

USS GYATT DD-712, DDG-712, DDG-1 & DD-712

I. 1943 ~ A Ship to be Named Gyatt

This book is the result of numerous trips to and many hours spent at the National Archives and the Naval Historical Foundation. It is also the recollections of men who served aboard a good ship and were willing to share their memories. This is the story of the destroyer USS GYATT DD-712/DDG-1 that served its country from July 1945 to October 1969.

The GYATT was named after marine private Edward Earl Gyatt, born in Syracuse, New York the 4th day of September 1921 and who enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on the 26th day of January 1942. Private Gyatt was awarded posthumously, in 1942, the Purple Heart, the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal and the Silver Star for service as set forth in the following Citation:

“For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving with the First Marine Raider Battalion during the seizure of Tulagi, Solomon Islands, from enemy Japanese forces, on the night of August 7-8, 1942. Assigned to duty in a listening post to the right flank and forward of his company’s position. Private Gyatt reported the approach of a hostile counter-attack to his platoon commander and then, with utter disregard for his own personal safety, remained at his post, inflicting a heavy toll upon the infiltrating Japanese until he was killed by an enemy hand grenade. By his skill, courage and indomitable fighting spirit, he contributed to the eventual repulse of the enemy and upheld the highest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in defense of his country.”

The sponsor of the ship was Mrs. Hilda Morrell of Syracuse, New York, mother of Private Edward Earl Gyatt, U.S. Marine Corps.

The fact that the Gyatt is a Gearing Class Destroyer is a story in itself. On the 11th day of November 1943 a letter was prepared for mailing to Mrs. Hilda Morrell that read as follows: “The name MORRELL has been recently assigned to a Destroyer Escort Vessel in honor of your son, the late Private Edward Earl Gyatt, U. S. Marine Corps. It gives us great pleasure to designate you as sponsor for the U.S.S. MORRELL (DE 550). The vessel is under construction at the U. S. Navy Yard, Boston, Massachusetts.” The letter goes on about security and transportation costs relative to the launching.

On the 12th day of November 1943 a revised letter was prepared for mailing to Mrs. Hilda Morrell that read as follows: “The name GYATT has been recently assigned to a Destroyer Escort Vessel in honor of your son, the late Private Edward Earl Gyatt, U. S. Marine Corps. It gives us great pleasure to designate you as sponsor for the U.S.S. GYATT (DE 550). The vessel is under construction at the U. S. Navy Yard, Boston, Massachusetts.” The letter reiterates its comments on security and transportation costs relative to the launching. Mrs. Morrell responds

to James Forrestal, Secretary of the Navy, that she would be honored. This letter was dated the 16th of November 1943. The DE-550 was a Butler Class (DE-539) destroyer escort with an overall length of 306 feet, a beam of 36 feet and a standard displacement of 1350 tons. This class destroyer carried two 5-inch 38 caliber turrets, four twin 40mms aircraft guns, ten 20mms aircraft guns and three 21-inch torpedoes. It had a 12,000 horsepower with a of speed of 24 knots. The ships compliment was 12 officers and 201 enlisted men.

On the 10th day of June 1944, the contract to construct the USS GYATT (DE 550) was cancelled. On the 8th day of July 1944 the GYATT, Greene, Bailey, Vogelsang, Steinaker, Ellison and Ware were reclassified from status as DEs to DDs. The aforementioned group eventually joined the Gearing as members of Destroyer Squadron (DesRon 4) Four.

On the 15th day of July 1944 a letter was sent to Mrs. Morrell that read in part as follows: "Referring to the Department's letter of 16 November 1943, a revision of the Navy's shipbuilding program has made it necessary to cancel the construction of the USS GYATT (DE 550). I am pleased to advise you, however, that the name has been reassigned to a destroyer that is being built at the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, Kearney, New Jersey. Accordingly your sponsorship is being transferred to the new USS GYATT (DD 712). The Supervisor of Shipbuilding, U. S. N., at the plant will arrange with you all details connected with the launching, which is tentatively scheduled to take place 11 February 1945." The letter reiterates its comments on security and transportation costs relative to the launching. On the 26th day of August 1944 Mrs. Morrell receives another letter from the Navy advising that they have not received a response to their letter of the 15th day of July and that the launching date is changed to the 11th day of March 1945. In a letter, dated the 31st day of August 1944, Mrs. Morrell accepts the sponsorship and the Gyatt is finally launched on the 15th day of April 1944.

The keel for the Gyatt was laid on the 7th day of September 1944 and in six months and one week it was launched (15 April 1945). The USS Gyatt was designed by Gibbs and Cox, New York, New York and was built by the Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock Company, Port Newark, New Jersey. It was shortly before the launching that a crew of fifty-one future Gyatt plank owners were brought aboard as inspectors (these men are listed behind the officers and preceding the remaining plank owners on the first crew listing). This group of fifty-one was barracked in the newly acquired (by the Navy) Jewish Club-house in downtown Newark, New Jersey. The USS Gyatt was commissioned, twelve weeks and two days after the launching, on the 2nd day of July 1945 and on the 9th and 10th day of July 1945 a portside-starboard side-commissioning dance was held at the Hotel Regis in New York City. The ship was placed under the command of Commander Albert D. Kaplan (2 July 1945 to 6 June 1946). Total time required to build the Gyatt was nine months, three weeks and four days. The cost to build the Gyatt in 1945 dollars was \$8,947,809.

The Gyatt was a ship that had the equipment to eavesdrop on others during the cold war. A ship that became the first of the missile destroyers and performed so well that the hull number was changed from DDG-712, designating it as a guided missile destroyer to DDG-1, honoring it as the first of its kind. When the missiles were removed, in late 1962, the Gyatt's original hull number, DD-712, was reinstated. The Gyatt, as it should be for fighting ships, was buried at sea in 1970, sunk as a target ship.

The Gyatt, a Gearing (DD 710) class destroyer, weighed 2425 tons (3300 tons fully loaded), had a length of 390 feet six inches, a beam of 40 feet ten inches and a maximum draft of 19 feet. This class destroyer was the USS Sumner (DD 692) extended fourteen feet to allow for additional fuel storage and consequently greater range. However, the extension reduced the overall speed of the Gearing class destroyers by approximately three knots per hour, to an estimated 35 knots. The two classes of destroyers (Gearing and Sumner) were so similar that the designers did not bother to change frame numbers. Instead, they assigned letters to the frames added amidships. The crew for this class destroyer was eleven officers and 325 enlisted men.

The original armament, on the Gyatt, consisted of three twin 5-inch 38 caliber guns, two quad 40mm guns, two twin 40mm guns, ten 20mm guns, two sets of five 21-inch torpedoes, six K-guns for 300 pound depth charges and two stern racks for 600 pound depth charges. In place of the aft set of five torpedoes the Gyatt and many others of the Gearing class received a third quad 40mm gun. In later years various weapons were removed and others added, such as the removal of the 20mm guns and the addition of hedgehogs in 1950 and the removal of the aft quad 40mm gun and aft 5-inch gun mount and the addition of the terrier missiles in 1956. In 1950, the number of whaleboats was reduced from two to one.

ENGINE ORDERS WHEN STANDARD SPEED IS 15 KNOTS						
KNOTS	RPM		KNOTS	RPM	KNOTS	RPM
1	6		13	119	24	234
2	12		14	129	FLANK- 25	245
3	21		15	139	26	257
4	30		16	149	27	270
10- 5	38		17	159	28	283
6	48		18	170	29	296
7	58		19	180	30	309
8	68		20	191	31	322
9	78		21	202	32	337
20- 10	88		22	212	33	355
11	99		23	223		
12	109					

Engine Orders as found on the bridge or in the engine room of the USS GYATT

The ship had four boilers and geared turbines that produced 60,000 horsepower and generated a speed in excess of 35 knots. It is understood that the Gyatt in late 1945 set a long distance speed record for destroyers of its class. The Gyatt maintained, for an extended period of time, a speed of 31.8 knots per hour. In 1946, on a run from Norfolk to Boston, the Gyatt was the only ship in Destroyer Squadron Four (DesRon 4) to sustain a speed of 38 knots that had been reached by the USS Gearing (DD 710), USS Greene (DD 711) and USS Bailey (DD 713).

An advantage of being a Gearing class destroyer was that you could walk from the most forward part of the ship to the most aft part of the ship without being exposed to the weather. From the

wardroom to the hatch leading to the after sleeping compartments was all inside passage. When you left the portside wardroom door, walking aft, you encountered the forward cross passageway to your right and left; a few steps aft and the wardroom pantry was on your left and the hatchway to the crew's messhall on your right; then came the crew's kitchen on the left and mess storage on your right. As you continued the walk aft, toward midships, you encountered entrances to the forward fire room and engine-room on your right and the dispensary on your left. Continuing aft and crossing the midship passageway the first doors on the left led to the supply office and radio counter measure operating room (out of bounds to all but a few) and a hatch to below deck storage. As you progress aft there is another cross passage that takes you to the small arms locker and a control room for the 40-millimeter gun radars. Continuing aft you come to the ship's post office on your right and on your left the ship's store, an entrance to the after fire room and engine room, the after chief's quarters, the barber shop, the after crew's wash room, the crew's head and finally the hatch that takes you below decks to the aft sleeping quarters. Other rooms on the main deck included; officer's quarters, the torpedo shack, the laundry room, the ship's office and the after paint locker. The main deck had, depending on the period, one or two twin five-inch guns, k-gun depth charges, rack depth charges, twenty millimeter guns or terrier missiles.

The O-1 Level, the deck above the main deck, from forward – aft, was a twin five-inch 38 caliber gun mount; 20 millimeter guns and later hedge hogs. This level also contained the captain's cabin, the Combat Information Center (CIC), radio room, control rooms for 40 millimeter twin gun mounts, torpedoes, three quad 40 millimeter gun mounts with their fire control towers and access to the motor whaleboat. The deck above, located forward of the torpedoes, had twin 40 millimeter guns located port and starboard with their radar controls mounted on the bridge deck. The bridge deck contained the captain's quarters when underway, the wheelhouse and the main battery radar atop the wheelhouse.

The deck below the main deck, forward to aft, housed; the chain locker, the forward paint locker, the forward chief's quarters, the forward crew's head and access to the First Division sleeping quarters. This was followed by the mess hall with access to the Operations Division and Supply Division sleeping quarters, the crew's serving line, the scullery and the Fire Control-IC room. The Fire Control-IC room housed the ship's gyroscope, the main gun (five-inch) battery computer and related controls and the ship's communication controls.

A bulkhead ran the width of the ship aft of the crew's serving line, the scullery and the Fire Control-IC room. Behind this bulk head was the forward fire room, forward engine room and then the midship storage. This midship storage area, fourteen feet, is the difference between the Sumner class and Gearing class destroyers. The Gearing class being longer. After the storage area came the after fire room, after engine room, the machine shop, Engineering Division sleeping quarters, the Second Division sleeping quarters, the after steering room and the damage control room.

From 1945 to 1954, the First and Second Divisions housed, fairly equally, boatswain mates, seamen, gunners mates, fire controlmen, torpedomen and theirs strikers. The split was to assure a fairly uniform disposition of disciplines forward and aft. The Second Division compartment was approximately forty feet wide, twenty-five long and eight feet high; it slept approximately

seventy-eight people, which meant about twelve square feet per man. The First Division, being forward was narrower and subsequently slept less, somewhere in the sixties. The Engineering or "E" Division, which also slept aft, was home to the machinist mates, boiler tenders, electricians, internal communication personnel, damage controlmen, firemen and their strikers; this sleeping area housed in excess of one hundred men. The "O" or Operation Division included; electronic technicians, radiomen, radar men, sonar men, quartermasters and their strikers. The "S" or Supply Division included cooks, corpsmen, yeomen, storekeepers, laundry men, barbers, postal clerk and appropriate strikers. The enlisted men had footlockers beneath their tier of bunks, which were stacked three high, and on occasion 1st class and sometimes 2nd class petty officers had upright lockers. The footlocker was about 36 inches in length by 36 inches in width and about one foot deep. Inside a foot locker and at a minimum an enlisted man kept; a pair of dress shoes, work shoes and sneakers; six pairs of under shorts and under shirts; three pairs of dungarees pants and dungaree shirts; a set of dress blues, a set of work blues – usually two sets of each; three sets of whites – one dress; six pairs of white and six pairs of black socks; a wool sweater; a pea coat; at least three white hats, one blue hat and a watch cap; a mattress cover and pillow case; three sets of towels; a complete shaving kit with extra soap, razors, toothpaste and a shoe shine kit. I don't recall where the foul-weather jacket was stored – somewhere.

In regards to sleeping quarters; the only people with access to outside air were those sleeping in the Second Division compartment. To the best of my knowledge, and I can only speak for the first ten years, the Gyatt did not have air conditioning; blowers were used for those areas requiring cooler temperatures where electronic equipment was in use. The hatch directly to open air and the main deck was not much help when operating in the Caribbean or points south; the steel deck absorbed the heat and shared it with the compartment directly below. In cold weather the reverse was true and in rough weather – the hatch leaked and any amount of tightening did not always help. When the sea was calm and it was hot many of the hands slept topside. The men would take their mattresses, which were about two inches thick, lay it on a piece of clean canvas and try to fall asleep in the slightly cooler night temperature and nature's soft breeze. The breeze was not always available.

Officer's staterooms were located on the second deck forward and on the main deck aft. There were two or three levels of bunks in each stateroom and generally only junior officers had to share a stateroom. The staterooms had a washstand (sink) and modular furniture that combined a clothing wardroom, a desk and dresser drawers all in one unit. If I remember these rooms were painted, what was referred to as, eye-ease green. The enlisted quarters were white.

Before getting on with recollections of the Gyatt we need to talk of what it was like for a sailor aboard ship, specifically a seaman. In the Navy the seamen were the above deck jack of all trades and the firemen were the below deck jack of all trades. Jack of all trades refers to those who are an absolute necessity to keeping a ship on course and moving. It is realized that a fighting ship such as the Gyatt needs the specialty groups, but before the specialty groups there were always seamen and with the advent of steam driven and subsequently diesel powered ships there have always been firemen and no matter what happens in the Navy there will always be seamen and firemen aboard a ship.

The life of a seaman at sea or ashore is never monotonous, although some may think otherwise, he is busy with both interesting and sometimes, what seems to many, mundane duties. At sea the seaman has no time to himself, nor does he have a place to hide so that he can waste some time. He is not like those who serve a more defined discipline; such as a Gunners Mate, who can escape to a gun mount or an ammunition magazine or a Fire Controlman, who can escape to one of the many restricted areas he controls or other discipline with their designated work areas. The seaman has no such place. Then there is the seaman's overseer, the Boatswain Mate, who can be a most extreme taskmaster. The boatswain's mate knows all the hiding places, for many times he has been a seaman for an extended period of time. The seaman's duties are never ending, his areas are always in view and the Navy probably coined the old adage, "Godliness is next to cleanliness." The saying; "a man works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done" could be as follows; the (whatever discipline) works from sun to sun but a seaman's work was never done. Seamen and firemen were experts at polishing brass and a destroyer had a lot of brass, both topside and below decks and it always needed shining.

Looking at a day in the life of seamen at sea. Remember until the mid 1950s a sailor usually came aboard ship as a seaman apprentice, having gone through boot camp as a seaman recruit. Aboard ship, if he was a squared away sailor and if he wanted, he was able to move to some more defined disciplines required aboard ship, in other words he could become a striker. One could consider a striker to be an apprentice. A seaman apprentice, reporting aboard a destroyer was assigned to the First or Second Division, and as stated earlier he could apply for a particular discipline, depending on his attitude and aptitude. He could transfer to the gunnery group, the engine room group, operations or some other group necessary to a fighting ship. However, if he remained in the deck force he was going to be super busy.

Duty time aboard ship is referred to as a watch, in industry we would probably refer to it as a shift. Aboard ship a crewman's watch consisted of four hours of specified duty at a specified station and eight hours without a specified duty. The watches start at midnight (0000 hours) and continue in four hour increments to four AM (0400), four AM to eight AM (0800), eight AM to noon (1200), noon to four PM (1600), thence to 2000 and finally midnight or 2400. One tick after 2400 and the clock goes to 0000. In industry one works eight hours and is off sixteen hours. Aboard ship watches occur seven days a week. The most tedious watch period was noon to 1600 and with eight hours off it was midnight to 0400. It probably would not have been a bad watch but with reveille at 0600 and boatswain mates that woke you by running a coke bottle around the inside of a ridged GI can – well the noise would wake up the dead. I know that those on the midnight to 0400 watch were allowed to sleep until 0800, but the clamor created by the coke bottle inside the GI can, all the lights being turned on and the noise of those required to get up, precluded sleep. So the deck seaman had breakfast and turned to (i.e. went to work). He could be on a cleanup task in quarters, cleaning the head (toilets), the passageways, shining brass, working on cables, lines, chipping and priming paint (red lead was our base coat and is no longer legal) or any number of things deemed necessary by the boatswain mate. Other duties included taking on fuel and/or supplies while at sea, working the chowline or scullery and practicing at General Quarter stations (battle stations). I forgot to mention lights out, in the sleeping areas, was 2200 hours (10:00PM).

A seaman or any sailor above deck must always be in the uniform of the day (no matter what time of day) and a seaman is always above deck. The uniforms may be dress blues, blues, whites or dungarees and a hat – always a hat. At sea, other than leaving or entering port or on a rare occasion inspection, the uniform was generally dungarees and a hat.

Finally, we will mention money, rather pay, monthly pay. A seaman in the very early fifties received somewhere between sixty to eighty dollars a month including sea-pay. In addition he received room, three meals a day, laundry services and movies. He could get a haircut for a quarter and if he was a smoker a carton of cigarettes, when at sea, cost eighty cents. When in port the sandwich truck came around and sold monster ham and cheese sandwiches or ham and egg sandwiches for a quarter and that same truck sold a bottle of pop for a nickel or a dime depending on the size and finally, if you liked ice cream it was a quarter a pint – life was good and we didn't even know it.