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The Real Navy

On Monday, December 13, 1943, our graduation class of radio technicians abandoned the barracks at Treasure Island and took off in all directions for almost all parts of the world, to our various assignments. In this class there was another man from Idaho Falls, Idaho, Carl Seawright. His wife had driven from Idaho Falls to meet him on graduation. Carl's assignment was in the eastern part of the United States, and he had to catch a train at Pocatello, Idaho, the next afternoon. He and his wife invited me to ride home with them. We got started late in the afternoon from San Francisco and drove all night. We got most of the way across Nevada by early morning. It was winter time and there was quite a bit of snow but the roads were not too bad



and we didn't have any trouble. Carl caught the train in Pocatello for his destination, and I rode with Mrs. Seawright the 50 miles home to Idaho Falls.

The navy gave me five days delayed orders to get to Bremerton, Washington, where our ship's crew was scheduled to gather. I had four days at home in route. After the four days I took the train from Idaho Falls to Bremerton, arriving there December 20, 1943. As soon as I entered that Bremerton office area someone recognized me. The officer led me to an information desk before I even had the seabag off my back. I was seated out in the hallway in front of an office where I was supposedly giving directions. I did that for the rest of that day and most of the next. While there in the afternoon of the second day, an officer, a stranger to me, came up and verified my identification as Earl Bagley and said, "Get your seabag and come with me." I didn't even have a chance to talk to anybody or tell them I was leaving. I got my seabag, which I had been very careful not to unpack, because I knew that I would be moving, and left with the officer.

We took a bus to Tacoma, Washington, where our ship's crew was gathering. We were in an old, dilapidated barracks in Tacoma at the bottom of a hill. The rain was continuous and mud was deep. It was quite a dreary place to be especially for Christmas Day. We had our Christmas dinner there which was really nice. The next day we left Tacoma for Astoria, Oregon. That is where our ship was being outfitted. We went aboard the ship the morning of December 28th, the day it was commissioned. There was still a lot of work to be done, installing equipment and taking on necessary supplies to get underway, and there

were many members of the crew who were not aboard yet. Among them was Chris. He had been sent somewhere and was unable to make contact to get back with the ship's crew. In fact it was another two weeks or more before I saw Chris.

There was not really very much for me to do until time for the ship to get underway. In talking with a couple of the officers, I asked them if there was any chance of getting a leave during that time and if they knew how long it might be before we would be getting underway. They were really surprised to learn that I had been in the navy 14 months, had been through boot camp and school and that I had never had a real leave. It was customary for sailors to get two weeks leave out of boot camp. I had had delayed orders in travel twice, but no leave showed on my record. I was given six days leave from Astoria, so I caught a bus into Portland and took the train home where I was able to spend three days. I arrived back aboard ship on the 13th of January 1944.

A brief description and explanation of the development of the escort carriers is in order here. In 1942, when Henry J. Kaiser was building conventional carriers for the navy, he got the idea that it would be practical to have some smaller carriers that could accommodate squadrons of fighter planes and small bombers for protection of landing forces and possibly some of the war ships during battles. President Roosevelt accepted his ideas, and the CVE (Carrier Vessel Escort) came into being.

Their squadrons were expected to intercept enemy aircraft, search for enemy submarines and bomb or torpedo ships and storage facilities within their range. This greatly reduced the long flights by planes

based on the large carriers. The USS Gambier Bay CVE-73 was the 19th carrier of this class built. Its construction from beginning to end took 171 days.

These rapidly built vessels did have some shortcomings. They had no armor to prevent penetration of shell fire. They were welded at the seams instead of being riveted. Their speed was slow. And their structure was flimsy. The Gambier Bay had a small hole in the deck of the supply compartment of the radar shack. Whenever someone asked me what had happened here, I told him that during construction one of the workmen had dropped his can opener while eating lunch.

The CVE's were built on the same keel and had the same hull as the Liberty cargo ships and oil tankers. The overall length from bow to stern was 512 feet. The flight deck was 480 feet by 80 feet wide and was about forty five feet above the water line. Below the flight deck was the hanger deck, where planes were repaired and stored while not in operation. Below that was the chow hall and some of the ship's services. The enlisted men's sleeping quarters, sick bay and the engine rooms were also on the deck below the water line. The superstructure, about one fourth of the way aft from the bow on the starboard side of the flight deck, supported the masts and antennas, the signaling facilities and observation levels for the captain, flight control, navigation, etc. This extra weight gave the ship an almost constant starboard list of a few degrees. The radar shack was just below the flight deck and about directly under the bridge, just described. Our fire power for battle or protection consisted of one five inch gun on the fantail. For antiaircraft purposes there were eight of what were

called twin 40 millimeter and twenty 20 millimeter antiaircraft guns. They were mounted in gun tubs just off and just below the sides of the flight deck. Maximum cruising speed for CVE's ranged from 17 to 19 knots.

These vulnerable ships were known by many suggestive names. Almost everyone knew what you were referring to when you said Kaiser Coffin, Jeep Carrier, Woolworth Carrier, Combustible, Vulnerable and Expendable (CVE) or Baby Flat Top.

On the afternoon of January 16, 1944, the Gambier Bay, CVE 73 cast off from the pier at Astoria, Oregon and headed down the Columbia River towards the Pacific Ocean on its maiden voyage.

A deep continental shelf in the Pacific lies right under the mouth of the Columbia River. As we went out across that shelf at high tide in a violent wind storm with the river being very high in the rainy season, we encountered the roughest water the Gambier Bay or I ever experienced or that I ever expect to experience. Some of the waves at the point where the tide and the swells incoming met the high water of the river going out, appeared to me to be over 100 feet high. They tossed our empty ship up as if it were a feather. Standing on the catwalk, I could see 20 feet of the keel underneath, with the ship almost completely out of water, balanced on the peak of a mountainous wave. Suddenly, as the waves fell from under it, the ship would come down in any position; sometimes bow first, sometimes port, sometimes starboard. It was only a few minutes until probably 90% of the crew were at the rails losing their dinners. The captain later described it as a case where for the first hour we thought we were going to die

and for the next hour we were afraid we wouldn't. There was no doubt in my mind then as to whether seasickness is real or imagined. The rough water still continued after we got past the mouth of the river and headed north around the point to come into the Puget Sound from north of Seattle. It was an extremely bad afternoon and evening for me. Eventually I was released from General Quarters and permitted to go to bed. When I awoke in the morning it was as calm and peaceful as in your living room at home. We were inside of the Puget Sound, where we took on supplies, and more members of the crew who had arrived in Bremerton or had been located there. Some had been there all the time, but had not been located. This is when Chris came aboard. I was very much relieved to see him. We spent two or three days in the Sound getting the ship degaussed, that is, demagnetized so that the magnetic forces of the ship would not attract certain missiles such as torpedoes. I had liberty one evening there and went into Seattle, took the ferry boat to Bremerton, Washington, and spent an evening with my cousin Vern Higbee and family.

When our business was finished in Puget Sound, we again went out into the Pacific and south, down the coast into San Francisco Bay, where we docked at a pier in Alameda. The water along the west coast of the United States is some of the roughest normal sea water in the world. There are numerous land swells all along the route. The Gambier Bay was still rocking, rolling and pitching a lot, although it was heavier now than it had been before. As soon as we hit the rough water, I was seasick again until we got into the bay at San Francisco. We were there a few days taking on other supplies and more crew members. I had one

evening of liberty while there and I went into San Francisco to a show.

When we left San Francisco, we went down the coast to San Diego, where we spent a week loading planes and a contingent of Marines, passengers going to Pearl Harbor. February 7th, we headed out to sea toward Pearl Harbor. The water was rough here and for the next four days I was seasick all the time. Then we hit smooth water, and from then on to Pearl Harbor, for the next two days, it was really beautiful.

For the benefit of those who have not had the experience of riding a small craft or one of these top-heavy vessels in rough waters, I should insert a short description of the mechanics involved in staying on your feet under such circumstances. The ocean is always restless, and whatever floats upon it reflects its movement. The lighter the weight of the object, the more nearly it duplicates the movement of the water. If you are erect on the said object and you want to walk on it, you must balance on one foot, raise the other and put it forward in anticipation that the deck will come up to meet it at a certain point. You can make allowances for misjudgment by spreading your legs and continuing to balance on the first foot until the other makes solid contact. As you learn to lean the body weight in adjusting your balance, it becomes easier. Of course, as the sea gets rougher and you teeter more, you may be accused of walking like a "drunken sailor." I am sure that is how that expression originated.

After walking in such a manner for a few weeks or months at sea, you have to learn to walk all over again when you get back on solid earth. One time when we came into San Francisco and I had liberty the day we docked, I am sure anyone would have been justified in calling me



drunk. As I put one foot in front of the other, the sidewalk refused to be in the right place. For the first several blocks I had the sensation that the sidewalk was actually moving up, down and sideways. It was two or three years after I mustered out of the navy before I could walk down the sidewalk with my wife without bumping into her every few steps.

During the last two days of that voyage, coming into the Hawaiian Islands, we were in the area of the flying fish. This was the first time I had ever seen flying fish. It was really a novelty. The first ones I saw, I mistook for real birds. I thought that we must be close to land, but when I saw some emerge from the water, I knew what they were. These creatures come out of the water at high speed, with fins spread and used as sails. They glide generally on a fairly straight course just a few feet above the surface. The distance traveled varies from fifty to over one hundred feet, but may be increased by dipping the tail in the water, usually the tip of a wave, for an extra boost.

We arrived at Pearl Harbor on the 13th of February. I had liberty the next day and went swimming at Waikiki Beach that Valentine's day, I even got a little sunburned. The Hawaiian Islands were light locked at night, which means there were no lights allowed at all. When we had liberty there it was from about 10 AM to 5 PM, at which time we had to be back on board the ship. We were in and out of Pearl Harbor a few times during the next three months. It was a beautiful experience, especially on the days I could get liberty.

Every time we went in or out we were reminded of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor by the stern of the Battleship USS Arizona that

still stuck out of the water although it had been sunk December 7, 1941, with some 1200 sailors going down with it. I went swimming several times at Waikiki Beach. The Royal Hawaiian Hotel there had been reserved by the navy as a rest and recreation area for battle fatigued submarine sailors. It was under control of the navy. The recreation and eating facilities were available to all sailors and were very good. The thing I liked most there was their ice cream. They had ice cream with papaya which I had never tasted before, and it was delicious. Rationing was not nearly as bad in the Hawaiian Islands as it was in the States. About the only things that I knew of that were rationed were shoes and gasoline. Food was plentiful.

I made up my mind during those months that when the war was over I was going to bring my family back to the Hawaiian Islands, and that is where we would live. One or two of the days when I had liberty I walked out into the country, into the pineapple and sugar cane fields just to be close to the soil. I guess it satisfied a little of my homesickness, because I had been on a farm most of the working time in my younger life. There was profuse foliage on that island. It was very appealing to me, very enticing. I had the privilege of going to the Mother's Day program in May in the Waikiki L.D.S. Stake Tabernacle. At this particular program they had participants from 18 nationalities paying tribute to mothers. It was probably the most inspiring Mother's Day program that I have ever experienced. After that meeting, I left convinced that love from mother and love for mother were universal attributes.

One Sunday morning in May, I was sitting in a meeting in the

Waikiki Chapel when I looked out and saw a familiar boy walking across the lawn. He was the son of our milkman in Idaho Falls, one of our neighbors. I learned that he had a job there in the Hawaiian Islands working as a draftsman. His friend had an automobile and after the meetings in the afternoon they took me for a ride along the coast of Oahu. This did more to encourage me in the idea of going back to live there after the War. We did not, however, get far enough around the island to see the L.D.S. Temple.

The first time the Gambier Bay was in Pearl Harbor we stayed only three days, unloading some of the planes we had brought from the States and reloading our flight and hanger decks with others. They were crowded together with the wings folded, and we took off for our first time to cross the international dateline on our way to the Marshall Islands. These islands had been secured previously in battles with the Japanese and we did not encounter any resistance. I was told that the planes we carried were to replace planes for the Aircraft carrier, Enterprise. As I remember we spent two days launching them. I don't think the Enterprise was ever within our sight.

From the Marshall Islands, we went again to Pearl Harbor for three days, then left for San Diego. There was a strange thing about this seasickness of mine. Every time we left the west coast through the land swells, I became seasick almost immediately. But after we had been out in the Pacific where the waters were smooth for a while I could ride out any storm in the Ocean, including typhoons, without being seasick. The sickness was only as we started each time from the west coast.

From the time Chris came aboard ship, he and I worked very

conscientiously to get the radar gear in really good working order. We spent most of our time in a regular day testing the components, the output, and the performance of the gear, trying to keep it in peak operating condition. While we were at sea it was difficult to work on some elements of the equipment because it had to be in operation all the time. We counted on what little time we had in any port to help us replace any defective parts and to conduct the tests we could not conduct while the gear was in operation at sea. We had quite an efficient system. In addition, we set aside at least one hour a day for study to analyze our equipment or theory or whatever we felt was a need. With Chris's expert mental capacity and comprehension of all the components, he quite often conducted a class for me to help me be more efficient and capable.

The first time we came back from Pearl Harbor into San Diego we had planned to shut down the gear immediately and replace any parts that we knew were not up to par. Then came the announcement over the loud speaker that Vernon Christensen and Earl Bagley will be on Shore Patrol tonight. We had just enough time to get our uniforms on and get out on Shore Patrol according to schedule. That was at least six hours wasted time that we could have used to work on the gear. We still managed, however, to keep everything in good working order. While I was on Shore Patrol I did not mind it. The assignment I had was to ride the bus back and forth from the receiving station to town. There was no problem at all, just a bunch of happy people going back and forth. On each end, during the wait, I would get an ice cream cone or a sundae or something else to eat that had been so conspicuously missing while out to sea.

That ice cream tasted so good after being out on that hot ship.

Upon returning to San Diego, we had learned that we had to wait a couple of weeks for a turn to go into dry dock for some repairs, making it obvious that we would be there a while, so I asked for another leave. I was given a six day leave from San Diego, which is not much time to get to Idaho Falls and back, especially with the schedules of the trains. I left the ship about 1:00 p.m. March 13th, but the train for Los Angeles had left about a half hour before I reached the depot.

I hurried to the highway and hitchhiked, getting to Los Angeles just in time. I didn't even get seated on the train before it began to move out. I rode the train through the night and got off late the next afternoon in Pocatello, Idaho. There was no train or bus and no scheduled way of getting to Idaho Falls, a distance of 50 miles, until the next day, except to hitchhike again. It was already dusk and very cold. I started walking out of town on the highway. Just at the outskirts of town, a fellow in a coal truck picked me up. I learned that he was Ole Hess, one of my old Scoutmasters from St. Anthony, Idaho. He took me a short distance to where he lived and got out in the road and tried to flag down a car. No one seemed to want to stop so he, a big fellow weighing about 280 pounds, stood right in the middle. He spread out his arms and the next car stopped. He got me into that car, an old relic from the early 1930's, which was going as far as Firth. That would put me within 15 miles of home. By the time we got to Firth it was after nine p.m. It seemed like the temperature was below zero. I got on the highway and stood there nearly an hour before starting to walk up and down the road to keep from freezing. There were no hotels

or motels or places to stay in Firth without knocking on some stranger's door. I was just about ready to do that when I saw the lights of a car coming up the highway. I got into a position under a streetlight, where they could not miss seeing me. The driver was a man who had been down to Clearfield, Utah to pick up his son, who worked for the navy supply depot there. His son was coming home for the weekend. Ironically, the man had worked for the same wholesale warehouse that I had worked for a couple of years before. They brought me home, arriving before midnight, and I am happy to report I was not frozen to death.

I spent three days at home and was able to make train schedules back to San Diego in the six day time limit I had, putting me back on board ship, March 19, 1944.

Two days later, Tuesday night, Lars Anderson and I went to Mutual in one of the wards closest to the docks in San Diego. At that meeting there was an L.D.S. navy chaplain, Chaplain Bowd, and Brother Willard Kimball, the L.D.S. representative for the San Diego area. I suppose they just guessed that I would be there. They came with instructions from Salt Lake City that they were to find me and set me apart as the L.D.S. group leader of the Gambier Bay. Lars Anderson was a missionary who had been drafted into the navy as soon as he had returned from his mission. He was a seventy and I was also a seventy at the time. Chaplain Bowd and Bro. Willard Kimball, who was a cousin to Spencer W. Kimball, set me apart that night as the L.D.S. group leader aboard the Gambier Bay and Lars as my counselor. As far as we knew at that time we were the only L.D.S. members aboard the Gambier Bay. Soon after that I went in to see the ship's Chaplain about getting my life insurance

increased to the maximum of \$10,000. The Chaplain, Vern Carlson, asked me quite a few questions about my physical condition for insurance. When he had finished the questions, he swung around in his chair and said, "You're L.D.S., aren't you?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

He said, "I had a commanding officer once who was an Elder in the L.D.S. church. That man would do anything for me. If there is anything I can do for you I would be glad to do it. Just let me know."

I said, "Chaplain, there is one thing that I would like to know, if possible, and that is the names of the men who have given their religious preference as L.D.S. in this ship's company."

He said, "I'll get it for you."

In the next couple of days he went through the whole ship's roster and listed those men that had the L.D.S. preference on their dog tags. There were only five with Lars and I as two of them. One was an active member from Salt Lake City. Of the two others who claimed membership, one had just been baptized while in the navy and the other who probably would have been no credit to any church, never participated with us. We held meetings every Sunday in the Library which was also the Chaplain's office. Later on, the fellow that had been baptized while in the navy withdrew from us. I think he received a letter from a priest or a pastor from his previous church. There were usually four of us and occasionally one or two visitors in attendance at our meetings, which we held on Sunday afternoons, since the Chaplain had his meetings for the whole crew in the mornings. The active L.D.S. member from Salt Lake City was William Lehnherr. We asked him to be the

secretary for our group. The Chaplain used part of the chow hall for his services and quite often he had not many more than we had, and almost all of the time we L.D.S. men joined with him. He had some good meetings and good advice but most of the crew would not come to services unless we were in battle zones or in extreme danger. Then, there was not room enough for everybody. This was especially true if we were at battle stations where all those that could would attend services in the bow of the ship out on deck. When the Chaplain held his meetings there, every sailor who possibly could would attend. It was very revealing to see the change in the sailors attitudes when they were in extreme danger compared to when things were peaceful and there was no danger.

During most of April 1944 we were off the coast west of Los Angeles, training navy air squadrons, teaching the pilots to take off and land in very rough water, which it was there.

Our Captain Goodwin was not a man to be content in a peaceful area. He wanted to be out where the action was. After a month of training air squadrons off the west coast, he was called to take us out to another duty. We left San Diego about the first of May and sailed for Pearl Harbor. We spent a month there conducting maneuvers and training, always training the men. Our pilots were taking off and landing with loads and empty. The gunners were training all the time, the captain having arranged for a plane to fly overhead towing a large balloon for the gunners to shoot at. These practices turned out to be very practical and profitable when we did get into battle.



6

The War - Rest - Change of Command

We left Pearl Harbor the 31st of May for the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. This was a rendezvous for the ships that were going in for the landings on Saipan in the Marianas Islands. D-day for Saipan was June 15, 1944. That is when our forces landed on its beach. We on this escort carrier were several miles out to sea, with our planes being used for antiaircraft patrol and antisubmarine patrol.

We got along very well the first two days, but on the second night, the 17th, three Japanese planes got through our fighter defenses and zeroed in on our ship, though there were six baby carriers in our unit. All three dropped bombs and all three were near misses. Some of them even splashed water into our gun tubs where our antiaircraft gunners

were. Our gunners shot down two of these first three planes. The next evening before sundown, when there were scattered clouds in the sky, the Japanese pilots stayed behind the clouds until they got as close as possible. When they came into sight they were lined up as directly as possible with the sun, so our gunners had the sun in their eyes. They did not shoot until the Japanese planes were more overhead and the sun was no longer a hazard. This evening they shot down two more Japanese planes and our aircraft fighter pilots shot down two. We had a good score going for us. One of the Japanese bombers went the full length of our flight deck with his bomb bay open, but his bomb did not release. One of their tail gunners, while passing our fantail, fired from his plane and a projectile ricocheted off of our equipment there hitting one of our men in the leg and causing a flesh wound. That was the only casualty I heard of during those three days.

The Japanese were well entrenched on Saipan, making good use of the rock caves and other hiding facilities. It took the Marines and the navy nearly three weeks to secure the island. Then our fleet withdrew and went back to Eniwetok in the Marshall Islands. We rendezvoused there for an attack on Tinian, another of the Marianas Islands not far from Saipan. D-day for Tinian was July 24. By the end of July, Tinian was secured and we moved on to Guam and became engaged in battle from August 1st to the 4th. Then, retiring from Guam, we went back to Eniwetok. We were under air attack almost every day during our campaigns on the above three islands. We really should have been sunk several times, but our Captain and the navigation people were so adept at handling the ship in battle that it was uncanny. I have been told

that the way they do this is that every time a bomb makes a splash you steer into the splash so the next one that comes in, having been adjusted to hit the ship, will hit the water on the other side. By clever steering and maneuvering of the ship, our Captain and crew were able to save us several times from serious hits.

Soon after the Gambier Bay got underway for the shakedown cruise and the various training exercises, it became apparent that Chris and I were on duty 24 hours a day. Either he or I or both had to be in the radar shack practically all of the time. We received permission to have our bunks located in the rear room of the radar compartment. They were mounted on the bulkhead so we could fold them up out of the way in the day time and let them down for sleeping at night.

During those early times, before we left Pearl Harbor for the battle area, Chris was called up to the bridge two or three times to make adjustments on the remote radar screen. Apparently he was able to handle it alright, as I never heard of any complaint. Lars Anderson was a radar operator, and had to bunk below decks with all the other sailors but his battle station was to operate one of the radars in the radar shack. During the times of danger he was in the radar shack with Chris and me and several other Radar Operators. The last day or two of May in 1944 it became obvious to most of the crew that we were setting sail for a combat area because of the supplies and equipment that were being loaded onto the ship. Chris and I decided that we would like a little extra treat to take along with us so we bought a case of 48 small cans of tomato juice and brought it aboard just a day or two before we left Pearl Harbor. We also bought a large pineapple which turned out to be

too tart to be palatable. Between us and some of the radar operators we ate it all anyway.

Each morning we had General Quarters, which began about one hour before sunup and lasted until about one half hour after sunup. During the General Quarters I soaked a little duffel bag in water and put in a couple cans of tomato juice, then hung it on a hook in the passageway just outside of our hatch. As we launched our anti-aircraft and anti-submarine planes we sailed into the wind. With the speed of the ship this created quite a breeze, and the cooling effect with evaporation on the wet duffel bag gave us a nice cool can of tomato juice for breakfast, which was always right after General Quarters. Our tomato juice was the envy of a lot of men though none of them ever tried to steal anything from us.

While underway, Chris and I usually had a lot of time to use as we desired. Our radar officer, Bill Cuming, came aboard the first time we arrived at the Hawaiian Islands, after having taken the radar training course for officers there. Bill, like Chris, was a very scientific minded bright young man. Bill was about 25 and a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a major in Chemical Engineering. He had been sent by the navy to their school in Honolulu to train for radar. He was one of the sharpest mathematicians I have ever seen. He was familiar with the Einstein Theory and could talk with you in that language very fluently. Bill always said that he was excess baggage aboard the Gambier Bay because Chris was sharp enough to know all the things that were needed. With Chris and I working together, we were able to keep our gear in top shape. Bill spent his time with us

when we were at battle stations during General Quarters and chatted with us and checked to see how everything was going. The three of us had a very interesting and compatible relationship in our assignments. I understand that after World War II ended, Bill Cuming and the partner that went in business with him did extensive research and development in the solid state circuits that eventually virtually did away with radio tubes and that they had a successful business throughout the United States.

By the time we had left Pearl Harbor at the end of May, I had a severe case of athlete's foot in my right foot. The navy called it Jungle Rot. My foot became infected and my ankle badly swollen. It began to look like a critical situation. Early in the Saipan campaign the ship's doctor ordered me into sick bay (the ship's hospital) where I remained for three days. They hung my foot in the air and the pharmacists mates were instructed to keep the wrapping on it cold with cold water applications every few hours. They performed the cold water therapy when I first arrived in sick bay, but there was never any more cold water or dressing change while I was there. By having my foot elevated in the air and my toes bare, my foot got much better and the swelling went down quite a bit. I was concerned about being in the sick bay for two of the days we were in the Saipan campaign. Sick bay was down below the water line and I surely did not want to be down there if we were sunk. I was the only patient in there. The two pharmacists mates were always coming and going. The doctor did not come in during the three days I was there.

One of the mates was rather green. I knew how to control my pulse

rate a little by the way I breathed. I would relax so my pulse rate would be slower than its normal slow, between 65 and 68. Once when this kid came to take my pulse, I took a deep breath and exhaled very slowly as he took my pulse. He shook his head and tried it again. He went away and the regular pharmacist mate came in and took the young man over to the corner where I heard the latter whisper that my rate was only 52. The pharmacist mate told him he was crazy. The young man insisted and told the mate to, "Go and take it yourself." I pulled the same stunt on him. He went back to the desk, and the young man asked him what they should do and what they should put down on my chart. The pharmacist mate said that my pulse could not be 52 and they should put down 72. I could hear every word. I was released soon after that, because my temperature was normal and the swelling was going down. The criteria in the navy seemed to be that if your pulse rate and temperature were normal you were fit for duty. I had to keep going back to see the doctor every day and soak my foot in a solution for 30 minutes. The swelling continued to decrease and the sores between the toes were healing very slowly, but one day the doctor said he was not satisfied with my progress. He changed the solution I had been soaking my foot in to salicylic acid. I continued to soak it every day for a half hour, and it began to swell again. The toes got so swollen that the doctor could not even get them apart to swab between them.

One Sunday morning I went in for the usual treatment and the doctor was not there. A warrant officer was in charge of the patients that day. When he saw my foot, he asked me how it was being treated. After I told him, he said it was a big mistake, because my infection was not

caused by athletes foot but by over treatment. He told me to use my bucket that I had for doing laundry in, and to fill it with plain, regular temperature water and to soak my foot every chance I had, and to cut the toe part out of my shoe so I could get air circulation through my socks and, "Whatever else you do, don't come down here again." If it had not been for that one doctor that Sunday the regular doctor would have amputated my foot or so he had indicated. From that day on the swelling began to go down, and eventually I was completely over that seige of jungle rot.

The sky search radar had what was called a bed spring antenna. It was a large antenna, probably not as heavy as it looked. I estimate it was about 15 feet across and 7 or 8 feet in height, with a net work of small antennas poised for maximum efficiency for its wave length. This antenna was rotated by a motor located just below it, near the top of the mast. One time the motor stalled, stopping the antenna. I climbed up to it and removed the plate on the motor housing. The internal brakes were on, activated by magnetism. I never understood just what was wrong or how I fixed it, but I got something to pry with and pried the brakes loose after which they worked fine.

That alerted us to the fact that sometime in battle there may be damage to the power line that went to the antenna motor or there may be damage to the electric supply. Chris and I built a battery power supply that could turn the antenna in case the regular power supply failed. Chris was the engineer for that. We did have a battery supply for the ship in case its power supply went out. It consisted of a bank of large batteries which it was our responsibility to keep charged at

all times, and we had constant access to them. If the ship's power went off, the radar itself would be out, but if the power line to the antenna was disrupted we could use the little auxiliary supply we had built and still turn the antenna.

Our ground search antenna, called GS, was of a different type. The GS was only for line of sight on the ocean level and the antenna did not require the intricate detail of the sky search. It looked like an old time automobile fender in the shape of an arc. It was between 4 and 5 feet long and just over one foot high. It was also rotated by a motor in a housing. The flight deck on this carrier was about 45 feet above the water level and it was about 60 feet to the top of the mast where the GS antenna was. There was a small platform one foot by one and a half feet to stand on while working up there on that equipment. One day while underway, I went up to work on the GS antenna motor. The sea was so rough it was really enchanting because as the ship swayed from one side to the other, I would be out above the water on the starboard side then swing back to where I was over the water on the port side. The flight deck was 80 feet wide so I was taking quite a ride. I did get the motor working so we only lost a few minutes' time.

One day while anchored we checked and found the lubricating oil was all gone in the mechanism which turned the large antenna and there was not a way provided to replenish that oil. I found that no oil was the trouble by using a piece of wire and running it down through about three feet of tubing in a narrow hole. We never knew when or how we lost that oil. There was no sign of leakage anywhere and it may be that we were lucky in getting by that long without oil and receiving no damage.



There was no opening to add oil other than the little hole on the top and I had no funnel or anything small enough to insert into that hole. I went to the machine shop on the hanger deck, close to the fantail, and scrounged through some of the discarded tin. There was a piece 14 to 16 inches long which I curved into a spiral with a tiny hole at the bottom and a larger hole at the top, thus making a slender funnel. At the top of the mast again, I had my home made funnel stuck in the little hole at the top of the motor. Bill Cuming, the radar officer, climbed the ladder to see what I was doing. After I explained everything to him, he said, "Bagley, that's what is winning this war - Yankee ingenuity." After that we had no more trouble with the antenna. It may have been the lack of oil that caused the brakes to bind earlier, though I can not see how the two conditions could have been related.

It has been inferred that Chris and I kept our gear operating as efficiently as possible under the circumstances. One day a very unusual thing happened. Our SK Radar picked up a bogey plane 175 miles away. The operator reported it to Combat Information Center, from where it was relayed to the Admiral's ship. Of course we were crazy. No radar was ever designed for that kind of distance. However, our operator tracked that plane for more than half an hour until it finally appeared on the screens of the Admiral's and other radars in our task unit.

The next two days we had technicians from the flagship aboard the Gambier Bay to study our system and take readings on our equipment. Chris was at his best, but we never knew what set of freak circumstances bounced an echo off of that bogey plane onto our antenna from that distance.

Earlier in my navy experience I had witnessed a lot of lazy sailors. It seemed like the contest was to see how much one could get out of doing rather than to see how much he could accomplish. Ever since I had been in the navy I thought I should write a poem about lazy sailors. One morning while we were at General Quarters during the Saipan invasion, while Chris and Bill Cuming sat with their chins in their hands, I finally wrote my poem, "The Song of the Lazy Sailor," as recorded here:

The Song of the Lazy Sailor  
by Earl E. Bagley

There's no sense cleaning this gun today,  
While the enemy's so far away.  
I think I'll sit here in the breeze  
And dream of home and big shade trees.  
There'll be plenty of time to clean the gun  
Before I see a Jap or Hun.  
Besides, it's hot, and I'm no fool.  
This work should be done while it's cool.  
Could be, if I put it off today,  
Our second class may pass this way  
And clean it up before night fall.  
Then I wouldn't have to worry at all.  
It's folks like him that fool themselves  
By working away like little elves.  
They're always tired and sweaty and sore,  
Just so the Chief will like them more.  
But wait until the big event,  
When all those gobs are fagged and spent;  
I'll be fresh and full of pep  
And maybe build myself a rep.  
If I save the ship and all these guys,  
It may help to put them wise  
To how unreasonable they are with me,  
When all in the world I want to be  
Is let alone so I can rest  
And thereby serve my country best.

I originally wrote this in a continuous essay, disregarding the rhyming lines, thinking it would emphasize the lazy theme. At the end

of General Quarters I showed it to Bill Cuming and he said, "Oh, Bagley, that's great! Let me take that to Chaplain Carlson. He can put it in poetry form." In the next issue of the ship's paper, titled "Full Throttle", this poem was on the front page.

Guam Island was declared secure as far as our participation in the invasion was concerned on the 4th of August 1944, and we left that very afternoon for Eniwetok in the Marshalls. . Rumor was that we were going to Eniwetok to take on some supplies and stores that were needed, but when we arrived each sailor was going to be given a chit (coupon) for two cans of beer and two ice cream cones. This was the first time in my navy career that I had heard of beer or any other alcoholic beverage, being authorized for the navy personnel. But it seemed to be common knowledge and everybody was depending on it. Quite frequently in the evenings, the radar operators gathered in the radar shack with Chris and I just for visiting and talking. Sometimes I played harmonica for them. We just had general visits. The night we knew about the chits for beer and ice cream was very exciting. They knew I didn't drink beer so some of them began making me offers. At first it was an even trade, ice cream chits for beer chits. However, it soon became like a public auction. They were bidding up to some rather atrocious figures. Finally, Chris said he would put an end to it all by giving me 10 dollars a can for my beer. I said, "Well, Chris, that stuff's not good for me. I wouldn't drink it myself. If it's not good for me, I surely wouldn't sell it to my friends to drink at any price." That ended the clamor for beer chits that night.

We got to Eniwetok and there was no beer. We did have a surprise,

though. We were not to stay there. We were to take on supplies and head south across the equator. The ship anchored out quite a ways from the dock at Eniwetok. I don't know why, but I went in a boat with some men after supplies. I was to get some radar tubes and other radio materials that we needed. As we were going across the water, about an hour's ride each way, I observed the ocean and formulated in my mind some of the things I wanted to remember about it. When I returned to the ship, Chris was taking a nap. While he was asleep, and while it was still fresh on my mind, I wrote down my thinking about the ocean. We were in comparatively calm water. When Chris awoke I read to him the description I had written. He thought it was great and said that as poetry it would really be something. I thought that if it would make that much difference I would try. I wrote it in poetry which took another couple of hours. I would like to record it here.

### Ocean

by Earl E. Bagley

Oh vast, formidable expanse  
 Who's surface does a constant dance,  
 How oft I try intent to see  
 Beyond thy far extremity;  
 But graciously you bend away  
 As if to lead my thoughts astray,  
 Enfolding secrets undeduced  
 Like a mother hen who clucks her chicks to roost.

How oft I wish these mortal eyes  
 Could penetrate thy deep disguise  
 And know the mysteries hidden there  
 That men have tried so long to bare;  
 But with deliberate ease you bend  
 The rays of light and thus defend  
 Your range of unknown life supported.  
 Revealed are only shallow things and they distorted.

The faulty reasoning of man

Can't calculate beyond thy ban.  
As vast and deep as life thou art;  
Unread as any woman's heart.  
With only axioms disclosed,  
Majestically you lie reposed.  
With thee fathomed on my shelf  
I could fathom even life itself.

The next morning after picking up those few supplies we were underway again. The word was passed that we were going to the New Hebrides Islands. Of course, in order to get to the New Hebrides Islands we had to cross the equator. In the navy, crossing the equator for the first time was a big event. Anyone who has never been across the equator is a Polliwog. Those who have crossed previously are Shellbacks. There was always the tradition that the Polliwogs had to be initiated to become Shellbacks. This was one of the most strenuous initiations I think that people could endure and the perpetrators could get by with and not be prosecuted. The Shellbacks began a few days before we even got to the equator trying to make a hardship on the Polliwogs but the Polliwogs outnumbered them about 20 to 1. One day the Shellbacks got the fire hose out and started washing some of the Polliwogs down the deck with it. The water pressure was sufficient to knock a man down and slide him along the deck. There were enough Polliwogs who thought this was cruel and unfair treatment that they rebelled. They took the hose away from the Shellbacks and turned the tide, so to speak. In the fracas, one of the planes on deck got hosed and the Captain declared a moratorium on this preliminary initiation and said there would be no further actions until the day of crossing the equator.

Some rather silly things went on. Some of the officers had to

serve chow in the enlisted men's chow line. The officer of the deck was a Polliwog. He had to wear his pea coat (equivalent to a heavy winter coat) all day on the deck during his watch. It was required that he be the 'equator watch' and watch in all directions with his hand shading his eyes looking for the equator.

A Shellback supposedly reported to the captain that the ship had a starboard list. The captain asked what caused it. He answered that it was because there was more water on the port side than on the starboard side. The captain asked what should be done about it. The Shellback suggested forming a bucket brigade of Polliwogs to pass water from the port side to the starboard side to level it off. That was authorized and a selected group of Polliwogs were assigned to dip water with a bucket from the port side and pass it along the bucket brigade across the fantail and dump it back into the ocean on the starboard side. Things like that were not too difficult and had a little humor to them. Where the real trial came was on the flight deck where the Shellbacks now had control of the fire hoses. They had every kind of an instrument they could make that was not a lethal weapon. Some of them had things as soft as cloth tubes stuffed with pillows or cloth. Many had harder objects in them, though. The Polliwogs had to run down the deck that was slick with water, with the fire hose at their backs. The Shellbacks lined up on both sides with the clubs they had made and tried to beat the runners to their knees.

One of the ordeals was for the Polliwogs to crawl through a target sleeve that was similar to a balloon about two and a half feet in diameter, for about 40 feet, being beaten the whole time by the

Shellbacks. A few of the fellows went to sick bay with injuries.

The Shellbacks had a King Neptune on a throne, and anytime a Polliwog did anything they could conjure up a fine or a penalty for, they took him to King Neptune, who pronounced a sentence. There were various sentences and almost every Polliwog had this opportunity. They put the polliwog in the guillotine with his head and arms secure then poured paint over his head and/or clothing. Then took him out, laid him on a bench they had made for the purpose, and painted whatever they had missed. It was not so much the paint that did the damage but the slipperiness of it. When one got up and tried to run through their lines it was awfully hard to stay on his feet. If he got knocked down he was in bad trouble.

They had run the forward elevator on the flight deck down about ten feet and built a canvas vat on it. This vat originally was filled with salt water and ships garbage to about four feet deep but after a little while all of the paint deposited made it a slippery, slimy mess. Right at the edge of the elevator shaft on the flight deck there was a high chair. Where they got all these things I do not know, but every Polliwog had to sit in that chair and take his turn with the barber. The barber ran the clippers up, either from the forehead to the back of the neck, or cross ways or both and in some cases clipped all the hair off. When he had finished one Shellback on each side gave the chair a flip forward sending the Polliwog down into the mixture of muck and paint. There was a ladder in one corner to climb up and get out, but as soon as you were on deck, Shellbacks were lined up to beat the tar out of you. You had to run but your feet were so slimy and slick it was

impossible to get through without falling down a few times. It was a merciless initiation. Somehow or other all the Polliwogs survived, and when we were through with it, we were real Shellbacks. That all happened on the 13th day of August 1944, a Sunday. We crossed the equator at longitude 160 degrees, 21 min. and 30 seconds east at 1602 hours (4:02 p. m.)

The Gambier Bay proceeded on to Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides Islands, where it arrived about the 18th of August. During these few days that we were en route there, I decided to write a poem to my wife, knowing that she would have reason to be worried and not knowing what was going on. Of course, people back in the States were not supposed to know anything that was going on or where anyone was out in the war zones. It seemed that some of the people knew about it, as did some of the news media from other countries. There was a gal called Tokyo Rose who gave daily broadcasts from Japan. She seemed to know every move we made. We, however, were not allowed through our correspondence to let anybody know where we were or what was happening. So I decided to write this poem to Alice, and I will record it here. This was written on the 15 of August 1944.

Together

by Earl E. Bagley

The big easy chair in the parlor  
Is vacant tonight and so  
You're saying a prayer for my safety,  
God's blessings wherever I go.  
You're standing there drying the dishes.  
The children are having their fun,  
Then one of them screams bloody murder.  
You drop the dish towel and run.  
I see every line in your forehead.



Your eyes register passionate fear  
Til you reach the scene of commotion.  
It was nothing dreadful, my Dear.  
The screams now are changing to laughter.  
Relief is so great you can't scold,  
So you sigh and turn back to the kitchen  
Mumbling something about making you old.  
Returning you pass through the parlor  
Right by the big easy chair.  
There's an ache in your heart for an instant.  
You recall how I used to sit there  
And spend so much time with my paper,  
Perusing its every content  
While the children played tag all around me  
Til finally the evening was spent.  
The children still play on the big chair.  
They climb up and ride on the arm  
As off for a trip into play land  
A threesome procession they form.  
It all is so plain, I imagine  
They are falling down onto my knees.  
Someone must pay for the damage,  
So I grab little Bonnie and squeeze.  
After 10 happy years spent together,  
Sharing our problems and joys,  
Up and down with the fevers of children,  
Stumbling over their myriads of toys,  
This one little brake can not end it.  
I spend as much time there as here.  
United we still work together.  
I hope I can help you, my Dear.  
Yes the big easy chair in the parlor  
Is vacant tonight, but still,  
I am there by your side, love, in spirit.  
And be there I always will.

We were anchored a few miles out of Espiritu Santo for one week and, as I remember, we had all the liberty we wanted. At least two of three days we were able to go ashore in the afternoon, if we wanted to. We had to go in boats, and it was quite a unique experience. Espiritu Santo had been conquered by the Japanese in the early part of the war. Later the Americans and the Australians, I presume, had been able to recover it. In the process, whoever had been there had a real sense of humor. They had designated different spots around the island as world

famous areas. There were markers identifying Long Beach, Waikiki Beach, Orange Beach, New Florida Beach -- all of the famous beaches in the world with signs sticking up out of the water just off shore. The only problem with those beaches was that they were full of sharp coral. There was no sand anywhere on any of them, just rocky coral. Sometimes the water was deep enough to swim in but you could never tell when you were going to jab your knee on a piece of coral just below the surface. The navy, or someone, had at least scooped out on the shore a swimming pool that did have some sand around it. I hardly ever saw anyone swim in it.

This was the first time in my life that I had been to a place that had a jungle like this. Right down to the water line the jungle seemed to be in control. It was fascinating to me, and I could hardly wait until I could penetrate the jungle to check around and see what I could find. The foliage was very dense with many giant trees and vines and all types of plant life. After wandering around a while, inspecting the various beaches, I went into the jungle and explored for quite a while. There were many of the most beautiful, small green lizards. They were a brilliant bright green color with tongues as red as fire lashing out all the time. They were very interesting creatures averaging about six to eight inches long. As I worked farther into the jungle, I was aware of some kind of music that sounded between singing and whistling but I could not determine which direction it came from. Each time I turned my head to listen, it sounded like it was coming from that direction. Finally I pinpointed one sound coming from one direction. Cautiously I kept going toward it, trying to not lose the direction. I soon

thought I was getting very close and should be able to see what was making the noise. It might be a bird on my right. I turned to look and within eight inches of my face was a spider web with an orange and tan spider spread out in it. Including his legs, he was about 4 inches long and 2 inches across. His body was quite slender, maybe a half inch across and about 3 inches long. My face was practically in that spider web. I was eye balling the inhabitant at about six inches. I guess I will never cease to be mystified by the harmonies of nature. I don't know whether there were 10 spiders or 100 that were in harmony but it sounded like only one sound. There was only one tone and it came from all directions.

I spent considerable time, while in Espiritu Santo, digging in the sand for sea shells. I was able to find enough shells the same size, color, and shape to make a choker type necklace for my wife, which she still has somewhere to this day. That was about the only thing I saved of the shells I found. I did try a coconut or two. They were very good. The jungle is so profuse and there were many of these large trees that I still do not know the names of. One variety has large leaves like elephant ears. I thought that I could take one of those large leaves back to the ship with me and find some way to press it and keep it until I got home. Just before leaving the island to go back to the ship, I chose a really nice one. But things in the tropics are different than I was used to. By the time I got back to the ship with the leaf, probably not more than an hour later, it had dried out and crumbled away.

Since I mentioned something about the ice cream and beer, I must

not forget to tell that the lines were long. By the time I could get an ice cream cone in that climate, I could hardly get it to my mouth before it had practically melted away. It was awfully good ice cream but consuming it was more like slurping it out of the cone than eating it. These lines were on shore, in the hot sun.

When this liberty time (vacation) was over and we were heading back north, I asked Chris what happened. I had not seen him in the beer line. He said, "Well, after you talked to me I decided I had gotten along without any alcohol for this long, I could get along without any the rest of my life." That made me feel really good. During the time we were in the navy I never saw Chris drink any alcoholic beverages, but we never had a liberty together off the ship again because one of us was supposed to be aboard the ship at all times.

Captain Hugh Goodwin had the reputation for being a very hard man, having little more compassion for his men than for the equipment they operated. The day after we anchored outside of Espiritu Santo, Captain Goodwin was transferred off the ship. He had received a promotion. Two days later a new captain, Captain W.V.R. Vieweg, came aboard. We called him "Bowser," a name that had been assigned to him previously. As for empathy and consideration of the men, he was just the opposite of Captain Goodwin. Our new captain was always considerate and willing to listen. He made a big hit with the crew when he came into the regular enlisted men's chow hall and ate with us to sample the food. All the time he was captain his intentions were to make things as nice for the crew as he could. Four or five days after Captain Vieweg came aboard we sailed toward the New Florida Islands going north again.

We anchored off the Island of Tulagi. In many ways this was like Espiritu Santo. It was not nearly as large but similar conditions existed there. The Sea Bees of the U.S. Navy (the construction people) had been in there and set up one or two facilities. Again we could have ice cream and beer. We were at this anchorage approximately two weeks. During that time I continued digging for shells when on liberty. I found what we call a cat's eye, a real treasured shell. I later made a setting with this cat's eye for a ring I made and sent to our son, Dean.

Here is an interesting thing I remember about Tulagi island: A native that came from a nearby island into our recreation area could speak a little English. This fellow had his hair reinforced with some kind of grease or oil, so that it stood straight up. It was shaped like a shock of wheat, tied near the top with a string. The ends stuck up above the string at an angle. We asked what was the significance of his hairdo. He said it meant he was eligible, unmarried, and when he got married he could let his hair go normal but until then he had to have it up in this dirwa. Some of the sailors questioned him about what he thought of the people from the different nations. He was not very enthused about the people from France or England but when asked about the people from the United States he just could not say enough good about them because they had liberated him from the Japanese. He was very appreciative of the United States.

On September 8th, we left Tulagi and sailed straight to the Palau Islands, arriving the 14th of September. The next day was D-day for Pelelieu, one of the southern most islands. We were not as involved in

this campaign as much as others although we did have enemy aircraft to contend with. Our air squadron had a really busy schedule during this invasion. Our planes were involved, but the ship did not seem to be in much danger. A few days after the invasion of Pelelieu, Anguar, another one of those islands, was invaded. On the 22nd our planes made a flight over the Island of Yap while the marines landed there. No resistance was encountered. The next day they made a pass over Ulithi and found no resistance there. The Gambier Bay did make the route and go to Yap and Ulithi. On the 25th of September we left for Hollandia, a port in Humboldt Bay in New Guinea, just a few degrees south of the equator. We arrived 3 days later but stayed only about a day. Then we sailed for the Admiralty Islands, to the Island of Manus, arriving on October 1st.

One afternoon when I was alone in our storage and sleeping compartment of the radar shack, a valve in a pipe in the overhead suddenly opened and spurted out black oil that barely missed my head, but splattered the mattress cover of my bunk. The incident coincided with the sound of a plane hitting the cable barrier directly above on the flight deck. However, the spray had never happened before. In fact, I had never noticed the valve before. I reached up between the beams and closed it. In a few minutes I heard another plane hit the barrier. Immediately afterwards I was confronted by an officer who wanted to know why that valve was closed. I showed him what it had done to my bedding and explained that it had never been open before. He was very upset as he emphasized that it had to be open for the safety of planes that were not stopped by their grab hooks catching the first cables on the flight deck as they landed. He reached up and opened the

valve and ordered me to not close it again. Just then another plane hit the cable, and he got the full shot of dirty oil on the side of his face. It ran down his neck and his whole right side.

I got a piece of cloth for him to clean up with, as much as possible. He reached up and closed the valve and stomped out. "I guess it all depends on who it happens to," I said (to myself). I don't know how they got along with that valve closed, but no one ever bothered it again and I never heard of it causing a crash.

The story of this ship, the Gambier Bay, and the involvement of its squadron in all of the battles I have mentioned is told in really interesting detail in a book entitled, The Men of the Gambier Bay, written by Edwin P. Hoyt. He is a famous war historian.

We were anchored out of Manus Island for about two weeks. We had some liberty ashore with a place to swim and to dig for sea shells. While here, on October 5th, I wrote this poem on composing. Chris was in the process of writing a poem and as I watched him I got the idea for this one. When he finished, I read his while he read mine.

### Composing

by Earl E. Bagley

I like to watch the poet meditate and muse.  
His vacant stare, I am aware, will likely blow a fuse.  
It's fun to watch his forehead wrinkle and settle down.  
His searching eyes, I just surmise, are scanning the next town.

At last he has a rhymed. Down on the pad it goes.  
And then I see for sure that he's alive from head to toes.  
His eyes now have a sparkle. They scan a higher plain.  
He thinks awhile upon the style and then turns to again.

The process is repeated. His fingers comb his hair.  
A squinted eye, a noble try, the right word just ain't there.  
The strain must be terrific, and then, when he is through,

He learns his mind left far behind what it started out to do.

Besides reading and writing poetry and descriptions during our free time, Chris and I frequently indulged in a game of chess. We kept score, and I was surprised at how even we were over the several months period. Once, in a several weeks period, I won 21 consecutive games. During the next two months, Chris won over 20 consecutive games. In spite of such lopsided scores over long periods of time, the overall totals were amazingly close.



7

History's Greatest Naval Battle --- Leyte Gulf

While we were at Manus Island the ship was taking on supplies and getting necessary repair work done on all equipment and the planes. In the afternoon of October 12th we left Manus harbor heading northwest. It became evident that something really big was going to happen. Literally hundreds of ships moved out, and as we got out to sea, as far as the eye could see the ocean was covered with ships, a gigantic flotilla. We heard on the radio that night from Tokyo Rose in Japan that the United States was on its way to invade the Philippine Islands. There were 18 baby flat tops (escort carriers) and several destroyers and destroyer escorts in this armada that were as a separate unit under the direction of Admiral Clifton Sprague. His flagship was the Fanshaw

Bay, one of the escort carriers.

Early in the war with Japan, General Douglas MacArthur was able to escape from the Philippine Islands. He made the Philippine people a promise, "I shall return." On October 20, 1944 General Douglas MacArthur returned with an invasion force and moved in on the Island of Leyte on the eastern part of the Philippines. For that invasion the Gambier Bay and seventeen sister ships were there to provide combat air patrol and antisubmarine patrol as we had done on the other islands. The 18 baby flat tops and the destroyers and destroyer escorts that were assigned to accompany them took positions. They were divided into three task forces stationed east of Samar and Leyte of the Philippine Islands. From there they conducted their protective assignments.

There were 6 baby carriers in each unit, escorted by destroyers and destroyer escorts. In our unit we had 3 destroyers and 4 destroyer escorts. We more or less just patrolled off shore 40 to 60 miles east of the coast line of Samar Island. For identification as task units they called them Taffy I, Taffy II, and Taffy III. We were Taffy III and stationed the furthest north. Sometimes there were 60 miles between the different units.

During the two or three days at the beginning of the invasion, an estimated 100,000 soldiers were landed on Leyte Island. The Japanese knew we were coming but they were just a few days late in making their preparations, mainly because they did not know exactly where the landings were going to be. As far as we men on the Gambier Bay were concerned the first three or four days after the landings were about

like we had experienced at Saipan. On October 24th the Japanese Navy began to move in according to their plans, coming in from the west side of the Philippines. I will not go into much detail on this. There have been two very interesting books written on this battle for Leyte Gulf. One book is entitled, The Battle for Leyte Gulf, the Death Knell of the Japanese Navy. The other book is The Men of the Gambier Bay. Both give a lot of detail on the battle, the strategies, and the different phases that went on for the next five days. Both were written by Edwin P. Hoyt.

When the Japanese moved in on the 24th, the battle between the navies was some 60 to 80 miles south of our task unit. Our officers apparently knew it was going on, but no information about it was given to the crew at that time.

On the morning of October 25th before daylight at 4:30 a.m. we were called to General Quarters and required to launch all of our fighter planes to help head the Japanese fleet out of the straits. I assume this was the Surigao Straits where the battle was taking place. Our planes and all the other planes of the escort carriers were commanded to take flight and assist in the battle that was going on. After daylight, some of our planes returned. We were secured from General Quarters about 6:30 a.m. In about 15 minutes, one of the pilots from another unit who was still in the air, spotted a Japanese fleet coming down through the San Bernardino Straits to the north of us and heading east. They had spotted us before we spotted them. We went back into General Quarters. It was 0645. Our radars picked up these ships that were now in our line of sight. Soon the watch on our bridge saw some

masts of Japanese ships north of us about 20 miles. This Japanese force had 4 large battleships, one being the Yamato which was the largest battleship that has ever been built even to this time. It was capable of firing 18 inch projectiles. The other ships could fire between 5 and 16 inch salvos. The cruisers fired mostly 8 inch shells which seemed to be the most explosive and did the most damage.

Seeing each other was quite a surprise both to us and the Japanese Admiral Kurita. This particular section of the Japanese Fleet had come through the strait with the idea of going south and into Leyte Gulf, where MacArthur had just gained a good foothold, and wiping him out. They did expect that our big American Third Fleet with "Bull" Halsey, would be out there somewhere and they expected an engagement with him. We also expected Bull Halsey to be out there because he had been sitting out there in sight the last four days with his big carriers, battleships, and cruisers as our protection. When the Japanese saw our little escort carriers, the 6 of us and the 7 destroyers and destroyer escorts, they assumed that we were the United States Third Fleet. They reported us as large carriers and battleships as they engaged in battle with us.

It was a stormy, misty day and visibility was not great, but the Japanese had definitely spotted us. The big ship, the Yamato, began firing at us when they were 18 1/2 miles away. Of course their cruisers and the destroyers got into formation making two columns of war ships and headed for us. Their ships had a top speed of over 30 knots. Our baby flat tops had a top speed of about 17 knots. We had no choice but to run. Each of our carriers had only one 5 inch gun mounted on the

fantail. Each destroyer had five 5 inch guns and each destroyer escort had one 5 inch gun, but they also had torpedoes that they could launch at the Japanese ships. In addition they had smaller caliber guns that they used in close battle.

We began a zigzag course going generally southwest. But we had no place to go. We could not go into Leyte Gulf, and draw the big warships of the Japanese Fleet in there. We would be cornered and they would then be in a position to wipe out General MacArthur and the gains he had made. As a result all we could do was stay out to sea as much as possible. We launched as many planes as we could before turning to run. In running, we were going with the wind, and we could not launch or receive planes. The enemy gained rapidly but not as rapidly as we thought they would. Apparently their radar was not as good as ours. Rather than tracking us with radar they appeared to be following the wakes of our ships. As they closed, their cruisers and destroyers began firing on us. Our destroyers and carriers laid down as much of a smoke screen as they could. It was pretty effective except the Gambier Bay was on the windward side, and the smoke blew off, leaving us vulnerable.

As the Japanese came dangerously close, having made damaging hits on most of the ships, our destroyers and destroyer escorts began an attack on them. They were no match for the enemy but our three regular destroyers and one destroyer escort actually made suicide runs on those big ships. Run after run they launched torpedoes and did a great deal of damage. Their 5 inch guns were on an electronic system by which they could be fired rapidly. Our Gambier Bay gunners fired our 5 inchers a

few times, since we were going away and our gun was mounted on the fantail. We made at least two hits on a Japanese cruiser, but were advised to cease firing, as our active gun was drawing enemy fire. Unfortunately our little guns would not penetrate very much armor on those large ships. They did start some fires, however.

We avoided taking any hits for over half an hour by the ability of our captain and the steering crew to dodge the salvos as they came. The theory here is just as it was in previous battles with the aircraft dropping bombs. Wait a certain time then turn into the splash that was just made so the next splash would be on the other side of the bow. This worked with the enemy ships. Their salvos were color coded. Some made white splashes, some pink, green, or yellow. They could tell by the color of the splashes whether their shells were landing long or short. As they adjusted their range, we steered the ship into the last splashes. I stood on the catwalk off the radar shack and watched this going on for what seemed about 10 minutes. I could have dived into a splash from one of those shells at almost any instant, they were so close to the ship and yet not close enough to do any real damage.

Finally we took a hit on the flight deck that caused some fires. It was fairly close to the bridge. Some of the damage of the fire went through the flight deck and down to the hanger deck killing several men. Three Japanese cruisers were closing on our port. Destroyers and a battleship were moving up from the starboard. An explosion from a near miss knocked out our forward engine room. That cut our speed to 11 knots. Then we began to fall behind the other carriers. A few minutes later our steering was damaged and we were locked in a circle until the

after engine room was knocked out. Then we were dead in the water. Two Japanese cruisers and a battleship closed on us and held target practice on the Gambier Bay until it was completely out of sight. Our destroyers and escorts did a wonderful job in trying to separate the Japanese force of about 25 warships from us. They were going in by pairs or one at a time toward the giant Japanese ships, trying to do as much damage as possible. Eventually two destroyers and one of our destroyer escorts were blasted out of the water with a big loss of men.

We had launched all of our planes except two torpedo planes. One of them was jettisoned by the catapult because there wasn't enough wind to launch it. The other was taken down on the elevator to the hanger deck when the flight deck was destroyed. This plane was loaded with a torpedo. Eventually that plane was hit with a shell and the torpedo exploded killing a lot of our men.

A friend of mine who was on the hanger deck when that happened said he did not know why but for some reason he had crouched under the piano keyboard. This piano on the hanger deck was strapped to the bulkhead so it could not get way. My friend was under the keyboard when the torpedo in the plane exploded. The explosion took the top right off the piano but did not damage the rest of it. He said he heard every tone in the musical alphabet. The explosion and fire killed many other men.

The first official navy report of this battle in a See Magazine Fotobook, 1945 estimated that 300 salvos had been fired from the Japanese big guns at the thirteen ships in our Taffy III Task Force before the Gambier Bay received the near miss that put our forward engine room out of operation. Several of the other ships had received

hits.

The Hook, Journal of Carrier Aviation, winter 1986 issue, identifies at least 26 direct hits on the Gambier Bay (page 48) and there were many more after our communications were knocked out.

One thing of note here which I do not say in a bragging way, but with humble gratitude. Out of all the hits that were made with 200 to 250 men killed aboard the ship from gun fire, the radar shack was said to be the only compartment in the ship that did not get a direct hit until after the ship was abandoned.

As Chris and I had anticipated, during this battle the radar antenna quit rotating. The radar was still on and apparently able to operate but the antenna had quit turning. We hooked up our auxiliary supply, but still nothing happened. I went out on the catwalk and looked up at the antenna. The mast that it was on had been shot in two. The antenna had fallen over and was hanging about half way down the mast.

When we received the call to return to General Quarters at 6:45 a.m. I had a feeling that this was 'it'. It was not actually a feeling, it was a sure knowledge that this was the end of our ship. I went to my locker and got my sailor's white hat and stuffed it in the bib of my shirt. I also took my shark knife and scabbard. I think that is all I took. I had a wrist watch in the locker that I could not wear in the tropics because it was metal and made my skin break out with fungus. I also had a pair of eyeglasses, with metal ear pieces and metal nose pads, that I could not wear for the same reason. The white hat was intended to avoid getting sunburned. This could be done by turning the



rim down to cover my forehead and ears. The shark knife had an 8 inch double-edged blade which could come in handy for many things. I had the most peaceful feeling that I think I have ever had. Although I knew this was the end of the ship, I had no fear whatever. It was just as though whatever happened would be the Lord's will and that was alright.

At about 25 minutes to 9 we got word from the bridge (the Captain) to throw all classified materials overboard. My pre-assigned job in case of an abandon ship order was to throw the spare parts boxes over the side. The instruction manuals were supposed to be in these metal boxes that had built in weights. The boxes had hasps so that when they were closed a padlock could be put on. I went about that duty. Chris's assignment was to detonate the identification equipment, a small machine that sent out a coded message and received one back from planes and ships that would verify if they were friend or foe. Chris was to destroy this so that it could not be identified and no one could get any information from it. This small piece of equipment was referred to as the IFF gear, (Identification, Friend or Foe.)

The IFF gear consisted of a radio frequency combined transmitter and receiver. When in operation, the transmitter sent a coded message that activated a transmitter on an approaching plane or ship, which in turn transmitted a coded signal. The codes were changed daily or at pre-arranged times. If the equipment was not turned on, or the code had not been set correctly for the day, no return message was sent by the approaching object, and it was assumed to be of enemy status.

One afternoon our radar tracked an on-coming plane several miles

without receiving an IFF response. When it came close enough it was identified as one of our fighter planes, but because of lack of a signal, one of our ships shot it down. At least the echo disappeared from the radar screen. According to the scuttlebutt, a Japanese pilot escaped from the cockpit and was picked up by one of our destroyers. How he came to have the plane or why he came flying over us I never heard. The story concluded with the pilot being confined in a storage compartment out of sight of the ship's crew until he could be turned over to proper authority.

The radar spare parts boxes were in the back part of the radar shack where Chris and I bunked and had our office. I had to lock them, carry them out and drop them over the side one at a time. When I came out with the first box, the radar shack was abandoned. Chris had done his job and gone. I got the other boxes, carried them out, and dropped them over. Shortly after they announced for us to jettison all the classified materials, word was apparently passed to abandon ship. I hadn't heard it. When I went out onto the catwalk, there were two or three sailors still in sight up on the flight deck. By now the ship was listing at least 30 degrees to the port. We were dead in the water and almost rolling over. The attacking cruisers were still holding target practice on that side and there were some destroyers on the starboard side that were still shooting at us. The only men I saw still alive on the flight deck ran and jumped off the starboard side. I guess they were afraid to jump off the port side because that is where most of the shells were coming from. Their jumping really scared me. These fellows cleared the hull, but it was a miracle. In addition to the broad jump

to clear the hull, they had the handicap of an uphill run on the flight deck to make the jump. There were men already floating in the water below, some alive and some dead, with life jackets on, but these jumpers missed them. It looked like they were able to swim and it looked like they jumped from what must have been 60 feet above the water. They had to jump blindly by running up the deck and jumping as far out as possible.

I learned later when I read the book, The Men of the Gambier Bay that one of the officers who had been wounded, tried to jump off that side and got caught and hung up, ripping his leg open. He bled to death because there was no one there to help him. Others were trying to take care of their wounded buddies. The men I had seen jump had had the advantage of a narrower hull near the bow of the ship.

From the catwalk, I saw a rope about an inch and a half in diameter that had a knot in it about every eighteen inches. It had been prepared for abandoning ship. It extended from the bridge at the flight deck level, to within six or eight feet of the water. Some of the officers had come down this rope to get off the ship. I immediately grabbed onto it and descended. No one else was anywhere near. I did not feel any rope burns I just went down hand over hand which was easy for me having been a pole-vaulter in high school.

I must have been the only one aboard ship who had read a book on how to abandon ship. Of course you would never wear white socks. You are supposed to swim into the tide and get as far away from the ship as possible. If there is any fire that gets on the water, it will go with the wind and the tide away from you and you will soon be out of it. I

took off into the tide which is quite a test of strength. It seemed especially strong right then as I struggled and swam. The shells from the Japanese ships were still splashing around, but none of them hit near me. I swam as fast as I could until it appeared I was at least one hundred yards from the ship. It is hard to judge distances on the water. Usually you underestimate them. In usual convoy, a ship that was a mile behind us never looked more than 400 yards away. I figured I was at least the length of a football field or more away from the ship. Now, what was I supposed to do? You get out there and inflate your life belt, then look around to see if there is anything to hold onto. I think that is rather foolish. Anything that might be out there would be on the other side of the ship going with the tide. That is what I learned with a bit of a shock. There was nothing there. No person either. As I was washed up on a wave from where I could see about a quarter of a mile down tide, on the other side of the ship, it looked like about a hundred men on rafts and floating debris drifting peacefully away.

The next thing I was about to do was to inflate my life belt, but the patch I had put on it the day before had already washed off. A hole had worn on a wrinkle from wearing it during General Quarters each day. They did not have any cement in the ship's store that would cement that material. The supposed air belt was slowly filling with water. I did not stop to take it off, but I did take off my shoes. I knew I had to swim back around the ship to reach the other men and some means of security.

As I came near the ship, I noticed a raft that was hugging the hull

at about amidships. A couple of men were trying to push it away. I swam over to them. Incidentally, that radar shack now had a hole in it that a man could walk through. A shell had really exploded there and had blown the side out. One of the men was sitting on the side of the raft trying to push it away from the hull. The other was in the water swimming and pushing, but the tide was holding the raft tightly against the hull. I swam to them and suggested we slide the raft along the hull and get clear of the fantail before the ship went down. The two of us swam and pushed while the other pushed from his position on the raft. We were able to get it around the fantail. I think we were between 100 and 150 feet from the ship when it rolled over on its port side and sank out of sight. It stayed down for 10 or 15 seconds. Then, suddenly the stern shot straight up into the air about 40 feet. For a second it appeared to stall as if it were deciding whether to go or stay, but the course was definitely straight down. By the time it disappeared from sight, it was exceeding its 17 knots maximum speed with a vengeance. I am glad we were farther than 50 feet from it because it may have sucked us down. Thus ended the account of the only U.S. Navy aircraft carrier sunk by shell fire from enemy ships.

I think I have never had a chapter of my life close so suddenly and completely as the one about the Gambier Bay, CVE 73. Within a few hours, that ship had faded from practically total physical support to nothingness, never to be seen again in mortality. Of course, friendships and memories would live, but at this moment there was no time for nostalgia.

The location of the sinking was 11 degrees 31 minutes north

latitude, 126 degrees 12 minutes east longitude. That is sixty miles east of Samar Island and ninety miles north of San Pedro Bay, in Leyte Gulf. It is over the Philippine Channel, where the water is between five and six miles deep, the deepest water in the world.