

The DD219.org Journey

“What happened to your father”, meaning our grandfather, we would ask our father at the dinner table as children. We had all met our mother's father who was a wonderful loving family man and wondered, “what about our Father's father”. The only response we would receive was that, “he died in the War”. He was lost in that part of the war that took place in the Southwest Pacific we later learned, but again how exactly?

My father kept a small frame containing his father's medals inside it on the wall of his study, a purple heart, a couple of service medals and a legion of merit. The Legion of Merit was for the successful defense of the USS Trinity from submarine attacks as Edsall, Alden and Trinity approached Darwin Harbor in January 1942. Life went on.

After my father passed away in 2000 and while going through his files and his library of history books on the Pacific war and various technical subjects, of which I spent a lot of time reading as I grew up, I came across a large brown envelope full of documents. It turned out to be the Japanese battle report of Battleship Division Three in Japanese with a translation attached. Also within were notes on meetings my father had had with Japanese veterans of two of the ships involved with the last engagement of the Edsall.

I later learned that he acquired this battle report on his last posting as Chief M.A.A.G. to our Embassy in Japan in 1983. My father never really discussed his “work” and had never mentioned any of this to the family. We were all pretty much grown up and on our own by then. However, I became aware that he and my uncle were discussing the report from time to time in the late nineties. Particularly after my uncle had found 8mm footage that had been in the possession of their mother Ella Vanna Washington/Nix/Schaefer.

The core of the Washington/Nix family passed away from 1999 to 2002. Ella V Washington/Nix/Schaefer 1999, Capt. Walt Nix 2000 and Robert Nix 2002. The footage my Uncle found was being digitized for VHS and it was dated from 1930 to 1940. So in 2002 I was again going through a family library and finding things related to our family history this time in my aunt's not so small home in Alpharetta, Ga. I found more of the footage my uncle had found and had more of it digitized.

At this point I realized I was probably the only NOK of the crew of the Edsall who knew what had happened to the ship, her crew and my grandfather. I also found, again in my fathers library, articles in Shipmate magazine, All Hands and in Proceedings about the Edsall's last battle. These periodicals are read mainly by the Naval

community, and there were many comments that the crew of the Edsall deserved commendations and/or awards. I wondered why they had not received any.

I later found out why in meetings with staffers for my congressmen in two districts I had resided in near Dallas TX. **There were no eyewitnesses** was the ironclad response. I queried about the crew members that had been captured and interrogated, they were witnesses and their statements were in the Japanese battle reports. Not good enough. And any statements by the enemy are not good enough. (But their description of the Edsall being so expertly maneuvered it moved like a “Japanese Jumping Mouse” seems to be becoming popular).

From being an avid reader of military history worldwide and having read about the warrior code, “Bushido”, of the Japanese Samurai warriors I cherish the words of Dr. Haraguchi in one of his post war articles about this battle. Dr. Haraguchi then, 1942, was a young Lieutenant who was present on the bridge of the Chikuma which was the Japanese ship nearest to the Edsall after the dive bombing attack. From his station on the bridge he heard the reports from two observers being relayed to the Captain. These two observers using very large and powerful binoculars were watching the activity of the crew on the Edsall after the order had been given to abandon ship. Upon seeing my grandfather, presumably, going down with the ship Lt. Haraguchi paused and wondered “what a very “Bushido” thing to do”. This act garnered respect from he and his companions.

When a commanding officer loses a man in combat he usually writes a letter to the mans next of kin, usually praising the mans contributions to the unit he served with, along with condolences from that unit and the circumstances of his loss. My grandfather was not able to carry out that duty and my father to my knowledge did not reach out, after a thirty one year career in the Navy he was busy enjoying his retirement.

I felt my grandfather wouldn't mind if I did reach out to the Next of Kin of the crew of his ship, thus DD219.org.

I started writing an account of their wartime service leading up to their last battle and contacting the few veterans who had served on Edsall, (their enlistments had ended before the ships last engagement thus they survived the war), and visited the national archives for copies of the ships deck logs. However I became too pressed for time so I contacted the authors of other WWII works to see if there was any interest to pick up the work. But they wanted too much money to engage in such a venture and I sensed they were more interested in the money than a factual, accurate account which would require serious and diligent research.

Then, through the DD219.org website Don Kehn invited me to a USS Houston annual event. After spending some days with Don and the veterans of the USS Houston, it became evident that Don was the best qualified researcher/writer/historian for the job and he told me he had already decided to write something regarding the Edsall.

Don's main qualifications were his association with Jim Hornfischer and the veterans of the USS Houston. He is very diligent and disciplined in his research. And his association with Jim Hornfischer had allowed him to establish excellent research contacts. And, he didn't want any money. Both of us knew this story would mainly be of interest to the next of kin, historians and hobbyists with enthusiasm for ships and maritime history, not a money maker.

Further it was a mystery to be solved. So, I shared the Battle report from Battleship division three with him and watched as his jaw hit the ground. Being the diligent researcher he is he contacted his Japanese sources and acquired his own copy. His work "Blue Sea of Blood" would be the first account available to the public and is a factual, well researched and responsible account of what happened in this obscure event at the end of the battle of Java, which was the stated goal of DD219.org at the time.

In closing I wish to thank Tony Tully the managing editor of Combinedfleet.com for maintaining his website over these past years. I regarded it as a valuable research tool in learning about the Japanese Ships involved in the Edsall's last fight. Ironically even though I had met Tony at a USS Houston event I never made his connection to Combinedfleet.com. Tony, Oops, and thank you.

I must also mention Kelley Geary and the Asiatic fleet group on Facebook for their activities some of which I attended early on in this journey. Kelley was already in contact with several families of NOK and has been of great help in my quest. Thank you Kelley and the members of the Asiatic Fleet group.

After the publication of "Blue Sea of Blood" we put our research materials into storage not thinking they would find the ship in our lifetime. Like that Malaysian airliner it was lost in the giant maw of the Indian Ocean.

Then.....