

This is the verbatim original text from the "cruise book" or souvenir-book which we discussed and which you've seen. This is the exact text -- every word, comma, period and syntactical error, if any, of the published book is exactly the same. I also photographed most, if not all, of the illustrations in the book; unfortunately, I shot slides and not prints, therefore it would be rather pricey to have prints made of all of them (over 100).

P.S. The text is attributed to Asst. First Lieutenant L.R. Eorenson.

A color photo of Sangamon appears on page 526 of the November 1943 issue of National Geographic Magazine. A good research library near you may have National Geographic issues that far back.

A NEW QUEEN of the fleet--the aircraft carrier--has become the symbol of the combined sea and air power of the U.S. Navy. These ships have been joined with other surface units of the fleet to form the great task forces that swept the Japs from the sea frontiers of the Pacific. Their air groups threw thousands of planes at the very heart of Japan.

Carriers are of several types, designed for assault or for escort duties. The scenes described on the pages that follow were created by one of the carriers originally put into commission as an escort, but which proved herself worthy and fit assault and support missions in the very fighting fronts, the battlefields of the Pacific War.

The words written here cannot give the whole story of relaxation and battle, the alternating calm and violence, but they do illuminate one significant point: the carrier, whether she be large or small, once scorned by Captains, Admirals and even Generals, has proven herself competent as a member of the fighting forces of a great and mighty nation.

This is the battle story of the light carrier SANGAMON. She has served during the entire period of hostilities on the fighting fronts. She was in the Atlantic and she cruised a long time in the Pacific battling the Nips right up to their front door. She was wounded on many occasions but she did receive one wound that spelled death to her, for as these words are being written she is being stricken from the Navy's list of active fighting ships. Read these words with respect and with reverence for a great little fighting lady and for a fighting crew.

HISTORY OF THE U.S.S. SANGAMON

This is the story of a tanker that sprouted wings. It is the history of a ship which, through the exigencies of war, became an aircraft carrier and whose achievements earned her the name "Queen of the CVEs."

The U.S.S. SANGAMON won her wings at Newport News, Va., on August 25, 1942. On that date she was commissioned a carrier just six months after the Navy began the job of converting her from the big tanker S.S. Esso Trenton.

Her name stems from the river Sangamon, which flows quietly and peacefully through central Illinois. Peace was not for the carrier Sangamon, however. Destiny had marked her for a turbulent career--a career that carried her into the farflung battlefronts of the Atlantic and Pacific. She participated in major operation after major operation. Her planes hurled tons of bombs and rockets on the enemy, helped clear the seaways of enemy shipping. Her guns blasted Jap aircraft from the skies. Her snub nose ploughed through thousands of miles of dangerous waters. She took part in the Atlantic's first big invasion. She fought the Pacific war from Guadalcanal to Okinawa.

She was a small carrier but she had a big punch.

Although the Sangamon was classified as a CVE she constituted a considerable increase in size over the early baby flattops. She was 553 feet long, displaced 12,500 tons and had a gross weight of 27,500 tons. She was the first of four tankers converted into carriers, which became known as the Sangamon Class. Her sister ships are the Suwannee, Chenango and Santee.

The Sangamon, first commanded by Captain C. W. Wieber, had an inauspicious beginning. Her crew was green. The shakedown cruise was short--a brief trip around Chesapeake Bay. She then embarked Air Group VC 26 and set out to sea as a carrier for the first time. She cruised to Bermuda. After a brief stay she and the Suwannee and Santee, plus the carrier, Ranger, sortied for a rendezvous with a tremendous invasion force which had formed at east coast ports. This armada was destined to transport and support the North Africa landing force--the same force which formed the springboard for the eventual death blows against Germany.

The rendezvous was made without mishap and the carriers fell in astern of the formation bound for Casablanca and Port Lyautey. Also in the formation was the Chenango, ferrying Army P-40s to be used as garrison aircraft. No flight operations were conducted enroute due to the secrecy of the movement.

3

On November 8, 1942, the landings were made, with relatively light opposition in the Sangamon's sector of operation. All air resistance encountered was that of the French Air Force. The Sangamon's air group provided combat air patrols, anti-submarine patrols and close air support for the ground forces. Cooperation of the air arm with the ground forces during the invasion proved to be an eye opener for many officials. The Sangamon lost none of her planes or pilots through enemy action.

The Sangamon left this operation several days later than it was scheduled to. A plane crash on the flight deck carried away all radio receiving antennae. As a result an order for the ship to return to the United States was not received until several days after it should have been carried out. Finally messages were straightened out and she headed for Norfolk, Va. A part of her air group was sent to the Chenango at Casablanca to provide air coverage for a convoy returning later. The pilots thus affected rejoined the ship at Norfolk. On her return trip the Sangamon was battered by heavy seas. The forward part of her flight deck was damaged and the forward catwalks were carried away. This necessitated a 10-day yard period for repairs. At the same time additional 20 millimeter guns were added to the ship's armament.

Then the ship turned her bow towards the Pacific where the Navy was sorely in need of carriers—there was but one. Early in December, 1942, the Sangamon, the Suwannee, the cruisers Wichita and Cleveland and a destroyer screen departed from Norfolk for Noumea, New Caledonia, via the Panama Canal. The voyage was long and uneventful, but an intensive program of gunnery, maneuvering, communications, and tracking drills were carried out. The group arrived at Noumea in January. After a brief stay the carriers were sent to Havannah Harbor at Efate Island in the New Hebrides. Later the Chenango joined the Suwannee and Sangamon there and the now-famous Carrier Division 22 was formed, with Rear Admiral A. C. McFall commanding. It is now the oldest carrier division and was the first organized during the war.

Havannah Harbor was little more than an anchorage then, but for the Sangamon it was home for the next eight months. This period was spent mostly waiting--waiting for something that never happened. The Navy had few carriers ready for action at that time. So few, in fact, that when all the old battleships and cruisers in the South Pacific force went out looking for the Jap fleet at the time of Guadalcanal's final evacuation, only three carriers went along. They were the Sangamon, Suwannee, and Santee. No contact with the Japs were made, however.

Once during the eight months period the Sangamon, in company with the same group, helped cover the landings on the Russell Islands.

Most of the time was spent in port in company with the

4

battleships Colorado and Maryland which had moved up from Suva. These battleships and the three carriers were organized into a task group for some time but never went out together except for maneuvers.

The Sangamon's air group, however, did have some active moments. It spent two 30-day periods on Guadalcanal during the height of that campaign. For the remainder of the time, the air group was shore-based on Efate Island except for occasional training exercises with the ship.

The last few months in the South Pacific were spent with the carriers alternately going out for a week or ten days covering convoys making the run to Guadalcanal.

In August the Division's base was changed to Espiritu Santo, but the Sangamon remained there only a short time before steaming to San Francisco for an overhaul at the Mare Island Navy Yard. The ship arrived in San Francisco in September, 1943.

She returned to the Pacific War in October, 1943. In the months ahead the ship's character was to change radically from what it had been during her previous stay in the war zone. Her activity had been limited for the most part to covering convoys in the area immediately behind the fighting front on Guadalcanal. Now she was to approach the fronts herself. She was to participate in the terrific island battles to be fought in the great expanse of ocean from Tarawa to Okinawa.

During the yard period at Mare Island, workmen had incorporated several changes into the material complexion of the ship. Now paravane sponsons jutted from her sides. She had air-operated barriers to replace the old ones which had been laboriously hauled up and down by hand. An inert gas arrangement had been installed to give added protection to her gasoline system. There was a redesigned Combat Information Center, and a second gyro ended her reliance on the single old one. Perhaps the most significant changes were the installation of an improved Mark HII-1 catapult in place of the Mark HII and the substitution of an SK radar for the old SC. In addition there was a new squadron, VC 37, which operated nine SBDs, nine TBMs and 12 F6Fs, the last being a new type fighter type replacing the F4Fs formerly on the ship.

The first port of call on the new cruise was Espiritu Santo. The ship remained there only a short time. Then on November 9 she went out to participate with transport and support groups in a practice landing at Pango Point on Efate Island. On November 13 she left Espiritu Santo again, rendezvoused with Task Force 53 the next day and steamed out. The Central Pacific offensive began.

First came Tarawa.

November 20³ was "D" or "Dog" day at Tarawa. The ship mascot,

5

gave birth to a litter of pups. It was this incident rather than Dog Day itself that the crew remembers best.

On the first two days of the operation, the ship launched strikes. During the rest of the time, and after November 29 at Apesama, the ship followed a pattern which became increasingly familiar as the Pacific offensive progressed. Combat air patrols and anti-submarine patrols for both the target area and the carrier group, searches and hunter-killer flights were launched regularly. Between launchings the ship with other carriers of the division fueled many destroyers and some cruisers. Once the Sangamon and its group contacted a Jap submarine. The U.S.S. Cotton took the sub under attack, possibly destroying it.

Several things learned at Tarawa proved important during the subsequent operations. In the first place there was the question of minimum wind with which Sangamon class carriers could operate. Weather conditions at Tarawa provided a ready answer. From December 3 to December 8, hourly wind averages fluctuated between a maximum of six knots and a minimum of two. It was concluded that with five or more knots of wind they could operate without undue loss. When winds dropped to less than five knots operations still were feasible although greater losses could be expected. An average launching took one minute and fifteen seconds, and for a limited number of planes this could be reduced to one minute.

Fuel and fueling created another problem. When the ship left San Diego before the operation began she carried more than 3,000,000 gallons of fuel oil. Together with the other two carriers she refueled 45 destroyers and two cruisers. She received no fuel herself during the long cruise and yet had enough left for 18 days steaming when she put in at Pearl Harbor.

Her crew began to call her "an oil can with wings". And eventually one of them designed an emblem, pointing up her tremendous fuel capacity. The emblem was an oil can sprouting wings with "2 in 1" printed on the can. The Sangamon was serving as a double duty ship in those days.

While her fuel capacity was an important logistic factor, it presented hazards too. In order to carry such a quantity of fuel the ship had to fill her wing tanks, placing the inflammable oil next to her skin. The anti-torpedo protection these tanks afforded when filled with salt water was sacrificed. Recognizing this, the division commander warned against use of these carriers as "handy tankers". He recommended the wing tanks be emptied of all oil before entering combat zones and that fueling be accomplished in areas well removed from the scene of action.

The ship left Tarawa December 7 to return to the States for alterations. The period in San Diego was especially

enjoyable for the crew since they were able to spend Christmas at home. Peace and quiet, however, did not last long.

On January 13 of the new year the Sangamon ploughed out into the Pacific again. She paused for a day at Maui in the Hawaiian Islands. Then she pushed on for another "D" Day. This time it was Kwajalein on January 31. At Kwajalein, she launched her routine patrols, sent off strikes and in general operated as she had before.

Three incidents distinguished this operation from the preceding ones. The first was a fire. On January 25, still far from Kwajalein, the ship with the others of her division broke away from Task Force 52 to operate independently through out the day. Everything proceeded in the usual fashion until late afternoon. At 1651 a fighter plane came into the landing circle, received a cut, floated up the flight deck, caught on arrester wires, broke through the barriers and crashed into parked planes forward.

Its belly tank, filled with 150 gallons of gasoline, ripped loose and scattered flaming fuel among the parked planes. Fire raged generally. The flames ran aft for 90 feet along the flight deck's starboard side and whipped up over the bridge making ship control extremely difficult. The carrier was swung out of the wind so the fire could be fought and by 1651 it was under control. Seven men died in the fire and crash. Seven were injured seriously. Fifteen men jumped over the side to escape the flames and all except two were subsequently picked up.

The second incident occurred the following day. The ships of the formation had formed a fueling disposition. Having completed fueling two destroyers, the Sangamon resumed zig-zagging and commenced a 40 degree turn to port. The Suwannee, about 1800 yards off the Sangamon's port hand, started a starboard turn preparatory to conducting flight operations. The ships began to nose towards each other. Orders were given on both carriers to back down. Their momentum was a little too great. With both backing down full, they scraped bow to bow. Fortunately they almost were dead in the water and only superficial damage resulted. It was the first and only collision the Sangamon had.

The third incident occurred on the night of February 11-12 (1/4) as the ship lay at anchor in the Kwajalein Lagoon. At 0203 several enemy planes were reported 60 miles away, coming in. The Sangamon sounded general quarters. None of the planes approached within attacking distance of the ship but several of them heavily bombed nearby Roi and Namur Islands. These islands had been occupied by the United States forces a few days before. Large explosions and many fires could be seen from the ship but the "all clear" signal finally sounded at 0415 without the Sangamon.

*Not the correct time, but I have no way of finding the correction.

7
herself having undergone an attack. The crew, which had begun to figure their ship was jinxed, decided her luck had returned.

And return it had. The Sangamon went through invasion after invasion without a scratch. The log for the remainder of the year reads like a storybook:

Eniwetok--D day on February 17...strikes and patrols until February 24 when the ship finally departed for Pearl Harbor to repair the fire and collision damage...Captain M. E. Browder flew aboard to relieve Captain E. P. Moore as commanding officer.

Palau Raid--The Sangamon rendezvoused with Task Group 50.15, the fast carrier train, on March 26.....it covered 50.15 while Task Force 58 hammered Palau.

Aitape--D day on April 22...covered landing for two days...launched patrols and strikes...little opposition.

Hollandia--Provided patrols from April 27 to May 5.

Saipan--Rendezvoused with the carrier group of Task Force 52 on June 21...supported landing for six days...fighter bombers used by Sangamon for first time...three fighters lost to AA but all pilots saved....even the ship's torpedo planes shot down enemy aircraft....only one enemy attack on the ship materialized... six to eight Jap planes bore down on the force the night of June 26....they orbited outside the formation, with one occasionally breaking off to make an attack on individual ships...at 2345 a Kata closed the Sangamon...flying low it crossed ahead about 100 yards away....it circled, dropped a torpedo which passed astern of the ship...two destroyers, with radar equipped guns, then shot it down in flames.

Gnam--Sortied for Guam on July 10...arrived in operating area July 13...more patrols and strikes...covered bombardment group until August 1...then back to Manus for almost a month's rest.

And so the winter, spring and summer passed swiftly. The Sangamon's crew began to grow restless. They were tired of "D" days, of long weeks of steaming. They were tired of seeing flat coral islands, and even the clear blue water of the Pacific had lost its beauty. They wanted to go home.

They turned towards the next operation--Morotai--with the hope it would be the last one of the year. The Sangamon arrived off Morotai on September 15, the day of the invasion. The landings were largely unopposed and there was no need for close support missions after the initial wave of assault troops hit the beach. Strike planes were diverted to bombing and strafing and, in general, rendering inoperative the nearby airfields on Halmahera Island.

8,

One memorable incident occurred during the operation in Wasile Bay at Malahora. A Santee plane, engaged in a strafing mission, was hit early on the morning of September 16. The plane blew up and the pilot was thrown free.

On the beach around the bay were many Jap gun emplacements. As the pilot descended by parachute into the bay, our fighter planes heavily strafed the Jap gun positions to keep them from hitting him. So low did our fighters make their runs that one Santee pilot was shot down and lost.

Meanwhile a PBV was dispatched to attempt a rescue of the stranded Santee flier. Jap gunfire was so intense, however, that the slow-moving PBV was unable to carry out its mission. The plane did get in long enough to drop a life raft. The stranded flier climbed in the raft and precariously eased into a sheltered spot behind a pier jutting out into the bay.

The fighter planes continued to keep him out of Jap hands with countless strafing runs. Back on the Sangamon, several torpedo planes were rigged with smoke tanks and launched. They arrived over the bay simultaneously with two PT boats which were to attempt a rescue.

The torpedo planes laid a heavy smoke screen and the PT boats sped into the bay hidden from the Jap gunners. They found their way to the pier and pulled the pilot aboard. In the smoky haze, the PT boat crews spotted a small Jap tug. They whipped towards it, opened fire with their 40 millimeter guns and sank it. Then they sliced through the smoke screen out of the bay and to safety.

That no enemy air attacks occurred at Morotai does not indicate that Jap planes were absent. They regularly were over the landing area either before the combat air patrol arrived at dawn or after it left in the evening.

In his comments on the operation, the division's commander pointed out several things which were to be important in future operations. He referred to the helplessness against a night torpedo attack of a CVE unit screened only by destroyer escorts. He recommended that destroyers and light anti-aircraft cruisers be added to the carrier dispositions. He suggested that pilots be given training ashore in night operations. Perhaps his most pertinent remark came with the recommendation that an additional type radar be installed on at least one ship of the division.

"In amphibious operations," he said, "where operations are carried on in close proximity to land masses, it would be relatively easy for aircraft to follow land until opposite the formation and then drop it without being detected."

9

That set the key for Leyte.

When the Sangamon left Morotai on the 27th a second chapter in her Pacific war experience came to a close. Although she had required almost an entire year to build up her standout record, there had been a minimum of mishaps. Between October 19, 1943, and September 27, 1944, she had participated in six major invasions. She had steamed 89,261 miles. She had launched and landed 4,834 planes. These planes had expended 537,800 pounds of bombs and 482,200 rounds of 50 caliber ammunition. It was an enviable record.

At the conclusion of the Morotai campaign, the Sangamon did not head homeward. There was one more thing to be done in 1944. There was one more invasion--destined to be the biggest, most action-packed event the ship was to participate in during that year.

When the Sangamon returned to the anchorage at Manus after Morotai, few aboard realized just how soon their ship would suffer its first battle scar. The crew sometimes referred to her as "Sangy, the Unsinkable" because of her fortunes in battle. She had seen a Jap torpedo plane run at her one dark night off Saipan. She had been drawn within the scope of sub attack. She had nosed precariously through countless Jap-held islands. Yet not once had she been stung by a torpedo or pierced by a bomb.

So when the first hints of the next operation--the Philippines--seeped via grapevine to the crew, a feeling of anxiety and apprehension swept the ship. Would the luck of the Sangamon hold? Could she escape damage once again?

Orders were received sometime between October 1 and 12 assigning the Sangamon to Task Force 77, a massive organization under Vice Admiral T. G. Kincaid. The force's objective was the Philippines. The escort carrier group to which the Sangamon was assigned included 18 CVEs under the command of Rear Admiral T. L. Sprague (aboard Sangamon). Operation plans outlined in meticulous detail what each of the hundreds of ships participating was to do. They pointed out the specific target--Leyte. Leyte lay not on the open sea but on the inboard side of a long gulf almost closed to seaward by land and surrounded by the myriad islands of the Philippines. These geographical facts proved unfortunate for the Sangamon and some of her sisters.

Shortly after dawn on October 12 the Sangamon and eleven other carriers steamed out of Manus bound for the Philippines. Two columns of six carriers each formed and the ships moved out to sea with their gun crews practice-firing on a towed sleeve*. About noon Task Group 77.2, the bombardment unit composed of battleships, cruisers and destroyers, appeared on the horizon.

*A long canvas cylinder towed at the end of a long line by an airplane.

The CVE's and the bombardment unit joined in the afternoon to form one large force under Rear Admiral J. B. Oldendorf. Other ships were to join later. Six CVEs and some cruisers had remained behind to escort transports.

For two days little disturbed the tedium of steaming. Late on the afternoon of the second day, however, rumblings of a storm to come penetrated the calm. This time it was nature's storm and not the storm of battle. Next morning a typhoon, reported in the northeast, whipped up winds around the formation. The ship's meteorologist scanned his charts worriedly and harassed the communications office for any additional word on the storm. The weather continued to thicken through the 16th. Shortly before noon of that day the battleship and cruiser group left the formation to proceed to Leyte Gulf, where they were to bombard the landing beaches three days in advance of the amphibious forces.

Winds continued strong around the carriers, increasing toward gales. As the night wore on heavy seas pounded the ships. Along towards morning the number two motor whale boat, the wherry and the port boom on the Sangamon carried away. The small boys in the screen were suffering an even worse trouncing. The most seriously damaged was the destroyer escort Rowell which lost her mast. The typhoon moved to within less than 100 miles. Visibility became limited to as little as one mile. Waves broke over the Sangamon's flight deck and spray whipped up onto the superstructure.

Fortunately the typhoon approached no closer. Late on the 17th the winds fell off and the seas subsided. The carriers once more turned towards Leyte, having cleared an unanticipated barrier in their quest of the Philippines.

October 18th found the Sangamon operating with Task Unit 77.4.1 off the Philippines. The unit included the Chenango, Santoo, Suwannee and escorts. Two other carriers, the Saginaw Bay and the Petrof Bay, were to join the unit on the 22nd. The operating area of this unit lay east and southward of Leyte Gulf. The ships were for the most part within sight either off Samar or Mindanao. This gave Jap lookouts stationed on mountain tops an opportunity to keep the unit under constant observation.

The Sangamon and her sisters launched flights in support of advanced elements of Task Force 77, operating in Leyte Gulf, and augmented these with strikes against Leyte and Visayan airfields. Whether reeling under the impact of the initial assault or merely marking time until they analyzed the situation, the Japs did not strike back immediately. Often his planes appeared on the radar screen but until the 20th no enemy aircraft approached the ship, no attack materialized.

On the day of the actual invasion, October 20th, dawn broke through a screen of high and middle clouds, generally scattered. There was no rain and visibility was good. All in all, it was a good day for invasion. The ship proceeded with routine operations, launching a combat air patrol for the Leyte area at 0552 and a support mission at 0750.

Then as the ship was launching a "How" hour strike against Leyte at 0825, it happened. The shrill sound of the general alarm cut through the noise of planes warming up on the flight deck. Three Zekes, having eluded radar detection, appeared high over the Santee. They dropped three bombs but missed. Flying fast into the west, they disappeared briefly. At 0827 they were sighted again coming in low on the water forward of the Sangamon's port beam. As they drew near, the Sangamon's port battery broke loose with a ship-shaking barrage. Standing staunchly on the open bridge, Captain Browder roared:

"Shoot the bastards down."

Exactly what happened in the next few minutes is obscure, as in all such cases. One plane turned on its right wing about 500 yards from the Sangamon and flew erratically along the port side. It probably was this plane that was spotted by a Sangamon fighter, just launched, who gave chase and shot it down with several 50 caliber bursts.

The second Jap plane evidently turned and fled from the ship's withering fire. The third Zeko pressed home its attack. It strafed the Sangamon, then whipped around hard and came in fast to skip a bomb into the ship's port side. As the plane, still under fire, pulled up over the bow, it burst into flames and plunged into the sea. The pilot--he gave his name as Yashio Yamamoto, petty officer first class of the Japanese Navy--was picked up by the destroyer Trathen and later delivered to the Sangamon.

The carrier took her hit at Frame 83 on the main deck level. Although a two by six section of steel plating ripped loose, the bomb failed to penetrate or explode and tumbled back into the sea. Fifteen seconds later it exploded at a point some 300 feet farther aft, but it was only a low order detonation of the part of the missile that had not crumbled on impact.

The explosion lifted and shook the carrier from stem to stern, but only caused superficial damage. What was more glaringly obvious was that electric power failed, the gyro repeaters went out and the electric steering was useless. The ship lost speed and dropped out of formation, her starboard engine falling off to less than two-thirds. With her port engine running full

however, she caught herself at 11 knots. At 0850 the engine room reported "ready to answer all bells" and by 0905 all except permanent casualties had been repaired.

Then there was time to survey the situation. Three men had been wounded by 20 millimeter shell fragments which scattered along the port catwalk during the strafing attack. Nono was injured seriously. The only permanent damage was to the forward gyro where the wires supporting the sensitive element broke. This was readily offset by shifting all equipment involved to the after gyro. The torn section of plating was patched immediately. No underwater damage resulted.

During the first few days after the initial attack something suggestive of normalcy settled about the Sangamon as she continued her business of launchings and recoveries.

On the night of the 21st the ship spent some time at general quarters when "phantom bodies" appeared on the radar screen. These "phantoms", looking much like the usual unidentified plane indications on the screen, showed up in the north and moved southward. Nothing could be detected visibly even though the radar indicated the "phantoms" were close to the ship. Only the destroyer McJord reported a plane low on the water. It flew around the formation showing lights and was tracked out by radar to 20 miles where it disappeared. The strange "phantom" procession continued over the ship until 2015, by which time tracks had been charted on 15 indications.

Meanwhile, Sangamon pilots reported another disturbing note. Many Jap aircraft, mostly grounded on Visayan fields, had been sighted. Between the 21st and 23rd the ship's pilots destroyed 19 Jap planes in the air and on the ground. On the 24th, they intercepted a large force of planes the enemy hurled at the landing area. They shot down nine for certain, probably got four more and damaged one. On the same day a Judy was splashed near the formation.

There was other cause for concern also. On the 22nd and 23rd U.S. submarines scouting off Palawan detected Jap fleet units steaming up from the Singapore area. The subs attacked and inflicted some damage but the Jap force continued northward.

This, then, was the situation:

1. Admiral Halsey's fast Third Fleet was deployed east of the Philippines. It was in a position to intercept should the enemy attempt to cross the narrow Visayan waters.
2. The CVE force, divided into three units, was steaming in separate operating areas also east of the Philippines. The Sangamon's carrier group and escorts, known as Task Unit 77.4.1, was operating east and southeast of Leyte Gulf. The second CVE

group, Task Unit 77.4.2, was operating 30 to 50 miles north of the number three unit.

3. In Leyte Gulf itself lay the battleships, cruisers and destroyers of the bombardment group, plus countless transports, supply ships, landing craft and other similar vessels.

On the morning of the 24th, the Third Fleet's planes sighted two large Jap surface forces moving eastward, one in the Sibuyan Sea and one in the Sulu Sea. Both these forces were taken under heavy air attack and many ships damaged. Meanwhile, a third Jap unit, this one built around carriers, was reported by a Navy search plane to be moving down on the Philippines from a point some 200 miles off Northern Luzon. To meet this threat, Third Fleet units sped northward to intercept.

During the early morning hours of the 25th the force first sighted in the Sulu Sea attempted to slip into Leyte Gulf but Seventh Fleet battleships, cruisers, destroyers and PT boats met and routed it.

The second Jap force, however, slipped out of San Bernardino Strait into the Pacific and the operating area of the CVEs. This heavy force--four battleships, eight cruisers, plus destroyers--burst unexpectedly on CVE Unit 77.4.3 and took it under fire. This unit was then about 100 to 120 miles north of the Sangamon and her group. The Sangamon's unit immediately launched a strike to aid the embattled CVEs. Not many planes were available for this strike, however, because two other flights already had been sent to hammer the enemy--one as a combat air patrol over the Leyte area and the other to hit at the Jap Force that attempted to steam into Leyte Gulf.

About the time the Sangamon finished launching her strike, several enemy planes were picked up on the radar screen 15 miles away. In a few minutes the Sangamon and her sisters were under a terrifying air attack.

A Jap plane precipitated out of a thin cloud cover, roared down upon the Santee, dropped a bomb and crashed into the flight deck in a suicide attack.

This was the Kamikaze--the first time the Sangamon's force witnessed the violent action of the Kamikaze (Divine Wind) Corps, pledged to plunge its planes to death on U.S. Ships.

Several more Zeros were sighted overhead, each apparently picking a target and preparing for a suicide. At 0738 one plummeted towards the Sangamon in a screaming, strafing dive. At first he seemed to experience difficulty in aiming himself. But at 3,000 feet he roared hard and straight through the heavy anti-aircraft barrage. At 1,000 feet he faltered. He veered slightly

apparently badly hit. Then he missed the ship, plunging into the sea off the port bow and exploding. So close did he come that three men on the forecastle were wounded, one of them fatally.

Three more enemy planes still circled overhead. Then they too began to break off individually and plunge down towards the ships. One crossed astern of the Sangamon at about 5,000 feet, turned and came up through the fire of the ship's entire port battery. It nosed up for a moment and plunged into the Suwannee. At 0759 the Sangamon opened fire with its port guns at the second Jap plane, attacking the Petrof Bay. That Jap pilot missed, too, plunging to death in the sea. A minute or so later the Sangamon blasted away again at the third plane. This Jap circled the formation and then fled into the West.

During the air action the Santee reported she also had been torpedoed. At 0803 the destroyer Trathan sighted a periscope about a mile away. She turned to attack but the sub eluded her depth charges.

Back in the formation the Suwannee and Santee were billowing forth flame and smoke. The Santee was fighting a six degree list resulting from the torpedo hit. Scattered about the sea were the many men who had tumbled overboard when the suiciders struck and exploded. The destroyer escort Bull scurried about rescuing them, many of whom were injured critically. Later the more serious cases were transferred to the Sangamon.

Finally the Santee and Suwannee reported the fires under control. Spirits aboard all the ships were bolstered by a courageous announcement from the battered Suwannee.

"All fires are out," boomed the voice over the intra-ship radio circuit. "All we found of the Jap are bits of his flesh. We're ready for battle again."

Within two hours after the fires were out, both carriers had resumed flight operations. At 1116 the Sangamon herself had a casualty. The electric steering failed and the Diesel generators lost their load. The starboard engine fell off to 44 RPM due to loss of vacuum when the starboard condenser was pumped dry and the air ejector became hot and vapor-bound. Shortly after this was repaired the catapult cable parted and it was estimated it would require 20 hours to replace. Fortunately a sharp breeze struck up permitting free deck takeoffs rather than the usual catapulting.

Enemy air attacks fell off the rest of the day although there was one weak strike at 1145. Two planes approached the disposition, one of which was shot down about 10 miles away by the combat air patrol. The other, a Judy, came in, dropped a small bomb near the Petrof Bay, strafed the destroyer escort Rowell and disappeared to the eastward.

15

Meantime, Sangamon planes were attacking both the southern and middle Jap surface forces. They were seriously handicapped by a lack of heavy armor piercing bombs. Such bombs had been omitted to make room for more of the smaller types. There was the additional handicap in that the Sangamon, having been out of a navy yard for a year, was not equipped to handle rockets as many CVEs were.

Twenty-four sorties in all were launched to aid the blows against the Jap fleet. When the reports finally came in on these attacks the following tally for Sangamon planes was recorded:

- (1) Jap ships south of Leyte:
 - 1 BB possible torpedoed. (Battleship).
 - 1 DD seriously damaged by strafing. (Destroyer).
- (2) Ships east of Samar:
 - 1 BB strafed.
 - 1 Mogami class cruiser possibly torpedoed.
 - 2 Tone class cruisers damaged by strafing and near misses.
- (3) Jap unit retiring through San Bernardino Strait:
 - 1 Nachi class cruiser strafed and damaged by one 500 pound SAP and a 350 pound DC. (Semi-Armor Piercing/Depth charge).

At darkness that night Sangamon pilots were disbursed over the entire battle area where they had landed, many of them out of gas. There were eight at Tacloban, two at Dulag, four were on the Suwanee and one was believed to be on a tanker. Eight were unaccounted for, although some later were located.

At 2038 the scarred remnants of CVE unit 77.4.3, which had been attacked by the heavy Jap fleet ships, was sighted six miles astern of the Sangamon's formation. An enemy submarine was pursuing the carriers which were travelling without escorts. Three destroyers were dispatched to assist but the sub submerged and disappeared. Shortly thereafter a Jap plane, evidently a snoopar, appeared in the vicinity. It did not attack, however.

The remnants of TU 74.4.3 joined the Sangamon's disposition. At 2230 the destroyer escort Coolbaugh in the screen reported a sound contact. On turning to investigate she sighted a periscope dead ahead. She hurried forward and dropped her depth charges. A moment later a loud explosion rent the air and watchers on the Sangamon saw a flash of flame rise some 200 feet above the water. The Coolbaugh claimed a direct hit. A few minutes later the Petrel Bay reported a torpedo wake close aboard paralleling her starboard side.* No additional attacks developed that night and TU 77.4.3 left the formation near dawn, departing for Woendi.

*Greatest example of courage that I have ever seen - DDs & DEs against full gunned BBs and cruisers.//The executive officer of Petrel Bay said the motor of the torpedo sounded like an outboard motor-torpedo was on the surface of the water and it's a little bit of a...

The Sangamon's communications shack received some cheerful news on the morning of the 26th. The Jap fleet, broken and routed was fleeing through the seas and narrow straits of the Central Philippines.

At 0830 a strike of six fighters carrying 500 pounds SAPS was launched to attack a Jap cruiser and destroyer fleeing south of Masbate. The planes scored probable hits on a Kuma class cruiser-- it later was reported that it sank--and sank the destroyer with repeated strafing attacks. In this and previous attacks the Sangamon pilots were met by intense anti-aircraft fire, yet they made run after run unswerving. Practically all the planes were hit by flak.

Enemy air attacks over the Loyte area on the 26th were light. Two Sangamon pilots, flying combat air patrol, reported only one small group of nine Jap planes. They shot two of these down.

But the mornings cheering news was offset shortly after noon. At 1215, six to eight enemy planes were reported by the Combat Information Center to be coming in from the north 48 miles away. When the raid closed to 25 miles it split into three groups. One group, three planes in all, was intercepted and destroyed by the combat air patrol. The other two groups, apparently having disappeared, eluded the fighters and came in without showing on the radar screen. At last they were spotted through the binoculars in the altostratus clouds high overhead. There apparently were four planes, maneuvering and winging over us they prepared to come down.

All ships opened fire. One plane crashed into the water just missing the Petrof Bay. Two of them fled. But the last one hit home. Down he flashed through heavy flak. At first he appeared to have chosen the Sangamon for his suicidal objective. But at 5,000 feet, whether deterred by the ship's fierce fire or seeing a better target in the Suwannee's planes parked forward, he turned out and circled the Sangamon's stern. The heavy flak barrage continued, but, somehow, he escaped a fatal hit. Up he zoomed, then nosed over and dove into the Suwannee, striking and exploding on the flight deck near the base of the island.

A huge ball of orange flame burst over the deck, engulfing the bridge and all the parked planes. As this flame leaped skyward it gave way to a mass of billowing white smoke, which turned black as the ship burned. The stricken carrier, out of control, swung in a wide turn across the Sangamon's bow. The Sangamon came hard left to avoid her, crossing in her wake. Scattered over the sea were fifty or sixty of the Suwannee's men and the Sangamon stopped her engines lest these sailors be caught in the twirling smoke. Three rafts and two life mats were dropped in the swimmers below.

The Suwannee gradually came to a stop in her slow blind turn. A great pillar of smoke mounted into the air hundreds

17

of feet above her. Flames crackled and billowed from her sides and flight deck. While other carriers of the formation maneuvered in wide arcs around their wounded sister, the destroyer escort Coolbaugh and the destroyer Trathen rescued personnel from the water.

Once again the Suwannee showed she was a courageous, rugged carrier. In just 48 minutes after she was hit, all fires were controlled. At 1430 she rejoined the formation, making full speed. As an operating carrier, however, she was out. The Jap suicider had been far too destructive. Her planes, some of which were attempting to land at the time of the attack, landed aboard other carriers. Many of her injured were transferred to the Sangamon. Late that night the Suwannee left the task unit for Kossol Roads.

The next two days proved anti-climatic but they still were trying ones for the Sangamon. The strain of constant vigilance and lack of sleep began to tell on the crew. Enemy planes, mostly snoopers, continued to appear on the radar screen. The ship went to general quarters repeatedly even after the cruisers Phoenix and Shrotonshire and four destroyers arrived to lend their guns to the formation's defense. One Zeko approached and was shot down nearby. A Judy, very high, crossed the disposition and drew fire from many ships.

No longer needed, the Santoe left for Manus after having operated almost two days since taking her torpedo hit and suicider. The mastless Rowell accompanied her back. Meanwhile, the Chenango, Saginaw Bay and escorts returned from their long mission to Morotai for replacement planes and rejoined the unit.

No more kamikaze planes attacked during the remainder of the operation. But the vivid pictures of their screaming, terrifying dives were stamped indelibly in the minds of the crew. The suicides had not proved effective in stemming the invasion of the Philippines but they had created a new problem of war.

Admiral Sprague who had witnessed their dives from the Sangamon's flag bridge aptly described them as "robot bombs with human minds". Captain J. M. (Kit) Carson, Sprague's Chief of Staff, and a veteran of many kinds of Jap attacks, described the suicide plunges as "the most terrifying type of offense I have ever seen."

So when orders to leave the Leyte area finally arrived on the 29th a feeling of relief and jubilation swept through the ship's company. They had undergone a rough experience and they knew their jobs had been well done. The gun crews stuck to their stations through seemingly endless periods of fire. The flight deck and catapult crews pushed and stoutly worked even while under attack. Officers and men both above and below deck handled their jobs without faltering, yet knowing death hovered in the seas nearby and in the skies overhead.

The ship had launched 473 sorties in 15 days under hazardous conditions--storms, night operations, enemy attacks. Yet no

major accident, not even a barrier crash occurred.

Commendations were an old thing to the Sangamon. But when she received them this time she felt they were well justified.

Admiral Kindaid's message:

MSG for Adm. Sprague x The gallant action of the groups under your command saved the day in Leyte gulf x You may be sure I am proud and grateful.

Kindaid.

Admiral Nimitz said:

CinCPac joins Com7th Fleet in respect and admiration for the performance of the escort carriers in their gallant fight against heavy odds.

The message from the ship's own Admiral Sprague was most valued. He said:

To the officers and men of the escort carriers and to the next of kin of those who were lost x This task group has participated in one of the decisive battles of this war x The aircraft of these carriers have not only met and defeated enemy attacks in the air but they have turned back a large enemy fleet composed of his most modern ships x The intrepid courage, skill and fighting spirit of the pilots and air crewmen were superb x Never have fighting men had a greater task and never have fighting men performed their duty with greater determination and distinction x The seamanlike handling of the vessels x The brilliant offensive and defensive work of the screen x The cool accuracy of the gunners x The sustained and imperturbable handling of planes on deck x The calm steadiness of purpose of the rearmine and gasoline details x The prompt and efficient action of the damage control parties and engineers x All contributed to turning the tide of battle to victory x Against such teamwork the enemy could not prevail x I am proud to have been privileged to be present and observe your achievements x May God bless everyone of you and may the citizens of your country forever remember and be thankful for your courage x To the mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers, wives and sons and daughters of those who were lost I say be comforted and inspired in the thought that the victory for which these men contributed so freely and courageously gave their lives has contributed immeasurably to the final defeat of the enemy.

T. L. Sprague,

Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy.

In communication talk MSG-Message; CinCPac-Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet & Pacific Ocean Areas; Com7th-Commander 7th Fleet and the x's equals periods.

19.

Departing from Leyte Gulf area on October 29, the Sangamon steamed into Manus four days later. She remained there until November 9. Then she began her long and much delayed voyage home.

The Sangamon finally arrived at Bremerton, Washington, and there were leaves and recreation for the crew, repairs and alterations for the ship. In some ways, these 400 days at sea had rendered the carrier obsolete. Both at Leyte and in the Marianas her planes had to peck away with 50-caliber guns while other carriers sent out rocket-equipped aircraft. The helplessness of exclusive reliance on the old type air search radar was patent at Leyte. A year-long series of failures on the Sangamon and her sisters pointed up the need for additional catapults. During the Navy Yard availability period from November 30 to January 24, workmen remedied these deficiencies. They installed a rocket stowage space and a second catapult. A new-type radar was included in the redesigned Combat Information Center. In addition, there were installed three new 40 millimeter mounts, a bomb elevator, lights for night flight operations and additional fire fighting equipment.

The cruise back into the Pacific war was leisurely but highly important. From January 24 to January 30 the ship conducted post-repair trials in Puget Sound. Then she steamed down to San Francisco, arriving February 1. During the short trip heavy seas inflicted considerable damage to the forward areas of the ship and difficulties arose with the port main turbine. This necessitated a 10-day repair period at the Alameda carrier pier.

At Alameda a new commanding officer, Captain A. I. Malstrom, reported aboard, relieving Captain Browder.

From February 16⁴⁵ to March 5⁴⁵ the ship spent its time in and near Pearl Harbor, training the new air group, CVEG33. Then on March 5 she departed for the forward battle zone in company with the battleship Maryland and four escorts.

The departure marked the beginning of a new and rugged adventure. The Sangamon arrived at Ulithi March 16. There she found many ships gathering and preparing for the invasion of Okinawa—the final assault on the sea lanes to Tokyo. The Sangamon was assigned to Task Unit 52.1.1 under Rear Admiral C.A.F. Sprague. The unit was one of two escort carrier groups to be engaged in the initial attack.

The approach to Okinawa was almost without incident. The Sangamon's planes flew routine flights over the assembled forces and, in addition, her new night fighters went out on dusk and dawn patrols. The Sangamon's night fighter unit was the first to be put aboard an escort carrier. On the 24th a night fighter coming in for a landing, hit the Fanshaw Bay's YE antenna, high on the island, and crashed into the sea. The pilot was not recovered despite a thorough search.

Actual operations around Okinawa began on March 25, seven

days prior to the invasion date. During the seven-day period the Sangamon operated 50 miles south of Okinawa, providing support for activities close to the beach. On April 1--Love Day--she left Admiral Sprague's unit and joined the other carriers of her division to form Task Unit 52.1.3 under Rear Admiral William D. Sample.

From April 1 to April 8, she continued to fly off her routine patrols, launch support missions to aid the forces around the beach and maintain a night combat air patrol until 2115. On March 26, a Sangamon night fighter shot down a Val in a radar-controlled interception. This was the first time in Navy history a night fighter flown from an escort carrier successfully carried out a night interception. The Val was picked up shortly before dawn some 40 miles away. G.I.C. vectored out a night fighter to intercept. Shortly the night fighter sighted the enemy plane on his radar, closed in and shot it down in flames.

On April 2, two night crashes occurred. At 2100 a fighter attempting a landing broke through all barriers and crashed into the planes parked forward. At 2200 a second plane repeated the performance. The crashes damaged eight planes beyond repair and put the barriers out of commission until noon the next day. There was no fire and no injuries, however.

Meanwhile, the Japs were beginning to strike back in force at Okinawa. On April 6 Sangamon fighters on patrol over Kerama Retto entered the general melee of the day and shot down three Jap planes.

On April 8 the Sangamon and other ships of her unit moved to a new operation area 70 miles east of Sakishima Gunto. This group of islands included two--Ishigaki and Miyako--on which the enemy had airfields for launching attacks against shipping around Okinawa. It became the task of the Sangamon's unit to keep those fields inoperative.

The islands became what the air group called "our baby." Since other carriers of the division took over the routine patrols, every flight from the Sangamon to Sakishima was either a strike or a target combat air patrol. It constituted a rigorous job to keep the Japs grounded. The Sangamon planes had to keep hitting the target all day and most of the night. Yet the Japs doggedly stuck to repairing their battered fields and installations.

Several breaks occurred in the schedule. Weather closed in on the targets for several days. There was another day of re-fueling, two more days of support missions for Okinawa, another day of re-arming and re-provisioning at Kerama Retto and two more days of strikes and patrols during the occupation of Iwo Shima.

During all this time, however, the closest approach the enemy made to the Sangamon's formation was during the mid-morning;

of the 12th. Two enemy planes, closing, appeared on the radar screen. They came in dropping "window" in the usual deceptive manner of Jap planes bent on attack. C.I.C. vectored out the combat air patrol and it shot down one Myrt within sight of the ship. The other plane fled. A parachute was seen to drop from the flaming Myrt but when a destroyer reached it no body was found. Another destroyer recovered the pilot's body from the plane's wreckage.

In about mid-April, Admiral Sample transferred his flag from the Suramoro to the Sangamon. He introduced a new schedule for the ship at this time. The Sangamon became a night-operating carrier almost exclusively. Large dawn and dusk strikes were launched daily. Weekler missions were kept over Ishigaki and Miyako fields at night.

Our planes noted considerable activity around these fields despite the continual bombings and strafings. On the 18th and on the 21st Jap planes were sighted either in the air or on the ground. The Japs were not "writing off" these fields as useless. Apparently they had underground hangars or well-camouflaged revetments and brought their planes out only for dusk and dawn flights.

The Sangamon reached its high point of effectiveness during the Okinawa campaign on April 22. A dusk strike of eight fighters and four torpedo planes was launched against the Sakishima group. They later were joined over the target by four night fighters.

As the strike approached Miyako, it spotted a large group of enemy planes--possibly 25 or 30--warning up on Kobara Field. Most of them seemed to be twin-engined jobs. As the Sangamon planes began their attack, seven Oscars appeared overhead at about 14,000 feet.

Our planes pressed home their attack on the grounded aircraft first. Down they plunged. Bombs, rockets and 50-caliber machine gun fire tore into the enemy planes. Explosions and flames spread destruction among the aircraft and Jap personnel. Then the fighter planes turned towards the seven Oscars overhead. In the ensuing fight five Oscars were shot down. Later four more Oscars were sighted and shot down with the aid of the newly arrived division of night fighters. Thus by destroying what must have been a major portion of the enemy's Sakishima air force, Sangamon planes accomplished in a single stroke the purpose for which the task force had been sent there.

After this master stroke, operations settled into a round of neutralizing strikes against the fields until May 4--the day the Sangamon steamed into Kerama Retto to replenish supplies.

May 4 was the largest single day in the Sangamon's history.

Shortly before dawn she slipped into Kerama Retto in company with the destroyer Fullam and the destroyer escort Dennis. Many enemy aircraft in the area and over nearby Okinawa forced her to sound general quarters several times during the day. The gunnery department and C.I.C. remained in Condition I starting at 0801.

Fate dealt the carrier a body blow late in the day. Her departure was delayed by the late arrival of some aviation lubricating oil. Had she begun her return trip on time, May 4 probably would have been just another routine day.

At 1830 she finally got underway. Low cumulus clouds and fine light effects provided an ideal setting for an enemy attack.

Hardly had the ship secured her special sea detail when C.I.C. picked up a large group of enemy planes on one of the radars some 60 miles to the southwest. At about 40 miles the other air-search radar set confirmed that there were six to twelve planes. Shortly thereafter the Sangamon and her two escorts went to general quarters and swung into an anti-aircraft disposition.

Land-based fighters over Morama Retto were vectored out to intercept and they tally-ho'd the enemy some 20 miles away from the ships. According to subsequent reports they shot down nine Japs in the ensuing air battle. Some got away.

At 1902 a Tony was sighted visually three or four miles off the Sangamon's port bow, circling fast to the left.

The carrier swung into a hard left turn, both an avoiding maneuver and an attempt to get into the wind to launch her own planes. Then all three ships opened fire. The Spears, a patrol craft nearby, also turned its guns on the plane. The Jap zoomed in a wide arc astern of the carrier, then straightened out on a course paralleling the Sangamon's. His speed was terrific. Smoke began streaming from the Tony as flak began to rip through it. The Jap continued to head towards the carrier, his wings almost vertical. But either the pilot was hit or the plane's speed was so great he could not quite nose into the ship. He crashed into the water about 25 feet off the starboard beam. So close did he come that the ship's transmitting antennae was carried away.

Three men went over the side but were rescued later by another vessel. (The Spears picked them up).

As the sun set the Sangamon completed its turn into the wind and launched two night fighters. The fighters were vectored out immediately on an enemy contact picked up by C.I.C., 12 miles to the southwest. Nothing was sighted by the fighters and the contact disappeared on the radar screen at six miles. Gun crews and lookouts continued to scan the darkening sky anxiously. Below decks, ordnancemen rapidly completed stowing rockets, closed the bomb elevator hatch against the possibility of renewed attack and hurried to their battle stations. All other personnel cleared the hangar deck.

At 1925, twenty-two minutes after sunset, the Puller reported an enemy radar contact bearing 264 degrees true, distance 12 miles. The Sangamon's radar picked it up almost

immediately and the two night fighters were sent out to intercept. As soon from the bridge the two fighters disappeared into a dark cloud in the west. At about the same time a twin engined Jap plane was sighted breaking out of the same cloud cover about three miles away. He circled fast towards the rear of the formation. All ships opened fire but the plane, a Nick, eluded the cone of flak and slipped into a dense black cloud about 3000 feet alt.

Guns were checked momentarily to reorient for the expected attack. Gunners peered anxiously into the darkened sky. Then the attack began. The Nick plunged out of the cloud. His speed increased as he flashed downward directly at the carrier. Flak from the Sangamon and the Pullam astern ripped into the Nick. He didn't waver. Leveling out momentarily at one point, he nosed over again into a more shallow suicidal dive. Flak continued to bite into the plane. It flamed. Then the Nick was over the ship. It dropped a bomb load and crashed through the center of the flight deck.

A tremendous explosion ensued. A huge flame burst skyward, seeming to cover the entire ship. The two 26-ton elevators were lifted into the air by the blast and settled away in their former seats. The ship itself shuddered as though attempting to shake off a fatal blow. For a moment a silence seemed to settle over the Sangamon. Then there was chaos. Flames began leaping from the ship. Fire broke out among planes on the flight and hangar decks. Raptured steam and water lines hissed and gusted. The roar and crackle of exploding ammunition added a terrific din to the fiery scene. The fire raged generally on the flight deck, on the hangar deck and on the fuel or main deck. A heavy black smoke billowed skyward.

The ship took its hit at 1732. Bridge communications remained intact for a few minutes, long enough to put the ship on a course out of the wind. Captain Malstrom ordered all hands off the bridge except the navigator, the helmsman and the captain's orderly. Captain Malstrom, too, remained on the bridge. As the fires grew electrical and telephone lines burned through, so that by 1955 all communications from the bridge were severed.

Finally the ship started a slow blind turn. It was apparent then that control between the engine room and the bridge had been cut. Shortly thereafter, however, the Sangamon steadied on a safe course to the south at slow speed as steering control was assumed at the emergency steering unit--but 11--back aft. At 2025 the bridge was abandoned entirely and a command post established by the Captain on the forward end of the flight deck.

Fire burned generally now on the flight deck between the two elevators, throughout the entire hangar deck where quantities of .50 caliber, 20 millimeter and 40 millimeter ammunition continued to explode, in the catwalks, on the gun sponsons and on parts of the main deck.

17:33 P.M.

The Sangamon literally was divided into two separate units by the flames. The thick wall of fire through the middle of the carrier prevented those on the forward part from knowing just what was happening in the after part, and vice versa.

As in any catastrophe involving hundreds of men, there were countless incidents that night that never will be recorded. There were heroic deeds, some known, some unsung. There was death and terrible pain. There was quick thinking and inertia. There even was some humor.

With the ship divided by flames and communications severed centralized control was impossible. Ramification from the suicide hit and fire were many. All sorts of problems developed in all sections of the ship and men in each section used the means best at hand to solve them.

Fire fighting groups often were driven back by scalding water, exploding ammunition, fire and dense smoke. But they hung on. Many things went on simultaneously. Doctors and pharmacists mates treated the wounded and burned. Breaks in fire mains were isolated. Steam was secured on ruptured auxiliary lines. A three and one-half degree list was corrected. Submersible pumps and handy billies were rigged. Broken risers were located and secured.

Back aft on the flight deck men pushed unburned and partly burned planes over the side before they became enveloped in flames.

Several ships came alongside at great risk to aid in fighting the fire. LCI 61 fought the hangar deck fire from the port side. LCI 31, attempting the same, suffered extensive damage to her superstructure when she collided with the Sangamon. The destroyer Hudson, attempting to get close to the starboard side, also suffered damage. In addition, a burning plane tumbled from the Sangamon's flight deck onto the Hudson's depth charges. The plane was jettisoned without the depth charges exploding.

By 2200 all major fires were under control. An hour or so later scattered fires in such places as the photo laboratory, the C.I.C. transmitter room and the battery locker practically were out. At 2320 the carrier, with the Dennis and Fullam in screening stations, got underway at 12 knots. The Sangamon still was afloat and capable of making speed but fire and explosions had shattered her usefulness for months to come. She had only one plane left and that was badly damaged. Her flight deck was a charred mass of twisted wood and steel. The hangar deck was even worse. Her steel sides were riddled and torn. She was just a skeleton carrier.

Shortly after dawn the next morning she rejoined her task unit. There riding gracefully in formation she saw a new 105 class CVE, the Block Island, which had joined the unit the day

A handy billie is a portable pump.

25
before. The Sangamon cruised with the disposition all day. At sunset she left on the first lap of a long journey that was to bring her to the Norfolk Navy Yard in Virginia on June 12.

As she headed out into the dusk of evening--a battered, blackened, plane-less carrier--there were many aboard who glanced back at the sleek 105 class CVE that had replaced her. The words went unspoken but these thoughts evolved:

The Sangamon was out of the wars forever. She had fought a good fight--a rugged fight--from Casablanca to Okinawa. Now she had been replaced by the Navy's newest most modern CVE. Her war career was ended. Her job was done.

The Queen of the CVEs, at long last, headed homeward towards peaceful waters and a peaceful world.....
