

PREFACE

They say there's a story behind every story. Here's mine. My Navy hitch was supposed to be a single chapter in a planned "Family History." Then I noticed a picture of the now-famous Liberty ship, SS *Jeremiah O'Brien*, in a San Francisco newspaper in 1992 and decided to pay her a visit. There I met the *O'Brien's* Shipkeeper, Bob Burnett. Before I knew it, Bob had convinced me I should write up my experiences on the four merchantmen I had served on during the war for the *O'Brien's* library. He even told me how and where to write to request previously classified documents from our national archives. He also told me about C.A. Lloyd and the Armed Guard Veterans group and showed me a copy of a "Pointer" newsletter, their official publication. That did it.

After a year of research gathering, I "launched" this book on a freighter trip to South America — the wanderlust bug never leaves you. I've been accused of living in the past ever since by friends and family. But in preparing this book, I was constantly reminded of how little we servicemen knew about the war around us, let alone the big picture. One example: two out of three cargo ships in our little convoy of three Libertys and three escorts were torpedoed by Japanese subs in the dark of night on

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June 23, 1943 after leaving Guadalcanal. I was on the lucky ship but, because we were ordered to hightail it out of there by the Escort Commander, I never knew until fifty years later both ships were sunk. Furthermore, I didn't even know the names of the ships or their hull numbers. But I've never forgotten the date or place. Declassified documents supplied the missing information. Fortunately, I was able to track down and interview forty some survivors. I don't call that living in the past. It's researching the past to update history. And it provides closure on an event that happened early in my life.

I hope, in some ways, this book will illuminate some of the events of World War II in the Pacific and the atomic bomb tests at Bikini. Perhaps through its pages the reader will achieve some small degree of closure of his or her own.

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