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Proudly We Served: The Men of the USS Mason

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Kelly, Mary Pat. *Proudly We Served: The Men of the USS Mason*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1995. 198pp. (No price given)

Mary Pat Kelly's book offers another correction to the historic record of African-American service in the armed forces of the United States. In presenting the documented and vivid recollections of African-American participants, *Proudly We Served* ranks with Paul Stillwell's *The Golden Thirteen: Recollections of the First Black Naval Officers*, Charles E. Francis's *The Tuskegee Airmen: The Men Who Changed a Nation*, and Eric Furdon's *Black Company: The Story of Subchaser 1264* in telling the truth about African-American service during the Second World War.

The author, an accomplished writer and documentary film producer, provides a clear record of the patriotic contributions of African-Americans who served in the destroyer escort USS *Mason* (DE 529) during World War II. She skillfully combines recollections and narratives into the story of how the U.S. Navy was forced to accept citizens of African descent into the general ranks, how African-American men stood ready to serve as patriots in a navy that embraced popular racist views on integration, how African-American bluejackets were treated as heroes in Ireland but were refused a meal in New Jersey, and how African-American men contributed to the war effort at sea

during dangerous convoy duty in the Atlantic.

In the initial chapter we meet the surviving crew members of the USS *Mason* who convey their wartime service experiences throughout the book. The reader is introduced to James W. Graham, who said, "No, I'm not going to cook for anybody or clean up behind anybody," and then went on to become a radioman in the *Mason*. Gordon "Skinny" Buchanan, who was originally from Harlem and attended a predominantly white school in Long Island, was later separated from whites during his swearing-in ceremony. Lorenzo DuFaz, from New Orleans, said, "A man will go forth and defend his home. You defend your family—you defend your country—because there's no other place that's home but here in America." There was also Arnold Gordon from Michigan, who listed his ancestry as German, Irish, Indian, and Negro in percentage order. He was rudely surprised to find that his service jacket stamped with the word "Negro" in letters that were over an inch high.

Ultimately Kelly takes the reader to sea aboard the *Mason*. It is through her compelling blending of firsthand encounters with historical events that the outstanding technical abilities, patriotism, and service of the crew are fully documented. For example, the subject of chapter six is the participation of USS *Mason* in Convoy 119 in August and September 1944. During its voyage, the convoy encountered extraordinarily heavy seas from a violent storm. The *Mason* was chosen to shepherd a detachment of small craft

and barges assigned to the convoy, and although damaged itself with a cracked deck the *Mason* led the detachment through a treacherous channel and escorted it to safe harbor. After reaching port, its damage repaired, the *Mason* returned to escort other stranded convoy vessels to port. Commander Alfred L. Lind, the task group commander, recommended each crew member for a letter of commendation; all were withheld for no apparent reason other than the race of USS *Mason's* crew.

The crew discuss a possible U-boat contact in another crossing. Surviving members still argue about whether they had an encounter with the "red-dog" that night in January 1945. (A *Mason* officer recalls Ed Ross saying "Boy, red-dog is really on the loose," referring to German submarines that attacked the convoys. The crew adopted the term to refer to any German submarine attacking the convoys escorted by the *Mason*.) Accounts like these are truly informative, making Kelly's *Proudly We Served* enjoyable professional reading.

In today's climate of national political debate over affirmative action, Kelly provides a historic benchmark from which to judge the progress of equal opportunity in the United States Navy. Today, we consider it almost routine to see successful African-Americans rising to new heights of authority and responsibility in the Navy. It has not always been that way, and there is ample reason to believe that the playing field in the Navy is still not completely level for all of its members. There are still isolated cases of discrimination akin to those described in *Proudly We Served* that are

experienced by men and women of color who wear the uniform.

Racism is a disease in this country, and to eliminate affirmative action in the Navy (right now congressional debates are taking place about abolishing mandated affirmative action programs) would be tantamount to eliminating the only remedy for that disease. Accurate, historical, comparative evidence of racism's prolonged existence is readily available. Perhaps not enough people have read books like *Proudly We Served*.

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Bauserman, John M. *The Malmédy Massacre*. Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane, 1995. 148pp. \$19.95

Few acts of Axis brutality during World War II provoked more revulsion and stronger emotion among Americans than did the massacre of nearly seventy U.S. soldiers on 17 December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. SS troops herded the captured soldiers into a field at a road junction near the Belgian town of Malmédy and murdered them with machine gun fire. The massacre became the stimulus for the heightened urgency surrounding the Allied mission in Europe and strengthened American determination to crush the Nazi state as quickly as possible.

The units involved were the U.S. Army's Battery B, 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion (with assorted hangers-on) and German troops from *Kampfgruppe* (battle group) Peiper,