

Irwin T. McGuire letter, 1950 August 30

(7 leaves, 1 envelope)

HDC 1099

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Irwin T. Mc Guire  
Private letter from the  
Benovelence Hospital Ship.

350 Dolores St.  
San Francisco Calif.  
August 30, 1950

My honey & all, I hope you are all  
feeling fine & I am O.K. God had  
his arms around us. I am writing  
on the kitchen table & I am dope  
up for a cold but it is nice & loose  
now. I am getting dope from  
the marine hospital. Doc & I got  
it between us that they will take me  
in if it is necessary but it isn't.

Well here is my story & two that I know  
& perhaps more of the engine dept. are  
gone. It was in the engine room when  
we were rammed. It was about  
16:55. We had received a stop bell  
before we were rammed. I told  
the throttle man to secure the ahead  
throttle & hit the astern to break her  
which he did. The last glance at the  
clock was 16:59. We were listing  
heavy port. I glanced at the tachom-  
eter & the shaft was dead. The  
order on the squack box said  
"Man the life boats!" Steel was

flying overhead & hitting the engine room deck. I made my way to the boilers & gave the order to secure fires & checked the valves to make sure. Then I stood back by the baily board & watched the steel stock flying at the ladder from the engine room. Two navy boys & myself were the last to leave the engine room & the turbines & the boilers were secure. We climbed the ladder to the main deck. Now we were listing very heavy port. I tried to climb up the deck to starboard to the rail but had to go forward to the superstructure to make it. There is 01 & 02 decks above main deck which I was on. Live boats are on 02 & they couldn't launch them only one & that I guess while I was still in ~~the~~ engine room. I called to boys on 02 deck to throw us life jackets but only one spare & many of us had none so I went foreward in passage way looking for some of a piece of wood or something that would float. I looked down the thwartwise passages & could not see any & if I had gone down in there could not

have gotten out so I worked my self to the point where the bridge superstructure is secured to the main deck & there on the outboard skin of the ship was a doughnut so I put my head & one arm through it. Water was coming on the main deck on the forward part. I climbed on the starboard skin of the ship & up on the 02 deck the nurses were sitting. I sized the ship up & saw that she was settling heavier by the bow so I went up & helped the nurses farther back toward the stern. Men were clinging like flies to the starboard skin all the way to the water edge & you could not see far from the ship because of the pea soup fog. They were going into the water bunches at a time. The ship settled all the way over on her port side. There were about 10-4" x 4" ten or twelve feet long & we made three rafts from them by lashing them with line & I took the line from my doughnut & tied a bowline around each nurse under her arms so it would not slip until the end of line. Three of them were hysterical so I put them one at a time between a couple of cool ones. That line must have

taken about ten of them. Then they shoved off with one raft. Those without jackets went with the other rafts as well as those with. There was a chief warrant officer without a jacket & a navy captain left after the rafts had gone so I wanted to get them together so we could all use my doughnut by this time we were about knee deep in water & a swell came & washed one of my men back to the decks so I helped him back. I looked & another swell was coming so I reached down & grabbed a gird on the skin of the ship & took that one & a little in my throat too. When I came up the navy captain & warrant officer were gone. The ship was all under water the bow lower than the stern. One life boat was upside down & part of it above water about 10 or 12 men were left. I saw a high swell coming so I started swimming at an angle from the bow as I thought she was about to nose dive to her grave & did not want to get caught in the suction. I swam hard for a little while & dared her than I looked back & could see her under the water & the top of the

turned over life boat, then I was alone in the fog. I swam easy to keep circulation for some time & I saw three men together loom out of the fog must have been in the water  $\frac{1}{2}$  hr. then so I went to them. One recognized me & said hey chief one man hasn't a life jacket. When I got to them he took a hold of one side of my doughnut & then we swam slow to keep circulation finally one of our timber rafts loomed through the fog so we swam to that. Finally a life raft loomed through the fog so we swam our timbers to that. Men were holding on to the timbers and as many as 4 or 5 tandems. The life raft was almost under water. I helped tie the timbers & raft together & was pinched between them taking my breath away & I took some water. I spit blood after that. I looked around & saw a lone nurse back at the end of the timbers so I swam back & took her by the hand & swam to the raft. All the men between the raft & myself pushed her over the top into it. I heard a whistle & about 15 minutes later I could see an outline of tug very thin in the fog I was getting numb. I was trying to work my legs slow but I guess they weren't

doing much as I had come to a standing position. I shivered terrible & I worked my way to the edge of the raft. My head was weak & I hooked my chin on the nurses life jacket to hold my mouth out of water. She was shivering terrible too but a good trooper. You'll meet her. She was holding a colored guys head out of water. The cut line of the tug in the fog worked all around us before he saw us & came to us. I couldnt have taken much more. The swells were so bad that the raft keep going under the stern. When the raft was unloaded I was struggling to get in it & couldnt I finally made it & was on my knee heaving. My second & chief refer were on the tug & came down & we hit the water & swam or they swam me to a ladder & helped me to the deck. It was dark my wiper who was on board stripped me rubbed me & wrapped me in a blanket & then I passed out. I shivered so. When I came to & could I crawled on my hands & knees through the door to the engine room & got warm. When I got to the hospital the nurse gave me two big slogs of whiskey. I told the red cross to telegram you & had a bowl of



so up some knock out tablets & awoken  
at 06<sup>30</sup> - Arrived at hospital about  
23<sup>00</sup> I guess. I would estimate the  
ship taking about 30 minutes sinking.  
They are hurrying the other ships  
now & are doubling the chieft & 1st  
on them so they-called for me soon.  
I'll help what I can & take it easy. They  
need them now so cannot come home  
now. I would sure like to come but boys  
are dying in Korea. The first opportunity  
I get I'm going to Michigan. I would like  
to see you all very much but cannot at  
present. How about you honey girl are  
you coming home or stay for awhile? You  
suit yourself.

All my love

Jim

Please come by  
train when you  
come -

xxx-xxx-xxxx

P.S. I saw selfishness & unselfishness & I saw  
men who should make a full back on a Notre Dame  
football team go berserk & little guys doing all they could.  
I must have seen about 6 or 8 bottoms up in the water but  
there was nothing I could do about it.

Please let dad read too as I do not feel like writing  
another letter & also Basil.

A life jacket helps keep you warm but I was in  
shirt & dungeeess & sweating when I came from  
the engine room.