

aug 31, 1945

29 August 1945.

Dear Clarence.

at sea

The war is almost over! I say "almost" because even though the Japs have said that they want to quit fighting, life for me goes on in the same old way -- points or no points. It seems to be more difficult to stop a war than it is to start one.

A few things have changed, among them being a relaxation of censorship restrictions. Although we still have censorship, we are now permitted to tell "all" -- or at least almost all. While this letter does not represent an official Navy release, it is not subject to publishing restrictions as my last letter, (as a matter of fact even that may now be published). So you can discuss the "Saga of the Able Alabama" over the backyard fence or send it to the local newspaper if you desire. And even if they won't take it, at least I can tell you some of the things you have been wondering about all of these months -- where I have been, what I have been doing, what I have seen.

You undoubtedly have as good an idea of my location at this particular minute as I have, because it has been announced that the Alabama is part of Admiral Halsey's U. S. Third Fleet, and that the Third Fleet is off the coast of Japan waiting for the peace arrangements to be made. What happens next is the subject of a lot of guesswork. The rumors are really flowing, and all of us sit around and try to predict the future. So I am not going to waste any time on this phase, for I shall be back again later to tell you about all of the interesting things that are undoubtedly going to happen.

Our last two months have been hectic ones. Today marks the 60th day that I have been at sea continuously. It hasn't been monotonous because it has been packed with activity and surprising developments.

We got underway from Leyte Gulf on Sunday, July 1. Shortly after we departed, all of us were informed that we were going north to conduct sustained attacks on the Japanese Empire home islands. From the plans it was quite apparent that Admiral Halsey was really determined to knock the blazes out of the Japs, for included in his intentions were orders for the battleships to steam right up to the Japanese coast and bombard some of the choice industrial targets which were extremely valuable to the Japs. This was something new for it had never been done before. Frankly, it made most of us a little bit more serious, for we all have had an acquaintance with the Jap Kamikazes. We really started training in earnest. By the 10th of July, the task force was in position and ready to go to work. Planes from the carriers started raking the Jap islands from Nagasaki to Hakodate, and by the time we got up as far north as Hokkaido the Japs had been severely mauled, and all of us were completely amazed. You see, none of our expectations had worked out. Only a few Jap planes had come near the force and things were really easy. Of course, the carrier planes had been finding lots of Jap planes, but they were mostly on the ground and as you have probably noted in the various communiques, those carrier planes really destroyed thousands of Jap aircraft. The whole thing seemed to be repetition of our Philippine attacks last fall. Each time we set out on a strike, we always said, "This is it. This time they will really come out." But they never did. Nor did they this time.

As a matter of fact, the pilots practically ran out of targets, because they were out principally to get airfields and planes. The remnants of the Jap Fleet were no worry to us, but when there didn't seem to be any more air facilities to attack, the planes were put to work on what was left of the Jap Fleet and the results were great for they completed the destruction of the Navy. They even sank the railroad ferries which connect the island of Hokkaido with Honshu, a very serious loss to Jap industry.

And then came the purely battleship phase of this operation. On the 14th of July, the Admiral turned three of our new battleships loose on an industrial area on Hokkaido. While we were not one of the ships assigned to this job it did touch off a lot of enthusiasm for at last we were getting a crack at the Japs in a more intimate way than just taking care of the carriers and protecting them from air attack with our anti-aircraft guns.

Our opportunity came three days later. With several other battleships, we had been selected to conduct a night bombardment of the HITACHI industrial area, located just 50 miles north of Tokyo. Every one was quite excited at the prospect and there were some wild conjectures at the sight which would be presented by the furiously burning plant buildings. Our group proceeded to the coast under the cover of darkness and probably arrived in position for the bombardment unobserved. If we did, we caught a lot of the Japs at work in the mills and other factory buildings, and surprised them with about 1500 tons of high explosives. After all the speculation as to what a rare sight our destruction would be, you can imagine the disappointment of all hands when they rushed up on deck after we finished only to discover that there was a terrific rain storm raging and that you couldn't see beyond the end of your nose. The Alabama learned later that it had done a very handsome job of demolishing the targets assigned to her.

I wonder if you heard the broadcast of that bombardment? Shortly after the first bombardment, broadcasts back in the states were started, -- regular play-by-play accounts of what was happening during the actions. Very much like a football game. Each time, a few ships names were mentioned. There were so many of us that they selected a different representative few each time. However, the war seems to have ended before the Alabama crashed the limelight. Just because you didn't hear the "Mighty A" mentioned does not mean that she was not there. The ship has been in practically everything since she reported to the Pacific in August 1943, except for the Iwo Jima campaign, during which we were in the Navy Yard at Bremerton for a much needed overhaul after steaming 25 months without any major repairs, the ship's personnel practically keeping things running with bailing wire. Just as a matter of interest, last Thursday, August 16, was the ship's birthday. In just the three years since she was commissioned at Norfolk Navy Yard she has steamed approximately 207,000 sea miles which has taken her from the United States on a tour of duty with the British Home Fleet in Iceland, Scapa Flow, and along the coast of Norway, then all the way out to the Pacific to throw her might into the fight against the Japanese.

Of the original crew that took her to sea for the first time, there are only 10 officers and 395 enlisted men left.

Not too many of us share in her complete and brilliant record, but all of us have a very deep pride in having been part of her ship's company, for, to us, she has been the best ship in the U. S. Pacific Fleet and there is no man that will deny that her reputation is of the highest.

Not long ago a news release from Guam, the Pacific Fleet Headquarters, had this to say: "The Alabama took part in 12 consecutive operations as one of the screening ships of fast carrier task forces. She not only escaped damage herself, but no carrier she was screening in any of the operations was reached by a Japanese bomb, torpedo, or kamikaze plane." Of course that record was spoiled several months ago when Admiral Mitscher's Flagship got hit as I told you in my last letter, but still in all we are quite proud of that reputation as it stands.

This rather sounds like an obituary. In a way it is, for in every nook and corner, the men are sitting around in groups dreaming of home and counting up point scores. And everywhere there is the sad realization that the best crew that ever served together is about to break up. It is the end of a grand

association together and makes you feel sad in the same sort of way you felt when it came time to leave school and all the old comrades you knew and with whom you had shared countless experiences, both good and bad. When one of these groups grows silent, it is this nostalgic feeling that always makes someone say, "Do you remember -- ?"

There is a lot of remembering to do. Some of the older men will recall the Fourth of July in Scapa Flow or experiences in Iceland. Someone is sure to remember when the ship participated in the attempt to draw the TIRPITZ out off the Norwegian coast.

After the ship left Panama on its way to the Pacific areas, our first introduction to the tropics was the anchorage at Havannah Harbor at Efate, New Hebrides. From there on the names and places and exploits are more familiar to the rest of us. The air strikes in support of the invasion of TARAWA in the Gilbert Island Operation, the bombardment of Nauru, a short rest period at Espiritu Santo, and thence to Funa Futi via a four day stay at Pearl Harbor, the eight Japanese prisoners that we took to Pearl, the bombardment of ROI - NAMUR in support of the Marshall Island landings and the subsequent supporting operations with the carrier forces, our first introduction to Majuro Atoll where we based for a while before our raids on Truk for the first time and the first attacks on Saipan, Tinian, and the other Marianas positions of the Japs, the large air attack off Truk when five of our shipmates were killed and eleven wounded in a casualty, our first ceremony of burial at sea when these dead were buried with honors the following day.

There were short rests now and then, but little time was taken to lie idle for there were the first Palau raids, and the supporting operations of the landings at Hollandia, New Guinea which required our services. Truk was hit again on the way back to our Majuro base. Then there was the Ponape bombardment, and the Battle of the Philippine Sea which developed shortly after we bombarded Saipan in support of the landings there. As a matter of fact that same news release I quoted a few paragraphs back had this to say about our part in this battle: "It was the Alabama which first gave the rest of a task force warning that a big air fleet of Japanese was approaching to attack in the first battle of the Philippine Sea. American carrier pilots got away in time to meet the attack in the air and make their part of the battle a 'Turkey Shoot'."

After another short rest at Eniwetok which had become quite a base, we were out again to attack at Palau, and then up to Guam to help out.

Everyone remembers the six Japanese prisoners we took aboard and the burial at sea of the one who died. He was given full military honors.

Almost everyone agrees that the first Philippine raids seemed to be the beginning of the end. We prowled up and down the length of the Philippines during September of 1944 with such very little opposition that it only seemed natural when we went probing up into the Japanese area around Formosa and Okinawa. Our raids there were the prelude to the invasion of the Philippines, and by the time we had withdrawn, bringing our damaged ships with us (we had two cruisers hurt in the very determined air attacks the Japs directed at us on the 13th and 14th of October) the time had arrived to support the landings at Leyte.

This appeared to be more than the Japs could endure for they finally came out in strength with their naval forces and staged the engagements at Surigao Straits, off Samar and off Cape Engano, all three of which are now known as the Battle for Leyte Gulf. You of course know what happened to the Jap Navy there.

After we finished the Philippine show, the Alabama was on her way home for the Navy Yard. What has happened since then I have already told you in my last letter and the first part of this. Possibly you will have become convinced by now that we have been amply occupied.

By the way, we recently heard that there are a few more copies of the "War Diary" available. If you can think of anyone I forgot to send one to let me know and perhaps I can get additional copies.

Any day now will bring the formal end to the war and we hope to have an opportunity to get an eyeful of Tokyo. But of course that is all another story and will have to wait for the time being. Who knows, perhaps before I can get the chance to write again about all of this, I may be telling you personally about it. But that is still a fond wish and something of which to dream.

For now I shall just say so long, and keep you chin up till that day of discharge.

Your loving bro.

Perdy

Jack Burgeon Stc 7 M div.

P.S. Well I can't, this letter or printed matter will give you an idea of what the Alabama has done in the last few years. I boarded her on the 9th of August of '43, and still I am part of her. We're still off the coast of Japan while today we either the boys landed. But I'm counting on my clearvoyant mind in leading me back to the states, soon, possibly a few months. However I don't intend ^{upon} getting discharged until about the month of March, '46. Possibly sooner!! Remember, I have not any dependents, am single, and ^{have} quite a yearning and desire in getting out of this outfit & trying to cope with the civilian world. That's where I belong. When I hit the civilian world again & if nothing materializes in my direction, then I would like to study photography, newsreel, motion picture, or commercial as a vocation. I may wind up as an itinerant.

Here's luck to you & Helen; one spouse will be as beneficial as the other. There is a goal ahead. Let's see you two reach it. Send my best to Carl Kelly and his wife Shirley. They are real people, whom I remember as being amiable & courteous. They must be a handsome pair. Good luck to you as a B 29 crewman gunner.