



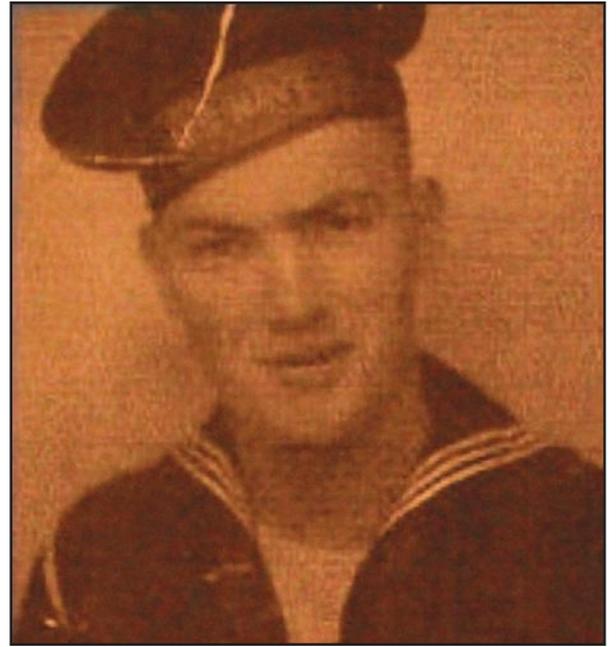
WATER TENDER SECOND CLASS WARREN CRAIG UNITED STATES NAVY WORLD WAR II

Warren Craig received his Purple Heart for injuries he suffered near Guadalcanal in late 1942. The United States had been in World War II for less than one year. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had destroyed most of the United States Navy's Pacific Fleet. Most of our battleships and destroyers were in the Atlantic supporting England. In the Pacific, the Japanese controlled all of the east coast of China, and were conquering islands from the Philippines to the Marshall Islands. It was not until the middle of 1942 that the United States began the long and arduous task of pushing back the Japanese imperialists.

Warren Craig was born July 15, 1924 in New Windsor, New York, "the seventh son of the seventh son. Seven is supposed to bring you good luck. Well, it brought me back home alive." As a child, he enjoyed fixing old, beat up objects to make them work again. He focused his interest on clocks and bicycles that he picked up from his local junkyard. He bought for next to nothing an old, broken car. The gentleman he bought it from had to help him drive it down the street. The car had been tossed aside for so long that snakes had built a home under the seats, and were crawling around inside the car as it bounced down the road.

A businessman offered Warren a job at his car dealership, an offer that was declined. "I wanted to be my own man. I just wasn't interested."

December 7, 1941. Warren Craig is walking down the street with his friends when he first hears the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. "My friends said to me, 'Warren, this is a good time to join the Navy.' I guess I listened to them.... I was always fascinated with the ships the Navy had." He walked over to the recruiting station in the post office, on Liberty Street in Newburgh. He was seventeen. "They said, 'we can't take you, you're too young, you'll have to get

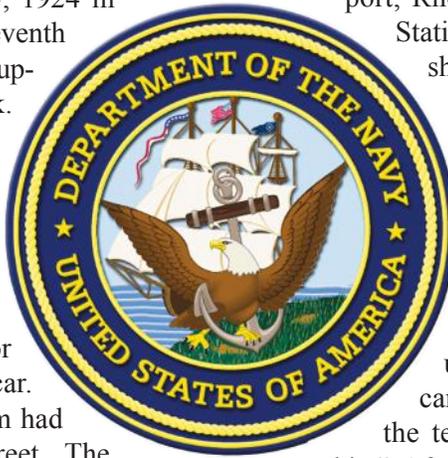


your parents to sign for you." His parents refused, but he persisted. "I wanted to do something for my country. I kept on raising hell until my parents consented."

He enlisted February 25, 1942, and was sent to Newport, Rhode Island to the Naval Training Station. "They had to take school kids, shove them in, and hope they made it.... They showed you how to kill another person before they could kill you. It was either you or them. I'm glad I never had to use it."

Warren enlisted as an engineer. "I wanted to learn a trade I could use in the outside world." He became the "handy-man, the guy with the technical know-how on board the ship." After six weeks of training, he was sent to the Brooklyn Navy Yard, assigned to the USS Duncan, DD 485. The destroyer had been named after Silas Duncan, a United States Navy officer during the War of 1812, who had received special Congressional recognition for his bravery. The USS Duncan could reach speeds of 38 knots, approximately forty-five miles per hour. Equipped with four five-inch .38 caliber guns, depth charge launchers, torpedoes, and anti-aircraft weapons, it was a threat to any enemy ship they encountered. They would need the firepower in the upcoming months.

They encountered their first fighting in the Atlantic after leaving Brooklyn, chasing German U-boats and acting as escorts in the first major U.S. naval engagement off the East Coast, dubbed "The Battle of the





Atlantic.” The crew would locate the U-Boat and drop depth charges, explosives set to detonate after sinking a certain distance, blowing up any nearby submarines. “You never knew [at the moment] whether you had hit one or not. We would wake up in the morning and there would be bodies floating in the Atlantic.... That would indicate that you sank a submarine.”

They were unsure whether they would be sent on to Europe, or to the Pacific. They soon found out.

“President Roosevelt said on the radio, we had to put more ships in the South Pacific.... The Japanese were taking island after island, heading for Australia,

then they were going to come up into Panama, and then up into the United States.”

In August 1942 the Duncan and crew were sent through the Panama Canal into the Pacific Ocean, where their first duty was escorting battleships, reducing the risk of their being destroyed by the enemy. They headed for the Solomon Islands, to assist the United States Marines fighting for the islands, although Craig did not know it at the time.

Eventually Craig was in charge of the boiler room and fifteen men. He found himself constantly studying manuals, books, everything he could find about the ship’s equipment and mechanical systems. He learned how to fix just about everything on board the ship.

South Pacific Theatre, September 1942. Now a Fireman 3rd Class, he was leaning over the railing on the deck of the Duncan, when he first saw the heavy black smoke billowing up from an American aircraft carrier, the USS Wasp. Before his eyes, Japanese torpedoes struck the ammunition room on the ship, blowing it up. “All hell broke loose.... So

many guys died, lads just like me who never came home.” One hundred ninety-three enlisted men died in moments.

It was a sobering sight. “I was scared,” he admits. “I never showed it in front of my men. But at night I would cry myself to sleep. So many nightmares. I cry myself to sleep even today, so many young kids died, just in a matter of minutes.”

Craig has earned the right to speak bluntly. “It was a one-way deal. You were put there until you got sunk or beaten up.... It was no place to be.”

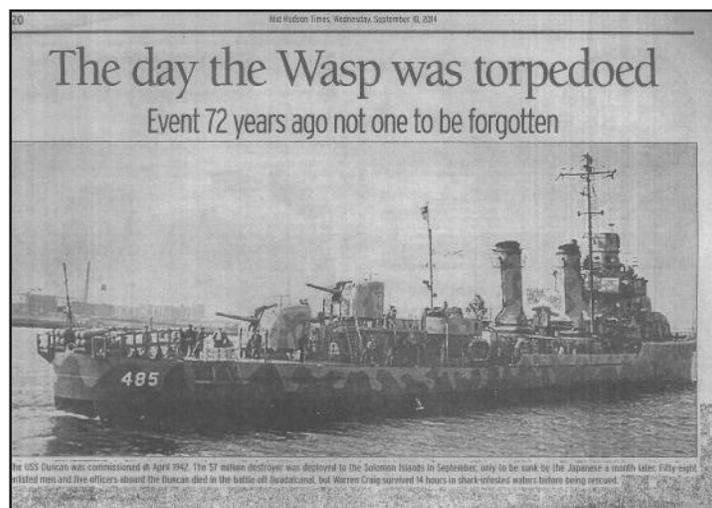
It was nighttime on October 11, 1942. The Duncan was stationed off of Savo Island, on the lookout for submarines. Craig’s battle station was in the ammunition room, the worst place to be on a ship during a battle. The men were awake, singing hymns, when the Duncan steamed straight into the middle of Japanese ships, part of the “Tokyo Express,” a fleet of destroyers escorting convoys of enemy soldiers and supplies to Guadalcanal. The Duncan opened fire with its cannon and torpedoes, destroying a Japanese cruiser, before turning its guns on a Japanese destroyer. In the magazine room, Warren Craig recalls feeling the ship getting hit with shells; he later found out they came from both the Japanese and the American warships. In pitch darkness, Warren Craig remained at the sides of his comrades at their battle station. “I was down in the engineer room, with all this ammunition around us. I felt the ship get hit again. It felt like a giant was lifting up the whole boat.” Two sailors were trapped in the second magazine room. They couldn’t escape because the hatches were jammed shut by the explosion. Craig managed to save them by creating an escape way by dismantling some equipment. “How we got out of there, I don’t know.”

Warren pulled them out, before going around the burning ship looking for any wounded sailors among the wreckage.

“You’d hardly imagine a steel ship could catch fire, but there’s enough munitions and flammable things that it can.” He was finally forced to abandon the sinking vessel.

The Duncan eventually sank after taking fifty-six hits. The final farewell the crew gave to their beloved ship was opening the sea valves, and setting depth charges to blow up the ship as it went down, preventing the Japanese from later pulling the boat out of the water.

As Craig jumped overboard to escape the fires and explosions, shells were still bursting around him. “I didn’t think I’d live. The paint was burning right off the steel.” He ended up swimming in the water for fourteen hours. “When the



sharks get excited, they'll eat you right up. There were two sharks nearby, but I wasn't attacked." He swam under the scorching tropical sun, searing his legs, shoulders, his back. Close to death from exposure, he was saved by two Marines from an American warship who pulled him out of the water. The doctors immediately went to work on saving his life. They had to re-hydrate him and treat his exposed skin all over his body, which had been severely sunburned. After several days in the hospital, Craig eventually recovered enough to be released back to duty.

On Christmas Eve 1942, Warren Craig returned to sea on the destroyer USS Shubrick. The destroyer sailed out of Norfolk, Virginia, destined for the Mediterranean Sea in support of the Allies' North Africa campaign. In 1943, they escorted the forces under Lieutenant General George Patton, commander of the Western Task Force during the invasion of Sicily. The combined German and Italian defense forces had heavy fortifications on the shoreline. "Our ships blew up the beaches for our invasion forces."

Off of Palermo one night, all of a sudden, "the sky lit up like it was daytime. The Germans started bombing our ships. A 500-pound bomb went right down the middle of the ship. It split the torpedo officer in half." Fifteen men were killed in the boiler room. "I'm down there with the rescue party pulling up guys out of the boiler room.... I'm holding a guy on my lap; he's alive but his skin is badly burned and he dies while I'm holding him.... Another guy came along, but he died, too." The memory haunts him to this day, the recollection of men dying in his arms, too badly injured for anyone to save them.

Battered but operable, and forced out of action, the destroyer limped to dry dock, where the bodies of the fallen mariners were recovered for proper burial. The sailors were forced to send divers into the flooded compartments in order to retrieve the bodies. Despite the damage to the ship, it was sent sailing back home to New York. "We needed an escort. We couldn't maneuver away from a submarine with only one engine."

The workers fixed the ship quickly, faster than it had taken to build, and Craig and crew set sail once again for Europe, arriving in Ireland in May 1944. During Operation Overlord, when Allied forces stormed the Nazi fortified French beaches, Warren Craig found himself in the middle of another heavy battle. At one point, the men on board the Navy ships sailing in the English Channel had trouble with German artillery located ashore. Unable to identify the position of the gunners, the Shubrick was sent close to shore as a decoy, in an attempt to find the location of the Germans by inducing them to fire, which they did. Ships nearby were hit, but the Shubrick was not damaged. After heavy fighting on the

beaches, the Allied Forces began their push through Western Europe, and, after a few months, the ships in the English Channel were sent elsewhere. "We knew the war was just about over when there was nowhere left for us to be sent."

Most of the Allied warships were re-directed to the Pacific, where there was still heavy fighting against the Empire of Japan. After a brief respite in the States, and the chance to visit his brother stationed in Hawaii, Warren Craig was sent to Okinawa, escorting six Patrol Torpedo boats, speedboats equipped with machine guns and torpedoes. The PT boats were hated by the Japanese sailors, who often referred to them as "devil boats," for the casualties they inflicted upon enemy ships, and their ability to escape unscathed.

The crew then sailed to the Philippines, where Warren came down with a bad case of dysentery. Badly dehydrated, it was all the doctors could do to keep fluids in his body. He lost fifty pounds in one week. His enlistment ran out, so, after he recovered, "the Navy had to let me go." When he heard the news of Little Boy destroying Hiroshima, Warren knew the war was over for good. "There was little celebration.... It was just another day for me. I was twenty-one years old then.... I had gone from being a boy to a man."

"Young lads just like me who never came home.... So few people today care about this. They would rather go to a ball game than a veteran's funeral."

Warren Craig was honorably discharged at Lido Beach, Long Island in November 1945. He received many commendations and citations including the Purple Heart. He came home to New Windsor, New York, going to work at the carpet factory in nearby Ferncliff. With the skills

that he had learned in the Navy, he was put to work in the pipefitting shop. Warren left to go work for a friend, doing pipefitting and plumbing for "the rich guys of Newburgh." He finally started his own business buying and selling cars. He worked all day, most every day, until late at night or until his wife called him home to supper. "I didn't mind the hard work. I was glad to be alive." He still owns the shop to this day.

Despite the time that has passed since World War II, he still carries with him the horror of his experiences. He sometimes still cries himself to sleep at night, thinking about his fellow sailors who perished protecting the lives of Americans back home. "Young lads just like me who never came home.... So few people today care about this. They would rather go to a ball game than a veteran's funeral."

But Warren Craig has no regrets. He has been blessed with a loving wife and numerous children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. "It's been an interesting life. I'd like to make it stretch another ten years if I can get this body back in shape."