

Deliverance at Kula Gulf

By Vane Scott

When the RADFORD Association was planning their second national reunion in 1993, it was to be held in Chicago and it was also to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Battle of Kula Gulf and the dramatic rescue of the HELENA CL50 survivors. It ranks with the most heroic rescues of any war.



Before my wife and I went to Chicago for the event, I wanted to have created a dramatic piece of artwork, that would depict the rescue in such a way as to capture the moment. The sheer terror, excitement, urgency, and intense human connection.

I had it all pictured in my mind.

I had hopes of a famous artist doing the piece just for us. I tried to contact the famed World Olympics artist but he was too busy. I tried my son who is a professional artist and teaches art. All were too busy to take on the project and there was just not enough time. My wife told me I was running out of time; I would have to do it myself

I have been an artist during all of my memory but I didn't consider myself up to the task for this project because I considered it beyond my capabilities and besides the human hand is the toughest part of the anatomy to reproduce. My oldest son and I both attended the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. He graduated. I didn't.

We were down to about 10 days left before we would leave for Chicago. I went up to my studio. Approached my drawing board and began to make crude sketches of the idea I had pictured in my mind. I went through all my files looking for hands that were just right. Nothing was suitable. I went to the library and thumbed through many books and magazines but to no avail.

Finally, in desperation, I put my elbow on the drawing board, raised my one hand up limply, like I was in the water needing to be rescued. I grabbed that wrist with my other hand and studied for a while. I could see the effect I wanted but how do I put it on paper when I've got one hand grasping the other wrist. I couldn't draw it by holding a pencil in my teeth.

While holding up my left hand I began to sketch it more in detail with my right hand. Then I would grab my wrist again and try to remember what I saw while I sketched that. Finally, it started to take shape. After about two hours it was what I wanted.

Using an overlay sheet I drew it again and again to work in more details till finally I did the ink version. We rushed it to the printers and got the reunion's Saturday night banquet program covers printed. Packed and we left for Chicago,

Chicago was the right location to have the reunion that year because in 1944 the CBS Radio network had broadcast a re-enactment of the battle and rescue from Chicago. The program, "*First Line*" was every Thursday night and it was sponsored by the Wrigley Co. It featured exciting stories from the war fronts all over the world.

As it turned out, our wonderful friend Abigail Van Buren was there Along with the Vice President of the Wrigley Co. to help us commemorate that 50th Anniversary. Earlier she had told our story in her nationally syndicated column and helped us find 12 sons of the survivors that had named their sons Radford after the ship that had saved them.

There were several HELENA survivors and four of the sons in attendance at the banquet. It was a very emotional evening with the survivors being able to hug and shake hands and thank the men that had saved them 50 years before.

Now, over three years later we are going to open our own museum in Radford, VA and this piece of art will be done as a life size sculpture to be displayed there.

The original artwork was displayed earlier in the Temperance Tavern Museum in Newcomerstown, OH where my wife Barbara is president of the Historical Society. The museum features the effects of Denton True "CY"

Young, the great baseball pitcher and Woody Hayes, famous Big Ten coach of Ohio State - both natives of Newcomerstown.

The artwork was hung as part of a large military display commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the end of World War II. It caught the eye of Marjorie Hanson Bean, a former native of Newcomerstown and very fine sculptress from Palin Beach Gardens, Florida. She asked me if she could do the dramatic scene as a sculpture. "Of course I was elated and gave her the go ahead.

She said she would need about 10 or 12 snapshots of real people grasping the hand to arm pose. The photos would need to be done in a 360 degree circle to capture all angles. It was my choice or the models.

This was in 1995 and our annual reunion was coming up in Reno and I knew there would be survivors there to use as one of the models. During that reunion I asked two men I knew that were involved in the rescue, my good friend Marty O'Brien from the RADFORD and Ruby Tolvin, a survivor from the HELENA that was rescued by RADFORD crew.

This was going to be a very dynamic piece to try and capture the moment of a drowning sailor being snatched from his watery grave at the last possible moment.

Martin J. O'Brien served on RADFORD as an Electrician in 1942-44. He is from Troy, NY and a retired Professor from Hudson Valley College. He is not a big framed man. He would be the rescuer because he really was there and participated.

The man in the water is Rubin "Ruby" Tolvin of Union, NJ and survivor from the HELENA that was rescued by the RADFORD crew. He is a large man and I'm sure there is no way Marty could pull him up over the side of a destroyer without an awful lot of adrenalin going. Ruby survived that ordeal only to be assigned to another ship and have it shot out from under him. He barely survived that sinking due to serious burns and was actually put in a body bag when someone noticed he was not dead. He was hospitalized for over a year after the war.

I wanted the rescuer's hand and arm to be a little smaller than the man in the water to show that even a small, young man can rise to the occasion

and do what has to be done. This man in the water has a family that loves him and wants him to come home when the war is over.

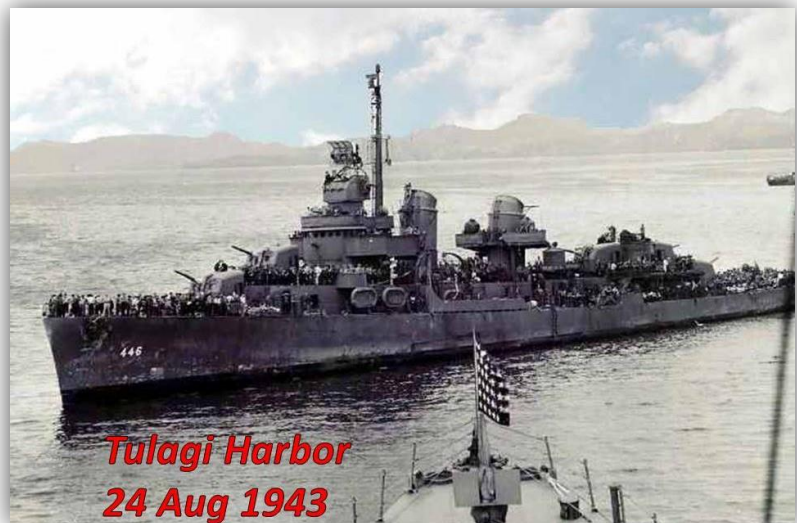
The man in the water is large, muscular and heavy. He is totally exhausted and at the brink of his existence. He has been struggling in the water for a long time. His eyes have swollen shut and he is inundated with the heavy oil and has begun to slip beneath the surface never to be seen again.

At the last second, a young sailor sees the hand come up out of the water reaching for the net in a last desperate attempt at life. The small, young sailor reaches between the lifelines and stretches to his small body's limit to reach the hand. He makes a grab but the oil is slippery and he can't hold him. Finally, with one last burst of adrenalin he grabs it again and begins to pull him toward safety.

Other sailors come and join the task. Finally, the almost drowned sailor is on the deck and the relative safety of a destroyer getting ready to go back into battle again but this time with hundreds of survivors on her deck. The rescued man thinks after all that he may still die but this time on the RADFORD. Who could rescue him now?

The RADFORD breaks away and lunges back into the battle of two small ships against the *Tokyo Express*. Three times she goes back, while shooting the guns and torpedoes over the heads of these survivors. Many of them helped pass the ammunition.

RADFORD along with the NICHOLAS were successful in fighting them off. They sunk two destroyers and a cruiser that night while rescuing over 700 men of the ill-fated HELENA CL50. Both ships were awarded the highest honor a ship can receive, the Presidential Unit Citation.



This piece of art is dedicated to the memory of all those men that took part in that heroic rescue on the night of July 5-6, 1943.

Deliverance

