



PARRISH (USA, 1945)

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bombs and steel" as they called the deluge of American firepower, or by Japanese troops when morale collapsed after months of sacrificially courageous defense. And if innocence can be quantified, the Okinawans had more of it than the victims of Hiroshima; they bore less responsibility — actually none — for the war in which they were massacred.

Military historian Hanson W. Baldwin wrote: *In retrospect, the battle for Okinawa can be described only in the grim superlatives of war. In size, scope and ferocity, it dwarfed the Battle of Britain. Never before had there been, probably never again will there be, such a vicious sprawling struggle of planes against planes, of ships against ships. Never before, in so short a space, had the Navy lost so many ships; never before in land fighting had so much American blood been shed in so short a time in so small an area: probably never before in any three months of the war had the enemy suffered so hugely, and the final toll of American casualties was the highest expected against the Japanese. There have been larger land battles, more protracted air campaigns, but Okinawa was the largest combined operation, a "no-quarter" struggle fought on, under and over the sea and land.*

The U.S. Navy had 368 ships damaged and 32 sunk at Okinawa, mostly by suicide attack during the 11-week long battle: 4,900 Navy men were killed, an equal number wounded. Of the approximately 4,000 kamikaze attacks Japan's Navy and Army Air Forces mounted during World War 2, at least 3,000 took place at Okinawa. Former Navy Captain Edward L. Beach wrote: *For our Navy, defense against airborne kamikazes was the principle issue of the Okinawa campaign. To detect incoming raids, picket destroyers were sent out to distant stations around the island, charged to report when their radars detected aircraft coming in. Soon aware of the function of these lonely ships, the kamikazes took to attacking them first, and it was here that the bloodiest fighting took place, in each case literally one small desperate ship madly shooting back against a murderous onslaught suddenly flung out of the air.*

By any system of measurement, Capt. Beach wrote in *The U.S. Navy: A 200 Year History*, the Okinawan campaign was the bloodiest and longest-lasting battle in the history of any navy, rivaled in size, though not in duration or casualties, only by the fantastic four-day Battle of Leyte Gulf. Only Japan could have put up such extraordinary resistance against such overwhelming odds. Yet Fieffer is puzzled Okinawa has never found its proper place in American history: *why so little is remembered — more precisely was never appreciated, even at the time — about the three months of mammoth American sacrifice. The whole nightmarish experience went into a kind of black hole of national memory.*

The Columbia River Maritime Museum's Naval History gallery fans out from the preserved bridge of the destroyer USS *Knapp* like ships in a convoy. Just forward of its bridge-shield a twin-mounted 20-mm antiaircraft cannon points skyward in perpetual wait for Japanese warplanes. On the portside of the *Knapp's* bridge are handmade wood models (by Fred S. Rice) of two of the Navy's most famous ships, the early frigates *Essex* and *Constitution*. *Essex* was the first American naval ship to circumnavigate the earth, and during the War of 1812 destroyed Britain's Pacific whaling fleet. *Constitution*, the immortal "Old Ironsides," is the oldest American naval vessel in active commission. Paintings of *Constitution* in battle (including its famous defeat of the British *Guerriere* August 19, 1812) and in review, and a photograph of its visit to Astoria in the 1930s, are on the wall opposite the model.

In a corner of the gallery is a model by CRMM founder Rolf Klep of the World War 2 heavy cruiser *Astoria*, which was the first of two named after the city of Astoria. *Astoria* was sunk by Japanese ships off Guadalcanal one August night in 1942 with three other Allied cruisers. The Battle of the Savo Sea was a nighttime gunfire and torpedo fight, at which the Japanese excelled. *Astoria* (which had conveyed home to Tokyo the body of a Japanese ambassador a few years earlier) was riddled with

shell hits. An all-metal, electronically guided, mechanically powered warship engaged in the largest naval war in history, *Astoria* went down like an antique sailing man-of-war gunned to death broadside to its enemy. 238 of *Astoria's* crew died with their ship, 142 were wounded. Above the model is a diagram showing where each of approximately 200 Japanese shells struck the *Astoria*. A 50th anniversary reunion of survivors was held at the museum in 1992; this year they gather August 9, the date of *Astoria's* sinking (and also the date of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945).

A fleet of ship models off the *Knapp's* starboard bow are all World War 2 vintage. One, U.S. destroyer *Reuben James*, is generally considered the first American naval vessel lost in the war (though the gunboat *Panay*, sunk in China by Japanese air attack in 1937, might also have a claim). *Reuben James* was torpedoed by a Nazi U-boat while escorting a convoy of cargo ships to England two months before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in December 1941. Its loss characterized the grim six-year battle to maintain English and Russian ocean supply lines against attacking German submarines. Thousands of ships and lives were lost, and for a perilous time U-boats sank allied cargo ships faster than they could be replaced. In response, American shipyards revolutionized shipbuilding, particularly the Kaiser yards on the Pacific coast. By war's end, the Kaiser shipyards in Portland and Vancouver were producing their famous "Liberty" and "Victory" ships one a day. (A PT boat, a plywood torpedo carrying vessel perhaps the closest Americans came to suicide craft in the war, made famous by John Kennedy; and an attack dog type of ship, a destroyer-converted submarine chaser, round out the model fleet.)

A classic example of a World War 2 Liberty ship is the *Star of Oregon*, which was built in Portland and launched in September 1941. It was the second Liberty launched, the first on the west coast. A year later, on August 30, 1942, a Nazi submarine sent it to the bottom of the Caribbean on its return to the U.S. from its maiden voyage to the Persian Gulf. A builder's model of the *Star of Oregon* is in CRMM's Steamship gallery, just preceding the Naval gallery.



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The Kaiser yards on the Columbia River also built warships, one of which was the escort aircraft carrier *Gambier Bay*. The model of *Gambier Bay* in the Naval History gallery was built from scratch by two Beaverton (Oregon) dentists, Nick Marineau and Robert Norgren, who singly or together made most of the ship models in the gallery, including a magnificent scale replica of the battleship *Oregon* (Marineau). The real *Gambier Bay* was built upriver in the Kaiser yards and was commissioned and crewed in Astoria. Escort carriers like *Gambier Bay* were constructed to provide air support for amphibious operations in the Pacific or against U-boats in the Atlantic. A popular name for them was "Kaiser Koffins," which a few became. The *Gambier Bay* has the unfortunate distinction of being the only American aircraft carrier sunk by surface fire. It was shot to pieces by Japanese battleships and cruisers at the battle for Leyte Gulf in late October 1944, which was the largest naval battle in history and ended with virtual destruction of the Japanese Navy — a spectacular victory for the U.S. despite heavy losses and serious blunders. As with the cruiser *Astoria*, survivors of the *Gambier Bay* have met at the museum for reunions at the replica of their lost ship, a society of sudden swimmers.

Along the far wall from the destroyer *Knapp's* bridge are a group of black & white photographs of Navy life at sea during World War 2: a photo of a PT boat, a battleship firing its huge cannons, sailors loading a gun battery with large shells, a fast-steaming destroyer. Near the wall's corner are models of two submarines, one nuclear (*Triton*), the other a World War 2 type, *Icefish* (which sank three Japanese merchant vessels in five combat patrols, underscoring the virtual destruction of Japanese shipping by U.S. submarines — at the cost of 52 subs and crews — and rescued six shotdown pilots), and a cutaway drawing of a typical World War 2 submarine by Rolf Klep, which shows all its compartments, engines, submersion tanks and torpedo tubes. (A similar X-ray rendering by Klep of a WW2 destroyer is on another wall of the gallery.) A large torpedo runs almost the entire length of the wall. Assorted shell casings are clustered in a corner. In a glassed case near the twin 20-mm antiaircraft guns is a photograph of a Navy Helicat divebomber flying over what is now Clatsop County Airport, used by the Navy as a training base during the war.

(The museum also has on display a series of photographs of the Pacific War by the late Victor Jorgensen of Portland who was a member of Edward Steichen's special Navy camera crew. Richard Rogers' *Victory at Sea* score acts as muzak.)

Two atomic bombs ended World War 2. Three actually, but the first (at White Sands, New Mexico) was a test. The Japanese Emperor decided he must do the unthinkable and surrender to the Americans after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, though many of his high-ranking officers were prepared to sacrifice themselves and Japan by fighting to the death against the invasion they knew was inevitable. Whether America should have used the bombs will be debated until the end of history. The claim of one million American casualties if the U.S. invaded Japan has never been verified nor is its origin known; discussion at the time never used that figure. However, it was predicted that more Americans would be killed and wounded assaulting the Japanese homeland than at any other time of the war (estimates ranged from 16,000 to 46,000 killed, and four times as many wounded; President Truman later claimed he was afraid 500,000 Americans would be killed), and that the Japanese cost would be astronomical. Capt. Beach wrote:

Absent the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whether Japan would, or could, have surrendered without the planned invasion of the home islands will never be known. All experience to that time had been that her military forces would fight to the bitter end.... That the people inhabiting Hiroshima and Nagasaki — and fire-bombed Tokyo, too — were no more responsible for Pearl Harbor than the population of New York City or San Francisco did not occur to us then.

Everyone has seen Alfred Eisenstadt's photo of VJ Day: the sailor vigorously kissing a young woman in Times Square, NYC. Herman Wouk described another response to the war's end at Okinawa: *A single green star shell suddenly burst over Okinawa and floated slowly down near the moon. Then, all at once, an unbelievably brilliant cascade of lights began rising from the island: a million crimson streams of tracers, countless blue and white searchlights fanning frantically back and forth, red flares, green flares, white flares, a 4th of July display many miles long of ammunition suddenly sprayed to the starry black heavens in a thank-prayer for peace.... Now the deck overhead began to thunder with the dancing and jumping of the sailors. And still the bursts of color rose from Okinawa in million-dollar streams, a glory of triumphant waste, and the rattle and roar of the guns came rolling over the water, and the ships in the harbor began firing, too...and then the Caine's 20-millimeters rattling as they had rattled at (a) kamikaze, making the bulkheads shudder.*

A Navy bomber pilot in the Pacific, Gordon Forbes (who flew a B-24 and sank nine Japanese ships, and won the Distinguished Flying Cross) reflected on the war's end in his very good book *Goodbye to Some*:

For a moment I am terribly sentimental and want to weep. I love the dead. I love them more than the living because I feel their fellowship, their staunchness, their valor, even their humor, things they can never again lose by being alive.... I have the feeling...that I am rushing into oblivion along with all of this. Were there really values around me somewhere in this desolation that were epic and will never find expression again? I do not feel lost so much as wasted. I was never needed and so many of the things we were all called on to do and that killed us were unnecessary. Our lives trickled away...and yet no one I knew could say why those who had died were really required to die, and what purpose their dying had served. Worse, no one seemed to remember who had died. It was in some ways such subtle decimation, despite the violent character of all airplane deaths.... And the blood of others I have shed, will I have to think of that when I am old? Perhaps I have killed a hundred men. We were authorized and encouraged to do it, but a rift has been opened in the boundary of human behavior, and behind it we have reveled and rejoiced in the lightless chaos we have found. Men tumbling from a burning ship, a few, how many, a dozen? Men sinking under their packs, 20 and more in a single picture, black dots drowning. Streaks of fire in the sky, billows of it rolling on the ground. It is quicksand as well as chaos, events sink beneath the surface of time quickly and leave so little memory. We seem to have been living in a vacancy beyond the world and many of us have died there, rather stupidly, in dribbles.

Robert Lovell wrote of Astoria at the end of the war: *Troopships began passing Astoria as the soldiers came home in the fall of 1945. You could hear their cheers all over downtown as the ships slowed to change pilots. In October 1945, Astoria played host to a small fleet of Navy ships that arrived just in time to celebrate Navy Day. They came from kamikazi action off Okinawa; then on the way here, they encountered a terrible typhoon. You can visualize how glad they were to be here.* (From Cumtux)