Monday Maritime Matters

Description

Note: When youâ€™re done here, donâ€™t forget Sunday Ship History â€“ The AF at Sea and the massive compendium at Frey Fry International Maritime Monday 91!

History Note: Today is the day ADM Nimitz assumed command of the Pacific Fleet in 1941.
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LCDR Jackson Pharris, USN

Photo Credit: HOWARD LIPIN / Union-Tribune

Born in Colombus, GA June 26th, 1912, he is another hero of the attack on Pearl Harbor, LCDR Pharris was passing the ammunition anyway he could get it to the anti-aircraft gun crews, and conducting damage control and life saving work at the same time aboard the USS CALIFORNIA on December 7th.From the Arlington National Cemetery site:

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> For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while attached to the U.S.S. California during the surprise enemy Japanese aerial attack on Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii, 7 December 1941.
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> In charge of the ordnance repair party on the third deck when the first Japanese torpedo struck almost directly under his station, Lieutenant (then Gunner) Pharris was stunned and severely injured by the concussion which hurled him to the overhead and back to the deck. Quickly recovering, he acted on his own initiative to set up a hand-supply ammunition train for the antiaircraft guns. With water and oil rushing in where the port bulkhead had been torn up from the deck, with many of the remaining crewmembers overcome by oil fumes, and the ship without power and listing heavily to port as a result of a second torpedo hit, Lieutenant Pharris ordered the shipfitters to counterflood. Twice rendered unconscious by the nauseous fumes and handicapped by his painful injuries, he persisted in his desperate efforts to speed up the supply of ammunition and at the same time repeatedly risked his life to enter flooding compartments and drag to safety unconscious shipmates who were gradually being submerged in oil.
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> By his inspiring leadership, his valiant efforts and his extreme loyalty to his ship and her crew, he saved many of his shipmates from death and was largely responsible for keeping the California in action during the attack. His heroic conduct throughout this first eventful engagement of World War 11 reflects the highest credit upon Lieutenant Pharris and enhances the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service.

Jackson Pharris joined the Navy in 1933 and was stationed aboard the USS MISSISSiPPI (BB-41), serving in the Gunnery Department until 1940, when he transferred to USS CALIFORNIA (BB-44).

From Wikipedia, more on Jackson Pharrisâ€™ military career:

Due to the injuries he received, Pharris was hospitalized at Naval Hospital, Pearl Harbor until March 1942. After being released from the hospital, he returned to the USS California. On July 17, 1942, Pharris earned his commission. In January 1943 he was admitted again to the US Naval Hospital after collapsing because of lack of oxygen due to oil still in his lungs. He returned to duty in June.

In October 1944 Pharris moved to Boston, Massachusetts where he reported aboard the USS Saint Paul (CA-73), a newly commissioned heavy cruiser. The ship left for Japan to participate in bombardments of the Japanese mainland. In September 1945, just five days after the surrender proclamation, Lt. Pharris was on deck when a Japanese kamikaze dove at the ship. He ordered the crew to take cover and he directed the firing of the guns and shot it down. His back was broken from the impact of the guns.

Lt. Pharris was transported to US Naval Hospital Oakland, California. In October 1945 he was transferred to US Naval Hospital Long Beach, California. After discharge from the hospital in April 1946 he was temporarily assigned to Naval Weapons Station Seal Beach, Terminal Island, Long Beach Naval Shipyard and Port Hueneme. He was medically retired in May 1948 as a Lieutenant Commander. His Congressional Medal of Honor was presented by President Harry S. Truman on June 25, 1948.

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LCDR Jackson died Oct 16th, 1966 and is buried at the Arlington National Cemetery.

His Medal of Honor (which is the one pictured above) has a story of itâ€™s own, only recently revealed. The report below also provides some insight into the character of the man who was awarded the Medal of Honor, from what he told his children. From the San Diego Union story:

WWII Medal of Honor winnerâ€™s family finally regains decoration

By Alex Roth
STAFF WRITER

October 3, 2007

The strange tale of Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jackson Pharrisâ€™ Medal of Honor begins as many old-timersâ€™ war stories do: with the bombing of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941.

His heroic actions on that infamous day earned him the nationâ€™s highest military award for valor. The medalâ€™s subsequent travels Ã¢â‚¬â€œ from Pharrisâ€™ possession to a bank vault to the bowels of a government office building Ã¢â‚¬â€œ provide a case study in what happens when the state of California seizes unclaimed property.

Unlike many other stories of noble battles waged against foreign enemies and Sacramento bureaucrats, this one has a happy ending. At a Navy base in Coronado yesterday, the medal was returned to Pharrisâ€™ family during a posthumous ceremony that served as a reminder of how brave he was.
[â€¦]

After his death, his wife took possession of his medals. When she became ill, one of his daughters, Janet Pharris, placed them in a safe-deposit box at a bank in San Pedro. Then, in 2002, Janet Pharris died of a heart attack, and a few months later her mother died of a stroke.

Jackson Pharrisâ€™ three living children went through their motherâ€™s and sisterâ€™s possessions and quickly realized their fatherâ€™s war medals were missing.

The medals, of course, meant the world to them. Pharrisâ€™ youngest son, Jeff, recalls giving a report about his father to his sixth-grade class and realizing for the first time what his father had done to earn the Medal of Honor.

Ã¢â‚¬Å“I can remember as a little boy putting it around my neck and wearing it and thinking it was pretty cool,Ã¢â‚¬Â• said Jeff Pharris, 48, who manages a Home Depot in Oceanside.

After Janet Pharris died, the medals sat in the safe-deposit box for three years until the bank, by law, turned the items over to the state as unclaimed property. Several years passed, and Pharrisâ€™ children tried to find the medals, with no success.

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Ã¢â‚¬Å“By the time we tracked down the bank, it had already been turned over to the state, and it kind of went into a black hole,Ã¢â‚¬Â• said one of his sons, Jack Pharris II, 63, a Rancho Palos Verdes real estate agent.
[â€¦]
Meanwhile, California officials passed a law eliminating some of the red tape that was making it difficult for state officials to find the owners of seized property. State Controller John Chiang, who took office last year, announced in August that he was stepping up efforts to return seized property to its rightful owners.

During the news conference, Chiang mentioned some of the odd items the state has seized over the years. He specifically mentioned a Medal of Honor.

Later that month, Chiangâ€™s staff tracked down Pharrisâ€™ children, who were thrilled.

Ã¢â‚¬Å“Weâ€™d been looking for the medal for a long time,Ã¢â‚¬Â• Jack Pharris said.

A dozen Pearl Harbor survivors were present for yesterdayâ€™s ceremony in the Medal of Honor courtyard at Coronado Naval Amphibious Base. So was Vice Adm. Terrance Etnyre, commander of Naval Surface Forces.

In a brief address to those in attendance, Jack Pharris described his father as Ã¢â‚¬Å“a modest guyÃ¢â‚¬Â• and a Ã¢â‚¬Å“normal dadÃ¢â‚¬Â• who felt sheepish about having received such a prestigious honor. The elder Pharris always believed that plenty of other sailors were every bit as brave as he was that day, his son recalled.

Whenever his children would ask him about the medal, Jackson Pharris would reply, Ã¢â‚¬Å“This is what you did in a crisis situation.Ã¢â‚¬Â•
[..]

On Jan 26th, 1974, the USS PHARRIS (DE-1094) (later FF-1094) of the KNOX Class, was commissioned.The PHARRIS was assigned to the Atlantic Fleet and I can track down two specific deployments of UNITAS XXI (Summer/Fall 1982), and a Mediterranean deployment in 1987-88, when she escorted the *MV Mighty Servant* while that ship carried the USS SAMUEL B ROBERTS (FFG-58) home after hitting the mine in the Persian Gulf.

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IN 1992, the USS PHARRIS was decommissioned and transferred to Mexico and renamed the *ARM Victoria (F-213)*, one of four KNOX frigates serving in the Mexican Navy today..

Category

1. Navy

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