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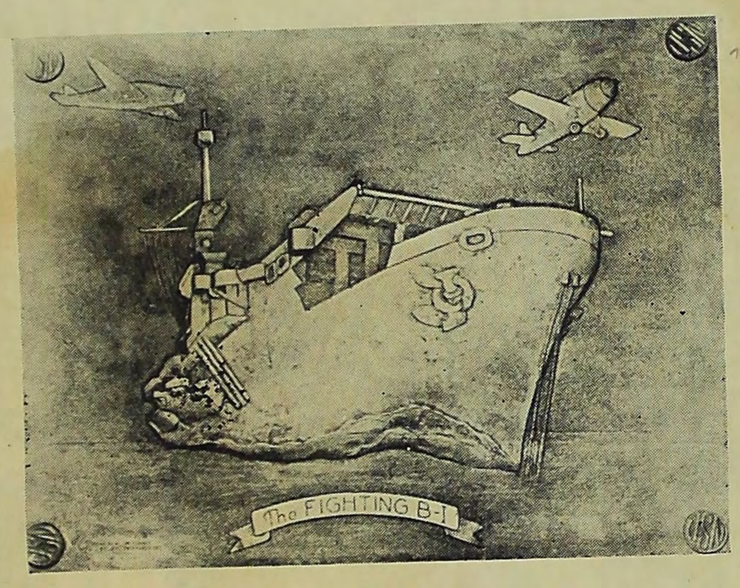
U. S. S. BLOCK ISLAND

CVE 21 and CVE 106

UNITED STATES NAVY



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THE STORY OF TWO ESCORT CARRIERS
WHO CARRIED THE WAR TO THE
ENEMY DURING THREE YEARS OF
CONFLICT

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FOREWORD

Now Hear This:

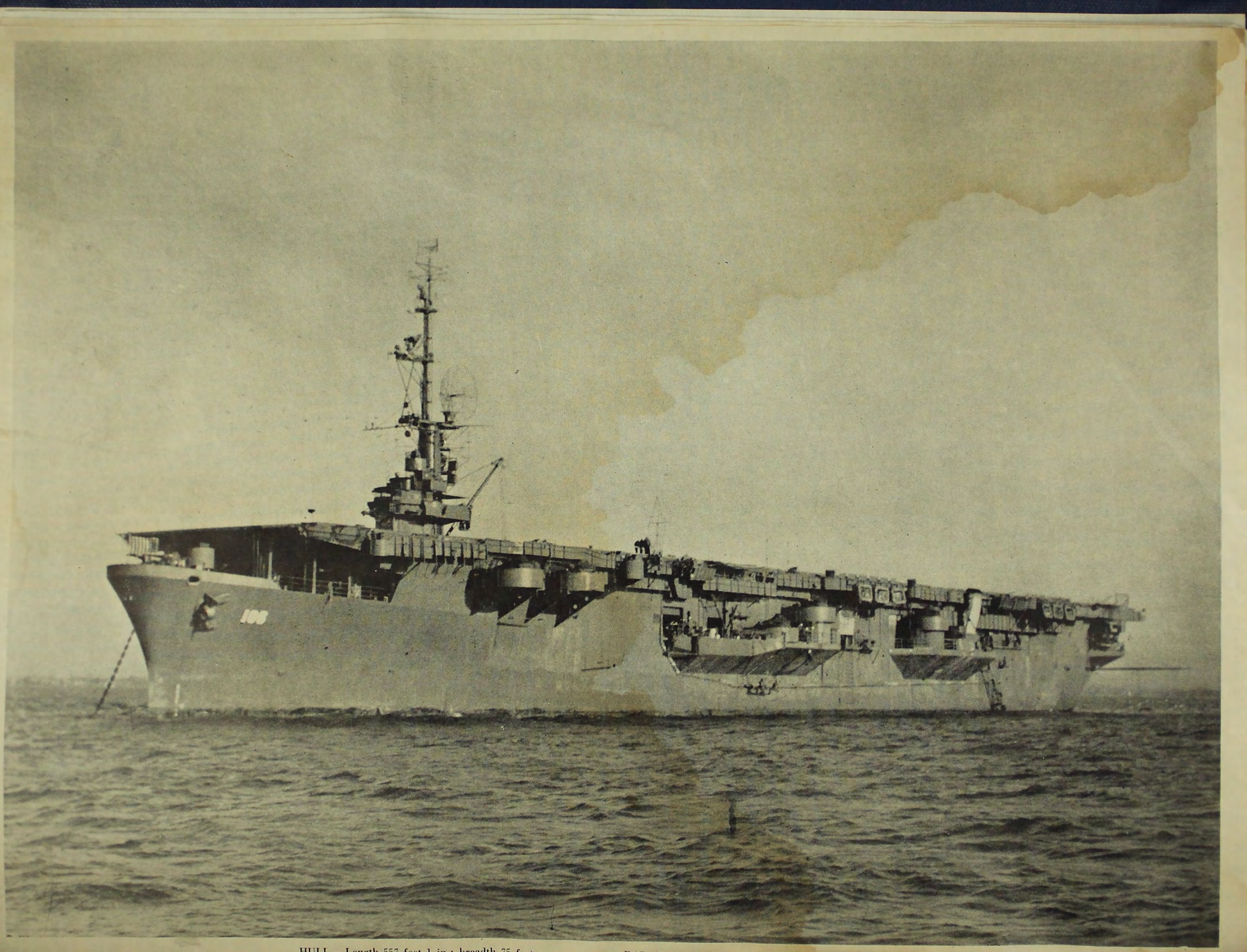
This volume is prepared as a fitting memorial to men who have served their country in a great and terrible war. Some of them were trained in the Navy. Others have left their homes, schools and work benches but the trained and untrained have worked side by side to defend their country against the Germans and Japanese who delivered that terrible air attack on Pearl Harbor, 7 December 1941.

Nothing we can put into pictures or words can fully express the earnestness of these men, their skill and their courage. To catch the patriotism, the fearlessness, and the devotion to duty characteristic of them, it is necessary to read much between the lines. Nor can we fully narrate the hard work, the long gruelling hours of training, the tiresome loading and stowing of supplies, and the tense drawn faces at General Quarters Stations ready for any eventuality.

Captain Wallace M. Beakley has been anxious to have this book prepared for the permanent record of the Navy and all men who have served aboard either or both BLOCK ISLANDS. Many of our personnel have spent all their Navy careers in one or both of these vessels. Without Captain Beakley's interest, effort and assistance, the book would have been impossible.

We, who have worked upon the story, know that many names have been omitted. It has not been possible to give every man his full account. Only incomplete records are available because of the sinking of CVE 21. The book is a story of a team and not a man. To have prepared a full Who's Who of our gallant crew would take more volumes than we can afford to print. Many men whose faces fail to smile back at them in these pictures may well claim their share in the glorious record of CVE 21 and CVE 106.

The illustrations in this volume are official U. S. Navy and Marine Corps photographs and may not be reproduced without permission. The landing signal officers were drawn by Frances Mead.



HULL — Length 557 feet 1 in.; breadth 75 feet
FLIGHT DECK — Length 500 feet; breadth 79 feet 10 in.
RADAR PLATFORM—105 feet above keel
DRAFT — 30 feet

THE COMMAND

REAR ADMIRAL DIXWELL KETCHAM, USN

ADMIRAL DIXWELL KETCHAM graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy in 1920 and became a naval aviator 19 December 1922 after training at Pensacola. After many important tours of duty, 1939 found him Air Officer in the USS SARATOGA. The following year he became Operations Officer of Carrier Division One and later aide and Chief of Staff. In 1943 he commanded the USS CHENANGO. While he was attached to Carrier Division 27 his flag flew from the BLOCK ISLAND masthead. Admiral Ketcham is now Commander, Fleet Air Wing One.

CAPTAIN F. M. HUGHES, USN

CAPTAIN FRANCIS MASSIE HUGHES, Academy Class 1923, made records as quarterback on the football squad and won letters in wrestling and lacrosse. His first sea duty was aboard the USS TEXAS. He achieved his wings March 1931 at Pensacola. After a tour of duty in the USS CHICAGO, he served with air units at Pearl Harbor and aboard three great carriers. His PBY squadron # 25, was the first to get into the air at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. Still in his pajamas, which he didn't doff for 48 hours, his Catalina careened up the channel and was off on a 1500 mile patrol flight. He commanded squadrons in the combat areas of the Pacific until he came aboard the USS BLOCK ISLAND, CVE 21, 10 March 1944. He is now Chief of Staff to Commander, Fleet Aircraft, West Coast.

CAPTAIN LOGAN RAMSEY, USN

CAPTAIN LOGAN C. RAMSEY graduated from the U. S. Naval Academy in 1918 with the class of 1919. During the last six months of World War I he served aboard the USS TEXAS in the British Grand Fleet. Captain Ramsey became a naval aviator in 1921. When the attack was levelled at Pearl Harbor, Captain Ramsey was Operations Officer of the Patrol Wings based in the Hawaiian Area. In May, 1942 he became Operations Officer at the island of Midway. Subsequently he served as Chief of Staff to Commander Aircraft, Pacific Fleet. 8 March 1943 he became the Commanding Officer of the USS BLOCK ISLAND CVE 21 and served aboard until 10 March, 1944, when he was ordered to duty as Chief of Staff to Commander, Fleet Air, Norfolk. He is now the Commanding Officer, USS LAKE CHAMPLAIN.

CAPTAIN WALLACE MORRIS BEAKLEY, Naval Academy 1924, earned his wings at Pensacola in 1926 after tours of duty in the USS UTAH and the USS MAHAN. Remarked for his ability as an aeronautical engineer, he took post-graduate courses in this field. At the start of the present war he commanded Fighting Squadron Five and subsequently was Air Group Commander aboard the USS WASP until it was sunk by the enemy submarine attack. He became Air Operations Officer of the Staff of Vice Admiral Towers, COMAIRPAC, and took part in strikes on Marcus and Tarawa made by the USS YORKTOWN and the USS LEXINGTON. After nearly 2 years on the staff of Fleet Admiral King, Captain Beakley 1 August 1945 became Commanding Officer of the BLOCK ISLAND.

CAPTAIN WALLACE M. BEAKLEY, USN

The Navy Soars With Wings

Men have always wanted to fly. The balloon provided the first successful vehicle for going aloft. Leonardo daVinci conceived three distinct devices for carrying men in the air. First he designed two pairs of wings which a man might operate using his arms and legs to flap them. His second design was a heliocopter with an aerial screw 96 feet which had to be turned by a strong and nimble operator. His final scheme of flight was a framed sail on which a man would glide. For nearly four centuries there was no significant advance.

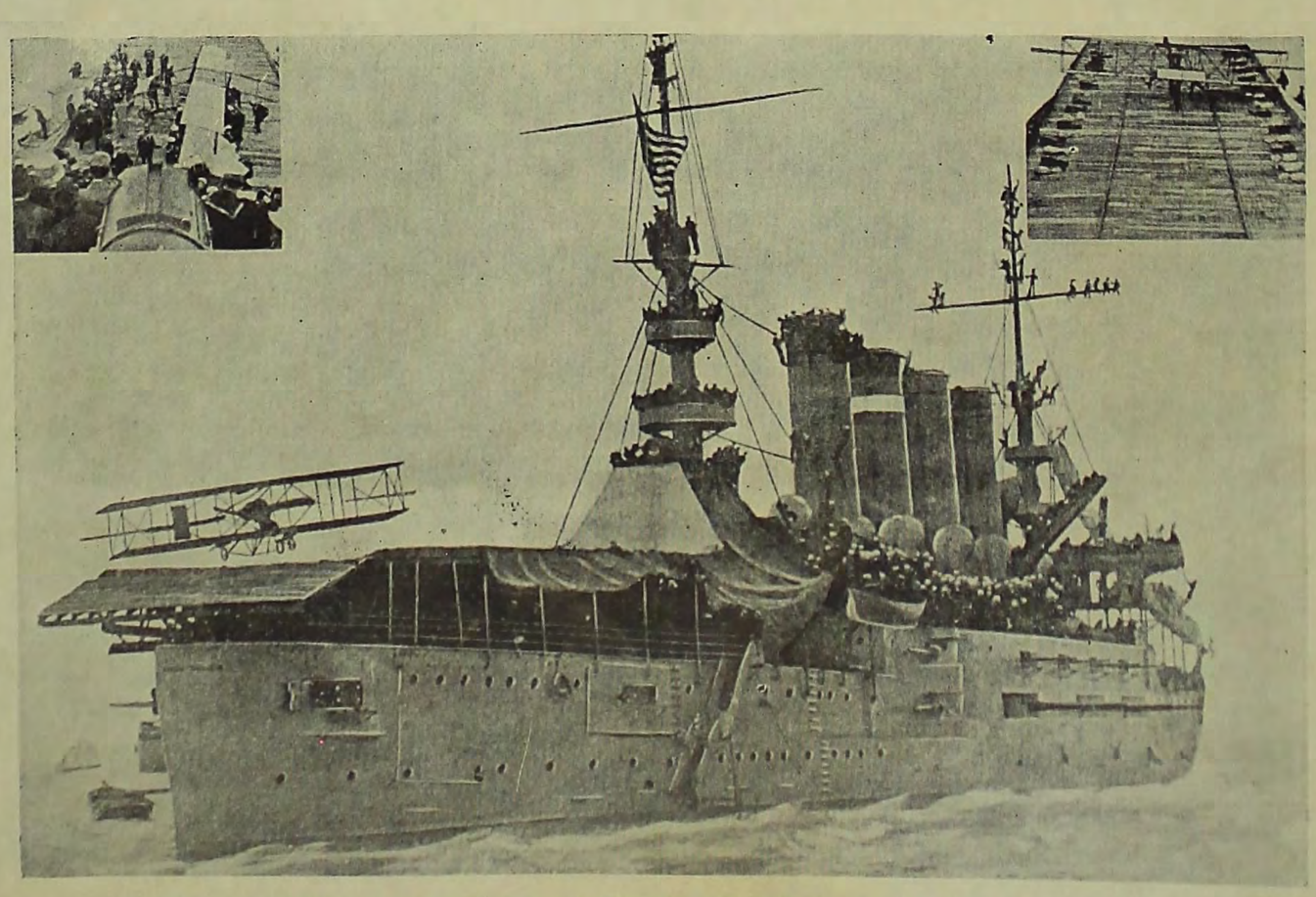
THEN CAME KITTY HAWK

17 December 1903 Wilbur and Orville Wright achieved the first powered flight of a heavier than air machine. Naval authorities showed their first interest in aviation by sending official observers to report on Orville Wright's demonstration of his airplane at Fort Myer, Virginia, in September 1908. Captain W. I. Chambers, USN, determined to interest the Navy in aviation, arranged with the Curtiss Company, after the Wrights had shown an unwillingness to cooperate, to have Mr. Eugene Ely, a skilled pilot, fly from a platform constructed on the bow of the USS BIRMINGHAM at Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Mr. Curtiss, taking advantage of the profound impression which this flight made, offered to teach a naval officer to fly free of charge. Lieutenant T. G. Ellyson, USN, was ordered to the Curtiss camp at San Diego on 23 December 1910. The potential value of aviation to the Navy was brought out more forcibly the following month 18 January 1911 when Mr. Ely landed on a platform built on the stern of the USS PENNSYLVANIA, anchored in San Francisco Harbor, and a few minutes later took off from the platform and returned to his base.

In addition to learning to fly, a difficult task at that time, Lieutenant Ellyson was assisting Glenn Curtiss in experiments on a hydroplane attachment. 17 February 1911 a plane thus equipped landed in the water alongside the USS PENNSYLVANIA and was hoisted aboard, then hoisted out on the water again making a take-off and flying back to the air field.

From 1911 on, naval aviators contributed much to the world history of aviation. Wind tunnels were built; model seaplane basins established; endurance and flight records achieved. 12 November 1912 Lieutenant Ellyson piloted the plane in the first successful catapult launching.



Mr. Ely flies from deck of USS BIRMINGHAM 14 November 1910

FIRST ANTI-AIRCRAFT FIRE ENCOUNTERED

Two planes with complete equipment were sent aboard the USS MISSISSIPPI which was ordered to Vera Cruz and another was attached to the USS BIRMINGHAM en route to Tampico, all three planes to be used in connection with the occupation of Vera Cruz in April 1914. Although not equipped for landing operations, these planes made scouting flights over the trenches in and around the city of Vera Cruz on 43 consecutive days. The plane piloted by Lieutenant P. N. L. Bellinger during these flights was struck by bullets, the first fired at U. S. Navy aircraft.

WORLD WAR I

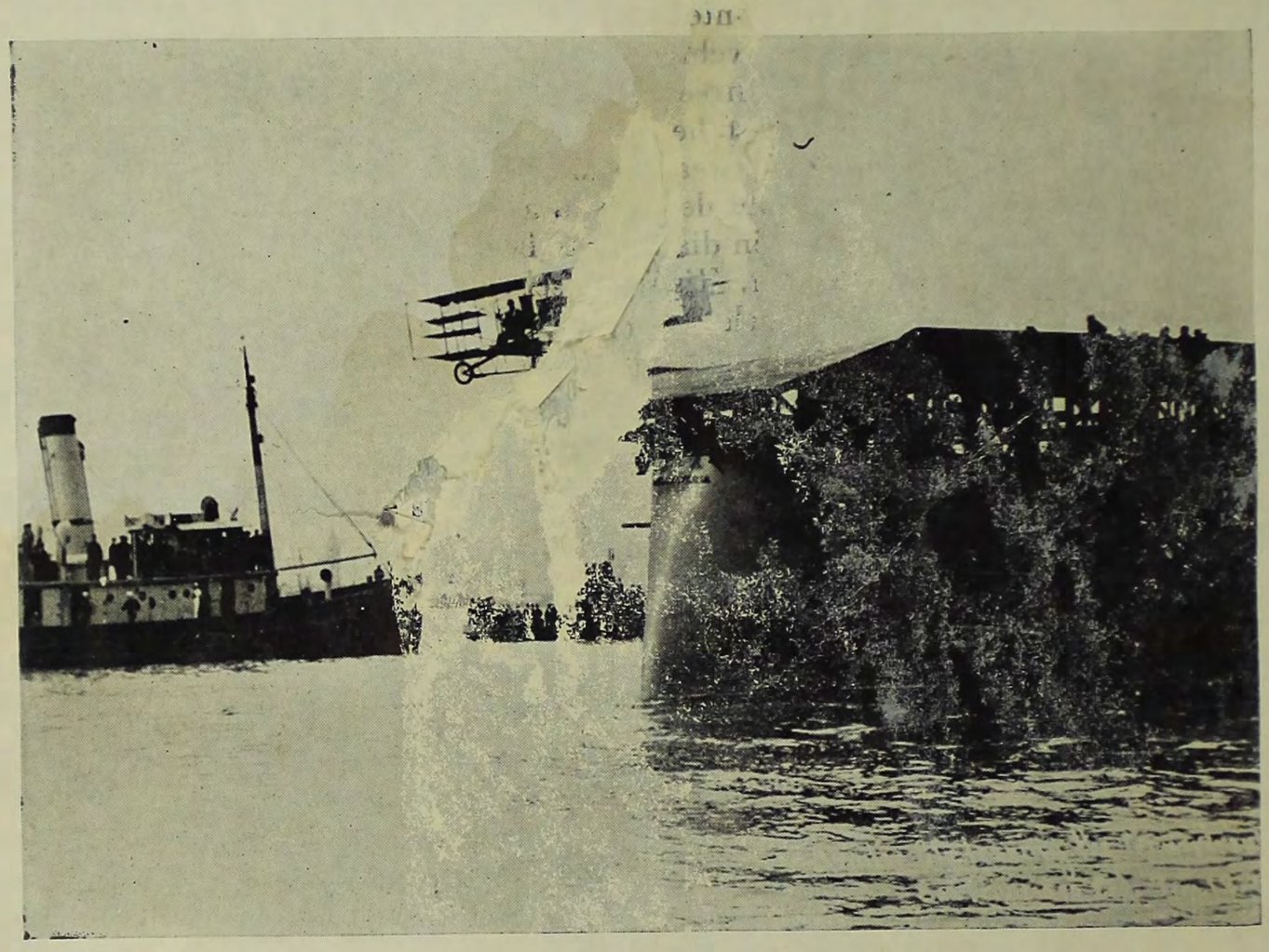
On the date war was declared, the Navy had only one air station, Pensacola, Florida; a total of 38 naval aviators; and 163 enlisted men. At the Armistice, 11 November 1918, 21 schools and stations were in operation in the United States, and 2,835 officers with 30,683 enlisted men were attached to the aviation program. This number does not include nearly four thousand student officers undergoing aviation training. Of this number 1,237 officers and 16,287 enlisted men were sent overseas during the war. Although air operations were exclusively land based and for the most part limited to convoy protection, submarine patrol, and in the case of the North Bombing Group, to bombing raids on submarine bases, the Navy learned much and contributed a great deal to the advancement of aviation. The war demonstrated clearly that the airplane was an essential component of military armament.

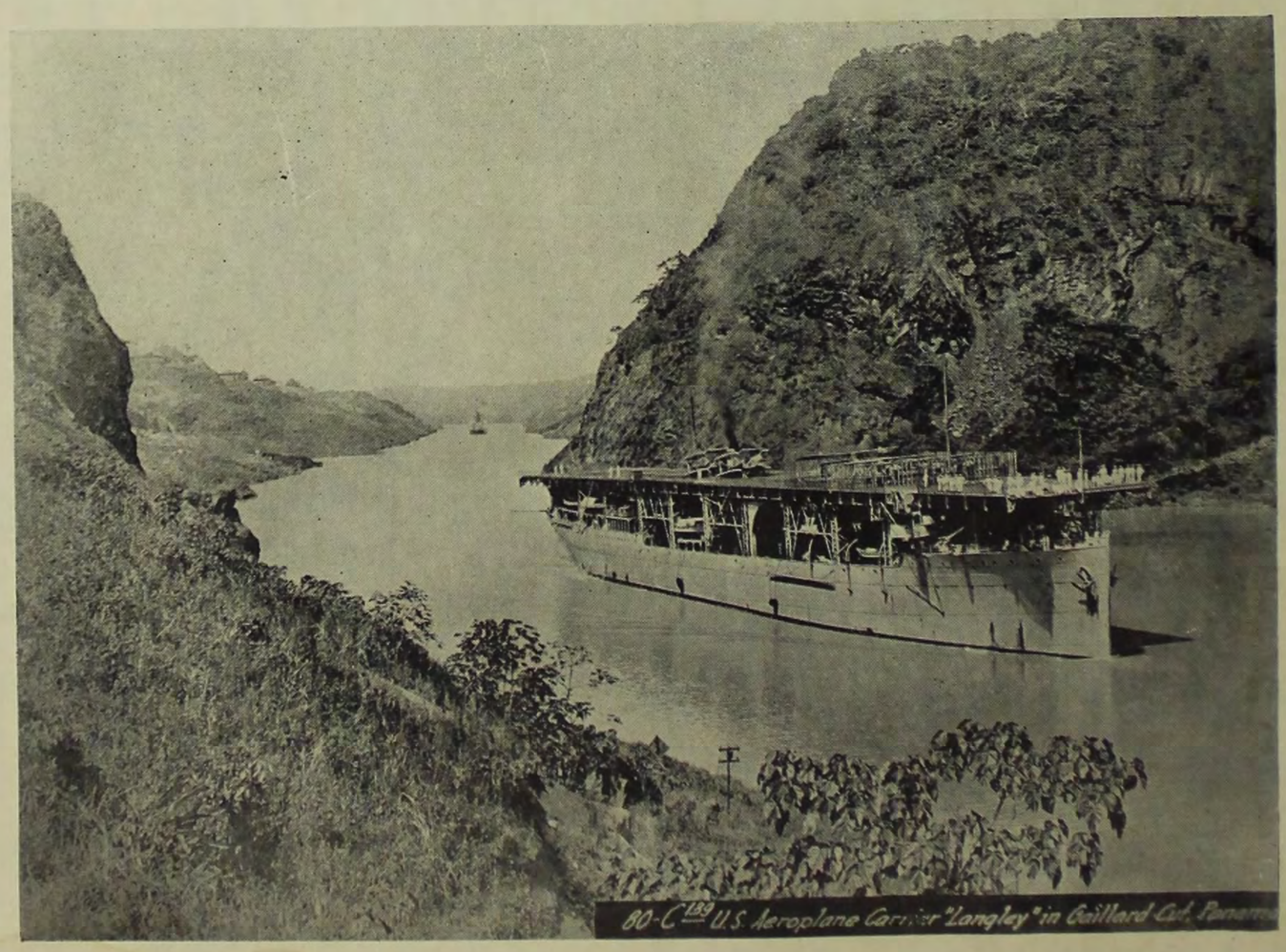
During the uneasy period between the two world wars, the most important accomplishment was the development of a mobile airdrome. The carrier, a floating. moveable, well-armed flying field was the result. The first step in this development was made in 1922 and the naval collier JUPITER was converted into a floating airfield and renamed the USS LANGLEY.

Six years later, after the USS LANGLEY had undergone many alterations, two practically completed battle cruisers, apparently destined for the scrap heap by the Washington Treaty for the Limitation of Armament, were completed as aircraft carriers and joined the fleet as the USS LEXINGTON and the USS SARATOGA. The USS RANGER, built in 1934, only six years before the dastardly attack on Pearl Harbor, was the first carrier designed and built from the bottom up as such.

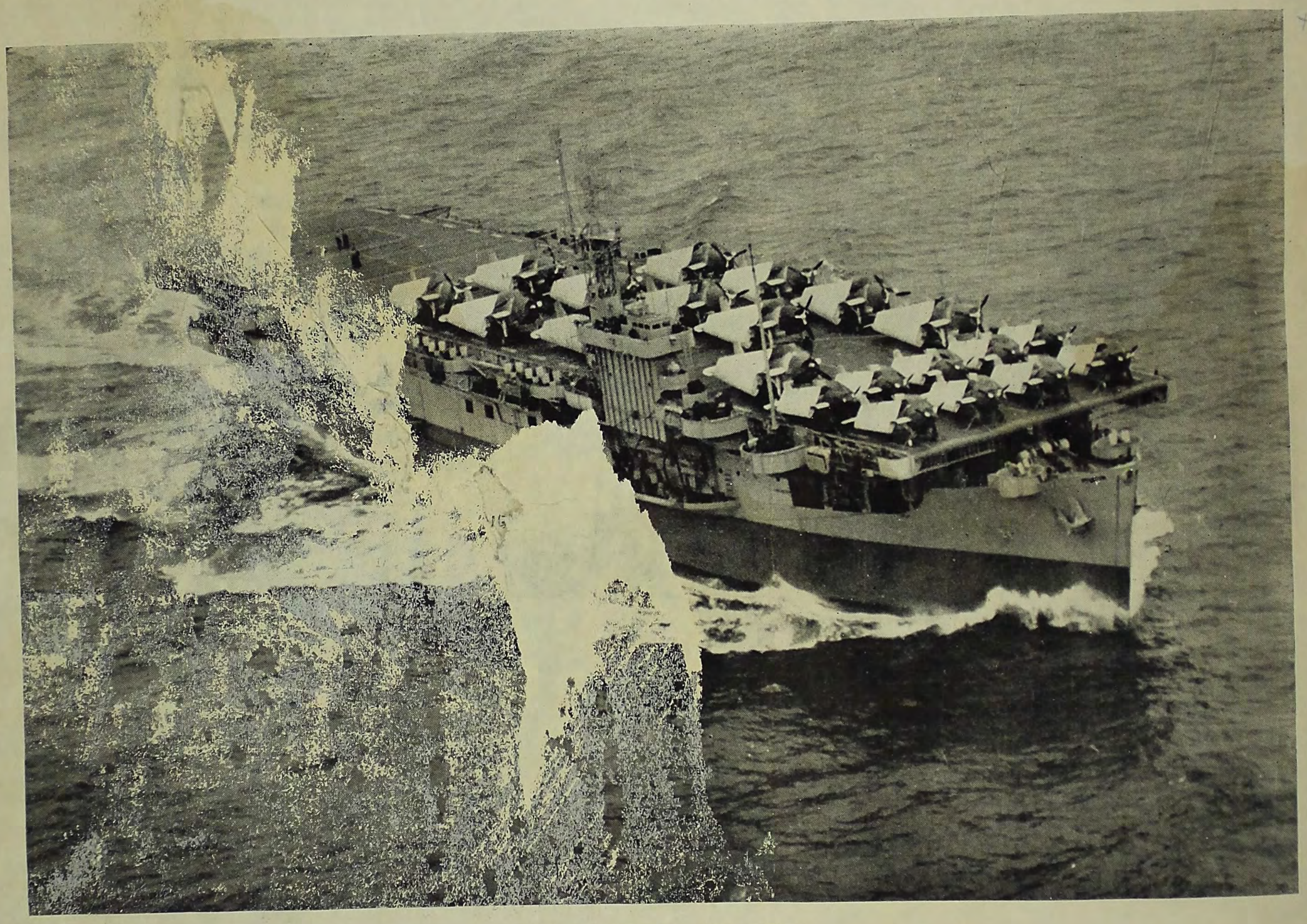
It was during these same years that the Bureau of Aeronautics experimented with, and finally adopted the air-cooled engine, now found in every type of naval service plane. There were many other advances, the substitution of metal alloys for wood in plane construction, the installation of self-starters, of de-icers, retractable landing gears, and complete radio equipment. There were steady improvements in material, in performance of planes and armament, in experimentation with new weapons, new methods of attack, new fields of research, new and efficient methods of training personnel.

Ely leaving the deck of the Pennsylvania on his return flight to the shore.



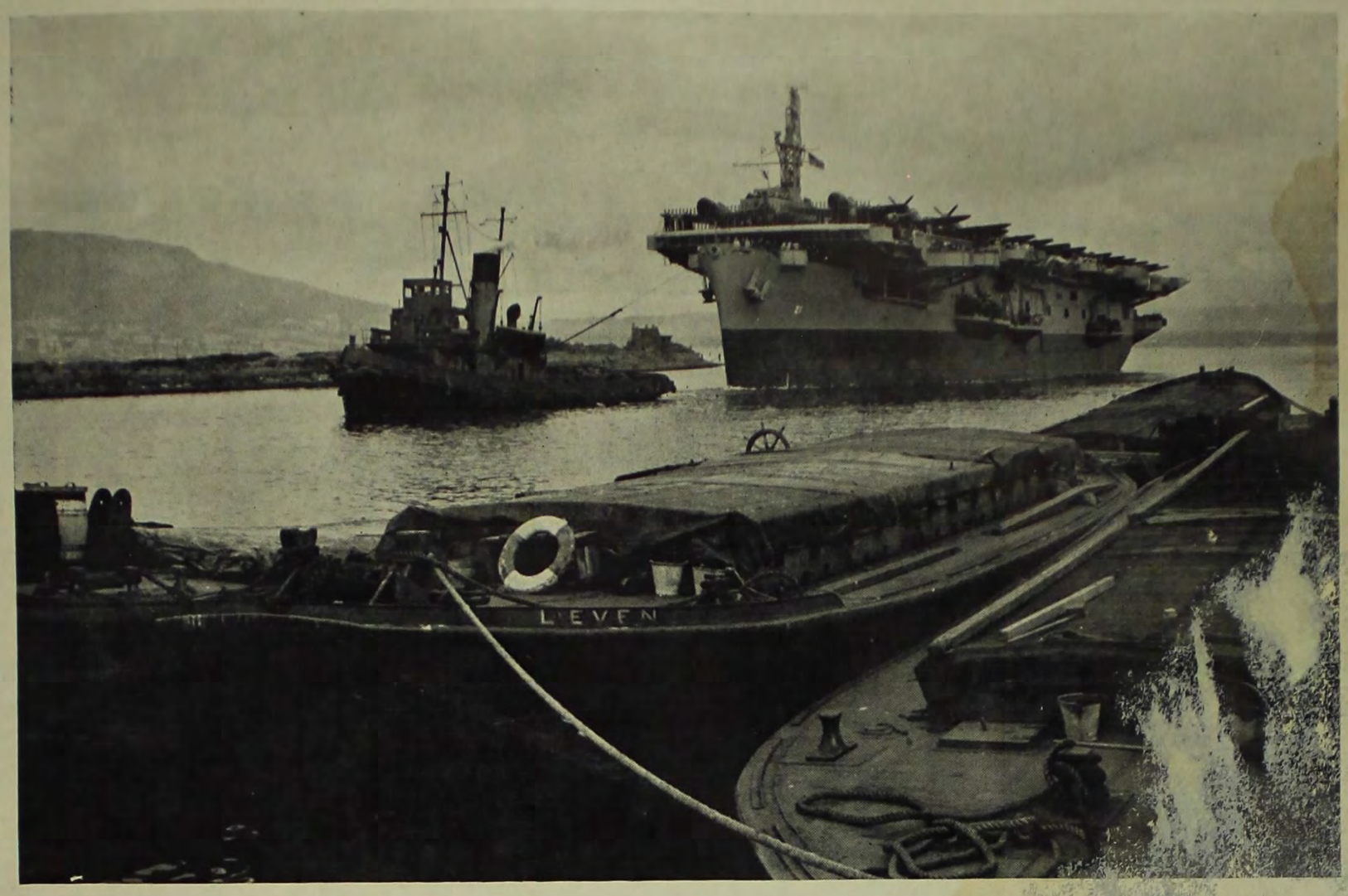


THE FIGHTING BLOCK ISLAND GETS READY



CVE 21 IN THE ATLANTIC

CVE-21 was built on a C-3 hull in Seattle-Tacoma Shipyards at Tacoma, Washington and commissioned at Bremerton on 8 March 1943. At an impressive ceremony the ship was accepted by the Navy and Captain Logan C. Ramsey, USN, was placed in command. The ship was named for Block Island, a small island off the Rhode Island shore. After a shakedown cruise in the Pacific the ship made two trips from New York to the United Kingdom travelling through submarine infested waters to deliver essential aircraft to the European front.



CVE 21 AT BELFAST

When Hitler's hordes began to terrorize Europe, Congress encouraged Naval Aviation. 14 June 1940, it raised the number of naval planes from 3,000 to 4,500.

The next day it jumped the ante to 10,000 and four days later to 15,000! At last, 19 June, a measure was passed containing the statement that this number could be exceeded "if, in the judgment of the President, it proved insufficient to meet the needs of national defense."

When Pearl Harbor was attacked the President did raise the naval air complement to 27,500 planes.

The Navy enlarged its training program, preparing to train 30,000 pilots a year as well as a proportionate number of technicians and other aviation personnel. Seventeen flight preparatory, 90 war training service, five pre-flight, 13 primary and two intermediate schools were established.

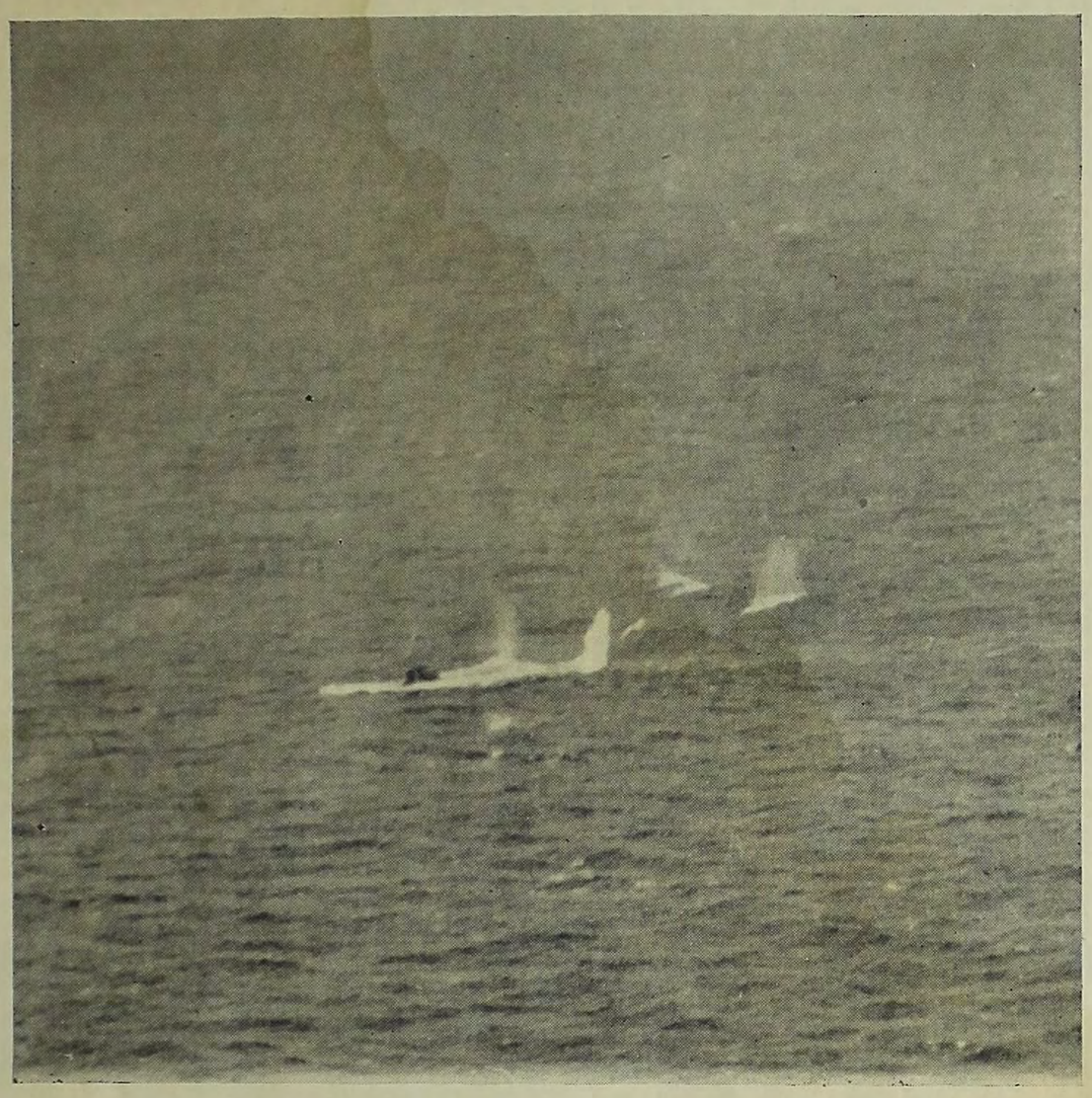
The Navy had but seven carriers: SARATOGA, LEXINGTON, YORKTOWN, ENTERPRISE, RANGER, WASP and HORNET. It was fortunate that the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was against battleships, not so essential in the early days of the war as carriers.

After that malicious attack 7 December 1941, plans were made at once to build more carriers. The Japanese already outnumbered us in this class of ship. The Navy had experimented with a smaller type of carrier for escort purposes and had already built some which it loaned to the United Kingdom.

These small escort c[illegible]ers, the first of 10,000 tons, could be built quick[illegible] operate a small air group, and be lost with[illegible]tremendous expense in man or air [illegible] The s[illegible]e CVE is one of the great stories [illegible]their value was quickly realized. Before [illegible]d nearly one hundred were flying our flag an[illegible]ny were under British Command. They pro[illegible]ant ladies. Six were sunk in heroic en-cou[illegible] The USS BLOCK ISLAND was the first and only [illegible]. Navy carrier lost in the Atlantic. Subsequently [illegible]e LISCOMB BAY, ST. LO, GAMBIER BAY, GUADALCANAL BAY, and BISMARCK SEA, met the enemy and received a mortal wound in the Pacific.

Once the Navy's escort carriers proved their ability to operate as the tactical air support of ground forces, the big carriers were left free to comb the seas on independent strategic missions. Acting as spotters, support carrier pilots directed the bombardment of surface ships and of shore-based artillery. They made uncountable low-level attacks on Japanese pill-boxes, machine-gun nests, and other targets beyond the range of other forms of artillery. They flew in low, hitting over hills and around corners. Escort carrier pilots also flew countless reconnaissance and observation hops, local combat air patrols, anti-submarine patrols and air-sea rescue missions. They laid smoke screens, dropped food, water, ammunition and first-aid equipment to isolated patrols, and even reduced malaria and typhus casualties by actually spraying the beaches with the DDT on or before every D-Day.

BLOODHOUNDS VS WOLF PACKS

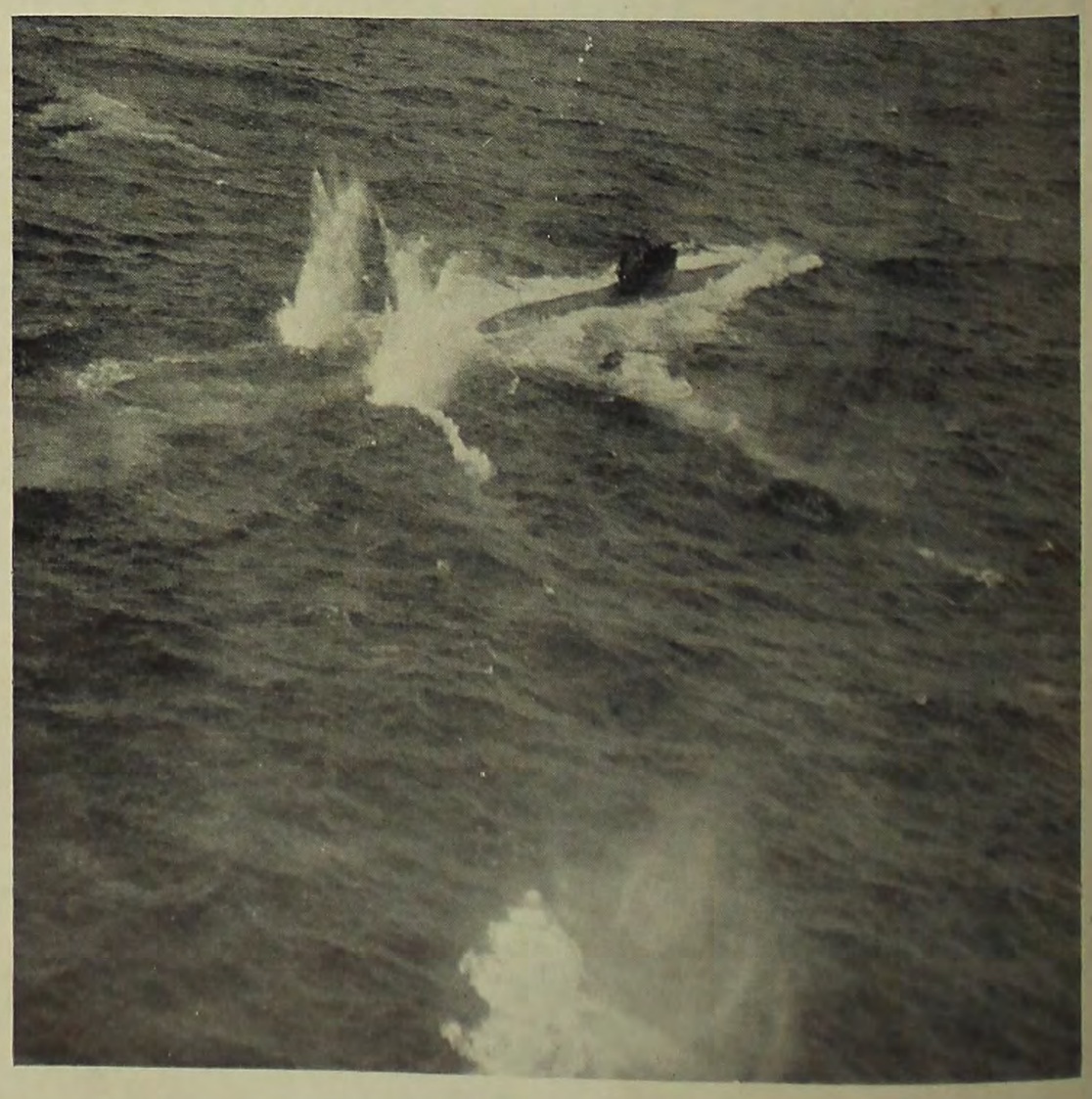


ROCKETS CHASE SUB

In the Atlantic naval aviators sank 65 German submarines, more than half the total credited to the entire United States Navy. It is indisputable that carrier aviation swung the pendulum to victory in the Battle of the Atlantic. In 1942 U-Boats were sinking one in every 233 ships. That ratio dropped sharply in 1943 when escort carriers began to be used, and continued to drop until by 1944 only one in every 1,000 ships were sunk.

In their counter-offensive the wolf packs tried a new trick—they remained submerged during the day and attacked at night. In January and February of 1944 these new tactics were successful. Then the USS BLOCK ISLAND developed new maneuvers. Our escort carriers began flying at night and, from that point on, the shadow of disaster deepened over the German submarines. Navy torpedo planes, flying from the deck of the USS BLOCK ISLAND (CVE 21) were the first, also, to attack with airborne rockets.

THE WOLF TRIES TO SUBMERGE



ATTACK AGAIN!

The Navy developed what is technically known as the HF/DF or high frequency radio direction finders. This electronic equipment was housed in stations dotting the coastline on both sides of the Atlantic, on mid-ocean islands, such as Ascension Island, and on ships at sea. A typical action was the sinking of U-Boat U-66 near the Cape Verde Islands.

In May 1944, U-66, operating off the west coast of Africa, wanted to refuel off Cape Verde Islands and decided to notify the home base of his location. His radiogram was very brief. It was sent in less than 15 seconds. But 26 Allied DF stations of the Atlantic net obtained bearings on it. From these the position was plotted nearly 18 degrees North and 34 degrees 30 minutes West. This was passed to the Commander-in-Chief, who dispatched the USS BLOCK ISLAND and her escorts to the scene. This group cruised in the area for five days, sending up squadrons of search planes each hour of daylight. Finally the surfaced submarine picked up at night by radar, was followed by a patrol plane. The USS BUCKLEY was coached to the scene by the pilot overhead, who held the U-boat's attention by making passes and firing his .45 calibre automatic into the conning tower. The BUCKLEY closed in on the German, engaged him in a running gun duel and then rammed the U-boat. The desperate Nazis leaped from their sinking submarine to the forecastle of the little destroyer and grappled with her crew. This was the first time in over 100 years that a United States warship had been boarded in a battle at sea. The Nazis were quickly subdued and the doomed submarine was finished off by gunfire. Fifty German prisoners were taken and the FBI rode victoriously into port with the skipper's pants.

The USS CORRY was guided to another submarine by the B.I. dusk patrol. At dawn the ships and planes attacked in force, impelled the wounded vessel to surface, and there it was blown to pieces by gunfire. Most of the crew survived and were taken captive.

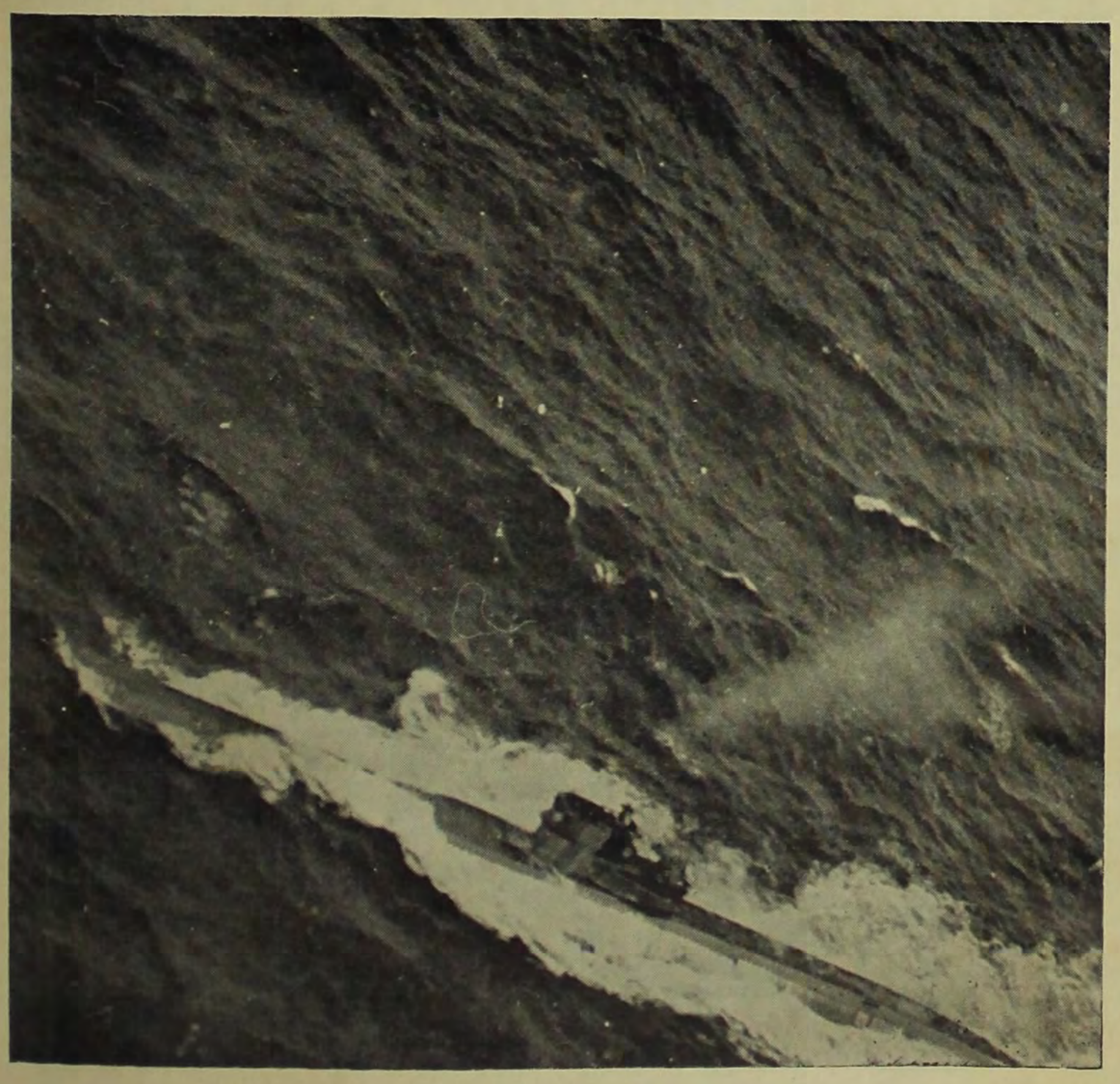
A Nazi sub captain who had lost his ship, tried to commit suicide. He was picked up out of the Atlantic with other members of his crew. The FBI medical officer removed the shell from his neck and he was given a new lease on life which continued in a U. S. prison camp.

Frequently the planes got the submarines. One aircraft team surprised a surfaced sub-wolf at dawn, completely destroying it in the first blazing sweep of fire. One of the planes was lost. The sole survivor, a young pilot-observer, managed to launch his little yellow life raft and as he sat there awaiting rescue he encountered the captain of the submarine with two of its crew. He held the Germans captive until he was rescued.

Twenty-four hours a day the planes from the flight deck of the FBI searched for submarines in the Atlantic. Twelve WILDCATS, and nine AVENGERS kept up a constant vigil. 45 pilots readily ventured out in the hunt. These men were skilled and fearless flyers anxious to be in at the kill. One aviator who bragged in the Ready Room that he'd get a "sub" on his next mission, achieved his goal but became so excited that he spun in. A passenger ensign lived to tell the story but the gallant pilot was lost.

Each night at sunset an AVENGER, having a 301 gallon belly tank, would be launched for patrol duty. This plane, flying on a beam search of 50-75 miles from the moving carrier travelling at 16 knots, sought to discover wolves as they surfaced for an evening breather. One submarine was literally caught with its pants down. The crew was in swimming.

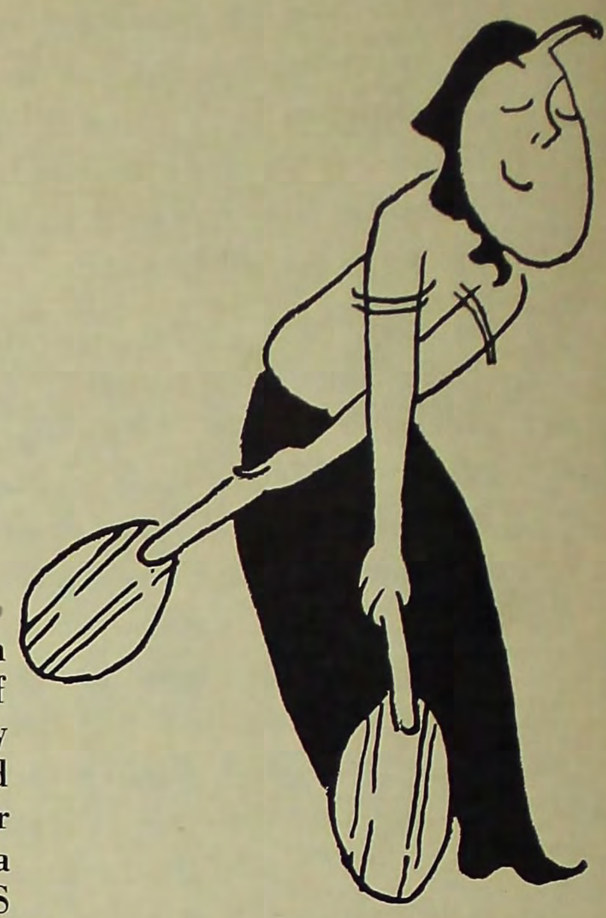
Each hunting expedition lasted about three weeks. The adventurers ranged between the Equator and Latitude 30°, from the Azores to within a few hundred miles of Europe. Each safari ended with recreation and rehabilitation at Casablanca.



THE NAZI SURFACES

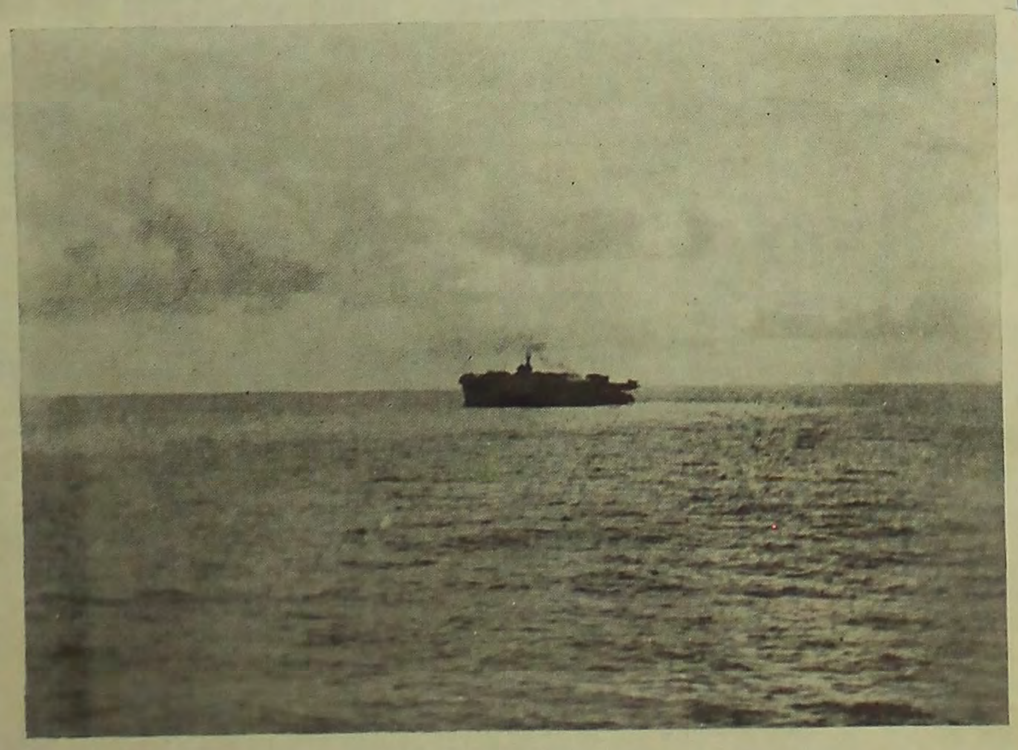
THE DEATH DIVE

A LAST ROUND UP



Nearly every day there was a periscope feather or other alarm and then on 23 May the flattop sailed out from Casablanca on another mission of destruction. A U-Boat, known to be headed south from the Bay of Biscay was its target. The FBI task force conducted round the clock air and surface operations. 27 May, 0225, Lt. jg Calvin E. Mansell, in a regular TBM scouting flight, made radar contact in 34°00′ N., 22°40′ W., on a target evaluated to be a submarine. As he started his approach the ICS went out and the plane passed over the contact before the pilot could ascertain the submarine's position. Lt. Mansell was unable to regain contact. Lt. Jack Littlefield was vectored to the scene of contact and relieved Lt. Mansell. Lt. Littlefield started square search and picked up blip, holding contact intermittently for one hour. The destroyer escorts were ordered to investigate contact but obtained only negative results. 29 May, 0255, Lt. John W. Magee saw the wake of a submarine, prepared to launch depth charge attack and then his flare went out. Lt. Magee once more illuminated area but sighted nothing. Several more planes were vectored out but the submarine, apparently alerted by the flare, submerged and the contact was lost. The task force, determined to locate the wolf, change its course and backtracked to the north at about 1958. It is probable that the CVE passed very close to the Nazi which thought itself cornered and launched a suicidal attack.

At 2013 without warning of any kind a torpedo struck the USS BLOCK ISLAND (CVE-21) approximately at frame 12, near the bow, probably on the port side. Four seconds later another torpedo struck farther aft, travelling through several frames of the ship and exploded in an oil tank through the shaft alley and up through five inch ammunition magazines.



CVE 21 MORTALLY WOUNDED

GOING DOWN BY THE STERN

The rudder jammed to port 20° and the vessel was out of control. Escort destroyers went to flank speed, reversed their courses and headed toward the carrier. All power was lost and communications with screening destroyers failed. At 2021 a periscope was sighted from the BLOCK ISLAND bridge. Because of power failure, guns could not be brought to bear on the target in time, although efforts to train manually were made. With the BLOCK ISLAND dead in the water and sinking fast, orders were given to *prepare* to abandon ship. The executive officer ordered all men in the hangar deck crews to go topside and this undoubtedly is responsible for the small number of casualties. At 2023 the carrier was hit again by another torpedo which blew a thirty foot hole in the aft end of the hangar deck. There was an opening of about 18 inches completely across the flight deck and down the side to the hangar deck. All salvage steps that could be taken were of no avail. Not only was there danger of the ship breaking in two but there was an ever present threat of another torpedo hit. The ship was abandoned at 2038. It had settled about 20 feet by the stern. Officers and crew left the ship on the starboard side, which was the windward side. Captain Hughes and the last of the personnel abandoned ship at 2145 after a man, pinned in the wreckage, had died while being extricated. A heavy explosion, probably of the remaining depth charges, occurred at 2208 and brought to an end the CVE 21.

In this disaster, six men were lost, only a few injured. Within an hour the crew, which had left their ship in an orderly manner, were kept close together on rafts. The stronger swimmers aided the injured and placed them with the weaker men in rafts. There was no disorder or confusion among these well trained naval men and many of them displayed high heroism the full story of which will never be known. That not one man was lost in this evolution although some were in the water over two hours until well after darkness had set in and during underwater explosions, demonstrates the discipline and character of all hands. Most of the personnel were picked up by the USS AHERNS and USS PAINE. The USS ELMORE took the USS BARR in tow after it had been damaged by the submarine which was fighting like a trapped animal. The AHERNS and the PAINE, after all men were rescued, stood clear of the area for the night while the ELMORE and the BARR stood by. In the morning the ships made a rendezvous and searched the area for any possible additional survivors. It is believed that 29 May at 2127 the submarine which had made the attack was exploded and sunk by hedgehogs from the USS ELMORE.

After probably causing the demise of eleven submarines, the crew of the USS BLOCK ISLAND came into Casablanca 1 June at 1230. Although they had lost their ship, the crew was not without high honor.

FBI SURVIVORS AT CASABLANCA

U.S.S. AHERNS ARRIVES AT CASABLANCA
WITH SURVIVORS

CAPTAIN HUGHES AND HIS OFFICERS
AT CASABLANCA

In Memoriam

†

When the USS BLOCK ISLAND was torpedoed six men aboard were lost. The demise of these shipmates depressed everyone although each man was thankful that the casualties in so great a disaster were so few.

JAMES O'NEIL FRANKS, COX, USNR
JAMES PETER KIBASH, MM3c, USNR
PETER TYCH, S1c, USN-I
HENRY ALFRED MEYER, EM2c, USNR
JAMES BYROL OWEN, AMM1c, USNR
JOHN J. SCHLINKER, S1c, USNR

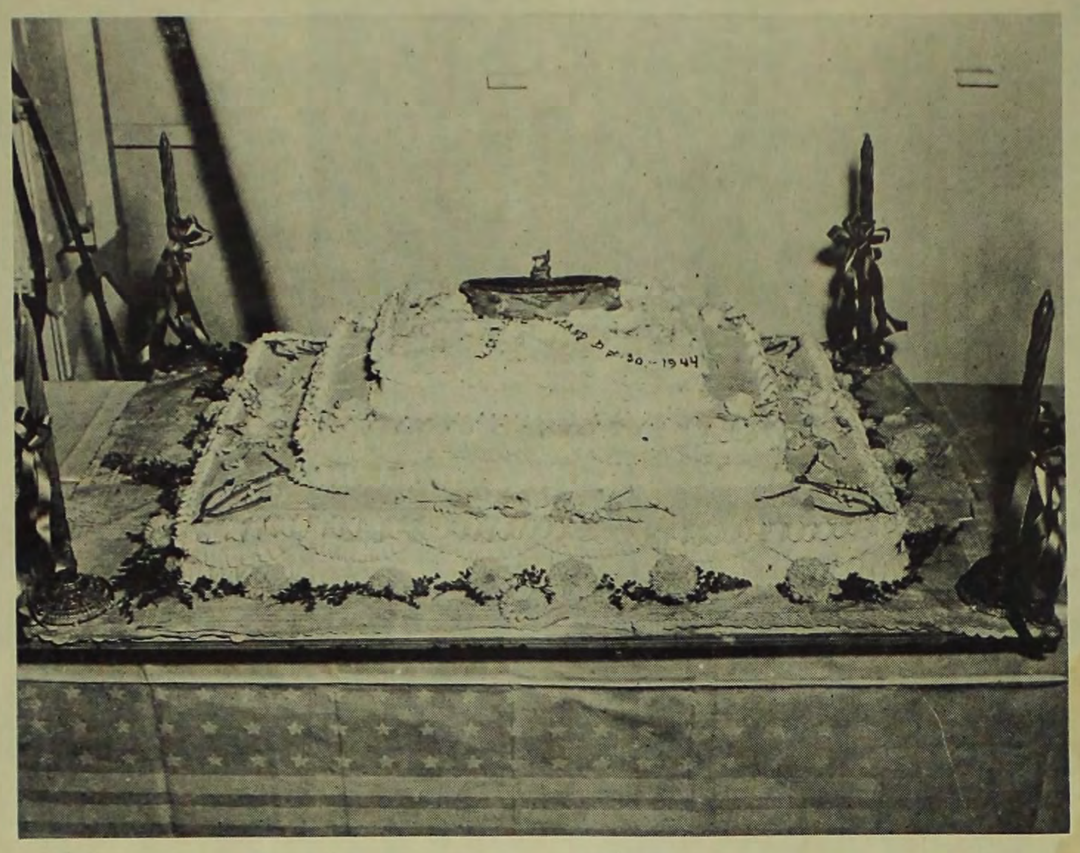
Six fighting planes were in the air at the time their carrier was destroyed. Having nowhere to land, they flew to the nearest islands. Only two of the planes made successful landings although when setting their planes down on Portugal possessions, they knew the reception would not be cordial. They were rescued as soon as possible by planes from Casablanca. To the four aviators of the FIGHTING BLOCK ISLAND who were lost, we make a final salute.

LIEUTENANT ROBERT P. BUELL, USNR
LIEUTENANT JG JULIAN L. PITTS, USNR
LIEUTENANT JG ROBERT W. WYATT, USNR
ENSIGN ROBERT E. INNIS, USNR

Fifteen other men were injured and taken to the U.S. Naval Base Hospital at Casablanca, where they recovered and most of them regained their full strength, returning to active duty in the Navy.

A NEW SHIP

DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO DIED AND TO THOSE WHO RISKED THEIR LIVES ON CVE-21



THE COMMISSIONING CAKE

Captain Hughes was determined to keep his valiant crew together and find another ship for the FIGHTING BLOCK ISLAND tradition. A new 23,000 ton carrier, a larger and newer type of CVE, the second in the COMMENCEMENT BAY class, was being finished at the TODD-PACIFIC SHIPYARDS, Tacoma, Washington. It had been launched 10 June 1944 and christened by Mrs. E. S. Hallenback, Okanogan, Washington. She is the mother of Major Gregory "Pappy" Boyington, a 30-year old Marine ace who was missing after shooting down 25 Jap planes. Later, after CVE 106 was commissioned, he was found to be still alive.

The launching is one of the most critical moments in the life of a ship. Imagine the problem involved in moving a fifty story skyscraper, lying on its side, the distance of a city block and you can get some idea of the task of launching a ship like the USS BLOCK ISLAND. There are two sets of launching ways. They are called ground ways and sliding ways. The ground ways are stationary and run the length of the ship extending well out into the water. The sliding ways are placed on top of the ground ways and sandwiched in between is a good half an inch of wax and grease. The ship is transferred to the sliding ways and is ready for launching. The sliding ways go with the ship on the greasy trip and are picked up in the water to be used again. Transferring the weight of the ship from keel blocks and cribbing to the sliding ways is accomplished by driving several hundred feather tipped oak wedges between the sliding ways and the hull.

The launching rites have a background of 4000 years of colorful history. Human sacrifice, the spilling of blood, incantations by high priests — these little extras marked the ceremonies of the early launchings. A little known but ancient custom took place aboard the BLOCK ISLAND during her trial and speed tests shortly before her commissioning. In early days a newly launched ship sailed out to sea on her trial run manned by a skeleton crew from the shipworkers who built her. The rest of the workers remained ashore perched along the ways, on high buildings, and in trees. If the trials were successful, a galley broom was run up the masthead, bristles up, a signal to the anxious workers that the ship they had built was accepted by those for whom she had been constructed. The first to sight the broom high on the masthead let out a great shout and spontaneous rejoicing and merry-making followed which lasted far into the night. A ship returning without a broom was known to be full of bugs and require more work to be acceptable. When the BLOCK ISLAND returned from her trial runs, proudly adorning her masthead was the witch's broom, attesting to the fact that the workmen had made a clean sweep.

After thirty days leave the FBI crew re-assembled in Tacoma, Washington. In spite of the inevitable transfers, the ship's company at the time of the commissioning contained 660 men and 52 officers who had been aboard CVE 21, out of its complement of 857 men and 63 officers.

30 December 1944 approximately 1000 high ranking naval officers, city officials and guests gathered with the ship's crew in the hangar deck to witness the simple ceremonies, shorn of their trimmings, to fit the tempo of war. Captain J. L. McGuigan, USN, superintendent of shipbuilding in the Tacoma area, presided.

At 1521, the colors were piped aloft and the ship's first watch set. A bronze memorial plaque having on it a replica of the ship, designed by Edward J. Garrison, together with a fund for the Ship's Welfare, was presented in behalf of the men and women employees of Todd shipyards who had worked on the carrier by Mrs. Jewell Greening, a fellow-employee, who made the presentation in honor of her son, Lt. Col. Charles Ross Greening, a participant in General Doolittle's first bombing of Tokyo, and at this time a prisoner of war in Germany. The plaque, appearing on the frontispiece of this book, is mounted on the Quarterdeck bulkhead.

In an impressive ceremony which followed, many men received awards for their unusual wisdom and gallantry at the time CVE 21 was torpedoed.

REAR ADMIRAL JOHN JENNINGS BALLENTINE AWARDS HONORS

LT. COMDR. KNOWLES
Receives Bronze Star

COMDR. CUSTER
Receives Bronze Star

LT. COMDR. GRONVOLD
Receives Bronze Star

LEGION OF MERIT

Captain Francis Massie Hughes, USN
Commander Delos Edwin Wait, USN

NAVY AND MARINE CORPS MEDAL

Chief Carpenter Clarence Meyers Bailey, USN

BRONZE STAR MEDAL

Commander Jasper Leslie Custer, USNR
Lieutenant Commander Robert Stinchfield Knowles, USNR
Lieutenant Commander George Richard Gronvold, USNR
Chief Boatswain's Mate Arthur Price, USN
Aviation Machinist's Mate 2/c Alexander Culberson, USNR
Aviation Machinist's Mate 2/c Don Arlo Taylor, USNR
Aviation Machinist's Mate 3/c Leonard Leroy Johnson, USN

COMMENDATION RIBBON

Boatswain's Mate 1/c Ellis Charles Church, USN
Carpenter's Mate 1/c Emil George Bazzini, USNR
Shipfitter 2/c Joseph Duran Lago, USNR
Coxswain Harold Roy Simms, USNR
Pharmacist's Mate 1/c Lawrence D. Anderson, USNR

Aviation Machinist's Mate JOHNSON
Receives Bronze Star

CHIEF PRICE
Receives Bronze Star

Aviation Machinist's Mate TAYLOR
Receives Bronze Star

U. S. S. BLOCK ISLAND DID IT "FIRST"

CVE 21 pioneered in the use of HF/DF (high frequency direction finder) against the submarine menace in the Atlantic.

The planes of CVE 21 were the first to use airborne rockets in attacks on German submarines.

CVE 21 was the first and only U.S. Naval Aircraft Carrier sunk by enemy action in the Atlantic.

The crew of CVE 21 was the first crew of a U.S. Naval vessel which had been sunk in combat to be maintained as a unit until another ship of the same name could be prepared for its use in World War II.

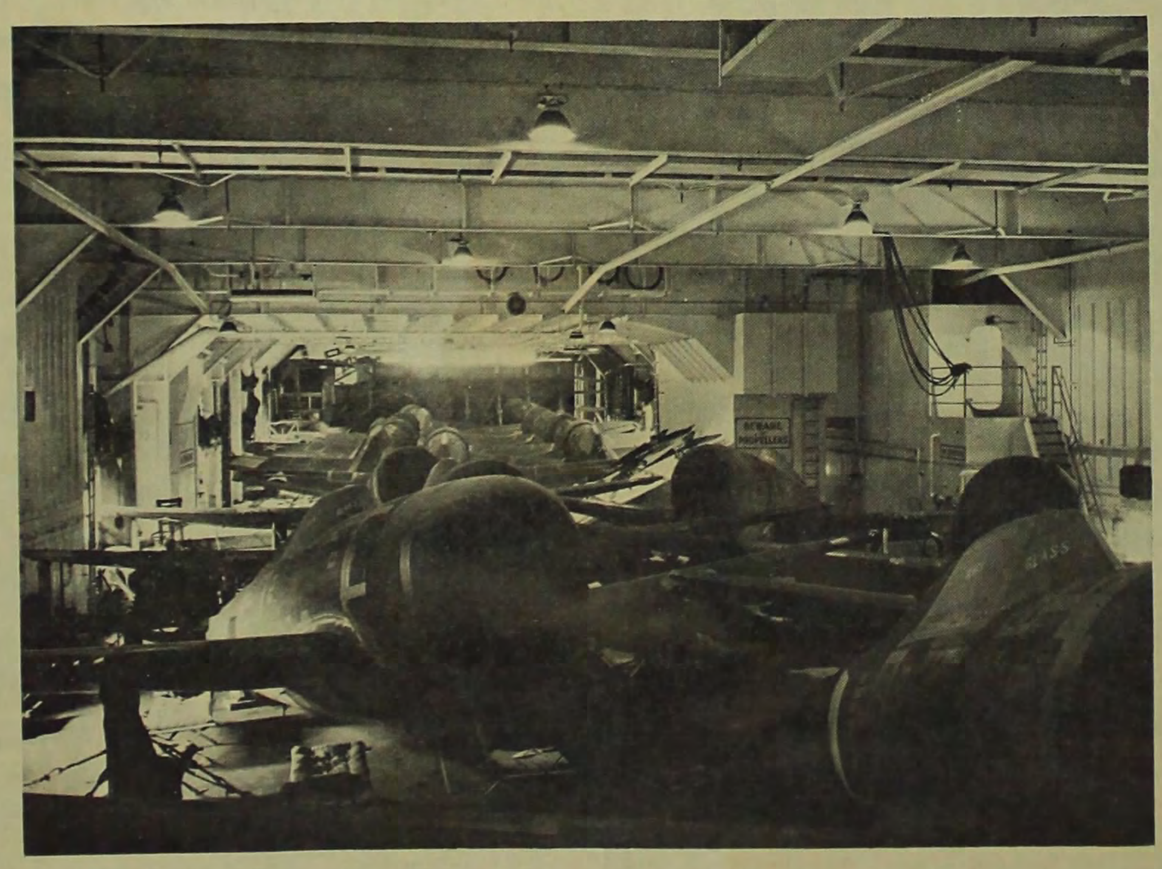
CVE 106 was the first U.S. Naval Aircraft Carrier to have an All Marine Air Group aboard.

Vice Admiral Barbey, Acting Commander Seventh Fleet, delayed the Balikpapan (Borneo) campaign until the Fighting Block Island became available because it was the first CVE with an experienced and skilled "night fighter" air group.

CVE 106 was the first U.S. Naval ship to sail through the Straits of Makassar after the Pearl Harbor attack.

CVE 106 was the first carrier to be used in the training of recruits. For nearly two months it served as a recruit training ship at Camp Peary in the York River. About 7,500 "boots" had their first experience aboard a naval vessel in this ship.

It will be the first aircraft carrier and combatant ship of a World War to be permanently anchored and used as a training ship at the United States Naval Academy.



THE HANGAR DECK CVE 21

AIR OPERATIONS CVE 106

COLONEL DOBBINS

COMMANDER HOOD

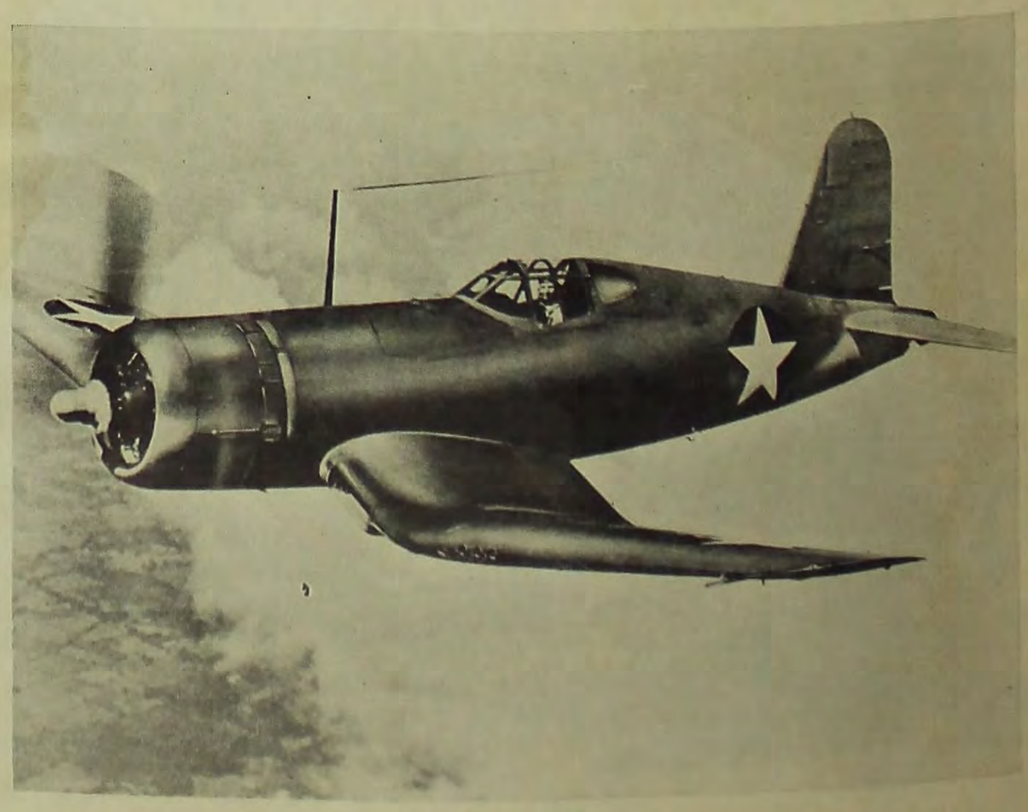
The carrier planes became the eyes and the fists of the Fleet. They provided the long range sea searchers, plus the long-range artillery and shifting flexible power needed to overcome the advantages of distance and geography the Japanese had in the Pacific. In the Battle of the Atlantic the escort carriers were the steel barrier on which the Nazi wolf packs finally broke their teeth. In the Pacific the big flattops took the offensive almost alone, against the spreading Japs.

The Navy chose the new BLOCK ISLAND for an experiment. It would have an entire Marine Air Group. Commander Hood, Air Officer of CVE 21 would continue in that capacity but the Marines would furnish the squadrons. Marine Carrier Aircraft Service Squadron One came aboard with 13 officers and 216 enlisted Marines. These men would service and maintain aircraft. It meant that some old timers would have to go on the beach. It was hard to leave this splendid new ship with a grand old name but only 144 enlisted naval air personnel could remain aboard.

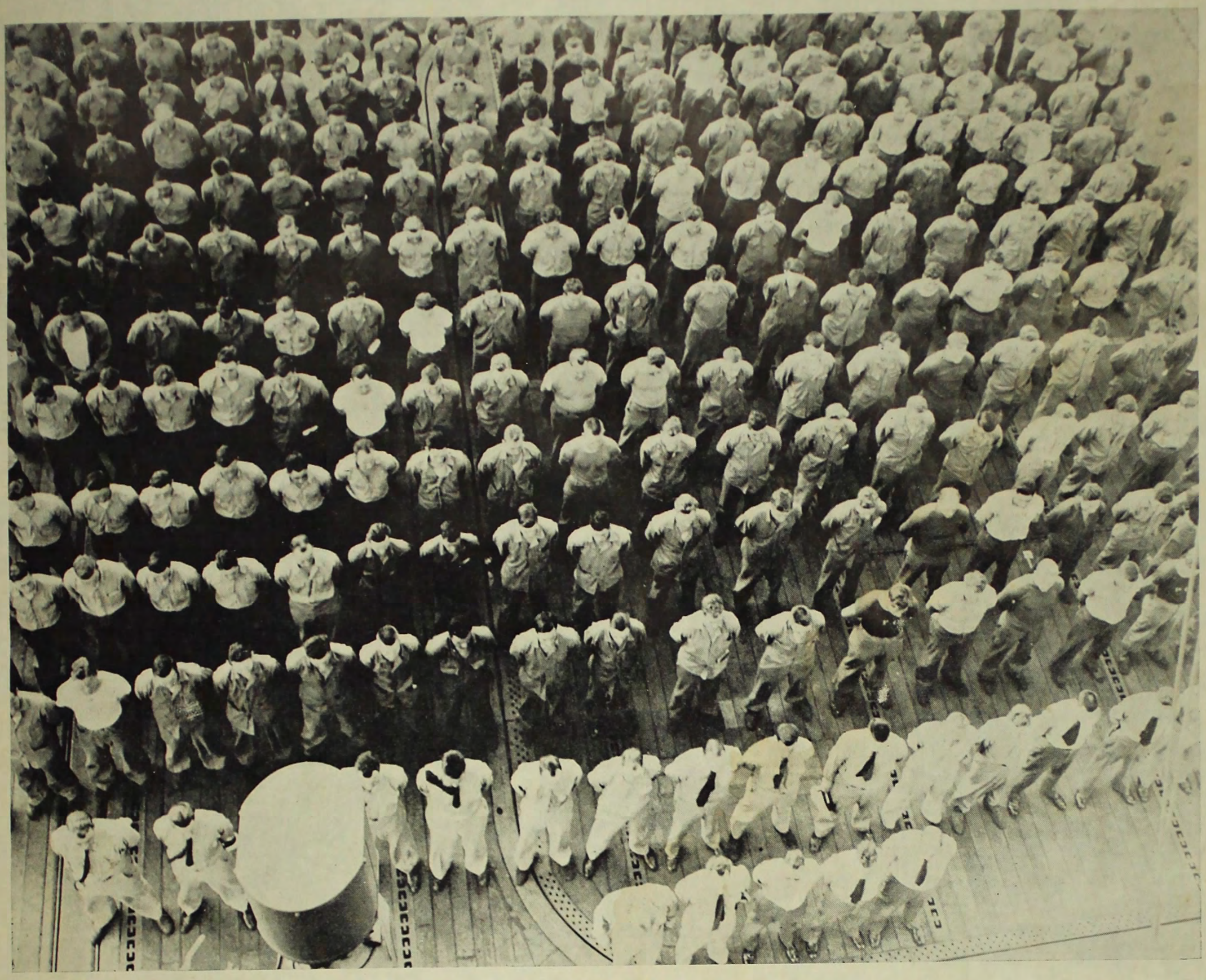
Lt. Colonel John F. Dobbin, USMC, holder of a Navy Cross for the destruction of 8 Japanese planes in the Guadalcanal campaign commanded the Marines. Two powerful squadrons fought the planes. Marine Fighting Squadron 511 and Marine Torpedo Bombing Squadron 233. The pilots were experienced men with splendid records in Marine Aviation in earlier campaigns. The unusual combination of Navy and Marine aviation units require many adjustments but worked out well under the splendid leadership of cooperating officers.

Four different types of missions of aircraft operated from the decks of the FBI and made its nights as busy as its days. CVE pilots flew as many as four long support missions every day, which said Rear Admiral Durgin, "meant nine hours in the air of constant flying and fighting." "That's too much," he added. The BI had twelve Corsairs (F4U-1D and FG-1) which fought brilliantly by day. Ten HELLCATS (F6F-5N) continued the battle into the night. Twelve Avengers (TBM-3) launched torpedoes at strategic points.

A TBF OVER OKINAWA



AN F4U



A MEMORIAL SERVICE ON THE FLIGHT DECK

TAPS

These Marines aboard the BLOCK ISLAND in San Diego on 3 February 1945 carried on extensive operational training. Not all the heroes of this war or any war die in combat. There are the men who do the research, make the experiments, and risk their lives in training. Before this ship entered the actual combat eight of its flying personnel were lost.

MAJOR ROBERT WESLEY VAUPELL, USMCR
2nd LIEUTENANT CHARLES CLINTON HARRIS, USMCR
2nd LIEUTENANT ROBERT J. HAIRE, USMCR
2nd LIEUTENANT RAYMOND DeLAUGHDER, USMCR
SERGEANT GUNTHER WILLIAM GUSTAV HUNRICHS, USMCR
SERGEANT F. PAWLOWSKI, JR., USMCR
TECHNICAL SERGEANT JAMES WILLIAM MILES, USMC
P.F.C. EUGENE SHUTE, USMCR

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53
57

THE FLYING DEADHEADS

CAMPAIGN AT OKINAWA

The BLOCK ISLAND entered the fray after its shakedown cruise on 4 May at Okinawa alongside such fighting veterans as the SANTEE, SWANEE, and CHENANGO, the first ships of this type to see action in WORLD WAR II. The FBI shared in the last 43 days of the 83 day siege at Okinawa, the longest in Naval history.

The Japanese, realizing that the loss of Okinawa would mean the loss of the war, used every means of its yellow power to stop the invasion of the Army and the Third Fleet which supported it. The losses of the Okinawa campaign were the heaviest in any single campaign of our Navy.

On 29 May when the anniversary of the sinking of CVE 21 rolled around they baked a cake but what was more important and made that day a special day in air operations, all bombs and rockets were marked as memorials. The flight schedule was typical. Over 30 planes flew from the carrier, fired 161 five-inch Holy Moses Rockets, more than 10,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition and dropped 19,000 pounds of bombs against the enemy. That day the attack was against Ishigaki, an island 500 miles from Japan proper.

From 4 May through 16 June the planes flew 1202 sorties.

Sorties over target:	262	VF
	11	VF (N)
	12	VF (P)
	302	VT
Total	587	
Sorties over own forces:	478	VF
	137	VF
Total	615	

On these sorties they fired:

444,900 pounds of bombs expended
2,213 five inch rockets launched
297,000 rounds of machine gun ammunition

The usual position of the ship in the Okinawa campaign was about 80 miles southeast of the island:

320 miles from Formosa
390 miles off the coast of China
380 miles from the southern tip of Japan
510 miles from the northern tip of Luzon
920 miles from Tokyo
1,100 miles from Chunking
1,130 miles from Guam
5,300 miles from New York City

The shortest line from the BLOCK ISLAND to New York City, we knew, was by the way of Tokyo.

Our planes carried quarter ton bombs to Shuri Castle and dropped them squarely on the wrought steel gates of that formidable stronghold, bursting them open for our land forces. Other 500 pounders were dropped on the big twin airfields of Miyako Jima. Once our planes came over a battlefield early in the morning, found a troop carrier truck rolling up the road with thirty Japs sitting on the rail. Then suddenly there was none.

The planes launched their rockets into cave entrances until whole hillsides quaked with internal explosions. They damaged airfields until the busy little yellow bees got tired of repairing them.

Enemy installations of every kind were attacked and annihilated.

The BLOCK ISLAND Marines proudly reported the havoc they wrought upon the enemy.

Okinawa Targets

Bracelet's chickens and turkeys do well!

The 500 pound bombs hit their marks.

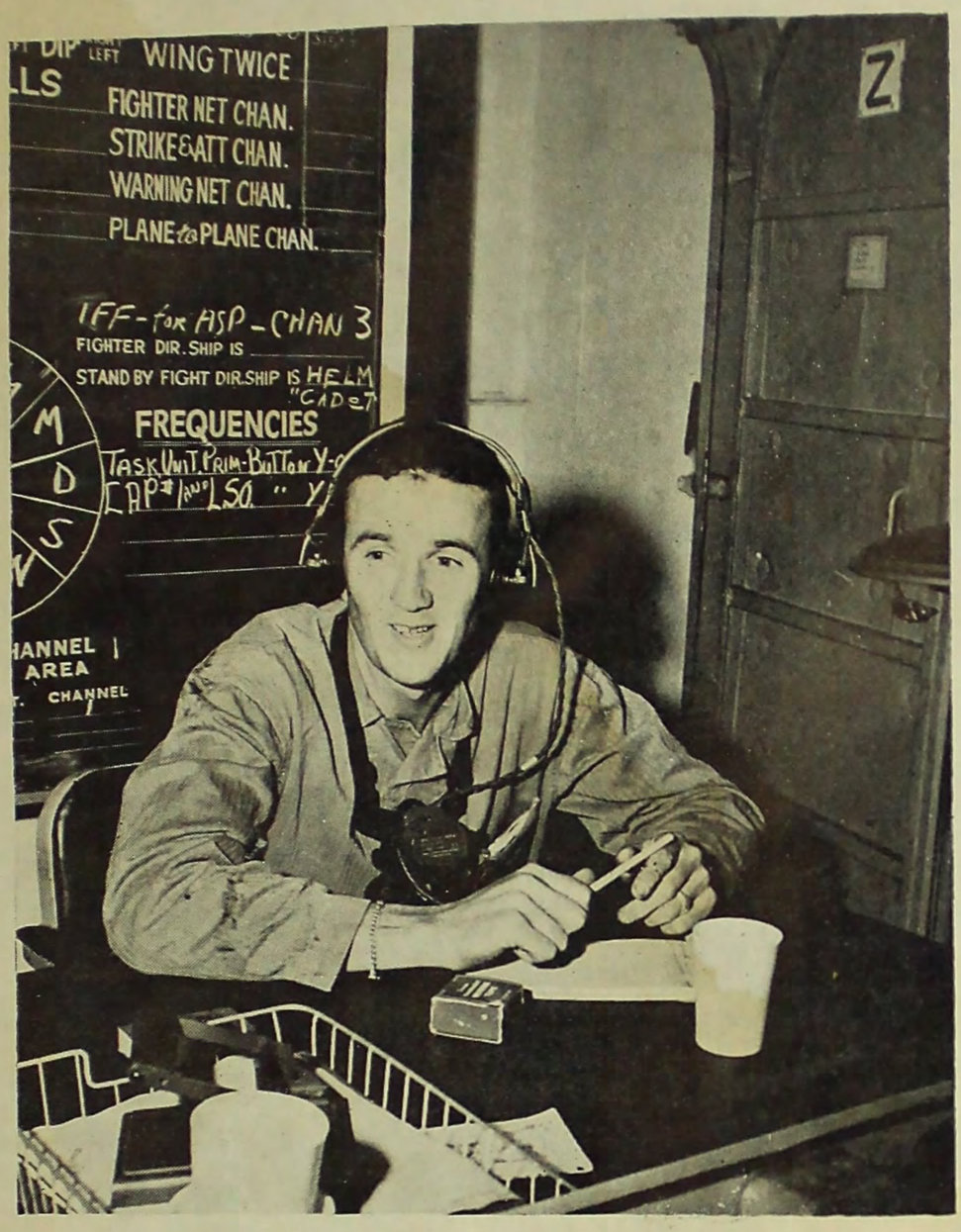
PROCLAMATION

PRESIDENT TRUMAN HAS PROCLAIMED THE UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER OF GERMANY:

Friday, 11 May 1945

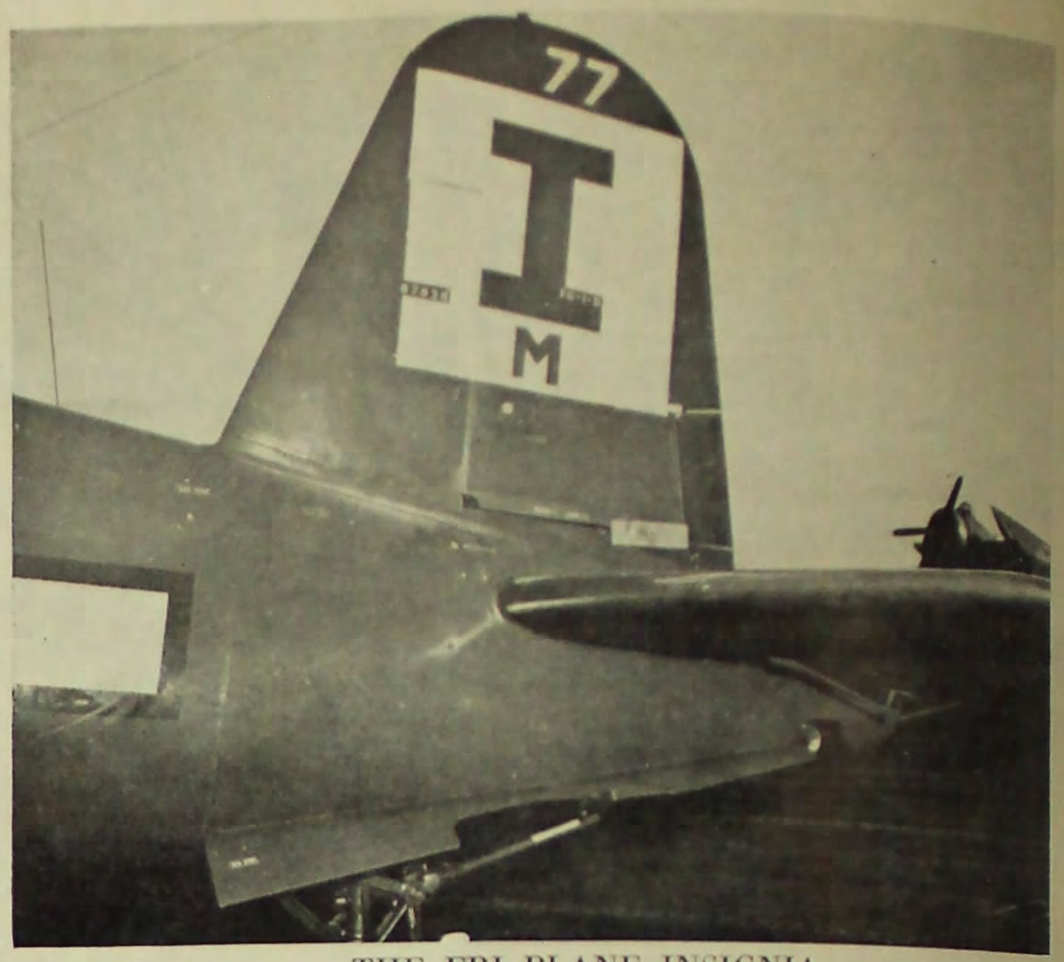
"YOU AND YOUR ALLIES HAVE WON A GREAT VICTORY. THE PRICE WAS HIGH; IT HAS BEEN WON BY DETERMINATION, SACRIFICE AND BLOOD. WITH THIS VICTORY YOU HAVE WON SOMETHING MORE; THE ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE OF AMERICANS AND THE WORLD. THE TASK HAS NOW BEEN HALF ACCOMPLISHED. ANOTHER POWERFUL ENEMY REMAINS. IT WILL REQUIRE ALL OUR RESOLVE AND FORTITUDE TO DESTROY HIM. ONLY BY DOING SO CAN WE KEEP FAITH WITH THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN. LET US NOW GO FORWARD TO SPEEDY AND COMPLETE VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC."

THE MARINES in the READY ROOM Work, Play and Eat

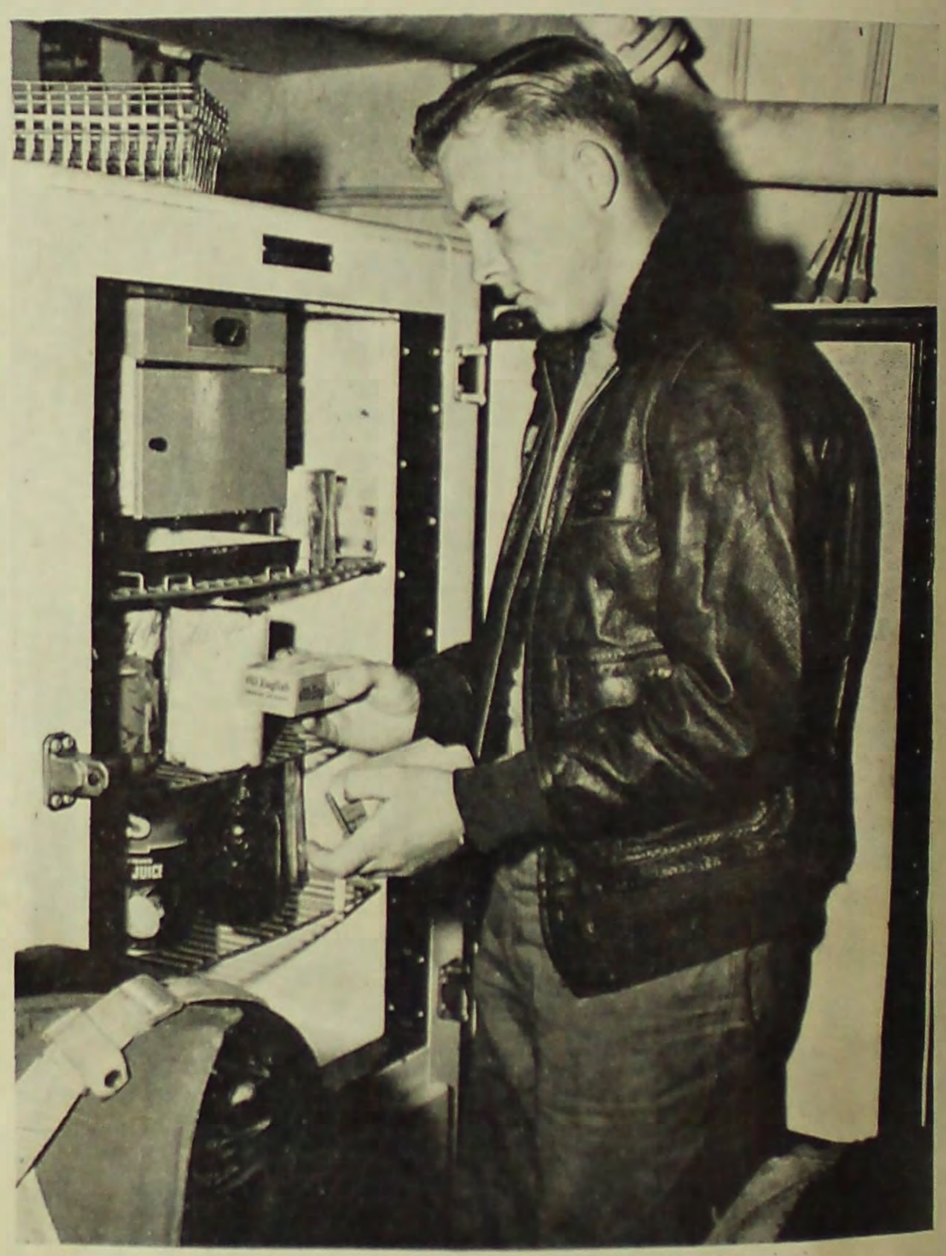


BEFORE THE READY ROOM "BOARD"

NOW THERE'S THE COURSE



THE FBI PLANE INSIGNIA

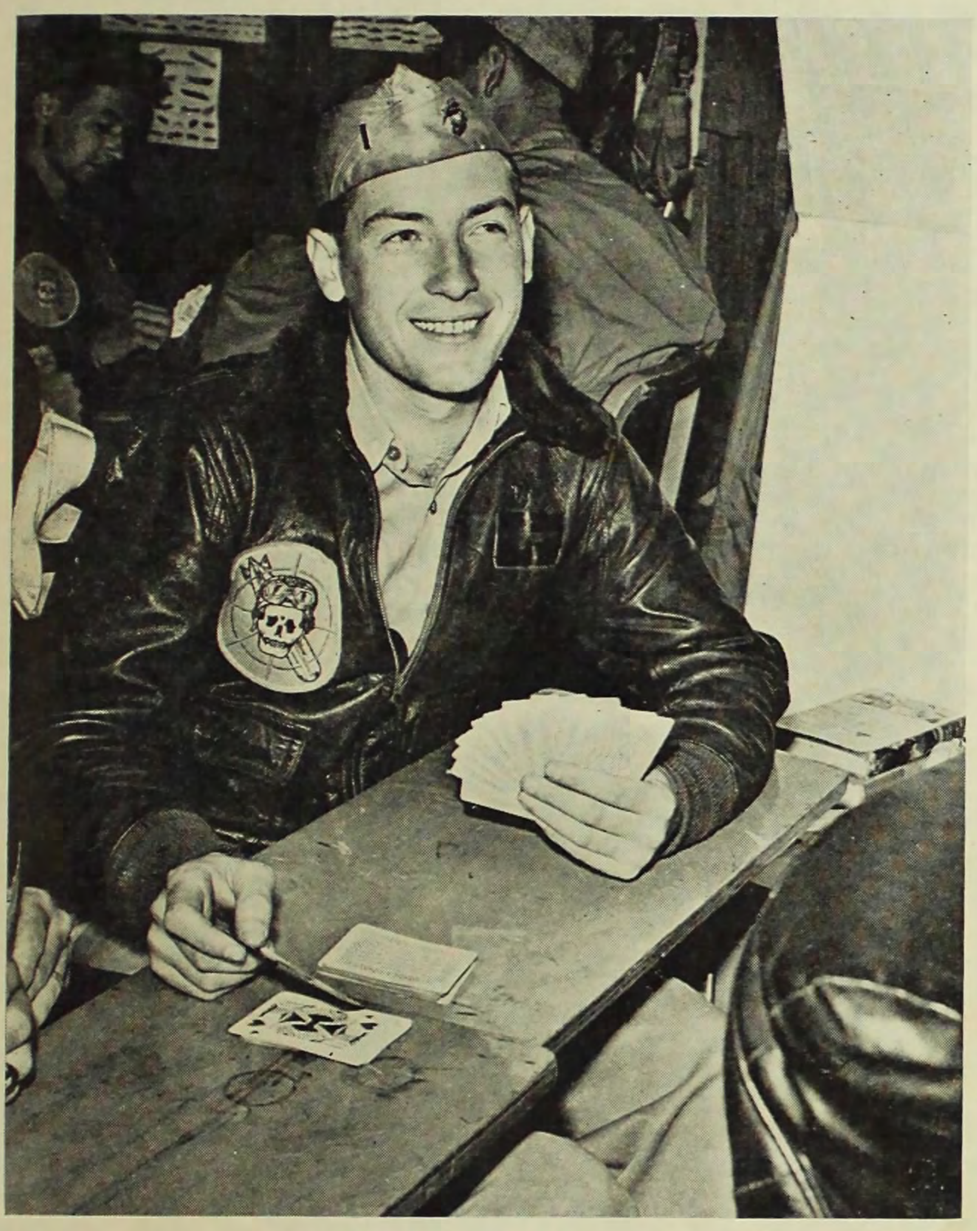


A SNACK AFTER A MISSION

AFTER 2000 LANDINGS

ON THE LINE

THE FIRST LANDING ON THE FLIGHT DECK — CVE 106



RELAXED BUT READY

LT. R. A. CLARK MAKES 3000th LANDING

ANNIVERSARY DAY BOMBS

ANNIVERSARY CAKE

ACTION REPORT

The "Action Report" of a carrier is two-fold. First the strikes must be recorded. We proudly paint another Japanese flag on our board, report the destruction of a machine gun nest, paint glowing reports of large fires set by our bombs. We talk about these things in the READY ROOM, each man bragging about his accomplishments but listening for hints from the other boys. The READY ROOM is the most gossipy place on the ship. There's tense waiting. There are thrilling reports. There is food and fun in between. It's a great life. But back in each man's mind the "Action Report" is the failure to return of some of our chickens and turkeys. The daily strike can best be felt now that it is so far removed by recalling the men who failed to make the return rendezvous.

U.S.S. BLOCK ISLAND
DISPATCH

HEADING: 10 MAY 1945
FM: BRACELET
TO: FEDERAL 3

THIS IS MY REPORT OF AIRCRAFT MISSING X TIME OF TAKEOFF 1616 X PLANE CALL BRACELET 64 X PILOT 2ND. LT. DOUGLAS H. HERRIN FILE NO. 035081 X MISSION TARGET TWO X NOT SEEN TO CRASH X LAST OBSERVED COMMENCING RUN ON TARGET X POSSIBLY MADE WATER LANDING NEAR TARGET UNOBSERVED X WILL YOU INITIATE AIR SEA RESCUE ACTION BTTIME 102005 ITEM

That was our first loss. Lt. Herrin was on a bombing mission over Okinawa. His flying crew included E. T. Gunning, S/Sgt., USMCR and J. L. Butchorn, Sgt., USMC.

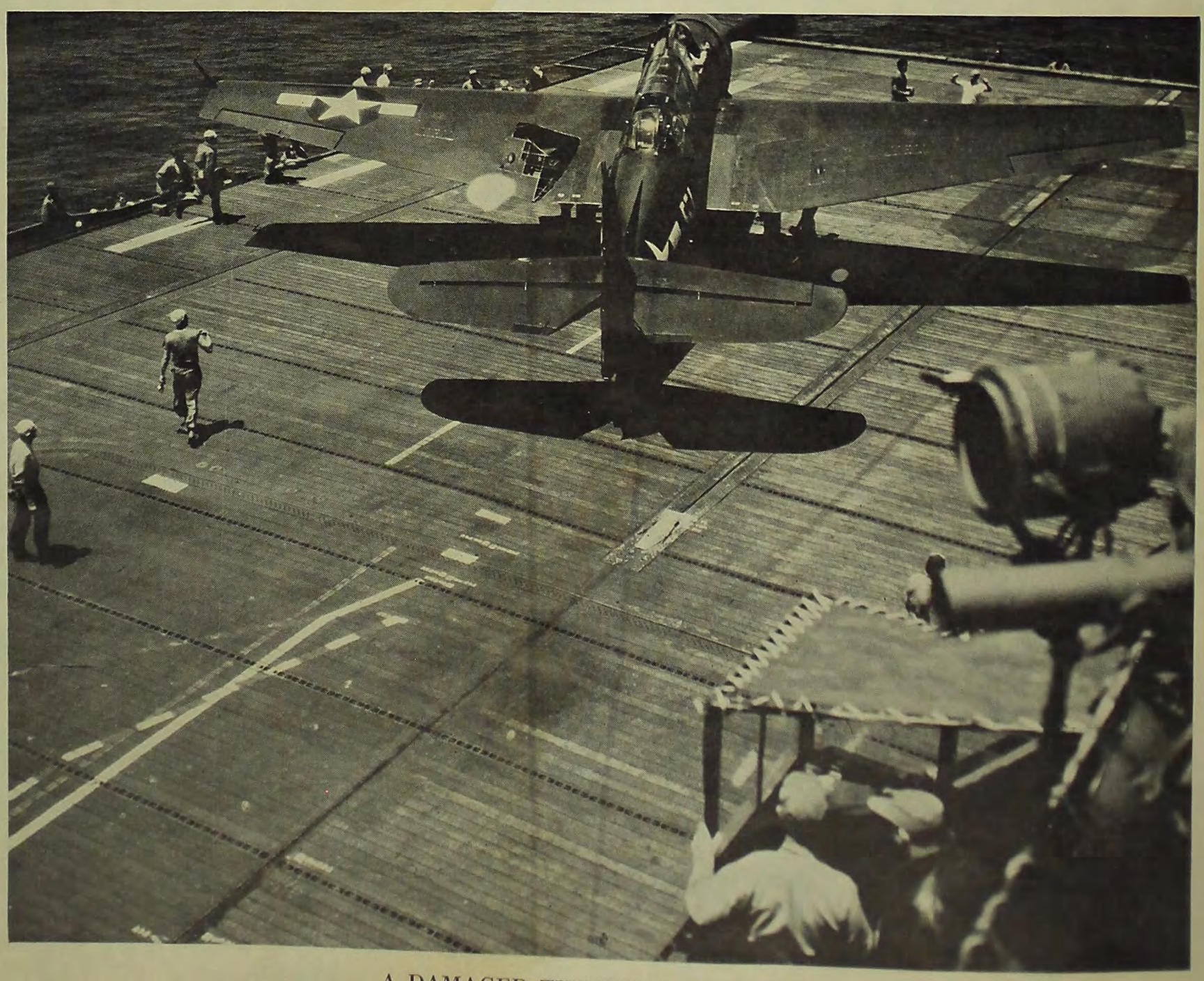
24 May, eight of our TBMs were called upon to help the Army with the stubborn Japanese units on Hill 72. Dug-in Japanese guns were concentrated just below the brow of the hill, only a couple of yards from American soldiers on the skyline. Captain Berry and Captain Takacs brought their divisions in to plant 30 five hundred pound bombs squarely among the Japanese manned mortars.

27 May, Major Robert C. Maze, USMC, commanding officer of VMF failed to come back. He led a dive attack against a shipyard on the coast of Ishigaki Shima. On the same day, 2nd Lt. R. A. Goldberg, USMCR, a Corsair pilot in VMF 511, after going down with a four plane run against Ishigaki airfield from high altitude disappeared. These losses are to be expected in our line of business but they always leave a mark and a heavier burden on the men who follow them.

29 May, more casualties came our way. 2nd Lieutenant Jack Marconi, USMCR, pilot, S/Sgt. Joe F. Survoy, USMC, Turret Gunner; S/Sgt. Ben D. Cannan, Jr., USMC, radio-gunner, lost their lives while making a bombing run on targets in the edge of Ishigaki, a short distance from where we had our losses two days before. Antiaircraft fire was intense during the attack and other pilots saw Lt. Goldberg's plane wing come off and the plane failed to pull out of the run.

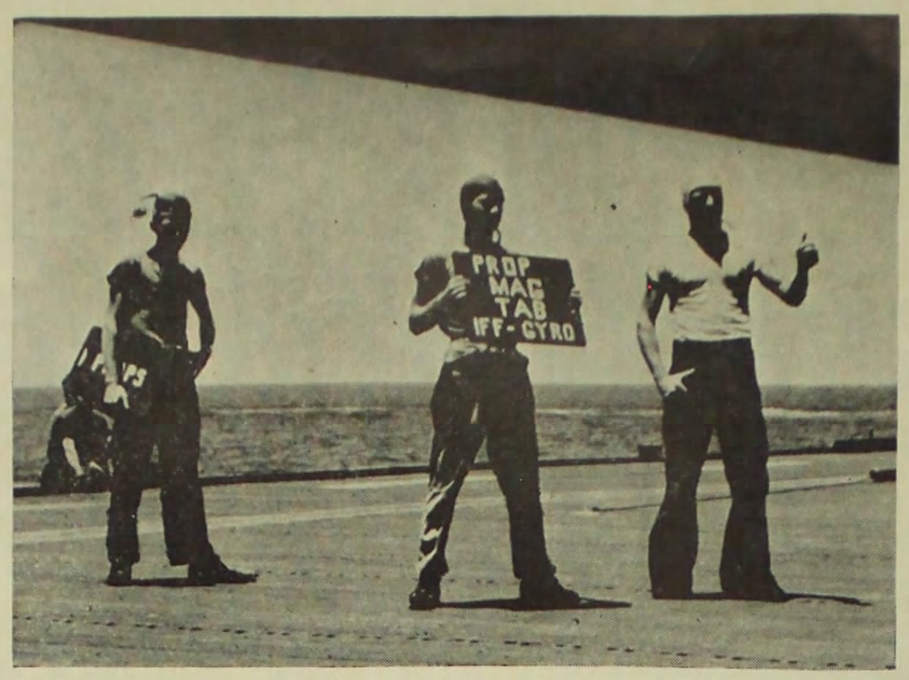
Reconnaissance planes brought back photographs and reports to show that our losses had not been in vain. Principal buildings in the neighborhood of the airfields had been gutted. Big radio stations were leveled. The airfields looked like hell's half-acre.

16 June, we lost another shipmate, 2nd Lieutenant A. E. Jones, USMCR. Having successfully completed a rocket attack on the seaplane base of Koniya on Amami Island, Lt. Jones, piloting a HELLCAT, was presumably struck by the heavy antiaircraft fire. But the Japanese were becoming more and more discouraged. Now our planes were landing at Okinawa to refuel. Okinawa was secure and the USS BLOCK ISLAND sailed with her sister ships for Leyte.



A DAMAGED TURKEY GETS HOME

READY



CHECK?

ARMED TO THE TEETH

THE SUN GOES DOWN LIKE THUNDER

A CHANGE OF ORDERS

Okinawa well secured, shortly after dark on 16 June, the BLOCK ISLAND, SUWANEE, GILBERT ISLANDS and SANTEE were detached from Task Unit 32.1.3 and proceeded to Leyte for a well earned rest. The ship's work continued but the men managed a little time ashore.

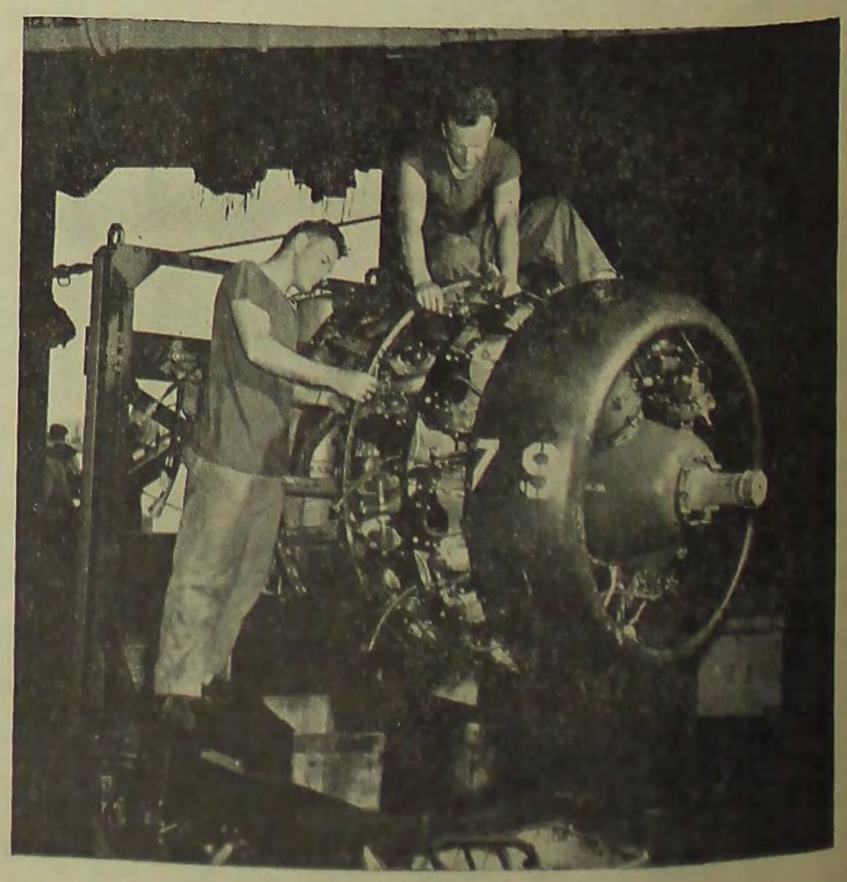
Word came through that a strike was to be made against Borneo to re-capture the Dutch territories and rich oil lands enjoyed by the Japanese during the war. On his way to that front, Vice Admiral Barbey, Acting Commander SEVENTH FLEET and CFT 78, came through Leyte on 23 June. After a conference with the Chief of Staff, Seventh Fleet, it was decided that the invasion could be delayed until the BLOCK ISLAND could join the CVEs assigned to provide air coverage at Balikpapan. CVE 106 was desired because it had a Marine support group and night fighters and it was evident that in this campaign that type of air operation would predominate. The mustering of carrier escorts for this campaign was the Navy's ace-in-the-hole to provide against failures on the part of shore-based aircraft.

MAKING A BEACHHEAD AT LEYTE

CAPTAIN PETERSON

CAPTAIN HUGHES CONFERS WITH ADMIRAL DURGIN

BEER AND RECREATION AT LEYTE



TUNING UP

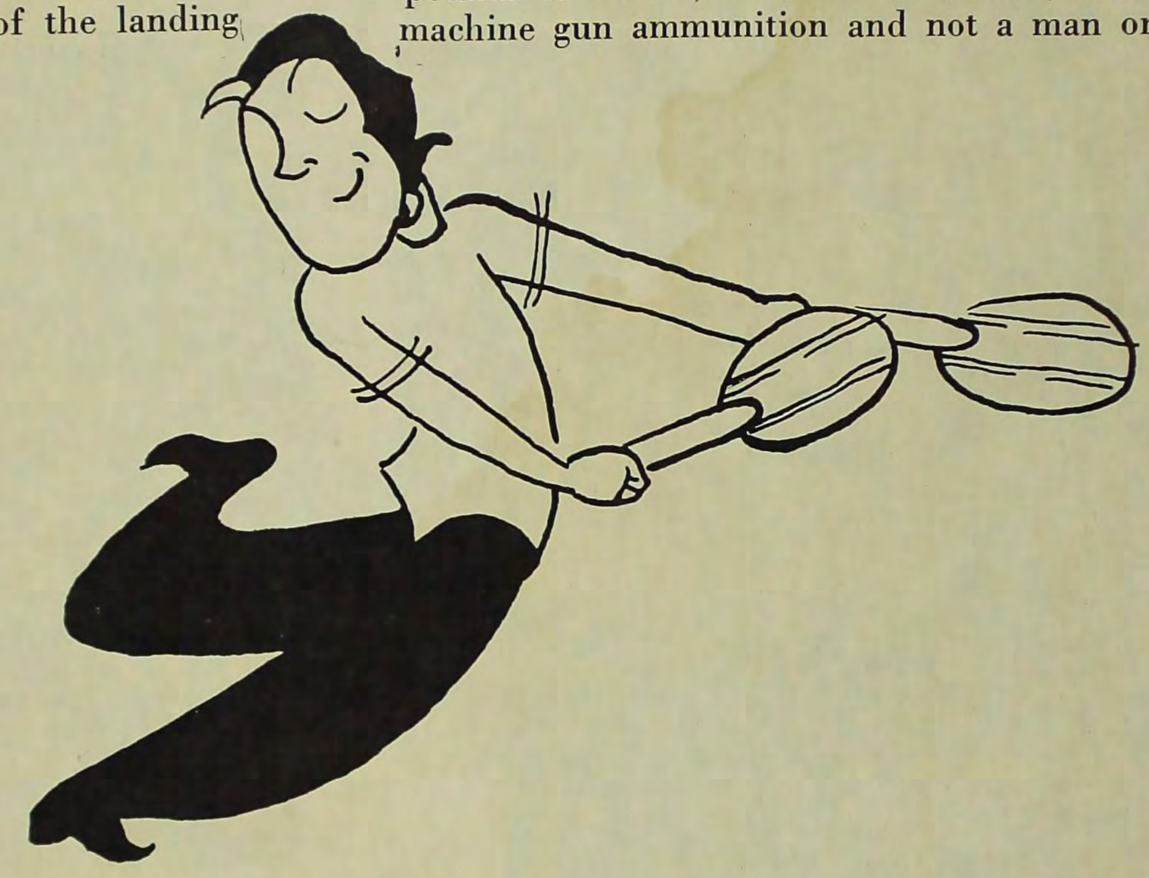
THE WILD MEN OF BORNEO

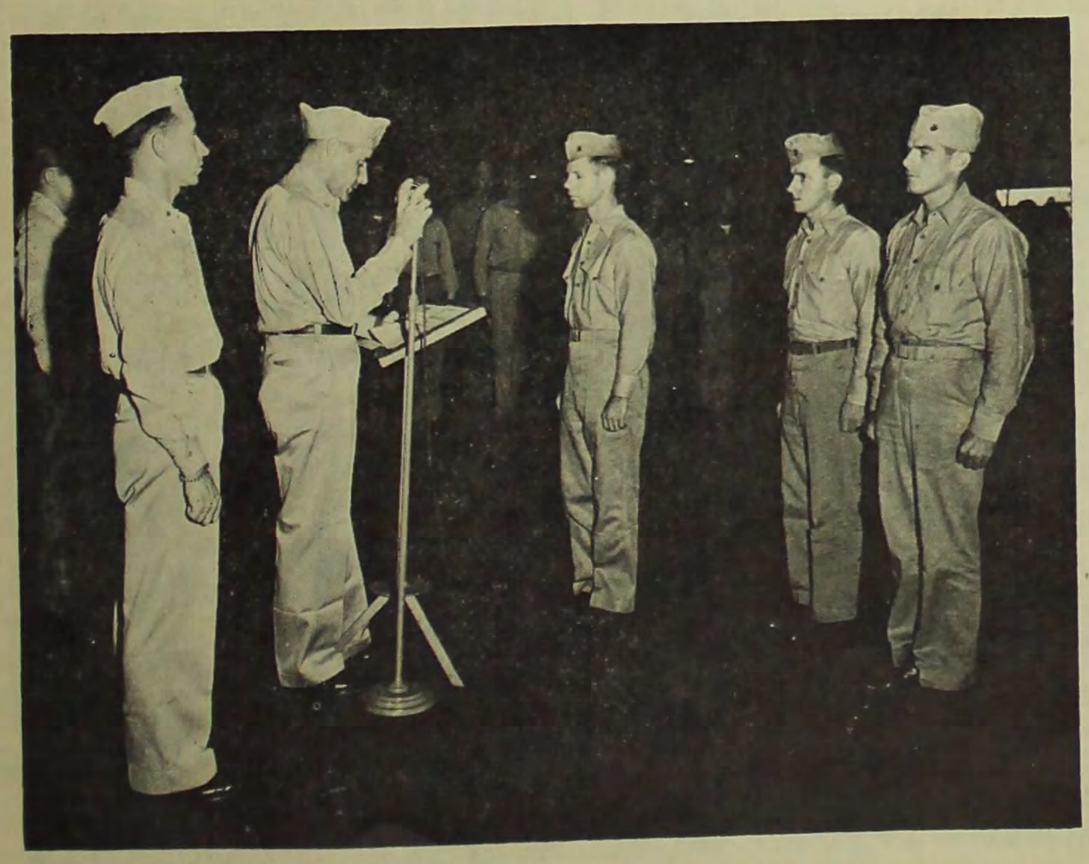
29 June, the BLOCK ISLAND left Leyte Harbor, threaded its way past Samar, Mindanao and the Islands of the Philippines, steaming south toward the Straits of Makassar, through water too blue to describe. One man said it looked as if the sea were "blue jello." The FBI was the first line ship of the U. S. Navy to enter these straits since early 1942.

Five minutes ahead of schedule, at 0855, 1 July, the landings at Balikpapan were accomplished. Amphibious forces of the Seventh Fleet, troops of the Seventh Division, Australian Imperial Forces, landed on the Klandasan Beaches a few moments after a staggering barrage of more than 8,000 rockets. LCTs stood a few hundred yards off shore. Farther out lay the cruisers and destroyers bombarding the beach incessantly. The attack was successful and, we were informed, worked out according to plan.

The carriers of Task Unit 78.4 stood about sixty miles off shore during the day. They were not too busy with combat but concerned with Air Patrol and Submarine Patrol. The FBI was the first aircraft carrier to strike in the Borneo-Celebes area when Captain Secrest with Lieutenants Haidt, Skelly and Johnson were ordered from a local patrol to attack a motorized column that had been spotted 3 miles north of the landing beaches. They found 14 trucks and 12 automobiles along a jungle road. The troops had taken cover in slit trenches at the roadside. When the Corsairs retired, four of the trucks were burned, the remainder damaged and the troops in the trenches had been strafed.

Squadron after squadron of Army planes came down from Tawi Tawi during the next day to provide the bulk of the bombing and support work for the invasion. Our night fighters flew patrols throughout the hours of darkness and received a "WELL DONE" from the Admiral. 2 July, the BLOCK ISLAND launched its biggest strike, 24 planes off the deck in one operation of which 22 went for the target. It was a field day. Our flyers were assigned an area four miles back of the beach where a concentration of military warehouses, barracks, trucks and troops were nested in heavy jungle. Control told them to go after it any way they wanted. The pilots cut loose. Altogether they made 170 passes over those targets, dropped 11 tons of bombs, 82 rockets, besides firing away many thousands of rounds of fifty calibre stuff. This "shoot" wound up the Borneo campaign in which we can take unusual pride not only because of our achievements but because we had NO CASUALTIES. 82 sorties over our own forces, 58 over the target, using 21,700 pounds of bombs, 82 five-inch rockets, and 10,800 rounds of machine gun ammunition and not a man or plane lost!





A MERITORIOUS MAST — CAPTAIN BEAKLEY

CAPTAIN HUGHES AND HIS COMMAND

THE REALM OF NEPTUNUS REX

The battle done against the yellow man for the moment, the FIGHTING BLOCK ISLAND encountered a jealous and sensitive sovereign, Neptunus Rex. He was welcomed aboard on 29 June 1945 and his flag flew from the yard-arm. The royal kingdom was entered at 118°56′12″ E. Lat.

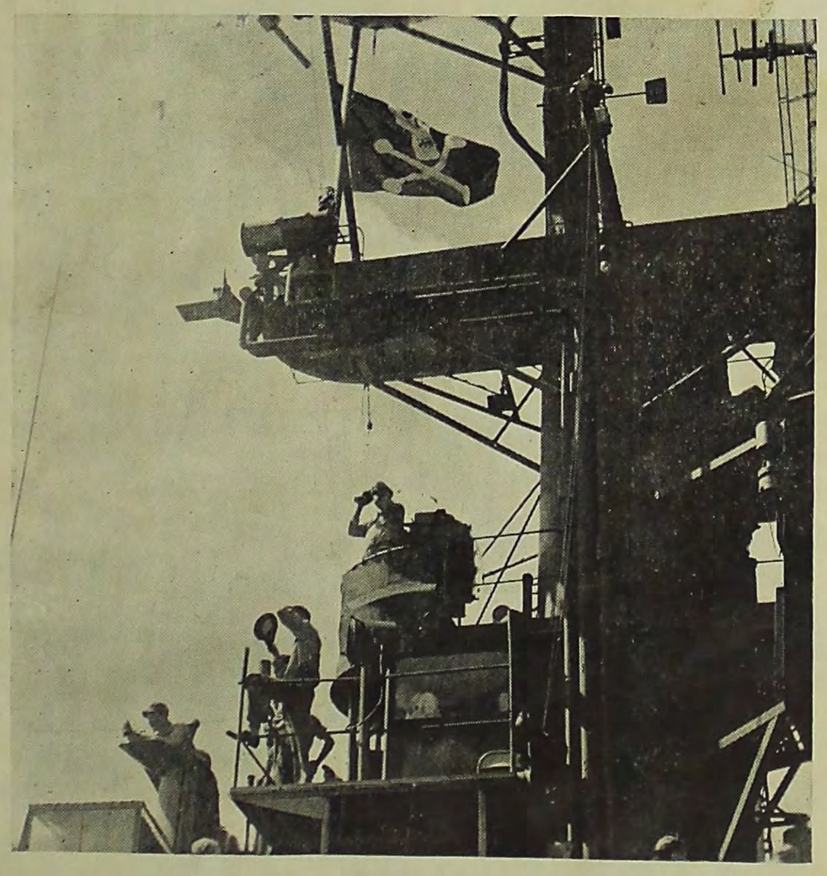
The auspicious event was not given full cognizance until we had crossed a second time. On 4 July the pollywogs did obesance at the Shellback court. The court consisted of:

Neptunus Rex, Chief Warrant Bailey
Royal Queen, Captain Hollis
Prosecutor, Lt. Comdr. Gilman
Devil, Chief Boatswain's Mate Wright
Royal Baby, Chief Able
Royal Barber, Lt. jg. Gaffrey
Royal Dentist, Mt/Sgt. Thomas
Royal Undertaker, Kubler

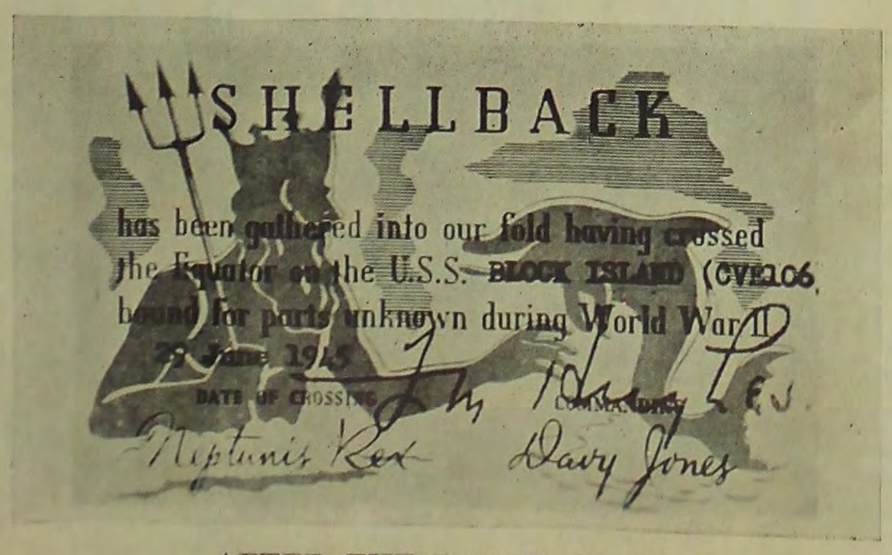
The pollywogs were assembled on the flight deck in shorts and socks as the uniform of the day. The Shellbacks dressed as pirates.

When the King and his court made the royal inspection, the pollywogs bowed and were scraped. As the Royal Court was seated the pollywogs crawled before it on all fours being urged on by Shellbacks with paddles.

The pollywogs crawled in grease, were washed with grease so that things would be "smooth" for them. Finally they were allowed to wash themselves in the swimming pool built into the forward elevator.



THE EQUATOR FLAG FLIES

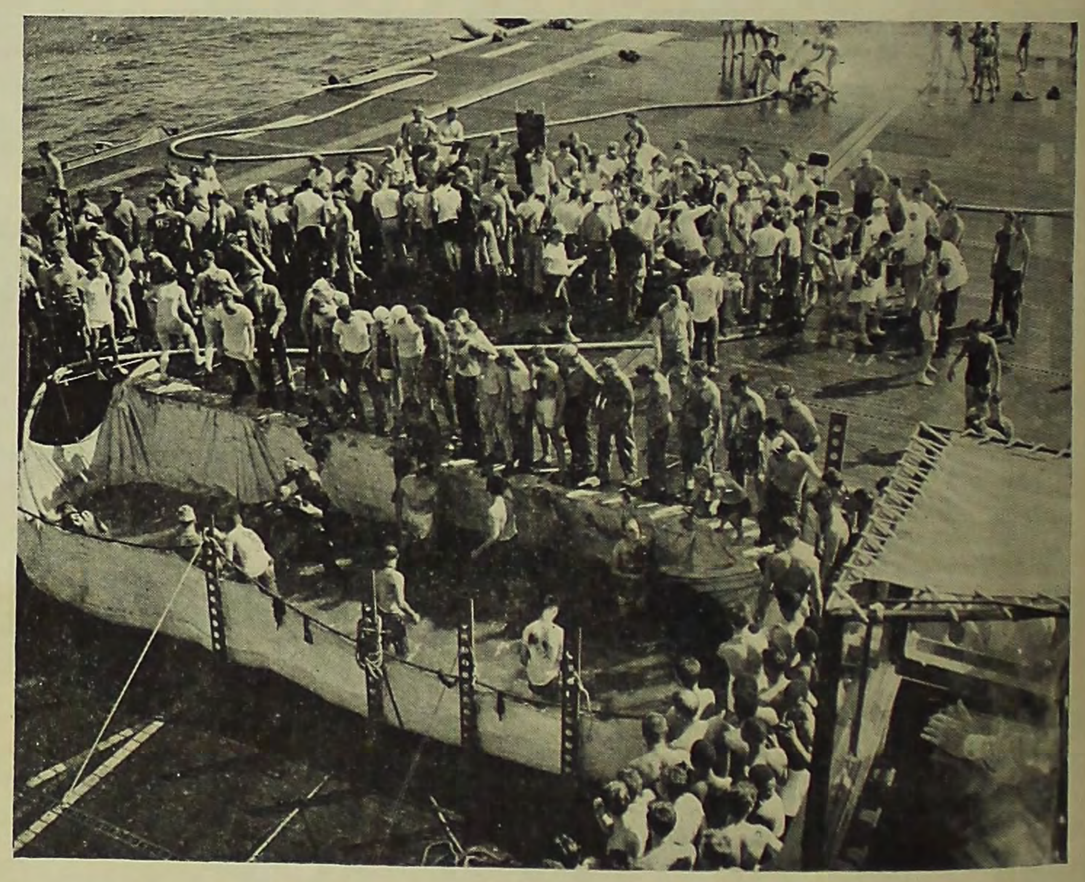


AFTER THE DAY IS OVER

Captain Hughes had warned his men to "Beware of that, —er— this, equatah." Three-fourths of the crew were pollywogs, a fact which led to unhealthy conceit among them. Lieutenant Comdr. Knowles even rallied the pollywogs on the forward end of the flight deck to remind them of their power when General Quarters was sounded for a "Bogey" not Japanese, we are sure.

FROM THE PLAN OF THE DAY

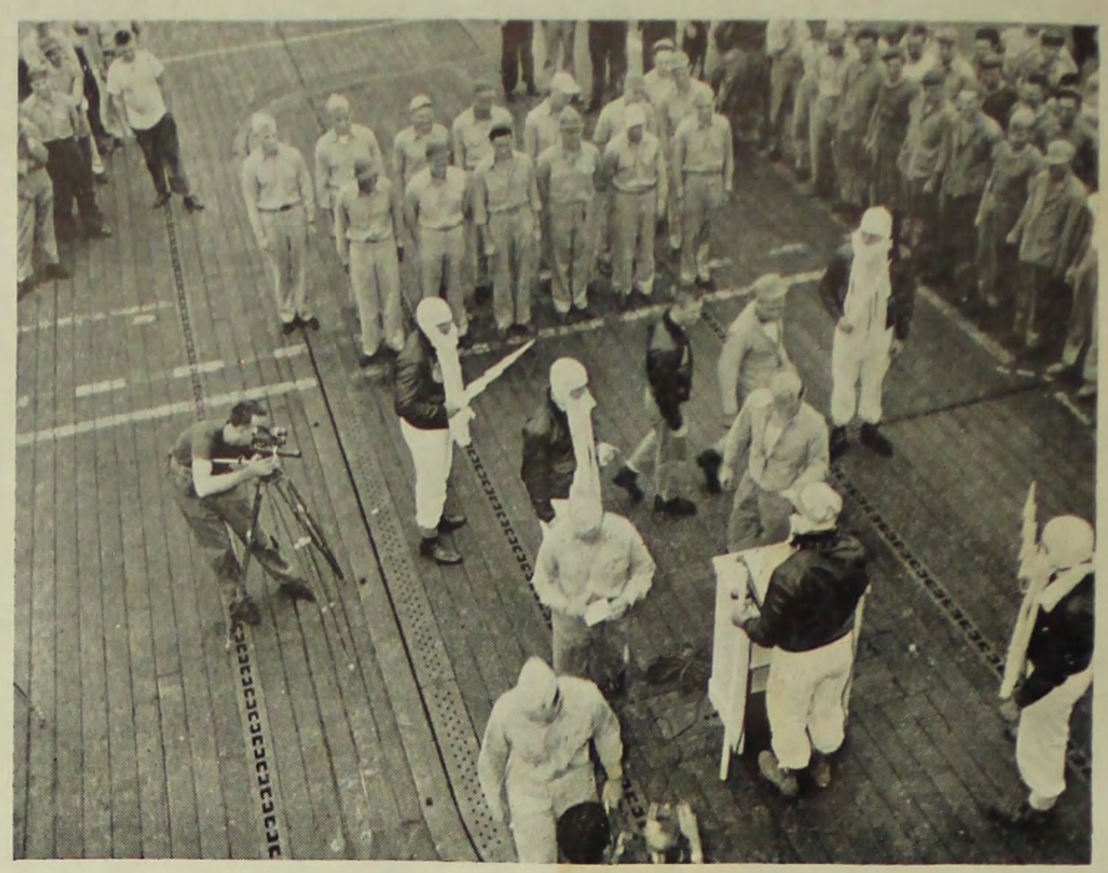
His Royal Highness King Neptunus Rex prior to his departure informed the Commanding Officer he was well pleased with the condition of the Good Ship Block Island, although somewhat disappointed in the low level of Pollywog Material he was forced to work with due to their unruly characteristics. At one time he thought he was going to have to resort to the use of gas. He indicated that with the education given during his visit that the polywog level was raised to the point where he felt all crew members would make fit members of his Realm and that he would welcome and entertain any or all on their next visit.



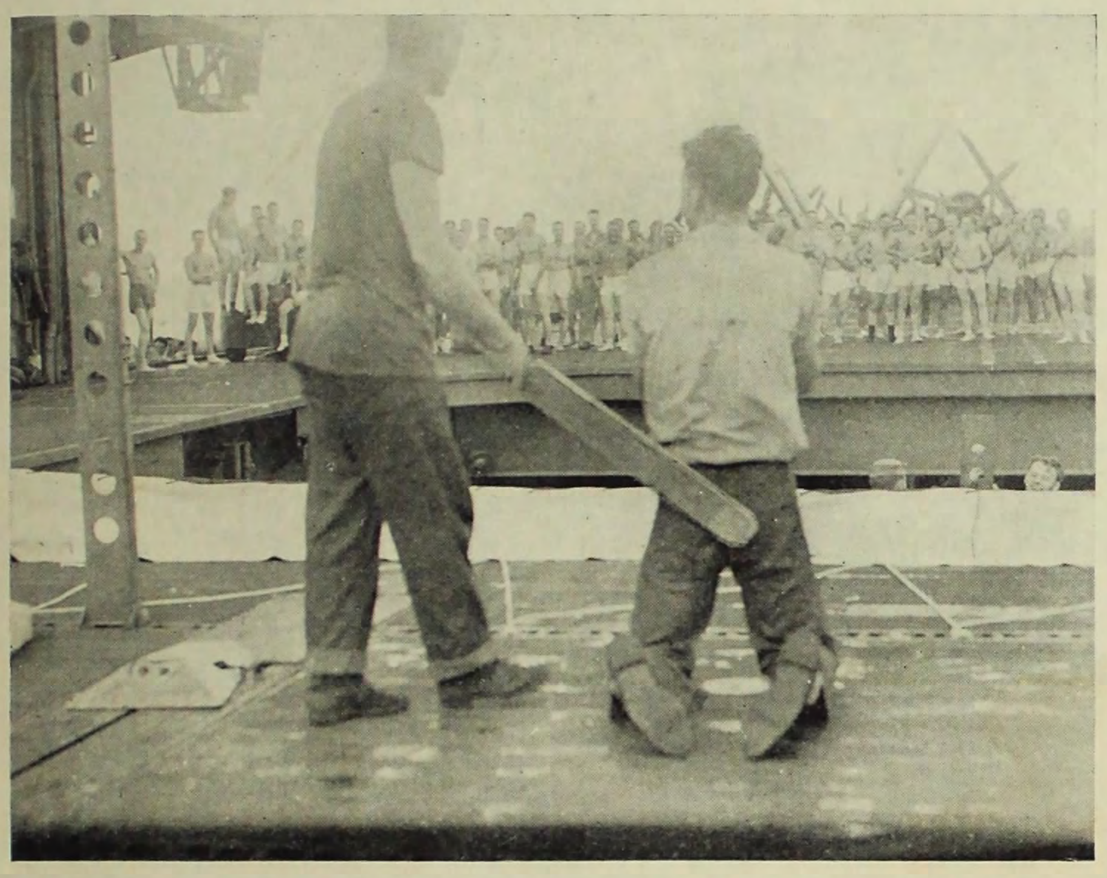
COME CLEAN FOR KING NEPTUNE

DOING OBEISANCE AT THE COURT OF NEPTUNUS REX

RUNNING THE GAUNTLET OF NEPTUNE'S ROYAL SHELLBACKS

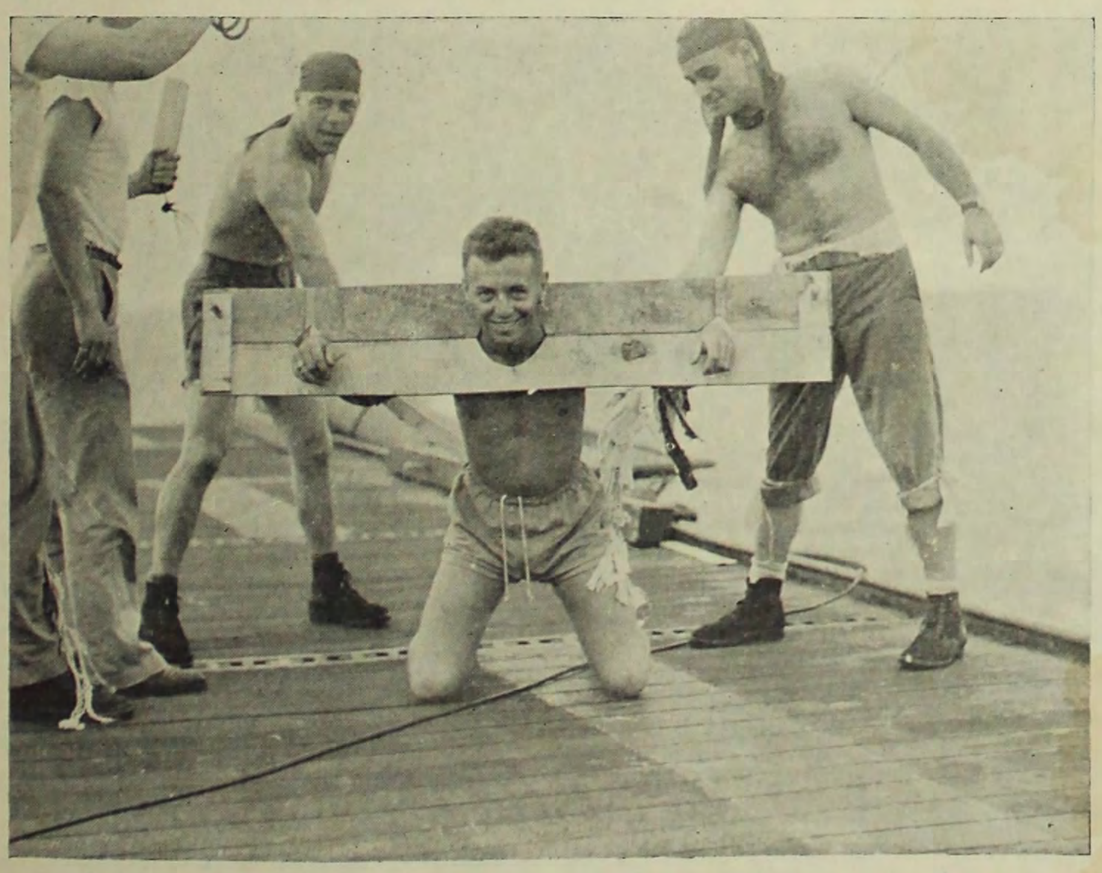


THE PILOTS HAVE THEIR OWN WAY OF PAYING THEIR WAY ACROSS THE "LINE"

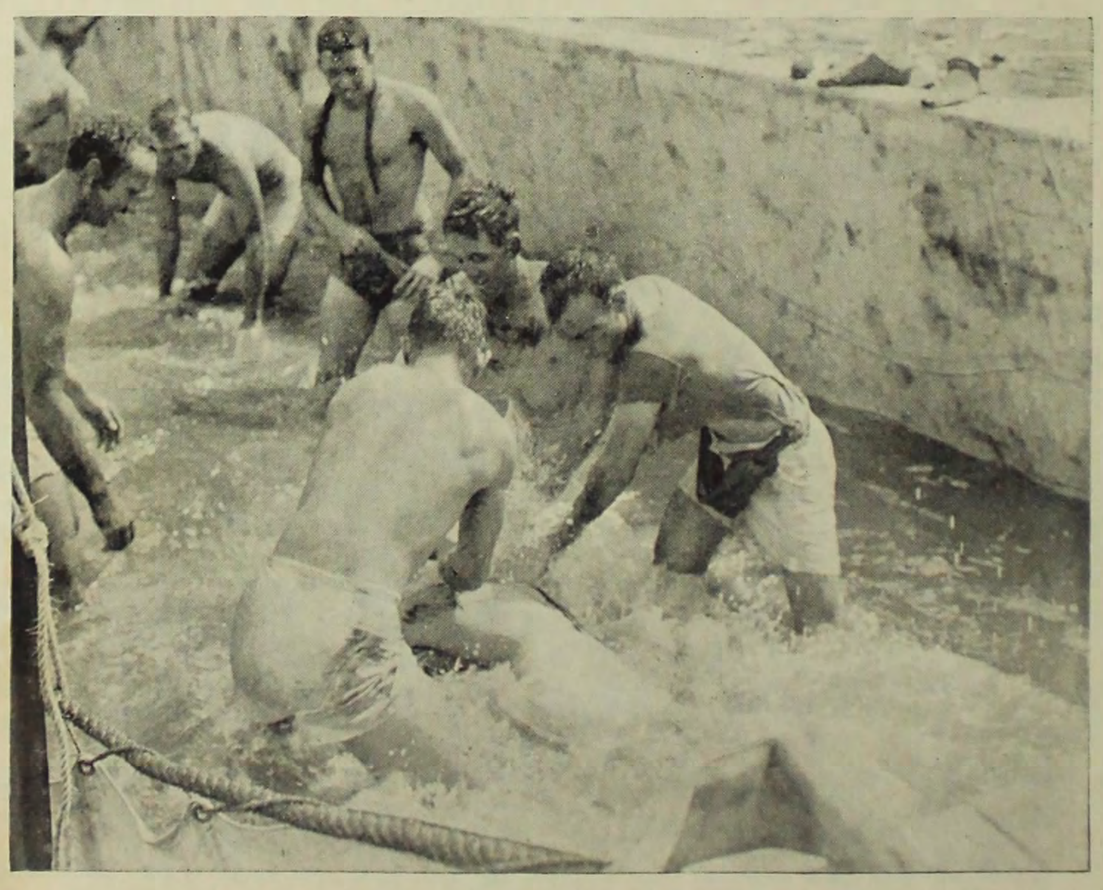


A SHELLBACK EMBRACES A POLLYWOG

A POLLYWOG IS MADE SMOOTH FOR THE ROYAL RECEPTION



A POLLYWOG IS RESTRAINED



AN EQUATOR BAPTISM