

547
Glenn Rollins

Retired

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This is really my lucky day! I found Glenn Rollins at his home in Cresent Lake, Oregan and today is Wednesday, the 8th day of June, 1988 and I have just one question for Glenn, and I know that he has more stories to tell, after he answers this one....

Glenn, I understand that you have a gold Life Saving Medal and that is considered rather a rarity in our Service! Would you tell us about it? The incident that led up to it.

Well, Sam, you got us in here at an opportune time. I just got through taking a shower, which I've needed for a few days.

The Gold Life Saving Medal was a long time ago, I remember some of the details. It happened in December in the Gulf of Alaska - in Latua Bay country - and up there on the beach a freighter went aground and there were about 17 men that we caught behind a glacial river that came out of the glacier and ran down into the ocean and went over a falls, which was handy, and because of the falls, which were about 200 ft. down river, they didn't want to try to get across that river because it was pretty high.

After lying off the beach, trying to get in through that surf - I happened to be the one who had to try and get in there with a self-baling surf boat - and I think after I took Commander Ceraly () in and we just about lost him, he was convinced we couldn't

get in, they finally took my idea of going down into Latua Bay and going up the beach. 24 miles.

The Skipper was a little worried - said that there were five glacial rivers in there - and I said, "Well, we can try." So we took a party in there and when we got to Twelve Mile River, there was about - I can't remember how many now but probably ten or fifteen - there was only myself and the Chief Gunner's Mate, Brown () Anthony Thomas () and Hayes () - five of us to go on because crossing the other rivers below Twelve Mile River it was pretty cold and their legs cramped up on them.

They camped up there and we built a raft to get across Twelve Mile River and then we went up twelve more miles and found them on the other side of Otter River, which ran out of the glacier, pretty tough stream.

(Sam) Let me interrupt here - Twelve Mile River is North of Latua Bay?

(Glenn) Yes.

(Sam) You were walking down the beach towards Yakitat?

(Glenn) Yes, To make a long story short, we just cut some saplings and there was a rock in the middle of the stream, it was kind of shallow and went off deep to the curve where they were and there was a pretty high beach. So, we got the saplings across and secured them on the other side so that we could take

them across holding onto this sapling and holding onto them and
they were holding on too, of course, and we had a couple of men
there of 70 years old - that's not much to us now, being 78 yrs
old myself, that's rather young, but anyway, we got them all
across and they kind of insisted that because I happened to be
the biggest - of the five of us - they wanted me to take them
across. I wasn't any stronger or bigger than Brown or the rest
of them but they seemed to think so, so, rather than argue with
them I went ahead and took them across.

One chap, he was one of the chaps of about 68 years old I guess,
he was an alcoholic and he apparently was off his likker and he
threw a fit on the ^h_A ting and pulled us both off and, of course,
being a hero, myself, I just swam like hell for the beach! There
were big roots coming down the bank from the trees there making a
big "U" and I grabbed onto one of those until I could get help
from top side and I just happened to look around and this old boy
was just floating by, not fighting or anything, his hair was out
of the water - white hair - and I just grabbed his hair,
otherwise he would have gone over the falls. I held him there
until we got some help and got up on the beach and then we got
him across and went back down to Twelve Mile River.

We had a big pot of stew and we told them to keep it warm and
keep the raft out of the water, so that it wouldn't be icy and
pinned down so we couldn't use it. Well, we got back down there
that night and we had to cross a bunch of logs that were over a

river and kind of dangerous, as we had to skoot across these on the seat of our pants with one of these chaps ahead of us all the time. It was kind of hairy at times. If you had fallen in there you would have been gone, I suppose.

We finally got them all across and down there and that raft was frozen up on the other beach - the other gang were all asleep, the stew was cold, the fire was just about out.....we got the raft out of the ice finally because we had lines where we could ~~x~~ pull it across and, believe you me, we woke them up!! They helped us and one of the Officers, I won't mention his name, he was sleeping in the sleeping bags and some of his men and they were supposed to be for the survivors.

Chief Gunners Mate, Brown, was so angry he was crying, because we were pretty tired, you see, and he took a knife and I was afraid that he was going to kill somebody but he just was going to chop some wood.

Well, we got squared away and we got them out of there in two days. Brown got the Silver Life Saving Medal and Thomas and Hayes and I got the Gold because they had to get affidavits from all this crew - I think they got eight - from us and the people who were involved and they figured I risked my life by swimming like heck for shore and reaching around and grabbing his hair but I took the Gold Life Saving Medal because it's 3.1/4 ozs of gold and that's very valuable and I might need that some day.

(Sam) What year was this?

(Glenn) Oh, it was back in '40 and I was stationed in Juneau then on the "Hydra Beru" and I got awarded for this because I had to go to Ketchikan on a 165 footer and I spent my Christmas down there standing watch.

(Sam) Was that the "Perseus", the 165 footer?

(Glenn) You know I've been out of the Coast Guard for 23 years and I don't remember what the name was but that was kind of a hairy existence out there.

They had these guides from Juneau, you know, civil guides who knew about the water and beach there but they didn't go ashore with us. They didn't know anything about the country in there and we found out but they would tell us about the water and I kept suggesting to the Skipper that these guides would be happy to stay there for 6 weeks at \$7.00 a day - it was a lot of money in those days, but,.....

That's the most valuable medal I've got.

We had two high octane tankers in the Battle of the North Atlantic, in the days when we were taking convoys across and these high octane tankers were afire and there was fire all over the water and I got orders to go down wind and pick up survivors.

I thought about this for a while and, being kind of stupid anyway, I could disobey orders and I wouldn't understand, see, so I went up-wind. I didn't want to go down-wind because the ships would drift faster than the wind and the men in the water, so we got 17 and, I wish I could mention his name, he went down-wind and he got one Chinaman. They got into a collision with one of the tankers because they were too close and the wind was drifting the tanker fast and right into them - it wasn't too serious a collision but a Chinaman jumped from the bow of one of those tankers, right into the area of depth charges, and didn't hit a thing. He runs up the deck real fast, hollering, "Me lucky son of a bitch." So, the Skipper, he was going to give me a letter of censor for disobeying orders and I thought that was very interesting - I did disobey orders, so I guess he was right, but we got 17!

(Sam) Were these people on the tankers?

(Glenn) No, the ones we got were in the water, in the fire, we got them and put them in the sickbay and some of them were badly burned. We got a couple of contacts - there were subs in there we were sure and I thought that if we lost the ship we wouldn't get anything done, so I had to drag some of them off the cargo nets, and that was a bit of a rough deal. I know we must have missed some of them but we just did the best we could because there was fire all over the water and they were having a heck of a time and we didn't have much time.

(Sam) You were the Commanding Officer?

(Glenn) Yes....I think I was, I'm pretty sure I was in Command.

(Sam) Do you know which ship, well, what class?

(Glenn) Well, I think it was a Rickerts.

(Sam) That was a D.E.?

(Glenn) Mmmm, D.E. We got one chap on there and he was a Marine Officer and he had been over in the Pacific and I got some of the stories from him. We invited him into the Ward Room, of course. He told us some of the hairy experiences he had. He asked to come up on the bridge and, of course, we would be making attacks off and on, you know how it was out there, and sometimes it would be a good contact and sometimes it wouldn't - we couldn't take a chance.

One was pretty good. I would kind of kid with the men as we went along to make it a little easier and a little more relaxed and they would make comments back and forth once in a while, "We'd better get this guy or we'll go down with the whole bunch", but this guy watched all that and he asked me, "How can you stand there so cool and kid with the men and do the job as well as you do?"

I said, "Well, let me tell you something, young fella, if I had the company you had over there and I was ordered to go over the hill after those Japs, it would take a whole company to get me

over there!"

We had very interesting conversations with a lot of them about their experiences in the water and how they would come up and get some air and then go down and keep out of the fire - terrible experience for them.

The Navy looked into this thing and somebody said I got the first Combat Brown Star that was awarded. I didn't know this to be a fact but they said the Skipper got a letter of something because he had taken the action to give the ships that had done the work some credit.

(Sam) The Skipper, was the Escort...

(Glenn) Screen Commander, not the Escort Commander. The Escort Commander was on a cruiser in the middle of the convoy - the Screen Commander was off in front of us. So, we took the Screen Commander onto our ship and the ship that was damaged had to go on in for repairs, so we had the Screen Commander with us for the rest of the trip.

Sam) The one that went in because of the collision with the tanker?

(Glenn) Yes

(Sam) Well, as I understand it, you had all together eight

different commands - sea going commands. That is somewhat a record in modern times.

(Glenn) Is it?

(Sam) I think so.

(Glenn) Well, I was kind of lucky, I guess, I had a square rigged sailing ship first, the "Joseph Conrad". We had a good, ~~Ship Chief~~ old ~~old~~ Bosun's Mate. He had sailed, so, let's be honest about it, he taught me to sail and I taught him some navigation but we sailed her one trip down to Havana and I took her right up to the dock with the royals and t'gallants and while they made a big issue out of it we had the wind that ^{was} ~~we~~ full on the bye and we went in easy - no problems. We got a lot of extra rum for that.

After that I got the 165 footer "Nemisis". I was running convoys from Galveston around to New Orleans, down through the Windward Passage to go on to Panama. From there I went to the Sub-Chaser Training Centre for instruction.

(Sam) Was that the Navy Training Centre?

(Glenn) Yes, the Navy Training Centre.

(Sam) We didn't, at that time, have the Coast Guard Training Station at St. Augustine?"

(Glenn) I don't know about that. All I know is that I went to the Training Station in Miami, Navy Sub-Chaser Training Centre and I ended up as an Instructor there and I was scared to death that I was going to get stuck there, that heat was terrible there in those ten buildings but I was waiting for ^a New V.E. that was being built at Brown's Ship Yard - the Rickerts, and then we went down to Bermuda for under-way training, as they called it then. Operation and training etc. etc. and then we went down to New York and ran convoys to Londonderry and Belfast. We would be in New York for ten days, ten days at sea and five days in Ireland. All this time I was trying to get a shore duty. Shore job. Wouldn't you.

(Sam) Unfortunately, I got one I didn't want! The day before the ship sailed for home from Greenland I went ashore as Ed Smith's () Flag Secretary.

(Glenn) I had a lot of fun with the Navy. They assigned me to the Navy a lot and we started with Antarctic Expedition and then went to the Arctic with Commander Whalley () and I was in Goose Bay for a couple of months and then Tooley for three or four months.

(Sam) During the war?

(Glenn) After the War - '54 or '53, somewhere around there.

(Sam) You had an Ice-Breaker at that time?

(Glenn) No, I went up as a Navy Staff Officer. I handled the labour problems with the civilian crews and I was stationed on a Greely Transport in Tooley (General Greely) and I had V.I.P. Quarters in Goose Bay and we were working on all these L.S.T's hauling supplies. Sunac Operation was supplying North East Command. Whilst I was there I used to run around with the Wing Commander of the 59th Fighter Squadron. They were the ones who were intercepting these planes that were coming in unidentified, from Russia. I got to fly in those things a lot. It was a lot of fun.

I flew in the Radar seat with Chuck.

I would take them out on week-ends and we would go fishing and I would walk their pants off and they would take me out during the week and just about kill me. We were once at 22,000 ft and he went straight down - you know that is kind of rough for an old man, and I was Commander then, I don't remember how old I was - too old, but I had a lot of fun.

I got a chance to fly it once. Old Chuck says, "Take it around that cloud over there." So I was thinking how we would drive those old Coast Guard planes.

You use the aileron and the stick in co-ordination and as I started to go around there we passed out and he was shaking the stick when the black disappeared and the light came back and he says, "What are you doing, flying one of those old Coast Guard junks?" He says, "All you do is keep your feet still and move the stick ve...ry gently, back - forth - you don't use the ailerons at all on a jet.

Coming back one time I said, "How can that little triangular thing sticking down below the fighter, how can that be a brake?" He said, "I'll show you."

When we would be coming in from those trips sometimes he would say, "We've got about 3 min. fuel!" and I would say, "Hell, let's get in." Well geez, 3 mins. fuel, God....."If you miss your navigation we would be miles out there in the Arctic and that wouldn't be good, would it?"

So, when we came in and we were going between these two hills and I was kind of enjoying myself, coming down into the land and he says, "Now, it's a little blocked in, now you watch over on this side and if you see a peak coming there just holler, just mention it." I says, "Holy cow." Well we finally got down through that one and he says, "Are you ready for the break" and I says, "Yep." He put that darned thing down and I thought it was going to tear my shoulders off. Holy smoke what a shock and I says, "Good Lord that's a pretty good brake." He says, "Well, you're coming down from 500 to 400." We used to have a lot of fun

up there.

When I was up at Tooley Bay the men would like fishing and we would go out to these lakes and I liked to fly fish and they had some of those Harri Char - good sized fish, and we couldn't get to them so I had this old, square, metal box about 3ft x 6th long and I was in heavy clothes and here I was in that old box pushing out there so I could get to those fish and I happened to think, "My God, this thing could turn over right quick and I would drown. I changed my idea on that fishing deal.

Tooley was interesting because they had that Base up there. It was really out of position but I used to run around up there with Father Bean. He was a photographer and a Chaplain for the Navy and I had a lot of fun - going around - places we had to go and take pictures. I remember we used to go in some of these Eskimo houses and we thought, "Gee, this is kind of tough." But, we would go inside and all over the walls inside were these pictures of gals. It used to be "Life" wasn't it, that had those pictures of gals? Pasted all over - not too bad.

Sam) I'm not sure it was "Life", that was the family magazine.

(Glenn) It was some years back when they had all the girls

like the.....

(Sam) Esquire

(Glenn) Yes, Esquire, that's the one. Girls all over the place.. We stayed there quite a while taking pictures, beautiful.

(Sam) Taking pictures of pictures....

(Glenn) He was quite a man,,,quite a man!

(Sam) Well now, as I recall, "Northland" was delivered to Boston in 1940. Was it Frankie Kinnear () or Willie Kinnear () who was in command?

(Glenn) Willie Kinnear.

(Sam) Willie Kinnear. You joined the ship at Boston?

(Glenn) Yes.

(Sam) I got off there. I had been the Navigator from Alameda around to Boston.

(Glenn) Oh, you had!

(Sam) Yes, Do you remember we went aground at 4.05am?

(Glenn) No, I don't remember that.

(Sam) We sat on Nixes Mate until about noon. I was the Navigator.

(Glenn) Oh, no wonder you didn't go to sea during the War!.
(Lots of laughter here)

I had command of Re-activation Detachment for 6 D.E.'s for weather. I took the last one. The filed it over at Tacoma, it was based there for two years. This Captain Brown was the Skipper down there (He's the one that put the "Missourie" on the beach in Norfolk Harbour) He was a fine Officer but boy, he was finished. He was way up there - a good skipper - but I don't know what happened.

(Sam) He put the blame on his Navigator as I recall from the news reports and that would finish him right there.

(Glenn) Well, he was a Navigator and then he was a little fussed about an incident with an O.D. that didn't make a simple report, and I guess he hadn't talked to Truman.

(Sam) I don't think Truman wanted to talk to him necessarily. Now, he queered himself right away when he put the blame onto Junior Officers.

(Glenn) But he was a good Officer and a fine gentleman. I

liked him.

(Sam) How long were you on the "Northland"? On that Antarctic....

(Glenn) Oh, all the way.

(Sam) What did you accomplish?

Nothing, We had to go back before we got there. The roaring 40's and the stinking 60's and we had had it. Really hated it. Boy, I didn't want to come back. I wanted to go down all the way.

(Sam) Well, that old bucket really knew how to roll.

x (Glenn) Good ship, but boy she was miserable. ^{Well} ~~Well~~ we had dogs all over the place. Around each wing of the bridge we had a ring of Huskies, Malamutes, they kind of made quite a mess. No, I had a lot better duty than that, fine Officers, good Skipper and I had an old buddy there, Quinty Walsh ().

I just wonder where Quinty is now? Have you seen Quinty Walsh?

(Sam) No. He was on the list of people I wanted to talk to back on the East Coast.

(Glenn) Tell him howdy, will you?

(Sam) I'll do that.

(Glenn) Tell that I'm old and crippled and slowly dying up here in the mountains.

My policy, since I retired is to be above 3300 feet and out of cities.

(Sam) What's your elevation here?

(our Son?)

? (Glenn) 4900 ft. We're a short distance from the Summer over there and it works out pretty good. We have to go down to the cities once in a while. Try to stay out of hospitals too. That'll get you for sure. Have you seen Dean lately?

(Sam) No. He had indicated that everyone knew his story so he wasn't interested in repeating.

(Glenn) So, you wanted us to tell you how I won the battle of the North Atlantic and I just don't have the time!

(Sam) Well, you've done fairly well here.

(Glenn) In other words you're going to give me about a 2/5?

(Sam) At a later date you had the "North Wind"?

(Glenn) No. Went with somnebody else.

(Sam) Oh, Tommy Mettling, I confused for a moment.

(Glenn) I had the "Duane" out of Boston and that was my last command. During the War I had one of those Corvettes for a while, while I was waiting for that D.E. and we ran convoys with that for a while. I was Screen Commander and Escort Commander going from New York to Montanemo. We had one hell of a time off Miami down there. You may remember, we would start out with say about 60 to 70 ships and arrive with about 30 or 40 - pretty tough mess.

I remember Adams (). I always liked Adams. He was a very capable Officer.

(Sam) This is Don Adams?

(Glenn) Yes, he was a skipper of one of them. He seniored me, of course. We were left behind on a convoy to bring two ammunition ships out of Norfolk. Now that is bad with all those subs out there. We got out off shore quite a ways - we were out say 600 yards this way and this way - starboard bow and port bow - and I sent him a message, "Permission to open to 60,000 yards." He came back, he says, "Your last message is negative."

He didn't want me to open out at all. You know, when those things get hit even 60,000 yards won't do you much good.

(Sam) Be quite a concussion!

(Glenn) We had a lot of interesting times on the "Falmouth" on those 5 months cruises where you go over to Midway, a weather station in between Queen and then you go over to Midway for plane guard and then you take another station between there and Japan and then you go into Japan for maintenance, upkeep and recreation. We had a lot of fun in there.

On up the coast from Japan on up passed Kam Chitka into Alaska, Kodiak, for plane guard for 21 days and then back to Tacoma. So we had an interesting trip up there. The biggest storm I had ever been in, and that was a pretty big one in one of our Cutters, a hurricane, but this North Pacific when you have got a 3,000 mile fetch, it's something. The whole ship would be going up one side of a wave, which sounds like a story, but it's true. Of course, I was on the bridge most of the time but one of the lads let her drop off a little bit and we broke two main support stantions in B2 Engine Room - that was kind of a serious thing. They secured it back as quick as they could - the welders. But that was an interesting trip and Kodiak of course is good fishing. To go fishing up there in those days you had to take one of the Madeson's boys or the old man and you had to take his .45/70 along with you and sit by a log in case a Kodiak got interested. I don't know if I cared for that too much. .

(Sam) Do you know that at one time, pre-War, three young Officers, Hermie Deal, Ray Bluen and Jimmy Muzzy went hunting for Kodiak bears with only their .45 pistols. Fortunately, they didn't see one.

I can't remember who it was, but we were in Kodiak and we went around this island and there were these tracks up there and I think, Melman, no, I don't know who the Exec. was, he was with us and, of course, they know I'm in the woods all the time, when I've got time, so they were asking about that track and I says, "Well it looks like Big Foot but it probably belongs to a Kodiak." We got up and it got so darned fresh, and we had rifles, .30 some odd, and when it got so fresh the water seemed to be running down and we said, " Gee, Mr. Melman, shouldn't we eat now?" "Yeah, good idea, let's have lunch." So, we had lunch and "it's getting pretty late now and a storm's coming", so we got the heck out of there, of course. Don't want to fool with those things.

(SAM) Did you, at any time in your adventures, get a Polar bear?

(Glenn) Nooo... I don't like to shoot bear, I can't eat them.

(Sam) The old-timers ate bear and thought it was good.

(Glenn) I don't know. I didn't care to go shooting bear unless I had reason to.

(Sam) And how about your dog food when you were carrying the

Huskies?

(Glenn) That wasn't my pigeon, that belonged to the guy who was in charge of the dogs. I had a lot of minor duties, clothing, and things like that, but I wasn't a dog man. I got a kick out of playing around with them but you can't play around too much because you don't know if they are going to take a hand off or not!

They don't like the sea very well, I can tell you that.

(Sam) A Greenland Patrol on the "North Star" had to take on about 20 of the dogs, in the after well deck and, as you say, they were quite a mess.

Well, anybody that was on Report was immediately assigned to cleaning up the mess. After a while we went out of our way to put people on report. That was the best behaved crew you have ever seen!

(Glenn) One thing happened in the North Atlantic one time. I've heard this story from other sources, like it happened on their convoy, I'm pretty sure it happened on mine and I'm pretty sure it was one of my Combat Information Officers pulled it. You've got the T.B.S. and it only reaches the horizon, so the subs won't hear you, and you only use it when you have to and it's really silence and one time the Cruiser was in the middle of the convoy, Escort Commander, and the Screen of course, and once in a while they'll get that key and knock it down, or something,

you know. You always try to figure out how to keep your ship in the right position when you're changing course, you've got different rudder angles and different props. on different ships you know, and you have to make allowance for the rudder angles to stay with it when you turn at night, see. Well, one time over the air came "Jesus Crimminy" (That is not the word used then!) and the mike frigged up and pretty soon over the air it says "Oregan this is Lion, man making that comment give name and ship, over." Nothing. Pretty soon he says, "Oregan, say again, man making comment give name and ship." Pretty soon a little voice came back, "I ain't that frigged up."

I wasn't up and I didn't hear it but the Chief on the bridge and the O.D., when I come up - they were grinning and they told me this story but the way they were laughing and giggling and kept looking at the Chief and Hodges, the C.I.C. Officer, I don't know. I imagined them thinking, "How's he going to find out if I don't tell him?" We heard the story all over the place but I never said that that happened on our ship.

Well, I can't think of anything anybody would be specially interested in. They've all had their experiences, probably more than I have had, but, I sure enjoyed my Service but I liked the Coast Guard and I missed it when I retired, but not too much.

(Sam) It's quite a change when you can make up up your daily schedule, if you want to be that formal, and you are the sole determiner of what you are going to do! I think I

asked you if you knew anything about putty chains for bouys?

(Glenn) What?

(Sam) I think I asked you if you knew anything about putty chains for bouys?

(Glenn) I don't remember.

(Sam) It seems to me that you and Jim Muzzy were feuding, friendly feuding, on and off. Does that bring anything back to mind?

(Glenn) We were always pulling jokes on each other. I would get on the 'phone and I would give him some orders - he ^was an Ace at navigation -and he would get me once in a while and this one time he got a call from said, "This is Captain So-and so, U.S. Navy, and I want to ask the Coast Guard about some of these anchor chains that you have," and Jim started out, he thought it was me, "Well what we do is use those rubber chaing^s because they - well, they stretch more and let the anchor hold better."

The Captain said, "Pardon me?" and Jimmy got the idea then, I don't know if the story is correct but this is the way that Jimmy tells it, he said' "All of a sudden I realised it wasn't you, it was the Navy and I had one hell of a time getting out of that one."

I think he just told him, "I thought it was one of my

(Sam) Is that the reason. Well all of us can assign various

reasons why we didn't catch the flag!

(Glenn) The lads that I worked with there - my station at 2nd District was Chief Officer and Chief of Operations and I had some good friends there and they really thought I was going to make it, see, and they came around and they would ask me once in a while - all the guys that don't make Admiral, they've got all got reasons why they didn't make it - and they said to me, "How come?." and I says. "Well, I didn't have what it takes." That's kind of a simple answer, isn't it.