

ATLANTIC OPERATIONS -- The USS Enterprise (background) was refueled by the fleet oiler. Replenishment of the carrier's oil supply was in 1962. The destroyers on each side of the Enterprise charged up into the wake of the Kaskaskia and came to a relative halt. (Navy photo)

**Commissioned 24 years ago,
this veteran fleet oiler is**

The USS Kaskaskia

By Franklin Hibel

The USS Kaskaskia is no glamour ship. She doesn't have the sleek lines of a dashing destroyer, nor anything approaching the fascination of an attack aircraft carrier and her gleaming planes.

But her mission is as vital as that of any combat vessel in the U.S. Navy. And in cold hard facts: she keeps the destroyers - and other ships - going.

For the Kaskaskia is a fleet oiler upon whom fighting vessels are dependent for fuel oil, jet fuel and aviation gasoline.

One of two fleet oilers homeported at Mayport Naval Station, the Kaskaskia's principal mission is underway replenishment. The primary aim in such replenishment is to deliver the maximum amount of product safely in minimum time.

The fleet's capability depends on the requirements of its least self sufficient ships, since the endurance of these ships determines force endurance. Although destroyers are an essential part of a task force, they have only a fraction of the fuel capacity of capital ships.

Larger vessels are limited not so much by their own endurance as by their ability to refuel their screening destroyers.

It is interesting to note that transfer between ships cruising side by side in the open sea is a process which is completely naval in concept and application. The U.S. Navy performed its first significant replenishment operation at sea in 1899 when the USS Marcellus installed a marine cableway on deck and, while being towed, transferred coal to the USS Massachusetts.

In 1913, still using the astern-towing method, the Navy had increased its rate of coal delivery at sea to four times that attained in the trial 14 years earlier.

Since then the alongside method of replenishment has been general-

ly adopted, and the time involved in delivering fuel and other supplies underway has been cut to a fraction of the former requirement.

The Kaskaskia was commissioned as a fleet oiler on October 24, 1940 and named after a river in Illinois.

It was originally the S.S. Esso Richmond I, launched a year before at Newport News, where she had been built by the Newport News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company.

She was the fourth National Defense Feature Tanker to be delivered to the Esso Co., which operated her until taken over by the Navy.

The vessel was sold to the U.S. Maritime Commission for acquisition by the U.S. Navy.

The oiler's first year of active service was 1941, during which period she operated between California and Pearl Harbor.

The Kaskaskia got underway to service the fleet immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The Mayport tanker sailed under a lucky star throughout WWII, for she never met with heavy enemy action. Nor did she sustain any damage from the enemy.

This good fortune becomes all the more meaningful when it is realized that the Kaskaskia operated almost entirely in the Pacific theater of operations. She poked her nose on several occasions into the forward areas where she rendezvoused with battleships, cruisers, carriers, and destroyers for refueling operations, thus enabling our fighting units to strike back at the enemy time and time again.



Capt. Ward

The fleet oiler operated in the vicinity of New Caledonia in 1942, as well as Auckland, New Zealand; Tutuila, Samoa Islands; and Suva Harbor in the Fiji Islands, prior to returning to the states in October that year.

After a short period in the Aleutians, the Kaskaskia returned to the U.S. for repair work and paid another trip to the Aleutians.

She was back in the Pacific in 1944, servicing ships from Pearl Harbor to the Marshall Islands.

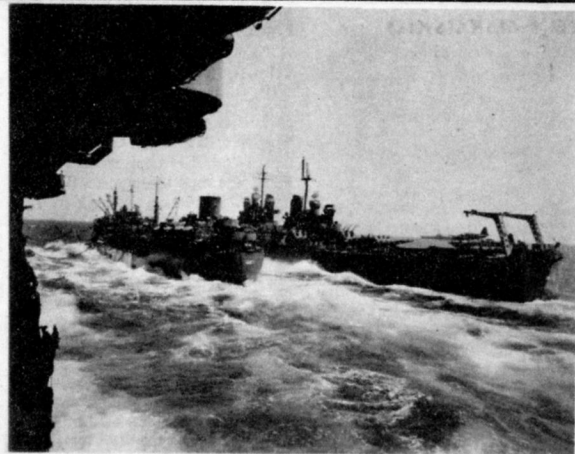
The Mayport oiler got her initial taste of enemy air action when a lone Japanese bomber made a run on her while operating north of the Caroline Islands, November 24, 1944.

However, the enemy aircraft had been tracked from several miles away. When it came within range the Kaskaskia gunners opened up with all AA guns that could be brought to bear.

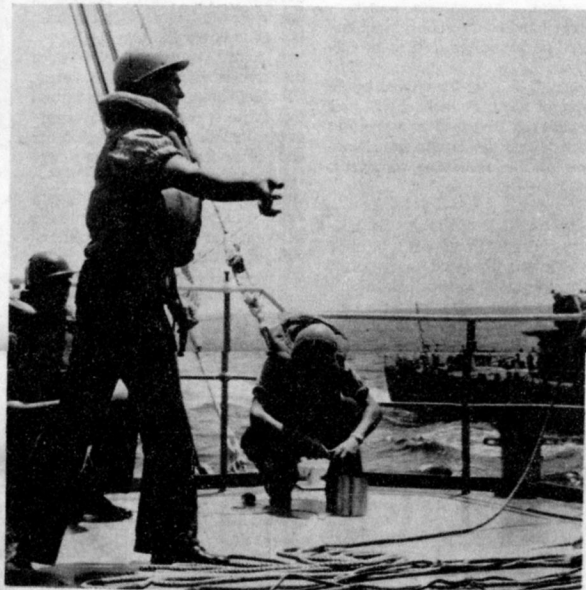
The Japanese pilot veered off and left the scene, presumed to be severely damaged.

After a routine overhaul early 1945, the Kaskaskia returned to the Pacific again and moved into the Okinawa area soon after that island was taken.

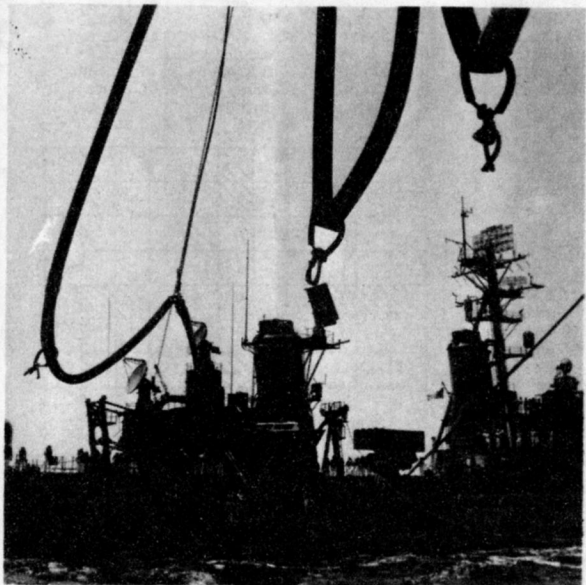
She had her second brush with



COMBAT AREA -- This historic photo was taken in July 1942 when the Kaskaskia operated in the Pacific theater during WWII. She is shown refueling the aircraft carrier USS Essex (left, from which the picture was taken) and the heavy cruiser USS Baltimore. (Navy photo)



FIRST STEP -- An oiler seaman slings a lead slug to the destroyer Wilkinson out of Newport prior to refueling underway. A nylon line will then be tied on, and eventually a three-quarter inch wire, following which will be a shackle wire to the bulkhead. The hose will then go over on trolleys and the refueling operations begin. (Courtesy Jax Journal)



HOSE GOES -- Sliding the hose on trolleys to the Wilkinson. (Courtesy Jax Journal)

enemy planes here after fueling fleet units. The ship's gunners opened up with murderous fire and the planes took off.

The fleet oiler remained in Tokyo Bay with the occupation forces

following the surrender of Japan, furnishing fuel to Navy ships.

After operations at Shanghai, China, Formosa, and Hong Kong, she made several cruises to the

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The Kaskaskia

(Contd. from preceding Pg.)

Far East -- April 1946 through June 1953 -- then took an active part in the Korean Conflict.

The Kaskaskia transferred to the Military Sea Transportation Service early 1957 and was decommissioned on October 21, 1957. She was subsequently stricken from the Navy List, January 2, 1959.

Reinstated on September 1, 1961, the oiler went through a reactivation period and was again commissioned, November 29, 1961.

Assignment came to Mayport and then completion of a training cruise to Guantanamo Bay early in 1962.

The Kaskaskia participated in Project Mercury and the Cuban Quarantine. While on a Med cruise last year, she steamed over 20,000 miles and replenished over 100 ships.

Assigned to the Service Force, Atlantic Fleet as a unit of Service Squadron Two, the Kaskaskia operates as a fleet oiler with the Second and Sixth U.S. Fleets in Atlantic and Mediterranean waters.

A twin screw vessel of 18,333 ton dead weight capacity, the oiler is 553-foot in overall length with a 75-foot beam.

She has an average speed of 18 knots and carries a crew of 17 officers and 206 enlisted men.

The Kaskaskia holds a quantity of 4,250,000 gallons of fuel oil, 1,083,000 gallons of jet fuel, and 302,000 gallons of aviation gasoline.

Capt. Charles W. Ward, the twentieth C.O. of the oiler, took command last month and is delighted with his new assignment.

Previous slots as skipper included the USSPC 465, USS Octa-

via, USS Hanna and USS Corry.

"I've always considered such assignments as high points in my naval career," he said.

Capt. Ward readily admitted he welcomed the challenge of being commanding officer of a ship.

Highly personable and gregarious, he made his presence felt before he started unpacking his bags. A strong advocate of the personal touch, the Kaskaskia C.O. believes in greeting each new man personally and welcoming him aboard. The same touch is added when a man departs for a new assignment.

Concerned over the mental and physical well-being of his men, Capt. Ward has delegated himself as both chaplain and medical officer since the ship has no such billets.

He has prayer books and medical reference books available.

"But I've requested a chaplain to go with us on our Med cruise in January," he said.

In correspondence to the parents of new men, Capt. Ward writes:

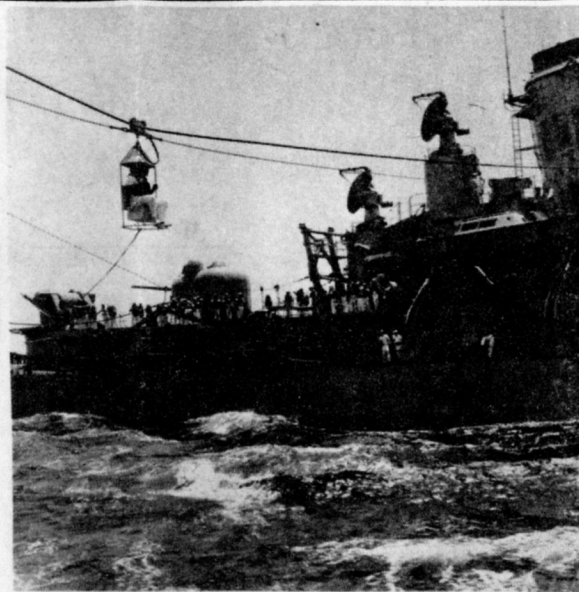
".....I personally ensure and insist upon the best conditions for them....and I personally check from time to time into the care each man takes of his health."

This personal check even consists of examining their teeth.

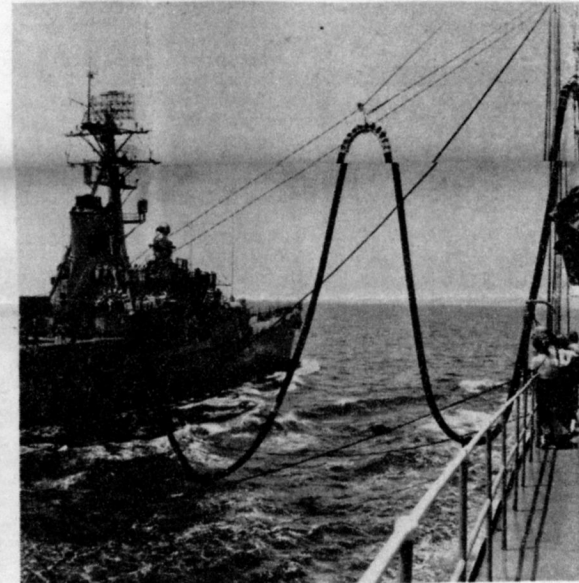
With three children of his own, he's well aware of parental concern.

A proud ship that proclaims she is the world's finest fleet oiler, as attested by her Latin motto, "In Mundo Optimum," the Kaskaskia's streak of good luck in WWII operations continues.

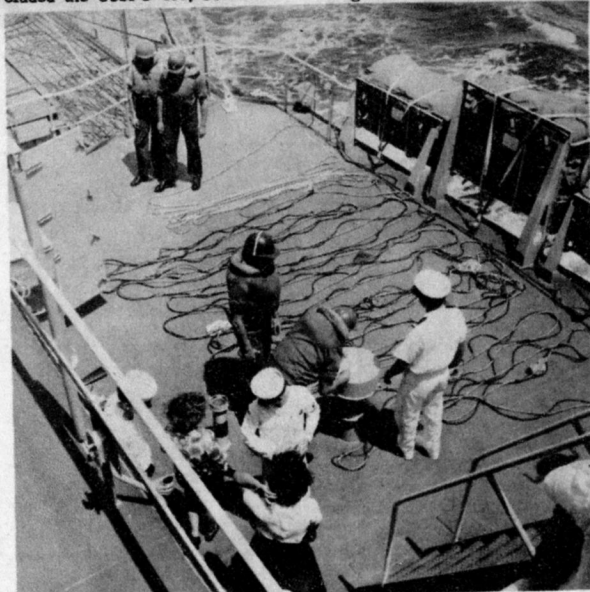
Capt. Ward's warm hand at the helm guarantees this.



HIGH LINE -- Fuel replenishment isn't the Kaskaskia's only mission. She's officially an underway Navy Movie Exchange in transferring films to and from other ships, as well as other light cargo. At the time this photograph was taken, personnel were high-lined from a vessel on one side of the oiler to the one shown above. (Jax Journal)



FILL HER UP -- Dependents on a Kaskaskia cruise watch refueling process of the Wilkinson. (Jax Journal)



PHONE LINE CHECK -- What appears to be symmetrically laid out ropes aboard the Kaskaskia are sound-powered phone lines, which are plugged in and used from ship to ship. The cannister, lower left, is used to send emergency instructions for refueling ops, as well as official correspondence. The two ladies in lower left were on the oiler's dependent cruise at the time. (Jax Journal)