

MIGHTY NINETY



SUMMER 2009

The Quarterly Newsletter of USS ASTORIA CL-90

Welcome to the 2nd issue of the Mighty Ninety newsletter!

This newsletter will be distributed four times a year, containing announcements and content surrounding the light cruiser USS ASTORIA CL-90 and the men who served aboard ship during her career, 1944-1949.

HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, JANUARY 1945

Excerpts from a ship's history section currently being written for the website.

When the Mighty Ninety cruise book was published in 1946, it included a photo taken in the officers' wardroom mess along with the caption, "The China Sea was rough, ask our Marine Captain!"

Although the Sailors and Marines who were aboard ship at the time know well what this refers to, it remains cryptic to the rest of us without further explanation. Here is the story.



THE CHINA SEA
WAS ROUGH
ASK OUR
MARINE CAPTAIN!

When Admiral Halsey took Task Force 38 back to sea following the Typhoon of December 1944, his primary mission was to return to the Philippines and provide air cover for the landings on Luzon. However, Halsey had been waiting months for an opportunity to take the Fast Carrier Task Force down into the South China Sea. All indications suggested that a significant portion of the remaining Japanese fleet was holed up there, and Halsey wanted to finish them off. Now he finally had the opportunity.

Once initial support of the Luzon landings was complete, Task Force 38 headed south, away from the Philippines and toward French Indochina (modern Vietnam). This was the first American incursion into the South China Sea since very early in the war. On 12 January 1945, USS ASTORIA and other cruisers and battleships were detached from the task force to enter Cam Ranh Bay, identify enemy ships and sink them. But the enemy wasn't there—the Japanese Navy had fled Cam Ranh for safer waters.



The day was not a loss. The Task Force also launched air strikes against targets ranging up and down the coastline, including Saigon (pictured). 850 planes flew missions throughout the day, bombing Japanese merchant shipping, tankers, freighters, and light naval vessels.

The results were devastating for Japan. In what Halsey called "one of the heaviest blows to Japanese shipping of any day of the war," 44 enemy ships totaling more than 132,000 tons were sunk. (continued on page 2)

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HISTORICAL SPOTLIGHT: THE SOUTH CHINA SEA, JANUARY 1945



(continued from page 1)

The next day the fleet backed away from the coast to attempt refueling. Winds were high and the sea was very rough. Several ships broke their lines during fueling attempts.

USS ASTORIA's Captain Dyer recalled Admiral Halsey coming over the radio stating, "Rampage (ASTORIA's call sign), you make a try at it. If you can't do it, nobody can." ASTORIA's attempts (pictured) were also unsuccessful, and the fueling operation was called off.

During these attempts, one of the ship's forward 20mm guns broke loose and began swinging wildly as the ship tossed. USMC Captain

Gerry Armitage worked his way up to the bow to secure the mount. As he worked against the heavy waves, the ship's bow plunged below the waterline, taking him with it. When the bow emerged, Armitage was gone—overboard and passing in ASTORIA's wake.

Quick thinking and accurate spotting by F Division shipmates relayed Armitage's position in the water to other ships of the task force. Following a vigorous swim, the Marine Captain was plucked from the water by the destroyer USS HALSEY POWELL several miles away.

The following morning, HALSEY POWELL came up alongside ASTORIA to return her adventurous officer.

The standard maritime ransom applied, of course—ASTORIA had to send across her ration of ice cream before HALSEY POWELL would hand over her prize.

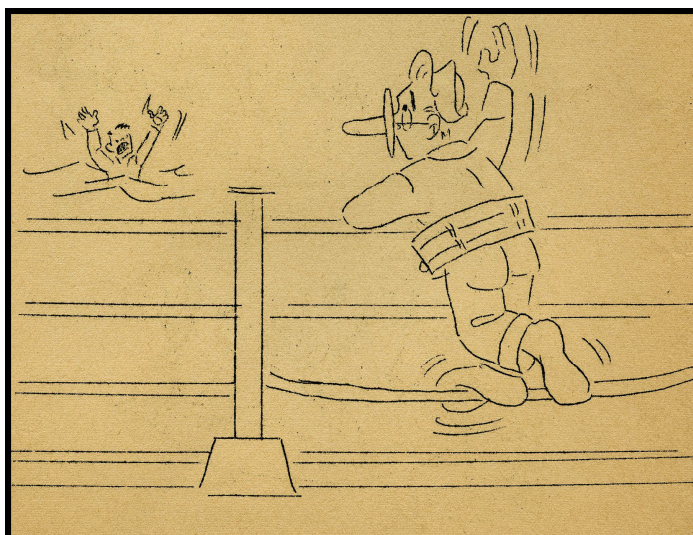
Once the ice cream was transferred, Captain Armitage returned to his ship via breeches buoy (pictured) where he was treated to a fine send-up in the officers' mess, which was later featured in the *Mighty Ninety* cruise book.

Meanwhile, the task force continued to conduct strikes in the South China Sea. Tokyo Rose came over the radio stating, "We don't know how you got in, but how the hell are you going to get out?"



More of this historical account will follow on the [Mighty Ninety website](#).

SHIPMATE SPOTLIGHT: GERARD T. ARMITAGE



Left: USMC Captain Armitage receives an “Extinguished Service Cross” in the officers’ mess following his adventure in the South China Sea. The paper in his hand contains a satire penned by F Division shipmate J. Fred Lind:

*The Captain of the Marines went over the rail, parlez-vous
It happened in a terrific gale, parlez-vous
He slipped on the deck and slid on his tail,
You’ll never teach a Marine to sail... Inky dinky parlez-vous...*

Right: A Joey Fubar cartoon that ran in the USS ASTORIA Morning Press shows Joey waving at a man overboard. (drawn by Joe Aman).

The USMC Captain in charge of USS ASTORIA’s Marine detachment was Gerard T. “Gerry” Armitage. He was a veteran of the Guadalcanal campaign. Armitage came ashore on 7 August 1942 under the fire support of ships including heavy cruiser USS ASTORIA CA-34, sunk two days later in Iron Bottom Sound. At Guadalcanal he and his fellow Marines endured “five months of starvation” according to his niece.

Armitage served aboard USS ASTORIA CL-90 throughout her wartime service. He is a common figure in shipmate diaries and Herman Schnipper’s photographs.

Armitage remained in the Marine Corps and served as a Battalion Commander in Korea—Ist Marines, 3rd Battalion. He played a prominent role in the battle of Bunker Hill in August 1952 and received the Silver Star. He retired with the rank of Colonel.

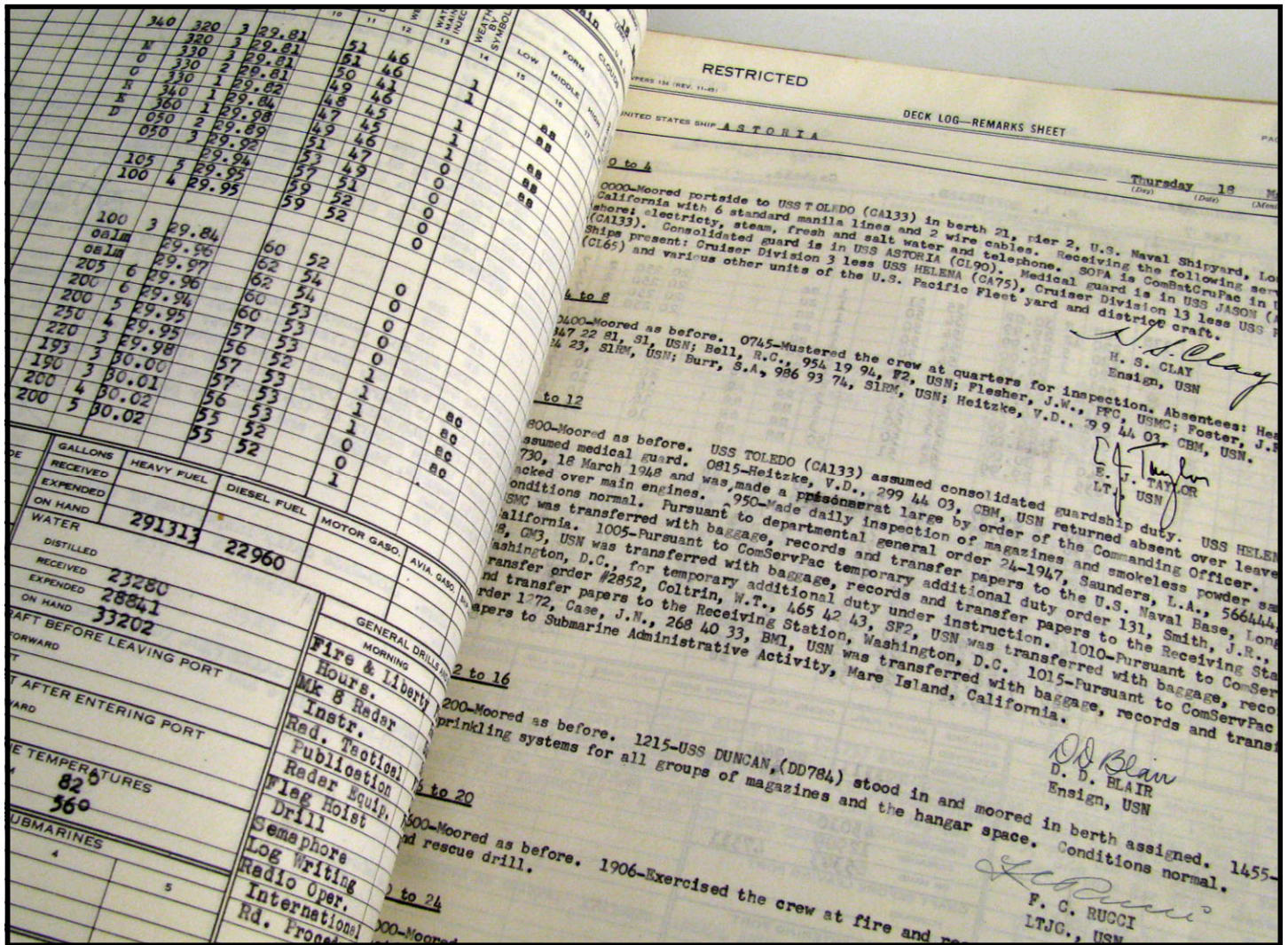
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks for contributions included in this newsletter:

- Herman Schnipper, N Division (photographs on pages 1,2, and 3)
- Jim Peddie, E Division (Joey Fubar cartoon)
- J. Fred Lind, F Division (wartime diary entries)
- John Moccia for his efforts in securing CL-90 planking for plankowners and their families

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ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHT: USS ASTORIA DECK LOG MARCH 1948

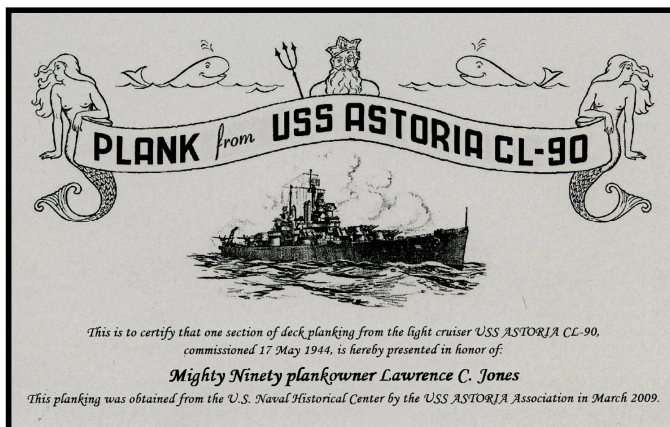


This original ASTORIA CL-90 log book was recently obtained through an online auction. 258 pages in length, it details the month of March 1948 when the Mighty Ninety was conducting training exercises between her homeport of Long Beach and San Diego, CA. It is unknown how the deck log was removed from the ship or where it spent the next sixty years before being offered for sale. It will now provide valuable source material for the preservation of the ship's history.

USS ASTORIA PLANKING DISTRIBUTED

Many thanks to John Moccia, son of B Division plankowner Rocco Moccia, for his work with the U.S. Navy Historical Center in tracking down a section of CL-90 deck planking. Earlier this year, the planking was distributed to several Mighty Ninety plankowners and family members.

At this time there is no more planking available, but we will remain on the lookout!



A MESSAGE FROM BRENT

Will the website be updated soon?

Several of you have recently asked this. The answer is—absolutely! I'm as anxious to get new sections posted as anyone. But there has been a lot of progress going on behind the scenes that will pay off in the coming months.

First and foremost, this project is committed to "getting it right." Unfortunately there are all too many books, documentaries, and websites that don't do justice to the story they are trying to tell. Facts are misstated; myths and inaccuracies are perpetuated. I just have to shake my head when I see an Okinawa documentary on the History Channel that uses film footage from Midway or Kwajalein, events that happened years earlier and thousands of miles away.

To prevent this, the Mighty Ninety project focuses on using primary sources as often as possible. These sources come in the form of photographs, film, official documents, deck logs, memoirs, and first-hand accounts from CL-90 crew members. That's where the past several months have been focused—accumulating this primary information.

We are incredibly fortunate that so much has been well-preserved over the past 65 years:

- Ship's Photographer Herman Schnipper meticulously maintained his photographs and many original documents. His photographic work spans the entire wartime experience of the ship.
- Fleet photographer Charles McGillis kept a copy of the color film footage he shot aboard CL-90 at Okinawa. He gave a copy to his buddy Mario DiMaio, whose son Gary shared it with the website. This unedited film footage depicts some of the most significant events experienced aboard CL-90.
- The ship's first skipper, George C. Dyer, recorded interviews in 1970 recounting his experiences aboard ship. I recently obtained a copy of these interviews from the U.S. Naval Institute and am currently transcribing them.
- Several shipmates who kept secret diaries (against Navy regulations) have shared their accounts. Mario DiMaio kept his diary on maps of the Pacific. J. Fred Lind kept his cryptically in Gregg shorthand, then transcribed it after the war. Herb Blodgett still refers to his when writing stories for the Cruiser Sailors Association magazine. Jim Thomson left his in the possession of his son Jim, who shared it a couple of months ago.
- Jim Peddie, Robert Migliorisi, John Moccia, and Carl Theaker have all provided important source documents.

The list goes on and on! We have a treasure trove of primary information surrounding the Mighty Ninety. Now the focus moves to assembling that information, telling a richly-woven story and preserving it in an "online museum" for all of us to share.

It doesn't just stop with the ASTORIA. The website has been contacted by family members associated with other ships—carriers such as FRANKLIN, HANCOCK, and BUNKER HILL, and cruisers PASADENA, MIAMI, and WILKES-BARRE. We're providing a story they can all share as well, learning about the task group that their family members served in. Yet another reason to "get it right."

So there you go... maybe I should have just said "updates to the website are coming soon!" Thanks for everyone's support and ongoing interest. Hope you enjoy the second quarterly newsletter!

-Brent



The Mighty Ninety website and newsletter are primarily written and maintained by Brent Jones, great-nephew of E Division plankowner Lawrence C. Jones.

Brent is looking to contact as many Mighty Ninety shipmates as possible to share the website and newsletter with them. If you can help locate someone new, please share!

Brent can be reached at (214) 995-9224 or via email: brentj@mighty90.com



USS ASTORIA CL-90 circa 1946 in Measure 22 paint scheme with postwar anti-aircraft modifications.

-U.S. Naval Institute Photo