

Overabundance on the *Colahan*, 1944

by JACKSON SELLERS

Food is always on the minds of sailors. The email below was written by Bob McDonald of Colorado in April 2005. It is addressed to Ted Knudson of Washington state. Both were *Colahan* plank-owners who went to war in early 1944. When Bob mentions “our beloved skipper,” he is being sarcastic. Virtually nobody aboard the *Colahan* loved Capt. Donald Wilber, the ship’s first commanding officer. That doesn’t mean, however, that Wilber didn’t have a successful Navy career. When I returned to Japan as a student and journalist in the late ’50s, four-striper Wilber was commander of Yokosuka Fleet Activities.

Ted,

Since you were the supply officer aboard our ship and had the duty of ordering all the food supplies, I wonder if you remember this incident. Our beloved skipper made you over-order some supplies, and since all the storage areas were full, they had to be stored topside. Well, that was great for us swabbies because they were stored on the portside deck just where we had to pass on our way to the mess hall.

To make a long story short, it was great for us because as we passed by the crates, we would liberate a few of the onions and stuff stored there. I myself always grabbed a couple of onions and proceeded to eat them like apples. Man!! this was the greatest thing since sliced bread. Our only source of fresh food. By the time the cooks prepared food, it was not very good. Wednesday and Saturday, we had beans for breakfast, bean soup for lunch and chili for supper, and below deck in the closed compartments it was noisy and stinky.

Thanks for all the fresh food.

Bob McD

Below is Ted Knudson’s response to Bob McDonald regarding the quantity and quality of food aboard the *USS Colahan* when she went back to war in 1944 after her Kwajalein damage was repaired at Pearl Harbor. The oversupply was so great that some foodstuffs had to be stored in Capt. Donald Wilber’s cabin. Commodore “Uncle Beany” Jarrett had just shifted his flag to the *USS Halsey Powell*, which had finally shown up for the war. Wilber could reclaim the cabin outside the wardroom. Until then, he was forced to sleep in his sea cabin on the bridge, while Jarrett occupied the more spacious cabin down below. The *Colahan*

was no longer the flagship of Destroyer Squadron 53, but Wilber could now move back to his main cabin, although he had to share it with crates of food. It was his own fault, as Ted's email indicates.

Jackson:

Should have sent you a copy of my response to Bob McDonald's email on the food, quantity, quality, etc. This is what I sent him:

A little more on what I remember about the food on that operation. A short time before an operation the captain would go to a meeting of skippers and come back to the ship with a book-size operation order. This time the operation order said it might take two months. Possibly it was Guam. We ordered what we could get for about 45 days — our holding space limit. After we had loaded the stores at Pearl the captain asked me, "How long can we stay at sea"? I am sure my answer would have been about 45 days of fresh and frozen, and somewhat longer for the dry provisions. Then with a lot of emphasis and profanity, he made it clear to me that we had been told we might need stores for 60 days. My response was approximately: "Captain, we are at more than our storage limit for frozen stores and we don't have space for any more."

He repeated the operation order said sixty days, and I am sure I just said: "Aye, aye, sir." What else do you say? So Chief Robinson (our commissary steward) ordered dry and canned stuff for another 15 days. The big trucks arrived at the pier and on them was a lot of fresh stuff — apples, onions, vegetables, etc. The commodore was no longer on our ship so I got the captain's OK to store stuff in his cabin. The captain's cabin was the commodore's cabin when he was aboard. The captain stayed on the bridge.

The big truck loads of provisions arrived and you remember stored stuff everywhere. In fact we were so loaded that the ship was actually lower in the water than it should be. This gave us the excuse to off-load a bunch of the fresh stuff to other ships.

Never again did the captain tell us how much stuff to order.

One more comment on food: When we left the amphib and went to the carriers, our quality of fresh and frozen food improved materially.

Jackson, I did not tell Bob, but I really felt that what our cooks and bakers prepared was quite good. In fact, once, when we were in a nest alongside a tender, we found our breakfast was so good that we had to break out a lot more eggs, etc. Our menu was the best of the nest, so we got all the business.

Best wishes, Ted