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MAN OR MONKEY OVERBOARD?

During World War 2 on April 1, 1945, which was Easter Sunday, the Destroyer Robinson stopped at Leyte in the Philippines to gather some supplies. During the stay there an Ensign bought a small monkey and brought the little fellow aboard. He was promptly named Damon.

Damon was young and frisky and enjoyed the attentions of the crew very much. Most of the crew returned the affection. Not so our Captain and, in view of this fact, you will be surprised to learn of his quick decision one night.

On April 10, 1945, we stopped at Mindoro in the Philippines and one of the crew brought aboard a very young puppy. We called him Boots.

Boots and Damon quickly became adversaries for Damon didn't like to have to share the attentions of the crew. Damon would run in circles around the little puppy taking nips at him and squealing with delight. But as the weeks went by and Boots kept growing, getting nearer Damon's size, Damon would hide under the torpedo tubes, in a gun mount, or climb a stanchion and as Boots walked by, Damon would pounce on him, take a nip out of him and then run. It wasn't long before Boots grew bigger than Damon and became wise to his little adversary's tricks. And sometimes Boots would get the better of Damon! But all in all, they were becoming fast friends.

During wartime in enemy submarine waters, it is the custom for ships to gather together for Dawn/Evening alert. All the ships in the area gather together a half an hour or so before dawn and sunset to maneuver and protect one another.

On the balmy evening of June 11th, 1945 off the coast of Borneo, we were part of a large group of warships, zig-zagging in maneuvers. While all this was going on, Boots and Damon were playing on deck. Boots came running up the starboard side of the main deck with Damon right behind him. As Boots came about to number one 5" gun mount, he turned sharply left, ran to the port snaking with Damon right behind him. As Boots came up to the snaking, he turned a sharp right. Poor little Damon was so intent on catching Boots and was running so fast, that he couldn't stop. Through the snaking he went and into the ocean!

I'm sure there isn't a Naval regulation which would permit a Captain to pull out of formation and try to rescue a monkey from mid-ocean. But any kind of man overboard calls for a quick decision on the part of the Captain of a ship. And, after a hurried conference with the officers on the bridge, one of whom was a young Lieutenant who later became Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, the decision was made. The Man Overboard flag went up (no known flag for monkey overboard) and a request was made to the Admiral on the battleship in our formation that we could pull out and search for our missing man. Permission was granted and it took about twenty-five minutes to get back to the area in which Damon had fallen into the ocean.

Darkness was closing in fast, and the prospect of our finding our little mascot was very remote. But there was not one sailor aboard unwilling to risk a possible enemy submarine encounter for the opportunity to try to find that little monkey in the

vast sea.

When it was just about total darkness a sharp-eyed sailor spotted our pet. A line was thrown to him, but he was too weak to hold on to it. At this point, one of the crew jumped in the water, cradled Damon in one arm and they were both pulled to safety.

As we sped to rejoin the rest of the ships, Damon was given to the ship's Doctor on Captain's orders. For the next few days, twice a day the Doctor would issue progress reports to the crew concerning his unique patient.

After four days Damon was allowed on deck. He was still a little wobbly, but after a few more days, he was himself again--frisky and fun. The two animals continued romping on deck, but Damon from then on stayed well away from the snaking!

Do you suppose the Admiral ever found out that it was a monkey who went overboard that evening instead of a man?