

# SUBMARINE SAGAS

## THE SINKING OF THE USS GRENADIER SS 210

By Robert W. Palmer

Pre-dawn on 21 April, 1943, USS GRENADIER (SS 210) was making an end-around on two Japanese ships which had been sighted to the westward during the previous night. Her Fairbanks-Morse engines were each delivering full power, driving GRENADIER along course 155 degrees toward Malacca Strait and a pre-determined position from which it was anticipated a successful torpedo attack could be made on the two ships.

At about 0835, still some ten minutes before diving, a single engine plane was sighted, at low altitude, approaching the port quarter. The C.O. by personal observation determined that the object

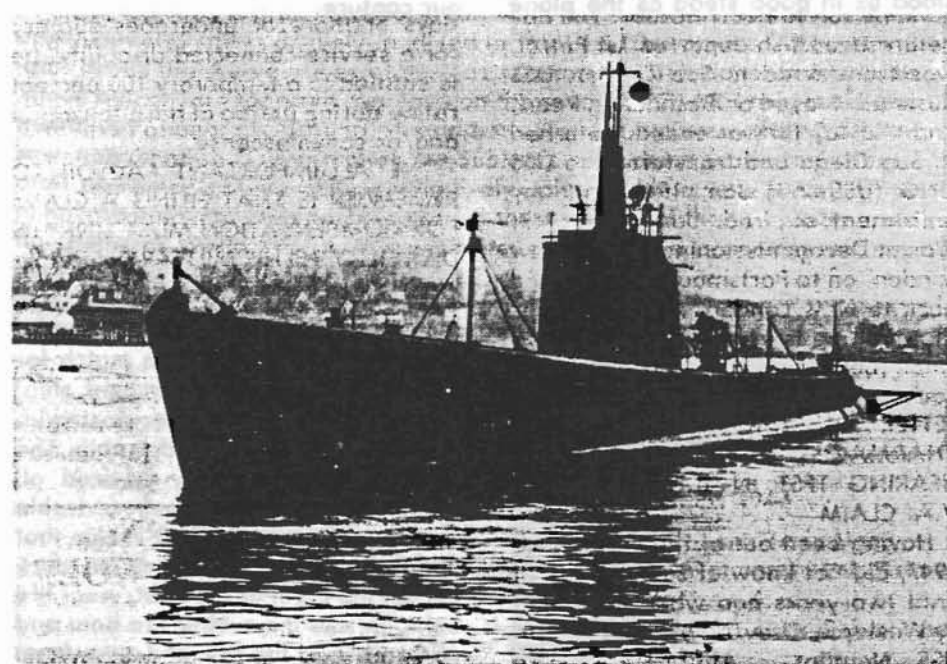
sighted was not a bird, or other false alarm, ordered 'DIVE-DIVE-this is not a drill.' ALL AHEAD EMERGENCY! The already electrified atmosphere below at once became volatile. As 120 feet registered on the depth gage a sense of safety was immediately destroyed by terrible sounds — a subtle turbulent S-W-I-S-H, a metallic click as a firing mechanism activated, then ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE — The instantaneous result was as though two express trains had collided head on. As near as could be determined the detonation occurred close by and to starboard above the after torpedo room bulkhead, causing a violent list to port. Stunned men in the maneuvering room were knocked about, those in the after torpedo room became airborne, ending up between torpedo tubes and on the deck. All power for propulsion, auxiliary equipment and lighting was

lost. Emergency lighting was activated at once; the awesome sight of devastation was incomprehensible, it was inconceivable that GRENADIER could have withstood so much damage, and still could be more or less intact; especially from abaft the after engine room bulkhead. The after torpedo room was in complete disarray; tubes were askew, pipe lines, valves and gages ruptured or rendered inoperative, equipment and bodies in a jumbled mess on the deck.

The maneuvering room was damaged beyond belief. Both propeller shafts were seized in a vice-like grip by the bulkhead which had been forced to port. To further complicate the situation, sea water was pouring in from the hardpatch above the cage, the ATR loading hatch, and numerous other openings. As we passed 200' on the way down, the electricians in the cage passed the word "FIRE IN THE MANEUVERING ROOM"! The fathometer indicated that we were in about 270' of water whereupon the skipper decided to settle on the bottom in lieu of surfacing. GRENADIER and crew began their struggle for survival.

A bucket brigade was established between the motor room and forward torpedo room. The object being to keep the water level from reaching the main propulsion motors. This continued until a jury rig could be established to power the main electrical circuits. Many exhausting hours were spent attempting to clear short circuits and establish propulsion. During the day, many a man passed out from fatigue, heat and foul air, even though oxygen had been released into the atmosphere and CO<sub>2</sub> absorbent had been spread throughout the interior. Finally at about 2130, preparations were made to surface. All tanks that would hold water had been filled in order to anchor

POLARIS



USS GRENADIER (SS 210) abandoned and all hatches were left open on 22 April 1943 off the Malaysia coast. The Chief-of-the-Boat, CTM Withrow, opened the vents and came topsides . . .

GRENADIER and keep her from moving in the fast current of Malacca, and sliding off our perch and into deep water which was close by. Banks of compressed air was bled into these and the main ballast tanks. Finally, and with reluctance, she moved upward, broke the surface and 76 officers and men, totally exhausted and very short of oxygen, tasted sweet fresh air which, but for their herculean efforts and a bit of luck, would have been denied them forever.

Throughout the night every effort was continued in hopes of re-establishing propulsion, but to no avail. The entire drive was out, shafts bent, screws damaged; radio communication destroyed, and the 3" deck gun inoperative. Mattress covers were sewn together and rigged to number two periscope in hopes that enough wind could move the ship close to the Malaysia shore where it could possibly be submerged and made seaworthy. Dead calm belayed this effort. Preliminary steps were taken to destroy GRENADIER should such action become necessary in order to preclude her falling into enemy hands. Shortly after 0800, another Japanese plane began an approach from ahead. Though we were a sitting duck, we were not incapable of some retaliation. The plane appeared to be dive bomber, referred to as a VAL and as it burped its guns it began a strafing run down our starboard side. We opened up with two



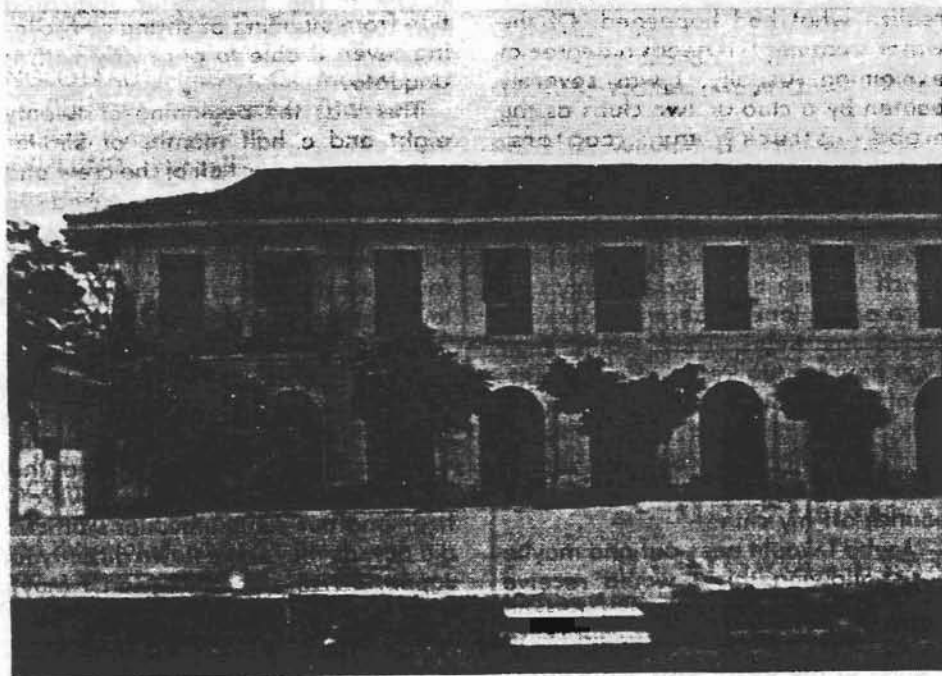
GRENADIER survivors (l to r): *by* L. Sawatzke, Charles H. Whitlock  
John F. Simpson, John F. Schwartz, Jewell Ben H. Fulton, and Charles E. Johnson. Newly repatriated from Japanese Prisoner of War Camp, the men had just picked up new tailor made uniforms.

20mm guns, two .30 cal. machine guns, a few rifles, some .45 cal. pistols, and some tommy guns. The commissary steward threw potatoes that he had brought topside in that there were no more arms to go round. Tracers revealed that the 20mm fire was effective, the plane wavered, pulled up and circled our stern making an approach up the port side, again our automatic weapons stood us in good stead as the plane was again hit several times. The pilot

must have become very discouraged for he released his bomb as he passed abreast to port. It detonated about 200 yards off the starboard bow. Subsequently we were advised by the Japanese in Penang, that the pilot died in the crash of his plane upon his return to base. This information was not without cost, special treatment was administered, especially to the Gunner's mate by the Japanese, after our capture.

By this time, surface ships were observed at some distance, approaching from both north and south. Destruction of sensitive equipment was completed. A Tommy gun was emptied into the TDC (Torpedo Data Computer), torpedoes were run hot in the tubes, radio gear smashed, all codes destroyed, documents thrown over the side in weighted bags. Time was running out! We would soon be surrounded, and being no match for Carvettes, an armed merchant ship, and a two engined bomber closing in, the skipper had to abandon ship. The skipper had previously advised all hands to put on their most servicable clothing, he then had to make that awful decision. "All hands on deck except the Chief of the Boat, wear life belts, inflate the rubber life boat and all hands over the side and away from the hull."

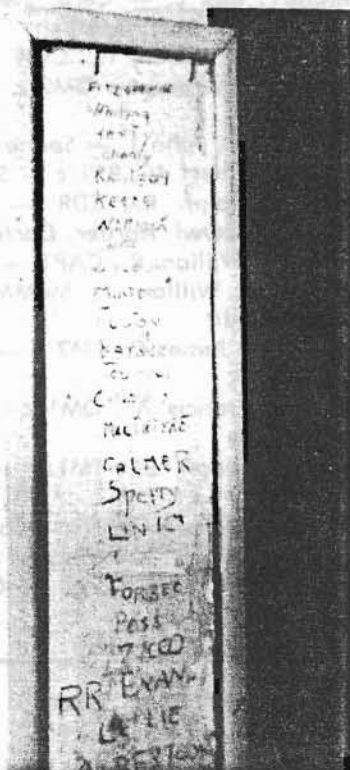
Then to the Chief below; "Open everything and come topside." The Chief of the boat, then the skipper, joined all other personnel in the



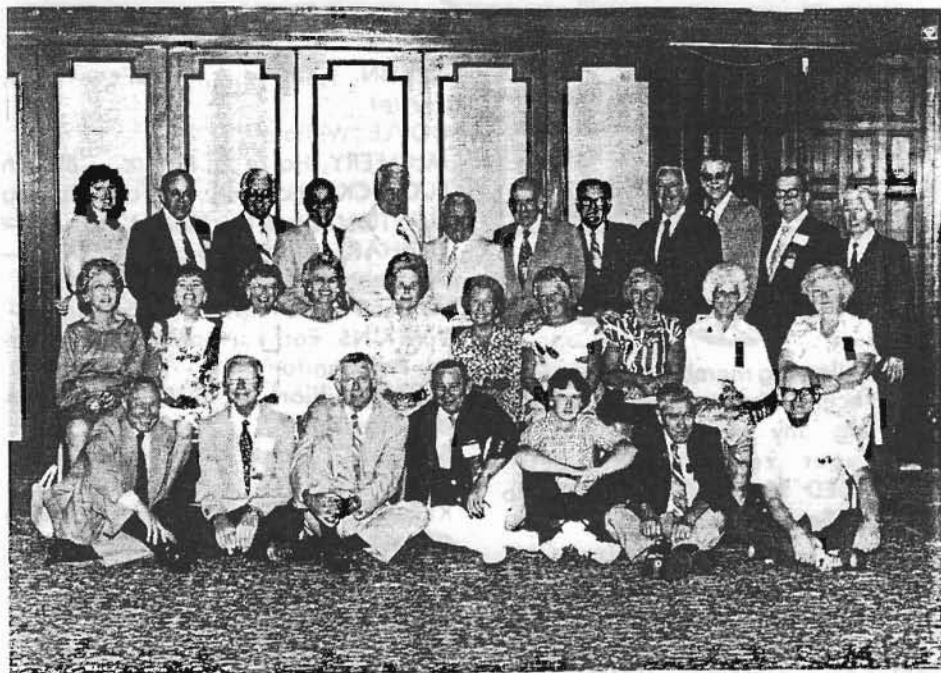
The Convent on Light Street in Penang where GRENADIER'S crew were imprisoned initially by the Japanese.



water. Many a tear was shed as GRENADIER slid gracefully under the water for the last time. Machine gunning the crew in the water did not occur and all hands were picked up by an armed merchant ship and taken to a commandeered Catholic school in Penang, Malaysia. Torture and inhumane treatment began immediately. Beating, burning, breaking fingers with bamboo or pencils between them, and to quote the skipper, then Lieutenant Commander John A. Fitzgerald, USN, as he described the various tortures inflicted; Quote: The men were divided half and half between the school rooms on the ground floor, stone decks; the officers in single rooms on the second floor, wooden decks. The rough treatment started the first afternoon, particularly with the men. They were forced to sit or stand in silence in an attention attitude. Any divergence resulted in a gun butt, kick, slug in the face or a bayonet prick. In the questioning room, persuasive measures, such as clubs, about the size of indoor ball bats, pencils between the fingers and pushing of the blade of a pen knife under the finger nails, trying to get us to talk about our submarine and the location of other submarines.



GRENADIER names scratched on the "benjo" wall of The Convent on Light Street in Penang. Sisters at the school have preserved the names until this day.



USS GRENADIER officers, crew, and their ladies at recent Reunion in Hartford '82. Of this group the POW's are: Herbert, Palmer, RAdm Albertsen, RAdm Fitzgerald, Garrison, Westerfield, Capt. Harty, Leslie, and Poss.

Considering all this, I believe the men held up remarkably well. To the best of my knowledge, our RM1c Knutson and I were the only ones to receive the water treatment and I the only one who lost a fingernail. Believe it or not, the pain of the pencils between the fingers was so great that I did not realize my left hand was being stabbed with a knife, only when I saw the blood gushing did I realize what had happened. Of the water treatment, it needs a degree of explaining. Usually, I was severely beaten by a club or two clubs as the mood struck my captors. Simultaneously, two guards would arrange themselves on each side of the victim, taking turns to see who could drive the hardest. I was then tied to a bench to such an angle that my feet were on a plane of about 30 degrees above my head. They would then start pouring tea kettle after tea kettle of water down my nose, holding a hand over my mouth in the meantime; everytime I would move my head or try for air, a heavy fist would bounce off my chin.

Maybe I would pass out and maybe not. Following this I would receive another club beating until I passed out. On coming to, they would try to get me to talk; when it was not forthcoming, more beatings — finally I would be carried to my room and dumped on the floor waiting for a

while until they decided to try again. Every time I would hear that warrant officer, assisted by his walking stick, come into the building, I would think it was for me again or maybe some other poor devil. We all had the same feeling for everyone received beating after beating, as like treatment was given to all hands. One became so stiff and sore it was almost impossible to move, let alone change position from standing or sitting or reclining, even if able to get away with it Unquote.

This was the beginning of twenty eight and a half months of similar treatment for most all of the crew and officers alike. Work camps eased the brutality somewhat, however, the Japanese contributed to the death of four crew members. There was a total lack of medical treatment.

At the time of questioning at the Catholic school on Light Street in Penang, as we were taken back and forth to the Benjo (toilet), we managed to scratch our names on one of the walls. The skipper, the executive officer and our communications officer did not, as they were flown directly to Japan, arriving at OFUNA on 1 May, 1943. The wall with the names on it has been preserved by the sisters of the Convent School over these many years. Visitors today view the names and hear the tale of torture of GRENADIER crew. The children, we

# Welcome Aboard!



The following members have joined us in recent months. If interested in obtaining any of their addresses, send your request with SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE to the Nat'l Sec-Treasures.

PORTER, H. Marshall, RT2/c — SeaRaven

COVERT, Robert John, TM2/c — Redfish

CAPORASO, Alessio D., MoMM1/c — Bream

LIGHTER, Hershel A., CMoMM — Cuttlefish, Archerfish, Halfbeak

ORR, James F., ET2/c — Cusk

REED, John C., TMT2/c — R-20, Apogon, Sablefish

TUCKER, Fred B., Capt. — R-14, Hawkbill

WILSON, Thomas, QMC — Nautilus, O-3, Quillback, SeaLion

EMBRY, J. Creston, CWO — Grenadier, Croaker, Clamagore

WELLS, James W., S1/c — Chub

WILLIS, Robert E., TM3/c — Loggerhead

DAVIS, Eugene L., EMCC2/c

CARRIGAN, Clifford W., MoMM1/c — Aspra, Pilotfish, Chub

DINSMORE, George D., CS1/c — S-27, S-28, Pargo

ENGLEHARDT, Robert C., MoMM1/c — Plunger, Pollack, Pickerel

Gabilan, Amberjack

VERNLUND, Russell M. — S-23, Spearfish

BROWN, Carr B., CRM — Boarfish

MAYER, Jack R., TM3/c — Plunger, Tarpon, Piper

DEVLIN, Timothy A., EM2/c — R-20, Sterlet

DOYLE, William

McCLEERY, Harry J., EM1/c — Billfish

LUDWICK, Michael L., S1/c — Cubera

NEWTON, Zane C., MoMM2/c — S-14

EARHART, Herman M., CDR — Sturgeon, Skate

WEXLER, Emanuel, S1/c — SeaLion

WATKINS, Earl F., MoMM1/c — Manta, Pompano

SMITH, William A., GMM2/c — Had-do, Medregal

STEWART, James K., Y1/c, Bluefish, Dentuda

KERNS, C. Douglas, TME2/c — Redfin

CRAWFOOT, Edward R., LT — R-11, Pompon, Blower, Hake, Toro, Sirago

BURTON, Charles T., CMoMM — O-3, Apogon

BURKINS, John J., GM1/c — Hoe

AURTHUR, Denver, MoMM1/c — R-2, Bream, Cutlass, Odax

BIALAS, Walter, MoMM1/c — R-4, Darter, Menhaden, Besugo, Bumper, Stickelback

RAYMOND, Clayton L., TM1/c — Tautog, Trout, SeaCat

RUISI, Nunzio F., MoMM1/c — Sargo

TANIS, Arend, SMC — Scorpion

EVANS, Ernest M., ENC — Amberjack, Sabalo, Tilefish

BUTLER, Robert R., FC2/c — Bream

CONTE, Harold J., TM2/c — Haddock, Kingfish

D'ANGELO, Gino M., RM2/c — Chopper, Chivo

LEVINTHAL, Barnett N., MoMM1/c — Narwhal, Blueback, Nautilus, Wahoo

JONES, Herbert P., F1/c — Bowfin

CONINE, Louie E., CRM — Perch, S-27, R-2, Sturgeon, Redfish

GRINUK, Walter, MoMM3/c — R-20, Baya

RIZZELLI, William D., MoMM2/c — Hammerhead, Gurnard, Tuna

HOLLEY, James A., CMoMM — Tautog, Tambor, Blower

ALLEN, Clifton C., CDR — R-13, Sawfish, Pipefish, R-10, R-1

CARPENTER, Richard L., MoMM2/c — O-4, Chub, Barb, Snapper, Barracuda

SIFFERT, Calvin E. — S-39, S-42

BADDAKER, Robert C., QM3/c — R-4, Charr

MOOMEY, Victor D., CDR — Tautog

HOOD, Paul W., RM1/c — Halibut, Finback

EUBANKS, L.S., CAPT — S-47, Bonefish, Pinke, Becuna

STORY, Lester T., LCDR — S-45, Pargo

WILLIAMS, Andrew R., MoMM1/c — Cuttlefish, S-46, Darter, Menhaden, Chopper

BRADEN, Gerald D., EM3/c — S-37, SeaFox

DeWEEES, John D., QMC — S-41, Sterlet

LUND, Robert C. — Blackfin, Caiman

GREEN, Alfred H., RM2/O — Sterlet

ANDERSON, John A., TM1/c — R-10, R-12, R-20, Baya

KELTY, William L., S1/c

MAY, Mack B., QM1/c — S-39, Greenling, S-42

PRASKIEVICZ, Wallace M., EMC — Skate

ZELMER, Ernest J., CAPT — Cavalla, Cusk

TRAUB, Frank J., CWO — Tautog, Pogy

PETERS, James B., EM3/c — Sailfish

GOBALEZA, Flores D., 3rd LT — Thresher

MICKEY, Rex L. — Cero, Swordfish, Plunger, SeaWolf, Boarfish

LUNDQUIST, Emery W., CTM

BAGOS, Andrew A., QM3/c — Ronquil

SEITLINGER, John J. — Sennet

LINKER, Robert W., RT2/c — S-41

BLAINE, Ralph R., CDR — Sardo, Bonita, SeaOwl, Harder, Darter

WERNER, William R., CAPT — Ploice

AMBROSE, William J., MoMM2/c — Becuna, R-10

HOLZSHU, James C., EM2/c — Spearfish

KOINIG, Francis W., QM1/c — R-12, O-8, Paddle

PAGE, Joseph L., TM1/c — O-2, Spikefish

WOHAR, Joseph, QM3/c — Spearfish

NOERR, R.C., F1/c — Tombor

NIEMEYER, E.V., LT, R-18, SeaCat

GIBSON, Alvin W.

## ANNUAL WISCONSIN MEETING & MEMORIAL

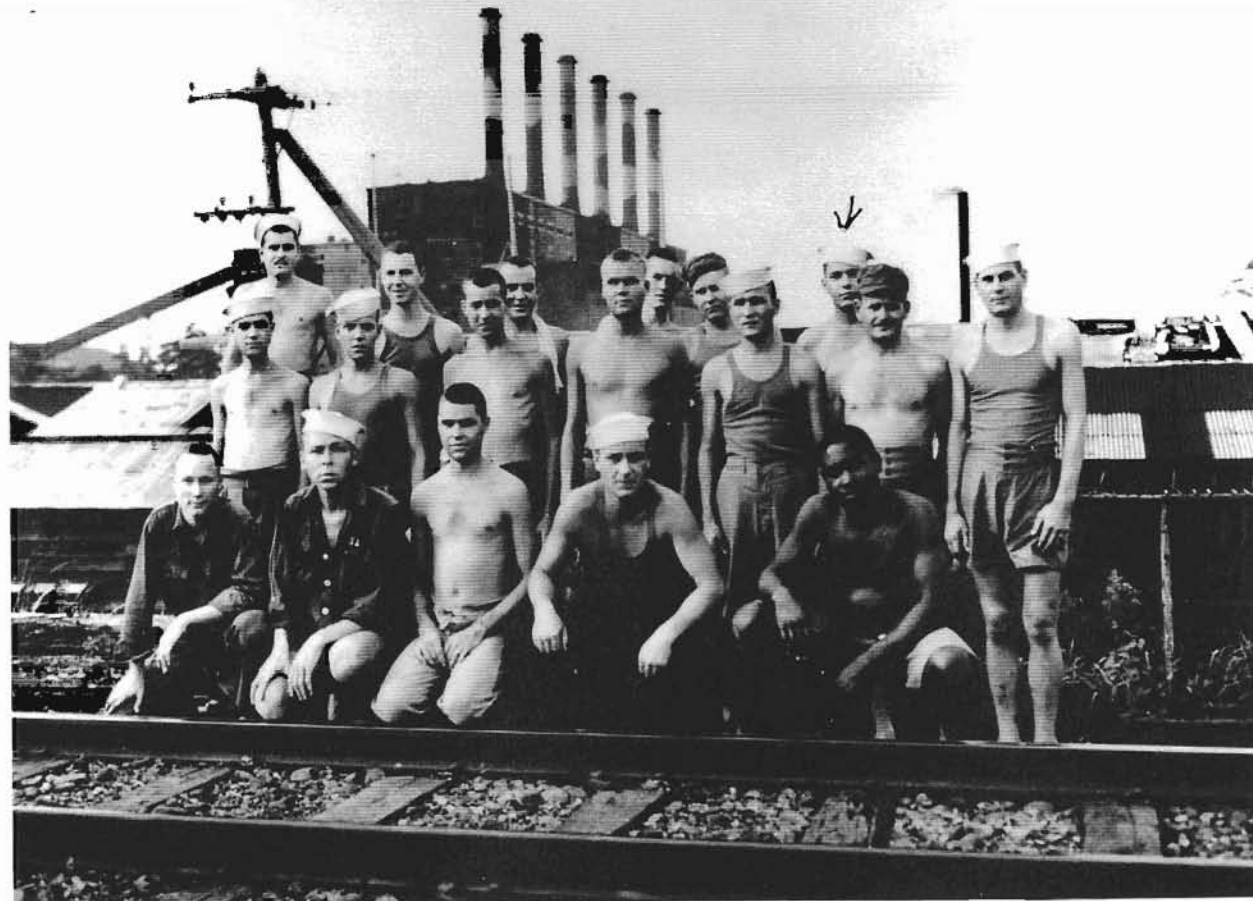
MANITOWOC, WISCONSIN, JUNE 17-18, 1983

The Annual Wisconsin State Meeting and Memorial Service will be held at Manitowoc, Wisconsin, June 17-18, 1983. There will be a "beer bust" and get-together on Friday night and then the impressive Memorial Service will be held Saturday afternoon. Saturday night there will be a dinner and dance. For additional info on motel reservation, etc. contact: Leonard Ernst, 2323 9th Place, Two Rivers, WI 54241, phone (414) 793-3835.

are told, have prayed for the crew thru the years since 1945 and not until recently have they learned that many of the crew had survived.

Communication has been re-established with the Convent School and those of us who can, have visited, and others are maintaining correspondence with the sisters.

Robert W. Palmer is the ex-yeoman of USS GRENADIER (SS 210) and currently resides in Medford, Oregon, where he publishes a monthly newsletter for the GRENADIER crew.



*we had all gained weight from  
a month of Air drops.*

U.S.S. Grenadier (SS 210) crew 15 September 1945 Prisoners of War at  
Fukuoka Camp No. 3 located northeast of Yawata between Tabata and Kokura.  
Camp in background and coal fired power plant.

Back Row: Dean B. Shoemaker, Ben H. Fulton, Randolph J. Garrison, Miner B. Pierce  
L - R John H. Gunderson, Bernard W. Witzke  
Center Row: William H. Keefe, Charles (n) Roskell, Henry W. Rutkowski, Rex R. Evans  
L - R Lyle L. Sawatzke, Charles H. Whitlock, Charles E. Johnson  
Front Row: Joseph A. Minton, John E. Simpson, Riley H. Keysor, Virgil A. Ouillette  
L - P Thomas J. Trigg



*Bernard W. Witzke  
winter of 1943/44  
Age: 21  
Height 6'2" weight 110 lbs*