

Ship of the Year, 1961 **USS SOMERS (DD-947)**

Gets OUR NAVY Second Annual Award



What is the magic that touches a name, a ship, its Commanding Officer, its crew, their efforts, and their accomplishments? Why is it that the name Lt. Richard Somers, III, USN, has been given to six ships in succession, and why after more than 150 years is the latest USS SOMERS (DD-947), the sixth of the lot, winning the love, respect and admiration of its crew as well as those who come into contact with one of the outstanding destroyers of our times?

The men who sail in Somers comprise a cross-section of experience and ability. But there is something special about the present crew after two years of living and working together—a spirit of dedication to their ship and to each other that has produced one of the finest teams afloat.

Perhaps it was the achievement of Cdr Edward J. Cummings, Jr., who assumed command of Somers 5 April 1959 when the general purpose destroyer was commissioned. Described as a superior Commanding Officer, Cdr Cummings provided the inspired leadership that permitted the dedication and will to serve in his men.

Cdr Wayne D. Surfact, Somers' second and present CO, aware of his predecessor's achievements, continues to lead his crew in outstanding fashion, following a goal commonly agreed to by every man in the ship. With weap-

on systems and tactics being as complex as they are in our modern Navy, and perhaps demanding consistently excellent teamwork and professional skill on the part of all, it is a small wonder that skipper and crew of Somers are so dedicated, and have set so high a goal.

The goal of each and practically everyone of the crew did not stop there, nor did they rest upon their hard-won laurels. Having a ship riding high and mighty, giving and obtaining

outstanding performance in the various fields of naval competition through cooperative efforts, the crew has also racked up a high score on a personal level.

The personal level includes an enthusiastic approach to self-education, participation in training programs, and the re-enlistment rate of the men, evidencing their pride and honor in being part and parcel of one of the Navy's top Gunboats.

During the calendar year 1961, Somers men have applied for 140 courses required for advancement in rate and 42 courses to increase their technical knowledge in special fields. At the same time 38 others enrolled in correspondence courses with USAF, with eleven of these men completing high school credits with the goal of high school diplomas in sight.

Sail 39 other Somers men took General Education Development Tests at both the high school and college levels during 1961, with almost three-fifths actually passing the test. Since many states will award high school diplomas to Armed Forces personnel successfully completing GED tests, two of the crew got theirs through the program.

In addition to individual courses two group study classes were organized using USAFI materials. Six were enrolled in a conversational Japanese course



Cdr Edward J. Cummings, Jr., SOMERS' first trained leader



R. L. Beterens, SM2, shows Wilbur W. Pardo, SN, Claude J. Moore, SM2SN, and James T. Kiermas, SM3, how to repair a signal light.

while nine others developed their practical English usage.

The Somers re-education rate shows a labor of love. In 1960 its men hit an envious average of 65 per cent in against CRUDESPEC's average of 32 per cent, and in 1961 Somers men attained a higher score with a new average of 69 per cent against CRUDESPEC's 27 per cent.

In terms of advancements in ratings, the Somers men in 1960 scored an average of 71 per cent and bettered it by two, making the 1961 average 73 per cent.

Both the educational endeavors and the high re-education rates on the part of Somers men clearly are the best votes of confidence that a Commanding Officer can wish for. This becomes the best guaranty that our country is well and fully served by that ship.

One of the unexpected Somers missions occurred last August after she had received a distress signal from the M. V. Barco, a 105-ton vessel which



In CIC, Carl F. Houbler, RDSN, learns how to do a maneuvering board problem from Stephen W. Thayer, RDE, while Alfred J. Thorslund, RDI, checks the solution.

Somers had quite a busy day when she rescued forty seven passengers, mostly women and children.

While rescue operations throughout the world are indulged in by the Navy in times of distress, this one was accomplished in extremely rough weather. A life raft from the Somers, carrying a 8-man rescue team, leaving a roaring surf, landed near the stranded and stricken motor vessel.

The feat of the rescue party was described as "all the more remarkable in that surf conditions were so bad that just prior to their successful effort, a motor whaleboat had been captured" by the rough seas. The Seventh Fleet destroyer had been called to the scene by an SOS message. A Merlin seaglass was first to spot the Barco and direct Somers to the area.

With the Navy's efforts all passengers escaped injury and all were removed from the ship with the exception of the Master and one crewman who elected to stay aboard and ride



St. F. Watson, MHC, describes engine room equipment to R. L. Sutton, MM1; D. B. Fushion, MM3; T. M. Olson, MM3; and J. A. Pierce, MM1 (l to r).

had run aground on a rock about one-hundred miles south of Manila. OUR NAVY reported the rescue, stating that



G. C. Jeffries, RMI, instructs M. E. Tates, SN, in the proper method to "break" the anchor chain on the forecath.



Back on Mount 32, H. F. Thompson, GMGI, showing correct way to check a recoil cylinder on 3 inch gun mount to W. C. Hibbard, GMGSN, L. L. Abrams, GMC3, and W. R. Tsai, GMG3.



In Summary Office, E. E. Poykorski, SKCM, explains lost control of *U-10* to T. C. Harwood, SN, R. B. Adams, SK2, and F. Valenzuela, SK1.



On occasion, Lt. C. James instructs G. L. Grossenbacher, SA, and O. G. McQuinn, SA, in proper way to make "sinking".

out the storm in order to protect the owner's rights in case of salvage claims.

The skipper and crew of the *Somers* were commended for their courage and seamanship by Capt. T. S. King, Jr., who is Command'g'vc.

Here are some additional interesting features about the *Somers'* name and the five previous ships named *Somers*.

Lt. Richard Somers, born at Somers Point, N. J., in 1778, received his warrant as midshipman when he was twenty. During the Tripolitan War he was promoted to Master Commandant in 1804, and commanded one of the gun boat divisions in the many attacks on the naval forces of Tripoli. One night intrepidly under Somers and a crew of volunteers, engaged in a daring maneuver, and all perished when the ship was blown up.

The first *Somers*, originally the merchant schooner *Callisto*, was converted into a ship-of-war in 1812. She operated with Perry's Squadron on Lake Erie and Lake Huron, and took part in the capture of the British Squadron September 1815, but eleven months later was captured by the enemy.

The second *Somers*, US Brig *Somers*, operated on the East Coast of the United States and in the West Indies until May, 1846. She also was actively engaged on the East Coast of Mexico, the last days being on blockade duty off Vera Cruz. During December 1846 Brig *Somers* was captured and lost in a sudden squall, and of her crew of 78 men, thirty nine were lost.

The third, U.S. Torpedo Boat *Somers*, was built in Germany during the 1880's. After completion the torpedo boat sailed for Weymouth, England, on route to the United States. However, due to her poor material condition she was laid up in England until April 1890, then transported to the

New York Navy Yard aboard the SS Manhattan.

She underwent overhaul and repair; was recommissioned in 1899, placed out of commission in 1902, leased to the Naval Militia of the State of Maryland in 1900, she was returned to the Norfolk Navy Yard in 1914. Torpedo Boat *Somers* became Coast Torpedo Boat Number 9 during 1918 and almost a year later again was placed out of commission, and sold July 1920.

The fourth *Somers* (DD 301) was commissioned at the West Coast Mare Island Navy Yard June 1920 and was assigned to Destroyer Division 35. She participated in Fleet maneuvers and cruises in the Caribbean. In 1925 the destroyer set out for Pearl Harbor for maneuvers in the Hawaiian operating area. She also cruised to Samoa, Australia, New Zealand, returning to Pearl Harbor before resuming local operations at San Diego.

After being placed out of commission, DD-301's name was stricken from the Navy List in 1930, and in accordance with the London Treaty for Limitation and Reduction of Naval Armaments was scrapped and sold in 1931.

The fifth *Somers* (DD-381) was launched March 1937, under the sponsorship of Marie and Suzanne Somers, distant cousins of the late Lt. Somers. Commissioned in New York, her operations kept her in the East Coast area of the United States.

Her duty was interrupted when she sailed to Portsmouth, England, where she received a commission of gold from the Bank of England for delivery to the Federal Reserve Depository at New York. Maybe it was at this time that the *Somers* name and ships and crews were "gilded."

During November 1941, *Somers* together with *Onasha* sighted a vessel on an evasive course, with the name "Wilhelm, Philadelphia" on her stern.

flying American colors. After receiving an unsatisfactory answer to her signals, a boarding party was called.

By now the mystery vessel hoisted an international flag signal "Fox Mill" (I am sinking, send boats for passengers and crew). As the boarding party approached the leeward boats of the vessel, one of the crew stated "This is a German ship and she is sinking." Explosives were heard detonating within the German freighter, named *Odenwald*.

The boarding party, armed with pistols and automatic weapons, clambered up her side for inspection. They found one generator in operation, with certain water-tight doors, valves and man-holes opened. Sea water had invaded the after part of *Odenwald*, and a *Somers* diver, sent down to determine the cause of leakage was recalled when recovered by sharks.

However, the boarding party made *Odenwald* unsavable and saved her cargo, overcoming difficulties thought at the time insurmountable by *Odenwald's* own crew. Her German master was of the opinion that she would sink in twenty minutes.

A salvage crew from *Onasha* rescued *Odenwald* and for the next eleven days she steamed for Port of Spain, Trinidad, under escort of *Somers* and *Onasha*. *Odenwald* was then taken to San Juan, Puerto Rico. Her value including cargo, amounted to almost \$3,000,000, and to the men who effected and aided her salvage, the U.S. District Court for Puerto Rico made awards that totaled almost \$200,000.

Each member of the *Somers* and *Onasha*, who were not aboard *Odenwald*, got two months' pay and allowances which totaled more than half of the awards, a net \$124,211.68.

In May 1945 *Somers* returned from England on her last voyage and two

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years later was sold DD-381, the year before, had earned two battle stars for operations in the invasion of Normandy and the invasion of Southern France.

The sixth and present *Somers*, DD-947, was the last of the Forrest Sherman class destroyers. A general purpose destroyer, her mission is to operate effectively with any of several types of naval forces engaged in striking enemy naval and land targets, hunting and killing enemy submarines, or supporting an amphibious assault against enemy beaches.

Also, she may be summoned to protect convoys or support ships against submarine and air attack. To do this her crew must be equally skilled in the techniques and weaponry of anti-submarine warfare, anti-air warfare, and amphibious warfare.

The latest *Somers* after her shakedown cruise proceeded to her first European port, Copenhagen, Denmark, and visited other European ports. While at Kiel, Germany, *Somers* represented the U. S. Navy during "Kiel Week", a yearly festival of that port.

Leaving Portsmouth, the ship stopped at Bermuda, en route to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, then transited the Panama Canal, heading for San Diego. She left San Diego February 1960 on her first WESTPAC deployment, arriving in Yokosuka, Japan, via Pearl Harbor. From there until late April *Somers* was engaged in routine Seventh Fleet Operations.

She then participated in Exercise SEALION, one of the most comprehensive combined maritime exercises to be conducted by SEATO up to that time. Forces of Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Britain also participated in SEALION, with the purpose of improving overall coordination and cooperation among the forces of these nations.

After the exercise, the ship departed Singapore and cruised south in what is described as "King Neptune's" domain, the Equator, and his "Trusty Shallocks" initiated all of the ship's "Follies" into the hazardous Ancient Order of the Deep.

The city of Saipon, Viet Nam, seldom visited by American warships, proved to be a most fascinating and cordial port. Some members of the crew took a 125-mile trip to the very primitive village of Hiao to distribute CAKE packages to a tribe of natives. Also, clothes obtained from a clothing drive held aboard *Somers* were given to the Ban San Leprosarium which had

recently been raided by Communist guerrillas who had taken most of the patients possessions.

In recognition of her competitive efforts during the fiscal year 1960 *Somers* was awarded Squadron "E" for DESRON 5, Operations "E"; Communications "C"; AGO-Submarine Warfare "A"; Individual Casework "E's", four awards, and COMCRUDESPAC Supply Efficiency Award.

In addition to these awards, *Somers* was nominated by Commander Center-Destroyer Force, U. S. Pacific Fleet and selected by the Chief of Naval Operations as the outstanding destroyer of the U. S. Pacific Fleet for the 1960 Marjorie Starnett Battleship Award for winning the destroyer anti-type battle efficiency competition and for her overall performance.

The *Somers* took part in the Second Annual Pil-An Fiesta at Subic Bay to further Philippine and American mutual relations. She visited a number of other Western Pacific ports during her first deployment.

During September and October 1960, she participated in the large anti-air warfare exercise Stormpleck conducted by Commander First Fleet off the coast of California.

Cdr Surface, USN, took over command of the *Somers* 28 October 1960, relieving Cdr Cummings, USN. Aware of the tremendous task ahead of him, aware of the high standards and many accomplishments his predecessor had set and obtained for *Somers*, Cdr Surface carried on to further the traditions, and glory, instilling and inspiring his men to the dominant spirit of *Somers*, the new skipper and his crew forged ahead to win additional honors.

While *Somers* 6060 was spent in type training exercises off San Diego and in preparation for its next deployments by the end of the year, *Somers* again was selected for 1961 by the CNO as the outstanding destroyer of the U.S. Pacific Fleet for the Marjorie Starnett award for the second consecutive year. For her other competitive efforts, during fiscal 1961, *Somers* was awarded for the second consecutive time all of the honors and awards she received year before.

While facts and figures are impressive, one also must be impressed and realize that all of this could not happen without direction, and without each and every member of the crew doing his utmost and then some! It could not happen without that intangible something, sometimes called "inspiration."

Regarding her role in the Navy, *Somers*, as a general purpose destroyer, is charged with the broad spectrum of task.

ALAMEDA COUNTY

Converted WWII LST - a unique ship

Operating in the Mediterranean with the Sixth Fleet is a most unusual ship—the USS ALAMEDA COUNTY (AVP-8). This converted WWII LST is the only ship of her kind. Her job is to quickly replace old, abandoned airfields along the African coast.

The Advanced Aviation Base ship and her crew of 108 can make ready an old air strip, whenever the emergency arises. Even the ones unused since the arrival of Montgomery and Rommel gurgled across the desert in 1943, can be made ready in less than 24 hours.

In a typical operation the Alameda cranes up on the beach, lowers her ramp, and disposes a fleet of bulldozers, trucks and fuel tankers. Her specially trained crew then proceeds to the site of the old runway, clears the debris, sets up a portable generator to provide power for landing lights, and erects a control tower.

When planes begin arriving, the pilots are fuel, their planes are checked and refueled, and, after a hot up-to-the-minute briefing, sent on their way one more—all with the same swiftness and skill of a pit stop at Indianapolis on Memorial Day.

The Alameda herself, if the situation permits, is prepared to serve as a floating hotel with accommodations for some 700. There are also holds a large sick bay, equipped with an operating room, aviation fuel tanks with pipeline systems for shore use, a 30-ton crane to lift cargo and an elevator that works like a carrier plane hoist.

The Alameda is a well-qualified member of the little known Navy—OUR NAVY salutes a unique ship with a vital job.

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From Commanding Officer to Division Officer, to Petty Officer, to seaman, the *Somers* radiates confidence. Not just the personal confidence in each man's ability to do his job, but confidence that their superiors are going to do their jobs properly, on time, and for the ship.

OUR NAVY, with great pride in the United States Navy, and at this time, for this particular ship—USS *Somers* DD-947—is proud of the opportunity to select USS *Somers* DD-947 as OUR NAVY'S Second Annual Ship of the Year.

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