

V. 1948 ~ Starting a New Year in Europe

1948: The official log for the first day of 1948 was written by Ensign D. A. Wentz, USN and reads as follows:

00-04

*Anchored in Salonika Bay
I guess we'll have to stay,
In the country of Greece,
I wish it were Nice.
Anchored in fathoms seven,
Believe me this isn't heaven,
With forty-five fathoms of endless link,
Lying in the drink,
The port sinker is in the mud,
I hope this poem isn't a dud,
Boiler number two is on the line,
The crew we have is doing fine,
The degaussing cables are energized,
By some of the most experienced guys,
The Royal Greek Navy is about us,
I hope they never doubt us,
The White Tower lies,
At zero three five,
The smoke stack awaits,
At one three eight,
The Cupola makes a fix,
At one three six,
The skipper is Senior Officer Present,
We wish you all a New Year, pleasant.*

Signed/D. A. Wentz, Ensign, USN

The Gyatt departed Salonika shortly after the New Year began and dropped anchor at Leros on the 5th day of January. Leros was a small island in the Aegean Sea and part of a string of islands known as the Dodecanese Islands. The island was a somewhat lonely place with deep clear water – you would take a coin and flip it into the water and follow its descent to the bottom, the water here was about 25 fathoms (150 feet) – but ever so clear. The island had over the years belonged to the Greeks, the Turks, the Italians, the Germans and the British. The island was again under the Greek mantle. During World War II Leros was a German U-Boat refueling station and when members of the crew went ashore they also found that “Kilroy Was Here.” One could see sunken ships in the harbor and the surrounding area and it is understood that the ships were still seen in later years. There wasn't much to do in this area – when the

crew visited in 1952 they went to play softball and drink beer. In 1952 the Captain had issued two bottles of beer for every man who went ashore.

The ship had a very short stay in Leros and within a day departed to meet the cruiser USS Little Rock and the carrier USS Midway. During this period at sea the Gyatt was plane guarding for the aircraft carrier Midway. During one of the plane guarding sessions the pilot failed to reach the carrier with his plane and put it in the water. The carrier directed the Gyatt to retrieve the pilot. The motor whaleboat crew was prepared and had the boat manned as it was swung out from the davits in preparation to being lowered and released. It so happened that the officer in charge was the young ensign who threw things into the wind. The Ensign in his haste to get to the whaleboat to the downed pilot directed that the hooks be released before the whaleboat touched water. The forward hook was released before the aft hook and the seaman in the bow was thrown into the water and from that point on it was like a "Chinese Fire Drill." As the after section of the motor whaleboat hit the water – the carrier was advised that the Gyatt had a man overboard – lights were turned on and a search started. In the end, all worked out well, the pilot was rescued by the motor whaleboat crew of another ship and the seaman was rescued by a trailing destroyer. The seaman received an extra thirty days leave for his harrowing experience and the young officer learned another lesson.

After ten days of exercises with the carrier and the cruiser, the 17th day of January was relieved to anchor in the Bay of Naples, Italy after briefly stopping at Augusta, Sicily and then passing through the Straits of Messina. As the ship headed north through the Straits of Messina you could stand on the forecastle – turn your head right and see Italy – turn your head left and see Sicily. When the ship arrived in Naples police were everywhere and security was totally enforced. All because of what had happened the previous month. While anchored, in the Bay of Naples, we were still able to shop, for vendors came to the ship to show and sell their wares. An Italian barber was allowed aboard and was kept busy during our stay.

It was while in Naples that two hungry seamen, who were country boys from the south had their first taste of Italian food. One of the seamen, who was from Texas, was not familiar with Italians, except for those he saw from the ship when it was in Genoa and they were fair haired and blue eyed. His companion, who was from Tennessee, was just as inexperienced. Anyway, both seamen had been ashore for about five or six hours and their wanderings had generated an immense appetite. The sailors looked around and found a young lad on the street and after many words and gestures they got the word across that they wanted something to eat. The lad led the two sailors into a small room that had a few customers seated at some red and white covered tables adorned with dripping candles stuck in wine bottles. The smell that invaded the nostrils was gourmet Italian to one of Italian descent – but to two country boys from the south – well, it was something else. The sailors looked at the menu, totally perplexed, stalling and bewildered at the selections they could not comprehend. The young lad kept saying, what sounded to the seamen like "Peach-a-pie, Peach-a-pie" and they shook their heads – yes. Their meal came and two seamen stared at this crust covered with tomatoes and onions and peppers and sausage and sprinkled with prime Italian cheese and tentatively took a bite and ate like they hadn't eaten in a month. They had their first taste of what is now an American favorite – pizza. It turned out that this "Peach-a-pie" was the only food that they ate in the Mediterranean and in

Northern Europe that they considered good. But they also liked Navy chow – but if most of us were honest – which of us didn't.

While in Naples the Gyatt was tied to the pier in what was referred to as the “Mediterranean Moor”. This method of mooring had the stern end anchored to the pier with a steel cable with the two anchors forward dropped and the slack removed from the anchor chains and the cable. In this fashion the ship was close to the pier but not close enough that the motor whaleboat was not required. The stern watch was quite important when moored in this fashion for enterprising individuals could come across the after cable. The stern watch also ran to the quarterdeck to advise that crew was on the pier and to dispatch the motor whaleboat to return them aboard ship. This particular time a young ensign was with three white hats at the end of the pier and all appeared to be somewhat inebriated. The after sentry advised that he would go to the quarterdeck and advise the motor whaleboat was needed. The ensign replied that it (the motor whaleboat) was not required – they would come across the cable. The sentry was beside himself as he rushed to the quarterdeck and the dispatching of the motor whaleboat. As the sentry returned to his post he heard a loud splash – he moved even faster and rushed for the stern and peered over the lifeline to see the young ensign paddling to stay afloat. Two firemen, sitting on the depth charge racks, observed the Ensign coming across the mooring line – hand over hand - making excellent progress until his hat fell off and he reflexively reached for it – which resulted in the loud splash.

While in Naples a trip to Rome was arranged and a number of the crew received the opportunity to visit that ancient city. Those making the trips received a five-day holiday without the loss of leave time. The crew had a visit with Pope Pius XII and the rest of the time they spent sight seeing. However; five members of the group, which included the Executive Officer, an Ensign and three white hats, wanted to see the opera. As the group departed the hotel they hailed a taxi and received a horse drawn carriage. The five men got into the carriage and directed the driver to take them to the opera – but the carriage would not move. It so happened that this particular carriage had fenders and when the five men entered this vehicle their combined weight caused the fenders to rest on the wheels and in turn they became a brake. The Executive Officer sized up the situation and directed the young officer to depart. When the young ensign left the carriage the fenders raised above the wheels and the vehicle moved down the road. The young ensign stood on the curb and watched Executive Officer and the three sailors ride into the setting sun of winter heading to the real “Grand Old Opera.”

It was the early part of this stop at Naples that a nineteen-year-old fireman, already serving his third year on the Gyatt and enjoying liberty, as he always did, bought a German Army uniform in excellent condition for two dollars. He didn't get very far with the uniform. As he was passing one of the narrow streets in Naples he saw an old man in a corner of one of the buildings. He thought the man huddled in a corner encircled in his own arms and shivering could have been fifty or sixty years old – but to a teenager everyone looks old. The fireman parted with his newly purchased uniform – giving it to the old man – along with a thousand lira, about a dollar and seventy cents in those days. The fireman said what he did was common place and he knew others aboard ship had done similar things.

After a week of liberty and catch-up on duties that could not be handled at sea we set sail for Taranto, Italy located in the arch of the Italian boot. After almost a month of operations the Gyatt arrived in Sfax, Tunisia. It was understood that on the way to Sfax a radarman striker by the name of Wainwright was the duty coffee maker. In a hurry to get another pot brewing Wainwright took the pot to the O-1 level to get rid of the coffee grounds. He stood on the edge of the O-1 deck took off the lid and shook out the coffee grounds – but he forgot that they were still in the strainer, so the coffee and the innards headed to Davy Jones Locker in the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. The men in the CIC gang were chagrined and wanted to know how anyone could be so irresponsible (some said stupid). Well – out of sheer desperation the gang started drinking boiled coffee – but that lasted only a few short weeks before a collection was taken and a new percolator was purchased. The new pot was only in service about two weeks when it disappeared and the old pot was back in service with the new innards. When queried about this – Walt Kluft, a sonarman, said he couldn't take the metal taste given off by the new pot. The fire control gang experienced a similar situation a few years later and I recall that they had two pots – one for inspection and one for coffee.

It was the 19th day of February when the Gyatt moored to a pier in the Sfax harbor and with the exception of a merchant ship at anchor we had the port city to ourselves. The city of Sfax was still only a pile of rubble and little had been done to remove the ravages of war. We were there only a short time when we were greeted by a motorcade of French Foreign Legion Troops on motorcycles. These motorcycle troops carried guns with folded wire stocks – something that was to be common in later years but new to us in 1948. The motorcycle brigade turned to their right and faced our ship – jumped off of their motorcycles and saluted. A drum and bugle group mounted on magnificent Arabian horses followed the motorcycle group; the riders were tall and were dressed in uniforms of the area. It was interesting to see how those with drums handled the drums, which were mounted on each side of the horse and the horse. A company of Legionnaires followed the drum and bugle group on matching brown horses and another company on matching white horses. The companies dismounted, turned and saluted our ship. Finally came a colonel on a magnificent black charger, he dismounted, approached Captain Tellefsen and presented him with a medal and the customary kiss on each cheek.

The Legion were a great help during our three days in port, while at sea many of the crew had come down with what we were to later understand to be “Yellow Jaundice” and had been unable to receive aid from a navy doctor delivered by helicopter. The Legion's doctor, upon seeing the men afflicted, ordered fresh fruit and milk, which relieved this malady. The Legion also assisted us by taking us to El Jemm for a mail drop by parachute. Mail was something that the crew had not seen for a while and any news from home was a joy. El Jemm had a coliseum similar to the one in Rome. Those that went to El Jemm traveled in half-track vehicles provide by the Legion and were rewarded for their trip with viewing of the coliseum.

Sfax also had a casbah that was off limits to all but shore patrol personnel, who were rewarded for their duty as patrolmen by being able to view the area under the pretext of checking for those that were not to be there. However, sailors are not prone to stay away from places designated as “off-limits” and three of the crew, one fireman, one IC striker and an IC second class, made it to one of the off-limits “dens of iniquity” to share time with the ladies. It was after a few drinks out of “not to clean” glasses that the three sailors wound up in a room with several of the

Arab beauties, including one who sported a rose tattoo on her cheek – face cheek – that is. The sailors and their friends were no sooner in the room when an Arab boy rushed in babbling in Arabic to the girls that American sailors with clubs were looking for sailors – to us this could mean only one thing – Shore Patrol. The IC2 went into a closet of sorts, whose door was a curtain, and was found almost immediately. The fireman was told to get out from underneath the bed. The IC striker, at the directions of the ladies, stripped to his skivvies, had his hands and feet dirtied by these same ladies, who also covered him with a foul smelling blanket. The ladies placed a set of “worry beads” in his and showed him how to move them advising him to grunt in a low voice as he rotated the beads through his fingers – one by one. Three Shore Patrol, lead by a first class quartermaster from the 712, came into the room without knocking and immediately spotted the shiny black shoes sticking out beneath the curtain and the soles of shoes underneath the bed and ignored the mumbling individual beneath the dirty blanket. The Shore Patrol escorted their two charges back to the ship – the IC striker spent the rest of his liberty with the ladies. When the striker went back to the ship he searched for and found the Lead Shore Patrol the next morning and asked if they found two sailors in the casbah? The Lead Shore Patrol replied he had and returned them to the ship. The striker said that he should have taken the dirty old man sitting on the bed – praying. It was like a light was turned on in the QM1’s head as he said: “You SOB – I can probably guess what you were praying for.”

The Gyatt’s next and final stop on this cruise was Gibraltar, where two to three dozen of the crew having the worst cases of “Yellow Jaundice” were returned to the “States” by air.

On entering Gibraltar on the 27th day of February the Gyatt lent assistance to the merchant ship “Kerma”, a coal-fired steam ship that experienced an explosion and had five men badly injured. The Kerma was boarded by LTJG David Silver and corpsmen petty officers Stitye and Verean who lent aid to the injured.

A letter of appreciation dated the 12th of March 1948 written by La Tunisienne Steam Navigation Company Limited for Frank C. Strick & Company Limited, Managers, the owners of the steamship, to the American Ambassador in London, England best describes the happenings. The letter reads as follows:

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

We would like to take this opportunity of expressing our keen appreciation of the prompt assistance afforded by U. S. Destroyer “GYATT” stationed at Gibraltar in meeting our s/s “KERMA” off that port on 27th February and rendering medical assistance which was urgently needed by several members of the crew as a result of an explosion on board.

The master of our vessel has expressed his gratitude for the service rendered and we are very pleased to say that four of the five members of the crew who were injured are making a satisfactory recovery.

Would you be good enough to convey our appreciation to the Commanding Officer and crew of the Destroyer.

We have the honour to remain, Sir,

Your obedient Servants,

*La Tunisienne Steam Navigation Company Ltd.
For Frank C. Strick & Co., Limited, Managers*

The letter was forwarded on the 19th day of March 1948, by the United States Naval Forces – Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean with pleasure and gratification and a request to post the letter for crew review.

The Gyatt left Gibraltar a few days later and crossed the Atlantic in typical time, arriving on the 11th day of March. While crossing the ocean a bump was felt and blood was observed astern of the ship, no leaks were encountered but in one of our later dry-dock inspections it was evident that the sonar dome had been hit.

The Gyatt spent four weeks in Norfolk, enough time for all hands to become reacquainted with their families, before sailing to the sunny Caribbean and the island of Bermuda. After exercises in the Caribbean area the Gyatt returned to Norfolk for three more weeks before heading to Newport, Rhode Island and a rendezvous with the carrier USS Kearsage (CV-33).

When the ship was scheduled to depart Newport they picked up a passenger. ComDesLant, Rear Admiral Felix Johnson, USN came aboard for the return cruise to Norfolk. The Admiral, much to the chagrin of the younger officers, spent virtually all his time aboard the Gyatt in the Combat Information Center (CIC), where he conferred with the radarmen, radiomen and other disciplines responsible for the operation of the CIC. After asking for a cup of coffee and some “down to earth” questions relating first to the man and then to the various equipment in CIC and being a “total” listener the crew warmed to the admiral and he remained at CIC for more than two watches. The Admiral asked about every piece of equipment and the crew responded. The Admiral observed the crew as they worked the maneuvering board and the DRT equipment. The crew was warmed by the “down to earth” feeling imparted by the Admiral Johnson and truly enjoyed his visit and his questions. Some of the men never left the CIC area, during the Admiral’s visit, as they listened and consumed pot after pot of the caffeine rich coffee. As we look back to our time aboard ship we wonder why we were so hyper, for on a daily basis, we really drank a couple of pots of coffee – not a couple of cups.

Two days after arriving at Norfolk on the 23rd day of May, Commander James M. Wolfe, Jr. (23 May 1948 to 10 September 1949) relieved Commander Carl R. Tellefsen and took command of the Gyatt. Prior to taking command of the Gyatt Commander Wolfe served aboard the USS Gleaves (DD 423) and the USS Columbia (CL 56) both ships served their country well during World War II. The Gleaves, during Wolfe’s stay, searched for the German Wolfpacks as she escorted convoys across the Atlantic. The Columbia, while Commander Wolfe was aboard as a Lieutenant Commander and Gunnery Officer, served in the Pacific Theater and received ten battle stars. It was on the Columbia that Commander Wolfe received a Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts and a Navy Unit Commendation. The Bronze Star was received: “For meritorious

achievement as Gunnery Officer of the USS Columbia in action against enemy Japanese forces during the invasion of Leyte and the Battle for Leyte Gulf, October 18 to 29, 1944. With the Task Group under intense enemy fire and frequent air attacks, Commander Wolfe efficiently directed the fire-control of his ship, thereby contributing materially to its success during a sustained offensive operation and a Naval engagement which resulted in the sinking of eight enemy vessels. By his skill, keen judgement and untiring alertness, he upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.”

Commander Wolfe’s Purple Hearts were awarded for wounds received during battles that occurred on the 14th day of December 1944 and the 9th day of January 1945. The Navy Unit Commendation was received: “For outstanding heroism in action as a Unit of a Task Group operating in support of the initial landings at Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, Philippines, from January 5 to 9, 1945. Engaged in bombardment of hostile shore defenses and in coverage of minesweeping operations as a Japanese suicide dive bomber plunged to attack, the USS Columbia promptly opened fire, blasting the target upward and forcing it between foremast and mainmast to crash 50 feet from the side abreast of the bridge and spray the entire forward part of the ship with gasoline. Although saved from serious fires by the quick work of the repair crews, the Columbia suffered personnel casualties later the same day when a hostile suicide dive bomber crashed her main deck, put two turrets out of action and caused progressive electrical failures from extensive flooding. Despite her crippled condition and the increased damage from a third suicide crash into the forward battery director, the Columbia stoutly continued her heavy bombardment schedule after each fanatical attack, sending her salvos into enemy gun positions and facilities with punishing effect in gallant support of our assault forces until her vital mission was fulfilled. A resolute and sturdy veteran, complemented by skilled and aggressive officers and men, the Columbia has rendered distinctive service, sustaining and enhancing the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service. Commander retired from the Navy as a Captain.

It was the 4th day of June and the Gyatt arrived at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba spent the day and then headed to San Juan, Puerto Rico arriving there on the 6th day of June. The ship returned to Norfolk after San Juan, stayed a few days and returned south for some experimental firing on Bloodsworth Island to check out a fire control system that could be beneficial in spotting targets. During this four-day mission the ship was overwhelmed with special equipment and technical personnel. It was while the ship was at sea, on this cruise, that the Captain thought it would be a good idea to have the designated landing party become acquainted with the weapons in the small arms locker. The ship’s landing party was comprised of around 100 crewmen, roughly one-third of the men aboard and about one-third of these were directed to the fantail, about 35 men, for indoctrination and practice in the use of certain weapons. This particular day the designated weapon was a Browning Automatic Rifle or a BAR as it is more commonly referred to. The instructor, a Second Class Gunners Mate, gathered the men in the vicinity of Mount Three and proceeded with the indoctrination. After the lecture he would take each man to the very stern of the ship and have him fire at some wooden crates obtained from the galley. The crates were secured to one of the stanchions by two heaving lines tied together and they bobbed wildly in the wake created by the ship. It was either the third or fourth man that created a problem that resulted in the discontinuance of small arm indoctrination for a number of years. This particular individual, very slightly built, took the weapon in hand and not realizing it was in the automatic mood depressed the trigger. The burst started to propel the individual to his left

and he sprayed bullets as he moved with the BAR. The men near Mount Three dove beneath or dashed behind its heavy steel plating. It was only the quickness of the GM2 that prevented a major disaster as he grabbed the BAR and yanked it out of the hands of the undersized member of the landing party. The tellers of this tale laugh now – but they didn't then.

Two weeks after returning to Norfolk the Gyatt headed to the Boston Navy Yard for a ten-week overhaul, departing for Norfolk on the 13th day of September. During this stay in the Navy Yard the Gyatt detached ten or so radar and sonar personnel to attend an advanced radar school. When the four-week school was completed the Gyatt personnel were recognized for having all of her attendees in the top fifteen slots. The school was attended by more than fifty men from the Atlantic Fleet. The number two finisher in the class was Larry Scallon, who was a Radarman Third Class at the time. The Gyatt continuously finished ahead of the other ships in the squadron in ASW and Air-Search exercises and when queried about this success the command was advised that as a group they attended all available schools when in port. As other ships began attending the various schools the availability of space became limited but the Gyatt maintained the high standards previously set.

It was also while in the Boston Navy Yard that two seaman restricted to the ship for antics in Norfolk wanted to go ashore and partake of some liquid refreshments. The two had been painting the waterline of the ship – yes the same two that missed the key items on the Thanksgiving Dinner a year earlier – anyway, they were in the same punt only taking their time as they moved along the waterline. This one particular day, after having been confined to the ship for more than two weeks, they decided they needed some beer. When the workday ended they left their punt tied to the portside screw guard. They went to chow and about an hour after sunset, dressed in unmarked dungarees they left the ship and got into the punt. The two seamen, fearless with the bloom of youth, rowed this dinky little flat bottom boat from the South Boston Navy Yard through Boston's Inner Harbor into the Mystic River and to the Charleston Navy Yard, totally oblivious to the ways of the sea and the potential dangers caused by larger craft. After buying a case of beer they returned via their punt to the South Boston Navy Yard and boarded the ship, undetected, with their case of beer.

If you were a baseball fan, Boston was the place to be in the late forties and early fifties. It cost a quarter for a man in uniform to walk through the gates of Fenway Park and Braves Field. The Boston Red Sox played at Fenway Park then as they do now. The Boston Braves left at the end of the 1953 season to become the Milwaukee Braves and subsequently the Atlanta Braves. Depending on the league schedule you not only saw Ted Williams, Bobby Doerr or Johnny Pesky of the Red Sox or Warren Spahn and Tommy Holmes of the Braves but you had the opportunity to see the likes of Bob Feller, Joe DiMaggio, Stan Musial, Enos Slaughter, Duke Snider, PeeWee Reese, Ralph Kiner and Johnny Mize. Boston also turned a lot of country and small town boys into lovers of seafood – especially lobsters and oysters.

Romance in the forties must have been in the air. Walter Klafft, a Sonarman Third Class, met his wife Ruth on a blind date that summer in Boston. Walter was dating a young lady who had invited him to a wedding when he first saw Ruth. Walter did not commit himself to the wedding saying he did not know how to get there. Ruth volunteered to get him there and as they say – “the rest is history.” Walter and Ruth were married in less than two months. His best friend

and best man, Larry Scallon, never expected it to last – but it pleases him to know that in August of 1998, Walter and Ruth celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

The Gyatt got underway for Guantanamo Bay on the 30th day of September for intensive training that took the ship into the first week of December. During plane guard operations for the USS Midway, in mid November, the Gyatt left formation heading to a plane that crashed in an attempt to land on the carrier. When the Gyatt arrived on the scene, all that was found was an oil slick, where the plane was to be. After searching the area unsuccessfully for more than two-hours the Gyatt was called off by the Midway. The pilot was not found.

It was during this training period and a high-speed torpedo-firing mission that the ship encountered difficulties with the steering mechanism. The ship would move hard port or hard starboard (left or right) even though the ship's wheel was moved only five degrees one way or the other. The problem was caused by the loss of a pin in the steering speed gear and it was not until the system was shifted to manual that things returned to normal. Hand cranks were used for steering during the remainder of the operation. For such a failure to occur during a simulated torpedo was a major problem and the office of BuShips was advised immediately. BuShips advised that the pin was to be secure at all times. After completing more than the two months of intensive training the Gyatt returned to Norfolk for the Christmas Holidays and replenishment of supplies prior to returning to Europe and the Sixth Fleet.

Harry S. Truman shocked the world in 1948 by beating Thomas E. Dewey in the race for president. The Marshall Plan was approved and seventeen billion dollars was set aside for European Aid. The first curved windshield and the first fins were on GM's Cadillac and that car sold for \$2,823.

The Cleveland Indians beat the Boston Braves in six games. The Philadelphia Eagles beat the Chicago Bears in a snowstorm by the score of seven to zero to win the NFL championship. The Baltimore Bullets won the second NBA championship four games to two. Tony Zale beat Graziano for the middleweight championship and in turn was defeated by Marcel Cerdan of France. The Olympics were held in London and the United States won 38 gold medals.

The top movie was "Hamlet" with Lawrence Olivier; competition came from: "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre, Johnny Belinda, Louisiana Story, Red Shoes, Bitter Rice, The Naked City, The Bicycle Thief and Key Largo."

The top songs were; "Because" by Perry Como, "Now Is The Hour" by Bing Crosby, "It's Magic" by Doris Day and "Buttons and Bows" by Dinah Shore. Other were: "All I Want for Christmas is My Two front Teeth, and On a Slow Boat to China."