

MILITARY SEA SERVICES MUSEUM, INC.



SEA SERVICES SCUTTLEBUTT

August 2012



Tony La Morte

A message from the President

By the time this news letter comes out, school would have opened for the coming year. So be a little more attentive in your driving, children will be walking to and from school.

On the lighter side Mary Anne and I will be traveling to Norfolk, VA, around the 10th or 11th of September. My granddaughter, Shannun LaMorte did something that I myself did not do. She called me a couple of weeks ago to let me know that she will be transitioning from a blue uniform to khakis around noon on the 14th of September when she will be initiated and promoted to Chief. This is one grandparent that's not letting any grass grow under his feet. My feet haven't hit the ground since I received her phone call.

The Museum may not have a dinner in September because Mary Anne and I will be attending the promotion ceremony, and the time between returning and the scheduled dinner date will be short.

Update on the murals. So far, the local Marine Recruiter hasn't let us know what he may be able to give us for a mural for the Marine Corps. We do have some people in mind for contacts to obtain ideas or material for the Coast Guard mural. We'll keep you informed.

The holiday season is coming up, started shopping yet?

Tony

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Hours of Operation
Open: Wednesday through Saturday Noon to 4:00 p.m.
Web site: <http://milseasvcmuseum.org/>

YMS-288 Revisited

Charles "Ed" Wolfe ex CGM USN

As one approaches the 90 year mark in life, at least one distinct advantage remains. I have found that an old CGM can easily turn back the clock nearly 60 years, to a time when a young gunner's mate with only two years experience would embark on his first sea duty.

While the reality of war in the Pacific would be brought home at a later date on *Terror* (CM-5) at remote places like Iwo Jima and Okinawa, life on YMS - 288 would serve as an introduction to shipboard life in the United States Navy. The following is a small gaggle of sea stories on 288 that I share with anyone who will listen. So there's no reason that you should be spared. By the way, newly commissioned YMS-288 was a 136' wood hull minesweeper, one of 481 of that class that served the Navy in World War II-- but you knew that anyway.



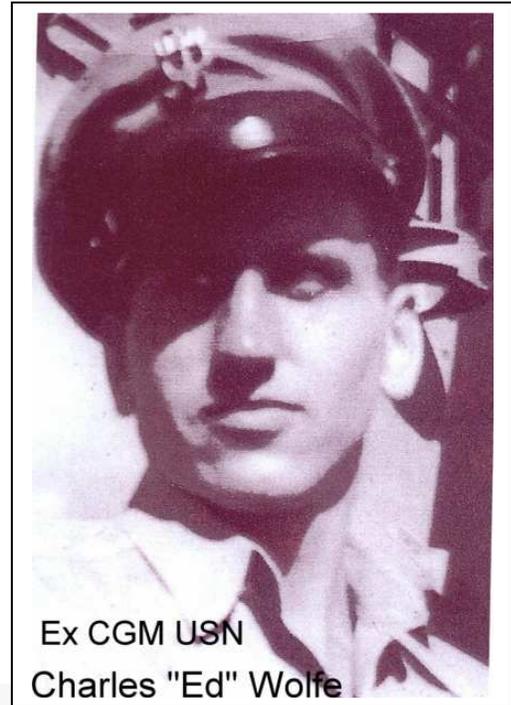
It is inevitable that one would, over a period of time, acquire rudimentary skills completely unrelated to one's rating. Such was the case I encountered while serving on 288. One day one of the guys approached me with, "Wolfe did you ever cut hair?" I responded that while I had no experience in the barber business, I would certainly be willing to give it a try.

At this he handed me a pair of industrial shears and a huge comb. I noticed that he had a truly shaggy head of hair and was badly in need of the services I was about to render. When I had finished, a tremendous amount of hair had been removed but unfortunately the back of his head looked as if several ladders had been placed there. I received no criticism of my efforts and that was really the beginning of my career as ship's barber on 288. Over the next few months I produced many haircuts and the quality of my work improved greatly. Further progress was made when we went alongside a tender and I secured proper clippers and a comb.

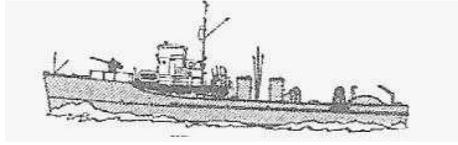
One day the Executive Officer, a green as grass Lt.(jg), requested a haircut. He was on duty so I went up to the wheelhouse with my hair clippers and comb in hand. Now fully prepared, I sat my customer on a high chair on the port side and proceeded to apply my trade. At this time the ship was underway, rocketing along at her usual 10k on a dead calm sea. As you know there is a metal rail around the bridge and the XO was sitting on his high chair holding on to the rail.

At this point I was nearly finished with my task and must admit that my skills had improved markedly. This was a particularly neat job, one in which I could take great pride. Suddenly, as the YMS was prone to do, the ship went into a long, slow roll. Responding to this action the XO's chair went scooting along the rail. At this moment things went out of control and unfortunately I was, at that moment, trimming around my customer's ear. Sadly, in the confusion of the moment I snipped off the top of the XO's right ear.

Continue on page 3.



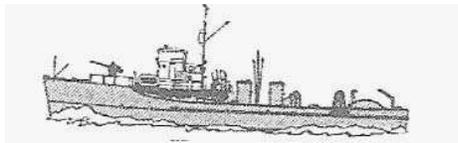
Before I could collect my thoughts, my customer leaped, screaming, from his high chair bleeding profusely. I didn't say a word, picked up my clippers and comb, vacating the bridge. The Lt. never asked me to cut his hair again.



At this stage in life boxing was my primary interest. Back home in Kentucky at the tender age of 13 I had participated in Golden Gloves. I had logged in 36 bouts with but 3 losses. Now, deep in the heart of the Pacific, we were patrolling at our usual breakneck speed of 10k. I reached the conclusion that I needed some exercise to while away some of the dreary hours. Bearing in mind that running areas on the YMS were quite restricted I concluded that skipping rope might be a poor but necessary substitute. Accordingly I took a piece of rope and proceeded to go into my skipping routine.

Things were, for some time, going quite nicely back on the fantail as I skipped away the dreary hours. At this point however one of the crew came back and said the skipper, in the wheelhouse wants to know if everything was all right back aft. I informed him that everything was fine and the only thing happening at the moment was a bit of jumping rope on my part.

The messenger trotted back to the wheelhouse but returned immediately. He promptly advised me "the skipper is going nuts up there because the ships screws are loping out of rhythm and you are to immediately stop jumping around". So -- I packed up my rope, ceased activities, simply noting as I had many times before, that these young officers are truly a nervous bunch.



The vast expanse of the Pacific, at least as far as the naked eye could see, was empty. The only exception was the little minesweeper YMS-288. As the vessel plodded along at her usual 10k one thing was abundantly clear, 288 was -- lost. As a Gunner's Mate I certainly had no experience in a craft as complicated as navigation.

Apparently the lack of a visible sun made use of a sextant unlikely, if not impossible. I think that for dead reckoning purposes a starting point is necessary. Whatever the circumstances, 288 relentlessly plowed on.

Our skipper was a young inexperienced reserve officer. During the three days it took 288 to find her way, our CO paced incessantly to and fro, back and forth, all the while sweating profusely. After 3 days, our position was finally established and our captain, at least partially, regained his composure. It was at this point that I concluded that young reserve officers tended to be a nervous lot.

***You will find more small gaggles of sea stories on 288 that Charles "Ed" Wolfe, ex CGM USN, shares with anyone who will listen, in future Scuttlebutt issues.

Quotable quotes:

"The Constitution is the guide which I never will abandon."
George Washington

"To compel a man to subsidize with his taxes the propagation of ideas which he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical."
Thomas Jefferson

Test Your Memory!

1. On what date did President Abraham Lincoln sign the act authorizing the Navy Medal of Honor?
2. On what date did U.S. Marines capture Mount Suribachi?
3. When was the Battle of Midway fought?
4. Did the Japanese ever bomb or shell the continental United States?
5. On what day did the Allied Forces fully secure the Philippine capital of Manila from the Japanese?

Answers located on Page 8 of 8.

Happy Birthday

Happy 222nd birthday United States Coast Guard. The U.S. Coast Guard goes back to the Revenue Cutter Service founded on 4 August 1790. The Revenue Cutter Service and the U.S. Life Saving Service merged to become the U.S. Coast Guard on 28 January 1915. In 1939, the U.S. Lighthouse service merged into the Coast Guard.



The Yard Motor Minesweeper (YMS) depicted here is under way off Long Island, NY.

At this point she is not commissioned or accepted by the Navy. Built at Greenport Basin & Covst., Long Island, NY, when finished she will have armament and perhaps electronics along with other necessities in place. She is one of 481, of this class, built for the US Navy in WW II.

The Final Voyage

On 24 October, 1942 a great, gray, giant troopship, *SS President Coolidge* departed singly from Noumea, New Caledonia, destination Espiritu Santo. The passenger list - over 5000 US Army and Navy personnel.

The *Coolidge*, on this date, was an ugly caricature of the vessel she was in her salad days. During the 1930's the ship was the Queen of the Dollar Lines and later the American President Line. The ship sported luxury staterooms, private telephones, dual swimming pools and every conceivable shipboard amenity one could imagine. Regular ports of call from the West Coast included Hawaii, Japan, the Philippines and several Australian ports as well. Now, the ship's handsome hull and superstructure smothered by thousands of gallons of haze gray paint, fine furniture and fixtures removed, interior gutted to accommodate 5000 bunks, the *President Coolidge* was now a troopship with the *Army Transport Service*.



SS President Coolidge in the 1930s

On 16 October, 1942 at 0930 hrs. as the *SS President Coolidge* approached the eastern entrance to Segund Channel, Capt. Henry Nelson scanned his sailing orders and failed to find a chart of the minefield laid by the US forces to protect the harbor entrance. After considering his options the skipper elected to utilize the broad and inviting expanse of eastern channel to make his entrance to Espiritu Santo. Within minutes after making this decision the great ship was rocked by a tremendous explosion which took out the engine spaces and killed one of the men on duty there. Just seconds later another explosion ripped the stern area of the vessel. At this point the captain knew that he had lost the ship and elected to beach the *Coolidge* in order to evacuate the thousands of personnel on board.

When the great ship was hard aground the order to abandon ship was given. The evacuation was successfully completed in a very short time. One detail that accelerated matters was the fact that all men had been instructed to leave their gear behind and it would be retrieved in a day or so. Unfortunately this would not come to pass.

While the Capt. had intended to place the vessel on the beach, unfortunately the ship had come hard aground on a coral reef. As a result of this fatal blunder, the ship within minutes after the evacuation, slid backwards off the reef and disappeared beneath the surface.

As a result of this unfortunate end to a great vessel there were two casualties.

First, the man who lost his life in the initial explosion in the area of the engine spaces and a bit later an Army officer lost his life. While this man had been successful in leaving the ship he somehow heard that the men in sick bay were unable to successfully abandon ship. He then went back on board and was successful in saving all the patients. In the end however he was trapped below and was unable to escape.



“All ashore that’s goin’ ashore”

The master of the ship survived two Boards of Inquiry and was declared not guilty on all counts.

Today the island of Espiritu Santo has two major attractions to lure the tourist. The wreck of the *Coolidge* has become a great diving attraction for those inclined to explore the world beneath the surface of the sea. For those more inclined to while away the hours on dry land it is of interest that Espiritu Santo is the locale of James Michener's *Tales of the South Pacific*, a classic novel later transformed into the musical film *South Pacific*.

(Thank you Allie Ryan for this contribution on the history of the SS President Coolidge).

Welcome Aboard New Members

In July, Denise McCabe became the Museum’s newest five year member. Denise is the very talented artist who painted the mural on the Kenilworth Avenue side of the Museum. Denise resides in Altamonte Springs, FL.

In August, Bill Clements became our newest member. Bill is a U.S. Army Veteran who served in Viet Nam. Bill has for several years and still does help out in the Museum at least a couple of days a week greeting visitors and conducting tours when needed. Bill resides in Sebring.

A very hearty welcome aboard to our newest members. A sincere thank you to all our members for their continued support. Without member support, The Museum would not be able to pay its bills and would have to close the doors.

2012 is the bicentennial year of the War of 1812, America's "Second War of Independence".

Hat Collection Expands to 230

The Museum's hat collection (ball caps) has taken a giant step forward. In July, Captain Robert R. Williams, III, USN (Ret) donated 21 Navy caps. The caps were individually presented to Captain Williams as Chief of Staff of Commander, Middle East Force from January 1990 through March 1992, including Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield. Each cap is special to Captain Williams because it represented a most capable unit initially reporting for duty, fully prepared to serve its military mission in enforcing United Nations Security Council Resolutions in the Persian Gulf. Captain Williams donated these caps because he felt the caps should now receive the increased visibility that the Museum can offer. We feel very honored and are deeply thankful that Captain Williams selected our Museum. We are proud to display these caps. Captain Williams resides in Severna Park, MD. Thank you Captain Williams!!!



Navy Khaki uniform with three stars. This uniform with the vice admiral stars was donated to the Museum by Vice Admiral J.A. Sagerholm, U.S. Navy retired.



Plebe uniform worn by first year students at the Naval Academy. This uniform was donated to the Museum by Daniel Lee, a graduate of Sebring High School who is a student at the Naval Academy.

Binnacle List

The Binnacle List contains reports of our members who are under the weather and could use the prayers of those of us that pray. They might also like a bit of cheering up.

No members reported.

If you are aware of any of our members who should be included in the Binnacle List, please send us an email at navmargrd@gmail.com or mail the information to the Museum at 1402 Roseland Ave., Sebring, FL 33870.

Mail Recipients of Scuttlebutt

If you are receiving the Scuttlebutt by mail and have an email address, please provide us your email address. You will not only save the Museum postage, but you will be able to see any color photos in color. Unfortunately, the Museum cannot afford the printer ink required to print 40 some copies of the Scuttlebutt for mailing. We copy them on our copy machine which only reproduces in black and white. You can send your email address to any of the following: navmargrd@gmail.com , marieryan@cox.net , Lamorte@vistanet.net , or genekissner@yahoo.com . Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

The current issue of Scuttlebutt will be posted on line at: <http://milseasvmuseum.org/1scuttlebutt@att.net>

Answers to Test Your Memory Quiz!

1. December 21, 1861. On July 12, 1862 a law with similar wording was signed establishing a Medal of Honor for Army personnel. Currently there are three versions of the Medal of Honor. The Navy version awarded to Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard personnel; the Army version awarded to Army personnel, and an Air Force version awarded to Air Force personnel. Prior to 1965 when the Air Force design was approved, Army Air Corps, Army Air Forces, and Air Force personnel were awarded the Army version of the medal. The Medal of Honor is awarded for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of one's life above and beyond the call of duty. This gallantry must be performed either, while engaged in action against an enemy of the United States; while engaged in military operations involving conflict with an opposing foreign force; or, while serving with friendly foreign forces engaged in an armed conflict against an opposing armed force in which the United States is not a belligerent party.

2. February 23, 1945, four days after the battle for Iwo Jima began. The battle continued for another 31 days and the island was secured by the U.S. on March 26, 1945.

3. June 4 - June 7 1942.

U. S Lost:

307 personnel

145 planes

one carrier

Japan Lost:

4800 personnel

291 planes

four carriers

4. Yes. On 23 February 1942 a Japanese submarine fired on an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California, causing little damage.

5. March 3, 1945, after a one month battle (3 Feb-3 Mar) that resulted in a terrible blood bath and total devastation of the city. This one month battle was the worst urban fighting in the Pacific theater, and ended almost three years of Japanese military occupation of the Philippines.