

Albert Dennis in World War II

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For more about the family of Albert Dennis, see *The Shatsky and Allied Families of Terre Haute, Indiana* (Shatsky.docx).



Albert "Al" Dennis, pictured above, was the father of my dear wife, Martha Dennis Christiansen. Al was born and raised in Maine. He moved to Chicago as a young man and came to Terre Haute, Indiana around November 1940 with his fiancée, Lucille Shower. In Terre Haute he worked for his future father-in-law, Max Shower, and late in 1941 started a shoe store.

Albert enlisted in the United States Navy in Indianapolis on March 13, 1942 and was trained at the Great Lakes Naval Training Station near Chicago. He was then sent to New Orleans, where in July 1942 he was assigned to work as a storekeeper at the Naval Air Technical Training Center at Ward Island near Corpus Christi, Texas.

In November 1943 Al boarded the U.S.S. Oyster Bay, a newly-commissioned PT boat tender, as a storekeeper first class (SK1C, the equivalent of an army corporal). In early 1944 the Oyster Bay traveled to the Southwest Pacific. Al remained on the Oyster Bay until he was transferred to the Hospital Ship Mercy in November 1944.



USS Oyster Bay (AGP-6) off Puget Sound Navy Yard, 28 November 1943, shortly after commissioning

(Source: navsource.org/archives/09/43/09432809.jpg)

The Oyster Bay was designed as a seaplane tender, but converted to a PT tender before completion. It was 311 feet in length with a top speed of 18.6 knots. It weighed 2,400 tons fully loaded and carried a crew of around 250.

Throughout Al Dennis's stay on the Oyster Bay, Lieutenant Commander Walter W. Holroyd was the ship's captain. Walter Holroyd had previously served on the John Penn, an attack transport sunk by Japanese planes off Guadalcanal in August 1943. Al, in his late 30s, was one of the older men on the ship, being even older than Commander Holroyd.

Al served on the Oyster Bay for nearly a year and participated in the following operations:

- ◆ The latter part of the encirclement of Rabaul, the main Japanese South Pacific base, which was on New Britain Island north of New Guinea.
- ◆ The western New Guinea Campaign.
- ◆ The invasion of Morotai, an island between New Guinea and the Philippines.
- ◆ The first part of the Philippines Campaign, on the island of Leyte.



PT-105 (Source: Wikimedia.org Dec 2013)

Motor Torpedo Boats, generally called PT boats, were heavily used in the South Pacific. Their primary mission was to destroy the barges that the Japanese typically used to move men and supplies, often at night, between the numerous South Pacific islands.

Al's Oyster Bay duty during his ten months in the Southwest Pacific took him to:

- ◆ Brisbane, in eastern Australia.
- ◆ Various anchorages on the north shore of New Guinea or on nearby islands.
- ◆ Manus, in the Admiralty Islands north of New Guinea.
- ◆ Morotai, between New Guinea and the Philippine Islands.
- ◆ Finally to San Pedro Bay in the Philippines just off the island of Leyte.

Around July 1944 Al developed a fungal infection in his feet, which subsequently worsened and spread to his hands. Treatment in the Oyster Bay sick bay was inadequate and in November Al was evacuated on the Hospital Ship USS Mercy from Leyte Gulf in the Philippines to Navy Base Hospital 17 in Hollandia, New Guinea. Al's story, for which we can't find supporting evidence, follows:

Al was burned in a fire on the Oyster Bay caused by a Japanese bomb hitting the paint locker. Al nearly lost his leg due to a subsequent fungal infection. While navy doctors were contemplating an amputation, a visiting French doctor with experience in the tropical French colonies suggested a treatment that turned out to be effective. (The treatment was likely the application of blue gentian to his wounds.)

Whatever the origins of Al's fungal infection, he was one sick puppy for a long time. Several months later, at the Portsmouth, Virginia Navy Hospital, a medical report stated that he was still "quite ill", "unfit for service", with a probable permanent condition.

After a week in the Hollandia hospital, Al was returned to the continental United States on the USS Mizar.



U.S.S. Mizar (AF-12) (Source: NavSource.org)

The U.S.S. Mizar, formerly the S.S. Quirigua, was a United Fruit Company cargo and passenger liner pressed into military service as a navy stores ship in 1941.

The Mizar docked in Oakland, California on December 15, 1944, and Al was assigned to the Oakland, California Navy Hospital.

It appears that after arriving in Oakland, Al was immediately sent to the Portsmouth, Virginia Navy Hospital, where he spent the next several months. Al was then transferred to the Bronx Veterans Administration Hospital in New York, where in April 1945 he received an honorable discharge for medical reasons from the US Navy.

After his three years of service and his discharge, Al returned to his shoe store in Terre Haute where he resumed operation of *The Shoe Box*, married Lucille, fathered Martha, and lived for the remainder of his life.

Timeline – Albert Dennis in World War II

(Much material herein comes from Albert Dennis' records as received from the National Personnel Records Center in April 2014.)

- 13 Mar 1942 Al enlisted in US Navy at Indianapolis, Indiana. Height 5' 7 ½", weight 120 pounds. Assigned service number of 626-31-18 and initial rating of Store Keeper Third Class (SK3c) and then sent back to Terre Haute to wait for call to active duty.
- 14 Apr 1942 To US Navy Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois.
- 25 May 1942 To US Navy Receiving Station, New Orleans, Louisiana.
- 9 Jul 1942 To US Navy Training Station, Corpus Christi, Texas. (Al subsequently worked at the Naval Air Technical Training Center (Aviation Radio Material) at the Naval Air Station on Ward Island for over a year.)
- 1 Jan 1943 Promoted from SK3c to SK2c.
- 20 Aug 1943 Requested overseas sea duty on a destroyer or destroyer escort. (Request rejected.)
- 7 Sep 1943 Promoted from SK2c to SK1c.
- 12 Sep 1943 To US Navy Receiving Station, Bremerton, Washington.
- 17 Nov 1943 To US Oyster Bay (AGP-6), a newly-commissioned PT Boat tender.
- 7 Dec 1943 Oyster Bay left Seattle, Washington for the South Pacific via San Diego.
- 10 Jan 1943 Oyster Bay crosses the Equator on her way to the war zone.
(The Oyster Bay's travels in the South Pacific are detailed later in this report.)
- 13 Nov 1944 Transferred by LST 1025 (Landing Ship Tank) in Leyte Gulf to Hospital Ship USS Mercy (AH-8) while in Leyte Gulf.
- 17 Nov 1944 Arrived US Navy Base Hospital 17, Hollandia (now Jayapura), New Guinea.
- 25 Nov 1944 To USS Mizar (AF-12) for return to the continental United States.
- 15 Dec 1944 To US Navy Hospital, Oakland, California. (Perhaps Al wasn't admitted but rather put on the train for Portsmouth, Virginia.)
- 18 Dec 1944 Arrived US Navy Hospital, Portsmouth, Virginia.
- 15 Feb 1945 Report of Medical Survey at the Portsmouth hospital recommends discharge because unfit for future service; gloomy prognosis.
- ? Apr 1945 To VA Hospital, Bronx, New York.
- 6 Apr 1945 Al given a honorable discharge for medical reasons and returns to Terre Haute.



Southwest Pacific map courtesy of WorldAtlas.com

The above map shows Australia, New Guinea (north of Australia) and the Philippine Islands, all of which the Oyster Bay visited in 1944. Detailed maps follow.

While in the Southwest Pacific, the Oyster Bay was assigned to Task Group 70.1, the Motor Torpedo Boat (PT boat) unit of the 7th Fleet, the naval component of General Douglas MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Theatre forces.

After February 1944, the Oyster Bay was usually in the war zone. During General Quarters, Al was stationed on the bridge communicating between Commander Holroyd and other ship stations. Thus Al couldn't wear ear protection, which he attributed to some of his hearing loss late in life.

The following pages provide:

- ◆ Timelines of the U.S.S. Oyster Bay's (AGP-6) known movements during Albert Dennis's service so Al's future descendants can trace his wartime service.
- ◆ A context for these timelines via an overview of World War II in the South Pacific. (The key map for the first two years of combat in the South Pacific is on the following page.)

In early 1942 the Japanese overran much of the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia, giving Japan access to the resources of this vast area and threatening to isolate Australia. The Japanese set up their major South Pacific base on the eastern tip of New Britain Island at Rabaul, the capital of Northeast New Guinea (Before World War II, the Australians had governed both Northeast New Guinea and Papua to the south.)

Three events stopped the Japanese advance in the South Pacific:

May 1942: The Battle of the Coral Sea when a Japanese naval force planning to invade Port Moresby in southeastern New Guinea was turned back.

Jul-Sep 1942: The successful Australian defenses of Port Moresby from an overland invasion from Buna and of Milne Bay on the eastern tip of New Guinea from an amphibious attack. Thus the Allies were able to retain toeholds on New Guinea.

Aug '42-Jan '43: Recapture of Guadalcanal and the associated naval battles in the Solomon Islands. During these naval battles, often fought at night in confusing circumstances, the United States and Australia lost 40 ships and the Japanese 50.

By the end of January 1943 the Allies had recaptured the Buna area on the north shore of eastern New Guinea at the cost of 3,000 dead, while Japanese forces had withdrawn from Guadalcanal to the east. Thus, the stage was set for Operation Cartwheel.

Operation Cartwheel

Operation Cartwheel, the encircling of the Japanese base at Rabaul, began in the middle of 1943 and lasted into the first several months of 1944. It consisted of three parts:

- ◆ In the South Pacific Theatre, directed from Admiral Nimitz's headquarters in Pearl Harbor, Marine and Army forces moved northwest through the Solomon Islands, finally landing on the island of Bougainville in November 1943.

It was during the Solomon Islands portion of Operation Cartwheel that future president John F. Kennedy lost his boat, PT-109, to a Japanese destroyer.

- ◆ Nearly a thousand miles to the west, in MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Theatre, forces moved northwest along the north coast of eastern New Guinea, finally capturing Madang in April 1944.
- ◆ Starting late in 1943, forces from both theatres of operations invaded western New Britain and the Admiralty Islands.



The Operation Cartwheel Area Isolating the Japanese Base at Rabaul

When the Oyster Bay arrived in the Southwest Pacific, Operation Cartwheel was nearly over.

Oyster Bay's World War II Participation prior to entering the war zone:

17 Nov '43: Oyster Bay commissioned in Washington; Al Dennis joins crew.

7 Dec '43: Left Seattle, Washington.

2 Jan '44: Left San Diego, California for the war zone.

~23 Jan '44: In Brisbane, Australia.

? Feb '44: Arrived at Milne Bay, on eastern tip of New Guinea.

Oyster Bay's World War II Participation in Operation Cartwheel:

28 Feb '44: Oyster Bay began servicing two squadrons of PT boats at Dreger Harbor, Finschhafen, on the Huon Peninsula of New Guinea.

29 Feb '44: Last major Cartwheel operation begins: U.S. forces invade Admiralty Islands about 400 miles north of eastern New Guinea.

9 Mar '44: Left Dreger Harbor w/ 15 PT boats for Seeadler Harbor, Admiralty Islands.

14 Mar '44: Shore bombardment of Pityilu Island near Seeadler Harbor.

20 Mar '44: Carried wounded soldiers to hospital in Finschhafen.

31 Mar '44: Shore bombardment of Ndrilo Island near Seeadler Harbor.

19 Apr '44: Returned to Dreger Harbor, Finschhafen.

The Western New Guinea Campaign



Western New Guinea in World War II (courtesy of vanderheijden.org)
(This is the best map I have been able to find.)

Before World War II, western New Guinea was part of the Netherlands East Indies, now Indonesia. Hollandia, now Jayapura, was the largest city in the western part.

The Allies began offensive action in New Guinea in November 1942. By April 1944, nearly a year and a half later, only the eastern quarter of New Guinea was in Allied hands. Then, in an ambitious series of amphibious operations from April to July of 1944 the Allies leapfrogged to the western end of New Guinea, bypassing Japanese troop concentrations.

Oyster Bay's World War II Participation in the Western New Guinea Campaign:

22 Apr '44: *U.S. forces invade Hollandia & Aitape, 100 miles east of Hollandia.*

26 Apr '44: Arrived Aitape w/ 15 PT boats from Squadrons 7 and 18.

2 May '44: Arrived Hollandia on north central coast of New Guinea w/ Squadron 18.

16 May '44: *U.S. forces invade Wakde Island, north of western New Guinea.*

27 May '44: *U.S. forces invade Biak Island, north of western New Guinea.*

5 Jun '44: To Wakde Island w/ two squadrons of PT boats.

~12 Jun '44: Shore bombardment at Woske River/Sawar Village, ten miles west of Wakde. While in Wadke area, Japanese bomb shrapnel injures three crew members.

9 Jul '44: Arrived Mios Woendi Island, just south of Biak Island.

12 Jul '44: Left Mios Woendi for maintenance at Brisbane docks.

22 Jul '44: Damaged in Brisbane when Royal Australian Air Force plane struck mast.

16 Aug '44: Left Brisbane to return to Mios Woendi Island.

Morotai and Peleliu Islands

Before invading the Philippines, the allies decided to first seize two islands held by the Japanese that lay near the invasion route and could be used as advanced bases.

- Morotai near Halmahera at the north end of the Molucca Islands in the Dutch East Indies (see the top left corner of the previous map).
- Peleliu at the south end of the Palau Islands 400 miles to the northeast of Morotai.

Oyster Bay's World War II Participation in the Morotai Operation:

15 Aug '44: U.S. forces invade Morotai northwest of New Guinea.

15 Sep '44: U.S. forces invade Peleliu.

16 Sep: Oyster Bay arrived at Morotai w/ Mobjack and Squadrons 9, 10, 18 & 33.

3-6 Oct: Back to Mios Woendi; Mobjack, damaged by Japanese plane, remained behind.

The Philippines Campaign – Overview

The Philippine Islands in the Southwest Pacific became a United States possession after the Spanish American War in 1898. In the five months after the United States entered World War II in December 1941, Japanese forces overran the Philippines in a military disaster without parallel in American history.

The Japanese advance in the Central Pacific was stopped at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. The U.S. offensive campaign in the Central Pacific began with the invasion of Tarawa in November 1943 and culminated in the capture of the Mariana Islands, nearly 2,000 miles to the northwest, in June-August 1944. Three Mariana Islands, Saipan, Guam and Tinian, provided bases for the subsequent long-range bombing of Japan using B-29 bombers.

Severing of the supply lines linking the resource-poor Japanese home islands with the resource-rich Southeastern Asia area was vital to the ultimate defeat of Japan. To achieve this goal military strategists contemplated invading Formosa (now known as Taiwan), Okinawa, or the Philippine Islands. MacArthur, having been the military commander in the Philippines before their loss 2 ½ years earlier, argued for the Philippines invasion and his view carried the day.

The Philippine Campaign began with a landing by MacArthur's 6th Army on the island of Leyte on October 20, 1944. See the map on the next page.

During the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the Oyster Bay was stationed in San Pedro Bay at the northwest corner of Leyte Gulf and was well removed from the carnage. In fact, the deck log for October 23-26 makes no mention of the battle.

The Leyte landing was followed by the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the last major naval battle of World War II, on October 23-26. This battle was actually a collection of four battles and a fifth smaller action, mostly fought outside of Leyte Gulf. Overall the Battle of Leyte Gulf was arguably the largest naval battle in history and was an overwhelming victory for the United States. However, disaster was narrowly averted when, during the Battle Off Samar on October 25, the Japanese Central Force nearly broke through Task Force 77, the 7th Fleet's contingent of escort carriers and destroyers.

Subsequently the fighting on Leyte continued for two more months, longer than expected because the Japanese shifted additional troops to the island.

After Leyte was secured, the 6th Army landed on the main Philippine island of Luzon on January 9, 1945. Nearly two months of hard fighting following, especially in the city of Manila, where 100,000 civilians died.

After the Philippines Campaign two other major campaigns, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, remained before two atomic bombs were dropped on the Japanese home islands, Russia entered the war with Japan, and World War II ended.

Oyster Bay's World War II Participation in Leyte Phase in the Philippines Campaign:

13 Oct '44: Left Mios Woendi for Palau Islands escorting PT boats.

18 Oct '44: Left Palau Islands for Leyte Gulf with Task Group 30.1.

20 Oct '44: *U.S. forces invade Leyte as first step in reconquest of Philippines.*

21 Oct '44: Arrived San Pedro Bay in Leyte Gulf near Tacloban.

23-26 Oct '44: *Battle of Leyte Gulf – five separate actions.*

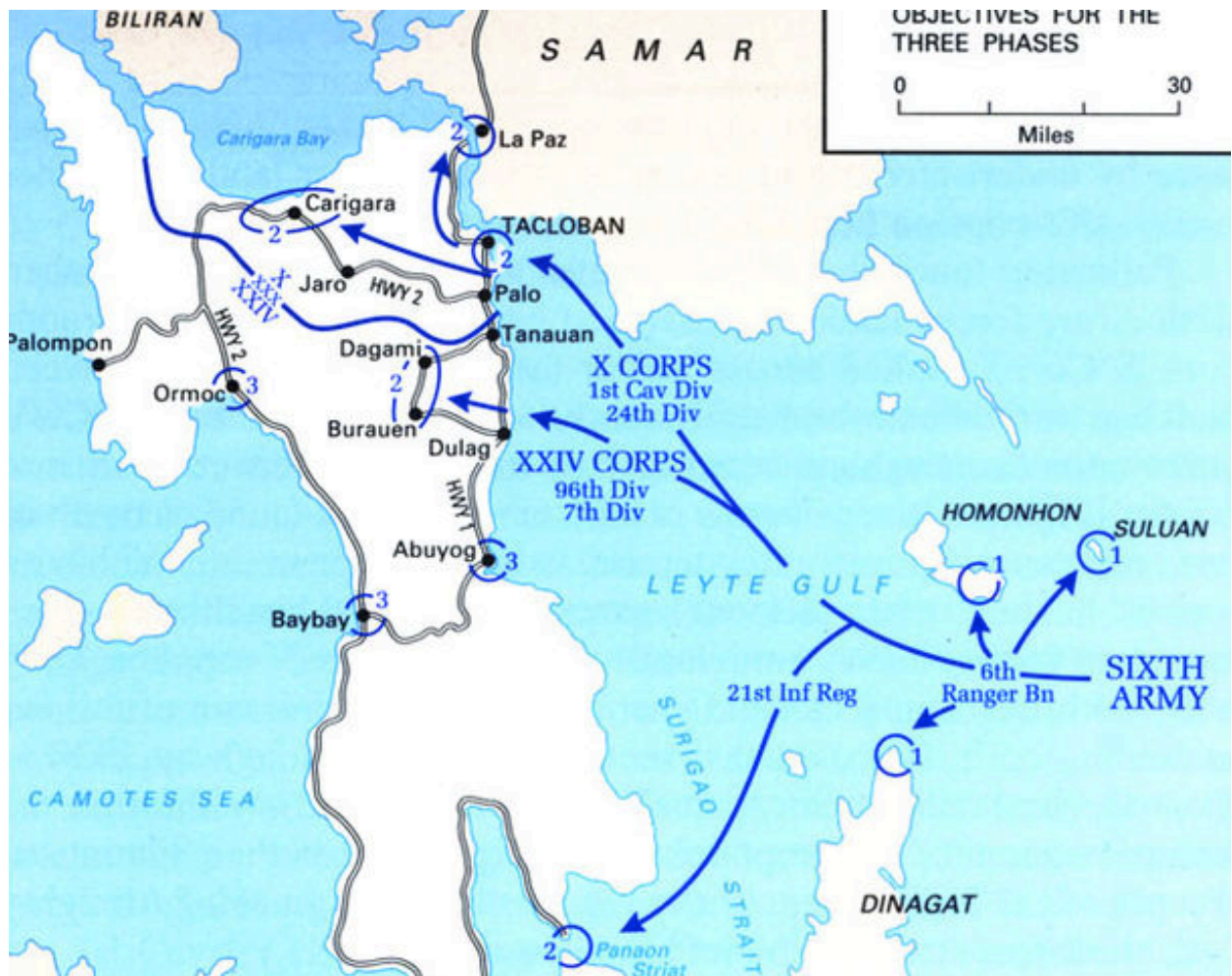
25 Oct '44: *Oyster Bay's PT boats participate in Battle of Surigao Strait.*

25 Oct '44: *Battle off Samar about 100 miles northeast of San Pedro Bay ends in unexpected Japanese withdrawal, preventing an attack on the invasion fleet.*

5 Nov '44: PT-320 destroyed by Japanese plane two miles from Oyster Bay.

13 Nov '44: Al Dennis transferred from Oyster Bay to Hospital Ship Mercy.

25 Dec '44: *Leyte declared secure.*



The Invasion of Leyte in the Philippine Islands, 20 Oct 1944
(map courtesy of Wikipedia.org)