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By: NDC NARA Date: Dec 31, 2012

U. S. S. S A N T E E

(CVE-29)

1940 - 11 November 1945

Copy #1

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U. S. S. SANTEE (CVE-29)
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

CVE-29/A12
Serial: (53-46)

5 February 1946.

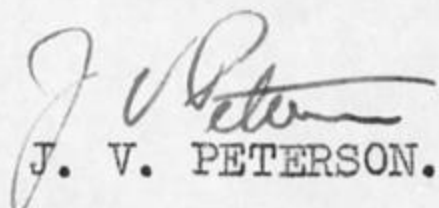
From: The Commanding Officer.
To : Aviation History Unit, Op-519-B.
(The Chief of Naval Operations).

Subject: Ship's History - Forwarding of.

Reference: (a) Aviation C/L 67-45.
(b) Aviation C/L 74-45.
(c) Aviation C/L 101-45.
(d) CNO Ltr., Op-519-HMD, Serial: 4-p-519
of 4 January 1946.

Enclosure: (A) History of the U.S.S. SANTEE (CVE-29).

1. In accordance with references (a), (b), (c),
and (d), Enclosure (A) is forwarded herewith.


J. V. PETERSON.

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USS Santee CVE 29



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THE HISTORY OF
THE USS Santee
"QUEEN OF THE
CVE'S"

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INTRODUCTION

November 7th, 1945 — East of Pearl Harbor.

The flight deck seemed almost foreign now that the roar of planes had ceased — the hangar deck looked naked without TBM and F6F's — the U.S.S. SANTEE CVE-29, was California bound, leaving behind years of war — a war in which she had battled Nazis and Japs, subs and Kamikazes — a war she had carried to:

North Africa — Invasion, Safi beachhead.

The South Atlantic — Participation in the Sinking of German Raider "KOTA NOPAN".

The North Atlantic — Four subs sunk; two probably sunk; three damaged.

New Guinea — Invasions of Aitape and Hollandia.

Mariana Islands — Invasion of Guam.

Halmahera Island — Invasion of Morotai.

Philippine Islands — Invasion of Leyte and Battle of Leyte Gulf.

Ryuku Islands — Invasion of Okinawa — 82 days continuous operations.

East China Sea — Mine sweeping off Okinawa.

Formosa — Evacuation of Prisoners of War.

Japan — Covering landing of occupation troops.

And now it was over — it was history — but bleak words could never tell the full story.

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- I -

Previous to her baptism of fire at Safi the SANTEE's history, like that of her crew, had been of a civilian nature. Back in the days when we were still selling scrap iron to Japan the Sun Shipbuilding Company constructed a fast tanker which, when launched in 1939, was christened the "ESSO SEAKAY". During the year that followed this ship set speed records for the runs between Panama and the West Coast ports. But in 1940 the "ESSO SEAKAY" lost not only her civilian status but also her identity. Absorbed by the Navy, she was converted to a fleet oiler, renamed the U.S.S. SANTEE (after the famous river in South Carolina). For the two years following this initial transformation she raced against time and Nazi subs to bring oil from the Gulf to the East Coast.

The summer of 1942 found the United Nations' hopes and shipping pool at their lowest ebb, both shattered by unceasing U-Boat attacks in the Atlantic. The convoys to England and Russia were helpless in mid-ocean beyond the protection of land based planes. The Navy's answer to this menace was the Escort Carrier. While the Kaiser ship yards were being developed, with mass production of carriers still months away, Naval engineers found an immediate answer in the fleet of oilers which could be converted in a matter of weeks. And so the SANTEE went into dry dock at Norfolk. In early August the first CVE's were commissioned, with the SANTEE's ceremony taking place the 24th of that month.

On October 12th, 1942, under the command of Captain W. D. Sample, the U.S.S. SANTEE (CVE-29) steamed out to sea and into the war.

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D-Day — Sunday, November 8th, 1942 — The Invasion of North Africa.

The first daylight began to stir across the water. Over the horizon to the East General Patton's troops were storming the beaches at Safi. The U.S.S. SANTEE moved among the shadows of the other ships in Rear Admiral McWhorter's Task Group 34.2 and prepared to launch her planes. In the hours that followed F4F's and SBD's from the SANTEE's Squadron VC-29 flew sorties over the beaches, strafing and bombing in support of the troops as they advanced toward Marrakech airport. On the second day of the invasion the squadron ranged over the battle area with fighters strafing and setting afire an enemy convoy of twelve trucks and SBD's bombing Marrakech airfield - hangars damaged and twenty aircraft destroyed. Flying regular patrols by the 10th, the SANTEE's planes on that date strafed a convoy of forty trucks loaded with troops, leaving the roadside scattered with charred wrecks and dead or wounded soldiers. One air patrol supported an advance tank column making sorties "on call", while another flew Anti-sub patrol over the Safi anchorage. Marrakech airfield, bombed and strafed again, yielded thirteen aircraft destroyed with several others damaged.

On the morning of the 11th a patrol of two SBD's and one F4F from VC-29 swooped down over the town of Mazagan and found the place surrounded by Patton's tanks and troops. The Army later reported that this sudden arrival of the SANTEE's planes had precipitated an immediate capitulation by the enemy.

For five days the squadron returned to the SANTEE only for fuel and ammunition - Marrakech, ripped into craters, was covered with shattered planes; all roads were under constant attack; advancing troops and tank columns were given daily air support; and the Subs menacing shipping were constantly

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attacked by both the air patrols and the destroyers. On the 11th a DD reported a sound contact and almost immediately thereafter two torpedo wakes were observed stretching a few yards ahead of the SANTEE's bow.

But by the 13th of November the area was secured and the Task Group turned their bows West for Bermuda. The SANTEE's war had begun.

SAFI OPERATION
(November 8th to 13th)

Planes destroyed or damaged - 38

Trucks destroyed or damaged - 62

Beach defenses blasted; advancing columns supported.

Gun installations bombed; aircraft hangars damaged.

From Bermuda to Norfolk, where the SANTEE passed several weeks at the Repair Base. The crew proceeded to make the most of their liberties, be they as they may in Norfolk. Wandering around in a tight group, the men successfully "introduced themselves to the local population.

And then, their ship's name famous, the crew returned aboard Christmas day and they headed for the South Atlantic.

The dawn of 1943 found the SANTEE sailing for Recife, Brazil, where the Task Group 23.1.6 was forming. This group, under the command of Rear Admiral Read, faced the difficult task of intercepting all enemy raiders and blockade-runners along a four hundred mile front. The Nazis had successfully slipped several ships around the Cape from Japan bound for Norway with invaluable cargoes of rubber and tungsten. And the possibility that German cruisers or pocket battleships might raid the sea lanes still existed - both these threats had to be eliminated by this group of ships operating out of Recife.

During the weeks of endless searching over the vast area, the SANTEE's

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planes perfected a system of search which, although very effective, involved almost constant flying for the squadron. But on March 10th the weeks of fruitless efforts were rewarded.

That morning the regular patrol left the SANTEE and swept out over the ocean to the outer limit of it's orbit. The two planes had flown for hours when at 1012, far below on the ocean floor, they spotted a ship. Sweeping down low the pilots identified her as a German blockade runner. This news flashed out to the Cruiser SAVANNAH, and the Escorts. As the Destroyer EBERLE raced forward a boarding party was organized. The Nazi crew frantically lowered boats. The German demolition party was placing it's last charges when the boarders reached the vessel. There followed almost instantly a series of explosions - eight men from the EBERLE were killed. After an heroic struggle, the surviving boarders left the doomed ship, returning with valuable information and 72 prisoners.

On that morning of March 10th the blockade runner KOTA NOPAN (flying the Dutch flag) with a cargo of crude rubber had been edging it's way northward across a seemingly empty ocean when the SANTEE's patrol planes swept down revealing her to the Task Group. After directing the approaching EBERLE, VC-29 planes returned to a proud ship.

This engagement completed, the Task Group swung North for the return to Norfolk. During the months while the SANTEE had operated off Safi and in the South Atlantic, the production of CVE's had increased. The Navy was preparing it's answer to the Nazis' mid-Atlantic undersea blitz. The summer months of 1943 were to be filled with action and **victory** for the carriers - defeat and death for the wolf packs.

A preview of these victories occurred on March 16th as the Group steamed

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toward Norfolk. At 1640 that day an SBD patrolling from the SANTEE spotted a surfaced U-boat and swept down for the attack. The sub's guns were on the plane almost immediately and the pilot was wounded as he reached for the bomb release lever. The depth charge landed short, passed under the sub, and exploded to port, abeam the conning tower. The sub was shaken, but no severe damage was in evidence. The SANTEE, informed of the sub's position by message drop, at 1712 sent off two planes from her killer group. These planes (one SBD and one TBF) attacked at 1725, dropped two depth charges and one depth bomb with instantaneous fuze setting. When the boil of water subsided, there was the sub - shuddering and gashed, but still afloat, still firing. The planes followed up this initial attack with strafing runs. With death circling above, the enemy fired their three-inch anti-aircraft gun furiously - a second plane was damaged. All the while the enemy zig-zagged and circled, her men clambering out of the conning tower hatch to take the place of the dead at the guns.

The DD EBERLE was dispatched to assist in the kill, having intentionally been delayed to permit the planes to attack before the arrival of the Destroyer would force the sub to submerge. By 1800 four more TBF's had flown off the SANTEE to join the battle; but the first attacking planes (by now out of ammunition and low of fuel) had left the sub on course 045°, considering her too badly damaged to submerge. During the five minutes that intervened before the arrival of the four TBF's, the sub disappeared, having submerged or sunk. The four SANTEE planes at 1815 found a stationary oil slick in which a large bubble was seen to rise. The U.S.S. EBERLE arrived, started the hunt, but during the hours of searching she was unable to make contact. The lack of survivors indicated that the sub had submerged - however, the presence of the oil slick and the DD's inability to make any contact might have meant that she

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had sustained damage which caused fatal structural failure upon submerging.

The SANTEE's planes had attacked and probably sunk their first sub - it was the beginning of what became one of the outstanding records held by a carrier in the Anti-Submarine war.

Having been instrumental in the sinking of a German raider and having gained credit for the probable sinking of an enemy sub, the SANTEE's crew was pardonably proud. Then on March 17th, after months of continuous operations, they welcomed the sight of land. Norfolk suddenly became aware of the SANTEE's return - the Shore Patrol prepared for activity.

The next two months passed with the ship engaged in the business of taking on supplies, undergoing repairs, and conducting training exercises in Chesapeake Bay. Captain W.D. Sample was relieved of his command during this period by Captain H.F. Fick.

In company with her escorts - three DE's and a large convoy - the CVE-29 got underway on June 13th. The planes of Squadrons VC-29 and part of VF-29 crowded her flight deck. During the voyage these planes kept up a constant search for subs, but only one was sighted and it submerged before the attack could be pressed.

After four days at Bassin Delpit, Casablanca, the Task Group departed July 7th with a Westbound convoy. Several days out orders were received instructing the SANTEE and her escorts to operate independantly against the subs in an area North of the Azors, (This was the only part of the Atlantic outside land based air patrol which offered weather and geographic conditions suitable for refueling the wolf packs.) Swinging North, the SANTEE threw out her air patrols over this region, hitherto a haven for the U-boats. During the two weeks - July 12th to 25th - which followed, seven surfaced subs were

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sighted and attacked. The Nazi's Admiral Doenitz had drawn all his subs in . during the summer and equipped them with the latest anti-aircraft guns. In panic and with teutonic stubbornness he had decided that the U-boats should battle the CVE's planes on the surface. As a result of this there were many days when the SANTEE's planes returned with ragged holes in the wings and fuselages'. But the air patrols continued and attacked - and at the end of the two weeks two submarines had been sunk, two probably sunk, and three damaged.

With this record behind her the SANTEE headed West on July 25th, and a rendezvous was completed with another convoy. On August 2nd, this galaxy of transports was edging across the Atlantic when a SANTEE pilot spotted two surfaced subs, dove into intense AA fire, dropped his depth charges, and thereby sank one sub immediately. Circling for his second run the pilot came in on the port quarter as the other sub crashed dived. When the spray of the explosion thinned, the sub could be seen, shattered and sinking. This twin victory brought to six the number of subs sunk or probably sunk by the SANTEE.

There followed many weeks of convoy duty when the SANTEE made three more voyages to Casablanca. Every transport under her protection reached it's destination, but from August 26th to November 17th the patrols were unable to locate a single U-boat.

Detached from convoy duty on November 17th, the ship operated in the Bay of Biscay on strictly anti-submarine duty; but again the planes were unable to make any contacts.

In December the A/S/W Task Group with which the SANTEE had been operating was dissolved at Norfolk. The SANTEE had completed her last anti-sub operation in the Atlantic. Disembarking her own squadrons on December 20th at New York, the ship loaded aboard sixty-one P-38's to be ferried to Scotland where

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they would be turned over to the Eighth Air Force. After steaming through the freezing mists of the North Atlantic which left every one on board miserably cold and wet except the "black gang", the SANTEE on January 8th, 1944 headed up the Clyde River and into Glasgow. Having discharged her cargo, the SANTEE returned to Norfolk. The SANTEE's Atlantic record read: Six subs sunk or probably sunk and three more damaged.

The Pacific war had spread into the Jap island defenses, and the CVE-29 was needed for future invasions there. Down the East Coast, across the Gulf, and into the Panama Canal - the SANTEE entered the Pacific on February 20th. Ahead lay months of combat in the island war to the West.

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The first weeks previous to the initial operations against the Asiatic enemy were passed by the SANTEE while she sailed up to San Diego from Panama. At North Island on March 1, 1944 CVEG-26 was embarked. (It was this squadron, consisting of twenty-four FM's and Nine TBM's, which the crew always remembered as their favorite - TWENTY-SIX fought with them through all the months before Leyte and during those weeks in the Philippines the squadron proved that the crew's admiration was not misplaced).

From San Diego to Pearl - and then on March 27th the ship joined Task Group 50.15 which comprised the fueling units for a fast carrier force. When these carriers raced through the Japs' cordon of islands and brazenly struck at Palau, T.G. 50.15 was protected by the planes of the SANTEE and her sister ships, the U.S.S. SUWANNEE and the U.S.S. CHENANGO. The whole force retired March 38th after a strike which had taken them into the Japs' "inner Defenses". Later at Pervis Bay, Floriday Islands the CVE-29 joined Task Force 78 and on April 16th these ships steamed West for the operation along the New Guinea coast.

At this time, spring 1944, the Pacific war was well along the main highway of Allied strategy. The American fleet had twice shattered Truk in strikes of great force. With the capture of the Green and Admiralty Islands and the landing at Cape Gloucester Rabaul had been neutralized. At Kwajalein and at Eniwetok the U.S. Navy gained intermediate bases which later made possible the solution of the supply problem during the great swing forward toward Guam.

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One of the lesser highroads of strategy, but one which led directly to the invasion of Leyte, was the series of advances along the Northern coast of Jap held New Guinea. This advance culminated in the twin attacks on Aitape and Hollandia; and it was in this invasion that the U.S.S. SANTEE for the first time attacked the Nip with her full force.

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D-Day, April 22, 1944 - Invasion of Aitape-Hollandia.

Within a few hours the dawn would herald H-hour and the Sixth Army's troops would pour ashore to battle across the beaches. On that April morning the element of complete surprise supported the attackers - for to the East at Wewak 18,000 Japs had concentrated in expectancy of an invasion there.

In the Bismarck Sea North of the landing craft assembly area the ships of Carrier Division TWENTY-TWO (U.S.S. CHENANGO, U.S.S. SAGAMON, U.S.S. SUWANNEE, and U.S.S. SANTEE) fueled and armed their TBM's and FM's. Then an hour before dawn the roar of planes echoed across the water. These four CVE's, which were to operate together during the climatic months ahead, had sent their planes off in the same operation for the first time. CVEG-26 swarmed off the SANTEE's deck and sped toward the beaches to prepare the way for the landing and then to support the attacking columns.

The enemy's 9,000 troops at Aitape were ill-prepared for the surprise assault. The Naval bombardment followed by vicious air attacks left them sturned and they offered only sparodic fire against the Army troops as they struggled from the landing craft and across the beaches. By noon those beaches were congested with mountains of supplies - the troops had advanced inland, pushing the shattered enemy into the dark fastness of the jungle.

While the squadron tore at the enemy ashore, the SANTEE's crew manned their guns awaiting air attacks. But all enemy planes in the

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area had been destroyed - and the men on the SANTEE were forced to fight their first operation vicariously with "the airdales" making seventy-nine sorties.

By April 24th the area was secured and the Task Force turned North for Manus. The SANTEE's first battle with the Japanese had been an overwhelming victory.

After a day at Seadler Harbor, Manus, Carrier Division TWENTY-TWO put out as part of Task Group 78.1, and April 27th found this group operating in the area North of Humboldt Bay. Here the SANTEE's planes flew sorties until May 4th when the division returned to the Admiralties.

Several weeks later the SANTEE reached Espirtu Santo where CVEG-26 disembarked to make room for Marine Aircraft - sixty-six Corsairs and fifteen F6F's comprising Marine Air Group 21. Hangar and Flight decks jammed with planes, living spaces cramped with over one hundred additional pilots, on June 2nd the SANTEE moved North for Guam. But there followed weeks of delay and changes of plans - for the sea-air battles around the Marianas and the battle for Guam prevented the SANTEE's Marine Corps air group from disembarking. Until Orote Air Field on Guam was secured these planes would have no base. And so while waiting for that day, the ship passed weeks at Eniwetok - weeks of monotony and heat with the only event of importance occurring when Captain Fick was relieved by Captain R. E. Blick.

On August 1st the ship put out for Guam and on the 4th the Marine planes were transferred to Orote airfield. The SANTEE had carried the

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first land based American air craft to Guam since the Jap occupation. That night at anchor in newly won Apra Harbor the SANTEE could see the great flashes from the guns of the U.S.S. TENNESSEE as she battered the Japs up the coast of the island. The next morning as the ship left Guam on her way to pick up her own squadron and return to offensive warfare, the Marines of air group 21 went into action against the enemy.

On August 14th CVEG-26 returned to the SANTEE and the next few weeks were spent in conducting training exercises of Manus. Scuttlebutt spread "the word" of a coming invasion.

Manus had faded into the morning haze. It was September 10th; over the horizon to the west lay the island of Mapia off the North Coast of New Guinea where Rear Admiral Sprague's Task Force 77.1 (Consisting of six CVE's - Carrier Division - TWENTY-TWO plus U.S.S. FANSHAW BAY and U.S.S. MIDWAY - and eight Escorts) would rendezvous with the transport force. From there they would proceed to a position off the island of Morotai.

This invasion of Morotai, planned under the code name "Interlude Operation" was similar to the Aitape-Hollandia landings in two respects: (1) Again the purpose was to secure another base from which to later on supply air cover for the invasion of Leyte; (2) Again the Japs were completely surprised. At Morotai the Jap garrison consisted of two hundred fifty men - there was also an overgrown air field. Expecting this attack to be at Halmahera, the Japs had built five airfields and had 25,000 troops on the island as of September 10th.

The CVE's in this operation would be expected to supply close air

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support for the D-Day landings. But their main function would be to completely neutralize the enemy's airfields on Halmahera.

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D-Day, September 16, 1944 - Invasion of Morotai.

The first fingers of dawn crept across the sky and on board the SANTEE there was all the familiar turmoil of a D-Day dawn - engines popped and howled in the warm-up; exhaust flames glimmered from the damp deck planking; and plane after plane streaked off the flight deck.

Carrier based planes attacked Halmahera according to schedule, and precisely at 0830 the Army landed on the beaches that bracketed Pitoe Airfield. By mid-afternoon U.S. troops had passed their first objectives and dashed on to the final perimeter. All day CVEG-26 attacked airfields, strafing grounded planes, bombing gasoline dumps and warehouses.

With twilight the FM's and TBM's began to circle the SANTEE and come in for landings. But unlike the years before the blanket of darkness did not end air operations. Soon the engines of the SANTEE's night fighters coughed and then settled into a steady roar. The planes took off into the fading twilight. That was the first time night fighters had operated from a CVE. These flights were extremely hazardous for the planes had no radar and the problem of seeing and navigating was acute. Frequently the SANTEE's improvised landing lights could not be distinguished from above - and once the twelve inch searchlight had to be used to flood the flight deck in order to guide in the "Night Hawks".

On D-Day the SANTEE's planes made fifty-five flights for a total

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of one hundred and seventy-four hours of combat flying. On the 17th CVEG-26's fifty flights helped raise Task Force 77.1.'s total of target sorties to one hundred sixty-nine. During the days that followed the intensity of these air attacks never slackened. Destroying or damaging fifty-five planes by the 19th of September Carrier Division TWENTY-TWO had so completely neutralized the five Halmahera airfields that even the nightly nuisance raids ("General Alarm Charlie") had to be flown from Zamboanga, 400 miles distant.

This neutralization of Jap airfields was vitally important even after the Island of Morotai had been secured, for the Army Engineers were working on Pitoe airfield and Jap air raids from their nearby bases could make such construction work impossible. But as the weeks went by the CVEs' planes continued to hold absolute air supremacy even over the Jap bases. Each day the enemy's air strips were left full of gaping craters and scattered with remnants of planes. But working feverishly at night, the Japs repaired the runways and brought from hiding in the jungles new Bettys, Kates, and Sallys. Always these planes were shot down or more frequently destroyed before they took to the air.

One of the highlights of this operation occurred on September 16th when one of the SANTEE's planes was shot down over Wasile Bay. The rescue of the pilot from under the guns of the enemy resulted in the following message from Admiral Kinkaid: "Congradulate those involved in the daring rescue at Wasile Bay and express my admiration of their corageous action."

When the SANTEE learned that one of her pilots had crashed into enemy waters but had survived and was drifting in front of enemy

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positions, several protective planes roared off the flight deck. CVEG-26 kept a continuous protective cover over the wounded pilot. The battle that followed continued throughout the day and involved two PT boats, forty-eight Hellcats and Wildcats, three Avenger smokers. Continuous air cover was dispatched to Wasile Bay and soon every carrier in the Task Force was vying to send her fighters to protect the downed pilot.

The ceaseless strafing fire of the fighting planes effectively protected the wounded pilot as he drifted close in front of enemy guns for a period of over 9 hours. PT boats with amazing skill and daring proceeded to within a few hundred yards of a heavy concentration of enemy batteries, made the rescue, and returned the fire from shore. During the dash into the Bay the PT's were protected by: (1) Avengers, who without regard for their own safety, laid a smoke screen at tree-top level over enemy AA positions; (2) The withering fire from Hellcats which pressed attacks at minimum height. The SANTEE's pilot was rescued and the enemy suffered heavy damage to fuel and ammunition dumps and gun positions were silenced. CVEG-26 battled all day but fortunately without loss. However four planes from other ships were lost in this battle, three pilots being rescued.

On September 27th the SANTEE's planes flew their last strikes against Halmahera. Pitoe airfield on Morotai had been rebuilt by Army Engineers and was ready for operations. During the days from September 15th to the 27th the intense Jap anti-aircraft fire claimed two of the SANTEE's planes but one pilot was rescued.

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By the 28th Task Force 77.1 had left Morotai over the horizon. The SANTEE had completed her third invasion-she was a veteran ship-she was earning her future title "Queen of the CVE's".

Morotai Operation
(15 to 27 September)

Enemy planes destroyed - 22

Severely Damaged ground installations, gasoline dumps, and warehouses.

Sunk several enemy barges filled with troops.

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-III-

Successful operations off Palau and Guam - shattering invasions at Aitope - Hollandia and at Morotai - such was the SANTEE's background when she set out for Leyte. By this time the ship had become an entity - as much so as any club - which would survive personnel changes and even the fire and death of the months ahead.

The whole area - from the Celebes to Luzon - had been under ceaseless sea and air attacks for weeks when the SANTEE in Carrier Division TWENTY-TWO of Task Force 77.4.1 arrived off Leyte on October 17th. From then on the intensity of battle precluded everything but work. Time consisted only of day and night, with dawn heralding a day of attack - Twilight, a night at G.Q. stations.

CVG-26 flew missions against targets ranging from small coast-wise craft along the Ormoc waterfront to grounded aircraft near Cebu City. On October 18th the squadron flew fifty-seven sorties for a total of two hundred eight hours of combat. On the strike against Cebu City the SANTEE's squadron spread their high-explosive hell over the airfield and installations, destroying fifteen planes; they bombed and sunk a total of fifteen thousand tons of Jap shipping in the waters east of Cebu. On the morning of October 13th the Leyte strikes resulted in four Jap PT boats blasted; several Jap trucks demolished; a transport plane destroyed; an eighty foot schooner sunk; six barges damaged, a seventh sunk; a PT boat sunk; a pier smashed. These doses of annihilation were delivered by the planes of the SANTEE throughout the period of "softening up", so that by A-Day the Jap air strength on Leyte was considered weakened almost to a point of non-existence.

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A-Day, October 20, 1944 -- Invasion of Leyte:

In the twilight of early dawn the SANTEE's deck force watched the blue exhaust flames of plane after plane blaze along the flight deck, curve away from the bow, climb and disappear into the high distance - bound for the beaches. At 0830 Carrier Division TWENTY-TWO was under attack by three Jap fighters. The SANTEE experienced four near misses, but her forty millimeter and twenty millimeter batteries were firing steadily, and when a Zeke tried a second attack, diving through the smoke of countless shellbursts and the interlocking patterns of tracers, he suddenly burst into flame and plummeted into the water off the starboard quarter.

The U.S. Army troops crashed onto the beaches at Leyte at 1000. With tanks in the lead the troops smashed inland; at noon the town of Dulag was a mass of flames. The planes from the CVE's were reported as "continuing highly effective support of our advancing troops, damaging buildings, fuel and ammunition dumps, trucks, gun emplacements, and troop's trenches." During those first days the SANTEE's planes flew strikes against the enemy on Cebu, Negros, Samar - and continued pounding Leyte. Two Jap Tonys were knocked down by CVEC-26 on the 21st. And on the 24th three SANTEE planes spotted a flight of forty-eight Jap Bettys and other bombers heading for the Leyte beach-head where unloading was progressing. These three FM's swarmed into the formation, and before other planes came to their assistance seven of the bombers had crashed while two more were probably destroyed. Then the SANTEE trio was joined by F6F's and when the air battle was over every Jap bomber had been shot down. This was a rather

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outstanding episode in the day's events.

Through the day of the 24th the Task Force's radios had been picking up reports from the fleet's scouting submarines - all these reports told of Jap battleships, carriers, heavy cruisers forming several task forces. The news that such heavy concentrations of enemy power were within twenty-six hours of San Bernadino Strait soon spread, and an air of tense expectancy settled over the CVE's.

That night of October 24-25th the USS SANTEE, USS SANGAMON, USS SUMANEE and the USS PETROF BAY, were moving west toward their operating area northeast of Surigao Strait. This group of CVE's had the battle designation "Taffy One". Thirty miles to the north in an area east of Samar Island the CVE's of "Taffy Two" were preparing for the next days strikes - and the carriers of "Taffy Three" steamed toward their area southeast of San Bernadino Strait. In those hours before the dawn of the 25th the air was filled with frantic reports: Admiral Oldendorf's 7th fleet of old battleships was steaming across the path of a great Jap task force in Surigao Strait; Jap battleships and cruisers were racing through San Bernadino Strait.

By 0600 the 25th the 7th fleet had turned back the Jap force in Surigao Strait but to the north "Taffy Three" faced annihilation. The Jap battleships had passed thru San Bernadino Strait and opened fire on the CVE's at eighteen thousand yards. The attacking Nips were under air assault from "Taffy Three's" planes, but without aid these carriers would be swept aside by the enemy as he headed for Leyte.

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With this news in mind the Santee's strike group was assigned to proceed north to the rescue. Five TBF's swept into the air carrying torpedoes - the men on board never expected them to survive the attack.

Along the catwalks the gun crews stood by their forties and twenties ready to jump in an instant into the swift, precisely drilled action of rapid fire. The flight deck was clear of planes - CVEG-26 was attacking. The after elevator was down - it was 1740.

The sudden whining cry of machine gun bullets sent men scattering for cover. Before the guns could fire the shrieking, screaming roar of a Jap plane hurtling crazily toward the deck was clinaxed by a shattering explosion. Flames and gases blasted across the flight and hangar decks. Men were struck down by flying pieces of jagged metal, myriads of them from pinpoint size to pieces of decking and parts of aircraft. The fury of the explosion ripped open the flight deck, tore loose steel fittings. The area near the explosion became a mass of fire, and gradually it grew into a roar which drowned out the sounds of human agony.

All over the Santee men raced to repair stations - fire parties rushed to the hangar deck - hoses were brought to bear on the flight deck fires almost immediately - damage control groups cleared away the wreckage - pharmacist mates carried off the dead, bound up the wounded.

Scattered near the bomb storage hatch were many five-hundred pound bombs, and several depth charges had split open and were burning. During minutes tense with the expectancy of an explosion men rolled these bombs over the side.

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The sprinkler system had been turned on instantly and this combined with the fire fighter's efforts, kept the fires from spreading through the planes parked on the hangar deck.

The forty millimeter batteries lining the flight deck had opened up almost immediately after the suicide plane hit for overhead more Japs circled for an attack. And then, amidst all this turmoil the men on the SANTEE saw a great explosion across the water. The USS SUWANNEE, CVE-27, had taken a Kamikaze - flames shot high above her flight deck.

On board the SANTEE sixteen minutes had passed since the suicide hit - and then there was a tremendous explosion on the starboard side. The ship lurched, shuddered, rolled over to a six degree list, but somehow she plowed ahead. A torpedo had crashed into the SANTEE midships just sixteen minutes after the initial damage. There followed a brief period during which time the situation was rather serious and the crew rather doubtful. But the instant action by damage control groups had blocked off the damaged area so that, although the sea rushed through a great rent in the SANTEE's hull, only four compartments were flooded. The greatest force of the torpedo had miraculously been absorbed by the thickest type cross-beam.

Within two hours after the initial attack by the suicide plane emergency repairs had been completed; the ship had been righted to an even keel; the flooded areas had been restricted so that stability was unimpaired and the ship had maintained her position in the formation throughout.

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At 0935 Captain Bligh informed the Admiral that the SANTEE could produce full revolutions, although "some so-called Jap barnacles seemed to be holding us back".

At 1117 a single TBF began to circle astern - the flight officer waved him in and the SANTEE then learned the news of CVEG-26. When the five TBF's had taken off at 0740 their pilots had expected to receive from the SANTEE their fighter protection for the mission. But in-as-much as the suicide plane had damaged the flight deck, no fighters were sent aloft. The TBF's circled over the SANTEE waiting until finally, being low on fuel, they decided to make the attack without fighter support. On approaching "Taffy Three's" area the five SANTEE pilots saw four Jap battleships, eight cruisers, and seven destroyers closing in on the slower CVE's and firing at a fifteen thousand yard range. The Jap force had strong air protection from land based planes, but even so many Jap ships were under persistent attack. The SANTEE's planes nosed over to make an attack on a Yamato class battleship which was firing salvos at the fleeing CVE's. Racing over the water through thick blossoms of AA shell bursts, the planes launched their torpedoes and then as they zoomed past the battleship, the tailgunners fired on the bridge - one gunner expending all his ammunition on that illustrious target. Three torpedoes were seen to crash into the ship. This attack resulted in the crippling of the Imperial Navy's newest type battleship.

On the return from this assault three of the planes ran out of fuel and crashed into the sea, but a fourth pilot voluntarily remained over these downed aircraft, radioing their positions to the ship.

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And then he too crashed into the sea. The fifth plane, having refueled on one of "Taffy Two's" carriers landed on the SANTEE at 1117. Destroyers were dispatched to the four pilots and they were rescued returning to the ship several days later. These five pilots of CVEG-26 had directly contributed to the repulse of the Jap force.

The SANTEE took on some of the SUWANNEE's planes before noon that day of the 25th; and at 1440, 1532, and 1721 the remaining planes of the SANTEE squadron took off for strikes. (CVEG-26 had been depleted by the loss of the four planes and also by the fact that several TEM's were operating from airfields on Leyte.)

The entire area was the scene of a mighty, but often confusing, battle. Leyte was under intermittent attack by hundreds of Jap bombers - "Taffy One" and "Taffy Two" were under aerial attack throughout the day - while to the north "Taffy Three", after the engagement with the Jap battleships and cruisers, was attacked several times by suicide planes. The SANTEE was supplying planes for the protection of Leyte, for the Local Combat Air Patrol (LCAP), and for continued attacks on the fleeing Jap warships.

On the following day, October 26th at 1220 twenty Japanese planes approached and LCAP intercepted, knocking down ten. The SANTEE's planes accounted for four of these. But the remainder pressed on into the area above the CVE's. By now - having absorbed the shock of the last two days events - the SANTEE's crew was somewhat tense. And when at 1226 a Judy directly above the ship nosed over at ten thousand feet, the forty millimeters sent up a frenzied fire.

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The bursts formed a blanket beneath the Judy - it hesitated and pulled up. Then again the Jap nosed over into a dive and again the forties warded him off. At this time a SANTEE plane, having climbed straight through the intense AA fire, shot down the threatening Jap plane. And then within a matter of minutes this same pilot sent another Judy down in flames.

But at 1240 a bomber was seen to nose over and hurl itself straight into the SUWANNEE. On the CVE-29 the crew watched in horror as their sister ship was engulfed in flames and black smoke. Great sheets of flame roared into the water when gasoline poured off the flight deck - men were seen dangling from ropes over the flaming waves - others dove from the burning ship into the fire below. Forty millimeter shells exploded and shot into the smoke blackened sky. But again the SUWANNEE survived. Other ships around the SANTEE were hit.

That night Jap "Snooper" planes made flights over the SANTEE alerting the crew. There was no break in the tension until the next morning - the 27th brought orders for the SANTEE to retire from the area in order to effect repairs. Clouds had gathered over Leyte during the night and rain poured down in torrents from their black bellies. Under this cover the SANTEE headed south for Manus, leaving fourteen of her crew buried in the waters off Leyte.

Bleak words would never fully describe those days but that week off Leyte was written indelibly in the memories of the SANTEE's men.

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INVASION OF LEYTE

OCTOBER 18th to 25th

Absorbed by the Santee

Bombings and strafings.

Kamikaze carrying five hundred pound bombs.

Resultant explosion, fires, damage, and death.

Impact of Jap torpedo (This being a shock which no CVE had ever previously survived).

Absorbed by the Japs, delivered by Santee

Sorties against targets - 377.

Planes shot down: 31.

Planes destroyed on ground: 31.

Tons of shipping sunk - 15,000 (Ammunition ship and 2 oilers).

Destroyer probably sunk.

Yamato class battleship severly crippled.

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IV

The SANTEE's return to the States was delayed at Pearl while a steel plate was welded over the gaping torpedo hole in her side.

San Pedro, California on December 5th, 1944, and the crew went ashore! The following weeks, while the ship was in drydock, were spent by the men on 23 days leave. Those days ashore were memorable for their activities.

Repaired and replenished by January 26th, 1945, the SANTEE on that date went to San Diego where Captain Blick was relieved. Captain J.V. Peterson became the "Old Man" on the SANTEE January 27th and remained in command from that date to the present.

CVE-29 saw CVEG-26 go over the side while at San Diego, and CVEG-24 - with eighteen F6F's and twelve TBM's - was embarked.

February was spent at Pearl Harbor while training exercises were conducted off Oahu. A few days before the SANTEE's departure the CV "Saratoga" entered Pearl after her tragic 'contact' with a Kamikaze. The sight reminded the SANTEE of her introduction to "The Devine Wind" - she prepared to face the Jap maniacs again, departing for the West Pacific on March 7th.

A short stop over at Ulithi and then on to San Pedro Bay, Leyte where two more F6F's were welcomed aboard. Scuttlebutt spread "the word" for days, then on the 27th all doubt was cast aside. The SANTEE put out from Leyte with the CVE STEAMER BAY and four DD's comprising T.U. 51.13.3. The SANTEE's Captain Peterson took command of this unit and it headed North on its way to the invasion of Okinawa, where landings were to commence on Love Day, April 1st.

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On "Love minus Two" day, March 30th, the SANTEE rendezvoused with the transports carrying the 7th and 96th Army Divisions to Okinawa. The SANTEE was absorbed into this group which was designated at T.U. 52.11.3.

Enroute to the Target area the ship prepared for the coming battle - such preparation being mainly a mental struggle within each man. Having experienced the viciousness of Jap tactics and having heard about Iwo Jima, the men now felt that they knew what the future would hold. Okinawa was encouragingly close to Japan - close to the final goal, but also it was closer than ever before to the home islands which spawned the suicide corps. And certainly new forms of fanaticism could be expected, new devices of death calculated by Tokyo to retrieve victory. On board the SANTEE those days on route to the invasion of Okinawa were fraught with an emotion common to all men of courage - fear.

On "Love minus One" (March 31st) T.U. 52.11.3. was absorbed in T.U. 52.1.3 and the planes of CVEG-24 joined the LCAP. That night with a full yellow moon showing from behind a light over cast, Admiral Sample directed his Naval forces to move up to the operating area off Okinawa.

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Love-Day, Easter Sunday, April 1st, 1945.

Invasion of Okinawa.

The landing craft were swarming around the attack transports, weaving in and out amid the early morning mists. Overhead circled several TBM's from CVEG-24 while the F6F's strafed the landing beaches. The Marines were loaded into the LCI's and LCT's and these little boats started for Okinawa's broad beaches. Suddenly the circling TBM's swept down over the whole area enveloping the ships in a long thick cloud of white smoke - back and forth, the planes traversed the area spreading their blanket from ships to beach. And then as soon as they were covered, the landing craft raced back to their transport's, embarked, and the entire force departed the area, leaving the Japs expecting an attack momentarily from out of the smoke.

This feint was surprisingly successful - over on the West coast of Okinawa the Marines reached the beach, rushed forward. Only sporadic shots met them, and the Marines suddenly realized they were experiencing an invasion devoid of their customary bloody losses. By evening of Love Day the 10th Army had crossed the island thus splitting the enemy forces. During the hours from 0545 to 1905 on Love day the ~~SANTIE~~'s planes covered the diversenary feint on the East Coast, then attacked enemy positions and supported the advancing troops on the West coast.

From that Easter Day on through ~~seventy~~^{seven} days of active operations off Okinawa the ~~SANTIE~~ carried the attack to the enemy. Through those long weeks - from April 1st to June 19th - the ship was on the constant alert. Guns were manned twenty-four hours a day and more times than anyone cared to remember the eerie bonging of the General Alarm sent every man on board racing

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to his battle station. Many times it meant long hours at stations waiting - tense hours of waiting, staring into the black blanket of night or into the glare of the gun. Sleep became an elusive thing pursued anywhere and at anytime the men were free to relax. And over it all was the uncertainty. The alarm might mean only watching and waiting, or it might herald a swift battle.

Hour after hour in the sun and wind along the catwalks the crews stood beside their loaded guns. The SAMTEE's gun crews saw many planes, shot at some, but were unable to claim a kill.

Down in CIC, in compartments where bulkheads were jammed with radio equipment, fighter directors leaned over their maneuvering boards to track movements of bogeys and to vector out the fighter squadron.

South of Okinawa the islands of Sakishima Gunto lay almost equally distant between Formosa and Okinawa. Here the Japanese possessed several excellent airfields. During those critical months of April, May, and June, these airfields had to be made untenable for the enemy - otherwise his bombers could fly straight from Japan, bomb Okinawa, and land at Sakishima. Or the bombers could fly up from these airfields, bomb American positions on Okinawa, and land in Japan. The islands also offered a threat to all Naval operations off Okinawa, for as a staging area the Japs could fly from there out over the supply lines running to Okinawa and raze havoc with Naval shipping. Thus the airfields on the Sakishima islands of Miyako and Isigaki were vitally important in the overall strategy and had to be eliminated as a threat.

This task could only be accomplished by keeping the islands under constant air attack; and a British Task Force was assigned this mission.

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During the first week of the campaign the SANTEE operated off Okinawa sending in daily strikes. On April 6th CVEG-24 shot down three Jills West of IE Shima. When on April 7th the British Force withdrew from the Sakishima area for the purpose of refueling and replenishing, T.U. 52.1.3 was ordered to take over this mission. This mission was described in an official plan as calling for "an early morning sweep and strike at the airfields on Miyako and Ishigaki for the purpose of destroying aircraft and airfield facilities. Such strikes are to be repeated, if necessary, to accomplish the purpose of the mission."

April 8th the SANTEE's air operations commenced at 0549 and terminated at 1907 with missions flown over both Miyako and Okinawa. The F6F's returned from Okinawa with holes in their wings as evidence of intense AA fire - one TBM was damaged over Miyako. But in return for this damage CVEG-24's two strikes against Miyako's Harara airfield left the runways pock-marked with craters, an ammunition dump blown up, and two planes (one Tony and One Betty) destroyed on the ground. The two strikes against Okinawa had attacked Jap positions, landed bombs at the entrances of fortified caves, supported troops and destroyed AA positions with rocket fire.

On the following four days the SANTEE's planes continued to help T.U. 52.1.3 neutralize the Sakishima area. On one mission CVEG-24 lost their commander when he was hit by AA fire while leading an attack on the Miyako airstrip.

On April 12th the British CV's resumed operations and T.U. 52.1.3 was therefore ordered to rendezvous with fleet oilers for refueling and thereafter to support the Tenth Army on Okinawa. These orders were in effect from April 12th to the 17th and the SANTEE responded by supplying aircover for

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the landings and the following operations on Ie Shima.

The British withdrew from the Sakishima area for refueling and replenishing on the 17th and again the SANTEE as part of T.U. 52.1.3 moved south to the operating area to carry out the mission of interdiction of Miyako and Ishigaki. Every day CVEG-24 flew off the SANTEE for two or three strikes and by May 4th (when the British CV's returned) the planes of the CVE-29 had destroyed twelve Jap aircraft and continued the successful neutralization of Sakishima area. After May 4th the British force operated under a program of alternating between two days of operations and two days of refueling and replenishing. This program was in effect until May 15th during which time the SANTEE and her sister CVE's substituted for the British force when it was not present; and then upon return of the British the CVE's went north to conduct strikes against the Japs on Okinawa. Upon completion of operations on May 25th the British warships retired permanently from the area. T.U. 52.1.3 assumed and carried out alone the Sakishima mission from the 25th of May to June 16th.

The U.S.S. SANTEE during that period flew forty-seven strikes against the airstripes on Ishigaki and Miyako, hitting runways, dispersal areas, an underground amphibious base, buildings, anti-aircraft positions, and storage areas - generally making life hell for the Nip and his airfield useless.

On Ishigaki the enemy had build up a heavy concentration of anti-aircraft guns making that airfield at times a deadly alley of fire. Constant attacks on these AA positions with bombs and rockets gradually knocked them out. But on both Miyako and Ishigaki the light AA was intense and accurate, and due to the fact that those positions were widely dispersed, thoroughly camouflaged,

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and tracer fire never used, this type opposition was never completely knocked out. It was almost impossible to locate the light AA gun positions for frequently they were hidden in towns camouflaged as houses and with no tracer to reveal the placements it was difficult to effectively combat this defense.

The Japs were accomplished in the art of camouflage and used it to full advantage. Their aircraft dispersal area were spread amongst the jungles and their revetments were in many places underground or inside caves; but rockets were successfully used against this type target. As a result of these defenses the SANTEE lost six planes to anti-aircraft fire over Miyako and Ishigaki - but two of the pilots were rescued from waters near the islands.

Aboard the SANTEE during the forty-two days the ship operated against the Sakishima area the crew would watch the returning planes, count them anxiously as they swung into the landing circle, watch each plane as it settled down on the flight deck and taxied forward, and study the wings and fuselages for the ragged holes which might tell them something of the tough anti-aircraft fire over the targets. The return of CVEG-24 was always a scene filled with suspense.

On May 2nd the following despatch was issued by the Commander of Task Unit 52.1.3 to his CVE's. Although it is in reference to a limited period of time, it might well have been applied to the whole Sakishima operation.

"The past several days have been tough ones for all hands X The ships have operated full out for an unprecedented period X The squadrons have been given the toughest air job in the book namely repeated attacks against strongly defended airfields X That you have done your job well is attested by the figures and confirmed by Admiral

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Kiland SOPA at Kerama Retoo who states that because of your thorough neutralization of airfields in Sakishima Gunto he has not been troubled by Jap planes from the South even though many ships have been sunk and damaged by planes from the North X There is no doubt that given the opportunity the Japs will use Sakishima as they planned on April 22nd when you nipped a forty plane raid from Nobara in the bud X You can well imagine the damage and casualties that such a raid could have caused X

So far we have only dished it out X If the Japs try to change that the screen I am sure has a ready answer for them X Currently you are going through one of the toughest campaigns of the war X Your response to every job you have been given has been more than one hundred per-cent X You can well be proud of your work X Well done X

When the SANTEE operated off Okinawa her planes were actively engaged in supporting the advance of the Tenth Army; an example of such support occurred on May 24th.

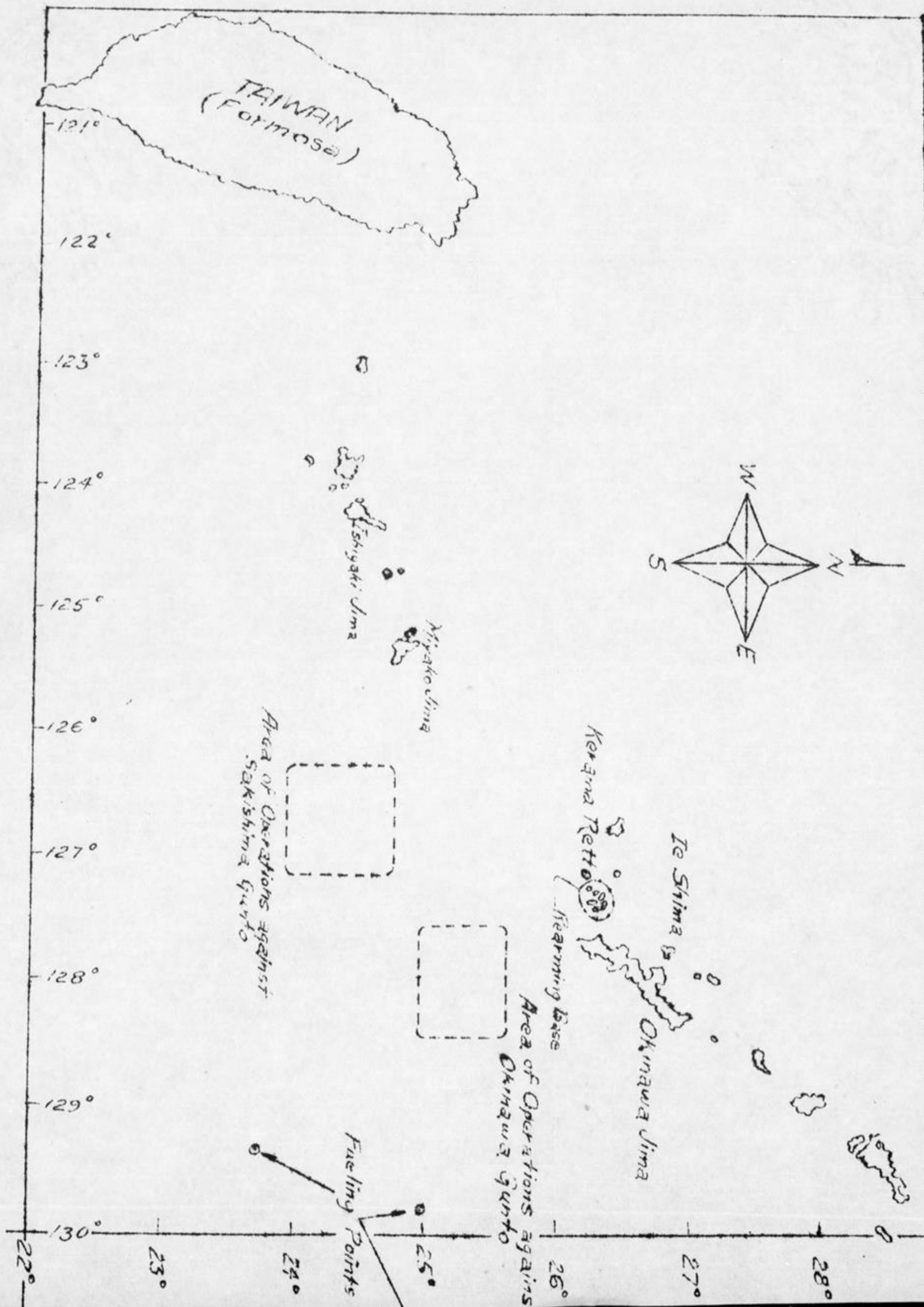
The troops had cleared the Northern end of the island but in the Southern area the Japs' defense was furious and on many days advances were counted in yards - or not at all. One of the Japs strongpoints and a place used as headquarters for the Jap Army was Shuri Castle. This old fort, with walls so thick that artillery and ordinary bombs were unable to break them down, was the scene of many bitter attacks; but always the enemy held fast. Finally a supreme effort was planned and the Navy's aircraft were called in to put it into effect.

On May 24th six TBM's on the SANTEE were loaded with 1,000 pound bombs.

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They took off, joined planes simularly loaded from other CVE's and sped on to their objective. Over Shuri Castle the planes peeled off and dropped their missiles. Great clouds of dust and rubble mushroomed skyward - when the air cleared thirty foot holes were seen in the walls. The troops attacked and at last gained a goothold in this position. Such was the type of support the SANTEE and her sister CVE's afforded the Tenth Army on Okinawa.

The factor which enabled the CVE's and other Naval forces to operate off Okinawa so continuously was a little group of islands called Kerama Retto, but known as "Suicide Harbor" to the SANTEE. A few miles off the Southern tip of Okinawa, a circle of small, rugged islands rose out of the sea and formed a huge harbor. This harbor was secured several days before "Love-Day" and from then on, thru to the end of the Okinawa operation, Kerama Retto served as a rearming base for all ships.

In the harbor there were often hundreds of ships - and here the SANTEE on six occasions came to load aboard her armament. Each time was an ordeal, for the Japs knew of Kerama Retoo's importance and comstantly attached the warships there. When the SANTEE entered the harbor she was five out of the six times the only carrier in the anchorage, thus being the logical target in any air raid. Always during those hours in "Suicide Harbor" the hangar deck was covered with bombs, rockets, and more bombs, all being laborously lowered into the magazines. The ammunition was brought from ammunition ships in LCI's to the SANTEE, and then the crew labored as at no other time to complete their job. The sooner the bombs were aboard, the sooner Kerama Retto could be left over the horizon - and that was as close as any one cared to be.

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Everytime the CVE-29 went into the rearming base the General Alarm sounded before loading could be completed - but miracously the SANTEE survived, while many other ships (the sister CVE, U.S.S. SANGAMON included) were hit by Kamikazis. On one occasion, May 6th, the Saint George (AV-16) anchored near the SANTEE was hit by a Jap suicide plane at 0848; and then at 0851 a Tony peeled off in a suicide dive in the direction of the SANTEE but was shot down by an LST.

Along with her regular operations the SANTEE also served as an Oiler, for she has a great cargo oil capacity. Seven times off Okinawa the ship received oil and gasoline from oilers, taking on a total of 56,505 barrels. During the operation twenty-seven destroyers were fueled by the CVE-29. Such refueling of vital operational ships was an invaluable factor in the ability of "picket ships" to remain in action against the enemy.

Finally on June 16th, after 77 continuous days in the target area off Okinawa, the SANTEE was detached and headed south for Leyte. After conducting the longest continuous carrier operation on record - 82 continuous days at sea, on June 30th the CVE-29 wearily pulled into San Pedro Bay, Leyte. The crew had not stepped off the ship since March 7th. If ever the men of the SANTEE felt that their ship deserved the name "Queen of the CVE's" it was during those days ashore after Okinawa. They openly and proudly referred to her as the "Queen" - no one challenged her title.

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77 DAYS OFF OKINAWA

(April 1st to June 16th)

Missions flown - 3,073.

Combat hours flown - 9,535.

Tons of bombs and rockets dropped on the Japs - 906.

Jap planes destroyed on the ground - 30.

Jap planes shot out of the air - 3.

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V

During July the SANTEE participated in a somewhat mysterious operation - mysterious due to the fact that it's purpose was unknown. And being seemingly unrelated to any definite part of the war this operation offered fertile material for "scuttlebutt machines".

The operation itself consisted of furnishing air protection for mine sweepers clearing an area of shoal waters 90 miles west of Okinawa. But the embroidery supplied by the crew of the SANTEE gave the operation an importance which it might well have merited. The possibility of invasions on the China Coast was real and such minesweeping operations would be a necessary preparation for any invasion of the Jap held coast line. The SANTEE may well have been preparing the highway for what would have been her sixth invasion.

On July 1st the ship took her position off Leyte amid Carrier Support Unit 32.1.2. This group of five CVE's was attached to Task Force 32 which boasted several battleships and cruisers. The entire group moved up to the operating area and supported the fleet of minesweepers. The "Sweepers" carried out their dangerous task several miles North of the supporting force while the planes from the CVE air groups flew sorties overhead, fanning out over a wide area of the East China Sea. But during the days of the operation - from July 5th (Jig Day) to July 15th - the planes were unable to intercept any Jap raiders. SANTEE's radar picked up Bogeys on several occasions, but CVEG-24 was only able to make visual contact with two enemy planes.

Operating over a large area South of the minesweepers the Task Force frequently found itself amidst floating mines. The sight of these mines became desparately common. Twice the SANTEE was able to avoid collision

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by only the sharpest of maneuvers. The DD screen during the ten days destroyed 15 mines with their guns.

The SANTEE flew strikes nearly every day and during all flight operations supplied several planes for the LCAP and LASP. It was a tedious operation what with the ever present and oppressive danger of the mines.

The main event for the SANTEE during this operation differed from past performances in that it did not concern action with the enemy - and yet on July 7th death revisited the SANTEE. An F6F had just taxied forward to the parking area on the flight deck when another plane droned up from astern and with a whistle and a thump hit the deck. This plane's tail hook broke and with a roar the F6F leaped forward, hurdled the barriers, and landed on top of the first. Both planes burst into flames. The pilot in the top plane was able to leap clear, but his comrade beneath the wreckage was killed instantly. The intense fire was restricted to the two F6F's and was finally brought under control after several tense moments. Within three hours repairs had been made and CVEG-24 was operating again.

The SANTEE was detached from this operation on July 15th and proceeded to Guam, arriving there on the 19th. During the next seven days CVEG-24 was transferred and on the 31st the planes of CVEG-26 once again crowded the SANTEE's flight deck.

As the quick red tropic twilight was changing to the night of August 16th the SANTEE welcomed the first definite news of Japan's surrender. There were some rather uncertain attempts at celebration that night - but the SANTEE's reaction to victory was one that had few outward manifestations. The relief and excitement were real, but after two years of war the men

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were somewhat at a loss as to how to accept the news of peace.

As it turned out there is no evidence of any transition from war to peace - in fact ahead lay another operation of danger.

The SANTEE reached San Pedro Bay, Leyte, August 18th and on the 29th of that month she was on her way to cover the occupation troops landing at Junsen, Korea. A severe typhoon necessitated a change of course south of Okinawa and before the task group returned to their original course new orders were received.

These orders directed the group to proceed to Northern Formosa where Allied Prisoners of War were to be evacuated. And so as part of Task Group 77.1 the dawn of September 5th found the SANTEE off Kiirun, Formosa. Since there had been no prior communications whatever with anyone on Formosa one of the primary missions was to make message drops in strategic locations, such as Administration Buildings near Kiirun Harbor, the Airfield, and POW camps. The purpose was to inform the Japs that the ships intended to land personnel and that the utmost cooperation would be demanded. To emphasize these messages the planes made a show of force and the entire area was covered with Combat Air Patrol. Destroyers took a Marine detachment into the Harbor and during their approach they were covered by planes from the SANTEE and the BLOCK ISLAND which were searching for mines - four were sighted, two destroyed. Photographic and reconnaissance planes reported the airfield operational and also located three POW camps.

After arrangements had been made planes were loaded with medical equipment and food. They then flew off the two carriers and landed at Kiirun airports. In this 9,500 pounds of supplies were delivered during the 5th

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of September.

Before dawn of the 6th the SANTEE's planes had again patrolled the sky's over Kiirun. The whole operation was touch and go during all this time for the Japs were in complete control of all bases and airfields in the area and the Task Group was operating independently. If the Jap commander had refused to cooperate or had planned treachery, there might well have been a post-war battle for the U.S.S. SANTEE. But as it was arrangements were completed after hours of tense and difficult negotiations and at approximately 1400 on the 6th of September the evacuation of Prisoners of War commenced. A Total of four hundred and seventy-seven prisoners were brought aboard the SANTEE where they recieved beds, food, clothing, and medical treatment, and made comfortable for the night. By 2337 the whole Task Group, carrying aboard it's various ships eleven hundred and sixty POW's, was underway for Manila. The Medical Officer from the DE U.S.S. FINCH was transferred to the SANTEE to make use of his professional qualifications.

The SANTEE was not prepared for an evacuation mission of this type and as a result great shortages existed in such items as cots, mattresses, linen, and blankets. The prisoners of war were made comfortable by "borrowing" such items from the crew.

The official report of this operation described the Prisoners of War as follows: "From the humanitarian viewpoint the laymen could not help observe the delight of the POW to be free and the immediate improvement in his spirits and health. This was due not only to the medical care and restoration of the reasonable comforts of life, but also to the little a man's family

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does for him when he is sick, hurt, or exhausted. Those were done by individual members of the crew for each POW. It was touching to the point of bringing tears to the eye of the most hardened observer."

Three days were spent at Manila and then on September 14th the SANTEE departed alone (for the first time) for Okinawa. From Buckner Bay the SANTEE made a voyage to a goal set way back on December 7th, 1941 - for on September 22nd, the CVE-29 anchored in a Japanese harbor, Wakayama. After two years of battle the crew looked out across the water to the land which the enemy called home. From Wakayama the SANTEE moved to Tokyo Bay where the Jap homeland was a sight which recalled to the Navy's mind the part which the B29's had played.

The days were now full of a wonderful expectancy for the crew. The greatest scuttlebutt of all was on everyone's lips - the SANTEE was going home!

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November 11th, 1945.

"Invasion" of the U.S.

For the SANTEE the dawn of November 11th was a sight long to be remembered - the sun rose over California - the ship was home - the war was a memory.

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APPENDIX

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COMMANDING OFFICERS OF THE U.S.S. SANTEE

CAPTAIN W. D. SAMPLE USN

284 N GONZALEZ ST. PENSACOLA, FLA.

24 AUGUST 1942

TO

22 MAY 1943

CAPTAIN H. F. FICK USN

PENSACOLA, FLORIDA

22 May 1943

TO

11 JULY 1944

CAPTAIN R. E. BLICK USN

716 SPRING ST., MICHIGAN CITY, IND.

11 JULY 1944

TO

27 JANUARY 1945

CAPTAIN J. V. PETERSON USN

835 GUADALUPE AVE, CORONADO, CALIF.

27 JANUARY 1945

TO

STILL IN COMMAND THIS
DATE 1 FEBRUARY 1946.

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PORTS AND HARBORS VISITED BY THE U.S.S. Santee

NORFOLK, NAVY YARD
BERMUDA, BAHAMA ISLANDS
YORKTOWN, VA.
HAMPTON ROADS, VA.
PORT OF SPAIN TRINIDAD
RECIFE, BRAZIL
CHESAPEAKE BAY
CASABLANCA, FRENCH MOROCCO
OFF SAFI, MOROCCO
NEW YORK CITY
GREENOCK, SCOTLAND
GLASGOW, SCOTLAND
GITUN LAKE, CANAL ZONE
BALBOA, CANAL ZONE
NORTH ISLAND, SAN DIEGO, CALIF.
PEARL HARBOR, T.H.
ESPIRITO SANTO, NEW HEBRIDES ISLANDS
PEKOA CHANNEL, NEW HEBRIDES ISLANDS
PURVIS BAY, FLORIDA ISLANDS
SEADIER HARBOR, MANUS, ADMIRALTY ISLANDS
KWAJALEIN ATOLL, MARSHALL ISLANDS
APRA HARBOR, GUAM, MARIANNAS ISLANDS
TANAPAG HARBOR, SAIPAN, MARIANNAS ISLANDS
SAN PEDRO, CALIF.
ULITHI ATOLL ANCHORAGE, CAROLINA ISLANDS
SAN PEDRO BAY, LEYTE ISLAND, PHILLIPINE ISLANDS
KERAMA RETTO, NANSEI SHOTO
OFF KIRUN HARBOR, FORMOSA
MANILA, PHILLIPINE ISLANDS
BUCKNER BAY, OKINAWA GUNTO, NANSEI SHOTO
WAKAYAMA, HONSHU, JAPAN
WAKANOURA WAN, HONSHU, JAPAN
TOMO GA SHIMA, HONSHU, JAPAN
URAGA SUIDO HARBOR, HONSHU, JAPAN
TOKYO HARBOR, HONSHU, JAPAN

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CONGRATULATORY MESSAGES

November 1942

From: Battle Report of Invasion of North Africa.

Arrival of Santee Planes reported to have precipitated immediate capitulation of this strong hold.

August 1943

From: CINCLAND
To : Santee

Effective blows against enemy during santee's long and successful cruise reflects great credit on all hands in Santee. Well Done.

January 1944.

From: ComAirLant
To : Santee

As the Commander Air Force Atlantic Fleet I desire upon your departure from my command to express my appreciation of your efforts energy and initiative for me and against the enemy. I wish you luck and success against your new foe. Good Hunting.

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EXCERPTS FROM MESSAGES AFTER THE BATTLES AT LEYTE

October 1944.

"I send my heartiest commendation of the magnificent Naval Victory of the 7th Fleet in the Leyte Gulf Battle. Under heavy attack and adverse odds their indomitable determination, splendid efficiency and outstanding courage overcame all obstacles", MacArthur.

"The skill and courage displayed by your forces in repelling the powerful elements of the Japanese Fleet were magnificent and have added an inspiring chapter to the History of the United States Navy" Halsey.

"The entire sixth army joins me in extending heartiest congratulations to your Seventh Fleet on your splendid victory over the Jap Naval Forces". ComGen 6.

"This praise you have earned. As stout men you have proven your Valor and Sunken Jap Ships attest your skill. To all who have contributed to our great victory, "Well Done" - - - Kincaid.

"To the Officers and men of the Escort Carrier and to the Kin of those who were lost. This task group has participated in one of the decisive battles of this war. Never have fighting men had a greater task and never have fighting men performed their duty with greater determination and distinction. Against such team work the enemy could not prevail. I am proud to have been privileged to be present and observe your achievements. - - - - T. L. Sprague

From: CincPac Adv. Hqs.
To : The 5th Fleet.

May 1945

The Officers and men of the Fifth Fleet by their courage fortitude and general fighting abilities are making proud pages in the History of our Navy and our Nation. The manner in which they are inflicting damage on the enemy keeping the sea for prolonged periods and controlling damage is cause for great pride and satisfaction. Congratulations to as superb a body of Seamen and fighting men as ever engaged in battle.

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From: COM TF 31 June 1945
To : RAdm Durgin (ComEsCarFor)

RAdm Durgin. Hope that you note with considerable pride and satisfaction that organized resistance on Okinawa had ceased. Your contribution to this successful campaign is generally appreciated and well known. None the less I wish to add my personal appreciation for a swell job and the ever ready and willing spirit of the CVE's.

From: Commander Air Forces Pacific Fleet August 1945
To : Air Forces Pacific Fleet.

It is with a feeling of pride and humility that I say to all officers and men of Air Force Pacific Fleet "Well Done!" From the grim early days of the war to the glorious day of victory over the last of the Aggressors Naval Aviation has been in the forefront. The notable part you and your comrades whose lives were bravely sacrificed have played in the reduction of Japanese Military is known to and will be remembered by all the world. You have earned the Blessing of Peace and the Enduring Gratitude of your countrymen.

From: Admiral Ketcham Passing on Admiral September 1945
Kinkaid's Message.
To : Santee and Ships in Company.

For evacuation of POWS from Formosa you were nothing short of sensational. To every officer and man in your ships is due resounding applause for shoving your noses into Kiirun before the Occupation without thought of self in a most worthy cause. Handling of passengers and their care like everything else in the operation was done in the American way and there is no better. I pass to you Com 7th Fleets message. "Your prompt and determined action in the Formosa evacuation under difficult circumstances was a magnificent performance. A Godsend to our prisoners. Well Done. - - - Kinkaid.

From: ComAirPac Admin
To : Santee November 1945.

Welcome. It is good to have you back and to commend the Santee upon completion of an effective combat tour. Well Done.

From: Com 11th Naval District.
To : Santee November 1945.

Commandant sends greetings and Well Done. Pass to all Hands.

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TASK ORGANIZATIONS ATTACHED TO

DESIGNATION	DATE	<u>OTC</u>
TF 22		
TG 22.3		
TU 22.3.1	13 Oct. 1942	CAPT. W. D. SAMPLE
TF 34	25 Oct. 1942	RADM HEWITT
TG 34.2	25 Oct. 1942	RADM MC WHORTER
TG 34.10	7 Nov. 1942	IN U.S.S. PHILADELPHIA
TG 34.2.3	13 Nov. 1942	CAPT. W.D. SAMPLE
TU 22.3.1	25 Nov. 1942	CAPT. W.D. SAMPLE
TF 23	26 Dec. 1942	CAPT. W.D. SAMPLE
TF 23.1	9 Jan. 1943	RADM O.M. READ
TU 23.1.6	14 Jan. 1943	RADM. O.M. READ
TU 23.1.7	1 Mar. 1943	CAPT. W.D. SAMPLE
TG 41.7	15 Mar. 1943	CAPT. W.D. SAMPLE
TG 21.11	13 June 1943	CAPT. H.F. FICK
TG 58.7	15 Mar. 1944	RADM. V.H. RAGSDALE
TF 78	16 Apr. 1944	
TG 78.4	7 May 1944	RADM. V.H. RAGSDALE
TU 53.7.1	2 June 1944	RADM. V.H. RAGSDALE
TU 57.18.1	1 Aug. 1944	CAPT. R.E. BLICK
TU 57.19.5	9 Aug. 1944	RADM. V. H. RAGSDALE
TG 77.1	10 Sept. 1944	RADM. T.L. SPRAGUE
TU 77.1.1	10 Sept. 1944	RADM. T.L. SPRAGUE
TU 77.4.1	12 Oct. 1944	RADM. T.L. SPRAGUE
	28 Nov. 1944	
TU 71.73.7	27 Mar. 1945	CAPT. J.V. PETERSON
TU 52.1.3.	1 April 1945	RADM. W.D. SAMPLE
TU 32.1.3	27 May 1945	RADM. W.D. SAMPLE
TU 32.1.3.	1 July 1945	RADM. E.W. LITCH
TG 77.1	29 Aug. 1945	RADM. D. KETCHAM
TG 51.3	19 Sept. 1945	VADM. OLDENDORF
TU 51.3.13	24 Sept. 1945	RADM. C. T. DURGIN
TU 51.3.33	1 Oct. 1945	RADM. C. T. DURGIN
TG 16.12	4 Nov. 1945	RADM. H.S. KENDALL

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AIR GROUPS ATTACHED TO THE U.S.S. SANTEE

	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>
VC 29	12 October 1942	
VC 29 and VF 29	13 June 1943	20 December 1943
CVEG 26	1 March 1944	1 June 1944
CVEG 26	13 August 1944	5 December 1944
CVEg 24	30 January 1945	15 July 1945
CVEG 26	31 July 1945	11 November 1945

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PLANES SHOT DOWN BY SANTEE'S AA BATTERYS

20 October 1944	3	AA
25 October 1944	1	AA

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SHIPS COMPANY LOST DUE TO ENEMY ACTION

KLEIN, Joseph Lee, 886 39 03, TMV2c, USNR San Francisco, California.	25 October 1944
TAYLOR, Clarence Irwin, 874 99 43, Slc, USNR Toledo, Ohio.	28 October 1944
WILLIAM, James Houston, 555 82 15, ARM3c, USNR Phoenix, Arizona.	25 October 1944
DECKER, Oscar Edward, 813 26 89, Slc, USNR Jersey City, New Jersey.	25 October 1944
DICKERSON, Robert Henry, 256 52 25, StMlc, USN Washington, D.C.	25 October 1944
MURRY, William Frank, 376 35 21, ARMLc, USN Chico, California.	25 October 1944
MC FARLAND, Hooper Eugene, 295 17 24, CBM(PA), USN San Diego, California.	25 October 1944
ONAN, William Franklen, 287 67 31, AMM3c, USN Louisville, Kentucky.	25 October 1944
HILL, Ernest Junior, 300 12 07, Slc, USN Viola, Wisconsin.	25 October 1944
STONEMAN, Clinton Edison, 658 59 44, ART2c, USNR Woodlaw, Va.	25 October 1944
ODOM, Shuler Jennings, 629 46 18, Slc, USNR Gibson, North Carolina.	25 October 1944
DE PANICIS, Vincent James 711 48 11, S2c, USNR Newark, New Jersey.	26 October 1944
MATHEWS, Levon Lee, 564 16 33, Slc, USNR Frankfort, Indiana	25 October 1944
SANFORD, James Robert, 836 62 95, Slc, USNR Washington, D.C.	27 October 1944