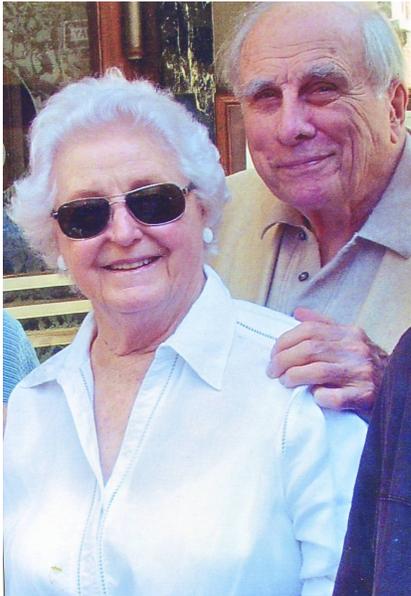


March 31, 2012: A sunlit late afternoon in San Francisco, California

Prep Development Director Larry Rocca '85 and I pulled up to the home of Steven Gwozdz '87 and his wife, Ally. Steve had graciously offered to host a talk that I would give to Prep alumni about Michael J. Daly '41, Prep's only Medal of Honor recipient and the subject of a book that I had just completed. When Larry and I stepped out of our car, so also did the occupants of a large, tan, Ford Crown Victoria already parked in the driveway. They were Captain Edward J. Cummings Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.), Prep Class of 1938, and his wife of almost 68 years, Ethel Crean Cummings. At 91-years-young, Ed stood with a military bearing that bespoke his earlier career in the Navy. He also sported a Georgetown Prep school tie. One year younger than her husband, Ethel greeted us warmly, her Boston accent still distinctive and her vivacious personality readily apparent. Throughout the evening, both Ed and Ethel captivated those present with their lively conversation and great good humor.



Ed and Ethel Cummings (Courtesy Ed and Ethel Cummings)

When Captain Cummings and I had a moment together, he told me that although he had been a senior when Mike Daly was a freshman at Prep, the two had not known each other. He expressed his eagerness to hear Mike Daly's remarkable story and then handed me a manila envelope, saying simply, "I'd like you to have

this.” The envelope contained a booklet entitled, “My First Destroyer – *USS BUCK*: Memories of My Days as a Junior Officer aboard *Buck*.” It described the harrowing experience Ed had endured during World War II, when the *USS Buck* was sunk by a German submarine in a part of the Mediterranean known as the Tyrrhenian Sea on the evening of October 9, 1943. On the first page was a short, handwritten note: “For Georgetown Prep – My Foundation in Life. Ed Cummings, Class of 1938.”

MY FIRST DESTROYER-USS BUCK (DD 420)

*With the Ebullience of Victory and the Joy of Peace,
the violence of war may recede in our memories.*

By Captain Edward J. Cummings, Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.)

*Inscription in the booklet presented by Captain Ed Cummings USN (Ret.) to the author.
(Courtesy Captain Edward J. Cummings Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.))*

It turned out that Ed Cummings had a remarkable and inspiring tale to tell – one that ranged across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans as well as the Mediterranean Sea. Ed’s wartime experiences severely tested his courage, faith, and character, but the lessons that he had learned and the person he had become at Georgetown Prep helped him to survive and surmount the trials he faced. I promised Ed that I would share his story with the Prep community.

Edward J. Cummings Jr. was born in Baltimore on August 28, 1920, the only child of Irish-Catholic parents from Boston: Dr. Edward J. Cummings and Helen Donovan Cummings. Dr. Cummings had studied under Jesuits at Boston College High School and Boston College. Graduating from Harvard Medical School in 1915, he specialized in ophthalmology. He did his residency at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore, where he met Helen Donovan, a nurse. They were married in 1919. Dr. Cummings had served as a physician in the Navy during World War I and remained

*3/5/2012
For Georgetown Prep
My Foundation in Life
Ed Cummings
Class 1938*

in that service until the late 1920s, when he opened his own private practice in Washington, D.C.

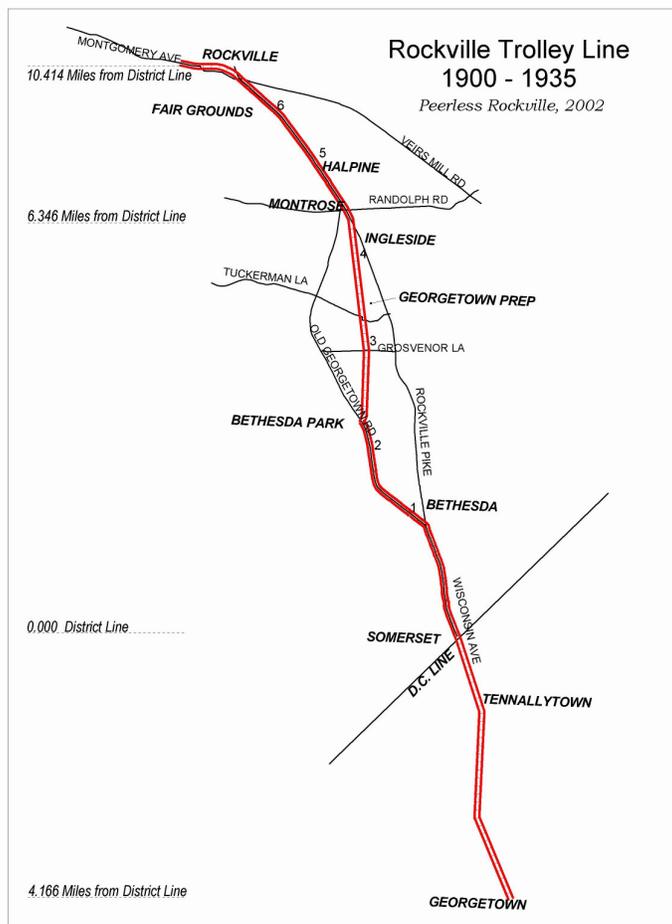
Young Ed enjoyed a close relationship with his parents. He described his father as extremely knowledgeable on many subjects and as a person who pursued many interests with great enthusiasm. He was brilliant, friendly, sociable, a good golfer, and a college football referee. Most of the games he officiated were in the Washington area and usually involved Catholic University, George Washington University, Navy, and then football-powerhouse Georgetown University. On one occasion, he even refereed a bowl game. Dr. Cummings had played football at Boston College High School and shared his passion for the sport with his young son, often taking Ed to the games at which he officiated. On such occasions, he arranged with the coach of the home team to allow Ed to sit on the bench during the game.

During the early years of the Great Depression, Dr. Cummings worked to establish his practice. Ed and his parents lived at the corner of Woodley and 38th Street NW, in DC. Devout Catholics, Dr. and Mrs. Cummings were parishioners at St. Thomas Apostle Church and sent their son to the parish school from first through sixth grade. His father, however, wanted him to have some time in public school away from the nuns, and so enrolled Ed at Alice Deal Junior High. Young Ed hated leaving his friends at St. Thomas and his two years at Deal were not particularly good ones. He found the classes relatively easy and the discipline lacking, and wound up “horsing around” in the classroom. He experienced school as drudgery and became indifferent to his studies.

In 1934, when it came time for high school, Ed’s father, keenly aware that his son was drifting, and desiring a good high school education for Ed in a Catholic setting, sent him to Georgetown Prep. That decision represented a significant financial sacrifice for Ed’s parents, but Dr. Cummings, living in a city insulated somewhat from the worst effects of the Depression, was able to set aside money for Ed’s schooling. In this, he was aided by the Jesuits’ decision to grant most families a

discount on the published tuition. Dr. Cummings also treated members of the Jesuit community at Prep when they needed his services.

During his freshman year, Ed rode the street car to Prep. The line was owned and operated by the Washington and Rockville Railway Company, which was known to the Prep boys as the “Toonerville Trolley.” The trolley was a small blue and cream car, double-ended with control equipment front and back and driven by a single conductor. There were almost 100 stops on the line that ran from the Georgetown station on Wisconsin Avenue – the “Car Barn” – out to Rockville.



The Rockville trolley line of the Washington and Rockville Railway Company.

(Source: "The Trolley Era in Rockville, 1900-1935," Peerless Rockville, URL:

<http://www.peerlessrockville.org/historic-rockville/rockvilles-past/the-trolley-era-in-rockville-1900-1935/>)

The stop at Prep, serviced by a trolley every half-hour, consisted of a small wooden shelter that stood just beyond the western boundary of the campus. The first Prep students Ed met, therefore, were fellow “day hops.” These included classmates Jack Dettweiler '38, Bill McGowan '38, George Sharp '38, Jules “Buddy” Titus '38, Harry Lee '38, eighth grader Joe Mundell '39, and sophomore Brison Norris '37.

They all would remain lifelong friends, a kinship formed in part by their shared, unique adventure of “catapulting along the track [in the trolley], swaying madly at times, bursting from woods into meadows and vice-versa, with the whistle-blowing at an occasional human, horse, or cow – a cow-catcher being standard equipment on the car.” When the line closed in August 1935, the boys had to find more mundane transportation. For Ed, that meant occasionally riding to school in his father’s Lincoln Zephyr, or hitching a ride with friends.



*During their freshman year, Ed and his friends rode to Prep via the “Toonerville Trolley.”
Courtesy Montgomery County (Md.) Historical Society*



After the Toonerville Trolley line closed in 1935, Ed's father drove him to Prep in a Lincoln Zephyr. (Source: "1936-1948 Lincoln Zephyr," How Stuff Works, URL: <http://auto.howstuffworks.com/1936-1948-lincoln-zephyr.htm>)

Ed entered a school that had been buffeted by the Great Depression. As the economic crisis deepened after the Stock Market Crash in October 1929, parents found it more difficult to afford Prep's annual tuition of \$1,500 – the equivalent in today's dollars of approximately \$20,000. Enrollment plummeted from 139 students in 1929-30, to just 75 by 1933-34, straining the school's finances. In 1931, all lay employee salaries were cut by nine percent to avoid layoffs. The Jesuit administrators also provided discounts on tuition – the equivalent of need-based financial aid – to many families whose sons would otherwise have been unable to attend Prep. The school found its financial resources stretched so thin that the Father Provincial of the Maryland Province excused Prep from paying its annual province tax for several years.

On a brighter note, school life went on as usual, although the smaller student population – Ed's graduating class had only 20 members – meant that individual students had to shoulder additional extracurricular and athletic responsibilities. In the fall of 1935, the Very Reverend Henri J. Wiesel, S.J., replaced Robert S. Lloyd, the school's first rector. Total school enrollment thereafter began to increase slowly, reaching 92 by Ed's senior year, although most of that increase came in classes below Ed's.

Almost 75 years after graduating from Prep, Ed wrote that Georgetown Prep was "My foundation in Life." He explained that he had been a "wanderer" in grade school, had never been "keen" on studying, and viewed it as a burden. He

experienced little thrill in learning and did not challenge himself. “Then I got to Prep, and the place ignited my intellectual and religious curiosity.”

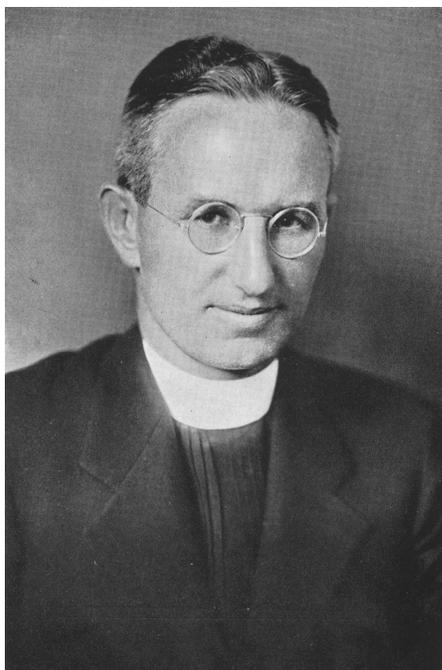
On Ed’s first day, he and each of his classmates received a daunting stack of textbooks. Then he went to his first Latin class, taught by a Jesuit scholastic, who told the boys to open their vocabulary book. He assigned the first three pages for memorization. Ed groaned silently, but one of his classmates was not as discreet, emitting an audible growl. The scholastic was not amused. He had intended to stop at page three, he explained, but would now add pages four and five. “And we will have a test tomorrow!” All these years later, the lesson still resonated with Ed: “I knew I had to go to work!” His grades improved consistently during his first month, and they kept getting better over the next four years. “At Prep, I really started to study. The Jesuits exercised my mind. I also knew that my dad was paying dearly for my education and felt a sense of obligation to him.”

During his time at Prep, Ed consistently garnered second honors with grades in the 80s and 90s. Math was a good example of his resolve. He finished his first month as a freshman with a 78 average and ended the second month with 89. His favorite subjects were French and history, taught by the eccentric and colorful émigré from the Austrian Tyrol, Dr. Michael A. Roman. Roman’s colorful personality and story-telling engaged Ed and piqued his curiosity. He won the “premium” for the highest grade in French in both his junior and senior years.

Ed also witnessed some of the prewar tensions of Europe boil over at Prep. Two of Ed’s friends were German nationals: the Briefs brothers – Godfrey ’36, and Henry ’39. The Briefs repeatedly clashed over Germany’s behavior in Europe with another German boy, whose father, a member of the Nazi Party, was a German official stationed in Washington. Another student, an Italian who admired Mussolini and his Fascist Party, joined in the fray. The Nazi and Fascist sympathizers, however, left Prep prior to their senior year.

Ed flourished from the *cura personalis* shown him by administrators, teachers, and coaches at the school. Fr. Lloyd, the rector, seemed to be everywhere on campus and took a personal interest in Ed during his freshman year. "I talked to him a lot in the halls," Ed recalled. "He was present to students." So, also, was the headmaster, the Rev. J. B. O'Connell.

However, the person who most significantly influenced Ed's growth at Prep was Rev. Bernard T. Kirby, who taught English, Latin, and religion, and who also coached tennis and other sports. Kirby worked closely with Ed to develop his writing skills, especially in weekly compositions. These had initially proved difficult for him as he struggled to organize and clearly express his thoughts. Ed found Kirby friendly, patient, and authoritative without being authoritarian. The Jesuit lived by a set of rules and had no qualms about requiring students to abide by the school's regulations. He was clear about his expectations, but also showed respect to his students. "He never ordered me around. He earned my respect, and I tried to earn his," Ed later recalled. "He was straightforward and clearly desired to educate us – not just in the classroom, but how to be men." Kirby challenged Ed to develop talents and abilities that he did not realize he possessed. "I would not want to try something, and he would say, 'Do it!' He put you in situations that developed you. He insisted that I try debate – something I had never considered – and I did well and stayed with it for my four years."



REVEREND BERNARD F. KIRBY, S.J.
Prefect of Discipline

The faculty member who most significantly influenced Ed's growth at Prep was Rev. Bernard T. Kirby, who taught English, Latin, and religion, and who also coached tennis and other teams. (Courtesy Georgetown Preparatory School)

Kirby and his fellow Jesuits and lay teachers also influenced Ed and his classmates in an even more profound way. Ed became, in his own words, "a better Catholic." Before Prep, he had attended church on Sundays "in a pretty mechanistic way." He went through the proper motions, but maintained a casual attitude. That changed at Prep. He experienced the Jesuits as exploring the meaning of Catholicism with him and the other boys. "They focused on understanding the meaning of things," he recalled with appreciation. His religion classes nurtured in him an interest in the development of Catholic doctrine and in the life of Jesus. He felt especially drawn to the younger Jesus, working alongside his father as a carpenter before beginning His public ministry. "I felt that I was getting a sense of purpose out of the classroom, sports, friendships, and religion," Ed said. "They all seemed to come together for me and gave me a sense of meaning and direction." That could also be seen in Ed's developing prayer life. "I was not super religious, but I often privately visited that wonderful Chapel ... to pray about various situations or

to give thanks for something. I was definitely more religious when I left Prep than when I entered.”

One aspect of Ed’s religious enthusiasm, however, caused problems for him and others: his singing at Mass. When the students gathered for services in the chapel, they sat in the front pews on the right (St. Joseph) side facing the altar. The boys were urged to sing along to the accompaniment of the organist, Brother Alfredo Oswald, a renowned concert pianist before he entered the Society of Jesus. Ed responded enthusiastically and reverently, singing out with great fervor. Unfortunately, Ed was also tone deaf! Brother Oswald complained that Ed’s booming, off-key voice distracted him in his playing. Ed’s singing, if such it could be called, also threw off his fellow students. So Brother Oswald moved Ed to the back of the main body of students, but even there, his compatriots complained. Oswald then ordered Ed to simply refrain from singing. When Ed protested, Oswald told him that if he wanted to sing, he would have to do so by himself, from the rear of the chapel in the empty seats on the left. Ed tried it a couple of times, but missed being with his classmates and decided to abandon his singing. Thus silenced, he rejoined his buddies.

Ed may have been a wretched singer, but he enjoyed great success in another realm of his life at Prep: athletics. Ed had always loved sports, especially football and baseball, and his passion for athletics strengthened his bond with his mentor and Prep’s No. 1 sports fan, Fr. Kirby. Prep offered Ed his first opportunity to participate in organized team sports, and he did so with passion and skill. He played football, basketball, and baseball as a freshman, and then focused on football and baseball thereafter. He earned three varsity letters in football, captaining the team in his senior year, and two varsity letters in baseball.

Ed’s coaches inspired him with their competitive spirit, integrity, faith, and gentlemanliness. His freshman year marked the final season at Prep for Joseph T. “Joby” Gardner. A recent graduate of Georgetown University, Gardner was an

intense, charismatic, demonstrative individual who coached football, basketball, and baseball. Ed remembered him as a master of the football halftime pep talk. “You’d be elevated,” Ed said, “and go back out on to the field reenergized and willing to give even more of yourself.” Gardner left Prep to marry and go into private business and was replaced by Coach Ed Hardegan.

Quiet and determined, Hardegan was intensely competitive, but did not have the numbers or talent to win consistently. During one football practice, in the midst of an injury-plagued losing streak, some discouraged and tired players appeared to be going half speed. Hardegan stopped practice and led the team on a long run. When players dropped, he made them get up and continue, but he led the way. The next day, Ed recalled, they had a great practice and won that weekend’s game.



A thoughtful, scholarly man who kept things in perspective and emphasized the primary importance of academics, Hardegan also worked to achieve excellence on the athletic field and believed firmly that athletics and academics reinforced one another.



Football was clearly Ed's favorite sport. Dubbed "Big Ed" – he stood six feet tall and weighed 180 pounds by senior year - he anchored the line as a two-way starter at offensive and defensive tackle during his sophomore year, drawing plaudits for his determined play. In Ed's junior year, Coach Hardegan, seeking more offensive power, moved him to the offensive backfield as a fullback in the single wing formation where he presented a triple threat running, passing, and kicking. That third assignment came as a surprise to Ed. Coach Hardegan handed him the ball one day, along with simple instructions: "Kick it." Ed did; Hardegan liked what he saw, and then instructed him on a few techniques. Ed's next kick went even further, and thus he became the team's punter, regularly booting the ball upwards of 50 yards. On a number of 4th down situations, Hardegan had Ed fake a punt and pass to a receiver. In each instance, the play was successful. Once again, a Prep instructor had challenged Ed, and he had discovered a talent previously unknown.



In athletics as in the rest of his life at Prep, Ed clearly displayed great versatility. Prep football teams of those years were seriously undermanned because classes were so small. "We had people who had never played in their lives." One of those was Henry Briefs '39, the anti-Nazi German national. Indeed, Ed actively recruited students to join the team. The 1935 team, on which Ed played as a sophomore, went winless. The next two years saw some improvement, but injuries to key players in 1936 resulted in a 3-6 season after a promising start.

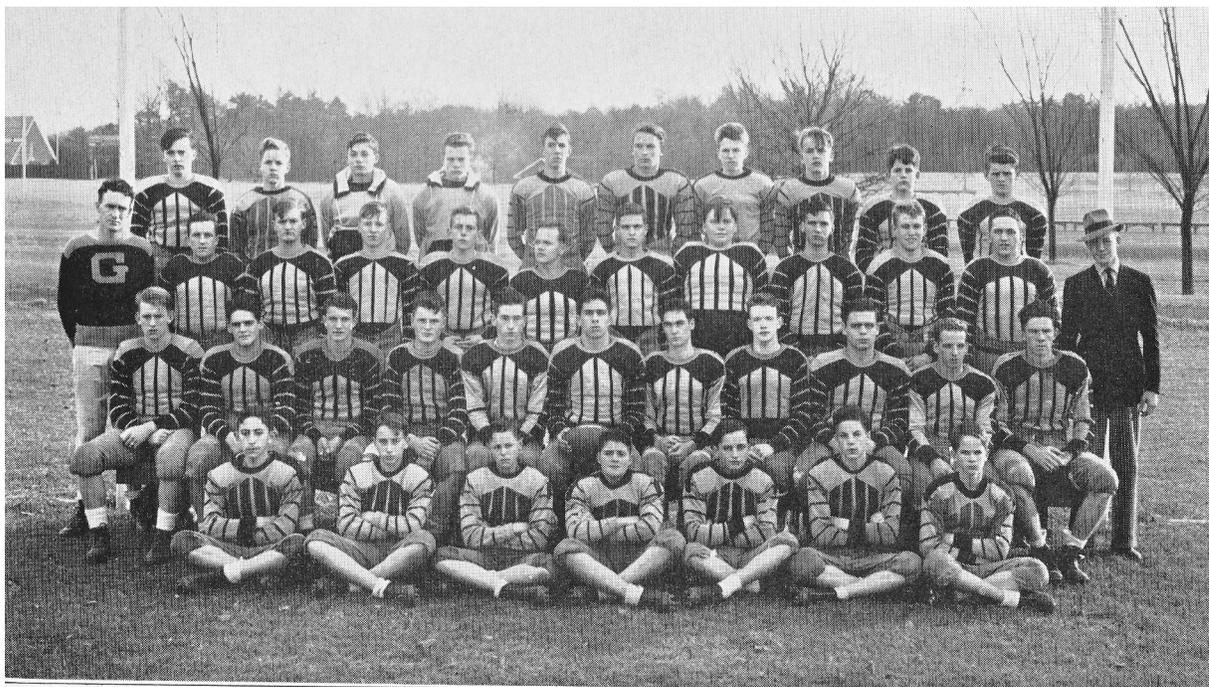
The 1937 team, captained by Ed, was much more competitive, finishing at 3-4-1. Throughout the three seasons, Ed performed consistently well and was a recognized team leader. "I was never the flamboyant guy. No question but that I could talk to guys in the huddle and say, 'On this play we do this and this.' But I

wasn't a cheerleader person. I was not bashful, but I wasn't pushy." Ed exercised quiet leadership; he led by doing. One of his heroes, Charles S. Lindbergh, exhibited the same characteristic, and Ed sought to emulate him. "I thought that was a good way to be." His classmates clearly held that same view and elected him a class officer in each of his four years at Prep.



In the fall of 1937, the *Little Hoya* declared that the football team was built around Cummings, "a good passer, hard plunger, and a very fast runner." It might have added "and a powerful punter." During the season, Ed accounted for touchdowns by rushing and passing, and his punts added another weapon to Prep's arsenal. In a loss to Gonzaga, Ed scored a spectacular touchdown when he took a lateral from a receiver who had just caught a pass and raced 50 yards down the sidelines. In the 12-6 victory over Landon, Ed capped a 60-yard drive by scoring on a short plunge and made numerous tackles in the defensive secondary. In its 6-0 victory over Loyola, Prep scored the game's only touchdown in the final quarter when Ed connected on two successive passes to his close friend, quarterback Tom Graham '38, moving the ball to the 8-yard line and setting up the winning TD. In the final game against archrival Iona Prep in New Rochelle, New York, on Thanksgiving Day, 1937, Ed blocked an extra point attempt, and, after taking a lateral from Graham, passed to an end for 50 yards, down to the 3-yard line. Ed then plunged through center for the lone Prep TD. Ed also starred in the annual Field Days held at Prep during the Memorial Day Weekend. In the May 1935 "Junior Division" of

freshmen and sophomores, he won the 50- and 100-yard dashes and the shot put, finished second in the broad jump, and anchored the winning junior relay team. In May 1937, as a junior, Ed won the 100-yard dash in the senior division.



THE FOOTBALL SQUAD, 1937

*The 1937 Varsity football team. Captain "Big Ed" Cummings is seated in the center of the second row holding the ball; Coach Ed Hardegan stands at the right. (All of the football photographs come from *The Blue and Gray*, Vol. XVI (1937-1938), Courtesy Georgetown Preparatory School)*

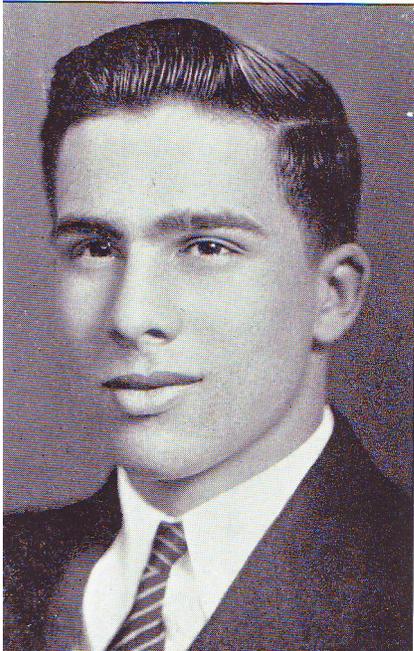
Edward Allen, a Jesuit who kept a diary of the sports seasons in the late 1930s, captured the Jesuit view of the role of athletics at Prep:

"I believe the 1936-37 sport programs were most successful – not on the record books – but as viewed from the all important angle, viz. the development of the adolescent. It is of paramount importance in our schools that the boys be kept busy not only intellectually but also physically. Healthy outdoor exercise makes for the better student and adds luster to a lad's spiritual life.

At the Prep, the happy medium was the end always in view – a boy was expected to participate in some form of athletics but at the same time he was to put in

the required amount of study. Hence, there was no over-emphasis on sports – yet, the average turnouts for the many teams was most impressive.

The formation many boys received from their participation in games was indeed gratifying. With some fine athletes returning next semester [Ed Cummings most prominently] boys who are true sports to the core and typical gentlemen of Georgetown, one cannot but maintain an optimistic outlook for the 1937-38 campaign.”



Ed was a “big man” on campus – intelligent, athletic, muscular, handsome, accomplished, and popular. Each year, he had been elected a class officer. His senior photograph in the 1938 *Blue and Gray* conveyed strength and confidence. His bright, intense eyes bespoke intelligence and focus. Given his achievements, he could easily have become a bully and an egoist. Instead, “Big Ed” became known on campus for his friendly, accepting, and kindly nature. The 1938 *Blue and Gray* underscored this reputation in the line under his senior photograph: “He is a gentleman because his nature is kind and affable to every creature.” The line reflected Ed’s approach to life. As he said years later, “I liked people and I liked animals. My mom taught me to be polite and fostered an attitude of respect and kindness. ‘If you can’t say something nice about someone, then say nothing at all.’ I

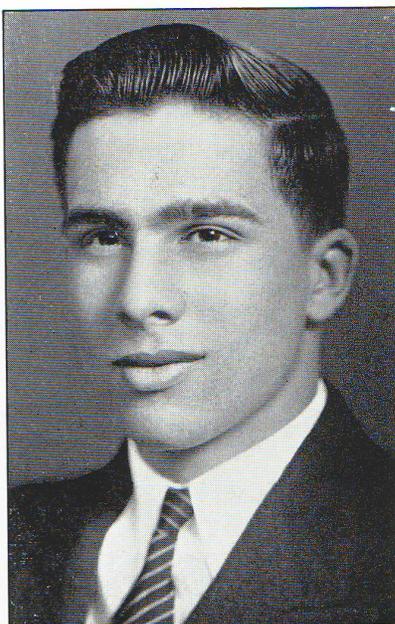
never engaged in running someone down.” Ed’s generosity extended to using his dad’s car to transport basketball team members, usually freshmen or junior-varsity, to games at Fr. Kirby’s request on those occasions when school vehicles were in short supply.

The Blue and Gray

EDWARD J. CUMMINGS, JR.

Washington, D. C.

Naval Academy



Treasurer of Class, 2; Vice-President, 3-4; Day Scholar's Sodality, 1-2-3, Treasurer, 4; St. John Berchman's Society, 1-2-3-4; Philalethic Debating Society, 3-4; Bellarmine Debating Society, 1-2; Varsity Football, 2-3, Captain, 4; Varsity Baseball, 3-4; Junior Football, 1; Junior Basketball, 1; Junior Baseball, 1-2; Rifle Club, 3-4.

“He is a gentleman because his nature is kind and affable to every creature.”

15

During the years of the Great Depression, the Senior Issue of The Blue and Gray served as the yearbook. Above is Ed Cummings’ senior page. Ed was awarded the Hamilton Medal in recognition of his contributions to school life. (Senior Issue, 1938, The Blue and Gray, Vol. XVI, No. 3 (1938), p. 15, Courtesy Georgetown Preparatory School)

Ed’s senior classmates chose him as the person in their class who “has done the most for the school” and as his class’s best athlete. For “Class Romeo,” however,

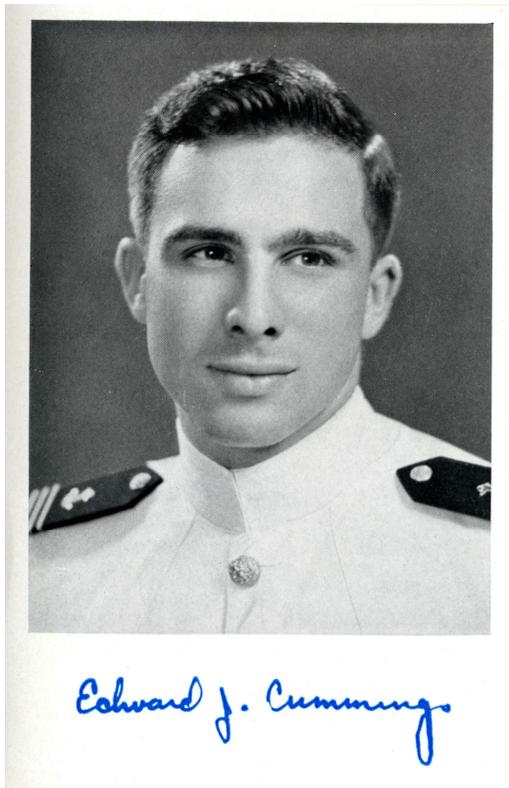
he received no votes! That would have to wait a few years until he met a lass from Boston.

At the commencement ceremony in June, Ed received the Hamilton Medal, Prep's oldest and most prestigious award, presented to the most "representative senior" who had "distinguished himself for four years by scholastic success," and "who, by his interest and helpfulness in all school activities," had "contributed in a marked degree to the life of the students."

During his senior year, Ed decided to follow in his father's naval footsteps and applied to the United States Naval Academy. He did not obtain a congressional appointment for the 1938-1939 academic year, but his outstanding record at Prep and his father's connections in the navy eventually gained him an appointment to the Academy beginning in the summer of 1939. Rather than wait a full year to start college, and hedging his bets in case the promised appointment fell through, Ed attended Georgetown University. He studied pre-med because Georgetown did not offer an engineering program – the program that the Academy required of all its students. Ed was able, however, to take the basic science courses in the B.S. curriculum. He entered the Naval Academy as a plebe in July 1939, shortly before World War II erupted in Europe. After the United States entered the war, the Academy accelerated its program, making it year-round. Ed's class of 1943, therefore, joined the fleet in June 1942.

While at the Naval Academy, Ed was a member of the Navy football team, but he never played in a game. Rather, he was part of the "scout squad" that ran the opponent's plays each week during practice. He did not like his first two years at the Academy all that much. Unlike Prep, he had little personal contact with the faculty, and he found the academic load difficult because of its concentration on engineering. After Pearl Harbor, however, Ed felt a greater sense of purpose. "We knew we were preparing to fight a war." That settled him down and focused him.

He worked hard, and graduated “fair and passing,” in June 1942, ranking 413 in a class of 718.



Naval Academy graduation portrait, 1942. Ed entered the Naval Academy in the summer of 1939. Students attending the Naval Academy hold the rank of Midshipmen and are classified not as freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, but as fourth class, third class, second class, and first class. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Academy compressed Ed's last two years into one. He graduated in June 1942. (Courtesy Special Collections & Archives/Archivist, Nimitz Library, U.S. Naval Academy)

Ed not only earned his commission as an ensign from the Naval Academy – but there also in the fateful month of December 1941, he met his future wife, Ethel Crean. An employee in the accounting department of Raytheon Corporation in Boston, Ethel had grown up in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and happened to travel down to D.C. with a friend named Ruth, who was dating a midshipman friend of Ed's. (When Ruth and her girlfriends visited Annapolis, Ed had often paired with one of the “unattached” young women.) One Sunday, Ruth and Ethel arrived at the Naval Academy and Ruth called Ed's room. “I want you to come up and meet a friend,” she

said. Ed complained that it was Sunday and that he didn't want to get dressed in his "blues," which were required for visiting the hall where the girls were waiting. But Ruth insisted, and Ed finally relented. When he and Ethel were introduced, he recalled, there was a "spark right there." He was especially struck by her effervescence. After she returned to Cambridge, Ed wrote her a note inviting her down for a Saturday night dance known as the "Hop." She accepted, and their relationship was born.

In June 1942, Ed was assigned to destroyer duty, something he had requested, and he was ordered to report to the *USS Buck* (DD420) – Atlantic Fleet. Commissioned in 1940, the *Buck* was the 12th and final of the 1,500-ton *Sims*-class destroyers. Ed reported as a new ensign to Destroyer Command in Norfolk, Virginia, only to learn that the *Buck* was out at sea. In the meantime, Ed trained in fire fighting, on 20-MM anti-aircraft guns, and in the use of the sonar chemical-recorder to track submarines. On July 28, Ed received orders to report to the *Buck* in Boston, Ethel's hometown. The next day, after a long, hot, stuffy ride on a crowded wartime train lacking air conditioning, Ed arrived at South Station and made his way to the Charlestown Navy Yard to report for duty aboard the *Buck*.

Before departing Norfolk, Ed had called Ethel to tell her that he would have one free night when he joined his ship, and that he wanted to see her. She already had a date, she told him. She was going to a dance with a young navy officer who was attending a military course at Harvard. Uncharacteristically, Ed bluntly replied, "Break it!" She insisted that she would not do such a rude thing. Ed noted that the officer was bound by a midnight curfew, a military regulation that governed students at the special schools conducted by the Navy, and he told Ethel that he would come to her house precisely at that time. Ethel was speaking to Ed on the phone in the hallway of her parents' home within earshot of her mother, Mrs. Irene Crean. Mrs. Crean pieced together enough of the conversation to declare: "Nobody is coming to this house at midnight!" Ethel nevertheless told Ed to meet her at the front doorstep.

That night, Ethel enjoyed the dance, but developed a headache on the way home for fear that she and the officer would arrive at her home at the same time as Ed! Luckily, they did not. The house was dark as she entered, and then she ran into her mother, who told her that a man had been walking around the house and that he looked like a policeman. (Actually, it was Ed in his Navy dress blues.) At that moment, the doorbell rang. Ethel opened the door, invited Ed in, and introduced him to her mother, who promptly announced that she was going to bed. As it turned out, Ed had two additional days before the *Buck* put to sea, and so he and Ethel were able to see each other twice more.



Upon graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy, Ed was assigned to Destroyer duty at his request and was ordered to report to the USS Buck (DD420), the last built of the Sims-class destroyers. (Source: "USS Buck (DD420)," Wikipedia, URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Buck_%28DD-420%29)

Ed joined the *Buck* just after she arrived back from convoy duty, escorting merchant ships across the Atlantic to Londonderry, Ireland, and back again from Greenock, Scotland. Since the spring of 1941, even before the United States had formally entered World War II, the U.S. Navy had been escorting convoys as far as Iceland and then turning them over to the Royal Navy for the rest of the voyage to Britain. By the fall of 1941, the U.S. Navy was engaged in an undeclared war against the German U-Boats in the North Atlantic. After official U.S. entry into the conflict,

the first six months of the war proved disastrous for shipping along the East coast as U-Boats sank more than 200 vessels in American waters. The *Buck* was part of the navy's effort to defeat the U-Boat threat and was engaged in both trans-Atlantic and coastal escorting of convoys. Ed was named Chief Engineer of the *Buck*, an appointment that he initially found daunting. He recalled going on his first day to the forward fire room that held the boilers that provided steam for the ship. He looked up at all of the steam lines overhead and wondered how he would ever learn where they all went and what purpose they served. Fortunately, he encountered Petty Officer First Class B. L. Woolever who buoyed his spirits by saying that he had learned them all and by assuring the young ensign that he would have no trouble.

On August 19, 1942, the *Buck* departed New York City with a small convoy bound for Halifax, Nova Scotia. It was not long before Ed learned how dangerous that duty could be, even in the absence of U-Boat attacks. At Halifax, the destroyers made a pre-dawn sortie, forming a departure screen for Convoy AT-20 bound in a northeasterly direction – either Iceland or the British Isles – they were not told which yet. The weather was calm with a light fog during the day. In the late afternoon of August 22, a destroyer picked up an underwater contact which it feared was an enemy submarine! It broadcast an alarm -- one that subsequently proved to be false -- and the ships of the convoy scattered. Once the truth of the situation had been established, the *Buck* received orders to search for a straggler, the *SS Letitia*, and lead her back to her station in the convoy.

The fog had thickened greatly by this time, and as the *Buck* passed through the formation, disaster struck. The troopship *S.S. Atwatea* suddenly appeared on the starboard – right hand -- side. Despite the desperate maneuvers of the captain, the prow of the *Atwatea* sliced into the *Buck's* stern, knocking a depth charge off its K-Gun projector mount. It exploded 100 feet below the surface, jarring Ed out of his bunk. Ed went up to the starboard weather deck only to see the *Atwatea* illuminated by blue flashes of sparks caused by the grinding of two hulls as she backed out of the stern of the *Buck*. "Stay calm," the loudspeaker on the *Atwatea*

blared out, "We only hit one of our own ships and we are clearing the area." Ed looked at the enormous gash in the *Buck's* stern – the fantail barely remained connected to the rest of the ship. Ed went to the Engine Room and learned that the engines and boiler were okay, that the ship still had power.

Two minutes later, there was a second collision and another explosion – this time involving the destroyer *Ingraham* (DD444) and the tanker *Chemung*. The accident left the tanker on fire and the destroyer sunk, with all but 11 of its crew lost. The *Buck* also suffered casualties: 7 men missing, 4 severely injured, and 14 with slight injuries. That night, many remained on deck, waiting in dread for a U-Boat to finish them off. Ed spent the night moving between the fantail and the engine room. Somehow, the crew got the port shaft to turn over slowly, but after moving about 1,000 yards, the shaft snapped off outside of the ship's hull.

Fortunately, the *USS Bristol* (DD453) stood guard over both the *Buck* and the *Chemung* as she successfully fought her fire. The *Buck* was towed back to the Navy Yard in Boston and, after yet another mishap, involving a bent starboard shaft that caused the ship to run aground in about 30 feet of water, the *Buck* entered dry dock, where she was often referred to as the "HALF BUCK." Ed had just turned 22.

Ed remained in Boston for three months while the *Buck* underwent repairs. During this time, his relationship with Ethel deepened. When the *Buck* was finally repaired, Ed returned to a hectic schedule, as the destroyer cruised up and down the East coast and then to the Caribbean for more training and convoy assignments. The German navy was very active in the Caribbean and deployed a dozen U-Boats there, where they wreaked havoc on Allied shipping. One evening, the *Buck* surprised a U-boat on the surface and attacked her with depth charges as she dove, but the sub apparently escaped. On the North Atlantic run, the *Buck* would dock in either New York City or Boston. When it was New York, Ethel would take the train down to the city and stay with a young, married couple Ed knew. On Sunday night,

Ethel would take an overnight train back to Boston, arriving just in time on Monday morning to change her clothes and report to the office.



Rendezvous in New York City. Ed and Ethel relax in Central Park. (Courtesy Ed and Ethel Cummings)

On one of those Sunday nights, the couple was saying goodbye at Grand Central Station. Ethel had one foot on the train and one on the platform when Ed said, "I have something to ask you. Would you marry me? But don't give me your answer now. I'll be back in six weeks, so you can think it over." With that, the train pulled out. "I was surprised and tried to think it out," Ethel recalled later. When she arrived at home, she told her mother, "I think Ed Cummings just asked me to marry him." Mrs. Crean replied incredulously, "You only think? You don't know?" Ethel told her that she had six weeks to think it over.

Six weeks later, Ed returned from assignment in the Caribbean. Initially, he did not mention his "big question," nor did Ethel, as she waited for him to broach the subject. One day, he finally said, "Do you remember what I asked you six weeks ago?" She did, she said, and then gave him her affirmative answer. She had dated

many young men. "After all," she noted, "there were so many men in Boston you'd have to have been a real dud not to date." What she saw in Ed, in addition to his good looks and intelligence, was that he was also a practicing Catholic, which was very important to her. She said moreover that as they continued to date, she came to appreciate his droll sense of humor. Finally, in describing Ed, she turned to the default word that people always seemed to ascribe to him: "He was a nice guy, always very considerate and polite – a real gentleman whom I trusted implicitly." They were engaged for a year. It was a memorable year for them – for more reasons than one.

In November 1942, U.S. troops landed in North Africa as part of Operation Torch, and by year's end, the *Buck* received orders to escort convoys of fast troop ships departing from New York or Norfolk bound for the North African theater. On February 28, 1943, Lieutenant Commander Millard J. Klein, an officer whom Ed would come to admire for his leadership and professionalism, assumed command of the *Buck*. Klein was a pleasant but thoroughly professional officer who emphasized training for battle readiness, something that Ed appreciated very much as he saw the performance of the crew improve under their new commander's leadership. In May 1943, Ed was promoted to Lieutenant, Junior Grade.

The *Buck* continued to escort troop ships to Africa and then, following the completion of Operation Torch, began escorting landing ships for the invasion of Sicily that began on July 10, 1943. Following a collision that forced two destroyers off the gun line supporting the invasion, the *Buck* moved into action, firing hundreds of rounds against enemy positions and troops. She also had to contend with daily attacks by Stuka dive bombers and other German aircraft. During these episodes, Ed and his men were hard at work in the hot engine room, providing power for the ship. They could hear and feel bombs exploding in the water nearby but had to remain focused on their primary mission of keeping the *Buck* moving.

The *Buck* remained on the gun line until early August, when she departed to escort a convoy of six Liberty ships to Oran, Algeria. On the night of August 2, 1943, southwest of Sicily, off the island of Pantelleria, the *Buck* detected a submarine. Klein ordered a depth charge attack, after which contact was lost. Shortly thereafter, contact was re-established dead ahead of the ship, and Klein ordered another depth charge volley. Suddenly, a blip appeared on the *Buck's* Plan Position Indicator, signaling that the Italian submarine, *RM Argento*, had surfaced about 1,200 yards astern (behind) the *Buck*.



On August 2, 1943, while escorting six Liberty ships to Oran, Algeria, the *Buck* encountered and sank the Italian submarine, *RM Argento*, pictured above. (Source: "Argento Submarine," www.wrecksite.eu, URL: <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?135883>)

Apparently suffering little serious damage from the depth charge barrage, the *Argento* fired a torpedo that passed down the *Buck's* starboard side. Ed received the warning of an incoming enemy torpedo. On hearing the news, he and his men

“tensed,” psychologically bracing themselves for an explosion even as they carried on their duties. Fortunately, the torpedo missed and the *Buck* unleashed a devastating volley of fire from its five-inch guns. The *Argento* managed to fire one more errant torpedo before the crew abandoned the doomed vessel. The *Buck* rescued 46 of the 49 crew members, including the captain. The *Argento* was the 12th submarine lost by the Germans and Italians in a four-week span.



MAP: The location of the engagement between the USS *Buck* and RM *Argento*. (Source: “Pantelleria map.png,” URL: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pantelleria_map.png)

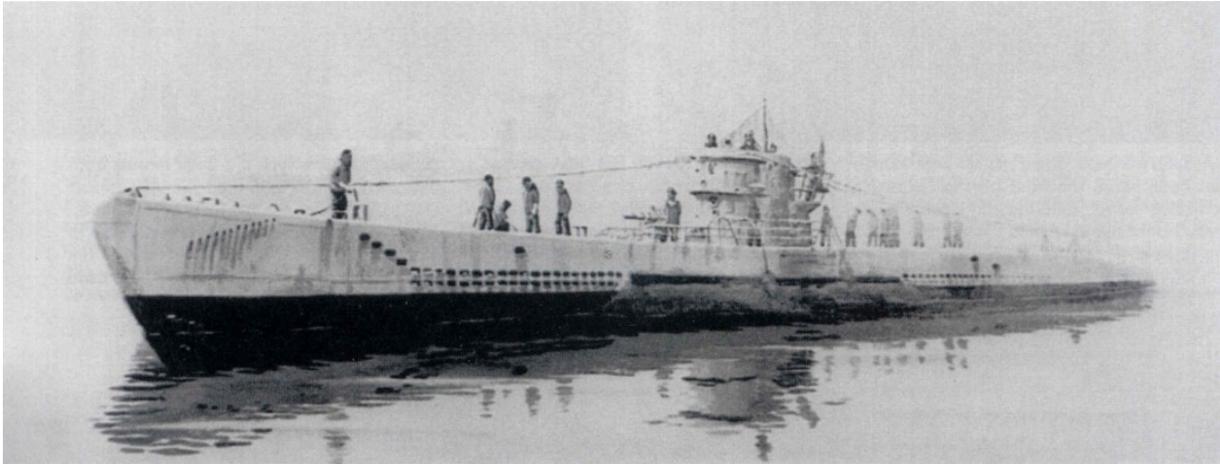
The crew of the *Buck* was understandably proud of having bagged an enemy sub and stood ready to add more “kills” to its credit. Ed just wished that the bridge would communicate an “all clear” signal to the engine room after torpedoes missed the ship. The bridge’s frequent failure to do so inadvertently kept his men hanging in suspense for longer than was necessary. Such had been the case with the second

torpedo fired by the *Argento*. But that suspense would pale in comparison to what they would soon encounter.

On September 25, 1943, in support of the Allied invasion of Italy aimed at Naples, the *Buck* took up patrol duties in the Gulf of Salerno, in the eastern Tyrrhenian Sea. Her mission was to protect the north-south sea lanes between Sicily and Salerno. Specifically, she was supposed to intercept and destroy Axis submarines and E-Boats, fast surface attack craft that sought to disrupt the Allied logistical tail. The *Buck* operated on a route that lay just west of the Isle of Capri and proceeded on a southerly course for about 40 miles. The crew speculated that the *Buck* had been selected for this particular duty because of its earlier sinking of the *Argento*.

The patrolling, which involved investigating contacts day and night, left Ed and the rest of the crew bone tired. Friday, October 8, 1943, proved no exception. The day started before dawn as the crew went to general quarters while investigating a surface contact. There followed a dawn air raid alert near Salerno. After a busy day, and while heading south in the Gulf of Salerno on that warm October night, Ed stood the 2000–0000 hrs (8:00 p.m. to midnight) watch on the bridge. He noted the mist clinging to the water's surface, and cautioned the lookouts to remain especially alert. In doing so, he was also preaching to himself, keenly aware of how exhausted he felt during a watch that seemed interminable.

Meanwhile, *U-616* had surfaced off the Gulf of Policastro. A German submarine sailing from Toulon, France, and commanded by *Oberleutnant* Siegfried Koitschka, it began to recharge its batteries and proceeded on the surface of the flat sea in a northwesterly route toward the Gulf of Salerno. *U-616* carried 10 torpedoes, 9 of them the standard *T-3*. The 10th was a new, electrical acoustic type, the *T-5*, designed to home-in on the sound produced by a ship's engine. Koitschka had little confidence in the new torpedo's technology, and ordered that it be loaded in a stern tube.



In its stern tube, the U-616 carried a new, electrical acoustic-type torpedo, the T-5. (Source: "U616 Submarine 1942-1944," www.wrecksite.eu, URL: <http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?14320>)

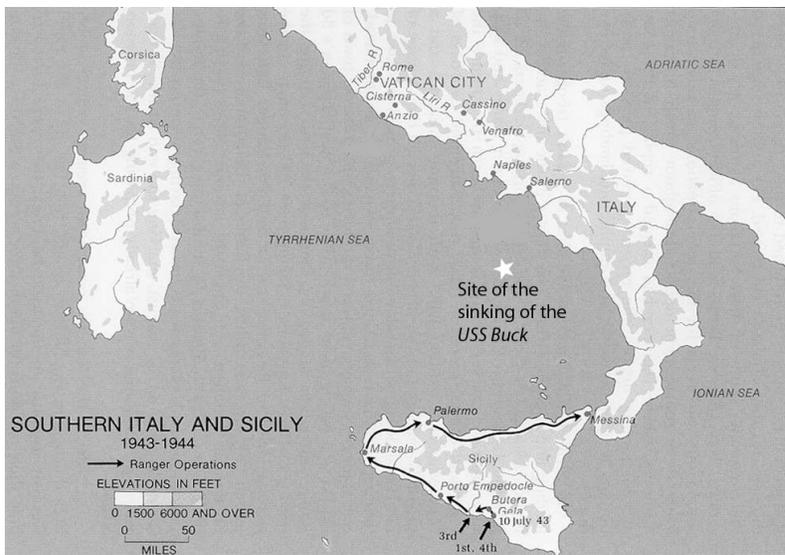
Mercifully for Ed, his replacement for watch duty appeared a bit early to relieve him. Ed made his way below, eagerly anticipating sleep. He stopped to down a cup of stale, lukewarm, wardrobe-room coffee, shed his boots, and then dropped into his bunk, where he immediately fell asleep. He had been asleep for only about 25 minutes when he was jarred awake by the sound of general quarters – the call to battle stations. Ed could feel the increased throb of the engines as his feet hit the deck. He moved quickly, reaching the weather deck and hurrying aft to the forward engine room, noticing as he moved that the mist on the sea was lifting. Ed went down the hatch to main control, his battle station. The ship was running at maximum speed, so he knew that it was investigating a surface contact. Above deck, Captain Klein ordered that the ship's guns be loaded and readied along with the K-Guns that would hurl the depth-charges in a 150-foot fantail pattern. The charges themselves were set to activate at a depth of 150 feet.

The USS *Buck* and *U-616* engaged in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse. At 0036 hrs (12:36 a.m.), the electronic listening device on *U-616* detected the radar signal from the *Buck*. A few minutes later, Koitshka sighted the *Buck* directly astern.



Oberleutnant (later Kapitänleutnant), Siegfried Koitschka, the commander of the U616. Koitschka distrusted the T-5 torpedo and only fired it because the Buck was bearing down on the stern of the U616 where it was housed away from the tubes that contained the standard T-3 torpedoes. Unlike most U-Boat commanders, Koitschka, who was awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd and 1st Class, and the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross for bravery, survived the war. He became a veterinarian and he and Ed Cummings eventually struck up a friendship. (Source: "The Men - U-boat Commanders," URL: <http://www.uboot.net/men/koitschka.htm>)

The *Buck* was closing fast, giving Koitschka no time to track and attack in the usual way. He ordered his U-boat to submerge and wait out the depth charges that were sure to follow. At that moment, however, he also remembered the single T-5 torpedo, which he had relegated to the stern tube. Despite his misgivings about the weapon, he fired the T-5 at about 2,000 meters from the *Buck* and rigged to dive. According to the last reading of the air search radar, both *U-616* and the *Buck* lay about fifty nautical miles south of the Isle of Capri in the Tyrrhenian Sea.



MAP: *The location of the sinking of the USS Buck.* (Source: "Southern Italy and Sicily, 1943-44," at URL: <http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/70-42/map2.JPG>)

The torpedo turned to follow the sound generated by the onrushing *Buck*. Suddenly, Ed heard his Engine Room telephone man, who was connected to the Bridge: "Torpedo in the water!" No torpedo wake was visible as the acoustic head homed in underwater on the *Buck*. It struck the starboard side near the magazines of the forward five-inch guns. Hull fragments from the initial detonation probably pierced the thin wall housing the *Buck's* shells, triggering a massive explosion that blew away the forward deckhouse and bridge, as well as the two forward five-inch gun mounts. About 35 feet of the bow broke off and remained afloat, with 5 to 10 feet of the prow above water. The rest of the ship heeled to port, and with her engine screws still churning, kept moving forward as water cascaded down the port side, lapping at the forward fire room hatches, just above Ed and his crew as they struggled to deal with the emergency. Witnessing the destruction he had wrought, *Oberleutnant* Koitshka quickly moved out of the area, toward Salerno, fearful that the massive explosion would soon draw more destroyers.

Seated on a large metal toolbox behind his throttle man, Ed initially felt a "bump," followed by the explosion that threw him up against the throttle valve wheels. The engine room listed to port, but the generators continued to hum, the lights remained on, and the engine order telegraph still indicated flank speed. Ed sent a man up to survey the damage. He shouted back down the hatch, "Better get out of the engine room; it's bad up here." In an orderly but rapid fashion, the men moved up the ladder, with Ed behind them. He paused momentarily to take a final look back, but scurried up when a steam line broke and the escaping hot vapor caught the right side of his face and eye.

Ed emerged to a stunning sight. Bodies lay "on the deck up against the deckhouse as if they had been carefully placed there." Ed quickly checked his motionless shipmates. He heard a moan from just one. Ed and a crewman carried the wounded sailor to the ship's fantail, while all around them men were running and shouting in confusion. In the middle of the chaos, Ed called for attention. Within seconds, a dead quiet prevailed. Ed told the men that they had lost this

particular battle, but that they all needed to take care of the wounded and themselves so they could get back to winning the war.

Then, a voice called out from the darkness, "Are we abandoning ship?" A senior officer would have to give that order, Ed replied. "They're all dead," he was told. "You are the senior officer left!"

The news staggered Ed. In just a few moments, his responsibility had mushroomed, from ensuring the ship's engines were in working order to leading all of the surviving crew members at a time of life or death. Fortunately, Ed knew all of the men in the engine room and had become familiar to the rest of the ship's crew from his regular stints on deck watch duty. He inspired respect and confidence in them, and in this moment of crisis, they responded to him. Ed paused for a few seconds, thinking that they might be able to keep the ship afloat, but then the *Buck* lurched downward a few more feet. He gave the order to abandon ship, urging the men to swim clear of the stricken vessel so that they would not be sucked down with her. "Get the wounded over the side," Ed commanded, "and set the safeties on the depth charges." A voice responded that that was already being done.

In order to ensure that all of the crew had received the "abandon ship" order, Ed went forward on the starboard side. The funnel of the ship was gone, and black smoke was pouring out of the area where the base should have been. The bridge had simply disappeared, and water was surging through the hatch. The reality of the sight hit him anew: all of his fellow officers, including Captain Klein, were dead. But he did not feel fear. His adrenaline flowing, Ed focused on his mission: saving the men who were his responsibility by making sure that everyone got off the ship. He encountered a man on the starboard side, who had not gotten the word to abandon the vessel, and told him to do so. As Ed walked back to the fantail, he saw the crew in the water, swimming away from what remained of the *Buck*. He was the only one still onboard. As a final check, Ed went from the fantail up to the first level to find any material that would float. But the *Buck* nudged down again. He had to

get off, immediately. Wearing his Kapok lifejacket, Ed strode to the port side and jumped, dropping about eight feet into the water.

As Ed swam away from the ship, it lurched about 20 degrees. He had escaped just in time. The water was not cold, but it was full of oil. Luckily for him, he was an engineer, who worked around oil every day, and was used to it. To him, “It smelled nice . . . rather sweet and clean.” Swallowing it while swimming away from the suction of the sinking ship, however, was quite another matter.



A Kapok life jacket. (Source: U.S. Militaria Forum, “US Navy Kapok Life Preservers,” URL: <http://www.usmilitariaforum.com/upgradetest/index.php?/topic/2892-us-navy-kapok-life-preservers/>)

The Kapok jacket that Ed wore was a big, puffy vest. It came up to the back of the neck, and had a collar that one tied under the chin to keep the head elevated, even during sleep. About 20 yards clear of the ship, Ed turned to see the *Buck's* stern upright, “with about 100 feet visible and her two propellers intact but completely still.” Transfixed, he watched her “plunge deeper, pause, and then silently slide under the water.” But the fireworks were not over. Although Ed had ordered his men to set the safeties on the depth charges, they had not been able to reach the farthest one before they were forced to abandon ship. Seconds after the *Buck* plunged to her watery grave, the ocean erupted as the depth charge detonated with catastrophic force.

Playing football at Prep, Ed had experienced being hit by three different players at the same time, and had been knocked out of the St. Albans game by one such collision. But that did not come close to matching the concussive force of the depth charge. It squeezed his stomach against his spinal cord, temporarily paralyzing his legs. And he was lucky. Many men were killed outright by the explosion, others died slowly from internal injuries caused by the blast.

Almost immediately after the explosion, two Kapok jackets popped up beside Ed. One he grabbed, and the other he attempted to reach by swimming, only to discover that he could not move his legs. Strangely, Ed felt a calm reassurance. He interpreted the unlikely appearance of the two life jackets as a sign from God that he would survive this ordeal. "At that moment, it never occurred to me that I wouldn't be rescued in time." Staving off the fear that his legs might be permanently paralyzed, Ed repeatedly reassured himself that his condition was most probably a temporary one caused by shock and that it would soon resolve itself – which it did, a few hours later.

Bobbing in the dark sea and fearing that he might be the only survivor, Ed drew on his faith, which had blossomed at Prep. He prayed fervently and often, asking God to return him safely to Ethel and to his parents. To remain alert and to assuage his anxiety, Ed concentrated on simpler, happier times. In his memory, he replayed each of his Prep football games, even changing the final scores. "The nice thing was, that night, we won every contest!!"

Ed maintained confidence that he would be rescued, and calculated how long it might take rescue forces to arrive in the area. Apprehensive about the patrol being ripe for ambush, Captain Klein had established a check-in procedure with the Task Unit Commander. It involved encoding and reporting the ship's position once during each watch. The vagaries of voice radio sometimes made it difficult to make contact and have the position acknowledged, but Ed had fortunately sent out a position report that was "rogered" at about 2200 hrs (10 p.m.). Even if the lack of a

message during the following watch were attributed by headquarters to atmospheric conditions, a missing message for two consecutive watches would surely prompt an alert.

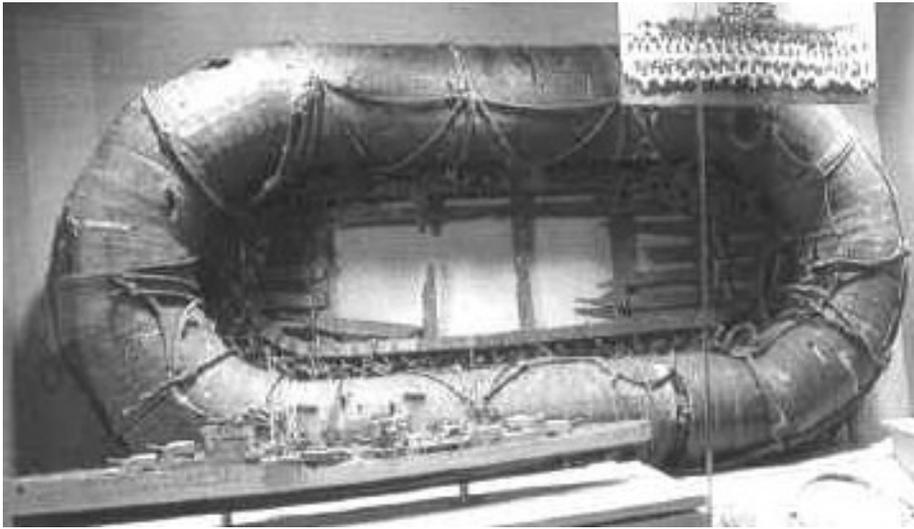
As dawn broke, a mild squall line passed, bringing waves and showers. At first, Ed tried to catch the rainwater, but his head and hands were covered with oil and salt, so he let the rain wash his face and then extended his tongue to catch some of the raindrops. More important, the wave carried Ed high enough that he spotted a raft with survivors not too far distant. He headed towards them, using his helmet liner to help pull him through the water, at which point some feeling began returning to his legs.



Ed verified that this photograph of survivors of a ship sinking captured well the scene that he remembered. (Source: "Destroyers Fletcher Class," www.worldaffairsboard.com, URL: <http://www.worldaffairsboard.com/naval-warfare/56651-destroyers-fletcher-class-30.html>)

The raft was full and about 25 additional survivors were clustered around it in the water, all suffering in varying degrees from the effects of the depth charge explosion. After greeting the group, Ed offered his two extra Kapok jackets to men in the water around him. One immediately took a jacket, but, to Ed's amazement, no one spoke up for the other, so Ed insisted that the medical corpsman wear it. Ed then suggested that they all pray for their shipmates who had perished, as well as for their own early rescue. In unison, they recited the Lord's Prayer. As he held on to the raft, he heard men pray more ardently than he had ever heard before,

including one chief petty officer who had mocked him when he took the “church party” to services on Sunday mornings.



A Carley Life Float. (Source: MV Melbourne Star, “The Rescue,” URL: <http://www.melbournestar.co.uk/Rescue.html>)

Ed’s poise under pressure, and his corresponding ability to rise to challenges, had characterized him throughout his young life. They now stood him and his men in good stead. Ed caught sight of one of his engineers floating near him. The man was suffering intense emotional distress. He hurt physically and could not handle the moaning of the wounded. He tried to swim away, but Ed managed to bring him back to the group, calmly reassuring him that help would soon be on the way.

As the sun rose higher, procuring food and water became the top priority. Except for “one terrified young man who clung to the interior rigging with all of his might,” Ed ordered the raft cleared so that it could rise further to the surface and make it easier to get at the supply pocket, which had sagged below the waterline. Unfortunately, when they got to it, they discovered the water cask had been split open and the fresh water contaminated. The hungry sailors did, however, find a tin of chocolate tablets. There were plenty of them, but all of the survivors had been hit by the shock wave of the depth charge, and Ed wanted them to be careful about what they put into their stomachs. So he ordered that, at least initially, each man would receive only two apiece.

The supply pocket also divulged two wooden paddles that the men used in an attempt to propel the raft eastward. As the more severely wounded climbed back into the raft, Ed slipped back into the water to join the others clustered around the float. Although the paddlers had to abandon their efforts because they could make no progress due to the weight of all the men in the rubber "Ark," Ed ordered them to keep the paddles handy, in the event that they might prove useful. That turned out to be a very wise command decision.

Daybreak brought renewed hope and increased warmth for the survivors as the sun climbed into the morning sky. It also revealed another chilling scene: body after lifeless body of shipmates adrift, including the distraught engineer Ed had tried to reassure the prior night. Maddeningly, the men spotted a few planes in the sky, but they were too far away to see the raft. Then, about midmorning, one plane approached closer than the others. Ed ordered the paddles raised, in hopes that the wet blades would glint in the sun and catch the pilot's eye.

The tactic worked. The plane, an Army Air Corps C47, carrying casualties from Salerno back to Sicily, was flying low over the water because the wounded could not stand higher altitudes. The pilot and co-pilot saw something sparkling in the water and then found themselves over approximately 150 men waving madly at them. Descending to an even lower altitude to investigate, the plane made several passes over the group, dropping a few inflatable rubber rafts and some life belts. Since they could do no more, the pilots reported the position of the survivors and continued toward their destination.

Along with a few others, Ed swam to one of the yellow rubber rafts. Six survivors had already boarded, but they managed to squeeze Ed in at the bow. The raft's equipment had fallen out, so they had no paddles to make their way back to the group. By that time, they had also lost sight of it and felt too exhausted to jump back into the water to tow the raft in that general direction. Regardless, Ed was

quite sure that the recovery operation was fully underway, and that rescue ships would appear in the area within two or three hours.

But as the day lengthened, his optimism gave way to concern. With each passing hour, Ed knew that other survivors would be succumbing to their injuries, or simply drowning due to exhaustion. By sunset, Ed feared that they might not be found until the next day or even later. The thought even crossed his mind that they all might die, but he firmly rejected it. Clinging to hope and physically spent, Ed involuntarily nodded off as darkness fell.

Shortly thereafter, he was startled awake by the glow of a flare fired overhead from one of the other rafts. Ed could also hear ships in the area. About 2230 hrs (10:30 p.m.), the men in the raft heard the throbbing of an approaching ship's diesel engine and worried that it might be a German submarine running on the surface rather than an Allied vessel. Fortunately, *HMS LCT* (Landing Craft, Tank) 170



A *LCT* (Landing Craft, Tank) (Source: "Ships of the U.S. Navy, 1940-1945," Hyper War, URL: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/LCT/LCT-198.html>)

loomed out of the darkness instead and rescue seemed near at hand. The ship, however, did not stop. Rather, it maintained its course and speed. As she passed

near Ed's rubber raft, he rose and shouted to the people he could make out on the bridge. Inexplicably, the LCT continued on its path. This proved more than even "easy Ed" could take. His frustration boiled over as he blistered the ship with a string of choice Navy expletives – what he called, "Navy plain language."

Ed's verbal pyrotechnics seemed to have the desired effect because *LCT 170* slowed, turned back toward the raft, and smartly came up alongside it. The men disembarked quickly from their "yellow boat" and went through a weather door to the interior of the LCT. As the last one out of the raft, Ed put his hands on the landing craft's low gunwale, but had no strength left to lift himself up on to the deck. A "doughty British boatswain" lifted him up and then pointed. Passing through a light curtain, Ed came upon "a most pleasing scene" – his six raft mates clustered around a very large pot of soup. He was also cheered to hear that *LCT 170* had picked up 17 other survivors of the *Buck*. After a bowl of hot soup, Ed prepared a muster list of the crew. Then he found his way to the bridge, where the captain, a gregarious Canadian, noticed that Ed had no shoes and offered him an extra pair of his own, plus the use of his cabin for the night.

The captain explained to Ed that he had been on his way to Palermo, Sicily, and had received notice of survivors in the area. Ed thanked him and also apologized for the way he had shouted when the ship first passed the raft. The captain laughed and told Ed that there had been cases when, after sinking a ship, a U-boat had surfaced and put two or three of its own crew in an inflatable raft in the area. Then, as a rescue ship approached and slowed, the U-Boat fired and sank the rescuers. The captain had exercised caution around Ed's raft, but "when we heard you," he humorously observed, "we knew you were a Yank!"

Ed thanked the captain again and went down to his cabin. He put on his shoes and went about the ship to see the survivors. He found most of them up on the deck, peering into the night as if to be sure that no other U-Boat would target them. Too oily and salty to sleep in the captain's bunk, Ed joined them and lay on

the deck. But he could not fall asleep, as adrenaline continued to course through his body. He got up, wandered about the ship checking on his men, and came back to the cabin from time to time.

LCT 170 landed in Palermo in mid-morning on October 10. Transportation to take the men to the hospital failed to materialize, but they learned that the hospital was only four blocks away. Leaving his chief petty officer with the more seriously wounded, Ed led a group to the hospital. He did so barefooted, as he had returned the shoes to the captain over the latter's protestations. The stone paving became so hot that Ed soon regretted his decision and proceeded from shadow to shadow until he eventually reached the hospital. Once there, he placed himself last in line behind his men to get a bath.

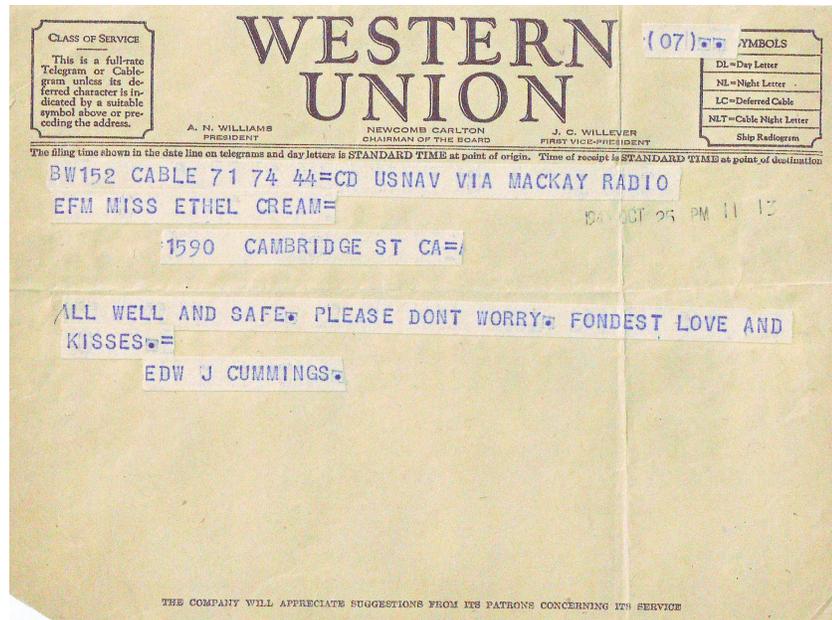
Indeed, in keeping with the highest ideals of the officer corps, Ed had placed himself last throughout the ordeal, showing selfless dedication to his men, making their welfare his top priority. Of course, in acting as he did, Ed was also reflecting the Jesuit ideal embodied in the prayer so beloved by Fr. Kirby, St. Ignatius's prayer for generosity: "To give and not to count the cost, To fight and not to heed the wounds, To toil and not to seek for rest. . . ." Ed had indeed been "Big Ed" in the midst of crisis. Now, after nearly 60 sleepless hours, he well deserved "to seek for rest." Having learned that most deaths from the effects of depth-charge blast occurred in the first 72 hours, Ed lay down, happy to be alive and hopeful that he would awake the next morning.

Of course, news from combat areas lagged, and back in the United States on October 15, an early rising friend of Ed's father opened his morning newspaper, only to see a Navy Department announcement that two destroyers had been lost in the Mediterranean: the *USS Buck*, with heavy fatalities, and the *USS Bristol* – sunk off Algiers – with lighter casualties. These destroyers were two of the 71 American destroyers lost during WWII, 60 of them in confrontations with enemy ships, planes, shore batteries, and mines. The friend waited to tell Ed's father until he came out to

pick up his own newspaper. Thus alerted, Dr. Cummings hid the newspaper from his wife and called a well-connected Navy acquaintance, only to learn that Ed was not on the first list of survivors.

Anna Cummings, Ed's aunt, and Mary Anderson, the wife of the *Buck's* assistant engineer, each attempted to contact Ethel at her parents' home. Ethel was at work, but Mrs. Crean took their calls and assured them that her daughter would call them back. When Ethel arrived home, her mother told her of the telephone calls and warned her, "I don't think this is good news." Ethel learned from the two callers that the *Buck* had been sunk, that fatalities were high, and that Ed's name did not appear either on the list of survivors, nor on the roll of the injured. Ethel, a person of deep faith, reacted stoically to the news and decided to go to work the next day in order to keep herself busy. She simply could not bear to sit around the house waiting for news.

Both Ethel and Ed's father continued to put up a good front even as the emotional strain increased. Then, Dr. Cummings' contact in the Navy called to say that a second list of survivors did include Ed's name. Only then did Ed's father tell his wife what had happened. She in turn called Ethel's mother, who relayed the good news to her daughter. "At that point," Ethel later recalled, "I fell apart and tears flowed." Tears of relief and gratitude, but also tears born of the stark realization of how close a call it had been – of how close she had come to losing Ed. He was in the hospital in Palermo, but despite his telegram telling her, "All well and safe. Please don't worry," she remained troubled because she did not know the extent of his injuries.



Telegram sent by Ed to Ethel after his rescue. Courtesy Ed and Ethel Cummings

Ethel also joined Mary Anderson in calling on Captain Klein's wife. The captain was still missing, but Mrs. Klein, who had three children, clung to hope, emphasizing that her husband was a strong swimmer and might yet appear. Unfortunately, he did not. Ethel's relief and gratitude for Ed's survival mingled with her grief for the brave young mother and for the many other families of *Buck* crewmen who had made the ultimate sacrifice.

Leaving the hospital on October 28, Ed and his crew boarded an LST in Palermo harbor and sailed to Bizerte, Tunis. From there, they travelled to Algiers, where they were transferred to a hospital transport ship carrying ambulatory patients and some prisoners of war. On November 21, 1943, Ed gratefully gazed out at the Statue of Liberty. The Navy assigned him to St. Albans Hospital in New York City, but Ed did not stay there. Rather, he lived in a hotel paid for by the Navy. He realized that his duty schedule was such that he could take a train to Boston, see Ethel, and return by lights out. One morning, shortly after his arrival in New York, he called Ethel and told her that he was coming up. They met at South Station. "I saw her, and held her, and kissed her, and said 'Let's get married.'" Ethel's first words were, "Ed, you look terrible!"

In truth, Ed not only looked terrible – pale, weak, and thin – he also felt terrible, especially troubled by his stomach, which had been “pancaked” by the depth charge blast. Still, Ed had 30 days of survivor’s leave coming to him, and he was determined to begin his married life with Ethel, who at that moment wondered privately whether Ed would even be able to make it through the ceremony. Nevertheless, they took out a calendar for December, and Ed suggested December 11, Ethel’s mother’s birthday. On hearing of the couple’s plans, Mrs. Crean’s first reaction was “Great!” Then she looked at the calendar and exclaimed, “Lord! That’s only three weeks from now!!”

Ethel did not have enough time to order a wedding dress, but luckily, her sister had recently married, and so Ethel borrowed hers. The couple also needed to obtain a church dispensation to have a wedding during Advent, which was granted because of wartime conditions. By the day of the wedding, Ed looked better but was still feeling weak. Indeed, Ethel and the priest warned the altar boys to be on the alert to catch him should he become ill or faint during the nuptial Mass. Thankfully, nothing of the sort occurred as the young couple exchanged vows at Ethel’s parish church of St. Paul’s in Cambridge, Massachusetts. (Ed and Ethel will celebrate their seventieth anniversary this December.)



By the day of his wedding to Ethel, Ed looked better but was still feeling weak. Ethel and the priest warned the altar boys to be on the alert to catch him should he become ill or faint during the nuptial Mass. Thankfully, nothing of the sort occurred. Courtesy, Ed and Ethel Cummings.

Ed's parents wanted the couple to honeymoon in Florida, but Ed did not feel up to that. Instead, they opted for New York City, a place they had always enjoyed. Their honeymoon began inauspiciously, however, as Ed became violently sick to his stomach on the train ride from Boston. In addition, Ed's sleep was disturbed each night by vivid nightmares of the sinking of the *Buck*. These had begun almost immediately after the incident. One night aboard ship during the voyage back to the States, Ed had leaped out of his bunk during the course of one of the nightmares and had hit his head just above the eye. The cut required a number of stitches to close. When he was with Ethel and suffered a nightmare, she would grab him and reassure him that all was well and then he would fall back to sleep until morning. After the

war, the nightmares decreased in frequency, but they persisted into the 1960s, a symptom of what is now recognized as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

The ordeal of the *Buck* had clearly taken a toll on the young officer. Ethel recalled that Ed was more serious and very quiet during the honeymoon. His sense of duty undoubtedly played a role, for Ed insisted on visiting the families of men from New York City who had not survived the sinking of the destroyer. “To give and not to count the cost, to labor and not to seek for rest. . . .”

After leave, Ed reported for a three-month gunnery course at the Washington Navy Yard, which the newly married couple found relaxing. Ed had orders to join another destroyer, but noticed that he kept getting “woozy” riding the bus to and from the Navy Yard. The pitching motion of a destroyer would make matters worse. Ed therefore talked to a friend from his Naval Academy days who served as an instructor at the gunnery school. The friend assured Ed that he would take care of things, and soon thereafter, Ed received orders assigning him to the *USS Missouri*, the last of the new Iowa-class battleships, and the last battleship constructed for the United States Navy.

Ed became the commander of aft turret no. 3, one of three turrets on the *Missouri* that each sported three 16-inch diameter guns. After completion of pre-commissioning training for the battleship at Newport, Rhode Island, Ed reported to the *Missouri* in April 1944. The ship was commissioned in June and during its shakedown cruise travelled down the East Coast to Cuba and then sailed west. Ed spent Christmas of 1944 in Pearl Harbor, and then the *Missouri* joined the Pacific Fleet for the final months of the war.



Following his survivor's leave, Ed was assigned to the battleship USS Missouri, an Iowa-class battleship and the last battleship constructed for the United States Navy. He joined the Missouri for her sea trials, and served as the officer in charge of aft Turret #3. (Source: USS Missouri memorial Association, URL: <https://www.ussmissouri.org/sslpage.aspx?pid=581>)

The *Missouri* was attached to Fast Carrier Task Force. Its primary mission was to protect aircraft carriers from the Japanese navy rather than to conduct shore bombardment. By the time that the *Missouri* arrived in the Pacific, however, the Japanese fleet had been decimated. Indeed, since the fall of Saipan and the capture of the Marianas in June 1944, Japanese leaders had realized that the war was lost. Still, they hoped to preserve the imperial and military establishments and at least part of the empire. They dubbed their strategy for doing so: *Ketsu-Go*. The Japanese would fight to the death and extract such a butcher's bill in American blood that American morale would buckle and the U.S. public would demand an end to the blood-letting. According to this scenario, the United States government would then drop its insistence on unconditional surrender and would agree to a negotiated peace. The nightmarish battles of Iwo Jima in February 1945, and of Okinawa in April 1945, embodied the strategy of *Ketsu-Go*. Ed found himself in the midst of this carnival of death.

The guns of Ed's turret no. 3 were each capable of firing at targets either singly or in salvos of two or three. These 66-foot-long guns hurled six-foot long projectiles weighing between 1,900 and 2,700 pounds to a maximum range of 24 miles. Off of Iwo Jima, Ed and his turret crew fired salvos onto the island in support of the Marine landings. The *Missouri* next raided the coast of Japan's northern home island of Hokkaido, bombarding munitions factories. Returning to the vicinity of Okinawa, the *Missouri*, together with other fast battleships, shelled islands near

Okinawa to ensure that Japanese forces there could not interfere with the planned assault. The *Missouri* then joined in the bombardment of Okinawa that preceded and accompanied the landing of U.S. Marines.



Ed directed fire from the three massive 16-inch guns of Turret #3 against the beaches Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and against munitions factories on the Japanese home island of Hokkaido.
(Source: "Wolr dWar II Photos," National Archives, URL: goo.gl/1145J)

As the turret officer, Ed often directed operations from the turret officer's station located inside the rear overhang of the turret to the rear of a transverse bulkhead, a dividing wall across the turret that protected against gas and flame. Occasionally, when the turret was placed in automatic mode, Ed also controlled its movement and firing from a position high up in the superstructure known as Main Battery Director, Spot 2. There, Ed witnessed up close what every man in the fleet dreaded: the terrifying kamikaze attacks. These inflicted the greatest losses in lives – nearly 5,000 – and ships – 34 sunk and 368 damaged – ever suffered by the U.S. Navy. If kamikaze planes made it through the protective outer picket line of destroyers, the *Missouri's* radar and its secondary battery of 5-inch guns and wide array of rapid fire anti-aircraft guns provided defense against what essentially had become guided bombs.



During the Battle of Okinawa that began in early April 1945, and lasted until mid-June 1945, the Missouri came under attack by Japanese kamikaze planes. In this photo, the Missouri's anti-aircraft batteries fire low as a kamikaze approaches the stern of the warship. The kamikazes inflicted the greatest losses in lives and ships in U.S. Navy history. (Source: "Kamikaze Image gallery," USS Missouri Memorial Association, URL: <http://www.ussmissouri.com/page.aspx?pid=402>)

During one attack, on April 11, 1945, Ed watched in fascinated horror as a *kamikaze* plane flew directly at him. "Dear God, please let it miss," he prayed. It did miss him, slamming into the ship about sixty feet below where Ed stood. When it impacted, it split horizontally, with most of the wreckage falling overboard. The plane caused some damage and ignited a fire that the crew extinguished, but the operation of the ship continued uninterrupted.



This iconic photo of a kamikaze about to hit the Missouri involved Ed directly. Perched above turret no. 3 on the ship's superstructure, he saw the plane coming towards him. It crashed into the battleship only about 60 feet below him. (Source: : "Kamikaze gallery," USS Missouri Memorial Association, URL: <http://www.ussmissouri.com/page.aspx?pid=402>)



"A view of the USS Missouri shortly after the kamikaze crashed into the battleship on April 11, 1945. Fire is visible amidships where a wing section landed. The primary point of impact was further aft adjacent to main battery turret no. 3" where Ed was in command. The pilot's remains were buried the next day at sea with full military honors. (Source: "Kamikaze gallery," USS Missouri Memorial Association, URL: <http://www.ussmissouri.com/page.aspx?pid=402>)

The unfortunate pilot of the plane was cut in half from head to foot. For all of the hatred that Navy men felt for the Japanese suicide flyers, members of the crew gathered the portion of the pilot's body that remained on the *Missouri*, prepared a Japanese flag, and the next day, buried the pilot at sea, offering a hand-salute, a three-rifle volley by a Marine honor-guard, a bugler playing taps, and a chaplain to commend his body to the deep. Many years later, the pilot's parents learned that their son had received a proper burial, knowledge that they found deeply consoling.

The use of two atomic bombs on August 6 and August 9, 1945, brought the war to an abrupt and unexpected end. On September 2, 1945, the *Missouri* steamed into Tokyo Bay to accept the formal surrender of the Japanese empire, thus marking the end of World War II. Representing the Allied powers, General Douglas MacArthur presided over the ceremonies as Japanese officials signed the documents acknowledging their nation's capitulation. On that day, Ed and his men stood in a line on the fan tail of the ship at turret no. 3. When the *Missouri* first sailed into the bay, about 50 of Cummings's team had been tasked to serve as part of the landing

force that secured the Japanese naval base at Yokosuka at the strategic entrance of Tokyo Bay.



SC 210649 USS Missouri anchored in Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945

Ed was aboard the Missouri as she steamed into Tokyo Bay to accept the formal Japanese surrender. Source: "The U.S. Missouri Anchored in Tokyo Bay, 2 September 1945," Naval History and Heritage Command, URL: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/japansur/js-8.htm>

On the day of the surrender, Ed received orders for an additional contingency duty – one that he regarded as somewhat bizarre. U.S. officials feared that some Japanese military die-hards might try to sabotage the surrender by launching *kamikaze* attacks against the *Missouri*. If that occurred, Ed was supposed to leave his turret and run forward to shepherd 10 to 15 admirals to a pre-designated motorized launch tied to a boom. Ed was to take them back to the Yokosuka naval base. Ed later said that the orders were among the craziest he ever received. If fanatical Japanese had attacked the *Missouri*, it would have been very hard for the admirals to get to the launch. In addition, setting out into the bay toward Yokosuka would have presented attacking planes with a great target.

Fortunately, such an attack did not occur, but only by the narrowest of margins. Unbeknownst to Ed, on the morning of the surrender, fanatical pilots had gathered at an airfield outside of Tokyo intent on dive-bombing the *Missouri* and

short-circuiting the national humiliation of surrender. Learning of the conspiracy, the emperor urgently sent his brother, the crown prince, to beg the men in the name of the emperor to desist. They did so reluctantly, and the surrender ceremony proceeded uneventfully. Had the attack occurred, Americans no doubt would have viewed it through the lens of the Pearl Harbor attack and would surely have visited fearful revenge on Japan.



Photo # 80-G-332701 Gen. Umezu signs instrument of surrender, 2 Sept. 1945

General Douglas MacArthur presided at the surrender ceremonies marking the end of World War II, September 2, 1945. Ed urged his men at turret no. 3 to go forward in small groups to witness at least a few minutes of the historic occasion, which was held on the ship's bow. Many chose not to do so, but Ed availed himself of the opportunity. He also had a contingency assignment to spirit admirals away from the ship in a motorized launch should the Japanese attempt a surprise kamikaze attack against the Missouri during the surrender ceremony – an attack that, unbeknownst to the gathering on the Missouri, came perilously close to materializing. Source: "Surrender of Japan," Naval History and Heritage Command, URL: <http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/events/wwii-pac/japansur/js-8g.htm>)

As the surrender ceremony unfolded on the prow of the ship, Ed and his men back on the fan tail could hear the proceedings over loud speakers but could see nothing. Ed sent men forward individually so that they could witness at least some of the historic event. Many, however, had no desire to see it. They shared the sentiments of one of the turret crew, who said to Ed, "Hell, don't send me forward, send me home!" Ed persisted, imploring them not to miss such a monumental event in world history, and warning them that in years to come they would regret their

decision. Still, many remained unmoved, and one suggested aloud that Ed himself go forward.

Ed had intended to see some of the ceremony after his men had had their chance to view it, but now decided to make his way toward the bow. He found a spot from which he watched as a Japanese Army colonel signed the instrument of surrender. When, because of a discrepancy in wording in one of the eight copies of the surrender document, the colonel voiced his objection and balked at affixing his signature, MacArthur thundered, "I find this document valid! The representative of Japan will sign it NOW!" Ed thought to himself, "I never want to lose a war."

To that end, Ed made the Navy – and specifically service in the destroyer force – his career, a career that Ethel supported and enjoyed as a navy wife. Ed was stationed in Britain during the Korean War, but in an ironic twist of fate, during the Vietnam War, he found himself again involved in sea rescues – this time as the rescuer. In 1968-1969, he directed operations that plucked downed American pilots from the waters of the Gulf of Tonkin.



Following the war, Ed remained in the Navy. In an ironic role reversal, during the Vietnam War, Ed became the rescuer as opposed to the rescued, commanding a destroyer squadron in 1968-69 that plucked downed American fliers from the waters of the upper Tonkin Gulf. Captain Cummings retired from the Navy in 1972, having just completed a stint as Chief of Staff to the Commander, Destroyer Crews, Pacific Fleet. Courtesy of Captain Edward J. Cummings (Ret.).

In 1972, Ed retired from the Navy with the rank of captain, having completed a stint as Chief of Staff to the Commander, Destroyer Crews, Pacific Fleet. He then embarked on a successful second career employing his engineering background in the commercial construction business. He still sits on the board of one such company today.



Ed and Ethel have now been married almost 70 years. They have one daughter, two grandchildren, and, in Ethel's words, two "greats" : great-grandchildren. When asked to explain her "formula" for a happy 70-year marriage, Ethel did not hesitate: "In addition to love, a lot of trust, and respect." As for their longevity and vitality, Ethel explained that she and Ed live near family and have always enjoyed and been interested in people. Their navy life took them to sundry places, where they were continually introduced to new experiences. To this day, Ed and Ethel remain active. In their parish church, Ed serves as an usher at the Saturday evening Mass – he did not volunteer for the choir! They have memberships in two clubs. And Ed has his boardroom duties. They maintain a wide circle of friends, entertain at their home, play cards, dine out, and read – she, fiction at night and "more serious things during the day" – he, non-fiction, mostly history.

Their faith in God and in each other has sustained them over the many years since a strapping, young gentleman from Prep, “kind and affable” in nature, fell in love and braved U-boats, shipwreck, and *kamikazes* to protect his country and return home to “that girl,” as he affectionately called her – his best friend – the love of his life. Ed wrote that Georgetown Prep had given him his foundation in life – that Jesuits such as Fr. Kirby and other dedicated teachers and coaches had taught him and his classmates how to be men [read that gentlemen]. How well they succeeded can be seen in the life of Edward J. Cummings Jr., U.S. Navy (Ret.), Prep Class of 1938: “an officer and a gentleman” by commission, but first and always a gentleman.



Wearing his Prep tie and holding the 1937-38 volume of The Blue and Gray, Ed stands in his study below a model of the USS Buck. He has remained close to the family of Lieutenant Commander Millard J. Klein, who perished when the Buck was torpedoed. Photo for Georgetown Prep by Peter DaSilva.