

Commander of the sea drops anchor on San

By ANGELINA DI FAZIO
Journal Reporter

At 80, Fred Hooppner remains hard at work, restoring "Marana," his CT41, a work in progress for 19 years. He mills all the teak woodwork himself, spending hours every day, laboring on his beloved yacht.

The sea has always been in his blood — he spent several years aboard cruisers and destroyers during World War II and the Korean Conflict, one of the most dramatic periods in U.S. Naval history.

Born in Seattle in 1918, Hooppner attended high school and the University of Washington until WWII came along. He had joined the Naval Reserve while still in high school because they were paid a day's wages per

month. Since tuition at the UW was \$30 a quarter, it supplemented his education.

All the young men were being called into the armed services and that summer he was ordered on a two-week screening cruise aboard the battleship USS Illinois. It resulted in a commission as reserve ensign on active duty aboard the battleship USS California. The gunboat was operating in the Pacific when Pearl Harbor was attacked.

Hooppner remembers being awakened by planes flying over the battleship. Feeling grumpy, he looked out the porthole and saw the red circle on the fuselage. "Oh-oh," he said to himself. "You see it but don't believe it." Japanese planes began bombing and strafing. The ship took hits from several torpedoes and aerial bombs, setting it on

fire. Japanese pilots kept strafing wounded as they struggled to get everyone off the sinking ship. Dropping the lead covered code book into the sea, Hooppner made his escape by jumping off the bow, clutching his regulation pistol.

Hooppner next skippered an XYP161 (experimental yard patrol craft). "It was *McHale's Navy* over and over," he recalled.

They patrolled local islands for seven or eight months. They rigged the P161 like a Northwest trawler and when the captain couldn't see them, they caught fish, providing them to locals who weren't allowed out in their boats during the war. "It was so good I nearly cried when I left," Hooppner said.

His next assignment was aboard the USS Denver, a light cruiser also based in the Pacific. After being in the South Pacific for a long time, he returned to the States to attend Annapolis, completing a postgraduate course in communications before returning to another cruiser, the USS Little Rock.

By then the war was nearly over, so they cruised South America as goodwill ambassadors. At age 30, he became the youngest navigator in the Atlantic fleet.

He was later deployed in the Mediterranean but also traveled up the Labrador Strait, North of the Arctic Circle to test equipment in frigid weather. As part of the experiment, the doctor aboard allowed no heating on the ship. Sure enough, they didn't suffer with flu or colds, "so the experiment must have succeeded," he said with a shiver.

Against his will, Hooppner was called to work in the Pentagon in 1951 as head of visual

command. NATO needed a signal book, so he was assigned to co-author it with his counterpart in the British Navy. "Working at the Pentagon was cruel and unusual punishment," Hooppner said, "because you're not your own boss. I was used to commanders of ships but people there are in command of LSDs, i.e. large steel desks."

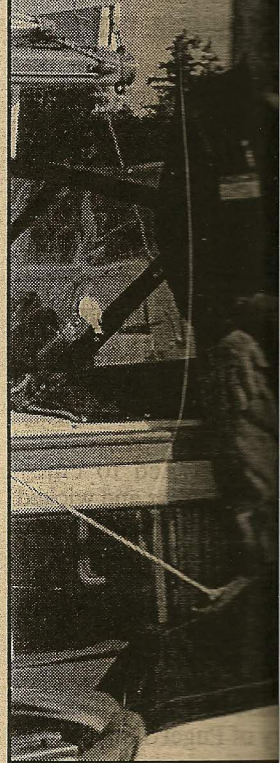
His plea for sea duty paid off when he became executive officer on the USS Duncan. A year later he took command of H.W. Tucker, another destroyer. "It was the best job, the most fun,

just the greatest experience that can ever happen to a naval officer," he recounted. "It is pretty close to being god."

Back on land, he returned to Seattle as District Communications Officer, responsible for the 13th Naval District for three years. Later he became Head of Naval Communication Systems in Washington, D.C.

Never far from the sea, he commanded the Markab, a heavy repair ship used to repair large Navy vessels at sea. Then it was

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Fred Hooppner spent sailing in local waters.

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