

## Fond Memories of Our Unrestricted Line Brethren

*By CAPT David A. Higgins, SC, USN (Ret.)*

Thirty years ago, a copy of an official letter between a surface combatant commanding officer and the precursor to our present-day NAVSUP headquarters was making the rounds amongst the staff at the Naval Supply Corps School (NSCS). Written during the early days of WWII, the letter struck a particularly strong chord with me, and it's one that I'd like to reshare with the Supply Corps community.

At the time, I was a new LCDR serving as a NSCS Branch Head, instructing O3-O5 Supply Officers going back to sea as afloat department heads. I was also a line transferee, having served my first seven years of active duty as a former Surface Warfare Officer. The WWII letter was an acute reminder of the numerous interactions that I and all SUPPOs have with our Line community compatriots, and it proved an extremely useful tool in sparking leadership discussions amongst prospective afloat department heads. Because of my pedigree, I found myself on both sides of class arguments.

Of the almost 100 Navy officer designators, the interaction between the Supply Corps and the Unrestricted Line community is a singularly unique and complex dance. It's a brotherhood – close, longstanding, rich in tradition, yet filled with a competitive spirit. There isn't a Supply Officer, having served in an afloat wardroom, that doesn't have fantastic memories or tall tales, though not always pleasant. Yet even the occasional sour note mellows with time, to the point

that they become great sea stories such that even they bring a smile or laughter today.

The excerpted letter (opposite page) is from the Commanding Officer of the USS JOHN D. EDWARDS and dated 28 June 1942. It is a formal response to the Chief of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts, whom two months earlier had formally requested a rather terse and bureaucratic request for missing rations records as well as reminding the command of their responsibility to submit these monthly records within five days after the close of each reporting period. One could argue that the following response was written by a perturbed afloat Commanding Officer, but I prefer to think of it as an opportunity to poke some fun at our Supply Corps community. I even harbor hope that the ship's Supply Officer was crucially involved in the authoring of the letter.

Esprit de corps is defined as a sense of unity and of common interests and responsibilities, as developed among a group of persons closely associated in a task, cause, or enterprise. It's a simple definition, but it fittingly describes the professional and personal relationships that are developed between officers of the Supply Corps and Unrestricted Line communities. It doesn't take long for ship designs, weapon systems, or propulsion plants to change, but the bond between the Line world and our Supply Corps community is endless.

25 March 1942

From: The Commanding Officer, U.S.S. JOHN D. EDWARDS (DD216)  
To: The Chief of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts

Subject: Ration Records

Reference: (a) BuS&A ltr. L-10-5(1)/DD216/(ASA-S-25) dated 3-25-42.

1. The Commanding Officer is grieved and astonished to receive reference (a).
2. The Commanding Officer is fully cognizant of the instructions contained in Article 512-3(b) of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts Manual, and believes that his close compliance with the provisions outlined therein is the probable reason for non-receipt in the Bureau of the desired records.
3. On November 5, 1941, the ration record for the month of October 1941, of the USS JOHN D. EDWARDS was placed in the mails in Manila, Philippine Islands. The Commanding Officer has no knowledge of what happened to this correspondence, but reminds the Bureau that mail from Manila was subsequently irregular due to the outbreak of war, and suggests the possibility that, if it ever left Manila at all, it might have been placed on a vessel later captured by the Nipponese.
4. The ration record for November 1941, was placed in the mails on December 5, 1941, in Balikpapan, Dutch Borneo, N.E.I. The Commanding Officer has no definite knowledge as to the fate which befell this record, but respectfully reminds the Bureau that the Dutch of Balikpapan became actively engaged in war but two (2) days later, and very few mail steamers left that port before its capture. It is highly within the realm of probability that the industrious Dutch may have placed these records in the S.S. RUTH ALEXANDER of American registry, known to have been sunk on December 9, 1941.
5. The ration record for December 1941, was placed in the mails on January 5, 1942, at His Majesty's Naval Base, Singapore, Straights Settlements, Malaya. Likewise, in this case, the Commanding Officer has no knowledge of the fate of these records, but believes it possible that the rapid retreat of the Australian troops for four hundred miles down a jungle covered, swamp infested peninsula, with only four percent casualties, may have allowed the Japanese to arrive and besiege this citadel before the slower moving British Naval mail clerks were able to put these records aboard an outbound steamer.
6. The ration record of this vessel for January, 1942, was placed in the mails in Koepang, Timor, N.E.I. on February 5, 1942, and later transferred to a Royal Australian Air Force plane which took off in the general direction of Port Darwin, Australia. This plane failed to reach its destination and its fate is unknown, but the pilot's bullet-riddled body was later recovered from the sea and it is believed that the record was lost.
7. The ration record for February 1942, was placed in the mails on March 1, 1942, in Surabaya, Java, N.E.I. The Japanese captured Surabaya twenty-four (24) hours later, and on the afternoon of March 1, 1942, a direct hit with a one-thousand-pound bomb was made on the post office of that city - it is rumored. The Commanding Officer is at a loss to know whether these valuable records were destroyed by the bomb itself or survived to swell the files of useless paperwork kept by the avid Japanese.
8. Reports for March and subsequent months have been regularly forwarded from Australian ports, but usually ten (10) days or two (2) weeks late due to the difficulty encountered in waiting for prices to be furnished from Royal Australian Naval Victualling Yards who were under the impression that we were fighting and in the return they were supposed to be feeding. Information is desired from the Bureau if any of the above records were received prior to the end of the fiscal year. This vessel is forwarding corrected copies of all ration records commencing with February 1942 to claim ten cents per night ration authorized in BuS&A des. 281600 of January 1942, which reached this command on June 5, 1942.
9. Information is further requested from the Bureau if copies of ration records prior to February 1942 are desired, or if the Commanding Officer may continue to consider these as useless paper work inasmuch as there was so little food available that reminding commissary personnel of their past difficulties in their present state of high nervous tension seems scarcely desirable.

Signed

William Jefferson Giles, Jr. LT, USN  
Commanding Officer