

MOCK BURIAL CEREMONY ON BOARD USS PENNSYLVANIA MARKS END OF

WARTIME CENSORSHIP

A burial at sea was held aboard the battleship PENNSYLVANIA on September 5th, 1945, but strangely enough the occasion was a happy one. To the light-hearted notes of a bosun's pipe and the accompanying strains of "Happy Days Are Here Again" by the ship's band, four of the Pennsy's officers joyously consigned to the arms of Old Neptune the censor's box which throughout the war had provided censors with one of the most distasteful of all tasks -- reading other people's mail.

With censoring officially ended on September 4th, the idea occurred to the ship's executive officer, Commander Claren E. Duke, USN, to hold appropriate burial services at sea for the square, metal box whose spacious cubby-holes, for so many months housed the daily allotment of mail for each censor. In charge of the service was the PENNSYLVANIA'S Navigator and Chief Censor, Commander William M. Kaufman, USN.

With the ship's censors (all commissioned and warrant officers) gathered on the quarterdeck the Chief Censor in mock solemnity read a letter commending all officers for their wartime censoring activities. Starting in what appeared to be a serious vein, he read,

"The ship which wins battles is the ship whose fighting spirit is maintained at a high level. By your performance of duty as ship's censors you have constantly and fearlessly aided your Chief Censor in maintaining the fighting spirit of this ship on an unusually high plane. By courageously rejecting letters and indicating no reason for your rejection, by artistic manipulation of your scissors---."

Here the Chief Censor was interrupted by appreciated guffaws from the long-suffering censors who looked upon the scissors as their badge of office. Continuing in a moment he read:

"By artistic manipulation of your scissors you have caused the blood of many a sailor to boil in righteous indignation, thus making of him a first-class fighting man who has vented his fury upon the enemy inasmuch as it was a court-martial offense to vent it on you."

This sentiment evoked spontaneous applause from the crew which had so long chafed under the yoke of censorship. Making himself heard above this applause, the Chief Censor went on:

"It is further recognized that the nation which wins wars is the nation whose fighting efficiency is high. By diligently and patiently snipping innocent little sentiments from laboriously written missives you have aroused the ire of civilians at home who upon receiving a letter resembling a cut-out paper doll have turned to their machines with controlled fury and malice in their heart. The weapons they have produced, though no doubt intended for use against censors, have eventually brought destruction to the Japanese enemy."

Having commended the censors as a group, Commander Kaufman next singled out for a special award, Lieutenant Robert E. Weaver, USN, who had served as a censor aboard the PENNSYLVANIA throughout

the entire war. The Chief Censor draped around Lieutenant Weaver's neck a red ribbon from which dangled the familiar "Passed by Naval Censor" stamp and a pair of much-used scissors. This newly created award, dubbed "The Order of Red Tape" was bestowed along with the following facetious citation:

By direction of the Chief Censor, namely myself, I take pleasure in conferring the Order of Red Tape on Lieutenant Robert E. Weaver who in fifty-three months aboard this vessel as a ship's censor has mutilated 15,967 letters.

CITATION:

"For meritorious achievement as a Ship's Censor during the late, unlamented war. Faced constantly by huge stacks of mail in your censor's box you exhibited at all times unflinching courage, perseverance and patience. With consummate skill and daring you wielded your scissors so as to delete unnecessary griping, secret information, and code words such as S.W.A.K. from the epistles of careless seamen. Even in port where the stacks of letters grew more mountainous, and some showed a tendency to laxness, you continued courageously to read nearly every other paragraph of every other letter.

For your outstanding ability, courageous conduct and leadership as a ship's censor and by the authority vested in me by myself I bestow upon you the Order of Red Tape."

W. M. KAUFMAN,
Chief Ship's Censor.

To conclude the ceremony, four officers who between them had censored more than 50,000 letters, were given the envied task of disposing of the last remnants of war-time censorship. With obvious pleasure and enthusiasm they heaved the censor's box over the life-lines and into the sea. As the hated box disappeared beneath blue Pacific waters three rousing cheers rang out from the censors themselves and from the assembled crew. Censorship, the most irksome of all non-combat wartime activities, had come to an end on the USS PENNSYLVANIA and throughout the fleet.