

An Excerpt from War Record: Dreams of a Stolen World, by Mark Zaccaria

Read this description of morning aboard a US Navy Destroyer in the months before America entered WWII. This is the eye you will look through as you follow a young man of his times through adolescence to manhood and on the ultimate test of survival in War.

Life on shipboard always seems to reduce itself to practice quickly. By early the next morning, Leo had acclimated to the vibrations of the decks, the gentle motion of the vessel underway, and even to the staccato and rather hydraulic snoring that marked Ensign Davies's sleep. The ship was quiet just before dawn, and like most of the rest of the crew, Leo slept soundly and at peace.

It was quiet in the *Monaghan's* bridge. Dim red lights illuminated the surroundings enough so that the three sailors standing the last watch could make their way around the space without stumbling. Outside, the late summer sky was just turning gray with the promise of a clear sunrise. The calm sea that lay before the destroyer glistened just enough to allow the deck watch to make out its surface and distinguish the horizon. The helmsman had an easy job of holding the ship on a course of 075, magnetic. As they glided along on a heading just north of due east, the officer of the deck was looking to starboard and awaiting the emergence of the sun. The ship's clock showed 0558 and 30 seconds sweep when the Bo'sun's mate stepped up to the OD and spoke.

“Request permission to pipe reveille, sir.”

The officer glanced back briefly at the large clock mounted on the rear bulkhead. “Permission granted,” he said, thinking about coffee.

As Leo sprawled out in the upper bunk of the small stateroom, he had become accustomed to all the background sounds of the moving ship. There was actually a fair amount of noise, but it was all constant, so it all faded from one's attention. When the room's intercom speaker crackled to life, however, this was something different, and he opened one eye to focus a question on it even before its message began. The time was 0559, straight up.

First, there was the shrill, three-toned attention signal of the Bo'sun's whistle. The mate actually blew his pipe into the microphone where its piercing tones were amplified and left no one wondering if they were actually hearing NBC.

“Reveille! Reveille! All hands heave out and trice up!” It only had to be said once.

Lights came on in the crew's bunk spaces and the officers' staterooms alike. There was softly padding foot traffic throughout the ship as the plumbing in the heads came gushing to life. The few new recruits were eager. Their excitement at their first morning at sea was obvious. Old salts watching from the petty officers' quarters smiled with feelings of both irony and approval. Stewards in all three mess areas set about making coffee, but somehow, the chiefs always got theirs first.

The captain arose, dressed, and climbed the ladder from his stateroom directly to the bridge. There, he turned a practiced eye to the weather, scanned the horizon to be sure it was clear, and asked the OD for an informal report. A steward presented him with a mug of coffee as he was glancing at the ship's log before retreating to his quarters again to prepare for breakfast.

By 0630, the lines were beginning to form in the crew's mess and the cooks were starting to dispense heaping mounds of scrambled eggs, sausage, dry toast, and oatmeal. Tonight, there would be

roast beef for dinner, so tomorrow morning, the new recruits would get their first taste of creamed chipped beef, on a shingle of course.

The Bo'sun's whistle rent the air again. "Attention in the ship. The smoking lamp is lighted."

After a cramped and abbreviated morning toilette, Leo followed Ensign Davies to the ward room for breakfast. Once again, he was surprised at how small the ward room actually was and that even though he took up an extra place, it was not at all crowded. They sat around the narrow table that occupied the tail of the *T* in the small space. Coffee was poured from steel pots that clipped into sockets on the coffee makers right there. Stewards arrived with plates of eggs, sausage, and pancakes. They seemed to take it personally if you didn't accept more of everything.

Leo's place was at the part of the table that opened out onto the rest of the room and the door. Davies sat across from him. He wondered why the far end of the table was reserved for the ship's master and the highest-ranking officers; it was the most inaccessible after all once everyone was seated. The question didn't distract him from applying syrup to a stack of pancakes. From the other end of the small table, Mr. Dobbins, the executive officer, spoke up.

"Mr. Zaccaria, it seems that our sea air agrees with you. Your appetite appears unaffected by a night at close quarters with Ensign Davies."

Things like snoring quickly became common knowledge on a small ship. Davies looked a little sheepish but actually pleased with the attention. He could have gotten a reputation for any number of things more embarrassing than snoring. He took it in good fun. After all, what choice did he have?

"Yes, sir," Leo replied with a smile. "I'm well-rested and ready to get to work."

"Excellent," the XO continued. "And just what will your work consist of on this short trip?"

"Mostly, I'll be observing the operation of the water treatment system I've devised for the boilers, sir. Chief Pickford has created a rig that seems to be quite workable for introducing the necessary chemicals into the feed water. I'll be watching to see how easy or difficult it is to actually do it under sea conditions," he explained. "We don't want to ask the fire room watch to do a task that is too difficult or gets in the way of some other function. After a couple months, I'll also be reviewing the ship's efficiency figures to try to estimate how much good all this has done."

"Very well, Mr. Zaccaria," Dobbins answered. "Our sea trials will consist of a series of high-stress maneuvers followed by ordinary steaming while we evaluate the ship's performance. I daresay you'll have the opportunity to observe your treatment system under extreme operating conditions." The captain raised an eyebrow at this last statement. He cast a critical eye on the young chemist and then back at his executive officer.

The intercom speaker came to life with a brief static hiss that served just as well as the Bo'sun's call for getting the crew's attention.

"Now. All hands fall in at quarters for muster and inspection."

The time was 0745.