Chapter 8: 1956: Shit Flows Nicely Downhill

The Pussy-Cat went to sea
In a beautiful pea-green boat.

Edward Lear, "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat"

Historical continuity does not exist aboard a warship. The captain and the crew are replaced every couple of years, and their memories go with them, scattered to the winds, irretrievable by those left behind. Each crew starts fresh and knows little, if anything, about what happened even two years earlier.

1945 stack emblem

1956 cruise book cover

"When I was aboard the Colahan, from 1952 to 1955, I never heard the name 'Tomcat' mentioned even once," said Jack Kuhn of Kearny, Arizona, in a conversation with the author. Kuhn, an officer who rose to chief engineer and left the ship just before Ensign Jack Sellers came aboard, was commenting on "The Original Tomcat," a book that traced the Colahan's course through the Pacific War. The author chuckled, because he, too, during his service, which stretched well into 1957, had never heard the nickname that Vice Admiral John "Slew" McCain lay upon the USS Colahan late in the Big War. No one was aware that, once upon a time, the Colahan had sported an angry tomcat emblem on each side of her forward stack, that she had been a senior member of the "Tomcat Squadron," which was officially known as Destroyer Squadron 53, and that the eight other destroyers in that nine-ship fighting unit had acquired the symbol from her, the Colahan, the original 'Tomcat.' There was only one small hint in those years. The cover of the ship's 1956 cruise book showed a friendly cat inside a capital initial 'C,' a mild approximation of what had graced her World War II stack. The tomcat had become a pussycat.

The seahorse, one of the many strange creatures in the sea, was the symbol

of Destroyer Squadron 17, which in the Fifties embraced eight warships, including the *USS Colahan.* And thus a toady idea was born. Commander CL "No Periods" Keedy Jr., who took command of the *Colahan* in early 1956, decided to install a seahorse aquarium in the *Colahan*'s wardroom. The unstated but obvious purpose was to impress Squadron 17's commodore, a four-striper who, after having his ass kissed, would surely see Keedy as a fine and loyal captain. Well, what the captain wants, the captain gets, but not necessarily without generating resentment in those who are convinced they have more important things to do.

Several grumbling officers, primarily the chief engineer, supervised the construction and installation, often lending clean and uncalloused hands to this messy project. Ensign Jack Sellers made a trip ashore to purchase aquarium compound. Eventually the tank was in place, filled with seawater, anchored to the deck and bulkhead, properly aerated and, most important of all, inhabited by a pair of seahorses feeding on tiny shrimp eggs. Such exotic fare, unavailable in the *Colahan*'s pantry, had to be purchased ashore. The tank was subject to all the pitching and rolling of the destroyer itself, so the aquarium cover had to be, and was made to be, slosh-proof. All in all, it was a troublesome project requiring never-ending maintenance, and thus was very unpopular among those charged with keeping the seahorses alive and the wardroom dry.

Commander CL Keedy served as captain of the *Colahan* from March 1956 until January 1958.

Over a period of time, the seahorses multiplied. The male became pregnant. Yes, that is the way seahorses do it; the process is natural to them, even if the very thought makes male humans queasy. Finally the little seahorses were born — and mysteriously, almost immediately, one by one, they began to disappear. The adults must be eating the youngsters, the captain was told. Eventually all the babies were gone, eaten, it was said, by their carnivorous parents. Then, one night, an *adult* disappeared. The captain surely suspected, by then, that someone was tossing the creatures overboard, but he said nothing, perhaps realizing he did not have the support of his officers on this one. The aquarium was allowed to languish and eventually was removed.

[Keedy bio]

USS Colahan, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 9 April 1956:

A couple of hours ago we arrived in Pearl Harbor, the first stop on this Western Pacific cruise. It's warm, almost hot, a pleasant change from the weather in San Diego. The mountains are purple, with colors changing from light to dark as clouds pass overhead and cast shadows on the land. The clouds are high-domed and fluffy, and the sky is very, very blue, like the water. It's all much nicer than California, although I guess California is something like this in the summer.

I've got the duty tonight and won't be able to go ashore, but I'll be free tomorrow and I'm looking forward to seeing Honolulu again. It's a nice enough town but a little expensive. We'll be here for a week before starting on the last leg to Japan, with a short landfall at Midway Island, the home of those famous Gooney Birds. I'm looking forward to Japan where I can start living well again.

In his dress twill whites, Ensign Jack Sellers inspects the *Colahan*'s Communications Division. Bored radiomen skylark behind his back.

I've been having trouble with my stomach. I hope it isn't an ulcer. I'll get some x-rays made when I get to Yokosuka.

It was a duodenal ulcer, although it was not diagnosed conclusively until around 1960, after Jack had left the Navy. In the early 1970s, the ulcer started bleeding and put Jack, by then Jackson, in a hospital's intensive care ward. Later in the decade, miracle drugs for ulcer patients were fully developed, including Zantac, which now controls in Jackson the ulcer that Jack built and endured as a young, perhaps too young, naval officer.

USS Colahan, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, 14 April 1956:

I am standing the midwatch now and have time to write the lengthy letter I promised. Night watches in port are the easiest because you don't have to be on the job all the time. I am in the wardroom now, drinking coffee, reading and smoking cigarettes. Every once in a while I check with the quarterdeck to see if everything is okay. It is all quite pleasant compared to daytime watches.

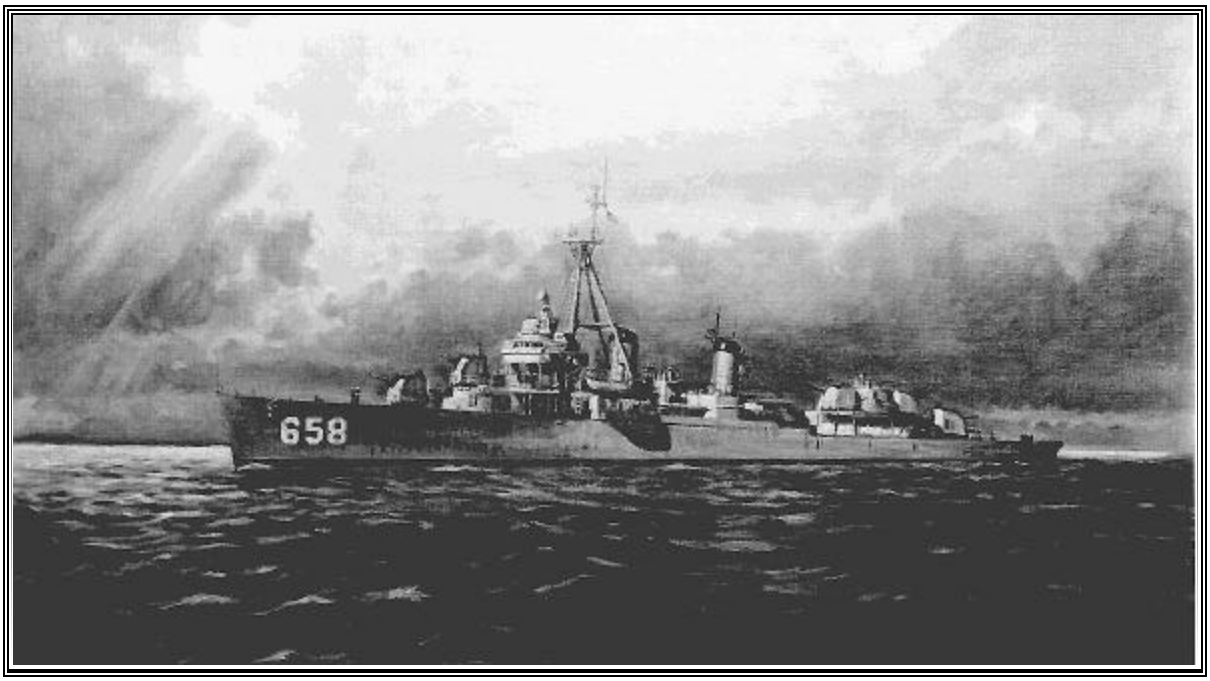
We are alongside a pier at Pearl Harbor. The weather is fine, warm and sunny in the daytime, and cool and balmy at night. We finished our sea opera-

tions yesterday afternoon. Now we have the weekend before us, with nothing to do until we leave for Japan on Monday morning.

I'm going on a tour of the island today and then to Waikiki for dinner this evening. The tour was scheduled by Mr. Bryce Little, the ship's first lieutenant, and it costs only four bucks. About twenty persons off the ship are planning to go. Lunch is included in the price of the tour. I believe I'll enjoy it. I hate to act like a tourist, but it's been my experience that if you don't act like one, you never see anything. Of course, in my opinion, this island hasn't got much to offer anyway. It's a lot like Southern California. Waikiki is a disappointment to almost everyone who goes there, unless you are rich and then I suppose it would be quite pleasant. I want to go there, though, because it's supposed to have some very fine restaurants, such as Trader Vic's and Don the Beachcomber's. It will probably be expensive, but I guess I can afford it after being at sea most of the time since last payday. You don't spend much money at sea. We get paid again on the day we leave Pearl and won't get a chance to spend any of it until we reach Yokosuka on the 26th of April. The only stop we will make between Pearl and Yokosuka will be Midway Island, where we will stop to refuel, laugh at the Gooney Birds and probably swim in the clear water there.

Commander DeBuhr, the executive officer, won't let Ensign John Staehle go ashore because he has fallen five assignments behind in the officer training course he is taking. All junior officers have to turn in one assignment a week, and DeBuhr keeps a strict eye on us. I'm working on a course for communications officers, and I am up to date. John Henry Staehle says he is too busy right now to catch up. He is probably justified in taking that attitude. The courses we take are stupid little things and consume a great deal of time. Staehle feels he should do his job first and then, if there is any time left, work on his assignments. That's an admirable attitude, maybe, from the standpoint of the Navy as a whole, but I'm much too selfish to look at it that way. If I were Staehle I would let my regular work go to pot until I was up to date in my assignments. I don't believe there is any satisfaction in doing a good job if you are going to be punished for it, and that's just exactly what's happening to Staehle. If the Navy insists that I do stupid little jobs, then I'll do them; but I'll do them on the Navy's time, not mine. I don't have enough time as it is.

Staehle got into more trouble today by nominating Mr. Terry Sutherland for mess treasurer. Sutherland, who made LTJG only a few months ago, thinks the job is beneath him and is sore at Staehle for putting him in line for it. Frankly I hope he gets it, and if it ever comes to a vote he will get mine. Of course, Staehle doesn't have to worry too much about Sutherland, because Sutherland is just a flunky like the rest of us, although he doesn't seem to know it.



Colahan wardroom painting by Nobuo Kanazawa

There's an old saying in the Navy that if anyone screws you there'll always come a time when you can screw him. And that's true up to a certain point. You can always find ways of screwing someone if that someone is of approximately the same rank, but it's pretty difficult if he is of higher rank. You can't pass shit uphill.

During the last two weeks before we left the States, I stood watches for six officers who wanted to spend as much time as possible with their wives before leaving. I was glad to do it because I will want them to stand watches for me on occasions in the Far East. If they all pay me back, as they should, I won't have to stand many in-port watches in the next few months. Several persons aboard, however, have warned me that standing watches for married men is a dangerous thing to do. The married men, they say, will promise anything to get ashore to see their wives, but when they get to Japan they are worse than the bachelors, and they are always the first ones on the beach. Maybe that's true, but I have faith in them. Anyway, several of them are junior to me, and, as I said before in so many words, shit flows nicely downhill.

I saw Tempest Storm at a local burlesque theater the other night. In case you've never heard of her, she's one of the top strippers in the business. She's too much woman for me, though. I'll take mine slim and small. (Don't be shocked, Mother. Your little boy shaves every morning.)

Did I tell you that we finally got the wardroom fixed up? It looks real nice. We have rust-colored drapes hanging on the port and starboard bulkheads, new leather furniture, dark tile on the deck, light green paint on the overhead and bulkheads, and a goodlooking silver cabinet in the corner. We're all pretty

proud of it. We even have a bookcase with artificial plants on top.

A further enhancement was made to the Colahan's wardroom that year, as reported in the preface of "The Original Tomcat." The author could have — should have — rewritten this story for "Old Tom," where it rightfully belongs. But he was too lazy. Sad to say, there is still a lot of Jack in Jackson. So here it is, excerpted word for word, without apologies.

Soon a handsome oil painting of the *Colahan* would be introduced to the wardroom, thanks to Jack, a very reluctant contributor to the ambiance. Early in the 1956 Western Pacific cruise, Jack sought out a Yokosuka artist named Nobuo Kanazawa, who agreed to paint a large portrait of the ship. Jack, even then, could envision a time when the painting would serve as a focal point for the book-lined study that surely lay in his future. "Yes," Jack would say to admiring guests, "that was my ship, the *USS Colahan*, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer."

The artist Kanazawa spent several days on the project, referring for technical details to a ship photograph supplied by Jack. He painted a seascape that managed to be both menacing and benign at the same time. The *Colahan*, underway, basked in sunshine breaking through gray clouds. The price was ridiculously low, a mere five thousand yen, about fourteen American dollars at the official exchange rate in that postwar decade.

When Jack toted the painting aboard the ship and showed it off to the other officers, Captain CL "No Periods" Keedy immediately appropriated it, answering Jack's whimpers with assurances that the painting could be retrieved from the wardroom upon Jack's discharge from the Navy. And so a frame was fashioned in a destroyer tender's carpentry shop, and the painting was bolted to the light green bulkhead, becoming a centerpiece for the officers' dining room. It looked nice, but poor Jack was worried. He was aware that possession is nine-tenths of everything, and he feared he would have trouble reclaiming his masterpiece. He was right.

As his discharge grew near in late 1957, Jack broached the subject to Captain Keedy. *Ah yes, Mr. Sellers, but before you can take the painting, you must replace it with one just like it. We can't have an empty frame on the wardroom bulkhead, can we?* It was unjust as hell, but what could a junior officer do? Jack went looking for the artist Kanazawa in the narrow streets of Yokosuka, a hopeless search, of course. The artist he *did* find was twice as expensive and half as skillful.

But the captain, somewhat to Jack's surprise, allowed the substitution to take place — whether from generosity or artistic ignorance, Jack never knew. Today, four decades later, Kanazawa's painting hangs above the fireplace in Jackson's library in Lake Forest, California, very much as young Jack envi-

sioned when he commissioned it. “Yes, that was my ship,” Jackson says to admiring guests. “That was the *USS Colahan*, a *Fletcher*-class destroyer, winner of eight Pacific War battle stars.”

I’m getting better at my job. It takes time to learn the ins and outs, but I think I’m going to make it. I like being communications officer. As long as I can keep the Communications Division well organized and manned with efficient personnel, I’ll never have much trouble with it. In fact, it almost runs itself. I only have twenty men now, including two chiefs, and I’d be happy to get a few more bodies, but everything is going smoothly just the same. I think we probably have the best communicating ship in Destroyer Division 172. I have only one problem child and I don’t believe he will give me much trouble from now on. I recently busted him from a third-class petty officer to a seaman. I’m not so naive as to believe the demotion will cure him completely, but now, as just a seaman, he will no longer be in a position to adversely influence the rest of my signalmen. He’s been a pain in the rear-end ever since he came aboard.

I have a very efficient bunch of radiomen. They are all good men and they do a good job. My chief radioman [T.W. Hennessy, RMC] is forty-one years old and will be getting out of the service late this summer; I’ll be sorry to lose him, but I have a petty officer who just made second class and I think he will adequately replace the chief. I hope so anyway. My chief quartermaster [T.E. Smith, QMC] is not so good. He is thirty-two-years old, looks forty and talks a much better fight that he’s capable of. I won’t be sorry to see him go. I don’t believe he handles the quartermasters the way they need to be handled.

My watch is almost over. It’s ten past three in the morning. In twenty minutes I will awaken my relief, and in forty minutes I should be cozy and almost asleep in my sack. Boy, do I love that sack! When we are at sea, it seems I never get to spend enough time there. Oh, I probably get eight hours of sleep a day, but almost never at the same time. I get a little during the night, a little after the working day, a little after dinner, and so on.

I just stopped to make a pot of fresh coffee. My relief will probably want some. The stewards on this damned ship are getting independent as hell. They should keep coffee here in the wardroom at all times. We’ve got a new supply officer [LTJG Stephen J. Barczewski] and he’s probably too easygoing on them. You probably think I’m becoming a bully. I’m not really; it’s just that if a man knows he’s going to get paid whether he works or not, then he’s not going to be too eager to work, unless he’s ambitious, and if he were ambitious he wouldn’t be a steward.

Lieutenant Commander Claude N. DeBuhr, executive officer of the

Colahan from late 1954 to late 1956, was detested by virtually everyone in the wardroom. The animosity was palpable. Jack referred to it in a "Dear Folks" letter written just two weeks after he reported aboard: "It seems that Mr. DeBuhr, the XO, is the unpopular one around here. Everyone likes the captain okay [Commander H.J. Brantingham at that time], but they can't stand 'Smiling Jack' DeBuhr."

Lieutenant Commander Claude DeBuhr, the *Colahan*'s executive officer, was hated and feared in the wardroom, but Jack had mixed feelings about him.

In April 1956, a month after "No Periods" Keedy took command but well before Jack adopted a somewhat contemptuous attitude toward him, our young hero wrote: "I like our new captain a lot. He doesn't say much but he seems okay to me. I would like to get rid of the executive officer, though. He has never given me any trouble, and sometimes I even like him, much to the surprise and disgust of my fellow officers; but I believe he wouldn't hesitate to give me a great deal of trouble if I ever gave him even the slightest reason for doing so. Most of the other officers dislike him with a passion, and the rest dislike him without passion. But if you're really honest about it, you have to admit that his methods are quite efficient."

Like all junior officers aboard the *Colahan*, Jack saw Lieutenant Commander DeBuhr as a tyrant who made life miserable for everyone. Everybody hated the son of a bitch, so why not Jack? And yet, there was lack of strong conviction in Jack's letters. There was more than a hint of peer parroting in what he wrote at the time about the ship's executive officer. None or few of the other officers would have predicted, as Jack did in June 1956, that DeBuhr might make a good commanding officer.

"We will lose the executive officer shortly after returning to San Diego," Jack wrote. "He has been given command of a ship slightly smaller than this one. Of course, everyone is heartbroken that we're losing the bastard. You never can tell, though. He might make a pretty good CO. As I've said before, you don't have to sweat the captain much. He's just the big boss. It's the exec who can make life miserable."

Jack's assessments of DeBuhr, relayed to his parents in letters and voiced on many occasions in 1955 and '56, were much kinder than the sentiments expressed by the *Colahan*'s other junior officers. Why was that? The answer was surprisingly simple. In the months after Jack came aboard, there had been two brief and private exchanges of feeling between the young ensign and the

executive officer. Almost accidentally, Jack discovered DeBuhr's humanity. Thereafter, his basic attitude toward the man everybody else hated was slanted forever in the XO's favor. No matter that Jack, in monkey-see, monkey-do fashion, continued to throw verbal darts at DeBuhr at every opportunity, in both correspondence and wardroom bull sessions. Among Jack's peers, and even among the crew, XO-bashing was the fashionable thing to do, and Jack willingly played the game, grinning at times, frowning when appropriate, and shaking his head along with everyone else. DeBuhr was a scowling scumbag, nobody's friend.

Lightly staffed on a Sunday in San Diego, the *Colahan* was unexpectedly ordered to move from a buoy to a pier. Captain Brantingham and all other officers except Jack and DeBuhr were ashore. So Commander DeBuhr, with minor assistance from Ensign Jack Sellers, got the ship underway, and the executive officer made a picture-perfect docking. Issuing engine and helm orders from the starboard bridge wing, DeBuhr skillfully nosed the bow close to the pier and then swung the stern parallel. The destroyer was quickly tied up and the special sea detail dismissed. There was no hesitancy, no fumbling around, no fuss. It was a beautiful job, recognized as such, even then, by shave-tail Jack, who barely knew his way around the ship.

It would be an exaggeration to say the executive officer acted like a schoolboy who had pulled off a neat trick, but the truth was something close to that. He took obvious pleasure in this feat of shiphandling. It wasn't often that an executive officer who never stood deck watches got a chance to show his stuff. He wanted to brag about it, but the only immediately available audience of officer rank was lowly Jack, with whom he would have to make do. "I can't get over how smoothly that went," DeBuhr kept saying in the wardroom, where he and Jack were having dinner alone that evening. The emotion he shared with an unworthy junior officer was one of pride, the good kind, the kind that uplifts all mortals. For Jack, this was an anthropomorphic sunburst. A sympathetic human quality had been bestowed on a creature suspected of having none.

Later, just prior to the start of the *Colahan*'s 1956 Asian cruise, a seaman in Jack's Communications Division refused to take the required inoculations, because of religious convictions. The young man, a fine sailor, was sincere, no question about it. Jack and DeBuhr reasoned with him in the executive officer's stateroom. Navy rules required inoculations for all crewmen headed overseas. The seaman's eyes welled with tears. He was fighting a losing battle, all alone, against his division officer and the ship's executive officer.

This clash between religious principles and Navy regulations was painful for the young man, and for Jack, too. Finally DeBuhr did what he had to do. He gave the seaman a direct order to accept the shots. A hospital corpsman was

called. As the inoculations were being administered to the downcast sailor, Jack and DeBuhr exchanged glances. After a moment, the executive officer lowered his eyes, tightened his lips and slightly shook his head, conveying a personal message to Jack alone. It had been painful for him as well. Another crack in the icon.

It would be outrageous and self-aggrandizing to compare Jack and DeBuhr with the *HMS Bounty*'s Fletcher Christian and Captain Bligh. Historical analogies should not be carried too far, else they become pretentious and silly. But there *were* casual similarities. Mean-spiritedness and unpopularity do not cancel virtues. First Officer Christian, like Ensign Jack Sellers, understood this, and it was this understanding that contributed to the *Bounty* mutineer's post-mutiny agony. Captain William Bligh definitely had a personality problem, but he was an efficient captain, a dutiful officer and a marvelous sailor who, after the mutiny, led loyal seamen to safety in an open boat on an incredible 4,000-mile journey through waters infested with sharks, and islands inhabited by cannibals, eventually reaching England and becoming a Royal Navy hero who rose to the rank of admiral.

Jack never joined a mutiny — indeed, there was never one to join — but Jack did, like Fletcher Christian in the early days on the *Bounty*, distance himself from the crew's denunciations of an officer whom he judged to be superior in more ways than the official one. In Jack's memory, which survives on a remote Pitcairn Island within Jackson's cerebral ocean, Claude DeBuhr remains a flawed but respected figure.

Also, not to put too fine a point on it, there is lingering warmth associated with any shared experience, especially unforgettable ones, such as the time in San Diego when a *Colahan* coxswain found himself stretched horizontally between the captain's gig and the dock, suspended a few feet above the water, supported only momentarily by extended hands and feet, until *Splash!* In he went, while Jack and DeBuhr, the gig's sole passengers, watched and grinned — what else? — since there was nothing they could do to stop the inevitable dunking. Jack wrote about the incident in a "Dear Folks" letter dated 15 October 1955, and DeBuhr, surely, has told the story, too.

Nevertheless, as late as June of 1956, halfway into the Western Pacific tour, Jack was still tossing barbs at DeBuhr and referring to the "happy day" when the executive officer would depart and assume command of the *USS Lansing (DER-388).* "I'll even carry his baggage," Jack chortled.

But before we assume that Jack's attitude toward DeBuhr had not really softened, that he was no different than the other junior officers, let's delve into our hero's psyche at the time he was volunteering to tote DeBuhr's luggage off the *Colahan.* Can we dismiss the fact that Jack, at the moment he wrote those

words, was restricted to the ship by order of the executive officer, and that he had missed several precious days of liberty in Japan? Did twenty-four-year-old Jack accept his well-deserved punishment without resentment toward the officer who imposed it? Of course not.

For the record, Jack was confined to the ship for missing muster. He overslept at a Japanese bargirl's house. He was already impossibly late when his eyes popped open that morning in Yokosuka. A wild taxi ride to the ship could not save him from Commander DeBuhr's ire.

"I was aware of my reputation in the wardroom. How could I not have been?" wrote retired Commander Claude N. DeBuhr in 1996, forty years after all this. "As you [Jack] suspected, yes, I was human. There were certain officers I liked and respected, and others I did not. Looking back, and given the same circumstances, I probably would do the job the same way if I could do it again. Maybe I would be a little less intense, a little more considerate. I think I demanded just as much from myself as I did from other officers. But if I had served under me, I would have been just as pissed off as all of you were."

DeBuhr, retired in Los Altos, California, was communicating with the author after reading *The Original Tomcat* and draft chapters of *Old Tom*. "You've done a great job in putting the history of the *USS Colahan* into two execellent books. The first volume is really a naval history of the Pacific portion of World War II. I like it a lot. Now I know why the *Colahan* was called the 'Tomcat.' I admire the work you are doing. You've improved."

Jack, now a grizzled Jackson, had to wait forty years for it, but he finally got a compliment from Commander DeBuhr.

From Terry Sutherland, June 2004:

Bob and Margie Marshall have been in our conversational and personal contact by letter and telephone sparsely over the years. I always looked up to Bob as an example to follow. Except for his dry Texas humor, he was all business. He taught me to be a better watch officer and could be tapped for solid advice. Sometimes he shocked me with his actions, though. One morning he mentioned that during the night a flying fish had smacked into the deck house bulkhead. He encouraged me to go to the side and retrieve the fish, which by then was in fish heaven. A scheme was born to present the fish on a clean wardroom plate on the table at the XO's seat so that he would have some protein for breakfast. We both sat down to feast on scrambled eggs and mushrooms, whatever, as a freshly shaven Claude entered the wardroom. He approached his chair and stared at the handsomely presented dead fish. A familiar DeBuhr grin emerged. He wondered to none of us in particular what

wise guy did this. Bob laughed and I smiled; then we had a great hoo-haw about it after we left the wardroom.

Claude DeBuhr was not there for a popularity pole. It was his droning task to seek out those who did not conform to the tenets of Navy Regulations and those who failed to follow the Captain's orders and to pass the word about each day's default situation. Surely, as a journalist, you have read Machiavelli's The Prince and the Prime Minister.

It is the Captain's pleasure to hand out medals, pass compliments on jobs well done, smoke in his hallowed throne on the bridge, announce ice cream socials, grant extra liberty. It is the exec's job to bust department heads and starry-eyed ensigns, drag poor sailors up to mast,

navigate the ship, and put up with very aggravating administrative details that would drive a good man crazy The job description covers at least 18 hours a day, even though the XO is a day worker and not a watch stander. Claude DeBuhr, although I would never be seized with a desire to go on liberty with him, was my role model for future duties as executive officer. This same day he retains many pieces of my tail and I would like to think that I was worth chewing on.

And I will tell you something. The two XO jobs I held years later on destroyer types will produce comments from former crew members that I was one flying-fish eating SOB, in accordance with Machiavelli, of course.

Your distanced perspective on DeBuhr is fair and interesting, for he was hard to love. Yet, having been an enlisted man and coming fresh from the Naval Academy, I expected the behavior. I must say I never sighted him and then ducked around the corner. But I cussed him quite a bit.

USS Colahan, Yokosuka, Japan, 11 May 1956:

We arrived in Japan late last month on a misty day. Yokosuka looks just the same as it did last year. It's a town full of sailors looking for the things that sailors have always looked for, the only difference being that they usually find them here. Rickshaw boys and taxicab drivers are only too willing to accommodate. A woman with a baby strapped to her back stands on a street corner and pimps for a group of girls up an alley. That's the Yokosuka that hits you when you first step ashore. It takes a while to appreciate the virtues of this country, the gentle politeness of its people, its beautiful scenery, its petite and unique

way of life.

I'm dating Momoko again. She was waiting for me just as I knew she would be. Soon after I arrived she cooked sukiyaki for me. Sukiyaki is Japan's favorite food, and it's close enough to American food to be enjoyed by Westerners. Its main ingredients are beef, sliced very thin; onions, both the long and round types; slices of bamboo sprouts (you can't eat full-grown bamboo; it's too tough), and some stringy gelatin-like stuff with a name that sounds like "con-yak." (For God's sake, don't show this letter to anyone. The spelling is terrible and I don't feel like looking up the words in a dictionary. I guess I will never learn to spell.) Momoko dropped the ingredients into a pan of bubbling hot soup, and we picked them out and ate them as soon as they had cooked for a while. We soaked everything liberally with soy sauce, of course. (I'm pretty good at using chop-sticks; it's not as hard as it looks. The Japanese can do anything with chop-sticks that you and I can do with a knife and fork, and that includes cutting meat.)

Jack never did learn to spell with precision, although in later years he scored highly in spelling error recognition tests, confirming a talent that was essential in the newspaper jobs he eventually held. Always, though, he had difficulty spelling from scratch, because he had been taught to spell phonetically in a half-baked educational program that was faddish in the Thirties and Forties. In those days, kids learned to be good spellers despite the system, not because of it. In this "Dear Folks" letter, up to this point, Jack rendered *apologize* as "apoligize," *truly* as "truely," *strapped* as "straped," *gelatin* as "geletin" and *ingredients* at "engridents." The gelatin-like stuff that Jack identified as sounding like "con-yak" is actually *konyaku* in Japanese, but that cannot be counted as a spelling error. As Jackson Sellers, a professional newspaperman with a modest reputation as a wordsmith, I am embarrassed by Jack's spelling deficiencies, but I don't rank myself significantly above him. Like Jack, I turn often to a dictionary, as I did for each of the misspelled words cited here.

We are tied up at a berth now. We have operated at sea only four days since we got here, but we'll probably go out tomorrow or the next day and stay at sea most of this month and part of the next. We will pull into Nagoya, Japan, on May 18th for three days of liberty. I've never been there and I'm looking forward to it.

During the four at-sea days this week, we anchored several times in Atami Wan Harbor. I went ashore once to visit the little city of Atami, which has often been called the Niagara Falls of Japan, since a large number of Japan's newlyweds go there for their honeymoons. They've got a hotel that's got a revolving

top floor, crazy as that sounds. Mr. DeBuhr, Mr. [R.C.] Marshall, Mr. [Fred] Dutton, Mr. [Jack] Ritter and Mr. [Jack] Zimmermann (oops, I almost forgot me) went up there and sat drinking Japanese beer and looking out over the city and harbor as the damned thing revolved. It doesn't go very fast, only one revolution an hour, but it was a novelty.

USS Colahan, Underway, 24 May 1956:

I'm on watch now, in CIC, and I'm not anticipating much action. We are steaming about two hundred miles directly south of Kyushu (Japan's southernmost island). We are just east of the East China Sea, on the western edge of the Philippine Sea. The weather is warm and quite humid. It's still spring, of course, but summer is near and it will get hotter and hotter until the Colahan becomes an oven. Once a ship gets hot, it never seems to cool off, even on the coolest nights. You sweat all day and then you lay in your bunk and sweat. Shirts last a couple of hours instead of a couple of days. The only consolation is that it's wonderful when you go ashore. I like the summertime, all in all. It's the best time of year as far as I'm concerned. The ideal, of course, is summer in the daytime and winter at night. But Japan, alas, is not like that. As a matter of fact, Japan in the summertime is much like Evansville in the summertime. Of course, I'm speaking about southern Japan. The northern part, up around Hokkaido, is pretty cold, I am told. But the southern part, as I said, is nice — nice because it's like the weather we have in the Midwest and because I'm used to that kind of weather.

We'll be at sea until the third of June, at which time we are due back in Yokosuka where we'll remain for a tender availability period until 15 June. In a couple of days we will join Task Force 77 for a secret operation that I can't say too much about. In fact, I shouldn't even mention the operation at all, so I'll drop it right now. I don't suppose you know any Soviet agents, but the details probably wouldn't interest you anyway, so it's best that I not say more.

As it turned out, there really wasn't much to say. A nuclear device of some sort was tested in the vicinity of Task Force 77. There was a good deal of excitement aboard the *Colahan* and the other ships. Everybody expected *something* — a bright light, a fearful noise, a mushroom cloud, *something*. But nobody heard or saw a damned thing.

I wrote a letter to Indiana University the other day asking for a post-graduate bulletin, so I can lay plans for returning to school for a Master of Arts degree. I also asked how to go about applying for a counselor's position in the Men's Residence Center. Confidentially, I think I'm a cinch for that job, consid-

ering my academic and military record. I'd like to have it because it would mean free room and board, and a private room to boot. I also believe I might qualify for a scholarship of some kind — although what it might be, I just don't know. Nor do I know for certain what I want to study; I might study journalism, which would be practical, or I might study creative writing, which wouldn't be as practical but which holds the key to years of dreams. I feel, since I already have a BA degree in journalism, that I can afford to pamper my dreams if I want to. Creative Writing would require a novel or a book of short stories as a master's thesis. In other words, I would be forced to get down to work for a whole year in order to produce some sort of book. But since I won't get out of the Navy until March 1958, a decision is not too urgent.

Jack actually got out a little earlier. After discharge from the Navy in December of 1957, he returned to Indiana University and, just as he predicted, was hired as a residence counselor. He enjoyed a private room in the Men's Residence Center, the same vine-covered cluster of dormitories in which he spent four years as an undergraduate. He did not pamper his creative writing dreams, however. He studied communications, completing all academic requirements for a Master of Arts degree. But he never actually received the degree. He failed to write the required thesis within a five-year time limit. Too busy with other matters.

USS Colahan, Yokosuka, Japan, 8 June 1956:

Well, here I am in Yokosuka, the home of weary sailors. There is not much to write about. Shipboard life is pretty unvarying. I work, stand my watches, and hit the beach whenever I get a chance. We'll stay here in Yokosuka until the 16th of this month. Then we will go out for some more operations, stop briefly at Sasabo, Japan, go out again for more operations, and finally, near the end of the month, tie up to a buoy in Hong Kong Harbor. We'll stay in Hong Kong until after the Fourth of July. Then we'll probably be assigned to the Taiwan Patrol, which means that for approximately two weeks we'll steam up and down the straits between Taiwan and the China mainland in an attempt to impress the Chinese Reds with the fact that we speak softly but carry a great big stick. I'm glad we are going on that one. If I have to be at sea, I might as well get a ribbon out of it, and if I'm not mistaken they are still giving the China Service Ribbon to those who help defend poor old Chiang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Chinese Army. As you know, I haven't gotten a single ribbon, and at the risk of sounding like a glory hound I'll admit I'd like to get at least one of the damned things. Just something to color up the uniform, you know.

USS Colahan, Underway, 16 June 1956:

We are underway again. We left Yokosuka this morning at 0800 and we're now steaming toward Sasabo, Japan. I'm not sure exactly where we are right now since I have not yet stood a CIC watch. I go on watch in an hour and a half, and then I'll find out.

I'm healthy as a horse with not a worry in the world — well, not too many worries anyway. You see, I am in sort of a jam. I will tell you about it. Last Wednesday night I spent the night ashore. For the past several nights I had been getting only five to six hours of sleep. Well, I went to bed that night and set the alarm clock for six-thirty. I slept like a log and when I awoke it was a quarter to eleven. I got back to the ship at eleven o'clock, three and a half hours after liberty ended. Fred Dutton, who was officer of the deck at the time, told me I was not logged in as AOL (my rank helped me there), but he said the executive officer wanted to see me. Well, since Commander DeBuhr wanted to see me, I figured the least I could do was go see him. He said, "Where the hell you been?" and I said, "Sleeping," and he said, "Don't go ashore until I tell you." So I am restricted to the ship for the time being. I missed two nights of liberty in Yokosuka.

Usually I hate going to sea, but I was eager to go this time. I don't like staying in port if I can't go ashore. Last night, when we were getting everything ready for sea, there was some doubt about whether we were going to make it. The evaporators wouldn't work; in other words, we couldn't make any fresh water for ourselves or any feed water for the boilers. The whole Engineering Department was running around like crazy trying to fix things up.

It's a funny thing about these ships: They are getting old and they work fine as long as we are operating at sea, but as soon as we come into port, presumably to fix everything up, they go all to pieces and it's one hell of a job trying to get them started again.

Well, as I was saying, the evaporators wouldn't work. I was OOD at the time and Joe Wachtel, the chief engineer, came to the quarterdeck and said, "Jack, you don't want to go to Sasabo anyway, do you? I think we're going to have to stay here in Yokosuka and get these damned evaps working," and much to his surprise I jumped all over him. "Oh no, Joe! Don't do that to me! I'm restricted! Let's get the hell out of here!"

Joe Wachtel was a mustang; that is, he came up from the ranks. At heart he was still a snipe, but he wore the silver bars of a lieutenant junior grade. He handled enlisted men better than any other officer aboard the *Colahan,* because he had been one of them for so long. He knew when they were lying and when they weren't, and if they were mistreated, he could become as incensed as they

were.

And Joe got mad when he heard a tale told by Dale Sullinger, a recently promoted member of the engine room gang. The new machinist mate third-class claimed that Marine military policemen in Yokosuka had beat him because he would not salute them. Yes, there had been a barroom brawl. Yes, Sullinger had been taken into custody by two Marine MPs. When the marines, mere puffed-up privates on shore patrol, demanded a salute, Sullinger responded as any proud petty officer would. “Fuck you” said the sailor to the marines. “I've got more rank than you motherfuckers.” The MPs flailed him with tightly-rolled wet bathtowels, a weapon designed to inflict maximum pain without leaving marks, a weapon that would be humorous if it were not so terribly effective in dispensing agony, a weapon that was clearly illegal in the hands of military policemen.

LTJG Joseph Wachtel, mustang engineer officer, donned an enlisted man’s uniform and accompanied Sullinger to the bar. “Start a fight,” the disguised officer ordered. For Sullinger, that was easy. He bumped a guy away from the bar, muttering “You’re next after me, motherfucker.” That did it, and Joe then jumped into the fight, one drunken sailor coming to the aid of another. Of course, the Marine MPs showed up. They took Joe away, and they gave him the same lesson they handed out to all uppity sailors, never dreaming he was a commissioned officer. Formal complaints were lodged. Heads rolled in the MP barracks, and Joe’s reputation aboard the *Colahan*, already high, soared.

As it worked out, we didn’t have to stay in Yokosuka after all, although the evaporators are still not fixed yet. We took on all the feed water we could hold from the tender, and fresh water, too. That should get us to Sasabo. Just a little while ago we sent out a message requesting emergency availability alongside the USS Dixie at Sasabo. It should take about three days to effect repairs.

I don’t figure my restriction will last too long. I’ll probably get a night or two of liberty at Sasabo and I’ll very likely be completely free by the time we hit Hong Kong.

Jack, always expecting things to work to his advantage, was too optimistic. He didn’t get ashore at all in Sasabo, and he barely got ashore in Hong Kong. DeBuhr had a long memory and an ungenerous soul.

Momoko will be glad when my restriction if over, too. I didn’t get to see her those last two days in Yokosuka. One of the enlisted men brought me a letter from her telling me how sorry she was that I got into trouble. Recently she gave me a silver napkin ring with her name engraved in Japanese. She also gave me

a white-and-blue-checked kimono. You should see me in it. I look like a shining Son of Heaven. I think I'll buy a couple of kimonos to wear while studying when I go back to school. They are pretty comfortable.

Well, in two and a half months I'll be promoted to lieutenant junior grade. September will mark my eighteenth month as a commissioned officer and my twenty-fourth month in the Navy. That means I'll get two pay raises at the same time. I'll get an additional thirty dollars for my promotion and an additional fifteen for hitting the two-year mark.

USS Colahan, Underway, 23 June 1956:

We're at sea again, just south of Japan's southernmost island, Kyushu. It's hot and it's going to get hotter. Through all of next week we'll be working our way down the coast of China toward Hong Kong. The Colahan is now part of Task Group 70.4, a hunter-killer outfit made up of one carrier and eight destroyers and destroyer escorts. My division left Sasabo yesterday afternoon and joined up with the task group early this morning.

The carrier is the USS Princeton. Yesterday, while we were still in Sasabo, I went aboard her for a conference of all communications officers who were scheduled to participate in the upcoming exercise. It was the first time I had ever been on a carrier. The wardroom is about three times the size of our house in Evansville. I felt like a hick from the country visiting a rich city uncle. They told me that carrier life wasn't all chicken and gravy, though, because sometimes, during rough weather, they had to secure the billiard tables. Tough shit.

Well, I'm still restricted. I didn't get ashore in Sasabo and I don't know whether I'll get liberty in Hong Kong either. The executive officer is a bastard. He'll be transferred when we get back to the States, and brother, will that be a happy day! I'll even carry his baggage.

I don't much care whether I get liberty in Hong Kong or not, because I very definitely will be assigned to shore patrol, and that's practically the same as liberty. The shore patrol just walks around and shops and eats in restaurants. I won't mind that at all. At least I'll get off this ship for a while.

Sometimes, when I read, I wear my glasses, and sometimes I don't. It's funny, but at times I feel I don't need them at all, and at other times I very definitely need them. All in all it's probably a good thing that I got them. My eyes are not perfect and they need some help.

Next month I'll probably have to take on a new duty. Jack Zimmermann will be released from active duty a couple of months after we get back to the States, and I will relieve him as Custodian of Registered Publications. It's a pretty big job and I'm not exactly looking forward to it. Zimmermann has talked the captain into letting me relieve him early so he'll be aboard for the first quarterly

inventory that I have to make. Really, though, that's just an excuse to get himself relieved early. I don't need him for that first inventory so I'm going to try to talk the captain into letting me take over the job in September. As it is, I am Communications Officer, OC Division Officer, Cryptosecurity Officer, Public Relations Officer, Postal Officer and a qualified CIC Watch Officer and Officer of the Deck in Port. Also, before Zimmermann leaves I'll have to assume the duties of Classified Material Control Officer and Top Secret Control Officer. That puts quite a load on me and I don't like it. I work approximately eighty hours a week when we are underway. When you work that much, it's tough having to stay aboard when you finally do hit a port, especially when everyone else is getting ready to hit the beach.

During the five days that we spent in Sasabo, some Japanese naval officers and enlisted men came aboard to look over our ship and equipment. Two Japanese destroyers were there in the harbor. I was a little surprised to find that Japan has a combatant navy. I will wager that the American public doesn't know about it either. Anyway, as I was saying, these Japanese officers and enlisted men came aboard to look around. It was both humorous and embarrassing. They knew about as much English as we knew Japanese, which is to say, not very much. We pulled out our English-Japanese books and they pulled out their Japanese-English books, but we were hardly ever able to make each other understand what we were talking about.

This letter will be picked up sometime tomorrow by helicopter and taken to the carrier. Then it will be flown to Japan and from there to the States. You will probably get it before I arrive in Hong Kong at the end of this month.

USS Colahan, Underway, Lat 22-25N Long 124-30E, 28 June 1956:

We are still at sea and will remain here until the morning of the 30th when we steam into Hong Kong Harbor. We are two hundred miles due east of the southern tip of Taiwan (Formosa), about six hundred miles from Hong Kong. I'll be glad to get there. This has been a rugged week of sea operations and I'm looking forward to a week of rest and recreation. Liberty will commence at 10 o'clock everyday, and the exec said he would lift my restriction sometime next week. I'll get ashore earlier than that, however, because I've been assigned two days of shore patrol. I'll wear a summer white uniform on shore patrol. I'll try to get some pictures made and send them to you.

The weather is nice, even if it is a little hot. The days are bright and blue and clear, the seas are smooth, and the foam kicked up by the screws is startlingly white. The other evening I was eating dinner near the wardroom hatch that opens out to the starboard side. As the stewards served my meal, I looked out at the blue water and perfect sky and couldn't help but think that many peo-

ple pay a lot of money to do what I'm doing now. I'll never regret coming into the Navy no matter how much I look forward to getting out. It has provided wonderful polish to my education. It has given me the "Grand Tour" that is traditionally an important part of the education of a gentleman. All I need now, to make the "tour" complete, is a visit to Europe, but I guess I'll have to do that as a civilian.

I'm on watch now in CIC. There's not much to do. We're steaming in a circular screen formation — eight destroyers around one carrier. Every once in a while we get a small contact on the radar. I won't get relieved for another three hours.

As I told you before in an earlier letter, I sent off for a post-graduate bulletin from Indiana University. I believe I've definitely decided to go back to school to study creative writing and to somehow finish a novel. It will probably be just another wasted year but I feel I owe it to myself to give it a try. I'll probably be twenty-seven years old before I actually start my career in journalism. That seems pretty old to be starting and yet I can't see how I could have made it any sooner. I could have saved a year by going into the Army, but that very likely would have been more of a waste. A war in the near future would just about ruin a civilian career for me.

Soon I'm going to ask you to send me my golf clubs. I'm not asking you now because I've got to ask the lady who is taking care of my car if it's all right to send the clubs to her house. It would be inconvenient to send them to the ship. I can keep them in the trunk of my car and have them ready whenever I want them. There's a second-class torpedoman aboard who is a pretty good golfer. We are planning to play in Hong Kong and also in San Diego when we get back there. My game is rusty but it probably won't take long to brush it up.

I'm really looking forward to December when my ship goes into the yards at Mare Island. That's not too far from San Francisco. We'll stay there maybe four months. It'll be like four months of shore duty, and I'll get acquainted with "Baghdad on the Bay," as some people call it. I'll have to make arrangements to get my car up there. It should be great fun. San Francisco is not a sailor town, despite the large number of sailors there. The city is large enough to absorb them. It will be nice to go to theaters and eat at famous restaurants. San Diego is not as bad as many sailors say it is, but it's a hick town just the same. It reminds me of an overgrown Evansville.

The night air is cool. We are making seventeen knots now and a breeze is coming in through the open port. I've got my shirt off and I'm feeling pretty comfortable.

I'll be in Hong Kong for your birthday, Dad. Your birthday is the 6th of July on this side of the world. Have you decided what you're going to do? I'd

like to see you go into the restaurant business if you wouldn't have to work too hard. If you do, get a good restaurant downtown; I don't believe you'd be happy in some dump on the outskirts. I personally don't want to see you move away from Evansville, but that, of course, is up to you. You cannot build your life on the desires of your children, just as I cannot build mine on the desires of my parents. We both have to do the best we can to be happy and stay financially solvent.

Faye and Dick are going to do all right, I think. Faye has a head on her freckled shoulders and she's extremely loyal to Dick. She's enthusiastic about his plans and respects his ideas. That's a most desirable quality in a wife, I think. She's smarter than Dick. (Ha! You won't be able to send this letter to Faye. Dick might read it.) But it doesn't make any difference as long as she doesn't let him know that she is smarter, or as long as she doesn't press it if he ever does find out. I've often wished that I had Faye's brains to go along with my ambition. She's a pretty smooth-thinking cookie.

Sister Faye and her husband Dick Willding did not make it as a married couple. They produced a son, Guy, and then split up. Perhaps Dick discovered what Jack feared he would discover, that Faye was smarter than he was.

Sometimes I feel that my "ambition" is a vague and impractical thing. I don't work hard enough to justify calling myself ambitious. I'm too lazy. I'm slowly educating myself, but Christ it's a slow process! I'm not competent in a single field of knowledge and I probably never will be. My interests are too diversified.

The open port, which allowed a breeze into the *Colahan*'s Combat Information Center, was not the only source of fresh air on that June night. In a rare moment, Jack sized himself up with refreshing candor.

We will lose the executive officer shortly after returning to San Diego. He has been given command of a ship slightly smaller than this one. Of course, everyone is heartbroken that we're losing the bastard. You never can tell, though. He might make a pretty good CO. As I've told you before, you don't have to sweat the captain much. He's just the big boss. It's the exec who can make life miserable.

Well, it's 2:15 a.m. and I've still got an hour and a half before being relieved. The sea is black outside except for little touches of silver. I'm looking forward to hitting the sack. I haven't been getting much sleep, but that's nothing new in the Navy. I've been smoking too much lately. I'll have to start cutting

down.

I'm trying to get a suntan. The sun is out all the time so I should be nice and red by the time we get back to Yokosuka early in August. I'm white as the belly of a frog right now, except for my back which is now red from sitting in the sun a few days ago. Of course, my face and arms have already began to get brown, or as near to brown as they'll ever get.

We are losing one of our officers in Hong Kong [LTJG John W. MacCormack]. He is being discharged. We're due to get a replacement, though. The new officer will come aboard while we are patroling the Taiwan Straits or when we get back to Yokosuka.

USS Colahan, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 9 July 1956:

We're patroling the Taiwan Straits now. We arrived in Kaohsiung, Taiwan, last Sunday, after leaving Hong Kong the day before. It was a hot and muggy day. The Colahan's officers assembled in the crew's mess aboard the oiler that aids the ships assigned to the patrol. Several senior officers explained to us the mission of U.S. naval forces in Taiwan. It isn't a very unusual assignment. Two destroyers will patrol the straits at all times. One destroyer will patrol to the south and one to the north. The mission is to protect the Nationalist Chinese from aggression by the Communist Chinese. As you know, those two factions are at war with each other. There is more shooting around this part of the world than is generally realized. Don't worry about me, though. U.S. patrol vessels here have been fired upon only once, and that was by a Nationalist Chinese ship that got confused in the dark and thought the American ship was its enemy. No American has ever been hurt.

The Colahan and the Shields left Kaohsiung at noon yesterday and steamed to their assigned stations. We were told to relieve the USS Eversole, which we did at 2300 last night. We are now steaming around in the northern part of the Taiwan Straits. It's sort of like a game of hide-and-seek that we are playing with the Commies. We are watching them and they are watching us. Their ships are not very big. Most of them are mere junks. Some are equipped with radar and they usually have a field piece of some kind mounted on the forecastle. We are not expecting them to give us any trouble. The Twining and the Erben are still at Kaohsiung. The Erben will relieve us two days from now and we'll go into port for a few days before coming out again. We'll be doing this for the next three weeks.

I got two days of liberty in Hong Kong. The executive officer finally let me go.

What Commander DeBuhr actually said was "Okay, Sellers, go get your

ashes hauled."

I went ashore the first night and just roamed around, finally winding up at Hong Kong's Foreign Correspondents Club, where I ate a dinner of baked macaroni. The view from there is magnificent. The club is located high on the peak which overlooks the city. I ate dinner on the veranda and I could see the whole harbor. When you're that high you can see the crisscrossed trails that the junks leave in the water as they shuttle back and forth between Hong Kong and Kowloon. I thoroughly enjoyed myself.

On the second day I pulled one of the best liberties I've had since I got into the Navy. A second-class torpedoman aboard the Colahan had been urging me for weeks to play golf with him. I couldn't while I was restricted, but as soon as I was free we went to make arrangements. The British don't let just anybody play on their courses, so we had to ask the Servicemen's Guide Center at Fenwick Pier to make reservations for us. We borrowed golf clubs from officers aboard the Twining and the Shields. We picked up our passes early that morning, and Steven LeFavbre, the torpedoman I mentioned before, changed into civilian clothes at the China Fleet Club. [Jack was already in civvies. As an officer, he was allowed to don them aboard ship before going on liberty.] We took a walla-walla across the harbor to the Kowloon train station. There we bought first-class tickets to Sheung Shui, which is the last stop before you reach the Chinese Communist border. Our tickets entitled us to a private room in the first-class coach. A steward served us drinks and we settled down for a one-hour train ride.

A wonderful thing about Asiatic trains is that they always leave and arrive on schedule. If a train is scheduled to leave at 1125, as ours was, then you can bet your bottom dollar that it will leave at that time, not 1124 or 1126, but right smack on the button. It's a very efficient system. The people loading the train know that it's going to leave on time and they work accordingly. In the States, the loaders know that the train will wait until they are done, so they take their time about it.

The train ride was an interesting one. We went through tunnels and along the coastline. I watched the people working in the fields and felt very lucky to be an American. The people look very poor and their houses are not too nice. It's not accurate to say that every inch of land is used over here to produce food, for there is much land that is not used for farming, but I think it is accurate to say that every acre of land is put to the best possible use.

We arrived in Sheung Shui early in the afternoon. As soon as we climbed down from the train we were surrounded by a group of boys and young men who fought to take our golf clubs. We surrendered the clubs to two boys and fol-

lowed them to the place where they kept their bicycles. The bicycles had little seats attached to the rear fenders. We rode on the back seats of the bicycles to the clubhouse, about a half mile from the railroad tracks.

I was surprised and pleased when I saw the Fanling Golf Course, one of the two courses owned by the Royal Hong Kong Golf Club. The clubhouse was big and comfortable looking. It had about it a very definite British atmosphere. I ate sausage and eggs and drank iced tea before going out on the course. We met two boys off the Twining, one of whom decided to play a round with us. The green fee was only three Hong Kong dollars. That's about fifty cents in American money. I hired a caddy for a little over two Hong Kong dollars.

I didn't score too well on the first nine because I took a 10 on the first hole and had a little difficulty getting started. That was only the second time I've played golf since I got in the Navy. On the second nine, though, I managed to birdie two holes and wound up with a 43. I got pretty sunburned but it didn't hurt me too much because I had taken the precaution of bringing a bottle of suntan lotion with me. Even my legs got a little red. The locker room boy at the clubhouse had given me a pair of shorts as well as a pair of golf shoes. The top of my head got sunburned too. (I've cut off my hair again.)

Golf was one of Jack's casual talents. Even after long layoffs, he could play the game surprisingly well, much to the annoyance of his more athletic friends, who could beat him consistently in any other sport. The knack never really left him, even after he became Jackson. Twenty-three years later, on 17 April 1979, he competed in a *Los Angeles Times* golf tournament at the Willowick course in Orange County, California. It was the first time in months that he had even picked up a club. He scored a 76 with the help of a hole-in-one on the seventh hole, and carried away the low-gross trophy. A couple of months later, again without intervening practice, he won the 1979 Orange County Press Club championship.

When we finished playing we went back to the clubhouse and drank a gallon of iced tea. Some rich-looking Chinamen who had been playing behind us came in and talked with us for a while. They spoke excellent English. They ordered a mixture of lemonade and beer. They said it was very good, but I couldn't see it and politely refused.

We wanted to catch the 1859 train back to Kowloon, so we had to leave fairly soon after that. We caught a couple of bicycle boys and rode back to the railway. The train, as usual, was right on time. When we got to Kowloon we caught a walla-walla to Hong Kong and returned the clubs to the Twining and Shields as we went by. I took Steve to the Foreign Correspondents Club for din-

ner. Enlisted men are not supposed to go there, but I figured that since he was in civilian clothes it would be all right. I had a glass of port, a prawn cocktail and the biggest filet mignon I've ever eaten. I finished it off with two cups of black coffee. It was dark by that time and we could look out over the harbor and see the lights of Kowloon. My dinner cost me a little over twenty-one Hong Kong dollars — about $3.25 in American money.

USS Colahan, Underway, Taiwan Straits, 23 July 1956:

It's noon and I've just come in from sunbathing. We're at sea again, patroling the northern part of the Taiwan Straits, back and forth, back and forth. In less than ten days we'll be back in Yokosuka. We left Yokosuka on the sixteenth of last month and it seems like a very long time, especially since I was restricted part of that time. I'm supposed to be working now, but I haven't been able to get much done lately. I worked very hard until the administration inspection (in which the communications section received a grade of excellent), but I developed a letdown feeling afterwards and haven't been able to get going since. I have quite a bit to do, but they are little things which can easily be put off. Don't get the idea, however, that I'm completely goofing off. I still work about ten hours a day, seven days a week, when my ship is at sea; and I average a good eight hours a day, seven days a week, when in port.

I'm going to be asking you to send me my golf clubs soon, so I wish you would see about getting them packed for shipment. I'll let you know the address later. I want them waiting for me when I get back to San Diego, so that means you will have to send them to a friend who lives there. They might get delayed if you tried to send them to the ship now.

I got a letter from Bob Hart. He and his wife are in Florida now — or rather on some island south of Florida. He is drinking like a fish and (although he doesn't say so) is trying to live the life of F. Scott Fitzgerald. He sold a story for seventy-five dollars to a magazine called "Dude," and it appeared along with stories by Erskine Caldwell and Tennessee Williams.

Bob Hart was one of Jack's closest friends at Indiana University. Theirs was a friendship based on shared dreams. Each wanted to be a writer, preferably in a Paris garret, *a la* Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and other members of the admired Lost Generation. Jack's first published short story, "The Way God Made Things," brought him to Bob's attention. They did more talking than writing. They were young dreamers of the early Fifties, and in those rosy times of ruddy youth, they were exactly who they should have been, never to become what they wanted to be.

USS Colahan, Underway, Taiwan Straits, 24 July 1956:

I'm writing to kill time. I'm on watch in CIC and there's not much going on. We are steaming on course 251 degrees at 10 knots, no skunks, no bogies, everything normal. I'm just sitting here looking at a chart of the area we are patroling. Just a lot of little islands off the China coast.

Dad, I guess you think I'm never going to send you your birthday present. Well, I am. It will go off in the mails as soon as my ship gets back to port. It's been in my drawer for weeks. I'm sorry I'm so late. The post office aboard ship is not open very often. Also, you have to fill out some cards whenever you want to send stuff back to the States. I'm going to get it off this time, though.

I've had a lot of problems in the last few weeks. My crypto machine has been acting up, and I've had to spend lots of time encrypting classified messages and seeing that they get sent out. I lost my chief radioman in Hong Kong. He's a few years younger than you, Dad, and he's retiring from the Navy to work for some civilian outfit. I guess he's tired to being away from home all the time. His absence doesn't affect me too much, though. He never did much anyway. I practically had to order him to stay up in the radio shack the last few weeks he was here. He had adopted a short-timer's attitude.

From: Commanding Officer, USS Colahan (DD658)

To: R.J. SELLERS, LTJG, 570780/1105, USNR

Subj: China Service Medal (Extended); authorization to wear

Ref: CINCPACFLT ltr ser 4445 dtd 11 OCT 56

1. In accordance with reference (a), you are authorized to wear the China Service Medal (Extended) for service aboard the USS COLAHAN (DD658) during the period 8 July 1956 through 29 July 1956.

CL KEEDY, Jr.

I'm healthy and happy. Can't complain too much. Too many cigarettes is about my only real vice. I've been working hard the last few days getting some of my men ready for the August advancement-in-rating exams. Some will make it, others won't. I'm getting a pretty good tan. The sun is hot as blazes around here. We're only twenty-six degrees north of the equator.

The chief engineer and I are conducting an audit of the records held by the Custodian of Registered Publications. The audit is necessary before I can

relieve Mr. Zimmermann as custodian. That job will make my workload considerably heavier. Oh well, there are only so many hours in the day, and I cannot work more than that.

USS Colahan, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, 29 July 1956:

Back in Kaohsiung again. Just sitting here now, waiting for the other ships in the division to finish up with their patrols. As soon as we are all together, we'll start back to Yokosuka. Typhoon Wanda is kicking up her heels southeast of here. Our track to Yokosuka will probably take us pretty close to her. Nothing to worry about, though. We'll stay far enough away. Might get a little rough, but that's nothing unusual when you're on a tin can like this one.

My room is a damned mess. I just can't seem to keep it straight. It's partly my fault and partly Zimmermann's. I wish to hell I was rooming by myself. There's a slight chance that I might get my wish. Mr. Sutherland, the CIC officer, might be called by the commodore to go over to the Twining and take over as staff operations officer. If he does get called, then Zimmermann will probably move to Sutherland's room and leave me alone and liking it. It wouldn't be so bad if we had separate desks, but we have to share one and can never keep our papers apart. Oh, for a life of floating shore duty aboard a big, big ship! Better yet, a life of civilian freedom.

I was supposed to go ashore as part of the shore patrol for this ship today. Liberty has been canceled, though, until after we go alongside a tanker and fill up with fuel. The commodore wants us to be ready to get the hell out of here if Typhoon Wanda happens to jump us. That old saying — any port in a storm — has little basis of fact. Ships are usually not safe in port during a large storm. They are much safer at sea where they can maneuver to stay afloat. In port they are likely to wind up on the beach, and that's always hard for captains to explain.

Title page for the *Colahan*'s 1956 Western Pacific cruise book.

USS Colahan, Underway, 1 August 1956:

We're steaming south of Honshu now, about thirty-five miles off the coast. In seventeen hours or so, we'll be back in Yokosuka. We left Kaohsiung early on the 30th of July, and steamed north through the Taiwan Straits and into the East China Sea, in order to avoid Typhoon Wanda, which was traveling northeast at a speed of twelve knots, toward Okinawa Gunto. Okinawa later set Typhoon Condition One. We raced at twenty-five knots throughout the night and most of the next day, until

we finally began to feel the effects of Wanda late that evening. Then we slowed down so as not to tear ourselves apart. The waves were large and hit us mostly on the starboard bow and beam, causing us to lean over far to port on occasions. The ship rapidly turned into a mess. Scattered papers, chairs resting on their sides, dishes broken, water on the wardroom deck, clothes damp and uncomfortable, everyone miserable. All of us crawled from our sacks only to relieve the watch, and then, when the watch was over, crawled in again. Chow, of course, consisted of nothing but sandwiches, since the messcooks and stewards couldn't possibly prepare a meal when everything was so unsettled. Some of the officers tried to play poker in the wardroom, but we had to hold onto the table, and then a big one rolled us to port and we all went sliding, with the table buckling and throwing chips every which way. Later that night, when I was in the wardroom by myself, I slipped and fell hard to the deck. I could have been hurt badly if it wasn't for a chair that was wedged against a post. The chair stopped me before I got going too fast.

We're out of the rough weather now. We heard over the radio that Wanda passed near the northern part of Taiwan, causing considerable damage. It feels good to have the ship steady again, and it feels good, also, to be near Yokosuka. I'm going to take three days of leave while I'm there. Maybe Momoko and I can go visit Atami or some other nice place.

I've been working for the last few days on an audit of Mr. Zimmermann's publication records, in preparation for relieving him as custodian of registered publications.

USS Colahan, Yokosuka, Japan, 19 August 1956:

Our period for repairs here in Yokosuka was extended for a few days because of some trouble that developed in connection with the after turbine. As it turned out, however, it can't be fixed here, and we'll just have to wait until we get to San Francisco in December before we can get a new one. We're not supposed to steam at high speeds but I know we will just the same. If we planeguard for any of the carriers out here, we won't be able to avoid it. It would suit me just fine if the whole thing blew to hell and back, as long as no one got hurt, of course. I'd like to spend a few unscheduled weeks in the yards.

I'm happy to hear that you like your new job, Dad. I suppose that's the best road to happiness: To find a job that you like. Of course, in many ways a job is a job, no matter how much you like it as a whole. I like my job fine, but naturally there are irritating things about it that I just have to accept. That's true of your job, too, I imagine. One thing is for sure: We should have plenty of good candy for Christmas.

Claude Sellers, Jack's father, had started work as a candy jobber, a job he would hold the rest of his working life.

Well, I'll be making LTJG soon. I'll let you know when you should quit addressing letters to ENS Jack Sellers. It should be around the fourth of September, but sometimes these things are delayed. The Bureau of Naval Personnel might send out the appointing letters alphabetically, for all I know, and if that's true then I'll probably get mine a little late. I'm eager to put on that extra quarter-inch stripe. LTJG is a pretty good rank.

I'm also expecting to be awarded the Chinese Service Medal for those three weeks I spent on the Taiwan patrol. I hope so, anyway. I'd like to have a medal to show my grandchildren (God bless 'em, wherever they are).

I don't know exactly what we'll be doing when we go to sea tomorrow or the next day. We're not due back in Yokosuka until the sixth of September. I do know, though, that we will spend one weekend in Kuri. I've never been there and I'd like to see it.

I guess I can be pretty certain of getting two weeks leave for Christmas. I don't want to take any more leave than that. Time is going fast for me, and I'll be getting out of the Navy before I know it, and when I do, I want some leave on the books that I can sell to the government. Every thirty days of leave that I have on the books will be worth about $440 when I get out. I'm figuring on having about $1,500 in cash and my car paid for when I get promoted to civilian a year and a half from now. At least I won't have to worry about eating for those first few months. I'll probably go back to school, as you know, and a little extra dough will certainly come in handy.

USS Colahan, Underway, East China Sea, 24 August 1956:

As you undoubtedly know by now, a U.S. plane was attacked and apparently destroyed by "unknown" forces this week. The incident occurred sixty or so miles north of Taiwan. When it happened, the Colahan and two sister ships were conducting "type" training east of Kyushu. We were scheduled to join up with the aircraft carrier Wasp for plane-guard duty. Well, we joined up with the carrier last night, but not for the anticipated reason. Commander Task Force 77 ordered the Wasp, Destroyer Division 172 (that's us) and Destroyer Division 192 to join him in the East China Sea. We are on our way now, at high speed. We will probably spend the next couple of weeks with either Task Force 77 or Task Force 72. The latter is the Taiwan area defense force.

Don't worry about me. The Republicans would sell their souls before they'd let a war start now, just a couple of months before the elections.

Jack surely wrote more letters in 1956, but this was the last surviving one for the remainder of that year. Perhaps his mother neglected to save his letters during this period. It is not until 10 February 1957 that we pick up the trail of our hero, in his own words. However, LTJG Jack Sellers served as staff advisor for a cruise book published in San Diego at the end of the *USS Colahan*'s 1956 tour of duty in the Western Pacific, and he wrote an article, "The Colahan Odyssey," which appeared as the centerpiece of the book:

The day we left San Diego, early in April, was a gloomy one for most Brown Baggers. It would be six months before they saw their wives and children again. But for most bachelors it was the commencement of an exciting part of their lives — a half year in exotic ports where cheap liquor and expensive women beckoned with the strong arm of Temptation — a trip that would cost thousands of dollars in civilian life but, for us in the Navy, was reduced to hundreds.

The trip to Hawaii was smooth and uneventful. The weather was fair and the seas calm. Finally, there was Diamond Head! — and somewhere along the coast was Waikiki and the Royal Hawaiian Hotel. We steamed up the narrow channel at Pearl Harbor and stared at the mast of the USS Arizona, still flying the Ensign, and tried to imagine the massive battleship beneath the water — a tomb of steel for a thousand victims of the 1941 tragedy.

The liberty party hurried off the ship when the Bos'n Mate passed the word "Now liberty commences . . . ." Some headed for the taverns and a good cold beer. Some found their way down a narrow alley to see Tempest Storm at the Follies. Others ate excellent dinners at Trader Vic's and Don the Beachcomber's. Some went to Waikiki beach and were disappointed because they saw no movie stars. And still others signed up for a tour of the island and saw, among other things, the hidden strip of sand where Deborah Kerr and Burt Lancaster made love in "From Here to Eternity."

We remained in Hawaii for a week of recreation and training operations and then headed for Midway Island, land of Gooney Birds and little else. We didn't stay long — just long enough to refuel before starting on the final leg of our journey to the Far East — but we did have time for a swim in the clear blue water of the inner harbor, a quick sunbath on sand as white and fine as sugar, and an even quicker stop at the gedunk.

And then the sea again, gray from the lack of sun, choppier than before. We received reports of a typhoon brewing down south. The waves grew larger and we feared we might get a taste of a typhoon's fury. We increased speed and ran smack into a gale. It rained and rained and the seas tossed our ship like a cork, rolling us from side to side in our bunks, breaking dishes, scattering papers and

pencils, and just generally making life miserable. Some of us always had a bucket handy.

But finally we arrived in the haven of Japan, land of mystery to us Occidentals, island of Buddhism and Shintoism, miniature trees and miniature people, pseudo-geisha girls and Nippon Beer. This was what most of us had been waiting for. Here in Yokosuka were the girls we had left behind last year. Here were the many blocks of shops where you could pick up everything from athlete's foot to the Wall Street stock reports and where the customer was always right within a few hundred yen. For the health enthusiasts there were hot baths, jujitsu schools, and athletic clubs such as Jimmy-san's and the New Fukusuke. For the student there were Oriental customs, various works of art, and the Japanese people themselves. For the funlover there were the many cabarets and bars. It was indeed a beer drinker's paradise, a Casanova's delight, and the Shore Patrol's headache. The girls were considerate, affectionate, good-looking and costly — especially the hit-and-run types known as Butterfly Girls. The orchestras copied Glenn Miller and the drummers beat the drums and shook their heads like Gene Krupa. It was a shock to many of us to find that even in Japan, land of cherry trees and koto music, we still couldn't escape the sound of Elvis Presley singing "Heartbreak Hotel."

In his reference to "athletic clubs," Jack was having a bit of fun. Jimmy-san's and the New Fukusuke were whorehouses, the former reserved for officers, the latter for enlisted men.

But Japan isn't completely geared to the appetites of sailors. A visit to Atami showed us the quiet refinement of a Japanese resort, and a trip to Nagoya, one of the largest cities in the nation, gave us a glimpse of Westernized Japan with its big cars and expensive living. And always, a few miles from any of the cities, were the platform farmers and the rice paddies of old.

In June we visited Sasebo, a smaller version of Yokosuka, and then headed south for Hong Kong and a week of rest and recreation. There we found a teeming metropolis only a stone's throw from Communist China. This for many of us was the high point of our travels. For years we had read of the sights of Hong Kong, the view of the harbor from its famous Peak, the fine restaurants and places of entertainment. Only "Singapore" or "Paris" can equal the romance elicited by the words "Hong Kong."

In none of his writings has Jack ever had much to say about Sasebo. During his only visit to the Japanese seaport, he was restricted to the ship and did not get ashore. It was punishment for oversleeping in Yokosuka and missing

muster, which annoyed the executive officer. Gee, Commander DeBuhr. The ensign was only three and a half hours late. Have a heart.

We bought suits from Kowloon tailors at bargain prices. We ate dinners at the Parisian Grill and saw a bit of night life at the China Night. Some of us played golf on courses belonging to the Royal Hong Kong Golf Club. Others took long rickshaw rides through crowded streets and alleys. And once again there were girls — beautiful girls with split dresses.

We left Hong Kong early in July and sailed north to join Task Force 72 at Kaohsiung, Taiwan. We spent three weeks patroling the Taiwan Straits, investigating merchant ships and challenging aircraft. The weather was roughly comparable to that of the Belgian Congo. Kaohsiung was a dirty little city with eighteen authorized bars and an aggressive Shore Patrol. Most of us were happy to get back to Yokosuka.

In August an incident occurred that interrupted our routine schedule. A U.S. plane, a P4M Martin Mercator, was shot down while engaged in a patrol over international waters. The Colahan and a number of other ships joined Task Force 77 in a massive search for survivors. The Red Chinese Ministry called this a "planned provocation."

Finally it was sayonara time. We spent ten days in Yokosuka preparing for the long trip home. There was a frantic rush to buy china and other gifts that we just hadn't had time to purchase before. Boxes of loot were shoved into every nook and cranny. At last we were ready. Excitement was high because we were going home. But for a few of us there was a strange sadness in our hearts. We had found that Japanese girls were not so different from American girls after all. They could get jealous, they could cry, they could laugh, they could love. Never again would we think of Japan as a land of barbarians with barbaric customs.

Author's note to his daughter: Kei, the *Noritake* china that you inherited from your grandmother in 1992 was purchased in Japan by Jack on this voyage. It was packed in straw in a large wooden crate and carried across the Pacific aboard the *Colahan.* Jack's 1950 Plymouth took it the rest of the way, two thousand miles from San Diego to Evansville, Indiana, just in time for Christmas 1956. Your grandmother treasured that set of fine china, a son's gift, and I am sure you will, too.

We stopped at Midway Island and Pearl Harbor on the way home, but we couldn't find there the excitement that we had found before. We were too eager to keep moving east. No one could sleep the night before we were scheduled to

arrive in San Diego. Some of us were constantly wandering into Combat to ask if any land had been picked up on radar. At daybreak a small group gathered on the forecastle so they might be among the first to sight Point Loma.

At last we arrived. Grins were wide and tears were many as families and girls greeted their husbands and sons and sweethearts on the dock. Some of us walked down Broadway and felt a little strange in the midst of fast automobiles and traffic lights. We went into a barber shop and paid a dollar and a half for a haircut. We were home.