

In Memory of Norbert Eugene Rau – Our Father

April 24, 1924 – August 8, 2008

Our father, Norbert Eugene Rau G39-75-26, served on the USS Essex for three years and two months during World War II. Dad was an aviation metalsmith repairman who worked on the crew that patched up the ship after it had been shot up. He also worked in the gasoline/fueling depot where he was in charge of the Forward Hanger Deck Gasoline Crew.

As kids, when we asked about what it was like on ship, Dad would say that for being in a war, the conditions on the carrier were good, considering the circumstances. He mentioned the food conditions and those were not as good. They were fed salty meat, the milk was very sour and when you picked up a piece of bread you could pick out a least 10-15 mealybugs before you could eat it. The cakes were frosted chocolate, so the bugs could not be seen. He told us that there were times when he would take potatoes back to his bunk and fry them up on a griddle. He loved potatoes and that showed when he returned to civilian life as he would make his famous potato pancakes for all the family to enjoy at breakfast time.

Our Father had a diary that he kept during the war. This may have been something that was not allowed, but nevertheless, we are glad to have it to look back on today, as it tells the story of a sailor's life during WWII on board the USS ESSEX-CV9--The Fightinest Ship in the Fleet. Here are a few excerpts from our Dad's diary.

October 29, 1942

I joined the US Navy – Boot Camp Training – Great Lakes, IL

January 2, 1943

Left Norfolk, VA. Three days later I was transferred on the USS Essex.

August 22, 1943

Left for Pearl Harbor to bomb Marcus Islands and left that same evening.

December 4, 1943

Bombed Marshall Islands, we were under attack for five and a half hours. The USS Lexington was damaged.

October 14, 1944

We launched our fighter sweep upon Formosa. We started to get the hell out of there as soon as our strike returned to the ship, but at 15:15 we went to GJ because the Japs came out and attacked us. We secured from GJ at 16:50, no damage was done to our ships. Our CAP in that time shot down 13 Japanese planes which were attacking us and again at 17:15 we went to GJ. We fired several rounds and shot down a Japanese Betty right off our port quarter. The fish dropped and just missed our fantail and another torpedo plane dropped another fish which missed the bow of the ship by a few feet. Some of the other planes that were attacking us started for the flight deck, which caused 15 casualties on the hanger deck. Zacok, a shipmate of mine who came aboard the ship the same time I did--we worked together 21 months, got hit in the head with a piece of shrapnel just a few feet ahead of me as both of us were running to our GJ station. I saw the ball of fire ahead of me, when I fell under a plane and when I got up to run again another sailor fell right in front of me. He got shot in the leg. I then ran over to the side of the ship and watched the attacking planes get shot down. We

November 25, 1944

We launched three strikes upon the Southern Luzon Island when our third strike was returning to the ship, which was about 13:00 when we got under attack by a large group of Japanese planes. One of the planes attacking us made a suicide dive on us and hit us on the port side of the ship about frame 74. It killed four Negroes who were at their battle stations on the guns. It also killed Silkwood, a sailor who worked with me on the hanger deck. There are a lot of wounded personnel and quite a few guys missing. They must have gotten knocked over the side of the ship. I don't know the total of how many got killed as yet. I just had finished my noon meal and was on my way back to my battle station when this had happened. We had a big fire on the hanger and flight decks, but the repair parties had the fire under control in about one hour after it happened. There were pieces of the Japanese pilot spread all over the flight deck. I picked up one of the Jap's foot and handed it to another sailor who said he would like to keep it. I also picked up a part of the Jap's parachute and some shrapnel but I kept those for myself. I sure didn't want to keep the Jap's foot. I also saw those four Negroes dead at the guns with all their clothes burnt off of them--it sure looked awful. We secured for GJ at 16:35. The USS Intrepid also got hit by suicide dive bombers. I don't know how bad she was damaged. While we were under attack, our guns on the ship shot down three Japanese planes. We are leaving here tonight and will fuel sometime tomorrow and we then get new orders.

December 18, 1944

We are in an awful typhoon and couldn't take on fuel again today. Nobody could go up on the flight deck because if they did, the waves would wash them off the ship. This is the worst storm I have ever been out in. I read in the News Press this morning where Air Group 15, which was with us for six and a half months, is now back in the States

The 12th Naval District announced that Air Group 15, commanded by Commander David McCampbell, was credited with destroying, probably destroying, or damaging over 1,000 enemy planes during the time they were with us out here in the Pacific. Of that thousand, 34 were downed by commander McCampbell himself. He is the Ace of Aces of all carrier-based pilots.

The whole Air Group paid a toll of 72 pilots and air crewmen listed as dead or missing in action. The group is credited with destroying 321 enemy planes in the air, 348 on the ground, and probably destroyed or damaged 388 that were also on the ground. They were with us when we met the Japanese fleet.

December 19, 1944

We launched C.A.P. and A.S.P. throughout the day. We also took aboard fuel from a tanker during the day. Yesterday, in the storm that we were in, we lost two D.D. and two D.E. The waves rolled them over and they sunk. Only ten of the personnel got off of one of the four ships and were picked up. One of the destroyers had 14 bags of mail aboard it when it capsized. Those bags belonged to us.

December 25, 1944

We took on supplies throughout the day and night. We also had a big meal at suppertime. What a life.

February 19, 1945

We are 80 miles from Iwo Jima this morning. We launched 48 planes carrying Napalm bombs. I helped make them last night. We also give air cover to the Marines who made landings on the island at 09:00 this morning. We launched C.A.P. and A.S.P. throughout the day. We went to G.Q. at 19:15 because there were three large groups of Japanese planes coming in to attack us. They got within three miles of us, but they couldn't spot us because we laid a smoke screen all around the ships.

Only one of our task force was under attack, but no damage was done. Two of the attacking planes were shot down. We secured from G.Q. at 20:55, but there were still enemy planes in close around us. We hope they leave us alone so we can get some sleep tonight.

April 30, 1945

Went to condition ONE two different times last night because them yellow bastards were all around us, but thank God the luck was with us because there wasn't much damage done to our ships. We got word that one of our hospital ships got hit by a Japanese suicide plane yesterday; it killed 26 and 100 are missing aboard her. They still have part of the plane aboard her, which didn't burn in the crash. We are 40 miles east of Okinawa Jima this AM. We launched strikes upon the island throughout the day. We are leaving here tonight and will take board fuel and ammunition sometime tomorrow.

May 3, 1945

It has been over one year since we have seen any women! We have been lucky the last couple of days because no enemy planes have come out to attack us. I am sure glad of that. We will give them hell again tomorrow.

August 6, 1945

The atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima.

September 2, 1945

Today is V-J DAY at 10:30 we were listening to General MacArthur speak on the formal surrender aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. Over our radio, after the surrender papers were signed, we were told that we will leave for Bremerton, Washington tomorrow morning. We were expected to arrive there the 13th and we unloaded gasoline to a tanker and took aboard fuel oil and some more passengers.

We were 180 miles southwest of Tokyo at 04:00 this morning we will start for home tomorrow.

September 13, 1945

We arrived back in **God's** country and anchored at 15:31. We will unload ammunition. The ship will pull into Bremerton for an overhaul. I will go home on a leave the 16th.

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Our Father and Mother (Jean) Rau attended over 23 USS Essex reunions. Our Mother began the first Essex Reunion Auctions. They enjoyed spending time with shipmates and their wives at the reunions. Oftentimes Mom and Dad took trips around the U.S. to visit Dad's shipmates.

We (Susie and Debbie) attended the reunions in Oklahoma City and in Minneapolis back in the 70's and enjoyed seeing all the World War II memorabilia and watching the films. What we liked best of all was meeting our Father's shipmates and their families!

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Our Father passed away **August 8, 2008** of a heart attack complicated by the effects of chemotherapy and lung cancer. He had just been diagnosed with lung cancer and began chemotherapy – ten days later he was gone. He had a fighting spirit all his life and thought he could win this battle too.

When the Oncologist suggested chemo, I (Susie) asked "Dad, are you sure you want to do this?" his comment was "We can win the War!" I thought differently as he had already lost so much weight and looked so frail that I believe he would not make it thru the treatment even if they were going to lessen the dose due to his weakened condition.

Dad still believed he could “Win the War.” On August 8, 2008, Dad collapsed in the living room of our parents’ home. Ironically he was wearing his “Essex T-Shirt” when he died.

When my Father and I (Susie) were at the Medical Center for his chemo treatment, he wore his USS Essex hat as he was proud of serving on the Essex. A nurse said to Dad – “Thank you for our Freedom!” It really touched me. Dad was just ‘one of the sailors on the ship.’ These brave sailors wouldn’t want to be called heroes—they were simply ‘doing their part in the war effort.’ But they are all heroes. **That is what it is all about, the men and woman who gave of themselves so we have our FREEDOM today. Our great appreciation goes out to all the American Veterans.**

There was a Memorial Service at the last reunion in Washington, and at that service a bell had been rung when our Dad’s name was call. We wish we had known about this as we would have been there. This location was appropriate as this is where our Dad had last stepped off the USS Essex CV9 at the end of World War II.

We hope you enjoy this and the photos we have attached.

Susan Rau Schaefer
Debbie Rau Castellon

