Monday Maritime Matters

Description

Other fine maritime issues reading (in case you missed it yesterday): Wake Island, 1941 at Eagle Speak and (in case you missed it today): Maritime Monday 90 at Fred Fry International.
â€”-
His name was James Richard Ward. A Seaman First Class aboard the USS OKLAHOMA (BB-37) on the morning of Dec 7th, 1941.





Born in Sept 10th, 1921, he enlisted in the Navy in Cincinnati, OH in Nov, 1940. On that fateful day, Seaman Ward had manned his assigned station in one of the 14â€³ gun turrets. He was, by derivation, a crew member of one of the main guns, as the secondary battery guns are properly called â€œmounts,â€• with the title of â€œturretâ€• being reserved for the large naval guns mounted on battle ships and large cruisers.From the Wikipedia entry:

> She was based at Pearl Harbor from 6 December 1940 for patrols and exercises, and was moored in Battleship Row on 7 December 1941, when the Japanese attacked. Outboard alongside USS Maryland, Oklahoma took three torpedo hits almost immediately after the first Japanese bombs fell. As she began to capsize, two more torpedoes struck home, and her men were strafed as they abandoned ship. Within 20 minutes after the attack began, she had rolled over until halted by her masts touching bottom, her starboard side above water, and a part of her keel clear.
>
> Many of her crew, however, remained in the fight, clambering aboard Maryland to help serve her anti-aircraft batteries. Twenty officers and 395 enlisted men were killed or missing. [â€¦]

James Ward was one of the men who perished when the ship capsized, but he did so ensuring his shipmates had a fighting chance of surviving. The citation for his Medal of Honor tells the story:

> For conspicuous devotion to duty, extraordinary courage and complete disregard of his life, above and beyond the call of duty, during the attack on the Fleet in Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces on 7 December 1941. When it was seen that the U.S.S. Oklahoma was going to capsize and the order was given to abandon ship, Ward remained in a turret holding a flashlight so the remainder of the turret crew could see to escape, thereby sacrificing his own life.

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A life defined in 20 minutes and he could have scrambled for the hatch and safety, too, but he didnâ€™t. The USS OKLAHOMA suffered the second highest casualty count of any unit at Pearl Harbor.



In honor of Seaman First Class J. Richard Ward, the USS J RICHARD WARD (DE-243), a unit of the EDSALL Class DEs, was commissioned on July 5th, 1943, LT T. S. Dunstan commanding. By September, she had completed her training and was running convoy escort operations between the US East Coast and Europe. The war in Europe ended and she was modernized for duty in the Pacific Theater. Sailing from New York on June 28th, 1945, she was enroute Pearl Harbor when the Japanese surrendered.On June 13th, 1946, the USS J RICHARD WARD was decommissioned and placed in the Reserve Fleet.The Class of EDSALL DEs is memorialized at the USS SLATER (DE-766) museum in Albany, NY. The SLATER is the last DE of the class still in existence.

In doing some of this research, I also found the Destroyer Escort Sailors Association (DESA) website. If you are one, you can join up as a sustaining member to help keep the history records alive. Lots of resoruces there for the history of these small, but important ships, to include some â€œlife aboard DEsâ€• section, and then there are the â€œsea stories,â€• including one by Ernie Pyle riding on a DE during the war:

> In the Western Pacific â€" So now Iâ€™m a D-E sailor. Full-fledged one. Drenched from head to foot with salt water. Sleep with a leg crooked around your rack so you wonâ€™t fall out. Put wet bread under your dinner tray to keep it from sliding. Even got my Jesus-shoes ordered.
>
> And you donâ€™t know what a D-E sailor is? You donâ€™t know the D-E Navy? Better not let one of them hear you say that. Theyâ€™re 50,000 strong out here. And they pride themselves on their rough life at sea. So better be careful.
>
> A D-E, my friends, is a destroyer-escort. Itâ€™s a ship, long and narrow and sleek, along the lines of a destroyer. But itâ€™s much smaller. Itâ€™s a baby destroyer. Itâ€™s the American version of the British corvette.
>
> It is the answer to the problems of colossal amounts of convoying; amounts so huge that we simply hadnâ€™t the time to build full-fledged destroyers to escort them all. The D-E was the result. It is a wartime product, and it has done very valiantly.
> [â€¦]

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Many other interesting bits of history are listed on the DESA site.

Category

1. Navy

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