

Remembrance of Navy Memories

The following items/stories are hereby dedicated to ' Old Irv ', & SKI, fellow shipmates on the USS Pyro AE-1 during WW2. Old Irv , SKI & I remained friends for 63 years after WW2 and their departure to the seas beyond leaves an irreplaceable void in the hearts and thoughts of their loved ones. Sail on old sailors may the seas be calm and peaceful through out your journey in the far beyond. I now consider myself one of the few remaining Twilight Sailor Survivors of the USS Pyro AE-1 until the last chapter is written.

My rational for compiling these stories is maybe, just maybe some day my Daughter, Bobbie and Jim, son-in-law, my Granddaughters: Melanie, Gina, Deanna and Melanie's children, Tyler and Katelyn Plus, Jeff and wife, Debbie and their children: Lindsay, Ryan and Adam will wonder some day just how I survived WW2 at the age of twenty two, a veteran of the greatest generation.

This commences a series of actual sea stories from a sailor of the greatest generation. Standby for additional stories before my memory fades away. You haven't read everything yet?

The recent dedication of the World War 2 Memorial appeared to be featured on D-Day 1944 but what about the Pacific War which had been going on for two years? Permit me to to ramble on !

In remembrance of the greatest generation, I continue my quest to sway from the hut sut and the flo flo, as I doubt whether our sons, daughters or grandchildren follow this jive and believe we're off our rockers but rock we did during WW 2. Actually unknown to us it was the beginning of rock and roll, through the "Peaceful Pacific" and turbulent seas indeed we rocked and rolled from port to starboard and the ship would shutter and shake doing the dips as the bow dipped down and up. Yes sir, that was really rock and roll. Now in the twilight of our lives we look back and cherish our comradeship formed during our service to our country. Born during depression and serving in the US Navy during WW 2, we suddenly grew up. The years we lost during the war we now reminisce through our reunions. Renewing our past and present friendship's, which will carry us to our days beyond. What more can be said from sailors of the past to present and future sailors but Anchors Aweigh and Peaceful Seas for ever.

Now for the rest of the stories involving my Naval career which featured the Atomic Bomb. Frankly, I don't believe we ever gave the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima a second thought as I served aboard an ammunition ship, the USS Pyro AE-1 during WW 2.

During the war as we entered the harbor of Manus Island in the Admiralty Islands we passed another ammunition ship the Mount Hood AE-11 and as we anchored at the far end of the harbor, the Mount Hood blew up causing huge damage to nearby ships. So you see the atomic bombing was just secondary to the end of the war. Incidentally, we also missed the Port Chicago explosion by several months. On a follow up of the previous mention of the Mount Hood Disaster in Seeadler Harbor of Manus in the Admiralty Islands at 0803, 10, November 1944. There suddenly was a loud terrific explosion and an air surge occurred...the Mount Hood AE-11 had just blown up, 4,500 tons of explosives. All 350 officers and men aboard were killed instantly. The largest

piece of the ship found after the explosion was a hunk of the hull about a hundred feet long. The Mount Hood had been anchored in about 35 feet of water. The force of the explosion blasted a trench in the harbor bottom, reported by divers as being 1,000 feet long, 200 feet wide and 85 feet in maximum depth.

Special Note: The CO of the Mount Hood was the former EX of the USS Pyro AE-1 So fellow shipmates, "count your blessings" as we have been there and done it and SURVIVED.

When the news of VJ - Day reached us in the Admiralty Islands, we assumed it was celebration time, "wrong" we were not permitted to celebrate. Period! We requested permission to blow the ship's whistle, not granted! Then how about firing some flares, again not granted. Well, then when in doubt run around and shout and so we did with the assistance of beer we broke out of stowage where it was stowed for "consumption ashore" for our customary liberty parties. Needlessly, to say the night was long but yes, we celebrated in a fashion of sort. This one goes back to the earlier mention of V-J Day. Oh, VJ night on the old Pyro and were we having fun, drinking beer and raising cain on the run. Bos'n Mates hid out in the aft sky 40 MM gun tubs slugging down beer in fear of getting busted if detected. The gangway PO stood guard on the beer stowage hatch. The Chief MAA made the scene and silently retreated as words were exchanged and the crew continued to celebrate with beer borrowed from the hold and cooled with CO2. The XO appeared and pleaded to break it up or else Marines would be requested, that failed as Marines aboard a LCM came alongside and requested some beer which they promptly received via MT beer cans. The Navigator buckled on a 45 and started to climb the wardroom ladder and said break it up but sailors standing top side shouted down how many shots you got?" as the officer silently retreated. As the celebration continued through the evening, waiting for Sam, the Skipper to return from celebrating from the "O" club on the beach as his faithful Capt's Gig Cox Old Irv sweated standing by for the return trip to the ship. Next morning as Quarters was held, our Division Officer, Old Chief Warrant Bos'n fuming mad questioned each "R" Division personnel in regards to who participated and received no replies as the Chief MAA stood glaring facing us. Officer's call was held and as the Old Bos'n returned, all red faced and ready to blow a gasket, nothing was said regarding the past evening events. The Skipper figured enough was enough, as he couldn't hang the whole crew. So my striker, a old Polish kid from Chicago SKI and I replaced the MT CO2 bottles as normal ship's work routine commenced the following day, and that was how we celebrated VJ Night on the AE-1. The following day the Skipper decided to drop the matter as the incident involved practically the whole crew and beside he had been ashore at the Officer's Club celebrating What did this mean to me? Huh, nothing as I had exactly three more years to serve on a six-year enlistment Note I served twenty years. I also was at Bikini in 1946 and witnessed Able and Baker atomic bombing from a front road view anchor detail aboard the USS Blue Ridge AGC 2 during Operation Crossroads. How has the world transformed in the past sixty years, outside of modern technology, we are still bombing and killing, so what has really changed? Incidentally, I served in Japan and Korea with the CB'S Amphibious Construction Battalion One and the USS Talladega APA 208.

Regarding reunions. I attend the USS Pyro AE-1 & AE-24, USS Yosemite AD 19, USS Hunt DD 674, USS Talladega APA 208 several reunions off and on but never have attended the ones of the other ships I served on namely: USS Blue Ridge AGC 2, USS Bronx APA 236, USS Des Moines CA 134, USS Fulton AS 11, USS Forest Sherman DD

931 and the US Naval Training Center San Diego where I “Pushed Boots” of Six Companies of which Five were Honor Companies including One Efficiency Trophy.

Yes, here we go again for a flash back to the past during WW 2. The USS Pyro AE-1 was departing from Brisbane, Australia 1943 under a new Captain in command. The harbor pilot ran the ship aground, damaging the ship’s rudder. The damage was accessed and slight repairs made and we proceeded to carry out our mission. Completing our assignment of delivering our cargo of ammunition to New Guinea we “sailed” at our usual “cruising speed” of 8-10 knots and proceeded to Sidney, Australia for repairs. Berthing at Circular Quay in Sidney we unloaded the ship’s ammunition and moved to a dry dock for removal of the ship’s rudder for repairs. We were then towed back to Circular Quay and thus were “stranded” for about 30 days. To us the “youngest sailors” it was an “unforgettable escapade” and for the older sailors in their 20’s plus, who undoubtedly forgotten by now due to memory loss caused by old age, no doubt or their “home health/better half” status. Well, being stranded under the circumstance in far away Sidney was pretty difficult to cope with especially during war time and having to “struggle” through all those Pub calls and Aussie women up at Kings Cross, Hyde Park, Bondi Beach, etc. Well, like some one once said, “war is hell” but we some how managed to survive the “BEST 30 days of WW 2”. Consequently, the ship moved back to the dry dock and the repaired rudder was reinstalled and then back to Circular Quay and loaded up ships and cargo ammunition for our next mission. The last night or rather “that last night” in Sidney was a night to remember. Cinderella Liberty was granted with the crew divided into Port and Starboard liberty sections with the final liberty [four hours each section] expiring at 2000 hours. Well, needlessly to say. that was one big “drunken celebration” as the ship’s brig cells were standing room only with returning “sober sailors”. The brig was located adjacent to the Shipfitter Shop and a young Shipfitter sailor was singing “ Your only a Bird in a Gilded Gage” to the confined inmates, until the XO inquired whether the soloist would like to join his mates, where as I suddenly lost my voice. Yes, our last night in Sidney was indeed a very memorable night to remember to all concerned. Thus, the next morning we departed and rejoined the war effort with nothing but fond memories and the famous Aussie expression “Dinky Die Aussie, Fair Dinkum’ with the tune “Waltzing Matilda” in the background.

Thus, during our last tour of twenty six months in the New Guinea and the Philippines Area plus, the other two other assignments; the Aleutian Islands one month and the New Hebrides Area nine months of being overseas during WW 2 in the South Pacific we eventually returned to the states as the war had ended but were we greeted by modern day welcome fan fare? Hell No! CNN we’ll wait! Matter of fact no one ever greeted our return which was the norm of the times, times change !

Hold on there’s more to the Sidney Escapade. Let us call this Cinderella Mast. This is a continuation of our “Last Liberty” in Sidney. As you may recall our Cinderella Liberty turned out to be a really big “barn burner” as so many sailors really got involved in what was referred to as a “ big drinking spree”. However, there were certain violations to Navy Rules and Regulations and several or rather many sailors were put “on report” and subject to Captain’s Mast [actually there were about 30 sailors involved]. The Pyro got underway and departed Sidney and was in route to New Guinea and back to servicing the 7th Fleet. The C.O. decided to Hold Mast, which was rather unusual being underway. The involved sailors were lined up in their White uniforms in a single file on the main deck Starboard side forward of the Bridge. The C.O. was at his Podium about to

commence "Holding Mast" when suddenly, a terrific storm hit without warning and the ocean opened up with huge waves and large amounts of pouring down rain with no let up, after 30 minutes of waiting for the storm to cease and no visible end in sight the C.O. canceled Captain's Mast in disgust and dropped all charges. All one could hear was the Bos'n Pipe, Piping "Turn To" and thus, we continued our journey back to the war and operations off New Guinea with the 7th Fleet.

Well, now, here it is the Fourth of July Weekend 2004 & so I'll continue my quest of Navy Memories. The following isn't exactly a sea story as it actually did occur during WW2 at Zamboanga in the Philippines. Serving aboard the USS Pyro AE-1 and while on a "Liberty Spree" in the Stinking Zamboanga I can still smell the stinking fish at the Fleet Landing in fact it was worse than the Chicago stock yards at SKI's home town of Chicago. No wonder he joined/drafted in the Navy.. Mean while, old Irv, SN 3/c and another sailor were wondering around this charming Village/City of Zamboanga and as one knows "old Irv" couldn't resist a drink or so as he sampled everything in sight. The other sailor wasn't as old as "old Irv" or the other "Sailor" SKI just how in the hell did SKI get into this story ?? . Incidentally, the other non drinking sailor was a tee toler in fact it's rumored that he still is a tee holder, whatever ? As the afternoon wore on and the very hot sun beat down on this charming village, the only cool place was the Circular Water Drinking or Bathing Fountain in the town square. "old Irv" begin feeling a little spry/drunken and commenced staggering around as his Buddy sailor led, dragged, shoved, carried him to the Fleet Landing and as we passed those fish again or was that "old Irv". Anyway the "drunk" was gently shoved and poured into the liberty boat for the return trip to the ship with his loyal non-drinking shipmate, singing Bell Bottom Drunks never fade away they just pass out. Returning to the ship "old Irv" begin to have hallucinations and fits still does and what ever, so we bundled him up like a mummy by wrapping him up with a hawsers line and secured him to a salt water valve and water was constantly sprayed upon this drunken sod in attempt to cool him off and bring him back to earth [deck]. Meanwhile "old Irv" continued to have these strange hallucinations better known as "Swedish Fits" muttering in some strange tongue Swedish I reckon, who cares, who knows whatever. Mean while as the hours passed the ship's crew begin to put the blame/fault for "old Irv's" condition on his loyal Liberty Shipmate who never even touched the stuff, in fact he still doesn't would you believe?

Well, the rest of the story is that "old Irv" survived and returned to the states after the Big War ended and spent the \$5.00 won on a bet from his old loyal Shipmate and once again "old Irv" celebrated and natch got "stumbling down drunk" and tossed into a Minneapolis jail and once again put the blame on his loyal Shipmate who's home town natch, was Minneapolis.

In the meantime where was his loyal Shipmate ? Still in the South Pacific, cleaning up those dam Reserve mess's, in fact it took him 20 years. Somehow, some way "old Irv" sobered up and settled down in his old home town of Red Neck, Iowa somewhere in the USA and discovered a Gold [Jewelry] Mine and continues to travel looking for a spot to have a cool drink and what happened to SKI ? he spends his retirement time counting his money in Drowners Grove.

Last but not forgotten, the old retired Navy Shipmate is whacking and chasing that little old white ball up and down the fairways, bunkers, trees, water and sometimes even on the green when he happens to be lucky and that's not very often.

Once again, to note the old WW2 Crew of the USS Pyro AE-1 is gradually breaking up and reluctantly “shipping out” on their last cruise. We continue to lose Shipmates and will not mention any names in fear of omitting anyone. The largest percentage of sailors on the USS Pyro AE-1 was from the mid-west and namely Iowa. Thus, it was the Iowa connection that got together in the “middle of a corn field” in Iowa soon after WW2 and each year there after and being single would meet in various Iowa towns and swap sea stories that’s lies to you civilians. They soon all married and begin raising families and subsequently the idea of going for the Big Reunion and so Paul led the charge and thus “Pyro Reunion History” was made in 1983 in Dubuque, Iowa. This First organized Reunion was well attended with over 125 individuals in attendance, which still remains a record attendance.

This reminds one of the times during WW2 in the South Pacific, that no one, meaning the US Navy Fleet wanted the USS Pyro anchored nearby. Countless times we would arrive at an Island anchorage and drop the hook and as soon as the various combat ships arrived the signal lights would commence blinking and lo and behold we would be ordered to shift anchorage and move away from the fleet. This brings us up to date to present times where as our membership is pulling that old fleet maneuver of isolation from the USS Pyro Association by not maintaining their current membership dues and not attending Reunions. As previously mentioned the old Pyro AE-1 crewmembers are either in ill health or are fading away in increasing large numbers. This leaves the Shipmates of the AE-24 to carry on the Pride & Tradition of the USS Pyro.

The year was 1947 Yes, I’m still in the Navy and I was stationed aboard the USS Bronx APA 236. We were anchored off Olympia, Washington for embarking Army troops from Fort Lewis for landing exercises off Southern California.

Returning from liberty in the early morning and with very dense fog, we awaited the arrival of a boat, which was a LCM [landing craft medium]. The “M” boat finally arrived with an Officer [Ensign] aboard to “navigate us safely back to the ship in the dense fog. Creeping back at 2-3 knots we struck/hit two anchor chains with the bow ramp, the anchor chains were moored to a buoy, which turned out to be a ship tied up along side of other ships.

As I stared up at the bow of the ship, I felt I was looking into “my coffin” because the number of the ship was E-1 . Yes, the USS Pyro AE-1, there it was in the “moth Ball” fleet at Olympia, Washington. Frankly. It got to me after having served aboard for 3 ½ years during and after WW2 and then almost being capsized in the fog returning from liberty. To me that was one to remember or so I thought? Now are you ready for this one. The year is 1950 and I was stationed at Long Beach [Terminal Island] California. The weather there was always hazy with no really clear sky. One morning however, the sky was crystal clear and as I was eyeballing the scenery and ships in the far distance, I almost flipped out as I could make out the “silhouette” of the USS Pyro AE-1. Rushing over to where the ship was tied up to a pier at the American Can Company. I was not allowed to go aboard but I inquired what was the status of the ship. The “unforgiving” answer was that it was going to be “dismantled” and cut up for scrap”. What a “tragic” way to go, I never went back to view the ship again as I received orders to report to Coronado, California for transfer/duty with the CB’s in Japan and a place called Korea.

Needless to mention all the above stories refer to the “good times’ and not the boring

tireless periods spent at General Quarter Stations and particular those "dawn alerts" and swinging around the hook at the various anchorages at the various Islands of where we serviced the fleet, etc. The record for GQ was 12 in one day-night period during the Leyte, Philippines ordeal. Not to mention or refer to the long ever lasting endless hours of cargo handling in providing replenishment ammo to the fleet during WW2.

The last interesting story brings to memory that when we were informed that we would transfer our cargo of ammo for the return to the states there was an over enthusiastic response which I believe never had happened before, where as Petty Officers [former deck hands including yours truly], even several Chief's and Officers all volunteered to work in the cargo holds to expedite the handling of the ammo to hasten our return to the states. No wonder as we had been out of the states for 26 months and the return was all hands objective. The most terrifying movement or rather hours we were subjected too was after WW2 and upon our return to the states with no available pier space we were anchored in Port Discovery Bay in the Puget Sound , Washington. This was in the early months of 1946 where we awaited facilities to unload our cargo of ammo brought back from the South Pacific. One early evening a terrific storm erupted with terrific winds and gale rain pounded down upon us. The ship was in a cold iron watch as the main steam lines were under repair and thus we were unable to get up steam to get underway. This is when the "terrific movement" commenced. The starboard anchor failed to hold and the ship begins to drag toward the shore and consequently the ship was unable to move to safer anchorage. A tugboat was standing by attempting to render assistance as we continued to drag the anchor and ship towards the shore with extremely high cliffs with very little beach area. The large ship's searchlight was turned on and focused on the beach/cliffs where we figuratively speaking could count the pebbles, etc. I was on the anchor detail with another sailor just out of boot camp who had no experience for the situation we were about to experience. The Chief Warrant Bos'n gave the command to let go the port anchor and I replied Bos'n it's the starboard anchor! Then the Bos'n shouted let go the port anchor "dam it !" and so I dropped the port anchor which was unheard of utilizing both anchors at the same time. Now with both anchors out we continued to drag towards the beach, which contained the terrifying, cliffs, which were being highlighted by our searchlight. Mean while the tug boat was tossing about and moving up and down between us and the beach which made it even more nerve wracking when the word was passed for all hands top side man life jackets. Somehow the engineers assembled the steam lines as we then had power to get underway and hoist the anchors. Now another problem arose as the anchor chains had somehow twisted around one another, which prevented hoisting the anchors. Manning the anchor windlass throttle, I kept attempting to hoist the port anchor with no success and by now the Bos'n was really shouting and cussing for me to hoist the anchor which by my attempts was forcing the chain to shake, shutter and groan. Needless to say the Bos'n kept on my butt regarding my unsuccessful efforts to hoist the anchor where as I had, had it and informed him, if he could do any better take over and relieve me. He then cooled down and informed me to relax and try walking out the anchor and then try hoisting again, thus we commenced to walk and hoist the anchor and after more nerve wracking movements which by now was near midnight and hours later, somehow the anchors un-twisted and we were able to complete hoisting the port anchor. Now all we had to do was to hoist the starboard anchor, which was accomplished with no problems? Did I say no problems, as I earlier mentioned my only assistance was the boot/sailor who lacked any experience required for the subject task?

This may be a little difficult explain but on the AE-1 which was built in 1919, the technology didn't even exist for lining up the anchor chains to accomplish this a large metal bar was utilized for adjusting the line up of sequence of operation on the anchor windlass by mating several rivets with one another to lock in the engagement for hoisting/walking the individual anchor/chains. Note the storm raged on restlessly without any let up. This operation was accomplished in the evening darkness using a battle lantern where I mustered the patience instructing my assistant for this ordeal on top of everything else that transpired that evening is still unexplainable. Thus, safely getting underway as the storm had ceased we shifted anchorage to a safer calm location and secured the anchor detail. The CO called the Bos'n up to his quarters and informed him that was the greatest piece of seamanship on record. Also, all the anchor detail was served coffee and hamburgers at 0200 and the Bos'n expressed his comments of well done. Incidentally, the Bos'n and I become real shipmates that evening.

Regarding the subject of drinking sprees was simply indicating an escape from reality while serving on an ammunition ship during war time.

Thus, I reckon this updates my Navy Memories, Last but not least, I sincerely enjoyed the good and bad times of my Navy service to my country and never regretted full filling my Pearl Harbor pledge at the age of 18 to volunteer before ever being drafted. Sayonara Ya'll. GringoBob

P/S What a memory!