

The WWII torpedo crew –

I recently learned the identity of another of the Torpedoman from **WWII, Billy Jack Smith**. Bill was tall but slight of stature and could in WWII trim, fit inside the 23' wide torpedo tubes to clean them. Senior Torpedoman Gerald Harms, TM-1 was in charge, tall with broad shoulders, too wide to fit inside the tubes for cleaning. Bill was just the right size and used often in this role to keep the tubes “spotless” at the direction of TM-1 Harms.

I learned about Billy Jack from long-time family friend Beverly Mitchell and Bill's daughter, Kathy Better. The torpedomen also manned the hedgehog mounts just beneath the bridge during anti-submarine battle stations. Harms preferred the starboard side; Smith was assigned to the port-side mount. One day, stationed at the hedgehog mounts, Harms and Smith watched as a Kamikaze appeared in front of the ship flying right at the FRANK KNOX. The KNOX's guns opened up, 5”, 40mm and 20mm. Pieces of the Kamikaze flew off as the plane “just missed the mast of the Knox and struck the ship following them with a thunderous explosion’. Harms and Smith, exposed on the O-1 level beneath the bridge, went from relief to astonishment when the ammunition report was completed; “5000 rounds we shot at that plane and it didn't go down” recalled Harms in his diary

Harms passed away in 2017 at his home in Oregon; Smith passed away near Schereville, IN. Mitchell continued to connect with the Frank Knox Reunion Association and is a Life Member. Mitchell referred me to Kathy Better for additional information. She kept Billy Jack's story alive – Who will tell your story? – We will if you will share it with our Association. We'll make sure your story and pictures will be recorded.

G. . Billy Jack Smith



Harms w/flag

