

Uncle Ed's War

by JACKSON SELLERS

Edward J. Flannery lived quietly in Jersey City across the Hudson River from Manhattan. He was born there in 1919 and remained there in delicate health until he died in 1995 at age 75. A lifelong bachelor, he cared for his mother until she passed away, and he spoiled his nephew, Charlie Flannery, with wonderful boyhood presents. Medications kept him going, and he earned a modest living as a self-employed auto mechanic, teaching Charlie everything he knows to this day about cars. When he felt well enough, Ed played the piano, went deep-sea fishing and did some woodworking.

But once upon a time, in the midst of World War II, Ed Flannery was feeling strong and healthy. He joined the Navy and was assigned to the brand-new *USS Colahan DD-658* as a seaman 2nd class, and he went to war with her in January 1944 along with Ted Knudson, Ray Loughrige, Henry Gaffin, Bob McDonald and a bunch of other plank-owners. He lasted less than a year in the Pacific War. The ship's medical officer, Dr. Peter Dingman, diagnosed his neurological problems and transferred him in September to naval hospitals from which he was eventually discharged.

Nevertheless, in that short time aboard the *Colahan*, Ed Flannery made a contribution to the history of the warship. He kept a diary, hand-printing it neatly, filling 20 ledger pages, not day by day but subject by subject, on matters that interested him. Often he expanded on topics that deckhand Bill Greenough and ship's clerk Albert Sikorski — two other *Colahan* diarists — merely touched on. After the destroyer ran aground at Kwajalein, Sikorski typed in the ship's office: "We went on reef Feb. 1. We lay in lagoon and watched show." Ed devoted 445 words to the incident. As a lookout on the flying bridge, 24-year-old Ed had a ringside view of what was going on. He



Edward J. Flannery, *Colahan* Plank-owner

told how Capt. Donald Wilber rushed from his sea cabin and yelled angrily at OOD Edmond Trudeau: "What the hell did you do now!" He reported what divers found when they inspected the bottom of the *Colahan*: "The screws were just hubs, no blades, all gone. The sonar dome was gone, too, and the sonar compartment was flooded. We had a rip along the bottom side, about 40 feet long." The ship had to be towed 2,000 miles back to Pearl Harbor for repairs. Sikorski noted, "We fished for sharks," but Ed Flannery provided details: "I got a meathook and some spiced ham from the galley and dropped a cable with hook off the fantail.... We caught 7 sharks. We pulled them up on the fantail and stacked them up. Others stabbed them and pulled their teeth out. When we got the first one, blood flowed over the side, and a whole school of sharks were suddenly off the fantail. We had a ball."

Charlie Flannery, Ed's nephew, sent me his uncle's diary. It required very little editing. The full diary, entitled "Ed Flannery's 1943-44 Journal," resides on my website: <http://members.cox.net/jackson.sellers>. Maybe someday the *Colahan* will have her own Internet site, but right now, this is the best we can do.