

The Story of
U.S.S. HIGHLANDS

By
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and
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The Story
of
U.S.S. HIGHLANDS

*Dedicated to those men of the
Beach Party and Boat Crew
13 who failed to return from
the beaches of Iwo Jima.*

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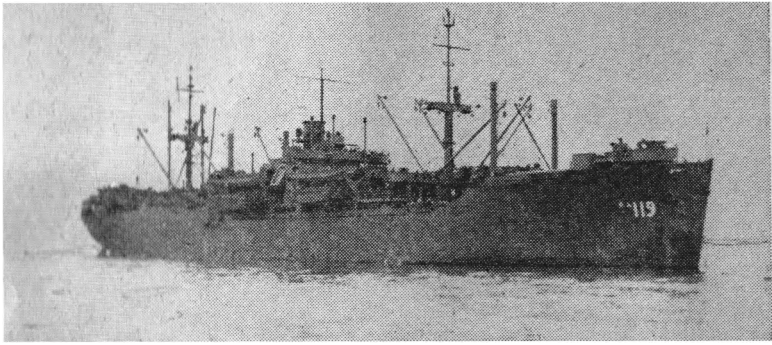
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BY

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SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA



U. S. S. HIGHLANDS

FOREWORD

This booklet has been written for a practical purpose. It seeks to give the crew of the U.S.S. Highlands a lasting remembrance of the part their ship played in the war against Japan. No attempt is made, however, to explain fully the services rendered by the Assault Transport in time of war. In fact, few persons on the home front understand completely the meaning of the term "APA". Some have referred to it as a hospital ship, others unknowingly have called it a supply ship or a cargo vessel. For those persons, who may by chance read this booklet, we inscribe this preface.

The APA was born in the early days of World War II. The "A" means Auxiliary; "P", Personnel; "A", Assault; combined, these words spell transportation, supply and invasion. En route to the target the APA is a tenement, a means of transportation and a weapon of war. Upon arrival at the scene of action, the ship becomes a means of supply—men, guns and materials, the spearhead of the attack and a draft-board of operational plans and strategy. When the essentials of war have been landed, the APA is immediately transposed into a clinic for the sick and a hospital for the wounded.

Chapter I

OFF THE WAYS

This is the story of a ship—a fighting ship. She lacks the speed and beauty of the destroyer and the glamour of the flattop, but that big "A" on the end of "APA" stands for "Assault," and the APA-119, about whom this story is written, has played her part in winning the Battle of the Pacific. Her story includes the bloody invasion of Iwo Jima and the battle of Okinawa, reaching a climax with her triumphant entry into Tokyo Bay on V-J Day.

Her first inauspicious step in an adventurous wartime life was in mid-April, 1944, when her keel was laid in San Pedro, California, by the California Shipbuilding Corporation. Speedy wartime construction resulted in the July 8th launching ceremonies as Mrs. G. W. D. Dashiell, wife of a Navy captain, splattered the big ship's bow with champagne, and christened her "The S. S. Highlands." Three thousand miles away, the scattered citizens of Highlands County, Florida, after which the ship was named, went about their daily work, oblivious to the birth of a ship which would bear their name into the fight against Japan.

The impressive commissioning ceremonies were held on October 5, 1944, and Captain G. D. Lyon assumed command as our first Skipper. The Highlands Beach Party, destined to become the fightingest group on the ship, came aboard the same day.

During the next few weeks, we became better acquainted with the Highlands, and she with us. The waters off Los Angeles Harbor were the scene of our first training maneuvers, and the shrill whistle of the boat-swain's pipe kept us on the alert with practice fire drills, collision drills, general quarters, abandon ship drills and other emergencies which might confront a fighting ship. On October 29, our "shakedown period" was officially over and the final inspection was completed. The Highlands, on October 29, was assigned to the Commander, Training Command, Amphibious Forces, for training in landing boat operations, to take place in the waters off San Diego, California. Back in San Pedro, a week later, with a full complement of 470 men and 49 officers, we realized that the U.S.S. Highlands had passed her babyhood. She was still young, but she and her crew were now ready for something besides playing in their own back yard. As a fighting unit, we were flexing our muscles and wondering when we would get a chance to test them in actual battle.

November 23 was Thanksgiving Day. But that date has another meaning for the men of the Highlands. That was the day we last saw the United States. Good-byes had been said, telegrams sent, long-distance telephone calls made. At 1343 that afternoon we cast off from Pier 48 in San Francisco Bay and pointed our bow westward, beneath the majestic Golden Gate Bridge and out into the blue Pacific. As we looked back, perhaps the most expressive and oft-repeated phrase was the trite, "Well, this is it." For most of us, this was the beginning of a new experience. The uncertainty of the future held a certain fascination which helped

counteract the homesickness we felt at the moment. We watched until the last, hazy strip of land had dropped below the horizon, realizing that many months would pass before we would once more see the land we called home. A few of us would never see it again.

The Highlands had grown up. It was time to get ready for the battle against Japan.

Chapter II

SOJOURN IN HAWAII

Six days later, before dawn, the lights of Honolulu were beginning to flicker through the darkness off our starboard bow. Those who had been to Hawaii before were pointing out the jumbles of lights that were Pearl Harbor, Honolulu and Waikiki Beach, and the darker space where we would soon see the famous and picturesque Diamond Head. The growing light of dawn finally revealed the latter, jutting into the sea in a rugged prominence that has become familiar the world over on picture post cards and in travel books.

We waited for full daylight and then, taking our turn, we moved slowly past the submarine nets into the harbor. Moving toward our anchorage, we passed the rusty hulks of the battleships Arizona and Utah, protruding from the water as grim reminders of the treacherous Jap attack almost three years before. There was little further evidence of the attack however, for Pearl Harbor had been rebuilt into one of the largest naval bases in the world. It was there that we joined the other ships of our squadron—Transport Squadron 16.

Our period of two months in the Hawaiian Islands was one of preparation—preparation for battle. Mock landings were made again and again on the various islands, with the big island of Maui taking the most “invasions.” The sonorous voice of the ship’s P.A. system made familiar such phrases as “Stand by to synchronize all watches” and “Away all boats.” Time and again, H-hour was set, our 26 boats were lowered and hit the beach on schedule. Again and again they returned to the ship—sometimes loaded with simulated casualties—were hoisted aboard, and made ready for the next day’s exercises. We knew those were rehearsals for our first big part in World War II, and the Highlands would be ready to play her part like a veteran.

Testimony to the efficiency of the Highlands crew were the frequent “Well done” comments in the Plan of the Day. Typical of these is the following notation by the executive officer, Lt. Comdr. John Lickwar, as copied from the Plan of the Day for December 17, 1944: “Yesterday’s exercises and boat handling were a fine example of cooperation of all hands. Our closest competitor was 6½ minutes behind us on the afternoon exercise. The average for the day was 12 minutes. Well done.”

But we found other things to do in the famed islands of Hawaii besides prepare for battle. While in Pearl Harbor, we had frequent liberties in Honolulu. The word “Honolulu” means “Fair Haven,” but wartime Honolulu was hardly the restful recluse that the name implies. The busy downtown section was over-crowded with the U.S. Navy, and the stores, restaurants and taverns slanted their window-displays and sales-talks to catch the fancy of the seagoing Yanks. “Your Picture With a Genuine Hula Girl for Only \$1.00” was a sign that topped a constant, laughing crowd of sailors, waiting their turns to publicly embrace a smiling lass in a hula skirt—perhaps born in Brooklyn—while the camera clicked. The

U.S.O., the Y.M.C.A., the ornate King's Palace and the imposing statue of King Kamehameha—all were within walking distance in Honolulu.

The part of Honolulu that best fulfilled the city's name was the famous Royal Hawaiian Hotel, a ten-minute ride from the bustling business section. Such great names as Franklin D. Roosevelt and Will Rogers appear on the hotel register, but during the war the U.S. Navy was using it as a convalescent home for submarine personnel. The beautiful structure stands majestically among swaying palms along Waikiki Beach, and about its spacious grounds are winding paths, tropical plants and green lawns. We found facilities there for such recreation as horse-shoes, badminton, paddle-ball and basketball, and in front, stretching toward the beach, was the roomy patio, with pianos, ping-pong tables, shuffle-board and a boxing ring. Tiring of these activities, we relaxed in the tropical sunshine on the soft, warm sands of famous Waikiki Beach. Then came a refreshing dip in the warm ocean waters that rolled toward the beach in long, white breakers, carrying the picturesque, native surfboard experts ahead of them.

The Royal Hawaiian was our favorite recreation spot, but there were other attractions on the island of Oahu. The scenic beauty of the rugged terrain could be seen on a bus-ride across the island, with the pinnacles of the Koolau Range pushing into the ever-present clouds over the eastern end. The prevailing northeast trade winds strike this range and sweep upward to form the cumulus clouds that always top the Oahu mountain ranges. Usually while it rains in the hills, Pearl Harbor and Honolulu—a few miles below—are bathed in sunshine. Tucked in between the mountains and the city is the 9-hole golf course of the exclusive Oahu Country Club. Some beauties of Hawaii not yet mentioned were the Hawaiian *reahines* (girls), who took up their share of the recreation time of the American *malihinis* (newcomers).

Honolulu wasn't the tropical paradise which Hollywood had built in our minds, but it was a pleasant variation in our preparation for the coming invasion.

Throughout the week before Christmas, very little of the traditional Yuletide atmosphere was prevalent in the Pearl Harbor area. For many of us Christmas was going to be a few thousand miles distant. But during that week, the Padre, Father F. J. Boland, was making repeated trips into Honolulu in search of trimmings and decorations for the crew's mess hall. It seemed that the Padre was determined to bring Christmas as near to us as possible, and in as traditional a fashion as could possibly be arranged. By Friday, December 22, our enthusiasm was bolstered greatly when we took our first glance at the messing compartment. All around the room were ivy wreaths and bells, and next to the piano stood a glistening Christmas tree. On Saturday morning the Padre and several hands were busily engaged in distributing Poinsetta plants about the ship. Then we knew for sure that Christmas was coming aboard the Highlands.

Except for the Beach Party, who were at Hilo, our Christmas party was a great success. In the early evening the crew assembled in the mess hall. Then in the midst of off-tune carolling, St. Nicholas made his grand entrance. Behind him followed several sailors, each loaded down with

Red Cross packages and candy, and the party progressed into a happily spent evening, with the spirit of Christmas consuming the ship.

On December 27, Commander Michael Toal assumed the duties of Skipper, replacing Captain G. D. Lyon.

The following day we arrived for a 3-day stay in the second largest Hawaiian city, Hilo, on the main island of Hawaii. Those who went ashore in Hilo found it a pleasant change from the bustling, commercialized, Navy-overflowed Honolulu. Open, grassy parks and rows of tall palm trees lined the waterfront. Sloping upward from the small, lazy business district were small homes surrounded by palms and other tropical plants, a large postoffice, and a modern high school. Hilo boasts the finest school system in the islands. Inland stretched great fields of sugar cane, with the snow-capped peaks, Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea, towering nearly 14,000 feet high in the background.

During our stay in Hilo, Marines of the 5th Division—destined to make history on the bloody beaches of Iwo Jima—boarded the Highlands. Saturday, January 27, 1945, loaded with cargo and carrying over 1500 of the toughest fighters in American history, we said good-bye to Pearl Harbor and again steamed westward.

Nine days out of Pearl, a strange sight appeared on the horizon. It was as if a great flatiron had descended upon a small group of islands and flattened each one nearly to the water level, so that it was straight and even across the top. Someone said each island looked like the side view of a hotcake. This was Eniwetok, our first atoll. It looked dry, hot, monotonous, uninviting. Very few of us went ashore at Eniwetok. Very few of us wanted to. After two days there, we were glad to take to the open sea again and head for Saipan.

The day we left Pearl Harbor, all rumors concerning our objective had ceased. They had been replaced by two words that will go down in history—Iwo Jima. Day after day, all officers, the beach party and the boat group were briefed on the armaments, defenses, manpower and terrain of that tiny Japanese island fortress. Marines sat in groups about the deck, studying maps of the island. Enlarged reconnaissance photographs were studied, showing in minute details the character and contour of the landing beaches. Six-foot, rubber, scale models of the whole island accurately reproduced the slopes that led up to the numerous air-strips, and illustrated the commanding position of Mount Suribachi at the southern tip. The entire operational plan was reviewed again and again, to assure perfect integration of Naval and Marine activities.

As we neared Saipan, we became increasingly conscious that we had arrived in dangerous waters. Almost daily, the Plan of the Day warned, "All lookouts and gun crews be on the alert. Report everything you see." We became accustomed to the lively bong of the general alarm, which sent us running to our battle stations at any hour of the day or night when our radar picked up an enemy plane or the sound gear of our destroyer escorts warned us of nearby submarines.

The green hills of Saipan were a welcome sight after our long voyage, but Saipan was just a 5-day stop-over on the way to our objective. This

was our last stop before the U.S.S. Highlands would face her first big assignment. The training period was over. The battle was about to begin.

We left Saipan on February 16 and turned northward. Our objective —Iwo Jima.

Chapter III

BLOODY IWO

Men clung to the rails a little later than usual on the night of February 18, hoping to catch some glimpse of the naval fire being constantly thrown on the little island of Iwo Jima. Until midnight the ship was very much alive with the nervous clatter of coffee cups, last minute "bull sessions" and song. The piano in the crew's messing compartment took a heavy drubbing that night, as the Marines and the ship's crew took turns beating the keys for "Boogie-Woogie" and "Jive."

That last night before D-day was sleepless and long for most of us. At any hour during the darkness of the early morning we could see in the distance the lightning-like flashes of the Fleet's heavy barrage. This was the start of the fifth day of Iwo's terrific pounding. For over two months the rocky fortress had been pounded from the air, and on D-minus-five the Navy's heavies joined the all-out attempt to smash the island's defenses. As dawn broke we found ourselves one of hundreds of ships slowly nearing the southern tip of the island, on which rested Mount Suribachi. As our column of ships moved closer in to the anchorage, the black features of the island became clearer. Out of the haze came scores of dive bombers, each taking its turn in a long, steep dive, to pour its cargo on the target. Observation planes lazily circled the island, spotting objectives for the warships lying close off shore. The resonant booming of the battlewagons behind us soon became a part of the quickening tempo. At this moment it was impossible to simultaneously watch all of the activity. Cruisers and destroyers were amazingly close to the shoreline, throwing round after round of explosives onto the beaches and inland defenses of the island. These ships hammered relentlessly as the LCI's sent screaming rockets from extremely close range. Suribachi was now plainly visible and we could see the sixteen-inch shells from our "heavies" exploding on her jagged surface. Iwo Jima was now belching smoke and fire, a sight that brought nearer to us the reality of war. Throughout this concentrated barrage of fire, it was puzzling to most of us that the Japs would take such a pounding from the ships anchored so near their shores without making some attempt to return the fire.

0900 was H-hour. Until this time we simply maneuvered slowly toward our designated anchorage, observing as we went the great spectacle taking place before us. All holds had been uncapped earlier, the boats and boat crews were standing by waiting for that familiar word, "Away all boats," and all first-wave troops stood by their debarkation stations.

At 0645 all boats were lowered and troops took to the nets. For many minutes our boats slowly circled in their rendezvous areas, then one by one, from scores of ships, each fell into formation and at the appointed signal headed for the beaches at top speed. The first wave, we learned later, landed on Red Beach One without meeting much opposition. The beach was small, about fifteen feet wide, and from it there sprang a steep bank of black, volcanic earth. Not until the first wave started over this ridge did the Jap mortars from Suribachi and numerous pill-boxes open up with

fury and precision. The return fire had commenced, and one of the bloodiest chapters in the chronicles of Marine history was to follow.

From the moment of the announcement of H-hour there was no let-up in the important and essential task of supplying the beachheads. The men manning the decks of the Highlands, and the men in the boats, fought off drowsiness, backaches, fatigue and sheer exhaustion until the final jeep, gun and last round of ammunition were placed on the beaches. The boat crews made repeated trips throughout those days and nights, dodging mortar shells in the daylight, sunken craft and debris at night. Some of the crews were on continuous duty from five to seven days in the open boats, drenched from the cold rain, shaken by the heavy surf and unnerved from the lack of sleep. During those early days of Iwo Jima, supplying the increasing demand for ammunition on the beaches was chiefly the responsibility of Lieutenant W. L. Fogg, Boat Control Officer of Red Beach Two. Throughout the dark hours, running lights could not be used, and navigation was a hazardous task in itself. These and many other hardships were endured heroically by the boat crews of the Highlands, and in addition there was the constant danger of Jap swimmers, boats laden with explosives, the anxious waiting for the whining mortars to pass overhead, and the many hours in cold rain. On the morning of June 14, 1945, the crew of the Highlands was gathered on the forward boat deck to witness the ceremony conferring the Commendation Ribbon upon Lieutenant William L. Fogg. Captain Toal read the following citation:

For excellent service in the line of his profession as Boat Wave Commander and Assistant Control Officer from 19 February, 1945 to 25 February, 1945, during the assault and capture of Iwo Jima. Demonstrating courageous leadership under enemy fire, he successfully led his assault wave onto the beach and then rendered valuable assistance in the control of traffic, salvage of landing craft, and evacuation of casualties. His determination and outstanding devotion to duty contributed materially to the success of these operations. His conduct gives evidence of his great value to the naval service. Signed, R. A. SPRUANCE, Admiral, U. S. Navy.

While the Highlands was completing the work of landing the troops and supplies, there remained many other tasks yet to be accomplished. She had made the attack and had supplied the fighting men with the materials of warfare. Now it was her job to receive the wounded. The doctors and corpsmen aboard the Highlands were already engaged in the task for which they had been trained. The time between H-hour and the arrival of the first casualty seemed relatively short. The process of converting the Highlands into a hospital was feverishly accomplished shortly after the troops went down the nets. Two operating rooms were set up. The officers' wardroom was converted into a receiving unit, properly arranged to accommodate a small laboratory, an X-ray and long tables for sterile instruments and dressings, blood plasma, whole blood, toxins, drugs and other necessary medical supplies. The troop officers' berthing area was soon converted into a hospital ward, and the forward berthing spaces of the ship were transposed in short order into wards for ambulatory cases.

For a majority of us who stayed on shipboard, Iwo Jima was our initial taste of the war in the Pacific. Until now, with the exception of those men who made the landings, the Pacific war was an exciting adventure. Upon the arrival of our first casualties, the thrill of the war faded away into oblivion, the reality was here, and the war focused itself clearly upon us as a grim and horrible catastrophe. Some of our casualties were brought aboard by our own LCVP's directly from the beach, others we received from the LST's lying off the beaches. Some of the wounded to receive treatment aboard the Highlands were mangled bodies, horrible to behold. There were many with arms and legs blown away, some with large, gaping shrapnel wounds covering their bodies, and others who were literally dotted with fragment wounds. The two operating rooms were buzzing with activity day and night during our week at Iwo Jima; the receiving units and wards were wide awake at all hours. Seamen, motor mechanics and corpsmen alike, carried stretchers at all hours. A great many of the ship's crew learned to know some of these patients quite well before their discharge. And it is fairly certain to say that all of us will agree that only the will of God, and their own will to live, kept some of them alive.

Mount Suribachi, later to be called "Hot-rocks," will long live in the memory of those who fought to conquer her and those who watched her from the decks of the Highlands. From the volcano came an endless, perfectly timed, accurately placed barrage of mortar fire. Two of those mortar shells most of us will remember particularly well, one falling short of the bow, the other crossing the fantail. After seeing the amazing bombardment from the air and sea that shook Suribachi time and again, we were convinced that the Japanese defenders were living, much like moles, within the outer surfaces of the volcano. Later, our early assumption was proven correct by the returning Marines. What we saw for ourselves, and what we heard from the returning casualties, was enough to establish the fact that "Hot-rocks" was not named ficticiously. Suribachi was a major battle all in its own. We were thrilled and gloriously proud on Friday, February 23, at 1035 a. m., when the stars and stripes were firmly anchored atop her highest crest. But little of the credit, however, was ours since the courage of our Marines, who had lived, slept and eaten with us for many weeks, had brought this triumphant moment. Their courage and blood placed Old Glory on Mount Suribachi. The price they paid for victory can never be measured. The eyes that saw it, will never forget; the eyes that read of it should never underestimate the cause for which they died.

Throughout the daylight hours we were a part of the emergency train standing by to receive casualties at a moment's notice. Come nightfall the entire convoy of APA's and AKA's would maneuver into position and cruise to the outer ring of our defense positions. We were then under the protection of several destroyer escorts. On the 21st of February, at approximately 2100, we met our first close call with the Nip airmen. The usual night cruise was in progress, and we were circling the outskirts of the battle area when the alarm was sounded. Jap planes were spotted approximately twenty miles from our position. All stations were manned promptly. Within ten minutes a smoke-screen blanket covered the entire convoy. For forty-five minutes or more we waited for what we thought would be an air strike at our own squadron. Through the smoky overcast

we could see in the distance flares being dropped on the beaches of Iwo. In short-lived minutes the fireworks broke loose. Over the port quarter of our forecastle we could see a continuous stream of tracers pecking at the sky. A terrific barrage of anti-aircraft fire shot heavenward. With the brightness of the flares for a background, the silhouettes of the destroyers were easily recognized. Thirty minutes after this episode with the Nipponese airmen, we could see a bright illumination on the horizon to the starboard side of our ship. The following morning we learned that Jap suicide planes had sunk the U.S.S. Bismark Sea, an escort carrier. She had taken one torpedo and two suicide planes. The Saratoga, some ten miles beyond the Bismark Sea, withstood repeated attacks, and remained afloat. During the afternoon of February 22, we took aboard some two hundred survivors of the sunken carrier. Of her total complement of 1,080 men, approximately 50 or 60 percent survived. The stories these men told of their experiences that night, were similar to the horrors of Iwo. High octane gas, bombs, torpedoes, anti-aircraft ammunition, rocket bombs and vast amounts of smaller munitions, all exploding in rapid succession, must certainly have created a scene similar to hell. Many men were killed outright by exploding ammunition; others were seen burning on the flight-deck in pools of flaming gas; some were drowned; many jumped too near the churning screw and were sucked into the blades; still others were unable to reach the life-rafts, and some were killed outright by concussion.

During the course of the battle for Iwo Jima, in its early stages, our greatest concern on the beaches was for the men in the Beach Party from our ship. In all, the Beach Party consisted of 43 shipmates and three officers. Before going to sea this group had been thoroughly trained in the tactics of land fighting, amphibious landings, ship-to-shore communications and supply routing. They had to maintain a constant flow of supplies, direct the hazardous landings of all boats, survey all beach areas, expel the remaining mines that were passed over by the demolition squads, and furnish medical supplies and medical aid at all times. These were but a few of the essential duties performed by the Beach Party. They were soldiers, sailors and Marines molded into one small group.

For many weeks before the landings at Iwo the Beach Party men were on the receiving end of all our chiding and hoaxing. We picked our own heroes, pointed out the men who would dig the deepest foxholes and those who would dig their holes before the boat touched the beach. On D-day, when the Beach Party was called to its debarkation station, earlier than expected, we learned rather late how impudent and unreasonable our hoaxing had been. Their boat was lowered for the sixth wave, when the fury of Red Beach One was at its worst. "Take it easy," "Good luck," "Don't forget to duck" and "Hurry back for chow," were shouted at them as they shoved off for the shores of Iwo Jima.

At noon on D-plus-one, we recall, word ran wild throughout the ship that the entire Beach Party had been wiped out, but as far as the crew was concerned there was no official report on their activities on the beach. Even without verification and good source this news chilled our spines. On D-plus-two, Wednesday, February 21, we learned that the Beach Party was returning to the ship, but no other information was available. When they returned to the ship, at approximately 1700, they clambered aboard

in ragged clothes and full packs. They were worn and weary, almost speechless. A few we hardly recognized. It was at this time that we learned that one of their group had been killed, and three wounded.

All of us aboard ship learned later, long after the days of Iwo Jima, of the outstanding performance of duty displayed by our Beach Party men on the ashy beaches of the tiny island fortress, when their commendations were read on the bridge of the Highlands by our Captain, Commander M. Toal.

The Highlands left the Iwo Jima scene on Monday, February 26, tying up to the floating docks at Saipan on the following Wednesday, the 28th. Casualties were discharged to awaiting ambulances on the docks, and the ship once again retained the status of Attack Transport.

Chapter IV

TROPICAL INTERLUDE

At Saipan, for the first time since Pearl Harbor, we could put foot on solid American-held territory. From the harbor, the green hills of Saipan showed little evidence of the grim struggle that had transpired there eight months before, but roaming about the island revealed the scars left by the battle for Saipan. Wrecked amphibious tractors lay at the water's edge, and farther inland we saw the wreckage of crashed planes and demolished tanks, where men had given their lives to take another island on the road to Tokyo. The island was entirely unlike Iwo Jima, but the same individual sacrifice had been made. Across the island, dusty roads led to the airfield, where huge B-29's were taking off and landing by the hundreds in their daily bombing runs to Japan. We little realized then that our next view of these mighty Superforts would be in the skies over Tokyo Bay!

From Saipan, after five days of rest, we headed due south, and all hands were on the alert, for our course lay midway between the Jap-held islands of Yap and Truk. Overshadowing this threat, however, was the threat of impending civil war on the Highlands. A few days after leaving Saipan the ship's company was divided into two factions—the trusty shellbacks and the lowly pollywogs. We were headed for the South Seas, and there were a large number of us who would cross the equator for the first time. These were the pollywogs, and advance propoganda about the equator ceremonies was gladly supplied by the shellbacks, veterans of previous crossings. The initiation was to be a fearsome and memorable occasion.

On March 9, the day of the crossing, all pollywogs were assembled about the ship by divisions. Then came the initiation ordeal on the forward boat deck, conducted by the shellbacks, who wore fantastic costumes representing such salty characters as King Neptune, the Royal Princess, the Royal Baby, the Royal Scribe, the Royal Doctor and the Royal Barber. The pollywogs took a royal beating. The "ceremony" was a nightmarish succession of flailing shillelaghs, 225-volt electric shocks and evil-eyed barbers, ending with a forcibly prolonged ducking in an over-sized tub—the Royal Bath. No one could deny that the ceremony was highly impressive—on certain parts of the anatomy. Survivors of this ritual were hardly recognizable, with newly acquired, large, bald areas on their pates, black grease and paint smeared from head to foot, and lengthy red welts in regions which later made the sitting position an ordeal. Such was the price paid for the great privilege of being a trusty shellback instead of a lowly pollywog.

As we crossed the equator, we had altered our course sharply to the east, and now, south of us were the sites of some of the greatest battles of the war—such historic names as Admiralty Islands, Bismark Sea, New Ireland, and Bougainville. Nosing in among the Solomon Islands, we passed Savo Island and dropped anchor at Tulagi Harbor, where the Marines had landed on D-day for the battle of the Solomons. The next day we were headed southeast again, and off our starboard beam rose the

mountain crests of Guadalcanal, the scene of one of the most prolonged battles with the Jap. The rugged terrain was beautiful to see against the tropical blue sky, but two years before those same mountains had been the fortresses that had protected the Japs as they fall back step by step from the steady advance of the fighting Yanks.

2600 miles off the east coast of Australia is a small group of islands—the New Hebrides. Our destination in these islands was Espiritu Santo, where we were to pick up troops for our next invasion. Here we found a strange mixture of races—the dark-skinned Melanesians, bush-haired Tonganese who had been imported as laborers by French plantation owners, and a few French who controlled the islands. At least one superlative is fitting in the description of Espiritu, for over the entrance to the recreation grounds is a huge sign advertising "The Largest Recreation Area in the South Pacific." The basketball courts, baseball fields, tennis courts and Coco-cola and beer stands in this area helped to pass our ten days in the tropical islands of New Hebrides. Shell-hunters combed the beaches for the elusive "cat's eyes," and later spent patient hours aboard ship polishing them to a glassy finish to use as settings in souvenir rings and bracelets.

One day troops of the 105th Infantry of the 27th Division began to embark with full equipment, and we knew our tropical interlude in the South Seas was about to end. On March 15 we hoisted anchor and headed back in the direction from whence we came. The U.S.S. Highlands was now a veteran. She had proved her worth in the Battle of Iwo Jima and was ready now for her next assignment, less than two months after her first. Nine days at sea brought us once more into the northern half of the globe and to the atoll of Ulithi, our last stop before we headed for the battle area. Our next objective, closest invasion to Japan thus far—the islands of Okinawa.

Chapter V

OKINAWA AND KAMIKAZE

With only four months of sea duty to our credit, already most of us thought that we had pretty well covered the greater portion of the Pacific. Little did we know then the many nautical miles that were yet ahead of us. Our stay at Ulithi, one of the many small atolls in the Western Carolines, was for only one day—just long enough to take aboard a few additional supplies. It was not generally known at this time on shipboard just what part we were to play in the invasion of the Ryukyu Islands. Soon after leaving Ulithi, maps and models of the little island of Tsuken Shima were broken out, the target was unveiled, and briefings became a part of our daily routine. Prior to this time the briefing sessions had consisted of four different operational plans, each of which specified a target in the Ryukyus. On the 9th day of April we were close to Okinawa, and our convoy of ships nestled themselves in the Kerama Retto group, temporarily resting at anchor in Aka Kaikyo. During this interval some of our troops and their equipment were transferred to LST's in preparation for the invasion of Tsuken, which was to come the following morning. Our part in this operation was to make a one-ship assault landing on the tiny island located but a few miles off the eastern coast of Okinawa. The capture of Tsuken was the sole responsibility of the troops we carried.

It was still dark in the early morning of Tuesday, April 10, when we lifted anchor and proceeded to the target. On the way we watched the bombardment of Okinawa by ships that could only be seen when the flashes of their guns lighted up the surroundings. At short intervals the skies were brightened with huge flares floating over the island, during which time the jagged coastline of Okinawa could be seen in the distance. The picture at this moment was pretty much the same as on the morning of February 19 at Iwo Jima. The same smell of gunpowder, the same flares in the skies, the same thunderous explosions that came from the battlewagons lying close off the shores of Okinawa—all made this morning seem as though it were re-enacting the early hours of February 19.

By 0700 all preliminary activities aboard ship had been completed. Our remaining troops had started down the nets into the landing craft; trucks, jeeps and weapons were being hoisted into the boats. Shortly after seven all of our boats could be seen circling in their specified areas. Then, as the control boat signaled the message, the first wave singled off in churning rows for the line of departure. From the ship we watched our boats and the LST's as they cautiously made their way toward the target. Soon the message was received aboard ship that the initial landing had been made at 0843.

At this juncture the interior of the Highlands was altered, once again becoming a receiving unit and hospital for the wounded. The Medical Department functioned smoothly in its task of reconverting essential spaces for stretchers and supplies, capitalizing on its previous experiences at Iwo Jima. Shortly before noon the first LCVP arrived alongside with casualties. The rest of the afternoon and the greater part of Wednesday were spent receiving the men who had been wounded on Tsuken.

Tuesday, night, April 10, was one not soon to be forgotten by any of us, particularly the men in the foxholes on Tsuken. The day had been calm and moderately warm, with hazy, scattered clouds overhead. Early in the evening the winds started whipping across the channel, and a cold, drizzling rain commenced. There was no let-up throughout the night.

Wednesday night, April 11, our troops returned to the ship, appearing not too elated over their victory. Of all the stories that the returning men had to tell, the misery they endured during the night of April 10 was the most outstanding. Our own Beach Party similarly agreed that it was the worst night they had spent in foxholes. As one soldier stated, "That night wasn't fit for a Jap." A majority of the troops had spent a great many months in the tropical climates of the New Hebrides, and found the sudden adjustment to the cold, rainy nights, a most difficult handicap, and in a sense, an unsuspected enemy.

The battle for Tsuken Shima was almost completely overshadowed by the greater struggle for the capture of Okinawa. Tsuken was not, perhaps, of great strategic value. Its capture, in terms of warfare, was not very costly. Early assumptions proved correct; the battle was short-lived. Our flag flew over the island two days after the initial landings, and only a relatively small number of men were lost. Of the troops that stormed the island, there were about 25 killed and 75 to 100 wounded. In a military sense, Tsuken was taken on "bargain day." The channel that lay between its shoreline and Okinawa could be used at our own discretion, free from the coastal guns hidden on its hillsides. The operation was nothing comparable to bloody Iwo Jima, Saipan or Guam. But most of us who saw the casualties and talked with them, formed our own opinions as to the cost of the capture, in terms of human suffering. For the wounded, for those who did not return, and their families, the price was pretty high.

On the morning of April 12 we slipped out of the Tsuken area and moved down around the southernmost tip of Okinawa. The plans for our arrival seemed to fit in well with those of the Japanese air force. As we neared our anchorage the battle for the capital city of Naha was reaching its full pitch. The bay was a sight that will not easily be forgotten. The first impression that most of us got was that we were watching the entire Pacific Fleet in action. The waters surrounding us were dotted with ships as far as the eye could see—battleships, cruisers, destroyers, auxiliaries and scores of smaller craft. The warships were laying a continuous barrage on the city of Naha and its nearby coastal installations. We were not yet anchored when the call to general quarters blared from the speakers. In what seemed to be a matter of minutes, the coastal anti-aircraft guns on Okinawa opened up with a continuous clatter. The ships in the bay followed suit, and their guns thickened the overhead carpet of flak for the two approaching Jap planes. One of the Jap airmen spiraled to the island, exploding in a burst of fire; the other plunged into the sea, narrowly missing the stern of a nearby ship.

It was in this manner that we were introduced to the open air theater of Okinawa. But upon arrival in these waters, the sudden GQ strengthened our alertness, and kept us on our toes for the remainder of our stay.

Thursday night, April 12, we were summoned to general quarters many times. Already GQ's were becoming familiar routine. Throughout Friday

things were relatively quiet, but our expectancy of momentary attacks filled the day with suspense. That night, however, the Japs sent over many bombers and suicide planes, keeping us at our battle stations from 1900 to 2200, again from 2300 until 0100, our last call coming in the wee hours of Saturday morning. The strange quietness that settled over the ship all day Saturday was a little uncomfortable. Expecting GQ's became almost as arduous as the real thing. Only the distant guns hammering at the Jap lines on Okinawa could be heard. Not until Sunday morning was this silence broken, when our battle stations were manned for only 30 minutes.

Most of us will agree that the evening of Sunday, April 15, brought with it, in addition to a beautiful sunset, one of the most spectacular air shows that could be witnessed. The day had been routinely the same as many that we had previously spent outside of combat areas—clear skies, church in the open air on the boat deck, with a few dutiful hours spent picking up the loose strands of routine work. The evening was very calm, and the setting sun burned the horizon into many shades of gold as it sank into the sea. It was almost seven o'clock when suddenly the dismal gong of GQ sent us scurrying to our battle stations. Several minutes elapsed before the report came over the phones that "bogies" were in the vicinity. The next report was: "Bogies at 35 miles." A few minutes later, "Bogies at 15 miles." Then, in a more assuring voice, "Enemy planes approaching off the port quarter at five miles." In a few seconds the coastline of Okinawa loosed its guns on the approaching enemy aircraft. Battleships, cruisers, destroyers, APA's, AKA's, LST's and LCI's in great numbers sent up a concentrated fire of anti-aircraft that lighted the skies with thousands of streaks of fire, puffs of black smoke and the bright red lines of tracers. One of the planes suddenly turned toward the bay area. Anti-aircraft sent him spinning like a pinioned bird. He crashed on the beach, immediately disintegrating in a cloud of fire and smoke. The second plane braved the great cloud of flak, but soon was smoking and losing altitude. In only a few short moments the Jap came spiraling downward, leaving behind him a streak of fire. The third plane was last seen scampering through the clouds over Okinawa, with two of our fighters on his tail.

Shortly after dark the Japs returned. Again all of the ships in the harbor welcomed the enemy with a tremendous barrage. Tracers drew long silver and gold streaks across the clouds, and great fingers of light played on the skies. Finally the lights converged directly overhead, pinning one of the planes in a great crossbeam. His extreme altitude was to his advantage, and slowly he squirmed away. It was a few minutes after this splurge of activity, many of us will recall, that a shell landed on our after well deck. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

Monday morning, April 16, we again found ourselves in a bedlam of action. The holds were emptied and the cargo was hoisted into the boats. Within thirty minutes the troops were off to join the battle for Okinawa. We were underway at 0900, and by 0915 were again rushing to our respective battle stations. As we cruised out of the harbor, we saw some of the planes coming in for the attack. A lone Jap bomber was shot out of the air, causing a huge geyser-like spray in the water. Forward of the ship we saw one of our fighters blast a Nip out of the skies.

We learned later how fortunate we had been during our week's stay at

Okinawa. We had been underway from Tsuken Shima only a short time when Jap planes struck that area. Thirty-five of the enemy airmen were shot down, and it was during this attack that the U.S.S. Tennessee was damaged. Our arrival at Okinawa was in the wake of another *kamakaze* attack on the bay area in the waters off Naha. We missed the main portion of that raid by only a few hours. Our third taste of good fortune came on April 16, when we left Okinawa. It is officially recorded that on this date the greatest enemy raid of the Okinawa campaign struck the bay area that had previously been our anchorage. Several days later, we learned that our fleet plus the army's coastal batteries, had had a "field day" at the expense of the Japanese air force.

SEVEN THOUSAND ISLANDS

Within 25 hours after reaching Saipan we had shifted our casualties to the beach and were headed again for the tropics—this time for the atoll of Ulithi in the West Caroline Islands. On April 23, 1945, the Highlands passed through Mugai Channel and into the great Ulithi Harbor. Like other atolls, Ulithi is a microscopic dot on the map of the vast Pacific, but inside that sheltering circle of tiny coral islands were planned berths for almost a thousand ships—and room for more if occasion demanded. Hundreds of fighting ships were there—carriers, battlewagons, cruisers, destroyers—some bruised from battle, others with fresh paint and untried crews, ready to hurl their power against the Jap. There we saw the mighty carrier, U.S.S. Bunker Hill, battered and burned by two suicide plane hits north of Okinawa, and soon to be on her way for repairs and a well-deserved rest in the Puget Sound Navy Yard.

Our own ship looked none too fresh after some 25,000 miles of sea-travel, so at Ulithi we buried the old three-tone camouflage design under a new over-all coat of dark blue-gray. In our 29 days at Ulithi, we found that it was anything but the tropical paradise portrayed in Stateside picture magazines. The one flat bit of coral that was set aside for recreation proved to be as unlike a paradise as its unromantic name—Mogmog Island. There we had our liberties—a small ration of beer, perhaps a baseball game in the burning heat of the sun, and an unsatisfying wade in the luke-warm waters of the restricted swimming area, where the maximum depth was four feet. Rather than swim, many of us searched the beaches and ocean floor for tropical shells and colorful bits of coral.

Such was life in Ulithi, and Mogmog Island was one of the reasons we were glad to leave the great coral-rimmed harbor with orders that would take the APA-119 to a new front in the Pacific War—the 7,000 islands of the Philippines.

A day's voyage to the north brought us to the island of Guam, where we lay to in the lee of Orote Peninsula for four and a half hours exchanging some of our landing craft before turning westward again. On May 27, we had our first view of the Philippines—rugged, verdant hills and mountains, constantly overhung with rain-soaked mist and clouds. Through the northern part of Surigao Strait and past Kanaoayang Point, we finally dropped anchor in San Pedro Bay in Leyte. After a 2-day pause there we had a scenic voyage through the Philippine Islands, with the rugged beauty of the islands frequently rising on both sides of us as we traversed the Mindanao Sea and then turned north through the Sulu Sea toward our destination. At 0420, in the darkness of the early morning of May 31, we sighted the signal light on "The Rock"—the famed island sentinel of Manila Bay where Lieutenant General Wainwright (now General) had finally surrendered in those bitter early months of the war. Gray daylight revealed the sharp outlines and the bare, featureless cliffs that had given Corregidor its nickname. A few hours later we entered Subic Bay, a small niche in the base of Bataan Peninsula on Luzon Island. This was to be our headquarters for almost a month.

Grande Island, at the mouth of Subic Bay, was our recreation island, and boasted a "swimming hole" that was the best we had visited. Baseball fields, horseshoe pits and basketball courts were also part of the facilities the Navy had provided to keep the bluejackets from getting stale on the job. All was quiet on Subic Bay, but not far to the north, thousands of Japs were still resisting on Northern Luzon. At night we could see the flash of bombs and light-streaks of tracer-bullets as the fighting continued around the clock.

A four-day recess from our monotonous rest in Subic Bay began on June 13, when we left on a strictly sight-seeing trip. Passing close by mighty Corregidor, we entered the huge shallow harbor of Manila Bay, dropping our anchor a scant 7½ fathoms into the soft mud bottom. Scars from the battle for Manila were still fresh, for the American reoccupation had occurred only a few months before. Scores of ships rested on the mud bottom of the bay, and over 200 of these still protruded above the surface—some showing a whole superstructure, others a few masts or a fantail jutting slantwise from the water, hardly beginning to rust, so recent was their death. These wrecked hulks were but hints of the wreckage we were to see in Manila itself. The "Pearl of the Orient" was no longer a pearl. She was a burnt, ruined, smelly mass of rubbish. Some of her beautiful federal and civic government buildings were unrecognizable piles of scrap—the rest were burnt-out shells with blackened insides and shell-scarred exteriors.

Each man had two days' liberty in Manila, which was more than enough to see the wreckage of that once beautiful capital. Then, loaded with souvenirs bought at inflation prices, and impressed by our first view of a city demolished by war, we returned for another week in peaceful Subic Bay.

During the next two months we saw much of the Philippines, anchoring in various parts of the islands in or near such tongue-twisters as Hinunangan Bay, Silago Cove Roads, Diut Point and Iloilo Strait. The latter anchorage lay off the fifth largest Philippine city, Iloilo, where we made frequent visits. This friendly city was less battered than Manila by the retreating Japs and its dirty, busy markets, bamboo houses, thatched-roofed ox-carts, and native night-clubs became familiar sights during brief recesses in our training program.

Yes, we were training again—this time for the biggest invasion of all—the landing on the Japanese homeland. We were indeed to take part in that invasion, but under much more comfortable circumstances than we then anticipated. After three weeks of landing rehearsals with the 81st Division, we embarked the 40th Division. It was during this training exercise that a quick succession of history-making events changed our plans for the invasion of Japan. On August 7, the ship's newspaper published an "Extra" announcing the new, devastating atomic bomb. More "Extras" followed in rapid succession and the tense expectancy of impending peace gripped the entire ship as the Russians declared war, a second atomic bomb hit Nagasaki, and the beaten Japs offered a conditional surrender. Finally, on the morning of August 15, official agreement on the terms of surrender was announced from Washington, D. C. Aboard the Highlands there were smiles, whoops and singing. The war was over!

THE TOKYO EXPRESS

After the first flush of excitement had faded we began to wonder what immediate changes peace would bring to the Highlands. The war was over, but peace would mean new assignments to replace the missions of war. We hadn't long to wait. On August 21, we headed for Batangas Bay, Luzon, where other assault transports were already assembling, preparing to carry troops of the battle-hardened 1st Cavalry in the final, triumphant invasion of Japan.

Day and night, bulging cargo nets swung deep into our holds. Heavy-duty trucks swayed over number five hatch and then were gently lowered to their assigned parking spaces two decks below. Fully loaded with fuel, troops and cargo, the entire convoy moved northward toward Japan on August 25. But to the north a raging typhoon forced us to turn back at midnight that night and we sought refuge among familiar surroundings—our former anchorage in Subic Bay.

At 0949, August 27, 1945, the U.S.S. Highlands hoisted her anchor and steamed northward. There were no more false starts. We were on our way to participate in the greatest and final chapter of World War II. Next stop—Tokyo Bay.

Our first glimpse of the Japanese mainland was at 0530, Sunday morning, September 2. Stretched across the gray horizon the black, jagged edges of a defeated empire rose steadily into the indistinct, far-eastern skies. Soldiers and sailors, lining the decks of the Highlands since the crack of dawn, each commented on the quietness that seemed to have settled over the island. Some said, "Here it is. After all this time, here it is right before our eyes." Some of the troops said with less enthusiasm, "So that's Tojo-land. Looks kinda quiet." It did seem strange, our sailing into Japan's front door with no guns barking, no smoke billowing from the objective.

A chill breeze whipped across the mouth of Tokyo Bay as our conveyer took form for its long procession into the one-time great base of the Japanese Imperial Fleet. We were in the center of a ten-mile column of troop-laden ships, and at 0736 the Highlands pointed her bow into the channel of the bay.

The morning was quiet, but the very thought of our being in the famed enemy harbor added to the effectiveness of the penetrating breeze. The sudden realization that we were actually there, and that we were taking part in the last triumphant "invasion" of enemy territory, made our stomachs tingle with excitement.

Practically everyone on shipboard crowded the weather decks. Every available pair of binoculars was in use, each trained on different objectives on the shores of Tokyo Bay. In all outward appearances with the naked eye, there was nothing unusual about the semblance of the one-proud empire. It had no oriental guise as most of us had expected it to have. In many respects the scenes that surrounded us that morning were similar to those we might see along our own west coast—sharp islets declining sharply into the sea, huge coves being rushed by the surf, bright green foliage drifting with the gullies to the sea, and low irregular hills covered with grass and trees. Along the shores and further inland were modern homes, small villages, and rows of barracks, sprawled out over the valleys. Here and there Japanese civilians could be seen watching our convoy as we cruised through their own waters. Partially concealed, heavy concrete revetments poked their rugged features out of the small island fortresses. But over most of them flew our national colors. Ahead of us, in the expanse of Tokyo Bay, scattered hulls of demolished Jap vessels could be seen, with their charred and battered bows protruding out of the sea. All during the young hours of this morning, planes hovered closely over the great fleet that lay at anchor in the bay.

Previous rumor had made the rounds of the ship to the effect that not one iota of alertness was to be wasted during our entrance into Tokyo Bay. At 0852 the sight-seeing was temporarily interrupted, and all hands were summoned to their battle stations.

En route to our anchorage we passed the might of our sea-power, assembled on all sides of our column of ships. To our starboard side,

nestled among many destroyers and cruisers, was the massive U.S.S. Missouri. At that moment dignitaries from many lands were gathered on her decks, and General Douglas MacArthur was signing the historic document officially pronouncing victory over the Japanese empire.

Speckling the skies were many patrol planes, some hovering closely over the sea, others scanning the inland hills at greater heights. Overhead they roamed at random, scattered squadrons of fighters and huge silhouettes of the long-winged Superforts. Suddenly the tempo quickened and an impressive air spectacle, as a finale to the war, focused itself on the horizon. It was as if a tender of beehives had suddenly liberated his entire swarm. Hundreds of planes winged their way over the harbor in proud and victorious formations—Wildcats, Hellcats and Avengers; and as if to further impress the Japs with our power, more squadrons of Superfortresses roared triumphantly through the skies. All eyes were turned heavenward as our great armada curtained the clouds over a victorious fleet hanging at anchor in the bay.

At 1037 the Highlands dropped her anchor in Tokyo Bay, a short distance from the shipyard city of Yokohama. Nine months and ten days after cruising beneath the Golden Gate Bridge we had reached the final objective, as part of the "Tokyo Express." Now before us was further evidence of the wrath of war. Yokohama lay on the shoreline, once a beautiful city of oriental design and the strength of Japan's great industrial force. But the grace of this city had been changed since its introduction to the B-29's. Buildings that withstood the pounding from the air, now stand ghostly empty and converted into black, desolate structures, their inwards hanging limp and burned. Factories, cranes and towering smoke-stacks lined the bay area, amid rubble and piles of wreckage. Many ships were still on the ways in the shipyards, with huge cranes hanging grotesquely over them. In one small way, we could visualize the port-city of Yokohama as a share of our revenge for Manila. Although the occupation of Japan had only just begun, some irrepressible Yankee had scaled the walls of a charred building and inscribed on its side in huge, bulky letters, "THREE CHEERS, U. S. NAVY."

The war was officially over, but for the Highlands and the string of APA's before her, the day's work was just beginning. As it was at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, so it was on V-J Day. Davit crews were called to their davits, and the boat crews clambored into their boats. Tokyo Bay was no exception—again it was the job of the Highlands to put troops ashore. At 1350 the first of our occupation troops went down the nets into the waiting "P" boats, and were carried to the docks. There was no delay in the task of debarking troops; the boatmen were retired from their repeated trips at 1500.

At 0735, Monday morning, September 3, a Jap pilot, G. Yamamasu, ascended the gangway and was escorted to the Captain on the bridge. At that moment word that a real Japanese was on shipboard spread rapidly, and both the Army and Navy seemed interested in getting a close-up view of the native Japanese, even though the war was one day over the duration. But our pilot-to-be seemed little interested in his surroundings, particularly his wide-eyed audience on the main-deck below, and continued his ascent in complete ignorance of anything else other than

the steep ladders. As he reached the bridge, he greeted our Captain in typical Japanese fashion, with a low, gracious bow. Shortly we were underway, slowly maneuvering into our docking area in the Japanese port. As we moved through the second breakwater, many small Jap tugs came chugging out to meet us, to help nose the Highlands into her berth. Particularly noticeable, as we nudged against pier No. 5, was the excellent condition of the docks. A few piles of rubble could be seen scattered about the immediate vicinity, but none of the warehouses were in complete ruin. This led us to believe that our airmen had been quite careful in their distribution of bombs, making certain that their strikes covered only the industrial area. Strange, too, was the fact that we did not see the customary assembly of native inhabitants meandering about the port. From the decks of the Highlands, no Japanese could be seen—evidence that the occupation troops had made a quick job of evacuating the civilian populace out of the port area.

Our sojourn in Tokyo Bay was scarcely two days old when we found ourselves once again making preparations for sea. Through the speakers the boatswain's pipe played the shrill prelude to the familiar chant, "Gripe down all boats," and at 1437 the Highlands was looking back on the great bay, and the dying embers of World War II. We had been in and out of many ports since being in the Pacific, but this day, as we cruised out of the mouth of Tokyo Bay, we felt with more assurance that now, at last, we could go home. The "scuttlebutt" that made the rounds of the ship that afternoon was music in our ears. Now, for some reason or other, this same rumor, that we had heard over and over again since the early days of Iwo Jima, contained more authenticity than ever before. It was easier to believe, and sounded quite possible. Some said, "San Francisco Bay on Thanksgiving Day"; at least now we felt it safe to rule out the old slogan, "The Golden Gate in '48." To visualize home was only a matter of closing the eyes and shutting out of the mind the constant beating of the sea against the side of the ship. And it was equally as easy that afternoon to look back on the job that we had finished, the men that we had left behind, and the war that at long last, had now reached its "duration." Perhaps there would still be many small jobs for us to do before walking through the open door at home, but for the most part the Highlands had completed her wartime tasks, and had done them well. Back of us, in the spray of our wake, lay the sullen outline of a ruthless, but defeated empire. What had been the objective of every fighting man and fighting ship, was now behind us all. On the distant horizon, pressing against the clouds, stood Mount Fujiyama, the symbol of Japan in war and peace.

OFFICERS

M. TOAL, Commander.....Commanding Officer
 J. LICKWAR, Lt.Comdr.....Executive Officer

W. H. Glass.....Lt.Comdr.	M. R. Reinschreiber.....Lt.(jg)
F. J. Boland.....Lt.Comdr.	L. B. Callies.....Lt.(jg)
H. T. Stoddard.....Lt.Comdr.	A. C. Kolb.....Ens.
W. L. Fogg.....Lt.Comdr.	J. H. Lersch.....Ens.
M. D. Stevens.....Lt.Comdr.	F. L. Schaffer.....Ens.
J. W. Sinclair.....Lieut.	J. Alexander.....Ens.
J. B. Hovey.....Lieut.	R. W. Bovee.....Ens.
*W. H. A. Habekoss.....Lieut.	R. J. Greensfelder.....Ens.
H. W. Gustin.....Lieut.	J. E. Howell.....Ens.
R. C. Hathaway.....Lieut.	C. A. Miller.....Ens.
A. P. McMahan.....Lieut.	J. P. McCollough.....Ens.
C. E. Jordan.....Lieut.	W. R. Riggs.....Ens.
C. C. Hulslander.....Lieut.	*J. M. Lee.....Ens.
R. S. Mazlish.....Lieut.	J. E. Sandford.....Ens.
*J. E. Johnson.....Lt.(jg)	E. J. Gibbs, Jr.....Ens.
F. L. Lees.....Lt.(jg)	W. M. Berry (USMCR).....2nd Lt.
E. C. Rauh.....Lt.(jg)	R. A. Mendenhall.....Chf.Pharm.
A. D. McCarrens.....Lt.(jg)	R. W. Stanley.....Chf.Mach.
H. A. Kugelman.....Lt.(jg)	J. F. Kostelac.....Electrician
J. C. Pigg.....Lt.(jg)	L. C. Herrell.....Carpenter
L. H. Wolfe.....Lt.(jg)	F. C. Cameron.....Acting Pay Clerk
J. J. Stachnick, Jr.....Lt.(jg)	J. B. Monico.....Pay Clerk
M. E. Vlcek.....Lt.(jg)	A. G. Nickel.....Bos'n.

TRANSFERRED

G. D. Lyon.....Captain	E. J. Smith.....Lt.(jg)
W. H. Behrens.....Lt.Comdr.	G. R. Bolton.....Ensign
*P. V. Ford.....Lt.Comdr.	H. S. Hawkins (USMCR).....2nd Lt.
J. C. Frudenberg.....Lieut.	L. Hill.....Chf.Bos'n.
W. W. Brashear.....Lt.(jg)	W. A. McDonough.....Pharm.
J. J. Brooks.....Lt.(jg)	H. R. Porter.....Carpenter
M. J. Garber.....Lt.(jg)	S. J. Trnka.....APC
R. H. Mitchell.....Lt.(jg)	G. W. Dixon.....Bos'n.
S. W. Tuell.....Lt.(jg)	

* Beach Party.

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Adam, Glen A.	Callipo, Eugene	Evatt, Cecil E.
Adcox, Dee N.	*Carona, Robert A.	Evilsizer, Carl E.
Africa, Baltazar M.	Carpenter, Duane M	Fairley, Joseph
Akins, John, Jr.	Carroll, Robert G.	Farley, Homer M.
Alamia, Andrew V.	Carter, Everette J.	Femons, Earl L.
Alger, Richard A.	Carter, Henry L.	Fennessy, John
Alves, Henry V.	Carter, John C.	Fields, Harry
Anderson, Cellas J.	Casady, Russell P.	Fishburn, Harry E.
Anderson, John C.	Casey, Edward S.	Fleeks, Shedrich
Anderson, May W.	*Castile, Willis T.	Flowers, Carl
Anderson, Nelson	Cavender, Jesse C.	Flynn, Robert G.
Anderson, Sheridan R.	Chamness, Earle Jr.	Forsythe, John E.
Angele, Otto C.	Chavez, Ernest B.	Forrester, George M.
Andrews, Ellsworth G.	Chavez, George O.	Fournier, Edmund M.
Andrews, James E.	Chester, Floyd C.	Foster, Shedrich
Archer, Harry W.	Chittum, Eugene E.	Fox, Earlie
Arellanes, Venancio	Clark, Garland R.	Fox, Thomas
Ariall, Elmer C.	Clyne, Giles W.	Foxworthy, Paul V.
Armstrong, John W.	Cole, Bennie	†Frantz, Samule W.
Ashmore, Aubert L.	Comparato, Andrew	Fritzsche, Leroy E.
Asonewich, Joseph S.	Crail, Earl A.	Frye, Robert L.
August, Roy J.	Croker, James J.	Fulcomer, Alvin D.
Bacciocco, William L.	Curtis, William L.	Fuller, Carlton H.
Bacha, John J.	Cutler, Jerel T.	Furtwengler,
*Baize, James E.	Dauria, Frank P.	Laverne G. R.
Baker, Frank O., Jr.	Dearing, James	Gaehle, Nelson J.
Baker, Norman J.	DeLuca, Michael J.	Gales, Alan T.
Balbin, Simplicion M.	Denney, Donald K.	Garcia, Joe B.
Baresich, Frank J.	Dennison, Robert J.	Gardner, Charle H.
Barnes, Clayton L.	Dine, George	Gardner, James S.
Baugh, Joe E.	Dingle, James W.	Gardner, Chester W.
Bennett, Morris E.	Dollar, Lawrence F.	Garza, Juan
Betterley, Robert L.	Dong, William Q.	Gautier, Everett A.
Bilben, Winfield S.	Downing, Marion E.	Gee, Walter F.
Blair, Lacy	Doyle, Lawrence K.	Geffen, Julius J.
Blankenship, Albert Y.	Dubick, Michael F.	Gerard, Milton L.
Blythe, Robert D.	Duke, Charles D.	Gilboe, Kenneth L.
Boehm, George A.	Duke, Harlan A.	Gilbon, Charles W.
Bombard, Howard C.	Edep, Tobias	Giles, Robert B.
Bozzo, Charles J.	Edinger, Clarence E.	Gillespie, John R.
Brooks, Lawrence G.	Eidson, Gorman C.	Gilliam, George E.
Brummett, Edward H.	Elliott, Carl R.	Gober, Jesse L.
Bryant, Thomas R.	Ellwood, Harold S.	Goldberg, Carl
Burish, John P.	Engberg, Leonard D.	Gardon, Donald
Bushi, Michael	England, Don G.	Gordon, Douglas J.
Byerly, Elbert H.	Erving, LeRoy	Graham, Alvin J.
Byrd, Phillip C.	Evans, Robert T.	Graham, Harrison L.
	Evans, William Jr.	Gray, Alan M.

* Wounded in action. † Missing in action.

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Gray, Benjamin F.
 Gray, Julius L.
 Greene, Jimmy
 Grieco, Daniel R.
 Griefe, Henry "H"
 Grimes, Monty R.
 Guerrero, Jesus S.
 Hagerty, Edgar C.
 Hall, Cleveland
 Hamberlin, Birgil P.
 Hamilton, Ralph T.
 Handley, Warren H.
 Hansen, Earl A.
 Hardgrave, John B.
 Hansing, Donald E.
 †Harkrider, Jimmie Q.
 Harnage, Archie L.
 Harrington, Ralph
 Harris, Jack S., Jr.
 Harrison, James R.
 Harrison, Oliver H.
 Hart, Harold W.
 Hart, Richard L.
 Hart, Rodney G.
 Hassbrock, William Jr.
 Hawkins, Ross L.
 Haynes, Lindsey C.
 Hayward, Joe B.
 Hazelrigg, Alan C., Jr.
 Heighton, Joseph M.
 Helton, Barney P.
 Hemmelman, Glenn R.
 Henderson, Melvin J.
 Henry James E.
 Hensley, Conley
 Heron, Wilfred W.
 Hilliard, Ruby
 Hinshaw, Winston F.
 Hinton, John W. Jr.
 Hoadley, Hubert E.
 Hodges, Leon
 Hodgson, James R.
 Horn, Chester D.
 Hoskins, John L.
 Howard, Walter E.
 Hoyt, Kenneth J.
 Huckins, Thomas C.
 Hunt, William H.

Hurd, Arnold S.
 Hurst, Alan D.
 Hutson, Elmer A.
 Isaacs, Chester R.
 Jacobus, Charles R.
 Jackman, John Jr.
 Jackson, Archie H. Jr.
 Jackson, Willie R.
 Jamison, Leslie
 Jahl, Otto A.
 Johns, Raymond E.
 Johnston, Arthur L.
 Johnson, Henry F.
 Johnson, Kier J.
 Johnson, Raymond H.
 Johnson, Roy J.
 Jones, Bruce
 Jones, Daryl D.
 Jones, Herman B.
 Jones, Howard E.
 Jones, Louis E.
 Jones, Lynn L.
 Jones, Oren E.
 Kaczerowski, Leo S.
 Kartchner, Marshall H.
 Kearney, John H.
 Kennedy, Gerald A.
 Kesling, Harold F.
 Kilby, William F.
 Kime, David D.
 Kimler, Wayne D.
 Kimmerling, Norman N.
 Knight, Bailey B.
 Knuckey, William C. Jr.
 Ko, Mosis
 Koetzel, Frank J.
 Kopytko, Leonard J.
 Kowalski, Steven J.
 Kratzer, Ernest G.
 Krebs, John J.
 Kretzschmer, Cyril W.
 Kronemyer, Morris E.
 Kuhn, Robert R.
 Lakin, Russell N.
 Lamanque, Henry J.
 Lamb, Douglas H.
 Landers, Forrest H.
 Lattimore, Charlie

Lear, Frank Y. Jr.
 Lee, Robert E.
 Ledger, Jack L.
 Lenkey, Steve
 Leskanic, Andrew A.
 Lesser, Stanley E.
 Lessick, Theodore J.
 Liles, Truman E.
 †Linke, Edgar O.
 Litano, Joseph J.
 Logan, William A.
 Long, Edward A.
 Lough, Warren E.
 Lowe, Alvan W. Jr.
 Lysinger, Gerald E.
 McBride, Adrian G.
 McCabe, Homer L.
 McCoy, Paul E.
 McCoy, Robert B.
 McFadden, Delbert H.
 McJunkins, Frank O.
 McLean, Jerold A.
 McPeek, Paul R.
 Macy, Clarence "I"
 Maloney, Francis B.
 Mandel, Theodore M.
 Marler, Erman E. Jr.
 Marler, "J" "C"
 Martin, Ed.
 Martin, Orvil F.
 Martineau, Edmond E.
 Martinez, Pete J.
 Mason, William M.
 Mathers, Fred W. Jr.
 Mathews, David S.
 Mathis, Lawrence H.
 Mattson, John A.
 May, Clarence E.
 Mayer, Thomas W.
 Mayer, William T.
 Mayes, Jesse R.
 Mayfield, Charles A.
 Mazzocchi, John S.
 Meek, Leslie C.
 Mendes, Louis E.
 Meng, Leo J.
 Mesecher, Ray S.
 Meshensky, Joseph J.

† Missing in action. † Killed in action.

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Mosinas, Delmacio
 Meyer, Donald R.
 Mezori, Eugene V.
 Miller, Burl
 Miller, Clark F.
 Miller, Joseph R.
 Miller, William R.
 Milligan, Harold R.
 Miloradovich, Michael
 Mills, David H.
 Mims, Lonnie J.
 Minchow, Mark L.
 Miner, Thomas C.
 Mitchell, Earl Jr.
 Mitchell, Robert L.
 Moerbe, Wallace W.
 Moerbe, Wilber W.
 Montague, Billie F.
 Montgomery, William S.
 Monty, John J.
 Moore, Calvin J.
 Moore, Hugh A.
 Moore, Richard H.
 Marin, Patrick A.
 Morley, Jack M.
 Morris, Theodore J.
 Morris, William T.
 Morrison, James P.
 Morvant, Lawrence P.
 Moser, Oakley E. Jr.
 Moses, William W.
 Mosman, James L.
 Mull, James R.
 Murray, Millard V.
 Murray, Morris L.
 Musante, James A.
 Myers, Albert B.
 Myers, Clarence E.
 Mytko, Anthony J.
 Nance, Arthur W.
 Naramore, James A.
 Nash, Sam
 Naylor, Vernon E.
 *Neeley, Robert H.
 Nelson, Clarence A.
 Nelson, Edward W.
 Nelson, "J" "S"
 Nelson, Stuart G.

Nesselrodte, James O.
 Nettles, Robert G.
 Newhouse, Robert M.
 Newman, Robert V.
 Newton, Eb.
 Nicholas, LeRoy S.
 Niemisto, William R.
 Nix, Audy E.
 Nixon, Bruce L.
 Norden, Warren C.
 Norris, Richard "C"
 Norwood, Columbus
 Norwood, Johnny W.
 Noyes, Howard K.
 Oakes, Paul F.
 Oakes, Wilbur
 Obermiller, John G.
 Oelschlager, Don L.
 Oggero, John W.
 Olejniczak, Irvin T.
 Oliver, Charles E.
 Olivieri, Tony F.
 Olson, Gordon J.
 Opitz, John P.
 Orso, Dominic
 Osborne, Marvin H.
 Overcash, Royal H.
 Owen, Milton C.
 Owens, Harry F.
 Ozment, Clyde
 Pace, Dewey
 Padia, George
 Padgett, Herbert L.
 Palko, Stephen J.
 Pancorbo, Angel A.
 Panusis, Fred F.
 Park, Nelson
 Park, Harlon
 Parks, Charles O.
 Parr, Lawrence
 Parrett, Harold
 Paschal, Charles T.
 Patton, Herman "V"
 Payne, John R.
 Pearson, Oliver J.
 Peoples, Richard
 Percle, Clifton S.
 *Pardue, Harold J.

Peterson, Elmer L.
 Peterson, John A.
 Peterson, Richard H.
 Peterson, Wylam F.
 Petrone, Felix A.
 Pettys, Myron G.
 Pfeil, Richard D.
 Phelps, Thomas E. Jr.
 Phibbs, Francis "X"
 Phillips, John H.
 Phillips, Victor B. Jr.
 Phipps, Joseph C.
 Pickett, John E.
 Pitzen, Ervin J.
 Pizzolato, Vincent J.
 Plambeck, Carroll A.
 Polk, Kenneth L.
 Plummer, Richard W.
 Pollard, Commie C.
 Pompa, Ruben
 Porter, Howard R.
 Posey, Glennie
 Prestenback,
 Wilmer P. Jr.
 Preston, Doyle M.
 Purcell, James H.
 Purdy, Richard A.
 Purkey, Claud H.
 Pyles, John C. Jr.
 Quigley, Arthur Jr.
 Quinlan, Robert V.
 Randall, Leonard L.
 Ratliff, Bobby G.
 Ratzler, Frederick W.
 Rayburn, Jesse
 Read, Francis J.
 Reece, Pearl
 Reilly, Robert J.
 Remschak, Stanley J.
 Reynolds, Charlie
 Reynolds, Marcus A.
 Rice, Robert P.
 Rice, Seth J.
 Richardson, Fay A.
 Rigdon, Paul W.
 Peoples, Sam E.
 Ringo, Joe L.
 Rissanen, Leo A.

* Wounded in action.

ENLISTED PERSONNEL

Ritenour, Russell E.
 Roberts, Samuel W.
 Rogers, John M. Jr.
 *Rogers, Johnny N.
 Rogowski, Harry J.
 Rohman, Chester L.
 Ronkee, Wilfred A.
 Roney, Verne W.
 Ross, David R.
 Ross, George R.
 Rorle, Marlon R.
 Roswurm, Lloyd C.
 Rovtar, Malcolm G.
 Roubideaux, Willard B.
 Roumeau, Paul A.
 Row, Arch
 Rucker, Charlie D.
 Russell, Maurice P.
 Russo, Frank P.
 Rutherford, Edward
 Rybacki, Victor S.
 Rzepka, Joseph S.
 Sales, Richard T.
 Sampley, Henry W.
 Sandlin, Noble D.
 Sands, George G.
 Sarantith, John G.
 Saunders, James A.
 Stavrovsky, John M.
 Schlueter, Herman A.
 *Schmider, Tom D.
 Schmidt, Francis "F"
 Schofield, Charles W.
 Schooler, Jesse R.
 Schultz, Howard L.
 (USMC)
 Self, Charlie W.
 Sells, James W.
 Selvidge, Tom M.
 Shepard, James E.
 Sheppard, Richard J.
 Shumway, Arthur R.
 Shurter, Richard D.
 Sikes, John P.
 Simon, Irwin H.
 Simpson, Clyde O.
 Smith, Francis L.
 Smith, James H.

Smith, Leonard M.
 Smith, Melvin E.
 Smith, Riley B.
 Smith, Robert Jr.
 Smith, William B.
 Smith, William T.
 Sorenson, Velby B.
 Sparks, James M.
 Spedden, Harry K.
 Stach, John Jr.
 Stafford, Joseph P.
 Stahel, John E. Jr.
 Stanforth, James K.
 Starrs, Henry J.
 Steib, Henry J.
 Stephenson, Irvin C.
 Strawn, Oren G.
 Strebis, Charles W.
 Strong, Robert O.
 Sumner, Harold L.
 Sutton, Bryan
 Swanson, Stanley G.
 Sweeney, Robert G.
 Switzer, Melvin C.
 Sylva, Theodore J.
 Tatum, John W.
 Tauscher, Howard
 Taylor, "A" "B"
 Taylor, Jesse D. Jr.
 Terry, Billy R.
 Tew, Roger W.
 Thibodeux, Lionel J.
 Thomae, Adolph W.
 Thompson, William B.
 Thomas, Charlie G. Jr.
 Thomas, Francis H.
 Thornton, John E. Jr.
 Tinsley, William W.
 Todaro, Joe
 Tomayo, Susano L.
 Tooker, Walter H.
 Torostan, Harry H.
 Trantham, Luther M.
 Trapp, Jack A.
 Tucker, Charles
 Upchurch, Charley J.
 Vansant, William B.
 Vathally, Thomas S.

Vennettilli, Ernest E.
 Verdugo, Raymond H.
 Vernimen, Robert W.
 Villarreal, Rudy L.
 Vodanovich, John
 Vulku, Eli G.
 Wade, Edger L.
 Wagner, Douglas B.
 Wahlborg, Clyde G.
 Walden, "J" "W"
 Walker, Herbert W.
 Walker, Namon N. L.
 Wall, Donald D.
 Walton, Kenneth C.
 Walwick, Paul A.
 Wardle, Donald W.
 Warren, Otis W.
 Watson, George W.
 Watkins, James E.
 Watson, Paul M.
 Watterson, Charles C.
 Wavada, James V.
 Webber, Robert P.
 Webster, William L.
 Weiser, Robert G.
 Welch, Curtis E.
 Welch, Grover C.
 Wensink, Theodore P.
 Wheeler, Charles W.
 White, Jack R.
 Whitley, John D.
 Whitters, Robert L.
 Willbanks, William Z.
 Willbern, Thomas A.
 Williams, George J.
 Williams, George J.
 Williams, Hugh "E"
 Williams, William W.
 Wilson, Charles H.
 Wilson, Edmond D.
 Wilson, Richard R.
 Winfield, Billy R.
 Winn, William D.
 Winsor, Kenneth C.
 Wittnebel, Lester C.
 Wood, Norman L.
 Wood, Robert E.
 Wood, William E.

Woodling, James H.
 Wright, Wilbur S.
 York, Roy O.

Young, Wilbur H.
 Zelaznowski, Edward F.
 Zinn, Jennings E.
 Zvoll, Gilbert L.
 Ziemke, Ira A.

FACTS AND FIGURES ON THE U.S.S. HIGHLANDS

Date of Launching.....July 8, 1944
 Date of Commissioning.....October 5, 1944
 Length.....455 feet, 3 inches
 Breadth.....62 feet
 Designed Maximum Speed.....18 knots
 Cruising Speed.....15 knots

Capacity—
 Cargo—dead weight tons.....4,601
 Landing Craft 26

Fire Power:
 One 5-inch gun.
 One quad mount 40 mm. gun.
 Four twin mount 40 mm. guns.
 Ten 20 mm. guns.