



H I S T O R Y

of the

* U.S.S. PYRO (AE-1) *

Keel laid..... 9 August 1918
First floated..... 16 December 1919
Last commissioned..... 1 July 1939
Built at Puget Sound Navy Yard

10 October 1945.

S.J. REIFFEL,
Comdr., USNR,
Commanding

158130

This is the history of a ship of a type which carries on in danger twenty four hours a day yet seldom sees an enemy or collects a battle star. In her holds are stored as much explosives as were dropped on Berlin during any major raid. A single bomb, an accidental fire, carelessness or a mishap in cargo handling could mean utter destruction of all on board as well as serious damage to every ship in the vicinity.

An ammunition ship is seldom in on the initial phases of a landing; it nevertheless stays close behind the front line ready to replenish fighting ships in the minimum of time.

Twenty eight years ago the keel for the U.S.S. PYRO was laid in the Puget Sound Navy Yard, Bremerton, Washington; and three years later she was commissioned, the original ammunition ship of the United States Fleet. The early history of the ship was brief and uneventful. After only a few years of service the Pyro was decommissioned, and until the recommissioning in July of 1939 remained tied up in the Puget Sound Navy Yard.

From 1939 until the outbreak of the war the ship operated on a steady run between the West Coast, Cuba, and the East Coast with occasional trips to Honolulu. The usual cargo was ammunition, though miscellaneous deck cargo was at times included, consisting in one case of part of Admiral Byrd's equipment for his Antarctic Expedition, which was carried from Boston to the Panama Canal.

On December 7, 1941 the Pyro was moored at West Lock in Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attack occurred. No serious damage was suffered during the battle, although one bomb landed on the dock within ten feet of the ship's side and luckily did not set off the ammunition in the holds and on the dock. The Pyro was credited with damaging one enemy plane.

Four days later orders were received to proceed unescorted to San Francisco, before dawn on December 14th, while on the passage to the United States, two torpedoes were sighted passing close aboard from astern. A submarine surfaced shortly afterwards 600 yards astern and was taken under fire by the after 5" guns. No hit was scored, but the submarine quickly dived. The remainder of the trip was uneventful.

From this time until late in 1942 the Pyro was busy carrying ammunition to Pearl Harbor from the West Coast. In October of that year a quick trip was made to Alaska with a load of mines which were taken to Adak and issued directly to smaller ships to be planted immediately as a defense of that newly established base.

The turn of the year found the Pyro just two days out of Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides. She had left San Francisco, many days before and was proceeding unescorted with a full load of ammunition her speed greatly reduced by a lighter she was towing astern.

Upon arrival at Espiritu she became the primary ammunition

issue ship for the Third Fleet combat ships in the area and carried on this duty for the next eight months. Between the many battles in The Slot and elsewhere in the Solomon Islands it was to her that the majority of the combat ships returned to replenish their depleted supply of ammunition. When the Minneapolis and the Honolulu limped back in port with their bows shot away, they tied up to the Pyro until sufficient repairs could be made for a return to the mainland.

In September of 1943 the Pyro was returned to California where she underwent two months of repairs and overhaul at United Engineering in Alameda. She then proceeded to Brisbane to report to Commander Service Force, Seventh Fleet. Under this command the ship served the last twenty months of the war, operating exclusively in the Southwest Pacific and Philippine Waters. She was the only Seventh Fleet ammunition ship and serviced both United States and Australian units.

Until April of 1944 the Pyro was continually on the move transporting ammunition from Australia, New Caledonia and the New Hebrides to Milne Bay in New Guinea. During the Admiralty Islands and Hollandia Campaigns she shuttled between Finschhafen and Buna replenishing the combat vessels. She then advanced to Hollandia to support the Schouten Island landings.

For the month of August the ship was able to enjoy a bit of colder climate while undergoing repairs in Sydney, Australia; but the next month found her again in the forward area at anchor in the Schoutens, assisting in the operations in the Halmaheras.

When the Leyte landing approached, the base of operations was changed to Hollandia, where a large portion of the invasion fleet was assembled. Damage to the ship's side was incurred here during stormy weather, and early in November, when the Pyro's services were no longer urgently needed, she sailed to Manus Island in the Admiralty group, for emergency repairs and a new load of ammunition.

Repaired and reloaded the Pyro returned to Hollandia for a brief stop shortly after Thanksgiving and then on December 19, 1944 set forth in convoy for the Philippine Islands. Christmas Day found the ship off Mindanao Island approaching Leyte Gulf. Any hopes of a pleasant Yuletide were broken when in the early afternoon an enemy torpedo bomber was sighted circling the convoy at a distance. It retired temporarily, but at dusk the visitor was back. One torpedo was dropped. The concussion of an underwater explosion was felt, but none of the ships in the convoy were damaged. The Pyro withheld her fire, though several LST's in the left hand column opened up with 20MM and 40MM with no hits.

Anchor was dropped in Leyte Gulf on December 26, 1944. During the next two months the ship was at General Quarters because of enemy planes an average of twice a night, with a maximum of seven alerts in one evening. Although these planes on occasions could be heard directly overhead, all attacks were concentrated on the air strips and no bombs were dropped in the vicinity of the Pyro.

Late in March the ship moved on to Mindoro, then Zamboango and finally Subic Bay staying approximately two months in each port. The only excitement during this period was in Zamboango where an

occasional air alert was incurred and where a submarine unsuccessfully tried to slip into the harbor in late May.

On August 4, 1945 the Pyro departed from Subic Bay en route to the Admiralty Islands for major repairs and overhaul. It was just after arrival at this destination that the Japanese Government announced acceptance of the surrender terms of the United Nations.

Since recommissioning the Pyro has been commanded by Captain R.S. Haggart USN., Commander A.R. Early, USN., (now Captain) Commander H.P. Burnett, USN., (now Captain), Captain N. Vytlačil, USN, Captain R.L. Boller, USN., Commander A.B. Dickie, USN., and Commander S.J. Reiffel, USNR., the present commanding officer.