



Ship Tease

A P O S T W A R A N E C D O T E

WARSHIPS operating under a task-group command communicate by means of a radio voice circuit which is a good deal like a party-line telephone. Since anyone who can tune in on the right frequency and is within voice range can hear the broadcast, it is necessary to use code expressions to keep the enemy as confused as possible about operating tactics.

One day the U.S.S. Surfbird, a mine sweeper in our task group, was given the code name of Marie Antoinette, and phrases describing slipshod dress were to be the coded commands for quick maneuvering as we went into action. For example, "Marie Antoinette, your hat is cockeyed" might mean that the Surfbird was lagging behind in formation.

Just as some tough maneuvering was coming up, the Surfbird's radio watch on the voice circuit was taken over by Joe Breen, who knew nothing about what code expressions had been planned, his job simply being to relay the messages to the officers on the bridge.

For a while, nothing very unusual came over the circuit; then suddenly the order snapped through, "Marie Antoinette, straighten your seam!" The radioman blinked, but he was sure he had it right, and he scratched it down on his log sheet and rushed the message along to the bridge. A few minutes later Joe was really set back on his heels by the excited command, "Marie Antoinette, your slip is showing!" The befuddled radioman asked himself if he could possibly have got that one right, and, if so, what the devil could be happening to the old Surfbird. But again he shot the order to the bridge.

After that there was a short, tense silence, and all at once a voice roared, "Marie Antoinette, Marie Antoinette! You've lost your panties!"

For a few seconds Joe just sat there, stunned. Then, ripping off his headphones, he dashed out of the shack and scrambled wildly up to the bridge, yelling at the top of his voice, "This I gotta see!"

—JOHN FRANCIS.

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