

Ray Toler has made several contributions to the special feature section of our newsletter. In this month of honoring our nation's war veterans, it is most appropriate to learn of a bit more of Bronze Star recipient Ray's life experience and knowledge. See Tired Iron Newsletter, Vol. VIII, Issue 4, for Ray's original biography.

THE DELTA QUEEN

By Ray Toler

In early 1945 I graduated from the U. S. Army Signal Corps Officer Candidate School, Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, and was assigned to a thirteen weeks course in radio transmitter operation at Hicksville, Long Island, New York. Upon completion of that course, I was assigned to an army base in Marysville, California. After a few days there, I was transported by truck to a river steamer for a ride down the Feather River and Sacramento River to a port of embarkation at Oakland, California.

The boat was painted battleship gray, and it carried a U.S. Navy alphanumeric designation (YHB-7/YFB) rather than a name. At Oakland I boarded a ship that took me to the Philippines for a nineteen month tour of duty.

After the war I completed my Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering (BSEE) degree at the University of Arkansas and took a job with Arkansas Power and Light Company at Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

In November 1971, I booked passage on the Delta Queen steamboat for a five day trip from Memphis, Tennessee, to New Orleans, Louisiana. As I boarded at Memphis, I had a strange feeling of *deja vu*. I later learned the Delta Queen had, indeed, served as a troop carrier in World War II on the Sacramento River.

As I walked about, I noticed the gray paint had been supplanted by gleaming white. The gray paint was gone from the deck revealing the teak. She now bore a name instead of a number. I was particularly impressed with the Tiffany stained glass ceiling over the grand staircase. It was painted over on my first trip.

During the five day trip to New Orleans, I had an opportunity to visit the engine room which I found fascinating. The engine was of the compound type. The starboard high pressure cylinder was twenty-six inches in diameter while the port low pressure cylinder was fifty-two inches. Stroke was ten feet. The Pitman arms were fabricated of wood. Here are some of the statistics on the Delta Queen:

Length 250' Width 57' Depth 12'

Two water tube boilers, oil fired

Stern wheel diameter 28' width 19'

Wheel shaft and cranks forged at the Krupp plant in Germany. Machined in San Francisco

One smokestack divided into two sections below

Four rudders

Machinery by Denny's, Dumbarton, Scotland

Hull (galvanized iron) by Denny's, Glasgow, assembled, knocked down and shipped to Stockton, California for final assembly about 1925.

In 1947 the Delta Queen was bought by Greene Line Steamers, towed through the Panama Canal and up the Mississippi River and the Ohio River to Cincinnati, Ohio, where she was refitted for a career masquerading as a Mississippi sternwheeler, an ironic fate for a vessel designed and built in Scotland.

Today the Delta Queen is docked ignobly at Chattanooga, Tennessee, in service as a three star floating hotel (<http://www.deltaqueenhotel.net/>). There is some effort afoot to get the Queen moving again, but the prognosis is not encouraging.

*Photos by Ray Toler



Delta Queen at Vicksburg, Mississippi



Good view of Pitman arms