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U. S. S. TOWNER (AKA-77)
FLEET POST OFFICE
San Francisco, Cal.

CONFIDENTIAL

20 September 1945

From: Commanding Officer.
To : The Secretary of the Navy.
Via : Commander, Administrative Command, Amphibious Forces,
U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Subject: Ship's History.

Reference: (a) ALPAC 202-1945.

Enclosures: (A) TOWNER History Condensed.
(B) TOWNER History Complete.

1. In compliance with reference there is forwarded herewith a condensed factual history of the U.S.S. TOWNER from date of commissioning to and including 18 September 1945.

2. There is also forwarded an amplified history, covering the same period, which has been prepared for use by this ship in connection with a proposed "Yearbook". This may be of greater interest for publicity purposes.


R. P. ERDMAN

Copy to: CinCPacPearl

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TOWNER HISTORY

The TOWNER hull was built in the shipyards of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company at Wilmington, North Carolina during late 1943 and early 1944. She is one of approximately twenty vessels of similar characteristics converted by the Navy from the Maritime Commission C-2 hull into cargo assault transports of the Classification AKA. Conversion was accomplished at the Erie Basin Brooklyn Yard of the Todd Shipbuilding Corporation.

The commissioning crew was formed at the Naval Training Station, Newport, Rhode Island. Approximately thirty percent of the crew were already veterans of this war, especially in the amphibious forces.

The commanding officer originally assigned was unable to continue because of illness. Five weeks before commissioning Commander Robert P. Erdman, USN(Retired) arrived to take over duties as prospective commanding officer. He had just returned from duty in the Soviet Union where he was senior member of a mine warfare mission to the USSR. The original roster of officers follows:

Commander Robert P. Erdman, 55989, USN(Ret)
Lieutenant Joseph G. Gershman, 183913, MC-V(S), USNR
Lieutenant John E. Morris, 91503, DM, USNR
Lieutenant Walter Winger, 69600, DM, USNR
Lieutenant Ezra M. Stiles, 199604, C-V(S), USNR
Lieutenant James M. Kerndt, 120137, E-V(G), USNR
Lieutenant (jg) Keller P. Parker, 216283, D-V(S), USNR
Lieutenant (jg) Edmund J. Daly, 187761, E-V(G), USNR
Lieutenant (jg) Glenn R. Allen, 187184, D-V(G), USNR
Lieutenant (jg) Michael P. Balwan, 225251, D-V(G), USNR
Lieutenant (jg) Buford B. Harding, 265992, D-V(G), USNR
Lieutenant (jg) Norman E. Auerbach, 225308, SC-V(G), USNR
Ensign Luke A. Yerkovich, 349245, D-V(S), USNR
Ensign George P. Mueller, 312512, E-V(RS), USNR
Ensign John Holland Crabb, 339319, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign John S. Lockman, 164619, DM, USNR
Ensign Ernest M. Bowman, jr., 181614, IM, USNR
Ensign Richard A. Curtis, 359401, E-V(G), USNR
Ensign John A. Brownlee, jr., 370895, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign John Marchese, 232399, DM, USNR
Ensign Irwin B. Jackson, 164960, DM(L), USNR
Ensign Moran M. Pope, 330633, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign Dale E. Wallace, 330837, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign Tommy Gunn, 332740, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign William W. Deissler, 339361, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign Lawrence H. Meyers, 357730, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign Charles E. Pitte, jr., 357824, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign Paul P. Konyha, 357598, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign George F. Thomas, 358020, D-V(G), USNR
Ensign Forest G. Witsman, 297655, D-V(S), USNR
Ensign Thomas F. McGuire, 360843, D-V(G), USNR

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Ensign Clifford T. Ellingson, 358734, D-V(G), USNR
Chief Carpenter George R. Crowder, 199480, USN
Chief Electrician William O. Nolen, 294070, USN
Boatswain David S. Maupin, 356277, USN
Pay Clerk Walter Kiczek, 397048, SC-V(G), USNR
Machinist Raymond Stafford, 388899, USN

On the icy-cold morning of 1 December the ship was commissioned by Captain H. V. McKittrick, USN, Captain of the Navy Yard Brooklyn. The stars and stripes and the commission pennant were hoisted and the commanding officer set the watch. Captain of the Chaplain Corps, Maurice Witherspoon, blessed the ship. Later in the day the U.S.S. TOWNER was moved to the Naval Supply Depot at Thirty-third Street Pier in Brooklyn where initial equipment, supplies, and spare parts were loaded. 3 December moved to Bayonne for deperming. 4 December moved to Gravesend Bay to load ammunition. 5 December proceeded with manufacturers' representatives, naval inspectors, and observers from pre-commissioning details of other AKA's through the East River to Long Island Sound for preliminary shakedown, operating off Oyster Bay, Long Island. 8 December returned to Naval Supply Depot, Brooklyn to complete loading stores. 12 December reported for duty to Commander in Chief and for shakedown to Commander, Amphibious Training Command, Atlantic Fleet -- proceeded to Hampton Roads. 14-23 December shakedown in Chesapeake Bay. 23-27 December post shakedown availability Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia. 27 December returned to Bayonne, New Jersey to Naval Supply Depot to load first cargo, consisting of anti-submarine nets and floats and general cargo for Pearl Harbor. 4 January 1945 in company with USCG SHELIAK sailed for Pearl Harbor via the Panama Canal. Arrived Balboa 10 January and sailed the following day. 11 January reported to Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet for duty with Amphibious Forces Pacific Fleet. 25 January arrived Pearl Harbor. Unloaded and cleaned boilers. Loaded at Honolulu 7 February. 9 February departed independently for Noumea, New Caledonia carrying amphibious tractors and miscellaneous cargo and personnel. Arrived Noumea 19 February. Made shuttle trips to Uarai Bay carrying "amph-tracks" for the 81st (Wildcat) Division. March and April upkeep and training based on Noumea, New Caledonia under Commander Service Force, South Pacific awaiting arrival of the ELEVENTH Transport Squadron to whom we had reported for duty 23 February. Loaded personnel and elements of 710th Tank Battalion of the 81st Infantry Division as a unit of Transport Division THIRTY-THREE for the invasion of Okinawa. This Division was in "Area Reserve" and was not required. Accordingly, on 3 May the TOWNER sailed with its squadron for Leyte via Manus, Admiralty Islands. 16 May arrived off Dulog, Leyte Gulf and disembarked troops and cargo. 25 May reported for duty to Commander SEVENTH Fleet. 27 May sailed independently to Hollandia, New Guinea, thence to Milne Bay to load deck cargo of boats, thence to Manus to off-load boats. 5 June arrived Lae, New Guinea and loaded elements of 35th and 247th General Base Hospitals for transportation to Manila. 9 June sailed via Hollandia arriving Manila 16 June. 27 June departed Manila for New Guinea via Leyte and Manus for logistics. 4 July assisted in celebration of Independence Day at Manus in company with British Task Force which was later to join Admiral Halsey and the THIRD Fleet for bombardment of Japanese home islands. 6 July arrived Lae and loaded elements of the 3529th Quartermaster Trucking Company and the 360th Air Service Group. 11 July proceeded to Manila via Hollandia arriving 17 July. Unloaded and departed 25 July for Biak Island via Leyte for logistics. Arrived 2 August. 4 August departed for Manila via Hollandia where deck cargo of boats was loaded. 10 August arrived Manila.

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13 August reported for duty to Commander Service Force SEVENTH Fleet, later to be called Service Squadron SEVEN. Sailed for Zamboanga, arriving 15 August, thence to Isabela on Basilan Island where the 118th Construction Battalion was loaded. 21 August departed for Subic Bay arriving 22 August. 26 August reported to Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet for duty in THIRD Amphibious Force and proceeded to Cebu to join Transport Division THIRTY-FIVE for duty lifting personnel and equipment of the Americal Division to Tokyo Bay area. 8 September arrived Yokohama. 10 September delayed by boiler repairs. Reported for temporary duty with Transport Division FIFTY-ONE. 12 August left Yokohama for Manila, P.I. 18 August arrived Manila, P.I.

Since commissioning on 1 December 1944 the TOWNER has steamed (up to 1 September) a total of 31,643 miles. The screws have turned over in covering this distance a total of 10,296,544 times. Note that we do not count the revolutions of the screw in warming up. Our monthly score in miles follows:

December 1944	1,467
January 1945	6,964
February	3,856
March	188
April	466
May	5,331
June	4,611
July	4,933
August	3,827

To accomplish this travel 1,329,448 gallons of bunker fuel were burned at an average of 29 gallons per mile. Our average speed over this extensive travel was 14.1 knots.

RPE:cfs

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER, ADMINISTRATIVE COMMAND,
AMPHIBIOUS FORCES, U. S. PACIFIC FLEET

FLEET POST OFFICE
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

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Serial:

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SEP 28 1945

FIRST ENDORSEMENT to
CO U.S.S. TOWNER (AKA-77)
Conf. Ltr. AKA77/AL2-1,
Serial 026, dated 20 Sept. 1945.

From: Commander Administrative Command, Amphibious Forces,
U. S. Pacific Fleet.

To: The Secretary of The Navy.

Subject: U.S.S. TOWNER (AKA-77), Ship's History - forwarding
of.

1. Forwarded.

Copy to:
CincpacPearl.

H. W. TURNEY,
Chief of Staff



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then 16E2

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TOWNER HISTORY

BIRTH OF A SHIP

The hull of the TOWNER was built in the shipyards of the North Carolina Shipbuilding Company at Wilmington, North Carolina during late 1943 and the early part of 1944. She was one of some twenty-odd vessels of similar characteristics, classed by the Maritime Commission as C-2, and taken over by the Navy for conversion into assault cargo transports. She was towed to the Erie Basin in Brooklyn, New York where the Todd Shipbuilding Corporation proceeded with the conversion and fitting-out. This was a period in the birth of the TOWNER that was filled with frustration and delay until the Navy Department assigned highest priority to her completion. Then things began to hum. In order to speed to completion this complicated ship it was only natural that some of the work would be slipshod and incomplete. The weather during the last few weeks was not much help. There were rain, sleet, snow, and high winds. By tremendous effort the time previously set -- 1 December -- was met. However, this cannot be considered an entirely accurate statement, for during the first week after commissioning large gangs of yard workmen still labored to complete the ship's equipment and to make her run properly. The decks were painted with swabs -- and that is no idle statement. Of course, a large amount of this work had to be done over later by the ship's crew, but that is another story.

BIRTH OF A CREW

From midshipmen's schools, from boot camps, from sea duty in every theatre of war, from shore bases, from advanced training schools, from all over the world there converged, during the summer and fall of 1944, at Coddington Point, Newport, Rhode Island and at the Erie Basin Shipbuilding Yards at Brooklyn, New York, a group of officers and men known as the "TOWNER DETAIL". A nebulous gathering, at best, this heterogenous group had one thing in common -- their ship.

They did not lack as individuals a brilliant and worthy experience. Many had been tested over many months, and in some cases years of experience in the Navy, on sea duty, in naval campaigns, and on foreign shores. Witness this notable and distinctive list.

Beginning with the Captain, who, after many active years in the Regular Navy covering every possible kind of naval duty, was called from Soviet Russia where he had been senior member of a mine warfare mission to our gallant allies. Lieutenant Morris had just returned from the invasion of Southern France, having served as first lieutenant on the AKA ANDROMEDA, to become our genial and sufficiently hard boiled Executive Officer.

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In the various departments the abundance of experience is imposing. We find Lieutenant Winger, our first lieutenant, an experienced seaman trained at the New York Merchant Marine Academy with years of duty as an officer in the Grace Lines and also an instructor for a time at the Maine Maritime Academy. His assistants, Lieutenant Allen and Lieutenant (junior grade) Harding were flown to join the "TOWNER DETAIL" fresh from the campaigns of Sicily and Salerno after months of duty on the APA ELIZABETH C. STANTON. Chief Carpenter Crowder was their shipmate and had acquired through prior years competent skills that, when applied to the TOWNER, fashioned her into a more useful and livable ship.

Of the men who are often referred to as the backbone of the Navy, we find Chief Petty Officers Reinhardt, Sutton, and Squires whose work helped carry the Navy through all the oceans in every class of ship. Boatswain's mate Balkenhol has the distinction of being a survivor of the ill-fated OKLAHOMA whose naval service was abruptly terminated on December 7, 1941 by a Japanese bomb at Pearl Harbor.

The C&R division received Kemble and Karnes from duty in Londonderry Ireland, while Diggs and Harre were uprooted from duty in the Canal Zone.

Of the engineers Lieutenant Kerndt was recalled from two years in the Southwest Pacific area, principally Noumea, New Caledonia, from duty on a repair ship. There he accumulated the "know-how" which has contributed largely to the efficient operation of the engineering plant. His first assistant, Lieutenant Daly, was a veteran of the campaigns of Sicily and Salerno where he survived the heat of the engines of the APA STANTON. Ensign Bowman received his experience and training in the Merchant Service on Liberty ships plying the Mediterranean. Machinist Morgan had as a background duty on the light cruiser WILKES-BARRE and service aboard the mysterious "Q" ships, and relieved our former shipmate Stafford who was detached while we were in Noumea awaiting the Okinawa operation.

The enlisted personnel of the black gang are an equally impressive group of experienced men. Hackett was recalled from pre-commissioning duties of the battleship NEW JERSEY after many months duty on other battleships and destroyers in the Mediterranean. Chief Machinist's Mate Malby and Machinist's Mate Watson came to the TOWNER from Destroyer Escort service in the North Atlantic. Miller came from the aircraft carrier ENTERPRISE. Mendonsa perfected his technical abilities on board the cruiser NASHVILLE. Grabowski came from Panama.

The communications and navigation departments also were born around a capable core of men. We have Lieutenant Stiles who unsnarled the communications complexities on board the ANDROMEDA during the invasion of Sicily and Salerno. The navigator, Lieutenant (junior grade) Balwan spent a glowing portion of his "very-junior-officer" days as assistant navigator on a navy tanker operating with destroyer task forces escorting convoys through submarine infested waters of the Atlantic and Mediterranean. The enlisted men claim the more glowing glories of distinguished service. Chief Quartermaster McDaniel, after seventeen years of continuous sea duty, was rushed to the TOWNER from a salvage ship which participated in all the naval engagements of the Mediterranean. Chief Radioman Chaffin survived every engagement on the "Road to Tokyo" on board the scrappy destroyer BAGLEY. APD's, cruisers, airplane tenders, PC boats,

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all lost personnel which they could ill afford when Fawcett, Allman, Logan, and Gentile were summoned for the TOWNER. Signalman Clemmer came from the cruiser PORTLAND.

Lieutenant Bates received his experience in forming expert anti-aircraft gunnery crews in over two years as an instructor on the PADUCAH steaming in the placid waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Ensign Marchese stood the test of fire when he was bombed in a North African port and lost his ship. The Armed Guard Service was the school of experience from which matriculated Heckman, Vitkevich, Price, Hanson, Trail, Morris, and Jones. The lessons learned in that individual, and sometimes very hazardous duty, undoubtedly played a large part in giving us the smoothly-functioning, straight-shooting guns which have enabled our crews to puncture in unending succession the targets against which they were used.

Our yeomen did not miss the call to sea service because they, too, were serving with various units of the Fleet when ordered to report to the TOWNER. Chief Yeoman Smith was riding a PYC; Soltis a tanker; Vargas a PC; and Charnega was a gunner in an Armed Guard crew.

To further examine the "TOWNER DETAIL" which we say is rather distinctive, tried and efficient, we find rich experience acquired from years of practice and study crystalized in the person of the medical officer, Dr. Joseph G. Gershman, who was pressed into the naval service at the beginning of the war. His conscientious efforts and enthusiastic energy, assisted by Chief Pharmacist's Mate Snyder and Pharmacist's Mate Cheshire form a medical department superior to any to be found in any sister ship. Both Snyder and Cheshire had served in the Fleet. The former from an SC and the latter from the cruiser TUSCALOOSA.

Not all of the "TOWNER DETAIL" was gathered at Newport. Some of those already named proceeded to Brooklyn where they joined with others with technical skills necessary to supervise the fitting out of the ship. Not by any means the least important was the supply department. They say an army moves on its stomach. It would be more truthful to observe that supply is the basis upon which any military organization is built. The TOWNER has made a superlative reputation for the food served and the equipment provided by its supply department. This is due to Lieutenant (junior grade) Norman Auerbach who had an experienced background of training in the Navy Supply Corps School at Harvard, plus sea duty aboard a transport in the Atlantic and shore duty in England. His assistant, Pay Clerk Kiczek, acquired his knowledge in Navy Supply techniques in two years on board the U.S.S. HAMUL then operating in Bermuda waters. As in other departments the paymaster's gang was received from a variety of naval activities. Witness the following: Brown from shore duty in North Africa; Darais from a PC in South America; Daugherty from the battleship TEXAS; Molloway from Pacific Ocean areas; Ellis from a cruiser and shore duty in England; Fitzgerald from an Atlantic destroyer; Leatherwood from the minesweeper SALEM; Beverly from sea duty in the Pacific.

The electrical department is a very individualistic and technical group that must not be omitted. Chief Electrician Nolen had many years active duty in the Fleet, culminating with service on a minesweeper throughout most of the fighting in the Pacific. He was well qualified to supervise the miles and miles of electrical wiring and complicated equipment built into our hull. Chief Electrician's Mate Recklein was

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conspicuous in the upkeep of bells, buzzers, phones, lights, and winches. He too, had many years of Regular service. Fink undoubtedly welcomes duty on the TOWNER after having had the minesweeper on which he served blown out from under him during action in the Mediterranean.

This list, as it must be, is incomplete. Omission of names of those whose duties were outstanding is inevitable. Where we have skipped in these paragraphs mention of some of our shipmates' record of past service, it will be found in the thumbnail sketches of the individuals.

As one can easily see, the birth of a crew of a ship, although outwardly a hodgepodge assemblage of butchers, bakers, plumbers, teachers, lawyers, students, soda jerkers, and salesmen, is really the coalescence of a talented group, conceived and refined in the fire of hard work and hours of Navy experience, made worthy and ready by the concentrated study of officers and men, and by supervised apprenticeship (we call them strikers).

For some, the stay in Newport and later in New York was but an interlude in the United States after service overseas. For some it was the last few months or weeks before leaving home for the first time. It goes without saying that everyone made the most of his "liberty". Toward the end of November the "TOWNER DETAIL" was transferred to the Receiving Station in Brooklyn, ready to man the ship.

In Brooklyn, the "DETAIL" joined forces with those officers and men who had been an advanced squad in preparing the ship for commissioning. The Captain, the Chief Engineer, and particularly the Paymaster, together with leading, experienced warrants, chiefs, and petty officers had occupied a bleak corner of the mould loft in the Todd Erie Yard. They had pored over the plans and circulated through the ship, carefully scrutinizing the work of conversion as it progressed. The Boatswain was most attentive to the rigging and fitting of deck gear. The Machinist kept an eagle eye on the installation of every pipe and valve in the engine room. The Carpenter was equally alert throughout the hull. The Electrician followed the installation of wiring and electrical fixtures. Probably the most meticulous attention was paid by the Paymaster to the preparation of the ship's allowance lists and to the ordering and collecting of equipage and stores. The Supply Department had a warehouse of its own several miles away. We cannot give too much credit to this group, for it was due to their foresight and unremitting toil that the ship, during her days of service in the Pacific, never suffered for lack of spare parts and supplies.

During these days in late October and November the Newport group were learning their jobs and to know each other. Those who were new to the Navy were getting first-hand instruction from the more experienced men. Classroom work consumed many hours. The preparation of the ship's basic organization and the watch, quarter, and station bills gave the Executive Officer and his assistants a continual headache.

COMMISSIONING

Finally on the icy-cold morning of 1 December all hands climbed the steep gangway laden with their personal belongings. Guests were present in heavy coats

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and furs, for a bitter wind blew in from the harbor. Number Four hatch was cleared and all hands were assembled aft while Captain H. V. McKittrick, U.S.N., Captain of the Navy Yard, Brooklyn, conducted the brief ceremony which culminated in the raising of the Star Spangled Banner and the commission pennant for the first time on the U.S.S. TOWNER. The Captain read his orders, Chaplain Maurice Witherspoon gave the ship an inspiring blessing, and the Boatswain piped the first watch.

SHAKEDOWN

After the guests had helped consume the turkey, potato salad, rolls, ice cream, and the magnificent cake that was provided on commissioning day, and had departed, lines were cast off and we moved down stream to the Thirty-third Street pier in Brooklyn where, for several days, the ship was loaded with its supplies, spare parts, and other equipment. Then we shifted berth across the Bay to Bayonne, New Jersey where the ship was depermed -- the operation requisite for reducing a ship's residual magnetism to a minimum, so that she will be less vulnerable to the enemy's magnetic mines and torpedoes. The next day we moved back to the opposite side of New York harbor to take on board ammunition. Finally on the morning of the fifth of December, laden with manufacturers' representatives and Naval Inspectors and observers from the pre-commissioning details of other AKA's, the TOWNER nosed its way through the freezing atmosphere of the East River on the first shakedown cruise, to Oyster Bay, Long Island. The decks were still littered with unfinished work. Tools and compressed air hoses everywhere presented obstacles and pitfalls for the unwary. The crew was beginning to function as a cohesive unit -- especially the ship's cooks in the galley who began to turn out food of a miraculous excellence never to be surpassed on any other ship in any navy.

Off Oyster Bay during the next several days we practiced at general drills, lowered and hoisted landing boats, made preliminary speed trials over the measured mile, compensated compasses, and, in general, tried out all of the ship's machinery. We returned on the 8th to Thirty-third Street to complete the loading of stores.

During these last few days in port the men of the TOWNER made their way at the close of day to their wives, families, sweethearts, and friends -- many for the last time for a long time. The ship's loading completed, we got underway for Chesapeake Bay. What a surprise was in store for land lubbers! For the Atlantic in its own particular winter fashion blew up a gale as a sort of initiation ceremony which was only relished by the fish which received unexpected tribute. We rocked and we rolled, we pitched and we tossed, and the gear about the ship which had not been securely lashed down banged back and forth throughout the night. However, there is an end to all things, and the next day we dropped anchor in Hampton Roads and proceeded to receive our full complement of boats and further prepare for shakedown and amphibious exercises in the Chesapeake Bay. Here the work of the past week off Oyster Bay, Long Island was repeated with more familiarity. The weather was more pleasant, for one thing. Also, we were on our own. Condition ONE ABLE was set for the first time and general confusion ensued. The Boatswain loudly blustered that we would never complete lowering away in less than six hours. He recalled this statement with a smile many weeks later when the total time consumed was sixteen minutes. But these

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were difficult days. Everything was new. We drilled at all conceivable emergencies and completed anti-aircraft gun practices with sleeve targets towed by planes from the Norfolk Air Base. On the whole things did not go too badly and the TOWNER returned to Norfolk and proceeded to the Navy Yard at Portsmouth, Virginia, just across the river, for post-shakedown availability and necessary repairs and revisions of installation.

THE FIRST "LIFT"

Our first Christmas was spent in the noisy, smoky confusion of the Navy Yard, with the decks covered with snow. Since the Navy Yard force had taken over the ship, we were able, most of us, to get ashore to do our best to celebrate the holiday in suitable fashion. However, Norfolk is not New York, and it was a suitable subject for celebration when news was received that we were to return to New York to load our first cargo. The Navy Yard work was only half done but we were a "hot ship" with all the priority in the world and we got underway for New York, still littered with gear and dirty from the accumulated muck of the Navy Yard. The sun shone and the weather was fine and we arrived in Bayonne again to load and to enjoy a few last liberties over New Year's Day in the great Metropolis. The loading seemed interminable, but who cared, New York was just across the Bay and a one-hour ferry trip or a cold bleak ride to the nearest subway station.

Negro stevedores manned the winches and worked in the holds, stowing anti-submarine nets and floats and general cargo for Pearl Harbor. An excess of "holiday cheer" rendered most of them unfit for work and we required an extra day of loading. Then one day, the 4th of January 1945, to be exact, the Commanding Officer of the SHELIAK, a sister ship manned by Coast Guardsmen, reported to our Captain and we sailed in company headed for the Panama Canal on the first leg of our long journey to Pearl Harbor and duty with the Pacific Fleet.

Day after day out of New York the weather became warmer and the sea more calm. The TOWNER was leaving behind her winter, snow, and ice which we would not see again for many a month. Through the azure Caribbean Sea the ship made her way and on the morning of the 10th of January we entered the Panama Canal. It was our misfortune to have only one night in this, our first tropical port. The Commander-in-Chief had issued instructions that we were a "priority" ship. As a consequence, we left Balboa the following afternoon and pointed our prow towards the Hawaiian Islands. Two weeks of smooth sailing, in company with the Coast Guard-manned SHELIAK, ended as we entered into the seething activity of war-time Pearl Harbor.

The next few days we discharged cargo and made use of the facilities of the great naval base to continue fitting the ship for her future duties. We cleaned the boilers, always an unpleasant but a most important task, and brought the salinity back to normal. Only our water tenders and fireroom gang will really appreciate this statement. It was still evident that the haste with which the ship had been passed through the post-commissioning and shakedown period had left considerable work undone and given us a backlog of things which had been done incorrectly to rectify. We then proceeded to dock in the city of Honolulu where we loaded cargo, amphibious tractors, and troops for Noumea, New Caledonia.

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On the 9th of February the eventful journey south and west was begun. Eventful, because on the morning of the 13th (a tragic date) a despatch was received from Neptunus Rex ordering the TOWNER to heave to and to prepare to receive the royal party of His Majesty. Naturally, we did as bid, and a strange crowd came over the bulwarks as we entered the Royal Domain. With terrible swiftness all polliwogs were charged with their individual offenses and brought before the Royal Tribunal. Here they were delivered into the hands of the Royal Executioner, the Royal Barber, the Royal Keeper of the Bath, and the Royal Physician. Each plied his special trade with great glee and ferocity. By evening all hands were loyal shellbacks, duly initiated subjects of the Ruler of the Bounding Main. Even our Army passengers suffered the humiliating rites. For days thereafter the tonsorial aspect of the crew showed that the Royal Barber had done his work not wisely but too well.

The remainder of February and the months of March and April passed slowly for us in Noumea, as we sighed at our misfortune in missing our baptism of fire at Iwo Jima and waited anxiously for the next operation. The shuttle trips to Uarai Bay with Army "ducks" and "amph-tracks" were followed by weeks at anchor in Noumea Harbor and Fisherman's Bay. A few days were spent at the Ship Repair Base on Isle Nu, where we repaired an unfortunately bent boom and completed installation of additional engine-room ventilation which had been left undone by the Norfolk Navy Yard. Here, too, we lost our handsome coat of camouflage and assumed Navy gray. We were preparing for the dark background of Japan. Here, too, fishing expeditions and hunting trips and excursions to Prony Bay and liberties in Noumea relieved the monotony of the daily routine. At the same time, we continued to improve and perfect our ship. Finally, the ELEVENTH SQUADRON came in and we joined DIVISION THIRTY-THREE on maneuvers and amphibious exercises. Returning to port we loaded in preparation for the invasion of Okinawa. Again, we were to be disappointed. That military operation progressed so well that our services were not required, so, we revised our cargo loading and proceeded in convoy for Dulog, Leyte Gulf. We carried a part of the 710th Tank Battalion, a unit of the 81st (Wildcat) Division.

In early May, after a few delightful days at sea, and some interesting experiences in keeping position in formation, we entered Seeadler Harbor of Manus Island in the Admiralties. Here an old story was retold, an old story which recurs again and again at ex-advanced bases: "We had an air raid just last week". The TOWNER men were in a mood to listen as, for the first time, they were coming closer to combat areas. We got no actual practice shooting at the enemy, but it was plain to see that the gunnery officer had serious affairs in mind. Every time we held anti-aircraft practice our guns' crews repeated their previous operations and continually punctured the center of the target. We were not very good at sinking mines and floating buoys but we could always knock the stuffing out of balloons.

Arriving in Leyte about the middle of the month we unloaded under conditions duplicating a combat landing with everything except enemy fire to contend with. This was the first of many visits to Philippine waters. After fueling and replenishing our depleted supply of provisions, we left the anchorage off Tacloban and set our course southward to New Guinea, reporting for duty to the Commander of the Amphibious Forces of the SEVENTH Fleet. Our erstwhile friends of the ELEVENTH SQUADRON were scattered once more. Some of them returned to the States for refitting and overhaul. A

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few remained to assist in the "roll-up" of General MacArthur's forces in the Southwest Pacific. This occupation was to employ us for almost three months.

We first stopped in Hollandia in Humboldt Bay, the seat of the Netherlands government of their part of the huge island of New Guinea. We stayed only long enough to secure onward routing to Milne Bay at the far eastern tip of the island. From here we returned to Manus, only to unload a deck cargo of boats and to return southward again to load troops and equipment at Lae. From Lae we returned to Hollandia, having in the meantime made good friends whom we were to see several times later on. The surrounding country provided interesting sightseeing. We found some American WACs and Army nurses with whom pleasant parties were arranged. Later, on our second visit, this was like a homecoming with bigger and better parties.

This trip we entered Manila Harbor past the recently captured island fortress of Corregidor and the old concrete battleship Fort Drum. The ruins of this great city, the former Pearl of the Orient, was our first vision of war's devastation. The city had been captured only a short time before. There had been little opportunity to clean it up. The stench of rotting Japanese carcasses still lingered in the fallen masonry of the Walled City and in the dismal desolation of the once fine residential districts of Ermita and Malate. Filth and the prevalence of disease in the shattered city combined with the heat and humidity to remove most of our incentive for liberty.

Eleven days were spent waiting for a chance to go alongside the docks and unload once we had gotten alongside. The harbor presented a most unusual sight. It seemed that all the ships in the Pacific were here. The harbor was crowded with transports and liberty ships waiting to disgorge their cargoes of material destined to equip the expected invasion of the Japanese home islands. Dotted the surface in all directions were the hulks and spars of some two hundred Japanese ships which had been blasted to the bottom by the aerial assault of our Army and Navy. The salvage gang of Commodore Sullivan, who cleared the tangled harbors of the Mediterranean and the English Channel, were applying their hard-earned skills under circumstances that could not be considered favorable. Yet, day by day, the wrecks melted away and the important parts of the inner harbor were made available for shipping.

We sailed again in early July, stopping in Leyte just long enough to fuel and provision. Then we proceeded to Manus once more, where we arrived on the 4th of July and assisted in celebrating Independence Day in company of those whom we had once vanquished -- the British Royal Navy. Their task force was in port: the task force which was to join with Admiral Halsey and commence the active bombardment of the Japanese coast as a prelude to the end of the war. Our British friends showed no hesitation in accepting the proffered libation and in joining us in toasting the freedom we had won from their forefathers.

We sailed again for Lae and were welcomed in port by a thrilling simulated bombing and strafing attack of flyers of the American Air Base at Nadzab. They remembered us from the month before. Again we were hospitably received and again we sailed for Manila, stopping at Hollandia on our way for onward routing. As usual, the Captain ordered "90 revolutions" and the water fairly flew from the stern.

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This trip to Manila was not so long as the last. The port was in better shape and it was not necessary for us to wait so long for an opportunity to unload. In a very few days we were off again to Leyte for the now familiar spot of San Pedro Bay. However, before our departure from Manila we completed the necessary service in Philippine waters to make us eligible to receive the Philippine Liberation Ribbon. Through the Captain's personal friendship with President Osmena, the Philippine Commonwealth was kind enough to present the ship with ribbons for all hands.

Our third and last trip to the New Guinea area occurred in early August, but this time to Biak Island. The Army was very efficient in loading us with vehicles and the personnel to man them. A few days only were required and we departed from Sorido Lagoon for another brief stop in Hollandia, this time to load a deck cargo of boats. This was to be our last visit south of the equator. We had crossed it eight times since leaving Honolulu.

Back in Manila again we found that facilities for unloading had become so improved that we were in port less than four days. It could have been longer, had we been content to merely wait for the expected arrival of our old friends -- the other units of SQUADRON ELEVEN. But the Captain had the urge to take the good TOWNER to new ports, so, when he learned that the Service Squadron had a lift in Zamboanga, he volunteered for the job. On August 13 we sailed.

This was an historic week. The entrance of the Soviet Union into the war, coupled with the cataclysmic effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had so shattered Japanese morale that they had announced their willingness to stop fighting. We received the news while steaming at "90 revolutions" past the triangular island of Panay. The end of the war was in sight. How would it affect the TOWNER?

In Zamboanga, we anchored for less than an hour, then proceeded across the strait, behind the island of Malamaui, to the tiny port of Isabela on Basilan Island. Here amidst torrential downpours that drenched us daily, for several hours in the middle of the day, we loaded the soaked and mud-crusting equipment of the 118th Construction Battalion (Seabees) - for transportation to Olongapo on Subic Bay. This was our largest load of passengers -- just 500 officers and men, plus two civilians. Permission was given to evacuate the wife and young son of a Swiss ^{rubber} coffee planter, so that they might start the long journey to Switzerland and enjoy again the comforts of home after three weary years of privation under Japanese overlordship.

From this point the slogan was "Hurry, hurry, hurry. We don't want to be left behind on 'The Road to Tokyo'". Our reception in Subic Bay was such as to chill our enthusiasm. They said we might be unloaded in about two weeks, if the weather permitted, and if LST's were available. The Captain refused to accept this and put the "heat" on. Next day, as soon as the weather moderated, a victory ship was displaced and we went alongside the only pier available. All hands turned to, and in less than three days we were off, fueled and provisioned, on our way to Cebu to join the THIRTEENTH SQUADRON to lift units of the Americal Infantry Division to Tokyo. Our Zamboanga trip had cheated us out of going in with the first echelon of occupation troops, but we were surely going to be with the second.

On September 1st we left Cebu, by way of Leyte Gulf, and, a week later, we were

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in Tokyo Bay off Yokohama. We had been ready for a beach landing in Sagami Bay, but the Japanese had become surprisingly quiet and unobstructive. Accordingly, that same day we moved inside and docked. The Army surely was on the job this time, and no mistake. Our holds were empty by 1030 next morning and out we went to the anchorage.

Liberty had not been permitted, but we could see that the once-teeming city of Yokohama was a desolate shell. The docks, warehouses, and factory district were not much harmed, but the two-hour fire bombing of June 29th, 1945 had leveled the residential districts to a charred mass of rubble and twisted metal. The people who remained had gathered together enough corrugated or sheet iron to construct tiny hovels in which they lived. All about, every possible bit of soil had been planted and with these meager crops starvation was avoided. These people were learning how it feels to be hungry and homeless, just as had millions of other unfortunates had suffered from the ruthless cruelty of Japanese military domination. We could not really feel sorry for them.

A minor boiler casualty caused us to delay two days for repairs, but we sailed for Manila with Transport DIVISION FIFTY-ONE, narrowly escaping a severe typhoon that was roaring northwestward from its birthplace south of Guam.

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