

CMDR. HAL A. LAMAR, USNR (RET.)

REMEMBERS

FLT.ADM. CHESTER W. NIMITZ

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As a Naval Reserve Officer, I had the privilege of serving as personal aide and secretary to Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz throughout World War II in the Pacific.

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-----which helped create a winning team of all services and become one of the great commanders in history.

First, as Assistant Chief of the old Bureau of Navigation, now the Bureau of Personnel, later as Chief, Nimitz had the opportunity to review the files of hundreds of naval officers. Thus he when he became Commander-in-Chief Pacific--Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Area, he knew how to pick outstanding officers and best of all, how to get optimum performance out of them.

As Adm. Hoyt said, Nimitz had a quality unique to himself. There was always a sense of urgency, and special responsibility to his delegations of authority. He wanted action, immediate, appropriate and resultful action, and he nearly always got it.

Admiral Nimitz, with his steel blue eyes, was ^{so}gentle and self-effacing person. This is probably why he never got the publicity of MacArthur or Halsey, however on social and official calls, he was the most punctilious man I have ever been associated with. When the Commander-in-Chief was involved, etiquettes, honors and schedules were followed to the letter and the minute.

The Fleet Admiral enjoyed people, officers and enlisted men alike. He insisted that the Commanding Officer of any ship arriving Pear Harbor the first time call on him. At 1100 each morning, we received the Captains of new battleships and just as important, Lieutenants, Junior Grade from LST's . He was a master at gleaning their thoughts on the war in the Pacific.

He was an outstanding raconteur and loved to tell humorous stories. Captain Stewart, his roommate at the Naval Academy kept him well supplied. From time to time, an enlisted man, usually from Texas, would come to call. He would receive an autographed picture of himself with the Admiral to show his shipmates. Nimitz knew that these stories would spread within the fleet.

When the big Naval Hospital was completed, on Ihia Height, and the wounded began to come back from the battle area, the Admiral made it his personal responsibility to present Purple Heart Medals. Whenever practical, we would do an outdoor ceremony and then visit the wards. Nimitz was always moved when he found a blind victim or an amputee. Staff doctors told me that the Admiral's visits were great boosts to morale. One visit he objected to however. He was ordered by Washington to call on Lt. JG John F Kennedy when he passed through Pearl after being wounded in the South Pacific.

The Admiral received many letters from the parents of men fighting in the Pacific. I prepared personal answers to all of these for his signature. If the person wrote twice, then I answered for him. After the heavy losses on Tarawa, Nimitz received many viscous letters from

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mothers who had lost their sons. I tried to keep the most vindictive letters from him, but he seemed to sense what I was doing and demanded to see them all. One of the heavy responsibilities of command he said, was to have to send men to deaths, and he knew.

We visited Tarawa several days after the island was secure and before all the dead had been buried. "It's the first time I have smelled death", murmured Nimitz. As we visited ships, island commanders, or battle areas, the Admiral liked to address officers by name. This was one of his personnel secrets. Adams, his Yeoman and I would work up 3 by 5 cards with the pertinent data at each location. It was then interesting, for example to watch the Executive Officer of a SeaBee Battalion or the Navigator of a cruiser beam when the Admiral called him by name.

Nimitz made a point to relax or exercise daily. In Pearl, we had a pistol target range where we fired hundreds of rounds of 22 caliber ammunition. He took long walks in the afternoons or pitched horseshoes at which he was an expert. On weekends we either swam at the beach home the navy had rented at Barber's Point or went across the island to Walker's lovely home at Muluui.

In Guam, we walked the hills but did less shooting. Everyday at noon, we drove the 5 star Jeep to the Nimitz beach for an hour of swimming and sunbathing. This meant no lunch, to which some of our guests objected. The Admiral's orderly was always invited to swim with us.

When the British carrier "**Illustrious**" visited Pearl to join the British Fleet, Nimitz asked that the semaphore in the CincPac tower contact the ship as soon as see was sighted on the horizon and send his welcome by searchlight as fast as possible. He wanted to test the British. His message looked like a solid light, but the "**Illustrious**" copied without a pause. The Admiral's signalman had no difficulty in receiving the British reply. But, we had another problem. The carrier had not been able to pick up a shipment of black Jamaican Rum passing through the Panama Canal and the English sailors wanted their daily tot. The word went out to all commands for their clubs to furnish Bacardi and other light rums. These were delivered to the carrie, but the Britishers turned up their noses at the substitute for the traditional black tot. This was the first time the Admiral had tried and failed. Fortunately, the black rum arrived the following week.

CincPac-CincPoa was always interested in the welfare of the enlisted personnel and when we were going to be away from headquarters at odd hours, he never failed to ask me whether the orderlies, drivers or barge crews had had their meal. His personal orderlies, all selected Marine Sergeants were with him or outside his quarters on a 24 hour basis. The Sergeants always liked it when we went out to dinner in Honolulu. They knew all the cooks and maids in the homes of the Admiral's friends. These young men, after serving with Nimitz for a year or so, were usually recommended for officer training. Our top platoon sergeant, Bruce Geist, retired as a Lt. Colonel.

Early in the war, the Navy commissioned Gene Tunney, the former heavyweight champion to organize a corp of physical and recreational instructors. We were fortunate in drawing Chief Irish Langdon, a former fighter and trainer. He organized weekly fights held in the barracks area where our staff enlisted personnel were housed. We were regular patrons, and the Admiral always enjoyed chatting with the boxers, winners and losers alike.

In 1943, when things in the Pacific were going better, the Admiral asked Commandant, 14th Naval District to organize a huge picnic for all enlisted personnel on Oahu. It was held in the big public park in Honolulu. Nimitz pitched horseshoes, ate hot dogs and chatted with hundreds of sailors and Marines that afternoon. The affair was a big morale booster.

When we first arrived ^{in Oahu} Guam, practically all the coconut trees had been destroyed by the pre-invasion bombardment. Nimitz was very anxious to have the island re-forested again as soon as possible, an awarded a can of beer to any enlisted man, sailor or marine who would plant a seedling in straight line. I am told now, 35 odd years later that the trees are beautiful in their symmetry.

The Admiral, with the assistance of John. D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Dept. of Agriculture had studies made of what would grow best on Guam. As a result the corn crop was increased to three harvests a year, and we even had watermelons. All of this to the delight of the natives.

The month before our transfer to Guam, the Admiral ordered all flag and commanding officers who had Guamanian stewards or mess attendants on their ships to transfer them to his flag lounge. We in turn, replaced them with Philippines or blacks. Nimitz wanted the Guamanian boys to see their families again after 4 long years.

On the first weekend after our arrival ^{in Oahu} Guam, my boy Antonio Roberto Perez asked if some members of the Flag Band could visit his home. I readily gave permission. Not until weeks later did I find out the CincPac band was performing at 3 or 4 weddings each Saturday. The Admiral was pleased and the bandsmen had fun at the wedding parties. Of course the Guamanian families were very happy.

Shortly after the Admiral shifted his flag to Guam, he discovered that the Spanish Roman Catholic Bishop had abandoned his people and had fled to Australia when the Japs were approaching. He left on one to care for his parishioners, except for a young man who was to be ordained a priest. Thus there was no one to say Mass, hear confessions, baptize or marry people.

The Admiral was upset that the spiritual needs of the Guamanians had been so neglected. Since we had no Chaplain on the staff, I was directed to prevent the Spanish Bishop from returning to the island. Unfortunately, he had slipped in that very day. Then I was told bluntly to get rid of him. What a job for an Episcopalian. Fortunately, then Archbishop Spellman was coming for a visit in a few days as Vicar General for the Armed Services. When he arrived, we told him the problem and were informed that only the Vatican could arrange for a new Bishop. Spellman, after calling on the Spaniard, asked if he could send a coded message to Rome. This was to Washington and then to Rome for delivery to the Vatican via our Naval Attaché. Another Navy first! Sometime later, we had the pleasure of flying the Bishop of Rochester out to take the Spaniard's place. The Guanamians were delighted. Another evidence of the interest the Admiral had in his fellow man.

After the surrender of Japan, we were in New York, for a Nimitz Day celebration. Many Congressional Medal of Honor winners were guest at the banquet. The Admiral insisted on thanking each one personally. On the rare occasion when the Admiral was aboard ship at sea, he always had his breakfast served from the crew's galley. He wanted to see how the sailors were eating. The morning of the surrender ceremony in Tokyo Bay, in his flagship, the "**South**

Dakota", Nimitz and the crew ate hash brown potatoes, one of his favorites.

While Nimitz planned the strategy of great battles, I was in charge of his personal affairs. It was my responsibility to see that he was relaxed, comfortable and protected from the details and minor irritations of a busy and great commander's daily life.

In November 1945, the command of the Pacific was turned over to Admiral Spruance and Nimitz left for Washington to become Chief of Naval Operations. Thus my close and happy association with the Fleet Admiral for more than four and half years came to an end.

My relationship with CincPac-CincPoa taught me many things about command ,humility and how to get the maximum out of people. Rear Admiral Eller called Nimitz the wise, calm tower of strength in adversity and success. The principle architect of victory in the Pacific.

Thus shall I, Hal Lamar, remember my friend and shipmate, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, U.S. Navy.