

PROLOGUE

Two versions of the War History were sent to me. One by Charles Hutchison and the other by Stan Woods both of V-2.

In preparing the War History for reproduction, it was necessary to retype all of the narrative because of the condition of the original versions.

During this retyping, every effort was made to remain faithful to the original wording. In rare instances, corrections were made to obvious spelling errors and typing omissions or other mistakes.

Due to time and stamina constraints, no effort was made to retype PART II, APPENDIX although some page renumbering was necessary.

If the process of retyping has resulted in a clearer copy with fewer errors, it is due to careful proof reading by my wife Phyllis.

Complete credit is given to Lt.(jg) RALPH. W. KEITH as the author of the War History. To what extent he relied on others to assist him in this endeavor, I do not know other than his credits list Lt. (jg) JOHN HIGHFILL and Ens. ROBERT WOOCK for the work done on the cover. I have been informed that LCDR WARREN DAUM our Supply Officer collaborated with Lt. KEITH on the project. From a notation I have found, I believe that much of the typing work was done by Y3c ROBERT W. NINNEMANN of "K" Division. It is my understanding that men of the Storekeepers Section of "S" Division produced whatever final copies were made.

It is my hope that the efforts of these men so many years ago and my limited contribution now, will provide you with a record of the MAKIN ISLAND's cruise that you can enjoy yourselves and pass on to your children and their children.

In the passage of time, very little has been recorded or remembered about the gallant and honorable service rendered by the Escort Carriers during World War II and in subsequent actions in Korean and Viet Nameese waters.

I recommend to you the works of William T. Y'Blood especially his "The Little Giants" (Escort Carriers Against Japan) which is available at libraries and through the U.S. Naval Insitute, Operations Center, 2062 Generals Highway, Annapolis, Maryland 21401.

I also suggest that you consider supporting the Escort Carrier Sailors and Airmens Association (1100 Holly Ln., Endicott, NY 13760). One of the purposes of this organization is:

"To foster, perpetuate and memorialize the small aircraft carriers known in Navy terms as AVGs, CVEs, ACVs, TCVEs, AGMRs, by causing a museum to be established to store memorabilia and portray the history of each of these Escort Carriers and a monument to be erected to honor these ships and the men who made the supreme sacrifice while serving in them."

**Gus Youngkrist
Pompano Beach, FL
November 1991**

**Revised 1 January 1999
Las Vegas, NV**

THE WAR HISTORY OF USS MAKIN ISLAND CVE-93

Named to further perpetuate the fame of Carlson's Raiders and their daring exploit on Makin Island in the Gilbert Island Group, the CVE-93 was launched with the words "Good Luck, good hunting, and God bless you, MAKIN ISLAND." But more than tradition-inspired names, sentimental slogans, and good wishes are necessary to mold the hulk of a ship into a medium of war. The designs and orders of the Navy Department are fulfilled not by the hopes of sponsors, however fervent they may be, but sensible direction from command and by cooperation from the ranks. Briefly, the success of this ship, whether adjudged mediocre or outstanding, can be attributed to training, drills and the coordinated effort of all hands to make it a good ship.

In a hard-fought war, a nation produces or discovers heroes among men and ships. Herewith is presented the narrative of perhaps not the greatest United States Ship of World War II, but certainly a ship which has carried out its orders.

Authorized on 18 June 1942, the ship was constructed by the Kaiser Company, Inc., at their Vancouver, Washington, yards, at the beginning of the third year of war. With proper ceremony, the keel was laid on 12 January 1944 with a four-leaved clover embedded in its first piece of steel, an omen of future good fortune. Thirty-ninth of fifty escort carriers, U.S.S. CASABLANCA Class, the U.S.S. MAKIN ISLAND was launched on 5 April 1944, two years to the day after the launching of the CVE-55. Built under the direction of the United States Maritime Commission, the ship was delivered to the Navy on the day of commissioning, 9 May 1944.

As the title, Escort Aircraft Carrier, implies, the CASABLANCA Class CVEs were built as small carriers, capable of carrying a plane complement sufficiently large to protect themselves and escorted convoys against submarine and air attack. The tides and fortunes of war demanded from this type carrier, new functions, different from the original escort conception. The record of the MAKIN ISLAND is an excellent example of a CVE whose primary and secondary functions have been modified continually by the vicissitudes of war in the Pacific Theater of Operations. Subsequent battle reports record the successes and limitations of this ship in adapting herself to the changing demands.

Concurrent with the physical construction of the ship, the initial training of the officers and crew began. From January until April 1944, future shipmates, singly and in drafts, reported to the Pre-Commissioning School, Bremerton Navy Yard, Washington. Sea-dogs and boots, old and recently-drafted, experienced hands and new hands, ranked and unrated, all joined in the bewildering task of organizing and being organized. Under the guidance of the prospective Executive Officer, Commander J. H. KUHL, USN, the men were given divisional assignments and their education for sea began.

From examination of cut-away models and tours of sister ships anchored in the harbor, they caught a glimpse of their future life in the Navy. Classes were many and varied -- a smattering of Officer-of-the-Deck procedure for officers; radio, radar and seamanship for the men; parade and drill for all hands; gunnery at Pacific Beach.

Out of this instructional conglomeration, one school stands as the most noteworthy. This was the Fire-fighting School built along the Puget Sound Coast at Point Orchard, Manchester, Washington.

On a carrier, where the stowage and handling of gasoline is a routine part of the ship's schedule, the fire bugaboo is ever present and ever dangerous. At this school, the greater part of the crew were given the opportunity to fight gasoline and fuel oil fires in simulated hangardeck and engine room spaces. Although the men of the ship have not been called upon to test their ability to combat a major fire, they have confidence in their ability to do the right thing at a time when the wrong thing would be inexcusable.

On 26 April 1944, the partially organized crew boarded buses for Tacoma, Washington, where half reported to the Receiving Barracks for further instruction and the other half went aboard the USS CASABLANCA to be shown how to make a CVE tick by the Puget Sound bound crew. Aboard her, they learned the layout of the compartments, fired the guns and stood watches on the bridge and in the below-deck spaces.

On 8 May, all hands traveled by troop train to NAB, Astoria, Oregon where the ship and department heads were waiting.

The following day, 9 May, the ship was commissioned and outfitting began. Captain, then Commander W. B. WHALEY, USN, assumed command. Ship's Company consisted of sixty officers and five hundred and sixty men. Since the ship was not Navy-constructed, alterations according to Navy specifications were undertaken to fully prepare her for the line. The rest of the month was spent in the outfitting procedure, work being done by the Navy Yard workmen and the Astoria Staff of the Kaiser Shipbuilding Company.

Spare time was utilized to train officers and men in initial General Drills and Exercises.

At 0657, on 31 May, the U.S.S. MAKIN ISLAND put to sea for her maiden voyage with ninety-five percent of the outfitting completed. The following day the ship put in at Bremerton where, during the next week, ammunition was loaded, speed and calibration tests were run, and guns were tested.

On the eighth of June, the ship left for San Diego, California, stopping at Alameda, California, to load bombs and aviation gasoline. All hands were on deck to view the Golden Gate. Anti-submarine protection was provided by a COMWESTSEAFRON blimp during daylight hours.

The day after the Makin Island arrived at San Diego, she was ordered to an operating area off the northern coast of Lower California, Mexico, to conduct shake-down exercises. Eager as the plane handlers and other flight deck personnel were, it was obvious that the business of flying airplanes from the deck of a carrier was a strange subject to them. To contrast the first hops with later well coordinated flight operations is a bit unfair, but it illustrates a point of prime importance -- there is no substitute for training and experience. Each small detail must become a thoroughly ingrained habit before planes can be launched and landed without delay, before men can react to emergencies, whether small or large, with the necessary expediency. Night gunnery and fueling-at-sea practice ended successfully the brief training period.

On the nineteenth of June 1944, the ship put out for Pearl Harbor as a transport, the first of her many missions. Seventy eight preserved planes and two-hundred-thirty six men were loaded aboard as the first pay-cargo. With practical and classroom instruction the order of the day, the trip was uneventful, but valuable from the training standpoint.

At Ford Island, the cargo and passengers were replaced by seventy de preserved planes and a Marine Squadron, VMO 155, and the shakedown cruise to Majuro Atoll, Marshall Islands, continued. At Majuro, the F4Us of the Marine Squadron were catapulted from anchorage and the other planes unloaded via the aviation boom.

After leaving Majuro, the ship anchored at Kwajalein and Roi where, at the former anchorage, Marine wounded from Saipan came aboard. The cases, for the most part, were ambulatory and although Sick Bay facilities of the ship were taxed, the care of the patients was excellent. Of special interest was the improvement shown by several shock cases under the soothing influence of life at sea and adequate medical care.

The wounded disembarked at Pearl Harbor, where the Navy Band on the pier greeted them with the Marine Hymn and the usual Hawaiian songs of welcome. In their stead, Air Group 16, recently of the U.S.S. LEXINGTON and the "Marianas Turkey Shoot", came aboard for transportation to the States. Officers and men were given lectures and informal talks on carrier warfare which left them with mixed feelings of apprehension and a desire to take their part in the fighting Navy.

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After leaving the Air Group at San Diego, the ship sailed to Terminal Island, San Pedro, California for a three-week availability period at the Naval Dry Docks. During the availability, both enlisted men and officers were granted nine day leave by the Commanding Officer, with those remaining aboard turning-to to assist dock workmen in the general overhaul and alterations program. Weaknesses discovered during the shake-down cruise together with alterations suggested by other CVEs were incorporated into repair agenda. Also, accommodations for a Flag were provided.

Between 16 August and 5 September, VC-84, VC-88 and VF 9 were trained and qualified in the operations area off San Diego. It was gratifying and fundamentally important that VC-84, the squadron later assigned to the ship, showed excellent performance in the air and on the deck, and promised to be a "hot outfit". Pilots, aircrewmembers and deck personnel were immediately accepted as part of ship's company and a long period of cooperative air operations was initiated. The desirability of this cooperation cannot be underestimated.

A clean-up availability period was granted the ship between 5 and 11 September, during which time minor repairs were completed. From that date until 16 October, as a member of Carrier division TWENTY-NINE, squadron and gunnery exercises were continued in the operating area off San Diego, with Rear Admiral Calvin T. DURGIN in command after 10 October. Air support was given to the practice amphibious landings on San Clemente Island by the Carrier Division which consisted of U.S.S. MAKIN ISLAND, LUNGA POINT, BISMARCK SEA, SALAMAUA, and screen.

On the 16th day of October, with experience as a transport and a squadron training ship, the U.S.S. MAKIN ISLAND put to sea for a new mission -- combat duty. As fully prepared as possible during the allotted time, four months, the new ship and untried crew were given the flagship responsibility of Carrier Division TWENTY-NINE for its first cruise into the battle zone. On a small carrier with already inadequate quarters and office space, the addition of a flag presented additional problems. With no choice but to work together, the ship, flag and squadron showed unusual adaptability and ingenuity in coordinating their various interrelated activities in order that no compromise of the operational efficiency of any of the three units was affected.

The period from the day of sailing from the States until the end of the year was highlighted by the ship's participation in her first operation, a minor role in the occupation of Leyte Island, in the Philippines.

Traveling from San Diego to Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Islands, via Pearl Harbor and Enewetok, the ship arrived at that anchorage in time to set Typhoon

Condition II, an incipient tropical storm being in the vicinity. No damage was sustained by the ship, but danger from floating mines loosened by the wind and sea necessitated a special mine watch on the forecastle. Several mines were detonated by small ship gunfire and several exploded on contact with nearby reefs. On the last day in the port, the entire ship participated in an over-the-side drill, utilizing escape lines and lifebelts. On the tenth of November, the Carrier Division, augmented by the U.S.S. HOGGATT BAY, (CVE-75), sailed for Kossol Passage in the northern Palau Islands.

From Kossol Passage, the Carrier Division and screen left for the Leyte area to act as protection for convoys enroute to and returning from Leyte Gulf. Extensive air operations were held, which consisted of local target combat air patrols, anti-submarine patrols and air searches. Occasional snoopers were encountered and on 21 November, the convoy and covering force were attacked by three twin-engined enemy bombers. The MAKIN ISLAND opened fire, with no observed hits, on an Irving which flew near the ship. Although the MAKIN ISLAND was the first ship to fire at the plane, the order to commence fire was several important seconds late. Thereafter, officers at the guns were given the responsibility to initiate firing, and in subsequent contacts with enemy planes there were no delays in opening fire. The ship and division were relieved on 23 November by Carrier Division 27.

During the afternoon of 26 November, traditional "Crossing the Line" ceremonies were held and over eight-hundred officers and men, including Rear Admiral DURGIN of the Staff, Captain WHALEY of the ship and Commander ROGERS, skipper of the squadron, were initiated into the Mystic Rites of the Deep and became worthy Shellbacks.

The following day the ship anchored at Seadler Harbor, off Manus Island, Admiralty Group. VC-84 went ashore to NAS, Pityilu Island to keep in flying trim with various training programs and routine patrols.

While the squadron was thus engaged in flight operation off the ship, those aboard loaded supplies and fuel and made extensive preparations for sea, spurred by rumors of impending large scale amphibious operations. Since the crew went ashore daily by sections to use the recreational facilities of Pteyilu Island, the morale of the ship was considerably improved.

Four days (16-20 December) were taken from the stay at Manus to sail to and to support rehearsal amphibious operation at Huon Gulf, New Guinea. Ship and squadron derived benefit from this practice, the squadron gaining valuable training on target spotting and general amphibious doctrine, the ship ironing out kinks in communications,

ordnance and flight deck procedure. Repair party, Officer-of-the-Deck, gunnery, ship-handling, and general drills continued.

After the practice landings in New Guinea, the ship again anchored at Manus whereupon thorough briefing for the coming operation was undertaken, indoctrinating necessary officers and men in the phase of the operation plan for which they would be responsible in the coming invasion of Luzon.

The ship anchored at Kossol Passage on 30 December, ending the year and its preparatory period at that anchorage.

When the MAKIN ISLAND started her first big job, the invasion of Luzon, the morale of the crew was at the peak. With knowledge that they were about to participate in a major strike against the enemy and with a month of planning, practice and preparation at Manus, a feeling of expectation and confidence was noticeable from the bridge to the guns, from the flight deck to the damage control lockers. The ship was ready.

"Nothing can stop us", was the accepted slogan as the mighty task forces, 77.4 and 77.2 comprising 18 CVEs, 6 battleships, 4 heavy cruisers, and various light cruisers, destroyers and destroyer escorts, made rendezvous at Leyte on the third of January.

As far as the lookouts could see were ships, in apparently suicidal formation, straddled by the island of Mindanao and Leyte. In a narrow three-mile-wide passage, there was no room to form an open, maneuverable formation. Not an end-around play, with sufficient room to form easily protected battle lines, this was a straight-through-the-center, flanks exposed, power drive. When the board of strategy made up the plan to reach Lingayen Gulf via the Straights of Surigao, the Mindanao, Sula and South China Seas, they considered the group sufficiently powerful to ward off any surface or air attacks which the Japanese might send. This opinion was correct, but although surface attacks did not materialize, the enemy was not reluctant to send all of his available Philippine air strength against the invading Americans.

The objectives of the operation were the seizure of the Central Luzon Plains and the eventual complete capture of the Island of Luzon by means of amphibious operations to be staged in great force along the Lingayen Gulf sector of West Central Luzon. As the most important single step taken so far toward the elimination of the Japanese from the Philippines, the operation constituted a necessary preliminary to the complete isolation of the enemy from his conquered territories and war materials to the South.

The special job of the MAKIN ISLAND and the other carriers was to furnish air support to our formation enroute to the objective area as well as to give air support

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in all its forms to friendly forces off Lingayen beachheads. Until United States Army planes would obtain a local foothold on Lingayen air strips, the CVE based planes were counted upon to furnish the major air support for the amphibious operation.

With the outline and importance of the mission in mind, with spirits high, and with confidence in the ability of the ship to get through, the MAKIN ISLAND, as Flagship of Rear Admiral DURGIN, steamed into the Surigao Straits on a beautiful January morning. Native craft sailing in the inland waters and the rugged island hillsides gave a tone of travelogue tranquility to the scene, but beneath the orderliness and calm was anxiety in the hearts of the crews. But the fears and apprehensions were relegated to a position of minor importance by the determination to do a job in accordance with U.S. Navy tradition.

As the battle force got underway, battle stations were manned and continued to be manned on an all-day basis -- the MAKIN ISLAND was alert. The first night brought a beautiful sunset which mimicked the Japanese flag in color and form, and the first narrow escape for the ship in the inland Philippine seas. The warm tropical night had hardly dropped its sheltering cloak when a Zeke, in a suicidal dive, plunged into the sea and exploded five-hundred yards off the starboard quarter of the MAKIN ISLAND.

The next escape from disaster was not to take place until the following afternoon, when a Jap pilot, soon to join his ancestors, dived into the water, one-hundred-fifty feet off the fantail of the LUNGA POINT, the CVE cruising next in line to the MAKIN ISLAND, off the starboard bow. At about the same time, in the rear formation, the U.S.S. OMMANEY BAY, veteran of the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea, was struck by a suicide plane and smoked on the horizon, friendly destroyers torpedoed her at dusk to prevent her from falling into the hands of the enemy.

The next day, 5 January, was the most eventful in the hectic career of the MAKIN ISLAND. As a curtain riser, at 0530 a Japanese plane flew over the bridge at an altitude of three-hundred feet. Evidently the Imperial mission was not to crash dive the ship. At any rate, luck was holding, and no attack was made. An hour later, the task force steamed into the South China Sea, past Japanese held Corregidor. These were the first American surface ships to sail those waters since December 1941.

Shortly after noon, two enemy destroyers were sighted near our minesweepers in the van. MAKIN ISLAND planes, in company with other CVE strike groups, rocketed the destroyers, and left them dead in the water. This action, plus the destruction of eight enemy aircraft made the day successful for VC-84. Their landings on the flight deck were cheered by the flight deck crew who worked tirelessly to launch, rearm, and service the planes.

Action again flared at 1700 when torpedo suicide planes approached the formation from the west. Two Jills headed for the MAKIN ISLAND, but chose instead to make successful crash dives on the U.S.S. LOUISVILLE and H.M.A.S. ARUNTA in the forward port section of the formation. At the same time two additional ships were struck in the formation to the rear. The climax came at dusk when the MANILA BAY, on the horizon, lighted the sky with her death explosion, and in the van, a Mindoro based Army fighter shot down a Jap, in flames off the MAKIN ISLAND's starboard bow.

From 6 to 17 January, the ship played its role as a support carrier from its operating area forty miles off Lingayen Gulf. During this period, the majority of the enemy attacks were directed against the bombardment ships at the beach. But on the seventh, in an early morning attack, two enemy planes were fired upon by this ship with negative results. At noon on the same day, a single enemy plane was driven away from the formation by the escorting destroyers.

Sugar Day -- the day on which the troops went ashore was marked by the beginning of the strong northeasterly monsoonal winds which continued to blow at 25-30 knots until the end of the operation. Continuous heavy seas and swells, day and night, resulted in hazardous landing and fueling conditions. Frequent minor landing crashes were unavoidable because of the pitching and rolling decks. Excellent handling by pilots, deck crews and the Landing Signal Officer prevented any serious accidents. Fueling from tankers was difficult and frequently delayed because of the condition of the sea.

At 0900 on the 13th of January, the U.S.S. SALAMAUA (CVE-96), steaming 2,500 yards off the MAKIN ISLAND's port beam, was struck by a suicide diver who approached the formation without being picked up by radar. It had apparently come in low over the water and had climbed to 2,000 feet immediately before making the dive. The MAKIN ISLAND went to General Quarters at once and ten minutes later the lookouts spotted a Hamp coming in on the port side. It flew past the fantail and at a distance of 3,200 yards was shot down by the 5" gun crew, the only kill for the ship's gunners.

On 17 January, the MAKIN ISLAND became the Flagship of Task Group 77.14, formed for the withdrawal from the Lingayen area. Eight CVEs and screen comprised the group, with Rear Admiral DURGIN in command. The ship left the following day and retraced its path through the inland seas, which were, this time, free from enemy interference. The formation cruised into Leyte Gulf and 0800 on 20 January to complete the operation, and immediately headed for Ulithi.

At the cost of a single pilot killed the MAKIN ISLAND with VC-84 went through the three week operation carrying out its mission of support.

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Incidental to the support work the squadron destroyed ten enemy planes, the ship, one. Sixteen of our own planes were lost, operationally and from enemy A/A fire. Jap pilots damaged several, but were unable to shoot down any planes, nor did they injure any flying personnel. There was no battle damage to the ship.

All ordnance equipment on board performed very satisfactorily; this included shipboard and airplane gear. Officers directing gun crews performed well in keeping their gunners alert in their own sectors. With action at times flaring on all sides of the ship, the gunners tended to rubberneck at a time when concentration was necessary. This tendency was immediately stopped. The control of the officers and the discipline of the men reflected the emphasis which had been placed upon daily drills, recognition, tracing range estimations, loading and talker procedure.

Other departments of the ship, through their department heads expressed satisfaction in the work of their men and, in general, the equipment. However, in the air department, continuous air operations increased the burden, lack of sufficient personnel making it impossible for the crews to work at maximum efficiency. The high number of minor plane accidents, due to enemy action and hazardous flight deck conditions, taxed the repair crews of the hangar deck to the limit. The high daily plane availability is a credit to the hard work of these men.

The interest and morale of the crew were kept high by frequent announcements of the progress of the battle and an evening summary of the day's news. Information lectures had preceded the operation and thereby the crew felt acquainted with the background, geography and people of the Philippines. The ship demonstrated that if maximum cooperation is desired, it is vital that the men have a personal interest in the ship. Such an interest was fostered aboard the MAKIN ISLAND and paid off handsomely in results.

And so, on 20 January, the highly successful operation passed into the stage of ground and land-based air action, and the CVE support phase was over. The MAKIN ISLAND had carried out her orders and had received a "well done".

Because of the rapid advance of the American Forces in the Pacific, the combat escort carriers were allowed but eighteen days in which to make preparations for the Iwo Jima operation. Already trained to a fine point of efficiency, the MAKIN ISLAND found the short period ample since her problem of preparation resolved itself into logistics and minor repairs. The Japanese were about to be struck a quick return blow while they were still reeling from the Philippines campaign. Subsequent events proved the wisdom of this move but the short preparation period taxed the crew, mentally and physically, due to their inability to find relaxation while priming the ship.

To ready the crew for their next task, intelligence lectures covering the purpose of the attack and the ship's part in the general strategy were given at the earliest moment. In no small measure the policy of keeping all hands informed contributed to morale and minimized dissatisfaction. Aware of their responsibilities, and tested in battle, the MAKIN ISLAND set sail for Iwo Jima on the tenth day of February.

The objective of this large amphibious operation was the seizure of Iwo Jima in the Kazan (Volcano) Group of the Nanpo Shoto Islands. The capture of the heavily defended island, strategically situated midway between the Marianas and the Japanese homeland, represented a long step towards the isolation and destruction of the enemy in his home waters and islands. From the tactical standpoint, the prime advantage to be gained from the operation was the utilization of Iwo's air facilities to provide fighter cover for our heavy bombing attacks on the Empire.

Again sailing as the flagship of Rear Admiral Calvin T. DURGIN and now in the Fifth Fleet, the MAKIN ISLAND as Task Unit 52.2.2, led the U.S.S. SARATOGA, U.S.S. ALASKA, eleven CVEs and 18 DDs and DEs in support of the Marine amphibious landings.

As at Lingayen Gulf, the principle mission of the ship was to cover formations enroute to the objective and to support all operations in the area until such a time as Iwo Jima was secure with land based planes able to use its airfields. Unlike the gauntlet running inland Philippine Seas, the path to Iwo was open sea and after a day at Saipan where the task force rehearsed the battle plan the group sailed to the Iwo operating area without contacting the enemy.

With the only casualty a wounded aircrewman, the ship completed its month of operating in a manner which brought repeated praise from those who were in a position to judge -- the Marine troops which were being covered by the CVE planes. No praise more worthwhile has been received by the MAKIN ISLAND than the words of congratulation given by the Marine commanders who paused in the bloody battle to commend the air-coordinators of VC-84 and in general the close support given the badly mauled ground troops. Because of the nature of the terrain and its defenses, it was difficult to assess in detail the damage inflicted on the enemy by our planes, but the ground and air spotters repeatedly called for rocket and strafing runs a few yards ahead of our front line troops. Carrier support reached its maximum point of efficiency in this operation.

Japanese attacks were not as heavy as expected, but on the memorable evening of 21 February a concentrated suicide air attack was made by 50 Jap fighter and torpedo planes. The CVE, BISMARCK SEA, cruising 3,500 yards abeam of the MAKIN ISLAND was struck by a Kamikaze and burst into flames. To personnel on this vessel, it appeared that the BISMARCK SEA had been struck either in the five-inch gun sponson, on the fantail, or in the pyrotechnic locker. The initial explosion

immediately the entire after portion of the vessel was in flames and a series of short, sharp explosions, suggestive of ready ammunition, were heard. Fire appeared to spread rapidly to the hangar and flight decks aft, while the planes spotted topside went up, feeding the conflagration. An hour later, the BISMARCK SEA rolled over and sank.

During this action, the SARATOGA, on the horizon, was struck by several suiciders, a torpedo, and a bomb. She survived with major damage and left the formation under her own power the following day. For about an hour the night air was filled with anti-aircraft fire, and the flaming Jap planes lighted up the sky repeatedly. The anti-aircraft cruiser ALASKA put up such a barrage that she appeared to be in flames herself and this, coupled with the fire from carriers and screen, made a spectacular display of anti-aircraft defense.

In the case of the LUNGA POINT (CVE-94), this defense was especially effective. Cruising 4,000 yards off MAKIN ISLAND's port bow, she was, simultaneously, under attack by four planes. At 1846, in near darkness, suicide runs were made by four torpedo planes, two of which were shot down after launching near-miss torpedoes. A third plane flew a few feet over the flight deck and disappeared into the sea, while the fourth was hit by gunfire and after crashing into the island, skidded across the flight deck into the ocean fifty yards from the ship on the port beam.

To climax the evening, the MAKIN ISLAND brought aboard five F6Fs from the SARATOGA, all successful night landings except the fifth which crashed into the barriers and damaged several planes spotted forward of the island.

Throughout the operation, the ship maintained a high level of plane availability and contributed to the full extent of its means to the successful capture of the island. Over 3,000 sorties were made by VC-84, almost doubling the record made in the Philippines. In addition to reconnaissance, support, anti-submarine patrol and combat air patrol, the MAKIN ISLAND planes did an excellent job spraying the island with Dog Dog Tare. The health of our troops and the absence of flies and other insects prove the effectiveness of this project. Along with the program at the main objective, fighter sweeps were made on Chichi Jima, and Haha Jima where an oiler, a lugger and other small craft, in addition to installations and planes on the ground, were destroyed.

Throughout the operation, interest aboard ship was kept at a high pitch by channeling the running account of the air observers over the ship's loudspeaker system. In that way, a battlefield account of the action was heard throughout the operation. Maps were posted in mess halls, wardroom and other spots on which the daily progress of the troops was lined. This procedure coupled with nightly news resumes by the Executive Officer kept the crew well informed.

Having bettered her Philippine record in operational efficiency the MAKIN ISLAND at 1800 on 8 March took departure from the Iwo Jima operating area and set a southerly course for Ulithi.

The last major operation of the war, the capture of Okinawa, began in March 1945, immediately after the fall of Iwo Jima. With the Japanese reeling, this great offensive measure was timed to prevent them from recovering between campaigns.

For the MAKIN ISLAND, this plan meant a fast recovery from the battle strain of Iwo and rapid preparation for the coming task. In ten days, 11 March to 21 March, the ship readied herself for the assigned mission.

The objective of the amphibious operation, largest in scale undertaken in the Pacific war, was the seizure and control of Okinawa Jima and other key points in the Nansei Shoto chain of islands. Our military leaders knew that the development of naval air and army bases in these islands would isolate completely Formosa and her controlled areas to the south. At the same time, a vital springboard would be made available for still heavier air, surface and submarine attacks on the Empire, as well as for future amphibious operations directed against the Japanese home islands and China.

The MAKIN ISLAND, in Task Unit 52.1.1, again sailed as flagship of Rear Admiral Calvin T. DURGIN, commander Escort Carrier Force.

In the ship's Task Group, 52.1, were 18 CVEs, 16 Destroyers, and 19 Destroyer Escorts. The mission of the MAKIN ISLAND, as well as the other Escort Carriers, was to furnish cover to friendly formations enroute to Okinawa as well as support in all its forms to the forces engaged in the extensive amphibious and ground operations at the objective area. Local and target anti-submarine and combat air patrol, searches, direct support, photographic, observational, artillery spotting, DDT spraying, propaganda leaflet and parachute supply drops were all listed as missions to be performed by the MAKIN ISLAND aircraft. Until such time as our land-based aircraft could be established on bases, still uncaptured, the planes from the CVE Task Group were counted upon to furnish a substantial portion of the air power requisite for the success of this most ambitious amphibious operation.

For 77 days, 69 of which were spent in the waters off Okinawa the MAKIN ISLAND gave direct support to the operation, possibly a record for Escort Carriers. During that time, the Japanese threw the bulk of their remaining air force, estimated at 4,000 planes at our naval vessels in and around Okinawa. One fact was, and is still an item of wonder -- the few attacks made on the Escort Carriers. With the fast carrier force standing between the islands and the Empire, and ample available targets, the bombardment group and picket Destroyers a few miles offshore, it is assumed that the enemy chose those targets of opportunity rather than to search further for the Escort Carriers. In any event, of the scores of ships struck

by bombs, torpedoes and Kamikaze suiciders, but two were Escort Carriers. The U.S.S. SANGAMON which was struck while leaving Kerama Retto, and the U.S.S. NATOMA BAY, hit in the operating area, a few days after relieving the MAKIN ISLAND.

For the ship and squadrons VC-84 and VC-91, the campaign was a long, hard grind. Daily the planes were launched to drop bombs on specifically assigned areas; pin point targets were blasted with five-inch rockets; troops and supplies were strafed. In all, almost 8,000 flying hours, 2,437 sorties, were recorded.

It would be unwise to believe that a campaign of this nature could be conducted without an attendant drop in the morale of the crew. The work carried on smoothly because the men were well trained and experienced, but the monotony of almost continuous air operations for a five month period showed itself conspicuously in the daily routine of the ship by the end of the Okinawa campaign. The crew was definitely tired and each man found it necessary to force himself to keep pace with the schedule. One result of this fatigue was illustrated in the increased number of forced landings because of operational trouble. The aircraft engineering crews were unable to keep up routine check and inspections and still do repair work. A normal work load for a fresh crew becomes burdensome to a crew which has become stale by interrupted rest, long working hours and lack of recreation and relaxation.

When, on the fifth of June 1945, the MAKIN ISLAND put into Apra Harbor, Guam, for a period of repair and availability, the ship had completed not a spectacular campaign, but two and one half months of hard, routine, but nevertheless, important work. It was a difficult period and taxed the mental and physical endurance of all hands. But the ship had accomplished the aims of the mission, and had again carried out her orders.

From 5 June until 11 July, the crew had a period of availability; the men scraped and painted the ship's bottom and repainted the camouflage, this work being done in a floating dry dock. While the task of repair, painting and loading of supplies was being accomplished, VC-91 was sent to a rest camp for rehabilitation, and during the month all ship's officers and men enjoyed a two-day stay at this camp.

The month was marked by a major change in personnel. On 16 June, Captain Ira E. HOBBS relieved Captain W. B. WHALEY as the Commanding Officer. On the 27th, VC-41 relieved VC-91. And in addition to these changes, there were many individual transfers and replacements in ship's company and in the staff of ComEsCarPac.

The entire period was spent at anchor except for two day in July when the ship put to sea in the Guam operating area to calibrate instruments, exercise at general drills and gunnery, and to train the new squadron.

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The next month, 11 July to 13 August, the MAKIN ISLAND undertook her last war-time mission, a minor task compared with the previous operations, but an important mission, nevertheless, as it was an integral step in the proceedings that led the way to Japanese capitulation. The objectives of the Task Group (32.1, later 95.8) of which the MAKIN ISLAND was flagship for ComEsCarPac, commanding officer of the air support group, were fourfold: 1. to cover a mine sweeping operation in the East China Sea; 2. to cut off any or all Japanese shipping or planes attempting to travel between the homeland and the continent; 3. to cover a fast cruiser strike group which was hitting targets of opportunity along the China Coast; 4. to launch air strikes against shipping in the Shanghai Area. During the completion of the later phase, several of the MAKIN ISLAND planes were struck by anti-aircraft fire and the VC-41 squadron Commander, Lt. G. V. KNUDSEN, was seen to bail out over enemy territory after losing control of his plane which had been hit. Because of the intense fire, the other planes in the strike group were unable to remain in the immediate area to ascertain the result of the parachute jump. The incident took place to near the coast to make possible rescue by Dumbo planes operating a few miles off shore.

The results of the operation were largely negative, although a few positive objectives were accomplished. On the positive side of the ledger, the principle fact was that the Japanese were deprived of the use of the East China Sea Area. Secondly, it was discovered that enemy shipping was negligible and that they were unable to launch large scale air retaliation strikes. Definite accomplishments were the collection of over 400 mines by the mine-sweep group. These were in addition to the strays destroyed daily in the carrier-battleship support group. A few enemy planes were shot down, snoopers and transports, one being destroyed by VC-41.

Two typhoons affected the ship during the month. The first encountered on the 17th of July and was avoided completely by an evasive course to the southeast of Okinawa. The second approached the ship while in the East China Sea, the MAKIN ISLAND remained in the northwest quadrant of the storm and no damage resulted.

When the ship anchored in Buckner Bay on 13 August, she was greeted by rumors of Japanese surrender. This news was received with great relief by the war-weary crew as the impending invasion of Japan would have again taken the MAKIN ISLAND into range of the Kamikaze suiciders. With her luck already stretched to the limit, perhaps the ship was fortunate not to go through another campaign.

The peace rumors were substantiated on 15 August by a message from the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Ocean Area, Advanced Head-quarters, to wit: "Cease offensive operations against Japanese forces. Continue searches and patrols. Maintain defenses and internal security measures at highest level, and beware of treachery or last moment attacks by enemy forces or individuals." This was the

message for which all hands had been waiting and climaxed the career of the MAKIN ISLAND.

With the end of hostilities, the MAKIN ISLAND drew a varied program of assignments, many of which were destined to be interrupted by the needs of the moment, or by the weather. The weather interference came in the form of a large number of typhoons which seemingly followed the ship wherever she sailed.

ComEsCarPac left the ship and proceeded to Saipan on the 2nd of August. This was a temporary move, for the MAKIN ISLAND never completed the proposed task of convoying tankers to Japanese waters to fuel the Third Fleet. At Ulithi the ship met the assembled tankers but after shepherding them for two days, was relieved and proceeded to Saipan where Admiral DURGIN and staff returned aboard. The next day the ship sailed for Okinawa with news reports indicating that she was to be included in the occupation fleet.

The trip to Okinawa was eventful in that the ship traveled in the after quadrant of a typhoon. Seas were rough, but except for a buckled clipping room deck, no damage was sustained.

At Okinawa, the ship learned that she was not in the occupation fleet - at least, not in the group which was hurrying to Tokyo Bay to receive the Japanese formal surrender. Instead, the MAKIN ISLAND remained at anchor in Buckner Bay for two weeks, a period long enough to come under the effects of another typhoon. But this time the storm was destined to strike the China coast and the effects in the Okinawa harbor were negligible.

From the 9th of September until the end of the month, the MAKIN ISLAND operated near, or anchored in Wakanoura Wan, along the southern coast of Honshu, the Japanese mainland. VC-41 covered the evacuation of Allied Prisoners of War and later the army landings in the Wakayama area. A good percentage of the officers and crew put foot on the once sacred soil of the enemy during this time.

The Japanese on the beach of Wakanoura Wan were not the type which the crew had expected to see, not the type they had fought so bitterly for so long. From a fanatical, to-the-death, Kamikaze nation, they were transformed overnight into a meek, cooperative-to-a-fault, pitiful people. With luxuries unheard of for years, with a war economy that strained their food supplies and resources, with their homes and industry bombed to rubble, they became a completely defeated, demoralized society. For a few cigarettes or a piece of candy they were willing to trade anything they had, which was meager to say the least. It was a strange conclusion to a savagely fought war.

On the night of 17 September, the MAKIN ISLAND engaged a typhoon in a hand to hand struggle and, in line with her lucky career, emerged undamaged. The

center of the storm passed less than one hundred miles to the northwest and for several hours during the night the 'divine winds' blew at sixty to eighty knots, gusting to an estimated one hundred knots, and the ship rolled to a record thirty-seven degrees. It was a wild unforgettable night, and gave credence to the legend of Kublai Khan. But the MAKIN ISLAND was made of sterner stuff than the barges of the Mongol leader, and the next day found her anchored as before in Wakanoura Wan.

On the first of October, orders were received to proceed to Tokyo Bay, but in keeping with the constantly interrupted schedule, the ship never arrived at the Japanese Mecca. It would have been appropriate to end her history and the war at Tokyo, but although this was not the case, the fact remains that the wake of the MAKIN ISLAND, begun in Astoria, Oregon when her propellers first churned water, led, in a few long months, right to the heart of the enemy homeland.

C-O-N-C-L-U-S-I-O-N

Since it is impossible to foresee the size and component ships of the post-war navy, the future history of the MAKIN ISLAND is not determinable. But no matter how far she sails, or what her missions will be, her war record stands as irrefutable evidence of her worth.

From an impersonal mass of steel, the ship developed into an almost human entity, or at least she housed a social organization, a society brought together by the demands of war to fulfill a single purpose, the defeat of the Japanese.

Through an endless stream of important and minor missions and tasks; convoy, transport, reconnaissance, strikes, anti-submarine patrol, combat air patrol, squadron training, DDT spraying, parachute supply to isolated troops, artillery spotting, propaganda leaflet distribution, searches, observation, the ship and her squadrons gave their best efforts, contributing the utmost to each task. And throughout, the outstanding trait was the adaptability to changing demands and circumstances. This adaptability keynoted the entire wareffort of the United States, and the history of the MAKIN ISLAND is a specific instance of a small unit built for anti-submarine warfare, changing into a support carrier and contributing to the total effort a larger share than was intended.

Interesting as material statistics are, the undeterminable human element is more engaging. In seventeen months, the ship traveled 100,000 miles and used two and one half million gallons of aviation gasoline, seven and one half million gallons of fuel oil, and her shafts revolved forty-eight million times. Her guns and planes destroyed twenty-one Japanese planes, many small ships, and an undetermined number of enemy installations on a score of islands. She won five battle stars and the admiration of her Force and Fleet Commanders. Yet her history is more than a

history of numbers, it is a record of a group of men working together, successfully completing a big job.

She did this job well and was not content to do it just passably because of the spirit and morale of the crew. Morale is made of little things like basketball and beer and the ship's dog Chico, and appreciative officers, gedunks and movies, and release of news. The more important elements such as healthy food, good equipment and sensible battle plans, are basic and are accepted by the men as such.

The MAKIN ISLAND fought to the limit and never failed to complete a mission or to carry out an order.



EPILOGUE

After her war service, as so excellently chronicled by Lt. Keith, USS MAKIN ISLAND returned to the States, via Pearl Harbor to NAS Alameda where she disembarked her planes. She proceeded to the Mare Island Naval Base at Vallejo, California arriving on 5 November. Although the victory parades were long over, the sight of the Golden Gate Bridge and the mainland of the United States finally brought home to her veteran crew the full realization that they had survived their long hazardous service in the Pacific Theater of Operations.

Many of her original crew were transferred off with orders to proceed to naval installations near their homes where they were ultimately discharged from the Naval Service.

Replacements came aboard to fill out her compliment. USS MAKIN ISLAND was called upon to make one more Pacific cruise. This cruise again demanded of her to be flexible in carrying out her assignments. As millions of servicemen of all branches of the services were justifiably anxious to return to the States from their overseas assignments, the sea lift capacity of the United States was seriously overtaxed. Therefore, USS MAKIN ISLAND and many of her sister ships were called upon to serve as troop transports. This massive sea lift was code named "OPERATION MAGIC CARPET".

Her hangar deck was outfitted to provide sleeping accommodations for hundreds of men. Multi-level bunks were welded in place. All other departments were ordered to be prepared to service these men while they would be aboard.

USS MAKIN ISLAND left Mare Island sometime around the 20th of November 1945 expecting her destination to be Subic Bay in the Philippines. She carried with her replacement personnel whom she disembarked at Pearl Harbor. Soon after she got under way again, it was learned that her destination was changed to Shanghai, China.

She arrived in Shanghai on the 7th of December 1945 and docked at the China Merchant's Wharf. While the embarking of Army personnel proceeded, most of her crew had the chance to experience a liberty period in the teeming city of Shanghai. They took in the sights and what sights they were. The New Garden Bridge being refurbished by hundreds of workers chipping paint with ballpeen hammers, coolies loading and carrying bags of rice of staggering dimensions and weights, riding in

rickshaws and visiting places like the Seventh Heaven restaurant and the Enlisted Men's Club on Bubbling Well Road.

Many of the men took this opportunity to buy beautiful kimonos and have their peacoats and the inside of their jumper cuffs lined with the traditional Chinese Dragon embroideries.

Before USS MAKIN ISLAND put to sea again on the 10th of December, many of the crew had come to understand something of the lure of the Orient and had a feeling of why generations of sailors had been attracted to being stationed in the Far East.

Again, as she had many times before, USS MAKIN ISLAND experienced high seas and foul weather on her trip home. This was very discomfoting to most if not all of her troop passengers. As much as they wished to get home, many of them thought they were not going to make it and some of them, at the time, really didn't care if they did. All were cheered and grateful when they were finally delivered home safely to Seattle on 30 December.

USS MAKIN ISLAND berthed at the Bremerton Navy Yard, Washington. Again, many of her long service crewmen left the ship for discharge and/or reassignment. During the period from January through April 1946 she made her final speed runs down Puget Sound and was prepared for decommissioning.

USS MAKIN ISLAND decommissioned 19 April 1946 at Puget Sound, was stricken from the Navy list 11 July, and sold 1 January 1947.

USS MAKIN ISLAND received five battle stars and the Navy Unit Commendation for her World War II service.

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Editor's note:

Early in the War History reference was made as to whether the ship would be adjudged as being mediocre or outstanding.

In the War History, there is overwhelming evidence, that USS MAKIN ISLAND fought in the same engagements, in the same formations, in the same waters, at the same time and against the same enemy as many of her sister ships which suffered great damage and even total loss with heavy casualties to their crews.

USS MAKIN ISLAND, in compliance with her orders, placed herself and her crew in *HARMS WAY* both in the face of the enemy and nature's forces. She and her crew including her attached squadrons performed according to the highest

traditions of the Naval Service, survived unscathed and delivered her ship's compliment home safely.

For this, the officers and men of USS MAKIN ISLAND as well as their families, will always be grateful to this outstanding ship and say once more "Well Done, MAKIN ISLAND, Well Done".

Gus Youngkrist
Pompano Beach, FL.
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