

A Lucky Man,  
The Story of a Pearl Harbor Defender

by

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We dedicate this story to fifty-two enlisted men and officers from the *USS Louisville* killed in action during World War II. All but one of them served in the Navy. (The exception was a Marine Corps private first class.) The rates of the men ranged from seaman second class to rear admiral, although only ten percent of them were officers.

Seventy-nine percent of those killed in action died as a result of three direct hits by kamikaze pilots upon the *Louisville*. The first two occurred in the Philippines and the third off the island of Okinawa. One sailor died in the initial assault on January 5, 1945 in Lingayen Gulf. Thirty-two more crewmen lost their lives the next day when the cruiser suffered a much more destructive hit. A reoccurring phrase in the ship's muster rolls for those killed on the 6<sup>th</sup> explains the cause of death in one terse entry- "As result of burns, explosion #2508 and wounds multiple (extreme) #2507." Eight more crewmen became fatalities on June 5, 1945 when another kamikaze plane struck the *Louisville*. Although the aircraft fell into the sea, a 200-pound shrapnel bomb it carried exploded near the number one stack.

The War Department sent notifications of the deaths to those designated by the crewmen as next-of-kin. Families in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin received telegrams. One arrived at the home of Mrs. Grace May Dare in Cedar Rapids, Iowa to notify her on the death of her twenty-year-old grandson, Seaman First Class Harry Leroy Averill. He was lost in the January 6, 1945 kamikaze attack. Also missing in action that day was Gunner's Mate First Class Charles Edgar Yauger. On December 11, 1940, he had walked into the Navy recruiter's office in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Six days before, Charles had turned seventeen. Even though the United States was not yet officially in the war, and even though Charles was not eligible for the draft because of his young age, he nevertheless enlisted. Some four years later, his parents, Brent and Bertha Yauger, received notification of their son's death. Another casualty on that January 1945 day was Signalman Third Class Joseph Charles Luiz. He had enlisted in the Navy on December 13, 1941, six days after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Joseph's sister, Mrs. Josephine Agnes Robinson, received a government telegram at her San Francisco home.

Those killed in the Philippines were buried at sea. Their names appear on the Tablets of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial on the Philippine island of Luzon. One such sailor is Seaman Second Class Darrel Charles Cochran. He was lost on January 6, 1945, six months shy of his twentieth birthday. (Perhaps the experiences of Darrel's father, who had served in the Army before and during World War I, influenced his decision to join the Navy.) Navy airmen Ensign Bates B. Craver, Jr. and Aviation Radioman Second Class Ralph Erichson died on July 24, 1944. Both were killed when anti-aircraft fire hit one of *Louisville's* spotting planes. Their names are etched on the Tablets of the Missing at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu. So is that of USMC Private First Class Walter J. Siegel, part of the Marine detachment assigned to the *Louisville*. Marine

Corps records summarize Walter's fate in the January 6, 1945 kamikaze attack--"at 5:15 P.M. this date, died of burns, immediately fatal, resulting from explosion of enemy plane. Buried at 10:05 a.m., 7 January 45 at sea." A few years after the war ended, some of these families applied to the



Veterans Administration for a marker with their son or husband's name on it. They placed it in their local cemetery where it stood on an empty burial plot since the body had been committed to the ocean years before. Catherine Rose Lemmon filled out such an application for her husband Charlie, a seaman second class killed on January 6, 1945. Aviation Machinist's Mate Second Class Charles Rufus Hartman was also killed in action

that day. His family arranged for a marker at the Hartmans Chapel United Methodist Church Cemetery in Mosheim, Tennessee.

Some crewmen who died were initially buried in temporary military cemeteries on various Pacific islands. They now rest, however, in hometown cemeteries in the States. One such sailor is Seaman Second Class Bobby Eugene Cloud. He had enlisted in the Navy one day after he turned seventeen. Bobby was still that age when he died in the kamikaze attack off Okinawa on June 5, 1945, only eight months after his enlistment. Bobby's remains came home to Knoxville, Tennessee in 1949. Seaman Second Class Raymond Harold Jelle was also killed off Okinawa, nine months after his enlistment. He was eighteen. Harold's father, Edward, asked the government to bring his son home to Grygla, Minnesota in 1949. Seaman Second Class Carroll George McGarvey was killed in action on the same day as Cloud and Jelle. His parents, Archie and Edna McGarvey, tended his grave in the Leeds Cemetery in Leeds, North Dakota until their deaths in 1992 and 1993 respectively.\*

One year after World War II ended, twenty officers and four enlisted men of the *Louisville* compiled a history of their ship from its Congressional authorization in 1924 to its decommissioning in 1946. They printed copies for the crew. On one of the early pages of the book, the authors identified fifty-two of their fellow shipmates as "killed in action" during the war. We duplicate that page here as we dedicate this story to them.

## Killed in Action

ALLSTOT, MAX VERNON . . . . .	S 1/c—USNR	GONZALES, RICHARD . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
AVERILL, HARRY LEROY . . . . .	S 1/c—USNR	GREEN, ROBERT R. . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
BARR, JOSEPH ALONZA, JR. . . . .	RM 1/c—USN	HARTMAN, CHARLES RUFUS . . . . .	AMM 3/c—USNR
BLAYLOCK, JAMES ISAAC . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	HENSLEY, WILLIAM FRANK . . . . .	SM 1/c—USNR
BOWLIN, JIMMY LEE . . . . .	S 1/c—USN	JELLE, RAYMOND HAROLD . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
BROWN, DWIGHT IRVING . . . . .	Lt. Comdr.—USNR	JOHNSON, LOUIS MARVIN . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
BROWN, WILLIAM CECIL . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	KATZ, ROBERT EUGENE . . . . .	S 1/c—USNR
BURKE, RICHARD LAWRENCE . . . . .	S 1/c—USN	LEMMON, CHARLIE EDWARD . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
BUSBY, CLARENCE RAYMOND . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	LOPER, WENSON WEBSTER . . . . .	RM 3/c—USN
CALHOUN, THOMAS JULES . . . . .	Lt. Comdr.—USNR	LUCAS, RONALD RAYMOND . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
CHANDLER, THEODORE EDSON . . . . .	Rear Adm.—USN	LUIZ, JOSEPH CHARLES . . . . .	SM 3/c—USNR
CHIN, SHOON . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	McGARVEY, CARROLL GEORGE . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
CLOUD, BOBBY EUGENE . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	MELINCAVAGE, RAYMOND JOSEPH . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
COADY, WILLIAM GEORGE . . . . .	S 2/c—USN	MESSER, FREDDIE CHRISTOPHER . . . . .	S 1/c—USNR
COCHRAN, DERREL CHARLES . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	MOORMAN, ODUS DEAN . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
CORDRAY, CREED JUSTICE, JR. . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	NOAH, BENJAMIN DEAN . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
CRAVER, BATES BARTELETT, JR. . . . .	Ensign—USNR	O'CONNOR, EDWARD HURLEY . . . . .	Lt. (j.g.)—USNR
CUMMINS, JAMES GEORGE . . . . .	CSM—USNR	SIEGEL, WALTER JOSEPH . . . . .	P.F.C.—USMCR
EDWARDS, ROBERT MORRIS . . . . .	S 1/c—USNR	STENZEL, JOHN EMIL . . . . .	Lt. (j.g.)—USNR
ERICHSON, RALPH . . . . .	ARM 2/c—USNR	STEPHEN, ERVIN JOSEPH . . . . .	RT 2/c—USNR
FLOW, HERMAN STANLEY . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	TAYLOR, GLENN CECIL . . . . .	Lieut.—USNR
FRITZ, JOSEPH HENERY . . . . .	SM 3/c—USNR	TAYLOR, LEROY FREDERICK . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR
FROST, EDWARD WALTER . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	WATKINS, WINFIELD WENDELL . . . . .	RM 1/c—USNR
FRUSHOUR, JOSEPH FRANCIS . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	WHEATON, ROBERT NELSON . . . . .	S 1/c—USNR
GABRIELLI, ELMO . . . . .	S 2/c—USNR	WORTHINGTON, EDWARD HICKS . . . . .	Lieut.—USN
GALL, ANDREW, JR. . . . .	S 1/c—USNR	YAUGER, CHARLES EDGAR . . . . .	GM 1/c—USN

*Man Of War, Log of the United States Heavy Cruiser Louisville By Her Officers and Men*  
(Philadelphia, 1946), p. 8.

\*Background information on individual crewmen killed in action is taken from documents on each man available at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com). Details on the deaths of Ensign Bates B. Craver, Jr. and Aviation Radioman Second Class Ralph Erichson are from *Man Of War, Log of the United States Heavy Cruiser Louisville By Her Officers and Men* (Philadelphia, 1946), p. 118. Specifics on the January 5 and 6, 1945 attacks, as well as the one on June 5, 1945, are in that same volume, on pp. 164-169, 184.

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## Introduction

On November 19, 1941, George Coburn wrote his mother a letter. As a twenty-two-year-old sailor in the United States Navy, he had been mailing her such missives since his enlistment in February 1938. That fall day, George sent her another one from on board his ship, the *USS Oklahoma*. It was moored at Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. In the letter, he complained to his mother that it was “hot as hell.” Yet, George added, “I’m still trying to decide whether the heat or the monotony is the worst. Today is the uninteresting duplicate of yesterday, tomorrow will be the duplicate of today, and so on into what seems infinity, but I guess it can’t last forever. Something is bound to happen.” That “something” occurred less than three weeks later--the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack upon the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

George Coburn experienced firsthand one of the most consequential mornings in American history. Over almost a two-hour period, Japanese planes dropped bombs and fired machine guns at United States naval vessels and military installations on Oahu. At least twelve aircraft targeted the *Oklahoma*. The battlewagon sustained catastrophic, direct hits within the first few minutes of the attack. The initial torpedo landed amidships. It crashed into the *Oklahoma* more than twenty feet under the waterline that was located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck. At the moment of impact, George was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck. He would have felt the repercussions from the explosion anywhere on the ship, but especially where he was since the torpedo landed some twenty feet below him. “I felt the deck actually jump under my feet,” George remembers. With water pouring in, George found himself trapped below the main deck, as were most of his 1,300 or so crewmates.

The vessel rapidly took on water from additional torpedo hits. After the fourth one, two officers agreed the dire situation required the crew to abandon ship. The *Okie*, the endearing nickname her crew knew her by, was capsizing. Through a combination of luck and shrewd judgment on his part, George made his way up from his location three decks below the main deck. More than four hundred others did not, some entombed for over nineteen months in the very compartments from which George had escaped. But he made it out and off of the capsizing ship. George swam to the battlewagon moored next to his, the *USS Maryland*. Once on board, he helped load ammunition for the antiaircraft guns. For approximately ninety minutes, George participated in the defense of Pearl Harbor.

Recalling how he felt that December morning, George recently concluded, “To me, and I’m sure to many others, the emotional impact of what was happening was totally devastating. We had just lost our home and probably some good friends. Our magnificent fleet was rapidly being turned into junk. Our own survival was uncertain. And we were experiencing a soul-crushing military defeat far greater and more complete than anything we had ever imagined. Now, seventy-five years later, thinking about it and trying to write about it still shakes me up.”

The historic events of December 7, 1941 did not by themselves define George Coburn's World War II service. Granted, nothing he ever experienced after that equaled what he went through on "the date which will live in infamy." Still, George's military service is also defined by the four years that followed the attack at Pearl Harbor. Less than two weeks after the Japanese raid, he boarded the heavy cruiser *USS Louisville*. (Among her crew, the ship was known as the *Lady Lou*, the *Lucky Lou*, or simple the *Lou*.) The Command assigned him to the cruiser's gunnery division, the same division he had served in during his three and a half years on the *Oklahoma*. As such, George was positioned to do what all Americans wanted to do--strike back against the enemy. World War II Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal observed of the *Louisville*, "Her guns were a potent factor in every engagement," from the first raids against Japanese-held islands to the last battles in the Pacific Theater.

George helped to direct those guns as a fire controlman. The modern Navy no longer relied on a bluejacket "eyeballing" the target. When it came to firing the guns, a ship's fire control system replaced such visual estimates. As George likes to describe it, "A fire control system is a system that determines where a moving gun has to be pointed to hit a moving target." One of its key components was a manned "director." The director was a large, enclosed piece of equipment installed high above the bridge. Within the director, George operated the computer. "I had to crank in course and speed [of the *Louisville*] and the target's course and speed," he explains. The ship had more than one director. "In the early days, I was assigned to the anti-aircraft director, controlling 5-inch AA guns. Later, for major actions, I operated the main battery director controlling our nine 8-inch guns." George's World War II service is a reflection of the *USS Louisville's* service since he was on the cruiser from December 1941 until April 1946. All but the last eight months took place during wartime.

Most sailors served in the Central and South Pacific, as did George. Yet he also saw action in the inhospitable waters of the North Pacific. The list of campaigns the *Louisville*, and thus George, participated in is an extensive one. The record begins with raids, less than two months after December 7, 1941, against the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. The *Louisville* was part of a task force that mounted air attacks on Japanese installations and shipping. Those raids constituted the first offensive strike against the enemy.

Operations in the Aleutians came next, first in the summer of 1942 and again in the summer of 1943. Up until the Aleutians campaign, the *Louisville* had not fired her guns at the enemy. Instead, the cruiser had been part of task forces that had provided support to carriers. George defines the *Lady Lou's* role this way--"We were more or less on escort duty for the carriers." But in the Aleutians, the ship took on a more offensive role than in her previous post-December 7<sup>th</sup> campaigns. As George summarizes it, "The Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska were the first to feel our

firepower.” The cruiser’s big guns were used in fire support and shore bombardment of Japanese installations.

More campaigns followed for George as a crewmember of the *Louisville*--the Solomon Islands, again the Marshall Islands, the Western Carolines, New Guinea, the Mariana Islands, the Philippines, and Okinawa. At the very end of a March 13, 1944 letter home, George took on an uncharacteristically serious tone. As he powerfully observed to his mother, “I can say that I’ve had a chance to take it out on the Japs for the loss of some of my very good friends on December 7, 1941. Surprisingly enough, I’m not overjoyed; it merely leaves me feeling empty. I get more pleasure from the fact that each action brings the war closer to an end than I do from the fact that each action brings an immediate end to some of the enemy.”

George’s last two campaigns are particularly noteworthy in any discussion of his military service. In the Philippines, the *Louisville* participated in what historians identify as the largest naval battle in history, the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944. In one phase of it, George helped to direct *the Lou’s* guns in the last battle line engagement in naval history. “The battle line” was how opposing navies, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, had positioned themselves to fight each other. Ships lined up, end to end, across from each other on the open seas. They then proceeded to fire their broadside guns. Four hundred years of such engagements came to a close in one episode during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. George and the *Louisville* played a prominent role in it.

During the *Lou’s* Pacific campaigns, Japanese dive-bombers, torpedo planes, and eventually kamikazes targeted the cruiser. By war’s end, fifty-two crewmembers had been killed in action. The most costly days for the *Louisville* came as a result of the kamikaze attacks, with a January 6, 1945 episode being the one that saw the greatest loss of life on board the *Lady Lou*. Thirty-two sailors and officers died. The *Lou* experienced another such enemy strike in her last campaign at Okinawa.

In the three years since the war began in the Pacific, the Allies had moved thousands of miles closer across a vast expanse of ocean to Japan’s home islands. Now off the island of Okinawa in the spring of 1945, they were just three hundred and fifty miles south of the main Japanese home islands. The Allied fight to take Okinawa began on April 1, 1945. During the three-month-long Okinawan campaign, the Japanese mounted some nineteen hundred kamikaze attacks against United States naval ships.

The *Louisville* arrived at Okinawa on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, because of the heat, many crewmen on board the *Lady Lou* were topside instead of staying in the stuffy lower decks. Just minutes before 7:30 p.m., the *Louisville* was notified that low flying aircraft was in the area. It was not immediately clear, however, if they were American or Japanese. Crewmen quickly manned the anti-aircraft battery. Radar verified two planes, but identification remained difficult. That uncertainty did not

last long. One of the aircraft dropped into a dive and headed for the battleship *USS Mississippi*. Before just seconds had passed, it crashed into the vessel. The sight of flames and smoke from the *Mississippi* transfixed sailors on the *Louisville* for only a few moments because they soon saw another kamikaze plane, this one heading for the port side of their ship. Some of the cruiser's 20-mm guns fired at the plane, hitting it. Yet even on fire, the kamikaze continued its dive towards the *Louisville*.

George recalls that June 5<sup>th</sup> evening off of Okinawa. "I was in the wardroom when the air attack alarm sounded. I started for my station in the antiaircraft gun director just above the bridge. As I went out on the weather deck, I saw the approaching kamikaze about 3,000 yards out. All our guns were firing. Pieces of the aircraft were falling off and splashing into the sea. I thought he'd go down. He didn't. He drove his plane into the ship, his bomb exploding on impact." George did not make it to his duty station.

The kamikaze crashed into the *Louisville*. It destroyed areas of the main deck. A 200-pound shrapnel bomb, carried by the Japanese plane, detonated near the number one stack. George shares what happened to him in those critical moments. "I remember that as I stepped out on the weather deck to go to my battle station, I saw a plane heading towards us. Our guys were all firing at him, and they were hitting him. Pieces [of the plane] were falling off into the water. I thought, 'Well, he's not going to make it.' But he did." George has no firsthand recollections of what happened after the kamikaze hit the *Lou*. "I have no memory of the actual explosion. I was knocked unconscious." Shrapnel from the bomb had hit George. *Louisville* casualties numbered eight dead and forty-five injured. George was one of the latter.

George Coburn's story can be shared in detail because more than one primary source is available--George's own memories, documents he kept from his early years, a United States naval record that summarizes his military service, brief accounts he wrote of his wartime service, two histories of the *USS Louisville* compiled by her officers, and eighty-nine letters George wrote home to his mother, Carrie Juel Coburn, during his time in the Navy. An eight-page, handwritten memoir by Carrie on her childhood gives insights into the type of woman who raised George. (His father died one month before George's seventh birthday.) Secondary sources by historians and other scholars provide the historical context for his story.

During World War II, sixteen million American men and women wore the uniform. They did so in the critical years when totalitarian governments in Europe and in the Pacific threatened democratic nations and the principles they represented. Today, less than 600,000 such veterans remain with us to share their firsthand accounts of those pivotal years in not just United States history but in world history. In some areas, George's memories and insights are still sharp after the passage of more than seven decades. A resident of San Diego, California since he was a young child, he remembers, for example, details on his earliest years. "When I was probably twelve, I got a job delivering a little weekly paper called *The Shopping News*. I covered a route that went from 35<sup>th</sup> to 40<sup>th</sup> Street [and] from Monroe to El

Cajon Boulevard.” George walked the route. He was careful with the money he earned. While in elementary school, George received a “Certificate of Thrift” from his school. It commended him on making regular deposits to a bank account “each banking week during the Semester,” a five-month period that had begun in September 1927 and ended in January 1928. We know this because he still has the certificate ninety years later. In the process of writing down the following story, George shared other memories and papers relating to his childhood, his years of military service, and his postwar life.

In addition to George’s recollections and the documents he kept, this story draws upon other primary sources that directly relate to his years in the United States Navy. One is his “Continuous Service Certificate.” It is an official, nine-page naval document that records his years as a crewmember of the *USS Oklahoma* and the *USS Louisville*. Dates for his arrival on board both ships, campaigns he participated in, and promotions are duly noted on the certificate. In the postwar years, George also wrote down some of his recollections of the war. One is a six-page, handwritten account of December 7, 1941 and the immediate days thereafter. It formed the core of the Pearl Harbor chapter in his story. Additionally, George wrote three pages of notes he draws upon when he speaks to community groups on his post Pearl Harbor service.

Other primary sources include two rare books on the *USS Louisville*. The wartime history of the cruiser is the history of George’s World War II service since he was on board the *Louisville* from the month of America’s entry into the war through the Japanese surrender. One book is a short volume of primarily photographs of the ship, her crew, and some of the campaigns. It is only thirty-one pages in length. Entitled simply *Lady Lou*, the year “1944” appears on its front cover. The last page records the *Lou’s* February 1945 arrival in San Francisco. A much more in-depth history of the ship appeared in 1946, one year after the war ended--*Man of War, Log of the United States Heavy Cruiser Louisville*. Twenty of the *Lou’s* officers and four enlisted men put together this authoritative history of the vessel. The two-hundred-and-nineteen-page book contains chapters on the ship from its construction through its decommissioning. George calls it simply “the cruise book.” It was printed primarily for crewmembers, not for the general public. Understanding that the *Lou’s* crew totaled around thirteen hundred men depending on the specific moment in time, copies of the cruise book in existence today are small in number. George still has his, a testament to his sense of history.

That sense of history is evidenced, too, in a collection of eighty-nine letters George wrote home to his mother Carrie during his time in the Navy. She saved them, each one in its original envelope. After Carrie’s death, George held onto the correspondence. He began writing the letters in boot camp. The first is dated February 13, 1938, two days after his arrival at Naval Training Station (NTS), San Diego. George penned the last one--March 25, 1946--on the eve of his discharge. He wrote all of them while either in boot camp or while serving on board the *USS Oklahoma* and the *USS Louisville*. The correspondence thus gives insights into the

life of a sailor in peacetime and in wartime. (George's three and a half years on the *Oklahoma* represent the former, while his five years on the *Louisville* represent the latter.)

George's letters home for the time he served on the *Oklahoma* are particularly rich in details. As in his correspondence from boot camp, the thirty-four letters mailed from the battleship sometimes ran ten pages in length. Collectively, certain themes stand out. In more than one piece of correspondence, George described the ship to his mother, his duties on the *Oklahoma*, the liberty time he enjoyed, and the "cruises" the ship embarked on. The last topic included dates of departure and arrival as well as the destination. In his May 30, 1938 letter, for example, George freely shared with Carrie the battleship's itinerary. "We are going out to sea tomorrow... On the ninth of next month, we are starting on a cruise that will take in all [of] the west coast and Hawaii." George announced to his mother that the ship was expected to stay in Hawaii for about a week before it returned to the mainland.

In the next few years, however, the content and frequency of George's letters to his mother changed. Developments in Europe, and the United States' response to them, provide the context for those changes. In September 1939, World War II broke out. In the two years after that, pressure mounted on the United States to enter the conflict on the side of the Allies (principally Great Britain and France) against the Axis Powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan). Presuming Carrie kept every letter George mailed to her, in 1941 he wrote only four letters home. That represented a marked decline from the number he had written to his mother from the *Oklahoma* in 1938 (fourteen), 1939 (nine), and 1940 (seven). A June 1, 1941 letter bluntly declared how the content of his correspondence now fell under censorship--"I cannot tell you where the ship is or anything that will reveal where it is." George further explained why his letters were now so few in numbers--"so little of what does happen...is permissible to write about." Because of the censorship, he had "practically nothing to put into a letter."

After the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor violently pulled the United States into the war, censorship became even more restrictive. George sent Carrie forty-five pieces of correspondence during his three and a half years of peacetime service. George's wartime letters totaled forty-four; he wrote them over a five year period. After December 7, 1941, the subjects George wrote about were much more limited. The military censored wartime correspondence written by its members who served outside of the United States. Men and women in uniform were ordered not to write details of their location, movements, or planned itineraries. George had freely discussed such topics in his prewar letters.

One subject George wrote his mother about throughout his years in the service concerned his movement up in Navy ratings. (The Navy does not use the word "rank." Rather, enlisted sailors and officers rise in "rates" based upon their assigned duties.) As an enlisted man, George held the following rates--apprentice seaman, seaman second class, seaman first class, fire controlman third class, fire controlman

second class, fire controlman first class, and chief fire controlman. Today, looking back on his many years, George concludes, "I've been a lucky man all my life." But he is quick to point out that "luck" by itself does not explain his promotions. He stresses, "All of this luck came as a result of working at it." When an opportunity arose, George studied for the qualifying exams, passed them, and received promotions. His advancement in the Navy as an enlisted man ended in August 1943. At that time, George became an officer with a temporary appointment as an ensign. In December 1944, the Navy promoted him to the rate of lieutenant (junior grade). After George's discharge, he worked for the Navy in the United States Civil Service System. There he followed the same pattern. He applied for higher positions, studied for any required qualifying exams, and received promotions. "In my whole working career, I've always had advancements offered to me as soon as I was eligible."

The war years proved George possessed another type of luck. He survived all of his campaigns without any serious injury or without being killed in action. On December 7, 1941, he could easily have been one of the hundreds of sailors trapped inside of the capsized *USS Oklahoma*. Good fortune and quick thinking on his part got him off the doomed battleship. Today, looking back on his wartime service, George concludes, "Pearl Harbor was above and beyond what followed." While that is most certainly true, more than once the enemy scored direct, deadly hits on the *USS Louisville*.

From the time he boarded the *Oklahoma* in May 1938 to his departure from the *Louisville* in April 1946, George Coburn lived the life of a sailor at sea. Even the Pearl Harbor attack resulted in less than two weeks of service on land. Once he boarded the *Louisville* in December 1941, George remained on the heavy cruiser until his discharge four years and three months later. The only time of any great length when George was not on board a ship was a six-month period in 1940 when he attended a Navy school in Washington, D.C. Altogether, during his peacetime and wartime service, George was away from home for eight years and two months. It could be that he missed home the most in his last few years of naval service, after he met the woman he later married. In spite of what prolonged times at sea cost him in his personal life, George carried out his duties as a member of the United States Navy in an exemplary manner. His promotions as an enlisted man and later as an officer, as well as two commendations he received, support this conclusion.

Given his job of directing the *Louisville's* guns, George acknowledges, "I probably am responsible for the death of many, many Japanese." But at the same time he concludes, "In spite of the raid and the years of war that followed, I harbor no hard feelings toward the Japanese in doing what they felt they had to do. They made a serious misjudgment in respect to the resolve and capability of the American people, with disastrous results for them."

Today, George reflects on some gatherings of veterans he attended decades after the war. "I talked to guys there who had an acid hatred for the Japanese, and I couldn't understand how they could live with it." George never felt such malice,

although he had more reason to do so than other veterans. In his era, sailors loved their ships with a passion. George believes they did so “because it was home, a sanctuary.” On December 7, 1941, the Japanese destroyed the *Okie*, the “home” George had known for three and a half years. As a result, four hundred and twenty-nine of his fellow crewmen died that day. His next ship sustained deadly kamikaze attacks; forty-two sailors who served on the *Lou* did not survive those enemy assaults. George Coburn’s decision not to harbor hatred of the enemy is as admirable, if not more so, than his years of military service.

## Chapter 1 Going It Alone

Many, if not most, of the World War II Generation grew up surrounded by a multi-generational, extended family. Before the onset of the Great Depression in 1930, Americans tended to “stay put.” They were born in rural or urban areas where, in all likelihood, their mothers and fathers had lived from childhood to adulthood. Even the grandparents of those who fought in World War II probably lived in that same farming community or town. Siblings stayed close to each other in more than one way. This meant that aunts, uncles, and cousins of the World War II Generation also lived nearby. Older family members offered younger ones guidance, emotional support, and if needed, financial assistance.

This was not true, however, for George Coburn. His father Robert, born in Kentucky in 1876, became estranged from his family as a young man. Robert set out at an early age on his own, moving from one locale to another. George, therefore, never knew any paternal grandparents, uncles, aunts, or cousins. While George inherited some relatives on his maternal side, they were few in number during his early years. His mother, Carrie Juel, immigrated to the United States in 1901. At age sixteen, she accompanied her father and two siblings when the small family left Australia. Their destination was Minnesota. George’s maternal grandfather died there before George was born in 1919. And while there may have been a network of relatives who descended from his mother’s two siblings, George never really knew them, either. Carrie left behind any family she may have had in Minnesota when she, Robert, and their children moved to San Diego in the early 1920s. As George was growing up, there was not, therefore, a network of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. When George was one month shy of his seventh birthday, tragedy struck the Coburns. His father died. The family had to get through the loss on its own. That one instance was not unique to George’s family. More often than not, its members had to go it alone.

### *Australian Roots*

In 1901, the Australian writer Henry Lawson shared with his fellow countrymen and women his new poem, *The Men Who Made Australia*. He wrote it at a watershed moment in the continent’s history. In essence, 1901 witnessed the beginning of Australia as a politically independent nation. Lawson understood the hardships first and second-generation European immigrants had endured to create a modern farming and industrial country. As such, he wanted to honor the common people who had labored “down under.” But Lawson’s poem paid homage to them in another way aside from their role in developing the continent. His verses acknowledged the challenging years they had recently lived through--a period of drought the likes of which Australians had never experienced before. In more than one line, Lawson referred to the severe water shortage inhabitants had been

suffering through since 1895. The poem stressed the contributions of “the brave drought-ridden farmer” to a modern Australia, emerging from its colonial period. Lines spoke of those who “died of thirst to win the land another mile” and of settlers who “must toil to save the gaunt stock in the blazing months of drought.” One of the unnamed men Lawson celebrated in his poem was Peter Juel, George Coburn’s maternal grandfather. What George knows about Peter and the historic drought comes from stories his mother Carrie handed down to her children. They give insights into her family’s life in Australia. Carrie’s stories also explain why her family left the continent for the United States in the same year Lawson wrote his poem.<sup>1</sup>

On his maternal side, George’s grandparents Peter and Anna Juel immigrated to Australia from Denmark. Some family genealogical records identify Peter’s birth date as September 18, 1859; only an approximate birth year, 1866, is given for Anna. Danes had begun the long sea journey from the Northern Hemisphere to the Southern one in the mid-nineteenth century when gold was discovered in Victoria, one of the colonies in Australia. Peter and Anna arrived later, probably in 1883 or the early part of 1884. The family genealogical records give 1883 as the year of their marriage. If 1866 is correct for Anna’s birth year, she was only seventeen when she wed and no more than eighteen when the young couple traveled to Australia. In all likelihood, the couple emigrated together. “In my memory,” George recounts, “they were married when they left Denmark.” Carrie, their first child, was born in Australia on August 26, 1884. Land grants, not gold, explain their migration. The Australian colony of Queensland offered land to immigrants. (Carrie told her children, in George’s words, “disputed territory between Denmark and Germany was one of the reasons” why the young couple left Europe. They had no hope for a piece of land, with a clear title, where they lived.)<sup>2</sup>

The Juels, especially Anna, had a difficult life in Australia. Carrie told her children she was born in Darling Downs, a farming area in southern Queensland. Three years before Carrie’s birth, the population of Darling Downs numbered close to thirty-five thousand people. Located in the drainage basins of two major rivers, Darling Downs offered colonists a fertile black soil for their crops. Government railroad lines provided farmers with a transportation system to get their produce to market. But nineteenth century colonists who carved out new settlements, regardless of the continent, more often than not experienced a hard life doing so. George remembers a story that illustrates this fact. “Mother mentioned a couple of times that when he [Carrie’s father] was clearing the land in Queensland, he had a tree fall on his knee. It broke his knee, and it never recovered properly. His knee would bend backwards. He had a real problem with that.” The result of that accident plagued him for the rest of his life.<sup>3</sup>

In the years following Carrie’s birth, Anna had two more children. James (“Jimmy”) was born on June 19, 1886 and Eliza (“Lizzie”) on April 1, 1888. The Juels made their living off the land for less than a decade before a personal tragedy struck the young family. As George shares the story, his grandmother Anna “was a very young bride. She just couldn’t take the responsibility of a family, the hard living they

experienced in Darling Downs or wherever. She had a nervous breakdown. She was institutionalized, and to the best of my knowledge, none of her children ever saw her again." George has a nine-page, handwritten memoir Carrie wrote in 1949 about her childhood in Australia. It furnishes information on her earliest years that supports the recollections George has of what his mother told him and his siblings about that part of her life.<sup>4</sup>

In her memoir, Carrie described Darling Downs as "a prairie type of country." The Juels were somewhat isolated. "Neighbors were far apart," Carrie recalled. It was not an easy life, especially when it came to basic necessities. She detailed the food that sustained the small family. "The diet consisted mostly of...beef from some neighbor who had cattle, home-baked bread made with home-made yeast, and a few home-grown vegetables if you had good luck. The diet often lacked milk." And the family needed staples that the farm could not provide. Carrie explained in her memoir how the Juels found the money to purchase those in town. "The cash to buy flour, sugar, fresh meat and all the rest that was needed had to be earned by going away to work at some sheep station or helping a neighbor clear land, build a house, put up a fence, or any odd jobs that could be had." At times, Peter Juel left home to do such work. Carrie movingly noted the impact on her mother of her father's absences. "I think Father must have been away from home a lot of the time, leaving mother to take care of the place the best she could. She was young then, not even twenty." Clearly, Carrie admired her mother's strength, seen especially when Anna was alone on the farm with the children. "Mother, with all the suffering and deprivation she endured, she did keep us alive, praise to her." Still, Carrie acknowledged, "The hardship and loneliness must have been hard to bear."<sup>5</sup>

Carrie's memoir described what happened to her mother, thus reinforcing the oral history George recounts today. Anna "began to break from the strain of everyday living. But nobody did anything about it, and when sister was a few months old, the little family was scattered to the four winds of the earth. Grandmother took our baby sister, and brother and I went to an orphanage. I think everything would have been all right with Mother if she could have had a little sympathetic understanding and relief for a while from the strain she was under. But that was not to be. We never saw her again." Note Carrie's reference to "Grandmother." Did Peter or Anna's mother accompany the couple to Australia? Or could it be that Carrie, writing for her children, inadvertently referred to Anna as "Grandmother"? The remaining memoir pages do not mention a grandmother or Eliza again.<sup>6</sup>

Carrie described the orphanage, located in Brisbane, the capital of Queensland. "It was set in the middle of a few acres, with eucalyptus trees...The dining room had long tables and wooden benches...the children all stood at the tables and sang grace before eating." By her own account, Carrie was "four years two months old" when she first arrived at the orphanage. She stayed less than a year. When Carrie was around five, a foster family by the name of "Streets" took her in. She began attending school while living with them. Carrie explained the curriculum in her memoir. "In

those days, it was reading, writing, and arithmetic right off, and about the first year the girls took sewing." After two years, however, the Streets moved and returned Carrie to the Brisbane orphanage. She remained there only a few weeks before she left the home. William Perry and his wife became Carrie's new foster parents. She lived with them until she was almost ten.<sup>7</sup>

The Perry farm, in Carrie's words, was "near a place called Mot Flinders not very far from the [eastern] coast." As Carrie explained in her memoir, living in the country meant the children went barefoot, in winter and in summer. "We just had one pair of shoes," Carrie added, "and we wore them the day they were expecting the superintendent of orphanages [to visit]." The household contained several children. The Perrys had nine of their own living with them. In addition to Carrie, the couple had one other foster child. Initially, all of these people were strangers to her. Carrie, nevertheless, remembered that it did not "take long until you feel more like you belong." The senior Perrys assigned Carrie certain tasks. She kept busy "shining shoes for the grownups, polishing silver, [and] gathering dry sticks for kindling."<sup>8</sup>

As Carrie noted, "The Perrys got about twenty-five cents a day for keeping us kids, and that meant the entire keep, clothes and all. So it is easy to see that we could not get much of everything or they would lose money on us." She added, "There were few second helpings." One of Carrie's chores was to help churn butter. She found a bonus in that job. "But I did not mind that so much because I got a little taste of it once in a while when some spilled out. We orphan kids got very little of either the milk or the butter, although the folks had a whole shed full of it." Note Carrie's use of the word "orphan." Its dictionary definition associates it with a child who has lost at least one parent. Which parent--her mother or her father, or perhaps both--did Carrie have in mind when she identified herself as an "orphan"?<sup>9</sup>

When the Perrys needed to shop, they went to Ipswich, a town about twenty-five miles from Brisbane. Once when Carrie accompanied the Perrys to Ipswich, she visited her brother Jimmy. He lived with the McCartneys, another foster family. Jimmy was, in Carrie's words, "two or three years old" at that time. As Carrie described the situation, the McCartneys "had several other orphan children along with brother..."<sup>10</sup>

Carrie was six and a half to seven years old when she went to live with the Perrys. She stayed with them until she was almost ten. As Carrie herself concluded in her memoir about the Perry farm, "That was home to me." During her time with them, she attended a one-room schoolhouse with a teacher whose name Carrie still recalled decades later, Emma Dunbar. But in May 1894, when she was nearing the end of third grade and just three months away from her tenth birthday, Carrie's life again dramatically changed. "One day when I came home from school at noon, Father was there, waiting to take me home. I was leaving the Perrys, and I was not very happy about it." Peter Juel made arrangements with his daughter's foster family. He preceded them to a railway station about five miles from the farmhouse.

Peter told the Perrys to bring his daughter to the station later that same day. They did so, packing what Carrie described as her “few belongings.” A “two-wheeled cart” carried them to the railway station. “It really hurt when they drove off without me, leaving me to go to a home I knew nothing about.”<sup>11</sup>

Daughter and father spent the night at a nearby boardinghouse since their train would not leave until the next morning. Carrie was not in a good mood. “I must have been like some chickens I have seen that are taken away from their regular roosting place. When evening came, I just could not be consoled. I wanted to go home to my own bed at the Perrys...I cried half the night.” When others tried to comfort her, Carrie admitted that she “cried all the more.” But at one point, she understood that her behavior would not change things. As Carrie concluded, “Well, I had to get over that, crying did not get me anywhere.” The next day, Carrie and her father boarded the train, getting off in Ipswich to pick up Jimmy from the McCartneys.<sup>12</sup>

The three Juels continued on the railway line to Esk, about forty miles northwest of Ipswich. Carrie noted in her memoir that the town was at “the end of the railway at that time.” After debarking in Esk early the next morning, the Juels boarded what Carrie described as a “coach,” undoubtedly a stagecoach. It took them sixty miles, “mostly over mountainous country,” as Carrie put it, to the town of Nanango. They arrived there “after dark.” The last leg of their journey began the next morning. The Juel farm was ten miles outside of Nanango. Peter had left an “old black horse” in the town when he had gone to reclaim his children. Jimmy rode it to the farm, while Peter and Carrie walked. In her memoir, Carrie admitted she surprised herself--“I don’t know how I made it, but I walked the whole ten miles home.” That sentence was the last line in Carrie’s memoir. Overall, the story of her childhood offered at least two lessons to her children--adapt to changes in circumstances and do not complain. She had learned those lessons at an early age. Certainly George could have drawn on them, consciously or not, during his own life, especially his eight years in the Navy.<sup>13</sup>

The Juels lived in Nanango for only a year before a second catastrophe struck the small family. This one was climatic, and it impacted more than just them. A severe drought affected Australian society. For the Juels, it prompted their emigration from the land Peter had come to about twenty years earlier. George knows the role adverse weather played in his family’s story. “The drought got so bad. They were subsistence farmers, and they could no longer subsist. They couldn’t make the land produce enough to keep them going. So they got desperate and left.” George also understands, in his words, “It was not a single-season-drought.” He is quite correct on this last point. The drought lasted from 1895-1903. It resulted in heat waves, dust storms, and bushfires. One hundred years passed before another drought of such severity struck the continent. Today, climatologists conclude that three El Ninos contributed to the eight-year drought that strained even more the subsistence existence of the Juel family.<sup>14</sup>

Located near the eastern coast in Queensland, Nanango was impacted by the drought, which hit that part of Australia especially hard. Cyclones even struck the colony. In 1896, hot, dry winds that resembled blasts from a furnace swept through areas; temperatures soared as high as 108 degrees Fahrenheit. Beginning in the summer of 1897 and continuing into 1898, another heat wave struck. In January and February of 1898, fires broke out almost daily in Queensland. Water shortages caused by the drought became more pronounced. The river system that drained the Darling Downs area, where Nanango was located, dried up. Additionally, epidemics such as typhoid, diphtheria, and influenza swept through communities. With the Juels' family farm located ten miles outside of Nanango, they may have been spared such serious illnesses. But even if this was true, dust storms wore away the topsoil, making Peter Juel's attempt to eke out a living even harder. If he had tried to purchase food staples in Nanango, such as vegetables and bread, Peter would have seen little on store shelves. What was there commanded high prices.<sup>15</sup>

Beginning in 1901, the drought became even more pronounced. Approximately sixty-three hundred colonists who had been born in Denmark lived on the continent in that year. By the summer of 1901, Peter made the decision to leave Australia. As George recounts the family story, his grandfather chose the state of Minnesota because it was known as "The Land of 10,000 Lakes." For a farmer who had experienced years of drought, to live in a new land surrounded by bodies of water must have sounded appealing. Perhaps Peter also knew that Danes before him had immigrated to Minnesota directly from Denmark. If he did the same, he would not be alone. Additionally, Peter may have had a brother who lived in Minnesota. A document from the Juels' sea voyage offers a wealth of information in support of the family story Carrie shared with George.<sup>16</sup>

### *A Family Relocates*

Initially, George did not know the exact year when his grandfather moved the family to the United States. A ship's manifest, however, provides that information along with other details on the Juel family. The manifest is for the *Ventura*, a ship built in 1900 for a San Francisco steamship company. She began oceanic crossings in



the *Ventura*

1901, sailing from San Francisco, Honolulu, Auckland, and Sydney. The *Ventura* could carry two hundred and forty first, second, and third class passengers. The Juels made the twenty-one-day voyage from Sydney to San Francisco in steerage. Their trip began on August 13, 1901 when the ship left the Australian port. The manifest listed the names of Peter, Carrie, James, and Eliza Juel. The document required an entry

for nationality; "Danish" appeared for Peter and "British" for his three children. The ship's manifest also recorded ages, with forty-two for Peter, sixteen for Carrie, fifteen for James, and thirteen for Eliza. We have no way of knowing if Carrie's mother was alive at that time, although George believes she may have been. Peter

was identified in the manifest as married, an entry that supports the conclusion that Anna was still living. Additional entries for Peter provide more information. He had never been to the United States before, but he was now bound for Minnesota where he had a brother. (George knows nothing of such a relative.) The Juels last residence was listed as “Narangoa,” a somewhat different spelling for “Nanango.” The manifest asked passengers how much cash they carried. Peter’s entry was for one thousand dollars, no small sum in 1901. (Peter must have sold the farm; that could explain the large amount of money.) The *Ventura* arrived in San Francisco on September 3, 1901. George does not recall his mother sharing details of her family’s trip from California to Minnesota. They probably took a train.<sup>17</sup>

The Juels became part of a tidal wave of immigration to the United States that began around 1890 and continued until the 1914 outbreak of World War I in Europe. In those decades, over sixteen and a half million people entered the country. (From 1790 to 1890, some fifteen and a half million had come to America. In the twenty-five years between 1890-1914, therefore, more immigrated than in the preceding one hundred years.) The fact that Peter decided to leave Australia is understandable given the long drought there. His choice of the United States also makes sense since immigration to America was so common in 1901. Additionally, Peter must have known that many Danes had made “The Land of 10,000 Lakes” their home. The 1900 Federal Census concluded that close to 1.8 million people lived in Minnesota. Some fifteen years before that, Scandinavians (Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes) represented half of all Minnesota residents who were foreign-born. Perhaps, if the *Ventura*’s manifest’s entry is correct, one of them was Peter’s brother.<sup>18</sup>

George has little information about his mother’s early years in Minnesota. He does not know, for example, where the Juels first settled. He does recall Carrie telling him that they “lived in a primitive fashion.” As George continues, “They had a tough time surviving there, too, [for] the first year or two. I remember Mom talking about living on salted fish.” When asked to explain that last phrase, George replied, “They caught the fish in the spring or summer, salted it, and saved it for winter.” George recounts one story from Carrie’s early years in Minnesota. “She worked in a bakery in whatever little town was closest to them [the Juel family]. She went home through the woods at night. Apparently, there was a lot of swampy land.” He remembers Carrie called it “muskeg,” meaning a bog with mosses and sedge. “She talked about wading through muck up to her knees.” From the family genealogical sheets George has, Peter Juel died on September 16, 1907, two days shy of his forty-eighth birthday. It was also exactly six years to the month after the *Ventura* docked in San Francisco. By that date, however, Carrie probably no longer lived with her father.

#### *Carrie Marries*

On June 7, 1904, less than three years after the Juels arrived in Minnesota, Carrie married William Kelsey. (He, too, was an immigrant, having come to the

United States from England.) Carrie had three sons with William. But by the time of the 1910 United States Federal Census, Carrie identified herself as “divorced.” Her oldest boy was then five years old, the middle one three, and the youngest a year old. (Based on an account handed down to George and his siblings, William deserted the family.) In 1910 when the government took the census, Carrie lived in International Falls where she was self-employed as a baker. (The town, in the northeastern part of the state, sits on the border between the United States and Canada. George remembers his mother calling International Falls “the coldest place in the country.”) Financially, life must have been difficult for Carrie. Undoubtedly, she wanted the best for her children and felt she could not provide well for them. Carrie thus made what must have been a wrenching decision. George explains it. “She was alone in the world with three children, and she felt she couldn’t care for them. She put them up for adoption. Two of them were adopted by a family named Hove. That was the older two. The youngest one was still a baby, and they [the Hoves] didn’t want a baby.” Carrie thus kept Herbert Edgar, who would be known as “Ed.” Mother and son may have lived alone or with one of Carrie’s two siblings for the next few years. (Based on oral history, George remembers being told that Lizzie married and moved to Louisiana, but he does not know exactly when this occurred. With respect to Jimmy, George does not recall his mother speaking about what happened to him after the Juels arrived in Minnesota.) At one point following her divorce, Carrie met and married the man who would become George’s father, Robert Ellis Coburn.<sup>19</sup>

In all likelihood, Carrie met Robert Coburn on the job. He, too, was a baker. Because his parents shared this livelihood, George “has always assumed,” in his words, they met at work. Like Carrie, Robert had lived a less than idyllic childhood. George never met any members of his father’s family, but he does know they lived in Kentucky. Entries on a Federal Census for Robert and on his World War I draft registration card give some basic information on his background. Robert was born on July 26, 1876 in Kentucky. His father immigrated to the United States from Scotland while his mother had been born in Kentucky. A family tale handed down to George about Robert begins in that state. As George tells it, his father “was twelve years old when he was apprenticed to a baker. This was someplace near Louisville, Kentucky. Robert was treated very badly by this man, according to the story. After a time, he decided he wasn’t going to take it anymore, and he ran away. Robert never saw the baker or his own family again.”<sup>20</sup>

George is not sure what Robert did immediately after that, but he does know that eventually his father went “to sea for awhile.” He served on merchant ships, George believes as a baker. George continues his father’s story. “In 1898, he traveled to Alaska. I think he went as a passenger. He went for the gold rush. He stayed in Alaska for a few seasons. One winter he and his partner just about starved to death out in a cabin, a place out in the boonies. As far as I know, he never found any significant amount of gold. When they got back into town in the spring, they went into a bar where there were hardboiled eggs on the bar. They both ate the hardboiled eggs (they were starving), and they both got severe stomach problems

from eating too much all of a sudden.” Someone took them out in the street, George continues, “and used a horsewhip to keep them moving, to help with digestion.”

If this chronology is correct, soon after the incident Robert returned to a seafaring job. Surprisingly, if a family story is true, he also shared an ocean voyage with Carrie when Robert sailed on the *Ventura* as a crewmember. Supposedly, he was on the ship as a baker when it departed from Sydney in August 1901. Until the *Ventura's* arrival in San Francisco some three weeks later, he and Carrie walked the same decks. They did not know each other at that time, however. Imagine their mutual surprise about a dozen years later when they realized they had shared this particular voyage. George believes, “This might be one of the things that solidified their relationship right after they met. It certainly gave them some common ground for discussion.” We do not know exactly when or where they met each other. It may have been in International Falls, located in Koochiching County. Carrie lived there at the time of the 1910 census, and her first child with Robert was born in that county.

Carrie and Robert married January 1, 1914, beginning a new year and a new life together. Robert became a father to five-year-old Ed. On October 26, 1914, Anna was born in Koochiching County, probably in International Falls. By December 1916,



however, the Coburns resided in Miles City, in eastern Montana, as indicated on the birth record of their second child, Robert. A World War I draft registration card for the senior Robert Coburn indicates that two years after his son's birth, the family of five had returned to Minnesota. Robert filled out the registration card on September 12, 1918. At that time, he and Carrie lived at 125 Second Avenue SW in Faribault. He worked as a baker there. Faribault served as the county seat of Rice County. Logically, Carrie and Robert would have resided in county seats such as International Falls and Faribault. Those towns would have had larger populations than small communities, making bakeries more viable. And as George points out, “In less populated areas, people made their own baked goods.”<sup>21</sup>

A year after Robert filled out this draft registration card, the Coburns moved yet again. Their third relocation found them in Mankato in southern Minnesota. It sits in a deep valley. Lakes abound in the area, some of the eleven thousand that serve as the basis for Minnesota's nickname, the one Peter Juel had heard of even in Australia. Rivers flowed next to Mankato, making it a natural trading center for not only southwestern Minnesota, but also for northern Iowa and eastern South Dakota. George was born in Mankato on October 26, 1919. He was Carrie's sixth child and her third with Robert. A United States Federal Census entry some months later placed the Coburn family at 119 Fulton Street in Mankato. Employed as a baker,

Robert and Carrie owned their home, although it had a mortgage. They probably lived on Fulton Street when George was born just months before the census.<sup>22</sup>

### *A Move To San Diego*

When George was still an infant, Carrie became sick during a flu pandemic that struck the United States. At the time, the illness was called “the Spanish Flu” because the first publicly reported cases came from Spain. George and his generation know it by that name. Globally, it killed an estimated fifty million people. The epidemic initially showed up in the United States in the spring of 1918; cases decreased in the summer months, only to reappear in the fall. Before it had run its course in 1920, an estimated 675,000 Americans had died from the epidemic. Some twelve thousand of those fatalities occurred in Minnesota. The state documented its first cases late in September 1918. As in the rest of the country, the flu continued to strike Minnesota residents throughout 1919. In a two-year period, an estimated 2.5 million Americans came down with influenza out of a population of approximately 100 million. Carrie became one of those statistics.<sup>23</sup>

According to George, after Carrie fell ill with the flu, a doctor told his mother “to get out of Minnesota.” Carrie needed a warmer climate. For reasons unknown to George, she and Robert chose San Diego, California as their new home. But Carrie, as George knows the story, moved there before the rest of the family. At the time of the 1920 Federal Census, Carrie still lived in Mankato, so she relocated sometime after that spring. Once his mother left, in George’s words, “Dad hired a woman to take care of me.” With a laugh, George easily remembers who that woman was. “My foster mom’s name was Mrs. Foster.” As George understands his family’s move to San Diego, Carrie lived there alone for a period of time. He does not know if she worked or if Robert regularly sent her money. Based on the family’s oral history, Robert and the children joined Carrie when George was a little over a year old. The 1921 City Directory for San Diego puts the Coburns living at 4475 Alabama Street. The family resided there when Carrie’s seventh and last child, Richard, was born on October 21, 1921.<sup>24</sup>



“Georgie” & “Richie,”  
February 1922

To support his wife and five children, Robert worked as a baker, the same occupation he had in Minnesota. When asked if his father was employed by someone else or had his own bakery, George replies, “I believe it was always his own business, in downtown San Diego, near 12<sup>th</sup> and Broadway. He had a partner. I don’t know if the partner was active in the business or whether the partner just financed it. The partner’s name was McMullen.” As with other parts of his family’s story, documentation supports George’s oral history

legacy. In the 1922 and 1923 City Directories, Robert worked for one “S.P. McMullen.” He is identified as a “foreman” for McMullen in 1923. Since the Coburns did not have an automobile, Robert rode the trolley to work, as George remembers it.<sup>25</sup>

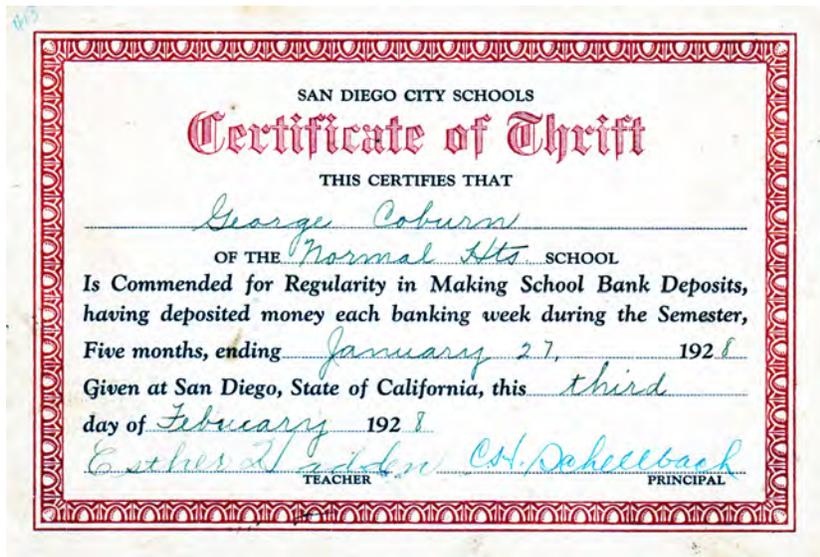
George’s earliest recollection dates from his first years in San Diego when one day, in his words, he “aroused the whole neighborhood.” He believes the Coburns lived on Alabama Street at the time, which is probably correct since the family lived there from 1921-1923 based on the city directories. With honesty, George admits, “My memory of it is very, very vague, but it has been refreshed by the family stories.” The front of the house had a long, screened-in porch. “I caused a big disturbance in the neighborhood. I was reported as a lost child. I was maybe still two, maybe three. All of the neighbors were out looking for me.” After some hours, “Somebody found me. I had crawled under a rug on the front porch and had fallen asleep. I was always on the front porch.” George shares this earliest memory with a hearty laugh.

Late in 1923 or early in 1924, the Coburns moved to 4444 43<sup>rd</sup> Street in San Diego. They lived there for a few years before relocating to 4460 36<sup>th</sup> Street. This placed the family in the Normal Heights district of San Diego, named after the local State Normal School. (A “normal school” trained high school graduates to become teachers.) Normal Heights experienced a large growth in residential and small business populations in the 1920s, the same time George and his family moved there. The Coburns were one of the earliest families to live on 36<sup>th</sup> Street. “I remember when there was just our house and two other houses on the whole city block, and I’m talking about all four sides of the city blocks.” Most, like the Coburns, lived south of Adams Avenue. By the end of the decade, over eight thousand people resided in Normal Heights. San Diego’s city population numbered close to 148,000 in 1930; voters in Normal Heights approved annexation to the city in 1925, an election in which Robert and Carrie may have voted. Being part of the city provided Normal Heights with more than one benefit. “Ultimately,” George explains, “we got paved streets, but I remember when they were dirt.”<sup>26</sup>

### *Schools Named After Presidents*

George did not attend kindergarten, so a formal education began with his enrollment in the first grade at Normal Heights School. He still holds vivid memories of what George calls his “introduction to school. The school was an old, old building, probably built before World War I. The first grade class was in a little separate bungalow on the same campus. Of all things, my teacher’s name was Mrs. George. We went to school barefoot. Part of it was [because] shoes were pretty scarce and you kept them for special occasions.” Saving for such “special occasions” and just life in general was a habit that the San Diego city schools tried to engender in their students. When George was eight, he received a “Certificate of Thrift” from Normal Heights School. It commended him on making regular deposits to a bank account “each banking week during the Semester,” a five-month period that had begun in

September 1927 and ended in January 1928. George regularly took a small amount of money to his teacher, Miss Esther Hadden. She oversaw its deposit in an account in his name with the Bank of Italy, which George points out later became the Bank of America. The amount he brought to school was always modest, perhaps “a nickel or a dime,” he thinks.



George may have collected some of the money he deposited from a competition he had with his siblings. “One of the things I remember about Dad is that sometimes he’d come home from work, and he’d call us kids together in the living room. He would reach in his pocket, and he’d always have a bunch of coins. He’d make them up in a roll, and then he’d roll them across the floor and let us scramble for them.” George had some encounters with his father, though, that do not bring smiles to his face today. “Ordinarily, he was a pretty gentle man,” George recalls. “But he could get angry and resort to rather severe physical punishment.” In keeping with childrearing practices in the 1920s, Robert spanked his children if they needed correction. “They had what they called ‘the strap,’ ” George explains. “It was a piece of a wide leather belt. The belt was cut into strips about a quarter of an inch wide. Part of it was left intact as the handle; it hung on a nail [in our house]. Nobody was immune.” Anna, the only daughter, received spankings, too. Robert was not the sole parent to dole them out. George adds, though, that his mother’s punishment “generally was one stroke. And dad’s were several strokes.”

The Certificate of Thrift was not the only award George saved. When he was nine and ten years old, he served on the School Safety Committee. One of its responsibilities was to assist students in safely crossing the street in front of the school. The committee was part of a “Campaign of Education for Public Safety” sponsored by the Automobile Club of Southern California. George received at least two certificates for his participation in the School Safety Committee. George still has them, almost ninety years after officials awarded the certificates to him. A comparison of the two pieces of paper, one dated April 22, 1929 and the other

January 24, 1930, illustrates the name change his school underwent. George began attending first grade at “Normal Heights School.” This name appears on George’s spring 1929 certificate. In the winter of 1930, however, the certificate bears the name of “John Adams School,” the new name for the educational institution.<sup>27</sup>



Ann, George, Richard, circa 1927-1928

It was while George was in elementary school that the family suffered a devastating loss. His father Robert, at age fifty, died on September 24, 1926. George was one month shy of his seventh birthday. “Dad had been ill for about a month. I don’t know for sure what the problem was. We had just moved during the summertime. We had bought a new house in a new subdivision. It was on 40<sup>th</sup> Street.” As if dealing with Robert’s death was not difficult enough for Carrie, she worried, too, about making the mortgage payments on the new place. According to George, his parents had used the house on 36<sup>th</sup> Street as a “trade-in” for the 40<sup>th</sup> Street home. He thinks it was less than six months after the move that Carrie and the children returned to their 4460 36<sup>th</sup> Street home. “Mom arranged to get back to the old house because it was free and clear. She knew she couldn’t afford to pay for the new house.”<sup>28</sup>

Financially, after losing Robert, Carrie must have worried about more than just the mortgage payment on the 40<sup>th</sup> Street house. Moving back to 36<sup>th</sup> Street took care of that problem. Still, she was now a single parent to five children, ages four to seventeen. Ed, the oldest and a high school graduate, took a job as a surveyor with San Diego County. (George believes S.P. McMullen helped his brother get that position.) Ed’s salary undoubtedly provided the main income for the family. The other children took on part-time jobs when they were old enough to do so. “We all worked,” George recounts. “When I was probably twelve, I got a job delivering a little weekly paper called *The Shopping News*. I covered a route that went from 35<sup>th</sup>

to 40<sup>th</sup> Street [and] from Monroe to El Cajon Boulevard.” George walked the route. As for his earnings, George gave some to Carrie. “I got to keep half of the money, and the rest went to the family coffers.”<sup>29</sup>

By then, George attended Woodrow Wilson Junior High School. As he had done at Normal Heights/John Adams Elementary School, he walked to class from his home on 36<sup>th</sup> Street. The distance was always “several city blocks” regardless of whether the school was one he attended for his elementary, junior high, or high school years. (After elementary school, George wore shoes to school.) At Woodrow Wilson, George worked as a volunteer in the library. There is one particular day he especially recalls. “I still have a vivid memory of it. We had only a few black students in Woodrow Wilson. There was a black girl in the library one day.” George was volunteering that day along with another student, a girl. “This black girl touched the girl volunteer who went crazy, yelling, ‘She touched me.’ I didn’t have any idea people would have that kind of response.” A classmate’s racial prejudice clearly surprised young George.

While in junior high, George pursued what he identifies as a pastime of “camping, hiking, and hunting.” Ed eventually bought a car, and sometimes the Coburns drove out to Flinn Springs County Park in San Diego’s East County. “It was out on Highway 8,” George adds. He remembers how they might stay just overnight or, perhaps, for a week. Closer to home, George enjoyed hiking through an open area about five miles from Normal Heights. It spanned Mission Gorge. The area later became Padre Trails Park. “I knew more about the Padre Trails Park down in San Diego than almost anybody. I would go out there with a blanket and a little bit of food and stay for three or four days.” He laughed at the memories those days brought to mind. “Right below the canyon on the east side of San Diego State College was an overflow from Lake Murray which was a couple miles upstream from there. This water came down and dropped into a canyon that was eroded down to granite boulders. They called it Adobe Falls, and there was a nice little pool there for swimming. On the downstream edge of the pool, there was a huge boulder [that] constituted a dam. It was smooth on the surface and slope. We called it ‘Slippery Rock.’ We would be skinny-dipping down there and slide on this rock. It was a popular place.”

George and his friends hunted in the Mission Gorge area, too. They shot rabbit and quail that they cooked over a campsite. “We ate on the site.” He shot “various guns because the group of kids I ran around with had guns and we traded. On University Avenue, there was a gunsmith, Allen’s Gunsmith. He used to sell guns to us kids on a layaway basis. When we got it paid off, we’d get the gun. They used to call it ‘the Easy Plan.’ ” At this point, George shares another memory that makes him smile. It is the recollection of a 1934 song, *Nasty Man*. One of the lyrics went, “I’m a nasty man, taking my love on the easy plan,” a reference to the layaway arrangement.

George preferred the Mission Gorge area to a famous park downtown, Balboa Park. "That was not one of my favorite places," George concludes. "It was too city-like." George's love for the outdoors explains his feelings towards school when he was young. With a hearty laugh, he admits, "I didn't like school because it was confining. I wanted to be free. I wanted the ability to do what I wanted to do." When George was an adolescent, that meant "camping, hiking, and hunting." Ed insisted George take violin lessons. But true to his desire to do "what I wanted to do," George eventually got out of it. "I hated the instrument. I took it until I was big enough to say, 'I ain't going to do this anymore.' "

After Woodrow Wilson Junior High, George attended Herbert Hoover Senior High School. Located on El Cajon Boulevard, it was, as he puts it, "quite a ways" from his home on 36<sup>th</sup> Street. As he had done at his other schools, George walked the distance, a little over a mile. Academically, Hoover High was different from other high schools in one significant way. As George explains, it was "set up for a three-year curriculum" even though four years was traditional. To see that students fulfilled the four-year high school requirement, the Hoover High administration accepted a student's last year at Woodrow Wilson Junior High as the freshman year for high school. George thus entered Hoover in February 1934 as a sophomore. He spent three years at Hoover. In that period, he took what the curriculum identified as the "prescribed" courses that are duly noted on his transcript--physical education (PE), U.S. History, Civics (known as "Citizenship" at Hoover High School), and English. In the first semester of his second year, George signed up for ROTC, but he returned to the traditional PE in the second semester. Today, George has no recollections of his ROTC semester. "I probably talked to someone who told me it was a great thing. It was probably too rigid for me." His transcript lists several other practical classes that would later make him an attractive enlistee when he applied to the Navy--algebra, plane geometry, general mechanics, electric shop, mechanical drawing, radio, and auto shop. (Some enlisted Navy ratings required mathematical calculations and mechanical skills.) Two science classes (physiology and geology), typing, Social Science, Public Speaking, and four semesters of architectural drawing rounded out his course loads.<sup>30</sup>



Richard, Carrie & George 1937

George graduated from Herbert Hoover High School in February 1937. Before the actual commencement ceremony, he enjoyed some of the traditional Hoover High senior class activities. Two months earlier, the students spent a "Play Day" in Long Beach. On January 12<sup>th</sup>, the administration honored the tradition of a

customary “Senior Ditch Day” with a picnic for the class at Pine Valley in the Cuyamaca Mountains of southeastern San Diego County. (With George’s love of the outdoors, that day was probably his favorite “graduation perk.”) A “Senior Ball” occurred on January 28<sup>th</sup> at Casa de Manana, a resort in La Jolla, one of San Diego’s upscale seaside communities. The event might have been the one to which George recalls taking a date. What made the evening noteworthy was the fact that, in his words, “My older brother Ed lent me his precious automobile.” The vehicle was a Ford, “and it was fairly new,” as George remembers the car. Another brother, Robert, also participated in these senior activities. Even though, as George explains, Robert “was three years older than me,” he graduated at the same time George did. Robert was “a sickly child,” as George describes him, who suffered from tuberculosis. His poor health caused so many absences that he fell behind several semesters. Special activities for the graduates ended in January with “Senior Vespers” on the 31<sup>st</sup> at the First Baptist Church.<sup>31</sup>

The actual commencement ceremony took place on the evening of Wednesday, February 3, 1937. The day before, seniors followed a campus tradition begun with the school’s first graduating class in 1932. They climbed the five-stories-tall tower



that dominated the campus. At the top, each signed his or her name in a large book bound in red leather. (George has no recollection of this custom. “I don’t know if I did that or if I did not do it.”) On graduation night, one hundred and twenty-four seniors gathered with their families at San Diego State College’s gymnasium. In George’s yearbook next to his class picture are the words “UCLA” and “draftsman.” They reflected what George calls today “my vague thoughts about my future,” namely college and a technical career. Yet those entries did not turn out to be his path. George’s high school had been named for Herbert Hoover, the President of the United States in 1930 when the school was built. That same year, President Hoover had the bad luck to preside over the beginning of the worst economic downturn in the country’s history.<sup>32</sup>

### *Life After High School*

George looked for a job after graduation. While at Hoover, he had delivered newspapers, but they were not editions of the *Shopping News*. Instead of that weekly, he delivered a daily paper on his bike, the *Los Angeles Examiner*. Even after almost eighty years, George has not forgotten his delivery route--“north of Adams to the valley rim, from Texas Street on the west to Ward Road on the east.” As with his other paper route, George gave fifty percent of his wages to his mother. Once he graduated, however, George wanted a job identified more with an adult than with a

schoolboy. The fact that he had earned a high school diploma set him apart from other job applicants. In 1940, the median number of school years Americans over the age of twenty-five had completed was around eight and a half. Even with a high school degree, however, the state of the economy limited George's options. Nationally, since 1930 the United States had been in the Great Depression. There was not one year in the decade where the unemployment rate dropped below 14%. The decade's average was 17.1%. In George's Normal Heights neighborhood, the Methodist Episcopal Church, dedicated in 1929, closed its doors in 1934 because it could not raise enough money for the mortgage. In San Diego County, many families lost their houses because they could not pay the property taxes, even though some owed only five dollars. Carrie counted on her children to help sustain the household. Still, to her credit, all of her children completed high school.<sup>33</sup>

George remembers the employment situation he encountered in the winter of 1937. "Jobs were pretty difficult [to get]." In some brief, undated notes he once made on his early life, George wrote for this period, "Scarce jobs--months to find used car lot." He explains the latter phrase. "I don't know who it was, but somebody gave my mother a tip that this used car lot was looking for a 'do everything boy.'" At this point in the recollection, George emitted a hearty laugh, apparently triggered by the job description. "So I went down [to San Diego]. Two guys ran the lot--Ray Romp and Elmer Ponder. They hired me, and I worked there until I went into the Navy." The car lot was on the northeast corner of State and C Street. George's bosses paid him twenty-five cents an hour. He usually worked an eight-hour-day, five days a week. "Sometimes I got a little extra," George adds, "like one time [when] they sent me to Los Angeles to pick up cars they had bought at auction."

On some days, Ray and Elmer asked George to ride in a car when a customer test-drove a vehicle. "I remember one of them in particular. It was a 1933 Cord or Auburn. It was a luxury car at that time. This sailor came in, and he wanted to try it out, so we went out together. He was on Marina Boulevard. (It ran along next to Mission Bay, which was then just mud flats.) Going north on Marina Boulevard, this crazy sailor gets up to one hundred miles an hour." Again, George laughed at the images the memory brought to mind before continuing the story. "Then he [the customer] slowed down, and the brake pedal went to the floor. He pumped it a couple of times [and it worked]." Initially, George rode the streetcar back and forth to work. By the end of 1937, though, he bought a used car, although he did not purchase it from Ray and Elmer. According to George, "They didn't have a car in my price range, so I had to buy it elsewhere." It was a 1929 Model A Ford Roadster.

In February 1938, a year after his high school graduation, one of George's friends, Perry Wherley, visited him at the car lot. As George tells the story, "Perry came by. He announced very cheerfully, 'Hey, George, I am going down to join the Navy. Why don't you come with me?' And I still remember how shocked I was. 'Are you crazy?' Neither of us seemed like Navy guys." George laughs again at the recollection before he continues. "Anyway, he talked me into going. I got some time off from the boss. We went down [to San Diego's naval recruitment office] and did

some preliminary sign-up.” George believes, after that, the Navy “investigated our personal history.”

George easily met the Navy’s eligibility requirements. First time enlistees had to fulfill several basic prerequisites. The Navy demanded the applicant be a United States citizen between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. If under the age of twenty-one, which George was, the Navy requested written parental consent. This posed no problem for George. He recalls that one day, “A chief petty officer came out to the house to talk with Mom and me. I remember her telling him she didn’t want me to go into submarines.” George laughed hard at that recollection. “The petty officer,” he continued, assured Carrie, “ ‘He won’t go into submarines unless he volunteers for it.’ ” George had no intention of doing that. He did not have a problem, either, when it came to a physical requirement. George easily fulfilled the minimum height demand of at least sixty-three inches for those applicants under the age of twenty-one. (Weight had to be in proportion to height, and George’s was.) To attest to his “good character,” the Navy recruiter asked for the names of at least two people who knew George. Protocol also required the recruiter to ask George if he had a criminal record. He answered “no” to that question, just as he did when the recruiter asked him if he was married or had any dependents. (A “yes” to either of those inquiries would have disqualified him as a first-time enlistee.)<sup>34</sup>



Even though a high school degree was not required, the Navy would have judged George’s possession of one as a positive factor in considering his application. Perry, though, had dropped out of school. Additionally, Perry did not pass the background check since he had a juvenile police record. George was the one in whom recruiters showed an interest. “I got a call to come in and actually join the Navy. I mulled that over for a while. I wasn’t real eager about it because it meant regimentation, with rules that had to be followed. But then I decided, ‘Well, it’s a good, steady job, and this used car lot is rather shaky,’ so I joined the Navy.”

By the time George enlisted on February 11, 1938, he was not alone in choosing the military as an alternative to a job in the private sector. The Depression’s high unemployment rates made many young men do the same. This increase in recruit applications allowed the Navy to be, in the words of historians, “very selective” from

the middle of the 1930s to the end of the decade. In 1938, George was one of 129,610 men who applied for admittance into the Navy. Only 15,094 were accepted for training, or about 11.6%. George distinguished himself by being one applicant the Navy selected.<sup>35</sup>

As noted earlier, George set himself apart in another way from his peers. He grew up without the network of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins that was so common to his generation. Members of George's family thus dealt with critical situations in their lives lacking the support of a wide circle of relatives. His maternal grandfather, Peter Juel, ended up "going it alone" at more than one point in his life. Presumably, Peter left a family behind in Denmark when he immigrated to Australia with his young wife Anna. They became settlers on an isolated piece of land in the colony of Queensland. After Anna suffered an emotional breakdown and was hospitalized, Peter found himself "going it alone" as a single parent. For several years, he allowed his children to live with others while he worked the farm on his own or hired out his labor. From age four to almost age ten, his daughter Carrie stayed with two foster families. Carrie thus spent a significant part of her childhood "going it alone" when it came to support from a biological family. She appears not to have seen her father Peter at all during those years; she rarely saw her brother Jimmy and probably never saw her sister Lizzie. Carrie again found herself "going it alone" years later when her first husband deserted her and their three young sons. Robert Coburn, her second husband and George's father, died suddenly, leaving Carrie with five children to raise on her own. Again, she ended up "going it alone," with the assistance of only her children.

Family stories Carrie shared with her sons and daughter prepared them to do the same when circumstances required it. At such moments in her own life, Carrie drew on an inner strength she clearly possessed. One could argue George inherited that trait. He is sociable, but by his own admission, George is "not a joiner." He belonged to no sport teams or clubs while in high school. A year after graduation, George's friend Perry suggested they enlist together in the Navy. He agreed to go to the recruitment office with Perry. When the Navy rejected his friend, however, George had to consider whether or not he would follow through by himself on his initial paperwork. George decided to do so, "going it alone" in the tradition of other family members when situations required it.

## Chapter 2

### "Three Short Months,"

February 11, 1938 - May 10, 1938

George's enlistment guaranteed that he would not be "going it alone" for the next few years while he fulfilled his military commitment. In February 1938, he became part of the United States Navy, joining almost 130,000 enlisted men who

wore the naval uniform. Service members in every branch of the American armed forces became part of a military unit that took precedence over their own individuality. In his first months in the Navy, George went through recruit training at the Naval Training Station (NTS) in San Diego. For twelve weeks, he was part of a company. He trained, slept, and ate his meals with men in that company. Exactly one week before graduation, George confessed to his mother that soon “I’ll sure lose some good friends. It seems that I have known them all my life, but it has only been three short months.” Other sailors replaced those “good friends” when George joined the crew of first a battleship and later a heavy cruiser. No, he would not have to “go it alone” as a sailor in the United States Navy.<sup>36</sup>

To a degree, we know how George felt about recruit training and the time he spent at sea because he wrote his mother letters on Navy life. In them, he shared some of his experiences. Certain letters ran only one page in length while others filled ten pages. Carrie received the first one in February 1938, just days after George reported for training. At one point after the initial envelopes arrived, she slipped a piece of twine around them. As the correspondence grew, however, Carrie simply kept them loosely together instead of in bound packets. George continued to send letters to the Coburn family home in San Diego until his discharge in May 1946. Altogether, Carrie kept eighty-nine letters from George, in all probability the total number he sent her. When George inherited the correspondence many years later, he, too, saved them. Without consciously realizing it, those two acts by Carrie and George preserved a treasured resource that documents his story of prewar and wartime military service.



The string Carrie wrapped around the first letters.

## Company 38-5-B6

But before George could officially be a sailor in the United States Navy, he had to undergo recruit training at NTS, popularly known as “boot camp.” One explanation as to the origin of the latter phrase dates from the Spanish American War in 1898. At that time, sailors wore leggings called “boots.” Navy or Marine recruits thus came to be called “boots.” They trained in “boot camps.” Another explanation, however, identifies the word “boot” as an acronym, standing for “basic orientation and organization training.” Regardless of the source of the phrase, what is clear is that these naval training installations were fairly recent in United States military history. Before the 1880s, a recruit received his education on board a ship. A fundamental change took place when the Navy decided to train recruits at a base on shore. It established the first training station in Newport, Rhode Island in 1883. Others followed. The Great Lakes Training Station in Illinois, located on the southwestern shore of Lake Michigan, opened in 1911. A third NTS began instructing recruits in Norfolk, Virginia in 1917. San Diego’s NTS was the fourth such facility, commissioned in June 1923 and dedicated four months later. George attended the San Diego installation.<sup>37</sup>

When it opened, training at San Diego’s NTS took sixteen weeks. By the late 1930s, that had been reduced to twelve weeks. Chief petty officers oversaw the daily instruction of the recruits. When enlistees entered boot camp, NTS issued each of them a book that was informally known as their “Bible.” Officially, it was *The Bluejackets’ Manual (BJM)*, a Navy publication that dated back to 1902. The volume



attempted to put into writing the training recruits received in boot camp as well as information they needed once they arrived at their first duty station. At NTS San Diego, recruits spent the first three-four weeks in “South Unit” and the remaining weeks in “North Unit.” The Command initially quarantined companies of enlistees in South Unit to guard against

the spread of infectious diseases. Antibiotics had not yet been developed. As such, contagious illnesses such as mumps, measles, and scarlet fever could spread throughout NTS and even onto ships when graduates who appeared well reported to their first duty station. Addressing the recruit, the *BJM* judged this part of training as “the hardest period of your naval career.” George agrees with this conclusion. “It was tough,” he explains, “because it was such a departure from anything I was accustomed to. I was used to being a free spirit.” Yet in South Unit, he adds, “I felt confined.”<sup>38</sup>

George reported for duty at San Diego's NTS on Friday, February 11, 1938. That very evening, NTS mailed a postcard to Carrie. George himself addressed it, although his handwriting on the front was his only contribution to the information on the card. The correspondence side (i.e., the back of the card) had lines onto which some sailor had typed the date and the recruit's name, informing the addressee that this individual had arrived for "recruit training." A lengthy paragraph outlined what would follow. Training would last for "about twelve weeks." If the recruit completed training in a "satisfactory" way, he would either be assigned "to a sea-going vessel" or be sent to a Service School for specialized training. NTS pointed out to the recipient the importance of letter writing. As NTS observed, "frequent and cheerful letters from his home are of great benefit to the recruit and they are the best means of encouraging him to write home frequently." To facilitate such exchanges, NTS gave its postal address and how the addressee should be identified. For George, the typed entry for his name appeared as "G. L. Coburn." The line below it identified his unit.

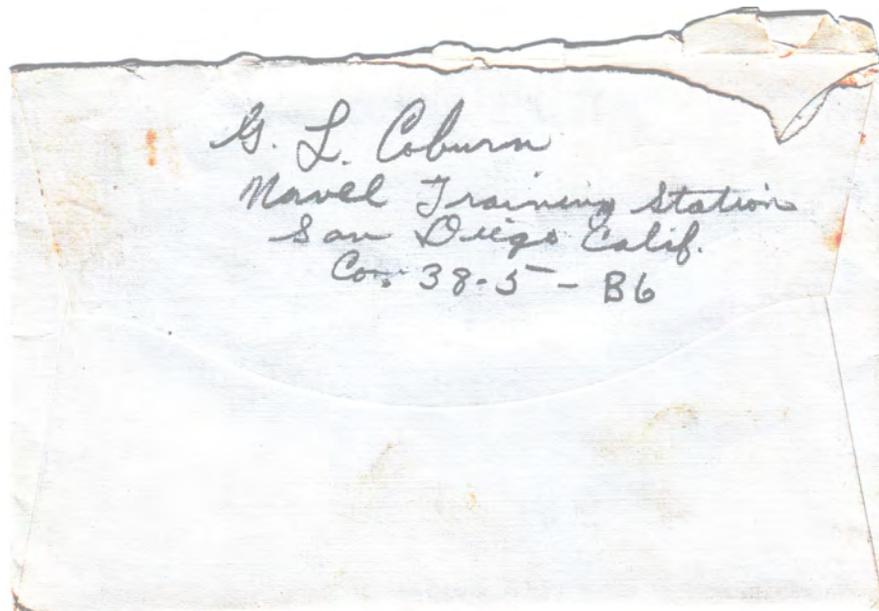
Seven days after he arrived at NTS, George received a letter from Carrie. He wrote back that same day. George admitted to his mother the importance he attached to the mail--"Every time I get a letter, it peeps me up." Carrie's piece of correspondence, however, was not his first one. Friends had sent him some, too. A girlfriend informed George "how much the gang" missed him. He admitted to his mother, though, that such a statement might be an exaggeration. "It's all a bunch of lies, I suppose, but I like them. It's nice to know people liked you enough to miss you a little when you leave." This was not his first letter home.

George initially wrote his mother on February 13<sup>th</sup>, two days after he arrived at NTS. "Here it is Sunday night," he announced to Carrie, "and the first time I have had any time to write. I have been so busy ever since [my] arrival Friday morning that I have hardly had time to miss home or any of my friends & good times." No doubt NTS kept George "busy" just putting him through the initial stages of turning a civilian into a bona fide recruit. The entrance to NTS was at the junction of Barnett Avenue and Lytton Street in downtown San Diego. When he reported for duty as an apprentice seaman on Friday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, George would have gone into the station through Gate One on Lytton Road. Naval personnel would then have taken him to what the Navy called "the receiving unit." There he took off his civilian clothes, and he was given a uniform to wear. (Recruits were not allowed to have civilian clothing either at the station or on board a ship after they graduated from boot camp. It appears that George mailed his civilian clothes home to Carrie. The Navy undoubtedly had all of its recruits do so after they arrived at a training center.)<sup>39</sup>

Once George received a uniform, a non-commissioned officer (NCO) ordered him to take a bath. That was followed by what the *BJM* called "a thorough medical exam." A dentist was also on hand. If the enlistee needed any work done on his teeth, it was recorded in the recruit's file. In addition to his medical and dental

exams, George probably received his first Navy haircut on the day he reported to NTS. Unlike other enlistees, George does not complain about being “scalped.” Asked today about his recollections of that first Navy haircut, he replies, “I wasn’t distressed by it because I knew it was coming. It was not a surprise.” With a hearty laugh, however, George quickly adds, “But there were fellas who were quite distressed that they lost their curly locks.” Once he completed these initial stages of induction, NTS assigned George to a company of one hundred enlistees. They were housed in more than one barracks. A NCO, specifically a chief petty officer, was in charge of the group, a man whom George refers to as “Chief.” The company went through boot camp together.<sup>40</sup>

The February 11<sup>th</sup> postcard NTS sent Carrie identified his unit as “Company 38-5.” Beginning with the very first letter George wrote to his mother two days later, he added one more piece of routing information--“B6.” On every piece of correspondence mailed home, therefore, his return address ended with the phrase “38-5-B6.” Analyzing the numbers and letter today, the “38” undoubtedly represents the training year, the “5” the graduation month, and, as George suggests, the “B6” identified which barracks his platoon was in. (The companies were subdivided into platoons.) The barracks designation would have, as he explains, “helped out with the distribution of mail.”



George’s handwriting on the back of the February 13, 1938 envelope

Soon after he arrived at NTS, George recognized some local men among the recruits. He confessed to Carrie, however, that he had no real history with them. There was only one he “used to run around with. He is the only fellow here that I really know.” His name was “Harry.” The two had been assigned to the same barracks, with Harry sleeping next to George. They used a bed just on their first night, though. After that, George and the other recruits slept in hammocks. To allay

any concerns his mother might have, George assured her that “sleeping in hammocks is really quite comfortable.” He honestly admitted, though, that where he slept was not an issue for him. “I would sleep well on a hard floor these nights because I get up early and work all day.”<sup>41</sup>

### *“Imposing Discipline”*

Regardless of whether recruits were in South Unit or in North Unit, their training days began early and ended at an hour a young man would judge as “early.” George shared with his mother the daily routine. At 5:45 a.m., “a guard comes in and hollers ‘hit the deck!’ ” Upon hearing that command, George folded and then rolled up his blankets. He tied them to his hammock. On his first day at NTS, George wrote Carrie that he was “put into service in the galley.” He explained that NCOs “kept us busy cleaning the big kettles and hauling supplies for the cook.” Sunday, February 13<sup>th</sup>, was George’s third day at NTS. When he went off duty for an hour that afternoon, George returned to his barracks. Upon arriving there, he found a visible reprimand awaited him. As he told Carrie, “My hammock was lying on the floor. It had been let down because one out of the seven hitches had been tied backwards. I have learned now to tie the hammock up right.” Lights went out at 9:30 p.m. The Command filled the hours from morning to night with training. As in all branches of the armed forces, regimentation described the recruit’s day. George remained at South Unit until March 9<sup>th</sup> when he and his company moved to North Unit. The day before, his company “scrubbed all the woodworks & tile walls, washed the windows, swept up everywhere & spaded the garden.”<sup>42</sup>

Such attention to cleanliness was a part of Navy life. In boot camp, recruits underwent more than one type of inspection. Thinking back on them today, with a strong laugh George concludes, “The only thing I can generally say [about inspections is that] I didn’t like them.” The company commander conducted daily inspections where he looked for what the *BJM* identified as “neatness and cleanliness.” If one recruit failed to live up to Navy standards, the whole barracks was disciplined. As George explains, the platoon received “a black mark.” For punishment, he adds, “The chief might have made the platoon take an extra run around the Grinder [a courtyard where the men drilled].” With an audible sigh, George recalls one particular recruit who posed a problem when it came to inspections. “We had a guy in our company. I don’t remember his name. Cleanliness [to him] was a foreign idea,” laughing at this recollection. “On inspection after inspection,” George continues, “our platoon got cited because of this guy’s appearance. One evening, they grabbed this guy and hauled him into the shower, disrobed him, and scrubbed him down with a kiwi brush.” That was, George explains, “a very stiff, bristle brush, and if you rubbed hard enough, it would take the skin off.”<sup>43</sup>

Aside from the daily barracks inspection, company commanders frequently conducted sea bag inspections. According to the *BJM*, passing “a good bag inspection is one of the first and most important things that a sailor must learn to do.” When

asked why a bag inspection was so critical, George replies, "For a number of reasons. One would be the fact that you showed you had all of the items you were supposed to have. A second reason was that you showed you had properly rolled and tied them. (That way, you could get more items into the sea bag rather than folding them.) A third reason was probably that the sea bag inspection was part of our neatness training." When the inspection began, recruits stood at attention behind their bag. The company commander ordered the men to "Open ranks" and "Lay out



your bags for inspection." The last directive meant that recruits were to take out their clothing. George describes how enlistees stored their uniforms in the bag. "We rolled our clothes so everything would fit in the sea bag. We put little pieces of cord called tie-ties around them [the clothing]. We tied the rolls with the tie-tie to hold it tight. That

way it took up less room in the sea bag." The commander checked to insure that the required articles of clothing were present, properly marked, and clean. The recruit's stenciled name or initials on each item had to be visible. In addition to the sea bag given to all recruits, the men also received a "small bag called a dittie bag." As George explains, "It was for toothpaste and brush, soap, and other personal items."<sup>44</sup>

As with inspections, drilling (i.e., marching in military formation) proved to be a daily exercise in boot camp. Recruits drilled not as individuals, but rather as parts of a company. All branches of the armed forces believed that drilling resulted in discipline and order within the ranks. Because of this, hours and hours were spent drilling in Navy and Marine Corps boot camps as well as in the Army's basic training camps. Drilling began with recruits standing at attention. The petty officer explained how the enlistee was to assume that position. The *BJM* took half a page to put the directions into writing. Words detailed the position of the heels, feet, knees, hips, chest, shoulders, arms, hands, head, chin, and eyes. How to properly execute a salute occupied almost an entire page. Drawings accompanied the written instructions. When marching, the *BJM* stressed the length and cadence of the marching steps; this varied depending upon whether the step was a full one, half, side, or a back step done in quick, double, or slow time.<sup>45</sup>

George especially recalls one particular aspect of drilling. "They used to have us sing when marching. One song was *What Shall We Do With the Drunken Sailor?*" The lyrics offered several answers to that question--"Put him in the brig until he's sober," or "Put him in a boat and row him over." The verse George remembers so well is, "Hoist him up to the topsail yardarm."

At San Diego's NTS, drilling took place on an outdoors area known as "the Grinder." It was an open courtyard made of asphalt. George's chief petty officer would have called out commands such as, "Right, face, forward, march!" and "Column, half left, march!" George believes, "The chief would have ordered us out on the Grinder even if the pavement was on fire." When asked why the petty officer would have done that, George replies, "Imposing discipline on us was important." George added the chief was sending a message that drilling would continue "even if the pavement was on fire--'You're in the Navy now and you are going to follow orders now.'"

A recruit paid dearly if he failed to precisely follow those orders. The chief may, for example, have embarrassed the enlistee in front of the whole company. George shared examples of this type of punishment with his mother in an early letter home. "If a man hangs up his bed or bag wrong, he carries it tied around his neck all the next day. If he wears his clothes wrong, they make him wear the whole uniform, either backwards or inside out. They sure look funny with bags around their necks while they're marching, but worse still is when they put on their uniform back to front." George found his hammock on the ground his third day at NTS. Whatever NCO had decided on that admonishment probably went easy on George since he had barely begun his three months of training.<sup>46</sup>

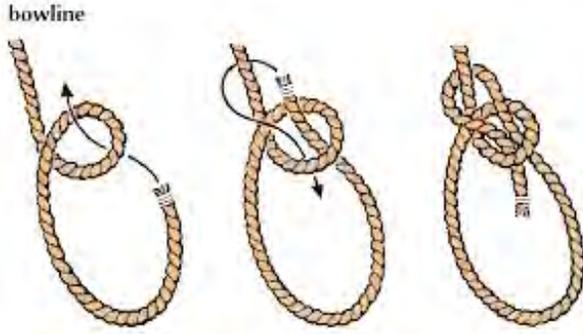
### *Some Areas Of Training*

Those months dealt with many topics aside from drilling. Recruits received lessons in areas such as basic seamanship, water survival skills, gas mask instruction, and small arms training. The *BJM* contained information on all of these and other subjects. The book was a thick one, almost eight hundred pages in length. Recruits could consult its fifty-nine chapters if they needed to clarify various topics. Some were very basic, such as the chapters entitled "General Information," "Navy Customs and Naval Organization," and "Rules and Regulations." Others addressed specific subjects the recruit would be trained in while at NTS, among them, "Manual of Arms," "Knots and Splices," and "How to Swim." George recalls that he "did have a copy of it [the *BJM*] at one time. At least in boot camp, it probably was required reading."

George defines "basic seamanship" as "what you would have to know to be a boatswain's mate. The seamanship type of thing." He then proceeded to give examples of such seamanship. "You learned how to handle small boats and be an oarsman in a small boat." George points out that recruits did not train on any large ships, but NTS did use "small boats, maybe twenty feet long. They could hold a dozen men or so." The *BJM* devoted twenty-six pages to such vessels, specifically powerboats and pulling boats (the latter being vessels propelled through water by oars while the former were equipped with engines).

Another aspect of basic seamanship focused on ropes. As George puts it, "You learned how to tie various knots, and I still remember how to do those." In a letter to

his mother, written “in the head” since barracks lights were out, he added that this phase of his training included “learning to splice ropes,” too. The *BJM* pictured fifty-eight “Navy Knots and Splices,” such as the chain knot, the granny knot, and the overhand knot. Although the book pictured all fifty-eight knots and splices, the *BJM* described in detail “only the ones most commonly used.” Still, that listing ran more than a full page. They included the bowline (described in the *BJM* as one “used whenever you want a knot that will not slip”), the half hitch (“used for making fast a



line to post or spar”), and the marlin hitch (“used for lashing hammock”). Today, George notes, he still “frequently ties a bowline. It is easy to tie and easy to untie, even if it had been under a lot of stress. The bowline gives you a line termination with a loop at the end.” In company gatherings, petty officers focused on the knots and splices they knew

recruits would regularly use. When asked if any of them gave him difficulty, George readily answered. “I had a little trouble with the monkey fist. That was a knot that turned out in a round ball, and it made up the end of a heaving line. This was a light rope that they would throw from one ship to another or to a small boat.”<sup>47</sup>

A second training area was swimming. The *BJM* put that topic in a chapter entitled “Subjects All Enlisted Men Should Know.” George explains, “If you couldn’t swim or learn to swim, you were automatically released.” He had no problem since he knew how to swim. Recruits used an indoor pool at NTS for this part of their training. The *BJM* began its chapter entitled “How to Swim” with a statement that acknowledged how fear of the water explained why some did not learn even the most basic water survival skill. “Fair health, normal mentality, co-ordination, and confidence are all that are required to learn how to swim.” The *BJM* pointed out that recruits undoubtedly qualified “in the first two requirements.” After all, they had been accepted into the Navy. “Coordination” would follow as the recruit learned to swim. It was the last requirement that could be most crucial. As the *BJM* argued, “The beginner must have confidence in the water to support him, and he must have confidence in himself to get his feet on *terra firma* any time he chooses.”

George recalled one recruit who just could not meet this most basic demand. “We had a guy whose name was Shouse who was from someplace in the Midwest.” George laughs as he explains Shouse “had never been near a body of water bigger than a puddle. He would dive into the pool, and he would go to the bottom. He would stay there until someone went in and got him. He never learned [how to swim]. He was discharged.” (George points out that Shouse was the only man in his company of one hundred recruits who did not graduate boot camp. The company’s high graduation rate no doubt reflected how selective the Navy was in its screening of applicants.)

With illustrations, the *BJM* explained various strokes--the dog paddle, the sidestroke, the American crawl (defined by the *BJM* as “the world’s fastest speed stroke”), the American backstroke, and the breaststroke. Looking back today on his time in boot camp, George believes he “probably knew everyone of those [strokes] before training.” Recruits were also shown how, if they found themselves unexpectedly in the water, they could create a life preserver. A bluejacket did this by removing his dungarees and tying it in a certain way “to catch air.” Once a sailor put the pants behind his head, the clothing acted as a life preserver. George readily explains the science behind this transformation. “The wet clothes prevented the rapid passage of air from the inside [of the dungarees] to the outside.”<sup>48</sup>

NTS also trained recruits in the use of gas masks. This was because World War I had introduced gas as a new weapon of war. As the *BJM* ominously warned, various types of gas that could be “encountered in future naval engagements are extremely dangerous. This is due to the insidious, poisonous, extremely irritating, and burning effects of even small quantities of gas.” Boot camp, therefore, trained recruits in how to protect their shipmates and themselves in case of a gas attack. A chapter in the *BJM* covered this topic. A ship at sea might meet up with a gas cloud that appeared as “a low-lying fog or hazy mist.” It might even look like “a smoke screen.” But the *BJM* also warned that the gas could be “projected with great velocity” when a “shell, bomb, or mine is burst.” If the attack occurred that way, the gas could spread “down into the various compartments of the vessel through the ventilation system.” Petty officers instructed recruits that if this happened, sailors should shut down as much of the ventilation system as possible. Additionally, the men should close “doors, hatches, and manholes.” NTS used tear gas in training sessions. With a gas mask on, George and other recruits entered a chamber filled with tear gas. According to the *BJM*, the men were in there for five minutes. George remembers that he and the others were ordered to take their mask off. In his words, doing this allowed the recruits “to experience the tear gas” firsthand.<sup>49</sup>

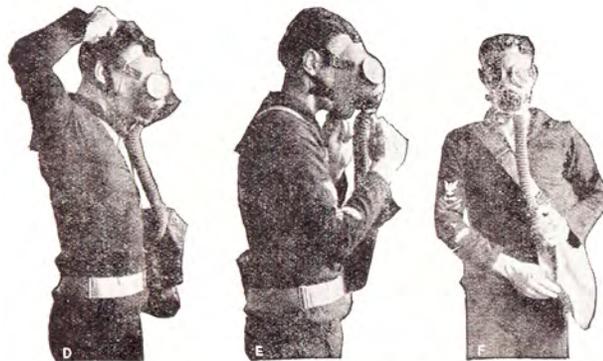


FIG. 58-3—Gas-mask drill B—To obtain accurate adjustment of the face piece.

At no point in his three months at NTS does George recall regretting his decision to enlist. “I don’t think I ever felt that confused or disappointed.” But he does acknowledge, “I was kind of overwhelmed by the change.” The biggest transformation was the fact that George was no longer in control of his life. “I was used to doing whatever the heck I wanted to do,” he admits with some amusement. “My family really didn’t try to impose much control on me when I was in my teens, so if I got some wild idea, I was just apt to follow it.” A hearty laugh followed this confession. George’s positive response to boot camp, in spite of the regimentation, is

born out in his first letter home. Written on Sunday evening after his Friday arrival, he asked Carrie to deliver a message for him. "Have Richard tell the guys I am doing O.K. and that they ought to join the navy. I am still wishing that Perry had come in with me."<sup>50</sup>

While drilling, basic seamanship, and the use of gas masks were all new subjects for George, swimming was not. Similarly, he felt comfortable in small arms training. On the Grinder and on a firing range at NTS, recruits learned how to carry, load, fire, and clean their rifle. The Navy used the bolt-action Springfield '03. The *BJM* officially identified it as "the United States Magazine Rifle, Model of 1903." The recruits practiced firing the '03 in standing, kneeling, prone, sitting, off-hand, and prone rapid-fire positions. Additionally, the *BJM*'s Manual of Arms chapter put into writing lessons the chiefs taught enlistees on how to execute various rifle commands. Among these were "order arms," "trail arms," "sling arms," "port arms," and "present arms." George remembers well this stage of his training. "I had done a

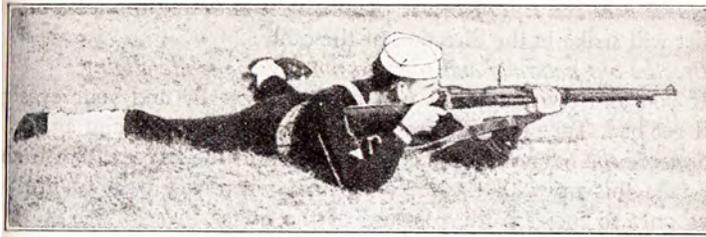


FIG. 42-15—Prone position.

lot of rifle shooting. But I was mildly upset because when they put me on pistol training, they gave me a .45 automatic, and the trigger-pull was so difficult that my whole hand or arm would shake. You had to really pull on that trigger to

fire the gun." Recruits also mounted a bayonet on the end of the rifle, thrusting it into a dummy. Asked today if this unnerved him in any way, George replied no. "Partly because as a sailor, I figured I'd never have to do that." Later, when George served in World War II, he reasoned, "The Marines saw their enemy eyeball to eyeball. I saw mine three to five thousand yards away." Upon reflection though, George quickly added, "Except for the kamikaze. He came in closer," a reference to a Japanese plane that purposely crashed into his ship.<sup>51</sup>

In George's letters to his mother, he gave little information on his training regimen. Instead, he shared details on some of his duty assignments, his much-anticipated leaves, and his post-graduation plans. A March 8<sup>th</sup> letter, written on his last day in South Unit, gives evidence of the high opinion his superiors held of George less than a month after his training began. In their estimation, he qualified for another stripe. It signified he was no longer an apprentice seaman (AS) as were other recruits in his company. George was now a seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> class (S2c). He explained to Carrie how his change in rate would appear on his uniform. (The Navy does not use the word "rank." Rather, enlisted sailors receive a "rate" based upon their assigned duties.) "White marks on the sleeve at the cuff indicated rates. A single stripe meant A.S. Two stripes indicated seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Three stripes meant seaman 1<sup>st</sup> class." In this letter home, George expanded on how his new rate impacted his responsibilities. "That makes me boss of eight men. It's a tough job. I do more work trying to get those fellows to work than if I would do all the work myself."

George had been assigned to galley duty his first day at NTS. At the end of that week, he told Carrie that such work was “steady, with no time to rest all day.” Almost six weeks later, George had mess duty. (Asked to distinguish between his earlier “galley duty” and now “mess duty,” George defines the difference this way. Galley duty basically was helping the cook. Mess duty entailed a broader spectrum of tasks, such as carrying food from the galley to the table and setting up tableware.) He shared with Carrie his assessment of that duty. “This mess work is a lot of hard work. We don’t get off at all any time during the day, except when we sneak off for a few minutes. We have shined all the cups and bowls, trays, windows brass, table silverware, and what have you. It seems that there is no end of things to shine.” In contrast, George judged guard duty in a more positive light. As he told his mother, “We lose quite a bit of sleep, but we don’t really work hard any time. During the day while off duty, we drill...”<sup>52</sup>

“Liberty” relieved George of the regimentation that marked boot camp. The *BJM* defined such a leave as an “authorized absence from duty for less than 48 hours.” Unless a duty assignment interfered, recruits received liberty on the weekends. Since liberty was not allowed when recruits were quarantined in South Unit, initially George had to wait more than three weeks to visit his home on 36<sup>th</sup> Street. A fifteen-cent, round-trip trolley car ride carried George from the city proper to Normal Heights. “I think I always went home. I had a girlfriend, and I had a car, and all of that was out in the old neighborhood.” George believes he changed into civilian clothing while at home. He appears to have arrived at the 36<sup>th</sup> Street house around noon on Saturdays, and like all recruits, he had to be back at NTS by midnight on Sundays. In his first weeks of liberty, George learned not to cut his return trip too close. At the end of March, he confessed to Carrie that he barely made it back to NTS by midnight. The problem was not the trolley car but the bus he took from downtown San Diego to NTS. One Sunday evening it was twenty-five minutes late. The bus took about eleven minutes to get to its NTS stop. “I had my eye on my watch all the way out,” George admitted to his mother. He made it back to NTS by midnight, but with only four minutes to spare. In truth, though, the liberty George looked forward to was one recruits received after graduation from NTS. It was called “boot leave.” Instead of the standard thirty-six-hour liberty, boot leave lasted for ten days.<sup>53</sup>

### *“My Life Was Changing”*

As graduation day approached, recruits would have anticipated not only the ceremony, but also news of their first duty station. The postcard NTS sent Carrie on the day George reported for training explained that one of two possibilities awaited the men after they graduated. “Each recruit is listed either for assignment to a sea-going vessel or, if considered qualified, for a course in a Service School.” Two weeks before graduation, George shared with his mother the fact that “all the guys are making out their requests for ships.” He heard that battleships anchored in San Pedro needed sailors. As for himself, George thought he would probably be assigned

to a destroyer. A few weeks before graduation, George and other recruits took exams that were meant to send some of them to a Service School if they scored high enough. George did not want that type of assignment. He poured out his feelings to his mother in an April 26<sup>th</sup> letter, written the day after he took his tests. "My chief says that the best thing for a fellow to do is to go to sea." Obviously quoting his chief, George told Carrie, "You can learn as much there" as in one of the Navy schools. He added, "I don't want to miss out on the summer maneuvers if I can help it. I don't know where the fleet will go, but I'm sure going to be with it." While at NTS, George also received "a card" from a friend who had joined the Navy about a year before George had enlisted. The sailor "wasn't sure I was in yet, but he figured it was about time, so he sent the card to the station." The man was in Hawaii, "having a swell time," as George put it to his mother. What also impressed George was the fact that his friend had rose through the ranks in just a year. The sailor now was a first class seaman, earning fifty-four dollars a month. (As George recalls his boot camp pay, recruits earned twenty-one dollars a month. Seamen 2<sup>nd</sup> class received thirty-seven dollars a month, which would have been what George got when the Command authorized that second stripe. His friend who had sent him the postcard more than doubled his salary in a year.)<sup>54</sup>

In an attempt to ensure that he went immediately to sea, George tried not to do well on the tests. He explained the exams in detail to his mother. "The first two tests were arithmetic and spelling. They were both so simple that I couldn't make many mistakes. The third test was a general information test. I really felt foolish about some of the answers I put down there, but they ought to keep me out of school. The fourth test was a block test. It consists of putting blocks of different shapes into holes made to fit them." The exams did not impress George. "The schools can sure be full of ignorant fellows if those tests are all that is required of them." Two days after George took the exams, he received the results. In spite of the fact that he had tried to not distinguish himself on the tests, he had obviously scored high enough to be placed in the Electrical Ordinance School. George was not happy with such a post-graduation assignment. He wanted to serve on board a ship.<sup>55</sup>

"If there is any way out, I'm going to find it," he promised his mother. In a letter to Carrie, George referred to "a waiver" that Service School candidates had to sign. As he explained it, the document stated that he would not "buy my way out of the Navy during this enlistment." (George had signed up for four years.) Today, he remembers his refusal to sign a piece of paper as the way he avoided the Electrical Ordinance School. In his recollection, he recounts, "They wanted me to sign something that said I wouldn't try to get out of the Navy. I had an argument with the lieutenant, and he was really disgusted with me." However, the result of his stand pleased George--he was no longer a candidate for a Service School. Not only did that almost guarantee a ship-assignment, it also guaranteed a ten-day boot leave. George pointed out to Carrie that if he had attended the Electrical Ordinance School, he would have had to wait four months for his extended leave since the school's courses ran that long. (Sailors in Service Schools received only weekend liberties.)<sup>56</sup>

George definitely had been anticipating the post-graduation, ten-day liberty. (Those who lived far away from NTS received more days for what George called in a letter to Carrie “traveling time.” NTS phrased it as “necessary travel time to his home.”) In a letter to his mother written just seven days after he reported to NTS, George was already planning how he would spend his boot leave. He asked Carrie to see if Ed could take vacation time after NTS graduation. The two brothers could spend some days together if he did. George readily knew even in February how he specifically wanted to spend his boot leave--“I would like nothing better than to go camping in a good spot where I can sleep all day.” After the May 10<sup>th</sup> graduation ceremony, George began his ten-day leave that same day. What he called in a letter to his mother “a special payday” also signaled the milestone he and the other recruits had reached. In recognition of the graduation and boot leave, George told Carrie that his last pay at NTS “will be more than a regular payday.” Unlike many of his fellow graduates, he did not have to spend some of the money on traveling expenses.<sup>57</sup>

Today, almost eighty years after boot camp, George has more recollections of his ten-day leave than he does of the graduation ceremony. He is not sure if his family attended the event. It could very well be that on May 10, 1938, his upcoming liberty occupied his thoughts more than the ceremony itself. When he explains the idea of “boot leave” now, a smile appears on his face. “I am pretty sure, given my desires at the time, I went camping. I used to enjoy a particular canyon that had, through most of the year, a little trickle of running water in the creek and a lot of oak trees in the canyon.” George undoubtedly delighted in the freedom he enjoyed in those ten days. At the same time, he understood that the hours he spent in his old outdoor haunts might be the last such forays he would have for quite awhile. As George explains, with his NTS graduation, “I knew that my life was changing.” And so it was, in ways he could never have imagined.

### Chapter 3

#### “Starting to ‘See the World,’ ”

May 27, 1938 – November 30, 1941

Once George reported back to NTS, he received news of his first duty station. It was the assignment George wanted--a seagoing station, not one on land. On May 27, 1938, he reported for duty on board the battleship *USS Oklahoma*. It was then anchored in San Pedro, California, up the coast from San Diego’s NTS. Within a month, the *Oklahoma* pulled out. As George wrote his mother Carrie, the battleship would depart for “a cruise that will take in all the west coast and Hawaii. I’m starting to ‘see the world’ a lot quicker than I really expected.”<sup>58</sup>

In the next three and a half years, George’s horizons expanded in more than one way. The young sailor had known only San Diego since the Coburns moved

there when George was about a year old. Yet in his first three years in the United States Navy, he visited towns on America's West Coast and East Coast. In California, George took liberty time in San Pedro, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and San Francisco. In Washington State, the *Oklahoma* dropped anchor at the Puget Sound Navy Yard. While the battleship remained in dry dock, George visited Bremerton and Seattle. On the East Coast, he trained for four months at a Washington, D.C. Navy school. On his way there, George briefly visited the Panama Canal Zone and New York City. Once in the nation's capital, he used his liberty time for sightseeing. Additionally, in his first years in the Navy the *Oklahoma* sailed as far west as the Hawaiian Islands. The young man who had never left the United States mainland stepped foot on the islands of Hawaii and Oahu. George walked the streets of Hilo and Honolulu, marveling at the native plants. Beginning in the summer of 1938, George definitely was "starting to 'see the world.'" At some points it was just through a port hole, while at other times he enjoyed liberty in various towns. Today, George remembers the old recruitment line, "Join the Navy and See the World." His brother Ed used to add the caveat, "through a porthole." And sometimes, to be truthful, an image of the shoreline was all that George did see.

George's letters to Carrie detail aspects of his life for the three and a half years he served on board the *Oklahoma*. As in his correspondence from boot camp, the letters mailed from the battleship sometimes ran ten pages in length. In one of them, George explained in a postscript why he did not write more. "The only reason I stop writing is that I'm really afraid a three cent stamp won't take much more." The letters became fewer in number and shorter in length after the first two years. As a Christmas gift in December 1939, Carrie mailed George some writing tools, perhaps as a gentle hint to pick up the pen more often. George apologetically acknowledged receiving the package. "I know that I should have written to you long ago, but somehow I have neglected it. I got the pen and pencil set and am writing with it now." Collectively, in the thirty-four letters Carrie saved from her son's years on board the *Oklahoma*, certain themes stand out. In more than one piece of correspondence, he described the ship to his mother, his duties on the *Oklahoma*, the "cruises" the ship embarked on, and the liberty he enjoyed. The correspondence also offers insights into George's character. He displayed a clear desire to advance himself and to save money, not just spend it.<sup>59</sup>

### *"This Luxurious Home Of Pig Iron And Steel"*

When George entered NTS, his rate was that of an apprentice seaman. But he boarded the *Oklahoma* as a seaman 2<sup>nd</sup> class (S2c). The boot camp "recruit" was now a "sailor." (Some other common names for enlisted men were "bluejackets," "white hats," and "gobs." George remembers being addressed by all of those names.) S2c George Coburn left San Diego on an oil tanker at 2:00 a.m. on May 27, 1938, bound for San Pedro, some eighty-five nautical miles up the coast from his hometown. He described the voyage in a letter to his mother written three days later. "We had a swell trip all the way up. The ocean was as smooth as glass." The tanker arrived in

San Pedro around 10:00 a.m., and two hours later, he reported on board the *USS Oklahoma*.<sup>60</sup>

George's initial description to Carrie of his new home testified to what impressed him about the *Oklahoma*--its size. "The ship is about as big as a whole city. It has over a thousand and one hundred men aboard, not counting the officers, and there is one of those around every corner." Before the year ended, the *Oklahoma* entered dry dock for annual maintenance work. George joined other crewmen in cleaning its bottom. The height of the hull itself equaled that of a six-story building. He observed in a letter to Carrie, "The ship is so big that when you are under it, it looks...as if you were under a big building or something." Two months after he joined the crew, he referred to the *Oklahoma* as "this luxurious home of pig iron and steel." George also came to call the battleship by a nickname its crew used with affection, the *Okie*.<sup>61</sup>



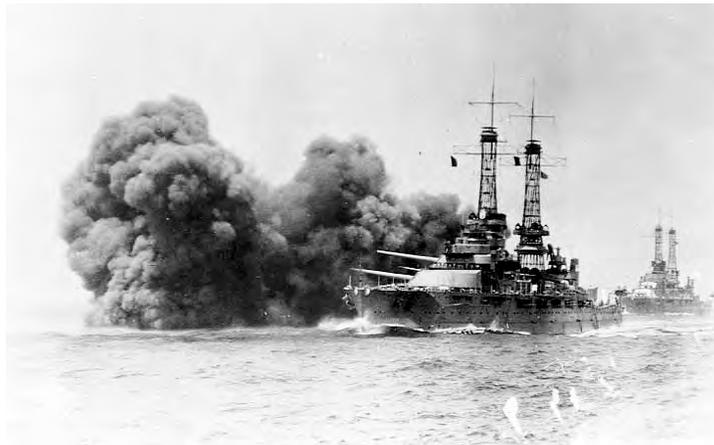
*USS Oklahoma*, April 1938

In stepping on board his first duty station, George became part of a battleship crew that generally numbered between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred men. In the summer of 1938, a battleship (also known as a battlewagon) was the premier warship in the United States Fleet. It had been so since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the appearance of a modern Navy. For some three hundred years before that, European navies in wartime counted on their wooden sailing ships, with cannons that fired from the sides of the hull, to engage the enemy. But by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the United States had built armored, steam-driven ships equipped with heavy guns; some fired from turrets. Battlewagons were the fighting ships in the United States Navy. One World War II battleship sailor described his vessel as "one big floating gun platform." George agrees with this assessment.<sup>62</sup>

The Navy had fifteen battleships when George boarded the *Oklahoma*. In the first three years of his service--1938, 1939, and 1940--the number remained fifteen. Each battleship was about as long as two football fields. (The *Oklahoma* measured

583 feet in length.) If all fifteen lined up behind each other, they would extend some six and a half miles. In a battle, ideally the ships were to follow each other, with about half a mile between them. War plans never envisioned battleships individually confronting an enemy. Instead, groups of them would do so. Navies divided their battleships into units called “divisions.” As naval historians have explained, the ships would, in these divisions, “concentrate heavy fire on one part of the enemy’s fleet, sinking and disabling one or two divisions of its battleships quickly, and then turning the heavy guns on the rest of the enemy’s forces.”<sup>63</sup>

When George joined the crew of the *Oklahoma*, the battlewagon had yet to engage an enemy ship. In theory, World War I (1914-1918) offered the initial crewmembers such an opportunity. Construction began on the battleship in 1911. The *Oklahoma* was christened in 1914 and commissioned in 1916. She and her sister ship, the *USS Nevada*, were the first United States battleships to, as George puts it, “use oil to fire their boilers instead of coal. The engines ran on steam from the boilers.” World War I had broken out in Europe five months after the *Oklahoma*’s christening. But the battlewagon’s oil-burning engines precluded her extensive use once the United States entered the war in April 1917. (America joined the Allies, principally Great Britain and France, in opposition to the Central Powers, led by Germany.) Great Britain simply could not get enough oil through a German blockade to accommodate ships like the *Nevada* and the *Oklahoma*. While both battlewagons arrived off the coast of Ireland in the summer of 1918, they spent most of their time at anchor. The *Oklahoma* remained in the war zone for eighty days. It left the harbor only one time, on a two-day trip escorting troopships to England. During those months, the crew basically drilled on board ship.<sup>64</sup>



*USS Oklahoma* firing her guns during exercises in the 1920s.

### *Aggression In Europe And The Pacific*

In the late 1930s, George would have heard more and more references to World War I due to events in Europe. Newspapers, radio accounts, and newsreels

shown in theaters reported on the growth of totalitarianism in Germany and Italy. Because of this fact, Americans remembered World War I as they voiced concerns that another war could occur. Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933. Benito Mussolini held power in Italy beginning in 1922. Both men were dictators who solidified their hold on power throughout the 1930s. They embraced a fascist mentality that condoned authoritarian rule and failed to recognize individual rights. Clearly, neither ruler embraced the democratic ideals America represented.

Hitler and Mussolini also shared a desire for territorial expansion. In March 1935, for example, Hitler publically announced his plan to buildup the German military, an act in clear violation of the treaty that had ended World War I. England and France did nothing to stop Hitler. In October 1935, Italian troops invaded Ethiopia. Months later, Mussolini controlled the African country. The League of Nations, an international peacekeeping organization founded at the end of World War I, failed to aid Ethiopia. The impotence of the international community increased the likelihood that more aggression would follow. It did. In March 1936, less than a year before George graduated high school, Hitler sent German troops into the Rhineland, an industrial area in western Germany. Again, this act violated the treaty ending World War I that had decreed the Rhineland to be a demilitarized zone. Germany and Italy formally aligned themselves with each other in October 1936. They became known as the Axis Powers. As George recollects, "I remember hearing about Mussolini and Hitler, but I really didn't have any understanding of what was going on."

In the Pacific during the 1930s, Japan similarly moved to extend its influence. It invaded Manchuria in 1931 and went to war with China in 1937. For various reasons, Americans paid more attention to what was happening in Europe than to Japanese aggression. Germany's actions reached a new level when, on March 12, 1938, Hitler sent German troops into Austria to enforce his annexation of the country. Austria would now be part of a Greater Germany that would spread throughout Europe. George had enlisted in the Navy in February 1938 and reported aboard the *Oklahoma* in May. At that time, policymakers in Washington, as well as everyday Americans, wondered if another world war was imminent. Supposing one did erupt, the United States might again join an alliance with Great Britain against Germany. When that occurred, ships such as the *Oklahoma* would form the battle line for the United States Navy. Traditional military thinking saw the battlewagons as the initial line of defense in engagements on the open seas. If a world war broke out, and America fought in it, George's first duty station insured he would be on the front lines.

### *F Division*

On one of his first evenings on board, George visited the areas of the ship that kept it moving through the waters--the engine and boiler rooms. Along with a few other recently arrived sailors, George descended "about a mile down" into the *Oklahoma*. He thought, as he wrote Carrie, he "might like to go down there to stay

before I knew what it was like.” George concisely characterized conditions in the engine and boiler rooms. It was, he announced to his mother, as “hot as hades.” George told Carrie he had considered working there before his visit. But “it was too hot for me that night, and they only had a small part of the equipment in operation. I don’t see how they can stand a four-hour watch down there and come out feeling O.K. They make rates a little faster, but they sure deserve them.” As it turned out, George’s station on board the ship was at a distance from the engine and boiler rooms. He ended up on the upper decks, in gunnery. Specifically, he was assigned to fire control.<sup>65</sup>

A United States Navy ship divided its crew among six major organizational units called “departments”--gunnery, navigation, engineer, construction and repair, supply, and medical. Each department, in turn, was divided into “divisions.” An officer in the gunnery department’s F Division quickly sought out George and three other new crewmen. As George detailed to his mother, the officer “picked four of us out of the draft before anyone else got a chance to get us. He got the four with the highest grades in the tests down at the station [NTS] because he says that we have to have brains to make anything in this division.” Today, George recalls the general aptitude test he took in boot camp. Part of it evaluated the recruit’s mathematical abilities. When he was in public school, math had been his favorite subject. “I understood numbers, and I understood angles...I had a pretty good understanding of the physical relationship of all kinds of things to one another.” He concisely explained his job to his mother in his first letter home. It “has to do with automatic firing of the guns.”<sup>66</sup>

It was those guns, of course, that defined the Battleship *Oklahoma*. Over the years, the Navy added to the ship’s arsenal when the *Oklahoma* was refitted. The battlewagon carried the 14-inch guns that constituted the greatest firing power on any battleship. They measured over fifty-three feet in length and weighed sixty-three tons. The 14-inch guns fired 1,400-pound shells that had a maximum range of



over eleven miles. If engaged with an enemy, their primary target would be battleships and cruisers. The *Oklahoma* also had in its arsenal 5-inch guns that, in a confrontation, would target enemy destroyers. George points out that the principle anti-aircraft (AA) weapon was a 5-inch 38-caliber gun. Other 5-inch guns, he adds, “were designed for surface action.” The battlewagon had additional guns as well, such as the 3-inch 50-caliber AA guns that would target enemy planes. George recalls that the 3-inch guns “had the worst bark for the ears” [i.e., their noise hurt the ears more than the other guns]. Machine guns were on deck, too, some mounted in what were called “gun tubs” on top of the masts. In a letter to his mother, George referred to the power of the weapons. “During the last two weeks, we have fired all the guns. When the big guns go off, it pushes the whole ship sideways enough to make the water swish around it.” And in what had to have been an understatement, George added, “It makes quite a little noise, too.”<sup>67</sup>

But when asked today about his duty station on the *Oklahoma*, George is quick to point out, "I never went on a gun. I was always on the director." Sailors such as George "directed" the firing of the guns, hence their title as members of "fire control." Some members of fire control operated an optical instrument called a "rangefinder" to calculate the distance between the *Oklahoma* and her target. Members of fire control called "spotters" stood atop masts one hundred and twenty feet above the ocean to report if shells were "shorts" or "overs" when it came to hitting the target. (George points out that spotters were always commissioned officers.) In fire control, George used a device called a "director." The Navy installed one on the *Oklahoma* during its 1927 modernization. To aim the guns, the electromechanical device calculated factors such as the direction the battleship was moving in and the wind speed. George defines the director as "a very complex mechanism." He entered the *Oklahoma's* "course and speed" into the director; he did the same for what he calls "the target ship." Then, in George's words, the device "would generate the current position of both ships...It would compute the range between the two points. The director would electrically communicate this information to each of the guns and the battery it [the director] controlled." George summarizes his job in fire control in one simple sentence--"I am operating the director, and the director generates the signal that goes down to the guns." He adds, too, a reference to a "computer." As George explains, "Our AA directors, known as the Mark 19s, were a combination of optics for sighting and rangefinding and a computer to solve the problem of where the guns had to be pointed to hit a moving target. The computer had no electronic parts. It was a complex arrangement of gears, cams, integrators, and magnetic clutches." George points out that radar was on board, "but we never used it. It was kind of primitive." He did, however, use information radar provided to fire control.<sup>68</sup>

A watch on board the ship (i.e., the time spent on duty at a station) lasted four hours. Yet as George notes, "The watches, of course, went on around the clock." Sometimes he reported to a duty station that was not fire control. For example, in his first year on the *Oklahoma*, George occasionally stood messenger watch. In a letter to his mother, George defined what that job entailed--an officer "would tell me to go someplace and tell somebody something." One watch in June 1938 unnerved him. George had reported to the *Oklahoma* only a few days before. "Out of a clear blue sky, one day my division officer told me to clean up and report to the officer of the deck for messenger [duty]." The problem George faced was that his knowledge of the *Oklahoma's* layout was still limited. "I had only been in a small part of the ship and didn't know that part very well. The O.D. [Officer of the Day] didn't know whether I had been aboard a year or a day, and [he] wouldn't have cared anyway." In his early days as a messenger, George asked other sailors for guidance when delivering communications. He emphasizes he did so "out of the officer's sight."<sup>69</sup>

George confessed to Carrie, however, that he did get "crossed up once" in those first watches. "An officer from aboard another ship came aboard and wanted to go down to the log room. He didn't know where it was, and what's worse, I didn't,

either. I guess I looked as puzzled as I was, because as I was turning away, he called me back and asked me if I knew where it was, and I told him 'no' because I couldn't very well ask questions while I was taking someone down there. I caught a fair sized dose of hell right then, but it didn't last long. Finally, he asked me if I knew where the engineer's office was. When I told him I did, and I really did, he told me that the log room and engineer's office are one and the same." Fifteen months later, George was done with messenger watches. Four new sailors arrived in the division, and George was ordered to train them for that duty. Soon, George declared to Carrie, he "won't have to stand the watch any more."<sup>70</sup>

Like all sailors on board, though, he did have to take his turns working in the mess. For that duty, George's title was "mess cook." He points out, though, that he "didn't do any cooking. The mess cook went to the galley to get food to take to tables in his division. The food was placed in pots called tureens. There were five such pots in a set, and the set was placed in a frame with a handle on top. Mess cooks carried the tureen to division mess halls and tables." When the sailors finished eating, "We picked up the dishes and delivered them to the scullery, adjacent to the galley, where they were cleaned." One such mess assignment began on August 1, 1939 and lasted for three months. World War II began in Europe one month into that duty watch. George adds that when bluejackets worked mess duty, they usually did not report to their regular duty station. "But if a general quarters drill occurred, I went back to my regular assignment in fire control."<sup>71</sup>

More than once, George assured Carrie that his workload on board the *Oklahoma* was fairly light. When he was "standing watch," George told his mother, sailors in other divisions would "be scrubbing decks or loading stores or some other hard work." On days when he did not have watch duty, he shared with Carrie the fact that "all I have to do is keep our living quarters clean...After we get the place clean in the morning, all we have to do is make sure we are busy when an officer comes along, which isn't very often." Two months into his service in fire control, George was assigned to the main battery director. It was located in the main top, one hundred and thirty feet up from the deck. In a letter home, though, George admitted that even in the main top, he had little to do. "Up there, we don't even pretend to work. We finish the little bit of work that there is to do and then sit down and talk, sleep, or do as we please." Today George recalls one downside of working in the main top. "We got the full benefits of smoke from the stacks." At the end of his fourth month on board the *Oklahoma*, George declared in a letter to Carrie, "I still spend a large part of my time doing nothing." Twelve months later, that conclusion had not changed. As he then wrote his mother, "My work here is still easy and getting easier all the time." Asked today if he had characterized his duty in such terms to allay any concerns his mother may have had, George quickly replied "no." He really did view his workload as light. Looking back on those prewar years on the *Oklahoma*, George still agrees with those assessments. "I worked a lot harder when I was on the used car lot in San Diego."<sup>72</sup>

*"Hardly...The Same Navy"*

Until he boarded the *Oklahoma*, George equated Navy life with a loss of individual freedom. In his first letter home after arriving on the ship, George shared his surprise at the contrast between boot camp and life on board the battleship. "Everything is so much different here that I hardly recognize it is the same Navy. I haven't done hardly a bit of work since coming aboard Friday at noon. The fellows all tell me that we never have to work more than a few hours a day." Asked today to expand on his first sentence about how different life on board the ship was from what he expected, George explains. "It's the idea, I think, that the control over our persons was much tighter in boot camp than what it was on the ship. The thing on the ship was that as long as you didn't cause a problem or get into some kind of trouble,...you were fine. They didn't try to control you beyond that."<sup>73</sup>

George's contemporary statement echoes a more detailed one he wrote to his mother. "Regulation isn't nearly as strict as I expected it to be." For example, in boot camp recruits learned how to properly salute. "At the station," George continued in his letter, "we had to salute every officer we saw, and if we saw him twice, we saluted him again the second time if he had been out of our sight." Yet George told Carrie how different it was on the *Oklahoma*. "We never salute them unless we are actually talking to them, and half the time not then."<sup>74</sup>

In part because of this relaxed atmosphere, George readily adapted to everyday life as a sailor. Fridays on the *Oklahoma* were what George calls "field days," which, as he defines the phrase, meant "a general cleanup time, whether an inspection occurred or not." The next day George invariably saw beans on his breakfast plate. One memory of mealtimes when the battleship anchored off of Long Beach is accompanied by gales of laughter. "We had one of the ship's cooks who owned an avocado grove, and we had avocados coming out of our ears." Apparently, the cook had some of the crop delivered to the *Oklahoma*. "We had avocados all the time," George recalls with a broad smile. "We [even] had creamed broccoli with sliced bananas mixed in it. We joked about it." When sailors questioned the cook as to why he mixed the two items, the cook replied, "Well, they won't eat the broccoli when I serve broccoli, and they like bananas, so I put bananas in the broccoli." Asked today if he generally liked the food served in mess, George replied, "I was always satisfied with it, but I'm not a gourmet." While inspections and mess reminded the crew of their boot camp experiences, the sleeping accommodations did not. They were markedly different.<sup>75</sup>

Bunks on board the *Oklahoma* replaced the hammocks recruits slept in at NTS. "In our compartment," George explains, "the bunks were four-high." He slept on the top one. George did not climb a ladder, however, to get to his spot. Instead, he used each bunk as a step. "If there was a person in a lower bunk, you got a blast from him." George kept some of what he calls "personal grooming items" in the canvas ditty bag issued to recruits in boot camp. He also had a locker not far from the bunks. It was not large, perhaps, in his estimation, "twenty-four or thirty inches

square." In it, he placed his uniforms, "folded and stacked." Additionally, "Everything you owned went into the locker."

As in other aspects of shipboard life, George even found uniform regulations to be more laidback than at NTS. In a letter to Carrie, he described this change from boot camp. "The condition of your clothes doesn't seem to matter. They [sailors] wear them till they are dirty, not just for one day...and nobody seems to care what kind of shoes you wear or whether or not you have a hat." As in boot camp, sailors on the ship did their own laundry, uniforms as well as underwear. "We had a bucket, and they issued us salt water soap. It came in a big bar, and they would cut hunks off of it. We used that and a kiwi brush." Steam pipes gave the bluejackets hot water. George relates how this was done. "They had some type of a hook device where you could hang the bucket where the steam pipe extended into the water. Then you turned on the steam, [and] presto, you had hot water." When it came to drying the clothes, "Sometimes we would hang them on the lifelines." (In George's words, those were "the lines that border the ship all the way around so that people do not fall overboard. I think they were metal. The posts I know were metal. The strands were metal coated with some anti-corrosive compound.") On days when the crew washed their clothes, George remembers how the *Oklahoma* "looked like a laundry ship. Also, when we aired bedding, we would take that out and hang that over the lifelines."<sup>76</sup>

When it came to washing themselves, sailors used a large, communal shower room equipped with what George describes as "multiple shower heads." Similarly, toilet facilities were also communal. Simply put, George remembers the lavatory room as "a very, very public bathroom." He offers more details when asked to do so. "The toilet was a long trough of cheap metal. It had seats periodically along the trough. One of the things the pranksters used to do was set a piece of paper on fire and put the paper in the trough. Because a lot of water flowed through the trough, the fire was actually moving."

By the time the holiday season came around at the end of 1938, George was content observing them in his new home, the Battleship *Oklahoma*. At Thanksgiving, the ship was in dry dock in the Puget Sound Navy Yard. In a letter to Carrie, George told her that on his first Thanksgiving Day in the Navy, his dinner consisted of "a cup of coffee and a hamburger!" Christmas was no better. On December 26<sup>th</sup>, he wrote his mother, "Well, Merry Christmas is a thing of the past, and I spent it standing a watch." George was not scheduled for duty on Christmas Day, but another bluejacket, suffering from "a bad hangover," offered him two dollars if George would take his watch. Asked today if it was difficult getting used to not being with his family over the holidays, George replied, "Not really. I just had the realization that this was the way it was. And I might say that I was in the Navy for eight years, and at Christmas time, I spent every one of them aboard ship." George tempers the last statement with a laugh.<sup>77</sup>

*"A Guy Who Puts Himself Out A Little"*

After his first holidays as a sailor, George anxiously awaited a ratings test to be given early in 1939. If he passed it, he would advance to the rate of seaman 1<sup>st</sup> class (S1c). In his initial letter home after reporting to the *Oklahoma*, George shared with Carrie his desire to take the exam as soon as he could. In another letter, though, he explained to his mother that the Navy required a ten-month wait between advancement from S2c to S1c. His plan to move up through the rates is evident in more than one of his letters. In June and July 1938, George, in his own words, spent “most of my spare time...studying” for the test. George thinks he probably used *The Bluejackets’ Manual* to prepare for the exam. He told Carrie in a July 31<sup>st</sup> letter, “I have already finished my Seaman first training course, but I’ll keep going over it till the exams are over.” George confessed to his mother in that same letter, “I’ll be plenty sore if I don’t make it the first chance I get to go up [in the ratings]...” At the same time, he understood how the system worked. Only a certain number of S1c openings would be available. While George was realistic, he was also optimistic. “Anyway, there is always a good chance for a guy who puts himself out a little to get ahead of others.”<sup>78</sup>

Two months later, he again assumed a cautionary tone in a letter to Carrie. “It’s just about four more months till I get the chance to try for seaman first. The way things are stacking up, the rate is going to be pretty hard to make because there [are] a lot of men going up and only a few rates available. I’m still in high hopes of making it first time, though.” A week later, George took a final exam in a “Seaman’s study course.” With a possible “top mark” of 4.0, he earned a 3.84, or a 96%. Such a score, he informed Carrie, “easily makes me eligible to go up for seaman in January.” George’s confidence proved to be well founded. He made S1c on February 16, 1939. Twelve months earlier, he had just entered boot camp.<sup>79</sup>

Throughout his eight years in the Navy, George never relented in his plan to advance himself. In the prewar years, he moved from the seaman rates to fire control rates. The latter required his attendance at a fire control school at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. The Navy operated several specialty schools. Some trained radio operators, aviation machinist’s mates, and deep-sea divers. Fire control, however, had been George’s duty station since he arrived on the *Oklahoma*. He enjoyed the division and had no desire to transfer out of it. But the Navy did have one stipulation for bluejackets who qualified for fire control schools. Such sailors had to sign up for two more years of service. In the spring of 1940, when this opportunity arose for George, he was halfway through his original four-year enlistment. Still, his desire to advance proved stronger than any reservations he felt about extending his military service. In a May 1940 letter to his mother, George announced, “February 1944 is the date for my pay off now.” Looking back today on his decision, George displays no regrets. “Keeping the school going cost the Navy some real dollars. I certainly can’t fault them for saying, ‘If you want to go to this school, you’ve got to give us some more time.’ ”<sup>80</sup>

At the end of May 1940, George received word that he was to leave the *Oklahoma* to attend the fire control school in the nation's capital. The battleship was then anchored at Pearl Harbor on the Hawaiian island of Oahu. With only about a two-hour notice, George packed his sea bag. He boarded the destroyer *USS Balch* that took him to San Francisco. During the voyage, George told Carrie he experienced his first bout of seasickness after more than two years in the Navy. It was not a severe case, however. As he assured his mother, "After feeding the fishes, I felt fine." In San Francisco, he boarded an Army transport ship, the *Leonard Wood*, which took him to New York City via the Panama Canal. The days on the Army vessel seemed like a vacation. In a letter to Carrie, George shared his routine with his mother. "Life on the Army transport is so easy that it is tiresome. If we don't want to eat breakfast, we don't have to get up until eight in the morning. Even so, the days seem awfully long because it is so hot, and there is nothing for us to do but sit around and notice just how hot it is." Bluejackets could watch a movie every night. Once the *Leonard Wood* docked in New York, Washington, D.C. was only a short train ride away.<sup>81</sup>

George excelled at the fire control school. Two months into a six-month curriculum, instructors posted the class average. George wrote his mother, "My name was holding down one of the choice positions near the top." (In his first week at the school, George stopped drinking beer because he believed it affected his ability to study.) He enumerated for Carrie the primary subjects fire control students studied--mathematics, electricity, Fire Control mechanics, optics, and rangekeepers (i.e., electromechanical fire control computers). The last one, George



*USS Oklahoma* circa 1940

admitted to Carrie, "has been a pretty tough subject." Today, George remembers the course lesson that covered rangekeepers was entitled something like "Basic Mechanical Devices." He recounts, "It introduced us to the use of gear segments to

generate vectors. The vector gave us the course and speed of a vessel. An integrator generated the speed of a ship." These were just a few of the mechanical devices. There were, George emphasizes, "a lot more." With three months still left at the school, one can almost hear him emit a deep sigh in a September letter to his mother. "This thing of studying all the time is getting old, though, and I'll be glad to get back to sea." Specifically, George wanted to return to the *Oklahoma*. He had no desire to be assigned to a different ship. George completed fire control school on November 22, 1940. His rate was now fire controlman second class (F2c). That translated into a twelve dollar a month pay raise. As George had hoped, his orders returned him to the *USS Oklahoma*.<sup>82</sup>

*"I Like To Be Square With The World"*

It was not unusual for George to refer to money in his letters home. Even while in boot camp, he announced to Carrie his financial strategy. After George received his first wages as a recruit, he envisioned the time soon when, he informed his mother, "I'll be able to pay off all my debts, and I'll still have some [money] left over. I'm hoping to save a few dollars every payday. What I don't spend then, I will put in the bank and leave it there." He understood, though, the temptations a young man faced when it came to spending money. Yet he pointed to a character trait he was determined to foster within himself--"I like to be square with the world, even though it is so easy to get into debt." George felt uncomfortable owing anyone money, including his own brother. Sometimes he borrowed a few dollars from Robert when he was home for a visit. But George paid back even that small indebtedness as soon as he could. At least once he helped out a family member with money he had saved. George offered to loan his brother Dick cash for a car. "Whatever I send you," he wrote Dick, "there will be no hurry about paying [it] back."<sup>83</sup>

Two years into his service, however, he suffered a financial setback. He shared it with his mother because it impacted what he knew she looked forward to--his trips home. "I ran up some bills recently and expect to put everything I earn into paying them off during the next three months. For that reason, I won't be home for quite a while." Even in those months when George placed himself on a strict budget, he still made a monthly deposit of at least twelve dollars into a Bank of America joint savings account. When he had opened it up, he listed Carrie as the second signatory. Receipts for a six-month period in 1940 show only deposits. George made no withdrawals in that time. In July 1940, the balance had reached \$326.62.<sup>84</sup>

Several letters testify to George's generosity to his mother. Even though he preferred not to send cash through the mail, he did so on more than one occasion. The very last line in one letter, for example, read, "I am sending a couple of dollars for you to use as you please." In another, George directed Carrie to "make good use of the five" he obviously enclosed in the envelope. He sent her fifteen dollars on September 19, 1941 with the request that she spend it "for anything you wish. Maybe a new pair of shoes, a hat, or purse or something like that." Two months later, George mailed her a money order to, as he phrased it, "help you fill out your Christmas shopping list. Get a gift for everyone, and if there is anything left, spend it however you wish." George showed concern for his mother's financial situation in another way. Just a few months after he reported for duty on the *Oklahoma*, George took out a two thousand dollar life insurance policy on himself that the United States government offered to its military. He designated Carrie as the beneficiary. The maximum amount of such a policy was ten thousand dollars, but as George points out today, the premium on that amount would have been greater than the premium on two thousand dollars. Ever careful with his expenses, George decided on the smaller number. Eventually, George also designated a twenty-five-dollar-a-

month allotment payment for his mother; the sum was, he explains, deducted from his pay.<sup>85</sup>

### *Cruises*

The content in some of George's correspondence dramatically changed in 1941 from what it had been in 1938, 1939, and 1940. In his May 30, 1938 letter (the first one he wrote after boarding the *Oklahoma*), George freely shared the battleship's itinerary with Carrie. "We are going out to sea tomorrow...On the ninth of next month, we are starting on a cruise that will take in all [of] the west coast and Hawaii." He announced to his mother that the ship was expected to stay in Hawaii for about a week before it returned to the mainland. Such details are understandable given the date when he wrote those passages. No world war had yet broken out in Europe. (That was still more than a year away.) When George reported to the *Oklahoma*, the United States military did not censor the letters of its soldiers, sailors, and Marines. As such, for about three years George told Carrie when the *Oklahoma* was to leave port, what its destination was, and how long the ship was expected to be gone from San Pedro or Pearl Harbor (at different times, those were its two home ports). Another letter written on June 4, 1938 detailed the ship's schedule for the rest of the year. Because San Diego had been George's world for basically his entire life, the cities he would see must have excited him--San Francisco, Seattle, and Honolulu. He was conveying more than an itinerary to his mother. George was sharing his excitement with her.<sup>86</sup>

In many letters George wrote over the next few years, he continued to divulge the details of his ship's travels. He never referred to a trip out to sea as a "voyage." George usually described it as a "cruise," a word he picked up from the other sailors. His first two trips began with the *Oklahoma's* departure from its 1938 homeport of San Pedro/Long Beach. After those voyages, George clearly had his so-called sea legs. As he reported to Carrie on the two cruises, "The water was very smooth and the ship didn't rock a bit more than it does here in the harbor, which, by the way, is enough to make dry land feel strange." When George made that observation, he had been on the battleship for only five days.<sup>87</sup>

George wrote Carrie about not only the itinerary of the *Oklahoma*, but at times he even shared information with her about other ships. In a September 1938 letter, he let her know that in November, the *Oklahoma* would be in dry dock at the Puget Navy Yard for about three months. After that, "We will stay somewhere along this coast. The rest of the battleships are going east." The *Oklahoma's* itinerary did not significantly change the next year. In January 1939, writing from dry dock in Bremerton, he told his mother about an on board posting of the ship's schedule for the spring and summer of 1939. "Most of the time, we will be going up and down the coast and not stopping anywhere. We have twenty days landing party on San Clemente and two months, May and June, are marked unknown."<sup>88</sup>

The year 1941 brought an end to George's detailed letters home. The world war so many feared in 1938 broke out in September 1939 when Germany invaded Poland. As in the Great War just twenty-five years earlier, major European nations faced off in competing alliances. The European Axis Powers, led by Germany, fought the Allies, led by Great Britain and France. President Roosevelt immediately proclaimed the United States to be a neutral nation, although policymakers in Washington, D.C. clearly favored the Allies. FDR's September 8, 1939 proclamation of "a limited national emergency" promised to safeguard the nation's neutrality while at the same time strengthening America's defenses.

Less than a year later, the situation became more ominous for the Allies. In the summer of 1940, German troops entered Paris. Basically, Great Britain now stood alone against Hitler's forces. Because of this fact, President Roosevelt skillfully maneuvered more aid to England. To prepare the United States for a war it may be forced to enter, Congress enacted, and the president signed, a draft law in September 1940. That same month, Germany, Italy, and Japan entered into a formal alliance.

Eight months later, in May 1941 as the war appeared even more ominous for the Allies, FDR declared "an unlimited national emergency." Roosevelt stressed to the American people that the Axis powers posed a threat "throughout the world" to "existing democratic order." What he identified as "a worldwide domination of peoples and economies" existed. The "military, naval, air and civilian defenses" were to "be put on the basis of readiness..." Defense spending increased from \$1.9 billion in 1939 to \$7.2 billion in 1941.<sup>89</sup>

Developments in Europe, and the United States' response to them, provide the context for the change in frequency and content of George's letters to his mother. Presuming Carrie kept every letter George mailed to her, in 1941 he wrote only four letters home. That was a marked decline from the number he had written to his mother from the *Oklahoma* in 1938 (fourteen), 1939 (nine), and 1940 (seven). A June 1, 1941 letter bluntly declared how the content of his correspondence now fell under censorship--"I cannot tell you where the ship is or anything that will reveal where it is." George further explained why his letters were now so few in numbers--"so little of what does happen...is permissible to write about." Because of the censorship, he had "practically nothing to put into a letter."<sup>90</sup>



Aid to Great Britain, a draft law, increased military spending, and censorship in letters George wrote home all indicated that the United States was on a wartime footing in 1941. So did something as simple as a hat, specifically the "flat hat" worn by sailors since 1852. It had always been manufactured with the name of the bluejacket's ship written on a band that encircled the hat. George had been issued a flat hat with "*USS Oklahoma*" written on the band. On his ship, George remembers sailors wore the flat hat for inspections.

They did not wear it when on liberty; instead, they donned a white hat while on shore leave. But if a sailor from any ship should wear a flat hat while on shore, the Navy knew that type of headwear posed a security problem. It advertised which ship was in port. Beginning in January 1941, because of security concerns, a prominent feature of the flat hat changed. The Navy replaced the ship's name with just a general identification phrase, "U.S. Navy." Thus the hat George wore for inspections in 1941 changed from the hat he had put on in 1938, 1939, and 1940. So did the number and content of his letters home.<sup>91</sup>

### *Liberty*

In his first letter home after reporting to the *Oklahoma*, George included a statement about future trips back to San Diego. Carrie understood that sailors were gone for months at a time. So perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, George tried to lessen his mother's natural feelings of loss. "Aboard this ship, everyone gets the thirty days leave he has coming to him each year." His boot camp leave, George added, "are extra days and don't count against my thirty." He made it clear to Carrie that he intended to spend his thirty-day-leave at home. The *Oklahoma* would never drop anchor, however, in San Diego. "The harbor is too small and shallow for us to be safe in there," George explained to his mother. In October 1938, the battleship stopped in San Diego, but it did not enter the harbor. Instead, it anchored outside of it. "No one but the big shots got liberty," George grumbled to Carrie.<sup>92</sup>

Sometimes when the *Oklahoma* was in San Pedro, George made it home by taking a Greyhound bus from Long Beach to San Diego. Two considerations factored into such a trip, though. George needed enough liberty time, and he needed enough



money. About three months after he reported for duty on the battleship, George had both. In August 1938, he thus went home for the first time since his boot leave. Two weeks after George visited his family in San Diego, he had another such opportunity, but he could not use it. "If I had enough money, I could have been home again this weekend with liberty starting at noon Saturday and not up till eight o'clock Tuesday morning." It was the lack of cash-on-hand that posed the problem. "I would only have fifteen dollars, though, and two weeks ago I got rid of twenty-five without any trouble at all."<sup>93</sup>

Until the Navy transferred the Pacific Fleet to Pearl Harbor in May 1940, George spent much of his liberty in Long Beach when the *Oklahoma* anchored at San Pedro. About six to seven miles separated the two cities. "I rarely went to San Pedro," he recalls today. "The ship ran liberty boats to either San Pedro or Long Beach. I went to Long Beach." In the latter city, "the Pike" attracted bluejackets. A popular destination for many sailors, the Pike was an area of Long Beach where an amusement park stood.

Bluejackets could ride the slow-moving Hippodrome Merry-Go-Round or the fast Cyclone Racer roller coaster. If sailors preferred a more risqué pastime, they could buy tickets for burlesque shows. Bars offered drinks, or non-alcoholic refreshments could be found at hamburger and chili stands. Concessions sold snow cones and saltwater taffy. With a laugh, George remembers “the girls” as a major attraction. As he recalls it, “The Pike was one of the first stops most guys made when on liberty. If they were going someplace else, they might visit the Pike first.”<sup>94</sup>

George did that just days after he reported to the *Oklahoma* late in May 1938. Twice on his first weekend as a crewmember, he took a liberty boat to Long Beach. As he shared with Carrie, “The ‘Pike’ in Long Beach is as far as I got either night. They tried to sell me everything from a hamburger to a suit of tailor-made-blues down there...I couldn’t do much, though, because I was nearly broke.” Sometimes, he unapologetically confessed to his mother that he rented a room in Long Beach while on liberty. George admitted that cost him some money, as did meals and entertainment. He did not see that as money wasted, however, even though he could sleep, eat, and watch movies on board the *Oklahoma*. As George reasoned, “Life aboard here would get very tiresome if it weren’t for a few breaks.”<sup>95</sup>

Sailors understood that liberty towns viewed the visits of bluejackets in two, contradictory ways. George succinctly summarized the viewpoints in a letter to his mother. “They cuss the fleet when it is here and moan when it is not.” Certainly San Pedro and Long Beach residents showed their awe of the military when the Navy put on a “show,” as George called it, in September 1938. He described the event in another letter to Carrie. “Water taxis [were] all over the bay, full of people who had come out to watch, and they sure got their money’s worth...All the ships were in formation and all the planes were flying in formation overhead. It was a real showoff of naval power.” Reading this letter, one can tell that the “show” even impressed George, who had graduated boot camp just four months earlier. “After the ships had anchored,” he continued, “the planes power-dived from way up where they looked like specks, till they just had time to pull out of the dive without hitting the ships. Then they laid down a smoke screen, and a squadron of bombers came right though it.”<sup>96</sup>

On some weekends, George traveled from the San Pedro/Long Beach area to Los Angeles, twenty-some miles north. He remembers riding the Red Car, an electric railway system, for the trip. Once in downtown L.A., George recalls he “would take a bus or taxi from there. We used to take taxis quite a bit when we were on liberty because taxis were pretty cheap then. They were more expensive than the bus, but they were not budget busters the way they became later.” George found liberty in L.A. fairly inexpensive. As he concluded in a letter to his mother, “You can eat for a dime, see five pictures for a nickel and rent a room for thirty-five cents.” In October 1938, George used his liberty time to visit a very special person who lived in L.A.-- Mrs. Foster. That woman had taken care of him in Minnesota when poor health forced his mother to leave for San Diego. George had not seen Mrs. Foster since he was a toddler. A letter to Carrie testified to how long they visited. George informed

George & Mrs. Foster, summer  
1921



his mother that he arrived at Mrs. Foster's home around 2:30 p.m. "We talked steadily from then till about eleven o'clock that evening." The two obviously enjoyed their reunion.<sup>97</sup>

In the summer of 1939, while the rest of the Pacific Fleet went to San Francisco, the *Oklahoma* stopped in Santa Barbara. The battleship anchored there on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Writing to Carrie, George described Santa Barbara as a city where "a lot of rich people" lived. He referred to "mansions off in the hills and swell yachts down in the harbor." George thought the sailors received "swell treatment" by the community. Residents organized dances for the sailors, and many people "took it upon themselves to drive us around town and the surrounding country." The crew of the *Oklahoma* reciprocated. Around one thousand visitors boarded the ship each day for a tour.<sup>98</sup>

George's favorite liberty town was up the coast from Santa Barbara--San Francisco. When asked why he readily chose it over other cities, he responded with a laugh. "Probably because it had better bars." His first visit to San Francisco was in mid-July 1938, almost two months after boarding the *Oklahoma*. That weekend, George stayed on shore from Saturday to Monday. He described to Carrie some meals out and a motion picture he saw. "They have some swell theaters in Frisco, but the swell ones get a swell price out of you." On another liberty in San Francisco two years later, George visited his high school friend Perry. The Navy had rejected Perry as a recruit in 1938. When George saw him, he was serving time in San Quentin, a state prison on the north side of San Francisco Bay. While George clearly enjoyed San Francisco, he missed San Pedro's "sunshine."<sup>99</sup>

The *Oklahoma* often stopped in San Francisco before and after it went into dry dock at the Puget Sound Navy Yard in Washington State. Sailors referred to it as "the yard" or simply "Bremerton." (The latter is the town where the yard is located.) George remembers it as "not a big town." Ships made visits to the yard for repairs and regular maintenance. Sailors scraped the bottom of the vessel, for example, before painting it and the ship's sides. George recalls utilizing "a straight hoe" that had "a blade we used to scrape off the barnacles." The rains endemic to the region sometimes added to the bluejackets' work. In December 1938, George told his mother that it rained daily, so much so that in the mornings, "When we go up into the top, it is full of water. We took out thirteen buckets full one morning and worked the rest of the day cleaning the place up." Once off the ship, in Bremerton sailors found several ways to spend their time. "We have all kinds of recreational facilities," George wrote Carrie. "Everything from ping pong to a swimming pool and a free theater." Today George characterizes nearby Seattle as a "pretty good" liberty town. He describes it, however, as "a long ferry ride away from Bremerton." During one stay in Bremerton, George went on a skiing trip to Mount Rainier, over eighty miles southeast of the yard. He shared details in a letter home. Even though it was late in

May, the snow was eighteen feet deep. "Our room was on the third floor, and...we could go out a door from there without any drop at all."<sup>100</sup>

On the East Coast, George experienced liberty in New York City and in Washington, D.C. because of his time in Fire Control School. In traveling to the East Coast for the specialized training, the transport ship he was on went through the Panama Canal. George had liberty in the Canal Zone. "It was my first introduction to dark beer," he recalls. Once the ship arrived in New York City, George and five other sailors went into the Big Apple. But he quickly notes, "Between us, we only had twenty-six cents." They had spent their money in the Canal Zone. In New York City, George continues, "We bought a loaf of bread and lunchmeat. We sat on a bench and ate our lunch." They spent the rest of their liberty, before boarding a train to Washington, just walking around. From July-November 1940, George lived at the Navy Yard while in Fire Control School. By the time George left, he did not have a high opinion of Washington as a place for sailors looking for a good time. In one of his last letters to Carrie from the capital, George concluded it was not a town where bluejackets could go "ashore and [be] raising hell." It costs ten dollars, he added, to get out of jail, "and they throw them [sailors] in for next to nothing." George quickly adapted by asking his mother to mail him a civilian suit that hung in his closet at home. "A uniform doesn't rate much in this town," he continued in the letter, "and in order to go places and do things, civilian clothes are pretty near a necessity." Even before those arrived, though, George had seen many of the main sights--the Lincoln Memorial, the Smithsonian, the Library of Congress, the Capitol building, and the Washington Monument (whose eight hundred and ninety-seven steps he walked up and down). In the Congressional Library, George stood in a long line to see the original copy of the United States Constitution.<sup>101</sup>

George, who knew he would "see the world" as a member of the United States Navy, went ashore on liberty in the Hawaiian Islands. As a member of the Pacific Fleet, the *Oklahoma* dropped anchor there more than once in the years between



George on right, Hilo, circa 1939

George's enlistment and America's entry into World War II. Hilo on the island of Hawaii captivated him. Just a month after boarding the battleship in San Pedro, George found himself in Hilo on his first visit to the islands. Writing to Carrie, he concluded, "I think that [Hilo] is about the prettiest place that I have ever seen." The color green dominated the land. Growing up in San Diego where only winter

rains guaranteed a verdant landscape, Hilo impressed him. "The whole place is green, not just in spots, but all over. My first impression was that it looked like a big

golf course with trees planted in some sections." The fig, coconut, and banana trees added to the wonder.<sup>102</sup>

Honolulu on the island of Oahu did not impress George. It was the largest city near the Pearl Harbor naval base, some twenty miles away. But today George admits, "I rarely went into Honolulu. I really didn't care for the place. I thought the population there was anti-military. They seemed to delight in causing problems for the military people." He adds, though, that maybe the civilian population in Honolulu "was intimidated by the number of military people who were there. We may have outnumbered them." (George clarifies that this "anti-military" feeling was before the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack. "Everything changed after Pearl Harbor," he notes.) Additionally, he described Honolulu as "dumpy and dirty" in a letter to his mother. "There is a small section in Waikiki that is O.K., but that is just around the Royal Hawaiian Hotel and Waikiki beach where all the tourists stay." George judged the hotel to be "a ritzy place." The water off the beach did not strike him as an accommodating area in which to swim. "The bottom is very rough and covered with coral, seaweed, and god only knows what else." A swimmer would not meet up with deep water until "you go out  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from shore. Then it gets very deep all of a sudden."<sup>103</sup>

### *"Something Is Bound To Happen"*

In May 1940, Pearl Harbor became the new base for the Pacific Fleet. Recent and presumed future aggression by the Axis Powers prompted that decision. In Europe, Japan's Axis ally Germany had invaded more countries, principally the Netherlands and Belgium. France seemed to be next. As the Axis Powers expanded their influence in Europe, some policymakers thought Japan might feel emboldened in the Pacific. It could seize more territory in Asia, especially the Dutch East Indies and French Indo-China. With such a grim outlook, President Roosevelt ordered the Pacific Fleet to remain at Pearl Harbor as a deterrent to Japan. In the next eighteen months, the government approved what one admiral later characterized as "generous appropriations for new ships, equipment, manpower, and for shore installations." Exactly a year after the fleet's transfer to Pearl Harbor, in May 1941 the Navy reorganized the Pacific Fleet into three task forces. Task Force II consisted of three battleships (the *USS Oklahoma*, the *USS Arizona* and the *USS Nevada*), the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise*, four heavy cruisers, eighteen destroyers, and four mine vessels. With heightened tensions in the Pacific, two of the three task forces were to always be at sea. Generally, ships spent about forty percent of their time in port at Pearl Harbor and sixty percent of their time on maneuvers.<sup>104</sup>

Throughout 1941, Japan posed an increasing threat to United States territories in the Pacific. As an island nation, it had few of the natural resources needed by a country that believed itself destined to rule the Pacific. The lack of raw materials partly explains Japan's seizure in the 1930s of Far Eastern areas belonging to other nations. What Japan did not have on the home islands, it would acquire from territorial expansion. The military especially needed iron ore, rubber, and oil. Before

a 1940 American embargo, the United States had supplied eighty percent of Japan's oil. Without it, the military literally could not move. The Dutch East Indies was rich in oil. Japanese troops invaded French Indo-China in June 1941. That positioned Japan to seize not only the Dutch East Indies but also the British possessions of Hong Kong and Singapore. United States military bases in the Philippines would be in even more danger if that occurred. When Roosevelt's administration levied its embargo in 1940, Japan had stockpiled a two-year supply of oil. The reserve would run out early in 1942. By that date, Japan needed to control the oil in the Dutch East Indies, without contending with threats from European or American bases in the area. The Japanese military believed it could put the United States' Fleet at Pearl Harbor out of commission for an indefinite period. Once that was done, Japan could seize the territories it needed to consolidate its Pacific empire. It began seriously planning for such an attack early in 1941. Still, late in 1941 Japan and the United States were attempting to negotiate a diplomatic solution to their opposing views on Far Eastern territorial possessions. Among the topics discussed was an American demand that Japan pull back from areas it had seized. Japan, in turn, wanted Roosevelt's government to lift the economic sanctions, especially the oil embargo.<sup>105</sup>

This was the context within which the *Oklahoma* operated late in 1941. George remembers that year as one of "more watches" and one where "the fleet participated in more war games." Some maneuvers occurred around the Hawaiian Islands. Two proved particularly noteworthy for the crew of the *Oklahoma*. One concerned a collision and the other a near-collision between George's battleship and other naval vessels. On October 22, 1941, the *Arizona*, *Nevada*, and *Oklahoma* were on maneuvers southwest of Pearl Harbor. The weather was poor. Rain and clouds made it difficult to see. At 5:35 p.m., the *Oklahoma* hit the *Arizona*, cutting a hole in her port blister (protruding metal on the side of the ship meant to absorb explosions). The collision also ripped off a garbage chute that ended up on the *Oklahoma's* bow. (This incident resulted in the removal of the *Oklahoma's* captain from his post. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, Captain Howard D. Bode assumed command of the battleship.) Damage to both vessels was not serious enough to warrant their return to Pearl Harbor. They did not do so until October 26<sup>th</sup>, after the exercises ended. Repairs were done at that time. George has no recollections of this collision, but he does remember a near collision the next month.<sup>106</sup>

It happened on the evening of November 10<sup>th</sup>. The *Oklahoma* and the *Enterprise* were on an exercise. The two ships got too close to each other. George vividly recalls those minutes when it seemed the battleship and the aircraft carrier would hit each other. On board the *Oklahoma*, he recounts, "They sounded the general alarm and said, 'Stand by for a collision forward.' About a minute later, 'Stand by for a collision amidships.' A minute later, 'Stand by for a collision aft.' The *Enterprise* went by and the overhang of her bow bent the flagstaff on the back of the ship." That was the extent of the damage to the *Oklahoma*. Upon her return to Pearl Harbor, she pulled into dry dock for repairs. The battleship stayed in dry dock for sixteen days. One could muse, however, that it would have been best for the crew and ship if the *Oklahoma* had been more seriously damaged, not enough to injure

any crewmembers, but enough to necessitate at least a month in dry dock. If that had happened, the battleship would not have been in its berth off Ford Island on December 7, 1941. When the Japanese attacked the Pacific Fleet that morning, the *Oklahoma* would thus not have capsized, trapping over four hundred men inside of the vessel.<sup>107</sup>

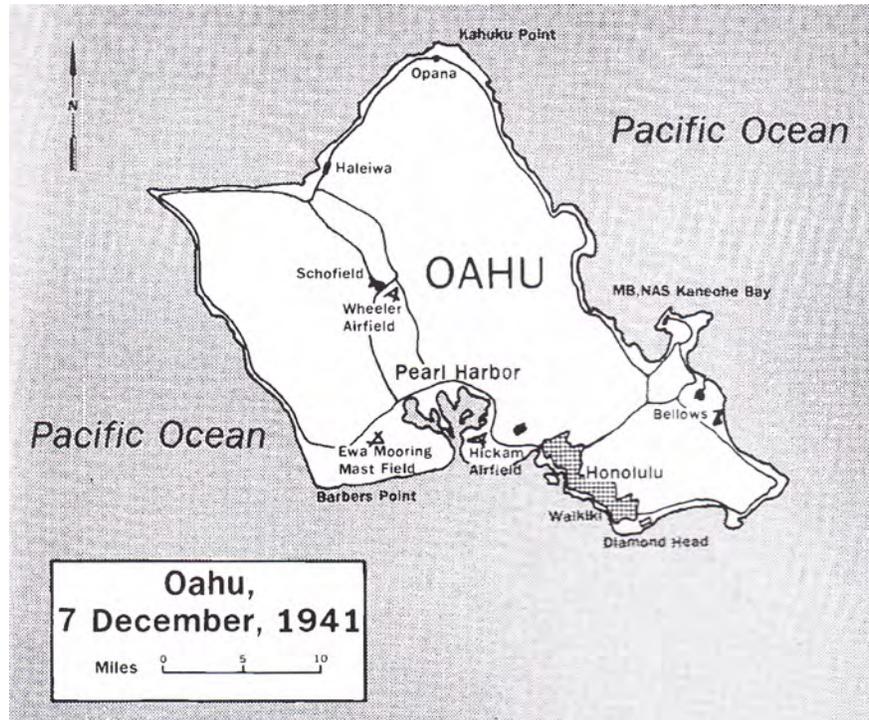
Nine days after the near-miss incident with the *Enterprise*, George wrote another letter to his mother. He complained to her that it was “hot as hell.” Yet “I’m still trying to decide whether the heat or the monotony is the worst. Today is the uninteresting duplicate of yesterday, tomorrow will be the duplicate of today, and so on into what seems infinity, but I guess it can’t last forever. Something is bound to happen.” That “something” occurred less than three weeks later.<sup>108</sup>

#### Chapter 4 “A Serious Misjudgment,” December 7, 1941

George Coburn’s February 1938 decision to enlist in the Navy and his subsequent assignment to the *USS Oklahoma* put him at the center of one of the most consequential days in American history--December 7, 1941. That morning, Japan attacked the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. President Franklin D. Roosevelt judged it as “a date which will live in infamy.” Japanese planes targeted Battleship Row, the name given to berths around Ford Island where American battlewagons moored. Planes dropped bombs, too, on other naval vessels and on military airbases on Oahu. Japan reasoned that if it could cripple the American fleet, it would have time to expand its empire by securing access to raw materials that would ensure a Japanese hegemony in the Pacific. This, George concludes, was “a serious misjudgment” of “the resolve and capability of the American people.” In spite of the tremendous casualties and material losses on December 7<sup>th</sup>, the United States led an alliance that not only defeated Japan, but also vanquished the European Axis nations. George’s wartime military service began in the opening hours of America’s participation in World War II. It continued for four more years as a crewmember of a heavy cruiser that fought in campaigns throughout the Pacific Theater.

On December 7, 1941, the United States had approximately 110,000 servicemen and women stationed at Pearl Harbor and other military bases on Oahu. With its one hundred and one ships at Pearl that morning, Navy personnel probably accounted for a large number of the 110,000. The various ships--battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines, a gunboat, minelayers, minesweepers, and auxiliary vessels--represented about one-half of the Pacific Fleet. Other ships in the fleet were at navy yards on the West Coast or at sea on various missions. Eight of the vessels at Pearl Harbor were battleships, with seven moored on Battleship Row and

one in dry dock at the Navy Yard. Only two of those eight were damaged beyond repair in the Japanese attack--the *USS Arizona* and the *USS Oklahoma*.<sup>109</sup>



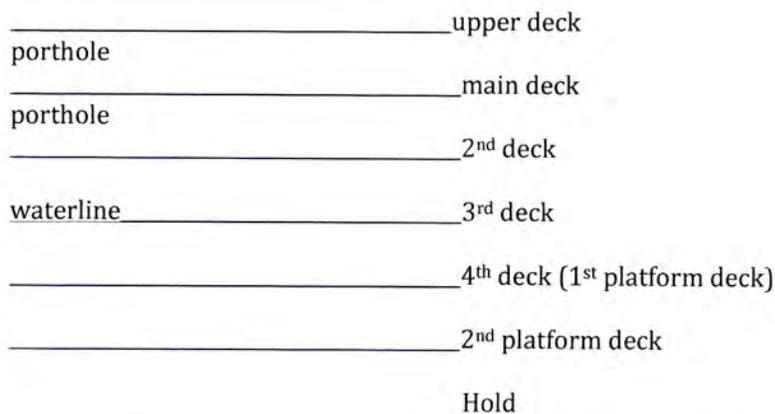
It is the number of crewmen who died on each that truly defines the loss of those ships. On the *Arizona*, 1,177 sailors and Marines perished; they represented over eighty percent of the crew. Those men also accounted for approximately one-half of all of the Americans killed in the Japanese attack. The *Oklahoma* lost 429 sailors and Marines out of approximately 1,353 men assigned to the ship. (Those deaths represented thirty-two percent of the crew.) Most who died on the *Oklahoma* were trapped in the capsized battleship. George, like the vast majority of the crew when the attack began, was not on the upper deck. He was four decks below. Initially, George, too, would be trapped down there, but he made his way up from the 4<sup>th</sup> deck, to the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck, then to the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck, and finally to the main deck. There, he seized an opportunity and escaped through a porthole. As it turned out, by the end of the war four years later, the United States Navy lost a total of only two battleships--the *USS Arizona* and the *USS Oklahoma*.<sup>110</sup>

Few days in American history rival the importance of December 7, 1941. It violently pulled the nation into World War II, forcing upon the United States a leadership role it has not yet relinquished. At the same time, December 7<sup>th</sup> represented the final day of service for the *Arizona* and the *Oklahoma*. They, more than any of the other vessels, would be forever identified with "the date which will live in infamy." Their crews became the last men whose names would ever be recorded on the ships' muster rolls. Like the 1,606 who died on the *Arizona* and *Oklahoma* that day, the ships they served on also ended their military service on

December 7, 1941. The number of Americans killed as a result of the enemy attack was 2,403. (Broken down by their service branch, 2,008 were Navy, 109 Marines, 218 Army and 68 were civilians.) The deaths on the *Arizona* and *Oklahoma* represent sixty-seven percent of the total number of Americans killed that day.<sup>111</sup>

At one point in the 1990s, George wrote down his personal story of December 7, 1941. His detailed, firsthand account is as follows, italicized to distinguish his words from the historical context before and after it:

*“The Oklahoma had Annual Military Inspection (A.M.I.) scheduled for Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. An A.M.I focused on a thorough check of all equipment systems and hull spaces. My responsibility was for the maintenance of the antiaircraft (AA) battery’s fire control systems, so Sunday the 7<sup>th</sup> was a workday as far as I was concerned. I was in the plotting room on the 4<sup>th</sup> deck (the 1<sup>st</sup> platform deck) where I worked on energizing the circuits to the AA directors in order to run tests in preparation for the inspection.*



George explained in his written recollections where he was right before the attack began. *“I was in the plotting room on the 4<sup>th</sup> deck (the 1<sup>st</sup> platform deck)...”*

*While I was in the plotting room, the P.A. system was keyed open, and I could hear the faint hiss and a little background noise. For several seconds, there was no other sound. Then a voice came on saying, “All hands man your battle stations,” a short pause, then the voice continued, saying “real planes, real bombs, no shit.” Well, that didn’t sound like anything official. My first thought was that some prankster had hacked into the P.A. system, and this was his idea of a great joke. The phraseology of the message convinced me and an electrician in the adjoining compartment that the announcement was bogus. We wondered how and where that kook got access to the P.A. system. That conclusion didn’t last long because the general alarm gong sounded, and a more authoritative voice announced the call to battle stations.*

*I started for my battle station in the AA director. I first made a quick stop for a shirt at my locker in the fire control shop on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck. In those days, you absolutely did not go topside without a shirt. While I was hurrying toward the hatch to get up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck, the first torpedo hit. When I got to the starboard side ladder leading to the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck, people were coming down in conformance with air raid procedure. It dictated that "unengaged personnel seek shelter below the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck," which was armored. However, they were violating another rule that said all starboard side ladders were up and portside down. (Traffic moved forward and up on starboard while it moved aft and down on port.) Before the ladder cleared, the hatch was slammed down and secured. More torpedoes hit. I have read that there were only five, but I still believe there were more.*

*Now the ship was listing sharply to port. The lights went out, and the cascading sound of water pouring into the ship became louder. Some source of oil ruptured, and the slanted deck got slippery with oil. A large puddle of oil formed against the bulkhead. Men were losing their footing and sliding into the puddle. I had a secure handhold on the main ammo belt. It was waist-high. I had my back against it so that the oil on the deck did not bother me. Men were on the ladder, working to get the hatch open. Panic was growing. Some were screaming, some were cursing, and one called repeatedly for help from "mommy." Someone produced a flashlight, and the hatch was finally opened. Almost everyone moved toward the ladder at once. The top anchor on the one side of the ladder broke because of the tilted deck and the weight of many men. Someone had the good sense to yell, "Get the hell off the ladder or it will break, and nobody will get out of here." Even though the ladder was twisted and hanging at a crazy angle, we were able to climb one at a time to the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck. From there, we quickly moved up the ladder to the main deck.*

*There we found a jumble of lockers, bunks, and equipment. Everything loose was sliding down the slanted deck. The tilt was about 45 degrees. Looking aft toward the weather deck, which would be our normal way out of the ship, we saw a large crowd of men, maybe 100 feet away, that didn't appear to be moving. Some in our group went that way. But all that loose stuff was an impediment to our going aft because we would have had to climb over it. Others, including me, opted to try for a nearby, open porthole. It should not have been open. It should have been closed because we were at general quarters. The men in my small group climbed up across the jumbled lockers and other stuff and went thru the porthole. The side of the ship was horizontal enough to where we could easily walk on it. I believe that 7 men escaped thru that porthole. As the ship continued to roll over, we walked across the bottom and entered the water between the Oklahoma and the Maryland. The Oklahoma had been tied up to the Maryland, and when she started to turn over, the mooring lines parted and some lines were hanging into the water.*

*That left a water gap of 50-75 feet between the ships. There were already men in the water. I slid down the bottom of the ship and joined them. Upon entering the water, I kicked off my shoes to make swimming easier. The USS Arizona exploded. We heard*

*the explosion and saw the rising fireball from what we later learned was the USS Shaw. Burning oil from the Arizona covered the surface of the water, and it was moving toward us. Planes repeatedly strafed the area while we were in the water. Small geysers erupted where the bullets hit the water. But I was unaware of any men being hit. Some of the broken mooring lines reached the water and men were climbing them to board the Maryland. However, so many men were holding onto lines that no one could make any upward progress. More lines were dropped. I climbed one, boarding the Maryland where I was put to work as an ammunition handler for an AA gun. A bomb hit the Maryland while I was aboard. I heard that the damage was minor.*

*When the raid was over, the Okie survivors who had boarded the Maryland were assembled on Ford Island. Some, including me, were transferred to the ammunition depot at West Loch where we assisted in replenishing ammunition used during the raid. One of the ships that came in for ammo and depth charges was the Ward, the destroyer that had encountered and sunk a midget sub off the entrance to Pearl Harbor. The crew was angry. If you have seen the movie Tora! Tora! Tora!, you learned of the disregarded warnings from the Ward and from the Army's radar site. I also served in various working parties that handled ammunition and cleaned the dry dock under the Cassin, Downes, and Pennsylvania. At one point, I even cut sugar cane with a machete when a fire in a nearby field approached the ammunition depot. Rumors were everywhere of more attacks and even of invasion.*

*At West Loch, we had nothing except what happened to be in our pockets when the raid started. The Navy provided us with nothing beyond work, food, and a place to sleep. After walking on all kinds of surfaces for a couple of days, my feet were sore. A member of the regular crew at West Loch gave me a pair of his shoes. I was, and still am, very grateful. After a few days, a Salvation Army team provided us with soap, toothbrushes, pencils, and stamped postcards so we could write home.*

*Ten days after the raid, I was assigned to the USS Louisville where I served until the war was over. The Louisville went to the States for a minor overhaul in March 1942, and I managed to get home. Surprise! My family had assumed that I had gone down with the ship. The postcard furnished by the Salvation Army didn't arrive until much later.*

*In spite of the raid and the years of war that followed, I harbor no hard feelings toward the Japanese in doing what they felt they had to do. They made a serious misjudgment in respect to the resolve and capability of the American people, with disastrous results for them. In the light of history, we inflicted far more pain upon them than they did upon us."*

## Addendum

As noted earlier, George wrote the above recollections decades ago. In reading them again, after so many years, he added the following in September 2017:

*“As I read these pages, my memory transported me back to that terrible morning. This has not happened before even though I have read, spoken, and written about the subject many times. Tonight the pages seem to be missing something important.*

*Maybe this is it: To me, and I’m sure to many others, the emotional impact of what was happening was totally devastating. We had just lost our home and probably some good friends. Our magnificent fleet was rapidly being turned into junk. Our own survival was uncertain. And we were experiencing a soul-crushing military defeat far greater and more complete than anything we had ever imagined.*

*Now, 75 years later, thinking about it and trying to write about it still shakes me up.”*

### *Sightings*

On the morning of Sunday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, exactly one week before the Japanese attack, the *Oklahoma* departed Pearl Harbor to participate in fleet training exercises off of the Hawaiian Islands. She met up with the other Task Force II battleships, the *Arizona* and the *Nevada*. But on Monday, the first of December, the *Oklahoma* left the group to continue some solitary, short-range gunnery exercises. In the evening, the watch reported seeing a submarine. Since no United States subs were in the area, the sighting caused what one historian has called “considerable concern” on board the *Oklahoma*. Gunnery exercises for December 2<sup>nd</sup> were cancelled because a destroyer that was to have towed a target received new orders. The destroyer was to look for the submarine the *Oklahoma*’s watch thought it had seen a day earlier. It found nothing. Perhaps nothing was out there on December 1<sup>st</sup>. As George explains, “At the surface of the ocean, if there is a breeze blowing, you’ve got little white caps, and something as small as a periscope is pretty indefinite out there amidst all that disturbance on the surface.”<sup>112</sup>

A few days before the *Oklahoma* had left Pearl Harbor, a particularly ominous message had arrived at the Navy command offices on Oahu. The Chief of Naval Operations in Washington, D.C. addressed the communication to the ranking naval officer in Hawaii, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel. It later became known as the November 27<sup>th</sup> “war message.” The transmission began, “This dispatch is to be considered a war warning. Negotiations with Japan looking toward stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased and an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days. The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of naval task forces indicates an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo.” The warning was not a great surprise since Washington had sent out more than one communication alerting its Pacific commanders to the deteriorating relations between Japan and the United States. Clearly, Washington expected a hostile action by Japan sometime after November 27<sup>th</sup>, but policymakers presumed Japan would attack the Philippines (to

defend its flank) or another area in Asia. Nothing intelligence units decoded in Washington or in Hawaii indicated an attack at Pearl Harbor.<sup>113</sup>

Today, George wonders if the captain of the *Oklahoma* knew about the “war message,” especially because of the captain’s plans for the December 8<sup>th</sup> inspection. (Those plans left the ship more vulnerable than it should have been on the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>.) In all likelihood, Admiral Kimmel did not share the November 27<sup>th</sup> communication with ships’ captains. Another admiral, years later, observed, “From official Washington there had come to Hawaii, as to other Pacific outposts, almost a superfluity of alarms and alerts for over a year. These were usually of a general nature as reflecting the new aggressions of Japan, or the widening gap in diplomatic relations...the Hawaiian commanders were always cautioned to limit the warning information to those who needed to know...”<sup>114</sup>

Understanding as we do today the details of the enemy attack, the *Oklahoma* sailor on watch the night of December 1<sup>st</sup> might very well have spotted a Japanese submarine. Twenty-five of them were positioned in the waters surrounding the Hawaiian Islands in the week before the attack. Twenty were off of Oahu. Their assignments varied. Once the attack began, for example, half of the Japanese subs were to go after any United States ships that got out of the harbor. Others were to rescue Japanese pilots shot down. In the days leading up to December 7<sup>th</sup>, ships aside from the *Oklahoma* reported sighting unknown submarines in the waters off of the islands. One, the destroyer *USS Ward*, even reported sinking such a vessel. And that was on the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup> itself. The crew of the *Ward*, as George wrote in his recollections, was especially angry in the aftermath of the attack. They undoubtedly felt their encounter with a Japanese midget submarine had not triggered the response it should have.<sup>115</sup>

In the hours immediately preceding the arrival of the Japanese planes in the skies over Pearl Harbor, the *Ward* had been on patrol at the harbor’s entrance. Another United States Navy vessel, the general stores ship *USS Antares*, approached the harbor. A member of its watch, around 6:30 a.m., sighted “a suspicious object” in the water. As the *Antares’* Commanding Officer (C.O.) wrote in his report three days later, “This object could have been a small submarine with upper conning tower awash and periscope raised, but it could not be positively identified as such.” The *Antares* contacted the *Ward*. The destroyer verified a conning tower and periscope above the water. Whatever the two ships saw, it was definitely not an American submarine, and the unknown vessel was in a restricted area. As George explains, “Submarines were not allowed to operate alone in the immediate, off-shore area from the entrance to Pearl Harbor. If they were in transit to that area, they had to be on the surface or submerged, accompanied by a ship.”<sup>116</sup>

At 6:40 a.m., the *Ward* sounded general quarters. Five minutes later, the destroyer fired two shells. It also dropped depth charges on the unknown target. The first shell overshot the conning tower, but the second one hit it at the waterline, right where the hull met the conning tower. The destroyer had been no more than

one hundred yards from the submarine when its guns first fired, and less than fifty yards at the time of the second shot. Sailors on the *Ward* verified the damage the second shell had inflicted on the conning tower. The C.O. later reported the sub “was seen to heel over to starboard.” A depth charge seemed to deliver the final blow when a large amount of oil appeared on the water’s surface in the area where a charge had exploded. The C.O. did not equivocate in a voice message he sent to his superior--“We have attacked, fired upon, and dropped depth charges on a submarine operating in defensive sea areas.” Unfortunately, officers up the chain of command believed the sighting by the *Antares* and *Ward* could have been just another of the false sightings that had previously been reported. As one admiral concluded in his book on Pearl Harbor, “The cry of ‘wolf’ had become so customary that it no longer made an impact.” And even if true, while the sinking of a midget submarine proved that a “mother” sub was in the area, the larger sub could have been operating on its own, gathering information on the disposition of the fleet. One Japanese ship did not prove a large-scale attack was imminent. Admiral Kimmel requested confirmation on the submarine’s sinking. He was still waiting for that when enemy planes appeared above Oahu about an hour later.<sup>117</sup>

In his written account of December 7<sup>th</sup>, George mentions another indication that, with hindsight, offered a “warning” an attack was imminent. It concerned what he referred to as “the Army’s radar site.” In the months before December, the Army had set up an Aircraft Warning Service. It consisted of more than one mobile radar unit mounted on trucks. The units were located at various points on Oahu. One was at Opana, at the northern tip of the island. As it turned out, the Japanese planes approached from that direction. At 7:02 a.m., two privates at the station saw on radar more than fifty planes. They called in the sighting to the Information Center at Fort Shafter. (The Army base received reports from all of the stations.) The privates neglected, however, to mention the number of planes on the radar screen. At the Information Center that Sunday morning, key personnel were not on duty. Only an enlisted soldier and a lieutenant, who had little experience at the Center, were there. For more than one reason, around 7:20 a.m. the officer concluded the planes were B-17s. Some were expected that morning from the mainland. What the soldiers were really seeing on radar, however, was the first wave of Japanese planes.<sup>118</sup>

The planes had flown off of six aircraft carriers; they were part of a strike force that totaled thirty-three ships. The enemy carriers held horizontal bombers (each carried a 1,760-pound armor-piercing bomb), dive-bombers (loaded with a 551-pound land bomb and equipped with machine guns for strafing), torpedo bombers (each had a 1,760-pound aerial bomb) and fighters (they escorted the bombers and could strafe targets below). The ships had left the Kurile Islands northeast of Japan on November 26<sup>th</sup>. On the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup>, the carriers sat two hundred and thirty miles north of the Hawaiian Islands. Beginning around 6:00 a.m., the ships launched the bombers and fighters. Twenty minutes later, when the planes in the first wave completed their aerial rendezvous, the attack force flew south. In ninety minutes, the pilots were over Oahu. While the Pacific Fleet was the primary target of the Japanese planes, the attack plan also called for simultaneous bombing of United

States air bases. This was to guard against any Navy, Army, or Marine Corps planes becoming airborne and going after the Japanese. (One hundred and eighty-three planes made up this first wave. Around 7:15 a.m., one hundred and seventy more aircraft took off. The second wave began its attack in the skies above Pearl Harbor around 8:50 a.m.)<sup>119</sup>

### *Preparing For Inspection*

That morning, the *Oklahoma* was moored at berth F-5 in Battleship Row off of Ford Island. The *USS Maryland* was at her starboard side, with the *Oklahoma* in the outboard position. The *Okie* had returned from exercises just two days earlier, on December 5<sup>th</sup>. Once in port, both battleships followed protocol as outlined by one of George's shipmates, a seaman first class who had been assigned to a gun turret. In his memoir, the bluejacket wrote, "Now in port, all gun watches were secured except for a few machine gun security watches. Live ammunition was stored away under lock and key, in ready boxes and in the powder magazines below. The officer of the deck had custody of the keys...Not only was the greater part of the fleet in port with guns secured, but a major fleet admiral's material inspection had been scheduled..."<sup>120</sup>

In their book on the *USS Oklahoma*, three scholars recount a request made on Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup> by Lieutenant Commander Harry Henderson to Captain Bode. (Henderson was the gunnery officer on the *Oklahoma*.) One aspect of the preparation for the inspection, scheduled to begin on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup>, was "the securing of battle stations, in particular the 5-inch/25-caliber AA guns." As part of the inspection preparation for the ship's guns, "the firing mechanisms would be taken to the ship's armory for cleaning" and "the ammunition would be taken four decks below for storage." Henderson, worried about the inability of the battleship to defend itself, "proposed that at least a portion of the anti-aircraft guns be manned." Bode, however, "denied the request." The inspection, the captain stressed, had priority. George did not know about Henderson's concerns, but he understands the captain's reply. As George concludes, "The inspection trumped everything else."<sup>121</sup>

Henderson's request on the AA guns appears puzzling when it is compared with a statement made by an admiral who wrote a Navy study on the Pearl Harbor attack. In the admiral's words, "All of the vessels at Pearl Harbor, except those undergoing overhaul at the Navy Yard, were...required [to have] about one-quarter of the anti-aircraft batteries and their control stations to be in a ready status with gun crews and ammunition at hand." If the *Oklahoma* adhered to that fleet order and one-quarter of the AA guns were "in a ready status," why did Henderson approach Bode on the AA guns? This was to be Bode's first inspection as captain of the *Oklahoma*. Did he go further than what was necessary in his desire to receive high marks in the inspection? Meaning, did Bode order the removal of firing mechanisms and ammunition for all of the guns? That would explain Henderson's concern. George does not know the answers to these questions, nor should he. He was, after all, just a 1<sup>st</sup> class petty officer. But because of his assignment to fire control, George

adamantly states that on the *Oklahoma*, “I’ll testify that the ready boxes were not ready and the control station was not ready.”<sup>122</sup>

The *Oklahoma* was one of three battleships scheduled for a “material inspection” on December 8<sup>th</sup>. (The other two were the *Arizona* and the *Nevada*.) The weekend would be devoted to preparing for it. (George points out that the inspectors were officers and enlisted men from other Navy ships.) The work began in earnest on Saturday the 6<sup>th</sup>. Sailors scrubbed and shined everything in sight. A thorough cleaning of the ship included the guns. Bluejackets cleaned, for example, the mounts for the 5-inch/25-caliber AA guns. Crewmen removed their firing mechanisms and delivered them to the armory to be cleaned. Sailors also transferred the guns’ ammunition four decks below where it was to be stored until the inspection was over. The crew opened watertight compartments on and below the third deck. This allowed inspectors to easily move through the ship. In addition to these measures, Captain Bode ordered that the blisters be vented. (Steel “blisters” encircled the ship at the waterline. Their purpose was to absorb the impact of torpedoes, reducing the damage the explosions could cause to the ship’s hull.) Of the three battleships scheduled for inspection Monday morning, only the *Oklahoma* opened the blisters. Bode’s decision to do so contributed to the ship’s tragic fate. At the same time, George agrees, in his words, that “the blisters had to be open for inspection. Inspectors would check, for example, for rust.”<sup>123</sup>

The *Oklahoma* gunner’s memoir cited earlier recounts a prescient concern by more than one sailor that early December weekend. “Some of the older hands commented that they could not remember such an inspection having been conducted before when ships were outside the continental limits of the United States. It was too dangerous, for ships were vulnerable to and could not contain any damage received from an enemy or by an accidental internal explosion.” But those were “the older hands.” The vast majority of the crew probably did not share that concern. The same gunner quoted had firsthand knowledge of how sailors prepared the guns for inspection. “Ammunition for the guns was safely stored in the 14-inch, 5-inch, and 3-inch magazines. All firing locks had been removed from the anti-aircraft and broadside batteries...Some anti-aircraft ammunition was stored in nearby ready boxes under lock and key.” With such tasks completed for the inspection, and others in progress, Saturday night arrived. Hundreds of the *Okie*’s officers and enlisted men left to enjoy some liberty time onshore. George believes he stayed on the ship since, as he confidently explains, “I think I would have remembered if I had been ashore.”<sup>124</sup>

### *“All Hands Man Your Battle Stations”*

George explained in his written recollections where he was right before the attack began. “I was in the plotting room on the 4<sup>th</sup> deck (the 1<sup>st</sup> platform deck) where I worked on energizing the circuits to the AA directors in order to run tests in preparation for the inspection.” Today he adds to this account by noting, “Someone was going to come and run tests on my equipment. If it didn’t perform the way it

was supposed to, I would catch hell.” While George was occupied at his duty station, sailors and Marines on the main deck prepared for a time-honored shipboard tradition--the flying of the colors. Crews on all naval ships raised the United States flag each morning in a ceremony first enshrined in Navy regulations in the late nineteenth century. Captain Bode would not be on board to witness the ceremony; he had left the *Oklahoma* about 7:40 a.m. to go ashore for liberty. (Executive Officer Jesse. L. Kenworthy, Jr. assumed command of the ship.) A few sailors stood watch, but most of the others on duty who were on the deck were there because of the flag raising. The *Oklahoma*'s band assumed its place on the quarterdeck as it prepared to play the National Anthem. The Marine Corps Color Guard assembled on the fantail near the flagstaff. Other United States naval ships in port made the same preparations as the eight o'clock hour approached. At 7:55 a.m., a bugler sounded the first call to colors. The Japanese planes began their attack before the ceremony could go any further.<sup>125</sup>

The initial bombs dropped on Ford Island around 7:55 a.m. The first of what would be three hundred and fifty-three Japanese planes came in from the southwest. It was an approach Navy pilots used to reach a naval air station on the island. Nine Japanese dive-bombers duplicated this approach as they targeted the air station. Torpedo planes attacked the battleships. In a December 18<sup>th</sup> action report filed by Captain Bode, he stated, “The first indication of the attack was the explosion of bombs dropped at a low altitude (100-150 feet) on the southwest hanger of Ford Island.” At the Navy Yard on Ford Island itself, right after the bombers dropped their load, sailors raised the Baker flag on the signal tower. Bluejackets used this flag to convey two messages to those within visual range. When they flew the Baker flag halfway up, that meant to prepare to fire. When the flag went all the way up, that meant to begin firing. Once the enemy bombs fell, the Baker flag did not stop halfway up. It immediately went to the top. Some men on the *Oklahoma* witnessed the Ford Island bombing and the raising of the Baker flag. One of them, a signalman, contacted the *Oklahoma*'s battle signal station. Another bluejacket, receiving that message, grabbed a Baker flag from the signal bag and raised it. (George points out that the *Okie* flew the Baker flag “on a halyard on a yardarm.” He adds that when the battleship hoisted its Baker flag, it flew from one of those poles “so the fleet could see it.”) While the *Oklahoma* did not fly the Stars and Stripes that morning, its well-trained crewmen saw to it that the Baker flag went up to alert all who could see it to commence firing.<sup>126</sup>



The PA system sounded the general alarm throughout the ship. It alerted the crew to what was happening much more than the Baker flag did because most of the men were below deck and would not have seen the flag. On a Sunday morning, the majority of the sailors and officers were in their quarters. Those were located amidships on the main and second decks. Seconds before the general alarm sounded, one of the officers, Ensign Herbert F. Rommel, knew something was not right. The sound of explosions at Ford Island could be heard below deck. Rommel hurried up a ladder. Once on deck, he saw a plane approach the *Oklahoma* and drop a torpedo. Rommel reached two conclusions very quickly. The obvious one was that American forces were under attack. The other one was a supposition Rommel arrived at knowing that most of the crew was still under the main deck, making it impossible for them to see the hostile plane in the sky. Worried that some men might discount the general alarm as another drill, Rommel decided to repeat it, with an attention-getting emphasis. At an intercom, he yelled into the PA system, "This is a real air raid. This is no shit!" It's the warning George remembers so well.<sup>127</sup>

The majority of sailors were below deck when the general alarm sounded. Since most of them had battle stations beneath the waterline, they remained on the lower decks when the attack began. This simple fact would have tragic implications within a few minutes as the *Oklahoma* sustained one torpedo hit after another. On the upper decks, bluejackets reported to their battle stations on the guns. Nine months earlier, the Navy had ordered additions to the *Oklahoma's* gunnery division. (With the war in Europe, and increased tensions with the Japanese, this augmentation became one example of the United States Navy's war preparation.) In February 1941, while in Bremerton, two 3-inch/50-caliber AA guns had been added to the *Oklahoma's* firepower. Also at that time, waist-high armor shields had been installed on all of the *Oklahoma's* 3-inch/50-caliber and 5-inch/25-caliber AA guns. Additionally, a .50-caliber machine gun platform had been put in the mainmast. An AA fire control station and two AA directors completed the additions to gunnery. That December 7<sup>th</sup> morning in 1941, the *Oklahoma's* AA guns fell into one of three categories--5-inch/25-caliber guns (the ship had eight of those), 3-inch/50-caliber guns (*Oklahoma* had four), and .50-caliber machine guns (the battlegun had eight). All totaled, twenty AA guns could have begun firing on December 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>128</sup>

But crewmen who reported to their battle stations on the guns immediately ran into problems. Because of the upcoming inspection, the firing locks for the 3-inch and 5-inch guns, as well as the .50-caliber machine guns, had been taken to the armory. Additionally, the ammunition, too, had been removed and taken below for the inspection. As George explains, "In ordinary circumstances, the AA guns used big, cartridge-type shells. Those were ordinarily stored in the ready box that was very close to the gun to provide quick access to the ammunition. But on the 7<sup>th</sup>, of course, our ready boxes were empty, and the ammunition was in the magazines."<sup>129</sup>

### *Three Post-Attack Reports*

In three reports, Captain Bode and Executive Officer Kenworthy, Jr. addressed conditions on board the *Oklahoma* before and during the attack. Kenworthy, Jr. sent a report to Bode on December 16<sup>th</sup>. Bode authored the ones to the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet; they were dated December 18 and 20, 1941. Since Bode was not on board the ship during the attack, the captain must have relied heavily on his executive officer's conclusions. Until recently, George had never seen the reports. Upon reading them, he takes issue with how the two officers described some of the conditions on the *Oklahoma*.<sup>130</sup>

One point in question concerns statements the captain and executive officer made in their reports regarding the *Oklahoma's* guns and ammunition. Neither officer wrote that the ammunition and firing locks had been taken below deck. In fact, both men implied that the guns were ready to fire. What prevented them from doing so, according to Bode and Kenworthy, Jr., were conditions on the *Oklahoma* that resulted from direct hits the ship sustained in the first minutes of the Japanese attack. Bode explained, "Although the anti-aircraft battery was manned within a few minutes after the call [to general quarters] and the ready ammunition boxes were being opened, because of the rapid heeling of the ship and oil and water on the decks, it was impossible effectively to service the guns." The captain's statement echoed one his executive officer had written in a report a few days earlier--"While all of the gun crews were at stations immediately after the first alarm, and the ready ammunition boxes were being opened, fire was not taken up by the guns of the 3-inch/50 and 5-inch/25 anti-aircraft batteries as the ship listed so rapidly that the guns could not be effectively serviced."

George points out that both officers wrote of boxes being "opened." The captain and his executive officer, he continues, "did not say that ammunition was in those boxes." They implied, though, in George's words, that "ammunition was available and guns ready to fire." Yet in reality, most of the ammunition was below deck. Additionally, George characterizes the statement on the 3 and 5-inch guns as "almost false" since it suggested that those guns could have been fired. That was not the case, however, since ammunition and firing locks had been removed because of the upcoming inspection. If the ship had not immediately taken on a list, and if water and oil had not flooded the decks, could the guns have been fired? From Bode and Kenworthy, Jr.'s reports, one would surmise the answer to that question would be "yes." Yet based upon George's recollections and what other bluejackets later told him, the answer would be "no." Additionally, written accounts of various crewmembers that mention the removal of ammunition and firing locks support this conclusion. The *Nevada* was also scheduled for an inspection on the 8<sup>th</sup>, but its action report stated, "two machine guns forward and two aft," as well as its 5-inch AA batteries, were operational; they fired at the enemy planes throughout the attack. Was the *Oklahoma* capable that morning of doing the same?<sup>131</sup>

As George emphasizes, "None of the large guns fired that day." However, members of the crew did briefly direct machine gun fire at the enemy planes.

Commander Kenworthy, Jr.'s report to Captain Bode points out that not all of the *Oklahoma's* guns were inoperable that morning because of the preparations taken for the Monday inspection. As Kenworthy, Jr. stated in his report, "Fire was taken up by the security watch on the .30 caliber machine gun on the port side of the superstructure deck, but this gun was almost immediately placed out of service by the first torpedo hit forward." (George points out that a .30-caliber machine gun would have been "ineffective against aircraft. It was to protect unauthorized ships from coming alongside our ship or even unauthorized persons coming aboard our ship. But if the .50-caliber had been going, they would have been more effective. You had a greater range [with the .50-caliber] and probably three times the impact force of a .30-caliber.") Captain Bode rephrased his executive officer's statement on the .30-caliber gun in his December 18<sup>th</sup> report to the Commander of the Pacific Fleet--"The port ready machine gun opened fire, but was soon silenced by the force of the explosion and the oil and water thrown up by the first torpedo hit forward." In firing the *Oklahoma's* machine guns, the crew joined the ranks of other sailors, soldiers, and Marines in defense of Pearl Harbor. A direct enemy hit and a rapid succession of two other torpedoes caused the battleship to list. Further defense was impossible.<sup>132</sup>

#### *Immediate Hits*

The *Oklahoma* felt the cumulative impact of the Japanese attack within moments, not minutes. Six to eight torpedo planes from the Japanese aircraft carrier *Akagi* had been assigned the *Oklahoma* as their target. Additionally, six torpedo planes from the carrier *Kaga* had also drawn the *Oklahoma*. (Japanese pilots had a map or chart with the location of their target.) In Bode's December 20<sup>th</sup> report, he identified five explosions on board the ship with just seconds between them--ten seconds between the first and second explosions, ten more seconds between the second and third, twenty seconds between the third and fourth, and thirty seconds between the fourth and fifth explosions. A prominent historian years later also stressed the rapidity of the attack and the destruction that it brought to the *Oklahoma*--"A few moments after the first bomb was seen to explode on the southwest end of Ford Island, and almost simultaneously with the call to General Quarters, *Oklahoma* was struck by three torpedoes in rapid succession and took a list of 25 to 35 degrees." The *Oklahoma* had over eleven thousand tons of armor on her. It could not protect her, however, from the blast of the first torpedoes because they hit in areas where the ship was vulnerable.<sup>133</sup>

The enemy torpedoes proved "especially effective," in the words of one scholar who was also a United States admiral. The officer pointed out several reasons for his conclusion. First, the Japanese military had tested the torpedoes' explosive power. (The American military did not run tests on its torpedoes because of economic considerations.) Furthermore, each torpedo represented an explosive charge of more than one thousand pounds. (The power of American torpedoes was about half of that amount.) In addition to these factors, the conditions under which the bombers dropped the torpedoes greatly favored the Japanese. The ships were all stationary--moored, anchored, or in dry dock. The attack caught AA defenses on the

ships and on the ground by surprise. Lastly, the Japanese planes, when they were only a few hundred yards from the ship, dropped the torpedoes from an altitude of just fifty to one hundred feet above the water.<sup>134</sup>

When the attack began, the Japanese first bombed Ford Island. George, in his written account of the day, was then “in the plotting room on the 4<sup>th</sup> deck.” Within a few minutes, torpedo bombers targeted Battleship Row. By 8:00 a.m., four torpedoes, at a minimum, had struck the *Oklahoma*. Lieutenant Commander William M. Hobby, Jr. was the second in command on board the ship that morning. He remembered how quickly the *Okie* sustained serious damage. As he was climbing a ladder to the AA gun platform from the main deck aft, Hobby wrote of feeling “what I believe was the first torpedo hit--a dull thud and a powerful reverberation, on the port side, and the ship began listing to port. I started back down with the idea of getting to Central and directing the flooding of the starboard blisters, but almost immediately there was a second torpedo hit and then a third and the ship listed more; at this time streams of men were pouring up through hatches to the topside. A second or so later, at about the time I was back down to the main deck aft again, came the fourth torpedo hit, and the ship continued to list to port--at least a twenty degree list at this time...”<sup>135</sup>

The first torpedo landed amidships. It crashed into the *Okie* more than twenty feet under the waterline that was located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck. At the moment of impact, George was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck where he had gone to grab a shirt. As George wrote in his account, he “was hurrying toward the hatch to get up to the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck.” The resulting explosion was a powerful one. It threw water and fragments from the *Oklahoma* as high as one thousand feet. The blast took out a major section of the anti-torpedo blister. The force of the explosion lifted part of the battlegagon out of the water. Shock waves reverberated throughout the ship. That is what happened, as George recalled, when “the first torpedo hit.” He would have felt its repercussions anywhere on the *Okie*, but especially where he was, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck, since it landed some twenty feet below him. “I felt the deck actually jump under my feet,” George remembers. “The impact would have been very close to the level where I was,” he continues. “The plotting room was a little forward [from the impact area], and I was even further forward.”<sup>136</sup>

As George wrote, “More torpedoes hit.” The second one slammed into the *Oklahoma* about six seconds after the first one. One historian observed that its “effect...was similar.” The third torpedo landed well below the waterline. Like the first two, it struck around amidships. But unlike the first two, this third torpedo went through the hull with disastrous effects. George had been on the 1<sup>st</sup> platform deck (the 4<sup>th</sup> deck) when the attack began. The force of the third torpedo demolished parts of the 2<sup>nd</sup> platform deck, the deck below the 1<sup>st</sup> platform deck. The latter suffered serious damage, too, from the impact of the third torpedo. The torpedo completely destroyed what had been left of the blister. The *Oklahoma's* list increased as water flooded the ship from the hole the third torpedo had made in the hull. The flooding led to an order to abandon ship soon after a fourth torpedo struck

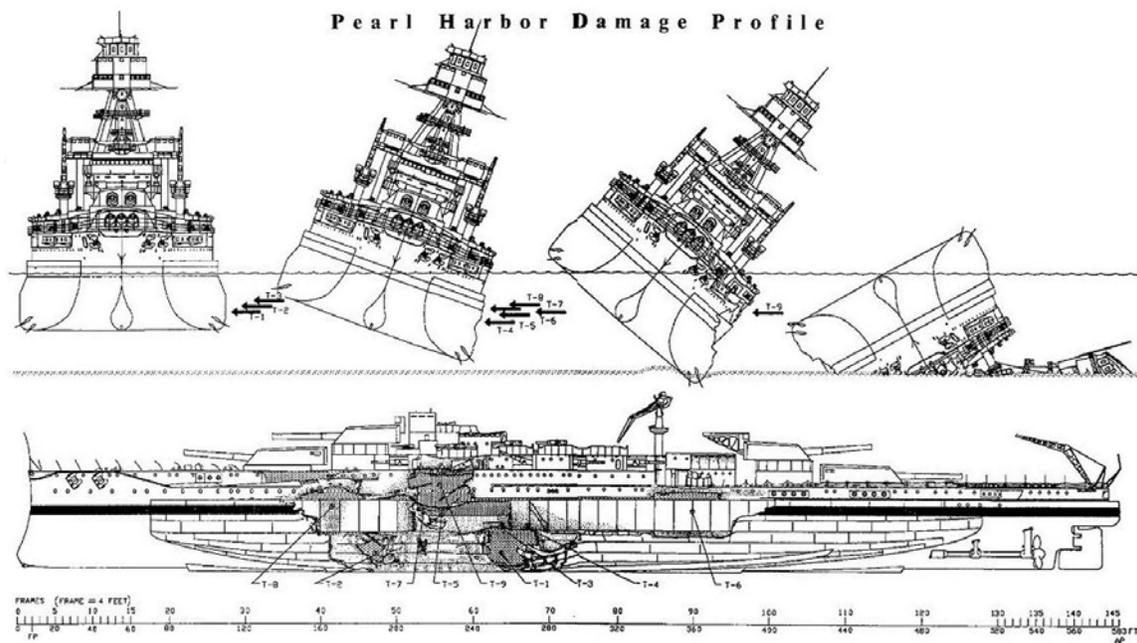
the battlewagon. Not more than two minutes had passed since the first torpedo had hit the *Okie*.<sup>137</sup>



Geysers rise between the *West Virginia* and the *Oklahoma* from torpedo hits.

The enemy continued its assault on the *Oklahoma*. The force of the fifth torpedo parted whatever hawsers (the thick ropes used to moor a ship) had linked the *Oklahoma* to the *Maryland*. Untethered, the *Oklahoma*'s list increased even more. George wrote in his recollections, "I have read that there were only five [bombs], but I still believe there were more." He is correct. As George and hundreds of other crewmen struggled to get out of the ship as it capsized, a sixth torpedo struck. It was probably not the last one. As many as eight or nine might have hit the battleship. The *Oklahoma*, built to fight, never was able to fire any of her big guns in combat from the time of her commissioning on May 2, 1916 to the deathblows she suffered on December 7, 1941.<sup>138</sup>

After the explosion on board the *USS Arizona*, the loss of the *USS Oklahoma* with four hundred and twenty-nine crewmembers became the second greatest ship tragedy that December morning. Several factors led to it. George explains his ship's vulnerability by pointing to the *Oklahoma's* position on Battleship Row and preparations for the scheduled inspection. In some notes he jotted down in 2007, written in sentence fragments, George pointed out, "Okie vulnerable and in a vulnerable position. Maryland tied to mooring. Okie tied to Maryland with port side exposed to Harbor." In other words, the *Oklahoma*, with nothing on her left side, was wide open to an aerial attack from that direction. Other factors concern executive decisions made in preparation for the upcoming inspection. George stresses that because of the Monday inspection, compartments below deck were open as were the blisters. "That resulted in rapid flooding. They could not possibly balance the ship with counter flooding like they did on other ships such as the *West Virginia* and the *California*." When the *Oklahoma* sustained a rapid succession of hits in the first few minutes of the attack, she began to capsize, trapping hundreds of men below.



They were caught up in what George describes as the "rapid flooding" of the *Oklahoma's* lower decks. George himself was never in a flooded compartment, but he heard the rush of water as it entered the ship. "I did not even see that [the water]. I heard it." George and men near him understood they had to get out. In his written recollections of December 7<sup>th</sup>, George described what confronted him. "*The ship was listing sharply to port. The lights went out, and the cascading sound of water pouring into the ship became louder. Some source of oil ruptured, and the slanted deck got*

*slippery with oil. A large puddle of oil formed against the bulkhead. Men were losing their footing and sliding into the puddle...Men were on the ladder, working to get the hatch open. Panic was growing. Some were screaming, some were cursing, and one called repeatedly for help from 'mommy.' Someone produced a flashlight, and the hatch was finally opened. Almost everyone moved toward the ladder at once. The top anchor on the one side of the ladder broke because of the tilted deck and the weight of many men. Someone had the good sense to yell, 'Get the hell off the ladder or it will break, and nobody will get out of here.' Even though the ladder was twisted and hanging at a crazy angle, we were able to climb one at a time to the 2<sup>nd</sup> deck. From there, we quickly moved up the ladder to the main deck. There we found a jumble of lockers, bunks, and equipment. Everything loose was sliding down the slanted deck. The tilt was about 45 degrees. Looking aft toward the weather deck, which would be our normal way out of the ship, we saw a large crowd of men, maybe 100 feet away, that didn't appear to be moving. Some in our group went that way. But all that loose stuff was an impediment to our going aft because we would have had to climb over it. Others, including me, opted to try for a nearby, open porthole...The men in my small group climbed up across the jumbled lockers and other stuff and went thru the porthole." By that time, the order to abandon ship had been given.*

### *Abandon Ship*

After the fourth enemy torpedo hit, Kenworthy, Jr. and Hobby agreed that the order to leave the *Oklahoma* had to be given. (Hobby, in addition to being the second-in-command that morning, was also the damage control officer. He knew too well what the flooding and capsizing meant.) Some crewmen learned of the order by word-of-mouth. Others, like George, instinctively understood the ship was in trouble. "I never heard it [the order to abandon ship]. [But] we could hear that water pouring in. It sounded like a big waterfall." Once George and the few men with him crawled through the porthole, they saw the enormity of the destruction their beloved *Okie* had suffered. "Until we got out into the open, we knew there must be other ships under attack. But we had no idea of how severe things were." Just seeing all of the devastation, George admits, "had an enormous impact." The sailors looked at their ship in a way they had never seen her before, broken and on her side. As George wrote in his recollections, "*The side of the ship was horizontal enough to where we could easily walk on it... As the ship continued to roll over, we walked across the bottom and entered the water between the Oklahoma and the Maryland.*" About fifty feet separated the two battlewagons. As the *Oklahoma's* list increased, George explains, "The hawsers parted from the strain of the ship overturning." Officers on board the *Maryland* ordered the severing of all remaining lines that connected the two vessels. Her sailors did so using fire axes. Ropes thus dangled down from the *Maryland* into the water.<sup>139</sup>

Once crewmembers from the *Oklahoma* reached the outside of their ship, some made their way to a motor launch, others to the Ford Island Landing, and still others swam toward the *Maryland*. Japanese machine guns strafed them. As enemy bombs dropped from above exploded, men felt their impact in the waters around

the *Oklahoma*. (Bode reported at least five bombs, some weighing one hundred pounds and others five hundred; in his account, they detonated “very close” to the ship, and one landed just a hundred yards off her port.) At one point, George went into the water with the other sailors. In his own words, “*I slid down the bottom of the ship and joined them. Upon entering the water, I kicked off my shoes to make swimming easier. The USS Arizona exploded. We heard the explosion and saw the rising fireball from what we later learned was the USS Shaw. Burning oil from the Arizona covered the surface of the water, and it was moving toward us.*” One of the Japanese bombs dropped in the first wave hit the *Arizona* and detonated a powder magazine. Within a minute of its impact, one hundred tons of explosives went off. The battleship split in two. Decks collapsed. Forward turrets and the conning tower fell into the hull. Fire jumped from the ship to oil that had leaked into the water. The flames and oil made a volatile mixture. George explains, however, that even though he was in the water, he was not in danger from the flames. “The oil from the *Arizona*, which was burning, was well off from us, and while it was approaching, its approach was very slow. I could swim faster than it was coming.” The explosion on the *Arizona* occurred sometime between 8:05 and 8:20 a.m., thus giving an approximate time George was in the water. His reference to the destroyer *USS Shaw* related to another explosion. The *Shaw* was in a floating dry dock at the Navy Yard that morning. Three bombs from Japanese dive-bombers landed on the destroyer. The last one ruptured the fuel oil tanks. Burning oil spread through part of the ship. The heat led to the explosion of the forward magazines. That was undoubtedly “the rising fireball” George mentioned in his recollections.<sup>140</sup>

After getting off the *Oklahoma*, George’s written account describes what happened next. “*Planes repeatedly strafed the area while we were in the water. Small geysers erupted where the bullets hit the water. But I was unaware of any men being hit. Some of the broken mooring lines reached the water and men were climbing them to board the Maryland...More lines were dropped. I climbed one, boarding the Maryland...*” A historian judged the *USS Maryland* to have been “the luckiest battleship” that morning since the outboard position of the *Oklahoma* protected her from any torpedo hits. Once on the *Maryland*, George explained in his recollections he “*was put to work as an ammunition handler for an AA gun.*” And as George adds, “I might point out that the *Maryland* did have AA ammunition in the ready boxes.” Other sailors from the *Oklahoma* helped to man AA guns and pom-poms (a 1 or 2-pound gun). George remembers being assigned to the 3-inch/50 AA. Looking back on it today, he observes guns that size “were inadequate to the job they were assigned. The 3-inch/50 was the poorest excuse for an anti-aircraft gun that you could come up with. I could do better with my shotgun.”<sup>141</sup>



*Oklahoma* (hull of capsized ship in middle left), *Maryland* (behind and to left of *Oklahoma*), smoke from the *Arizona* and *West Virginia* (latter burning to right of *Oklahoma*)

The *Maryland* “gave” more than she “got” that morning. In the captain’s action report dated December 15, 1941, the C.O. claimed the ship’s AA batteries shot down at least four, and perhaps seven, enemy planes. As George noted in his written account of that day, “A bomb hit the *Maryland* while I was aboard. I heard that the damage was minor.” It was. While the battleship sustained some damage from two bombs, she was later repaired without going into dry dock. (In February 1942, the *Maryland* became the first of the Battle Fleet to reclaim her active service status.)<sup>142</sup>

### *West Loch*

By 10:00 a.m., the attack was over. Captain Bode, Commander Kenworthy, Jr., and other officers from the *Oklahoma* reported to the naval ammunition depot at West Loch. Enlisted men, including George, ended up there, too. George wrote of his new duty station in his recollections. “When the raid was over, the Okie survivors who had boarded the *Maryland* were assembled on Ford Island. Some, including me, were transferred to the ammunition depot at West Loch where we assisted in replenishing

*ammunition used during the raid.*" In all his years of military service, the only time George feels the Navy let him down was the period immediately following the attack. He arrived at this conclusion because it was then that the Navy seemed to forget about the everyday needs of its enlisted men.<sup>143</sup>

In the ten days after December 7<sup>th</sup>, the only clothing George had to wear was what he had on the morning of the Japanese raid--pants (Navy dungarees, described by George as "the equivalent of blue jeans"), a buttoned shirt (probably long-sleeved; it was made of "coarse, blue material"), a white undershirt, socks, and underpants. The clothes had oil all over them from the oil that had poured onto the *Oklahoma's* decks. George did not receive a new uniform until he left West Loch to report to his next duty station. That was ten days after the Japanese attack. As for footwear, he only had the socks he kept on his feet after he took off his shoes in the water. "I had the shoes on when I went into the water. I kicked them off when I found out they impaired my swimming ability." As for a new pair of shoes, he shares this story in his recollections--"*After walking on all kinds of surfaces for a couple of days, my feet were sore. A member of the regular crew at West Loch gave me a pair of his shoes. I was, and still am, very grateful.*" This was in spite of the fact that, as George points out, the shoes were "too big for me, but I loved them."

The Salvation Army, not the Navy, provided George with some personal essentials in the days after December 7<sup>th</sup>. George critically observed in his written account of those days, "*At West Loch, we had nothing except what happened to be in our pockets when the raid started. The Navy provided us with nothing beyond work, food, and a place to sleep...After a few days, a Salvation Army team provided us with soap, toothbrushes, pencils, and stamped postcards so we could write home.*" The assistance given by that charitable organization had special meaning for George. When he was a child, after his father's death, the Salvation Army gave the Coburn family food items at the holidays. George thinks one of the gifts may have been a turkey for their Thanksgiving or Christmas meal. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, the Salvation Army offered George a postcard so he could notify his family he was alive. Other enlisted men received similar postcards, not all from the Salvation Army. It took days and even weeks for such correspondence to be in the hands of parents or spouses. Until the postcards were delivered, not knowing if one's child, spouse, or sibling was alive must have been unbearable.

### *Not Knowing*

Back in the States, news of the attack spread quickly. Many members of the World War II Generation confess that when reports first came in, they incredulously asked, "Where is Pearl Harbor?" The Coburn family knew its location because George's ship had been based there for well over a year. When the attack began at 7:55 a.m. Hawaiian time, Washington, D.C. clocks showed 1:25 p.m. due to the five-and-a-half-hour time difference. (There was a two-and-a-half hour difference between Hawaiian time and Pacific Standard Time.) Everyday Americans learned of the attack about an hour after it had begun.<sup>144</sup>

The radio initially delivered the news. Beginning in the 1920s with the first commercial broadcasts, the radio had become an entertainment and a news medium. Stations broadcast music, sports, and theatrical programs. It is estimated that in the days before the country entered World War II, the American people owned forty-five million radios. They turned them on approximately four and a half hours each day. (George still recalls the first radio his family owned, a battery-run, tabletop RCA.) Because of the prominent role radios played in the lives of families, only some were small, tabletop models. Larger ones served as a piece of stand-alone furniture. George remembers Carrie owned a tabletop model when he was in the Navy. Radio networks first received news of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor in the form of an Associated Press (AP) bulletin. At that moment in Hawaii, enemy planes were still bombing American military installations on Oahu. The major networks, such as the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), contacted Washington, D.C. to verify the AP report with government authorities. Officials in Roosevelt's administration confirmed the news. The networks then interrupted their scheduled shows at 2:30 p.m. with an announcement of the attack, which remained in progress. (It was then 9:00 a.m. in Hawaii; the first attack wave had left and the second one was mounting its assault.) In all likelihood, from that Sunday morning on, George's mother and siblings listened intently to their radios as more and more information came over the wires.<sup>145</sup>

The composition of the Coburn household on 36<sup>th</sup> Street in San Diego had changed over the last few years. George, of course, was gone, and so, too, was Ed. He had married but still lived in the city of San Diego. One can imagine Ed telephoning his mother at one point on the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup> to see if she had heard of the attack. Carrie's only daughter, Anna or Ann, had remarried after a divorce. Her second husband was a Marine who served overseas. In the spring of 1940 when the government took the Federal Census, the Coburn household held three generations--Carrie, her children (Robert, Dick, and Anna), and Anna's two young children, ages five and eight. Probably most, if not all, of them remained with Carrie some twenty months later.<sup>146</sup>

The night of December 7<sup>th</sup> was an unsettling one for every American. For families with a loved one stationed at or in the vicinity of Pearl Harbor, the end of the day would have been even more disturbing. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt had a weekly radio program scheduled for that evening. At the beginning of it, she briefly addressed what the events at Pearl Harbor meant for all citizens, but especially for mothers. "I should like to say just a word to the women in the country tonight." Roosevelt reminded her listeners that she had "a boy at sea on a destroyer," adding that even as First Lady, she did not know what the advent of war meant to him. "For all I know," she remarked, "he may be on his way to the Pacific." Empathizing with her audience, Roosevelt continued. "Many of you all over the country have boys in the service who will now be called upon to go into action. You have friends and families in what has suddenly become a danger zone." The Coburns knew that

George had seen the “action” to which Roosevelt referred. Oahu for him had already become “a danger zone.” The First Lady spoke of feelings she knew the women in her audience were undoubtedly experiencing. “You cannot escape anxiety. You cannot escape a clutch of fear at your heart...” Yet after acknowledging the anxiety Americans felt, the First Lady added words of confidence, too. “I hope that the certainty of what we have to meet will make you rise above these fears...and when we find a way to do anything more in our communities to help others, to build morale, to give a feeling of security, we must do it. Whatever is asked of us I am sure we can accomplish it. We are the free and unconquerable people of the United States of America.” Even with such comforting remarks by the First Lady, the Coburn family must have slept very little, if at all, on the night of December 7<sup>th</sup>.<sup>147</sup>

In addition to the radio, Americans received their news from newspapers. George’s hometown had two major publications--*The San Diego Union* and *The San Diego Tribune*. George’s mother subscribed to one of them, so we know she received the December 7<sup>th</sup> edition. The main headline in the *Union’s* Sunday special edition boldly screamed, “U.S. Fleet Battle Japs as Tokyo Declares War.” It was the sub-headline for the article that would have hit the Coburns hard--“Damage Severe, Casualties High In Bombing of Hawaiian Bases.” The initial reports on December 7<sup>th</sup> were understandably sketchy in respect to American casualties. What everyone



knew for sure was that many Americans in uniform--Army, Navy, and Marine--had been killed and wounded. It would take time for the postcards mailed in the days immediately after the attack to reach relatives. Until then, all families could do was to wait and hope.

Carrie and Anna probably listened to a live broadcast of President Roosevelt’s address to Congress on Monday the 8<sup>th</sup>. In his speech, FDR asked for a declaration of war against Japan. He spoke beginning at 12:30 p.m. (EST). His five hundred and eighteen words took twenty-six minutes to deliver. The first sentence still resonates today. “Yesterday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941--a date which will live in infamy--the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.” A few minutes later, the president’s admission of heavy casualties would have been especially difficult for Carrie and her family to hear--“I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost.” An estimated sixty-two million people listened to the president out of a population of about one hundred and thirty-two million. In all likelihood, Carrie and Anna were part of that forty-seven percent. As of that date, it was the biggest daytime radio audience in history.<sup>148</sup>

FDR was the first president to talk directly with Americans using the radio. Roosevelt literally came into their living room with this new form of mass communication. He did so most effectively in his “fireside chats.” Carrie and the family assuredly tuned into FDR’s fireside chat on the evening of December 9, 1941. “Many American soldiers and sailors have been killed by enemy action,” FDR announced as he had the day before in his war message to Congress. Roosevelt promised that the government would share information as soon as it could. Another line became a personal one for Carrie and George’s siblings---“I deeply feel the anxiety of all the families of the men in our armed forces...” While the president did not specifically reference relatives of those who had been stationed at Pearl Harbor, the “anxiety” of those parents would have been immeasurable. Two days after Roosevelt’s fireside chat, Germany and Italy (Japan’s European allies) declared war on the United States. In response, the American Congress passed war resolutions against those countries.<sup>149</sup>

### *The Days After December 7<sup>th</sup>*

While at West Loch, George’s superiors assigned him to a variety of jobs. One in particular prompts a memory today. As George wrote years ago in his recollections, “I also served in various working parties that handled ammunition and cleaned the dry dock under the *Cassin*, *Downes*, and *Pennsylvania*.” While beneath one of the first two ships he named, an amusing incident occurred. (Anything that brought a smile to George’s face in the days immediately following the attack would have been welcomed.) Cash kept in the ship had become unsecured because of an on board explosion during the attack. Another sailor in George’s working party, cleaning the bottom of the vessel, decided to help himself to some of the money. As George tells the story, “A guy came up [from underneath the ship in dry dock] with dollars stuffed in his pockets.” The bills, as George quickly points out, had oil all over them, so identifying the money as stolen from the ship would not have been difficult. Needless to say, the sailor did not get away with the cash.

In the first days George and others from the *Oklahoma* were at West Loch, rescue work was taking place on board their ship. Hundreds of crewmen had been trapped below deck when the *Oklahoma*, in rapid succession, sustained one torpedo hit after another. As she capsized, men below could not easily get out of the battleship that was quickly taking on water. Initially, George was one of them, but he escaped through a porthole. Others did not. Some of those still trapped in flooded compartments may have been in the large group from which George and a few others had separated. George and those few sailors had decided to seek a porthole as an escape route. Asked today why the men in the large group did not go to the porthole, too, George explains two factors that may have influenced their decision. “I think they knew it was there, but they thought nobody could get through that little hole. You also go with what is a habit. Men in the large group opted for the normal exit.” However, George points out that the “normal exit” during the attack meant the men confronted “a steep ladder, poor footing, poor balance” and difficulty opening

the hatches. Handles on the watertight hatches were called “dogs.” George stresses that the men would have had to “push firmly on the dogs to open the hatch.”<sup>150</sup>

When George is asked today if he thinks his fate would have been different if he had stayed with that large party on the main deck, George answers, “I feel almost certain some of the men in that group did not get out, but I do not know that as a fact.” What we do know is that over four hundred men remained within the capsized *Oklahoma* after the attack ended. They were trapped in various compartments, such as Radio IV, Steering Aft, the powder handling room, and the Lucky Bag (a storage place for pieces of unclaimed clothing). On the morning of the 7<sup>th</sup>, when crewmen reported to battle stations as the general alarm sounded, many ended up below the third deck. Those in the boiler room and in engineering spaces, for example, were deep down in the ship. The third deck was at water level. It and decks below had no portholes through which men could have escaped.<sup>151</sup>

An attempt to rescue them began even before the attack ended. Lieutenant Commander Hobby returned to the ship between 9:15 - 9:30 a.m., intending to oversee an effort to get more men out of the *Oklahoma*. But after assessing the situation, the damage control officer knew he needed pumping and diving equipment. On Monday December 8<sup>th</sup>, sailors, officers, and civilian workers from the Navy Yard boarded the overturned ship. Only the bottom of the battlewagon could



be seen above the water, having capsized one hundred and seventy degrees. Among the workers that Monday were crewmembers of the *Oklahoma*, coming to rescue their shipmates. They brought air compressors, pumps, cutting tools, and torches. Some men inside of the hull signaled, using wrenches and other implements, that they were still alive. “Every once in a while, one of us in the trunk...rapped out the distress call SOS...in Morse Code, with a dog wrench, on the steel bulkhead,”

one seaman later wrote. He and others were freed on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The last rescue occurred the next day. In total, thirty-two crewmen were brought up alive. A watch remained on the hull until December 11<sup>th</sup>, but the tapping had ceased. With no more signs of life, rescue efforts ended. The bodies of hundreds more remained below, in flooded compartments.<sup>152</sup>

#### *429 Who Could Not Be Rescued*

On the morning of December 7, 1941, before the Japanese attack began, the depth of the water under the battlewagon measured between forty-eight and fifty-

four feet. Once she capsized, only the starboard side of the ship, with part of the keel and the propeller shaft, was visible above the water. Salvage of the *Oklahoma* began in July 1942. The process started with the removal of about 350,000 gallons of fuel oil. Other steps included pumping air into the *Okie* (to force water out through the torpedo holes) and sealing the hull. To pull her upright, the Navy brought in twenty-one electric winches. It built twenty-one concrete pedestals at the edge of Ford Island. Workers then installed one winch on top of each pedestal. On the *Oklahoma* itself, men attached twenty-one timber A-frames to the starboard keel. Wire cables connected the A-frames to the winches on Ford Island. The ship was then ready to be righted.<sup>153</sup>



That process began in March 1943 and was not completed until June. It took eleven days, pulling the ship up at the rate of 1.4 degrees per hour, to reposition the *Okie* on her side. Salvage crews removed more water and soil from inside of the ship, lightening the weight the winches had to contend with. In mid-June, the bottom of the battleship sat on the floor in the water off of Ford Island. The portside list was only two degrees in contrast to the one hundred and fifty degrees she had less than twenty minutes after the Japanese began their December 7<sup>th</sup> attack. It had taken three months to right the *Oklahoma*. Once that was done, she resembled her old self more than she had at any point since right before 8:00 a.m. on December 7, 1941. Still, her June 1943 physical appearance was merely a semblance of the mighty battleship she once was. Six more months of salvage work was needed before she could be put into dry dock; that finally occurred in December 1943.<sup>154</sup>

The most personal part of the salvage operation was the task of recovering the remains of over four hundred officers and enlisted men. That had begun with the July 1942 salvage operation. First, as previously noted, water had to be removed from the ship, specifically the water on the lower decks. Workers used pumps to bring the water level down to about two feet, the height from the ground to a diver's knees. Once that water level was reached in all of the compartments, pumps were turned off. Bodies now floated in the ship's passageways. (As a Navy diver who worked on the *Oklahoma* explained, the recovery of the remains had to be done before all of the water was removed. If not, the power of the pumps would have pulled out bodies as well as debris.) Workers divided the remains into canvas bags, two for each body. They placed the skull in one bag and the bones in a second bag. Salvage workers then wrote a number, the same one, on both bags. Above, a casket awaited each set of canvas bags. Once the remains were inside of it, a United States flag was draped across the casket. A twenty-four-hour Marine Honor Guard stood at attention on the *Oklahoma* for days, until every body the workers could find had been recovered. Additionally, a Navy diver recounted how "medics sorted through all the sludge and debris for bones." They placed two hundred of them in a bag. (That number represents how many bones are in a human body.) An Army hospital on Oahu received the bags; a chaplain prayed over them. More bodies would be found later when the ship was completely out of the water. Undoubtedly, the same reverence was shown for them in their removal from the *Oklahoma*.<sup>155</sup>

In the period immediately after the attack, the Navy had identified twenty-nine crewmembers of the *Oklahoma* killed on December 7<sup>th</sup>. Names could not be ascertained for six others, so they were initially listed as "unknowns." The Navy



buried these thirty-five servicemen at Nuuanu Cemetery on Oahu. The remains found during salvage were interred at Halawa Cemetery since Nuuanu was full. At Halawa, remains of some four hundred *Oklahoma* crewmen were placed in fifty-two graves. After World War II, the United States created national cemeteries to serve as permanent resting places for those members of the military who

died during the war. One such site is the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific near Honolulu. Most who lost their lives at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 were eventually reburied there.<sup>156</sup>

### *The Fate Of The USS Oklahoma*

After the attack at Pearl Harbor, the *USS Oklahoma* never again saw active service. The Navy decommissioned her on September 1, 1944 while the war was still going on. She remained at Pearl Harbor. Two years and two months later, the

Navy auctioned her off. The Germans and the Japanese had surrendered, respectively, in May and August 1945. Commanding by then the largest fleet in the world, the United States Navy did not plan to keep all of its ships in service. Some would remain active, others would be put in reserve, and many would be discarded. The military sold this last group at auction. Most of the battleships, even those that had not sustained the damage the *Oklahoma* had, were disposed of this way. Aircraft carriers and submarines had replaced the old battlewagons as the most valued ships. Still, four of the newer battleships remained part of the Navy in the post war period.<sup>157</sup>

A shipbuilding company in Oakland, California bought the *Oklahoma* for scrap, paying \$46,127. The plan was for two tugs, sent from Puget Sound, to tow the battleship east, across the Pacific. A one-thousand-foot-long steel cable linked each tug to the *Oklahoma*. On May 12, 1947, she left Pearl Harbor. The tugs maintained a speed of five knots (not quite six miles an hour). Four days later, history seemed to repeat itself, specifically the *Oklahoma's* history on December 7, 1941. Early on the morning of May 16, 1947, the battleship began to list to port for no apparent reason. The list increased to thirty degrees by day's end. After conferring with authorities in Honolulu, the tugs planned to turn around and return to Oahu. But the *Okie* took control over her own fate. As the list became greater, the cables that had connected her to the tugs broke. The *Oklahoma* went down at sea. It was a much more fitting fate for a battleship than what awaited her in Oakland.<sup>158</sup>

### *Memories Of Shoes And Oil*

In the years immediately after the attack at Pearl Harbor, George saw the *Okie* every now and then. The *USS Louisville*, the Navy cruiser that became his next duty station, stopped in Oahu as it headed west to participate in various island campaigns. In particular, George remembers looking at "the anchor points and cables" built to right the *Oklahoma*. Such a sight might have prompted the emotional reactions George remembers having, in his words, "for a long time after December 7<sup>th</sup>." In one example, he explains, "I didn't tie my shoes so I could get them off if I had to swim." The enemy never sank the *Louisville*, but any sailor who had gone through what George did realized he could once again hear the order to abandon ship. It happened to at least one of his *Oklahoma* shipmates, Francis "Parky" Parkinson. After the December 7<sup>th</sup> enemy attack, the Navy assigned Parky to the cruiser *USS Northampton*. Japanese torpedoes sank it in November 1942. Although Parky spent time in the water before being rescued, he survived that second enemy sinking of his ship, as he did the war. In such a context, George's habit of not tying his shoes made sense. So did a feeling he got, as George continues, "when ever they fueled the ship [the *Louisville*]. The hair on the back of my neck stood up." The smell of the fuel oil reminded him of the oil all over the decks of the capsized *Oklahoma*. George had to move through the oil as he made his way upward. "The oil is what made things much more difficult on the 3<sup>rd</sup> deck."<sup>159</sup>

Thinking back today to that famous Sunday morning in December 1941, at one point George became uncharacteristically solemn. He chose his words slowly and deliberately when asked what he wanted younger generations to remember about December 7, 1941. “The devastation was so complete and so debilitating.” Additionally, George concludes that those who were not there that day could never really understand what he and others experienced. As he recently concluded in an addendum to his written account of December 7<sup>th</sup>, *“To me, and I’m sure to many others, the emotional impact of what was happening was totally devastating. We had just lost our home and probably some good friends. Our magnificent fleet was rapidly being turned into junk. Our own survival was uncertain. And we were experiencing a soul-crushing military defeat far greater and more complete than anything we had ever imagined.”*

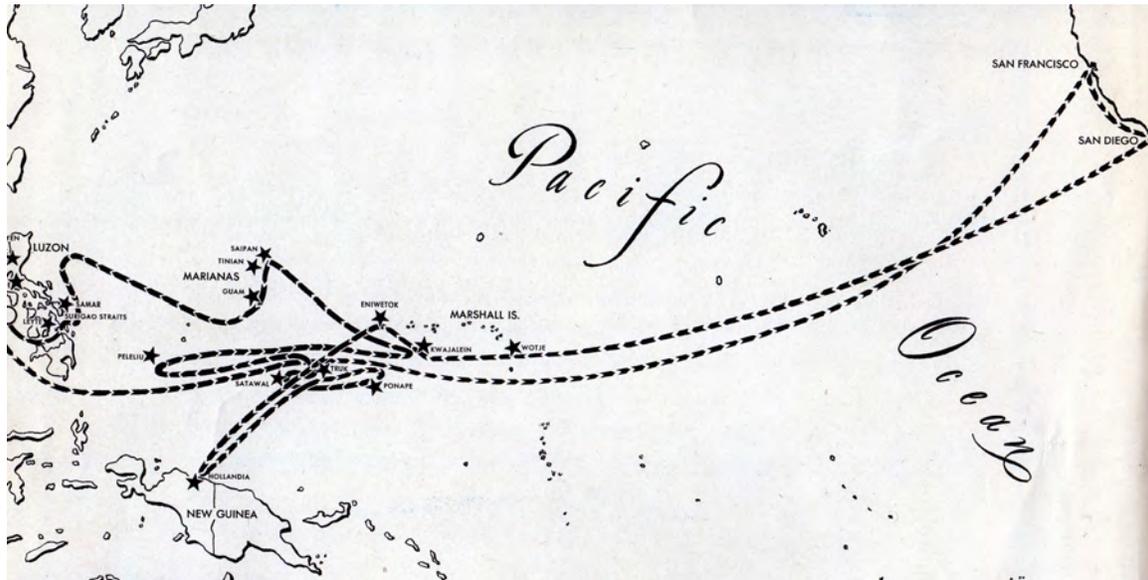
Unquestionably, “the date which will live in infamy” emerged as a watershed moment in United States history. George Coburn not only witnessed it, he also narrowly avoided being one of those entombed on board the *Oklahoma*. He considers himself to be, throughout his life, “a lucky man.” Certainly that proved true on December 7, 1941.

## Chapter 5 Striking Back, 1942-1945

*“Several days after Pearl Harbor, I was assigned to the USS Louisville where I served until the war was over. Louisville’s primary assignments were to damage enemy defenses prior to [the] landings of troops—usually marines—and to provide gunfire support once the marines were ashore. My rating was fire controlman. We had nothing to do with firefighting. Our job was to point a moving gun so that its projectile and a moving target would arrive at the same place at the same time.”*

The preceding paragraph is George’s description of his duty station on board the *Louisville*. He wrote it in 2014. By that date, community groups and schools were increasingly asking him to speak about his wartime experiences. George usually began with a firsthand account of the attack at Pearl Harbor. Even if there had been some time left after that, it would never have been enough to share all the campaigns George participated in as a member of the *Louisville’s* gunnery department. The list is an extensive one. It begins with raids, less than two months after December 7, 1941, against the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. Operations in the Aleutians came next. Campaigns in the Solomon Islands, again the Marshall Islands, the Western Carolines, New Guinea, the Mariana Islands, the Philippines, and Okinawa followed. In most of these, the *Louisville* assumed a fire support role, i.e., she fired her guns to “soften” enemy defenses before assault landings by United

States Marines or soldiers. The *Louisville* also bombarded Japanese installations during and after the landings.<sup>160</sup>



Map from the “*Lady Lou*” 1944 cruise book that shows her campaigns, with the exception of the Aleutians, through 1944

In addition to George’s recollections and his letters home, this chapter draws heavily upon two other primary sources. One records George’s World War II military service in an official, nine-page naval document entitled, “Continuous Service Certificate.” The other primary source is a rare book on his ship. One year after the war, twenty-one of the *Louisville*’s officers along with three enlisted men published the most authoritative history of the vessel--*Man of War, Log of the United States Heavy Cruiser Louisville*. The book contains chapters on the ship from its beginnings through its decommissioning. *Man of War* was printed primarily for crewmembers, not for the general public. Copies in existence today are few in number. George still has his. He calls it by its general name, the “cruise book,” since it records the voyages of the *Louisville*.

World War II Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal observed of the *Louisville*, “Her guns were a potent factor in every engagement” from the first raids against Japanese-held islands in January 1942 to the last major battle at Okinawa in June 1945. As a member of the ship’s crew, George saw more action than did most sailors in the United States Navy. This is explained, in part, by the rate he held as a fire controlman. It dictated that he be on a ship with “the big guns.” The *Louisville* qualified as such a vessel. And as a member of its gunnery department, most bluejackets did not have as many opportunities to directly strike back at the Japanese as did George. Months before Okinawa, he helped to direct the *Louisville*’s guns during the war’s largest naval battle at Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. In that enemy engagement and in a subsequent one in nearby waters, George performed

his duties so well that his Continuous Service Certificate documents commendations for his “excellent performance” in both engagements. At Pearl Harbor on board the *USS Maryland*, George had fought the enemy in the first hours of America’s entry into World War II. In the four years that followed, he participated in major campaigns throughout the North, Central, and South Pacific. Two words--“striking back”--summarize George Coburn’s wartime experiences.<sup>161</sup>

The history of the *USS Louisville* dates back to the 1920s. Congress authorized the building of “Cruiser No. 28,” along with six other vessels, on December 18, 1924. Over two years passed until actual construction began on the ship at the Puget Sound Navy Yard in Bremerton, Washington. In March 1929, the Navy announced Cruiser No. 28 would be called the *USS Louisville*, CA-28 (the “C” stands for “cruiser” and the “A” for “armored”). References to the Kentucky city and to the state pervaded the ship’s christening ceremony on September 1, 1929. A young woman from Louisville broke a bottle of water over the *Louisville’s* bow. The water had been



drawn from Lincoln Springs in Hodgenville, Kentucky, which is Abraham Lincoln’s birthplace. When the ceremony ended, the cruiser pulled out of dry dock as a band played, among other songs, *My Old Kentucky Home*. On a bulkhead hung a shoe from one of the most famous horses in racing history, Man o’ War. Although it had

never raced in Louisville’s Kentucky Derby, Man o’ War had lived most of his life in Kentucky. The *USS Louisville* displayed the horseshoe as what the ship’s cruise book called “a talisman,” an object thought to bring good luck. In time, that came to reflect the nickname crewmen came to call the cruiser, “the Lucky Lou.” Other sailors shortened the ship’s name, fondly, to “the Lady Lou,” “the Lady,” or just “Lou.”<sup>162</sup>

But as George states, the cruiser “was always the *Louisville* to me.” It was, after all, his second ship, and it never held the same place in his heart as “the *Okie*” had. George confessed as much in a letter to his mother written a year and a half after he first boarded the ship. Referring to the cruiser, he concluded, “It is a good ship and has a fine crew. It has given me as much as any other ship could, yet somehow I have never come to feeling really at home aboard her. Even after all this time, my first ship seems more like home to me than does this one.” Throughout his eight years in the Navy, George had only two duty stations--the *USS Oklahoma* and the *USS Louisville*. Even though he served longer on the cruiser, the battleship would always be George’s first love.<sup>163</sup>

As with the peacetime years (1938-1941), we have for the war years (1942-1945) letters George wrote to his mother Carrie. She was the one who originally kept them, the earliest ones bound together with a string. For decades after her death, George saved them. He even left in place the string around the first pieces of correspondence. Their shared sense of history preserved letters that initially documented the life of an enlisted man over a four-year period, from boot camp to the eve of war. During his years of peacetime service, George sent Carrie over forty pieces of correspondence. For George's last five years in the Navy, the letters again numbered over forty. More often than not, the correspondence from the *Louisville* appeared on stationary that had a drawing of the ship at the top of the sheet. But one significant change readily distinguishes the *Louisville* letters from his earlier ones on board the *Oklahoma*--the subjects George wrote about. After December 7, 1941, they were much more limited. The military censored wartime correspondence written by its members who served outside of the United States. Men and women in uniform were therefore cautioned not to write details of their location, movements, or planned itineraries. (George had freely discussed such topics in his prewar letters.) The front of envelopes George mailed home from the *Louisville* bore a circular censor's stamp with the phrase, "Passed by Naval Censor." The initial of the officer who read the letter appeared in the circle.

One of George's letters to his mother illustrates the redactions that could occur if someone in uniform violated censorship rules. Its date may provide a clue as to why George deviated from protocol in writing his letter--December 7, 1942, the first anniversary of the attack at Pearl Harbor. The officer who read the letter crossed out almost half of its lines. Today, George understandably has no idea what he wrote over seventy years ago underneath the black markings. The sentence after the redactions reads, "...it made me mad as the devil while it was going on, but now that it is over, I'll have to admit that I was seeing and feeling only the worst side of it." There is no way of knowing if George was referring in that sentence to the Sunday morning attack or perhaps to a more recent event in the Aleutian Islands where the *Louisville* had participated in a campaign. Then again, maybe the sentence after the redactions concerns neither of those incidents.

Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dot-matrix, or penball. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.



MRS CARRIE COBURN  
4460-36TH STREET  
SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA

GEORGE LEONARD COBURN  
(Sender's name)  
U.S.S. LOUISVILLE  
(Sender's address)  
To Postmaster SAN FRANCISCO  
DECEMBER 7, 1942  
(Date)

Dear Mother,

I received the package you sent me - thanks. Everything is still moving along smoothly, except <sup>for</sup> ~~that~~ [redacted]

[redacted]

It made me mad as the devil while it was going on, but now that it is over, I'll have to admit that I was seeing - and feeling only the worst side of it.

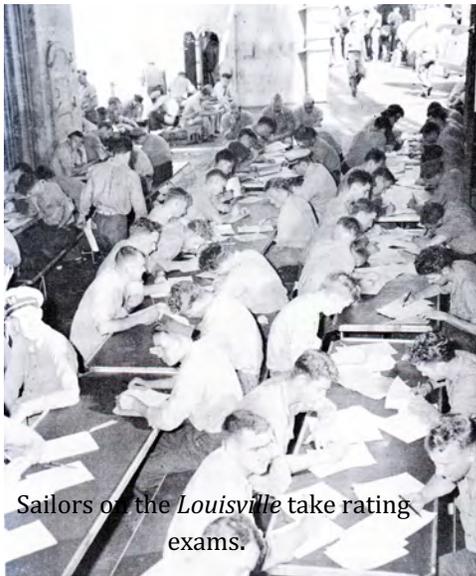
If you have Ed's new address, I wish you would send it to me.

George Leonard Coburn

Love  
George

That letter proved to be the only piece of correspondence in which George overstepped censorship rules. He usually wrote about safe topics, often inquiring about, or commenting on, members of the family. Two brothers entered the wartime military; Dick joined the Navy and Ed the Army. Only Bob did not wear the uniform in World War II, but for an understandable reason. As George explains, "He was a victim of tuberculosis. Bob was three years older than me, but we graduated from high school in the same class because he missed that much schooling." In spring 1943, Carrie wrote George that the local draft board had made it clear it would not recommend Bob for induction. George shared his mother's relief. "It would be mighty lonesome for you with all of us in the service. Seventy-five percent of the men in the family should be enough for the service anyway." Since Ann's husband was a Marine, the Coburn family was represented in every branch of service except for the Coast Guard. Carrie made sure that Mrs. Foster in Los Angeles knew that George was alive after the attack at Pearl Harbor. Carrie wrote her following George's visit to San Diego in January 1942. In her reply to Carrie, Mrs. Foster acknowledged the joyful news. Nevertheless, the old family friend still understood that Carrie's "heart is very heavy." Mrs. Foster's son was in the Army, and with that context, she observed, "Bad enough to have one in service and almost too much for three to have to go," a reference to George, Ed, and Dick.<sup>164</sup>

Another topic George wrote his mother about centered on his advancement in the Navy. George's Continuous Service Certificate details a steady upward rise in



Sailors on the *Louisville* take rating exams.

rate. Soon after George boarded the *Oklahoma* in May 1938, he held the standard post-boot-camp rate of seaman second class (S2c). By the time of the attack at Pearl Harbor in December 1941, George had achieved the rate of petty officer first class, fire controlman (FC1c). In September 1942, nine months into the war, he became chief fire controlman (CFC). George held that enlisted rate until the Navy promoted him to the officers' ranks as an ensign on December 1, 1944. In April 1946, one month before his discharge, George received an appointment as a lieutenant, junior grade.

George credits his rise in rates to his belief that he was a "lucky man." But he obviously was also responsible and smart. George studied hard for the written exams that the Navy used as a major determinant as to which enlisted men moved up in the rates. His advancements proved that.

George's earlier correspondence before America's entry into World War II captured his experiences from his months as a recruit through his years as a sailor on board his first duty station. To various degrees, other young men went through what George did. We just do not have their letters home to provide us with personal insights into what their lives were like. George's post-1941 letters continued to

document aspects in the life of a bluejacket, although now one who served in wartime. George's correspondence gives us a window into the very human feelings some sailors went through. More than once, for example, George vented his frustrations when he made it clear to his mother that sometimes he just wanted to get off his ship and again feel dry land beneath his feet. The letters George wrote Carrie are as valuable a resource for his story as are two other primary sources he has held onto for over seventy years--the *Louisville's* cruise book and his Continuous Service Certificate. Taken collectively, the letters, the cruise book, and George's Navy service record tell the story of "a lucky man."

### *The USS Louisville And "The Day"*

Like the *Oklahoma*, the *Louisville* was based at Pearl Harbor throughout much of 1941. She followed, as her cruise book explained, "a heavy operational and training schedule." At times, the ship convoyed troops and supplies to United States bases in the western Pacific. Early in November, the *Louisville* became part of a convoy bound for Manila in the Philippines. After troopships unloaded their cargo, the *Louisville* left Manila on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, heading back to Hawaii. Word of the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor reached the ship on the morning of December 7<sup>th</sup>. The *Louisville's* cruise book dramatically recounted her crew's reaction to the news. The initial communications appear not to have been coded. "Shortly after morning quarters...the first flashes of plain language messages reached us." Recall that as 1941 drew to a close, talk of a possible war with Japan increased. The cruise book subtly referred to this fact. "Try as we might to convince ourselves that we were mentally prepared for this most extreme eventuality, quite plainly and simply, we weren't. We were overwhelmed. Confusing reports continued to pour in, and our human imagination was quick to paint the picture even darker than it actually was. For a short time, we were even ready to believe the false rumor that the landing of enemy troops had been effected on Barbers Point [Oahu]...In a short time the true facts were radioed to all the fleet units, and while the picture was most appalling, it wasn't as hopeless as we were all too quick to fear."<sup>165</sup>

The *Louisville* arrived at Pearl Harbor on December 16<sup>th</sup>, nine days after what her cruise book called "The Day," capitalized and set off with quotation marks. Her crew experienced a spectrum of emotions. As the ship pulled into the harbor, the men on board looked for "some encouraging detail in the havoc before us. At first we failed." The officers and enlisted men stared at the Army's Hickam Field, "shattered and torn." Damaged ships "at the turn in the channel," and the sight of Battleship Row, testified to the destruction the enemy had inflicted. "But then gradually, we became more and more impressed," the *Louisville's* officers wrote. "Here were countless men on every ship, no matter what her condition, still standing to their guns and ready for anything. Their spirit could not be doubted or denied...Here then, deep in the debris of Pearl Harbor, we found the inspiration for the spirit which was to carry us through all obstacles to victory."<sup>166</sup>

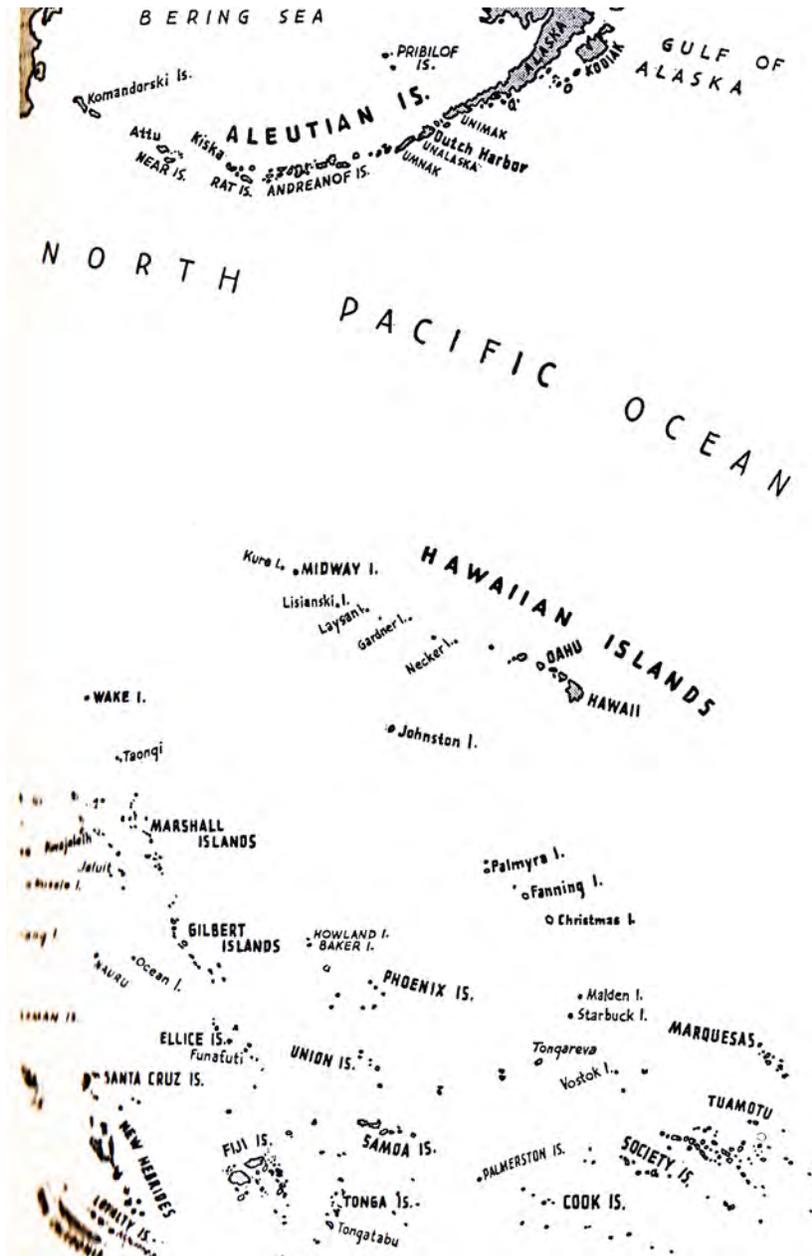
### *The Marshall And Gilbert Island Raids,*

*"The First Offensive Strike,"*  
*February 1942*

Less than two months later, the *Louisville* again returned to Pearl Harbor. George joined the crew shortly after the ship pulled into the naval base in mid-December. In January the cruiser received orders that became a point of pride for George and others on board the *Louisville*. As he explains, "We were the first offensive strike [against the Japanese]." That strike took the form of raids against the Marshall and Gilbert Islands in the Central Pacific.

But before that happened, the *Louisville* arrived in San Diego where it joined the task force that would launch those raids. It was early in January 1942. Back in his hometown, George had the opportunity to visit his family. His unannounced appearance at the front door shocked his mother and others in the house. They all knew that George had been on the *Oklahoma*. News reports mentioned the severe damage the battleship had sustained. George had, with the help of the Salvation Army, filled out a postcard in the days after the December 7<sup>th</sup> attack telling his mother that he was alive. By the time George appeared at the front door of his house, however, Carrie had not received the postcard. As George tells the story, "I don't remember who was there [in the house]. There were family members there. It was more than just mom." With some levity in recalling that moment today, he adds with a laugh, "They were all unbelievably shocked to see the ghost of George walking in the door." He agrees that, in all probability, Carrie never received the Salvation Army postcard. It is not in the correspondence she so carefully saved. If the Post Office had ever delivered the December 1941 postcard from George, surely she would have kept it.

Within days after George's dramatic visit home, the *Louisville* left San Diego as part of what its cruise book identified as "a veritable armada." In a convoy that included the aircraft carrier *USS Yorktown* and other Navy ships, the *Louisville* first set out for Samoa, a Pacific island about midway between Hawaii and New Zealand. Passenger ships, now converted for military use as troop transports, carried the first Marines who left the United States since Congress had declared war. The convoy was to deposit the Marines at Samoa. Once that was done, some of the ships in the convoy became part of what the Command identified as "the Southern Force" (the *Yorktown*, the cruisers *St. Louis* and *Louisville*, and some destroyers). On January 25<sup>th</sup> the Southern Force proceeded to the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. (Each was actually a coral atoll, with anywhere between twenty-five to fifty islands, islets, and reefs. Over the years, Japan had built military installations on the atolls that now threatened Allied sea-lanes.) In the Marshall-Gilbert chains, the *Louisville* participated in its first World War II campaign.<sup>167</sup>



*Battle Report, Pearl Harbor to Coral Sea*, Prepared from Official Sources by Commander Walter Karig, USNR and Lieutenant Welbourn Kelley, USNR (New York, 1944), p. 3

The *Louisville's* cruise book identified the action in the Marshall-Gilbert islands as "our first retaliation for the raid on Pearl Harbor." The central mission assigned to the Southern Force was to mount air strikes against Japanese installations and shipping. The Southern Force focused on the atolls Jaluit, Mili, and Makin. The raids began on February 1, 1942. The *Louisville's* position was just south of Jaluit, a location the ship reached, according to its cruise book, "after a high speed run all night." Planes from the *Yorktown* led the raids even though bad weather affected visibility. Hours later, "fly boys" from the *Louisville* catapulted off the cruiser's deck in their observation planes; they conducted an anti-submarine search in the waters ahead of the Southern Force. An entry in George's Continuous Service Certificate acknowledges his presence as part of a "task force attacking enemy forces in [the] Marshall & Gilbert Islands on January 31, 1942."<sup>168</sup>

The aerial attacks proved successful. They destroyed an estimated thirty-five Japanese planes, damaged airfields, "neutralized" enemy bases, and sunk some 73,000 tons of shipping. As the *Louisville's* cruise book concluded, "The first great offensive blow against the Jap had been struck...But perhaps even more important was the lift to the Navy's pride afloat and ashore, and at home." Ships in the task force returned to Pearl Harbor on February 6<sup>th</sup>. The cruise book recorded the reception sailors there gave to the *Lady Lou* and to the other vessels. "We received an ovation that we will never forget. Bluejackets lined the rails of every ship present, giving three cheers as each unit of the force passed to its anchorage." Even today, decades later, George remembers that welcome.<sup>169</sup>

*George's Second Campaign,  
Again "Attacking Enemy Forces,"  
March 1942*

George and the *Louisville* did not stay long on Oahu. The cruiser departed Pearl Harbor on February 16, 1942, heading for the southwest Pacific as part of another task force. As with the earlier one, it, too, included the *Yorktown*. And this new task force was also to safeguard shipping lanes to Australia. But this time the *Yorktown* was not the only vessel that could launch planes against enemy installations. With the *USS Lexington's* assignment to the group, the task force counted two aircraft carriers. By March 10<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville* was positioned off of the southeast side of New Guinea. Over one hundred planes from the *Yorktown* and *Lexington* attacked Japanese naval ships, antiaircraft installations, airfields, and other facilities near Lae and Salamaua (a town and village, respectively) on the northeastern coast of New Guinea. Back in Washington, D.C., President Roosevelt announced to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that the Lae-Salamaua raid was "the best day's work we have had." The American attack, like the one in the Marshalls-Gilberts just weeks before, had again proved two things. First, even after the blows to the United States Pacific Fleet on December 7, 1941, its ships could still severely damage Japan's defensive perimeter. Second, Australian communication and shipping lanes remained open to the Allies. George's Continuous Service Certificate places him on the *Louisville* as part of a task force "attacking enemy forces of Salamaua, New

Guinea, on March 10, 1942.” In reality, however, planes from American aircraft carriers had really done the “attacking.” The *Louisville’s* guns played no active role in the assault. That would not be true in George’s next major campaign. His ship had to sail far, far north, however, to strike its blows against the Japanese. And as a fire controlman, George helped to direct the *Louisville’s* big guns in that engagement.<sup>170</sup>

The letters George wrote to his mother over the next months furnish evidence of a man who was bored by the perpetual waiting that is so much a part of wartime service. “I am well and everything is O.K. except that time is dragging by pretty slowly,” he shared in a June 1942 letter. A few weeks later, George hinted that the inactivity was still getting to him--“It’s the same old routine here. About all I can say is that I am well and that I am staying out of trouble—there isn’t much of a chance to get into any.” George injected some humor into a similar observation in an August 1<sup>st</sup> letter--“There is nothing new here, same ship, same people, the water even looks the same.” While it might have looked “the same,” by that date the *Louisville* was in different waters. The cruiser had arrived in the north Pacific, specifically in the Aleutian Islands off the coast of Alaska. Understanding censorship regulations, George could not have shared that fact with his mother. Even though he had news he might have wanted to tell Carrie, wartime rules required his silence on where he was and what he was doing. Aside from some briefly worded telegrams he sent home, an August 24, 1942 letter to his mother was the shortest communication he sent her during the war. The entire letter consisted of just one, long sentence--“I have absolutely nothing to write about, so I’ll just drop you these few lines to let you know that I am still O.K.” George had “nothing to write about” because of censorship regulations. If not for them, he could have shared with Carrie a major piece of news, namely the fact that the *Louisville* had finally fired her big guns against the enemy seventeen days earlier.<sup>171</sup>

*Two Alaskan Cruises,  
1942 & 1943*

*“In the early days [on board the Louisville], I was assigned to the anti-aircraft director, controlling 5-inch AA guns. Later, for major actions, I operated the main battery director controlling our nine 8-inch guns. The Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska were the first to feel our firepower. No resistance at Attu. Weak shore battery response at Kiska was promptly silenced by the ship with that assignment. Louisville continued destruction of fortifications. The invasions were carried out later, with no resistance. The Japs had abandoned the islands.*

*The Aleutians and Bering Sea area had some of the world’s worst weather. Frequent dense fog, winds sometime in excess of 100 MPH, mountainous waves that tossed our 10,000-ton ship around like a toy. We had no casualties due to enemy action, but we did have men hurt, including broken bones due to the violent movement of the ship.”* George Coburn, 2014 written recollections

Today, George readily recognizes the irony in the word prewar and wartime sailors used to describe their ships’ voyages--“cruises.” In more modern times, we

associate that noun with relaxing vacations civilians take on board a passenger liner. Yet George wrote the word in his prewar letters to Carrie in a very different context. "Cruises" denoted the voyages the *Oklahoma* made. After joining the battleship's crew, George picked up on the word from the lexicon used by more seasoned sailors. The *Louisville's* cruise book used the word throughout its chapters, wartime as well as prewar. So in keeping with the language in his letters, and the language in the *Louisville's* cruise book, George's major campaigns early in the war involved two Alaskan "cruises." One



Battle Report, p. 3

occurred in the summer of 1942 and the other in the summer of 1943. Both came out of the United States' effort to take back from the Japanese two islands, Attu and Kiska, in the Aleutians chain. But as George explains, "I really cannot separate the two campaigns." He admits he remembers Kiska more because "they shot back at us."

Up until the Aleutians campaign in the summer of 1942, the *Louisville* herself had not been tasked with firing her guns at the enemy. Instead, as noted earlier, the cruiser had been part of two task forces that had provided support to carriers; their planes had mounted raids in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands as well as raids in New Guinea. As George explains, "We were more or less on escort duty for the carriers." In the Aleutians during the summer of 1942, the *Louisville* joined another task force. This time the ship took on a more offensive role than in her two previous post-December 7<sup>th</sup> campaigns. When the *Lady Lou* returned to the Aleutians in the summer of 1943, the cruiser again found herself in a position to forcibly retaliate against the enemy.

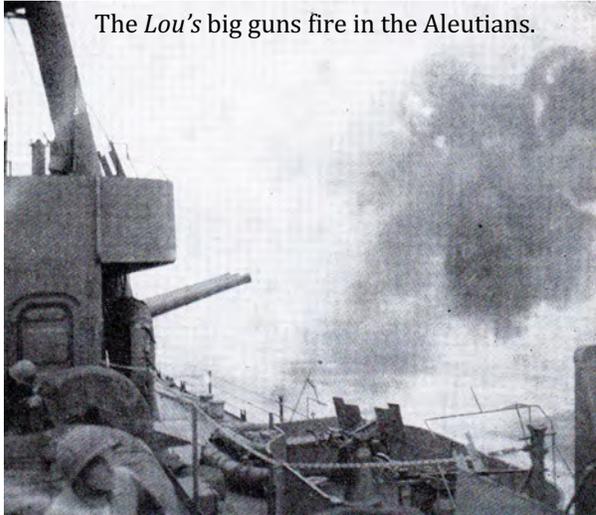
Alaska had been a United States territory since 1867 when the administration of President Andrew Johnson purchased it from Russia. Its Aleutian Islands stretched westward from the southern tip of Alaska. Once the United States entered World War II, the islands appeared on a map as a bridge that could theoretically be used by the Japanese to invade the North American continent or a bridge that could be used by the Allies to invade Japan. Neither strategy was a realistic one, and neither the United States nor Japan planned such invasions. That did not, however, stop the two adversaries from confronting each other in the Aleutians. By the summer of 1942 when the *Louisville* and the rest of Task Force 8 arrived, the United States military had increased its presence in the Aleutian Islands. In the summer before the attack at Pearl Harbor, the Army and Navy had established bases at Dutch Harbor on the island of Unalaska (located on the extreme eastern end of the island chain). In early 1942, the Army built an airfield on the island of Umnak and one at Cold Bay on the Alaskan Peninsula. The primary bases were on the island of Kodiak on the extreme eastern end of the Aleutians. Supply lines posed a major problem, however, for these far-flung northern installations. Seattle, the closest major city in the continental United States, was 1,742 miles by air or 1,957 miles by sea.<sup>172</sup>

In June 1942, Japan fought American forces in the North Pacific. At that same time, to draw parts of the United States Fleet northward, Japan invaded the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska. The former is located at the extreme western end of the Aleutians chain, and the latter just east of Attu. About one thousand miles lay between Attu and Dutch Harbor. Some eighteen hundred Japanese soldiers landed on Attu and Kiska, unopposed since no American bases existed on those two islands. For the next twelve months, the Japanese dug in as the Americans worked to harass the invaders and ensure that no further enemy forces could be landed. However, the Japanese and United States High Commands placed a greater priority on engagements against each other in the South Pacific's Solomon Islands. Americans did not attempt to regain possession of Attu and Kiska until the summer of 1943. The *Louisville* played a role in both the 1942 harassment of the occupying enemy forces and in the 1943 successful reclaiming of the two islands.<sup>173</sup>

On August 7, 1942, the cruiser participated in Task Force 8's bombardment of Japanese batteries and installations on Kiska. The three to four mile wide island is twenty-two miles in length. Halfway down its eastern side is Kiska Harbor, the area where the enemy had located most of its installations. Four United States naval cruisers (one of which was the *Louisville*), five destroyers, and four destroyer-minesweepers mounted the attack. They had all left, surrounded by fog, from Kodiak. Once at Kiska, the sun greeted them.<sup>174</sup>

The admiral in charge of the task force constrained his ships when it came to their firing position. He did not want to expose them to Japanese guns on shore. Additionally, reefs dotted the harbor, waters that the United States had never charted very well. Rather than firing the American batteries from the mouth of the harbor, the admiral ordered the task force ships to go back and forth some four to six miles south of the peninsula at the tip of the harbor. Ships thus had to shoot over South Head, the peninsula. The *Louisville* and the other heavy cruiser fired their guns at a distance of 19,500 yards. "That, by the way," George adds, "was not a problem. In doing direct fire, we were on a plot generated by our rangekeepers. We knew where we were and where the target was." Observation planes from the cruisers were to pinpoint the targets, but Japanese planes effectively went after them. Once the enemy controlled the skies, they radioed in the location of Task Force 8. Enemy guns on Kiska began a bombardment of the ships. The United States admiral in charge became furious that he was losing the upper hand. From about five miles off shore, he "pounded Kiska with every ton of high explosives in his magazines." George remembers the enemy barrage. "A shore battery opened up on us," he recounts. "The *St. Louis*, a light cruiser that had fifteen 6-inch guns as its main battery, opened fire. The ship not only sounded but looked like it had exploded. All fifteen guns going off at the same time made an enormous blast and smoke. And I might add that the shore battery was silenced." The task force's ammo was completely spent in seven minutes. No American ships received any damage.<sup>175</sup>

Upon reading the account of this exchange in the *Louisville's* cruise book, one can detect the pride the crew felt about the role their ship played in the bombardment. The narrative also captures the emotion many if not most crewmen experienced. "Soon our turn came. We swung into position and at long last our guns spoke, spoke with all our pent-up emotions. Every shot fired served to cleanse us of



The *Lou's* big guns fire in the Aleutians.

the bitterness and savagery that had been bottled up for so long." George echoes this sentiment--"We wanted to strike back. Landing a counterpunch was very important." In the words of its cruise book, the *Louisville* "steamed back and forth, wrecking harbor shipping and facilities, shore installations and gun emplacements." The cruise book judged Japan's return fire as "sporadic and inaccurate." Most of the enemy shells "hit several thousand yards ahead of us." Task Force 8's bombardment proved effective. It destroyed barracks on one

side of the harbor and landing barges on the beach. A freighter became engulfed in flames. American guns sank a Japanese flying boat and severely damaged two others. Still, enemy destroyers, subchasers, and midget subs remained unscathed.<sup>176</sup>

The August 7<sup>th</sup> bombardment had been attempted in July, but fog near Kiska led to collisions between four of Task Force 8's destroyers. The task force thus returned to Kodiak to await better weather conditions. One student of the Aleutians argued, "The hazards of surface and air navigation are greater there than in any other part of the world." He described the weather system in dramatic terms--"A giant low pressure system hovers over the Aleutian Chain in the North Pacific like a permanent hurricane," the system "often blanketing the entire region with rain and fog or winds of up to 100 miles an hour or even greater." George emphatically concludes there are no words to describe how bad weather conditions were in the Aleutians. It was "ferocious" in those waters, to use his word. "The waves were absolutely immense," he explains. "They were so steep. The ship would come over the top of a wave as it crested and then hit the next wave. Blue water would flow clear back to the bridge." The *Louisville's* cruise book noted that sometimes the fog was so thick that the crew could not see "the bow of the ship from the bridge." The weather also made it impossible to guarantee tactical air support when United States forces sought to regain control of Attu and Kiska. The American military thus heavily relied on naval bombardment of the entrenched Japanese forces.<sup>177</sup>

Aside from its role in the shelling of Kiska, the *Louisville* also refueled destroyers at sea. But as its cruise book noted, "rough weather adds to the difficulties and dangers of this maneuver" as the sailors fought the elements to control hose lines between the ships. After a week or more of this duty, the *Lady Lou*

went into Kodiak for some liberty time. George grimaces when he remembers those days. "Kodiak was a miserable place," he emphasizes. "The weather was bad," and he laughingly adds, "They used to say about it that it was the only place in the world where you could be in mud up to your ass and have dust in your face." Sometimes, though, George admits there was sunshine in Kodiak. "But generally," he is quick to stress, "it was foggy. And when I say foggy, I mean a real dripping wet fog. Everything was dripping wet, including people who were out in it." George shares one strong memory of a liberty in Kodiak, but only part of the story. He was with another sailor named "Goodwin." As George recounts the tale, "We illegally came into possession of a case of beer." But he prefers not to divulge the details of how that happened--"I am not going to explain how we got it." He and Goodwin shared the beer with other friends, "a pretty restricted little club," as George defines the group. "I remember sitting on the seawall and drinking the beer." The cruise book explained that aside from beer, softball games, and walks, there was little to do in Kodiak. "Everyone's nerves were on edge," the book continued, "with the result that razzing between men, which ordinarily could have been accepted in good humor, became the occasion for many fights."<sup>178</sup>

George echoes how the weather impacted relations among the men in Kodiak. "There was a lot of agitation there, and the weather did not help." He readily recounts one strong recollection he has of another liberty in Kodiak. "I remember there was a Canadian ship there at the same time we were there, the *Prince Rupert*. There were many fights between the American sailors and the Canadian sailors. And when a fight started, the Canadian sailors would yell, 'Prince Rupert.' Canadian sailors would come from everywhere. They had a great sense of duty to their own ship and crew."

On their first Alaskan cruise, George and the *Louisville* remained in the Aleutians throughout the summer and into the fall of 1942. On the very day--August 7<sup>th</sup>--that the task force fired its guns at Kiska, Marines landed on the South Pacific island of Guadalcanal, in the Solomons. Their fight there against the Japanese would last for six months. The Command ordered the *Louisville*, along with other cruisers in the Aleutians, to head to the South Pacific. Even without that imperative, however, the increasingly harsh weather conditions spelled the end of the task force's offensive actions in the Aleutians. As the *Louisville's* officers concluded in the cruise book, "The nights grew longer and the days shorter, the seas more ferocious; and the fog remained our curse, enveloping the wind-swept, snow-driven island chain, enforcing peace even against man's wishes. No longer able to wage effective war, the *Lou* was directed south. We were glad to say good-bye to the ice and snow and the 'williwaws' of the Aleutians." By the end of October 1942, the *Louisville* had left Alaskan waters.<sup>179</sup>

### *The Louisville Returns To The Aleutians, 1943*

The 1942 Aleutians campaign that the *Louisville* participated in had bombarded Japanese installations on Kiska. A year later, with Guadalcanal firmly in

the hands of Marines, United States naval ships arrived off of the Alaskan coast. Together, they constituted Task Force 16. The *Louisville* was one of the cruisers. The task force was there to support the landings of American forces on Attu and Kiska. For Attu, the *Louisville* patrolled north of the island to protect the landing forces. For Kiska, she fired her big guns at enemy, onshore targets. Using her guns to back an island invasion signaled a significant change in *Louisville's* wartime service. As her officers explained in the cruise book, in the Kiska campaign, "A new era had opened in the *Louisville's* life. We had become the power behind the blow which was to put troops ashore in most of the remaining great invasions of the Pacific war."<sup>180</sup>

Before Kiska, though, was Attu. The *Louisville* arrived back in the Aleutians, with Task Force 16, on April 25, 1943. George's ship patrolled the waters around Attu. Even though it was officially spring, it still felt like winter. "I remember it was snowing," George recalls. The *Louisville's* cruise book referred to the weather as a time when the ship, on patrol, was "feeling our way through the fog and cold of the northern sea." The landing on Attu had been scheduled for May 8<sup>th</sup>, but as one historian noted, "weather so foul and sea so high" forced a postponement. Three days later, the dense fog benefitted the Americans. Japanese planes and submarines simply could not see the invading forces. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, more than two thousand men initially landed on Attu to take back the small island from over two thousand entrenched Japanese. It took close to three weeks to do so.<sup>181</sup>

When American soldiers went ashore at Attu, they carried out the first amphibious island landing by the Army since the Spanish American War in 1898. Additionally, only the 1945 Battle for Iwo Jima surpassed Attu in respect to the ratio between the number of United States casualties and the number of Japanese the Americans fought. On Attu, American casualties totaled 3,829 (549 of them were killed in action) as infantrymen engaged 2,650 of the enemy. When the battle ended, Americans buried 2,351 Japanese bodies; the total number of prisoners of war (POWs) did not even reach thirty. (Officials presumed that hundreds more had been buried by their comrades during the weeks of fighting. A suicidal banzai charge at the end of the battle helps to explain the high Japanese death count.) In the end, the *Louisville* played only a peripheral role in the Battle for Attu. She patrolled west of Attu and "protected the inner transports from attack by enemy ships." Two months passed before the Kiska landings allowed the *Louisville* to fire her guns.<sup>182</sup>

Over five thousand Japanese soldiers were on Kiska where they had built an extensive underground city. The United States military scheduled the American landing for the second week in August 1943. Immediate preparations for it began in July when the Command ordered ships to the waters around Kiska. Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers were to fire upon Kiska to weaken whatever defenses the Japanese had built there. When the *Louisville* arrived off of the island early in July, she initially convoyed troops and supply ships for the upcoming landing. Once again, the cruiser had to contend with extreme weather. "We were caught in one of the worst storms of the Lady's long career," the cruise book recounted. "Winds of gale proportions piled up mountainous seas, until the capital ships of the convoy were

rolling and bobbing like corks. For two days our ship fought the lashing sea, rolling and tossing to the beat of its mighty waves.” As the cruise book noted, on July 5<sup>th</sup> the *Louisville’s* guns offered “fire support and shore bombardment.” It was a significant moment in the ship’s history since it was one of the first times she directed her guns against the enemy. The *USS Nevada*, another member of the task force, surely felt the importance of the day, too. Like George, the battleship had been at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.<sup>183</sup>

Throughout the war, cruisers like the *Louisville* and battleships like the *Nevada* fired their guns in support of various infantry landings on enemy-held terrain. The *Louisville’s* cruise book dubbed the ship’s nine 8-inch guns as “the Lou’s ‘Sunday Punch.’ All other functions of the ship are subordinate in battle, dedicated only to bringing our nine guns of the main battery to bear on the enemy.” The *Louisville’s* 5-inch guns, George explains, were used for shore bombardment, antiaircraft fire, and for naval battles where the ships were close to each other. Additionally, the cruiser also had 20-mm antiaircraft guns and 40-mm guns for planes or surface targets. In May 1942, after *the Louisville’s* early campaigns, she went to Mare Island for a routine overhaul. While there, some of her old antiaircraft guns were replaced and radar was installed. However, according to George, “They did not replace the 5-inch guns. We got 40-mm [guns], maybe 20-mm. 40-mm was a four-barrel nest of guns that put out an enormous amount of firepower, [with] limited range, of course, but a lot of fire power.” George readily contrasts these additions to the *Louisville* with what the cruiser had before the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack in Hawaii. “The antiaircraft guns were not that effective before Pearl Harbor. I was working in a position that gave me maximum exposure to how effective or ineffective they were.” As an example, George cites the “old 3-inch 50s.” (He explains they were “single barrel, 3-inch caliber guns, loaded by hand by pushing the projectile through the breech.”) George judges them to have been “in my mind, absolutely useless. All they did was make a lot of noise.”<sup>184</sup>



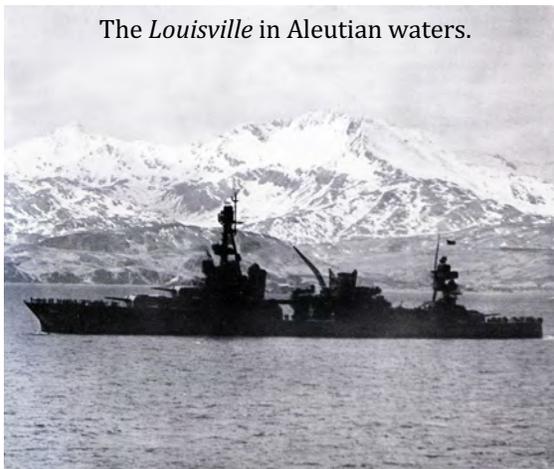
George identifies this director as “somewhat similar” to the one he used. The one pictured is a Mark 37 director for AA guns.

As a fire controlman, George helped direct the guns. The modern Navy no longer relied on a bluejacket “eyeballing” the target. When it came to firing the guns, a ship’s fire control system replaced such visual estimates. As George likes to define it, “A fire control system is a system that determines where a moving gun has to be pointed to hit a moving target.” One of the system’s key components was a manned “director.” Again, as George wrote in 2014, “In the early days, I was assigned to the anti-aircraft director, controlling 5-inch AA guns. Later, for major actions, I operated the main battery director controlling our nine 8-inch guns.” The director was a large, enclosed piece of equipment installed high above the bridge. Its top could be opened or enclosed. On the *Louisville*, George worked with the Mark 33 director. More than one fire

controlman sat or stood inside of the director. George, for example, was one of three men in his director, each with his own title and task. The “pointer” moved the sight vertically while the “trainer” moved the sight horizontally. George, the “computer operator,” operated the computer. When asked exactly what he did with the computer, George describes his job. Using knobs on the computer, “I had to crank in course and speed [of the *Louisville*] and the target’s course and speed.” (An observer in the main top gave fire control his estimate of the latter.) For island bombardments such as Kiska, George explains how fire control identified the target area. “We had maps of the island, cut into grids. Each grid or square was identified. We would get directions to fire on square such and such. We set up our system to make our projectiles land there, although, unless we had a spotter [and the Americans did not have one on Kiska], we were not sure where they did land.”

After the early July bombardment of Kiska, ships in the task force returned to Kodiak, only to leave again for Kiska on July 19<sup>th</sup>. Three days later, having arrived in the waters off of the island, American sailors found clear skies, the first such temperate day in two months. Again, the *Louisville* fired her guns at Kiska. All totaled, battleships and cruisers directed what George estimates was hundreds of pounds of high explosives at the island. The August 15<sup>th</sup> landing would not mirror the one on Attu in May since the Americans encountered no enemy troops on Kiska. Cloaked in the bad weather that was endemic to the Aleutians, Japanese surface ships had snuck into Kiska and had successfully evacuated all of their troops.<sup>185</sup>

What George will never forget about the Aleutians campaigns is the inclement weather. It damaged ships and men. In George’s words, the weather, for example, “bent metal sheeting around gun installations.” Sailors, he recalls, were sometimes



The *Louisville* in Aleutian waters.

“slammed” into the ship as waves tossed the vessel about, resulting in “broken limbs.” The freezing cold affected George on a daily basis. He did not have heavy clothing on either of his Alaskan cruises. The *Louisville* had not taken any in 1942; in 1943, the cruise book trumpeted the fact that the ship did have warm clothing on its second trip north. Yet George disputes that statement. Recalling the 1943 trip to the Aleutians, he recounts, “I do not know where I was when the word came out that warm clothing was available, but I did not get the word. As a result, I went through the campaign without any warm clothing, and I know that many others did, too. What I suspect is that the supply of warm clothing that we got aboard was extremely limited.” It could very well be that only officers received it. George bundled up the best he could. “I used to put on at least two pairs of trousers and three or four shirts before I would go on watch. Even so, when I got off watch, I

generally would go down and get into my bunk. It took a couple of hours to warm up again.”<sup>186</sup>

*Crossing the Line,  
December 1, 1942*

After the first Aleutians campaign, the *Louisville* headed south, bound for the West Coast. The cruiser arrived there by early November 1942. At Mare Island, the ship refueled and brought on more supplies. From an apologetic line in a letter he later wrote his mother, George appears to have called home since he could not make it down to San Diego--“I hope no one got mad about the time that one or two of my calls came through. The only thing that time of the day means to me any more is that in the daytime, it is light, and at night, it is dark.” The *Louisville* did not stay long in California. She left for the Hawaiian Islands, pulling into Pearl Harbor on November 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>187</sup>

George wrote his mother a short letter that day. One line in it stands out--“Everything is back in the old routine again and it seems pretty dull, but I sure had a good time while it lasted.” Even though decades have passed since he penned that sentence, George knows exactly what he was referring to with the phrase “good time.” In the 1942 Aleutians campaign, in spite of the harsh weather, the *Louisville* fired her guns against the Japanese for the first time. As George puts it, “We were doing things instead of aimlessly cruising.” George and others anticipated more such moments. They had a few days liberty on Oahu before setting out for Australia. The sailors initially welcomed the change in climate from what they had experienced in the Aleutians. But as the cruise book noted, crewmembers later lamented what seemed to be the constantly warm weather--“Little did we think that soon we would be cursing the sun and heat and eternal sweat of the tropics. All we could think of as we steamed south was sunbathing, tans and swimming, for it was always summer in the ‘land down under.’” Less than two weeks after departing Pearl Harbor, the *Louisville* crossed the equator. Once that happened, George found himself pressured into participating in a ceremony known as “Crossing the Line.” It was so much a part of Navy tradition that an entry for it appears on his Continuous Service Certificate--“qualified as a Shellback. Crossed Equator this date [December 1, 1942].” While some sailors might recall such a ceremony as a “good time,” George does not share that positive view.<sup>188</sup>

The ceremony inducted sailors into what the *Louisville's* cruise book identified as the “Royal Order of the Deep.” Before a bluejacket crossed the equator, he was known as a “pollywog,” or a “wog.” (A pollywog is an early stage in the life of an amphibian, especially a frog.) As the amphibian pollywog matures, it physically changes. In the Crossing the Line ceremony, pollywog sailors underwent a change, too, which was the point of the ceremony. Since “shellbacks” are defined as veteran sailors, after bluejackets crossed the equator they became “shellbacks.” The roots of the ceremony go back to bygone eras when wooden ships sailed the seas with their sails unfurled, the wind as their power source. Seafaring in those days was a more

dangerous venture than in modern times. As such, successfully crossing the equator represented a true accomplishment. On the day of the ceremony, a Jolly Roger flag flew above the deck on board the *Louisville*. According to the cruise book, this signified “Neptunus Rex had come aboard to see that all wayward Pollywogs are properly initiated into the Royal Order of the Deep.” King Neptune and his “Royal Party,” the cruise book continued, conducted the initiation “with traditional mock pomp and boisterous ceremony.” For the pollywogs, there was no way to avoid the ritual. George points out that “a pollywog who did not show up was hunted down, and there weren’t many places to hide.”<sup>189</sup>

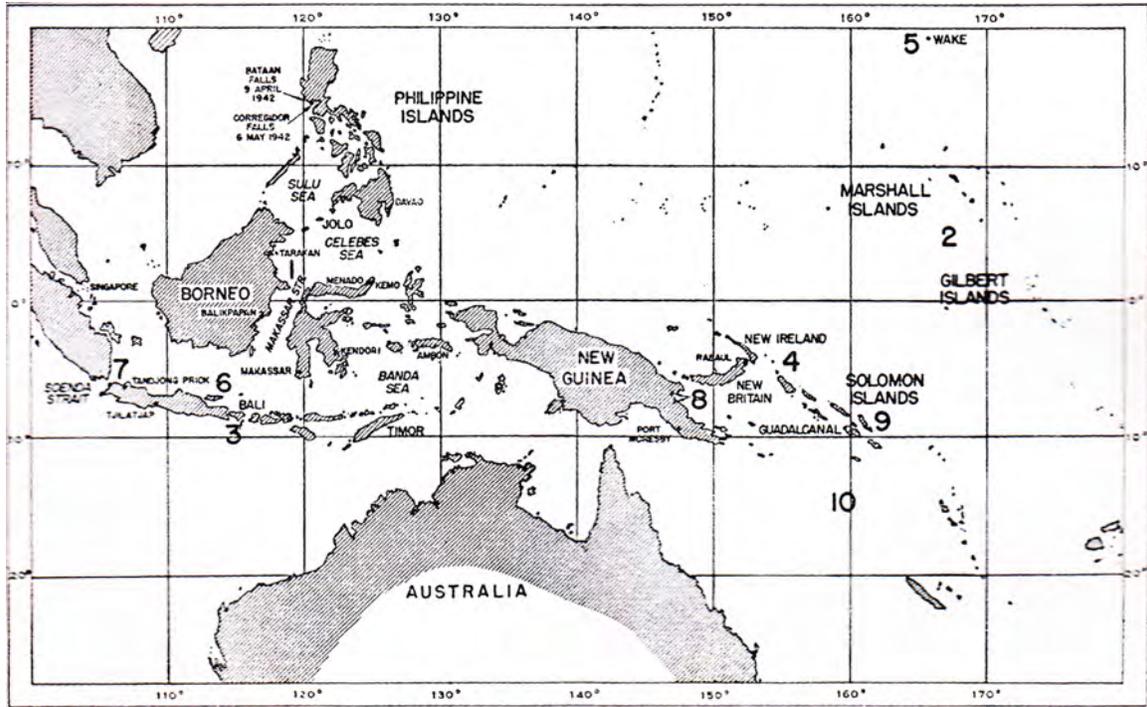
Before being dubbed a shellback by a sailor dressed as King Neptune, the pollywog endured some hazing by his crewmates. George recalls that he “ran the gauntlet.” At this point during the ceremony, shellbacks lined up across from each other in two rows. Each sailor held a tube with a rag stuffed inside of it. A shellback might wet his rag, which insured that his hit would be delivered with more force. The pollywog was instructed to run this “gauntlet” as the shellbacks struck those who passed before them. George recounts that shellbacks hit him with a canvas tube, which he calls a “shalaylee.” George recalls, “I remember taking many blows.” Looking back today at the Crossing the Line tradition, George shares a strong conviction he holds. “I never thought much of that ceremony. I thought it was brutality without any sense.” One major reason for this conclusion relates to what happened to another pollywog. George is not sure if the incident occurred during his initiation or a later one. “One guy in our division was a real sadist. He did everything he could [to the pollywogs]. We had one kid who died as a result. He was wearing a grass skirt, and some jackass set it on fire.”

A few days after George’s induction into the Royal Order of the Deep, the *Louisville* received new orders. As the cruise book recounted, the ship’s Commanding Officer “called the crew to the well deck for an important announcement.” The Japanese had sunk the *USS Northampton*, another cruiser. The ship had been part of a task force blocking enemy reinforcements of Guadalcanal in the Solomons. (Marines had been fighting the Japanese there since August.) The Navy Command changed the *Louisville’s* orders. She was no longer bound for Australia. Instead, the ship was to join the task force in the Solomons, in essence, replacing the *Northampton*. The *Louisville* arrived in Noumea, New Caledonia (an island south of the Solomons) early in December 1942 to join Task Force 67. Two months earlier, the *Louisville* had been in the freezing waters of the North Pacific, firing her big guns at enemy installations. In the South Pacific, she would fire her anti-aircraft guns at Japanese planes. In return, enemy planes targeted the *Louisville* one night late in January 1943. She emerged unscathed, but a sister cruiser did not. The moment served as one example of why George’s ship earned the nickname “the *Lucky Lou*” and, as a consequence, why he was “a Lucky Man.”<sup>190</sup>

*The Guadalcanal Campaign,  
December 1942 - March 1943*

By the time 1943 began, George had already been a part of more history than he ever thought he would have been when he had enlisted in the Navy five years earlier. World War II was filled with encounters between enemy forces, but not all entered standard history books since some were of greater significance than others. Certainly the attack upon Pearl Harbor begins every chronology of America's participation in the war. George fought there on that December 7<sup>th</sup> morning. He participated in yet another campaign every student of the Second World War has heard of, the Battle for Guadalcanal. The island is only ninety miles long and twenty-five miles wide. It possessed no natural resources that the Japanese or Americans coveted. Yet the military of both sides fiercely fought each other for six months to control it. George was there on the *Louisville* for some of those months. The long campaign entered Marine Corps folklore. Countless monographs have detailed the six months, and history textbooks include it in the limited space allocated to the war.<sup>191</sup>

Guadalcanal is in the Solomons, a chain of islands that stretch eastward from New Guinea. "The Canal," as American forces came to call it, is one of the chains' seven largest islands. If Japan gained control of the Solomons, Allied communication lines with Australia would be endangered. Japan had landed forces on Guadalcanal in July 1942. Construction of military installations strengthened its hold. By August, one base that particularly concerned the Allies was a partially constructed airfield. Once completed, Japan would increase its ability to strike at neighboring islands as well as Australia and New Zealand. The seven largest islands in the Solomons form two columns that point westerly. Americans dubbed the wide, deep channel between the columns "the Slot." Japanese ships brought supplies and reinforcements to Guadalcanal down the Slot. After the Marines landed on Guadalcanal in August 1942, United States naval task forces operated in the waters around Guadalcanal to disrupt the enemy's supply lines and support the Marines. This led to months of confrontations between American and Japanese ships and planes. In the estimation of one noted historian, "Hardly a day passed when Guadalcanal was not in the news."<sup>192</sup>



*U.S. Navy At War, 1941-1945, Official Reports To The Secretary Of The Navy* by Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Navy (Washington, D.C. 1946), p. 41

*“Then we moved to the more benign climate of the South Pacific and turned our guns on a series of islands where Japs had built fortifications. Boring duty—2% intense action, 98% watch-standing and tedium.”* George Coburn, 2014 written recollections

Back in San Diego, Carrie received her local newspaper everyday. She would have seen stories on the Battle for Guadalcanal. But she had no idea George was there. When his letters arrived at her home, the envelope bore the censor’s mark. In more than one piece of correspondence, George referred to the “tedium” that he still remembers today even though more than seventy years have passed. In a 1943 New Year’s Day letter to his mother, for example, George complained, “time drags by pretty slowly.” This letter was the third one for which George used “V-Mail” instead of traditional stationary. (He had sent his mother the first two V-Mails in December. The much-used wartime alphabetical letter “V” referred to the Allied goal of “victory.”) Creating V-Mail involved a multi-step process, but it saved space and weight when it came to shipping. Letters originating either on the Home Front or in an overseas war theater were reduced in both size and weight. The Signal Corps (a technical service within the Army) microfilmed the correspondence written on a government-supplied sheet of paper that measured seven and a half inches by seven and three quarters inches. The resulting film role was then sent to the Home Front, or overseas, where the Signal Corps printed the V-Mail on smaller, lightweight paper for delivery to the addressee. This dramatically reduced the space bags of mail took

up in transit, allowing for as much cargo room as possible to be used for military equipment.<sup>193</sup>

When George wrote his mother the New Year's Day V-Mail, the *Louisville* had been in the South Pacific for about three weeks. As noted earlier, the primary job of Task Force 67 was to stop Japanese reinforcements from reaching Guadalcanal. The enemy troops and supplies arrived on ships the Marines named "the Tokyo Express." The *Louisville's* orders directed her to join other Navy vessels to intercept the Express as it moved down the Slot. While on New Caledonia, waiting to meet up with the task force, the cruise book reported on a conversation that took place between a *Louisville* sailor and a bluejacket from a destroyer. "We knew the job was a tough one, but one of our crew learned just how tough when he chanced to meet a friend on the island who was attached to a destroyer. 'What outfit you with?' asked the tin can sailor. When he was told we had just joined Task Force 67, he whistled in exclamation. 'Boy!! I've seen four Task Force 67s add to the plating of Iron Bottom Bay.'" That was the name given by Allied sailors to the waters at the southern end of the Slot. Naval personnel called it "Iron Bottom Bay" or "Iron Bottom Sound" because of the number of ships and planes sunk there during the Battle for Guadalcanal. On January 30, 1943, the *Louisville* narrowly avoided being one of them.<sup>194</sup>

On December 11<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville* left New Caledonia for Espiritu Santo, an island to the north in the New Hebrides chain, to meet up with the task force. Six days later, the *Lady Lou* went out on her first patrol. In an honest assessment of that undertaking, the cruise book admitted, "Our force was acting upon sheer fighting 'guts' rather than strength to stop the mighty Jap fleet." The enemy, as the authors explained, did not know "how few ships were blocking their way." The cruise book identified the early morning of January 5, 1943 as the "first real trouble" the *Louisville* encountered. Just four days earlier, George had complained to his mother about the "tedium" that marked his hours. That changed on the 5<sup>th</sup>. George's Continuous Service Certificate duly notes the significance of what happened--the *Louisville* "was attacked during daylight hours by Jap dive bombers on 1-5-43."<sup>195</sup>

As the task force moved in the waters around the Solomons, aircraft approached the ships. Because of their high altitude, however, it was not clear they were Japanese planes. Initially, the ships thought they were American. But once the planes began a dive-bombing attack, it was clear they were enemy aircraft. Members of the task force fired their guns, shooting down several of the planes. The encounter added to the wreckage at Iron Bottom Sound. The *Louisville* downed one of the Japanese bombers. But the Americans sustained some losses. The cruiser *Achilles* was hit, with nine of her crewmen killed. The next day, in the words of the officers who wrote the cruise book, those on the *Louisville*, "witnessed our first multiple burial at sea." Up to this point in the war, no sailors on the *Louisville* had died in combat. None did on January 5, 1943. Still, George and others had to have understood that the war was now one where that could happen. They knew that in

theory, but the reality had to have sunk in as they gathered on the deck of the *Louisville* to watch fellow sailors laid to rest.<sup>196</sup>

At the end of January, five United States Navy task forces operated in the southern Solomons with one shared responsibility. They were to escort four transports, filled with troops, north to Guadalcanal. The Command assigned the *Louisville* to Task Force 18. It consisted of eleven ships (destroyers, light cruisers, and heavy cruisers) and eight planes for air support. The *Louisville* and her sister ship the *Chicago* were two of the heavy cruisers. Members of the task force received orders to rendezvous fifteen miles off the southwest coast of Guadalcanal on the night of January 29<sup>th</sup>. A prominent historian who served in the United States Navy during the Second World War best explained the context for what happened that night and into the next day. In his history of naval operations during the war, he wrote an entire volume on the fight for Guadalcanal. During the contest for the island, the scholar concluded that in “some half a hundred ship-to-ship and air-sea fights, only one..., in this superabundance of heavy slugging, attained the dignity of a battle name.” It was the Battle of Rennell Island. And the *Louisville* played a prominent role in it. As George’s Continuous Service Certificate notes, “At dusk on 1-29-43, ship and task force were attacked by Jap torpedo planes.” What happened in that attack serves as another example of the *Lucky Lou’s* good fortune and George’s right to call himself a Lucky Man. Looking back on that night, George stresses, “That was one tense evening.”<sup>197</sup>

The Battle of Rennell Island proved to be the last significant naval contest in the fight for Guadalcanal. The island that lent its name to the encounter between Japanese and American forces lies in the Solomons, south of Guadalcanal. The size of the task force led the cruise book to conclude, “We were...[a] challenge to any and all Jap forces.” The ships traveled in a formation that placed the cruisers in two columns. The heavy cruisers (the *Wichita*, the *Louisville*, and the *Chicago*) were in the right column. In the early evening of January 29<sup>th</sup>, the task force passed about fifty miles north of Rennell Island, moving towards its rendezvous location off of Guadalcanal to the north. The air support, guarding the ships from overhead, returned to its base for the night.<sup>198</sup>

Before sunset, two Japanese torpedo-bombers appeared in the moonless sky about sixty miles to the west. One targeted a task force destroyer, but the torpedo missed the ship. The enemy plane then strafed the destroyer and the *Wichita*. The second Japanese plane flew between the *Chicago* and the *Wichita* as it dropped a torpedo. To avoid the bomb, the *Louisville* executed a hard left turn. The American ships fired their anti-aircraft guns, and one of the planes hit the water off of the *Chicago’s* stern. At this point, none of the task force ships had been damaged. The commanding admiral concluded that the attack was over. As such, he did not change course. Determined to be on time for the rendezvous off of Guadalcanal with the other task forces, he also stopped zigzagging (an evasive maneuver ships could use when in enemy waters).<sup>199</sup>

In less than an hour, a second aerial attack began. It consisted of many more Japanese planes than those seen in the first attack. The aircraft came in from the east. The *Louisville's* cruise book detailed the tension-filled moments that followed. "General Quarters rang throughout the ship. As we dashed for our battle stations, the ship swerved sharply to port to avoid a possible torpedo strike." One of the planes dropped a torpedo that landed just ahead of the *Chicago*. That vessel, recall, was next to the *Louisville*. The cruise book's account continued. "Thirty seconds later our guns opened on an attacking torpedo plane, and at 1930 [hours] a torpedo wake slithered from port to starboard between the *Louisville* and the *Chicago*." Eight minutes later, all of the Japanese aircraft attacked the cruiser column on the right. A torpedo hit the *Louisville*, but it did not explode. George remembers some crewmen referring to the torpedo that hit their ship. "The men in the engine space well below deck talked about the thud they heard." In the cruise book's dramatic account, "Our Captain passed word to the crew to hold fire for definite targets. The purpose was to hide us as much as possible in the semi-darkness."<sup>200</sup>

The captain of the *Louisville* ordered the gap between the *Lou* and the *Chicago* closed. The cruise book recounted the strained minutes that followed. The *Louisville* "moved astern the *Chicago* and lead ship. The planes maneuvered around the task force. Then with a shriek of racing motors, they plunged down among us. The volume of anti-aircraft fire scattering in all directions to meet the attack was unsurpassed in the *Louisville's* history up to that time." Antiaircraft fire from the ships hit two planes, one of which "dove off *Chicago's* port bow, illuminating her brightly and searing her deck with the intense flame from burning aviation gasoline." In spite of the darkness, other enemy planes zoomed in on the now very visible *Chicago*. A torpedo hit the *Chicago* on her starboard side. Two compartments flooded. A second torpedo hit the ship. Crewmembers from the *Louisville* later described the *Chicago* in these words--"Topside men say she appeared as a Halloween decoration with orange flames leaping out of a black hull." Sailors managed to extinguish the fire.<sup>201</sup>

The *Louisville* herself had some close calls that night. As noted earlier, one torpedo had hit the ship, but it failed to detonate. A crewmember "reported seeing six distinct torpedo wakes drive at our ship at one time. All passed in front or beneath us." But the *Lucky Lou* proved true to her nickname. The *Louisville* emerged from the Battle of Rennell Island unscathed even though she was near the *Chicago* in the cruiser formation. It was the *Chicago* that sustained severe damage. While her crew put out two small fires, flooding from four torpedo hits remained a problem. Emergency diesel generators furnished light and power as damage control worked on counter flooding measures. Still, the *Chicago* sat in the water at an eleven-degree starboard list. Her stern sunk below its usual water line. The Command ordered the ship towed out of the area so as to safeguard her from another attack that could doom the cruiser. The *Louisville* received the order to tow the crippled *Chicago*. Around 8:30 p.m. the *Lucky Lou* dropped out of the formation as other members of the task force moved on.<sup>202</sup>

The two cruisers now stood alone, more vulnerable to enemy attack than they had ever been. In addition to that obvious fact, just executing the tow posed immense problems. The cruise book stressed this. "It was almost an impossible job. Neither ship dared show a spark of light in the black, moonless night. All communications between the darkened ships were by megaphone--hollow voices shouting through the heavy darkness." George vividly recalls the scene. He echoes the inherent difficulty of the task. "It was a pitch black night. We were, of course, under darkened ship; there were no lights. I always have wondered how did these guys handle that heavy equipment without someone getting hurt. The towing equipment was heavy duty stuff."<sup>203</sup>

A naval historian furnished more details. He judged it "a remarkable exhibition of masterful seamanship." The captain of the *Louisville* "placed his cruiser's stern about 1000 yards on *Chicago's* weather bow and lowered a whaleboat containing a manila messenger [a rope or line], the end of which was delivered on board *Chicago*. Sweating sailors groping in the dark managed to rig the complicated towing tackle. On *Chicago's* forecastle the thick steel hawser was brought on board by manual heave-ho, its bitter end shackled to the anchor cable and 60 fathom of chain tenderly paid out." The "back-breaking job" was done by midnight. Pumps on the *Chicago* had corrected her list. With the *Louisville's* engines "slow ahead," early on January 30<sup>th</sup> the two cruisers set course for Espiritu Santo. They traveled at a speed of only about four knots. George capsulized in one brief sentence the next hours-- "We towed the *Chicago* through darkness." Crews of both ships must have been on edge throughout the night, hoping the enemy would not stumble upon them. At one point, George remembers an incident he dubs "the mysterious destroyer." The episode does not appear in the *Louisville's* cruise book, making George's recounting of it especially intriguing. "When towing the *Chicago*, this ship appeared on radar." Crewmembers "determined it to be a destroyer by its speed and its image on the screen. It came very close [to the two Navy cruisers]. We were ready to start shooting at it, but it went right by us. As far as I know, we never learned its origin or destination."<sup>204</sup>

In daylight on the 30<sup>th</sup>, the sea-going tug *Navajo* showed up to take over the tow. The *Louisville* left the *Chicago* with the tug and six destroyers that had been assigned to guard the damaged cruiser. The destroyers encircled the *Chicago* and the *Navajo* as the two ships slowly moved through the water, still at four knots an hour. A dozen Japanese planes mounted a daylight attack. Antiaircraft guns from the destroyers and the *Chicago* returned fire. But the *Chicago* sustained four more torpedo hits. The other ships rescued most of her crew before the cruiser sank. George recalls an "evening excursion" his ship had with the *Chicago* before the one that ended with this disaster. While on patrol, crewmen from the *Chicago* joked with their *Louisville* counterparts to be careful or something might happen to the *Louisville*. Little did they know then that it would be their ship that would go down.<sup>205</sup>

In February and part of March, the *Louisville* and the task force continued patrols in the Slot. Much to the Allies' surprise, though, on the night of February 7<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>, exactly six months after Marines had landed on Guadalcanal, the Japanese evacuated the island. They snuck almost twelve thousand troops out in the cover of darkness. As one scholar concluded, "Never in the history of naval warfare have there been such clever evacuations as those by the Japanese from Kiska and Guadalcanal." And George had been in both campaigns.<sup>206</sup>

*R & R In Wellington,  
March 1943*

After months patrolling the waters around the Solomons, the *Louisville* headed for dry dock in Wellington, New Zealand. Crewmembers would get some liberty time. Such leaves are usually called R & R, for rest and relaxation. George, however, does not see his stay in Wellington that way. "We didn't have R & R. We had R & R when we had to go to the Navy yard," a reference to Mare Island back in California. He questions, too, the glowing description the cruise book offers of the two weeks the *Louisville* spent in Wellington after the Solomons. The book characterizes those days as some "of the warmest hospitality in the ship's history. Island tours were arranged for all. People in villages throughout the countryside threw open their homes to us. Parties and dances were given continuously during our stay in port."<sup>207</sup>

George remembers his time there differently. "I don't know about a great time, but we did have time in Wellington. Three or four other guys (one was Thompson) and I from the *Louisville* checked into a hotel in Wellington. We knew the ship would be in for a while (for maintenance). One night, some Marines from Guadalcanal, who were on R & R, were complaining that they could not get any scotch. Thompson and I agreed that taxi drivers always know where to get scotch. We hired one and he took us way the hell out to the countryside. Finally we came to this building that looked abandoned, but there was someone living there. This guy had a flask of what he called scotch. We bought that from him. We took it back to the hotel. By the time we got to the hotel, both Thompson and I knew we had been had. This stuff was absolutely awful. It probably had a little bit of kerosene in it and a little bit of something to intoxicate you other than alcohol. We sat it on the table in the lobby area. The Marines hung out there. We expected the bottle to be empty soon. It wasn't. Even the Marines wouldn't drink it." George ends this story with a hearty laugh.

As for the maintenance on the *Louisville*, "We were going to be put into dry dock and have barnacles scraped off. But the floating dry dock turned out to be three hundred feet long and the *Louisville* was six hundred feet long. The captain said, 'They are not going to put my ship in there.' I don't know whether we got scraped or not." In any event, the cruiser left Wellington early in April. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of that month, George wrote his mother. "Everything is still in the same routine groove." The following line, however, could be interpreted as a clue to his destination. "Life is about as interesting as a thick wet fog." In the past, he had used the last four words

to describe the weather in the Aleutians. Perhaps George did not intend that phrase to be read as a reference to the *Lou's* next assignment. Certainly the censor didn't see it that way since the officer did not redact the sentence.<sup>208</sup>

The *Louisville* arrived in the Aleutians on April 25, 1943 for her second "Alaskan cruise." The day before, George wrote his mother another letter, undoubtedly knowing mail from the ship could be processed soon. "I am still getting plenty of work, plenty to eat, and plenty of sleep, but darned little else. All of which, when added up, doesn't mean an interesting or exciting life." Obviously, the Battle of Rennell Island had receded in his mind. By the time the *Louisville* left the North Pacific in October 1943, George had served in two campaigns where he had helped to direct the ship's guns at enemy targets. In the Guadalcanal campaign at the end of January 1943, the *Louisville* had fired anti-aircraft guns at attacking Japanese planes during the Battle of Rennell Island. On Kiska in July 1943, George had used fire control information that allowed the big guns to target enemy installations. His performance in battle may have factored into promotions he received.<sup>209</sup>

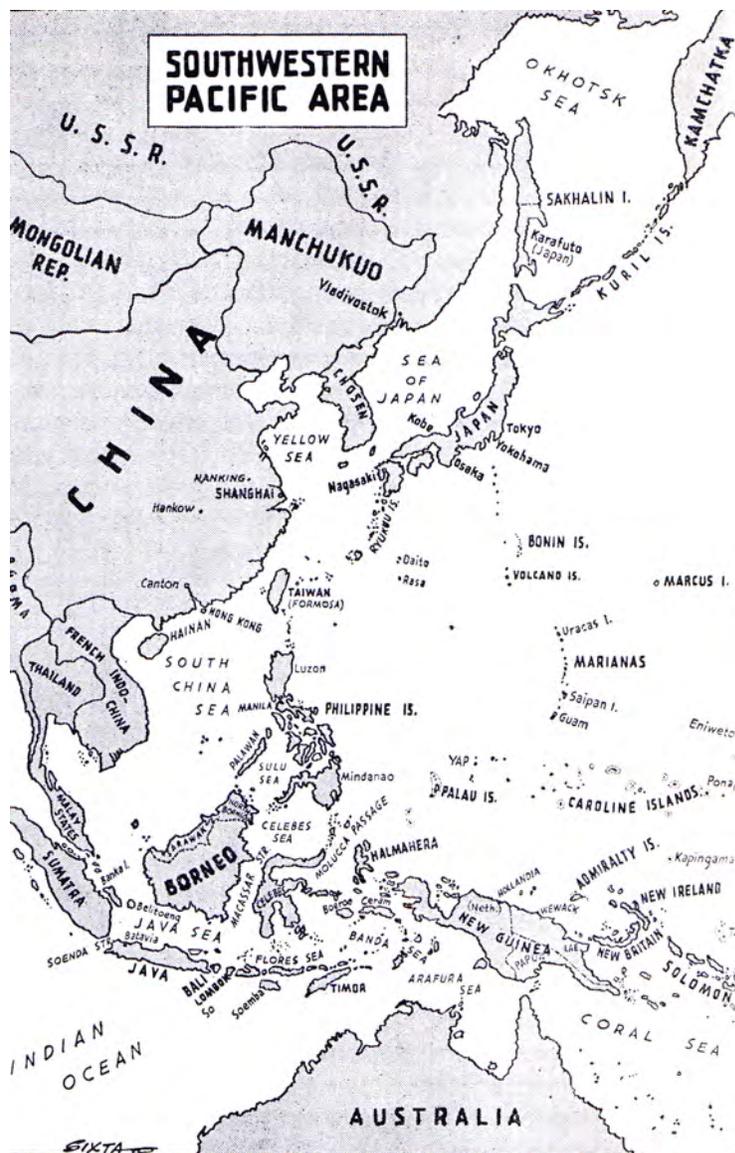
By the time George returned to the States in November 1943, his uniform bore the markings of a sailor who had moved up in the ratings. On June 1, 1943 in the Aleutians, while acting as Chief Fire Controlman (CFC), he qualified as Range Keeper Operator, First Class. Exactly three months later, his acting CFC rate became permanent. One day later, on September 2, 1943, George received an appointment as an ensign, "for temporary service." (The rate was retroactive to August 15<sup>th</sup>.) Two weeks after he became an officer, George wrote his mother. He presumed Ed and Dick had received commissions by then. "How do you like having all your boys in the ranks of commissioned officers?" The admiral under whom George served required all officers to wear a tie. It was, as George reminded Carrie, "an article of clothing that I have disliked ever since I can remember. But today I find myself wearing one and doing my best to like it." He told his mother the commission was a temporary one, however. In the language of the military, George points out he was a "mustang officer," meaning a commissioned officer that began his service as an enlisted man. After the war, George continued in his letter, he would return to CFC. As it turned out, he advanced one more time in rate during the war, but that would not be until December 1944. By then, George had distinguished himself in even more Pacific campaigns.<sup>210</sup>

### *Island Campaigns, 1944-1945, An Overview*

George's Continuous Service Certificate contains two commendations he received for actions that were part of the seven-month campaign known as the Liberation of the Philippines. Early in 1942, the Japanese had seized those islands, United States territories since 1898. In both commendations, the Navy recognized George for "excellent performance of duty." One commendation came out of the largest naval action against the Japanese in the Second World War--the Battle of

Leyte Gulf in October 1944. But the Liberation of the Philippines was just one engagement of many that George fought in during the last two years of the war.

The *Louisville* began 1944 with participation in the Marshall Islands campaign. Other Pacific battles followed that same year for the cruiser, most notably in the Western Carolines, coastal areas of New Guinea, the Marianas, and the Philippines. Up to the fall of 1944, no crewmembers had been killed by enemy fire. That changed in the Philippines. Nineteen forty-five saw George and the *Louisville* in only one major campaign, the Battle for Okinawa. It proved to be historic in more than one way. In respect to the military history of World War II, Okinawa was the last major confrontation between American and Japanese forces. In a personal way, George suffered his only wartime injury at Okinawa when an enemy plane crashed into the *Louisville*. His wound qualified him for a Purple Heart.



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Throughout these last two years of the war, along with hundreds of other naval vessels, the *Louisville* carried out the Allied strategy for the Pacific Theater. It dictated that forces move toward Japan from two directions. One was a movement north from Australia, sometimes identified as the Southwest Pacific Drive or Advance. Allied Army divisions and Navy ships spearheaded the offensive. Army General Douglas MacArthur commanded this movement north. The other direction from which forces moved toward Japan emanated west from Hawaii, the so-called Central Pacific Drive or Advance. United States Army, Navy, and Marine forces were responsible for the offensive. Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz commanded this movement. (Without the Central Pacific Drive, MacArthur's flank would have been vulnerable in attacks mounted from Japanese-held islands west of Hawaii.) Since the Navy was an integral part of both offensives, some ships participated in the Southwest Pacific Advance as well as the Central Pacific Drive toward Japan. This was true for the *Louisville*.<sup>211</sup>

As a heavy cruiser, she supported Allied troop landings on islands and atolls held by the Japanese. (Not every enemy-held island had to be taken. In the movement west from Hawaii toward Japan, the United States Command followed a "leapfrog" or "stepping stone" strategy. In other words, the Americans did not try to wrench from the enemy every island. The Command bypassed some, effectively isolating them from Japan's ability to reinforce its garrisons.) The key objective was to end the war by using Central Pacific islands as bases from which United States planes could bomb the Japanese homeland and/or strangle the Japanese economy by sinking ships destined for the homeland. As a member of various task forces, the *Louisville* became part of naval gunfire support groups for amphibious landings. The ship bombarded Japanese positions on islands before Allied landings occurred. She also fired upon enemy forces as such landings took place. At other times, the *Lou* safeguarded fragile beachheads from attempts by Japan to thwart successful Allied landings.<sup>212</sup>

In 1944 and 1945, George directed the *Louisville's* guns more than he had in 1942 and 1943. The offensive nature the Allied war effort took on in those two later years explains this increase. The *Lou* participated in the Marshall Islands Campaign in January 1944, the first major stepping stone in the movement west from Hawaii. Over the next few months, other island campaigns followed. George himself recognized his increased involvement in the war in a March 13, 1944 letter he wrote his mother. Censorship, of course, still limited his ability to share with her specific campaigns in which he had been involved. George took on an uncharacteristically serious tone at the very end of the five-page letter. As he powerfully observed to Carrie, "I can say that I've had a chance to take it out on the Japs for the loss of some of my very good friends on December 7, 1941. Surprisingly enough, I'm not overjoyed; it merely leaves me feeling empty. I get more pleasure from the fact that each action brings the war closer to an end than I do from the fact that each action brings an immediate end to some of the enemy."

*The Marshall Islands,*

*January 30 – March 7, 1944*

In December 1943, the *Louisville* was based in Long Beach. As part of a task force, for two weeks she underwent ship-to-shore training with transports. Within the task force, the *Lou* was one of five fire-support units commanded by Rear Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf. The admiral chose the *Louisville* as his flagship. George visited his mother when he had liberty, using buses and trains to make the trip south to San Diego. On January 2 - 3, 1944, the *Lou* participated in “full scale rehearsals” in the waters near San Clemente Island, one of the Channel Islands off the coast of Southern California. The ships were preparing for their role in the invasion of the Marshall Islands. As the *Louisville's* officers wrote immediately after the war, the Marshalls Campaign “was to be a combined operation of unprecedented size in Pacific warfare. This was the first of the all-out invasion drives with which the *Louisville* was so intimately associated. The drives were to take us to Tokyo.”<sup>213</sup>

After leaving San Diego on January 13<sup>th</sup>, the task force steamed for the Central Pacific, stopping for just one day at Lahaina Roads in Hawaii to re-provision the ship. It was probably while in Hawaii that George mailed his mother a letter dated January 19<sup>th</sup>. In it, he referred to his recent visit home. Because of censorship regulations, George could not be specific as to where the *Louisville* was going, but he could make an obvious statement--“I’m off again. Just three words, but they mean an entirely different way of life. Watches at night instead of liberty.” From Hawaii, the task force steamed straight to the Marshall Islands, some 2,600 miles to the west. The Japanese had seized the Marshalls during World War I. Japan thus had two decades to build military installations there. By the time of the attack at Pearl Harbor, the Marshall Islands formed the eastern edge of Japan’s defense perimeter.<sup>214</sup>

George’s Continuous Service Certificate credits him with participation in the Marshalls Campaign from January 30 to March 7, 1944. The *Louisville* was part of Task Force 53 that had been subdivided into task groups. The Command assigned the *Lou* to the Northern Support Group commanded by Oldendorf, organizationally identified as Task Group 53.5. The Marshalls, the task force’s target, is a coral atoll made up of over thirty islands. In his capacity as a member of the gunnery crew, George’s duties, in the words of his Continuous Service Certificate, “included the bombardment and shelling of Jap installations” in support of the invasion and occupation of the Marshalls. The *Louisville's* cruise book contained an apt description of “bombardment”--“...seeking to destroy all visible means of the enemy’s power to resist landing forces.” The *Louisville's* action began on the morning of January 30<sup>th</sup> when the cruiser and others in her group mounted a diversionary bombardment of enemy fortifications on Wotje Island. In this first action, the crew of the *Lou* saw an example of their ship’s luck and the cost some sailors would pay in the months ahead. In the words of the *Louisville's* cruise book, even though the bombardment was successful, “our screening destroyer was struck by a five-inch shell from the beach.” The *Lou's* officers continued their account. “As

we retired from the islands, we took off her [the destroyer's] critically wounded for treatment in our sick bay."<sup>215</sup>

On the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville's* task group rejoined the hundreds of ships in the task force to prepare for the assault on the Kwajalein Atoll. It is the largest atoll in the world. Located at the southern end of the Marshalls, it measures about sixty miles in length by thirty miles in width. Close to one hundred islands and islets stand within the atoll. Japanese submarines that had attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941 had left from Kwajalein. Over two years later, the Navy chose Kwajalein as a main target in its Marshalls Campaign because it was Japan's major base in the island chain. At the northern end of the atoll's lagoon are two islets, Roi and Namur. A narrow sandspit connects them, leading many to identify the two as Roi-Namur. Together, the islets resemble a rectangle, about 2,300 yards in length and 900 yards in width. On them, the Japanese had built runways and a garrison. Within the atoll, the first islands targeted by Task Force 53 were Roi and Namur with their air base and garrison. At the southern end of the Kwajalein Atoll is Kwajalein Island. Japan built a supply depot there. Because of these military installations, the Kwajalein Atoll (with the Roi-Namur islets and Kwajalein Island) was the main target for the Marshall Islands Campaign.<sup>216</sup>

D-day for Roi-Namur was January 31<sup>st</sup>. That would have been a long day for George with his responsibilities in gunnery. Fire support units began bombardment before dawn. Later, the *Louisville's* cruise book recorded that the cruiser "opened the intensive pre-invasion bombardment of Namur...The heavy fire schedule was maintained throughout the day with good effect." Usually, George's duty or watch stand lasted for four hours. However, he is quick to point out that an order to GQ "superseded" that. In George's words, when the ship was engaged in an action, "We stayed until the heavy work was over." In the afternoon of D-day, as the *Louisville* waited for orders on additional targets, George's ship sustained her first battle damage. It resulted from "friendly," not enemy, fire. The cruise book recounted the incident. "An 8-inch shell from another cruiser ricocheted off the island to explode alongside our starboard quarter. Heavy pieces of shrapnel riddled the chief's quarters, but the crew of the battle dressing station within miraculously escaped injury." Even after all these decades, George has not forgotten what happened. "I remember that incident." He explains one moment in it. "A piece of shrapnel cut the back legs off the chair that the chief was sitting in and dumped him over backwards. If it did happen, he was probably the luckiest man alive." The next morning, the bombardment increased. Before Marines landed on Roi-Namur, fire support units had expended about 6,000 tons of explosives. Assessing the terrain, the damage the bombardment had done was apparent. On Namur, "hardly a tree was left alive in what had been a pretty wooded island." Once Marines secured the island on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, the *Louisville* dropped anchor in Kwajalein Lagoon. Work proceeded to repair the battle damage from three days earlier.<sup>217</sup>

Even then, however, George and the *Louisville* were not done with their role in the Marshalls Campaign. February 17<sup>th</sup> found the cruiser's fire support unit

bombarding Eniwetok, another atoll over three hundred miles west northwest of Roi-Namur. As she had at Namur, the *Louisville* “led the gunfire group into action.” Once the cruiser steamed into Eniwetok’s lagoon, the *Lou* proceeded to mount a heavy bombardment of the atoll’s northern island, Engebi. After the Marines seized Engebi, the *Louisville* remained in Eniwetok’s lagoon. There the ship, in the words of its officers, “maintained an ironic schedule of alternating movies and bombardments until the islands were a mass of devastation.” To show the Hollywood films, “Portable screens were set up on the fantail,” George explains. One final island in the Marshalls that the *Lou* bombarded was Parry Island, northeast of Eniwetok. It was the last island Japan held in the Marshalls. From February 19<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>, American naval, air, and surface units fired “every projectile they had” at Parry to eliminate as much Japanese resistance as possible before Marines landed on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. The action at Parry, in essence, ended the Marshalls Campaign. The Command and later history judged it a success. The close naval gunfire support, in which George played a key role on the *Louisville*, proved to be a major factor. In the conclusion of a prominent historian, “Rapid advances on shore with moderate loss were made possible by prolonged bombing and bombardment before the landings and by effective support of artillery and of naval vessels in delivering call fire as needed.”<sup>218</sup>

The Navy had particularly wanted Eniwetok because it lies furthest west in the Marshall Islands chain. Given its location, the Command determined that the atoll could be used as a temporary naval and air base until more permanent ones could be seized in the Carolines and Marianas, two more island chains west of the Marshalls. As it turned out, those two island groups occupied the *Lou’s* task force from March through August of 1944.<sup>219</sup>

*The Western Carolines,  
March 31 – April 2, 1944*

The *Louisville* left Eniwetok on March 5<sup>th</sup>. The cruiser arrived at Majuro, another Marshalls atoll, two days later. Its lagoon afforded the ship a resting place for two weeks before the *Louisville* left. During that time, George wrote a five-page letter to his mother, probably knowing that the mail would go out since the *Lou* was no longer at sea. “Our mail service has been notoriously slow,” George complained to Carrie. Since leaving the West Coast in mid-January, he told her, the ship had received mail only one time, early in February. Because of censorship, George reminded his mother, “There is no news that I can send you.” But he did hint that he had been in battle. Carrie had three sons in the military, yet George’s service seemed, so far, to be markedly different from that of his brothers. “It looks as if I’ll be the only one of the family seeing the action part of this war for some little time to come,” George observed to his mother. “Dick and Ed have certainly been lucky in the duties assigned to them. After spending so much time out here, I’m just a little envious of them.”<sup>220</sup>

In this March 13, 1944 letter, George wrote openly about how the monotony of the last few months at sea bothered him. Undoubtedly, he spoke for other sailors,

even those not on his ship. The weather was part of the cycle of sameness. "It's hot, the sun shines, it rains, the sun shines again, and then it's hotter than before." It had been, George shared with Carrie, more than two months since he had been off the ship, "except for taking a swim over the side occasionally." He probably did that more than once when the *Louisville* stayed in some of the lagoons in the Marshalls, such as the one at Eniwetok. Today George recalls what must have been a strange sight that accompanied this pastime. "I don't remember which lagoon it was, but at one of them, we had swim call every afternoon. A guy sat on the foremast while we were in the water, ready to shoot any sharks he saw. As far as I know, he never fired a shot." His letter home ended on a serious note. "It took me a long time," George confessed to his mother, "to adjust myself back to sea duty this trip, but I've finally...resigned myself to the sea for another year or eighteen months." One thing that kept George going everyday, he told Carrie, was "the hope that a visit to the States is in the near future...When I give up the hope, life becomes dull and dreary..." Since late in November 1943, trips back to California had taken on a new meaning for George. He had met a girl, more correctly, the girl. She no doubt played a role in his impatience to get back to the West Coast.<sup>221</sup>

Her name was Jeanette ("Jenny") Garofalo. George met her on Thanksgiving Day 1943. After the Aleutians Campaign, the *Louisville* had returned to the States. While it was at the Mare Island Navy Yard, George enjoyed two or three weeks of liberty. He ended up in the town of Vallejo, located in the San Francisco Bay area, not far from Mare Island. George and a sailor friend stayed at the Casa de Vallejo, a well-known hotel. On Thanksgiving morning, the telephone in their room rang. "I answered it," George relates. It was the hotel clerk who told George he had "two nice-looking ladies down here who need escorts to a Thanksgiving dinner put on by the uncle of one of these girls. So I said, 'Send them up.' " Once the young women arrived, they and the two sailors made dinner plans. Looking back on that day, George notes, "Strangely, Bet, whose uncle gave the dinner, became my date." The other woman, Jenny, became Bob's date. Yet, George continues, "Somehow or other, during the course of the evening, that changed." Jenny, he explains, became "my girl."

When asked what attracted him to Jenny, George smiled broadly and pointed to a large picture of her. "Just look at her. She was a beautiful woman. Bet was one of those jivey women, and I never cared for that type of woman. Jenny was a little more sedate." Jenny later shared with George what had appealed to her about him. It was something he did at the Thanksgiving Day dinner. Their host had a little girl, George explains, "three years old or so. I sat down on the floor to talk to her." Much later, Jenny told George she "was favorably impressed by my behavior." The two spent time together over the next weeks. Jenny worked as a photographer in Vallejo when they met, but she planned to move to Los Angeles. Jenny did so, and by the time of George's March 1944 letter to his mother, Jenny worked in a West Los Angeles hospital. (Carrie not only saved the letters George wrote her; she also kept the ones she received from Jenny during the war.)

When George visited home in December 1943 and January 1944 (between the Aleutians and the Marshalls Campaigns), he told his mother about Jenny. In his March 13, 1944 letter to Carrie, George signaled he was serious about the young woman. "I expect that you'll soon be getting another picture of me. Jeanette, the girl I spoke of while I was home, says she is going to send you a copy of one she took when we were in Vallejo." George followed his references to Jenny with news that he had just received a letter from his brother Richard. He expressed surprise to Carrie that Dick had "nearly got married." If Carrie surmised how serious George was about Jenny, his next sentence affirmed her conclusion. "What in the devil has gotten into the Coburn family that two of us should be getting serious about marriage at the same time when for years on end no one gave it more than a passing thought." George did not know it when he wrote those lines, but he would be gone from the West Coast for fourteen months, beginning with his January 1944 departure for the Marshalls Campaign. In that time, he and Jenny "wrote a ton of letters." George kept the ones he received from her. "I had them for a long time, [but] I don't know what happened to them."

George's opportunity to readily receive letters ended when the *Louisville* left Majuro on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Once at sea again, and approaching the equator, shellbacks gathered to plan another Crossing the Line ceremony. George, given his feelings on that tradition, probably did not join his fellow shellbacks or attend the initiation of pollywogs on the 25<sup>th</sup>. Still part of Task Force 58, the ships now steamed into the Western Carolines, one more stepping stone in the movement to Japan. MacArthur's plans for offensives in New Guinea necessitated Allied control of the Western Carolines. Between March 31<sup>st</sup> and April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the *Louisville* bombarded Palau and Woleai, part of that island chain. In those days, George had the opportunity to write a V-Mail letter to his mother. A package he received probably prompted his letter. In a January 19<sup>th</sup> note to Carrie, George had asked her to buy him a pair of sunglasses, "the goggle type." The glare was bothering him. When George received her package in March, he wrote to tell his mother the glasses "are swell." They were comfortable even when, as George pointed out, "I have a pair of earphones clamped on over them."<sup>222</sup>

In the limited space V-Mail afforded a writer, George ended his letter on an upbeat note. He sounded more positive than he had in the March 13<sup>th</sup> pages he had written Carrie just a few weeks earlier. In that long letter, he had lamented the months at sea. But now George assured his mother in the V-Mail that he had "been having a good time considering the limit ship board life places upon us. It's been nearly three months since I've had my feet on dry land. Probably I'll get run over when I do get ashore again. Ordinary things like stepping up a curb and watching the traffic are forgotten out here."

*"Keep Them Safe,"*  
*April 21 - May 2, 1944*

In April and May 1944, the *Louisville* participated in more bombardments of Japanese-held islands to weaken the enemy's installations before Allied troops landed. The ship's cruise book entitled the chapter on this period "Keep Them Safe." It was a reference to the Navy's goal to make the beaches and inland areas as safe as possible for the landing troops going on shore against the entrenched Japanese. The *Louisville* helped to do this in more than one way. Initially, the cruiser participated in pre-invasion bombardments. As the landings took place, the *Lou's* guns shelled enemy positions. Once American soldiers and Marines got on shore, the ship offered continued gun support to the troops. In less than two weeks beginning late in April 1944, George participated in actions at Hollandia (on the coast of New Guinea, an island north of Australia) and three more islands in the Carolines (Truk, Satawan, and Ponape). In the summer months, even more campaigns awaited him.<sup>223</sup>

Hollandia was a small settlement in Humboldt Bay on the coast of northern New Guinea. (Americans identified the entire area around the settlement as "Hollandia.") After the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, Japan invaded parts of northern New Guinea. The enemy's control of areas on the island endangered not only Australian lines of communication but also MacArthur's plans to liberate the Philippines. In April 1944, the *Louisville* and the rest of Task Force 58 supported the Allied landings in New Guinea, specifically "the covering operation off Hollandia" on April 21<sup>st</sup>. Next, the *Lou* assisted in the American landings on Truk, an island in the Carolines with important Japanese air bases. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, to "neutralize enemy positions in the Western Carolines," the *Louisville* and other task group fire support units bombarded Satawan Island where the Japanese had an airstrip. George's ship "led the way" in the bombardment. The *Lou's* cruise book characterized the ship's intense shelling by concluding, "We gave Satawan a through going over." On May 1<sup>st</sup>, fire support ships bombarded Ponape, another island in the Western Carolines.<sup>224</sup>



"F" DIVISION—SHIP'S FIRECONTROLMAN

The *Lou's* "F" Division of fire controlmen. George is standing in the back row. He is second from the right with his cap tilted.

After Task Force 58's roles in the Hollandia and Western Carolines Campaigns, the Command gave the crewmen a well-deserved rest. Ships, including the *Louisville*, stopped briefly at Eniwetok before returning to the Majuro lagoon for a month. In a June 1<sup>st</sup> letter to his mother, George voiced a theme seen in his earlier letters--"Life is preceding in its usual unexciting manner. I'm feeling fine except for being a little bored." He did get a brief respite, though, from the monotonous days. George shared the break with Carrie in another letter written while on Majuro. "About a week ago I got off the ship for the first time since leaving the states. I was ashore for about three hours and had a big time swimming, playing football, and drinking a very limited amount of beer. It was sure good to get my feet on dry ground again and have room enough to run around in." This letter to Carrie was a V-Mail piece of correspondence. While George used some V-Mails in 1942 and 1943, his greatest use of that format came in 1944. Sixty-four percent of the fourteen letters he wrote his mother that year were V-Mails. And from mid-June through the end of August, every one of the letters to Carrie was a V-Mail. Asked today about his preferences in the format he used when writing home, George replies, "I think I actually preferred the stationary," meaning the traditional writing on ship's letterhead or plain paper. It could be that because the *Louisville* was involved in the Marianas Campaign throughout the summer of 1944, officers encouraged the men to use V-Mail. For George's correspondence, that meant the end of lengthy letters since V-Mail was a one-page format.<sup>225</sup>

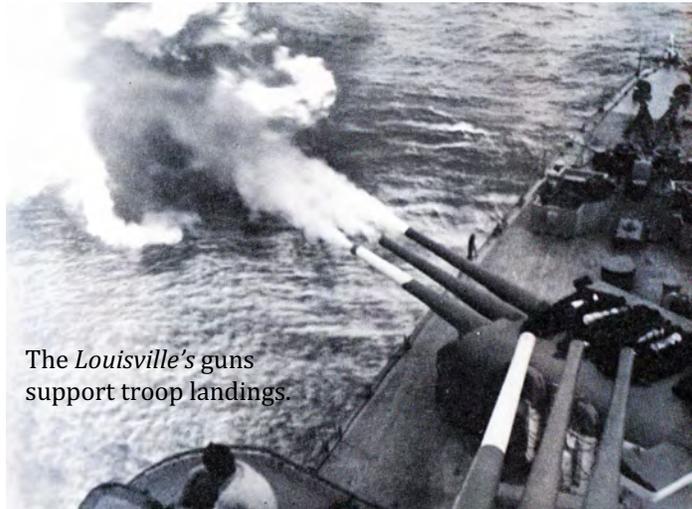
*The Marianas,  
June - August 1944*

On June 9<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville* left Majuro to participate in a major campaign, the Marianas in the Central Pacific. This chain of islands extends some 1,300 miles southward from Tokyo, putting it within Japan's inner defense perimeter. Fifteen of the Marianas appear on a map as an arc that measures about 425 miles. At the southernmost end of the arc lie the four biggest islands--Saipan, Tinian, Rota, and Guam. Their distance from Pearl Harbor, approximately 3,500 miles, provides one example of the vast expanses over which Americans fought the Pacific war. Aside from Guam that had been an American possession since 1898, Japan occupied the Marianas during World War I. (The Japanese invaded Guam two days after they attacked Pearl Harbor, giving them complete control of the Marianas.) Many naval officers, including Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King, believed control of the Marianas was key to an Allied victory in the Pacific. Navy men that they were, such officers thought the Japanese could be defeated without an Allied invasion of the homeland. The United States Command envisioned advanced American naval bases in the Marianas from which Japanese ships could be attacked. They reasoned that from those installations the Navy could destroy the enemy's ability to wage war. This would be done by depriving Japan of the goods it needed, such as oil and rubber, to continue the war. Additionally, the Marianas offered airstrips from which American planes could bomb the main island of Japan. Unlike other Pacific campaigns, the Marianas was not an Allied operation. It was one completely controlled and prosecuted by the United States. The Americans targeted Saipan,

Tinian, and Guam as the islands they would go after. The Command decided to completely bypass Rota, an example of the “leapfrogging” that characterized the war in the Pacific. The *Louisville* spent two months in the waters off of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, fulfilling a fire support role for the three island invasions.<sup>226</sup>

Just as she had been in earlier campaigns, in the Marianas the *Louisville* was part of the fire support group in Task Force 58. Rear Admiral Oldendorf, who still commanded the fire support vessels, again used the *Lou* as his flagship. After leaving Majuro, battleships, cruisers, and destroyers met for fueling at Roi Anchorage. Altogether, there were approximately six hundred ships in the task force, ranging from battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, high-speed transports, and tankers. In addition to such vessels, over two thousand aircraft and more than three hundred thousand Navy, Marine, and Army personnel participated in the Marianas Campaign. (Strategists further broke down this large task force. The *Louisville*, as part of the Bombardment Group, became a member of the Northern Task Force, identified as Task Force 52. Within it, the Command assigned the *Louisville* to Fire Support Group One, or Task Group 52.17.) On June 10<sup>th</sup>, in the words of the *Louisville*'s officers, “the entire force got underway for the first phase of the greatest amphibious effort yet made against the Jap [sic]. The *Louisville* was guide ship, and the first stop was Saipan.”<sup>227</sup>

American planes began bombing Saipan on June 13<sup>th</sup>. Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers followed suit the next day. The *Louisville* led the shore bombardment. Afetna Point was one particular site on the 14<sup>th</sup> that George helped to target because of his position in the director. Aerial reconnaissance had identified Japanese defense guns, pillboxes, and camouflaged trenches there. The *Lou*'s 8-inch shells, in the



The *Louisville*'s guns support troop landings.

words of one historian, “blasted” Afetna Point. George explains that accuracy was not a problem. “We had the grid coordinates for everything on the island. With that data, and the data where the ship was, we could put our salvos anyplace they could reach.” On D-day, George also helped direct the guns as they fired in support of landing forces. The *Louisville*'s cruise book described that assignment.

“The bombardment group formed an arc off the western and southern shores, with the *Louisville* taking a position on the northern perimeter of the fire support ships. She gave heavy support to the northern flank of the hotly contested beachhead as the streams of landing barges flowed to the shores.”<sup>228</sup>

George explains that firing over the heads of soldiers and Marines who were landing on the beaches was “pretty common practice.” At the same time, George points out, “We had to know where our troops were and that was always the problem. We didn’t want to shoot our own people.” He recalls one such moment. “There was an incident at Saipan where I had direct contact with a spotter on the beach. He told me to bring my salvos down two hundred yards. I said if I brought them down two hundred yards, I would be shooting my own people. He said no, they’ve fallen back, and we need them where I am calling for them. So I brought them down, and I never heard a bad word. This guy told me that the Japanese were tying their bayonets on the end of sticks and creeping up through low brush; they were able to get close enough to make a stabbing attack [on U.S. troops].”

The bombardment of Saipan continued for eleven days and nights. The only “time out,” according to the *Louisville’s* cruise book, was “for fueling and taking on ammunition.” When asked if nighttime firing posed a problem for George at his duty station, he replied that for him there was “very little difference” between day and night firing. “My job, the aiming of the guns, was predicated on data.” At one point, as explained in her cruise book, the *Louisville* “moved in for close range firing. It was a dangerous mission,” the officers wrote. “An enemy battery could spell doom at any moment.” The *Lou* “unloaded her deadly salvos and received no return fire.” The cruise book documented another moment in the bombardments. “On one occasion, the *Louisville* was firing a bombardment mission and anti-aircraft simultaneously.” While George does not remember that instance, he agrees with the implication of the cruise book’s statement--“I’d say it was unusual.” One afternoon, the ship supported underwater demolition teams that were removing obstacles the enemy had built to protect the shoreline. The *Louisville* did so, in the words of its officers, by “holding snipers at bay with automatic weapon fire.” George thinks the 40 mm and 20 mm anti-aircraft guns would have been used. Admiral Oldendorf believed the cruiser “had set an all time gunnery record by being on the firing line night and day during the first eleven days of the Saipan operation.” The Command declared victory at Saipan on July 9<sup>th</sup>, after which the *Louisville* and others in the task group moved on to the second island campaign in the Marianas, Tinian.<sup>229</sup>

During the Saipan phase of the Marianas Campaign, George wrote his mother two letters, both V-Mails. The first was dated June 25<sup>th</sup>, which coincided with the close of the eleven-day fire support actions. One imagines George, now having more time, picking up the pen. “This trip is setting a record,” he concluded, “for staying clear of everything that even resembles a good liberty town. The mail service is good as can be expected, the work load isn’t too heavy, and the food is good considering that none of it is fresh.” There is no question that George thought often of Jenny, the young woman he had met in Vallejo. In a July 1<sup>st</sup> V-Mail to Carrie, he shared the fact that Jenny had been writing him “very frequently.” But he explained, “Nothing has been settled between us and won’t be as long as I am overseas because I won’t attempt to settle anything through writing. I’m still very fond of her, and when I return, anything can happen. Sometimes I wonder how the short time I spent with her had such a profound and lasting effect on me.”

Just days before the task group reported to the waters off of Tinian for the second phase of the Marianas Campaign, George wrote his mother another V-Mail. "Subject matter for letters is rather scarce," he concluded. "We follow the same old routine day in and day out, and if anything of interest does happen, it's usually of such a nature that it can't be included in letters." The Marianas Campaign was one such subject. Tinian's runways and proximity to Saipan (just one mile away) made it the second island in the Marianas that the Command was determined to seize from the Japanese. As with Saipan, at the beginning of the Tinian operation the *Louisville* acted as "the leading unit of the shore bombardment."<sup>230</sup>

On July 20, 1944, the *Louisville* and other ships in the task group began pre-landing bombardments of Tinian. The *Lou* "softened the island" for four days. On D-day, the cruiser sat two thousand yards off the main landing beach as troops began their attack. As the *Louisville's* officers later wrote in the cruise book, "Every gun that could bear from ships and nearby Saipan was speaking--'keep them safe.'" Still, American casualties occurred. As men were landing on the beaches, enemy anti-aircraft fire brought down a "spotting plane" that had taken off from the *Lou*. It fell in the waters just six hundred yards from the *Louisville*. The pilot and observer did



A burial at sea. *US Navy War Photographs* (New York, c. 1946), p. 101.

not survive. The *Lou's* crew pulled the bodies out of the sea. Burials occurred the next day on the cruiser's quarterdeck. In its limited pages, the cruise book detailed the ceremony. Obviously, it was important to the officers who wrote the cruise book to document the funeral the two Navy men received from their peers. (The cruise book included the names of these two airmen on a list of KIA.) George "vaguely remembers" the service. The cruise book

described the ceremony. "From the port hanger, on the far side of the deck, emerged the procession, our chaplain dressed in his ecclesiastical robes, followed by pallbearers wearing undress whites. On two biers, supported by friends of the deceased, lay the bodies encased in white canvas, each covered with the American flag. With slow, half steps, they approached the quarterdeck." The remains of the pilot and observer were saluted with rifles after an officer shouted the order, "Present arms!" The chaplain then spoke. "In the distance," observed the cruise book, bombarding guns "provided the organ music." A seven-man Marine guard fired "three sharp salvos." When the ceremony concluded, "Sustained tones of 'taps'

rang out in tribute. As the bugle notes faded, the *Louisville* committed the bodies of her dead heroes to the sea.”<sup>231</sup>

Like Saipan, Tinian proved to be “a long, hard and grueling fight.” Bombardments continued daily, with heavy air and surface attacks from July 22<sup>nd</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup>. The *Louisville's* cruise book credited the Tinian phase of the Marianas Campaign with giving the cruiser her nickname. “The *Lucky Lou* can attribute that name to her action at Tinian. For two days she lay off the southwestern sector of the island, pounding known strong points without receiving return fire. On the third day, a battleship and destroyer, while lying in the same waters, received extensive damage from an unspotted active enemy gun.” With Tinian officially secured on August 1<sup>st</sup>, fire support moved south to support the attack upon Guam.<sup>232</sup>

Ships from the main task force had moved against Guam a few weeks earlier, so by the time the *Louisville* joined the attack on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, it was almost over. George did not see it that way, however. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, he wrote another V-Mail to his mother. In it, George doubted, admittedly with some exaggeration, he would ever get back home. (George had left the West Coast, recall, in January.) “The way things are now, looks like I’ll be out here forever and a day.” On the 10<sup>th</sup>, organized Japanese resistance was basically over. A prominent historian concluded for the Tinian and Guam phases of the Marianas Campaign, “Never before had the Navy done so much to help a ground operation, or stayed with it for so long.” Shelling from ships reached not only perimeter enemy installations but also mountain caves that housed Japanese command posts. After the campaign ended, POWs told American interrogators that during the assault, they feared naval guns more than field artillery or aerial bombing.<sup>233</sup>

The Marianas Campaign lasted from mid-June to mid-August 1944. The *Louisville* was assigned to it for fifty-nine days. In that time, the cruiser fired 24,948 rounds of ammunition. After leaving Guam, the *Louisville* reported to Eniwetok where the crew drew liberty, loaded supplies, and received mail. The cruiser was not alone since most of the Pacific Fleet anchored at Eniwetok. A week later, on August 19<sup>th</sup>, the *Lou* set out for Espiritu Santo. The *Louisville* arrived at that Allied base on the 24<sup>th</sup> and stayed there for three days before departing for Guadalcanal. Once at the Canal, the cruiser and other task force ships prepared for the next campaign.<sup>234</sup>

*Letters From Guadalcanal,  
August 27 – September 6, 1944*

The *Louisville* remained in Guadalcanal for the next eleven days. Rear Admiral Oldendorf again chose the cruiser as his flagship. From it, he directed bombardment rehearsals for an upcoming Marine landing on Peleliu in the Palau Islands. George wrote Carrie twice before the *Louisville* left the Solomons. He dated the first letter the very day the ship arrived in Guadalcanal, August 27<sup>th</sup>. George assured his mother he was well. “I’m feeling fine, as usual. Guess I’m too slow to catch a cold or anything

else.” The V-Mail only had room for two paragraphs. From one devoted entirely to food, Carrie may have surmised that her son was in a more settled location than he had been. “For the first time in a couple of months, we’ve been getting fresh food. Boiled or baked potatoes sure taste good after eating that wallpaper paste referred to as dehydrated spuds for such a long time.” To George’s delight, apples and oranges were also now available to the crew.<sup>235</sup>

His next letter to Carrie supports the conclusion that George preferred regular stationary to V-Mail. Dated just a week after the above piece of correspondence, the September 3<sup>rd</sup> letter ran four pages. Again, as in the prior week’s correspondence, Carrie understood that her son’s ship was no longer at sea. George shared with her the fact that, for the second time in eight months, he could go ashore. But he confessed that liberty could be hazardous in a way that civilians would not have imagined. “Living aboard ship so much,” George observed, “has almost made me forget how to walk. Uneven ground and loose stones trip me up and make me stumble because I don’t watch where my feet are going. It’s not necessary aboard ship because the decks are smooth, and anyway, a person gets to know his way around well enough so that he could go most anywhere without even opening his eyes.”

In that same letter, George shared what he judged to be the “remarkable results” of a bond drive held on the *Louisville*. Ninety-five percent of the crew committed themselves, by filling out allotment paperwork, to buy bonds. “That’s a pretty good record for men who are already giving so much in other ways.” Perhaps, when writing that line, George thought of his years at sea, almost three now since the Pearl Harbor attack. George himself signed up to purchase a monthly, one hundred dollar bond.

It could also be that some recently received news of the war in Europe accounted, in part, for that ninety-five percent participation figure in the *Louisville’s* bond drive. On August 25<sup>th</sup>, American soldiers entered Paris, which had been occupied by Germany since June 1940. George devoted an entire page in his letter to his reaction to word of the French capital’s liberation. “The news from the European front is sure cheering. That little party will fold up pretty quickly now and everybody will be able to go home. I hope our boys go right on into Germany. It would be a little disappointing to me if the Germans were allowed to get through this war without being given a taste of their own medicine. A turnabout here would be in good taste. Let’s see how they like the destruction and damage and closely supervised lives that they have given to so many other people during the past few years. I’d like to put on a pair of spurs, climb up on Hitler’s neck and ride him bareback down the Broadway of Berlin.” George obviously thought strongly about the war his fellow servicemen were waging in Europe. He was not alone in thinking the liberation of Paris meant the war in Europe would be over soon. Unfortunately, eight more months, marked by heavy casualties, remained.

George usually wrote letters when he knew he would be able to mail them. It would be three months before George again picked up pen and paper. In that time, the *Louisville* was again at sea for an extended period. At one point during that time, the cruiser became a participant in the greatest naval battle in World War II, or, for that matter, in all of naval history--the Battle of Leyte Gulf. First, though, the *Louisville* participated in another campaign, the landing of Marines on Peleliu.

*Peleliu,*  
*September 12 - 24, 1944*

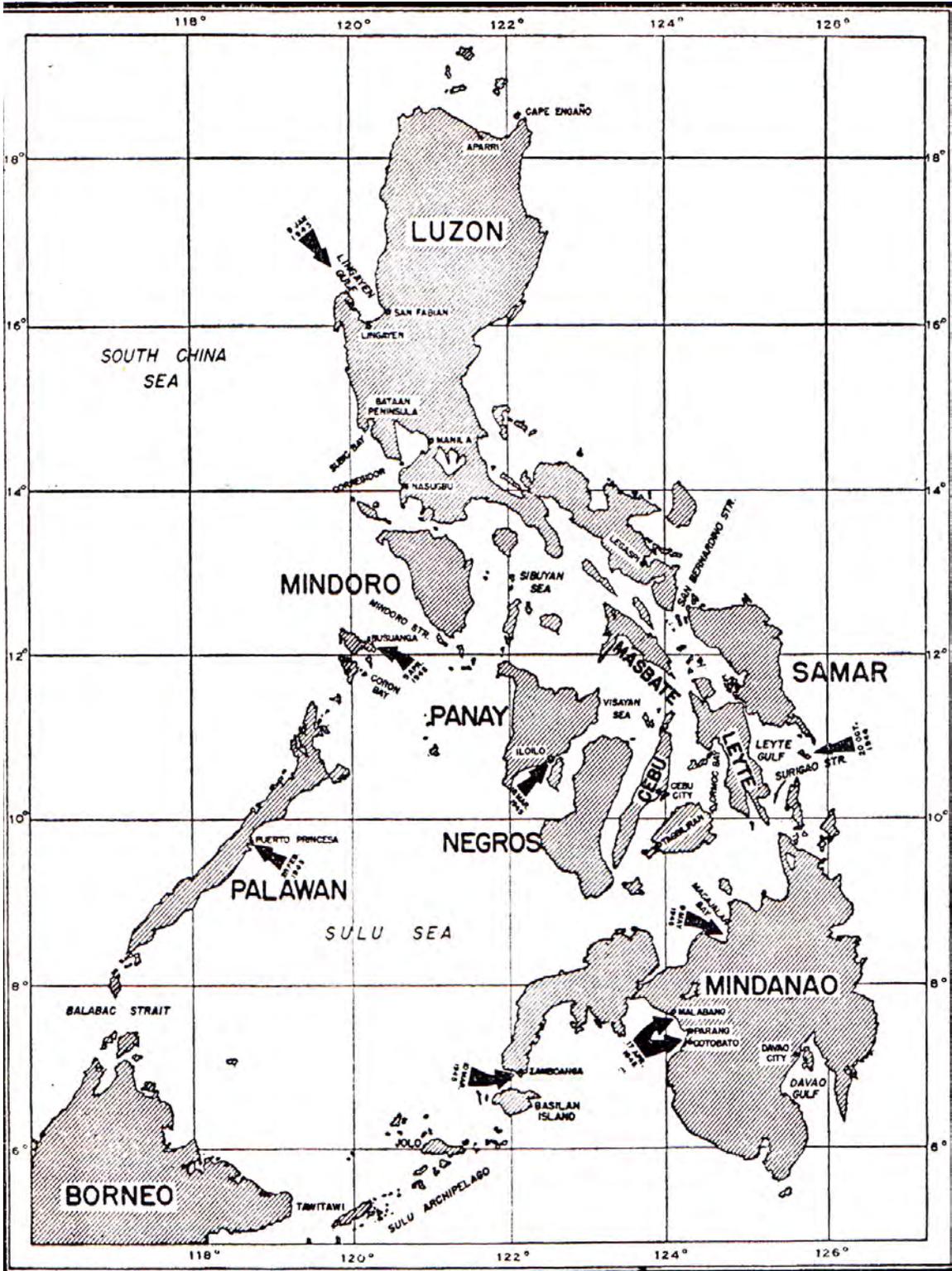
Peleliu is an island in the Palau chain, located in the most western part of the Carolines. It offered airstrips from which American planes could mount strikes against the Philippines. Japan had used the runways as its primary air base in the Western Carolines. Three days of surface and air bombing preceded the landings by Marines. The *Louisville* and other fire support ships began their bombardment on September 12<sup>th</sup>, and two hours later, planes from the aircraft carriers dropped their bombs. This preliminary bombardment continued for three days before the initial landings on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Yet on D-day, the *Louisville* and her fellow cruisers the *Portland* and the *Indianapolis* sat in the waters off of Peleliu without firing for most of the day. Their silence might have related to a situation George recalls. As he explains it, "The biggest problem our troops were having concerned a ridge on the island that was parallel to the beach. In the valley behind the ridge, the Japanese had mortar emplacements. They were firing mortar charges over the ridge, with the charges landing on our troops. We were called upon to silence the mortars. But when we got lined up to shoot, we found out that we could only hit the side of the ridge. Our gunnery officer asked the ship to move out to 25,000 yards from the beach. He had figured out a trajectory arc on our salvo that would descend on an angle, going over the ridge, into the valley." The plan worked, and George's admiration for that officer grew.<sup>236</sup>

Fierce fighting continued on the island for two months. The role of the *Louisville* and other ships in her task group ended long before the Marines took Peleliu. On September 25<sup>th</sup>, the fire support ships received orders to report to Hollandia. From there, the *Lou* steamed to Manus, an island in the Admiralty chain north of New Guinea where the crew enjoyed some much-needed R & R. Less than three weeks later, however, the *Louisville* pulled up anchor. It joined a task group that played a role in the liberation of the Philippines.<sup>237</sup>

*The Reoccupation Of The Philippines,*  
*October 1944*

Of all the island campaigns Americans fought in as they moved closer and closer to the Japanese mainland, the Philippines held particular meaning for them. Some seven thousand islands makeup what had been a United States territory since 1898. The main island of Luzon was the site of a five-month-long battle that began in December 1941 and continued into April 1942. During those months, American and

Filipino forces held off a much larger Japanese force on the Bataan Peninsula. In April, however, they were forced to surrender as food and military supplies ran perilously low. The Japanese marched approximately seventy thousand Americans and Filipinos sixty miles to a POW camp. About ten thousand of them died on the journey, many murdered by enemy soldiers, on what became known as the Bataan Death March. With the May surrender of American forces on Corregidor (a small island off of Bataan), Japanese control of Luzon was complete. Island resistance, led by Filipino guerrillas and escaped Allied forces, continued over the next years. In that same period, POWs languished, beaten and starved, in various camps throughout the Philippines. By the fall of 1944, Americans knew of the Bataan Death March. They also had heard, from a handful of escaped POWs, of the brutal treatment surviving American prisoners had been receiving for three years. The *Louisville's* cruise book acknowledged that the Philippines Campaign would be different than earlier ones. As the *Lou* approached the Philippines, the mood of many on board darkened. "It was becoming a personal war," officers wrote in their cruise book. "We were going to avenge the deaths of those who had fought and died on Corregidor and Bataan. This was our land and the Jap could not stop us."<sup>238</sup>



*U.S. Navy At War, p. 118*

The Philippines also held great strategic importance. Once the Americans again controlled it, they would sever critical communication and shipping lines between Japan's home islands and its "Outer Empire" to the south. Additionally, the Philippines, only thirteen hundred miles from Japan's home islands, could become another staging point for the invasion of Japan itself. The beginning of the Philippines' liberation started with landings on the island of Leyte, southwest of Luzon, on October 20, 1944. The Command identified the landing date as "A-day." (General MacArthur believed the public now associated the phrase "D-day" with the Normandy landings in France four months earlier. He thus ordered the Leyte landings to be called "A-day.") In the nine days before October 20<sup>th</sup>, task forces from various ports in New Guinea and the Admiralty Islands moved toward the Philippines. This included the American Navy's Third and Seventh Fleets. For this campaign, the *Louisville* was one of seven hundred and thirty-eight vessels in the Seventh Fleet. Its commanding admiral divided the fleet into three task forces. The *Louisville* was in the Covering and Support Force composed of heavy bombardment, fire support, and escort carrier ships. Six battleships, five heavy cruisers (the *Lou* being one of them), six light cruisers, eighteen escort carriers, eighty-six destroyers, twenty-five destroyer escorts, and eleven frigates made up this task force. Hearing these numbers today, George commented on the naval strength they represented-- "When we went there, we intended to take it and stay."<sup>239</sup>

The fire support formations were divided into three units. The *Louisville* became part of the Southern Force, or Task Force 79, along with the heavy cruisers *USS Minneapolis* and *USS Portland*. Altogether, Task Force 79 included three battleships, three heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and thirteen destroyers. The three battleships--the *Tennessee*, the *California*, and the *Pennsylvania*--had been at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Aside from these battlewagons and their crews, sailors on other vessels, such as George, had also fought at Pearl Harbor on that Sunday morning. Confronting the Japanese in the Philippines was, therefore, even more personal for them aside from considerations of Bataan and Corregidor. Navy ships and men that had been at Pearl Harbor had participated in other campaigns before the liberation of the Philippines. But in so doing, they had generally served in support capacities for the Allied air war and ground operations. This would not be the case in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the major confrontation in the Philippines. There, the Navy held the primary role. Aircraft carriers played no significant part in the battle.<sup>240</sup>

As in earlier campaigns, within her task force the *Louisville* would be part of the bombardment and fire support group commanded by Admiral Oldendorf. The *Lou* steamed into Leyte Gulf on October 17<sup>th</sup>. Pre-bombardment of Leyte Island followed. Three days later, on the morning of the landings, ships fired their guns and planes mounted air strikes. Fifteen minutes before the landings took place at 10:00 a.m., some vessels fired rocket and mortar barrages. The *Louisville's* cruise book described what happened next. The bombardments became "a withering barrage riddling the beach" until it seemed "that no living thing could exist there." Thousands of landing craft headed for the beaches. The first ones reached the

shores at four points on the island, all along the western side of Leyte Gulf. Japanese planes took off from nearby air bases, targeting the invading Allied ships.<sup>241</sup>

Twice on A-day the *Louisville* lived up to her name, the *Lucky Lou*. The ship's cruise book described one of them in riveting detail. "It was on 'A' Day morning, as we were resuming our systematic destruction of shore installations, that a dive bomber slipped in over the formation. *Louisville* lookouts were the first to spot him, and our guns were the first to take him under fire. Then, as if in vengeance, the Jap pilot swerved from his course, diving for a low sweep over the ship." The *Louisville* fired her five-inch guns at the plane but failed to hit it. The 40-mms and the 20-mms opened fire as well, but the enemy plane kept coming toward the ship. Before heading to a Japanese airfield on Leyte, the pilot dropped "two wing bombs" above the *Lou*. As ship officers later wrote in the cruise book, "All hands topside stared hypnotized as the bombs arched gracefully away from the speeding plane. Their flight seemed endless." But luck was with the *Louisville*. "The bombs whistled over the ship to explode harmlessly in the sea, not 300 yards away."<sup>242</sup>

A second lucky moment for the *Louisville* occurred around 4:00 p.m. on A-day. The *USS Honolulu*, a light cruiser, had finished her assigned bombardment and was sitting in the waters of Leyte Gulf about five miles off shore. A Japanese plane dived down out of the sky and dropped a torpedo, clearly aiming for the cruiser. Approximately three minutes later, the torpedo hit the *Honolulu* on her port side. Sixty members of her crew died. The *Honolulu*, as the *Louisville's* officers observed in their cruise book, was "lying not far from our ship."<sup>243</sup>

A few days later, on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, the *Louisville* had a third close call. This time the enemy did not drop a bomb from a plane. Rather, the plane itself became the explosive projectile. The *Lou* was being refueled that afternoon in Leyte Gulf. Crewmembers spotted eight Japanese planes over nearby Samar Island. The *Louisville's* cruise book dramatically documented what happened next. "Two planes broke from the group to start an unhurried circling of the ship...The Jap pilots were waiting for the zero minute—that time of the evening when darkness filters into the eyes of nervous gunners." When one of the enemy pilots thought the light favored him, he "rolled his plane over on the wing tip and pushed his throttle against the stops. Our gunners sent up a challenge of steel to meet his steep angle dive, but nothing seemed to divert his aim. He drove through the mists of darkness like a projectile. Every man felt the plane was directed at him as he froze in position, waiting for the crash. Then suddenly it was over. The Jap had missed the ship by inches. As he plunged into the water on the starboard side of the boat deck, shrapnel flew back aboard ship, killing one of our men. That was our first kamikaze. It had caused our first action death aboard the *Louisville*." George did not witness this moment. "I was probably down in the plotting room."<sup>244</sup>

The Japanese word "kamikaze" translates as "the divine wind." Its historical significance goes back to 1274 and 1281 when two powerful typhoons appeared in the waters around Japan. In both of those years, invaders threatened an attack from

the sea. Typhoons, however, destroyed their ships. This led the Japanese to believe the wind god had sent the typhoons. By their reasoning, they were “a people protected by the gods.” In October 1944 during the Allied campaign in the Philippines, Japan attempted to repel the liberating forces by introducing a new offensive weapon--the Suicide Attack Corps. Pilots who sacrificed their lives by crashing their planes into Allied ships became known as “kamikaze pilots.” Such attacks resulted in on board explosions and fires that caused heavy damage to Allied vessels. At the same time, the kamikaze assaults resulted in a significant loss of life in respect to the ship’s crew. By the end of World War II, this new strategy killed more American sailors and sunk more American ships than any tactic the Japanese used in the war.<sup>245</sup>

Luckily, the second kamikaze aircraft that targeted the *Lou* on October 22<sup>nd</sup> was also not successful. Again, the cruise book explained what happened in the words of officers who were there. This second plane “made his do-and-die plunge before we had fully recovered from the first. However, he had waited an instant too long to start his run and narrowly missed the bridge. He crashed into the water a few feet beyond us, in a funeral pyre of smoke and spray.”<sup>246</sup>

With the introduction of kamikaze planes, loading ammunition onto the ship took on a new danger. The *Louisville’s* cruise book referred to crewmembers who now felt “edgy” about what had been, up to this point in time, a mechanical process. On the afternoon of October 24<sup>th</sup> the *Louisville* was, in the words of its cruise book, “dangerously low on ammunition.” The cruiser thus pulled up next to an ammunition ship to, as her officers wrote, “repeat a process that had grown familiar through the many months of heavy bombardment.” George explains that when ships brought ammo on board, both vessels were “stationary in the water. We tied up to the ammunitions ship and usually transferred loads by crane from one ship to another.” Once on the cruiser’s deck, what George calls “manpower” took over. Crewmembers, he continues, “picked up the cartridges or projectiles and took them to the magazines.” On the 24<sup>th</sup>, the cruise book described the operation in the following way--“Soon the booms were going at top speed, whipping up box after box of projectiles, and net after net of powder charges to deposit them on our decks.” Men lifted the containers, walking them to a hatch that lowered the ammunition below. What the cruise book described as a “whip or hoist” picked it up below deck until more manpower finally deposited the ammo in the magazines. Knowing too well the dangers the kamikazes posed, that afternoon the crew “completed the job in double time.” The officers who wrote the cruise book added that the ship “had received several ‘red alerts’ while handling the explosives, but luckily nothing materialized.” In describing the loading of ammunition on the 24<sup>th</sup>, officers of the *Louisville* later confessed, “We were not, however, fully aware of how important that ammunition was soon to become in the night engagement at Surigao Strait.”<sup>247</sup>

*The Battle Of Leyte Gulf,  
October 23 - 26, 1944*

Once American landing forces secured a foothold on Leyte, the Navy focused on protecting the beachheads from enemy sea and air attacks. Unable to prevent the landings, the Japanese became determined to weaken the Americans' hold on the beaches. They knew reinforcements and supplies would have to follow the initial troop landings. The *Louisville's* cruise book summarized Japan's intent by concluding that it wanted to "smash our hold in the Philippines." To execute this plan, one historian described how the Japanese "committed to action virtually every operational fighting ship on the lists of the Imperial Navy," a navy that was still "a formidable surface force." Three Japanese fleets, the scholar continued, "were hurled at our newly established beachhead in the Philippines from three directions." The first approached from the north, a second from the west, and the third from the south. This last Japanese task force planned to enter Leyte Gulf from the Mindanao Sea, south of the Gulf. Between October 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, elements in the Third and Seventh Fleets fought Japanese naval forces. Collectively, four of these engagements became known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf.<sup>248</sup>

Historians use superlatives to describe the Battle of Leyte Gulf's significance. One scholar, for example, classified it as "the biggest and most multifaceted naval battle in all of history." Another concluded, "The Battle for Leyte Gulf was the greatest naval battle of the Second World War and the largest engagement ever fought on the high seas." One last example of the battle's historic importance relates to what was called "the battle line." That was how opposing navies, dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, had positioned themselves to fight each other. Ships lined up, end to end, across from each other on the open seas. They then proceeded to fire their broadside guns at each other. As it turned out, four hundred years of naval history came to a close in one episode during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. It occurred at Surigao Strait. George and the *Louisville* played a role in that last battle line engagement in naval history.<sup>249</sup>

The four separate actions that make up the Battle of Leyte Gulf occurred, in the words of one historian, "in three different bodies of water separated by as much as 500 miles. Yet all four were fought between dawn of one day and dusk of the next, and all were waged in the repulse of a single, huge Japanese operation." Collectively, the four engagements included the typical carrier-based air strikes that had characterized the Pacific war. The Battle of Leyte Gulf also saw surface ships and subsurface vessels engage each other, from ones as small as patrol (PT) boats to the large battleships. Enemy forces fired at each other from point-blank range to fifteen miles, using weapons as small as machine guns and others as large as the battleships' big guns. The four engagements that together are called the Battle of Leyte Gulf are the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, the Battle of Surigao Strait, the Battle off Cape Engano, and the Battle off Samar. Altogether, almost two hundred thousand men fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf; they served on two hundred and eighty-two American, Australian, and Japanese ships. George Coburn was one of those men and the *USS Louisville* was one of those ships.<sup>250</sup>

*The Battle Of Surigao Strait,*

October 24 - 25, 1944

The southern waters of Leyte Gulf flow into a body of water called Surigao Strait. Some thirty miles long, the strait runs north and south. It connects the Mindanao Sea in the south with Leyte Gulf in the north. The admiral in charge of the United States' Seventh Fleet believed the Japanese would use Surigao Strait to enter Leyte Gulf in an attempt to disrupt the Allied reoccupation of the Philippines. If they did so, the Japanese ships would come into the strait through its twelve-mile-wide southern entrance. The admiral thus ordered Oldendorf's Bombardment and Fire Support Group to guard the twenty-five-mile-wide northern entrance to the strait. Ships under Oldendorf's command became Task Force 77.2. It consisted of six battleships, four heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and twenty-four destroyers. Additionally, thirty-nine PT boats were already guarding the southern entrance of Surigao Strait. They, too, would now fall under Oldendorf's command. In the words of one historian, the predictability of Japan's movement and the topography of the strait "allowed Oldendorf to lay a trap."<sup>251</sup>

Oldendorf once more chose the *Louisville* as his flagship. In the estimation of its officers, the ship "had reached the pinnacle of her career." The *Lou's* cruise book, with clear pride, concluded, "She was the flagship that spear-headed the greatest surface engagement of this war." Task Force 77.2 weighed anchor on the night of October 24<sup>th</sup>. The crew of the *Louisville* knew what awaited them. The day before, according to the cruise book, "scuttlebutt raced like wildfire through the ship of the approach of large enemy naval forces." The next day, once the task force was on its way, Oldendorf addressed the men through the loudspeakers. He verified what they already knew--a battle was imminent. Speaking for all of the men and ships in the task force, officers from the *Louisville* later observed, "On our success hinged the fate of thousands of men ashore and in troop transports in the Gulf....Silently, grimly, we steamed in column down the Gulf with the *Lou* in the van."<sup>252</sup>

Oldendorf strategically placed the task group's ships in key positions from the northern end of Surigao Strait to the waters outside of its southern end. The admiral ordered the "main battle line" (composed of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers) to the extreme northern end of the strait. Six battleships formed the center of the main battle line. Five had been at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941--the *Pennsylvania*, the *Tennessee*, the *Maryland*, the *West Virginia*, and the *California*. The Japanese attack that morning heavily damaged the first three, and Japanese planes sank the last two. (Salvage work eventually made the *West Virginia* and the *California* fit again for duty.) These five battleships, along with the *Mississippi*, now awaited their opportunity for revenge against the Japanese fleet. Asked today whether he remembers references by crewmembers on how personal the Philippines campaign was, George honestly replies, "There were probably thoughts of vengeance."<sup>253</sup>

Three or four thousand yards directly south of the battleships, cruisers and destroyers formed a left and right flank for the center of the battle line position. The heavy cruisers (the *Louisville*, the *Portland*, and the *Minneapolis*) assumed their

positions on the left flank. Two light cruisers and nine destroyers completed the left flank. The remaining heavy and light cruisers, along with some destroyers, made up the right flank. Five to six miles south of the battle line, Oldendorf positioned three destroyer squadrons. Below them, at the extreme end of Surigao Strait and into Mindanao Sea, thirty-nine PT boats stood watch. These small crafts were “the eyes of the fleet.” At Surigao Strait, the PT boats were to report the first contact with the enemy.<sup>254</sup>

For hours, the *Louisville's* officers later recalled, “Alert and apprehensive, we steamed back and forth across Surigao Strait, waiting our prey.” The left flank cruisers, which included the *Lucky Lou*, repeated that movement again and again some two-and-a-half miles south of the battle line. The cruisers moved ten miles east and then ten miles west at a speed of five knots. On the night of the 24<sup>th</sup>, a quarter-moon disappeared in the sky just minutes after midnight. The strait was now completely dark, with visibility in the water under three miles. It was a windless night and the sea was calm. A five-knot-wind and lightening appeared now and then.<sup>255</sup>

About one hundred miles south of the main battle line, PT boats patrolled in thirteen sections of three boats each. Right before midnight on October 24<sup>th</sup>, an outermost section sighted Japanese ships entering Surigao Strait. In total, the enemy fleet consisted of seven vessels--two battleships, one heavy cruiser, and four destroyers. They moved up the narrow entrance to the strait in a column, surrounded by darkness. The Japanese fired upon thirty of the thirty-nine PT boats, hitting some of them. The enemy ships did not sustain any damage from the PT boats. By the time this phase of the Battle of Surigao Strait ended, six crewmen on the PT boats were dead. On board the *Louisville*, Oldendorf first received word of the engagements at 12:26 a.m. In the words of the *Lou's* cruise book, “Tension electrified the air.” Before the Japanese could come within range of the battle line’s big guns, the enemy first had to confront United States destroyers. Those engagements began shortly before 3:00 a.m., about three hours since the PT boats had first encountered the Japanese fleet. For over an hour, the American destroyers fired at the enemy as the battleships and cruisers waited their turn. That could not begin until the Japanese ships were within range of the battle line guns.<sup>256</sup>

One historian referred to George and his peers when he wrote, “fire controlmen held the directors on their targets” for more than thirty minutes. Finally, about ten minutes before 4:00 a.m., the foremost Japanese ships were 15,600 yards (almost nine miles) from the *Louisville*. The *Lou*, recall, was positioned in the left flank, below the battle line. The battle line itself was about 21,000 yards from the enemy ships. Moments later, at 3:51 a.m., Oldendorf ordered all ships to “open fire.” The five left flank cruisers immediately began firing their 8-inch and 6-inch guns. As the flagship, it is not surprising that the *Louisville* was the first cruiser to do so. About a minute later, cruisers on the right flank followed suit. The battleships of the main battle line fired next, aiming their projectiles over the cruisers.<sup>257</sup>

Those early morning hours are very clear to George even with the passage of over seventy years. "Oh, I remember that very well. I was operating the main battery rangekeeper down in the plotting room on the 4<sup>th</sup> deck. We were on target by radar." (George explains, "Radar was our first contact with the enemy force. I'm sure the people topside saw fires, but for my work, where I was controlling the main battery, radar was my contact.") He continues reminiscing on that pivotal moment in Surigao Strait. "When the radar picked up the approaching enemy, I could see them coming on the radar screen. The elevated director could see them by the time we opened fire." (Altogether, George explains the main battery had three directors. Two directors were above the main deck, one in the foretop and the other at the top of the superstructure. "These both were smaller than the one in the plotting room where I was. Each director could track the course and speed of the enemy and keep tabs on the enemy's position." There were also two directors for the AA guns.) George distinctly recalls that when the Japanese ships were at a distance of "under 20,000 yards, I became concerned." In his own mind, he was asking himself, "When are we going to start shooting?" I was on a circuit that went to all the major control stations. I started calling out the range every 1,000 yards as it decreased. I put that on the phone circuit, hoping somebody would get more anxious than me and start shooting. The range closed to 13,800 yards."

At this point, George pauses in his recollection to stress an important point that he argues history books have gotten wrong--the distance between the American cruisers and the Japanese ships at the time the former opened fire. Scholars used official Navy records as their source for that distance, but George knows that the initial written record of the distance was in error, a mistake various accounts of the battle perpetuated. For example, George even cites the book officers of the *Louisville* wrote immediately after the war. "The cruise book says it was 18,000 yards, but they got that information from the log book on the admiral's ship, I'll bet. The admiral was on a battleship 5,000 yards behind us. "We opened fire at 13,800 yards. I know that because I was the guy who said we're ready to go." George is rightfully proud of the way in which he fulfilled his duty that morning. "I had the range set up, and I thought it was perfect. (And I still think it was). On the radar repeater, I could see our projectiles going out. I watched them go out and drop right into our target."

The *Louisville's* cruise book dramatically described what happened in the following minutes. "A blinding spurt of fire billowed into massive, rolling flames, filled with acrid, orange smoke. The *Lady* lifted a few feet, recoiled to port and shook as her nine-gun salvo hurled over a ton of steel and explosives at the approaching column of ships...Other ships opened up at our signal. Night was day as their guns belched flame and fire. Our attention was riveted on the first group of shells as they descended toward the target. A hit!" Men on the *Louisville* cheered. The Japanese ship at the head of the column "was a mass of flames shooting hundreds of feet into the sky...The enemy never quite knew what happened as salvo after salvo tore into him, ripping ships apart like matchboxes, setting off magazines that scattered the remnants of battered hulls into oblivion. Time and again, the *Lou's* guns roared. Shaking and shuddering from stem to stern with each blast of the turrets, we

continued our devastating fire.” According to the *Louisville’s* officers, the ship “fired more main battery eight-inch shells than the total of all calibers fired by the six battleships added together.” George’s duty station was on the director that aimed the main battery’s guns. His Continuous Service Certificate documents George’s commendation “for excellent performance of duty during the Battle of Surigao Strait.” In his capacity directing the *Louisville’s* guns, the Navy concluded George’s actions resulted “in the destruction of many Jap warships.”<sup>258</sup>

What the Japanese fleet confronted at Surigao Strait was a classic naval strategy, hundreds of years old, known as “crossing the T” or “capping the T.” The majority of a ship’s guns were mounted on the starboard and port sides of the vessel, not on the bow or stern. The most ideal location for ships when firing upon enemy vessels, therefore, was to position themselves like the “cap” at the top of an uppercase letter “T.” The vertical part of the “T” would be the approaching enemy ships. In such a scenario, the enemy could only fire its bow guns at an opponent while the opponent had full use of the guns along its starboard or portside. (With the mounting of rotating turrets on modern naval ships, George points out that vessels could use the main battery guns in the turrets regardless of whether the ship’s starboard or portside faced the enemy.) If a tactician could create a scenario where his ships assumed the horizontal position in a capital “T” and his enemy the vertical one, the enemy fought under a terrible disadvantage. The narrowness of Surigao Strait forced the Japanese ships to travel up the strait in a vertical column. This gave Admiral Oldendorf the perfect geography for “crossing the T.” George points out the advantage the United States task force had in the narrow strait. “It was a natural for ‘crossing the T.’ The opposition fleet had to come up the strait. We were at right angle to the enemy line. As a result, we could fire all of our guns. They [the Japanese] could only fire their forward guns.” That October morning, “capping the T” was the “trap” Oldendorf set for the enemy ships.<sup>259</sup>

George remembers how a “blow by blow description” of the battle could be heard throughout the ship via “sound-powered phones.” Some sailors at their duty station wore a headset. As George explains, the headset “had a vibrating mechanism like a microphone that generated the current that carried the information to the other phones on the circuit.” Bluejackets with such a headset who were on the upper decks could see what was happening. Some of them relayed firsthand accounts of the engagement to others below decks who also used sound-powered phones. “The sound-powered phones could only be heard by the wearer of the headset,” but George adds, “He would pass the word along. The word eventually got throughout the ship; it wasn’t just for the gunnery dept.”

Oldendorf ordered his battleships, cruisers, and destroyers to stop firing less than twenty minutes after his original 3:51 a.m. order to engage the enemy. “Friendly fire” was the reason for the cessation. The admiral received word that some of the American ships had accidentally directed their guns at the task force destroyers stationed directly south of them. One, the *USS Grant*, had been severely damaged by both the Japanese and the Americans. Twenty shells hit the *Grant*,

eleven of them from United States cruisers. The *Louisville* was one of those ships, but her projectiles missed the *Grant* while those from others in the task force did not. Oldendorf ordered the 4:09 a.m. cease fire to allow the American destroyers time to move out of the line of fire. He gave the command to resume firing at 4:19 a.m., with a final cessation directive at 5:39 a.m.<sup>260</sup>

By 6:00 that morning, Task Force 77.2 saw the damage it had done to the Japanese fleet by looking at the surrounding waters. Debris from enemy ships, some of it on fire, littered the strait. Oil slicks were visible on the water's surface. The Americans picked up Japanese crewmembers, although many did not want to come on board the ships of their avowed enemy. In the Battle of Surigao Strait, the United States task force possessed, in the words of one naval historian, "overwhelming strength." The number of ships lost and the casualty counts testified to the American advantages. About six weeks after the battle, George wrote his mother a letter in which he shared some of the details of what had happened at Surigao Strait. George assured her, "The lucky *Louisville*, true to her record, came through without a scratch." In fact, Oldendorf's task force lost no ship in the Battle of Surigao Strait that morning, although enemy gunfire damaged six PT boats. In respect to major vessels, however, only one destroyer, the *Grant*, was severely hit. In comparison, the American task force sank five of the seven Japanese ships--both battleships and three of the four destroyers. The remaining two Japanese ships were badly damaged. With so many enemy ships sunk, scholars estimate the number of Japanese who died in the Battle of Surigao Strait totaled in the thousands, with one concluding it might have been over five thousand. American deaths numbered thirty-nine (thirty-four of them died on board the *Grant*); another one hundred and fourteen were wounded (ninety-four of those were on the *Grant*).<sup>261</sup>

In the decades after the Battle of Surigao Strait, probably few if any of the men on board the American ships understood the history they had just brought to a close. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, naval ships had fired upon each other in a battle line formation. The last time it was employed was four hundred years later in the Battle of Surigao Strait. The era of the battleship ended with World War II. It did not take long in that global conflict for the aircraft carrier to overshadow the battlewagon. With the end of the battleship's tactical importance came the end of the battle line. In the conclusion of one historian who spoke for others, Surigao Strait "was the last engagement of a battle line."<sup>262</sup>

What happened in Surigao Strait in the early morning hours of October 25, 1944 was but one part of the Battle of Leyte Gulf. As noted earlier, that battle goes down in history as the largest naval engagement between the Allies and enemy forces in World War II as well as the largest naval engagement in all of history. It was unquestionably an Allied victory in many ways. The Japanese did not stop the American reoccupation of the Philippines. And in trying to do so, their navy paid a high price. In the four engagements that collectively are known as the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the Japanese lost twenty-six combat ships--three battleships, one large carrier, three light carriers, six heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, and nine destroyers. In

comparison, the Americans lost only six--one light carrier, two escort carriers, two destroyers, and one destroyer escort. After the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the United States held the naval advantage in the Pacific Theater. The Japanese navy suffered such a defeat that it would never again pose a real danger to the Allies. Henceforth, Japan relied on its land forces and air power in its unsuccessful attempts to check the Allied advance toward the homeland. One part of the air power was the use of kamikaze missions. George and the *Louisville* had already been introduced to that new method of Japanese warfare. They confronted it again when the Americans prepared to land on the main Philippine island of Luzon just a few weeks after the Battle of Surigao Strait.<sup>263</sup>

By November 1<sup>st</sup>, the *Louisville* and other ships that had fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf returned to the Carolines where they re-provisioned. In the words of the ship's cruise book, for two days the crew "had been sweating when line after line of men rushed to load stores and ammunition from the supply ships." On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, the *Louisville* joined Task Group 38.3. It headed back to the Philippines to support future landings on Luzon. (The Command had not yet set a date for those landings.) The group participated in strikes against the city of Manila and other locations on Luzon. For example, on November 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, the task group supported carrier air attacks on the island's southern airfields and harbors. The 9<sup>th</sup> of the month found the *Louisville* back in Ulithi (an atoll in the Carolines) for a week of repairs, steaming through a typhoon to get there. As soon as the repairs were completed, the cruiser took Oldendorf to Hollandia for a meeting with MacArthur and the Navy commander of the Seventh Fleet. The men needed to finalize plans for the invasion of Luzon. George and his fellow crewmen got a brief respite from the war while they waited to pick up Oldendorf. The *Louisville* crewmen spent their week of wait-time on the island of Manus, north of New Guinea.<sup>264</sup>

It was probably while the *Louisville* was in Manus that George wrote his mother a letter dated December 4<sup>th</sup>. He shared with Carrie the fact that the day before, he had received an October 30<sup>th</sup> letter from her, as well as one from his brother Bob dated November 12<sup>th</sup>. Most of George's letter to Carrie detailed the Battle of Surigao Strait. George probably guessed that she would have read about the Battle of Leyte Gulf in the newspaper.

*December 4, 1944*

*Hello Mom,*

*I haven't written much lately—really, I've been too busy...Censorship regulations have relaxed enough to allow my telling [you] that the ship was present and doing her part for the invasion of Leyte Island in the Philippines. We took part in the pre-invasion bombardment and also in the sea battle that took place a little later. The sea battle took place at night so we don't know exactly what happened, but we do know that several Jap ships were sunk and that all of ours are still afloat. The lucky Louisville, true to her record, came through without a scratch. Since my station is below decks, I*

*didn't see a doggone bit of the battle myself, but I heard a blow by blow description of it over the telephones, and it sure sounded like bad news for the other side."*

*Love,  
George*

December 1944 was far from a quiet month for George and the *Louisville*. While anchored at Manus, the fire and support unit received a new commander, Rear Admiral Thomas Chandler. (Oldendorf had been promoted from rear admiral to vice admiral.) Chandler and the *Louisville* returned to Leyte Gulf, the staging area for the Luzon invasion. In the middle of December, American forces landed on Mindoro, another island in the Philippines. The *Louisville* had no direct role in that landing, but it did encounter some Japanese sailors whose destroyer had engaged in a futile attempt to stop the Americans. United States planes sank their ship, and the *Louisville* received some of the Japanese crew who had been in the water.<sup>265</sup>

As the enemy sailors were brought on board, their *Louisville* counterparts jockeyed to get a glimpse of them being taken to the brig. George remembers the moment. "I thought they looked like a bunch of scared kids. They looked like the fight was all gone." George's words today echo a passage he wrote in a wartime letter home about the POWs. "I sort of pitied the poor little beggars even after all the trouble their race has caused us. They were a very dejected looking lot, small and huddled together fearfully as if they expected us to commence torturing them at any moment. Actually, they were much better treated than some of our own wayward men who happen to get themselves into the brig."<sup>266</sup>

In the days thereafter, the *Lou* watched for Japanese air attacks, now knowing all too well that an enemy plane could be a kamikaze strike. "We were continuously alerted," the cruise book explained, "to keep Jap planes out of our stack." Occasionally, enemy attacks occurred. On the evening of December 20<sup>th</sup>, for example, the *Louisville* shot down a Japanese plane off the starboard quarter. Five days later, crewmembers observed Christmas Day with a "St. Nick party" on a Leyte beach. While the month closed on a relatively uneventful note for the *Louisville*, this would not be the case when a new month began. Near midnight on January 2, 1945, the ship left the waters around Leyte, bound for Luzon. The new month proved to be a deadly one for the *Lucky Lou*.<sup>267</sup>

*Lingayen Gulf,  
January 5 - 6, 1945*

Out of the thousands of islands in the Philippines, Luzon was the key one for the United States military. Symbolically, it was the island that held emotional meaning because of Bataan and Corregidor. Strategically, it was the largest of the Philippine Islands and the location where the United States military had built its installations in the prewar years. The Japanese took over those bases early in 1942. Now, three years later, the American military was determined to take back Luzon more than any other island in the Philippines. The Navy committed over eight

hundred and fifty ships to the Luzon operation. Vice Admiral Oldendorf commanded the fire support group that consisted of six battleships, nine cruisers, and thirty destroyers. It was charged with bombarding the beaches in the days before the invasion. The Command scheduled the landings, initially on the southern and southeastern coasts, for January 9<sup>th</sup>. Fire and support ships were to begin pre-bombardment on the 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>268</sup>

The job before the *Louisville* and other ships in her task group was similar to what the crews had been doing for more than a year. In the words of the *Lou's* cruise book, fire and support ships used their guns "to neutralize and destroy enemy shore installations such as pillboxes, stores, coast artillery, and personnel concentrations." It was by no means a task devoid of danger. The cruise book pointed out that "air coverage" for the fire and support group "was seldom possible." During the Philippines Campaign, the danger of Japanese air attacks on United States naval vessels now included not only traditional aerial bombing of the ships, but also the possibility that an enemy plane could be a kamikaze. Even before the *Louisville* was scheduled to fire her guns in the pre-bombardment hours, kamikaze attacks became a reality.<sup>269</sup>

In the late afternoon of January 4<sup>th</sup>, the fire and support group was heading north to Luzon. Rear Admiral Chandler was on board his flagship, the *Louisville*. In the Sulu Sea area, located in the southwestern part of the Philippines, the task group made its way past islands still held by the Japanese. Crewmembers heard the call to General Quarters when enemy planes were sighted overhead. A kamikaze targeted the *USS Ommaney Bay*, a carrier escort. The ship and ninety-three members of her crew were lost. After the enemy attack ended, the Japanese planes remained in the area. As *Louisville's* officers wrote in the cruise book, "Like the tiger stalking her prey, they were always with us." Twenty-four hours later, kamikazes went after the *Louisville*.<sup>270</sup>

When that happened on January 5<sup>th</sup>, the fire and support group was less than one hundred and fifty miles off of Luzon. Japanese planes from an airbase on the island took off to attack the American ships. The alarm was sounded on board the vessels--"Bogies—low—closing fast." Two kamikazes dived toward the *Louisville*. Her cruise book's firsthand account recorded the tense-filled minutes that followed. "The first plane rushed into an angular dive at the ship." The *Lou's* guns fired at the enemy plane. Still, as the cruise book explained, "On and on it came through the great barrage of steel. It seemed nothing could stop it from crashing into us. Then suddenly it made a last-minute swerve from the *Louisville* to plow into a nearby destroyer." Once again, the *Lucky Lou* confirmed the validity of her nickname. However, her luck did not hold.<sup>271</sup>

A second kamikaze attacked the *Louisville* moments later. In the cruise book, officers recounted what happened next. "As the second plane plunged at us, all port guns were immediately on it. Tense figures throughout the ship drew a sigh of relief as they saw projectiles drive into the rapidly descending plane, setting it ablaze.

However, their relief was soon spent. The plane merely wavered and then plunged on towards the ship. The crescendo of its motor became a roar, reaching its zenith with a terrific explosion as she crashed into turret two, ripping the gun compartment open and sending a wall of fire up through the superstructure to the main battery director at the foretop." Just for a short period, "The engines backed down at the Captain's order" (i.e., the engines reversed the rotation of the propellers so the ship pulled backward instead of forward). The cruise book's account followed with even more details. "With control established in Batt. Two, we proceeded at full speed ahead to regain our position. Quickly, reinforcements were rushed to re-man the AA batteries affected and they were reorganized to continue the fight." Numerically, casualties were light. Although many men were burned, only one crewmember was dead.<sup>272</sup>



A kamikaze (circled in the air above the ship's bow) approaches the *Louisville*.

The *Louisville* was not so lucky when the second kamikaze hit occurred on January 6<sup>th</sup>. The enemy strike against the fire support group involved an estimated one hundred Japanese planes. The day had begun with an early morning bombardment by the *Louisville* and other ships of Japanese beach installations. Enemy air attacks on the fire and support vessels occurred throughout the morning and into the early afternoon. The ships' guns, however, fought them off. Around 3:30 p.m., the fire and support group entered Lingayen Gulf on the northwestern side of Luzon, looking for more Japanese defenses to fire upon. After bombarding Lingayen beaches, the task group headed for the open sea. But soon after that change in

course, Japanese planes mounted a powerful attack. It was about 5:30 p.m. when aircraft dived toward the *Louisville*. Those who were there described what happened next in the pages of the *Lou's* cruise book. "All ships opened fire simultaneously as the planes came in. The sky, in a matter of seconds, became a billowing cloud of smoke, flying steel, and flaming planes." Japanese suicide planes again streaked down toward the *Louisville*. "Three kamikazes closed in on our starboard bow in an attempt to break through our fire." Guns from the *Lou* and another cruiser shot down two of the planes. But "the third, flying low over the water, continued to drive upon us...Gun crews shrieked curses as the plane came onward through their steady rain of bullets. A 20-mm. machine gun got him fifty yards from the ship."<sup>273</sup>

Crewmembers, however, focusing as they were on this plane, did not see another kamikaze "coming in at an intense speed off the starboard quarter." The cruise book continued, "Guns swung to fire on him, but to no avail...One of its bombs exploded above an ill-fated 40-mm. *Louisville* gun, killing the gun crew which had fired on the plane; the other bomb exploded at the height of the open bridge just outside the Captain's sea cabin, hurling death-dealing shrapnel throughout the area." Admiral Chandler was "critically burned" along with other crewmen. The cruise book described the horror that ensued. "The entire forecastle was engulfed in flames. The starboard side became the funeral pyre of many of those men who were stationed in the area of the hit. Men horribly burned stumbled to assist firefighters. Persistently, relentlessly, damage control parties fought to save the ship, to beat back the inferno. In the after half of the ship, men, choking and gasping for air as the thick smoke, stinking of burned flesh and paint, enveloped them, stood their ground feeding the anti-aircraft guns. They blazed away at two other suiciders closing in on us, making a total of six fired upon in a few minutes."<sup>274</sup>

The *Louisville's* cruise book attempted to convey the horror of what confronted crewmembers. "Lingayen Gulf became a holocaust. The forward portion of the ship was a tragedy of twisted plates, twisted bodies, and twisted minds. High in the superstructure in the main battery fire control station, men wondered if they were trapped. On bended knees, one of them prayed." Below, on the decks, "out of the flames, broken, burned bodies pulled themselves over blackened fire hose, through stinging salt water, along the blackened decks to the arms of those who mercifully injected morphine, applied rudimentary first aid, lifted them into the wire-meshed battle stretchers and lowered them to safer areas." Over one hundred and twenty-five crewmen had been burned. Damaged as she was, the Command ordered the cruiser to safer waters. As the cruise book poignantly noted, for the first time in her history, the ship could not complete an assigned mission. Casualties on board the *Louisville* were high. Thirty-two members of the crew had been killed and fifty-six wounded. (Admiral Chandler died of his burns the day following the attack.)<sup>275</sup>

Asked today about his memories of the January 6<sup>th</sup> attack, George honestly admits that he does not have any clear ones. "No, I really don't. Obviously, I wasn't in the AA director. I probably had a temporary reassignment and [was] told not to

leave the main battery." George was further questioned about the devastation he saw when he did get to the main deck. George again has no strong recollections of the destruction that surrounded him in that moment. It could be he subconsciously buried those images long ago.

The at-sea burial ceremony took place the next day. Members of the crew had stitched what the cruise book called "canvas bags" in which they placed the bodies of the deceased sailors, including that of the admiral. During the service, the ensign flew at half-mast. The chaplain conducted the service. At its conclusion, Marine Corps riflemen fired three volleys followed by a bugler who played taps. The cruise book explained the final moments of the ceremony. "Then gently the bodies of our shipmates were committed to the deep waters of the South China Sea." The *Lou* was one of seventeen vessels hit on January 6<sup>th</sup> by the kamikazes. No doubt other burials at sea occurred on some of those ships.<sup>276</sup>

George received his second commendation "for excell [excellent] performance duty while ship part of advance fire support prior to landing at Lingayen Gulf." The citation also commended his actions in the "engagement and repelling of enemy air attacks and bombardment of Japanese installations ashore." When asked today about these entries in his Continuous Service Certificate, George is characteristically modest. "I think we probably did an effective job in our pre-bombardment. I was in an essential position on the main battery rangekeeper. Our fire power was well-directed and did what it was supposed to do."

Even after the damage inflicted on the *Louisville* in the kamikaze attacks, the cruiser again bombarded the beaches on Luzon in preparation for the January 9<sup>th</sup> landings. The *Lou* was forced to withdraw from action once the extent of the injuries she had sustained became clear. The *Louisville* left the waters off of Luzon after the landings took place. She joined other ships in need of major repairs. The vessels first stopped at Leyte Gulf where the wounded were transferred to hospital ships. From the Philippines, the *Louisville* proceeded on to Manus.<sup>277</sup>

It was probably while George was on Manus, where we know mail was received and sent out, that he wrote a January 13, 1945 letter to his mother. It was a reflective letter. His words gave evidence of the toll twelve months at sea had taken on him and, undoubtedly, on other sailors. In his letter, one could argue, George spoke for himself and other bluejackets. He noted, "It is a year today since we steamed away from the west coast and came out here." George acknowledged that in those months, Americans had "accomplished a lot and we've advanced a long way." There was well-deserved pride in that rightful conclusion. Yet the progress had come at an emotional cost. George explained to Carrie what he missed. "Never in all this time have we touched at any civilized port or had any decent liberty or period of relaxation. Now I'm tired, and I want to get out of the fight for awhile and go somewhere, anywhere where I can go to bed with the calm assurance that there will be no emergency call in the middle of the night," meaning, there would be no call to General Quarters. George also shared with his mother a wish to see "a full moon

[that] means its time to take the girlfriend for a walk instead of time to keep a sharper watch for a plane or ship that has intentions of paying an unfriendly visit.” George ended this part of his letter with a hope that he could go somewhere “where I can relax completely—if I still know how. I’ve been wondering if I do.”

In the same letter, George shared with his mother some good news. He had received a promotion from ensign to lieutenant junior grade (lt. j.g.), effective December 1, 1944. Recall George had received two commendations for his actions at Surigao Strait and Lingayen Gulf. One could presume that George’s performance at his duty station factored into his commanding officers’ decision to move him up further in the officers’ ranks. In a letter to Carrie, George explained his understanding of the new rate. “The promotion came not as a result of any outstanding service on my part, but simply as a result of my having discharged my duties as an ensign in a satisfactory manner for a period of 16 months.” Perhaps his assessment was true. But George did not know when he wrote this letter home about the commendations his superiors recorded for his attention to duty at Surigao Strait and Lingayen Gulf.

Some days after writing this letter home, the *Louisville* left Manus as part of a convoy bound for Pearl Harbor. The cruiser did not stay long in Hawaii. The *Lou* departed the islands on January 31<sup>st</sup>, arriving in San Francisco on February 6<sup>th</sup>. Fourteen months had passed since the last time the ship had been home. The *Louisville* underwent repairs at the Mare Island Navy Yard. George used his liberty time to again visit his mother. But before that trip south, he saw Jenny, the woman he had been writing to for over a year.<sup>278</sup>

*A Brief Respite From The War,  
February – April 1945*

George contacted Jenny soon after the *Louisville* arrived at Mare Island. He sent a telegram to let her know he was back from the Pacific. (Jenny was living with her parents in Fontana, a town in San Bernardino County, at the time.) Military regulations prohibited him, however, from telling Jenny exactly where he was. But George figured out a way around that. His message to her was short, “I have arrived where we met.” A few days after he sent the telegram, Jenny and George were reunited. They married on February 27, 1945. The ceremony was performed at the First Baptist Church in Vallejo, the town where they had met in November 1943. George had just a short liberty. With their families in Southern California, no one close to George and Jenny could quickly make the trip north. “It was just Jenny and I and the preacher, a man named ‘Parker.’ ” In the next few months, George spent most of his time on board the *Louisville* as it underwent repairs. He saw Jenny when he could get liberty. “We lived in a Quonset hut, really half of one, on the Mare Island naval base.”

In mid-April, the *Lou* was again ready for duty. She and her crew headed down the coast to San Diego for some “refresher training” and an “intensive shakedown.”

(George defines a “shakedown” cruise as one when, “after major work, the ship has a trial run to check out whether all the systems were working properly.”) Jenny left for San Diego, too, intending to stay with Carrie for a short visit while the *Louisville* was anchored in George’s hometown. The ship’s stop there allowed him to see both his mother and his wife when he could get liberty. By the end of April, the *Louisville*’s time in San Diego came to an end. She set out for Pearl Harbor, arriving there on May 5<sup>th</sup>. In Hawaii, the ship refueled. The *Lou* also brought on board, in the words of her officers, “ton after ton of supplies...tucking enough TNT inside our tight steel skin to blow us over the moon.” (George thinks the officers who wrote the cruise book used “TNT” here to mean “explosives in various forms.”) Clearly, the *Louisville* was again heading into action. The ship left for Guam on May 10<sup>th</sup>. From there, it would depart for George’s last World War II campaign, which was also the last major United States battle of the war.<sup>279</sup>

*Okinawa,*  
*May 23 – June 14, 1945*

On the day the *Louisville* departed Hawaiian waters, George wrote his mother a letter. In it, he referred to a historic event just a few days earlier. While the *Louisville* was moored at Pearl Harbor, the world received news of Germany’s surrender to the Allies. At least the war in Europe was now officially over. George shared with his mother a thought he had. “I wish the Germans had quit while I was home. I’d have liked to have joined in the celebration.” But George knew that the war in the Pacific continued. “I have been busy as the very devil since I left,” George observed to Carrie. “New jobs keep coming up, each overlapping the last one, two, or several. It will sure be swell when once again I can get a day or even a night of relaxation.” There would be none of that, however, in George’s immediate future. The *Louisville* was heading to yet another campaign, one that had begun in April.<sup>280</sup>

The Battle for Okinawa took place on an island in the Ryukyu chain just over four thousand miles west of Hawaii and nine hundred miles north of the Philippines. In the three years since the war began in the Pacific, the Allies had moved thousands of miles closer to Japan’s home islands across a vast expanse of ocean. Now at Okinawa in the spring of 1945, they were just three hundred and fifty miles south of Kyushu, the most southern of the main Japanese home islands. That proximity explains, in part, Japan’s annexation of Okinawa in 1879. The island is no atoll. It is large, some twenty-seven miles wide and sixty-five miles long. The harbors offered a superior naval base for the Allies. And if needed, the island’s size meant several airfields could be built there. The Allied fight to take Okinawa began on April 1, 1945 when over 1,200 ships landed some 170,000 Marines and soldiers on the western side of the island. When the *Louisville* arrived at Okinawa on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the battle for the island had been going on for about seven weeks.<sup>281</sup>

Having been through costly engagements with the Japanese in the Philippines, it appears the crew had voiced some concerns among themselves about another encounter with the enemy who now used suicidal pilots as part of its tactics. The

*Louisville's* cruise book hinted at this. "When we came in sight of the harbor, a great deal of our old confidence returned," a reference perhaps to the fact that some of that "confidence" had been shaken at Lingayen Gulf. Asked about this passage in the cruise book, George responds, "The Philippines was behind us." Recalling his own state-of-mind, George adds, "I don't recall being nervous about going into Okinawa." That may have been true for George, but maybe not for all of his fellow crewmen. The sailors' renewed self-confidence might have been related to what they saw before them when the *Lou* dropped anchor. According to the cruise book, "There were so many ships of all kinds and types that we might have been looking at East River, New York, rather than an assault task force in the battle areas. Many old friends of former engagements, battleships and cruisers were present." George adds to what officers wrote with his recollections. "I recall my own feelings when we came into Okinawa for the first time. I was really impressed by the size of the operation and the number of vessels."<sup>282</sup>

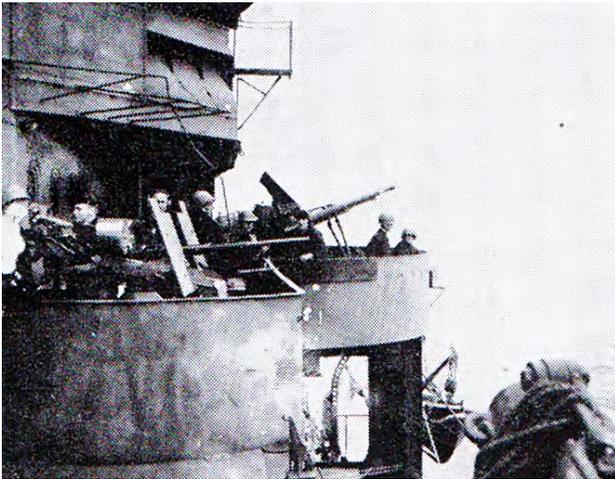
The *Louisville* began working with some of those "old friends" on May 24<sup>th</sup>, the day after the cruiser arrived in the harbor. The Command attached the *Lou* to a fire support group, Task Force 54, as Marines moved inland. On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville* fired star shells over ridges to lessen the possibility that Japanese troops would infiltrate Marine lines. (These projectiles illuminate areas rather than destroy ground installations or kill enemy forces.) In the late afternoon, the *Lou* joined other cruisers and fired in support of a nighttime operation. The next day, the *Louisville* directed her heavy guns on inland areas where Japanese troops were located. As her officers wrote in the ship's cruise book, "Reeling from the concussion of each explosion, we repeated, and repeated again the thundering salvos." Asked today about such noise, George comments, "I didn't experience it like people topside because I was usually in the plotting room."<sup>283</sup>

A "picket line" of United States vessels encircled Okinawa to protect the *Louisville* and other ships from enemy aircraft. Destroyers, destroyer escorts, and small vessels made up the picket line, stationed twenty to fifty miles off shore. It would first sight any approaching Japanese planes and respond accordingly. The picket line shared information on sighted bogies with Army, Navy, and Marine fighters. During the day, approximately seventy-five American planes flew in circles over the island and surrounding waters to form an aerial picket line. Thus sea and air attacks upon enemy aircraft could be mounted. Sailors understood picket line duty to be especially dangerous. Since the April landings, ships on the picket line had a one in three chance of being hit by a kamikaze plane.<sup>284</sup>

During the three-month-long Okinawan campaign, the Japanese mounted some nineteen hundred kamikaze attacks against United States ships. Although the suicide missions sank twenty-eight of them, they were all smaller vessels. Kamikazes did not sink any American battleships, cruisers, or carriers at Okinawa. They did, however, damage ten battleships, five cruisers, and thirteen carriers out of a total number of two hundred and twenty-five ships hit in kamikaze assaults. The Japanese mounted ten major kamikaze attacks from early April to late June. Aircraft

in the ninth raid early in June targeted the *Louisville*, and she became one of the five cruisers damaged at the Battle for Okinawa. But before that happened, the *Lou* experienced a close call soon after the cruiser arrived at Okinawa.<sup>285</sup>

The Japanese Command ordered a major kamikaze raid on May 24<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup>, with approximately two hundred pilots sacrificing themselves to damage American ships. On the evening of May 24<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville* became caught up in the raid. At the time the enemy attacks began, the *Lou* was again firing star shells over the beach. The ship's cruise book documented what the crew experienced that night. At one point, the raid became too personal with a radio announcement "which caused a shudder on the *Louisville*. The *Stormes*, our escort from Pearl Harbor, had been hit as she stood her first night's duty on the picket line." In spite of the picket line, the



The *Louisville*'s anti-aircraft guns.

cruise book continued, "The kamikazes were getting through. There were too many to hold. Already, estimates indicated over 100 planes in the area. Every gun was ready, every radar searching. A bright full moon made fine targets of the ships on the water." Through a circuit that allowed ships to communicate with each other, the *Lou* heard "calls for help from the crippled and dying ships on the picket line. And the reports of ships being hit continued to mount." Eventually, the cruise book

recounted, one Japanese plane "started circling us from a low altitude." Before the *Louisville* fired her guns, however, the enemy aircraft "straightened for a run on an LCI [Landing Craft Infantry] out to port." The LCI shot the plane down. At another point that night, Japanese suicide boats attempted attacks on some American ships at another location on the island's coast. These enemy craft were speedboats with explosive charges in their bows. All such Japanese boats were destroyed, however, before they could accomplish their suicide mission. Just a few days later, nine United States ships were hit by kamikazes; one destroyer sank within two minutes.<sup>286</sup>

George and the rest of the *Louisville*'s crew must have been relieved when, on May 30<sup>th</sup>, the cruiser left the firing line. Orders sent it to Kerama Retto, some small islands not far from Okinawa, for more ammunition and fuel. The Navy had set up a logistical center there. "I remember Kerama Retto because many of the ships from the picket line that had been hit were anchored or tied up together there. It was kind of disheartening to see how many there were that had the whole topside destroyed. I remember another thing [when at Kerama Retto]. I don't recall if I was officer of the deck at the time or whether I was just on the bridge. But I was up there and the skipper had taken over con of the ship. We had a real strong wind blowing, and as we turned, to come up to an oil or a supply ship, the ship was influenced enough by

the wind that it was not responding well to the rudder. And it looked for while that we were going to be involved in a collision. But the captain avoided it.”<sup>287</sup>

On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, George took advantage of the respite at Kerama Retto to write his mother a letter. He opened it with an honest assessment of the toll the last weeks had taken on him. “The past month has been one of the longest months I have ever experienced. True, May has only 31 days, same as many another month, but getting through each individual day was quite a task. At first there was such a pileup of work that it looked as though we’d never get through it, then when the work load began to drop off a bit, the watches started in earnest, twelve hours a day. For awhile, I was so doggone tired I could hardly wiggle, but now the two to six hours sleep I get each day seems to be sufficient. Or maybe I just got numb and can no longer feel the loss of sleep or anything else. Anyway, I’m doing better and feel that the present pace can be kept up indefinitely without ever really getting me down.” Asked today to explain the long watches, George does so in this way. “The watch is four hours, but the number of watches you stand can change depending on the situation. At Okinawa, we probably were four hours on watch and four hours off watch. So we spent twelve hours a day on watch. When we were on hazardous duty, twelve-hour-watches in a day were the norm. If we were in Hawaii, then maybe we had only four hours a day on watch.”

The *Louisville* was back on the line a few days after George wrote that letter. The ship’s return to fire support duty coincided with the ninth of the ten major kamikaze raids. That raid occurred between June 3<sup>rd</sup> and June 7<sup>th</sup> when fifty kamikazes attacked American ships off of Okinawa. (This was a smaller number than in the two previous major raids--one hundred and sixty-five between May 24<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> and one hundred and ten between May 27<sup>th</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup>.) On June 5<sup>th</sup>, the cruiser received orders for “flycatcher duty,” meaning, the *Lou* fired star shells for small ships that were patrolling close to the shore. But the overcast sky was not the best condition for illuminating objects. Because of the heat, many crewmen were topside instead of staying on the stuffy lower decks. According to the *Lou’s* cruise book, she “was off the southern part of the island, a highly undesirable area from the standpoint of [an] air attack.” Around 6:30 p.m., the *Louisville* moved about three miles offshore when it received orders to relieve the cruiser *USS New York*. The battleship *Mississippi* sat about two miles astern or behind the *Louisville*. The destroyer *Rook*, the escort for these fire support ships, was approximately two thousand yards ahead of the vessels.<sup>288</sup>

Just minutes before 7:30 p.m., the *Louisville* was notified that low flying aircraft was in the area. It was not immediately clear, however, if they were American or Japanese. Crewmen quickly manned the antiaircraft battery. Radar verified two planes. But as the cruise book explained, “The deepening twilight and low clouds made identification menacingly difficult.” That uncertainty did not last long. One of the aircraft dropped into a dive and headed for the *Mississippi*. Before only seconds had passed, it crashed into the battleship. The sight of flames and smoke from the *Mississippi* transfixed sailors on the *Louisville* for only a few moments because they

soon saw another kamikaze plane, this one heading for the port side of their ship. (The Japanese pilot ignored two LCIs just three thousand yards away. He undoubtedly wanted a richer target.) Some of the cruiser's 20-mm guns fired at the plane, hitting it. Yet even on fire, the kamikaze continued his dive towards the *Louisville*.<sup>289</sup>

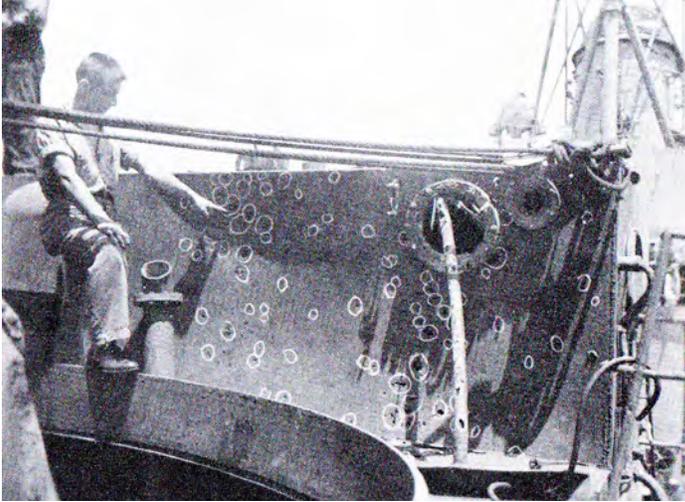
Years ago, George wrote down his memory of those moments. Understand that when the *Louisville's* orders called for a sea attack or a bombardment on the beaches, George's station was in the main battery in the plotting room. However, if the *Lou's* guns were needed in an enemy air attack that targeted the *Lou*, George's station was in the antiaircraft director. With this background, George wrote, "I was in the wardroom when the air attack alarm sounded. I started for my station in the antiaircraft gun director just above the bridge. As I went out on the weather deck, I saw the approaching kamikaze about 3,000 yards out. All our guns were firing. Pieces of the aircraft were falling off and splashing into the sea. I thought he'd go down. He didn't. He drove his plane into the ship, his bomb exploding on impact." George did not make it to his duty station.

In the *Louisville's* cruise book, her officers detailed what took place after the plane hit their ship. "The kamikaze struck our plane perched on the port catapult with cyclonic power...All that was left of our plane was the engine and propeller, which had been hurled 30 feet into the air and dropped on the starboard side of the signal bridge as neatly as if by the calculating arm of the ship's crane." As for the Japanese plane, it drove "across the ship into number one stack, most of which it carried away, as it ricocheted to starboard, and fell into the sea in a geyser of smoke, burning wreckage and spray. A 200-pound shrapnel bomb, carried by the enemy plane, exploded near the stack, riddled all bulkheads in the area, and by concussion blew out the boiler casings in number one fire room."<sup>290</sup>

George shares what happened to him in those critical moments. "I remember that as I stepped out on the weather deck to go to my battle station, I saw a plane heading towards us. Our guys were all firing at him, and they were hitting him. Pieces [of the plane] were falling off into the water. I thought, 'Well, he's not going to make it.' But he did." George has no recollections of what occurred after the kamikaze hit the *Lou*. "I have no memory of the actual explosion. I was knocked unconscious." The first thing he remembers after that was "lying on a bench-like seat down in the wardroom." Shrapnel from the bomb had hit George. An iron bulkhead was located where he thinks he had stood when that happened. Some time later, after the attack, George went by that bulkhead. As he describes it, "There were holes in the iron bulkhead where I could put my fist through."

*Louisville's* casualties numbered eight dead and forty-five injured. George was one of those hurt in the kamikaze attack. In his written account cited earlier, he explained, "I have no memory of the explosion [which] knocked me out." The two-hundred-pound-bomb unleashed an outpouring of shrapnel. As George continued in his written recollection, "Fortunately, my shrapnel injuries were not serious. I was

back on duty in 48 hours.” Today, George expands on this account. “All I got was four little pieces of shrapnel, each of them about the size of a bb. One [was] in each foot, one [was] in the cheek of my butt, and one [was] under the scalp on the back of my head.”<sup>291</sup>



The riddled bulkhead of Radio III within which all of the crew died.

The crew immediately worked to control the on board fires. The destroyer *H.C. Edwards* escorted the *Louisville* through the darkness to an anchorage off shore. Early the next day, sailors removed parts of the damaged #1 stack. That afternoon, burial services were held on Okinawa for bluejackets killed in the kamikaze attack. George wrote his mother a letter on June 9<sup>th</sup>, sharing with her some details of his injury. His opening line would have put her at ease. “I have been living the life of Riley for the past few days. I stand no watches and do practically no work...” At that point, George explained why this was the case. “The reason for this easy life is a minor injury to my right foot, two of its toes having been pierced by a small piece of shrapnel. I expect to be returned to regular duty any day now.” George did tell Carrie his injuries “came as the result of enemy action,” which was probably the minimum of information he could share with her. Carrie’s San Diego newspaper would have had stories on the Battle for Okinawa. She may have guessed what “enemy action” George had been in. His injuries earned him the Purple Heart, although he confessed to his mother that he did not believe he deserved the medal. “I feel kind of silly getting an award for anything so inconsequential.” In that same June 9<sup>th</sup> letter, George asked Carrie to make a change in their joint savings account. He wanted the balance to be “about \$250, putting all in excess of that amount into war bonds.”<sup>292</sup>

Within a few days, with some critical repairs completed, the *Louisville* again took her place on the firing line. She bombarded areas on the island in support of American troops making their way more and more inland. On June 12<sup>th</sup>, Marines on Okinawa contacted the *Louisville*, asking if several of their casualties could be brought on board the cruiser. Two small vessels carried thirty-four wounded Marines to the *Lou* where the medical unit cared for them. In the words of the cruise book, “Some were badly wounded, others were suffering from battle fatigue. Their

greatest desires were satisfied with showers, haircuts, Coca-Cola, ice cream and fruit juice." This list is testimony to some of the things men missed most in their Spartan existence on the island. The day after the Marines came on board, the Command ordered the *Louisville* to report to Pearl Harbor for repairs. By then, the Battle for Okinawa was just about over.<sup>293</sup>

The fight for the island, which had begun with landings on April 1<sup>st</sup>, ended on June 22<sup>nd</sup> with organized Japanese resistance over. Looking back a year later, a group of the *Louisville's* officers characterized the campaign in the following way-- "Okinawa will never be forgotten by the U.S. Forces who fought there, and it will never be forgotten by the Japanese. To us it represented one of the greatest trials of courage in a long war of tough challenges, and to the Japs it meant the destruction of over 4,000 planes, the core of their weakened air force, the loss of their last outpost of defense, and consequential proof that the home islands themselves could be successfully invaded." Out of approximately 77,000 Japanese forces on the island, 69,600 died. (Their preference to die rather than to surrender explains this large number.)<sup>294</sup>

The Allies paid heavily to take Okinawa with over 12,500 killed and 31,807 wounded. United States Army deaths totaled 4,675 and Marine Corps deaths 2,928. The Navy lost more men than either of those two branches of service--4,907 killed or missing and 4,824 wounded. One historian pointed out it is "extremely rare for the number of deaths to exceed the number of wounded." This happened at Okinawa because of the shipboard fires caused by the kamikaze crashes. That desperate Japanese form of warfare also explains why more Navy personnel died at Okinawa than in any other Pacific campaign. The fleet lost 763 aircraft and 30 ships and craft. Another 368 vessels were damaged.<sup>295</sup>

*News Of A Surrender,  
August 1945*

With the *Louisville* being one of the damaged ships, she left Okinawan waters on June 15<sup>th</sup> to undergo repairs. The cruiser arrived at Pearl Harbor on the 28<sup>th</sup>. She remained there into August. After repairs were completed early that month, the *Lou* took part in "refresher" training exercises in Hawaiian waters. For George, this two-month respite meant he had time to relax and write letters home. He also formally received his Purple Heart in a shipboard ceremony. But what came to mark this lull in the war for George was news of the Japanese surrender.<sup>296</sup>

Thoughts of home and family dominated George's letters to his mother. He shared with her what was clearly a major topic in his mind that summer--an impending birth. George and Jenny were expecting a baby in November. If it was a boy, George wrote Carrie, Jenny had chosen the name "Charles." Home and family came to mind, too, because of a chance encounter one day on Oahu. George shared it with his mother--"The impossible finally happened. Dick and I arrived in the same place at the same time." Recalling the reunion today, George explains that he and his

brother ran into each other by chance “at some kind of a beer bust or something.” Dick was at Pearl Harbor with his ship, one that George remembers as “some type of a support ship.” The brothers saw each other three times before Dick left the islands.<sup>297</sup>

While at Pearl, the captain of the *Louisville* formally conferred Purple Hearts upon members of the crew at a shipboard ceremony. Writing to his mother about the moment, George repeated a sentiment he had shared with her in a June letter written from Okinawan waters. In one he wrote in July, he again confessed he felt as if he did not deserve the medal. “Being decorated for wounds as minor as mine were makes me feel like a sap. That sort of thing should be saved for those who really earn it.” He enclosed with the letter a photograph of the moment when the captain conferred the medal upon him. George sent Jenny another copy of the picture, along with the medal itself.<sup>298</sup>



The boredom George had endured in earlier periods returned. He admitted so to Carrie. “Life goes on as usual here. [There is] the old routine with enough added to keep me busy most of the time, but there’s time enough between jobs to get bored as can be with being out here. It will sure be a happy day when the props fall out from under these Japs.” A few weeks later, people throughout the world heard news they had been waiting for.

On August 6, 1945, a United States B-29 left Tinian, one of the islands in the Marianas. A year earlier, late in July 1944, the *Louisville* had bombarded the then Japanese-controlled island for four days in preparation for the landing of American forces. Once the United States secured Tinian, American planes took off from the island in some of the final bombing campaigns of the war. On August 6<sup>th</sup>, however, one plane did not carry conventional bombs made up of the explosives with which George would have been familiar. Instead, the B-29 carried an atomic bomb, close to

ten feet long, made mostly of uranium. It weighed eight thousand nine hundred pounds. The power of this atomic bomb represented about twelve thousand five hundred tons of TNT. The B-29 dropped the bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, chosen largely because it had not yet been targeted by conventional Allied bombings. This meant the power of the new bomb could be easily discerned. It was apparent that the bomb meant destruction on a scale the world had never before seen. Ground zero temperatures at Hiroshima were estimated to have been five thousand four hundred degrees. Shock waves emanated out for miles from the drop zone area, and radioactivity permeated the atmosphere. The one bomb destroyed over sixty percent of Hiroshima, killing more than seventy thousand residents and injuring tens of thousands more.<sup>299</sup>

George remembers the day he heard about the dropping of the bomb. "When the word got to me, I was on watch in the forward anti-aircraft director. We, of course, didn't know the magnitude of the bomb and the total devastation it could cause to a whole city. But we knew it was something big and something new. We figured because the Japanese were so hard pressed already, that this was going to end the war, and we were very happy about it. One of the reasons we were very happy was that there was a rumor we were scheduled to go up through the Sea of Japan (between Japan and Korea) to do some type of liaison work with the Russians. Everybody knew that going up through the Sea of Japan at that time, with the kamikazes, was one very dangerous venture."

On August 7<sup>th</sup>, the day after the United States dropped the first atomic bomb, the *Louisville* left Pearl Harbor for what her officers later identified as a shakedown cruise and "intense refresher training in Hawaiian waters." The cruiser was so occupied when news came of the dropping of a second atomic bomb on the 9<sup>th</sup>. This time the target was the city of Nagasaki. That very same day, Japanese radio indicated the government was moving toward a surrender statement. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Emperor of Japan publicly announced his nation's capitulation to the Allies. The *Louisville* was then off of the Hawaiian island of Maui. Planes towed targets lit up for nighttime anti-aircraft practice. George would have been in the director for the AA guns. In spite of the news reports the *Louisville* received of the Emperor's announcement, on the night of August 14<sup>th</sup> the cruiser still completed her gunnery practice. The next day, the Command ordered the *Louisville* back to Pearl Harbor.<sup>300</sup>

While still at sea, on August 12<sup>th</sup> George had written his mother a letter. It focused on the impending peace and his family's future. "Well, it looks as if the war will be over almost any time now. After having been involved in it for nearly four years, I really shouldn't be impatient over a short delay now, but I am. Were the announcement of peace to be made right this instant, it wouldn't be soon enough to suit me." George followed these pronouncements with thoughts of his two brothers who were also in the service. With Ed in "the States on reassignment," George hoped that would mean Ed would get discharged quickly. As for Dick, George guessed the Navy might take "more time than just a few months" to let him out. In respect to his own immediate future, George admitted to his mother that he was not sure yet what

he would do. "I'm still on the fence myself. I'd like to remain in the service if I can stay in and also have a halfway decent chance to make something of married life for Jeanette and myself." Clearly, George was seriously considering a career in the Navy, but not at the expense of the family he was beginning with Jenny. Statistically, odds favored him getting a sea assignment if he remained in the Navy. (George's specialty, fire control, virtually guaranteed that.) Could that type of life work well with a young wife and child? He still had time to consider his options.<sup>301</sup>

As for Jenny herself, if an August 22<sup>nd</sup> letter to her mother-in-law is any indicator, she dwelled more on the present than the future. Jenny's excitement at news of the impending peace can be felt seventy-some years later just reading her words to Carrie. "Haven't all the events been wonderful!? Did you keep your ear practically glued to the radio for days on end? It's a little difficult to realize that the world is at peace for the first time in decades." At this point in her letter, Jenny next mentioned something that Carrie must have talked to her daughter-in-law about. "I'm so happy and grateful the end of the war will mean the fulfillment of one of your strongest desires to have your family safe and together again." Unquestionably, mothers across the country shared that wish throughout the war years. Jenny's following sentence spotlighted one somber concern the Coburn family still held in the midst of the national jubilation. "I thought of Ann several times during the past weeks," Jenny wrote. "I heard that one of the first things that would be attended to at the onset of peace was the liberation of prisoners. She has waited such a long time. I hope everything will turn out fine for her."

Carrie had four immediate family members in the wartime military. Aside from her three sons, she had a son-in-law, Henry "Hank" Elvestad. Hank enlisted in the Marine Corps in April 1934. He served in San Diego (where he probably met Ann), Hawaii, and eventually the Far East. In December 1941, Hank was stationed in China as a staff sergeant at the America Embassy in Peiping. After Pearl Harbor, the Japanese seized control of more areas of China, and Hank became a POW. He was held at Fukuoka POW Camp #1 on the Japanese home island of Kyushu. When George was at Okinawa, he had no way of knowing that Hank was only five hundred and thirty-four miles north of him. Hank might have seen the mushroom cloud that resulted from the dropping of the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki, a city on Kyushu, sixty-five miles south of the POW camp.<sup>302</sup>

*"The Settling Of The Peace,"  
August 1945 - November 1945*

On August 16, 1945, the *Louisville* pulled out of Pearl Harbor. Her destination was Guam. The ship's cruise book explained what lay ahead--"The *Louisville* had taken a telling part in the winning of a hard fought war; now she was to take her part in the settling of the peace." The last phrase translated into occupational duties that would keep the cruiser in Pacific waters until December. In carrying out those responsibilities, George and the other crewmen spent time in Manchuria, Korea, and China before finally receiving orders in November to return to the States. First,

though, the *Louisville* steamed to Guam and Okinawa before beginning her official occupational duties. On August 25<sup>th</sup> the cruiser arrived at Guam where she joined a peacetime task group. The ships went to Okinawa next; the task group was anchored there on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, the day the Japanese signed the formal surrender. Japanese representatives did so on board the battleship *USS Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. The *Louisville's* crew listened to a broadcast of the ceremony. The *Lou* left Okinawa on September 7<sup>th</sup> to carry out her first "settling of the peace" duties.<sup>303</sup>

One day before the cruiser pulled out, George wrote a letter to his mother. He began the correspondence by envisioning how San Diego would change because the war was over. "I imagine the old home town will gradually diminish in size until it reaches or nearly reaches its pre-war size. Imagine getting on a streetcar at 5<sup>th</sup> and Broadway and finding a seat. For the past few years, that's been hard to do even at midnight." Life in San Diego was not uppermost in George's mind, however. Most of the letter returned to his ruminations on whether or not he should stay in the Navy. He shared with Carrie the fact that he had sent a letter to the Chief of Naval Personnel in Washington, D.C., asking to "be considered for permanent appointment to the rank of commissioned warrant officer." If that happened, George told his mother, he would then hold a job he would "like a lot better than my present one." And his pay would continue "at its present rate." However, George continued, "If nothing comes of my letter, and I revert to chief petty officer, I may leave the service altogether. During the past few months the navy has certainly done nothing to induce me to stay. At times I've been so disgusted with it that I wonder why I ever consider staying in any status. I wouldn't if I didn't know that things can be much different than they have been."<sup>304</sup>

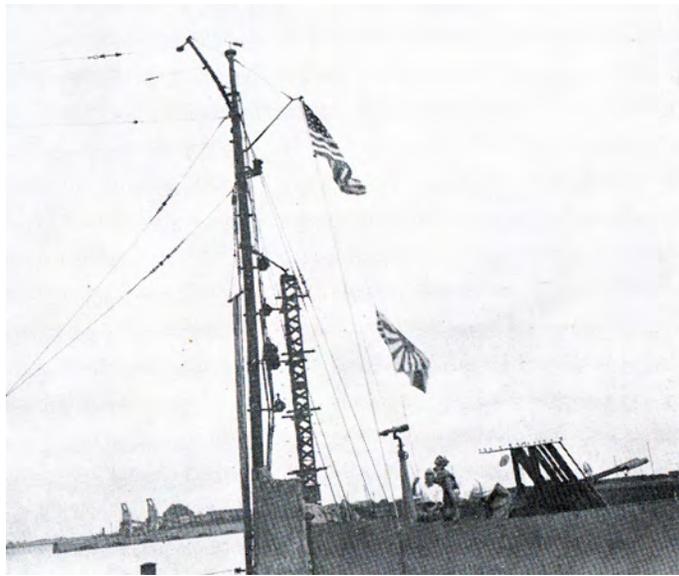
This same letter alerted Carrie to the fact that George might not be coming home soon. George knew that his two brothers in uniform could be discharged earlier than he would be even though he had enlisted more than three years before Ed and Dick. Service members qualified for discharge under a point system the military had developed, with points allocated for categories such as months of service, time spent overseas, and combat service. George, however, had re-enlisted for four more years in May 1942 when his original enlistment was up. That meant his discharge could not take place until at least May 1946.<sup>305</sup>

In a September 6, 1945 letter to Carrie, George shared what he calculated to be his points. They "total up to 59, 10 more than what is required for discharge." Yet George's exasperation at how the point system related to him showed in his next sentence--"but they don't mean a darned thing." George then explained why a discharge was not in his immediate future. "Under the present plan, no amount of points will make me eligible for discharge until my temporary commission is revoked, and it can be kept in force until July of next year, and through legal manipulations, perhaps even longer."<sup>306</sup>

Just days after George wrote this letter, the *Louisville* began her occupational duties in the Yellow Sea (a body of water in the northern area of the East China Sea,

between the Korean Peninsula and Mainland China). The cruiser first steamed for Dairen, Manchuria (near Mukden), arriving there on September 11<sup>th</sup>. The *Lou's* crew oversaw the evacuation of about seventeen hundred members of the Allied military who had been held by the Japanese as POWs. (The men had been imprisoned in camps around Mukden.) Surely, George thought of his brother-in-law while the *Lou* carried out her orders at Dairen. Once the cruiser completed her assigned task, she headed for Jinsen, Korea to pick up supplies. According to the *Lou's* cruise book, it was the next assignment (in Tsingtao, China) that became "the highlight of this entire period in the Yellow Sea."<sup>307</sup>

The *Louisville* arrived at Tsingtao on September 14<sup>th</sup>. The task before the United States cruiser, one that had seen so much combat in the war, must have been



A Japanese flag is lowered and a United States flag is raised over a ship at Tsingtao.

meaningful for the men on board the *Lou*--she was to assist in the surrender of naval ships from a Japanese Vice Admiral. This occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> in a highly symbolic ceremony on board the destroyer *USS Herndon*. Six Japanese naval vessels were moored around Pier No. 1--two destroyers, one destroyer minesweeper, and three subchasers. Initially, a Japanese flag still flew over each vessel. After the ships formally surrendered, however, American sailors raised the United States flag above the Japanese one. For the next six days, the *Louisville's* Marine Corps detachment

stood guard at the pier. On board the Japanese ships, what the *Louisville's* cruise book characterized as "six prize crews" from the *Lou* and the *Herndon* "occupied the Jap vessels, supervising their disarmament and maintaining a security watch."<sup>308</sup>

George was a member of one of those "prize crews." He shared details of his duty with Carrie in a letter he wrote four weeks later. "Had an interesting experience last month. We sailed into Tsingtao, China and captured several Jap ships that were there. A few officers and men from the *Louisville* were put aboard each of the Jap ships and we sailed them out to sea and here to Jinsen. I made the trip on the Jap destroyer *Hasu*. It was an old ship, incredibly dirty, and badly infested with rats. We took all our own food and water along, and enough firearms to make John Dillinger jealous. The Japs ran the ship. Our job was to see that they stayed on the proper course and didn't attempt to sink the ship. On the whole, the Japs were congenial and cooperative. However, there were a few of them that I didn't like to have standing behind me."<sup>309</sup>

The *Louisville's* cruise book detailed what her sailors and officers found on the ships, and its passages echoed what George wrote his mother. The vessels were in poor condition, needing "parts and repairs." Except for two of the three sub chasers, the ships were all old vessels. They were dirty and rat-infested. Every morning before the sun rose, the Japanese crews gathered on deck to chant and bow twice in honor of the Emperor. The United States Command ordered the *Lou* and the *Herndon* to escort the six Japanese ships to Jinsen, Korea, the logistics base of the Seventh Fleet. ("Jinsen" was the Japanese name for the city; it is known today as "Inchon.") What the *Lou's* cruise book called a "strange armada" arrived in Jinsen on September 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>310</sup>

From that point on, the *Louisville's* crew carried out what her cruise book characterized as "a series of different and more general assignments...Our tasks now were confined to patrol duty in supporting our forces in the Yellow Sea during the transition period following surrender." Basically, that support involved overseeing the surrender of Japanese forces to the Chinese. In keeping with this general directive, the *Louisville's* next stop was at Chefoo in northern China. (Today the port is called "Yantai.") She arrived there on September 29<sup>th</sup>. Her orders were simple--"to show the flag and await further developments in that area." In Chefoo, George ended up at the site of a former POW camp. This one had interned Christian missionaries, primarily British citizens. American troops had liberated them a month earlier. On October 14<sup>th</sup> the *Louisville* departed again for Jinsen, Korea. After resupplying the ship, the *Lou* joined yet another peacetime task group bound for the Yellow Sea.<sup>311</sup>

George thinks it was an incident in Tsingtao that explains a strange action by the *Lou's* captain about a month after the ship left port. As George begins the story, "I was officer of the deck, the ship was under way, and we were on the bridge. We had the regular bridge crew (the helmsman and the signalman, etc.). The captain was on the bridge. He was sitting in his special chair, and then the captain stood up and spat on the deck. With a billowing voice, he called me over, 'Mr. Coburn.' I replied, 'Yes, sir?' He said, 'Your deck is dirty. Get someone up here to clean it up.' So I called the boatswain mate who cleaned it. I was really mystified by the captain's action. After I was out of the Navy, I thought it through, and I decided the captain had taken this action to show his contempt for somebody who wasn't in full support of him. This came about because of what had happened when we were in China at the end of the war." George explains that when the ship stopped in a Chinese city after the war (he believes it was Tsingtao), "There was a lot of Japanese in the city. We didn't know which one of them might be a rebel and decide to do his own kamikaze bit." Therefore, when the captain stayed on shore in what George describes as "a swanky hotel," a guard was posted in the lobby. One morning, as George continues the story, the captain "put a boy [an enlisted man] on report who had been on night watch. He had gone on watch at 8:00 in the evening. The boy was supposed to be relieved at midnight, but he had not been relieved. His relief [in turn] was to have been relieved at 4:00 in the morning, and [still] no relief was

made then. [Finally,] this lad went to the head in order to pee. That is when the captain came down and put him on report for being off station.”

“The boy went to the brig when he went back to the ship. The captain ordered a summary court-martial for him. I was one of the three unfortunate officers of the court. I authored the letter we wrote when we finished our deliberations. In the letter, I explained that we felt the boy, in view of the circumstances, had already been adequately punished. (He had been in the brig for about a month.) I signed the letter, along with the other two officers.” Looking back on this after the war, George concludes, “I thought the captain was mad at me.” George never asked the other two officers if the captain had ever said or done anything to them to convey his displeasure at their decision to show leniency toward the sailor. George feels that the captain spat on the deck as a comment on George’s decision in the court-martial case.

On October 18, 1945, while in Jinsen, George wrote his mother a letter. It appears to be the first one since America entered World War II where he could freely identify his location. George wrote “Jinsen, Korea” above the date. The Navy had been very slow in delivering mail from the States. (The ship’s duties at sea complicated such deliveries.) “We’ve been cruising around the east China coast all this time without mail, supplies, or anything else,” George pointed out to Carrie. But at Jinsen, the *Louisville* received her first incoming mail in six weeks. A letter from his mother dated August 29<sup>th</sup> was in one of the mailbags.

In his October 18<sup>th</sup> letter, George shared the fact that as the *Louisville* carried out her occupational duties, he had thought of his brother-in-law. “Has Ann heard anything from Hank yet? He should be home by now. We got the last prisoners out of China and Manchuria nearly a month ago, and the ones in Japan should have been released even sooner. I hope he’s o.k.” He was. Hank survived his four years as a POW. As it turned out, he arrived at the San Diego Naval Hospital in October, the very month George wrote this letter. George understood that even though he himself felt that he had been away from home for a long time, Hank’s imprisonment put his experiences in perspective. In another letter to Carrie, George reasoned, “From time to time, I get to thinking that I have been away a lot during the war, but compared to him, I’m practically a stay-at-home.”<sup>312</sup>

The October 18<sup>th</sup> piece of correspondence is especially noteworthy because it spoke to a frustration George felt that was shared by other crewmembers. In the letter, George observed, “Everybody had come to the point where they just about believed that the Navy had stuck us out in this corner of the world and then promptly forgotten that the United States had a ship named *Louisville*. There is no information at all about when we might start back to the States. I keep hoping it will be soon though. I’d like to be with Jeanette when the baby is born, or if not by then, at least by Christmas.”

After steaming out of Jinsen, the *Louisville* stopped at the Chinese ports of Chefoo, Weiheiwei, and Taku Bar. At the last stop, George joined other crewmembers on a liberty trip. They took a ship's boat twenty miles inland to Tientsin for the weekend. The group stayed in a hotel. George recalls buying Jenny "some silks" in Tientsin. Most of the *Lou's* crew could not enjoy such a trip. Instead, they worked and played on board the ship to, in the words of its cruise book, "dispel the low hanging clouds of monotony." The men "cleaned and polished day after day to bring our standard of smart appearance back to the high level of peacetime days." The crew harked back to that time, too, by holding boxing matches and basketball games (a court was installed on the well deck). And a constant reminder that home was not that far away came "every week or so." That happened when, as the cruise book recounted, "Another group of our high point officers and men would depart for home and discharge." One such man was Quarter Master Third Class Sverre I. Scheldrup who had enlisted in the Navy in February 1944, boarded the *Louisville* in December 1944, and left the ship "for home and discharge" on November 1, 1945. Scheldrup was discharged on December 2, 1945; he arrived home in Minneapolis, Minnesota eight days later. Scheldrup is just one example of servicemen who went home months before George was discharged.<sup>313</sup>

But today, George stresses that he had to stay in the Navy so long after the war ended "because I re-enlisted." He did so in May 1942. A five hundred dollar bonus accompanied the re-enlistment, and it explained why George filled out the re-enlistment papers. He reasoned that signing up again made sense. "I am going to be here anyway, so I may as well get the bonus." When peace came, George, in his words, "qualified by then as underway deck watch officer." That, he explains, meant he "was in charge of the ship when the captain was absent from the bridge." By November, George no longer vacillated as to whether or not he would stay in the Navy. Writing to his mother on November 11<sup>th</sup>, George shared with her his decision. "My present intentions are to leave the naval service as soon as possible, which will be next May."



The *Lou* and her guns under the Golden Gate Bridge, February 1945.

Around the time George wrote this letter, when the *Louisville* was anchored at Taku Bar, the ship received orders the crew had been anticipating. The *Lou* was to become part of the "Navy's 'Magic Carpet' Fleet." That phrase was used to identify vessels that carried service members back home to the States. The *Louisville* stopped in Jinsen to pick up "high-point Navy personnel." But before her Magic Carpet duties were over, George

points out that the ship “ferried a lot of people home,” including soldiers and Marines. The *Lou* left Jinsen on November 14<sup>th</sup>, bound for Pearl Harbor before proceeding onto the West Coast. Altogether, one newspaper reported that the *Louisville* brought back to the States five hundred “high-point veterans.” The cruiser anchored at San Francisco’s Terminal Island and San Pedro. Once in Southern California, George was finally able to see his wife and newborn son. “Jenny was still in the hospital,” George recalls, but he visited her parents in Fontana. With his father-in-law, George went to the hospital in Ontario to see Jenny and the baby. The *Louisville* departed once again for Pacific waters on December 8<sup>th</sup>. The cruiser had been Stateside for only six days. She had to leave to pick up and bring home more service members. Even though the war had been over for some months, this year the crew would still not enjoy a Christmas with their families.<sup>314</sup>

Guam was the *Lou’s* destination. There, hundreds of service personnel awaited their Magic Carpet ride home. On this second such voyage, the cruiser picked up “1,000 high-point Army veterans.” What should have been a two-week trip back to the West Coast, though, became a seventeen-day one because of bad weather. The *Louisville* spent Christmas Day anchored at Saipan where the temperature reached ninety degrees. On December 26<sup>th</sup>, the *Lou* set out from Saipan for San Pedro. She arrived there around January 10, 1946.<sup>315</sup>

#### *A Retirement And A Discharge*

That cruise turned out to be George’s last one associated with the war. Because of his decision not to remain in the Navy, he finally was home to stay. Two months earlier, George had written his mother yet one more letter that testified to how much he missed home. “In a few more months, I will have been out of the States for six years, except for a few months at school and the few times the ship has been in the navy yard.” As it turned out, one more trip to a navy yard awaited the *Lou* and George. In January 1946, while the cruiser was anchored in San Pedro, George visited his wife and son in Fontana. (Jenny still lived with her parents.) George saw his family in San Diego, too. But on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the *Louisville* left for the Philadelphia Navy Yard. It would be the *Lou’s* last sea voyage with her crew. In the cruise book, officers who loved her summarized what awaited the proud ship. She had been “designated for the Inactive Reserve Fleet, Atlantic, with permanent berthing in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and now the time had come for her to take her retirement.” The *Lucky Lou* went through the Panama Canal on her way to the East Coast. At one of the stops in the Canal Zone, George bought Jenny perfume as well as an alligator skin purse and matching compact. They were gifts for the couple’s first wedding anniversary at the end of February. On February 7<sup>th</sup>, the *Louisville* arrived at her destination in Philadelphia. George envisioned only one reason why the *Lou* would ever sail again. In a letter to Carrie two days later, he announced, “The old *Louisville* has made her last trip to sea, barring the possibility of an early World War III.” With her inactive status, he added, “She’ll stay right here, tied up to the dock in the navy yard until her bottom rusts out.” The *Lady Lou* had been in active service for fifteen years and one month.<sup>316</sup>

As a lieutenant (junior grade), George held some responsibility for, in his words, “putting the ship out of commission.” It involved weeks of paperwork. Complaining to his mother, George wrote that “about a dozen different departments” within “a shore based organization running the show” demanded a list of materials on board. “That would be fairly simple,” George admitted, “except that each list must be arranged in a different manner. My division has several thousand items of equipment, so you can see that after a while, the situation gets very complicated.”<sup>317</sup> (Looking back today on the decommissioning process he dealt with, George points out one aspect of fire control that made the task time-consuming. It was “custodian” of a large amount of equipment such as the fire control directors, the optics, all of the telescopes, and binoculars.)

George’s frustrations led to some uncharacteristically belligerent actions on his part. In February and March letters to his mother, George confessed to a few confrontations he had that he was not proud of. “Philadelphia and I haven’t been very good friends, in fact, we don’t get on at all well together. Every time I’ve been ashore, I’ve fallen in with some sort of trouble.” His second time ashore, George told Carrie, “I became involved in a brawl and came out of it with the most beautiful black eye the world has ever seen. The brawl was the outgrowth of the ill feeling that some ex-servicemen have for officers. That feeling seems to be quite prevalent already and growing stronger. I don’t really blame the guys a lot; some of them did get a pretty rotten deal at the hands of their officers while they were in the service.” George did not blame the city, either. “The trouble-making is all in me...I’m so darned dissatisfied with my job and the fact that I am here and can’t bring Jeanette here that I take a belligerent attitude toward everything.”<sup>318</sup>

George had anticipated his discharge month to be May 1946. But late in March, as he wrote his mother, “The Navy Department issued a letter making me eligible for immediate discharge--subject to approval by the Bureau of Personnel.” George did not lose any time acting on this opportunity. “My request for discharge,” he told Carrie, “went in the same day that the letter was published so now I’m practically on pins and needles waiting for the Bureau’s answer. It should come soon, probably this week, and if the request was approved...I’ll be on my way to the West Coast in a matter of days.” The Navy officially authorized George’s appeal on March 29<sup>th</sup>, just four days after his letter to Carrie. George left the *Louisville* on April 4<sup>th</sup>, at which time he headed for San Diego. Back in his hometown, George enjoyed a month-long leave. Then, as his Continuous Service Certificate reads, his leave expired “at midnight of 10 May 1946 at which time temporary appointment now held is terminated and is honorably discharged from the Naval Service.”<sup>319</sup>

From February 1938 to May 1946, George gave his life to his country, specifically the United States Navy. As he observed in an October 1945 letter to his mother, George spent over six years outside of the States during that time. First there had been the peacetime cruises to Hawaii. Then once war came to the United States at Pearl Harbor, there were more cruises in the vast expanse of the Pacific

Ocean that became George's home for several years--the Aleutians, the Solomons, the Marshalls, the Carolines, New Guinea, the Marianas, Palau, the Philippines, and Okinawa.

"I've been a lucky man all my life," George proclaims. As a child, he describes himself as "a wild, young kid." Yet, he adds, he avoided getting into "trouble" for his "mischievous" ways. Once George enlisted in the Navy at age eighteen, his luck continued. He cites his constant advancements as evidence of his good fortune. As an enlisted man, George held the following rates--apprentice seaman, seaman second class, seaman first class, fire controlman third class, fire controlman second class, fire controlman first class, and chief fire controlman. But he points out that "luck" by itself does not explain his promotions. George stresses, "All of this luck came as a result of working at it." If George had an opportunity, as he puts it, "to go up in the rate," he seized it. George studied, took the qualifying exams and passed them. His rise in the Navy as an enlisted man ended in August 1943. At that time, George became an officer with a temporary appointment as an ensign. In December 1944, the Navy promoted him to the rate of lieutenant (junior grade).

George was lucky, too, to have survived more than one major battle without becoming a significant casualty statistic in any of them. On December 7, 1941, he made it off the battleship *USS Oklahoma* after being trapped below when it capsized. Four hundred and twenty-nine sailors and officers who had been on board the *Oklahoma* that Sunday morning died as a result of the Japanese attack. On December 16, 1941 George joined the crew of the heavy cruiser *USS Louisville*. He later avoided becoming one of the *Louisville's* losses at Lingayen Gulf and Okinawa when kamikazes struck the ship. As a result of the attack on the ship at Lingayen Gulf, thirty-two crewmen were killed in action. At Okinawa, the number was eight. By the time the war ended, fifty-two crewmembers from the *Louisville* had been lost. Naval casualties for World War II totaled 56,557 dead, 80,264 wounded, and 8,624 missing. In these statistics, George is one of the "wounded" because of the kamikaze strike during the Battle of Okinawa. Yet he stressed then and stresses now that his wounds were minor ones.<sup>320</sup>

Yes, George Coburn is "a lucky man." And we are lucky, too. His mother Carrie's sense of history led her to keep her son's letters home from boot camp through his discharge eight years later. George inherited that sense of history, holding onto the correspondence for some seventy years. George wrote his first letter to his mother from Naval Training Station San Diego on February 13, 1938. He penned his last one to Carrie from the *USS Louisville*, anchored in the Philadelphia Navy Yard, on March 25, 1946. The former focused on boot camp, the latter on his imminent discharge. The eight-year correspondence allows us to follow George in his training as a recruit through his years on board his two duty stations, the *Oklahoma* and the *Louisville*. It is the story of a sailor, first in peacetime, then in war, and finally again in peacetime. George added to those contemporaneous written accounts with sharp memories he still carries of those years. His firsthand story of life as a member of the United States Navy--as a boot, as an enlisted man, and as an officer--dates from decades ago

with his letters home to his present oral recollections. How lucky we are that he now shares that history with us.

## Epilogue

George harbored no ill feelings towards the Navy when he decided to accept a discharge rather than remain in the service. In fact, he freely admits, "I liked the Navy quite a bit still." So it seems entirely fitting that he never really left the service from the time of his departure in 1946 to his retirement in 1973. As George explains, "A month after my discharge as a military member of the Navy, I went back to work as a civilian for the Navy." A career working for the Navy as a federal civil service employee gave him the time with his family that he so looked forward to after eight years in the service. About a year after his discharge, George received a letter from the Navy. If he re-enlisted, he would enter as a warrant officer, the rate he had wanted late in 1945 as a condition of his remaining in uniform. George and Jenny discussed the opportunity, but in the end, he decided not to accept the commission. "We didn't want to be separated," George explains.

Letters George wrote to his mother in the months immediately after the war ended illustrate how much he had been mulling over his future before his discharge. "My present intentions are to leave the naval service as soon as possible..." George understood that would not be until the spring of 1946 because of his re-enlistment four years earlier. But as he added in his letter home, "Once I become a civilian, my plans are indefinite." What he did know for sure, however, as he told Carrie, was that, "I'm not particularly anxious to go to work for anybody else." After his May 1946 discharge, George, Jenny, and their young son lived with Carrie for a short time before they found their own place. George describes himself as "a typical job seeker" in the weeks after he left the Navy. Major newspapers had a "Help Wanted" section. As George remembers, "I scanned the ads to see where jobs were." He soon saw that the Navy ran ads to recruit civilian workers. George applied for such a position in San Diego and was hired.<sup>321</sup>

George had found what he called his "career," one with the Navy but not in the Navy. Initially, he worked at the naval station with what he calls "the ship to shore gang." Its job was to ensure that vessels docked at the naval station received electrical power from onshore installations. What George describes as "a big heavy cable" carried electricity from the beach to the ships. (Once George began working as an electrician, he remained in that occupational area until he retired. He had not been an electrician on board the *Oklahoma* or the *Louisville*. Yet George had always been mechanical, and electrical principles figured into his fire control duties.) After this first assignment at the naval station, he was transferred to a place George knew very well from his months as a recruit--the Naval Training Center. "I was still doing

cable work. I became one of two splicers who could work lead cable.” He adds that basic to the job was “keeping the sheath of the cable watertight.”<sup>322</sup>

Eventually an opening came up for a lead electrician at Camp Elliott, a naval installation about twelve miles northeast of downtown San Diego. George applied. He took an exam and, as he puts it, “I came out top man.” Camp Elliott hired him. (This is not surprising. While in the Navy before and during the war, George had taken exams to rise up in the rates. He always studied and always did well. Whether it was in the Navy or in the federal civil service, George, in his own words, was “always studying and looking for the best avenue to get ahead.”) George remained at Camp Elliott until 1960 when the installation closed. He next went to nearby Naval



George & Jenny at Thomas Wolf's home in NC

Air Station Miramar where he became head of the facilities maintenance division. George explains that in such a position, he oversaw the work of one hundred and sixty-five federal civil service employees. He describes them as “carpenters, plumbers, painters, and

[workers from] all the building trades.” George remained at Miramar until his retirement at age fifty-three in June 1973. (He points out that the federal civil service system, in totaling his years, gave him credit for his time in the Navy. Thus his retirement was based on about thirty-five years of service.) While working for the Navy after World War II, George studied for the California State electrical contractor's license. He easily passed it. The license allowed George to work as his own boss in his retirement years, fulfilling a wish he had shared with his mother in a postwar letter twenty-eight years earlier.

Throughout his decades working at various San Diego naval installations, George lived in the city that had been his home since he was a young child. Only his eight years on the *Oklahoma* and the *Louisville* had taken him away from San Diego. He and Jenny raised their son Charles and a daughter Marie there. The couple did not leave until 2001 when they moved to the city of Vista in the northern part of San Diego County. Jenny passed away four years later, just months before their sixty-first wedding anniversary. George remained in his Vista home until late in 2016. At

age ninety-seven, he moved to a retirement community in Oceanside, west of Vista. There he continues his jewelry-making hobby, looks forward to karaoke nights, and speaks to community groups about his wartime experiences, especially about December 7, 1941.

In 1974, the year after he retired, George joined the national Pearl Harbor Survivors Association (PHSA), founded in 1958. A member of the local PHSA sponsored him. He did not, however, regularly attend meetings of the San Diego chapter. George explains, "I have never been a 'meeting person.'" It appears he let his national membership lag. When he and Jenny moved to Vista, George joined the PHSA again in 2002. At that time, another local Survivor sponsored him. That veteran was a member of the North San Diego County PHSA chapter, yet George preferred not to attend the group's monthly, Sunday morning meetings. Since he was not a "joiner," his lack of involvement was not unusual.

Yet in the few local PHSA chapter meetings he went to, George noticed something that bothered him. As an enlisted man and later an officer, he had been responsible for directing the *Louisville's* guns at enemy ships and onshore installations. "I probably am responsible for the deaths of many, many Japanese, but I never saw one of them. I never hated the Japanese. When I was going to the meetings at the Pearl Harbor Survivors' group, I talked to guys there who had an acrid hatred for the Japanese, and I couldn't understand how they could live with it. Those guys, most of them were Marines and soldiers. They had seen the enemy eyeball to eyeball, and I did not." As a sailor, George had witnessed firsthand the casualties and the destruction at Pearl Harbor as well as the kamikaze attacks on his ship at the end of the war. He would have been justified in hating the Japanese. Yet George did not do so. He never let hatred of the enemy consume him.

Over the decades, PHSA members attended yearly observations of December 7<sup>th</sup> at Pearl Harbor. George never went to any of those, not even the much-publicized 50<sup>th</sup> or 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the attack. He and Jenny did, though, visit Hawaii twice. The first trip took them to Oahu where they went to the Arizona Memorial. On the second trip, they stayed on a different island altogether. George preferred to "Remember Pearl Harbor" in his own quiet way. It did not include visits as a distinguished visitor to the site of the December 7<sup>th</sup> attack.

Instead of local PHSA chapter meetings or national PHSA gatherings, George kept in contact with World War II shipmates primarily through reunions of crewmembers from the *USS Oklahoma* and the *USS Louisville*. Men who had served on the vessels formed associations for which they elected officers. The latter compiled rosters of those who joined. Members received newsletters that shared information on individuals in their group as well as plans for the next gathering. George explains his trips to various cities where the reunions were held as opportunities "to see some of the fellas I knew when I was on the ship."

The *USS Oklahoma* Association's earliest reunions appear to have been held with veterans from other organizations. A May 1992 newspaper article reported on "the first reunion ever held exclusively" for the ship's crew. Appropriately, Oklahoma City in the state of Oklahoma hosted it. The gathering turned out to be a small group, with only twenty in attendance. At that time, according to the newspaper story, the association estimated some 164 crewmembers were still alive. (The article states that 1,353 men were assigned to the *Oklahoma* on December 7, 1941.) The last reunion occurred twenty years later, in June 2012. Only four *Oklahoma* crewmen attended. They met in San Juan Capistrano, a coastal city in Southern California. (For reasons George cannot recall, he was unable to be there.) Two special guests joined the four men. They were the daughter and granddaughter of the woman who had christened the battleship in 1914.<sup>323</sup>

As George remembers them, reunions of the *Louisville* occurred every two years. They began in 1962, with Louisville as the host city. George recalls attending one in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Wives often accompanied their husbands. In the last years of the reunions, widows, adult children, and grandchildren of crewmembers came to the ships' gatherings. A fair number, therefore, met regularly even as the ships' sailors and officers themselves decreased in number. The *USS Louisville* Reunion Association held its 2012 get-together in Branson, Missouri. George appears to have attended it. Today, neither the *Oklahoma* nor the *Louisville* associations hold reunions, and the newsletters ceased publication. George explains the obvious reason why--"Reunion associations discontinued operations because they lost too many people."<sup>324</sup>



George and Jenny at a 1996 *Louisville* reunion in Portland, OR

Yet even as we lose the veterans, memorials to their ships and to those who died on them increase in number. On December 7, 1999, a remembrance of those killed on board the *Oklahoma* was dedicated. It took the form of a wall that lists the names of the four hundred and twenty-nine crewmembers lost in the Pearl Harbor attack. The memorial stands in the State Capitol Park in Oklahoma City; it is part of the Oklahoma Veteran's Memorial. While the state of Oklahoma donated the land, everyday Americans paid for the wall. If one crewman who survived the attack is correct, it was the survivors of the *Oklahoma* who paid for most of the memorial's cost. They wanted to honor their shipmates.<sup>325</sup>

Similarly, *Oklahoma* survivors were a prime force behind the building of the *USS Oklahoma* Memorial on Ford Island. In the year 2000, they and others created a *USS Oklahoma* Memorial at Pearl Harbor Committee. Survivors enlisted Oklahoma State agencies, among other organizations, to lobby with the national government for such a remembrance. It was dedicated on December 7, 2007. The monument stands not far from where the battleship was moored on December 7, 1941. Like the wall in Oklahoma City, the tribute on Ford Island focuses on the four hundred and twenty-nine names. The memorial is made of black granite blocks that hold up white marble slabs. On the marble slabs are engraved the names of the crewmen along with their ratings. The marble used came from the same quarry that furnishes the headstones for Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.<sup>326</sup>

One other remembrance of the battleship *Oklahoma* stands in an Oklahoma park. In 2006, the Navy came upon three pieces of the ship's mast that had been long buried in the waters off of Ford Island. One is an eleven-ton mast section that measures forty-five feet in length. The Navy loaned it to the War Memorial Park and Museum in Muskogee, Oklahoma where it is prominently placed in a covered, outdoor display area.<sup>327</sup>

No comparable memorials exist for the *USS Louisville*. The cruiser itself is long gone. A month after George received his discharge, the Navy officially decommissioned the *Lou*. She was placed in an inactivation status at a June 1946 ceremony at the Philadelphia Naval Yard. George saved an undated newspaper article the *Louisville* association sent its members that explained the ultimate fate of the ship years after her decommissioning. As the newspaper reported, the Navy sold her for scrap iron, receiving in return around \$250,000 from a shipwrecking company. In 1959 the *Lucky Lou* made her last cruise. The same newspaper story detailed the trip. It was a fifteen-day journey from Philadelphia to Sparkman Channel in Tampa, Florida. A tug pulled the *Lou* that carried a crew of just four men. Their job was a simple one, to keep the running lights burning at night to avoid a collision with another ship. Over a period of ten months in Tampa, civilian employees of the shipwrecking company used equipment such as cranes and blowtorches to take the proud cruiser apart. Workers cut away major sections, among which were the armament, gun emplacements, and the superstructure. Once reduced to her water line, the *Lou's* hull was dragged on shore. According to the

newspaper article, the only items the Navy wanted returned were some pieces of radio equipment and twenty-five feet of the wooden deck.<sup>328</sup>

Somehow, two other items made their way to the Naval Ordnance Station in Louisville, Kentucky, the city that gave the ship her name. One is the engine order telegraph. It allowed an officer on the *Lou's* bridge to communicate with another crewmember in the engine room so the ship's speed could be set. The telegraph stands on the Station's Quarter Deck where visitors see it as soon as they enter the building. Also, a 516-pound ship's bell from the *Lady Lou* is displayed in the Station's Drill Hall. At least one other piece of the *Louisville* survived the wrecking ball. In the post World War II years, the federal government tested atomic bombs above ground at an isolated Nevada site. Scientists needed a place to house monitoring equipment. One worker thought of using a gun turret because of its ability to rotate. That is why, today, the *Lou's* main battery turret #2 sits in the Nevada desert about one hundred miles north of Las Vegas. After the kamikaze attacks at Lingayen Gulf damaged it, the 8-inch/55-caliber turret had been taken off the ship at Mare Island early in 1945. It was shipped to the Nevada testing site in 1957. The cruiser's bell and gun turret might be all that is left today of the *Louisville*. What few remains we do have from the *Oklahoma* and the *Louisville* act as tangible reminders of a battlewagon and a heavy cruiser that served the nation in World War II.<sup>329</sup>

George's story of military service is inextricably tied to the history of the two ships. He boarded the *USS Oklahoma* as a seaman second class on May 27, 1938. By December 7, 1941, the date that largely defined his ship's history and George's military service, he had achieved the rating of fire controlman first class. The enemy attack that day rendered his battleship incapable of further military service. On December 16, 1941, the Navy transferred George to the heavy cruiser the *USS Louisville*. He remained on board the ship until five weeks before his May 10, 1946 discharge as a lieutenant (junior grade). In over four years on board the *Lucky Lou*, George's personal story was again tied to that of his ship. As a crewmember, he fought in numerous North, Central, and South Pacific campaigns.

On his beloved *Okie*, George had experienced the opening minutes of United States involvement in World War II. That same morning, on another battleship he boarded after he left the capsized *Oklahoma*, George helped fire the ship's guns at the enemy. At Okinawa, George fought in the Navy's last Pacific campaign, again directing guns at the enemy. It is estimated that out of the approximately 110,000 military personnel stationed at Pearl Harbor and the surrounding island bases on December 7, 1941, only some two thousand Pearl Harbor Defenders are still with us today. The United States Department of Veterans Affairs calculates that of the sixteen million Americans who served in the war, just 558,000 remained alive as of 2017.<sup>330</sup>

George's ships are gone now, with only a few physical traces of their once powerful presence remaining. George himself has never visited the *Oklahoma* Memorial at Pearl Harbor or the memorial wall in Oklahoma City. He doesn't have

to. George knows the history each represents because he was a part of it. He also doesn't need a memorial to remind him of the ultimate price paid by some members of his generation. Nor should we. Yet such memorials serve an important purpose. They allow younger generations to connect with the history of World War II. Now, with George Coburn's story, *A Lucky Man*, they can do so in another, more personal way.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise cited, quotations from George Coburn throughout this story are taken from conversations between him and the author from March 2017 - July 2018. Henry Lawson's poem is quoted by Don Garden in *Droughts, Floods & Cyclones, El Ninos that shaped our colonial past* (Victoria, Australia, 2010). Chapter Thirteen, that deals with the drought, is available online at [www.climatehistory.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/.../Garden\\_Book\\_Chapter\\_2010.pdf](http://www.climatehistory.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/.../Garden_Book_Chapter_2010.pdf) (accessed March 26, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Carrie Juel Kelsey Coburn gave her parents' names as "Peter P. Juel" and "Anna K. Sorrensen" on a United States Social Security form in June 1962; she also listed her birth date as August 26, 1884 ([www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007, accessed March 25, 2017). Carrie's birth date is also found in an entry in the California, Death Index, 1940-1997 on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed March 25, 2017). On Danish immigration to Australia, see <https://museumvictoria.com.au/origins/history.aspx?pid=13> (accessed March 23, 2017) and <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/programs-and-publications/community-info...> (accessed March 23, 2017). Peter Juel's birth year is derived from a 1901 ship manifest entry for the *Ventura*, found on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), California, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1959 (accessed March 21, 2017). The "disputed territory" George remembers Carrie telling her children about was probably the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein.

<sup>3</sup> On Darling Downs, see <http://queenslandplaces.com.au/darling-downs> (accessed March 26, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> General birth years for James and Eliza Juel are based on their age entries in the 1901 ship manifest for the *Ventura*, found on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), California, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1959 (accessed March 21, 2017). George Coburn has in his possession some genealogical sheets an unknown family member once made that give the month and date of James and Eliza's births. Additionally, Carrie gave the same months and dates in her memoir. (Carrie Juel Kelsey Coburn's 1949 memoir, p. 2. Hereafter referred to as *Carrie's Memoir*.)

<sup>5</sup> *Carrie's Memoir*, pp. 1, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 5. According to what the Streets told Carrie, they were moving to a place where they could not have children (p. 5).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7 ½ 1 [sic].

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 3, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 7, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Don Garden, *Droughts, Floods & Cyclones, El Ninos that shaped our colonial past* (North Melbourne, Victoria, 2010). Chapter Thirteen on the 1895-1903 drought is online at [www.climatehistory.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/.../Garden\\_Book\\_Chapter\\_2010.pdf](http://www.climatehistory.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/.../Garden_Book_Chapter_2010.pdf) (accessed March 26, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "By 1901," the number of "Denmark-born" residents of Australia was 6,283 according to <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/programs-and-publications/community-info...> (accessed March 23, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Information on the ship is taken from

[www.shipspotting.com/gallery/photo.php?lid=2279119](http://www.shipspotting.com/gallery/photo.php?lid=2279119) (accessed March 22, 2017).

The August-September 1901 ship manifest for the *Ventura* is on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), California, Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1959 (accessed March 21, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> United States immigration statistics are taken from Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America* (New York, 1994), p. 58. Population figures for Minnesota are from The Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration, *The WPA Guide to Minnesota* (1985 edition; originally published in 1938 as *Minnesota, A State Guide*), pp. 77, 496.

<sup>19</sup> Carrie's marriage date to William Kelsey is taken from the family genealogical sheets George has in his possession. 1910 United States Federal Census for "Carrie Kelsey." Her three sons were Bertram (born May 8, 1905), James (born February 8, 1907) and Herbert E. Kelsey (born January 25, 1909). Bertram and Herbert's birth dates are taken from their respective birth record; James' is based on an entry in the 1910 census and the family genealogical sheets George has. The 1910 census entries for the sons identify England as the place of their father's birth. The federal census and the two birth records are on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed March 29, 2017). George has a copy of an undated letter his brother Richard wrote to a niece who had inquired about the type of woman Carrie (her grandmother) was; in that letter, "Dick" explained, "She was deserted by her first husband." When George was asked if his mother ever saw Bertram and James again, George replied, "Yes. When we lived on 36<sup>th</sup> Street in San Diego, they visited us. Whether she ever saw them as children, I don't know."

<sup>20</sup> Robert's birth date is taken from Robert Ellis Coburn's registration card on [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) (U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, "Robert Ellis Coburn," accessed March 25, 2017). The birthplaces for Robert and his parents appear as entries on the 1920 United States Federal Census, also on [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com), for "Robert Colum," accessed March 21, 2017. Note the two spellings of the surname--"Coburn" in 1918 and "Colum" in 1920. The former "is of early medieval Scottish origin" and the latter "of Gaelic origins," with "an astonishing number [of] different spellings" ([www.surnamedb.com](http://www.surnamedb.com), accessed March 23, 2017). Once in San

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Diego, George's family stayed with "Coburn" as seen, for example, on listings in city directories, also available on [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com), and in public school papers George has in his possession.

<sup>21</sup> Carrie and Robert's wedding date is taken from the family genealogical sheets George has in his possession. Birth dates for Anna Caroline Coburn and Robert Ellis Coburn are found in the Minnesota Birth Index, 1900-1934 on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed March 25, 2017). Robert Ellis Coburn's registration card is also on [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) (U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, accessed March 25, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Information on Mankato is taken from *The WPA Guide to Minnesota*, pp. 126, 396, 401, 402. "Robert Colum" in the 1920 United States Federal Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed April 12, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Carol R. Byerly, *Fever of War: The Influenza Epidemic in the U.S. Army during World War I* (New York, 2005), pp. 5, 33. For Minnesota statistics, see [www.mprnews.org/story/2009/05/07/1918flu](http://www.mprnews.org/story/2009/05/07/1918flu) and [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1997248/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1997248/) (both accessed April 15, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> "Carrie Colum" in the 1920 United States Federal Census, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed March 21, 2017). Richard Coburn's birth date is taken from his obituary, <http://obits.columbian.com/obituaries/columbian/obituary.aspx?n=richard-coburn&pid=127844029> (accessed April 16, 2017). See "Robert E. Coburn" in City Directories, 1822-1995 on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed April 16, 2017). The San Diego City Directories for 1921, 1922, and 1923 list Robert at the 4475 Alabama Street address.

<sup>25</sup> See "Robert E. Coburn" in City Directories, 1822-1995 for 1921, 1922, and 1923 on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed April 16, 2017). The 1922 and 1923 directories associate "S P McMullen" with Robert's employment as a baker.

<sup>26</sup> See "Carrie Coburn" in City Directories, 1822-1995 on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed March 25, 2017). The San Diego Directories for 1924 and 1925 place the Coburns at 4444 43<sup>rd</sup> Street; beginning in 1927, Carrie lived at 4460 36<sup>th</sup> Street. For a history of Normal Heights, see Suzanne Ledebor, "San Diego's Normal Heights: The Growth of a Suburban Neighborhood, 1886-1926," *The Journal of San Diego History*, volume 52, no. 1, available online [www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v52-1/pdf/2006-1\\_normal.pdf](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v52-1/pdf/2006-1_normal.pdf) (accessed March 26, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> On the names of George's elementary school, see [www.sandiegounified.org/schools/adams](http://www.sandiegounified.org/schools/adams) (accessed April 14, 2017) and Suzanne Ledebor, "San Diego's Normal Heights: The Growth of a Suburban Neighborhood, 1886-1926," *The Journal of San Diego History*, volume 52, no. 1, available online [www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v52-1/pdf/2006-1\\_normal.pdf](http://www.sandiegohistory.org/journal/v52-1/pdf/2006-1_normal.pdf) (accessed March 26, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> In an April 6, 2017 telephone conversation, Jenny Mitchell at San Diego's Greenwood Cemetery furnished the author with the date and cause of Robert Coburn's death. (The cemetery handled his cremation.) Notes in this cemetery file state that Robert died of myocardial infarction with acute cardiac dilation (i.e., a heart attack). Since George recalls his father being ill for some weeks before his death, the heart attack may have been the immediate cause of death, with an

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underlying illness not recorded in Greenwood Cemetery's file. Carrie did not pick up Robert's ashes until October 8, 1927; that was thirteen months after his death. Perhaps she made a partial payment to the cemetery when Robert died, with the rest due when she claimed the ashes. If this was the arrangement, tight finances could explain why Carrie waited so long.

<sup>29</sup> Edgar Coburn is identified as a county surveyor in the San Diego City Directories after Robert's death. See, as examples, the ones for 1927 and 1930. City Directories, 1822-1995 on [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com) (accessed March 25, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> The classes are listed on a copy of George's high school transcript that he has in his possession.

<sup>31</sup> Senior class activities are found on page 11 of the *Dias Cardinals 1937* yearbook and in the *Commencement Program* for February 3, 1937. George kept both of these mementos of his high school years.

<sup>32</sup> On the history of Hoover High School, see <http://cityheightslife.org/2011/09/hoover-high-school-80-plus-years-of-rich-history/> (accessed April 20, 2017). The number of graduates is taken from the *Commencement Program* George kept. The seventy-four male graduates outnumbered the fifty female graduates.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait* (Washington, D.C., 1993), Table 5, p. 21, [www.nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf](http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs93/93442.pdf) (accessed April 16, 2015). David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear, The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York, 1999; 2001 edition) p. 166. Suzanne Ledebor, "San Diego's Normal Heights."

<sup>34</sup> Requirements first-time enlistees had to fulfill are taken from the United States Navy's own publication, *The Bluejacket's Manual*, 10<sup>th</sup> edition (Annapolis, 1940), p. 146.

<sup>35</sup> The selectivity of the Navy in 1938 is found in Jeff Phister, Thomas Hone, and Paul Goodyear, *Battleship Oklahoma BB-37* (Norman, Oklahoma, 2008), p. 17 and on [www.mybaseguide.com/navy/21-584/ns\\_great\\_lakes\\_history](http://www.mybaseguide.com/navy/21-584/ns_great_lakes_history) (accessed April 5, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> The number of enlisted men in the Navy in 1938 is taken from a chart of "U.S. Military Personnel (1939-1945)" on the National WW II Museum's web site and [www.shsu.edu/his\\_nep/IntNav.html](http://www.shsu.edu/his_nep/IntNav.html) (accessed August 1, 2016). George's observation on his "good friends" is taken from a letter he wrote to his mother (George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 3, 1938).

<sup>37</sup> Postcards NTS sent to Carrie Coburn as well as the return address George used on his envelopes used "NTS," not "NTC" (for Naval Training Center). NTC was another name used later for the boot camps. For George's story here, then, the former is used. See the back cover of Jennifer A. Garey, *Images of America, San Diego's Naval Training Center* (Charleston, 2008) for the acronym and pages 10 and 11 for its commissioning and dedication dates;

[www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrma/installations/ns\\_newport/about/history.html](http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrma/installations/ns_newport/about/history.html) (accessed April 5, 2016) for Newport; [www.mybaseguide.com/navy/21-584/ns\\_great\\_lakes\\_history](http://www.mybaseguide.com/navy/21-584/ns_great_lakes_history) (accessed April 5, 2016) for Great Lakes; [www.nsnbg.com/editorial-content/history](http://www.nsnbg.com/editorial-content/history) (accessed April 6, 2016) for Norfolk.

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<sup>38</sup> For the weeks of boot camp at San Diego's NTC, see [www.quarterdeck.org/AreaBases?NTC%20History\\_files/ntc\\_history.htm](http://www.quarterdeck.org/AreaBases?NTC%20History_files/ntc_history.htm) (accessed March 16, 2016) and [www.quarterdeck.org/book/1930s.htm](http://www.quarterdeck.org/book/1930s.htm) (accessed March 16, 2016). For what a recruit went through in his first hours at NTC, see United States Navy, *The Bluejackets' Manual* (Annapolis, 1940, Tenth Edition), p. 6, cited hereafter as *BJM*. Consult *BJM*, p. 7 on the receiving unit, especially the three-week period recruits stayed there. A sailor who went through San Diego's NTC two years after George, Theodore C. Mason, authored a memoir that devotes several pages to San Diego's boot camp. It is entitled *Battleship Sailor* (Annapolis, 1982). Mason describes the three weeks in the South Tower as "twenty-one days of purgatory" (p. 28).

<sup>39</sup> *BJM*, p. 6. George mentions mailing his clothes home in a February 18, 1938 letter to Carrie.

<sup>40</sup> *BJM* first came out in 1902, with revised editions in 1914, 1916, 1922, 1927, 1938, 1939, 1940, and years after that. At NTS, George would have been given the 1927 or the 1938 edition. The 1940 edition, used here, was very similar to whatever edition George used in boot camp and thereafter. On an unnumbered page at the front of the book, the 1940 edition explains, "Except for a few minor corrections, it [the 1940 edition] is the same as the eighth edition published in 1938." See pp. 6-7 for what a recruit went through on his first day at NTS. Garey's *Images of America* also mentions the fact that recruits were divided into companies of "at least 100 men" (p. 31).

<sup>41</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 13, 1938; George identifies Harry by name in a February 18<sup>th</sup> letter to his mother.

<sup>42</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 13, 1938 and March 8, 1938.

<sup>43</sup> *BJM*, p. 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>45</sup> Mason, *Battleship Sailor*, pp. 31, 35; Garey, *Images of America*, pp. 18, 26. *BJM*, pp. 41-42. Garey, *Images of America*, pp. 24, 30, 33, concisely summarizes the experiences of a recruit in boot camp.

<sup>46</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 18, 1938.

<sup>47</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, March 23, 1938; *BJM*, Chapter 12, "Knots and Splices," pp. 94-98.

<sup>48</sup> The two *BJM* chapters on swimming are 15 and 30; for the quotation on "confidence," see p. 107 and for the strokes cited, see pp. 109-117. The lesson in using dungarees as a life preserver is taken from Garey, *Images of America*, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup> *BJM*, pp. 744, 747, 758-759.

<sup>50</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 13, 1938.

<sup>51</sup> *BJM*, pp. 50-56, 490.

<sup>52</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 18, 1938; March 29, 1938; and April 20, 1938.

<sup>53</sup> *BJM*, p. 135. For references to his leaves, see George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 18, 1938; March 8, 1938; March 23, 1938; March 29, 1938; April 26, 1938; April 27, 1938 and NTS postcards dated April 30, 1938 and May 8, 1938 sent to Carrie that notified her of George's leaves.

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- <sup>54</sup> February 11, 1938 NTS postcard to Carrie Coburn; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, April 20, 1938; April 26, 1938; April 27, 1938; May 3, 1938.
- <sup>55</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, April 26, 1938 and April 27, 1938.
- <sup>56</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, April 27, 1938.
- <sup>57</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 18, 1938; April 20, 1938; April 26, 1938. See also NTS' February 11, 1938 postcard to Carrie Coburn for the statement on additional boot leave days for recruits who lived out of the area.
- <sup>58</sup> The letter quoted, from George to Carrie, is from May 30, 1938.
- <sup>59</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 4, 1938 and January 14, 1940.
- <sup>60</sup> For examples of the use of "white hats" and "gobs," see Mason, *Battleship Sailor*, pp. 19, 23, 209. Note also the memoir title of another pre-war sailor, Floyd Beaver, *White Hats, Stories of the U.S. Navy Before World War II* (Palo Alto, CA, 1999). Recall that the Navy publication given to recruits at NTS, that became their "Bible," was entitled *Bluejackets' Manual*. George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938.
- <sup>61</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938; July 25, 1938; and January 20, 1929. Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 15 for the six-story hull measurement.
- <sup>62</sup> Craig L. Symonds, *World War II At Sea, A Global History* (New York, 2018), p. xvi for the general crew size. For changes in the ships that constituted the mainstay of the Navy's fighting forces, see Pat Martin, *USS California (BB-44)* (Paducah, Kentucky), pp. 11, 13; the World War II sailor's quotation is from Mason, *Battleship Sailor*, p. 129.
- <sup>63</sup> The number of battleships is taken from [www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#1938](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#1938) (accessed August 1, 2016). The quotation on how battleships fought in an engagement with an enemy is taken from Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 10; see also pp. 11, 14.
- <sup>64</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 23-24
- <sup>65</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938.
- <sup>66</sup> June 1944 Navy publication *Seamanship*, [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ref/Seamanship/index.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ref/Seamanship/index.html) (accessed August 26, 2016). George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938.
- <sup>67</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 5, 10, 11, 14, 27. George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 1, 1938.
- <sup>68</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 11-12, 32 on fire control and the director.
- <sup>69</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 4, 1938.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 6, 1939.
- <sup>71</sup> George Coburn to Dick Coburn, July 30, 1939 mentions the three-month mess duty that began August 1, 1939.
- <sup>72</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 4, 1938; July 31, 1938; September 24, 1938; and September 6, 1939.
- <sup>73</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 9, 1938.
- <sup>76</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938. See also Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 14-15 on the food and how sailors did their laundry.

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- <sup>77</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, December 3, 1938 and December 26, 1938.
- <sup>78</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938 and July 31, 1938.
- <sup>79</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 16, 1938 and September 24, 1938. George's advancement through the rates, with their effective dates, are shown on his Continuous Service Certificate from the United States Navy.
- <sup>80</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 17 on the various Navy schools. George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1940.
- <sup>81</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1940.
- <sup>82</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1940; July 15, 1940; August 5, 1940; September 6, 1940; November 9, 1940.
- <sup>83</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938; March 23, 1938; and June 4, 1938. George Coburn to Dick Coburn, July 30, 1939.
- <sup>84</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, January 23, 1940 and August 5, 1940. The latter has bank records of deposits attached to it from the joint account. (The \$326 would be close to \$5,900 today.)
- <sup>85</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 25, 1938; January 20, 1939; March 18, 1939; September 19, 1941; and November 19, 1941.
- <sup>86</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938 and June 4, 1938.
- <sup>87</sup> For examples of George's use of the word "cruise," see his letters to Carrie dated May 30, 1938; July 31, 1938; and March 18, 1939. On his first cruises, see George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 4, 1938.
- <sup>88</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 16, 1938 and January 20, 1939.
- <sup>89</sup> [www.usgovernmentspending.com/total\\_spending\\_1939USbn](http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/total_spending_1939USbn); see same web site for 1940 and 1941 (accessed August 21, 2017).
- <sup>90</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 1, 1941.
- <sup>91</sup> On the change in the flat hats, see [http://bluejacket.com/naval\\_uniform\\_b.htm](http://bluejacket.com/naval_uniform_b.htm) (accessed August 11, 2016).
- <sup>92</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 30, 1938; May 27, 1939; and October 21, 1938.
- <sup>93</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 31, 1938; August 6, 1938; and September 1, 1938. For other references to his trips home, see April 27, 1939 and June 18, 1939.
- <sup>94</sup> Mason, *Battleship Sailor*, pp. 94-96 on the Pike.
- <sup>95</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 4, 1938 and August 2, 1938.
- <sup>96</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, March 18, 1939 and September 24, 1938.
- <sup>97</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 6, 1939 and November 5, 1938. On George's inquires regarding Mrs. Foster, see his letters to Carrie dated August 6, 1938 and October 21, 1938.
- <sup>98</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 6, 1939.
- <sup>99</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 25, 1938 and May 30, 1940.
- <sup>100</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, December 3, 1938; January 20, 1939; and May 27, 1939.
- <sup>101</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 15, 1940; August 5, 1940; and November 9, 1940.
- <sup>102</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 30, 1938.
- <sup>103</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 30, 1938 and July 9, 1938.

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<sup>104</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume III: The Rising Sun in the Pacific, 1931-April 1942* (Boston, 1948), p. 43; James O. Richardson and George C. Dyer, *On the Treadmill to Pearl Harbor, The Memoirs of Admiral James O. Richardson* (Washington, D.C., 1973), pp. 307, 311, 320; *Battleship Oklahoma*, Phister, pp. 48, 51. The admiral quoted is Vice Admiral Homer N. Wallin, from his book *Pearl Harbor: Why, How, Fleet Salvage and Final Appraisal* (Washington, D.C., 1968), pp. 50, 51.

<sup>105</sup> James M. Scott, *Target Tokyo, Jimmy Doolittle and the Raid That Avenged Pearl Harbor* (New York, 2015), p. 11; J. Garry Clifford and Masako R. Okura (editors), *The Desperate Diplomat, Saburo Kurusu's Memoir of the Weeks Before Pearl Harbor* (Columbia, Missouri, 2016), Chapter 2.

<sup>106</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 54, 55.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>108</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, November 19, 1941.

<sup>109</sup> The number of military personnel at Pearl Harbor and other bases, as well as the percentage of crewmen on board that morning, is taken from Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, pp. 53, 54, 105. For the number of battleships at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, see Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 54 and [www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/pearlhbr/ph-bba.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/pearlhbr/ph-bba.htm) (accessed May 8, 2014).

<sup>110</sup> For the number of officers and enlisted men on board the battleships on December 7<sup>th</sup>, see Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 106; Joy Waldron Jasper, James P. Delgado, and Jim Adams, *The USS Arizona: The Ship, the Men, the Pearl Harbor Attack, and the Symbol that Aroused America* (New York, 2001), pp. 4, 209; Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 170, 179; [www.okhistory.org/kids/usshistory2](http://www.okhistory.org/kids/usshistory2) (accessed July 15, 2017). (For the battlewagons moored on Battleship Row, approximately sixty to seventy percent of their officers and, on average, ninety-five percent of their enlisted men were on board that morning.) For the total number of crewmen on the *Oklahoma*, see the Commanding Officer's report dated December 18, 1941 at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Casualty numbers vary slightly depending upon the source used. The number of Navy, Marine, Army, and civilian deaths used here are taken from <https://visitpearlharbor.org/how-many-pearl-harbor-deaths-were-there/> (accessed October 20, 2017).

<sup>112</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 57. The *Arizona* also sighted what were thought to be Japanese submarines on the exercises (Jasper, *The USS Arizona*, pp. 82-83).

<sup>113</sup> Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor, Warning and Decision* (Stanford, 1962), pp. 41, 45, 46; Gordon W. Prange, with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *Pearl Harbor, The Verdict of History* (New York, 1986), p. 137; Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 78.

<sup>114</sup> The quotation is from Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 75.

<sup>115</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 57, 60-61.

<sup>116</sup> For the report by the *Antares*' C.O., see <https://ww2db.com/doc.php?q=100> (accessed September 14, 2017).

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<sup>117</sup> For the December 13, 1941 report by the *Ward's* C.O., see [www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/digitized-collections/action-reports/wwii-pearl-harbor-attack/ships-s-z/uss-ward-dd-139-action-report.html](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/digitized-collections/action-reports/wwii-pearl-harbor-attack/ships-s-z/uss-ward-dd-139-action-report.html) (accessed September 13, 2017). The Japanese mini sub was discovered at a depth of about 1,200 feet three to four miles outside of Pearl Harbor in August 2002. The damage the *Ward* inflicted upon its conning tower was evident. For this discovery, see <http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2002/Aug/29/In/In03a.html> (accessed September 13, 2017). For Kimmel's request, see Wohlstetter, *Pear Harbor*, p. 17. The quotation is from Admiral Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 80.

<sup>118</sup> Gordon W. Prange, *At Dawn We Slept, The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* (New York, 1981), pp. 500-501; Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor*, pp. 11-12.

<sup>119</sup> Robert J. Cressman and J. Michael Wenger, *Infamous Day: Marines at Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941* (Washington, D.C., 1992), p. 2; Jasper, *The USS Arizona*, pp. 103, 104; Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, pp. 488, 490; Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 61, 142; Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 90.

<sup>120</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 58 and Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 110 on the ship's position; on the location of the *Oklahoma*, see also Commander Jesse L. Kenworthy, Jr.'s report to Captain H. D. Bode date December 16, 1941 at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017). The quotation is from *Oklahoma* seaman first class Stephen Bower Young, in his memoir *Trapped at Pearl Harbor, Escape from Battleship Oklahoma* (Annapolis, 1991), p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> The scholars quoted throughout the paragraph are Phister, Hone, and Goodyear, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 59.

<sup>122</sup> Wallin is the admiral quoted (*Pearl Harbor*, p. 56; see also p. 106).

<sup>123</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 58-59. Phister notes that in October, an *Oklahoma* sailor became ill from fume poisoning when he opened the hatch to one of the blisters; that could have contributed or explained Bode's decision "to vent the blisters on December 5 and 6."

<sup>124</sup> The quotation is from Young, *Trapped*, p. 3. Young also has a clear definition of blisters (p. 3).

<sup>125</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 61, 62, 81, 82, 85, 89. On the history of raising the colors, see [www.seaflags.us/customs/customs.html](http://www.seaflags.us/customs/customs.html) (accessed September 17, 2017). The British Navy began the practice at the very end of the eighteenth century, and the American Navy followed the custom early in its history.

<sup>126</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 62, 81, 82; Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 125 on the torpedo planes attacking the battleships; for Captain Bode's December 18, 1941 report, [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017).

<sup>127</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 73-74, 85.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 71

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 74, 85, 93.

<sup>130</sup> All three reports are at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017).

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- <sup>131</sup> The *Nevada's* action report is at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb36-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb36-Pearl.html) (accessed September 24, 2017).
- <sup>132</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 73. Commander Kenworthy, Jr. and Captain Bode's reports are at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017). See also, Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 110 on "one or two machine guns" that fired.
- <sup>133</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 5-6, 61, 71-72; Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 110 is the historian quoted; Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 94.
- <sup>134</sup> The admiral quoted is Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 92; see also p. 103.
- <sup>135</sup> Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, pp. 92, 133.
- <sup>136</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 74, 83. The book has a useful diagram of the ship on p. 80.
- <sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.
- <sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75. Phister estimates perhaps eight hit the ship (p. 75). The Oklahoma Historical Society puts the total at nine, with the last one striking the ship "as she sunk in the mud." ([www.okhistory.org/kids/usshistory2](http://www.okhistory.org/kids/usshistory2) (accessed July 15, 2017).
- <sup>139</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 75, 91; Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 110.
- <sup>140</sup> Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, p. 133. On the *Arizona*, see Jasper, *The USS Arizona*, p. 147 and Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 493. On the strafing and bombing, see Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 110 and Captain Bodie's December 20, 1941 report at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017) respectively.
- <sup>141</sup> The historian quoted is Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 111. On the *Oklahoma* men assisting with the AA guns and pom-poms, see Bode's December 18, 1941 report in [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017).
- <sup>142</sup> On the *USS Maryland's* action report for December 7, 1941, see [www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/digitized-collections/action-reports/wwii-pearl-harbor-attack/ships-m-r/uss-maryland-bb-46-action-report-07-dec-1941](http://www.history.navy.mil/research/archives/digitized-collections/action-reports/wwii-pearl-harbor-attack/ships-m-r/uss-maryland-bb-46-action-report-07-dec-1941) (accessed October 3, 2017).
- <sup>143</sup> See Commander Kenworthy, Jr.'s December 16, 1941 report at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017).
- <sup>144</sup> For the Hawaiian and Washington D.C. times, see [www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/app-f.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/pha/congress/app-f.html) (accessed September 14, 2017). There was a five-and-a-half hour difference between Hawaiian time and Washington, D.C. time. The two-and-a-half hour time difference between the Pacific Coast and Hawaii is noted on a December 8, 1941 front page article in the *Los Angeles Times*.
- <sup>145</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/local/war-how-a-stunned-media-broke-the-pearl-harbor-news](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/war-how-a-stunned-media-broke-the-pearl-harbor-news) (accessed August 14, 2015); <http://library.umkc.edu/spec-col/ww2/pearlharbor/radio.htm> (accessed August 14, 2015).
- <sup>146</sup> 1940 United States Federal Census for Carrie Coburn and H. Edgar Coburn at [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) (accessed March 25, 2017).

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<sup>147</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt's speech can be found on more than one web site. The quotations here are taken from [www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/q-and-a/q21-pearl-harbor-address.cfm](http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/q-and-a/q21-pearl-harbor-address.cfm) (accessed August 14, 2015).

<sup>148</sup> Scott, *Target Tokyo*, p. 23 gives the time, length, and radio audience of Roosevelt's address.

<sup>149</sup> Quotations from Roosevelt's December 9, 1941 Fireside Chat are taken from <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3325> (accessed July 24, 2015).

<sup>150</sup> Phister points out that, following protocol, men sealed hatches as they descended. In spite of the fact that the hatches were spring loaded, it was hard to open them from below (*Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 128).

<sup>151</sup> Young, *Trapped*, pp. 6, 136.

<sup>152</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 142; Wallin, *Pearl Harbor*, pp. 176, 178; Young, *Trapped*, pp. 112, 136, 142-143, 147.

<sup>153</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 149, 152, 153, 155; Captain Bode mentions the water depth in his December 20, 1941 report cited earlier. Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 111; Commander Kenworthy, Jr.'s December 16, 1941 report at [www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/logs/BB/bb37-Pearl.html) (accessed July 15, 2017).

<sup>154</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 153; Morison, *Rising Sun*, p. 111.

<sup>155</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 154-155. The Navy diver is Commander Edward C. Raymer, *Descent into Darkness, Pearl Harbor, 1941: A Navy Diver's Memoir* (Annapolis, 1996; 2012 edition), pp. 181, 187. The dates for the removal of the remains are taken from [www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&Grid=81490916](http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&Grid=81490916) (accessed April 11, 2015).

<sup>156</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 170, 171. For more details on the burial of the unknowns, see also the [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) web site cited directly above.

<sup>157</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, p. 167. On the Navy's plans for the fate of its WW II fleet (plans drawn up during and immediately after the war), see "Mothballing the US Navy after WWII: pt. 1" at <https://wwiiafterwwii.wordpress.com/2016/03/27/mothballing-the-us-navy-after-wwii-pt-1/> (accessed October 12, 2017). The four battleships were the ones of the Iowa-class, [www.militaryfactory.com/ships/detail.asp?ship\\_id=USS-Iowa-BB61](http://www.militaryfactory.com/ships/detail.asp?ship_id=USS-Iowa-BB61) (accessed October 12, 2017).

<sup>158</sup> Phister, *Battleship Oklahoma*, pp. 168-169; Young, *Trapped*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>159</sup> Personal story of Parky Parkinson as told to author by Mr. Parkinson.

<sup>160</sup> The most authoritative account of the *USS Louisville* in World War II is a volume written by its crewmen--*Man of War, Log of the United States Heavy Cruiser Louisville* (Philadelphia, 1946). It has chapters on the campaigns in which the ship participated. George's Continuous Service Certificate also identifies the campaigns.

<sup>161</sup> For general statements on the breadth of the campaigns the ship fought in, as well as the names of the fifty-five crewmembers killed in action, see *Man of War*, pp. 7, 8, 10, 21. George's Continuous Service Certificate records his "excellent performance of duty" during the Battle of Surigao Straits (October 25, 1944) and

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during the “advance fire support prior to landing at Lingayen Gulf” on the island of Luzon (January 5-6, 1945).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., pp. 10,13, 14. The WW II *USS Louisville* was the third naval vessel to bear the name of the Kentucky city. The first *USS Louisville* dated from the Civil War, an ironclad armed with fourteen guns. The second *Louisville* dated from World War I. The Navy took over an ocean liner named the *St. Louis* and renamed it the *Louisville*; the ship served as an auxiliary cruiser until the war ended, at which time the Navy decommissioned it and returned the ship to its original owners (p. 14). For examples of the *Louisville*'s shortened, more familiar name, see *Man of War*, pp. 21, 91, 102. On the horse Man o' War, see [www.racingmuseum.org/hall-of-fame/man-o-war](http://www.racingmuseum.org/hall-of-fame/man-o-war), accessed February 6, 2018.

<sup>163</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 18, 1943.

<sup>164</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 24, 1943; Mrs. Foster to Carrie Coburn, April 4, 1942.

<sup>165</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 69, 72, 73.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>167</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 77-78. Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume VII, Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls, June 1942-April 1944* (Boston, 1951), p. 70.

<sup>168</sup> *Man of War*, p. 78; on the *Louisville*'s V-Division (its “fly boys”), see p. 42.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., pp. 80, 81.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., pp. 83-84. A detailed account of the raid is at [www.pacificwar.org.au/Yorktown/Lae Salamaua Raid.html](http://www.pacificwar.org.au/Yorktown/Lae_Salamaua_Raid.html) (accessed January 1, 2018).

<sup>171</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 30, 1942; July 16, 1942; August 1, 1942; August 24, 1942.

<sup>172</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 4, 5.

<sup>173</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 4; Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 518; *Man of War*, p. 88.

<sup>174</sup> George Coburn's Continuous Service Certificate has the date of the *Louisville*'s bombardment of Kiska as does Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 9. See also, for the August 7, 1942 bombardment, Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 9, 10. *Man Of War*, p. 91.

<sup>175</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 11; Brian Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War, World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians* (1969; 1995 edition), pp. 151-152.

<sup>176</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 11, 12; *Man of War*, p. 91; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, pp. 151-152.

<sup>177</sup> Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, pp. xi, 5, 150; Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 3, 37; *Man of War*, p. 89. Morison argued, “Sailors, soldiers and aviators alike regarded an assignment to this region of almost perpetual mist and snow as little better than penal servitude.”

<sup>178</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 91; Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 14.

<sup>180</sup> *Man of War*, p. 99.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.; Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 40; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, pp. 271; 332.

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- <sup>182</sup> *Man of War*, p. 99; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, pp. 272, 332, 333. Garfield (p. 333) breaks down the 3,829 casualties in the following way--549 killed, 1148 wounded, 1200 severe cold injuries, 614 disease (not counting exposure), 318 other casualties (self-inflicted wounds, psychiatric breakdowns, drownings, and accidents). Because Attu was the first World War II battle where United States troops suffered injuries from the extreme cold, Attu helped to prepare the Army's medical unit for European winter campaigns, most notably the 1944-1945 Battle of the Bulge. Donald L. Miller, *The Story of World War II* (New York, 2001) pp. 185-186. Garfield cites 28 Japanese POWs (p. 333), while Miller uses the number 29 (p. 185).
- <sup>183</sup> Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, pp. 358, 360, 361, 364, 379; *Man of War*, p. 102.
- <sup>184</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 39, 40, 87, 99, 100.
- <sup>185</sup> Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, pp. 359, 361, 364.
- <sup>186</sup> *Man of War*, p. 99.
- <sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, November 17, 1942. The cruise book notes that crewmen heard news of the Allied landings in North Africa while in the States. Those occurred on November 8 - 11, 1942, which places the *Louisville* on the West Coast early in November.
- <sup>188</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, November 17, 1942; *Man of War*, p. 91.
- <sup>189</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 64, 91-92 (page 92 of the cruise book gives November 31<sup>st</sup> as the day of the "King Neptune ceremony," which is one day earlier than the one entered on George's Continuous Service Certificate. Several websites explain the history of the ceremony. See for examples [www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story\\_id=75241](http://www.navy.mil/search/display.asp?story_id=75241) and [www.ww2db.com/other.php?other\\_id=17](http://www.ww2db.com/other.php?other_id=17) (accessed September 19, 2016).
- <sup>190</sup> *Man of War*, p. 92.
- <sup>191</sup> Morison, Samuel Eliot, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume V, The Struggle for Guadalcanal, August 1942-February 1943* (Boston, 1949), p. 3.
- <sup>192</sup> Morison, *Guadalcanal*, p. 4; Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 522; Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Navy, *U.S. Navy at War, 1941-1945, Official Reports to the Secretary of the Navy* (Washington, D.C., 1946), pp. 49, 53.
- <sup>193</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, January 1, 1943; Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 96.
- <sup>194</sup> *Man of War*, p. 92. Iron Bottom Bay was also known as Iron Bottom Sound (Morison, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 3-4). Morison credits the Marines with coming up with the name "Tokyo Express" (p. 81).
- <sup>195</sup> *Man of War*, p. 92.
- <sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>197</sup> Morison, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 3, 352, 353. *Man of War* identifies the task force as Task Force 16 (p. 93). However, Morison identifies it as Task Force 18. The Morison citation is used here (*Guadalcanal*, p. 353). The number of ships and planes in the task force is taken from *Man of War*, p. 93.
- <sup>198</sup> *Man of War*, p. 93.
- <sup>199</sup> Morison, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 355-356.
- <sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356; *Man of War*, p. 94.

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- <sup>201</sup> Morison, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 355-357; *Man of War*, p. 94.
- <sup>202</sup> Morison, *Guadalcanal*, p. 358; *Man of War*, p. 94.
- <sup>203</sup> *Man of War*, p. 94.
- <sup>204</sup> Morison, *Guadalcanal*, pp. 358-359.
- <sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 359-360. *Man of War*, p. 94.
- <sup>206</sup> *Man of War*, p. 97; King, *U.S. Navy At War*, p. 63; Morison, *Guadalcanal*, p. 371.
- <sup>207</sup> *Man of War*, p. 97.
- <sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>209</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, April 24, 1943.
- <sup>210</sup> George Coburn's Continuous Service Certificate records his rate advancements; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 16, 1943.
- <sup>211</sup> The two movements toward Japan are explained in King, *U.S. Navy at War*, p. 103 and C. Vann Woodward, *The Battle for Leyte Gulf* (New York, 1947), p. 14. Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 70, 81 explains the danger to MacArthur's flank. Morison also uses the phrase "Central Pacific Advance" (*Aleutians*, p. 74) rather than "Central Pacific Drive."
- <sup>212</sup> King, *U.S. Navy at War*, p. 104.
- <sup>213</sup> King, *U.S. Navy at War*, p. 103; Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 70-71, 233; *Man of War*, p. 107. In a January 19, 1944 letter from George to his mother, he mentions a trip from Long Beach to San Diego.
- <sup>214</sup> *Man of War*, p. 107; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, January 19, 1944.
- <sup>215</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 346 for the *Louisville's* assignment to Task Group 53.5 and the Northern Support Group; *Man of War*, pp. 107, 111.
- <sup>216</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 70, 74, 203, 206, 207, 230, 232, 234, 236-237 (for the number of vessels in the Marshall Islands Joint Expeditionary Task Force, Morison gives "297 sail of shipping, not counting the fast carrier task groups or the submarines," p. 207); Sverre Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6. An explanation is needed for this last citation. The author owns Mr. Scheldrup's copy of *Man of War* as well as an eight-page (legal-sized paper), mimeographed history of the *Lou* entitled *History of the U.S.S. Louisville (CA-28)*. On the title page, Mr. Scheldrup wrote his name. The eight pages cover the cruiser's history from its January 15, 1931 commissioning to its October 15, 1945 arrival in Jinsen, Korea. It is cited here as Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*. Ship's officers probably put the eight pages together, and either they or other officers later drew upon the chronology for *Man of War* that was printed in 1946.
- <sup>217</sup> *Man of War*, p. 107; Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 242, 250.
- <sup>218</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 282, 288, 300, 301, 331, 332; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6.; *Man of War*, p. 107; [www.pacificwrecks.com/provinces/marshall\\_parry](http://www.pacificwrecks.com/provinces/marshall_parry) (accessed April 7, 2018).
- <sup>219</sup> Morison, *Aleutians*, p. 202.
- <sup>220</sup> The dates for the *Louisville's* stay at Majuro are taken from a chronology made, probably in 1945, by another *Louisville* sailor, Radioman Robert Sylvester Brown; original chronology owned by author and hereafter is cited as Robert Brown's Chronology. George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, March 13, 1944.
- <sup>221</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, March 13, 1944.

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<sup>222</sup> Brown's chronology mentions the Crossing the Line ceremony and preparation for it. George Coburn's Continuous Service Certificate places him and the *Louisville* in the attack on Palau and Woleai on the dates cited (March 31 - April 2, 1944). See also, King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 105; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6; *Man of War*, p. 109. George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, March 31, 1944.

<sup>223</sup> George Coburn's Continuous Service Certificate is the source of the April 21-May 2, 1944 dates and locations.

<sup>224</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume VIII, New Guinea and the Marianas, March 1944-August 1944* (Boston, 1953), pp. 36, 38, 41, 59; *Man of War*, pp. 109, 110; King, *U.S. Navy*, pp. 105, 106; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6; Morison, *Aleutians*, pp. 316-317.

<sup>225</sup> *Man of War*, p. 109; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, June 11, 1944.

<sup>226</sup> The June 9, 1944 date for the *Louisville's* departure from Majuro is taken from Robert Brown's Chronology; the ship's two-month stay is taken from Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6; King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 106; Morison, *New Guinea*, pp. 5-6, 149, 151, 157, 160, 341.

<sup>227</sup> *Man of War*, p. 110; King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 108; Morison, *New Guinea*, p. 160; Morison identified the *Louisville* as part of Task Force 52 and Task Group 52.17 (*New Guinea*, pp. 170, 409 respectively).

<sup>228</sup> King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 108; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6; Morison, *New Guinea*, p. 197; *Man of War*, p. 116.

<sup>229</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 111, 116, 117; Morison, *New Guinea*, p. 328; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6.

<sup>230</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 14, 1944; Morison, *New Guinea*, p. 351; *Man of War*, p. 117; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6.

<sup>231</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 117, 118. The names of the two *Louisville* crewmen were pilot Ensign Bates Bartelett Craver, Jr. and observer Aviation Radioman Second Class Ralph Erichson. Their names and rank are listed on p. 8 of *Man Of War*. Research on ancestry.com (specifically the section of the web site that has information on military "casualties") yielded the following information on both men--they served in Navy air, they died on July 24, 1944, and they were buried at sea.

<sup>232</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 117, 118; King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 112.

<sup>233</sup> Morison, *New Guinea*, pp. 325, 326; King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 111; *Man of War*, pp. 120, 121.

<sup>234</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 120, 121, 123; Robert Brown's Chronology.

<sup>235</sup> According to Robert Brown's Chronology, the *Louisville* left Espiritu Santos on August 27, 1944 and arrived at Guadalcanal that same day. The September 6<sup>th</sup> departure date from Guadalcanal is also taken from Brown's chronology; *Man of War* gives the same departure date (p. 123).

<sup>236</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 123, 124; King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 115; Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume XII, Leyte, June 1944 - January 1945* (Boston, 1958), pp. 34; 39. Morison observes that the *Louisville*, *Portland*, and *Indianapolis* were "idle most of the day" (D-day) because of "the confused nature of the fighting"(p. 39).

<sup>237</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 135, 137.

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<sup>238</sup> *Man of War*, p. 137.

<sup>239</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 137, 147; King, *US Navy*, p. 175; C. Vann Woodward, *The Battle for Leyte Gulf* (New York, 1947), pp. 21, 25, 26, 27, 114n; Thomas J. Cutler, *The Battle of Leyte Gulf, 23-26 October 1944* (Annapolis, 1994; 2001 edition), p. 174. The admiral in command of the Seventh Fleet was Thomas C. Kinkaid.

<sup>240</sup> Two of the three battleships in the Northern Force had also been in the harbor that morning. H.P. Willmott, *The Battle of Leyte Gulf, The Last Fleet Action* (Bloomington, 2005), pp. 142-143, 312.

<sup>241</sup> King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 238; Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, p. 31; *Man of War*, p. 141.

<sup>242</sup> Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 27, 31; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 6; *Man of War*, pp. 138, 142.

<sup>243</sup> Morison, *Leyte*, p. 145; *Man of War*, p. 142.

<sup>244</sup> *Man of War*, p. 144. The crewman killed was probably Seaman Second Class Louis Marvin Johnson. His name is entered in *Man of War's* list of crewmen KIA, and research on ancestry.com (specifically in the military's section on "casualties") gives October 27, 1944 as his date of death. Johnson may have been hit by shrapnel on October 22<sup>nd</sup> and later died of his injuries.

<sup>245</sup> Cutler, *Leyte*, pp. 265-266; Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russell A. Gugeler, and John Stevens, *United States Army in World War II, Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, D.C., 1948; 1993 edition), pp. 67, 93; Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa* (New York, 1995), pp. 32-33.

<sup>246</sup> *Man of War*, p. 144.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>248</sup> Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 1, 90-91; King, *U.S. Navy*, p. 120; *Man of War*, pp. 141, 144, 147.

<sup>249</sup> The two quotations on the historical importance of the Battle of Leyte Gulf are from Cutler, *Leyte* (p. xiii) and Vann Woodward, *Leyte* (p. 1) respectively; for a similar description, see Willmott, *Leyte*, p. 5. In his book, Vann Woodward details the tonnage of ships at Leyte versus that at Jutland, the World War I naval battle, pointing out that at Jutland, the tonnage was "considerably less" than the tonnage at Leyte. (p. 3); Cutler in his volume on Leyte (p. xiii) also compares it with the Battle of Jutland, pointing out that 250 British and German ships fought each other at Jutland while 282 American, Japanese, and Australian ships fought each other at Leyte.

<sup>250</sup> Vann Woodward identifies the four engagements, *The Battle for Leyte Gulf*, pp. 1, 2; Cutler, *Leyte*, p. xiii on the number of men and ships.

<sup>251</sup> Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 94, 95; Willmott, *Leyte*, p. 141; Morison, *Leyte*, p. 198; Cutler, *Leyte*, p. 175; *Man of War*, p. 147. The historian quoted is Craig L. Symonds, *World War II At Sea*, p. 575; Symonds cites thirty-nine as the number of PT boats (p. 576).

<sup>252</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>253</sup> Cutler, *Leyte*, pp. 174, 181, 182.

<sup>254</sup> Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 97-98, 99; *Man of War*, p. 149; Cutler, *Leyte*, p. 175; Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 204, 206.

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- <sup>255</sup> *Man of War*, p. 149; Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 97-98; Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 199, 206.
- <sup>256</sup> Willmott, *Leyte*, p. 145; King, *U.S. Navy*, pp. 120-121; Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 99, 102, 108; *Man of War*, p. 149; Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 208, 223. Morison, *Leyte*, p. 217 gives 2:54 a.m.- 4:20 a.m. as the time when the destroyers on the left and right flanks attacked the Japanese ships. Symonds, *World War II At Sea*, p. 576.
- <sup>257</sup> Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 108, 111, 113; Morison, *Leyte*, p. 224.
- <sup>258</sup> *Man of War*, p. 154.
- <sup>259</sup> Cutler, *Leyte*, p. 182. To stress the “T” image, Cutler suggested the reader imagine an aerial view of such a confrontation. For a different description of the “T,” see Miller, *The Story of World War II*, p. 418--one fleet advances in columns, forming a vertical bar and thus can fire only its forward pointing guns; attackers form a horizontal bar (the top of the T) and bring their broadsides to bear.
- <sup>260</sup> Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 118-119; Morison, *Leyte*, pp. 227, 228; Willmott, *Leyte*, p. 149.
- <sup>261</sup> The historian quoted is Morison, *Leyte*, p. 240. For ships and casualty losses, see Morison, *Leyte*, p. 240; Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, p. 127, and Cutler, *Leyte*, p. 205. There is a difference in the number of Japanese ship losses between Cutler and Vann Woodward; Vann Woodward is the one used in the narrative. George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, December 4, 1944.
- <sup>262</sup> Morison, *Leyte*, p. 240 is the historian quoted; see also p. 226. Cutler, *Leyte*, p. 205 also refers to Surigao Strait as “the last of the great gun” battles.
- <sup>263</sup> Cutler, *Leyte*, pp. 283, 285; Vann Woodward, *Leyte*, pp. 229, 230;
- <sup>264</sup> Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, pp. 6-7; George Coburn’s Continuous Service Certificate (as well as *Man of War*, pp. 157-158) for the November 5-6, 1944 fire support the *Louisville* rendered on the air strikes.
- <sup>265</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 157, 158; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 7.
- <sup>266</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, January 13, 1945.
- <sup>267</sup> *Man of War*, p. 158.
- <sup>268</sup> King, *U.S. Navy*, pp. 125, 126; *Man of War*, p. 159.
- <sup>269</sup> *Man of War*, p. 159.
- <sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164; on the *USS Ommaney Bay*, see [www.navsourc.org/archives/03/079.htm](http://www.navsourc.org/archives/03/079.htm) (accessed May 8, 2018).
- <sup>271</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume XIII, The Liberation of the Philippines, Luzon, Mindanao, the Visayas, 1944-1945* (Boston, 1959), p. 101; *Man of War*, p. 164.
- <sup>272</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 164-166; Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines*, p. 103.
- <sup>273</sup> *Man of War*, p. 167; Morison, *The Liberation of the Philippines*, p. 109.
- <sup>274</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 167, 169. George questions one sentence in the cruise book’s account of this attack--“In a matter of seconds, the plane crashed into the signal bridge.” George insists this statement is not correct. It was at Okinawa in June 1945, he explains, that a kamikaze pilot hit the *Louisville*’s signal bridge. He believes the officers who wrote the cruise book mixed up Lingayen with Okinawa.
- <sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169, 171.
- <sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

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- <sup>277</sup> Ibid., p. 171.
- <sup>278</sup> Ibid.; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 7.
- <sup>279</sup> Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 7; George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, April 10, 1945; *Man of War*, p. 174.
- <sup>280</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, May 10, 1945.
- <sup>281</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume XIV, Victory in the Pacific, 1945* (Boston, 1960), pp. 79, 80; King, *U.S. Navy*, pp. 175, 176; *Man of War*, p. 175; Max Hastings, *Inferno, The World At War, 1939-1945* (New York, 2011), p. 618.
- <sup>282</sup> *Man of War*, p. 174.
- <sup>283</sup> Ibid., pp. 175-176, 177; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 7.
- <sup>284</sup> *Man of War*, p. 176; George Feifer, *The Battle of Okinawa, The Blood and the Bomb* (1992; 2001 edition, Guilford, CT), p. 171.
- <sup>285</sup> Morison, *Victory*, p. 233 cites about 1,900 “suicide sorties” while Symonds, *World War II At Sea*, p. 626 states there were “ten massed kamikaze attacks” that “sent 1,465” Japanese planes at the Americans; the difference between those two number (1,900 and 1,465) could be in the word “massed” that Symonds used, meaning Morison may have counted some individual kamikaze attacks; Roy E. Appleman, *United States Army in World War II, The War in the Pacific, Okinawa: the Last Battle* (1948; 1993 edition, New York), pp. 362, 364; Feifer, *The Battle of Okinawa*, pp. 167, 171.
- <sup>286</sup> Appleman, *Okinawa*, p. 362; *Man of War*, pp. 177-178, 181. (The destroyer sunk within two minutes was the *USS Drexler*, Appleman, *Okinawa*, p. 362.)
- <sup>287</sup> *Man of War*, p. 181.
- <sup>288</sup> Morison, *Victory*, p. 233; Appleman, *Okinawa*, p. 364; *Man of War*, pp. 181-182.
- <sup>289</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 183-184.
- <sup>290</sup> Ibid., pp. 184-185.
- <sup>291</sup> Ibid., p. 185.
- <sup>292</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>293</sup> Ibid. *Man of War* has June 7<sup>th</sup> as the date when the *Louisville* returned to the firing line (p. 185). However, Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8 has the date as the 9<sup>th</sup>. On the wounded Marines, see *Man of War*, pp. 187-188.
- <sup>294</sup> *Man of War*, p. 189; Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 613.
- <sup>295</sup> Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 613; Feifer is the writer quoted, *Okinawa*, p. 174; Cutler, *Leyte*, p. 285; Morison, *Victory*, p. 282; Symonds, *World War II At Sea*, p. 632.
- <sup>296</sup> Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8; *Man of War*, p. 190.
- <sup>297</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 8, 1945.
- <sup>298</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, July 26, 1945.
- <sup>299</sup> Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, pp. 620-621; Max Hastings, *Retribution, The Battle For Japan, 1944-45* (New York, 2008), p. 477.
- <sup>300</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 190-191; Kennedy, *The Library of Congress World War II Companion*, p. 624; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8.
- <sup>301</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, August 12, 1945.

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<sup>302</sup> Information on Henry A. Elvestad is taken from POW records and USMC Muster Rolls on ancestry.com (accessed May 27, 2017). Hank died in 1958 at age forty-eight. He had retired from the USMC just a year earlier. Asked about whether George thought Hank's time as a POW contributed to his early death, George replied, "I do believe it was a prominent cause." When Hank returned home after the war, George continued, "He looked like a skeleton. Hank's biggest problem was starvation." George described his brother-in-law, before his years as a POW, as "a robust man."

<sup>303</sup> Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8 (the *Louisville* was a part of Task Group 10.3); *Man of War*, pp. 191, 195.

<sup>304</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, September 6, 1945.

<sup>305</sup> The point system is described in Guy Lofaro, *The Sword of St. Michael, The 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division in World War II* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), p. 554. A more detailed explanation of exactly how many points were given for various categories can be found in *Yank, The Army Weekly*, June 1, 1945, "Redeployment," p. 20.

<sup>306</sup> Effective November 1<sup>st</sup>, the number of discharge points the Navy required for male officers, which was George's category, became 46, then 44 on December 1<sup>st</sup>, and 43 on January 1, 1946. (The Navy discharge points cited are found in *All Hands, The Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin*, December 1945, p. 72.)

<sup>307</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 195, 196; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8.

<sup>308</sup> *Man of War*, p. 196; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8.

<sup>309</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, October 18, 1945.

<sup>310</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 196, 200; Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8.

<sup>311</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 200-201. Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8; on the internment camp at Chefoo, see [www.mundas.ac.uk/cats/4/904.htm](http://www.mundas.ac.uk/cats/4/904.htm) and [www.bbc.com/new/world-asia-330709730](http://www.bbc.com/new/world-asia-330709730) (both accessed June 5, 2018). The new unit was Task Group 71.6 (Scheldrup, *History of the U.S.S. Louisville*, p. 8).

<sup>312</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, November 11, 1945. A USMC muster roll for October 1945 put Hank in the San Diego Naval Hospital in October 1945 (ancestry.com has the muster roll, accessed June 9, 2018).

<sup>313</sup> *Man of War*, p. 202. The author owns Sverre I. Scheldrup's cruise book, *Man of War*. His notations inside of the book chronicle his time in the Navy and on board the *Louisville*.

<sup>314</sup> *Man of War*, pp. 202, 208; the number of veterans (five hundred) the *Louisville* brought home early in December 1945 is taken from a Terre Haute, Indiana newspaper, *The Saturday Spectator*, December 15, 1945, p. 12 available on the web site newspaperarchive.com.

<sup>315</sup> *Man of War*, p. 208. The "1,000 high-point Army veterans" number is taken from the *Taylor Daily Press* (a newspaper in Taylor, Texas), January 17, 1946, p. 2 available on the web site newspaperarchive.com.

<sup>316</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, October 18, 1945 and February 9, 1946; *Man of War*, pp. 208, 212.

<sup>317</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 22, 1926.

<sup>318</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 9, 1946, February 22, 1946, and March 25, 1946.

<sup>319</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, February 9, 1946 and March 25, 1946.

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<sup>320</sup> George's arrival date on board the *USS Louisville* is taken from the Navy's December 31, 1941 Muster Roll found on ancestry.com (accessed June 10, 2018). The names of the fifty-two men are listed on page 8 of *Man of War*. Naval casualties numbers are as of November 9, 1945; they are taken from a Navy publication, *All Hands, The Bureau of Naval Personnel Information Bulletin*, December 1945, unnumbered page entitled "The Cost..."

<sup>321</sup> George Coburn to Carrie Coburn, November 11, 1945 and February 22, 1946.

<sup>322</sup> In 1944, the Navy re-designated the Naval Training Station (NTS) as the Naval Training Center (NTC). [www.militarymuseum.org/NTCSanDiego.html](http://www.militarymuseum.org/NTCSanDiego.html) (accessed July 25, 2018).

<sup>323</sup> The 1982 membership roster for the *USS Oklahoma* Association lists four hundred and eighty-one members; the one from 2007 has ninety-nine names (George Coburn has copies of these rosters). Two newspaper articles are available online that covered the first and last *USS Oklahoma* reunions--*The Oklahoman's* May 10, 1992 "USS Oklahoma Survivors Hold Ship's Reunion" at <https://newsok.com/article/2394165/uss-oklahoma-survivors-hold-ships-reunion> (accessed July 1, 2018) and *The Oklahoman's* June 9, 2012 "USS Oklahoma reunion draws guests with ties to ship's history" at <https://newsok.com/article/3682735/uss-oklahoma-reunion-draws-guests-with-ties-to-ships-history> (accessed July 1, 2018).

<sup>324</sup> Years after it was formed, the *USS Louisville* Reunion Association solicited recollections from crewmembers for a publication, *The Lady Lou and Her Valiant Crew, 1931-1946*, compiled by Irma Caluwe (it appears to have been printed in 1992 based upon a reference to that year on page 61). Page 61 gives a brief history of the association. Information on the 2010 *Louisville* reunion in Branson (fourteen crewmen attended) is taken from a November 2010 association newsletter George kept. It also mentioned that another reunion would be held in the same city in 2012. The November 2010 newsletter reprinted a note George wrote to the association stating his plan to attend the 2012 reunion in Branson. Today, George remembers a trip he took there, although he cannot positively link it to the reunion.

<sup>325</sup> For the dedication date of the *USS Oklahoma* Memorial, see the web site for the Oklahoma Veteran's Memorial in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. The *Oklahoma* Survivor was Frances "Parky" Parkinson (one of Parky's conversations with the author over their years of friendship). A newspaper article on the fundraising for the memorial appears to backup Parky's statement ("Monument To *USS Oklahoma* To Be Unveiled," *Amarillo Daily News*, November 9, 1998, p. 39, available on the web site newspaperarchive.com.).

<sup>326</sup> For the role played by *USS Oklahoma* Survivors, see Phister, *Oklahoma*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>327</sup> "Piece of Ship Sunk at Pearl Harbor Arrives in Oklahoma," *The Oklahoman*, June 22, 2010 (article available online at <http://newsok.com>); "USS Oklahoma Mast Comes Home," *Tulsa World*, July 11, 2010 (article available online at [www.tulsaworld.com](http://www.tulsaworld.com)). (Both articles accessed July 25, 2018.)

<sup>328</sup> *Chester Times* [Pennsylvania], June 18, 1946, p. 3 for the decommissioning ceremony. Three newspaper articles from the *Tampa Tribune* appear in the *USS*

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Louisville Reunion Association publication, *The Lady Lou and Her Valiant Crew, 1931-1946*, pp. 58-60. One article, "The End of the Heavy Cruiser Louisville," is undated; it refers to \$265,000 as the selling price. A November 11, 1959 article cites \$250,000 as the selling price ("Louisville Was 'Real Ghost Ship' "). For ten months as the length of time it took to take the *Louisville* apart, see a third *Tamp Tribune* source, a photograph of the ship entitled "Requiem for the Lady Lou," August 7, 1960.

<sup>329</sup> Information on the *Louisville's* engine order telegraph and the bell is from a July 30, 2018 telephone conversation between the author and the Naval Ordnance Station's Public Information Officer, Lieutenant Commander Lewis Anderson. According to the Lt. Commander, the Station acquired the engine order telegraph in 1959 and the bell in 1972. On the gun turret in the desert, see an April 7, 2016 article entitled "Mystery in the Desert is a Mystery No More" by Jeff Garberson in *The Independent News* and "The Mystery of the Gun Turret in the Desert" by R.D. Hoffman, a report for the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (November 30, 2015); both of these are available online.

<sup>330</sup> The number of survivors who were believed to still be alive in 2015 was 2,000-2,500; this was an estimate from a staff member at the USS Arizona Memorial (quoted in an October 9, 2016 article, "One of the Last Survivors of the Pearl Harbor Attack on the USS Arizona Dies at 94," in *The Washington Post*, available online at the newspaper's web site). The number of World War II veterans still alive in 2017 is taken from [www.nationalww2museum.org/war/wwii-veteran-statistics](http://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/wwii-veteran-statistics) (accessed July 6, 2018).

## Illustrations

### Chapter 1

- Photograph of the *Ventura* from the Trove Australian National Library taken from [www.shipspotting.com/gallery/photo.php?lid=2279119](http://www.shipspotting.com/gallery/photo.php?lid=2279119).
- Coburn Family Collection

### Chapter 2

- Coburn Family Collection
- United States Navy, *The Bluejackets' Manual* (Annapolis, 1940, Tenth Edition)

### Chapter 3

- Official United States Navy photographs
- Coburn Family Collection

### Chapter 4

- Maps appear in United States Navy publications
- Official United States Navy photographs of the December 7, 1941 attack upon Pearl Harbor appear in various publications
- Drawing of the *USS Oklahoma* capsizing appears in various publications

### Chapter 5

- U.S. Navy map and photographs from 1944 cruise book "*Lady Lou*."
- U.S. Navy photographs from *Man of War, Log of the United States Heavy Cruiser Louisville* (Philadelphia, 1946).
- U.S. Navy maps and photographs that appear in various publications
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### Epilogue

- Coburn Family Collection