

Terry & Darla Hakala  
March 9, 2010

Dear Community Foundation,  
After reading the article  
in the Portage County  
Gazette about the Honor  
Flight to the WW II Memorial  
in Washington, D. C., my  
wife and I immediately went  
to our checkbook and wrote  
out a contribution on their  
behalf. Lyle Duily served in  
the Pacific Theatre as a medical  
Corpsman. Walter Hakala  
served in the Gulf of Mexico  
and Pacific Theatres as a  
Chief Petty Officer Machinist  
Operator.

(over)



Both of our dads spoke little of their duties in World War II, however they were both very proud of the parts they fulfilled, the teamwork they were a part of, and did not hesitate to go into battle to defend democracy and freedoms of Countries around the globe. Our dads are in Eternal Paradise but we wish they could have witnessed the WWII Memorial. They would have been so honored.

We request that the memorabilia of both of our dads be sent with a vet in your organization who is taking the trip and leave the entire package inside the Memorial so they can be with those who served!

Thank You! Terry & Darla Hukala



Lyle J. Dailey



Walter E. Hakala



# Life Aboard the Coast Guard's Only Sailing Ship in World War II

By Walter Hakala, as told to Joan Behm, Weyauwega, Wisconsin

IN 1940, my friend George Laurila and I enlisted in the Coast Guard. We traveled from our homes in Newberry, Michigan to Curtis Bay, Maryland. After 3 months of training at an old CCC camp, George left for duty on a PT boat in the Pacific, and I was sent to Hemphill, a diesel school on Long Island, New York.

My new life on Broadway in New York City, while commuting daily to Hemphill, was exciting. Then war was declared on Japan.

My orders sent me to Peterson Builders, a shipyard in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. What a jolt when I learned that I was to be the chief motor machinist on a sailboat!

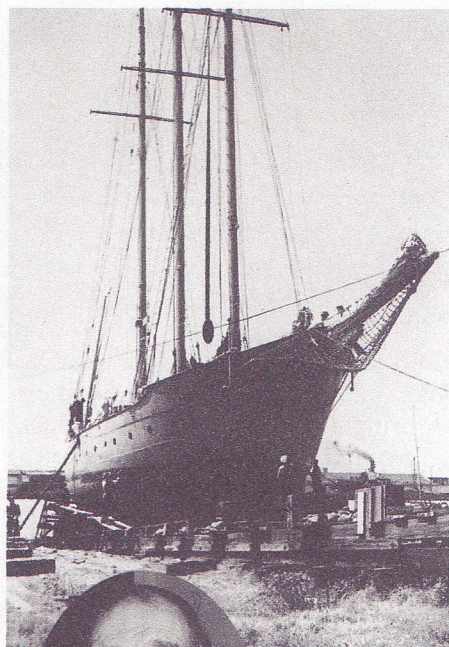
The government had taken over the yacht owned by the Schlitz Brewery of Milwaukee. Made in Germany, this beautiful 160-foot sailboat had a steel hull, teakwood deck, six sails and a "blanco" sail that could be lowered across the bow for extra stability in rough seas.

The yacht was re-equipped for military purposes with sonar, radar, ship-to-shore communications, guns and depth charges. It was the only vessel of its kind in the Coast Guard, and the crew of 26 named it *USCG Blanco*, after the sail we prayed would save our lives in a storm.

Our home port was to be Burwood Naval Base at the mouth of the Mississippi River. To get there we sailed down Lake Michigan to Chicago, through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to the Illinois River, which took us to the Mississippi.

Our job was to escort cargo ships and battleships, maneuvering between the vessels and looking for submarines. When our sonar spotted a sub, we shut down the engines and used the sails so we wouldn't be heard.

We also couldn't be detected by the enemy, as the



**A REAL SAILOR.** Walter Hakala (today above, and at right in '41) sailed on the *Blanco* (at top) during World War II in the Gulf of Mexico and around Australia.



*Blanco* drew only 10 feet of water.

Our depth charges were 35-gallon drums filled with TNT. They had timers set to go off at depths of anywhere from 35 to 70 feet of water, as we sailed away. An oil slick verified a successful operation.

Our most traveled area was the Gulf of Mexico from New Orleans to the Yucatan Channel, down the Caribbean to the Panama Canal, through the Canal and on to Australia. In my 4-1/2 years of service, we circled Australia seven times and never once took the same route or set foot on its soil.

With the food and water we had on board, we could remain at sea for about 28 days.

The oil refineries in Galveston, Texas made the Gulf of Mexico an important military area. Our radar spotted nine submarines in the Gulf during our duty there. We called in the Navy but were never told of the outcome.

We had a dedicated crew, including four weathermen and a meteorologist, who always got us to within a mile of our destination, even through heavy fog.

They were also good enough to spot a rain cloud and get the *Blanco* right on the edge so the

crew could lather up and take a refreshing shower on one side of the ship, and dry off in the sun on the other.

My most frightening experience was riding the 40-foot waves in the six hurricanes we encountered. One of those storms pushed the ship over Fishermen's Wharf in Miami and right onto Biscayne Boulevard. Traffic was tied up for hours until a crane came, lifted the bow and slid us back into the water.

After the war, the *Blanco* was purchased by Texas A&M University. They installed a glass bottom and used the boat for oceanographic study.

The ship had an ignominious end as a target ship for the Navy's air corps. ❖