

Historic Fleets

By ROBERT J. CRESSMAN

'THE BUSY LADY'

Eight days before Christmas 1940, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Captain Daniel J. Callaghan, his naval aide, to suggest names for a number of authorized ships that included destroyer tenders. On 21 December the Bureau of Navigation provided the chief executive with candidates for his consideration, including one that honored the "valley and its environs in east-central California" that encompassed the western slope of the Sierra Nevada.

A week later, the fifth ship of the *Dixie* class, two of which were already serving in the Fleet, became the *Yosemite*, designated AD-19. The Navy awarded the contract for her construction on 10 April 1941. Just under eight months later, the Japanese attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet and naval, military, and air installations on Oahu drew the United States into World War II.

Workers at the Tampa Shipbuilding Company in Florida laid the *Yosemite's* keel on 19 January 1942, 43 days after Pearl Harbor. On 16 May 1943, the new tender slid down the ways. Lola W. Powers—whose husband Melville, a retired commander with 30 years' service who served as assistant general manager of the building yard—performed the christening. Construction continued, with the *Yosemite* being commissioned on 25 May 1944.

Her sheer size awed young Machinist's Mate Second Class Dick Wibom: "I couldn't believe how *big* she looked." Captain George C. "Bull" Towner, who at the start of the war had been navigator of the heavy cruiser *Louisville* (CA-28) on her return voyage to Pearl Harbor from Manila, assumed command of the *Yosemite*. He told his crewmen on commissioning day that they had been given a fine ship "but [one] with

no reputation and with no ship's spirit." Those intangibles lay within *their* power to earn and generate.

Following her shakedown cruise and fitting-out, which included enlarging the ventilating systems for the engine rooms and combat-information center, the *Yosemite* sailed for the Pacific, reaching Pearl Harbor on 29 August 1944. She welcomed her first customer, the *Caldwell*

spirit, he declared on the *Yosemite's* first anniversary: "The 'Mighty Y' [as she had become known] takes off her hat to no other tender afloat."

Powered by geared turbines with 11,000 shaft-horsepower that turned twin screws, the *Yosemite* had made 19.6 knots on trials, making her and her sisters the fastest destroyer tenders of the U.S. Fleet. Her heaviest boom capacity was

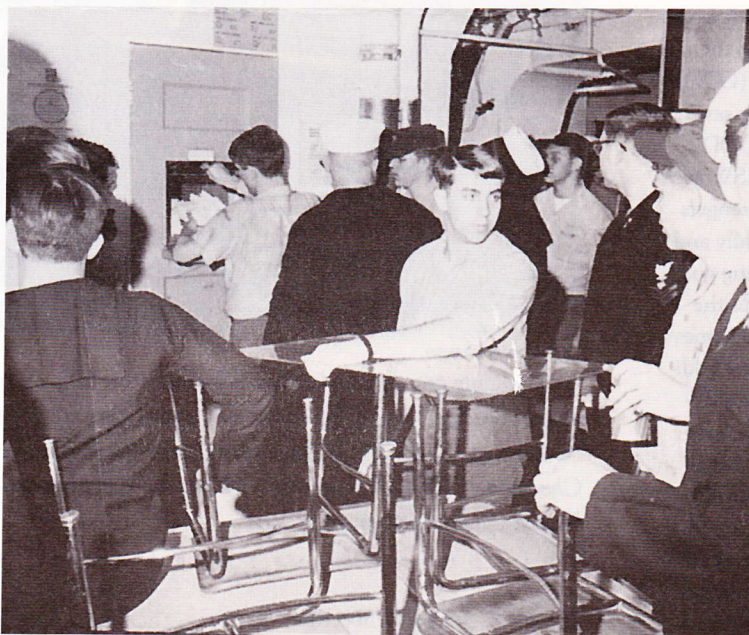
20 tons, with the cranes so situated as to be able to service radar antennae. Her bunkers could contain 24,555 barrels of fuel oil and 2,705 of diesel fuel.

She sported a main battery equal to a destroyer's—four dual-purpose 5-inch/38s, two stepped forward and two aft on the centerline. By the time the *Yosemite* entered the Fleet, even tenders bristled with anti-aircraft weapons, wartime experience having proved the 40-mm Bofors and 20-mm Oerlikon machine guns far more capable of downing a fast, modern, high-performance plane than the 1.1-inch/75-caliber and .50-caliber machine guns that had been the secondary batteries of auxiliaries.

Several large hatches on both sides of the ship

provided easy access to the spaces within her thin steel shell. On the upper deck, one found an operating room, a sick bay, and a dental office, as well as shops to fix canvas and gyros. In addition, there was a pattern shop and a carpenter shop, a sonar-attack teacher and a typewriter shop. On the main deck were shops to maintain fire-control and optical equipment and one for watch repair, as well as a photographic lab and a design and blueprint room.

A traveling crane serviced the *Yosemite's* cavernous machine-shop well to the second deck below. In addition, the repair department spaces on the main deck featured a foundry and a blacksmith shop, as well as pipe, welding, boiler,



COURTESY JAMES MCWATERS, USS YOSEMITE ASSOCIATION

Sailors of the *Yosemite*, clad in uniforms of the 1960s ranging from undress blues to dungarees, wait in anticipation at mail call outside the ship's on-board post office. In the days before cell phones and the Internet, a vessel's postal unit provided a vital line of communications with faraway family and friends.

(DD-605), alongside on 2 September. Over the next five months, the tender provided repairs to 216 ships, of which 126 had been alongside.

The *Yosemite* then steamed to Eniwetok, then to Ulithi, in the western Caroline Islands, arriving on 3 March 1945 to begin the busiest month yet of her career—tending 73 ships (21 of which she took alongside) that generated 1,689 work requests. Her hardworking crew maintained its sanity among the business of readying ships for the Okinawa campaign with pinochle, clandestine craps games, and music—from ragtime to classical. One year after Bull Towner had talked of reputation and