

AND NOW FOR THE LETTER

The Captain was pleased to receive acknowledgment from some of the families indicating their appreciation of the "Dear Folks" letters which were sent home.

Dear Folks:

"General Quarters! ALL HANDS MAN YOUR BATTLE STATIONS!" is an order none of the crew of the TELFAIR will ever forget, particularly on the evening of April 2, 1945. That was a night of the wildest possible dreams. And it wasn't the music of Hoffman's Tales, because the air was filled with Jap planes out to get us by fair means or foul. We learned that night and saw with our own eyes what happens when a Jap pilot goes into a suicide dive...but I'm getting ahead of my story or Chapter 2 of the "TALES". (We call 'em "sea stories").

So far as you knew our last definite location was in San Pedro Bay Leyte, in the Philippines. We had "that feeling" that we were scheduled for something big and one day we sailed with some friends heading northwest for what was to be our eventual destination...OKINAWA and the KERAMA RHETTO. By this time you must have read news accounts of the general action that took place there, culminating in Fleet Admiral Nimitz' announcement on June 21st that "Organized resistance on Okinawa had ceased". We had a full weeks work immediately before Easter Sunday, which I am sure we celebrated differently than you.

It was a real spine tingling thrill to be an eye-witness of the assault on these Jap-held islands. The bombardment was terrific both from sea and air. It seemed like there couldn't be a solitary living creature left on any of the islands by the time the troops were ready to go in. Strangely enough there were very few civilian casualties on the adjacent islands. Those natives who were found to be injured had received their wounds from their own hands, the Japs having "sold" them on the idea that Americans were really out to slaughter them whether they bore arms or not...so there was evidence of where natives were either killed by the Japs or forced to commit a sort of special Hari-Kari.

Our preliminary mission having been accomplished, we were ready for the "Easter Parade", but with steel helmets as our "Easter Bonnets". And that brings us up to that day in our history, mentioned above, for on that evening of 2 April 1945 the so-called wiley Jap riding in light bombers and fighters, "contacted us" and what followed was real war. We had been attacked the previous morning by one Jap plane, evidently on reconnaissance, but as he was out of range the action was short lived.

The attack was our first major action and you would have been proud of the way our gun crews went into action. Our gunners and crews upheld the best traditions of the Navy, and of our frontier ancestors by really drawing a bead on the attacking planes. Officially we were credited with two and one-half planes which means that we got two ourselves and gave assistance on getting the third. The quail shooters from the middle west among us found out this was faster shooting than using the old 12 gauge on Bob White.

In at least one way, shooting down Jap planes was just like being at a major league baseball game...everytime the favorite would get a hit there would be cheers from the crowd and the grandstands would go wild. Well, we hit two homers and were credited with an assist for the third. Each time one of the planes went down there would be cheers from everyone aboard, but only while we were searching the skies for more of the enemy intent upon their suicidal attacks. Yes, we know what a suicide attack means and maybe someday we'll be able to tell you more about what we've seen. The action lasted about ten minutes but during those ten minutes the air was filled with planes as well as flak from our anti-aircraft fire.