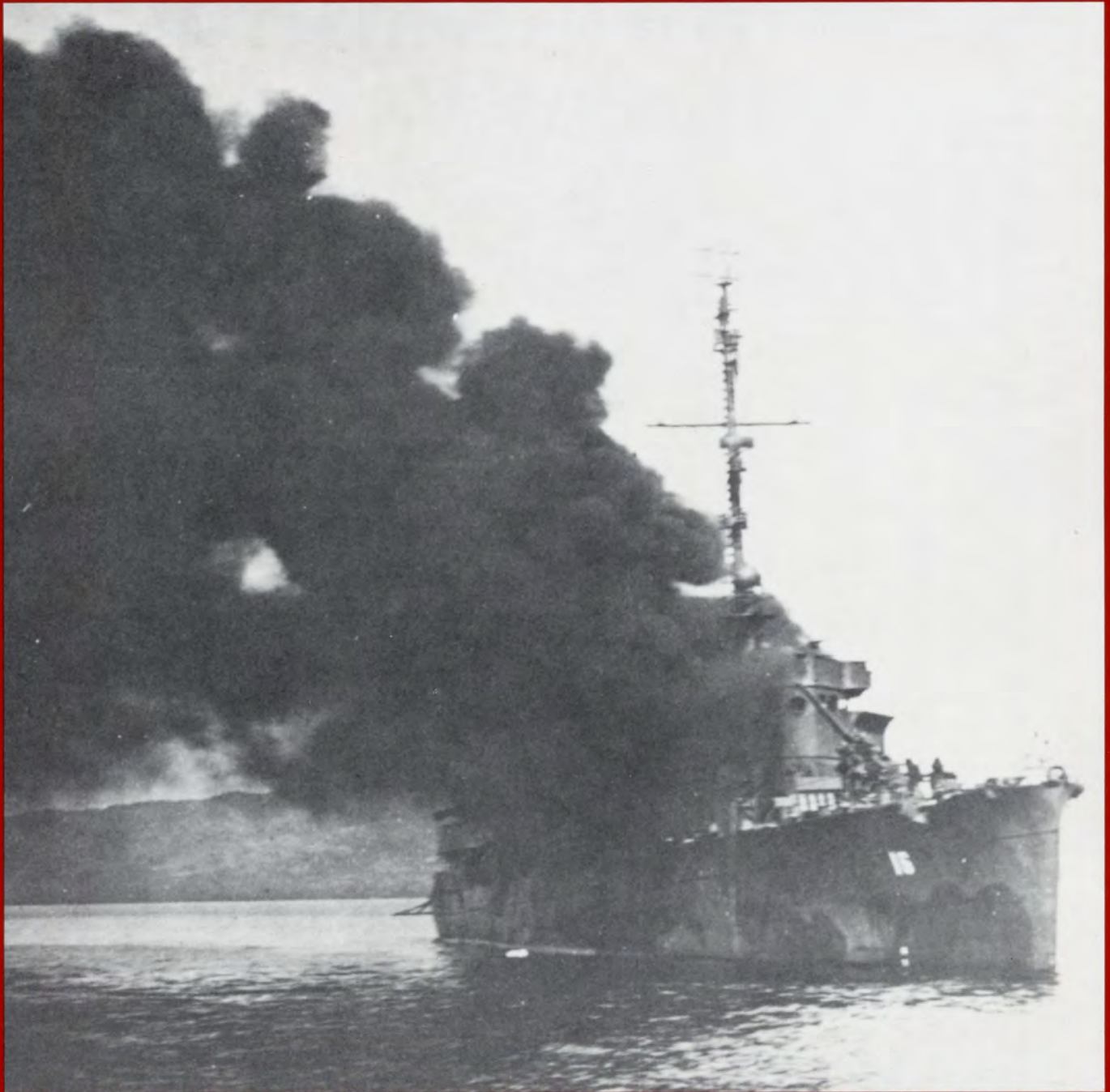


RAMSEY COUNTY

# History

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*The death of the U.S.S. Ward. The destroyer whose crew made up almost entirely of St. Paul men fired America's first shot of World War II, was sunk by gunfire three years to the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. See the article beginning on page 4 about the ship and her crew.*

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## A Message from the Editorial Board

Fifty years ago this month the United States joined the global conflict known as World War II. This issue of *Ramsey County History* focuses on that momentous event with Jane McClure's article about the St. Paul men who served on the U.S.S. *Ward*, which fired the first shot at the Japanese. While men like the sailors of the *Ward* fought the enemy overseas, others, such as Hilda Rachuy, battled different adversaries—hunger, hardship, and poverty—as a single mother with two small children at home in St. Paul. Her article is a first-person account of that truly difficult side of the war. Lastly, Tom Kelley gives us new awareness and insight into Family Service of Greater Saint Paul, a 100-year-old social service organization developed to help those like Hilda Rachuy who need institutional support and comfort in their daily struggle to hold a family together.

—John M. Lindley, chairman, Editorial Board

## St. Paul's First Shot Veterans

# The Crew of the U.S.S. *Ward* and the Attack

Jane McClure

Black smoke filled the sky; flames engulfed the magnificent ships lined up on Battleship Row. The bodies of sailors were flung into the air as Japanese bombers swooped over the United States' naval base and explosions rocked the military installations in the Hawaiian Islands. The attack on Pearl Harbor, fifty years ago on December 7, 1941, has been called the greatest, most important and most horrible event of this century.

More than eighty young sailors from St. Paul watched in horror the worst naval disaster in American history. "We thought it was the end of the world," Thomas Nadeau recalled. Nadeau and the other men were crew members on the U.S.S. *Ward*, an over-age destroyer assigned to patrol the entrance to Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu. The men and their ship led the United States Navy into the war that now became truly worldwide.

The *Ward* fired the first shot at Pearl Harbor, sinking a Japanese midget submarine more than an hour before the air attack. And it is the *Ward's* crew, organized as the First Shot Naval Veterans, who have kept that memory alive throughout all the years of the past half century.

Before the war, the circumstances of most *Ward* crew members were modest. The 1930s had ended, but for many St. Paul families, the Great Depression had not. The men were young, some of them still in high school, others just finishing and all facing an uncertain future. Jobs and money for more schooling were scarce. "There wasn't much work anywhere," said Ray Nolde, who'd had a number of jobs, and spent some time in a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp.

Nadeau had been eager to join the regular Navy but, told he'd have a six-month wait, joined the Naval Reserve instead. The Naval Reserve offered not only work but also a change in routine for the young men who would be assigned to the U.S.S. *Ward*. Ed Bukrey and other friends from St. Paul's East Side, including Don Pepin and Ed Mrozak, had enlisted together. They had been students at Johnson High School.

Giles LeClair enlisted as a Marshall High School student. Orville Ethier was seventeen when he enlisted, joining a year before his 1939 Mechanic Arts High School graduation. "You just went down with a buddy and signed on," he said.

Based in Chicago, Ethier cruised Lake Michigan for two years. Many of the other

men gained their "sea legs" on the Great Lakes, sailing on the elderly gunboat *Paducah*. Commissioned in 1905, the *Paducah* was older than her youthful crew. Nadeau remembers that the pre-World War II and early wartime military had scanty resources. "At that time, the country was pretty broke," he said. "There were not enough ships or money for the Reserves." As the reservists did duty state-side, the prospects of actual combat seemed far away. "We never thought there was going to be a war," said Giles LeClair.

On January 21, 1941, eighty-five St. Paul reservists were ordered to active duty as members of the 47th Division, 11th Battalion, 9th Naval District. For John Merthan, the call to active duty came just six months after graduating from Woodrow Wilson High School. Nolde and Nadeau left family and friends on the West Side. LeClair said his goodbyes at an apartment building near the Selby Avenue streetcar tunnel.

Four days later, the young men



Ward crewmen, home on leave during the ship's refitting. Photographed at the Union Depot were, top row from left: Robert Olson, Frank L. Fratto, Edward J. Bukrey, Harold J. Harris, Howard F. Gearin, Clarence W. Fenton. Bottom row, from left: Alfred J. Fink, Donald R. C. Pepin, William G. Griep, Raymond B. Nolde and Orville S. Ethier.

# on Pearl Harbor

gathered at the St. Paul Union Depot for the train trip to the base in San Diego. Leaving cold St. Paul and arriving in sunny California was a thrill the young Midwesterners wouldn't forget. Many hadn't traveled beyond CCC Camp and the Great Lakes, Illinois, Naval Reserve training station. Seeing the Pacific Ocean for the first time made Lake Superior seem small indeed, they remembered.

After a week of orientation, they moved onto their new ship, the U.S.S. *Ward* on February 2. Except for the officers and a few senior enlisted men, it was an all-St. Paul crew.

The *Ward* may have been new to her Minnesota sailors, but like the *Paducah*, she also was older than most of her crew. She was a flush-deck, four-piper destroyer (meaning that she had four exhaust stacks and a level deck) and she was among more than 200 of these vessels cranked out during World War I. One of a fleet of destroyers, tugs, barges and gunboats, she was turned out by the famous Mare Island Navy Yard near Vallejo, California. But the *Ward* was no ordinary ship. Before her days ended, she had ties to three wars, and could claim important firsts in two of them.

The *Ward's* namesake was Commander James Harmon Ward, a forty-year Naval veteran and the first executive officer of what is now the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, but he left academia in 1847 to command the U.S.S. *Cumberland* during the war with Mexico.

Commander Ward is familiar to Civil War buffs as the planner of the Potomac Flotilla. It was under his command that the first naval engagement of the Civil War was fought on May 20, 1861, at Acquia Creek. Two months later, after a series of successful engagements, Ward was killed by a sharpshooter at Mathias Point. He was the first Union naval officer to be killed in the Civil War.



*Launching of the U.S.S. Ward on June 1, 1918, seventeen days after her keel was laid at the Mare Island Navy Yard, Vallejo, California.*

Even before she hit the water, the ship named for Commander Ward was a legend. She was built in seventeen and a half days in May of 1918, setting a world shipbuilding record. Navy shipyards maintained a lively rivalry in those days. The ability to build ships quickly and efficiently was a matter of great pride. Mare Island Master Shipfitter J.T. Moroney, nicknamed the "Fighting Irishman", wanted a world's record to end all world's records. He talked the shipyard managers into letting him build a ship in thirty days.

No one else believed it could be done. "The keel of the *Ward* was laid on May 15, 1918," the ship's history stated, "but Moroney had played an Irish trick and had first built the ship in his hat. Then he built pieces of it in the shop and assembled the sections on the ways — 'prefabrication' they called it, a war later. Construction gangs worked around the clock. The birth

of the ship was attended with bedlam. Eighteen riveting gangs set up the most infernal and continuous din ever to assault Vallejo's ears, as they hammered the *Ward* together with 275,000 rivets."

When the *Ward* was launched at sunset on June 1, 1918, people from the village of Vallejo, and three surrounding counties, looked on. They covered the hills across the Napa River from the yard. A new banner went up, proclaiming "17 Days to Break the Record, 17 More Days to Break the Hun."

Dorothy Ward, granddaughter of the ship's namesake, wore her best white dress and a big hair bow as she christened the flag-draped vessel. Mare Island Yard Commandant Captain Harry George looked on proudly. Speeches, a parade and dancing in the streets of Vallejo capped the celebration. When the *Ward* was completed, Mare Island's 1,700 shipfitters paraded

down the dock to the accompaniment of a brass band. They bore a gift for the ship's crew: a shiny new victrola.

The *Ward* steamed off to join the Navy on July 24, 1918. She served as flagship for Destroyer Division 18, and was a plane guard for the historic flight of NC4, the first aircraft to fly the Atlantic. In July of 1919, the *Ward* steamed back through the Panama Canal into the Pacific Ocean. With the end of the war, however, the *Ward* and her sister ships were moored at the San Diego destroyer base and remained there, lying idle for twenty years in what sailors called "Red Lead Row."

The *Ward*, the darling of the World War I Navy, was the last of the San Diego-based destroyers to be returned to commission as World War II approached. "For once, being at the tail end of the line had some advantages," the *Ward's* history pointed out. "As was customary in the old peacetime 'tin can Navy,' where allotments were meager, sailors and officers sometimes resorted to 'midnight requisitions.' As a result, anything not welded down had been 'borrowed' by the crews of other ships. Much topside equipment and many pumps, motors, valves and such had already gone to sea—at no expense to the government—but in order for the *Ward* to be put to sea, all such items had to be replaced by new ones."

Much of the equipment given the *Ward's* crew was not of such recent vintage. "We were armed really pathetically," said Nadeau. "They gave us each a World War I rifle, a dishpan (World War I) helmet, a gas mask that leaked and a life preserver that probably didn't work."

With her new crew on board, the *Ward's* overall recommissioning began February 10, 1941. That same day, she made her first trial sea run. The St. Paul sailors still remember how they felt after their first real stint at sea. Lake Superior was never like this. Later in February, the *Ward* left San Diego for Mare Island. She took on ammunition there on February 26, and headed for Pearl Harbor. She arrived March 9, 1941.

The *Ward* and her crew settled into a routine at "Pearl," the nation's largest and best defended base. The *Ward* was one of four older destroyers assigned to patrol and guard the harbor entrance for a week

at a time. Although Pearl Harbor was considered the Navy's safest base, it was also a "mousetrap" with a narrow channel and mouth that made it difficult for ships to enter and exit.

"We knew Japan was going to attack someplace," Ethier said, "but we thought it would be the Philippines, Guam or Midway. We didn't think they'd come to Pearl." Pearl Harbor was seen as more logistically difficult and impregnable to attack, he added.

The men grew accustomed to their new duties. Seaman Second Class LeClair worked on deck, and oversaw the deck supplies. He also was part of the #1 gun crew. Ethier started as part of the deck force, but with Nadeau switched to the "black gang," working in the engine room.

The *Ward* had four guns, each with a nine-man crew. Nolde, Bukrey, John Peick, Clarence "Scotty" Fenton, Ambrose Domagall, Don Gruening, Karl Lasch, Pat Flanagan and Russell Knapp made up the crew for gun #3.

On December 5, 1941, the crew welcomed their third skipper in less than a year. Lieutenant William Outerbridge, son of a British sea captain and a United States Army nurse, was assuming his first naval command. He was the eighth sea captain in his family. Just thirty-five years old, Outerbridge's resumé included three years' experience at the San Diego base where the *Ward* had sat empty for so many years.

As Outerbridge acquainted himself with the *Ward*, the Japanese were completing their preparations for what was called the "Hawaii Operation." Extensive submarine activity was planned, with two-man midget submarines to be launched early on the morning of December 7. Five midget subs were piggybacked into the area by larger submarines. An encounter with one of the midgets would put the *Ward* in the history books.

The *Ward's* latest stint of off-shore patrol began December 6, and it would hardly be routine. Just before 4 a.m. on December 7, the minesweeper U.S.S. *Condor* sighted a periscope off the harbor mouth. The *Condor*, *Crossbill*, *Cockatoo* and *Reedbird* were routinely sweeping for magnetic mines when the sighting was reported. The yardarm blinker gave the

*Ward* the message: SIGHTED SUBMARINE ON WESTERLY COURSE SPEED NINE KNOTS. (Some accounts indicate the submarine was traveling five knots.)

For two hours, the *Ward* joined in a fruitless sweep of the area. "Doughty, Lt. Hartwell Doughty, who was my executive officer, and I thought, 'Well, let's go to general quarters,'" Outerbridge recalled years later in a *St. Paul Pioneer Press* interview. The *Ward* crew members rushed to man their battle stations.

"We didn't know, but maybe there was a submarine out there, and we started closing on the *Crossbill*," Outerbridge continued. "Then we searched westward. We didn't find anything, so we came back and asked the *Crossbill* if they had any more information and they said no, so we went back on regular patrol."

At about 4:30 a.m., the *Ward* asked the *Condor* if it had any more information on the submarine. The answer was no. Not long after that, two of the minesweepers entered Pearl Harbor. At least two midget submarines followed.

Since he and Doughty had been on general quarters, which required all hands, Outerbridge decided to sleep in. He also decided to skip reveille at the usual time that morning, as crew members also had had little sleep.

It was now about 5 a.m. and ships continued to enter the harbor. When the supply ship *Antares* and her barge approached the gate to the submarine net guarding the entrance to the harbor, *Ward* Seaman Herbert Raebig spotted a moving black object in the water astern of that ship.

Raebig quickly notified quartermaster Howard Gearin: "Put a glass on that thing," he said. They then notified Lieutenant (j.g.) Oscar Goepner, who called Outerbridge. At first Goepner thought the object was a loose buoy, but the quartermaster disagreed, saying it looked to him like the conning tower of a small submarine.

"Goepner stuck his head in the porthole and said, 'Come out on the bridge, captain.' I thought that was pretty strong language since it was my first night out," Outerbridge said. "But I went out to the bridge.

After seeing the object and agreeing that it appeared to be a conning tower, Outerbridge again made the decision to go to



Artist's conception of the Ward's sinking of a Japanese midget submarine off Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941.

general quarters. It was 6:40 a.m. The young commander assessed his options. His first order was to stand by to ram.

"... but then I thought that I had only been on the ship less than 24 hours," Outerbridge continued, "and . . . [ramming] would make a mess of [the *Ward*], and besides there was no indication they had seen us."

"[Outerbridge] probably asked himself whether this old bucket of bolts could actually ram anything," said LeClair. Outerbridge's next decision was to hold speed, race ahead of the sub and attack with guns and depth charges. The sub continued to move toward the buoys at the harbor entrance.

"If only he'd known what a green crew of men he had," Ethier said of Outerbridge. "I wonder if he would have actually gone into battle."

The *Ward's* history indicated that Outerbridge was feeling his own inexperience. "If he did shoot, and if the gunners did hit it, and if it turned out to be something new that belonged to the U.S. Navy and no one at Pearl Harbor had been notified of it, Lt. William Outerbridge was going to set an all-time record for having assumed and lost command, of the same ship in less than 24 hours."

The guns were prepared, as the men flew into the tasks they'd practiced for months. At a range of about 100 yards, the order was given to fire. It was 6:45 a.m. The #1 gun fired and missed, its shell flying over the submarine's conning tower.

The #3 gun fired next, hitting the base

of the conning tower. Knapp was the gun captain but Nolde, the trainer on the target, and Clarence "Scotty" Fenton, who pulled the trigger, fired America's first shot of World War II.

"It takes two people to fire one of those guns," Ethier explained. Vertical and horizontal crosshairs had to be carefully lined up on target. Bukrey was a gunner's mate in charge of maintenance and operation of equipment. He and others recall that after that first shot, the gun's bearing was fouled. No matter. About a dozen men on the *Ward* saw the submarine hit. As the *Ward* continued to swing to starboard, Seaman Daniel Lombardi watched from the depth charge racks. A jagged hole could be seen in the conning tower.

On a signal from the bridge, Chief Torpedoman William Maskawilz dropped four depth charges, as did a Catalina pilot overhead. The submarine, its topsides peppered with seaweed and rust, was surrounded by a circle of foam and spray before sinking. It never came back up.

At 6:46 a.m. a report of the attack was radioed to naval headquarters. It was followed, at 6:53, by a voice transmission to the Naval Control Center . . . "We have attacked, fired upon and dropped depth charges upon sub operating in defensive area."

The naval radio station at Bishop's Point on Oahu acknowledged the *Ward's* message, but no alarm bells were sounded, nor were the bells set off by a report from a dawn air patrol pilot, who claimed to have sunk a submerged submarine one mile off

the entrance to Pearl Harbor.

But despite the two reports, the lone duty officer at the Operations Center on Ford Island failed to get confirmation of that attack, and thus gave the report low priority. It would be more than half an hour before the harbor duty destroyer *Monaghan* would be alerted. The *Monaghan* didn't receive the report until almost 8 a.m.

By then, it should have been clear that Pearl Harbor was under attack. The lazy Sunday morning routine was soon to be disrupted. Only three-quarters of the crews were aboard the ships lying at their berths within the harbor and many ships had their watertight doors clipped open.

Just as the report of the submarine sinking was sent, a white sampan was seen trying to enter the harbor's restricted area. The *Ward* moved to head off the small craft. When an order to halt was ignored, Outerbridge ordered rifle shots fired across the sampan's bow. The little boat hove to quickly, its skipper waving a white flag. Years later, Outerbridge would recall that encounter as "peculiar." The Coast Guard towed the sampan to Honolulu.

The *Ward* then made what was thought to be sonar contact with another submarine. Depth charges were dropped, but only a huge bubble surfaced.

By this time, the air over Pearl Harbor was filling with airplanes. The men on the *Ward* assumed that the aircraft carrier, *Enterprise* and its planes were arriving until a plane bearing the rising sun insignia dropped a bomb about 100 yards from the *Ward*.

At 7:58 a.m., the signal went out: "Air raid Pearl Harbor This is not a drill." The war was underway.

"We were scared, for the simple reason that you could see all of the planes coming in," LeClair said. Ethier was working on the #1 boiler when the first shot was fired, but he was on deck when the first air attack began. The horror of watching ten Japanese planes flying straight at the ship is something Ethier will never forget.

"They were flying right at the *Ward*," he said. "We thought, 'Well, we're done for.' They didn't even fire at us." The Japanese were after larger quarry, and that was fortunate, because the *Ward* could do little in the face of attack from the air. Her main battery guns were too slow and cumbersome to fire effectively at planes.

Later, the engineers managed to get off some shots that missed—fortunately. The *Ward* found that in the confusion she was firing on a group of Army B-17s coming in from the West Coast. Nadeau remembers that machine guns on board were also useless. Salt plugged the guns' cooling lines, causing them to jam. "All we could do was run," he said.

The *Ward* spent most of December 7 on patrol. About mid-afternoon, the ship took on more depth charges and fuel at West Loch within the harbor. It was then the crew saw the devastation at Pearl Harbor.

"It was so hard to look over and see the ships burning," Nolde said. "Anyone who wasn't scared was either nuts or not telling the truth," Nadeau added. Although food was prepared for the men, he remembers that nearly everyone was too shaken to eat. For some men, the reality of what had happened didn't sink in at first. "When you're in action, you're so busy," Ethier said. "You've got so much to do, you can't really be worried about what the hell is going on. Afterward, when you talk about it, that's when it starts to hit you."

On the evening of December 7, the *Ward* and other ships sped to intercept a reported invasion force approaching the Hawaiian islands. It turned out to be a false alarm.

While his shipmates were making history, twenty-year-old John Merthan was having a harrowing experience on land. On the morning of December 7, he was preparing to leave the base hospital. Minor



Crew of the *Ward's* #3 gun as they appeared on December 7, 1941. Left to right: R. H. Knapp, C. W. Fenton, R. B. Nolde, A. S. Domagall, D. W. Gruening, J. A. Peick, H. P. Flanagan, E. J. Bukrey and K. C. Lasch.

surgery had sidelined him for a few days, and he was eager to rejoin the crew.

At about 8 a.m., Merthan and others heard some explosions. "We didn't think anything of it," he said. "We thought they were practicing." The sailors ran from the hospital into the street. Another plane bore down on them. "We looked at the pilot and he looked back at us," Merthan said. The sailors ducked behind a hospital pillar. "We never, ever thought of the Japs attacking Pearl harbor."

More low-flying planes swooped over the harbor. One crashed behind the hospital. Merthan and the others could only watch horrified. "It was just like in the movies," he said. Turning to look out at the harbor, Merthan watched as the U.S. S. *Nevada* was beached.

As the air assault continued, the casualties began arriving at the hospital. The first wounded serviceman Merthan saw arrived with a bullet wound in his stomach. "I learned later that he died." Months of training for battle hadn't prepared the sailors for war on dry land. "We had no place to go, nothing to do," Merthan said, so he and the other sailors were pressed into service to move the wounded, the dying and the dead. Many were badly burned and disfigured.

The bodies soon filled available space

in the hospital basement. More were placed in the nurses' quarters. Merthan jumped into a window to get the building open, turned around and saw another row of corpses. Soon, bodies lined the streets. "I looked at them and thought, 'God, the poor guys didn't have a chance'," he said. The first information he received about the fate of the *Ward* was that the ship had been sunk.

That evening, Merthan was reassigned to a Marine machine gun nest. Next, he was sent out to a ship that carried Navy officials assigned to the grim task of inspecting the carnage. Running the launch, Merthan had another first-hand look at the casualties of war. When told the extent of the casualties at Pearl Harbor, Winston Churchill exclaimed "What a holocaust!"

History has agreed. Eighteen ships were sunk or badly damaged. Of the eight battleships sunk, the *Arizona* and *Oklahoma* could not be saved. More than 2,000 of the 2,403 men killed were in the ranks of the Navy; nearly one half of those casualties were on the *Arizona*. But the aircraft carriers Japan wanted to destroy were 200 miles at sea.

Merthan remembered a visit to the *Arizona* just days earlier. "A few of us had gone out to visit a friend of mine," he said. The visitors toured the ship, and then ate

ice cream. "We didn't have ice cream on an old four-stack destroyer like the *Ward*," he said. Many months later, Merthan learned that his friend had survived.

To this day, the men of the *Ward* credit Outerbridge with true courage at Pearl Harbor. "I remember thinking, 'I hope we don't run into any battleships or destroyers, because we have a skipper who'll attack,'" Ethier said. However, he and other veterans look back at mistakes made in alerting American forces to the dangers the *Ward* had encountered first that day. "They should have hit the panic button," Ethier said. Previous sightings of the Japanese forces by a merchant ship and a Russian ship also went unreported. "It was a series of classic mistakes," he added.

The days after the attack were tense for the *Ward*. Patrol duties continued, but without two crew members from St. Paul. Not long after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Jack Gill and John Entenmann were found to be underage and were sent home.

In September, 1942, the *Ward's* crew said a sad farewell to Lieutenant Outerbridge. Under its new commander, the *Ward* returned to Mare Island in December to be converted into an auxiliary (later armed) personnel destroyer or APD.

After one of the ship's exhaust stacks had been removed, the men learned of a change of plans. The rest of the conversion would take place at the Puget Sound Navy Yard. There, the renovation continued and by the time it was completed, the *Ward* had lost two exhaust stacks and their boilers. The four guns on board at Pearl Harbor were replaced with new armaments. A two-level troop space was created.

The work was finished on February 6, 1943. The *Ward* left for hazardous duty in the Pacific under her new skipper Lieutenant Frederick (Jack) Lemly. Her destination once again was Pearl Harbor, where she delivered 1,000 sacks of mail and where her blue paint was covered with a "dark pattern system" in various shades of green and brown.

Life on board an armed personnel destroyer was hectic. The *Ward* took part in numerous landings, escorting troop transports and convoys. She saw action at Guadalcanal, New Guinea, the Philippines and elsewhere.

One of the *Ward's* visitors in the Pacific

was the young skipper of *PT 109*, John F. Kennedy. Ethier remembers that Kennedy's boat was damaged by flotsam and the *Ward* left him a bilge pump. Another visitor was the Bishop of Melanesia, who tied up his boat one day and gave the crew an interesting talk about the area. The Bishop's small boat was one of few that could travel safely during the war.

Not long after returning to the Pacific Theater, the *Ward* became involved in the struggle for Guadalcanal. On April 7, 1943, the *Ward* shot down three planes attacking Marine forces on Guadalcanal and Tulagi. At Guadalcanal, the *Ward* and other ships had to run ashore at high speed near Henderson Field. Fifty-five gallon drums of gasoline were rolled overboard as close to the beach as possible. The *Ward* then beat it out of there before the notorious Japanese cruiser-destroyer force, "the Tokyo Express," caught her.

The *Ward* was part of the first echelon to land troops on Vella Lavella, the Japanese-held Treasury Islands and Choisel Island. She was carrying Marine reinforcements to Cape Torokina days later, when the convoy was attacked by enemy aircraft.

"Doctrine for night operation at that time called for ships to hold fire if Japanese planes approached," according to the *Ward's* history, "but that night the *McKean* (another APD) opened up on a snooping Betty with her 20 mm machine guns. The tracers immediately pin-pointed her location and a second plane torpedoed her. Although the *Ward* passed close to the sinking ship, she was unable to stop and drop boats to help survivors in the water, as it was essential that her own troops get ashore."

Action at Guadalcanal was the most hazardous the *Ward* would see. "The *Ward* escorted four ships [to Guadalcanal], but only one of those ships came back," Ethier recalled.

On October 17, 1944, three days before General Douglas MacArthur's landing at Leyte Gulf, the *Ward's* assigned task was to make an assault landing on Dinegat Island to knock out Japanese radio and radar stations serving Leyte Gulf. The troops leaving the *Ward* had been hand-picked for the mission. They were to take and hold the island until the gulf invasion was completed.

The *Ward's* crew had been warned that they would be out of range of air support while in and out of the beachhead area. Heavy rains, high winds and rough seas were in the *Ward's* favor the day of the assault. Although the storm made landing difficult, the problems it caused for the planes were even more pronounced. The mission succeeded, although the *Ward's* crew had difficulty recovering all of their boats.

The *Ward* continued operations in the Leyte Gulf area that fall of 1944. The faces of her crew had changed greatly. Only sixteen of the men who boarded her in February of 1941 were still with the *Ward*. Many of the St. Paul men had scattered to other duties elsewhere. Bukrey, Ethier, Fenton, Albert Fink, Gearin, William Griep, Harold Harris, Frederick Hughes, LeClair, Willett Lehner, Nolde, Pepin and James Spratt were the "old hands" who stayed with the ship.

On December 6, 1944, the *Ward* carried four companies of the Sixth Army Rangers to a landing at Ormoc Bay. It was to be her last trip. Three years to the day of the Pearl Harbor attack, the *Ward* was struck just above the waterline by a kamikaze pilot and was so badly damaged that she had to be scuttled.

Carrying four officers and 104 men of the Army's 77th Division, the *Ward* had been part of a seventy-ship convoy. Although the battle for Leyte Gulf had ended just days before, the ships were still threatened by attack from the air. After unloading her troops, the *Ward* began an anti-submarine patrol between Leyte and Ponson Island.

The first enemy aircraft were spotted at about 9:40 a.m. As they closed on the *Ward*, the ship opened fire. No hits were made, and the planes flew away. Minutes later, a formation of bombers was seen over the destroyer *Mahan*. American fighter planes flew to the rescue, but the *Mahan* was hit.

The *Ward* was ordered to fishtail at full speed to throw off the aim of enemy fire. Some of the planes attacking the *Mahan* took aim at the *Ward* and she opened fire. Two of the enemy planes crashed into the sea 200 yards off the starboard bow. A third suicide plane struck the fatal blow. The two-motored Japanese bomber





For the record: The #3 gun crew shows how they fired at the enemy submarine.

“crashed right into the empty troop space,” Ethier said. “An hour earlier, and he would have gotten 250 Marines there.”

It is thought that the plane’s gasoline fueled the huge fire that broke out amidships, topside and in the troop compartment. Simultaneously, a flareback in the remaining fireroom caused a second blaze.

“With the fireroom out, we lost steam pressure,” said Nadeau. The engines stopped, and all hands worked to fight the fire, but it was to no avail. The lack of steam pressure idled the fire and bilge pumps. Other firefighting equipment was in the center of the conflagration itself. Some men tried to use two of the ship’s boats to pull alongside and battle the flames, but the boats’ little “handy-billy” pumps were too little, too late.

By 10:15 a.m., a small force of rescue ships had arrived to help the *Ward* but the fire was setting off ammunition on board, and there was a chance that the forward magazine would explode. Seaman Fink’s efforts to prevent the explosion later earned him a Bronze Star. He had left his battle station, and gone below to open the magazine flooding valves.

Ethier and James Lovstad were two of the last ten men off the ship. They had stayed another fifteen minutes to fight the blaze, but their efforts, coupled with those from other ships, weren’t enough. The *Ward* was lost.

At 10:24 a.m., the order was given to abandon ship. “And that was it,” the *Ward* history stated. “No time to go down below for spare socks or pictures of girl friends.” The U.S.S. *Crosby* and *Scout* picked up the crew. The *Ward*’s skipper, Captain Richard Farrell, boarded the U.S.S. *O’Brien* and was surprised to meet former *Ward* skipper, William Outerbridge. Farrell had been an ensign on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack three years earlier. “He was as surprised to see us as we were to see him,” Ethier said.

Outerbridge asked permission to go alongside the now-engulfed *Ward* to try to put out the blaze, but the possibility that the magazines hadn’t flooded and ammunition would explode made such a venture too risky. The order was given to sink the *Ward* by gunfire.

The *Ward*’s crew members still recall the difficulty Outerbridge had in sinking his old command. The shot struck the after magazine, flinging bits of steel into the air. LeClair sat on the deck of one of the destroyers and watched the shots fired.

“When the smoke cleared, there wasn’t a ripple on the surface.” Others saw the ship’s bow stand straight up and plunge into the sea.

Farrell and Outerbridge watched with tears in their eyes. “As the ship disappeared, Farrell had a hurried recollection of ninety cases of beer stowed in the for-

ward peak tank . . . ,” the *Ward* history stated. “Only some time later did he suddenly remember something else and turn to Outerbridge to exclaim, ‘You know, Captain, I left \$150 in my safe!’ ”

The lost beer and the money were of little consequence. All the men from the ship were safe. “We were very, very fortunate,” LeClair said. The men were transported to San Pedro Bay and the calm of a hospital ship.

The *Ward*’s record of service had been impressive. Throughout her entire naval career, she lost only one man, a sailor from Chisholm named Eddie Duchin. His life-line carried away during a routine drill, and he accidentally fell overboard. Despite an intensive search, Duchin’s body was never found. After she was scuttled, the *Ward* was saluted in news items ranging from Riply’s “Believe It or Not” to a *Time* magazine article headed “Death of a Sentry.”

The war continued. *Ward* crew members received new assignments, and moved on. On March 26, 1945, the *O’Brien* was hit by a plane. Although she didn’t sink, she was heavily damaged and she lost fifty-two men. Outerbridge was one of 125 who were wounded.

With the end of the war, most of the *Ward*’s original crew members returned to St. Paul. Several stayed in service, including Don Jones, Frank Hadju, and Fritz Phanning. Dave Morgan, a St. Paul Police officer before World War II, rose to the rank of commander and headed Naval security efforts during the Vietnam War.

Gill and Entenmann, the too-young *Ward* crew members, rejoined the military as soon as they were old enough to do so. Entenmann became an air force pilot. Gill’s military career eventually led to his becoming Veterans of Foreign Wars representative at the Veterans Hospital in Minneapolis.

LeClair worked for the telephone company for thirty-seven years before retiring. While the #3 gun crew can take credit for the first shot, LeClair can claim a “first” of his own. He was the “talker” for the crew, passing on messages. “I’m the first one who hollered ‘Commence firing!’ ” he said.

Nadeau was in the Aleutian Islands when he learned that the war was over. He returned to St. Paul, and married his long-

time sweetheart. Merthan worked for the federal government for many years. Pepin went to work at 3M. Both he and Nadeau are retired. Merthan lives in Woodbury, Pepin and Nadeau in St. Paul. Panagiotes Dionmisopoulos, the "gorgeous Greek," became a political science professor at Southern Illinois University. Now retired, he is living in DeKalb, Illinois. Bukrey went to law school, then spent his entire career with West Publishing Company, living in St. Paul, Michigan and Texas before retiring. He and Ethier are to be speakers at Pearl Harbor commemorative events December 7 in Hawaii, by invitation of the Arizona Memorial Museum Association.

Ethier married while still in service. Both he and his wife, Patricia, were from the West Seventh Street neighborhood, and both were in the Navy. Patricia Ethier was stationed on North Island. "We were married in our uniforms," she said.

Ethier retired after thirty years of service in the City of St. Paul building inspection department. They live in St. Paul. Nolde and Ethier returned to active duty during the Korean War. Both were nearing the end of their Naval Reserve service when the call to serve came. Nolde worked in construction and as a carpenter before he retired. He also lives in St. Paul. Fenton established a business in Forest Lake and managed the Forest Lake Veterans of Foreign Wars. He died three years ago.

Many of the men have been active in state and local veterans' associations, including the Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association and the Arizona Memorial Museum Association. Richard Thill was president of the Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association. Ethier is one of several who give talks on Pearl Harbor. He made an appearance last July at the U.S.S. *Nimitz* Museum. Many of the men remain active with the First Shot Naval Veterans. Of the eighty-five St. Paul reservists, about half are still alive and the whereabouts of about forty are known. There is no current information on about ten others.

The club itself is forty-four years old. It was organized on February 28, 1947, by several *Ward* crewmen and members of 11th Battalion Naval Headquarters. It was always a special event when retired Admiral William Outerbridge and other

*Ward* officers visited St. Paul.

A highpoint for club members came in 1958 when the famous #3 gun was brought to St. Paul and installed as a monument on the state capital grounds. Although the *Ward* had been lost, the guns that had been fired at Pearl Harbor had been removed during the conversion to an APD in 1942. After a sometimes hectic search, the #3 gun turned up in the Washington Navy Yard.

Initially, the gun was destined for the Smithsonian Institution, but the First Shot Naval Veterans thought otherwise. They appealed to the VFW for help. Despite limited funds—the gun weighs 6.5 tons and its moving costs were substantial—the gun was moved to the *Ward's* "home port" of St. Paul. Ethier and others credit the Minnesota Centennial Military Committee, formed to mark the 100th anniversary of statehood in 1958, with bringing the gun to St. Paul. It was a joint effort, however. The Air Force transported it from Andrews Air Force Base to Wold-Chamberlain Airport in a C-119 Flying Boxcar. The Minnesota National Guard provided the large truck needed to haul the gun to its resting place.

On May 9, 1958, several of the crew members gathered to dedicate the memorial and to pose for one more picture. With less fanfare, the gun recently was moved again so that it would be closer to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial at the capital.

Fifty years have passed. Many of the members gathered in September at a fiftieth reunion that attracted about 200 guests from around the United States. More events are planned for December, including a ceremony at 9:30 a.m. December 7 at the gun site on the capital grounds, followed by a gathering at the Rice Street VFW.

The 47th Division veterans still meet once a month for breakfast. As those gatherings and the annual reunions grow smaller, the men wonder about the fate of their records and their book. Members are concerned that the memorabilia be preserved for posterity. "We're a dying organization," said Merthan.

The publishing of the ship's history, *USS Ward Fires First Shot WWII* may have been the crew's final "rescue" mission. Several years ago, the group worked with

a publisher to produce a book about the *Ward*. When the publisher developed financial problems, the men rallied to save their book. They now retain the copyright and handle book sales.

When and if a second edition is printed, new information may be added. A few years ago, a Minneapolis man sent them a picture of the *Ward's* sinking. And an unusual letter came from a former Japanese military man who was on board a submarine that could have sunk the *Ward* at Pearl Harbor.

"He wrote that he had us in his sights," LeClair said, "but the *Ward* was spared, because the Japanese didn't want to start the Pearl Harbor attack too soon. It just adds a little bit more to our history."

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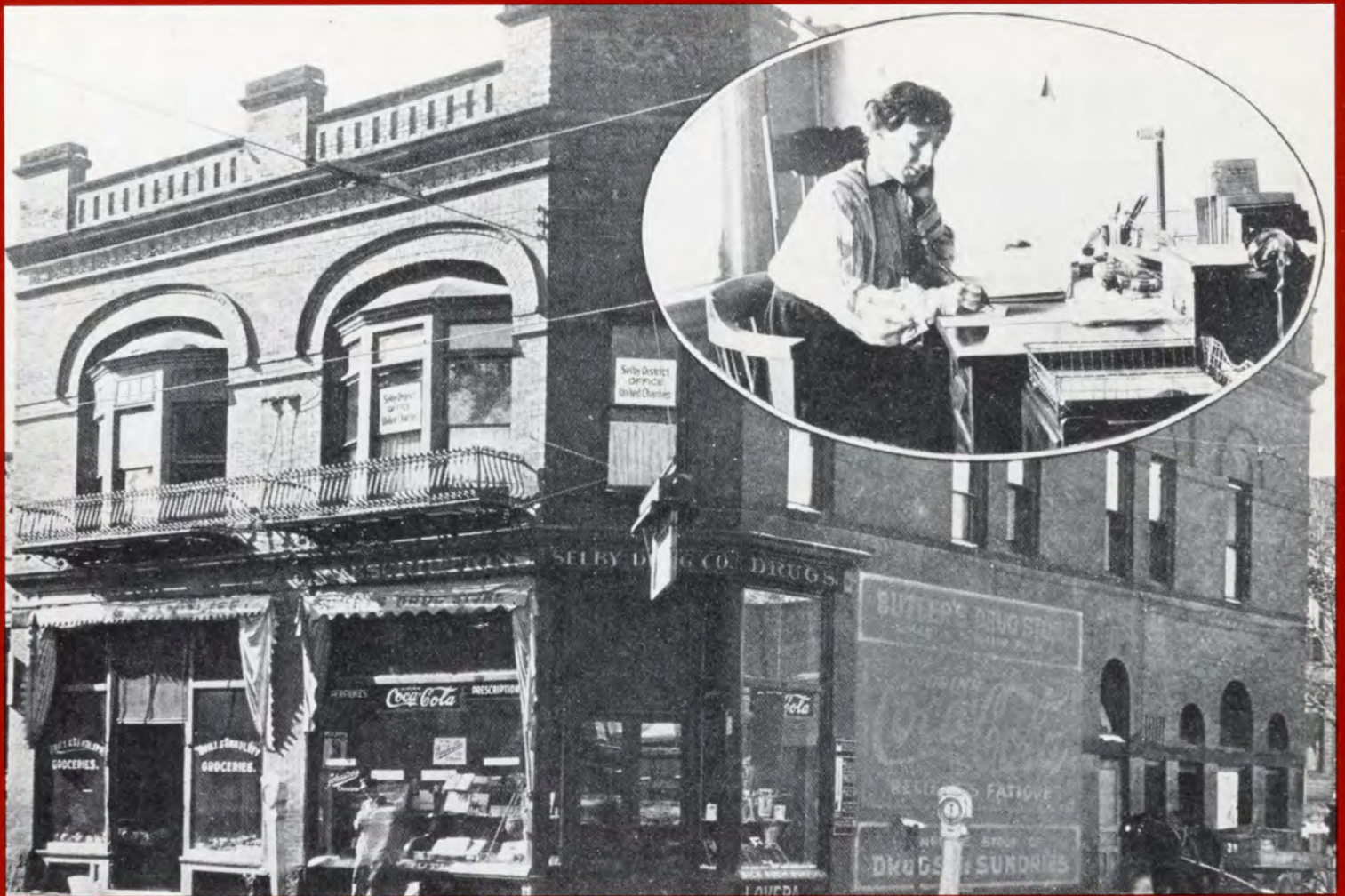
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*Family Service of Greater Saint Paul is marking a century of service to the community. It is an outgrowth of earlier charitable organizations, such as the United Charities, whose Selby District Office is shown here. It was located at 624 Selby Avenue from 1916 to 1919. An article tracing Family Service's history begins on page 18.*

**R.C.H.S.**  
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