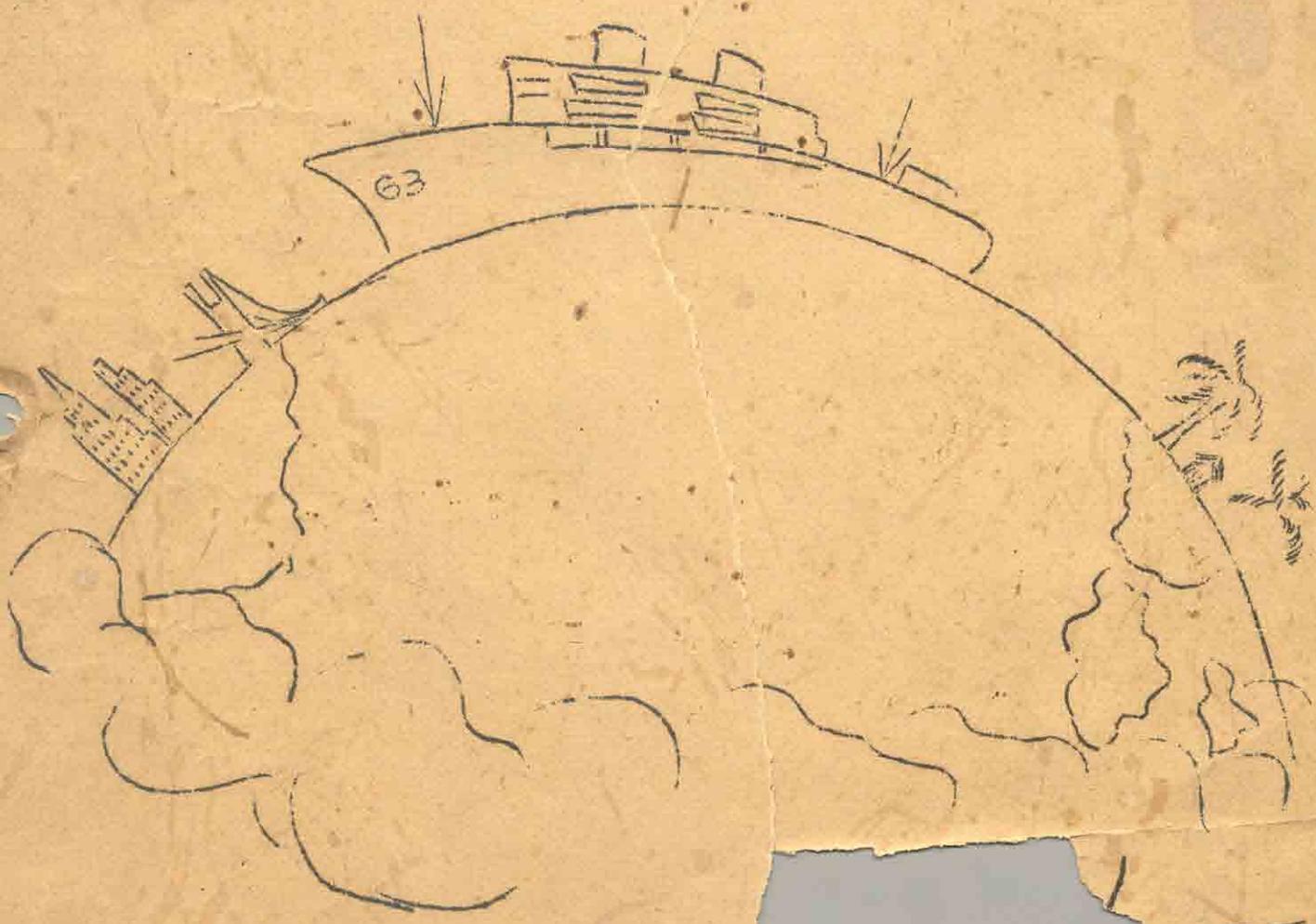




Provided by Bradley J. Cate for his father Merle P. Cate, USNR Signalman, USS Bladen

AN INFORMAL BIOGRAPHY
OF THE
USS BLADEN



PROLOGUE

This is the biography of a ship. A brief chronological history of an humble auxillary about which there hangs no aura of glory or romance. She is just a ship, that and no more; and the men who have served upon her are just men, good men who have done their duty, but just men nevertheless, that and no more.

Were it possible, this history would be the story not so much of the ship as of the men who make up the ship. It would be the story of each individual man aboard the ship, a record of his experiences and emotions, his thoughts, his fears and his hopes. Unfortunately neither time nor space make such a record feasible, and so this history must remain essentially that of the ship and the men as a corporate whole.

The Bladen never quite lived up the promises of her builders, the expectations of the Navy or the dreams of her crew. Her eccentricities have kept her officers and crew constantly plugging away to keep her in trim. She never did anything really outstanding and never had a chance to be a heroine, but she always managed to be where she was supposed to be, and did what she was ordered to do in a creditable if not heroic manner.

And so to the men of the Bladen we dedicate this history. To the men whose efforts kept her name honorable and unbesmirched; to the men who scraped her decks and painted her sides; to the men who loaded cargo and carried stores far into the night when they were weary and sleepy and had a watch to stand; and to the men who toiled so ceaselessly in the heat of the engine rooms to keep the screws turning over. To these men therefore, who had a job to do and did it well, we dedicate this work.

With the amphibious type warfare in the Pacific scheduled to reach new heights, the Navy Department launched an intensive shipbuilding and training program. And thus it was that men from all corners of the United States, in fact a few from the distant combat areas of the world, began streaming in to the shipbuilding centers to form the crews of the new Attack Transports, APA's.

So we have the phenomenon of the ship forming on the ways and at the same time the men who were to man her, shaping up as a crew.

The keel of this ship was laid on 8 March 1944 on the ways of the Consolidated Steel Corporation at Wilmington, Calif. Only a small number of men and no officers had arrived at the Training Center, Terminal Island, San Pedro, Calif.

On 2 June 1944 the ship's most dramatic moment to date had arrived. The months in which she had been forming from miscellaneous pieces of welded steel and a number had ended. She was ready for her element, the water, and for a name. Her sponsor, Mrs. Gladys Moore Mc Nerney, swung the bottle of champagne at the perfect moment, christened her and the BLADEN slid gracefully and dutifully into the water. It was a sight to remember, the ship which was to be affectionately known as the Maiden.

During the pre-commissioning period, officers and key enlisted personnel were being sent to special schools up and down the west coast. The training center in cooperation with prospective Commanding Officers, filled quotas to such schools as Loran and Damage Control in San Francisco, Gunnery and Troop Quartermaster near San Diego, Hatch and Winch at Port Hueneme, and Fire Fighting at San Pedro.

The Supply Officer displayed a minor stroke of genius in having the Ship's jeep assigned to us. From the moment it arrived to the time it was hoisted aboard, the water in it's radiator wasn't given a chance to cool. The Supply Officer also presented us with the spectacle of an ancient model A Ford which he used for personal transportation. It was great fun guessing which tire would be flat each time he tried to start the Ford.

Up to a month before commissioning it was difficult to get into the Consolidated Shipbuilding Yard to see the ship. Now the bars were let down. It started with Navy supplies and spare parts having been delivered to the Yard. The supplies and parts were beyond the jurisdiction of the Maritime Commission and it was necessary for ship's company personnel to inventory them.

At the same time groups of officers and men were being sent out on short cruises on other newly commissioned ships as observers. This proved valuable as they could see beforehand where some of the Maiden's difficulties would lie. It seems as though some problems of a new ship are common to all.

The Captain began putting pressure on the officers to take advantage of every source of help and information in order to make the Maiden the best of her class. We led the entire administration of the Long Beach area on a merry chase. In examining the deficiency reports on the first of the class completed, we found shortcomings we thought we could eliminate from the Maiden. The Captain's Plymouth, "Betsy", the Supply Officer's frail Ford and the ever reliable jeep really covered miles in the Long Beach, San Pedro & Wilmington area. It was said the jeep put in so much time on the San Pedro Ferry that it was two months senior to the ship in sea duty.

We slighted no one in our quest for knowledge, correction of deficiencies, and procurement of extras. The Assistant Industrial Manager, The Pre-Commissioning Detail, the front office, back office and all side offices at Consolidated Steel Corp. Ltd., the Supply Depot, the Training Center Personnel Office, and every salvage yard within a radius of fifty miles, were all aware of the Maiden Bladen, her problems and her needs.

When two thirds of the crew had been put through the training center preliminary course, they were turned over to the ship's office and officers for administration. Now the pressure really began. Green Division Officers began to learn the way a division had to be run. Personnel problems arose for the ship's office and Executive Officer. Specific training in groups began. Definite assignments for enlisted personnel were made effective.

Gun crews were formed and given a two week non firing course of instruction. The 5 inch and 40 MM crews were then sent to Anti Aircraft Training Center Pacific Beach and the 20MM crews to Port Hueneme for intensive firing.

As the weeks flowed by the pressure increased. The Officers began to really "sweat" as writing was started on the Damage Control Book, the Battle Bill, Ship's Organization, Casualty Control Book and Ship's Regulations. All this time classes in Damage Control, Navigation, Gunnery, Fire Fighting, Visual Aids, Naval Legal Procedure, National Service Insurance, O.O.D. Procedure and physical fitness were being attended by all hands.

Special amphibious training was given to a group of officers and men at Coronado, California in order that they might efficiently operate boats carrying assault troops and necessary cargo to hostile beaches. Another group received special training at Oceanside in the control and operation of a hostile beach during an invasion.

By this time departments were doing everything possible to insure the smooth functioning of the ship. The Supply Department had a gigantic task in checking arriving supplies and parts against garbled allowance lists, initiating correct paper work procedure, worrying about qualified technical help, and dates of arrival of perishables. They also had the task of taking over pay accounts and setting up disbursing funds. The C & R Department was swamped with the job of getting to know intimately all the features of a new ship of a new class of ships. They had too, the job of discovering deficiencies and initiating job orders to correct them, and had a tremendous stock of damage control equipment, spare parts and such things as ground tackle, rigging and boom capacities, to say nothing of the seaworthiness of the entire hull for which they were responsible. The Engineers, aside from hundreds of motors, pumps and spares, had the headache of checking a brand new 6,600 horse power engineering plant. The Communications Department jointly with the Navigator, was busy with such things as radio and radar operation, compasses and portfolios of charts to be corrected. The Medical Department was doing a bang up job in supplying the ship with a medical set up whose value and efficiency was to be conclusively proved in a short time. The Gunnery Department checked the armament making sure the guns would shoot and shoot straight.

The tension mounted as the commissioning date approached. But all work and no play wasn't good either so we planned a precommissioning party.

We were granted use of the spacious first floor and basement of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Hall in Long Beach. The Supply Department arranged a choice selection of meats, cheeses and other necessary supplies for sandwiches. Due to a little lack of foresight and the slight miscarriage of some plans it was necessary to install a Gunners Mate Third Class in a neighboring butcher shop to slice the meat and cheese. This was at a time when these foods were not only strictly rationed but were practically non-existent for civilians. The GM said he never dreamed he'd have to say no to so many women in so short a time. It was also necessary for the Gunnery Officer to spend an entire afternoon making sandwiches.

The first floor of the V.F.W. Hall had an excellent dance floor and the Welfare and Recreation Officer obtained a band. It ended well with lots of girls, sandwiches and beer for all. Even the most conservative admitted it was a good party.

The precommissioning training ended, the entire crew was moved to the Receiving Station on Terminal Island preparatory to moving aboard ship. A Quarter Deck was set up, a watch established and we were doing as good a job of running a ship, without actually having one, as possible. The one outstanding impression and memory of the Receiving Station was the odor given off by the near by fish canning factories.

On 11 October the beach party arrived, and our crew was almost complete. It was uncertain if the boat group would report in prior to the ship being placed in commission.

On 15 October we had a preview of how the Maiden would behave. On that date key officers and enlisted men went aboard the ship for its trial run. The results of this run would determine whether or not the ship would be accepted by the Navy as satisfactory. It would have been exciting to be aboard any brand new ship, being put through her paces for the first time, but it was more than exciting to us who were to man her. She behaved beautifully and was thus accepted.

On 16 October the ship was towed from the Consolidated Yard to a dock several miles away on Terminal Island, arriving there at 2100. On that date the crew ate early dinner at the Receiving Station, picked up their personal gear and were transported to the dock. The crew went aboard and immediately began loading stores. Surprising as it may seem there was little confusion. The majority of the crew had inspected the ship previously, and the berthing arrangements were well worked out.

The next day we all went back to the Receiving Station for breakfast and lunch, as arrangements for eating aboard had not been completed. The following day was scheduled for the commissioning.

On the 18th of October, the fog that habitually shrouds the Los Angeles Harbor area rolled early away, to reveal a coppery sun that glared balefully through the haze of factory smoke that belies the glowing terms with which the chamber of commerce is wont to describe the county of Los Angeles.

It was this sun, along with the fumes of a nearby Sardine cannery, that leant an air of sweaty melancholia to the three hundred odd officers and men gathered on the hot steel decks of the two stackers at Berth 231. Even the impressive commissioning ceremony in which Capt. Wm N. Thornton, USN officiated, did little to brighten their steaming countenances. It was not until the band played the National anthem, the Commissioning Penant was hoisted, and the Ensign rose with languid pride to flutter from the gaff, that their expressions changed.

With a start they realized suddenly and fully that the Bladen was now in commission, and that she and they had become a part of each other for better or for worse.

The ceremony over, and Lt. Comdr. Walter P. Hartung in official command, the officers and crew which will for the remainder of this history be known as "we", commenced to fulfill their various duties. First the guests were escorted around the ship that they might see the other "her" who had claimed the persons of their sons and husbands if not their love; and then the work commenced.

From the 18th to the 29th the Maiden Bladen became a scene of violent activity. There were provisions to be brought aboard in vast quantities, both fresh and canned, to feed the bellies upon which men fight. Other stores and spares had to be brought aboard and put away, each item in its designated place, for a ship of this size is like a small city, sufficient within itself. Truck loads of ammunition were stowed away in the magazines. Some of it to be fired in practice that the gun crews might be able to hit what they were aiming at when the life of the ship depended upon their accuracy. All these things and many more were brought aboard, and pin-up pictures were taped to the lockers. With amazing rapidity, the Bladen changed from a floating mass of lifeless steel to a busy community into which each man brought with him his hopes, his dreams and his sorrows. Thus the ship drew life from the lives within her and became a living thing.

On the 29th the Captain reported to the San Pedro Shakedown Group that the Bladen was now ready to take her Shakedown cruise, and with some apprehension we steamed around the San Pedro Breakwater, the ship thrusting her sharp bow into the long swell, biting at the water like a swimming dog in her eagerness to be at sea.

For the benefit of those whose knowledge of the term "Shakedown" is purely civilian, we will pause to say that it is in no way related to that term as applied to the underworld. A shakedown cruise is that period in a ship's life when she is first put through her paces; when the engineers can search for "bugs" in the mighty throbbing heart, and when the crew becomes familiar with its duties, stations and guns. On this cruise the ship must run a measured mile to attain an accurate curve of shaft revolutions in relation to knots. She is maneuvered in circles to obtain tactical data concerning the amount of rudder required to turn the ship in a given distance. Emergency drills, such as fire, man-overboard, and collision are held, and at battle stations the guns are fired at stationary and moving targets. The ship is fueled at sea, and "rubber-docked", and the officers and the deck are sweated through situations both normal and abnormal. On the shakedown cruise the Captain and Executive Officer can, for the first time, ascertain to what extent their crew has been trained, and what they may expect of them. And the Chief Engineer begins to foresee what troubles lie ahead. All in all, the shakedown cruise is a period of nerve wracking strain for all hands, and sleep becomes a luxury which few can afford.

In the final phase of the shakedown cruise we steamed down the coast to San Diego, there to operate in company with several other new transports, maneuvering in formation, holding drills, and making practice landings in which the ship's Boat Group and Beach Party operated together for the first time in simulating landings. There, for a few days we had the honor of becoming a flagship; for Capt. D.L. Ryan, USN, OTC and his staff moved aboard. Capt. Ryan, now Commodore, will long be remembered by us, not so much for his efficient handling of the temporary task group, but for the fact that while anchored in

San Diego Bay, he caught, with a single cast of his line, three large mackerell, which still stands as the record among the anglers of the Bladen.

At noon on the 10th of November we joyfully returned to San Pedro for eight days availability; and for fueling, provisioning, and replenishing our ammunition.

Since all hands now consider themselves veteran sailors of the sea, having sojourned some five or six hundred miles upon the fringes of the deep, it was only fitting that we should do the town in strict accordance with the traditions of the sea, and that we should walk with that swaggering roll that distinguished the true salt water sailor from the boots on the beach.

On the 20th of November, with many fond farewells and last lingering embraces, we set sail for San Francisco, there to load naval personnel for transportation to Pearl Harbor.

Some of us made efforts to become acquainted with the haunts of San Francisco and the Barbary Coast, but found that our stay was too short to become familiar with more than a spot or two.

Our first real voyage, carrying our first load of troops, proved both painful and informative. We had a great deal to learn about transports, especially those of us who had come from other type ships or boot camps, and the experienced hands, including the Executive Officer and the 1st Lieut., had much to teach us.

Our maiden voyage to Pearl was uneventful, save for the fact that a couple of submarines were rumoured to be engaged in sinking ships in our near vicinity. This fact, coupled with a roughish sea, gave rise to considerable consternation among the new crew. Some were afraid that we might be torpedoed, and men suffering from severe sea-sickness (mal-de-mer) were afraid that we might not get torpedoed.

Arriving in Pearl we disembarked passengers and set forth to explore the magic and romantic Island of Oahu.

War-time Honolulu proved to be a great "let down" as it is about as romantic as lower Los Angeles, without the drama. It is far too crowded to be enjoyable.

We remained in Pearl Harbor for 15 days and then loaded Seabees of the 103rd and 109th Construction Battalions, and once more set sail, this time for Guam, in company with a destroyer as escort.

This run also, was made without incident. The seabees proved congenial passengers and turned to with a will, building this, tearing that down, cutting a hatch here, and welding a shelf there. They also gave us our first concert shortly after we crossed the international date line. It was corny but it was funny, and of all the passengers we have carried I believe the Seabees remain our favorites.

Guam was in the throes of one of the most colossal construction campaigns undertaken in this or any other war. Where once had been virgin jungle and palm groves, great swathes had been cut, and "quonset huts" by the hundreds were being assembled. Incidentally when we returned to Guam a few months later we could scarcely believe our eyes, for as far as one could see on the island it was covered with quonset huts and concrete buildings, and tremendous airfields had been constructed for the mighty B-29's.

Christmas day we celebrated at sea enroute to Guam. For many it was the first Christmas away from home, and on that day, perhaps more than on any other, they felt the keen pangs of homesickness that they had been striving to quell since the shoreline of California had faded into the horizon. We had turkey, of course, with all the trimmings, but excellently though our cooks had prepared it, a Christmas turkey six thousand miles from home somehow just doesn't seem the same.

When we arrived in Pearl on the 14th of January we first heard the ominous rumors that an invasion was in the offing. An invasion of an island we had never heard of before, a place called Iwo Jima. It was a name however with which we were shortly to become very familiar. A name we shall never forget.

We were ordered to commence "combat loading" immediately and by the 16th we had completed loading, including 1200 cans of 8" powder and 810 8" projectiles, unpleasant to load and hell to unload.

By the mere act of combat loading we knew that we were headed for trouble. There are two methods of loading. Commercial and Combat. In commercial loading the maximum load is taken aboard and stowed in the holds irrespective of what is on top or what is underneath, so long as all the space is used up. In combat loading each item has a priority, a material with the highest priority being loaded on top in order that it may be the first unloaded, space being sacrificed for speed and the facilitating of unloading. You don't combat load for a milk run, and the cat was out of the bag.

On the 17th of January, in company with four other APA's we took part in maneuvers and firing practice off Wainae, Oahu, and returned to Honolulu on the 19th, only to pull out again a day later for three more days of the same thing off the Maui beaches. Returning to Honolulu on the 24th we completed taking on provisions and fuel and embarked the remainder of our troops, all Marines.

On the 27th of January much bequaled we faired forth from Honolulu to form up with Transport Group Baker, which consisted of APAs, AKAs, destroyers, and aircraft carriers, enroute for Eniwetok, our first stop. In command of our group was no less person than Admiral Turner himself, in the USS ELDORADO. Turner of the Amphibs. That in itself spoke volumes for the coming operation.

At Eniwetok we refueled. Generally a simple operation, refueling can sometimes be quite an adventure. It was so this time. A strong wind was blowing against us when we attempted to go alongside a tanker, and the Bladen became as balky as a Missouri mule. Her high bow and superstructure caught the wind like a sail and by the time the Captain had her roped down hand and foot he had lost two inches of girth.

Underway again we headed for Saipan, and at dawn on Feb. 11, our entire convoy maneuvered through the narrow channel between Tinian and Saipan in a heavy fog. Hardly a pleasant experience in unfamiliar waters. Without mishap however we anchored in the outer harbor of Saipan, where we remained only for one day, and then got underway for more maneuvers.

Tinian had been selected as the staging area for our task force, and as we had all become familiar on the voyage over with the operation plans for the invasion of Iwo Jima, the landing exercises were quite successful. Our boat groups and davit teams had already proved themselves to be above average in speed and efficiency, and we were reasonably sure that they would not drop the ball when we were playing for keeps.

On the 16th of February we got underway from Saipan, in company with Task Group 51.11, Transport Group Baker. Destination - Iwo Jima, Bonin Islands. Our orders, To attack, capture, and occupy the island of Iwo Jima.

There were other task groups and task forces, dozens of them, amounting to hundreds of warships, heading for the same objective. They were coming from Saipan, Guam, Eniwetok, Ulithi, and Pearl and there were others we knew nothing about. This was a comforting thought, especially when we heard Tokio Rose on the radio cheerfully telling us that the Nips knew we were on the way to Iwo, and were waiting impatiently for our arrival.

Of course the airforce had been bombing the daylight out of Iwo for some seventy odd days, or so they claimed, and three days before our arrival, our heavy units moved in and commenced one of the most terrific bombardments in history. At the same time that mightiest of all Task Forces, Task Force 58, equal in itself to the combined navies of the rest of the world, launched its first attack on Tokio. Tokio Rose became slightly hysterical and we felt better.

On the 19th of February (D-day) we reached Iwo. In the clear darkness of early morning, while we were still many miles away we could see the distant flashing of gunfire like heat lightning over the horizon, and the wierd green glow of starshells hovering over the island. As we drew nearer we could see the arching shells from battleships, and cruisers looking for all the world like the tail-lights of fast receding express trains. Mt. Suribachi we could see standing like an evil witch, plainly outlined in the lume of the star shells against a heavy cloud of dust and smoke that rose sluggishly in the still air. It was a sight at once awsome and horrible and filled with ominous portent.

By the time we reached the transport area the red streamers of dawn had fused into daylight, and the ship was at condition 1-A for debarkation. The sound of gunfire which had been like the distant muttering of thunder on a summer afternoon, rose in crescendo until the very air vibrated to its terrific roar and beat against the eardrums like a heavy hailstorm on a tin roof.

Our boats were lowered with the same dispatch as had been shown in practice. Some of our LCVPs were sent to the Hinsdale and others to the Pickens. The medical group of the Beach Party was sent to the LST (H)-931 where for ten days they did a magnificent job in caring for the wounded brought aboard for treatment.

At 0900 (H-Hour) on the 19th, the Marines stormed ashore for one of the bloodiest battles in Marine History. Their story you already know.

Just prior to the landing a barrage of shells bombs and rockets, of the most terrific intensity imaginable was laid down on the beach by battleships, cruisers, destroyers, landing craft, and planes. Nothing, we felt could possibly have lived under this unbelievable holocaust. That we were wrong in this surmise soon became evident, when the Japs, strongly entrenched in holes, caves and pillboxes, after allowing the first three waves to land without incident, opened up on the beach with everything they had.

From the comparatively safe decks of the Bladen we could watch the tiny antlike figures on the beach crawling painfully upward, making their way toward the airfield. Suddenly there would be a puff of smoke and flame in the midst of a group of men and when it cleared away the place would be empty of life. The tanks, too, fared little better. They would bog down in the soft deep volcanic ash that is Iwo, and become easy targets for Jap anti-tank guns. Other tanks as we watched would suddenly seem to blur as though for a moment they were out of focus, a large ring of dust would rise around them and they would burn with an intense white flame. They had ridden over buried torpedo warheads, and a torpedo warhead is more than a match for a tank.

For the remainder of that day we stayed in the transport area watching the drama being enacted on the beach, watching and marveling at the sheer guts of the men who crawled and writhed across the blood soaked ashes and died with their faces to the enemy.

That night we retired in company with Task Group 52.3 and returned at dawn the following morning. That day we debarked some of our troops and received the first casualties from the beach for treatment.

We were well set up for the handling of casualties as we had a marine medical detachment aboard as well as seven doctors of our own. The wardroom was turned into an operating room and it was not uncommon for lunch to be served at one table while an operation was in progress at another. The medical department on this ship is deserving of the highest praise for the efficient manner in which they took care of the casualties. Through their tireless efforts, many marines are living today who would otherwise have added their names to the long list of heroes who died at Iwo Jima.

That afternoon we had our first air alert, and all ships not unloading were ordered to retire for the night. At 1907 we had another air raid and this time they meant business. As we steamed into the dusk we could see on the horizon a flaming curtain of anti-aircraft fire rising into the sky. CIC reported bogeys coming in from several directions. Soon tracers were criss crossing the sky on all sides. Suddenly ahead of us on the horizon a terrific barrage of AA fire burst into the sky like a gigantic 4th of July celebration. Our TBS informed us that we were witnessing the death throes of the CVE USS Bismark Sea. Two hours later we crossed the oilslick that marked her grave. Planes from the Bismark Sea were circling near us in search of carriers on which to land. Some dropped into the water, their lights blinking frantically. Destroyers boiled in their wake and picked up most of the unfortunate plane crews.

The next two days were a repetition of the first two with the exception of the transferring of the 8" ammo to the USS TUSCALOOSA and the transfer of the ship's Beach Party to Blue Beach 2.

The transfer of the ammunition took considerable skill on the part of the winch and boat crews, for there was a heavy swell and the ship was rolling badly. Ammunition is tricky stuff to handle in the first place, but when it must be lowered into violently pitching boats it becomes extremely hazardous.

That night the Bladen was ordered to anchor close off BLUE Beach 2 where occasional stray 20 MM shells were seen to explode near us. This hardly tended to make our stay more pleasant and it was not unusual to see all hands topside diving for cover. Ensign Coset's somewhat corpulent form could be seen flattening itself against the deck, his stern sheets well into the wind, as the sound of exploding projectiles drew nearer. One plane dropped a stick of bombs which fell off our starboard bow without inflicting any damage. The smoke generator of an LCI close by caught fire at that instant lighting up the whole area in an unearthly glare.

The air raids continued to be a nightly occurrence and the Bladen (no longer Maiden) continued to be the most conspicuous ship in the transport area. Anchored for the rest of her stay off Blue Beach 2, the Bladen was continually in danger not only from the bombs but also from the Jap 20 MM shells which still peppered the area and in one case set a nearby LST on fire.

By the 28th of February all cargo had been unloaded and all troops debarked. With a load of casualties the Bladen, now a battle hardened veteran set sail for Saipan, minus the Beach Party which was still on Blue Beach 2.

Throughout this period no injuries were sustained by any of the ship's personnel although close calls were too numerous to mention.

Before passing on to the next phase in the life of the Bladen, some mention should be made of the work of the Boat Group and Beach Party during the Iwo operation.

Our boats carried assault troops in the fifth and sixth waves, and followed later with supplies. In a mean sea and against a beach so difficult that it was soon littered with wrecked landing craft our crews kept their heads and did a job they can be proud of. At times when the beach was considered unsafe for their type of craft our coxswains took off the badly wounded and delivered them to hospital ships. Almost every crewman helped administer plasma at one time or another, for there were no corpsmen to accompany the wounded away from the beach. They left the ship well supplied with foul weather gear and blankets, and came back without them, because they felt that the wounded marines needed them a lot more than they did. Not that the Bladen's men did more than others did or would have done, but they did it competently, even when they were so cold, wet, and tired they could hardly move, when their ship had left them because of the danger of Jap air raids and they didn't know when she would be back, and when she did return they came aboard for hot coffee and a little rest and volunteered to go right out again.

Two of our boats were wrecked on the beach and the crews had to make their way back to the ship as best they could, some of them having to spend the night in shallow foxholes while Jap shells and mortars exploded around them, landing with startling accuracy on landing craft coming into the beach.

The Beach Party too had its share of excitement. Almost immediately after landing on Blue Beach they were given a taste of Jap mortar fire and had to take shelter in the nearest foxholes, which were already overcrowded with Marines. The bombardment over, they made their way down the beach to Blue Beach 2, the nearest beach to the front lines, where they set up their command post and dug foxholes.

For seven days the Beach Party remained on Iwo, working as they had never worked before to keep much needed supplies coming in. The line handling teams especially caught hell. For hours at a time they would have to stand in the cold surf handling lines in an effort to keep the landing craft from breaching on the beach. The radiomen did an excellent job in maintaining communications with ship and various commands, and the signalmen were kept busy on the beach sending messages to control boats and incoming landing ships.

Since the beach was often under heavy sniper and mortar fire it was necessary at times to seek shelter, after which work would have to be redoubled to catch up. At night especially, the Japs endeavored to disrupt unloading operations and their flares hung over the beach continually.

One of the most disheartening experiences was to watch the Bladen steam away, while the Beach Party remained; dirty, hungry, weary and wondering where the next mortar would land. When finally, after seven days of nightmare existence, during which the smell of death hung heavy over the island, the Beach Party was evacuated to the APA62 which carried it back to the Bladen at Saipan.

Saipan, dear old Saipan, Fantastic though it may seem it was one of the finest sights imaginable. There was no thunder of gunfire and no air raids, and best of all there was recreation, and movies again on No. 2 hatch. Men laughed at corny jokes and enjoyed warm beer. And why not? They had been to the portals of hell and life was good.

But there was another cloud already on the horizon. The war wasn't over and in the offing was - Okinawa.

By the time the Beach Party returned to the ship on the 11th of March the Bladen had already commenced loading troops for the coming invasion. This took a lot of the kick out of the beer, for by adding two and two together it was plain that Okinawa would be no pushover. It was just too damn close to Japan for comfort. We knew that we would be within range of a hundred enemy airfields and we also knew that the Japs had plenty of planes. It would be to say the least - gulp - hazardous. The operation plans when they came aboard did little to allay our fears. We only hoped that this time by the grace of God we might be downwind when smoke was made.

From the 16th to the 19th we maneuvered off Tinian and again held practice landings and firing exercises, and then returned to Saipan to combat load and pick up the remainder of our troops.

At 0830 on March 27 we got underway from Saipan in company with Task Group 51.2 enroute for the invasion of Okinawa. No one did any cheering and certainly no one seemed very happy about it. Some one said "This is it", and had a shoe thrown at him. Tokio Rose again informed us that we were expected and that the remnants of the 6th Marine Division would be able to get into a single jeep. We knew it was propoganda, but it didn't make us any happier to know that they would be waiting for us again.

The invasion was scheduled for Easter morning, April 1st, a day we would much rather have spent at home admiring the price tags on our wife's Easter bonnet and going to the Sunrise service. Instead we were to participate in one of the most colossal April Fools jokes in history, for that day was April Fools day and the Navy had a practical joke cooked up for the japs. And this is how it was.

We of Transport Squadron 15, along with a squadron of LSTs, LCIs and several heavy units of the fleet were to stage a mock invasion on the South Eastern beaches while the main force of the 5th Amphibious Fleet steamed around to the Western beaches for the actual landing. We were the decoy, and the tiger might get us first.

Sure enough, as we approached the island in the grey dawn, the lead ship in our column, the Bladen was third, commenced firing and in a few seconds was enveloped in a cloud of smoke. It was the Hinsdale, and she had taken a suicide plane in her engine room. Listing, she fell out of column and we commenced chewing on our knuckles. A little to our left an LST burned furiously, long tongues of flame licking at the sky.

As the Easter sun rimmed the horizon behind us, the warships commenced to bombard the beach and our boats were dispatched to the rendezvous area from whence several waves would make a run on the beach, only to turn around and return to the ships. We could picture the Japs watching the boats roaring toward them and muttering banzai's into their saki. A study of their facial expressions would have been most interesting when the boats did an about face. That night a Tokio broadcast reported repulsing an attempted landing, although actually they had fired only a few shots at us. Tokio did not mention the unopposed landing that had be successfully made on the Western beaches. The hoax had worked.

That evening we retired for the night as we had done at Iwo, and much to our surprise we were unmolested. The following morning we again made a demonstration attack on the Southern Beaches to further confuse the enemy.

At about 0900 that morning a Jap plane (Val) suddenly made its appearance over the transport area. Now a Val is an old and slow dive bomber with fixed landing gear. It is also one of the easiest planes in the world to identify, yet it was some time after it made its appearance before some of our guns timidly opened fire. We were then treated to a most remarkable sight. The Val, literally blunting its nose at us flew slowly, jauntily across the entire transport area and through an intense barrage of anti-aircraft fire. Once it dipped its wings as though contemplating a dive on one of the ships, and then it straightened out and continued on its course, not even deigning to dodge. One could not help feeling a tinge of admiration for the pilot who had thus taunted death within range of hundreds of flaming guns. Some one said that a destroyer had, by means of radar, finally splashed him after he had disappeared into a cloud at the far end of the transport area. Be this as it may, we had learned at first hand what we were up against. These Nips just didn't scare easy, and there would be hell to pay when they really started coming in, in force.

That afternoon, in company with three other ships we steamed around the Southern tip of Okinawa to the Western beaches where unloading operations were well underway and that night, with an air raid imminent, we again retired to a cruising area, spending a good part of the night at General Quarters, listening to the reports from CIC.

The following morning we again returned to the Western transport area to find it enveloped in a blanket of smoke so heavy that it was impossible to see the bow from the bridge. With several hundred ships of all types around us it was necessary to proceed with extreme caution and it was late morning before we reached our anchorage. For the rest of our stay at Okinawa we remained anchored, moving only to shift berths when we would find ourselves isolated by the moving of other ships. It is not a pleasant sensation to find yourself anchored in a large open space enabling a plane to attack from any angle. During an air raid such a condition is similar only to the predicament of a man who suddenly and unaccountably finds himself strolling down the main street of town with nothing on but his wristwatch.

On the night of the fifth we received word to expect heavy enemy air raids the following day. We had been wondering when they would come, for we had had several air raids by this time, and none of them had as yet been particularly severe.

At approximately 0400 that morning "Condition Flash Red, Control Yellow" was ordered by Admiral Turner and the General Alarm was sounded. This particular condition meant that enemy planes had been identified in the area, and all ships were to fire on any aircraft that might be seen. CIC reported that large groups of enemy planes were approaching from all points of the compass and the order was received to "Make Smoke", which we did with a gusto. In a short time the area was wrapped in a thick soft covering of acrid smoke, that is, nearly all of the area.

Running through the smoke there was a thin river like line of clear air where the wind had somehow pushed against itself. And in the center of the opening, by the perversity of fate, sat the Bladen, smoke billowing out from her own smoke generators to cover the ship astern, and not a bit of smoke for herself. Two of our boats equipped with smoke generators were ordered to screen us from ahead, but soon became lost in the smoke and began wandering around in circles, bumping into each other in the stygian gloom and making smoke to beat hell. Occasionally one of their generators would catch fire and a wierd hellish glow could be seen casting gigantic shadows against the wall of smoke.

In the meantime, the raids were persistently getting closer in spite of the heroic work of the night fighters and outlying destroyer screen. Suddenly the distant sound of firing guns drew nearer and we knew that enemy planes had broken through the screen and were coming over. The fact that we were still uncovered by smoke put us in an extremely awkward position. We could not see the planes in the night sky, but they would be able to see us. And that was bad. But at precisely the same moment that we detected the sound of their motors, the wind changed slightly and in a second we were enveloped in smoke. There was the roar of planes overhead, the dull shuddering thuds of bombs being dropped indiscriminately into the smoke, and they were gone. Remembering that we had stopped breathing, we breathed deeply of the smoke and coughed happily.

All that day the Japs strove to press their attacks home to the transport area, and each time they came in they were met by our navy and marine fighters (God bless 'em) or by impenetrable flack from our outer screen.

It was a sight such as many of us had never seen before, and such as I trust we shall never see again. Plane after plane would appear in the midst of bursting anti-aircraft shells and would dive suicidally at the nearest ship. Some of the "Komikaze's struck their targets and a pillar of smoke would blossom over the stricken ship. But for the most part the planes crashed into the sea, throwing up tall geysers of water, or became great flaming torches in the sky that would arch meteor like into the water, trailing long tongues of flame behind them. Twice only that day did a plane manage to break through to us. One appeared suddenly out of a cloud and pointed it's deadly nose toward the Bladen. Not at General Quarters this time, we nevertheless opened fire quickly along with several other ships in the near vicinity and the plane spun into the ocean two thousand yards on the port quarter.

The other one roared over the island to appear suddenly over the ships nearest the beach. A solid wall of steel was flung up at him, though we did not open fire for fear of hitting one of our own ships. One of our own planes following close on his tail was hit and crashed into a fuel dump setting it afire. Another fuel dump was set afire by our shells and marines on the beach had to take cover from the hail of shrapnel that was falling around them. Finally the plane which was diving at a ship on our starboard beam was hit, deflecting his aim. Wobbling, but still miraculously intact he struck the water perilously close to a group of landing craft.

Several battleships had formed a screen around us and appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely, for three and four planes could be seen bursting into flames around them at the same time. Destroyers were dashing to and fro taking pot shots at the planes and looking for suicide boats and submarines which were known to be in the area. One submarine fired a torpedo but somehow managed to miss every ship in the area, and the torpedo blew up harmlessly on a reef.

At last the day was over and the radar screen was clear of bogeys. Out of the hundred and sixty-eight planes that had made the attack, one hundred and eighteen had been splashed by our combat air patrol and surface craft. Twelve ships, mostly outlying destroyers on picket duty had been hit by suicide planes or bombs. That made the score about even.

That night we received word that a Japanese task force was on its way with an estimated time of arrival of 0800 the following morning. This was the least of our worries, for, besides our own screen of battleships and cruisers spoiling for a good fight, Admiral Spruance and his task force 58 was out there waiting for the Nips. The Jap task force, including the the super-battleship Yamato as it subsequently turned out, was very definitely annihilated in one of the quickest and most decisive actions of the Pacific War, for the Japs scarcely knew what hit them when Spruance turned his hornets loose.

The next day was comparatively quiet except for a suicide boat which managed to strike an AKA (cargo ship) while we were engaged in making smoke. Little damage was done to the AKA for the suicide boat hit a tank lighter tied alongside and the nips must have been chagrined on reaching their own particular heaven to find that they had one small LCM to their credit. It is doubtful whether their ancestors were overly pleased by this act of heroism. Possibly their supply of heavenly saki and women was considerably restricted for their carelessness. Several other suicide boats of which the island abounded were rounded up during the day by destroyers and gun boats and blown to kingdom come.

Thus went the war as we saw it at Okinawa, and on the morning of April 10 with much joy we departed the damn place just as another air raid was developing

On the way from Okinawa to Guam scuttlebutt was rife that we would continue on to the Golden Gate. A delightful dream but one doomed to disappointment, for, on reaching Guam we were ordered to rejoin our squadron at Saipan, and to Saipan we went, where we sat stewing in the sun and our own anxiety for six long boring weeks.

Saipan is not and never can be one of those islands that attract droves of gaping tourists in times of peace when such denizens of the shipping lanes are wont to haunt the highways and byways of the world. No, Saipan is not a thing of beauty, nor is it a joy forever. The longer you look at the place, the more distasteful does it appear. And we looked at it for a long time.

There were a few diversions however. There was liberty, such as it is in such places, and of course movies in the evening. and there was swimming. "Chips" constructed a sea sled which was towed behind an LCVP and to which we clung whenever our turn came around every few days. There was also a softball tournament in which various ships within the squadron vied with each other for the honor of winning a mythical division pennant. In this the Bladen came to the fore with an invincible team which literally wiped the diamond with their opponents, and romped away with the pot of gold on the final game. Thus enriched we were more than ever anxious to return to Uncle Sugar and the varied delights with which it abounds. There was one other sport which gained rapidly in popularity and resembled in a minor way the gold rush days of '49. This sport was known as "Cateye hunting" and its most vigorous exponent was none other Dr. Carl A. Heise, who, on blistering afternoons, could be seen on the beach hatless and shirtless, industriously digging with an entrenching tool. Others haunted the outlet of a dredging pipe, digging and scratching at the coral in search of the fabulous cateye.

But it was not all play at Saipan. By no means, no! A formal inspection had been promised us by our division commander, and this threw the Bladen into a fever of activity. The clamor of chipping hammers beat against our ear drums from dawn until dusk. Bulkheads were scraped and painted and scraped and painted again. The sides were painted, the decks were painted, the masts were painted and everything that needed paint was painted. There was hurrying and scurrying, hustle and bustle, and a look of madness was in every eye. In the suddenly the inspection was upon us. Spick and span in clean dungarees and khakis we stood at attention, our bellies out and shoulders in, confident that we had earned a "Well Done". The inspection finally over we were informed that our ship was one of the best cared for in the squadron, thanks to the men who had scrubbed her and rubbed her and painted her sides.

While at Saipan the Boat Group and Beach Party were also given a workout. The Boat Group to its unbounded disgust was required to perform up and down the bay, playing follow the leader with little thought other than to keep them occupied and in practice. The Beach Party made a landing on Saipan and spent the night cursing the frequent showers which made their foxholes far from habitable. Several of the men on one pretext or another infiltrated a nearby Sea Bea camp where a movie was being shown.

Liberty at Saipan was typical of liberties on all such islands and consisted of going ashore with a few cases of beer to be consumed in the hot sun while sitting in drifting clouds of coral dust. The topic of conversation was the same as aboard ship. Generally concerning women and Uncle Sugar, and many and unprintable tales that made the rounds. At 1700 the liberty party, slightly the worse for wear, would board the boats and repair to their home away from home, the good ship Bladen.

At long last, on the 4th of June to be exact, the Bladen, in company with 12 others of her kind got underway for Tulagi. Glad as we were to get to hell out of there, we were nevertheless somewhat dissappointed that our destination was not the Golden Gate as scuttlebutt had had it. In fact some of us, less discreet than the rest, were actually financially embarrassed, having placed certain bets on Frisco, and Frisco was the other way.

Now the Bladen was a Pollywog, and so were some 29 of her officers and 301 of her crew, a deplorable state indeed, and three days out of Tulagi matters came to a head. The pollywogs received each a subpoena, couched in salty language, informing him of his lowly and despicable state and the fact that the morrow would be a day of reckoning. We were also told that Davy Jones would board us that day and several pollywogs, dressed in unnatural and degrading garb, were posted about the ship to keep a sharp lookout for the august presence. That afternoon he appeared, clomping down the deck on his wooden leg, his eye bepatched and his black cocked hat displaying the Skull and Crossbones, emblem of his domain.

Being formally introduced to the Captain, Davy gave notice that on the morrow when we reached the equator, we would be boarded by His Imperial Majesty, Neptunus Rex, and court, and that at that time swift and terrible justice would be meted out to all slimy Pollywogs. With which dire threat he disappeared.

Davy Jones' dark speech had created considerable unrest among our ranks. There were those who favored an attitude of quiet submission, but certain of our number throwing caution to the wind raised the Pollywog flag and swept the out numbered Shellbacks from the superstructure with fire hoses. The battle raged for an hour or more but eventually, due largely to the preponderance of gold braid on the side of the shellbacks, the mutiny was put down, and there was nothing to do but wait for the morrow.

At 0815 on June 10, King Neptune and his antourage were received aboard with all the pomp and fanfare. All Pollywogs knelt at quarters, their heads bowed abjectly, bemoaning their heinous crimes, and salaaming as the royal party (the most villanous crew of cutthroats ever assembled together) walked past in review.

Neptune wasted little time in formalities, and soon the long line of pollywogs were crawling through torrents of salt water from the fire hoses toward No. 2 Hatch which had been set up as the court room.

Commencing at No. 1 Hatch we had to crawl on hands and knees past many Royal Police equiped with fire hoses and enormous shillelagh's which they wielded with a fiendish sadistic pleasure. On reaching No. 2 Hatch the Royal Police became thicker and the shillelachs heavier and we were dragged unceremoniously to the Royal Prosecutor, a shifty eyed brute who had apparently been spawned by the devil himself, for there was no spark of mercy in him. The Royal Judge whose benign appearance marked a cold and cruel heart passed the most frightful sentences upon us without batting an eye. The Attorney spoke no English, and when Lt. Turner tried Latin he was mercilessly beaten for his impertinence. Those among us who had thought to protect our sternsheets with an extra pair of pants soon rued our foolish action, for they were discovered immediately and cut away with scissors, leaving us naked and absolutely at the mercy of these fiends, who, with wild shouts of glee snatched us into a veritable maelstrom of agony. From the judge we were dragged and flogged to the Royal Baby, great fat wretch whose huge belly was covered with an inch of axel grease and graphite. Squealing happily he would clutch us to him and rub our faces through the grease while a red Devil with horns and forked tail, jabbed us in our exposed extremities with a pitch-fork to which a wet cell battery had been connected. It was like being spitted on a bayonet. From the Royal Baby we were pounded to the stocks in which our head and arms were locked while the flogging continued and the Devil jabbed to his hearts content and our near madness. In the meantime King Neptune, surrounded by his court favorites leered at us from a grand stand. The Queen and Princess were with him and took great pleasure in the proceedings. They were not unattractive in a dubious sort of way, the Princess especially looking not unlike many of the blondes who inhabit the bars on lower main street or call lewd invitations to sailors on dark side streets in any water-front town. But when you are being pounded to a pulp, and your eyes are full of grease, and your nerves are wracked with electric needles, Hedy Lamarr herself would draw little more than a pleading glance. And pleading glances, or even dying screams were as ineffectual as tears before a loan shark.

From the stocks we were taken to the Royal Barber who specialized in steps and V's for victory, and thence to the Royal Doctor. What words can describe the sheer horror of this experience? First he would give us a dose of medicine which seemed to be compounded of all the bitterest and vilest liquids known to science, and then we were forced to recline upon an operating table. Here while the doctor and his aid looked for unbroken bones with the aid of mallets and clubs, the Devil again made his presence felt with his diabolical pitchfork. As a parting gesture the doctor smeared our faces with a sickening mixture of catchup and paprika.

From the doctor we crawled weak and weeping to the water treatment. This consisted of a wooden chair (also electrically wired) on a hinge arrangement. After being seated in the chair and given another dose of medicine, the catch was released and the chair fell backward, throwing us head over heels into a tank of water in which two brawny fiends were waiting to dunk us until we would shout "Shellback". It was often difficult to shout anything with a mouth full of medicine and water, and sometimes the victim would be damned near drowned before he could yell.

Out of the tank we crawled with our remaining strength through a flailing double line of Royal Police with shillelaghs and lengths of stuffed canvas fire hose, and into a long canvas garbage chute, emerging from which we were Shellbacks, having been duly initiated into the mysteries of the deep. Some of our number staggered to the rail and became very sick, while others whose stomachs were stronger than their hides merely lay on the deck and groaned, oblivious to a heavy rain squall that thoroughly wet down the Royal Party, King, Queen, Princess, and all.

Two days later we steamed into a beautiful tropical little island with thick verdant jungle and palm fringed beaches. After the dusty spectacle of Saipan, its heavy foliage was a welcome change. The fishing too was excellent, and many large and tasty fish were hooked, rivaled only by the ones that got away. Liberty parties were taken ashore to drink their beer amidst the lush undergrowth and perfume of exotic flowers. Again cat-eyes were sought along the beach and fuzzy haired savages appeared with handfulls of them for sale at fantastic prices. One particular incident in this connection is worthy of record. One of our pharmacist mates, an astute yankee trader by nature, decided to bargain with the natives. Producing a dog-tag chain he acclaimed it's great value in the States and informed one of the savages of his willingness to part with it in exchange for several cat-eyes. The savage, his eyes gleaming avariciously looked at the chain, weighed it, bit it, and then turning on his heels he exclaimed in excellent English, "Horsefeathers", or words to that effect.

On June 16 we got underway once more on route for Noumea, New Caledonia, a new part of this world indeed for the Bladen. For several hours the first day we steamed close to the shores of Guadalcanal where the marines had first sunk their teeth into the Nipponese flank. Old camp sites could be seen already half hidden by the insatiable jungle and here and there a plume of smoke rising pencil like into the cool morning air, gave evidence of human occupation. To eyes starved for beauty it was truly an enchanting sight, with its high emerald peaks cloud crowned, and the broken silver threads of a mountain stream. It was pleasant to look at but could well become hateful with familiarity.

The trip to Noumea was quiet and uneventful for we had parted company with the major portion of our squadron at Tulagi. Several of our number had been to Noumea before and their tales varied greatly. Some were loud in their praise of the damoselles of the island, and others contradicted them just as loudly claiming that they would rather keep company with a Jersey heiffer than with the belliest of the belles of Noumea. As it turned out they were all partly right.

Noumea is the capital city of the French colony of New Caledonia, and like most French colonial cities, it is a strange mixture of pride and shoddiness and a cold aloof disapproval of all things American, and a grasping avoriciousness which belies their distaste for American things, especially money. The French colonials rely heavily upon their allies but bitterly resent the encroachment upon their privacy. Nevertheless Noumea is a good liberty port, chiefly because of the many bars and officers clubs which have come into being since the "allied invasion".

For some Noumea was perhaps a little too rich for the blood. The local whiskey, a blend of kerosene, gasoline and torpedo alcohol proved the downfall, literally and figuratively, of many a sailor. A glass of aviation ethyl would have been mild in comparison.

For those interested in the pursuit of romance there were a few women, hardly Connover models, but at least they were female. The officers club is a structure of considerable magnificence and is not unlike many of the better night clubs in the States and is always crowded to capacity, with the result that it has all ready paid itself off with interest.

For three days we remained in Noumea receiving threatening messages from the Admiral who claimed that too much hell was being raised hither and yon by naval personnel. It seemed that after the rigors of Iwo and Okinawa everyone had let their hair down and painted Noumea a deep dark red. Besides it was cold and we had to do something to keep warm.

On the 22nd of June, our holds filled with fire brick, we set sail singly for Guam, arriving there on the 2nd of July, having run the gauntlet of a couple of subs between Eniwetok and Guam.

It was there that we received the most momentous news that we had heard up to that time. The Captain returned from the Port Directors office to say that we had been ordered to San Francisco. Had we been told that a wealthy relative had left us a million dollars we could not have shown greater enthusiasm. At last the thing for which we had lived and fought had come to pass, we were headin' home. No longer need we sit at the movies singing to the tune of "Glory Glory Hallelujah."

"Send the Bladen back to Frisco,
Send the Bladen back to Frisco,
Send the Bladen back to Frisco,
And let the Aircorps win the war!"

Our prayers had been answered.

Frantically unloading we set sail for 'Frisco on July 5, and without a stop we slid under the Golden Gate Bridge at 0730 on the morning of July 21, and dropped anchor in San Francisco Bay.

As always seems to be the case at such times, our joy was not unbounded. We had hoped our stay in "Gods Country" might be at least a month as we had considerable work to be done on the ship. However to our bitter disappointment we were told that we would be there little over a week, and the leaves we had expected were mere "seventy twos". Faced with this situation there was nothing to do but to make the best of it. And that we did.

It is not necessary to go fully into the details of our stay in San Francisco, for each man in his own way made hay while the sun shone, though actually the over-rated Californian sun shone very little.

Despite every effort on the part of the Captain to prolong our stay in San Francisco in order to effect several necessary repairs, we were ordered to leave on the 3rd of August for Seattle. Amidst much weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth therefore, we bid goodbye once more to the Golden Gate and headed into a choppy sea.

Several new hands had reported aboard in Frisco, and for these the gyrations of the Bladen in the rough coastal waters proved too much for their stomachs. Some of them in true landlubber fashion ran to the windward rail

to get sick, and learned to their discomfiture that the wind has a habit of blowing things back.

Early in the morning of the 6th we steamed up the quiet and beautiful straits of Juan de Fuca and into Puget Sound. This being the home of the Captain he proudly pointed out the scenic landscape and, shortly after docking, was seen disappearing up the dock in his blues.

Seattle is an excellent liberty port, but for those of us who had just said goodbye to our wives in Frisco, it did not hold quite the attraction that it did for the more footloose, who were loud and even maudlin in their praises of the city.

It was while we were in Seattle that the momentous news of the first atomic bombing of Japan electrified the world. A little sceptical at first we nevertheless foresaw a sudden end to the war, something that we had dreamed of and hoped for these many weary months. There was an air of excited expectancy over the ship that was not even dulled by our departure from Seattle.

With a load of over 800 Naval personnel and forty-one troop officers destined for the Philippines we set sail on 8 August for Pearl Harbor, our first stop. One day out of Pearl the word was received over the radio that the Japanese had accepted our peace terms. A Happy Hour was in progress at the time and the band struck up "Show me the way to go home". Then all the ships guns were ordered to commence firing in honor of the occasion, and never before, either at Iwo Jima or Okinawa had they fired as fast or as furiously. And somehow, there seemed to be a different sound to their roar. It was a jubilant noise, as though the gunners had transmitted to their guns their own jubilation. The war was over, and ahead lay - HOME.

But it was not home for all of us. True, when we arrived in Pearl it was learned that a point system had come into effect, and that certain of our number were eligible for release. Enviously we watched them as they packed their bags, and with a wave of the hand walked down the gangway. It was home for them, but for us there was still a long way to go.

Pearl had changed little since we had left there on the way to Iwo. It was still over-crowded, wet and exorbitantly expensive. The curfew had been lifted, but since there was little or nothing to hold us out after dark there were few who were not back aboard at an early hour. It was therefore, with no regret that we continued on our way, this time with a PC as escort.

Our next stop was Eniwetok from whence we proceeded in company with nine other APA's and two escorts to Ulithi, the stomping grounds of task force 58 prior to the invasion of Okinawa.

At Ulithi liberty parties made the acquaintance of the enchanted Pacific island of Mog Mog, whose enchantment apparently lies in the fact that it is a fleet recreation center. Here twenty thousand men a day gather under the palm trees to swill cold beer and pitch horse-shoes. The island of Mog-Mog was once a peaceful little community of christianised savages, however since the arrival of the United States Navy they have been moved to another island lest they should pick up any of our bad habits.

Due to the torpedoing of the U.S.S. INDIANAPOLIS between Ulithi and Samar a month previously, we were not allowed to proceed without adequate escort, and it was therefore three days before we could again move on to our destination, Samar.

On the morning of Sept. 7th we steamed into San Pedro Bay between Leyte and Samar, and dropped anchor for the first time in the Philippines.

Another milestone had been passed and we had made our last wartime run. But the work of the BLADEN was by no means over. Ahead of us still lay the goal toward which we had been sailing for so long - Japan.

The Philippines, sans liberty, proved to be relatively uninspiring. True there were mountains and streams and grey-green jungles galore, but viewed from the sweltering decks of the Bladen, they gave rise to little poetry such might be evoked even by the mud-banks of the Mississippi.

Our stay in the Philippines, from the 7th to the 20th, was one of restless wanderings to and fro, in which nearly as much time was spent at special sea detail as at regular sea detail.

After unloading our troops at Guiuan, Samar, we proceeded in a roundabout way for Subic Bay, which we never reached as our orders were changed to Lingayan Gulf enroute. It was on this trip that an historical incident of considerable importance took place. For the first time in the life of the Bladen she was not darkened underway. Furthermore the first underway movie was held on No. 2 hatch. This, as nothing else could have done, brought home to us the fact that the war was over. Men walked around the decks after dark half guiltily lighting cigarettes and then grinning as no reprimand was heard. It was "light ship" from here on. No longer would the ports and hatches have to be closed at sunset, holding in the stifling heat and forcing men to sleep on deck despite the frequent showers that would wet them down during the night. With this move morale went up despite the lack of liberty. Another wartime headache to go, was the old Condition III watch, when half of the ships guns had to be manned 24 hours a day. As we steamed up the Leyte coast gun watches were secured and the Regular Sea Detail was set. Again morale rose. The third wartime restriction to be lifted, shortly before our arrival in the Philippines, was that of censorship. We could now write letters without wondering who, besides the addressees, would be reading them. Yep, the war was over and we were getting a glimpse of the peacetime navy.

On the morning of the 12th we steamed past historic Corregidor and the little concrete, turreted island that the Japs had held to until burned out by fuel pumping LST's, and into Manilla Bay. We had been ordered to Manilla to reprovision, and within four hours we were once more picking our way cautiously between the sunken wrecks that dot the bay and line the shores. Close to Bataan we sailed, and as night fell we passed Corregidor again, seeing in the gathering dusk shadows the ghosts of a broken but dauntless army bitterly defending this last bastion of democracy after all hope of aid had died away.

Early on the 13th we reached Lingayan Gulf, and after a short wait, anchored off the San Fabian beach, where the following day we commenced to load army personnel and equipment for transportation to Wakayama, Honshu, Japan.

On the 16th we moved anchorage to San Fernando where we remained until the 20th, engaging in maneuvers and practicing for the landing on Japan, which was to be amphibious and employing the same principles and tactics as would be used in a full scale wartime invasion.

At 0630 on the 20th, the convoy formed up and we were on our way to Japan. The trip was quiet and on the evening of the 24th we picked up the coast of Honshu on our radar. From there on in we had to proceed with extreme caution, as there were a great many mines around. Ships ahead on seeing a mine, would train their searchlights on it until the ships astern had picked it up.

Thus, steaming slowly, we entered the Japanese Inland Sea to stand off the Kino Kawa river at Wakayama at daylight.

It was our first view of Japan proper and we thanked the good Lord that we were looking at it now instead of three months ago.

The Beach Party was lowered immediately and ordered to report to the Okanagan, the division guide ship, where they picked up the Division Beach Party. Although the Beach Party was not scheduled to land until after the seventh assault wave, it received permission to proceed in behind the first assault wave, and thus became the first Beach Party to land on that part of Japan. Instead of being met by gunfire they were met by newspaper photographers and reporters who were wandering around the beach grinning and bowing and asking discreet questions.

The beach itself was long and wide and of soft white sand which gave promise of trouble for wheeled vehicles. The Beach Party established a bivouac area on the dune line beside a wooden anti-aircraft gun, of which there several along the beach, and then prepared to receive landing boats containing cargo.

It was not long before the cargo phase commenced. Soon the beach was lined with everything from LSTs to LCVPs discharging vehicles, some of which dropped into water over their windshields, and had to be pulled out by that most marvelous of gadgets, the bulldozer.

As the day wore on, the beach, which had been so quiet in the early morning, assumed the appearance of a huge industrial area in a large city. A constant stream of vehicles of varying types clanked and roared along the beach and great piles of equipment rose higher and higher just above the tide mark. Awestruck Japanese sat along the dune line staring in amazement at the equipment coming ashore. One Jap reporter asked if this was our whole fleet. He was told that these ships were ordinarily used to carry recreational equipment to our various bases, but as this was a small landing it was not considered necessary to employ our regular fleet. In a way it was the truth for we were a comparatively small task group.

The army, never slow to take advantage of natural resources, soon had several hundred of the Japs working on the beach, hauling material from the LCVPs and stacking it in neat piles on the beach. The Japs seemed only to happy to participate in the proceedings and worked like beavers under the command of their own officers. It seemed incongruous that these men, most of whom were in the uniform of the Japanese Army, should be working so cheerfully for us now, while but a few months ago they would have been trying to kill us just as cheerfully.

Immediately behind the beaches were several factories, some uncompleted and others giving evidence of having been bombed and strafed. All were poorly constructed and shoddy. After seeing the people themselves and some of their buildings and equipment, all of which show an unhappy blend of the primitive and the modern, the thought which forcibly struck all of us was, - how did this people ever have the nerve to attack us, and how were they able to fight on as long as they did?

The city of Wakayama has been literally razed to the ground. It is a scene of utter desolation. For miles there is nothing but rubble and dust and twisted bits of metal. Hundreds of blocks have been smashed and burned to the ground, and yet, here and there among the ruins families still live with nothing about them but the ghosts of the past and the wail of the wind through the wreckage. And through this desolation street-cars still rattle, traveling the streets of the dead. A small portion of the city remains standing however, and in it the

army has taken up temporary quarters until it can move on to Kobe and Osaka.

All that night landing craft were continuously unloading and as soon as unloaded they would return to their respective ships for another load. Dawn found the beach stacked with a vast amount of equipment which was being hauled away by army trucks. As soon as the larger landing craft (LSMs and LSTs) were unloaded they too commenced to unload the transports and AKAs. Thus by 1300 the beach parties were told to return to their ships, their work completed.

By 1600 on the 26th we were underway again, enroute for the Philippines having completed the landing and unloading in the record time of 36 hours. Tired and sleepy we bid farewell to the shores of Japan, content in the knowledge that we had earned the "well done" which we had received. Once more the Bladen had in her small way contributed to the end that all men might be free.