

of the passing minutes. There was the overdue picket boat lying off to starboard waiting for me, and here was Bill in this one spot in all the world. I only had 20 minutes with him, but we made them last as long as we could. We didn't say it, but we both recognized the element of timelessness which one acquires so quickly out here. To see each other for 20 minutes or 2 minutes is all that's important. It happened that I had just received a belated letter from Berta, written the day after Christmas, in which she described everything about 4832 and the folks, and told about Christmas Eve and morning, and about little V and you. We read it together and he appreciated it. You see, it's been a long time since Bill received any mail. In the destroyer service, one hasn't time to write many letters, and there is a terrible delay in receiving them.

I met a couple of Bill's shipmates. It's obvious that they like and respect him. He has a certain aloofness in his character which keeps his personality intact, and uninfluenced too much by things and people around him, and that is a good quality. When he returns to you, you won't find him much changed. That is the strongest impression I carried away with me.

You will never know my emotions as the time came when I could delay no longer. We shook hands again and looked at each other. I had called the picket boat alongside. Bill's ship is so low and streamlined that all I had to do was step over the rail and onto our boat, which is a converted cabin cruiser.

We had talked of plans to see each other today. Either he was to come ashore or I was to return to the ship. But even while we talked, I think we both felt that it wasn't going to happen that way. I can't get out to him, and I know something of his mission and don't expect him to be able to come ashore. That's the way things are out here.

As our boat pulled away, I kept watching Bill there at the rail. We waved back and forth a few times. He had that little smile on his face and we made a few funny remarks back and forth. His ship-mates were around him and he was easily discernible among them, standing fair and tall and slim. We slipped under their counter and headed for the beach, 10 miles away—and my visit was over. Don't feel sorry for us, that we had so little time and that it had to be spent on the quarterdeck. It was a comforting experience to both of us, and took us home again—and sharpened our memories of the people and the things we love.

Let me tell you what I know of Bill's combat experience. They have been in many campaigns. They were at Kwajalein, at Truk, they were in the great naval action off Formosa. They went into Lingayen Gulf on S-Day. Prior to that, they were a member of the celebrated Task Force 58. He will have many bronze battle stars on his Theater ribbon when he comes home.

About his ship: by Navy standards, she is old. But her class is still the fastest in the Fleet. She's single stacker of 1500 tons, carrying much fire-power; how much I can't very well tell you on paper. There is an officer in our Headquarters who sailed in her from Guadalcanal to the Russells, before Bill joined the ship and back in the days when Guadal was the front. This officer says she's a tight little ship. The skipper is a good man, Lt. Cmdr. Carroll. And he is conservative, never exposing his ship unnecessarily to enemy fire. She has lost no one and is unscathed, and will continue to be.