

THESE LITTLE WARSHIPS PLAYED A VITAL ROLE DURING WORLD WAR TWO BY F.A. FREEMAN

t the stroke of midnight on 31 December 1951 at Newport, Rhode Island, I greeted the arrival of 1952 by ringing the bell, blowing the whistle, and sounding the siren aboard USS Blair (DE-147). Nearby ships did likewise.

I was an Ensign, one of 14 or so officers assigned to the ship, which had a total complement of 186. She was named in honor of Chief Machinist's Mate Eugen Blair, who was awarded the Silver Star posthumously for his brave actions when his ship was attacked and bombed by Japanese aircraft near Port Darwin, Australia, in mid-February 1942.

Blair, an Edsall-class destroyer escort, built at Orange, Texas, in

1943, had a standard displacement of 1200 tons, was 306 feet long and was powered by Fairbanks-Morse diesel engines. Its main armament consisted of three 3-inch/50 guns, one twin 40mm, eight 20mm guns, one triple 21-inch torpedo tubes, one depth charge (hedgehog) projector, and two depth charge tracks.

During World War II, Blair was principally engaged as an escort for troop convoys between the United States and Europe. After escorting the oiler USS Kennebec (AO-36) to Bermuda, the new destroyer escort sailed to Charleston, South Carolina, where, on 7 November, the ship's SA radar was removed and DAQ HFDF (High Frequency Direction Finding

- "Huff Duff") equipment was installed. Departing Charleston on 14 November, Blair reached New York on 16 November. After shifting to New London, Connecticut, for exercises, she returned to Staten Island, New York, briefly before departing New York in a convoy bound for Hampton

Roads, Virginia.

From that location, the ship helped to screen Convoy UGS-25 to North Africa. Relieved of escort duties on 11 December, she put into Casablanca the same day; but tarried only briefly before heading home with GUS-24 on 18 December. She escorted the Norfolk. Virginia, and Delaware sections of GUS-24 to Chesapeake Bay on New Year's Day 1944. Blair then sailed to New York for upkeep. After refresher training at Casco Bay, Maine, the warship returned to Chesapeake Bay to join a

"hunter killer"

Blair's first active duty sailing was to escort USS Kennebec (AO-36). England; and Cherbourg, France; also frequenting Portland, Portsmouth, and Plymouth, England. On several occasions, suspicious contacts prompted the ship to drop depth charges and make hedgehog attacks, but none of her targets proved to be a submarine. During her first cycle in 1945, she was detached from her convoy (UC-51B) to stand by the Army artillery transport Lakehurst (formerly APM-9) as she labored across the Atlantic, "having difficult with improperly secured locomotives."

force that embarked on its mission

on 24 January 1944. While crossing

the Atlantic, she stopped briefly at

Horta, in the Azores, to transfer her

commanding officer to USS Livermore

(DD-429) for medical treatment. He

re-embarked as the two ships were

catching up with their task group,

TG 21.14, which they rejoined on 15

February. The group reached North

For the next few months, Blair

crossed and re-crossed the Atlantic,

Kingdom, making a total of ten round

Northern Ireland; Liverpool,

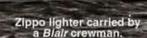
trip voyages between the east coast

of the USA and the ports of Derry,

screening convoys to the United

African waters five days later.

Blair's last convoy was UC-70A, which left the Welsh coast on 28 May and reached New York on 8 June. Proceeding down to Guantamo Bay for refresher training soon thereafter, Blair exercised in Cuban waters until 17 July, when she sailed for the Panama Canal Zone. After arriving at Coco Solo on 20



U.S.S.BLAIR DE-147

