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Log Book



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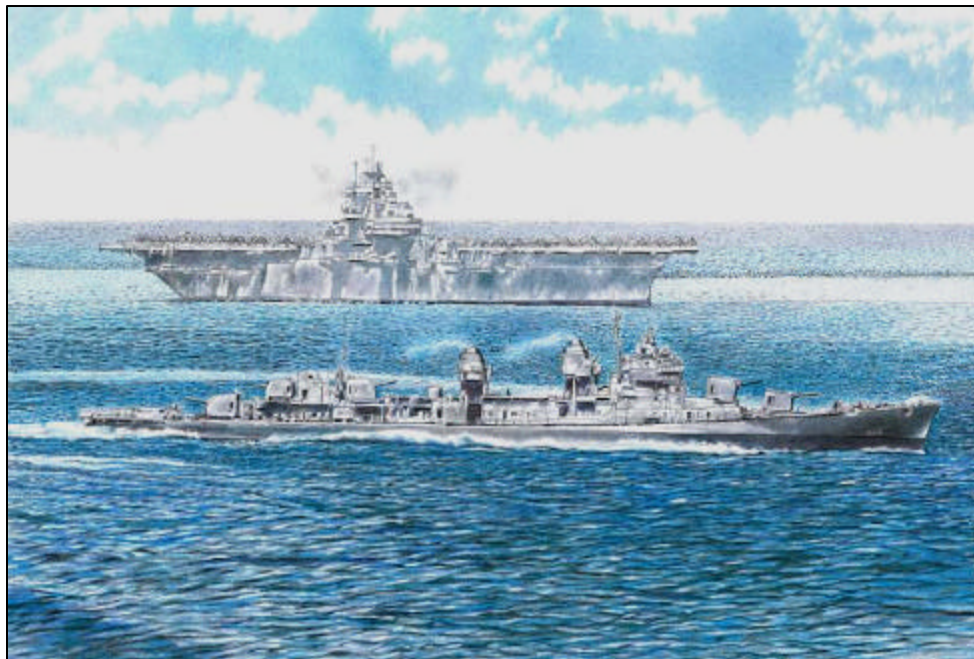
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Tin Can Calendar® 2010 is about to get underway. Order/reserve your copy by November 14! (details on page 3.)

Commentary: *Missing in Action*

By David Sears

Note: In our last issue, we mentioned that we would occasionally include a Commentary section. What follows is our first effort. We welcome feedback from readers by e-mail or mail. (Our full contact information is on page 6.)

Recently, the Texas Department of Transportation discovered that at least 11 of the 67 Legion of Merit license plates on its roads had been issued to people who never actually earned this prestigious

medal.

In September 2008, Congress rescinded a bill naming a Las Vegas post office for a World War II veteran after learning he had lied when he claimed he had been a Silver Star recipient.

And in April of this year, investigators found that the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs was paying disability benefits to 286 supposed POWs from the 1991 Persian Gulf War and to 966 supposed prisoners of the Vietnam War. This despite Defense Department records showing that only 21 POWs returned from the Gulf War, and that fewer than 600 Vietnam War POWs are still living.

Military imposters are nothing new of course, but the problem has only mushroomed with the rising popularity of the armed forces. After 9/11, as more people joined the military and were being publicized for their heroics, praised for their sacrifices and eulogized for their deaths, more and more fraudulent "home front heroes" have tried, both literally and figuratively, to "cash in."

It's even worse in a way when such despicable behavior is perpetrated by "insiders"—veterans themselves. Not long ago, for example, *The Marine Corps Times* turned up 40

Missing in Action (Continued on page 2)

★ Taps ★



★ Benjamin Paul (Speedy) Brannon ★
USS *Mustin* (DD-413)
11/22/1919–5/18/2009

★ Benjamin Edward Hall, Jr. ★
USS *Walke* (DD-723)
9/25/1920–7/5/2009

★ Paul N. Wilson ★
USS *Gainard* (DD-706)
4/10/1926–5/4/2009

★ E.A. Fowler, Jr., USS *Howorth* (DD-592), 6/12/1926–8/22/2009 ★

★ Forest (Woody) Shrider, USS *Howorth* (DD-592), 9/25/2009 ★

★ Kenneth McFall, USS *Mugford* (DD-389), 8/22/2009 ★

Missing in Action (Continued from page 1)

erroneous profiles in the annual Marine Corps Association Directory, including false claims of 16 Medals of Honor, 16 Navy Crosses and 8 Silver Stars. (Semper Fi, indeed!)

This tawdry crime wave of “stolen valor” comes at a time when the Internet has made it easier than ever for charlatans to obtain fake military documents and medals. Fortunately, the Web has also made it simpler and faster for authorities and concerned citizens to uncover and spotlight stolen valor.

Still, in the absence of meaningful punishment and an official, comprehensive database of military service dates and awards, it is extremely difficult to pin down these valor thieves, never mind bring them to justice.

Committing systematic military fraud often begins with fabrication

of a false DD-214 form, the one-page summary that all service members receive at discharge. DD-214s officially document key information such as rank, training, awards and length of time in the service.

While the DD-214 has potentially far-reaching benefits (and consequences) for veteran recipients, no DD-214 database currently exists. This even after a 2004 study concluded that digitizing all DD-214s issued since 1947 could result in annual savings of \$4 million over the current costs of storing and retrieving paper records. (Separately, a piece of Congressional legislation seeks to require the Defense Department to create a national online database of all medals and honors awarded.)

Without digital recordkeeping and Congressional mandates, the job of debunking frauds and cheats is

largely left to volunteers, many of them veterans, who connect via the Internet and comb through mountains of online and offline information. For example, these pro bono patriots scan small newspapers searching for poseurs, file Freedom of Information requests for military files, and provide research help for employers, local authorities, biographers and even obituary writers.

A few years back volunteer motivation (and case loads) soared with passage of the Stolen Valor Act. The 2006 Act makes it a federal crime to falsely claim, verbally or in writing, that a person had been awarded a medal. Before, the law only prohibited actually wearing any unearned medal.

Such volunteers are not without their critics. Despite best efforts

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USS Wedderburn (DD-684) and USS Porterfield (DD-682)



USS Halford (DD-480)



USS Monaghan (DD-354) and USS Dale (DD-353)

Tin Can Calendar® 2010 About to Get Underway!

November 14, 2009 is the final day we can accept reservations and orders for copies of Tin Can Calendar® 2010!

Tin Can Calendar® 2010 includes a Roll Call honoring the ships and sailors of America's Tin Can Navy. The Roll Call will include the names of Tin Can Sailors (along with their ships) who have purchased or reserved copies of this limited edition.

So please hurry if you want your name (or the name of a family member who is or was a Tin Can

Sailor) represented. Either:

- Fill out and mail the reservation form below (make sure you mail in time to reach us by November 14, 2009.) Or
- Fill out and mail the D.L. Sears Books order form on page 6. Or
- Go to our web site (www.dlsearsbooks.com), click on "Tin Can Calendar" and follow the link to reserve a copy. Or
- E-mail, write or even phone us (973 285-0258) so that we re-

ceive the critical information before our November 14 publication deadline.

The key information items we need for Roll Call are:

- Veteran's name
- Veteran's ship (Tin Cans only, please!)
- Veteran's rate/rate while aboard that ship
- Veteran's "beginning year" (for

Tin Can Calendar (Continued on page 6)

Tin Can Calendar® 2010 reservation. Please reserve ___ copies of Tin Can Calendar® 2010 for:

Name: _____

Street Address or PO: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Tin Can Calendar® 2010 Roll Call: Veteran Name (if different from Name above): _____

Ship Name and Hull # (Tin Cans only, please): _____

While aboard the Ship listed above:

Veteran Start/End Service aboard the Ship listed above (format XXXX - XXXX): _____ Rank/Rate: _____

Note: If you would like to have another veteran's name added or have a veteran's name listed under more than one ship, please fill out a separate reservation form. (We ask that you reserve at least one copy of Tin Can Calendar® 2010 for each veteran name and/or ship.) We will invoice you at time of publication for the copies you reserved (see page 6 for postage and shipping costs). Thank you for your Tin Can Calendar® 2010 reservation!

Updates

- ✈ Tin Can Calendar® 2010:
As described in more detail on the following page, *Tin Can Calendar® 2010* will go to press in mid-November. [The deadline for reserving one or more copies \(and having the name and ship of a Tin Can veteran included in the Tin Can Calendar® Roll Call\) is November 14, 2009.](#)
- ✈ Selections from Thomas Calvin Houtz' original artwork for *Tin Can Calendar® 2010* will be on display in November at the Morris County Library, Morris Township, NJ.
- ✈ We are currently making plans for *Tin Can Calendar® 2011*. If readers have compelling photo images they feel could be used as the basis for a Tin Can Calendar® 2011 full color illustration, please send them.
- ✈ *At War With the Wind:*
The softcover edition has gone to press and should be available in retail bookstores and online book sites. The names of approximately fifty more veterans have been added to the Roll Call Appendix. The cover price is \$14.95. Remember that personally inscribed and autographed are available through the D.L. Sears Books, both on our web site www.dlsearsbooks.com (for credit card orders) or by using the order form on p. 6 of Log Book.
- ✈ On Veterans Day November 11, David Sears will be appearing at a noon-time book signing event at the Navy Memorial in Washington DC. For additional details, check the Navy Memorial web site: <http://www.navymemorial.org>
- ✈ D.L. Sears Books web site and *Such Men as These:* (www.dlsearsbooks.com) Draft versions of the *Ready Room* and *Roll Call* Appendices will be posted to the web site very soon. (The documents are in .pdf format; they can be opened by "clicking" "Roll Call" on the web site main menu, then following the links.) Korean War Navy veterans and/or family members of Korean War Navy veterans who have already submitted information should check the documents to be sure we have the name correctly spelled and listed under the correct ship or air squadron. Please e-mail or call us as soon as possible with any corrections.
- ✈ Those who have not yet submitted *Ready Room* (squadron pilots and air crewmen) information or *Roll Call* (ships' crews) information, still have a chance to. (Again, click on "Roll Call" and follow the links.) *Such Men as These* will be published in May 2010. We anticipate "closing" the *Ready Room* and *Roll Call* appendices in January 2010.
- ✈ We continue to add new ship gallery pages and photos to the web site. As we update ship gallery pages we are also including sections for "Ship News" and "Ship Links." These sections are intended for ships and ship associations that currently lack a web site presence. If readers have information of general interest to ship veterans and their families, please send it to us for posting. (If your ship does have a web site, please let us know: we will place an appropriate link on the ship gallery page.)

Missing in Action (Continued from page 2)

and honorable intentions they have to be careful about rushing to judgment. Overzealous allegations based on incomplete, missing, misinterpreted or misprinted military documents risk slandering the lives, reputations and careers of innocent people.

Some might wonder whether detecting and exposing such "victimless" fraud is all that important. The blunt truth is that stolen valor costs money, distorts history and perhaps most importantly, cheapens the service and sacrifices of millions of honest veterans, living and deceased.

Consider money. Many POWs and military medal recipients are eligible for disability benefits related to their service. Many also receive special (and well-deserved) perks such as free parking, tax breaks and specialized medical treatment. In one way or another, false claims cost taxpayers millions and millions of dollars.

Some financial impacts are more indirect but no less telling. Untrue or embellished stories of heroics, battlefield suffering or POW deprivation, may be used to create leverage in jobs and careers, gain the trust of loan officers, earn leniency in criminal sentencing or even defer child-care payments.

As an historian and author, I'm particularly attuned to how false claims of heroics can undercut the integrity of my research and writing. The dense fog of war is difficult enough to cut through without having an interviewee blowing his

Missing in Action (Continued on page 6)

Second Looks: *Corpses that Challenge the Clouds*

Note: The following passages, excerpts from At War With the Wind: The Epic Struggle with Japan's World War II Suicide Bombers, recount the experiences of Ben Hall, an officer aboard destroyer Walke (DD-723). As noted in this issue's Taps section (p. 2), Ben Hall recently passed away.

In a destroyer's deckhouse at the main deck level, was the Combat Information Center. CIC, a relatively new configuration pioneered in destroyer *Hutchins* (DD-476), consolidated radar equipment, interior communication and target plotting capabilities into a nerve center for coordinating the DDs' battle capabilities—its guns and torpedoes to fight air and surface targets, and explosive depth charges to combat submarines.

Working in a tin can CIC was often exciting, but it could also be a claustrophobic, disorienting experience. The compartment had no portholes to let in external light. It was virtually always a dimmed or darkened space, fleetingly illuminated by the ghostly emanations of radar repeater screens and the muffled glow of red battle lamps. To stand watch or GQ in CIC, as did Ben Hall, 24, an officer on *Walke* (DD-723), was to be inundated with cryptic information while simultaneously feeling half-blind. When under attack by an aircraft, for example, crewmen in CIC would know, often with scary precision, exactly what was about to happen well ahead of anyone else on the ship, yet, in their closed-off space, be entirely disconnected from actually seeing it. Hall noticed that this confinement was only made worse because the CIC compartment had just one exit—to port. Before *Walke* reached the war zone, Hall had succeeded in correcting

this; shipfitters had installed a second exit on the starboard side.

↗

For the U.S. ships at Lingayen, 6 January was to be a day unmatched by any other since the kamikaze's debut. It began with Task Force 77 separating into groups—the CVEs to open sea northwest of Lingayen, fire support ships to bombardment stations off either shore at the entrance to the Gulf, a quartet of destroyers to shield minesweepers from coastal batteries. C.A.P. intercepted a morning raid of ten bogies, shooting down five and chasing the rest, but even more were overhead before noon. A near miss dive by one kamikaze on destroyer *Richard P. Leary* kicked off a relentless hour of direct hits to *New Mexico*, destroyer minesweeper *Long* (DD-209/DMS-12), two destroyers, and a transport.

↗

Gunners on destroyer *Walke* (one of the minesweeper screens) battled four attackers. They shot down two, but the wing of a third—a Zeke armed with a bomb—sliced into the bridge. Bill Rugh, 19, a port side 20-mm gunner stationed just below the bridge, ducked an instant before the plane's wing hit. When Rugh got to his feet, his shirt and dungarees were burning, but he quickly put out the fire, sprinted to the railing and leapt feet first to the main deck. Fleeing barely a stride behind Rugh was Pete Ryan, the gun's loader. Ryan had been soaked in gasoline and burned like a torch until



USS *Walke* (DD-723)

Rugh and several other sailors were able to tackle him and smother the flames.

The Zeke's bomb had broken loose on impact but failed to explode, instead zipping clear through CIC, passing just inches from the head of Ben Hall, Walke's sonar officer. Splashes of gasoline followed in its path. Hall, though shaken, was untouched by either gasoline or flame, but a sailor standing across from him was instantly wrapped in flame—burning, Hall later recalled, "like a corncob."

Though now out of commission, the CIC space itself was still intact, while the officers' wardroom—the forward battle dressing station during GQ—was in ruins. With no other place to take the wounded, they were carried into CIC.

Among the worst of the casualties was *Walke's* new skipper Commander George Davis, who'd taken command less than two weeks before. Hall liked Davis and thought him by far the best of the three skippers he'd worked under. Davis, clad now only in shoes, a watch band and dog tags, was horribly burned. He was in desperate need of plasma, but it was hard to find a spot to attach an IV. *Walke's* doctor finally discovered a patch of unburned skin near Davis' groin. Davis got his plasma but died within hours.

Like Davis, Rugh and Ryan, most of *Walke's* casualties (47 in all with 13 dead, including George Davis and, several days later, Pete Ryan) were burn victims. All three had literally been set ablaze while others, often just as badly injured, were instead scalded by superheated steam. When Ben Hall tried to grasp the hand of one of these victims, a damage control officer, a sheath of elbow-length skin slipped off like a glove.

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example, 1947) and "ending year" (for example, 1948) aboard that ship.

The cost of each *Tin Can Calendar*® 2010 is \$19.95 (see the table of shipping charges on this page). It makes a perfect holiday gift for Tin Can veterans, their families and history buffs.

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(or her) own smoke. One person's exaggerated or invented "war story" cheapens history and dishonors the heroics of others who may have made the ultimate sacrifice.

And there is another wrinkle that often goes unnoticed or unmentioned. As portrayed in this issue's "First Looks" section, an excerpt from my forthcoming book *Such Men as These* (p. 8 in the print subscription edition), earning honors for heroism is never a straightforward matter. Beyond the risks of wounds and death, it depends on subjectivity in judging and recognizing true valor. Only then does valor face its greatest hurdles: surviving a process fraught with military politics and chain of command protocol.

Sometimes, deserving veterans avoid the process entirely. Many wounded combatants, for example, forego their right to receive Purple Heart medals, believing their own combat wounds were "nothing special" compared to the actions and suffering of others. It is in this context that garnering medals through outright deceit has its special place in the all-time hall of shame.

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Order Form

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<i>At War with the Wind</i> Softcover edition Available Nov '09; orders taken now		\$14.95	
<i>The Last Epic Naval Battle</i> Hardcover edition		\$41.95	
<i>The Last Epic Naval Battle</i> Softcover edition		\$15.00	
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