Reminiscences of the Naval Academy and World War II

Two years at the Naval Academy were most interesting. The best part of it all were the friendships formed there. Some of these boys I will never forget. Many friends were made while playing plebe football. We had a lot of fun scrimmaging against the varsity and playing six games. We won two, lost two, and tied two.

The subjects we took were quite challenging. Our plebe year we took Trigonometry, Chemistry, English Composition and Literature, French, Mechanical Drawing, and Analytical Geometry. Our second year we took Differential and Interegal Calculas, Physics, Basic Mechanisms, Naval History, French, Government, Mechanics, and Government.

Besides these subjects, military drill and sports occupied our time. Every Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning we drilled on the parade grounds in good weather. During the cold winter months we were instructed in various naval subjects. Among these were signaling and navigation.

At the end of our plebe year we took a cruise to Europe on the battle ships New York, Texas, and Wyoming. The cruise took us to La Havre, Portsmouth, and Copenhegen. From La Havre we took a train to Paris, where we spent four enjoyable days. From Portsmouth, we went to London and spent four days visiting famous places there. It was an interesting experience seeing parts of Europe and meeting some of the people before Europe was involved in World War II. The English people were preparing to defend themselves against the German air force.

The football trips were most enjoyable. We travelled by train to Baltimore, New Haven, Princeton, and Philadelphia. We enjoyed parading at half time. Navy won about half of their games, but lost to Army both years.

After leaving the Naval Academy at the end of two years, I re-entered Ga. Tech for three years and graduated with a degree in Textile Engineering. I joined the Naval Reserve unit and took courses in Naval Science for a commission in the Naval Reserve.

Upon graduation in May, 1942, we received our diploma, Commission, and orders at the same time. Many of us applied for cruiser duty and were fortunate to be assigned to this branch of the service. I was assigned to the New Orleans, where I served as Assistant navigator and division officer for eighteen months. Our captain on our frist cruise was a former executive officer at the Naval Academy, Walter S. DeLany, our Executive Officer was William S. Riggs, and our navigator was Oliver Francis Naquin.

Our first cruise we joined a task force composed of the air craft carrier Saratoga and the cruisers Astoria, Quincy, Vincennes, ~~and the Australian Cruiser Canberra~~, with several destroyers. We participated in the landing of marines on Guadalcanal. Shortly after this landing, the cruisers Astoria, Canberra, Quincy, and Vincennes were sunk by Japanese cruisers in the battle of Savo Island. We returned to Pearl Harbor with the Saratoga, after a cruise of 74 days.

We left Pearl Harbor in early November and headed for Guadalcanal, visiting Espiritu Santo on the way. There we were notified that the Japanese were headed for Guadalcanal with re-inforcements and supplies. Our force consisted of the cruisers Minneapolis, New Orleans, North Hampton, Pensacola, and Honolulu and several destroyers. We went into battle at 32 knots. However, ever, in a few minutes all but the Honolulu were torpedoed. The New Orleans had her bow shot off, and the North Hampton was sunk. The damage control department on the New Orleans extinguished the fires and allowed us to proceed to Tulagi, near which we anchored. While there we covered the ship with bushes, trees, and vines.

After twelve days, we left for Sydney, Australia with the destroyer Lansdown as our escort. After an uneventful voyage of twelve days, we reached Sydney harbor on Christmas Eve, 1942. The adding of a substitute bow took 74 days. During this time, we enjoyed the golf courses, beaches, and tennis courts of Sydney, one of the world's great cities.

On March 7, we left for Bremerton, Washington via Somoa, Pearl Harbor, and Honolulu. We spent about four months in Bremerton, while a new bow was added. From there we went back to Pearl Harbor and joined the fleet in

a raid on the Gilbert Islands. Our objective was Makin Island, which we shelled. After returning to Pearl Harbor, I was tranaferred to new construction and enjoyed thirty days leave.

I reported to Newport for about six weeks and then was sent to Camp Devens..Then the Hancock was commissioned and moved to Boston harbor. While there, we took a shake down cruise to Trinidad and back. In September, we left for the Phillipines via the Panama canal and San Diego.

During the second battle of the Phillipine Sea, a strong Japanese force broke through San Bernidino straits and threatened the landind force. While re-fueling, we responded to a message of desperation and headed back to the scene of action. Our air planes helped drive off the enemy. On the Hancock. I served as division officer, assistant navigatro, and O.O.D. After the battle was over, the fleet sailed for Ulithi, which was now the fleet anchorage.

I sailed fos Pearl Harbor to await new orders on the Intrepid. After six weeks in Pearl Harbor, I was ordered to the Cabot, where I served as division and gunnery officer on the Iwo Jima and Okinawa campaigns and a raid on Japan. The Kamikazes damaged our ships considerably during this time.

In june, 1945, I was transferred from the Cabot and received an honorable discharge in late July. From Ulithi I sailed aboard a Liberty ship for San Francisco. On the way, we stopped by Maui to load pineapples. The war ended while we were there.

Since the war, I spent twelve years in the plastic seat cover business, one year as a dreftsman for Lummus Cotton Gin Company, one year teaching school, and eleven years as a librarian for the University of Georgia, after three semesters in library school at Florida State University.

I am married and have three children and two grand children.

Eugene M. Ransom Jr.

Eugene M. Ransom Jr.
Former class of 1941
U.S. Naval Academy

Dec. 11, 1986

Mr. Donald R. Lennon
Director
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Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4383

Dear Mt. Lennon:

In responce to your letter of December 8, I will try to add some additional Material. I grew up in Atlanta, Ga. and attended public school there from Kindergarden through high school. In high school, Boys' High, I played baseball and football, In football we were undefeated in 1934 and '35 and were Southern Champions in 1935. I went to Ga. Tech for one year before attending the Naval Academy for two years and went back there for three more years after leaving the Naval Academy. I was enrolled in the Naval R.O.T.C. program and received a commission in the U.S.N.R. and orders to the U.S.S. New Orleans when I graduated in May, 1942.

About twenty of us spent ten days together in San Francisco before leaving for Pearl Harbor. We went aboard ship on June 15 and left for Guadalcanal on July 7. On August 8, the Task Force of The U.S.S. Saratoga, Astoria, New Orleans, Quincy, and Vincennes and several destroyers helped the marines land on Guadalcanal. On August 10, the Japanese sunk the American cruisers Astoria, Quincy, and Vincennes, and the Australian cruiser Canberra, which was a staggering loss to the U.S. Navy.

Later on in the same campaign, the Saratoga was torpedoed early one morning. The New Orleans accompanied her back to Pearl Harbor. On the way back, we stopped in Tonga Tabu for some supplies, mainly food. While we were there, the U.S.S. South Dakota joined us in the harbor, but ran aground on an uncharted reef. The only charts we had at that time were 75 year old Dutch, English, and German. The captains exchanged greetings and conversation at that time.

Later that fall we left for Guadalcanal via Espiritu Santo Island, where we waited for the Japanese to come down from the north to supply their troops with men and equipment. The New Orleans was part of a force with the Minneapolis, North Hampton, Pensacola, and Honolulu, and several destroyers trying to prevent them from doing this. All of the cruisers were torpedoed, but the Honolulu, and the North Hampton sunk. Without a bow, which was shot off, we proceeded to Tulagi, off of which we anchored. Twelve days later, we left for Sydney, which trip took twelve days to travel 1800 miles. The Destroyer Lansdown led us down there.

We stayed in Sydney for 74 pleasant days before leaving for Bremerton, Washington via Samoa and Pearl Harbor. We stayed there for four months before going to San Diago and back to the Gilbert Islands on a raid. Shortly after returning to Pearl Harbor I was transferred to the U.S.S. Hancock, which was to be built in Quincy, Massachusetts in early 1944. In June we boarded the Hancock and took a shake down cruise to Trinidad and back to Boston. We left Boston in the late summer and proceeded to the Phillipines through the Panama Canal. We took part in the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea. While aboard the Hancock we saw a Kamikaze plane hit the Cabot near one of the 40 mm guns.

To return to the New Orleans, I was assistant navigator and was on the bridge as J.O.O.D. when we were torpedoed on November 30, 1942. The Executive Officer, Commander W.S. Riggs, who was in Stearing Aft, joined us on the bridge and helped us proceed to Tulagi Island. Since the Battle of Tassaforanga was at night, we did not reach Tulagi Island until about 0400.

At the Naval Academy the most memorable experiences were making friends with some of the other midshipmen, playing plebe football, and

going to Europe during the summer of 1938 on a midshipmen's cruise. We first went to La Havre, France and on to Paris on a train, enjoying the beaufitul French county side on the way. We spent four days in Paris, before returning to La Havre and on to Portsmouth, England. From there we went to London for four days. The English were very much worried about the German air force at that time, and with good reason.

Next to the cruise to Europe, the most enjoyable time at the Naval Academy was going to Princeton, New Haven, Baltimore, and Philadelphia on football trips on the train. We had much fun on these occasions.

Our 27 day trip from Ulithi to San Francisco on a Liberty Ship was uneventful, except for stopping at Mauai to load pine apples. While we were there the war ended on August 14. The marines who were stationed there celebrated for two days and so did the workers who were loading pine apples.

The times at the Naval Academy and in the Navy were most interesting, and I was most fortunate to have been in the Navy during the war and at the Naval Academy and Ga. Tech before then.

Yours sincerely,

Eugene M. Ransom Jr.

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