

MEMORIES FROM DONALD A. CRUSE AEROGRAPHER SECOND CLASS, U.S. NAVY



USS WASP (CV-7) became my happy home in the spring of 1941, when three young Aerographers shouldered their sea bags and hammocks to WASP from RANGER (CV-4). Both ships were briefly at anchor in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, during exercises. Very soon WASP became active in President Roosevelt's so-called "Neutrality Patrol" across the Atlantic, operating mostly from Bermuda. We also ferried a deck load of P40 aircraft to Iceland for the Army Air Corps (one of two voyages to Iceland).

WASP was at anchor in Grasse Bay, Bermuda on 7th December, 1941. Much idle time was spent sunbathing on the flight deck; and that is where I was when I heard the PA system announce the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Within a few hours we were underway for Martinique, located in the Windward Islands, with orders to blockade three French 'men o' war' that were taking refuge there (an aircraft carrier and two cruisers). We saw our ordnance men loading real bombs on our dive bombers for the first time. Our diplomats settled it.

When the BISMARCK broke out of the German seaport and was sighted in Denmark Strait, WASP attempted to sortie from Argentia, Newfoundland. Winter weather iced our flight deck and made flight operations impractical. We took temporary refuge in Casco Bay where our crew enjoyed exceptional Maine hospitality. In April 1942 we steamed to Scapa Flow to coordinate the ferry operation to Malta - for example, our signalmen learned to identify strange flags utilized by RN vessels. I accompanied my Aerological Officer, LT S. W. Betts USN, on a visit to HMS KING GEORGE V for fresh details of weather broadcasts WASP would need to use. Our scout bombers were flown ashore to RAF Hatston for the duration. Two fighting squadrons remained aboard and operated from our flight deck after the Spitfires were loaded

From Scapa Flow WASP steamed to Greenock where she picked up a tow wire from a large tug for the trip up the Clyde to Glasgow with our crew at "flight deck parade." From open windows near the river we saw people waving. As we approached the city visibility was restricted by dense smoke. As we moored in the King George V docks, one could see only half the length of our flight deck. The incoming Spitfires buzzed WASP as they prepared to land at Renfrew Field nearby. Soon the forty-seven brand new Spits were being hoisted aboard and stowed in our hangar deck. HMS RENOWN accompanied us into the Med and back. Off Biscay the destroyer screen was busy prosecuting potential submarine threats. One Spit was lost over the bow at launch.

Due to heavy attrition of the Spits after arriving in Malta, WASP was ordered to repeat the task; so we returned to Glasgow. Our hangar deck crew devised slings to safely stow two Spits in the overhead bays, so on our second voyage WASP carried forty-nine. Our ship suffered a minor casualty in the narrow river at sailing when one ship's propeller dinged the quay while backing out of the King George V docks. We proceeded to the Irish Sea for trials before continuing to the Med with maximum speed reduced to about twenty knots. At launch time in the Med, we could have used more speed to create wind across the deck for the Spits because surface wind conditions were nearly calm. But Captain "Blackjack" Reeves USN knew his business and restricted our speed enough to avoid damaging vibration.

Sgt Pilot Smith inadvertently dropped his auxiliary fuel tank after launching and chose to attempt a landing, which he skilfully accomplished. As we exited the Med he was



launched for Gibraltar. From that load, forty-eight Spits reached Malta and proceeded to hold a field day on Luftwaffe bombers. Following this operation, Prime Minister Churchill sent his oft-quoted message, "Who said a WASP cannot sting twice!"

Submitted by CDR Don Cruse. USN Retired
NWSA Historian

THE YEAR 1906, A Reminder, Since you don't REMEMBER

Show this to your children and grand children. One hundred years ago, what a difference a century makes! Here are some of the U.S. Statistics for the Year 1906:

The average life expectancy in the U.S. was 47 years.

Only 14 percent of the homes in the U.S. had a bathtub.

Only 8 percent of the homes had a telephone.

A three-minute call from Denver to New York City cost eleven dollars

There were only 8,000 cars in the U.S., and only 144 miles of paved roads.

The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.

Alabama, Mississippi, Iowa, and Tennessee were each more heavily populated than California.

With a mere 1.4 million people, California was only the 21st most populous state in the Union.

The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower!

The average wage in the U.S. was 22 cents per hour.

The average U.S. worker made between \$200 and \$400 per year.