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STAND AND FIGHT

The Story of a Destroyer in Battle

By:

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"But since the man that runs away
Lives to die another day,
And cowards' funerals when they come,
Are not wept so much at home.

Wherefore though the best is bad,
Stand and do the best, my lad,
Stand and fight, and see your slain,
And take the bullet in your brain."

A. E. HOUSMAN

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CHAPTER I

THE U. S. S. STERETT

It was a most important night for my class - the Naval Academy Class of 1941. We were all assembled in Memorial Hall, Memorial Hall whose stone walls bear plaques and paintings of so many distinguished alumni of the Academy. Lawrence's banner hung in its customary place, just where it had been when as candidates we were sworn in with the sharp reminder from the Commandant: "DON'T GIVE UP THE SHIP!"

Now it was almost four years later; we had gone through the grind and the remaining 400 of the original 576 were soon to graduate; 347 of us were to be commissioned immediately as Ensigns in the Navy. The Marine Corps and physical examinations had accounted for the rest.

A rostrum was set up at one end of the hall and on it a large fish bowl. Inside the bowl were 347 folded slips of paper. Standing beside the rostrum was a blindfolded "plebe" - the person who was to decide between life and death for many of us, and the destiny of all. It was a tense occasion.

We had previously requested the type of ship we were to be sent to - and the ocean. The order in which those slips of paper were taken out of the bowl would decide the assignment precedence.

I had requested cruisers or destroyers on the West Coast, so as to be with the Battle Force. Craig Spowers, my roommate, had requested destroyers, East Coast, because he thought that the Atlantic Squadron would see action first. It was January of 1941 then and we were not at war - but to my classmates and myself it was inevitable; we would be the first "war class." Our course had been cut short by half a year and, coupled with the trend of events, well . . . .

The "plebe" put his hand in the bowl and handed one slip to the Class President. The name was read out, "Joe Gish - Number One!" "Gish" shouted with joy and left the Hall. He would get the best duty in the type of ship that he requested.

The lottery dragged on through what seemed like hours. Mine was number 256; Craig's name had not yet been called. I waited with him as the class filed out, one by one, as their names were drawn. Finally there were only two more slips in the bowl - and the next one drawn was Craig's. It was a bad sign. He would get what was left.

And so an important issue in the lives of many was decided. As in so many ways in a Navy at war or in peace, fate is entirely arbitrary. A man is arbitrarily assigned to a ship; when he reports aboard he is arbitrarily assigned a battle station. An enemy shell wipes out his station while men on other parts of the ship receive not a scratch. Or it may depend on the watch he stands - or whether the watch was "dogged" the night before - or a thousand other things under the same general heading of "fate."

Soon before Graduation the ship assignments were posted. I was on my way to a "hop" (a Midshipman's dance) when I got the word and ran for the bulletin board. On the line opposite my name was written the word "STERRETT." So that was it! I looked up the data on her: She was a relatively new destroyer, commissioned in 1939 - single stack - 1500 tons - good armament in torpedoes and guns, and one of our fastest types.

Craig drew the REUBEN JAMES, an old War I[illegible] four stacker.

Then in rapid succession came Exam. Week, the "No More Rivers" ceremony, Drill Week, "Sob Sunday", June Week, Graduation, commissions, the Oath of Office, a leave in Texas, and then I found myself in San Francisco waiting for the transport U. S. S. HENDERSON to leave for Pearl Harbor.

When the HENDERSON pulled into Pearl Harbor the moon was just rising into a previously dark sky, silhouetting Diamond Head and nearby palm trees in a typical picture postcard fashion. All of the "fresh-caught" Ensigns, including myself, were on deck "Oh-ing" and"Ah-ing" and taking in all of this scenic beauty with the Hawaiian Chamber of Commerce propaganda foremost in our minds. We were soon to be sorely disappointed, however, as Honolulu could not absorb even a fraction of the service men in the area.

The following morning I started my search for the STERRETT in company with a classmate who was going to a sister ship. Both ships were in, but the problem was, now to get out there with

our trunks and other baggage? We hit on the sound idea of getting a boat from our assigned destroyer tender and went to the Ship's office of the transport to find out which was the proper tender. At the office we asked a yeoman to let us see a Fleet Organization book. Before he could hand it to us, a Lieutenant Commander growled at us and asked,

"What do you want?"

"We would like to see the Fleet Organization book," I told him.

"What do you want to see if for?," he snarled.

We told him. He took the book out of the yeoman's hand, looked through it and said sarcastically:

"Your tender is the DIXIE; you will probably have to get a DIXIE boat. This is just one of life's little problems that you will have to learn to figure out for yourselves."

There being no apparent answer to this sarcasm, we proceeded along the lines previously determined, fully cognizant of where we, as new Ensigns, stood.

The Dixie motor boat headed for a nest of destroyers moored to a buoy in East Loch. As it passed asterm of the nest, I picked out for the first time the ship that was in the future to gain the praise of Commander of Destroyers, Pacific Fleet, as "The outstanding destroyer of the Pacific Fleet." Across the sterm, in black letters, was painted the name, "STERRETT."

Once aboard, I found that all the officers from the Captain on down were quite friendly to the new Ensign and seemed interested and helpful. It did not take long to get the idea of the brotherhood of destroyer life that makes a destroyer sailor

scorn the conveniences of a larger ship. I soon got settled down in my new capacity as "man George," the Wardroom flunky. My official jobs were as Assistant First Lieutenant and Assistant Torpedo Officer. I was interested in torpedoes.

A situation that immediately seemed rather extraordinary to me was the fact that we had British code aboard; also a Commander, David Cairns, R. N., who was an observer of our fleet operations. It looked as if the alliance with Britain was already formed.

I began a diary in which I intended to keep all of the important happenings of my new life; unfortunately censorship soon put an end to the diary but on the first page I wrote this:

"This is a journal which disregards the unimportant days and happenings and begins what promises to be some interesting memos in the perhaps near future." Little did I realize <u>how</u> near.

The STERRETT soon went to sea for operations with major units of the Fleet. These first days at sea I still refer to, in my mind, as "dog-days." It seemed that on the least provocation the ship would swap ends, "sunfish" and do a one-and-a-half somersault with a half-twist all at one time. On the bridge, while I hung on to a stanchion partly due to the lunges of the ship, but mostly because I was too weak to stand, the Captain, Commander Atherton MacCondray, sat in his chair ignoring the sheets of salt water coming over the bridge, and calmly remarked,

"It's dusty on the road today, Mac!"

I felt like turning in my suit.

But in spite of the initial encounters with "mal de mer," I soon found the STERRETT to be an interesting as well as "happy" ship. My new shipmates, officers and men, were capable and

efficient, well above the normal expectancy of a ship's company as a whole. Coupled with efficiency was, strangely enough, an unusual degree of informality and fun. There were remarkable personalities aboard and idiosyncracies abounded. The Executive officer, Lt. Cmdr. Singer, never ran out of screwball stories, (true stories with himself as the principal character), each one of which sounded like Thorne Smith or Damon Runyon situations. As he would tell them, he would laugh until tears ran down his cheeks - and everyone else in the Wardroom was equally helpless. Ray Calhoun, the Communications Officer, was not far behind in tales of the same caliber.

Calhoun was from Philadelphia - U.S.N.A. Class of "38. He was an easy-going sort of a fellow, level-headed and efficient, very popular and liked by every officer and man on board. I was assigned to his watch section underway and soon got to know him quite well. It was a sure way to break the monotony of a long mid-watch to get Cal to telling stories of his batchelor days (the settling down he did when he was married was truly miraculous); about his excursion to the Mauna Loa volcano; his midshipman cruises; Army games; frequent races with the Academy "jimmy legs"; commonplace things turned into a circus by a fantastic sense of humor and a lively imagination. This was the man whom I usually turned to when I had questions about shipboard duties and, even though he was a contemporary, he was fully as expert in shipboard duties as he was in how to raise hell ashore.

He was understanding and helpful and I learned a lot from Cal, the model of a good shipmate.

The Fleet was on a wartime basis at sea. All ships were darkened at night and watches were stood on the guns. Sometimes we would stand "watch on, watch off" for days at a time. Radio silence was maintained. Some days we practiced such wartime necessities as fueling at sea. The operating schedule was rough and the Navy prepared for war.

One day we were sent to investigate a Japanese sampan that had been suspiciously floating around in our operating area for a couple of days. Our Assistant Engineer Officer went over in a motor whaleboat to board it. Nothing out of the ordinary was observed but the Jap did succeed in selling our officer a miserable string of fish. Very nice Jap. Kept his bright-work quite shiny for a little fishing smack though.

After operating in and out of Pearl Harbor for about two months our outfit put to sea on a supposedly routine operation. We were to return to port on the following Tuesday. Then late one afternoon a destroyer passed some secret mail to us. We formed up with a battleship, a cruiser and two other destroyers and set course 155°. These were our first secret orders. Since our new Captain, Commander Jesse Coward, would not divulge our destination, wild speculations arose. Some guessed that we were going to occupy Tahiti or go through the Canal and take Martinique. Others thought that we were just going around to the Atlantic -- and they were right.

During our long trip to Panama there was little of interest except for the various drills and competitions that the Division

Commander devised. A prize crew was organized enroute. We passed through the turtle country around Clipperton Island - without turtle soup - and arrived at the Canal at dark on June 6th.

Our ships' names and numbers were painted out and we were not allowed to divulge them, much to the consternation and annoyance of the Army patrol boats and shore batteries. In any case, the Admiral finally pacified them and the STERRETT made a six-hour transit of the Canal.

Once through, we fueled and head for Guantanamo Bay; then pushed on north, through the Delaware Capes to Philadelphia. A port in the States was never more welcome, as all hands shared the dislike for anything outside of the U. S. A. in general, and Hawaii in particular. Even staid old "Philly" had its attractions, and our stay was pleasant.

A big news story broke while we were there: Hitler had invaded Russia.

We were shortly sent to Norfolk and went on to Charleston for overhaul - to be rearmed for anti-submarine duty in the Atlantic. During this overhaul, I spent my time at the Torpedo School at Newport, Rhode Island. This was a break for me as it put me in line for Torpedo Officer - and torpedoes are the big wallop of destroyers.

CHAPTER II

SHOOTING WAR IN THE ATLANTIC

Newport in the summer was duty to be envied and was, to me, a very instructive torpedo course sandwiched in by innumerable parties and informal get-togethers. The four weeks passed quickly and I rejoined my ship in Casco Bay. At that time both my ship and myself were better prepared to begin what was to be later called the "Battle of the Atlantic."

The morning after my arrival at Casco Bay I received a visual signal from Craig Spowers. The REUBEN JAMES was in! He asked me to come over to his ship as he had the day's duty. Our ship was on four hours' notice but in the late afternoon I got permission to leave the ship and soon I was climbing aboard the ancient decks of the REUBEN JAMES. Craig, of course, took the first opportunity of showing me about his ship. The REUBEN JAMES had seen better years. Craig showed me the "lizards" on the main deck - hand-straps on a trolley arrangement which were necessary for men to hold onto when walking along the main deck underway, to keep from losing their footing and being washed overboard. Their necessity was obvious: four-pipers are the first cousins to submarines in the North Atlantic. He told me of a persistent leak in a fuel-oil cofferdam and how he, as First Lieutenant, finally "remedied" it satisfactorily after the Engineer Officer and even the Captain had given up. The leak led into one of the crew's living compartments. It couldn't be welded; the pressure would force putty out of the crack. Craig concocted a mixture of putty, aluminum powder and some other unidentified ingredients.

This he put in the opening and from the center of the mass he led a small rubber tube. This arrangement accepted the inevitable and drained the escaping oil into a bucket, which was emptied back into the fuel-oil tanks every couple of hours. Even though this "chewing-gum" repair job looked like an appendectomy, it was effective--and it took ingenuity to keep that old ship going after 25 years of faithful service. The Engineer Officer had more weighty problems to keep his plant going--and it was rumored that some of his pumps were held together with the ever-trusted bailing wire, and the pumps were started by a sharp rap with a Stilson wrench. The decks at the foot of the ladders were worn through after 25 years of wear. Craig showed me the guns (he was the gunnery officer as well as First Lieutenant). The old 4-inchers and their meager, out-moded control looked strange to me, being used to the precise 5" battery of a new destroyer. Yet in spite of all the materiel failings of his ship, she was seaworthy and Craig was proud of her. His skipper, Lt. Cmdr. Edwards, was a fine officer, the Wardroom congenial, and it was a "happy ship."

We went down to the little wardroom and continued our chat. Craig explained that the big radio-phonograph there was promoted by him--having managed to get it through Welfare funds. It was a special set that had speakers led to various parts of the ship: the crew's quarters, the quarter-deck, etc. And inasmuch as it was actually for the crew's welfare, Craig had

bought over $100 worth of records with Welfare money. This was something of an Utopian idea as Craig was an incurable record collector. He had a couple of mess-boys trained to operate the machine and it was a huge success, with music throughout the ship practically all the time. His current favorite was Dinah Shore's recording of "Jim."

We had dinner in the Wardroom alone. Naturally talk drifted to the War in Europe and of our participation. It was inevitable. I ventured the prediction that we would be in it the second week in September. This was August 23rd. (As events bore out my prediction, the "shoot to kill" order from the President came during the second week of September - and the "Battle of the Atlantic" was on.)

After dinner Craig called away his gig for me and was standing at the gangway when I got in the boat--capless, with a "Lucky" in his mouth. So with a familiar "Good-night Osborne" in my ears, I left. We had planned to get together on the following Wednesday. I never saw him again.

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From Casco Bay the STERETT went on north to one of our "lend-lease" bases - Argentia Bay, Newfoundland. We were in that port when, in early September, the President's order to "shoot on sight and shoot to kill" any and all German submarines in our way. This did not change the existing situation appreciably as we had long been taking severe measures to protect our shipping. But in any

case, with this official order from our Commander-in-Chief, the Navy was engaged in an undeclared war with the German Navy.

During this period of undeclared warfare the vast majority of the American citizenry and their representatives in the Congress of the United States were still fast asleep and dreaming fondly of the silver lining even after the storm of war had already broken for our Navy in the North Atlantic. The extension of the draft was passed by a vote of 203 to 202. One vote less and our nucleus Army would have been disbanded! The 202 men of the "people's choice" were criticized bitterly by even the most poorly-informed seaman of the Atlantic Squadron. Foresight is expected of all lawmakers and psuedo-statesmen, but lack of knowledge of an accomplished fact is intolerable.

Argentia Bay was no prize as a naval base. It was a harbor--and little else can be said for it. The northeastern side of the harbor is protected from the weather only by a low sand-spit, and this spit afforded the only feasible site for shore installations.

It was no relief to put into Argentia. On an average of every other day the wind blew up a gale--often as high as 50 or 60 knots. The holding ground in the anchorage was fair, but the winds necessitated veering out maximum anchor chain and dropping a second anchor underfoot. At all times it was necessary to stand underway watches and when the winds were worst it was necessary to steam slowly into the wind to reduce the strain on the anchor chain.

The British had driven a hard bargain for our use of Argentia. In addition to the deal of 50 four-pipe destroyers, the U. S. Government was required to pay a high yearly rental (said to be $4,000,000) for the use of the above-described sandspit for shore facilities (and the wharf we built) and for the use of the harbor in general.

In attempting to go alongside a tanker one day, a combination of wind, tide, and a poorly-charted harbor put the STERETT aground on a rocky shoal spot. There was some touch of humor in the poor situation, however, when we saw from the bridge some of the off-duty engineers in a mad scramble out of the engine rooms, steering flats and living compartments as soon as the screws and hull scraped the rocky bottom.

With the aid of a tug we were soon off the rocks, however, and with no apparent damage except for an excess vibration which indicated damaged screws.

It was at about this time that I assumed the duties of Torpedo Officer, which carried in addition, depth charge maintenance and control. These were the jobs that I particularly relished as it placed me in control of the torpedo battery as well as making me responsible for supplying the Captain the best possible information in the execution of a depth charge attack. It was the direct contact with these offensive weapons that was especially appealing to me with the knowledge that a successful attack with depth charges was, to some extent, dependent upon my judgment, and the directing of the torpedoes was my responsibility entirely.

I immediately instituted a different system of mechanical plotting of submarines. This system I soon replaced with a refinement based on a mechanical aid that I devised.

Another advantage in my new job was that, for the first time, I had my own gang of men. That was a gang to be proud of too, as it comprised one of the smartest and most technically efficient groups on the ship--as is generally true of all Ordnance ratings.

The gang was bossed by an "old-timer," Chief Torpedoman G. R. Jackson. "Jack" had been a Staff Sergeant in the World War and wore battle clasps for participation in four of the bloodiest of battles, including Marne, Chatteau-Thierry, and Argonne. Jackson always had a tale to tell over his cup of "Torpedo Shack" coffee. He liked to tell the story of how he joined the Navy. When he was shipped back from France he had every intention of staying in the Army. But he fell for a "hasher" on the East Coast, got his discharge from the Army and followed her to Oklahoma. He broke up with the "hasher" quite unexpectedly one day, told her to "gotahell", and left her in the street. The first thing that caught his eye when he stalked away was a Navy recruiting office--so he did a "hard right", entered, and....joined the Navy! Jackson was easy-going, likable, had thorough knowledge of his beloved torpedoes and the "kids" liked to work for him.

Another mainstay of the Torpedo Gang was Keenum, a TM 1/c who was to later make Chief and later still received his commission.

An outstanding man in any group. Then there was James--a real character. He was a horse of a man and a horse for work, stood about 6'2", 220 pounds and as hard as nails... Jensen, another TM 1/c was a quiet, easy-going Scandinavian with a long service, and a man dependable in emergencies. I made him my talker and firing-switch operator on the torpedo directors and also the operator of the depth-charge release mechanism. Solloway and Hollingsworth were two very clean-cut fellows...outstanding 3/c. Solloway was my torpedo director pointer. The Torpedo Gang was more than any torpedo officer could ask for. I considered myself very fortunate.

The Navy was engaged in a shooting war all right--our formal entry was sure to come. I looked up the mean drafts of every known ship in the German, Japanese and French Navies and placed them carefully in my notebook. It might be useful information later for torpedo depth-settings.

Operating out of Argentia one night the STERETT struck its first blow. The sound gear got a good metallic "thwaak!" in return for its usual monotonous "ping!" The "dit-dit-dah" U-boat warning was sounded on the chemical alarm. The Captain took the conn as we went in for the attack. The interval between the "ping" and the return echo steadily decreased until they were almost one. "Fire a full pattern," yelled the Skipper, "COMMENCE FIRING!" As I called them out to Solloway and Jensen, the big charges in the racks were dropped and the side throwers fired in accordance with our pre-arranged plan that we had rehearsed so often. Then we heard the explosions and felt the ship jump as

each charge went off in turn. We ran out a distance then returned to try to develop another attack. Sound contact was not regained. When the ship passed through the water where our charges were dropped, the faint glow of moonlight enabled us to see an oil slick on the water and the pungent odor of some form of petroleum filled our nostrils. There was no other evidence.

Failing to reestablish contact, we increased speed and rejoined our task group.

Seldom is there anything conclusive about a depth charge attack. Unless you see the sub surface and then plunge on end, or unless the ship is fortunate enough to take prisoners, you are never quite sure of complete destruction. The incident described above was assessed as "probably damaged," which is as much as any destroyer would dare to claim under the circumstances. Sometimes German subs discharge oil out of an empty torpedo tube in order to trick their antagonist into giving up the chase. Subs with fuel tanks torn open sometimes get back to base and repairs. It is exasperating to try to fight something you cannot see. The satisfaction of victory is denied to the victor.

It was this uncertainty of the target that made unrestricted anti-submarine warfare so easy for a nation not officially at war. We had full right to hold depth charge practice as we saw fit. If our unseen target happened to be a German submarine, then he was in our waters and on our shipping lanes and the responsibility for his destruction rested with the German government. And then, how could we be sure that we were not his target? No German submarine commander would discriminate at night, and it is to be

doubted that daylight would make much difference.

Submarines were plentiful in the Newfoundland area of the North Atlantic. On almost any night our radio direction finder could pick up several subs close aboard, transmitting back to Germany on their radios. We would follow the bearing of the closest of them until they were well abaft our beam. We would notice the water temperature as recorded in the log: 31 degrees Farenheit was normal in the Laborador Current as it swept southwestward around Cape Race, Newfoundland. The sea was constantly rough, as only the North Atlantic can be. A steady stream of salt spray drenched the bridge and often waves of green water lunged over the director platform above the bridge, breaking the windows of the pilot house and freezing on all weather surfaces after the bulk of the water had drained off. On several occasions rolls up to 40 degrees were experienced. A man's survival in those waters for longer than a few brief minutes was purely an academic question. His chances of being located even if he did survive were quite as slim. The STERETT would take no chances. We would continue to attack first. We, as the German themselves, believed in Nietzsche's theory on "the survival of the fittest," and if it came to the test, there was no doubt in our minds that we would prevail.

Upon our return from Argentia to Norfolk, the STERETT was assigned to operate with the USS LONG ISLAND during her shakedown training and practice flight operations. This ship was the first in a new experimental type of naval vessel which was to play a big part in the coming war in both the Atlantic and the

Pacific. The LONG ISLAND was the CVE #1, a converted Moore-McCormick freighter. After working with her for a few days, the success of her type and her value for anti-submarine escort work was obvious to the most casual observer.

After another trip or two to Argentia, the STERETT picked up the LONG ISLAND at Norfolk and got underway for Bermuda, B.W.I., another of the bases contracted for in the over-aged destroyer deal.

Bermuda, and the town of Hamilton, is a picturesque place with its brightly painted limestone houses and rather Victorian due to its lack of automobiles and prevalence of great numbers of bicycles and horse-drawn conveyances. The harbor is fair with a large outer anchorage. The sleepy sub-tropical climate and the activities ashore, however limited, were a respite for all hands and a big relief from the rigors of the North Atlantic.

It was in Bermuda that the STERETT first began operating with the WASP, an assignment that was to last, virtually unbroken, for almost a full year and in all fleets and war theatres.

None of the destroyers in our squadron liked operating with the WASP...this was partly due to the fact that operating with any carrier is an extremely strenuous job for a destroyer, but the principal reason was that the Captain of the WASP was considerably more exacting than is usually the case and a little less considerate of the limitations of a destroyer. Captain J. W. Reeves of the WASP was very jealous of the safety of that great ship, and his every movement as a hard task-master was directed along those lines. The WASP would not fall prey to

submarines if it was humanly possible for the Captain to save her by any precaution. The STERETT soon became imbued with that same spirit and our determination to give the WASP maximum protection made efficiency in that duty second nature. "RIGHT FULL RUDDER AND 29 KNOTS!" became a standard order when the WASP would turn into the wind for flight operations. To refer to an old Navy axiom, we found out what the WASP wanted and we gave it to her.

Then one day in October we got news of the destroyer KEARNEY being torpedoed in the Northern waters. The incident caused little excitement among Naval personnel at Bermuda. It was to be expected sooner or later--and the ship had been saved. The eight enlisted men that were killed on the KEARNEY were the first American casualties of the war.

The newspapers and the radios in the States went wild over the KEARNEY incident. The American public was at last waking up from a long and degenerate period of pacifism. Then the merchant ship ROBIN MOORE was sunk in the South Atlantic.

Walking aft to the quarterdeck on the morning of 31 October, I was stopped by Hugh Sanders, our Assistant Engineer. I roomed with "Sandy" and he knew of my search for the REUBEN JAMES since we entered the Atlantic.

"Had you heard that the REUBEN JAMES was sunk?" he asked.

Not knowing when to take him seriously, I replied, "No... you're kidding me."

"No, I'm not," he said. "It was torpedoed up north last night."

"But that's impossible," I answered, still thinking this was his poor idea of a joke. "Craig is the First Lieutenant of the REUBEN JAMES. He wouldn't let her sink!"

I ran up to the radio shack to confirm the story and try to get some details of her sinking and of her casualties. She had sunk all right; about 40 enlisted survivors had been picked up. That was all...the search for survivors was being continued. This was inconceivable. It was a long, anxious three days before the search was abandoned: the final total of survivors was 40 enlisted men and no officers. The ship had been struck just under the bridge structure and the bow had sunk immediately. Officers' quarters were forward.

A couple of weeks later when the ship was in Norfolk for a few days, I obtained a back issue newspaper which carried the complete casualty list, and confirmed Craig's death: one of the first officer casualties of the war.

It was a blow to me. It seemed so ironical that my closest friend, whom I regarded almost as a brother, should have been killed as a result of enemy action even before war was declared. I had lost a friend; the Country had lost a fine young officer patriot, the likes of whom America sorely needed in the trying days ahead.

The memory of Craig Spowers immediately brought to mind his motto: "THE ONLY TRUE SIGN OF PATRIOTISM IS SINCERE SERVICE!" With our first casualty list, the time had come for all Americans to think in these terms. In an attempt to get that idea across

to the public and in my small way to set forth my impressions of the character of Craig Spowers, I wrote an article about him, which was published in the magazine "SHIPMATE" the HOUSTON POST, and was placed in the March 4, 1942 Edition of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD by Craig's Congresswoman, Mrs. Mary T. Norton, under the title of "TRUE SIGNS OF PATRIOTISM." If Craig had lived a moral that was it.

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CHAPTER III

FORMAL WAR BEGINS

Our state of belligerent neutrality was brought to an abrupt end by circumstances too well known to be elaborated upon here.

The STERETT was at anchor in the peaceful harbor of Bermuda when the news began to arrive about the Pearl Harbor disaster. It was late in the afternoon when we heard our first announcements. I personally received the news at first unbelieving, then as a matter of fact. There seemed to be no great deal of surprise or excitement throughout the ship; it was merely that the event of war with Japan, long expected by all Navy men, had at last become a reality. It is admitted that the news was received in general with a degree of smugness and a firm confidence that when the returns were in, it would be learned that our damage was not severe and that the attacking force had been sunk.

We held movies on deck that night at dusk and the news reports came back to us periodically. An early report announced that the WEST VIRGINIA had been sunk. We were a bit skeptical at the report. Our Chief Engineer, Sanders, was concerned especially, since he had served aboard the WEST VIRGINIA before coming to the STERETT.

Our optimism was false. We had, indeed, been dealt a severe blow.

There was an unusually heavy flow of encoded messages over the Fleet broadcast schedule on the night of December 7th and Ray Calhoun, the Communications Officer, was busy most of the night breaking them. Most of the dispatches were of an operational nature and gave no details of what had happened at Pearl Harbor.

It was sickening and disgusting to hear the radio news commentators on the ensuing days, and even months, in selfish attempts to goad the Navy into releasing the whole facts about Pearl Harbor. Without regard for military security these drones loudly insisted on "freedom of the press", and "the Public has a right to know" and other such cliches--at a time when it was obvious that if the Japanese had known the real damage done to the fleet and ground installations, the Hawaiian Islands might have been lost. And the Great American Free Press, in its characteristic "me, too" attitude, noisily shouted its condemnation of the Navy at the time of lowest ebb of our modern Fleet. The Army was given the same low brand of verbal abuse and General Short's name was linked with Admiral Kimmel's in terms of Archtreason.

Important events followed each other in rapid succession following the December 7th attack. Japan announced her declaration of war against the United States and Great Britain soon after the first bombs dropped on Pearl Harbor. The next day Congress and Great Britain declared war against Japan. The one dissenting vote in Congress was cast by a woman who, in the face

of reality, insisted on identifying herself to the end with the decadence and isolationism that was pre-war America. She was a sorry spectacle in an awakened Nation.

On 9 December Germany declared war upon the United States, thus completing the picture. The struggle had begun in earnest.

The war's beginning had immediate effect upon the operations of the STERETT. On December 10th Destroyer Division 15 covered the sortie of the WASP, NASHVILLE, SAVANNAH, and other heavy ships, and all in company set course South at 20 knots' speed.

Our mission was Martinique, the French Island in the West Indies where the French Carrier BEARN, the Cruisers EMILE BERTIN and JEANNE D'ARC had been anchored since the fall of France. Our intelligence had informed us that the French ships were going to make a break for it, if they had not already. The possibility of their attempt to join the Japanese or German Navies was considered strong enough to warrant our prevention of such action by any restraining measures that the Navy deemed appropriate. The Admiral of the French Squadron was Admiral Robert, a Vichy-French with known pro-German leanings.

At dawn on December 13th our Task Force was in position off the coast of Martinique. Our plan of attack was simple: Unless further instructions were received from Washington, the WASP would launch her planes before dawn and the combined air and surface forces of the Task Force would destroy the French ships on sight. As for our special role in the proceedings, if the ships made a run for it the LANG and the WILSON were to take

one cruiser and the STACK, and STERETT the other. There were no complications expected and the affair seemed to be a simple matter of air attack, surface shooting and torpedo work.

At dawn, however, the Admiral cancelled his previous orders. No offensive action was to be taken until further orders. The next two or three days were spent steaming up and down the coasts of the chain of islands of which Martinique was one. Then we found out the reason for our failure to attack the French force: the French ships had made no attempt to escape; the State Department had put the pressure on Admiral Robert and a positive assurance of his neutral intentions was made real by the removal from his ships of certain parts without which a ship cannot be sailed or fought. Inspection of the ships by representatives of our government confirmed their demobilization and a peaceful solution to the controversy was arrived at to the satisfaction of all concerned. The Task Force returned to Bermuda.

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From Bermuda the STERETT returned to Argentia--and the anti-submarine patrolling and heavy winds. On 10 January we departed in company with the WASP and other ships to rendezvous with Task Force 15 in waters about 300 miles to south of Newfoundland.

It was an impressive force that we met at our rendezvous--the Battleship TEXAS, a couple of cruisers (TUSCALOOSA and WICHITA, as I remember), some other destroyers and four transports. Our assignment was to convoy thefirst contingent of American troops across the Atlantic!

The trip was rather uneventful. We took maximum precautions with that outfit ... it would have been of great propaganda value to the Germans to have been able to claim that the first contingent of the new AEF had been destroyed in passage. The WASP flew daily anti-submarine patrols in spite of bad flying weather. After a few days on our way the WASP left the formation and returned to base.

Our orders were to escort the transports to a MOMP, which, to get away from Navy abbreviations means "Mid-ocean meeting point." This point was a few hundred miles due south of Iceland. We reached the MOMP early in the morning of 23 January. There was no sign of the British ships that were to take our transports on from there. Our Task Force steamed around until about noon when the British destroyers were sighted. The British "force" which was to relieve our big outfit consisted of exactly <u>two</u> of the old four-pipe destroyers that we had given them a few months before!

When the British got within visual range of us, one of the ships flashed us the following message: "May I have my ships now?" The situation had a ridiculous twist to it, but neverthelesss we turned two of the transports over to him and he went on his way toward Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

We took the other two transports on to Iceland, arriving there on January 25th.

The temperature of Iceland is not the bitter cold that the name suggests - the Gulf stream passes near enough to give it a mild climate, comparatively speaking. The names of Greenland

and Iceland were apparently interchanged sometimes in the past. HHvalfijord Harbor is a large natural harbor of glacial origin, surrounded by a plateau of green grass, farm houses and some scrubby variety of live stock. In the background are some rugged foothills leading to the surrounding white mountains. But, as is to be expected, the wind blows with a frequency and violence that compares with, if not exceeds, that of Newfoundland. Various merchant ships cast grotesquely high and dry upon various points of land bear testimony of the force.

The wind is habitually such that two days out of three, small boats cannot be operated in Hvalfijord, and almost as often in Rekjavik Harbor. The ship moved down to the latter place after a couple of days in Hvalfijord.

Liberty and shore leave were granted in Rekjavik. On the second day two other officers and myself and about 30 enlisted men went ashore. When we got back to the dock we found out that the STERRETT had shoved out without us! It was a sensation hard to describe. We were reassured though when we learned that all the destroyers had been ordered out on a submarine hunt and would be back upon completion. The ALEXANDER HAMILTON had been torpedoed and sunk only a few miles to the Eastward of the entrance to Hvalfijord.

That left me with a peculiar problem on my hands: How could I quarter and feed 30 men and three officers ashore until the STERRETT returned? I first went to see the Operations Officer on the staff of the Commander of the Naval Operating Base. Arrangements were made for the officers to stay on the ComNOB'S Flagship,

the old yacht WILLIAMSBURG. A suggestion was made that I try to get the men quartered on one of the merchant transports that had come up with us, the SS BORINQUIN.

A sojourn to the BORINQUIN (a former liner on the West Indies run) proved more difficult than I suspected. The Purser was worried about the pay for the men's rations, and the Skipper was just worried and, what was more, didn't want to be bothered. I finally won him over to my way of thinking and convinced him of the urgency of the situation ... and the men were given fairly comfortable troop bunks, blankets and, as I understand, quite good food. They took it as sort of vacation and had no complaints and actually enjoyed the break in routine.

On the WILLIAMSBURG there were quite a number of officers who were stranded as we were, including the Captains of some destroyers. The next two days passed pleasantly enough with some impromptu get-togethers on a British minesweeper and the traditional hospitality of a British man-of-war.

On the night of the second day we got word that the STERETTwas standing in and would fuel from a designated tanker. It was one of those miserable cold, rainy nights - better spent inside - by a fire and with a hot buttered-rum. Nevertheless, we rounded up our men and out we went. We boarded our ship from the tanker and very glad to get back we were.

During our stay on the beach, the STERETT had launched two depth charge attacks on good sound contacts, with only probably results. The Stack had seen the sub on the surface just prior to our attack. The only hitch in the attack was the fact that the officers conducting weren't at all acquainted with my system

and its advantage was lost ... for whatever it was worth.

The troop convoy job completed, the STERETT returned to the States and New York, for a Navy Yard availability in the Brooklyn Yard. While in the Yard the Gunnery Officer was transferred and Ray Calhoun was moved up to the gunnery job. Joe Marver, the Ass't. Comm. Officer, took over the Communications. In about a couple of weeks the Captain called me up and told me that he was giving me Communications. Marver was snowed under right up to his ears and hated communications with a vengeance -- almost to a point of cracking up.-- When I took over from Marver, he showed me the dope. The confidential files consisted of two jackets: the "To be filed" file and the "To be filed in the to be filed file." It was strictly a one-man system and it worked like a charm... for Calhoun. When somebody asked to see a particular letter, Cal would just put his finger to his forehead and think for a few seconds, then pull it right out. But it was murder for anybody else.

The big surprise came when Marver casually mentioned the matter of corrections to publications that were outstanding at the time. These consisted of a stack of pamphlets at least six inches high. These jolts, added to the fact that I knew exactly nothing about communications, were enough to make me tear my hair and swear to myself.

Realizing that the Communications were more than a full time job, the Captain planned to have another officer take over my

torpedoes. On my insistence, however, he permitted me to retain the job of Torpedo Officer in addition to my new duties. For that I was glad.

To add to my difficulties, Marver applied for and was given, the duties of Assistant Gunnery Officer. That was the last straw for me but, undoubtedly, a very good thing for him because communications were getting him down in a big way. Icould understand why. When he was put into gunnery, he insisted that he would continue to give me a hand in getting squared away... but that was the last I heard or saw of it.

Our availability over, we went up to Boston for a rather unusual job with "MADAM X." That, as we soon learned, was the code name for the Queen Mary.

We joined MADAM X at the Boston Harbor breakwater; took a course of Southeast, speed thirty knots! The STACK was the other destroyer escorting this seagoing brute ... and our stations were on the big ship's bow, as is usual. Thirty knots was not just the speed for getting clear of the land ... it was standard speed for the Queen Mary

The sea was fairly rough and it was a hectic day and a half that we had to splash around and keep up the pace that was being set for us. We were glad when we turned back and assumed a comfortable speed back into Boston. The MADAM X disappeared over the horizon, still at the same speed, and taking the sea just as if it were a mill pond. A few days later the Germans announced that they had torpedoed and damaged the QUEEN MARY somewhere in the Atlantic. There was no basis of truth to the report; the Germans were just

fishing for information, as it would be the remotest change that any submarine could get close enough to that baby to put a torpedo in her.

In a couple of weeks after our job with the QUEEN MARY, we went down to the Norfolk Navy Yard for another short overhaul. I had the duty one night when a long twist of an Ensign came aboard in a rain coat and shyly announced that he was reporting aboard for duty. That was undoubtedly the only time before or since that Herbert A. May, Jr., could ever be accused of shyness. He was a welcome sight -- I had an assistant!

While sitting in the yard there was much speculation about where we were getting ready to go. We knew that we were getting ready for some special assignment with the WASP - but where? This was soon after the time that our Asiatic Squadron was annihilated in the Java Sea - and a division of old four-pipe destroyers had turned in a brilliant performance in the vain attempt to break up a Japanese landing in the Makassar Straits. It was only natural to assume that we were being sent to Australia - and the usual "scuttlebutt" which mysteriously passes around made it almost a certainty. It was not a pleasant prospect. But we were wrong.

CHAPTER IV.

SCAPA FLOW

Arriving at Casco Bay, Maine, we found a small but formidable, group of ships already assembled. The WASHINGTON, newly commissioned, the TUSCALOOSA, WICHITA and another division of destroyers which were to fill in Destroyer Squadron 8. The USS STACK (DD406) had to be replaced in our lineup due to an unfortunate collision with the WASP in a pea-soup fog off the Delaware Capes when on our way to Norfolk for the previously mentioned Navy Yard period. Desron 8, however, was filled in up to the full eight ships from ships of other divisions. The WASP, now all but officially named the SNAFU MARU, completed our Task Force. (The STERETT, incidentally, due to our long association with the WASP, was called the SNAFU MARU, JUNIOR.)

Task Force 39 sortied from Casco Bay on March 26th, and took an easterly course. The word was out now that we were heading for Scapa Flow, Orkney Islands for the purpose of operating with the British Home Fleet. We were to be the first United States Task Force to join our British allies in European waters.

On the second day out, a rather singular event occurred that shocked the entire Force. Sometime during the morning, signals were run up from the WASHINGTON announcing a "man overboard." Some of the destroyers were sent back to search, and after giving the water a thorough going over, reported negative results. The

sea was choppy as is usual for the North Atlantic, but only a moderate sea was running, and compared with the hellishly rough water that we were used to, the day was fairly calm. A man in the water though is a very hard object to locate even in a glassy sea and any waves or white-caps make it a slim chance. Another factor is that the Laborador Current, which originates in the Arctic Ocean, sweeps down past the coast of Greenland and on down a few hundred miles off of the Maine Coast. Survival in this frigid water is measured in terms of minutes instead of days. Men have been known to last for about four hours if they were heavily clothed and had on life jackets and winter underwear.

The search continued and in spite of bad flying weather the WASP put up two SBD's to join the search. One of these planes and two crew members were lost.

After an hour or so the search was abandoned and the Task Force continued on its course. A signal came from the WICHITA announcing the failure of the search and the name of the missing man. The man who had been lost at sea was the Task Force Commander, Rear Admiral Wilcox! Rear Admiral R. C. Giffen on the WICHITA took command of the Task Force.

Later we found out what had happened - as far as anybody knows: Admiral Wilcox had a habit of taking walks on deck and casually inspecting the top side as he did so. He very often left his cabin without his Orderly being aware of it, and proceeded about the decks by himself - often unobserved. On this particular morning, as stated before, a moderate sea was running - just enough

to occasionally wash over the decks of the WASHINGTON. Someone saw a man fall over the side and gave the alarm. The search was conducted and the WASHINGTON held quarters for muster to determine the identity of the missing man. All hands were checked and rechecked but, apparently, no one was missing. Doubt rose that a man actually had fallen overboard, or that anyone had positively seen the event. With this negative information the the Captain went to make his report to the Admiral. But the Admiral was nowhere to be found!

As the story has it, Admiral Wilcox had an unusual dread of falling overboard and frequently expressed this fear. This may have had something to do with his losing his footing when close to the ship's rail; or when a wave came over the deck, as the case may be.

This incident struck me as being extremely pathetic and rather futile. Here was a man who has devoted his life to the sea; he had worked and studied; he had made flag rank and was near the top of the ladder. Furthermore, he had realized the ambition of every Naval officer -- to be in command of a Task Force in time of war. He had been given a powerful group of ships and was on his way to the war zone. Twenty four hours after he assumed command of his Task Force the Admiral was lost at sea.

With our new Task Force Commander in charge, we proceeded on our mission assigned.

Early in the morning of 4 April, 1942, Task Force 39 was near the approaches to the Straits between the northern tip of Scotland and the Orkney Islands -- and Scapa Flow. The morning was foggy with visibility of about 3 miles; the sea glassy. It was an

unusually still and quiet morning, in contrast to the hot reception we tenderfeet were expecting, as a matter of course, from the Germans. We were met and welcomed by the British Cruiser HMS EDINBURG, which took the guide and led the Task Force through the channel, north up into the wide bay (the "Flow" proper) and on into the back channels in which the Home Fleet was anchored and moored to buoys. It is a real trick to get into Scapa past the anti-submarine and anti-torpedo nets and through the winding channels; of course, after you get past the numerous mine fields. We could not help expressing admiration for the German submarine skipper who sank the Battleship HMS ROYAL OAK inside of the Scapa Flow and then made his escape.

The STERETT was, at last, in a Theater of War.

Upon anchoring, the British were prompt in welcoming us to the Home Fleet and in giving us preliminary information. The first liaison officer aboard was a Viscount something-or-other--a Lieutenant Commander--with some special instructions, including a special ultra-secret code to be used only in event of invasion of the British Isles. The principal things that I remember about the Viscount was that he was quite helpful--and that he had the ability to grow whiskers high upon his cheek bones. I thought at first that he had a couple of hairy moles up there but upon close inspection I saw that the whole thing was deliberate, planned, and properly trimmed. It produced a unique effect--that of an eye-brow high upon each cheek. The Viscount also carried a handkerchief in his sleeve; but as I found out later, it was the accepted thing--and was no reflection on the fighting ability of the British Navy.

Hard on the heels of the Viscount came a deluge of British Signal Publications; eighteen bags of them! That was the last straw for a new communicator. There was no place to put them except in my room and for several days, until I got them all straightened out and accounted for, a person would break their leg coming into my room--with publications about a foot deep over every inch of floor space. They were in my custody and were to be strictly accounted for to the British Admiralty.

To help us get broken into the ways of the British Navy, we soon received aboard six British Signalmen and six radiomen who were to be attached to the ship until such time as our own ratings had mastered the British communication system. I was impressed with the efficiency of these men in their specialties. This is thrust upon them by necessity. The British officers assign much more responsibility to their ratings than our Navy does. Another important factor is that the men are enlisted as early as 12 years old and are put through an extensive and thorough training period, amounting to years, before they are ever aboard a man-of-war. (While in Portsmouth, England, during my "youngster" year, I visited the Navy Signal School of St. Joseph's where the British signal ratings are trained, and I can attest to the length and completeness of their training in that specialty.)

A British Lieutenant attached to our destroyer squadron was especially helpful to me in getting reoriented to their ways.

Our new Allies greeted our Task Force with open arms. We were there only a few days when invitations came pouring in inviting our officers over to the Wardrooms of various British ships. A reception was given for us by the Lyness (the Naval Base at Scapa) Officers' Mess. It was a huge success. I am afraid that our group drank up most of the Scotch whiskey that the mess possessed. The poor devils had to drink Irish whiskey after we left. It was a noble sacrifice and was well appreciated. They showed further consideration for us by having ice for the drinks, which the British never use themselves. Their beer, however, was putrid--an ungodly swill that tasted and looked like spunk-water. But in any case, they welcomed us aboard in fine style with the best they had, and our officers and theirs became fast friends. A good start.

When the party was over the weather outside was in direct contrast to the mood of the occasion; a cold driving rain and high winds blew over the Flow. We were taken back to the ship in a "drifter"--a cabin craft of about 50 foot length. The old Scotsman who piloted the boat had great difficulty in bringing it alongside our ships in the choppy water and low visibility and to add to his troubles, one of his men up on the forecastle turned on a bright light, blinding the skipper. When this would happen the old man would yell out into the wind, "Put that light doon, matey! Put it DOON! Put it DOON! Those words still come back to me when I am on

the bridge or in a small boat during a pitch black night, with cold rain in torrents and heavy seas.

"Drifters" seem to be endemic to the Scapa Flow area; I have seen them in use in no other place. Actually they are a type of motor fishing boats, perhaps taken over by the British Navy for use as described above. In true British style, the dirtiest and most insignificant of the lot proudly bore the name of HMS MAGNIFICENT!

There were many interesting things about Scapa Flow that were new to us. Spaced at intervals around the Scapa Flow area were a number of small, circular towers about 20 feet high and 15 feet in diameter made of stone. These are called Martello Towers and were intended to be small forts. Their history dates back to the Napoleonic Era when they were built to repel an invasion by Napoleon. Of course in this modern war the Martello Towers were absolutely useless, but they remained standing as symbolic relics of the day when Britain was once before threatened by the possibility of foreign invasion.

Numerous barrage balloons floated in the skies above Scapa Flow. This also was something new for us. On clear days the balloons were released to an altitude that made them appear as silver specks in the sky; when there was a cloud cover they were hauled down to a position just below the clouds so as to not present a made-to-order marker for any German plane who happened by. A strange sight was to see a small coastal convoy steaming along, each tramp steamer with

a barrage balloon in tow! Talking to an officer on the beach, I was surprised to learn that there hadn't been an air raid on the big base for over a year. The reason given was that the raiding planes could not come down low enough to hit a ship for the balloons, and the numerous Spitfires based all around the Flow made such a venture extremely unprofitable. So except for an occasional high flying reconnaissance plane leaving long, white vapor trails in the sky, Scapa Flow was unmolested.

Sitting on the muddy bottom of the harbor, but still in full commission, was the HMS IRON DUKE--the Flagship of the Grand Fleet in the Battle of Jutland in the First World War. In another part of the harbor, sunk and with its rusty bottom showing above the water was the Flagship of the German High Seas Fleet in the same battle--the DERFFLINGER. Significantly, the latter was being raised for salvage scrap-metal, to be hurled back at the Germans in various forms.

The land surrounding Scapa Flow was barren and desolate and covered with heath in the manner typical of Scotish moors. To stand looking across the fields of heath (not yet in bloom) and the rugged hills in the background, it was easy to see that a more dismal setting was not to be found for stories such as the Hounds of Baskerville and Wuthering Heights. The air was a dry cold. A small group of sheep were engaged in the thankless task of grazing in the moors. There was no other sign of life inland except an occasional Anti-Aircraft gun position and a barrage balloon control station.

The STERETT soon swung into the routine of operating with the British Home Fleet, and under the orders of the Admiralty at Whiteside, London. We were assigned a code name of "HMS STEADFAST." Almost every day we would go out on maneuvers with the KING GEORGE V, the VICTORIOUS, RODNEY, a host of other British heavy units, destroyers and the rest of our Task Force. The ships were mixed up in order to get us used to the idea that we were operating as one fleet rather than as two. The idea was highly successful and demonstrated to us all the unprecedented degree of cooperation that was to be of such value in the years of war ahead.

On the days when the Fleet did not operate, often we would go out into the Flow and have A/S training with a submarine... or stay in port and attend some of the British A/S or AA training classes. The British were good at Anti-Submarine work.

During this routine, the WASP was missing from our group for ten days or two weeks. She returned to Scapa on the 27th or 28th of April. On the morning of the 29th, the STERETT, WASP, LANG and the British destroyer HMS BLACKMOOR formed up and headed for Greenock, Scotland, on the River Clyde. Upon arrival, the destroyers anchored off Greenock and the WASP proceeded on up the river to Glasgow. The purpose was fairly obvious to us all: the WASP had left her own air groups behind at Scapa. She was now loading Spitfires for a ferry service to hard-pressed Malta! This was to be a real assignment--probably our first tough one.

While waiting for the WASP to load and return, I managed to take an over-night trip up to Glasgow. The city was dirty and not at all impressive. At a large hotel that night I had my first taste of the British war-time diet. There was only one thing on the menu; when it was brought out, it was a piece of calf liver with a big pile of mashed potatoes. It was ample food as far as energy value goes, but not the fancy dishes characteristic of peace-time England. As a matter of fact, I didn't expect the quantity that was served me. The dinner was made womewhat appetizing by some Guinness Stout.

The WASP, LANG, STERETT, * HMS ECHO, and * HMS INTREPID departed Greenock on 3 May and headed south for the Straights of Gibraltar.

On May 7th the destroyers were relieved by a group of British "tin cans" from Gibraltar. We then proceeded ahead of the WASP to Gibraltar for fuel, getting there in the early afternoon. We got our fuel according to plan and stood by for a sortie at about 2000 the same night, at which time we and the rest of "FORCE W" were to meet the WASP as she passed through the Straights. The operation was naturally of highest secrecy, but in spite of it all, something happened to us during the sortie that was at once embarrassing and immensely funny. In clearing the dock the Captain ordered one short blast on the whistle blown to warn a ship astern that we were moving out...and the whistle stuck! It seemed an eternity before an engineer could climb up the mast and cut off the steam. The extra-loud and extra-long toot must

* Note: We had operated extensively with these two ships before--as a division. The Admiralty announced them both sunk a few months later--along with our old friend the EDINBURGH--much

have sent all the inhabitants of the Rock scurrying for their air-raid stations. However, we did not wait around to see the commotion we had caused, so we steamed out and joined the "SNAFU MARU." In addition to our original group, TASK FORCE W now had the following ships: the battleship RENOWN (with the Task Force Commander aboard), the small carrier EAGLE, the cruiser CHARYBDIS and the destroyers SALISBURY (the former USS CLAXTON--in which I made my Second Class cruise), PARTRIDGE, ITHERIEL, VIDETTE, GEORGETOWN, WESCOTT, WISHART, ANTELOPE, and WRESTLER. It was a sizeable force and adequate for anything we would run into in the Mediterannean in the way of surface forces or submarines. The Germans were reported to have at least 50 submarines in the approaches to Gibraltar, but the Task Force got through without so much as a good sound contact.

The following day was spent in peaceful cruizing in the Mediterannean. All of our common sense expectations of the Germans throwing the book at us were for nothing--to our relief. It was a little uncanncy for there to be no air opposition. The Germans had complete control of the air in the Mediterannean at that time. Malta was being given a daily pounding by both German and Italian planes. Invasion was expected. Those were the worst days of Malta. The British only expected 50% of supply convoys to reach the Island and counted on those huge losses every time they sent supplies there. But we had steamed for a whole day without anything more than a couple of reconnaissance planes sighted. Nothing

developed from that, however, and our combat air patrol chased them away.

At dawn on the 9th we were at our flying-off position about 450 miles from Malta and southeast-by-south from Sardinia. We turned into the wind and the Spitfires took to the sky. The WASP flew off 48 planes and the EAGLE 18. Those 66 fighters were sorely needed at Malta in its fight for its life. It was a magnificent sight to see that group of planes form up and then disappear from view as they streaked for their new operating base. With this mission accomplished successfully, all of us had a feeling of satisfaction that we had at last done something that had a direct bearing on the course of the war, however small our part in it had been. TASK FORCE W reversed course and headed back toward Dibraltar--mission completed.

That day and the next were as peaceful as the last day had been in the so-called "Mare Nostrum." Again as we neared the Rock the destroyers went on ahead for fuel. When we got in port and tied up to the dock, we got word on the results of our recently completed assignment: The Germans and Italians had been caught completely by surprise, expecting no opposition from the air over Malta. Their bombers came down as usual in force, but with apparently little fighter protection. Our Spitfires arrived while a big raid was in progress, and fought their way in. Then they refueled, immediately took to the air again and worked the bombers over in fine style.

The score for the weekend by those Spitfires stood at 69 bombers and fighters!

In standing out of the harbor before dawn on the 11th, the STERETT fouled the starboard screw in the anchor chain of a diving barge. This delayed us in joining up with the WASP, but we cleared the screw and rejoined the Task Force on the following morning. While enroute, we received the following message signed "Winston Churchill": "WHO SAID A WASP CAN'T STING TWICE!" (The WASP had made one previous trip to Malta.) While in the Mediterannean we got another congratulatory message, this one from the British Admiral on the RENOWN--congratulating our Navy on the Coral Sea Battle. The boys in the Pacific were beginning to kick back!

After dark on the day following our return to Scapa Flow, I broke down a dispatch indicating that we were to leave there early the next morning. The message indicated that it was more than just a short trip. The question at once occurred to me "What to do with my 18 bags of British publication?" I jumped into a boat and went over to our squadron flagship, the LANG, to find out. I had cut the squadron Communicator's throat because he had not yet received the message. After an hour or so of waiting, I finally got the decision that we would transfer them immediately to the Issuing Office on the beach. While waiting for a decision though, I had sent a visual signal back to the ship telling Herbie May to get busy on inventorying the publications. I got back after a while and Herbie and I got down to business. We finished our inventory and making our list at 0800 the next morning, the

Publications Officer at Lyness signed for them, and several hundred potential courts-martial were off our hands.

We took the WASP back to Greenock, joined the BROOKLYN and four other destroyers, and put to sea on May 20th. Our orders were to go back to the States! That phrase was becoming increasingly important to us, and was onethat the "boys in the South Pacific" gave up all hope of hearing.

Norfolk on the 27th. Even Norfolk looked good after seeing nothing but the drabness of the Orkney Islands for two months. The trees, and shrubs in new leaf at Old Point Comfort were especially beautiful. The ship was sent without delay into the Navy Yard at Portsmouth. We had a top priority for repairs, and installations of our first radar. It was a rush job; we were only allowed a week to be ready to go. This time something pretty hot was in the wind; messages to the WASP were being sent for information to Commander of Carriers Pacific Fleet.

On the 3rd of June, Task Force 37 got underway and stood out of Hampton Roads. Our new outfit was composed of the WASP, the NORTH CAROLINA, QUINCY, the new Anti-Aircraft Cruiser SAN JUAN, and DESDIV 15 plus the new destroyers FARENHOLT and BUCHANAN. When formed up we took a course south, enroute to the Panama Canal--and the Pacific wars beyond.

We passed through the Canal on June 9th. For the STERETT, that represented almost an even year to the day since our first passage between oceans. It had been an even six months of peace and six months of war in the Atlantic. It was with

some pleasure that we again felt the slow swells of the Pacific under our feet, and thought back over the long days and nights in the Atlantic when there was no respite from violent rolling and pitching; when 35° rolls were commonplace (and once even 48°); of green water, freezing cold, beating against the bridge and spraying in sheets high over the director platform; of balancing our plates on our laps as we tried to eat in the Wardroom while hanging on by our legs; of the struggle it was to try to stay in our bunks at night, let alone getting some sleep; of the U-boat alarms in the middle of the night that sent us running to our battle stations as we fastened up our life jackets--with a subconscious thought of that cold, black water. We were glad to be back in the Pacific where the real Naval war was--but also where you could see what you were fighting, and where the water was warm enough that a man would have a fighting chance of survival if his ship was shot out from under him.

CHAPTER V

RETURN TO THE PACIFIC

The former President liners, but now Navy Attack Transports, were busily engaged in loading troops when our Task Force arrived at San Diego. These five ships, plus an Attack Cargo ship, also loading, represented the bulk of the Amphibious Forces in those lean days. They were loading for some special job, yet to be learned by us. Whatever they had in mind, we were taking them to their destination. The Battle of Midway had just been won, ending our defensive phase of the war, and the time was drawing near for an offensive operation somewhere, however limited.

Our new TASK FORCE 18, consisting of 5 APA's, 1 AKA, the WASP, QUINCY, VINCENNES, SAN JUAN, BUCHANAN, FARENHOLT, AARON WARD, and DESDIV 15, left San Diego on July 1st. As Communications Officer I usually knew where we were going soon after Captain Coward got the word, if the information came by written instructions, and before if it came by radio, but this time I knew no more than the deck hands did. I do not know if even the Captain had that information.

As the days passed and we curiously watched our daily position on the chart the usual speculation arose. We were headed almost straight for Christmas Island, near the Equator, so the scuttlebutt had it that we would occupy that forlorn place. The only trouble with that reasoning was that it was too far from any place to have any particular value except possibly for an emergency landing strip.

Soon after we passed on by Christmas Island, however, our idle speculation was interrupted by a most unusual phenomenon: We were approaching the Domain of Neptunus Rex, Ruler of the Raging Main, feared by all landlubbers and "pollywogs" and held in reverent esteem by all Trusty Shellbacks. Crossing The Line was upon us, and under the direction of the King himself and of his Scribe, Davy Jones, the Pollywogs of the STERETT were to have a bad time before Neptunus Rex had fully subjugated and humbled all of the uninitiated.

The proceedings began the day before the prospective date of crossing. All day long, from reveille to "darken ship", strange sights were seen all over the ship: men in bizarre costumes dancing the Can-Can to the accompaniment of wierd vocal discords; a man hard at the task of pushing a thin dime from the foc'sl to the fantail with his nose; several men with "binoculars" (made out of two huge fire nozzles lashed together) standing lookout watch on the foc'sl, looking for The Line, etc. I was placed in an undignified position astride one of the 5" guns and given a pair of the aforementioned "binoculars." My function was to keep the "binoculars" up before my eyes and ride while some wiseacre trained and elevated the gun in as jerky a manner as possible. This sort of thing continued until sunset when out of a cloud of smoke and mist His Majesty's Scribe Davy Jones climbed up over the foc'sl with his Party. He was greeted by the Captain in an official manner and soon made known his mission. He was to notify the STERETT that

her load of low landlubbers and pollywogs had incurred the Royal displeasure of Neptunus Rex, and that His Majesty would report aboard at 0830 the next day, the 11th of July, to attend personally to this deplorable condition. Davy served an individual subpoena to each man aboard--with all charges and specifications duly listed. With his departure the Pollywogs (consisting of about 90% of the crew) breathed easily and braced themselves for the horrors, brutality and excrutiating pain inevitable on the morrow.

Punctual as ever, the King and his Royal Party reported aboard at the time set. His Court consisted of as wierd a bunch of cut-throats as will ever be seen in one spot; some of the most important characters being: the Queen, the Royal Baby (a powerfully built Negro mess attendant, with bicepts as big as an ordinary man's leg), the Royal Chief of Police, the Royal Barber, the Royal Dentist, the Royal Photographer, the Royal Executioner, the Royal Chaplain and several lesser dignitaries. The King's long, golden beard, hair and mustache strangely resembled untwisted manila line. It was an impressive sight.

The proceedings began after the Royal Party had been welcomed aboard by the Captain and the ship turned over to King Neptune. All of the uninitiated were herded up forward to reduce any temptation of mob violence. Being a Pollywog--and an officer Pollywog at that--I was one of the first to go through the unholy assembly-line and experience the tortures and humiliations ordained to my despicable ilk. In

full flight I passed by about 100 feet of murderers with bludgeons made by splitting two foot lengths of old canvas and rubber fire hose. These they laid on my sore posterior without mercy until I arrived at the scene of major activity. Required to pose before the camera of the Royal Photographer, my eyes, mouth, nose and ears were promptly filled with a deluge of lubricating oil which issued from the innocent-looking box camera. Thus effectively blinded, the remainder of the ceremony was somewhat vague to me, but I believe that something like this happened in rapid succession: the Royal Dentist laid me out prone and placed a large amount of some hellish concoction in my open mouth. Then I was passed on to the Royal Barber who did a very unprofessional job on my hair, followed by a shampoo of egg and thick "600W" torpedo grease. In the meantime I was being painted with oil and deck-paint, but that was definitely anti-climax. The Barber turned me over backwards to the deck below. Fortunately a net was rigged where I landed, with a couple of mattresses in it and three fire hoses playing into it. Still blinded with oil and befuddled, I couldn't find my way out of this new difficulty. Assassins beat me with a vengeance until I finally rolled myself out of the net onto the deck in sheer desperation. But that was not all. I was then guided to my last barrier to freedom by two electrical spears; this was so constructed that it was necessary to slither through about 20 feet of garbage, chicken entrails, etc., on my belly

while I was still blind and being beaten on. Once through that I became a Trusty Shellback, was handed a swatter, and turned to with enthusiasm upon my most recent compatriots who were still in the process of overcoming the stigma of being Pollywogs. The bloodshed was terrific...."it may be human gore."

The Crossing the Line Ceremony just described may sound rather childish to landlubbers; but to sailors everywhere it is a very real and necessary thing. It goes far in developing sportsmanship and a feeling of a brotherhood of the sea. In spite of the foul play and rough tactics, it does help build morale. There is no distinction made between officers and men--both get the same treatment and like it. Captain Coward was himself initiated at thistime. He was not required to "walk the plank," but he took all of the rest in accord with the traditions of the sea.

With the hum-drum and confusion of the Crossing the Line Ceremony somewhat dissipated, we sighted the first of what the travelogue commentators fondly call the "South Sea Islands". These had a very lovely appearance from seaward, although such things had long since failed to excite any great interest for me. It was the Tonga Island group, located to the south of Samoa. The Task Force steamed in through the natural barrier reef common to the South Pacific Islands, and anchored in the harbor of Tongatabu.

The Tonga Island group is a British protectorate, largely self-governed by the native Queen. She is reported to be large, dusky and authoritative and has her own Royal Guards. Tonga was but recently taken over by the United States as a well needed base, when we arrived.

Being in port for a few days, liberty parties were sent ashore to afford some relaxation. In spite of an attempt at enforcing prices, inflation was very much in evidence. The natives knew the word "dollar" and priced everything in that term, however hazy in meaning it was to them. For example, the more or less standard price for a tour of the island or to rent a horse was $5.00. One of our seamen though approached a native with the object of renting a horse. He was offered the horse for the reasonable sum of $2.00, and took it at once. When he had ridden as much as he felt like (probably with a couple of other sailors on with him most of the time) he took the nag back to the native who told him that the sailor had bought the horse instead of rented it! Thus passed into the ownership of a member of our crew, one steed of quality. The ride and liberty hours were concluded simultaneously and the horse turned loose to graze--saddle and bridle still in the maximum condition of readiness. To this day the STERETT owns a horse in Tongatabu.

The few days around Tonga were spent in serious preparations for events to come. Amphibious rehearsals with bombardments were conducted on nearby uninhabited islands of

the Tonga group. Then TASK FORCE 18 again put to sea. On the second day out we met up with what looked like, to us in those lean days, to be a magnificent array of ships. It was the most ships in one force that we had seen since the days of Fleet maneuvers in Hawaiian waters before the war. It included TASK FORCE 11 with the SARATOGA, TASK FORCE 16 with the ENTERPRISE, their supporting cruisers and destroyers, the Australian cruisers AUSTRALIA, CANBERRA and LEANDER, various destroyer transports (APD's), and some other vessels beyond my present recollection. But as stated previously, to us it was a tremendous outfit; at least it was due to give the Japanese a real jolt!

Then I had the thrill of reading my first Operation Order--the plan for the first American offensive of the war. The combined force was designated as TASK FORCE 61. Our mission was to capture and defend Florida Island and certain sections on the northern coast of Guadalcanal, in the southern Solomon Islands. The objective came as no particular surprise to us as we had heard rumors from aviators and had received daily aircraft reconnaissance reports on the Guadalcanal-Florida area.

This area constituted one of high strategic importance. Its naval possibilities long recognized, it had once been referred to by the German Admiral Scheer as "the finest natural fleet base in the world." The Japanese, very receptive to such advice, recognized this fact and it was from Tulagi,

Florida Island, that they fought the ill-fated Battle of the Coral Sea.

The Japs had advanced down from the north, taken Rabaul New Britain, the northern coast of New Guinea, and all of the Solomons. They were smugly and confidently building an air-strip on Guadalcanal (the progress of which we received daily reports). This air-strip, when operational in a few days, would give the Japs command of the air over the New Hebrides, preparatory to invasion, and also command of the air over sections of our supply routes from the east. Observation planes operating out of Guadalcanal would be of immense value to the enemy. The air-strip was almost complete. The time had come for us to deprive the Japs of the fruits of their labors.

D-Day was set for August 7th - just eight months after Pearl Harbor.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST AMERICAN OFFENSIVE - GUADALCANAL

August 6th--D minus 1 day--was the critical period of our approach. The weatherman was a friend of ours that day. The ships plowed along under a low overcast and through slow rain-squalls all day, heading for our first beachhead. We were not detected and consequently the Japs were to have a rude reveille on the next morning. During the night the following paraphrased message was received from ComSoPac (the Navy abbreviation for Commander South Pacific Force): "ALLIED SHIPS PLANES AND FIGHTING MEN CARRY ON FROM MIDWAY, WE LOOK TO YOU TO ELECTRIFY THE WORLD WITH NEWS OF A REAL OFFENSIVE. SOCK EM IN THE SOLOMONS!" Yes, this was it.

The overcast had lifted on the morning of August 7th, giving the carrier aviators the good flying weather they had been hoping for. This was of special concern to us on the STERETT as it was something we had come to look for almost automatically in our year of operations with the WASP. We went to "general quarters" at about 0530 and shortly thereafter the carriers began flight operations. The first strike disappeared to the north at 0600. Our group returned to our base course to wait for either our planes to return or for the Japs to return the compliment.

Waiting was hard. Then our planes came back--all of them. At about 0900 we began receiving our first reports of the progress of the operation. The carrier groups had

caught the Japanese in the typical embarrassing position. The WASP planes alone had destroyed 10 Jap planes, mostly patrol seaplanes and Zero float planes--not a plane was airborne!

More good news followed soon after H-hour, which was set for about 0830, as I recall. The first report announced that the Marines were ashore on Tulagi Island with little opposition. On Guadalcanal, the report went on, the Japs had offered no opposition and had run off into the hills! The air-strip was quickly taken and was reported to be in good condition and lacking only a couple of days in being operational. The enemy had even strung electrical wiring around the field for lighting the strip for night landings. We could not have taken it at a better time.

Later in the day the Marines assaulted tiny Gavutu Island, a few hundred yards from Tulagi. This was our first determined resistance of our first offensive, and the going was tough during the short time required in siezing it and the casualties were moderate to heavy.** Gavutu was a small piece of rock not over 200-300 yards long and connected to Florida Island by a narrow sand spit, but it apparently had a strong, well-armed garrison of Japs on it.

The WASP lost one plane during the day. Excitement on the STERETT was limited in the natural exuberance of success and in listening in on the fighter frequency on the radio. Snatches of conversation such as this were heard

** Note: I later learned that one of the officers of the small Marine detachment that took Gavutu was Lt. Antonelli, '40, with whom I had played Battalion Lacrosse at the Academy.

throughout the day:

"That hospital is full of Japs. They are firing on the Marines..."

"Let's go get 'em."

"I see a Jap running like hell down there; permission to go down and get him?"

"Permission granted."

"WILCO!"

Meeting little opposition in our original landing the ships secured from general quarters that night to rest for a repeat of the same thing on the next day. The assault phase was successful; now the planes were giving support to our ground forces upon call.

On the morning of August 9th we received a message from the Task Force Commander sadly announcing that on the night before the Japs had struck back. We had lost four of our sorely-needed heavy cruisers: the QUINCY, VINCENNES, ASTORIA, and HMAS CANBERRA. The Japs had entered Savo Sound undetected and had worked our ships over without suffering a single loss. When they opened fire, our disposition was such that our ships could not tell friend from foe, and we had so many ships there that utter confusion resulted. The cruisers were severely damaged before firing a shot. The Japs could "chalk one up" for this First Battle of Savo Island. We could hardly believe it. The QUINCY was an especial favorite of the STERETT; when we would go

alongside to fuel, pass sea mail, or provision, the QUINCY would always treat us to a few gallons of ice cream, gratis. Destroyer sailors appreciate that as one of the most noble and considerate of gestures. These ships were lost--and we were hopping mad. But here again, as at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese underestimated our losses and quickly steamed away. If they had had a picture of the situation, they could have gone on and destroyed a large portion of our transports and cargo ships. They failed to take full advantage of their success, and our losses, though serious, were not critical.

In the days that followed, TASK FORCE 18 was occupied in just steaming around to south of Guadalcanal, making daily searches and reconnaissance flights with our planes, watching for any sign of the enemy and keeping our supply lines to Guadalcanal open and unmolested. After two weeks of this with not a move from the Japanese, TASK FORCE 18 retired to a rear area for fueling at sea and provisioning. We were gone only 3 or 4 days, but during that time the ENTERPRISE (TASK FORCE 16) had had a set-to with a flight of Jap planes and had received a bomb hit on her flight deck. She had given a sterling account of herself in a tangle with a Jap carrier group off the Stewart Islands and had inflicted heavy damage on a carrier and other ships. The WASP and TASK FORCE 18 had just missed out on a chance for a crippling strike against Honorable opposition. Though damaged, the ENTERPRISE remained in operation and kept her planes going with the use of only one elevator from the hangar deck. The Stewart Islands Battle took place on 23-25 August; the WASP came back on the line on the 26th.

The Guadalcanal campaign was going well; so far, heavy resistance from the ground forces had not been encountered. However, on the night of August 21st we got the first real indication that the Japanese were going to try to hold Guadalcanal at all costs; on that night they landed troops on Guadalcanal from a group of destroyers. The fate of that first attempt at reinforcement was eloquently explained in the following paraphrased despatch, received on the 25th:

> "A Japanese force which landed on Guadalcanal the morning of the 21st consisted of about 700 men. The Japs tried to withdraw into the forest after a hand to hand encounter with our Marines but were outflanked, trapped and destroyed. Jap losses: 670 killed, remainder captured; our losses: 28 Marines!"

This contingent of Japanese were landed at a point about 30 miles from our beachhead. They had made a remarkable march through the almost unpenetrable jungles, dragging their equipment with them, including 70 mm cannon and arrived in the short period of four days. In their distorted Oriental minds they must have figured that this small group of soldiers would be sufficient to liquidate the few thousand Marines on the beach at Lunga Point. They advanced to an attacking position, apparently without plan, and were apprehended by the Marines at a time that the Japs were caught on a narrow sand-spit between the jungles and Savo Sound. There they were summarily annihilated. The operation from the Japanese standpoint was a heroic gesture, but - so what?

At the same time we received word of another one-sided engagement: On the 19th a detachment of 60 Japs were wiped out; a

landing party of 20 more Japs in a rubber boat were encountered - only two escaped. Our losses in these two actions were 6 Marines.

In the air the Japs were striking often. The handful of Marine aviators were in the air most of the day and were doing a terrific job of stemming the tide with what little they had to do with. A typical report from General Vandergrift was received announcing that on the 24th 10 Jap bombers and 11 "Zeros" were shot down over Guadalcanal. We lost 2 fighters. Although this represents one of the Marines' better days, the ratio was what we came to expect. Plane for plane and pilot for pilot, the Japs were hopelessly outclassed in the air.

Ships can stay at sea for just so long, and even the carriers and cruisers get low on fuel and provisions eventually, so on September 4th, Task Force 18 entered port at Noumea, New Caledonia.

We had come to expect nothing from the ports in the Pacific, but Noumea was new to us - something to break the monotony. On the beach I found it to be a good sized town, run-down, dilapidated and dirty. Every once in a while a platoon of Free French soldiers would march down the street, their helmets and bayonets bedecked with flowers. The one justification for going ashore at all was that the French Officers' Club had extended its privileges to our officers. There I managed to get a quart bottle of Australian beer and relax for a couple of hours. The small luxury of beer on the beach is the only pleasure of sailors in the South Pacific. Food ashore was scarce and the few eating places had long waiting lines of Americans and Noumea civilians, so the only sensible plan was a quick return to the ship. That was the gist of shore leave at Noumea.

On the 8th, Task Force 18 was at sea again and headed north toward our usual beat south of the Solomons.

On September 10th, DEsDiv 15 was relieved of our duties with T. F. 18 by DesDiv 24. Even though the old SNAFU MARU was a hard task master and a great responsibility for a division of destroyers, we were somewhat reluctant to leave her. For a full year we had taken her through the worst submarine waters in the world without a scratch; for that length of time the destinies of the STERETT and the WASP were the same: Bermuda, Martinique, Argentia, Scapa Flow, the Mediterranean, Malta, the Coral Sea. She was a fine ship and a friend of ours.

We joked to each other about it: "They can't do that," we said, "Why the WASP won't last a week without the STERETT to keep her out of trouble!" The joke was not funny.

We received the following message from the Task Force Commander just before we left Task Force 18:

"DESDIV 15 IS DETACHED FROM THIS COMMAND TODAY X WE SHALL MISS THEM IN THE TASK FORCE X THROUGHOUT THIS CAMPAIGN THEIR WORK HAS BEEN EXCELLENT X MY BEST WISHES FOR THEIR CONTINUAL SUCCESS."

DesDiv 15 split up and went our separate ways in compliance with individual orders. We were to work directly under ComSoPac. The STERRTT returned to Noumea.

At Noumea I ran into a friend of mine who had been ordered to the Destroyer JARVIS; which suggests one of the mysteries of the war. The JARVIS had been damaged in an air attack off Guadalcanal soon after our invasion. She was seaworthy and had set out for Espiritu Santo (a distance of some 500 miles) under her own power. The JARVIS has never been heard from to this day; there were no survivors, no radio message --nothing. Not even debris was found

on that wellworn stretch of water from Guadalcanal to Santo.

CHAPTER VII

THE GUADALCANAL SHUTTLE

Our first assignment under ComSoPac was to escort two Navy cargo ships to the Guadalcanal -- Tulagi area. The USS HULL was the other destroyer.

At dusk on the day we arrived, September 14th, the STERETT saw her first action against the Japanese. Flying in low over Guadalcanal came several dive bombers, Zeros and Zero float planes. The fighters, in addition to protecting the dive bombers were carrying out strafing missions. Ray Calhoun up in the 5" gun director got a Zero float plane in his sights, range 8000 yards, and opened fire. Just after we opened fire we saw our first enemy plane crash. High in the air and on our port bow a red spark developed, and turned into a long trail of red flame and the Jap spiraled down into the water. It was a beautiful sight. Soon after that our target imitated his unfortunate comrade and added his wreckage to the Savo Sound. This plane was quite low and did not leave such a lingering and spectacular trail in the sky, but since it was the STERETT'S target, it was even more beautiful than the first. The STERETT HAd drawn her first blood! The next day we painted our first Jap flag on the bridge.

The night after the attack we anchored in Tulagi harbor. The "Tokyo Express" had by this time become a very real thing. Usually composed of one or two cruisers and about 4 destroyers, this force would enter Savo Sound sometime during the night, make a sweep around for our light forces, then bombard Henderson Field and leave at a speed that would get them away from our planes by daylight.

The Japs had good aerial reconnaissance and would not strike when some of our heavy surface units were in the area. A few days before this instance the old 4-stack destroyers GREGORY and LITTLE had gone out to oppose them and were sunk in a matter of minutes. However, on our first night in Tulagi, the Tokyo Express failed to show up. On the next day the cargo ships finished unloading and we retired down the "Slot" and on back to Espiritu Santo.

When we returned to Santo we received a shock that struck us deep. During our brief absence from Task Force 18 the WASP had been struck by four torpedoes from a Japanese submarine, had burned furiously for a few hours and was sunk in her patrol area to south of the Solomon Islands. We were sick. It seemed ironical that she should have been lost so soon after we left here- and lost to a Japanese submarine at that.

A few days after the loss of the WASP - Vice-Admiral Halsey relieved Vice-Admiral Ghormley as ComSoPac. Our first notice of this change of command came in a curt message addressed to all ships in the South Pacific Area: "STRIKE REPEAT STRIKE X HALSEY SENDS!" "Bull" Halsey had taken command and all of the South Pacific knew it. The Japs were in for a good kick in the teeth from the new ComSoPac!

* * *

Things were tough on Guadalcanal. The Japs were continually putting reinforcements ashore at night from destroyers; air attacks were stepped up and the Tokyo Express was an almost nightly occurrence Messages from the Commanding General of the First Marines (General

Vandergrift) were received daily reporting operations, but mainly reporting the status of his troops and equipment. It was a little pathetic to read these messages day after day pleading for more planes, more gasoline, more troops. He would report the results of the previous night's bombardment by the cruisers and destroyers of the Tokyo Express listing the number of serviceable planes on Guadalcanal; sometimes it would be pitifully few - 18 or 20. Some of the planes were old P-40's and P-39's which were of small value. A flight of a dozen or so planes would arrive and some would be promptly destroyed by bombardment. Gasoline was critical at times, especially in the middle of October and was being flown up by DC-3 transport planes. Some old 4-pipe destroyers were used to carry gasoline. The rate of attrition was high among the few Marine aviators who were carrying the burden in spite of the fact that they were exacting 5 or 6 Jap planes for each of our losses and 50% of our pilots were being saved to fight again. General Vandergrift begged for "one more division in order that offensive action may be initiated." He stated that excellent though his First Marine Division was, the troops were constantly fatigued by strenuous operations during the day and bombardment by night. The last remark made us grit our teeth because the Navy was not yet in position to stop the Tokyo Express.

We had by this time lost the HORNET and we had exactly two operative carriers in the Pacific Fleet. The cruisers and destroyers that were carrying the weight of the war in the South Pacific were pitifully few also. The ENTERPRISE and the SARATOGA were all that remained of our carrier force; it was hard to keep even one of them on the line at a time. While the ENTERPRISE was being

repaired from bomb hits, the SARATOGA was operating; by the time the ENTERPRISE was back in operation the "SARA" had caught a torpedo and had to go back to be patched up. Then the same sequence repeated itself. The SARA got the nickname of the "RELUCTANT DRAGON" because her damage was always from torpedoes while the ENTERPRISE always got hers from mixing it up with the enemy air forces and carriers.

During all of this time the STERETT was getting not a moment's rest; it had come to be a very personal war for us; it seemed that we were practically carrying the load ourselves and we were glad of the opportunity. But all were not Americans in the South Pacific during those dark days, unfortunately. We got down to Neumea about two weeks after the crew of a merchant ship refused to carry some vitally needed supplies to Guadalcanal unless they were given a $1000 bonus for the job. The ship was unloaded into a Navy cargo ship requiring an unnecessary delay of 4 or 5 days. Our Navy sailors were more than happy to take this load up there, knowing how much it was needed - and at $50 a month, too. Money had no meaning in the South Pacific except to our "dollar patriots" in the Merchant Marine. This story was repeatedly denied by the National Maritime Union, but the facts are there for all ages to look upon with disapproval.

The "Guadalcanal Shuttle" was in full operation. Every trip to the Solomons brought about a quick turn-around for us, and we were back again; escorting cargo ships one time and assault transports with reinforcements the next. During our time of working under ComSoPac the STERETT escorted every group of reinforcements the Marines received. It seemed that after every successful trip to Guadalcanal, Tokyo Radio would blare out a friendly, patronizing

broadcast to our Marines saying: "Marines on Guadalcanal, you are doomed if you insist on waging this losing fight in the Solomons. You are now cut off from all supplies and reinforcements by the big guns of the Imperial Japanese Navy. You will get no more food and you will starve. Lay down your arms; think of your loved ones back home!" It was always good for a laugh to listen to Radio Tokyo; they understood our fighting men less than we understood theirs. "Tokyo Rose" ran the most popular radio show in the Pacific at that time. She would open by saying in her cheery voice, "Hello, you Honorable boneheads in the the Solomons. This is your favorite enemy, Ann." Then she would play some good old American records intended to make us homesick and quit. It was a good morale builder.

In our numerous trips "up the Slot" we found the Japanese tactics to be following a set, unalterable pattern. Air attacks on Henderson Field were regularly at 1145 and 1500 by high altitude bombers, then at dusk by dive bombers and Zeros. The high altitude bombers were beautiful planes, trim and silvery as they came in from the northwest in perfect formation, dropped their bombs and veered south over Guadalcanal, then back toward Buka and Rabaul from whence they came.

We would shoot at them but they were too high and wide for accurate anti-aircraft. The Japs never learned. Everytime they pulled a high-level raid - always on schedule - they would come in at 25,000 feet. The Marines would be waiting for them with their F4F "Wildcats" at 30,000 feet, dive down on them through their fighter cover, if there, and send a large percentage of them to join their ancestors. Japanese losses were high but they kept coming.

We had our set routine also, dictated by necessity. On our runs to Guadalcanal our task groups would be timed to enter Lengo Channel at about 0500 and arrive off Lunga Point at daylight. We were always at general quarters during these approaches, and most of the time in the area, incidentally. It was rather pleasant up on the bridge when steaming through Lengo Channel though. The channel is about 3000 yards from the beach, the morning air before dawn was cool and refreshing and carried a heavy fragrance from the wild honeysuckle and vegetation on the beach. Once at the anchorage the transports and cargo ships would make greatest haste in unloading while we patrolled and searched for the Jap submarine that was usually in the area. The ships got under way during air attackes, with the attendant loss of time, then back to the anchorage to unload until the next raid. At dusk the ships retired out Lengo Channel and on to the south of San Cristobal Island to return at dawn. As soon as we left, the Tokyo Express moved in. Often they were so close on our heels that we could see their guns flashes as they bombarded the Marines and the air field. It was a strange setup. The Japs had control at night and we had it in the daytime. It was a bitter pill to run out and submit to letting the Japs bombard with impunity. Our PT boats were on the job in the absence of any other of our surface forces and they would damage a Jap destroyer every once in a while - even sank a couple of them.

The Guadalcanal - Tulagi area had acquired several unofficial names by this time: "Sleepless Hollow," "Torpedo Junction," and "Iron Bottom Bay" being the favorites. The latter is now the official name for the former Savo Sound and it appears on all

charts as such. "Iron Bottom Bay" has a meaning behind it to all who fought there.

The Japanese controlled the jungles just a few hundred yards to westward from our beach at Lunga Point; they had several landing boats pulled up on the beach there -- all very cozy. A piece of Jap artillery, "Pistol Pete," opened up on the airfield at dusk every night. We could see his flashes and a couple of times we gave him a bad time with counter-battery fire from the STERETT's 5" guns. We steamed back and forth in the semi-darkness dodging other ships bent on the same purpose and blinded every few seconds by the red glare of our main battery as they gave their rude kicks in the general direction of the Emperor's posterior. Periodically a star-shell would light up the beach then drop slowly into the jungles giving a silhouette of palm trees in the descent. It presented an eerie picture. After the star had struck the ground a flicker could be seen for a few seconds as the flame died. Sometimes a small fire would start, giving our guns a point of aim; then more of our red tracers describing their arcs in the darkness, the arcs terminating in an explosion as the projectiles struck.

Events moved in rapid succession in the month of October. The Guadalcanal campaign was already two months old; the Japs were gradually getting their forces together for a supreme effort to recover the important island and we were reinforcing our troops in an equally determined manner. To be beaten in our first offensive would have been unthinkable.

In the meantime, news in other parts of the world had our interest, however, secondary. The Battle of Stalingrad had been grinding along for much the same length oftime that had our own.

Naturally, it was heartening to know Hitler had been stopped. The national policy was by this time apparent that we were to defeat Germany first, giving the Pacific secondary consideration; it was the primary duty of the Navy and Marine Corps, almost unassisted, to make what progress we could with what little we had. I stress the word "little" because in those days to see a Task Force of as many as four cruisers and a squadron of destroyers, or an air strike going out with as many as 15 B-17's was an event worthy of special comment and significance. To occasionally see a single battleship in Segone Channel at Espiritu Santo would always give us the feeling of great power; the feeling that with the SOUTH DAKOTA and a few destroyers we could like the whole Jap Navy. Practical thinking was disillusioning.

And so the campaign went on in to October. The first operation that I recall for that month was another Task Force and another group of reinforcements for the Marines on Guadalcanal. The Japs had been active in their sneaking way and the night before we arrived had landed several hundred troops at Kŏli Point to the Eastward of our positions, in an obvious attempt to attack our forces from both sides, outflank and surround them. This situation called for some very special treatment, and the Task Force Commander called upon the SAN FRANCISCO, HELENA and STERETT to do the job. We were provided with a spotting plane by the SAN FRANCISCO, formed in column astern of the cruisers and got on with the assignment.

In a bombardment of terrain such as these islands afforded, unless the beach line itself is bombarded, it is impossible to

see just where your salvos land and what they hit; the only thing to be seen from the ship is the black smoke from the burst and the rising dust. The air spot served as our "eyes" and gave us a running account of what we were doing in a commentary something like this:

"Up 50; right 02."

"Right on that time. No change!"

"Nice work...now shift over to that village...It is FULL of Japs!"

"NO CHANGE, NO CHANGE--POUR 'EM IN THERE!"

And the above was what we heard that day. Calhoun was beaming when he came down from the director. The Japs had been caught in a very unfavorable position; they had just landed a few hours before, had not had time either to dig in properly or to move on inland as was their intention. Moreover, there is nothing quite so demoralizing than to be on the receiving end of a Naval bombardment. Reports coming from General Vandergrift about two weeks later, after the Marines had pushed on over and taken Koli Point, stated that 250 to 300 dead Japs were found on Koli--presumably the combined effect of our bombardment and action by the ground troops. It is a pleasant feeling to know that your ship has killed a few Japanese!

On the night of 11-12 October, Rear Admiral Scott and his newly formed TASK FORCE 64 steamed out to meet the Tokyo Express. Though not in it ourselves it was a vitally interesting operation. Messages flew thick and fast from Admiral Halsey to C.T.F. 64 giving him the latest reports on a group of Japanese that were

on their way down the Slot with the intent of giving the Marines a bad night. Australian "coastwatchers" stationed in the Jap-held northern end of the Solomon chain had a smooth working communication system and, combined with our patrol planes, provided the tip-off on practically every movement of the Japanese, both on the sea and in the air.

The two forces were evenly matched - each with 4-5 cruisers and a group of destroyers; our group was headed by the HELENA, SAN FRANCISCO, BOISE, and SALT LAKE CITY.

Complete surprise was effected in this first large scale night action since the First Battle of Savo--but this time it was a complete reversal of the situation in that battle. The Japs were the ones that were taking it on the chin. When the first Jap heavy cruiser was located, a bridge of red tracers poured in to the Jap task force from every ship in T.F. 64. Destroyer torpedoes polished off the burning cruisers. When the shooting had stopped, 4 Jap cruisers were on the bottom along with a few destroyers. The cost of us was the loss of the destroyer DUNCAN, and the damaging of the BOISE and SALT LAKE CITY. Iron Bottom Bay had received some more Jap ships to lay alongside our cruisers lost on the First Savo. It was gratifying to realize that we had won a resounding victory and had at last struck back at the Tokyo Express. The Japs had seen nothing yet.

Things took a turn for the worst later in October. The Japs came down in force and despite the fact that we sank some of their transports (four of them) off Guadalcanal, they still succeeded in

putting ashore an estimated 10,000 troops. This was the blackest period in the whole campaign and although we had the utmost confidence in our ability to hold the island, there was the possibility that we might not.

More bombardments by the Japs on our positions around Henderson Field; more pleading messages from General Vandergrift. The few serviceable planes remaining had no gasoline, so gasoline was flown up in DC-3's...just a large enough trickle to keep our fighters in the air with none to spare.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MEREDITH, VIREO AND CHESTER

We were in Santo when we got the tragic news of the disaster of the destroyer MEREDITH. She was escorting the seagoing tug VIREO with a gasoline barge in tow, headed for Guadalcanal when spotted by an entire carrier air group. When the planes came on the radar screen and were identified as a very large group, the MEREDITH went alongside to remove the crew from the VIREO, knowing that the slow tug would be helpless against enemy planes whereas the maneuverability, speed and guns of the destroyer would give all hands at least a fighting chance. The MEREDITH had not gotten up speed when the divebombers and torpedo planes struck...with all the force they could muster. The MEREDITH was struck almost simultaneously by 5 or 6 torpedoes and about the same number of bombs. She was literally torn to pieces and sank instantly, many of her crew who were uninjured by the explosions and fire were unable to get clear of the unfortunate little ship.

This event was the necessity for our next orders from Admiral Halsey. We were to proceed to Noumea, pick up the BOBOLINK (a tug), and proceed to salvage the VIREO which was unmanned and drifting though undamaged, by the above course of events. The BOBOLINK was maddeningly slow. To be forced to steam at 8 knots will drive any destroyer sailor out of his mind, but we made our plodding way northward. Before we had gotten half way, our orders were changed telling us to forget the VIREO, locate the gasoline barge (also adrift) and take it on up to Guadalcanal. We would take up where

the MEREDITH was forced to leave off.

Half a day before we were to arrive at the last reported position of the barge another emergency came up calling for another change in orders: the CHESTER, one of our extremely valuable heavy cruisers, had been torpedoed by a Japanese submarine just a few hours to the eastward of our destination, and we were to proceed to give her assistance in making port at Santo. She had been hit in the engine room and was being towed by one of the destroyers. However, by the time that the STERETT and the BOBOLINK appeared on the scene, making our breakneck speed of 8 knots, the CHESTER had worked up to five knots under her own power. We fell in with her and followed her on in to Santo, as precaution against her breaking down enroute. It was a real relief to see the big cripple crawl on into the harbor and to safety.

Our three sets of orders on this assignment give a clear indication of how critical the situation was in the South Pacific at that time. At first it seemed more important to rescue the VIREO, because in the overall picture she was vital in delivering future gasoline to the Marines. Then the situation developed that made immediate delivery imperative and the already loaded gasoline barge took first priority. Later when we were in danger of losing the CHESTER, there could be no doubt that even a temporary shortage of gasoline, however vital, was more desirable than the loss of one of our few remaining heavy cruisers at that time.

While these operations were in progress, the survivors of the MEREDITH were suffering beyond the limits of human endurance in the hot, shark-infested waters of the Coral Sea. All available ships were employed on critical assignments so days elapsed before the GWIN and the GRAYSON were available to rescue the remainder of

the MEREDITH'S crew. A best-seller titled Condition Red, written by the Captain of the GRAYSON gives an excellent account of this rescue in great detail so I will not attempt to improve upon that, as it would be only hearsay at best. The facts on the sinking of the MEREDITH that I got firsthand from a survivor I shall touch on briefly.

On our next trip to Noumea, to jump ahead a month, a member of the Class of 1942, an Ensign Kauffman, came on board to visit our Assistant Gunnery Officer. He still appeared to be suffering somewhat from shock at the time. There were a few events that typified their experience under violent attack followed by the long days in the water:

A classmate of mine, Lt. (jg) Penrod was the Gunnery Officer. The attack developed so swiftly and from so many directions that the guns had little effect; with the first bomb hit all control was lost and in a matter of minutes, if not seconds, the ship was sunk. The VIREO, undamaged, drifted downwind faster than did the survivors in the water. It was Penrod's idea to play a long-shot and make an attempt to swim over to the VIREO, get it underway somehow and come back and rescue the remainder of the survivors. He left the rafts, swimming in the direction of the tug and was never seen again.

The hot sun, exposure, unbearable thirst and sharks have strange effects on men. After two or three days in the water, many of the men went out of their minds, with the attendant hallucinations. One chief petty officer, apparently bearing up well, suddenly announced:

"Well, fellows, I just live over here a little ways. I am going home."

Whereupon he swam away from the raft in a direction leading only to a thousand miles of sea and was never seen again.

One of the miracles of the survivor's experience was the case of a Pharmacist's Mate who ended up in the water a great distance from the remainder of his shipmates -- and without a life jacket. Incredible even for the expert swimmer he was, this man swam without support for three days until a searching B-17 sighted him in the water and threw him a life jacket. He was later rescued by one of the destroyers.

Many of the survivors, a month afterwards, were suffering from mental disorders brought about by injury, exposure and fatigue; most of the others were being hospitalized for more tangible injuries.

CHAPTER IX

THE AOLA BAY PROJECT

Meeting the possibility of losing some of our positions on Guadalcanal, notably Henderson Field, November 1942, found the STERETT again in a Task Force carrying reinforcements to the Solomons. From the 2nd to the 6th of November, the transports unloaded troops and supplies at our beach at Lunga Point, but the primary purpose of this trip was to form a new beach at Aola Bay, about 15-20 miles to eastward of our main positions. There we unloaded an Army Engineering Battalion. It was the job of this group to build an airfield at Aola Bay. This spot was chosen for obvious reasons, considering the topography of "Guadal."

Guadalcanal is a mountainous island of volcanic origin some 40 miles in length (east to west) and 20 miles in width. On this relatively small land area are several mountains over 6000 feet high and 2 or 3 of 7000 or 8000 feet. On most parts of the northern coast the foothills of these mountains slope down almost to the waters edge. There are two positions on the northern coast suitable for building an air strip: the first and more desirable is in the vicinity of Lunga Point where Henderson Field is located. The other is at Aola Bay. An airfield at Aola Bay would serve several very useful purposes. It would provide a stand-by field sufficiently far from the center of operations that if we should lose Henderson Field we could maintain an air strength on Guadalcanal to neutralize the Jap

control of Henderson. Another practical use of a second field (other than the obvious advantage of having two fields instead of one) was that it would disperse our planes to minimize damage by aerial bombs and naval bombardment.

Thus the Aola Bay project was undertaken. The combatant ships during the unloading phase were employed in a manner by this time familiar to us: at night when the transports and cargo ships retired to the south of the Eastern Solomons, the combatant ships, cruisers and destroyers, formed up and patrolled Indespensible Straights--thus insuring the other ships against possible surface attack by enemy ships approaching from the North and West.

It had for almost two months been the practice to stay at our battle stations during all hours of darkness while in the Solomons area. It was a relief when the Task Force completed its assigned task and retired eastward through the Slot between San Cristobal and Malaita Islands, and on the southeast to the good harbor of Espiritu Santo.

Soon after our arrival at Santo the STERETT received orders detaching her from her long duties as the South Pacific handyman and placing her once again on the "main team." It looked like a fighting outfit when we joined the cruiser Task Force 64.

CHAPTER X

"SPLASH FOUR BETTYS"

After the Japanese had landed large reinforcements two of three weeks before, the situation was close to desperate. Rumors had circulated about at one time that Guadalcanal was lost and it took some reassuring before the crew disbelieved it. But another group of reinforcements, even more than the last group, (part of which were taken to Aola Bay), had to be landed without an hour's delay.

Thus it was that on the morning of November 10th, when Task Force 64 heaved up anchors and stood out of Espiritu Santo harbor. Our mission was to provide surface coverage for a large group of transports and cargo ships going up to reinforce Guadalcanal. The combined force had the designation of Task Force 67.

The reinforcements were delivered on the following morning, November 11th. Unloading during the day was rapid and relatively uninterrupted by air alerts. In the afternoon the PORTLAND flew her planes back to Espiritu Santo so as to have her decks clear for any eventuality; at dusk the transports and escorts retired to the South and the combatant ships, now redesignated as Task Group 67.4, took up our patrol in Indespensible Straits. At about midnight we turned back into Iron Bottom Bay for an offensive sweep. We covered the area thoroughly with negative results - this was one night that the Japs did not choose to bombard. But for the surface forces, as usual, it was just another sleepless night in "Sleepless Hollow."

The transports group and Rear Admiral Turner, returned at dawn and the unloading operation was resumed.

The day was uneventful until around 1600 when the warning net frequency announced "Condition Red," whereupon we immediately went to general quarters and stood by for an air attack. Dive bombers, torpedo planes and fighters were reported on their way down from the northwest. It was an interesting report, too, because if it was correct the target would be the ships instead of the air strip as was customary. Our fighters climbed up to an altitude which would permit them to handle the dive-bombers; however, the divebombers did not materialize and they mixed it up with a medium-altitude flight of Zeros.

We did not have long to wait for our promised air action. Soon a long line of black specks came into view over the eastern end of Florida Island, flying very low. As they came in closer they were identified as twin-engined medium bombers of a type called "Bettys" - for simplicity. A versatile plane, these were carrying torpedoes. The STERETT was on the exposed side of the formation where we could get an open shot at them. The whole formation held fire waiting for them to get within range. Then as if by signal, every 5" gun in the Task Group that would bear opened fire and a multitude of black bursts began to appear all around the attacking planes.

Once committed to their attack the Japs neither hesitated nor wavered but came straight in, using no evasive maneuvers. A straight run. The first planes came on in fairly close to the formation before we got our first kill. It was a direct hit on the fuselage, knocking off the entire tail aft of the big red

ball of the Japanese insignia. The plane nosed over and crashed into the water, exploding and burning as it hit. Then planes started dropping everywhere, always with a gasoline explosion and a lingering column of smoke and flicker of flame on the water to mark where another Jap met his end. Another direct hit from our 5" sent a second "Betty" crashing in. Two of the big flying boxcars (or so they appeared to us) passed close astern with our 20 mm tracers hitting them squarely in the cockpit; both carried on for a few hundred yards then spun in.

The raid was over in what seemed a matter of two or three minutes, leaving the wreckage of 9 planes in the water; gasoline still burned on the water at various places, a wing here, there the huge wheels of landing gear were stuck grotesquely out of the smooth surface of the bay. We passed close aboard, a Jap pilot in the water; apparently in no mood to die for the Emperor, he was waving his arms wildly at us as we steamed past, trying to attract attention and be picked up. One of the destroyers astern of us was directed to act on these curt orders: "Pick him if he wants to be picked up; if he resists, shoot him and to hell with him." This had long been our policy. Frequently before, as our ships came alongside downed enemy aviators to rescue them, they would pull out a pistol and fire at us. That leaves no recourse but to fire back, a pleasant enough job for any machine gunner.

When the planes were first sighted two friendly fighters, an Aircobra and a Wildcat, were on their tails making repeated passes on them. These fighters would not give up and followed the "Bettys" on in through our anti-aircraft fire. The Aircobra

was unavoidably shot down but the Marine pilot was picked up by one of our destroyers, uninjured. The Wildcat pulled out and escaped damage. It was piloted by Joe Foss, one of the war's first aces. These planes had been up at 30,000 feet waiting for dive bombers when they sighted the torpedo planes coming in. They dived down all the way and reached the bombers in time to make a kill or two before they reached the formation.

The only damage caused by this expensive, but futile, attack by the enemy came when one of the planes, already burning and doomed, crashed into the after superstructure of the SAN FRANCISCO starting fires and killing some 35 men. The few torpedoes that the enemy managed to drop passed harmless through the formation.

During this action I had a grandstand seat on the bridge and nothing to do but watch. The planes that we fired at we hit; that I know.

Of course there were several ships sometimes firing at the same plane and it is impossible to say just which shot got him. The fact remains that no one ship repulsed the attack but it <u>was</u> 100% repulsed.

Of the 23 Jap planes participating, only one is believed to have escaped - our fighters and ship's gunfire accounted for the rest.

There was a natural elation throughout the ship over the outcome of the air action - everybody congratulated everybody else and all talking at once.

I went back to check over a few details on the torpedo battery with Chief Jackson and gabbed with him for a while. He talked to me about the possibility of rating Shrieves, Hawkins and Rhodes Second Class Torpedomen on the first of the next month. I agreed that I thought they were ready for the rate. The discussion was ended with a remark that I hoped we would get a chance to get rid of our torpedoes into the side of a couple of Jap cruisers. He replied that of course he would like to destroy some enemy surface ships himself, "But," he added, "there are two sides in a fight. I have seen kids die by the thousands in winning. I have seen the Marne red from the blood of floating bodies. It isn't at all a nice thing to see, but if we do fire our fish and they don't run hot and straight, I'll go over the side after them.!"

I thought that over as I walked back to my battle station on the bridge; it was almost dark and time to go to general quarters for the night. It wasn't at all like Jackson to be morose. He had expressed the usual American desire to kill Japs, but at the same time he seemed a little apprehensive, almost reluctant, as if in anticipation of damage and death. He knew war; it is not all give, but receive as well. I shrugged it off and went on up to the bridge, in too good a mood to be pensive.

CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLE OF GUADALCANAL

"Go tell the Bashaw of Tripoli and the people of your country that in the future they may expect only a tribute of powder and ball from the sailors of the United States."

....Lieutenant Andrew Sterett, USN

At midnight of 12-13 November the striking force entered Lengo Channel to conduct an offensive sweep of Iron Bottom Bay as we had on the night before. The transports had completed unloading and, with their escorts, were steaming south toward Santo. TASK GROUP 67.4 was ordered back to strike at the enemy forces which were expected on this night.

A big push by the Japs had been shaping up for several days, and promised to be an all-out effort. Our intelligence had predicted that air attacks would be stepped up several days before the assault; this assumption had already been proven correct. This night was expected to see the first of a bitter seige of pre-landing Naval bombardments by the Japs.

TASK GROUP 67.4, composed of the Anti-Aircraft cruisers ATLANTA, and JUNEAU, the light cruiser HELENA, the heavy cruisers SAN FRANCISCO and PORTLAND, and the destroyers STERETT, LAFFEY, CUSHING, O'BANNON, MONSSEN, BARTON, FLETCHER and AARON WARD, went back to see.

The night was deathly quiet except for the distant noise of sporadic gunfire on Guadalcanal; the sea was smooth, agitated only by a very slight breeze cool and moist from a light

shower earlier in the evening; the night was dark with a low overcast, and the moon had set. This was the setting when we were suddenly brought to the alert by the warning of "condition Red" over Guadalcanal. The time was 0028.

Occasionally we could see what appeared to be an aircraft flare in the direction of Guadalcanal, nothing more. We assumed that a night air attack was in progress, but we had gone through that so many times that it did not cause any excitement. The guns trained out, their crews on their feet and ready to fire on a second's notice. The torpedo gang yawned, partly from the boredom of the possibility of having the guns shoot at planes again, and partly from two days without more than a cat-nap of sleep.

But at 0130 the entire picture was changed; our radio voice circuit from Admiral Callahan's flagship blared out with the report of SURFACE SHIPS in Iron Bottom Bay, range 14,500 yards! This was it! I had Herbie May relieve me of the Deck and I ran back to the Torp. Director. I ordered the torpedo tubes trained out and the primers for the impulse charges inserted. Within a minute the report came back from Jackson on the tubes, "Primers inserted, sir."

Then we had nothing to do but wait. It is difficult to express the feeling in one's mind, and the terrific tension, while waiting for a first, inevitable battle. Each man seems to be affected in much the same way: I found that my mind was unusually keen, racing; but I was disgusted to notice that my

knees were shaking as I stood there in one place during that awful suspense. I was even more disgusted when I found out that concentrate as I would, I could not force my legs to keep still. Call it fear if you will, but I honestly do not think that it was. Bodily harm never crossed my mind. The tension of impending action and temporary inactivity was the most logical reason. Later, when things began to happen and there was not a second of free time, that phenomenon disappeared entirely.

And things soon BEGAN to happen--at breakneck speed.

"Bogies now at 8000 yards." The speaker boomed out.

"Another group of ships on the PORT bow; range 7000 yards!"

That last report was startling. We were steaming in column, with the STERETT third from ahead, following the CUSHING and LAFFEY. The cruisers and the other destroyers followed astern of us.

The first group of enemy ships had been reported on the STARBOARD bow. The TASK FORCE was headed directly between the two groups!

Then from the flagship, "There is a BATTLESHIP in the group to port!"

Our guns swung out and began tracking the left hand group.

It had all of the earmarks of a trap. The enemy had come down in force, battleships and God knows what all, and were deployed in two groups spread out in a column to the northwest of Lengo and Sealark Channels; disposed so that all guns would bear on us--and they had already, by accident, achieved the classical

tactical advantage of "crossing our T." But regardless of whether it was a trap or not, the Japanese force, however large, HAD TO BE ENGAGED AND BEATEN...or Guadalcanal might be lost. Admiral Halsey had thrown all available ships into it against seemingly hopeless odds; we were all he had. Regardless of necessity, it must have been a terribly hard decision for him to make. Never before had a small cruiser task force fought a strong battleship and cruiser task force at short range!

"Ugh," I said, as I looked out into the darkness through my binoculars. And in retrospect, I suppose that is as intelligent a remark as could be made under similar circumstances.

The range to the enemy was closing rapidly. Some last minute orders came from the Admiral:

"ODD NUMBERED SHIPS FIRE TO STARBOARD, EVEN NUMBER TO PORT!"

Our main battery director wheeled around to starboard and picked up a Jap cruiser, now dimly visible through binoculars ab about 4500 yards. I ran over to the starboard side to train the torpedoes on them.

"GET THE BIG ONES FIRST. COMMENCE FIRING! COMMENCE FIRING! GIVE 'EM HELL, BOYS!"

These were practically the last orders ever given by "Uncle Dan" Callahan.

Our 5" battery began firing in precise salvo at the cruiser. While trying to get the torpedo director on the target, I followed our first salvo of red tracers out to the target; my first reaction was that "We are knocking the hell out of him!" Our shells were hitting squarely at 3500 to 4000 yard range.

At this time a Jap searchlight went on and the ATLANTA, close astern, was being hit heavily in the after superstructure. The searchlight was promptly shot out by one of our cruisers, but the ATLANTA was in serious trouble.

I was trying every conceivable way to get the torpedo director on the target. I could see it plainly through my glasses but Solloway could not pick it up through the director optics. I pointed it out to him; then took a true bearing on it--he trained the director to that bearing but still could not pick it up. I did not want to fire the precious "fish" just on a bearing, I wanted him to see the target. I jumped up and took over the director optics myself. I couldn't see any more than Solloway could--and we both had excellent eyesight.

In the meantime our main battery was whaling away at the cruiser without mercy. At this time the O'BANNON came charging up our starboard side, threatening to get between us and our target, so we checked fire and started looking for other game. We had damaged the cruiser with 13 salvos and a large, red, V-shaped nick could be plainly seen on the forecastle where our shells hit. A large explosion was seen on this ship shortly after we ceased fire, and it is presumed to have received serious damage while under fire from one of our other ships.

Lt. Comdr. Gould, our Executive Officer came leaping through the pilot house and yelled at me, "BATTLESHIP CLOSE ABOARD ON THE PORT SIDE! DEAD IN THE WATER!"

That was enough for me. I gave up working on the cruiser

and flew over to the port side, Solloway and Jensen at my heels. Quickly I set up my solution: Target angle 075; speed 6 knots. I couldn't believe that a battleship could be dead in the water this early in action, even though the cruisers had been mauling him severely and had kindled a large fire aft. This provided Solloway with an excellent point of aim and he trained on it. A couple of more adjustments and I was ready. The range was just 2000 or 2500 yards. He looked as big as the Empire State Building with the pagodas of his superstructure rising skyward. If the speed was correct I couldn't miss.

"PERMISSION TO LET THESE FISH GO," I yelled to the Captain.

"YES. FIRE WHEN READY!" came the answer.

"COMMENCE FIRING! COMMENCE FIRING!"

Then at regular intervals came the muffled explosion and the hollow ring of the tubes as the fish leaped out of the tubes and splashed into the water, on their destructive, one-way trip toward the enemy ship. When I saw them leave "hot and straight", I said to myself with a smile, "Well, old Jack won't have to go over after them TONIGHT!"

The 5" guns had opened fire and were beating a tattoo on the superstructure of the battleship. I could see the tracers leave, follow them all the way to the target, and see them explode with a big red flash, carrying with it plainly visible chunks of the enemy bridge.

Sweating out the time it takes for a torpedo to travel 2000 yards, we were rewarded, after the proper interval, with

two huge explosions at the target's waterline. They caused a big spray of water to leap high in theair, the spray a glowing red--just like the lighted fountain in an amusement park. We had gotten a maximum number of hits in our first attempt; considering the spread we used by doctrine, two hits out of four was worth a 4.0.

Calhoun, through his high-powered director optics, saw some of the Japs over on the battleship jumping over the side--as if abandoning ship. It must have been pretty hot over there!

It was at about this time that we received our first hits from the enemy. Two shells hit our mast, bursting and scattering fragments all over the bridge and director platform. The shrouds were severed, voice radio, radar and identification lights knocked out...but no casualties except superficial scratches. The range-finder operator in the director stopped a large piece of shrapnel with his steel helmet, but was uninjured. So far so good.

Starshells burst all around us, giving us an extremely uncomfortable feeling as they threw out their brilliant light in a tortuously slow descent; the shadow of their parachutes formed eerie patterns on the clouds as the stars swung around in the slight breeze.

The action had deteriorated into a general melee; all ships--friendly and enemy--were mixed up at close range. An old time barroom brawl of the first order, with ear-splitting bedlam on all sides.

A searchlight went on from a Jap ship on the port side, illuminating an old Jap three-stack cruiser slightly on our port bow. It was steaming at right angles to us and going from starboard to port. I have never been quite so furious as I was when I saw that ship for an instant and realized that I had no torpedoes that would bear on him. The Captain asked me if I could give him one, but I had to tell him that I could not unless we changed course about 100°. By this time the cruiser had disappeared.

I was standing on the forward part of the wing of the bridge with Captain Coward when a Jap searchlight came on illuminating a beautiful Jap destroyer crossing our bow from port to starboard, range 800 yards! 800 yards is so close at sea that you can hit the target with a spud.

The Captain, whose night vision was not as acute as mine, asked, "Is that one of ours?"

"NO SIR," I answered, "IT'S A JAP. SEE THOSE WAVY STACKS ON HER?"

But before I could get that speech out of my mouth, I was half way back to the starboard torpedo director. A quick solution and then:

"COMMENCE FIRING! COMMENCE FIRING!

That order was getting to be commonplace on this hectic night. I did not trouble to ask the Captain's permission to fire, because I already knew what he wanted and there was not a second to lose. So far the Jap still had his guns trained in--he hadn't seen us. OK.

Again the hum of torpedoes leaving the tubes as Jensen turned the firing switches and in a methodical manner called out over the phones, "Fire ONE.....Fire TWO."

In the pause between the first and second torpedo, I saw our 5" tracers go out with a flash and a roar. By this time the Jap had swung around and was on a course almost parallel to our own. The salvo struck violently on his bridge, ripping it open from the pilot house to the waterline; the hole caused by our shells glowed red with internal fires, and the destroyer took a decided list to port. Cal had the range and the Jap was a dead duck. No use wasting anymore fish on him. "CEASE FIRING!" I screamed at Jensen; and the third torpedo was not fired.

In contrast to the general bedlam of guns going off, a couple of seconds after our first 5" salvo hit there was a second of complete silence. Then a voice gleefully pealed out from somewhere up toward the director, with a volume that could be heard all over the ship:

"OH, YOU POOR SON OF A BITCH!!!"

That was the situation in a nut-shell, and it could not have been more eloquently expressed!

Calhoun hit him with one more salvo. Then the torpedoes struck and literally lifted the unfortunate destroyer out of the water. The 5" guns ceased firing and we watched the Jap burn from stem to stern for a few minutes and then plunge to the bottom. When the first torpedo hit, that tin can would not have brought two-bits from a pre-war scrap iron dealer. He buckled upward from amidships apparently with his whole bottom

knocked out, and before he settled from the first, the second fish hit. Fuel oil and everything burnable was apparently scattered all over him, and what was, a minute ago, a nice, efficient Fubuki class destroyer, was now a pile of burning junk. It was perhaps the most terrifying and savage, but at the same time the happiest, scene that I have ever witnessed.

Our attack had been simultaneous to the second between the guns and torpedoes. The torpedoes were launched first and I ceased firing when I saw the 5" hit. Cal had only fired two quick salvos when he saw the torpedoes hit; then he ceased firing. It was all over in but an instant; two torpedoes and two 5" salvoes--that was all. The thing that made me shudder later was the thought; "What if he had seen us first?" Without doubt, if the Japs were on the ball, they could have made just as short work out of the STERETT....and provided, of course, that they had seen us first!

As we passed the Japanese destroyer abeam to starboard, his range could not have been more than 600 yards. We got a good look at a positive kill...and without an iota of sympathy.

But our close proximity to the burning ship was not altogether to our advantage. The pyre lit up the entire scene of action for a couple of miles around. Ships, friendly and enemy, were all around us. Astern I saw the SAN FRANCISCO; other forms were set off in silhouette by the red glare. The STERETT seemed in the center of the universe at that minute--standing out like a sore thumb--and a perfect target for any enemy ship.

While on the after part of the bridge looking at the burning destroyer and the SAN FRANCISCO, we received our first solid

hit. A heavy caliber salvo hit our #3 gun and below it in the ammunition handling room. As it struck, a ball of fire some 30 feet in diameter billowed from the top of the gun mount, then receded to a steady blaze punctuated by smaller explosions. On the first burst I heard terrifying screams from the gun crew and saw two men, clothing ablaze, tumble backwards out of the gun mount to the deck below.

We could see other groups of tracers coming at us; even though the tracer is in the base of the projectile, the red glow from them looked as bright as sun to us as they arced over in a flat, short-range trajectory. Most of them passed over as we were bracing ourselves for them--but some more struck us with violence.

The only thing I could think of was "GET THAT DAMN FIRE OUT." The blaze from the after part of the ship provided a perfect point of airm for the enemy.

Fortunately, our engine room had not been hit and we could still make speed. The Captain was ringing up the engine room telegraph for "ahead full" and then after a few minutes he would ring up"stop." This was a smart bit of seamanship on his part as the rapid change of speed confused the enemy fire control solution and some of the projectiles splashed harmlessly both ahead and astern of us, but the range was correct. Some straddled but did not hit.

The Japanese must have checked us off as destroyed because after a while they stopped shooting at us.

In what seemed to be an eternity, but was actually a matter of munutes, our fires were under control and we were once again invisible to the enemy. That was the most beautiful darkness I have ever seen--when I could no longer see a bright red flame in the after part of the ship! The STERETT steamed off into the night and pulled the blackness in behind her. We were safe--temporarily,at least.

To go back a few minutes. During the time that we were getting hit the worst, communications were lost between the bridge and the torpedo tubes. Try as he would, Jensen could get no reply. Learning this, I told the Captain that I was going to go down to the tubes and see what conditions were and if we could fire the two remaining torpedoes. He gave his consent.

When I got down to the tubes--on the main deck amidships--the first thing I noticed was complete lack of activity. There was a pungent stench about the area; my feet slipped on the deck and I almost lost my footing. As my eyes became accustomed to the darkness I could make out two or three bodies on the deck--prone and silent. Then I realized that the entire deck was slippery with human blood and pieces of human flesh.

But no time for that now. The tubes were not manned. I got up on the starboard tube, the one with the two remaining torpedoes, and trained it out. It trained out a few degrees then grated to a stop; it was damaged and useless. Then I returned to the bridge and reported to the Captain that the remaining torpedoes could not be fired. In addition to this, both of the after guns were disabled--leaving only the two forward guns as our total offensive armament and protection.

I heard the Captain say: "We will fight her until we sink!" This Captain of ours was a fighter, and no mistake about it, as long as we could contribute any appreciable amount of firepower to the melee, in which every gun counted, we would fight. Actually it amounted to just that: the odds were so heavy against us that one torpedo or one gun was of unprecedented importance. Destroyers had to fight as hard as cruisers and cruisers had to fight with the ferocity of battleships. Through the engagement we could see that the other ships were doing their part, in superhuman effort. The 15 big guns of the HELENA were shooting like machine guns; here and there other unidentified ships were blazing away like mad. Early in the engagement we saw the CUSHING get it before she had much of a chance. She was leading the column, was hit heavily, and pulled out of column clear of the ships coming up astern. Illuminated for an instant, I saw her low in the water with a pall of black smoke belching out of her entire amidships section. The ATLANTA I have already mentioned.

The STERETT had done more than can possibly be expected from a destroyer. We had broken all precedent by engaging a battleship and a cruiser with gunfire at very short range; confronted, for a change, with something our own size, we had sunk a destroyer with the greatest of ease, but in the course of our battle we were seriously damaged ourselves.

Soon after the Captain received my report that our offensive power was reduced to only two guns, he realized that his little ship had shot her load and that the only reasonable thing

to do was retire and save our ship, now practically defenseless. The Japs had broken off the engagement anway and the last action of the battle was our sinking the destroyer and our own subsequent damage. The ship swung around to course due-South and we began groping for Lengo Channel.

A summary of the STERETT'S battle was this:

0148 - Commence firing. (13 salvoes at cruiser. Cruiser damaged.)

0151 - Received two hits on mast. (Estimated 5".)

0205 - Engaged battleship "HIEI". (Two torpedo hits; 8 salvoes of 5". Battleship heavily damaged.) Received one or two 4" or 5" hits aft. small damage.

0220 - Sank FUBUKI class destroyer. (2 torpedoes; 2 salvoes of 5".)

0227 - Received numerous hits aft and amidships. (Three 14"; several 5".)

0235 (about) - Commence retirement.

We had received a total of 11 hits and had survived; something of a record for a destroyer. Luck was with us in many ways; three of the hits had come from a turret of a battleship, but it is authoritatively believed that the Japs in their excitement were firing the bombardment ammunition they had planned to use against our positions on the beach--before we broke up their plans; hence, we received less damage than would have been expected from service ammunition. The remainder of the damage was from 5" hits.

CHAPTER XII

AFTERMATH

As we steamed on toward Lengo Channel we passed within a few thousand yards of two Japanese ships who were slugging it out with each other at close range. They were using all guns, including streams of 40 mm machine guns. It was a pleasant sight to see the dopes blast away at their own ships.

During our retirement we counted 6 or 7 ships still burning in Iron Bottom Bay. Some of these undoubtedly were our own, but the majority were Japanese. One large Jap ship was watched for quite a long time. He was having great trouble with his fires; they would die down then blaze up again, brighter than ever before. This cycle repeated several times, until we saw a terrific explosion issue from his after-section. It seemed unlikely that a ship could survive an explosion of those dimensions - but it is extremely difficult to assess damage in a night action.

I took over the Deck from Herbie soon after we commenced retirement. One of the steering cables had been severed and soon gave away; that produced a steering casualty and the ship lost steering control for a few moments until I got it shifted to another station. That was just another small headache to add to our troubles.

At about 0400 Iwas relieved from the Deck. The ship had secured from general quarters as soon as we got into Lengo Channel for the reason that there was too much else to do and,

at any rate, we had only two guns with which to protect ourselves; those remained manned. I was exhausted and somehow, involuntarily, got the notion to go below and try to get some sleep - nothing else occurred to me until I got down to the Wardroom.

I was horrified. The Wardroom was completely filled with the most gruesome assortment of broken bodies imaginable. Of course we had been hit... of course there were dead and wounded. Hadn't I heard the screams when the 14" salvo hit us, and seen the death around the torpedo tubes! Why didn't I think of that before? There was to be no sleep tonight. Doctor Harry Nyce and the pharmacists mates were hard at work; the Wardroom table was piled high with medical supplies; some of the men were receiving blood plasma.

As I entered the Wardroom, I saw three of my torpedomen who did such a grand job firing the torpedoes from the tubes, lying on the deck; they were in high spirits.

Rhodes yelled out at me, "There's that man from Texas!"

Shrieves started talking about how "We gave them hell," and asked, "Did you see us get that tin can?"

And Rhodes came back with a remark about "kicking the hell out of that battleship!"

Hawkins was silent, apparently more seriously injured than the others and doped up with morphine.

I asked the Doctor what I could do to help. He showed me a jar of sulfathyzol paste and said I could be patching up some wounds. There was one man sitting over on the transom who was able to move but with multiple shrapnel wounds; he was my first "patient". It occurred to me that the first thing to do was

carry him in and lay him on my bunk, where I could work on him better; but as I placed one arm under his legs to pick him up he let out a scream of pain. There was a deep gash under his left knee, another on the back of his neck, his left elbow was shattered, and fragments had pierced him in numerous other places. I managed to get him to my bunk by some means, laid him out and started cleaning up his wounds with warm water, spreading sulfathyzol over them and bandaging up. A radioman came in to help me, a man named Janzen.

When we got that man fixed up we went back into the Wardroom and got another. Some were suffering from shock, burns and terrible wounds of all descriptions, but not a whimper out of anybody.

While giving first aid, I told Harry Nyce that if he needed me I would be available and went about my work. I met Solloway in the ~~corridor~~ passageway and he told me that Jackson, Smitty (M.E. Smith), V. R. E. Martin (a gunner's mate) and almost the entire crews of the after guns were killed. This was the first realization I had on the extent of the casualties.

After a while Harry sent up and asked me to come back to Sick Bay. I finished up the man I was working on and hurried back. It was the first time I had been back near the heaviest damage and as the Sick Bay was within ten feet of #4 Handling Room there was a putrid odor all about characteristic of a combination of fire, burned flesh, blood and death. It was unbearably hot. In Sick Bay, standing by the operating table was the Doctor, stripped down to his shorts for the heat. I followed suit.

In one corner of the Sick Bay, a foot and a section of leg hit my eye - it was thrown over in the general direction of the waste basket.

"Whose foot is that?" I asked.

The reply stung me deeply. "Rhodes," he said shortly.

"Are you sure you didn't make a mistake, Harry? Rhodes didn't act like he was badly hurt."

I had a closer look at the amputated leg and saw that about 12" of the leg had been hanging on by about an inch of flesh and muscle.

Hawkins was brought in and laid out on the operating table. The same condition existed with his right leg; it had to be amputated, too, and it was unavoidable if gangrene was to be be prevented. The Doc stuck a hypodermic needle into Hawkins' wrist, then gave it to me. "If he starts to pull out of it before we finish, give him another "cc," Mac." Hawkins quickly passed out as the pentathol sodium entered his blood stream.

Amputations, especially when done with greatest speed, are grim business. The Doc took his largest knife and cut through the flesh and muscle, all around the bone; then quickly, as soon as he had clamped off the blood vessels, he took his hand saw and hacked off the bone - the same thing exactly as someone cutting off a 2x4. This done, he placed great packs of gauze saturated with sulfa paste on the stump and bandaged it up. The leg joined that of Rhodes' over in the corner. Hawkins had received a metal fragment in his left eye, seemingly piercing the cornea, a deep wound at his left cheek bone and numerous other wounds all over his body. The Doctor patched them up the best he could

and called for the next patient. We were very apprehensive about Hawkins, he could well have died but some spirit held him on.

Next came Shrieves, still in good humor. "You are not going to have to cut if off, are you Doc?" he said with a touch of anxiety in his voice.

"I don't know, old man," Harry said. "I'll do all I can to save it." This was just small talk because the Doctor knew it was hopeless.

"I'll keep my fingers crossed, Doc!" And as Shrieves passed out from the pentathol sodium I gave him, his fingers were still crossed, in a futile little gesture. They remained crossed throughout the operation.

Shrieves had the whole lower side of his leg, above the knee, ripped open. The bone was not broken but it was impossible, even with the best surgery facilities, to save his leg. It came off.

Shrieves had just fired his torpedoes at the Jap destroyer when two 5" shells struck the port torpedo tube and exploded. Large fragments were thrown across to the starboard side, shattering the metal seat that he and Hawkins were sitting on. In danger of bleeding to death, Shrieves stayed on his seat until he saw the torpedoes strike home. Our Chief Gunner's Mate came by, applied tourniquets to Shrieves' and Hawkins' legs and had them carried up to the Wardroom.

The next man on the operating table was L. A. Martin. He was on a morphine jag, and in spite of his multiple wounds he was singing out that his name was "L-a-a-a-a- Martin." He had

a shattered left leg, injuries around his head and chest, and some ominous shrapnel holes in his abdomen. We get to work on his leg first. I got down at the end of the operating table, took a firm grip on his leg and pulled it for all I was worth, in the proper manner to set the bone while the Doctor applied a plaster caste It seemed hours before the cast was applied and set; in the meantime, I could not slack off for a second for fear of giving him a crooked bone set. Sweat poured down my face and body; I was trembling with exertion and the unbearable heat and was near heat prostration when Harry said that it was OK to turn loose.

The Doc and I were smoking one cigarette after another during all of this time. They helped enormously. The Doc was doing a masterpiece of first-aid surgery - not a slack or hesitant motion throughout the ordeal. He was fighting hard for the lives of our shipmates.

There was an incident at this time that did cause him to stop temporarily. He spilled some alcohol on the front of his shorts and the stuff flowed down to his crotch. He howled with pain and danced around before he washed it off and cooled it down with water. None of us could keep from laughing at him - at the most un-funny time of our lives.

"Red" Spaulding was brought in next. He was in such a bad shape that the Doc held him until almost last, knowing that he did not have a chance of living. "Red" was one of the most unforgetable men of my life. He was a red-headed, freckeled-faced kid that I had known ever since he came aboard as an Apprentice Seaman; courteous, hard-working, with a personality

that made me want to "run" him as I would a good "plebe" at the Academy. As an officer, of course, I had to treat him with the usual formality, but there was no doubt that I liked him and he liked me. I had personally given him his semaphore and blinker tests a couple of months before when he was going up for his rate of Coxwain. A little coaching and he made it in a breeze.

Back in the Wardroom when we first began carrying men back for operations, Red remarked, "I wonder why they don't take me now?" Then he thought a little while and said, "Well, I guess those other fellows need it worse than I do." Though he was being given large amounts of blood plasma, he did not realize that the real reason was that his case was hopeless, and that death was certain. When he was carried in and stretched out on the operating table, he was still conscious and in good humor. Just then we dropped some depth charges in an embarrassing barrage at a submarine. The ship shook as the big charges blasted away. It was unexpected and since we were jittery anyway from our recent surface action, I was afraid that it would disturb Spaulding.

To reassure him I remarked, "We are just kicking the hell out of their submarines now, Red. Just routine. Nothing to worry about."

He might well have been calming me down when he replied, "Sure, Mac. We will get 'em the same way that we did last night."

Then we passed a few more remarks. When I was trying to get a morphine serrette through his skin and the Doc was having trouble pusshing the hypodermic needle through, Red remarked,"That arm is a tough one, Mac!"

I agreed, "Just like iron, Red," and I wasn't just talking either.

"When old Doc Nyce gets through fixing you up, you will be like a new man, Red."

"I hope so, Mac!" Then the anesthetic took effect and Red passed out with a faint smile on his lips. It was the last thing he ever said.

Harry Nyce began the hopeless task of doing what he could for Spaulding. He had two good sized holes in his abdomen; part of his bladder was frayed and sticking through one hole while through the other protruded a section of his colon. Peritonitis and multiple injuries in the abdominal cavity. The Doc shook his head as he tied off the end of the bladder, cut off the ragged end and pushed it back through the wall of the abdomen. Through the hole could be seen nothing but a pool of blood. I was holding Red's hand with the hypodermic needle still in the vein of his wrist all through the short operation. Then I felt his pulse stop and told Nyce. He confirmed it; Red had bled to death internally, in spite of the blood plasma. Red Spaulding was dead.

During this time in the operating room, Red Spaulding had paid me the greatest compliment I have ever received; courteous to the letter and always respectful during normal times, Red had repeatedly called me "Mac" while he was dying, with a naturalness in his voice as if he had always called me that. "Mac" was the last word he uttered.

Harry Nyce patted him on the arm and said solemnly, "You were a great boy, Red."

And those were the sentiments of all of us who watched him die; and of all who knew him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE JUNEAU DISASTER

It was 0900 when we finished with Red Spaulding -- the last man who needed an emergency operation. I went up on the main deck and sat down to get a little fresh air and rest for a minute. One of the Negro Steward's Mates came by and gave me a piece of sausage and an orange that he had. I had forgotten that I was hungry.

At 0600 the STERETT had joined up with the other surviving ships of Task Group 67.4. There were the SAN FRANCISCO, heavily damaged, the HELENA, light damage, the JUNEAU, heavily damaged, FLETCHER undamaged, O'BANNON, very slight damage and the STERETT.

The Officer in Tactical Command was now Captain Hoover of the HELENA since Admiral Callahan and staff and Captain Cassin Young had been killed on the SAN FRANCISCO. The second in command, Admiral Scott, had been killed on the ATLANTA.

This, however, was a larger group of surviving ships than I had dared expect to see get out of the fracas, and the tally clearly showed that instead of being annihilated as expected, we had won a resounding victory over a strong battleship and cruiser task force!

The ATLANTA was still afloat but had to be scuttled by her own crew. The PORTLAND remained in Iron Bottom Bay, with heavy underwater damage and no steering control. She could be saved to fight again. The AARON WARD had some damage and her

engineering plant disabled; she could be fixed up quickly. Our only ships sunk were the ATLANTA, BARTON, LAFFEY, CUSHING, and MONNSEN. Our Japanese battleship was dead in the water off Savo Island at daybreak and she was quickly finished off by Marine torpedo planes. With the light of day, a Japanese destroyer, assisting the doomed battleship, showed the misjudgment of coming too close to the PORTLAND as she circled, out of control. The PORTLAND made short work of the destroyer and sank it with a bare minimum of salvoes. We assessed the Japanese damage as: 1 battleship, 4 or 5 cruisers and 4 destroyers sunk; the remainder of the original Japanese force which consisted of 2 battleships, 4 or 5 heavy cruisers, 3 light cruisers and 10 destroyers were considered to be damaged or probably damaged. Our estimate was optimistic but a clear-cut victory was certain - the biggest surface engagement since the Battle of Jutland, and much more decisive than Jutland!

The Japanese radio paid us a very nice compliment and was much more optimistic than we were. They claimed to have sunk two American battleships, 12 cruisers sunk or damaged and several destroyers sunk! If the fools had known how small a group it was that fought them to a stand-still, they would have all committed hari-kiri.

The surviving ships, though damaged, were making good speed and it was a nice sight to see the islands on both sides of the "Slot" slip away past our beam.

Sometime during the morning the group had left Guadalcanal behind and were off of the southwest coast of San Cristobal Island, heading South. The O'BANNION, whose sound gear was disabled, was sent out at a distance to send a message to Santo

requesting maximum air coverage for the damaged ships. We had received word that two Jap carriers were sighted to the north of Guadalcanal, and we had no desire to try to fight them off with only the guns of a group of crippled ships.

At about noon I went up on the bridge for a "Condition Red" air alert; the FLETCHER and SEERETT moved in closer to the cruisers to our air attack stations. However, the air attack failed to materialize and the destroyers put on speed to return to our former stations.

I was watching our signalman send a flashing-light message over to the JUNEAU when suddenly there was a terrific explosion on the JUNEAU; one gigantic sphere of flame obliterated the entire ship. The signalman who was sending the signal to us was thrown high into the air with great quantities of debris. After the original flame, the JUNEAU was seen no more; a pall of smoke hung on the water where the ship had been; a thick column of white smoke mushroomed several thousand feet into the air. When the smoke lifted there was nothing to be seen; no ship, no floating debris .... nothing; the cruiser had disappeared completely, carrying with it some 500 brave men who had survived one of the fiercest surface battles in history, only to fall victim to a submarine.

Beyond being stunned and beyond being excited or surprised at anything, I went over and sat down on the flag, shaking my head as I went. Any one who saw the explosion would not have given a plugged nickel for the lives of any man aboard the JUNEAU; the risk of another ship under those circumstances was not considered to be warranted by the O. T. C., and the remaining ships steamed off at full speed, zigzagging radically.

Here was the most terrible event I had ever witnessed; it is indescribable, futile, hopeless. One minute a ship was steaming along at 18 knots; the next minute the only evidence that the JUNEAU had ever existed was in the tall column of smoke, rising ominously above the scattered cumulous clouds. The Japanese submarine had struck a magazine; he had done his job well.

By some miracle about 50 survivors were still alive when a plane sighted them the next morning. When a rescue ship finally got to them, only four remained. Four survivors out of a crew of 500.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

This afternoon our dead were laid out in a long row on the quarterdeck. It did not look like a funeral parlor; we did not have the fluff and flowers due the dead; just that long, grim row. All day the First Lieutenant and several men had been working, carrying pieces of our former shipmates up the ladder from the Handling Rooms to the Main Deck and sewing them up in canvas, with a 5" projectile in the foot of each. It was a big, dirty job.

In #4 Handling Room several bodies, detached arms and legs and mutilated torsos washed back and forth in several inches of water with each roll of the ship when the job was begun. Now the ship was beginning to look somewhat cleaned up. But back in #3 Handling Room where the 14" shells had struck could be seen a headless body, slumped over in an upright position where he had fallen. Still clutched in his arms was a 5" powder cartridge.

The stories of heroism were passed from person to person, and what had happened in our hour of hell began to be clarified.

Jackson was standing by his torpedo tubes and he had the satisfaction of seeing his torpedoes explode against the enemy hulls. Smitty was in the torpedo shack at his depth charge control station when things started to happen. He told the other torpedoman in there with him - in his piping voice: "I'm going out to help Jackson."

The other man tried to get him to stay in under the protection of the torpedo shack, but Smitty repeated,

"No, I'm going out to help Jackson."

Almost as soon as he reached Jackson's side the Jap shells hit, killing both of them and maiming three of the four men stationed on the tubes.

When the after guns were hit and the #3 gun completely ablaze, CTM Keenum ran down from his station on a 20 mm gun and with a hose playing on him to keep him from being burned to a crisp, he climbed through the smoke and flame into the #3 handling room and flooded the after mazagines. Had the fire reached these magazines, we would have exploded in much the same manner as the JUNEAU.

Chief Gunner's Mate Hodge was knocked unconscious when #4 gun received a direct hit, but managed to crawl clear in a few seconds when he regained consciousness. During the process of the next few minutes he jumped in and fought the fire; inside #3 Handling Room he threw some hot, spewing powder tanks over the side before they had a chance to explode. Some of these did indeed explode before they hit the water. Then, somehow, passing by the damaged torpedo tubes, he applied tourniquets to Shrieves and Hawkins' legs and had them taken to the Wardroom - possibly saving their lives.

One man, with second degree burns on his face and hands was ordered to report to the Wardroom for treatment; but before he went he jumped down to the deck below, reeled out a fire hose and was back fighting the fire.

Four members of the crew of #3 gun with their clothing completely ablaze, jumped over the side in their anguish. The First Lieutenant, Hanna, in half the time it takes to tell it, cut loose a life raft to give the men a chance for survival. Three of the men were picked up the next day, in good condition. The other, Joe Godecker, was lost.

Ray Calhoun came down from the director and went aft to supervise fighting the fires. He crawled through a shell hole with the handling room and powder tanks still smouldering and inspected the magazines. He found that there was only a few feet of water in the magazines, so he flooded them the rest of the way to make sure they would never explode.

A pile of potato crates on the after deck house absorbed the shell fragments and saved two 20 mm machine gun crews from serious injury. One small fragment did catch one of the machine gunners in the rump. His principal concern and comment was: "What will I tell my old man when he asks where I was injured?"

Heroism was commonplace that night. The more I think of all the stories, the more I am convinced that the STERETT had the finest crew that any ship ever had; they may have at some time been equalled, but never excelled. Some of the men that we hdd thought of as "bums" came through when the chips were down in a manner that will always have my deepest reverence. Not a person on the ship that I know of thought of himself -- only of the ship and his shipmates. That was the only reason that the ship and many men lived to fight again.

Our casualty list was long when we entered the names in the Log the next morning: there were 28 men listed as dead, 13 seriously injured and 4 missing.

Late in the afternoon all hands assembled back in the fantail with bowed heads as the Captain read the traditional burial-at-sea ceremony; and at the completion made a few remarks of his own, ending with the words: "WE WILL NOT FORGET OUR FORMER SHIPMATES!" There was a quaver in his voice as he said them. There was not a dry eye in the entire crew assembled.

The guard of riflemen fired three volleys, and as the names were called out, one by one the mute bags of canvas were lifted and slid over the stern, disappearing in the wake of the ship. "Jackson.....Walker.....Kula.....Klepacki.....Perry.....Martin.....Smith, M.E.....Robinson....", the names droned on. "Smith, Joseph.....Kreilick..... Stapleton.....Spaulding.....Tynan..... Each name meant a great deal to us. It seemed that the ceremony would never end. When the last of our departed shipmates had slid into the blue water of the Coral Sea, the crew slowly and silently walked away. Darkness soon set in; we were safe from air attacks for the day.

The STERETT had paid a terrible price for victory.

CHAPTER XV

THE REAR AREAS

On November 14th, the remnants of TASK GROUP 67.4 anchored in Segond Channel, Espiritu Santo; never before had that port been so welcome. Word had been received that the Navy Hospital Ship SOLACE was on her way up from the rear areas and was expected in Santo in the afternoon. We could transfer our wounded to her where they could receive the best of medical care--far better than we were equipped to give. Those men deserved the best if any American ever did.

Hawkins and L. A. Martin* were the worst off. Martin, with suspected peritonitis, had spent a terrible day in the bunk up in the Division Commander's Cabin, moaning in agony all day and night. Water and food were denied him due to his abdominal condition and the ship had no facilities for an abdominal operation. Nyce would have done his utmost with equipment at hand had the SOLACE or a shore hospital not been available in a short time. Upon arrival at Santo these two men were sent over to the shore hospital for emergency treatment--the others were in good enough condition to wait for the SOLACE.

The beautiful SOLACE steamed in and anchored in the afternoon, and had a boat for our wounded alongside our gangway almost as soon as her anchor hit the water. Before the officers'

* Note: Hawkins and Martin were returned to the Mare Island Hospital in the latter part of December--both recovering nicely. Martin's leg was set perfectly and did not require re-setting; he did not have peritonitis.

bunks were cleared of the wounded, Rhodes asked to see me; he was rather discouraged over losing his leg and his broken arm but, as the others, was otherwise in good spirits. He talked to me about better days--the time when my family and I were on our way back to Texas after graduation and we had run into him by coincidence--on his way back to the STERETT from an emergency leave....about how my Dad danced a jig in the aisle of the train when we received a paper announcing that the first well of the Lake Creek Oil Field had been brought in as a producer.... and about how we all celebrated that momentous event together on beer at the Union Station in Houston, while he was waiting for his train to pull out.

Rhodes, Shrieves and Hawkins were all rated Torpedomen Second Class before they left the ship....so much less than they deserved but the best we could do nevertheless. That had been Jackson's last request from me before the battle, and from his seat in Valhalla he would approve.

With our troubles and the realization that we had done our utmost for winning Guadalcanal, we had lost track temporarily on what was happening on Guadalcanal; the news that began trickling in on the 15th brought back our broader interest. On the day of our retirement all of the planes from our only operative carrier, the ENTERPRISE, had been flown to Henderson Field to help stem the tide--it was our only immediately available air replacement. On that day the ENTERPRISE fliers had gone to work on the Japanese troop transports in grand style--sinking or setting ablaze most of the convoy. The night of 14-15 November was to be the Japanese D-Day, and in characteristic Jap

style they intended to go through with it regardless of the changed tactical situation and regardless of losses. It was to be their supreme effort in the Solomons and a plan, to their inflexible minds, once made must be carried out in exactly that way. The carrier planes played havoc with them but did not stop them. Admiral Halsey had only two more major ships left with which to stop the Japanese tide--the new battleships WASHINGTON and SOUTH DAKOTA; the latter had sustained bomb damage a few days before but she was still in almost top fighting trim. If these failed to finish the job that TASK GROUP 67.4 had started, then nothing more could be done. So he sent them in with an escort of 4 destroyers, WALKE, BENHAM, PRESTON and GWIN--with Rear Admiral W. A. ("Ching Chong") Lee as Task Force Commander. After intercepting a Japanese air patrol report which reported the battleships as cruisers, Admiral Halsey sent this message to Admiral Lee: "GIVE THEM SOME SIXTEEN INCH SURPRISES!" And this was exactly what the Japs got from these, our "clean-up" batters. The Jap battleship "KIRISHIMA"--apparently the one that got away from our cruisers--was sunk along with some assorted cruisers, destroyers and the remaining transports.

The battleship action concluded a weekend of some of the most desperately fought naval warfare in the history of the world--and perhaps the most decisive surface battle since Trafalgar. (A British Captain later expressed this same opinion to me.) It was one of the turning points of the Pacific War; Guadalcanal was ours, and it spelled disaster to the Japanese.

The STERETT was somewhat more livable when we shoved off for Noumea; human flesh had been removed from obscure corners back in the damaged parts of the ship and the ship had been cleaned up as best we could; the stench of battle was now less pungent. Some of our shell holes now had metal plates welded over them.

In Noumea we were greeted first by a group of repair officers from a destroyer tender who were sent out to see if they could get us ready for more action without a Navy Yard overhaul. Regardless of the critical need for us in the South Pacific, the idea was quickly given up as hopeless as we needed two new guns, two new torpedo mounts and extensive structural repairs.

Close on the heels of the repairmen came the "Old Man" himself--"Bull" Halsey. He was wearing for the first time the four stars of a full Admiral, quickly given him in recognition of his masterful direction of the Battle of Guadalcanal. After meeting all of the officers we took him on an inspection of our battle damage which drew the comment from him, "It is incredible the amount of damage these little ships can take."

When the Admiral noticed that we had painted the silhouette of a Japanese battleship and a destroyer on our bridge to signify our destruction of the latter and our "assist" on the former, he suggested that we also paint our damaged cruiser up there. This we never did, however, as it would seem too fantastic to a person unfamiliar with the facts.

Admiral Halsey throughout the inspection was extremely quiet and pensive; his manner almost humble. And when he turned to

us as he was leaving and said, "God bless you," we knew that he meant it from the bottom of his heart. As for us, we had this day seen greatness.

The entire ship's company was assembled on the forecastle for a word from the Captain. For several days congratulatory messages had poured in from all quarters; the Captain stepped to the center and read them to the crew. He ended with some remarks of his own that were as expressive as the messages. Some of these messages are quoted below in paraphrased form:

"FROM HALSEY TO THE SUPERB OFFICERS AND MEN ON SEA, ON LAND, UNDER THE SEA AND IN THE AIR WHO HAVE PERFORMED SUCH MAGNIFICENT FEATS FOR OUR COUNTRY IN THE PAST FEW DAYS. MAGNIFICENTLY DONE. MY PRIDE IN YOU IS BEYOND EXPRESSION--NO HONOR FOR YOU COULD BE TOO GREAT. YOU HAVE WRITTEN YOUR NAMES IN GOLDEN LETTERS ON THE PAGES OF HISTORY AND WON THE UNDRYING GRATITUDE OF YOUR COUNTRYMEN. GOD BLESS EACH AND EVERY ONE OF YOU. TO THE GLORIOUS DEAD--HAIL HEROES--REST WITH GOD."

"FROM REAR ADMIRAL TURNER. I HAVE DISSOLVED THE TEMPORARY TASK FORCE SIXTY SEVEN THIS DATE WITH THE EXPRESSED WISH THAT THE NUMBER SIXTY SEVEN BE IN THE FUTURE RESERVED FOR GROUPS OF SHIPS AS READY FOR HIGH PATRIOTIC ENDEAVOR AS YOU HAVE BEEN. MY MOST GRATEFUL THANKS FOR YOUR MAGNIFICENT SUPPORT OF THE PROJECT OF REENFORCING OUR COURAGEOUS TROOPS ON GUADALCANAL AND FOR YOUR EAGERNESS TO BE THE KEEN EDGE OF THE SWORD THAT IS CUTTING THE THROAT OF THE ENEMY. I WAS FULLY COGNIZANT OF THE ODDS WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN AGAINST YOU IN YOUR NIGHT ATTACK OF

NOVEMBER TWELFTH BUT FELT THAT THIS WAS THE TIME WHEN BRAVE MEN AND FINE SHIPS SHOULD BE CALLED UPON FOR THEIR UTMOST. YOU HAVE GREATLY JUSTIFIED MY EXPECTATIONS IN TAKING FROM THE ENEMY A TOLL OF STRENGTH FAR GREATER THAN THAT WHICH YOU HAVE EXPENDED. WITH YOU I GRIEVE FOR THE LONG CHERISHED COMRADES WHO WILL BE WITH US NO MORE AND FOR OUR LOST SHIPS WHOSE NAMES WILL BE ENSHRINED IN HISTORY. NO AWARDS HOWEVER HIGH CAN POSSIBLY GIVE YOU THE HONOR YOU DESERVE. WITH ALL MY HEART I SAY GOD BLESS THE COURAGEOUS MEN, DEAD AND ALIVE, OF TASK FORCE SIXTY SEVEN."

"FROM THE COMMANDER OF UNITED STATES NAVAL FORCES IN EUROPE TO THE SOUTH PACIFIC FORCES. MY HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU AND ALL CONCERNED FOR THE SPLENDID SUCCESS OFF GUADALCANAL. SIGNED ADMIRAL STARK."

A message from General Vandergrift to Admiral Halsey read: "WE LIFT OUR BATTERED HELMETS IN ADMIRATION OF THOSE WHO FOUGHT AGAINST OVERWHELMING ODDS AND DROVE THE ENEMY TO CRUSHING DEFEAT." This message was sent to the SAN FRANCISCO, HELENA, FLETCHER, and STERETT by Rear Admiral Tisdale who was in liaison with General Vandergrift of the 1st Marines: "IF WORDS COULD ADD TO THE TRIBUTE PAID YOU BY THESE MEN OF GUADALCANAL, MY STAFF AND I WOULD JOIN ALL AMERICANS IN SAYING THIS: WE ARE PROUD TO BELONG TO THE SAME SERVICE WITH YOU."

And from the USS PENSACOLA:

"THE OFFICERS AND CREW OF THE PENSACOLA WISH TO EXPRESS TO YOU THEIR HEARTFELT ADMIRATION FOR YOUR HEROIC ACTION."

All of these messages gave us a great and humble feeling of pride, but important though they were to us they were only secondary to the feeling of satisfaction deep inside on the realization that we had done our job well--and that our shipmates had not died in vain.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LONG VOYAGE HOME

The STERETT, in company with the SAN FRANCISCO, began her long voyage home when she set sail for the first stop east--Pearl Harbor--the place whose name symbolizes to all Americans, Japanese treachery, and which always brings to mind the black days of 1941 when the Japanese were unchecked in the Pacific and Hitler invincible in Europe. It was to be the STERETT'S first return to Pearl Harbor since we left with the battleships for the Atlantic in the days of undeclared war in early 1941. But to the crew of the STERETT the name had taken on a new meaning--it now signified security and victory; for we could now see the silver lining. The Japanese had been thrown on the defensive in the Pacific, and we had played a leading role in that accomplishment.

As we approached Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 4th, we were greeted with the following message from Admiral Nimitz:

"NO WORDS CAN EXPRESS MY ADMIRATION FOR THE SAN FRANCISCO AND THE STERETT AND THE OFFICERS AND MEN WHO MAN THEM BUT TO YOU I GIVE YOU WHAT NO OTHERS HAVE MORE FULLY MERITED--THE NAVY "WELL DONE." MY WISH FOR YOU IS THAT YOUR REPAIRS MAY BE FAST AND EFFECTIVE AND YOUR PERSONNEL LOSSES MADE GOOD BY MEN AS WILLING AS THE SHIPMATES YOU HAVE LOST TO GIVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY AND ITS NAVY'S HONOR. SIGNED NIMITZ."

As the STERETT and SAN FRANCISCO filed through the channel into Pearl Harbor we received an honor which cannot be expressed in words, however eloquent. All shore units were formed up in ranks lining the channel; all ships in the harbor had their crews at quarters, and the ships that had bands had them on deck and playing. As each ship passed by a given ship or shore unit we were given three cheers that resounded throughout the entire Navy Yard. It is something that happens only once in a lifetime and has a way of putting a curious lump in your throat.

We had a few anxious days at Pearl Harbor while the various staffs were debating whether to accomplish our repairs in the Pearl Harbor Navy Yard or to send us back to San Francisco with the SAN FRANCISCO. I think that some fast talking by Captain Coward was largely responsible for the ultimate decision; to have denied us a trip back to the States under those circumstances would have produced very unfavorable results with our crew. We were all exhausted and had undergone a period of severe mental tension; the leave, liberty and recreation that San Francisco could offer us, and Honolulu could not, was never in our lives desired quite so much. And so it was with a great sigh of relief that we and the SAN FRANCISCO saw OAHU drop down over the horizon on the first anniversary of the war, December 7, 1942. We were on our last lap homeward.

Our reception in San Francisco was vastly different from the one we had received in Pearl Harbor. We entered in a pea-soup fog (which the Californian Pilot called "unusual--first of the year") and lay at anchor for some four hours waiting for

the fog to lift enough that we could find our way into the Mare Island Navy Yard(about 20 miles north of San Francisco.) In the meantime the SAN FRANCISCO had docked at San Francisco proper, to receive one of the biggest ovations ever staged by that city--complete with a parade, receptions and the keys of the city. The STERETT, unannounced, and under conditions of strictest secrecy, was quite happy to be left alone to celebrate our return in our own individual ways.

Half of our crew was immediately sent on leave home--the other half to follow on the return of the first group, 15 days later. I look over the duties of Gunnery Officer while Ray Calhoun was on leave--and eagerly sweated out his return. My plane reservation was made two weeks in advance, leave papers signed by the Senior Officer Present Afloat--all set. On the morning Cal got back I was off like a shot, got a cab immediately--just enough time to make my plane at the airport. I got as far as the gate of the Navy Yard when the Marine Guard informed me that I was to return to the ship at once. Stalking back to the ship, bag in hand, indignant and fuming that I had missed my plane, the world seemed very cruel indeed. Cal met me at the gangway and explained that I was not being imposed upon, and the clouds were not as black as they seemed. I had received despatch orders detaching me from the STERETT and ordering me to Kearny, New Jersey, to commission one of the new 2100 ton "glamour" destroyers that had just recently begun to bolster the Fleet. The Naval construction program was in full swing. Never again would a handful of cruisers and destroyers

be expected to carry the load against the full strength of a first-rate Naval power. In a few months the Pacific would be flooded with ships of our New Navy, the numbers of which were to startle the world. Hereafter we could choose our own odds! And God willing they will always be in our favor.

It was with reluctance that I left the STERETT to proceed to my new assignment. Long association tempered by the hot flame of battle, had welded the crew of the STERETT into a sort of kinship; a group of men out of a common mould, who understand, and apeak the same language; men of a metal as real as that of the STERETT herself, who made her live and fight as a hero. It was a great honor and privilege to have been a small part of that great little ship.

FINIS

APPENDIX A

EPILOGUE

Since I left the STERETT, she has continued to distinguish herself in a way apparently habitual with her. Upon completion of battle damage repairs at Mare Island, the STERETT was sent directly back to the Solomons, where she resumed her duties "up the Slot" in the invasions of other islands up the Solomons' chain. In another night action in Vella Gulf on 7 August 1943, she received sole credit for sinking another Japanese destroyer and assisting in the destruction of others.

After this she operated for several months with the fast battleship and carrier task forces that raked the Pacific from one end to the other.

In May, 1945, in action off Okinawa against Japanese "Kamikazi" suicide planes, the STERETT shot down four planes before being struck by one. Her engineering plant disabled for the first time, she was towed back for repairs where she was once again restored to full fighting condition.

At the end of World War II, the total score of the enemy credited to the STERETT is as follows:

2 Destroyers (sunk);

1 Battleship (seriously damaged--later sunk);

1 Cruiser (damaged);

Submarines: (1 believed sunk or damaged; I believed damaged);

Planes Destroyed: At least 10 (further information not available).

In Santo after the Battle of Guadalcanal one of our officers was talking to a Marine recently evacuated from Guadalcanal.

"STERETT?", the Marine asked. "Hell yes! Every Marine on Guadalcanal knows she's the fightin'est tin can in the Navy!"

And she was, too.

Among the great fighting ships of all times, the STERETT can carry her head high.

APPENDIX B
PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION

On July 22, 1946, the following citation was approved by the President of the United States, thus officially recognizing the Sterett for her part in the Battle described in this story:

THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON

The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION to the

UNITED STATES SHIP STERETT

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION:

"For extraordinary heroism in action against an enemy Japanese Task Force during the Battle of Guadalcanal on the night of November 12-13, 1942. Fighting boldly and with determination against units of the powerful enemy Fleet intent on bombarding our airfield at Guadalcanal, the U.S.S. STERETT successfully engaged three Japanese vessels at close range during the thirty-four minutes of furious action. Scoring numerous hits on an enemy light cruiser, she then closed range to 3000 yards and fired a full salvo of torpedoes to cause two large explosions and assist in sinking a battleship. When an enemy destroyer was sighted at 1000 yards from her starboard bow, she immediately took it under fire and, with two torpedoes and two five-inch salvos, exploded and sank the vessel before it could open fire. With her after section severely damaged and burning and with both after guns disabled as the remaining enemy ships concentrated their gunfire on her, she fought desperately to control the damage and succeeded in retiring from the battle area under her own power. A gallant fighting ship, superbly handled by her officers and men, the STERETT rendered invaluable service in defeating a major enemy attack at this crucial point in the Solomon Islands Campaign."

For the President,

James Forrestal

Secretary of the Navy

U.S. NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS SERVICE

U. S. S. _____

Heading:

IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT THE ENEMY HAS SUFFERED A CRUSHING DEFEAT!
OUR THANKS FOR THE STURDY EFFORTS OF LEE LAST NIGHT, AND TO KINCAID—

FOR HIS POUNDING OF THE FOE BY OUR AIRCRAFT HAS BEEN GRAND. WE APP-
RECIATE ALL THESE EFFORTS, BUT TO SCOTT AND CALLAGHAN AND THEIR

MEN WHO AGAINST SEEMINGLY HOPELESS ODDS-WITH MAGNIFICENT COURAGE-
MADE SUCCESS POSSIBLE BY DRIVING BACK THE FIRST HOSTILE ATTACK,

GOES OUR GREATEST HOMAGE. IN DEEPEST ADMIRATION THE MEN OF GUADAL-
CANAL TO THEM LIFT THEIR BATTERED HELMETS X VANDERGRIFT CACTUS

Date	TOR / TOD	Opr.	Sys.	Freq. or Method
17 NOV-42			RDO	FOX

FROM:	ACTION TO:	INFORMATION TO:
COMGEN 1ST MARDIV	TASKFORCE 67	

Ref. No: _____

Unit Comdr	Unit Gun	Unit Eng	Unit Comm	Unit Disb	Unit Med	Capt	Exec	OOD	Eng	Gun	1st Lt	Torp	Comm	Stores	Comay	Offics	