

SEASICK. WHO? ME?

By Commander J. H. De Loach

The Spring/Summer 2017 issue of THE SILENT DEFENDERS featured five NMA members who are also renowned authors, one of them Mr. Herman L. Wouk, former WWII Lieutenant serving in the USS ZANE (DMS-14) and later author of, inter alia, THE CAINE MUTINY. Mr. Wouk's creative writing based upon experience in small ships, and a gift of description only a Sailor who has "been there" could envision, has long been a part of my memory stemming from when I first "met" him in late 1952.

At the time, I was a yeoman first class recently assigned as senior yeoman on the staff of Commander Landing Ship Flotilla TWO at Little Creek, Virginia. We were making all preparations to conduct an amphibious landing exercise on the island of Vieques in the Caribbean after the New Year. Although I had recently been in a similar exercise on my previous ship, USS LST 1071 (Landing Ship, Tank--some said Large Slow Target), I was certainly not opposed to spending part of the cold Norfolk winter in the sunny climes of the Caribbean. As part of my preparation, I had recently bought a copy of Mr. Wouk's new book, THE CAINE MUTINY and it was certainly going into my ditty bag for the cruise.

We did embark in the Flagship, USS SHELIKOF (AVP-52), an auxiliary seaplane tender along the same lines and size of a destroyer, in late January and set sail with our group of LST's for the Caribbean. Except for the loss of one bow door by an LST, the exercise was successful and ships were released to proceed independently to assigned liberty ports; our ship headed for Kingston, Jamaica, for our three-day port call. So far, so good.

Those three days were over quickly, but well rested, tanned and broke, SHELIKOF's linehandlers took in all lines as she backed away from the pier and then headed east, then northeast as one of the frequent hurricanes spawned in the Caribbean began developing all around us. As the wind and seas built, our lady rose and fell up and down the wave troughs as well as beginning rolling a bit from side to side. Although not yet really violent in these actions, Staff office work on the old manual typewriters was not possible as their carriages would not work on the uproll and ran too quickly downhill on the downroll. Someone, however, was required to man the phone therein and most of my people were already seasick. As I had endured the gyrations of the flat-bottomed LST's in heavy weather without calling "O'Rourke," I volunteered to take the watch.

Since I could not work, I retrieved Mr. Wouk's tale of the sea from my desk drawer, tipped back in a chair with my heels on the edge of the typewriter well in front of me and continued reading where I had stopped a few days ago. This tale was a WWII story of officers on a destroyer minesweeper—a DMS—in the Pacific, and I was well into the time they were caught in a typhoon—some have since disparagingly termed it Halsey's Typhoon--pitching and rolling heavily almost to the point of capsizing. As I read, our own ship continued pitching and rolling albeit to a lesser degree, but the vivid scenes of the writer and a fertile imagination of this reader mentally transported him onto the bridge of the CAINE:

"Kay. All engines ahead full. Right standard rudder. Steady on 180," said (CO) Queeg.....'

"Rudder is right standard, sir," said (Helmsman) Stilwell. 'Jesus, she's getting shoved around fast. Heading 010, sir—020--' Like a kite in the wind, the minesweeper heeled, and swept sharply to the right. Fear tingled in (OOD) Willie's arms and legs as he was swung against the wet windows. 'Heading 035, sir—040--'"