

## THE STORY OF JESSE ROKUSON

I was born in Brooklyn, New York on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1923 and enlisted in the Navy January 4, 1941. After receiving basic training I was assigned to the USS Meredith DD434 on March 6<sup>th</sup>, a training destroyer. This ended on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1941 and the next day July 15<sup>th</sup> I was ordered to report for duty on the USS Gwin DD433, another sturdy and dependable destroyer. My rating was Seaman S2.

In November, before the war, around the 15<sup>th</sup> we left Staten Island, New York, with the first expeditionary force to England. We were to patrol from Iceland to Greenland and await for the balance of our convoy. Our ship got word that the U.S.S. Destroyer Reubens James had been sunk. We were accompanying the Coast Guard ship Alexander Hamilton. The Kearney was also damaged.

We pulled into the harbor in Newfoundland to pick up another convoy. While we were there we detected a sub on our sonar in the harbor. Knowing it was the enemy, we dropped several depth charges on it. The sub rose to the surface and exploded. Chalk one up for the Gwin!

The Hamilton was with us when we took radar direction bearings on a Greenland German base. They had been sending transmissions out to the sub. We both closed in until we had pinpointed where the base was. The Coast Guard ship sent in a landing party to capture the base while we patrolled the area giving protection. The landing was a success so we left and crossed the Atlantic, headed for England.

Off the coast of England the English and Canadian destroyers took over. We headed to Londonderry, Ireland. While there war was declared and we immediately left, re-crossed the Atlantic and headed through the Panama Canal to San Diego, California to be outfitted for war time. After completing our outfitting we joined the fleet consisting of, among other ships, the Mighty "E", the famed Enterprise.

This Task Force "Mike" under the command of vice Adm. William F. Halsey had left the Hawaiian Islands (April 12) with two carriers (Hornet and Enterprise) three heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, 8 destroyers (USS Gwin 433) and 2 oilers. Their mission was to bomb Tokyo.

After dark on April, 18, aboard the Hornet with sixteen B-25's under the command of Col. James H. Doolittle, we joined the convoy. The after dark bombing was changed to daylight bombing which was 8:00 AM (7:00 AM Tokyo time). The takeoff flight was about a 5 hour flight. We were about 620 miles from Tokyo. My ship the U.S.S. Gwin was on escort duty.

May 4, 1942, we were under Rear Adm. Fletcher's task force 17. This

consisted of the carriers Lexington and Yorktown and a screen of cruisers and destroyers. We steamed into the Coral Sea looking for trouble. The planes raided the newly arrived Japanese at Tulagi. The battle of the Coral Sea opened on the morning of May 7. Our planes sent the Japanese carrier Shoho to the bottom. The opposing task forces finally came to grips on the morning of May 8. By noon the Coral Sea battle was over. The Lexington was battered. My ship and other destroyers escorted her out but Lady Lex was running out of time. An hour after the attack, fumes from a damaged tank of aviation gasoline ignited. A tremendous explosion shook the ship from stem to stern. In mid-afternoon a second explosion rocked the carrier and fires blazed out of control. The crew was ordered to abandon ship. One of our destroyers put five torpedoes into her to sink her so the Japanese couldn't salvage her.

About eight pm Lady Lex slid under. For the first time in history a Naval battle had been fought entirely by aircraft carriers. One month later my ship was in the battle of Midway which was one of the most furious in all history. The battle was fought June 4-7 1942.

All available ships were sent to defend Midway. The task force carriers Enterprise and Hornet along with six cruises and nine destroyers answered the call. Task force 16 consisted of the carrier Yorktown with two cruisers and five destroyers. Admiral Spruance commanding TF16 flew his flag on the Enterprise.

Rear Admiral Fletcher the overall commander, flew his flag on the Yorktown. By the time the battle was over Japan had been dealt the worst Naval defeat in her history. All four Japanese carriers and a heavy cruiser had been sunk. 250 planes lost, more than 2000 men killed. We lost the carrier Yorktown, 1 destroyer, the Hughes and more than 300 Americans. This marked the end of Japanese dream of Naval domination of the Pacific ocean. This also cancelled Japans threat to Hawaii and the west coast. The next six months my ship's homeport was Nomura, New Caledonia.

On Aug. 7, 1942 my ship the Gwin was in the landing of Guadalcanal. We shelled the Japanese positions on the island. During this time we were with the aircraft carrier Hornet. In the battle of Santa Cruz island October 26, she was sunk and the Enterprise disabled. Sept. 15 1942 while escorting a transport convoy to Guadalcanal the carrier was torpedoed and sunk by a Japanese sub.

About Nov. 1, 1942 the Gwin, Porter Walker, Preston, Battle ship South Dakota and Washington under rear Adm. Willis Ales engaged a strong Japanese task force. This was the first time sixteen inch guns aboard a battle ship were used.. Two of our destroyers were sunk and two damaged. The South Dakota was battered, the Washington took on the enemy single handed and his radar controlled

guns smashed the Japanese battleship Kirishima into a ruined hulk.

My ship took some hits mainly in the engine room. We escorted one of the damaged destroyers out with most of her bow was missing. We had to sink her and take her crew off. My tour of duty aboard the Gwin ended on December 22, 1943 and I was assigned to the USS Celeno. That tour lasted until May 16, 1943 when I was assigned to USS Solace, a Hospital Ship. I was on the Solace until July 31, 1943, two months, 14 days.

While on the Solace I went into a deep coma. When I woke up I was in the hospital and strapped to the bed. I was shaking all over which was due to my combat fatigue. My high temperature was diagnosed as left Hydrocephrosis. In 1964 this was changed to Renal T.B.C. after being dormant for about 21 years.

In 1943 they didn't know much about Renal TBC. It will be dormant for the rest of my life and can break out anytime. I must have checkups once a year. They operated to try to save my left kidney, but it was not successful. A second operation was performed to take out my kidney which was successful. Later my fingernails turned black, my left lung collapsed and I was pronounced dead but brought back to life.

I was in the US Naval Hospital in Albans, New York for one month and 13 days--from Dec. 18, 1944 to February 1, 1944. On the way home the scab on my left side broke open and was draining. I was treated with silver nitrate and sent back on duty. I was in a recovery station in New York on February 1, 1944 until the 19<sup>th</sup>, a total of 19 days.

On February 19, after release, my woes continued. I had an infection on my left side, with a high temperature. The bandages were soiled so they dropped medication in my left side hole and sent me back to duty after 17 days.

I attended Midshipmen's school March 8, 1944 for 5 days and back to the Naval Hospital again. I was there for two months, 26 days--from June 17, 1944 until September 12, 1944.

Then another try at Midshipman's school for 10 days until September 22, 1944.

Then back to the hospital on September 22, 1944 until January 19, 1945. This time for three months and 28 days. My side opened up, soiled bandages and high temperature. They realized I needed an operation. This operation was performed the right way as the doctor performing it allowed it to heal from the inside out. He told me that it should not have been closed up to form a scab. The crust over the healing opening would open and infection would set in. Performing my duties, my bandages would get dirty.

They realized I was too weak and ill to perform my duties and I was

honorably discharged on Long Island, New York on January 31, 1945.

I was in some of the most notable actions in World War II and fortunately I came home safely to my family.

The following information is from Wikipedia reporting the action of the USS Gwin (DD-433):

Japanese in the crucial battle for **Midway Atoll**.

Battle of Midway Gwin departed Pearl Harbor 23 May 1942 with Marine reinforcements for Midway and returned to port 1 June.

Two days later she raced to join the Fast Carrier Task Force searching for the approaching Japanese Fleet off Midway. But the crucial battle was all but concluded by the time she arrived on the scene on 5 June 1942. Four large Japanese aircraft carriers and a cruiser rested on the bottom of the sea along with some 250 enemy planes and a high percentage of Japan's most highly trained and experienced carrier pilots. The Island of Midway was saved to become an important base for operations in the western Pacific. Likewise saved was Hawaii, the great bastion from which attacks were carried into the South Pacific and Japan itself. But there were American losses too. Gwin sent a salvage party to assist in attempts to save carrier Yorktown (CV-5), heavily damaged by two bomb and two torpedo hits in the Battle of Midway. As attempts continued 6 June 1942, a Japanese submarine rocked Yorktown with torpedo hits and sank destroyer Hammann (DD-412) which was secured alongside the carrier. The salvage party had to abandon Yorktown and surviving men were rescued from the sea, The carrier capsized and sank the morning of 7 June 1942. Gwin carried 102 survivors of the two ships to Pearl Harbor, arriving 10 June 1942.

**Guadalcanal:**

Gwin departed Pearl Harbor 15 July 1942 to operate in the screen of fast carriers who pounded Japanese installations, troop concentrations and supply dumps as Marines invaded Guadalcanal in the Solomons on 7 August 1942. In the following months Gwin convoyed supply and troop reinforcements to Guadalcanal. Joining a cruiser-destroyer task force, she patrolled "the Slot" of water between the chain of Solomon Islands to intercept the "Tokyo Express" runs of enemy supply, troop and warships supporting Japanese bases in the Solomons.

On 13 November 1942, Gwin and three other destroyers formed with battleships

South Dakota (BB-57) and Washington (BB-56) to intercept an enemy bombardment-transport force approaching the Solomons. The following night the task group found the enemy off Savo Island: the battleship Kirishima, four cruisers, 11 destroyers, and four transports. The Naval Battle of Guadalcanal was hot and furious. Gwin found herself in a gun duel between the light cruiser Nagara and two Japanese destroyers (the Ayanami and the Uranami), versus the four American destroyers. She took a shell hit in her engine room. Another shell struck her fantail and enemy torpedoes began to boil around the destroyers.

Though shaken by exploding depth charges, Gwin continued to fire at the enemy as long as any remained within range. In a short time the other three American destroyers were out of action; two sinking and the Benham (DD- 397) surviving with her bow partially destroyed. But a masterful battleship duel fought by the Washington wrecked Japanese battleship Kirishima. She had to be abandoned and scuttled as was Japanese destroyer Ayanami. The battle was over and these ships had saved Guadalcanal from a bombardment in a naval action that marked the turning point toward victory by U.S. forces in the Solomons.

Gwin attempted to escort the nose-less Benham to Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides Islands. But when all hope was lost, survivors transferred to Gwin who hurried Benham's abandoned hulk to the bottom with gunfire. The survivors were landed 20 November at Nouméa, New Caledonia, and Gwin was routed onward to Hawaii, thence to the Mare Island Navy Yard, arriving 19 December 1942.

Written by Robert Hatch from Jesse's notes and help from Wikipedia.