

NAVY NOTES  
by  
George L. MacKellar

March 16, 1942 Applied for enlistment in the US Navy.

March 18 Sworn in.

March 21 Left Los Angeles from Federal Building in Greyhound ~~bus~~ bus, bound for US Naval Training Station, San Diego. Left at 9 a.m. and had trouble all the way down (with bus). Arrived San Diego at 4:30 p.m. Had chow and was given shots, vaccinations, physical examination, clothes, and had to stencil all our clothes. Then assigned to tents at Camp .  
At 11:30 p.m. finally turned in.

Reveille following morning at 6a.m. For the next three weeks we marched, drilled, and cleaned up barracks and tents; and every Tuesday we got a break. Instead of marching, we were lucky: we stood in a line for three hours and got shots.

April 11 - Transferred to Balboa Park, San Diego. Got first liberty. Liberty started at 12 noon and 3 buddies and I went to Mission Beach. Rented a sailboat to go sailing. Out in Mission Bay inexperienced hands capsized sailboat. I wound up in the water. Rescued by a speedboat and hauled back to the dock. Spent rest of day until midnight in wet dress blues.

April 18 - Transferred to Naval Training Station Outgoing Unit. Four days later transferred by train to Armed Guard Training Center, Treasure Island, San Francisco, California, for signal school. There were 40 fellows in the class and 39 lived in SF. Needless to say, I didn't go ashore very often. Two fellows I bunked next to, both Swedes, were tall: the short one was 6'4" and the other was about 6'6". Whenever the two of them wanted to go someplace and I didn't want to, they simply grabbed me by the arm, lifted me off the floor, and we all went.

Six days a week from 8 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon we studied flag hoist, light, semaphore, procedure, tactical manoeuvres, yardarm blinker; and then in the evening we studied. Six weeks of that and I was ready to give up. Semaphore was very easy; flag hoist was simple, but light--impossible. To make it even harder, we were facing the wind.

June 4 - The chief told us we were to be shipped out Monday morning and would have from 1300 Saturday until 0800 Monday morning liberty. Called up home Friday night with last dollar and told folks I was leaving. Mother asked me if I could make it home over the weekend if she would send me some money. Saturday left SF at 1430 and arrived Sunday morning 0430 by bus. Spent afternoon at picnic at Arroyo Seco Park. Left at 4:30 by bus. Arrived SF 0700 Monday morning.

Received order to go to Destroyer Base, San Diego. Left by train 11:30 that night. Went to Bakersfield by train, transferred to bus, and arrived at Destroyer Base 1700. Two weeks

at Destroyer Base and transferred to USS Henry T. Allen, APA 30. Assigned to NC Division Quarters on D deck. When I reported with Kallegian S-2/c, Stevens SM-1/c asked 3 questions:

- (1) Are you married? Ans. No. Reply to Ans. Yippee.
- (2) Reserve or regular? Ans. Regular. Reply to Ans. Yippee.
- (3) Can you make good coffee? Ans. Yes. Reply to Ans. You'll do.

Signal gang consisted of Ivan E. Mustain CSM, L. J. Stevens, SM-1/c, Doolittle SM- 2/c, Lindberg SM-2/c(The first time I saw him he was sewing on his SM crow) R. R. Finley S-1/c, Kallegian S-2/c MacKellar AS (I was the junior man on that gang for over 1 1/2 years!)

Stood first watch noon next day and made a complete mess of the first message I received. Lucky it was from a ship across the dock, so I went over to the ship personally and received the message by copying it from his copy. A short time later assigned to beach party and spent next few weeks training for amphibious landings. Crew became adept at lowering ~~bat~~ boats. Set new record by lowering boats at 11 minutes flat in pitch darkness.

On my first trip to sea, we went for a firing run off the coast of Mexico. The thing that amazed me most was the blueness of the water. All the sea I had seen had been green, but the water at sea is so blue you think you could write with it like ink. There were 3 ships in the formation and our target was a 16 sq. ft. raft with a sort of wigwam on it. On our first couple of runs our marksmanship wasn't so good, but on our third and fourth runs, our 3" guns practically demolished the target.

July 5 - We left SD for SF. We picked up some troops in SF and brought them to Monterey. You could tell when you were nearing Monterey by the ~~smell~~ smell of fish. We pulled into SD again on Aug 21 and I put in a chit for early liberty the following day. At 9 o'clock I went up to the ship's office to see if my liberty had been granted, and the chief yeoman said ~~Not yet~~ "Not yet; come back later." I went back at 10 and stood around until 1130, and still no liberty. At that time the public address system came on and a voice said, "close all watertight doors; make preparations to get under way at 12 o'clock." At noon we left SD and headed to sea. No one knew where we were going, not even the captain. That night at midnight the captain opened his sealed orders and found our destination was Panama. In the convoy goind to Panama with us were three other ships: the Algarab, Harris, and Prycon. On our way down the coast, we painted the ship. One day I was painting the side of the ship, hanging by my knees, and thought at the time how funny it would be to fall in the water. That afternoon I was up on the bow when I noticed something sticking out of the water from what appeared to be seaweed. Upon looking closer, I saw that it was a tiger shark that measured approximately 28'. Then I realized that it would have been far from funny to fall in the water.

Oct 31 -Lindberg and I went on watch at 0400 and I noticed a strange smell in the air. Lindy said "That's land", and sure enough, in about 3 hours we sighted the coast of Central America.

We arrived at Balboa, C.Z. at noon, and at 1600 the port watch was granted liberty. We went into Balboa and then Lindy, Barber, and myself went on over into Panama City. The streets were narrow, dirty, and the automobiles travelled up and down the street like racers. We hunted for souvenirs in a lot of little shops and stopped at a few bars. The following day I had duty, and while still on watch, it started to rain. Within 15 minutes lightning struck the forward A frames twice. Who says lightning doesn't strike in the same place twice?

At 8 o'clock in the morning of the third, we proceeded through the Canal. Going through the Culebra Cut, ships pass right through the jungle. Alligators swim in the Canal and the jungle steams under the tropic sun.

Arrived in Cristobal, C.Z. about 3:30 and went on liberty again. Went into Colon, Panama, and although the streets are wider, ~~ix~~ they are still dirty. Little children run around in their birthday suits and the women of the streets are sometimes as young as 12 years old.

Sept. 5 - We got under way for Norfolk, Va. At that time the Caribbean Sea was nicknamed "Torpedo Junction" and right in the middle of it the USS H T Allen decided to break down. We had a destroyer escort of 3 ships. Our course took us between Haiti, Jamaica, and Cuba up past San Salvador.

Sept. 10 - About 9 o'clock General Quarters was sounded. A Nazi U-boat had fired 2 torpedoes at us; both passed ahead of the bow and the destroyer Mayrant began laying depth charges. After the ninth depth charge went off, she steamed up into position ahead of us, and as she passed us she sent a visual message "Operation favorable."

Sept 12 - We reached the channel going into Norfolk. The Allen was to proceed in first, then Harris to follow, then the Algarab, and then the Prycon; but the Algarab got her signals mixed and swung right into the Harris. I was down in the compartment when it happened, and they sounded General Quarters. As I started up on deck, I heard the word passed to man all life boats. I had visions of torpedoes coming at us from all angles so I developed my speed. The Algarab had rammed the Harris just astern of her bridge. A man in the forward compartment of the ~~Alax~~ Algarab was crushed to death. Both ships made it into Portsmouth Navy Yard under their own power.

We arrived at Hampton Roads around 3 o'clock and proceeded ~~ix~~ into Portsmouth Navy Yard that ~~evening~~ evening. Lindy and I rated liberty so we went over to Norfolk and got the bus for Washington, D. C.

Sept. 13 - Arrived at Washington at 4 o'clock in the morning, and tried to find some place to sleep. After searching for 2 hours, we gave up and went to a little restaurant on Pennsylvania Avenue for breakfast. The fellow who ran the restaurant was

quitting that day ~~and~~ and for a big meal of hotcakes, bacon, and coffee, he charged us 20¢. We went to a USO and washed up and at 10 o'clock went on a sightseeing tour of Washington and vicinity. Went to Mt Vernon and spent 3 hours there looking ~~every~~ everything over. Came back and spent several hours in the Smithsonian Institute. Had dinner, and at 9 o'clock caught the bus for Norfolk.

The next month was spent in shipyards having the ship repaired. About the 12th of October we went to the Naval Supply Depot to take on supplies, and on the 15th of October I was sent to Radar School at the Naval Training Station. On the afternoon of the 18th, Warren Adams S-1/c came after me and told me they wanted me back at the ship immediately. I couldn't leave without ~~written~~ orders, so he went back for them. A short time later he came back with ~~written~~ written orders and I was transferred back to the Allen. The following morning we put out into the Chesapeake Bay for our final phase of training. We made practice landings with the soldiers who were aboard on the Solomon Island in Chesapeake Bay.

Oct. 23 -We pulled back into the Supply Depot for one night, and on the following morning we left Norfolk. As we we steamed out of the Chesapeake Bay, we at last jully realized that we were on the trip we had been training for. With us, pulling out of the bay were destroyers, cruisers, battleships, transports, supply ships, cargo ships, mine sweepers, etc. Three days out of Norfolk we were informed as to where we were going. Our objective was to be a small town just north of Casablanca in French Morocco.

The following morning I went up on the bridge about 8 o'clock and saw a sight I have never seen equalled before or since: there were ships as far as the eye could see, and beyond. From then until Nov. 7 we were constantly intercepting German U-boats. They had got through our outer screen and depth charges were frequent. At 11 o'clock on the night of Nov. 7 we reached our objective. From about 9 o'clock until GQ sounded at 11:30, all the fellows who weren't on watch ~~were~~ were down in the compartment writing letters and putting their valuables together in ~~water~~ waterproof containers. At 11 o'clock we went to eat what was to be our last real meal for over a week. ~~When~~ When GQ sounded, I went to my battle station on the starboard side of the poopdeck and noticed some lights coming toward us. Four French ships were leaving Port Layautey and our destroyers went out and intercepted them. Sent prize crews aboard. They were ordered to put out their lights and maintain absolute radio silence. Two destroyers "escorted" them far out to sea.

At midnight a radio broadcast ~~was~~ was made in French to the people of Morocco stating that off their shores lay an American and British invasion fleet and that if they wanted to surrender, by night they were to shine search lights straight up in the air, and by day, to fly two French tricolors one above the other on their flagpoles. At approximately 12:30 our boats were lowered into the water and the first assault waves loaded aboard.

H-hour was at 4 a.m. The first three waves of assault troops hit the beach at 4 without any resistance. Instead of putting their search lights shining in the air, they were shining on the boats coming in, lighting up the entire bay. When the fourth wave landed, just as the sun was coming up, the ~~fire~~ fight began. The beach was strafed by 7 planes. All 7 planes were shot down by small gun fire within two or three hours. We stayed at our battle stations for 48 hours, taking time out only to grab a cup of coffee and a sandwich.

Nov. 9 - In the afternoon Finley and I were standing on the stern of the ship watching the activity on the beach when we noticed a flash from the top of the hill by the fort. A moment later there was a loud report and a splash of water about 20 feet from us; and we realized that they were firing at us from the beach. Needless to say we got under way, quick. Our destroyers knocked out the gun a few minutes later.

After securing our after signal station on the poopdeck, I went up to the flying bridge to go on watch. I was there for 24 hours when the flag chief signalman wanted someone to go over on the beach for a salvage crew. I left the ship just ~~after~~ as it was growing dark and headed for the beach. At 10 o'clock we hit the beach. Our job was to haul our boats off the beach. We worked until 2 a.m. on a LCM only to have the 8" hauser snap. Two hours later we have a  $1\frac{1}{4}$ " steel cable hooked on to the LCM. After about 20 minutes, that broke, too, same way. At about 5 o'clock we all stopped working and went over to get some coffee and something to eat; and sat around until the sun came up.

The following morning I ran a portable transmitter for an officer off another ship, and while standing on the beach sending a message out, a bullet whizzed past my ear. I could feel the wind of it. I headed for the nearest cover, but fast!

That afternoon we were to report back to the ship, but the boats couldn't come into the beach to pick us up because of the breakers, so we had a 4-mile walk to the fort. I had lost my shoes and the 4-mile walk was over gravel road. Going through a small cluster of hills where there had been a battle two days before, the smell was terrific. All the Americans had been taken away, but the French and natives who were killed there were still there. When we got back to the base of the hill where the fort was, it was just getting dusk. I noticed a special light shining on a sign alongside the road. The sign read: L.A. City Limits, Traffic Rules Strictly Enforced.

I got back out to the ship about nine o'clock and a short time later got under way for Casablanca. One of the ships in our division had been sent to Casablanca already. Its orders were given by radio in plain language. Two hours later, the message was received: U.S.S. Electra torpedoed making for Casablanca.

We arrived in Casablanca the following morning. We got a call from the task force commander and Doolittle and I went up to the 24" light~~s~~ to receive it. The message contained two groups: Come on. We were doing 10 knots at the time. About two minutes later another message said: Hurry. What we didn't know was that the destroyers screening us were between us and a bunch of German U-boats. ~~(X)~~ The entire bay at Casablanca was full of scuttled ships. There were French destroyers run aground and set afire. Alongside of a dock the French battleship Jean Bart lay with her forecassle torn up--a credit to the marksmanship of the battleship Massachusetts.

It was 4 o'clock that afternoon when we finally got alongside the dock. From then until the following ~~evening~~ evening we unloaded the ship.

Nov. 16 About 8 o'clock we left Casablanca with a convoy of 16 ships and escorts for the United States. For the next 14 days we were in a storm. We arrived Norfolk, Virginia, December 1, 1942 and I went ashore and got drunk.

Dec. 16 We left Norfolk with 1800 Marines bound for Panama and our final destination with the Marines was Samoa. Arrived in Balboa, Canal Zone, December 24, tied up alongside the dock and found out on Christmas Eve, of all nights, that there would be no liberty because the ship was quarantined: spinal meningitis.

Dec. 26 We left Balboa for Samoa.

Dec. 30 We crossed the equator.