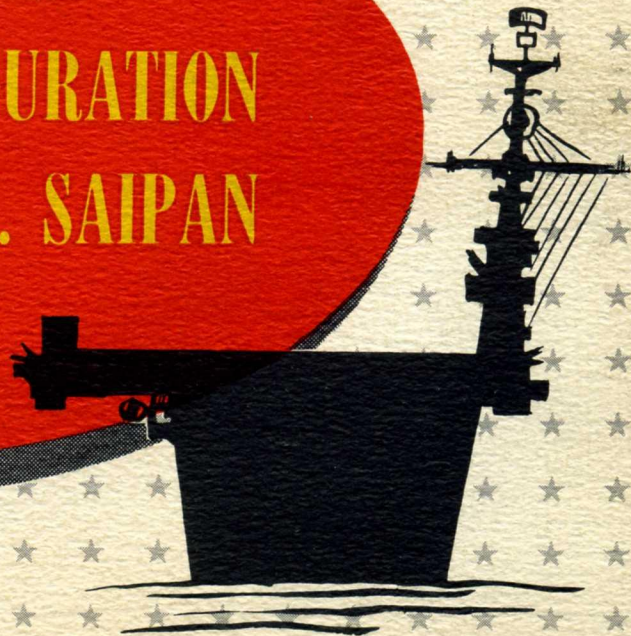


**THE VENEZUELAN
PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION
CRUISE OF THE U.S.S. SAIPAN
CVL-48**

FEBRUARY 7-24, 1948







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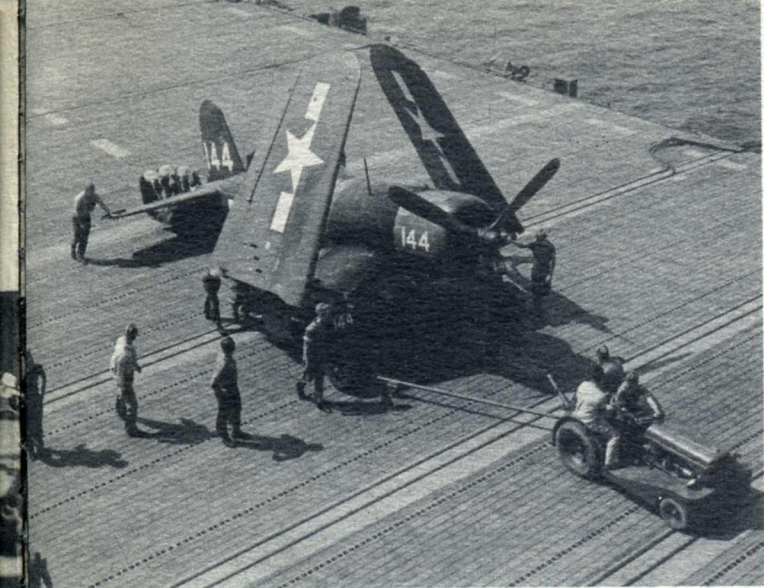
SATURDAY, 7 FEBRUARY 1948.

- 0700** Liberty and shore leave expires.
- 0730** Set the special sea, mooring and anchoring details.
- 0800** Underway.

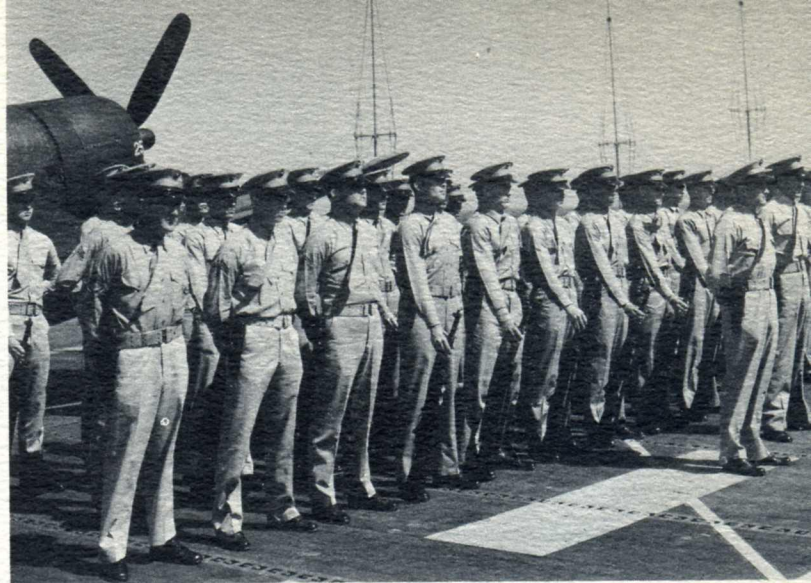
It was gray and cold the morning of the seventh, you may remember, as it had been for some time past; in fact there had been a flurry of snow about the docks

at dawn. The *Saipan* was at Pier 7, NOB Norfolk. At 0800 she left the dock; the colors were run up; the band played the Star-Spangled Banner. Tugs helped the ship





to turn about. She ran past Old Point Comfort, past the Red Light and the Light Ship, through the gray waters of Lynnhaven Bay. A man fell overboard and was picked up



by the whale boat. The sky thickened up and the land disappeared.

Aboard the ship were about 160 officers and 1,400 men. Most of these were



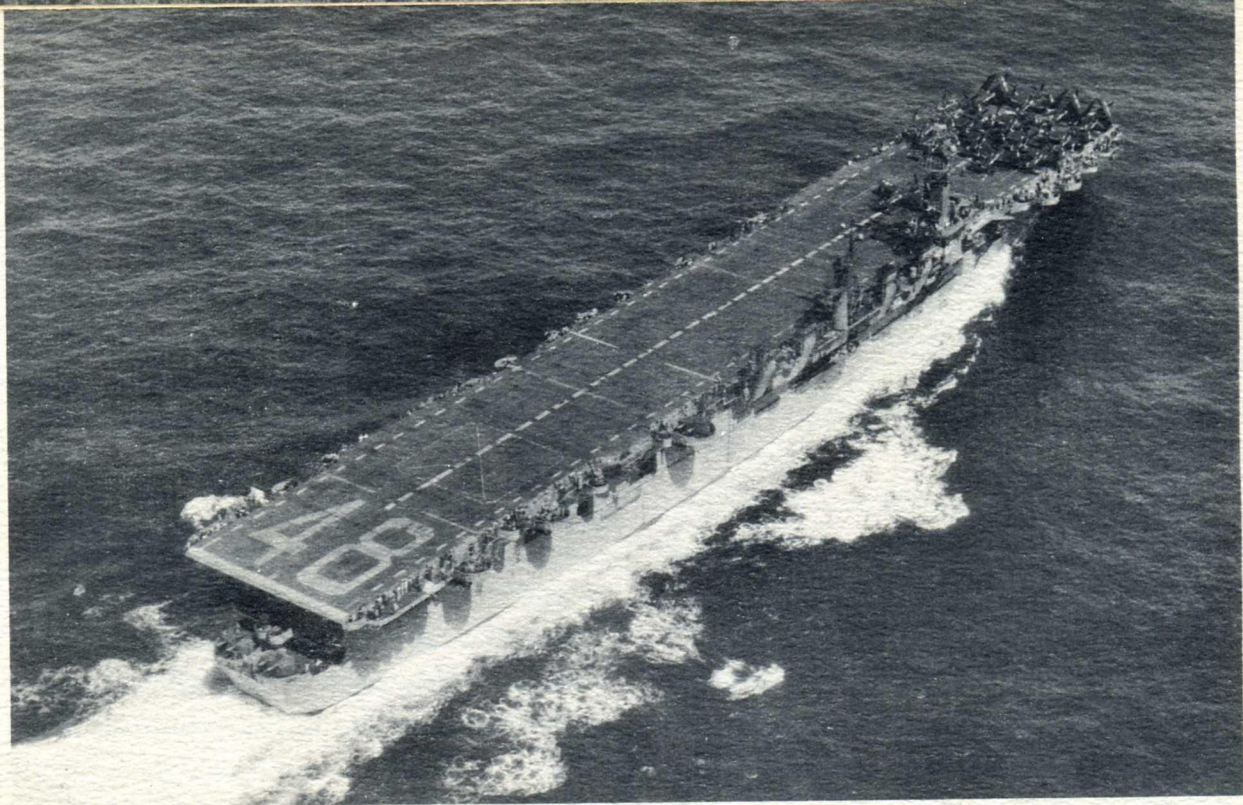
members of the ship's company, but not all. There were 42 officers and 150 enlisted men of the Naval Reserve aboard for training duty. There was a Navy band from the U.S.S. *Kearsarge* and a detachment of marines from the U.S.S. *Franklin D. Roosevelt*. There was a Minister and Special Representative of the President of

the United States, the Hon. Archibald MacLeish. There was a jet propulsion expert, Mr. Gordon S. Pearce, and an electronics expert, Mr. John Everett. Then there was Air Group One from Atlantic City, for whose operations the ship existed, and for whom it functioned as hangar, flight deck, machine shop and base. The Air Group,

thirty-six planes with their pilots and handlers, had come aboard two days before. The planes were F8F's, F4U's, and TBM's.

The purpose of the cruise had been announced in the press. "To participate in the inauguration of the new president of Venezuela." For the first time in the history of the country a president had been elected by direct vote of the people.

Suffrage had been universal; even the illiterate had been permitted a ballot. Under these circumstances our government, together with the governments of thirty-six other countries, had decided that it would be well to take some special notice of this occasion. And that was why the *Saipan* and its escort the destroyer *Witek* were sailing to Venezuela with Mr. MacLeish, the band, and the marines aboard.



And now it's about time we ran a picture of the ship—

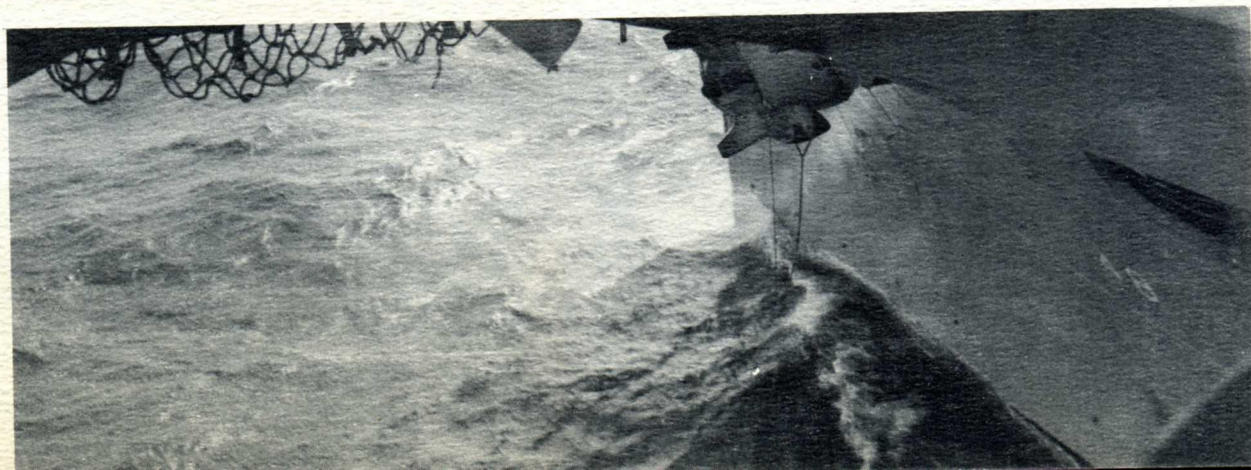
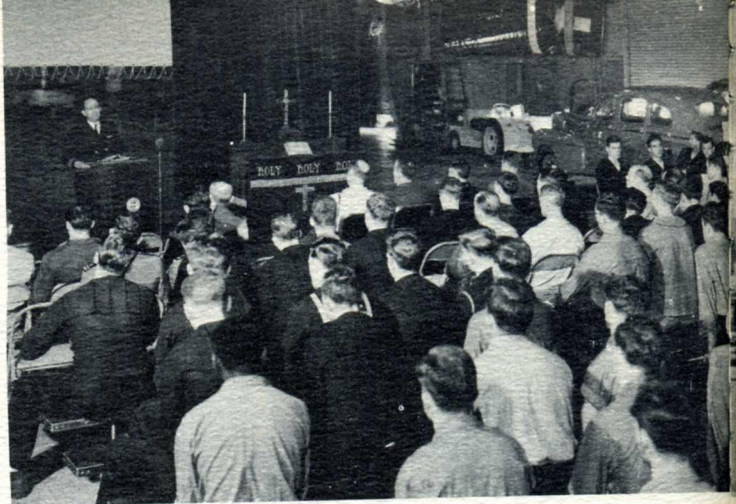
—and of our skipper, Captain Robert W. Morse—



—and our executive officer, Cdr. L. H. McAlpine—



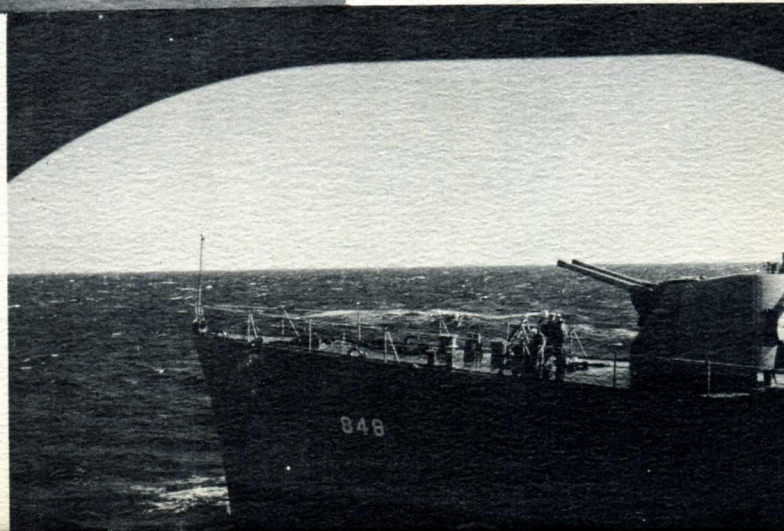
The ship cruised at 15 knots, course 160. By the morning of the second day, which was Sunday, 8 February, we had reached the 31st parallel of latitude, roughly that of northern Florida. It was bright and sunny and the water was blue. At 1000 chapel was held on the hangar deck. Afterwards all hands who were not on watch or at work below got topside to enjoy the day. There were some sore arms,





for typhus and yellow-fever inoculations had begun the day before, and were to continue for the next two days.

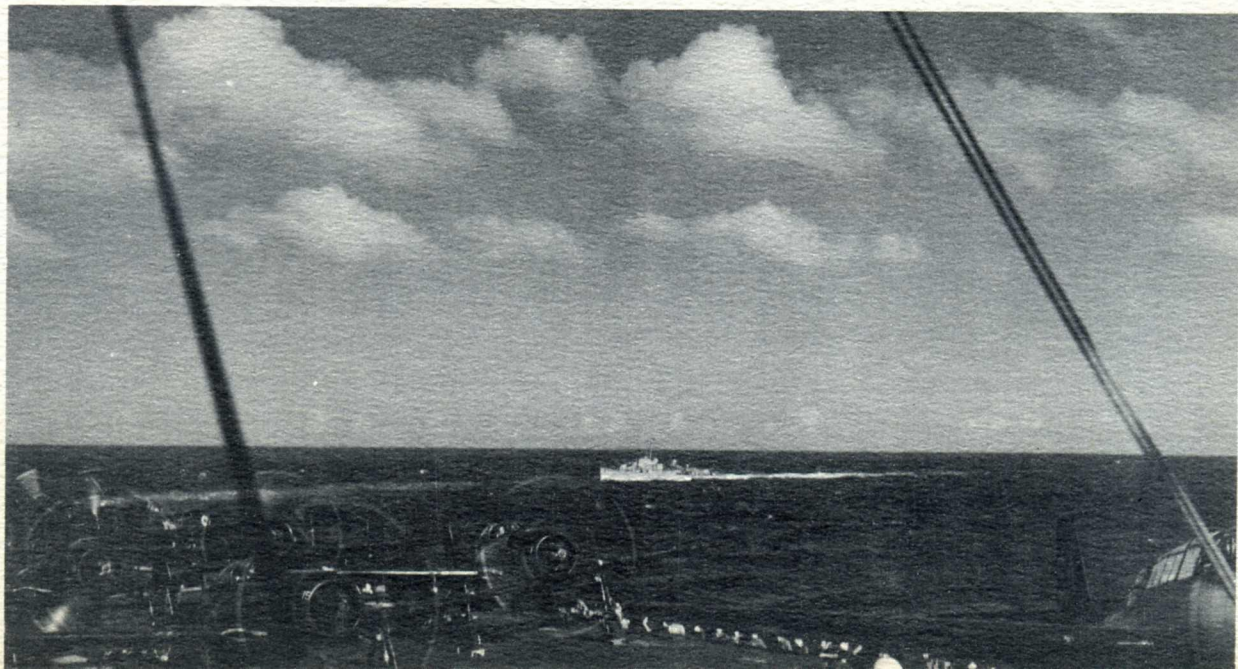
By Monday the ship's company had settled nicely into its routine. We borrowed books on Venezuela and polished up our Spanish. The landing detail began drilling on the flight deck.

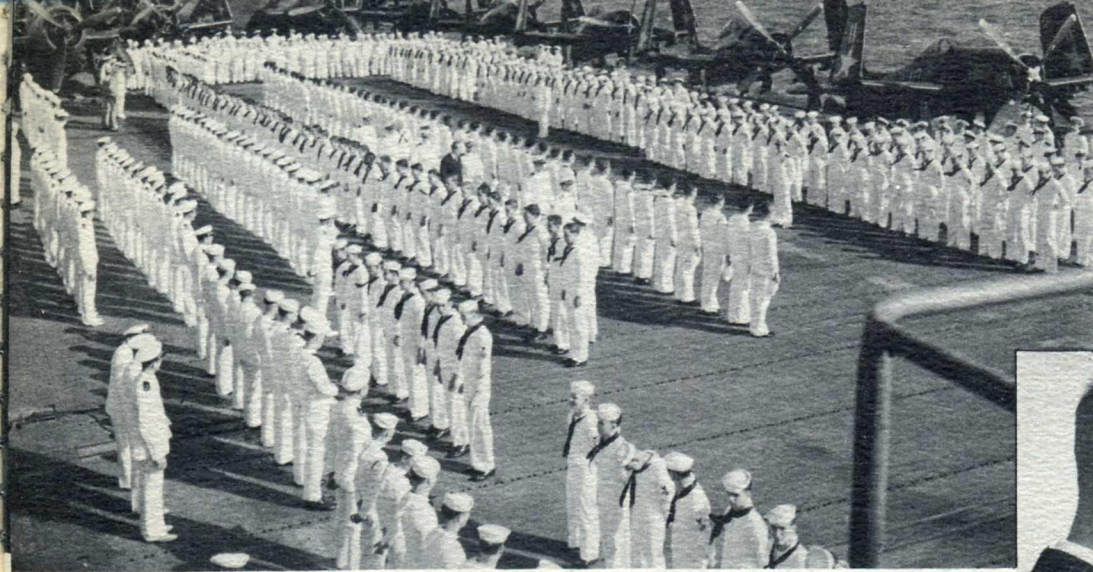


The weather was if anything more perfect than the day before. Even the destroyer ceased to roll. Flying fish flew from the bows, in singles, doubles, and in schools; porpoises were reported,

and a single large turtle, slowly cruising the other way. The color of the water was a deeper blue. Glossy and brilliant, at times it looked like paint.

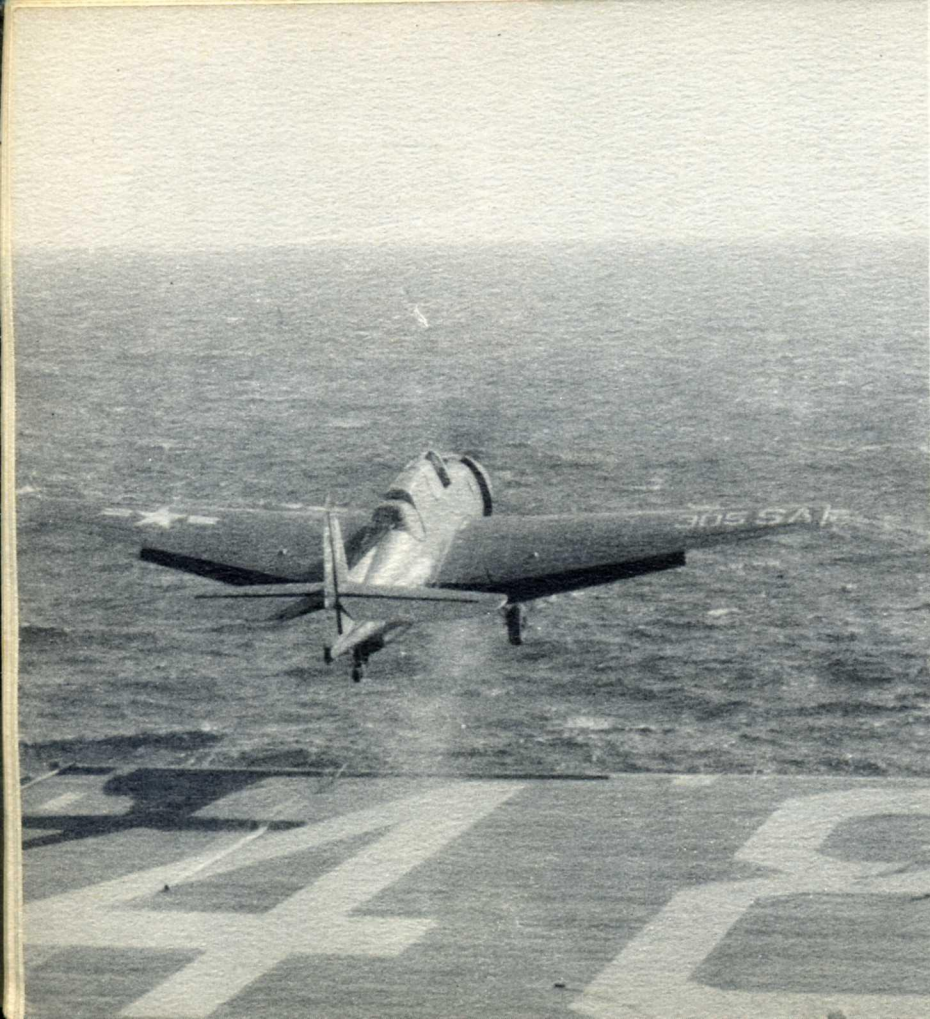
On Tuesday at 0800 we stood for





the captain's inspection. Mr. MacLeish read the Presidential Unit Citation for the U.S.S. *Fanshaw Bay* and pinned the decoration on C. E. M. Eddy, who had been in the company of that historic ship at the Battle off Samar. The *Saipan's* Plan of the Day included general information about Caracas and La Guaira. Officers and men who could speak Spanish were asked to turn in their names.





Wednesday at daybreak we slipped through Mona Passage into the Caribbean. The morning was spent in flight operations, concluding with a message drop, and gunnery practice.

1130-1300 Sunbathing.

1600-1730 Sunbathing and athletics.

Some of the personnel had begun taking the sun in sheltered spots as early as Sunday afternoon, twenty-eight hours out of Norfolk, and by the middle of the week it had become the general practice.

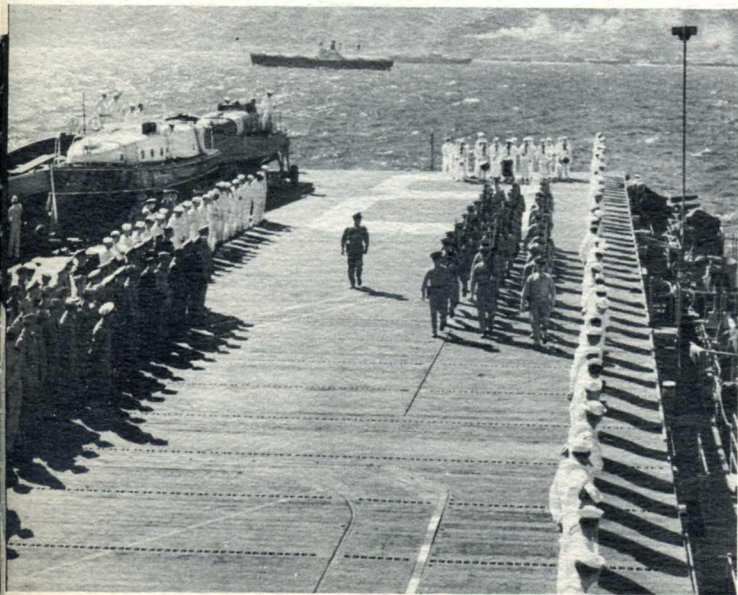




By this time Mr. MacLeish had become a familiar figure to all hands. He had explored the *Saipan* from stem to stern,

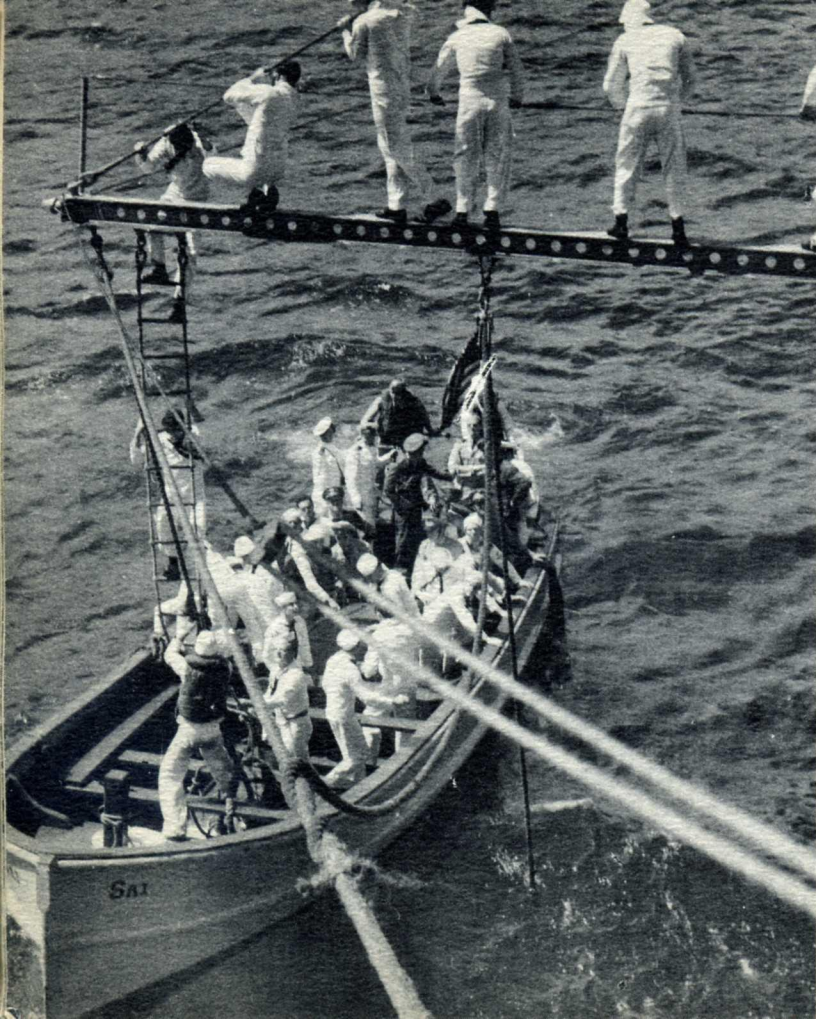
and from engine room to the fighting top, showing the greatest interest in all details of carrier operation.

At daybreak on Friday, 13 February, the Venezuelan coast was visible

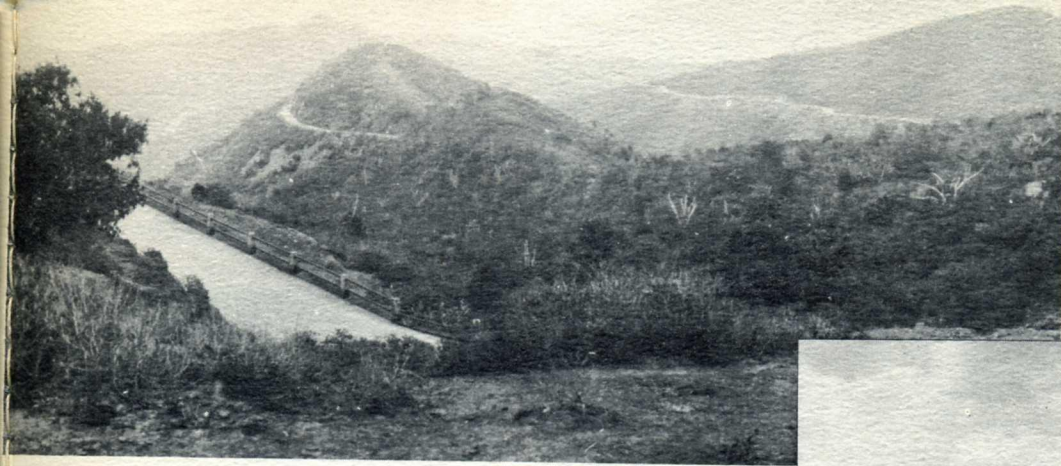


like a dark and lofty cloud on the horizon. A few hours later we steamed into the roadstead of La Guaira, the principal port of Venezuela and the port of Caracas.





The celebrated ground swells of La Guaira were not particularly high for this season of the year, according to the hardened natives. They ran three to five feet however, and were very troublesome. It was difficult to bring the boats alongside and hold them there without damage while embarking personnel. During the first two days both starboard and port gangways were smashed; after that we used the Jacob's ladders from the starboard boom or over the fantail stern. This was great fun for those who did the climbing, particularly after a spirited evening ashore, but harrowing indeed for the boat handlers and the deck watch.



It is seven miles air line from La Guaira to Caracas, but twenty-two miles by road. This road zigzags steeply along the flanks of the hills, climbing from sea level to 3,000 feet before leveling off (in a manner of speaking) for the run to Caracas. The first time over, it was a stupefying experience—





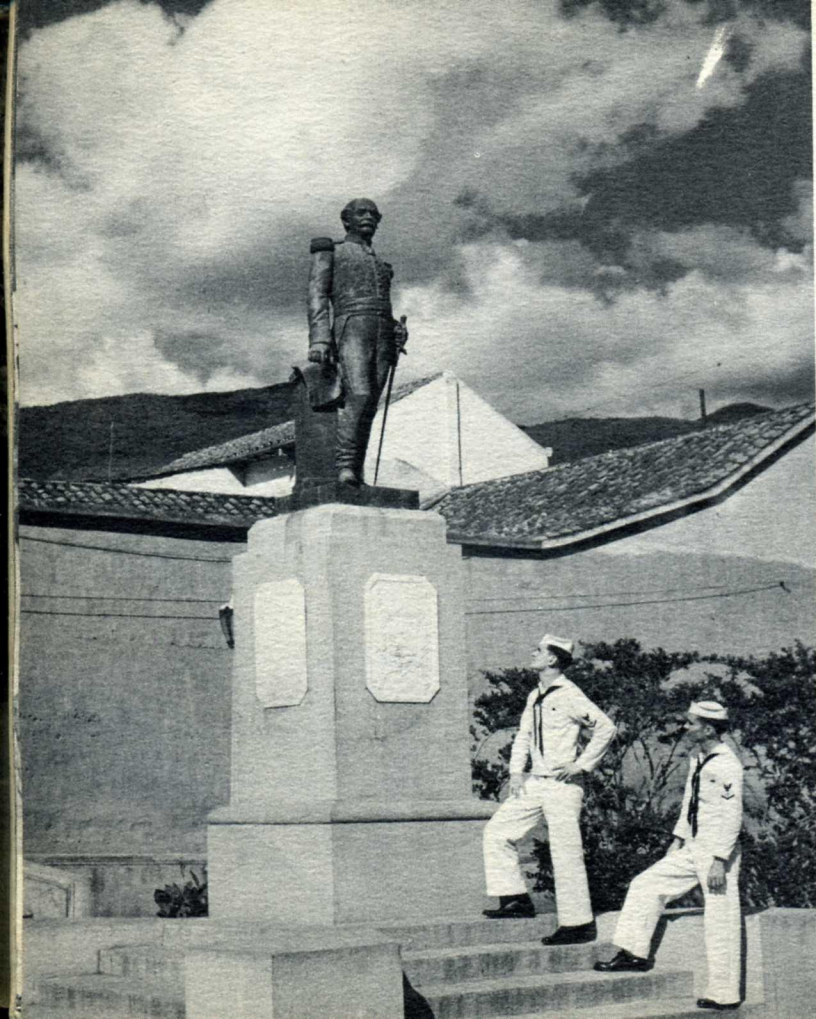
But Caracas was worth it.

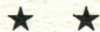
What was that you were saying?



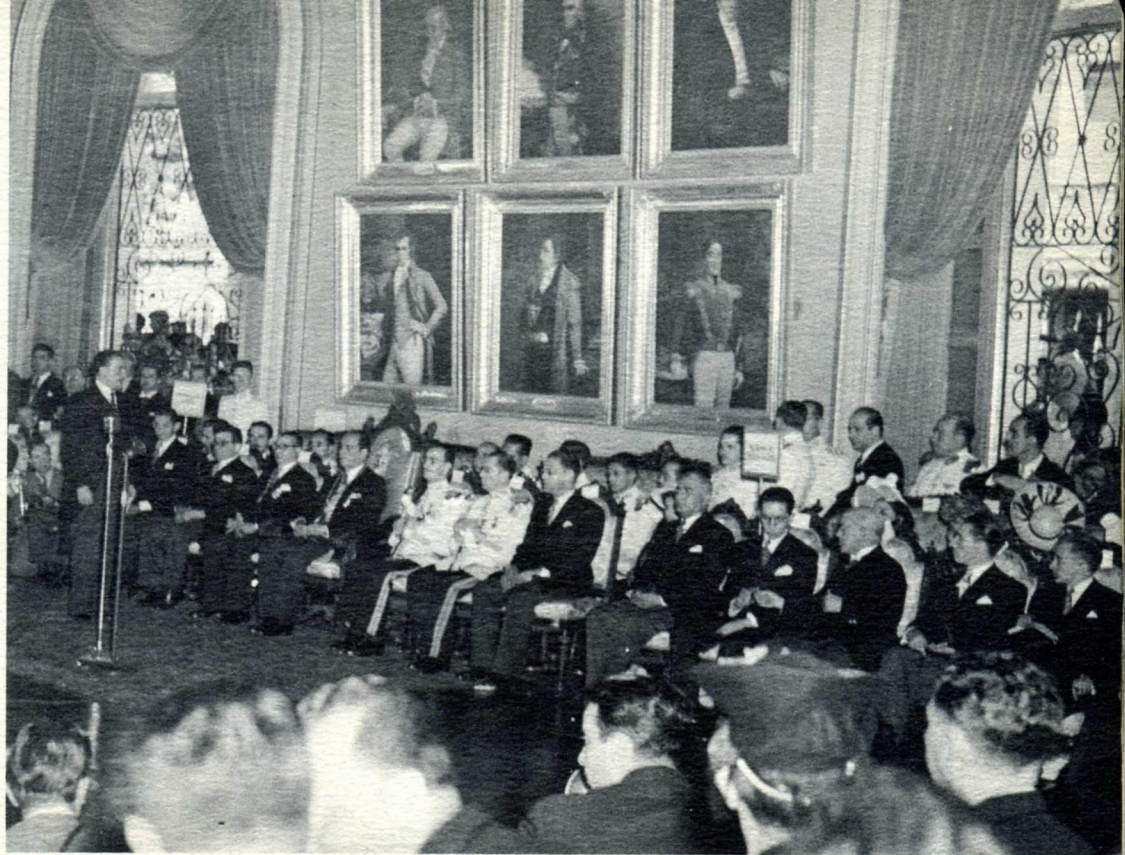
We did some shopping, and we saw the town.







The new president, Rómulo Gallegos Freire, was inaugurated on Sunday, 15 February. A delegation of the ship's officers, led by Captain Morse, attended the inauguration, and lent what moral support they could to the official delegation.



Here you see the U. S. Ambassador to Venezuela, Mr. Walter J. Donnelly, flanked on his left by Mr. MacLeish and Vice Admiral Barbey, ComTen, on his right by Lieut. Gen Crittenger, commander in chief of the Army's Caribbean Command, and by the U. S. Military and naval attaches, respectively.

After the inauguration there was a parade, to which *Saipan* and *Witek* furnished a detail consisting of the band, 40



Marines and 142 Navy personnel. The parade was held on the widest avenue in Caracas. It should be noted that the naval detail, perhaps inspired by the Marines, performed superbly, to the surprise of those who had witnessed the rehearsals, and many compliments were heard.





President Gallegos in the reviewing stand. The outgoing president, Rómulo Betancourt, is at his left.



Next day we had company. A number of Venezuelan Navy, Army and Air Force officers, and ten officers from the British cruiser H.M.S. *Sheffield* came aboard. The ship got under way and the planes were launched. The F8F's came out of the clouds in a steep dive, firing four rockets each at a green dye patch in the water. The TBM's plastered the sea with heavy bombs. The expressions on the faces of our guests



would indicate that they enjoyed the performance. The officer on the right, with the

benign episcopal air, is our own Cdr. Hopkins, Air Officer of the *Saipan*.

After their target practice the planes took off through a pass in the mountains for Caracas, paraded over the city, and dropped flowers on the tomb of Simon



Bolívar. The altitude of Caracas, we should have noted before, is 3,000 feet. There were lovely cloud effects among the mountains, as you can see.

This is Caracas from the air, a very handsome city with many fine modern buildings, courtyards and gardens shaded with tall mahogany trees. The domed building in the center is the Salon Elíptico where part of the inaugural ceremonies were held. Unfortunately the picture can give no impression of the color and movement of the city, the regiments of native guards, splendidly uniformed, the troops of mounted cavalry, nor the hazards of traffic throughout inaugural week, when the spirit of great and fortunate changes in the government of their country seemed to fill the throngs of pedestrians and the drivers of automobiles alike



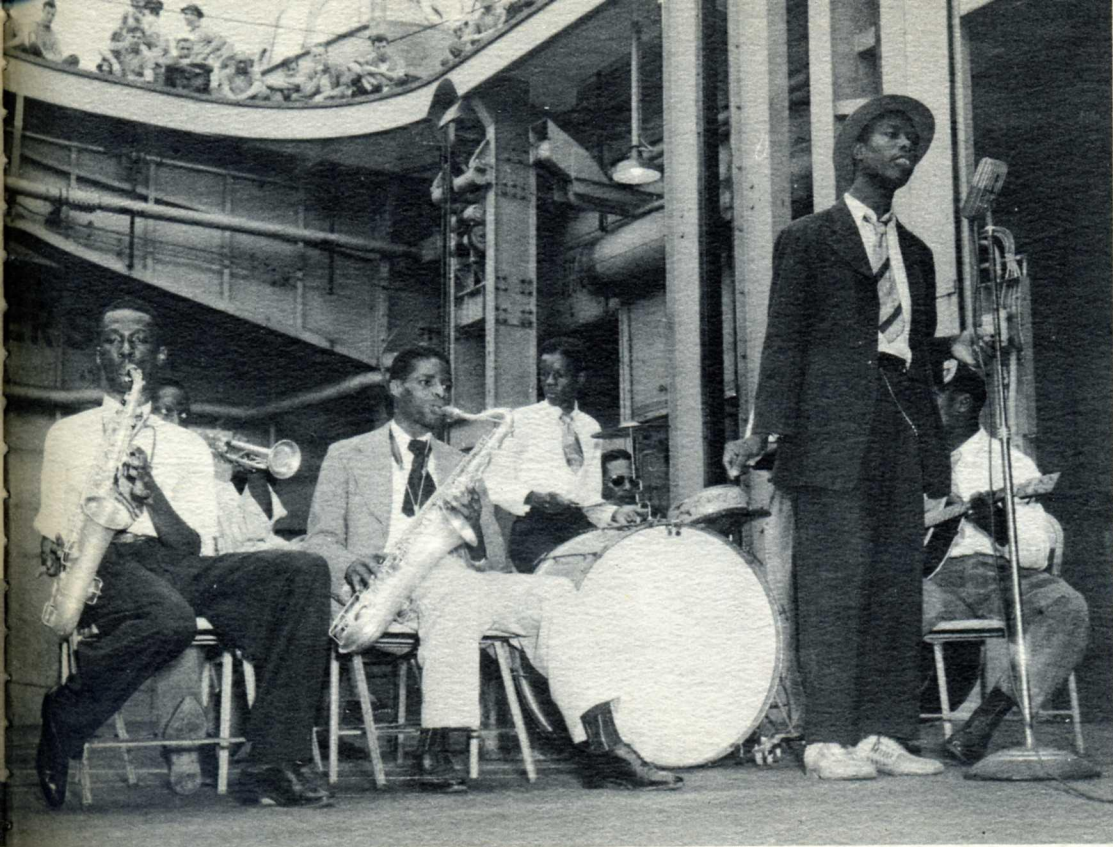
with a profound emotion and great disregard for life.

On Wednesday, the eighteenth, we left La Guaira. We had a beautiful run along the Venezuelan coast, passing at a distance the Island Margarita. It was a hot day, and by evening there were many applications at the dispensary for sunburn ointment.

Early on Thursday morning we passed through the Boca del Drago and an-

chored off Naval Base, Trinidad. It was a gray day, warm and showery. A Calypso band came aboard at noon. The partly raised elevator was used as a stage until rain sent the musicians into a corner of the hangar, and the elevator was sent up to the flight deck, shutting off the view for a considerable part of the audience.





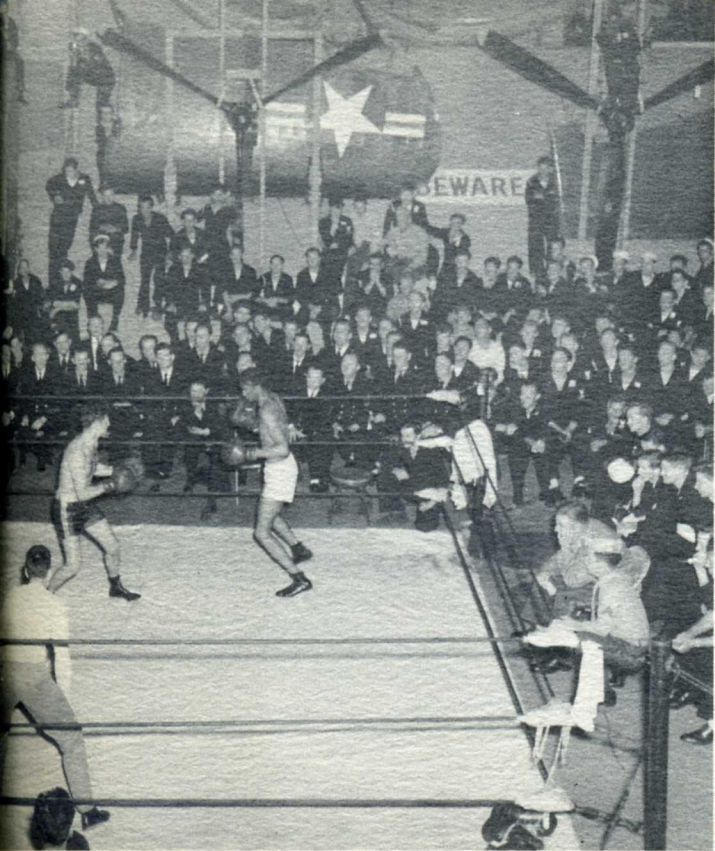
"Hello-oh-Joe!"

Friday the twentieth was the climate of Paradise. Some who were off watch on this day were known to sit for four consecutive hours in and among the gun tubs, the bow, the stern, wherever they could see the sea and the sky, not reading, not thinking, just sitting and looking.

We had very fine weather for the next three days and up until the afternoon of the twenty-third. Then indeed it did kick up a little but not enough to interfere with the smoker we had planned.

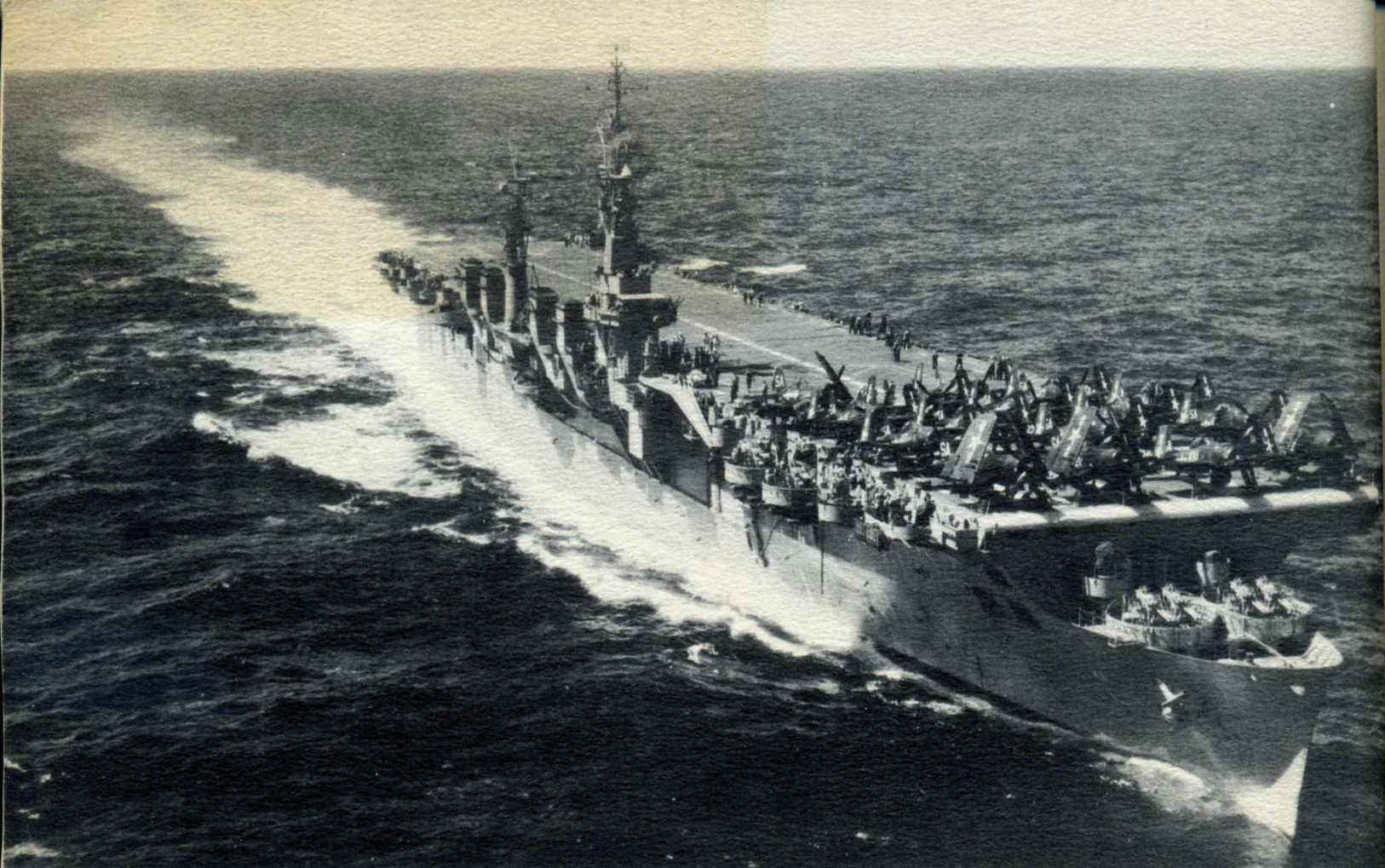
Here you see one of the tenser moments of the evening.





Not Rocky Mount, N. C. No sir, somewhere off Cape Hatteras.





That night the sea was medium rough, but by morning we were in calm water and the land was in sight. We circled about off the capes waiting for the port authorities to clear a berth for us, and late that afternoon we tied up at Pier 5. It was seventeen days and nine hours since we had left Pier 7.

