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# Below-deck: The Specialist Sailor in World War II

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Below-deck: the specialist sailor in World War II

A Thesis by

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Orange, CA

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

August, 2021

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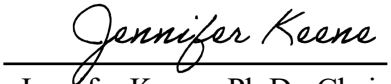
WILKINSON COLLEGE OF ARTS, HUMANITIES, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

War and Society

The thesis of Gregory Falcon is approved.



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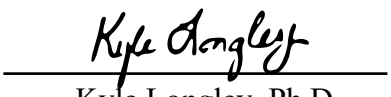

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June, 2021

Below-deck: the specialist sailor in World War II

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ABSTRACT

Below-deck: the specialist sailor in World War II

by Gregory Falcon

U.S. Navy ships were made up of many unexpected jobs during World War II. Traditional war histories say little about sailors who rarely saw direct combat below active war decks but instead worked skilled jobs. Specialized sailors were often unseen as they worked below the waterline as, for example, electrician's mates and boiler room firemen. These jobs were pivotal to keeping the ship running and allowed men to make use of their valuable time in the navy. This thesis argues that, although evolving naval culture led men to enter for various reasons, many entered to enhance their future career during WWII. The emphasis on these skilled jobs expanded over many years since 1900. The navy changed its relationship to incoming sailors by expanding the skilled education of its sailors. The potential for skill creation began surpassing patriotism as a motivator for men to enter. Duties aboard ship, however, stressed constant physical labor. Although instrumental to maintaining their ship, these men rarely saw the direct outcomes of their efforts. This uneven understanding of the broader war often troubled sailors. Facing intense job requirements, long hours, vague service length, and other insecurities, below-deck sailors searched for control. Many found it difficult to maintain morale and find what mattered each day. This insecurity on dangerous wartime waters fueled a desire for maintaining links to home, whether replicating comforts aboard ship or exchanging gifts by mail. Specialized sailors further cemented connections to home by taking skilled classes in the navy. To extend their value both aboard ship and for future employers, men in these jobs found they had less catching-up to do when they returned home. Understanding how these specialized, below-deck sailors emphasized skill creation during the war provides new interpretations to World War II and what came after.

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## Introduction

The U.S. Navy during World War II was not simply admirals and gunners instead was comprised of multiple elements of manpower that made ships run. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, new and old battleships, cruisers, support ships, and various vessels witnessed their portholes welded shut for safety and their exterior hull painted battleship grey for better disguise along the warring oceans. After the nation declared war on Germany and Japan, skilled men joined the navy or were drafted to perform these, and other, less heralded tasks. The navy needed gunners and officers, but also technicians and laborers. Despite all that has been written about the navy in World War II, comparatively few studies have elaborated on the highly-skilled duties relegated below active war decks. Watertenders, boilermen, electrician and machinist's mates, and shipfitters were vital to the navy's success. This thesis examines those occupational rates, or skill-focused jobs, of petty officers that are often overlooked in the national narrative of the naval war in World War II.

Understanding the naval war cannot be fully comprehended without exploring the jobs these men performed. Studying these men as a significant component of a living, breathing community aboard ship enhances our understanding of the nautical culture and how society and war intersected at the time. Ships were a community of interconnected positions, perspectives, and hierarchies all at play in the same temporal space for months at a time. Thus, adding below-deck navy sailors to the conversation adds rich layers to the historical narrative.

When the sailor is articulated, the ship he serviced and the technological advancements often frame histories of the naval war. However useful, these sources only vaguely remark upon the actual men aboard ships and the evolution of how their wartime service connections to their past, their career, and their home. By evaluating sailors' letters, diaries, and oral history

interviews, this study expands understandings of specialized navy ranks during the war. This thesis argues that their career within the navy played out differently from traditional army and navy enlisted veteran experiences centering around stressful and uncertain combat narratives common to the armed service experience. Instead, many men depicted in this thesis exercised control over their time and took advantage of unique opportunities that influenced the trajectory of navy and postwar careers.

In 1968, Harold Wool was one of the first scholars to trace the evolution of occupational servicemen in the armed forces. *The Military Specialist* studied how the economic supply and demand of skilled enlisted men took shape and reached peak in 1945. Wool noted this "personnel system was a closed institution … only vaguely understood by the outside world," until the abundance of wartime stories settled in 1950.[1] From the outset, Wool focused on skilled men who did not receive proper credit for their efforts after the war. He claimed "the Navy, which had entered the war with a broad craft-oriented" structure of thirty-six skilled jobs, "ended the war with 174 separate enlisted occupational designations."[2] He argued that the skills specialized sailors gained while in service directly affected the economic boom after the war, through an examination of how men exiting the navy affected the job market and wages with their unique skills. Specialized men who connected their military with their postwar civilian occupations were an economic necessity. In some ways, Wool wrote his statistically-based study, including naval economic and educational studies, for future war generations, depicting how their military-acquired skills might translate to the homefront. However, he also warned veterans of the

[1] Harold Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968), v.

[2] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 20.

challenges they would face returning home. This thesis examines the same complex issues by using veteran testimonies instead of statistical analysis.

Whereas Wool examined sailors on their career skills at exit and the effectiveness of their civilian transition, the 1978 work *Manning the New Navy* by Frederick Harrod investigated skill acquisition at sailors' entries in the navy. He tracked many aspects of sailor life, such as racial interactions, discipline, illness and injury, and general recruitment strategies. Wanting to understand how past work experience primed men for the naval service, he focused on the early twentieth century to understand how the Navy Department adapted to the demands of the U.S. imperial moment. Harrod depicted continuity and change in the various measures that the Department took to attain men with specialized skills. Although well-researched in memoirs and civilian or navy newspapers, Harrod mainly utilized broad official histories of the navy and naval battles to understand how "the enlisted man became even more of a specialist."[3] Indeed, technological needs and developments threatened to outpace the civilian abilities of men entering the service. These new demands made the general recruitment process difficult, he argued, devoting each themed chapter to showing how the navy changed to match its needs aboard ship. This thesis builds on Harrod's work by carrying the story into the war years and beyond.

In 1986, general studies of the Navy started to focus more on individual experience as a distinct topic worthy of analysis. Veteran Raymond O'Connor wrote an article entitled "The American Navy, 1939-1941," chastising other larger studies for their failure to consider the perspective of everyday navy sailors and their daily understandings of the war.[4] This first-person

[3] Frederick S. Harrod, Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force, 1899-1940 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 7.

[4] Raymond G. O'Connor, "The American Navy, 1939-1941: The Enlisted Perspective," Military Affairs 50, no. 4 (1986).

narrative interspersed personal perspectives on training and physical standards in the larger context of shipbuilding in the era leading up to America's entry. Prior to Pearl Harbor, O'Connor suggested that "most of us manning the ships and stations of the Navy perceived merely the ripple effects of the diplomatic and military" developments toward war, suggesting that traditional narratives of an informed and ideologically-driven fighting force only provide part of the story.[5] His article influences this study by indicating the shift toward trusting testimony as a primary route to understanding veteran's experiences, a personal element often absent in studies.

Kenneth Hagan mentioned sailors in his authoritative 1991 history of the Navy, *This People's Navy, the making of American sea power*, although only tangentially. Primarily concerned with warship technology and naval policy, he discussed officers and various commanders to elaborate on those most directly associated with the glory that naval warfare afforded them during World War II. He used naval logs and perceptions by admirals across multiple stages of war. Accessing the successes and failures primarily in roles enacted by men above-deck, this work synthesized a large body of naval histories into basic themes and arguments within each chapter. Unrecognized, the men beneath the active war decks worked twenty-hour days while admirals charted a ship's course.[6] This text provides a useful foil for this thesis, as texts often incorporate everyday sailors into discussions of bodies deployed on ships, rather than as individuals possessing unique skills that contribute toward victory.

Edwin Hoyt's 1993 text signaled a distinct departure from Hagan-like scholarship of the 1960s-1980s that viewed sailors as secondary to the larger warship and admiral narrative. In 1993, *Now Hear This* discussed understandings of general events from the viewpoint of sailors

[5] O'Connor, "The American Navy, 1939-1941: The Enlisted Perspective," 177.

[6] Kenneth J. Hagan, *This people's Navy: the making of American sea power* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 326.

like seamen and lieutenants. His intention was to "show how the Second World War appeared to the people who served in it," realizing the Navy included many who performed "unsung activities."[7] Although offering wide-ranging perspectives, he did not offer much breadth on his included job positions. His sources and interviews illuminated mostly lower and higher positions in the navy, oversimplifying the job variants aboard ship. This thesis adjusts the sailor-driven focus onto middling, skilled men aboard ship and arranges chapters by theme, rather than key moment or period during the war. Nonetheless, Hoyt skillfully contextualized general sailor perceptions with official battle narratives by arguing that enlisted men completed their job with little knowledge of what lay ahead. Hoyt genuinely sought to understand how sailors dealt with terrifying moments. Having realized the experience of admirals and sailors drastically differed, he mused "if Seaman Lynch had known what was in Admiral Nimitz's mind [in the Coral Sea battles] he might well have decided to jump overboard."[8]

Ronald Spector's 2001 broad study, *At War, at Sea*, combined operational with diaries and letters of British, American, and other sailors across the world. Although often abridged, viewpoints taken from seamen, gunner's mates, or lieutenants usefully framed how naval battles progressed in World War II. Using comparative voices across country and battlefront helped to answer "some important questions about the complex relationship between naval technology, operations, and human factors."[9] Spector chose to describe training experiences and coping mechanisms, among other themes of war, from the sailor's point of view to illuminate the broader war. However thorough in describing sailor experiences, he often used aggregate records

[7] Edwin Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), ix.

[8] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, 53.

[9] Ronald H. Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Viking Penguin Group, 2001), vii.

of training, promotion, and desertions to understand general morale; lacking specificity to occupation and rank. His assertion that examining battle narratives is useful when in conjunction with social elements of the navy, however, remains an important interpretation.

In 2005, Bruce Petty released *Voices from the Pacific War* which contained sailor testimonies collected long after the war ended. This text arranged each chapter by various sailor vignettes directly at the beginning, remembering their experiences in general chronological order. While transcribing the everyday understandings of sailors, Petty realized that, for many, "their wartime experiences have never been far from their thoughts" even while raising families and working for a living.[10] He illuminated those men relegated to mundane and unexpected jobs within ships, whose contributions were rarely acknowledged. Petty conveys sailor perceptions through oral history. Supplementing each sailor vignette with official naval information, Petty was one of the first authors who allowed sailors themselves to dictate the storyline. His study noticed inequities in the national system of remembrance for specialized sailors, as many of these men reintegrated into society via similar careers and raised happy families after the war. However, all of his correspondents, he noted, "wanted to be remembered for what they did in World War II."[11] This thesis relies upon the lens of letters and diaries to reveal sailors' thoughts close to the time to further elaborate on their wartime experiences.

In 2017, Lisle A. Rose released the work *America's Sailors in the Great War*. His research questions and sociological approach offered a strong model for this thesis. Using official publications and biographies with officer or enlisted diaries in equal measure, Rose depicted the operational and social difficulties in mobilizing U.S. industry and bodies for the

[10] Bruce M. Petty, *Voices from the Pacific War: Bluejackets Remember* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005), xix.

[11] Petty, *Voices from the Pacific War: Bluejackets Remember*, xix.

armed forces. He wanted to see what it was like for American sailors fighting the naval war. He concluded that they discovered new dangers, juggled thoughts of home, economics, and attempted to understand new technology in real time. The experience and motivation of sailors had previously been "tangential at best to America's naval history in the Great War," an insight equally applicable to scholarship on navy sailors of the Second World War.[12]

Understanding that different experts can ask different questions about and come to different conclusions from the same sources, this thesis melds various historiographic viewpoints as a backbone to help formulate this newer way to interpret sailors in skilled jobs during World War II. As a military sociologist, Harold Wool offered important statistical background to the experience of general servicemen. His quantitative approach tempered other sociological sources that answered theoretical questions about identity in relation to the navy. His text was the first to consider how working men in the navy affected the structure and reflect how their experience can build a better military. After altering the focus onto the ongoing interactions between wartime sailors and the homefront, interdisciplinary background research helped illuminate which analytical lenses can help current scholars better understand the single sailor's war.

This thesis incorporates a middling approach to understanding sailors and their jobs. Rather than shooting for higher or lower ranked sailors, with a few middling ranks sprinkled between, all sailors discussed in this paper inhabited skilled or semi-skilled positions of little to moderate authority. This cross-section of men encountered few privileged or hierarchical opportunities to access information that offered great insights into the war. Thus, these men understood the war in the way they depicted it through letters and diaries until perhaps after the

[12] Lisle A. Rose, *America's Sailors in the Great War: Seas, Skies, and Submarines* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2017), 3.

war when newer information came along. Their understandings of the war, as John Keegan noted in his classic work, *The Face of Battle*, "… enhance [the historian's] surety of touch in feeling his way through the inanimate landscape of documents."[13]

Letters and diaries of these average skilled sailors can help establish a different story of naval experiences during World War II. Using these types of materials can be controversial. Written in haste and often improperly recounting events later made clear, letters can offer inaccurate depictions of life during war. However, men genuinely attempted to understand their experience, self-reporting how their career or personal route, or detour, evolved in the navy. Men often wrote transparent entries, intending their document to reach a small audience. These emotive outlets say much about sailors outside of the immediate locus of combat.

Although sometimes imperfect, basic primary documents offer the purest essence of the past without alteration over time. Personal letters and diaries represent beliefs and insights in a single moment. Trusting such materials ensures future historians can access them to understand how individuals conceptualized the war on a daily basis. Also, preserving these documents allow veterans to rediscover their past and reclaim their experience with newer understandings of their contribution to the war and how it transpired aboard the microcosm of a single ship. Letters and diaries provide the specificity that illuminates broader themes of war and society. Indeed, allowing personal perceptions to dictate the story of war complicates tactical explanations of naval battles, expanding the military and social history of the Second World War.

Oral histories conducted a considerable time after the war also cause some concern due to their pointedness. If interviewers ask certain questions too specifically, in order to attain a certain answer supporting a certain political or social goal, the interview becomes tainted with bias.

[13] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 31-33.

Nonetheless, information from veteran interviews can be taken reliably even if unsupported by written sources. A healthy dose of accuracy, without too much embellishment or creativity, is important for oral histories to be considered useable in academic fields. Those who can recall the past clearly can offer unique stories often not included in biographies or traditional war histories.

Finding these sources proved to be an inspiring test, even without the unique challenges posed by the pandemic environment. Many archives and institutions have only recently begun the process of digitizing their holdings and documents while others mostly prioritize in-person research. However, many representatives of these archives generously offered scans or replications of their physical content, often without incurring costs, to ensure this thesis could happen.

The following chapters survey 43 sailors, evenly sampled across five navy positions, to understand why sailors entered and stayed inside the navy with their specialized skills. Working otherwise overworked, underpaid, and mundane jobs in civilian life, it is interesting to consider how these types of skilled jobs meant little in ordinary work environments. Selecting five jobs allowed this study to represent how ships steamed across oceans to participate in large, important battles. Actions done by men working these underestimated jobs allowed admirals and generals to commit their ship across the globe, although the men ensuring this movement are often skipped over whether in the broader nautical culture. Their important inclusion addresses the blind-spots in many studies of navy sailors which overlook men who sought wage and social mobility.

In certain segments of this study, using interchangeable dialogue between each skilled position was key. Choosing similarly-skilled jobs held by white men allowed collective analysis on topics like reasons for enlistment, duties aboard ship, and postwar careers by holding factors

of class and race constant. Other positions of importance like ship's stewards or ship's cooks required additional, and very important, discussions on racial dynamics within the wartime navy in these roles. Groups like African-Americans were often relegated to positions like steward or cook. Adding these jobs ultimately would have expanded various research questions further than originally intended.

The five skilled experiences highlighted here are richly layered, quite different from higher or lower positions in the navy. Whereas Harrod and Wool examined skill acquisition particularly on entry and exit, respectively, this thesis depicts skill acquisition and enhancement as a regular pursuit of specialized sailors during their naval career. Indeed, somewhat lower-status jobs during the war, or at least those with less public recognition, ended up having considerable economic payoff in the course of their postwar lives. Acting with intentionality while in uniform, their choices within the navy vaulted them ahead in the long term. Men learned that taking advantage of their time in the navy meant they could mine interesting experiences and opportunities. Although most had no way of predicting the future, the expectation of social mobility became a defining feature of their wartime experience.

Chapter One depicts the changing nautical recruitment practices in preparation for World War II and the evolving requirements imposed upon incoming men. It shows what immediate skills men already had or gained by joining the navy, and how specialist sailors exhibited initial elements of control and customization in their beginning career with the navy. Chapter Two explores the general duties of five working positions aboard ship, both how the navy envisioned these positions and how men themselves spent working hours. Working days were long and intense with multiple stressors complicating the experience, further establishing why these complex jobs deserve similar attention as the admirals and gunners above decks. Chapter Three

describes the uneven project of forming and maintaining morale. Men did not always understand the broader war and their place in it. This chapter attempts to understand what activities and relationships remained important in the everyday scheme for men while in the war. Chapter Four analyzes opportunities for career and personal mobility during and after the war. New civilian opportunities afforded specialized sailors meant some experienced fewer difficulties upon return to their home after the war's end, being more prepared to directly enter the workforce.

This thesis addresses key issues in the field of war and society, such as civil-military relations, the impact of military service on those who serve, and the broad process of historical memorialization by examining a group of veterans largely absent from the national memory of the Second World War. Critical to the project of naval warfare, specialized sailors complicate classic narratives of the armed forces. The ways that the military waged war, in the eyes of working sailors, impacted them quite differently than those participating directly in combat. Thus, reintegration played out differently for specialized sailors after this extraordinary period of change. Memory of the war in textbooks, memorials, and museums often privilege standard narratives of combat and in turn provide a distilled but easily understood story of the war. Examining the historical record breaks the mold that society has formed in memory of these events. These stories help cultivate complicated but intriguing sets of individuals doing their best to influence what their life might look like during, and after, a challenging time in their life.

By exploring five interconnected working positions aboard ships, this thesis attempts to humanize the myth and memory of the national story of the U.S. navy. We need to understand our veterans better, especially those whose experiences do not fit standard narratives of direct combat. Investigating reasons for joining the navy, training programs, connections to home, and

expectations for time spent in the navy and afterwards illuminates the interplay between war and society during World War II.

## Chapter 1: Skilled Navy Recruitment and its History

In 1900, the U.S. Navy "ranked second only to Britain in number of battleships" and searched widely for qualified men, according to longtime navy and empire scholar Ronald Spector.[14] Initially, the navy focused on reaching out in seaside cities to attract gentlemanly men from traditionally respectable Anglo-American families. The special consideration given to white, native-born men indicates the racial and economic bias at the time. The ideal coastal sailor, educated yet brawny, necessarily upheld those "best qualities of a nation … animated by the national spirit," ready to deploy these qualities across the world as the U.S. built its empire, Spector noted.[15] Nevertheless, increasingly technical demands began changing the naval bias in whose background was deemed superior. Technological advancement, plus wider deployments of the U.S. navy at the turn of the century, demanded different skills of incoming men.

Naval Academy history professor Frederick Harrod noticed that the navy department "would begin recruiting in the Midwest" at the turn of the century despite its expenses and new challenges.[16] These efforts tapped on untouched potential; men who grew up accustomed to hard work, though retained the same demographic bias. While city men boasted desirable technical skillsets, the navy found massive numbers of immigrant bodies could not uphold the identity expected of its sailors. Harrod noticed the "poor, foreign element" in cities diminished the overall desirability of city men for the navy.[17] To target the most suitable men for the job and further sift through the traits of recruits, Harrod's analysis found "many [naval] officers had sought to improve their efforts" by adopting civilian employment tactics like "psychological

[14] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 127-128.

[15] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 31.

[16] Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force*, 35.

[17] Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force*, 54.

testing and the concept of salesmanship."[18] Yet there remained no easy answer regarding where to find skilled men for the navy. Considering the technical skills of incoming sailors became increasingly important in World War I.

Whereas the U.S. navy sailor prior to World War I became known as "not only a skilled mariner and mechanic but a special type of man" in Spector's analysis due to calculated selection of affluent white men occupying naval jobs, the waning enthusiasm for overseas imperial territories left a vacuum in determining what qualities naval recruiters should emphasize.[19] After World War I, the notion of national and colonial service no longer swayed large amounts of men. Throughout the 1920s, Harrod noticed "the service reverted to stressing travel and adventure" in its public advertising.[20] Newspaper advertising attempted to attract public attention to the changing navy. Using rhetoric that home visits and instructional or inspirational pamphlets could not, newspapers devoted stories to sailors and their evolving identities both at home and abroad. Illustrations of naval life and its benefits to promising young men helped explain new opportunities for travel, skilled education aboard the ship, and social status.

Prior to the Great Depression in 1929, the navy provided havens for men with practical concerns such as consistent meals and a place to sleep. Media accounts of "liberty in the city," or time off, was a "sailor's dream," Stillwell claimed, for those men who entertained romantic notions of exotic port locales.[21] However, few sailors experienced this freedom in Spector's interviews as "fuel was expensive, and ammunition even more so," thus most men "spent relatively little time at sea" but rather on the coast or bouncing between various port cities.[22]

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[18] Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force,* 39.

[19] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 31.

[20] Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force*, 42, 27.

[21] Paul Stillwell, "Sailors of the Battleship Navy," *Naval History* 21, no. 1 (2007), 19.

[22] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 134.

Overall, bad press and problematic interactions with civilians in port cities threatened general sailor retainment. Stories circulated in the print media illustrated sailors spending inappropriate time at saloons, publicly intoxicated while on leave from their ship. Navy recruitment numbers dramatically decreased throughout the 1930s as interest faded and sailors deserted the service.

Declining interest in the navy, mixed with sailor frustrations within the system, made it difficult for the Navy to build-up in the years prior to World War II. By the end of 1939, O'Connor recalled, the government ordered that the maximum number of naval enlisted men should increase to "145,000 by executive decree," although achieving these tangible numbers required renewed encouragement of the navy project.[23] The public image of the navy required rehabilitation to entice potential sailors and their families. Naval historian and veteran Kenneth Hagan aptly described the unsteady period while tracing the fate of a bill to "authorize construction in those classes [of cruisers and destroyers] over the next several years."[24] The proposition warranted heavy popular opposition from the public and included, notably, "ministers of forty-five churches in Buffalo, New York." General public mistrust of the U.S. Navy was widespread due not only to uncertain precepts toward unpopular war but also the prospect of enriching and empowering businessmen and sloppy sailors.

The navy mission required intense retooling by the late 1930s, which included a public reckoning with some the navy's widely publicized shortcomings. Indeed, scholars like Petty and Wool privilege "massive patriotic appeals" as a common denominator in men queuing to enlist in the WWII navy, overlooking a significant cross-section of newly specialized sailors who exhibited other reasons for joining the wartime navy.[25] This crop of newer men during World

[23] O'Connor, "The American Navy, 1939-1941: The Enlisted Perspective," 175.

[24] Hagan, *This people's Navy: the making of American sea power*, 283

[25] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 94.

War II took advantage of fresh opportunities for responsibility, status, and career advancement due to the navy's expanded schooling and experiential emphasis. This group of men were informed and personally motivated, combatting long, and vague, enlistment terms by taking advantage of career opportunities coming down the pipeline; chances for control that made joining the post-Pearl Harbor navy an impactful decision, especially due to its weak reputation. This newer interpretation of sailor motivations does not disregard patriotism, as the year 1942 boasted around 125% increase of enlisted sailors than the year prior. However, expanding the traditional motivations of sailors entering the navy to encompass career interests and personal endeavors, decentralizes December 7, 1941 as the key determinant.

**Reinterpreting the Navy and Motivation for Sailors to Enter**

Men joining and staying in the navy began before World War II, often for reasons most immediate to each individual such as poverty or education, rather than national service and adventure. During the early days of the Great Depression, the navy promised, and often delivered, gateways from poverty or job stress but could not always provide exotic travel or worldly knowledge. The navy consequently earned little praise during this uncertain time. Spector found that port cities in the States absorbed the brunt of sailor activities, while also hosting "endemic problems" like venereal disease and alcoholism.[26] The popular perception of the navy lost much rhetorical and creative momentum, something writers attempted to remedy as war loomed. These public educational efforts upsurged after Pearl Harbor.

The mythical allure of the navy re-entered public consciousness thanks to an expansion of articles trying to make sense of the devastation of December 7, 1941. A military affairs editor for the *New York Times* attested that the same vigor displayed by American men who pacified

[26] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 134.

and settled the "wind-swept prairies of America" motivated 1940s navymen in their "assertive, proud traditions."[27] Mythical representation of the navy by writers like T.H. Thomas attempted to reinvigorate the public trust in the navy, galvanizing its renewal by reaffirming the navy's superior construction and command after the devastation at Pearl Harbor. These countrywide efforts increased enlistment after the nation was at war. Some men were no doubt convinced by this newly-revived naval rhetoric of comradeship and mythologized combat gliding across the high seas. Indeed, the year 1942 saw visible increases in U.S. navy recruits to the tune of roughly 640,000 people, about 350,000 more than the year before.[28] Public efforts toward revising public mistrust of the naval institution bore fruit over time, especially during 1943 with enlisted numbers dramatically strengthening to around 1,740,000 men. By war's end, there were roughly three million sailors in the Navy across all jobs and theaters of war.

By December 7, 1941, the U.S. Navy had also made headway enticing men for technical jobs aboard ship. One of the most pressing motives for enlistment, as during the Depression, was to escape undesirable conditions at home. For Frank Albert, the U.S.S. *Enterprise* provided him "the first time ever I had my own bunk to sleep in; first time in my life I had three meals a day… I tell you; it was gorgeous!"[29] The roaring seas provided avenues to escape troubles at home, whether monetarily or career-wise, and hopefully bring something better when one returned home. "Living in a house without electricity" on a farm in rural Illinois, as Lawrence Burzynski recalled, he "hoped that by joining the Navy I could be an electrician."[30] Richard Young

[27] T.H. Thomas, "No Need seen for Pessimism: Criticism of Navy after Hawaii Attack regarded as Unwarranted," *New York Times* (New York, N.Y.), Dec. 15, 1941, pg. 18.

[28] "Research Starters: U.S. Military by the Numbers", National WWII Museum New Orleans, accessed April 2021.

[29] Frank Albert, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[30] Lawrence Burzynski collection, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.

remembered similar experiences about hardship in his memoir. Having made "better grades" than most of his class in 1939, he "won a scholarship to L.S.U. worth $40.00," an insufficient amount as he "had nothing else" to complete and maintain the costs of the university.[31] For Young, the navy was a gateway toward monetary and educational options previously unavailable to him when restricted by his finances at home.

Other men learned enough from hearsay or popular media to determine the Navy would be better for them than other armed services. As Arthur Brown recollected, he did not "know how to dig a foxhole," but knew how to swim so he decided "I'll get in the Navy," citing these practical concerns as a primary reason he followed his brothers into the service.[32] Gerald Wendorf, before working as a machinist's mate aboard the U.S.S. *Louisville*, heard just enough to convince him to join the navy and too much that dissuaded him from other armed services. He recalled receiving classmates' "reports back of what was going on down in the South Pacific Islands … Marines were living in mud, with snakes, and all kinds of reptiles. I didn't like that at all."[33] Other men heard much more about the navy than other branches and felt these stories portrayed the renewed navy system as one of stability. "I wanted a good clean bed to sleep in and three meals a day," Wilbur Lee McCracken recollected while elaborating he chose the navy branch "without interruption at all" due to the abundance of favorable stories he heard.[34]

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[31] Richard Oliver Young Collection (AFC/2001/001/49970), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[32] Arthur Brown, interview by Larry Rabalais, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

[33] Gerald L. Wendorf Collection (AFC/2001/001/76193), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[34] Wilbur Lee McCracken Collection (AFC/2001/001/65120), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

Some knew little about the Navy and wished to ride out into the elegant blue sea. As small towns were still incredibly insular, some incoming sailors, previously dwelling within a perimeter of twenty or thirty miles in any direction, joined for this geographic freedom. As Frank Albert remembered, he and other potential sailors like him "never even left the State of Illinois … let alone cross that Mississippi River."[35] The navy offered these men a chance to explore a wider world only known rhetorically or through books and stories. J.C. Brownwell echoed this sentiment looking back, saying "it was just like everything exploded [when heading from rural Texas to San Diego for training.] You know, you lived in this one place all your life and all of a sudden you're seeing the world!"[36] These men bought into the revived ideal that the navy offered travel as a primary perk of enlisting, even during wartime.

As wartime stimulated the economy and movement of bodies across the United States, monetary and technological investment into ships continued to grow. The active installment of newer ship systems and technologies forced the navy to increasingly seek from, or train, its incoming men in certain skills required aboard ship. To Ed Kirshenmann, as "not too many [young kids] could drive a tractor with a disc or something behind it," he was "a prime suspect to get drafted off the bat." He did not allow the army or another branch to draft him, as he claimed "I'll choose what I want [and enlist.]"[37]

[35] Frank Albert, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[36] J.C. Brownwell, interview by Ed Metzler, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 21, 2013.

[37] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

**Sailor Skills at Entry**

Shipboard needs in World War II required the navy to search for male prospects with technical skills rather than gentlemanly qualities of the navy past. By 1941, the navy provided skilled education within the navy to develop this newer "best man" ideal for their ships. Initial training mechanisms aboard ship no longer sufficed. As early as 1906 sailors began developing skills through outside training opportunities to meet the demands for specialized jobs aboard ships. In turn, sailors began enhancing their rank.

Many of these sailors personally invested in further training to augment their value aboard ships, though only if their social class, navy rank, and monetary capabilities allowed them to undertake such classes. For sailors attempting to make use of newfound skills within the 1930s navy, there remained little potential for career development. The slackened pace at which men increased their rating did not rebound until 1941. Efficiently developing and training general men with useful skills was still a somewhat new concept in WWII.

Sailors occupying specialized job positions aboard ship often entered the service with desirable skills. Meeting skill requirements for multiple jobs on ships, like shipfitter or machinist's mate, was easier for men who obtained technical skill levels before entering. Paul Willard Davidson "worked as a mechanic on the farm" before becoming a machinist's mate aboard the *Louisville*.[38] Familiarity with tools helped sailors prepare for similar expectations of them aboard ship. Meanwhile, Frank Boffi reminisced that during his time "in a manufacturing plant, we manufactured spinning machines for the cotton industry [before the war,]" providing skills which equipped him with background later useful when reporting to Newport, Rhode

[38] Paul Willard Davidson Collection (AFC/2001/001/95989), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

Island for training from the navy.[39] Harold Wool, a postwar specialist in manpower concerns for the Pentagon's Office of the Secretary of Defense, noticed the service began demanding a higher "level of education and mental capacity … never before associated with the traditional image of the enlisted man."[40] Some men found they could use their civilian skills aboard ship when they entered the navy. "I was serving machinist apprenticeship [when the war was declared against Japan,]" Lindsey Wilcox elaborated, reflecting that his key set of educational experiences primed him to serve aboard the U.S.S. *Indianapolis* as a boiler fireman.[41]

Frank Frazitta was among other incoming men who attempted to customize their training or schooling before entering the navy. Having worked at Elmvale Worsted Company with textiles, his experiences in hot, cramped mills working with clothing equipment surely prepared him for similar conditions aboard ship. In May, 1943, he wrote "I got my induction papers. I'm awfully surprised and mom is upset. I hope I pass."[42] His job and attention to wartime news often blended before he entered the navy, making his naval education an extension of his technical skills and interests. Like Frazitta, Perl Farrington found projects he experienced in school were "kind of my start," in becoming electrician's mate in the navy. Having "studied aviation engines at Quoddy [in Maine for NYA school,]" he realized this helped him envision a future path using similar skills.[43]

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[39] Frank Boffi, interview by Charlie Simmons, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 11, 2012.

[40] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 21.

[41] Lindsey Wilcox, interview by Mike Zambrano, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, August 9, 2007.

[42] U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation Collection: Frank M. Frazitta Papers (#677.048), East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, USA.

[43] Perl Vernon Farrington, Jr. Collection (AFC/2001/001/99462), Veterans History Project. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

Personal training or schooling undertaken by these sailors did not address base levels of sailor knowledge and competency. Private classes were neither standardized nor necessarily always updated on the latest technological trends. To find better trained men or those able to be trained into specialized duties, Harrod argued the navy "found it had to institute its own advanced training" to fill increasingly complicated skills.[44] Increasing emphasis on general sailor education changed the institutional relationship to the men it inducted. The navy took on a new role in educating men coming aboard ship for skilled jobs.

**Training Incoming Sailors**

Initially demanding little technical background from incoming sailors, Wool established that the navy system only "included four recruit training centers … two electrician's schools … and a machinist's school" in 1914.[45] By 1918, the navy's advanced schools mushroomed to encompass more than one-hundred rates, or jobs, considered vital to the modern navy. By the end of World War II, the navy boasted almost one-hundred and seventy-five full occupations with unique schools and training courses. This achievement required time, funding, and expanding the naval mission.

While the number of U.S. battleships remained one deficiency for the government to address by the end of 1941, recruiting strategies and training schools were not in such diminished state. Indeed, most newer curriculum became standardized by this time in schools across the country from San Diego to New York City, down to Norfolk. No doubt some already-qualified sailors enlisting in WWII underestimated the training regimen upon reporting to specialized

[44] Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force*, 89.

[45] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 13-14.

schools. Rather than training with rifles and drilling, technical schools instructed men largely on specific mechanical abilities that ships needed from them.

Most sailors were trained in specialized schools before embarking to the Atlantic or Pacific aboard their ship. Before heading off to schools, fit and able men passed interviews, medical exams, and disciplinary standards through general training programs like Great Lakes Training Center near Chicago. Technical training then remedied any technical blind-spots for both fresh and already knowledgeable recruits. Anthony Joseph Buccieri attended an engineering and diesel school "in Richmond, Virginia for about eight weeks" to prepare for working with steam boilers as a watertender.[46] The length of time tended to encompass six to fourteen weeks of class across various programs. After "marching and standing and … learning how to take orders," Lindsey Wilcox went to a trade school in San Francisco to learn "bolts and parts and stuff like that" through 1943.[47] To meet ever-increasing skill necessities, the navy prepared intense training programs both at entry and during the tenure of sailors in technical jobs.

After Pearl Harbor, the navy also expedited the academic pursuit of higher rank. Streamlining the speed at which sailors learned specialized skills in elevated positions remained crucial throughout the war. Ships needed ample numbers of men who could handle complicated duties aboard ship given any situation. Therefore, the navy needed to devote time to refine and expand schooling curriculum to compensate for manpower influxes throughout 1941-1942. The quality of schooling was often valuable and comprehensive.

[46] Anthony Buccieri, interview by Mike Russert and Wayne Clarke, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, January 8, 2003.

[47] Lindsey Wilcox, interview by Mike Zambrano, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, August 9, 2007.

Douglas Cady recounted "they [the instructors in his Boston mechanical school] were good … and most of them [were] young fellas."[48] Keeping up with the latest technological trends was key, and sometimes those who came to these techniques later or perhaps fell behind could not keep up. Advanced classes primed men, even those who had invested considerable time sharpening skills back at home, for new technological developments possibly not yet implemented in civilian jobs.

Francis Shiner "took all the studies, electrical studies actually," and finally became an electrician's mate after he passed the interviews and preliminary testing, afterwards sent "to do university" to prepare for his assignment on the *Enterprise*.[49] Schooling helped incoming sailors understand the difference between A.C. and D.C. power, for example. Men learned techniques and skills useful for working on any number of machines in both naval and civilian life. Some of these school modules investigated how electrical motors work and why certain systems like generators and telegraphs might "switch from mechanical to electrical and then back to mechanical power."[50] Handbooks helped men tutor themselves through the path to an electrician's mate ranking. Indeed, John Hladik Jr. felt that, after attaining "fifth in the class, and I was rated, I got a rate … This really paid off later, I'll tell you that much."[51] Some classes started out with presentation slides, ship nomenclature, and the conceptual framing of ship systems, but most training sites ultimately privileged practical skills. For example, Frank Frazitta

[48] Douglas Cady, interview by Charles Leven, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, September 26, 2002.

[49] Francis Shiner, interview by Brainerd Parrish, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

[50] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Basic Electricity; Navy Training Courses* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print Office, 1945), 171, 193.

[51] John A. Hladik, Jr. Collection (AFC/2001/001/102899), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

wrote he "went to a building today and saw an actual switchboard and boilers and diesel engines" to solidify the theoretical knowledge he gained prior.[52]

**Alternative Naval Education**

Other sailors received fewer educational opportunities before joining, or none at all. James Robinette claimed he, while working in the coal mines, "enlisted, and on my brochure I had put that I had done electrical, which in the mines it was nothing but labor." After reporting to Morehead, Kentucky, he undertook electrical school "for four months" and left as an electrician's mate.[53] Although attending navy schooling, he reflected that, rather than having direct prior experience with electrical work to draw from, he mostly learned "the ship by being there as they were completing [the U.S.S. *Quincy*.]" His interactions with the electrical field were therefore limited to navy education and his responsibilities aboard ship, drawing from and relating his newfound skills primarily to what lay in front of him. Thomas Hair, a watertender, simply did not receive any initial "specialty training. When we got on board our ship they just assigned us to a division and we got our training from there on."[54] Nevertheless, his skill requirements remained very clear and crucial. He needed to display "calmness under stress" when maintaining "proper steam pressure in boilers by controlling feed valves of oil burners" and other specialized equipment in the bottom depths of the ship.[55]

These particular men learnt on the job and upon receipt of their expected daily tasks, often using any introductory training to assist them in those duties specific to their assigned ship.

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[52] Frank Frazitta Papers, January, 1944, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University.

[53] James R. Robinette Collection (AFC/2001/001/59986), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[54] Thomas Hair, interview by Wayne Clark, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, May 23, 2001.

[55] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *U.S. Navy Interviewer's Classification Guide: December 1943* (*Watertender)*, (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print Office, 1943).

The U.S.S. *Massachusetts* introductory manual for the engineering department alerted incoming electricians of the turbine stages necessary for helping the propellers work, proper steam pressure, and similar technical information common to naval training courses. Learning aboard ship, however, emphasized specific duties and safety precautions unique to their ship.[56] The navy became an opportunity for men to make use of and develop unique, yet transferrable, skills while learning how to be desirable in the work force without relying on costly private schooling to achieve personal mobility.

**Linking Naval Education to Civilian Training**

Many young men coming of age in the late 1930s occupied the navy during WWII. White working-class men during the Great Depression faced severe unemployment. Manual laboring jobs provided a route away from financial instability. "Massive public works projects like the Hoover Dam" and Civilian Conservation Corps "were an important part of the New Deal's response" to the Depression in Derks's analysis of the period.[57] Especially during the late 1930s, projects stressing labor primed men both physically and economically for long hours of difficult and often tedious work. Men without access to college found work in dangerous environments like mines, mills, coal companies, factories, and logging camps. Working class men assuming skilled navy jobs also discovered similar working conditions. Accustomed to hard, physical labor, their civilian work experiences prepared them for their naval careers in yet another way.

Generally, however, incoming sailors were better educated during World War II. Due to the navy extending sailor age boundaries to between "eighteen to thirty-seven," men with more

[56] San Francisco Maritime National Park Association, U.S.S. *Massachusetts Engineering Installation - Brief Description* (*Massachusetts* BB-59 Engineering Department, 1942-1945)

[57] Scott Derks, *Working Americans 1880-2012,* vol. 1*:* The Working Class (Amenia, N.Y.: Grey House Publishing, 2012), 237.

substantial "civilian work expertise" joined the navy.[58] Thus, men collectively joined the navy with more information available to them, as "41 percent of the white World War II draftees" graduated high school, an increase of 32 and 16 percent over World War I and pre-Pearl Harbor sailors, respectively. Commonly underlining the educational benefits of enlistment helped the navy recruit more skilled sailors, especially those who trained in civilian academic settings with technical skills before the war.

Some inductees thus invested time in civilian schools affiliated with the navy prior to enlisting in World War II. Shipbuilding and systems classes explained the complexities in ensuring a ship will run appropriately from sailors completing various jobs. In a handbook depicting a course in marine electricity, men learning electrical theory could study procedures to "lay out a main wireway" to ensure that general lighting, battle lighting, and emergency lighting were all hooked properly with power.[59] With the intent that these skills translated to wartime, the foldouts and examples provided within often corresponded with typical warship voltage and usage of space. Indeed, "moneys are available," the text prefaced, to states like California "to train large numbers of personnel in defense occupations to meet the demands of local industries having defense contracts."[60] The navy allied with civilian schools to help train men in related technical and manual fields, and hopefully link those skills to duties within the armed service.

By 1941, civilian schools assumed new roles to bridge gaps between civilian and naval occupations before a potential sailor began specialized schooling through the navy. In this way, a sailor would be less difficult to train and less likely to drop out in accelerated navy

[58] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 22.

[59] San Francisco Maritime National Park Association, *Unit Course in Marine Electricity* (Sacramento: California State Department of Education, 1942), 108.

[60] *Unit Course in Marine* Electricity, 108.

courses. Sidney Dashevsky, as he worked in plumbing before the war, possibly took a shipfitting class prior to deciding to enlist in the navy on November 18, 1941.[61] Classes at the Shipfitter Instruction Apprentice School at the Navy Yards in Philadelphia provided a manual for "student shipfitters" written in conjunction with both naval representatives and civilian counterparts in the field.[62] Those who took courses like these learned that "the key to maximum production in any shop is a systemized distribution of its equipment," depicting layouts of successful shipfitter shops and what should be included within their radius.[63] Attentive shipfitters learned and employed their training on the stages of shipbuilding, how to examine blueprints, and how to diagnose plating or hull issues during ship outfitting. Such skills would benefit those sailors that reached higher ratings with more responsibility over ship structural integrity, construction on newer ships they would supervise, and general department cohesion.

**Conclusion**

With new emphasis on integrated schooling for its skilled sailors, developing technical skills they did not possess or wanted to hone further, the navy revitalized itself as a gateway to mobility for incoming sailors in specialized positions aboard ship. Specialized sailors found themselves motivated to join for a variety of reasons. The navy further expedited the process to attain roles in various work fields for those men fit, ready, and willing to be inducted. The standardized education process to become an electrician's mate, or shipfitter, was not easy. Sailors required high test scores in relation to actual technique in the field and sustained interaction with homefront technological trends.

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[61] Sidney Dashevsky to Emily Van Gelder, January 10, 1943, Sidney Dashevsky Second World War correspondence (2017.507.w.r.), Center for American War Letters, Chapman University, CA.

[62] Albert F. Crivelli, *Shipfitter's Manual* (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1942), iii.

[63] Crivelli, *Shipfitter's Manual*, 65.

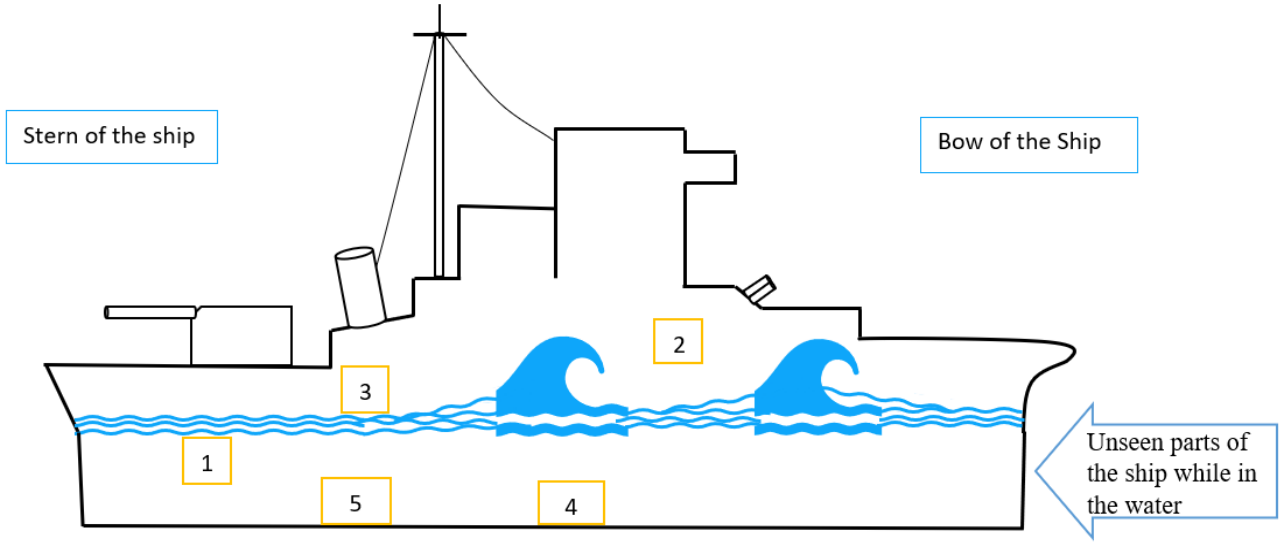
Test scores represented the minimal level of performance for men to attain higher occupational rates for their proposed function aboard a ship, thus ensuring a "sufficient number of men to meet the needs of the fleet."[64] Therefore, many sailors devoted time at school studying and developing skills with engines, technical equipment, and various machineries closely modeled after practical ship systems and their engineering.

With their new skillsets, men embarked aboard their new ship and the job at hand. They felt some semblance of control when looking at their future, even as they encountered extreme workdays and perilous seas.

[64] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *U.S. Navy Interviewer's Classification Guide: December 1943* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print Office, 1943).

## Chapter 2: The Specialist Aboard Ship

Upon receiving training and beginning their tenure in various occupational jobs, sailors within five working positions inhabited unexpectedly interconnected sets of duties. Rather than learning the trade of killing, the navy trained these portions of its crew in career trades. Among shipfitters, machinist's mates, watertenders, boilermen, and electrician's mates, each position held unique skills and expectations of their workforce. Many of these men spent most of their time below the active war decks (see Figure 1.) although their jobs remained just as intense as those above the waterline or directly fighting.




Locations of note aboard general U.S. Navy ships

| Location | Number |
|---|---|
| Shipfitter's Shop | 1 |
| Electrical Shop | 2 |
| Machinist's Shop | 3 |
| Water Treatment | 4 |
| Boiler Rooms | 5 |

**Figure 1. Work locations of specialized sailors in WWII Navy.**

Most battleships or cruisers, for example, featured between twenty-five and thirty-five feet of deck, or a draft, beneath the waterline. This point is key in understanding that a whole subset of crew existed beneath, completing duties to keep ships running but rarely seen in naval histories. This chapter will explore those servicemen, their occupational positions, and intense workdays.

## I. Shipfitters

In 1943, the Naval Personnel Information Bulletin required that shipfitters use "hand and machine tools … for repairs to ship structure," work that included welding metal sheets for the hull and fixing pipes, tubing, or other welds.[65]

For most shipfitting, men crouched and sprawled on hands and knees to fix leaking pipes and re-fit various plating across the ship, lifting heavy objects and generally maintaining both the outside and inside hull soundness. As the vessel experienced damage, shipfitters became increasingly in-demand and valuable aboard a ship. Often these varied jobs took shipfitters across multiple decks and levels of the ship, consequently they were not always below-deck. When John Tait was called for "a massive job down in the engineering spaces," he found his job expectations quite malleable as his "repair gang was also the primary firefighting crew."[66] Shipfitters needed to be flexible in the moment, not just mentally but physically as their body and strength was utilized heavily each day.

For most men, this physical demand meant long hours which added extra pressure. Sidney Dashevsky claimed to his New York sweetheart early in his tenure aboard the U.S.S. *North Carolina* "there isn't really much I can put … meaning my activities of course."[67] Fearing

[65] Patrick Clancey, "Ranks and Rates of the U.S. Navy," Hyperwar Foundation, https://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ref/Ranks&Rates/index.html

[66] John Tait, interview by William Alexander, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, December 6, 2001.

[67] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 5, 1943, Center for American War Letters, Chapman University.

censorship, many sailors rarely discussed specific work duties or locational information and even fewer attempted to make diagrams or drawings as these were surely confiscated. Nonetheless, he was able to describe his workday. At 7:45 in the morning, Dashevsky wrote, his day started.[68] He projected his general schedule as finding drainage leaks in both bow and stern of the ship, checking fire plugs and ventilator motors for the boiler rooms below. He joked that he "only work[ed] seventeen and one half [hours a day.]"[69] Understanding himself as an essential technician aboard ship, he and other shipfitters test of their physical stamina to ensure ship safety across the dangerous seas.

Jobs maintaining the internal and outside structure of the ship, and all of their tinier components, required intense concentration as "there could never be any light at night, and very little light below decks," making plumbing and the steel hull even more complicated, Richard Young recalled. However, Young claimed he "enjoyed the ship-fitting work" for all its intensity, and the men he worked with, as he began to rise up in the ranks of his department aboard the U.S.S. *Laub*.[70] Similarly intense workdays were common for other technically qualified positions like machinist's mates, men needed at all times of the day or night for complicated jobs working on ship systems.

## II. Machinist's Mates

Machinist's mates in the World War II navy operated, maintained, and repaired "main and auxiliary engines, steering engines, anchor machinery, turbines, pumps, and related equipment."[71] Additionally, they familiarized themselves with all equipment and tools relating to

[68] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, April 30, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[69] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, June 24, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[70] Richard Oliver Young Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 50.

[71] Patrick Clancey, "Ranks and Rates of the U.S. Navy," Hyperwar Foundation.

those larger jobs. These were handymen, demanding intense knowledge of their field upon entry as well as in the latest versions of engines, propulsion devices, and other machinery dedicated to keeping a ship afloat and running.

Working mostly on lower decks, machinist's mates surely dealt with always being greasy, taking pumps or valves apart, fixing them, maintaining the propeller shafts in close and dirty quarters. Their knowledge of the ship's inner workings paid off at unexpected times. John Kevice noticed this when he claimed "we kept them [destroyers] supplied and sometimes cruisers came in and … there was one ship that lost their Mast; it was made out of wood so we made them one right there."[72] It took incredible knowledge on the part of machinist's mate crews like his to approximate the correct height and interior diameter of a proper makeshift mast to allow the crew using it to still be able to hook the radio connection lines, maintain proper lookout, and ensure the right equipment installed properly.

Whereas Kevice spoke on the varied nature of the job, Mike Marko wrote often in his diary about repetitive machinist work aboard the U.S.S. *North Carolina*. While his entries after battles convey intense thoughts about what happened within the battle, he often described his "usual sea routine" as "very monotonous" and rarely spoke on his work duties or personal feelings.[73] In October, 1942, he described his expected location aboard ship without interruption from battle or other duties, a day that he "worked all day on condenser, nothing unusual."[74] To Marko, his tight ship space offered him little respite or escape from the loneliness and repetitiveness of long workdays with few interactions.

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[72] John Kevice, interview by Phillip Leonard, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, July 31, 2003.

[73] Mike Marko Diary, July 12, 1943, Battleship North Carolina Archives, Wilmington, North Carolina, USA.

[74] Mike Marko Diary, October 3, 1942, Battleship North Carolina Archives.

Training was key in maintaining the proper systems aboard ship, therefore ensuring safe crossings through the Atlantic and Pacific. “I had some great training,” Paul Davidson said, continuing that his department and others “were self-sufficient.”[75] The U.S.S. *Louisville*, like many other ships, was self-sufficient in training qualified machinists, preparing them to diagnose various ship systems. Kevice enthusiastically claimed that his ship “was a floating machine shop, they did everything,” supporting this claim of self-sufficiency. Machinist’s mates saw themselves as essential both in moments of war and calmness. Trained men needed to know how to fix and maintain boiler pumps, for example, both how these pumps connected from the main water room and the places where they splintered off into powering other things, such that “every sailor on that ship could take a fresh water shower every day.”[76] Beside the thousands of gallons of water needed daily to create steam in the boilers for ship propulsion, machinist’s mates worked closely with watertenders to allocate suitable amounts of water for showers or drinking. This interaction highlights the need for many skilled men to work together across various jobs.

## III. Watertenders

Watertenders ensured the boiler room and its firemen maintained and properly operated “boiler room equipment including pumps, condensors,” and all the repairs and proper distributions of equipment and water needed for various uses.[77] Sailors in these duties operated both as leadership and manual labor in the boiler passages. The boiler and water rooms in the depths of a navy ship primarily created the energy necessary to propel a ship in the water.

Some watertenders helped produce fresh water for the ship. For Douglas Cady, working in the “forward motor room” meant he made “saltwater into fresh water” for the men and the

[75] Paul Willard Davidson Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

[76] Paul Willard Davidson Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[77] Patrick Clancey, “Ranks and Rates of the U.S. Navy,” Hyperwar Foundation.

boilers and, in turn, the engines propelling the ship.[78] He would ensure that salt water taken into the ship properly went into pumps and cleaning pipes, purifying the water as fresh as possible. From there, fresh water entered the boilers to start creating power, continuing down to the engine room turbines that "made the ship go," as Wilbur McCracken confirmed.[79] The water purifying room sent the cleanest water possible to the boilers to avoid any corrosion from salt within the inner boiler mechanisms. From there, other watertenders worked with the treated water at the next step in propelling a ship forward within the direct heat of these boiler rooms.

Watertenders within the boiler rooms could be found checking valves of pressure and steam output from each one, with most men like Richard Eberle on a "four [hours] on and eight [hours] off" schedule due to the heat and strenuous workflow down below.[80] Massive water boilers took on the treated water through tubes connected above a furnace in each boiler, superheating the water into steam. Thomas Hair called it "tough work" in his interview, noting the "extremely hot" temperatures exacerbated further by the "forced-draft" system.[81] Using ventilators from upper parts of the shop, the boiler rooms took air from outside the ship and force-fed it to the boilers. This function helped the boilers burn fuel more efficiently, creating more intense fires and thus rapidly boiling water into steam.

As a watertender involved in the manual labor segments of the job, Thomas Hair was "always around that extreme heat" with the fires from around four to sixteen boilers on a single ship. He spent his time in 110 to 120-degree temperature conditions, making sure the water and

[78] Douglas Cady, interview by Charles Leven, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, September 26, 2002.

[79] Wilbur Lee McCracken Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[80] Richard Eberle, interview by Thomas Venezio, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, September 12, 2002.

[81] Thomas Hair, interview by Wayne Clark, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, May 23, 2001.

steam properly made their journey down the ship. Wilbur McCracken, who attended oil burning school before joining his ship, worked right near the boilers to sustain "the right amount of air going through the boilers in the furnace," along with ensuring the burning oil remained at the correct temperature to make steam.[82] Just as water inside a teapot reaches a heavy boil and sends steam out the spout, these massive boilers needed to create and send massive amounts of steam down to the engine rooms to keep the ship moving ahead.

It was intense work not only due to the heat but also the rapid pace within these spaces. "You don't think, you just do," Hair added while reiterating that "you are lighting off boilers and cutting them out, operating the safeties," and other duties that do not allow much standing but "for a 20-year old it was quite the thing."[83] While less technically demanding than other jobs and training modules, watertenders and boiler room firemen required training on the job to ensure safety and proper execution to keep the ship going. "It isn't a very easy job to learn," F. Warren VanWert stressed, but one that he began "catching on very well" to as he began to understand the larger process.84 Like other occupational jobs aboard navy vessels, constant instruction was key in this job as each day the demands on watertenders and firemen could look a bit different, depending on the speed and location that superior officers decided the ship needed to go.

## IV. Boiler Firemen

Working as a boiler fireman, the main functions these men performed revolved around direct contact with the boiler, generally to "maintain fireroom equipment" and the multiple fires

[82] Wilbur Lee McCracken Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

[83] Thomas Hair, interview by Wayne Clark, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, May 23, 2001.

[84] F. Warren VanWert Papers (#704), October 17, 1941, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, USA.

creating steam from water.[85] Firemen faced the brunt of the manual labor necessary to change and keep steady the ship speed, normally with multiple men working at once, packed in hot and tight spaces. While the watertenders mainly dealt with supporting the creation of steam, boiler firemen were those men most directly responsible for keeping fires burning and guaranteeing the propellers on a ship kept spinning.

Waiting to embark aboard a ship, Richard Worley knew he would not be shoveling coal into a boiler furnace but instead lighting fires with fuel oil and maintaining the flames. While stoking fires and contending with intense smoke and heat right in their face, sailors like Worley knew that ships needed many men in less-skilled positions like his new job. However, he noticed while writing from San Diego that "this is the place that the Pacific Command draws its men from" but found that "there are a bunch of rated men … [that] have to work in the chow hall.[86] Even though enlistment rates began decreasing by June 1945, Worley spent extra time waiting for assignments, mostly finding himself sent him aboard ships bordering the coast of California.

Although high in demand, advancement was less likely for firemen. Considerable numbers of men working as firemen desired advancement from the position due to its stress level. Furthermore, the position demanded less skilled education, required a more significant detour from civilian job skills, and ranked lower than other jobs aboard the ship. It was not a comfortable spot, both professionally and emotionally, for some of its men. Though firemen with a first class ranking received the same pay and rank as the lowest, or third class, men in other jobs, firemen remained in a lower status job title. Fewer firemen were able to enter other

[85] Patrick Clancey, "Ranks and Rates of the U.S. Navy," Hyperwar Foundation.

[86] Richard Bruce Worley collection, June 3, 1945, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience, Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida.

departments in positions utilizing similar skills, such as electrician's mate or machinist's mate, since other greater-skilled men populated these higher ranking jobs quicker.

The job of fireman was a tenuous and demanding position for many men working aboard their respective ships, but some specialized sailors found their place within this craft. Having the prior job to "sweep the floor … whatever the watch engineer wanted me to do," Harry Lyons found himself thrust into the boiler rooms of the U.S.S. *Nevada.* By spending long hours trudging amidst the greasy fumes and extremely loud rumbling of massive cube or cylinder-shaped boilers, Lyons learned how to fire a boiler and run them, enjoying the technical work but dreading the relentless heat conditions.[87]

Meanwhile, Ed Kirshenmann bounced around various positions on his ship, the *Saratoga*. For him, the position of fireman was a difficult start but his desire to ultimately leave the position inspired him toward further career evolution. He "went around the back door" to get into the B-Division, housing boiler firemen, and "talked to a guy over there."[88] He jumped around multiple ratings up to fireman second class after Pearl Harbor, claiming "that's where I slept [in the generator room near the boilers]." He made use of his brother having been on the ship earlier and knowing some of the men, thus "that was easier" for him to "find out what I was looking for" by gaining entry "into the Evaporator Room," the facility where water was purified to suitable standards before entering the large boilers.[89] After all, he said he "wanted to remember everything, what it took to fire one of them big boilers" and understand how that technology,

[87] Harry Lyons, interview by Pete Jensen, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[88] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

[89] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

although quite old by the 1940s, created vital energy rippling down to the engine rooms and through the propellers.

## V. Electrician's Mates

The duties for Electrician's mates were varied, but these sailors generally maintained the "main switchboard, main gyro compass," and other control rooms. These jobs were useful for communications and navigation to help preserve circuits and repair equipment.[90] Consequently, this job filled specific electrical necessities for a ship, such as maintaining lights and ensuring outlets and electrical wiring stayed properly secured to their vital equipment, such as radar or telephone systems.

Men in this job expected to take equipment apart and put it back together with the right components, without their fingers messing something else up by accident. Having an inquisitive yet technical mind surely helped here, as testing switches and sockets was part of the job. J.C. Brownwell worked showing "picture film before the war," and ended up in the electrical division aboard the U.S.S. *Tennessee* as it "had the duty of showing movies" on occasion to his crew.[91] For him, the familiar job meant using his skills to uplift sailor morale. Meanwhile, Angelo Grippo was "assigned to handle the automatic telephone system" in the room dedicated to these inboard communications around the ship.[92] This was an important job as rudimentary speaking tubes connecting the whole ship and its unique departments to communicate had been almost fully replaced with electrical telephones by the 1940s.

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[90] Patrick Clancey, "Ranks and Rates of the U.S. Navy," Hyperwar Foundation.

[91] J.C. Brownwell, interview by Ed Metzler, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 21, 2013.

[92] Angelo Grippo interview, Battleship North Carolina Archives, Wilmington, North Carolina, USA.

John Hladik Jr. elaborated in his interview about how his department worked aboard the U.S.S. *New York*. With his shop divided into a "light shop and power shop," each various division worked on different decks and different jobs. Some men specialized in ventilators, primarily for the boiler rooms, and others worked with upper-deck cranes to load equipment or cargo. Each electrician's mate completed somewhat different goals on the ship. Describing one day on the job dealing with steering gears, large equipment that turned the ship from side to side, "twice a day [Hladik Jr.] had to swing over to steam [or hydraulic] steering" from electric steering.[93] Electric steering automatically moved ships from point-to-point, but took large amounts of energy and left the ship vulnerable to veering off course. For Hladik Jr., "scraping the contacts" clean on steering panels was key before switching from electric to steam steering to correct the path. Otherwise, they risked having no control due to the switches welding shut in one direction. This microscopic below-deck job seems insignificant at first pass, however it was instrumental to helping the ship run properly.

Electrician's mate duties remained similarly intricately connected to other jobs aboard the ship, requiring precise attention to detail. James Robinette remembered his "job was to keep those motors" working to allow those in the battle to "elevate guns which controlled how they fired those guns."[94] Other times, duties were quite practical and not unlike civilian jobs. One of Frank Frazitta's notebooks included a guide to lumens, voltage, and other information for light current. A General Electric pocket notebook enumerated many expected electrician's mate skills.[95] Customizing their civilian electrician notebooks for Navy counterparts, the G.E. tailoring this notebook to sailors suggested how skills transferred from peacetime to wartime, and vice

[93] John A. Hladik, Jr. Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

[94] James R. Robinette Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

[95] Frank Frazitta Papers, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University.

versa. Companies' partnerships helping to train skilled men entering the navy also enhanced their access to future potential skilled workers. The list of G.E. recruiting centers and offices mentioned within the notebook surely suggested one postwar career option for navy electricians; a job at General Electric.

**On-Call, Watch, and Weather**

Extra hours on-call added to intense workdays for all specialized sailors, regardless of occupation. Electrician's mate John Hladik Jr. "would take night calls" in his department shop and remain on-call for any electrical repairs. He recalled the need to "sleep in the shop" and await any problems with equipment "that happened at night," the advantage being that he did not have to attend meetings, call-ins, or "quarters in the morning!"[96] Edwin Hoyt expressed in his text that, "as the British put it, if they were going to fight the American navy, they would let them stay at sea for two months, after which the Americans would be too exhausted to fight anybody" due to full day's work that averaged sixteen to eighteen hours.[97]

Although necessary for ship security, watch time extended the considerable time awake for men across multiple jobs. "The watch system called for four hours on and eight hours off," Hoyt found, mainly in the early morning.[98] Watch positions varied by position and job, positioning men at various monitors and panels or logging steam output from boiler rooms. Richard Worley, a fireman, wrote dismayed that he was "still getting up at [5:30 in the morning], going to bed at 10 [in the evening] and getting up in the middle of the night to stand a watch every other night."[99] Although important for ensuring equipment shutoff or malfunction did not

[96] John A. Hladik, Jr. Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[97] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, 85.

[98] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, 85.

[99] Richard Bruce Worley collection, June 30, 1945, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

endanger the crew in the early hours of the morning, this extension of specialized sailors' days took considerable toll on their concentration and morale. Eugene Gasseaux wrote to a girl at home that "I am now on watch, the time passes so darn slow that it isn't even funny," presumably positioned next to generators or engine equipment while he proceeded to "smoke, drink coffee, and think of you."[100]

Navigating intense storms complicated matters for specialized sailors. As history and maritime lecturer John Reeve noticed in his introductory statements in *The Face of Naval Battle*, naval warfare in any age has "a third participant, one which is always neutral – the cruel sea."[101] Retaining focus amidst ocean swells and storms, being just as confident fixing a pipe when a ship buckles as when upon land, took practice. Men braced and held in their breath, even got sick, as the sea rippled underneath and shuddered the ship's decks.

Sidney Dashevsky candidly wrote about his ship leaping across the ocean and pitching side to side, imagining land-sickness after becoming accustomed to rough ocean travel. The everyday difficulties of working carefully aboard a steel vessel thumped by waves were considerable. Dashevsky cautioned in a letter to "go on a rollercoaster with a bowl of soup and try to eat."[102] He further illustrated a day aboard his second ship, *Melvin Nawman,* while attempting to eat; a bell would sound to signal the chow line to begin, as the ship itself listed to high degrees both port and starboard sides. Skid chairs tumbled across the deck while the "ship

[100] Ruth A. Adams Second World War correspondence series 1, Correspondence from Eugene A. Gasseaux (1943 May 16 – 1946 May 14), October 11, 1944, Center for American War Letters Archives.

[101] John Reeve, "Introduction: an anatomy of the face of naval battle," in *The Face of Naval Battle: The Human Experience of Modern War at Sea*, eds. John Reeve & David Stevens, 31. Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003.

[102] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, November 22, 1944, Center for American War Letters, Chapman University.

rolls back and forth and you slide halfway back to where you were at the beginning."[103] "Honey," he joked, "don't join the Navy."

In his interview, Paul Davidson detailed the storms facing the *Louisville* as "some of the roughest water in the Pacific … they would just pick up a ship," clearly frightening many sailors as the bow of their ship disappeared under waves and popped back up on the other side.[104] Lawrence Burzynski, also aboard the *Louisville*, proclaimed "this is really great" when he joined the ship, only to endure seasickness four days later and withdraw this prior statement.[105] Thus, the rolling warship was the one steady yet tumultuous constant for these men among ever-changing work and watch schedules. Safety aboard ship was often compromised, however, by the possibility of structural destruction.

**Destruction of Space**

Navigating intense workdays across specialized departments, sailors not only encountered rough waters but the destruction of their ship. The shriek of tearing steel and prolonged heart-pounding moments made sailors suddenly realize their position in the ocean was tenuous. Though specialized sailors did their best to synergize their interconnected efforts and duties, destruction of portions of the ship nullified a sense of safety and success in battle. Destruction of the ship or internal accidents, often not the battle itself, reminded sailors that everything could change at a moment's notice.

During active wartime operation, specialized men were called to their battle stations or general quarters location. John Tait, a shipfitter, remembered his "battle station, and that of most of our division gang, was the repair locker" which could mean firefighting, repairing the

[103] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, November 24, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[104] Paul Willard Davidson Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[105] Lawrence Burzynski collection, January 4, 1940, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

hull, or other duties.[106] Machinist's mates also used their skills for disaster prevention aboard their ship. James Andrini similarly quoted "damage control" as his primary function during battles, elaborating that "if a compartment got hit" and filled with water, he patched up the bulkheads and walls to "contain the water in that one ship section.[107]

Having the battle station within "the forward interior communications room," to handle automatic telephones and ensure that sections of the ship could communicate during combat, Lawrence found "each deck of the escape hatch is [closed] during general quarters."[108] Finding himself effectively locked to his location until the battle was over, or someone let him out, did "not make for a nice, comfortable feeling" for him. Though unseen and often distracted in the heat of combat with work, the effects of naval battles felt close to these men. Harry Lyons pointed out that below-deck in the fire room, "the depth charges [fired by ships to detect and destroy enemy submarines] … made a great noise up against our hull."[109] Men down below like Lyons frightened themselves thinking these were torpedoes and absolutely shuddered each time similar noises pulsated their deck.

Containing threats to tangible ship space, even when hatches were shut to hopefully isolate any damages, also meant accounting for unintended accidents. Describing when an elevator aboard the U.S.S. *Enterprise* was "blown right out," Francis Shiner recalled the water rushing in from gaping cracks in the hull. Men were unable to get out because "the emergency

[106] John Tait, interview by William Alexander, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, December 6, 2001.

[107] James T. Andrini Collection (AFC/2001/001/76151), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

[108] Lawrence Burzynski collection, January 29, 1943, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[109] Harry Lyons, interview by Pete Jensen, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

hatch, the round one" had bent and unexpectedly drowned men.[110] These startling threats to workspaces caused further complications. Flooding, faulty machinery, lack of care and other hazards threatened sailor's lives. "Some were caught in the [propellers] and chopped up, and others were crushed," certain unexpected hazards Bruce Petty noted in his book, and others were killed from steam leaks not patched in time from the boiler rooms.[111]

After receiving damage from enemy ships or accidents, men had to clean up. Despite injuries or exhaustion, men had to rebuild destroyed portions of the ship immediately. Paul Davison recounted how his group of "welders would go over the side" of the damaged ship and repair busted weld seams on the hull during battle.[112] These men were called to use their specialized skills in these times of intense danger. The decks twisted and sailors glimpsed mortality closer and closer. If not serving aboard a larger battleship or carrier, where damage and compression rippled more evenly across the ship, Spector noted "most sailors felt an extreme sense of vulnerability" aboard smaller ships.[113]

For Frank Boffi, vulnerability took a personal turn; unaware of how he ended up "getting off the ship" after an attack, he found "burns over 85% of my body, so the last think I remember was being blown out of the portside hatch." He recalled "screaming and yelling," only discovering who saved him many years later at one of his navy reunions.[114] Each man dealt with multiple stressors in combat like injury, extreme pressure, and the possibility of dying instantly. Aboard the U.S.S. *Tennessee*, electrician's mate J.C. Brownwell remembered that after a five-

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[110] Francis Shiner, interview by Brainerd Parrish, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

[111] Petty, *Voices from the Pacific War: Bluejackets Remember*, 76.

[112] Paul Willard Davidson Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[113] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 219.

[114] Frank Boffi, interview by Charlie Simmons, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 11, 2012.

inch gun turret above deck was destroyed with nine men killed inside, he was called to enter the turret and "rewired all the electrical in it," in the heat of the battle. He compared the experience inside the turret to a night "full of lightning bugs."[115] In the aftermath of similar experiences, Frank Albert joked, "everybody owed us [shipfitters] favors, you know."[116]

**Conclusion**

The five positions elaborated in chapter encompassed duties which required specific skills that delivered expertise across the entire ship. These men were often sent for various duties below below the upper decks, within the inner workings of the ship. Indeed, navy skills and seafaring are "a separate language of its own," Reeve observed, with tasks less well-known to the public and certainly not as "user-friendly as sources of contemporary history."[117] Workdays were long, intense, and tiring, but their comrades on the bridge and in the galleys needed their dedication each day. Although extra duties and constantly uncomfortable ocean displacement affected their attention, specialized sailors remained vigilant with whatever challenges came their way. They devoted extra attention to make sure complications and accidents aboard ship would not undermine hard work. "Going into battle, the confined spaces of the engine rooms and fire room were not the most desirable places to be," Hoyt admitted, nonetheless these sailors "were ready and willing."[118] Beyond these daily stressors inhabiting workdays and battles, men discovered opportunities to use free time. Everyday sailors began to exert more control over their naval contribution, even while insecure and vulnerable feelings clouded their experience.

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[115] J.C. Brownwell, interview by Ed Metzler, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 21, 2013.

[116] Frank Albert, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[117] Reeve, *The Face of Naval Battle: The Human Experience of Modern War at Sea*, 8-9.

[118] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, 110.

## Chapter 3: Morale and Personal Time

Specialized sailors neither contributed to direct acts of killing nor participated in direct combat. Thus, men outside of traditional combatant roles often wondered about their broader positioning within the war. Specialized sailors realized they were perceived differently by onlookers. Ed Kirshenmann attested to this general confusion when recounting conversations with a commander aboard his second ship, the U.S.S. *Bushnell*. Insisting on his promised thirty-day leave before embarking aboard his new ship, Kirshenmann found the commander indifferent to this expectation. When asked if he "realized there's a war going on out there," Kirshenmann recalled his shock that narrowly avoiding "being dead by a hair" aboard the *Saratoga* did not allow him vacation. This was the moment that "turned [him] against this ship."[119]

Navy veteran and Pacific War specialist Bruce Petty also indicated specialized sailors were often passed over in receiving gifts and necessary materials, at least temporarily, in favor of the traditional "fighting man" and higher-ranked officers. Discussing a machinist's mate, Petty relayed a story in which Red Cross personnel passed over the machinist who required shoes after his ship was destroyed. When the representative told him the "officers haven't been tended to yet," the sidelined sailor was ready to "throw him over the side."[120] Men engaging in "support" jobs encountered stress, danger, also neglect. How did specialist sailors whose position lay somewhere between combatant and noncombatant keep spirits high in these moments?

Specialized sailors wanted to feel anchored to some aspect of their new life in war. Both sailors' work and outlets for leisure impacted their morale. Initially for some, food boosted morale. In letters home explaining his mental and physical health, Eugene Gasseaux stressed

[119] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

[120] Petty, *Voices from the Pacific War: Bluejackets Remember*, 80.

positivity for food and its comforts. “The Navy is taking darn good care of me,” he wrote, crediting “three good meals a day and lots of good clean air and no night life” as part of the reason he was so productive.[121]

Edwin Hoyt explored the relation between food and morale with the suggestion that sailors in the Navy “were very used to very good food and lots of it.”[122] Navy ships floating around various ports were able to access wide varieties of ingredients, thus creating a system of comfort for sailors. However, sailors like Lawrence Burzynski expressed their concern for “marines and soldiers on those jungle islands,” wondering what they had available to eat daily. Even with more innovative meals on the monthly basis, some sailors discovered food had an expiration date of effectiveness. Richard Worley wrote that, after a few months of service in 1944, food offered only temporary satisfaction and began “getting worse.”[123]

Sailors also learned class difference in the navy extended to food. Although the navy structure became more forgiving for lower-ranked men, higher-rated men still received superior meals. Lawrence Burzynski composed a unique diary entry commemorating the first anniversary of his second ship, the *Alaska*, remarking on the “homemade noodles … plus anniversary cake and ice cream.”[124] These class disparities partially accounted for the special meals he received, as he is one of the very few sailors ranked as a chief discussed in this thesis. Chiefs enjoyed special cooks and dining areas, allowing them unique treatment aboard ship.

Using food as a morale booster fluctuated in its effectiveness due to ship location and rank differences. Attempting to assert their identity and unique role as naval specialists, men

[121] Eugene A. Gasseaux correspondence, February 4, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

[122] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, 110.

[123] Richard Bruce Worley collection, November 27, 1944, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[124] Lawrence Burzynski collection, June 17, 1945, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

faced misunderstandings from within and without the navy. Men therefore sought other substantial opportunities, some off the ship, to maintain morale. Realizing they did not have as much control as they hoped over their situations, sailors attempted to stay informed about the larger war to keep themselves psychologically healthy. Access to wartime orders and chances for liberty (vacation) offered some unique challenges and benefits to working men attempting to preserve high morale.

**Knowledge of Wartime Operations**

Sailors looking for information about the broader war found various degrees of success. As Charlie Boswell discovered, the radio wireless line connection aboard the U.S.S. *Tennessee* guaranteed them consistent contact with news from the mainland. "They put out a little paper everyday just like the news," he recalled, realizing he perhaps knew more developments about the war and the homefront than the average sailor.[125] Many specialized sailors who kept up with civilian news outlets before personally entering the war did not do so as readily during their tenure in the navy. Instead, newspapers like one aboard Charles Levi's ship shuttling his construction crew offered vignettes on its men, their personal endeavors and career achievements, and creative writings. In order to allow men of various rank to communicate with others, sections like "Made up of Your Ideas" overshadow wartime news.[126] Hoyt argued that the war and uneven access to information forced sailors to accept high levels of "ignorance of facts and strategy" across all services but especially the navy.[127] Many sailors steadily lessened their focus on broad wartime news and increased their commentary on the immediacy of dangers and

[125] Charlie Boswell Collection (AFC/2001/001/105953), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

[126] Charles A. Levi Papers, Series II: *85th Sea Breeze* Publication, Archives Branch, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington Navy Yard, D.C.

[127] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, xi.

complications in their current location. Knowledge of the war related more to what ships engaged in at the time, and what intimate dangers or issues men faced.

However, close attention to ship operations also depended on superior ranking and proximity to the most detailed reports or broadcasts. The highest ranking specialized sailors, men with the rank of "first class" or "chief" in their department, received the most pertinent information as frequently as possible. Lawrence Burzynski, at the time an electrician's mate third class felt his ship "was just wandering around in circles."[128] His journal appeared to include annotations to align his limited information at the time with future research he later conducted to align his experiences with pivotal moments, such as the general acceptance of Battle of Midway as a turning point in the war. Some sailors realized their information was necessarily limited at the time, able to be revisited at later moments in their life. Constructing these initial narratives during wartime required men like Burzynski and Mike Marko to vigilantly write and express their momentary understandings when safe to do so. They had to remain cautious each day, as journals and diaries were prohibited in the navy. Marko realized he could face legal charges and other allegations by the navy if he failed to stow away his diary at any moment, best summed up in his brief but direct statement: "Locker inspection. Hid these books."[129]

Sailor notations on the war offer vague approximations of how and what access men had toward picturing the broader war. Sailors were more detailed when contemplating how any available information related to their immediate situation. Like other ranks across the ship, specialized sailors relied on scuttlebutt, or hearsay, to determine the broader mood of their friends and the ship. Scuttlebutt could arise from alleged activities of men and their lives at

[128] Lawrence Burzynski collection, February 26, 1942, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[129] Mike Marko Diary, March 11, 1944, Battleship North Carolina Archives.

home, where the ship was headed, when sailors could go home, and other everyday rumors. For Frank Frazitta, one of his favorite rumors was "we are going to New York. I hope so."[130] Often the most circulated rumors involved vacation stints at home in the States, due to men wanting long days to add up to something meaningful in the near future. Their morale depended on exchanging information and creating bonds. After all, sailors began caring for new comrades along with their families and friends.

When Thomas Hair reasoned that "the small ships" were preferable to larger ones like battleships, he suggested that "it was the guys you were with" who offered the most compelling reason to stay.[131] Divisions stuck together and swapped any information they could amongst themselves, often leading to detailed theories arising from small groups of men swapping the scuttlebutt. Intense workdays with the same men created stability and a sense of comradery. For Ed Kirshenmann, his eventual job materialized after bouncing around multiple duties because he connected with the men. Becoming "the best of friends" with a first class machinist's mate and bonding over long hours down in the engine room meant the man "took [him] under his wing" and steered him along to find a suitable job.[132] This made the tight, confined space of working even more personal when the battle above occurred. "Most of the sailors engaged in [various struggles in the Pacific like Midway] had no idea" what was occurring, as Hoyt established in his discussion on sailor attention to the wider war.[133]

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[130] Frank Frazitta Papers, April, 1944, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University.

[131] Thomas Hair, interview by Wayne Clark, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, May 23, 2001.

[132] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

[133] Hoyt, *Now Hear This: the story of American sailors in World War II*, 76.

Thus, most sailors took swirling rumors and theories only so seriously as they affected the everyday workflow and safety. For Perl Farrington, engaging in war duties as a "young kid like that" meant he "never [was] concerned]" about the broader war and just kept doing his job.[134] His job required him to show up even when he knew not where or what his ship careened closer towards. Especially in the boiler rooms, with seven men scampering along the confined catwalks and corridors at once, Harry Lyons and other firemen were not "privileged to hear" battle updates and information shared above deck.[135] Although they could hear the concussion of the planes and feel the shaking of the battle decks, all these men could do was pray and commit momentary changes in speed or steam pressure to ensure various tactical outcomes, all while they remained detached from the battle itself.

Localizing their thoughts about the war to their men and ship, some men felt their responsibilities for the larger war minimized in response. When Burzynski wrote one year after Pearl Harbor that he was "not too happy about not having any idea" what role he and his ship might have in the war, this sentiment reminds us that fighting and not-fighting distills the essence of war.[136] There are many times in-between, sometimes exciting and sometimes stagnant. Thus, just as the wartime news comes unevenly, the feeling of participating in war renders both excitement and monotony. But the workday continued. George Schmid realized his unawareness all too strongly, writing to his parents that "I still don't know where we are going," although he

[134] Perl Vernon Farrington, Jr. Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[135] Harry Lyons, interview by Pete Jensen, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[136] Lawrence Burzynski collection, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

helped create all the steam to get the ship there and stayed up long hours with the men he began to call comrades.[137]

Many men never received the whole story of their ship, and segments of the broader war, until much later. Richard Eberle, attending a navy reunion fifty-eight years later, received "a lot of information … I wasn't even aware of sometimes below decks."[138] Everyday subscription to the broader war remained incomplete, and was not enough to sustain morale. Sailors instead discovered unique avenues for gaining morale provided by the travels of their ship.

**Liberty Abroad and at Home**

Liberty offered a temporary departure from the wartime landscape for men on the Atlantic or Pacific, an often rare and unexpectedly short, but timely, vacation from the ship. John Yeager expressed that, in seven months since embarking aboard the U.S.S. *Essex*, he enjoyed a liberty off the ship "four times, a total of about twenty-four hours away from the ship."[139] Sailors received liberty when at all possible, a complex negotiation among higher officers regarding how many men were needed for duties, and if reaching port was possible for more than a few days. Some men experienced life-changing events while on vacation from their ship.

Ships provided liberty to men in various units, not all at once, and often between various ports due to fleet needs. But "most officers recognized the relation between liberty and morale," ideally every five or six weeks in Harrod's estimation, allowing sailors to walk on land, eat what they desired, meet locals, drink alcohol, and take breaks from the strict workday routine

[137] George Schmid Second World War correspondence (2017.606.w.r), August 3, 1944, Center for American War Letters Archives, Chapman University, CA.

[138] Richard Eberle, interview by Thomas Venezio, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, September 12, 2002.

[139] U.S. Navy Memorial Foundation Collection: John A. Yeager Papers (#677-053), East Carolina Manuscript Collection, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, USA.

necessary aboard ship.[140] Most of the time, liberty occurred in foreign ports most beneficial while the ship refueled, or in proximity to other ships nearby if assistance was needed. Pearl Harbor remained a popular liberty spot for many ships. Francis Shiner remembered he "got the Royal Hawaiian pass" on leave in Honolulu in late 1944, recalling his shock finding "ice cream, there was steaks," which was the perfect feast away from the electrical power shop aboard the U.S.S. *Enterprise*.[141] Sailors exiting their ship onto wooden planks leading to a port city temporarily entered spaces filled with unfamiliar scents and sensations.

Men especially appreciated liberty in their home country. Sidney Dashevsky took advantage of his timely returns home to the contiguous United States from the U.S.S. *North* Carolina. He took these opportunities to cement his relevance in Emily Van Gelder's life and court her, a girl whom he met at a party while on liberty in 1943.[142] In a series of letters, Sidney and Emily rehearsed their chance encounter about two years into his navy stint. They grew an emotional bond and attachment to writing letters. What began as simple correspondence grew into swapping photographs and speaking about their potential future. In July, 1944, he began sending home money for her to use.[143] Their relationship changed drastically over time to spawn a joint bank account they both grew. He began to illustrate, through his enticing prose, how his shipfitter shop on the ship brightened the mood with men ogling at her portraits and wondering how a "mug" like him might win her.[144]

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[140] Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: the Development of a modern Naval Enlisted Force*, 157.

[141] Francis Shiner, interview by Brainerd Parrish, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

[142] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, January 10, 1943 Center for American War Letters.

[143] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, July 20-24, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[144] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, June 23, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

Their relationship was charming and witty, as they swapped jokes and funny stories about their lives back at home. In May, 1943, he shared with Emily his meeting with a man aboard the *North Carolina*, one whom Sidney socialized previously with in New York City. He slyly proposed they might meet up together in a group of four next time they enjoy leave.[145] This period of liberty did arrive, in his month and a half period before disembarking from port aboard the *Melvin Nawman*. He received three of four weekends off and visited his mother, "meaning of course that I will be able to … see you," a time he narrated as the "happiest time of my life."[146] Back aboard the seas, Sidney Dashevsky realized how fast their relationship progressed.

Sidney projected his future visits with Emily and her family, once the war reached a terminus. He suggested, "if my [next] leave is long enough we will go up to Niagara Falls," which is also where he could meet one of Emily's family members.[147] He asked her, in one letter, to alert him before swimming so he may provide "a life jacket and outboard motors," with one caveat being she must furnish "[her] own gas."[148] "Oh Sid, how you do talk!" he exclaimed in mocking tone to her, a symbolic attachment and link to home produced in part by his liberties. When she expressed dismay at the prospect of attending homefront weddings without him, he softly expressed "you can go to your own [wedding.]"[149] On September 16, 1945, he asked the girl whom the war brought into his life to marry him and applied for shore duty.[150]

Although Dashevsky channeled liberty for benchmarks in his life, sailors sometimes realized they were unable to take advantage of their unique opportunity for liberty and its

[145] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, May 25, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[146] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 4-7, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[147] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, October 7, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[148] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, November 30, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[149] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, May 9, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

[150] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, September 16, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

unusual experiences or foods. Lawrence Burzynski wrote, when he finally received his first liberty in over a year, "I was too tired to go ashore" due to his long workdays and standing so many night watches.[151] For sailors who achieved higher positions in their field, timing was key as increased responsibilities often forced them to work during liberty. For Arthur Brown, rating increases meant more money and more responsibility aboard the *Enterprise*. Although he craved personal time, he "had to stay on the barge tied up to the drydock" to help with ship repairs while his fellow crew enjoyed shore leave.[152] Reading ship blueprints and helping yard workers with the intricate construction of the ship, he found that, as a first class shipfitter, his responsibilities necessarily exempted him from liberty on occasion.

Sometimes sailors found it difficult to enjoy liberty in port cities or islands. Eugene Gasseaux wrote to a girl at home that he "didn't have a good time" on leave for four days in the United States, "you won't be home so there isn't very much for" him at home, as she was off at university.[153] For Gasseaux, coming home temporarily provided extra anxiety considering all the loved ones he could not access. Sailors also knew precious time at home reconnecting with family and friends was temporary. One of the luckier sailors included Harry Lyons who "went in August … home for thirty days. [Of course] that included transportation too," remembering how it took him three and a half days to travel by train back to Franklin, Massachusetts from the west coast. Especially on leaves for four days or a week, every train boarded and taxi hailed steadily decreased the time available.

[151] Lawrence Burzynski collection, March 26, 1942, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[152] Arthur Brown, interview by Larry Rabalais, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

[153] Eugene A. Gasseaux correspondence, October 3 & 9, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

While on liberty in Kodiak Island, Lawrence Burzynski viewed his time on leave with frustration as he found it "very expensive to pay 50 cents for a small hamburger."[154] Little disappointments added up. Men drank whatever alcohol they could find in hot Pacific ocean climates, sometimes too little or other times too much. Then, they might face reprimands from department superiors. Ed Kirshenmann, although remembering those liberty days fondly, realized all too candidly that "you're drinking in that hot sun, playing ball, and [getting feisty]" to the point of starting fights with other men. Without stable access to liberty for sailors, many became agitated aboard a ship's closed space. Port cities absorbed pent-up emotions through drinking and adventuring antics by sailors. "These stupid sailors," Frank Albert reminisced of his time as part of "shore patrol to help the local police," only needed "two beers and they were drunk."[155] While on liberty in Pearl Harbor, Albert lifted a soldier up for reprimanding only to find he was "face to face" with his brother. Sometimes a meeting place for more than one ship, or another family member if extremely fortunate, port cities mostly hosted interactions between sailor and local civilian.

**Interacting with Other Societies**

Interactions with overseas societies, though temporary, did not always create satisfactory memories. To the contrary, men began exotic adventures wooing local women. To Arthur Brown, freedom on liberty in New Caledonia and other islands meant admiring women who "never wore anything above the waist."[156] White men envisioning themselves as prime options, due to their ethnicity and newfound status, used these moments to charm women. "You could go

[154] Lawrence Burzynski collection, May 30, 1942, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[155] Frank Albert, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[156] Arthur Brown, interview by Larry Rabalais, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

ashore and find nice young ladies, if you could find them," Perl Farrington Jr. remembered when describing his time in Balboa, Panama City.[157] However, most sailors could enjoy solely the afternoon and evening with new contacts. John Tait called this system "Cinderella Liberty" as "very few of the enlisted men were allowed to stay overnight."[158] This system likely ruined the plans of many an enlisted man.

This did not dissuade men from taking advantage of limited time. J.C. Brownwell recalled men would return to their ship and "tell each other about all the women we'd conquered," and generally boost each other up.[159] Russell Hammel discussed with his wife through letter that, while on leave in San Francisco, "some sailor raped a [female naval reserve member] this morning at 4:00 a.m. and … [we] decided that she had said yes and then got caught so it was rape then."[160] Within these hyper-masculine environments, sailors often sanitized uncomfortable conversations about unwanted sexual advances.

Racism also affected interactions with women and the enemy while on liberty. Arthur Brown remembered he and a buddy from the ship "got drunk one night. I lost him," he said, "only finding his friend at midnight when he "had a black women on each arm. He said, 'I got you one!' with Brown responding to him, "you're crazy!"[161] Louie Sullivan remembered touring Japan after the war ended, exclaiming that "some of the guys upfront would run up and holler, 'geisha, geisha,' looking for a woman. It's just natural," explaining what he saw as typical men

[157] Perl Vernon Farrington, Jr. Collection, Veterans History Project. American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

[158] John Tait, interview by William Alexander, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, December 6, 2001.

[159] J.C. Brownwell, interview by Ed Metzler, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 21, 2013.

[160] Russell V. Hammel Papers 1943-1948, May 18, 1945, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, USA.

[161] Arthur Brown, interview by Larry Rabalais, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

having fun.[162] Having a wife and daughter who visited him in engineering and diesel school before receiving his ship assignment, Sullivan concluded that chasing women appealed to men because it increased their sense of power and morale.

In particular, men felt the need to exercise painful control over the conquered Japanese whenever possible, particularly female civilians, proportionate to the death and destruction each surviving sailor had witnessed. The destruction at Pearl Harbor offered one prime motivator for sailors discussing the racial hatred they developed. J.C. Brownwell spoke on his past and present animosity towards the Japanese, stating "Yeah that's right. Well, I still hate 'em … Even though I'm eighty-eight years old and know better, I still hate 'em."[163]

Even if liberty helped maintain morale among many sailors, it did not replace but rather fueled a desire for home. Most of the time, sailors did not launch any meaningful relationships while on liberty. Rarer leave to the United States could start or rekindle relationships, as it did for Sidney Dashevsky among a few others, but not always. George Schmid emotionally wrote on the day before Christmas of 1944 that "it's been a year now, and no kidding I had enough … I'm only half alive out here away from you."[164] While diverting their attention away from war, sailors realized their second life at home carried along without them. Some took steps to replicate home's comforts in ways that local port cities could not offer.

**Creative Projects Aboard Ship**

Personal projects, whether physical or symbolic, consumed spare time for some specialized sailors and kept them attached to the comforts of home. Personalizing their space was

[162] Louie Sullivan, interview by Larry Rabalais, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 19, 2009.

[163] J.C. Brownwell, interview by Ed Metzler, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 21, 2013.

[164] George Schmid correspondence, December 24, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

one way for men to assert individuality and control over their working and living environment aboard ship. So far from home, one route men took to maintain morale was creating personal space when the war seemed remote and their future unclear.

Some sailors made use of their work department's space aboard ship for creative customization. Sidney Dashevsky often wrote his sweetheart, Emily, about transforming his shipfitter shop into a malleable space he could call his own. Ever-increasing in rank aboard his ship, he sought to increase the livability of his men's workspace. "I finally bought a portable electric victrola and about fifty records," he wrote to his sweetheart, noting "Blue Danube" and "Cherry Torpedo Jet" among the lot of them."[165] In his temporary home, personalizing his space diverted his attention from the broader war. Indeed, calming portraits leaped from his letters; "we gather around my mighty juke [with a lovely tango record], drink coffee, tell tall tales."[166] Not just music, however, created homely feelings. "To day I bought six fancy glasses and also silverware for the shop," he added, turning the shop into a second home.[167] Indeed, he began to feel that "the only thing this shop lacks of being a complete home is you and a set of curtains," he wrote to Emily.[168] He adapted his workspace to his liking, even building a cabinet in 1944 for his continued enjoyment in this intricately tailored personal cabin.

Aboard the U.S.S. *New York*, John Hladik Jr. found, he could take opportunities to enliven his workspace to compensate for his nightly on-call assignments. Having his "bunk welded in the power shop … near the overhead," he began to find his shop quite comfortable.[169] As he was technologically savvy and extremely knowledgeable about the ship's current and

[165] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, August 10, 1944. Center for American War Letters.

[166] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, September 11, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[167] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, September 16, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

[168] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, August 20, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[169] John A. Hladik, Jr. Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

wiring system, he "had a light to read by and … a fan to cool me off at night!" He and the upper deck power electrician customized their workspace to be more than a bunk on work nights. Manufacturing personal space required dodging potential pushback from his superiors. Having to "go through the bulkheads to get to [the ice machine shop]" to refrigerate foods they took from the galley, their expanding personal space certainly drew attention. They "arranged a deal" to share any stolen food with the nearby shops, also allowing other men to "kick in and we would buy records" for their personal record player installed by running wires to the power shop.

Besides willfully modifying his space aboard ship, warranted by his increasing rank, Sidney Dashevsky bought a car while abroad. In June, 1943, he related to Emily that he "had my brother [Abe] who's still back home buy a car for me," a 1936 Ford Coupe.[170] Letters to home doubled as micro transactions, leading to money orders and bank transfers. Upon receiving a letter from a man claiming his car could be sold to Sidney by Abe's reference, Sidney found he could "buy the car for 150$," have a "new motor put in… around 130$," with insurance piling on further costs.[171] Sidney claimed he received Emily's letter "with the receipt for Sam's money order," suggesting that he was working through another brother to pull money from his account.[172] In May, he relayed that this whole transaction ended up costing about 730$, including plates.[173] Remarkably, he regulated the whole set of single transactions through letters, even telling Emily which local businesses should work on the car, suggesting they will "take care of the details concerning the car."[174] Sidney projected his return home in a manner accounting for his personal and material growth abroad. He was willing to let consumer ideals overtake his

[170] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, June 23, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[171] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 15, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[172] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 15, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[173] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 28, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[174] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, April 28, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

attention in the midst of war, even using advantageous links to home like his brother, family friends, businesses, and his later wife to help direct his purchases.

**Gifts and Home**

Gifts also immensely contributed to oceanic exchange between sailors and loved ones. A sailor's family helped to combat their sons' homesickness by sending packages and gifts to help men feel more comfortable and loved. Whether gum or new socks, this material exchange often solidified relationships even across waters. For Richard Worley, "everyone of [his] bunk mates" got hold of the cookies sent by his family which did not "last very long."[175] However, sometimes this overseas exchange of home goods and various comforts from home spun primarily the opposite direction. Many sailors sent local money or token gifts, even war prizes. Other men formulated and forwarded special individualized gifts or completed projects in anticipation of returning home and using them.

Russell Hammel enlisted in the navy at the beginning of 1944, leaving behind his wife and teenage children. Owning two or three plots of land in their small town of Morocco, Indiana, Russell sustained his involvement in the family store and the monthly sales expectations. Rarely speaking about his work or locational details, he rather was more interested in advising his wife Dolores to advertise items she thought "won't sell at an auction home and sell them from [the store.]"[176] He constantly offered advice and instructions in their joint business, and keenly realized "this is the time that I should be home to help."[177] Dolores faced additional duties as a result, not just raising teenagers but maintaining the physical business. In addition, their family

[175] Richard Bruce Worley collection, November 27, 1944, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[176] Russell V. Hammel Papers, January 29, 1944, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

[177] Russell V. Hammel Papers, October 12, 1944, Indiana Historical Society.

seemed tied-up in real estate at various moments, both in the family moving to a new home and re-selling another home. After his family moved to a new home, Russell wrote regarding a "deal on the house on the hill" that he wanted and answered her letter that the "Ross property [offer] is entirely too much."[178]

Maintaining multiple homes and a side-business reminded Russell of home often. A comfort while abroad as an older specialized sailor, he strongly felt "this is no place for a married man" but made the best of his situation by completing projects necessary for the family.[179] After asking her to send the costs of new house fixes so he could track their expenditures and presumably account for them in his monthly pay, he began coaching her through home improvement by letter. "And go get the heater," he added, noting that "any parts you can get them from Sears," which could be found in the included book that "lists all of the parts and their number."[180] His two teenagers, Rose and Sonny, also spoke to Russell through mail but not as often as he liked. Nevertheless, he gave life lessons to his son while abroad and encouraged his daughter to retain faith that he could attend her high-school graduation.[181]

While ensuring these life and home projects stayed as fruitful as if he was still at home, Russell found other unique ways aboard his ship to help out. "Dolores I want you to send me a Sears Catalog if you can," he requested by letter, elaborating that "I can use it for Christmas [and the house.]"[182] He realized how much he expected her to do both alone and with his advice on loans, house contracts, and other items that needed time-sensitive responses from him. One advantage of having a Sears catalog aboard ship was to quickly agree on items to either furnish

[178] Russell V. Hammel Papers, May 7, 1944, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.
[179] Russell V. Hammel Papers, February 9, 1944, Indiana Historical Society.
[180] Russell V. Hammel Papers, October 16, 1944, Indiana Historical Society.
[181] Russell V. Hammel Papers, January 29, 1944, Indiana Historical Society.
[182] Russell V. Hammel Papers, June 3, 1944, Indiana Historical Society.

their home or stage one they would sell. Russell asked Dolores to "look in the catalogue [for a big floor rug] and see which one you like," requesting her to then write "the page it is on" for the two to agree upon agree on and purchase.[183] They made many important decisions while Russell was abroad, as he maintained his second life at home by contributing to the family as male provider and head of the household. "And in regards to the way you have handled things at home," he wrote to her one evening, "keep up the good work."[184]

Gifts sent by Sidney Dashevsky to the woman he actively courted also substituted for his tangible presence in her life. Constructing meaningful gifts and décor for Emily during his time-off both asserted his masculine creativity and indicated, often explicitly, how their future home might look. Within his shop, he wrote to Emily that he enjoys seeing "how many nick nacks I can make.[185] One of his first projects, he wrote, was to "make a frame for the pictures which I sent… in fact, I will convoy it myself."[186] As photos were very important exchanges between Sidney and Emily leading to 1945, he created another "frame made in the shop for [two of her] pictures.[187] He also made a symbolic pin bracelet of corrosive-resisting steel, with a small replica of the anchor from the *North Carolina*.[188] These items were intended to enhance a future home he projected with Emily, demonstrating expectations of his inevitable return. In June, 1945, he sent a mahogany frame lamp he partially constructed from gun shell casings, a task that took altogether twelve nights.[189] These projects, on a ship pitching and rolling, were neither quick nor

[183] Russell V. Hammel Papers, October 25, 1944, Indiana Historical Society.

[184] Russell V. Hammel Papers, July 21, 1944, Historical Society.

[185] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, August 28, 1943, Center for American War Letters, Chapman University.

[186] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, July 18, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[187] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, June 2, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[188] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, January 10, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

[189] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, June 23, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

fault-proof. For example, while working on the bracelet, he began torching the stones to practice a procedure he would replicate on a future engagement ring. In preparation for this future project, he pleaded, "send a finger size."[190] While they had spoken briefly about an engagement, this request clearly acted as primer for preparing Emily. After torquing the ring at his workbench and sending it to her, he asked her to marry him in September, 1945.[191] A set of lamps he constructed and sent earlier in June became engagement gifts.

**Conclusion**

Facing general lack of knowledge concerning their unique positioning in the war, most specialized sailors wanted to find something of significance in their wartime experience. While access to wartime news consistently challenged their sense of legitimacy, displacement across the wide ocean held some unexpected benefits for fatigued specialist sailors. Attempting to assert control while on liberty offered one source of morale, but most simply drew more satisfaction from their relationships with fellow sailors and those back home. Some men compensated for dramatic distances by pursuing creative projects that heightened their links to home. While simply crafting a letter cured loneliness for some, others designed personal space or participated in transoceanic gift exchanges with loved ones. Eugene Gasseaux wrote Ruth, a girl at home, about his troubles, noting it was "very selfish of me; especially with a girl who has a future like you have ahead of yourself."[192] He soberly noticed their profound difference in place, time, and situation. Home eluded the grasp of many sailors dotting across the oceans even while crafting compelling connections.

[190] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, November 21, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[191] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, August 16, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

[192] Eugene A. Gasseaux correspondence, February 4, 1945, Center for American War Letters.

Those men who relished in special opportunities to arrive home recording their experiences by diary, such as Lawrence Burzynski, sometimes realized their unexpected understanding of the war might puzzle various future readers. “A person may not realize the war is still going on,” he reflected after he wrote primarily about his courtship with a woman and schooling while on liberty.[193] Indeed, he particularly realized his unique career experience in the war did not lend itself to the most accessible understanding by people at home and outsiders. Specialized education systems, however, offered sailors perhaps their most important path to controlling their present and future.

[193] Lawrence Burzynski collection, October 11, 1944, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

## Chapter 4: Wartime Classes and Postwar Career Development

While initial navy education primarily introduced a sailor to the technical aspects of their jobs when at sea, sailors also found they could exert some control over their career trajectory during the war. Before 1941, Spector found that sailors often "had to sit for the same competitive exams a dozen times" before advancing through the guarded rating system in their job department.[194] Throughout World War II, sailors interested in expanding their rank, status, monthly pay, and other personal factors found the educational system more favorable for this undertaking. Career-enhancing educational classes instructed men on more advanced skills in their field, adding to what they had learned prior to the war, in schools before given their ship assignment, and while aboard ship. Besides learning to handle more complicated jobs aboard ship, sailors extended the value of these course opportunities to brighten their future professional career prospects.

Each of the five occupational positions discussed in this thesis has multiple ratings. From lowest ranking to highest, they are third class, second class, first class, and chief. Whether a shipfitter or machinist's mate, these job titles qualified all men of any ranking to be considered a petty officer; this is a middling rank in the navy. Although firemen were just a step beneath the title of petty officer, they are included in this analysis as they participated in semi-skilled labor. Men participating in skilled labor occupied a distinct segment of the navy's workforce above lower positions like seamen, and without frequent leadership or command opportunities afforded to advanced positions like lieutenants, cadets, or colonels.

The average ranks in the petty officer class, whether a third class petty officer or a chief petty officer, exhibited compelling interest in accessing skilled classes that underlay their

[194] Spector, *At War, At Sea: Sailors and Naval Combat in the Twentieth Century*, 260.

distinctive placement in the navy hierarchy. Unique stressors posed after Pearl Harbor forced schools and classes to standardize content and loosen close grips on rank advancement. Thus, increased rates were given quicker. Men of all ranks could find access to classes, whether aboard ship or on firm ground. "Over 1.2 million individuals completed technical training courses" by 1944, as Harold Wool stated, showing that men took advantage of these course offerings when they discovered them.[195]

Besides conversing with superiors about advancing through ranks or simply being offered classes, qualified men often came to the forefront due to performance evaluations. Semi-annual enlisted performance evaluations helped the navy filter out which specialized sailors aboard a ship responded well to the intense workdays and the demands of them. Alan Hunt discovered these performance evaluations reminded men that their positioning aboard the ship, and in the war itself, was tied to their job and general "proficiency in rating, sobriety, and obedience."[196] Superior officers noted which men scored highest, attesting to their notable workmanship or spirit. High scoring performance evaluations helped determine those men most fit "to be promoted throughout the Navy," in assignments requiring approval such as "leadership team duty … and assignment to new construction [ships]."[197] Therefore, making good impressions in workmanship and efficiency were important for superiors to consider passing along information on further educational opportunities. Most sailors taking advantage of educational opportunities during the war did so because of a few standard benefits.

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[195] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 23.

[196] Alan G. Hunt, "Enlisted Performance Evaluation in the United States" (master's thesis, George Washington University, 1966), 11.

[197] Hunt, "Enlisted Performance Evaluation in the United States", 2-3.

Men took classes to increase their rate to receive pay raises. Sidney Dashevsky constantly connected his shipfitter training regimen to his intended rate. In March, 1943, he reflected to Emily that he was then a shipfitter 3rd class.[198] About seven months after his first correspondence with Emily, he had achieved his next "higher rating": shipfitter, second class.[199] He was paid considerably better. As a second class petty officer in his department, his paygrade amounted to ninety-six dollars a month, an increase from his previous pay of seventy-eight dollars a month.[200] These paygrade increases were direct ways to increase a sailor's standard of living or his savings, along with that of his family or other loved ones to whom he sent money home. As Harry Lyons expressed in his interview, being "promoted to fireman first class and I …. think it was thirty-six dollars a month [up from twenty one dollars] …I thought I was a millionaire!"[201] Monetary benefits consistently offered men tangible benefits for increasing in rank. Classes also offered more remote, or theoretical, benefits to men.

Ed Kirshenmann took his opportunities to establish his status aboard the ship and hopefully become indispensable. After acquainting himself with and learning from superior rated men, he jumped around multiple jobs like watertender aboard the ship and extracted multiple skills from each before settling on a route through the ranks. "And before I know what really happened," after setting his sights on the machinist's mate position, he jumped multiple rates up to second class machinist's mate after Pearl Harbor.[202] It was only a short time later, "November of '43 that [he] made Chief" of the machinist's mates aboard the *Saratoga*. Another sailor,

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[198] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 5, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[199] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, June 18, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[200] Patrick Clancey, "Ranks and Rates of the U.S. Navy," Hyperwar Foundation.

[201] Harry Lyons, interview by Pete Jensen, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[202] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

Richard Young, wrote that he was "able to take an examination for [shipfitter third class], which I easily passed. I felt that my fortunes were really going up aboard" his ship, the U.S.S. *Laub*.[203] Recognizing his boosted views of his ship and the war came from "many privileges which I did not have before," such as increased pay, more opportunities for control aboard the ship, and consequently more responsibility for his department's duties, he endeavored to continue enriching the career prospects he extracted from the war. In late 1943, he went to a welding school in Portsmouth, Virginia to extend those skills required of his rate but also happily extended his "smooth and uncomplicated [feelings] in the welding school, and I suppose I actually learned to weld." During his stretch of liberty, he interacted with society, foods, women and friends from home, all while viewing schooling as an intriguing option at expanding his horizons and also making his life in the war easier.

Lawrence Burzynski experienced at least seven rate increases from seaman to chief electrician's mate through his seven years in the Navy. Although earlier periods of the war imposed less urgency for higher rates, he achieved the fireman second class rating after a six month period from the prior rating.[204] Like other men, he endeavored to take classes while serving aboard the U.S.S. *Louisville* while tutoring other men in electrical theory to do the same. As an electrician's mate at the time of Pearl Harbor, he noticed how, after two months receiving four men and two "strikers," or men testing for the position, "this is the most we've ever had" in his ship department.[205] Incoming men helped split duties but also churned extra competition for

[203] Richard Oliver Young Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 50.

[204] Lawrence Burzynski collection, May 16, 1940, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[205] Lawrence Burzynski collection, February 6, 1942, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

higher rankings. Burzynski subsequently began thinking more about testing. Indeed, about six months later he had gained his next higher rate to first class electrician's mate.[206]

**Finding Access to Classes or Tests**

Men wanting to increase their rating could either take tests aboard ship, or take a class on firm ground to engage directly with new equipment. Although performance evaluations and personal probing accounted for many sailors pursuing either mode of ongoing training, men found they had to be diligent in ensuring their opportunities actually happened. Some men simply took tests aboard ship.

For Frank Frazitta, his ship was equipped with all the necessary equipment, accounting presumably for both the newest technical versions and necessary skills. He wrote he "took a test for third class electrician. Almost or in fact all of us got a little help by [other men helping them study.] We all passed it," even while bouncing across the Atlantic ocean from Norfolk, Virginia to Bizerte, Tunisia.[207] When Richard Young increased his rank as a shipfitter, he did so aboard ship as well. For his welding class, however, the U.S.S. *Laub* rounded "one more trip across the Atlantic," presumably in a merchant ship convoy, which stopped somewhere in the United States and allowed Young to be transferred to attend his class.[208]

Even specialized sailors like Lawrence Burzynski, who thought about classes actively aboard the *Louisville*, sometimes fell into career classes unexpectedly. Having volunteered for the navy in summer 1939, Lawrence witnessed how the modes and routes toward advancement changed from peacetime to wartime. In his diary, he explained his surprise when informed about a school called the Electrical Interior Communications School, in Washington, D.C., offering

[206] Lawrence Burzynski collection, August 1, 1942, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[207] Frank Frazitta Papers, June 20, 1944, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University.

[208] Richard Oliver Young Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 51.

one spot to the electrical division aboard the *Louisville*. "It was assumed, especially by me," he wrote, "that I would be the next one to go," yet he was horrified to learn that some second class electricians tested for the spot.[209] Having not only attained one of the highest rankings in his department, first class, but also spending almost four years aboard ship by then, he fought for his spot in the class. He frustratedly decided "the one [rule] that prevents you from seeing a senior officer without permission … was time to be broken," and raised his gripes to his superior: the chief engineer. Thrown out of the impromptu meeting, Burzynski prepared for severe reprimanding for his hasty pleas to take the test. Rather, his division officer "demanded I take the test" and he passed, finding he was "satisfied that I did the right thing … even though I did disobey regulations."[210]

For Burzynski, timing was everything. Before attending the communications school, his ship steamed from "Wellington, New Zealand, for liberty and well-earned rest," where he tested for the class with required equipment and personnel without the stressors from a war-zone. From there, they stopped at Pearl Harbor. Having successfully petitioned for his spot in the class, he then was "transferred to receiving station … and then passaged on a troop ship to San Francisco" from Pearl Harbor.[211] Indeed, no doubt feeling the pressure from the steadily-increasing number of men aboard the ship, not to mention a healthy dose of rank privilege, Lawrence realized class opportunities only occasionally posed themselves. Sailors had to stay informed and diligent.

Sometimes, classes and tests were simply unavailable. After being transferred from his previous ship, the *St. Louis*, John Tait remarked that his new ship was still being constructed in Long Beach, California. As he remembered, he "went to them and said, 'I'm eligible for

[209] Lawrence Burzynski collection, January 29, 1943, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[210] Lawrence Burzynski collection, January 29, 1943, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[211] Lawrence Burzynski collection, April 16, 1943, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

promotion to first class shipfitter," to which the few officers there at the time responded that they were "not set up to rate anybody."[212] For Tait, classes were not available nearby him and the onboard ship testing modules, intended machinery, and the personnel able to grade and approve the test for a higher rating were not available yet.

**Classes on Firm Ground**

For Burzynski and other specialized sailors, training for advanced rates was not easy. To advance through third class electrical skills, sailors studied various ways of generating power and the various physical generators aboard a ship, as depicted in a course workbook.[213] Various chapters in the study guidebook provide practical skills necessary for sailors to qualify for higher ratings. Indeed, the appendix lists certain skills for those "applicable rates" from third class up to first class, and finally chief rating.[214] This allowed men to anticipate postwar career options if they connected work to future professional goals at home. Exploring how men envisioned their postwar life, and how their newfound skills might impact their future, reveals another element of control specialized sailors exhibited over their wartime situation. The navy incentivized training on the latest trends in their field to keep up with newer technology for the benefit of shipboard maintenance, but sailors also notably relayed that knowledge to their intended career.

Throughout his letters, Sidney Dashevsky suggested that his training would pay off when he returns home. In November, 1943, he mentioned his hopes to "open a plumbing business" when he "get(s) back home to stay" using war bond funds he receives, "a couple thousand in

[212] John Tait, interview by William Alexander, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, December 6, 2001.

[213] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Electrician's Mate 3; Navy Training Courses* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print Office, 1949), 89, 115.

[214] Bureau of Naval Personnel, *Electrician's Mate 3; Navy Training Courses* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print Office, 1949), 346-351.

each," to fund the venture.[215] He appeared confident of his survival and that his wartime training would pay off in this regard. He continuously honed his technical craft to increase his occupational rate. In 1943, during almost two months on firm ground in Cape Charles between his assignments upon the *North Carolina* and *Melvin Nawman,* in Norfolk, Virginia, he worked temporarily at a plumbing shop on base. He continued studying repair processes of pipes, and fire lines or extinguishers.[216] During another mainland stint, he attended a welding school in Houston in April, 1944, and by then was studying very hard for his "highest rating," as a first class shipfitter.[217] While on liberty, he also visited his sweetheart Emily, worrying about making it back to the naval base on time due to lagging transportation, noting he had "worked to(o) hard these past couple years for my rates to lose one or both of them now."[218] Upward mobility in his career was always on his mind.

Upon attending communications school in Washington, D.C. around mid-1943, Lawrence Burzynski found that schooling reviewed "material I had studied to pass exams that qualified me to advance to my present rate," yet was more difficult for other sailors.[219] He reflected that the content was "too tough for some of the old sea dogs" who promptly dropped out of the class, presumably due to the rapidly expanding ship systems and technical equipment. If an electrician's mate, for example, did not learn the basic electrical functions and properly allocate for developments over time in the field, they could likely fall behind. During this period of schooling, Lawrence took advantage of his liberty at home and saw family, watched films, and

[215] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, November 8, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[216] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, September 10, 1943, Center for American War Letters.

[217] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, April 24, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[218] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 20, 1944, Center for American War Letters.

[219] Lawrence Burzynski collection, May 15, 1943, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

experienced the city life.[220] Increasing his rate in the Navy during World War II simultaneously allowed Lawrence to experience a lifestyle quite different from the one he had been living in a small Illinois town before the war.

For Lawrence, home meant meeting women, among them a friend of his sister Ruth. When he met Kathryn, or Kay, he was diligently studying telephone systems and other instruments.[221] Although his time and attention was often diverted to expanding his training course certificates, he courted Kay that fall and winter. Although neither possessed a car nor full independence, he made liberty work for him both professionally and emotionally by enjoying three out of four weekends off. Indeed, "after six months of courtship in Washington, D.C.," he and Kay declared their engagement.[222] Right after this, he was promoted to Chief electrician's mate with stellar grades from the communication school and reported for his next assignment.

For both Lawrence and Sidney, their investments in technical courses paid off in the short term for their wartime mobility. Having learned how to "maintain the ship's PA system," its telegraph system, and "how the bridge was able to get the engine room to maintain the proper speed," Lawrence found himself uniquely necessary aboard his next ship. He wrote in February, 1944, that "the receiving station I reported to was … in Gloucester, N.J.," finding himself part of a crew picked to induct the new U.S.S. *Alaska*.[223] As construction began encompassing each department and those higher-ranking men who knew their needs best, "occasionally we toured the ship … [spending] many hours studying the prints of circuits I would be responsible for."[224]

[220] Lawrence Burzynski collection, May 10, 1943, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[221] Lawrence Burzynski collection, August 1, 1943, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience

[222] Lawrence Burzynski collection, February 3, 1944, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience

[223] Lawrence Burzynski collection, February 8-18, 1944, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[224] Lawrence Burzynski collection, February 8-18, 1944, Institute on World War II and the Human Experience

As a Chief electrician's mate by that time, he provided unique expertise to the construction process and planned for his department's functions.

Sidney Dashevsky also encountered a close relationship with the shipbuilding process after his classes. In April of 1944, he began helping outfit his next assignment of embarkation, aboard the U.S.S. *Melvin R. Nawman*. Before this, he claimed he filed a "special request for the Brooklyn Yards," where "my type of ship is being built."[225] Realizing his newfound skills also increasingly made him an asset, Sidney exercised more choice over his next assignment as he reflected on his rank and status after two years aboard the *North Carolina*. Expanding his skills allowed Sidney to discover his agency as an individual employing his distinct technical value in the navy, no longer solely working as part of a large set of bodies aboard a ship. Instead, unique educational opportunities mobilized Sidney and Lawrence to better understand their specialized craft aboard ship while harnessing fuller command of their futures.

Some men chose not to expand their rate. When Arthur Brown was offered tests to attain a first class rating as a shipfitter, he found he did not "want it because I had seniority at second class … and you're the high man on the totem pole."[226] Figuring that he would simply "wind up on the bottom again" if he achieved first class and suddenly had to compete with chief shipfitters above him, he decided to stay at second class as it was good enough. For him and others, rank increases were unnecessary in the long term.

Most specialized sailors realized educational opportunities did not have a static end, but rather evolved as they stayed in the war longer and envisioned their futures. When unsure about their place in the war, sailors like Lawrence and Sidney extended their responsibilities for home

[225] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, March 7, 1944, Center for American War Letters, Chapman University.

[226] Arthur Brown, interview by Larry Rabalais, interview by William Cox, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

and career. As their second life at home carried along, newfound skills could translate to their future and help them reach home quicker and with less dissonance upon final return. Upon exit from the navy after World War II, many men found their unique training opportunities helped guarantee their future career and home life.

**Demobilization and the G.I. Bill**

The U.S. Navy did not simply demobilize their forces, especially as ships still had key duties to fulfill. Sailors needed to help contend with ensuring a peaceful transition was secured, and necessary peace protocols were followed. For Sidney Dashevsky, that meant, "from what the radio says, the war is over, as for me and many other it has just begun" due to his new duties.[227] Ships navigated the de-escalated waters from port to port, around Korea and China, also Japan, evading unexploded Japanese mines. As Russell Hammel related to his wife at home, "I think that the people back home are having a lot of nice dreams about the war being over … they have been so far away from it they just don't realize how big a job" there was left to clean up and attain peaceful transition from war.[228]

Frank Frazitta was thrilled to find out that the navy was beginning to send sailors back home, albeit not as quickly as many expected. "The navy has finally come out with a navy point system," he wrote, finding that forty-four points allowed men to be sent home. Men accumulated "one-half point for each month in the service. 10 points for any amount of dependents [like a wife or children] and one-half point for each year of your age."[229] Unfortunately at the time, he realized he had almost 39 points, thus adding around eight to ten months of duty left for him.

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[227] Sidney Dashevsky correspondence, September 7, 1945, Center for American War Letters, Chapman University.

[228] Russell V. Hammel Papers, October 12, 1944, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

[229] Frank Frazitta Papers, September, 1945, East Carolina Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University.

Russell Hammel similarly realized, although he was older with children and a wife, he would not be coming home very soon. Due to his later induction into the war, in early 1944, he found "it wouldn't be so bad [to have 37 of the necessary 44 points] if they gave you extra points for overseas duty," finding that men on shore bases who did support or clerical work closer to home might be going home earlier than him.[230]

Scoring developed as milestones against Europe and Japan were met. By late 1945, the points system was completed to account for overseas service but also maintain several seasoned sailors to supplement the large number of newer initiates who would receive the bulk responsibilities. Orlan Scott also remembered the process of eagerly counting his points. For those who "had been in combat, at least two major engagements," he recalled, gaining the necessary total came quicker after incorporating extra points to the count.[231]

Men coming home found much had changed since they had last spent time there. Men missed out on birthdays, celebrations, but also hard times. Francis Shiner recalled issues with illness within the family, topics often not included in letters to men at war. "There were some family problems. My father wasn't well and so forth," Shiner remembered having trouble adjusting to societal expectations of him as a masculine breadwinner upon return home.[232] These stressful or saddening events reached their apex upon demobilization.

Once soldiers and sailors came home, the U.S. government endeavored to offset significant numbers of expected unemployment. A return to normalcy, both servicemen and the government knew, would be hard. "College and homeownership weren't attainable dreams for

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[230] Russell V. Hammel Papers, August 16, 1945, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society

[231] Orlan Scott, interview by Mark Cunningham, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, March 14, 2014.

[232] Francis Shiner, interview by Brainerd Parrish, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 30, 2011.

the average American" before 1945, as established in the Department of Defense article dedicated to the reintegration process for veterans. [233] These practical concerns prompted the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944. Dubbed the G.I. Bill, this legislation offered "federal aid to help veterans buy homes, get jobs, and pursue an education," ensuring about eight million veterans graduated from college and university at successful rates that "more than doubled between 1940 and 1950." The G.I. Bill helped men learn skills for general education and employment. As many men worked in low-skilled jobs before the war, education offered incentives for attaining a new and better normal. Men were undoubtedly also worried about securing a job when they returned home.

The G.I. Bill helped cement higher education as a trusted route for men to take in constructing a series of skill sets toward a well-paying job later on. After the war, veterans desired a comfortable home and a firm path toward a profession. This thesis offers another understanding of men achieving the ideals of social mobility as a result of their careers within the navy. Focusing solely on the G.I. Bill benefits obscures another important way certain enlisted sailors in middling jobs achieved postwar career advancement: by increasing their department rank and paygrade aboard ship. Those men developed their postwar trajectories through careers and tests during the war, and thus required less catching up upon returning home.

**Careers**

"Although the broad trends of change in the military and civilian" types of careers have generally matched, Harold Wool cautioned that some navy jobs like shipboard mechanics or metal workers are not congruent to civilian life.[234] However, these standardized skills do not

[233] "75 Years of the GI Bill: How Transformative It's Been," U.S. Dept. of Defense, January 9, 2019.

[234] Wool, *The Military Specialist: Specialized Manpower Requirements and Resources of the Armed Services*, 54.

solely compose the job and his economically-focused study sterilized the lived experiences and consequently failed to capture how these veterans used their broad specialized skills to find jobs after the war. Listening to sailor voices on how they applied practical wartime-attained skills to the working world offers new understandings of career-wartime connections.

Specialized sailors looked forward to coming home, and attempted to make use of all their newfound experience and skills. Lawrence Burzynski reflected on his connections he made across the rolling seas, writing that "my good friend Thomas will be going back to Chattanooga," and will "help me get an electrical job."[235] Russell Hammel was more cynical about the prospects of finding a well-paying, skilled, and in-demand job. When he wrote "I can figure on taking any job that is left and think I am damn lucky to get it," feelings that likely stemmed from his realization he would be returning home later than many sailors due to his lacking points.[236]

For some men, their job experience translated directly into a career after the war. "After I got discharged," James Andrini recalled, "I got a job at General Electric and there I met my wife and I got married and I raised a son."[237] With all the powerful tools and electrical instruments he worked with as a machinist's mate in the navy, his timely investments with naval skills paid off when he returned home and helped him re-integrate easily.

Unlike Wool's claims that training in shipboard mechanisms were generally incompatibility to careers within civilian life, Ed Kirshenmann found that, "after spending six years" in the Navy, he "looked around and finally found ads that the state puts out for engineer. They call it a stationary engineer." He reflected on those skills he had obtained in the navy, and

[235] Lawrence Burzynski collection, August 20, 1945, The Institute on World War II and the Human Experience.

[236] Russell V. Hammel Papers, August 21, 1945, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society.

[237] James T. Andrini Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

he later believed knowing "a little about refrigeration and the boilers was very important [in determining his prerequisites for a job exam.]" Indeed, he "took that exam and passed it," then went on to work for the Department of Public Health using his skills for a new job outcome.[238]

Orlan Scott also found his specific capabilities prepared him for manual labor with similar facets of machinery in the civilian world. Serving as "a specialist in the Navy" as a boiler tender, Scott stressed that the navy was "where I learned my trade [in boiler engineering and diesel fuel.] And before I got out, I received instructors' rating on every engine made by General Motors for the service."[239] Thus, he luckily found his civilian career needs blended with the particular wartime equipment he learned to use. In other words, naval machinery prepared him to work with his new company machinery. After some difficulties searching for a satisfactory job after the war, he noticed "General Motors was looking for a service rep" and he learned their factory process through them. In 1967, he "went in business … specializing in General Motors and Detroit engines." He reminisced that, after leaving General Motors and working for himself, he was "the only independent guy I knew of in any state that specialized in those engines."

Sometimes, sailors' future careers endured detours or alternative routes along the way. For John Hladik Jr., his intended career required some more schooling before he could competently compete for a position. He said that "[after the war] Rutgers looked at my records" of schooling and "said 'we don't know, so I sent for my naval records. And my rating I had, fifth in the [electrician] class of 240, then says 'Okay, we'll let you in."[240] Ultimately, his schooling and experience in the Navy assisted him getting into higher education after the war. Thus, he

[238] Ed Kirshenmann, interview by Bruce Petty, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, July 4, 2001.

[239] Orlan Scott, interview by Mark Cunningham, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, March 14, 2014.

[240] John A. Hladik, Jr. Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

went to school for three years and "got an auxiliary certificate in electrical engineering" and was in business as an engineer "for forty-five years" after that. He also narrowed in on certain skills that helped both aboard ship and at home, in particular a "method of cleaning the commutator … and I applied this when I went to work at Union Carbide" when he briefly worked at an instrument shop before becoming an engineer.

Lindsey Wilcox also found, after his release from the navy, that finishing his practical education would increase his usefulness in the civilian workspace. After working as a fireman and watertender aboard the U.S.S. *Indianapolis*, Wilcox recalled that he finished his apprenticeship "about five years [after war's end.] Prior to the war, he had participated in a machinist apprenticeship, transmitting some of those skills to his wartime duties. "It had mechanical drawings," he remembered about his student training, finding he could "do nearly anything on a locomotive, steam locomotive" by the end.[241] Working in the navy with complicated machinery helped him complete this training. As a watertender, he accustomed himself to pipes and machinery connections. Thus, in 1948 he went to diesel school and "went to work for Southern Pacific," in the transportation business for a while.

Meanwhile, Frank Boffi took some time to determine where his skillset best lay, reflecting that he "was hired by Continental Insurance Company [in 1958] as a field engineer."[242] Working with electrical utilities as a machinist's mate during the war, he realized his training prepared him for working with "motors and transformers, and power plant equipment," a transfer of his internal skills he had deliberated upon during the war. Indeed, he

[241] Lindsey Wilcox, interview by Mike Zambrano, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, August 9, 2007.

[242] Frank Boffi, interview by Charlie Simmons, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, May 11, 2012.

found that developments in wartime electronics and civilian electronics were not dissimilar. As a civilian engineer both as part of a company and, presumably contracted, on vessels, he retired in 2006 as the "oldest boiler tinker in the state of Florida."

For other men, achieving their expected career goal did not develop as directly as anticipated. Thomas Hair remembered he "tried to get a job in boiler work, but that was impossible in New York," so he worked in construction, an alternative route to working with his skills understanding water pressure, steam, and boilers as a watertender.[243] Some of those skills understanding the construction of pipes and water filters helped prepare him for this career. Richard Young, before finishing his tenure in the navy as a shipfitter, was "in the Duke hospital for two months" due to rheumatic fever and "was given an honorable discharge for medical reasons" in mid-1945.[244] "In the fall of 1945 I enrolled in L.S.U. under the G.I. Bill to work for a degree in petroleum engineering," he recollected, but further elaborated he did not end up settling in that somewhat-familiar business he trained for in the navy. Just like Young, Roland Eberhardt found his watertender training relayed well into his intended job, but struggled to find his place in that workforce. After working as a "steam engineer" for Southern California Gas Company, he moved into the lesser-related field of the construction business.[245]

Charles Levi, at war's end a chief shipfitter, made use of all the intricate details he learned in his skilled trade during the war. Training courses he took and special training he received helped influence not only his career decisions but his entrepreneurship during and after

[243] Thomas Hair, interview by Wayne Clark, NY State Military Museum Oral History Program, New York State Military Museum, May 23, 2001.

[244] Richard Oliver Young Collection, Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 53-54.

[245] Roland Eberhardt, interview by Chuck Nichols, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 23, 2001.

the war. Before the war, his work as a welding foreman at a railroad was optimum training for his naval shipfitting job. Having served not only aboard the U.S.S. *Seabass* and *Chaumont* but also in a naval construction battalion, as a Seabee, he encountered unique forms of naval equipment and construction through his tenure in the war.[246] He put those skills to use after the war to complete a Welding Certificate in sheet metals after being recruited by the Lincoln Electric Company, likely an incentive to secure his employment with the Cleveland company after he left the navy.[247] However, in addition to his indispensability to the workforce, he invented a pitchometer before the end of the war to further make use of his unique training.

Levi noticed that damage, caused by mines or underwater structures to the propeller frame and its blades affected the performance of a ship. He invented this ship propeller straightening device to alleviate this problem. Dents distorted the productivity of propeller revolutions and its alignment. These symptoms force a ship to cruise slower or even break down. Levi, very experienced in welding and the hull, generally worked on structures on the side or exterior of the ship. He considered the problems he saw within navy ship gear on a daily basis and attempted to fix them.

The device seemed to work best on smaller propellers, held in the square base tight like a vice.[248] The base was connected to an overhead measuring bar, called a scribing tool, to measure the distortion on the propeller frame or its blades. The dimensions of distortion, and the necessary corrections, presumably were measured by the base underneath. A curving rod attached to the base appeared to bend, or torque, the propeller frame or blade back into place. It

[246] Charles, Levi Alvin. "U.S. World War II Navy Muster Rolls, 1938-1949," College Park: National Archives, *Ancestry.com*.

[247] Charles A. Levi Papers, Series I, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington Navy Yard.

[248] Charles A. Levi Papers, Series II, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington Navy Yard.

appears Levi did not patent his creation after the war, but perhaps passed it along to another naval specialist to complete. He took photographs with this propeller straightening device and drew up plans for the whole structure in late 1944. Levi made considerable use of his unique training in the navy to target a problem he saw intersecting with the military and civilian spheres.

**Conclusion**

Overall, specialized sailors took advantage of opportunities for additional training over the course of the war. For personal and career reasons, sailors often took classes to enhance their future career plans while also improving shipboard maintenance and safety practices within the navy. These classes improved sailor rankings in their department and made them increasingly indispensable in civilian workplaces upon their return home. Though some men found their skills inadequately primed them for their intended career, many found their abilities aligned with civilian economic needs in their field of work. Coming back home was the final test for men who grappled with insufficient public understanding of their line of work, and lack of acknowledgment for their wartime contributions. Unlauded during the war, many went on to enjoy financial and career success, achievements bolstered by their naval training and work experience.

## Conclusion

Specialized sailors descended down below decks into their occupational jobs during World War II, essential to ships running and yet few know of their experience. As part of his interview, Lindsey Wilcox related his experiences speaking to group tours and school groups. When he spoke to one group, he remembered "the guy raised his hand and said 'Wilcox, nine times out of ten, no one in here knows what a water tender is.'"[249]

Specialized jobs aboard ships evolved over many years and only began to enter public consciousness after World War II. Men entered the World War II-era navy for many reasons, and many came to realize that the navy offered unique options to customize the skills they acquired. Navy education and training courses, at the onset, began expanding the career prospects of its informed and future-motivated petty officers.

Aboard ship, men filling all five job positions detailed in this thesis found they had less control over their wartime situation than expected due to the intensity of their jobs. However, skills learned on the job often transferred to skills needed for civilian jobs, often an unforeseen development given how unappreciated they felt at times due to their placement below decks. This future payoff with immediate benefits helped make sense of their difficult situations,

Maintaining morale was important for these sailors working specialized jobs. When rank and work aboard ship exempted them from privileges in the navy like receiving complete news or satisfying vacation time, many sailors looked elsewhere for a boost in morale: to home. For lucky sailors, that meant crafting relationships with people at home through letters or gifts. That also meant sailors found ways to make the ship feel more like home by customizing their space.

[249] Lindsey Wilcox, interview by Mike Zambrano, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, August 9, 2007.

In order to exert further control over their time in the navy, sailors turned to their career path. The navy offered unique opportunities to attend training classes during the war. Unlike previous understandings of a static shift from wartime to civilian life, and vice versa, this thesis noted that career-minded sailors in specialized jobs found education to be an ongoing process forged from before, during, across multiple transferrable skillsets. Many sailors found their career appraisals within the navy paid off upon returning home at war's end.

This study argued that the war was not a primary motivator for specialized sailors to enlist, and various systems of mobility known or unknown to incoming sailors helped them gain much more out of the navy than initially expected. As Reeve pointed out, war's stressors and the "tragic price paid for duty, service, and victory" obscured a simple transition process for many soldiers returning home in World War II and yet, for the specialized sailors examined here, this "gulf of understanding" was easier to manage.[250]

Nevertheless, specialized sailors discovered insecurities and frustrations understanding their public role as veterans. Men like Lindsey Wilcox became accustomed to documentaries and films, among other public media and events, failing to include working positions aboard ships like his. Speaking on documentaries about navy operations, he recalled "one good documentary. Of course, I'm not in it. In the low decks, you're not in anything."[251] Men realized their experience was not well-documented in the public sphere. Their actions aboard ship did not align directly to the public understanding of winning the war. The United States war narrative privileges grand, strategic, and precise naval battles moving toward victory. Harry Lyons pointed

[250] Reeve, *The Face of Naval Battle: The Human Experience of Modern War at Sea*, 35.

[251] Lindsey Wilcox, interview by Mike Zambrano, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, August 9, 2007.

out about his time in the navy, as "a seagoing mechanic in the boiler room … I never saw anything, but I knew …"[252]

Looking back upon the war with from the vantage point of time, Charlie Boswell also noticed that historical texts, films, and other tools to approach historical events privilege the narrative toward winning the war and not the everyday priorities, frustrations, distractions, triumph, and struggles. "In other words," he argued, "the history books don't tell you what it was."[253] He suggested that Pearl Harbor and the flowing naval theater of war through the lens of the individual "ought to be taught in schools, because – and tell it like it was, not like the big officials want it." By understanding the wartime experience through the eyes of everyday sailors in middling jobs with modest means, these stories connect historical photographs of ships on the warring seas to the men aboard, especially those below active war decks not shown in images.

This study focused on a block of white men, many of whom shared their stories of intense work and stress with at least the idea that their role meant something more than given credit for. Pushing back against traditional narratives was not the intention for most of these men, however it is important for family history and for the national understanding of this pivotal time in our history. One way to further this study for the future is to continue breaking-up this mass of men into their component parts and mining their distinct experiences. Positions that were not developed in this study deserve more attention, such as the service roles that more diverse voices were relegated to serve in such as stewards and cooks. African-American men, for example, served with little recognition in similar spaces as white sailors working sought-after

[252] Harry Lyons, interview by Pete Jensen, Nimitz Education and Research Center Oral History Program, National Museum of the Pacific War, September 21, 2007.

[253] Charlie Boswell Collection (AFC/2001/001/105953), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress.

roles, white men embodying the ideals of career leverage often kept at arms length for other men. Representation matters and, as outlets to address veteran and societal issues, further studies can help further diversify overlooked working positions aboard ship. By broadening acknowledgment for the varying types of jobs men performed aboard ship, ways to maintain and secure stories that do not fit the combat narrative also encompasses these more-silent voices.

In this thesis, the individual commands the experience. This approach reveals more of the story of naval wartime service and shows real-time challenges and changes in sailors' lives and the meaning of their time in the navy, both for the navy and for the individual. Rather than sifting through traditional war memoirs and studies, this thesis looked at what was important for men in the everyday process of waging war. These stories complicate the slick narratives regarding whose story receives recognition. Less traditional in the issues they faced as veterans, their letters and diaries and oral histories call into question how society grapples with memorializing wartime experiences. Many sailors in this paper did not fit neatly into the national narrative of the good war for patriotism and freedom, rather involving themselves for seemingly mundane and self-motivated reasons. These men found elements of their future within a navy that was at war. These men mattered in the larger scheme of making sure ships at war ran properly. Shipfitters tinkered on bulkheads and pipes, affecting watertenders who ensured those pipes purified saltwater. Thus, spheres of entangled individuals engaged in jobs below decks, so many who did not know these sailors by name could do theirs above the waterline. How specialized sailor stories connect to the war is just as important as the men whose actions earned them national glory.

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