

John Harwood Writes About His Work As Naval Guard Officer on Freighter

(Editor's note: On a recent visit to Birmingham, Ensign John H. Harwood, USNR and former managing editor of the Eccentric promised to write a rather detailed account of his trip abroad and his visit to Egypt. The following is the first part of this story. Other parts will follow each week for the coming three weeks. The story has been approved by the Office of Public Relations of the U. S. Navy.)

It was by some odd prompting that I told a group of friends early last December, as they said goodbye:

"Well, I'll be seeing you in a few months, and I'll buy you all a Birmingham, Ensign John H. Harwood, USNR and former managing editor of the Eccentric promised to write a rather detailed account of his trip abroad and his visit to Egypt. The following is the first part of this story. Other parts will follow each week for the coming three weeks. The story has been approved by the Office of Public Relations of the U. S. Navy.)



WARTIME HINTS for a lady who wants to SAVE electricity and appliances!

SAVING ELECTRICITY A cardinal rule today is that "Use only what electricity you need, and don't waste it." There are many practical ways of saving electricity in your home—in your cooking, lighting, the use of appliances. And not one of them involves any sacrifice in the use of your helpful electrical servants. It simply means knowing the most economical way to use them, with greatest efficiency. A few of these suggestions are listed below.

YOUR HOME LIGHTING Don't steal light—robbing you of as much as one-fourth the light you pay for. This is pure waste. Keep lamps and fixtures clean. Wipe bulbs and reflector bowls frequently. Dust shades inside and out. Use the right-size bulbs in your lamps and fixtures, and select shades with a white lining.

ELECTRIC COOKING Use the thrift center of your electric range when you cook. Plan complete meals that can be cooked in the oven at one time. Finish up face cooking on "low" or stored heat whenever possible. Use flat-bottomed utensils in your large and heavy pots, and select utensils with a light lid.

YOUR REFRIGERATOR Don't overwork your refrigerator. Unless the motor is hermetically sealed, have it oiled and inspected regularly. Be sure there is adequate circulation all around the refrigerator. Defrost regularly. Never use a knife or sharp tool for defrosting. Clean inside of refrigerator with lukewarm water and mild soap.

YOUR ELECTRIC WASHER Drain washer and rinse tub thoroughly after each washing. Remove suds and rinse. Wipe dry with a soft cloth. Don't force thick, bulky objects through your wringer—here, rollers take half buckles, etc. Release pressure on rolls when not in use, and dry rollers thoroughly. Don't overload your washer.

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write them off as pure chance; I wouldn't give you a plugged nickel for all the bunches and promotions in a dozen crystal balls. I got to Cairo by way of one of Uncle Sam's plodding Liberty ships—one of those workhorses of the sea which are bringing victory ever nearer as they haul great loads of cargo to the many battlefronts all over the globe. I am, in a branch of the Navy known as the Armed Guard, and my duty is the command of a sizeable detachment of gunners and communication personnel which is found on every American merchant ship. These vessels are well armed. In fact, one high official has declared that today's cargo carriers often bear as much armament as the destroyers did in the First World War. You would believe it, too, if you ever saw one of my funny, affectionately called "Little Moe" by its crew, was a big projectile cut into space, meanwhile breaking light bulbs, jarring electric fans loose, and generally making the ship from stem to sternpost. It's quite a gun!

But to return to Cairo and the attendant narrative—I want to make clear at the outset that this is no Saga of the Sea, and that it is devoid of heroics. Hundreds of soldiers and sailors in this city will have far better stories to tell when they come home; and as far as my own tale is concerned, it is pretty plain stuff when compared, for example, to the experience of my friend, Lt. William Luitje, of the U. S. Navy, who made the then-called "suicide run" to Murmansk in the early days. His ship was tied up for some six months before it was safe for a convoy to make a dash for home. Bill told me all about it one night in New York, and it was clear enough that "them was the days" as the rugged old sailor in the Armed Guard was concerned. Now, for the time being at least, upon a less hazardous existence, though it is true that ships are still polished off by the Axis planes. A half-dozen survivors from another ship whom we brought home testified as to that.

Aside from that rather unpleasant sort of thing, the Armed Guard has its advantages; and major one is the fact that we get around and see things usually followed by a necessary—and we loathe—trip back to the States for more cargo. But seeing the United States again was no more a thrill than we experienced one bright morning on the blue Mediterranean when out of the horizon there arose the lighthouse and colorful buildings of Port Said, Egypt, at the northern end of the Suez Canal, a waterway famed in history, and a city which once, we are told, had the reputation of being the "rickest city in the world."

Port Said didn't look so wicked that morning, in fact, it was in vivid contrast to the cold and dull port we left in the States. Brightly painted fishing boats were anchored in the harbor; there were swarms of small craft being towed everywhere in seeming confusion by swarthy fellows in tattered garments resembling the old-fashioned nightshirt. Great ships, little motor launches, puffing tugboats straining at heavy barges surrounded us, while wheezing sea birds overhead completed the picture. Beyond, lay the busy city, with its palm trees, cluttered streets, and oriental buildings of many hues, the most imposing of which, along the quay, was the office of the British Colonial Company with its three bulbous domes. At the entrance of the canal stood his big brass statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps, who, in 1869, completed the 104-mile waterway which, before the war, at least, carried more tonnage than our own Panama Canal, making it the busiest such salt water thoroughfare in the world. (Our Great Lakes canals are three or four times as active.)

As soon as we anchored, the bad news came. Port Said had been restricted because of smallpox; no one could go ashore. What a collection of sad faces!

"After weeks at sea—to get a bum break like that," the crew murmured. "This place is no good," was their immediate reaction, as though to prove at once that they didn't want to hit the beach anyway.

Meanwhile, 'Abdullah, Achmed, Ali, Mohammed and all their uncles and brothers and cousins were swarming aboard to start at work on the cargo. A native barber showed us, ready to cut hair. The stewardess dressed in nightgown, and ragged pants and shirts, toiled seriously, despite the fact that their wages for 24 hours' continuous labor was but 53 piastres (\$2.20). After 24 hours, another gang appeared to take their place of the first one. They brought their lunches with them, and sometimes built little fires right on the bare deck, in order to boil water for tea.

As soon as the captain and I got ashore to report our arrival officially we found that restriction was not so bad as first feared; trips to Cairo could be arranged. So a couple of days later we were buzzing along a good road parallel to the canal, on our way to that ancient metropolis on the River Nile, about 100 miles southwest of Port Said. At first, the country was nothing but a waste of sand, a continuation of the great desert of North Africa, but soon we got into the irrigated sections which, with their bright green fields and waving palms, were a welcome relief from the dust and monotony of the desert.

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