Survival, Bravery, & Brutality
William Flury, Steward Department

Student Worksheet

Historical Context:
Merchant ships and seamen were critical to the outcome of World War II in the Pacific. Convoys of merchant ships transported machinery, equipment, munitions, food, troops, and supplies across the Pacific to the Philippines, Okinawa, and other areas of invasion. Many ships and lives were lost to Japanese aircraft, torpedoes, and artillery.

The SS Jean Nicolet was carrying supplies for “the Burma Road.” This refers to the road that connected Lashio in Burma (now Myanmar) to Kunming in China, an essential lifeline for the Nationalist Chinese government’s defense against Japan.

During wartime, there are always incredible acts of survival, bravery and brutality. Listen carefully to William Flury, who in 1944 was an 18-year-old cook working in the Steward Department, as he recounts the attack and sinking of the Liberty Ship SS Jean Nicolet on July 2, 1944, you will find examples of each.

Instructions:
Answer the questions on the next page using the accompanying primary sources found at: http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/oral_histories/maritime Voices/flury.htm.

These questions are based on the accompanying primary sources. They are designed to help you practice working with historical documents. Some of these documents have been edited, but all are authentic. As you analyze the documents, take into account the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.
Questions:
1. Citing evidence from the words of William Flury and one supporting primary source, list two acts of survival, two acts of bravery, and two acts of brutality from his experiences in the Indian Ocean.

2. Based on a close examination of the poster and a review of William Flury’s oral history, what is the significance of the shark image on the submarine, and what effect do you think it would have on Merchant Mariners who saw it?