

VWOA NEWSLETTER

Email Issue #7

2005



Bernard Flatow to be the Keynote Speaker at the VWOA Fall Luncheon. The 80th Annual Business Luncheon will take place on Saturday, November 19, 2005 at the Top Deck of the Seamen's Church Institute, 241 Water Street, New York City. Please make your Reservation on the Forms recently supplied to you.



Director Bernie Flatow announces a Celebration Program for Merchant Marine Veterans at Kingsboro Community College in Brooklyn, New York on November 9, 2005.

This location is the site of the US Maritime Service Training Station of Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, NY. A location that many of our VWOA Radio Officers, graduates of the Gallups and Hoffman Island Schools took their Maritime Basic Training. Assembly of attendees will take place in the cafeteria. Lunch will be served at 12 Noon. The Memorial Program will take place in the auditorium at 1 PM

A wreath will be placed in the water from a boat at about 1:30 PM

A Special visit to the Flag Pole, cannon and brass plaque memorials will be made at 2:30 PM
The Memorial Ceremony will adjourn at 3 PM.

If you have an interest in attending, send an Email to 71147.1437@att.net and I will provide Bernie Flatows telephone number for further coordination details.

William B. Devoe AA3YR

Back by popular demand

VWOA Member William B. Devoe AA3YR continues to tell us about Diaries kept by him while on World War II Voyages in Liberty Ships and now has them told as stories to entertain his Grand Children

Bill Devoe's War Time Voyage Number Four – New York to Archangel to Baltimore. February 28 1944 to June 6, 1944.

The Liberty Ship SS Joyce Kilmer had returned from the Persian Gulf on February 15th and was tied up at Pier 74 (34th St and 12th Ave) Manhattan. Soon there were workmen swarming all over the ship adding special equipment.

The Kilmer moved across the North River to Hoboken and then to Craven Point where we loaded 3,000 tons of high explosives. I was startled to see that steam radiators had been added to my cabin and to the Radio Shack - it was obvious that we would be going into some cold waters. Several articles of cold weather clothing were also waiting for me. Included were a fox-fur vest, felt boot liners, Russian type fur hat and a fur-lined pea jacket.

During the refurbishing and loading period of 18 days, I took Tommy Vachon, Navy RM 3/c and my assistant on the last voyage, with me to Tenafly, NJ. We had a good time with many of my high school friends. Upon reporting back aboard with Vachon I learned that I would have another Navy helper, J.Gunn, S 1/c as a third assistant. Jim Gunn didn't know much but he learned fast.

I attended the convoy conference with Captain Wilson on March 3rd and set pre-sailing watch at 0000 that midnight. I took the 4 - 8 and assigned my two helpers on an interchangeable basis to the 8 - 12 and the 12 - 4-hour watches.

The convoy formed up off Ambrose Light Ship and steamed due east at 9 knots, ship rolling in seas. Spent a lot of time showing Jim Gunn the ropes. The Bos'n helped me put up the emergency antenna and then I put up Coronet Magazine "gat-fold" nudes around the cabin. Captain Wilson saw them and said "Well, I'll be God dammed Sparky - got any more?"

I spent time fixing the two 12" navy blinker searchlights, which didn't work. I got the wiring diagram from the Chief Engineer and after tracing the wires to the engine room discovered blown fuses were the problem. I did lots of little jobs like that - wired up a loudspeaker in the crews mess so they could hear news broadcasts when I could tune them in. I copied news from Reuters on the mill and everyday posted a page in the crew's mess and in the engine room.

By May 10th it had started to snow and the weather slowly deteriorated. My diary says that the First Mate was the best mate I've ever sailed with. Together, we stowed the medicine chest and the very next day had to use it because the dishwasher had an infected finger on his left hand that needed lancing. I held the light; the patient and the medicine while the First Mate did the slicing.

My notes also said that the Bos'n was a good worker now that he was sober but that he looks like a rummy with no teeth and a whiskey complexion. The weather was typical for the North Atlantic this time of year. We were at 44N/ 41W with rain squalls on the 14th.

Enemy activity was starting. We had a large escort including a British pocket aircraft carrier in the center of the convoy. One of the Swordfish (biplane) crashed on landing (lost a wing). I

watched through binoculars and saw that the pilot was OK. On the 17th we changed our position in the convoy from #53 to #63. This change was to eliminate a column due to the loss of two ships as stragglers.

I copied several distress signals that day and noted in the diary that the chow was very poor. On the 19th we were close to Scotland. I took D/F bearings from 9AM to 3PM and again from 8PM to midnight. We were off The Mullet a little after midnight and proceeding in a two-column formation.

By 4:00 AM we were off Tory Island and by noon off Rathlin when we left the column of ships and started up the Clyde River. We passed Ailsa Craig at 4:40 PM. This is a most impressive island jutting straight up out of the Clyde for a thousand feet with sheer cliffs all around. By 9:00PM on the 20th of March, the Kilmer had arrived in Lock Long, Scotland, and anchored out in the middle so we wouldn't blowup anyone else if we were bombed.

Two local shipyard electricians in the shack installed a new shortwave receiver with my help. On March 22nd the First Mate called a boat drill and we launched two lifeboats. I controlled the inboard engine of one and we went ashore for two hours in Greenock. My notes say that we had a fun time, that I broke my glasses, and that we had to tow the other boat with about 25 of our crew because they had engine trouble.

The next day we calibrated the D/F by having a British trawler circle us while transmitting. We then departed for Lock Ewe sailing independently. I took visual bearings for the First Mate. When we arrived, there was a departing convoy forming up so we waited outside until they had all come out, then went in and anchored.

The convoy conference was held on March 27th at Aides Point, Lock Ewe at 8:45 AM. The Captain, Armed Guard Officer and I were ferried there on a drifter named "Lupino". The Kilmer was designated as a special W/T ship but only when requested by the Commodore.

I set radio watch at 3PM and we sailed at 4PM. The convoy started to form up at 6PM but heavy fog set in. I was busy with the blinker signaling other ships from the bridge. We finally took position #94 along with three other Liberty ships (nos. 93, 84 and 104) as a separate group since we all carried high explosives. If one went up we might all go but no adjacent ships would be lost.

The next morning we had clear skies. The Commodore signaled a course change at 5:02 AM and then signaled that there were enemy aircraft overhead. There were no attacks that first day out; the Luftwaffe apparently was just circling and keeping tabs on our position. The winds had increased to at least 30 mph.

The next day Wednesday the 29th was clear with 30 mph winds and 40-degree temp. Two aircraft carriers and three cruisers joined us at about noontime. One of the cruisers was the Milwaukee. U-boat action started at 5:30 PM so our general alarm sounded. There were many depth charge runs and white flares shot off. No ships were sunk that night, but the next morning our Commodore hoisted a flag signal saying one U-boat had been sunk.

On Thursday morning we had fire and boat drills. There were snow flurries and the air temp dropped to 35 deg. Another British Swordfish crashed on landing after his patrol. We were now at 68 N.,

which was the beginning of the danger area designated to us at the convoy conference.

On the 31st we crossed the Arctic Circle; snow flurries, sighted floating mines and had a single Stukas plane attack. One of the cruisers catapult launched a Mustang fighter plane and the Stukas departed. The Mustang could not return to its cruiser so he had to fly back to Scotland. Meanwhile our two pocket carriers were very active and there were two more plane crashes, one on each. My diary noted that the pilots in each crash were safe.

The air temperature was now 22 deg. with 30 mph wind, and snow. The ship was covered with a 2" coating of ice and we continued to steam northward.

April 1st was an exciting day. At 0025 there were many depth charge explosions. At 2:30 AM it was very obvious that we were under U-boat attack. There were flares and depth charges for the next three hours then a lull but at 10:15 AM the cruiser Milwaukee started firing its 6" guns and antiaircraft guns. These were directed at enemy planes above the convoy. Then at 11:00 AM there was another plane crash on one of the British pocket carriers with much black smoke and lives lost. By 11:15 the carrier was still burning but the smoke had turned white.

We were experiencing 15 to 20 depth charge explosions per hour and by that evening the explosions were getting closer to us. The convoy was now in a close formation and going at full speed of 11 knots with several course changes. U-boats were however closing in on our starboard and depth charges were dropped all night and during the early hours of Sunday morning. I don't know how many ships had been torpedoed but we

were apprehensive. The Commodore kept us posted by flag signals and indicated that our escort had sunk three U-boats during the night.

We had a respite from the attacks for several hours that Sunday afternoon. My diary indicates that we passed Bear Island 35 miles on the Port beam at 12:30 PM. Also one aircraft was down at sea but an escort rescued the pilot.

The U-boats were back at us again by 10:00 PM but we still had daylight. Twilight came from midnight to 2 AM.

We were under attack all morning with a let up in the afternoon but then depth charges rocked us from about 8:00 PM on. It was snowing on and off and the bone chilling cold came right through my heavy weather gear.

On Tuesday, April 4th, we were attacked at 10:00 AM but after a lull a Russian escort joined the convoy and we were told our destination was the White Sea, which we interpreted as Archangel. Captain Wilson was angry because he thought we would be in Murmansk so he could go ashore that night.

I took D.F. bearings all afternoon and again from 8 to 9 in the evening. We figured we would reach Archangel on Friday but this didn't happen.

The Bos'n cut his hand that night and the First Mate and I sewed it up. I held the light and acted as the operating nurse.

On April 5th we entered the White Sea where a Russian pilot was put aboard and we were met by two Russian icebreakers. The largest was the "Lenin". It was interesting to watch the breaker

surge up onto the ice, and then break through and so porpoise a path for the nine merchant ships, which were in a following line. After a short time the pack ice would close in on us and we would be stuck. One of the icebreakers would then circle around and break a new channel through the ice for us. We got stuck many times, as did the other Liberty ships.

It took several days before we finally arrived at Molotovsk (64 34 N/39 46 E) that had gantry cranes. We had a heavy lift in No. 3 hold that our booms couldn't handle. It was the anvil for a metal stamping press and so it was necessary to use gantry cranes.

The temperature was 25 deg.F and stayed cold. The next day passes were given to the Captain, Chief Engineer and Gunnery Officer for shore leave. When the Captain returned he brought with him bonus rubles. There were 1,000 each for Capt, Mate & Chief, 600 each for other officers including me, and 300 for each of the crew. Unfortunately, I learned later that the rubles could only be spent in the USSR and you had to have a ration card. Since none of us had a card we could not buy very much.

On April 8th, after supper, I was given a pass and the third mate and I walked about 2 miles into Molotovsk. The town had an Intourist club but it was closed. There were loud speakers blasting war news at most street corners. I had my pocket picked and then walked back to the ship. Didn't loose anything except a few paper rubles.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE

VWOA MEMBER NEWS

P O'BRIEN K8LEN writes to us:
Enjoyed the news again, e-mail news is a lot better than snail mail.
Did you know that KSM is operational on the weekends with a wheel running?, in its last report a vessel out of California sends regular tfc to them enroute to Honolulu...
regards P O'BRIEN

Hi:

The newsletters on line are great. Certainly enjoyed reading about Earl Korf and the comments of Ted Phelps. When I was going to sea after retiring as an engineer, I used to keep daily schedules with Earl K2IC. Earl would try to estimate my ship's position and was frequently on the mark. Had Earl and his wife aboard my ship the M/V Sea Venture/WJMV several times when we were docked at the Mobil Oil facility in Paulsboro, NJ. Earl's passing just short of his 100th birthday was a great loss to all of us who knew him in person and on the air.

Thanks again for the on line newsletters.

73, Ben Russell, N6SL

If you have a hi speed internet connection, Wendell Benson, our Assistant Secretary, brings to your attention a very interesting and outstanding web site operated by:

**YL Radio, Western Canada's
YL Amateur Radio.**

A dialup connection will work, but takes time to down load the excellent photos and graphic displays.

Visit URL

<http://www.qsl.net/ylradio/>

Their Archives include stories of interest on:

Olive Roeckner VE7ERA - Writing Her Story and Author of Deep Sea Sparks

Royal Canadian College (RCC) 1942 First Graduating Class of Wireless Operator's

Wendell would also like you to visit this URL as well:

<http://www.nps.gov/safr/local/sparks.html>

for an interesting tour of the:

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

And their display about:

Sparks, Waves and Wizards: Communications at Sea

We at the VWOA Newsletter would like to hear from you and try to pass along to the rest of the VWOA stories of events that you have experienced and that you feel the rest of the membership would enjoy hearing about.

Send us a picture or two and we will try to include it in one of our Email Newsletters.

We would prefer to hear from you by Email at: 71147.1437@att.net

or

wenben@nyc.rr.com

but if you must, send mail to:

VWOA

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