

Excerpts from the Charles Hall Diaries

Charles Hall diaries, 1942-1944

A copy of the diaries can be found at the Collinsville Public Library.

Original diary location: Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Ala.

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Historical Note: Charles Hall was born ca. 1918 in Collinsville, DeKalb Co., Ala. He served in the submarines Grouper, Peto, and Logger Head in World War II, and after that conflict ended, returned to Collinsville as a banker. He died there on 1977 Oct. 29.

Scope and Content Note: Diaries, 1942 Sept. 10 - 1943 Nov. 24 and 1943 Nov. 23 - 1944 June 29, in which Hall detailed his experiences daily, discussing routine matters such as the bad food, watches, the weather, and daily chores. He is especially clear on resentment toward the officers and members of the merchant marine on the ship by all the enlisted men, and he gives detailed accounts of shore leaves, especially in Canberra, Australia, and of ship and aircraft movement in the South Pacific Ocean. There are also detailed accounts of the submarine attacking Japanese shipping, of being hunted by Japanese destroyers, and of rescuing pilots at sea.

September 18, 1942

Same difference as yesterday. Lecture on carrying or wearing Mae Wests. As if we could ever make it out of the lake of flaming gasoline which would result in the event of our being torpedoed.

September 19, 1942

Just another day. Emergency drills. Sunbathing galore. Blistered backs and burned bellies also galore, if not galorer.

September 20, 1942

Spent the day feeling sorry for myself. Read and reread last letters from The Little Corporal, Mrs H. and Mah Honey. The drain pipe in the head became clogged and the damn(?) refuse ran all over the deck. The odor reminded me of Bartlett's barn which only made me more homesick.

September 29, 1942

Forgot to say we rounded one of the Tonga(?) group sometime ago. The island was probably Tonga Taboo. We also passed the Fiji's. Probably one of the few Phi Gams to ever near the true Fiji Home. I wish I were down at the house singing "For tonight we'll Fiji's be, for tonight we'll Fiji's be" -----

October 2, 1942

Sailed into Santos. What a base. Merchant ships, tankers, aircraft tender, cruisers, cans, and PT boats in the harbor. Planes are taking off & landing on a field somewhere back on the island. Towering mountains stick up into the low-hanging clouds. Some kind of village around the bay. Church steeple sticking up. Understanding these islands are under French and British mandate. Wonder if there are any women over there?

October 24, 1942

The natives like to come up on the ship when we are not working. The boys give them cigarettes and ice water, and show them pictures in Look, Life, Pic. The natives got a big kick out seeing the bathing beauty and cheesecake sections---they had never before seen white women with so few clothes on. We ran across the Peps-Cola in one of the holds. The boys drank about half of it and gave a few bottles to the natives who delightedly rubbed their bellies as they drank. They loves the taste but were mildly disappointed when they found out it was non-intoxicating.. Weren't we all.

November 9, 1942

Went to a dance last P.M. One somewhere tonight. If this pace keeps up, I'll have to go back to sea to recuperate. Riding in this morning with Di & neighbors to work. I found out that many Aussie's were afraid that loss of some seats in Congress to the Republicans might change our status in the war. They were evidently relieved to hear that the war would go on as before. One of the neighbors is a woman from

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Texas. She was mightily pleased to hear a few good “you alls” and “yes ma’am’s” again.

January 20, 1943

Transferred to the Grouper. Leave for parts unknown tomorrow.

January 28, 1943

Japs ran us down 7 times last night---everytime we would get the battery charge going, the Jap radar would pick us up and in about 20 minutes planes would dive on us. Numerous bombs. None close enough to worry over.

March 2, 1943

Narrow squeak last night. Plane forced us to dive and the stern planes jammed our “hard dive.” The boat took such an angle that it was almost impossible to stand up. We were going down like Insull utilities stock, but we finally straightened out. I wouldn’t have minded so much, but I had just made a pair of kings and was in the act of betting my shirt when we started down. The cards all slid together at one end of the table and no one could tell whose his’n or her’n. What I ever do to deserve this?

April 20, 1943

Back to the old grind. Not much to do. Letters from home. Wonder if I’ll ever get back there?

May 31, 1943

The only birthday present I really want is a one-way ticket back to Alabama.

June 9, 1943

Transferred to the Peto today. Go out tomorrow. Wonder why the hell they always wait until the last minute to transfer me to a boat. Hell, I’m not going to run away. Not that I don’t want to -----.

July 7, 1943

After chasing a 10,000 tanker for 2 days we finally got in and fired. 3 fish. Two hits. That’s 2,500,000 gal. of gas and 2,500,000 gal. of fuel oil that will never be burned by the Japs. From what I hear they could use it to stop the army on Munda. Shook the escort. Name of tanker was Sinkoko Mane (?) – made port in serious condition.

July 12, 1943

Lost \$15 playing blackjack. I never did like that game anyway.

August 13, 1943

Been trying to kick a football thru a window in the apartment across the way. We charge 2 shillings (.32) per try and the proceeds go to the Bline & Thirsty A’ss’n. Cute gal lives over there, June Steele—her mother doesn’t approve of sailors (she

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ought not look over at the Grande.) However, I don't approve of her mother, so there.

September 6, 1943

Possibly Guadal on her NW side. Savo on the Port beam. The beach on the N side of Guadal is littered with landing barges. Several hulks (remains of transports) are run up on the beach We are sailing over what is perhaps the largest single graveyard of fighting ships in this war.

September 7, 1943

Spent the night in Tulagi after refueling. Some of the boys went over to a movie. Lots of PT Boats here and several concrete tankers lying around. Lots of junk from battles lying here and there. One cove over on the island is still supposed to have some 200 odd dead Japs in it. Someone tossed some dynamite in there. The stench is so bad that no one can go near without a gas mask. Didn't have time to look it over, myself. Admiral Halsey's sign on a hill beside the harbor reads roughly (literally and figuratively) Kill Japs, Kill Japs, Kill More Japs, You can help kill the Yellow Bastards If you do your job well.

September 23, 1943

Are dashing madly after a convoy.

September 24, 1943

Well, we caught the damn thing and were sailing along at night about 13,000 yds away from it (had planned to get in front of it today and attack) when a five inch shell whistles over our heads and plunks in the water about 500 yds. On the other side of us. All the lookouts heard it whistle as it went over. A can picked us up on his radar from about 12,000 yds. That was damned good shooting for the first shot. We didn't stay up to witness the second salvo. We went deep and started using evasive maneuvers but that guy had us on the sound gear and gave us about two of the worst hours yet. Every DC was right on us and besides we were taking on water. When we finally started pumping, the drain pump sounded like a Birmingham street car crossing a six track intersection. Am fully convinced that this noise scared the Jap away - he probably thought it was some sort of infernal machine. We did.

October 19, 1943

Today was the closest call we have had. A Jap fish missed our bow by about 25 feet. I'd hate like hell to get it just two days out of port and before we get leave. Wouldn't be so bad to get it going out after two weeks of fast leave, but, please, not now.

October 25, 1943

Leave is suttingly a fine invention. The weather, wine and fishing are excellent. Nailed one 65 lb. jewfish. Took 45 min. to get him in thru the surf. We were fishing off Furgal, a beautiful basalt affair jutting out into some very pretty but dangerous water. Only way to get to the place is across a natural causeway over which waves are constantly breaking. One has to dash across between waves and if you don't

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make it --- well, you just don't, that's all. Beautiful place for a honeymoon. Much moon – no honey.

November 25, 1943

Figure we ought to get back in about 8 months. About 240 days.

December 30, 1943

After being submerged all day (and, man, is this boat hot and crowded with 157 extra men aboard), we surfaced at night and went in on the battery. After flooding down until only the superstructure was above the water, the boat handlers inflated one of the rubber boats, and Murray, two natives, and four officers paddled the 3,000 yards to the island. They were supposed to signal whether or not they wanted the other boat to come in, but the signals got all fouled up and we spent the rest of the night shuttling around a large reef.

We ran up on a submerged reef and ruined our port sound head. I was on the controller and had already started backing her down before they rung up Full Astern. Anyway, we had to leave the men on the island and run out to sea. The batteries were so low and we had so little time before day that we slapped in an emergency charge. After dive at dawn, the boat was four degrees hotter than August in hell. We are going back in tonight.

December 31, 1943

We surfaced some 40 miles from the island, and slapped in another emergency charge. Battery temperatures went sky high. After getting instructions on just how to demolish (13th time) the ship in the event of another serious encounter with a reef or otherwise, we went in, and much to our surprise, picked up the men about midnight. Some of them were seasick from being tossed around in the boat for some five hours.

Their story: After leaving the boat, Solly (native, who was promptly renamed Charley upon coming aboard the Peto) showed Capt. Murray a channel around the reef which lay between the sub and the island. Upon landing, they tried to signal over the other boat, but they couldn't make us understand. We were playing leap frog with that submerged reef about then, I guess. After seeing that we were going back out, they set about doing their job of giving the place the once-over. By dawn word had spread the length of the island (some 10 miles) that Americans were on the island.

About 9 a.m. they went down the island to a native village in which Charley had renewed acquaintances (some of them slightly on the intimate side with a local belle or two – a fact which let him in for some ribbing when he got on the sub. Funny thing, although the natives wear very few clothes and have their own “houses of ill repute” etc., they are pretty modest about this sort of thing).

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Anyway, the gang made friends with the natives—gave them tobacco in exchange for food, and also found out that there were Japs nearby. Murray and the other officers went ahead and looked the place over and started back up the island to where the boat was hidden. Charley stopped behind in the village as a scout and lover. Shortly before 1 p.m. Charley caught up with them bringing the news that six Japs were coming after them. It seems that the natives further down the island had spilled the beans, but someone had sent word ahead of the Nippos to the village. Due to a littly lying on the part of Cap't Murray and Charley, the Japs thought that the whites were aviators who were forced down at sea. They promised to be easy on the aviators providing that they men surrendered. The deployed on both sides of the trail and lay there sweating for a four hour eternity. About 5 p.m. six Japs (marines – big, husky fellows), two carrying light machine guns came easing up the trail.

By previous arrangement, all were to hold their fire until Cap't Murray opened up. Murray's first burst nearly tore the shoulder off one Jap carrying a machine gun. The Jap dropped the gun, but tried to crawl over to it. As he sat up Murray's slugs ripped him from crotch to cranium. One of the other officers was trying to get the Jap captain, but his carbine miss-fired 4 times and the Son of Heaven departed without bothering to commit Hari-Kari.

While all this was going on someone had creased one of the other Japs in the head. Two of the Americans drew a bead on him at the same time and both bullets hit him at the same time; one above the right eye and one above the left. His head exploded like a rotten tomato. One of the Japs tried to climb a tree and was sent to his ancestors by Charley. The other Nippo was just sort of divided up by the gang. The other native who had been sent back down the trail started toward the firing and was nearly run over by the fleeing Jap officers and the remaining marine. He had heard the firing and that the Japs had killed Murray. The party then reassembled and made their way back to the boat. A native brought word that more Japs were on the way so they put out to sea at about 7 pm intending to row to a nearby island if we didn't come back.

The sea was rough and rain was falling at intervals and several of the men were sick. We finally picked them up at 11 p.m. and headed out to sea. They were wet, sick, and damned happy to get back aboard. Capt. Murray brought back a Jap Luger and one of the light machine guns. While we were going back out we spotted some kind of a ship and ran like hell. We gave him the slip—the last anyone saw of him was a searchlight waving around in the distance. Anyway, we are going back to Tulagi now with only a damaged sound head—thanks to the Gentleman Upstairs.

Afterthought: those guys in the rubber boat deserve some kind of a medal or at least some leave in Sydney according to the crew of the Peto (which includes me). My hat is off to those fellows. Quite a condescension when I consider my growing bald headedness.

Jan 22 - 25, 1944

Few letters dribbling in from home. The problem of answering them is overwhelming. I have used every gag I ever knew and covered every non-military subject (except possibly the sex-life of the Seven Year Locust) and I'm just about at my wit's end - perhaps nit-witt's end would be better.

February 19, 1944

We closed in last night for a radar attack. One of the escort's nearly got us as we went in on the surface. Rather a tense period there with the radar ranges on the escort coming "2,500, 2,400, 2,300, 2,000, 1,900, 1,800", then a blessed "2,100 yds." He was pinging all around during this interval and when he had gone back out to 2,200 yds, the sound man reported, "He has us on sound - picking up speed & turning back towards us." Needless to say we left that vicinity and space furious.

February 20, 1944

We followed the convoy all day yesterday. In contact with the Cero. Both of the boats got set for an early evening attack. The Cero submerged some little while before we did and we never saw her again, but as we were closing in for our attack the sound man reported fast screws moving down our stbd side. After listening for a couple of seconds, he said, "Hell, that's a torpedo and it wasn't too far away." About 35 seconds later the fish hit the target. Depth charging started on the Cero. We saw the target fire two flares and one of the escorts went over to the sinking Jap. By this time we were about 6,000 yds away from the ships and the skipper decided to surface and pull the other escort away from the Cero. We surfaced in about 20 acres of dead fish, so I guess the Nippos got some thing for their DC's after all. We couldn't seem to attract the proper attention, so we moved out a little farther and flipped a few 3 inch shells at them. This seemed to have the desired effect so we moseyed along.

March 5-7, 1944

The skipper says we will go into Pearl Harbor this time. Don't relish the idea, but I know of nothing that I can do about it.

April 25, 1944

After one months layoff I am almost too lazy to resume writing. Or perhaps too tired would be closer to the truth. After 18 days leave at the Royal Hawaiian (which is, along with the rest of Hawaii, one of the most overrated places I have ever seen) I came back to the ship to find that I had to attend school on the new electric torpedo. This work is definitely outside my field and the school was boring, but the gods spoke so what could a mere enlisted man do but obey. Besides I was somewhat groggy after that leave. Liquor is the only thing that is seriously rationed here in Honolulu and even that is obtainable. I imagine the situation here is comparable to that in the states. Everyone is so concerned with the getting and spending the Almighty Dollar that he would forget all about the war were it not for his income tax. A few people in the states will get a shock along about June when the business in Europe gets going. Anyway, after completing my little course in electric fish, I came

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back to the ship to get into the damndest training I have ever been through. We operate all day and work all night; everyone is about ?ingy from lack of sleep, but still we continue playing games. By now everyone is either so bored or tired, or both, that any benefit he might have received from the drills is counterbalanced by aforesaid state of mind and body. Then, too, we are all disappointed about not going home. The boat should have gone; something out of commission all the time, but once an admiral gets an an idea, he retains it --- or so it seems. Personally, I think castor oil would remove at least that idea. Only bits of excitement so far have been the close shave we had an hour or so ago when a destroyer nearly rammed us, and the little flurry of two days ago when some unidentified object smacked into us while we were making a submerged practice approach. For my part, the Gentleman who controls such things can just omit such excitement for the rest of my days. I hear the scamp got the hell bombed out of her and barely made the Marshalls with a 17 (degree) list on. Talking with some of the Gato boys the other day – it seems that they had rather a busy time last run. Plane ran her down and she smacked the bottom at some 150 feet. She had a bad hour. Another time she surfaced with two depth charges lying on deck. One rolled off (failed to explode) and the eng. Officer sat on the other until they could drag up a Jap prisoner they were lugging around in order to read the depth setting, etc. They floated the charge off in their rubber boat and then fired at it with the 20 MMs I think. What lovely lives we lead -----.

April 28, 1944

Back to sea again on my 6th war patrol. I don't know that I feel so very different from the way I felt when I made my first on the Grouper. May be a little shakier, and I know what we are likely to run into, otherwise things seem about the same. Temper is a little on the trigger side, however. Received news of the death of John Di's father today. Made me feel pretty badly. He had some faults I guess (and who the hell hasn't), but he was a kind and hospitable man; trains which are not found too often I fear. The death is merely one of the unwanted changes that have and will continue to take place. Nothing will ever be the same with any one anymore. Life may be better or it may be worse, but I will never think of the past without a twinge of regret some of the people I knew or times we had together. One thing is sure --- I know that they were good and enjoyed them to the fullest extent. And John has married. Don't know why that should seem strange. Maybe it's because he was such a play-the-field lad during the years we batted around together. Or perhaps it's just one of the pangs you get when the realization finally comes that you aren't kids anymore and that you must play for keeps from now on. To get on the with war -----.

April 30, 1944

The Peto made her 600th dive a couple of days ago.

May 31, 1944

We surfaced this P.M., bent on 3 engines and headed for the channel again. Still no dope on the message, but everyone knows that if we continue burning fuel at this rate, we wont be out here much longer – praise the Lord and pass the leave papers.

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Have a birthday to-day --- an event which doesn't arouse much emotion anymore, I'm afraid. Except one of regret for my falling hair, perhaps.

June 1, 1944

We surfaced about 1900 and started charging batteries. Sighted a large hospital ship at 2030. We circled her and licked our chops for awhile, but we couldn't fire because she was properly marked, etc. - lit up like a showboat. This is the 3rd or 4th hospital ship I've seen in my wanderings, and as yet we have not fired on any. I am always plagued by mixed emotions as to whether or not we should fire (not that it is left up to me), and I always remember the sinking of the Centaur some 40 miles out of Brisbane.

June 6, 1944

We have been on the way in since June 2, and are now going thru the Marianas. We were submerged all day to-day - probably be down all day tomorrow and the next day, too. A radio report just received says that the invasion of Europe has begun with heavy shelling of the invasion coast and the landing of troops. Hate to see the men get killed but it's good to know that we are at last beginning to settle down to the job of winning the war.

June 27, 1944

We are due to arrive in San Francisco tomorrow. Whether in the A.M. or the P.M. I don't know. After 22 months of this stuff a few more hours won't make much difference, and I have the duty the first night in, anyway. Nothing of any importance has taken place since leaving P.H. We just submerged to run a battery discharge --- one of the necessary and irking jobs before entering the yard for overhaul.

June 29, 1944

The Golden Gate Bridge looked wonderful yesterday. It's good to be home, or at least, it's good to be back in the U.S. Crew going on leave tomorrow. I have to stay here for awhile. It won't be so bad --- I hope.