

Washed Ashore

By J. W. Henson

Where Two Souls Met!

I sat near the bottom of a long flight of steps, which ascended upwards to the double doors of my school administration building. It was a pleasant, bright and sunny day, but I did not notice. Like an old injured dog, I sat licking my emotional wounds. Mother had been what I perceived abusive to me. It was not an unusual state of affairs, but it was weighing on me more than it commonly did.

Sometime during this self-empathy beating that I was giving myself along came my first cousin, Ray Johnson. It was not uncommon for one of us to be down in the *dumps* but the other was usually upbeat and that changed the entire outlook of the miserable one.

However on this particular day we were both suffering from an ill-treatment syndrome that we supposed was being heaped upon us at home. We were the same age and had an uncanny similar appearance. So much so, that we were known as "*The Gold Dust Twins*" in and around our community. Where you saw the one of us you saw the other.

I at once recognized the peril of our combined condition. Ray was used as a beast of burden on their family farm. He did a lot of extra-hard work. He had been hastened out of bed at an early hour this very morning and had put in a day's work before coming to school. Not just hard work but with an abusive attitude thrown in for good measure, because he could work no harder. Getting up early before the sun arose did not appeal to me and I knew how difficult his Dad was under the pressure of getting more work done than was humanly possible at so early an hour.

My maltreatment was of a different nature. Mother feared that my reckless demeanor might allow me to slip from under her control, and she would never be in a position to reinsert her authority over me. That seemed to be a poor prospect since she appeared able and willing to come up with all manner of control. Fear always causes one to overreact and to be abusive to those under them, even those they presume they love. She tried the use of adoration, but always backed it up with corporal punishment. I never resented the beating for I felt able to stand any thing another could pile upon me. However, it was the verbal tirades punctuated with Bible reading and prayer that left me physically and emotionally drained. This was the present set of circumstances.

Someone once said, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words won't ever hurt me". Well, I have found that the bruises from sticks and stones healed in a much more timely manner than do emotional injuries, and do not leave the same deep scars. Any family group that is not held together by love is attached by very tenuous cords. Wealth alone will not do it and neither will the absence of money.

"Hey, Sport!" I asked Ray as he sat beside me, "What's up?"

“Do you have room for me to move into your house with you?” he asked.

“What’s wrong? Is it Uncle again?”

“Yeah! You know it!”

“Well, I’m not sure you would find my place a Garden of Eden either! Mom’s been after me all morning.”

“Are we going to have to put up with this for the rest of our young lives?”

“My, but you have tuned into my very thoughts”, I said as we sank into silence.

These communications progressed without any resolution being suggested until the class bell jerked us onto our feet.

Later in the day found us together in the study hall. Turning to face each other we both said at once, “Hey, why don’t we run away from home?” That brought the wrath of the room monitor down on our heads. “What are you two talking about?” he asked. We offered no interpretation so he dropped the subject. Ray and I nodded to each other, picked up our books, and exited the room as an indistinct comment punctuated by the monitor wafted past us.

“How long will it take you to pack?” Ray asked.

“Oh, just a few minutes! I’ll walk on home and start at once. Mom’s not there and I do not intend to leave a parting note. What about you?”

“Well, I can get Jim to run me home. My mother is the only one there and its naptime for her. Jim and I will meet you at your house in 45 minutes.”

Jim was a very close friend to the two of us. We could count on his confidence in the matter, but still there was no need to give more information than required to anyone. Not even to our good friend.

On The Road

In less than an hour Ray and I were in Jim’s car with all of our worldly belongings stuffed into two cardboard suitcases. One of them his and one mine. So it was that we two 14-year-old boys were going out into the world to seek our fortunes. Hard work was nothing new to us. In looking back over the years I wonder if we would have had the courage to make this bold step if we knew what lay before us.

Well, Ray and I sat in the Bus Station in Chattanooga all night working on our future plans. Firstly we were proceeding as a set of twins named Raymond Clay Johnson and John William Johnson. That way in my calling him Ray would come naturally and he calling me John the same. What little money we had would just pay bus fare to Florida. That seemed where we had discussed going.

Sometime during the long hours of the night I told Ray a Fable that was to be our modus operandi. It was a take off from the childhood story of the “Three Little Pigs”, and went something like the following. Once, there was a Mother pig who had three little piglets. As they grew she found that she no longer had the where-with-all to continue their support so she sent them out into the world to seek their fortune. The story was so well known that I just hit the highlights.

The first little pig went along the road until he met a man with a wagonload of straw. He asked the man for the straw to build a house, and was obliged to be given the same. The second pig went into the world to seek his fortune. He met a man with a load of sticks. He asked for the sticks to build his house, and was given them. The third little pig went along the road and saw a man with a load of brick. These were given to him also at his request for the purpose of building a house. Each built his house, but the wolves of earth blew away the first and second pigs’ houses and ate the poor unfortunate creatures. The little pig with the brick house withstood the assaults of the worldly-wise wolves.

Did the third little pig pass men with straw and sticks ignoring them until he finally saw a man with bricks? I don’t know, but he really went for the **BRICKS**. Each pig was given what he asked for. Each sought nothing better. I suggested to Ray as we traveled that same road we go for the **brick!**

It was a long night interlaced with talk, plans and naps. As the first gray streaks of dawn appeared in the eastern sky, Ray suggested that we walk to the railroad and join the hobos as they traveled. I felt that was just a load of straw and vetoed the idea. At last we went to the ticket counter and bought two tickets to Orlando, Florida. That left us just enough money for a couple of meals along the road.

We were seated in the back of the bus with two other passengers. One was a very talkative man by the name of Wiley who was in his mid thirties. He was curious where two teens were going in such wartime days as this. When he discovered that we had no firm plans and fewer resources, he suggested that we come along with him to Jacksonville.

He had a job in the shipyards there and was sure that two such strong lads as we appeared to be could certainly get some kind of work. It was 1942 and the war was in full progress so he could not give us any definitive information except to go to Blount Island Marine Station in the mouth of the St. John’s River at 10 Pierhead Way and ask for a Mr. Clarence Ervin. Spies were on every corner acquiring any bits of information that might be of value to their agents. In those days it was relatively easy to get a job if you could walk, see, hear or otherwise have reasonably normal use of yourself.

I was always one, who needed eight hours of sleep and regular meals to retain a bright, vibrant personality. Since we left home I had been suffering from food and sleep deprivation so it was easy for me to nap as the bus jogged southward. When I awoke, the bus was in the Macon, Georgia depot on its regular stop. Wiley had fled without taking leave of us and took the bus to Savannah, Georgia and from there on to Jacksonville.

Ray and I stepped across the street to a *Greasy Spoon Diner* and had a light snack. It wasn't like home cooking, but did improve our outlook.

As we resumed our way south we began to discuss the piece of intelligent that Wiley had passed on to us. The more we talked the better we thought of the Jacksonville connection. It had an element of romance and might even prove providential.

When our jingly bus pulled into the Valdosta, Georgia terminal we were fully decided to reroute our trip to Jacksonville. It did not cause the trouble that we had anticipated in making the destination change and we got back 74 cents each from our itinerary change.

Mr. Clarence Ervin

We caught our first glance of the St. John's River as we traveled toward Blount Island. The St. John's is the only major river in America to flow north. After an extended amount of time we arrived at Mr. Ervin's office at 12 o'clock. Ray asked to see Mr. Ervin. His secretary told us that he was out and would not be back until 1pm. We were just preparing to be seated when Mr. Ervin opened his office door and came out. The secretary said, "I thought you had gone to lunch!" He was a kindly faced man of medium build and stature.

"These young men are here to see you!" He walked directly up to us and shook our hand in the most friendly way. "Are you looking for work?" he asked.

We assured him that we were distressed and in need of work for sure and hoped him to be our salvation. He said for us to come along with him to lunch and we would discuss the matter there. Looking us up and down he said, "It will be my pleasure to have you as my guests for lunch!" We stashed our poor cardboard cases in his office and were off.

The restaurant was only a couple blocks away so we took to it on foot. During the meal he returned to our prospects for work. "How old are you?" he asked.

"We will be 18 in just a few weeks. You see we are twins." I lied to him.

"Well, you know we must have your parents permission in order to give you job assignments."

“That will present somewhat of a problem. You see our parents have both recently died, so we left the farm to seek our fortune. They were killed in an auto accident, you see.”

“Well, I like farm boys. I find them to know how to work. What kind of work are you seeking?”

“We are hoping to join the Merchant Marines, sir.”

“That is pretty dangerous work just now with the Battle of the Atlantic in full swing!”

“Young men with no resources cannot afford fears, lest they go hungry and be thought cowards.!”

“Very well said. I believe that I may be able to place you aboard a merchant vessel before too long. I am sure you two would like to ship out together.”

We gave an enthusiastic nod of affirmation.

“You must know how things stand in this war. I cannot give you a shipping date for even I am not given that information. But the ships will soon be loading. Where can I get in touch with you?”

We had finished our meal and were walking back to Mr. Ervin’s office. It was a beautiful day in Florida as wintertime goes, and we felt that our luck was changing definitely for the better. For the better, at least up until that last question. Seated in his austere wartime office things did not look as well as when we were walking and talking in a friendly manner away from the restaurant.

“We have just now arrived in Jacksonville and find that the few dollars that we left home with were spent for bus fare and food on route south. We are destitute, without local friends, funds and with dwindling strength. I fear we must have a strong arm come to our assistance very soon.”

The room fell deathly silent, but I never removed my eyes from our only prospect of help. Mr. Ervin sat staring at the ceiling, his thumbs beating a drum against the desk. It seemed hours that nothing was said, though in truth it could have only been minutes.

Finally he turned to the telephone and dialed a number. Even from our chairs we could hear it ringing.

“Captain Lawrence please!” A pause, then . . . “Hey, Joe, this is Clarence, how’s it going? Great! I have two lads here that I believe you will have a lot of interest in. They are in my office now just off from a farm in Chattanooga, Tennessee.”

At first I thought that one of us had let that slip somewhere in our conversation, but later noticed it tagged on our poor cases.

“They will make excellent cabin boys or I will miss my guess! They are twins of 18 years of age and do not wish to be separated, their parents having recently been killed in an auto accident. There is only one problem from my view; they need a place to go at once since they just arrived in Jacksonville today and have no friends and even less money.”

There was a prolonged pause during which time I studied Mr. Erwin’s face, but it gave me no hint of our future. He would have made an excellent poker player.

“I see! Yes! Yes! Wait a minute so I can write that all down.” He was busy for some minutes writing and at last said, “Sure! I’ll send them right over.”

“Now lads Captain Joe Lawrence is one of the finest captains on the Atlantic. Furthermore he is a kindly man. If I were sending two sons of mine to sea there would be none better to mentor them that Captain Lawrence.” Handing me the piece of paper he said, “Take this and go around to Pier 14. Because of wartime restrictions there were no maps, but he gave us adequate instructions how to get there. Show this paper to each man that approaches you as you go aboard and they will work you around to the Captain.”

Glory be! It looked at last that we had jobs and were instantly billeted. Mr. Ervin told us to be back at his office at 1pm on Wednesday if Captain Lawrence gave us a situation and he would sign us up and join us into the Maritime Union. Thanking him from the depth of our hearts I assured him that we would return to him on Wednesday and again with more tangible tokens of our gratitude upon return to the USA from our first cruise.

This seemed to please him richly.

Captain Joe Lawrence

It was a reasonably long walk down to the ship ‘*RoseMae*’ at Pier 14 in our weakened condition. The ship was large and had camouflaged blue and white designs running the full length and extending from top to below the waterline. As we turned and started up the gangplank, a uniformed sailor only a little older than we asked who we were and what business we had aboard the ship.

I handed him the paper that Mr. Ervin had written. After reading the missive he turned to us and said in a solemn voice, “This way please.” He delivered us to the Deck Officer, a man in his fifties. He was bald with a white mustache and a goatee bristling on his chin. From the way his mustache looked it must-ached. I never did like a man that had more hair on his face than on his pate. He took the memo from Mr. Ervin and read it with a very serious demeanor. Turning to us he said, “This way if you please.” I knew what would happen if it did not please us to follow so weird a character. Being tired, hungry and in need of sleep we fell in line and followed in his wake.

He knocked on a door that had a brass nameplate that simply read "Captain's Quarters". Captain Lawrence opened the door and I liked him from the beginning. He was a man about fifty-five years of age with a full head of salt and pepper hair. His eyes were warm and the mouth carried perpetual wrinkles from his habit of smiling so frequently. He took the paper and gave it a glance. "So you are the Van Johnson twins sent over by my friend Mr. Ervin. A little younger than I should have expected, but no matter you can help win this war as good as any other! Follow me and I will show you to your quarters.

Spend the rest of the day putting your things away, and in the evening after our meal you will be given an introduction to the ship and to your responsibilities. We eat at 6pm in the ship's mess. Be on time if you wish to eat." With that he was out and we closely behind him, having said nothing and indeed having been asked nothing that required a response. He failed an explanation of where the ship's mess was located and to us at that time it was a vital sticking point.

We returned to our room and each chose the bunk that we liked best and put our things away into seaman's chests. With the help of a passing seaman we located the ship's mess and the trash area. There we discarded our miserable old cardboard suitcases hoping never to need them again. We had a short nap being very careful not to let mealtime pass us by.

Neither of us seemed obsessed with what we had left behind in Tennessee. There was a thrill surging through the tired tissue of our bodies. We had been gone from our miserable situations to a future that had all the appearances of glory. Hard work was nothing new to us so that prospect was not daunting.

I had often heard that those aboard ship ate well and did not have to slog through the mud and misery of the foot soldier. Our first meal attested to that fact. At last we were full and beginning to sense our need of sleep. A smart seaman by the name of Jones took us in tow after supper and began our orientation. There was going to be so much to learn.

Jones gave each of us a syllabus that we were to memorize. It showed the location of all things on each deck and how to best navigate to them. It also listed the responsibilities of each man aboard and those we were to be aware of, especially our own. Lifeboat, emergency equipment, fire extinguishers and many wartime regulations related to being crew of a merchant seaman were to be known verbatim.

We slept well as the ship gently rocked to and fro at its mooring. It was tied to the large pier with ropes near the size of my wrist. Up near the top of the ropes were round discs about 24 inches in diameter with a hole in the center for the rope to be passed through. This simple arrangement was for stopping rats from coming aboard. Those stow-aways could make sea life miserable if allowed aboard.

For a week or more Ray and I searched every crook, crack and cranny of the RoseMae. It was a bodacious big chore. Our ship was the largest and also the flagship for the convoy of 207 ships loaded with all manner of war material. Being the flagship the Admiral was

aboard her for the Atlantic crossing. Ray was assigned to the Admiral's contingent to do leg service for any chore that might be needed. Run this here and take that there, get coffee and serve tea at 3pm.. I was attached to the Captain in the same service.

One day after our ship had been loaded we were moved out into the bay so another ship could have our spot for their loading. Ray and I had gotten used to the continuous clanking and banging, and the shouting of men as the cranes swung the loads of material aboard. Now it was quieter. Many ships were anchored around us. Over-head and out into the ocean there was a continuous drone of aircraft on the lookout for German submarines that could wreck havoc in the harbor. They could render it all but useless with a few ships sunk in the narrow water way. The loading went on day and night and at last one evening the Captain announced that on the morrow we would be underway for England. Wars are funny things. You never know who your long-term friends really are.

We had just fought two wars with England for our independence and now we were going to help insure their continued freedom. I guess that is how international friendships are.

In WWI Japan fought along side of us for freedom and in this crazy war they are attempting to conquer us.

By the time we pushed off I had my routine well established and was very comfortable with it. Mid morning while the Captain was in the wheelhouse I would run up a small urn of coffee with a muffin to him. I had observed the flavor of each that he was most fond of and that was the ones he got. Again at teatime I refreshed his urn and brought up a platter of cold meats and cookies. He made many flattering comments about the service he was getting, about the extra weight he would gain if this were to continue. It seemed that he had never had such efficiency before.

A navigation error

An error can prove be the stuff of which opportunity is made if seized upon with proper prospective. One morning when we were well out to sea I was on the way to the wheelhouse with the Captain's morning refreshments. I always carried a white towel draped across my right arm to assist with any little mishap that might occur. In fact it gave me a rather professional appearance. On the way up I was just passing by the Navigator's quarters. His door was open on this morning and as I approached he knocked over his coffee flooding a chart that he had been studying. I rushed in and with the towel wiped up the mess almost before it did damage to his chart. I placed his empty mug on my tray and set off all of the Captain's goodies onto his desk. He was amazed and expressed his appreciation with many words. I returned to the galley and got fresh supplies for the Captain.

Every day after that I stopped by the Navigation Office with the same fare that I furnished the Captain. It was not long until he asked me to stop by on my way back from the wheelhouse. He had seen Ray and me together and could tell that we were twins.

He wanted to know more about us. He had such a friendly face and mild manner that it was all the more difficult to tell him the lies of our past, but if must be done.

One day as I was returning from the Captain's refreshing Jim Wall, the Navigator, was going on deck to calibrate a new sextant and asked if I would like to come along to watch the operation. Since I had shown interest in the equipment before he could see latent curiosity on my part. We stepped out onto a side deck. It was a beautiful day and the sea was calm and pleasant. A stiff breeze blew across us due to our headway. Ships were to be seen horizon to horizon, a mighty armada. He sighted the lower limb of the sun and explained each and ever twists and turns of the knobs on the instrument all the while noting the time on his chronometer.

From that day on I was an avid student of navigation every spare moment that I had. I had some training at school in Trigonometry. With that background my grasp of direction finding went along at a high rate. Mr. Wall was amazed at my rapid clutch of the subject. He furnished me with textbooks, and old instruments that had been replaced with more state-of-the-art equipment. In my spare time I was always on deck, day and night, shooting the sun and various stars and plotting our location.

Mr. Wall began to take me on deck when he was going to shoot for a plot and have me do the same and we compared our location results. My rough calculations soon began to catch up with reality. I was within five miles of Mr. Wall on most every shot. That was impressive, so he took my sextant on deck and re-calibrated it. Now all of a sudden my numbers were matching his.

By the time we got back to Jacksonville, I had finished Navigation 101 and was well on the way to a Masters in the subject. I had spent many hours day and night researching in depth to know where in the world we were. As we docked we were given our paychecks for the round trip. Wow! It was more money than I had ever seen at one time. We were told to be back aboard in two weeks.

Ray and I went searching for a small apartment that we could rent. We found a small nice place with a large window facing the ocean. It had two half beds and a small kitchenette. We shared the bathroom, which was across the hall with another apartment. We went out and bought a round of clothing and a nice gift for Mr. Ervin and took it to him. I asked him when the next licensing test would be given for Navigation. He looked at me and said, "By Jove, I believe you mean to try for it!"

"Well I have been studying under Mr. Wall since we left for England. I have crammed every night well into my sleeping hours."

"You are in luck then. The day after tomorrow we will be giving the examination. Should I sign you up?" What about Ray? Does he intend to take the test too?"

“No, Ray does not share my interest in the subject. If you will be so kind, just sign me up.”

“Do you mind if I take a peek at your test results when they become available? You will be at sea before they are posted.”

“That’s fine with me. Have you any way of sending the grade on to Captain Lawrence, for I will be on edge until I know how I did?”

“Oh I think that can be arranged!” With that we left his office with his grandest good wishes sent along with us.

On examination day I was there a little early after having gotten a long night of good sleep and a hardy breakfast. I was feeling bully! There were eight of us arraigned for the test. It took almost three hours for me to write the exam and review my work. There was only one to leave the room before me and he did not appear to have done too well. The tutor announced that there were only 30 more minutes allotted for the test as I was leaving. I put my books aside for the rest of the time we were ashore.

Ray and I toured the city of Jacksonville and seated ourselves into life within our own digs. We were beginning to feel as though we belonged.

Poor Mr. Wall

The leave was short and we soon were back aboard our ship. Ray and I fell right back into our scheduled routine. I spent all the time in the Navigation Office that I possibly could without going slack with my regular chores. About mid way across to England it was rumored that a German U-Boat had been spotted off our starboard side. Everyone was watching, like a cat in a room full of rocking chairs. A destroyer went out and dropped a few depth charges and then continued along with the convoy. If there were a direct hit, an oil slick would surface along with other floatable items. The Germans had been known to stuff things of that sort into the torpedo tube and blow them out to make it appear that they had imploded.

About dusk the sea got rough like a cob with 30-foot waves. That pretty well did away with the submarine threat. When things were very rough you slept with your arm run through a leather strap that was attached to the wall by your bunk. That prevented you from being thrown out onto the floor. As the ship rose to meet the wave your body was pushed down into the thin mattress until you felt to be going through. Then when it fell off the crest you could run your arm all the way between the mattress and your body, like you were floating above the bunk.

I slept well through the night but awoke in the morning with a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Not many turned out for breakfast. Guardrails had been attached to the rim of the tables to keep dishes and food from sliding off and onto the floor. I was told to eat

only solid foods, so as to limit the liquids from sloshing around in my stomach and encouraging seasickness.

It was impossible to get navigational shots of the luminaries during the heavy overcast so I got to practice my dead-reckoning skills for the next 24 hours. About a day out of South Hampton the Captain called me to his cabin. That was unusual for it had happened only once before. He said, "I got a call from Jacksonville with a message for you. Mr. Ervin said to tell you that you passed the navigational test. Not only passed but made the second highest score ever made on the test in America. I knew you had been spending a lot of time with Mr. Jim Wall, but had no idea that you were so serious in your pursuit of navigation."

"I do appreciate you letting me know. It's been on my mind for the last few hours."

"What do you plan to do with this training?"

"That I am uncertain of, sir. I probably will have to lean on you for that knowledge."

He dismissed me to go back to my regular chores, but I dropped by to tell Mr. Wall the good news.

The next two trips across the Atlantic went rather smoothly. We carried loads of war material eastbound and came home more or less deadheading it. Then on the following trip eastward as we were just a day out of England a pack of German U-boats hit us very hard. We lost three ships. One was loaded with gasoline and we all had to scurry away from it for the fire was tremendous. Another was carrying food products for the British Isles and our soldiers, and the third was loaded with thousands of tons of industrial stoker coal.

We were given an extra leave because of the U-boat danger. Flights of RAF planes were hourly made to reconnoiter the enemy's activities. Four U-boats were damaged or sunk in the operation. The morning just 24 hours before we departed for home the Captain set out an urgent message for the shore patrol to locate Ray and me. You had to sign-in a report of the general area where you would be along with telephone numbers, addresses, and so on. It still took them four hours to locate us.

We put on our dress uniforms went aboard to see what burr was under the Captain's saddle. He had a very serious look on his face. You could tell that he had missed his night's sleep and we were very curious as to why.

Captain Lawrence did not spend any time with amiable amenities, but went directly to the point. "John I fear that I have some grave intelligence for you. Last night Lieutenant Wall was killed in an air raid on London. That leaves us in a quandary as to how to proceed. We are to depart tomorrow for America, but cannot do so without a navigator. Due to limited wartime personnel there is only one navigator assigned to each convoy. Wall was it. In reviewing my options I recalled that you are a qualified navigator, even with your

limited experience. Do you feel that you are comfortable enough in that position to safely see us back home?"

I heard Ray draw a sharp quick breath through his teeth and felt it should have been mine. I looked the Captain directly in the eye for maybe 30 seconds and then said in a calm, strong voice, "Sir my rating speaks for itself. As for confidence, Sir, I feel very capable even with *me* aboard!"

"Then move your things into the Navigation Office. I have already had Wall's belongings removed."

"Sir what bars will I carry?"

"Well, I haven't given that any thought. What do you think you should wear?"

Without a seconds pause I said, "Lieutenant bars are the usual, Sir!"

"Well I can give you an emergency commission at sea, but you would have to wait until we are ashore for a permanent commission, if one is approved. Bring your uniforms to me right away and I will get the bars attached. This is a little unusual and I feel that I should have them attached so there will be no questions."

Ray dismissed himself and shortly reappeared with my uniforms. He was always so thoughtful and was so very pleased at my commission, though it placed me above him in rank.

"Captain, Sir, would it be proper military protocol for me to break the bad news to Lieutenant Wall's wife? We have met on several occasions and I feel it would be easier for her if the news came from me. I would like to have you present during the call."

"Yes that can be arranged. When would you like to break the news?"

"As soon as a line can be established. The sooner the better before I lose my nerve."

"I think there is little danger that you shall ever lose your nerve at anything!"

It took us about half a day to get the call through to Belle Wall. When she answered the phone I said, "Belle this is John Van Johnson somewhere out on the Atlantic. I'm afraid I have some serious news for you. Jim is dead. He was caught yesterday in a German bomb raid on London. I have his things, which I will bring to you when we get ashore. I am afraid that is one of the symptoms of this crazy war, Belle." This all spilled out in one great tirade without getting her reaction.

"Oh my! What was Jim doing in London?"

I glanced at the Captain and said, “Oh he had a few days leave and went sight seeing in the London area.”

“Was there another woman involved?”

“I am certain that there was not. No definitive information has reached us yet. Jim was totally devoted to you and missed you greatly when he was on extended duty and away from home. You tell little Jack in your own way. You are a very strong woman and I will have more and complete data when I see you in about 12 days.”

“Phew I am glad that is over. You cut straight to the chase and got off the line before she got weepy, that *was* very clever. I am not sure I could have handled it so smoothly,” the Captain said.

We were still in port, but I did not tell Belle so for you never know who has his big ears on and is listening.

The Coming Storm

When we weighed anchor it was a bright morning with only a light zephyr blowing across the deck. I had been working at my desk for several hours before we started, and felt good about our crossing. We had not been under way more than three hours when an overcast sky blocked out all prospects of celestial navigation. I started on my dead reckoning routine at once and sent a detailed steerage report to the topside.

Weather was telling me that there was a storm system working its way eastward. It seemed that we were running into the teeth of an early hurricane. We bore on westward on course, but without have to zigzag our course across to America since we were deadheading and in an active storm area. Two days out we were still unable to see the stars. Dead reckoning told me that we were in the vicinity of Iceland. Iceland was one of the few spots that still had a strong radio station that could be picked up for 250 miles at sea. I tuned my ADF on the station. It showed Iceland to be at 76° from our position. I took out true speed and used it against the number of degrees that we were traversing. This gave me an approximation of our distance south of the Island.

Two more bad storms hit us with still no stars to navigate by. The door opened and in came the stoic faced Admiral. I never did like the man!

“Do you have the slightest idea where we are out here on this big ocean? I thought it was a screwball idea letting you navigate with no previous experience. You could use up all of our fuel, or worse yet take us right into German hands or run us ashore. Running out of gas would be a serious court-martial offence, but the other two would be death! What do you have to say for our position?”

“Well Sir if you are trying to frighten me you’re doing a darn good job. If I were in your position I would spend all my energies in keeping the navigator comfortable and assured.

Now if you will take a look at this chart you will notice the path that we are currently sailing.” He took a quick look and said, “I sure hope so!” Turned and walked out in a huff. I noticed that he turned down the right corridor, so I was pretty sure he was headed for the bridge. I called the Captain and said, “The old man is on your way up. Try to calm him down and give him reassurance. In his state of mind he could jump overboard!”

I was at my desk for about 20 hours a day. One day Ray came bursting in about 2am and said, “Bud the sky is clear. Jump to it for it won’t last long.”

I grabbed the chronometer and sextant and dashed at his heels onto the side deck. What a beautiful sight to see the night sky hung so full of those diamonds. I took two very confident readings and went below. When the calculations were complete I saw that we were only 75 miles off our proper course. Sure enough and hour later a curtain of darkness was drawn across the sky. I gave Ray such a thanks that he said it was better than a hug.

A day later I redoubled my dead reckoning routine and figured that we were now only three hundred miles off the Florida coast. That was just 20 hours away. I called the bridge and asked that they post two of their best lookouts on ready in the crow’s nest. Sixteen hours later I was able to pick up Jacksonville Radio and glory-be but we were in perfect position. The pilot’s boat came out and what a relief to turn the ship over to him.

Other pilot’s were swarming aboard the other ships and the air was full of radio transactions. I secured my office and waited to go ashore. Besides my belongings I had Jim Wall’s things. A sailor was assigned to take them ashore and deliver them to where I instructed.

The Captain passed by and slapped me on the shoulder and said, “Good job man. I have never seen worse conditions!”

When Ray and I arrived at our apartment I flopped down with clothes and all on and was at once sound asleep. When I awoke the morning was beginning to break over the ocean away from Jacksonville.

I said to Ray, “Hey I slept all night for a change.”

“What do you mean all night? You have slept for 27 hours.”

We loafed around town for that day and the next. On the third day I was summoned to the Admiralty office. I wondered if the old man wished to apologize or to reprimand me for my cocky attitude back on the ocean. I was not long in finding out. When I was ushered into his office there was more brass than I had ever seen in one place.

“You have been given the North Star Medal for the excellent job you did out there. I doubt there is another man in the navy who could have done the same thing. We have given hundreds of medals,” he said waving toward the others in the room, “but this is the first North Star Medal that we have ever seen.”

With the pinning completed I walked down the street with my feet barely touching the ground. The North Star Medal is a diamond about the size of a ten-cent piece. It's a diamond of the first water and mounted on a gold and platinum star about three inches in diameter. It was created for one singular piece of navigation during the First World War and had never been awarded since. Beside the honor that went with it, its monetary value is beyond description.

I was told that the next day a Bill Wrightson was coming over for an interview for various newspapers and magazines, plus the Navy's "Waves". He appeared at the precise time he was scheduled. I instantly liked him for his promptness. He had a good sense of humor and we hit it off from the get-go. This was the beginning of a friendship that lasted for the next 30 years.

The SoundDeck Machine

I spent many nights at sea and in our apartment on shore working on a device that I called the SoundDeck. During the early stages of the war individual ships were followed and preyed upon by the German Wolfpacks or submarines working together as a unit. We had to begin sending the ships over in great groups called convoys. This slowed down the success of the submarine but did not completely eliminate its threat. We lost over 5000 ships during the war with many, many brave mariners.

However the United States had submarines that were being preyed upon by German and Japanese surface ships. Sonar was a highly developed detection device that picked up engine sounds at a great distance away. They were of particular value in locating submarines and also for the submarines in locating surface craft.

A submarine could shut off its engine and lay still under the surface. The destroyer would then proceed to the last known location and begin dropping depth charges. These devices were particularly hard on ocean wildlife that was in the vicinity of the explosion.

The depth charge could be set to explode at various depths depending upon where the submarine might be thought to be lurking. The submarine could not out-run a surface vessel when it was submerged, so it would shut down and try to wait it out . . . hoping, yes hoping for a favorable outcome. If a charge went off relatively close the submarine would implode with great violence killing all souls encased. A couple hundred helpless men would be destroyed in milliseconds.

The SoundDeck (SD) was a modified torpedo that gave the illusion that the sub was continuing on its course. In my plans I drew it with an extra large propeller that turned slowly to block out the cavitations or noise from the machine's propeller. It was driven

through the water by a battery fed electric motor within the speed range of a submerged submarine. It was set to run under the surface at a predetermined depth. There was an eight-inch circular diaphragm on the surface of the SD that became increasingly depressed by the escalating water pressure as it went lower. The diaphragm controlled a set of external fins that raised or lowered the device as it moved through the water until it reached its stipulated depth.

On each side of the SD there was a set of six-inch speakers open to the outside. Inside behind the speakers was a 10 inch compartment that connected with the outside water so the outside and inside pressure would remain equal and the speakers would not be crushed. The speakers were connected to a recorder that exactly duplicated the sound of that particular submarine when it was running.

When the submarine was detected and being chased by a destroyer the engines to the sub and that of the SD were simultaneously shut down and turned on so it appeared that the submarine was still under way. The SD then led the enemy away, chasing a false sound, until it was crushed by depth charges, out-distanced the destroyer, or ran out of power and sank.

A solenoid held a plug in the outer surface of the SD. When the battery expired the plug was drawn inside and the SD filled with water and sank out of the enemy's ability to recover it. I spent hours working with underwater speakers, recorders, and various depth control devices.

When I was satisfied with the device I made an appointment to speak with the Admiral. I showed him my various drawings and test results and left it all with him to study. He would recall me after he had time to digest all of the plans. It was not until we reached America however that the Admiral and I came face to face again. An officer from the Marines called for Ray and me and escorted us to the Admiral's quarters. When we arrived I found several other important looking men in the room. I was greeted warmly and introduced to each. There on the table before us was all of my material for the SD. The Admiral spirited the conversation along.

He said, "Lieutenant we want to give you and your brother an office here and start on the manufacture of five prototypes of your SoundDeck torpedoes. What do you say to that?"

"Well it appears that we have been WASHED ASHORE by our own cunning! Is there a chance for a set of Captain bars to go with this assignment?"

"Why you young dog! I expected just such a demand and brought the bars with me."

"How long will we be away from active sea duty, Sir?"

"Well that depends on the progress that you make here. We are assigning a crew of 15 skilled artisans to assist with your invention. You and your brother will be sent out on a shakedown cruise when you have the prototypes perfected. You can start tomorrow in the

lab that's attached to this building. It will be a highly secure post with 24-hour guards, and our highest security rated personnel only. You are to talk with no one about your work. For the shakedown you will be on the submarine and Ray will chase your invention on a destroyer. When the shakedown is successful you two can have a month's leave and then return to active sea duty aboard the RoseMae."

"But I have no security rating, Sir."

"It will be here before the day is finished." And so it was.

I had my 17th birthday while working on the first prototype. I had some very intelligent men working with me in the lab. One day one of them walked up to me and saluted, "Captain Boy . . ." His voice trailed off into silence.

"What is this Captain Boy thing?" I asked.

"I am most sorry Sir. It was a slip, nothing more . . . yet I guess I may as well tell the whole story. Your men on shipboard respectively refer to you as Captain Boy because of your youth, Sir! It is certainly meant in respect. They, as we do, have the greatest esteem for you, Sir."

"Be sure that remains the case!"

"Aye Sir, Captain Boy!" He turned and walked away without asking the question that brought him to me in the first place.

We soon had the beta prototype completed and ready for the initial sea trials. Ray was in charge of getting all of the men and ships lined up for the trial. We went out and had a most successful operation. We then built the other four prototypes and in less than two months turned them over to the Navy for real service.

We were offered a leave until the reports came in from the secondary trials, but I told the Admiral that there was another device called "SonicEars" that I had been working on and would like to make six prototypes during the secondary trials. The subs loaded the SoundDecks and departed for Atlantic service. They were at sea for about two months and when they returned one by one all four reports were positive.

The Sonic Ear

The Sonic Ear (SE) was a device that was carried aboard the point destroyer at the rear of the convey. It would be activated and dropped overboard into the ocean. It was an element that would float for about four hours before sinking to the seabed. It was four inches in diameter and 18 inches long. Right at the bottom was a six-inch compartment that would flood, and keep the device upright and floating so the top was flush with the surface of the sea. In this flooded compartment was a two-inch sonar listening ear on

each side. The ear was connected with a continuous transmitter located in the top of the mechanism with a 12-inch antenna protruding from the surface and into the air above.

The battery was of such power that it would broadcast for four hours and then the powered solenoid would retract removing a plug to allow the apparatus to flood and sink to the sea bed.

The SE would be dropped overboard and its frequency monitored for four hours for any German subs that might be in the area. If the sound of a submarine was detected the destroyer would drop out of formation and with engines stopped await the enemy.

We worked on prototypes of the SE while the ships were testing the SD. The technologists added suggestions to my plans that made the SE an even more viable tool. We turned over our six SEs to the Admiralty for sea testing.

Ray and my leave were cancelled for an indefinite period of time, so we could supervise the set up and manufacture of 1000 SEs and about 70 SDs. As these weapons went to sea great results were experienced. The German U-boat threat was beginning to be emasculated, and more of our ships reached England intact.

All the while this was in progress I was again busy at night studying for my Captain's test. It was my desire to be the skipper of one of the ships. After about three months I felt ready to take on the Captain test. It was certainly more difficult than was the Navigator's test and took about four hours to complete. There was no time limited to this examination. There were seven others taking the test.

When I got the results of my test, which was very acceptable, I went to the Admiral and asked to be reassigned to sea duty. He was very curious as to why I had taken the written Captain test. I disclosed to him my desire to be a skipper someday. He said that a new ship was being put into service sometime within the following month. It was the SS Hustler and that he would like to recommend me for the Captaincy.

Smiling he said, "Of course your twin would be aboard as Purser if that is acceptable with him." He said that it would be presented at a meeting on the following week and that I should know something within a week after that. He suggested that if I had any choice of seamen to be on my staff he would like to have their names right away so he could review their ranks and qualifications. I did not tell Ray of the possibilities of our own new ship. He must wait to find that out until later.

Aboard the Hustler

War could have been fun if the opposing sides were not mortal enemies, and if no one were to be injured in the game, or it did not cost national fortunes to carry it on. I was working for a commission of Commodore if I got my own ship. I had learned the means

and methods of securing a rank increase. Commodore would put me one commission above my mentor Captain Lawrence.

I submitted a list of officers for my assistants aboard the Hustler. The war was rapidly winding down and the U-Boat menace in the Atlantic was almost non-existent. We were sending smaller conveyances now that the threat was dwindling. It looked for awhile that the Hustler would be cancelled, but about a month later I was called to the Admiralty and given the commission of Commodore. They said that the ship should be done and ready for a sea shakedown very soon. A Test pilot was to be in charge of the trials and I was to be aboard as observer.

The shakedown went well and with a few minor alterations we were ready to begin loading. I was told that we would be going through the Panama Canal into the Pacific to support that theatre against the Japanese. I was given orientation for crossing the Canal and further training as to crossing safely the Pacific. I must say that it was with some trepidation that as a new chief I was to go into unfamiliar territory with a new crew and new ship facing a very different enemy.

The Admiralty sent a news reporter along on this cruise. He was to report on the new line of ships. As my luck would have it, they sent Bill Wrightson along. After the Hustler was loaded and the pilot took us to sea he handed me the sealed orders for this tour of duty. It was not to be opened until at sea for one day and then in the presence of the first officer.

As our conveyance of six ships headed south along the American coast we were placed in the center being an all new crew and ship. When we read the sealed orders we discovered that we were carrying a shipment of corn. However, I noticed that all of the passageways into the hold were locked and fastened with lead seals. It was only after we were unloaded in the South Pacific did we discover that our cargo was really munitions.

Everything written was assumed to be known to the enemy.

We had a safe trip South and upon reaching the Panama Canal we were boarded by the Canal Pilot and his crew. It took all day for the entire conveyance to transit the Canal. It was growing dusk when the Pilot shook my hand and exited by a sea-sling into the waiting tug. From this trip on through the duration of the war we were returned to the harbor near Seattle, Washington. Ray and I were on this ship for the duration. It was a comfortable way to spend a war.

Bill Wrightson was permanently assigned to the Hustler due in part to some of my finagling. Many were the hours that we spent relaxing on the promenade deck. One day he asked, "John have you ever thought of having your memoirs published? I would be available for the task." He knew that I had kept a diary ever since Ray and I went to sea.

"What interest would such a life of nothing but hard work hold for the general public?"

"You underestimate *my* abilities!" he said in a self-satisfied way.

“There are many things about our early history that you do not understand, nor are Ray or I willing to share until later.”

“All the notes that I would take from you in confidence would be permanently locked into my safe. Yet, unbeknown to you I already have a very large dossier on you in anticipation of just such a project. A good writer is always keeping information on prospective stories! I believe the Navy would pay for the project. I would write it under pretense for the Naval Library covering the war at sea from your perspective.”

“You believe me to be 23 years old but I am nothing of the kind.” I said with a smile. “It a secret that I have always intended to go to the grave with me. This conversation is of a very confidential nature, of course.”

“Of course!”

“Well give me sometime to masticate the idea. If there is a book in it I believe you to be the man to wring it out. I would have to have Ray’s permission for such a project and he would have to be starred in it too.”

“I would have expected such a gracious response on your part and find that quite acceptable.”

A Surprise Commission

Now that the war had ended many of the high-ranking officers were of such an age that they needed to retire and live out their remaining years in comfort. The war had taken its toll on them and they were relieved that it was all over at last. It was a high season for young officers to be drawn into the upper echelons. One day I was called into the Admiralty. I dressed in my best regalia and arrived at the appointed time; not a minute too early nor a second late. I saw several of the officers glance at their watches with one making a slight adjustment to the minute on his timepiece.

The brass was seated along one side of an extended table. The entire arrangement resembled that of a court marshal. I hooked my hat under my arm and gave a smart salute. Those salutes had been practiced before a mirror for hours on end and came as naturally as drawing breath and very smartly executed if I must say so. I was asked to be seated.

The officer in the center of the table gave a litany that pretty well escaped me for I was running through the imagined reasons for my appearance before this august assemblage.

At last he asked what my plans were now that the war was over.

“Sir, I have no training except in plying the oceans of earth for my country. If I were to be turned out of the service now, I should be as hobbled as a preacher who had just been defrocked.”

A smile crossed the face of a couple of the men. I took that as a positive omen.

“Well would you be amenable to a desk job such as we men here have?”

Oh what a trap! If I said no it might cast dispersion upon their position and if I were too quick in a positive response I might find that what they had in mind was not for me at all.

“Sir that would be much dependant upon where my desk would be located, what my given duty would be and if I would find it a challenge!”

I cut it short with that. My eyes were directed from man to man. They put their heads together for a few minutes and then returned my gaze with a stare. At last the moderator said, “You have been recommended to be graded as a rear Admiral. However it is our unanimous belief that we should recommend you for a full Admiral. You are very young, would be the youngest Admiral the United States has ever had, but your record, as given to us, shows that you are the type man we need for oversight of the Atlantic fleet.

This would pose a problem for us and for you. We cannot offer a position to your twin that would allow him to work in connection with you. You two have been of great service to your country and it would be with sorrow that we should separate the two of you. Can you give us some enlightenment on the subject?”

For the first time I dropped my eyes to the floor and sat in silence.

“I see! You may want time to considerate this offer.”

“Well Sir, since it does effect another who is not present at this time, I would like 24 hours to think and discuss the matter with Ray. He has been very supportive of me in every task that I have undertaken.” I sat silent again with our past years of serving together flashing before my clouded eyes.

“I like a man who has so deep a sense of loyalty. I believe that you would serve your country just as well. We have agreed by mutual nods that this be postponed until this hour tomorrow.” With that they arose and walked out of the room, leaving me alone and bewildered. What would I say to Ray, the greatest supporter that a man is ever likely to have.

I strolled down and walked for some hours along the beach wrestling with the greatest problem I had ever been faced with.

Back at the apartment I met Ray going out just as I came in. “Could we talk for a minute before you go out?” I asked.

“Sure! What’s on your mind?”

I laid the entire scene before him. As I talked I could see a smile starting to curl the corners of his mouth.

“Why do you smile,” I asked.

“I have been grappling with a secret of my own, and did not know how to tell you. You must know that I have been away in the evenings much during the last few months. I have fallen in love with a wonderful girl and we wish to be married. Her father owns the Tower Shipping Company and he has offered me a job overseeing his vast western holdings. I just have not known how to tell you! It seems to be a good job, and the right time for both of us.”

“There are two things that I ask of you. First, I would like for you to meet with the Admirals and me tomorrow. Secondly, Bill Wrightson has me convinced that he should write a book about you and me and our service in the great war. It would mean bringing our entire past out into the open. We have lived a lie so long that the shock could extend even to us! I thought that Bill should go to Chattanooga and arrange for a great parade in our honor, you might call it our swansong. How do you feel about that scenario?”

He stood and exited the room with a fancy dance that expressed his thoughts more than words could ever have said.

“Hey! This must be kept confidential until my rating comes through. Not even your sweetie is to know. There’s many a slip ‘twix the cup and the lip, you know.”

“Aye Admiral!” and he was gone out into the night.

We presented ourselves in full battle dress the next day at the appointed minute. They were surprised to see that I had brought Ray along, but I sensed a relief that it should all be out into the open. I made application for the new commission and it was now in the hands of others.

A Return To Our Old Lives

It was about two weeks before a set of Admiral globes were delivered to our apartment with the commission. No great fuss was made over the deal. I walked into the Admiralty and gave my profound thanks to each man who had been supportive to my cause. I had now been truly *washed ashore*.

I found that I now had much more control of my affairs within the Navy than before. At that point I put writer Bill Wrightson on my staff. We were moved into the Pentagon

Building near Washington, D.C.. I took Ray along as adjunct and brought in some of my old trusted officers from the Hustler as aides.

One of the first chores was that Ray and I had a lengthy meeting with Bill Wrightson about the possibilities of the upcoming book "*Washed Ashore*". It was to be about Ray and my experiences in the Merchant Marines and later the transfer to the U.S. Navy during and after the war.

I swore in Bill that all the information of our former lives would not be committed to paper until he had finished writing the balance of the book. Ray and I were to sign off on anything that he had edited and considered print ready. Everything that he wrote was to be highly classified or "For the Admiral's Eyes Only".

It was at this point that I let Bill read my early diary pages. He was astonished to learn that we were four years younger than was generally known.

"This will really bring the book to life. I hope it will not get you two court marshaled," he said with his droll sense of humor.

"Now that you know the sordid facts of our early life we would like for you to arrange for a "Van Johnson Holiday" in Chattanooga complete with a parade in which Ray and I would ride in an open limousine through the town. Three days of fun and holiday will be about right. Dancing in Broad Street, with classical and country style music available free to all. The last night should end with a grand finale of fireworks along the Tennessee River. Contact the mayor of the City and set-up all tentative arrangements with him. No preparations are to be finalized until Ray and I have signed off on the project. Here is a voucher for your expenses. Be careful with the taxpayer's money. My office will be responsible for all expenses. Use your voucher number as a purchase order number for all expenditures. You will contact Ray's family and my mother and swear them to silence as to our family connection and background! Invite all Merchant Marine and Navy brass that protocol dictates and don't forget any of our old friends."

Turning to Ray, Bill asked, "Sir, would it be proper to have your wedding as one day's highlight?"

"I think that can be arranged, but I must ask my better half to-be before I can say for certain. Insert a place in the timeline for it, one that can be knocked out if I can't get her approval."

With these words I dismissed Bill to see after his chores.

About a week passed before we heard from Bill. He was very ardent in his work and had made a lengthy outline of every contingency. It took Ray and me a full week to review and amend this extensive tome. We gave certain portions of the work to some of our aides who double-checked important people to be invited so that we not be embarrassed by omitting someone in the finale.

A few days later Bill brought to us the revised program which Ray and I signed off on after another long and tedious review.

He set out with a new set of Captain Bars in a Navy automobile complete with chauffeur. I was busy for a couple of weeks with the matter of a court marshal of a certain Captain for dereliction of duty. He had run his vessel aground while reportedly under the influence of alcohol. After his lengthy trial he was given a dishonorable discharge with a suspended year's sentence.

When Bill returned from the southland he had some astounding stories to tell. Most amazing was his contact with Ray's family and my mother. They were astonished to learn that we were alive and well after so many years away, and with no communication whatsoever from either of us. Bill presented us with an album of family photographs that he had taken while away and many others to illustrate parts of his holiday timeline. I was sure some of the pictures would end up in *Washed Ashore*.

Bill fell to work on the Van Johnson Holiday and made all of the arrangements. One could tell from looking at him that he had been using himself rather freely. Invitations were sent out under the seal of the Admiral and the date was set for July 4. It was to be a grand gift to Chattanooga for the birthday of the United States of America. The newspapers and radio was full of advertisements and talk of the upcoming event. Bill pulled another rabbit out of the hat. He finished the book, gave it to us to read and then made final corrections and sent it off to the publisher. It was promised that we would have copies of the finished book ready for the great southern holiday.

Ten thousand prepress copies were sold with an estimate that another 10,000 would sell on the street during the holiday. Ray did indeed get his wedding arranged for the celebration.

Everything was set and excitement was running at a fevered pitch for the biggest extravaganza in the City's history.

On July 2 my chauffeur drove me to Chattanooga and Ray came down with his intended family. Bill had been down there for several days before us tweaking the details of the festival. Broad Street had been shut down for more than a mile. Bill stuck Ray and me into a limousine and had us driven to our parents residences in the Ooltewah area.

"Sport I'm nervous about what we will find or what our reception will be like when we arrive at the old homestead. I wonder what life has been like around there without us to grouch at?"

I said to Ray, "Well we won't be long in finding out." he answered as we began to see the sights that used to be so familiar to us in the past.

“Did you see that? There is old man Carson and his wife. Do you remember how they used to walk everywhere they went? He would walk about 10 steps ahead of her. They fussed so much with each other that the two could not walk together. Due to his exalted position in the family he was always in the front. Now she had to steady him. The years have not been good to them!”

“Yeah! Look, do you remember Comber’s pond. We used to fish there, but today it is dry, and there are trees growing there. Wonder where the water went?”

Just then we drove up to Ray’s parent’s farm. They were all seated on the patio awaiting our appearance.

“So I see Bill has been at work alerting them of our arrival!”

The black automobile came to a halt and the driver with Bill got out, opened the two back doors and stood at stiff attention while we were exiting the machine. We had no more than set foot on the ground that we found ourselves smothered in the arms of the entire family. They were laughing, crying, and talking all at the same time. We no longer had to wonder what our reception would be like. It must have been similar to when Joseph fell into the arms of Jacob his father on their Egyptian reunion.

What a table had been set, but I was anxious to get on to Mom’s house. I said to Bill, “Shouldn't we be moving on to my old house?” But he just stood there smiling. Silence fell across the scene and from the house came Mother, her face a full wrinkle of smiles. I hastened to meet her, and saw that I had come home fully forgiven for leaving without note or notice.

We went to the table and after several grateful graces being said to the Lord for our safe return and the abundant food we began one of those meals that I had so often dreamed of in the dark days of the war. We ate, we talked and I must say there were tears all around.

After satiating ourselves we moved out onto the patio again. For about 30 minutes we brought ourselves up to-date on the many years of absence. I saw a copy of *Washed Ashore* on the table. Pointing to the book I asked, “Have you had a chance to read Bill’s appraisal of our years?”

Indeed it had been well read and portions underlined as I could see when the copy was placed into my hands.

While we had been eating and talking Bill and the driver had stood at parade rest by the door to the dining room. Bill now spoke up and said, “Admiral I hate to intrude on this heart warming scene, but its time that we get you back to Chattanooga. There will be another day for much more chit-chat and reminiscence after the celebration, but you two must be on hand during the festival.” As we stood to leave Bill and the driver snapped to attention and gave a smart salute, then opened the back doors of the automobile for us to

enter. As we drove away there were goodbye waves and the wiping of eyes on all sides, I can assure you.

“Well gentlemen how were the salutes?” asked Bill.

“Do you think maybe it was a little overdone?” asked Ray.

“No! There is nothing to impress parents like a sharp salute with military courtesies to show that their absent sons have done well.”

“Well it impressed Ray and me, too, I am sure!”

The first day of the celebration went well.

“What a lovely day for a Chattanooga July.” Ray commented.

“Yes, we had the weather moderated for the occasion.” Bill teased.

The day opened with Ray and me being driven along the street in an open limousine past a reviewing stand filled with all of the brass that had chosen to accept our invitation. Our parents were ensconced with the officers in the stand. There were three sailors who marched along the off side of the car. As we approached the review stand Ray and I stood, turned left and remained at attention in a salute while passing that august group.

In turn all of those in the stand stood to return our honors.

On the bright side about 250 stalls stuffed the street full of venders of all manner of foods, mode clothes, books, electronics, tools, and a dozen more things. The side streets extending perpendicularly both ways from Broad Street to Market on the east and to Chestnut Street on the west were sealed off. There were bands, orchestras, stringed quartets, Blue Grass singers with dancing, and areas to sit and rest. The fun went on into the night.

Ray and I went to the Patten Hotel where his fiancée was staying. There I was first introduced to the Macon family and to Mary Beth. I stayed and talked for awhile and then turned in for the day.

At 4:30 the next morning I got a called from the Secretary of the Navy. He and the President wished to reactivate three of the ships in the dry docks. They were to start loading in three days and depart for Korea within the week. He had four ships being loaded at present, and my three would make seven in the convoy.

“I am sorry to break into your grand celebration, but we must gear up for this Korean Conflict. I thought I could handle the situation all by myself without infringement on your holiday, but after working all night on the project I realized that I must have your

expert help. Send the vessels through the Panama Canal and along to Korea. Which Admiral will you have on the Flagship?"

"I will be aboard, Sir!"

"I'm not sure that is entirely wise or necessary, is it?"

"Maybe not, but it will be sort of a shake down cruise for all of us! I will be in Washington later in the day."

I called the Captain that was in charge of all dry dock operations and told him that we needed the *Santa Ana*, the *Northland* and the *Marie Stout* brought out of moth balls and readied for loading in three days. I heard him draw a sharp breath then an, "Aye, Aye Sir. It will be done."

I then called operations and told them to issue emergency sea duty by week's-end. "Give me three of your best crews. Pull them in from where ever you must!"

I shook Bill out of bed and briefed him on the situation. I told him to cover the bases here for me and to have the chauffeur ready to leave within 30 minutes. I threw my few things into a suitcase and was ready as the driver slammed the hood of the car. He saluted, opened the car door for me and we were off.

It was good to be at sea again, to see and smell the sights, sounds and effluvia of past years. The tune of the sea washing alongside my flagship with the deep throbbing of the diesel engines in the bowels of the vessel took me back to my teens when it was all so new and strange. If I could do it again what would I change? I had left no tracks on a trackless sea, and had nothing to show for all of my efforts except what could be read on a few pieces of paper and a small number of flicks in film.

Returning from Korea we docked in Washington State to ready for a return cruise. It was nicer crossing now for there were no submarines to add to the formula of dangers. Since I was the Admiral for the Atlantic Fleet and another was in charge of the Pacific I returned to the Pentagon to sit out the rest of the conflict.

It was satisfying to see an international conflict come to an end. I was always so naive as to believe that there would be universal peace at last not knowing that our politicians were always working on the next provocation somewhere on the globe.

I was ordered to the Admiralty one afternoon and told that we were in need of troops in a place called Viet Nam. I little realized what a slaughterhouse that would be for our young American boys. Historians say that in the old days kings and rulers lead their armies onto the field of battle, putting themselves into harm's way. With the cowards that we have in high places today, this would bring most wars to a halt if that were a requirement for all hostilities.

The old days did have their good points.

When the butchery of Viet Nam ceased, I found the time right for me to resign. I had been connected with marine service for 30 years and was glad to lay the chore upon younger shoulders.

I moved back into the area of my birth and picked up life where I had laid it down. It was much as Rip Van Winkle coming back to his village after 20 years away. Few if any were known and fewer remembered me. The roads were changed, old houses had vanished and new ones sprung up, old neighbors were gone, replaced with more viral youth who neither knew of or cared who I was or what I had done with my life.

Ray was living on the west coast and we talked upon occasion by telephone. His voice sounded distant as in a dream. Had I ever had a close relationship with him? I could hear his children playing in the background and realized what I had lost by pledging my entire life and strength to the service of our country. I could hear the mockery of those words that he and I exchanged some thirty years before when we discussed our imagined woes and set out into the unknown. Today I was surely forever *washed ashore*.