
"HERO"

The steam tug TATOOSH proceeded in the face of a raging gale and heavy seas off the mouth of the Columbia River as other rescue tugs were forced to return to shelter. TATOOSH continued on and entered the breaking surf, rescuing not only the forty-eight passengers and crew aboard the steam schooner WASHINGTON but the ship itself. The newspapers had already declared in their headlines that the WASHINGTON had been driven ashore and her passengers were doomed. Without the reliable power plant in TATOOSH this rescue could not have occurred.



THAT DAMNED PARROT

Karl Reinert was a crusty old fart who kept to himself for the most part. I later learned that the crew thought it was because of his heavy Danish accent and his slow responses (probably because he was taking time to mull over what was said, then translating between his native tongue back to English and by that time the thought or topic was out of sync with the rest of the conversation). He couldn't understand why we didn't burst out laughing at a punch line of his joke until we had taken the time ourselves to translate what he had said.

He had taught himself English by reading newspapers printed in English and Zane Gray novels he found aboard ship. Because of this, his pronunciation was often wrong or the accent would be on the wrong syllable. For example the word Avegetable≅ always came out of his mouth as AweG-a-TABLE≅, Abottom≅ was Abutton≅, shrimps were Askrimps≅ and our Chief Mate, AHugh Rogers,≅ was AHuG RoGGers≅....all AG=s≅ coming out hard in his translation. I won't attempt to write as he talked, but I think you get the picture.



Frank Jr. tosses line as he comes along side

WATER TAXI

Just a few more cases to unload and we could call it a day. Twelve hours is enough for anyone, especially after loading half dozen ships with their last minute stores and having to argue with the pursers over the COD's before allowing the supplies to be taken aboard. The Water Taxi business was going full steam with so many ships coming into L.A. because of the low cost bunkering fuel, and this being the only transportation available for the crews to go ashore or receive supplies while their ships rode at anchor.

The number 13 boat was coming along side with a large group of the ship's crew to off-load. "Hey! Gus! Help them with their lines and I'll finish loading the basket," I shouted to Water Taxi Service's part-time jack-of-all-trades.

ODD TWIST OF FATE

In the early days of World War II newsreel accounts of Merchant ships being sent to the bottom were dramatically shown in movie houses around the world. Usually the scenes were the lead propaganda item to get your fullest attention for the sale of war bonds. BOOM.... BOOM....BOOM: Five second clips of ships sinking after being torpedoed, bombed or hitting mines.

Not much was said of the men that crewed on those doomed vessels other than "some survivors were rescued". After the war those same men were all but forgotten. This is but one of their many stories, including a tale of why the German High Command considered the Allied merchant seamen the one single force that was to become the greatest threat to German Victory in Europe.

The Allied viewpoint was to arm the ships with so called defensive weapons and Navy Armed Guard gun crews. The civilian crews were also trained to assist the gun crews, such as passing ammunition and even assist firing the guns.

Who was in command of the Armed Guard? The civilian Merchant Marine Captain who commanded the ship. So, since the Navy never takes orders from a civilian, our government directed that all licensed ship's officers were, in fact, naval reserve officers. However this did not include the documented crewmen, and the government didn't even bother to inform the crewmen of that distinction, let alone many of the ship's lower echelon officers.

The enemy considered that any act by the merchant ship such as firing weapons at them, trying to ram them, or even communicating their position, was an act of aggression by a belligerent military force. This started the infamous conduct of killing all surviving civilian merchant crew members of their sinking ships.

NEAR MUTINY

The introduction of the steam power plant in merchant ships has on occasion fomented a rivalry between the Engine and Deck departments. Having served with pride an equal amount of time in both departments my thought was that this tale might offer the reader some insight as to differing attitudes I found on one of the last vessels that I sailed on.

This yarn is about a near mutiny; a few years after WWII, aboard a Victory class cargo ship operating out of Seattle, which hauled military cargo to and from Western Pacific bases.

If you've read *Mutiny on the Bounty*, by Nordhoff and Hall, you will remember the incident concerning the ship's fasteners (nails) traded to the island natives for whatever favors there were to offer, creating a crisis over the near destruction of their vessel.

Our Victory ship was only a few years old, made of steel and (of course) no nails, but that didn't prevent a member of the crew from devising a scheme to literally make off with most of her stores....even those carried under lock and key.

The problem started innocently enough. On our last haul from Singapore to Manila, we discovered that most of the sheets, towels and blankets were missing from the Chief Steward's storage compartment one deck below the engine room mess. A thorough questioning of the crew resulted in nothing to which one could point a finger. We made port at Okinawa, replenished our linen supplies, and thought the dilemma was over. We off-loaded our cargo of trucks and earth moving equipment and we were on our way back to the states, with a scheduled stop at Honolulu.



H.M.S. PRIMROSE

Destination Murmansk

This tale is of an American merchant seaman whose ship was sunk by a Nazi U-Boat in a previous convoy when approaching the western waters off Iceland. After having been adrift on a life raft for two days he was rescued by the long-range armed trawler, HMS Primrose. This tale could have been told by any number of survivors of the North Atlantic convoys who were rescued by one ship only to suffer more terror when their rescuing vessel also came under heavy attack.

Two days adrift on a raft on the frigid waters of the North Atlantic seemed like an eternity, especially after being warned not to succumb to “that everlasting frozen sleep.” After all hope of rescue appeared to be waning as each day went by, our survivor entered that realm of hallucinations, dreaming of

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(over)

OFF-ROADIN'

by ron stahl

Recently retired and eager to travel, my wife and I decided to join the motor-home craze. We purchased a first rate, fully self-contained, 23 foot cab-over, with a 4 wheel-drive Bronco II tag-a-long. We decided to do a trial run up to a local mountain getaway before our six month, cross-country tour.

We loaded up with provisions for two weeks, hooked up our 4-wheel dinghy (boaters will understand) and off we went. We stopped for the night near Kernville at Lake Isabella. Early the next morning we took off for Kennedy Meadows, a popular camping area high in the Inyo-Kern back country. We found a beautiful site in a State Park campground and after settling the motor-home into her space we unhooked the four-wheeler and took off “adventuring”.

The scenery was spectacular and everything was running smooth....that is....until we got ourselves lost on a trail that kept getting smaller and smaller and finally turned into a deer trail which disappeared into dense brush. Rather than scratch the new paint job we backed out for nearly a half-mile until we could find enough room to turn around in. Then, back-tracking to what appeared to be a crossroad, we turned onto a road which seemed to go on for ever. It crossed deep washes that had at least three-foot high banks.... “Thank God!”.... we thought, that we had the foresight to get the four-wheel drive, oversized shocks and the large off road tires.

As we went ever deeper into the unknown and bumpy terrain my wife, who was hanging on with white knuckles, had all she could stand and informed me that, “Enough is enough!” and told me to turn around and head back or I could let her out and she would walk back.

I spun around on the dry river bottom and tried to climb the three to four foot embankment, but couldn't force our vehicle up the wall. I could hear some very powerful engines scooting around in the area, and eventually I saw them coming up the dry river bed. Three large pick-ups with the loudest un-muffled engines and the largest tires imaginable. Some young fellows got out and after seeing our circumstance offered to help us get up the bank.

"Just stand back and we'll show you how it's done", said the guy in the lead truck.

They hopped in their trucks and drove into that bank, their front push-bars acting like bulldozer blades. In two or three minutes the solid wall was reduced to a graded slope which I could maneuver easily with the Bronco II, and away they went to seek more challenges as we took off in the opposite direction.

An hour or so later my wife was growing weary of all the joggling and tossing about and was ready to call it quits. We soon found ourselves on a paved road and heading back towards our camp ground.

A few miles down the road we spotted a roadside sign "Stop at Grumpy Bears. Open faced chili-burgers and beer our specialty! One mile ahead."

As we approached the only structure we'd seen for the past three hours, we spotted, parked next to the building, the three off-road pick-ups that had helped us at the river. I suggested that we should stop and at least buy them a beer.

My wife and I went in and sat at the cafe's bar so we could look out the large window that gave us a wide view of the valley below us and a view of a roaring fire in the largest "Ben Franklin" iron fireplace we'd ever seen. A group of maybe six or seven people were sitting around an old fashion oak dining room table listening intently to one individual spinning a tale. He spoke quite loudly with a southern drawl that seemed to last forever, explaining how he had just paid a bundle to develop the perfect off-road truck...bar none. He explained how he had put it through all its paces until he was convinced that no other vehicle could match it in power or ability to climb grades, and how he was able to go where no other off-roader could go.

"You guys know that steep, winding trail up to Long Valley before it drops down to the Upper Kern River and how there is only one way IN or OUT.....well...." He paused, "I was climbing that grade....I was in grand-ma (lowest gear)....standing on the throttle....powering my way up....I was so damn proud of my truck....That was....until I met this damned Freet-oh-Lay delivery truck coming from the other direction! That sucker'd been UP and was on his way back down!"

I nearly choked. One poor fellow had just taken a swig of beer and sprayed the wall. The laughter didn't die down for 15 minutes!