TO THE FAR EAST WITH SAVAGE

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FOREWORD

From Aztec shores, to Arctic zone, to Europe and Far East,
The flag is carried by our ships in times of war and peace.

"SEMPER PARATUS"

The Coast Guard manned USS SAVAGE (DE-386) was built by Brown Shipbuilding Company of Houston, Texas, and placed in commission on 29 October, 1943. She was named in honor of Ensign Walter S. Savage, (SC) USNR, who gave his life on December 7, 1941, aboard the USS ARIZONA during the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. After final fitting out at Galveston, SAVAGE proceeded to Bermuda for combat training and shakedown. After completing her training on Christmas Day, 1943, she reported to Norfolk, Virginia as a unit of Escort Division 23, Atlantic Fleet.

In January, 1944, SAVAGE was assigned with the rest of the Division to Task Force 63, engaged in escorting large convoys of 60-80 ships between Norfolk and the Mediterranean. So effective was the escort that losses from U-boats along this sea line of communication (SLOC) were nil. On April 1, 1944, Convoy UGS-36, whose escort included SAVAGE, was attacked by 30 Luftwaffe aircraft north of Algiers, Africa. The task force threw up such a strong defensive fire
that only one merchant ship was hit and later beached in the nearest **5** port.

From June, 1944 until the end of the European war, SAVAGE escorted high speed troop convoys between New York and the British Isles. In 18 Atlantic crossings, with weather being the worst enemy, over 1,000 loaded troopers were escorted without a single loss.

Following the defeat of Germany, the ships of QJRTDIV 23 were overhauled and more anti—aircraft guns were added. After completing more operational training, the division passed through the Panama Canal and into the Pacific in June, 1945. It was then ordered to the Aleutians as Escort Division 42 of the North Pacific Fleet. At war's end, SAVAGE was engaged in the last strike against the Japanese Kurile Islands. Her commanding officers up until that time had been CDR Oscar C. Rohnke, LCDR Randolph Ridgely III, and LCDR James A. Norton.

Her subsequent adventures are recounted here by her last Coast Guard skipper, Lieutenant John N. Waters, USCG (now Captain, retired), with an addendum from NAVAL HISTORY by her first Navy commanding officer, Robert C. Peniston, Captain, USN (Ret.).

TO THE FAR EAST WITH SAVAGE

by

Capt. John M. Waters, USCG (ret)

I first saw SAVAGE on a bleak rainy night in Finger Bay, Adak, Alaska at the end of a 10,000 mile odyssey by sea and air from the Philippines, where I had received my orders to command her. During this seemingly endless journey, the Allies dropped the atomic bombs, and Japan had just surrendered.

As she had operational orders pending, I took command with a minimum of ceremony. She had an experienced crew and capable officers, so we dispensed with the usual exercising of the crew at quarters. We had orders to sail to Attu, where we were to pick up mail and classified cargo, then on to the big Russian naval base at Petropavlovsk, Siberia. Russian had entered the war only weeks before.

After a brief stop at Attu, we sailed to a rendezvous point 50 miles off the Petropavlovsk minefields, where we were to meet a Russian destroyer. After arrival, we steamed back and forth for several hours until informed by COMNOPPAC (Commander North Pacific) that the Russians would not be there. We were then instructed to proceed to Akhomten Bay, on the Kamchatka Peninsula about 25 miles south of the main naval base.

We eased into Akhornten Bay late in the afternoon, feeling our way in by radar in the fog and gloom. Except for two small shacks on shore, there were no signs of life. We dropped hook in the bay and waited -one small ship in a deserted bay surrounded by towering mountains, which we soon discovered had cut off our radio communications with Alaska. Seeing nothing moving, we hoisted the international flag signal signifying, I WANT A PILCYF.

Soon after darkness, a small boat came alongside and a Russian officer, Lieutenant Popov, came aboard. He spoke no English, and I no Russian, but we had a tortured conversation by pantomime, gesturing, and loud talking. When someone mentioned that Kondrosak, one of our gunner's mates, was of Ukranian descent, he was quickly pressed into service as an interpreter and did a fine job despite his nearly forgotten vocabulary.

That night we had a corny third rate musical for a movie, and Lieutenant Popov stared in fascination as he smoked his first cigar, holding it Russian-style between the thumb and index finger arid inhaling deeply. It soon began taking effect and our guest went up on deck where he was deathly ill.

The following morning, we made a high speed run to Petropavlovsk, keeping inboard of the mine field and just off the steep rocky coast. Popov, who was conning the ship, had difficulty thinking of the English for each course change and went into hurried consultations with Kondrosak while I paced the bridge in anxiety as the rocks loomed closer. It was damn unsettling. From time to time, I would exclaim, “Point to the course!” Popov would smile and reply, “Ah, yes.” This was the apparent extent of his English.

As we entered the harbor, Popov pointed out the anchorage on the chart and I relieved him of the conn. Being the first American ship into that Russian port during the war, I decided to give the Russians a demonstration and took the ship in at 19 knots. As we approached the anchor site, I swung hard left, then backed down full and dropped the anchor. The whistle blasted, colors were shifted, and the boat was dropped into the water and moved around to the accommodation ladder, which had been smartly lowered. It was a sassy approach, and I knew the Russians would appreciate that they were watching real seamen.

It had indeed impressed the Russians. When I came ashore to pay my respects to the Russian admiral, I was informed by Lieutenant Rosonoff, the base liaison officer, that the ship’s wake had caused considerable damage ashore, banging around several dozen boats at their docks. Furthermore, he said, several of our crew had been seen taking pictures, and it must be stopped. As most of the equipment, excepting the submarines, consisted of U.S. lend—lease frigates, Catalina flying boats, Higgins torpedo boats, and one destroyer transport (APD), it seemed highly unlikely that we were stealing any secrets. To the contrary, we had been withholding certain equipment from the Russians. Earlier we had been alongside a frigate being readied for delivery to them. Up on the short HF/DF mast, a technician was working on the antenna. it required nearly an hour to complete the fine electronic adjustments. All that time, a workman sat beneath the mast waiting. When the technician finished his adjustments, the workman with a cutting torch proceeded to cut the mast down. We did not want the Russians to have the secret HF/DF equipment!

Petropavlovsk sits on a large well—protected bay that can accommodate the biggest fleets. There was little evidence, however, of any sizable shore-support facilities. The harbor freezes over in winter, and this would cause a great deal of trouble to light vessels attempting to use it then. It is also a long way from anywhere, at the eastern bitter end of the 6,000 mile long Trans-Siberian Railroad. The military and government officials ashore appeared to live well enough, but the great majority of people we saw lived in what, to us, seemed grinding poverty.

The official rate of exchange was five ruples to the dollar, but in actual purchasing power, the ruple was worth about two cents, not twenty. As a result of the unrealistic exchange rate, several of our sailors were billed twenty dollars each for poorly cooked fish dinners. I had to intervene with the Russian naval authorities to settle the bills more reasonably. Russian troops, staging through on their way to Manchuria, eagerly bought rings, watches, and other valuables from our crew, paying what to our boys seemed fantastic prices. Only later did they discover the ruple had little purchasing power, and there was little to buy.

Before we departed, the Russian admiral invited me up for farewell drinks. The Russians did not drink from small glasses; they did not sip the vodka; they drank for keeps. The first toasts were soon made - to President Truman and Generalissimo Stalin. The last toast I remember was to the junior senator from North Carolina.

I didn't get up until the following noon. After a cold shower, I went ashore, but my Russian host was not in. When we sailed two days later, he had still not returned to his office.

With the war over, OJMNORPAC deployed the ships of our division to visit various ports in Alaska and show the flag, as well as get some rest and recreation. In Seward, we held open house and invited the whole town for dinner. They all accepted, and in return their hospitality was overwhelming. But my main memory of Seward is of goats.

On the second day there, four of us took the ship's 26-foot motor boat to hunt wild mountain goats, which we had observed on the mountainsides as we entered the bay. Armed with 30/06 Springfield service rifles, we rounded the point at the entrance to Resurrection Bay, and found the cliff alive with goats. We leisurely broke out our ammo, loaded, and at my signal opened up on the goats, who scrambled behind rocks on the nearly vertical mountainside. The rapid fire barrage from four guns quickly downed three goats, all three rolling down the mountain before falling off the cliff into the water.

We were dressing them on the quarterdeck of the ship, in plain view of Seward's main street, when Mr. Roth, the school superintendent, came aboard. After listening to our hunting stories, he said, "If I were you, I'd get those goats out of sight right now. It is a hefty fine to hunt here without a license. It is against the law to hunt from a boat. Finally, you were shooting in a National Park and game preserve.

The dressed meat quickly went down to the freezer locker! Two days later one of our young ensigns, together with a machinist's mate and a local girl, went out in the boat to see and photograph the goats in the wilds. When they hadn't returned by dark, we got underway in company with two mine sweepers to search for them. At 0200 we located them by searchlight hanging onto the face of a cliff with the cold seas breaking just below them. They had been there for hours since their engine failed and the boat was set onto the rocks. We took them off, and the next morning one of the minesweepers hooked onto our boat and hauled it in with its powerful winch. When it was turned over to us and hoisted on the davits, it was a sad sight, and obviously a terminal case. To commemorate the events of the night our First Lieutenant, who before the war had been professor of English literature at Peabody College, wrote an epic ode entitled "Gravel Gertie", which had a chorus: *"Oh sing of Gravel Gertie, she done our fonty dirty, she lured him to a precipice, and dashed his boat to tiny bits."*

On arrival back at Adak, our Chief Bos'n Mate did some scouting. On the first dark night, the wrecked boat was lowered onto a truck and carted over to the depot where spare boats were stowed. There it was clandestinely swapped for a new boat, which was brought back to the ship and hoisted aboard. Before dawn, the new boat had been repainted, and a metal "S" fastened to its bow, stamping it as the SAVAGE's own. The identification plates, which had been carefully removed from the old boat, were then mounted on the new one. Midnight requisitioning, as the practice is known, is a tidy way of doing business and avoiding paper work - if you aren't caught. It is not condoned in peacetime, but it saved lots of time and effort during the war years. It also afforded honest men an opportunity to steal felonious amounts for good causes with a clear conscience. In this instance it promised to save a lot of embarrassing paperwork, a possible board of investigation, and perhaps a dirty letter about wrecking a boat with a female civilian aboard. However, I later chickened out and obtained approval for the boat swap, and there were no repercussions.

The following week we left Alaska for good enroute to Okinawa to join the Seventh Fleet. Enroute, Commander J. H. "Long John" Forney gave the division a workout. After forming the division in two columns of three ships each, he signaled for the two sections to merge on signal into a single column in natural order. To do this, the Second Section would increase speed to 18 knots, alter course to starboard, and sandwich in the intervals in the First Section before reducing speed to 15 knots.

As the flagship's signal hoist was hauled down to execute the movement, the ship ahead of SAVAGE altered course, but did not increase speed as required. This caused us to surge up on him, and we reduced speed. When he finally realized his mistake and increased speed, we were behind station. Turning to the OOD, I said, "No sweat. Slide on through the interval between MILLS and RHODES and parallel the column to starboard. Then you can ease back in."

We slid through the gap, and I heard the OOD give the orders to parallel the column, "Left fifteen degrees rudder. Both engines ahead standard."

Everything was going fine; once parallel with the column, we could ease our way into our proper slot. I turned to the signalman to ask about the signal hoist that the flagship was flying at the dip. Suddenly I heard the OOD shout, "Right full rudder!" I looked up and stared disaster in the face. On our port quarter RHODES was three ship lenqths away and coming right at us with a bone in her teeth. Instead of paralleling, our OOD had continued to turn left with fifteen degrees of rudder and was cutting across the speeding column. I threw the OOD away from the voice tube and yelled, "Shift your rudder! Both engines ahead flank!"

Smoke belched from RHODES' stack as she backed down hard. Still she came on, and our stern, now swinging rapidly left, was less than fif yards from her sharp bow. Someone had hit the general alarm and it was clanging. RHODES' whistle blasted repeatedly as she sounded the danger signal.

SAVAGE was now nearly parallel to the course, hut I had to stop the swinging stern from hitting RHODES. I quickly shifted rudder, as our screws dug into the water under emergency power, the stern slowed, then started moving to starboard, and we began opening on RHODES. Less than twenty yards separated the two ships at the closest point. Thirty seconds later the danger was past. As we opened out, the Exec said softly, "Captain, you can put your leg down now.

Only then did I notice my left leg cocked high in the air as though trying to fend off RHODES while I gripped the voice tube. I grinned sheepishly, and said in a voice that shook a bit, "Well, I'd better make my peace with Bill Earle in RHODES."

Our signalman blinked over my message, "PLEASE ACCEPT MY PROFUSE APOLOGIES FOR EMBARRASSING YOU."

It had been awfully, awfully close. Once again an old adage was proven - “At sea eternal vigilance is the price of safety.” My OOD had made a mistake in not watching his heading more closely with a helm order still on, but I had made a worse mistake by taking my eyes off my ship in the midst of a close maneuver. On the bottom line, the skipper is always ultimately responsible.

We spent two miserable weeks at Okinawa in the middle of the wet monsoon season. Buckner Day was littered with dozens of wrecks from the recent typhoon, while ashore the mummified Jap dead still lay along the pathways and in the caves. In one cave we found a 75 mm gun with eight dead Japs scattered around, apparently the victims of an aircraft rocket r direct artillery hit. A Japanese marine officer was at least 6’3” all, or had been before both feet were blown off just above the ankles. Among the bodies was a wealth of loot, including rifles and pistols, with plenty of ammunition for both.

As we made our way back, a marine on the main road began yelling at us. We stopped and yelled back, asking what he wanted.

“You damn fools,” he shouted, ”that area is out of bounds. It’s full of land mines. Stay put until I get help.”

We froze. Soon he and two other marines came slowly through the bushes with a mine detector, and we followed them back to the road, stepping gingerly in their foot prints. Back on the road, the sergeant aid, “Don’t ever go back in there again. Why in the hell do you think the dogfaces haven’t been collecting all the loot in the caves. The place is lousy with mines.”

As we thanked him profusely, he added, “By the way, the brush is like with snakes, and they are more poisonous than diamondback rattlers.”

We arrived thankfully back on the ship that night, and the Exec **put** out the word to cease and desist from further souvenir hunting. The sergeant was right; if the Army had left all the loot in the caves, it as too dangerous for sailors to go in after.

This did not prevent us exploring the numerous igloo-shaped tombs, which were said to represent the womb. Many of the natives believed in reincarnation, with a new spirit being conceived at the moment of death. after nine months, and the birth of the new person, the bones of the old eased to have significance. I crawled into one tomb with the ship’s doctor, who then proceeded to show his knowledge of anatomy by calling

out the names of bones as he tossed them aside. Later, so many old Okinawan skulls and fresh Japanese ones were being brought back to the ships as keepsakes that an order was issued prohibiting the practice.

Two days later we left Okinawa for our new base at Tsingtao, China. I took away no fond memories of that bloody island, nor any desire to return. Ahead lay the vast land of China, and in China lay adventure.

After anchoring at Tsingtao, we could hear rifle and mortar fire in the hills back of town where the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists, having defeated the Japs, were now taking on each other in a bitter civil war. Tsingtao had been a Germany colony until 1914 and strolling through some of its streets was **reminiscent** of an old town in the Rhineland. Part of the Sixth Marine Division occupied the area, with headquarters at the old Bismarck Barracks.

It was a new world for our crew after long months of isolation in the Aleutians. Rickshaws could be rented at ten cents per half day, but the newly arriving sailors quickly ran the price up to fifty cents, much to the disgust of the marines ashore. Laborers were paid ten cent and a cup of rice for a day’s work. Junks and sampans lay off our stern all day in the bitter cold, waiting for our garbage to be dumped after meals. The Chinese eagerly ate it. The conditions were heart rendering.

A bright young Chinese boy showed up, and applied for the position of Number One Boy. He had several letters of reference from other ship~ which confirmed that he could provide labor and many other required services. The Exec arranged with him for thirty laborers to chip rust and prepare the ship for painting.

At first light fifty Chinese of both sexes, ranging from 10 to 80 years of age, showed up, and didn’t quit work until noon chow. Afterward they worked until dark. The daily wage agreed on with the Number One Boy was two cups of rice. Moved by pity and some fear that I would lose this industrious force if we were too miserly, I directed that a bonus of two oranges be issued to each person in addition to the rice. The Chief Commissary Steward warned that we would contribute to inflation with such extravagant wage scales.

The following morning, word had spread and SAVAGE was surrounded with boats bearing others eager to work. **Words** and warnings were useless, and we finally had to resort to fire hoses to clear our sides of the native craft.

I was absorbing knowledge of China in massive gulps. The following day we moved into the inner harbor. The pilot conned the ship in at high speed, and when I suggested he was violating the rules of the road by ignoring the right-of-way of sailing vessels over powered ones, he replied, “Captain, the Chinese don’t expect a man-of-war to worry about them. They will get out of the way.”

With that, we barreled up the harbor into a mass of junks, which at the last second cleared the way. Obviously they knew the score.

Coining out of the harbor three days later, I still could not shake off my Academy training and past sea experience. When several junks crossed ahead of us, I slowed and stopped, allowing them the right-of-way. This seemed to puzzle them, and the junks ended up in confusion. Finally, to stay off the rocks, I started ahead slowly, and ran in among them. They avoided us at the last minute and things were soon restored to the white man’s status quo. The Rules of the Nautical Road were henceforth suspended between SAVAGE and sailing junks, once w nearly tragic results.

Coming down the Yellow Sea at night from Taku at 18 knots, our radar picked up a weak target at 2500 yards, and we threw a searchlight on it. It was a three masted junk packed to the gunnels with some two hundred Communist troops, probably enroute from Darien to Chefoo to join the Eighth Route Army. Exercising the unwritten warship’s right-of-way, I held course. At 500 yards, we again threw a search light on the junk, and raced by at fifty yards or less. There was a near riot on the junk as it wallowed in our wake. Apparently the Chinese Communists were already beginning to challenge the white man’s assumed rules and rights Sooner than any of us dreamed, they would all be thrown in the trash can.

Back in Tsingtao, during the evening movie, the messenger of the watch told me that the OOD needed me on deck. After I climbed to the bridge, where the OOD had taken station as the winds increased, he pointed out a large barge several hundred yards ahead of us, illuminate by the searchlights of two anchored destroyers.

“Sir, she is dragging fast and setting down on the rocks, and I think I can make out some men on her.”

Grabbing a pair of binoculars, I examined the barge. It had a load of tractors and construction equipment, and at least two men that could see. The barge **was now almost abeam** and **only a few hundred yards from the rocks. It was going to be a squeaker. Our boat was lowered**

and as it pulled under our stern, we passed it a six-inch hawser, and the cox'n headed for the barge, towing the heavy line. In the rising gale, it was now a race against time. Could he get the hawser to the barge and secured before it fetched up on the rocks? We were in too close quarters for SAVAGE to get underway and maneuver. As the boat came alongside the barge, our men on the fantail were paying out the line. One of the boat crew climbed aboard the barge to give a hand wit the line, and with less than fifty yards of hawser left on our deck, the men on the barge straightened up and signaled that they had secured their end. Quickly our deck force took turns on a bitt, and the line tightened and held. The barge was checked less than a hundred yards from the rocks. Only then did the boat take off the three men and bring them back to the ship. While the boat was hoisted, I went down I congratulate the cox'n. When he climbed out of the boat, I shook hands complimenting him on a nice job of seamanship. As we talked, it became obvious that he was drunk. I said nothing about it, but as we walked forward I said to the Exec., "Do you know he was stoned?"

"Well, it was pretty obvious, sir. However, he isn't in the duty section. He just got back from liberty."

I didn't like a drunk cox'n in the boat, but he had pulled off a nice job. They still score results in my league. I laughed and said to the Exec., "Let's prepare a letter of commendation for him, and save it for the next muster. I think that tomorrow morning he will have one helluva headache."

On December 17th, 1945, SAVAGE was ready duty destroyer at Tsingt Shortly before noon a message came from the Task Group Commander order~ us to proceed immediately to a position fifty miles from Tsingtao to investigate a possible piracy incident. We were underway in jig time, and as soon as we cleared the harbor, I summoned Ensign Bob Pea to the bridge. He was the boarding officer, and we had been training his part f or such an event. There had been other episodes of piracy in the South China Sea, and more were expected in the wake of war. I explained the picture and Bob went below to brief his troops.

After noon, we sighted a boat ahead and came alongside. Aboard were five hungry and nearly frozen Chinese who had been caught and swept out to sea by a recent storm. Despite the boat being dismasted and thirty miles at sea in freezing weather with only a sweep oar for propulsion, they refused to abandon their only possession or to be taken aboard. We gave them provisions and water, but they still looked cold and miserable.

I ordered five jungle cloth suits passed down to them, and our crew members caught the spirit and showered them with clothes and shoes. Hopefully they later made shore and turned a profit in the used clothes business. My conscience eased by the provisioning, and still unable to persuade them to abandon their junk or their new found affluence, we resumed our search for the reported piracy victims.

Less than an hour later we sighted a junk under bare poles several miles ahead. Altering course slightly to close it, I ordered the boarding party to close up, and the bos'n mate piped, "Fall in the boarding party."

When they had fallen in, I walked aft to look them over. From the boarding officer, with two pistols and a long knife in his belt, to the youngest seaman cradling a tommy gun, they were a fierce looking crew.

When we eased up to the junk, I made out a man lying on deck, and mother tied to the mast. The boarding party climbed aboard and reported that both men were dead and had been so for some time. They were taken aboard SAVAGE and laid out on deck for identification photographs, their eyes staring and limbs swollen and white as marble. Turning to the Exec., I told him to have them prepared for burial at sea and to find me a non-sectarian service in the prayer book.

"I don't know what religion, if any, they had," I said, "but any man rates a decent burial."

While the bodies were being prepared, we attempted to sink the junk, which was a menace to navigation, with gunfire. Neither shell fire or machine guns had much effect on the water soaked wooden hull. Final we steamed by and fired two depth charges from the K-guns, and these broke up the hull. With the junk disposed of, I called the Exec and asked when we would be ready to bury the bodies. He hurried up to the cabin and apologetically explained that there had been a misunderstanding between him and the Chief Pharmacist Mate. The chief had become ill while preparing the badly decomposed bodies, had secured a three-inch shell to each leg for weights, and deep sixed them without ceremony. It was regrettable, but the deed was done and life in China was cheap. When we turned pictures of the corpse over to the Chinese provost marshal on our return to port, he looked at them quickly and threw them in a waste basket. They were only two more dead among thousands.

We concluded that pirates were not involved. More likely, the junk had been blown out to sea by the storm, and the unfortunate crew had been washed overboard or died of exposure.

The day after we returned to Tsingtao my cabin steward, an 18—year old black lad from Alabama, appeared with a white T—shirt instead of his customary white jacket. In his left ear was a large silver ear ring, and on his right arm a freshly tattooed dragon, running from the elbow to the shoulder. I didn't know whether to laugh or shout, but decided to play it cool.

"Hudson, what have you got on your ear?" I asked, pointedly ignoring the tattoo which he was displaying proudly.

"That's an ear ring, suh. All the China hands wears 'em."

"Do you think you're a China hand already."

"Yassuh, got me a tattoo too," he said, pointing to the snarling dragon.

"Well, Hudson, if you don't get your jacket on," I said, "you are going to be an extra-duty hand."

His face dropped as he started out, and I called, "Hudson!"

"Yassuh?"

"When you get back to Alabama, your mama's going to see that tattoo and beat hell out of you."

We didn't have long in Tsingtao before sailing again. The Yellow Sea and the East China Sea were infested with floating mines, and the heavily loaded troop transports had to be escorted. Our job was to scout ahead and warn of mines. We would then blow them up with rifle or machine gun fire. At night, we closed our watertight doors and fittings and hoped no mines were in our path. In mid-December, a refrigerator ship carrying Christmas turkeys for Task Force 77 hit a mine, so our 1945 Christmas menu would have to be steaks.

We next escorted an attack transport, the USS EGGINGHAM, into Inchon, Korea, a port with an amazing range of tide. Three years later General MacArthur landed his troops there to cut off the North Korean invaders, and the Navy did a masterful job putting such a large force into that difficult harbor. On a quick trip to Seoul, the capitol of South Korea, my most lasting impression was of the smell. Carts of human feces were being trundled down the streets for use as fertilizer, a common practice in many Asian countries, where Westerners eat native vegetables at their peril.

Shortly before Christmas, we were standing into Tsingtao from Inchon and were only three miles from our anchorage when the tender BLACK HAWK began blinking out a message. We were to proceed at best speed to the Shantung coast of the Yellow Sea and conduct a search for five Marine F7F fighters believed to be down in that area. They had overflown Tsingtao after a flight from Okinawa, become lost, and the flight had broken up with each man for himself. An air search had located one aircraft on a Shantung beach, but four were still missing. We were directed to proceed at best speed to the location of the aircraft and wait arrival of an LST which was following with a landing force of Marines. They would attempt to salvage the aircraft. The territory was occupied by the Chinese Communist 8th Route Army, which was locked in a battle with the Nationalists troops further south, and our relationship with the 8th was tenuous.

Within minutes, SAVAGE had wheeled around and was racing for Shantung. One plane found, and four missing; we had a job on our hands, and it was Coast Guard work - search and rescue.

The following morning we could see the F7F, a new twin engine fighter, on the beach and stood in close while two Marine TBM bombers circled overhead. After arrival of the LST, I went ashore with the Colonel commanding the Marine force and stood by while he had a confab with the Communist commander. The marines stood on one side, while the quilt-uniformed Communists faced them. After considerable talking the Communists agreed to let the fighter take off.

Fuel for the plane was transported ashore in five gallon jerry ms while several hundred yards of steel matting was brought ashore and laid out. In late afternoon, the major who was to fly the plane finished his inspection and made ready for takeoff. With several hundred spectators watching, he revved up the engines to full power, released the brakes, and the fighter leaped down the strip. Just when he appeared to have it made, he ran out of matting and ended with his nose buried in the said. The pilot was unhurt, hut the F7F, only a couple of months out of the factory, had found a final resting place. The marines poured fuel over it and set it afire.

When we returned to the LCVP and were watching the oily black smoke
rising from the burning plane, a messenger arrived from the Communist general. He demanded that we call off the relays of TBMs over the beach; if we did not, he threatened to take appropriate measures. As there were still four pilots to account for, and we needed his cooperation, we called Tsingtao to cancel the flights.

No sooner had this irritant been removed than another arose. Three LSTs east bound from Taku had dropped anchor in Jungchang Bay, smack in the middle of Communist territory, and started running liberty parties ashore. The general was incensed, and he had a right to be. The last thing we needed now was to have a mob of LST sailors try to wahoo the local village.

On orders from the Task Group Commander, we got underway and bent on full turns. I had to marvel at the sheer stupidity of the LST skippers in picking such a liberty site, especially with a civil war going on. American sailors, Communist troops, native women, and Chinese brandy added up to an explosive mixture that was sure to detonate and cause big trouble. I hoped we wouldn't be too late.

Two hours later we turned into Jungchang Bay and began blinking away at the LSTs with our signal light. Get everyone back aboard pronto and get the hell out of here was the gist of it. Back came a reply demanding to know who I was. Being a very young CD, I decided to put on my boss's mantle, a perfectly legal bit of one-upmanship, as I had been sent by him. Our signal lamp blinked out:

COMMANDER TASK GROUP 78.17 SPEAKS. COMPLY IMMEDIATELY. As we stood back out to sea, boats were hurriedly bringing the liberty parties back. Jungchang never did catch on as a liberty port.

We then proceeded toward Weihaiwai, a former British submarine base on the north coast of Shantung, which was now in Communist hands. I wished to try and determine from the local commander any information about the missing pilots. One of the Communist stipulations was that we were to enter the harbor with all guns covered. Seeking their cooperation, we of course complied. After anchoring, I went ashore to call on the Communist commander - an officer seemingly in his mid-thirties, though it is hard to judge the age of an Asiatic. His interpreter was an elderly physician - a graduate of Yale University.

The general said that they had recovered two of our pilots, one dead and the other wounded. They would turn over the body, but the wounded Marine was under medical care and could not be moved at that time. The conversation was friendly, and I invited the general and his party to come on board the ship, where they were honored with side boys and bosun pipes. We had coffee and fruit cake, and the general presented me with a bottle of Chinese brandy, which I later gave to the CPO mess.

The old doctor held forth in excellent English on how much better living conditions were in the Communist area than in the Nationalist. The people I saw ashore did appear better clothed and fed than those around Tsingtao.

The general told how they had waged guerrilla war against the .Japs. A heavily guarded railroad ran between Tsingtao and Tiensin. The guerrilla forces cooperating with the 8th Route Army were assigned to stop the traffic. After dark, the peasants, who during the day were laboring in the filed, quickly mobilized. Jap guards along the railroad were ambushed, and before morning the partisans would tear up fifty miles of rail. Then they faded back into the farms and countryside. The struggle had gone on for years against the Japs, and was now continuing against the Nationalists.

We sailed from Weihaiwai amid great protestations of friendship and continued our search for the other missing pilots. Christmas Day, 1945, was bright and clear in the Yellow Sea. To the west of Weihaiwai was a group of islands, the largest of which is called Changshan Tao. One of the planes had crashed near there, so I decided to search the shores of the islands carefully for possible signs of life. As noon of Christmas Day approached, we had no turkey, no mail from home, and little to be cheerful about. Then an inspiration hit me.

In some of the world's navies, an alcohol ration is served daily. It was abolished in the United States Navy by Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy under President Wilson. Daniels, an ardent populist, did so not out of hate for deamon rum, but because officers of that time could drink aboard ship and the men could not. For Christmas Day I decided to make my own rules; any clerk can blindly follow rigid rules; a leader has other options. In my locker was a case of good Bourbon which I had obtained from COMSERDIV 104 at Okinawa for only twenty-five dollars. When the chief commissary steward said he could make eggnog if he only had the "squeezings," I told him that would be taken care of if he would send up two men.

Soon the eggnog was being blended in the ship's ice cream machine. One by one the twelve quarts of bourbon were opened and poured in while thirsty sailors crowded the passage outside the galley and cheered as each bottle was opened and gurgled into the machine.

At noon, the sharp tweet of the bos'n pipe rang throughout the ship and the call went out, "All hands lay aft. SPLICE THE MAINBRACE!"

Old Josephus may have turned slowly in his grave, but he had no reason to. On SAVAGE, the enlisted men were getting the lion's share of the grog and regulations be damned. For a short while, a couple of hundred Americans in a lonely sea half a world from home had a slight taste of Yuletide cheer.

The spirit of peace on earth was to be short lived. In late afternoon as we nosed within a thousand yards of the beach scanning it with glasses for any signs of life, there was a sudden WHACK twee! It sounded like a bullet ricochet. Now another, and it damn well was one! There was also a whiff of smoke and a small pop from the beach. Without a word, everyone on the bridge dropped below the splinter shield.

“Right full rudder,” I yelled, “Both engines ahead full.” This was followed by an order for all hands to clear the decks and seek cover. When we were a mile off the beach and safe from small arms fire, we went to general quarters.

I told my Gun Boss, pointing to a bushy area near the water, that the snipers had been near there. We would work over the area with our twin and quad 40 gun mounts, then close and finish the job with the 20 mm guns.

“I don’t want a damn bush left standing,” I said, strapping on my steel helmet.

Alas for heroic words, Task Group came back quickly with orders to haul out and under no circumstances to fire back. It was a time of attempted detente with the Communists, and no ragged sniper or tin can skipper would be allowed to disrupt it. Ours not to reason why, so we tucked our tail between our legs and sneaked quietly away - put to flight by a couple of Chinese bushwackers.

Back in Tsingtaoi, the division managed to get five ships together in port at the same time, and we went ashore to celebrate. This resulted in an infamous rickshaw race by four of the skippers and the division commander, with the coolies riding. It was finally broken up by the Marine MPs, whose major insisted that we would “lose face” in the eyes of the Asiatics. I thought it may have enhanced it a bit by proving that all skippers are not old fuds.

The following day, a heavy cruiser arrived from the states with a crew of mostly young boots. When liberty was granted the kids, many away from home for the first time, they tried to drink all the Chinese alcoholic concoctions, and ended up sodden drunk.

I arrived at the Pagoda Pier late on a bitterly cold and windy January night. The place was a mess with at least 50 sailors laid out in various stages of sobriety. A Shore Patrol chief came up as I was getting in my boat and asked if I would take some of the drunks back to the cruiser.

"What's wrong with their boats?" I asked.

"They just aren't sending any, sir. I'm afraid some of these kids will freeze here."

I agreed to drop some by the cruiser on the way to SAVAGE, and a dozen or so were carted down like sacks and dumped in the gig. Ten minutes later we approached the cruiser and were hailed.

"SAVAGE," my cox'n shouted, the call indicating that the CO of SAVAGE was aboard the boat. lie added, "We've got a bunch of your drunks here and they're in sad shape."

No one appeared to help and my cox'n shouted, "You guys get your ass down here and get this bunch of bums off!"

The cruiser's OOD shouted down, asking that we ease forward to a small crane, from which they lowered a cargo net to our boat. My boat crew and three men from the cruiser piled six drunks into the net, which was then hoisted with the men like a net of mackerel, hut with muttered curses and arms and legs akimbo. As the last load went up, a sailor's white hat fluttered forlornly into the water. Considering their condition, a cargo net was the most effective way of handling them.

The flagship wasn't too worried about its drunks, hut two nights later the Admiral's dog turned up missing while being walked ashore by an orderly, and all hell broke loose. From Senior Officer Present Afloat (SOFA) flashed a message about the missing mutt as marines began scouring Tsingtao. All ships were directed to report any news of the dog. There was none. The following morning a boat came alongside bearing a worried classmate who commanded a sister DE lying several hundred yards away. Beckoning mc to follow, he walked up to the bow out of hearing of others before revealing his dark secret. Some of his crew had dognapped the Admiral's dog the night before! What should he do?

After a deep discussion over several cups of coffee, we settled on a plan. That night, in the mid-watch, a motorboat raced up from astern of the cruiser, past the companion way, and off into the night. The watch on the cruiser was puzzled until someone noticed a movement below on the landing platform. A messenger was sent down and returned with the Admiral's dog. Operation FIDO was successfully accomplished and peace reigned in the fleet.

Mid-January found us escorting the big transport USS WAKEFIELD through the East China and Yellow Seas. The danger was mostly from floating mines, thousands of which still drifted in the waters around Japan and China. We maintained station well ahead of the transport to warn her of any mines sighted. At night the mines could not be seen, so we buttoned up for maximum watertight integrity and hoped for the best. The transport dropped hook at Taku Anchorage to discharge troops, and we had an opportunity to see one of the bleakest anchorages a fleet has ever used.

In the Gulf of Pohai, at the western end of the Yellow Sea, the water is very shallow and only very light draft craft can get over the Taku Bar into the port which serves Tientsin. The fleet anchorage was twenty miles off the port, traffic with the shore being by landing craft and small boats. When at anchor, no land was in sight. The holding ground was poor, and the cold fronts came down with little warning out of Mongolia and Russian occupied Manchuria. With no land marks on which to take bearings, it was difficult to determine if the vessel was dragging anchor.

On the second night at Taku anchorage, a gale swept down from the northwest. WAKEFIELD, the largest vessel there seemed to be holding steady, so we took frequent radar ranges and hearings on her. Twice during the night we dragged anchor, and each time raised them and steamed back to our assigned spot and dropped the hook again. The third time, I decided to drop anchor down wind of the main body. Checking the charts, we discovered that the water was only 10 fathoms deep for some 30 miles down wind. Other than violating accustomed maritime habit, what did it matter if we dragged?

I wrote in the night order book, “Use WAKEFIELD as reference point to determine if we are dragging. As long as the wind holds in the northwest, I don’t mind dragging at a moderate rate. Call me if we drag over five miles, or if any other vessels start dragging down on us.”

With that I turned in and got a few hours sleep. By the following morning we had dragged two miles, and when the storm abated, weighed anchor and moved hack to our assigned anchorage. Not many anchorages afford a skipper such leeway however.

Following a day of fresh breezes, the wind and seas started rising the next evening, and by 2200 was again blowing at gale force. The OOD called me to the bridge, and pointed out a destroyer that appeared to be dragging down on us. Radar reported the can at 2000 yards, directly upwind and between us was an LST. We could see lights on both ships and activity around the decks. The destroyer was trying desperately to raise steam, and the LST was trying to raise anchors to get out of the way. I ordered the special sea detail piped and all four engines ready to answer bells.

A short while later, the destroyer dragged into the LST's anchor chain, fouling one screw, and then swung at an acute angle to the landing vessel, bow to stern. Both continued dragging down on us.

Our anchor chain was coming in at an agonizingly slow rate. We had been riding with a long scope of chain on one anchor, with the other snubbed under foot. In a DE, only one anchor at a time can be raised, so the time required to raise two is almost doubled. With the two entangled ships only 500 yards away now, our chain continued coming up CLANK CLN~IK CLANK as my anxiety mounted. I thought of slipping the anchor cable, but I hated to be left with only one hook for an indefinite period. Besides, the division commander might well ask why I hadn'1 grasped the situation sooner.

The two ships were so close that we could hear the tortured grinding of metal as they rolled against each other. I decided that in another 60 seconds I would have to sup the anchor cable. Then the talker shouted "Anchor at short stay, sir!"

"Very well, break it out."

Stepping to the voice tube, I said, "Engine room, report ready to answer bells."

Then from the fo'csle talker, "Anchor's aweigh!" With a sigh of relief I ordered, "Both engines, back one third. Rudder amidships." Slowly we backed away from the two unfortunate ships.

The destroyer skipper, freshly arrived from the States with his new ship, had been deceived by the weather and the nature of the anchorage But he had erred in not keeping steam at the throttle in such an exposed position. Fortunately for us in the Des, our Diesel engines required very little warmup time. But in China waters, with the lack of weather information from our Communist neighbors to the north and west, I always kept two engines on line anytime we were at anchor.

At Taku, I learned that WAKEFIELD was going back to the States. We had about 25 men who were eligible for demobilization, but we needed replacements for them. The nearest Coast Guard manning depot was at Manila, and we had no idea when we might get there. But the WAKEFIELD was a Coast Guard transport, and was going directly back to the States, so why not swap some of our long service men for some of their green horns. Captain Roy Raney of the WAKEFIELD was most agreeable, so on her sailing date we sent over our men scheduled for discharge, and WAKEFIELD provided the replacements from her crew. As they came aboard, they were not pressed men, but the next thing to it. One day, they were on a 45,000 ton transport heading back home. The next, they were reporting aboard a destroyer escort, stationed in a God forsaken part of the world with no idea of when she would go home. Lord Nelson's conscripted crews could not have looked more woebegone.

The Exec came to my cabin with a stack of service records and in an agitated mood.

"Captain, look at these jackets," he said. "We have been had. Nearly all these men came right out of the WAKEFIELD's brig. They've unloaded all their jailbirds on us."

An old slogan came to mind - Caveat Emptor - "Let the buyer beware!" It wasn't too bad though. Most of the men were in for minor offenses, and as a group gave little trouble. Within a few days, they were integrated into the crew, and no one could tell them from an old SAVAGE hand.

In March we sailed for Pearl Harbor, where the division commander, LCDR Bill Earle, was detached for duty on a board of investigation. As senior skipper, I took over the division when we sailed. As we cleared the islands, and Diamond Head faded in the distance, I looked back at the ships in line astern and thought how fast things had moved. Four years before I had been a senior cadet. Now at age 25, I was leading a division of warships with over a thousand men aboard. The skippers were tough and war experienced, but so young that CORTDIV 42 became widely known as the "Boys Division."

As the great and very modest Admiral of the Fleet Sir Andrew Cunningham once said in explaining his success, "You just have to be in the right place at the right time."

When halfway to San Diego, COMDESPAC (Commander Destroyers, Pacific Fleet) ordered us to alter course and proceed direct to the Panama Canal, we were, it seemed, going hack to the Atlantic. But someone on the DESPAC staff had not done their homework, for aboard our ships were over 300 passengers of all services enroute from Hawaii to the West Coast for demobilization.

We messaged COMDESPAC this vital information, followed by a request that we be allowed to continue to San Diego. They had other ideas. Turn north, they said, giving us a rendezvous point. They would have a San Diego based destroyer division and a destroyer tender meet us there and take aboard our passengers, after which we were to proceed to Panama as ordered.

Talk about doing things the hard way! Transferring 300 people in mid-ocean is no picnic at any time, but now the barometer was falling rapidly. But orders were orders, so we turned north. Every four hours we advised DESPAC of conditions as the weather worsened. That night, we met the other formation, but the sea was ugly. There would be no transfer in this weather. Getting on the TBS radio, I talked with the skipper of the destroyer tender. Would he intervene with DESPAC? Maybe a four striper would have some influence. He readily agreed.

Finally after 18 hours DESPAC relented and ordered us to San Diego. When we arrived there with our 180 foot long homeward bound pennant flying (only ships that have been overseas for a year or more are entitled to fly the pennant, with one foot for each member of the crew), I went ashore to pay my respects to the Commandant of the Eleventh Naval District, Vice Admiral Jesse Oldendorf, already a legend whose battle wagons “crossed” and smashed the Japs at Surigao Straits.

I was promptly ushered in to the Admiral’s office by his Chief of Staff.

“Welcome home, Commodore,” he said, motioning me to a chair. (The flattering reference to the title of Commodore was an honorary one, accorded to an office-command of a group of ships. It carried no gold braid or extra pay with it, but it sounded good, especially coming from a famous naval hero. We talked of various things until the subject of our mid-ocean delay came up.

“Young man,” said the Admiral smiling, “there is a lesson in this that you can profit by. When you determined that you shouldn’t go on to Panama, you asked permission to continue on to the west coast. The next time, don’t ask permission. Just tell them that unless otherwise directed, you are going to do it. This will throw them off so badly that they will have to call the chief of staff or operations officer back from the golf course, and one of them will agree with you.”

The Admiral had a point, but I was a little junior to be telling COMDESPAC what I would do. But over the years I have been in similar situations, and have followed his advice. A staff is reluctant to say no to a skipper who is actually on scene and seems to know what he wants. They will at least buck it upstairs, and admirals and captains are often more understanding than more junior staff men.

A week later, as we entered the approaches to the Panama Canal, a large man-of-war was sighted coming out of the canal. At first it could not be identified, but as it came closer, we saw that it was the former German heavy cruiser PRINZ EUGEN, which had been the BISMARCK’s consort in the famous battle with the HOOD off Iceland. Manned by a crew of German sailors and American officers, she was now enroute to Bikini, where later she would be one of the targets for the first nuclear bomb tests. I did not think she was a U.S. Navy commissioned warship (I later learned she was so designated enroute to the tests), but as she passed, we exchanged passing honors with the big cruiser with German and American sailors, so recently enemies, at attention facing each other.

Stopping over in Panama for a night on our way to the east coast, we found that the Blue Moon girls were using their same modus operandi. Despite ample warnings, the sailors would pick up these bar girls, or more accurately be picked up by them. The girls would con drinks from the sailors, consuming a half dozen or so in a couple of hours. The drinks were plain cokes passing as rum cokes, and the girls got half of the price of each drink as a kickback from the clubs. If the man balked at the mounting bar bill, the girl would promise that when they got off work, the man could spend the night at her apartment. The catch, as the girls well knew, was the midnight curfew for sailors. Having spent thirty dollars for drinks following lavish and lascivious promises of what was to follow, the troops had visions of sugar plums as midnight approached. Then the bubble burst as the Shore Patrol began rounding up all hands. Over the years, thousands of fighting mad sailors have been dragged away while their intended bed mates coolly walked away to count up their night's share of the take.

Having observed the setup both as a naive cadet and a not so dumb shore patrol junior officer, I had the word passed to our crew. It could as well have been left unsaid. As soon as liberty was granted, the crew headed for the fleshpots. Predictably, they were herded back aboard fighting mad after midnight. They had been warned, but hope springs in the human breast eternal.

As we approached Charleston on the final leg of our voyage, we were ordered to throw overboard all Australian and New Zealand meat and dairy products. As most of these products for ships in the Pacific Fleet came from those countries, we had a large stock in our freezers, so over it went. Arriving in Charleston, we discovered that an acute shortage of these same foods existed in the stores, and were extremely costly where available. The political power of the American meat and dairy producers was clearly evident.

We also were ordered to throw overboard all of our three-inch ammunition, as the ammunition magazines at Charleston were already filled to capacity. Thousands of dollars of ammunition were deep-sixed. It was rather painful when one remembered the difficulty of obtaining a few practice rounds in peacetime.

EPI LOGUE

After a short availability at Charleston, we sailed to Green Cove Springs, Florida, where the ship was to be laid up in the Reserve Fleet. On 13 June, 1946, she was decommissioned and turned over to a Navy maintenance crew.

As the men of SAVAGE and Escort Division 42 filed ashore, they were the last of over 200,000 Coast Guardsmen who had served in the Navy in World War II to return to their parent service or be discharged. SAVAGE remained in the Reserve Fleet until 1956, when she was reactivated as a radar picket ship (DER) and manned by a Navy crew.

In 1957, I was pilot of a helicopter returning from an offshore mission when I saw a DER steaming by North Island into San Diego. When I noted the bow numbers, I hovered alongside to give the old girl a salute. It was my last view of her.

She was assigned to duty on the Mid-Pacific Barrier Patrol until the early 1960s. With the onset of the Vietnam War, the Barrier Patrol was phased out and the remaining ships sent to Southeast Asia. Finally, in October 17, 1969, SAVAGE was again decommissioned after 26 years of service. Of the 85 FMR type diesel driven DEs, only three outlasted SAVAGE, so we may assume that she was given loving care by her Coast Guard and Navy crews. After being laid up, I presume she was used as target to test new weapons.

SAVAGE did sail again. In 1978, I named my new 37-foot sloop after her, and we sailed the high seas until 1985, when an electrical fire damaged her beyond repair. In 1986, I fitted out a new 46-foot sloop, which I also proposed to name SAVAGE. We took her to Tarpon Springs, Florida to have the electronics installed. Entering the harbor, I noted black hulled 70-foot shrimp trawler named SAVAGE at a dock. Thinking it might be owned by one of the old crew, I went over after docking. Alas, this SAVAGE had been seized by the Coast Guard for drug smuggling and turned over to Customs for disposal. This was too much for my wife.

“The first SAVAGE is on the bottom of the Pacific,” she said, and the second is on the bottom of the Atlantic. Now the third is confiscated by Customs! Find another name!”

I agreed to name the new boat METEOR, but in the central lounge is mounted a plaque with a picture and history of SAVAGE (DE-386).

There is another larger bronze plaque which was mounted by the gangway of USS SAVAGE (DER-386) and lists the ship’s campaigns. It will soon be placed in the coast Guard destroyer escort display being prepared in the Coast Guard destroyer escort display being prepared in the museum of the famous USCGC INGHAM, now a National Historical Landmark at the Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum at Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. INGHAM and SAVAGE - two great ships, and I was privileged and honored to serve on both!