

Y.M.S. 305

...memories of a special crew

September 1994

Captain's Log

From Boothbay Harbor to Normandy, and beyond

by Ralph Fiebach Jr.
Commanding Officer

Labor Day 1943: My wife, Roberta and I drive to Boothbay Harbor, Maine.

Traffic south was bumper to bumper, and traffic north

(going our way) was zero.

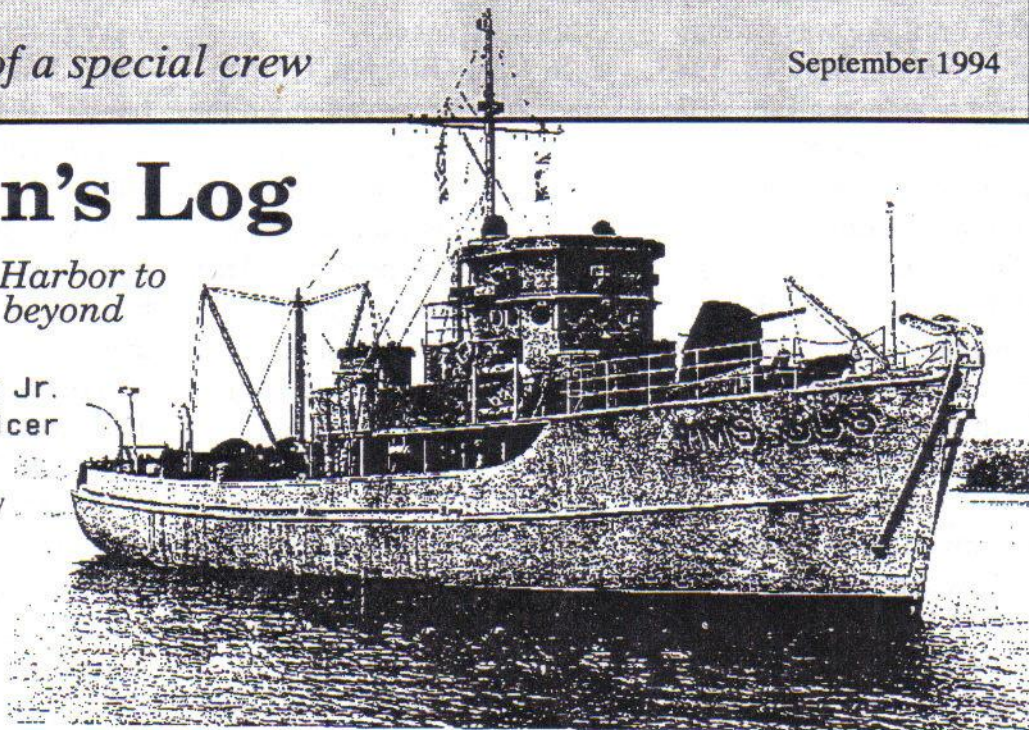
Arriving in Boothbay we found everything closed — not even a place to eat! We found an elderly widow lady who gave us a room, and we checked out the shipbuilding yard that had the Y.M.S. 305 under construction.

I contacted the Bureau of Personnel to send up about a dozen of the crew having the highest ratings to help outfit the ship. Jim Wills, the executive officer, arrived and I learned that he had planned to be married in Pittsburgh, Pa., but that his orders had caused cancellation of the big wedding. Our group organized wedding plans in Boothbay, decorated a small church, and

Jim and Marilynn had a wedding they couldn't possibly forget! My wife, who was quite pregnant at the time, was matron of honor.

Nov. 20, 1943: The ship was christened in a fine ceremony, slid into the water, and began the process of outfitting. Y.M.S. 305 was commissioned in the Boston Navy Yard Chelsea Annex. The ship was depermed and the degaussing coils were checked to reduce its magnetic signature, thereby protecting it from magnetic mines.

Dec. 4, 1943: We got under way to Little Creek, Va., the amphibious training facility.



Dec. 10, 1943: The Y.M.S. 305 ran the range in Chesapeake Bay to check its magnetic signature on various headings. In the bay, fairly close to us was a small aircraft carrier, on the deck of which some new naval pilots were practicing landings. We could hardly keep our minds on our own business because of our concern for the near-misses of several landings and take-offs.

Jan. 8, 1944: We sailed in heavy winter weather to Portland, Maine. We began entry to Portland around midnight in heavy seas and strong winds. pressure!

continued on page 12

Foreword

This book is a history of the Y.M.S. 305 from the time her keel was laid in April 1943 until she was decommissioned on May 18, 1945. It is a tribute to all the officers and men who served aboard her, and to our recollection this total was 48.

Of the many shipmates who helped acquire this information, one man stands out, and this man is Denny Gilchrist. He has spent countless hours writing letters, making phone calls and traveling to Washington, D.C., where he and Aubrey Gilman looked up records at the National Archives and Department of the Navy.

After the Y.M.S. 305 was turned over to the Norwegians, the majority of us

came home aboard a troop ship. After that we sort of drifted apart and lost contact with each other.

In 1991 Gilchrist, Gilman and John Brown attended the Mine Warfare convention in Norfolk, Va., and at that time decided to try and locate as many of us as possible. They got us together at the Mine Warfare Convention in Oklahoma City in the fall of 1992. Those of us who attended were Gilchrist and his wife, Pat, Paul Guglietti and wife Marilyn, Bill Reilly and wife Lula, Gilman and wife Geneva, Bob Reichenbaugh and wife Jean, Bill Becker and wife Ann, Ralph Fiebach and wife Roberta, Robert Haines, and Richard Watson.

Shipmates who attended our Mine Warfare convention in Phoenix, Ariz., in 1993 were Gilchrist, Gilman, Vince Woodard and Reichenbaugh. Plans for our convention in San Diego, Calif., in 1994 were being formulated at this writing, with hopes that shipmates who have not attended in the past would make an appearance so that we could once again reminisce about our time aboard the U.S.S. Y.M.S. 305.

I sincerely hope you and your family and friends will enjoy reading about your old buddies and shipmates who made history on the Y.M.S. 305.

Bob Reichenbaugh
"Rick"

Shipmates

*not located

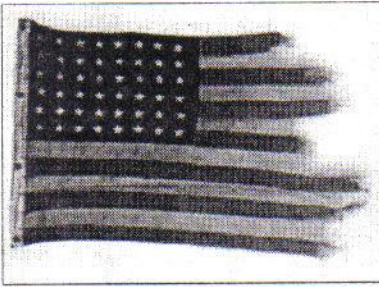
**deceased

*Robert Arnold
William Becker
**George Benett
**Edward Betsworth
**Herman Bradley
**John Brown
John Bucco
**George Burkhard
James Canis
Judson DeFoore
*Ralph Davis
*Joseph Dyer
*Calvin Evans

*Velva Ferguson
Ralph Fiebach
**Mark Fuller 5/17/92
**Bill Eliason
Dennis Gilchrist
Aubrey Gilman
Paul Guglietti
**Edwin Golden
**Joseph DeFiguiredo
Robert Haines
**Donald Haustein
**Clayton Higginbotham
Ralph Lehr
**Harold Little 5/3/92
**Robert Lovejoy
**Collie Kinkade
**Malcolm Jones
**Hugh McGinnis

Ireland Miller
**Harley Mintner
Leo Poole
*John Puchniak
**Kurt Pfister
Robert Reichenbaugh
William Reilly
**Lynn Roberts 1970
John Rojewski
**George Russo
Vincent Sullivan
William Shively
**Thomas Van Horn
Richard Watson
**James Webster
Vincent Woodard
**James D. Willis

History of the U.S.S. Y.M.S. 305



Original ship's flag

Built by Rice Bros. Corp., East Boothbay, Maine, she was a 350-ton wooden ship measuring 136 feet long by 18 feet beam.

- * Keel laid April, 1943
- * Launched Sept., 1943
- * Completed Nov., 1943
- * Commissioned Nov. 20, 1943

Vital Statistics:

Draft 7 feet 10 inches forward, 9 feet 2 inches aft

Main Engines:

Two G.M. 400 horsepower Diesel Direct Drive

Armaments:

One 3-inch 50, two 20mm, two 50 caliber, two Depth Charge Racks, two Depth Charge K-Guns, 32 Depth Charges

Compliment: 4 officers, 29 enlisted men

Allowance: 26 petty officers, 3 non-rated

Mascot: Alice, who served with dignity

Decommissioned: May 18, 1945. Turned over to the Norwegian Navy.



Vincent Sullivan, (left) and Leo Poole

"I was the dark-haired girl behind the little diner in East Boothbay the day that crew appeared, along with another girl, Pearle.

I well remember the day -- we were at a time when there was mixup with our ration coupons. We were having a hard time feeding these crews, but they came through with their coupons to tide us over until our account started. We were having to resort to seafood, some that was very unknown to many, such as clams, lobsters, etc. It didn't go over so well.

After all was said it was a great crew. I married your boatswain. We were married in Boston just a year after D-Day!

My dear is in a nursing home now, no memory of anything. I think of how much all these observances of that day would mean to him. Nothing touches him. He's lost the ability to communicate, he knows me, but that's about all. Alzheimer's Disease, such a cruel situation to be trapped in a body that was so vital! He's a retiree of Delta Airlines. We raised seven children. Now I'm surrounded by grandchildren -- 14 in all.

I hope the years have been good to you."

Sincerely,

*Avis Poole
(Mrs. Leo Poole)*

Life on the Y.M.S. 305 During the Invasion of France

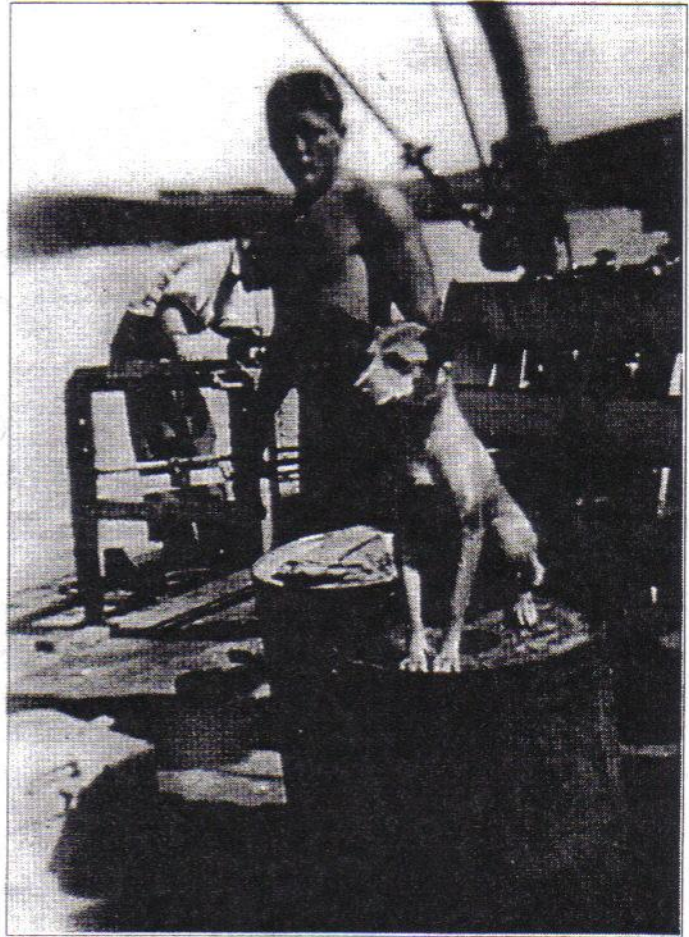
by S1C Aubrey L. Gilman

(The following was written by Gilman in 1944 shortly after the Normandy Invasion)

The Y.M.S.s were the least known ships of the Navy until the invasion of France came. I'm telling of a certain Y.M.S. 305 made up of 31 enlisted men and four officers. The crew itself is one of the rarest I have ever seen or heard of. They meet all the qualifications of their respective rates and better. They all have an unusual sense of humor, and would give you the shirt off their backs.

The fourth of June the Captain called us all in to give us a pep talk and discuss other matters, which included a forewarning of the possible phase of gas attacks. He told us what effects gas would have on a person, such as blistering and turning the flesh red. Then he asked if there were any more questions. The Stewards Mate, Calvin Evans, a colored man, said "Captain, what color would I turn?" Everybody had a big laugh over that.

We started across (the En-



Gilman and Alice, the ship's mascot

glish Channel), but due to bad weather conditions it was delayed for 24 hours. We cruised around for the required length of time, then started across. On our way we could see the bombing and firing as our airborne troops went in and did a swell job.

It was now the night of June 5, the eve of D-Day. We, the third of the minesweepers, went in close to the beach and streamed our gear at 0125 of June 6. It was really dark, but you could see the beach very well. It wasn't that you were scared, but excited, waiting for something to happen, as any

and everything was expected. We were determined to do a good job as everything depended upon doing just that.

We made our first sweep with the starboard gear streamed, sweeping "O" type, and recovered to stream the port gear so as to make a sweep closer to the beach. When almost completing our sweep, the dawn broke the darkness, revealing our position to the shore batteries, which immediately commenced firing. We had started to recover our port gear to proceed to drop anchor;

continued on page 5

from page 4

the shells were flying all around and close to us. Our ship was in line with the British cruiser, *Black Prince*, and the shore batteries. The near misses on the cruiser were almost direct hits on us. Our Boatswain's mate, Leo Poole, was on the fan-tail along with a few of the crew working to recover the gear, when the first shell burst close to us. He remarked, "Who let that crazy son-of-a-bitch have a gun." It was said at just the right time as it produced a round of laughter. We saw a Spitfire laying a smoke-screen to protect us get shot down, but it didn't faze the other pilots a bit as another came right out to continue the laying of the smoke screen.

We then cleared out to make room for the others to do their part. When we had almost reached our anchorage a mine was sighted and our ship was called upon to dispose of it. We had quite a time as it was the first opportunity to fire our guns since D-Day began. We finally sank the mine and proceeded to anchorage. We ate a good chow and prepared for the sweep that was to come at 1300 that afternoon.

Then we went back into the part where all the activities were in full swing. We swept for most of the evening. Most of the mines were of the magnetic and acoustic type, so we had to alternate our type of

sweep. We secured from sweeping on the first day at about 2000 hours, however, as night came on more excitement was in store for us. Soon after anchoring for the night, a few enemy planes came over to avenge the invasion and destroy what they could. The clouds were low and the planes were forced to come in at a low altitude to find their targets.

what type of gun that was used on us was never known, but the Square Heads waited until the first two ships came in to make the turn to go back out; our position was broad-side to the shore when they started firing. There were two fellows on the bow talking about "what a nice peaceful looking place" and wishing they could make a liberty there. The words had

One fellow, the yeoman, was taking a shower while all the excitement was going on, unaware of the danger.

Attempts were made on the U.S.S. ARKANSAS, one of our oldest battleships, but no hits or near misses were scored. When one of the planes swooped down unusually close all the ships fired on it without any success. One of these planes made several calls the following nights and became known to the crew as "Washing Machine Charlie" because of the sound of the plane's motor.

The third day was spent in routine sweeping and more mines were disposed of. The fourth day, however, brought about an unusual bit of excitement. We and five other YMSs were to sweep down by a place called St. Vass, which was supposed to be clear of German forces, but later proved to have a few left. We were sweeping in a group of two each, and a column of three. The truth of

hardly left their lips when the first shot was fired. Upon seeing the flash, one of the boys told the other to hit the deck. At the same time the cook was looking out of the galley door, and made the remark, "somebody fired at us."

The fellows at the chow tables jumped over the tables and were at their gun stations before "GQ" could be sounded. One fellow, the yeoman, was taking a shower while all the excitement was going on, unaware of the danger. He saw everybody running about the deck and grabbed up a jacket and a pair of dungarees and hit the deck bare ass, running to his station. Two of the machinist mates, Betsworth and Jones, were on the fantail razzing the

Continued on page 6

Christmas?

On Christmas Eve in 1944 our Y.M.S. 305 was tied up at the docks in Cherbourg, France. It being Christmas Eve, our spirits were none too high and we were destined to have them lowered some more. We suddenly got orders to get underway and were told we were going to pick up survivors. A troop ship carrying 2,200 American service men had been sunk (supposedly by a German sub). A Destroyer escort was said to have come alongside and taken more than a thousand men aboard (all she could carry) before the troop ship went down. When we

arrived on the site we saw bodies everywhere in the water. The troops had been in full gear (Garrison belts and overcoats) as they were prepared to leave ship as soon as it docked. Those that ended up in the water had hardly a chance as cold as it was. We found no survivors but pulled as many bodies as we could from the water using boat hooks. Our decks were loaded with bodies (even had one on the galley table). I'm sure everyone who was aboard that evening will never forget it. That was a less than happy and cheerful Christmas.

Bob Reichenbaugh "Rick"

Gilman

from page 5

marksmanship of the Square Heads until one shell burst was too close for comfort. They then hit the deck. The boatswain and I were on the port-side ready to fire the 3" / 50. We were about only two feet from where the shell burst. That was too close for comfort. I had another shell ready to shove into our gun. Meanwhile, the cruisers, upon seeing the shore battery fire at us, started firing back at the shore battery. The shore battery was then soon silenced. We had just about finished our sweep by then, so we secured to look over the ship for damage.

On the fifth or sixth day, an unexpected demonstration of the destructive power of these mines we were sweeping was quite suddenly displayed in a few short minutes. We had just finished sweeping and had secured the gear when there was a hell of an explosion. It was a mine exploding off our port bow. The mine was exploded by a British sweep by direct contact or some other means other than usual methods, because the British sweep sank immediately.

We went in to pick the survivors up, but the other British sweepers got there sooner than we. The British sweeper lost two men that were trapped below. Seeing everyone was taken care of we proceeded to anchorage. Later in the evening we were called upon to salvage the

magnetic tail of the sunken sweep. A magnetic tail is sixteen hundred and eighty feet long. It had to be pulled in by hand and flaked down the full length of our main deck. The job took us way into the night to complete. The next day was spent transferring it onto a British sweep that had its magnetic tail cut off by a PT boat.

The higher-ups figured our chances of getting through the D-Day sweep were so slim that they had six extra sweeps standing by to be ready to replace any of us that were lost. It was said that we left the scene of the invasion after sweeping the first day. Well, if our group left the area after the first day, we were fools for hanging around until the 17th of June. We were then relieved to return to the mainland to pick up stores and other needed gear. The relief was also needed for a little recreation for the crew and officers.

How the Y.M.S. 379 could get an individual write up when she was only a spare ship in our group to be used in case of a breakdown was something we could not quite figure out. The crew of the Y.M.S. 305 has its time of bitching, but all in all they love their ship and especially their buddies. We would all like to know what is to become of these sweeps when the work is cleaned up so the British can handle it. Will they be given to some foreign power to do their own sweeping, or will we do it?

Bits and Pieces

Storm

Even after 50 years I remember a little about the storm we were in while crossing the Atlantic to England. No one was allowed out on deck for fear of being swept overboard. It was bad. One time we would be in a trough between two waves and it looked like the crests were twenty feet above us, then the next moment we would be up on the crest looking down. I can't remember what we ate, if anything. I'm sure the cooks couldn't do any cooking for a couple of days. I can't remember if I was seasick or not. Probably was. That was the worst storm I ever experienced. Not long after that we reached the Azore Islands and stayed there for two days. I was always thankful that our engines didn't die during that storm or that would have been the end of us.

Bill Becker

Bottles? What Bottles?

The Y.M.S. 305 got underway to England on April 3, 1944, along with several other Minesweepers and a large convoy of 200 ships. This was a twelve-knot convoy and our top speed was approximately 14 knots, so you know we were hard pressed to keep up. We hit a bad storm beginning April 13 and we finally left the convoy and hobbled into the Azore Islands along with the other sweepers.

The storm we went through had waves so high that the ship ahead of us would climb the crest of a wave and you could view both propellers completely out of water. The next moment the ship would completely disappear. We didn't tie up at the Azores, but anchored in the harbor. We weren't allowed to go ashore, but the bum boats 'soon found us. They sold us some pretty potent wine (we later found out) at a dollar a bottle.

Our skipper didn't allow us to buy, but of course, what he didn't know was that about 50 bottles were slipped through the -hawser openings in the gun-wales. The bottles included what



Some of the crew: Poole, Bradley, Mintner, Kincaid, Canis, Guglietti, Watson, Reichenbaugh and Eliason.

two of our Gentlemen officers asked us to buy for them, with strict orders not to dare open any of it until we reached England. As the bottles came aboard they were immediately hidden. A good spot to conceal them was in the high rubber boats which hung on the walls in the Forecastle. All of that booze on board was too much of a temptation, so some of us decided to sample it. A few of us hit it a little too hard and became (I hate to say inebriated) but at any rate we were pretty high. Somehow the skipper found out and ordered "Boats" to keep us busy, so "Boats" told us to hose down the deck with the salt water hose. We started to do so and as I was handling the base the skipper stepped out the wardroom door and got slightly damp. This little incident was one of many that we look back on and smile about. Incidentally, at the time I was Seaman 2nd Class, and when we reached England the skipper promoted me to Seaman 1st Class. So there were no hard feelings (or Captain's Mast).

Bob Reichenbaugh "Rick"

continued on page 8

Bits and Pieces

Snacks

The fact that we had no bread aboard the Y.M.S. 305 was something that we had to contend with as we had no facilities to make same. Occasionally we would cross paths or come in contact with a larger naval vessel and we would take on bread and fresh eggs. It was usually a case of eggs and a couple of burlap sacks of bread. I recall being in the galley at night after taking on these items and there were many egg sandwiches being devoured. What a treat. And it was no problem with the cook, so long as we cleaned up the mess we made there.

Bob Reichenbaugh "Rick"

Caught Between a Dock and a Hard Place

A humorous event took place one evening after dark. I don't remember where we were tied up but I was on generator watch and the hatch was open to top side. I heard the deck watch holler "man overboard," I grabbed a hand lantern and ran up the ladder to topside. I shined the light down between the two ships and there was jonesy hanging onto a life ring and hollering "Get me out of here." I guess he was coming down between the ships. He was a big guy and I can't remember how we got him back on board. Jones didn't have much hair (fact is he was bald) and we called him "skin head." A lovable guy and we were all happy for him when he made Chief M/mate.

Bill Becker

Captured Booty

Sometime after the invasion of Normandy, France, we on the Y.M.S. 305 were operating out of Brest, France. As you know this was the

home port of the German subs. We had some free time on our hands and we done a good bit of exploring when we went ashore. There were large caves built into the hillsides which the Germans used to store their torpedoes. As we roamed through these caves we were astounded to find the floors covered with guns, mostly German 8mm's. There were thousands of them as much as two feet thick in some places. We brought a good many of them aboard ship and under the supervision of the Gunnery Officer and Gunners Mates we test shot them with a rig of some sort and a string attached to the trigger. If they fired OK we were permitted to keep them. If we wished to ship them home we had to unscrew the barrels, because the length of a box was limited to 32 inches. I sent three home and still have mine. When German troops were rounded up and captured their rifles were loaded onto trucks and hauled to the caves.

Bob Reichenbaugh "Rick"

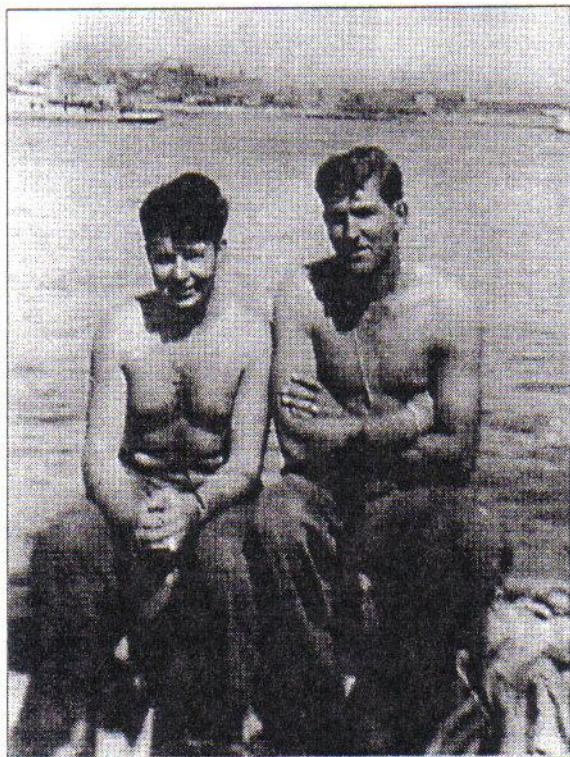
Scraping the Bottom

When we were alongside Baltic Wharf in Plymouth, England on June 23, 1944, the tide receded and we found ourselves in less than six feet of water. The captain had been assured by the port authorities that there would be sufficient depth for our draft. The ship began to list and we doubled and tripled all lines with all available line. Then, we all stood on the dock and watched and waited. Fortunately, the lines held and the returning tide re-floated our ship. As we started to change our location, one screw was fouled. An examination revealed that a barrage balloon which had been lying on the bottom was the culprit. Who ever heard of fouling a ship's propeller in a barrage balloon.

Denny Gilchrist

continued on page 9

Bits and Pieces



Guglietti and Reichenbaugh

Woody

This is a story about Woody. I think Van Horn was on watch but anyhow Woody came back aboard drunk and needed help to get down below to his bunk. He slept on the top tier and couldn't get up there himself so Van Horn and I lifted him up into his bunk and covered him up with a blanket. Old Woody was shaking all over like he had the DTs. I remember Van Horn or Doc as we called him laughing so hard and making his funny remarks.

Bill Becker

Depth Charges

I remember a time when we were on Shakedown cruise that we made a practice run with real live depth charges. I was on one rack on the fan tail and Eliason was on the other rack. When the lever was operated one charge was supposed to

roll off the end of the rack into the sea. Well, the first one rolled down and dropped like it was supposed to but the next one rolled part way and jammed. I panicked as I forgot they would not explode until they went down to the depth they were set for. Anyway I started screaming for Eliason to help me as I thought the whole fantail was about to be blown off but guess what — Eliason had the same problem. Somehow he got me calmed down and we got things straightened out. Dumb green kid.

Bill Becker

The Shirt Off His Back

The crew was allowed a 72-hour pass to Paris (one at a time) and the travel was by train. It was quite hilarious when our Boatswain Mate 2nd Class came back from his 72-hour pass. He came across the gang plank wearing nothing but his pants and T-shirt. Seems he ran a little short of money so he sold most of the clothes from his back and shoes for French Francs.

Bob Reichenbaugh "Rick"

Tipsy

One time we were in a floating dry dock in Cherbourg, having our propellers repaired. When the work was all done they started letting the water into the tanks of the dry dock and one side was sinking faster than the other. Some guy on the repair crew risked his life to open a valve to level us off again, otherwise we would have capsized.

Bill Becker

continued on page 10

A Cook's memories

by Bob Haines

As I recall I joined the ship in the Boston Navy Yard, Chelsea Annex. It had just arrived from Boothbay Harbor, Maine. I was just a very young seaman Second Class. After working the deck for a few weeks I decided it was warmer in the galley. I asked for permission to strike for ship's cook. Permission was granted. This started my career in food service and it has never

ended. That move got me started in a career that has led to four published books, a 32-year teaching career and work in some of the finest food service establishments in the Ohio-Kentucky area.

There are a number of incidents I remember, but I will only touch on the ones that I think were unusual or funny. At the time I suppose these were very serious events.

continued on page 11

Bits and Pieces

from page 9

French Roasted

Those times after the war in Europe was winding down got to be somewhat monotonous for us as our routine was always the same. Go out and sweep for mines, and come in and tie up. We spent a good deal of time ashore and we were always on the lookout for souvenirs to bring home. Everyone was trying to obtain a German Luger or P-38 pistol. The French people of course needed everything, but coffee was really in demand. We had very few items to barter with but we devised a sort of underhanded scheme to do so. We saved all of the coffee grounds we could and spread them out to dry. Then we would mix a little bit of coffee with them. I traded five pounds of those grounds for a 7.65 mm automatic pistol. As I remember there was only one P-38 or Luger gotten, and that was obtained by Leo Poole.

Bob Reichenbaugh "Rick"

Where's My Cap?

One of our trips to Brest, we were moored to a buoy in the south end of the harbor nested to another Y.M.S. A terrible storm came up and our mooring lines parted and we had to get under-

way in a hurry. I was C.O. and rushed to the bridge. As I did so my cap blew away. It was a favorite cap (well-worn and seagoing) and its loss distracted me (I assume). Anyway I ordered course 180. After a couple of minutes, the Quartermaster said "Captain, we are headed toward the beach." We turned north immediately and rode out the storm. The other good news was that my cap turned up in the starboard 20mm mount.

Denny Gilchrist

Close Call

On "D" Day we were sweeping in toward the beach. I was standing on deck near the main engine room hatch listening to a couple of older guys as they watched shells from a German gun on the beach falling near another sweep some distance away. These guys were saying "he has him bracketed now and the next one will be right on." but the next one hit the water very close to our bow and putting some shrapnel into our side. Every one hit the deck at the sound of the explosion. No harm done, but it sure scared everyone and the Captain lost no time in changing course 180 degrees back to sea. That was the closest call I can remember.

Bill Becker

A Cook's memories

from page 10

Vincent Sullivan would drink a lot of beer when he went on liberty. One night he drank an excessive amount. He slept in a top bunk above Mintner (the electrician). This particular night he urinated in bed. This strange smelling liquid soaked Mintner and his bunk. If you remember Mintner could be pretty hot-headed. In the morning he was furious, but couldn't do much about it because Sullivan, the old St. Louis cop, was much bigger than him.

One morning I was on breakfast duty in the galley. I put a sheet pan of bacon in the oven, but I forgot to lock the oven door. We hit a very rough sea. The oven door flew open and out came the pan of bacon. The grease coated the galley floor. As the shipmates came up the ladder from our sleeping quarters, still half asleep, they hit that greasy deck and flew from one end of the galley to the other, hitting the bulkhead with a thud. It resembled a pinball game. I had to hide out for half a day or I might not be here today.

One day, after the invasion, we were sweeping south of Cherbourg, France, very close to the coast. A German gun crew was still active, although the troops were further up the line. They opened fire on us. We tried to run out to sea, but one of the 88 shells scraped our bow. Miller, our yeoman, was in the head taking a shower. He came running out on deck bare ass, quite shook up. First time I ever saw a bare-ass yeoman. Come to think of it, I haven't seen one since.

I also remember the time we tied up next to a French ship. We traded our jackets and other apparel for their wine. Needless to say, we all got drunk. Brown got so drunk he started throwing my pots and pans over the side. This was about the time Woodard was experimenting

with raisin jack and Poole was cutting his grapefruit juice with Doc's rubbing alcohol.

According to the notes from the smooth deck log, sent to me by Dennis Gilchrist, I was transferred from the ship on Dec. 12, 1944. This transfer came about because we had too many cooks on board, Mark Fuller and I both wanted the transfer, even though the orders read, report to Camp Elliot, San Diego, Calif., for duty beyond the continent of the U.S. It was decided by Mr. Wills that we would flip a coin. The winner would get his choice of staying on board and making first class ships cook or taking the transfer. I won and took the transfer, hoping I could get home for a while before reporting to Camp Elliot. I got delayed orders in New York and was able to get home for about 20 days. Eventually I ended up on Okinawa, which was pretty sad duty. Fuller stayed on board and became the only cook. I can't help but think this may be the reason so many of our shipmates died young, including Fuller.

We went ashore one day, I believe it was near Brest, France. We were the first sailors ashore in that area. How many went I don't remember. We went to the local school and passed out candy. We traded the usual items to the local citizens for some white lightning. Needless to say we got drunk. We were all supposed to be at the dock at a certain time. Mr. Wills was going to bring in the wherry to pick us up and take us back to the ship, which was anchored out in the harbor. I had a few problems in the town and didn't get back to the dock in time, so they left without me. If it wasn't for Mr. Wills, who was a grand person, I may still be there among a number of French-American children. Yes, Mr. Wills made a special trip, he came back to get me.

Bob Haines

Captain's Log

from page 1

There were no navigational lights due to blackout conditions, and the coast is a clutter of high rock formations. It was a long approach. I remember it today with elevating blood pressure!

Jan. 14, 1944: Portland is near Cosco Bay which was a submarine training base. Since we were outfitted with gear to track and destroy subs, we spent some time in the bay making practice runs on submerged subs. We would make an underwater signal when we would have fired depth charges, and they would send up a buoy if we had "made a kill." The crew did its usual fine job.

Jan. 16, 1944: (In Boston) After one day's exercises, we came back with a very heavy coat of ice on everything. As we prepared to dock, the steering cable to the rudders broke. The ship was equipped with emergency gear, but it could not be utilized because of the thick ice. The bay was jammed with large ships at anchor, and we spent nearly an hour trying to maneuver with the engines to avoid a collision in the strong winds and fast-running tide. A tug finally came to our rescue and took us to our berth at the section base.

March 17, 1944: My son, Gary Ralph Fiebach, was born at the

Chelsea Naval Hospital in a Boston suburb. The crew nicknamed him "Skipper," a name which he carried through some 15 years of his early life.

April 3, 1944: We sailed from Norfolk, Va., as part of a huge convoy, bound for the war zone. Our destination was Falmouth, England, by way of the Azores. At mid-day each ship would take a sextant sight on the sun, from which a determination could be made of our position. Despite the fact that there were many larger ships involved, we wanted to be the first to run up our flag hoist indicating that we were fast and had confidence in our calculation. We usually were first!! I mention this to indicate the high level of morale and the positive attitude that prevailed.

April 13, 1944: Our first land fall was the Azores, where the convoy was to divide — part going into the Mediterranean Sea, and the other part to the English Channel. We were a few hours away in the late afternoon so the convoy would arrive in the middle of the night. The main convoy was ordered to stay underway all night. Due to the heavy seas, the Y.M.S. 358 was taking on water, and we received orders to escort her into Horta in the Azores. We broke off from the convoy and headed for the harbor, arriving around 10 p.m.

The harbor nets were closed, so the two Y.M.S.s found a protected location off Horta and anchored for the night. We tied up in Horta the next morning. Since I was the senior officer of the two ships, I made a trip to pay respects to the American Consulate in Horta. The Y.M.S. 358 was able to make repairs. The Azores were neutral in this war, and it was interesting to learn that while our convoy was on one side of the island, German subs were refueling on the other side.

April 24, 1944: We arrived at Falmouth, England. There was some activity of German aircraft, so we had to stay awake until 1 a.m. since it did not get dark until then.

April 28, 1944: Sailed into Plymouth and nested with other Y.M.S.s to a mooring buoy in the Lamar River. Had many exercises over the next several days to prepare for the invasion.

During my briefing of the crew for our part in Operation OVERLORD, I was explaining about the possibility of gas attacks, and its effect on the skin, turning it pink. One of the black mess attendants interrupted with, "Scuse me, captain, what color does I look for?"

June 4, 1944: (Operation OVERLORD) Since we were

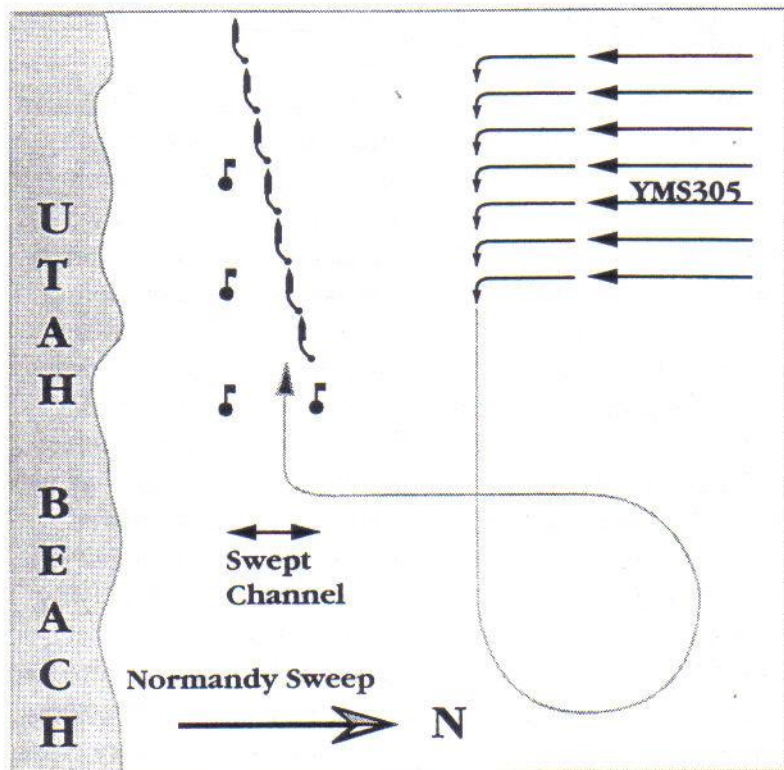
continued on page 13

from page 12

due on the beaches of Normandy just before midnight of the day of the landings, we were well up front in the convoy of ships moving along the English coast. As we moved along we were being joined by other units which had been based in other harbors. Passing the Isle of Wight we turned south with the Utah beaches directly ahead. We were all equipped with belt knives, and in the excitement, a big mess attendant, who was engaged in horseplay with someone, got a bad slash along his second finger. He had tremendous, "meaty" fingers. The pharmacist mate and I both tried to sew up the wound without success. We managed to close it with tape, bandage it, and it later healed without infection.

Shortly after this incident, we received orders to reverse course, and head back to Plymouth. The invasion had been postponed for 24 hours due to extremely bad weather. We were sure that all the Germans would get the news and be waiting for us upon our return.

We reached Plymouth just in time to turn about and start the operation all over again. A few miles off the Utah Beach, the Y.M.S.s streamed their magnetic gear, took station abreast of one another and began an exploratory sweep to the beach. No action yet from the enemy. (See sketch of the formations of



the ships, above.)

A few thousand yards from the beach all sweepers turned to port in single file, retrieved magnetic gear and streamed the moored sweep gear (orepesa) to the starboard side only. Turning in a wide circle away from the beach we finished the equipment changes. We then headed back toward the beach and formed an echelon formation, — with the lead ship and the last ship dropping buoys.

These buoys held flags which marked the bombardment channel for our destroyers which would arrive at daybreak.

Overhead, though not visible to us, the sky was full of tow planes and gliders full of troops. German tracer fire was everywhere. As the tow planes returned, they were at tree-top

altitude. We could nearly touch them as they roared by.

As we were swinging parallel to the beach, the enemy began firing star shells, lighting the area like a movie set — and we were only a thousand yards away. Fortunately they didn't want to waste ammunition on us. We swept a marked channel along the beach and just at daybreak with some light firing from the beach, an Air Force A-26 swooped down, laying a smoke screen. He was almost immediately hit and cartwheeled to a fiery, watery grave. A second A-26 quickly picked up the task — much to our comfort. By this time, we had progressed west to near the Cherbourg Peninsula. The cruisers and battleships were in

continued on page 14

Captain's Log

from page 15

the area, and heavy shelling began. We had finished our first major task and began retrieving our sweep gear, when an English Cruiser (*Black Prince*) nearby began a dual with heavy batteries on the Cherbourg Peninsula. First her shells whistled overhead, and about 15 seconds later the German shells screamed overhead. The crew established a new record for getting the gear aboard so we could get out of the way. At this point it was mostly thick smoke and thunderous noise.

June 7, 1944: The next day's operation had our sweep group sweeping where mines were anticipated. A mine was spotted on the surface some distance away, and we were ordered to sink it with gunfire. After firing several rounds, we were approached by one of our destroyers which sent the following blinker light message "Are you engaging the enemy?" I recognized the destroyer as the one having the famous movie star, Robert Montgomery, as its captain. My reply was "Negative, but you are standing in a heavily-mined area." With that, the black smoke poured from his engine stacks as he went astern and backed out where he had come in.

June 9, 1944: Upon taking Utah Beach, the Allied forces moved west across the Cherbourg

Peninsula, cutting off German forces and preventing their retreat. Those forces were left there for a time, which we did not know. On approximately this date we were sweeping close to the beach. It was a clear, warm day, and as we turned back away from the beach, there were explosions around or ships. Since we were towing sweep gear, it was impossible to make a fast exit, so our escape was strictly by evasive turning. It has been assumed that we were attacked by German tanks on the shore. One shell exploded very close to our port bow, throwing water and shrapnel all over the forward sections of the ship. The blast opened up the seams of this wooden vessel and the forward magazine took on four to five feet of water. This was a very close call. This action was written into the book "The Most Dangerous Sea" by Commander Arnold Lott. Fortunately the seams swelled shut, and after a few hours we were able to pump the water out.

June 23, 1944: We returned to Plymouth and were ordered to tie up to a wharf new to us. Checking our charts, we had concern about the depth of the water at low tide. I checked with the English officer in charge about our concern. He proceeded to "dress me down" for questioning the berth assignment. Later the crew was

given liberty, leaving only a few men aboard. About noon we felt a bump and knew immediately what had happened. We were aground, and the ship began to list.

The wharf was at the edge of a park surrounded by fairly large trees. We broke out every hawser aboard, wrapped them around the trees, and secured them to anything substantial on deck. I'm sure this was a sight that no one in the English navy, with all its tradition, had ever seen. This episode lasted until the tide came in, which was several hours. What I had to say to that English duty officer would have been unprintable — even in a pirate's log.

The next several weeks were filled with various activities along the Normandy beaches, and then on August 27, 1944, I was relieved of command of the Y.M.S. 305 by C.D. Gilchrist. I went aboard the U.S.S. Chimo as flag officer of the Y.M.S. squadron, responsible for the operations of the sweepers along the French coast.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I have been extremely proud of our performance in all operations as described above. This is entirely due to the competence and dedication of the great crew of the Y.M.S. 305.

*Ralph Fiebach, Jr.
Commanding Officer*