

WW11 DIARY of JOSEPH F. PAURO

Oct.27,1942

U.S.Navy - 244-49-61
Philadelphia Customs House
Navy Day

I joined the Navy and took boot training in Bainbridge, Maryland. 11 weeks training. After boot camp I was transferred into the Armed Guard and was sent to Little Creek, Va. for four weeks of gunnery training, then transferred to the Brooklyn Arm Guard Center in New York where I caught my first ship as a gunner. We were put on cargo vessels to protect them against the enemy. I was aboard the S.S. Henry Knox. I went aboard my first ship in Philadelphia, Pa; where it was being loaded. The Henry Knox was a Liberty Ship. We reported aboard, March 4, 1943.

We left Philadelphia with a full cargo of war supplies for Iran in the Persian Gulf. We arranged convoy at New York, leaving for Cuba, March 28, 1943. We arrived in Cuba at Guantanamo Bay April 4, for rearrangement of convoy. Left Cuba April 10, arriving at Panama April 14, 1943. We docked at Cristobal for fresh water and fuel for our long journey across the Pacific.

Went through the Panama Canal April 16 taking approximately 8 hrs. to go through. We then anchored on the Pacific side of the canal. April 18th we started our journey across the Pacific. June 5, 1943 we arrived at Fremantle and Perth Liberty was good in both Fremantle and Perth. Left Australia June 8. Now heading for the Persian Gulf. From now on we were traveling alone. We have not had an escort since we left Panama. All Alone !!!

It was on the night of June 19, all the gunners were at general quarters which we held at dawn and dusk. That's the best time for the enemy to strike, and all of us gunners ready with loaded guns to defend the ships and its vital cargo.

General Quarters was just about over when there was a terrific explosion!! I was on the bridge at the time. We had been torpedoed!!! I was on the bridge at the time when the torpedo hit, somewhere up forward on the port side, I froze in my tracks. The flame shot up on both sides of me. I was behind the stack at the time. We were hit and the flame missed me but fellows who were not quite shielded by the smoke stack were burned pretty bad. The ship was listing Port fast and in the cargo holds forward was a supply of ammunition. It was continually exploding!!! The gunnery officer was on the starboard wing of the bridge. He came running up on the flying bridge where I was, he looked at me and didn't say a word. His eyes looked as big as saucers and he was too scared or shocked to say anything. In a very few seconds we were both running aft over the catwalk, which was built on top of the cargo, by this time the bridge was well on fire.

While I was running aft I felt my back and a little of my neck, and left elbow was burning. It felt as though someone was lashing me with a razor. I was being burned by the heat of the flames. The gunnery officer fell as we were running, I didn't notice it until I reached the after gun deck, where I fell and I saw the officer reaching for his hat trying to get up. The heat and flame was terrific by this time and I was getting weaker as the time went by, so I did my best trying to get up, also thinking maybe I could help the officer. When I got to my feet I saw that he was also on his feet. I then made my way to the edge of the gun deck looking for a life jacket to put on. My life jacket, which was on the bridge was burning when I left the bridge.

I finally reached the edge and jumped overboard. I must have passed out just as I went over because I seemed to come to as I was under the water. It seemed as though I was under water for minutes until I finally reached the surface and I started to swim. I could see the ship quite a distance from me now. It was burning like hell!!! The metal seemed to be screaming as it twisted and fell. There was a series of explosions and the night seemed as though it was day! I could hear the cries of men, some screaming with agony and pain, some yelling, "Oh help me God!!" It seemed as though I was having a nightmare!! It just could not have happened!!

I didn't swim long before I met a fellow clinging on to a large plank which was part of the wreckage, so I joined him. At first we were much too scared to talk. We just watched our home burning and wondered what was to come next! Soon we met six other fellows who were clinging to the wreckage; some floated on tires which were inflated so they wouldn't dry rot in the ships hold. They were blown clear of the ships at the time of the explosion. We all joined together and collected all the tires we could. It seemed as though there were hundreds of them floating around. After we gathered them together we put large planks through them and pulled them over to a large section of wood which was in the shape of a raft. We used the tires as floats but it started to rain and the water got rough, and the idea of making a raft was out!! So we all left it go and each got a tire to sit in and joined hands. The

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weaker ones tied their wrists together with belts from their dungarees so they wouldn't float away.

The water was warm and the air was cold and to keep warm we would lower ourselves into the water to also keep from getting the cramps. We put our mouths up to catch some rain water which helped to clear the salt from our mouths. We started to tell jokes to try to erase what happened off our mind, but it wasn't easy. It did help as some laughed and some cried. Some tried to hold back the tears. We didn't float long before we heard a humming noise which we thought might be an airplane, because we were supposed to have air support. It kept coming closer and closer, then all of a sudden a submarine appeared out of the darkness and we could see it was coming straight for us!!

We decided to break hands in case it should ram us, but then we noticed that the sub was changing course and was going to pass on the right of us. We thought we had been spotted and the next thought was being strafed, so we let ourselves, still holding hands, as low into the water as possible, hoping and praying that the Japanese didn't spot us. The sub sure did come close, for we could hear the Japs talking and shouting, then we could see that they were sending blinker messages, but to whom?! Out in the distance we could see another light which was answering and we knew there was another sub close by. We could hear some of our crew shouting to the japs to pick them up. The sub passed us again shortly, but not nearly as close, after that we didn't see them again.

One of the fellows had his watch with him and it was still running. It was ten minutes to ten, exactly three hours since we were torpedoed. Suddenly, there was one terrific explosion and we could feel the vibration under the water. We knew our ship was going under. The heat of the ship warmed the air, but as she sank it grew cooler. Only the stern was sticking out of the water and little by little she was going under, then there was complete darkness! The ship had disappeared.

It stopped raining now and the stars were shining brightly. It seemed as though you could reach up and touch them. The water was calm now, except for the swells which seemed to want to rock us to sleep. We sure were tired and exhausted. We were sleepy, but had no beds, it felt as though weeks had gone by. We later found ourselves floating into the mass of wreckage. It seemed to slap at us and some of the wood had large nails in it which would give us a prick every so often. Some of us who were able to push the wreckage away kept it from hurting those who couldn't help themselves, and also to keep the nails from putting holes in the tubes of the tires, which were the only means of staying afloat. Once, we did hear a hissing noise and found one of the fellows going down, but in no time we had him on another. This fellow was burned pretty bad. Our burns did hurt, but the salt water seemed to help take the burning sensation out and left us with a stinging feeling.

While we were trying to clear the wreckage away one of the fellows floated away from us. Before long he was well out of reach and soon disappeared into the darkness. We called to him to keep up his courage up and maybe by morning things would be different. Maybe there would be a boat or a raft, then perhaps, a RESCUE!!

It seemed as though the night would never end. We were getting weaker and weaker. Our mouths were all drawn up and burned, and raw from the salt. We hoped and prayed it would rain, but it didn't. We had to change position in our tires about every five minutes or so to keep from getting the cramps. We weren't talking now, just waiting, waiting for the daylight to come so we could see what was floating around. Maybe food or water, or something we could use for transportation. Once in a while we would find a large tank floating around or a wooden box which looked like it contained something valuable to us, but to our disappointment the tanks were ammunition holders and the boxes were empty.

We were still floating in the wreckage and we were trying to keep the wreckage from the injured. While I was trying to keep the wreckage from the others I turned my back to the others and when I turned around, to my surprise, I found that I had drifted away from them. The fellow who was holding onto my tire couldn't hold on to me any longer.

I was soon out of sight from the others and all alone in the night! Wondering what was going to happen next, I seemed to be more afraid. It seemed as though I was alone for ages, when I saw in the darkness two figures floating a short distance away. I shouted to them and they answered. I was much too worn out to say much. I soon joined

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them after paddling hard to reach them. One of the fellows seemed to be suffering from shock. Every now and then he would cry out "I don't want to die, I don't want to die!" The other fellow would try to calm him down so they could keep up their courage. The three of us were floating in the tires holding onto a large plank instead of holding hands and taking a chance of breaking away from one another. We were not floating amidst wreckage now, but tires, planks, and powder cans. We were well clear of the wreckage.

It seemed as though a thousand nights had passed, when finally daybreak arrived. The sun came up over the horizon. We were dreading the sun, as it sure did get hot and we were just about dying from thirst!! The sea was calm, except for the swells that would take us far up into the air and then take us low into the water. It wasn't too long after daybreak when the fellow suffering from shock started hollering "I see a lifeboat" We didn't believe him because of his state of mind. But to our surprise when the next swell took us in the air, we too, saw the lifeboat. The next thing you knew we were crying, then laughing with joy because we knew the Lord wouldn't let us down! It seemed as though we were being risen from the dead to live again.

Note: When the lifeboat came alongside to pick us up, I helped the two fellows that I was with into the boat, then I was pulled into the boat. I more or less fell into the boat, but soon on my feet. As I stood up holding onto the side of the boat a tiger shark shot out of the water and balanced itself on the side of the boat. The shark had its mouth wide open and we looked eye to eye at each other. In a few seconds he closed his mouth and wiggled back into the ocean. I looked out over the ocean and saw the sharks coming in for the kill. We were thankful that we were carrying ammunition which drove the sharks miles off and kept us fairly safe during the night. I heard later some fellows were gotten by a few strays. These sharks were six to eight feet in length.

They soon had us in the lifeboats, wrapped us in blankets, as the air sure was cold. Each of us had about two ounces of water. We felt a little better, except for being hungry. There wasn't time to hand out rations, for there was work to do!

We found out there were three lifeboats cut free when we were hit and the other two were somewhere close by. After five long hours of searching for survivors we found the two lifeboats, plus a raft which some one had set loose. We found as many fellows as we possibly could before giving up the search. The men we did find were in fairly good condition except for exhaustion, hungry and thirsty. Most of us were burned, some worse than others. We picked up one sailor whose face was burned so badly he could hardly see. His hands were burned and swollen twice the normal size. He was the worse of the burned victims.

The fellow who floated away, the night before I did, was still floating by himself on the tire. We rowed over to pick him up and noticed he was almost dead. His eyes were as big as saucers. He was limp in the tire and he moaned as we pulled him in the boat. He started to say "give me an oar I want to row and get to land." He repeated it over and over and over again and again, until we gave him an oar so he could row.

I was sitting directly in the next thwart in back of this sailor, also rowing. There was another sailor next to me. I reached over and lifted the sailor's shirt. He had a hole in his back about eight inches in diameter. There wasn't any blood, just his insides hanging out. I could see part way into his body. I pulled in my oar, went to the stern of the lifeboat and threw up. I sure was sick, he must have been hit with something when the ship was torpedoed. It could have been done by a shark. He died five minutes later after we picked him up. Another sailor died in the lifeboat that night from his burns. He was wrapped in a blanket. We wrapped the other sailor in a blanket, said a prayer and gently lowered them over the side of the boat. I watched their bodies disappear below the surface; I don't believe anyone who witnessed this burial and watched their bodies disappear could express their feelings. It didn't seem possible they were gone. We were all playing cards the other night, laughing and joking. Whoever thought we would be attending their funeral today!!

Our boat, two other boats, and a raft got together, and held muster. There were thirty-three present, thirty-five missing or dead. The gunnery officer who I thought jumped when I did, was missing. One of the sailors in another boat told me he saw him lying on the deck with his head crushed. As he was leaving the ship something must have hit him in the head. He appeared okay when I left to go over the side.

The boats were in good condition with full rations with the exception of one. They didn't have anything in their boat. A Jap sub found them during the night and took all their supplies, food water, even their sail, but none of them were touched by the Japs. I guess they wanted them to suffer knowing they were so far from land. We shared our supplies with them hoping it would be enough for the long journey. How long would it be? Only God knew!!

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Just before we were hit with the torpedo, the Captain, who was in the chart room, knew exactly our position and fortunately he was with us. He told us we were about 250 miles from land. The Maldiv Islands, southwest of India. He said there were many islands and each of the lifeboats, even a little off course of one another would reach an Island. Therefore they could send out air search if possible!!

The men who were on the raft climbed into one of the boats. We had thirteen men in our boat. We soon had the sails up and were slowly moving. The wind and current were in our favor, and by the use of a compass we headed for the Islands. Soon the boats were well out of sight of each other. We were sailing alone. We decided a little chow would go good now. Each man was handed a cracker with a little bit of Pemican spread along the top. Pemican came in a small can which consists of raisins, coconut and other rich spices. It tasted very sweet. You could not eat too much of it at one time. It would make you sick. To us, it tasted like a turkey dinner. We were fed this delicious chow two times a day with a few ounces of water. Sometimes it would rain and we would catch it in the sail by tilting it and put our mouth up to a corner where the rain would be draining off.

The first two nights we hit storms. Our boat was pitched around like a leaf in the wind. A few times we thought we were goners. One of the fellows in the boat managed to survive a water-tight pouch of tobacco and his pipe.. Once a day each one got a couple of puffs. Fortunately, I didn't smoke. I thought the ones who smoked heavy would go crazy for the craving of a cigarette!!

The days & nights seemed as weeks. We would take turns at the rudder and lookout. During the day we would fish, but no luck. We would sing songs and tell jokes, but this wore off for the longer we were out the more disagreeable the men would get. Sometimes we would loose control and want to fight, but we would have to take control of our emotions.

When I did sleep I would dream of food all the time. My dreams seemed so real at times, when I would awaken I had forgotten where I was. We had thirty days of rations and water for the thirteen of us. The boat was well equipped with fishing gear, lantern, which was filled with oil, a flashlight, a vary pistol, we used to shoot flares up every night hoping some ship would see them.

Just about everyone had burns. Those that were slightly burned were on the road to healing, some were not. Two men were pretty bad and we used up our medical supplies in a very short time. The boat smelled of fire and gun powder, and burned flesh. The smell made us sick at our stomachs most of the time.

It was on the ninth day, just before daybreak, when one of the men who was on lookout at the time, gave a yell!!!” a ship!!!” “A ship!!!” so we shot up the flares, but no reply. We could see the dark object and it seemed to be passing, and to our surprise we saw at the break of dawn we had sailed into the center of Islands. We judged them to be the Maldiv Islands. It sure was swell to see land again! There was an Island dead ahead of us, so we took to the oars and started to row. We seemed to have a bit more pep to us now!

After a couple of hours of rowing we were close to the Island. We noticed it was surrounded by large reefs of coral and there was a terrible undertow. Now, the problem was how to get ashore!. We knew there were people on the island as we could see huts and boats on the beach. They must have some way of bringing their small boats in and out the reefs!!

Finally, we saw a narrow stretch of deep water which lead to shore, and the people who lived there must have made it for their small boats to go in and out. We started in. The going was rough and the reefs sticking up sure did give us the chills. In a short time we made it to the beach!!!

We did our best to pull the boat on the beach but somehow we couldn't stand up!! My head felt dizzy and I couldn't stand. Each one of us just laid on the beach as we couldn't walk. we were lying there relaxing when we saw the natives coming down to the beach to meet us. We felt better when we saw smiles on their faces.

They shook hands with us and bid us to follow them. We showed them the two burned men in the boat and they shouted something in their language. In a short time a couple of natives came with two homemade stretchers. They carried the men toward the huts. We followed the best we could, falling on the way, some of us crawled, it was easier. We had to learn to walk all over again. They took us to a large coral hut which was covered with palm leaves and branches. It was built on the sand. They gave us mats to lie on and made us as comfortable as possible. Soon they brought us some cooked coconut. It sure did hit the spot.. The first thing we noticed as we entered the

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hut was a large wooden cross propped up in the corner. We knew then, it was their place of worship and that missionaries were once on the island and the people here knew the difference between their friends and enemies.

The flies and mosquitoes were so bad. The two men that were burned the worse felt the insects the worse. They would stick to their wounds and every once in awhile they would scream with agony. It was enough to drive a man crazy. We took turns keeping the insects off of the one sailors he couldn't help himself. The natives later gave us coconut oil to put on their burns. It was soothing and did keep the insects away. They also gave us mats to put over him, and soon he was comfortable and not bothered by the insects and mosquitoes.

We showed the natives maps of India which we had in the boat, hoping they would recognize it as we needed an area with a hospital and some good food, but no hopes. None of them could speak English, nor could they help us. We then decided that the best thing to do is to get a little rest and forget our troubles for awhile. I laid on my mat in the sand and it felt to me like an inner spring mattress. It sure felt relaxing to be able to stretch out and not be cooped up like sardines. I was soon fast asleep.

When I awakened it was dark out and the natives had put the lanterns in the hut. They were standing all around us watching, as though we were on display or something. Every once in a while they would give out a silly laugh or a giggle. I didn't see anything funny, but they did! Maybe it was the way we were dressed. I got a big kick out of watching them!! Once one of our guys flashed on his flashlight that he had survived and the natives became very frightened. They gathered at one end of the hut and started a big commotion, pointing up at the light on the wall, talking loudly in their language. It sounded like an auction sale. Everytime he would turn the light off a native would sneak over to him and tap on his shoulder to see what sort of a light maker he had. The sailor showed them how to turn it on and off and they played with it most of the night!!! Soon I was asleep again.

The natives awakened us in the morning and even had breakfast ready. They cut off the tops of coconuts and we drank the milk. They us gave of strips of fish and a few bananas to eat. The natives were dressed in sarongs with a shirt which looked like a blouse. They wore no shoes, and sweatbands around their foreheads. Some were of light complexion, and others were very dark. We didn't see much of the women, they stayed in their huts. Once in awhile we would catch one looking out of the hut at us, but she would duck right back in. There were a lot of children playing around, some worked with the men, others helped to clean fish.

We were not on this island long before they had a boat ready, and soon we were all aboard. We didn't know where they were taking us, but it was probably for the best. The boats weren't too big and they sure did travel on the water. It had a big white sail, and when they opened it the boat seemed to jump ahead. The boat was built strong and put together well. We left our lifeboat behind for them to keep.

It wasn't long before we were on another Island with more natives. They put us on a large porch of a house, a real house! We were not allowed inside. We later found out it was the Governors house. He was in control of a certain group of Islands. We still did not come across anyone who could speak English! We made ourselves comfortable on mats and just waited to see what was going to happen next. Soon it was time for chow again. They gave us some more coconut milk, coconut and more of that delicious smoked fish, and a little fruit to eat.

The house looked like one of our small cottages. It had a fence built around it. There was a small yard with a well right in the center of the yard where we took our baths. They gave us a little soap to wash with. We felt much refreshed. During the day we would take strolls along the beach. The Islands were pretty with their tall palm trees swinging in the breeze. The tall green grass and the air was so fresh and clean, and the water so clear. The water was a beautiful color, like a picture. Wherever we went there would be a native watching us. I guess they didn't trust us much. We were on this island for four days. We men a native boy who came by boat from one of the other islands and to our surprise he could speak English!!! He was well educated. We learned from him that we were going to be taken to the Island of Male, it is the capitol of these many islands. We would be taken care of there. We met sailors from the other life boats. The natives brought them from another island in their small boats. News must have traveled around by the natives as they brought us all together on the same island. It was wonderful to see the other guys. There were fourteen of them which made twenty seven of us all together. They told us they had a tough time landing their boat. While they were trying to put it ashore a roller wave caught the back of the boat and upset it, end over end giving the captain, who was in the boat, two broken ribs and the cook who was there with them, a broken foot. All of them survived okay. They walked in the water which was about four feet deep helping those ashore who weren't able. They were in the boat for eleven days. Their boat had a motor but was not operable. It was added weight. They landed on an island and the natives treated them the same as us.

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The fourth day the natives arranged a boat to take us to the island of Male. The natives name who could speak English was Benjamin. We called him "Ben- Ben" was going to Male with us. He was going on business of his own. The boat was a much bigger boat and we were well fitted aboard. For food we had the same familiar dish, fish coconut & bananas. We were soon on our way.

The natives were very good sailors. We watched how they worked and it was amazing how well they timed themselves. As soon as an order was called, there were natives climbing all over the boat like monkeys and busy bees! We watched as they would smell the air, then they would bring down the sail. A native would then go to the bow and tie a line to him and jump overboard, tie the line to the reefs. The water was about six foot deep. When the native came aboard they would just wait. At first we wondered what was taking place, then it began to rain, the wind got stronger and stronger, the water got rough and the boat rocked. This lasted about a half hour, then it would calm down. The line was then pulled in and we would soon be underway again.

The next day, late in the afternoon, we arrived at the Island of Male. We tied up to the small landing and soon we were all ashore. We were welcomed by natives who could speak very good English. The natives here were very well educated. Their homes and shops were made of coral. Their main occupation was trading. Male was their capitol of the Maldive Islands. Their large sailing vessels would go to Ceylon and they would trade food for goods and clothing. They would trade with all the smaller islands also.

Here we were given a bath and clean clothes, a shave and a haircut. We looked really funny dressed like the natives. I had on a pretty colored sarong with a white blouse. I didn't mind them not giving me shoes, as I was used to going barefooted. Then they took us to a very large dining room and fed us rice and curry, bananas, tea and biscuits. It felt good to drink something hot!

In another large room they were setting up beds for us. We were surprised to see mattresses on them. After they were set up we just relaxed and took it easy. A few hours later we met three English fliers on the island. They were there to do some surveying, so the catalinas and flying boats could have a decent place to land, because of the dangerous reefs around the island. They invited us over to the island where they were staying, so we got into the small boats again and went to their island which was a short run away.

There was a house which looked like one of our two story apartment houses. It looked as though it was built especially for the English fliers. It was equipped for the use of fifty men. There were beds for all of us and a large dining room. A very large porch with rows of chairs. On the grounds in front of the house was a tennis court. The ideal place for a vacation!! It was like heaven to us!! They had a small supply of medical articles and soon we were patched up. They fed us rations from the planes, which they had stored on the islands like, canned bully beef, canned butter and cheese. Jelly and canned crackers, we drank hot tea.

We were here for five days waiting for a plane to return from Ceylon. During the day some fellows played tennis, some fished and others went swimming. Most of the time all we did was a lot of sack time!! The plane never showed up, it was delayed because of bad weather. On the fifth day there was a large sailing vessel prepared to make the trip to Ceylon, the Port of Colombo. The 27 of us were soon aboard with a supply of airplane rations and a native crew of about 25 natives.

It took us three days to reach Colombo. When we arrived in the harbor we were welcomed by the U>S>Navy. They gave us a few cartons of cigarettes and the Australian Red Cross gave us each a bag of toilet articles with two suits of pajamas. They could not help but laugh at the way we were dressed, and I really couldn't blame them!!

We bid the natives good-bye. We sure hated to leave them as they treated us so very well. The Navy paid them for rescuing us. We then got into ambulances and taken to the English Dispensary. The guys who were burned the worse were rushed straight to the Royal Navy Hospital. Arriving at the dispensary I had my burns attended to and then taken to a rest camp, called the Fleet Club. I was there for four days when I took sick with malaria and sent to the Royal Navy Hospital. I was there for eight long weeks. I was treated for burns, malaria, skin rash and a tropical ulcer. When I was discharged from the hospital I reported to the navy officer and the same day I boarded a Liberty Ship. The "Elisha Graves Otis". I returned as a gunner and back to duty again. This was September 3, 1944.

We traveled to Australia, Panama, Cuba then back to good old New York, after which I went on leave!! The men left Ceylon as they recovered. They came back as re-replacements. I was next to last to come back to the states,

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Nov. 3, The End

When arriving at the Armed Guard Center I was given a new seabag and gear. I was granted a 24 day survivor leave. After leave I was taken sick with another attack of malaria and was in St. Albans hospital for four weeks. When well, I reported back to duty and I was soon assigned to another ship.

S.S. Richard Jordan Gatling

Boarded ship at Baltimore Md. Dec. 28, 1943, ship was being loaded. Jan. 15, 1944 we left Md. fully loaded and heading for North Africa. We discharged our cargo at Oran and reloaded. We went to Arzew discharging cargo again, returning to Oran to reload. Loaded we left Oran arriving in Augusta, Italy to rearrange convoy. Left Sicily and went to Naples, Italy where we discharged our cargo. We made this run twice. Taking cargo and troops from Oran, North Africa, rearranging convoy at Augusta, Sicily and discharging cargo at Naples, Italy. With the convoy we finally left Oran in April and headed for the states, unloaded. April 15, we had engine trouble and had to stop to make repairs. The convoy continued on to the United States.

It took 24 hours to repair the engine, while being escorted by a destroyer, which stayed behind with us. After engines were repaired we were escorted into the dock at St. George, Bermuda by destroyer for further repairs. I had another attack of malaria and was taken to the 221 Army Hospital for treatment. I was there three weeks in the hospital. As I lay in the hospital my ship sailed to the United States!

After being discharged from the hospital I reported to the personal office at N.O.B. staying there two days. I left Bermuda by plane (P.B.M.) arriving five hours later in Maryland. From there I was sent to the Naval Receiving Station to receive transportation back to my base, the Armed Guard Center in Brooklyn, N.Y. I stayed at the receiving station in Washington, D. C. overnight and left the next day, by train, for New York, at the Armed Guard Center. I managed to get a 72 hour pass to go home. After arriving back at the center I soon was assigned another ship!!

S.S. Juan De Fuca

Boarded ship at New York, May 27, 1944. Ship was being unloaded and re-loaded. We sailed to Davisville Rhode Island to take on more cargo. Leaving R. I. fully loaded, we arrived at New York to receive a convoy. Leaving N.Y. we went to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to rearrange a convoy, then to Panama going through the Canal into the Pacific Ocean. We traveled alone to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii where we discharged cargo.

We left Hawaii empty and traveled alone to California to reload. From California we traveled across the Pacific to Sydney, Australia to discharge cargo, then to Brisbane, Australia to reload. Leaving Australia we then went to Lae, New Guinea to discharge our cargo then to Hollandia, New Guinea to take a load of cargo and troops. We were now headed for Leyte, which was the front at the time in the Philippines. Leaving New Guinea, we finally reached the Port of Tacloban, a Leyte Island. We were anchored out at Leyte Gulf most of the time, but we managed to discharge the cargo that was needed. They took about half the cargo off, also the troops which we brought up from New Guinea. We arrived at Leyte, Nov. 15, 1944, just 26 days after the main landing which was Oct. 20, 1944.

While we were anchored out in the Gulf, we had quite a bit of action. Everyday Jap planes would come over flying high and out of range of our guns. The high powered search lights would be crossed on the Jap bombers, and the larger guns, both from the larger ships and the shore battery would fire at them, but the bursts were short of the planes. They were much too high for the guns to score hits. Sometimes during the day two or three Jap planes would come over where all of our ships were anchored. They would be flying high out of reach of our guns, then all of a sudden they would go into almost a straight dive and head for a ship. Suicide, as they would be coming down in their dive, we would fire at them. All the ships in the harbor would open up with all they had. It sure was a thrill firing at them but we didn't feel so good when one or two would get through our gun fire and plunge into our ships killing maybe 40 or 50 men at a time.

During the day we used to watch our planes and the Jap planes dog fight in the air. We'd be right beside our guns in case they would come to attack us. While watching them we would be jumping up and down on the gun deck hollering, "Get 'em!!" "Get 'em!!" it was very exciting! Every moment was a tense one! Our planes would score almost everytime, but once in a while the Japs would score. Sometimes Jap bombers would fly over making direct

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hits on our air field. Once they tried dropping Jap paratroopers, but they were soon captured or shot. Here at Leyte, one of our task force was preparing for the invasion of Mindoro Island, which took place Dec.15, 1944. The task force returned after making a landing on Mindoro on the 19th of Dec. with light damages. On Dec.20th we took on troops and with the same cargo left for Mindoro Island with a convoy of 33 ships, 1 L.S.T.'s; 4 Liberty Ships and 11 destroyers for escort!! All of the men were very much on edge for we knew it was going to be a Hot run!! We were now standing 4 hours on and 4 hours off on our guns. We did see a little action on the 21st. Passing off an island, about eight miles away we saw two of our destroyers going full speed ahead for a small island. When we looked through the binoculars we saw the destroyers firing upon a large Jap barge. It was loaded with troops, the japs were firing back, but soon the destroyers returned and took their regular places in the convoy leaving the Jap barge burning in the distance.

Dec.22,1944, everyone was on their guns. We were standing by all the time. We would take turns sleeping and resting at the guns while others would keep lookout for enemy aircraft. About 10 o'clock in the morning two Jap reconnaissance planes came over. We opened fire on them, but they were well out of our reach and they soon flew away. I was in charge of the gun crew on the after gun, a 3in 50 caliber, so after the two Jap reconnaissance planes went out of sight one of the gunners said "Is that all the resistance the Japs are going to give us?" and he just about had the words out of his mouth when we heard the destroyers open up with their guns, and we saw Jap planes coming in formation of fives. They completely surrounded our convoy. They started diving at us!! We had the 3in firing away and the machine guns. All the ships were firing now, and the noise was so great you couldn't hear yourself think, The shrapnel was so great that it looked as though it was raining on the water!

While we were firing at the Jap planes on the starboard side one of the men was pointing and trying to shout!! There was a Jap plane coming in for an attack of the port side and he was trying to attract our attention. We then tried to train the three inch around to fire at the plane, but the gun was much too slow at training to get it around in time. The plane was in before we could do any good. The men on the 20mm machine guns were making direct hits on him. The next thing we realized that the Jap was coming for a suicide hit and he was aiming the plane straight for our bridge. We could see the two zeros on his wings and his machine guns were wide open. He was making holes around the stack. The Captain saw the plane coming in and gave us orders "Hard Right!" and as the ship was turning, the Japs plane missed our bridge by about five feet. It plunged into No.2 Cargo Hole forward. This Hole had little cargo in it and the ship shook. The ship was on fire, but soon under control and put out. While we were burning we turned out of convoy in case a ship in the rear would ram us, but we saw two L.S.T.s which were in back of us were also hit by suicide planes and burning. One of them was completely destroyed and blowing up. It was carrying ammunition and troops. Many of the troops were killed on it. Another ship stayed behind with us to pick up the survivors.

We were soon back into position in the convoy, planes were still coming in. On our stern was a torpedo plane called "Sally". She was coming in low to the water, ready to release a torpedo. We fired five rounds from the 3" 50 gun at the plane, the shells exploded and the shrapnel hit the plane and it went down into the ocean. It then disappeared. The ship was listing port as we had a few holes below the waterline. The holes were soon patched and the ship was on equal balance once more. Soon the action was over. This action was continuous firing, there wasn't one Jap plane left in the sky. They were either shot down or did suicide dives into our ships. We shot down most of them. About five of them were hit with suicide dives. The L.S.T. was the only ship to be left behind, burning and exploding.

The suicide dive that hit our ship killed two soldiers which were a part of the troops we were carrying. Also wounded were three of our gunners. Late that evening we sailed and dropped anchor off the island of Mindoro. The L.S.T.s were soon at the beach with their ramps down and discharging cargo. In a few hours they were unloaded and with the destroyers. We sailed back to Leyte for more cargo. Our ship and three other Liberty Ships had to stay behind with two small Army cargo vessels because there wasn't any way for them to unload us except by small army L.C.M.s and that would take a lot of time.

The Jap planes didn't come over so much during the day, but at night they would fly over and try to bomb our air strip. They would strafe once in awhile.

Dec.26, just before dusk we received a blinker message that a Jap task force was on its way. We were told to take the ship and try to hide it around the other side of the island. We were soon underway for the other side of the island. Our planes were taking off now to intercept them. The Japs had one battleship, one cruiser and six destroyers in their task force. They were also protected by air support. It took some time before we were around the

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other side of the island. It was dark by this time and we knew the battle was on. The noise of planes were in the air and we could hear them dog fighting!!

We were all on our guns and waiting. Then the Japs dropped flares and it lit up the sky. The next thing we knew we heard planes diving at us!! We couldn't see them to fire at. He dropped his bomb and just missed our ship. This happened six times!! Everytime they would dive in and release their bomb they would come back and strafe our ship. Fortunately, no men were hurt or killed. Our ship was full of shrapnel and holes. We also had one plane come over releasing a torpedo just missing the stern. We watched it go by!

This action lasted until three o'clock in the morning. Our planes sank three of the destroyers and damaged the battleship and cruiser, forcing them back toward Manila. Soon all was calm. At dawn we sailed back to where we were anchored. We found out that two Liberty Ships had been sunk, one was still smoking, the other was sunk with its bow far into the air. both were hit by bombs.

Jap planes continued coming over, mostly at night. On Dec.30; just at the break of dawn another one of our convoys was coming in from Leyte and it was under attack. All the ships were firing. We could see Jap planes burning and fallen into the sea. We were on our guns and ready for action!! One of the ships that came in had just dropped its anchor and it got hit with a suicide plane. It started to burn and explode as it was carrying gas and ammo. There was also a destroyer hit with a suicide dive killing 40 men. Soon the ships were in and unloading and the action over. Again, in action, and again the Lord kept me safe.

The ships were soon unloaded and sailing out and back to Leyte for more supplies with their escorts. That evening a small army boat came out and told our skipper he had better take his ship out to sea during the night so the Jap planes wouldn't see us by the light of the burning navy ship.

By dark, we were well under way at sea. We could see the ship which was burning and it gave off a terrific amount of light. Later, that night, we heard Jap planes. They were fairly high and flying in the direction of the island. There were bomb flashers on the beach, then we would watch the tracers from our shore battery. Sometimes a Jap plane would be hit and fall to the earth like a ball of fire. The Japs were flying over regularly, more so than usual.

We were on our guns all night, taking turns sleeping, also taking turns going down to grab a cup of coffee. We sailed back & forth keeping well off the island and around the other side of it where there was a P.T. base, for torpedo boats. His idea was that there was plenty of A.A. fire there and we would be more safe. Most of us disagreed with him, for if we lasted this long without being attacked, why go in toward the islands and look for it!! Why not wait until dawn, when our planes would be taking off and patrol the skies above, but we didn't have a say and I guess the skipper knew what he was doing!

We were soon on our way and at about 3:30, just as we were sailing between the main island and another small one we heard the sound of a plane coming closer and closer. We knew he was a Jap by the sound of his engine. Then we heard him give the plane more speed. He spotted us and was coming in for the attack!! He had seen us by the wake of the ship, and our screw which was protruded half way out of the water because of the ship being so light. We couldn't see he Jap coming in, but we could hear he was coming on the port side!

A couple of the gunners opened up with there machine guns, but they were probably missing by far as they were judging where he was. The plane zoomed over! It seemed as though he was only 30 feet above the bridge, then there was a terrific explosion!! He made a direct hit with his torpedo, hitting on the port side, just forward off the bridge. The ship shook and it seemed as though it was raining for the salt water from the torpedo hitting, leaving a hole big enough to drive a freight car through. It caused a suction and the water came up through the hold and was just like a fountain.

The ship started to give a port list and was sinking. The Captain tried to put it on the beach, but we sunk on top of the reefs in just about a 1/2 hour after we were hit. Most of the ship stayed out of the water and the cargo we had was safe. Not one man was hurt!

In the morning we got into the lifeboats and hit the beach. There was no sense to stay aboard as the ship was sunk. We were afraid that a Jap might suicide dive, so we decided to hit the beach. We were here on the island for 21 days. The first fifteen of them we spent in fox holes as the japs sure did raise cane night and day as they flew over dropping bombs and strafing.

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When the next big convoy came in from Leyte, we watched it from our foxholes. The japs did all they could to stop it and there sure was a big battle. Ships were being suicidal right and left. Jap planes were dropping like flies. Soon it was quiet again! Ships unloaded and soon on there way back to Leyte for more supplies.

After they struck Luzon, things quieted down on Mindoro Island. We had tents up, but still had the fox holes standing by!! Ships were anchored in the harbor and we were fairly safe. Once in a while Jap planes would come over and the ships and shore battery would soon have things under control. Once in an air raid there was eleven of our sailors killed, they were off another sunken ship. The reason they were killed, was that they waited too long to make for their fox holes. A jap plane dropped a personal bomb killing them as they were running for their fox holes.

They kept us busy working so to keep our minds off the action. Some men drove trucks and tractors. They would go on work parties loading ammo and food supplies. We also stood guard duty.

At first we ate C&K rations, but later we managed to survive food off the ships which were hit and beached! On some ships it sure was sickening to work on. There were dead bodies all around, and sometimes a hand here and maybe a foot there. they were scattered all over. We soon got use to it and having seen it was just a daily routine.

On the 21st day of Jan. 1945, we left Mindoro Island by plane (C-47), escorted by P-38 fighters. It was good to leave there. We arrived in Leyte about 3 hours later. We were there about two days and then put aboard a transport and sailed to Hollandia, New Guinea. We were in New Guinea 10 days waiting for orders, then finally we were put on a Dutch freighter to man the guns. With troops and wounded men we started for the states. About sixteen days later we pulled into Seattle, Washington and from there we were granted a 30 day survivors leave.

After leave, I returned back to duty and requested that I be transferred out of the Armed Guard and into the fleet to get on a Navy ship. My transfer was granted. I stayed at the Arm Guard Center standing watches. I was a station guard.

About 6 weeks later I was transferred to Pier 92 in N.Y. for further transfer. I was here for about 5 weeks and got orders to report to the Naval receiving Station, Washington, D.C.. Here I went to electrical hydraulic school. School was a four week course, but I was in Washington for 7 weeks, then I was transferred to Miami, Fla. I was in Miami for about 8 weeks taking another course of gunnery and a course of seamanship. I finally was assigned to a ship and transferred to New Orleans, La. to receive it. I left for Fla. Oct. 9, 1945.

U.S.S. Noxubee (A.O.G. 56)
built-Sauage, Minn.

I boarded the ship Oct. 12, 1945, it was just a new navy tanker floating down the Mississippi and tied up to the repair base here at New Orleans. The ship was still being put together when we boarded it. Oct 19, 1945 the ship went into commission. After commission we sailed for Galveston, Texas to put the ship through a shakedown. At Texas we took the ship out into the Gulf and tested the ship and its equipment.

After shakedown we took gas from Texas to Bermuda. We made two trips and on the second one I was taken off in Bermuda for an infected knee and sent to the hospital. The ship sailed back to the states to pick up more gas. I was transferred off the tanker Feb. 12, 1946 reporting to the hospital. Feb. 25, I was discharged from the hospital after treatment for an infected knee, and having a tumor removed from the right side of my face.

Feb. 27, 1946 we left 7:30pm Bermuda by plane (C-54), arriving at Maryland 4 hrs. later. At 6 o'clock on the morning of the 28th of Feb. we flew by C-47 to Washington to take on more passengers continuing to Norfolk, Va. for further transfer.

March 6, 1946, went aboard the U.S.S. Pamina (A>KA>) 34, with orders to report to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to go back aboard the U.S.S. Noxubee. Went aboard the AKA at Norfolk

March 7, left Norfolk, Va. Arriving at San Juan, Puerto Rico the 11th, in the morning, here we discharged a little cargo and a few men that afternoon we left Puerto Rico, now heading for Cuba. Arrived in Guantanamo Bay March 13, here I was taken off the AKA 34 now waiting for the Noxubee to come in.

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March 21, 1946, went back to duty aboard the U.S.S. Noxubee.

March 27, 1946, left Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

April 2, 1946, Refueled two fleet tugs, towing a floating drydock, also gave them stores. We are about 1800mi east of Cuba.

April 3, 1946, today we got orders to go to N.O.B. Bermuda instead of going back to Cuba.

April 7, 1946, Arrived in Bermuda.

April 10, 1946, Left Bermuda, now heading for the states.

April 12, 1946 Arrived at Marcus Hook, Chester, Pa.

April 16, 1946, Left Marcus Hook and went to the Philadelphia Navy Yard, tying next to the cruiser Nashville, and the battleship Tennessee. Here we had our fuel tanks steamed and cleaned...

Left Phila. navy yard April 26, 1946 arriving at Norfolk on the 27th. At Norfolk we tied next to the tender "Aphion" for minor repairs and work on the guns.

May 16, 1946, left Norfolk, Va. with full load of diesel oil, now heading for Newfoundland.

May 20, 1946, arrived at Argentia, New Foundland.

June 1, 1946, left Argentia with a load of aviation gas, arriving at Stevensville, New Foundland and discharging gas for the airfield.

June 4, 1946, left Stevensville, arriving back at Argentia on the 5th.

June 14, 1946, left Argentia with full load of gas, arriving at St. Johns, Newfoundland, on the morning of the 15th and discharged cargo.

June 19, 1946, left St. Johns arriving back at Argentia with another load of aviation gas for Stevensville. Arriving there on the 28th and discharging cargo.

June 29th left Stevensville arriving back at Argentia on the 30th.

July 1, 1946, left Newfoundland, now heading for the United States!

Arrived a New York on the 4th of July. Mooring in the North River near the battleship Wyoming.

July 15, 1946, left New York this afternoon, now heading for Marcus Hook, Pa. to take on a load of gas.

July 16, 1946, arrived at Marcus Hook and took on cargo of 80 octane gas.

July 21, 1946, arrived at Argentia, and discharged cargo.

July 24, 1946, left Argentia, Newfoundland, now heading for Norfolk, Va.

July 28, 1946, arrived at Norfolk, Va.

Aug. 1, 1946, left Norfolk, Va. now heading for Boston, Mass.

Aug. 2, 1946, arrived in Boston, Mass. Today I was detached from the U.S.S. Noxubee reporting to the Kohler Building in Boston for further transfer to be discharged.

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Aug. 9, 1946, reported to the Fargo Building, in Boston, Mass. to be discharged. Discharged 10 o'clock this morning, August 10, 1946, at 1:15pm. I was discharged from the United States Navy with an Honorable discharge for service of 3 years, 10 months, and 14 days.

MEDALS RECEIVED

1. WORLD WAR 11 VICTORY MEDAL
2. PURPLE HEART MEDAL
3. GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL
4. AMERICAN AREA MEDAL
5. ASIATIC PACIFIC AREA MEDAL
6. EUROPEAN AFRICAN MIDDLE EASTERN AREA MEDAL
7. PHILIPPINES LIBERATION MEDAL (2 STARS)
8. RUSSIAN COMMEMORATIVE MEDAL
9. NEW JERSEY DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL
-10 N.J. MILITARY SERVICE MEDAL FOR HONORABLE SERVICE

Miles traveled by water . Approx. 117,249

TESTIMONY

June 19, 1943, one week off the coast of Australia in the Indian Ocean. I was aboard the SS Henry Knox, Liberty Ship carrying vital cargo for the Russians going to Iran in the Persian Gulf.

Merchant seamen and naval gunners were on general quarters looking out over the sea to spot the enemy and be ready in case of an attack. I was standing at the rail on the highest part of the bridge near the smokestack when I felt something heavy on my shoulders. It felt like hands on my shoulders turning me around and heading me towards the back of the smokestack.

Knowing I was not suppose to leave my post, but unable not to follow the leading of the hands on my shoulders. I stood there with the Guiding Hands on my shoulders and heard the whistle of a torpedo! I froze in my tracks and said "Oh, my God!" The torpedo struck the ship on the Port side in the hold which was carrying the ammunition. The bow of the ship was blown off and many men perished. If the hands of the Lord had not turned me away, I would have been burned to death. The smokestack was a shield that saved me.

I know in my heart and soul that the Lord was with me and I praise Him for His Guidance.

SHIPS ASSIGNED TO :

1. Henry Knox - Liberty Ship
Torpedoed, June 19, 1943, Time: 1910
Indian Ocean, attacked by two Japanese subs. Ship stayed afloat 3 hours before it sank. thirty-five out of sixty-eight men lost their lives. I came back as a gunner on the LibertyShip -

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Elisha Graves Otis

2. Richard Jordan Gatling - Liberty Ship
Made a successful trip and delivered the valuable cargo.

3. Juan De Fuca - Liberty Ship
Suicide Dive - sunk December 31,1944, Time: 0330
Mindoro Island , Philippines, by an aerial torpedo. Ship was also hit with suicide plane , December22, 1945, killing two troops as passengers and wounding three of our gunners. Ship sunk in approx. 1/2 hour on the reefs after captain tried to beach it. I flew from Mindoro to Leyte Is; Philippines. Then took transport to Hollandia, New Guinea. There I was assigned to the Dutch ship Kota Inten as a gunner ship pulled in at Seattle, Wash. Kota Inten means city of diamonds.

4. U.S.S. Noxubee - A.O.G. 56
Ship commissioned at New Orleans, Oct. 19,1945. Took ship to Galveston, Tx. for shakedown, the we transported gas from Texas to Bermuda. On the second trip I was taken off because of an infected knee, sent to the hospital, missed the ship. Feb. 12,1946. While in the hospital I had a tumor removed from my right cheek on my face. Was discharged from the hospital on Feb. 25. Feb.27, left Bermuda by plane, arriving at Maryland 4 hours later. I was then flown to Wash. D.C. then to Norfolk, Va.
March 6,1946, Left Norfolk, Va. as a passenger on the U.S.S. Pamina (A.K.A.)
March 13, arrived in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.
March 21, reported back to duty aboard the U.S.S. Noxubee, A.O.G.56

Detached from ship Aug 2,1946 at Boston,Mass.

COUNTRIES :

1. Cuba
2. Panama
3. Australia
4. Maldive Islands
5. Ceylon
6. Africa
7. Sicily
8. Italy
9. Bermuda
10. Hawaii
11. New Guinea
12. Philippines
13. Puerto Rico
14. Newfoundland