

AN ENCOURAGING WORD

Below is an e-mail from a young ensign aboard the USS Winston Churchill to his parents. (Churchill is an Arleigh Burke-class AEGIS guided-missile destroyer, commissioned March 10, 2001, and is the only active U.S. Navy warship named after a foreign national.)

Dear Dad,

"We are still at sea. The remainder of our port visits have all been cancelled. We have spent every day since the attacks going back and forth within imaginary boxes drawn in the ocean, standing high-security watches, and trying to make the best of it. We have seen the articles and the photographs, and they are sickening. Being isolated, I don't think we appreciate the full scope of what is happening back home, but we are definitely feeling the effects.

About two hours ago, we were hailed by a German Navy destroyer, Lutjens, requesting permission to pass close by our port side. Strange, since we're in the middle of an empty ocean, but the captain acquiesced and we prepared to render them honors from our bridgewing. As they were making their approach, our conning officer used binoculars and announced that Lutjens was flying not the German, but the American flag. As she came alongside us, we saw the American flag flying half-mast and her entire crew topside standing at silent, rigid attention in their dress uniforms. "They had made a sign that was displayed on her side that read, "We Stand By You." There was not a dry eye on the bridge as they stayed alongside us for a few minutes and saluted. It was the most powerful thing I have seen in my life. The German Navy did an incredible thing for this crew, and it has truly been the highest point in the days since the attacks. It's amazing to think that only half-century ago things were quite different.

After Lutjens pulled away, the Officer of the Deck, who had been planning to get out later this year, turned to me and said, 'I'm staying Navy.'

I'll write you when I know more about when I'll be home, but this is it for now. "Love you guys."

And here's a picture of what that scene looked like:

