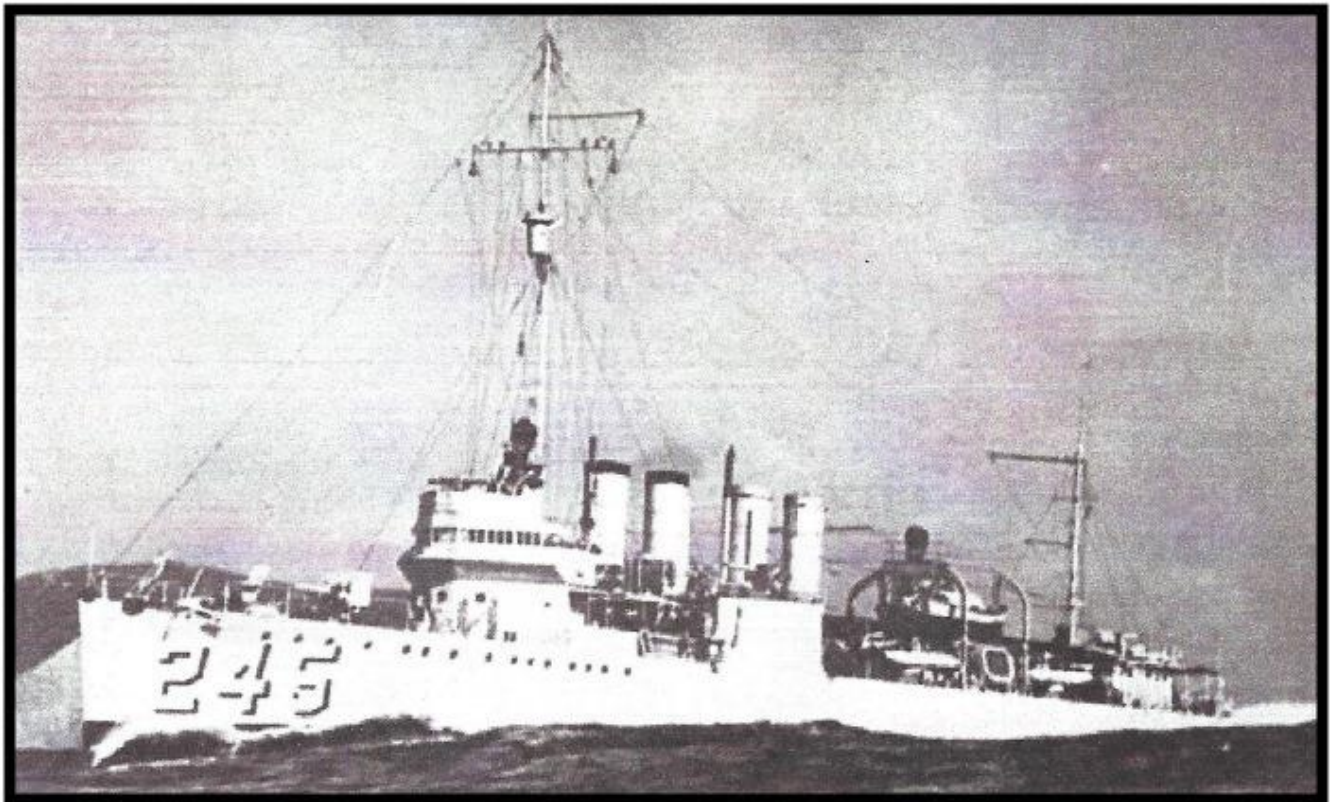




WEBFOOTER EXTRA

MARCH 2018

Liberty Before the Storm



USS Reuben James DD 245, sunk by German U-boat prior to the start of WWII on Oct. 31, 1941

◆ Liberty Before the Storm by Bill Nix – see page 2.

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LIBERTY BEFORE THE STORM

By Bill Nix



USS Brooks DD 232 and sister ship to USS Reuben James, both at Portland Rose Festival 1937.

Portland, Oregon is a favorite liberty port for sailors on vessels of the US Navy. Every year in mid-summer the US Navy comes to Portland for Fleet Week celebration during the Rose Festival. These periods of sailor liberty were usually provided when Navy vessels were visiting during the annual Rose Festival Celebrations every year. The first Rose Festival took place in 1907 and the Navy's first protected cruiser the USS Charleston (CL 2) tied up there for the new festival. From 1919 until World War II the USS Oregon (BB 3) was tied up on the Portland waterfront as a tourist attraction.

Since 1907 the Navy has sent ships to this festival, except during periods of war or national emergency. The Rose Festival offered sailors time away from their ships to meet with friendly citizens, invitations to visit and attend family dinners, watch the Rose Festival Parade and see the sights of the Columbia River in-route to Portland from Astoria.

As I noted above, the first visiting naval vessel was a cruiser and generally speaking these have been the largest vessels capable of tying up in the Port of Portland, although the much larger battleship USS New Jersey (BB 63) visited Portland in the summer of 1990. Cruisers before World War II were no larger than 10,000 tons

displacement carrying 8 inch guns on heavy cruisers and 6 inch guns on light cruisers. The time period described in this article, 1937, had the United States in compliance with treaty obligations limiting the size of all cruisers at 10,000 tons maximum.

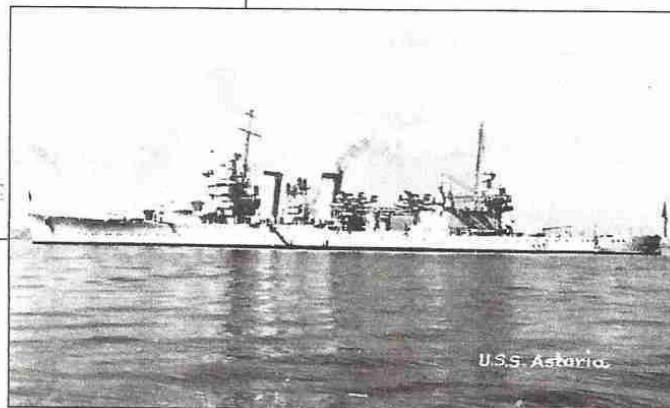
The Washington Naval Treaty 1922, followed by the London Naval Treaty of 1930, placed limitations on the size and quantity of various sizes of ships primarily the large battleships, but also included limitations on cruisers. The ratio for tonnage between the nations of Great Britain, United States, Japan and Germany was 5:5:3, thus the two larger nations navies had greater tonnage than Germany and Japan. It should be noted that the Imperial Nation of Japan walked out of the treaty conference in 1930.



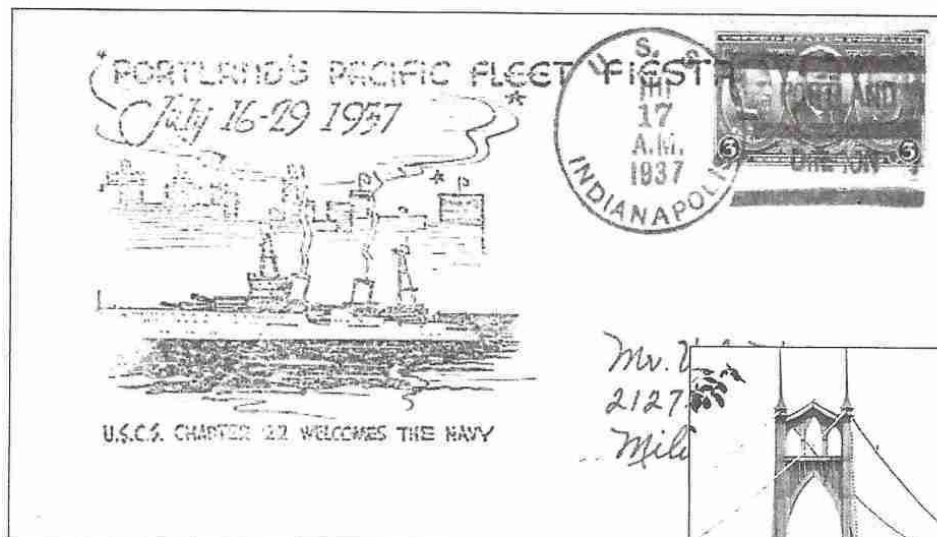
Light cruiser USS Memphis CL 13 tied up near the Public Market during Portland Rose Festival 1937.



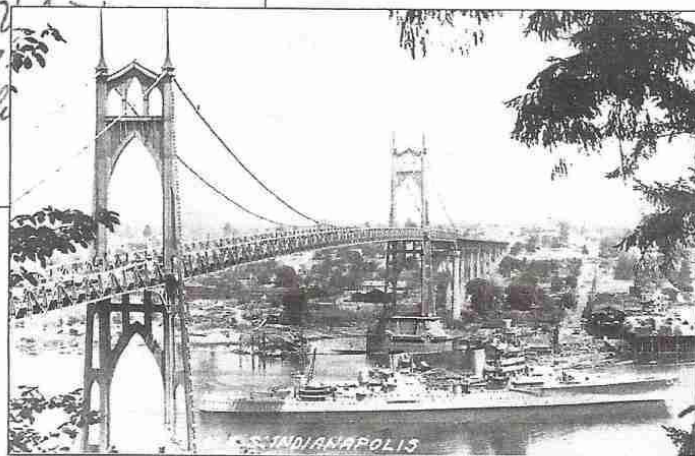
USS Astoria CA 34, sunk at the Battle of Savo Island, August 9, 1942.



U.S.S. Astoria



SS Indianapolis CA 35, sunk on July 31, 1945 by Japanese submarine after delivery of two atom bombs to Tinian Atoll.



U.S.S. INDIANAPOLIS

The treaties also stipulated to the size and types of cannon on the cruisers and consequently these ships have the nickname "treaty cruisers." In short, cruisers were divided in the nomenclature of heavy and light cruisers with the heavy having a displacement of under 10,000 tons with 8 inch guns and the light having the same tonnage, but with no larger than 6 inch guns.

Annually, between the wars, the US Navy conducted naval war exercises in the Pacific Ocean between two opposing fleets of US Navy vessels identified by colors. In reality a potential military confrontation between Imperial Japan and the United States in the Pacific was predicted.

During May 1937 a naval exercise labeled Fleet

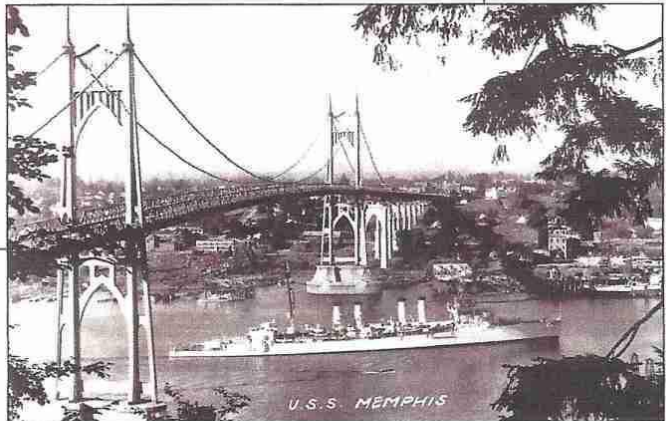
Problem XVIII involved the "white" and "black" fleets in Alaskan and Hawaiian waters. From April 16 to May 28 the white fleet, representing Japan was in Alaskan "home" waters and the black fleet representing the United States was in the southwest Pacific Ocean. The white fleet had surrounded 20,000 troops at the southwest Pacific location called Capitola, in reality Manila, P.I. The black fleet was trying to relieve their troop forces by seizure of the



BATTLESHIP OREGON

"The Bulldog of the Navy"
Sabites United States Navy
"For You a Rose in Portland Crows"

Light cruiser USS Memphis CL 13 passing under the St. Johns bridge during Portland Rose Festival 1937.

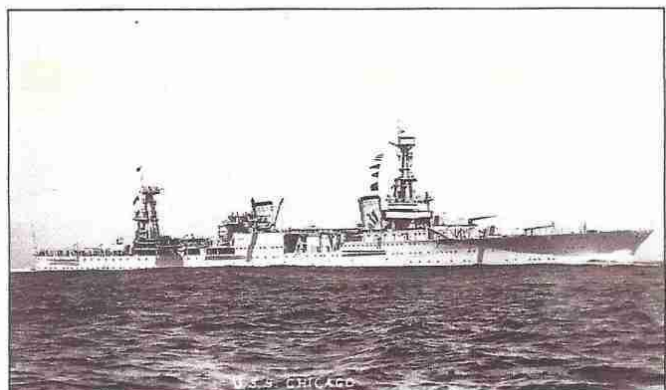


islands of Midway and Hawaii.

The aggressor white fleet was under command of Vice Admiral William T. Tarrant and the defending black fleet was commanded by Admiral Claud C. Bloch. During this exercise Bloch had three aircraft carriers, the USS Lexington (CV 2), USS Saratoga (CV 3) and USS Langley (CV 1). His strategy was to use the aircraft from the carriers as reconnaissance for enemy ships or submarines and as spotters for naval gunfire against the enemy. This strategy kept the carriers close to the battleships as support vessels while Vice Admiral Tarrant used his single aircraft carrier USS Ranger (CV 4) as a separate offensive unit with favorable results.

Admiral Bloch's strategy led to his near defeat in the war game and one of his subordinates, Vice Admiral Frederick J. Horne, Commander Aircraft Carriers Battle Force, recommended greater autonomy for his ships as independent operators. We can only speculate that Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto studied the actions and results of this war game in his planning of his 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor.

Following the war game, Vice Admiral William T. Tarrant sent the Scouting Fleet warships to visit west coast ports, one of which was the Portland Rose Festival from July 16 through July 29, 1937. The 16,000 crew members on the visiting ships were on eleven treaty heavy cruisers, four pre-treaty light cruisers, four destroyers, a hospital ship and a supplies ship. The size



USS Chicago CA 29, sunk at Battle of Rennell January 30, 1943.



U.S. Navy Hospital Ship "Relief" - Portland, Oregon
USS Relief Navy Hospital Ship that accompanied naval vessels to the Rose Festival annually

of this 21 ship fleet visit was reported by the Portland Morning Oregonian as the largest in the history of the Rose Festival. You will see that many of these visiting ships would have subsequent historical importance during the coming Second World War.

The following list of the visiting ships notes their WW II loss or damage:

Heavy Cruisers

- Pensacola Class – two ships built
 - USS Pensacola CA 24
Damaged at Tassafaronga
 - USS Salt Lake City CA 25
- Northampton Class – six ships built
 - USS Northampton CA 26
Sunk in battle of Tassafaronga
 - USS Louisville CA 28
 - USS Chicago CA 29
Sunk in battle of Rennell
- Portland Class – two ships built
 - USS Indianapolis CA 35
Sunk in Philippine Sea
- New Orleans Class – seven ships built
 - USS New Orleans CA 32
Damaged at Tassafaronga
 - USS Astoria CA 34
Sunk in battle of Savo Island
 - USS Minneapolis CA 36
Damaged at Tassafaronga
 - USS Tuscaloosa CA 37

USS Quincy CA 39
Lost in battle of Savo Island

Light Cruisers – ten ships built

Omaha Class

USS Richmond CL 9
USS Trenton CL 11
USS Marblehead CL 12
USS Memphis CL 13

Destroyers

Clemson Class – 156 ships built

USS Brooks DD 232
USS Fox DD 234
USS Reuben James DD 245
Sunk by U-boat pre-WW 2
USS Goff DD 247

Hospital Ship

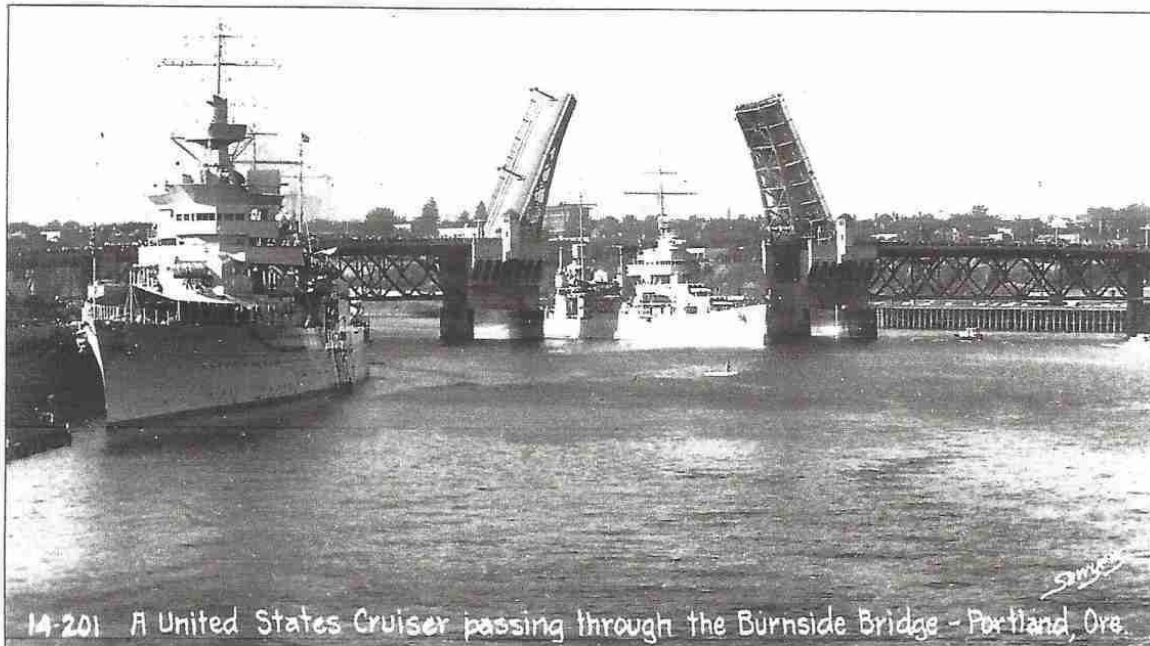
USS Relief AH 1

Stores Ship

USS Arctic AF 1

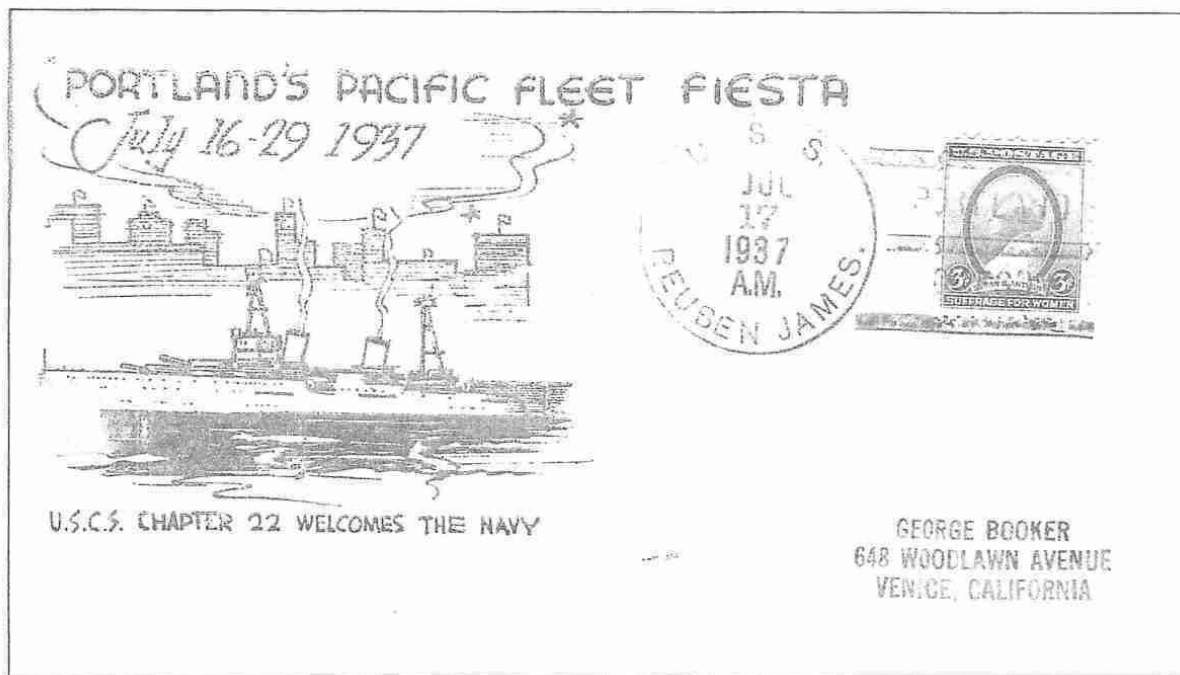
In the Portland *Morning Oregonian* leading newspaper stories during the two weeks of the Portland Rose Festival; the reported the search for Amelia Earhart had ended, an increase in the cost for butter to 40 cents a pound was reported, the appellant trials of the nine Scottsboro boys were completed with the release of five and death sentences or life imprisonment of the other four.

Also in the local news the eight 13 man and eight 10 man lifeboat races between Navy crews with a crew of



14-201 A United States Cruiser passing through the Burnside Bridge - Portland, Ore.

USS Indianapolis CA 35 on the right with USS Minneapolis CA 36 is tied up behind and USS New Orleans CA 32 passing through Burnside Bridge during the Portland Rose Festival 1937.



USS Reuben James DD 245, sunk by U-Boat, October 31, 1941.

10 winning from USS Chicago and crew of 13 winning from USS Tuscaloosa. Vice Admiral Tarrant reported that "not only because of Portland's unrivaled hospitality but because of the value to officers of learning from actual experience the navigation features of the strategic Columbia River" that these were the best reasons to continue visiting Portland yearly. This wasn't Tarrant's first trip to Portland, he was commanding officer of the USS Oregon in a 1919 visit by the battleship to the city's waterfront.

During the 1930's the collection of covers mailed off US Navy ships was a popular hobby and these envelopes are easily available. The navy postal clerks inserted slogans between the killer bars of their cancellation devices denoting the location of the ship. During the Portland Rose Festival the postal cancels contained the slogan PORTLAND / OREGON with all of the attending ships using this killer on their mail.

In addition the blank portion on the left side of an envelope would have a printed inscription called a cachet. This cachet referred to the Rose Festival with the celebration date of July 16 to July 29, 1937. In the USCS catalog of US Navy ship cancels these labeled type 3 cancels have a value rating of "A" translated as common. Because these were canceled in a specific port during a celebration or festival a collector may value these at a higher price.

Six of the twenty-one visiting ships were subsequently lost and three heavily damaged early in World

War II. This represented a major loss to the US Navy during the war. Five of the ships that docked in Portland, Ore., in July 1937 were lost to Japanese military action, another three were heavily damaged and one destroyer was sunk by German U-boat two months before the start of World War II. You should also note that the US Navy no longer had battleships in the Pacific Ocean after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor and now the cruisers were the primary naval weapon, in addition to the aircraft carriers and submarines.

In Memoriam

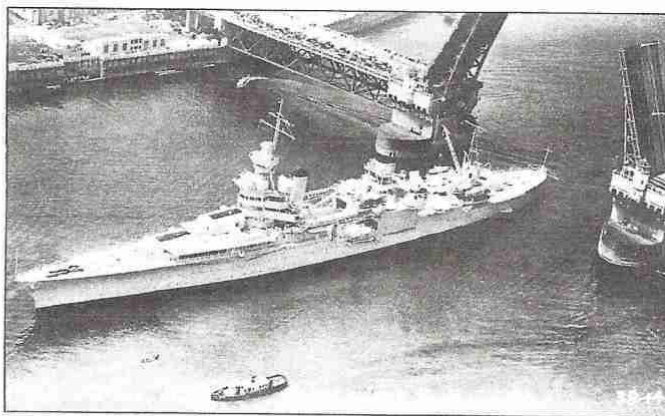
The USS Reuben James was sent to the Atlantic Fleet in January 1939 and on September 4, 1939, was ordered to participate in the Neutrality Patrol, unit Patrol Three with USS Manley, USS Decatur, and USS Barry between 34th and 38th parallels escorting merchant ship convoys in-route from Halifax to Liverpool. On October 31, 1941, the German U-Boat (U 552) torpedoed and sank the USS Reuben James of which 44 survived of a crew of 159. In 1942 folk-singer Woody Guthrie wrote a commemorative song about the sinking entitled "The Sinking of the Reuben James" which was again a later pop-tune hit of the Kingston Trio during the 1960's. The general public in the United States, in late 1941, generally ignored the sinking and loss of life caused by Nazi Germany.

The USS Astoria and USS Quincy were attacked by Japanese naval units between Savo Island and Gua-

dacanal, these cruisers were protecting the US invasion forces off Guadalcanal. The Battle of Savo Island commenced during the night of August 8 and 9, 1942, a fleet of Japanese cruisers / destroyers attempted to strike the invasion fleet, but were met by the US protecting forces. During that night the US Navy lost three cruisers that included the USS Astoria and USS Quincy with additional losses of the USS Vincennes (CA 44) and Australian heavy cruiser HMAS Canberra. There were two crewmen from the Pacific Northwest declared missing from the ships sinking. Paul L. Magaris, radio-man, Ft. Stevens, OR and Peter Anderson, watertender, Sumner, WA

The USS Northampton was one of a group of five cruisers and four destroyers protecting the US invasion forces off Guadalcanal, November 30 and December 1, 1942. A group of eight Japanese destroyers attempted to attack the US invasion fleet which became known as the Battle of Tassafaronga, or Fourth Battle of Savo Island. The battle commenced just before mid-night with radar equipped US destroyers launching torpedo attacks against the Japanese destroyers sinking one. The Japanese counter-attacked with torpedoes launched toward the US ships with subsequent hits and sinking the USS Northampton and heavy damage to three other cruisers USS New Orleans, USS Minneapolis and USS Pensacola. Repairs to these three cruisers took nearly a year to complete.

The USS Chicago in a naval force of six cruisers and six destroyers were protecting US invasion forces at Guadalcanal on January 29, 1943. The ships were attacked by Japanese aircraft which dropped torpe-



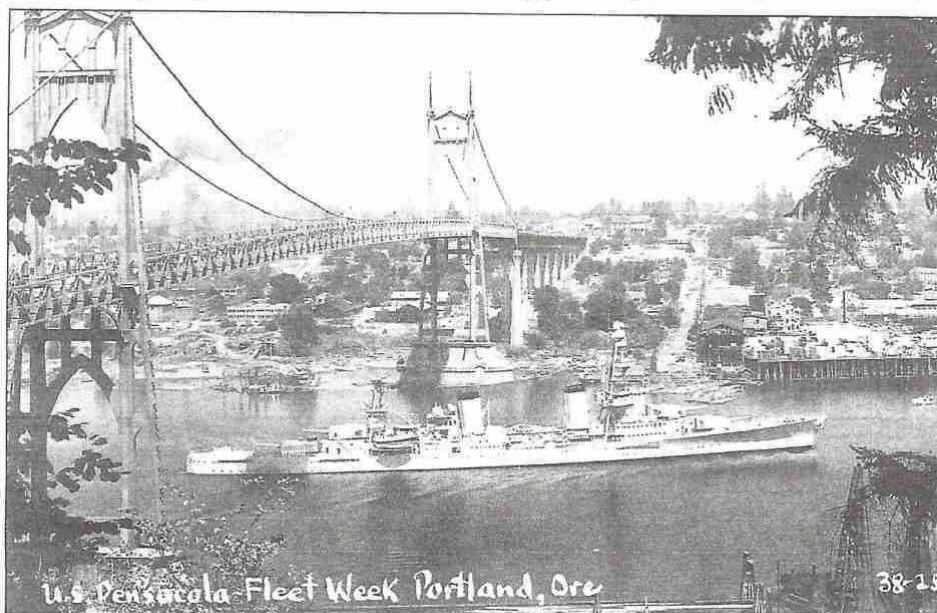
The USS Indianapolis on the Willamette River.

does striking the USS Chicago afterwards the heavily damaged ship was towed to safety by the cruiser USS Louisville. The following day the crippled cruiser was again attacked by aircraft and struck by four torpedoes, the ship sank with a loss of 62 men.

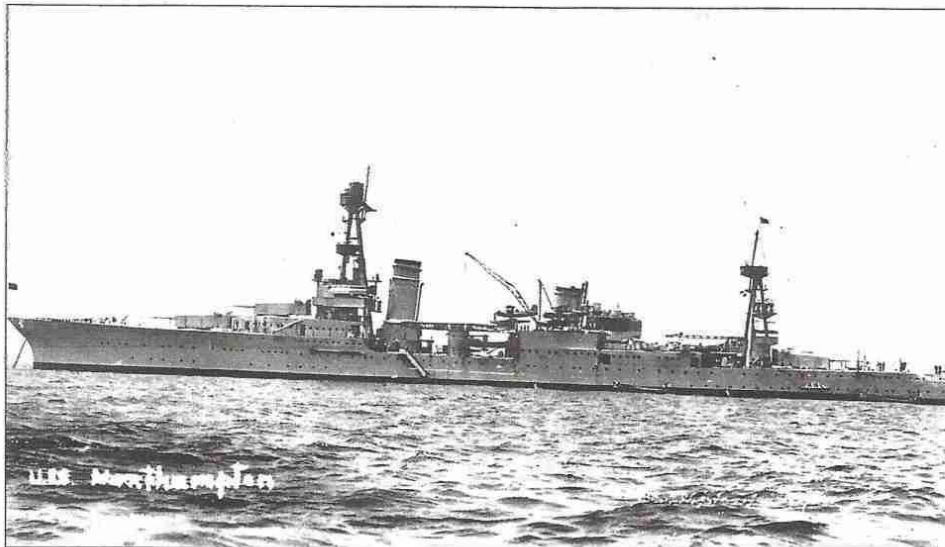
The USS Indianapolis, near the end of the Second World War, became the US Navy's greatest loss of lives in naval history with her sinking. Commanded by Capt. Charles B. McVay III, on July 26th the ship had just delivered the atomic bomb to Tinian Atoll that was to be dropped August 6, 1945 on Hiroshima. From Tinian Atoll Capt. McVay III sailed the ship to Guam, but never arrived there.

On July 30, 1945, just after mid-night the Japanese Imperial Navy submarine I-58 commanded by Lt. Cmdr. Mochitsura Hashimoto torpedoed and sank the USS Indianapolis in the Philippines Sea. About 900 of a crew of 1,196 survived the sinking to float in life rafts, life-belts and debris. The distress signal radioed from the sinking ship was not responded to by three radio receivers causing the survivors to float undetected for over three days.

The floating survivors were attacked by schools of shark leading to great loss of life as well as sea-water immersion. The morning of August 2nd a patrolling US Navy PV-1 Ventura saw the survivors and initiated rescue operations. A Navy PBY Catalina floatplane commanded by Lt. Adrian Marks arrived to see the floating survivors. He disregarded naval operational instruction



USS Pensacola CA 24, heavily damaged at the Battle of Tassafaronga, November 30, 1942.



USS Northampton CA 26, sunk at the Battle of Tassafaronga, November 30, 1942.

on duty, but his career was ruined, he never commanded another ship in the future. He was promoted to the rank of Rear Admiral in 1949 and retired from the military. Reprimands were issued to another four officers in the Pacific for their failure to mount a timely

that directed the floatplane only be landed in calm waters and landed his plane to assist the survivors. His aircraft was used to bring survivors out of the water as would be done with a lifeboat. He had 56 of the ship's crew-members on his aircraft until rescue ships arrived. The now un-flyable aircraft was abandoned following the rescue of the ship's crew. Lt. Marks would later be awarded the Air Medal by Adm. Chester Nimitz. Of the original crew of 1,196 there would only be 317 survivors one of whom was Capt. McVay III.

The commanding officer of the Indianapolis, Capt. Charles B. McVay III, was court-martialed in December 1945 and found to have left his ship vulnerable to torpedoes by maintaining a straight course rather than zig-zagging. Testifying at the court-martial Japanese Lt. Cmdr. Hashimoto said that a zig-zag maneuver wouldn't prevent his sinking of the ship.

Following his conviction he was allowed to remain

rescue operation, but these were later rescinded. At the age of 70 years Rear Admiral McKay committed suicide. In October 2000, Congress exonerated him and his service record was purged of all blame for the loss of the USS Indianapolis.

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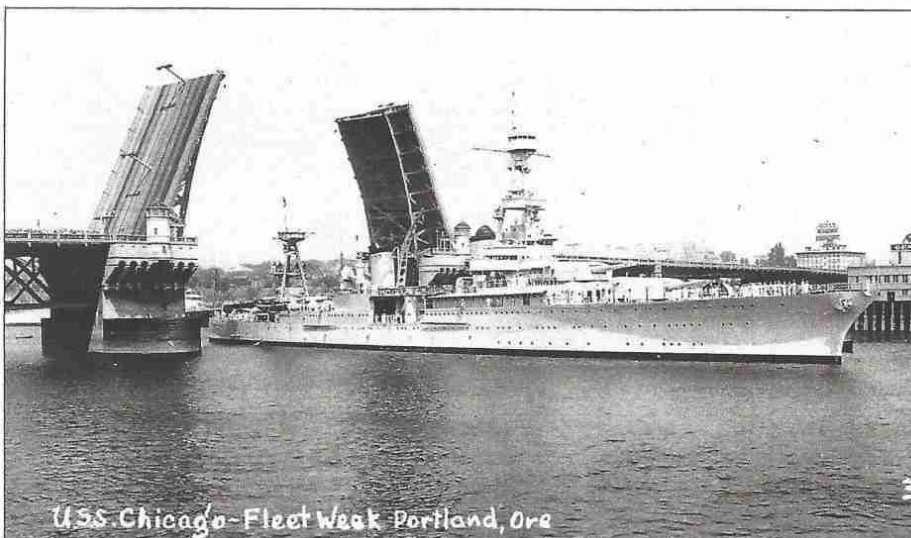
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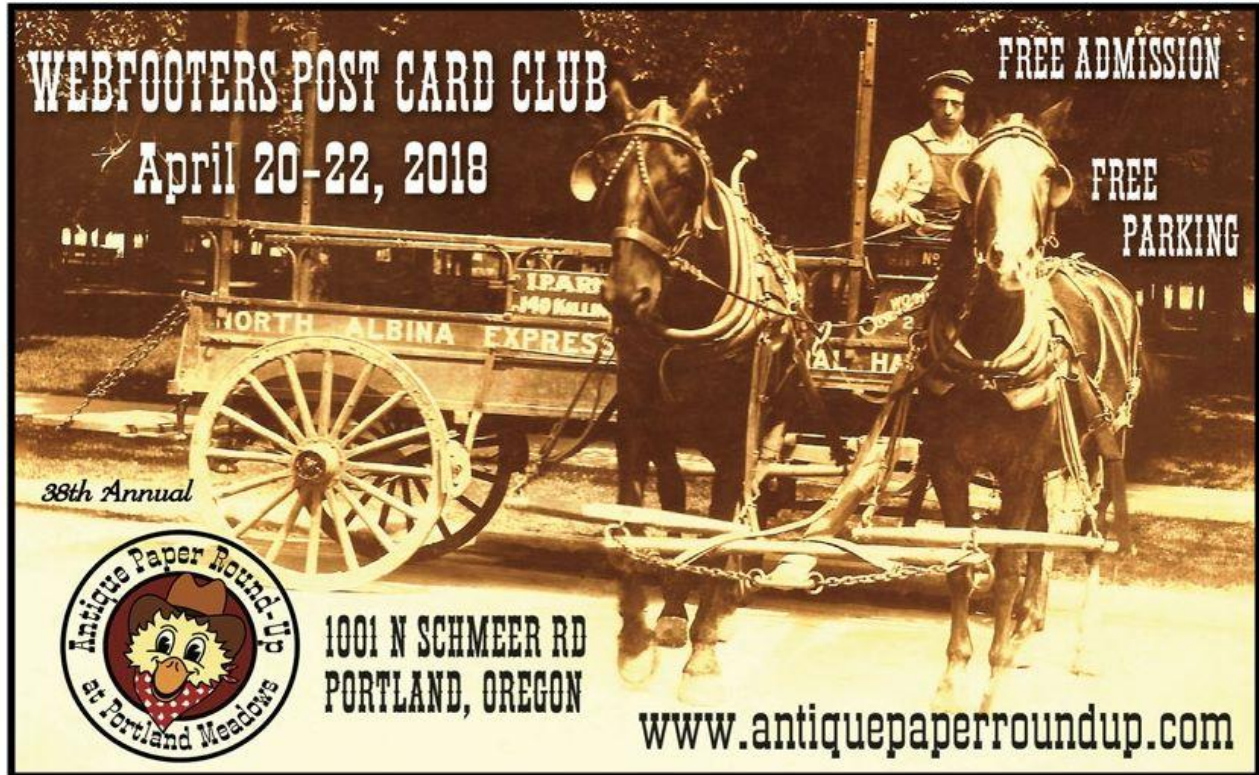
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USS Chicago at Portland Rose Festival 1937.

From an article that originally appeared in the Spring 2015 edition of *The Oregon Country*.

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