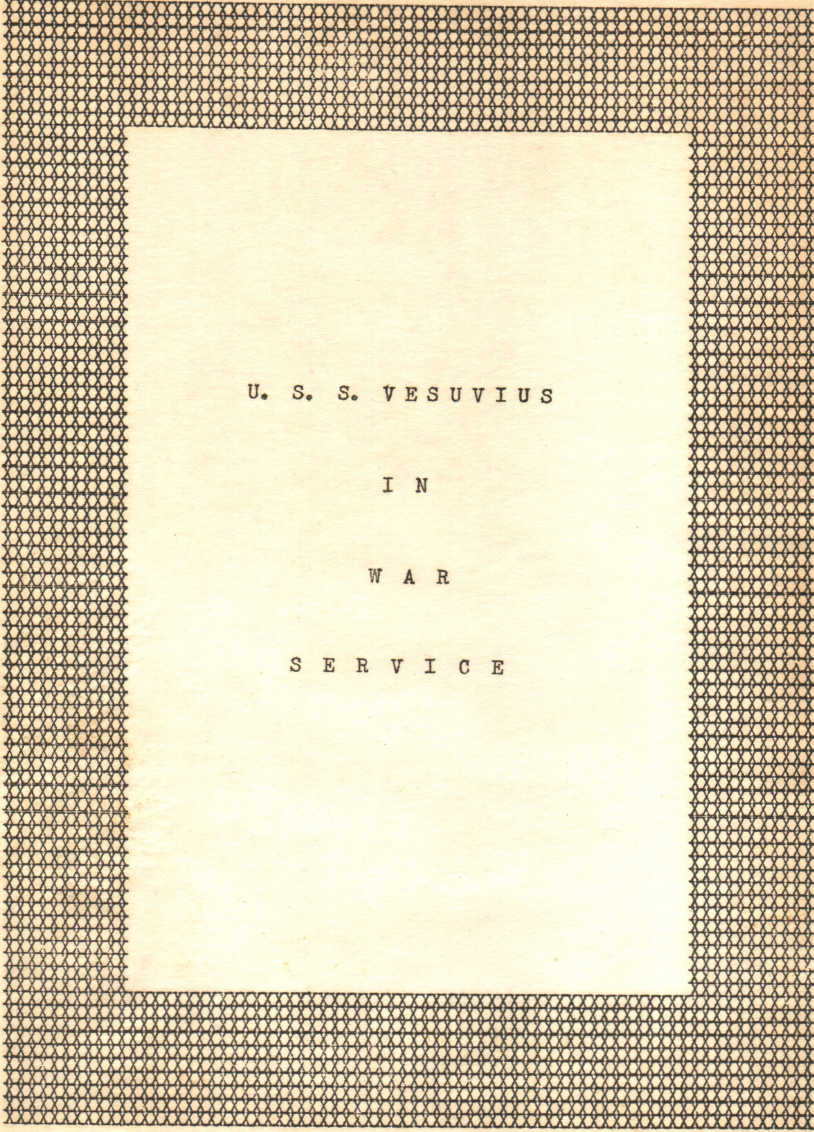


Contributed by Christopher Larson
In Honor of LT. James W. Larson Sr.



U. S. S. VESUVIUS

I N

W A R

S E R V I C E

Navy Day,
October 27, 1945.

FORWARD

Less than a year ago, as green and inexperienced a crew as ever manned a Navy AE shoved off from New York to join the Pacific Fleet.

Due to the grim necessity of war, no time was available to familiarize ourselves with the new technique of Re-Arming at Sea before we found ourselves "on the line" in support of the Okinawa invasion. But, while experience in transferring ammunition was lacking, the will to learn and to excel was present and in short order we became an efficient and essential unit of the greatest Navy in history.

That the Vesuvius not only did its job but did it in an outstanding manner is an accomplishment for which every man aboard can feel justly proud. In all sincerity, I have never seen better team-work and spirit, or a crew I would be prouder to command.

In the lively account of our operations that follows, our "historians," Chief Quartermaster Gregory Haran, U.S.N.R., and Chief Yeoman John Segedin, U.S.N.R., imbue the Vesuvius with a definite personality, something all good ships have.

She will remain a very real person to each of us until the day arrives when we no longer enjoy recounting our exploits in The War. And old salts being old salts, that will not come to pass for many, many years.



F. J. George
F. J. GEORGE,
Commander, U.S.N.R.,
Commanding, U.S.S. VESUVIUS (AE-15).

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INTRODUCTION

This is a story for the crew of the U.S.S. VESUVIUS, a Navy ammunition ship. It tells of the months they lived, worked, worried and played together aboard. It might help settle a few arguments in later years.

The Vesuvius was late, in one sense, in arriving to aid in the conclusion of the war, for transfer of ammunition at sea while under way was first used in the pre-invasion bombardment of Okinawa in March of 1945. The Vesuvius started her at-sea rearming operations on April 14, 1945, and she participated in all the major operations of this nature that followed.

In this narrative, the words and phrases "Service Group," "Replenishment Group," "Rearming Line," and "Service Squadron Six" are all used synonymously.

Service Squadron Six was composed of a huge convoy of store and refrigeration ships, tankers, Fleet tugs, hospital ships and ammunition ships. In addition, the Service Squadron had its own screen of some twenty or more destroyers and destroyer escorts at all times and two or three escort aircraft carriers. The old light cruiser U.S.S. DETROIT (CL-8) carried the Service Group's boss, Rear Admiral D. B. Beary.

Generally, the replenishment group was some distance from the actual combat area, but it had ample demonstration that the enemy was aware of its presence. Floating mines were continually encountered and an occasional Jap plane was shot down in the area by the Combat Air Patrol.

Never once, in the six months that the replenishment group existed as a unit, were any of its ships hit.

Tankers have long accompanied Fleets and refueled them at sea, but previous to the Okinawa Campaign, warships were always dependent upon the capacity of their magazines and store rooms for their ammunition supply. The innovation of ammunitioning at sea in enemy waters greatly increased their striking power.

The success of rearming at sea was a product of American ingenuity. The men who drew the plans, the ships that experimented with the rigs may take a bow. If you handled thousands of tons of ammunition, as the crew of the Vesuvius did, and sent it over the side in all types of weather and during a storm of gale proportions, you could not help having a warm place in your heart for the thousands of men and women

who labored in its manufacture, who did their job so well as to allow a margin of safety for its handlers in the forward areas.

That American ingenuity was successful is in the record. All the ships that participated in transfer-at-sea operations were serviced safely, except for a few minor incidents which do not merit mention.

This same story, with a certain amount of adornment, could be told by each and every one of the ammunition and supply ships. Tankers, we won't count, because machinery did all their work on the refueling line, whereas in ammunition and stores handling nothing had been invented to replace the human arms and back.

The following are the designating letters of ships used in this narrative. There are hundreds of other ship designations, but the narrative only concerns itself with these.

- BB - Battleship (16-inch guns and heavy armor)
- CA - Heavy Cruiser (8-inch guns and less armor)
- CL - Light Cruiser (5- or 6-inch guns and less armor)
- CV - Major Aircraft Carrier (LEXINGTON types)
- CVL - Large Aircraft Carrier (converted from cruiser hull)
- CVE - Escort Aircraft Carrier (converted from freighter hull)
- DD - Destroyer (5-inch guns, no armor)
- DE - Destroyer Escort (Smaller than destroyer, not as fast, armed with 3- or 5-inch guns, no armor)
- AE - Ammunition Ship
- AK - Cargo Ship
- AO - Tanker
- AH - Hospital Ship
- APA - Attack Troop Transport
- APD - High-Speed Troop Transport

Descriptions of many of the operations and incidents were brushed aside, sometimes purposely, in order that the men, themselves, might embellish this story with their own versions.

Portions of this narrative may seem repetitious. That is exactly what it was to the crew, repetition of the most monotonous sort. Yet, it can be seen that the job was essential and important.

Pardon the split infinitives, cumbersome sentences and some not-too-clear descriptions. After all, the crew lived through it and can tell the story better than any document.

And finally, if crew members brag, that is a sailor's prerogative. They all do.

COMMISSIONING AND SHAKEDOWN

The U.S.S. VESUVIUS (AE-15) was placed in commission at the Atlantic Basin Iron Works, Brooklyn, New York, at exactly 1417, Tuesday, January 16, 1945. She had been converted at this yard from the C-2 freighter "S.S. GAME COCK."

Old Man Winter and his assistant, Jack Frost, graced the commissioning ceremonies with their presence in the guise of a heavy snow storm. By the time the Stars and Stripes and the Commission Pennant had been hoisted, the first watch set, and preparations to get underway completed, the Vesuvius had acquired a full-dress coat of frost and icicles. Its decks were heavily carpeted with white snow and sleet as if in honor of the occasion.

Immediately after the ceremonies, the invited guests of the crew — their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, wives, sweethearts and close friends — stood on the snow-covered dock and watched as the Vesuvius unmoored and backed out into the harbor.

She was underway as a Navy ship!

The crew was filled with a special feeling of pride by the task to which they were assigned to accomplish as their contribution to this war's end.

Thirty minutes later, the Vesuvius docked at the Thirty-fifth Street pier in Brooklyn for final loading of stores that had been gathered there months in advance.

On January 20th, the ship got underway through the heavy ice floes in New York Harbor for final builder's trials. Prior to the actual trials, the ship was depermed at Bayonne, New Jersey, and the following day ammunition was taken aboard for ship's use from a lighter in Gravesend Bay.

Builder's trials started January 22nd. Few will forget the trip up the East River, under the Brooklyn Bridge, past New York City on the island of Manhattan, into Long Island Sound. After full-power trials, running a measured mile course, compass compensation, direction finder calibration and a long continuous series of drills, except for a few minor alterations, the ship was pronounced fit for her shake-down cruise.

She returned down the East River on January 24th and tied up again at the Thirty-fifth Street pier in Brooklyn to complete further work needed prior to shake-down.

On January 27th, the Vesuvius was underway to commence shake-down at Hampton Roads, Virginia. She arrived at Hampton Roads on January 28th and immediately went into cargo organization, the first of a long series of drills in cargo handling. Dummy ammunition was used for this first phase of ammunition handling, and the nemesis "Cargo Organization" thus had been added to the crew's vocabulary, never to be forgotten.

On February 3rd, the shake-down runs started up and down and across the Chesapeake Bay.

Outside of anchoring off the Severn River, which if it demands mention, was the incident of Smith Shoals, "when the bottom was touched," it says in the Log. However, the word-of-mouth accounts now have the ship running over-land for quite some distance and, no doubt, in the future, its over-land journey will probably end in a Kansas wheat field. Please remember, however, she just "touched" the bottom, which was a soft mud-like sand bar.

Then more shake-down. Maybe the word "shake-down" at this point merits further explanation. If a butcher came into the Navy, after spending ten years in business, and was told he would be required to steer the ship, operate a 20-MM gun and also run a cargo winch, he would get the shakes right down to his toe nails thinking about it. The practice through which he learns to do the things required of him provides the experience and confidence in his ability, and thereby eliminates the "shakes."

In the case of a ship, even though the crew may be experienced on other vessels, time is still needed to accustom them to its newness, as no two are alike.

Inspection came and the Vesuvius passed with flying colors, even though she was theoretically sunk in her "Battle Problem." Then again, it seems all ships are "sunk" at this time in order to work an "Abandon Ship" drill into the shake-down. On February 8th, she was released to the Norfolk Navy Yard for final alterations.

ENTRANCE ON ACTIVE DUTY

The 17th of February brought the day of entrance to active duty for the Vesuvius. She left the Norfolk Navy Yard and slipped down the Elizabeth River to Hampton Roads, where she anchored over-night, and the next morning she was underway for Earle, New Jersey, for her first load of cargo ammunition.

Then came those last several days state-side, from February 20th to March 5th, at Earle. The actual loading was done by civilian stevedores. The crew was on shore leave at every opportunity.

The usual rumors were already circulating as to destination. However, it was doubtful if anyone did have any accurate information.

On March 5th, the Vesuvius, with the U.S.S. FRAGMENT (APD-77) as its screen, headed for the Panama Canal Zone and points west.

She steamed down through the Bahama Islands, around Cape Maysi on the Southeast Coast of Cuba, direct to Point Morant, Jamaica. Here course was changed to South-Southwest for Cristobal, Colon, Panama Canal Zone, and finally, five days out of Earle, she docked over-night to take on fuel.

During this night's stay, docked at Cristobal, a lively banana boat trade was carried on with the local natives, a new experience for most of the crew. Some of the crew had not seen a banana for months and they bought and ate them by the stalk.

On Sunday, March 11th, transit of the Panama Canal was made; through the Gatun Locks, Gatun Lake, Pedro Miguel Locks and finally clearing the Miraflores Locks, a short halt to drop the pilot at Balboa, and with her bow pointed west, the Vesuvius started to breast the broad Pacific for the first time.

During the trip down the Atlantic Coast, the single escort, the U.S.S. FRAGMENT, was looked on as rather insignificant by itself, bravely zig-zagging ahead, clearing a lane for the lumbering Vesuvius. But as the war in Europe was coming to a swift conclusion, there were no particular qualms. "After all," was the continually heard expression, "when we get into the Pacific there will be escorts knee deep."

A number of the crew admitted feeling rather chagrined when it was revealed that the trip to Ulithi, a distance of some 8,800 miles, was to be made, all the way, alone.

How broad the Pacific was, soon became apparent. The period of time from Sunday night, March 11th, to Saturday, March 31st, was spent in steaming west, always west, with nothing but the ocean in every direction. Coleridge's over-worked "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" should be alluded to here, but it is better passed over in silence and allowed to insert itself into the mind of the reader, if so desired.

On March 29th, eighteen days out, land was sighted for the first time. It proved to be the Jap-held "Aur" Atoll. It was abeam to starboard at a distance of ten miles at dusk, and with the crew at general quarters, the Vesuvius steamed safely by. On through the Marshalls the Vesuvius continued to Eniwetok Atoll, where she dropped anchor on March 31st.

Naturally, cargo organization followed, and by the next day the first request for ammunition had been filled.

Ready again for sea, on April first, Easter Sunday, (also April Fool's Day and the date of the Okinawa Invasion), she was underway for Ulithi Atoll in the Northern Caroline Islands.

Four days at sea and on April 5th, the hook splashed into Ulithi's Lagoon.

The first liberty on shore since leaving the states was granted on April 8th, the place, Mog Mog Island, and, of course, the few brews hit the spot.

The inevitable cargo organization followed and ammunition was taken on and more discharged. This was the rounding out of the load in preparation for further operations.

On April 10th, the Vesuvius' first major operation began. At 1600, she was underway in company with the U.S.S. NANTAHALA (AO-60), the U.S.S. ATSCOSA (AO-66), the U.S.S. TAPPAHANNOCK (AO-43) and the U.S.S. SABINE (AO-25), with the U.S.S. SCHROEDER (DD-501), the U.S.S. HOBBY (DD-610), the U.S.S. MITCHELL (DE-45), the U.S.S. SILVERSTEIN (DE-534), the U.S.S. EIBERLING (DE-640), and the U.S.S. MCCOY REYNOLDS (DE-440) as screen, heading for Okinawa, or so popular opinion ran.

Several times since leaving Panama, the main engines were slowed while the engineers fought and wrestled with an onerous piece of machinery called the "forced draft blower." As only one of the two installed quit running on these occasions, the ship was able to maintain headway at reduced speed. Just what was wrong with these blowers was evidently a mystery, or else too many things were wrong.

On April 12th, both forced draft blowers tripped out together. Luckily, it happened at night.

The convoy continued on its way, leaving the Vesuvius wallowing in the swells, a perfect target and absolutely helpless.

She was completely without power!

It was a rough, sweaty two hours until the necessary repairs were made and everyone topside looked long and hard into the inky night for the phosphorescent torpedo wake that would be a prelude to obliteration.

The Vesuvius, however, was not actually left alone. The destroyers HOBBY and SCHROEDER were detached from the convoy and they raced frantically in circles about the stricken ship as a protecting screen against possible submarine attack, the Radarmen disclosed after the incident.

Day at sea followed day at sea until Friday, April 13th (yes, Friday the thirteenth), when a large convoy of ships was sighted just off Okinawa. Now the Vesuvius became a part of the not-yet famous Service Squadron Six.

OPERATIONS OFF OKINAWA

On Saturday, April 14th, the Vesuvius commenced cargo operations at sea for the first time.

This was something new! We were to rearm a Fleet without its having to leave the combat area!

Powerful Task Force Fifty-eight moved in for replenishment. As far as the eye could see were battleships, heavy cruisers, light cruisers, destroyers, and large and baby aircraft carriers. In every direction the sea was mottled with combat ships.

This first day of rearming was rather bewildering. Three ships were serviced. The U.S.S. WILKES BARRE (CL-103), the U.S.S. ASTORIA (CL-90) and the U.S.S. BUNKER HILL (CV-17).

The only serious casualties suffered aboard the Vesuvius occurred on this day. No excuse or alibi could be offered. Inexperience and over-anxiousness to serve probably were to blame.

A load of bombs being brought out of No. two hold dislodged a heavy cross beam and knocked it down on top of five men in the hold. Fortunately, no one was hurt fatally but some of the men were in bad condition, suffering compound fractures, concussions and lacerations. Their injuries were attended to immediately by the Medical Officer and his assistants. Splints and casts were applied and the men were resting comfortably with no time lost.

A lesson evidently was learned, and the dangers of this type of work were impressed on all hands.

On the 15th, the U.S.S. SAN DIEGO (CL-53) and the U.S.S. INTREPID (CV-11) came along side for rearming. The INTREPID was hit by the Kamikaze Corps' suicide planes the next day, it was learned.

The U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL-22) and the U.S.S. CUSHING (DD-797) were alongside for ammunition on the 16th. Today the casualties of the fallen hatch beam were transferred at sea to the U.S.S. LAYMAN (DE-302) to be taken to the U.S.S. BOUNTIFUL (AH-9), a hospital ship.

All the genius and skill of civilization was to be had out here at sea to attend to the needs and welfare of the Fleet.

The 17th was a good day's work as seven ships were rearmed in twelve hours. They were the U.S.S. SAN JACINTO (CVL-30), the U.S.S. SAN JUAN (CL-54), the U.S.S. HARRISON (DD-573), the U.S.S. BENNINGTON (CV-20), the U.S.S. BLUE (DD-744), the U.S.S. COLLETT (DD-730) and the U.S.S. JOHN RODGERS (DD-574).

The days seemed too filled with work to think of anything but bombs, shells and rockets going over the side to the fighting ships by the ton.

There were times when rather complicated situations developed in station keeping under way on the rearmament line. This was particularly true of a disposition that came about, quite by accident, this date.

Picture an ammunition ship, with a major aircraft carrier on its port side taking on ammunition and launching a squadron of planes at the same time. While on the ammunition ship's starboard side were three destroyers, the first taking on ammunition, and the second transferring mail to the first and third destroyers.

All five ships were steaming along at ten knots with lines attached to one another.

This situation was symbolic of the pressure under which ships operated in order to accomplish their tasks.

The 18th was the jackpot for eight ships were serviced. It was going to be a long time before this number of ships were to be ammunitioned in one day again. The eight ships were the U.S.S. SPRINGFIELD (CL-66), the U.S.S. LIND (DD-703), the U.S.S. OAKLAND (CL-95), the U.S.S. PASADENA (CL-65), the U.S.S. ERBEN (DD-631), the U.S.S. ESSEX (CV-9), the U.S.S. AULT (DD-698) and the U.S.S. ASTORIA (CL-95).

On the 19th, no ships were rearmed but cargo holds were squared away.

Seven more ships were replenished on the 20th. The U.S.S. SAN DIEGO (CI-53), the U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL-22); the U.S.S. HAZELWOOD (DD-531), the U.S.S. COLAHAN (DD-658), the U.S.S. MCGOWAN (DD-678), the U.S.S. YORKTOWN (CV-10) and the U.S.S. MERTZ (DD-691) came alongside.

The 21st was a day of rest. A day of rest was any day when the Fighting Fleet was in combat operations. The crews of the service ships took advantage of these days to catch up on sleep and treat sore muscles, in order to be ready with the best in them when the warships returned to load up.

The 22nd brought the combat ships back, asking for ammunition. The U.S.S. BRUSH (DD-745), the U.S.S. MANSFIELD (DD-728), the U.S.S. HORNET (CV-12), the U.S.S. TAUSIG (DD-746) and the U.S.S. STOCKHAM (DD-683) were rearmed.

The 23rd was the eighth day of ammunitioning at sea. The U.S.S. THE SULLIVANS (DD-537), the U.S.S. LIND (DD-703), and the U.S.S. RANDOLPH (CV-15) came alongside.

On the 24th, the U.S.S. MONSSEN (DD-798), the U.S.S. BATAAN (CVL-29) and the U.S.S. ULHMANN (DD-687) took their share.

The Okinawa-Gunto Campaign was in full swing now, with the Fleet going back and forth, back and forth, loading at sea and unloading on the Japs.

The 24th brought the U.S.S. NORMAN SCOTT (DD-690), the U.S.S. McNAIR (DD-679) and the U.S.S. YORKTOWN (CV-10) alongside.

The eleventh operating day, the 26th of April, brought the U.S.S. QUINCY (CA-71) and the U.S.S. MADDOX (DD-731) to the Vesuvius for rearming.

The 27th of April brought the U.S.S. BLACK (DD-666), the U.S.S. LEWIS HANCOCK (DD-675), the U.S.S. ENGLISH (DD-696) and the U.S.S. BUNKER HILL (CV-17) alongside for service.

Monotony, the plague of all Naval operations, was setting in. This is especially true of Naval Supporting Forces, who do necessary work but are usually denied the excitement of combat.

On April 28th, the thirteenth day of rearming, the Vesuvius ammunitioned the U.S.S. LANGLEY (CVL-27) and the U.S.S. SHANGRI-LA (CV-38).

Then came a two-day rest holiday and nothing was ever more welcome.

On May 1st, those insatiable monsters, the aircraft carriers, were back for more. The U.S.S. RANDOLPH (CV-15), the U.S.S. ESSEX (CV-9) and the U.S.S. BATAAN (CVL-29) rearmed, and like a pilot fish following sharks came the can U.S.S. AULT (DD-698) for its share.

On May 2nd, the U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL-22), the U.S.S. LANGLEY (CVL-27) and the U.S.S. SHANGRI-LA (CV-38) ate into the Vesuvius' supply.

The 3rd through the 5th of May brought another much-desired and sought after rest period.

The 6th, the next to the last day in the area, brought four ships alongside, the U.S.S. WILKES BARRE (CL-103), the U.S.S. PASADENA (CL-65), the U.S.S. RANDOLPH (CV-15) and the U.S.S. BATAAN (CVL-29).

The last day, May 7th, was finished off with the U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL-22) and the U.S.S. SHANGRI-LA (CV-38) alongside. This was the seventeenth rearming day in the Okinawa area of a total of twenty-four days spent in the combat zone.

During this period of time, a Japanese "Betty" aircraft was shot down 17 miles ahead of the refueling-rearming line. Smoke from the explosion could be seen beyond the horizon dead ahead. A pilot from the Combat Air Patrol had spotted and finished off this bomber.

The protective screen of ships and fighter pilots never once let the enemy slip through to the service ships, loaded with oil, gasoline and ammunition.

This was not war as most expected it to be. It was the side of the war that was never discussed or heard of. For ammunitioning at sea underway was a closely-guarded military secret. It had never been attempted before by any Navy, but military necessity weighed against the dangers involved dictated that it be accomplished.

On May 7th, with cargo depleted, the Vesuvius left in company with the U.S.S. MARIAS (AO-57), the U.S.S. SARANAC (AO-74) and the U.S.S. MILLICOMA (AO-73), escorted by the U.S.S. CONKLIN (DE-439) and the U.S.S. LAYMAN (DE-302), for Ulithi Atoll.

More days at sea, but these were not minded as land was to be in sight for the first time in thirty days, and anything for a relief from the constant sea routine was welcome.

RELOADING AND RETURN TO OKINAWA AREA

Then finally, on Friday, May 11th, the convoy slipped quietly between Mugai Island and the reef, and the Vesuvius dropped her hook in Berth 116 in the clear blue waters of Ulithi Lagoon.

Relaxation at last was possible!

However, soon, all too soon, it was remembered that a war was still being fought, and cargo organization was again set. While part of the crew worked cargo, the rest slipped over to the beach on Mog Mog Island for a cold drink of beer and a swim. Well, maybe the beer was not so cold, but it was beer -- so most believed. It broke the monotony, though, for Mog Mog was a typical Pacific Island, with soft breezes, palm trees, native cemeteries and nothing else.

The 15th through the 24th flew by with rapidity. The S.S. LUXEMBURG VICTORY and the S.S. WACO VICTORY slowly unloaded their holds and the high-riding Vesuvius sank deeper and deeper into the water.

On May 25th, with hatches battened, booms cradled, and the anchor aweigh, she glided leisurely back to sea with the U.S.S. ENOREE (AO-69), the U.S.S. NAMATEE (AO-58), the U.S.S. COMANESQUE (AO-79), the U.S.S. SARANAC (AO-74), and the U.S.S. COSSATOT (AO-77), with the U.S.S. LAKE (DE-301), the U.S.S. CONKLIN (DE-439), the U.S.S. WEAVER (DE-741) and the U.S.S. MCCOY REYNOLDS (DE-440) as escorts.

Bow pointed north, the Vesuvius headed back to another stay in the rearming area off Okinawa with Service Squadron Six.

The 26th through the 28th passed in rapid succession steaming north. On May 29th, the Service Group was sighted and presently the Vesuvius was back in station on the line.

This time, there was no wondering about the next move. It was all old stuff now. The booms were rigged, hatches opened, and the crew was in cargo organization at sea with no lost motion -- like a football team coming out of a huddle intent on making a goal.

The first day, the 30th, was a no-work day, for the fighting ships were up at Okinawa and Kyushu, where they reported fewer and fewer targets.

May 31st dawned with the Task Force of warships appearing over the horizon. The U.S.S. SAN JACINTO (CVL-30) maneuvered to position on the portside first, followed by

the U.S.S. BELLEAU WOODS (CVL-24). The U.S.S. BENNINGTON (CV-20) nosed her bulk alongside next, followed by the U.S.S. HORNET (CV-12). The U.S.S. STOCKHAM (DD-683) finished off a busy day.

June 1st brought the U.S.S. HEERMANN (DD-532), the U.S.S. TICONDEROGA (CV-14), the U.S.S. McCORD (DD-534) and the U.S.S. COLAHAN (DD-658) alongside. That day the U.S.S. WRANGELL (AE-12), a sister ammunition ship, came alongside for consolidation of cargo. This was a new experience for the crew, receiving ammunition at sea instead of unloading it.

June 2nd turned out to be a day of rest. This time, at least, there were no exhaustion cases. June 3rd was also a rest day — Plutocrats now — but the radio was screaming about a typhoon down off the Philippines heading in this direction. That was not so good! "It won't hit though," the radio consoled.

On June 4th, the typhoon reportedly blew itself out somewhere north of the Philippines, but the weather was threatening with winds of gale proportions, a lowering swiftly-moving stratus of heavy dark clouds, rain squalls and a rough sea. At 0700, the U.S.S. BELLEAU WOOD (CVL-24) and the U.S.S. TWINING (DD-540) were first alongside. Next came the U.S.S. BENNINGTON (CV-20).

Then the radio claimed a mistake!

It shouted that the typhoon was about 100 miles away from our position! Orders to cease rearming immediately were received and the BENNINGTON disconnected her lines and sped away. The Vesuvius battened down for heavy weather.

TYPHOON

All speed possible was ordered (fourteen knots, the speed of the slowest ship in the convoy), and course was set Southeast to avoid the storm area moving Northeast.

On the 1600 to 2000 watch, it was believed that the storm had passed to the west and had gone on to the north, but that idea was soon dissipated by the barometer. It continued to fall!

The wind increased until it was a screaming living thing attempting to tear the ship to pieces. Now there was no doubt about the typhoon!

The storm's course had shifted due east right into the path of the convoy. This was it!

Course was altered with orders to head into the wind to ride out the typhoon.

By midnight, every ship's position was blotted out. Searchlights were ordered on to prevent collisions. Their strong beams were of no help. They could only penetrate a few yards of the thick weather. Rain and spray was streaming horizontally against the Vesuvius! A ship was reported in trouble a few hundred yards abeam!

The Vesuvius was pitching like a wild elephant on a rampage. The clinometer recorded a roll of 41 degrees and the pointer jammed at this reading. The maximum roll was estimated at 45 degrees! No cargo ship was ever built to take this much of a roll!

The helmsman had only a token of control. "Keep her into the wind," was the only order he followed.

Over the radio came worse news. Men were being washed overboard from the decks of other ships. Some ships had lost steering control! Another was afire!

So far, the Vesuvius was lucky!

Then from the Security Patrol came bad news. Some of the cargo was shifting in the holds! A one-thousand-pound bomb in No. two hold was loose! A man lying unconscious top-side was in immediate danger of being washed overboard! A line of injured men was forming outside sick bay! Most injuries were minor. Two men were brought in on stretchers.

The man on deck, it turned out, had been fighting his way aft with the wind when a combination of wind and sea threw him violently against a bulkhead and stunned him. Fortunately, he was rescued before the next wave could wash him into the raging sea.

Meantime, the combined efforts of the crew secured the shifting cargo in the holds and the one-thousand-pound bomb that had been running amuck.

Another danger was added when it was reported that one-hundred pound bombs settling in their bins were causing sparks -- a very real and distinct danger amongst the ether fumes given off by powder cans. However, nothing was to come of it, but uneasiness.

A tanker reported passing a man in the water, but it could do nothing to help him. The U.S.S. DETROIT (CL-8) reported a number of men washed overboard.

The U.S.S. ANZIO (CVE-57) had a fire among her aircraft! The U.S.S. LASSEN (AE-3), an ammunition ship, reported a fire in her No. four hold! Both fires were brought under control and extinguished.

The U.S.S. ANZIO had lost steering control and was reported falling off toward the Vesuvius. Searchlights on board could not spot her. She was unable to see anything in the Vesuvius' direction. Radar reported the ANZIO close, then veering off, and finally as having passed clear.

Radio transmitters aboard were now out of order! Logs, charts and instruments were all jumbled in a mass of soggy paper in the chart house!

Not many men aboard expected to see the light of day again. Men prayed and prayed hard. Others did not have time to pray but battled desperately to master the dangers which threatened. The situation was grim!

At five o'clock in the morning, the center of the storm was reached. The wind stopped abruptly, but the enormous seas continued. Men who ventured out on deck into the dim light of dawn described the sea as being like mountains of water.

The air was calm for twenty minutes and the barometer dropped to 28.30. Suddenly, the wind in one-hundred-and-ten-mile gusts started in from exactly the opposite quadrant.

It was a howling living thing again!

Mines were a constant threat during normal weather, and lookouts night and day helped spot them, but no one gave them a thought during the storm. No one dared!

At 0700, visibility was improving and the wind died down as quickly as it came.

A count was taken. The entire Vesuvius crew answered up or was accounted for!

The rest of the day was taken up with repairing damage to essential equipment and to re-orienting convoy formation.

On June 6th, on emergency order, the U.S.S. SCHROEDER (DD-501) was rearmed. The casualties of the typhoon were transferred at sea to the U.S.S. HOWARD F. CLARK (DE-533) for hospital ship treatment on this date.

On the 8th, the crew shook off the effects of the storm by resting.

The 9th dawned with the U.S.S. BELLEAU WOODS (CVL-24) coming alongside to port, while on the starboard side at the same time the U.S.S. BRUSH (DD-745) was rearmed. The U.S.S. MADDOX (DD-731) followed the BRUSH to finish off an easy working day.

Quite a bit of damage was done to the entire combat Fleet by the typhoon, in fact, active combat operations had ceased.

The tenth was another day of rest, while on the eleventh the escorts from Service Squadron Six were replenished.

PHILIPPINES AND OFF JAPAN

On the same day, a new unit was formed and course was set for San Pedro Bay, Leyte Gulf, Philippine Islands, in company with the U.S.S. DETROIT (CL-8), the U.S.S. SHASTA (AE-6), the U.S.S. LASSEN (AE-3), the U.S.S. MAUNA LOA (AE-8) and the U.S.S. CHENANGO (CVE-28), plus escorts.

Three days at sea and on Tuesday, June 14th, Suluan Island was sighted at the entrance to the Surigao Strait in the Philippine Islands. It was passed close aboard. Then past Homohon Island, course was changed northward through the mine field, a turn at Manicani Point and so into San Pedro Bay.

From the 14th to the 22nd was a time of well-earned relaxation and recreation.

On the 22nd, the U.S.S. BUCYRUS VICTORY (AK-234) came alongside and cargo loading began.

The local beer dispensary was on Tolosa Beach, where certain rationed quantities of an imitation of the venerable "Dew of Bacchus" were available. But it was still not very cold, though enjoyable.

Cargo, cargo and more cargo, from June 22nd to July 7th. Then the Vesuvius was underway in company with the U.S.S. WRANGELL (AE-12), the U.S.S. LASSEN (AE-3), the U.S.S. SHASTA (AE-6), the U.S.S. MAUNA LOA (AE-8), the U.S.S. GARRETT (APA-84), with the U.S.S. TAYLOR (DD-488), the U.S.S. CARLSON (DE-9), the U.S.S. BEBAS (DE-10) and the U.S.S. GRISWOLD (DE-7) as escorts.

Where to, this time, was the question? Down through the Gulf and off Desolation Point on Dinigat Island, course was set Northeast.

On Wednesday, July 11th, when between the Marianas and the Bonin Islands at about five at night, the greatest show on earth passed over-head, B-29 Super-Fortresses on their way to Tokyo! They kept coming for three solid hours in formation, flashing their recognition lights as their radar recorded our convoy, until our group was out of the line of their flight.

On Friday, July 13th (Friday the thirteenth again), our task unit joined a group of tankers, escort aircraft carriers and more destroyers. The nemesis of Friday the thirteenth evidently doesn't follow all the time, as this was another uneventful day.

Day followed day, and more and more steaming, until Tuesday, July 17th, when the main Refueling and Rearming Group was consolidated off of Honshu Island, Japan, for the logistic support of raids on the home-land of Japan by the Third Fleet.

The 18th and 19th of July passed without work. The Third Fleet was bombing and shelling Honshu and Hokkaido, but so far without replenishment. Then on July 20th at 0330 in the morning the Fleet was sighted to the northwest. It came with a raging appetite for food, fuel oil, bombs, bullets and rockets.

Back in the United States, newspapers reported that the Third Fleet was now operating under a strict news black-out. Its location was a carefully guarded military secret. Now it can be told — The Third Fleet had arrived in the midst of the Navy's successful secret weapon — Service Squadron Six — with almost empty fuel tanks and store rooms that must be filled to enable its battering offensive to continue against Japan.

At 0537 of the 20th, the U.S.S. SAN JACINTO (CVL-30) came to port. The U.S.S. JOHN RODGERS (DD-574) and the U.S.S. CAPERTON (DD-650) were ammunitioned on the starboard side. The U.S.S. SOUTH DAKOTA (BB-57) followed the SAN JACINTO. She was the first battleship rearmed by the Vesuvius. The U.S.S. SWENSON (DD-729) and the U.S.S. TAUSSIG (DD-746) finished off the day. What a day! Rearming operations were completed at 1945, a total of 14 hours and 38 minutes of continuous unloading.

Six hours sleep for the crew, and the U.S.S. LEXINGTON (CV-16) was alongside at the crack of dawn, 0350, of the 21st, while the U.S.S. DASHIELL (DD-659) took ammunition on the starboard side.

The U.S.S. KNAPP (DD-653) took the starboard after the DASHLELL and the U.S.S. BELLEAU WOOD (CVL-24) followed the LEXINGTON to port. The U.S.S. OKLAHOMA CITY (CL-91) followed the KNAPP on the starboard side. On a misunderstanding the battleship U.S.S. INDIANA (BB-58) came alongside to receive ammunition but then immediately cast off in order to allow the U.S.S. SAN JUAN (CL-54) to rearm. The U.S.S. AMSTERDAM (CL-101) followed the U.S.S. OKLAHOMA CITY to starboard and finished off the day.

All day again, it was 1901 before rearming was completed. Today, the crew put in 14 hours, 11 minutes of back-breaking work.

The 22nd brought more requests for ammunition from the Fleet.

Early reveille was difficult. The men were so exhausted from the previous two days' labor in high gear that they had to be virtually pulled out of their bunks in order to be awakened. It was a situation of the mind being willing but the flesh weak.

The battleship U.S.S. WISCONSIN (BB-64) started the day on the port side. The U.S.S. UHLIANN (DD-687) was followed by the U.S.S. CHICAGO (CA-136) on the starboard side. The U.S.S. RANDOLPH (CV-15) followed the WISCONSIN on the port.

Things were slacking off, only 12 hours work today.

The 23rd through the 25th were no-work days, as the Fleet was away blasting the Nips.

Did the crew sleep? Yes, and how!

The crew also read with pride the following messages on their efforts the past few days.

FROM: COMMANDER THIRD FLEET. "Well Done" to all hands in Service Squadron Six for passing more beans, bombs, bullets, bogies and buck juice than has ever been done before in such a short time. Your untiring efforts have only been equalled by Task Force 38's enthusiasm in receiving them. This Big Blue team could not possibly continue without your well-planned operation. You boys have a direct hand in every bomb that we are able to drop on the Nips. -- (Signed) W. F. Halsey.

FROM: COMMANDER SERVICE SQUADRON SIX: If hard work, sweat and cheerful effort will win this war, then we will. Keep up the good work and may we all be home by Christmas.
(Signed) D. B. Beary.

FROM: COMMANDER SERVICE SQUADRON SIX: Congratulations, Vesuvius. Your crew set the record for total tonnage transferred during the last three days. "Well Done!"
(Signed) D. B. Beary.

FROM: THE CAPTAIN TO THE CREW. The past three days has seen Naval Warfare revised by the manner in which the service group of which we are a part provided logistic support, allowing the largest combat task force in Naval history to remain in enemy waters and ravage the enemy home-land. I am proud to be given the opportunity to take part in this operation and prouder still of the tremendously fine job which all hands on the Vesuvius accomplished. Working under pressure, through long hours, the crew of this ship transferred to combatant ships at sea a total tonnage of ammunition that will go down in history. May the fruits of your labor ripen soon in order that we may all be back home with our families shortly.
(Signed) F. J. GEORGE.

Cargo operations started again on the 26th with the U.S.S. COMPENS (CVL-25), nick-named the "Tighty Moo," and the U.S.S. MELVIN (DD-680) alongside first. Next the U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL-22) was serviced on the port side. The U.S.S. WATTS (DD-576) was followed, respectively, on the starboard by the U.S.S. FRANK KNOX (DD-742) and the U.S.S. MONSSEN (DD-798). These gave the Vesuvius a rough few hours. The U.S.S. YORKTOWN (CV-10) followed the U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE, and the U.S.S. CUSHING (DD-797) finished off on the starboard side for the day. Eight ships had been serviced in nine hours.

Again there was no rest on the 27th. The U.S.S. REBEY (DD-688) came on the starboard side followed by the U.S.S. ROWE (DD-564) and the U.S.S. HERTZ (DD-691).

The aircraft carrier U.S.S. SHANGRI-LA (CV-38) took her ammunition on the port side, and with it the bombs that got the Jap battleship HARUNA in the Inland Sea. The SHANGRI-LA signaled the story a few days later.

The 28th through the 30th were days of rest.

The 31st brought the Third Fleet back again. Only three ships were serviced today, the U.S.S. SHANGRI-LA (CV-38), the U.S.S. TWINING (DD-540) and the U.S.S. WEDDENBURN (DD-684).

The Vesuvius' stock of ammunition was almost exhausted.

The first of August, the last operating day of the war for the Vesuvius -- but at the time no one could guess that -- brought the U.S.S. COWPENS (CVL-25), the U.S.S. INDEPENDENCE (CVL-22), the U.S.S. QUINCY (CA-71) and the U.S.S. CHICAGO (CA-136) alongside. These were the last ships the Vesuvius rearmed at sea.

The second of August was detachment day and in company with the U.S.S. WRANGELL (AE-12), the U.S.S. SHASTA (AE-6), the U.S.S. MAUNA LOA (AE-8), the U.S.S. LASSEN (AE-3), and escorts, course was set for Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

LAST DAYS OF WAR

The 3rd through the 6th of August, the last days at sea under war-time conditions, brought the convoy off Suluan Island, past Homonhon, change course at Manicani Point and the hook splashed for the last time during the war, into the waters of San Pedro Bay, Leyte, the Philippines.

The 7th through the 11th passed, as always, in cargo loading. Word was received that the Vesuvius was needed earlier than expected and her loading and sailing dates were advanced one week.

All this was cancelled on the night of August 11th. At 2100, word came over that the Japs had accepted surrender terms and all proposed operations were to be held in abeyance.

The whole harbor held a spontaneous demonstration. Searchlights and pyrotechnics flooded the night with lights of many colors. The best sight in many a day!

The best remembrance of the occasion was not the sweeping searchlights and colored flares that looked like a thousand lighted Christmas trees bunched together, but the over-flow of emotion from the crew, themselves.

Hand-shaking gave way to hugging! Shouting gave way to singing! Singing gave way to music and dancing! There was not a pair of eyes that did not sparkle with a new light that night!

It was unbelievable! Peace was near!

Slowly, day by day, the pattern of the war's end emerged from rumor, speculation and doubt into reality.

So, the war-time career of the U.S.S. VESUVIUS came to an end while at anchor in the Philippines.

It was a short career, but she and her crew fulfilled the task assigned to them. All hands felt a rebirth of the pride which filled their hearts after the commissioning ceremonies. They helped materially to bring this war to a swift conclusion.

"Praise The Lord and Pass the Ammunition," was a cry first heard at Pearl Harbor. The U.S.S. VESUVIUS (AE-15) answered proudly and with the best in her, just a day away from Tokyo Bay.

It seems fitting and proper that this story should end with the words of a Prayer of Thanksgiving a crew member wrote for the ship's newspaper on the day peace was announced:

O God, we humbly thank Thee for Victory over the foe,
For thus making our thoughts of Peace and Home
come true. May we have participated in the
war to end all wars on the universe. May
we live in friendship, trust and
contentment with all our fellow
men, and may we walk in Thy
Light and be guided into
the ways of lasting
Peace, forever,
and ever.
Amen.

REARMING OPERATIONS AT SEA

- I. Okinawa (Fifth Fleet)- April 10 to May 11, 1945.
- II. Okinawa (Third Fleet)- May 25 to June 14, 1945.
- III. Japan (Third Fleet)- July 8 to August 6, 1945.

SHIPS REARMED

<u>Battleships</u>		
1. INDIANA*	2. SOUTH DAKOTA*	3. WISCONSIN*

<u>Cruisers</u>		
1. AMSTERDAM*	5. OKLAHOMA CITY*	9. SAN JUAN**
2. ASTORIA**	6. PASADENA**	10. SPRINGFIELD*
3. CHICAGO**	7. QUINCY**	11. WILKES BARRÉ**
4. OAKLAND*	8. SAN DIEGO**	

<u>Aircraft Carriers</u>		
1. ANZIO*	7. ESSEX**	13. RANDOLPH****
2. BATAAN****	8. HORNET**	14. SAN JACINTO****
3. BELLEAU WOOD****	9. INDEPENDENCE *****	15. SHANGRI-LA****
4. BENNINGTON**	10. INTREPID*	16. TICONDEROGA*
5. BUNKER HILL**	11. LANGLEY**	17. YORKTOWN****
6. COMPENS**	12. LEXINGTON*	

<u>Destroyers</u>		
1. AULT**	15. HEERMANN*	29. NORMAN SCOTT*
2. BLACK*	16. JOHN RODGERS**	30. REMÉY*
3. BLUE*	17. KNAPP*	31. ROWÉ*
4. BRUSH**	18. L. C. TAYLOR*	32. SCHROEDER*
5. COLAHAN**	19. LIND**	33. STEVENSON*
6. COLLETT*	20. LEWIS HANCOCK*	34. STOCKHAM**
7. CAPERTON*	21. MADDOX**	35. SWENSON*
8. CUSHING**	22. MANSFIELD*	36. TABBERER*
9. DASHIELL*	23. McCORD*	37. TAUSSIG**
10. ENGLISH*	24. McGOWAN*	38. THE SULLIVANS*
11. ERBEN*	25. McNAIR*	39. TWINING**
12. FRANK KNOX*	26. MELVIN*	40. UHLIANN**
13. HARRISON*	27. MERTZ**	41. WATTS*
14. HAZELWOOD*	28. MONSSEN**	42. WEDDENBURN*

Note: Each asterisk (*) represents an individual rearming operation. The U.S.S. VESUVIUS performed successfully a total of 121 rearings at sea in enemy waters.