

## Bizarre, Fascinating, and Wacky World War I & II Secrets. America's Forgotten Navy

"Right rudder!" the skipper shouted. "Full speed ahead, and ram her!" The helmsman at the wheel questioned this order, "Did you say ram her?" "Are you deaf, sailor? Yes, I said ram her!" The skipper is Commander James A. "Texas Jimmy" Hirshfield, his ship is the USS Campbell. (A 327 ft. warship of the Hamilton Class.) The Campbell is one of the escort warships protecting a convoy carrying supplies to England. They are grouped together for protection, and guarded by escort warships. However, the USS Campbell was not a United States Navy, but belonged to the United States Coast Guard.

Vital supply lines to England absolutely had to be kept open, so the US Coast Guard's fleet of combat cutters were the backbone of the escort force, at times, because of a shortage of warships, the Coast Guard Cutters and a lone US Navy Destroyer made the Trans-Atlantic runs to England.

The Campbell left her convoy to rescue survivors of a sinking cargo freighter. (Which had just been torpedoed by a Nazi U-boat.) Rescue work is the most difficult and dangerous task to perform because the warship has to stop in order to pickup the survivors. This makes her a "sitting duck" for any Nazi U-boat (submarine) that is lurking nearby.

Suddenly, just behind the Campbell, a terrific explosion occurred! A Nazi U-boat had fired a torpedo at the Campbell from extreme range and misses. When the "Tin Fish" (torpedo) has run its limit, it detonates automatically.

Darkness is closing in, as the Campbell nears her convoy again. This is the time that the subs are the most active, for they are hard to spot. A lookout reports: "A sub on the surface thirty degrees off the starboard bow!" Then, excitedly an-

other lookout reports: "Another sub on the surface thirty degrees off the port bow!" This U-boat was only a few yards away, and was desperately trying to get away. That is why Commander "Texas Jimmy" gleefully shouts, "Full speed ahead, and ram her!" (Remember that all ships are referred to as a female, never a he or it.) It certainly takes courage to ram a U-boat, knowing she is full of "TNT." Each torpedo is loaded with at least 800 lbs. of TNT. So if a sub had 10 torpedoes left, that amounts to 8,000 lbs of TNT!

As the Campbell neared the sub, her searchlights flooded the whole area. Several of the crew members were on the deck of the sub, but firing of the forward guns of the Campbell kept them from firing their deck gun. Then suddenly... Whamo! The USS Campbell rammed the Nazi U-boat! With a tremendous thud, there is the rending sound of tearing metal! Although it was only a glancing blow, the sub begins to sink, with a large hole ripped in her side. In all of this excitement, a Campbell sailor begins firing his machinegun into the conning tower and deck of the sub!



Rammed Nazi U-Boat

But he also shoots into the bridge of his own ship! The skipper is the only casualty of the entire battle. Fragments from the bridge bulkhead inflict several cuts on Commander Hirshfield's face and head! Soon his uniform is soaked with blood, but he refuses to leave his battle station.

The entire battle lasted

only a few minutes, as the rear guns of the Campbell opened fire. They pumped several rounds into the already crippled submarine.

At point-blank range, the sub shuddered under the impact. During the past twelve hours, the Campbell had depth-charged five Nazi U-boats. But they could not know if a single one had been sunk. At the sight of their tracer bullets slamming into this one, the Campbell's crew were over-joyed. And as the Nazi Raider began to go down by the tail, they shouted in victorious triumph. Their shouts were the sub's only requiem, for there are no tomb-

stones in the ocean. However, their joy is short lived, as a twelve foot gash is discovered in the Campbell's hull. It quickly floods the engine room, and leaves the warship completely helpless. This is in one of the most dangerous ocean areas of World War Two.

(Although, the ship was in no danger of sinking.) But, the Campbell was not left alone, a Polish destroyer, the Burza, dropped anchor nearby. The skipper of the Campbell, Commander "Texas Jimmy," transfers four officers and one hundred sailors of his crew onto the Burza. He figured that there was no point in all hands being jeopardized any farther.

Next, a small tug-boat arrived to tow the USS Campbell back to an allied harbor. It was a long, slow 800 mile trip that took 10 days, but the Campbell was saved to fight again.

Although the United States Coast Guard did lose five combat cutters: The USS Hamilton, USS Escanaba, USS Muskeget, USS Natset, and The USS Aca-cia, most people do not know of the heroic deeds of



USS Coast Guard Cutter Dropping Depth Charges

the United States Coast Guard during World War Two, for most of them have never been recorded at all. It is not a little "fly by night" outfit, but a large complex organization. It was started by Congress way back in 1790, with its own fleet of Coast Guard Cutters. It maintains an academy at New London, Connecticut, just like the United States Navy Academy at Annapolis, Maryland. The uniforms are the same, and the pay is also the same. It has performed various duties, especially during our amphibious invasions in the Pacific Islands. When our Army and Marine troops were landed, most of the boats were piloted by the Coast Guard. When ammunition, food, or other supplies were unloaded, most was done by the Coast Guard. When our wounded were evacuated, most was done by the Coast Guard. Sometimes, when an infantry unit was hard pressed, the Coast Guard fought in the trenches with them. Many pilots shot down in the ocean were rescued by the Coast Guard.

Perhaps the reason the services of the Coast Guard have not been recognized, is because it is ordinarily a peacetime force under the Treasury Department. It maintains light houses, buoys, fog signals, radio beacons, and rescues strays stranded in the water. It also watches for smugglers, whether they are smuggling booze or humans. But in time of war, the Coast Guard acts as part of the Navy, under the Secretary of the Navy.

Our Navy is traditionally a "blue-water" Navy, trained to meet and defeat our enemies on the high seas. It didn't have a "white-water" Navy, trained to handle small boats, and land them on the beaches. So, one of the first things the Navy did after Pearl Harbor, was to call on the Coast Guard. They needed sailors that could pilot the invasion landing crafts. Boats like the 36 foot Higgins Landing Craft, for landing troops, to the 370 ft LST (Landing Ship, Tank). The Navy developed twenty different types of these invasion craft that would run up on a beach, unload, and back off again. The Coast Guard supplied several thousand sailors to pilot these craft. They were called surf-men or invaders.

There was one sailor on-board a Coast Guard Cutter on the Greenland Ice Patrol that I always admired. His name was Boatswain Mate First Class Victor Mature, the Hollywood movie star. He was ordered to Washington, D.C. to participate in a war-bond selling campaign. When he arrived at the airport, an officer was there to meet him. As Victor got off the plane, the officer noticed



by Cecil Owen

that he was bareheaded. "Where is your hat?" the officer asked. "You cannot go around Washington without a hat, because that makes you out of uniform!" "You know what, Jack?" said Victor, calling the officer by his first name. (An enlisted sailor cannot call an officer by his first name.) "I cannot keep a hat to save my soul. The dames keep snatching them wherever I go! I have already lost thirty-seven hats that way!" "I don't care how you lost them," snapped the officer, "get a hat -- but quick!" "Now look," protested Victor, "I have been traveling for the last six or eight hours with "Russ" and he has not objected yet, so why should you?" The officer's jaw dropped as he looked in the direction of Mature's gesture toward "Russ." For "Russ" was Vice Admiral Russell Randolph Waesche, Commandant of the United States Coast Guard.

Victor Mature was 26 years old when he enlisted in July, 1942. He was discharged in November 1945, as a Chief Boatswain's Mate.

Just like all other branches of the service, the United States Coast Guard had a woman's auxiliary called "The Spars," derived from the Coast Guard's motto, "Semper paratus." Always ready!

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