Memories of Two Years (almost) Before the Mast

by Ronald Vaughn

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USS KITKUN BAY

With Honor I Served in World War II

CRUISER

PLANE

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MEMORIES OF TWO YEARS (ALMOST) BEFORE THE MAST

In January, 1944 my twin brother (Donald) and I finally persuaded Mama to sign the papers so that we could volunteer for the Navy instead of waiting to be drafted into the Army. The papers were signed about 9:30 a.m. on January 22, 1944, and at 2:00 p.m. on the same day, we left Brownwood, Texas on our way to Abiline, Texas for testing and a preliminary physical exam.

After spending the night at a local hotel and having breakfast, we went to the recruiting office in the Federal Bldg. for a written test and a preliminary physical. After we found out that we had passed, we were put on a train for Lubbock, Texas where we were to have our pre-induction physical and swearing in. Most of the men at the induction center were draftees, with a scattering of volunteers like me and Donald. After our physical was completed, our papers were handed to a table of recruiting officers to be assigned to the branch of service next in rotation. Since I was a volunteer, my branch was already assured. A Marine recruiting Lieutenant picked up my papers and looked up at me. As he handed the papers to the Navy officer he said, "Here is a volunteer for you, but he sure would make a good Marine." We had to wait two days to find out if we had passed our physical exam. When we found out we had passed, we were separated into groups of about 30 men each, according to the branch of service. There were about eight groups of Navy recruits, and out of the eight groups, the group Donald and I were in was the only one assigned for boot training in San Diego, Calif. We were sworn in on January 27, 1944, two days before my eighteenth birthday. After being sworn in, one of the group was appointed officer in charge and given all the train tickets and meal tickets for our trip to California.

The trip to Calif. took about three days because we stopped for meals at the Harvey House Depot Restaurants, and our train was side-tracked about four times to let train loads of war materials go ahead of us.

After leaving the train at the San Diego train station, we boarded buses for our trip to the Naval Training Station. During the ride to the training station, we passed by some defense plants and aircraft plants making planes, etc. for the war. They were painted with camouflage colors, and camouflage nets were stretched across the tops of the buildings, and even across the streets we were going along. That was a most interesting sight to see, and brought the war a little closer to home.

When we arrived at the San Diego Naval Training Station, we were greeted by men who were about halfway through their Boot training, and they kept saying, "You'll be sorry." We unloaded off the bus and were promptly shown to sleeping quarters since it was about 8 p.m. We were told to put our money inside our pillowslips and sleep on it to keep it from being stolen.

The next morning we were taken for a final physical exam and then issued our seabag of clothing and accessories which we would need for our tour of duty. After this, we were shown to the barracks that would be our home for the first two weeks of our training. After being shown how to make our bunks, we were told to pack the clothes we wore when we arrived and send them back to our homes. The rest of the day was spent getting our barracks ready for living.

For the next two weeks we went through a routine of 4:30 a.m. rising, morning classes, afternoon calesthentics, shots for immunization, and physical exercise along with obstacle courses and whale boat rowing. Each time we received an immunization shot, we were issued dummy rifles (called pieces in the Navy) and marched to the grinder for 30 minutes of physical drill with rifles. This was to keep our arms from getting so sore.

After two weeks, we were transferred to another part of the training station, and allowed our first liberty. This was our first chance to see what San Diego looked like. Most of the men went to the first bar they saw and began to get drunk. Instead of this, Donald and I roamed as much of the town as we could before having to catch the bus back to the base so we

could be in bed by 10:00 p.m. The routine in this new section of the training station became more intense than it had been in our first two weeks, with more emphasis on physical development. This physical exercise was something I enjoyed, but my attitude was not shared by all.

During this second phase of Boot Camp, I met the person who was to be my buddy for my time aboard ship. His name was Wm. W. Vaughan from El Monte, California. He had just been released from the base hospital and was assigned to my company to complete his boot training. He approached me one day after mail call and asked if any of the mail I had, had his name on it, since my twin brother Donald and I had gotten all letters when the name Vaughn was called. Since he was new in the company, his mail hadn't caught up with him yet, so I didn't have any of his mail.

After three weeks in this section, we were once again transferred to another section of the base before our training was completed.

While we were in our second round of training, Donald went to one of the Ship's Stores to buy some shaving supplies and ran into a girl that we had gone to high school with. Her father was in the Navy, and the family had moved to Calif. to be close to him. We were invited to visit with them, and we did on two occasions before our Boot training was over.

When our training was completed, Donald was sent to Radio School on the base, while I was transferred to the Recruit Transfer Unit to wait for a new class to start in Sonar School. During this time, my Mother wrote to inform me and Donald of my Grandfather's death and burial.

While waiting for the Sonar class to start, one of my friends (Wm. W. Vaughan) and I hitch-hiked to his home town of El Monte, Calif. to see his parents. We got a ride on the back of a truck hauling empty 10 gallon milk cans. The temperature was about 40° and the wind chill factor was about 20° which made our ride quite refreshing because we didn't have our heavy "P" coats on.

While waiting at the Recruit Transfer Unit, about 4 CVE's came into port after completing their initial Shakedown cruise. Since their complement of men wasn't complete, they asked for

men to fill out their crews. About 300 men from the Recruit Transfer Unit were assigned to these ships, me included.

The day we went aboard ship, we got up at 4:30 a.m. and lashed our gear up seagoing fashion. (This meant tying our mattress and pillow inside our canvas hammock, placing our tied up seabag in the center and tying both ends of the hammock around the seabag so that if it were dropped into the water it would float.) We then ate breakfast and waited for the trucks to come pick us up with our gear and take us to the Destroyer Base in San Diego Bay. This is where the ships were moored that we were to be a part of. About 9:30 a.m. the trucks finally arrived to take us where we were to go. After loading our gear, we arrived at the Destroyer Base about 11:00 a.m. We unloaded, and began standing and lounging around waiting to be taken to our ships. Finally about 1:30 p.m. they decided that we should be fed, so they took us to a mess hall and fed us lunch. After lunch, we waited for about another hour, or until about 3:30 p.m. before they came to take us to our ships. We were assigned a certain truck to put our gear on, and were driven to the dock where our ships were tied up. The snip I was assigned to was the USS KITKUN BAY (CVE 71). As we went aboard, we were asked our names and then assigned to someone to show us where our particular division was to sleep for the duration of our time aboard ship. I was assigned to the Second Division which was a deck division in charge of keeping the after end (back) of the ship scraped, painted, swept and in good repair. We were also in charge of one of the two motor whale boats on board. Our function for battle stations was to man the guns and look-out stations. My friend W. W. Vaughan also went aboard with me.

After settling into our new quarters, we were allowed to roam the ship and acquaint ourselves with our new home.

The next morning, we were all assigned sea detail stations which we were to man for getting under weigh, and entering port. As soon as we were all assigned, we cast off the ship's moorings and took her into dry dock in the San Diego shipyards. When we cast off the moorings, I missed the whale boat that

was to take us to the dry dock, and I had to run all the way. A distance of about 2 miles. After things were secured, and the water was pumped out of the dry dock, we were allowed to go on overnight liberty. My friend and I once again hitch-hiked to El Monte to see his parents.

For the next two weeks, we spent our days scraping the barnacles and old paint off the bottom of the ship and putting on a new coat. During this time we were allowed to go on liberty every other night, and to have duty on board every other night. Most of my overnight liberties were spent roaming around town, or going to all night movies. The movies were open 24 hours a day to give people someplace to sleep because there weren't enough rooms or apartments for everyone.

When the painting was completed, we made severl trial runs out into the ocean for a day, returning to port each night. While this was happening, our liberty schedule was the same as before. One afternoon about a week later, a large working party was assembled and taken to the dock where there was a large number of tractor-trailer trucks parked. These trucks were loaded with all types of ammunition and bombs that we would need in our ensuing encounters with enemy forces. Beginning about 5:00 p.m., we unloaded ammunition off the trucks and onto the ship until 6:30 a.m. the following morning. At 8:30 a.m. my friend woke me to tell me that they had just announced liberty for all the men who had been on the ammunition working party. I got up and dressed and went with my friend to see his parents, knowing this would be the last chance to see them before we left the United States.

On the morning of May 9, 1944, we cast off our lines and set sail for the island of Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands. We were not told officially where we were going, but from our direction of travel we had a pretty good idea. The first day out was pretty routine as far as I was concerned. I worked my cleaning station and stood my watches in a routine way. After completing the 8-12 p.m. watch, I went below and turned in. At about 5:45 a.m. reville was sounded, and about 15 minutes later we went to our battle stations to watch the sun come up.

This was a routine that occured each day at sunrise and sunset. When I first got up, I was feeling a little bit seasick, and by the time we secured battle stations to go to breakfast, I was so sick I couldn't get within smelling distance of the mess hall without wanting to throw up. The second day, I got as far as the top of the ladder going down to the mess hall. The third day, I got to the bottom of the ladder before having to go topside for some fresh air. I had a bad case of what is known as the dry heaves because there was nothing in my stomach to throw up. The fourth day, I finally got through the chow line and got a little food down. That was the medicine I needed, because from that time on I was never seasick again.

We finally arrived in Pearl Harbor approximately seven days after leaving the United States. We tied up at a dock at Ford Island Naval Air Station to unload the aircraft that had been taken aboard for us to transport to squadrons that needed replacements. Liberty was given to the Port Watch the day after we arrived at Pearl Harbor. To go ashore, we had to leave the ship and catch a bus to the main gate of the Naval Air Station. This was an exciting event because the buses were wire cage trailers pulled by tractors at about 5 mph. To board the bus, you ran alongside and jumped on when you could. The buses never stopped, and when you got where you wanted to go, you jumped off and went on about your business. After leaving the Naval Air Station, we had to board a ferry to get from Ford Island to the main island of Oahu. When we got to Oahu, we had to board a bus for about a 15 mile ride to the city of Honolulu. This was usually a pretty wild ride because the roads were narrow and rough, and buses were crowded to the gills with sailors. The bus drivers didn't know what the word slow meant, and would drive about 60 mph to town. When we got to town, the streets were so crowded with Soldiers, Sailors and Marines that it was almost impossible to walk down the sidewalk. We had to exchange our U.S. currency for Hawaiian currency which was U.S. currency with Hawaii printed on the back. Most of my liberty day was spent wandering around town seeing the sights because I didn't have a lot of money to spend since it was about the middle of the month, and payday was the first of every month. I did have a picture made of me with one of the Hawaiian girls that posed

for those kinds of pictures. I paid $1.00 for it.

After taking aboard an operating squadron (VC-5), and making a few repairs to the ship, we sailed with a troop convoy for an unknown destination. The destination turned out to be the island of Manus in the Admiralty Island chain. We left our convoy there and rendesvoused with a convoy headed in a Westerly direction. The task assigned to my group of ships was to furnish Combat Air Patrol and Anti-Submarine Patrol for the troop and supply ships in our convoy. My group of ships consisted of 6 CVE's, 3 Destroyers, and 4 Destroyer Escorts. The names of the CVE's were, USS GAMBIER BAY, USS WHITE PLAINS, USS ST. LO, USS FANSHAW BAY, USS KALININ BAY and USS KITKUN BAY. We would launch aircraft before daylight, and about every 4 hours after that. This was usually a very noisy operation because the plane support crews would have to crank up the starting mechanism for the engines. When the planes were ready, they would start the wound up motor to start the propellers turning. When the propellers started turning, they would fire a shotgun shell to spin the prop fast enough to start the motor. If the motor failed to start, the process was repeated. While the engines were warming up, the exhausts made a lot of noise. When the planes were launched, they were catapulted off the ship with a catapult that had 3,000 psi behind it.

The trip to our destination was uneventful except for one nighttime submarine scare during which our 5"-38 rifle fired a star shell which lit up the whole convoy. We had a few anxious moments after that wondering if the submarine was stalking the convoy. Our destination with this convoy turned out to be the Islands of Saipan, Tinnian and Guam. Our purpose there was to recapture these islands from the Japanese. For two days after our arrival, we watched the Battleships and Cruisers shell the islands in preparation for invasion. We also sent planes on bombing raids over the islands. The islands were invaded on June 6, 1944. Approximately two days after the initial assault on the islands, our radar picked up a flight of enemy aircraft closing in our direction. We went to battle stations while they were 25 miles away. Our Combat Air Patrol engaged the enemy planes at approximately 15 miles away, and shot down 10 planes. By this time, the planes were within range of our

anti-aircraft guns, and our planes had to break off contact to keep from being shot down when we opened fire. The attack came a few minutes later in the form of dive bombers screaming down from the skies dropping their bombs as they came. Lucky for us the bombs missed their targets. Several of the attacking planes never pulled out of their dives, but crashed into the sea because the pilots had been hit by anti-aircraft fire. During this attack, the powder magazines behind the anti-aircraft guns on the flight deck catwalks began to run low on ammunition, so they asked us to help get ammunition from the powder magazine in the hold. For about 45 minutes, I stood in front of the lift from the powder magazine in the hold and handed cans of 40 mm ammunition to another man in a human chain to the flight deck. These cans weighed approximately 140# each and were normally handled by two men. After it was all over, I was so weak that I could hardly move. During the next two weeks, we were to have two more raids. Once more with dive bombers, and one with torpedo planes. The pilot of one torpedo bomber was captured by a Destroyer, and brought aboard my ship for questioning. Seeing this Jap gave me a strong feeling of hate for an enemy. My ship's planes and guns shot down 10 enemy planes during these raids.

During one of these raids, an officer in charge of my lookout station was watching the activity of the gunners firing at the enemy aircraft, and he thought he saw an enemy plane approaching on our Starboard quarter. He immediately radioed the bridge telling them the location of the incoming plane. The bridge couldn't confirm the sighting, and upon closer examination, the enemy aircraft turned out tobe a butterfly serenly flying through the chaos around it.

During the next 3 months at sea we had routine flight and drill operations. There were some exciting moments during some of the flight operations. Several times when planes landed on the flight deck their tail hook failed to catch an arresting cable, and the plane would continue down the flight deck until it hit the barriers at the front erected to keep planes from going off the end of the flight deck, or crashing into parked planes. Most of the time when the planes hit the barrier they would flip upside down, and the pilot would walk away cussing.

Several times planes would come in and fail to catch an arresting cable and wind up either on the Port or Starboard catwalk alongside the flight deck. Sometimes they would bounce completely off the ship and into the water. We lost several pilots and air crewmen this way. Sometimes a plane would come in too low, and the landing signal officer would wave him off, but he was too low to clear the screen behind the signal officer, so they would have to drop the screen and jump to safety into a net alongside the platform he stood on. Another time during landing operations, one of our fighter pilots was circling for his landing approach, flying close to the water. When he banked the plane for one of his turns, his left wingtip caught a wave in the ocean and he and the plane did about 5 cartwheels before coming to rest in the ocean. The pilot threw out his life raft and climbed into it just before the plane sank.

During these routine operations, and after the ship had secured for the night, I would go up on the flight deck before going on watch and watch the stars in the sky and marvel at the wonder of them. When there was no moon present, and all of the ships were running dark, the stars would seem so close you could almost touch them. During these moments to myself, I spent a lot of time talking to God. Also, during these operations, I got in the habit of sleeping somewhere on the flight deck, or catwalk, because it was too hot down in the sleeping compartments. I would tell someone where I would be sleeping so they could wake me to go on watch. I would then angle across the flight deck until I found the lifeline (a chain across the end of the flight deck). I would follow the lifeline by feel until I got to the end which was about 2 feet from the side of the flight deck. It was then just a matter of stepping to the edge and jumping down on the catwalk to my watch station. One night when there was no moon, and I was awakened to go on the midnight to 4 a.m. watch, I got up and angled across the flight deck to where I thought the lifeline was. I started feeling around in front of me for it, but it wasn't there, and it was too dark to see. When I couldn't find it, I thought to myself, "Maybe I haven't gone far enough," so I started to take a step forward to see if I could find it. When I started to move, a voice said, "Don't move," so I stayed where I was and started feeling for the lifeline again in front and to each

side of me. When I couldn't find it the second time, I started to walk forward again, and the voice said again, "Don't move." This voice gave me a strange feeling because there was no one else close to me. I once again started feeling for the lifeline, and this time I reached around behind me and felt the end post to the lifeline directly at my back. If I had taken one more forward step, my feet would have hit a curved steel plate, sending my feet out from under me, and putting me in the drink. Needless to say, I got on the right side of the lifeline in one big hurry.

After being at sea for 3 months covering and supporting the invasion of the islands of Saipan, Tinnian and Guam, we went into port at Guam to replenish our food supplies. Since the island wasn't completely secured, we anchored about one-fourth mile off shore and took a barge to the supply ship which was anchored about 500 yards off shore. While aboard the supply ship loading supplies, we saw a sailor in an infantry landing craft between us and the shore. He was swimming off the boat, and every time he would dive into the water, there was a sniper on the shore that would try to shoot him. He was just out of range of the sniper's gun, and the bullets would splash into the water between him and the shore. During our stay at Guam for supplies, we were awakened one night about midnight to go to our special sea detail stations. (Our stations for weighing anchor and getting under way) The reason for this was that a typhoon had blown up during the night, and we were in danger of colliding with another ship anchored close by due to dragging anchor. We had to raise anchor, move back to mooring position, drop anchor and keep steam and engine power to hold our mooring. As I stepped out onto the sponson that was my sea detail station, the wind caught my cap, and before I could put my hand up to catch it, it was flying through the air about 100 feet from the ship. The winds were at 80 knots. The boat crew in charge of the Captain's Gig (power launch) had left the Gig tied up to the boat boom alongside the ship. When the typhoon blew up, the sea was so rough that it tore the mooring eyes out of the top of the Captain's Gig and sank it. It was later replaced with another boat, but it wasn't as nice as the first one.

After replenishing our supplies, we went to sea again and furnished invasion support for about a month. We then were sent to Manus in the Admiralty Islands to pick up a convoy headed for the invasion of the Caroline Islands which are between Guam and the Phillipines. The invasion of the Carolines turned out to be a routine operation as far as the fleet was concerned, with very little resistance being shown. The main inconvienience was that we had to get up every morning 30 minutes before sunrise to go to battle stations to watch the sun come up. This routine was also repeated at sunset. The reason for this was that it was a favorite trick of the Japanese to attack by air flying out of the rising, or setting, sun when it was low on the horizon, making them very hard to see.

During our time at sea, most of the waking hours were spent cleaning my cleaning station, chipping and scraping paint, repainting what we had scraped, and making boat fenders from old manila mooring lines. We also spliced lines and hawsers. I also stood watches on a 4 hours on and 4 hours off schedule. The reason being, that if you were on a 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. watch, you would be relieved at 7:15 a.m. for breakfast, the 8 a.m. watch would relieve the one that had relieved at 7:15 a.m. and we would go back on watch at 12 noon.

One thing I enjoyed while sailing among the islands was seeing the beauty of the palms and forests on them when we were given a day's liberty from time to time. The flowers and foliage were lush, green and beautiful. I also enjoyed wading along the shore on the islands and seeing some of the sea life and beautiful shells there. Some of the prettiest shells I couldn't bring back because they were inhabited by crabs.

After the Caroline Islands were reasonably secured, we again went to Manus to furnish convoy support to a group of ships going to New Hebrides Islands with troops to relieve some of the troops stationed there so they could participate in the invasion of the Phillipine Islands. After returning to Manus by way of the Solomon Islands, we picked up a convoy of troop and supply ships that was to undertake the invasion of the Phillipine Islands. The trip to the Phillipines took about 2½ weeks to complete because of the huge number of ships

we were escorting, and because of our zig-zag course. Each day we would get reports of ships that had either been torpedoed or sunk by Kamakaises (Japanese suicide Planes). As we approached the Phillipines, the air and fleet activity of the Japanese became more intense, and we were instructed to be on the lookout for Japanese surface ships as well as Japanese planes. D-Day for the invasion of Leyte Island was Oct. 22, 1944. The invasion started as scheduled, with very stiff resistance on the land. The activity at sea was relatively quiet for a couple of days. The third day, after securing from our early morning call to battle stations, and while the crew was beginning to eat breakfast, battle stations was again sounded, and when we got to our battle stations, we found ourselves under attack by units of the Japanese fleet. My work station at this time was in the scullery (where the dishes were washed). When battle stations was sounded, I got so excited that I forgot to turn off the dishwashing machine and one of the cooks had to do it. I hit the ladder going topside at full speed, and when I got topside I saw shells splasing around the ships in my group. The attacking group consisted of two Battleships, four heavy Cruisers and ten Destroyers. We immediately turned into the wind to launch aircraft, but by doing so we were headed toward the Japanese ships instead of away from them. As soon as our fighters and bombers were airborne, we turned the other way and ran for our lives. The Japanese were shooting from about 20 miles away, and the biggest gun we had on board would only reach 5½ miles. For the next 2½ hours we were chased by the Japanese ships. Most of our Destroyer escort had left us to go and attack the Japanese ships, while some stayed to help us lay smoke screen. All the ships in the task force were laying thick black smoke as fast as they could to make range finding more difficult. In spite of this, hits were being scored on the ships in my task group. The ship which normally sailed behind my ship in formation (GAMBIER BAY) took repeated shell hits, and eventually took enough hits so that she could no longer maintain steam. As she fell back, our Destroyers went bak to pick up survivors, and had to engage Japanese ships first. Every ship in my task group took shell hits from the Japanese ships except mine. The

reason we didn't take any shell hits was because our Captain was smart enough to chase salvos. (Bracket of shells). If a salvo landed on the Starboard side, he would order the helmsman to turn hard to Starboard. The next salvo would then land either astern or on our Port side. When this happened, the helmsman was ordered to put the ship hard to Port causing the next salvo to land to Starboard or ahead of us. The closest they came to my ship was when a salvo landed about 20' off our fantail. The resulting concussion was so violent that I thought we had been hit. During this time, the Japanese ships had closed to within range of our 5" gun, and we began to return the shell fire, scoring several hits of our own. The planes from my ship accounted for 2 Cruisers sunk and a Battleship dead in the water from 5 bomb hits and 2 torpedo hits. As the Japanese ships closed in, we found ourselves heading in a direction that would run us aground in another hour. We could, in fact, see the land ahead of us. About this time, the Japanese ships suddenly turned and headed away from us. As we turned away from the approaching land, our radar picked up a flight of enemy planes but lost them shortly after. We began landing operations for the aircraft from our task group, and it was suddenly discovered that the Japanese planes were intermingled with our own planes. As our planes scattered to get out of the way of our anti-aircraft fire, each of the Japanese pilots picked a Carrier out of the task group and headed for it in a suicide mission. The plane that chose my ship was coming in over the stern section of the ship and headed for the middle of the flight deck. Our anti-aircraft fire was hitting the plane from both sides as he made his dive. The only guns that could fire were the last twin mount 40 mm's on each side of the ship (Port and Starboard). In other words, only 4 guns were firing because the rest of the guns had been shut down by an automatic cut-off that kept them from firing across the flight deck. At about 500 feet, the plane suddenly buckled in the middle and exploded. This knocked him off course, and he narrowly missed the ship, taking about 25 feet of the Port catwalk and one man with him. Another Carrier wasn't so lucky. The plane that chose her for his target hit in the middle of the flight deck and set their aviation

gasoline on fire. As the fire spread, the bombs on their aircraft began to explode, as well as the powder magazines for the flight deck anti-aircraft guns. As the men abandoned ship, the explosions on board sent pieces of steel weighing several hundred pounds each into the water, killing several hundred men. As night began to fall, we were ordered back into position guarding the troop and supply ships for the invasion. The next day, my entire task group was ordered to proceed to Pearl Harbor for temporary repairs. When we arrived, the shipyard at Pearl Harbor couldn't accomodate all of the ships, so the rest of the task group was oredered to proceed to the United States for repairs, while my ship was put in dry dock at the Naval Air Station at Ford Island, Honolulu. We were in Honolulu for about 30 days getting damage repaired, and having some of the hangar deck modified. During this time, we were given liberty on alternate days according to what watch we were assigned to. On one of my liberty days, I had my picture taken in Honolulu in my white uniform. On another liberty day, instead of going to town, I boarded a bus on the Naval Air Station and rode it around to the place where the mine sweepers were tied up. A friend that was my older brother's age was assigned to a minesweeper, and I wanted to see if he was in port. His name was Jack Mc Culley from Brownwood, Texas. After looking over several rows of mine sweepers, I located his in the middle of one row. I had to jump from one mine sweeper to another for about eight jumps before I got to his ship. When I got to his ship, I found him on his hands and knees painting. He was really surprised to see me, and he quit painting and hugged me because he was so glad to see someone from home. We went below and had about a 3 hour visit swapping sea stories.

After repairs were completed, we were again sent to Manus in the Admiralty Islands to pick up another convoy and furnish Combat Air Patrol and Anti-Submarine Patrol for them on their way to the invasion of Luzon Island in the Phillipines. On our way to Luzon, we stopped at Leyte Island to pick up supplies and additional ships for the convoy. While we were at Leyte, I was picked to go ashore on a mail working party. Since it was the rainy season, they issued us rubber boots to wear because the mud

was more than ankle deep in the streets of the town of Tacloben on Leyte. When we got ashore, we found that we had about 2 hours to kill before they needed us for the working party. While waiting for the work to start, we walked around town to see what kind of damage there was from the war. The people we met were very friendly and smiling, but since I couldn't speak Spanish and they couldn't speak English, we could only use hand signals. I did, however, meet a man who was an attorney and had studied at Harvard Law School in the U.S. He invited me to his house and introduced me to his wife and daughters. Since his wife and daughters couldn't speak English, he was the only one I could talk to. He gave me some Japanese occupation money, and we gave him some U.S. coins for souveniers.

When we got back to the warehouse for the working party, we were shocked to see mail sacks piled almost to the 16' ceiling of the warehouse. It was close to Christmas, and this was Christmas mail for all of the ships. They put us to work sorting the mail sacks according to the type of ship it was going to; ie: Cruiser, Carrier, DD or otherwise. We worked at this until about 2 a.m., and the pile seemed just as big when we got through as when we got there. We then went back to the ship to begin our convoy duties again.

The sailing was routine until we started through the straits between the islands. At that time, the Japanese once again began using the suicide planes to attack the convoys. The convoy just ahead of us was hit several times, and a small carrier like mine was sunk just two days before D-Day on Luzon. As we approached Luzon, we were called to battle stations because our radar had picked up a flight of approaching enemy planes, but some of them got through our Combat Air Patrol. As the planes came in, we began a very heavy barrage of anti-aircraft fire, but one of the planes had singled us out for his target, and although we had an almost solid wall of anti-aircraft fire he was able to penetrate and hit the ship on the Port side right at the water line. At the same time the Cruiser on our Starboard quarter fired an anti-aircraft shell into the Starboard catwalk of the ship. The suicide plane killed one man in the engine room, and the anti-aircraft shell killed 16 men topside. When the suicide plane went through the

side of the ship, she began to take water rapidly, and to list heavily to Port. When this happened, the skipper ordered everyone on the Port side to move to the Starboard side. Shortly after this, it seemed as if the ship was going down, so everyone was ordered to abandon ship, except for a small group of men who volunteered to stay behind to see if they could save the ship. As I was starting to my abandon ship station, two medical corpsmen came carrying a stretcher with a severely wounded man. They asked for help to get the stretcher to the fantail so they could attend to more wounded. After several minutes of struggling down the ladder, we finally reached the fantail. When we did, one of the ship's doctors was there to examine the wounded man. After examination, he pronounced him dead. An officer who had helped get the stretcher to the fantail got the man's wallet and asked if anyone had a flashlight. I said that I did, and we went just inside a hatch off the fantail to look at the man's I.D. and find out who he was. As we shut the hatch, the sight that greeted us was an eerie one. The passageways were dark except for a couple of emergency lanterns that had been blown loose from the bulkhead and were swinging back and forth by their electrical cords. It was a typical scene from a war movie. The hatch we went into was reasonably close to my sleeping compartment, and I had a very strong urge to try to get to my locker to salvage my picture album. I wasn't worried about the rest of my stuff, but I didn't want to lose my pictures. However, my better judgement got the best of me and I decided not to try it. While we were moving the wounded man down from the flight deck, a Destroyer had manuevered in under our Starboard catwalk. A line was secured, and the men from my ship began jumping across to the Destroyer. I helped transfer the body of the dead man from my ship to the Destroyer, and then I jumped across. After the Destroyer had taken as many men as she could, we cast off the line and began moving to catch up with the rest of the convoy. The Destroyer sailors were showing the men from my ship where they could sleep for the rest of the night, because darkness had fallen while this was happening. Being extremely tired from the excitement of the last few hours, I lay down and went to sleep. About daybreak the next morning, we were awakened by the five-inch guns on the Destroyer firing very rapidly.

We later learned that they had shot down another Japanese plane. The ship-fitters who had stayed aboard the KITKUN BAY had managed to keep the ship afloat and to restore power to most of the ship. About min-morning of the next day, the Destroyer was ordered to return us to the ship so we could take her to Leyte for repairs. As we were sailing back to the ship, we were all topside getting some fresh air, and one of the crew members from my ship sat down on the stretcher holding the canvas wrapped body of the dead man from my ship. When someone told him what he was sitting on, he jumped like he had been shot and left the area in a big hurry.

After arriving back at my ship, we were transferred from the Destroyer to my ship by way of a motor whale boat, a few at a time. When we reached the ship, we had to climb aboard by way of a rope ladder (known as a Jacob's ladder). This was a slow process because only two or three men at a time could climb, and the ups and downs of the whale boat riding the waves, plus the motion of my ship made it a hard climb. While enroute to Leyte Island, the tail assembly from the Japanese plane that had hit us was lodged on a Port sponson amidships. Since the hatch had been blown off the hinges on impact, the hatch was secured by ropes so that it couldn't be opened. I wanted a souvenier from the Japanese plane, so I went to the sponson forward of the one that the tail assembly was on, and walked the boat boom from one sponson to the other. There was a cable securing the boom to the ship, but you could only hold onto it about 3/4 way along the boom. When I walked the boom, I held onto the cable as far as I could, and then waited until the ship took a Starboard roll and ran the rest of the way leaning against the side of the ship. If the ship had suddenly rolled to Port, I would have had a bath. When I got to the sponson with the tail assembly, I took my knife and cut a square piece of fabric from the tail assembly. I then reversed the proceedure to get back to the starting point of my journey. The next day, the tail assembly was brought into the hangar deck and all who wanted souveniers could get them. (I already had mine, and I still do.) The tail assembly was completely dismantled in a short time.

We slowly made our way back to Leyte Island. During this cruising time, one of my shipmates who slept a couple of bunks above me started talking in his sleep. I told him about it, and

he said,"The next time I start talking in my sleep, wake me up." A few nights later, after completing an 8 p.m. to midnight watch, I went below to turn in. When I started to crawl into my bunk, my friend started talking in his sleep. I shook him to wake him up, and he said, "What's the matter?" I said, "You were talking in your sleep." He said, "I was?", and swung his legs over the side of his bunk. I said, "Yes you were." He then jumped down from his bunk and went at a fast pace to the passage between the bunks. As he turned the corner, I suddenly realized that he was walking in his sleep. I ran to the corner he had just turned, and he was nowhere in sight. I ran all the way to the fantail looking for him, but couldn't find him. I went back to my bunk wondering who I should tell, and about that time he came back around the corner and crawled back up into his bunk. As soon as he lay down, he opened his eyes and woke up. When I told him what had happened, he was scared to death, but made me promise not to tell anyone because he didn't want to be transferred off the ship. A sleep-walker was not allowed to serve aboard ship for fear of them walking off at night into the water.

When the suicide plane hit us, he knocked out one engine and one set of fresh water evaporators. Because of this, we were unable to make enough fresh water for us to take fresh water showers. Salt water showers were the rule, and usually left the skin sticky until it dried, and then it would cause itching because of the dry skin. This led to the practice by all on board that every time the ship passed through a rain squall the message would be broadcast on the ship's public address system, and all who weren't on watch would grab soap and towel and run up to the flight deck for a shower. It was funny to see the flight deck covered with people taking showers. Most of the time, about the time you were all soaped up, the rain would stop and we would have to dry off without rinsing. This led to the practice of using the outer part of our combat helmets to catch rain water so we could rinse off.

When we got to Leyte Island, they had frogmen come out and weld a patch on the side of the ship so they could pump the water out of the engine room and machine shop that were flooded. When the patch was in place, pumping operations were begun. When the pumping was about 3/4 finished, they suddenly abandoned the engine

room, and ordered all personnel to stay away from the mess hall and galley area. The reason was that they had found two 500 pound bombs in the engine room. One of the bombs was inside one of the boilers broken in two. They immediately called for a bomb removal team from Leyte Island to come and defuse the bombs so they could be disposed of. Most of the day was taken up while this was going on. When the bombs were defused, they were thrown overboard through a hole that was cut in the patch welded to the side of the ship.

After the excitement and delay of finding the bombs, the patch was restored and the ship put into a floating dry dock so that the propeller for the useless engine could be removed, allowing us to make more speed as we sailed toward Pearl Harbor and home. It took us almost two weeks to sail from Leyte Island to Pearl Harbor, and then another ten days to the United States. This was our first trip back home since we had left the States some ten months earlier. We were a very happy crew when we knew that we were going to see the good old United States once again. We arrived back in the United States in early March 1945.

As soon as the ship was put in dry dock in the States, and repairs were begun, the ship's company was given a 20 day leave in two separate shifts. The men in what was known as the Port watch were the first to get leave, and then the men in what was known as the Starboard watch were given leave. Since I was assigned to the Port watch, I was with the first group to go on leave. Since we had, had a payday while enroute from Pearl Harbor, I had drawn all my pay that I had been letting ride. When I got my leave, I had over $200 in cash. I caught a bus to the train station in Los Angeles and bought a round trip ticket to Brownwood, Texas. The train ride took 3 days to Brownwood. I had not let my mother know that I was in the U.S., and the night I arrived at the train station, Mama was working as a Red Cross volunteer serving coffee and doughnuts to the servicemen that were passing through on the train. I was hoping to get to the serving counter before she saw me, but she spotted me when I was about half way across the floor of the train station. She froze in her tracks until I got to where she was standing, and then she hugged me real tight and looked up into my face and asked,"Which one are you, Donald or Ronald?" Since she had always bragged that she could tell us apart a block

away with our backs turned, the ladies at the counter thought it was funny, and laughed and cried at the same time. While home on leave, I was married to Wanda White, a girl I had known before joining the Navy. Our wedding day was March 9, 1945.

When I returned to duty after my leave, Wanda went with me to California so she could be there until I had to go back overseas. The ship was in port for about six weeks after my return, while repairs were being completed. Several of the men who were assigned to the Port watch failed to return from leave at the appointed time, and they were considered A.W.O.L. and deserters.

After repairs were completed, we went through a series of shakedown maneuvers to be sure the repairs were completed properly, and that the ship was once again seaworthy. After these maneuvers were completed, it was decided that we could return to combat.

As we were leaving port to go back overseas, one of the deserters rode the boat that came out to pick up the harbor pilot and returned to duty on the ship. He was court martialed and placed on 6 months probation and restriction. This meant that he couldn't leave the ship for 6 months. Since we weren't in the U.S., he didn't mind. However, all of his clothes and accessories had been transferred to the brig on shore so he had to buy all new clothes and accessories.

When we returned to active combat duty, my ship was assigned to a task group of small carriers that was furnishing Combat Air Patrol and Anti-Submarine Patrol for a fleet of tankers that was refueling the ships of the Third Fleet. This Fleet at that time was in the process of shelling the Japanese mainland in preparation for invasion. The ships of the Third Fleet would rendesvous with the tankers in my group on an interval of about once a week. While refueling operations were in progress, we had every available plane in the air for protection. Sometimes, the rendesvous would take place at night, and it was a strange sight to us to see these ships coming toward us led by a hospital ship which ran with all lights showing. The rest of the ships in the fleet would be running on a darkened ship schedule (no lights on weather decks). The contrast was quite unnerving when you realized that there could be submarines in the area. We were with this group of tankers about two months, and since they were running low on fuel oil, we escorted them back to Manus in the Admiralty Islands to replenish their

supplies. While we were at Manus, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, Japan. As we were making preparations to return with our tankers to the Third Fleet, the second Atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. Shortly after the dropping of the second atomic bomb, the Japanese offered to surrender. When this was announced to the ships anchored in the harbor at Manus, many of the ships began firing their anti-aircraft guns into the air. This lasted for about an hour. My ship wasn't in this group because of orders from the Captain.

While we were in the U.S. for repairs, our forces had invaded the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa with very heavy casualties and loss of men and ships due to suidide plane attacks. If we had not received the damage we did and had to go to the U.S. for repairs, we would have covered both of these invasions.

Soon after the announcement of the surrender offer by the Japanese, my ship loaded supplies of cold weather gear and was ordered to proceed to Adak in the Aluctian Islands. We headed North from Manus toward the Aluetian chain. About a week after we left Manus, we crossed from the Southern Pacific waters into the Northern Pacific waters. The color contrast was really something to see. It looked as if someone had drawn a straight line down the middle of the ocean and colored one side a brilliant blue, and the other side an aqua green. That is one sight I'll never forget. Soon after crossing into the Northern waters, we encountered a bank of dense fog. It was so thick that you could see only 15-30 feet from where you were standing. The ships in the task group had to reduce speed and hold their positions in convoy by radar because it was impossible to see the other ships. We were still standing wartime watches because some of the Japanese might not have received the surrender message. We arrived in Adak and took on some more supplies of cold weather gear. From the supplies we loaded, we assumed that we would be in a cold climate for the rest of our service time. While in Adak, we had an open house one day and invited the Army troops stationed there to come aboard and tour the ship. Since there were no tug boats operating in the Aluetians, we had to manuever the ship to the dock using only our engines and rudder. That was a ticklish operation, but went without mishap. A short time after we left the Aluetians, we heard

about another ship that almost destroyed a dock trying the same manuever.

After leaving Adak, we headed West once again. This time our destination was the main island of Japan, Honshu. After about two weeks of sailing, we were told to be on the lookout for loose mines that our mine sweepers had cut loose but had not been able to destroy because of high seas and strong currents. Soon after this order was received, I was standing the 8-12 morning watch when one of the forward lookouts suddenly came alive on the intercom and yelled that there was a mine dead ahead of the ship about 200 yards. The Captain ordered the helmsman to move two points to Port on the compass. When this order was completed, we all went to the railing along the Starboard side of the ship and held our breath while the live mine floated the full length of the ship at about 25 feet distance. If one wave had moved the wrong direction, it would have thrown the mine into the side of the ship and blown us out of the water. After the mine was past the ship, one of the Destroyers in the task group fell out of formation and went to the mine and destroyed it with 20mm gunfire. The rest of the trip to Japan was spent with all eyes watching for mines.

We arrived in Tokyo Bay about two weeks after the Japanese had negotiated and signed a surrender agreement with the Allied forces. We anchored in the harbor at Yokahama, Japan and immediately got orders to proceed to the Northern Island of Japan, Hokkaido. to pick up P.O.W.s for transport to Tokyo, and eventually to their homes. We sailed the next morning, and had a safe trip to Hokkaido. When we arrived, a delegation of Japanese dignitaries came aboard to negotiate the transfer of prisoners to my ship. Since it was late in the day when the prisoners began arriving in small boats, it was well after dark before they were all aboard. The Captain decided to wait until morning to proceed back to Tokyo. During the night, we would sweep our searchlight around the ship approximately every 15 to 30 minutes to prevent any attempt at sabotage to the ship. I stood a 4 hour watch on the fantail that night with an M-1 rifle and orders to shoot first and ask questions later if anyone tried to come aboard.

The next morning, we set sail for Tokyo. In talking with some of the prisoners, I found out that some of them were soldiers

and Marines that had been captured during the battle for Midway and Wake Islands in 1942. We also had some Britis P.O.W.s aboard that had been captured by the Japanese in Singapore, China in early 1940. They told us about having to eat leaves and grass in order to survive. They also made tea out of Mulberry leaves. Toward the end of the war, our planes dropped food to these P.O.W. camps, and they told us of some of their fellow prisoners who were so hungry they wouldn't wait for the packages to hit the ground, but would run out and try to catch them in mid-air. This caused some of them to be hit and killed by the packages.

After unloading our prisoners in Tokyo, we were given a one day liberty to go ashore in Tokyo and look around. The devestation in Tokyo was really something to see. Most of the shops and houses had been made from bamboo, and the incindiary raids had reduced Tokyo to a pile of rubble. You could stand on a street corner and look for a mile in any direction and see nothing but rubble and burned out brick buildings. The Japanese people were trying to pick up their lives again by selling souveniers along the streets, and rebuilding what had been destroyed. I got some chopsticks and other trinkets while there. The day was interesting, but depressing.

After everyone had, had liberty ashore, we headed South again to Guam to pick up a load of Soldiers, Sailors and Marines for transport back to the U.S.A. While there, we transferred our squadron ashore. Some of the men we picked up for transportation back home had been away from the U.S.A. for 4 years. The trip from Tokyo to Guam was uneventful, as was our trip from Guam to the U.S.A. When we got to Los Angeles with our load of GI's, we arrived early in the morning, and the fog was so thick that we had to find the entry opening in the breaker wall with our radar. We laid to until the harbor pilot came aboard. When he came aboard, he asked the Captain if he wanted to wait until the fog lifted, or did he want to go on in. The Captain told him most of the troops aboard had been gone from home for a long time, and he didn't want to delay their homecoming any longer. He then said,"Let's take her on in." As we cleared the breaker wall, there was a Navy blimp flying overhead playing popular songs of the day. The blimp crew

were the only ones that could see us through the fog. There was a pleasure yacht anchored in the harbor with the Harry James orchestra aboard to welcome the returning GI's home. We could just barely make out the outline as we sailed by, and they never saw us. When we arrived at the dock in Los Angeles, it was completely deserted. Everyone was inside waiting for the fog to lift. As soon as we were spotted, the dock filled with people. Sailors on duty to catch our lines, and family and friends of a lot of the returning boys aboard. It was quite a sight to see, and the surprise was one that we all enjoyed.

It was getting close to Christmas at this time, and we were hoping to be home for Christmas, but it was not to be. After unloading our passengers, we were sent to the Mare Island Navy Yard near San Francisco where the ship was outfitted with temporary bunks on the hangar deck, and extra sleeping facilities below decks. We were also fitted with temporary heads (bathrooms) on the fantail (rear deck) of the ship. As soon as the work was completed, we were dispatched to the Phillipine Islands to pick up more troops for the trip home.

Since we were to arrive at the Port of Luzon Island on Christmas Day, we had a Christmas party on board for all the crew the night before, complete with Santa Claus. We began loading troops as soon as we arrived, and received troops and their gear until dark. The next morning, we completed our loading of troops and began the trip home. A couple of the troops who were the last to board had to throw their gear to the fantail and climb fast to get aboard because the ship had already started to move.

Shortly after leaving for home, we ran into a bad storm. The waves were running 50' to 60' high, and the ship was pitching and rolling so bad that the tables wouldn't stay up in the mess halls. We had to take the tables down and eat sitting on the deck. We would sit with our legs crossed and holding our food trays on our knees so that when the ship rolled one way we could raise that leg to keep our tray level, and when it rolled the other way, we would raise the other leg. There were a lot of seasick passengers, and none of them were allowed on any of the weather decks for fear of their being washed overboard. We were taking waves in such a way that when they broke over the bow of the ship solid water from

the top of the wave would hit the windows on the pilot house which was 75' above the water line. I was on wheel watch at this time, and a normal wheel watch schedule was 30 minutes on the wheel and 30 minutes rest. During this storm, both wheel men were on the wheel for the full 4 hour watch trying to keep the ship on course. We made such slow progress that it was over two weeks before we got back to the U.S.

Upon arrival back in the U.S., I was transferred to the Naval Station at Terminal Island, San Pedro, Calif. for discharge. The processing for discharge took about a week. While I was in San Pedro, the KITKUN BAY went to Bremerton, Washington to the Naval Yard for decommissioning. My friends on board wrote to tell me of all the fun they were having while there, and wished I could be there to share it with them. The final score for the USS KITKUN BAY was 26 enemy planes shot down, 2 Cruisers sunk, a Battleship dead in the water plus numerous landing barges and enemy tanks.

My discharge was final and I was released from active duty on January 18, 1946, nine days less than two years after I had first sworn into the Navy. I then boarded a train back to Brownwood, Texas and returned to civilian life, a very much older and wiser person.

THE END

RONALD VAUGHN

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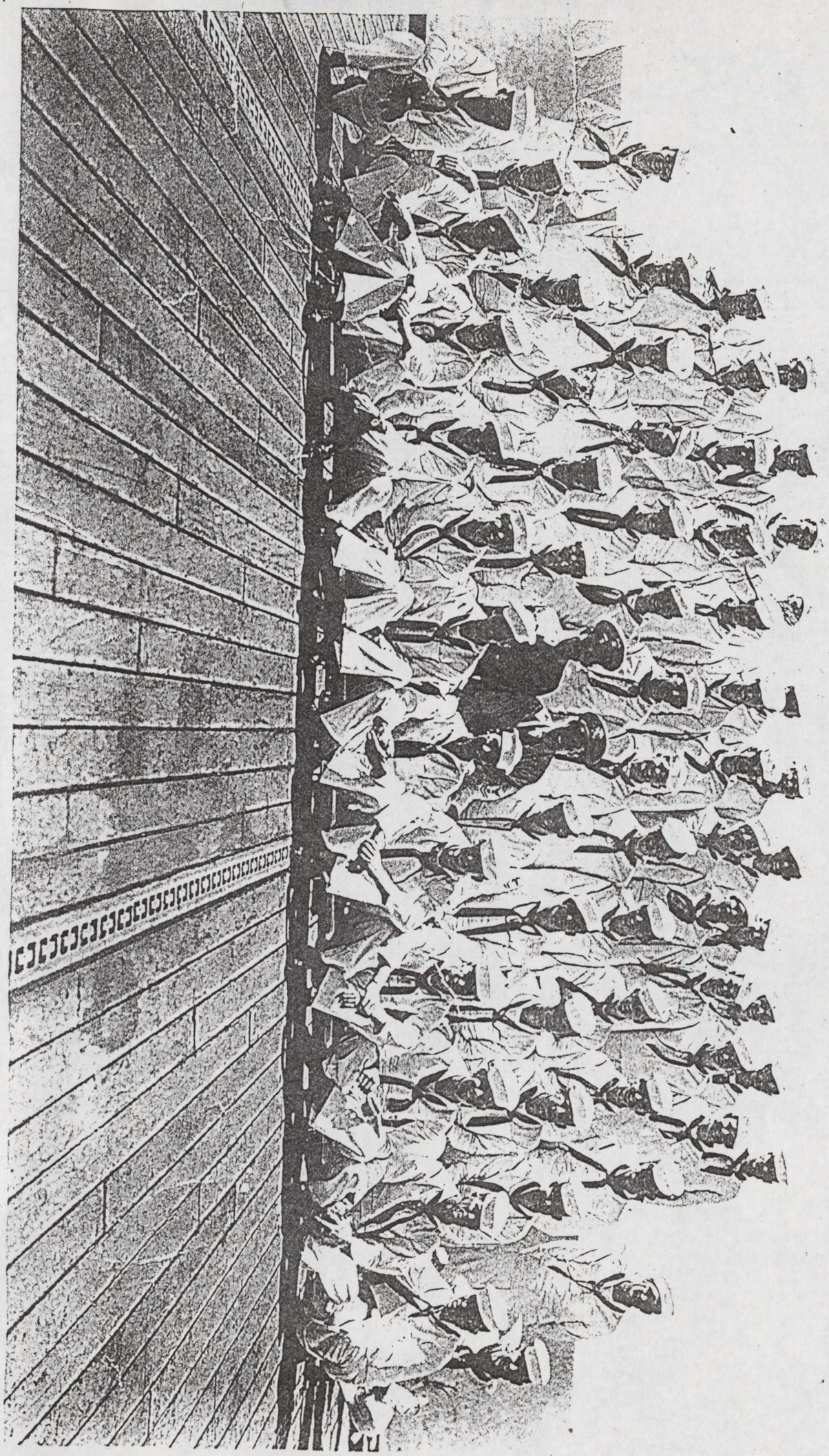

SECOND DIVISION
USS KITKUN BAY
(CVE-71)

K. C. Brandall

2nd Division
U.S.S. Kitkun Bay CVE 71

E. D. Valentine

Risser-Dover-Shanno-Carter-Boscamp-Kennedy-Keane-Schumann-Wilbanks-Tucker-Clark
Sorenson-2-West A.-Tackett-Arnold-Toporcer-Coughenhower-Mr. Valentine-Mr. Brameha[illegible]
Sanchez-Holmes-Holcomb-Coig-West E.-Barron-3-Bartley-Vaughn, R.-Vaughan, W.-
Bissnette-Carr-Dewitt-Troisinger-Lasek-Cristenson-Stubbs-Vancleave-Whittier
Anderson-Koserowski-4-Watkins-Martin-Ware-Pruskot-Waggoner-Vickers-Nolan
Barnes-Roady-Hammons-Gladney-Graham-5-Coons-Kirer-Staats-Blaha-Kellerman
Huseth-Whitworth-Werhan-Kranz-Smith-Sizemore

Warren C. Anderson
Joseph Kirer
Coy Troisinger
Frank Dr. Koserowski
Lester L. Graham
J. R. Coons
John C. Bartley
Albert L. Staats
Chester G. Smith
Carr. K.T.
Ralph E. Barnes
Eugene F. Tucker
Dale W. Schumann
Conrad E. Sorenson
James. a. Sizemore.
A. N. Holmbo
H.F. Barnes
Charles F. De Witt
Alden G. Whittier
J. E. Stubbs
L.C. Clark
Harold M. Roady
M.O. Huseth
J.C.T. Arnold
Joseph E. Christenson
William C. Vancleave
Kellers V-M.
O'Ja Carter
William M. Vickers
W. W. Vaughan
Leo a. Bissonette
Kenneth N. Shamp
Carnelius J. Coig
Mariano R. Sanchez
William O. Holcomb
Lasek L.F.
William W. Watkins
Jr. Bmc
Jerry Kennedy
J.W. Nolan
W.E. Coughenhour
B.J. Whitworth
John Wm. Martin
Emmett E. Werhan
Chester Franklin Dover
Adath L. West
plushot c.h.
Jack Ware
D.J. Hammons
Earl R. Kranz
Richard J. Kellerman
A.N. Boscamp
Blaha J.J.
Charles E. Tackett
O.C. Waggoner
C.C. Willbanks
J.M. Toporcer