

HISTORY OF THE USS CONSOLATION (AH 15)

A desperate need for more hospital ships during the final months of the Japanese conquest produced the USS CONSOLATION (AH 15) as one of six "floating hospitals" known as the "Haven Class". Their ingenious construction, a tribute to modern medical design and equipment, marked the first time in history that the Navy has had a class of hospital ships.

In capacity, each ship of this group exceeds that of any other hospital ship by several hundred beds. Permanent wards can absorb 786 patients - 660 enlisted men and a total of 126 in Sick Officers' Quarters. The number of beds, however, may be expanded to handle far greater numbers whenever the need exists.

Each ship displaces 15,000 tons, has 7 decks and an over-all length of 520 feet. The beam is 71 feet 6 inches. Each also has a speed of $17\frac{1}{2}$ knots and a cruising range of 12,000 miles at that speed.

Built by the Sun Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company, Chester, Pennsylvania under Maritime Commission contract MC-2573, the USS CONSOLATION is a C4-S-B2 type hull. Delivery to the U. S. Navy in a partial state of completion occurred on 30 August 1944, whereupon the hull was towed to Hoboken, New Jersey for conversion to a hospital ship by the Shipbuilding Division of Bethlehem Steel Company. Leaving Chester, Pennsylvania on 1 September 1944, she reached Hoboken on 3 September 1944, and conversion was started at once.

On 15 January 1945, the prospective commanding officer, Philip G. BECK, Captain (DM), USNR, arrived in the yard. Several other officers had already reported and by 15 February, most of the department heads were deeply engrossed in the task of supervising conversion and preparing to commission

the ship. On 20 April 1945, Captain BECK received orders from BuPers to proceed to Washington, D.C., on additional temporary duty in connection with a selection board. He was temporarily relieved as PCO and CO, when commissioned, by Commander P. S. TAMBLING, USN.

Conversion was completed on 22 May 1945, and the vessel placed in commission at 1100 that date by Captain Harold V. McKettrick, USN, representative of the Commandant, Navy Yard, New York. The ship was then turned over to Commander TAMBLING, USN as temporary CO. Executive Officer was R. E. LEWIS, Lt. Comdr. (D), USNR, and E. L. GILBERT, Lieut. (EM), was Chief Engineer. Medical spaces were under the supervision of Captain Lloyd R. NEWHOUSER, MC, USN, Senior Medical Officer, Chief of Surgery was Captain L. McCARTHY, MC, USNR and Chief of Medicine, F. R. BAILEY, Commander, MC, USNR. Department heads were:

Commander M. SHUPP	Neuro Psych.
Commander M.D. WILSON.....	Orthopedic Sur.
Commander B. OESTERLING.....	Sr. Dental Off.
Lieutenant G. H. NELSON	Chief Nurse
Lt. Comdr. J.M. McNISH	Urologist
Lt. Comdr. W. J. KEEFE	Otol ^{aryn} gologist
Lt. Comdr. J. P. COWEN	Ophthalmologist
Lieutenant R. M. CAULK	Radiologist
Lieutenant F. W. McKEE	Pathologist

The entire commissioning personnel consisted of 21 line officers, 19 medical officers, 3 dental officers, 6 Hospital Corps officers, 30 nurses, 2 Red Cross workers, 246 Hospital corpsmen and 293 enlisted men.

On the afternoon of commissioning day the ship moved from Pier #1, Bethlehem Steel Shipyards, Hoboken, N.J., to 33rd Street Pier, Brooklyn, New York; mooring there for a five-day period during which time stores and provisions were taken aboard.

In preparation for a three-day sea trial period, commencing 28 May 1945, the vessel moved from Pier #33, Brooklyn, New York to the deperming station, Bayonne, New Jersey on 27 May. The following morning in readiness for sea trials, the USS CONSOLATION took departure for Long Island Sound area via the East River and Hell Gate. Trials terminated on 30 May, and the vessel returned to Pier #33, Brooklyn, New York where provisioning was resumed preparatory to getting underway for Norfolk, Virginia.

The USS CONSOLATION departed for Norfolk, on 2 June 1945, steaming 312 miles at an average speed of 12.3 knots, and arrived at the Naval Operating Base, Norfolk, Virginia on 3 June. The same day the temporary Commanding Officer, Preston S. TAMBLING, Commander, USN, reported to Commander Auxiliary Vessel Shakedown Group.

Two days following her arrival in Norfolk, she was again underway. This time for Chesapeake Bay waters to undergo a shakedown period expiring 18 June. Shakedown did not differ in any important particular from that of any other auxiliary vessel with the exception of intensive drill in the technique of embarking and disembarking casualties with sand dummies as patients into and from LCVP's and lifeboats. Drills stressed various methods of embarking such as hoisting boats to deck level by Welin davits and taking stretcher patients aboard by means of power-operated multiple-litter hoists, capable of raising 500 pounds at a speed of 150 feet a minute.

Commencing 18 June, the ship underwent approximately two weeks of post-sjakedown Navy Yard availability in the Norfolk Navy Yard, Portsmouth, Virginia. It was during this yard period that Commander Preston S. TAMBLING, USN, temporary Commanding Officer, was relieved by Captain Philip G. BECK, (DM), USNR, the ship's regular CO. Availability completed on 1 July 1945, the CONSOLATION moved to the Naval Operating Base, Norfolk to effect additional repairs and corrections; climaxed by a day of sea trials on 13 July.

Pursuant to orders of Comservlant, the USS CONSOLATION departed from Norfolk on 14 July enroute to the Canal Zone, steaming 1897 miles at an average speed of 13.7 knots to anchor off Cristobal, Canal Zone on 20 July. Passage through the Panama Canal to Balboa followed that day with an elapsed time of seven hours, sixteen minutes.

Further routing by Cincpac was received at Balboa. In compliance with those orders, the ship was underway again the morning of the twenty-first, destination Peral Harbor, T.H. Following an approximate great circle course over a distance of 4745 miles, the ship arrived at Pearl Harbor on 4 August 1945 having averaged 14.0 knots for the voyage.

No further movement order was received until 13 August (the evening of that date, the ship was notified of the Japanese surrender) when Comserforpac directed the Commanding Officer to depart on 14 August for Eniwetok Atoll, Marshall Islands Group. Early in the morning of the third day at sea, radio despatch orders directed a diversion to Okinawa via Guam. Arrival at Guam on 24 August, found no orders pending; so the ship proceeded without stopping, to Okinawa as originally ordered. This new destination was

reached on the twenty-eighth of the month. Upon anchoring in Buckner Bay, Okinawa, the steaming log recorded a distance covered of 4778 miles from Pearl Harbor at an average speed of 14.1 knots.

With the receipt of Combatron One secret operation order 6-45 of 7 September 1945, arrived the opportunity to assist in the evacuation of prisoners-of-war from the Japanese homeland. Morale among all of ship's company rose to new heights for here was an operation to which everyone's training and the ship's design itself were particularly adapted, the first major contribution of the USS CONSOLATION to the succor of the casualties of this war!

On 9 September, she was underway enroute to Wakayama on the island of Honshu, Japan as a component of Task Unit 56.5. 2 commanded by Rear Admiral R. S. RIGGS aboard the USS MONTFELIER (CL-57). About 1900 on 11 September the ship anchored in Wakanoura Wan approximately $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles offshore from the Japanese village, Dejima.

Exploration of the situation at this village on shore began 12 September with a view toward setting up facilities for the reception of Allied ex-prisoners of war.

A large hotel was taken over by the Medical Department personnel of the USS SANCTUARY (AH 16) and equipped for the screening of ambulatory patients. The Medical Department personnel of the USS CONSOLATION established its center for the reception of the more seriously ill in a steamship ticket office adjacent to the pier.

All former prisoners brought to Wakayama arrived in 5 trains from the interior of Japan between the hours of 2230 on 14 September and 0815

on 15 September. Transportation from the bomb-scarred Wakayama railroad station to the beach at Dejima, a distance of perhaps five miles was provided by Japanese ambulances, trucks and streetcars. Medical Officers, nurses, corpsmen and representatives of the Red Cross met each train and directed the unloading. All former prisoners were taken directly to the CONSOLATION's field unit on the beach. Those requiring transportation by stretcher and others who appeared to be seriously ill were treated at the field unit, while the ambulatory cases were sent directly to the SANCTUARY's reception center in the hotel.

In the CONSOLATION's beach hospital, all former prisoners were stripped of their clothing. Valuables and clothing worth saving were tagged and placed in bags for sterilization aboard the ship. Each man was then given a bed bath or shower and thoroughly sprayed with DDT powder. Following a careful medical examination, new clothing was issued and hospital tickets prepared. Patients were then sent directly to the hospital ship by stretcher via LCVP boats.

During the first day, all men requiring medical care were transported to the USS SANCTUARY. By early morning of the 15th September, however, the SANCTUARY was loaded to capacity and soon got underway for Okinawa. It then became necessary for the staff of the CONSOLATION to take over the operation of the screening center at the hotel in addition to their beach hospital unit.

About 0630 of the fifteenth, patients began arriving on board the CONSOLATION and were admitted throughout most of the day. By 1400, the last of the ex-prisoners of war were hospitalized aboard. Records

reveal that a total of 1062 repatriated Allied nationals, separated into the following categories:

U. S. NAVY	3	BRITISH NAVY	2
U. S. MARINES.....	6	BRITISH ARMY	599
U. S. AMRY	192	AUSTRALIAN ARMY	246
U. S. CIVILIAN	1	AUSTRALIAN NAVY	4
		NETHERLANDS ARMY	9

As the number of patients exceeded the CONSOLATION's normal capacity by about 300, cots were set up in every available place throughout the medical departments' spaces.

While the conditions of all former prisoners varied, most men suffered from some degree of malnutrition, and the majority also had evidence of beri-beri. There were many with severe beri-beri characterized by peripheral neuritis, edema, enlargement of the liver and not infrequently, cardiac insufficiency. Ophthalmoscopic examination revealed in numerous cases the presence of degeneration of the optic nerve.

Examinations were made of the stools and parasites of the intestines. The Ascaris, a round worm, was found in most of the specimens. Other types of illnesses found were furuncles and ulcers, signs of chronic bronchitis and respiratory infections which were common. The number of cases of tuberculosis found were negligible.

Psychologically, the men were in excellent condition displaying both patience and gratefulness. Usually their descriptions of horrible experiences were characterized by a tendency toward understatement.

With proper medical and nursing care, good food and supplementary

vitamins, the condition of every man improved strikingly during their stay which was clearly evidenced by the remarkable rise of their already-good morale.

Movement of the ex-prisoners was delayed by typhoon warnings received throughout Sunday and Monday, 16 and 17 September that cancelled sailing orders. The ship was ordered to assume a state of readiness permitting the possibility of getting underway on one-half hour's notice. By 1200 on Monday, a plot of storm warnings left little or no doubt that the storm center would pass within 100 miles or less of Wakayama. Reaching its severest intensity between 2400 and 0200 the night of the seventeenth, the wind approximated 76 knots accompanied by a minimum barometer reading of 28.82.

Suffering no damage nor casualties, the USS CONSOLATION stood out to sea at 1300, 18 September enroute to Buckner Bay, Okinawa in compliance with orders of Commander Task Unit, 56.5.2. Two days later she anchored in Buckner Bay, awaiting instructions on disposition to be made of the ex-prisoners of war evacuated from Japan.

Debarkation of all the former prisoners to Army facilities at Okinawa was carried out over a period of three days beginning 22 September. Completion of this mission found the ship under orders to return to Wakayama and rejoin her task unit.

With disembarkation of ex-POW's completed on 25 September, the CONSOLATION suffered a delay of one day in Buckner Bay, Okinawa before again taking departure from Wakayama, Japan. This time to rejoin Task Unit 56.5.2 and function as a hospital for units of the Fifth Fleet in that area. Anchorage was reached in Wakanoura Wan on 29 September.

The ensuing days were full of activity for the Medical Department. Operating as a "floating hospital" for this unit of the Fifth Fleet, the USS CONSOLATION predominated in medical consultation activities as well as treating emergency cases. The ship's excellent equipment for diagnosis was put at the disposal of medical officers and pharmacist's mates of other ships. Heaviest activity in consultations and treatment was found in the E.E.N.T. Clinic, X-ray Department, Dental Clinic and Laboratory.

Simultaneously with receipt of information the ship would accompany Amphibious Group Eight in its movement to Nagoya, Japan on 15 October came frequent and regular warnings of an intense storm center in the nature of a typhoon sweeping over the Okinawa area and re-curving to strike the Empire Island of Honshu. With ComPhibGroup Eight's decision to place the Typhoon Bill into effect on 9 October, and in compliance thereto: the CONSOLATION proceeded to its typhoon anchorage in outer Wakanoura Wan that afternoon to await storm developments. Fortunately the storm center did not pass as near as had the typhoon experienced the previous month. Yet, this typhoon was by far more destructive to ships and installations of the U. S. Armed Forces. Damage and destruction was extensive; and, with accompanying loss of life and injury to personnel, was centered on Okinawa.

Feeling the USS CONSOLATION could be of considerable aid to injured personnel and patients ashore who were without shelter, she was dispatched at best possible speed to Buckner Bay, Okinawa to lend all possible assistance to authorities there. Making departure on 11 October as soon as seas had subsided to some extent, an average speed of 16.7 knots was maintained.

She anchored in Buckner Ba, in early forenoon on 13 October. Okinawa Shima had experienced the worst of the storm on the 9th, affording military authorities four days before the CONSOLATION's arrival to initiate relief measures. Air evacuation of patients played a predominant role prior to her reaching Okinawa, however, a few score men injured during the typhoon were embarked from ships in the harbor and commands ashore. Pending movement of the Eight Amphibious Group to Nagoya, Japan, in which the CONSOLATION was to participate, she remained in Buckner Bay providing medical consultations and treatment.

Port Director Okinawa's despatch orders 240010 of October 1945 directed a return to Japan, this time to Nagoya. Originally, plans included a rendezvous with amphibious forces off Wakayama, whereupon the task unit would proceed to Nagoya. Those arrangements were cancelled, however, by ComPhibGroup Eight's despatch orders 250247 of October 1945 received enroute, directing the CONSOLATION to proceed independently to Nagoya. Thus, she anchored in Ise Wan off Nagoya on 26 October, having steamed 752.6 miles for an average speed of 14.8 knots. The following morning anchor was weighed and mooring made to buoys in Nagoya inner harbor.

From the 27th of October until 3 November 1945, her function was that of providing medical service to Fifth Fleet units in the vicinity as well as shore activities including Army. It was while so engaged that notification was received that the ship was to be included in the U. S. Navy's "MAGIC CARPET" movement. A shuttle service born of the urgency for returning veterans to the United States. ComServPac's order to proceed to Okinawa for embarkation of patients was contingent upon release by

ComPhibGroup Eight. With receipt of that release, the USS CONSOLATION stood out to sea on the third of November, and anchored in the vicinity of Brown Beach, Buckner Bay on 5 November, ready in all respects to embark patients for transportation to the United States.

At 0600, on 9 November, the USS CONSOLATION sailed for the United States with a total of 754 patients and passengers aboard.

On 10 November 1945 a despatch was received from CincPac with instructions that the CONSOLATION's designation had been temporarily changed from AH-15 to APH-115.