

Today is the 7th of August and the U.S.S. Tarawa left Quonset Point R.I. at 1400. On the way out we witnessed the burning of a Tanker which collided with another ship also a Tanker. The accident occurred early this AM and caught fire. There was a terrific fire and the other ship was beached, a charred wreck. The approximate location of the mishap was Newport, Rhode Island.

Tonight we were told that our cruise was changed from the North Pole to the South Atlantic, where we will be conducting ASW operations plus scientific experiments with rockets and missiles. Our area of operation will be well below the Equator which means a tough initiation for all Pollywogs (people who have not crossed the Equator at any time during their Naval Career) and that includes me. I anticipate getting the living limit beat out of me. OH, PAIN!

The 8th of August found the Tarawa off the coast of Cape Hatteras sometimes referred to as the Graveyard of the Atlantic due to the numerous ships that have been lost in the many storms that occur in this area. We hit some rough rain squalls, but nothing serious. At 1500 today Dave and I went flying for an hour and a half. Nothing exciting.

The day draws nearer for the big initiation into the Shellback Club and all hands who haven't been across the Equator yet are speaking of everything from fighting, to hiding to Mutiny to avoid the terrors that have been promised by the Shellbacks at some future time. One Chief AT has crossed the Equator some 26 or 27 times and unless he can prove it beyond any shadow of a doubt, then he too will ~~face~~ the wrath of the Old Pros. Dave vows and declares that nobody is going to lay a hand on him regardless of their rate or rank. More power to him!

I heard today that there are some 1300 Pollywogs in the ship's company against 150 Shellbacks. That doesn't include the two Squadrons that are aboard. There are many cases of the Pollywogs taking over the ship and doing the Shellbacks in, but this was during the War. However we shall see what we shall see.

August 9th found the ship on a very Southerly course passing reasonably close to the Isle of Bermuda. The weather grows hotter by the minute, and last night was almost unbearable. Before dawn there were many of the Ship's company and most of the Squadron Personnel sleeping on, or near the Flight Deck on very hard but cool surfaces. Of course, if you have to make a choice between a hard deck or a sweltering compartment then you must first consider what weather like this can do to your sleeping habits. I for one will take the hard surface any time.

The Court of Last Appeals convened today to determine whether men who claim to have crossed the Equator but have no proof are lying or telling the truth. The Chief I mentioned earlier was found to be a duly qualified Shellback and he is most happy to say the least. I am looking forward to it with anxiety and much gnashing of the fingernails. From all I've heard and been able to determine it is the "harriest" initiation I've ever been forced to face. Oh, well, that's the way the mop flops.

August 10th---All quiet on the Pollywog front!! Most probably the quiet before the storm.

August 11, 1958.....The Ship's position today at 1800 was approximately 15° North, 65° West just off the island of Guadaloupe near Ciudad Trujillo in the Carribean Sea.

The last few days have been filled with nothing but talk of the forthcoming initiation and today some of the Pollywogs got things going in full swing when they took one of the Shellbacks, stuffed him into a mattress cover, painted his face with black marking pencil, beat him unmercifully and took him to the OOD to show him what they thought of the threats being passed out by the Shellbacks. This will undoubtedly go hard on these individuals when King Neptune calls his court into session on Saturday. Other examples of this "fun" were exhibited throughout the Ship when one poor boy who works in the Ship's Disbursing Office was made to wear a mixed uniform of white pants, dungaree shirt...both backwards... and a sign saying "I am a pencil pushing Pollywog". This not being enough, he was made to push a pencil up and down the passageway with a broom handle. Another boy was made to wear his winter blue cap and swimming trunks and stand at attention on the messdeck with a broom. His duty was to come to "Present Arms" with his broom every time an Officer came by. As yet I haven't been required to do anything, but I fear my day is coming soon. They are probably saving the worst for me 'til last. Oh, Pain and Agony! More tomorrow.

Well, tomorrow has arrived in the shape of August 12th and there isn't as much to tell as I had thought there would be. In fact the only thing I have to say is that Allyn Howard (a buddy from Newton, Texas) and I went flying last night. We accomplished very little as the pilot was practicing CCA's for the two hours that we were up and we couldn't do much at all. So maybe there will be more tomorrow. As we push further South the weather gets warmer and warmer. It is approaching the point of being unbearable and every night is spent sleeping under one of the ventilators (on the deck) which brings what little air there is to the compartment. I have become somewhat accustomed to the hardness of the deck and have managed to get a halfway decent night's sleep. We are flying continuously. So goes a typical day's work at sea.

With the dawn of August 14th a typical refueling operation was launched. Of course, it was nothing like the refueling operations that were to be witnessed on the NATO cruise, but it always fascinated me never-the-less. Flying was as usual and things were quite dull in the routine aspect of the Ship's work. However, in the line of the "Big Battle" - the one between the Pollywogs and the Shellbacks - the story was somewhat different. Today it was discovered that someone - evidently a number of Pollywogs bent on deterring the beatings as much as possible - had broken into the Sail Locker where all the tools for beating were being kept and had thrown some over the side. As a result many Shellbacks are aroused to say the least and have had the Carpenter Shop working over-time to manufacture paddles and the like to take the place of those that went into the bounding main. More incidents involving Shellbacks and Pollywogs have occurred. For example: Today the crew in the Deck Division took a first class who is a Shellback and tied him securely in a laundry bag, strung him up on the Hangar Deck, wet him down thoroughly and proceeded to beat him severely and unmercifully with brooms. Viva la Pollywogs!

Last night I got into the act by helping the Personnel crew wire their Chief's typewriter to a hand operated generator. The Chief got wise to the idea and didn't show up at the office at all after he heard about our little surprise for him. Maybe it's a good thing he didn't come up because this practice joke would probably have knocked him on his "gluteus".

August 15th...Davy Jones was piped aboard and personally handed out the Subpoenas to the Pollywogs. Tomorrow is the big day and everyone is anticipating a mass beating since several Shellbacks have been sent to Sick Bay as a direct result of the pranks played by the Pollywogs. I for one have refrained from any form of this rowdy type humor and I am beginning to think maybe I should have joined the sport since they are going to whale the living daylights out of us anyway. It's still not too late to do something about it, but I'm tired and I'm sure I'll need a good night's sleep for tomorrow's festivities so I think I'll just pass this trip.

On August 16th we crossed the Equator at 32° West. Time: 0800. The initiation went off very well and only a few people were hurt, none too seriously. I for one was glad to see the thing get done with. They had us waiting on the Hangar Deck for most of the morning as there were so many to be run through. They took us up to the Flight Deck on the No. 1 elevator where we were "greeted" by many Shellbacks dressed as Pirates with patches over one eye, bandannas wrapped around their heads, bright colored sashes and shillelahes constructed from canvas sleeves stuffed with rags and soaked in salt water. The first thing we had to do was to crawl through a long line of Shellbacks who brandished these weapons with zest and untiring vigor. Next we got our throat sprayed with a vile tasting liquid composed of Cod Liver Oil and something which tasted like soap and salt water. Then came the Royal Barber and the Dunking Stool. I had a chunk of my hair removed and was immediately dumped over backwards into a pool of water and dunked thoroughly several times. Following this we were made to crawl about ten feet to the Royal Baby and kiss his belly which was rubbed with a foul tasting mixture of mustard and some kind of grease. Here let me say that the ten feet we crawled was lined with more Shellbacks soundly whacking away with their instruments of torture. Also the Royal Baby is usually the biggest, fattest man they can find on the ship and today was no exception. As I approached him for my kiss he grabbed my ears and rubbed my face through the mess on his stomach...UGH! Next, about ten more feet of crawling to the Garbage Chute where we were made to crawl on our stomach through all the garbage that could be brought up from the Mess Decks from the last meal. This particular "jewel" was constructed from canvas about fifteen feet in length and three to four feet in circumference. It was calculated to make even the strongest men lose what had been eaten for several days. I managed to get through without the slightest retch as did many other poor initiates. Next we had to stand in line to use the salt water hose to get ourselves cleaned up a bit and that was worse than the rest of the course all put together. Standing there with that slime dripping off you is ^{THE MOST} abominable thing they could do to ~~me~~. Finally I got my turn and then proceeded to go below to finish cleaning off the mess that the salt water hose couldn't loosen. It took three scrubblings to get the grease out of my hair alone. WHEW! I'm thankful that it's all over. Now we get a card and a beautiful certificate saying we have crossed the Equator and are duly qualified and duly initiated Shellbacks.

I guess things will get back to normal now and we will be routine sailors from now on.....I hope. At any rate I won't forget this for a long time to come and even if I should begin to forget, I'll remember every time I sit down since my rear is as tender as a boil and slightly blue and red.

Sunday, August 17th.....Many sore rears, mine included. Weather getting rougher and cooler. The compartment is now bearable for sleeping purposes and the temperature has begun to drop considerably. The Flag(the Admiral and his Staff) has passed the word to expect weather much colder than was anticipated by all hands since this hemisphere is having its winter season now. Lowest temperature expected is thirty degrees. Brrr.End report of August 17th.

August 18th... All quiet and normal operations continuing.

August 19th... Flying as usual. Ship's position well below the Equator and still heading South. Weather growing colder by the day!

August 20th... Rough weather and fairly heavy seas. Deck pitching. Weather getting even colder.

August 21st... Flying as usual and weather steadily getting colder.

August 22nd... Rendezvous with the Norton Sound VM-1, a guided missile ship. Rough seas and heavy flying. We hope to be away from here by the end of next week.

August 23rd... Visited CIC--Combat Information Center-- today and that is the most interesting function I've seen on this ship since I came aboard. Really an electronic masterpiece. With the CCA--Carrier Control Approach--room being the main point of interest to me since we work with these boys numerous times during the weeks we are at sea. Flying tomorrow to end or help end this top secret operation and get on with more important things like LIBERTY!

August 24th... Not much going on today except flying and general work. Can't say for sure if they have fired any progressive stage missiles but I feel sure that they have. This is purely speculation on my part.

August 25th...The weather is really rough now and several hops have been cancelled due to the pitching of the Flight Deck. It is also getting colder and colder. On my hop today we went up to 8000 feet and it was really beautiful. We were above the clouds and it's hard to visualize how pretty it is at that altitude unless you have been up there before yourself. It all looks like a huge snow-bank stretched for miles and miles like a carpet. The temperature was about 3 degrees above freezing but you would never know it by looking out the window. The sun was shining brightly and everything looked as warm as toast except for the effect you got by looking at the clouds which resembled--as I said--a huge snow-bank. A beautiful sight that I'm grateful for having been able to see.

August 26th...The final stage of the operation is in progress and if all goes well tonight we expect to be on our way away from here tomorrow. However, no one can say for sure until the final stage is fired tonight. This too is speculation on my part. Tomorrow's report will tell the tale.

August 27th...Well, the final stage is still in operation and is likely to go on for some time yet. Weather is playing an important part these days and Mother Nature hasn't been at all cooperative. Maybe in the near future she will give us a hand with this thing and allow us to go back soon, we hope!

August 28th...Mother Nature is not coming through for us at all like we were hoping she would. Late yesterday afternoon we ran into a snow storm and all operations were postponed until further notice. We are about 200 miles north of the Antarctic ice pack and our heading is about 175°. The Admiral put us on this course in hopes of finding better weather but only succeeded in putting us in a worse situation in so far as weather is concerned, and as I said yesterday weather is the determining factor in this operation. We seem to be at a loss so far, but things will get better I'm sure...they couldn't be much worse.

August 29th...A sailor lives for three things: chow call, pay call, and liberty call. Chow call has been held three times a day since coming aboard and it is not a novelty, but only one pay call has been held. Tomorrow the second pay call will be held and it is a very welcomed thing indeed. The snow is still blowing around like crazy and it looks like we may get another pay call or two before liberty call is held. This morning the snow was about four inches deep on the Flight Deck and they had snow shoveling crews working overtime to get it cleared off in an effort to get the planes launched, but two launches have been canceled so far today but the third one is in a state of readiness and the pilots and crews are hot to go and try to get this thing over with as quickly as possible. There is another launch scheduled for 2300 tonight but this ship is pitching and rolling like a cork in a bath tub, and I doubt if that one will go as planned. Meanwhile, back at Quonset Point there is danger of a Hurricane hitting the Narragansette area and the residents of R.I. have been put on the alert for high winds of considerable damage. Batten down you Quahoggers the winds will be blowing tonight. Let's hope tomorrow is a better day for the task force operating in the South Atlantic.

August 30th...Missed payday. Slept right through it all, and didn't wake up until the word was passed for noon chow. The Exec. said we could get paid on the following Monday. Let's hope so. Still no luck on the flying situation. It seems we are being discriminated against by the forces of nature and there isn't any let up in sight.

August 31...Weather very cold and rough and as a result I haven't been up on the roof (Flight Deck) for about five days now. Still there is limited flying with only the really important hops being launched. I'm getting rusty from not flying and I wish they would put me in the air.

September 1st...The weather is about as rough as I've seen it since I got assigned to the U.S.S. Tarawa and there is definitely no sign of let-up. It snows almost every day now and the temperature is never over thirty degrees. The peculiar thing about this is that 'tho the outside temperature is thirty degrees the sea water temperature is thirty five degrees. This, among other things, is always an amazing thing to me and almost always hard to believe.

September 2nd...Today we got up to find the ship really rocking and rolling. We are about 150 to 200 miles from the Ice Cap and let me tell you it is fantastically cold. Another thing, guess what I forgot? That's right, my coat. I brought my peacoat, but who wants to wear that thing? I'm lucky to be working in an office and inside all the time. Today makes about a week since I was on the roof last and I can see no future in going up there either. Amazingly enough I haven't caught a cold yet and I'd venture to say that I'm about the only person in the outfit who hasn't come down with the sniffles. This won't last long.

September 3rd...Flying still limited except for the crews on the special flights. The weather is still rough and not too conducive to flying. Better weather is expected for tomorrow although I don't see how since it is snowing now like a full scale blizzard and no sign of letting up.

September 4th...We are really on the deep South now although it isn't like the South that I'm used to at all. Today we sighted a huge iceberg and I got some pictures of it tho' I doubt they will come out since the thing was so far away. It looked monstrously large even at that great a distance and you could tell it was bluish in color. It was one of the prettier if not the prettiest sight I've seen since we set sail in these untraveled waters. The flying that was scheduled for today wasn't cancelled, miraculously, and it's the general consensus throughout the ship that the great doings will soon come to a halt if the weather holds up as it seems to be doing. Let's hope so.

September 5th...Tonight I witnessed the firing of one of the Navy's rockets, though I strongly suspect that if the Commander of Task Group 88 were aware of this fact he would blow his stripes right off his shoulders and the "scrambled eggs" on his cap would truly be scrambled. At 2135 (9:35 at night) General Quarters was sounded and the word passed that all unnecessary personnel clear all topside areas. This, of course, meant the Flight Deck and all adjacent areas. Ten to fifteen minutes later the count-down started. I was in the electronics shop playing cards with my buddy from Texas and at time 0 minus 10 we went up to the catwalk to await the blasting off of the final rocket. We could still hear the monotonous hum of the individual on the P.A. system calling off the minutes and seconds and all pertinent information. Then at the word "rocket away" we could see from our vantage point that the rocket had been launched slightly seconds before this word was sounded. The Norton Sound, the guided missile ship which lay about six miles off our starboard quarter was surrounded by a firey light almost instantaneously and a thin, almost invisible point of fire could be seen rising rapidly from the deck. This was the rocket. We could see it as it passed swiftly through the low lying cloud layers on it's way upward. It seemed to move at an angle to it's expected path of flight but I'm sure this was due to it's rapid rate of climb and that it was actually going straight up. We knew that this rocket carried an explosive charge of some kind to mark it's altitude from the talk around the ship. So we prepared ourselves for a wait of at least ten minutes and in less than seven there was a flash of light that resembled the end of the world so ably described by the Hellfire and Brimstone Preachers. This faded quickly and a fairly wide shaft of light with a red tinge to it is all that remained in a matter of just a few minutes. There were at least twenty people watching this and I feel sure that all would say it was one of the most spectacular things that they have ever witnessed in their entire lives. I for one found it the most interesting thing that I have seen since my tour with the Navy began. Now everyone is happy and we are headed for Rio, or so rumor has it anyway and even a rumor sounds good after having been at sea for thirty two days. As I said it was interesting and very educational, but I'm glad it's all over and done with and we are at least headed for civilization again.