

# Radar Picket Ships Stand Watch

Eight Navy vessels operate out of Seattle on defense, weather-observation duty

By CLARK SQUIRE

"Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide, wide sea!"

AFTER two weeks of horizon-watching out on the Pacific, men aboard the Navy radar ship Haverfield (DER 393—destroyer escort radar) stood ready to wager a month's pay that the experience of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner was a joyful vacation cruise, compared to their lonely tour of duty.

And what was worse: While the rhyming Mariner's becalmed vessel sat "as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean," the Haverfield kept rolling and pitching on a sea that was far from pacific.

However, in their second 17-day tour "on station" several hundred miles off Washington's coast nearly two years ago, the men resolved to improve their lot in that lonely area of the Pacific. They proposed installing an intership-radio station, utilizing the ship's communication system as an outlet.

Lieut. (j. g.) James Henning headed a group which drafted plans and submitted them to the commanding officer, Lieut. Comdr. B. G. Westerfield. He approved the proposal and laid down a policy for operation.

Immediately there was a contest for an appropriate call signal for the station, with all personnel invited to participate. The judges selected WPRN, for Western Pacific Radio Network. Broadcast hours were set for 11:30 to 1 o'clock in midday and from 4:30 to 7:30 in the evening.

Besides giving news reports and personal interviews, WPRN played recorded music. Men having records

on board lent them to the station. Afterward tape recordings were obtained in port and soon there was an ample supply of music for all occasions.

NAVY men nowadays seek assignment to the Haverfield, flagship of Escort Squadron 5, based in Seattle, or to any of its eight sister ships. Present personnel includes a high percentage of men from the Pacific Northwest. The re-enlistment rate is among the highest in the Navy.

The radar picket ship has two missions. The first is to spot any aircraft, submarines or surface vessels headed for continental United States. A secondary mission is to take weather observations and submit reports to the Navy's Fleet Weather Central in San Francisco.

Whenever a radar operator picks up an aircraft in his scope, the position of the plane is plotted immediately in the ship's combat-information center and is reported to the combat-control center of the 25th Air Division (Defense) at McChord Air Force Base.

This report, if of critical significance, is relayed to the Western Air Defense Force at Hamilton Air Force Base, Calif., and to the Continental Air Defense Command at Colorado Springs, Colo.

Should the plane be unidentifiable, the commander of the joint air-defense division would give orders for intercepting it. Brig. Gen. Romulus W. Puryear, commander of the 25th, could "scramble" fighter-interceptors or he could have Nike guided missiles launched. He might send out delta-wing Convair F-102's from McChord Air Force Base, or Northrop F-89D

Scorpions or F-89H's from Paine Air Force Base, or other all-weather aircraft from Portland Air Force Base.

Control of the interceptors could be taken over by a radar picket ship, which navigates by loran (long-range navigation) and can give the planes a target's position at any moment.

Besides being watchful for aircraft and surface vessels, the radar picket ship must be on the alert for submarines. It carries sonar equipment for detecting subs and also modern weapons for destroying them.

THE Haverfield was the first DER on duty in the Pacific. Escort Squadron 5 was commissioned July 30, 1955, in Seattle. That day the Haverfield went to her station, then only a short distance off Cape Flattery. She was relieved by the Savage, which, in turn, was relieved by the Wilhoite.

These ships were joined October 20, 1955, by the Falgout and in mid-December by the Koiner and the Lowe.

Since then two more distant stations have been patrolled by DER's out of Seattle. Latest to join the squadron were the Finch, which arrived last December, and the Vance and the Forster in March.

Squadron 5, of which Comdr. John C. Spencer is commodore, has headquarters at Pier 91. It is part of the Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet, commanded by Rear Adm. Chester C. Wood, with headquarters at San Diego.

WHEN on picket station these ships are under operational control of the commander of Naval Forces, Western Air Defense Region, Continental Air Defense Command. All saw service as destroyer escorts in the Second World War.

First use of radar picket ships was made off Okinawa near the end of the war.

After the war the vessels were put in mothballs. The Korean outbreak in 1950 brought them from the Reserve Fleet for various assignments.

Some have been commissioned three times. For instance, the Lowe was built and commissioned in 1943, decommissioned in 1946, commissioned again in 1951 as a Coast Guard weather ship, decommissioned in 1954 and commissioned for the third time in 1955 by the Navy.

The Falgout was used as a weather ship during the Korean crisis and the Koiner also was in the service of the Coast Guard.

CONVERSION of these destroyer escorts was done in 1954 at a cost of approximately \$4,000,000 each. Present value of a radar picket ship is placed at nearly \$25,000,000.

Combat-information centers—nerve centers of the ships—were made larger to take care of additional information from electronic detection devices, such as the new air-search, surface-search radar and height-finder.

More communications equipment was installed, much of it in space formerly used for mess and for berths. Consequently, to provide adequate living quarters for 161 enlisted



COMDR. JOHN C. SPENCER, commodore of the picket-ship squadron based in Seattle.

men and 12 officers, the main deck was inclosed amidships and a superstructure was added.

Picket-ship operations in the Atlantic have continued for five years. Six of the dozen DER's of Escort Squadron 16 have been performing picket duties off the East Coast since 1952.

Escort Squadron 18 was established as part of the Atlantic Fleet two years ago, when six more DE's were converted to DER's.

Three of the picket ships in the Pacific were converted on the East Coast. Work on the others was done at Mare Island Navy Yard and at Long Beach.

In developing this phase of the national-defense program, the Navy and the Air Force had the support of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, of which Senator Henry M. Jackson of Everett is a member.

AFTER being at sea 17 days, the ships of Squadron 5 spend two weeks at maintenance and repair work at Pier 91. Then they devote a week to various exercises on Puget Sound and at sea, conducting firing practice, working with submarines and engaging in many individual ship exercises to improve over-all battle readiness.

Every two years the DER's enter Bremerton Naval Shipyard for three months of overhauling. Then they go to San Diego, where they undergo four weeks of intensive refresher training.

"Radar picket ships are the country's most advanced line of early warning against surprise attack from seaward and as such fulfill a wartime mission when patrolling their stations," Commander Spencer said.

"Perhaps residents of the Pacific Northwest may sleep more securely knowing that these ships are con-

## Today's Cover

Pictured on Page 1 of the Magazine Section is the radar picket ship Haverfield, the DER (destroyer-escort radar) 393, flagship of Escort Squadron 5.

Parker McAllister, Times artist, depicted the Seattle-based vessel en route to her station hundreds of miles off the Washington Coast.

# Far at Sea to Safeguard U. S.

tinuously on guard far at sea in the interest of their safety."

The isolation of radar picket ships on station was emphasized Saturday, February 18, 1957, when it became necessary to rush a member of the Koiner's crew to a hospital.

John Paul Edwards, Jr., 18-year-old fireman, was stricken with acute appendicitis late the previous day as the ship pitched through choppy seas and rain squalls several hundred miles west of Cape Flattery.

No doctor was aboard, so Edwards was given emergency treatment by the chief pharmacist's mate, who followed radiotelephone directions of an Air Force doctor at McChord.

The Koiner was given permission to leave her station and dash for the coast, but heavy weather cut her speed to 12 knots. At 9 o'clock Saturday morning she made a rendezvous 60 miles west of Flattery with a helicopter from the Coast Guard Air Station at Port Angeles.

Edwards was placed in a transfer basket and, despite the ship's heavy rolling and gusts of wind up to 50 knots, was hauled into the helicopter within five minutes. He was delivered to Bremerton Naval Hospital in two and a half hours. A week afterward he returned to duty.

The Koiner was commended last December for helping to save the life of a seaman injured critically in a fall into the hold of the Norwegian merchant ship Molda. The Koiner hurried December 2 to the Molda and transferred its hospital medical corpsman by boat to the Molda. The corpsman accompanied the Molda into port, performing emergency medical measures on the way.

Last May 10 the Forster obtained permission to leave her station for a run to Astoria, Ore., where Raymond E. Matthis, electronic technician, was operated on for appendicitis.

ALL of the ships have equal facilities for recreation and sports. Each has a team in the squadron's softball league. Games are played on the Seattle Naval Station diamond. The crews also compete in basketball and bowling. Trophies are awarded the champions in each sport.

Another form of recreation was inaugurated last summer and is being continued this year. Each DER takes a Dependents' Day cruise on Puget Sound. About 75 guests (none under 13 years) are picked up at Pier 91 at 9 o'clock in the morning. They are taken on tours of the ship to observe operations and are served luncheon on board. The return is at 3 o'clock.

The ships go frequently to Pacific Northwest ports where civic celebrations are held. The Forster will be in Seattle for the Seafair, August 2 to 11.

In May the Vance visited Bellingham, the Haverfield went to Astoria and the Finch participated in the Rhododendron Festival in Port Townsend. Visits are expected to be made to Tacoma, Vancouver, B. C., and South Bend.

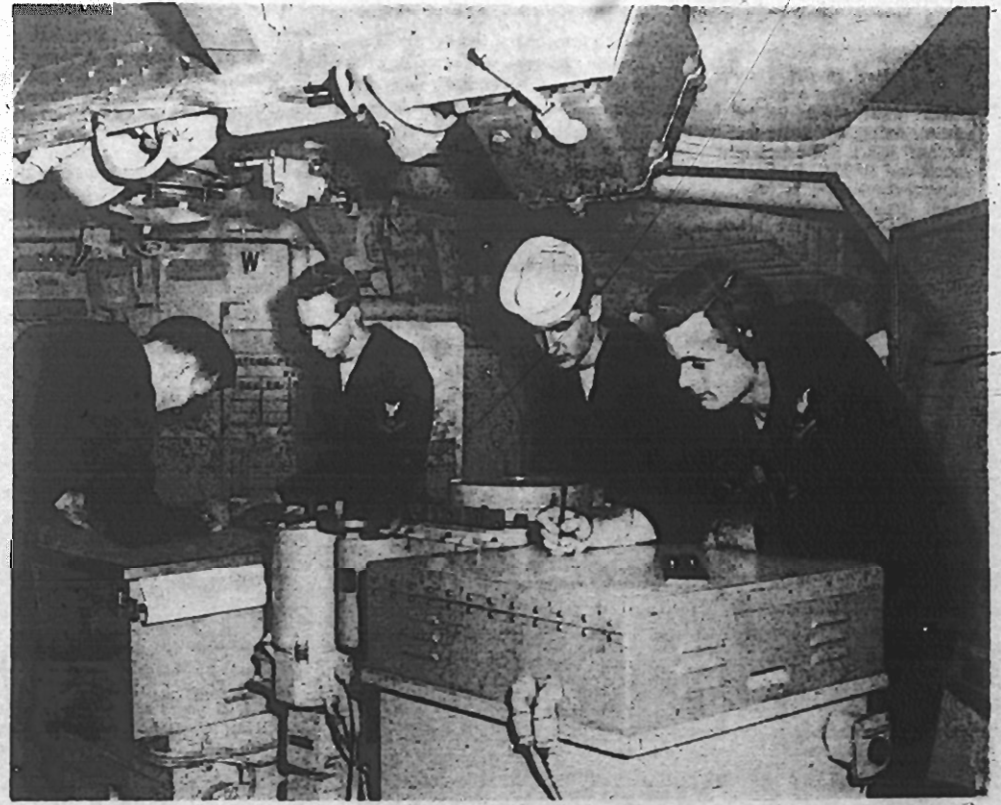
While men aboard the Haverfield and her sister ships may feel at times as if they were being tossed around in an isolation booth on a rough sea, they realize as soon as they walk down the gangplank in Seattle they are about to encounter plenty of fellow beings.

Crowds at recreation spots are as large as ever. Parking space is becoming even scarcer. Nevertheless, officers and men consider Seattle one of the finest of all home ports.



ABOARD THE LOWE, Lieut. Comdr. J. R. Bohlen, left, examined a 14-ounce radiosonde transmitter, which sends information on weather conditions to the ship after being carried aloft by balloon and released with a parachute. Robert G. Ferguson, aerographer first class, checked information that was coming in on a radiosonde receiver.

(Photos on this page by Parker McAllister; on Page 2, by Navy.)



MEN in the combat-information center of the Lowe simulated the operation of tracing the movements of a plane detected by radar. H. V. Stevens, left, and R. H. Stang served as north and south plotters at a dead-reckoning tracer. Charles S. Mitchell, third from left, radar-operator, observed the scope of a positive-plotting indicator, and R. F. Wren kept watch at a surface plotter. Information compiled here is relayed to McChord Air Force Base.



REAR ADM. CHESTER C. WOOD, from San Diego, inspected members of the crew of the U. S. S. Lowe. The picket ships are attached to the Cruiser-Destroyer Force, Pacific Fleet, commanded by Admiral Wood.