

Johnson

From Iwo Jima to Okinawa, Walt Johnson shares his WWII Experiences

By Lynne B. Bulgaris
Derry News

Walt was recently interviewed by Lynne B. Bulgaris of the Derry News of Derry, New Hampshire. Walt served on the Daly from 1943 to 1946. He has been very active in attending ship reunions and was instrumental in launching the first Daly News idea by establishing a mailing list of the entire crew. He also managed the sale of Daly hats which are no longer available. This copy was taken from the interview as printed in the Derry News.

Veteran Walt Johnson of Derry, NH isn't shy about sharing his experiences in the Navy during WWII but you won't hear him boast of his record. Though proud of his ship, the USS Daly and his shipmates, he is not impressed with his own heroics.

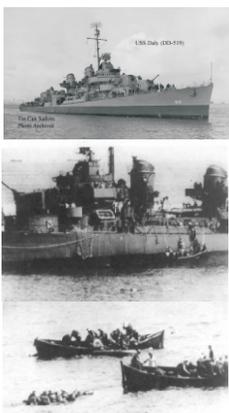
Over cups of de cafe coffee he shared his experiences with a visitor. "I got started late", he said. "I turned 21 in September 1941, and the war started on December 7, when the Japanese bombed Pearl harbor. My mother asked me and my two brothers to wait until after the holidays to enlist. In January we went to the Lawrence Recruiting Office, my older brother had a vital job, so he did not get in. My other brother and I joined the Navy.

"I flunked the eye test, so they wouldn't take me. I wondered what else might be wrong with me, so I went to Boston for another physical exam by the Navy. I passed, despite guessing a few times during the eye test. My beginning rank was apprentice seaman, By the time I got my papers it was March. All the ships remaining after Pearl Harbor were full, so until more ships could be built I was sent to school, first at Great Lake, IL. And then to Washington, DC. From There I was assigned to the Daly, It wasn't until March 10, of 1943 that the USS Daly was commissioned."

Johnson said with a smirk. "The pay was minimal. We got paid \$21.00 once a month." . "First we went to Newfoundland for training; then after three months, we went through the Panama Canal and up the West Coast to the Aleutian Islands. Our target was the Japanese-held air base at Kiska. The Daly was to provide support while landing craft off-loaded troops onto the island. The landing went well. But the Army never found the Japanese. They left the island before the troops landed. During that period another Destroyer the Abner Reed was hit and 75 sailors were killed."

"From there we went to New Guinea, first stopping at Pearl harbor. They called us MacArthur's Navy. His plan was to land troops along the New Guinea coast covering the largest area with the least amount of fighting. The Daly was one ship of Task Force 76, US 7th Fleet. We were involved in bombardments on New Guinea and later in 1944 on the Admiralty Islands. I received regular promotions and went from apprentice seaman through the ranks to Chief Firecontrolman."

"While putting troops ashore on New Britain, a port at the southern tip of New Guinea, the Japanese Air Force attacked us. A bomb hit the USS Brownson, it sank quickly and 108 men were killed. Each ship had two whaleboats and they were used to rescue 160 men who were in the water swimming or in rafts." This was December 26, 1943, we had crossed the International Date Line, and so back home it was Christmas day. "When this happened, I was in stationed in the plotting room and Pat Gram was above me in the Mark 37 Director, the highest vantage point above the ship's bridge. His job was to observe what was happening and report to me. My job was to plot and fire the guns. He told me a bomb that went down the aft stack hit the Brownson. We found out later it actually fell besides the stack but the damage was disastrous. "After a ship is hit everything goes dark; the air is full of shrapnel. Our job was to keep moving away from the target area, but the Captain turned the Daly about and returned to the rescue of the officers and men in the water. I think the greatest thing we did was rescuing those 168 men in the water."



The Daly rescuing Brownson survivors.

From Iwo Jima to Okinawa....continued from page 1



Lest we Forget...
The three men who
died as a result of the
Kamikaze attack.



Lt. Curby -Ship's Doctor



W.R. McElyea S2/c



A. Scheidt SK3/c

"Sometimes Gen. MacArthur didn't need us for anything; twice he gave us orders to head for Sydney, Australia, for repairs. The first time we went straight into Sydney Harbor. But the other time we entered the Great Barrier Reef going down the coast, with land on one side, the Pacific on the other, waves crashing on the other side. That was different. After New Guinea, we were in the Philippines for awhile: then we escorted damaged ships back to the states for repairs."

"In March, 1945 we went to Iwo Jima. The destroyers protected the small aircraft carriers that sent planes to give fighter support to the landing troops. Before it was light the planes would take off and by sun up they would be in position to bomb where ever the Marines were about to attack. When they ran low on fuel or had expended their bombs they would return to the carriers. The pilots grabbed a sandwich while the planes were being refueled and rearmed and then took off again on another sortie well into dark. Landings on those small carriers had to be very difficult. One night a Kamikaze sank one of the smaller carriers."

"Next we went to Okinawa, June 1945. That's where I spent 70 days without once seeing my bunk. It was a plan called 'One Easy'. We stayed at our battle stations in teams. When we were manning our battle stations we could rest on the nearby deck, 70 days without letup. That was when we lost three men during a Kamikaze attack. The Kamikaze plane carrying a bomb came down across the ship missing the superstructure but the bomb exploded just as the plane hit the water. The shrapnel from the blast killed three men and wounded scores more. One was the ship's doctor, another was a storekeeper and a third was seaman on the upper deck. I knew them all."

There were 300 men and 20 officers on the ship and we knew everyone by their first name or nickname. But the ones I knew personally were the firecontrolmen I worked with. Our job was to direct and fire the 5 inch 38 guns on board. We could fire one or all of them simultaneously. The men in the Director would track a target on radar or using a range finder, then telephone the plotting room below. Then the guns were set on the targets and we fired them. We were floating artillery and could shoot accurately to 10,00 yards.

"We bombarded the coast line prior to the troops landing or moved about protecting the carriers from enemy submarines. When on picket duty we alerted the carriers when the Kamikaze planes were spotted on radar. Then the carriers would launch planes to intercept the enemy air attack.

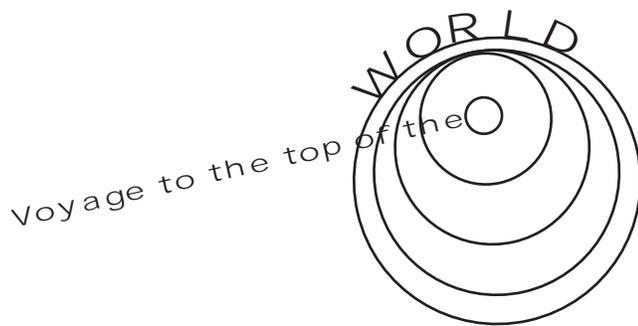
After Okinawa and the Japanese surrender we were sent to Nagasaki. Trains brought soldiers from prisoner of war camps to the aircraft carriers for medical care. Again our job was to protect the carriers from a submarine or air attack.

The war ended August 1945 but the Japanese pilots continued to fight.

The Daly returned to San Diego on December 7, 1945. I left the Daly in Charleston, SC in April 1946.

Walt spent the last 15 years before retirement with the US Postal Service. He is now retired but leads an active life.

In a recent E-mail from James E. Kelly of Pinehurst, NC, on the subject of the Kamikaze attack, he writes; He was the gun trainer in Mount 5 when the explosion occurred that killed the three men and seriously wounded many others. His gun had just splashed a Japanese plane that was attacking from the stern. Parts of the plane were found on the deck including the pilots leather helmet and goggles. He felt the his gun captain, Tony Pigmatelli, BM1c was responsible for saving his life when they took down the oncoming plane. When the smoke cleared he opened the gun hatch and saw the Chief Gunnersmate who pointed to his neck, his collar was torn open on both sides and revealed a large spot of blood. He must have been hit by a piece of flying metal. He further described the burial at sea of the three who were killed. He stated it was a very difficult time for everyone, the first time for many to witness a burial at sea. "We cut canvas bags to fit each body, then added two 5 inch projectiles that weighed 54 pounds each to the foot of each bag. Their flag draped bodies each received a 21 gun salute and then ceremoniously committed to the deep to their final resting place somewhere off Okinawa, a quarter mile apart. The men who were seriously wounded in the attack were immediately transferred to another ship with a doctor. Those with lesser injuries were treated on board the Daly by the duty corpman J.J. Meeder, CPhm."



After the Korean tour and a world cruise on the USS Daly in 1953-54 as a Ltjg. David Gilboe (now retired CMDR) still seems to be a restless adventurous soul. After leaving the Navy he returned to his graduate studies and earned his doctorates in Medical Research. Since then he has been traveling the world attending conferences and presenting papers relative to his research findings as well as a trip to Antarctica in 2003.

In the past six years, accompanied by his wife and daughter, they attended many of the Daly Reunions. In spite of several medical setbacks including a serious car accident he continues his travels.

Last July 24th-2007; he and his family flew to Murmansk, Russia, then steamed to the North Pole on the Yamal, the largest nuclear powered Arktka Class Russian Icebreaker afloat. They arrived July 27th breaking through ice 2.8 meters thick (roughly 108 inches = 9Ft.).

Sarah, his daughter, is pictured standing near the bow of the Yamal holding a North Pole Marker and a hand held GPS indicating an exact reading of 90 degrees north. Sarah took the aerial view of the icebreaker from a helicopter launched from a platform on the ship's stern.

Antarctic
Cruise 2003



North Pole 2007 www.eaglecry.com/yamal.htm

Little Known Naval History

The USS Constitution (Old Ironsides) as a combat vessel carried 48,600 gallons of fresh water for her crew of 475 officers and men. This was sufficient to last six months of sustained operations at sea. She carried no evaporators (i.e. Fresh water distillers).

However, let it be noted that according to her ship's log, " On July 27, 1798, the USS Constitution sailed from Boston with a full compliment of 475 officers and men, 48,600 gallons of water, 7,400 cannon shot, 11,600 pounds of black powder and 79,400 gallons of rum."

Her mission: " to destroy and harass English shipping."

Making Jamaica on 6 October, she took on 826 pounds of flour and 68,300 gallons of rum. Then she headed for the Azores, arriving 12 November. She provisioned with 550 pounds of beef and 64,300 gallons of Portuguese wine.



Built 1797
44 Gun Frigate - 3 masts
2200 tons displacement
204 ft length
43.5 beam
14.3 draft
copper sheathing armor

On 18 November, she set sail for England. In the ensuing days she defeated five British man-of-war, captured and scuttled 12 English merchant ships, salvaging only the rum aboard each.

By 26 January her powder and shot were exhausted. Nevertheless, although unarmed she made a night raid up the Firth of Clyde in Scotland. Her landing party captured a whiskey distillery and transferred 40,000 gallons of single malt Scotch aboard by dawn. Then she headed home.

The USS Constitution arrived in Boston 20 February, 1799 with no cannon shot, no powder, no food, no rum, no whiskey and 38,600 gallons of water.

GO NAVY!!!

The Mail Bag

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In the past two years as Editor of the Daly News, I received several inquiries regarding WWII photographs used on the Daly web site. - www.dalydd519.org

The source of these photographs was from the original WWII Daly Cruise book published in 1947. Unfortunately this was my only source and I too looked for the possibility that other photos may exist. I recently learned that Hank Weiss who lives in Honolulu, Hawaii, was the key person in the production of the cruise book who may have some answers. I was able to contact him and received this information.

As a Yeoman, 2c he handled the paperwork and decommissioning of the Daly in Charleston, SC. With his editing experience he took on the responsibility of assembling the photos, artwork and narrative for the cruise book publication. He worked with a printer in Charleston who agreed to publish the book at cost. The printer never returned the photos or copy and is no longer in business. All the original material has been lost.

Charles Sweeny, also a Yeoman on the Daly, worked with Hank in the distribution of the books after they were published. He also mentioned that the Daly Book may have been the first of it's type in the Navy and has since become a tradition.

If anyone has knowledge of WWII photos, a story or other information regarding this quest, please contact me: boyerhere@verizon.net



A farewell salute to ~
Billy Joe McGee~2008
and his buddy
Al Patrizi~2004

A farewell
salute to ~
Nick Lasorsa
2007



Donations now being accepted to cover the costs of publishing the Daly News and maintaining the Daly Web Site. A small contribution is very acceptable.

Make checks payable to:
Hal Boyer
316 Harriet Drive,
Perkasie, PA 18944

In an earlier edition of the Daly News, a story was published on the mystery of the "Scrubbed Mission", a bombardment assignment for the USS Daly which was aborted. The following is recent information from Roger Froelich - FC3, and Merle Van Gieson - FC3, who were part of the Shore Observer Team, providing new details of the incident.

Korea, Early July 1953- Assignment Shore Observer Team

As part of the USS Daly Shore Fire Control Shore Observer Team, they were transferred to the Marine Base Point Silver on the East Coast of South Korea, in the Taebaek Mountains overlooking the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) as observers. Their assignment was to spot enemy targets for bombardment by ships of the Task Force operating in the East Sea off the coast.

The USS Daly was one of the ships assigned to the mission and would partake in the bombardment, however prior to embarking on this mission they were informed that the Daly would not be participating ; the Daly gunnery support was aborted.

The reason they learned later, was that the Mark 25 Radar which controlled the accuracy of the 5 inch guns was not operating due to the failure of a strategic element. They were told a vacuum tube, a large diode, had failed. The tube was located in the back console of the Mark 37 Director. The defective tube was replaced but the replacement also failed. It was their understanding that this was why the mission was aborted.

July 10th, the Daly was re-assigned to Patrol Cheju-do Island, where prisoners of the Korean conflict were detained.

During this period Roger and Merle, along with other Naval Personnel and several Marines were put ashore and occupied a mountain top position overlooking the DMZ where they maintained contact with ships in the Task Force. They were stationed in special bunkers with powerful binoculars where they could observe the movement of North Korean troops and equipment across the large open space of the DMZ. They had a beautiful view from their high vantage point.

There was a continual off-on cease fire, but on July 27th, 1953 an Armistice was formally signed and a cease fire went into effect. Their mission as observers was terminated and they returned to the Daly. The Daly completed her Korean tour on November 10, and sailed south, final destination USA.

Don't forget to
Register for the
Daly Reunion in
Pittsburgh, PA
before June 23, 2008