

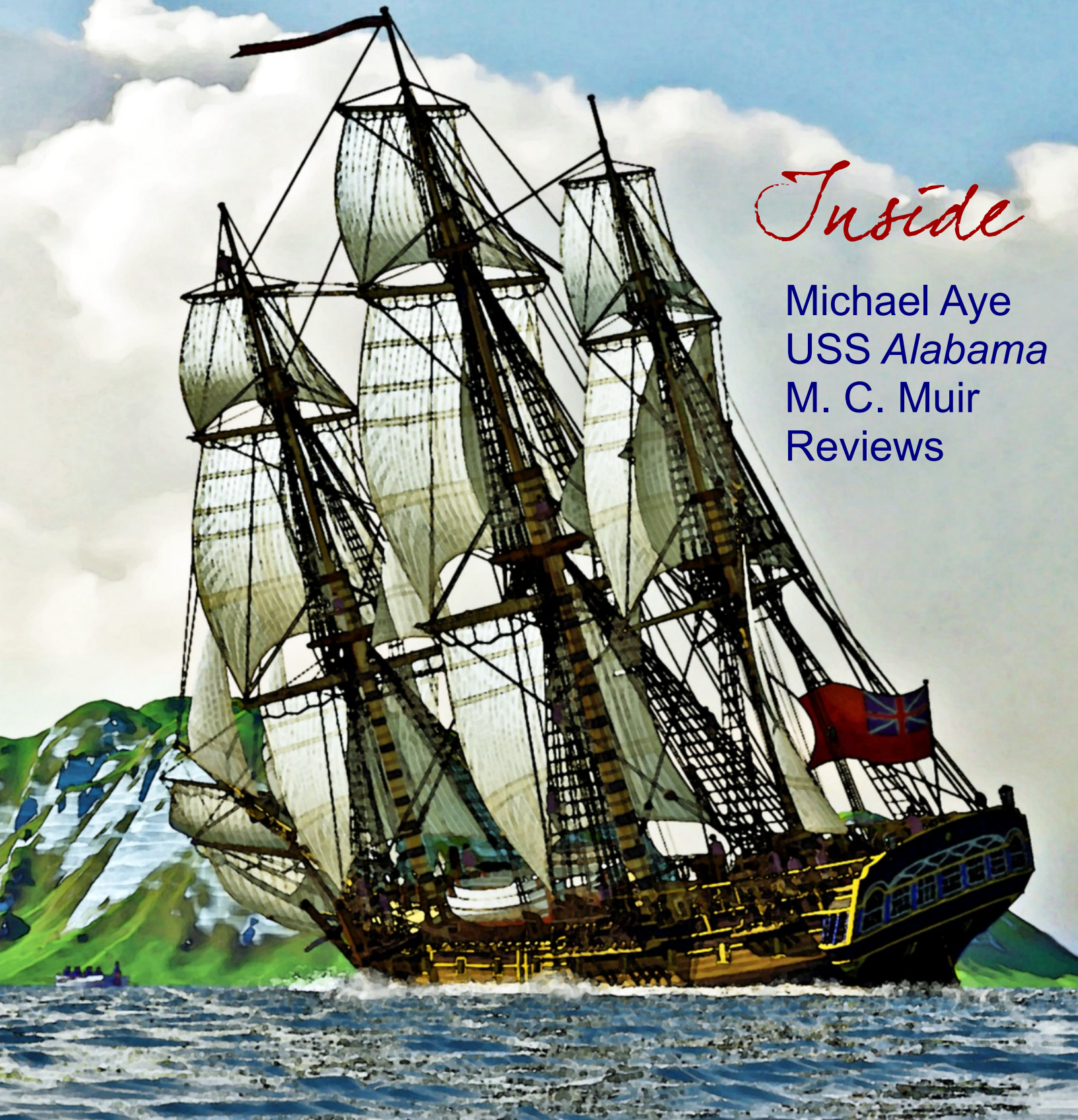
QUARTERDECK

A REVIEW CELEBRATING NAUTICAL & HISTORICAL FICTION

November/December 2013

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Novelists James L. Nelson (left) and Michael Aye at the Maine Maritime Museum in Bath, Maine.
(Photo by Pat Fowler)

MICHAEL AYE

“... the joy of writing ...”

by George Jepson

HISTORICAL NOVELIST MICHAEL AYE was born and raised in small-town Alabama in the years following World War II. It was in this rural setting – far from the sea – that the seeds were sown for a passion that one day would lead him into naval service and later into writing historical fiction.

During the Vietnam War, Aye enlisted in the United States Navy, following in the footsteps of the men from his hometown who had served their country a quarter of a century earlier on the decks of American ships in the South Pacific.

By the late 1990s, although established in an active medical practice in his Georgia, Aye’s interest in ships and the sea had not abated. The result was *The Reaper*, the first title in The Fighting Anthonys series, a naval

adventure set during the American Revolution. The sixth book in the series, *Trident*, will be published in 2014.

Aye’s latest novel, *Remember the Raisin* (see page 8), is set on land during the War of 1812 and is the first of-fering in a planned trilogy. Aye recently discussed his writing and the influences that led him into print in this interview with *Quarterdeck*:

What factors eventually led you to writing fiction?

I think the biggest reason was the joy of writing. Luke Bryan, last year’s Country Music Association’s enter-tainer of the year, Bob Gooden and I used to play mu-sic and write songs every Tuesday night. Bob moved to St. Louis and Luke went off to college; suddenly I had

a void. I had read almost everything Tall Ships Books had to offer, so I decided to try my hand at writing. I will soon have six books out in The Fighting Anthonys series, and Book one of the War of 1812 series. I have co-authored a patient information booklet entitled “What’s the Reason for all that Sneezing and Wheezing?” This was written under my given name, Michael Fowler, along with my co-worker, Nancy McKemie.

You served in the United States Navy during the Vietnam War. What drew you to the sea service?

My uncle’s barber chair, believe it or not. I grew up in Union Springs, a small farming community in Alabama, which is just down the road from Troy, Alabama, where novelist Ace Adkins is from. All the farmers came to town on Friday or Saturday night. Sometimes they used the showers and visited the local barbershop

for a shave and a haircut. There was very little to do in our town, other than during football season, until you were sixteen and could drive to Troy or Montgomery. I spent a lot of time sitting in one of my Uncle T. J.’s barber chairs listening to the men, including my uncle, talk about World War II and the South Pacific. A lot of the farmers had been in the Navy or Marine Corps and served

aboard ships. Talks of battleships, destroyers, and occasionally aircraft carriers, sea battles, plane attacks, and the South Pacific filled my head with images that I still think of today. I remember my first cruise and thought, “so this is what it’s like.”

Had you written any fiction prior to your first novel, The Reaper?

No, *The Reaper* was the first, unless you count song writing. I had written a lot of protocols for the Navy. I drafted “Plans of Care for Certain Emergencies and Casualties”, but *Reaper* was my first work of fiction.

What was the genesis for The Fighting Anthony’s series?

The name, Anthony, came from the great naval scene

“I write in the old fashioned way – pen and paper.”

in the movie, *Anthony and Cleopatra*. I later wished I had chosen a different title because my middle name is Anthony. Some people have asked whether I chose my middle name for the main characters; the answer to that is, no. In retrospect, I would have changed it to something different and used Michael Anthony as my pen name.

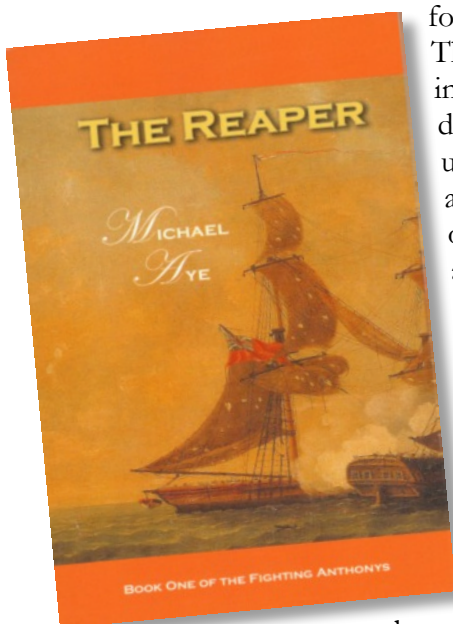
Back to the question, I wanted to write a good naval fiction book that was different. I started it with a half-brother whom Gil Anthony was oblivious to. I then threw in Dagan to add a degree of mystique. Not so much that it would turn off the genre fan, but enough to make it different from other Age of Sail books. Sailors were and some still are a superstitious lot. I wanted to initially bring a family together and eventually introduce adversity among the characters. Louis L’Amour, the famous western writer, did that with the Sacketts. Someone once said my characters were too perfect, because everyone got along and there was no adversity. I wrote back and said you have to set the stage before you can bring about adversity.

How do you write your novels?

I write in the old-fashioned way – pen and paper. My wife then types the manuscript.

Do you have a special place in which you’re most comfortable in writing?

I enclosed my garage and added another carport to my house, so I would have a place to write. My wife Pat calls it, “man land.” I have several large Age of Sail fine art prints on the walls, three that were covers for Alexander Kent’s books. I built a small library with approximately one-thousand reference books and works by other nautical fiction authors. I have an old roll-top desk where I write with a nautical lamp I made to add an extra bit of light. There is a huge window in front of my desk. The weather I see outside – rain, clouds, wind blowing a huge old oak or bright sunshine – is what often goes into the manuscript. I have recently added a



“A message to readers: I do listen to you.”

table, so that my computer could be close at hand, and another filing cabinet. It's hard to write anywhere other than my office, where I have so much of the genre surrounding me. I find it difficult to write when I'm not in my den surrounded by friends.

Do you follow a particular process in your writing?

First I research things that happened in the year I want to write about. Then I usually go on location to visit where I want to focus my main interest in the story. I have found it is much easier to write about a location once you have been there. *Trident*, the next Fighting Anthonys novel, was a little different. I got the idea for *Trident's* main events from a National Geographic series. I recently visited the Grand Cayman Islands and will use an incident there as the focus for my next book. (It will not be the Wreck of the Ten Sails, which author and maritime historian William H. White recently featured in his new novel, *Gun Bay*.)

After visiting my location, I spend a lot of time exploring the history I found. I then do a brief outline setting the time frame to coincide with true historical events. Next, I decide on characters and make a new character page. This was a suggestion from a reader and since following his advice I have had numerous positive emails. A message to readers: I do listen to you. After I write the book, Pat types the manuscript. Then I edit it and she re-types it. I edit it one more time and then send it to a local editor for a final edit. I started this with *SeaHorse*. The book then goes to the publisher and after a series of back-and-forth edits (something my first books didn't have) the book goes to print.

How do you generate inspiration for each succeeding novel in The Fighting Anthonys series?

I'm a history buff and enjoy reading all about our country. I have been overwhelmed by talking to people who never knew there was a War of 1812, or why Washington's face is on the dollar bill. The inspiration comes from a desire to teach people about our history and do it in an entertaining fashion.

Do you ever experience writer's block?

Yes and no. I'm never at a loss of what to write about. I sometimes find it hard to find a term or phrase that the non-nautical reader can understand or identify with, but no, I don't get writer's block.

You recently launched a new trilogy about the War of 1812, with the publication of the first title, Remember the Raisin. What was the driving force behind this project?

Tom Grunder, who founded Fireship Press, was an old Navy guy, who was introduced to me by Alaric Bond. After our first e-mail, Tom and I would write and call each other about once a month or so. One day I got an e-mail that simply said, "Call me, I have an idea." The idea was the War of 1812. It was close to the 200th anniversary and he felt someone should write about the war ashore. Bill Hammond and Bill White have done a good job with naval aspects of the war. I told him I would check with my publisher and see if they were interested. He said, "Okay, but if they're not, I will."

After a few months of research (while doing the Fighting Anthonys and my day job) I called Tom back and said I'd do a trilogy. The first on the battles in our Northwest Frontier, a second dealing with the Creek Wars in Alabama, and the last would be the Battle of New Orleans. Unfortunately, Tom passed away before *Remember the Raisin* was complete. Bitingduck Publishers bought out my publisher, Boson Books, and they liked the idea. *Remember the Raisin* came out in July and I'm now working on the *Battle of Horseshoe Bend*.

If I may take a minute here, I'd like to say that Native Americans were wooed by the French in the French and Indian Wars and lost. They fought with the British in America's War for Independence and lost. Then the British and the Spanish lured them into war once again. In return, they were promised their traditional homelands with no intrusion from the white man. Not only did they lose their land each time, but countless lives. President Andy Jackson even took land from America's Creek allies.

What can you tell us about the subsequent titles in the trilogy?

The second book, *The Battle of Horseshoe Bend*, begins with a speech given by Tecumseh in his effort to rise up the Southern tribes against the whites. It moves quickly into the Massacre at Fort Mims, in which the Creek Indians under William Weatherford (also known

as Red Eagle) attacked Fort Mims slaughtering men, women, including pregnant women and children. John Armstrong, Secretary of War, then authorized the forming of a force to deal with the Indians and if need be the Spanish. Governor Blount of Tennessee put the plan in action and Andrew Jackson was placed in overall command. I am somewhat sympathetic to the Indians in the book and have corresponded with Red Eagle's great-grandson, who is also named William Weatherford.

Book three will find Jackson marching to New Orleans to deal with the British threat there. He will face a formidable fleet as well as local hostilities and will enlist a notorious pirate to aid the American cause. It is interesting that the battle took place after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed, officially ending the War of 1812.

There is the possibility of a fourth book dealing with the little known Seminole War in Florida.

The sixth novel in The Fighting Anthonys novels, Trident, will be published in 2014. How far ahead have you planned the series?

There will be at least two more books. One I mentioned earlier set in the Cayman Islands, and one dealing with Great Exuma, where many loyalists moved to escape persecution after America's War of Independence. My publisher would like to see The Fighting Anthonys go to ten. We'll see.

Is there subject matter you would like to pursue in the future that you haven't touched on with The Fighting Anthony's or the War of 1812 trilogy?

The Riverines in Vietnam is definitely a big interest. After talking to my publisher, I have decided to do a series on the gunboats. James L. Nelson brought up the subject. A lot has been written about the ground war, but I have only found one book on the Brown Water war. The men manning the gunboats constantly put their lives on the line, inserting and picking up special operations personnel, doing search and siege operations and offering a means to keep the rivers open to the Allies and closed to the Viet Cong.

Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

First, I would like to say "thank you" to the readers, who have been so kind and loyal. Second, I would like to say every would-be writer has the dream of being published. I know as I was one. It's hard to explain the

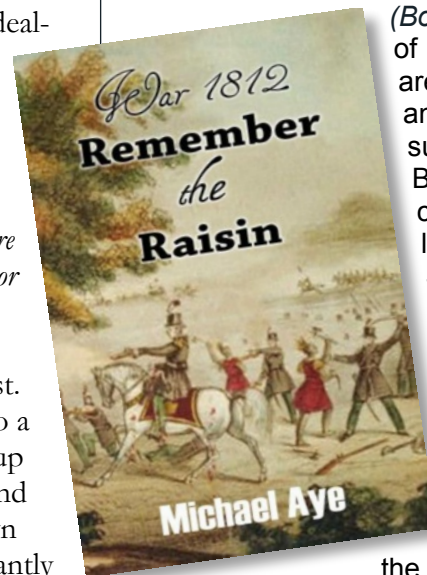
way I felt when *The Reaper* was published. The joy of being published one day was over-shadowed the next week when reviews came out slamming the book for poor editing. In those days, as a new writer, I had no control in that process. Things have changed. The good folks at Bitingduck have agreed to go back and edit the word file in order to provide a better quality book. *The Reaper* will be first and then *SeaWolf*.

In closing, I'd like to say that hardly a week goes by that someone doesn't ask for advice about publishing. The best advice I can give is to *write*. Then have someone other than family or friends give you a true critique. You can't wear your emotions on your shoulders. After writing and re-writing, *edit, edit, edit*. And finally do not send a manuscript to just one agent or publisher. Send it to everyone who publishes your type of material. Finally, *Never Give Up!*

Visit the Michael Aye online at:
michaelaye.com

Remember the Raisin

by Michael Aye



(Boson Books, \$20.99) It's the War of 1812. The early days of the war are met with one failure after another. General Hull has surrendered an entire army to the British without inflicting a single casualty. After discussing the lack of Army leadership with the Secretary of War, President Madison decides he needs someone to be a mover and shaker. Jonah Lee fits that description. Once a trusted scout for General "Mad" Anthony Wayne, Jonah is a man of action. His first assignment as an agent for

the President is to ensure the Northern American army under General William Harrison takes the fight to the British, pushing them back into Canada. And, if possible, do it before the winter sets in. The United States cannot afford a long protracted engagement. Follow Jonah and his lifelong companion Moses as they take you from the massacre at the River Raisin, to Commodore Perry's great defeat of the British on the Great Lakes, and end with the overwhelming British defeat at the battle of the Thames. Experience the hardships of war, smell the battle smoke as cannons roar and feel the sensation of a beautiful woman in your arms.



USS *Alabama* (BB-60) at Battleship Memorial Park on Mobile Bay, Alabama.
(Photo by Michael Fowler)

Mighty Pacific Hero

by Michael Aye

IT WAS A RAINY SEPTEMBER DAY, THE TRAFFIC was heavy and the wind was blowing my pick-up, as my wife and I crossed the bridge over Mobile Bay. In the distance, I saw the outline of a big ship. Chancing another glance, I realized this was the South Dakota-class battleship USS *Alabama* (BB-60).

This was the ship I had contributed toward when I was in the fourth grade, bringing her to the State of Alabama. That was more years ago than I care to admit. However, for my one-dollar donation, I was given a card that declared me a charter member of USS *Alabama*, BB-60.

I had passed the memorial many times over the years, but due to time constraints had never stopped. It was the same that day. I was headed to New Orleans to lecture on asthma at a medical meeting, but I decided I would stop on the return trip.

On our return, the sun was shining and the wind had died down. There was just a slight chop to the waves in the anchorage. Pat and I arrived at the USS *Alabama*

Memorial behind a tour group of veterans, all as excited and anxious as I was to go aboard the mammoth ship. Most of the men wore caps bearing a ship's name on it or a phrase declaring them a veteran of wars they had fought in. It did my heart good to see three old warriors using walking sticks and wearing hats proclaiming them to be World War II vets.

Entering the museum and gift shop, I discovered that BB-60 was the third of six ships to be named the USS *Alabama*. One of these vessels was the Confederate commerce raider CSS *Alabama* during the American Civil War.

BB-60's keel was laid down at the Norfolk Navy Yard on February 1, 1940. She was commissioned August 16, 1942. She was one of the new South Dakota class battleships. Captain George B. Wilson was her first commanding officer.

Alabama is 680 feet long, has a 108-foot-2-inch beam and a 36-foot-2-inch draft. Her registered weight was 35,000 tons, but under battle conditions she



USS *Alabama* from the air during World War II.
(Official U.S. Navy Photo)



USS *Alabama* firing her powerful guns.
(Official U.S. Navy Photo)

weighed well over 45,000 tons. The ship's steel armor plate was a foot thick above the waterline, 18 inches on turret faces and 16 inches on the conning tower. The distance from her keel to the top of the truck light is 194 feet. Her maximum speed was 28 knots.

Alabama's official complement during the war was 127 officers and 2,205 enlisted men, but she normally carried about 2,500 men, including marines. Her armament included nine 16-inch guns on three main turrets that were accurate to 21 miles; twenty 5-inch guns on 10 side mounts; forty-eight 40mm guns on 12 mounts and fifty-two 20mm guns.

During the war, *Alabama* saw action in both the Atlantic and the Pacific. The British lacked heavy ships necessary to patrol northern convoy routes. In 1943, the *Alabama* and the *South Dakota* (BB-57) were assigned to protect lend-lease convoys to Britain and Russia, which were operating on the Murmansk Run.

On August 20, 1943, the battleship sailed from Norfolk to the Panama Canal, bound for the Pacific, where she distinguished herself in many major battles and engagements. Her first significant engagement was in the Gilbert Islands – Operation Galvanic – during November and December 1943.

From this assignment, *Alabama* and five other battleships proceeded to Roi and Nauru, heavily

bombarding these installations during the first Pacific gunfire strike conducted by that type of warship. Her guns fired 535 rounds into enemy strong points.

Over the next year, the *Alabama* participated in numerous major battles. In June 1945 she returned to the Leyte Gulf to prepare for a strike at the heart of Japan. In July the *Alabama* screened the U.S. aircraft carriers that struck at industrial targets on the Japanese home islands. On the night of July 17–18, she directly bombarded six major manufacturing plants just to the northeast of Tokyo.

USS *Alabama* was decommissioned in January 1947 at Naval Station, Seattle. During the ship's short life as a warrior she earned nine battle stars and shot down 22 enemy airplanes.

The ship was awarded to the State of Alabama in June 1964 and was towed to her permanent berth at Mobile, arriving in the bay in September.

Having served on board numerous ships during my twenty-two years of naval service, I must admit I have never felt so little and insignificant as I did when I crossed the quarterdeck of this imposing ship. Sitting in the after turret, I recalled the alarms of a ship at war – “battle stations, battle stations, all hands man your battle stations, this is not a drill.”

Recalling those moments, I could only imagine what the sailors who manned the big guns must have felt. Slipping out of the hatch of the turret I felt something like breaths of air touch my cheek in this closed-in space. I paused and took a second look around and then humbly saluted the ghosts whose spirits still reside aboard BB-60.

To learn more about the Alabama, visit
www.history.navy.mil.