

**U.S.S. SAVAGE**  
**RADAR PICKET**  
**DESTROYER ESCORT**

**DER - 386 - U.S.N.**

Author

BRUCE KEENER, III  
RADM,USN (Ret.)

21 Maria Place  
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082  
23 May 1991

Dear Rollins,

After much agonizing, I have finally had to face up to the reality that there is really no way I can make the USS SAVAGE reunion next week. The time, unfortunately, just doesn't work out for me, and so -- much as I wish it could be otherwise -- I'll just have to settle for being with you in spirit. And I promise you, I WILL do that.

Some time ago, you mentioned that, if I could not attend, you would appreciate my sending along any information about my days sailing in SAVAGE when she was a DER. This I am happy to do, but I warn you that I will run out of time and energy tonight before I run out of sea stories. If this letter turns out to be too long for you to cover during the reunion, feel free to Xerox it and pass out copies to the attendees.

I joined SAVAGE on June 24 in her new homeport of Seattle, Washington, and was detached on June 24, 1958, also in Seattle (at that time, two years of sea duty in the grade of LI were required before you could be promoted to LCDR. Inasmuch as all my previous three years as a LT had been spent at the Naval Postgraduate School studying electronics, BuPers advised me that I had better spend two years to the day in SAVAGE. I was happy to comply). Throughout my time on board, she was a unit of Escort Squadron FIVE (CORTON FIVE), along with FALGOUT, LOWE, HAVERFIELD, KOINER and WILHOIIE. Near the end of my tour, FINCH, FORSTER and VANCE joined the squadron, and about a year later the whole squadron was moved from Seattle to Pearl Harbor.

Our mission was to function as the seaward extension of the DEW line, manning radar picket stations 250 -300 miles off the coasts of Washington and Oregon, and passing track information on all air contacts to a NORAD regional control center at McCord Air Force Base. The stations off the California coast were normally manned by YAGR's (converted Liberty ships) operating out of San Francisco, but on a couple of occasions we filled in their northern station, reporting to Hamilton AFB.

The duty was pleasant in summer, but hell in winter, riding out the fronts that came roaring across the Pacific from Siberia. Also, it was the only sea duty that I have known in which the schedule was absolutely predictable. When the annual OpSked was published, you could make firm plans for the rest of the year. It was GREAT, so much so that every ship lived in dread of suffering a casualty that would break the chain, and did everything possible to make sure that it didn't happen. One ship did have to come off station early (of which more later), but it was only by a matter of a couple of days, so her relief's sailing

was just moved up a day. Even so, the ship that had to come home early never lived it down.

A few odds and ends about the conversion, and the ship itself. As most everyone probably knows, a new aluminum superstructure was installed, which included plating in the main deck amidships, similar to an APD conversion, except that in the DER conversion the mess deck, scullery, sick bay and CPO lounge were on the starboard side, and two berthing compartments were on the port side. Invariably, the latter were assigned to the engineers, because scuttles to the main spaces were located in them. CIC was located on the second deck forward, basically where the mess deck used to be. Aft on the 01 Deck was a new deckhouse containing electronics for the AN/SPS-8B height-finding radar and the Tacan, a 20mm clipping room, and a balloon hut for inflating and rigging weather balloons (our secondary mission was assisting air navigation). The CO's cabin and the sonar shack were both on the 02 level, just aft of the pilot house, and just below on the 01 level were Radio Central and the Ship's Office.

The ship's complement of 12 officers and 165 enlisted was, from my viewpoint, just about ideal from every aspect of a sailor's or a naval officer's life. The ship was large enough to have state-of-the-art equipments to perform diversified primary and secondary missions, and skilled personnel to operate and maintain those equipments. But at the same time it was small enough so that everyone onboard could rapidly acquire skills and responsibilities important, even vital, to the ship's performance, and so derive pride not only in his personal achievements, but also in his contributions to the ship's performance as a unit. We don't have any such ships today, and the U. S. Navy is the poorer for that fact.

Sea stories!! I've got about a million of them, but will try to hit just the highlights. Think I'll start with our port visit to the little logging town of South Bend, Washington, not too long after I reported on board. Two, no three, things stand out in my mind. First, the ship was open for general visiting on both Saturday and Sunday, and every male - man or boy - who came onboard was wearing logger's caulk boots. It is hard to exaggerate the damage those boots can do to freshly painted steel and (especially) aluminum decks. I thought our leading boatswain's mate, an absolutely marvelous first class named Van Scyock ("Van Sike") was going to die of apoplexy. In my first real test as XO, I had to order the Gunnery Officer, the First Lieutenant and BM1 Van Scyock to dismiss any thoughts of posting "No Caulk Boots" signs at the brow, or demanding that such boots be checked at the gangway.

The next crisis was the discovery of a boy, somewhere around 8 to 10 years old, halfway up the foremast, with the HF radio transmitters still active, and two of his playmates hot on his heels. After we got them safely down, I ordered the OOD to secure both masts, and he did so with a vengeance. On my turn

around the ship next morning, I discovered that 3/4" plywood ratguards, at least six feet in diameter and reinforced with angle iron, had been securely fastened on each mast. Furthermore, each was carefully painted a regulation haze gray. They stayed up until the morning we sailed

The third event burned in my memory at South Bend was that SAVAGE, for the first and only time in my two years in her, ran out of starting air. Of the all the ships in CORTON FIVE, SAVAGE was the only one whose torpedo-charging flasks had not been removed during conversion. Consequently, we routinely carried those big bottles filled to 3500 psi, fed in turn through HP reducers and check valves into the starting-air system. But, on our arrival in South Bend and wishing to turn head-to-sea to facilitate our later departure, we were defeated by a pilot who, familiar only with big, single-screw lumber carriers, didn't have a clue how to turn a twin-screw ship in the Willapa River. Instead of, "Port ahead one-third, starboard back one-third, right full rudder", and in blissful disregard of the CO's increasingly vocal entreaties, he stayed firmly with the only game in which he had confidence:

'Right full rudder. All engines ahead full." "All engines stop."

"Left full rudder. All engines back full." "All engines stop."

"Right full rudder. All engines ahead full." "All engines stop."

etc.

etc.

After some 15 -20 of the above cycles (I used to know the exact number, but age has dimmed that light bulb), we ran out of starting air just as number one line got secured to the pier. A providential flood tide got the rest of the ship safely alongside, but the air compressors were running long after the main engines had been secured.

A great port visit, from both the ship's and the town's perspective, as illustrated by the fact that the town drunk (honest to God) cast off number one line when we sailed early Monday morning. This prompted other townspeople on the pier to loudly observe that (1) they had never before seen him awake that early, and (2) the only reason he didn't follow the line into the water (and he almost did) was that he was uncharacteristically sober.

As I mentioned earlier, our patrol stations were some 250-300 miles off the Washington and Oregon coasts, which put us fairly in the middle of the migratory whale routes each spring. Entire pickets (i.e. 2-3 week on-station cruises) would pass when we would seldom be out of sight of whales, traveling either as pods of a dozen or so down to individual families of two or three. Usually they ignored us, often it seemed at their own peril. In good weather, we usually steamed at 1/3 speed on one screw, which gave us a speed of 5 knots, and it was not unusual for whales traveling on the surface to get within 100 feet or so of our beam before sounding with a disdainful wave of their flukes. In fact, one big fellow bore in so close before diving that the OOD sounded collision quarters, and both the CO and I supported his decision to do so.

This Russian roulette had its tragic consequences, however, because one calm day, when surrounded by 50-100 whales, we felt a slight jar, and a small whale 15'-20' long surfaced astern. We lighted off the other shaft and came around to witness a sight I shall never forget, and hope never to see again. Our screw had sliced off 3/4 of the fluke of a baby whale, and two mature whales (presumably the mother and father) were swimming alongside to support the baby, which was thrashing the water with the pitiful remnants of its fluke, from which were pouring great gouts of blood. About 5 minutes of that was all we could take and, realizing there was nothing useful we could do, we steamed off to let the tragedy play out in privacy.

Another experience with whales was sighting the carcass of an enormous dead whale, close to 100 feet long, which we lay right alongside on two successive days as we steamed to and fro to remain within the boundaries of our picket station. The carcass had attracted dozens of sharks, who launched themselves 2/3 of the way out of the water to fasten their jaws on the carcass, then whipped their bodies back and forth with their tails to rip off great scimitar-shaped chunks of flesh before sliding back into the sea.

Being on the receiving end of those trans-Pacific winter gales had its compensations in the spring, because glass floats ripped out of Japanese and Korean fishermen's nets by the winter gales later turned up off the Washington and Oregon coasts in the summer. We had a field day picking them up. As I said previously, when the weather was good we normally steamed at 1/3 speed on one shaft, this to remain within a circle of 60 miles' radius centered on our station coordinates. One spring, we were within sight of glass fishing balls virtually every daylight hour for 2+ weeks. Our established ground rules for picking them up were as follows:

The second shaft would never be lighted off.

Whaleboat recovery would never be considered.

Nine bells -- including each "Stop" counted as a separate bell were allowed per attempt.

Maximum RPM allowed -- 2/3 ahead and 2/3 astern (i.e. no "Full" bells allowed to save a sloppy approach)

OOD on watch had the first shot at recovery. Thereafter first-come, first-served as conning officer, with a limitation of nine bells per person until the ball was recovered

We were picking up so many that summer that, in addition to spreading the opportunities for conning the ship, we began awarding the recovered fishing balls in accordance with seniority, i.e., the skipper got the first, I got the second, etc.. Before the weather got too bad to play the game any more, most of the non-rated seamen and firemen on board had been piped to the bridge to pick up a fishing ball.

I don't know how SAVAGE used to roll before her conversion to a DER, but I can tell you that after her conversion she had the fastest snap-roll I ever experienced in a lifetime in destroyers. To compensate for the extra mast and other topside weight fitted during her conversion, fifty tons of pig iron ballast had been installed in a void right down by the keel amidships. Her roll period -- from full over on one side to full over on the other side and back again to her original starting point -- was about eight seconds, whether she was rolling ten degrees or thirty degrees. That increased somewhat as she exceeded thirty degrees' roll, which got increasingly worrisome as the roll amplitude increased, because you began wondering at what point she would start to hang up. The biggest roll I can remember taking in SAVAGE was 56 degrees, and although I can vividly remember lying against the bridge wing and looking almost straight down into the water, I must confess that SAVAGE didn't show any signs that she was anywhere near her limit.

I don't know how many engineers will be attending your reunion, but I imagine they will remember that SAVAGE had four Fairbanks-Morse 38D8 1/8 medium speed diesels, rated at a total of either 5500 HP or 6000 HP (I have seen both numbers, but we used the lower figure), coupled to twin screws through reduction gears with a 1.8 to 1 ratio and fluid couplings. The instruction manuals listed the maximum propeller revolutions as 400 RPM, which translated to an engine speed of 720 RPM. However, the best we were able to achieve routinely was about 370 -375 RPM, which figure represented something of a challenge to us. Therefore, when it came time to run our annual full power trials in 1957, the chief engineer announced to all and sundry that we were going to achieve 400 RPM, and the engineers were all heads-down and fannys-up, tweaking and tuning and adjusting the plant to make it so. Well, the upshot was that we DID make 400 rpm for the one-hour full power trial, but it was about the hairiest ride anyone ever had. Apparently Fairbanks-Morse didn't devote a

great deal of effort to ensure that the fuel racks and governors worked smoothly at the upper end of the RPM range, because those engines were surging 20-30 RPM throughout the trial. If it hadn't been for the fluid couplings, which allowed a certain amount of tolerance in handling engines surging at different rates, some very unpleasant and expensive noises would probably have terminated any thought of reaching 400 RPM.

Another engineering challenge was posed by the two auxiliary boilers, whose purpose it was to provide steam for the galley, laundry, ventilation heaters and - most especially - the evaporators for making fresh water. I don't know if these were the same boilers that were originally installed, or whether they had been modified or even replaced during the conversion. At any rate, although they were small units rated at only 150 psi, they were fired by an automatic control system of uncertain ancestry, wondrous complexity and cantankerous unreliability. To stop it all off, our total allowance of personnel to operate and maintain these beasts was a single BT3, usually right out of school, where he had been taught about nothing except 600 psi express boilers with superheat.

I mentioned earlier that, in my two years with the DER's, only one ship had to leave station early. Her downfall was caused by the total failure of both boilers, which left her unable to make fresh water. She had to head for home, not because of a shortage of drinking water (lifeboat rations, soups, canned soft drinks and juices, etc, gave a pretty good reserve there), but because she had to reach port before running out of cooling water for the main engines and generators. In SAVAGE, our engineers painted the name "Peter" in large letters on one boiler and the name "Paul" in equally large letters on the other, because in order to keep one boiler working we were always robbing Peter to pay Paul. As further insurance, during our yard period in early 1957, we had the forward peak tank sand-blasted and zinc dusted for use as an emergency fresh water tank. Our getting underway checkoff list included filling the peak tank with clean fresh water the day before we were scheduled to sail.

I hope the above paragraphs give something of the feeling that, during the time I sailed in her, SAVAGE was a special ship, because she truly was. We not only felt it, we knew it, and so did everyone else - including the squadron commodore and even the squadron wives. And, knowing that it was so, every man on board put more pride in his work to make sure that we -- the ship -- lived up to it.

One example typifies that spirit, and the results it achieved. After completing 3-month overhauls in Bremerton, SAVAGE and HAVERFIELD sailed to San Diego for 6-weeks refresher training with the Fleet Training Group. Some jackass on the DESPAC staff, located in San Diego, decided that it would save the staff some travel time and money if they gave us our annual Sanitary Inspections on a Saturday, right in the middle of our underway

training. Although both ships and the Fleet Training Group protested mightily, it was to no avail. In HAVERFIELD, the reaction was by and large that it was not a reasonable requirement (which it wasn't), and they wouldn't put any more effort into it than the bare minimum necessary to get by. That's exactly what they did, scoring a borderline SATISFACTORY.

The reaction in SAVAGE, though, was "If those S.O.B.'s think they can put us down, they've got another think coming. We'll show the bastards." And did we ever. Every bunk had a clean, pressed mattress cover. The crew wore dirty clothes for a day so the laundry had time to be transformed into a spotless showplace. All the tiled decks were stripped, waxed and buffed to mirrors. The reefers and provisions storerooms were emptied, cleaned and re-stowed. In over 38 years in the Navy, I have never seen a ship's company work with as much enthusiasm, initiative and energy to turn an already good ship into true showplace. About 2200 the night before the inspection, I went to the Captain (Bob Brogoitti) to report that things were going well and reassure him that, in my view, we would do well. He turned in, and I continued prowling about until 0100 or so, when it became apparent that my travels were increasingly restricted by roped-off compartments and passageways, and department heads, division officers and gangs of men inspecting, cleaning and polishing everything in sight. Breakfast Saturday morning was held at 0500, to give the galley, messdecks and wardroom adequate time to clean up.

Neither the CO nor I will ever forget what we found when we got up that morning. Except for the two of us, every man aboard SAVAGE had stayed up working all night long. Everything we saw was perfect in every detail, as typified by the deck drains. These are drains located in the heads, showers, galley, mess deck, laundry, berthing compartments, etc, which are mounted flush with the deck, and in which are fitted brass closures held in place by four brass screws (most of which are usually missing or broken). The closures are operated with a "T" wrench when setting or securing from Condition ZEBRA. Every one of SAVAGE's deck drain closures had been removed, buffed to a bright shine with a wire brush, and placed upside down next to the drain in which it fitted. Each one of the screw holes was fitted with shiny brass flat-head screw. Each rack held a "T" wrench, most of which had been made in the machine shop that week. And each drain, usually the repository of a stomach-turning collection of dirty swab water, cigarette butts, rotten swab strings and the like, had been cleaned until it shone. That, and ever so many other superbly-executed details, literally brought tears to the captain's eyes as he and I walked through the ship with the inspecting party.

Needless to say, we passed! With the highest grade of OUTSTANDING ever awarded by DESPAC. The SAVAGES as we always referred to ourselves \_showed the bastards, but good. Incidentally, the CO of the HAVERFIELD's first words to Bob

Brogoitti after the inspection party left were, "You son of a bitch!" He never did believe that the skipper played a very minor role in achieving those results, and that the SAVAGES had just gotten it in their heads to show those bureaucratic boobs what a REAL ship looked like.

Last sea story. Bob Brogoitti was an excellent ship-handler, and he encouraged all the officers to get as much ship-handling experience as possible, Recovering Japanese fishing balls was one example. Another was the fact that we normally held two or more hours of ship-handling drills four or five times a week when the weather was good, making approaches on boxes thrown overboard to simulate buoys or piers. But we all knew that the best ship-handler on board was our sea detail helmsman, a hashmarked Signaller Third Class named Baker. Many is the time that the CC, or I, or one of the officers conning an approach on Pier 91 would order (for example), "Right full rudder", only to have Baker immediately acknowledge, "Rudder is right full, sir". And we'd look down to find that the rudder angle indicator was indeed already at right full. We never had a clue as to when Baker put the helm over, nor to my knowledge did Baker ever make a rudder correction that the conning officer later failed to order.

Baker was not only good, but he knew it, and like most signalmen -- so much of whose career is spent with the command echelons on a ship's bridge -- he was not bashful in expressing himself. On a number of occasions as we were making our approach to a pier or a buoy, I heard Baker shout from the pilot house to the CO (or other conning Officer), "Sir, you're blocking my view of the jackstaff. Would you please stand to one side?" We always did.

One fine sunny afternoon in the spring of 1958, we were making practice landings on the end of Pier. 91, which was perfect for the purpose, the end of the pier being 300 feet wide, in deep water, and more than half a mile from the shoreline. Various officers took turns making landings. After each there would be a brief critique, then the ship would circle around for the next candidate's turn. After the first 4 or 5 landings, the skipper asked, "Do you want to try it, Baker?" Needless to say, the answer was yes, whereupon Bob Brogoitti asked, "Who do you want to take the helm?" To which Baker said, "I'll handle the helm myself." And he did just that, standing on the bridge wing, giving engine orders to the lee helmsman, and strolling into the pilothouse every now and then to touch up the helm. It was a beautiful landing, and Baker looked like the cat who had swallowed the canary when he turned the conn over to the officer who was next in line.

Those are some of the most vivid memories of SAVAGE that come to mind. She was a great ship when I was in her, a proud ship, a most capable and professional ship, and a happy ship. I think almost everyone who sailed in her during those years would say the same, because we shared an uncommon sense of purpose and

**camaraderie**. None of us wanted to be the one to let our ship or our shipmates down. Other people must have appreciated that we were doing things right, because that little twelve-man wardroom bred two flag officers, myself and the Gunnery Officer, Richard C. Berry, who is now a retired rear admiral living in Myrtle Beach, S.C..

This has been far too long, but I think so often and so fondly of my time in SAVAGE -- and the things we did in her played such a big part in the success of my own commands -- that I wanted you to have some sense of how it was then. I hope that I have succeeded without boring you to tears. All best wishes for a wonderful reunion. I will be with you in spirit.

Fair winds, following seas, and God bless,

Bruce Keener, III  
RADM, USN(Ret.)



(

I

U

