

YOU HAVE THE HONORS

M. Dick Van Orden, Ensign U.S.N.

Replenishment day was always a peaceful time during World War II in the Pacific; a short respite when crews could relax—beyond the range of Japanese aircraft—and receive the badly needed supplies of food, ammunition, and fuel (B, B, and B—beans, bullets, and black oil) needed to continue the war against Japan. Replenishment ships steamed slowly along and passed fuel and various needed items by “highline” to the ships of Task Force 38. On one quiet replenishment day, the Commanding Officer of the aircraft carrier USS *Independence* (CVL 22) had a bit of a prank in mind. Captain E. C. Ewan, USN (Class of 1921 at the U.S. Naval Academy, and captain of that year’s varsity football team), was a proud leader—a capable skipper who won the Navy Cross in recognition of the warfighting of his ship and aircraft. He was a fun-loving, happy-go-lucky skipper who ran a “happy ship” that did a good job of protecting the Fleet as the Navy’s first night-fighter carrier.

One of our officers was LCDR A. J. (Jack) Westland, a reservist on active duty, who was the Air Combat Intelligence Officer. Jack had been a professional golfer before the war, and became a tour-professional after the war. Naturally, he boarded the ship with a full bag of clubs. On a quiet day, he could sometimes be seen practicing his swing on the flight deck, and he even drove a few practice balls into the Pacific—until he ran short of golf balls. On one leisurely day, Jack had interrupted his stroll along the flight deck to watch the contest between the gunner’s mates and bos’n’s mates who were attempting to get a line over to an approaching destroyer. The gunner’s mates used a line-throwing gun with a heavy projectile to carry a cotton “whiteline” to the destroyer so that heavier lines could be carried across for transferring messages, movies, mail, and other items between ships. The bos’n’s mates used the traditional “heaving line,” with a weighted “monkey’s fist” thrown by armpower, to do the same job.

On this occasion, however, the line throwing gun’s whiteline tangled, and failed to reach the destroyer on several attempts. Heaving lines were still out of range. Jack was heard to remark in disgust, “That’s disgraceful! Why, I could hit a

seven-iron that far!” His off-hand remark was soon reported with to the Captain, who gleefully plotted his strategy. As the next destroyer approached with its usual blinker message:

HAVE IMPORTANT MAIL FOR YOU x CAN YOU SPARE 25
GALLONS OF ICE CREAM BT

The carriers had “ice cream machines,” (too bulky to be carried by destroyers) that mixed water with powdered milk, sugar, and flavoring to produce a frozen ice cream-like dessert that was beloved by sailors. The *Indy* skipper responded to the destroyer’s message with:

50 GALLONS IF YOU MAKE SMART APPROACH TO
EXACTLY 100 YARDS MY STARBOARD SIDE EVEN WITH
ISLAND BT

The DD seemed to straighten up and settle down to an exacting approach as her Captain himself took the conn. Captain Ewan then took the 1-MC public address mike and made an announcement throughout the *Independence*:

*“Now hear this. This is the Captain speaking. Commander Westland please report to the starboard side of the flight deck, just forward of the island. . .
... AND BRING YOUR DRIVER!”*

At this unusual announcement, the curiosity of the *Independence* crew was thoroughly aroused, and everyone not otherwise occupied poured out onto the flight deck to see what was up. Soon Jack Westland appeared—puzzled expression on his face and fine persimmon driver in hand. When he arrived forward of the island, the Captain motioned to him from the open bridge to approach the edge of the flight deck where—teed up on a wooden tee driven into the crack between two teak flight-deck planks—there was a bright white golf ball fitted with a screw-eye to which was fastened the bitter end of the whiteline neatly coiled on deck. A grinning gunner’s mate pointed toward the ball and the Skipper shouted down from the open bridge,

“JACK, YOU HAVE THE HONORS!”

By this time the destroyer was in position and was keeping station exactly 100 yards away, her bridge even with the island. Her crew, alerted to some unusual goings-on, occupied most of her topside spaces and stared curiously at the crowded flight deck with the khaki-clad officer on the edge of the flight deck, brandishing a golf club. Jack addressed the ball, waggled his driver a time or two, and gave the ball a mighty whack. The line payed out beautifully for about 50 yards, then began to tangle, and ended up falling in a long white arc just short of the DD's port side.

A great cheer went up from the flight deck—undoubtedly led by the gunner's mates and bosun's mates. Another ball was quickly teed up and Jack connected with another good drive—straight and true. This time the ball with white line attached arched gracefully over the destroyer's foredeck, and as the line tended aft it was caught by the destroyer's spectators on the number two gun mount.

The destroyer's crew led the cheers, amplified by similar cheering from the *Indy*. Soon a double ration of ice cream was passed, and the DD returned to her position in the formation, with her crew wondering if the U.S. Navy had found a new secret weapon to replace standard-issue line-throwing guns. Captain Ewan, smiling broadly, gave LCDR Westland a congratulatory salute. Jack smiled back, dusted off his driver, and kissed its face in appreciation.