

II. 1945 ~ The Gyatt is Commissioned

1945: *The first official Deck Log for the Gyatt was written on the 1200 to 1600 watch on Monday the 2nd day of July 1945 and recorded the commissioning ceremony and dignitaries in attendance. The log also listed the orders governing the ceremony and duties of the ship and a list of all hands; including officers and enlisted men, their rank and rating and their serial numbers. The commissioning ceremony was at the New York Navy Yard, Brooklyn, New York. A dinner and dance, for the crew, was held later at the Regis Hotel in New York City.*

It was one of the very first cruises that the Captain, Commander Kaplan, endeared himself to the crew. The ship was refueling at sea, the men were in dungarees, some in their chambray shirts, some had them opened, some in tee shirts, some had their hats on the back of their heads, some had them pulled down over their ears and only a few had them on squarely. The flagship, on this cruise – a carrier, flashed a signal “all hands on destroyer being refueled get in uniform.” The Captain, without hesitation, signaled back “for the task being performed, my men are in uniform.”

Commander A. D. Kaplan took command of the Gyatt in March of 1945; two months before World War II ended in Europe and five months before the war was totally over. Prior to taking command of the Gyatt Commander Kaplan commanded the USS Mayo (DD 422), a ship he boarded as the Executive Officer in April 1942 and became her Captain in November 1943. The Mayo operated in the North Atlantic in 1942 escorting some of the first troop transports out of New York City. When the USS Wakefield caught fire later in the year the Mayo was alongside and removed 247 survivors. In August 1943 the Mayo was moved to DesRon Seven and the Eighth Fleet and became part of the fire and anti-aircraft protection for the beachhead landings. While at Salerno the Mayo experienced a sudden explosion that killed seven men and wounded 23 others while almost breaking the ship in two. Captain Kaplan’s cool action during this explosion resulted in a Citation from the Secretary of the Navy that read as follows: “For heroic performance of duty as a Commanding Officer of the USS Mayo during the Advanced Landings at Anzio, Italy in January 1944. Operating his vessel as fire support and anti-aircraft ship in restricted enemy mined waters and at a necessarily low speed, Commander Kaplan courageously fought his ship and skillfully directed her fire on long-range targets despite heavy aerial attack. When the Mayo was damaged by a severe underwater explosion, he maneuvered her into harbor for temporary repairs and thereafter affected her safe conduct back to her homeport. Commander Kaplan’s expert seamanship and decisive valiant conduct during this vital mission were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.” He was an experienced Captain in all areas. Commander Kaplan retired from the Navy as a Captain.

It was brought to my attention, by one of the plank owners that a number of the original Gyatt crew members were in fact sailors released from the brig at Harts Island. Harts Island is a small island at the southern end of Long Island Sound and during World War II was the retention spot for wayward navy personnel. It is understood that if a sailor had brig time of eighteen months or less he was given the choice of going to sea or serving his time at Harts

Island. Consequently; a number of seaman and fireman aboard ship elected to finish their time in the navy aboard the Gyatt. It is also understood that a few of the white hats had been highly decorated, based on the ribbons displayed during inspections.

As for decorations, at an award ceremony aboard the Gyatt one of the crewmen, Seaman C. M. Bumgarner, as a member of the USS Pillsbury (DE-133), received a Presidential Citation for participation in the capture of German submarine U-505. The information regarding this capture, which I understand to be only the second of the 20th Century, as noted in the book the "Two Ocean War" reads as follows: "At a point halfway between the Canaries and the Cape Verdes, Captain Dan Gallery, commanding the Guadalcanal escort carrier group, performed the unusual feat of boarding and salvaging a U-boat. At 1110 June 4th a DE (Destroyer Escort) of his screen, USS Chatelaine (DE-149) made a sound contact on U-505. Brisk action followed. Two other DEs bore in to assist, Wildcats circled overhead like hawks, and Guadalcanal swung clear at top speed, as Captain Gallery wrote, "A carrier right smack at the scene of a sound contact is like an old lady in a barroom brawl. She has no business there, and can do nothing but get in the way." Chatelaine delivered a full depth-charge pattern which caught the Germans just as lunch was being served, holed the outer hull and rolled the boat on its beam ends, dumping crockery, food and sailors into the bilges. Some of the men panic stricken, rushed up to the conning tower shouting that the boat was sinking; the skipper, taking their word for it, blew his tanks and surfaced. A boarding party from the DE Pillsbury (DE-133), specifically trained to profit from such circumstances, swarmed on board, closed seacocks, disconnected demolition charges and took over. Guadalcanal passed a towline and, until relieved in mid-ocean by a fleet tug, towed the captured boat toward Bermuda. U-505 after serving as a "tame submarine" during the remainder of the war, found a final resting place in the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry." Another interesting note relating to the U-505 is that Gordon Sanders, a Fireman was assigned to the decommissioning crew of the USS Guadalcanal – while working in the Captain's cabin he came upon a framed picture box laying on the deck with the glass broken. Inside were a German flag and a small brass plate identifying the flag as the one aboard the U-505 when the Guadalcanal escort carrier group captured it. Sanders asked the chief in charge of the detail what he should do with the picture box and the flag – the Chief replied; "burn it." Sanders burned the picture box and kept the flag, which is still in his possession.

Another sailor receiving a Presidential Citation about the same time was James Hegdal, GM2. Hegdal after completing basic training was assigned to a Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron in the Mediterranean. The squadron participated in the invasion of Southern France, Albania and numerous other engagements in the Western Mediterranean. During the invasion of Southern France the squadron was credited with the destruction of two enemy Corvettes. Hegdal had two brothers and a sister, Natalie, who served in the military during World War II. One brother spent considerable time in a Veteran's Hospital recovering from the ravages of a Japanese POW camp. His other brother was captured early in World War II and was killed on a prison ship enroute from the Philippines to Japan.

On a lighter vein it appears that a plank owner on the Gyatt had its reward. It was in 1945 that plank owner Larry Haines, standing in as the bestman for fellow plank owner Bill Shortz, met his wife Violet, who joins him at our reunions.

Larry Haines recalls two incidents that occurred as 1945 was coming to a close. The first occurred on the mid-watch (midnight to four AM). Haines operated out of the Fire Control room as an electrician on what would eventually become an "IC" rating; anyway, a shipmate who was somewhat bored with his watch, asked if the headphones could be attached to the P.A. (Public Address) system so he could hear some music. Like a good shipmate Haines complied. Well about an hour later, when Haines returned to his station, he found the headphones and a brief note attached to the speaker, which read; "If this occurs again, dire consequences will occur;" the note was signed by the Chief Engineer. It seemed that this music had reached various working areas throughout the ship and that the "P.A. System" was not to be misconstrued with the "Musak System" used in factories and offices for employee moral.

The second incident involved a junior engineering officer, Ensign Ehman. Haines was the duty electrician when he received a call from Ensign Ehman who advised that his reading light wasn't working. Haines dutifully reported to the Ensign's sleeping quarters and began searching for the source of the trouble. After trying the light and finding that it worked elsewhere Haines removed the cover of the terminal box and began probing with his screwdriver, when he inadvertently touched the side of the terminal box and a terminal. Immediately it was a miniature fireworks display as sparks flew everywhere with most landing on the Ensign's pillowcase. The pillowcase had little holes everywhere and a concerned Haines finished his task, turned the pillow over to hide the holes and departed. Haines was grateful to Ensign Ehman for never commenting on the status of his pillowcase – for as it was with enlisted personnel – officers also paid for replacement linens and clothing.

In the limited time remaining in 1945, after the commissioning, the Gyatt underwent shakedown training at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba on the 24th day of September while at gunnery practice the starboard barrel of 40 mm gun mount 45 exploded; careful examination by gunnery officers King, Yount and Lovejoy indicated faulty ammunition, fortunately no one was injured. At the end of this training, while returning to Norfolk, the Gyatt set a long distance speed record of 31.8 knots per hour for destroyers of its class.

One of the duties of the Boiler Tenders was to check the refrigeration units on the ship and on the midwatch (0000-0400) the man on duty went to the galley to get the keys to the "icebox," as the units were referred to, so that they could be checked. Ice buildup on the piping and the freezers were checked to see that all units were working properly and the buildup was not excessive. This duty was performed at least twice a week when in port and every other night when at sea. The man on duty rarely failed to leave the refrigerated area empty handed and when he returned to galley with the keys and fresh bread was being baked he also reduced the number of loaves by one. In later years, those on midwatch who knew the cooks well would partake of warm miniature loaves of bread, baked by the ship's bakers who would split them in two, cover them with butter and add a thick slice of a large Bermuda onion for the ultimate midwatch sandwich. As a chief once said to one of the men leaving the ship for discharge; "Hey – why don't you ship over – no man ever left a ship weighing less than when he got aboard."

On some of those watches, while standing in the forward engine room when the ship was operating out of Guantanamo Bay and other warm areas, the talking tube would whistle. The talking tube, a three-inch brass tube – that was highly polished, ran from the upper level to the

engine room and was used to transfer messages between levels. When the man on watch looked into the tube, as he responded to the whistle, he was, on occasion, greeted with a flow of tepid water that thoroughly soaked his upper torso and left him sputtering. Fortunately for the man on the upper level, who had dropped a gallon container of water into the tube, the water was like a cool shower in the 120 degree plus temperatures of the engine room and the joke was usually accepted as a welcome gift.

The ship had a 45-day post shakedown period at the New York Navy Yard Annex at Bayonne, New Jersey and then celebrated Navy Day at Baltimore, Maryland. From early November until late March 1946 the Gyatt used Pensacola, Florida as her homeport and operated in the Gulf of Mexico. During this period the Gyatt trained air officers and aviation cadets in shipboard indoctrination. During this period the ship visited the port of Corpus Christi, Texas and helped celebrate a late Armed Forces Day. Christmas in 1945 was celebrated in Pensacola, Florida.

In 1945 the Gyatt, along with other ships that became Destroyer Squadron Four, was in Destroyer Squadron 68, Destroyer Division 135 or Destroyer Division 136. On the 1st day of January 1946 Destroyer Squadron Four was formed and split into Divisions 41 and 42. The Gyatt became part of Destroyer Squadron Four and placed in Division 71. The Gyatt remained with the squadron until August 1959 except for the latter portion of 1955 and the first eleven months of 1956 while it was decommissioned for conversion into the first guided missile destroyer.

Division – 41

DD-710 USS GEARING
DD-711 USS E. A. GREENE
DD-712 USS GYATT
DD-713 USS K. D. BAILEY

Division – 42

DD-862 USS VOGELGESANG
DD-863 USS STEINAKER
DD-864 USS ELLISON
DD-865 USS CHARLES R. WARE

Based on information available the Gyatt and the seven other destroyers noted above were part of Destroyer Squadron Four from the day they were built. These destroyers were slated for the Pacific Fleet but with the ending of WWII the squadron and ships were assigned to the Atlantic Fleet. Other destroyers were added too and deleted from DesRon Four in 1954, 1956 and 1959. The Gyatt left the squadron when decommissioned in October 1955 and was reinstated in December 1957 as the DDG-712, the first of the missile destroyers.

The original DesRon Four destroyers in the Pacific Fleet during World War II were comprised of the USS Selfridge DD-357, USS Bagley DD-386, USS Blue DD-387, USS Helm DD-388, USS Mugford DD-389, USS Ralph Talbot DD-390, USS Henley DD-391, USS Patterson DD-392 and the USS Jarvis DD-393. The Blue was lost to torpedoes at Guadalcanal in August 1942 and the Henley was also lost to torpedoes in March 1943. The Jarvis and all hands were lost at Guadalcanal to a Kamikaze attack in September 1942. The aforementioned destroyers and the Australian Cruisers Australia, Canberra and Hobart were combined in early 1942 to form Task-force 44. Some of the destroyers were on hand in Tokyo Bay to observe the Japanese surrender.

In addition to the commissioning of the USS Gyatt; 1945 included the death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, on Thursday the 12th day of April, the only president to be elected to four terms of

office and who had barely started his last term. Harry S. Truman took Roosevelt's place. Chuck Heaton, a radioman already assigned to the Gyatt was on liberty, walking the streets of Newark, New Jersey and listening to the song "Tangerine" when the music changed to Gregorian Chants and the death of President Roosevelt was announced.

World War II, in Europe, ended on the 7th day of May with the surrender of the Germans in Europe and on the 15th day of August with the surrender of the Japanese after the devastation caused by the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. World War II left more than 45 million dead, with ten of those million dying in concentration camps. The GI Bill was enacted and opened the door for Middle America. It was the year that a B-25 Bomber, flying in heavy fog, hit the Empire State Building between the 78th and 79th floors without structurally damaging the building.

In 1945 the population of the United States was slightly less 140 million. The annual average military earnings were \$1,017 per year, the average miner earned \$2,629 per year, the average construction worker \$2,600 per year, and teachers were at \$1,641 per year, federal employees at \$2,646 and state employees at \$1,962 per year. A house cost \$4,625 and stamps were three cents each. A table relating to costs of various items familiar to us could be found in the miscellaneous section.

In baseball the Detroit Tigers beat the Chicago Cubs in the World Series four games to three and the New York Yankees were sold for the staggering sum, at the time, of 2.8 million dollars. The Cleveland Rams, later to become the Los Angeles Rams, edged the Washington Redskins 15 to 14 to win the National Football League Championship.

The best picture of 1945 was "The Lost Weekend." Other movies that got attention were: "Mildred Pierce, a Tree Grows in Brooklyn, a Brief Encounter, and the Way to the Stars, the Last Chance and National Velvet."

Some of the best songs of 1945 were: Perry Como's "Till The End of Time;" the Andrew Sisters' "Rum and Coca-Cola;" Les Brown's "Sentimental Journey," Johnny Mercer's "Accent-Tchu-Ate the Positive" and Bing Crosby and the Andrew Sisters' "Don't Fence Me In."