

Ned James Wentz: History of His Sword

by:

His daughter, Frances Wentz Taber

BACKGROUND

My father, Ned James Wentz, was born 12 January 1910, Haigler, Dundy Co., NE. His youthful years were spent at his family's homestead, The Wildcat Ranch, Fort Morgan, Morgan Co., CO.

On 01 June 1933, he was graduated from United States Naval Academy. Annapolis, Anne Arundel Co., MD.

On 11 November 1934, he wed my mother, Elizabeth Frances Simms, of Charleston, Kanawha Co., WV, at Goody, Pike Co., KY.

Throughout their marriage, his tours of duty included: *USS COLORADO (BB-45)*, battleship, San Diego, CA; Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, Philadelphia, PA; on staff of RADM William Frederick "Bull" Halsey, Jr., *USS YORKTOWN (CV-5)*, aircraft carrier, Carrier Division Two, Norfolk (City), VA; US Submarine Base, Coco Solo, PCZ; and, *USS ERIE (PG-50)*, patrol gunboat, flagship of the Special Service Squadron, Balboa, Panama.

I was born, 27 May 1940, at US Submarine Base, Coco Solo, PCZ.

Shortly following 07 December 1941 and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, US Navy dependents were ordered to leave The Panama Canal Zone. My father accompanied my mother and me for our return to reside with my maternal grandparents, at Charleston, Kanawha Co., WV, on 18 March 1942.

On 30 March 1942, my father was assigned to *USS ERIE (PG-50)*, Balboa, Panama.

My mother, having left me in the care of my grandparents, spent several months as a civilian, commencing 27 July 1942, at Cristobal, Panama, the new home base for *USS ERIE (PG-50)*. She was there – to be with my father, when his ship returned to her homeport.

In October 1942, my father had been given orders to report to Naval Air Station, Corpus Christi, Nueces Co., TX. He returned to The United States for leave – which was spent with my mother and me at Charleston, Kanawha Co., WV, with my mother's family, and at Fort Morgan, Morgan Co., CO, with his family. He had sought and was granted permission to return to *USS ERIE (PG-50)* – in order to train his replacement. My mother and I were to have joined him at Texas.

On 12 November 1942, *USS ERIE (PG-50)*, while leading Convoy TAG-20, between Trinidad and Guantanamo, was torpedoed by a German submarine (the *U-163*). This occurred off the shore of Curacao. My father and his replacement were two of six officers and a Philippine officer's mess boy that died that day— a total of seven lost.

We did not go to Texas.

SEVENTY YEARS LATER

On 12 March 2013 a kind gentleman, Kent Eldemire, of George Town, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands, contacted me. He told me that he had, in his possession, my father's U.S. Naval Academy sword!

This news was astounding. It is the most overwhelming lost-and-found story I have ever heard – and, it connects to me!

For years, Kent had searched the Internet – first, for my father. Then, he discovered that my father had a daughter and found her married name. His early clues were through genealogy websites, where I had postings. And, the final clue was contact information for me, through my beloved late husband's obituary. Then, in early March 2013, he finally found me! (Kent has reiterated to me, a number of times, his appreciating that I have forever used my maiden name as a part of my full name on all documents! Without that, he would never have found me!)

Kent's late father, Enos Wellesley Eldemire (1910-1977), was first mate and senior salvage diver on the salvage tug, *KILLERIG*, which served in the Caribbean Sea Frontier during World War II. This tug was a former Royal Naval vessel, owned by Merritt-Chapman & Scott, headquartered at New London, CT. In 1942, the *KILLERIG* was stationed at Kingston, Jamaica, chartered to the US Navy. Kent's father and other *KILLERIG* crewmembers, *ERIE* officers and enlisted men, and workers from a local dry dock company attempted the salvage of *USS ERIE (PG-50)*, at Willemstad, Curacao, Netherlands Antilles, over the period November 19 to December 5, 1942. These salvage efforts failed when, on December 4, officers in charge failed to take into account the *ERIE*'s low stability condition and ordered the removal of fuel from two lower tanks and the addition of significant weight topside, which caused the vessel to capsize.

My late father's sword was discovered during those salvage efforts. His sword has been in the possession of The Eldemire Family, since that time – for over seventy years! Both his father and Kent have long wanted to return this sword to the rightful owners, the family of Ned James Wentz. These gentlemen have had a long mission!

When port activity began increasing at Willemstad harbor, following World War II, the Netherlands Antilles government requested The US Navy to remove *USS ERIE (PG-50)*. She was obstructing the harbor. The US Navy contacted my mother, in 1950 at Winter Park, FL, where we were residing, and asked if she wanted to be notified of any findings. Since I was age of ten years, I remember this – and, I have this letter, today! *USS ERIE (PG-50)* was brought up and towed just out from the harbor – to create an artificial reef. This continues to be a popular diving site – especially for tourists and for Venezuelan residents. I have a fifteen-year friend, Venezuelan native and now US citizen, who has utilized that dive site!

My late husband, Robert “Bo” Weiss Taber, my daughter, Elizabeth Winslow McAuliffe, and I spent a day at Willemstad, while on board a cruise ship, holidays 2000. We visited a small museum, there, devoted to the memory of *USS ERIE (PG-50)*.

Since 1969, the sword was kept at Kent’s second home at Cairns, Queensland, Australia – the locale where three of Kent’s four children reside. His son, Shane, located the sword, and initially sent me photographs of it. Then he carefully packaged it for shipment to my home in Tallahassee, FL. On 08 April 2013, the sword was safely within my possession.

Believe me, overwhelming emotion and excitement prevailed as I awaited its arrival and, after seventy years, held it in my hands.

The sword, within a proper case, is designated for my son, Francis Boll Gibbs, and his son, Couper Marshall Gibbs.

(See following page for photos of the sword and of Frances Wentz Taber receiving the sword on 08 April 2013.)

Ned James Wentz' sword in its scabbard (photo taken by Shane Eldemire, at his parents' second home, Cairns, Queensland, Australia).



Ned James Wentz' initials engraved just below the sword hilt (on the scabbard).

Frances Wentz Taber happily receives her father's sword on 08 April 2013, after shipment from Queensland, Australia.

