

## CREWS LETTER

(Note: The following informal letter summary of the activities of this ship may be included, in whole or in part, in your letters home. It is not an official Navy release but it is a factual account verified by your commanding officer and it may be published in hometown newspapers or in plant, office, or school papers.

Dear Folks:

Now that the war is over, I can tell you something of my part in it during my tour of duty on the U.S.S. BUCYRUS VICTORY (AK-234).

This ship has been commended by the Commander Amphibious Group Seven for the important role it played in the Okinawa Operation. We were up there twice, once at the very beginning of the assault, and again when the suicidal resistance of the Japanese was at its height. We carried thousands of tons of ammunition to the anchorage in Kerama Retto, which is a small group of islands just west of Okinawa, and issued it to battleships, cruisers and destroyers. That cargo worried us a little ( to put it mildly ) during the 73 times we were at general quarters and Japanese Kamikaze planes were in the sky somewhere above us.

From the very beginning our ship was designated an ammunition cargo ship. She and nine sister merchant ships were taken over from the U, S. Maritime Commission for the specific purposes of carrying ammunition to the fleet and issuing it to the fighting ships thereof. However, we did carry one load of general, non-explosive cargo. After commissioning at Richmond, California, and a brief shakedown at San Pedro, California, the ship was loaded at Port Hueneme with a general cargo which we took to Pearl Harbor and discharged there. Then we returned to San Francisco Bay and proceeded to Port Chicago, for our proper cargo, ammunition.

It was February 18th, 1945, when we left Port Chicago and steamed through the Golden Gate, bound for the forward areas. We passed close by Oahu, the Hawaiian Island on which Pearl Harbor and Honolulu are located, and continued on to the west and slightly southward. On February 28th, we crossed the International Date Line and four days later, came to anchor at Eniwetok, in the Marshall Islands. We paused there for only a day, however, and once again steamed westward. On March 8th we reached our destination, Ulithi in the Western Carolines.

At Ulithi, we found ourselves in company with one of the greatest fleets ever assembled and we began at once to perform our function of rearming the combatant units. A few evenings after our arrival we had our first taste of the frantic enemy's suicidal air attacks. Three Kamikaze planes made death dives on the anchorage, but only one of them did any real damage. That one landed on the stern of a carrier not far from us, and caused a terrible fire which endangered every ship in the vicinity. Our situation was especially grave because of our explosive cargo and the fact that our holds were open. We had to get underway in the darkness and attempt to move out of harm's reach. Fortunately the fire on the carrier was put under control before any other ship's were effected.

We had transferred a good part of our load to battleships, cruisers and other ammunition ships and were beginning to hope we might soon be returning to the States. But we began reloading right there and soon we were making ready to sail for Okinawa to play a part in the great operation that was planned for its capture, We left Ulithi March 24th and steamed northward to join logistics task group which was steaming about, in an area within a day's journey of the selected landing beaches.

The initial landings were made Easter Sunday, April 1<sup>st</sup> and two days later our ship was at anchor in Kerama Rotto.

We worked hard at Kerama Retto, loading powder and projectiles on

the battleships and cruisers which were bombarding the Japanese positions and on the destroyers from the radar picket stations which were to warn of enemy air attacks and fight them off. There were many alerts and we had to stop work frequently and were frequently roused from hard-earned sleep to man our battle stations. One day some Kimikaze planes got in and we saw a ship hit and several Jap planes shot down. And twice at night we saw the anchorage filled with the red tracers of our ship's anti-aircraft fire which meant that raiders were in the immediate area.

After seven days and nights of this we were glad to get underway and out of that all too interesting place. We rejoined the task group and, after several days with it, steamed away for Ulithi. There we were again reloaded and made ready for a second visit to Kerama Retto. This time we sailed directly to the anchorage, carrying in addition to our bombardment ammunition, a deck load of smoke pots which were in great demand at Okinawa for protection against the stepped-up suicide attacks. We stayed fourteen days this time, from 3 May to 17 May, and again saw a ship hit and some Kamikaze planes shot down. One of these was threateningly close to us. We opened fire on it with our own guns and it was finally splashed by a destroyer which had been tied up to our side loading the very ammunition with which it blasted the plane.

The air attacks were, if anything, more frequent than they had been on our first visit and we spent many weary, worrisome hours at general quarters. Never the less, we transferred great quantities of vitally necessary ammunition to the fighting ships engaged in the bitter struggle for Okinawa. The importance of our part in that struggle was emphasized in the letter of commendation the Commanding Officer later received from the Senior Officer Present Afloat at Kerama Retto, Commander Amphibious Group Seven.

We returned once more to Ulithi and then moved on to Leyte in the Philippines. We were at Leyte reloading ammunition for the next projected assault on Japan when news came of the Japanese desire to

surrender. Excitement swept the harbor and a brilliant display of red, white and green pyrotechnics broke out from all the ships present. We were as excited as any of them. Excited and Happy, Happy that this terrible war was ending, and happy that we would not have to sail again into a combat area with a load of ammunition.

I hope to be home again in a reasonably short time, and home to stay. I shall fill in many details then. In the meanwhile, I hope this brief recital of my travels and activities, which have so long been hidden by censorship, will satisfy your natural desire to know what I have been up to all these months.