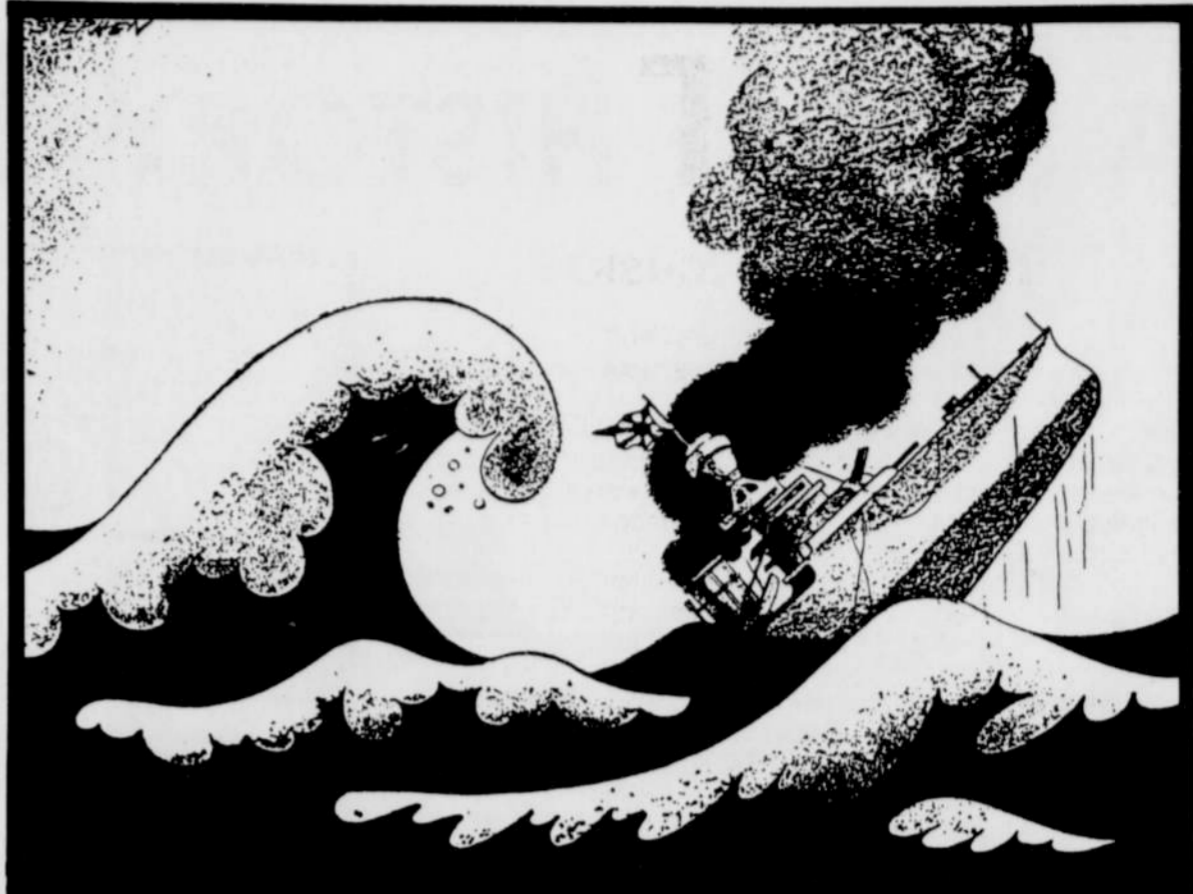


BILL CRAWFORD (USA, 1944)



STEPHEN ROTH (LONDON, 1943)

futures and decided to tear up Astoria, which was their last American port."

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 sea battle in history and ended with the virtual destruction of the Japanese Navy --- a spectacular victory for the USA despite heavy losses and serious blunders. As with the cruiser *Astoria*, survivors of *Gambier Bay* have met at CRMM for reunions at the replica of their lost ship, a society of sudden swimmers.

No longer currently on display in the Naval Gallery is an example of the other savage undersea war that was fought simultaneously with the Battle of the Atlantic, the World War 2 diesel submarine *USS 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 shot-down pilots. Rolf Klep's cutaway drawing of a typical World War 2 submarine (also removed from display) shows all its compartments, engines, submersion tanks and torpedo tubes. A similar X-ray rendering by Klep of a WW2 destroyer is on a wall next to *USS Knapp*.

Rounding out the gallery's World War 2 fleet is a model PT boat, a plywood torpedo carrying vessel perhaps the closest Americans came to suicide craft in the war, made famous by John F. Kennedy; and an attack dog type of ship, a destroyer-type converted submarine chaser. In a glassed case near twin-mounted 20-mm cannon that point skyward in perpetual wait for Japanese warplanes is a photograph of a Navy divebomber flying over what is now Clatsop County Airport. Photos of sailors on wartime seaduty (such as *Astoria's* crew members) are on the walls, and the radio broadcast of President Franklin Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech to Congress the day after Pearl Harbor, declaring war on Japan, is repeated interminably.

A poignant yet routine sight of the war years in Astoria when American servicemen crowded into the city and filled out Navy crews, aerial squadrons and combat infantry shipped to hostile shores was described by Paul Barkman:

"One day in 1944 when my patrol boat, which was about 50 miles offshore, spotted a large troopship that had come out of the Columbia River and was heading across the Pacific. We could see hundreds of soldiers at the rails, staring at us or looking back at the land many of them would never see again. I thought I knew how they felt and how they must have yearned to be in my place aboard a Coast Guard patrol boat that never left the USA or ever had a shot fired at it."

The war against Nazi Germany ended May 8, 1945, with the defeat and eradication of Nazism. (Its periodic resurrections

in various parts of the world, including the Pacific Northwest, are yet far out on the political fringe.) The Pacific Ocean War came to a conclusion that summer a few days after atomic bombs obliterated two Japanese cities. Japan surrendered to the Allies on August 14, 1945, and officially signed surrender documents aboard a U.S. battleship in Tokyo harbor, the famous *Missouri*, on September 2. Both dates are claimed as the real 'VJ Day.

(Two photographs of *Missouri* are on display in the Naval Gallery of the Maritime Museum, one the famous shot of a Kamikazi plane barely missing the ship, the other of *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay with snowcapped Mount Fuji prominently in the background.)

Whether America should have used the atomic bombs on Japan will be debated until the end of history. The claim of one million casualties if the U.S. invaded Japan has never been verified or its origin known; discussion at that 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 in the war (estimates varied 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. One point is certain, as Capt. Edward L. Beach wrote in his book, *The U.S. Navy: A 200 Year History*: "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."

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 Kamikaze 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*)

Vestiges of World War 2 remain in Astoria. The balcony and wood dance floor of a nightclub that was crowded every night during the war years with servicemen and local ladies is part of a garage between a restaurant and a plumbing store. The wharves at Tongue Point after the war berthed a fleet of 500 mothballed ships that were dismantled or sent north to Puget Sound (some retired a second time after reactivation for the Korean War 1950-53). And of course the old houses, the city's most conspicuous residences that have sheltered its population through two World Wars as well as the entire 20th Century and earlier when Astoria was a booming riverport and its canned salmon a world-class delicacy.

and that "outside agitators" were responsible. While she expressed her pinched views of democracy --- a country club torism which she represented --- her son Blair Henningsgard, then a Clatsop County Commissioner, attempted dismantling the nuclear free zone law by claiming the state attorney general's ruling that the law was unenforceable was a legal and not a political ruling by a Republican candidate for governor sowing party support.

The climbers did not intend to drop onto the battleship as authorities claimed, yet there was fear the tall ship would collide with one or more of them, which caused the delay. Finally, after the captain was convinced no one was to be hurt, the ship passed under the bridge. Two climbers raised up several feet to assure themselves of clearance.

All were arrested and initially held without bail after they climbed back onto the bridge. After several hours in jail bond was set at \$30,000 apiece by a judge impatient to watch Portland Trailblazer playoffs. Astoria attorney Elizabeth Baldwin finally got them bailed out for \$5000 (\$500 each), despite the anger of the local district attorney who wished to make them pay dearly for their dissent and possible endangering of homeporting Naval vessels in Astoria, an idea that later disintegrated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the Cold War.

Ten years later many Astorians remain angry at what they consider the willful embarrassment of Astoria by Greenpeace. Yet many others express satisfaction that Astoria was chosen to confront the Navy's nuclear policies and its arrogant violation of Clatsop County's 'Nuclear Free Zone'.

"We aren't anti-American," one of the Greenpeace climbers said at the time. "We actually care a great deal about the United States to try and make it as peaceful as possible, as good as possible." Another said he was not against the Navy "but we are against nuclear missiles."

"We felt we needed to do this and getting arrested comes with the territory," said a third.

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

It used to be remarkably easy to step back into the World War era near the Flavel House. Up a grassy knoll from Astoria's most famous Victorian was an old frame house that until recently headquartered the local Red Cross chapter. For years a French boxcar that hauled American soldiers to the frontlines in both World Wars --- on its sides painted shields by Cannon Beach artist Don Osborne of every U.S. Army unit that served in World War 1's trenchlines and World War 2's liberation of France --- was exhibited in a corner of the Flavel estate. It is now at Fort Stevens, which is the only American military installation in the lower 48 states attacked by the enemy in either World War (Hawaii, which became a state in 1959, was a U.S. territory at the time of Pearl Harbor; and the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island, a part of Alaska which was also granted Statehood in 1959, to protect their amphibious invasion of two other Aleutian Islands.)

Like most cities worldwide Astoria has a monument to the World Wars, a "Doughboy" from World War 1 scrambling through barbed wire with his infantry rifle held aloft, shouting no doubt to inspire his comrades across 'No Man's Land'. The statue looks more completely a soldier when local pranksters stick an empty whiskey or wine bottle in his other hand.

Compared to cities all over the world that were shattered by World War 2, their populations decimated by bombs, fire, disease, starvation, forced removal and extermination, Astoria's postwar problems were minor. It did not have to rebuild or recreate its reasons for being a city. Its countryside, though ravished by forest fires during the war years, had not been obliterated by savage combat or bombs. The war's end provoked an economic dislocation that was a microcosm of the early postwar years nationwide. Astoria was without a manufacturing base and did not profit from the reconversion to consumer goods (though some of its markets and shops did). The Korean War caused a flurry of activity, but afterward the Navy abandoned its Tongue Point base. Even back then there were signs of the imminent collapse of the region's resource based economies. Perhaps that is why Robert Lovell's *Cumtux* reminiscence of wartime Astoria ended on a dismayed note: "Our population still has not returned to the level of the 1940s."

World War 2 played out one last act in Astoria, however. *USS Missouri* visited the city in the late spring of 1998. It stayed for several days before being towed to Pearl Harbor to join the sunken 'Arizona' as monuments to the war. An estimated 125,000 people came to see the old battleship before its last voyage --- such crowds as will never be in Astoria again unless, as one man suggested to the Mayor, the city hosts the Olympics.

Americans are notorious for being largely indifferent to their history, yet a collective chord of memory occasionally revives and they respond as they did to *Missouri's* short visit to Astoria, a full century after battleships made the USA a world power. *Missouri*, almost the world's last battleship, represents what might well be considered the nation's high-water mark half a century later.

*Missouri* left Astoria towed by a powerful tugboat, fittingly named *Sea Victory*, disappearing to a watchful crowd into fog that rolled up from the river's mouth. The old battleship towered over more recent Navy vessels visiting the city before going upriver to the annual Rose Festival in Portland. The moment the tug moved 'Mighty Mo' toward the ocean, another famous vessel, Astoria's own *Salvage Chief*, blasted its horn in tribute.

Above the *Missouri* photographs at the Columbia River Maritime Museum is a vintage blue banner with a golden Eagle. Inscribed across the banner is a statement that probably says it all for the soldiers, sailors and airmen who survived World War 2, and who are now half a century later, in a new century, dying at a rapid rate from advanced age:

Welcome Home Buddy.

Many more wars have killed many more millions since World War 2, and for half a century afterward it seemed almost inevitable that humanity would obliterate itself by nuclear holocaust, and it is not certain yet that it eventually won't. World War 2 is a war of a previous century, the world has changed and soon the remaining survivors will be as dead as those who died in the war. Yet the war burnishes the far horizon like a persisting afterglow of a sunset long after other more recent wars have slipped past memory.

## ASTORIA'S WAR REDUX

Ten years ago, on June 6, 1990 (the 46th anniversary of 'D Day' at Normandy) the World War 2 battleship *USS New Jersey*, which fought in the Pacific during the war, including the Battle of Leyte Gulf, was stopped for the first time in its history while attempting to transit up the Columbia River past Astoria. Eight Greenpeace members dangled 200 feet in the air on ropes from the arch of the Astoria/Meglar Bridge over the shipping channel, which delayed the old battleship at least four hours during its voyage to the Portland Rose Festival. The Coast Guard offered to clear the bridge of protesters but *New Jersey's* captain responded that he did not wish to start an incident, saying that those dangling from the bridge were as much Americans as his crew and had the right to dissent that his sailors were in service to defend.

Greenpeace mobilized the demonstration with precision and imagination. The rappellers were dropped onto the bridge from three vans and they instantly tied off their lines and went over the side. Each was an experienced climber, each had a survival suit and was equipped with a 2-way radio with several channels, and banners that said 'Nuclear Free Seas'.

Their purpose was to draw attention to the possibility of the *New Jersey* carrying nuclear weapons. The Navy neither confirms or denies if its ships carry nuclear weapons. Clatsop County is and remains a nuclear free zone, voted into law by 60% of county voters, though Astoria has no such ordinance. Greenpeace pulled off the stunt with the assistance of a local group opposed to the proposed establishment of a Navy home-port in Astoria, 'Nuclear Free Harbors'. Hardly noted by news accounts of the affair was that the Cold War nuclear arms race had for the most part gone undersea in Navy submarines or out of sight of voters on the oceans' surface in naval vessels such as *New Jersey* which made land-based sites increasingly obsolete as well as bargaining commodities by the competing superpowers who were able to carry out treaty obligations while continuing the arms race.

Local officials responded angrily. Astoria's mayor Edith Henningsgard said the protest did not represent Astoria citizens



### Columbian Cafe

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