

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE PACIFIC WAR

The Nimitz Education & Research Center

Fredericksburg, Texas

An Interview With

Russell R. Santora

U.S. Merchant Marine

Guilford, Connecticut

November 22, 2013

Mr. Misenhimer

My name is Richard Misenhimer and today is November 22, 2013. I am interviewing Mr. Russell R. Santora by telephone. His phone number is 203-453-0804. His address is 351 Colonial Road, Guilford, Connecticut 06437. This interview is in support of the National Museum of the Pacific War, the Nimitz Education and Research Center, for the preservation of historical information related to World War II.

Mr. Misenhimer

Russell, I want to thank you for taking the time to do this interview today, and I want to thank you for your service to our country during World War II.

Mr. Santora

I appreciate that.

Mr. Misenhimer

The first thing I need to do is read to you this agreement with the museum to make sure it's okay with you.

"Agreement Read."

Mr. Santora

That is fine.

Mr. Misenhimer

The next thing I'd like to do is get an alternative contact. We find out that sometimes several years down the road, we try to get back in touch with a veteran he's moved or something. Do you have a son or a daughter or someone we could contact, if we need to reach you?

Mr. Santora

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Who would that be?

Mr. Santora

My son Marcus Santora

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have a phone number for him?

Mr. Santora

203-435-7222

Mr. Misenhimer

Where does he live?

Mr. Santora

He lives in East Hampton, New York 11937, at 196 Hogcreek Road.

Mr. Misenhimer

Hopefully, we will never need that, but you never know. What is your birth date?

Mr. Santora

October 4, 1927.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where were you born?

Mr. Santora

I was born in the Bronx, New York.

Mr. Misenhimer

Do you have brothers and sisters?

Mr. Santora

I just have one brother.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, was he in World War II?

Mr. Santora

No, he is four years younger.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, you grew up during the depression. How did the depression affect you and your family?

Mr. Santora

Well, I just remember some men coming to work for food—in the yard, or clean the cellar. Actually, as far as the depression goes, my aunt is a school teacher and she has always had a good job. I was raised by my aunt and grandmother. I did not live with my mother until I was about eight years old.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go to high school?

Mr. Santora

Because of some legal proceedings, I had to live with my mother and that was in Brooklyn, New York, so I went to Brooklyn High School.

Mr. Misenhimer

What year did you finish there?

Mr. Santora

My last year was 1944. I would really be in the class of '45. My high school issued what was called a "war diploma" because I had joined the Merchant Marine.

Mr. Misenhimer

When did you go into the service?

Mr. Santora

I was accepted for service in July, 1944.

Mr. Misenhimer

How did you choose the Merchant Marine?

Mr. Santora

Well, I tried to join the Navy and they would not take me because of my eyes. I was near-sighted and wore glasses so when I went to take the exam the next time, I just memorized the eye charts and hid my glasses (chuckles). Then I got my mother to sign the papers because I was under age. I was only 16.

Mr. Misenhimer

Where did you go in?

Mr. Santora

Sheepshead Bay, U.S. Maritime Training Station in Brooklyn. There was a training base there.

Mr. Misenhimer

Is that where you took your training?

Mr. Santora

Yes, that is where I took the training. It was like boot camp like the Navy.

Mr. Misenhimer

What all did you do during that boot camp?

Mr. Santora

Well, learned ship handling, lifeboat handling, and how to fire the guns. They had machine guns and 20 mm guns. Also, aircraft identification, tying knots, sailor stuff.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, in the Merchant Marine you were not actually in the service, is that correct?

Mr. Santora

I guess it wasn't considered the service at the time. Although at the time we thought it was another military service because we marched, saluted officers, etc.

Mr. Misenhimer

Later on it was changed but at the time it was not. Anything in particular you recall from boot camp?

Mr. Santora

Things that happened, you mean? I remember one time when we were told to work the life boats and take turns being the cox'sun, and I think one of my shipmates couldn't manage the commands. The life boats, of course, had a lot of momentum and went underneath the dock and broke up. Some of the oars and the cross framing went under the dock. He couldn't stop the boat as he couldn't remember the orders to oarsmen to slow the boat down.

Mr. Misenhimer

What happened then, what did they do to him?

Mr. Santora

Oh, nothing, everybody just kind of laughed at him. He was chewed out by a Chief Petty Officer (CPO), (bo'sun), in charge of the training.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were instructors Navy, civilian or who were your instructors?

Mr. Santora

I can't really remember. I guess most of them were either retired or active Navy bo'suns. The officers were Merchant Marine graduates of the Merchant Marine Academy or Naval Reserve.

Mr. Misenhimer

What kind of uniform did you wear there?

Mr. Santora

The dress uniform was like the Navy but it did not have white stripes on the back flap. It had two Red Anchor insignia at each corner of the flap and no white stripes on the sleeves or the flap. When we were on leave everybody would say what kind of uniform is that?

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what happened?

Mr. Santora

After we finished training we had a few days leave and we were going to be assigned a ship. So, I went home to my mother's house in Brooklyn.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what?

Mr. Santora

They asked for volunteers for the West Coast as they were sending some officers out to the Pacific and they wanted to fill the Pullman car since there were only three officers. I volunteered to go along with a couple of other guys.

We went across the country in a Pullman observation car coupled at the end of a passenger train. We were traveling in style during wartime having a Pullman porter wake us, make up our beds, eat in style in the Pullman dining car, and being treated as if we were officers.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what?

Mr. Santora

In Chicago, as I remember, we were added to a troop train and the dining car moved so we had to go through the troop cars to eat. We kind of got stares from the guys that were in the troop cars. The troop cars had three to four tier bunks without much room between the tiers. When we had to walk through the troop cars to eat in the dining car the guys in troop cars did not give us a very good look because they were living like dogs while they knew we had these good conditions in the Pullman car.

I was embarrassed to go through the troop cars (they were called "cattle cars" by the army guys) so loaded up on "Baby Ruth" candy bars to eat and avoid having to go through the "cattle cars" to eat in the dining car. Traveling across the country while sitting in the observation platform gave me an insight to the wealth and power of our country. For example, I think it was Cheyenne, Wyoming where we stopped to change locomotives for the haul

over/through the Rocky Mountains. Spread before me on either side were hundreds of locomotives steamed up waiting to exchange and pull trains west or east. To my 17-year-old mind it was a visual symbol of the industrial power of our country.

Mr. Misenhimer

Then what?

Mr. Santora

We ended up in Oakland. There the crew, me and others (the officers were met by a limo) gave up our stylish quarters and were bused to something like a dormitory in San Francisco. From there we waited until we were assigned a ship. To be assigned a ship we had to join a union.

Until then we were free to do as we liked except for muster each morning. Under age and in a city I knew nothing about, wearing a uniform no one seemed to know what it meant, I was a child afloat without friends. In the downtown area of Frisco I was passing a bar where the Naval SP (Shore Patrol) were breaking up a brawl, arresting anyone in a Naval uniform including the sailor next to me watching the fun when he asked one of the SP's, "What's going on?" and the SP arrested him and I slipped back into the crowd. Shortly afterwards I met two slightly drunk Navy sailors about my age. They had a bottle of whisky, invited me to share after we exchanged our mutual woes of loneliness. Never having had tasted any alcoholic beverage I ended up colossally drunk; drunk and hung over sick for two days afterwards, when at the end I was told to report to a union hall. I had told the officer in charge I was trained in the engine department (to avoid the deck crew because of my eyesight and the Steward Department because I deemed it unseamanlike). No one questioned my abilities or training; eager to crew a ship.

Therefore, I was sent to the union hall of the "Marine Firemen, Oilers and Watertenders Union (MFWO)" for a ship assignment. At the union hall I was issued a "Permit Book" membership, assigned a ship, and given the location to pick up the launch that would take me to the ship. A "Permit Book," as I remember, was a temporary membership issued to protect the pre-

war membership when the war ended and fewer crew would be required in a post-war Merchant Marine comprised of fewer ships.

The launch dropped me off alongside a moored "Liberty" ship. I had never been aboard any ship this size before. I was told I was relieving the man on watch in the boiler/engine room. I found out later only a cook, the port engineer and myself were the only persons aboard the ship. The entire crew had left the ship when it returned to San Francisco. The man I was relieving in the engine/boiler room (the two areas were contiguous and open to each other) gave me a quick tour with some instructions such as "If this pump gets stuck, hit here with a wrench." He must have assumed I knew the workings of a ship's boiler room and he was anxious to get off the ship.

My job was to keep up steam pressure and maintain the water level in the one boiler on line to provide steam to run the generator and various pumps. Sitting on the mattress he had used to nap, I worried trying to remember everything he told me to do. Listening to all the unfamiliar clanks creaking, hums and hisses, I was scared. The most important thing I knew I had to do was maintain the water level in the boiler indicated in a tiny glass tube about ten feet above my head. Too low the fire would burn through the tubes empty of water; too high it would choke the ability to make steam. In either case there was the possibility of a boiler explosion. How to maintain proper steam pressure was unknown to me, something the man I relieved assumed I knew, which I assumed was regulated automatically as I watched the steam pressure gauge gradually rise from 200 psi (pounds per square inch) to over 220 psi without a clue to stopping the rise of pressure or who to turn to for help.

Sometime around midnight an older man (the ship's port engineer I found out later) came racing down the ladders to the engine room and burst into the boiler room yelling, "What are you doing, trying to wake up the whole harbor? You've popped the safety valve; you've let the pressure get too high!" Since I was almost in tears I think he took pity on me and helped me get things straightened out in the boiler room. I then asked him to instruct me in my duties as a fireman/water tender. So, over the course of a couple of hours under his instruction, I was

able to work the boiler room of a liberty ship. His instructions were so good I was able to train other youths green as I was when I came aboard to man the boiler room. Eventually the ship was fully crewed and we left San Francisco bound south for Long Beach, California, the port of Los Angeles where we took aboard 15 of the Naval Armed Guard, and loaded general cargo and 10,000 drums (I was told) of aviation gasoline. Once loaded our ship departed alone since at this time no Japanese submarines operated, we were told, east of longitude 170 degrees east. My watch was the 8 to 12 watch (i.e., 8 a.m. to 12 noon and 8 p.m. to 12 midnight) and since we had to cross about 71 degrees of longitude to reach 170 degrees east and at 10 knots we made about five degrees east in 24 hours. It would take our ship two weeks to reach 170 degrees east and link up with a convoy. Geography was my favorite subject in elementary school.

In those two weeks the ship settled into a monotonous routine, four hours on eight hours off, twice a day, seven days a week. Standing watches one could never get a full eight hours' sleep since, if you were engine/boiler room crew you came off watch dirty and sweaty (temperature was sometimes 120 degrees F.). A clean-up, shower and crawling into your bunk took nearly an hour only to be awakened six-and-a-half hours later to stand your next watch. Daytime was spent grabbing more sleep time, reading and eating. To break the routine most of the merchant crew would train with the Naval Armed Guard as shell passers for the 3" gun at the bow and the 5" gun at the stern or man the 20 mm cannons.

We were away from the main fighting—the great naval Battle of Leyte Gulf—except for kamikaze attacks on mostly naval ships. With our load of gasoline we were a prime target if the Japanese pilots knew of our cargo. We saw a "Zeke" flying low shoot along our starboard side in a suicide attack on a cruiser astern of our ship. I had a momentary glimpse of the pilot, he seemed no older than myself, then his plane blew up. His futile sacrifice suddenly exposed to me the tremendous waste of war. After the landing on Mindanao the Japanese forces in the Philippines surrendered. We off-loaded the remainder of our general cargo and aviation gasoline on to barges, joined a convoy to 170 degrees east, topped off with fuel, fresh water, and food for the ship's galley for the two week return to the United States.

Once again in Long Beach, most of the crew signed off after their payoff. My pay was almost \$800 cash since I had been with the ship for over four months; two months in a war zone; the kamikaze flyby considered an “attack;” and carrying hazardous cargo, the last items subject to bonus pay. I kept about \$50 and wired the remainder to my aunt in New Haven—the most money I ever saw in my life. I stayed aboard the ship since I had no place to go and knew no one on the west coast. In a few days I witnessed the return of my shipmates that hadn’t signed off, relieved of their cash payment lost to the bars, rooming houses, restaurants and women ashore.

Part of the new crew coming aboard at Long Beach included an old timer union member of the Marine Firemen, Oiler & Watertenders Union (MFOU) acting as the union representative. No one during the previous voyage had represented the union. He informed me the union frowned upon the wearing of the uniform issued to us who had completed the Merchant Marine boot camp training out of fear that the U.S. Merchant Marine would gradually become militarized and the shipping unions dissolved. Of course, the youths serving in the Merchant Marine wanted recognition of our involvement in the U.S. war effort to be able to visit USO clubs and have a chance to date girls our age. Most of the time, despite the uniform, we had to explain what we did and they (girls and others) didn’t think we were doing anything dangerous. I wasn’t sure if it was (dangerous) or not. Most of it was tedium standing watch twice a day for weeks on end knowing when in a war zone a torpedo would be aimed midship at the engine/boiler room space, the prime center of a ship’s buoyancy; and if it was on my watch my two mates and I would be killed instantly or horribly. Or considering our cargo of aviation gasoline if it were targeted and hit our ship would go up like a Roman candle.

Again, as before, our cargo was general cargo—food supplies, beer (yes, beer, but 3.2 prf beer in olive drab cans about 1.6% alcohol for PX’s—Post Exchanges) atop 10,000 drums of aviation gasoline sailing independently across the Pacific to longitude 170 degrees east. As before, I’m not sure of the exact longitude because we in the engine department crew were not informed of our destinations and if we wanted to know had to foster a friendship with an officer or someone in the deck crew in the second mate’s (the ship’s navigator) watch to find

out where we were and where we were headed. This time it was Iwo Jima after we off-loaded some of our general cargo, topped off tanks with fuel and fresh water and joined a convoy.

At this time almost none of us knew where Iwo Jima was on a map of the Pacific except it was an actual island belonging to Japan before the war, therefore part of the territory of the Empire of Japan. It was the first step in the invasion of Japan and its eventual defeat. We stood far off behind the line of battleships and cruisers bombarding the island--distant strip of land with a small volcanic mountain at its south end. The battle ended in mid-March (69 years ago as I write this today 15 March 2014) and we moved the ship in closer to unload general cargo onto landing craft. When off watch at noon I hitched a ride ashore. The Marines told me I could not go inland since they were still clearing mines. The island cover is a sandy black-to-grey volcanic ash, seemed perfectly flat providing little or no cover dominated at one end by its volcanic mountain, an American flag flying at its summit. I felt for the Marines that had to storm this terrible place, heard casualties were high and only a dozen or so Japanese were prisoners the rest KIA or suicides. It seemed the war would never end, fighting an enemy whose troops it appeared would never surrender and preferred to die even when continued fighting was useless.

After off-loading most of our general cargo, we were ordered to sail for Okinawa, another island we in the crew were ignorant of, carrying our load of gasoline. In transit we heard of Hitler's suicide and Germany's unconditional surrender--V.E. Day! Okinawa compared to what I saw before was a virtual hell-hole. It seemed every Jap (now they were to us only Japs) was intent on suicide hoping to sink a ship and succeeding in devastating a naval ship's superstructure and killing crew without any strategic or tactical purpose--something I was able to understand years later--the futility in pursuit of an unworthy lost cause. The mayhem at Okinawa ended near the end of June 1945. We off-loaded our cargo of gasoline used to fuel the aerial bombardment of the Japanese home islands. From the terrible dispiriting national suicide witnessed from my tiny viewpoint I thought there would be a tremendous sacrifice of lives to defeat Japan by an invasion of the home islands.

During our return to the U.S. we learned Japan, like Germany, had surrendered unconditionally and when we got ashore we learned it took an atomic bomb of two cities in Japan to make their leaders end the war. All or most all of us who knew how the Japanese might fight to defend their homeland were relieved not to have to invade the home islands. We knew the invasion would be costly in lives and an exercise in futility since it was obvious even to lowly crewmen aboard one small merchant ship that Japan was clearly defeated in October 1944 yet their leaders continued to order the sacrifice of the people in a futile war. We gave them an out, "See, we didn't lose, they had a terrible weapon!" Much of this awareness occurred in later years. As a teenager at the time, ignorant of the issues, I was glad the war was over and I had a tiny, tiny, tiny role in a great historical event. Would I feel this way if I was a German, Japanese or Italian teenager? I had Italian cousins whom I learned of years later who would not or were unwilling to discuss their participation in Mussolini's alliance with Hitler's Nazi Germany. During my brief visit to Italy in 1993 I realized my male cousins were unwilling to explain their feelings. I detected it was a sore subject to explore so acquiesced to a pleasant visit.

Our ship returned to San Francisco where it was slated for dry docking for routine maintenance; the entire crew including myself quit the ship after payoff. I had no place to go except the dormitory I had stayed in a year ago. After a short stay and visits to the union hall, I found a berth aboard another liberty ship. Though the ship was devoid of crew and the man I relieved was as before anxious to quit the ship, I was now competent after nearly one year to run the boiler room under any conditions at sea or in port. The new engine crew, excepting two old timers, were all around my age and fresh out of boot camp. Usually the three firemen shared the same stateroom with one double bunk (if I could get it I always tried for the upper bunk) and a single bunk that served as sort of a sofa if the off-watchman wasn't using it. In this case the two old timers were friends, one was an oiler so the other fireman/watertender bunked with the two oilers. I might mention that "staterooms" weren't lush by any means--three men sleeping and using a space about eight foot in each dimension, three tall narrow

lockers in one corner and a sink in the opposite corner, a porthole at one end and a door at the other.

Again, I took the 8 to 12 watch and the third engineer in command on the watch was only three years my senior (I having just turned 18) named Owen Stout and by coincidence the ship's name was Owen Summers operated by the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company. Liberty ships, with some exceptions, were named after prominent Americans, men and women. Owen was a Mormon while I was a Roman Catholic and over the course of time together aboard this ship, one year, we became good friends. He seemed to be able to connect in most ports with the Mormon community and together we would be welcomed. It was an opportunity to meet friendly people ashore and not have to spend off hours on the ship. Also, I think Owen was hoping to convert me.

We up-anchored in San Francisco Bay and were moving ship during the end of my 8 to 12 watch to a fuel dock. The 12 to 4 watch fireman/watertender asked me to help because he was as new as once I was and much worse had no idea what he had to do in the boiler room when the ship was maneuvering. Both boilers were on line (in port only one used since steam was only required for the generator, a few pumps and heating) so maneuvering (i.e. "Ahead; Slow; Half; Full; Stop; Astern; Slow; Half Full") became tricky to keep steam in two boilers at proper pressure during the changing demands required by the engine. I told him I would run one boiler, he the other and duplicate what I did on his. Steam pressure was regulated by removing one or more of the burner's tubes spraying atomized oil that ignited and flamed at the nozzle at the end of each burner. You had to remember to shut off the oil supply before pulling the long burner tube. If you didn't, you would get a baptism of hot bunker E oil, which during a long "Stop" on the engine telegraph happened to my student. The burner tube(s) had to be pulled out of the firebox, otherwise the heat would bake the residual oil in the nozzle and plug the tiny hole. He wasn't scalded, only his clothes partially sprayed with hot oil so when we got "Finished with Engine" he went topside to shower and change.

After topping off with fuel and water at the dock, we left San Francisco, bound for cargoing in Long Beach. There I went ashore with the third engineer. We had a meal with a Mormon family, attended a service and afterwards socialized with a youth group. We did discuss our respective religions and my being the only Catholic the discussions were very polite; in any case I was impressed with their kindness and manner.

For the next few days when off watch I took an interest in watching our cargo being loaded and stowed. Again, I was aboard a ship carrying aviation gasoline at the bottom, beer on top. The only thing different a secure wooden structure the size of a small one-story house was being built by carpenters on the orlop deck of #2 hold for what apparently would be expensive PX (Post Exchange) goods. The purpose was an attempt to prevent pilferage of the expensive cargo; the authorities apparently weren't worried about the beer, there was too much of it, much too much for the crew to make a dent in that part of the cargo. Our cargo, excepting the gasoline in drums, too heavy to lift, will later prove to be an albatross and a problem. The peacetime merchant marine is going to be different than the wartime merchant marine. The first change, our ship no longer required the Naval Armed Guard, one officer and about ten crew gunners. Instead, because the ship still carried the usual armaments and ammunition the ship was assigned one U.S. Navy gunner's mate to be in charge of these components. He became another close ship-board friend because we were only months apart in and because of later events I was in need of a friend.

Perhaps some words about relationships aboard a merchant marine vessel are in order, though only from my experience as a crew member of the "Black Gang" as the engine/boiler room crew—and engineering officer, sometimes—were referred to, stemming from days of coal burning ships when we came off watch black.

1. Only once in all the years and on the half dozen ships I served did I see, much less talk to, the captain of the ship. The only meeting I had once came about because I was charged with "disobeying a lawful command" by the chief engineer of that ship. The charge came about because the chief, distraught due to his specifications led to the

failure of one two ship's engines regarded me as a trouble maker and as scapegoat due to my earlier complaints that the day crew (wipers) were not performing their duties and because of that I lost respect for him and wrongly took a flippant attitude over a minor command without understanding the stress he was under. It was a non-union ship so without a formal "captain's mast" it took awhile to remove the taint from my service.

2. On half, six ships I did see or interact with the chief engineer including the one noted in #1.
3. As a watch engine/boiler crew man only interacted with the engineering officer only during the watch, the other engineering officers were seen only at the watch changes.
4. My relation with Owen Stout, the third engineer officer during off-duty times ashore was unusual. Crew did not mingle with officers even though the relationship, at least in the U.S. Merchant Marines, was informal, i.e. we did not salute, we only had to obey orders.
5. The relationship between the deck crew and the engine/boiler crew was mixed. Deck felt they were the true sailors in the tradition of ship's driven by sails managed aloft in tall masts until we pointed out we below in the engine and boiler spaces were now the "sails" of modern ships. Once the engine(s) stopped the deck crew was useless, though as long as the prop(s) turned they steered and navigated the ship. We mingled in respect as shipmates and seamen.
6. The Steward's Department, the cooks, dishwashers and messmen were not considered as sailors, yet they were vitally important in running the ship. At the time I was naively unaware of the racialism in the merchant marine unions and failing to notice there were no negroes in the deck and engine/boiler crews and all the negroes aboard Owen Summers and in every ship on which I served the Steward's Department was manned by blacks ("negroes" as used at the time). The racism became more apparent when a white man (actually a youth my age) came aboard as a dishwasher/messman and had to bunk with his steward's crewmates. Most of the deck and engine/boiler crew treated him as someone of lower status.

7. Crews and officers, even captains sometimes, changed after each voyage so a cohesive dedicated crew and officer core had only a slight chance of being established. The merchant marine depended on each member of the ship's complement knowing and adhering to their duties as individuals rather than as a team in comradeship between individuals under military command and discipline as practiced aboard naval vessels. Once our cargo was loaded and tanks topped off we departed from Long Beach. I found out from Owen that we were bound for Japan, 5200 nautical miles distant on the great circle route, the shortest distance on the earth's surface. This route would take us north to latitude 46 degrees 40' when the ship crossed longitude 180 degrees the date line and take at best 26 days, since our ship laden with cargo and probably a fouled bottom due for dry docking to clean off a layer of seaweed and barnacles could only make a bit over eight knots, about 200 nm per day. The engine was kept at 72 rpm which should drive the ship at 10.4 knots so we in the engine/boiler crew said we would arrive in Japan five days ahead of the deck crew. Such were the things we spent to relieve the tedium of the sameness of each day, four hours on eight hours off, seven days a week, the monotonous throb of the engine, the beat of the prop, some of us might wish for a storm just for a change. Off hours, we slept, read, played cards, there was no entertainment. I oftentimes would sit on the bow with my legs straddling the blunt prow just watching the expanse of ocean until the sunset. The forward motion of the ship most times provided a light breeze. If it was too windy or cold I could sit in the forward 3" gun tub shielded by the splinter screen. Clear nights provided the drama of a canopy of stars from horizon to horizon, a sight one would never see on land, something I do not see today when I sail our boat at night. When the ship was in warmer climes some would strip and sunbathe on one of the cargo hatches; no chance this trip in late fall on a northerly route.

I can't remember the date, mid-December I think, I came on deck at noon after ending my watch to be greeted by the majestic sight of Mount Fujiyama, seemingly a snow-capped perfect cone. We stood offshore for the day and through the night waiting for a pilot to take the ship into the harbor. Apparently no pilot or pilot boat was available so the captain and

first mate decided in the early morning hours to take the ship in without a pilot. We were still making the passage towards Tokyo Bay when I went below on the morning 8 to 12 watch. About three hours into the watch the feed water pump began making strange noises and the engine began laboring, then slowed. We realized the ship was aground, the prop was in mud, and we were sucking mud into the condenser inlet. Owen cut steam to the engine without a command on the engine telegraph to prevent any damage and telephoned the bridge. The Deck Command had run the ship onto a sandbar in Tokyo Bay. After some discussion between Owen and the bridge it was decided to try pulling the ship off the sandbar by reversing the engine since the prop seemed to be only in mud. I had pulled all the burner tubes from the two fireboxes, but we continued making steam off the red-hot firebricks and popping the boiler safety valves. The engine telegraph rang "Slow Astern," Owen cranked the engine valve gear over to reverse and opened the throttle valve while I put the burner tubes back into the fireboxes, opened the fuel valves one by one igniting the oil spray off the hot bricks as the engine slowly turned over gradually to 25 rpm. Bridge called on the telegraph "Half Astern," then "Full Astern," turning 18" diameter, 150' long shaft driving the 18-1/2' diameter prop churning the mud and water at the ship's stern and causing ominous sounds and terrible vibrations. By this time the chief engineer had come below and was in command and stopped the madness without an order from the bridge, then communicated with the captain concerning his order learning the ship hadn't moved and we were stuck fast on the sandbar. Later I learned from the ordinary seaman on deck at the bow that Japanese fishermen were waving and yelling, "Shally! Shally!" and ran back to warn the bridge. The captain ignored the warning and ran the ship full speed onto the sandbar. Later three tugboats couldn't pull the ship off the bar. We had to empty our fuel and water tanks onto barges, and with the help of the tugs and our engine in reverse, ended our ignominious entry into Tokyo Bay.

The one thing I loved working aboard a Liberty ship was that all the parts were exposed; from the armaments, anchor chain, winches, masts, booms, hatches, galley, pumps, machinery, down to the great reciprocating engine with all its intricate working parts wrought big and all of it visible. The engine looked majestic, if an engine could. From my station in the fire/boiler room I could see its towering twenty foot height from the engine room floor plates to the top

of its cylinders. All the linkage moving in unison to the four foot stroke of three pistons to position each valve to deliver steam at the right moment into each cylinder to drive the piston up and down to convert that motion to the huge connecting rod that converted its motion to the rotary motion of the crankshaft driving the propeller shaft.

Most of the moving parts of the engine were automatically oiled from oil cups that dripped oil at a rate that would properly lubricate a bearing. The duty of the oiler was to assure all the oil cups were filled and feel the outward parts surrounding a bearing were at normal warmth and not hot, indicating a bearing in need of attention before it became a problem. This was an art for the oiler and somewhat easily accomplished on some of the engine parts with short limited motion. Not so for the crosshead that connected the up-and-down motion of the piston rod to the connecting rod. This particular piece of machinery was moving about ten feet per second so there was no way to fill an oil cup dripping oil to lubricate the bearing. It had to be done by the oiler, timing each squirt of oil at the one instant at the top of a stroke when the crosshead was motionless. One watch, with the approval of Owen, the third engineer, we traded places for the duration of the watch after we instructed each other concerning our respective duties. I was fine until one moment I miss-timed the crosshead motion and a part of it snagged the oilcan, chewed it, grinding into a small ball of metal, then spitting it out within a few seconds. The incident gave me a respect for the work of a ship's oilers, at least those powered by reciprocating steam engines. Later ships powered by steam turbines bored me and those powered by diesels smelled and were a noisy pounding. I preferred sail or a steam reciprocating-powered ship.

After being freed from our sandbar our ship proceeded north through Tokyo Bay to a dockage in Yokohama. Off watch afforded the view of a bay and harbor littered with the hulks of Japanese naval ships along the shore as our ship made its passage. Once docked alongside a pier, our ship was swarmed with Japanese stevedores to unload our cargo. Knowing what I had heard and seen, my teenage self felt insecure among the hundreds of Japanese aboard our ship. On the contrary, it was soon evident the ordinary Japanese were subdued, even docile, under the apparent power of the United States. The towering height of many Americans compared to the Japanese helped that impression—we were in most cases a head taller.

Our ship went on a port watch schedule, eight hours on, sixteen off. This afforded enough time to spend a few hours ashore; however, Yokohama was a burnt out desert of a city, leveled by our aerial fire bombing. I used my sixteen hours off to take the train on the reconstructed railway to go to Tokyo. On the way I was able to see the devastating destruction our fire bombing visited on the twin cities of Yokohama and Tokyo, only a twisted steel structure or broken concrete structure rising above a plain of rubble. Strangely, when I arrived in Tokyo I found the central city around the Imperial Palace untouched. By happenstance I arrived at the headquarters of General MacArthur, the administrator of the occupation of Japan just as he arrived at the steps of his headquarters. The steps were crowded and I only had a glimpse of his imperial head and his corncob pipe above the heads of the crowd. Ignorant of the sights of Tokyo I wandered around the closed grounds of the Imperial Palace then returned to Yokohama to stand my watch.

Owen, the third engineer, again, as he seemed somehow able to do, connected to a Japanese Mormon family, then invited me to accompany him on a visit. The family lived in a suburb of Tokyo, a town named Funabashi spared of the fire bombing of Yokohama and Tokyo. We were met at the train station by a member of the family who guided us through the dirt streets of the town to his home. Owen and I, as we walked through the town, were curiosities to the townspeople whom had never seen Americans and only four months ago mortal enemies. Also, Owen and I towered over everyone we met or passed. At our guide's home, constructed it seemed, of wood and paper, we removed our shoes at the entry then were ushered into a mat-covered floor of a room that one would consider a parlor. We were given urns filled with sand with the embers of burning charcoal for warmth. Conversation was smattering since we did not speak any Japanese and our guide had limited knowledge of English. We had brought gifts of food for the family and the women stayed apart only appearing to serve us a fish stew and tea. It was my first introduction to a different culture. I wondered what their thoughts were when their country went to war with the U.S. and before, during their country's years of war in China. Before it got dark we had to part because there was no electricity to light our way to the train station. From what I observed and the visit I marveled that the leaders of Japan could convince their citizens it was necessary to institute a

war with the U.S. and think that it could cow the U.S. to surrender because of early victories. Then continued as we sunk their navy and merchant marine, retook their island conquests one by one and starved and fire bombed the home island's cities.

After a portion of our cargo was delivered at Yokohama we moved to an anchorage in the bay. Within a few days we up-anchored and sailed south to Nagoya where we off-loaded more of our cargo onto barges from an anchorage without the opportunity to go ashore and visit this historic ancient Japanese city. From Nagoya our ship proceeded south, rounded Kyushu, Japan's southern island, then entered the East China Sea, turned north into the Yellow Sea to anchor in the roads of Inchon, Korea.

If it seems my narrative has more detail in peacetime than in wartime, it was because in my youth life aboard ship was an endless day-to-day, week-to-week, month-to-month routine, spent below the ship's waterline and in teenage sleep above, never knowing what part of the western oceans and seas I was in. The ship(s) on which I served were never directly attacked so I could only observe and remember what I saw happening elsewhere during the few hours of awakesness, despite the knowledge my life was on the line tied to the fate of my ship. My experience might be typical and atypical to thousands who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine, none of us doing anything heroic and if on watch in the engine/boiler room when a torpedo struck, dying instantly or horribly. Nor did I escape a sinking ship in a lifeboat to be rescued or arrive safe on a distant shore. We simply delivered the ship's cargo and hoped for a safe return to a port to load another cargo to help end the war. Only a minuscule number of us did a heroic act, but all of us in the U.S. Merchant Marine put our lives on the line to deliver the cargo that would help to end the war.

Peacetime was different. When I came off watch during our passage through the Yellow Sea the refrigerator in the mess room devoted to containing a midnight light lunch was filled with the olive drab cans of beer pilfered from the cargo in the ship's holds. Shortly after we anchored awaiting off-loading our cargo onto barges, the tidal drop between high and low was 30' or more at Inchon, meaning a ship had to traverse the river at either side of near high tide and pass through the lock into the harbor of Inchon, a basin perhaps no larger than a mile square. Only cargo ships of the highest priority or passenger ships were allowed in the harbor.

During the night after our arrival I came off watch showered and collapsed in my bunk. When I was awakened in the morning for my watch I found the deck of our stateroom was awash in beer gently sloshing back and forth and my sea bag lying on the deck under the lower bunk soaked with beer. While I was asleep a drunken party had commenced ending with injury of one of my old-timer bunkmates. Army MP's came aboard, locked down the ship and conducted a search for items pilfered from the "secure house" in #2 hold. During my watch crew members came below hiding what they had stolen to avoid discovery during the search of their quarters. Near the end of the search above someone threw his contraband from the deck entry above to the engine/boiler space below, showering us with watches, binoculars and other valuables from the PX cargo. As a joke, a stupid joke, I re-hid the items the crew had hidden earlier in the engine/boiler spaces. I was unprepared for the storm that followed when fights broke out among the thieves. I owned up to my "joke." Instead of regarding it as a prank I was accused of stealing what had been stolen and no one seemed to recognize the absurdity of the affair. I became a persona non grata among some of my shipmates. One of the things that turned the party into a brawl, aside from the drinking I found out later from my injured bunkmate when I visited him in the Army hospital ashore, was the fighting had racial overtones. One of the drunken crew went into the steward's quarters, woke up one of the cooks and demanded he cook a meal for himself and his buddies. In the galley it got nasty. The cook, either angry or in fear for his life, swung a cleaver and my bunkmate told me he put out his arm to ward off the blow that could have killed a shipmate and was cut halfway through his wrist. I visited other shipmates jailed for their involvement while the Army tried to sort out the guilty. Eventually the Army gave up, the half dozen they arrested after our ship was unloaded were released; otherwise the ship would be short-handed for the voyage to the U.S. Most likely the captain and chief engineer pled for their release. The name given to the crew behavior like this was euphemistically called, "performing."

Visiting the shipmates ashore in Korea afforded another view of a country to compare with the United States. Though excepting Tokyo, a modern 20th century city, its suburb Funabashi appeared primitive. The city of Inchon and even Seoul, the capital, appeared just as primitive, lacking in many cases paved streets. However I only witnessed what I could see

walking about for a few hours in a country formerly occupied by Japan. For the first time I heard the racist word “gook(s)” used by the occupying U.S. Army troops in reference to the ordinary Koreans. The trip upriver in a launch to Inchon revealed the affects of a wicked tide. It was as if traveling in a canyon with fishing boats stranded and beached ashore each side of a river at the bottom of a canyon.

Departing Korea and the return voyage to the U.S. only three events were remarkable:

1. Crossing the East China Sea in fog at night the steam engine driving the generator blew a gasket and before we could get up to the generator platform and get one of the standbys started and on line the voltage dropped to a point that the gyro compass lost its setting and magnetic compass for some reason wasn't dependable. For two days we circled ship until the fog lifted and the second mate could get a sun sight and reset the gyro compass.
2. The second occurred in the mid-Pacific while I was off watch on a sea-calm, sunny afternoon in the stern gun tub helping the Navy gunner's mate, my friend, dispose of the 5" gun's ammo overboard. The deck, without warning, slowly pitched downward toward the bow at a steep angle and when we looked forward we saw a wall of water, a wave towering vertically above the masts advancing on us—our ship as well sailing to meet it. The bow plowed into its base, the entire ship shuddered under the impact. I thought we were going to go down and not come up because though I couldn't see it, I knew the entire forward section of the ship was awash under water. Indeed, water spewed through both companionways on each side of the mid-ship house flooding the afterdeck. The ship's propeller, beneath us, freed of its load momentarily, raced for several revolutions until the ship tilted to climb the face of the wave and the propeller slowed as it bit into the water and thrust the ship over the crest. The wave passed and when I looked astern the only evidence of the encounter was the abrupt ending of the ship's wake. Sixty years later in a New York Times science article I learned a wave such as we encountered was called a “rough wave” credited on occasion with sinking ships. I think now the fact that we were unloaded sailing in ballast prevented our sinking.

3. During my 8 to 12 night watch outside of our entry into the Strait of Juan de Fuca the third event occurred when, without warning, "Stop" was rung up on the engine telegraph on our way into the port of Tacoma, Washington. Owen used the quick engine stop butterfly valve while I frantically closed the fuel oil valves and pulled the burner tubes. Then the engine telegraph rang, "Full Astern" after a half a minute. This required a frantic effort to put everything back to what it was before when we were routinely at "Full Ahead." All that we could think below in the bowels of the ship's engine/boiler room was to brace for a collision that never came. Instead, "Full Ahead" was rung up on the engine telegraph. Owen telephoned the bridge to find out, "What was all that about?" The explanation, someone leaned against the bridge telegraph, panicked when the internal bells rang, then confused, ran the bridge telegraph lever through the wrong sequence. Knowing what the bridge telegraph is like it could only be a joke in retribution for what happened in Korea while the third mate was making rounds and away from the bridge or while he, the 3rd mate, was away someone of the inexperienced deck crew actually saw something ahead to be avoided and in ignorance gave conflicting commands on the bridge telegraph. In any case, we let any inquiry into what occurred on the bridge that night go by the board.

We tied up alongside a pier in Tacoma and, as usual, we were paid off and most of the crew left the ship, only a few of the original crew remaining including myself and Owen, the third engineer. As before, I wired the bulk of my payoff to my aunt in New Haven, Connecticut and watched in the days following those of the crew whom had not signed off returning broke of their payoff, in need of a place to sleep, and meals to eat.

This time in Tacoma our ship's holds were laden with sacks of wheat and corn bound for Europe to alleviate the shortages of foodstuffs resulting from the ravage the harvesting of food crops brought upon by the aftermath of the war. Still a teenager I was blithely aware how the hardships war and its end upended the lives of ordinary people and what those who survived went through in order to continue to live. It was an education in the futility of modern war. We were bound for Europe via the Panama Canal. Our ship sailed south along the western

coast of the U.S., Mexico and Central America to await in the Bay of Panama for clearance for the passage through the canal. Our ship traversed the Miraflores and Pedro Miguel Locks during my morning 8 to 12 watch so I had no idea of what it was like. When I came off watch, our ship was traversing through the Gaillard Cut into Gatun Lake which supplied the water to raise and lower ships in the locks. Strangely, the passage from west to east from the Pacific to the Atlantic through the canal was mostly northwest until the Gatun Locks where our ship seemed dwarfed by the lock basins and the huge gates. On the concrete walls of the locks I could see the scrapes from the sides of U.S. battleships that passed through the locks and the painted graffiti on the wall, inscribed by their crews only inches separating their ship from the walls. Our ship centered in a lock was 20' or more from either wall.

Traversing the Caribbean Sea I sunbathed in the afternoons off watch. One day I became aware the sun was changing position, got up and looked over the side to see the ship's wake was describing a large curve and went up to the bridge to find it empty except the quartermaster steering the ship on course had dozed off at the wheel. We were able to get the ship back on course without any officer noticing.

After crossing the Atlantic we passed through the Strait of Gibraltar during my 8 to 12 night watch so I missed seeing the passage. Three days later we docked at Marseilles. My one excursion ashore revealed only slight damage was visited on Marseilles as a result of the war. After unloading a portion of cargo our ship continued eastward to Naples (Napoli). I was off watch at the time and could see Mount Vesuvius impressively dominating the bay as we entered. During our entry what appeared to be a fishing boat oared by two men came alongside as we slowly moved towards our dockage. The third man commenced negotiating with an exchange of cigarettes (the actual coin of the realm at this time) for Italian lira. A bargain was agreed to and a bag containing cartons of cigarettes (a carton of cigarettes from the ship's store cost sixty cents; months later on another voyage I was able to buy a bicycle for four cartons of cigarettes in Livorno (Leghorn) Italy) was lowered to the "fishing boat" oared by two men. Once the bag was unloaded of its cartons of cigarettes the rowing fishermen shipped their oars, fired up the concealed inboard engine, and sped away—welcome to the rampant thievery of postwar Naples. Ashore within yards of the docks boys no older than in their mid-

teens were offering (pimping) their “sisters” while they relieved an unsuspecting newly-arrived seaman of the watch on his wrist and the wallet in his pocket. I was spared from any loss because I did not own a watch nor carry anything of value ashore excepting the almost worthless paper lira in denominations of bills numbering in the thousands and millions.

I was able, by trading and standing an extended watch, to manage enough time to hire a guide for a trip to the partially excavated ruins of Pompeii buried in the year 79 by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. I was only aware of Pompeii from a movie, “The Last Days of Pompeii,” I saw ten years ago. What I remember were the ruts carved into the stone paved streets by the wheels of carts, the plaster casts made from the hollowed out voids left by humans suddenly killed and entrapped in the ash, and for extra payment to my guide a view of sexual explicit wall paintings. Forty-seven years later I visited Pompeii with my father and my wife during a tour of Italy. More was excavated but the aura of the death of an ancient city remained. Returning to Naples my ship was gone! I panicked, in a foreign port with only a smattering of Italian, until I found the ship had been moved to another pier about a half mile away.

Our return voyage brought our ship to the Upper Bay of New York’s harbor near almost where I left two years ago. During the return my watch coincided with our ship’s passage through the Strait of Gibraltar where, again, I was denied the view of the “Rock,” and this historical passage. During our anchorage in New York’s Upper Bay, three events stood out in my memory. Some of the crew, me included, thought it fun to dive from the ship’s bridge nearly fifty feet above the water. We were unprepared for the ebbing current in the harbor and once in the water barely able to swim back to the ship’s ladder. If we tired and missed the platform we would be swept out to the Atlantic Ocean without any chance of rescue. Desperately swimming to the ship’s launch pick-off and drop-off platform I realized our bravado could end in tragedy; therefore we ended the game.

The following day I arranged a visit with the family of my high school sweetheart Lorraine Ginty, the daughter of a strict Roman Catholic family living in the Park Slope section of Brooklyn. A visit I thought as payback to Owen for the hospitality shown to me months ago on the west coast and Japan. It was, all told, a pleasant visit until the next morning when Lorraine’s mother became aware that Owen was a Mormon and she said, “You brought a man

who sleeps with all those wives into my house?" I assured her she was mistaken, that Owen, whatever his beliefs were, was no threat to her or the Roman Catholic faith. I then realized I had changed and was in the process to challenge or question my own or anyone's belief. I had changed because I had witnessed the diversity of beliefs, that I was a Roman Catholic only for the fact it was my family's belief and I attended parochial Catholic school. Further, if born in Japan I could have been taught to hate, love the emperor and pilot that kamikaze in Leyte.

Back aboard SS Owen Summers we found the ship was to be decommissioned. We were to sail her into Kill Van Kull, a waterway between Staten Island, New York and Bayonne, New Jersey, and tie up alongside about a dozen other "Liberties." Liberties were my home for two years, the departure was sad for me. Owen and I also parted company—he to return to his family in Utah for a vacation and for me to find another ship.

When I went to the MFW union hall I found a vote was in progress to join the National Maritime Union (NMU) in a strike against the shipping companies for reasons unknown to me. As a "permit book" and not a full member I was not allowed to vote but able to observe. The atmosphere was noisy and rowdy, the issues not explained except to join with NMU, the union officers speaking in support of the NMU and in favor of the strike. The few voices in opposition were drowned out in the clamor. I perceived many of the members on the floor were drunk. The vote when taken was "Yes." I looked upon the affair and the strike as the first scuttling puncture of the hull that was the U.S. Merchant Marine. Nevertheless, I approached one of the union officers concerning full union membership and was told if I served picket duty I would be "considered." Assigned to a remote location in the far reaches of Brooklyn piers in the dark of early dawn I realized becoming a full member was remote, that placements would be fewer amongst a dwindling number of ships and priority given to the senior members, thus serving one time I quit and looked elsewhere for a ship.

The U.S. Army Transport System, a quasi military non-union branch of the U.S. Army was in desperate need of crew for their ships from what I heard. I applied, was accepted and assigned a ship confiscated from Germany after the war and renamed the USAT President Tyler, undergoing repairs and refit in dry dock. I was happy because it was powered by two reciprocating steam engines, though concerned as a watertender I was in charge of a fire/boiler

room with six boilers and in command of two firemen as a teenager, nineteen years old, a command, something that I had never experienced. A problem arose from a comment made by one of the yard workers that the ship's chief engineer specified a clearance on a vital piece of the engine's machinery greater than required and as noted earlier problems for myself to absolve the Chief Engineer's accusation of "disobeying a direct order." The result of the Chief Engineer's dockyard specs was that one engine failed in the mid-Atlantic and we limped into the Weser River to Bremerhaven, Germany on one engine for repairs. USAT Tyler—I forgot to mention earlier was a combination passenger/cargo ship. Eastbound, carrying occupation personnel and families along with their personal belongings and cargo of food for German citizens; westbound we were to carry German "war brides" along with military personnel and families returning to the U.S.

Bremerhaven afforded my first look at the devastation visited upon Germany's cities by our aerial bombardment. In contrast to Japan, leveled by the firebombing of homes built of wood and paper, the concrete and stones of homes and apartment buildings rose as empty shells above the rubble surrounding them on the ground. It seemed in contrast to France and Italy the Germans were endeavoring to clear the rubble of war and begin a new life, but that's only my impression. Others, was my embarrassment for the image of my country due to the attitude and actions of our occupation troops toward German civilians especially in street arrests. Front line combat veterans in my experience treated the defeated enemy with compassion though later I heard of the anger from men who had come upon the Nazi camps. The occupation troops I saw were young and seemed to be trying to emulate the John Wayne swagger from the movie "Stagecoach;" however, even if they acted with their best behavior no one likes an occupation army no matter how benign. Another experience, the number of people DP's (displaced persons) who fled their homes and countries to escape the Russian occupation zone. It did not jibe with the glorious equalitarian Russia painted by my younger brother and his friends. Instead, masses of people wanted, would, did, give everything to escape the Russians.

The USAT Tyler was repaired and returned to the U.S. I spent a month or so to clear my record of "disobeying a lawful command," and assigned another ship, the USAT George W.

Goethals, named for the U.S. army engineer who organized the successful completion of the Panama Canal. Things come around a passage through the canal to later sail a ship named for its engineer. This ship was a steam turbine-driven ship and for me lacked the feeling and seeing the mechanism that drove a ship across the oceans, perhaps the feeling of crewman on a sailing ship when sail gave way to steam. I made numerous voyages on Goethals crossing and re-crossing the Atlantic Ocean. Most round trips were accomplished within a month. At nearly twenty knots the ship could reach most any European port between eight or nine days and layovers to discharge or load cargo and passengers (Goethals was a combo passenger/cargo ship) in port amounted to no more than several days. I served as watertender and gradually advanced through the ratings available to someone not a licensed engineer though I desired mostly to be directly involved in those duties that drove the ship through the sea. The voyages became routine. I can't remember anyone in particular to assign an incident aboard or ashore to one voyage so I'll recount a few remembrances that come to mind.

- Blacks were no longer restricted to service in the steward's department and could now serve in the deck or engine crew. A new fireman came aboard, he wasn't even black, but a shade of brown. He naturally was supposed to bunk with the other firemen, but they threw his sea bag out of the firemen's quarters into the companionway. My two bunkmates agreed to take him in our cabin rather than create incident which at that time could have led to more problems. We were young and not prepared to handle racial injustice; we took the easy way out rather than confront the injustice.
- I did get to see our passage through the Strait of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea to dock the following day in the harbor of Livorno (Leghorn on U.S. maps—why?), an artificial harbor created by breakwaters similar to Long Beach, California. My new shipboard friend, "Tex" Mercer from San Antonio, Texas, managed to convert our built-up allotments of cigarette cartons (neither of us smoked), the monetary lingua franca of post war Italia (and all of Europe except England) to exchange on the "black market" enough worthless Italian lira in the

millions to purchase bicycles. My three-speed aluminum racing bike was purchased for five cartons of cigarettes that cost sixty cents each from the ship's locker (store), i.e. six dollars for a bike. For some reason the owner of the shop would not accept cigarettes in payment.

- Tex and I rode our new bikes to Pisa, about fourteen miles distant from Livorno and were allowed to walk the steps to the top of the "Leaning Tower," the campanile of the cathedral we passed up seeing, green tourists us. The steps up, some almost flat and others steep, ascending the tower and at the top looking over the leaning side and seeing no evidence of support, I was on the edge of space and in the place where Galileo demonstrated all bodies regardless of weight fall at the same rate except as affected by air resistance, Physics 101.
- We were able to hitch a ride aboard an army truck bound for Firenze (Florence, again, why?, some fifty miles or more distant from Livorno (Leghorn) to spend less than two hours to tour, but we saw Michelangelo's David displayed outside under a canopy alongside the Palazzo Vecchio, the town hall of Firenze. We were ignorant of the cathedral with its Brunelleschi dome and Ghiberti's bronze doors, but we walked the Ponte Vecchio (old bridge) crossing the Arno River housing small shops lining both sides of a pedestrian passageway. We had to curtail our tour to catch an army truck returning to Livorno.
- The one voyage to Livorno was an exception, the remainder were routine trips to Bremerhaven with occasional stops in Southampton wherein I managed to quick trip by railroad to London. Again, with only a few hours available between port watches and limited knowledge of city I did get to stand outside Number 10 Downing Street the only place I knew of in England because of Winston Churchill's stance against Nazi Germany, but then at the time voted out of office and replaced by Clement Attlee.
- One stop in Southampton I had the opportunity to visit a Liberty ship turned over to the British Merchant Marine. It appeared the accommodations provided as

standard for ships commissioned for the U.S. Merchant Marine were stripped as too lush for the ordinary British seaman and suitable only for the officers, an intro to the class separation existing in Britain. A Liberty ship that I knew should be a carbon copy of every Liberty ship that slid down the ways had been turned into a dismal relic where its crew was reduced to apologizing for its condition.

- Our ship, when it returned to the U.S., carried as passengers so called “war brides,” women who married G.I.’s. Not all were faithful to their new husbands. It was hard to blame them, given the lot of young women in a country devastated, ruined and split, starving with most of its male youth killed or maimed. Yet I knew of only one actual example of unfaithfulness and lay the others to the braggadocio of my shipmates.
- From April to October the ship took the shorter northern great circle route that brought us above latitude 50 degrees north in the mid-Atlantic. November to March it was usual to take the longer southern route to avoid the severe winter North Atlantic storms. One passage in December the bridge command decided to chance the northern route. It turned out to be an example of a reason to avoid this passage in winter when we encountered a 10-11 wind on the Beaufort Scale (48 to 63 knots; 55 to 72 mph), on the nose with mountainous seas topping at 40-50’, the wind-blown crests turning the spray to ice shot through the wood structure of the fair weather bridge and nearly tore one of the lifeboats from its davits. Most of our passengers and many of the crew were seasick. In all my years at sea I never witnessed anything like it from my off-watch view in the limited protection of the fair-weather bridge, a view not to be missed from the safest, highest deck of the ship.
- In October of 1947, I gave up my thoughts of getting a marine engineer’s license and a career at sea, but I was undecided about what to do. I signed off the USAT Goethals, wired most of my pay to my aunt (I had no idea how much my savings amounted to) and went ashore, took a temporary job as a salesclerk in one of

New York City's department stores for the Christmas season. When it ended I returned to New Haven and my aunt, decided on Industrial Design as a career, applied to the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) and was accepted. This probably was the last class comprised of a substantial number of WWII veterans on the G.I. Bill, a bill that a WWII merchant mariner wasn't entitled to.

Mr. Misenhimer, you asked some questions concerning pay, other items, and I've included additional ones that came to mind as follows:

- Pay: \$90 per month, eight hours a day, seven days a week (I think it was raised later to \$120 a month). This included meals and bedding but no clothing allowance. The crew duties were comparable to a U.S. Navy CPO. A U.S. Navy "Liberty" ship was crewed by between 250-300 men, the officers in merchant crew spaces in addition to merchant officer spaces. The Navy crew was housed in the #4 hold.
- A Merchant Marine Liberty had a total of 41 officers and men plus 12 to 15 in the Navy Armed Guard. There was some resentment over the disparity in pay, especially at payoff after several months voyage that included bonuses for war zone, attack, hazardous cargo, when the Armed Guard shared equally in the dangers.
- There was no allotment for dependents, no survivor benefits for dependents.
- There was no paid 30 day leave, pay stopped at sign-off from a ship and commenced at sign-on to a ship. In order to get time off in port a crewman in the engine department on port watches had to make a trade of watches with another crew member. Sometimes liberal port watches were set up to allow more time off.
- Subject to draft into one of the "armed" services after 30 days without serving on a ship. How this was or could be enforced seems impossible except to be stopped by an MP or SP or civilian police and asked for ID and papers.

- If your ship was sunk your pay stopped. It would depend on the shipping company to find your survivors and/or the union to collect the pay due. The records, of course, were lost with the ship. If you survived and managed to be rescued or reach shore the rescuer(s) would provide help or medical aid; ashore a shipping company's agent would take over to act on the crew's behalf.
- There were no medical care benefits such as sickness and dental care except through charitable organizations such as the Seaman's Church Institute in New York City. The U.S. Army Transport Service did provide medical care in Army hospitals.
- I don't know the status of a seriously wounded merchant sailor for long-term care.
- No "G.I. Bill" for those who served in the U.S. Merchant Marine during WWII.
- Subject to the draft during the Korean "Conflict" (War), I was drafted and told my service in the U.S. Merchant Marine "Did not count as service!"
- Everyone in the U.S. Merchant Marine served aboard a ship. There was no shore duty. Over 7,000 KIA, no accurate figures available, no information available concerning wounded. Proportionately U.S. Merchant Marine KIA equals U.S. Marines KIA, i.e., 2.9%.

Mr. Misenhimer

I have some questions for you. Were you in the Atlantic and the Pacific both?

Mr. Santora

Yes, and the Mediterranean.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you with the same people very often?

Mr. Santora

No, actually, the longest I was with anyone was Owen Summers because we made the one voyage across to Japan and Korea and then back into the States, through the Panama Canal.

Then off to New York and across to France and the Netherlands and back again, mostly the same rules applied on every ship.

Mr. Misenhimer

What was it like to go through the Panama Canal?

Mr. Santora

I could see on the side the names of ships. The war ships could barely get through the canal. The Navy ships at the time were built to be able to get through the canal—the Washington, or North Carolina or some of the battleships. They just barely had enough room to get through the canal lock. There were locks at either end of the canal and they went individually through.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you get home from World War II with any souvenirs?

Mr. Santora

No, I did not go for that. Some of the guys did. They tried to find shrapnel or something in the Philippines, Japanese swords or something like that. I stayed aboard the ship instead of going ashore.

Mr. Misenhimer

What would you consider your most frightening time or was there any time you were scared?

Mr. Santora

Well, I guess one time there was a plane, a Kamikaze, it did not go for us, it went right by our ship and it did not fire at us, because it was going so fast, it was going parallel to our ship and I think it was aiming for a destroyer. Further in front of us and it got hit and blew up maybe several yards off our stern. That was maybe the closest we ever came to any kind of danger. Most of the time the Japanese went for the Navy ships. They weren't going after the Merchant ships. There was more honor getting the Navy ships.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you ever attacked by Japanese submarines?

Mr. Santora

We never had experience with that. Actually, I don't know that Japanese would go after Merchant ships like the Germans did.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, April 12, 1945, President Roosevelt died. Did you all hear about that?

Mr. Santora

Yes.

Mr. Misenhimer

Were you on your ship or where were you?

Mr. Santora

I think I heard he died after we got back into port.

Mr. Misenhimer

Now, May the 8th, 1945, Germany surrendered. Did you have any kind of celebration then?

Mr. Santora

No, we were at sea. We were returning from Okinawa, also, when we saw what the Japanese were doing with the suicide bombers and suicide planes. The war was going to be pretty horrendous if we were going to have to invade Japan. They dropped the atomic bombs that ended the war right away.

Mr. Misenhimer

Have you had any reunions with any of your groups?

Mr. Santora

Reunions, no.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever cross the equator?

Mr. Santora

No. Most of the trips we had were north of the equator and we didn't have to go around to South America to go into the Atlantic; we went through the canal. So we were more north of the equator.

Mr. Misenhimer

Did you ever hear Tokyo Rose on the radio?

Mr. Santora

No, none of us had a radio. The ones to have radios would be the ship's radio. I quote somebody who heard her or that had heard about her, but there was somebody in Japan, and she would say what their wife was doing back in the States.

Mr. Misenhimer

Well, that is all the questions I have for you.

Mr. Santora

Okay.

Transcribed By:

Lesvia T. Benavides

February 5, 2014

Alice, Texas

Oral History By:

Richard Misenhimer

P. O. Box 3453

Alice, Texas 78333

Home: (361) 664-4071

Cell: (361) 701-5848

Retyped:

Connie Jones

Winamac, Indiana

September 5, 2014



Head on Lyte Oct 24
"Zeke" Kamikaze low level
attack on a light cruiser - (our ship might have been a more rewarding target since our cargo
moments before it blew up was 10,000 drums (1/2 million gallons) of aviation gasoline.)
about 900 ft astern of our
ship. Coax of original now in fragments

KAMIKAZE

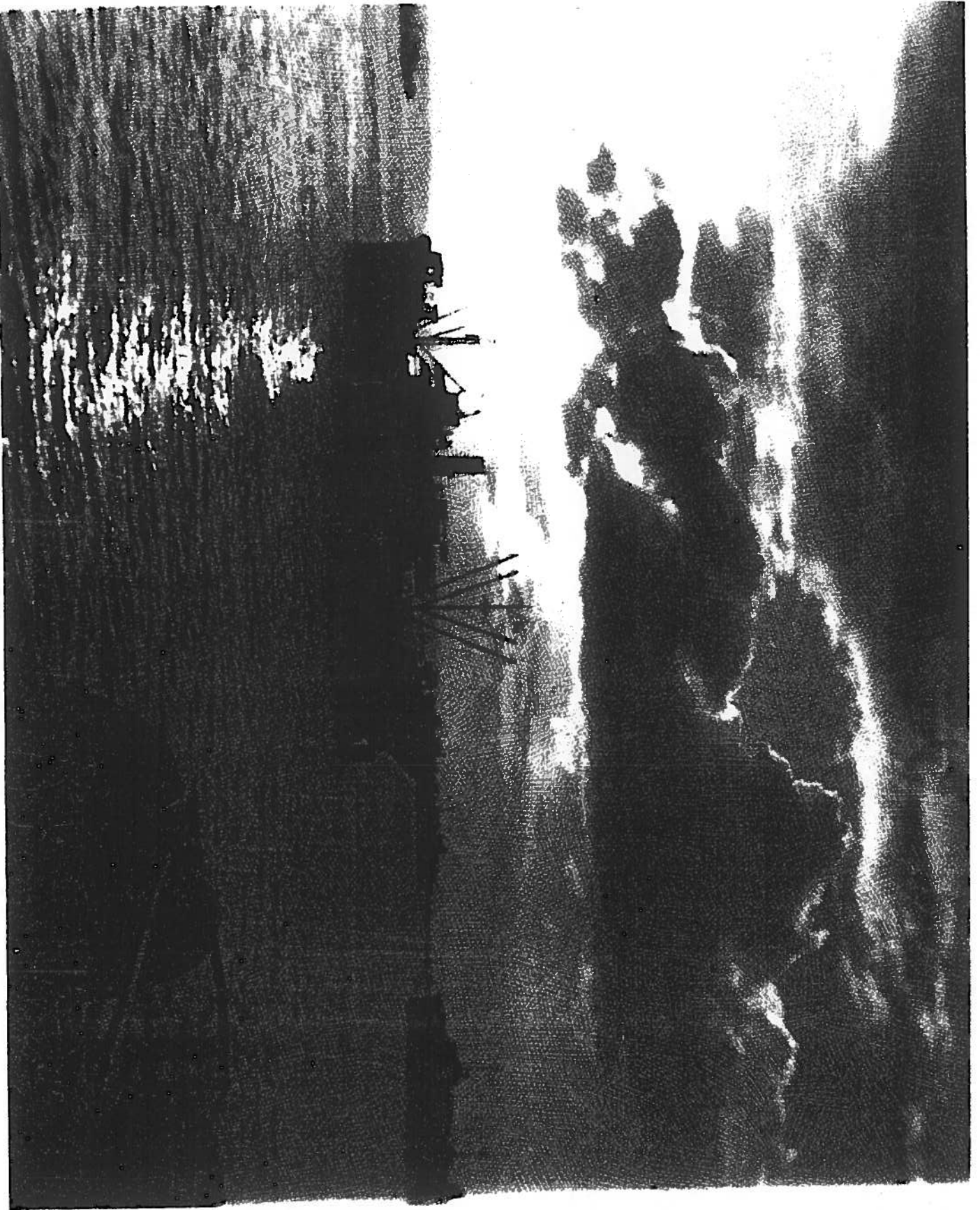
^{fountain pen}
Original size of original drawn in ink on newsprint paper that after sixty years disintegrated
Not sure of the Japanese number and Japanese characters since the view was momentary

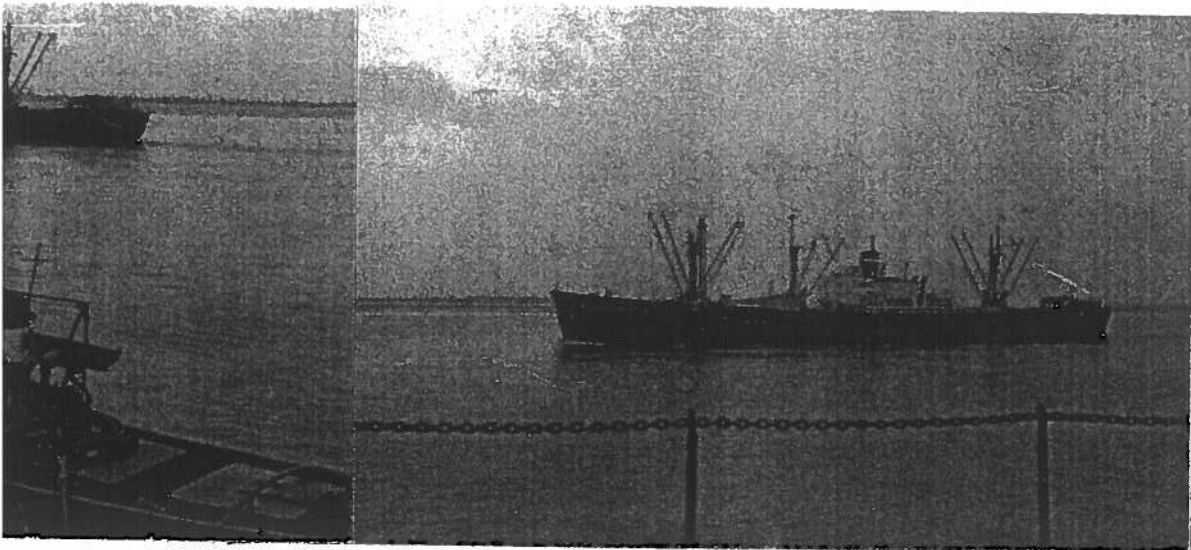


RUSSELL TORRA
5/17/45

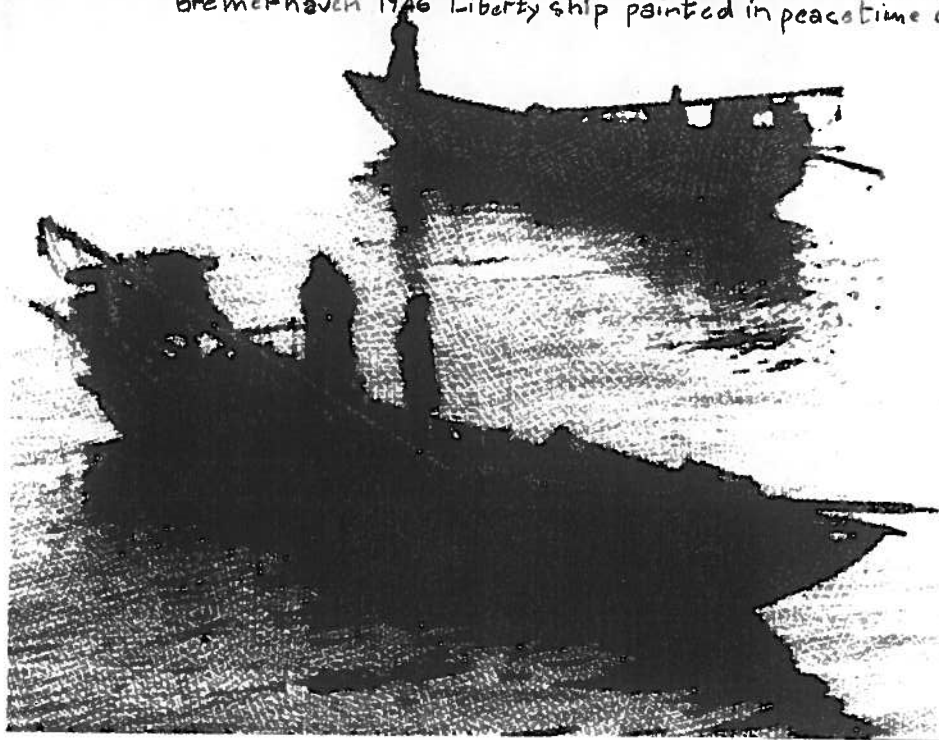
Copied from a photo Iwo?

CARGO SHIP'S TOKIO BAN NOV 1945





Bremerhaven 1946 Liberty ship painted in peacetime colors



enlarged
photo printed later
with an etched
screen overlay

SAM PAMS TOKYO BAY JAN 46

We were not allowed to bring a camera aboard ship
but in September or October I was able to smuggle
my folding camera through security in San Francisco



Me

27



er Russ



Me, Russel Santora at 18. Thought I was pretty cool with a pipe



too many
too close
too long

Gantora
10/31/45

Copied From a watercolor by
US Marine combat artist Dickson