

## **Ole Leaky WEEKS 1950 -1954**

**By Jack Joyce**

(Writing Your Life Stories Group)

\*Named for naval officer, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of War John W. Weeks the DD-701 was commissioned on 21 July 1944.

How nice it was to receive my copy of the Tin Can Sailor newspaper and see the article by Dave Kurtz, VP of the USS JOHN W. WEEKS (DD-701) Association, of which I am a member. It brought back so many memories of my days aboard the Ole Leaky Weeks as she was affectionately known.

I graduated from boot camp in September 1950 and was told I was going to storekeeper's school in Bayonne, New Jersey, which was my home state. We were not given any boot leave because Korea was really picking up, and we were told that the boot leave would be given at our next duty station. I lived less than 20 miles from Bayonne, so I wasn't too concerned about the leave. Was I ever surprised when I was told that I was going to Charleston, South Carolina, to pick up a destroyer. I was given orders for myself and about 13 others from my company and was told I was in charge of that draft. We boarded the train in Chicago and the next evening, we arrived in Charleston.

At that time, the WEEKS was undergoing recommissioning and you could not live on it. We were assigned to a barracks ship. An APL. The next morning, which was a Saturday, we reported to one of the CPO's and were each given a sea bag inspection. I said to the Chief that we were told to ask for our boot leave at the next duty station. He said the ship was going into commission in two-and-a-half weeks and there would be no leave for anyone until after that date, which I believe was October 24<sup>th</sup>. The WEEKS had just been put in mothballs in May of 1950, and four months later, was being recommissioned. Our whole division was being activated at about the same time. We were assigned to Destroyer Squadron 22, Division 222. The three other ships were the flagship, USS AULT (DD-698), USS WALDRON (DD-699), and the USS HAYNSWORTH (DD-700).

The ship was a mess to say the least, with hoses and yard workers all over the place. Each morning we would muster on the dock and march over a few piers to where the WEEKS was tied up and start working on the ship. You never knew where you were going to be assigned. I remember one day I was down in one of

the holds sorting out life jackets. We came across a box of sea rations from WWII that had to be discarded; I believe there was a small pack of cigarettes in there, about four to a pack. Some of the fellows lit them up and soon threw them away because they'd been there for a good five years. At night, we were assigned fire watches. While the yard workers welded, they would give us protective goggles and a fire extinguisher in case a spark from the welding rod ignited something it wasn't supposed to.

The ship went into commission and we never got our boot leave, nor did I ever get to storekeepers school. But after a year on the deck force, I was transferred to the radio shack and made RM2 as I was getting discharged.

In September 1951 we went to the Med. The WEEKS and the USS WILLARD KEITH (DD-775) went on a good-will tour of Northern Europe. While in Bordeaux, France, the WEEKS was called out to standby and to rescue a merchant ship, the SS FLYING ENTERPRISE, which had capsized in the North Atlantic in the worst storm in 50 years. We were with them for about five or six days in the roughest weather I have ever seen. We ate sandwiches, Spam I believe, because it was so rough the cooks couldn't cook. We finally were relieved, but we did pass coffee and cigarettes to Captain Kurt Karlsen; who remained with the ship. The KEITH came out to relieve us, and we limped back to Plymouth, England, because we were low on fuel and had lost most of our water-tight integrity on the doors and hatches.

We were given a hero's welcome in Plymouth. Newsreel cameras and reporters were all over the ship and were paying top dollar for any pictures that were taken while we were there. We didn't realize how much publicity we were getting until we returned to the states and my parents told me that all they heard about were the attempts for a rescue. A seagoing English tug finally got out there and put a tow line on the ENTERPRISE, but it snapped about 20 miles from Landsend, England, and the ENTERPRISE sank. Karlsen did get off the ship and in New York, he was given a hero's welcome.

The Isbrantsen Line that owned the ENTERPRISE presented the WEEKS and KEITH with a plaque that used to hang amidships. I believe that Hal Gross obtained it from D.C., because I remember seeing it at one of the reunions.

On our World Cruise of 1953-54, two of the ships in our division, the AULT and HAYNSWORTH, collided in the Sea of Japan and the WEEKS was called upon to take up the slack. Also the flag that was on the AULT was transferred to the WEEKS.

Yes, the WEEKS was a good ship and never missed a calling. There were also a couple of other ribbons mentioned in the article that we were awarded while I served on her. There were the European Occupation Ribbon and the United Nations Ribbon with Korean clasp. There were also other ribbons from the Korean era that were awarded to me many years after I was discharged. I had lost my originals and our Congresswoman here in Florida was successful in having replacements sent to me.

I have many fond memories of the ship and its crew. I served on it for over four years and was proud to be a tin can sailor aboard the Ole Leaky Weeks.