



Courtesy of Charles Flannery

Seaman 2nd Class Ed Flannery kept a diary aboard the *USS Colahan* during the Pacific War. Diary-keeping was against wartime rules for sailors, but Ed wanted a personal record of this exciting time in his young life, so he did it anyway. When Ed died in 1995, his hand-printed 20-page diary fell into the hands of a nephew, Charles Flannery, who 10 years later shared it with *Colahan* shipmates still living. In the diary's heading, Ed jotted "Stevenson" as the name of the executive officer. This must have been Ensign Graham Stephenson. Ed came aboard very early to help make the ship ready for sea duty, and perhaps Graham was serving as second in command until Lt. Grant Heston could show up to claim the XO spot. Anyway, Ed Flannery's entire *Colahan* journal appears below, with only minor editing. It stands alongside the Pacific War diaries of deckhand Bill Greenough and ship's clerk Albert Sikorski.

**Jackson Sellers, March 2005**

## ***Edward J. Flannery's 1943-1944 Journal***

USS COLAHAN DD-658

CAPT: LT. COMMANDER D.T. WILBER

EXECUTIVE OFFICER: STEVENSON

**1943 May:** Enlisted in Navy.

**1943 May-June:** Boot camp, 6 weeks at Newport, Rhode Island.

**1943 July:** Went to gunnery school in Connecticut — 2 weeks.

**1943 August:** After that, went to Brooklyn Navy Yard to get our ship. It was the destroyer USS Colahan DD-658. It was built and launched May 3rd 1943 by Bethlehem Steel Co., Staten Island, N.Y. We went on board in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and had to work to put bedding and supplies on. Then we put on ammunition for all guns. We went to our assigned quarters. Then I went to my battle station, which were twin 40mm anti-aircraft guns. I got put on KP in the spud locker in the galley.

**1943 August 23:** We had a commissioning ceremony with ship's company and

relatives attending. Lt. Commander D.T. Wilber in command. They said she became a ship of the line. Then they struck down the commissioning pennant and gave it to the captain. Then blew the bosun's pipe and set Watch One. Now we were part of the fleet.

**1943 September:** We had a shakedown cruise to Hamilton, Bermuda. Went to gunnery school there on 40s and 5-inch/38s. Anti-aircraft and surface targets.

**1943 October:** Rode out a hurricane at sea. Had to tie yourself to the bunk, she bounced so bad. Went back to Hamilton Harbor and had liberty there. We became qualified for the fleet. Our shakedown was finished, so we sailed back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. We went over 33 knots. We had more repairs in Brooklyn. Had liberty, so I came home. Had to be back at 8 o'clock in the morning. After repairs, we had to escort ships to Newfoundland. On the way back we stopped at Boston, Mass., for one day. Had liberty there. Went to a nightclub and had enough to drink. Got the other guys back to the ship. They could hardly walk, but they got back to the ship. We sailed back to the Brooklyn Navy Yard for more repairs.

**1943 November:** Had Thanksgiving on ship, then sailed to the Norfolk, Va., Navy Yard. Had liberty in Norfolk. Went to town. This was the real South, red noses. The MPs wanted to shoot a colored sailor porter. That's all they were: officers mess, make up bunks. The MP Marines had to take a gun away from the head. He got put out of the trolley because he would not go to the rear. That was some experience. We went back to the ship after we had enough to drink. The next day we sailed to Newport News, Va. They done more repairs there. While we were there, an old 4-stacker destroyer tied up alongside. It was all shot up. Holes all over. They gave them liberty. When they went over [the Colahan to the dock], we thought they were savages. They were wild men running off. So we thought: Is this the way it was going to be? We were told they lost 25 men battling a submarine on the surface. They sank the sub. It was the USS Borie DD215, a WWI 4-stacker. Something to see. They had been on convoy to England in the Atlantic.

*In his monumental "U.S. Destroyer Operations in World War II," Theodore Roscoe tells the USS Borie's dramatic story in the very first paragraph of the very first chapter: "Night, and a sea lathered with storm. A small gray ship, her bows streaming spume, fights her way across the heaving slopes and sinking valleys of water. Off in the blowing murk another vessel rides the sea — a low-lying craft that slides through the waves like a gliding shark. Suddenly the little gray ship spears the blackness with a shaft of light that reveals the second craft in dim silhouette. At once the little gray ship charges, rolling her beam ends under. There is*

*a crash, the shock of collision. Pinned together, the two vessels wrestle in the storm; then the shark, wounded, burrows into the sea. In her wake, the small gray ship releases a tumble of iron cylinders. Lightning flashes beneath the waves, and there is thunder down under. Some time later a deep-sea blast is heard. The little ship steams away. She is U.S.S Borie, and she has just killed a German submarine.” — Jackson Sellers*

**1943 November:** We had liberty in Newport News. Got drunk with all hands in the party. Came back to the ship. We were waiting for two other destroyers to be ready. That’s why we had duty as an Atlantic anti-sub patrol escort. They were now ready to join the fleet. They were the USS Halligan DD584 and the USS Gatling DD671. Some of their crew were in the same boot company in Rhode Island. We sailed the next day. We were going to Panama. We sailed through the Caribbean Sea. It was all moss seaweed on top. You would think we would not be able to go through it, but we did. Had a sub contact. Threw some depth charges over. No more contact. We had a probable.

**Panama Canal:** We finally got to the Panama Canal at Christobal on the Atlantic side. It was a lousy place. It stank. All one-story shacks. All saloons. You could buy anything. We had rum. That’s all that was any good. We got back to the ship before nightfall. The next day we started to go through the canal. They would close the locks, raise the water level, and open the next lock. It takes 2 days.

**Balboa:** We finally got to the Pacific side at Balboa. We got another liberty. It was a little better, but they had the same things to drink. We looked at the town and got back to the ship before dark. The next day we sailed into the Pacific Ocean and up along the coast of Central America. The Pacific sky was the same as the sea. It was all colors — red, orange, blue, black, white, just like a painting. The coast of Mexico was another painting. The cliffs were green, gold, black and yellow.

**1943 December:** We finally got to San Francisco. We sailed under the Golden Gate Bridge. It was some sight. I finally got to see it after hearing about it for so long. We docked at a pier. We got liberty. We went to a good restaurant and had a good meal, then went to a bar and had something to drink. After that, we went to get hamburgers. The place we went to was a hole in wall, very narrow. We asked the man where the head was. He told us to go to a door at the end of the place. So we opened the door and got a big surprise. The place was a gambling hall. Anything you wanted to play. The head was at the end of the hall. You had to walk through the whole place to get to it. What a trap that was! They thought you

would drop your money gambling. We had enough to drink, so we went back to the ship. The next day we got another liberty and went into the city of San Francisco again. We went to what they call the International Settlement. There were all nationalities, even Russian. Bars for each. At one bar they did not speak English. You would think you were in another country. We went from one to the other. First one side of the street, then the other. Then we went to Chinatown. It was all hills. Then we rode on the cable cars. I had always heard of them. Again, we had enough to drink, so went back to the ship.

**Pearl Harbor:** The next morning we set sail again. But before we sailed, we took on passengers — boots who would go with us to Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. We had a cruiser to escort. The boots on board got seasick. They were lying all over the ship. The head was a mess. They were throwing up on both the deck and in the head. The mess hall was the same. There were 100 men. We got all their candy and smokes because they could not eat or smoke. We sailed like this for 4 days. We finally got there. The first thing we saw was Diamond Head, a big mountain sticking out into the sea. We went through The Slot to tie up. We saw the Oklahoma battleship, upside down with just the keel showing. Then we saw the Arizona with just the masts showing. She was sitting on the bottom. The flag was flying on the mast. They told us she was still counted as a ship of the line. It was some sight to see. The airfield was all bombed out. We got to the dock and tied up. The boots got off. They were glad. We were now in Pearl Harbor. Some place to see! All Navy.

**Liberty and Camouflage:** I got liberty and went to Honolulu. On the way, we passed the Del Monte pineapple fields, also sugar cane fields. There was no real whiskey to drink in Honolulu. Only imitations, and rum and light beer. So we settled for rum and Coke. There were a lot of tattoo parlors in Honolulu. I almost got one but changed my mind. Some of the others got tattoos. Then it was time to get back to the ship. The next morning they put the ship in drydock. So we went down to see what they were doing. They fixed the props and we got a camouflage paint job. We were in drydock for only a week.

**No More KP Duty:** We sailed the next week to shake her down again, then came in again. Got another liberty and went to Honolulu for sightseeing on a tour bus. Went to the mountains and went to a luau, Hawaiian style, plenty to eat and drink. They did the hula dance. Had a good day, then went back to the ship. I was trying to get on as an electrician striker. Talked to the chief. Went to gunnery school again on the anti-aircraft 40s, for another week. They wanted us to do all the jobs — load, point, train, misfire, hang fire. The captain wanted everyone to know

these jobs. He was tough on gunnery. When I got back to the ship, we sailed again for more training on sub periscope sighting and lookout duty, working with a real sub. There was anti-aircraft practice with real planes diving at us. Five-inch guns firing at a towed target. Depth charges fired. We did this for three days. Then we went back to Pearl and docked, and we had another liberty. So I did the same thing as before — drinking and sightseeing. I had Christmas dinner on board the ship. First one away from home. Finally I got to strike for electrician 3rd class. No more KP duty.

**1944 January:** We sailed out of Pearl Harbor and joined Task Force 52, 5th Fleet. Our group had 6 LSTs (Tanks) and 6 LCIs (Marine infantry). We were their only escort. The captain told us where we were going and showed us on maps. It was the Marshall Islands. We were sailing a week out when we got a submarine contact at 12 o'clock midnight. So we left the convoy and dropped depth charges. This happened for a week at the same time of night. Then we did not get any more contacts. So we had a probable sub kill. The next week two Marines — one on an LST, another on an LCI — got appendicitis. We had to slow down to get them over with lines, bosun style. We slowed down at night. We had our own doctor on board. He operated on them at night, and put them in sickbay to recover.

**Kwajalein:** We were sailing for about two and a half weeks. Then we saw battleships firing on islands at night. We saw the shells streaking through the sky. So we knew this was the Marshall Islands. The next morning the Marines in the LSTs and the LCIs started to go in for a landing on the beach. We gave them covering fire going in. Then we started to bombard the shore, first to port, then to starboard. We saw oil tanks blowing up. We were getting target bearings from a spotter plane. We got word that a pilot was down in the water, so we left our position and sped at full throttle to pick him up. We found him on a raft and got him on board. We were going back to our position when we got word of another pilot down. Same thing, full throttle. The pilot was in a bad place, drifting toward the beach. We kept throwing lines to him and he kept missing them. This happened about 5 times. The captain said one more would be the last because soundings would have to be taken this close to the beach. But he caught this one, and we pulled him toward ship and got him aboard. Was he happy! The island wasn't taken yet, so he was lucky. As we were going back to our position, we got word that still another plane was down. We were told to sink it. We put 5-inch/38 shells into it. Then we went back to shore bombardment of Kwajalein, firing on targets identified by spotters. All this happened in just one day. Before nightfall, we stopped firing and took the pilots back to their carriers, and the Marine patients to

a hospital ship.

**The Colahan Runs Aground:** At night you could not stay in the atoll, so we went out to sea as escort for the Mississippi BB-41 and other TF 52 ships. I left my GQ station for an hour to become lookout on the flying bridge. I was on lookout duty when I heard this bumping and scraping sound. I was thrown against the portside rail, and almost went overboard before I got a hold on the railing. We had a bad list to port. The captain came out of his sea cabin and said to the officer on watch, "What the hell did you do now?" He broke radio silence and told the Mississippi to change course because we had struck a reef. We had to stay on GQ all night at all battle stations. A damage control party had to find out where the flooding was. The captain was told he had to wait until morning for a tug to get us off the reef. The captain decided not to wait for the tug. The island ahead was not taken, and we were too close to the beach for comfort. Before, while screening the Mississippi, we had to check between islands because we were told the Japs were hopping from one to the other, moving aircraft guns. During the day they might be firing from one island, but at nighttime they would move to another. So we caught them with a gun in a raft. We kept firing at them. There were no survivors. We got them all. That was why the captain wanted to get off the reef himself, without waiting for the tug. We threw shell casings overboard and pumped out water and oil to lighten the ship. We backed off until she started to move off. Finally she came off, right side up. The ship could move at only about 2 knots, shaking like hell and bouncing all over. First morning light was coming. BB-41 got another escort. We finally got back to the Kwajalein lagoon. Divers checked the screws and sonar dome. The screws were just hubs, no blades, all gone. The sonar dome was gone, too, and the sonar compartment was flooded. We had a rip along the bottom side, about 40 feet long. They could only use us as an anti-aircraft battery, with everybody manning 24-hour GQ stations. We had to wait for an empty supply ship to tow us back to Pearl Harbor. We waited a week for one. Our supplies were low and we could not get any. They said they needed all their supplies for the ships fighting in the zone. We would have to get supplies at Pearl.

**1944 February:** I was in a whaleboat going to Kwajalein with the officers. When we got ashore, I was rated as marksman with a rifle. While waiting for them to come back, I and two others in the party talked to Marines on the beach. They said there were sunken landing barges with Jap rifles in them. So we dove down and got about six of them. We put them in the whaleboat and covered them with tarps. When we got back to the ship, they wanted to know what we had. We had

to show them — small and new Jap rifles. They said we could not keep them, and they took them from us. We lost out. We saw Japanese prisoners at Kwajalein. They were big and strong, the first I had ever seen. I thought all Japs were small.

**The Tow to Pearl:** We got our tow and it took us two weeks to get back to Pearl Harbor. The towline broke at midnight, so we had to drift by ourselves all night until daybreak. Then a line was passed across to us. It took all hands to work on the line. Rate was nothing here. You would grab the big line up on the bow and run down to the fantail with it. Then you would let go and rush back to the bow to do it again, until all the line was aboard. Hard work in the heat. This happened four times. We were wide open for enemy subs and aircraft. Our food supplies were gone. We had only bread and spiced ham and coffee for a week and a half. We were at GQ for two weeks. We were going about 6 knots under tow. Sharks were swimming alongside for over a week, so I got a meathook and some spiced ham from the galley and dropped a cable with hook off the fantail. There were eight of us doing this fishing. We caught 7 sharks. We pulled them up on the fantail and stacked them up. Others stabbed them and pulled their teeth out. When we got the first one, blood flowed over the side, and a whole school of sharks were suddenly off the fantail. We had a ball. The executive officer came back with a camera and took pictures. Then he told us to knock it off. We could not have cameras — against regulations, wartime rules. The sharks were nearly 8 feet long, big ones. So we dumped the sharks over the fantail and cleaned up the mess.

**Repairs in Drydock:** We finally got to Pearl Harbor and went into drydock. I went down to see what the damage was. The sonar dome was gone, the props were just hubs, and a big gash ran 40 feet along the bottom of the hull. That was the reason for the flooding in compartments. We hoped we would be put up in a Hawaiian hotel, but we weren't. We had to stay on board, manning the guns 24 hours a day and carrying on the ship's normal routine. The supply officer went with a party and got supplies the first day. That day we had chicken for dinner, fresh milk, fruit, all you could eat. Pie, cake and ice cream, too. We had liberty every other day. I took care of lights and motors and I repaired the anchor winch.

**Bombed-Out Captain:** We had a commodore on board. We carried his flag. It was always flying from the mast when he was aboard. He was with us at the Marshall Islands campaign. He was a regular guy. He would talk to the crew sometimes at the rail. He and the captain and the executive officer would go off in a taxi. When they came back, it was always something to see. They would come back before movie time on the bow deck. The commodore would get out of the cab, walking straight. Then came the captain with two officers holding him up. He

was bombed out. We had to wait for him to come on deck, sit down and then start the movie. That's the way it was done. The movie was supposed to start at 8 o'clock. We made bets that, every time they went out, the captain would be bombed out. We never lost a bet. But the commodore sure could drink without showing it.

**Quarts of Beer:** They had to take up the deck between the head and the torpedo shack, and the decks below as well. This provided open space to get the shafts out. I spent my time working on motors, lights and the freezer. With liberty coming every other day, we soon had seen all you could see in Honolulu. So on one liberty we stayed on base in Pearl. We went to the Marine base canteen. You could get all the beer you wanted. They had quart bottles. We had one guy with us who was a beer hog. He went around to all the tables and grabbed bottles left behind. He drank them all up. Of course he was loaded and could not walk, and it was time to get back to the ship. We had to carry him across a baseball field. It started to rain hard. We dropped him once in the mud. We all had our whites on. We were getting muddy, but we picked him up and got to a road leading outside the base, but the road was completely fenced. We went on to a lumber storage yard and laid him on some timbers, making a racket. A Marine guard came over and challenged us. One of the guys started arguing with him. It got nasty. The Marine cocked his rifle and threatened to shoot. Now we had more trouble. So we picked up the guy from the timbers and got the hell out of there. Once we got outside the base, the Marine could not do anything to us. We heard the Marine call for the corporal of guard. We moved fast. We got outside and got transportation to the drydock. The beer hog's pants fell down and we had to pull them up. Officers were passing. We were all muddy. We got back to the ship and got him on board. The officer of the day looked the other way, but on our way forward, the bosun's mate started a fight with us, so we dropped him again. All of us got into it. The captain wanted all our names, and then he said to get the guy down below and break it up. So we did, and that was the last time we took that guy with us. Not after all that. I damned near got shot and beat up, so I said that's the last time with him. That's what you can get into.

**1944 April:** We had been in drydock nearly 2 months now. On liberty we started taking tours to see the rest of the island. Some fishing, too. Now it was starting to bore us. You would drink and take tours. We had seen it all now. The captain sent us to gunnery school for a week. We took our cook with us and had a ship's party. I had a chance to go to the Hawaiian Hotel — someplace for R&R — but they were all filled up and our ship was locked out. So it was back to the same routine



for us.

**1944 May:** We finally got our repairs done, and a new camouflage paint job, too. We had to shake her down again. We sailed through The Slot and out for a day. We seemed to have lost some knots. It was only 33 after the shakedown. We joined the 5th Fleet and operated on radar picket duty and performed shore bombardment and fire support during the capture and occupation of Guam.

**1944 June-July:** We escorted and screened carriers in the invasion of the southern Palaus. Then the captain told us he had gotten orders for the next operation. He told us where we were going and showed us maps. It was the Marianas islands of Saipan and Tinian. Our job was to escort LSTs and LCIs carrying the Marines. We sailed for two weeks. No sub contacts on this one. We arrived at the islands. The battleships were firing over our heads. Minesweepers were clearing the area, and frogmen were blowing up Japanese craft. There were steel barricades in the water near the beach. We were in the fourth wave to land. When they got word it was clear, the LSTs and LCIs went in. All waves were stuck on the beach and could not move. They were pinned down by pill boxes. More kept landing. We got orders to start bombarding wherever they wanted it. First the port side, then the starboard side, and then back into the smoke screen. All destroyers had this job, one after the other on the firing line. We did this for about an hour. Then we got word that carrier pilots were down in the water. We picked up two pilots and sunk their floating planes. We returned them to their carriers. Just finished doing this when, all of a sudden, we went to full throttle until we caught up with another carrier group needing screening. The Japanese sent out planes to attack our landing. Our planes shot down 400 Jap planes that day and our subs and planes sank three Jap carriers and damaged two other Jap carriers and a Jap battleship. This was the start of the Jap navy coming down in force to try to stop us. This was the Battle of the Philippine Sea, before the landing on Leyte.

*Look, the very words “before the landing on Leyte” indicate that Edward Flannery was not writing contemporaneously in this June-July 1944 report. He was medically released from the Colahan in September 1944 and was in a naval hospital back in the United States when the Leyte Gulf landings took place in late October. Mostly likely, he spent hospital time in updating his lapsed journal. — Jackson Sellers*

**1944 August-September:** We kept going from one thing to another. We finally went back to Saipan to support the landings. The Marines had a tough time on

Saipan. It took them over two weeks to get it all. We were in Task Force 58 at that time. I started to come down with nerves in late July. I still answered GQs in this condition. The doc told me to hold on for a while. We went back to the Marshall Islands. That's where I got off the Colahan and was put on a hospital ship at Kwajalein. A supply ship took me back to Pearl Harbor where I was transferred to the naval hospital. From there I got transportation back to the States on the New Mexico BB-40 battleship. I entered the Bremerton, Wash., naval hospital, and was there from late September to October.

**1944 October:** I got discharged. About \$300 of my pay, left on the ship, did not get to me for about three months. I got an extra \$150 in mustering-out pay. The war was over for me. I left part of myself in the Pacific. I came home by train across the country to Chicago, then by train to New York. That's when I saw how big this country was. Last year I had circled around the country by sea. I can say I saw things never to be forgotten. I saw the whole Pacific Ocean across the International Dateline. When I crossed the Equator, I became a Shellback. We kept going back and forth across the International Dateline, hopping from island to island. I was in five campaigns that I know of:

**1944 January** — Kwajalein

**1944 May-June** — Battle of the Philippine Sea

**1944 June-July** — Saipan, Tinian

**1944 July-August** — Guam

**1944 September** — Palaus

*These five battle dates are historically correct but not exactly as Ed Flannery listed them in his journal. The Colahan did not participate in the Battle of the Philippine Sea and was not seriously engaged in the landings at Saipan and Tinian. Yes, she was at Kwajalein, Guam and the Palaus. But I do not wish to quarrel with ailing Ed Flannery's memories. He was there then. I was not — Jackson Sellers*

**Final Entry:** Ships I worked with and screened:

BB-41 USS Mississippi	(battleship)
BB-62 USS New Jersey	(battleship)
BB-40 USS New Mexico	(battleship)
BB-38 USS Pennsylvania	(battleship)

BB-42 USS Idaho	(battleship)
CVE-73 USS Gambier Bay	(carrier)
CVE-63 USS St. Lo	(carrier) — sunk
CVE-79 USS Ommaney Bay	(carrier) — sunk
CVE-9 USS Bouge	(carrier)
CV-31 USS Bon Homme Richard	(carrier)
CV-13 USS Franklin	(carrier)
CVL-26 USS Monterey	(carrier)
CV-18 USS Wasp	(carrier)
CV-17 USS Bunker Hill	(carrier)
DD-353 USS Dale	(destroyer)
DD-471 USS Beale	(destroyer)
DD-560 USS Morrison	(destroyer)
DD-583 USS Hall	(destroyer)
DD-797 USS Cushing	(destroyer)
DD-584 USS Halligan	(destroyer) — sunk by mine off Okinawa
DD-671 USS Gatling	(destroyer)



*Plank-owner Edward Flannery, age 24, when he came aboard the USS Colahan in 1943.*

## **Edward J. Flannery (1919-1995)**

**by Nephew Charles Flannery**

My uncle was born on March 23, 1919, in Jersey City, N.J. He was the youngest, my father being the older brother, and he grew up in Jersey City. My father was in the Army at the time my uncle joined the Navy. Aboard the *Colahan*, my uncle's nerves got the best of him. It took him a while to recover from the war. He went on to be a self-employed auto mechanic. He was a bachelor all his life and took care of his mother until she passed away. After that, he lived alone, but later I took care of him. He survived all those years by taking medication, from the day he left the Navy until he passed on at Lyons Veterans Hospital, N.J., on January 7, 1995. His favorite pastimes were playing the piano, deep sea fishing and woodworking. He was a very good uncle to me, spoiling me with wonderful presents in my younger days. He taught me everything I know about cars, because I worked part-time with him in his garage while I was in high school.