

Unto us this day is born

Merry Christmas Shipmate

PFC. Don W. Dennis
U.S.M.C.

TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES:

On behalf of a grateful nation I send to the men and women of our Armed Forces everywhere warm and confident good wishes this fourth Christmas of war. On Christmas Day more than on any other day we remember you with pride and with humility, with anguish and with joy. We shall keep on remembering you all the days of our lives.

It is therefore with solemn pride that I salute those who stand in the forefront of the struggle to bring back to a suffering world the way of life symbolized by the Spirit of Christmas.

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT
Commander-in-Chief.

From: Secretary of the Navy
To: All Naval Activities.

To the men and women of the Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard: On this fourth Christmas of the United States at war, I, in behalf of a grateful nation wish each of you a Happy Christmas.

Your efforts have brought us all nearer to the day of Victory - To the day when we shall again know "Peace on Earth".

From: CINCPAC.
To: ALPOA

This fourth wartime Christmas finds the fighting men of the Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas far from homes and loved ones. But there is comfort in the knowledge that the extent of our distance from home is a measure of our success in beating back the aggressor Japan and that through our joint efforts all danger to our homes and families has been removed. We may look forward to this new year assured that it will see new and more powerful blows dealt the enemy and that it will bring us closer to victory and peace. In the reestablishment of this peace all of you brave and skilled men will have a share. That is the priceless gift you are earning for your loved ones and all future generations.

Essex Claims Title Of Navy's Fightingest Ship--Aces Abound

By **ROBERT TRUMBULL**
(Copyright 1944, by New York Times and Honolulu Advertiser)
ABOARD U. S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER ESSEX IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC, Nov. 17 (Delayed)—The title of "fightingest ship in the U. S. Navy" is now being claimed for the Essex, first of the new big carriers commissioned after the declaration of war, pioneer of the famous "Essex class" of floating airdromes whose planes have blasted

a path for every Pacific invasion, sunk more of the Japanese fleet than Tokyo has ever admitted, and brought destruction to every major Japanese stronghold from Rabaul to Nansei Shoto.

Employing two air groups—Air Group 9 and Air Group 15—since she left Pearl Harbor on her first war mission on Aug. 22, 1943, the Essex has been in the forefront of every major engagement and has set records for carrier performance in practically every category. She has the leading air group, the leading individual ace, the greatest number of planes shot down in one day, and the greatest over-all destruction of enemy planes and shipping.

Officers of the Essex are proud also of the fact that their fighter planes, while shooting down a record number of the enemy, have given such excellent cover to bombing missions that not a single bomber or torpedo plane has been lost in combat. No one on the Essex has been killed or injured by enemy action and she has not been scratched although she has been attacked many times and had several close brushes with Jap bombs and torpedoes. Perhaps most amazing of all, not a man has been killed in 16,522 landings aboard.

World Traveler

A catalogue of the Essex's travels, covering 151,805 miles in 15 months, reads like a gazeteer of the Pacific war zones. She has made strikes on Marcus and Wake (twice), Truk, Rabaul, Saipan, the Bonins, the Philippines, Formosa, Kavieng, Nansei Shoto (Ryukyu Islands) and Pescadores. Her air attacks on the Gilberts, Marshalls, Truk, Saipan, Bonins, Mindanao, Visayas, Luzon, Nansei Shoto, Formosa and Pescadores were the

first Allied action against these enemy bases.

She has participated, in a supporting capacity, in the invasions of the Gilberts, Marshalls, Marianas, Palaus and Philippines. In addition, she has been with the fast carrier task forces in two historic sea battles, the Philippine Sea engagements of June 19-20 and Oct. 24-25, the first of which completely destroyed Japanese carrier air strength, the second doing the greatest damage of any single engagement to the enemy fleet.

Her air group commander, Commander David McCampbell, with 34 Jap planes at this writing is tied with Maj. Richard Bong of the Army AF as "ace of aces." It was McCampbell who set a record of nine planes downed on one flight, in the second Philippines Sea battle Oct. 24. The air group collectively made a new high for naval aviation on June 19, in the first Philippines sea engagement, by shooting down 68 and a half enemy aircraft in one day (a pilot from another group helped down the sixty-ninth plane, so the Essex got credit for a fraction).

There's glory in the air combat figures for the air officers: McCampbell, the ace of aces and group commander; Cmdr. J. H. Mini, 31, of Vallejo, Calif., boss of the divebombers; Lt. Cmdr. V. G. Lambert, 29, of Lake Charles, La., head of the torpedo plane squadron, and Lt. Cmdr. James Francis Rigg, 29, of Norfolk, Va., commander of the fighters. But the captain and the exec like to dwell also on the achievements on and beneath the flight deck, where medals are not given plentifully.

For instance, one day scores of planes came home with battle

damage. The landing signal officer, the man who stands on a stern platform with two colored flags and waves them on or off, brought every plane down without injury to any pilot or aircrewman.

Japs On Way

Then there was June 19, day of the first Battle of the Philippine Sea, when all planes were forward on the flight deck, and two still to land from the combat air patrol—the guardians against submarines and "snoopers." Word came that the Japs were on the way. The fighters must take the air immediately, and the bombers and torpedo planes could not remain on deck, targets for the enemy.

The hangar deck was full too, so the planes could not be lowered by elevators. They had to fly and, as Cmdr. McDonald said, "Get the hell away from the ship." Well, they landed the two planes, got the others back aft, and sent them off—some of the pilots warming up their engines while jeep tractors hauled them aft for the takeoff. The jeeps, Cmdr. McDonald thinks, sometimes hit 35 miles an hour racing back and forth on the flight deck.

In Combat 15 Months

Except for one period when she was installing new equipment, the Essex has not been out of combat waters the whole 15 months.

Capt. Carlos Wieber, of San Diego, and his executive officer, Commander David L. McDonald, of Winder, Ga., are in love with their ship's battle statistics, and can reel them off from memory: 1,028 planes destroyed, of which 441 were shot down (310 by the Hellcats of Air Group 15, and 129 by their predecessors of Air Group 9, plus two by Air Group 15 divebombers; more than one million tons of shipping sunk or damaged; over 7,000 sorties flown, in which were expended tons of bombs, rockets, and torpedoes.

Ships sunk by the Essex planes unaided include an escort carrier, two destroyers, two tankers, and 26 cargo vessels. Working with other carriers, she has sunk one large and one small carrier. Her outstanding individual feat was an

attack on a convoy of 30 ships off Pagan in the Marianas. In a single raid she sank a destroyer, five cargo ships and two escort vessels, and probably sank six more cargo ships and one escort—a total of approximately 60,000 tons of shipping sunk or probably sunk from one convoy.

Telephones Essex

There is no way a carrier can be used in which the Essex has not been employed. For the invasions of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, she was taken close to the beach and her planes were coordinated with the ground fighting so long as air support was needed.

The writer of this dispatch once lay in a ditch on Guam while the Japs were dropping mortar shells all around. The lieutenant colonel—for this ditch was an advanced command post, no less—picked up his field telephone as if he were going to call a taxi, and in less than five minutes the Essex divebombers had silenced the mortars, which were on a small island off Orote Peninsula. That's what is meant by coordination.

One of those things that warm a captain's heart, and show what kind of men are doing our fighting for us, occurred when the Essex was taking on supplies in a far Pacific lagoon. She piled her hangar deck high with crates, and pulled away for a peaceful cruise to another outlandish place. Getting the supplies below decks would be a long and back-breaking job which the executive officer figured could be done by noon the next day, with luck.

All Volunteer

Suddenly, late in the evening word came to change course and prepare to launch planes at dawn against a Japanese convoy. The hangar deck must be cleared. From all over the ship, officers and men came to the hangar and volunteered to help, and the whole thing was done by 3 a.m. The planes took off at dawn.

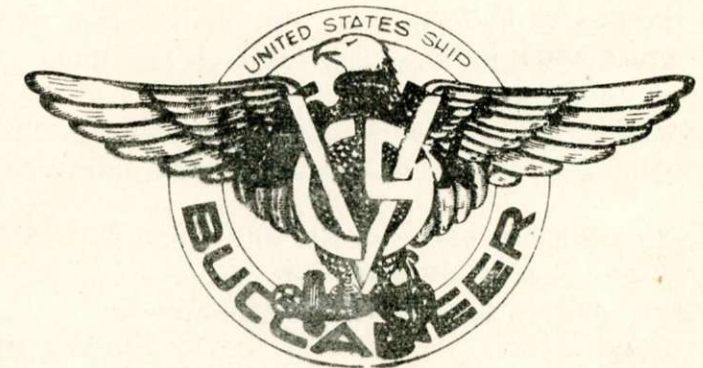
There are many aces on the Essex, an ace being a man who has shot down five planes. You never hear their names, for only the Bongs and McCampbells, the Fosses and Gentiles and Gabreski's get mentioned in the papers. One of the Essex pilots who has got his five kills in a quiet way, with nothing said about it until now, is Lt. Wayne Morris, the motion picture actor.

TO EVERY OFFICER AND MAN ABOARD: CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM THE CAPTAIN.

The word "shipmate" can and does have its own special meaning for men of the sea. And never more so than today, Christmas Day.

I therefore join with all of you in the wish that, spoken or unspoken gives this day, for you and me, its own distinctive feeling: **MERRY CHRISTMAS, SHIPMATES ALL.**

C. W. WIEBER.



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Commanding Officer.....Captain C.W. Wieber, USN
Executive Officer.....Commander D.L. McDonald, USN

Co-Editors

G.D. Crossett.....R.R. Spence

Staff Artists

Lewis Cook.....D.G. Peterson.....E.G. Katigbak.

Reporters

E.D. Grimm.....G.C. Kemp.

G.T. Emery.....R.G. Graves.

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H. Harris.....C. E. Miles.

THE FISH THAT GOT AWAY

By R.G. Graves, AMM1c.

I'll never forget that thrill-packed day -
We'd made those darn Jap raiders pay
Through the nose for their ticket to hell
And we stood by our guns for a
breathing spell.

The sky was festooned with the dull
battle haze
And a Betty still rode on the surface,
ablaze.

A cigaret, then was our utmost need -
But the crew was alert
As we dragged on the 'weed'.

We never knew how that Betty got in -
But suddenly, there she was -
Ugly as Sin - She was coming in low
With a weave and a bob -
Low on the water - a twin-engine job.

(Six Nip patriots, coming to call,
Sleighriding to hell
Through the grey battle pall).

We opened up then and the tracers went wide
Then steadied and cut through her dung-
colored hide.
They ripped her wide open, from end to end,
But still that twin-engine hellion came in.

She's blazing too late for she's got her wish!
She's made her last run -
But she has dropped her tin fish!
Fascinated, we watched it leap in the foam
That doom-laden war-head
Was heading for home!

(Stand fast and take it, you can't run away,
Here's a good spot for a sailor to pray.)

We'd forgotten, I guess, that old man of steel
Our Skipper, who stood on the bridge
near the wheel,
Unruffled, grim and biding his time,
He spun that ole flattop around on a dime!

Some say that torpedo skimmed by by a yard
Some argued a foot - the decision was hard
And they'll argue and wrangle for many a day
'Bout the size of our tin fish that got away.

Lest readers obtain the impression
that once our ship is west of Pearl Har-
bor the only time her guns cease firing
is to permit a quick change of gun barrels
or a hurried snack for the crew, we print
the following poem which was turned in
during the one time we were "resting" by
doing patrol duty.

PASSING OF THE ESSEX

Brave **ESSEX** was a fighting ship
With a roaring, rugged crew
She searched the seas for Japanese
From Wake to Espiritu.

O'er a hundred planes snarled off her decks
Each action-happy day
Thirsting for combat they climbed
Into skies blue or gray.

'Twas on nineteen June, 'neath a tropic noon
That the debris hit the fan.
Our boys knocked down so many planes,
It's curtains for Japan.

Tho' it may seem strange,
Then there came a change;
We no longer got the call.
Less famous ships go after Nips
While **ESSEX** does patrol.

It's C.A.P. and four-plane strikes
And mail trips round the course;
Instead of a knockdown, drag-out group,
We're errand boys for the force.

The ship glides on while the crew recalls
Mem'ries of days gone by
When instead of routine, service hops
We knocked Japs from the sky.

If you hear wan sighs 'neath Pacific skies,
Trade winds moaning in the mast,
And the mournful knell of a ghost ship's bell,
It's the **ESSEX** drifting past.